

The Art of PREEMPTING

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I. The Preempt

One of the most effective strategies in competitive bidding is the preempt. When you have a long strong suit and not many points you can start the bidding at the three level with a 7-card suit and at the four level with an 8-card suit. This makes life very difficult for the opponents since they have lost the space needed in the bidding to find their own correct contract and much of the time doubling you will not be profitable enough.

Using the two level for preempting as well makes it even harder on the opponents. This is known as the weak two bid. It only gives up your own bidding space on those very strong (22+) one suited hands that you almost never get. The bid of 2 clubs can be used for all your hands of 22+ (except 21-22 balanced which are opened 2NT).

II. FACTORS TO LOOK AT WHEN DECIDING TO PREEMPT

The perfect preempt has a long good suit and at most one outside high card. A hand like this:

♠764	
♥KQJ10962	
♦9	
♣J4	

Or this:

♠AJ109764	
♥4	
♦K82	
♣54	

But if we only preempted with the perfect hand, we would not be giving the opponents much trouble. So let's consider what other hands we can preempt on. First of all, partner needs to understand that our non-

vulnerable preempt is not so much a descriptive bid, as an attempt to get in the opponents way.

Second of all, our suit does not need to be good if we are not vulnerable. The advantage of length outweighs the need for a good suit. With reasonable breaks, a long suit does not have to be very strong to take tricks and thus avoid a big penalty. Remember we want to preempt as often as possible, particularly when we are the dealer.

How about this:

♠Q1076432
♥J10
♦K98
♣2

Or this :

♠76
♥J1098752
♦2
♣653

Neither of these has a good enough suit for a classic preempt, but both could be very effectively preempted not vulnerable.

III Position at the table

The two positions at the table to be most aggressive with your preempts are first and third chairs when no one else has bid. If you are in second seat, your partner is as likely to have a good hand as the remaining opponent, so you want to have a more classic preempt. That way he does have to guess as to what to do next.

When your right hand opponent has opened the bidding, the time to preempt aggressively is with either shortness or length (four or more) in their suit. Having three cards in their suit should be a warning to be more conservative. What happens when you have three is that they lead their singleton or doubleton and your partner often has three cards there as well (since LHO did not raise), so your RHO takes the first two or three tricks then gives his partner a ruff or an uppercut. So you start out by losing at least three tricks. When you have four or more cards in their suit then your partner is likely to be just as short

as your LHO. So in that case, as long as dummy has a few good trumps, you will start out with only one or two losers there.

When both opponents have bid, they have already exchanged enough information to be in a better position to double you. This is the wrong time for an aggressive preempt. Having a good suit is the best protection against the opponents being able to double you.

IV. OPENING BIDS of 2♦, 2♥, and 2♠ are WEAK 2 BIDS

These bids promise 6-10 points and a 6 card suit. In other words, a hand which, if your partner opened one spade, you would not be strong enough to bid your suit at the two level (you would have to bid 1NT and hope partner bid again). If vulnerable (RED) then the suit must have some honors, a good rule of thumb is 2 of the top 3 or 3 of the top 5 (thus KJ10xxx or AQxxxx but not KJxxxx). If the decision on whether to open a weak two-bid is close, do it with a singleton and not without one. Another plus factor is having good internal texture so Q109876 is a much more likely suit than Q76543. With the first suit you would have a maximum of three losers no matter how badly the suit splits.

Exercise 1. Would you open a weak 2 bid on the following hands at all vulnerabilities (or just non-vulnerable or just favorable)?

Note we count our points as high card points on the 4321 scale plus an extra point for each extra card in a suit longer than four thus a six card suit is worth 2 length points. Also you can use the hand reevaluation techniques written up by us on the district 17 site at:

<http://www.d17acbl.org/index.php?page=hand-evaluation>

A.	B.	C.	D.	E.
♠2	♠AQJ765	♠A54	♠743	♠KJ9843
♥J98654	♥83	♥AQ10954	♥Q109652	♥843
♦K543	♦952	♦5	♦Q64	♦65
♣53	♣73	♣843	♣9	♣95
Pts _____	Pts _____	Pts _____	Pts _____	Pts _____
Y/N _____	Y/N _____	Y/N _____	Y/N _____	Y/N _____
Vuls _____	Vuls _____	Vuls _____	Vuls _____	Vuls _____

IV. RESPONDER IS CAPTAIN AFTER PARTNER PREEMPTS

What happens next? Well, now your partner is captain. One of the golden rules of preempting is that you never bid again unless partner bids 2NT to ask about your hand. All further decisions on competing and saving belong to your partner. You have told your story.

Partner should not expect to be making a game opposite a preempt unless their hand has at least 16 plus support points. **Note that partner should always raise the level immediately with a trump fit** to increase your opponents' discomfort. Your level of safety is to contract for the number of tricks that is equal to your side's number of trumps. So with hands of less than 16 points, raise partner's weak two to the three level with three trump and to the four level with four or more trump (raise 2D to 5D with five or more diamonds). Similarly raise a three level preempt to four with three or more trump. Your side has enough trumps to either make your contract or to have a good sacrifice against the opponent's contract. When you think the opponents might have a slam, you can take all their room away by raising to five when you have extra trump length and some distribution. If you are red versus white be more careful - you need a side singleton or extra strength to raise to four and a side doubleton to raise to three.

How about responder's new suit bid? This is a game try in that suit and it is forcing for one round.

2. Partner opens 2♠ weak, make a bid with the following hands:

A.	B.	C.	D.	E.
♠K43	♠K65	♠AQ74	♠98	♠KJ98
♥J1098	♥KQ543	♥54	♥KQJ10765	♥8
♦32	♦K53	♦K542	♦3	♦96432
♣8542	♣73	♣J98	♣J87	♣J32
Pts _____	Pts _____	Pts _____	Pts _____	Pts _____
Bid _____	Bid _____	Bid _____	Bid _____	Bid _____

III. RESPONDING to a WEAK TWO-BID with 16+ POINTS:

A way to think about your game prospects when partner preempts is to look at how many winners and losers you would have opposite his

best and worst hands. If most hands would have four losers or fewer than ten tricks do not look for game. Just raise appropriately with a fit.

A. If you have the balanced or fitting 16+ hand and are not sure whether to bid game or not, bid 2NT to ask partner how good they are.

1. The weak two-bidder repeats his suit with 6 to a bad 8 (and you pass unless the reason you asked was to choose the best game contract)
2. With a good 8 - 10, weak two bidder:
 - Bids another suit that has an A, K, or QJx (a stopper for NT aka a "feature"). Responder decides whether to play 4 of the weak 2 suit (often safest) or 3NT.
 - Bids 3NT with a solid suit.
 - With neither of the above but a good 8+, partner bids game in his suit.

B. If you have a long suit of your own and think game is possible, bid your suit, this is forcing for one round and partner will use common sense to respond, raising whenever possible and raising to game when they like it.

3. Partner opens 2♠ weak, make a bid with the following hands:

A.	B.	C.	D.	E.
♠74	♠AK65	♠AK874	♠AJ10	♠Q9
♥J109874	♥KQ54	♥54	♥QJ1076	♥A854
♦K2	♦K53	♦654	♦KQ32	♦KQ4
♣KQ4	♣73	♣J98	♣7	♣AK32
Pts _____	Pts _____	Pts _____	Pts _____	Pts _____
Bid _____	Bid _____	Bid _____	Bid _____	Bid _____

4. Partner opens 2♥ weak, make a bid with the following hands:

A.	B.	C.	D.	E.
♠KQJ954	♠AK65	♠AK874	♠AJ10	♠Q9
♥J10	♥KQ5	♥54	♥QJ	♥A854
♦A2	♦K532	♦K43	♦KQ32	♦KQ4
♣KQ4	♣73	♣Q98	♣Q876	♣AK32
Pts _____	Pts _____	Pts _____	Pts _____	Pts _____
Bid _____	Bid _____	Bid _____	Bid _____	Bid _____

Answers:

1.

6 pts	9 pts	12 pts	6 pts	6 pts
no	yes	No, too strong	yes, except ...	yes, but
just non-vul			Not vul vs not	vul vs not prefer if had a singleton

2.

5 pts	12 pts	11 pts	10 pts	8 pts
3S	3S	4S	Pass, you would have preempted yourself but partner beat you to it!	4S

3.

10 pts	16 pts	9 pts	16 pts	18 pts
pass	4S	4S	2NT	2NT

4.

18 pts	16 pts	13 pts	15 pts	18 pts
2S	2NT	Pass	Pass	4H