

Negative Doubles

- Like takeout doubles – x replaces a direct penalty double and instead is used to show the unbid suits
 - Very little value in lower level penalty doubles – too speculative
 - Negative doubles are very useful in competitive auctions
 - Negative doubles, like most conventions, are made by **responder**

Partner opens 1♦; your right hand opponent overcalls 1♠.

♠873 ♥KQ82 ♦Q5 ♣Q982

In the days of Goren, a double here was defined as penalty. Since this hand could not respond 1NT (no stopper) or 2C/2H (not enough high card points), it would have to pass. Of course, opener when making a competitive decision didn't know back then if responder has this respectable nine count or some horror show like:

♠873 ♥J832 ♦T5 ♣9842

In 1957, Al Roth invented the **negative double** to handle hands such as these as responder. It is very rare to hold a hand that wants to penalize 1♠. It is far more common to hold a hand that would have responded 1♥ without the interference, but now can't. In modern bridge, responder can double with the first hand and pass with the second so that opener can better judge the auction.

Negative doubles are usually used to show hearts, but can be used to show spades, the majors or the minors in various situations.

1♦-(1♠); x – negative, showing hearts (at least 4)

1♦-(2♣); x – negative, showing both majors (generally at least 4-4, but you can have only one major when you have diamond support)

♠AJ87 ♥32 ♦QT85 ♣Q84 – go ahead and x; if partner bids 2♥, you can bid 3♦

♠J7 ♥AJ932 ♦T8 ♣K874 – if partner bids 2♠, you'll be stuck so double is out.

Pass or bid an aggressive 2NT (I like pass).

1♥-(1♠); x – negative, showing both minors (at least 4-4, 2 or fewer hearts)

The next two go together. I see this mistake made commonly among newer players; i.e. they forget to double with 4 spades and respond 1 spade instead. Using x to show 4 and 1♠ to show five can be invaluable in competitive auctions in judging how high to compete when your side owns the boss suit.

1♦-(1♥); x – negative, showing exactly 4 spades and 6+ HCP

1♦-(1♥); 1♠ – 5 or more spades, 6+ HCP

- Two Main Differences
 - Takeout doubles are made by an overcaller; negative doubles are made by responder
 - Takeout doubles show all three unbid suits; negative doubles show two unbid suits
 - As with takeout doubles, negative doubles strongly imply you hold the unbid major – you should always have it
- **Rules of negative doubles – when are negative doubles “on”**
 - **They apply as responder to partner’s opening one of a suit**
 - Valid over partner opening 1♣, 1♦, 1♥, 1♠, followed by your right hand opponent making a simple 1 or 2 level overcall
 - Not valid (double is penalty) when partner opens 1NT, 2NT, preempts, or opens 2♣
 - We talked last month that I recommend using x after 2♣-(bid) as a way to show a bust hand. It should not be played as negative.
 - Also, not valid (again, double is penalty) if your right hand opponent overcalls 1NT, 2NT (for the two lowest), or with a cue bid (usually a two suiter including one major)
 - They are valid if your right hand opponent preempts, but you need extra strength
 - Guideline: 6+ HCP at the one level
 - 9+ HCP at the two level
 - 12+ HCP at the three level (you’re usually forcing partner to game at this point)
 - A common level for negative doubles to be “on” is through 3♠ – beyond whatever level you establish, doubles are for penalty
 - They tend to deny great support for partner’s suit
 - Better to raise partner (especially when partner opens a major) via direct raise or cue bid – always a good idea to support as soon as possible

1♦ – 1♠ – (?)

Don’t let the opponents bury your heart fit! Use negative doubles to recover.

There are six different hands you could hold with hearts; this is how each should be bid.

Horrible (0-5 points, 4+ hearts) – you pass (as you would without interference)

♠JT5 ♥Q765 ♦T5 ♣J432

Preemptive and shapely (<8 HCP, 7+ hearts) – jump to 3♥ which is weak

♠9 ♥KQT9852 ♦87 ♣T62

Weak and flat (6-9 points, exactly four hearts) - you double

- You would then pass any nonforcing bid by partner – opener should always bid as if you have this type of hand after a negative double

♠87 ♥KQ74 ♦Q64 ♣J432

Weak but shapely (6-9 points, 5+ hearts) – you double

- You will try to rebid hearts later to show your length; the original double then confirms you have limited strength

♠87 ♥KQT63 ♦Q8 ♣J432

Strong but flat (10+ points, exactly four hearts) – you double

- Depending on partner's response, you will take further action

♠KT ♥AJ65 ♦K97 ♣AJ43

-> Game is certain and slam is possible, but you need information to choose which strain and how high. For now start with a negative double to check on the heart fit. Negative doubles are unlimited in terms of HCP.

Strong and shapely (10+ points, 5+ hearts) – you bid 2♥.

♠A5 ♥KQ743 ♦Q32 ♣J54

-> Finally, you can use 2H to describe this decent hand.

What does opener do?

Opener assumes partner has 6-9 points and four hearts (weak & flat) and bids accordingly.

With a boring opener, opener makes a limited rebid (usually 1nt, 2♥, or 2♦...even 2♣)

♠KT2 ♥65 ♦AQ93 ♣A764 -> bid 1nt

♠96 ♥QJ65 ♦AQ93 ♣A764 -> bid 2♥

♠96 ♥65 ♦AQJT53 ♣AQ2 -> bid 2♦

♠96 ♥65 ♦AJ976 ♣AKJ5 -> bid 2♣

With extras, opener should jump the bidding

♠KJ7 ♥A6 ♦AQ93 ♣AT93 ---- bid 2NT (nonforcing)
♠A5 ♥AJ64 ♦AQ93 ♣K76 --→ bid 3♥ (nonforcing)
♠A5 ♥AJ64 ♦AQ93 ♣AQ5 -→ Bid 4♥ (nonforcing, to play)
♠8 ♥KJ ♦AQJ76 ♣AK853 -→ Bid 3♣ (forcing)

If negative doubler, now has extras, he/she should go on.

Other common negative double situations

1♣-1♦-x.....(shows 6+ HCP, exactly 4-4 in the major suits)

- Principle here is that responder should only double when the suit length is equal; bidding a major shows a preference; with 5-5, start with 1♠ and rebid hearts to show excellent shape)

1♦-2♣-x..... (shows 9+ points, ideally 4-4 in the majors but sometimes 4-3 – easy to get stuck here)

♠AK7 ♥AT65 ♦QT6 ♣873 – very awkward! I'd make an unhappy negative double...game is far too likely to risk passing)

1♥-1♠-x.....(shows at least 6 points, 4-4+ in minors)

1♣/♦ – 1♥ – x (shows exactly 4 spades, 6 + points)

1♣/♦ - 1♥ – 1♠ (now shows 5+ spades, 6 + points)

1♠ – 2♣ – x (shows 4+ hearts, diamond tolerance, 9+ points)

What happens if we actually wish we could make the 1957 style penalty double?

At favorable vulnerability:

1♦-(1♠); ??

♠AQT82 ♥K82 ♦9 ♣J932

With the opponents vulnerable and game uncertain, this might be a good time to take a shot at a penalty pass. You can't double as partner will think you have hearts and will certainly take another call. **In tempo**, you pass and wait for partner to reopen with a double when he/she has shortness and then pass that when it comes back to you. You still might get a good board if partner can't reopen at these colors; you are probably beating it and game seems unlikely if partner can't do anything.

If partner disappoints and doesn't double (say partner bids 2♦), you might try 2NT on the next round to show that you had interest in a penalty pass the first time. A 10-11 HCP hand that wasn't so great for penalty (♠KJ9 ♥QT2 ♦J82 ♣KJT2) would have bid 2NT on the first round.