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A vital tool for competing in the auction is the *overcall*. Simply stated, the overcall is a watered-down version of the opening bid but with slightly different purposes. Coming *after* the opponents have opened the bidding, the overcall is mostly a *competitive* bid and as such has relaxed high card point demands, but has increased suit texture requirements.

The overcall has three distinct objectives:

1. To block or disrupt communications between the opponents
2. To suggest (request) an opening lead from partner (if defending)
3. To introduce a long suit or a *good* hand to compete with in the auction

Requirements for an Overcall

BECAUSE OF THE IMPORTANCE of entering the competitive overcall, a certain risk factor is necessary to undertake, however, *no rewards for the timid!* Unlike the opening bid which requires a 12-point hand, an overcall is often made with as little as 8-10 high card points. The more important qualification is the *texture* of the suit. This reasoning is twofold and apparent:

1. We're not the favorite to "buy" the contract after the opponents have opened the bidding, therefore the primary value of an overcall is in obstruction or getting our *best* suit lead.
2. The more high cards we have in our suit, the harder it is for the opponents to double us for penalty, even when we have overcalled (and raised) with very minimum values.

Attractive suits for 1-level Overcalls

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. ♠KQ1092 ♥J65 ♦J103 ♣Q7 | 2. ♠AJ10xx ♥Ax ♦853 ♣652 |
| 3. ♠A109764 ♥K3 ♦A7 ♣842 | 4. ♠AK983 ♥Q104 ♦K32 ♣95 |

In all the above hands, after an opening bid, you should overcall 1♠ although only example 4 is a hand you would *open* the bidding. You'll note that *all* have good suit texture in spades.

Undesirable suits for 1-level Overcalls

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. ♠Q7532 ♥AJ6 ♦Q103 ♣K7 | 2. ♠J7632 ♥A9 ♦Q53 ♣K52 |
| 3. ♠107643 ♥KJ2 ♦KQ ♣K108 | 4. ♠K8763 ♥Q104 ♦Q42 ♣KJ |

In the above four examples, all 11-13 point hands, *none* are desirable for overcalling 1♠ due to the weakness of the spade suit. Can you see how easy it would be for the opponents to have holdings in the spade suit which will make you an attractive victim of a penalty double?

Responding to an Overcall

AS RESPONDER (partner) to an overcall, treat the bid as if partner had opened the bidding in that suit, but exercise some caution due to the relaxed high card strength required of an overcalled suit. More specifically, raise partner one level with 6-10 point hands (and a fit of course), invite a game with 11-13 point hands, and bid a game with hands of 14 or more and a fit. You will notice that these requirements are just slightly higher than those of responding to an opening bid.

With good responding hands (11 or more points) a good way to invite a game in partner's overcalled suit is to use a *cue* bid. These cue bids should always guarantee a fit - three or more.