

What's Standard?

by David Lindop

This series is based on *Grant Standard*, a set of conventions and agreements that are in popular use today, such as 15-17 INT openings, five-card majors, and weak two-bids. A summary chart of *Grant Standard* and the corresponding convention card can be found at www.AudreyGrant.com. The site also has *Grant Basic*, a simpler set of agreements.

Earlier articles in this series appeared in the *Bridge Bulletin* and can also be found under 'Articles' at www.AudreyGrant.com.

The partner of the player who makes an overcall or a takeout double is called the *advancer*. This is to avoid confusion with the responder, the partner of the opening bidder. It's a valuable distinction since **the guidelines for advancing differ from those for responding**.

It's not surprising that there are differences. Opening bids at the one level cover a range of about 13-21 points. An overcall at the one level typically has a range of about 7-17. A simple—non-jump—overcall at the two level is closer to the values for an opening bid, but there is less room for the advancer to maneuver.

In addition, an overcall or takeout double makes the auction competitive.

Advancer's priorities may not be the same as those of a responder when there is no interference.

The Grant Standard guidelines for advancing an overcall are:

ADVANCING A SIMPLE OVERCALL

- A jump raise is preemptive.
- A cuebid is forcing for one round.
- A new suit is non-forcing but constructive (invitational).

This could do with some further explanation, so let's take a more in-depth look.

Advancing (Responding to) a Simple Overcall

The Single Raise

The requirements for a simple raise of partner's overcall aren't included in the guideline since they are similar to those for responder: **raise with three-card or longer support and about 6-9 points**. The only difference is that this applies whether the overcall is in a major or a minor suit. The overcall presumably shows a five-card suit or longer; an opening bid of 1♣ or 1♦ could be made on a three-card suit.

Suppose we are South and the auction begins this way:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♣	1♦	Pass	?

We have this hand. If ♠ A 10 7 3 partner had opened ♥ 7 4 1♦, our priority would be to respond 1♠, ♣ J 6 5 3 looking for a major suit fit. When partner overcalls 1♦, our priority is to show support. Partner has five or more diamonds, so we have an eight-card fit. Partner would probably have started with a takeout double if interested in finding a spade fit.

We might wonder why we bother raising diamonds at all, since we have only 7 high-card points. Partner could overcall with as few as 7 points and has at most 17. Raising might get us too high and game is unlikely, so why not pass? The reason is that this is a competitive auction. 2♦ is more of an obstructive measure than a constructive move toward game. If partner doesn't have much, our raise may make it more difficult for the opponents to find their best spot. If we go down, the opponents can likely make something. If partner has a good hand, partner can compete further, knowing we have a fit.

Suppose we have the same hand and partner makes an overcall at the two level:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♥	2♦	2♥	?

We should be willing to raise to 3♦. Partner should have a good hand and a good suit to overcall at the two level, so it's unlikely we'll get doubled. Also, partner won't treat our raise as invitational to game. Partner knows it's a competitive auction and, as we'll see later, we have another way to invite game.

The Preemptive Raise

With four-card support for partner's suit, advancer knows the partnership has at least a nine-card fit. In competitive auctions, the Law of Total Tricks (see Larry Cohen's article in the November 2004 issue) suggests that it is okay to compete to the level corresponding to the combined number of trumps. With a weak hand, responder should raise immediately to the appropriate level as a preemptive action.

Based on this, **standard practice is for advancer to make a preemptive jump raise with good support and fewer than 10 points**.

PREEMPTIVE JUMP RAISE

With fewer than 10 points when partner overcalls at the one level:

- Jump to the three level with four-card support.
- Jump to the four level with five-card support.

Suppose we are South and the auction starts like this:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♥	1♠	Pass	?

With this hand, we can ♠ Q J 7 3 make a preemptive ♥ 9 4 jump raise to 3♠. ♦ J 8 7 5 2 This should make it ♣ 9 3 challenging for the opponents to find their best spot and is a relatively safe competitive action.

Suppose the auction begins:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♥	1♠	2♦	?

With five-card support we could make a preemptive jump raise to 4♠ with this hand. Is vulnerability a consideration? Yes and no. If the vulnerability is favorable—they are vulnerable and we are not—there is little risk. If we don't make 4♠, any penalty is likely to be less than the value of whatever contract the opponents can make.

If the vulnerability is equal—both sides non-vulnerable or both sides vulnerable—the odds still favor taking preemptive action. Even if we are too high and the opponents could theoretically double 4♠ and collect more than the value of their potential contract, that's easier said than done. The opponents often judge incorrectly and fail to double, or bid higher, perhaps getting overboard themselves.

Only when the vulnerability is unfavorable—we are vulnerable and they are not—should we be cautious. The opponents will be more eager to double and collect a penalty. The modern style is to be very aggressive, however, and many players would still jump to 4♠ with this hand and take their chances.

What if partner overcalls at the two level?

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	2♥	2♠	?

A jump raise is still preemptive. So, we could raise to 4♥ with this hand. We might have only a nine-card fit, but putting pressure on the opponents is usually a good idea. Besides, partner could have six hearts for the two-level overcall.

The Cuebid

If a jump raise is preemptive, what do we do in this situation?

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♦	1♠	Pass	?

With this hand, we would like to make a limit—invitational—raise, but a jump to 3♠

would be preemptive, showing a weak hand. The solution is the *cuebid*, a bid of the opponent's suit. **Advancer cuebids with three-card or longer support and about 10 or more points.**

So, advancer would cuebid 2♦ with this hand, showing interest in reaching game. With a minimum, overcaller simply rebids the suit at the cheapest level. Advancer can now pass, or bid again if still interested. With more than a minimum, the overcaller does something other than rebidding the suit at the cheapest level.

The cuebid lets the partnership stop at a low level when overcaller has a minimum. For example:

OVERCALLER	ADVANCER
♠ A Q 10 7 2	♠ K J 8 3
♥ 8 4	♥ A 9 6 2
♦ 10 9 3	♦ 8 6 4
♣ Q 8 2	♣ K 4

	OVERCALLER		ADVANCER
	1♦	1♠	Pass
Pass	2♠	All Pass	2♦

Overcaller has a minimum hand and rebids 2♠ after advancer's 2♦ cuebid. Advancer can now pass, knowing that there is not enough for game. The partnership stops safely at the two level.

When either overcaller or advancer has extra strength, the partnership can reach game after the cuebid:

OVERCALLER	ADVANCER
♠ A Q 10 9 7 2	♠ K J 8 3
♥ 8 4	♥ A J 6 2
♦ A 3	♦ 8 6 4
♣ Q 8 2	♣ A 4

	OVERCALLER		ADVANCER
	1♦	1♠	Pass
Pass	3♠	Pass	4♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	

After the cuebid, overcaller shows more than a minimum by jumping in spades, and advancer has enough to put the partnership in game.

Advancing in a New Suit

One major difference between responding and advancing is that **a new suit by advancer is not forcing.** Some partnerships prefer to treat a new suit as forcing, but that isn't standard practice.

The reasoning behind this is that an overcall has a lower upper limit than an opening bid. A strong hand can be shown by starting with a takeout double rather than an overcall. Also, the auction is competitive, making game less likely but getting to the best partscore more of a priority.

When partner overcalls, raising partner's suit is the priority. So, when advancer bids a new suit, it implies that advancer does not have a fit with the overcalled suit. Let's look at an example:

OVERCALLER	ADVANCER
♠ K Q 10 8 5	♠ 7 3
♥ 8 6 2	♥ A K Q 9 5
♦ Q J 4	♦ 8 7 5
♣ 9 3	♣ K 8 4

	OVERCALLER		ADVANCER
	1♣	1♠	2♣
Pass	Pass	Pass	2♥

With a good hand and a good suit, advancer bids the heart suit in a competitive auction. Overcaller, with a minimum, passes. This leaves the partnership in a reasonable partscore.

What if advancer has a hand too strong to risk partner passing? Then advancer can start with a cuebid. **A cuebid followed by a new suit is forcing.** For example:

OVERCALLER	ADVANCER
♠ A Q J 6 5	♠ 9 2
♥ J 4	♥ A Q 9 7 6 3
♦ 7 6	♦ A 10 8
♣ 10 9 6 3	♣ A Q

	OVERCALLER		ADVANCER
	1♦	1♠	Pass
Pass	2♠	Pass	2♦
Pass	4♥	All Pass	3♥

After the 1♠ overcall, advancer starts with a cuebid since 2♥ would not be forcing. Overcaller shows a minimum by rebidding spades at the cheapest level. Now advancer introduces the heart suit. Overcaller doesn't have anything else to show but can't pass. Overcaller settles on raising with meager support as the best option and the partnership gets to the best spot.

Advancer has many options after an overcall, such as a preemptive raise, a cuebid, and a new suit. Making the best choice takes some practice. ♠