

Balancing (in EU – Protection)

There are two types of balancing bids, when one opponent has bid and when both opponents have bid. We will discuss both, but first some background. The designation Balancing Seat is common in the bridge community to describe the player who has the option of either bidding the third pass, which would end the auction, or taking some additional action in order to increase the level of play or possibly penalize the opponents. Thus, when in this seat you have the option to balance or are balancing.

One wants to balance when:

1. You're short in the opponent's suit.
2. You have length and high-card strength in the other suits.
3. You have a good 5-card or longer suit.
4. Based on their bidding, the HCP are roughly divided between you and your partner and the opponents.
5. You're not vulnerable (if you can't make your bid, the penalty will be lower, and may be even less than the score you would have lost if you had defended the one-bid).
6. The opponents have stopped in a low-level suit partscore (1 or 2) -- especially if it's possible that you can find a 2-level contract of your own (they've stopped in 2C, 2D or 2H or below).
7. The opponents have found a trump fit (they have bid and raised a suit).

Balancing Over One-Bids

A balancing bid is made in the pass-out seat after an opponent has opened the bidding (1 of a suit on your left, Pass, Pass, to you). In these situations, it's often a good idea to stretch to keep the auction alive. In general you can add 3 HCP to your hand and bid normally.

One reason for balancing is to protect partner when he has good values, but did not have a descriptive bid available in the direct seat. In some of these cases, he may have had a "trap pass"-a strong hand that could not call because of length in opener's suit.

If the auction has gone 1C-p-p-?? your side will have about 20-22 pts. and the opponents will have 18-20 pts. (14-16 for opener, 4 for his partner).

Balancing after a Suit Opening Bid (1C/1D/1H/1S - Pass - Pass - ?)

When you balance over a one-bid, you are, in effect, bidding some of partner's values for him. This means you can "shade down" many of your bids. As a guideline, most of your balancing bids promise about one King fewer than you would need to make the same bid in the direct seat.

- **Minimum suit bid** (1D-Pass-Pass-1H) = 8-13 pts., usually a 5+-card suit (but may be a good 4-card suit at the one-level). The better your suit, the fewer pts. you need to bid.
- **1NT** (1D-Pass-Pass-1NT) = About 11-14 pts. with stoppers (or moderate length) in the opponent's suit. Suggestion – play systems on.
- **A jump in a new suit** (1H-Pass-Pass-2S) = 13-16 pts. and a strong 6+-card suit. A jump in the balancing seat *invites* game-it is *not* a strong jump-shift or a preempt.

- **Double** = for takeout, showing 10+ pts. with shortness in the opponent's suit. A takeout double can also be used to start the description of a better hand (14+ pts.) that was too strong to balance with a simple suit bid or 1NT. After partner responds to your double, you can show the stronger hand by rebidding 1NT (to show 16-18 pts.) or freely bidding a new suit (to show 14+ pts. and a 5+-card suit).
- **Bid of the opponent's suit (1H-Pass-Pass-2H)** = This is called a *cuebid*, and depending we have defined it as Micheals
- **Jump to 2NT (1S-Pass-Pass-2NT)** = Unusual, showing length in the two lower unbid suits (this meaning is probably more valuable).

Balancing Over an Opening Notrump (1NT - Pass - Pass - ?)

In this class we will still play Cappalletti. But lots of people have various agreements, so make sure to ask.

When balancing over 1NT it important to have the right type of values. Remember the strong hand will be sitting over you. Strangely enough, less is actually more. If you have a two count and it cause 1NT-p-p with Jxxxx, Jxxxx, xx, x 2D is automatic. As RHO is limited to 7 HCP, LHO has 15-17, so partner must at lead has 14 count, and on overage more. You shape, will give him/her an excellent chance of making it. Now if you have KJxxx, KJxxx, Kx, K, while have a lot more HCP, I'm less likely to expect partner to make this one, as the As and Qs will be sitting over me.

Responder's Bids (after partner balances over a one-bid)

Remember that partner may have stretched to keep the auction open for you, so don't hang him/her. In general, most of your responses promise about one Queen more than you would have if partner had taken action in the direct seat.

If partner balances with a suit (showing 8-13 pts.):

Don't get too excited. Partner usually has less than opening-bid strength, so you should usually pass if you have a weak hand without a fit. The meanings of your other bids are:

- **"Free" raise of partner's suit** (1H-Pass-Pass-1S / Pass-2S) shows a constructive hand (8-12 playing pts.).
- **Competitive raise of partner's suit** (over an intervening bid -- 1H-Pass-Pass-1S / 2H-2S) shows support, but may be made with a slightly weaker hand than a free raise. If opener bids again (or if his partner comes into the auction), compete if you have a fit and fair playing strength (7+ pts.).
- **Jump raise of partner's suit** (1H-Pass-Pass-1S / Pass-3S) invites game -- 11-13 playing points.
- **Low-level notrump bid** shows good strength, stoppers in the opponent's suit and no fit for partner's major. (1NT = about 9-12 pts.. A jump to 2NT = 12-13 pts. A jump to 3NT = 14+ pts.)
- **New suit** (1H-Pass-Pass-1S / Pass-2D) shows a 5+-card suit and good playing strength. If partner balanced with a major, your new-suit bid usually denies support for his suit.

- **Cuebid** (bid of the opponent's suit -- 1C-Pass-Pass-1S / Pass-2C) Artificial, showing a **very** strong hand and interest in game – we have not discussed this yet.

If partner doubles (showing 10+ pts.):

Remember that partner can be relatively light in high-card points, so don't hang him/her. With most hands, respond at the cheapest level possible (don't jump, even with 10-11 pts.). If partner has a full opening bid, he'll usually bid again.

If partner balances with 1NT (showing 11-14 pts.):

"System on" -- 2C is Stayman, transfers, 2NT invitational.

Balancing after both opponents have bid

If the opponents stop in 1NT (they bid 1C-1H-1NT or 1D-1NT, etc.):

Balancing in the pass-out seat is somewhat risky because the opponents don't have a fit. You'll want to have some extra strength to balance over these auctions. As a result, most of your actions suggest at least moderate length in the suit bid on your right (because if you had shortness in that suit, you probably would have made a bid earlier in the auction).

Some pairs like to play a double in these auctions as a "trap pass", showing a strong holding in the suit bid on your right. In this case, responder shouldn't be afraid to pass and lead dummy's suit.

Balancing Actions

If you're in the pass-out seat after the opponents stop in a part score, the meanings of your bids are:

- **Double** (1H-Pass-2H-Pass / Pass-DBL) = For takeout. You may be fairly light for this action if you have the right shape (shortness in their suit). A typical hand for a balancing double after the opponents stop in 2H would be:
♠QJ72 ♥2 ♦AJ76 ♣Q1053 .
- **Suit bid** (1H-Pass-2H-Pass / Pass-2S) = A one-suited hand that doesn't have the right pattern for a takeout double. Your failure to make a direct overcall at your first turn tells partner that your suit may not be robust:
♠J7432 ♥832 ♦A7 ♣K107 .
- **Notrump** (1H-Pass-2H-Pass / Pass-2NT) = Unusual, showing length in the two lowest unbid suits (usually the minors). A balancing bid of 2NT is never natural; partner should always pull this to one of your suits. If the opponents stop in 2H, your balance of 2NT would show a hand like:
♠7 ♥J72 ♦AJ104 ♣QJ972 .

Responding to Partner's Balancing Bid

When partner balances over the opponent's low-level contract, it's important to remember that he has essentially already bid your cards for you. Your partnership's goal is to find a fit and a safe part score, *not* to bid a game.

- **If partner balances with a suit**, the best advice is *don't* bid on at all. Unless you have a great fit and extraordinary playing strength --or no fit, but a good suit of your own -- you should pass.
- **If partner balances with a double**, resist the temptation to jump in your suit. Respond your longest suit at the lowest level available. You may pass the double for penalty if you have a long, strong holding in the opponent's suit.

AT THE TABLE

The auction by your LHO 1H - Pass - Pass to you. What is your bid with:

♠Q3 ♥KQ4 ♦AJ87 ♣QJ92 ?

1NT. This is about the strongest hand you should have for a balancing 1NT.

♠984 ♥QJ6 ♦AQ1032 ♣K10 ?

1NT. A 2D bid is also a possibility, but with your balanced shape and heart stopper, 1NT is a better description.

♠K5 ♥64 ♦J102 ♣AJ10854 ?

2C. Don't be afraid to balance light if you have a good suit, especially if you're relatively short in your opponent's suit.

♠QJ93 ♥2 ♦A874 ♣K1032 ?

Double. You have minimum points, but you have right distribution.

♠AQJ103 ♥754 ♦6 ♣AQJ3 ?

Double. This hand is too strong for a simple 1S balance, which can show as few as 8 pts.. You plan to rebid 2S over partner's response, showing a "good" overcall.

♠4 ♥1043 ♦AQ7 ♣AKJ1084 ?

3C. This hand is too strong for a simple 2C balance. Jump to show your strong suit and invite game.

♠J ♥QJ84 ♦Q7654 ♣AQ7 ?

Pass. Your long suit is very weak and you have length in opener's suit. Also, they may have a better contract in spades, and they may find it if you reopen the bidding for them.

♠53 ♥J973 ♦KQ1032 ♣Q9 ?

Pass. You have a good suit, but you're very weak. Partner's failure to bid suggests that opener has a powerhouse, or that the opponents have a better fit somewhere.

The starts with your RHO; 1H -p - 2H - p; p - p - to you. What is your bid with:

♠QJ93 ♥2 ♦A874 ♣K1032 ?

Double. You have minimum points, but you have right distribution.

♠32 ♥2 ♦Q8743 ♣J10432 ?

2NT. Unusual, I didn't have enough the over 1H, but now that I now they have at most 24 HCP, and partner must have 14+, and stuck for a bid, I should come in and give partner a chose of where to play.