

## BALANCING

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### ***When the opponents have stopped at the two level ...***

When the opponents have stopped in a part score at the two level, should you pass it out or bid? The answer depends on what contract they have stopped in and what kind of hand you have yourself. If they have stopped in two of a minor, that is not necessarily a good score for them since notrump might make more, so only balance when you have the perfect hand for it. However two of a major is almost always a great score for them, so don't let them play there if at all possible.

Let's look at the classic situation where they are in two of a major:

1♥ Pass 2♥ Pass  
Pass ?

First of all, they have less than 26 pts, probably less than 25; their range is roughly 19-24; this leaves plenty of high cards for our side. The mathematics of suit distributions indicate that if they have an 8 card fit, we usually have one as well. Thus if we have an 8 card fit and roughly half the high cards, perhaps we should try to play the hand.

A golden rule of competitive bidding is not to let the opponents play in two of a major when they have an eight card fit. This means that we strain to reopen in the above auction using one of the following bids:

<b>DOUBLE</b>	Shortness and support for the other 3 suits
<b>2NT</b>	Both minors
<b>2♠</b>	4+ spades (but prefer double if we can support all suits)
<b>3♣ or 3♦</b>	This 5+ suit and no other 4+ card suit

How do these bids differ after the following auction?

1♠ Pass 2♠ Pass  
Pass ?

The answer is that all the bids are the same, except 2NT shows two suits, in other words, two places to play at the 3 level, so it can include hearts. Partner responds by bidding their best minor suit. If we don't have that suit, then we bid the next one that we do have

<b>DOUBLE</b>	Shortness and support for the other 3 suits
<b>2NT</b>	<b>2 places to play at the 3 level, so it can include hearts</b>
<b>3♣/ 3♦/3♥</b>	This 5+ suit and no other 4+ card suit

One word of caution, if you are vulnerable be a little more careful; down two is -200, as is down one doubled. These are very bad scores at duplicate.

The following auctions do not indicate an eight card fit, so we do not strain to balance:

A.	RHO	Partner	B.	RHO	Partner	C.	RHO	Partner
	1♠	1NT		1♥	1NT		1♦	1♠
	2♠	Pass		2♦	2♥		2♦	Pass
				Pass				

A final word of advice, don't go out of your way to pass partner's reopening double, partner has already bid your high cards for you, so four trumps are not an adequate excuse for pass. Four very good trumps (at least three trump tricks!) and what look like five possible tricks for the defense *might* be enough.

Exercise 1. 1♥ Pass 2♥ Pass Pass to you. What do you bid ?

A.	B.	C.	D.	E.
♠AJ32	♠K3	♠65	♠Q87	♠A5
♥65	♥73	♥74	♥72	♥KQ104
♦Q9732	♦Q953	♦KQ9752	♦KJ74	♦KQ6
♣Q8	♣KQ854	♣A98	♣Q952	♣9854

How do we handle partner's balance on the other side of the table? Well, the most important thing to know is that 2NT asks partner to pick a suit at

the three level. We do not often need 2NT as a natural bid, but we desperately need to play in our 8 card fit rather than our 7 card fit.

1♠ P	2♠ P	♠43	♠K76
P DBL	P ?	♥AK42	♥32
		♦Q987	♦AJ107
		♣J65	♣K932

Look at the above pair of hands, after partner doubles, if you bid 3♣ you will be playing in a terrible 4-3. However, if you can bid 2NT asking partner to bid their lowest 4 card suit, you will get to your 8 card fit in diamonds.

Exercise 2. 1♥ Pass 2♥ Pass Pass Double Pass to you. What now ?

A.	B.	C.	D.	E.
♠AKJ2	♠K32	♠A65	♠87	♠J9
♥652	♥732	♥AJ74	♥QJ1098	♥A98
♦QJ73	♦Q953	♦KQ97	♦KJ7	♦K952
♣Q8	♣KQ8	♣A98	♣AJ5	♣Q854

Reminder, when the opponents have 19-24 points, your side is not going to hold 26 points. Therefore, unless you are wildly distributional, don't punish partner by bidding a game. In fact, don't punish partner by bidding again when the opponents take the push to the three level! Not unless you have significant extra distribution so that you are very sure that you are making or that they are making and you're only one down (and you had better be right). Remember, the job of pushing them up one level has been done.

A good book to read to follow up on these ideas is the classic by Larry Cohen, *"To Bid or not to Bid"* which explains the law of total tricks as a basis for when to compete in these and many other auctions.

Simply stated, the "law" says that you want a nine card fit to bid over their three level contract and you do not let them play an eight card major suit fit at the two level unless they are going down or you think that they are making four!

## **ANSWERS**

### Exercise 1

A. 2♠. You do not have support for all suits. Partner knows you did not bid 1♠ over 1♥ originally, so you either have only four spades or a bad five card suit. With only two spades, partner can bid 2NT to look for a minor suit fit.

B. 2NT. You want partner to pick a minor.

C. 3♦. You have a good 6 card suit.

D. Double. You have support for all suits.

E. Pass. your best suit is their suit, a good time to defend.

### Exercise 2

A. 2♠. Yes you have a great hand but partner has already bid your points for you so don't punish him by jumping.

B. 3♦. However bidding 2♠ to play the 4-3 could be the winner at matchpoints. Last time my opponent did this, he played a 3-3 and went 4 down; of course you play your cards better than that! Also 2NT could win if partner has 5 clubs and 3 diamonds but if he is 4-4 in the minors you want to play in diamonds.

C. 3♦. Your hearts are not good enough to be passing here. Partner is counting on you for all these points already and probably has only 6 or 7 points with a singleton heart. Remember 2NT is not a natural bid here.

D. Pass. You have 3 trump tricks and possibly 2 side tricks, if partner has anything this should go down.

E. 2NT. Get partner to pick his better minor.