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Is It Forcing?

What? I have to bid again?



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Introduction

This article will discuss forcing bids in the context of normal auctions. It will answer the question, "Is my partner's bid forcing?" It will **not** tell you what to bid, only when you must.

This article will not discuss forcing bids in the context of specific conventions such as Stayman, Blackwood, etc. If you play any conventions involving forcing bids, it's your responsibility to learn them.

Responder's First Bid

Reevaluate your hand **if you have a fit with partner's suit**. This involves adding points for short suits (void, singleton, doubleton) if applicable (refer to the article on [counting for short suits](#) for more details).

1. A raise by responder of opener's suit is not forcing.

Example 1

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North

1♥

East

Pass

South

2♥

West

South holds 6 to 9 points, and either three or four hearts (holding five or more hearts, South should raise directly to 4♥).

Example 2**North dealer, neither side vulnerable****North**

1♥

East

Pass

South

3♥

West

South holds 10 to 11 points and four hearts.

- When partner opens one of a suit, any new suit bid by responder is forcing for one round, unless responder has previously passed.

Example 3**North dealer, neither side vulnerable****North**

1♥

East

Pass

South

1♠

West

South's 1♠ response is forcing for one round, because South has not previously passed. North must bid again (if West makes a bid, however, North may pass if that seems appropriate, because South will have another chance).

Example 4**East dealer, neither side vulnerable****North**

—

1♥

East

Pass

Pass

South

Pass

1♠

West

Pass

In this case, South's 1♠ response is not forcing, because South has previously passed. **A passed responder can never make a forcing bid.** North may bid again with a suitable hand, but may pass if that seems best.

- After a takeout double, a new suit by responder **at the one level only** is forcing for one round (if responder has not previously passed). A new suit by responder **at the two level** (assuming no jump in level) is **not forcing**.

Example 5**North dealer, neither side vulnerable**

North	East	South	West
1♥	Double	1♠	

South's 1♠ bid is forcing for one round. However, as in Example 1, if West bids North may pass.

Example 6**North dealer, neither side vulnerable**

North	East	South	West
1♥	Double	2♣	

South's 2♣ bid is **not forcing**. South is showing an 8 to 9 point hand with at least five clubs. With more points, South would redouble first.

- An overcall does not change things. If responder bids a new suit, it is forcing for one round unless responder has previously passed.

Example 7**North dealer, neither side vulnerable**

North	East	South	West
1♥	1♠	2♦	

South's 2♦ response is forcing for one round. North must bid again unless West bids.

Example 8**East dealer, neither side vulnerable**

North	East	South	West
—	Pass	Pass	Pass
1♥	1♠	2♦	

In this case, South's 2♦ response is not forcing, because South has previously passed.

- A notrump response by responder is never forcing (in standard bidding), even with a jump in level. However, there are some conventions where a notrump response is forcing.

Example 9

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	East	South	West
1♦	Pass	1NT	

South's response is not forcing. It shows 6 to 9 points with no four-card major.

Example 10**North dealer, neither side vulnerable**

North	East	South	West
1♦	Pass	2NT	

South's response is not forcing. It shows 10 to 12 points with no four-card major. Some players, however, prefer to treat the 2NT bid as showing 13+ points. If you have that strong a hand (with no four-card major), then jump directly to 3NT.

Example 11**North dealer, neither side vulnerable**

North	East	South	West
1♥	Pass	1NT	

South's response is not forcing. It shows 6 to 9 points. However, many experienced players consider the 1NT response after a major suit opening to be forcing for one round. If in doubt, ask the opening bidder. This convention formerly required an alert or announcement, but because it has become so common, the alert or announcement is no longer required.

Opener's Rebid

Reevaluate your hand **if you have a fit with partner's suit**. This involves adding points for short suits (void, singleton, doubleton) if applicable (refer to the article on [counting for short suits](#) for more details).

1. If opener raises responder's suit, it is not forcing.

Example 12**North dealer, neither side vulnerable**

North	East	South	West
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1♥

Pass

1♠

Pass

2♠

Pass

Opener has a minimum hand (12 to 14 points) with four spades (occasionally three, but they should be good ones).

Example 13

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	East	South	West
1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass
3♠	Pass		

Opener has a better hand (16 to 18 points) with four spades.

2. If opener rebids his suit, it is not forcing, even if opener jumps.

Example 14

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	East	South	West
1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♥	Pass		

North's rebid is not forcing. He has a minimum opening bid (12 to 14 points) with a six card heart suit.

Example 15

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	East	South	West
1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass
3♥	Pass		

North's rebid is still not forcing. He has a better hand (16 to 18 points) with a six card heart suit.

3. If opener bids a new suit **lower ranking than his first suit**, it is not forcing when partner responded at the one level.

Example 16

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	East	South	West
1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♣	Pass		

North's 2♣ bid is not forcing since partner has responded at the one level. North has a minimum opening hand (12 to 14 points), with at least five hearts and four clubs.

4. If opener bids a new suit **lower ranking than his first suit**, it is **forcing when partner responded at the two level**.

Example 17

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	East	South	West
1♥	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♦	Pass		

North's 2♦ bid is forcing since partner has responded at the two level. North still has a minimum opening hand (12 to 14 points), with at least five hearts and four diamonds.

5. If opener bids a new suit at the three level without jumping, **it is forcing**. Opener must have a game-going hand (ie 16 points or more).

Example 18

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	East	South	West
1♥	Pass	2♦	Pass
3♣	Pass		

North's bid is forcing. North has a game-going hand (ie 16 points or more). With a weaker opening, North cannot bid a new suit at the three level, but must choose some other bid. In this case, 2♥, 2NT, or 3♦ would be acceptable. Opener may have to distort his distribution somewhat to avoid bidding a new suit at the three level with insufficient values. This is one of the rare cases where rebidding 2♥ on a five-card suit may be unavoidable.

6. If opener bids a new suit **higher ranking than his first suit**, it is forcing for one round (if partner responded at the one level) or to game (if partner responded at the two level). This type of bid is called a **reverse**, and is an integral part of standard bidding. Refer to the article on [reverses](#) for more information.

Example 19**North dealer, neither side vulnerable**

North	East	South	West
1♦	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♥	Pass		

North's bid is forcing (for one round, in this case). North has a good hand (16+ points), normally with five diamonds and four hearts. Holding a weaker hand with four hearts, North **cannot bid hearts**. North has to find a different bid. Bidding 2♥ in this type of auction with a minimum opening hand is one of the most common errors made by newer players.

7. If opener bids a new suit **jumping a level**, this is forcing to game.

Example 20**North dealer, neither side vulnerable**

North	East	South	West
1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass
3♣	Pass		

North's bid shows a 19+ point hand. South cannot pass (unless he wants a new partner).

8. If opener bids no trump it is not forcing, even if opener jumps in no trump.

Example 21**North dealer, neither side vulnerable**

North	East	South	West
1♦	Pass	1♠	Pass
1NT	Pass		

North's bid shows a minimum opening (12 to 14 points), and is not forcing.

Example 22**North dealer, neither side vulnerable**

North	East	South	West
1♠	Pass	2♦	Pass
2NT	Pass		

North's bid still shows a minimum opening (12 to 14 points), and is not forcing.

Example 23

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	East	South	West
1♦	Pass	1♠	Pass
2NT	Pass		

North's jump bid inNT shows a good hand (18 or 19 points) with less than four spades, but is still not forcing.

Responder's Rebid

Reevaluate your hand **if you have a fit with partner's suit**. This involves adding points for short suits (void, singleton, doubleton) if applicable (refer to the article on [counting for short suits](#) for more details).

1. If responder rebids his suit without jumping, it is not forcing.

Example 24

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	East	South	West
1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♣	Pass	2♠	

Responder's 2♠ bid is not forcing. It shows at least 5 spades, no support for partner's suits, and unsuitable distribution for no trump.

Example 25

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	East	South	West
1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass
1NT	Pass	2♠	

Again, responder's 2♠ bid is not forcing.

Example 26

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	East	South	West
1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♥	Pass	2♣	

This is a sequence that often gets newer players in trouble. Responder's 2♣ bid is not forcing. In fact, it's highly discouraging. A wise North will pass and let South (the weaker hand) play. Even if South gets doubled and goes down, you will likely get a better score than the more foolish North's who keep bidding, get doubled at a higher level, and go down. **The worst thing North can do here is bid 2NT as a rescue attempt.**

2. A new suit by responder is normally forcing for one round. There are exceptions, which will be shown in the examples.

Example 27**North dealer, neither side vulnerable**

North	East	South	West
1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♥	Pass	3♣	

Responder's 3♣ bid is forcing. Responder should have a game-going hand (bidding a new suit at the three level by either player is game forcing).

Example 28**East dealer, neither side vulnerable**

North	East	South	West
—	Pass	Pass	Pass
1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♥	Pass	3♦	Pass

Responder's original 1♠ response was not forcing, since responder is a passed hand. Opener chose to rebid hearts (which is acceptable with a good six card heart suit). Responder, however, is quite unhappy. His 3♦ bid is an attempt to find a better contract, and is **not forcing**. Responder probably has five spades and five diamonds, with a void in hearts. Opener should either pass the diamond bid, or go back to spades. Anything else would be foolish.

Example 29**North dealer, neither side vulnerable**

North	East	South	West
1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass
1NT	Pass	2♦	

This one is a bit complicated. Responder's 2♦ bid is **not forcing**. Why? Opener has rebid 1NT. After a 1NT rebid by opener, a **lower ranking new suit bid by responder is not forcing**. If responder wanted to make a forcing bid in diamonds, he would have to bid 3♦. In this auction, South again has a two suited hand and feels notrump is too dangerous. North should normally pass or bid 2♠.

Example 30

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	East	South	West
1♣	Pass	1♥	Pass
1NT	Pass	2♠	

In this auction, South's 2♠ bid is **forcing**. Why? Because spades is a higher ranking suit than hearts (which South bid first). This is an example of a **reverse by responder**. South is showing a game-going hand with five hearts and four spades.

3. A notrump bid by responder is not forcing.

Example 31

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	East	South	West
1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♦	Pass	2NT	

South's 2NT bid is not forcing. South has a 10 to 12 point hand. His likely distribution is four spades, two hearts, two or three diamonds, and four or five clubs. Note that South cannot bid 3♣ even with a five card suit: that would promise a game-going hand.

4. A return to opener's first suit is not forcing.

Example 32

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	East	South	West
1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass

2♦

Pass

2♥

South's 2♥ bid is not forcing. In fact, it's highly discouraging. South has a weak hand and only two card support for hearts (with three card support, South would have raised in the previous round of bidding). North should not make the mistake of thinking South is encouraging. North should pass promptly.

5. A raise of opener's **second suit** is forcing.

Example 33

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	East	South	West
1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♦	Pass	3♦	

South's 3♦ bid is forcing to game. If South wanted to play a part score in diamonds, he would have passed 2♦.

Competitive Auctions

Apart from some simple examples, this article does not cover forcing bids in competitive auctions (it gets more complicated).

The major differences in competitive auctions are:

1. All raises of any suit partner has bid are not forcing. Raises to any level show weak hands with trump support (the higher the raise, the better the support).
2. A cue bid (bidding the opponent's suit) generally shows support for partner's suit with a good hand. Obviously, a cue bid is forcing for one round. If your partner cue bids and you have a stopper in the opponent's suit, bid notrump; otherwise rebid your suit with a minimum, or bid a new suit with a good hand (ie, a hand better than your previous bids have indicated so far).
3. Notrump bids promise at least one stopper in the opponent's suit (ideally two stoppers for a major suit, or a suit the opponents have bid and raised). They remain non-forcing.

Conclusion

This article won't cover subsequent rounds of bidding for the following reasons:

1. There are too many possible sequences to illustrate. After all, you and your computer only have so much memory.
2. The first two rounds of bidding are the critical ones. If you and your partner get through the first two rounds with an understanding of which bids are forcing and which aren't, neither of you should make any serious blunders in subsequent rounds.

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