



THE BALANCING ACT

What does “balancing” mean in bridge vocabulary?
 You are in the “direct” seat if your RHO (Right Hand Opponent) has made the last bid:

West	North	East	South
1C		?	

You are said to be “balancing” when you are in the pass out seat after a bid by your left-hand opponent (LHO).

West	North	East	South
1C	Pass	Pass	?

If you were to pass, the auction would now be all over. If the opponents have opened with one of a suit, you simply must not allow them to play a contract at such a low level. You must either:

Try to push them to a higher level *or*

Try to buy the contract for your side instead of letting them make an easy part-score

The action that you take in the balancing seat is often different from that taken in the direct seat. You should tend to overbid by 3 points when you are in the pass out seat. Just add 3 points to the value of your hand to determine what you should bid. Why do you do this? To protect partner, who may have quite a good hand. For example, your partner would have had to pass after 1C on her right with the following hand:

S A542 H K6 D KJ72 C Q65

Since the responder to the opening bid has also passed (showing 0-5 points) you can now be more aggressive, since your partner most likely has some goodies.

Let's practise! In all cases, the bidding has proceeded.

West		North		East		South
1C	-	Pass	-	Pass	-	?

What should you bid on each of these hands:

- S Q2 H AJ10 D K976 C QJ109
- S Q75 H A102 D KQJ C AJ94
- S Q5432 H 76 D AQ76 C 87
- S A76 H A987 D Q1054 C 42
- S 65 H AQ4 D 765 C AQJ98

Answers:

1. In direct seat, you would pass. In balancing seat, you should bid 1 N.T. (You have 16 pts for a fleeting instant, having added those 3 points!)
2. Now you really do have 17 H.C.P. In direct seat, you would overcall 1 N.T. In balancing seat, you will double first and then bid notrumps later.
3. In direct seat, you will pass with this tired, moth-eaten spade suit. In balancing seat, you must overcall 1S.
4. In direct seat, you will pass. In balancing seat, make a takeout double.
5. In direct or balancing seat, you must pass. Your only decent suit is clubs, and the opponents will have a most unpleasant time in their 1C contract.

Some people say that you should consider that you are “borrowing a king” when you balance. Whenever I have taught “balancing” this way, my students always get very fussy about which king they wish to borrow! Thus, I prefer to base actions on “adding 3 points”. You must remember, however, that since you are overbidding in this seat, that your partner must now compensate (as responder to your bid) by underbidding accordingly.