

HOW HIGH SHOULD WE COMPETE IN BIDDING?

In a competitive auction, there are several factors to bear in mind:

- 1) The “magic number” for a **major-suit game** (or 3NT) is **26 HCP** between your and your partner’s hands. If you know you don’t have 26 HCP, don’t go looking for game. Try to sign off in a partial (e.g., 2 hearts or 2 spades).
- 2) If the **opponents overcall** at the **1 level**, that opponent should have at least 7-8 HCP. If an opponent overcalls at the **2 level**, s/he should have **at least 11 HCP**. (Check your opponents’ convention cards to see what range of HCP their overcalls promise.)
- 3) If an **opponent overcalls** and is **raised** by his/her partner, the partner making the raise should have at least 6 HCP for a **total of at least 13** (1-level overcall) **or at least 17 HCP** (2-level Overcall)..
- 4) If your **opponents’ likely HCP are greater than 14, you are unlikely to have game** (unless you have extra distributional values to compensate).
- 5) If an **opponent opens the bidding** at the one level, your side will have to have almost all the remaining high cards (or extra values due to distribution) in order to make game.
- 6) If an **opponent opens the bidding with one no trump**, your side will rarely have game—unless you have a great fit and extra values from good distribution.
- 7) Remember the **Law of Total Tricks**. The Law tells us that, in a competitive auction, each side is usually limited to the number of tricks equal to the number of trumps they hold, e.g., an 8-card trump fit yields 8 tricks (2 hearts or 2 spades); a 9-card trump fit yields 9 tricks (3 hearts or 3 spades), etc. [Also bear in mind that the Law is a good guide, but is NOT infallible.]
- 8) Remember how **match point scoring** works. If you are sure that the opponents are going to make 2 spades (-110 points for your side), you can get a better score by going down 1 (doubled or undoubled) if you are nonvulnerable. (Down 1, undoubled, nonvul is -50. Down 1, doubled, nonvul, is -100. Either number provides a better score than -110.) The dangerous situation is when you are vulnerable. Going down 1, doubled, vulnerable is -200—worse than any part-score loss you would have taken. Be more cautious in competing when vulnerable.
- 9) The “**boss suit**” (spades) is a **tremendous advantage in competitive auctions**. Be aggressive in overcalling with spades, making a take-out double to look for a spade fit, and supporting your partner in spades.
- 10) Remember to continue to **re-evaluate your hand as the bidding proceeds**. Hands get “better” or “worse” depending on the auction. For example, if you open: AKQxx Kx Jxx xxx and LHO (left-hand opponent) overcalls 2 hearts, your hand just got worse. Your King of hearts rates to be useless. It is as if you just lost 3 HCP. However, if you open that same hand, your partner says 2 Spades, and RHO says 3H, your King of hearts rates to be working now. Singletons and voids in the opponents’ suit become more valuable—especially if the suit is overcalled and raised—because your partner is less likely to have “wasted values” in that suit.