

Doubling in the pass-out position

One of the most important strategies to know in low-level competitive auctions is the balancing double. If you are in the position of making the third and final pass to end the auction, you are said to be in the pass-out position. Doubles made in the pass-out position are known as balancing doubles.

If your opponents have stopped in a one-level major-suit contract you should always consider making a balancing bid. With a five-card suit you may choose to overcall your suit. With no five-card suit you should double unless you have length in the suit bid by your opponents.

Doubles in the pass-out position do not require the same strength as doubles made directly after an opponent's bid. A balancing double may be made with hands that have as few as 8 points. A balancing double is a takeout double so asks partner to bid a suit.

11 D	N undefined	W	N	E	S
	♠ AQ93 ♥ 83 ♦ 1094 ♣ A987	1♥ P 2♥ 2♠ P P	P	P	P
W undefined	♠ 74 ♥ AKJ652 ♦ AQ ♣ QJ5	E undefined			
	S undefined	♠ J1065 ♥ 109 ♦ K652 ♣ 432			
	♠ K82 ♥ Q74 ♦ J873 ♣ K106	2♠ N NS: 0 EW: 0			

On board 11, neither side is vulnerable and you are south and the dealer with ♠K82 ♥Q74 ♦J873 ♣K106. You have 9 points so you pass. West opens 1♥, partner north passes and east passes. Do you pass again or do you bid?

The correct action with south's hand is double. The souths who let west play in 1♥ committed one of the cardinal sins of duplicate bridge. If you let an opponent win the auction in a one-level major suit contract you are usually going to get a poor score. At most tables south passed so west won the auction in 1♥. West was able to make eight tricks in 1♥ and score 110 points.

There are two good reasons to make a balancing double.

- When your opponents stop low it indicates that they have insufficient strength for a game contract. This means your partnership has sufficient strength to defeat any high-level contract bid by your opponents. This strength is also often sufficient for your partnership to make your own low-level contract.
- Even if your partnership cannot make a contract you should often make a bid to force your opponents to a higher contract or find a sacrifice bid where you can bid to a failing contract that loses fewer points than your opponents' making contract.

After you double on this hand, west bids 2♥. West has a strong hand and a six-card heart suit. Your partner has 10 points and four cards in spades so will bid 2♠. 2♠ goes down one or two and you will lose 50 or 100 points. This is better than losing 110 points which west will win for making 2♥. Going down two on this hand wins you an 80% score! You may find that west bids on to 3♥ which will fail if partner makes the normal lead of ♦10. You will then score 50 points which wins you over 90%.

14 D	N North	W	N	E	S
	♠ 107 ♥ A1062 ♦ KJ102 ♣ Q52	1NT	P	1♠	P
W West		P	X	P	P
♠ ♥ 8743 ♦ 8643 ♣ AK643		P			
	E East				
	♠ AQ6543 ♥ QJ ♦ Q5 ♣ 1087				
	S South				
	♠ KJ982 ♥ K95 ♦ A97 ♣ J9				
		2♠x E NS: 0 EW: 0			

On board 14, neither side is vulnerable and you are north with ♠107 ♥A1062 ♦KJ102 ♣Q52. East opens 1♠, partner south passes and west bids 1NT. You have 10 points with no five-card suit to overcall so you pass. East rebids 2♠, partner south passes and west passes. Do you bid now or do you pass?

North should make a balancing double. Doubles at the two level are usually made with hands that have a shortage in the opponents' suit. You have a doubleton in spades so your hand is ideal for a balancing takeout double.

When your opponents have bid to the two level and you are in the pass-out position, an important factor to consider is the vulnerability. On this hand both sides are not vulnerable.

When both sides are not vulnerable it is known as 'the bidder's vulnerability'. This means you bid when they stop low! At this vulnerability both sides may consider bidding to a hopeless contract which loses 100 points rather than letting opponents win the auction in a contract where they will score 110 points.

After you double with your 10 points, east passes and partner south surprises you by also passing. Your double is a takeout double so why did partner pass?

Partner had a 'trap pass' hand with ♠KJ982 ♥K95 ♦A97 ♣J9. East is trapped in 2♠ doubled and goes down by three or four tricks to lose 500 or 800 points.

If partner balances with a double, resist the temptation to jump in your suit. Respond your longest suit at the lowest level available. You may pass the double for penalty if you have a long, strong holding in the opponent's suit.

Final Warning!

Balancing is fun, but it's also dangerous. Both you and your partner must remember that you are both treading on thin ice. **Check Vulnerability** Keep in mind at all times that you and your partner are not bidding your hands individually; you're bidding them together. Don't get carried away!

In most cases, the purpose of balancing is to **make the opponents bid again**. If they do, **stop bidding** unless you or your partner have something extremely important to say. In that case, think again anyway. It will probably turn out to be not so important to say it 😊