

It's Just MayHem



Marilyn Hemenway
mayhembridge@cox.net

When partner overcalls

Don't you just hate it when the three people ahead of you have bid, and you find yourself with some values that you'd like to show? You are in position to advance the bidding if you decide to enter the auction at this point. In bridge terms there is: 1. the opener, 2. the overcaller (also called the intervenor), 3. the responder and 4. the advancer. Everyone at the table has a designation. Perhaps the responder passes. In either case, you want to show your values. The important question is how to do that?

The following are offered as guidelines, but remember that it's always safer to bid with a partial fit than without one. Don't forget to keep in mind your partner's style of overcalling. Some players overcall very light while others believe that they should have decent values. A one-level overcall can have a wide range, but an overcall at the two level should show a much better hand — at least 10 high-card points and a good suit.

An overcall at the one level typically shows a good 7 to 17 points. As advancer, how should you proceed?

When you have a fit, raise much as you would if partner was opener.

1. raise one level with 7–9 points,
2. raise two levels with 10–12 (limit raise) or, better yet, cuebid, if that's your method, to show a limit raise or better (only three-card support needed),
3. raise preemptively to game with lots of trump support and good distribution but not much else.

But what do you do when you have a semi-fit (usually two cards in partner's suit) and some values?

Bid notrump as a constructive bid:

1. 1NT with around 8–10, balanced or semi-balanced,
2. 2NT with about 11–12 balanced or semi-balanced,
3. 3NT if you think you can make it (often with a source of tricks of your own).

When partner overcalls and you don't have a fit, decisions are more difficult. The following are good guidelines:

1. Bid a new suit of five cards or longer as constructive, but not forcing, usually without support for partner's suit (some play this as forcing),
2. Cuebid with a very strong hand with or without support. Doing so makes a new suit by you at your next opportunity forcing for one round. This is perhaps the hardest for partnerships to handle as most want to assume that a cuebid shows support. Usually it does, but this is the one case it doesn't.
3. Pass without support and few values — trouble may be lurking. Do not attempt to save partner.

What about after partner overcalls at the two level (don't forget it shows a good suit and decent values)?

When you have a three-card or greater fit, raise much as you would a one-level overcall:

1. One level with 6–9 points,
2. Cuebid with 10 or more HCP,
3. Bid game with a good hand if your RHO bids and you don't have room to cuebid or otherwise tell partner you have good support,
4. Make a splinter bid (showing shortness) to show a good hand with at least four-card support.

Pass without support and few values. Same as before: Do not attempt to save partner.

Partner bids at the two level, and you have two-card support (or perhaps a singleton honor). Now what?

1. Bid notrump at the cheapest level with 8–10 points and suits stopped,
2. Bid 3NT if you think you can make it.

Without much of a fit for partner's suit you can:

1. Bid a new suit if you have a good suit of your own,
2. Pass.

When partner overcalls an opponent's weak two-bid, he should have sound values, not just a long suit — a bid after a preempt cannot be just a long suit. What can you as advancer do?

1. Raise much as you would had partner overcalled at the two level (see above),
2. Raise to game if you think it can be made,
3. Bid a new suit — forcing,
4. Bid notrump at the cheapest level,
5. Bid 3NT to show decent hand with good stoppers in weak two-bidder's suit,
6. Pass. □