

Balancing, Or Re-Opening the Bidding

When the opposition have opened the bidding, your partner has passed and the next person passes too, you're in what's often called the "pass-out" or "balancing" seat. This means if you pass, the bidding is over.

Often, you and your partner will have enough points between you for a part-score or even game. Partner may have an opening hand but be unable to bid because:

- a) Their hand is the wrong shape for a double
- b) They have no good suit for an overcall
- c) They are strong in the opponent's suit but unable to double or bid NTs.

There are other possibilities, of course - a hidden Ace; can't add up; fell asleep, for example - we've all done that.

You can be sure the opener's partner has a weak hand – and possibly a misfit as well.

There are various actions you can take in the pass-out seat to get your side into the bidding.

- a) **Overcall at the 1-level:** The rules are relaxed in the pass-out seat – your suit and hand can be weaker than in 2nd seat. A strong 4-card suit will do at a pinch, and you may have as few as 7-8 HCP if not vulnerable.
- b) **Overcall at the 2-level:** You should have a 5-card suit and 9+ HCP.
- c) **Bid 1NT:** Your hand may have only 9-12 HCP but should be balanced with at least one stopper in the bid suit.
- d) **Pre-empt:** With a long, fairly strong suit, bid it even if you would not have done in 2nd seat. After partner has passed, you can pre-empt without risking damage to your own side's bidding.
- e) **Double:** Used to re-open the bidding when the above actions are not possible. You may have only 10 HCP, or 9 with good shape (eg void in their suit). This is known as a "balancing double" - a special kind of takeout double. Your partner should be aware that your hand may be weaker than if you doubled directly after the opening bid.

Warning!

If the opening bid is 1NT, don't bend the rules because you're in the pass-out seat. Bid only if you would have bid in 2nd seat. Usually this calls for a good 6-card suit and an opening hand, or a bit less if not vulnerable.

Similarly, if your partner passes a 1-level suit opening, followed by a 1NT response, be wary. This indicates the opposition have at least half the HCP and your partner may have very little.