

POSITIVE DOUBLES

When partner makes a takeout double and RHO raises, your "free bid" is a bit ambiguous. Maybe you would have jumped if RHO had passed, or maybe you're just stretching to compete. For instance:

West	North	East	South
1♣	Dbl	2♣	2♦/2♥/2♠

Was South going to make the same bid (a jump) if East had passed, or is she just competing and would have responded at the one level over a pass? There's no telling. Free bids over a raise are therefore wide-range, too much so. The doubler often doesn't know whether to pass or bid on.

The "Responsive Double" convention is popular in this situation. The trouble with responsive doubles is that they are either vague as to meaning, or so restricted in meaning that they rarely come up. For instance, in the above auction a responsive double by South might be played as showing both majors, or, as some play, two of the three unbid suits. Others play that it just shows "cards," with no decent suit to bid. Whatever the meaning, it isn't used much.

The Positive Double shows a hand that would probably have jumped if RHO had not raised. It follows that a minimum suit bid is just competitive, denying that strong a hand. For reasons that will appear later, this applies only to the cheapest and dearest unbid suits, not the one in the middle. A bid in that suit remains ambiguous:

West	North	East	South
1♦	Dbl	2♦	Dbl (1)
			2♥/3♣ (2)
			2♠ (3)

- (1) Positive Double
- (2) Merely competitive
- (3) Ambiguous

If South would have jumped to 2♥ or 3♣ over a pass, she doubles. The 2♠ middle-suit bid is ambiguous. South might have bid either 1♠ or 2♠ over a pass, there's no telling. With too much for that, she can bid the standard invitational 3♠ or double "positively" and show the spades later.

So what does partner do in response to a Positive Double? If he would have passed a jump in the cheapest suit, he bids that suit. If he would have bid notrump, or the dearest unbid suit, he does so. With a good hand and four cards in the unbid major(s), he cue bids, forcing to game. With none of those messages to give, he usually bids the middle suit as an artificial mark-time bid:

West	North	East	South
1♠	Dbl	2♠	Dbl
Pass	3♣ (1)		
	3♦ (2)		
	3♥ (3)		
	3♠ (4)		
	2NT (5)		

- (1) Would have passed a jump to 3♣
- (2) A mark-time bid, "Tell me more," would not have passed 3♣
- (3) Five hearts, forcing
- (4) Four hearts, extra values, game force
- (5) Normal rebid (too strong for a 1NT overcall), forcing

When North bids 3♣, the cheapest suit, saying he would have passed a jump in that suit, South can either pass, holding that suit, or bid something else. Her bid in the middle suit is also an artificial mark-time bid. Any natural suit bid promises at least five cards. A jump in a new suit is forcing. A raise of bid in the cheapest suit is strong but not forcing. A cue bid shows four cards in any unbid major:

West	North	East	South
1♣	Dbl	2♣	Dbl
Pass	2♦	Pass	Pass (1)
			2♥(2)
			2♠(3)
			3♣ (4)
			3♦ (5)
			3♥/3♠(6)

- (1) Diamond suit, would have jumped to 2♦ over a pass, no more to say
- (2) A mark-time bid, "tell me more," no five card suit
- (3) Five spades, would have jumped over a pass, not forcing
- (4) At least 4-4 in the majors, does not promise another bid
- (5) Natural, too strong to pass, not forcing
- (6) Natural, forcing

The major-suit jumps are forcing because with a weaker hand South would have bid an ambiguous 2♥, or would have jumped invitationally in spades, instead of doubling. The 3♣ bid is not forcing to game, since 3♣ could have been bid over 2♣ with a game-going hand. If the takeout double was non-minimum, the doubler should bid four of a major, not three, which would probably be passed.

If the Positive Doubler bids notrump over doubler's mark-time bid, it means she would have jumped in *that* suit over a pass:

West	North	East	South
1♣	Dbl	2♣	Dbl
Pass	2♥	Pass	2NT - would have bid 2♥ over a pass

North's 2♥ bid is artificial (would not have passed a jump to 2♦). South has a little too much for an ambiguous 2♥ response to the double, but not enough for an invitational 3♥ response over 2♣, or for a forcing 3♥ bid at this point. Other notrump bids by advancer are natural.

After a mark-time bid by either partner, a minimum bid by the other partner may be passed. Raises by either partner are limit bids that can also be passed.

If opener reraises over a Positive Double:

West	North	East	South
1♣	Dbl	2♣	Dbl
3♣			

A repeat double of the same suit by North is still for takeout. It shows extra strength, as does a "free bid." From this point on all bidding is natural. If the reraise is passed around to the Positive Doubler, a repeat double is for penalties, as are doubles of any other bid made by either opponent. After a Positive Double the opponents cannot play the hand unless they play it doubled, so one partner can pass a bid by RHO without fear that the other will also pass.