

# LESSON 7

## *Overcalls and Advances*



General Concepts

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## GENERAL CONCEPTS

### The Bidding

#### Bidding with competition

Either side can buy the contract. When the opponents open the bidding, your side wants to compete in order to buy the contract, interfere with the opponents' bidding or help your side if you have to defend. The downside is that you may get too high in the auction, perhaps be doubled or may give information to the opponents.

#### More on scoring

When competing, you must be aware of the vulnerability. It's also possible that the opponents will make use of the penalty double if you get too high in the auction.

#### The overcall

When an opponent opens the bidding, you can overcall in a suit or in notrump. To overcall in a suit, you need a five-card suit and 8-16 HCP (10-17 total points). Overcalls at the two level suggest a hand that is strong enough to have opened the bidding. A 1NT overcall shows a balanced hand with 15 to 18 HCP and some strength (stoppers) in the opponent's suit.

#### Advancing to an overcall

The partner of the overcaller is called the *advancer*. To avoid confusion for the students in our bidding discussions, the partner of the opening bidder will always be called the responder, while the partner of the overcaller will be called the advancer. When partner overcalls at the one level, the advancer can do all the same things as a responder to any opening bid. In addition, the advancer has one other tool available – the cuebid.

#### Rest of the auction

Following a cuebid by the advancing player, the rest of the auction is not defined in the Standard American bidding system. It's recommended that the teacher define new bids by the advancer according to what's popular in the local bridge community. (Note that some teachers may choose not to teach cuebids at this time.)

### The Play

#### Discarding losers

If the opponents are going to gain the lead, declarer must be aware of losers as well as winners. In a trump contract, one way to get rid of losers is to discard them on extra winners in dummy. The need to discard losers quickly may affect whether you draw trumps right away.

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

“Up to now each partnership has been able to bid back and forth without any interference from the opponents. We’ve assumed that once one side has opened the bidding, the opponents quietly pass. Now we are going to change all that and see what happens in a competitive auction, where both sides are bidding.

“There are several advantages to competing when your opponents have opened the bidding. Can you think of any?”

The students will come up with some of the following ideas:

- (1) To try to buy the contract for your side.
- (2) To make the bidding more difficult for the opponents.
- (3) To push the opponents higher on the Bidding Scale.
- (4) To help your side when you are defending.

“There are also some disadvantages. Can you think of any?”

The students will probably come up with:

- (1) You might be left to play in your contract and be defeated.
- (2) You’ll give information to the opponents.

“Before we look at how to compete, we’ll look at another danger.”

## GROUP ACTIVITIES

### EXERCISE ONE: More on Scoring

#### Introduction

“On every deal, your side is either nonvulnerable or vulnerable. How vulnerability is determined depends on the form of scoring, and you can read about it in the Appendix. For now, all you need to know is that vulnerability affects the scoring. The bonuses for making contracts and the penalties for being defeated are bigger when you are vulnerable.

“Another new element that affects the scoring is the penalty double. If your opponents bid to a contract you don’t think they will make, you can say double when it is your turn to call. You can double only the opponents’ contract, not your own. A double doesn’t end the auction unless it’s followed by three passes. If someone bids, the double is no longer in effect. The effect of the double is to increase the penalty if the contract is defeated and increase the score if the contract is made.

“The penalty for going down in a doubled contract when nonvulnerable is 100 points for the first undertrick, 200 points each for the second and third undertricks and 300 points for the fourth and subsequent undertricks. The penalty when vulnerable is 200 points for the first undertrick and 300 points each for subsequent undertrick.”

#### Instructions

“When you are considering bidding in competition, scoring becomes important. Fill in the following chart and notice the differences that vulnerability and whether or not you are doubled makes to the score. You are in 3♥ and are defeated two tricks.”

	Nonvulnerable	Vulnerable
Undoubled	100	200
Doubled	300	500

#### Follow-up

Discuss the exercise.

#### Conclusion

“If you are vulnerable, you must be more careful when competing. The penalties for going down are much greater, especially if you are doubled.”

## EXERCISE TWO: The Overcall

### Introduction

“The simplest competitive action you can take is the overcall. When an opponent opens the bidding, you can make a bid or call over your opponent’s bid. An overcall can be made at the one level or the two level (or even higher). You can overcall in a suit or in notrump. When you make an overcall in a suit, you should have at least a five-card suit.”

### Instructions

“The opponent on your right opens the bidding 1♦. What would you want to bid on each of the following hands?”

1) ♠ A Q 8 7 4  
♥ 7 6  
♦ J 10 8  
♣ A K 3

2) ♠ 7 4 2  
♥ A J  
♦ A 8  
♣ K Q 10 9 7 5

3) ♠ A 3 2  
♥ K Q 8  
♦ K J 10 2  
♣ K J 2

HCPs 14

HCPs 14

HCPs 17

Length Pts. 1

Length Pts. 2

Length Pts. 0

Bid 1♠

Bid 2♣

Bid 1NT

### Follow-up

Discuss the exercise. The students should note that in the second hand they must bid at the two level.

### Conclusion

“Overcalling is similar to opening the bidding. However, sometimes you must start the auction at the two level.”

## EXERCISE THREE: The Strength and Shape for an Overcall

### Introduction

“When you overcall, you run some risk. The opponents have opened the bidding, indicating they hold some strength. It’s as though they have landed the first blow in a fight. Let’s look at what you need to consider before competing.”

### Instructions

“Everyone take a suit and construct the following hand:

♠ A 7 2  
♥ K Q J 9 3  
♦ J 5 4  
♣ 9 2

“If you were the dealer, what would you bid? (Pass.) If the opponent on your right opened the bidding 1♣, would you consider overcalling 1♥? (Yes.) What would you hope to accomplish by bidding this suit? (You expect to interfere with the opponents’ bidding, compete for the contract, tell partner something about your hand and perhaps push the opponents too high.)

“Would it make a difference if the opponent on your right opened 1♠? (Yes. To overcall 2♥ would be more dangerous.) Would it make a difference if you were vulnerable? (Yes. To overcall 2♥ would be even more dangerous.)

“Now construct the following hand.

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

“If you were the opening bidder, what would you bid with this hand? (1♣.) If the opponent on your right opened 1♣, would you overcall 1♥? (No.) If not, why not? (The suit isn’t long enough.) What would you do? (Pass.)”

### Follow-up

The students should see the advantages of overcalling 1♥ with the first hand. They will probably agree that it would be dangerous to overcall 2♥, especially if vulnerable. With the second hand, they will probably see the danger of overcalling with only a four-card suit. They might mention 2♣ or double as an alternative. Point out that they don’t want to compete in the opponent’s suit and that a double (for penalty) is premature — it will warn the opponents and they may bid a different suit.

### Conclusion

“When you overcall, you should have at least a five-card suit, whether you are bidding a major or a minor suit. A five-card suit provides some measure of protection against a possible penalty double. Try to have a six-card suit to overcall at the two level. Although overcalling is similar to opening the bidding, in competitive situations it sometimes pays to be more aggressive. You should have between 8-16 HCP (10-17 total points) for an overcall. Overcalls at the two level suggest a hand that is strong enough to have opened the bidding. To overcall 1NT, you should have a balanced hand with 15-18 HCP and a stopper in the opponents’ suit.”

## EXERCISE FOUR: Whether to Overcall

### Introduction

“When an opponent opens the bidding, you don’t have to overcall, even if you have an opening bid. Some hands are not suited for an overcall.”

### Instructions

“The opponent on your right opens the bidding 1♥. Your side isn’t vulnerable. What would you do with each of the following hands?”

1) ♠ A Q J 10 8  
♥ 7 3  
♦ A 9 5  
♣ 10 4 2

Bid 1♠

2) ♠ K 8 4 2  
♥ 8 7 3  
♦ 5  
♣ A K Q 10 6

Bid 2♣

3) ♠ 10 3  
♥ 3  
♦ A Q J 7 3  
♣ A K 9 4 2

Bid 2♦

4) ♠ A Q J  
♥ K 9 7 3  
♦ J 8  
♣ Q 8 6 3

Bid Pass

5) ♠ K 4  
♥ K Q 10  
♦ A J 9 3  
♣ K J 10 8

Bid 1NT

6) ♠ 6 3  
♥ A K J 8 4  
♦ A J 8  
♣ 10 7 3

Bid Pass

### Follow-up

Discuss the exercise. On the third hand, point out that the students can use the same rules as they use for opening the bidding to decide which suit to overcall: the higher ranking of two five-card suits. On the fourth and sixth hands, they should understand why it’s correct to pass for now.

### Conclusion

“When the opponents open the bidding, you can overcall if your hand is suitable. If it’s not, you can pass, even with a good hand.”

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## EXERCISE FIVE: Advancing After a One-Level Overcall

### Introduction

“When you respond to partner’s overcall, you are called the advancer. Obviously, you are a responder in this situation, but it will be clearer if you think of the responder to the overcaller as the advancer when discussing competitive auctions.

“When you are the advancer, you can do all the same things that you can do when partner opens the bidding. You can pass, raise partner’s suit, show a new suit of your own or bid notrump. There is one additional thing that you can do and that is to make a *cuebid*. A *cuebid* is the bid of a suit first mentioned by the opponents. The *cuebid* is really the only truly *forcing* call that the advancer can make in our bidding system, and it promises a **limit raise or better** in the overcaller’s suit. The *cuebid* asks the overcaller about the quality of the overcall. With a minimum hand, the overcaller would just rebid the original suit of the overcall. Any other bid by the overcaller shows an opening hand.

“However, if the advancer knows there is game, even when the overcaller has a minimum bid, the advancer should bid game directly and not worry about using the *cuebid*.

“The most important thing to say about bidding as the advancer is that you want to take the bidding to the level that will be best for your side, remembering that your final contract may be doubled for penalty. If you have support for your partner, it is important to show it right away, in case you run into interference from your opponents. You should keep in mind that your partner as the overcaller may not have an opening hand if the overcall is made at the one level.

“To decide how to advance the bidding when your partner has overcalled, it would be nice to be able to use the same responses as when our partner opens the bidding. However, since we may be advancing the bid when our partner does not have an opening hand, we have to be more cautious with our responses. The main reason we respond with a six-point hand when partner opens is that partner could have 19-21 HCPs and we might belong in game – so we must bid. When partner overcalls, this is not the case, since the maximum total points partner could have is 17.

“So, with a minimum hand, 8 or 9 total points, you will raise overcaller’s suit with support or bid a new suit at the one-level with no support and a good five-card suit of your own.

“With a limit raise or better hand, more than 10 total points, you can bid a good suit of your own, make a *cuebid* or just bid game on your own. Let’s see how this works.”

## Instructions

“Your left-hand opponent bids 1♣ and your partner overcalls 1♠. What would you bid with the following hands?”

1) ♠ A 8 7  
♥ 10 9  
♦ K 7 6 3  
♣ J 7 5 2

Bid 2♠

2) ♠ J 6 3 2  
♥ 9  
♦ K Q 8 7  
♣ Q 8 7 6

Bid 2♣

3) ♠ K 10 7 5 3  
♥ —  
♦ A J 8 2  
♣ Q 10 7 3

Bid 4♠

“Your left-hand opponent bids 1♣ and your partner overcalls 1♥. What would you bid with the following hands?”

4) ♠ 9 7 3 2  
♥ Q 2  
♦ K 8 6 3  
♣ 7 5 3

Bid Pass

5) ♠ A Q J 8 5  
♥ 10 4  
♦ K 8 3  
♣ J 4 2

Bid 1♠

6) ♠ Q 10 8  
♥ 7 6  
♦ K 10 6 3  
♣ K J 10 7

Bid 1NT

## Follow-up

Discuss the exercise.

## Conclusion

“When advancing to a one-level overcall, raise directly with three-card or longer support. Raise to the two level with 8 or 9 total points, and begin with a cuebid with 10 or 11. Bid game if you have enough total points opposite a minimum overcall. You may wonder what a jump to the three level in the overcaller’s suit would mean. This is a preemptive bid that we will learn about in the *Play of the Hand in the 21st Century* series course. If you can’t raise, bid as though you were responding to an opening bid, but pass with only 6 or 7 points. Remember, if you want to advance with a notrump bid, you must have a stopper in the opponent’s suit.”

## EXERCISE SIX: Advancing After a Two-Level Overcall

### Introduction

“When partner overcalls at the two level, it promises an opening hand with a maximum of 17 total points. Keep this information in mind if you decide to advance the overcall.”

### Instructions

“Your left-hand opponent bids 1♠ and your partner overcalls 2♥. What do you bid with the following hands?”

1) ♠ K 10 7 3  
♥ J 4  
♦ Q J 6 2  
♣ 7 4 2

2) ♠ A 8  
♥ K J 5  
♦ Q 10 6 2  
♣ J 5 4 2

3) ♠ J 3  
♥ A 10 7 2  
♦ A K J 8  
♣ 10 4 2

Bid Pass

Bid 2♠

Bid 4♥

### Follow-up

Discuss the exercise.

### Conclusion

“When advancing to a two-level overcall, keep in mind your partner has an opening hand.”

## EXERCISE SEVEN: Advancing after a 1NT Overcall

### Introduction

“When partner overcalls 1NT, you can bid in the same manner as when partner opens 1NT. You are the captain and you must decide at what level and in what strain to play the contract.”

### Instructions

“Your opponent bids 1♦ and your partner overcalls 1NT. What would you bid with the following hands?”

1) ♠ 4  
♥ 9 7 6 5 3 2  
♦ Q J 7  
♣ 6 4 2

Bid 2♥

2) ♠ K J 3  
♥ Q 9 6  
♦ A J 3  
♣ 7 5 4 2

Bid 3NT

3) ♠ 8 7 5 3  
♥ K 9 6 2  
♦ 10 8 3  
♣ 7 5

Bid Pass

### Follow-up

Discuss the exercise. This exercise could be skipped if time is short, since it's merely a review of advances after a 1NT overcall.

### Conclusion

“When advancing after a 1NT overcall, bid as though your partner had opened 1NT.”

## EXERCISE EIGHT: Discarding Losers

### Introduction

“In a trump contract, if you have to give up the lead before taking all of the tricks you need to make the contract, you should always count the losers in your hand (not the losers in the dummy). If you have too many losers, one way to get rid of them is to discard them on extra winners in the dummy. Such considerations may affect whether you draw trumps right away.”

### Instructions

“Each player take a suit and construct the following hands:

NORTH (Dummy)

♠ A K 6

♥ J 5 4 3

♦ A 8 3

♣ J 5 4



SOUTH

♠ 3

♥ Q 10 9 8 7 6

♦ 7 6 5

♣ A K Q

“Suppose you are in a contract of 4♥, and the opening lead is the ♦K. How many tricks will you have to lose when developing the trump suit? (Two.) How many tricks could you potentially lose in the diamond suit? (Two.) Can you start playing the trump suit right away? (No.) If not, why not? (The opponents win two diamond tricks and two trump tricks.)”

### Follow-up

Discuss the exercise. Whenever it becomes necessary to give up a trick, the declarer has to be aware of the number of potential losers. If there are too many, as on this deal, declarer has to do something about them.

### Conclusion

“When playing in a trump contract, it’s generally a good idea to draw the opponents’ trumps before taking your sure tricks in other suits. However, there are times when you must delay drawing trumps because you have more pressing concerns.”

The first three pre-dealt deals involve discarding a loser and deciding whether to draw trumps first. The fourth deal is an example of suit establishment in a notrump contract. Now that both sides are competing, the choice of opening leads should be reviewed. **Students should be made aware of the importance of leading their partner’s suit unless they have a clear-cut alternative.**

## SAMPLE DEALS

### EXERCISE NINE: Overcalling

*(E-Z Deal Cards: #7, Deal 1)*

Dealer: North	♠ 5 3 ♥ K Q 7 3 ♦ A K Q 3 ♣ 9 6 5											
♠ K J 10 6 ♥ 10 8 ♦ 6 5 4 ♣ A Q J 3	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ A Q 9 8 7 ♥ A 9 4 ♦ J 7 2 ♣ K 4	
	N											
W		E										
	S											
	♠ 4 2 ♥ J 6 5 2 ♦ 10 9 8 ♣ 10 8 7 2											

### The Bidding

“North is the dealer. What would the opening bid be? (1♦.)

“What would East bid? (1♠.) What is this bid called? (Overcall.)

“What would South do in response to partner’s opening bid? (Pass.) Has East’s bid affected South’s response? (No.) How would West advance East’s overcall? (With 12 total points, West begins with a 2♦ cuebid.)

“What does North do now? (Pass.) Does North have an opportunity to finish describing the hand? (Pass with a minimum.) What is the bidding message given by West’s bid? (Invitational or better in support of spades.) What rebid would East make? (Game. East bids game since East has 15 total points and West has shown at least 10 total points.) What would the contract be? (4♠.) Who would be the declarer? (East.)”

### The Play

“Which player would make the opening lead? (South.) What would the opening lead be? (♦10.) Why? (Partner’s bid suit.)

“How many tricks must declarer take to fulfill the contract? (10.) How many sure tricks does declarer have? (10.) Which suit should declarer play first after winning a trick? (Draw trumps first.) Why? (Declarer doesn’t have to give up the lead to do this.) What will happen to the two low hearts in declarer’s hand? (Discarded on the clubs in dummy.)

“Pick up your cards and bid and play the deal. Did declarer make the contract? (Declarer should.)”

This is the first example of a competitive auction. East–West should be able to reach their 4♠ contract in spite of North’s opening bid. Declarer essentially has 10 winners, but the play also can be viewed as disposing of two heart losers. In this case, declarer must play trumps before playing the side suit.





