

## Competitive Agreements

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## **General Principles**

- Pre-balancing aggressively when they have a fit.
- Passing a redouble is for penalties except at the one-level over the redoubler.
- Redouble is always for business except where partner had the chance to raise on a previous round.
- When we have a game force established, we cannot play in a merely doubled part score.
- When we have forced to a level, passing is always the least encouraging (and least constructive) action. In some circumstances we might still defend a part-score.
- Where our cue-bids look for stoppers in opponent's suit they always ask.
- No splinters in competition: more accurately, you cannot agree trumps with a splinter as your first bid. When the opponents are dead, splinters are possible.

## Doubles

Unless the situation fits one of the categories below, double is for take-out. Of course, the higher the level of the double, the more likely responder is to pass for penalties. Take-out doubles over 4♠ and above tend to have the meaning "Bid if you have some shape or primary support, otherwise pass and hope to beat them in high card strength". At lower levels, responder should be reluctant to pass without a trump holding.

### *Less obvious doubles for take-out include:*

- (a) 1♥ 2♥\* P 3♠ (2♥ = Michaels, 5/5 spades and a minor)  
Dbl
- (b) 1♠ 2♦ 3♠ Dbl
- (c) 1♥ 1♠ 2♦ Dbl (Double shows clubs and spade tolerance.)
- (d) 1NT 2♥ Dbl (The take-out double here shows at least two hearts and values to stand a penalty pass.)
- (e) 1NT 3♣ Dbl
- (f) 1♥ 1NT 2♠ Dbl

### **1. When Double is not take-out:**

We have agreed a suit (not necessarily a fit). A suit response to a take-out double is taken as suit agreement. All the following doubles are penalty, or at least penalties in context (e.g. showing a balanced hand such as (e)).

- (a) 1♠ P 2♠ 3♦  
Dbl
- (b) 1♦ 2♣ Dbl 3♣  
3♥ 4♣ Dbl
- (c) 1♣\* Dbl 2♣ 2♠ (1♣ could be short, in five-card majors style.)  
Dbl
- (d) 1♠ Dbl 2♠ 3♥  
3♠ P P Dbl
- (e) 1♦ Dbl 1♥ 3♣  
3♦ Dbl
- (f) 1♣ 2♣\* Dbl 2♠ (2♣ = Michaels, 5/5 in the majors.)  
3♣ P P Dbl

### **2. Opposite pre-emption by our side.**

- (a) 2♥\* 3♦ Dbl (2♥ = weak)
- (b) 1♥ 3♠ 4♥ Dbl

**3. They make an honest attempt to play our suit**

A double of a suit we have bid naturally or implied is for penalties, as in (a) and (c). A short club does not count, so double in (b) is take-out.

(a) 1♠ P 2♦ 2♠  
Dbl

(b) 1♣\* 2♣ Dbl

So if our short club is overcalled with a natural 2♣, double is take-out from both sides.

(c) 1♦ Dbl 1♥ Dbl (2♥ here would be natural, suggesting five.)

**4. Opposite complete (or sufficient) definition**

When one partner has sufficiently defined his shape (any rebid does this or a two-suited overcall, for example), then double is for penalties.

(a) 1♣ P 1♥ 1♠  
2♦ P 2♥ 2♠  
Dbl

(b) 1♣ 2♣\* 3♣ Dbl (2♣ = Michaels)

(c) 1♣ 1♥ 1♠ 1NT  
P 2♦ 2♠ P  
P Dbl

**5. When they protect**

Except when an opening bid is passed by partner, double is penalty. Only the first three below are for take-out:

(a) 1♠ P P 2♦  
P P Dbl Take-out

(b) 1NT P P 2♥  
Dbl Take-out

(c) 1NT P P 2♣\* (2♣ = Astro; 2♦ = NF relay)  
P 2♦\* P 2♥  
P P Dbl Take-out

(d) 1NT P 2♦\* P (2♦ = transfer)  
2♥\* P P 2♠  
P P Dbl

(e) P P 1♦ P  
1♥ P P Dbl  
P 2♣ Dbl

(f) 1♠ P 1NT P  
P 2♥ Dbl

### 6. *The Lurk*

Double by a hand that had 'lurked' on the previous round is penalty, unless the opponents have shown a fit in time for his re-entry and a take-out double is still conceivable. Double is for penalty in (a), (b), and (d), and take-out in (c) and (e).

- |     |          |          |          |    |   |
|-----|----------|----------|----------|----|---|
| (a) | 1♥<br>2♦ | 1♠<br>2♠ | P<br>Dbl | P  |   |
| (b) | 1♠<br>2♠ | P<br>Dbl | 1NT      | P  |   |
| (c) | 1♠<br>P  | P<br>Dbl | 2/3♠     | P  | Take-out (Although lurking, opponents have shown a fit and a light protective take-out double is possible.) |
| (d) | 1♥<br>P  | 1♠<br>P  | P<br>Dbl | 2♠ | (Although opponents have shown a fit, responder cannot have sufficient values to double for take-out now.)  |
| (e) | 2♥*<br>P | P<br>Dbl | 3♥*      | P  | (2♥ = weak; 3♥ = pre-emptive)<br>Take-out   |

### 7. *They bid a new suit opposite a pre-empt*

If opponents bid a new suit opposite a pre-empt, double is penalty, as below:

- |     |     |     |    |     |             |
|-----|-----|-----|----|-----|-------------|
| (a) | 3♦  | P   | 4♥ | Dbl |             |
| (b) | 1♠  | 3♦* | P  | 3♥  | (3♦ = weak) |
| (c) | 2♦* | P   | 2♠ | Dbl | (2♦ = weak) |

### 8. *Penalty-seeking auctions*

When we double or redouble to express interest in taking a penalty (e.g. when they compete artificially or double for take-out), subsequent doubles are for penalty providing pass would be forcing (see section 9 below). Pass is forcing over opponents' removal of the double or redouble at the cheapest level. If opponents voluntarily raise the level above the minimum (through a jump shift, for example) pass is non-forcing and doubles are take-out. For example, 1M-Dbl-Rdbl-2m; Dbl is penalty (and pass forcing) where as 1M-Dbl-Rdbl-3m; Dbl is take-out (and pass non-forcing).

All the following are penalty doubles:

- |     |                |                 |            |          |   |
|-----|----------------|-----------------|------------|----------|---|
| (a) | 1♥<br>Dbl      | Dbl             | Rdbl       | 2♦       |   |
| (b) | 1NT<br>Dbl     | 2♣*             | Dbl        | 2♥       | (2♣ = any conventional defence to 1NT.) |
| (c) | 1NT<br>P<br>2♦ | Dbl<br>P<br>Dbl | 2♣<br>Rdbl | Dbl<br>P |   |

**9. Where pass would be forcing**

If pass would be forcing, then double is business, as below:

(a) 2♣\* P 2♦\* 3♠  
Dbl

(b) 2NT 3♦ Dbl

**10. Support doubles**

Support doubles by opener in fifth position. (a) and (b) show exactly three-card support, within almost any hand. (c) is simply for take-out.

(a) 1♦ P 1♥ 1♠  
Dbl

(b) 1♣ Dbl 1H\* 2♥ (responder has diamonds)  
Dbl

(c) 1♣ P 1♥ 2♠  
Dbl

**11. Action doubles**

Action doubles by a hand not expected to act again, especially a pre-emptor showing additional offence (and not necessarily any defence) – it sends the message: "I would have bid on but am giving you the opportunity to defend if preferred".

(a) 3♣ 3♥ P P  
Dbl

(b) 1♦ 2♦\* 3♦ P (2♦ = Michaels)  
P Dbl

(c) 1NT P 2♦\* P (2♦ = transfer)  
2♥ 2♠ P P  
Dbl (Dbl = maximum with three hearts)

**12. Lead-directing doubles**

Lead-directing doubles of various kinds. A double of a splinter by an unpassed hand or a double opposite a partner who will not conceivably be on lead expresses interest in competing in the suit (a double of a splinter by a passed hand is conventionally lead-directing for the higher of the remaining non-trump suits):

(a) 1♥ P 2♠ P  
3♠ P 4NT\* P (4NT = Blackwood)  
5♥\* P 6♠ P  
P Dbl (Dbl = "I have a void – please lead it")

(b) 1♥ P 1♠ P  
1NT P 3NT Dbl (Double asks for a spade lead, dummy's first bid suit.)

(c) 1NT P 3NT Dbl (Dbl = "Please lead my running suit i.e. your shortest".)

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- (d) 2NT P 3♣\* Dbl (3♣ = Stayman. Double indicates a club lead.)
- (e) 1♥ Dbl P 1♠  
P 2♥\* Dbl (Double shows a top heart honour.)
- (f) 1♠ P 3♠ P  
4NT\* P 5♦\* Dbl  
6♠ P P Dbl (The second double negates the first and asks for a non-diamond lead.)
- (g) 1♥ P 4♦\* Dbl (4♦ = splinter. Double shows the playing strength for at least 3♦.)
- (h) 1♥ 1♠ 3♠\* Dbl (Double shows the playing strength for a raise to 3♠.)
- (i) 1♥ 1♠ 2♥ P  
3♣\* Dbl (3♣ = short-suit game-try. Doubler held KJxxxx, x, xx, AKQx)

### **13. Commonsense exceptions to take-out**

Commonsense sometimes precludes double being take-out, even if it may be construed as such according to the rules. If in doubt, responder's trump holding should tell him what partner's double is, as in (b). (a) and (c) below are penalty.

- (a) P P 1♠ P  
2♠ Dbl 3♠ Dbl (See also rule 6 on lurking penalty doubles.)
- (b) P 1♣ P 2♣  
2♠ Dbl P 3♣  
Dbl
- (c) 1NT P P 3♠  
Dbl (Doubles by the NT opener of protective bids at the three level and above are for penalty.)

### **14. Take-out doubles of no-trumps**

Doubles of NT bids can also be take-out, chiefly of a NT response to a suit bid. Doubles of artificial raises are for take-out of the suit raised. For example:

- (a) 1♥ P 1NT Dbl (A sound take-out double of 1♥.)
- (b) 2♥\* P 2NT\* Dbl (2♥ = weak; 2NT = enquiry. Double is take-out of hearts.)
- (c) 1♥ P 1♠ P  
1NT Dbl (This shows a penalty double of 1♥ - lurking.)
- (d) 1♥ P 3NT\* Dbl (3NT = heart raise with a singleton spade. Double is take-out of hearts.)
- (e) 1♦ 1♥ P 1NT  
Dbl (Double is take-out of hearts.)
- (f) 1♠ 3♠\* P 3NT

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- |     |               |           |     |     |  |
|-----|---------------|-----------|-----|-----|--|
|     | Dbl           |           |     |     | (3♠ = asking for spade stop. Double is penalty.)   |
| (g) | 3♦            | P         | 3NT | Dbl | (Double is take-out of diamonds.)                  |
| (h) | 1♠            | P         | 3m* | Dbl | (3m = Bergen raise. Double is take-out of spades.) |
| (i) | (1m)<br>(1NT) | 1M<br>Dbl | P   | P   | (Dbl is take-out of the minor opened.)             |
| (j) | 1m<br>Dbl     | (1N)      | P   | P   | (Dbl is take-out of the other minor)               |

### **15. After a penalty double**

Following a penalty double – or a pass of a take-out double for penalties – all subsequent doubles are for business.

### **16. Exceptions**

Precedence is given to other agreements elsewhere in the system notes which contradict these rules on doubles. See, for example, the sections on 4SF and cue-bids.



## Redoubles

All redoubles for business (either looking to take a penalty or to play in that contract redoubled) unless otherwise defined.

Exceptions:

- Support redoubles by opener in fifth seat, e.g. 1m-(P)-1M-(Dbl); Rdbl shows 3-card support and almost any hand (2M shows 4-card support and a minimum).
- Rescue redoubles such as from a hand running from 1NTX, e.g. 1NT-(Dbl)-2m-(Dbl); P-(P)-Rdbl shows shortage in the suit bid and asks opener to remove.
- Pass of an opponent's redouble is to play (i.e. defend the redoubled contract) unless at the one level and under the trumps.
- e.g. (1♠) Dbl (Rdbl) P shows no preference as to where to play and asks partner to remove 1♠XX but (1♠) P (P) Dbl (Rdbl) P is to play 1♠XX (as you sit over the spades rather than under as before).
- In a game-forcing auction, we can never play in only a doubled part-score (we must either redouble or bid on).

## 2NT in competition

The dominant interpretation of 2NT is 'Bad' - a way of introducing a poor or merely competitive hand in a crowded auction. By dominant I mean that this is the first explanation to test for reasonableness. If game is conceivable and none of the exceptions below is met, 2NT is 'Bad'.

### *Other interpretations*

1. Major-raise: only when 2NT is the first action opposite a one- or two-level opening or overcall in a major. 2NT may or may not be a jump.
2. Transfer: only after (a) 1♣ (2♦/♥/♠) 2N, (b) 1N (2♦/♥/♠) 2N and (c) (1L) 1N (2♦/♥/♠) 2N
3. Natural: only when 2NT is the first action opposite a one or two level minor opening or overcall when there is a two-level-cue available.
4. Minor-raise: only when 2NT is the first action opposite a one or two level minor opening or overcall when there is NO two-level-cue available.
5. Two-places-to-play:
  - a) when bid by a hand with a defined range (such as a NT opener)
  - b) when bid by a hand that had previously declined an opportunity to bid 2NT 'Bad' - "no second chance"
  - c) when we are protecting with no hope of game
6. 'System on' situations:
  - a) 1♣ (X/1♦) 2N (weak/strong clubs)
  - b) 1NT (2♣) 2N (diamonds)
  - c) (1L) 1N (2♣) 2N (diamonds)
  - d) 1M (X) 2N (LROB)

### *Classic 'Bad' 2NTs*

These are examples - NOT a definitive list

1. Replying to a take-out double at the two-level:
  - a) (2M) X (P) 2N
  - b) (1M) X (2M) 2N
  - c) (2♦\*) X (2M\*) 2N
2. After a minor opening and action around the table without our side declaring a fit:
  - a) 1♣ (1♥) X (2♥); 2N = bad 3♣ bid, 3♣ = good but NF
  - b) 1♦ (X) 1♠ (2♥); 2N = bad 3♦ bid, 3♦ = good but NF

This 2N in a 'Hot Auction' is never anything other than a limited 3-level rebid of the opened minor.

3. All the others:
  - a) (1N) P (2♦\*) P; (2♥) P (P) X; (P) 2N - we might still make game...
  - b) (1♠) P (2♠) X; (P) 2N
  - c) (2♣[11-16]) P (2M) X; (P) 2N

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### ***Actions after a 'Bad' 2N***

Opposite 2N the usual action is to bid 3♣ and await developments. 3♦ is natural, poor clubs and good diamonds, 3OM should be very strong and choice of games, 3NT or 4OM. Three-level-cue is no major, no stop.

When the 2N bidder did not have to bid, the 'Bad' 2NT separates forcing from NF bids at the 3-level. For example; (2♦\*) X (2♥) 2N; - Pass would be weak, 2N is competitive, 3m if F1.

### ***Other developments***

Note that a two-places-to-play 2N can conceal a bad hand in the highest ranking suit at the 3-level, for example; 1NT (2♠) X (P); 2N (P) 3♣ (P); 3♥. Opener is clearly not offering an alternative spot so this route to 3♥ is 'bad'. The corollary is that an immediate 3♥ is better within context.