

Competing & Sacrificing ♠♣♥♦

Competitive auctions bring excitement to the bridge table. You will usually get a poor score if you fail to compete; or if you compete too much. Knowing exactly how high to bid on every deal is an impossible task — even experts have to guess sometimes. This lesson explains some important guidelines to follow to improve your competitive bidding.

Partscore Competition

When neither side has the clear majority of high-cards — each side holds 18-22 HCP — it is common for both sides to be in the bidding. The continuing problem is whether to keep bidding or to sell out to the opponents. If your side has already raised a suit, generally you should compete for *as many tricks as your side has trumps*. I would fine-tune this strategy by suggesting two rules:

Compete to the three level with a nine-card trump fit, or with an unbalanced hand.

♠A 2
♥K J 8 7 6
♦K Q 4
♣8 4 3



♠9 4 3
♥Q 5 4 2
♦10 5
♣A J 10 5

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♥	Pass	2 ♥	Pass
Pass	2 ♠	3 ♥	

East

competes to 3 ♥ because he knows his side holds nine trumps. If East did not bid 3 ♥, West should pass 2 ♠.

♠A K 9 7 6
♥Q 8
♦A 8 2
♣5 4 3



♠Q 5 4
♥7 5 4
♦9 6 3
♣A Q 8 6

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♠	2 ♥	2 ♠	3 ♥
Pass	Pass	Pass	

West and East each have

balanced hands and minimal trump length so it is wise to sell out. Note that 3 ♥ is likely to fail.

Compete to the four level with a 10-card trump fit or with exciting shape such as 5-5 or 6-4.

♠A 8 3
♥J 3 2
♦K 4
♣A J 8 6 5



♠K 4 2
♥4
♦Q 8 6 3
♣Q 9 7 4 3

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>	
1 ♣	2 ♥	3 ♣	3 ♥	West expects
4 ♣				a 10-card
				club fit
				because a

minor-suit raise typically shows five.

♠9 7 6
♥Q 10 8 3
♦Q 9 2
♣K J 8



♠3
♥K 4
♦K J 8 7 4 3
♣A 9 7 6

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>	
3 ♦	1 ♠	2 ♦	2 ♠	East competes to 4 ♦
	3 ♠	4 ♦		because of his 6-4
				shape. If this goes
				down one, it is likely

that 3 ♠ would have made.

If your side has *not* raised a suit, the strategy is more liberal: **Compete to the three level if you expect an eight-card fit, or to the four level with a nine-card fit.**

♠A 9 8 7 6
♥A 4 3
♦K Q 10 2
♣2



♠5 2
♥J 9 7 5
♦J 9 8 4
♣A 8 3

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♠	Pass	1 NT	2 ♣
2 ♦	3 ♣	3 ♦	

East competes to

3 ♦ because he knows of the diamond fit. Note that West would not know of the fit without East's raise.

♠K Q J 9 7 6
♥A 2
♦5 4 2
♣K 3



♠4
♥9 7 3
♦A J 8 7 3
♣Q 6 5 4

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♠	Pass	1 NT	2 ♥
2 ♠	3 ♥	Pass	Pass
Pass			

West should not bid 3 ♠ because he has already shown six and

East would have competed to 3 ♠ with a doubleton.

Competitive Game Tries

If partner has raised your suit and your right-hand opponent bids, it is impractical to use a bid in the raised suit as a game try — else how could you compete? Most good partnerships have these agreements:

Any bid in the raised suit is competitive (not a game try).

♠3 2		♠A J 7 6
♥A K J 10 8		♥Q 7 6
♦K 10 6 5		♦Q 9 7 2
♣3 2		♣J 7

A new suit bid is a game try. This is *forcing* and it may not be a real suit. Partner should return to the raised suit with a minimum; or bid game with a maximum.

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♥	2 ♣	2 ♥	3 ♣
3 ♥			

West competes because his hand is unbalanced. He is *not* trying for game.

The new-suit game try is artificial and should be alerted to the opponents.

♠3 2		♠10 5 4
♥K Q 9 7 6 3		♥A 10 4
♦A 2		♦K J 8 7 4
♣A 9 3		♣8 4

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♥	1 ♠	2 ♥	2 ♠
3 ♣*	Pass	4 ♥	

*Artificial. West improvises the 3 ♣ bid to try for game (3 ♥ would be competitive). East has a maximum so he accepts.

♠A J 7 3		♠K Q 9 8
♥Q 8 2		♥K 7 3
♦7 6		♦9 2
♣A J 10 2		♣K 7 5 3

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♣	Pass	1 ♠	2 ♦
2 ♠	3 ♦	3 ♥*	Pass
3 ♠			

*Artificial. East must bid 3 ♥ to try for game, and West rejects by returning to the agreed trump suit.

High Level Decisions

When both sides have a trump fit, the bidding sometimes gets to the four or five level very quickly — usually because of extreme distribution around the table. Assuming the high cards are about evenly divided (18-22 for each side), it is difficult to gauge which side can make what. In many cases *each side* can make its contract if the distribution is wild enough. What to do? I would be guessing like anyone else, but experience has shown the following general advice to be sound: **In a “pressure situation” tend to bid one level higher than you normally would if necessary to buy the contract. If the enemy competes further, let them play it. (Double only if you expect a two-trick set.)**

♠3		♠8 4
♥K Q 9 7 5		♥J 10 8
♦K Q 9 7 2		♦A 8 6 4
♣A 3		♣J 8 4 2

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♥	1 ♠	2 ♥	4 ♠
5 ♥			

West normally would bid 4 ♥ so the push to 5 ♥ is justified under pressure. This time 5 ♥ will be set, but there is a good chance the opponents would have made 4 ♠.

♠A J 10 8		♠Q 7 5
♥9 7 4		♥2
♦4 3		♦A 8 7
♣K 9 6 5		♣A Q 10 8 4 2

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>	
5 ♣	1 ♥	2 ♣	4 ♥	West normally would compete to 4 ♣ (based on the known 9+ card fit and not having raised clubs) so he wings it to 5 ♣ under pressure. Note that 5 ♣ will make if the spade finesse works; and if it loses, the opponents probably could make 4 ♥.

Sacrifice Bids

Until now it was assumed the high cards were about evenly divided. Another case is a “sacrifice bid,” a *deliberate overbid* when opponents have most of the high cards and you expect them to make game.

When making a sacrifice bid, you should expect to be doubled and the penalty should be lower than the score your opponents would have made. Sacrifice bids are most attractive at *favorable* vulnerability (only the opponents are vulnerable) since you can afford to be set three tricks (minus 500) if the opponents have a game. At *equal* vulnerability you can afford to be set two tricks. At *unfavorable* vulnerability sacrifice bids are almost nonexistent.

When considering a sacrifice bid, it is usually impossible to know exactly how many tricks you can win; or even if the opponents can make their contract. Some guesswork is required. Here are several tips.

Sacrifice bids are likely to be profitable when you have a 10-card or greater trump fit and an unbalanced hand.

♠8 3
♥8 6 4
♦4
♣K J 9 7 6 5 4



♠2
♥Q 9 7
♦K 9 7 6 5 3
♣A 10 3

N-S Vul (favorable to you). East expects a 10-card club fit so he takes the sacrifice. If one of East’s diamonds were a spade, he should pass because his hand would then be balanced.

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
3 ♣	4 ♠	5 ♣	

Do not sacrifice if you have made a weak bid — it is up to your partner to decide whether or not to sacrifice.

N-S Vul (favorable to you). West should not bid 5 ♥ because he has made a weak bid. East is the captain and he also passes because of the balanced shape — there is a good chance to beat 4 ♠.

♠—
♥AJ98752
♦10 9 2
♣4 3 2



♠A 8 6 2
♥Q 6 3
♦8 6 3
♣A Q 10

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
3 ♥	3 ♠	4 ♥	4 ♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	

♠8
♥5 2
♦K Q 9 8 6 5 4
♣Q 8 5



♠J 10 2
♥A J 10 6 4
♦J 10 7 2
♣4

Once you decide to sacrifice, do so immediately. Do not wait for the opponents to reach their final contract.

None or Both Vul (equal). East anticipates that the opponents will bid game in spades or clubs so he exerts the maximum pressure.

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
3 ♦	Dbl	5 ♦	

Note the opponents can make at least 5 ♠.

If the opponents bid over your sacrifice (instead of doubling), it is usually wise to pass. Be content that you pushed them up.

None or Both Vul (equal). Once the sacrifice is taken in 4 ♠, the best chance for a good score is to pass and hope you can defeat 5 ♥. If you bid on to 5 ♠ it would defeat the purpose of the 4 ♠ bid.

♠K Q 10 7 5 4
♥Q 8 2
♦J 9
♣4 3



♠A 9 8 2
♥3
♦4 3 2
♣K J 10 6 2

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
2 ♠	Dbl	4 ♠	5 ♥
Pass	Pass	Pass	