

The background of the entire cover is a dark blue color. It features several playing cards scattered across the surface, appearing to be in motion or falling. The cards are semi-transparent and show various suits and numbers, including the Ace of Diamonds, the Six of Clubs, the Ten of Hearts, the Eight of Spades, the Seven of Spades, the Ten of Diamonds, and the Eight of Clubs. The cards are arranged in a way that creates a sense of depth and movement.

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&
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THE POWER OF PASS

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Introduction

There's a time to bid and a time to bide. The trick is knowing which it is on the current deal. This book aims to show you the frequent occasions when passing is the best action to take even when you might well be tempted to bid.

Most players beyond the beginner and novice stages bid too much. This is particularly true of those just below expert level. The mantra for these players is like the watchword at Verdun; 'They shall not pass.' They feel that their declarer play will compensate for being too high and they often make their contract even though in theory they are overboard. How does this happen? Defence at club level is often so weak that contracts succeed even when they should have been routinely defeated. Repeated success can then ingrain bad habits of overbidding.

Experts do better most of the time, but even they can fall from grace. The book is replete with examples from actual play, from club events to minor championships to national and international tournaments. By studying where the players involved stepped out of line, you will be able to avoid those mistakes yourself when a comparable or similar situation arises.

There is certainly satisfaction in bidding and making a contract. There can be even greater satisfaction in passing and then being rewarded for your discipline by defeating the opposition contract when you would have been defeated if you had bid higher.

If you currently have difficulty in passing, we have a remedy for you. Call it bridge aerobics if you like. Each morning, after you shower and shave or put on makeup, whichever it is you do, stand in front of the mirror and say 'No bid, no bid, no bid' until you can reproduce it regularly at the bridge table.

Chapter 1

Overcalling with a balanced hand

If partner is a passed hand in first or second seat and your right-hand opponent opens, you should pass if you have a balanced hand below 15 HCP unless you have a strong suit to overcall or you have 12-14 HCP with a doubleton in opener's suit, a hand which is suitable for a takeout double.

A 1-level overcall is commonly based on about 9-16 HCP. It can be a touch less if the suit is strong, such as A-K-J-10-5 or a bit more if you have scattered values, J-x, Q-x, or a singleton honour.

Not that everyone adheres to it, but there is a sensible approach to considering whether your suit is good enough for an overcall. This is the 'Suit Quality Test'. Add the number of cards in the suit you wish to bid to the number of honours in that suit. The total should equal or exceed the number of tricks for which you are bidding. Thus, for a 1-level overcall, the total should be 7: Q-8-7-4-3 is not good enough, but Q-J-7-4-3 is. For a 2-level overcall, the total should be 8: A-J-5-4-2 is not enough, but A-K-J-4-2 is. Of course, you still need the high card values to be bidding at the relevant level. Also, do not count the jack and ten as honours unless accompanied by another honour or honours, queen or higher. A holding of J-10-8-7-4 does not qualify for a 1-level overcall and likewise J-10-6-4-3-2 is not good enough a suit for a 2-level overcall, whether it is a simple overcall or a weak jump-overcall.

One of the reasons a simple overcall should indicate a decent suit is that partner will tend to lead your suit if partner ends up on lead. If partner leads from K-x or A-x and your suit is poor, the lead has been squandered and partner has probably set up tricks for declarer. Another reason to eschew overcalling with a poor suit is the danger of being doubled for penalties.

A. Your right-hand opponent opens 1♣. What do you do with:

- | | | | |
|----------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|
| 1. ♠ Q 9 6 5 2 | 2. ♠ K J 7 6 | 3. ♠ A Q J 8 6 | 4. ♠ A K Q 2 |
| ♥ A J 6 5 | ♥ A 10 | ♥ 10 5 4 | ♥ K 7 6 |
| ♦ Q 8 | ♦ J 10 7 5 4 | ♦ 9 8 5 2 | ♦ 9 8 |
| ♣ 10 4 | ♣ 3 2 | ♣ 4 | ♣ J 7 5 4 |

Answers:

1. Pass. You have 9 HCP, enough for a 1-level overcall, but the Suit Quality (SQ) of the spades is only 6. For a 1-level overcall (seven tricks), the SQ should be 7 or better.
2. Pass. A jack-high suit does not warrant an overcall.
3. Bid 1♠. Only 7 HCP, but the Suit Quality (8) is excellent.
4. Bid 1♠. Yes, it is only a 4-card suit, but the SQ is 7. You surely want a spade lead and that is an important function for an overcall.

B. Your right-hand opponent opens 1♠. What do you do with:

- | | | | |
|-------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1. ♠ Q 9 8 | 2. ♠ 6 | 3. ♠ A Q J | 4. ♠ A J 2 |
| ♥ 6 5 | ♥ A 10 | ♥ 4 | ♥ K 7 |
| ♦ A K 9 | ♦ A J 9 7 5 4 | ♦ K 9 8 5 2 | ♦ K Q J 6 5 |
| ♣ A 8 5 3 2 | ♣ J 7 6 3 | ♣ A 5 3 2 | ♣ Q J 8 |

Answers:

1. Pass. You have 13 HCP, enough for a 2-level overcall, but the SQ of the clubs is only 6. For 2♣, the SQ should be 8 or better.
2. Bid 2♦. The SQ is 8 and shortage in opener's suit is also a plus for a minimum overcall.
3. Pass. The SQ of the diamonds is only 6.
4. Bid 1NT. Yes, your diamonds (SQ 8) are good enough for 2♦, but a 1NT overcall (15-18 or 16-18 points, balanced, at least one stopper in opener's suit) takes priority over a suit overcall.

Dealer North : Both vulnerable

	North	
	♠ J 9 6 2	
	♥ A 10 5 4	
	♦ Q 8 5	
	♣ 10 4	
West		East
♠ A Q 5		♠ K 10 8 4
♥ K J 7 2		♥ ---
♦ J		♦ A 9 6 4 3 2
♣ Q 7 5 3 2		♣ A 9 8
	South	
	♠ 7 3	
	♥ Q 9 8 6 3	
	♦ K 10 7	
	♣ K J 6	

The deal arose in the 2015 Bermuda Bowl (World Open Teams) quarter-finals. At six tables, North-South were silent. One West was +600 in 5♣ and five Wests ended in 3NT. Three were +630 after a spade lead and one was +600 on the ♣10 lead. The other West went down after North led the ♥4 to the queen and king.

At the other two tables, it began Pass : 1♦ : 1♥ by South. Facing a passed partner and vulnerable, this is courageous (read ‘unwise’) with a balanced hand, 9 HCP and a moth-eaten suit. With the actual layout, it is great as a lead-directing bid as long as partner keeps quiet, but neither North did.

At one table, West bid 2NT, North bid 3♥, all pass. West led the ♦J, ducked to the ♦K. South played ♥Q, king, ace, and ended two down, -200, for +10 Imps vs 3NT +630 at the other table. That is unlikely to dissuade South of similar overcalls in future.

At the other table, West bid 2♣, North 3♥. East doubled, takeout, all pass. It went ♦J, ace; ♦3, ruffed; ♣2, ace; ♦9, ruffed; ♠A; ♠Q, plus a heart trick later for three down, East-West +800 and +5 Imps versus 3NT +630 at the other table.

Not only did South have a poor hand on the deal on page 11, but the suit itself was poor. With Suit Quality of 6, the suit does not warrant an overcall. On this deal from a BBO game, the suit was better, but still below the Suit Quality requirement.

Dealer North : North-South vulnerable

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

At every table it began Pass : 1♠ : 2♣ by South. If you noted the Suit Quality Test on page 9, you can see that, although South has 13 HCP, the suit quality of the clubs is 7, below expectation for a 2-level overcall. South should pass, but no South did.

West generally doubled 2♣, takeout with 4+ hearts. Results: East 2♠ +170 x 5, +140 x 2; East 2NT +120 x 4; 3♠ +170 x 1; 4♠ +420 x 1. Two Wests passed and 2♣ was passed out. One South was four off, East-West +400, the other three off, East-West +300.

At the remaining table, it went Pass : 1♠ : 2♣ : Double, all pass. East figured West to be short in spades and East was short in the red suits. Playing for penalties appealed. West led ♠K and shifted to the ♥8, ten, queen. East cashed the ♥A and ♠A and switched to ♦J. West took ♦A and gave East a heart ruff. Back came ♠2, ♣6, ♣Q. West returned ♦4, ruffed, three off, East-West +800.

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