

“Negative (“Sputnik”) Doubles”

When Partner opens one-of-a-suit and the would-be Responder’s RHO (Right-Hand Opponent) makes an overcall, his/her having done so thwarts the bid of a 4-card suit that the would-be Responder was planning to bid. Responding now requires five or more pieces, not four, under most circumstances, in addition to the prerequisite number of HCP’s. Responder would, therefore, be precluded from making his/her desired call because of either a lack of holding 5 or more pieces of the desired suit, too few HCP’s, or even both.

The **Negative Double** is a conventional bid which copes with this situation. A “double” by Responder at his/her first opportunity, opposite a one-of-a-suit opening bid by Partner, subsequent to an interference overcall by the would-be Responder’s RHO (Right-Hand Opponent), is a “Double” for Take-Out rather than a “Double” for penalties. A **Negative Double** exhibits 6 (+) HCP’s at the 1-level, 8 (+) at the 2-level and 11 (+) at higher levels. There is no upper limit to the strength of **Negative Doubles**. **Negative Doubles are not alertable!** When a **Negative Double** is employed, Opener must make every effort to respond based upon his/her strength and distribution, coupled with his/her perception of what suit or suits Responder is referencing by use of the **Negative Double**.

<u>(Example: 1)</u>	<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
<u>East Holds:</u>	1D	1S	Dbl.	
XXX				
AXXX				East’s “double” shows at least four Hearts and at least
XX				enough strength to have responded to Opener’s 1D bid had
QXXX				there been no interference. Responder hopes Opener will
				Be able to bid 2H. Here if instead, Opener re-bids 2C,
				Responder will “pass” as Responder also likes Clubs.

<u>(Example: 2)</u>	<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
<u>East Holds:</u>	1D	1S	Dbl.	
XXX				
KJXX				Absent a 2H call from Opener in this case, Responder is
KXXX				prepared to correct to 2D.
XX				

<u>(Example: 3)</u>	<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
<u>East Holds:</u>	1D	1S	Dbl.	
AQ				
KXXX				Here, Responder has a very strong hand but still requires
QXXXX				the use of the Negative Double in that the Overcaller has
AX				made it difficult for East to bid the hand naturally. Once
				East finds out whether or not the Opener has four Hearts,
				East plans to force at least to Game thereafter [4H or 3-NT).

A “*double*” by Responder is **not** negative if, (1) by Partnership agreement, the Opponent’s overcall is above the level of 3-Spades, or (2) the Opponent’s overcall is a *No-trump bid*, a *Michaels Cue-bid*, or a *Unusual 2-No-Trump Overcall*. Under these conditions a “*double*” by Responder is a “*Penalty Double*,” not a **Negative Double**.

Note: The use of an immediate “*double*” by Responder after an intervening overcall by the opposition as a **Negative** or **Take-Out Double** means that Responder cannot “*double*” the overcall for penalties. The fact, therefore, that the use of **Negative Doubles** may force the Responder to “*pass*” when otherwise he/she would have made a **Penalty Double** places a heavy obligation upon the Opening Bidder. As a result, **Opener must make every reasonable effort to keep the bidding open if his/her left-hand Opponent’s overcall is “passed” around to him/her, especially if he/she is short in the Overcaller’s suit.**

Exception: There exists one, and only one, bidding sequence, accepted by most Bridge Partnerships, wherein a Responder to Partner’s opening bid of **1C**, faced with an intervening overcall of **1D** by the would-be Responder’s right-hand Opponent (RHO), holds just one 4-card Major suit, but the absence of either of the “*fallback*” alternatives that make the use of a “**Negative Double**” possible, can respond with a 4-card new suit response. In this singular circumstance, most Partnerships have an agreement allowing the Responder, absent the alternatives of either support for Opener’s Club suit or absent a stopper in the Overcaller’s bid suit, to respond with a 4-card Major suit, notwithstanding the normal, customary 5-card suit requisite in the presence of the intervening overcall. (See Example 4)

(Example: 4)	<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
<u>East Holds:</u>	1C	1D	?????	
(a) AQXX				
KX				
XXXX				
AXX				
(b) KX				
AQXX				
XXXX				
AXX				

Here, Responder, wanting to make an acceptable response, normally required to have a 5-card or longer suit in the presence of the existing intervening overcall, absent support for Opener’s Club suit as well as a stopper in the Overcaller’s Diamond suit, is incapable, therefore, of making a “**Negative Double**,” absent either of these latter “*fallback*” holdings. Assuming Partnership agreement, however, he/she is allowed to make a response of **1S**, in (a), or **1H**, in (b), despite holding only a 4-card Major suit in each! To be incapable of doing so would leave the Responder without the ability to compete, thereby, potentially, disenfranchising Partner by the inability to show the presence of some added HCP values to the Partnership’s combined holdings.