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# Ask Jerry

## Balancing – part 2

Dear Unbalanced,

Here is a continuation about your question addressed last month. When values seem to be somewhat evenly divided between North–South and East–West, it is usually best not to allow the opponents to rest at the two level when they find a fit quickly and are attempting to stop.

### Auction B

West	North	East	You
2♥	Pass	1♥	Pass
		Pass	?

Previously, we established that in an auction like the one above, our side rates to hold about half the deck. With this in mind, it is often correct to take some action in the passout seat. Examples:

♠J 7 5 4 3 ♥A 4 3 ♦6 4 ♣K 5 2

2♠. Our premise gives partner 10 or 11 points. He holds at most two hearts, and with 11 unknown cards, hopefully three or more of them will be spades.

♠K 5 ♥4 3 ♦A Q 6 4 ♣J 8 5 3 2

2NT. Surely this should be “unusual,” showing the minors. We want to compete and we hope one of the minors is best. If it’s wrong, at least partner has to play it!

♠Q 7 4 3 ♥4 ♦K 7 6 4 ♣A 8 5 2

Double. Not a good takeout double in the direct seat, but the recommended action in the passout seat.

### Auction C

As above, the opponents have found a fit quickly and are attempting to stop at the two level. A classic balancing opportunity.

West	North	East	You
1♦	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♠	Pass	Pass	?

When your balancing action forces you to the three level, be a little more careful, but winning bridge, especially at matchpoints, does not favor the timid. Examples:

♠8 6 2 ♥K 8 7 6 3 2 ♦A 3 2 ♣6

3♥. Partner has at most two spades and, with a little luck, heart support, or at least tolerance.

♠6 ♥A 8 6 3 2 ♦3 2 ♣K 7 5 4 2

Double. Takeout.

♠Q J 10 7 ♥7 4 ♦A 8 4 3 ♣K 6 2

Pass. You have defense. Partner, who is known to hold at most one spade, has been silent. Try to beat them.

### Caveats

① It is frequently right to balance when the opponents find a fit quickly and try to stop at the two level. All of the above meet this criteria.

② When your partner acts in the balancing position, remember he is already bidding his values and yours! The better your hand fits partner’s balancing action, the more you should be pleased at having an aggressive partner. If the opponents “take the push,” and bid to a higher level, tend to pass – don’t bury your partner for being aggressive!

③ Beware of balancing when the opponents have not found a fit. Examples:

West	North	East	You
1♣	Pass	1♥	Pass
2♣	Pass	Pass	?

This is a dangerous auction to enter, because the opponents have not found a fit. Responder’s shape could easily be 4=4=4=1, and they might be very happy for you to enter the auction. It does not mean you can’t bid, but be careful. Almost always you would need a long suit to chime in now.

West	North	East	You
		1♦	Pass
1NT	Pass	Pass	?

Opener could be 4=4=3=2. Responder could be 3=3=2=5. All of this means the opponents have not found a fit, so you may not have a fit. It could easily be right to balance if you hold length in both majors, but it’s not as clear to act in the balancing seat.

In two short articles, I have made a feeble attempt to cover a subject that merited an entire book on the subject written by Mike Lawrence, “The Complete Book on Balancing in Contract Bridge.” Well worth the read for any serious duplicate player. 🧐