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Balancing at the 1 Level

If you can make a balancing bid at the 1 level, then your LHO has made a one bid in a suit, and both your and opener's partner have passed. In this case you can deduce a great deal about the likely deal by looking at your own hand. You know the following things:

- Opener has 11 – 19 points. Usually, opener will have 13-14.
- Opener's partner has less than 6 points.
- Your partner probably did not have a strong suit of his own, or he would have overcalled.
- Your partner did not have a strong NT type hand (he would have doubled for takeout without a stopper, or bid 1 NT with a stopper).
- Partner might have an opening count with a distribution unsuitable for a takeout double (long in opener's suit).
- If you have a 10 – 14 count, partner probably has a 9 – 12 count, and your side probably has a makeable part-score contract.
- Unless you have a strong NT or better, your side is very unlikely to have a game. Therefore, the objective is to find a good low-level contract.

At matchpoints you will almost always get a terrible result for letting the opponents play in one of a suit. Either they make their contract, or you find that you could have made more points by declaring. Therefore in this situation it is almost automatic to balance at matchpoints, and even at teams it is usually right.

The following table shows the standard bids in the balancing seat after LHO opens one of a suit.

Conventional Bids in Balancing Seat

Your Hand	Bid
10 – 16, decent 5 card or longer suit	Bid your suit
Balanced 11 – 14, with no stopper	Double
Balanced 11 – 14, with stopper	1NT
Balanced 15 – 17	Double, then rebid 1NT if possible
18 or more	Double then bid a suit

Before we get to some examples, we need to talk in some detail about what a balancing bid of 1NT means. Based on what I've seen happen at the Center, many players believe that when partner balances with 1NT, partner has the same hand as if they had opened 1NT (15-17). Some would probably announce just like you would with an opening 1NT. Furthermore, some would argue that a 2D or 2H bid by you is a transfer, although you might be unsure about that.

In standard American or 2/1, this idea is just wrong. In either system, 1NT in the pass out (balancing) seat shows a balanced 11-14 count. The strong NT hand in the balancing position is shown by doubling, then rebidding 1NT (if possible).

Examples:

In each case, LHO deals and opens 1C, and the next two players pass.

1. S-Ax H-KQxxx D-Qxx C-xxx

Bid 1 Heart. You should still bid 1H even without the spade Ace. Remember that the less you have, the more partner is likely to have.

2. S-xx H-Kxx D-AQxx C-Axx

Bid 1NT. All responses by partner are natural (not transfers), unless you and partner have agreed otherwise. If 2C is Stayman, it should be alerted.

3. S-Kxxx H-Kxx D-AQxx C-xx

Double for takeout. This is very similar to a takeout double in the direct seat – you will be happy with whatever suit partner chooses. Game is not impossible.

4. S-Kxxx H-Kxxx D-Kxxx C-x

Double for takeout. Super shape, and there is a possibility that partner has a good hand with 6 or 7 clubs (in which case they may choose to pass for penalty).

5. S-Kx H-Kxx D-AQxx C-KQxx

Double, and plan to bid 1NT after partner responds. This is how you show a really good balanced hand (equal to a 1NT opener) with stoppers.

6. S-AKQxxx H-xx D-AQ C-KQx

Double, and then bid spades. Just like a direct takeout double, making a double here and then bidding a suit shows a big hand with a fine suit. Partner should raise to game

unless they are broke or void in spades.