

Negative doubles and Takeout doubles are very similar. They have become popular because they solve a difficult (and common) bidding problem, for example:

Partner opens 1♦ and your right-hand opponent (RHO) overcalls 1♠
You hold: ♠762 ♥KQ75 ♦94 ♣QJ93

The overcall has taken away your 1♥ response, so you have no way to accurately describe your strength and distribution. You can't bid 1NT (which promises a spade stopper) and you can't bid a new suit at the 2-level (which promises 10+ pts).

This solution is called a *negative double*. Why call them Negative Double, I have no idea, as I think they are a positive bid. To use this convention, you and partner need to agree that a double by responder is *NOT* for penalty. Instead, it shows:

- At least 7+ points *AND*
- 4 cards in at least one of the unbid suits (usually the unbid *major* but not necessarily). You should have at least 3 cards in the unbid suits, in case partner bids one.

In the problem above, you double to show the values for a response and a 4 card suit. This tells partner that you would have responded at the 1 level if the opponent had passed. If opener has 4 hearts, they can "raise" your response by bidding hearts. If not, they can choose another descriptive bid. In the good old days this type of double was called a Sputnik Double and promised 4♥, but these days the double just promises support for unbid suits and no immediate support for partner's suit.

Responder's Freebids

Playing negative doubles also offers you the advantage of assigning a more specific meaning to a freebid of a new suit. After an opponent's overcall, if responder freely bids a new suit (instead of making a negative double), they promise a *5 card suit*. A new-suit freebid at the 1 level shows 7+ pts.; at the 2-level or higher, it shows 10+ pts.

Example 1:

♠A973 ♥AJ2 ♦932 ♣KJ10

If partner opens 1♦ and RHO overcalls 1♥, make a negative double. Even though you have enough strength for a bid, use the double to be even more descriptive.

Example 2:

♠QJ1073 ♥874 ♦A92 ♣74

If partner opens 1♦ and your RHO overcalls 1♥, bid 1♠. The overcall hasn't taken away your 1 level response and you are now showing 5 spades.

So now you have *two* ways to show spades. In these situations, use the negative double to show a 4 card suit. A freebid to show a 5 card suit. Now partner will know they can raise with 3 card support if you bid the suit.

NB: if partner opens 1♦ and your RHO overcalls 2♣, the Example 2 hand isn't strong enough for a 2♠ freebid. In this case, you'll have to use a negative double. If partner bids 2♦, you will pass. If they bid 2♥ (thinking you could have ♥), you can still pass. 2♥ in this situation is not a reverse

When is the negative double "off"?

You and your partner need to decide at which level of bidding you'll use negative doubles. One popular agreement is that negative doubles are "on" if the opponent makes a suit overcall up to and including 2♠. Think of taking it to 3♠, as this then handles the opposition's pre-emptive bids as well, or better still up to 4♥

Once negative doubles are "off", responder's double is now for penalty. No matter how you choose to play negative doubles, they apply only if the opponent overcalls a *suit*. Responder's double of a 1NT overcall should be for penalty.

Opener's rebids

After responder's negative double, opener must make a rebid that describes both their strength and support for the suit partner has shown with the double. In most cases, bid your hand just as if partner had made a 1-level bid in that suit:

- With a MINIMUM opening (13-15 pts.), make your natural suit rebid at a low level. If you have 4-card support for the suit partner's implied suit they have shown with the double, you should always show it.
- With an INVITATIONAL hand (15-17 pts.), *jump one level* to show extra strength (eg 1♣ by you - 1♥ overcall - DBL by partner - P - 2♠ by you).
- With a FORCING-TO-GAME hand (18+ pts.), *jump to game* or, if you are not sure of which game to play, *cuebid* the opponent's suit to force responder to tell you more about his hand.

QUIZ

After 1♣ (1♠) what would you do with each of these hands?

- A) ♠54 ♥KJ43 ♦8764 ♣432
- B) ♠42 ♥KQ76 ♦A542 ♣1087
- C) ♠2 ♥KJ876 ♦Q32 ♣J876
- D) ♠2 ♥KQJ8 ♦AQ76 ♣AJ43

A. Pass (not enough strength to act). B. Double C. Double You don't have enough strength for a direct 2H response. D. Double (there is no upper limit; let's look for a 4-4 heart fit to start with).

1♣ - (1♥) - X

**NEGATIVE
DOUBLE**

1♥ - (3♣) - X

Board 1

N	E	S	W
1H	1S	1NT	P
2C	P	P	P

South can show points and a hold in Spades by bidding 1NT

Board 2

N	E	S	W
	1C	1D	1S
P	3S	P	4S

East immediately knows partner has 5 spades.
They have a big hand so invites to game

Board 3

N	E	S	W
		1D	1S
X	P	2C	P
2D	P	P	P

North was hoping partner had
Hearts. After the 2C bid, it is clear they don't

Board 4

N	E	S	W
			1S
2C	X	3C	3H
P	P	P	

East has hearts and is hoping
Partner may have some. 3H by W does imply
a better hand But East should pass with so many losers

Board 5

N	E	S	W
1S	3C	X	P
3D	P	4S	all P

This demonstrates why using the negative double
Up to an including 3S is useful

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2C	P	P	P

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Board 6

N	E	S	W
	1H	2D	X
P	3H	P	H

West can't bid 2S as this is showing a 5 Card suit

Board 7

N	E	S	W
		1D	1H
1S	P	3D	P
3H	P	P	3NT

Looks like 5Ds makes but always hard to make a game in a minor, so 3H by North is asking for a H hold. They bid 3NT to say they have

Board 8

N	E	S	W
			1H
2C	X	P	2D
P	2NT	P	3NT

East could bid 2NT immediately but is hoping partner has spades, so uses the X to find out at a lower level of bidding

Board 9

N	E	S	W
1D	1S	X	P
3H	P	4H	P

If N bid 2H and not 3H, this is just an opening hand not a reverse, so they must bid 3H to show a bigger hand

NB: Normally 1D – 2H by opener is a reverse, but when responder does a negative Double, it isn't, as they have implied they may have hearts

Board 10

N	E	S	W
	1D	1H	X
P	3D	P	P

Board 6

N	E	S	W
	1H	2D	X
P	3H	P	H

West can't bid 2S as this is showing a 5 Card suit

Board 7

N	E	S	W
		1D	1H
1S	P	3D	P
3H	P	P	3NT

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			1H
2C	X	P	2D
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N	E	S	W
1D	1S	X	P
3H	P	4H	P

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N	E	S	W
	1D	1H	X
P	3D	P	P