



# Adventures in Bridge

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## *This Week in Bridge*

### **(428) Is it Forcing by Responder?**

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Level: 6 of 10 (2 of 6)

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#### **General**

Having good agreements with partner about the meaning of our bids is important. One of the most important parts of these agreements is deciding when a bid is forcing. Having a misunderstanding with partner about whether a bid is forcing or not can be an extreme disaster. Since it is primarily Responder's job to search for a Major suit fit and determine the level of the final contract, being clear about which bids are forcing and which are not is extremely important for both Responder and Opener. Many of us learned the rule that "a new suit is forcing by an unpassed hand," but unfortunately it is not that simple. This rule is not always true. "Is it forcing?" is more complicated than that. Usually, new suits are forcing on the first round of the bidding and not in competition, and even that is not always the case. That means we really need to work to have good agreements with partner about which bids are forcing.

#### **New Suits by Responder**

When partner opens the bidding with a suit at the 1-level, we can bid a new suit as a traditionally forcing bid. This new suit is forcing by agreement, but also by logic. A new suit response at the 1-level shows a 4+card suit and 6+pts. Since this bid is unlimited in value, partner should not pass!

#### *Example 1*

1♣     1♠

This 1♠ could be as few as 5-6 HCP but could also have 20 or more HCP. Since Opener does not know the partnership's combined assets, they should not pass. This is the nature of a forcing bid and leads to the common assertion that a "new suit is forcing by Responder".

Though this statement has some truth, it is not complete.

#### *Example 2*

1♣     1♠

1NT    2♥

This 2♥ bid shows 5-4 or 5-5 shape and about 6-9 points. This is a non-forcing bid, even though it is a new suit. So, we should change our understanding to "new suits are forcing by Responder, on the first round of the bidding, in non-competitive auctions."



We cannot force, even by jumping in a new suit.

*Example 3*

1♣    1♠  
1NT   3♥

This jump to 3♥ shows 5-5 shape and invitational values. It is non-forcing.

The way to make a forcing bid as Responder is with a convention, like New Minor Forcing, or by making a Responder's reverse.

*Example 4*

1♣    1♦  
1NT   2♠

This 2♠ bid shows a 4+card ♠ suit and 10+ points. It is forcing for 1 round.

### **Responder's New Suits in Competition – Freebids**

A new suit in competition, bid by choice not because partner forced us to bid with a double, is called a *freebid*. When Responder bids a new suit on their own, without being forced to bid, this is Responder's freebid. As a general rule, Responder's freebid auctions fall into two cases:

- *Positive Freebids* – when new suits are strong and forcing.
- *Negative Freebids* – when new suits are competitive and non-forcing.

#### ***Positive Freebids***

*Positive freebid* auctions are the traditional ones that most of us are quite familiar with. These are auctions where bidding a new suit is forcing and generally shows a strong hand with a long suit. In these auctions, we make a *negative double* with hands that want to compete in the bidding but for some reason do not qualify to make a positive freebid.

These positive freebid auctions most commonly take place when partner opens the bidding with 1-suit, RHO makes an overcall, and we bid a new suit without jumping. The values shown by our freebid depend on the level we respond at:

- 1-level: 4+card suit, 6+ pts, Forcing 1 round
- 2-level: 5+ card suit, 10+ pts, Forcing 1 round
- 3-level: 5+card suit, 12+ pts, Game forcing

*Example 5 -- 1-Level Positive Freebids*

- 1♣    1♦    1♥            4+♥, 6+ pts, 1F (Forcing 1 round)
- 1♣    1♦    1♠            4+♠, 6+ pts, 1F
- 1m    1♥    1♠            5+♠, 6+ pts, 1F (exception that this shows 5+cards)



*Example 6 – 2-level Positive Freebids*

- 1♣ 1♥ 2♦ 5+♦, 10+ pts, 1F
- 1♣ 1♠ 2♦ 5+♦, 10+ pts, 1F
- 1m 1♠ 2♥ 5+♥, 10+ pts, 1F
- 1♣ 1♠ 2♦ 5+♦, 10+ pts, 1F
- 1♣ 2♦ 2♥ 5+♥, 10+ pts, 1F
- 1♣ 2♦ 2♠ 5+♠, 10+ pts, 1F
- 1m 2♥ 2♠ 5+♠, 10+ pts, 1F

*Example 7 – 3-level Positive Freebids*

- 1♣ 2♥ 3♦ 5+♦, 12+ pts, GF
- 1♣ 2♠ 3♦ 5+♦, 12+ pts, GF
- 1♣ 2♠ 3♥ 5+♥, 12+ pts, GF
- 1♣ 3♦ 3♥ 5+♥, 12+ pts, GF
- 1♣ 3♦ 3♠ 5+♠, 12+ pts, GF
- 1m 3♥ 3♠ 5+♠, 12+ pts, GF

***Negative Doubles***

We should clarify a common misconception about *Negative Doubles*. A negative double is a bid that is extremely flexible, not specific. Many players wrongly are taught that a negative double “promises” the unbid suits. It is true that we will often have the unbid suits when we make a negative double, but we will also make a negative double with many other types of hands where we cannot find another call.

The best way to think about negative doubles is:

- Partner has enough values to take some action, but no other bid looks attractive.
- Partner is looking for a fit (or better fit) and wants to compete in the bidding.

**Responder’s New Suits in Competition - Negative Freebids**

Negative freebid auctions are rarer than the previously discussed positive freebid auctions. Negative freebids are new suits bid by Responder or Advancer that are non-forcing and competitive. They are used in auctions where double or redouble shows a strong hand, 10+ pts. Thus, in these auctions, bidding shows fewer points and a long suit, usually 5-9 pts and 5+card suit. We use these bids in auctions where the opponents have shown some strength and both sides will be battling to win the auction as cheaply as possible. The two most common negative freebid auctions are when RHO overcalls 1NT or makes a takeout double.



### ***Vs. Notrump Overcalls***

When partner opens the bidding with a suit at the 1-level and RHO overcalls 1NT, then we double with almost any hand that has 10+ pts. That means that if we bid at the 2-level, partner will know that we have fewer than 10 pts. Therefore, a new suit by the Responder shows a long suit (usually 6+cards) and 5-9 pts. This limited bid is non-forcing and is an example of a negative freebid.

#### *Example 8 – Negative Freebids*

1♥ 1NT 2♦ *Negative Freebid, 6+♦, 5-9 pts, non-forcing*

### ***Freebids Vs. Takeout Doubles***

Negative freebids over the opponent's takeout double are slightly more complicated. When partner opens the bidding with a suit at the 1-level and RHO makes a takeout double, we will *redouble* with most hands that have 10+ pts. When we bid a new suit we usually do not have 10+ pts.

But it does not make much sense for us to make a non-forcing bid at the 1-level (we are unlikely to buy the contract there.) We will treat our 1-level bids as forcing (just as if the opponents had not interfered.) If we bid a new suit at the 2-level, it is a negative freebid and is non-forcing.

#### *Example 9 – Freebids*

- 1♠ X 2♥ *Negative Freebid, 6+♥, 5-9 pts, Non-forcing*
- 1♠ X 2♦ *Negative Freebid, 6+♦, 5-9 pts, Non-forcing*
- 1♠ X 2♣ *Negative Freebid, 6+♣, 5-9 pts, Non-forcing*
- 1♥ X 2♦ *Negative Freebid, 6+♦, 5-9 pts, Non-forcing*
- 1♥ X 2♣ *Negative Freebid, 6+♣, 5-9 pts, Non-forcing*
- 1♥ X 1♠ *Positive Freebid, 4+♠, 6+ pts, 1F*
- 1♦ X 2♣ *Negative Freebid, 6+♣, 5-9 pts, Non-forcing*
- 1♦ X 1♠ *Positive Freebid, 4+♠, 6+ pts, 1F*
- 1♦ X 1♥ *Positive Freebid, 4+♥, 6+ pts, 1F*

*Responder's New Suit Forcing at 1-level over the opponent's takeout, but non-forcing at the 2-level.*

### ***Redoubles***

When we are in a negative freebid situation, but we want to make a positive freebid showing 10+ pts and a 5+ card suit, we can't just bid our new suit. The way that we show this hand is a two-step process. We start with a redouble to show 10+ pts and then we bid our 5+ card suit to show our length. This is the way we show a strong hand with a long suit.



*Example 10*

1♠	X	XX	P
P	2♣	2♦	

This 2♦ bid shows a 5+card ♦ suit and 10+ points. 2♦ is forcing for 1 round.

*Note: Redoubles generally show 10+ pts and a hand without a large fit for partner's suit – we have other bids, such as Jordan 2NT to show those hands with fits.*

**Conclusion**

How Responder makes a forcing bid is an important set of agreements to have with partner. The idea that a new suit is forcing by Responder has some truth, but is not a complete truth. It is important to get into the details of these agreements with partner – we do not want to have a mix up in these auctions. Make sure you discuss “Is a bid forcing? How forcing is it?”