

## BALANCING: WHEN YOU ARE IN THE PASS-OUT SEAT

Balancing: When your LHO opens the bidding at the one level followed by two passes, any bid you make is called a **balancing bid**, and can be a suit overcall, no trump, a double, or a cue bid. The difference between bidding in the pass out seat, as opposed to the direct seat, is that you are reasonably certain opener's partner has fewer than 6 points, so your partner will have something. Now you are able to "stretch" your values and make bids with fewer points than you might otherwise.

Why Balance? Scores of -110, -120, or -140 are generally poor duplicate scores. When each side has 17-23 points, it's generally possible for both sides to take 8 tricks in their 8+ card fit. Therefore, going down -100 (off 2 not vulnerable or off 1 vulnerable) beats allowing opponents to make their low level contract. Even better is pushing opponents to a level they cannot make, in which case you will get a positive score.

### When to Balance:

- You are short in opponent's suit
- You have a good 5+ card suit of your own
- You have strength and good support for unbid suits
- When opponents have stopped in 1NT or a two-level contract

### When Not to Balance:

- You have a weak hand (under 8 points) and/or a weak suit
- You have length in opener's suit (harder to find a fit and better to defend)

Evaluate Partner's Hand: The weaker your hand is, the more likely it is that partner has a strong hand, but couldn't bid in 2<sup>nd</sup> chair (no suit to overcall or no support for all unbid suits for a takeout double). Opener may have bid partner's suit!

- Subtract your high card points from 20 to estimate partner's points
- Subtract your holding of opponent's suit from 6 to estimate partner's holding

Balancing After Opponent's 1-Level Suit Bid: Since you suspect partner has values, you "borrow" a king (3 points) from partner's hand when making your own bid:

- Bid a 5+ card suit with 8-13 high card points. The stronger your hand, the weaker the suit needs to be, and vice versa. With 13-16 points and a six-card suit, jump bid, which is not pre-emptive (nobody to pre-empt in the pass out seat)
- With a balanced 11-14 and a reasonable stopper in opponent's suit, bid 1NT. We recommend playing "systems on" with partner (Stayman and transfers).
- Double for takeout with 10+ points and reasonable support for unbid suits. A new suit (or NT) by you after partner's response shows a stronger hand (14+). Partner can also convert his/her "trap pass" into a penalty double by passing.
- Cue bid (e.g., Michaels) or unusual 2NT to describe your hand.

Balancing After Opponent's 1NT: This is generally riskier, since the strong hand is sitting behind you. It is generally best to have a distributional hand, so agree with your partner what no-trump defense system you prefer. A weak distributional hand is better than a hand with points, because it means partner's points are sitting behind opener.

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### Balancing When Both Opponents Have Bid:

- When opponents stop in 1NT (1♣/♦-1♥/♠-1NT), they do not have a fit, and it is more difficult for you to find a fit. With a stronger hand, bid a good suit or double.
- When opponents stop at the 2-level (1♥-2♥), you can be more aggressive. Bid a long suit, double for takeout, or use unusual 2NT to show the minors.

Partner's Bids (After a Balancing Bid): Remember, your partner may have stretched to balance, so don't get carried away. Your goal is to find a fit, not game. If balancer has extra strength, you will find out on the next round.

- Generally pass with support for partner's suit, unless you have 8+ points
  - If opener rebids, you may support with as few as 5 points (at 2 level)
  - Cue bid with a strong, game invitational hand
- No trump shows 8+ points and reasonable stoppers in opponent's suit
- A new suit should show 8+ points, a 5+ card suit, and no support for partner
- Don't jump respond to a takeout double unless you have 12+ points
- Respond "systems on" to partner's no trump bid. Since partner may have bid NT with as few as 11 points, you should have 11-13 points to bid 2NT, 13+ for 3NT

### **Practice Hands:**

- 1♥ pass pass ? ♠KJ43 ♥AJ6 ♦Q843 ♣Q3  
Ans. 13 hcp, reasonable heart stop, **bid 1NT**, systems on
- 1♥ pass pass ? ♠KJ5 ♥76 ♦Q108432 ♣Q3  
Ans. 8 hcp, **pass** (your diamonds are not strong enough to bid)
- 1♥ pass pass ? ♠KQ5 ♥76 ♦AQJ1084 ♣A6  
Ans. 16 hcp, **jump to 3♦**, inviting game
- 1♠ pass pass ? ♠7 ♥A852 ♦KQ85 ♣J743  
Ans. 10 hcp, **takeout double**; partner may pass with 5-6 good spades
- 1♦ pass pass ? ♠QJ754 ♥A9532 ♦void ♣Q108  
Ans. 9 hcp, **2♦** Michaels cue bid
- 1♦ pass pass ? ♠AJ1089 ♥932 ♦K8 ♣AKQ6  
Ans. 17 hcp, **double, then bid spades** to show a strong hand
- 1♠ pass pass ? ♠KQ64 ♥87 ♦Q9643 ♣AJ  
Ans. 12 hcp, **pass**, long suit too weak to bid; better to defend
- 1♥ pass 2♥ pass pass ? ♠J9642 ♥765 ♦A109 ♣K6  
Ans. 8 hcp, **2♠**; partner knows your spades were too weak to overcall on the first round
- 1♥ pass 1NT pass; 2♦ pass pass ? ♠Q1084 ♥K43 ♦94 ♣AQJ6  
Ans. 12 hcp, **double for takeout** (couldn't double 1st round w/o ♦ support)
- 1♦ pass pass 1♥ (balancer); pass ? ♠A64 ♥8543 ♦K42 ♣873  
Ans. 7 hcp, **pass**, but bid 2♥ if LHO bids anything
- 1♥ pass pass 1♠ (balancer); pass ? ♠62 ♥KJ1083 ♦AK6 ♣Q96  
Ans. 13 hcp, **2NT** inviting game
- 1♥ pass pass 1NT (balancer); pass ? ♠J106542 ♥64 ♦KQ7 ♣84  
Ans. 6 hcp, **2♥** (transfer to spades)