

FROM THE AUTHORS OF THE BEST-SELLING
"25 BRIDGE CONVENTIONS YOU SHOULD KNOW"



BRIDGE



25 WAYS TO COMPETE



IN THE BIDDING

BARBARA SEAGRAM & MARC SMITH



BRIDGE



25 WAYS TO COMPETE



IN THE BIDDING



BARBARA SEAGRAM & MARC SMITH

MASTER POINT PRESS • TORONTO

To my children, Heather and Chris, and my wonderful husband, Alex Kornel. Bridge is my passion but you are my life.

Barbara

To my wife, Charlotte, and my dogs, Benito and Giorgio. Bridge is my life, but you are my passion.

Marc



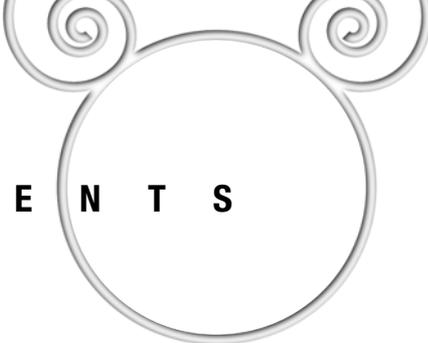
A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

Our sincere thanks to Eddie Kantar, everyone's favorite author and teacher, who has helped us so much over the past year. His humor and wisdom kept us afloat throughout all crises. Many thanks also to Alan LeBendig, who was always a willing sounding board for hands and auctions. His support and patient advice have been invaluable.

The loyal students, members and staff of the Kate Buckman Bridge Studio are a constant source of encouragement and inspiration — grateful thanks to all of them.

Finally, thanks to Ray Lee, a wonderful editor who does much more than just edit. It is such a pleasure to work with him.

Barbara Seagram
Marc Smith



C O N T E N T S

Suit Overcalls

Chapter 1	Simple Suit Overcalls	11
Chapter 2	Raising Partner's Suit	21
Chapter 3	Responding to Overcalls Without Support	29
Chapter 4	Overcalls That Show Two Suits	39
Chapter 5	Jump Overcalls	45

Takeout Doubles

Chapter 6	Takeout Doubles at the One Level	53
Chapter 7	Responding to a Takeout Double	59
Chapter 8	Later Bidding After a Takeout Double	71
Chapter 9	Other Takeout Double Situations	81

Notrump Overcalls

Chapter 10	Notrump Overcalls	91
Chapter 11	RHO Bids Over a 1NT Overcall	97

Bidding Over Opponents' 1NT Opening

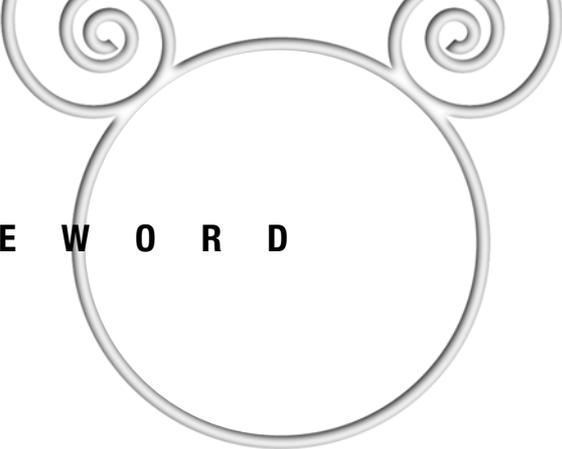
Chapter 12	Competing Over 1NT	105
Chapter 13	Doubling 1NT	113
Chapter 14	Conventional Defenses to 1NT	121

Bidding Over Preempts

Chapter 15	Takeout Doubles of Weak Two-Bids	133
Chapter 16	Overcalling Weak Two-Bids	141
Chapter 17	Bidding Over 3-Level Openings	151
Chapter 18	Bidding Notrump Over a Preempt	163
Chapter 19	Bidding Over Other Preempts	171

General Competitive Issues

Chapter 20	Balancing — General Principles	177
Chapter 21	Other Balancing Auctions	185
Chapter 22	Forcing Passes	191
Chapter 23	Locating Stoppers for Notrump	199
Chapter 24	The Law of Total Tricks	205
Chapter 25	Hand Evaluation	213



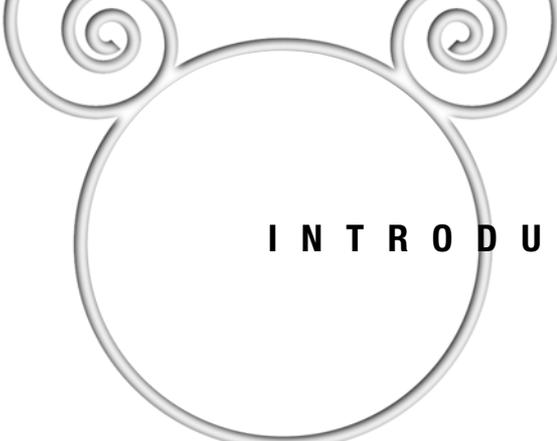
FOREWORD

If this were Las Vegas, Barbara and Marc would have hit the jackpot — twice. Their first book, *25 Bridge Conventions You Should Know*, was a clear-cut winner and lo and behold, they've done it again. This time they have selected a topic that screams for exposure: explaining those bread and butter competitive bidding sequences; your side doing the competing, their side doing the sweating and vice versa. They show you how to make life miserable for your opponents. No longer are you going to sit there like a bump on a log and let the opponents bid merrily to their best contract. With an eye on the vulnerability you *will* (army talk) put maximum pressure on your opponents by overcalling, jump overcalling, doubling, balancing, and preempting, including preemptive jump raises in many sequences. In short, you are about to become a feared opponent.

Included are some wonderful chapters about deciding whether to double an opening bid or overcall, how to handle an opponent's 1NT opening bid, when to balance, and how to deal with those miserable preempts that they are always throwing at you. My two favorite chapters were the ones entitled 'The Law of Total Tricks' and 'Hand Evaluation', the two absolute keys to improving your competitive bidding judgement, what it's all about. Each topic is explained clearly with neat example hands. The kicker is the quiz at the end of each chapter which nails down the whole chapter and gives you a final chance to see what you have absorbed. Another plus is the length of each chapter, not too long, not too short, just right. What was impressed upon me, even though I know it well, is how difficult high-level preempts are to deal with, even for world-class players. True, you are given some tools to help reduce your trauma, but the authors level with you and tell you that you simply are not going to land on your feet every time they stick it to you. How true, how true, how true.

This book can and should be used as a reference book. Think back. How often do doubles, overcalls, balancing bids, preempts, and bidding over an opponent's 1NT opening bid, come up? Did you say, "On almost every hand?" Right on. But now you have a place to go to see if you handled the sequence properly, how you should have handled the situation, or more likely, what your partner should have bid. You are holding a winner in your hands; just make sure you get one in your partner's hands as well!

Eddie Kantar



I N T R O D U C T I O N



It is possible to sit an entire evening at the bridge table and never play a hand. *Florence Irwin, Auction Highlights, 1913.*

To bid or not to bid? When you started to play bridge, you were undoubtedly taught some rules that would help you decide whether or not to open the bidding. With a good hand, say thirteen points or more, you were allowed to open at the one-level, while with a weaker hand but a very good suit you were encouraged to open with a preemptive bid — a bid at the three- or four-level designed to make life difficult for your opponents. At that time nobody talked very much about why or how you get into the bidding once one of the opponents has made an opening bid.

Once an opponent has opened the bidding, you are immediately on the defensive. You have two choices: pass and let the enemy bid unimpeded to their optimum contract, or get in amongst them. There are numerous reasons why you might choose action rather than inaction. In the first place, it's more fun than passing all the time! Moreover, just because they opened the bidding, it doesn't necessarily mean the hand belongs to them. You may be able to outbid the opponents and make a contract of your own; perhaps only a partscore, but game or even slam may not be out of the question. Maybe you can just push them up enough that they cannot make what they bid, or maybe you can use up so much of their bidding space that they find it hard to get to the best contract. And even if they do get to the right spot, your side may be able to find a profitable sacrifice, a contract which goes down only a trick or two, costing you much less than letting them play their game.

If you are happy to pass once the enemy has opened the bidding, you don't need this book — you should buy one on opening leads and signaling, since you are going to be doing plenty of defending. If you would prefer to be in the bidding, however, then this is the book for you. We are going to show you how

to get into the auction effectively and safely after the opposition has opened the bidding.

One thing that it is important to understand is that there are relatively few absolute rights and wrongs in the area of competitive bidding. Often, the way you decide to do things will be a matter of personal preference for you and your partner. As in most aspects of bridge, the critical thing is that you and your partner are on same wavelength. Many of the ideas that are presented in this book are almost universally accepted, while others are popular in some form or another with many players around the world. Where there is more than one way to approach a particular situation, we shall give you our recommendation, while pointing out that it may not be the only playable method.

You should understand, too, that a subject as complex as this one cannot be covered comprehensively in a book such as this. As you gain experience, you will realize that we have left many questions unanswered, and indeed that we have failed to mention a good number of the ideas and agreements that the modern tournament player will encounter. But it is not our goal to be all-encompassing. Our objective is to describe a set of sound general principles for defensive bidding so that you have a firm foundation to build from with your favorite partner; at the same time, if you happen to sit down one day with a strange partner, you will be more confident that you know basically what they are going to expect of you in these situations.

*Barbara Seagram
Marc Smith*



BRIDGE



25 WAYS TO COMPETE



IN THE BIDDING

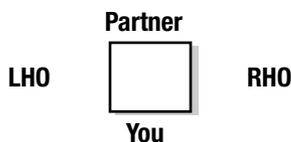




AUTHORS' NOTE

In the course of this book we frequently refer to 'points'. If you are bidding notrump, then this means 'high card points' (HCP) since you cannot count distribution for notrump purposes. However, when bidding suits, 'points' means total points (HCP + distributional points) unless we specifically say 'HCP'.

Your opponents are referred to as LHO (Left-hand Opponent) and RHO (Right-hand Opponent) respectively. If LHO opens the bidding, partner bids next, then RHO, then you. A diagram of the table seen from above would look like this:



If you have played organized duplicate bridge, then you will probably have come across the Alert Procedure. Some of the methods contained in this book, although fairly standard, must be alerted — you must warn your opponents when you use them so that they have the chance to ask for an explanation if they wish. Exactly which bids require an alert varies from country to country and even from area to area or from club to club. You can check with your local club organizer, but if in doubt, err on the side of alerting too much rather than too little.

Within this book we always use the terms 'he', 'his' and 'him' when referring to partner or an opponent. We appreciate that these persons may be male or female, of course; the use of the male pronoun exclusively avoids such awkward constructions as 'his or her' and 'he or she', and should not be construed as implying any gender bias on our part.

Final note: The quotations that begin each chapter are taken from *Auction Highlights* by Florence Irwin, published by Putnam in 1913. Some of them are quaint and amusing from the lofty perspective of ninety years experience; others still ring strangely true. We hope you enjoy them.

SIMPLE SUIT OVERCALLS



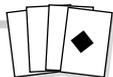
There are many players who practically always hold poor hands, and their only defense, up to now, has been to reduce their losses by not bidding and by letting the other side win.

Florence Irwin, Auction Highlights, 1913.

Once the opponents have opened the bidding, there are only two ways in which you can get into the auction — by doubling for takeout or by bidding something yourself, which is termed overcalling. We shall deal with takeout doubles at some length later in this book; for now, we'll just assume that you know what they are (if you don't, we suggest you take a quick skim through Chapter 6 before continuing). First, let's talk about the kinds of hand on which you might want to get into the bidding with an overcall, and why.

BY THE WAY

You might also, as a result of your overcall, find a cheap sacrifice in the event that the opponents bid to a game (or slam) they can make, but this is usually a minor consideration in deciding whether to enter the auction in the first place.



When would you want to make an overcall?

The answer to this question is very similar to the answer to, “When should you open the bidding?” — when you have either a good hand or a good suit. If you have a good five-card suit or better, you probably want to make an overcall (we’ll worry about hand strength a little later). However, to judge whether a hand is worth an overcall, it is important to understand what you are trying to achieve by bidding. There are three main reasons for making an overcall (often, a hand will justify overcalling for more than one of these reasons).

1. You have a good hand or a good suit so you wish to compete for the partscore or perhaps even look for game if partner has some values and a fit.
2. You want to harass the opponents, either by using up their bidding space or by pushing them to bid too high.
3. You want to suggest a good lead to partner in case your LHO becomes declarer.

These reasons for overcalling are listed in order of importance. You may be surprised to hear that the most important reason to make an overcall is constructive — you want to try to play the hand. For years, overcalls were viewed as merely obstructive maneuvers. That is no longer the majority view, but it is still a widely-held belief in some circles that an overcall shows a bad hand, and that if you have an opening bid or better you must start with a takeout double. However, as we shall see, it is now common practice to overcall on quite strong hands, with the intention of bidding again later to show extra values.

What does an overcall look like?

First, let’s define our terms. We are going to start with one of the basic building blocks of competitive bidding — the simple overcall, which means an overcall that is made at the lowest possible level of the suit you bid (you can also overcall in notrump, too, but we’ll be talking about that later on). These auctions are both examples of simple overcalls:

LHO	Partner	RHO	You	LHO	Partner	RHO	You
1♣	1♥			1♥	2♦		

In both cases, partner has bid his suit at the lowest level that he could. By comparison, look at these auctions:

LHO	Partner	RHO	You	LHO	Partner	RHO	You
1♣	2♥			1♥	3♦		

In both cases here partner has made what is called a **jump overcall** (he has not bid his suit at the lowest possible level) and as you might suspect, this kind of overcall shows a somewhat different type of hand. We’re going to ignore jump

overcalls for now, and come back to them in Chapter 5.

When an opponent opens the bidding, he is announcing that the hand belongs to his side. What's more, he is probably right. The enemy probably does have more points than your side. It is also now less risky for them to double you if you bid too much, since they already know that they probably have the balance of strength. In fact, if they are looking at trump tricks as well as a good hand, they will find it very easy to double. However, when you have a strong suit for your overcall, it will be more difficult for your opponents to double you, since they will not have good trumps. Your first requirements for overcalling are therefore:

1. *A good suit, at least five cards in length* **or**
2. *A good hand (an opening bid or better)* **and preferably**
3. *Both.*

So when deciding whether or not to overcall, it is not just a matter of counting your high-card points. Indeed, there are many 14-point hands on which you should pass, while there are plenty of 8-point hands on which an overcall is clearly correct. The key is to have a suit that is good enough to take some tricks if it is the trump suit, or to have enough high cards instead. For example:

♠ A Q J 10 7 ♥ 10 9 6 4 ♦ 4 ♣ 8 6 3
 ♠ J 10 6 3 2 ♥ A K 4 ♦ A K 4 ♣ 6 3

Both these hands are very reasonable 1♠ overcalls if your RHO opens, say, 1♣. You would not dream of opening one spade with the first hand — you have only 7 HCP! However, it is a perfectly respectable overcall. Now look at this example:

♠ K J 7 ♥ A J 10 ♦ K 8 6 4 ♣ Q 6 3

You have 14 HCP and would not consider passing if you were the dealer. However, you cannot make an overcall (or any other positive bid) once RHO opens, say, 1♣. You have no five-card suit, and (as you will see when we get to Chapter 6) you cannot make a takeout double with three cards in the enemy's suit. If you were a little stronger, you might consider a notrump overcall (again, we'll get to that in a later chapter), but you don't have enough points for that bid. So like it or not, you must pass.

The point is that when you are thinking about overcalling, playing strength is more important than high-card points. 'Playing strength' is a way of talking about the capacity of your hand to take tricks, which comes from a combination of your high-cards and your long-suit tricks. Compare the three hands above; the first, with only 7 HCP, has much more playing strength than the third, despite its 14 HCP. On the first hand, you can expect to make four spade tricks (if they are trumps). On the third example hand, though, what tricks are you going to make? The ace of hearts and maybe a couple more in the wash, but that's about it.

'Suit quality' is another important factor, which relates not just to the high cards in your suit, but also the intermediate spot cards. A suit like ♠QJ1098 is clearly much better in terms of trick-taking potential than ♠QJ432 and yet both