

Bidding Over and Responding to 3/4/5 Level Preempts

By Neil H. Timm

Preemptive opening bids (bidding that begins at the three, four and even the five level) cause problems no matter which system you play since they take up valuable bidding space. On your convention card you have the Section Titled **VS Opening Preempts Double Is Take Out** Thru ____ **Penalty** What approach do you use?

Our goal is to keep it simple because there is no best system. The underlying principle that you must use is to devise a system that enables you to reach your own BEST contract, and do not worry too much about penalizing the opponents.

Opponents Open at the Five Level

To play straight penalty doubles at this level does not make sense. Opener will always have a long and strong single suit and the opponents are trying to steal the contract!

DOUBLE should always be for take-out, not penalty, and the bid of 5NT show the two lowest unbid suits. This can be played in both the second and fourth positions.

Opponents Open at the Four Level

When the preemptive bid is made at 4-level, one has more options. Many Play the World Bridge Standard.

Double of any natural 4-level preempt through 4♥ is for takeout, bids are natural.
4NT over 4♠ is for takeout and double is usually for Penalty
Over 4♥, 4♠/5♣/5♦ are natural, 4NT shows the minors, double is for Penalty

Opponents Open at the Three Level

This is perhaps the most common preemptive bid. The best approach is a simple system.

In both the second and fourth positions:

- 1) Double is for take-out, NOT For PENALTY
- 2) 3NT or any suit bid is natural and non-forcing
- 3) A cue-bid is either a big two-suiter or giant three-suiter

KEEP IT SIMPLE!

Point count requirements for takeouts and bids

A common approach is to use the 10, 12, and 15 systems.

2-level bids 10+ points

3-level bids 12+ points

4-level bids 15+ points

Let's consider an example. Suppose West is the dealer with east-west nonvulnerable and north-south vulnerable. The deal follows.

North		
♠ A		
♥ Q 10 x x		
♦ K Q x x x		
♣ K J x		
West		East
♠ A K Q J 10 9		♠ x x x x x
♥ x		♥ A x
♦ x x		♦ J x x x
♣ x x x x		♣ x x
	South	
	♠ x	
	♥ K J 9 x x x	
	♦ A 10	
	♣ A Q 10 x	

Using the rule of 2 or 3, 13-6 (losers) = 7+3 (not vulnerable) = 10, west opens four spades. Because a double is for penalty, north bids 4NT for take-out. South bids five hearts, but misses the vulnerable slam. Note that if east bid five spades this may force south to bid six hearts. Do not preempt the preemptor.

How do you find the slam? One method is to bid 5NT over 4NT, pick a slam; after partner bids 6♦, bid 6♥ (you have two aces).

Asking Bids after a Partner's Preempt

How many times have your partner opened at the three level and you find yourself with a very good hand? What do you bid? Often neither Weak Roman Keycard Blackwell over Preempts nor cue bids help. To consider a specific example, suppose you pick up the hand:

♠AQ4 ♥AKQ654 ♦A10 ♣84

And your partner opens three spades. What do you bid? The problem resolves around what your partner has in the club suit. You have a worthless doubleton and should NOT use Blackwood. What is one to do?

Consider the following three weak 3 opening hands.

1. ♠KJ109765 ♥32 ♦K76 ♣2
2. ♠KJ109763 ♥32 ♦K9 ♣J10

Opposite hand 1, 6 spades is a laydown. With the second hand, six cannot be made because of the two club losers. The same problem occurs if your partner opens 4 spades.

The solution is to play ASKING BIDS whenever one opens at the three/four level.

For a three level bid, any JUMP response in a suit is an asking bid in that suit.

Thus, after 3♠ followed by 5♣ asks, what do you have in clubs?

After 3♦ followed by 4♥ asks, what do you have in hearts?

Following a FOUR level bid, any five level bid becomes an asking bid.

After 4♥ the bid of 5♦ asks, what you have in diamonds.

After 4♠, the bid of 5♣ asks about clubs.

These bids do not interfere with normal bidding procedures because a new suit in response to a preemptive bid is forcing so that responder need not jump to game. Thus, the jump bid may be used more profitably. When opening at the four levels, opener should have a very powerful suit and responder is not likely to have a better suit. Hence, responder is more likely to make an asking bid.

Responses to Asking Bids

Let's consider an example with the sequence: 3♠ followed by 5♣, what do you have in clubs? Note: 4♠ would be a Roman Keycard 1430 bid.

Responses to asking bids ALWAYS start with the next suit.

First Step – two or more quick losers' xx, xxx, xxxx

Second Step – singleton

Nearest notrump regardless of step = king

Fourth Step – Ace

Fifth Step – A-K or A-Q.

Sixth Step - Void

Example 1: Opener's Hand: ♠K4 ♥65 ♦AJT9432 ♣43

And Responder's Hand: ♠87 ♥AKQJ109 ♦K4 ♣AKQ.

The bidding goes, 3♦ followed by 4♠ what do you have in spades? The bid of 4NT shows a KING, closest NT, and responder bids 6NT to protect the king. Notice that in this case the first step is notrump, showing the king. With two or three small spades, opener would have responded 5♣ to the 4♠ asking bid.

Example 2: Opener's Hand: ♠AKJ98765 ♥32 ♦2 ♣54

And Responder's Hand: ♠QT4 ♥J7♦AKQJ ♣AKJT.

The bidding goes, 4♠ followed by 5♥ what do you have in hearts? Opener bids 5♠, first step, to show two or more quick losers in hearts. Responder passes.

Some recommend using only five steps for asking bids against preempts. They combine singleton and a king (step 2&3) into step 2. Then step 3 is an ace, step 4 is A-K or A-Q, and step 5 becomes a void. Always discuss how you play asking bids with your partner.

THERE IS NO DISASTER WORSE THAN A MISUNDERSTOOD ASKING BID!

Grand Slam Force

A bid of 5NT (**with a known agreed fit**) after a 3-level or 4-level bid is called the Grand Slam Force and is used most often when the bidding has shown a strong suit. The definition of a strong suit is: (1) a preemptive opening bid or overcall when vulnerable, (2) a jump rebid, (3) a rebid in your original suit after you partner has made a jump shift. Then, a bid of 5NT by partner is the Grand Slam Force bid ask about the strength of your suit. Your responses are:

- 6♣ one of the top three honors, almost always the ace or king.
- 6 of the agreed suit two of the top three honors.
- 7 of the agreed suit three of the top three honors.

Some also play the bid even if the bidding does not show a strong suit. For example, a preemptive bid not vulnerable. Then the responses are:

- 6♣ queen or less.
- 6♦ ace or king with minimum length.
- 6♥ ace or king with more than minimum length.
- 6♠ two of the top three honors.
- 7♠ (or 7 of the agreed upon suit) the top three honors.

Many times the responder must first find out about aces before using the Grand Slam Force. Then, the bid of 6♣ becomes the Grand Slam Force bid! An example follows:

Opener	Responder	Opener Bid	Responder Bid
♠KQJ10xxxx	♠A	4♠	4NT
♥x	♥AKQxxx	5♥	6♣
♦x	♦AKxx	6♠	7NT
♣Axx	♣KQx		

Note: Without a fit, the 5NT bid is known as the Pick a slam bid.

Lightner Slam Double

This convention was designed by Theodore Lightner and asks the partner of the opening leader to make a lead directing double of a slam contract.

If doubler has bid a suit, (1) partner MUST NOT lead the suit, (2) DO NOT LEAD a TRUMP, (3) assume that the double is based on a void or an unexpected AK (or AQ) in a suit bid by the opponents. (Very often dummies first bid suit).

If doubler has NOT bid a suit, (1) partner MUST NOT lead the unbid suit, (2) DO NOT LEAD a TRUMP, (3) assume that the double is based on a void or an unexpected AK (or AQ) in a suit bid by the opponents or perhaps declares side suit (second bid suit).

If both the doubler and the doubler's partner have bid a suit, (1) partner MUST NOT lead the suit bid by the doubler, (2) DO NOT LEAD a TRUMP, (3) partner is forbidden to lead his own suit, (4) Lead the unbid suit.

Doubles of notrump slams usually ask partner to lead dummy's first bid suit, or an unusual lead.

Fisher Double

Invented by Dr. John W. Fisher, it is used when opening 1NT or 2NT. The double of the final notrump contract at any level asks for a lead in a minor suit, CLUBS if the 2♣ Stayman Convention was NOT used and Diamonds if Stayman was used but it was not doubled. Some partnerships use the convention asking for a diamond lead, no matter if clubs were bid or not. Discuss this bid with your partner!

A final note, some use the convention that a double of 3NT asks partner to lead dummies first bid suit. Simple!

1430 RKCB Over Preempts

When your partner preempts, there are ways to investigate the hand further. For two-level preempts, one may bid 2NT to ask your partner for a feature or you may use the Ogust Convention.

Or, you may play Modified Ogust, Two-step Ogust, Roudinesco rebids, Romex rebids, the McCabe Adjunct Convention, etc.

How about RCKB?

Using 4♣ as RKCB over 2 or 3 level pre-emptive bids!

The responses are:

4♦	first step	0 keycards in the agreed suit
4♥	second step	1 keycard without the Queen
4♠	third step	1 keycard with the Queen
4NT	fourth step	2 keycards without the Queen
5♣	fifth step	2 keycards with the Queen

After the pre-emptive bid of 3♣, the bid of 4♣ is natural and advances the preempt; a jump to 4♦ is RKCB for clubs, Crosswood.

Over the weak 1430 response of 4♦, the next step bid of 4♥ is the Queen ASK. The next step bid of 4♠ denies the Queen and 4NT says yes with no side king. A 5-level suit bid shows the Queen and an outside king in the suit bid. If you by-pass the Queen ask, then a 5-level bid is the SSA and 5NT is the king ask.

Let's look at an example.

Opener	Responder
♠ A 7	♠ K 2
♥ K 10 9 8 7 6 5	♥ A Q 2
♦ 7	♦ A Q 6 5 4 2
♣ 3 4 5	♣ A 7

Opener	Responder
3♥	4♣ (1430 RKCB for hearts)
4NT (2/5 w/o Q)	5♦ (SSA for diamond-Skip Queen ASK)
6♥ (singleton ♦)*	7♥

*Without the control in the diamond suit opener would bid 5♥ and responder would only bid a small slam by bidding 6♥. The Queen Ask step over 4NT would have been the next step 5♣. The SKA bid is again 5NT.