

Competitive bidding: takeout doubles and responding

One of the biggest changes in bridge over the last twenty years is how competitive the auction has become. Traditionally it has been a failing in Scottish bridge as the conservative style of many strong players has found them being regularly outbid.

An important consideration for any partnership is to understand what doubles mean: takeout, penalty, game try, 'values', negative or even the rarely seen 'striped tailed ape'¹.

RULE: Low-level doubles are takeout

A double is for takeout if all of the following are true:

1. The opponents have bid a suit at the one-, two- or three-level.
2. Partner has not bid.
3. The double was made at the first opportunity.

As its name suggests, a takeout double asks your partner to bid. The doubler must bear in mind that a minimum response could be very weak since their partner must bid. It is possible for your partner to convert a takeout double to a penalty double by passing, but this requires very strong trumps, should never be done on weakness and you should expect a trump lead. Passing any takeout double for penalties is rare.

Traditionally a minimum takeout double would be:

(1♥) Dbl

♠ Kxxx

♥ x

♦ KJxx

♣ AQxx

Opening values with shortage in the opponent's suit and support for all the other suits. A takeout double can also be made with a very strong hand, but over the years this bar has been rising with more experts overcalling on strong one-suited hands rather than making a takeout double.

It is rare that you will be dealt the perfect takeout double and these days people will double on less suitable hands. The key features of the modern takeout double are:

- Close to opening values.
- Support for the unbid major(s).
- Support for the unbid minor is less certain.

¹ https://www.bridgebum.com/stripe_tailed_ape_double.php

<p>(1♦) ?</p> <p>♠ KJxx ♥ AJxx ♦ QJx ♣ xx</p> <p>Double: minimum points but support for both majors.</p>	<p>(1♥) ?</p> <p>♠ AQJx ♥ xx ♦ AKJxx ♣ xx</p> <p>Double: a good hand with four spades that will convert a 2♣ response to 2♦.</p>
<p>(1♠) ?</p> <p>♠ Ax ♥ Kxx ♦ Axxx ♣ Kxxx</p> <p>Double: not ideal distribution but non-minimum and important to get into the auction.</p>	<p>(1♦) ?</p> <p>♠ AQx ♥ Axx ♦ Axx ♣ KJxx</p> <p>Double: too strong for 1NT overcall, so double planning to rebid no trump.</p>
<p>(1♦) ?</p> <p>♠ AQxxx ♥ Kxxx ♦ x ♣ Kxx</p> <p>1♠: I would overcall my 5-card major and then double (or bid) on the second round to show hearts.</p> <p>This is my style. Many experts advocate doubling, so there is no correct answer.</p>	<p>(1♣) ?</p> <p>♠ AQx ♥ KJx ♦ QJxxx ♣ xx</p> <p>Double: more important to show support for both majors than overcalling a weakish suit.</p>

Responding to a takeout double

A simple suit response shows 0-8 points.

A jump response shows 7-11 points. With a four-card suit and 7-8 points I would normally just make a single suit response. With a five-card suit I would jump with 7-8 points if the points are in my long suit.

A cue bid response shows any 11+ points hand and is forcing to suit agreement or game.

<p>(1♦) Double (Pass)</p> <p>♠ KJxx ♥ Jxx ♦ QJxx ♣ xx</p> <p>1♠ - 8 points but a flat hand, wasted values in diamonds and only four spades.</p>	<p>(1♦) Double (Pass)</p> <p>♠ KJxxx ♥ xx ♦ xx ♣ Axxx</p> <p>2♠ - 8 points again but a five-card major and all the points are 'working'</p>
<p>(1♦) Double (Pass)</p> <p>♠ Kxx ♥ Jxx ♦ QJxx ♣ xxx</p> <p>1♥ - the nightmare hand, but 1NT should really show 8-10 points with a stop and your diamond suit is not good enough to pass.</p>	<p>(1♦) Double (Pass)</p> <p>♠ AQxx ♥ Axxx ♦ xx ♣ Kxxx</p> <p>2♦ - a cue bid forcing to suit agreement or game. You will raise partner's two of a major to game with this hand.</p>

Doubles in competition

"First double shows values, second double is takeout, third double is penalty"

There are a number of auctions where you make a strength-showing double without specifically showing a suit. In these, the intent behind subsequent doubles can be murky and the above mantra is intended to help.

The first double shows 'values' when the opponents have not shown a specific suit so you cannot make a pure takeout double.

For example,

(1NT)	Dbl=values	(2♥=nat)	Dbl=takeout
(1NT)	Dbl=values	(2♥=5+spades)	Dbl=takeout of hearts!
1♦ Dbl=takeout of hearts	(2♦=majors)	Dbl=values	(2♥)
1♦ Pass	(2♦=majors) (Pass)	Dbl=values Dbl=takeout of hearts	(2♥)
1♥ Dbl=takeout of diamonds	(2NT=minors)	Dbl=values	(3♦)

Once you have made a takeout double, this is presumed to show all the other suits and subsequent doubles are always penalty. This is a general rule that applies to a wide variety of auctions.

1NT Dbl=penalty	(2♥)	Dbl=takeout	(2♠)
1NT Dbl=takeout	(2♣=majors)	Dbl=values	(2♥)