

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.

When the opponents open the bidding, one of our primary tools for getting into the auction is the takeout double. The basic guideline for a double is:

DIRECT TAKEOUT DOUBLE

When an opponent opens in a suit, a double shows:

- Support for the unbid suits.
- 13 or more points, counting dummy points.

Seems straightforward enough, but there's a lot left unsaid. So let's take a closer look.

Dummy Points

When we make a takeout double, we are asking our partner to choose the trump suit, so we expect to put our hand down as the dummy. As such, **we value shortness in opener's suit using dummy points:**

DUMMY POINTS

Void	5 points
Singleton	3 points
Doubleton	1 point

Suppose we are sitting in the South position, and East on our right opens the bidding 1♦.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
		1♦	?

Takeout Double

This hand has only 10 high-card points, so we don't really have enough to open the bidding at the one level. Yet when the bidding is opened 1♦ in front of us, we can add 3 dummy points for the singleton diamond, and that gives us enough strength to make a takeout double.

With a void, we need even fewer high-card points to make a takeout double at the one level. This hand would qualify (8 + 5 = 13).

♠	A J 6 3
♥	K 10 7 4
♦	4
♣	Q 9 6 3

♠	A 10 6 3
♥	Q 10 7 4
♦	—
♣	Q 9 6 3 2

Support for the Unbid Suits

Ideally, we would like to have four-card support for all the unbid suits. However, if we wait for the perfect hand, we won't be making enough use of the takeout double. **Three-card support is generally acceptable, although we prefer to have four-card support for any unbid major suit.** Partner will give preference to bidding a major suit, so we don't want to land in too many 4-3 fits.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
		1♦	?

This is the ideal hand for a double of 1♦. Whichever suit partner chooses, we'll put down a good dummy.

♠	A Q 7 3
♥	K J 6 4
♦	5
♣	A 9 7 2

This hand isn't quite as good, but it is certainly an acceptable takeout double. Partner is likely to choose a major. If partner chooses clubs, more often than not partner will have a five-card suit, since partner presumably doesn't have four hearts or four spades.

♠	A Q 7 3
♥	K J 6 4
♦	5 2
♣	A 9 7

Not ideal, but most players would double with this hand. If we land in a 4-3 spade fit, we'll hope partner plays it well.

With this hand it's getting dicey. We have 13 points, but the ♦Q is of dubious value and we have only three-card support for both majors. We don't have to double with 13 points and support for the unbid suits, so most players would choose to pass with this hand and await developments.

We don't always need a three-suited hand. Suppose the auction begins:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♣	Pass	1♠	?

Now there are only two unbid suits, so a takeout double asking partner to choose either hearts or diamonds is standard with this hand.

♠	9 2
♥	A Q J 6
♦	K Q J 7
♣	9 5 4

The Level

Our first opportunity to make a takeout double won't always be at the one level. The opponents may open with a preemptive bid, or responder may have bid at the two level or higher before we get a chance to bid.

In theory, **the higher the level, the stronger our hand should be for a takeout double.** Partner may have a weak hand and be forced to bid at a high level...and may have to play the hand, perhaps doubled, with our high cards exposed on the table as dummy. Partner may not like that!

In practice, however, **it's up to the partner with the right shape to take action.** Otherwise, aggressive bidding by the opponents will too often 'steal' the contract from our side.

Also, **it is relatively safe to take action when the opponents have found a fit.** If they have an eight-card fit, our side is likely to have a fit also.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
		2♠	?

If East had opened 1♠, we would have a clear-cut takeout double with this hand. When East opens with a weak two-bid, it's a little more dangerous to double. Partner will have to bid a suit at the three level, even with a weak hand. There's no guarantee West has a fit for spades. With a good hand and spade shortness, West might double for penalty any contract we bid. However, it would be timid to pass. With the appropriate shape for a takeout double, the onus is on us to get the partnership into the auction.

If East opened 3♠, our decision would be even more challenging. A takeout double would mean partner has to bid a suit at the four level. That's probably too aggressive with this hand. Just because East is showing a weak hand doesn't mean that West couldn't hold all the missing high cards. We should probably pass. After all, the auction isn't over; our partner can still act.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♥	Pass	2♥	?

No problem. Here we have a strong enough hand to make a takeout double, even though partner may have to bid at the three level.

What if East had made a limit raise to 3♥ instead of 2♥? Tougher. However, the only way to get our side into the auction is with a takeout double. Partner will have to bid at the three or four level, but we have some leeway because the opponents have found a heart fit. When they have a nine-card fit, we must have at least an eight-card fit in one of our suits.

What if East made a preemptive raise to 4♥? Most players would still risk a takeout double on the premise that the opponents have found a fit and it's up to the partner with the right shape to take some action to stop them from stealing the contract. Could it work out badly? Sure. But we have to take some chances!

Takeout or Penalty?

At what point does our double become a penalty double rather than a takeout double? The partnership needs to agree. A popular agreement is: **a double at our first opportunity to bid is for takeout *through* (up to and including) 4♥.**

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
		4♥	?

It's good to have an agreement, otherwise we would have a real dilemma with a hand like this. A takeout double of 4♥ is quite reasonable. 4♠ might be a good contract for our side if partner has length in spades, or we might make 5♣ or 5♦, or even a slam. With some length and strength in hearts, partner has the option of passing and converting our takeout double into a penalty double. If our double would be for penalty, we'd probably have to pass with this hand.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
		4♠	?

If our agreement is that a double of 4♠ would be for penalty, we should probably pass with this hand, although some might double anyway.

Some partnerships play a double of 4♠ for penalty and use 4NT as a takeout bid in this situation. Others prefer that 4NT be a two-suited takeout — an extension of the 'unusual' notrump convention — while a double of 4♠ is 'flexible' — partner can leave it in or take it out. 'Standard' becomes a little murky in such situations.

Another place where it is useful to have a partnership agreement is the double of an opening notrump bid. Since we can't really have good support for *four* unbid suits, the standard agreement is that **a double of an opening notrump bid is for penalty.** However, many partnerships assign a conventional meaning to the double of 1NT, so it's best to check with partner.

Double or Overcall?

With some hands, we have a choice between making a takeout double or overcalling. **Usually it is best to double when our long suit is a minor but overcall when our long suit is a major.**

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
		1♦	?

With this hand we could overcall 2♣, but a takeout double brings the other suits into consideration, and we have adequate support whatever partner chooses to bid.

We could double with this hand, but partner might have four spades and three hearts. Partner will bid 1♠, and we may miss the eight-card heart fit. We can overcall 1♥, and perhaps double later.

Balancing Doubles

In the balancing position, standard practice allows us to make a takeout double with about 3 points — a king — less than in the direct position. Of course, we could still have full values for our takeout double, but partner has to be aware that we may be a little 'light.'

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♥	Pass	Pass	?

If we pass in this situation, the auction is over and we are defending 1♥. Partner likely has some points since West didn't open with a strong two-bid and East didn't have enough to respond. We should stretch to compete for the contract and a takeout double best describes our hand.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
3♦	Pass	Pass	?

It's risky to bid, but also risky to pass since we could be missing a game. The partner with the right shape should strive to take some action. That's us. Hopefully, partner will give us some leeway if we double. ♦