

Cardiff Bridge Tutors

How to Double for Penalties.

Doubles.

Some people feel that Doubling for Penalties is somehow unsporting or unkind but it is just part of the game. It is mentioned in the Rules of Bridge 1895, it has always been part of the game!

If you do not Double then some opponents will consistently overcall your bids, but if you double them they will quickly learn to be more careful!

If you are known to Double then opponents will tend to be more cautious and you just might persuade them to underbid.

Before we look at Penalty Doubles let's just recap on what type of Double are used. For more information on these topics see the relevant "How to ... " booklet.

1. Takeout Doubles
 - a. Show a shortage in the suit bid by the opponents and opening points
2. After a Three level Pre empt
 - a. Asking Partner to bid their longest suit
3. Negative Doubles
 - a. To show at least one four card+ major (and another 4 card suit) after the opponents have interfered (See How to use Negative Doubles)
4. Doubles in the 4th seat
 - a. To protect your partner who may have had to pass with 11ish points when you hold 11 too but cannot overcall.

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	1NT	

South
♠ A Q 9 6
♥ K Q 8 7
♦ 5 2
♣ 10 7 3

South would have liked to borrow a King and bid 1NT but after East's bid a X will ask North to make a bid.

Doubling for Penalties.

There are very few rules for doubling for penalties.

1. Usually we assume that any double below the three level is a Takeout Double.
2. Your partnership should hold the majority of the points
3. Your partnership needs 6 trumps between them or four GOOD trumps in one hand.

The majority of points.

Here is a table of the points needed to make contracts. The number you need as the majority are shown in red.

Remember that distribution is very important and this is only a guide. Contracts can be made with few points but a good fit and distribution.

This is why you also need at least six trumps between the partnership or four good trumps in one hand.

Suit Contracts		No Trump Contracts	
Level	Min HCP	Level	HCP
1	16	1	19-21
2	19 (21+)	2	22-24
3	22 (18+)	3	25+
4	25 (15+)		
5	27+ (13+)		

Remember!

You need the majority of points.

18+ at 3 level

15+ at 4 level

13+ at 5 level

Six trumps together

or

Four good trumps in one hand

Well that all looks very easy! Which of course, it isn't! You need to gather clues from the bidding too. There are some situations which need a little less analysis so let's look at those first.

Indications that a Penalty Double might be an option.

There are some obvious indications:-

- A deliberate sacrifice over your contract
- Where your opponents cannot find a suit match
- Where the bidding is clearly in error

But most of the time it is hard work!

Example Spotting a deliberate sacrifice.

West	North	East	South
1♠	2♦	3♠	Pass
4♠	5♦		

- West's opening shows 12-19 points.
- North's overcall shows a 7 loser hand (either 11+ HCP or 6 good ♦s).
- East shows an 8 loser hand and four ♠s by bidding 3♠.
- South has less than three ♦s or they would have supported North.
- West with six losers can bid game.
- North's bid is clearly a sacrifice E/W must have enough points for game they have 7-8 ♦s but no more than that and they clearly have insufficient points.

N/S are unlikely to make more than 8 or 9 tricks on this hand and they are stealing your game contract – DOUBLE!

Example a 1NT overcall when you hold 9+ points.

West	North	East	South
1♠	1NT	?	

West must have 12+ points to open.

North must have 16+ points to overcall.

If East has 9 points then South can only have a maximum of 3! It is worth a chance.
If East has 10 or more points they must Double.

Example of opponents failing to find a suit match/mis-bidding.

West	North	East	South
1♥	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♦	Pass	2♠ ¹	Pass
3♥			

¹ Fourth suit forcing

East clearly cannot support ♥s or ♦s whilst West cannot support ♣s.

East's 2♠s is 4th suit forcing and if West had a stopper in ♠s then 3NT should be the bid.

If they do not then 2NT would be the bid as they clearly do not have a fit.

Double!

Spotting the chance to Double for Penalties - How on earth can you know how many points you hold between you and how many trumps you hold?

You have to interpret the bidding to work this out.

Let's look at an example.

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	1NT	

West has 12-19 HCP and East 6-9.

East does not have 4 ♠s.

Now watch the bidding progress.

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	1NT	Pass
2♦			

Now we know that West has 5 ♠s and 4 ♦s but 12-15 points.

The bidding continues....

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	1NT	Pass
2♦	Pass	2♠	

East has made a preference bid. They are likely to have 3 ♠s and do not have 4 ♦s.

So West's hand is 5♠, 4♦s and 4 split between ♥s and ♣s

East's hand is 3♠, 2-3♦s, 3-4♥s and 3-4♣s

Therefore N/S have 5♠s and the points may be fairly evenly spread; West say 14, East 7.
It is not worth even considering a double if they play in ♠s.

Summary.

Remember!

You need the majority of points.

18+ at 3 level

15+ at 4 level

13+ at 5 level

Six trumps together

or

Four good trumps in one hand.

Look out for opportunities:-

Obvious Sacrifices.

1NT Responses and bidding continues to 3 level.

Suit mismatches & Bidding wars between partners

Incorrect bidding