

NEGATIVE DOUBLES

by

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In the world of old-fashioned Standard American, before the advent of Negative doubles, then the following Auction

1D
□ 1S
Dbl

was a penalty double. This opportunity to penalty double the opponents at such a low level came up so seldom that it was deemed pointless to save this double for this use only. But way back when, this penalty double in effect dared the opponents to make their contract of 1 Spade, and suggested that they had no hope of making it.

In 1957, along came Al Roth and Tobias Stone who decided that a "double" in this seat should instead have a very different meaning. They called the double the SPUTNIK double because back then the Russian satellite of that name was the big news story of the day.

Why it got the label: "Negative Double" I will never know but perhaps when previously such a double used to be a penalty double...that would be a "positive" double..."I gotcha!" So this new double was not "I gotcha" so maybe that is why it is called a Negative Double.

In any case, aside from Blackwood and Stayman, I would say it is the most important convention in bridge.

Imagine that you pick up this hand:

1D □ 1S
♠ 4 3 2
♥ A 4 3 2
♦ 3 2
♣ A 4 3 2

Partner opens with 1D. Your RHO overcalls 1S. If you don't play negative doubles, you would have to pass. You may NOT ever bid 1NT here (showing 6-9 points) unless you have a Spade stopper.

Playing negative doubles, you will now say "double" & this will show partner that you have 4 of the unbid major AND at least enough points to respond to partner's opening bid (6 or more points)

The Negative Double therefore is simply a special kind of takeout double for the two unbid suits. It is a Take-Out Double by the Responder. It GUARANTEES the other major and but does not guarantee four cards in the other minor, merely suggests that you may also have 4 of the other minor.

The negative double shows that the responder has enough points to bid, but a hand not suitable for anything else. e.g. Above hand: Responder cannot bid 2H as that would show 10 or more points and 5 cards in the Heart suit.

The normal Take-Out Double occurs after opponents have opened the bidding.

THE NEGATIVE DOUBLE IS MADE AFTER PARTNER HAS OPENED THE BIDDING WITH ONE OF A SUIT AND THERE HAS BEEN AN OVERCALL OF A SUIT BY THE PLAYER ON YOUR RIGHT.

THE NEGATIVE DOUBLE DOES NOT EXIST IN ANY OTHER SITUATION !!



Without the Negative Double, many hands become difficult and even impossible to bid sensibly after the opposition interferes.

This is especially so because of the strict requirements for a 2 level response of a new suit.

You need 10 or more points (as the responder) to bid a new suit at the two level when partner has opened the bidding.

1D
 2C

When partner opened with 1D, you were about to respond 1H & R.H.O (right hand opponent) overcalled 2C...you have the hand below...now what?

Axxx
KJxx
xxx
xx

You are too weak to respond at the 2 level as this would show 10 or more pts.

Therefore you would have to pass using Standard methods.

A good fit in either major could be lost.

Playing Neg. Dbls. you will say "Dbl" & now partner will bid again. She will know that for sure you have the unbid major and maybe the other unbid suit also. If she has FOUR of one of those, she will bid it.

Remember this though:

Responder that bids a major suit at the two level or higher(on his first bid) guarantees 5 cards in it.

1S - 2H guarantees 5 cards.

W	N	E	S
1S	2C	2H	

2H here also guarantees 5 Hearts and 10 or more points.

And

W	N	E	S
1H	2D	2S	

2 S here also guarantees 5 Spades and 10 or more points.

What does South's bid mean in each of these bidding sequences?

	West	North Partner	East Overcaller	South You
i.		1C	1D	1S
ii		1C	2D	2S
iii		1C	3D	3S

i. Four-plus spades and six-plus points; forcing for one round.

ii. *Five*-plus spades and *ten*-plus points; forcing for one round.

iii. *Five*-plus spades and *12 or more points*.

1.	West	North Partner	East Overcaller	South You
		1C	1D	Dble

This negative double shows exactly 4-4 in the majors and six-plus points.

AQxx Double: Shows BOTH unbid majors.... all in one breath and partner can pick one.
 xxxx
 Qxx
 xx

After this specific sequence of 1 C – 1D to you only...if you now bid 1H or 1S, you may only have four cards or you may have more. You will see the significance of this shortly.

So now for the \$64,000.00 question:

West	North Partner	East Overcaller	South You
	1C	1H	1S*

*Your 1S bid here guarantees a FIVE card suit. Like an oath in blood, carved in stone. Because IF you only had a FOUR card Spade suit, you would have made a negative double.

So it is a double that really gives an inference. It keeps the bidding cheap and allows your side to explore if you have an eight card fit in a major.

West	North	East	South
	1C	1H	Double

You guarantee a FOUR card Spade suit, as if you had FIVE, you would have bid 1S.

A.

S KJ72
H 752
D KQ92
C 92

This is perfect for above auction. IF opener has four Spades, she will now bid Spades.

B.

S KJ72
H 752
D 92
C KQ92

IF opener has four Spades, she will now bid Spades. If not, she may now bid Diamonds (since you suggested you may have four of these. IF she bids Diamonds, now you return to Clubs as you have a fit with her Clubs.

C.

S KJ72
H AQ2
D 952
C 962

IF opener has four Spades, she will now bid Spades. If not, she may now bid Diamonds (since you suggested you may have four of these. IF she bids Diamonds, now you bid Notrumps, because you have a stopper in Hearts (Opponent's suit).

D. West	North	East	South
	1C (or 1D)	1H	1S**

** this bid guarantees at least five Spades.

E. West	North	East	South
	1C (or 1D)	1S	Double***

*** This double guarantees four Hearts. BUT sometimes you are responder with only 6-9 points and have a five card or longer Heart suit. You may not now bid 2H (after above sequence because you will promise 10 or more points...so sometimes this double may be done with 6-9 points and a 5 card or longer Heart suit.

Note that if you were responder with 10 or more points and FIVE Hearts, you would have bid 2H not made a Negative Double.

West	North	East	South
	1C	1S	Double

Let's say you, as South had

S xx
H AJxxxx
D Kxx
C xx

You would be forced to say "Double" as you just have to get into the act.

F. West	North	East	South
	1C	1S	Double
Pass	2C	Pass	2H #

Opener will know that you must have 6-9 points and a long Heart suit. IF you had had 10 or more points and FIVE Hearts, you would have bid 2H at your first opportunity.

West	North	East	South
	1C	1S	2D

Shows at least 10 or more points and at least four Diamonds...if you had four Hearts, you likely would have made a negative double instead so this is an added inference.

IF you held:

S 96
H AJ82
D K7432
C 83

West	North	East	South
	1C	1S	?

It would be best to make a negative double in an attempt to uncover a potential 4-4 Heart fit right away.

G. West	North	East	South
	1S	2C	Double

South here guarantees 4 Hearts. See E because it could be more if you had a 6-9 point hand.

H. West	North	East	South
	1H	1S	Double

South's double promises at least 4-4 in the minors. With a negative double, when opener has opened with 1 of a major, responder will never make a negative double if he could have raised opener's suit. Note that with above bid...with 11 or more points, responder almost promises exactly 4-4 in the minors because with 5-4, he could bid 2 of his long minor. This is a question of style. Chat to partner.

HOW HIGH TO PLAY NEGATIVE DOUBLES?

Most players agree to play negative doubles up to 3S

i.e.

West	North	East	South
	1C	3S	Double would still be a negative double.

The Neg. Dbl. is especially useful when the opponents make a pre-emptive jump overcall.

1D
 2S

xx We cannot bid 3 H as when we bid a major suit (as responder) at the 2 level or higher, we are promising at least 5 cards in that suit. So, we would have to consider bidding 3 C. How much easier life would be if we could make 2 bids in one..."Dbl"
 KJxx showing 4 Hearts for sure and maybe Clubs also.
 xxx
 AQxx

BUT NOTE: You are now driving partner to the 3 level, so you need to have 10 or more points including distribution to make a Negative double after 2S on your right.

The Negative Double is an attempt to compete for the right of becoming declarer by discovering your side's best "fit" in a suit or N.T.

REMEMBER:

After 1C by partner and 1D overcall on your right, DOUBLE promises at least 4 cards in BOTH majors. Bidding a major in this exact auction only guarantees 4 cards in that major.

After 1C or 1D by partner and 1H overcall on your right, Double promises exactly a 4-card spade suit. If you bid 1S, it will show at least 5 cards in spade suit.



REQUIREMENTS FOR MAKING A NEGATIVE DOUBLE:

6 or more pts. and four of unbid major.

You must ALWAYS have the unbid major, but you do not have to have the unbid minor...If you do not have the unbid minor, then you most likely have a fit with partner in her first bid suit. OR you can bid NT next if you have a stopper in opponent's suit.



e.g.

1D

□ 2C

Axxx

xx

KQxxx

xx

Here you only have one unbid major. BUT if opener has four Hearts and bids them, you now run back to Diamonds.

If however the opponents have bid at a higher level e.g 1D – 2C...you now require **8+ pts.** to make a negative double.

If however the opponents have bid at an even higher level e.g 1D – 2S...you now require **10+ pts.** to make a negative double.

Because you are driving opener to a very high level.

REBIDS BY THE OPENING BIDDER:

The Opening Bidder will pick one of the suits that you have shown her that you have (you have shown this by inference). She will bid this suit only if she has 4 of them.

If she does not have a match, then she will bid N.T. (with stoppers in opponent's suit) or she will simply rebid her own suit with none of the above.

If she has 13-15 pts, then she will bid the matched suit e.g. major...as cheaply as possible

If she has 16-18 pts, then she will jump in one of the unbid suits

If she has 19+ pts, then she can bid game in the known 4-4 major fit or 3 N.T.

TRAP PASS: 1D
 □ 1S

If you have AQ1087
 x
 xxx
 AJxx

If partner has opened with 1 D & R.H.O. overcalls with 1S, now you are forced to pass as "Double" will be a Negative Dbl. asking partner to bid again. You desperately wish the opponents to have to play this contract so you pass.

NOTE THAT: Playing Negative Doubles, the Opening Bidder MUST (99% of the time) re-open the bidding, if his partner (responder) failed to respond over the opponent's overcall.

Opener: x
 AQxx
 AJxxx
 Qxx

 1D
Pass □ 1S
 Pass

 AQ1087
 x
 xxx
 AJxx

Look at opener's hand: He opened with 1 D and the person on his left overcalled 1S. It has now proceeded Pass- Pass back to you. With this hand, opener will now make a re-opening takeout double and the responder (with S AQ1087 x xxx AJxx will now pass, converting the T.O.D. to a penalty double.

ADDITIONAL INFERENCE GAINED BY NEGATIVE DOUBLES:

Remember: If the Auction proceeds:

1D

1H

1S

The 1 S Bidder must now have 5 cards in the Spade suit because if he had only 4 cards in this suit, he would have made a negative double.

Remember also: The responder bidding Hearts or Spades at the 2 level shows 5 cards in those suits after an overcall.

1C

1D

1H or 1S

Note that in this sequence (& this sequence only) that the bid of 1 H or 1 S could be done with only 4 cards in that suit.



A. 1D
 1S
 You

What will you bid with the following hands in this seat?

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. S 87
H AQ94
D 752
C K753 | 2. S A8
H 10763
D K76
C Q874 | 3. S AQ10873
H 84
D 8
C 9852 |
| 4. S 92
H AQJ53
D KQ
C 10862 | 5. S AJ10
H Q73
D 965
C Q842 | 6. S 76
H K542
D 983
C QJ64 |

B. 1C
 1H
 You

What will you bid with the following hands in this seat?

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. S AQ62
H 954
D Q532
C 54 | 2. S A763
H 108
D 32
C KQ764 | 3. S KJ654
H K98
D 3
C K872 |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|

C. Playing negative doubles. What should you bid after the bidding has gone:

- | You | Opponent | Partner | Opponent |
|--------------------------------------|----------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1C | 1S | Double | Pass |
| ?? | | | |
| 1. S 87
H KJ74
D A83
C AJ98 | | 2. S AJ10
H Q5
D K72
C KJ743 | 3. S 4
H AJ6
D 943
C AQJ932 |
| 4. S A7
H KQJ6
D 93
C AQ743 | | 5. S 9
H AQJ7
D KQ7
C AQ752 | 6. S AQJ10
H 93
D KQ8
C AQJ4 |

ANSWERS:

A 1. Double

2. Double

3. Pass & hope that partner can re-open the bidding with a double

4. 2H

5. 1 NT

6. Double

B 1. Double

2. Double (If partner now bids 2 D , you now bid 3 C)

3. 1S (Just bid naturally with a 5 card major)

C 1. 2H

2. 1NT

3. 2C

4. 3H

5. 4H

6. Pass : You will get lots of points for defeating them in 1S

Hands at end of handout are by Phillip Alder and Ron Klinger. Analysis by Barbara Seagram.
Some of the examples given within article are thanks to Phillip Alder.

Thanks also to Steve Overholt, Keith Balcombe & David Colbert for generously sharing their opinions.