

# Defence to Weak Twos



Your opponents pre-empt for two basic reasons: to *disrupt* and to *describe*.

Opponents' pre-empts cause a lot of disruption, making your life very difficult. To understand how to defend against them, you need to know what you are up against. Basically a Weak Two shows 6-10 points and a six-card suit. A simple summary of a hand you might expect would be:

- A hand with a *long suit*,
- *Weak on points*, and with
- *Little defensive strength*.

What your opponent is telling you is that he will not make many tricks if you (or your partner) play the hand: he is pre-empting you because he thinks that you are likely to be able to make a contract.

What this means is that you should try to come in over pre-empts as much as possible: *be aggressive – try hard to make a bid!*

## A Simple Defence

Before you go any further you need a system of defence; the one I recommend – basically natural – is laid out below.

- (1) **Double for Take-out** (shortage in the opponent's suit, opening values)
- (2) **Suit Overcalls**: 10+ points & a 6-card suit (or good 5-card suit)
- (3) **2NT Overcall**: 16-19 points semi-balanced with a stop in the bid suit.

## Take-out Doubles

A take-out double is a call which asks your partner to bid his best suit, so that he 'takes you out' of the opponent's suit. There are three basic requirements for a take-out double:

- (a) Shortage in the opponent's suit;

- (b) Support for each of the unbid suits;
- (c) The strength for an opening bid (13 or more points, or 14 points including shortage).

The ideal hand for a take-out double is a 4-4-4-1 with a singleton in the opponent's suit: if your partner replies in his best suit, then you are sure to find your best fit. In fact you should assume that you will have a fit, which means you can add on points for shortage. So with 11 points and a 4-4-4-1 shape you can add 3 points for the singleton giving you 14 total points, enough for a double.

With less perfect shape (5-4-3-1, for example) you cannot be so generous with points for shortage. Rather than adding 3 points, you might add just 2. Thus the worse your shape, the more points are required for a take-out double.

Over 2♥:

♠	K Q 5 4
♥	4
♦	A J 7 2
♣	J 6 5 4

Double for take-out, though minimum for this action.

Over 2♠:

♠	6
♥	A K 6 2
♦	Q J 8
♣	Q 10 6 3 2

Double for take-out. An extra point to make up for the discrepancy in shape.

Why not play Penalty Doubles?

There are quite a number of reasons why take-out doubles are better. Firstly,

take-out doubles give flexibility on hands without a long suit; secondly, judging whether a penalty double is sensible at a low-level can be difficult; and finally, you can actually still get a penalty out of the opponents' pre-empts even though you cannot make a penalty double yourself, as you will see.

What is important to note is that once you have agreed to play take-out doubles you must *not* make a double of 2♠ on a hand like this:

♠	K J 9 4 3
♥	4
♦	K 9 3 2
♣	A J 4

You must *pass* because, if you double, your partner will 'take you out' and not only that: he will probably respond with a jump to 4♥ because he will expect you to have a hand with the spades and hearts reversed.

Let us move on to the other facets of our system of defence.

## Suit Overcalls

You need a good suit: either a strong five-card suit of some solidity, or a longer suit. You also need about the values for an opening bid. However, if you are contemplating overcalling 2♥ with 2♠, you do not need so much strength because your overcall is still at the two level. In fact, why should you not do it with the same strength as your opponent, i.e. a 6-card suit and 6-10 points!

Having said this, it is best to keep your strength up a little, because you are bidding more constructively than your opponent, so you should really have a minimum of 9 or 10 points for the 2♠ overcall.

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Over 2♠:

♠ 7  
♥ A Q J 6 5 4  
♦ J 5 4  
♣ A 9 4

Overcall 3♥, showing an opening hand with a good six-card suit.

Over 2♥:

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

Overcall 2♠. It is worth competing at the two level. You are not showing much strength, but this would probably be about the minimum hand for such a call.

### 2NT Overcall (16-19 points)

Over strong opening bids, many players use the Unusual 2NT overcall (showing the two lower unbid suits). However, over weak opening bids you need to use all of your no-trump bids as strong natural calls, showing balanced (or semi-balanced) hands with a stop in the opponent's suit. The 2NT overcall over a Weak Two shows a fairly wide range of points. This is because so much of your bidding space has been taken away.

In response to the 2NT overcall, you should play any convention you might normally play over a 1NT overcall: for example, Stayman and Transfers. The 2NT overcall is described as 'semi-balanced' because you might have a 5-4-2-2 shape or even a 6-3-2-2, especially with length in the minor suits.

Over 2♠:

♠ A 4 2  
♥ K Q 3  
♦ Q 8  
♣ K Q J 9 4

Bid 2NT. You have only one stop, but it

is the best bid you can make because it is much more descriptive than 3♣

With hands that are stronger than 19 points, you do best by making a take-out double first and then rebidding in no-trumps or in your best suit.

### Bidding in Fourth Seat

For the system of take-out doubles to work well, it is important that the last person to call bids very aggressively. Whenever you are sat in 'fourth' seat, that is, whenever your pass will finish the auction (e.g. 2♠ – Pass – Pass – ?), you should always consider making a positive call. In fact, whatever the auction is, if you are last to call you should think seriously before passing, especially if the bidding has been weak.

Why is the auction dying so early? Because the opponents are not so strong. They are giving up below game level, so you can put their assets at a maximum of 23 points. This means that you know that your partner must have some strength. Bearing this in mind, you can bid on slightly fewer values (about 3 points fewer than necessary, hence the often-used expression 'Borrow a king'). Thus if you are in the pass-out seat, you should add on 3 points and see if you are worth a bid or a double.

There are two main reasons for doing this:

1. Your partner might be quite strong, but was too balanced to overcall or double in second seat.
2. Your partner might have a penalty double (he would have passed at his first turn because a double would have been for take-out).

Dealer: South. Love All.

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

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	Dbl	2♥
3♠	End		Pass

2♥ + 1 = -140  
3♠ = +140

Sitting East, you hold just nine points and thus probably do not feel able to bid. However, because you are the last caller, you should think very carefully before passing. Put a king in your hand and consider whether you would then make a bid. With '12' points and a singleton you should certainly call because you have the perfect shape for a double. As seen before, with perfect shape you can add on for shortage, and thus you are worth 15 points (9 points + 3 borrowed + 3 for the singleton = 15). You should definitely make a take-out double.

West responds to East's double in spades, but he is careful not to overbid with his 13 points, because his partner may have stretched (and 'borrowed a king'), thus the jump response of 3♠ is perfect.

Competing for the part-score is very important in bridge and on this hand there is a difference of 280 points between letting your opponents play in hearts (-140) and stealing the contract for yourselves in spades (+140).

From this hand, you can see how difficult it is to bid with balanced hands. West has 13 points, but has no bid to describe his hand, so he has to pass on the first round. It is because of this that East tries so hard to make a bid in the fourth seat.

Dealer: South. Love All.

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

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	Dbl	2♥
			End

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East has the same hand on this deal and thus would reopen the auction with a double in the same way. This time, however, West has a hand that wants to defend against 2♥, so he passes his partner's double.

East is asking West to bid his best suit (he is making a take-out double), but West knows that passing and converting his partner's double to a penalty double is the best policy. Note that it was important for West to pass on the first round. Had he doubled, East would have responded 3♠ – not ideal!

As you can see, although this system involves playing the take-out double, this does not preclude the partner of the doubler passing when he holds very good trumps.

On this last deal, 2♥ doubled minus two scores 300 to East-West, and beats any part-score, whereas an undoubled 2♥, scoring +100, would be beaten by 1NT plus one.

### Bidding over a Pre-emptive Raise

The sequence 2♥ – Pass – 3♥ (or 2♠ – Pass – 3♠), is often very weak, so you should not let it put you off bidding. Bid as if it were a weak three opening bid. Be aggressive and try hard to make a bid.

After 2♥ – Pass – 3♥:

♠ A Q 3 2  
♥ 2  
♦ K Q 6 3  
♣ Q 10 9 4

3♥ is not a strong bid, so pretend you are bidding over a pre-empt: *double* for take-out

### Responding to Your Partner

Learning how to defend against Weak Twos is all well and good, but you also need to learn how to respond to partner's call after a Weak-Two opening.

#### RESPONDING TO A TAKE-OUT DOUBLE:

- (1) With 0-8 points make a simple response (lowest level).

With 9-10 points make a jump response if you have room.

With 11+ points go for game (in a major).

Over 2♥ you have room for three bids in spades, 2♠, 3♠ or 4♠.

Whereas over 2♠ you have room for just two in hearts 3♥ or 4♥. Thus the 9-10 range above is only used over a 2♥ opening.

Over a 2♠ opening your two ranges should be 0-9 weak response, 10+ go for game.

- (2) Add on for shortage and distribution; partner is promising support for your best suit, so you should assume that you have a fit and evaluate your hand accordingly.
- (3) Bear in mind that if your partner was last to bid he may have one fewer king, so you may need to 'give back' that king. You should adjust your ranges by about two points.
- (4) Assess your holding in the pre-empted suit. Your points in the opponent's suit (other than the ace) are worth a lot less.
- (5) If you have a *stop* in the bid suit and no length in the unbid major, consider bidding no-trumps. You do need at least 10 points to try this: with 10-12 points bid 2NT; with 13+ bid 3NT
- (6) Only *pass* if you have *very good trumps* (good enough to take at least three tricks). This is very important; do not pass just because you are weak. Remember that your partner is asking you to respond, so unless you can be pretty sure that 2♥ doubled will be your best score, you should bid another suit.

Here are some examples.

After 2♥ – Dbl – Pass:

♠ A J 3 2  
♥ 6 4 2  
♦ 6  
♣ Q J 10 4 3

Bid 3♠: you have 8 HCP and a singleton, i.e. 11 points (8 losers). Not enough for game, but enough to *jump*.

After 2♥ – Dbl – Pass:

♠ A 6 3 2  
♥ 6 4 2  
♦ 6 3  
♣ Q J 10 4

Bid 2♠ – just 8 HCP, so make a simple response (9 losers).

After 2♥ – Pass – Pass – Dbl:

♠ A J 3 2  
♥ 6 4 2  
♦ 6  
♣ Q J 10 4 3

Be careful, your partner might have 'borrowed' 3 points, so devalue your hand a little. Thus you should bid only 2♠. If your partner then bids 3♠, you can bid to game.

After 2♠ – Dbl – Pass:

♠ A J 2  
♥ K J 3  
♦ K Q J 5 3  
♣ 10 4

Bid 3NT. You have a spade stop and 14 HCP. Do not worry that you only have one stop. Because you have the ace, you will be able to hold it up and hopefully keep the Weak-Two bidder off lead – he will hold very few high cards outside his spade suit.

After 2♠ – Dbl – Pass:

♠ A 6 3 2  
♥ A 8 4 2  
♦ 6  
♣ Q 6 4 3

Bid 4♥. Do not pass, your spades are not good enough. Furthermore, you have 10 HCP and a singleton, which gives you comfortably enough to go for game. Your hands should fit together well, because it is quite possible that your partner has a singleton in hearts and thus you might be able to ruff in both hands.

We must now consider how to respond to suit and 2NT overcalls.

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### RESPONDING TO A SUIT OVERCALL

Remember that partner expects you to hold 8 or 9 points. Evaluate your hand including points for *shortage* and *length*; if your total comes to 10-11 points, raise by one level, and with 12 or more go for game. If responding to a 2♠ overcall, bear in mind that your partner might be quite a bit weaker. Also, with 10 or more points and a stop in the opponent's suit, you could consider a no-trump contract.

### RESPONDING TO 2NT

Use all your conventional responses, especially *Stayman*. Go for game with 8 points (or a good 7-point hand). With 6 points, you should pass: your partner might have 19, but with the points so divided, you would find 3NT a struggle.

♠ 8 6 3		♠ A Q 9
♥ A 8 4 2		♥ K Q 7 6
♦ 6		♦ A 9 5
♣ K J 6 4 3		♣ Q 9 5

  

	N	
W	S	E

<b>West</b>	<b>North</b>	<b>East</b>	<b>South</b>
	2♠	2NT	Pass
3♣	Pass	3♥	Pass
4♥	End		

As West, with 8 points you should go for game, but rather than raising straight to 3NT, you should first look for a fit in hearts, since if you can find a 4-4 fit you would much prefer to play in hearts. Thus West should bid 3♣, Stayman: 3NT will be defeated by a diamond lead, whereas 4♥ may well make twelve tricks.

### Conclusions

The system I have suggested is basically natural and I would recommend playing a similar system over weak three openings too. The main message is to bid aggressively. Remember that your opponents are trying to steal your contract from you, so you should try to get it back. Bidding aggressively will go wrong every so often, but that is part and parcel of good bridge. If you get a bad result (and it could be -1100!), then put it behind you, because nine out of ten times bidding aggressively will lead to good results. ■

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Dear Mr. Bridge,

I make it a rule never to write to publications unless (a) I get paid or (b) I am likely to win a prize. Today I am to make an exception.

I really must write and congratulate Bernard Magee on his brilliant Acol Bidding software. I bought it about three months ago, and I am still addicted to it – in fact, I have to put a time limit on my using it! My family think I am so clever when they pass the door and Bernard's voice rings out with "Well done," or "Very good choice" I try not to let them hear him when he says: "No comment!"

I would also like to mention that when I first purchased the CD my intention was not to use the sound as I thought it would be distracting. In actual fact, now I always have the sound on, and I find Bernard's voice very easy to listen to.

It must have been a marathon task to make this software, and I wonder how long it took him. It would be interesting to have an article about it.

I am now saving up to buy QPlus.

Audrey Walsh, Rolvenden, Kent

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