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A Brief Digression Into Overcalling

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Overcalling an Opponent's opening bid has different requirements than an opening bid. There are 3 reasons why one might wish to Overcall: (1) with strong holdings, to enter a competitive auction in an effort to secure a makeable contract, particularly if Partner has not yet bid, and thus may also be holding HCPs with a possible fit with your hand, (2) to force Opponents to bid to higher level when they should obtain a contract, but possibly can be enticed to bid too high, or (3) to make a "lead directing" bid, telling Partner what suit you want led at first opportunity.

Many Partners have partnership agreements to not let Opponents play certain contracts. For example, Partners may agree to (almost) never let Opponents play a 1-level suit part-score contract.

If your Opponents bid a suit in which you hold length, even with honors in the suit, you cannot bid that suit. Instead, you most likely should Pass, and pray that you Opponents improvidently will set a contract in your suit.

A 1-level Overcall bid in an unbid suit may be reasonable if you hold both (1) 9+ HCPs (11+ points including distribution points)¹ and (2) 5+ cards with honors in your suit. Some players find Ron Klinger's "Suit Quality Test ('SQT') Score" very useful. The "SQT Score" has been discussed in many locations, including "Esther Bridge Quiz #100"² and in Tip #21 (pp. 36-37) in Klinger's excellent 2003 book, 100 WINNING BRIDGE Tips for the Improving Player. The "SQT Score" says, "Add the number of cards in your potential long overcall suit to the

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¹These point limits must be invoked with some *flexibility*, taking into account your position in the bidding, and information from the auction regarding Opponents' holdings. For example, your hand holds higher value if your short suit is the Opponents' long suit, particularly if you hold extra cards with which to trump, assuming you believe the contract will be set in a suit.

² See: https://esther-bridge.com/quiz/q0100_q.pdf

number of honors in that suit. Count a Jack or Ten as honor cards if, and only if, you hold at least 1 higher honor in the suit. Overcall with a suit bid if the '**SQT Score**' is equal to or higher than the number of Tricks you must take to make your contract." For example, if you hold K,J,8,6,3 of Hearts, the "**SQT Score**" $5+2 = 7$, so you can Overcall RHO's 1**D** bid with a 1**H** Overcall because $7-6 = 1$, but you should not Overcall at a higher level.

You can Overcall by bidding 1**NT** if you hold (1) 15 to 18 HCPs, and (2) a "flat" or "square" hand, and (3) "protected" stoppers in the Opponents' bid suit(s). If you Overcall 1**NT**, **all** systems with your Partner (i.e., Stayman and Jacoby Transfers) are "on".

If you Double the Opponent's 1**NT** bid, you are telling your Partner, "I hold (1) 15-18 HCPs, (2) no void or singleton, and (3) no more than 1 doubleton. All systems are 'on.'" This Double does not require Partner to bid, and if Partner feels Opponents' **NT** bid can be set for a higher Bridge Score than would be obtained by securing a contract, Partner is free to leave the Double in.

If Partner has not yet had the opportunity to bid, one can Overcall at the 2 level RHO's suit bid if holding **6** cards with honors in an unbid suit, with **11+** HCPs, especially if Not Vulnerable. With 13+ HCPs and **5** cards with honors, one can Overcall Opponents' 1-level suit bid at the 2 level.

"Take Out" Double

Sitting 2nd, or 3rd if Partner Passed, one can bid **Double**³ of RHO's 1-level suit bid, if, and only if, one holds (1) an opening hand, (2) no 5-card Major in an unbid suit, (3) 4 cards in any unbid Majors, and (4) at least 3 cards and preferably 4 in an unbid Minor if a minor was opened by Opponents. If Opponents have bid 2 suits, one can Double holding an opening hand with length in both unbid suits.

These Doubles are "take out", and **require** Partner to bid, unless the Opponent to the left of the Partner who Doubled makes an intervening bid. If Partner Doubles, my LHO bids, and I nevertheless voluntarily bid when I am no longer required to bid, I am showing a bigger hand than would otherwise be the case.

Overcalling Opponents' 1NT Opening

Some players use the "**Rule of 8**" to decide whether to bid over a 1**NT** opening, assuming you have at least 6 (preferably 7) HCPs. The "Rule

³ See the Esther Bridge Lesson, "**22. Not-for-Penalty Doubles.**":

<https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/double.pdf>

of 8" involves adding together (1) the number of cards in your longest 2 suits, *minus* your number of A,K,Q losers across all 4 suits. If this sum is **2 or more**, you should bid over the 1NT open.

For example, when counting Spade losers, and you hold the top 3 Spades (A,K,Q), count 0 losers for Spades. When counting losers in a suit, **only count** the number of losing cards you hold in a short suit. For example, if you hold only the 9 of Clubs, count only 1 loser for Clubs. If you hold K,x in Hearts, count only 1 loser for Hearts.

If as a 1NT Overcaller you hold **S:** Qxxx, **H:** Axxxx, **D:** -, and **C:** xxxx, you hold 6 HCPs. You also hold 7 A,K,Q losers: 2 Spades, 2 Hearts, 0 Diamonds, and 3 Clubs. $5+4 = 9$ cards in your longest 2 suits minus 7 losers = **2**. Therefore, according to the "Rule of 8", you should bid.