

# Responding to simple overcalls

*Note: in these articles, if there is not a full bidding diagram, then calls in brackets, like (1NT), are made by the opponents.*

This is very much a style question, which is another way of saying that it is partnership agreement.

I overcall on a very wide range of hands: they can be very weak overcalls at the one level aimed at helping a partner with their lead; or a very strong hand that is just not suitable for a takeout double.

So how does my partner cope with this?

Firstly they assume I have an average overcall, close to opening points, and bid as if I'd opened the bidding. If I, the overcaller, have a weak hand then I should have a good suit that I can rebid. If my suit is weak, then I'll have compensating values.

This style means that a new suit is forcing for one round but only promises the values for this. If the overcaller has a strong overcall, then they have to avoid making a non-forcing continuation.

A popular convention used by the overcaller's partner is the **Unassuming Cue Bid (UCB)**. Traditionally this was a cue bid of the opening bid to ask the overcaller to describe their hand further and show whether they were weak or strong. For example (1♥) - 1♠ - (Pass) - 2♥ is a **UCB**.

If you play my style, where a new suit is forcing, the UCB can be used as a **good raise** in your partner's suit. This means that direct raises are **weak**, for example (1♥) - 1♠ - (Pass) - 2♠ is weaker than the UCB and (1♥) - 1♠ - (Pass) - 3♠ is pre-emptive, not invitational.

The alternative style is that new suits are constructive but non-forcing. This is popular in some countries but has generally fallen out of fashion.

(1♦) - 1♥ - (Pass) - 1NT would show 8-10 points with 0-3 spades as you'd normally bid a four-card spade suit.

What does a jump response to an overcall show?

Whatever you agree that it shows. Larry Cohen, a prolific American writer and world-class player, advocates weak jump shifts (essentially a weak jump overcall). Andrew Robson recommends that jump shifts are **fit jumps**, showing four-card support for partner, five cards in the suit bid, and values for the level of bid made.

Helen and I play **fit jumps**, so the auction

(1♦) - 1♥ - (Pass) - 2♠ - shows 4 hearts, 5+ spades and the values for 3♥ or better.

If you follow this style of responding to overcalls, then you can actually overcall on very strong hands as your partner will only pass with a poor hand when game is unlikely.

This also means that you don't need to double just because you have a single-suited hand with 16+ points, you can just overcall.

Which removes one type of hand that people tend to double with.

So takeout doubles tend to be shape suitable or “strong and flexible”.

North	East	South	West
1♦	Dbl	Pass	1♠
Pass	2♥		

So 2♥ is not a one-suited hand, but a hand with 17+ points with 5 hearts, 3 spades and 4 clubs that is looking for the best contract. Why play in a 4-3 spades fit with you might have a 5-3 heart fit?

It is important to appreciate that this sequence shows extra values, so West must not simply rebid 2♠ or pass if they know that the combined values are close to game values.