OVERCALLING - BASIC METHODS

Opponents open one of a suit

1NT	15 - 18	with good stops	Partner will respond as to a 1NT opening.
Double (for take-out)	10,11	with 4-4-4-1 or 5-4-4-0 shape, short in their suit.	
	12 - 18	no more than two cards in the opponents' suit, and at least three cards in each of the other three suits - you will pass any response.	
	19+	double and then make a further bid.	

Suit Overcall

An overcall at the lowest level should be based primarily on a good five-card or longer suit - one that you will be happy to see your partner lead in defence.

SQUOT the (Suit QUality Overcall Test).

Add the length of the suit to the number of honours in the suit - only count the J or 10 if a higher honour is held.
An overcall at the one-level will normally be based on a five-card suit and a squot count of 7;
an overcall at the two-level will normally be based on five-card suit and a squot count of 8.

Strength

Overcall at the one-level	6 - 18 points
lowest-level overcall at the two-level	8 to 18 points
(stronger hands will double first).	

Vulnerability

When not vulnerable the hand may be quite weak and the SQUOT test will provide an excellent guideline.
For a vulnerable overcall at the two-level the suit will usually be six-card or longer.

Jump overcalls

These are played as weak and resemble weak opening bids.
When not vulnerable a jump overcall at the two-level will usually be made on a six-card suit and a jump overcall at the three-level will usually be made on a seven-card suit.
When vulnerable you may choose to bid a level lower.
The hand will not usually be as strong as ten points - just make a simple overcall.

Note in particular that an opening hand frequently does not justify an overcall, and that many overcalls will be made on hands which do not justify an opening bid. In particular an opening 1NT hand will never warrant a 1NT overcall, will only occasionally justify a take-out double, and will hardly ever provide a suit overcall.

Overcalling in the protective seat

The requirements can be relaxed considerably in the protective seat following an opening bid of one of a suit and two passes.

1NT	12 - 14	with good stops	Partner will respond as to a 1NT opening.
Double (for take-out)		Might be on as few as eight points if the shape is near-perfect.	
Suit overcall		Might be of lesser quality, or even just four-card.	

Other opening bids

Opponents open 1NT (weak)	16+	Double	Not for take-out
	Good suit - SQUOT = 8		Natural overcall.
Opponents open 1NT (strong)		Don't.	
Opponents open 2NT		Don't.	
Opponents open a natural weak bid		Double for take-out.	
		overcall with a good five-card suit and good opening values (say 15+).	
Opponents open a natural strong bid		Overcall with an excellent long suit and next to no defence.	
Opponents open an artificial strong bid		Overcall on any half-decent five-card suit at the one-level, or not vulnerable.	