

Bridge 101 – Lesson 6

Overcalls

Terminology:

An **overcall** is a bid made over an opener who is one of your opponents. Your partner has either not yet bid or has passed.

We will look at the case where the opener is your RHO (right hand opponent). This is called a **direct overcall**.

If your RHO is opener you can do one of three things, pass, overcall (bid other than pass) or double. Doubles are covered in Bridge 201.

Today the basic scenario is RHO is opener and you are making the decisions as to whether to pass or overcall.

The roles of the players, with East as **opener** will then be South as (potentially) the **overcaller**, West as **responder** and North the **advancer** (if South overcalls and opening by East). We will mostly be thinking of ourselves as sitting South.

Just as the responder is the partner of the opener, the advancer is the partner of the overcaller.

Objectives of an overcall:

There are three primary reasons to make an overcall.

Reason 1 is what is called “**lead directing**”. If the opponents win the contract and your partner makes the opening lead, partner should lead your suit.

Reason 2 is to obstruct the opponents' bidding by taking bidding space from them and possibly “lifting” their bids to a higher level where, perhaps, they should not go.

Reason 3 is to compete for a part score or (less likely) a game contract. If opponents have opened the bidding it is unlikely you and your partner have enough points for game.

Your RHO opens 1♦ and you hold ♠A3 ♥KQT62 ♦853 ♣854

With 10 total points we would not open with this hand but we will overcall with a 1♥ bid.

One level overcall requirements and examples:

A **simple overcall** is an overcall at the 1 level of bidding a suit.

You will find sources that give varying point ranges.

As beginners, we will make a simple overcall with 10-16 points and a “good” suit.

Counting points when considering an overcall is just as we count for an opener – hcp's plus distribution points for length.

A “good” suit is a 5-card suit with 2 of the 5 honors (A, K, Q, J, T.) headed by at least a Q (a K is safer) or a 6-card suit at least 1 honor (here I'd like at least the Q).

Your RHO opens 1♦. You hold ♠A3 ♥J7532 ♦AK5 ♣732

With 12 hcp's plus 1 for length you have 13 total points.

But your heart suit is not “good”.

You pass.

Your RHO opens 1♥. You hold ♠KQT97 ♥A6 ♦J963 ♣J6

You have 12 total points, 11 hcp's plus one for length.

Your 5-card spade suit “good”, better than good with 3 of the 5 honors headed by the K

You bid the 1♠ overcall.

Your RHO opens 1♦. You hold ♠762 ♥AQT73 ♦K85 ♣63.

You have 10 total points, 9 hcp's plus one for length.

Your 5-card heart suit is “good”.

You bid 1♥.

Your RHO opens 1♦. You hold ♠KJT ♥JT754 ♦AJ ♣K96. Do you overcall?

With only JT high in your five card heart suit you PASS.

Your RHO opens 1♣. You hold ♠A8 ♥Q97532 ♦Q54 ♣95.

You have 10 total points, 8 hcp's plus two points for length.

Your 6-card heart suit has at least 1 honor.

You bid 1♥ but I wouldn't object to a pass here.

Two level overcall requirements and examples:

For an overcall at the 2 level you want to have 13-16 total points and a good 5+ card major or a good 6+ card minor.

Your RHO opens 1♣. You hold ♠JT43 ♥AKJ54 ♦75 ♣T6.

You bid 1♥ here with 9 hcp's plus one for length for 10 total points and a good heart holding.

Suppose you hold the same hand but RHO opens 1♠.

To make an overcall in hearts you would have to bid 2♥

You only have 10 total points, not enough.

Sadly your hearts will have to go unbid.

Your RHO opens 1♠. You hold ♠JT ♥AKJ54 ♦A76 ♣T62.
With have 14 total points, 13 hcp's plus one for length.
You have five ♥'s with 3 of the top 5 honors.
You bid 2♥.

Your RHO opens 1♠. You hold ♠QJT ♥72 ♦AQJ742 ♣T76.
With 10 hcp's and 2 length points it is just not enough.
You PASS

Summary and some:

With 5+card major or 6+card minor with 2 of the top 5 honors, the minimum total points to make an overall of one of a suit is 10 and the maximum is 16

With 5+card major or 6+card minor with 2 of the top 5 honors, the minimum total points to make an overall of two of a suit is 13 and the maximum is 16

With 17+ points (this is unlikely as RHO has opened) there are other bids. One is a take-out double (not covered in this class). The other is 1NT.

To make an overall of 1NT you need a balanced hand (a hand with no singleton or void and at most one doubleton), 15-18 hcp's and a stopper in the suit that your RHO bid.

A **stopper** is a protected honors you hold in a suit an opponent has bid.

Examples are Kx, Qxx, Jxxx. This term refers to their ability to "stop" the opponents from running their suit if you are playing a no-trump contract. If RHO bids, you overcall 1NT and land in that contract, opps are most likely to lead the suit that was bid so you have best have a stopper in it.

Suppose your RHO opens 1♦ and you pass. When you passed you said to partner, I can't make an overall. There are lots of possibilities.

If I have 10 or more total points, I don't have a 5-card major suit with 2 of the top 5 honors.

If I have a 5-card major, I may or may not have 2 of the top 5 honors but it doesn't matter, I don't have 10 total points.

I might just have a really lousy hand with no points and no good suit!

RHO opens 1♥. You hold ♠AJT43 ♥J62 ♦AK ♣T63.

You bid 1♠ with 13 total points and 2 of the top 5 honors in you 5-card ♠ suit.

Partner does not know you are holding an opening hand.

Partner only knows that you have enough for a simple overcall.

Thinking scenario:

Now suppose LHO opens 1♥ and your partner overcalls 2♣. What do you know?

You know that partner has an opening hand because she bid at the 2 level and she has 5 (preferably 6) very good clubs.

You know your LHO with the 1♥ bid has opening values (13 total points) and at least five ♥'s.

You now begin to form a picture of where the cards are and where the points are.

Now suppose you hold ♠JT9 ♥QT3 ♦Q76 ♣KT73. Think about the situation.

What is the minimum number of hcp's for opener?

Remember I said not to open with fewer than 12 hcp's plus one for length. I would take opener for at least 12 hcp's.

How about partner's hcp's as partner has overcalled at the two level?

Same reasoning, probably at least 12 hcp's.

So you know where at least 24 (12 for partner and 12 for LHO) of the hcp's are.

You hold ♠JT9 ♥QT3 ♦Q76 ♣KT73.

You have 8 hcp's.

Between you, your partner and the opener, about 32 hcp's are accounted for.

The maximum number of hcp's left for RHO who is responder for East with this reasoning is 8.

West as responder can have at most 8 hcp's. Suppose RHO passes (bidding is now LHO 1♥, Partner 2♣, RHO pass).

What do we know about RHO's holding?

No more than 8 hcp's.

Maybe no support for his partner's hearts.

Maybe hasn't got enough points to respond.

We don't know exactly but we need to get in the habit of analyzing each hand with each bid, not just our own.

The topic of conversation for next Tuesday is "Advancing the Overcall".