



# Competitive Bidding: The Overcall

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**A**vital tool for competing in the auction is the *overcall*. Coming *after* the opponents have opened the bidding, the one-level overcall is mostly a *competitive* bid, and as such enjoys relaxed high card points, but if weak, has increased suit texture requirements. Simply stated, the overcall is a watered-down version of the opening bid but with three distinct purposes.

## ***The 1-level overcall objectives:***

1. To interfere or disrupt smooth communications between the opponents.
2. To introduce a *good* long suit or a *good* hand to compete for the contract.
3. To request or suggest an opening lead from partner if defending.

## **Requirements for Overcalls**

**BECAUSE OF THE IMPORTANCE** of the competitive overcall, a certain risk factor is necessary to undertake, however, *no rewards for the timid!* Unlike the opening bid which usually requires a 12-point hand, a one-level overcall is often made with as little as 7-10\* high card points. The desirable overcall qualification is the *texture* of the suit. But Overcalls at the two-level or higher should be opening hands *and* good suits. Or very strong hands if just average strength suits.

*\*Tip: The more honor cards you have in your suit, the harder it is for the opponents to double for penalty, even if you've overcalled at the one-level with just minimum high card points.*

## **Attractive Suits for 1-level Overcalls**

- |                           |                          |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. ♠KQ1092 ♥J65 ♦J103 ♣Q7 | 2. ♠AJ10xx ♥Ax ♦853 ♣652 |
| 3. ♠A10763 ♥K94 ♦A7 ♣842  | 4. ♠AK983 ♥Q104 ♦K32 ♣95 |

**I**n all the above hands, after an opening suit bid, you should overcall 1♠ although only Ex. 4 is a hand good enough to *open* the bidding. You'll note that *all* have good suit texture in spades.

## **Undesirable Suits for 1-level Overcalls**

- |                           |                          |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. ♠Q7532 ♥AJ6 ♦Q103 ♣K7  | 2. ♠J7632 ♥A9 ♦Q53 ♣K52  |
| 3. ♠107643 ♥KJ2 ♦KQ ♣K108 | 4. ♠K8763 ♥Q104 ♦Q42 ♣KJ |

**I**n the above four examples – all 11-13 point hands – *none, IMO*, are desirable for overcalling 1♠ due to the weakness of the spade suit. Can you see how easy it would be for the opponents to have strong holdings in spades that will make you an attractive victim of a penalty double?

## **Responding to an Overcall**

**AS RESPONDER** (partner) to an overcall, treat the overcall as if partner had opened the bidding in that suit, but exercise caution due to the relaxed high card strength required of an overcall. Raise partner's overcall one level with 6-10 point hands (and a fit of course), invite a game with 11-13 point hands, and bid a major suit game (4♠/4♥) with 14 or more and a fit. Notice that these raise requirements are just slightly higher than those of responding to partner's opening bid.

*Tip: With a good responding hands (11+high card points) the way to invite a game in partner's overcall is to use a cue bid. Cue bids should always guarantee a fit - three or more trumps.*