

# Balancing Bids: Give 'em a Push

Let's say your right hand opponent has opened 1 heart, and your left hand opponent has raised her to 2 hearts, and then opener passes it, and the auction has come to you:

rho	you	lho	pard
1♥	p	2♥	p
p	?		

So far, I haven't even told you what your hand is, but what do you know? You know the opps have a fit in hearts, and you know they have no more than about half of the available high card points. Opener didn't invite, so she has less than 16, probably just 12 to 14. Responder showed less than 10, so she holds only 6 to 9. The opps could have as few as 18 points together, but not more than 23, at the outside. All told, they have about half of the points.

So where are the other half? Those belong to you and to your partner. If you have 10, your partner has about 10 also. If you have only 8, then partner has about 12. You and pard are as strong as they are. With 8 or 9 trump together and about 1/2 the points, your opps are favored to score 110 points, while you score 0. So why should you just roll over and play dead?

The answer is: DON'T PASS.

You are sitting in the BALANCING SEAT.

The balancing seat means that if you pass, the auction is over. When you bid when you are sitting the the balancing seat, you are making what we call a BALANCING BID. No, you are not bidding with an opening hand. You aren't even bidding, exactly, on your own hand. You are bidding on your partnership's combined values. And if you don't do it, you will not be playing winning bridge.

Does it take some courage? It may feel like that at first. But you need to be more scared of passing than of bidding. Passing WILL result in a poor score for your side. That is what you should be afraid of. Bidding your combined values will change the equation and give your side a chance to get a good score.

We will talk in a minute about WHAT you should bid. But let's just think a minute about will has change when you do bid, which is to say, let's think a minute about will have changed when you do balance.

The opponents will no longer be able to play

2 Hearts, the very thing they wanted to play. If they don't get to play what they wanted to play, they will no longer be as happy. They will either have to let you play, which means they won't be scoring their anticipated 110 points ... or else they will have to bid 3 hearts and be at a level higher, where they may not be able to make their contract. By balancing, you will have pushed them around a bit, and they won't like it. Too bad for them, isn't it?

To play winning bridge, you have to push the opponent's around at a time like this. You have to take them out of their comfortable niche and put them in a less comfortable situation. Sure, sometimes they will go to 3 hearts and make it. Fine. They still had to fight harder. But sometimes when they go to 3 Hearts, you will set them. Then your balancing bid will have gained.

Or maybe they won't go to 3 Hearts. Maybe they will surrender to your side, and your side will play the cards. Maybe your side will win 110 points! Wow, what a turn around! Or maybe you won't make your bid. Maybe you will go down 1, for -50. That's still better than giving them 110, isn't it. Maybe you will even go down 2 for -100. But that's still better than giving them 110, isn't it?

Does a balancing bid ever end badly? Well, sure, once in a while. All the bids end badly once in a while. But over the range of making balancing bids whenever they come up, you will come out far ahead by balancing. By not balancing, you'll only end up losing. So which do you prefer?

Therefore, let's make a golden rule. Any bridge rule we make needs to be broken once in a while, but let's not break this one for a long while, until you see how well they work. Here's the golden rule:

***Never let the opponents play at the two level in a fit.***

Obey this golden rule, and your bridge scores will start rising.

Now let's talk about WHAT to bid, and how to handle yourself in the balancing seat.

# The Balancing Bids

## 1. The Balancing Double

A double in the balancing position is for takeout. Please bid partner.

rho	you	lho	pard
1♥	p	2♥	p
p	dbl		

Your hand may be something like this:

Q1085 K4 A642 J75

Note that you lacked the points to double at your first turn. Partner will understand you lack the values of an initial double. You may elect to make a balancing double with as few as 8 points.

## 2. A Balancing Bid

Instead of a balancing double, you can elect to make a balancing bid if you have a suit that is 5 cards long (or longer). Consider the same auction given above.

With the following hand, balance by bidding 1 Spade:

Q10974 64 AJ52 Q6

Pard may wonder why you didn't overcall 1 Spade at your first bid. Was it because your spade suit wasn't good enough? Well, it is now, when you need to balance.

Or maybe you hold a minor suit:

K7 873 AJ753 J54

Balance by bidding 3 diamonds. Yes, this could be dangerous and get you into trouble. But, remember, you're already in trouble if you let them play 2 Hearts. I wouldn't advise you to balance with this if you are vulnerable, but take the chance when you are nonvulnerable.

*You don't want to make scary balancing bids when you are vulnerable. You can let them play at the two level in their fit in this circumstance.*

You can even balance with a 4-card spade suit if it's a good one that may help give direction to the defense. Balance with 1 Spade with the following hand:

AQJ4 632 QJ105 52

Presuming the opponents take the push to 3 Hearts, lead the diamond queen, and expect partner to return a spade to your hand unless some other clear avenue of defense opens up.

## 3. The Balancing 2NT Bid.

Again looking at the same heart auction by the opponents that we have been using all along, the balancing bid of 2NT instructs partner to bid her best minor. You will have good holdings in the minors, probably 5-4, like this:

72 A4 QJ985 K974

In the balancing seat, bid 2NT with such a hand.

## 4. Don't balance when you have their suit.

When you hold their suit, a balancing bid isn't called for. You don't have clear direction to steer your partner, plus you may have enough defense to beat them. Don't balance with:

K6 AJ96 Q1064 875

### To the balancer's partner

Partner has already bid your hand by balancing. It is not your responsibility to keep bidding. On the contrary, it is your job to stop bidding. Your side may now be playing a contract as low as possible, or the opponents will have outbid you and landed one level higher, where perhaps you can set them. Don't sabotage partner's brave efforts with excessive bidding.

### A Final Note

If the opponents do not have suit agreement, then don't balance. If they can't find a fit, you will not likely find one either. You may even be saving them by injuring yourself.

But here is your mantra:

*Never let them play at the two level in a fit.*

So get in there and balance. And if something goes wrong, and you go for a telephone number, blame it on your teacher.