

Mini Lesson 6: Negative Doubles

Definition: A **negative double** is made by responder after partner opens and a right-hand opponent overcalls *on the first round of bidding*. It is used to show support for an unbid major, or both unbid minors (if both majors have been bid), as well as enough strength to compete. Typically, it is used when you would have bid, but the overcall took your bid away. Either you don't have the length or the strength to bid directly because of the overcall.

The most common use of a negative double is when you want to respond one of a major but because of the overcall, you can't. For example, your partner bids 1♦ and your RH opponent overcalls 1♠. You would like to bid hearts, but to bid two hearts would imply 10+ points and 5+ hearts. If you are missing one of those two requirements, you have a problem describing your hand. But using a negative double here says: I have 6+ HC pts and at least a 4-card major. It is saying in essence, "I would have bid at the one level, but I can't bid two."

For instance, your partner opens 1♦ and the next person bids 1♠. You hold:

♠9 7 2 ♥K Q 6 5 ♦7 5 ♣Q J 7 4 (four hearts, 8 pts)
♠T 7 2 ♥K J 8 6 5 ♦8 5 ♣K 8 3 (five hearts, but not 10+pts)
♠8 7 ♥K Q 8 2 ♦6 4 2 ♣A Q 7 4 (11 pts, but only 4 hearts)

With these hands, you would have responded 1♥ if the right-hand opponent had passed, but the 1♠ overcall took that bid away. The negative double shows the 4+ card heart suit and at least six high card points – enough to compete to the two-level opposite partners' opening bid. You usually should have support for the unbid minor as well.

A handy nuance: If opponent overcalls 1♥, many partnerships agree to *double* with a 4-card spade suit, and *bid* 1♠ with a 5+ card suit.

♠K 9 7 2 ♥Q 6 5 ♦7 5 ♣Q J 7 4 (double to show your 4-card spade suit)
♠K 9 7 4 2 ♥Q 6 5 ♦7 5 ♣Q J 7 (bid 1♠ to show your 5-card spade suit)

The overcall enabled us to give our partner more information!

If both majors have been bid (e.g. 1♥, 1♠), a double shows both minors.

♠9 7 2 ♥6 5 ♦K 9 7 5 ♣A J 7 5 (double to show your 4/4 minors)

Jim and I played for years with these understandings of Negative Double. You and your partner could agree to the above understandings, stop here, and get 90% of the benefit of playing Negative Doubles.

Higher Level Negative Doubles. Standard American defines negative doubles to apply through 2♠, but most pairs today have it apply higher (through 3♠ or 4♥). Make an agreement with your partner & mark your card.

If you decide to use Negative Doubles at a level higher than 1 or 2 (due to 2 or 3 level overcalls of partner's opening bid), you'll need more points. Before making a higher-level Negative

Double, think about what options partner will have for a rebid. If opener must bid at the 3 level, you should have 10+ points, and 12+ points if partner has to bid at the 4 level.

If the bidding is 1♣, 3♦ (preemptive), you can double with hands such as:

♠ A J 7 2 ♥ K Q 6 5 ♦ 9 ♣ T 9 7 5

♠ A T 7 4 ♥ Q 6 5 3 ♦ K 2 ♣ Q 7 4

Or if the bidding is 1♥, 3♦ (preemptive), you can double with a hand such as:

♠ Q J 9 8 ♥ K 5 ♦ T 9 7 ♣ A 9 7 5

Rebids by Opener

With 4+ cards in partner's implied major suit, opener can bid it at the cheapest level with a minimum hand (12-15 points). Don't just automatically bid the implied major one level up. With 4 cards in partner's shown suit and a medium hand (15-18), jump a level. With a maximal hand (18+), bid game.

Lacking 4 cards in partner's implied major, opener can do one of the following:

- Rebid original 5-card (preferably at least 6-card) suit.
- Bid notrump with a stopper in the enemy suit.
- Bid a new suit naturally (a reverse still shows a strong hand).
- Cue-bid the enemy suit with a strong balanced hand that lacks a stopper in that suit.
- Bid partner's shown suit with only 3 cards (last resort).

Other Considerations

- *What is the difference between a Take Out Double and a Negative Double? A negative double is when partner opens and you as responder doubles an opponent's overcall. A take-out double is when your partner *doubles* an opponent's bid, instead of overcalling.*
- A negative double denies 3 card support of partner's opening bid if it is a major. As usual, your first move would be to support your partner's major if you have 3+.
- Negative doubles are not alerted.
- *There is no upper limit on points for a responder's negative double.*

Test Your Negative Doubles

You are opener. You and partner use negative doubles. What does partner's bid tell you?

1. 1♣ 1♦ Double
2. 1♦ 2♣ Double
3. 1♥ 2♦ Double
4. 1♥ 1♠ Double
5. 1♠ 2♦ 2♥

You open this hand, partner responds with a negative double. What is your next bid?

6. ♠AQ93 ♥K52 ♦K10764 ♣10
1♦ 1♥ Double *Your Bid?*
7. ♠KQ76 ♥J ♦AKQ74 ♣1082
1♦ 1♥ Double *Your Bid?*
8. ♠AKQ7 ♥K5 ♦Q107532 ♣A
1♦ 1♥ Double *Your Bid?*
9. ♠KJ3 ♥QJ6 ♦A10 ♣K8642
1♣ 1♠ Double *Your Bid?*
10. ♠J7 ♥7542 ♦AKQ8 ♣AKQ
1♦ 1♥ Double *Your Bid?*