

Fifth Chair



99% forcing:

Technically this should not exist but it does. It is a situation when partner is expected to bid but may pass on rare occasions.

Perhaps the obvious example of partner passing your 1-level take-out double for penalties does not quite count, since leaving the opponents to play doubled is considered permissible even in game-forcing situations.

A slightly more obvious situation is a Michael's cue-bid. RHO opens 1C and you bid 2C to show 5-5 in the majors. Partner may occasionally hold

S:xx H:xx D:Axx C:QJTxxx and elect to pass.

Another situation is often quoted when partner makes an opening bid and the next player overcalls. If you pass, then partner should try to re-open most of the time but may occasionally pass, especially when holding length in their suit.

Highly invitational

These bids are not forcing, but usually partner is expected to bid on unless very weak and misfitting.

A common example is a new suit by opener when partner has responded one-over one. (A few play this as forcing). The sequence: 1H-1S-2D may be passed by responder holding S:Kxxx H:x D:Qxx C:JTxxx

Invitational

These bids are non-forcing and partner is expected to pass if minimum. There is no exact dividing line between the levels of invitational bids.

Limit bid

This is a bid that describes your hand fairly accurately and sets up partner as captain in the captain/soldier situation. The bids are not necessarily sign-off, they may well be invitational. A bid such as 2H in the sequence 1H-1S-2H is a limit bid, but of course partner could be very strong.

Sign-off

This is a bid that declares no interest in going any higher. Occasionally partner may be permitted to show preference to your former suit, or to rebid his own suit (in extreme circumstances when the length is far longer than partner may have expected).

Competitive

This comes when the opponents have made a bid, and you would like to compete the part-score. It is not a good idea to double-cross partner and punish him for wanting to compete. Bid further only if holding totally unexpected trump length in partner's suit and then sometimes only if pushed. (Often partner's intention was to push the opponents to a higher level. If he succeeds, the last thing he may want is for you

to go on bidding).

Certain competitive bids consult you to choose the denomination, maybe from a selection. The obvious ones are take-out doubles (asking you to select from the unbid suits) and 2-suited bids like Michaels and Unusual NT.

Principle of Fast Arrival

This principle is basically that when you leap to game, it is usually intended as a sign-off bid. So if you make a forcing bid first and then bid game, it shows a bit more interest in slam.

This can often be used in game-forcing situations. Bidding game is usually a sign of giving up on slam, or at least leaving further tries to partner.

Systemic Agreements on Forcing Bids

This is the part I was not too happy on writing, because it is system and different partnerships have different agreements.

There are so many different forcing bids, and so many differences of opinion. It is up to your partnership to decide in certain situations.

In most natural systems, a change of suit by responder is forcing. At the one-level it is forcing only for one round. At the 2-level (two-over-one) the bid shows (usually) at least 10 points, and so more subsequent sequences are also forcing.

Usually a new suit by opener after this is also forcing, so 1S - 2D - 2H is forcing.

When there is interference, the situation is not so clear-cut, but most partnerships prefer to play it as still forcing. So 1S (2D) 2H is forcing. So is 1D (1S) 2H. (Bids in brackets refer to bids made by the opponents).

That means if you hold a hand that just wants to compete the part-score in hearts, you must either make a take-out (negative) double or pass, and bid hearts next round (if you have the chance). (Doubling first usually shows a better hand).

Two-over-one systems declare that bids like 1S - 2D set up a game-forcing situation. (This doesn't usually apply to the bid after interference, in this case a 2C overcall).

The theory behind this arrangement is that game-forcing situations leave more room to investigate slams (you can make descriptive bids without the risk of being passed below game). Of course it means you cannot start with a 2/1 bid unless you have the values for game, which means you have to bid 1NT more often (and that bid then becomes forcing too).

Those who employ 2/1 systems may occasionally reach the second-best part-score but they win on the slam hands, which at IMPs will usually prove more important.

Not everyone who claims to play 2/1 agrees that it should be unconditionally game-forcing and they give exceptions when the bidding may be dropped below game. Once you start making exceptions though, it can be difficult to stop and mix-ups are likely to occur unless you are very certain of your system.

The forcing NT has other advantages though. It allows responder to sign off in his own suit with a weak hand. On these occasions, it will usually play better than 1NT. The slight downside is that opener has to rebid 2 of a minor with only a 3-card suit, which means when he does hold 4, partner doesn't find out about it.

My own preferential treatment is to allow opener to rebid 2C even with only 2 if holding 5-3-3-2 distribution, so 2D always promises 4 (as does 2H).

After opener's rebid, any new suit by responder is sign-off. So 1S-1NT-2H-3D is sign off. Responder has a weak hand with a string of diamonds. Opener, holding 5-5-1-2 should respect this and give up before the opponents start doubling.

As a result of these advantages, many Standard American players also like to employ the forcing 1NT convention.

In natural strong club systems (like Precision), the opening bid of 1H or 1S is limited to 15 points, so clearly responder does not need to keep the bidding open on 6 points. So 1NT is better used as forcing, though opener's rebid structure is changed slightly due to the limited nature of his hand. (He doesn't have to account for hands of 17-18 points, which would have been opened 1C).

A new bid by responder on the second round is usually considered forcing, if his first bid was not 1NT. So 1D-1S-2D-2H is forcing. Clearly with a weak hand holding 5-5 in the majors, we would like to not to be, but then we would probably pass 2D for the same reasons as above. It is far more useful though to keep this bid as forcing for the 14 counts with 5 spades and 4 hearts.

When opener has bid 1NT second round after opening 1 of a minor and hearing a response of 1 of a major, 2 of the unbid minor is not only forcing but artificial (new minor forcing or NMF). This generally asks for information in the majors, seeking: i) 3 card support for the major you bid or ii) 4 cards in the other major.

Example: 1D - 1H
1NT - 2C

Opener should bid 2H with 3, 2S with 4 (many players prefer not to bid 1S first round when holding a balanced hand. This means you occasionally lose 4-4 fits at the part-score level, but means that when you do bid 1S you show 5 diamonds, and partner can give preference to 2D on a weak hand with a 3 card suit. It also means you can play in 1NT without partner holding club-stoppers. Either you have them or you don't care if they run clubs).

With neither, probably the best agreement in this sequence is to bid 2D with 5 and 2NT otherwise. After the auction

1C - 1S
1NT - 2D

Clearly the only bids available now are 2H, 2S and 2NT.

Cue-Bids

Cue-bids is a general term, probably over-used, and usually refers to either:

1. Bidding a suit bid naturally by the opponents
2. Bidding a suit to show a control rather than length, with intention of playing in an agreed suit or partner's suit.
- 3 (rarer): Bidding a suit just as a general try for slam without showing any specific holding in the suit.

Both of these types are forcing (with the rare exception I gave earlier with Michaels).

Type 1. is used usually when either partner or the opponents have overcalled.

It shows at least an interest in game and is a way of keeping the auction going. Sometimes it particularly shows an interest in NT and asks for a stopper in their suit. On other occasions it is used as a means of

showing support for partner's suit and certain values in high cards (as direct raises are used pre-emptively).

Type 2. are used in slam-try situations and are used to show controls in the suit bid. A control is usually an ace or king or void or singleton.

Aces and voids are 1st round controls, kings and singletons 2nd round.

When cue-bidding in a suit bid naturally by partner, many prefer this to always show a high card (ace/king) rather than shortage. This subject is too big to cover in detail here.

Type 3. are used partly in conjunction with the principle of fast arrival. Meckstroth and Rodwell have invented a cue-bid they call "Last Train To Clarksville", which means that a bid just below the sign off, if that is the only bid available, is a general slam try rather than showing control. This may happen in particular if the opponents are bidding. Say, they are bidding diamonds and we have agreed spades. If they bid 4D, our only slam-try available below game is 4H, which becomes the "Last Train To Clarksville" try.