

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
	1♣		?

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
1♣	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 partscore

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 1♣ on her right with the following hand:

A542
K6
KJ72
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
1♣	-	Pass	-	Pass	-	?

What should you bid on each of these hands:

1. ♠Q2 ♥AJ10 ♦K976 ♣QJ109

2. ♠Q75 ♥A102 ♦KQJ ♣AJ94

3. ♠Q5432 ♥76 ♦AQ76 ♣87

4. ♠A76 ♥A987 ♦Q1054 ♣42

5. ♠65 ♥AQ4 ♦765 ♣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 1♠.
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 1♣ 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.

	West		North		East	South
Sometimes the bidding will go	1♥	-	Pass	-	2♥	Pass
	Pass		?			

This is another fine time to balance and apply all of the above rules.

However, it is more dangerous to balance if the opponents have both bid and they have not found a fit:

West		North		East		South
1♣	-	Pass	-	1♥	-	Pass
1N.T.	-	Pass	-	Pass	-	Pass (most of the time)

Bridge is a bidders' game. Get involved! Don't let the opponents steal contracts at a low level. Become a feared opponent! Balance! Alex reminds you that the meek shall not inherit the earth.



If the opponents have bid a suit and raised it

e.g.

W	N	E	S
1H	P	2H	P
P	?		

You really must get back into this auction. Even on a skimpy, tired looking five card suit and not many points.

Same with

W	N	E	S
1D	P	1H	P
2H	P	P	?

You should not sell-out (give up) at the two level.

When they have a trump fit and about half of the available 40 HCP between them, they can usually take eight tricks for their side. The point is that if their side has half the HCP, then so does your side. It is a fact that if their side has a fit, then your side usually does also. So it is up to you to push them around a bit out of their safe two-level contract up to the not-so safe three-level.

This does mean that you will have to be prepared to go to the three-level yourself and you may not make your contract. But often it will mean that the cost of your going down in your contract will be less than if they MAKE their contract if they had been left undisturbed to play their contract at the 2 level. You will strike gold if they bid one more and go to the three level. You will have pushed them higher and that is what balancing is all about...they will be forced to make uncomfortable decisions. Now with luck, you will be able to beat their contract.

Once you manage to push them to a higher level, do not now bid one more yourselves. Pass and Defend and take your plus.

Here are some possible consequences of your aggressive "pushiness!"

YOUR SIDE

	PLUS	MINUS
a) If you let them play at the two-level		110
b) If you bid at the 3 level and make it	110	
c) If you bid at the 3 level and go down		50 or 100
d) If THEY bid to the three level and go down	50 or 100	
e) If they bid 3 and make it		140
f) If they double you at 3 level		500

So you can see that most of the time, it is right to not let them play a contract in their comfort zone and bid and make their contract. You will be ahead 60% of the time (b, c and d).

You will break even 20% of the time: (e)

Suffer 20% of the time (f). This is the least likely result. Most of the time you will not be doubled.

When is it not smart to balance?

When they may not have a trump fit.

W	N	E	S
1S	P	1NT	P
2D	P	2S	P
P	?		

East most likely does not have a fit in Spades. He is merely taking preference. East may only have two cards in spades. You should not have to race to buy this contract, North.

When they are about to play in their third suit as trumps:

W	N	E	S
1C	P	1H	P
1S	P	2S	P
P	?		

The only suit left is diamonds. Declarer is likely to play this hand on a cross ruff so lead trumps at every opportunity.

THE DELAYED 2NT OVERCALL

If the bidding goes 1H on your right and you bid 2NT, we should all know by now that this does not mean you have a strong balanced hand and 20-21 HCP.

If you have 20-21 HCP and a balanced hand, you must double and then bid NT to show that hand.

If you make a jump to 2NT as an opponent after the opening side has opened with a major, you are showing a hand with 5-5 in the minors. This is called the Unusual No Trump.

<input type="checkbox"/>	1H
2NT	

xx
x
AQxxx
KJxxx

This bid is called the UNUSUAL NO TRUMP. It is indeed unusual!!! It tells partner you are 5-5 in the minors and asks her to pick her best minor.

It is different here though...let's see how this applies to our discussion of delayed intervention in the bidding:

W	N	E	S
1H	P	2H	P
P	<u>2NT</u>		

Note that this NOT a jump to 2NT, therein lies the difference. The Unusual NT is always a JUMP in NT by an opponent.

If North had been 5-5 in the minors, he would have bid 2 NT early on in the bidding. He wants to bid now and show minors but he only has 4-4. He bids 2NT. It cannot be a real No Trump bid. Not when they have bid and raised a suit. If you had lots of stoppers in their suit, you would be planning to make them play it and go down for a much more profitable score than you making a part score your way.

You have ♠ xxx ♥ xx ♦ KQxx ♣ KJ10x Bid 2NT in Balancing seat after the above auction and partner will choose her best minor suit to bid. Perhaps East West may now push on to 3H. You have driven them one level higher. This is GOOD!!

Here are some practice hands to bid. West is the dealer in all cases.

1. KQ10
1097
K98
A963

86
KJ32
AJ742
K7

J7542
A5
Q10
J852

A93
Q864
653
Q104

2. KJ654
AK64
J
Q87

A
J1083
97654
J102

Q1072
Q75
A103
964

983
92
KQ82
AK53

3. Q74
AQ73
Q1062
108

K52
98
983
A9632

10963
KJ105
AJ7
J4

AJ8
642
K54
KQ75

4. K984
K6
976
J1063

1063
1054
A832
AQ2

QJ75
AQJ72
K5
75

A2
983
QJ104
K984

5. AKJ3
Q104
J83
K64

1074
A
A962
J9873

Q962
KJ9
1075
Q52

85
876532
KQ4
K64

1.
W N E S
1D P 1H P
2H P P 2S
?

2.
W N E S
P 1S P 2S
P P 2NT 3S
P P P

3.
W N E S
P P 1C P
2C P P Dbl
P 2H ?3C?

4.
W N E S
P P P 1H
P 1S P 2S
P P 2NT P
3D P P P

5.
W N E S
P 1C P 1S
P 2S P P
2NT P 3D P
P P

865432
 A72
 10
 K32

1097
 KJ94
 A92
 J109

KJ
 Q1083
 K7543
 A8

AQ
 65
 QJ86
 Q7654

With such a lousy suit, North should not make an overcall of 1S in the direct seat. Ditto for South who should not overcall 2C after 1D opener. The delayed bid of 2S shows a poor quality spade suit in North's hand. EW should not sell out to 2S and should bid one more. NS has done their damage and must not bid again.

N leads D 10. Declarer wins this and draws trump. N must HOP UP with the Ace of trump (saving the baby trumps for ruffing) and now leads a S. South wins the first spade and gives N a D ruff. N leads another S. South wins and gives N another D ruff. Down One

W	N	E	S
	P	1D	P
1H	P	2H	P
P	2S	3H	All pass

J98
 873
 AK73
 K54

Q762
 KQ
 842
 J1063

AK1043
 A962
 Q6
 98

5
 J1054
 J1095
 AQ72

Opening lead: J D. N wins K D and cashes Ace D. When declarer gets in, she draws three rounds of trump, cashes H KQ and ruffs the H loser in dummy. NS gained nothing this time by competing over 2S but SOME EW pairs might give up over 3D and some days 3S might go down.

W	N	E	S
		1S	P
2S	P	P	Dbf
3S	P	P	P

Q86
 KQ42
 87
 AK84

J10
 107
 AQ103
 Q10953

AK95
 53
 K954
 762

7432
 AJ986
 J62
 J

South cannot make 3 H. That is West's reward for not selling out to 2H which does make.

3D would also have failed. (2 hearts, 2 clubs and a club ruff)

It is quite common for both sides to fail at the 3 level. These guidelines are not infallible. The success rate is better than 80% which is excellent but there will still be occasions where following the rules will lead to a loss. Since this is rare, 'tis best to abide by the rules.

W	N	E	S
P	1C	P	1H
P	2H	P	P
2NT	P	3D	3H
P	P	P	

BALANCING HANDS BY EDDIE KANTAR

Dir: East
Vul: E-W

North
S. AQ10872
H. 1054
D. AQ
C. Q2

West
S. 65
H. 82
D. J86543
C. 986

East
S. J
H. AKJ9
D. K97
C. K7543

South
S. K943
H. Q763
D. 102
C. AJ10

East	South	West	North
1C	Pass	Pass	2S
Pass	4S	All Pass	

Opening lead: HA

Bidding Commentary: North's jump to 2S in the balancing seat is strong- not a weak jump overcall. In this position, it shows a strong six card suit with 13-15 HCP. East is not strong enough to get back into the fray and South has enough to raise to game.

Defensive Commentary: West signals with the H8 at trick one and East continues with the King and **jack** to squash declarer's 10. West ruffs the HQ and returns a diamond.

Play Commentary. Even if the diamond finesse works (and it is a big favorite to fail), declarer still needs the club finesse which figures to work. If the club finesse works, a diamond can be discarded on a winning club, Why take two finesses when only one is needed? North should clearly rise with the DA, draw trump and run the CQ through East. After this holds, a club is led to the jack and the DQ goes off on the CA. Just as the Dr. ordered.

Never take two finesses when one does the work of two.

Dir: East
Vul: None

North
S. Q95
H. J109732
D. 86
C. A5

West
S. J82
H. 8
D. 75432
C. Q962

East
S. A43
H. KQ
D. AK109
C. J1087

South
S. K1076
H. A654
D. QJ
C. K43

East	South	West	North
1NT	Pass	Pass	2H
Pass	3H	All Pass	

(1) 15-17

Opening lead: DA

Bidding Commentary: When the opponents die out at the one level, chances are that the high card points are rather evenly divided between the two partnerships. Translation: If you are in the balancing (passout) seat with a long suit, **bid it!** North expects to find 10-12 HCP in partner's hand. Partner has a bit more than normal expectation and raises to 3H. North is thrilled to pass.

Defensive Commentary: After cashing the DAK, East exits with the CJ.

Play Commentary: As declarer, try to form the habit of adding your HCP to dummy's HCP. Here, both the good and the bad guys have 20. In addition, East has at least 15 of those 20 HCP. Win the CA, cross to the CK and ruff a club stripping clubs. Your plan is throw them in with a heart and force a spade return, a suit you would rather not attack yourself. By removing their safe exit cards in clubs, you can force a spade return or a ruff and a sluff diamond return. Next play the HJ to the ace and exit a heart. After East wins he either has to surrender a ruff-sluff or switch to a spade. If he shifts to a spade, you can lose no more than one spade trick. If you had to attack spades, play East for the ace and West for the jack? Why? East has turned up with 13 HCP outside of spades and can't have the AJ (18 HCP) and can't have the jack without the ace (14 HCP). Ergo, East must have the ace without the jack. Elementary, my dear Watson.

If you want to force them to lead a suit you would rather not attack yourself (spades), strip the side suit(s), before giving up the lead in trump.

Dir: West
Vul: E-W

	North	
	S. 653	
	H. A82	
	D. 962	
	C. A653	
West		East
S. KQ10		S. A872
H. 75		H. 943
D. AQJ1053		D. 874
C. Q4		C. 1098
	South	
	S. J94	
	H. KQJ106	
	D. K	
	C. KJ72	

West	North	East	South
1D	Pass	Pass	1H
2D	2H	3D	3H
All Pass			

Opening lead: SK

Bidding Commentary: West's 2D rebid facing a passing partner promises at least 6 diamonds with extras. East is allowed to compete one level with an ace and three card support. East-West make 3D. South has extras for the reopening bid of 1H (only needs 8+ HCP) and should not count the DK. South's distribution makes competing to 3H attractive.

Lead Commentary: Pretty obvious.

Defensive Commentary: East signals encouragement with the S8 (not the 7!), the higher of equals. The S8 also denies the S9. The defense reels off three spades and East switches to a diamond. West plays the ace of diamonds and then queen of diamonds. South ruffing the queen.

Play Commentary: East, a responder who has passed an opening bid, has shown up with 4HCP, the SA. If East had the CQ, he would have had enough to respond. West must have the CQ, so there is no point in finessing. After trumps are drawn, declarer plays the king-ace of clubs hoping the queen is doubleton. Guess what?