



Play & Learn

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Direct versus balancing overcalls

Let's compare bidding in direct seat – after your right-hand opponent opens the bidding – to bidding in balancing seat after your LHO's opening bid is followed by two passes.

With each hand below, choose your action before reading the answer when:

- RHO deals and opens 1♦.
- LHO deals and opens 1♦, followed by two passes to you.

① ♠A94 ♥AQ1093 ♦1063 ♣K5

a) You have more than enough to overcall 1♥. While a non-jump overcall on the two level shows a good suit and a hand worth opening, a one-level overcall can be made with less than opening strength.

b) Recall that you overbid by about 3 points in balancing seat. When advancing your bid, partner underbids by those same 3 points. In balancing seat, bid as if you had 16 HCP instead of the 13 HCP you actually have. The range for an overcall goes up to about 18 points, so your balancing action over LHO's opening bid is the same as your call in direct seat.

② ♠A94 ♥AQ1093 ♦1063 ♣53

a) The lower limit for a one-level overcall is determined by partnership agreement; many agree to overcall on as little as 8 points and a decent suit. Overcall 1♥ after RHO's 1♦ opening. You'd have to pass if RHO had opened 1♠.

b) In balancing seat, you are treating this 10-HCP hand as a 13-point hand

and you have more than enough to bid 1♥ over LHO's 1♦ opening.

③ ♠A94 ♥109 ♦K863 ♣AQ53

a) You have a 13-point opening hand and would have opened 1♦ as dealer, but RHO beat you to the punch. Now your options are to overcall or make a takeout double. Sadly, your hand doesn't meet the requirements for either action. You lack the five-card or longer suit needed for an overcall in a major or minor suit and don't have sufficient heart support to make a takeout double. Having to pass an opening hand after an opponent opens is difficult for players to accept, but it can be your wisest action – especially when an opponent has bid one of your longest suits.

b) You might have considered overcalling 1NT directly over RHO's 1NT opening with the right shape and necessary stoppers, but you lacked the required 15–18 points. After LHO opens, you are in balancing seat where you overbid by 3 points. That brings this 13-point hand up to 16 points and you can balance with 1NT.

④ ♠A94 ♥K93 ♦K1063 ♣AQ5

a) This hand meets all the requirements for a 1NT overcall in direct seat.

b) It's tempting to make the same bid in balancing seat, but partner will still expect you to be overbidding by 3 points and will underbid his hand by those same 3 points. This could cause you to miss a game unless you always

overbid by 3 points in balancing seat. Treat this as a 19-point hand after LHO's opening bid is passed to you. 19 points is too good to overcall 1NT. Start with double, planning to correct to notrump on your next turn. This shows a hand worth 19–21 points including the 3 points borrowed from partner.

⑤ ♠A94 ♥K93 ♦AK63 ♣AQ5

a) This is a double-and-correct-to-notrump hand in direct seat.

b) You might think you have to start with a double in balancing seat and then make some dramatic bid to show 23 points including the points borrowed from partner, but that is not the case. You can balance by jumping to 2NT immediately. For those of you who use a convention known as unusual notrump, this can be confusing; but it should make sense if you realize that the unusual 2NT overcall is typically used as a preempt and traditional preempts are not made in the passout seat. A balancing jump to 2NT shows a hand in the range of a 2NT opener.

⑥ ♠AQJ94 ♥K9 ♦63 ♣AQ52

a) Overcall 1♠ in direct seat with this 17-point hand (16 HCP plus 1 length point).

b) In balancing seat, you are bidding not a 17-point hand, but a 20-point hand. Because the range for an overcall stops at about 18 points, you must take a stronger action with 19–21: Double and correct. No jumping needed. ■