ADVANCES OF SIMPLE OVERCALLS

The technical term for responding to an overcall is "advancing," and overcaller's partner is called the "advancer." The overcaller may also be called the “intervenor.”

-- A raise should show the full limit of your hand. Do not raise 1♠ to 2♠ and then later go to 3♠ after being pushed. That is just asking for a double and lets the opponents communicate too easily. Either you are good enough for 3♠, or you are not--make the decision, make the call, and stick with it. If you go down after bidding 3♠ you will often find that the hand belonged to the opponents anyway. Your jump will have stolen the hand and averted a double. What if you could have bought the hand for 2♠? Against good players you will find that the reason is that they are weak and partner is strong. You will therefore make 3♠, so you might as well bid it immediately (in case you can't make it!).

One advantage of bidding the limit of your hand is that partner will know very closely the combined partnership assets. If you underbid good hands he will not be in as good a position for making decisions. Or do you make all the decisions?

With ♠K32 ♥A8 ♦7653 ♣J642 raise partner's 1♠ overcall of a 1♥ opening to 2♠ at any vulnerability, even if RHO passes. With ♠Q9876 ♥8 ♦K953 ♣J64 raise a 1♠ overcall to 3♠. Bids like these make life difficult for the opponents. Stronger hands must usually cue bid before raising.

Vulnerability doesn't have much effect on raises to the two and three level, despite the fact that overcaller should have a better minimum overcall when vulnerable. In effect, the raise says, "I think we can make this" when vulnerable, and "We probably won't go down more than one," when not vulnerable. The result is that vulnerable and non-vulnerable raises require about the same strength. Raises to game, however, or cue bid plus a raise (urging game), require more strength when not vulnerable. If the hand may belong to the opponents jump raises to games may be deliberate overbids justified by distributional values. Such bids are possibly speculative, and therefore partner’s double of an opposing bid merely shows “cards” and is not a warning to stop bidding. Moreover, a pass by partner is not forcing.

Be conservative in raising when you have secondary strength in the opposing suit(s). You may be going down when they have nothing their way. Those secondary cards in the opposing suit(s) figure to be more useful for defense than for offense.

-- A cue bid advance of an overcall when third seat passes or doubles negatively is a probing cue bid, forcing to a limit situation. See section 10-12, Probing Cue Bids; and section 10-7, Cue Bid Responses to Overcalls, which also discusses the meaning of a cue bid when third seat bids 1NT, raises opener, or bids a new suit, and the meaning of a jump cue bid.

-- A 1NT advance varies with vulnerability. Be quicker to bid 1NT opposite a vulnerable overcall, because partner is supposed to have a good hand. It is not bid as a rescue with a poor hand--1NT shows encouraging strength, so pass if you don't have a fairly good hand, even with a singleton in partner's suit.

-- A 2NT advance strongly implies a double stopper in the enemy suit, or one stopper plus a high card in partner's suit. The overcaller can count on this when deciding whether to bid 3NT or not. A pass to 2NT is rare, since the overcaller will usually rebid his suit, or bid a second suit, with a hand that is unsuitable for notrump. The 2NT bid is not forcing, however; the overcaller can pass with a five-card suit and a marginal overcall. The Stoplight Convention (section 4-12) applies when the 2NT bid is a jump.

-- Transfer advances (bidding one suit to show another) are an optional convention that is discussed in section 11-1.

-- A non-jump new suit advance in a non-transfer situation is not forcing. You can do it with a weak hand and a long major suit if you think your suit is a better spot than partner's. Do not bid a minor over partner's major with a bad hand, however. The risk has little to gain, for you may not be improving the contract and you are one level higher. Such a takeout is deemed "constructive," i.e., it does not discourage additional bidding.

The minor suit takeout has a slightly different flavor when made over a bid by third seat:

South	West	North	East
1♠	2♥	2♠	3♣/3♦

East might have passed 2♥ if North had passed. In this situation the takeout may not be very constructive. East wants to compete, but can hardly raise hearts with something like ♥32. He therefore suggests an alternative trump suit, which means his suit must be extremely strong if only five cards long.

-- A single jump in a new suit by an **unpassed hand** shows a strong suit, usually at least six-long. A jump in a minor tends to show a completely solid suit.

-- A single jump in a new suit by a **passed hand** is a “fit jump.” It shows appropriate values for a raise of the overcall suit, plus a good holding in the jump suit. The bid can help partner evaluate defensive and offensive potential, and may enable him to make a killing lead against an opposing contract.

If the fit jump is in a major and the overcall was in a minor, it should be exactly five cards long and need be headed only by the ace or king. All other fit jumps may have fewer cards in the suit, which must be headed by the ace or king plus another honor.

South	West	North	East
-	-	-	Pass
1♦	2♣	Pass	3♥/3♠ - fit jump, five-card suit

East has values for a raise to 4♣. West can raise these bids with three-card support, since East must have five. These advances are not quite forcing.

Do not use fit jumps in a six-card major suit. Either transfer to the suit (see section 11-1, Transfer Advances) or bid the suit minimally. A cue bid is always available if the hand is strong.

-- A double (or higher) jump in a new suit is natural and preemptive, not a splinter bid. Splinter bids are not used in advancing an overcall, except for a double jump to show a void in a suit that opponents have bid twice (rebid or raise). If the opposing suit has been bid only once, a jump takeout in that suit is natural.

After a Negative Double by Third Seat

-- A redouble shows a strong hand not suited for any other call.

-- Raises to any level are preemptive.

-- A bid in a suit explicitly indicated by a negative doubler is natural, non-forcing, not a cue bid.

-- A 1NT advance is natural

-- A jump to 2NT is artificial, showing a good raise that includes at least two defensive tricks. This is analogous to the artificial jump to 2NT over a takeout double.

-- A jump to 3NT is natural, implying a great fit in partner's suit and a distributional hand that calls for denying bidding space to the opponents.

-- After passing or redoubling over a negative double, a subsequent double at the two level is generally for penalties, not takeout:

South	West	North	East
1♣	1♠	Dbl	Pass/Rdbl
2♥	Pass	Pass	Dbl - business double

If South had rebid clubs instead of bidding 2♥, the reopening double would have been for takeout:

South	West	North	East
1♣	1♠	Dbl	Pass/Rdbl
2♣	Pass	Pass	Dbl - for takeout (2=4=4=3?)

-- This is one of the very few cases when a double is for takeout even though partner has previously acted.

-- Other bids have the same meaning as over a pass.

After a Business Double by Third Seat

-- A direct redouble by fourth seat is not "S. O. S." It says, "Don't run! I have a strong hand!" The redouble may enable overcaller to double a runout by opener, who may have psyched an opening bid.

-- New suit bids are "rescues," supposedly saving partner (who will not be happy if the rescue makes things worse, especially if he could make his bid).

-- A bid of opener's suit is also natural, wanting to play there.

-- A raise is so illogical that we give it an artificial meaning: "Pick another suit." The raiser might have 6-6 in the two unbid suits.

-- Jump takeouts are preemptive.

-- A notrump bid is natural. When too weak for the artificial raise (showing the two unbid suits), which increases the level of bidding, bid notrump if that will keep the bidding lower. When this gets doubled by opener, redouble for takeout:

South	West	North	East
1♣	1♠	Dbl	1NT
Dbl	Pass	Pass	Rdbl - diamonds & hearts

If the notrump bid gets doubled by third hand, North in this case, a redouble is to play, so just bid the lower ranking unbid suit, asking for a preference between the unbid suits:

South	West	North	East
1♥	1♠	Dbl	1NT
Pass	Pass	Dbl	Rdbl - to play
			2♣ - clubs and diamonds

After a Raise by Third Seat

When third seat raises opener's bid, the principles of Advancive Doubles (section 9-2) apply. A cue bid shows a strong raise if the overcall was in a major suit, as described in section 10-7, Cue Bid Responses to Overcalls. Since the cue bid is dedicated to that purpose, jumps in a new suit have to be played as forcing:

South	West	North	East
1♣	1♥	2♣	Dbl - spades/diamonds
			3♦/3♠ - natural (UPH) or fit jump (PH)
			3♥ - good heart raise
			3♣ - stronger heart raise

The double is an Advancive Double, showing the two unbid suits. When the overcall is in a minor suit, the cue bid of a raised suit merely asks for a stopper in the opposing suit.

After a New Suit by Third Seat

When third seat bids a new suit over partner's overcall, Advancer has a choice of two suits for a cue bid. See section 10-7, Cue Bid Responses to Overcalls. Also see section 9-2, Advancive Doubles. A jump in the fourth suit is a fit jump, described above. With a real suit advancer can either bid it minimally, show it with an adancive double, or (with a powerhouse) cue bid in responder’s suit befor showing if (forcing). Bidding the fourth suit minimally implies no tolerance for overcaller’s suit.

A bid of opener’s suit is natural and non-forcing. Jump cue bids in either of the opposing suits are natural, non-forcing. Players do psych, do open short/weak minors, and do respond with very weak four-card suits.

After a 1NT Bid by Third Seat

When third seat responds with a free bid of 1NT, any action by Advancer denies the ability to double 1NT. With 2NT available as a cue bid (with a good but distributional hand unsuitable for a double or other action), a bid of opener's suit is natural and a jump raise is preemptive: