

Developer Notes – Overcalls

Why Overcall?

Let's say your right hand opponent has opened the bidding with one of a suit. That does not mean the opponents have some divine right to bid their way to their best contract. You are quite entitled to throw a spanner in the works. One way of doing this is by bidding your suit. This is an overcall. There are three main reasons for overcalling:

1. To compete for the contract. You think that your side has a chance to play in a part score contract or maybe even a game.
2. To tell partner what to lead. If you end up defending, partner will know where your high cards are.
3. To make life difficult for the opponents. By taking away their bidding space, it may be harder for them to find their best contract.

What are the requirements to make an overcall?

Suppose your opponent bid one of a suit, for example 1♥

- To overcall at the one level (1♠), you need between 8 and 15 hcp.
- To overcall at the two level (2♣ or 2♦), you need between 10 and 15 hcp.
- Bidding 2♠ is a jump overcall and that is completely different. A topic for another time.
- With more than 15 hcp, you make a take-out double. Another topic for later.
- You also need a good suit...

Suit Quality

The suit you propose to bid:

- must contain at least five cards.
- must contain at least two honours.
- must include an ace or a king or a queen.
- must pass a suit quality test.

Suit Quality Test

- Add the **length of the suit** to the **number of honours** in the suit. The honours are ace, king, queen, jack and ten.
- To pass the test, the total should be no less than the number of tricks you propose to make. In other words:
- To overcall at the one level, the total should be 7 or more.
- To overcall at the two level, the total should be 8 or more.

Some examples:

A Q T 6 5	The suit quality is eight. You can overcall at both the one and two levels.
K J 6 5 4	The suit quality is seven. Overcall at the one level but not at the two level.
Q J 9 6 5 4	The suit quality is eight. You can overcall at both the one and two levels.
A 9 7 5 3	The suit quality is six. This is not enough for an overcall.
J T 9 5 4 3	Suit quality is eight but the suit does not contain an A, K or Q. Do not overcall.

Responding to an Overcall – The Traditional Way

The partner of the overcaller is usually known as the **advancer**.

Let's say partner made an overcall and the next player passed. Let's also say you have at least three cards in partner's suit. An overcall is weaker than an opening bid and responses are adjusted accordingly. Count hcp and total points in the usual way and then:



- With 0-6 hcp, you have a **very weak** hand:
 - If you have five card support, raise to the four level
 - Otherwise, pass
- With 8 to 11 total points, you have a **weak** hand. Raise overcaller's suit.
 - Overcaller may invite to game with 15 or more total points
- With 12 to 15 total points, you have an **invitational** hand. Jump in overcaller's suit.
 - Overcaller will bid game with 13 or more total points
- With 16 or more total points, you have a **strong** hand
 - * Bid game in overcaller's suit

Responding to an Overcall – The Modern Way

Let's say partner made an overcall and the next player passed. Let's also say you can support the suit. Count hcp and total points in the usual way and then:



- With 0 to 6 hcp, you have a **very weak** hand.
 - With 3 to 6 hcp and four trumps, raise to the three level.
 - With 3 to 6 hcp and five trumps, raise to the four level.
 - Otherwise, pass
- With 7 to 11 total points, you have a **weak** hand
 - Raise overcaller's suit
 - Overcaller may invite to game with 15 or more total points
- With 12 to 15 total points, you have an **invitational** hand
 - Bid the opponent's suit. This is known as a cue raise. Now overcaller will:
 - With 13 or more total points, bid game
 - With 11 or 12 total points, invite to game. Advancer will accept with 14 or 15 total points.
 - With less than 11 total points, rebid the suit
- With 16 or more total points, you have a **strong** hand
 - Jump in the opponent's suit. Now overcaller will:
 - With 10 or more total points, bid game
 - With less than 10 total points, rebid the suit

What if they bid some more?

If the opponents open the bidding and your partner overcalls and then the next player bids:

- Work out the bid you would have made if the opponent had not interfered
- If that bid is available, make it
- If that bid is not available, pass

What if Advancer does not have support for partner?

Advancer may be able to bid a new suit or no trumps. Count the high card points. With seven or less hcp, pass. Otherwise, try and bid something.

Bid a new suit

The suit should contain at least five cards.

- With 8 or more hcp, bid a new suit at the one level.
- With 10 or more hcp, bid a new suit at the two level (no jump).
- With 8 or 9 hcp and no suit you can bid at the one level, pass unless you can bid no trumps...

When you bid a new suit, your overcaller should bid again.

Bid No Trumps

To bid No Trumps, you must have a stopper in the opponent's suit.

If you know their suit contains five cards or more, you need a double-stopper. Examples of double-stoppers are: AQ, AJT, KQT, KJ32, QJ92 or better. With a double-stopper, you are confident you can win two tricks in the suit if that is the opening lead.

If you know their suit may be only four cards, a single-stopper is sufficient. Examples of single stoppers are: K2, QT2, JT32 or better. With a single-stopper, you are confident you can win one trick in the suit if that is the opening lead.

If partner overcalled at the one level and you have the requisite stopper:

- With 8 to 12 hcp, bid 1NT
- With 13 to 15 hcp, bid 2NT
- With 16 or more hcp, bid 3NT

If partner overcalled at the two level and you have the requisite stopper:

- With 11 to 13 hcp, bid 2NT
- With 14 or more hcp, bid 3NT

Deal 1/5/9

	North	
	♠ Q 4 ♥ K 8 7 4 2 ♦ A 3 ♣ K T 9 4	
West		East
♠ K T 5 3 ♥ A T 6 ♦ K T 9 7 ♣ 7 5		♠ A J 9 7 2 ♥ 9 3 ♦ 8 4 ♣ A Q J 2
	South	
	♠ 8 6 ♥ Q J 5 ♦ Q J 6 5 2 ♣ 8 6 3	

West	North	East	South
	1♥	1♠ ⁽¹⁾	2♥
3♠ ⁽²⁾	Pass	4♠ ⁽¹⁾	All Pass

- 12 hcp. Suit quality is 7.
- 10 hcp, 1 shortage point and 2 points for the extra heart makes 13 total points.
- Partner has 12-15. I have 12 hcp plus 2 shortage point. That's enough for game.

South will probably lead partner's suit and start with the ♥Q. Win with the ace. Play two rounds of trumps; first the ace and then the king. With north known to have most of the points, take the club finesse: low club to the queen. When the queen wins, there are no more problems. Lose two diamonds and a heart.

Deal 2/6/10

	North	
	♠ K T 5 4 ♥ A Q 2 ♦ K T 8 7 ♣ 9 5	
West		East
♠ J 9 8 2 ♥ 9 6 ♦ Q J 6 4 ♣ T 8 2		♠ A 6 3 ♥ K J T 5 4 ♦ 9 5 ♣ A 6 4
	South	
	♠ Q 7 ♥ 8 7 3 ♦ A 3 2 ♣ K Q J 7 3	

West	North	East	South
		1♥	2♣ ⁽¹⁾
Pass	2NT ⁽²⁾	Pass	Pass ⁽³⁾
Pass			

- 12 hcp. Suit quality is 8.
- No support for clubs, 12 hcp and a double-stopper in hearts.
- With partner's 11-13, 12 hcp is unlikely to be enough for game.

The systemic lead is the ♥J. Declarer will start work on clubs immediately. East will win with the ace and play another heart but to no avail. That double-stopper was really needed! Declarer will make four clubs tricks. Together with two diamonds and two hearts, there are eight tricks in all. There should be no more because east can make three hearts and the two aces.

Deal 3/7/11

	North	
	♠ 6 2 ♥ A 9 7 ♦ A 9 8 6 5 ♣ 9 6 2	
West		East
♠ A Q 9 7 4 ♥ 8 4 ♦ K Q 7 2 ♣ K 8		♠ J T 5 3 ♥ T 5 3 ♦ T ♣ Q T 5 4 3
	South	
	♠ K 8 ♥ K Q J 6 2 ♦ J 4 3 ♣ A J 7	

West North East South

1♠⁽¹⁾ 2♥⁽²⁾ 3♠⁽³⁾ Pass⁽⁴⁾

Pass Pass

- 14 hcp. Suit quality is 7.
- 8 hcp plus 1 shortage point.
- Weak, pre-emptive bid.
- With 15 hcp plus 1 shortage point and with the knowledge that east is weak, some souths may try a hopeful 4♥. As long as east-west defend carefully, 4♥ should not make.

On this occasion, east is lucky to find partner with a good hand. Declarer's first action should be to play diamonds. Having regained the lead, declarer can ruff a diamond in dummy and take the spade finesse. When that succeeds, declarer should wind up with nine tricks.

Deal 4/8/12

	North	
	♠ A Q 8 5 ♥ 9 5 3 2 ♦ 6 ♣ K J 9 7	
West		East
♠ T 4 ♥ K Q 6 ♦ T 7 4 ♣ T 6 5 3 2		♠ 7 2 ♥ A J 8 4 ♦ A K J 5 3 ♣ Q 4
	South	
	♠ K J 9 6 3 ♥ T 7 ♦ Q 9 8 2 ♣ A 8	

West North East South

Pass Pass 1♦ 1♠⁽¹⁾

Pass 2♦⁽²⁾ Pass⁽³⁾ 3♠⁽⁴⁾

Pass 4♠⁽⁵⁾ All Pass

- 10 hcp. Suit quality is 7.
- 15 total points now south has bid spades.
- East has a good hand. Some players would bid 2♦ or 2♥ but that won't change south's next bid.
- Invitational with 12 total points.
- North is maximum.

No doubt, west will lead a diamond, partner's suit. The defence can start off by winning a diamond and two hearts but that is where their fun ends. Declarer wins the next trick in hand and ruffs a diamond. Back to the ♠K and ruff another diamond. Back to the ♣A and ruff another diamond. Cash the ♣K, ruff a club in hand and draw trumps. Five spade tricks, three ruffs and two club tricks. That singleton diamond was worth its weight in gold!

Deal 13

	North	
	♠ A K T 6 2 ♥ Q 7 4 ♦ 6 4 ♣ K 5 2	
West		East
♠ 9 ♥ K 9 6 2 ♦ Q T 9 2 ♣ A Q J 9		♠ 8 7 5 4 ♥ A J T 5 3 ♦ A J 7 ♣ 8
	South	
	♠ Q J 3 ♥ 8 ♦ K 8 5 3 ♣ T 7 6 4 3	

West	North	East	South
	1♠	2♥ ⁽¹⁾	2♠
3♠ ⁽²⁾	Pass	4♥ ⁽³⁾	All Pass

- 10 hcp. Suit quality is 8.
- This is the bid that would have been made if south had not bid. 16 or more total points.
- Very happy to be in game with a combined 28 points.

South starts with a spade and then switches to a club. Declarer wins and takes two rounds of trumps; the ace first and then the king. The queen does not fall this time. Next, the diamond finesse. That loses too. Still, all is not lost. Declarer wins the return and cashes the ♣A. Next, the ♣Q. If north plays the king, declarer ruffs in dummy and the jack is a winner. Otherwise, declarer discards a spade from hand. Either way, it is ten tricks.

Deal 14

	North	
	♠ J 9 5 ♥ 6 4 ♦ A Q J 8 5 ♣ K Q 6	
West		East
♠ K Q 8 3 ♥ K J 9 8 2 ♦ K T 7 ♣ 7		♠ T 6 ♥ T 7 5 3 ♦ 9 4 ♣ A 8 6 4 2
	South	
	♠ A 7 4 2 ♥ A Q ♦ 6 3 2 ♣ J T 9 3	

West	North	East	South
		Pass	Pass ⁽¹⁾
1♥	2♦ ⁽²⁾	2♥ ⁽³⁾	2NT ⁽⁴⁾
Pass ⁽⁵⁾	3NT ⁽⁶⁾	All Pass	

- 11 hcp and no five card suit.
- 13 hcp. Suit quality is 8.
- 4 hcp and 2 shortage points.
- 11 to 13 hcp. Double stopper in hearts. Balanced.
- 14 total points. Not enough to bid again.
- 13 hcp, Even if partner has only 11 hcp, the club suit may see us home.

West's obvious lead is ♥8. Fourth highest of longest and strongest. South wins and starts on clubs. When east takes the ♣A, declarer knows that west must have the ♦K. After all, west opened the bidding. Declarer wins the heart return and confidently, finesses in diamond. When the finesse succeeds, back to hand with the ♠A and repeat the finesse. That should wrap up ten tricks.

Deal 15

	North	
	♠ 8 2 ♥ T 8 5 ♦ Q J 7 5 2 ♣ J 6 4	
West		East
♠ K J T 7 3 ♥ A 6 3 ♦ 9 8 3 ♣ K 7		♠ Q 9 6 5 ♥ 9 4 ♦ A 6 ♣ A Q 8 5 2
	South	
	♠ A 4 ♥ K Q J 7 2 ♦ K T 4 ♣ T 9 3	

West	North	East	South
			1♥
1♠ ⁽¹⁾	Pass	3♥ ⁽²⁾	Pass
4♠ ⁽³⁾	Pass	Pass	Pass

- 11 hcp. Suit quality is 8.
- 12 hcp plus 2 shortage points plus 2 points for extra spade makes 16 total points
- 12 total points. More than enough to accept the invitation

Naturally, north leads a heart, partner's suit. Declarer wins and starts work on the trumps. South will take the ace and cash a heart trick. There is no more for the defence. The clubs break kindly and there are eleven tricks for the taking.

Deal 16

	North	
	♠ K Q J 8 3 ♥ 8 7 ♦ J T 8 7 ♣ K 5	
West		East
♠ 6 4 ♥ A K Q 5 2 ♦ K 4 3 ♣ J T 2		♠ A 2 ♥ 9 3 ♦ A Q 6 5 2 ♣ 9 8 6 4
	South	
	♠ T 9 7 5 ♥ J T 6 4 ♦ 7 ♣ A Q 7 3	

West	North	East	South
1♥	1♠ ⁽¹⁾	2♦ ⁽²⁾	2♥ ⁽³⁾
3♦ ⁽⁴⁾	3♠ ⁽⁵⁾	Pass ⁽⁶⁾	Pass ⁽⁷⁾
		Pass	

- 10 hcp. Suit quality is 8.
- A five card suit and 10 hcp.
- 7 hcp + 3 shortage points + 3 for the extra spade makes 13 total points.
- Three card support.
- 12 total points. Invite to game.
- Some players may bid 4♦.
- Not quite enough to accept the invitation.

If east bid 4♦, only 8 tricks will be made. On the other hand, the 4♦ may push north-south into game which should also go down.

East will start with a heart and east will win the ace and follow up with king and queen. Declarer must be sure to ruff the third heart high. Declarer then works on trumps. East will score the ace and at some stage, will win a diamond. That's it for the defence. Declarer makes the nine tricks needed.