



Competitive Bidding – The NEGATIVE DOUBLE CONVENTION

General

When partner opens the bidding with a 1-level bid of a suit (1♣, 1♦, 1♥, or 1♠) and RHO overcalls a suit, Responder is under pressure to try to describe their hand and search for a possible fit. Responder can bid a new suit, called a *Freebid*, with the appropriate length and strength to compete in the bidding. But if Responder does not meet the requirements for a freebid, they need another tool to show enough values to compete in the bidding but no good other action. This tool is *Double*! Responder's double in this specific type of auction is called the *Negative Double Convention*. The same logic as the Takeout Double Convention applies to the responder seat Negative Double. Since low level penalty doubles rarely work well the double has been given special meaning to solve a competitive bidding problem.

The Science of Responder's Action in a Competitive Auction

In a competitive auction It is important that responder at their first opportunity to bid shows that they have the values to compete, otherwise opener will assume that responder has 0-5 pts. If the opponents have bid such that opener's second bid will be at the 3-level opener will be reluctant, even with a very good hand, to bid again if responder's first bid is a pass.

Low-Level Negative Double Specifics

Only two negative double auctions "promise" a specific distribution by Responder. These are the lowest-level negative doubles possible.

1♣	(1♦)	X	Exactly 4-4 Majors, 6+ points
1♣/1♦	(1♥)	X	4-card spade suit, 6+ points

More Flexible Negative Doubles

Negative doubles after a 1♠ or higher overcall can be made with a larger variety of shapes but does require additional values depending on the level.

These doubles do not "promise" a specific distribution; they are more flexible actions. In general, the higher Responder makes a negative double, the more flexibility Opener must allow for their possible distributions.

Example Auction

1♣ (1♠) X

This is the first negative double that is somewhat “blurry” about exactly what distribution it shows. The “normal” hand we may have for making a negative double is one with 4-card ♥, 4-card ♦, and 6+HCP.

But as Responder we may make a negative double with a variety of different distributions in this auction:

1♣ (1♠) X

Example Hand 1

♠ 84

♥ A976

♦ A8432

♣ T6

A classic hand for making a negative double. We pass if Opener bids either of the unbid suits.

Example Hand 2

♠ 84

♥ A9762

♦ A843

♣ T6

Here we have extra length in the unbid Major, but not enough values to make a freebid. So, we make a negative double, planning to pass if partner bids either of the unbid suits.

Example Hand 3

♠ 84

♥ A976

♦ 43

♣ AT643

Here we have support for the minor suit partner opened and for the unbid Major. If partner bids ♥, we pass; if partner bids ♦s, we correct back to ♣s.

Example Hand 4

♠ AJ8

♥ AJ97

♦ 43

♣ JT6

Here we have support for the unbid Major, which we hope partner bids, but we also have a stopper in the opponent’s suit. If partner bids 2♦ after our negative double, we bid 2NT, showing our ♠ stopper and invitational values.

Example Hand 5

♠ 843

♥ AQJ976

♦ 43

♣ T6

Here we make a negative double because we have enough values to act, but not enough to make a freebid in our long ♥ suit. If partner bids anything other than ♥, we bid ♥ next to show a hand with 6-9 pts and a long ♥ suit. This hand type is sometimes referred to as a *Negative Freebid* hand.

Example Hand 6

♠ 843

♥ A97

♦ A843

♣ T64

We have no good bid. 1NT shows the right values and shape, but we have no ♠ stopper. 2♣ shows more ♣ than we have. 2♦ shows more values and more ♦ than we have, as does 2♥. This leaves double or pass. Pass does not let partner know that we have some values and may make the auction more difficult later. Double is a possible call, showing “enough values to compete in the bidding, but no other good action.” None of these bids are good and it is a bit of a partnership style issue as to how you handle these types of hands.

Higher-Level Negative Doubles

When RHO makes a higher-level overcall, Responder needs more values to compete in the bidding. This is true for freebids and for negative doubles. For us to make a negative double after a 1-level overcall, we need about 6 points. As the opponent’s overcalls become higher we need more values in order to make a negative double. Versus a 3♠ or higher overcall, we need about 12+ points. These are total points, not just HCP, and the more shape we have, the fewer HCP we promise. But we should keep in mind that if Opener has length and strength in the suit overcalled, they may convert our negative double into a penalty double. We should have some defensive tricks when making a negative double, especially at higher levels. Also, the higher the level of interference we face, the less space we have to communicate with partner below 3NT. In this case, we are forced to make a negative double with a large variety of shapes. Opener should know this and not assume we have a perfectly shaped hand for a negative double in these auctions.

The values Responder needs to make a negative double after a variety of different overcalls are:

1♣ ()

- 1♦/1♥/1♠ Need about 6+ points to make a negative double.
- 2♣/2♦/2♥/2♠ Need 8+ points
- 3♣/3♦/3♥/3♠ Need 12+ points

Opener's Rebid after responder makes a Negative Double

Opener assumes responder has support for both unbid suits and enough strength to compete.

Based upon the level required for opener's minimum rebid.

1. With a minimum-opening bid, rebid at the cheapest available level.
2. With a medium-strength hand, jump a level.
3. With a maximum-strength hand, go to game.

Responder's Rebid after Making a Negative Double

With a minimum hand (6 to 9 total points),

1. Pass opener's minimum rebid.
2. Give a simple preference to opener's original suit, or
3. Bid a new suit without a jump.

With an invitational-strength hand (10 or 11 total points)

1. Bid again to invite opener to game.

With a maximum hand of 12 or more points,

2. Bid game.

Negative Double Summary

Eddie Wold, one of the top experts, has a good "rule of thumb" for deciding whether to make a negative double. He describes them as having "two places to play!" Those could be:

- The 2 unbid suits
- One unbid suit and NT (often the other Major suit)
- One unbid suit and partner's suit
- Extreme length in one of the unbid suits (like having that suit "twice")

This is a reasonable way of thinking about negative doubles and helps get players out of the habit of thinking they must promise both of the unbid suits.

Conclusion

The negative double is a very important and useful bid in bridge. It can be a bit more complicated than just "having the other 2 suits," but it is worth some complexity because in a competitive auction Responder needs to have good tools to search for a fit. This bid is so useful that when a group of the best bridge players in the world were asked in a poll in *The Bridge World* magazine if they had to play bridge and could only use one convention, what it would be, the *Negative Double* was the overwhelming winner! So, make sure that you are proficient in using this tool to look for a fit, and to land in a reasonable contract if your partner does not do what you hoped they would after your negative double. The key to successfully using a negative double is to make a plan for what to do after you make your double.