

## THE PENALTY DOUBLE

The easiest kind of double to understand is the penalty double. A penalty double is made after an opponent makes a bid and a player believes that this contract will be defeated. For example, if the opposition bids 4 hearts, and one player is holding the A,K,Q,J of hearts, it is obvious that this contract would not be achievable. Then this player would say, “double”. This is a bid, and as such, if it is followed by three passes, the contract would be 4 hearts doubled. However, after the player said, “double”, bidding could continue. The player bidding 4 hearts could decide to make another bid, or he could pass.

Either the player who bid 4 hearts, or his partner could also say, “redouble.” This bid is made if the partnership that made the bid that was doubled really thinks they can make the contract. Obviously, in the above example, if they knew they were missing the top 4 trump cards, they would never redouble the bid, since they would know that this contract will be defeated.

Why would someone bid for a contract that is unmakeable? One reason might be that they believe they can make the contract. Maybe they have a void, or a singleton, and anticipate being able to trump the opposition’s high cards in that suit. Or maybe they are just making a *sacrifice* bid. This is a bid you make when you don’t really expect to make the contract, but you’re bidding high enough to discourage the opposition from bidding. If you feel that they have a good chance of making their contract, and you can keep them from bidding, you might bid for a contract you won’t make. The amount of points your opponents will get from defeating you may be less than they would get from winning their own contract. Even though you lose the contract, you’re still ahead of the game!

How do you know when to double? Not every hand is as obvious as the one described above, when 4 hearts was doubled. But the player who makes the penalty double should have counted potential tricks, and they should be enough to likely defeat the contract made by the opposition.

What happens if a doubled contract is made? The partnership that bid that contract will get a higher score than if the contract was not doubled. What if the contract is doubled and is not made? The partnership that defeated the contract will get a higher score than if the contract was not doubled. Therefore, doubling is a risk.

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What does it mean to be *vulnerable*? You may have heard this word, or seen it in a bridge column in the newspaper. In most bridge hands, one or both sides is vulnerable. This means that if you make your contract in a complete game (3 NT, 4 hearts or spades, 5 clubs or diamonds), you get a higher score than if you were not vulnerable. Likewise, if your contract is defeated, the opposition gets a higher score for defeating you. If you're doubled and vulnerable, your score would be much higher than if you were not doubled and not vulnerable. Unlike being doubled, neither side has a choice in whether or not to be vulnerable. In duplicate bridge, the sides that are vulnerable are predetermined for certain hands. In regular bridge, the sides that are vulnerable switch off depending on which side dealt the hand.

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Scoring – While you can play bridge for a lifetime without knowing how to score, it's a good idea to have some idea how scores are determined.

Partial scores—For any score less than a complete game, multiply the level that is made in a successful contract by 20 when playing in a minor suit. Then add 50 points. Therefore, if a contract of 4 diamonds is bid and made, multiply  $4 \times 20$  and add 50. That's  $80+50=130$ . For major suits, multiply the level made in a successful contract by 30 and add 50. Say the partnership bid 2 spades, but made 4. You would multiply  $4 \times 30$  and add 50.  $4 \times 30=120$ . If you add 50, that's a total of 170. Note: Even though the partnership made it to the 4 level, they didn't bid it, so they didn't get the bonus for a complete game. Let's see what would have happened if they bid and made a complete game.

Complete games—For complete games that are bid and made, multiply the level by 20 for minor suits, and multiply the level by 30 for major suits. However, instead of adding 50 points for making a partial contract, you would add 300 points if your side was not vulnerable and 500 points if your side was vulnerable. See why I want you to bid a complete game if you think it's doable?

Remember—You only get a score if you successfully make your contract. You could bid 7 hearts, and make 12 tricks, which is great, but you would get nothing, since you didn't make the required number of tricks for that contract, which is 13. When your contract is defeated, the opposition gets the score. The more tricks you "go down", the higher the opposition's score. For every trick you "go down", the opposition gets 50 points, or 100 points if you're vulnerable. If they double you and defeat you, it's even more. So, when you are playing defense (trying to defeat the opposition's contract), you don't just want to keep them from making their contract, you want to make as many tricks as possible. Similarly, when you are the offense (trying to make your contract), you don't just want to make your contract, you want to make as many overtricks as you can (tricks over the required number).