

SUPPORT DOUBLES

Takeout, negative, penalty, lead directing, support ... doubles can be confusing! A key to keeping them straight is to be clear about when each kind of double applies.

When is a double a support double?

1. Our side opens the bidding 1-of-a-suit.
2. Responder bids 1♥ or 1♠. (It doesn't matter if LHO passed, bid, or doubled.)
3. RHO competes with a double or a suit overcall *below 2 of responder's major*.¹
4. If opener doubles (or redoubles), that is a support double.

What does a support double show?

Exactly three card support for responder's major suit. That's it. It doesn't say anything else about opener's hand: he can have any strength or distribution.²

Exercise 1: Which of these doubles are support doubles?

1. <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center;"> <tr><th>N</th><th>E</th><th>S</th><th>W</th></tr> <tr><td>1♣</td><td>P</td><td>1♥</td><td>1♠</td></tr> <tr><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> </table>	N	E	S	W	1♣	P	1♥	1♠	X				2. <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center;"> <tr><th>N</th><th>E</th><th>S</th><th>W</th></tr> <tr><td>1♣</td><td>P</td><td>1♠</td><td>3♦</td></tr> <tr><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> </table>	N	E	S	W	1♣	P	1♠	3♦	X				3. <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center;"> <tr><th>N</th><th>E</th><th>S</th><th>W</th></tr> <tr><td>1♦</td><td>X</td><td>1♠</td><td>2♥</td></tr> <tr><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> </table>	N	E	S	W	1♦	X	1♠	2♥	X				4. <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center;"> <tr><th>N</th><th>E</th><th>S</th><th>W</th></tr> <tr><td>1♣</td><td>1♦</td><td>1♠</td><td>2♦</td></tr> <tr><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> </table>	N	E	S	W	1♣	1♦	1♠	2♦	X			
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Exercise 2: What would you bid with each of these hands? (You are opener.)

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N	E	S	W												
1♦	P	1♥	1♠												
??															

¹ What if RHO overcalls 1NT? If 1NT is natural, opener's double is **penalty**. If 1NT is a Sandwich NT (both unbid suits), we treat it as a suit overcall and opener's double is a **support double**.

² Does opener *have* to make a support double if he has three cards in responder's major? This is something to discuss with your partner. I recommend that you not make a support double with a very minimum balanced hand, but some partnerships play that they are mandatory.

Bidding after a support double

Responder's second bid is natural. The first thing to check for is your major suit length: do you have an 8+ card trump fit? Remember that opener's support double doesn't set your major as trump, since you may only have a 4-3 fit.

With a 5 card or longer suit, you have a "golden fit" and should play in your major.

- **2 of your major** shows a weak hand (6-10 points), even if RHO bid over opener's support double. (If RHO passed, you might only have a 4 card suit for this bid.)
- **Jumping to 3 of your major** is invitational (11-12 points) with a 5+ card suit.

With a 4 card suit, the partnership does not have an 8 card trump fit. You can:

- **Bid NT** with a stopper in the enemy suit: 1NT = 6-10, 2NT = 11-12, 3NT = 13-15.
- **Raise opener's minor** with 4+ card support: 2-level = 6-10, 3-level = 11-12.
- **Bidding 2 of your major** says that you have a weak hand (6-10), but does not guarantee a five card suit if RHO passed. There will be times when you have to make this bid with a four card major because you are unable to do anything else.
- **Cuebid the enemy suit** with a strong hand (13+) that can't bid notrump. This bid is forcing, and the bidding can't stop below 3NT. New suits are also forcing!
- **If RHO bids over opener's double** you are allowed to pass. Double shows extra strength without a fit.

Exercise 3: What do you bid next? (You are responder.)

N	E	S	W
1♦	P	1♥	1♠
X	P	??	

1. ♠ Q 10 6
♥ J 8 4 3
♦ A 9
♣ 10 7 6 3

2. ♠ 8 2
♥ K 9 7 5
♦ Q J 10
♣ Q 7 4 2

3. ♠ 7 6 3
♥ A 6 5 2
♦ K 9 8 4 2
♣ 9

N	E	S	W
1♣	1♦	1♠	2♦
X	P	??	

4. ♠ K J 8 2
♥ Q 10 3
♦ Q 7 4 2
♣ 8 5

5. ♠ A 7 6 5
♥ Q J 9
♦ K J 10
♣ 9 7 2

6. ♠ Q J 10 8 3
♥ 7
♦ A Q 6
♣ Q 5 4 3

ANSWERS

Exercise 1: 1, 3, 4, and 7 are support doubles. In 2 and 5, RHO's overcall is too high (above 2 of responder's major). In 6, the double is not made by the opening bidder. In 8, the double is penalty (the 1NT bid is natural).

Exercise 2: 1. Dbl 2. 2♠ 3. Dbl 4. 3♥ 5. Dbl 6. Dble

Exercise 3: 1. 1NT 2. 2♥ 3. 2♦ 4. 2♠ 5. 2NT 6. 3♠