

TOP-AND-BOTTOM CUE BIDS

There are four ways to make a top-and-bottom cue bid:

1) Directly over a natural opening bid of one in a suit:

| | |
|-------|------|
| North | East |
| 1♠ | 2♠ |

A cue bid over a higher level opening may be based on a two-suited hand, but is not a "top-and-bottom" cue bid. A cue bid over an artificial opening is a natural bid.

2) After a single raise by RHO:

| | | | |
|-------|------|-------|------|
| South | West | North | East |
| 1♥ | Pass | 2♥ | 3♥ |

3) Over an opposing Drury response (see section 12-15)

4) After a 1NT response to a major suit opening by RHO:

| | | | |
|-------|------|-------|------|
| South | West | North | East |
| 1♠ | Pass | 1NT | 2♠ |

When the opening bid is in a minor suit, however, the cue bid over a 1NT response is a major suit takeout:

| | | | |
|-------|------|-------|------------------------|
| South | West | North | East |
| 1♦ | Pass | 1NT | 2♦ - shows both majors |

But not over a suit response:

| | | | |
|-------|------|-------|-----------------|
| South | West | North | East |
| 1♦ | Pass | 1♠ | 2♦ - is natural |

All of the above (except No. 3, by a passed hand) are two-way cue bids, either:

-- A super strong hand, the conventional cue bid meaning (see section 10-4, Direct Cue Bid Overcalls), or

-- A top-and-bottom cue bid, showing a moderate hand with four cards in the top unbid suit and six cards in the lowest unbid suit:

| North | East |
|-------|-----------------------------------|
| 1♣ | 2♣ - six diamonds and four spades |
| 1♦ | 2♦ - six clubs and four spades |
| 1♥ | 2♥ - six clubs and four spades |
| 1♠ | 2♠ - six clubs and four hearts |

The strength required for a top-and-bottom cue bid varies somewhat with vulnerability and the level at which partner must bid. Two to three defensive tricks are about right, but the cue bidder may play it a little loose if partner has passed. A typical hand for a non-vulnerable 2♦ cue bid over a natural opening bid of 1♦: ♠KQ43 ♥Q4 ♦4 ♣AQ10872. A 2♣ overcall would be more advisable when vulnerable. A takeout double is unwise, because you would have to pass a 2♥ response; the hand is not good enough to double and then bid 3♣, which implies a hand that is too strong for a top-and-bottom cue bid.

With a stronger hand, but not super strong, the overcaller must choose from takeout double, simple overcall, and jump overcall.

Suppose RHO opens 1♣ and you hold ♠AQ108 ♥3 ♦AQ10854 ♣K3. This hand is too strong for a top-and-bottom cue bid. A jump overcall of 2♦ is better than a takeout double because of the singleton heart. If the club/heart holding were reversed, a takeout double would be acceptable, since you have enough to bid 3♦ after a 2♥ response.

A club jump overcall (necessarily at the three level) implies solid clubs. It may therefore be necessary to make a hefty 2♣ overcall at times. Suppose you hold ♠AKJ3 ♥8 ♦76 ♣AQJ987 and RHO opens 1♦. This hand is too good for a top-and-bottom cue bid, and is not the sort of hand for a strong jump overcall in clubs. The best course is to bid 2♣, which will probably not be passed out, with the hope of bidding spades later.

The suit requirements for a top-and-bottom cue bid may be stretched on occasion. The top suit can be a weak five carder, and the bottom suit a seven-carder. The top-and-bottom cue bidder can never bid either suit himself, however (unless invited to do so), even if it is longer than standard. He can only hope that partner bids the non-standard suit. When the top suit is a strong five-carder, it is better to start bidding the suits rather than cue bid.

Responses

How does the cue bidder's partner distinguish between a strong cue bid and a top-and-bottom cue bid? First of all, he assumes that partner has made a top-and-bottom cue bid until he learns otherwise, and makes the appropriate response:

| South | West | North | East |
|-------|------|-------|--|
| 1♦ | 2♦ | Pass | 2♥/2♠/3♣ - weak signoffs 3♥/3♠/4♣ - invitational 2NT - forcing |

The heart responses require at least a six-card suit.

After a signoff response, the top-and-bottom cue bidder must pass, even if RHO makes a call. Any other action shows a strong cue bid.

After an invitational response, the top-and-bottom cue bidder can only pass or raise the response one level. Any other action shows a strong cue bid, and is game forcing in view of the invitational response. In the last auction, the invitation in hearts will generally be accepted with a doubleton heart, declined with a singleton.

The 2NT response asks for clarification--"What kind of cue bid is this?" In the auction above, West must bid 3♣ with a top-and-bottom cue bid; any other call shows a strong cue bid and is forcing to game (in view of the 2NT response). If the cue bidder shows a top-and-bottom cue bid, the 2NT bidder's next call will place the contract, except that a raise to 4♣ would of course be invitational.

One reason for limiting the top-and-bottom cue bidder's strength is that she may not reopen the bidding after making a cue bid:

| South | West | North | East |
|-------|---------------|---------------------|------|
| 1♦ | 2♦ | 2♥ | Pass |
| Pass | 2♠ - forcing, | strong cue bid hand | |

West must pass 2♥ with a top-and-bottom cue bid, even with ♠108543 ♥6 ♦5 ♣AKJ543, because she has already shown her hand.

After confirming a top-and-bottom cue bid, however, the cue bidder may choose to reopen a dying auction:

| South | West | North | East |
|-------|------|-------|------|
| 1♣ | 2♣ | Pass | 2♦ |
| Pass | Pass | 3♣ | Pass |
| Pass | 3♦ | | |

West, not vulnerable, is willing to chance 3♦ with ♠KQJ10 ♥6 ♦AQJ1098 ♣32. If this goes down one doubled, North-South probably could have made 3♣.

Top-and-Bottom is not used by a passed hand, except over a Drury response. A direct cue bid by a passed hand is a Michaels Cue Bid. See section 8-5, Defensive Bidding by a Passed Hand. Also see section 10-4, Direct Cue Bid Overcalls, and section 10-5, Reopening Cue Bid Overcalls.