

How to deal with Pesky Preempts

Preempts are and will always be annoying! Regardless of how many masterpoints you have, dealing with a pre-empt is everyone's worst nightmare.

The main reason the opponents preempt is to use up bidding space and make it hard for us. You need the right tools to counter their preempt and reach a sensible contract. Once you achieve that, you may even find that their preempt gives you information that helps you with the play.

Another thing to remember is that you will not always get it right!

There are a few conventional methods of competing depending on partnership agreements.

- 1 Double is for take out
- 2 Overcalls are natural
- 3 A 3NT overcall says "I want to play in 3NT"
- 4 A bid of the opponent's suit shows a strong two – suiter.

Doubles by the opener may be more flexible than bidding:

♠ A K 9 7 5	♥ K Q 10 6	♦ J	♣ K 7 5	West	North	East	You
							1♠
		3♦		Pass	Pass	?	

You are certainly not going to pass, so the question is do you bid 3♥ or do you double?

Doubling here is the most flexible action. This keeps 3♦X as a potential contract (if partner has diamonds, this is called a trap pass) and partner can still bid 3NT if he feels uncomfortable with 3♦X. Doubling also allows us to find clubs, and we can still play in hearts also if partner has them.

For example give partner something like ♠ 63 ♥ 73 ♦ A 8 5 ♣ J 10 9 6 4 2..... had we balanced with 3♥, partner will correct that to 3♠ and we would have lost our club fit.

Another example: ♠ A K Q 3	♥ void	♦ A Q J 9 7 3	♣ J 8 6	West	North	East	You
							1♦
				2♥	Pass	4♥	?

You certainly do not want to be passing out 4♥ with this hand. Although partner didn't act he may still have 6 – 8 points that could not do anything over 2♥ So what is best?

4♠ would get your shape across, but making a takeout double here is a much better action. It keeps the club suit alive (nothing is stopping partner from having 6+♣) as well as the spade suit, but it also allows the partnership to defend 4♥X if partners hand is more suited to defence.

Partner may have something like: ♠ 7 5 4 ♥ K 8 3 ♦ 8 5 ♣ K 10 5 3 2 - in which case, defending 4♥X seems like the best option.

Shape is King in Competitive Auctions:

In a constructive auction (opponents are silent), we generally like to bid game with 24 or 25 combined points. However, in a competitive auction, distribution (e.g. the number of trumps we have, together with singletons and voids) now play a much more important role, as you often don't need the traditional 24-25 combined points.

For example: ♠ 6 4 3 ♥ J 6 5 ♦ 7 ♣ K 10 8 6 5 3

West	North	East	You
	1♦	2♥	Pass
4♥	X	Pass	?

What do you do here?

Partners double is not for penalties. With the opponents bidding and raising, partner seems short in hearts with a good hand, along with support in the unbid suits. Here, with a six card club suit, it should be clear to bid 5♣.

It is true that 4♥X is unlikely to make, but it is doubtful that we would be able to take that many tricks. Making a 5♣ game contract should compensate us more.

Overcalls:

The emphasis should be on aggression, bear in mind your opponent has been bold enough to bid at the three level with few points so you should not be worried about making aggressive overcalls!

What do you need for an overcall? At the three level, an opening hand with a 5 or 6 card suit is perfect. Assume partner has about 8 points and bid accordingly.

The 3NT Overcall:

If you are worried about making a four level overcall then bidding 3NT is even more risky, if you get it wrong you go a long way off! Again, allot your partner with 8 points when deciding whether to bid over a three level pre-empt, and when considering bidding 3NT you need more than one stopper in the opponent's suit and at least 17 points. Only the player who has the stoppers can bid 3NT, so it is no good hoping that your partner will bid it for you.

Strong Two Suited Hand:

If you want to show a strong two suited hand then you bid the opponents suit:

♠ A K 9 6 5 ♥ A K 8 6 4 ♦ A 2 ♣ 3

This hand is ideally suited to a bid of the opponents' suit, over a 3♦ opening bid you would call 4♦, aiming for a game contract in either major.

As responder to the takeout double of a preemptive bid it certainly seems right to bid with distributional hands but some thought should be given to passing with balanced hands that contain a few values. If you chose to bid your call at the level at which you wish to play as the doubler should not bid again unless he has a very powerful hand.

High Level Competitive Decisions:

No one likes to deal with a high level competitive bidding problem, but it's a problem we all have to face.

♠ 7 6 ♥ A Q 10 8 6 2 ♦ K 5 ♣ A Q 5	West	North	East	You
				1♥
	2♠	3♥	4♠	?

What do you do here?

Two very important factors must be considered when faced with these 5 level decisions.

1 Distribution: You should have some distribution to be bidding on – else you usually defend

2 Opponent's Suit: Number of cards in the opponent's suit – do we potentially have two losers here? If so, better to defend.

The worst number of cards you can have in an opponent's suit is a doubleton. Although your opponents may have bid aggressively to the 4 or 5 level, they are not guaranteed to have a ten card suit (particularly if they are not vulnerable) Therefore, if the opponents are in a nine card fit and you have a doubleton in their suit – guess what – your partner also has a doubleton! This means you have two losers in that suit. Better to have a singleton or three cards (marking partner with a singleton)

Back to the problem above – with a doubleton spade and only a semi balanced hand, it is better to defend. Bidding 5♥ will likely see the contract fail by one trick, so it is better to take the plus score and double 4♠

Takeout or Penalty?

At what point does our double become a penalty double rather than a takeout double? The partnership needs to agree. A popular agreement is: a double at our first opportunity to bid is for takeout through (up to and including) 4♥.