



# Play & Learn

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## Simple overcalls – part 2

Below are some hands that you might hold as South after East has dealt and opened in a duplicate pairs game. What is your call when East opens a minor? What about when the opening is a major? Ask what you are trying to accomplish and how likely an overcall is to succeed in achieving your purpose. If you want to direct the lead, you should expect the defense to go best when your suit is led. If your purpose is to foul up the opponents' bidding, consider how much bidding room your overcall steals from the opponents. If you hope to win the bidding, you should have a fairly good hand. The more that your overcall accomplishes, the more attractive the overcall.

- ① ♠63 ♥AQJ98 ♦9742 ♣86.
- ② ♠AQ ♥J7542 ♦974 ♣J62.
- ③ ♠A6 ♥J7542 ♦A86 ♣KJ10.
- ④ ♠J10986 ♥97 ♦AQ4 ♣J62.
- ⑤ ♠86 ♥A62 ♦KQ3 ♣K7642.
- ⑥ ♠82 ♥53 ♦A86 ♣KQJ762.

When you are at the bottom of the overcall range (about 8 points) and considering whether to bid, apply the Suit Quality Overcall Test (SQOT, from writings by Andrew Robson and Ron Klinger), which evaluates the strength of your long suit. *Add the number of cards in your suit to the number of honors that you have in that suit (10 is an honor). Your hand qualifies for an overcall if the total is no less than the number of tricks that you would need to make your bid.*

As a corollary to this guideline, keep

in mind that *simple overcalls at the two level tend to show opening strength up to about 18 points.*

### Answers:

① With a SQOT of 8 (five hearts and three honors), bid 1♥ over East's minor opening. A 1♥ overcall probably won't cause the opponents too much trouble in finding a fit. Directing the lead is likely to be your main objective when your overcall is minimum, so your suit should be good. If you end up defending, partner might lead another suit without the overcall and give declarer an undeserved trick.

It's a different story when East opens 1♠. Despite sufficient SQOT for eight tricks, your hand is too weak to overcall at the two level, so you are better off passing.

② Pass. The SQOT number for this hand is 6 (five hearts, including one honor), below the required 7 for a 1♥ overcall. You don't really want a heart lead and a 1♥ overcall takes little bidding room away from your opponents.

③ Your heart suit is identical to No. 2, but here you can bid 1♥ over 1♣ and 1♦. With well more than a minimum for a one-level overcall, you can be less concerned with SQOT and overcall a weak suit.

After East opens 1♠, you no longer have extra strength. With a SQOT of only 6, your suit is not good enough to overcall at the two level. Do you have to pass? No – with shortness in spades and adequate support for the unbid

suits, your hand qualifies for a takeout double. It's important to realize that you are committing to go with any suit partner chooses, so don't plan on bidding hearts after partner chooses a minor. That would be *doubling and correcting*, which shows a strong overcall with a good, long suit.

④ Overcall 1♠ with a SQOT of 7. You shut out all suit responses at the one level and can complicate the opponents' bidding. If partner has a spade fit, you will be able to push the opponents to the next level in a competitive auction.

⑤ After East opens 1♥, you can't double, and you should not overcall 2♣. *With no extra strength to compensate for a poor suit, don't overcall at the two level.* Penalty doubles become more likely with higher-level overcalls. Your SQOT number is 6 in clubs, so you have no business bidding for eight tricks. *Sometimes, the best thing to do is pass even though you would have opened had you been dealer.*

⑥ You have only 10 high-card points, but you can overcall 2♣ after East opens 1♦. There's no question that the clubs are strong enough, and your bid is a good lead director. 2♣ also serves as a blocking bid, preventing responder from showing either major suit at the one level. The most annoying simple overcalls are 1♠ over a minor-suit opening and 2♣ over a 1♦ opening. Both steal bidding room that the opponents might need. ■