

C H A P T E R

TAKEOUT DOUBLES AT THE ONE-LEVEL



It is, according to my opinion, the only conventional call for which there is the slightest excuse.

Florence Irwin, Auction Highlights, 1913.

Strictly speaking, when you make the call of 'double' it says that you believe the opponents have bid too much and have arrived at a contract you think will fail. It signifies confidence that you will collect a penalty and that you wish to double the stakes for which the hand is played. This 'penalty double' (or 'business double') comes in handy if you think the opponents have bid too much. If declarer's contract is defeated, he will lose more points because he was doubled.

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
		1♣	dbl

However, in situations like this one, there are other (much more useful) meanings for the call 'double', the one most commonly encountered being the takeout double. To see why, consider the following hand:

♠ AJ74 ♥ KQ83 ♦ KJ95 ♣ 6

Your RHO opens 1♣. You cannot make an overcall because you do not have a five-card suit, but you do not want to pass and let the opponents buy the contract cheaply when you have a nice opening bid yourself. So, what can you do?

You would like to have a magic word that will force partner to bid his longest suit. In fact you do have such a word, and that word is 'double'. Since you will very rarely have a hand where you want to double an opening bid of one of a suit for penalties, you give up very little by using the double for takeout.

How do you know when a double is for takeout?

Now there's a question. What's your final answer? These are the four rules that define a *basic* takeout double:

1. *The bidding is below the game level.*
2. *The doubler has not made a call other than pass.*
3. *The doubler's partner has not made a bid other than pass.*
4. *The opponents' last bid was a suit, not notrump.*

If a double meets all these requirements, it is a takeout double. The double in each of these auctions is for takeout; notice how in each case, all four of the conditions are satisfied.

Auction 1

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
		1♠	dbl

Auction 2

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
1♠	pass	2♠	dbl

Auction 3

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
1♠	pass	pass	dbl

Auction 4

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
3♣	dbl		

On the other hand, the *final double* in each of these auctions is not for takeout:

Auction 5

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
	1NT	2♥	dbl

Partner has bid, so this is not for takeout.

Auction 6

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
1NT	dbl		

Doubles of notrump bids are not for takeout, except by special agreement.

Auction 7

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
1♠	pass	3♠	pass
4♠	dbl		

Since 4♠ is a game bid, this double is for penalties.

Auction 8

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
pass	1NT	2♣	1♦
			dbl

This double is not a takeout double for two reasons: partner has made a bid other than pass, and so have you.

What do you need to make a takeout double?

There are three types of hand on which you can make a takeout double. What can be regarded as a 'normal takeout double' is by far the most common of these three hand types and has the following requirements:

1. *At least opening bid values (including distribution)*
2. *Adequate trump support (at least three) for all of the unbid suits*
3. *Shortness in the opponent's suit (at most a doubleton)*

The purpose of the normal takeout double is to show a hand with sufficient strength to wish to compete in the bidding and to ask partner to choose his best from the three unbid suits. As we shall see later, there is no upper limit for your strength when you make a takeout double. However, to qualify as a 'normal takeout double' your hand must fit all three requirements. Let us therefore start with the kind of hand on which you cannot double.

♠ AK74 ♥ 84 ♦ A92 ♣ Q963

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
		1♣	?

You should not say 'double'; partner is too likely to bid hearts. You are not strong enough to bid twice, and your partner will not approve if you put this hand down in dummy having promised support for all of the unbid suits.

Here is an example of a typical takeout double after RHO has opened 1♦:

♠ KQ74 ♥ QJ64 ♦ 5 ♣ A1074

You have opening bid strength, shortness in the opener's suit, and support for all unbid suits. Whichever suit partner chooses, he will be happy with dummy's support.

You should not be afraid to double with few high cards, if your shape makes up for it. Look at this collection:

♠ KJ104 ♥ A1094 ♦ — ♣ Q9875

BY THE WAY

When you hold a decent five-card major, you should usually choose to overcall, even though your hand may qualify for a double by the other criteria. The primary reason for this is that partner will not bid a three-card suit in response to your double, and thus you will not be able to find your 5-3 fit. Remember, doubling and then bidding your major shows a very good hand.



Again, RHO opens 1♦. Although you have only 10 HCP, the fantastic shape more than compensates for that. This is a clear takeout double of a 1♦ opening. The better your shape, the fewer high cards you need for a double, and vice versa.

We mentioned earlier that there are two other hand types on which you can also start with a double. Basically, these are the two types of hand that are too strong for any other action:

1. *A very strong one-suited hand — double then bid your suit next round (16+ points and a six-card suit, or 18+ points and a five-card suit)*
2. *A hand too strong to overcall 1NT — double then bid notrump next round (19+ points and a balanced hand)*

Summary

- ✓ A normal takeout double shows all of the following:
 - strength at least equivalent to an opening bid
 - support (at least three cards) for all unbid suits
 - shortness in the opponents' suit.
- ✓ You may also start with a takeout double on very strong hands (either balanced or single-suited) that are too strong for any other initial action.

TAKEOUT DOUBLES AT THE ONE-LEVEL

NOW TRY THESE...

What do you bid with each of these hands?

1 ♠ A Q 4 2
 ♥ 6
 ♦ Q J 5 2
 ♣ K J 3 2

LHO Partner RHO You
 1♥ ?

2 ♠ K Q 8 2
 ♥ K 4
 ♦ A 10 6 3
 ♣ Q 8 5

LHO Partner RHO You
 1♥ ?

3 ♠ K 9 8 5
 ♥ A 8 3
 ♦ K 10 9 8
 ♣ K 2

LHO Partner RHO You
 1♥ ?

4 ♠ A K J 4 3
 ♥ 3
 ♦ J 7 6 5
 ♣ A 9 5

LHO Partner RHO You
 1♥ ?

5 ♠ A Q 5
 ♥ 7 2
 ♦ K J 6
 ♣ K 8 7 5 4

LHO Partner RHO You
 1♥ ?

6 ♠ A K Q 6 4 2
 ♥ A 7 4
 ♦ A J 3
 ♣ 9

LHO Partner RHO You
 1♥ ?

7 ♠ A 7 4 2
 ♥ A 6
 ♦ J 9 7 5 2
 ♣ K 2

LHO Partner RHO You
 1♥ ?

8 ♠ K 10 9 2
 ♥ —
 ♦ J 9 7 5 2
 ♣ A Q 9 8

LHO Partner RHO You
 1♥ ?

TAKEOUT DOUBLES AT THE ONE-LEVEL

ANSWERS

- 1 dbl This is a classic takeout double of 1♥.
- 2 dbl Your shape is not as good this time, but the extra high cards compensate for that.
- 3 pass Although you hold a solid opening bid, you have both too many hearts and not enough clubs for a takeout double.
- 4 1♠ Although your hand is suitable for a takeout double, the chances are that you belong in a spade contract. Partner will not bid spades on ♠Qxx, and if he responds to your double by bidding 2♣, you are not strong enough to bid spades later. If you are to reach your 5-3 spade fit, you must overcall now.
- 5 dbl Your suit is not strong enough for a 2♣ overcall. You have adequate support for the other two suits and short hearts, so make a takeout double.
- 6 dbl You are too strong for an overcall. If you overcall 1♠, you will miss game when partner has a few scattered values but short spades. If you overcall 4♠, you will miss slam when partner has just the right cards. (A 4♠ overcall would be preemptive and show more spades but fewer aces — usually less than 10 HCP and at least seven and often eight spades). There is no rush with hands this strong. Start slowly with a double, conserving bidding space, so that you can investigate fully. As we have seen, when you double and later bid your own suit, you are showing a very good hand.
- 7 pass You have the wrong shape for a double, and a 2♦ overcall on that suit would be asking for trouble. Sometimes you just have to bite the bullet and hope the opponents bid to a contract that you might beat.
- 8 dbl Despite having only 10 HCP, you should make a takeout double and not be ashamed of it. Compare this to Hand 2, which has 4 HCP more. This is a much better takeout double than that was. A void is a powerful feature as it provides ruffing power in the dummy and reduces the value of the enemy high cards.