

Simple OverCalls

By now you might be thinking, is the only time I get to Bid is when I deal or my Partner deals and Opens? The answer is No, an emphatic **NO!**

There is only one Opening Bid and the Partner of the Opener is called the Responder. If either opponent of the Opener does bid the first to do so is called the Overcaller and his partner is termed the Advancer. So each bidder at the table has a unique name in a given bidding sequence.

The general guideline regarding OverCalling is: Whenever you have a holding that suggests you should, **YOU SHOULD OverCall**. Take every opportunity to describe your hand and interfere with the opponents. Without interference opponents have a better than 75% chance of finding their best contract.

To OverCall you should **always** show a decent 5-Card suit. A decent suit means that the suit probably has at least two (2) Honors. At the 1-level you can OverCall with as little as 7-8 HCP. If you OverCall at the 2-level you are showing at least 10 PP. With 7 HCP you should have two quick tricks or a 6-card suit.¹

There are several advantages to OverCalling; it is these advantages that recommend OverCalling at every opportunity:

- a) It forces opponents to bid higher, perhaps completely interfering with their bids.
 - b) It suggests an opening lead to Partner if you end up on defense
 - c) It suggests a long, good suit to Partner (helps in counting the hand)
 - d) The opener may only have a minimum hand but the opponents may have a half or less of the points.
 - e) It uses up bidding space and can take bidding options away from Opponents.
- Note: OverCalls **never** promise or deny Opening HCP.

In such cases the earlier you get a bid in the better chance you have of winning the contract or enticing the opponent's to a higher, less comfortable level. All of this notwithstanding, you should consider other factors: (a) Whose Vulnerable? (b) Matchpoints or IMPS? (c) Is it a Safe suit?

Let's suppose Opponents open with 1♣ and you are next to bid and are holding: ♠KQJ84 ♥QT2 ♦J95 ♣T6. You should Bid (OverCall) 1♠. What does your bid do? It tells your partner you have 5 decent ♠'s. In addition, the Opener's Partner, if only able to respond at the 1-level, could be shut out of the bidding. You have removed a piece of data from opponents information exchange. Let's say you have the following hand ♠QT2 ♥KQJ4 ♦J954 ♣Q3 and LHO Opens the bidding with 1♣. You do not have a 5-Card suit to Overcall, but you have 11 HCP (maybe just 1 less HCP than the Opener); You can't Pass!! Bid 1♦, in some ways it is better than either 1♥ or 1♠. When you understand Negative Doubles you'll see why. For now, put on your Nikes and just do it.

What if you are holding ♠T2 ♥KQJ74 ♦J95 ♣AT6 and your RHO opens with 1♠? For all the same reasons you should bid 2♥. You have the HCP to bid at the 2-level and you have a 5-Card suit. Do it!

What if you were holding this same hand and the bidding starts with your LHO: 1♠ – P – P – ? Should you still OverCall? Definitely YES! What if Partner had been Passing because he had 11 HCP but didn't have a 5-Card suit; she might even have 3♥'s for you. So your partnership has 22 HCP and an 8-Card fit. How would you feel if you had passed? Opponents get a positive score (making 1♠ yields 80 points) and you miss giving them a negative score (you making 2♥ gives them -110) or perhaps only a smaller positive (50 for setting you 1 trick). Remember the game is about getting the best score – usually achieved through bidding and making your contract; but can also be gained through going down.

Rather than Overcalls we normally use the TakeOut Double (TOD) to show an Opening hand or better.

¹ We use the suit quality test to determine whether to overcall or not.

However there are times when we have such a hand and cannot Overcall. Example you are holding: ♠A2 ♥KJ74 ♦A95 ♣JT62 or ♠AKQ62 ♥K974 ♦A95 ♣2 when LHO Opens the bidding with 1♥. A TOD would be wrong – a lie. In the 1st hand 2♣ is an understatement and for hand 2 1♠ suggests a 5-Card suit but Overcaller has no legitimate 2nd bid. The ubiquitous Double to the rescue. It takes two rounds of bidding to show either of these hands and the order in which we exercise the X shows the size of the hand. For hand 1 the bidding should go 1♥ – 2♣ – ? – P; P – ~~X~~ Bidding a suit first followed by a X shows a 12/13-15 HCP hand. For Hand 2 the bidding would go 1♥ – X – 2♣ – P; P – 2♣ Doubling first followed by a X shows a 16+ HCP hand. It has a special name “Double and Originate”.

How Should I respond... rather advance if my Partner OverCalls?

Remember your Partner may only have 7-8 HCP and is not asking you the same question that an Opening bidder is asking. Advancing an OverCall is not a complicated subject but it is detailed so for now we will KISS² it for you. How you respond depends on how many HCP you have and how high your side can afford to take the bidding. Your **VERY** first consideration should be: “Can I support my Partners OverCalled suit?” If you can then you should initially treat your Partner's OverCall the same as if it was an Opening bid. Example your Partner Overcalls 1♠ after opponents Opens: 1♦ – 1♠ – ? – ?. You hold ♠T92 ♥Q743 ♦J95 ♣AT6. Regardless of what 2-level response (or even a Pass) LHO interposes you should show support for Partner's ♠'s by bidding 2♣. You know there is an 8-Card fit! What you don't know is whether Partner has 8 or 18 HCP. If you don't show your support your Partnership loses information. Remember bidding is all about information exchange. Your bid tells Partner you have a minimum of 6 HCP (the amount needed to respond [1♠ – P – 2♣] if he had been the Opener. This way if he has more than 8 HCP he can make a better decision if the Opponents become competitive. (And you have forced them to become competitive if they want the bid) In addition it gives Partner a better estimated Count of ♠'s both for bidding and for defensive play. These are all positive reasons you should advance your Partner's OverCall when you can. Can you change suits? Remember Partner is in a different status from the Opener – An Opener has no clue how many points the Opponents hold – here everyone knows one opponent (the Opener) has at least 12 HCP. Thus, Partner is more likely to be asking if you can support his suit rather than for a description of your hand. But if you can't support (a) if you have 2-Card support you know your side has 7-Cards in the suit which isn't that bad at the 2-level. With less than 2-Card support you can consider a level NT if you have a stopper in the Opponents suit. With neither Pass is hardly ever wrong. To bid another suit you should have some confidence that your suit is longer and/or stronger than Partners.

Remember: Opening and OverCalling are not the same thing. A hand with Opening point count is always Opened. That same hand might not even come close to qualifying for an OverCall. AND OverCalls always promises a 5-card suit.

“More points are lost at the bridge table through bad or pointless overcalls than any other way.” – Helen Sobel Smith