

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 partner opens one-of-a-suit and the next player overcalls, it takes away some bidding room. In exchange, we get three new options:

- Passing with 6 or more points
- Cuebidding the opponent's suit
- Doubling

We discussed the first two choices in the last issue. Let's focus on the third option, responder's double.

Responder's Double

At one time, responder's double of an opponent's overcall was treated as a penalty double. At a low level, however, responder rarely wants to double an opponent's overcall for penalty. So in the 1950s, Al Roth, in his partnership with Tobias Stone, introduced the concept of using a low-level double by responder for takeout rather than penalty.

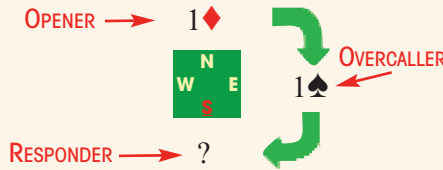
This was initially called Sputnik, after the Russian Satellite launched in 1957. Today, it is more commonly known as the negative double:

NEGATIVE DOUBLE

After opener bids one-of-a-suit and the next player overcalls in a suit, responder's double shows:

- Support for the unbid suits.
- Enough strength to compete.

The Negative Double

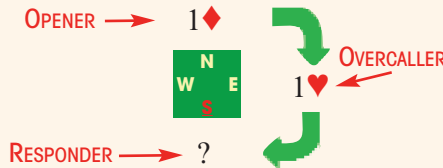


With this hand, we would have responded 1♥ if our right-hand-opponent had passed, but the 1♠ overcall takes away that possibility. We don't have enough strength to bid a new suit at the two level, and the hand is not suitable for 1NT with no stopper in spades. However, we do want to compete for the contract.

The negative double is the perfect solution. We are showing support for the unbid suits, hearts and clubs, and at least 6-10 points — enough to compete to the two level opposite partner's opening bid.

Support for the Unbid Suits

Ideally, responder should have four-card support for both unbid suits.



With this hand, we'd make a negative double of the 1♥ overcall. We don't need good spades for this call. Any four spades will do. After all, we would have responded 1♠ if East had passed. We want to look for a 4-4 spade fit. We're also happy if partner bids clubs.

In practice, responder won't always have the perfect hand, but responder should have four-card support for an unbid major suit, and support for an

unbid minor suit or something else to bid if opener bids the minor suit.

With this hand we don't have support for clubs, but we can still make a negative double. If partner bids clubs, expecting us to have support for that suit, we can return to diamonds, and the partnership will be in a suitable trump fit.

Here we don't have support for either clubs or diamonds, but we can still double. If partner bids 2♣, for example, we are willing to bid 2NT.

Here we can't afford to double because we don't have support for the unbid major, spades. If we were to double, partner might jump to game in spades, and we'd have no safe landing spot after that. We'll have to settle for some other call, such as 2♦, 1NT, or Pass.

By inference, if responder bids a suit over an opponent's overcall, it tends to show a five-card or longer suit. With only a four-card suit, responder would likely have made a negative double.

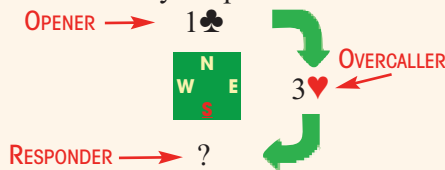
With this hand we would bid 1♠ over the 1♥ overcall. If we were to make a negative double, opener would bid spades only with a four-card suit. If opener has three spades, we would miss our 5-3 fit in the major suit.

A response of 1♠ after an overcall doesn't guarantee five or more spades. With this hand we'd be poorly placed if we doubled and partner bid clubs, expecting us to have support. Our best choice is to bid 1♠, even if partner might assume we have a five-card suit.

The Level

The Standard American Yellow Card (SAYC), developed by the ACBL and widely used in club games and on the Internet, states that negative doubles only apply when right-hand opponent makes an overcall up to and including 2♠. If the overcall is at a higher level, responder's double is for penalty.

In practice, most players assume responder's double is for takeout at even higher levels. In Grant Standard, **negative doubles apply after overcalls up to 4♥**. It's a good idea to check the level with your partner.



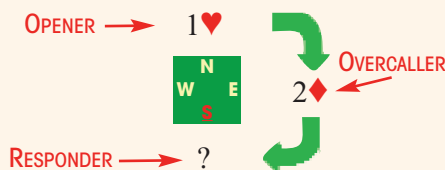
This hand is perfect for a negative double after East makes a preemptive jump overcall of 3♥. We want to compete and have support for the unbid suits.

♠ K Q 7 5
♥ 4 2
♦ K J 6 3 2
♣ Q 4

However, if the partnership has agreed to use negative doubles only through 2♠, responder is faced with an uncomfortable choice. A double would be for penalty, and that would be risky with two low hearts. A bid of 4♦ would be forcing and might get the partnership too high or to the wrong contract. Pass would be very timid, but there is no clear alternative.

The Strength

To make a negative double, responder must have at least enough strength to compete at the appropriate level. What does 'appropriate' mean? That can be challenging. Suppose the auction begins:

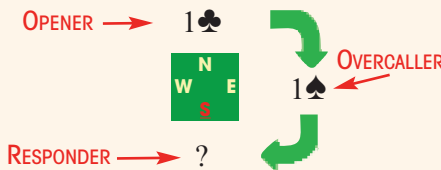


If responder makes a negative double showing support for spades and clubs, opener can bid spades at the two level, 2♠, but would have to

go to the three level to bid clubs, 3♣. So does responder need enough strength to compete to the two level or to the three level? It's a matter of judgment. Responder typically takes the optimistic — aggressive — view that opener will be able to bid at the cheapest available level.

As a minimum, therefore, responder needs about 6-9 points to compete at the one or two level, about 10-12 at the three level, and about 12 or more at any higher level.

There is no upper limit to the strength shown by a negative double. Opener initially assumes responder has only enough strength to compete at the appropriate level. With extra strength, responder can bid again.



With 11 high-card points, responder would start with a negative double. If opener makes a minimum rebid, such as 2♣, 2♦, or 2♥, responder would then raise to the three level to show a hand of invitational strength.

♠ 9 3
♥ K J 7 3
♦ A J 6 5
♣ Q 6 3

If East had overcalled 2♠ rather than 1♠, responder would again make a negative double. If opener makes a minimum rebid, such as 3♥, responder should probably pass. Responder has already shown about 10-12 points by competing to the three level.

What if East makes a preemptive jump overcall to 3♠? Tough choice. A negative double commits the partnership to game level if opener bids hearts, so it is a bit of an overbid. Still most players' judgment would be to double rather than pass and risk being kept out of the auction.

What if East jumped to 4♠? Now a double would be for penalty, assuming the partnership is only playing negative doubles through 4♥. That's okay. It's unlikely that East can take ten tricks after partner opened the bidding and we have this much high-card strength.

Opener's Rebid

If responder makes a negative double:

OPENER'S REBID AFTER A NEGATIVE DOUBLE

- With a minimum hand, 13-16, opener chooses a rebid at the cheapest level.
- With a medium hand, 17-18, opener jumps a level.
- With a maximum hand, 19-21, opener gets the partnership to the game level.

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

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♣	1♠	Double	Pass
2♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

After East makes a negative double, West knows the partnership has an eight-card heart fit. With a minimum opening, West bids at the cheapest level. With nothing extra, East passes.

Effectively, the partnership reaches the same partscore it would get to without the interference. East would have responded 1♥, West would raise to 2♥, and East would pass.

WEST		EAST
♠ A K 8 6 3		♠ 7 4
♥ K Q 6 2		♥ A J 7 3
♦ J 4		♦ 10 6 2
♣ Q J		♣ K 10 7 5

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	2♦	Double	Pass
3♥	Pass	4♥	All Pass

West has 16 high-card points plus 1 length point for the five-card spade suit — a medium-strength opening bid. After East makes a negative double, West jumps to show the extra values, and East accepts the invitation.

WEST		EAST
♠ Q 10 7 4		♠ K J 6 3
♥ 7 3		♥ 6 5
♦ A K Q J 3		♦ 10 6 2
♣ A Q		♣ K 10 7 5

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♦	1♥	Double	3♥
4♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

With a maximum, opener makes sure the partnership gets to game. ♠