

1.4

THE "OPENING" IN DEFENSE

(25-06-24)

In general, defensive bidding is taught only at the end of bridge lessons, one might say almost in passing. Yet, it is in the interaction of bidding that all the ingenuity of bridge lies. Without this dimension, bridge is just another card game.

This lack of interest among educators can be explained, on the one hand, by the difficulty in structuring the teaching of this dimension and, on the other, by the habit of stratifying information by degree (level) in the belief that this will be beneficial in the long run (a euphemism for saying that competition is learned "on the job"). One might question this pedagogically childish approach because, according to experts themselves, this learning requires several decades of sustained effort to barely make progress.

It must be acknowledged that competitive bidding is the poor relation of bridge instruction; The proof is that there are only two specific terms, namely overbidding and intervention, which are also used interchangeably to encompass all statements in bidding competition.

With two words that also have the same meaning to describe bidding competition, we must agree with those who claim that it takes a lifetime to learn bridge and that the pleasure of performing well while easily finding a partner is reserved for the lucky few. It is obvious that we cannot develop precise concepts with simplistic vocabulary under the pretext that bridge is complicated to understand.

To claim to have an effective bidding system, we must consider bidding competition as the *raison d'être* of bridge; this therefore implies giving it paramount importance.

In this Chapter (Volume I), the focus on bidding competition will obviously be on the First Defensive Bid.

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Concretely, the goal of modern defensive bidding is the opposite of its original intentions. This "right to speak" is no longer an attempt to embarrass opponents' communications. The modern approach is now instead focused on discovering contracts, just as it is for the team that had the good fortune to open the bidding first; and, surprisingly, with an even greater degree of precision.

To develop this language in defensive bidding, it is necessary to establish precise and useful terminology to avoid chaos.

We must therefore consider the words "intervention" and "overbidding" as a banally generic term that simply means: "the opposing team's bid."

The first piece of advice for reasoning in bridge is this. It is absolutely essential to get into the habit of naming bids by their specific names, either mentally if you are playing or verbally if you are practicing.

Therefore, any first bid (other than a pass) made by the team in a defensive bid situation will now be called an **Opening overbid**.

To simplify and avoid redundancy, using this wording without mentioning the bidding round in which it occurs will implicitly mean that it is a first-round Opening overbid.

So, if an *Opening overbid* occurs after the player has previously declared "pass," the explicit wording "second-round" will always be added to avoid confusion.

Let's take a moment to establish some fundamental principles regarding "defensive bidding."

As soon as a team opens the bidding with a suit, or with No Trump, the opposing team is theoretically in a defensive bidding situation (*on the other hand, if there is an opening with a suit and the opposing team declares No Trump, it is not necessary to comply with this definition; we will come back to this later*).

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When one finds oneself in a defensive bidding situation, it is strictly necessary to have a minimum enlarged hand (**13 to 17 HL**) and at least one anonymous five-card suit to be able to announce an Opening overbid in color, therefore a first-round bid.

Ex. 1.4:1 The First Category of Opening Overbid: the defense in color

1	2	3	4
1 Tr	1 Di

Player #1 is the OPENER. Player #2 has made an opening overbid at level 1 as a defense to compete in the bidding ladder for the right to decide the contract.

The team that opens the bidding is in an OFFENSIVE BIDDING situation, and therefore, the other team is in a defensive bidding situation. This terminology is necessary because the meanings of bids differ in the *First Bid*.

You should know that there are **three categories** of opening overbids. There is the Opening overbid **in color at level 1 or 2 without a jump**, the Opening overbid by **takeout Double**, and the **Cue-Bid of Overbid**.

So, in this example, it is more precise to say that there is a Opening overbid in color or, its synonym, Opening overbid at level 1 (at level 2 without a jump). In other words, if we specify the level, it goes without saying that it is in a suit.

The meaning of a Opening overbid in color is the same regardless of the suit. That is: a non-maximum hand and an anonymous straight of at least 5 cards if it is level 1; and a robust fifth if it is level 2.

Ex. 1.4:2 The second category: the opening overbid by take out double

1	2	3	4
1 Tr	Double

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The **first defender**, who in this case is player #2, made a different bid. This bid does not specify an exact suit; it is the second "way" to make an OPENING OVERBID.

PRINCIPLE 1.4:1 DEFINITION OF AN OPENING OVERBID

Any first announcement, which excludes by definition the *Pass* declaration, in a defensive bidding situation constitutes an OPENING OVERBID (commonly referred to as a "defense").

An Opening overbid can be made on the first round as well as on a later round. Depending on the case, it is referred to as a first-round Opening overbid or a second-round Opening overbid because the requirements are different.

There are three ways for the defending team to enter communications after the opposing team has opened the auction.

PRINCIPLE 1.4:2 THE THREE CATEGORIES OF OPENING OVERBIDDING

There are three possible categories of Opening overbidding, namely:

- A) The Opening overbid in color (suit), at level 1 or 2, with or without a jump (you can omit "in color (suit)" when mentioning "at level...");**
- B) The takeout double;**
- C) The Cue-Bid of Overbid .**

N.B. IT IS ALSO POSSIBLE TO MAKE A "DEFENSE" IN **NO TRUMP**. HOWEVER, BECAUSE THIS DEFENSE CAN ONLY BE DECLARED IN THE FIRST ROUND OF BIDDING AND MAINTAINS EXACTLY THE SAME **TRANSFER RESPONSE SYSTEM**, IT CAN BE CONSIDERED A "REOPENING OF BIDDING" AND NOT A *DEFENSE*.

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There is therefore **no** Opening overbid in No Trump, both technically and semantically.

The defending team can only declare one Opening overbid at a time, just as there can only be one opening bid by the attacking team. This concept is an important principle of defensive bidding because it implies that the second defender must first respond to the partner who has announced an Opening overbid.

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To visualize the game, whether learning or playing, one must always be aware of the defender's role, just as it is for the attacking team, where there is a clearly established opener and responder.

The terms first defender and second defender are only used to specify their position in relation to the opposing opener. Their role is not specified.

The defender who declares an opening overbid is called the defender-opener. The other defender becomes the defender-responder. You can guess that if the defender-responder is forced to change his partner's defense for any reason, he then becomes the defender-opener because his bid is considered the "NEW DEFENSE."

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To declare an Opening overbid at level 2 (i.e., a suit) without jump, without having already passed, you still need 13 to 17 points and five cards, but the suit must contain an Ace or a King and it must have a **robustness**, that is, contain at least one small Honor in addition to the GH; it would be excessive to require a Specific suit.

A valid robust suit would be: **Ace or King, 10, 9, 8, 2** or higher.

The minimum robustness: **King, 9, 8, 7, 2** or **Queen, J, 10, 9, 2**.

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Ex. 1.4:3 Opening overbid at level 1 or at level 2 without jump.

	1	2	3	4
a)	1 Di	1 He
b)	1 Cl	<i>Pass</i>	1 He	1 Sp

c)	1 He	<i>Pass</i>	2 He	2 Pi

d)	3 Di	3 He

Note that either the first or second defender can intervene to make an opening overbid; the rules for making a defense are identical for both defenders.

The bid level increases the minimum requirements without exceeding 17 points; when there is a maximum hand, this fact must be described differently.

The last example demonstrates that it is possible to declare an opening suit raise at level 3 provided it is without a jump (otherwise it would be a *barrage* at level 3, and therefore a weak hand). It goes without saying that the suit must be a robust sixth suit instead of a robust fifth suit and have between 15 and 17 HL.

Before going further to explain what happens with hands with maximum scores, we must first look at situations where a defender enters the auction after passing.

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Ex. 1.4:4 Opening overbid at Level 1, or 2 without jumping, after Passing,

	1	2	3	4
a)	<i>Pass</i> 1 He	1 Cl ...	<i>Pass</i> ...	1 Di ...
b)	1 Di <i>Pass</i>	<i>Pass</i> 2 Sp	2 Di ...	<i>Pass</i> ...
c)	1 He 2 Cl	<i>Pass</i> <i>Pass</i>	1 NT <i>Pass</i>	<i>Pass</i> 2 Di
d)	1 Cl <i>Pass</i>	<i>Pass</i> Double!	1 Sp	<i>Pass</i>
e)	1 Cl <i>Pass</i>	<i>Pass</i> 2 Sp!	1 Pi	<i>Pass</i>

These bidding sequences demonstrate that a defender may make an opening overbid on the second round of bidding, i.e., after *Passing*. This Opening overbid can be declared either by the **suit** (at level 1, 2, or higher), by a **takeout Double** (*example d*), or by a **Cue-Bid of Overbid** (*example e*), which will be discussed later).

These sequences further demonstrate that the *Pass* bid can occur either at the start of the game or after the opponent's opening. To describe these contexts, we will refer to both cases as a **second-round Opening overbid**.

Thus, the three categories of Opening overbids (first-round) can also be useful in the second round after passing, and may have a specific meaning.

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Here are the two Principles grouped together for an overview. Remember to include the *Complement*, if applicable, when calculating **high card points** (hcp or PH).

PRINCIPLE 1.4:3 REQUIREMENTS FOR AN OPENING OVERBID AT LEVEL 1

To make an Opening overbid at level 1 in the first round of bidding, you must have at least:

- at least a fifth suit, which can be anonymous,
- from 13 to a low 17 HL; or
- 12 HL and a Specified fifth suit.

PRINCIPLE 1.4:4 REQUIREMENTS FOR AN OPENING OVERBID AT LEVEL 2 WITHOUT A JUMP

To make an Opening overbid at level 2 without a jump in the first round of bidding, you must have:

- a fifth suit that must be at least **ROBUST**,
- 13 to a weak 17 HL; or
- 12 HL and a Specified fifth suit.

*You should never announce an Opening overbid at level 2 **without a jump** with A WEAK SUIT REGARDLESS OF THE SCORING.* You must use the other alternatives (explained below) or declare *Pass*.

The explanations for second-round the opening overbids in color, the opening overbids by takeout Double aut first-round and second-round, and the overbids with a Cue-Bid of Overbid represent four specific topics (subtopics) that are explained as such in this chapter.

For now, we'll see a few exercises.

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PRACTICE SECTION 1.4

Ex. 1.4:5 **What do you declare with each of the following hands?**

	1	2	3	4
	1 Di	You
a)	K 9 9 8 5 3 2 K J 2 K Q 2	b) 9 A K 9 8 2 K 9 5 2 10 7 6	c) J Q 10 9 8 5 4 Q 9 5 A J 7	
d)	K 9 4 5 A J 4 2 K 10 8 7 5	e) J 9 8 7 2 Q 8 4 2 A 9 K Q		

ANSWERS:

- a) **1 Heart:** 12 PH + 1 PL, you must bid an Opening overbid because level 1 (therefore in color) is still available and the hand contains 13 points and a fifth suit; You must inform your partner of your holding score even if the suit is *anonymous* and there are losing points. Bridge requires minimal risk.
- b) **Pass:** 10 PH + 1 PL, the suit is specified, but the score is a little too low to make a first-round overbid. Bidding *1 Heart* in the first round of bidding would give your partner a poor assessment of your holding score. You **should not** consider the value of the singleton in the first bid because there is no guaranteed fit, and the value of "short" suits is not part of the "Honor-Length" scoring system, which is the correct system to use for evaluating an opening hand.

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It should be noted that **the first round of bidding prioritizes the TOTAL SCORES** of a hand for both the offensive and defensive teams.

With **11 points and at least a specified five-card suit**, it is necessary to wait until the second round of bidding to precisely describe such a hand, which allows both partner and opponents to speak in order to assess the relevance of entering the auction.

- c) **1 Heart:** 10 PH + 2 PL, the *Heart* suit contains 1 GH, the queen, and two low honors, as well as a sixth card. This 12-point hand meets the minimum requirements for an Opening overbid thanks to its EQUIVALENCE to a Specified fifth suit.
- d) **Pass:** 11 PH + 1 PL, the *Club* suit is fifth and strong, but one more point is needed, or the *Club* suit should be specified to justify an Opening overbid to the suit.
- e) **1 Spade:** 12 PH + 1 PL, the suit is ordinary, but the score is sufficient to signal an opening overbid. There is no question of folding for fear of encountering a convoluted spade contract. This approach is far too defensive and both ineffective and boring.

Ex. 1.4:6 What do you declare with each of the following hands?

1	2	3	4
1 Heart	You

- | | | | | | |
|----|-------------------------------------|----|-------------------------------------|----|------------------------------------|
| a) | K 9
A Q 5
K Q 2
10 7 6 5 2 | b) | K Q 8
Q 6
K 10 9 6 4
Q 7 2 | c) | K Q 8 6 5
J 8
Q 9 5
Q J 7 |
|----|-------------------------------------|----|-------------------------------------|----|------------------------------------|

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d)	K 9 5 J 8 4 2 K Q 8 7 6 5	e)	K Q 10 9 6 5 10 2 Q 8 7 4 8
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ANSWERS:

- a) **Pass:** 14 PH + 1 PL, the fifth suit in Clubs is not robust and it is not possible to bid at level 1. This hand has PREDOMINANTLY DEFENSIVE POTENTIAL, so you should logically listen to the rest of the bidding and not enter into a bidding competition without a valid reason. Remember that it is technically “forbidden” to bid an Opening overbid at **level 2** with an *anonymous* suit.
- b) **2 Diamonds:** 12 PH + 1 PL, the Diamond suit is robust and the score is the minimum to make an Opening (first round) overbid at level 2. If this hand contained only 11 PH + 1 PL, the suit would have to be specified to allow such an overbid; in other words, one must always have a Specified five-card suit to make any Opening overbid if the hand does not have at least 13 points.
- c) **1 Spade:** 11 PH + 1 PL and a Specified fifth suit, it is correct to enter the competition because A SPECIFIED FIFTH SUIT HAS BOTH OFFENSIVE AND DEFENSIVE (*which can win tricks in contract defense*) VALUE; unlike a short suit, which offers no protection if the trump is deficient.
- d) **Pass:** 9 PH + 2 PL, there's a very nice suit in Clubs, but you'll have to wait for the rest of the bidding due to the insufficient score; you never know! Hands of 10-11 points with a good distribution have definite potential, but you'll have to let your opponents and partner speak to determine the appropriateness of revealing the suit to your opponents and, above all, to accurately describe it **in a single bid to partner**.

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- e) **2 Spades!** This is a jump opening overbid; its meaning is completely different from a jump opening overbid at level 2 without jump. (or a overbid in color). This is, more precisely, the Weak Opening at Level 2, which you will soon learn because it is indeed a First Bid.

Ex. 1.4:7 What do you declare with each of the following hands?

	1	2	3	4
	1 He	<i>Pass</i>	2 He	You
a)	K Q 8 Q 7 5 2 A Q 9 6 5 2		b)	K 10 8 6 5 Q A K 10 9 10 9 2

ANSWERS:

- a) **3 Clubs:** 13 PH + 2 PL, the hand is worth 15 points and there is a good sixth suit, it is worth entering into a bidding competition especially if you are not vulnerable. An **OPENING OVERBID WITHOUT A JUMP at the level 3** describes a minimum hand between 13 and 17 points and a sixth suit that is at least robust. Level 3 for an opening overbid without a jump in the first round describes a longer suit and a "regular" score, i.e., at least broad (13-17 HL).
- b) **2 Spades:** 12 PH + 1 PL, the suit is barely robust and there are two losing points in Hearts, but the requirements for an Opening overbid at level 2 (Standard suit, no jump) are present, so why not! Particularly in a non-vulnerable position, one should not hesitate to take risks when the minimum conditions are met.

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Ex.1.4:8 **What do you declare with each hand?**

	1	2	3	4	
	1 Cl	<i>Pass</i>	1 He	You	
a)	K Q 10 3 8 7 A Q 7 5 2 6 5	b)	A K Q 5 Q 7 K 10 8 6 K J 10 9	c)	10 8 5 4 3 Q 7 K 8 6 A 9

ANSWERS:

- a) 2 Diamonds:** 11 PH + 1 PH, there are only 12 points, but the fifth suit is specified. Bidding must be entered even if the opponents might withdraw from the auction with a point advantage. A "defensive" style of play by the opening team is generally not threatening to the defensive team if the opening overbid criteria are met. Thus, there is no question of *Passing* with this well-constructed hand, whose score is just at the limit.
- b) Pass:** 15 PH. In **the absence of a fifth suit**, it is forbidden to make an OPENING OVERBID IN COLOR i, regardless of the bidding level.
- c) 1 Spade:** 12 PH + 1 PL. There are no special rules for the second defender when it comes to making an opening overbid. Here, level 1 is still available, and the requirements are minimal. The risk of failure is real, but the chances of partner holding some support cards are relatively good, and if the opponents *Pass*, they have more to lose than to gain, and a penalty double (against you) is unlikely.

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