



Ask Jerry

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Dear Jerry,

My partner and I are having difficulties responding to overcalls. Our agreements following an overcall are basically the same as following an opening bid. Is this a reasonable agreement? On a specific hand, I held,

♠6 4 2 ♥A 8 ♦K J 8 7 ♣K 9 6 5, and heard the auction 1♣-1♥ (by my partner)-Pass-? What should I bid?

Rollie

Hi, Rollie,

Reasonable? Yes. Best? No. And before I address your specific hand, let's get a few things out in the open, including some definitions.

Responder is the partner of the opening bidder. The term *advancer* applies to the partner of an overcaller or take-out doubler. This distinction in terms might be the first clue there should be a difference in responsibilities.

When your partner opens the bidding, especially in a minor suit, he is often interested in alternative contracts and values your opinion. Because of this, one of responder's prime obligations after hearing a 1♣ or 1♦ opening bid, provided he holds at least 5 or 6 points, is to respond in a four-card or longer major of any strength. For instance, you hold:

♠Q 8 6 5 ♥9 6 4 2 ♦A 6 5 ♣J 3

After opener's 1♦, which could be

on a poor three-card suit, a response of 1♥ is the correct bid. This action is 100% forcing and paves the way for further exploration for the best fit and level.

An overcall should be viewed more as a statement. Say you're *advancer* holding the hand above, in this auction: 1♣-1♦ (by partner)-Pass-? A raise to 2♦, supporting overcaller's known good suit, is the appropriate call.

An overcall shows a desire to compete for the opportunity to play the hand. In addition, it suggests holding a good five-card or longer suit and asks partner to strongly consider leading that suit if you end up on defense. In other words, a typical overcall allows for the consideration of alternative contracts, but is not necessarily interested in them.

A new-suit advance should show a good five-card or longer suit of your own, tending to deny primary support for the overcall.

The auction goes 1♣-1♦ (by partner)-Pass. Holding:

♠K 6 5 ♥A Q 7 5 4 ♦6 5 ♣8 7 6,

a 1♥ constructive advance is called for. Note how this hand differs from the 1♥ forcing response on a four-card suit headed by nary an honor shown above.

This time, the bidding proceeds 1♠-2♣-Pass, and you hold:

♠9 7 6 ♥A 8 7 ♦K J 9 7 4 3 ♣4.

Here, you have the option to bid a nonforcing 2♦. With this hand, I would not want to force partner to do anything, but I would certainly be interested in hearing from him again if he has extra values, extra shape, support for my suit or any reason to speak again when he could have passed. If partner is short in diamonds with a minimum 2♣ overcall, I would try my best to take at least eight tricks in a diamond contract.

Notrump responses should be different from *notrump* advances. When partner opens the bidding at the one level, you expect him to hold at least 12 or 13 points. When partner overcalls at the one level, he could have as few as 8 or 9 high-card points. Because of this, *notrump* advances should be a little "beefier" than *notrump* responses, more like:

1NT	7-11
2NT	12-14
3NT	Game opposite even a minimum overcall

Back to your question: Depending on partnership style, 1NT would likely be enough with your hand. Best not to hang a partner who could easily have as little as:

♠Q 8 6 ♥K Q J 10 6 ♦9 6 5 ♣J 8.