

BALANCING IN THE PASS-OUT SEAT

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

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| 1♣ | Pass | Pass | ? |

South is now in the balancing seat. If South passes, the auction is over. If the opponents have opened with one of a suit, passing would let them play at a very low level. You balance (bid) in the pass-out seat to either:

- Try to push the opponents to a higher level or
- Try to win the contract for your side if it is your hand

When Should You Balance?

Add three points to the value of your hand. If you now have enough points to bid, you can (and should) bid in the balancing seat. This protects your partner, who might have had to pass with a very good hand because they did not have the right shape to bid. 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 values. After you balance, your partner must remember that you might be 3 points light for your bid, so they must now compensate (as responder to your bid) by underbidding accordingly.

What Should You Bid?

Assume the following auction:

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| 1♣ | Pass | Pass | ? |

What should you bid with 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 the direct seat, you would pass. In the balancing seat, you should bid 1 NT. (You have 16 pts after adding 3 points.) This is called the “balancing NT” and is typically done with 11-14 HCP (14-17 after adding 3) and a stopper in the opponents’ suit. You and your partner need to decide if you will play “systems on” or “systems off” after this bid.
2. This time, you really do have 17 HCP. In the direct seat, you would overcall 1 NT. In the balancing seat, you should double first and then bid NT later to distinguish this hand from the previous one.
3. In the direct seat, you should pass with minimum points and this poor quality spade suit. In the balancing seat, you must overcall 1♠.
4. In the direct seat, you will pass because you do not have enough points for a take-out double. In the balancing seat, make a take-out double (you have 13 points after adding 3).
5. In both the direct and balancing seat, you must pass. Your only decent suit is clubs, so you should defend against their 1♣ contract. You cannot double for penalty here!