

THE BALANCING ACT

What does "balancing" mean in bridge vocabulary?

You are in the "direct" seat if your RHO (Right Hand Opponent) has made the last bid:

West North East South

1C ?



You are said to be "balancing" when you are in the pass out seat after a bid by your left-hand opponent (LHO).

West North East South

1C Pass Pass ?

If you (sitting South) were to pass, the auction would now be all over. If the opponents have opened with one of a suit, you simply must not allow them to play a contract at such a low level. You must either:

Try to push them to a higher level or

Try to buy the contract for your side instead of letting them make an easy "partscore."

The action that you take in the balancing seat is often different from that taken in the direct seat. You should tend to overbid by 3 points when you are in the pass out seat. Just add 3 points to the value of your hand to determine what you should bid.

Why do you do this? To protect partner, who may have quite a good hand. For example, your partner would have had to pass after 1C on her right with the following hand:

A542

K6

KJ72

Q65

Since the responder to the opening bid has also passed (showing 0-5 points) you can now be more aggressive, since your partner most likely has some goodies.

Let's practice! In all cases, the bidding has proceeded.

West North East South

1C Pass Pass ?

What should you bid on each of these hands:

1. S Q2 H AJ10 D K976 C QJ109

2. S Q75 H A102 D KQJ C AJ94

3. S Q5432 H 76 D AQ76 C 87

4. S A76 H A987 D Q1054 C 42

5. S 65 H AQ4 D 765 C AQJ98

Answers:

1. In direct seat, you would pass. In balancing seat, you should bid 1 N.T. (You have 16 points for a fleeting instant, having added those 3 points!)

2. Now you really do have 17 H.C.P. In direct seat, you would overcall 1 N.T. In balancing seat, you will double first and then bid notrumps later.

3. In direct seat, you will pass with this tired, moth-eaten spade suit. In balancing seat, you must overcall 1S.

4. In direct seat, you will pass. In balancing seat, make a takeout double.

5. In direct or balancing seat, you must pass. Your only decent suit is clubs, and the opponents will have a most unpleasant time in their 1C contract.

Some people say that you should consider that you are "borrowing a king" when you balance. Whenever I have taught "balancing" this way, my students always get very fussy about which king they wish to borrow! Thus, I prefer to base actions on "adding 3 points". You must remember, however, that since you are overbidding in this seat, that your partner must now compensate (as responder to your bid) by underbidding accordingly.

The following hand by Eddie Kantar illustrates the importance of being more aggressive in the pass out seat. Commentary by Barbara Seagram.

	Q95					
	J109732					
	86					
	A5					
J82				A43		
8				KQ		
75432				AK109		
Q962				J1087		
	K1076					
	A654		E	S	W	N
DEALER: EAST	QJ					
VUL: No-one vul	K43		1N	P	P	2H
			P	3H	P	P
			P			

Opening lead: D Ace

You would never consider bidding 2H if your RHO (Right Hand Opponent) had opened 1NT. But when the auction goes 1NT- P - P to you, odds are that your side has about the same points as the enemy have. So, jump in and maybe the opponents will bid again and you will have pushed them higher. If they then go down, great! OR maybe you make 2H. OR maybe you go down one and they could have made 1NT. Minus 50 versus minus 90 for your side.

East leads the D Ace and King and then shifts to the C Jack.

North ponders the situation. Declarer and dummy together have 20 HCP. Don't forget that as declarer, you should always use the Rule Of 40 early on in the hand, as soon as the opening lead is made and dummy comes down. There are 40 HCP in the hand, subtract yours from 40 and you know that EW have 20 HCP of their own. AND you know that East has 15-17 HCP. That marks West with 3-5 HCP only.

North counts losers at trick one:

0 Club losers

2 Diamond losers

1 Heart loser

2 Spade losers (IF you have to play this suit yourself).

So therein lies the rub...the Spade suit. You, as declarer, cannot do anything about the 2 Diamond losers or about the Heart loser. You cannot help losing one Spade trick BUT that already totals 4 losers. You cannot afford to lose TWO spades.

So when East leads the C Jack, win it with the C Ace and now lead a C to the King. You must now ruff a C in your hand. This is called "stripping" the suit.

You now lead The H Jack. East covers with the H Queen. You win this in dummy with the H Ace. Now lead a Heart and East has to win with H King.

Aha, now what would you have poor East do now? If he leads The S Ace, that means you only have one S loser. If he leads a small S, you play small from dummy, West plays the Jack and now all you have to do is force out the S Ace. Only one S loser.

If East leads a C or a D instead, this means you can sluff (discard) a S from your hand and ruff in the dummy. Declarer's dream: A sluff and a ruff. (Clue: When given this opportunity, it is usually right to ruff in the dummy and discard a loser from declarer's hand.)

The strip and throw-in. When your contract depends on a finesse, consider whether you can execute a strip and throw-in. This is otherwise known as an End Play because it often happens near the end of a hand.

CHECKBACK STAYMAN

with an added twist
by Barbara Seagram

1C - 1S

2N - 3C* * Checkback Stayman

3D = I do not have 3 Spades and I do not have 4 Hearts

3H = I have 4 Hearts but do not have 3 Spades

3S = I have 3 spades but do not have 4 Hearts

3NT = I have both 3 Spades and 4 Hearts

And

1D - 1H

2N - 3C* * Checkback Stayman

3D = I do not have 4 Spades and I do not have 3 Hearts

3H = I have 3 Hearts but do not have 4 Spades

3S = I have 4 spades but do not have 3 Hearts

3NT = I have both 4 Spades and 3 Hearts

Responder now places the contract.

PART TWO: CHECKBACK STAYMAN

(when responder has NOT bid a major)

1C - 1D

2N - 3C

3C should indeed be Checkback Stayman.

Rebids by opener:

3D = No, I do not have a 4 card major

3H = Yes, I have a 4 card Heart suit

3S = Yes, I have a 4 card Spade suit

3NT = I have both 4 card majors.

Responder to opener now places the contract.

If he has discovered an automatic 4-4 fit (e.g. because opener has bid 3H and responder has four hearts) then responder bids the appropriate number of Hearts, depending on his point range.

If Opener has bid 3NT showing both majors, responder can now use a relay to allow the stronger hand to be on play.

1C - 1D

2N - 3C

3N - 4D = " I have four hearts. Please would you bid 4H so that you become the declarer."

And - 4H instead by responder would be: "I have four Spades. Please would you bid 4S so that you become the declarer."

(If the latter relay is too complex for you, just omit and let the weaker hand play the contract.)

The following hand should illustrate the importance of this convention.

AQJ	5
QJ32	K1054
AQJ	K87542
J73	A5
W	E
1C	1D
2N	3C
3H	4H

As you can see, declarer can make 4H with an overtrick but in 3NT and a C lead by North (yes, of course N has the Spade King and also five Clubs), West is in trouble as he has to knock out the Heart Ace and when he does, NS will have their way with him in Clubs.

BRIDGE GLOSSARY OF TERMS YOU MAY NOT KNOW

Cold	When a contract cannot be defeated or a declarer cannot or should not go down. e.g. "4S is cold" or "6H is ice cold".
Artificial	When a contract cannot be defeated or a declarer cannot or should not go down. e.g. "4S is cold" or "6H is ice cold".
Hit It	Ruff it
Hook	A finesse. A verb or a noun
Moysian Fit	Playing on a 4-3 fit. Named after Sonny Moysian who loved the challenge of playing these hands.
King-fourth	A holding in a suit: 4 cards headed by the King
Queen-empty fifth	Five cards in a suit, headed by the Queen with NO cards of quality. No 10's and 9's, only 2's 3's or 4's.
Flat	A balanced hand: 4-3-3-3 or 4-4-3-2
Reverse	A rebid by the Opener of a suit that is of a higher rank than the suit he opened with. This is always a reverse. e.g. 1D - 2C 2H



This shows more of the first bid suit than the second and promises 17 or more points. It shows an unbalanced hand.

The following is also a reverse.

1H - 2D
2S

Playing Standard, this shows 17 or more points and more Hearts than Spades. Playing Two Over One, the partnership must agree on whether this shows extra values (17 or more)

BID THIS HAND

Your partner opens with 1NT and you have this hand:

32

K4

A

AJ976532

What should you bid? Lots of people will have lots of different opinions. We suggest that you use Gerber, that convention that comes up very seldom. Bid 4C. Opener will reply: 4S (2 Aces). Now you bid 5C (more Gerber, asking for Kings) and opener bids 5S (2 Kings). Now bid 6C or 6NT. On this hand 7NT makes but you cannot be sure that partner has the Club King. If the missing King is the C King, you could be in trouble in a grand slam. 6C is a safe contract but 6NT is also a sure thing.

P.S. Alex wants to remind you that 6C is NOT asking for Queens!!!

Remember that while the HCP do not add up to 33 HCP, you have an 8 card suit which is what experts call "a source of tricks".

Partner's hand:

AK765

A82

Q75

K10

Alex was responder to my 1NT opener. He bid 3NT only. I get very few opportunities to criticize his bridge, so it did my heart good to discover that he is less than perfect!!

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