

Trap Pass – After an opening bid by RHO, holding 8+ to 16 hcp you have options. You can overcall, double or pass.

Overcall – With a good suit, you can make a direct seat bid as an overcall showing values and a good suit, and asking partner if he has a fit.

Example 1: With 8+ hcp and a good 5-card suit you can make a 1-level overcall. Holding ♠KJ1095 ♥A5 ♦764 ♣873 you would overcall any 1-level bid 1♠. **You are protected - nobody plays doubles of 1-level bids for penalty!**

Example 2: With about an opening hand 11+ hcp and a good 5-card suit you can make a 2-level overcall. Holding ♠106 ♥AQJ96 ♦A1042 ♣Q3 you would overcall 1♠ with 2♥ ... if you are courageous you would make the same bid without the ♣Q ... if you are reckless you would make the same bid without the ♥Q ... if you are dangerous you would make the same with without either Q.

Without a good suit **and** values you would not make an overcall.

Example 3: Holding ♠652 ♥54 ♦A109 ♣AQ1072 you would not overcall 1♠ with 2♣. This hand just does not have the values to overcall and with 3 spades the shape is wrong.

Example 4: Holding ♠74 ♥KQ752 ♦AJ7 ♣Q32 with both sides vulnerable you would not overcall 1♠ with 2♥. Points might justify an overcall and they do not necessarily provide playing strength.

Takeout Double – A direct seat double is for takeout normally showing an opening hand, shortness in the opening bid suit (at most a doubleton) and 3-card support for all unbid suits (at least Jxx).

Example 5: Holding ♠K985 ♥KQ73 ♦74 ♣A107 you would make a Takeout Double of 1♦.

Example 6: Holding ♠72 ♥AQJ10 ♦A54 ♣K873 you would **not** make a Takeout Double of 1♦.

The Overcall is a bid showing values and a good suit, and is asking partner if he has a fit. A Takeout Double, in contrast, is a bid showing values and a fit for all unbid suits, asking partner to name a suit.

Trap Pass – When you have values and would like to jump into the bidding, with substantial length and strength in the opponent's suit, you just have to pass and trust in your partner, if s/he has values, to Balance and keep the bidding open.

When you pass a lot of good things can happen – the opponents can over bid their hand, the opponents may not be able to find a fit, or partner can balance-in and give you an opportunity; but when you get into the bidding almost nothing good is going to happen.

Example 7: Holding ♠KJ93 ♥K54 ♦KQ3 ♣1065 Pass an opening bid of 1♠.

Example 8: Holding ♠K3 ♥A8432 ♦Q107 ♣Q95 Pass an opening bid of 1♥.

Example 9: Holding ♠AQ ♥KJ109 ♦KJ3 ♣QJx bid 1Nt over an opening bid of 1♠.

How does partner know if your bid is a Trap Pass or just a Pass? This is an easy answer ... subsequent bidding. If you Pass a Double for Penalty or make a free bid (a not forcing bid) you have a good hand and could not bid on the first opportunity.

“If you don’t have the shape for an overcall (at least five good cards in a suit), and you don’t have the shape (or points) for a takeout double. **PASS** ... Good players love it when their opponents make silly wrong shape bids against them. It not only tells them how to play the hand, but gives them the option of punishing the miscreant for his undisciplined ways.” Edith McMullin [see EB1 p.41]

Important: When you are making a Trap Pass it is critical that you pass in tempo. You must not look pregnant: like you are ready to deliver; you must not look like Zorro: like you are ready to carve a blazing Z across the foreheads of your opponents; you must not look like a hunter setting a steel-jawed trap to crush your opponents; simply, you must not hesitate and then Pass.

You can take all the time you want to think about a bid if you are going to bid. But, if you are going to Pass, then you must Pass in tempo like you are bored with this auction. Under your breath count to 7 and Pass smoothly.

When you hesitate and Pass you are:

- 1) Alerting the opponents that you have a good hand and likely length and strength in the opener’s suit. You are telling them how to bid and play the hand.
- 2) Giving partner information he is not entitled too and good opponents will call the director to protect themselves.

See Mike Lawrence, The Complete Book on Balancing in Contract Bridge, (Louisville, KY: Devyn Press, Inc. ISBN 0-939460-13-0) The Penalty Double p.73.

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