

Play your cards Right

The Complete Series

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Based on

“Card Play Technique – or the art of being lucky” – Mollo & Gardiner

Introduction

This is a compilation of the 21 articles produced in the first half of 2024 and gives an intermediate-level introduction to the various techniques that occur most often during the play of a bridge deal. The articles alternate between declarer play and defence and were produced with the clear aim of restricting information to two sides of A4.

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The above provide a framework of basic skills. The below are more advanced, but essential if your bridge is going to improve.

- 11) Reading Defenders' cards – declarer play
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Play your cards Right – 1: Protect your high cards (declarer play).

This is the first in a series of articles about card play technique – interspaced with some other thoughts.

When playing your cards you want to maximise your efficiency. With high cards you want your own high cards to win tricks and capture the opponents' high cards. You want to lose tricks to high cards without wasting your own.

Leading up to high cards

Leading up to high cards gains when the opponents' high cards are in front of the high card. In all examples, unless otherwise stated, you are South as declarer and there are no entry problems.

- a) KQJ2 b) KQJ2 You make three tricks in a) by playing top cards.
A73 T98 A7 T983 You make three tricks in b) by leading towards dummy
654 654 as the Ace is wasted on two small cards.
- c) QJ54 This is exactly the same other than the King is in the short hand. Lead twice towards the QJ54
A7 T983 again the Ace will be wasted. Leading small to the Queen and back to the King doesn't work.
K62
- e) K654 The only way to make three tricks in this case is if an opponent has the Ace doubleton. If
AX? AX? West has it you lead towards the King and duck the return. If east has it then you lead towards
Q872 the Queen and duck the return. You cannot afford your second high card to be captured.
- f) J53 You make three tricks if the suit splits 3=3 – and you can make three if the suit splits 4-2 and a
AQ42 player has KX. If you think it is East play low to the Queen and cash the Ace: if you think it is
West then lead low to the Jack and cash the Ace.
- g) Q2 This is probably the simplest situation: You lead small to the Queen gaining whenever West
A654 has the King. (Known as the "Lob Finesse"). Leading the Queen cannot gain as East if they
have the King, will cover.

Finessing

Often you have two (or three) high cards missing and must finesse several times.

- h) Q96 Obviously you would prefer the opponents to lead this suit – but if you must then lead small
J54 to the Jack and then finesse the nine. This wins legitimately if West has the ten or East has the
AK (maybe even with the ten!): and East may go up with the Ace or ten on the first round.
- i) AJ9 You can make two tricks here if west has the Ten and either the King or the Queen. You finesse
432 the nine on the first round (which loses to the King or Queen) and you can then finesse the
Jack on the next round.
- j) AQT8 You often have a trump suit like that shown. The correct way to make the maximum
7654 number of tricks is to finesse the ten first and then the Queen. If you only need to make three
tricks then you finesse the Queen and then the ten! At pairs the first option is best.

Unless you have lots of high cards or entry problems, usually do NOT lead a high card when finessing.

- k) AT65 if you lead the Queen and West has a lone King then you will lose a trick to the nine. If you
K 9874 lead a small one then you make all four tricks. Sometimes you may be scared of losing a trick:
QJ32
- l) AKJT87 This situation often occurs. Finesse at the first opportunity or play a top honour first? The
32 correct play is to finesse on the first round. Both methods win if the Queen is doubleton or
trebleton. If the suit splits 4-1 the two finesses gain unless the Queen is singleton. (1 in 5)

The Ruffing Finesse

The ruffing finesse utilises the fact that you can trump a high card lying over the tenace. This assumes that you can afford a quick loser if your option fails.

- m) AQJT You could either lead the seven and finesse the Queen (if it loses then the JT are set up as extra tricks)
 or you could lead the 7 to the Ace and then play the Queen throwing away a loser if it isn't covered.
 7 If the finesse fails (West having the King) you have still set up two tricks to throw away losers.

Since you have the option of losing the trick to either East or West, your choice of which type of finesse to take will depend on whether you don't want East or West to win the trick if the finesse fails. If you don't mind losing a trick to East you take the normal finesse – if you don't mind losing the trick to West you take the ruffing finesse. Of course if you don't need the extra tricks then you might not take a finesse at all.

Discarding a loser when taking a ruffing finesse is a form of “loser on loser” play.

The “Chinese Finesse”

- n) A6 If West is likely to have the King, try the effect of leading the Queen from hand. West may
 KT2 J954 think you have the Jack as well and fail to cover – since the king cannot be captured. This works
 Q873 best against a good player (a poor one would cover) and is useful if you cannot afford a loser.

Planning the play

The most important time during the play of the hand is at trick one. Before you play a card you haven't made any mistakes and obviously the aim is to keep it that way. (The defender may have already made one on their lead!). You must therefore try and plan how to play the hand. This involves a LOT of thinking – and counting.

- How many losers do I have? (Cards that aren't winners are losers)
- How can I get rid of them? There are only two ways: 1. Ruff them in the hand opposite or 2. Discard them on winners in the hand opposite. (Many players never think of the second option – setting up dummy).
- How many winners do I have?
- How can I get extra tricks? This usually means finessing, ruffing or setting up suits by forcing out the opponents cards. The important point is that you must be able to set up these extra tricks before the opponents can get to your losers. This may mean, for instance, that you must play on a suit before losing the lead e.g. if you have a trump loser.
- What are the most likely ways of getting these extra tricks? For this you need to know some basic truths about distributions: If the opponents have an odd number of cards in a suit then they are likely (about 2 in 3) to be evenly split: if they have an even number of cards then they are likely to NOT be evenly split (again 2 in 3). If an opponent has lots of cards in a suit, then their partner is likely to have more cards in the other suits – and hence the honours. Any two designated cards are more likely to be split between the defenders than both be in the same hand.
- What does the opening lead suggest? Your opponent has made the best lead they could think of. If they lead a 2 then they probably have four cards in the suit to an honour (IMHO a bad lead, but many do it) and no longer suit or a sequence. If they lead a high card, then it could be in a sequence (without the card above). If the AK are missing and one isn't led, then their partner has at least one of them. If they lead dummy's suit then it is likely to be from a shortage – typically a singleton.
- How many points are outstanding?
- What does the opposing bidding/ lack of bidding suggest? If an opponent didn't open the bidding then they won't have 12 points – if they passed their partner's bid then they won't have 6. If they bid and responded and only 17 points are outstanding then the split is likely to be 11-6. If an opponent opened with a weak-2 bid then you know they have (usually) six cards in the suit and 6-9 points. This enables you to work out how many cards in the suit their partner has and if the bidder could have a decent card outside the trump suit.
- How many entries do I need to execute my plan? If you don't have them then try another.
- What other dangers are there? Can I take steps to avoid them?

Most mathematics in Bridge is counting to 13. Advanced mathematics is counting to 40. The only exception is that you need to know some basic distribution probabilities.

Play your cards Right – 2: To Cover or not? (defensive play).

You should always decide what you will do when declarer leads a high card either from his hand or dummy and you have an option BEFORE declarer does it! That way you will not betray the position of a high card if you duck.

High cards in defence need to be protected, just as much as when declaring, the more so since you will probably have fewer of them. You want to use your high cards to capture declarer's and, just like declarer, you want to lead UP towards partner's high cards – the only problem is that you must guess where they are. If you realise that your high card is doomed, then at least it should go out fighting – forcing declarer to use two high cards to capture it.

The overwhelming reason why you cover a card led through you is **PROMOTION**. Your aim is to promote lower cards that your side holds – and Remember that partner might hold those important cards. If they don't then you can't promote anything. Don't lead towards high cards in Dummy/ Declarer hand especially from your own.

You hold KT9 over dummy's Q74 and declarer leads the Queen. Do you cover? Yes! The King probably loses to the Ace and declarer (if they have it) cashes the Jack – but then your ten is good. If you duck the Queen then it wins and declarer (if he has the Jack), makes two more on a second finesse while your lovely T9 are wasted. The principle is that you **Cover a Single Honour led through you from dummy**. But only if there is a chance of promotion. If dummy has lots of trumps (5 or 6) and you have KX then there is nothing to promote when declarer leads the Queen. Perhaps declarer is only missing two trumps and hopes your cover will save a guess. Maybe he is missing three – in which case partner only has a singleton and it will fall this round. And should the singleton be the Ace it will eat up your King and your side loses a trick. So in general **you need a good reason to cover a trump lead**.

Every bridge player will have this happen to them at least once – and hopefully only once:

T876 This is the trump suit and declarer leads the Queen. Do you 'win' the trick with the King? If dummy
K5 has an entry then you shouldn't! if declarer had the AQ he would cross to dummy and finesse – so he
Q Led hasn't got the Ace – therefore partner has it – and it is probably a singleton.

If dummy has touching honours, then **don't cover the first one if you have the option of covering the second**.

QJ5 If (as east) you cover the Queen then declarer can finesse against your partner's ten and make
T432 K76 three tricks. If you duck, then they can't. This should be automatic since covering the Queen
A98 cannot promote the Jack – dummy has it! But covering the Jack promotes the ten.

If you have no option but to play your high card on the second round then you should cover the first. At least you are taking out two good cards that declarer has. If you duck declarer might lead Low from dummy on the next round and your high card gets decapitated at a reduced cost to the other side. You hope partner has a good holding.

QJ9 If you duck the Queen declarer makes three tricks. If you cover the Queen declarer may finesse
8765 KT the nine on the second round – your King might have been singleton and even if it was
A432 doubleton the second card is unlikely to be the ten. On other occasions you must hope that
partner has sufficiently good high spot cards to set up a trick.

It may help to try and work out what you would do with the combination in dummy if you were declarer.

AJ9 You saw this position last week. Declarer's correct play for two tricks is to finesse the nine and
KQ4 T876 hope you have the ten and an honour. So if you have both honours then you should usually
532 duck – and declarer ends up with one trick. Declarer may make two if you cover.

Holding up can also be an effective technique – here declarer is leading towards dummy.

KQT4 Declarer leads towards the King-Queen and it holds. He comes back to hand and leads
A73 J65 towards the QT. If you go up with the Ace then he makes three tricks. If you duck then he
might play the ten which is the winning play if the East-west cards were switched round.
982

So: If dummy has a tenace position don't make life easy for declarer. Make him guess. Sometimes he gets it wrong!

This is an exception

JT7		When declarer leads the Jack you must cover with the Queen! If you duck then declarer can
932	AQ84	then lead to the King and make two tricks. If you cover then declarer only makes one trick because
K65		partner has the nine. Always consider if partner could have a high card you can promote.

Sacrificing high cards

Nobody likes to sacrifice a high card – after all they could represent a trick, but you must remember that an entry to a long suit could represent three or more tricks. Losing one trick to save three is a good return on investment.

AJT765		If dummy (North) has no entry to the long cards, South will lead the nine, prepared to lose
Q4	K32	one trick on a finesse, but then make the rest of the tricks with a second finesse. If East goes
98		up with the Queen on the first round, however, declarer cannot run the suit no matter.

(If west ducks then East should duck as well. Declarer makes two tricks – better than five if East were to win but worse than the one they would have made if West had gone up with the Queen. In fact, declarer might duck the first trick and finesse the second playing West for KQ4 – and make no tricks at all!)

Nowhere is this more important than when dummy has an outside entry and a potential source of tricks in another suit.

A5		East is on lead. He can see that dummy has a powerful suit, but that he can hold up his Ace
KQJT98		until South has no more. Unfortunately, there is an entry to the strong suit in the form of an
J754	KT63	Ace. The answer? Get rid of that entry before the suit is set up. Play the King and, if South
32	A54	ducks, play another. As the cards lie this doesn't even cost a trick.
Q982		
76		

Free Bonus – PASS is not a 4-letter word.

I often see auctions where players who have already limited their hand will continue to overcall on inadequate values. Often their partner will be very short in the suit – and frequently has a good holding in the opponents'!

- When you have said everything, you should pass.
- You have a partner. Do not take unilateral or impulsive actions when they still have a choice to call.
- You do NOT win an auction necessarily by becoming declarer – you can also win it by having the opponents over-reach themselves (just what you are about to do!) or end up in the wrong contract.
- Weak players never consider sacrificing. Better players understand that a sacrifice can be profitable. Even better players consider whether the opponents will actually make their contract. IN general do NOT sacrifice if you can see how to hold the opponents to their contract.
- If you have a distributional hand, remember that the bad distribution may cause problems for declarer.
- Do not sacrifice with a balanced hand. Your side is short of high cards so needs long suits and trump tricks to make the sacrifice worthwhile.
- Do not overcall 1NT with a 1NT hand i.e. balanced hand of your own – that hand will defend quite well.
- Do not bid if opponents bid your best suit.

Of course, your partner must be prepared to consider the auction. Your pass does not say “Let them play the hand” – it says, “I have nothing further to say.” Which is a slight but important difference.

Take a typical example – you have 5 good hearts and a boring 11 point hand. The bidding goes 1 Heart, Pass, 1 Spade, 2 Clubs (on your right-hand side).

You PASS. That PASS tells your partner exactly what you had. If you had six hearts or three card support for partner then you can rebid the suit or raise your partner. Each option tells your partner that you had more than a minimum hand with no fit. That 2 Clubs bid saved you the necessity of making a rebid: take advantage of it when you can.

Play your cards Right – 3: To draw or not draw trumps (Declarer Play).

Your trumps are your most vital asset: amongst other things they can be used to ruff losers, or help set up a suit. They can also be used as entries to enable you to get to dummy (and back again). Trumps also give control – something we will deal with later.

The maximum number of tricks you can make with your trumps is the total number of trumps you have – a complete cross-ruff. Every round of trumps that you make to draw the opponents trumps reduces this (hypothetical) figure by one. So, you must make sure that you use your trumps effectively before entering the humdrum task of drawing them. Drawing trumps is basically the last thing you do with them – although when the time is appropriate it is the first thing you do.

- Draw trumps as soon as you have made use of them or you are concerned about opponents ruffing winners
- Do NOT draw trumps if you need them for other purposes – ruffing losers or setting up winners.

S AKQ74	S 6	If spades are trumps you expect to make 4 spade tricks (there is a loser) three diamonds (after losing the AK) and 2 clubs. = 9 tricks. You also expect a heart loser. The important point is that you cannot afford the opponents to ruff a diamond with a losing trump. You therefore draw 3 rounds of trumps and play on diamonds. 9 tricks
H 5	H KQ6	
D QJ862	D T95	
C AK	C J98742	

S AKQ74	S 6	If diamonds are trumps it is a completely different kettle of fish. You have what is known as SLOW losers – ones that turn up several tricks into the suit – in Spades. You must therefore aim to ruff a spade loser in the short trump hand. You therefore do not touch trumps until you get that ruff. If you play a round opponents might draw them all and leave you without one in dummy for the vital task of ruffing the spade. 10 tricks.
H 5	H KQ6	
D QJ862	D T95	
C AK	C J98742	

A count of losers and winners will usually warn you of the dangers of drawing trumps. Remember that the only way to get rid of losers is to either trump them or throw them on a long suit. If you need to trump them then you should aim to do that as quickly as possible: you may need to trump cards in the long suit to set it up.

S KQJT9	S 863	You are in three spades and a club is led. You have a slow club loser, a spade loser possibly two heart losers (if the Ace is in the North hand) and a Diamond loser. BUT you can ruff that second heart loser – provided you don't let the opponents play three rounds of trumps. You play a heart to the King, cross to dummy with a club and lead a second heart to the Queen (as described in the first article). If the Ace beats one of them, you can ruff the third round as the opponents can only play two rounds of spades. If you play a trump, then the opponents might be able to play two more rounds when they get in with the Ace of hearts – and you are left with an extra heart loser.
H KQ6	H 95	
D A7	D 8642	
C 953	C AK64	

Crossruffing

Crossruffing is the most efficient use of your trumps: you use one trump to take one trick. One side effect of this is that you lose trump control so you **must cash outside winners before embarking on the cross-ruff**. The result is that the opponents remaining trumps are used to ruff their winners – not yours.

	S QT76	The QH is led (a trump would have worked better). You have the nine top trumps, the AK of Diamonds, and the Ace of Hearts. If you cash the diamonds you will indeed make 12 tricks (you need to ruff five clubs and only 4 hearts so make sure that the first ruff is a club to balance the hand.) and West will have the dubious pleasure of under-ruffing on tricks 11 and 12. If you don't cash the diamonds, West will discard a diamond and ruff one and will make a long trump as well.
	H 5	
	D A74	
	C 87532	
S 542	S 3	SO: Win the Ace of hearts, cash the King and Ace of Diamonds and then just keep trumping Clubs and Hearts. If you draw three rounds of trumps, then you lose three tricks. NB ensure you can't be over-ruffed and a trump returned for as long as possible. (This is the classic defence against a cross-ruff).
H QJT864	H K	
D J5	D QT962	
C J6	C AKQT94	
	S AKJ98	
	H A9732	
	D K83	
	C -	

Ruffing in the long trump hand.

This does not (usually) gain a trick and can weaken your trump control. **So don't do it unless you have a plan.** I can think of THREE main reasons here. (A fourth is.... Well, you'll just have to wait)

- Setting up a long suit for discards. This should always be on your mind if the hand with the long suit has lots of entries. Once the long suit is set up you can throw your losers (dump 'em) on the long cards.
- If you can ruff more than once you may be able to change the long trump hand into the short trump hand e.g. 5-4 becomes 3-4 and gain one or more tricks. Normally you use dummy's trumps to ruff losers and your own trumps to draw the opponents' trumps – but if dummy has strong trumps you can reverse the process: use your trumps to trump losers and dummy to draw them. In fact, this is called a **dummy reversal**.

S A9864 You (South) are in 7 hearts and a spade is led. You have 11 winners (1 spade, 5 hearts, 1 diamond and
H QJ9 4 clubs). You can't ruff a diamond without conceding one so you appear to have two losers.

D A7
C AQ8 Now pretend that you are North – you have 4 spade losers and a diamond loser. BUT that diamond
can be thrown on the fourth club – and South can ruff all those spade losers – they have 5 trumps!

S 3
H AKT64 So: Win the Ace and ruff a spade, cross to dummy with a diamond and ruff a spade, cross to dummy
D 963 with a club and ruff a spade, cross to dummy with a club and ruff the last spade. Provided you have
C KJ42 used the Ace and King of hearts to ruff, you can now draw trumps and the diamond goes on the club.

Note the ruff with the Ace and King of Hearts. You MUST be in a position at the end to cross over to dummy – often in the trump suit - which means that you must be left with a small heart. Indeed, ruffing with top trumps in the long trump hand is a standard feature of a dummy reversal – as is the requirement for lots of entries to ruff losers.

- Ruffing with small trumps before the defence can use their top trumps to draw them.

S AK742 S 63 You are in 2 spades on the 2H lead. Your trump suit is pretty ropey so your best chance of
H 5 H AJ84 making tricks with them is to use them to ruff hearts. So: Win the lead and ruff a heart, cross
D 842 D AK93 to the Ace of diamonds and ruff a heart, cross to the King of diamonds and ruff the fourth heart
C 8642 C Q95 That is six tricks, and you have the AK of spades to come. Remember: count winners/ losers.

This technique is called “**Trump Elopement**” – as is usual when this happens you will find that the opponents high trumps (likely two of them) will be used to ruff their own winners at the end. Trying to draw trumps is hopeless.

Don't be forced.

One problem if you don't have many trumps is that the opponents might be able to force you into reducing the number of trumps you have in the long trump hand. To avoid the force you can aim to throw losers (or maybe even winners!) and hope that dummy's trumps (the short trump hand) can eventually come to the rescue

S AKQT S J74 You are in 4 spades and the opponents start off with the AKQ of hearts. If you ruff in your hand
H 63 H 872 then you are down to three trumps – and it is likely (with 6 trumps outstanding) that one of
D 986532 D AK the defenders will have more trumps than you. Instead you simply throw a diamond on the
C A C 86542 third heart. Dummy can ruff a fourth round without you reducing your trump length.

So: if you can afford to lose a trick but not trump control then don't accept the force. Of course in some circumstances the opponents can repeat the force. If that looks to be the case then you might have to ruff anyway.

Summary

Trumps are your most important asset – and greatest danger. You must therefore plan whether you intend to draw trumps and establish winners or if you need your trumps for other purposes. Cash outside winners – other than needed entries before embarking on a crossruff or trump elopement. Ruffing in the long trump hand per se doesn't help: do so if you will use the short-trump hand to draw trumps or you need to set up a long suit.

Play your cards Right – 4: The Trump Lead – and after (Defence).

Every trump the defence has sows FUD (Fear, Uncertainty, Doubt) in the mind of declarer, which is why quite often they draw trumps (or trump with a high trump) when they shouldn't. A trump lead will probably reduce the defence's trumps by two and this is usually to the benefit of declarer. So, we must decide when we should lead trumps. The default position is: do NOT lead trumps unless the other suits have high honours (AKQ) in them.

We saw last week that declarer basically has three options in a suit contract: -

1. Draw trumps and then set about establishing tricks (which may involve ruffing of course)
2. Ruff a few losers/ set up tricks and then draw trumps. E.g. a dummy reversal/ trump elopement
3. Cash winners and then ruff everything in sight – the cross ruff - which may involve losing a trick to get going

If declarer plans option 1 then a trump lead is obviously poor – it plays into declarer's hands. However, if declarer is planning (or has forced upon him) to NOT draw trumps then the defence should do that for him.

How do we know that declarer is going to rely on ruffs? **Listen to the bidding!**

1H – 1S On this auction dummy has preferred clubs to hearts – he will be very short in hearts so a trump lead is suggested. Any time dummy prefers declarer's second suit, a trump lead is indicated.

There is one exception to this – if you have a very poor holding in declarer's first suit, they might be able to set it up by finessing through partner. In such a case a more aggressive lead is indicated. A trump lead can also be effective against 2-suited overcalls, under the same circumstances and for the same reasons.

1H – 3H Declarer has shown a balanced hand with the 3NT rebid, and yet Dummy has gone for the harder
3N – 4H contract. The must have some shape – so lead a trump to reduce ruffing values.

1S – 2C Dummy (and declarer) have implied 3-suited hands (declarer is short in clubs, dummy in Diamonds

2D – 2H A crossruff looks imminent – so a trump lead looks the best bet to reduce the cross-ruff.

3H – 3S (Dummy is almost certainly 3=4=1=5 and declarer 5=3=4=1)

4S – PASS

If a trump lead is indicated, then **do not be afraid to lead one** even with alternatives such as an AK – you may get in with the A and lead another. If the lead costs a trick, then if you have managed to stop a ruff in the short trump hand you have broken even: if the lead did not cost a trick, then you have gained. You should always lead your lowest trump: partner might have a singleton honour. Even with AXX a small trump is usually best: if the defence can get back to play in time, then THREE rounds may be played.

Sometimes a defender must seize the initiative. Here it is apparent that declarer is going for ruffs.

S QJ5 South is in four spades and partner starts off with the Ace and another trump (great start).
H 4 Declarer wins in Dummy and leads a heart! **Since declarer isn't drawing trumps he must be aiming to ruff a heart loser** with dummy's last trump. Partner won't have another trump so
D QJ73
C AJ864 East must go up with the King of Hearts and hope it wins the trick. (There is JUST room for
S 872 Partner to have AJX of hearts) If it does win then the third trump kills the heart ruff and we
H K63 hope that declarer can only make 4 spades, 4 diamonds (If partner has the AH declarer must
D 962 have the AK of diamonds and a club singleton to excuse his bidding) and a club.
C KQT3 Remember: what is bad for declarer is good for the defence.

The best time to lead trumps is when you have two or three. This is when it is least likely to cost a trick. A singleton trump is a bad lead as it is leading through partner's strength up to declarer's – exactly what declarer would do if he were going to play trumps – but with the added advantage that he doesn't have a guess. If you have four trumps, then a lead from a long suit might cause declarer to lose trump control: don't play for a ruff with four trumps unless it is clear that declarer/ dummy will have at least six. Don't aim to ruff at the cost of a natural trump trick. Leading a trump when you have five is recommended. Partner almost certainly has none – so you are pulling 2 for 1.

Remember: try and hold onto high trumps – in particular trumps that can over-ruff dummy. When declarer embarks on a crossruff then you may be able to over-ruff and return a trump.

The forcing defence.

S J7	At first glance this looks an easy 4 spade contract by South – he has 5 spades, a heart
H K 864	and four clubs once he forces out the Ace. A trump lead makes life easy – declarer
D K742	adopts plan 1 from above: draw trumps and goes about setting up club tricks. If a
C QJ5	diamond is led then it is completely different. Declarer must ruff the second diamond
S 8642	S 93 or he has four losers, and when he forces out the Ace of clubs then the third round of
H AJ3	H T975 diamonds forces him to ruff again and then West has one more trump than he has.
D QJT3	D A965
C 84	C A63 Remember – a trump lead is a very passive defence. Lead one with the aim of
S AKQT5	reducing ruffs or if the lead from another suit is too dangerous. (This especially applies
H Q2	because if you have values in three suits then your hand is almost certainly the
D 8	stronger so partner will be weak – and we all know that you lead up to honours not
C KT972	away from them, don't we? Conversely an honour from a weak hand may pay off).

Note that it is a good idea to lead trumps if the opponents are known to be weaker in high cards and your side has all round strength i.e. you do not expect declarer to be able to set up a second suit. This can happen in a competitive auction when the other side has overcalled and raised a particular suit and you can tell (from partner's opening bid) that your side has the balance of strength.

When partner is marked with strong trumps

This usually happens when you make a take-out double of an opening bid, or a balancing double and partner passes it! (The balancing position follows 2 passes – you can either pass out the auction or take some action).

1S – X – P – P!	In either of the cases on the left, partner is marked with a strong sequence of trumps and the
P	aim is to prevent declarer from making his small trumps by ruffing. Once his trumps are drawn
1S – 2C – P – P	THEN you can go about cashing your outside winners. (Note you aren't on lead in the second
X – P – P! – P	case: the advice is what to do when you DO gain the lead.)

A couple of points here: 1. If you do overcall with hands with poor spot cards then be aware that you are putting your head on the block. Spot cards are important! Your RHO has announced strength and your LHO could have values as well so you need some source of tricks – and that will inevitably be the trump suit – so it must be of quality. 2. Many players will pass a take-out double with lots of weak trumps. This is NOT recommended – the opener sits over you with good trumps and an opening hand – and only needs 7 tricks to make the contract. In such a circumstance, the best bet is probably to bid 1NT (or higher depending on your strength).

On NOT over-ruffing.

Whilst it is usually a good idea to trump/ over-ruff with weak/ moderate cards, it is not a good idea to over-ruff with an honour especially if there are tens and nines supporting it. Equally you should be wary about over-ruffing with a natural trump trick – although you may have to do so - for instance to play a trump.

S AQJ	Partner leads a suit in which both you and dummy are void – and declarer ruffs with the Jack
S KT2	if you over-ruff with the King then the T2 fall under the AQ – but if you discard you will make
	both the King AND the ten.
S 53	Again let us suppose South and west are void in the same suit – and South ruffs with the ten.
S J742	S Q8 If you over-ruff with the Jack then South can draw the remaining trumps. If you don't then
S AKT96	not only is South down to the same number of trumps as West BUT west will make TWO trump
	tricks – one with the Jack and one with the seven! Yes, even 7s (and lower trumps) can get
	promoted.

A final note: as mentioned before – don't waste your trumps on ruffing losers. Every trump you have is a thorn in declarer's backside. Don't waste them unnecessarily.

Bidding Advice: Bidding NT is NEVER a rescue bid. If partner takes you out of NT they don't want to play in NT.

Play your cards Right – 5: Trump Control (Declarer Play)

The trumps are your most valuable asset – after all you risked bidding to have the right to choose them. To go with the power to trump losers and set up long suits comes the idea of Trump control. Only trumps can control another suit.

S AKQT5	S J6	This is a pretty obvious example. Playing in no trumps you have no control of the diamond suit. Opponents can make at least five diamond tricks – and perhaps more depending on the distribution. If you play in a trump suit, however, you control the third round of diamonds. There is no need to ruff any losers – but you make 11 tricks!
H K4	H AQJT6	
D 83	D 75	
C K842	C AQJ6	

If you don't have trump control then you may not have time to establish it. Always look at slow losers. A slow loser is one that arises when you lose control of a side suit. If possible you should arrange to set up tricks to discard it.

S K84	S A73	North leads a spade against your four heart contract. You have three aces to lose and that seems all – BUT if the defence knocks out your second top spade they have exposed another loser. You MUST set up a winner to take care of it before you lose the lead. Play the King of diamonds (and another if they duck) - not a small one or the suit will be blocked. Did you notice something else? You must get to the third diamond trick quickly. The only quick entry is the Ace of spades – so you must win the first spade with the King to keep the Ace as an entry.
H KJT74	H Q65	
D K3	D QJ84	
C QJ5	C K73	

When you have a choice of trump suits.

Surprisingly if you have the choice of trump suits, it may not pay to play in the biggest fit! You want to play in the suit that is more evenly spread between the two hands.

S J74	S AKQ82	if you play in spades then you make 11 tricks (5 spades, 4 hearts and two aces), but if you play in hearts then you make 12 tricks since you can draw trumps in three rounds, play the spades discarding two losers, and then ruffing one. This illustrates the importance of a 4-4 fit. You can ruff in one hand and keep control in the other.
H QJ63	H AK85	
D 873	D A5	
C A64	C 93	

Don't draw the last top trump.

If the opponents are left with a top trump then you should usually ignore it. Why use two of yours when you don't have to?

S KQ5	S AJ6	You are in two hearts and South leads a diamond to North's Ace and a trump comes back. You run this to towards the ten but South wins with the Jack and leads a club. You have no real choice but to play the King – but it loses and another trump comes back. Since you have diamond losers you need to ruff you must go up with the Ace.
H T864	H AQ73	
D 73	D K642	
C K842	C 73	

You now Play King of diamonds and ruff a diamond, spade to the Jack and ruff your fourth diamond. Now cash the other two spades – you make 3 spades, 1 diamond, two diamond ruffs and two hearts (The Ace and you have two left in the East hand with only one outstanding.) if the opponents ruff one of your winners you don't mind – you now have two heart tricks instead of only one.

Beware of surrendering trump control when an opponent might have four trumps.

S AK84	S 7653	A club is led against 4 spades. When you win with the Ace the only controls that you have in the club suit are trumps. If trumps split 4-1 then if you draw trumps and set up the diamonds, the defence might play two more rounds of trumps and then nothing can stop them running the clubs.
H KQ62	H A84	
D 5	D KQJT7	
C A863	C 7	

The solution is to set up the diamonds while you have trump control of the clubs. NOW you can play two rounds of trumps and then cross to the Ace of Hearts and play diamonds throwing away clubs.

When you have trump control as well as normal control.

Occasionally a defender leads a suit in which dummy has a void and you have the Ace (or King). Your plan of action depends on circumstances. You can discard a loser and win with the ace: you can discard a loser and after the defence take their ace, discard a loser on the King. Either play, however, means that the only control you have left in the suit is with your trumps – and if you draw trumps you might lose that. It may be better to ruff – that way you retain control in the suit with the high card even after trumps have been played.

When trump control is in the balance.

Many declarers start the play of the hand in a haze of optimism unjustified by mathematics. If trump control is at risk it usually pays to duck a round, so that you can play a second and then proceed to the rest of the hand. If you play Ace and another then the opponents can play a third round. Here is an example of a hidden danger.

S AKQ8 S 742 Playing in 4 spades North cashes the AK of diamonds and then plays a heart. If trumps split
H AK73 H 862 3=3 then you have 11 tricks (4 trumps, 2 hearts, 5 clubs). But trumps are more likely to split
D 94 D 63 4=2 and if you play three rounds the defender with the remaining trump will ruff the third
C J84 C AKQ73 round of clubs and you still have one or two hearts to lose as you can't get to the clubs

The solution: Duck a spade. You can win the return and play three more rounds of spades, getting rid of all of them when the suit splits 4-2. You can now play on clubs. By giving up a trump trick you ensured two extra club tricks.

Setting up the Dummy.

A blind spot with many players is to set up dummy's long suit and then use trumps to get to it. This is usually explained as "drawing trumps ending in dummy". It all depends on entries.

S AKQJ5 S T73 North leads a heart against 4 spades. South wins and returns a trump (he can see dummy will
H K64 H J5 be ruffing hearts and clubs if he does nothing). If you try and ruff a club the defence will lead
D 86 D A97532 another trump and you will have 1 trump in dummy to ruff two losers. Not easy!
C AJ4 C 62 The solution is to win in hand and duck a diamond. (preserving the trump and diamond entries).
You win the return (you still have the KH remember) and play Ace and another diamond, ruffing high. Provided the
trumps and the diamonds split 3-2 you can now cross to the ten of spades on the third round of trumps ("drawing
trumps ending in dummy") and play your diamonds throwing your three losers on them. Note the importance of NOT
ruffing that heart loser. By ruffing a heart (and gaining a trick), you lost the ability to set up and enjoy the diamonds (3
tricks.)

Summary

- Trumps give you control of a suit enabling you to switch and develop other suits.
- With weak trump suits try and set up side suits or ruff losers or the defence may draw your trumps.
- Ducking may enable you to keep control as you can choose whether to just draw one more round or two. If opponents have control then they have the choice (and will usually play two more rounds).
- An even trump fit (4=4) is more flexible than an uneven one (5=3) as you can ruff in one hand and keep control in the other – and use a 5=3 fit to throw away losers.
- If dummy has trump entries it may be better to set up the dummy for discards than ruff losers.

Bonus feature on bidding. Misfits

This must have happened to you several times – you have two nice suits, but partner keeps bidding the other ones. What do you do?

The answer is simple: when there is evidence of a misfit then you stop bidding! You may be in a poor contract but continuing to bid will almost certainly make it worse. On no account should you consider bidding no trumps unless you have substantial values and either a good semi-solid suit (as a source of tricks) or good 2-card support for partner – QX as a minimum, KX or AX preferably. This also happens when partner overcalls – the overcall is usually based on a good suit, not so much on high cards, so if you have a singleton in their suit then this is bad news. It doesn't mean that you shouldn't bid – but you should have decent values and a decent suit of your own e.g. a six-card suit – partner promised at least 5.

Play your cards Right – 6: Attack in Trump contracts (Defence)

As mentioned, you can win tricks with High cards and trumps (you are unlikely to win many tricks with long suits when declarer has control of them with their trumps – see the last article). So as defender you must decide whether you can make any tricks with small trumps before declarer can draw them. If you can't then your decision must be whether to play an active defence (try and set up high cards before declarer can set up their own high cards for discards) or a passive defence – i.e. make declarer do the hard work themselves and hope some tricks fall into your lap.

If declarer is in a low contract, then the defence are more likely to have high cards e.g. the split may be 20-20 or something like that, whereas if the declarer is in a game contract, they are likely to have 25 or more – leaving fewer points (15) for the defence. If you add the appropriate figure to your high cards **and subtract the total from 40**. then you have a rough estimate strong your partner is. Whilst not forgetting the principle of leading up to high cards, not from them (especially in trump contracts) an estimate of partner's strength may help you plan your attack. The stronger your hand, the less likely partner can help you in a suit: the weaker, then your few points may help set up tricks for partner.

Singleton Leads

Easily the best lead to make – you hope that partner can win the trick and give you a ruff, or they can get in before all the trumps are drawn and give you a ruff. If partner is known to be weak and there is no chance of putting them in, then a singleton lead might not be best – it may expose partner's QXXX for instance saving a 2-way finesse.

Doubleton leads

Doubleton leads (again especially from weak hands) aren't as bad as many people fear. The aim is not so much to get a third round ruff but to hope that partner has some high cards in the suit and you can set them up by leading towards them (see article 1). Again, with a strong hand a doubleton lead may not be as aggressive – but ok passive.

Has partner led from a doubleton or singleton?

Often you have the Ace of the suit (and perhaps no other entry). If partner has led a singleton you want to go up with the Ace and give a ruff – if he has led a doubleton then you need to duck a round first, hope partner has a trump trick and then win the second round and give him a third-round ruff. Well? In fact, the answer is to COUNT. If partner has a singleton what does that leave declarer?

S Q3 You opened 1C on the East hand, South overcalled 1 Spade and after North bid 2 Diamonds
H 875 rebid 2 hearts which was passed out. Partner leads the nine of clubs. Is it a singleton?
D AQ964
C JT3 South has shown 9 cards in the majors. It is unlikely they hold KQ65 as well in clubs – and if
S K64 they haven't then the 9 isn't a singleton. It is likely to be a doubleton (leaving South with three)
H J6 so duck the first club and hope partner can get in with a trump (he probably has four if South
D KJT has four: count them!) then you can win the second club he plays and give him a third round
C A8742 ruff.

When partner has the singleton or doubleton.

If you have a lot of cards in a suit bid by declarer and dummy it is possible to realise that partner is short. Instead of trying to get a ruff, by leading a short suit, you aim to give a ruff by leading a long suit.

S QJT Declarer is in 4 hearts after the auction: 1H – 2D – 3D – 3H – 4H. Declarer therefore has 7 or 8 diamonds
H K6 in the two hands. So, lead a diamond (the two to tell partner your entry is on clubs). Even if partner
D 87532 doesn't ruff this time, he will almost certainly ruff the next and may get another ruff when you get in
C A64 with the Ace of clubs. Without diamond length the SQ would be best aiming to set up spade tricks.

Trump Promotion

This has been mentioned before – but if partner gives you a ruff and you are relatively short in the trump suit then you should ruff with your highest trump (not the Ace!). If declarer over-ruffs then his high trump only drew one of the defender's trumps, not two, and so has been used inefficiently. Partner's intermediate trumps have been promoted and declarer may now be subject to a force. Declarer has a counter in that they can throw a loser instead – which means you should cash your winners before going for a trump promotion.

S K84 After an auction of 1H – 2C – 2H partner starts off with three top diamonds and all follow. He then
H 65 leads the 13th Diamond (conceding a ruff and discard!) declarer discards a spade from dummy. What
D 853 is your plan?
C KQJ84

S QT73 You ruff with the Queen of hearts. Hopefully partner has four trumps or three good ones and
H Q7 because you ruffed with the Queen they have been promoted. Even T832 will now make two
D 974 tricks (Declarer plays off his two high trumps (AJ) but his next one is the nine).
C A532

Don't ruff losers!

Often declarer will lead a card towards dummy when a defender is void – and the defender decides to ruff. This is usually pointless if declarer can discard a loser – and can even cost tricks.

AKJ74 AKT5 In each case Declarer plays the Ace from dummy, crosses to his hand
3 QT82 or 4 QJ93 and leads a small one. As you can see, East will make one or two tricks
965 8762 with his high cards. If west ruffs he wastes a trump.

Make declarer guess!

Declarers cannot see through the back of the cards, so if you can present declarer with a guess then some of the time, they will guess wrong. Playing top cards in front of third position can quite often resolve the guess for declarer. You must be prepared to duck (smoothly) to give him a losing option. Ducking, as we have and will see, is an integral part of the game. Both as declarer and defender you must be prepared to duck.

S KJT5 The contract is 2 hearts by South and west leads the 2 of diamonds. It looks like
H T96 South will lose 2 spades, 2 diamonds and a trump (with the finesse against the queen
D QJ9 working).
C KQ5

S A842 S Q3 East wins the first diamond, decides not to set up the Queen and switches to a club.
H A7 H Q52 Declarer wins in dummy and runs the ten of hearts to the Ace in the West hand.
D T842 D AK63
C 762 C T984 West can see that declarer has no losing clubs, one losing diamond and probably no
S 976 losers in hearts. To defeat the contract the defence needs three spade tricks, so
H KJ843 West plays his partner for QX in spades (and South to have three of them). He leads a
D 75 small spade. If declarer goes up with the King then he makes the contract, but if he
C AJ3 finesses then East can win with the Queen, lead a spade back and get a ruff!

Punching dummy

Last week we discussed the tactic of setting up a long suit and then “drawing trumps ending in dummy”. If you can force dummy to ruff so that you have more trumps than dummy, or sufficiently good ones, you can stop this.

S AQ76 The contract is 6 spades and West leads the D7. The only defence is to win with the Ace and
H AKT932 play the King forcing dummy to ruff. Declarer can play heart to the Ace, ruff a heart, play a
D 3 spade to the Queen and ruff a heart setting up the suit – but now the only entry to dummy is
C 93 by overtaking the King (or Jack) of spades with the Ace – setting up East's ten.

S 32 S T95
H 76 H QJ54 If you find these diagrams hard to follow, lay out the cards on the table and observe what
D 97642 D AKT8 happens.
C J765 C Q2

S KJ84
H 8 This ends our discussion specifically on trump contracts. The next few weeks will concentrate
D QJ5 on No trump contracts where “Winning tricks with long suits” becomes more important both
C AKT84 for declarer and defenders.

Play your cards Right – 7: No trump contracts (Declarer)

Now we are into no trump contracts. There is now no way that declarer can use trumps to control suits: there is no way that they can ruff losers. All that declarer can do is win tricks with high cards and long suits. And it is likely that the defence are attacking him with their own long suits hoping to set them up first. What can the declarer do?

The key point is that it does not matter how many winners a player has in a suit. If they have no entry, then they cannot cash them. So, declarer's main aim is to disrupt communications: the usual method is by **holding up**. Before we start, please remember that there are 13 cards in each suit!

The hold-up play.

S A74 The contract is 3NT and West leads the King of Hearts. Declarer can see seven tricks in the form of
H 85 aces and Kings and can set up two more diamond tricks even if the finesse fails. So, what is the danger?
D AKJT8

C A73 The danger is that the finesse will fail and East will return a heart to West's five-card suit. The defence
take four hearts and the Queen of diamonds.

S K862

H A63 But wait: if West has five hearts then East has three. (This must be the case since the defence have 8
D 95 hearts between them.) If we hold up winning the Ace of hearts until the third round then East won't
C K942 have any left. If East happens to have 4 hearts then so does West (4+4=8) and we only lose 3 tricks.

Now suppose we know that East has the heart length (maybe he bid them) We can still hold up twice and win the third round – but if the finesse in diamonds fails then East will get in and cash his winners. The solution in this case is to cash the AK of diamonds and play another. If West (i.e. the finesse) wins he can't do any harm, but we have increased the chances should East have a singleton or doubleton Queen. If east had three to the Queen there is nothing we could do. **Don't take a finesse into the "danger hand" when it can be avoided.**

(If you don't recognise the term – a "danger hand" is the one that could do you damage if they get in.)

Avoidance Play

Sometimes we must take steps to ensure that the danger hand cannot obtain the lead.

S 54 East having bid spades, West leads one. Our only possible source of tricks is the club suit and the
H K732 finesse must be right to give us a chance. As usual we duck two rounds and then lead a club to the
D A86 Queen. It holds! What do we do next?
C AQ863

S A82 If you play the Ace then West might have a doubleton King, leaving East with the Jack as the master
H A842 club. You MUST come back to hand and lead a club towards the Ace. If West plays the King then you
D K73 let him make the trick – he can do no damage. If West plays anything else, then you go up with the Ace
C 752 confident that East cannot get in on the next round.

Holding up with TWO stoppers

Just because you have two stoppers it does not mean you can win the first trick.

S K62 Again the contract is 3NT and hearts is the danger suit – but we have two stoppers. Note that if the
H 84 diamond finesse fails we need a spade trick. So we face losing the lead twice. The solution is to duck
D AKJT5 the first heart, win the second. **And now play a spade setting up the extra trick.** If East has it and
C A74 returns a heart then we simply win and finesse in diamonds. If east has a fourth heart the suit split 4=4

S QT95 There is a fundamental principle here. When setting up tricks you should play first on the suit where
H AK3 you must lose a trick (here spades).

D 92

C K8632 NB Don't duck (with 1 or 2 stoppers) if the opponents might switch to a more damaging suit.

Holding up with two honours.

Sometimes what you do may depend on who you expect to get the lead. If you think that an opponent will get the lead and play through your remaining honour then you should duck. If you think that your other honour will be safe then you can afford to win. Also: watch out for tens and nines your side holds – they can boost the number of tricks that you can win.

- 76 If West leads the suit and East goes up with the King (or Queen) you have choices. If you think West will win a trick then you can go up with the Ace knowing that the Jack is safe. If you think that East will win a trick then you duck a couple of times, just as if the Jack was a low card.
AJ7
- 873 West leads the suit and East plays the Queen. If you think East will get in then you must duck or East will play their second card through the King enabling West to make several tricks.
KJ5 (Many players get this wrong in their desire to get started and set up their own suits!)
- T73 This situation is different. If you cover the Queen with the King then you have the T7 in one hand and the J5 in the other. That combination is good for a second stopper in the suit. If you duck then
KJ5 East returns the suit and you only make one trick.

The rule of Seven

This rule tells you how often you must hold up to break communication **when one defender has a five-card suit**. If a player leads the lowest outstanding card of the suit then they probably only have four. Pay attention. **Deduct the number of cards you have in the suit from seven and hold up (if you can) for that number of rounds**. Note that this rule does NOT APPLY if a defender is known to have four or six cards. You can deduct from eight/six instead.

Ducking

Ducking is basically the same as the hold up, but instead of breaking defenders' communication the duck is designed to maintain communication – in effect it creates an extra entry in the long suit,

- S A5 West leads a spade against 3NT: you play low from dummy but east wins with the King and knocks out
H 973 the Ace, which is the only entry to those lovely diamonds. At the moment the defenders have 3rd-
D AQ8642 round control of the diamond suit (with the K,J or T) so what can you do?
C J6

- Well the important point is that you must be in a position to win the third round of diamonds! This
S QJ74 mean that you must duck the first round and hope that the AQ will win the next two – i.e. a second
H AT64 round finesse. Since you must duck then you might as well play a low diamond from dummy. You are
D 53 there already and it will take a brave East to duck when holding something like K7 of diamonds.
C AK7

- S J843 Unlike most hands, this one came up on BBO. East opened 1NT and it was passed out and
H Q9 South led the Jack of Clubs.

- D KQJ83
C 73 To enjoy the long club, declarer must duck the first round. They can then win four club
S 975 S AQT tricks. In real life declarer (a good player) won the first trick with the Ace and only made three.

- H T8 H KJ65
D T74 D A962
C AKQ42 C 96

- S K62 As is so often the case, declarer rushed in to try and set up tricks and in their haste lost one
H A7432 to which they were entitled. Note, for reference, that when you have seven cards in a suit the
D 5 six cards are more likely to split 4-2 than 3-3. Playing on this, you should duck a club as you are
C JT85 more likely to make 4 tricks than five. (South might have switched – would help East.)

Ducking comes up again and again (it did last week and the week before, remember). I cannot emphasise too much the importance of accepting that the best course to win as many tricks as possible is often to lose one or two!

Play your cards Right – 8: Defending No Trump Contracts – defence.

If you decide to play an active defence (trying to set up tricks rather than make declarer do his own dirty work) then you should be aware that (against 3NT contracts in particular) your side is likely to be outgunned in terms of high cards – you cannot really expect your side to hold more than 14 points – unless it seems that declarer has based his contract on a long solid suit and a few stops on the outside. You must therefore try and set up tricks by length and, just as important, having an entry to cash them. A weak hand should therefore try and play for partner's long suit, whereas the stronger hand should play for their own suit. (the weaker hand will have 6 or fewer points) There is a lot to be said for a weak hand leading top of a strong 3-card suit (KQX, QJX), in the hope that it helps set up partner's five card suit. Six card suits tend to be unproductive unless you hold two or three entries to them.

A Major or a Minor Suit Lead?

Since we can assume that dummy would have transferred if they held a 5-card major or used Stayman with two (or even one) four card majors (and some players use Stayman without guaranteeing any four card major at all), there is a bias against declarer's side having many cards in the major suits. Even if North has used Stayman – the fact that South has denied a four-card major should not put you off. South has at least 7 cards in the minors and possibly 8.

So, lead a major at any sensible opportunity. If your hand is strong lead 4th highest, if your hand is weak then lead your shorter major suit – and hope that partner (if not a passed hand) has six or 5 of them.

If South has bid one major over Stayman and North has then bid no trumps – it may be better to look elsewhere: both sides have 4 cards (at least) in their respective major. If dummy transferred then lead the other major.

Leading from Long suits

If you do have a long suit that can be set up, you should lead small (4th highest) hoping that partner (if they can get in) has another to return. In my opinion leading from four card suits is over-rated: the potential benefits are marginal since it is likely that another player also has four. You should lead up to honours, not away from them.

Sequence Leads

When you have a sequence or near sequence of honours (KQJXX or JT8XX) lead the top one – and also lead the top of an internal sequence (AJTXX). The object is to prevent declarer winning a trick cheaply. If you DO have an entry to the good suit e.g. AQTXX then it may pay to lead the Ace – dummies have been known to contain KX or JX and you can then make the appropriate lead at trick two. If partner has a high card, then they can signal. (see below). With a good suit e.g. AKXXX and NO entry lead low – so partner can return the suit.

Unblocking

When partner seems to have led from strength, you must in third position make sure that the suit does not get blocked. This means that you must be prepared to overtake an honour led, so you can return the suit. E.g. with A4 if partner leads the King, or even the Queen, you should play the Ace so you can return the suit to set up winners that partner can cash. Do not do this if it would set up an extra trick for the declarer.

Signalling

Partner did not know what dummy would have when he led, but now both defenders can see what dummy contains. If you are not going to try and win the trick, then you must tell partner whether you want them to continue the suit when they regain the lead. The standard signal is to play a high card if you want partner to continue the suit and a low card if you want them to switch to another suit. The signal does not mean "I like the suit" or the converse. Sometimes you may have nothing in the suit, but don't want partner to lead through your high cards since that may help declarer. (There is some merit in playing "reverse" signals – a high card says "Please Switch", a low card means "Please continue" – sometimes called "High-Hate, Low Like".)

Returning Partner's suit

Unless you need to unblock you should return a high card unless you have at least four cards in the suit. This enables partner to work out declarer's holding.

65 Partner leads the 2, dummy plays the 6 and captures your Queen with the King. Since you only
AJ72 Q93 have three cards you lead the nine: declarer covers with the Ten and partner wins with the Jack
KT84 partner knows that declarer has the 84 under his A7 so switches to another suit.

65 This time you have four cards, so when you get in you return the 3. This tells partner that you had 4 AJ72
Q943 cards originally, therefore declarer only had three and his last card will fall under the ace and the
KT8 fourth round of the suit will be won by your four!

The Rule of 11

If you play fourth highest leads from length, then this rule helps you to work out what declarer might have. It is of course a two-edged sword in that Declarer can also work out what you have. Applying this rule can save you wasting your high cards. You simply note the spot card partner led, deduct the value from 11 and that tells you how many higher cards there are in the other three hands.

Q82 Partner leads the seven and declarer plays the two. Applying the rule of 11 tells us that there
AT3 are four cards higher than the seven out. And we can see them all. Therefore the ten will win.

AT4 Partner leads the six. This means that there are five cards (11-6) higher than the six in the
Q95 other hands. You can see four so declarer has one. If he has the King then if you go up with the Queen he will be able to finesse the Jack and make three tricks. If you play the nine declarer may win with the Jack but he cannot make more than two tricks. This is an application of the principle to keep a card that beats dummy's.

Finessing

Pay attention to partner's lead: can work out how many cards in the suit declarer has and if you should finesse.

JT95 Partner leads the three. This shows a four-card suit as it is the lowest out. This means that declarer
K872 only has one card in the suit (13-4-4-4) and it might be the Ace! So, play low and keep the King safe.

J53 Partner leads the two and declarer plays low. Again, we note partner has four cards in the suit and
KT64 declarer therefore has two: If he has the Queen he must make one trick. If he has the Ace, then if you go up with your King the Jack can be set up as an extra trick. So: play the ten

732 If dummy only has small cards, then you should in general play your highest card. Not to do so is
KJ64 called a "finesse against partner". (You don't want declarer to win a trick with Q5 do you?)

73 This is a different situation. When partner leads the suit, if you go up with the Ace then declarer
AQ4 (if they hold the king) will duck according to the rule of 7 (see last week). If you play the Queen, on the other hand, declarer will probably win with the King otherwise he might lose it altogether. (if partner has underled the AJ). The suit is then open (if partner has the Jack) to be run whoever wins the next trick. (If partner has the King it does not matter what you do)

Surround Plays

If you have two cards either side of dummy's highest card, and another honour, the best play is usually to lead the card that is just above dummy's.

972 The T8 "surround" dummy's nine. If you lead the ten then partner can capture one of
A65 QT84 declarer's high cards and then lead a card through the seven. Declarer makes one trick. If
KJ3 you lead the 4 (4th highest) declarer can run this to the nine and make two tricks.

Play your cards Right – 9: Suit Management - Declarer.

We are still in No Trumps (or at least situations where the opponents have no trumps!) and now we come to suit management: look at the four suits in turn and plan how you will handle them. Basically there are three types:

- Long Suits – these are suits you hope to set up to win your tricks by card length.
- Average Suits – ones where you won't gain many extra tricks, but are most flexible.
- Short Suits – these are the dangerous ones. Whilst you don't mind within reason losing tricks with long suits or average suits, short suits are your weakness. Your high cards are just stoppers and must be used to prevent the opponents setting up and enjoying their own long cards. Unfortunately, you only have 26 cards in the two hands so any time you have a suit with lots of cards in it, you will have a short suit. You will find that hands with both long suits and short suits will make more or fewer tricks than just with average suits. It depends on who wins the set-up race.

S J74 You are in 3NT and fortunately the defence start off with a spade. Clubs and spades are your short
H 53 suits, hearts is an average suit and diamonds is your long suit. You play low from dummy (let the trick
D AQT74 run up to high cards - here the 9 is useful). East plays the Queen – which is good news since it means
C 863 he can't have the ten – so you win with the Ace and know you have a second stopper if they lead it.
 Diamonds is obviously your first port of call as you hope to make 5 tricks there. Any problems? Well
S A95 only if one player has the J853. You play the Ace, or Queen and can then finesse either way.
H AQJ4 Hearts can make one or two extra tricks – but you will need an extra entry to dummy to take the 2nd
D K962 one. So, after playing the Ace/ Queen of diamonds you lead a heart. If the finesse wins you can use
C A5 the diamond suit as an entry for the second finesse. Don't waste entries because they are tricks.

An easy hand, but some might play a diamond to the King (losing to the 4-0 split) or cash all the diamonds before playing the hearts and so not able to take the second finesse. **You should not concentrate solely on one suit at a time. Plan how you will use the suits working together to maximise your trick potential.**

8-card suits with missing honours

On the above hand you had nine diamonds and could guarantee taking four tricks. If you have a 4=4 fit, however there is a good chance that both opponents will play to the first trick – but you must plan ahead.

AQT9: K642 → Play the Ace: If the Jack falls or someone shows out all well and good: if not you can finesse.

AQT2: K765 → Missing the nine you have only one way to finesse. Play the Ace and King. Then you can finesse.

AQT5: K876 → Play the Ace – if South drops the nine play the Queen – you can then finesse.

AQ92: K543 → Now play the King. If North plays the J or T you can play the Ace and finesse on the third round.

In each case you play a high card setting up a tenace with the ten or nine if the defence must play a high card

Avoiding ending up in the wrong hand when finessing

Plan your finesses before you take them. Work out what will happen. Very important if short of entries.

AQT3: J92 → Play the nine: if it wins you can then play the Jack (beating the ten) and take a 3rd round finesse. If you lead the Jack and it wins then the next time the ten will beat dummy's card and you are in the wrong hand.

J65: AQT → Play the Jack. Now you can play the ten and remain in the hand and finesse the Queen the next time.

AQT: 9742 → Finesse the ten first. Then you can finesse the Queen and pick up KJ(X) onside for no losers. If you finesse the Queen then even if it wins you must lose a trick to the KJ.

Blocking the opponents' suit.

This play is not known as well as it should be: -

A6: T742 → North leads a small card and South plays the nine. The rule of 7 suggests that you should hold up once BUT if you start thinking you should realise that North does NOT hold the KQJ – or he would have led one. That means that South has one (or two of them): This means that the suit is blocked. When the defenders gain the lead they cannot run the suit since North would have to overtake South's honour – setting up the ten. Always try and work out what a player would do if they held certain card combinations. If they don't do it, then they haven't got that combination.

KJ85		This is the situation after the first trick has been won with the Ace. As you can see, if North
6	T74	captures the Queen with the King, then the ten will stop the suit and if North ducks the Queen
Q		then South hasn't another one to play.

Creating Entries

To misquote Tal "Entries are the soul of Bridge". You should be very careful how you use them (an entry when needed can create many extra tricks) and plan accordingly. Sometimes you must create entries: -

KQ72: A863 → 4=4 fits often provide an extra entry. If the suit splits 3-2 then the fourth round is an entry to one hand or the other and by careful planning, you can choose. In this example after three rounds, you can either keep the 7 or 2 in the West hand, and the 8,6, or 3 in the East – so you can set up an entry to either hand

Overtaking a singleton honour with another is sometimes a good way to create an extra entry.

K: AJT98 → If you play the king and don't overtake then you need two entries to dummy – one to force out the Queen and one to get back to run the suit. If you overtake the King with the Ace, then you only need the one entry as you can force out the Queen immediately.

Don't get attached to high cards – sometimes it is best to get rid of them!

K63: QJ5 → North leads this suit, you play low and South goes up with the Ace. If you need an extra entry to the East hand, you can throw the King under the Ace. Playing the King is an unblocking play.

Returning the opponent's suit.

There are many situations where you would prefer the opponents to lead a suit – usually when you have a relatively weak suit of your own, or you have a choice of plays.

S J63	S K95	South leads a diamond and North plays the Jack. You have lots of chances, but the point is that
H KT5	H AJ6	if the defenders play a heart then you will make three hearts, and if they play a spade you will
D 874	D AQ6	make a spade trick. Win with the Queen, play three rounds of clubs and then the Ace. If North
C KQ63	C AJ42	follows exit with a diamond! South can take three diamond tricks but must then lead either a heart

or a spade – saving you a guess or letting you make the King of Spades. You lose 4 tricks and make nine.

You MUST learn to lose tricks (Have I said this before?). Failure means you are "Frightened of the fifth suit."

Percentage Plays

Hopefully you know that a finesse is about 50% and a 3=3 break a lot less than that. But when you have seven cards in a suit, the suit is likely to break 4-2 and there are several plays to take advantage of doubleton honours.

AQT963: 5 → Finesse the Queen – you can then drop the doubleton Jack. If you finesse the Ten then if the King doubleton wins, you must still lose a trick to JXXX.

AJ43: K65 → If you want three tricks, play Ace, King, and lead to the Jack. This avoids losing an extra trick to QX

AJT7532: - → After the Ace play a small one! If the suit splits 3=3 you have two losers no matter what you do. But if an opponent has KX (or QX) then if you play the Jack you will lose three tricks (to e.g. the Q9). For some reason players do not like to lead small cards in this position but remember. **Sometimes the opponents must play a high card in following suit when they don't want to.**

Play your cards Right – 10: More NT techniques – defence.

In this article we will discuss whether to lead partner's suit or our own, which card to lead, preserving communication to long suits, disrupting declarer's long suit.

When partner bids a suit should you lead it?

The answer is: probably! But remember that if partner opens a suit they might only have four in it (possibly a 3-card minor) and, above all there is no guarantee that they have the Ace or King. If they double 3NT then they are basically demanding that you lead the suit (and if you have a good suit then double!) An overcall (especially at the two level) promises a good suit. If partner has doubled a conventional call or bids a new suit at a high level then this is a request to lead the suit. With 3-card support it takes a lot to lead another suit – you need a good suit of your own **and entries to run** it once it has been established. With fewer cards then you must consider your options, but in general leading partner's suit is the best policy – at least you win the postmortem if things go wrong 😊!

The fact that partner has opened a particular suit does not mean that they have no values elsewhere! Suppose partner has opened "One Heart" and the opponents end up in 3NT.

J74 : T5: Q8642: K73 K63: 94: J7532: Q64	Lead a heart from hands like these – you have a weak hand and no good suit whilst partner has entries to his hand. (The ten or nine could help set up the suit as well!)
JT8642: 5: K73: Q72 possible KJ742: 6: K72: 8742	Now lead a spade: you have a decent suit if partner can help, and you have a possible entry with the King of Diamonds to enjoy it

What card in partner's suit should you lead?

With a doubleton lead the top card. With 3 small cards lead high if you have supported it, but lowest if you have not.

If you have an honour (AKQJ) then it is usually best to lead low if declarer is expected to have the stopper(s) but lead high if dummy has indicated strength in the suit. The former keeps your honour to capture one of declarer's: the aim of the latter is to retain the lead and continue to push the suit through dummy's strength.

74 J63 AQT	If you lead the Jack then South has three tricks – if you lead small then when partner gets in they can lead a card through South's ten and declarer only makes two tricks.
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If you have two touching honours, then standard technique is to lead the higher – Q from QJX

Preserving communications

There are many situations where you must hope that partner can get in and lead the suit again so you can win and clear it before your own entry is taken from you. Partner leads the nine of your suit: this could be the position.

A4 95 QJT	Suppose you only have one entry to your hand. If declarer ducks and you win with the King and play another then declarer still has a stopper so you won't be able to run the suit. BUT if you duck then when partner gets in they can lead the 5 and set up the suit while you have your entry intact.
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T2 6 led	Partner has probably led fourth highest to an honour. If you win with the Ace, declarer will duck and hold up according to the rule of 7. If you play the Queen declarer will probably win since they might lose the king altogether (if West has the AJ) – and now the suit can be run when the defence win a trick.
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I keep emphasising the importance of ducking at the right time. Has it sunk in yet?

Disrupting communications

Just as the defence are prepared to duck to preserve communications, so they must be prepared to jump in and play high cards to attack entries – usually to the dummy.

- S 874 West leads the QH against 3NT and observes that a) dummy has a good diamond suit and b)
H 63 the only entry to the diamond suit is actually in diamonds. When declarer plays a diamond
D AJT95 west must be prepared to insert the King! If declarer wins with the Ace then there are no
C 842 entries to dummy. Declarer might duck the first round and play the Ace on the second, hoping
S KQ63 S 952 that East has the Queen doubleton.
H QJT5 H 842
D K84 D Q73 Why should declarer not finesse on the second round? Because if West had the KQX in
C 73 C JT96 diamonds they should duck the first round to avoid setting up a finesse position.
- S AJT
H AK97 The next example is a bit flashier and has a name “The Merrimac Coup”. (Named after a ship
D 62 that was deliberately sunk in a harbour to block it.). A Similar coup is the Deschappelles coup
C AKQ5 where a defender leads an unsupported high card to create an entry to partner.
-
- S A4 South opens 1NT (12-14) and North raises to 3NT (wouldn't you?): partner leads the 2C and
H 73 your Queen loses to the Ace. You know partner has 4 clubs (why?) and therefore declarer also
D AQT8642 has 4 clubs to the AK (why?). Declarer leads a diamond and finesses. What do you return?
C 75
- S K63 South has another diamond (why?), so he can set up the diamond suit.
H JT95 BUT the only entry to the diamonds is the Ace of Spades. How do you get rid of it?
D KJ3
C Q64 You lead the King of Spades! If South ducks you lead another. Bye-bye diamonds!

Signals

It is important, when declarer leads a suit that defenders signal their length – usually a high card in the suit shows an even number and a low card an odd number. This enables their partner to **count** the suit and work out how many cards in the suit declarer has.

- S Q4 West leads the Jack of hearts and declarer wins with the Queen and leads the King of clubs.
H 875 Naturally East holds up and declarer leads the Queen. Should East hold up again (correct if
D K63 South has three clubs) or win the second round (correct if South only has two clubs)? It is clear
C KQJT4 I hope that dummy has no entries other than clubs as East can capture the QS or the KD.
- S K75
H 642 The answer depends on the club that West played. There are 8 clubs visible: if West played a
D A875 a high club on the first round it means they had two clubs – so declarer had 3 (13-8-2) and
C A65 East must hold up again. If West plays a low club, he had three, so declarer only 2: so win!

Counting is the sine-qua-non of defensive play. Count points, suit lengths, and tricks – it will help enormously.

Switching

Returning partner's suit is usually a good idea, but when it is not likely to set up tricks you must be prepared to switch suits and hope that partner has a suitable holding in that suit. In general lead through strength and up to weakness (I have discussed Surround Plays already) or try and set up tricks.

- S QT94 West leads a small spade and declarer plays the nine. What can you do?
H KQ
D K73 Spades aren't going to make many tricks so you might as well win – but what are you going to
C QT64 switch to?
- S A85
H 9642 Diamonds look the most promising and it might be tempting to play the Queen or Jack - but
D AQJ5 you don't have to. Just play the five. Even if declarer wins cheaply, if partner can get in (maybe
C 75 with the KC or AH) they can play another diamond through the K7 and you get three tricks!
(If you lead the Queen or Jack declarer will stop the suit if they have four to the ten!)

Play your cards Right – 11: Reading Defender's Cards (Declarer).

Before we start. Please revise articles 1-10 so you are comfortable about setting up tricks and stopping the opponents from making theirs. We are now half-way through the series. This is probably the most important one!

The average bridge player is inattentive, lazy, illogical, and innumerate. I want you to overcome these traits.

The basics of reading defender's cards.

- There are 13 cards in every suit. You know where yours and dummy's are: if you can find out how many cards one defender has in a suit then you know how many cards the other defender has in the suit.
- Every bridge hand contains 13 cards. If you know how many cards in three suits a defender has then you can work out how many cards they have in the fourth suit.
- Every bridge deal contains 40 high card points. You can count your own points and that tells you how many points the opponents have. If you can work out how many points one player has then you know how many points their partner has – and if they have shown them all you play their partner for the remainder.

That is all it takes is: paying attention, making deductions and inferences. Regrettably lacking in many players.

Bidding and not bidding - inferences

Every bid an opponent makes conveys information. They open 1NT so they have 12-14 points and balanced hand: they open a weak 2 so they have six (usually) cards in that suit and less than an opening bid. They pass partner's opening suit bid: they have fewer than six points. They raise a level – they have 5-9 points etc.

S J64 East has opened 1 Heart, after 1 Spade West raised to 2 Hearts. North supported spades and East then
H 8754 bid 3 Diamonds. You competed in spades and West raised to 4 diamonds. This was passed round to
D 53 you who bid 4 Spades. West led the ten of hearts, East won with the King and played the Jack and
C AQT8 you ruffed. You played the AK of Spades and **West** showed out. You have lost 3 tricks. How will you play the clubs?

S AK8752

H Q We know that East had 3 spades: We also know that they have five hearts and surely five diamonds.

D A7 That comes to 13 cards – so they can't have a club! So, you finesse the 8 on the first round.

C 7542 Note how the diamond bid by East helped declarer. Don't give away information you don't have to!

Opening leads – inferences.

If a player leads a small card, then it is probably four to an honour **and no better lead** – that tells you how many their partner has. The main reason a defender leads a card in dummy's suit is if they are trying for a ruff: they will only have 1 or 2. **It is very important to draw inferences from what a player has NOT done.** If a defender does not lead their partner's suit this usually (unless void) indicates holding the Ace. If missing a sequence of cards, the fact that one is not led indicates that their partner has at least one high card. If the Ace and King is missing, then the fact that the suit hasn't been led shows that the opener hasn't got them both and so their partner has at least one of them. If a defender doesn't give their partner a ruff, it may be because they figure they can't ruff higher than dummy. "The dog that didn't bark in the night" is just as important in bridge as it was for Sherlock Holmes.

Locating missing honours by counting points

S AJ42 West dealt and passed. South opened 1 Club in 4th position and West overcalled 1D. NS end up in 5C

H Q6 West leads the DK. You win, draw trumps, and lead a heart towards the Queen – West wins with the

D 84 Ace, cashes the Queen of diamonds (East drops the Jack) and continues with a (safe) third diamond.

C QT742 The contract hinges on who has the Queen of spades (you can finesse either way) – well?

S KT6 Count points! West has shown up with nine already (AH and KQD) and six diamonds. If they had the

H KT5 Queen of spades they would have opened the bidding. They didn't so they don't have it. Finesse East

D A72 for the Queen of spades with what must be a 99% certainty. (Yes, West could have opened a weak 2 in

C AKJ5 diamonds if they played the agreement – this would in fact make no difference)

Locating missing honours by counting suit lengths,

Remember – every hand has 13 cards in it!

S 653 West opened 1 Spade and you ended up in 3NT. West led the Jack of spades and East played the nine.
H 9742 You have lots of chances of course (the ten of hearts might drop or you get the club suit correct).
D K63
C A52 Anyway – West probably has 5 spades (there are 13 points outstanding and he didn't open 1NT)

S KQ74 Attack the hearts first – not only because you must lose to the Ace but because you want to defer your
H KQJ play in the club suit as you have options (finesse or play to drop the Jack) and if the Ten drops you want
D A5 need to find the Jack of clubs anyway. West wins (as expected: count points) and plays back a heart
C KQT6 and East discarded on the third round. The ten didn't appear so you now must get the clubs right. It is
more likely that East has the Jack (long clubs) – but West might have it – they did bid with a maximum of 13 points.

On this hand, counting suit lengths gets the following information.

- West Had 5 spades (for his bid)
- West had 4 hearts (East only had two – they showed out on the third round).
- Therefore, West has 4 cards in the minor suits. (Difficult to work out, isn't it!)

To find out how many clubs they have, simply play off the AK of Diamonds. If West follows twice they have a maximum of two clubs and you play KA and finesse. If they follow only once, then the clubs are splitting 3=3. (If West showed out on the first diamond it means they have four clubs, so you must hope East has JX).

Avoiding taking a no-hope finesse

S 532 East opened 1NT promising 15-17 points. You overcall 2 Spades, and this buys the contract. West leads
H AQ65 the 2D – East plays the Queen. During the play West turns up with the King of Diamonds and East has
D 8753 the AK and another Spade and Ace of clubs. How are you going to play the hearts?
C J6

Let's count points: you have 20 between the two hands and West has turned up with three. There is
S QJT975 absolutely no chance that the heart finesse will work providing East has been honest since that would
H 432 only give him 13 points. The only chance therefore is to hope that East only has two hearts and will
D AJ have to play the King on the second round. This isn't unlikely either. East has 3 spades, 3 diamonds
C KQ and could quite easily have five clubs (there are nine missing). Anyway there is nothing left to play for.

The law of vacant places.

Just a reminder: if you discover that one player has more cards in a suit than the other, it is more likely that they will hold high cards in the suit. But bear in mind any bidding that has taken place.

Playing for split Aces

If you select any two specific cards, the odds are slightly (52-48) in favour of them being split one in each hand.

S A6 Playing in 4 hearts you get the JS lead (note that East has the Queen!). You win with the Ace, cash the
H QJ74 King and ruff a spade and draw trumps. They split 3-0 so dummy has none left (if they had split 2-1 you
D KJ3 could have played a diamond to the Jack and if it lost East would have to give you a trick with a king or
C K972 a ruff and discard.) Anyway: do you play Clubs or Diamonds first?

S K73 The point here is that in clubs you only have one play – either the King wins or it loses. In Diamonds
H AK8652 you have a choice of plays – low to the King or finesse the Jack. Playing clubs first gives you additional
D 85 information. If the King wins then that is it. If it loses then you assume that West has the Ace of
C 64 Diamonds as it is more likely the Aces are split.

Do not commit yourself to a line of play when there are different options. By delaying you may gain more information – or the opponents might open up the suit for you. And Finally: The odds are that the high-card strength against you is spread evenly e.g. 6-8 than 12-2 – unless there is any indication to the contrary.

Play your cards Right – 12: Reading Declarer's cards (Defence)

If you bother to take the time and trouble, you can get a pretty good idea of declarer's cards. In fact, it is probably easier than reading the defenders' cards as declarer must have made at least one bid – and your partner is there signalling encouragement and count of the suits as they get played. They might even have made a bid!

Just remember that declarer does NOT usually have all the remaining cards and that partner, even if they have not bid, does not necessarily have a yarborough.

Obviously no-trump bidding is the easiest: declarer has limited his hand accurately in terms of high card points and, if they have opened 1NT, have indicated no singleton or void. However, if declarer hasn't made a forcing rebid (showing 16+ points) then they are limited to a maximum of 15. Similar reasoning applies if declarer has opened a weak-two bid: they should have 6-9 points and a six card suit. As ever, when you have noticed that declarer has shown everything they can have, your partner MUST have what is left. If he hasn't then he has something left.

Any no trump rebid shows a specific range of points. Playing a weak no trump, a 1NT rebid shows 15-17. Playing a strong No Trump and 5-card majors (as in the example below), a 2NT rebid over a 2-level response shows 12-14.

S KQ6	W	N	E	S	As you will see, paying attention to the bids made by declarer, can give a picture of their hand and help the defence a lot.
H J5			1S	P	
D Q9863	2D	P	2N	P	
C Q74	3S	P	3N	AP	

S 9752

H A84

D K7

C T983

You lead the ten of clubs: partner goes up with the Ace and returns the two which declarer wins with the King. Declarer now leads a small heart. Let's do some constructive thinking, rather than ducking automatically.

- In Clubs: Declarer must have the King Jack to four. Partner cannot have the Jack or he would have not gone up with the Ace – he would have kept it to kill the Queen. Equally partner cannot have three – or he would have returned a higher club. So, he has two – which leaves declarer with 4 clubs and 3 club tricks.
- In Spades: Declarer must have five for his bidding (not six or he would have 9 tricks). Why isn't he establishing the suit? The obvious answer is that the suit is already established. Declarer has 5 spade tricks.
- In hearts: why has declarer led towards the Jack? This only makes sense if he has the KQ and another.
- In Diamonds: Now we can work out that declarer only has one diamond (5 spades, 4 clubs, 3 hearts), which means that Partner has either the AJXX or (if the singleton was the Jack) ATXX. Anyway we can take three diamond tricks – and defeat the contract – but ONLY if we go up with the Ace and then play the King of Diamonds. If we duck then declarer has his ninth trick and will quickly cash the other seven.

When defending, try and put yourself in declarer's shoes. Assume that he is playing the hand to the best advantage and you should be able to work out what he is doing and why – and why isn't he doing something else?

S 742	W	N	E	S
H Q			1H	P
D AQJ873	2D	P	2S	P
C J52	3D	P	3S	P

S A53

H 87532

D 64

C AK7

You lead the King of Clubs and Declarer drops the Queen. Now what?

On the bidding East has six hearts and five spades. (He rebid spades but bid hearts first: if he was 5-5 he would have opened 1 Spade and rebid 2 (or 3) hearts). This means that he only has two cards in the minor suits. If he has two clubs (dropping the Queen cannot hurt) then he has no diamonds and a club loser would go on the Ace. So play the King – The Jack of clubs is no use to declarer. Assuming the Ace wins, now what?

Since declarer has six hearts and five spades, you know that partner only has one heart (and 2 spades). Play a heart. When you get in with the Ace of Spades you can give partner a heart ruff.

An example of paying attention to partner's signals, and thereby getting a count on declarer.

S 5	W	N	E	S
H 6	1S	P	2D	P
D AJT742	2H	P	3C	P
C QJ986	3N	AP		

S 74
H 87532 North leads the ten of spades, Declarer wins with the Ace and plays the Ten of clubs, North Plays the
D Q63 Seven. What is your plan?
C AK3

Firstly: West has three clubs – we know that because North played his highest club showing a doubleton – and we can see the other eight. Obviously, we don't want to help declarer set up the clubs, so we duck the first time. When we win the second round what do we return?

Since declarer probably had 5 spades and 4 hearts for the bidding – and three clubs, as we have worked out, they can only have one diamond! That diamond is the potential entry to those long clubs. We need to kill the entry to those long clubs before they can be set up (see article 10 in the series about Merrimac Coup) so we return a diamond! Yes, into that strong 6-card suit. Declarer cannot now get to dummy provided the defence play on the major suits. (Probably better to lead hearts when you get in through any tenace West may have.)

Helping partner by your discards.

If you have weak suits, you should discard all your cards in one suit before playing the other. This helps partner get a count of the suit – and therefore declarers. Don't drop off to sleep just because you have a poor hand.

S 874	South opened 2 clubs and ended up in six spades. Your partner leads the King of diamonds, which South ducked and then won the continuation of the Queen. He then
H A6	cashed the AK of hearts, ruffed a heart and then played off six trumps (AKQJT9)
D 863	
C J9542	
S 63	Your hand obviously cannot take a trick, but you CAN help partner with your discards.
H 9742	South hasn't claimed so has a potential loser – With six spades, 2 hearts and a ruff, a
D 9754	diamond and the Ace of Clubs (and a diamond ducked) we know of 12 cards in the
C 863	South hand. But is the last card a diamond or a club (not the King or Queen)?

West will need to know whether to keep the Jack of Diamonds or the King of Clubs as his last card. To help him we throw away two diamonds on those spades, and then another card. PS – Why do we know that declarer hasn't the King or Queen of clubs? Because if he had the King he would have 12 tricks, and he would finesse the Queen.

If partner is paying attention, he will work out that you only had four diamonds. (He might also have been helped if you played high-low on the first two rounds). If he had three diamonds, he can then count South for three diamonds initially – and therefore only one club (the Ace). (South has six spades, three hearts, and three diamonds – hence 1 club). If he had four diamonds then he can just as easily count South for six spades, three hearts, two diamonds – and therefore two clubs.

Summary

This and the previous article, have, I hoped, awoken you to the great advantages that you can gain on many (but not every) hands by paying attention to the cards played, the bids made (and not made), and signals that both your partner (as defenders) and the opponents (when declarer) might give.

Too often players just play cards by rote and don't make much effort into working out what is happening on the deal. This, and the previous, article emphasises the great rewards you can make by just a little effort.

“The average bridge player is blind, deaf, lazy, inattentive, innumerate and illogical”. Please wake up.

PS. If you want a book try “How to read Your Opponents' cards” – Mike Lawrence.

Play your cards Right – 13: Safety Play (Declarer)

Although important bridge technique, playing safe is usually associated with Rubber or Teams bridge where the security of the contract is paramount, and you are insuring against large losses (13 IMPs for instance if a vulnerable game is defeated) for a small cost (1 Imp for a trick). Playing matchpoint pairs it is the frequency of the gain that matters – a trick difference can be half a top – so, unless you have found a very good contract that may not be reached elsewhere, your aim is to play to take as many tricks as possible and safety plays are an expensive habit. The exception being if you are sacrificing, where you must keep the cost less than the opponents would have made in their contract. In pairs whether you make the contract or not is irrelevant. If you make an extra trick six times and go off once, then you have six good scores and one poor one. The fact that the gain is 30 points and the loss 720 is irrelevant.

What is a safety play?

A safety play involves playing a suit in such a way that it might cost an unnecessary trick but ensures that the chance of losing more than that one trick is much reduced or eliminated should a bad split occur. If the play cannot cost a trick, then it really comes under “Suit Management” – as discussed earlier. For Example: -

AJT543 opposite 9876. You are missing three cards (KQ2) and must lose one trick unless the opponents make a mistake. The safety play, to guard against KQ2 being in the hand under the AJT... is to not lead the Ace. Lead a small card from either hand. If you lead the Ace, you could lose two tricks. You cannot avoid losing two tricks if the KQ2 lie over the Ace unless you can execute an endplay at trick 11.

Some typical principles of safety plays.

- Enabling you to lead towards a high card.
- Enabling a finesse position.
- Pinning an intermediate card
- Taking a finesse knowing that if it loses then a certain bad distribution cannot happen.

Some safety plays will give you the option of doing more than one of the above depending on what turns up.

Nine cards missing the Queen and Ten.

AJ432 Playing pairs you would cash the King and if the Queen doesn't drop play the Ace. The problem with
K965 This is that if East has the QT87 you would lose two tricks. You save a trick by cashing the Ace. If west
 shows out you can lead towards the K9: if east shows out you can lead towards the jack.

AK876 The missing nine causes a further problem. Here you lead a small card from the South hand and cover
J432 the card played by West e.g. if they play the five you play the six! If it loses the suit has split. If it wins
 then you will still only lose one trick. Cashing a top card loses two tricks if West has QT95,

Missing the Queen and Jack

AKT2 You must have a loser unless the QJ are doubleton, but if you play the Ace and King then you lose two
9876 Tricks if West has QJ54. Play the Ace by all means, but then you can either lead a card towards the ten
 covering if necessary, or you could even lead a small card towards the nine, setting up a finesse

A8 This play is not well known. If the suit splits 3-2 then you have one loser. You can also escape
QJ32 9 for one loser with a 4-1 split as shown, if the singleton is a nine. You lead the ten and run it.
KT7654 Guess what – more examples of the importance of ducking during early plays of the suit.

A9 Again if you need seven tricks you would play the Ace and then the King – unless West had played the
KT86542 Queen or Jack when you should finesse. If you need only six tricks you should finesse the nine, saving
 a trick when West has QJ73

Eight cards missing the Queen and Ten

J76 If you needed five tricks in the suit you would play the Ace, and unless the Queen falls then the King.
 i.e. hoping the Queen is doubleton. If you only need four then you can play the Ace and lead towards

AK954 the Jack – either the Jack wins or you set up a tenace against the ten. Aren't nines useful?!

Eight cards missing the Queen, Jack, Ten and Nine

K843 A765 To avoid losing two tricks in this suit all you have to do is duck the first round! If the suit splits 4-1 then provided one player does not have QJT9 then, either two high cards get used on the first round, and you have an automatic finesse when the suit is continued, or the player with the singleton high card is on lead and must play another suit. For this to be effective you must ensure that the play of any other suit will be to your advantage. i.e. eliminate suits in which the opponents could exit safely.

Cashing Long Suits

In pairs you would play to take as many tricks as possible if the odds are better than even. In teams you may duck one more round to ensure that the rest of the suit cashes

72 With 8 cards in the suit the odds are that you can cash all six tricks (68%). If you only need five, you should duck a round or, better, finesse the ten. You will make five tricks unless West has J8432 and

AKQT95 ducks the first round – you will still make four tricks in that case.

Leading up to high cards

If there is any danger of a ruff, lead up to a high card. That way it won't get ruffed if the player in front of it is void.

Loser on Loser

S AK8652	S QJ7	You are playing in 4 spades and the KC is led. The danger is that South will get in and lead a heart through the King. You can avoid that by letting the King win, and then throw a diamond on the Ace! By exchanging one (diamond) loser for another you can then set up the diamonds without letting South in – making if good breaks.
H K73	H 964	
D A62	D K8753	
C 6	C A5	

Loser on loser plays occur quite often, either to control suits, setting up tricks/ suits or avoidance plays.

Not finessing

Sometimes it is best if you do not finesse, and hope that you can throw in an opponent with the high card.

S AQJ72	S 98643	Against 4 Spades, North leads a heart. Obviously you would prefer opponents to lead
H K63	H A5	a diamond to save you a guess. What you do is NOT play on Diamonds. You concede
D KT4	D AJ6	your two club tricks, ruff the third club and third heart and then play Ace and another
C 83	C 752	spade. If the King didn't fall then the player with the King must now lead a diamond or else play another suit giving you a ruff and discard – and your losing diamond goes away.

A final warning

Playing safe may not be as safe as you think. By ducking a trick you concede a tempo – enabling the defence to try and find the best switch. If a switch to another suit could be damaging and might appear obvious then it is probably better not to try and play safe – if the defence threatens to get a ruff, for instance then you should play on trumps rather than give them the opportunity to get that ruff.

The key points in safety plays are: can you afford the premium of a lost trick and do you have to? Safety plays can be overdone. The time to use them is when you need them to ensure the contract. There is no real point to make a safety play when the worst that can happen is that you still make your contract. In that case play the percentages for the overtricks.

Play your cards Right – 14: Leads, Signals & Discards (Defence)

You defend a bridge hand twice as often as you declare. It is therefore paramount that defenders co-operate in sending information (legally) between them so they can form an accurate picture of their hands. To do this they have a few options: 1) Lead directing doubles, 2) Playing their cards in a specific order and 3) discarding.

Lead Directing Doubles. (Yes, this is bidding but it affects the play of the cards)

A double of a conventional bid e.g. 1N – P – 2H (Spades) X -shows desire for partner to lead that suit. Don't make it on a few small cards or just the Ace. It is your aim to set up tricks in the suit, so you need a good sequence of top cards. Equally, of course, if you don't make that double then partner will be justified in leading another suit.

A double of 3NT is often lead directing – it usually demands the lead of a suit that the partnership has bid and shows either a very good suit or a high honour in partner's suit. If no one has bid a suit then the double is usually a demand to partner. "Don't try and set up your suit – find mine" (usually partner leads the weaker major).

An exception is the double of a "splinter bid" – one that shows shortage – it is usually unproductive to lead the suit and some players use it to ask for the next non-trump suit up.

The final lead directing double is a "Lightner double" – against a slam it requests an unusual lead – usually dummy's first suit: the player making the double either has a good high-card combination or (more usually) a void.

General advice for leading against No Trump Contracts.

- The higher the contract the more passive the lead i.e. lead from small cards rather than honours.
- Passive leads are recommended if declarer is limited e.g. 1NT-2NT-3NT or playing in 2NT.
- Fourth-highest leads to an honour are over-rated. Leading from five is better, six not so good. Don't lead from a high honour if the hand on your right is known to be strong e.g. 2NT opening or rebid.
- The lower the top card in a suit, the safer the lead. Lead a high card to tell partner you have no honours.
- If you have a weak hand, then you should try and find partner's suit. By default lead the shorter major.
- Given a choice, lead a major rather than a minor suit. This applies even after Stayman – if declarer has denied a four-card major. If it appears both opponents have a four-card major though – lead a minor.
- Leads from strong 2 and 3 card combinations in a major can work well. The aim is to use your high cards to force out declarer's stoppers and for your partner to then get in and run the suit.
- Don't lead from tenaces (KJ, QT) although partner might have a filling card the odds are against it.
- Leading from KQXX or QJXX are dangerous. In fact, you need QJ9X to make it worthwhile.
- Leading from suit combinations with a 2-card gap are dangerous e.g. AJT7.
- Ace leads are reasonable as sight of the dummy may give you an idea of how best to continue. Always lead an Ace against a 6NT (or 7NT!) contract at pairs.

General advice for leading against Trump Contracts

- Trump leads are ineffective! Only lead them if the bidding suggests declarer is going to play for a cross-ruff, dummy gives preference to the 2nd suit or the other leads are too dangerous (From Queens or Higher)
- Never underlead an Ace. Ace leads are pretty good as you may be able to switch – and you won't lose it.
- If you do lead unsupported aces – have an agreement with partner to lead the King from AK.
- Singleton leads are usually the best lead to make – you may get a ruff or break communications.
- Doubleton leads aren't bad (especially from weak hands). The object is to set up tricks for your partner.
- Don't make aggressive leads against slams. Simulations show that passive leads work best.

Once you have decided which suit to lead. (Standard leads)

- Lead top card of a doubleton.
- Lead the middle card of a worthless tripleton and then play the card above.
- Lead the second highest of four or more worthless cards– and follow it with the fourth highest.
- Lead top of a (three-card) sequence and top of an internal sequence (AJT9... etc i.e. NOT the Ace)
- Lead the fourth (or third from three) highest if you DO have to play from an A, K or Q)

Signals. (Standard Signals)

There are three common types of signals: if you want to improve your defence you must make them and pay attention to them. The others are a relatively rare bird but useful when they come up: -

1. Ask partner to continue (High) or switch to another suit (Low).
2. Count. Even (High) or Odd (low)
3. Suit preference Signal. (High for a high suit – SHDC, Low for a low suit CDHS)
4. Trump signal – play high-low when declarer plays trumps to indicate you want a ruff.
5. Smith – Peter. – Play high-low on declarer’s first suit to say you **really** like partner’s 1st suit.

The fourth and fifth occur later in the play. The first three signals have a specific order of preference.

On partner’s lead

1. Encourage continuation/ Discourage continuation.
2. Show count.
3. Make a suit-preference signal.

On declarer’s lead

1. Show count.
2. Make a suit preference signal.

You give count or make a suit-preference signal when the primary signal is pointless. E.g. dummy will ruff.

Suit preference Signals

These can be made by the defender on lead, usually when clearing their suit or giving their partner a ruff. Again – a high card asks partner to return a card of the higher suit when they get the lead, a low card asks for the lower.

Discards.

A discard should indicate which suit you want partner to play when they next get in. There are several different types of agreement – so you should discuss the options with your partner.

1. Standard: A high discard says: I like this suit. A low discard says: I do not like this suit.
2. Upside Down: A high discard says: I do NOT like this suit. A Low discard says: I DO like this suit.
3. Revolving: A high discard says: I Like the suit above. A low discard says: I like the suit below. (CSHDCS)
4. DODDS: An EVEN card says: I like this suit. An ODD card says I like the other suit of the same colour.

Given the choice, I prefer either Upside down or Revolving. You always have higher and lower cards and, for revolving, two suits to choose from (A low heart (better) or high club both ask for diamonds). DODDS is dangerous because you might have no even cards in the suit you like, or odd cards of the appropriate colour – and this inevitably leads to hesitations and the passing of unauthorised information to partner.

Caveats

Players will often play the lowest card when following suit, forgetting that this is in fact sending out a signal. Worse – good players will pay attention to it and base their defence on it. Just remember that partner must play a card to each trick – they may be discarding losers and not signalling for anything (In doubt play a middle spot card). You must disclose your carding agreements to declarer – and he can make use of them! So sometimes it is better not to signal if you think declarer will make more use of the signal than your partner. Defenders with poor hands should signal honestly. Defenders with good hands can be more flexible in their signals as their partner won’t be able to make use of them – but declarer might! So, you can pass on false information. (More about deception later).

Not every card is a signal – sometimes partner must try and win a trick, but you should consider any suspiciously high or low card from partner as a possible signal – and check! Partner may have no very high or very low cards!

Play your cards Right – 15: End Plays (Declarer)

Throughout this series, the benefits of not winning tricks have been a current theme, whether disrupting communications, keeping them open, creating entries, playing safe or whatever. If you are still scared of losing tricks by this stage, I recommend you take up dominoes. Now comes the biggie.

As you are (hopefully) now aware there are many situations where you would like the opponents to lead a particular suit, either to save a guess or to ensure a certain trick, or you might like a particular opponent to lead.

AJ9 opposite KT8 → You have a guess for the Queen – if the opponents lead the suit, you must make 3 tricks.

Q96 opposite J43 → You aren't certain of a trick if you play the (frozen) suit – but are if an opponent leads it.

AQ5 opposite 76 → If the opponent to the left of the AQ5 leads the suit you will win two tricks.

The Ruff and Discard

If a defender leads a suit in which neither you nor dummy have any cards, you can ruff the card in one hand and throw away a loser in the other. In effect you have ruffed a loser that you couldn't do otherwise – gaining a trick!

S 7

H 5

D –

S – East is on lead. Spades are trumps. NS have a heart loser, but if East leads the Ace of diamonds then Declarer can ruff in one hand and throw away a losing heart in the other - and D A then ruff their losing heart for the last trick.

S 6

H 7

D –

Note that for a ruff and discard to work you need trumps in both hands.

The Strip (elimination) and Endplay (throw in)

This is a fancy term: basically, all you are doing is removing any cards that the defenders may have with which they can safely exit when you put them on lead (the elimination) and then put them on lead in a situation that no matter which card they play, they will help you. Usually either by conceding a ruff and discard or opening up a new suit.

S AK74 S 98532 You are playing in six spades and North leads a (safe) club. As above you have a diamond guess to make. Anyway, you win and cash the AK of spades and someone shows out (it does not matter who). You now play three rounds of hearts and three rounds of clubs (ruffing) and then play a trump (The exit trick for the endplay)

S 74 S 32 This is the situation when you play the trump. No matter who wins, they have either to return a diamond (saving you the guess) or a heart/ club, which have been eliminated from the two hands so you can ruff in one hand and throw away a diamond loser. If the player with the last trump could ruff earlier and exit safely then you must guess the diamonds – but you are in no worse a position than you were before.

The above example gave you a 100% certainty for the contract, provided you could exit with a trump. Sometimes the elimination and endplay serves to improve your chances by forcing the opening up of the suit.

S KQ842 S A7653 The contract is 6 Spades and North leads a club. If you must lead hearts, you have a certain loser – and a club loser, but if the opponents lead a heart, then you might avoid that loser, by capturing one high heart and finessing against the other. Again you draw trumps, eliminate the diamonds, and then exit with a club loser.

S 84 S53 This is the situation after the club is lost. If a low heart is returned, then you run it and it leaves you with a tenace in the hand opposite to pick up the other high heart. H K95 H AT4 If a heart honour is led then you must guess whether it has been led from a hand holding both or a hand with just the one. So, a defender should exit with a high card. D - D - in this position. Good defenders will ensure that a hand with small hearts only would win this trick if possible. C - C -

Loser on loser

A prerequisite for an endplay is that there must be an exit card to throw the defenders in. (A trump in the 1st example, a club in the 2nd.) This means that sometimes instead of ruffing a loser, you throw another loser on it.

S A S J6 North leads the KS against Six Clubs. This probably shows the Queen. You have 11 top tricks:
H Q3 H AK4 a spade ruff doesn't gain one so it looks like you need the diamond finesse – but wouldn't it
D AQ82 D 7653 be nice if North led a diamond – then you wouldn't mind who held the King. In this case you
C AQT864 C KJ72 draw trumps, throw one losing diamond on the third heart and exit with the JS.

S - S J When you play the Jack of Spades, you throw away the losing 8 of diamonds. North is almost
H - H - certain to have to win with the Queen of spades and then must either lead a spade or heart
D AQ8 D 7653 conceding a ruff and discard (you throw away the Queen of diamonds and ruff in dummy) or
C T864 C KJ lead a diamond into the AQ. If South has the QS, you will still need the diamond finesse.

Sometimes you must exit more than once to get the desired result.

S K73 S A64 Playing in 4 hearts North leads the King of Diamonds. You win, draw trumps, and exit with the
H AQ842 H K9653 third round of spades. If North wins, then he must eventually lead into the AQ of clubs
D 72 D AJ but let's assume that South wins and returns a Club (not the 4 or 2). Don't finesse! Win with
C AQ7 C 653 the Ace and exit with a diamond. North must win and lead a club to the Q or a ruff/ discard.

You may have noticed that in each case declarer had a lot of trumps so that they can threaten the ruff and discard. In No trumps you can't threaten the ruff and discard BUT you may still be able to force an opponent to make a damaging return. Once that situation is set up the endplay is ready – even if the hand has barely begun.

S AK5 S QJ73 North leads a diamond against 3NT (giving the eighth trick). Declarer would much rather the
H AJ9 H T862 defence play the other suits, so he plays four rounds of spades (discarding a club) and then
D AQT D 63 leads a heart covering South's card. Whatever North now plays, declarer will easily be able to
C AJ74 C T53 set up their ninth trick. The endplay happens on the sixth trick!

S - S - This is the position after a heart was lost, South played low, and the Jack lost to the Queen
H A9 H T86 A heart or diamond return from North is into a tenace – giving the extra trick. If North leads a
D AQ D 6 club declarer runs it to the AJ7 - either the Jack wins or (if South played the King or Queen)
C AJ7 C T53 the JT are there to force out the other high honour and set up the ninth trick.

Favourable positions – a partial elimination.

Sometimes you must hope that the cards are situated favourably for the endplay. i.e. that a defender is in a position where they must win the exit trick and do something helpful i.e. no exit card in their hand, only their partner's.

S 98642 S A73 South leads a diamond against 6 diamonds. It looks like you must lose two spade tricks as the
H AJ H KQ6 KQJT5 are missing, but there is some hope. Draw trumps and lead a spade to the Ace. Then
D K842 D AQJ73 eliminate the hearts and clubs and play another spade. If a player had KQ doubleton
C A5 C K8 then they must win – and have no spades left and so give a ruff and discard.

This play may work even if a player does not have the KQ doubleton. If they have doubleton King small, then they may not play the King on the first round (which is why you led to the Ace early before it became clear you were planning an elimination), or the player with three spades may, mistakenly, try and win cheaply with the Jack (e.g. they may fail to put up the King swallowing partner's Queen - known as a Crocodile Coup).

Summary

- Endplays consist of two parts: eliminating safe suits and then throwing the opponents in to make a damaging lead.
- Look to an endplay when you would prefer opponents lead a suit – and try and keep trumps in both hands.
- Even if you cannot see how an endplay might gain, eliminating suits is good technique.
- If you have a finesse or options on how to play a suit combination – try and get the opponents to help. The expert player does not guess when they don't have to.

Play your cards Right – 16: Countering End Plays (Defence)

To recap last week. To endplay the defenders a declarer must do two things.

- Remove all the safe (exit) cards from a Defender's hand. – the elimination.
- Put the defenders on play so they must return something helpful – the endplay.

Endplays may work either against both defenders (e.g. solve a 2-way finesse) or against one defender only (e.g. force a lead round to a tenace.) The defence against an endplay therefore revolves around a few actions.

- Keep a safe exit card.
- Don't leave yourself with an isolated top card that can be used to throw you in.
- Ensure that the correct player wins the throw in trick, so their partner isn't endplayed.

Danger hand high – preventing a Duck.

One of declarer's tactics is to lead either through the danger hand, intending to duck if the danger hand plays low, or through the safe hand, intending to duck if the safe hand plays high. To combat this the danger hand should consider playing a high card to prevent a cheap duck. Are you the danger hand? Well, you might be if you are able to lead through strength or up to weakness – and your partner isn't.

S K642 You are defending 3NT. You lead a diamond, find partner with K72 and you take two diamonds, declarer H KT7 wins the third with the Ace. Declarer plays on hearts; partner turns up with the Ace and returns a heart D 853 Declarer cashes the hearts and Spades and has shown up with S AQ3 H QJ95 and D A64. South has C AQ8 won 7 tricks (1 diamond, 3 spades and 3 hearts) and now leads a club towards the AQ8.

S JT95

H 863 Do you think South is going to finesse the Queen? If you think about it then you will realise that there D QJT9 is no need to do so. West only has clubs left (he was 3=3=3=4) and if declarer ducks a club then West C J6 will have no option but to win and lead a club back towards the AQ. Go up with the Jack and you **may** be able to prevent it – partner obviously has the king but he needs the Ten and Nine as well to have any chance.

Getting rid of a high card

S 742 Against 6 diamonds, West leads a small spade: partner' Jack loses to the Ace. Declarer draws trumps H J5 in three rounds (partner discards a heart) and then plays the AK of hearts and ruffs a heart (all follow) D KQT6 and then leads the Ace of Clubs and follows suit. C AK75

S Q8654 South had the AKT of spades (East would have played the ten or King if they had held them. They H T98 have three hearts and four diamonds – leaving (after the Ace of clubs) two unknown cards that must D 742 be clubs. What will he do next? He will lead a small club hoping to set up the thirteenth to throw a C Q6 spade. As the cards lie you will have to win with the Queen and lead a spade back into the KT. You must get rid of that Queen. Then partner can win with the Jack and if his clubs are good enough (JT9/8) make two tricks.

Playing off winners

If you don't have winners, then you can't be endplayed.

S T963 Against 4 spades you lead a diamond. South wins the Ace and plays off the top two trumps, East shows H 642 out. Declarer leads a diamond to the table and then a heart on which he plays the Jack. (This is a D KQ5 mistake, declarer should have eliminated the diamonds and exited with the trump a genuine endplay) C A83

S QJ5 West has a safe lead at the moment (the diamond) but what will he do if declarer then eliminates the H AQT diamonds and exits with a trump – he will have to win and concede a heart or club trick if declarer has D T964 the King-Jack. The solution is to play off the Queen of trumps before making the safe exit. Declarer C Q72 can no longer throw you in and you will make two more tricks (H AQ or the QC)

Switching the lead by overtaking/ ruffing partner's winner.

There are situations where declarer is hoping to duck a trick to your partner who cannot attack declarer's weak suit without costing a trick. If declarer ducks a trick you may need to win – a variation on danger-hand high.

S KJ5 South is in 5 diamonds and West leads the Queen of hearts (from QJ obviously) and declarer ducks.
H A64 When looking at Dummy, East can see that it is very weak in Clubs – and that East cannot lead
D AQT5 clubs without leading into declarer's potential tenace. The duck of the Queen is obviously an attempt
C 873 to leave West on lead where he cannot hurt declarer and to break communication if declarer only
S Q862 has two hearts. What is good for declarer is bad for the defence – so overtake with the King and lead
H KT732 a club through towards the weakness in dummy. East can exit safely with a heart at this stage
D 4 and the endplay is thwarted.
C 952

S 73 East opened 1 club so West led a club against 4 spades. Declarer ducked so he switched to a
H AQ82 trump. Declarer won, played Ace and ruffed a club and then led the AK and another
Diamond.
D AKJ74
C Q5 For the defence to prevail, they will need to make a heart trick – and it is clear that East cannot
S 854 S A62 lead a heart into the AQ. This time instead of winning to lead up to weakness, West must win
H T965 H KJ3 so they can lead through strength. And the only way they can do that is to trump the Queen
D 93 D QT6 of diamonds and lead a heart through.
C 8762 C KJT9
S KQJT9 These two examples make clear some points 1) Don't fall in with declarer's plans! 2) plan
H 74 the defence on which defender will be better placed to lead through strength or up to
D 852 weakness.
C A83

Endplaying Declarer/ Dummy!

I have already mentioned the importance of entries (both as declarer and defender). If you can time things correctly then you may be able to separate declarer from dummy and eventually cause one to have to lead away from a tenace. Endplaying dummy is easier as you can see from trick one their distribution and high cards – endplaying declarer is harder as you will have to count their hand – and that takes time. Think about killing entries if (dummy especially) is short in a suit: can you remove them?

S AK432 East bid spades and hearts but North led the Queen of spades against 3NT. Declarer wins the 2nd
H AKQTspade and leads the Queen of Diamonds.
D Q2
C K8 South's aim is to cut the link between declarer and dummy. West must have KJ of diamonds and Jack
S 7 of clubs to have anything like a response, so you duck the first diamond and win the second, killing any
H J432 entry to declarer's hand. You now play Ace and a small club – dummy wins but must eventually let you
D A653 make the Jack of hearts or partner to make several spade tricks. Now suppose declarer throws the King
C AQ42 of clubs on the Ace to avoid the endplay in clubs. You take your two club tricks and exit with a heart –
allowing dummy to make 4 heart tricks – but they must let North make a spade at the end. Note that if you win the first
diamond, declarer will make his diamond tricks and can then endplay you in hearts or clubs.

Summary: <https://tinyurl.com/3rh8kkm4>

- Watch out if declarer starts eliminating two suits.
- You may avoid endplays by cashing (or discarding hoping partner can help!) winners, unblocking high cards in short suits or by ensuring that the correct defender is on lead when declarer exits.
- Be prepared to play a high card if it looks like declarer is intending to duck – danger hand high.
- Endplays aren't solely the prerogative of declarer. If the defenders can isolate dummy from declarer, then they may be able to force an endplay on one side or the other.

Play your cards Right – 17: Deceiving Defenders (Declarer)

You can deceive ONLY by the cards played and calls MADE. You cannot deceive by HOW you play and make them.

As declarer, you have several advantages over the defenders for deception. Amongst which are: -

- You know the total assets you and dummy have. The defenders (at least initially) must guess.
- You have no partner to confuse. A defender must look after their partner.

Your aim with deception is to keep the defenders in the dark so that they don't know what is happening. You can confuse them by confounding their signals, and, as Sun Tsu said, "pretend to be weak where you are strong and strong where you are weak." And remember – it is easier to be deceptive early on before the defence can exchange information.

Encouraging/ Discouraging a switch

The rule here is to signal the same way that the defenders do. If they play that a high card is encouraging, then you should play a high card to encourage them to continue the suit and a low card to discourage them.

S JT5 S 7632 West opens 1NT and it is passed out. North leads the Jack of Diamonds and South plays the 7.
H AKQ H J98 You have six top tricks – eight if the diamonds are 3-2. But suppose they are 4-1. When you
D AQ632 D K54 set up the long diamond North will surely switch, and the defence can take a lot of tricks. If
C QT C 853 you duck, however, South's 7 will seem to be encouraging and North will continue.

S Q82 S 753 North leads the Ace and South plays the 4. You want a continuation to set up the Queen. If you play the 8 then (with the 3 and 2 missing) North might think that South is encouraging.

Don't false-card for the fun of it. Careless false carding may help the opponents.

AK965 North leads the Ace and South plays the four. You don't want South to ruff, so what you must
J83 QT7 not do is play the 8. With the 3 AND 2 missing South is more likely to be playing high-low
42 (or showing the Queen), than if you play the 3 when only the 2 is missing.

Winning with a higher card than necessary can pay dividends. The trick you may lose comes back with vengeance.

S KJ74 S AQ5 In 3NT, North leads a diamond. If the club finesse wins there is no problem, but if it fails you
H Q3 H 972 don't want North to switch to a heart. Try the effect of winning with the Ace. North will
D AQ8 D 94 surely underlead his King of Diamonds to South's "Queen". (There is no need to hold up the
C A963 C QJT877 Ace of diamonds as the finesse is into the "danger hand" – as North sees it)

As with defence, you should always play the card you are known to hold. Do not give away extra information.

KQT 8654 North leads the Jack to South's Ace. South knows North cannot have the Queen – so play it.
KJ9 7653 North leads the ten to South's Ace. South knows North cannot have the Jack – so play it.

Pretending to have extra cards in a suit may make a continuation seem dangerous.

K4 QT3 North leads the nine against your no-trump contract. As this is likely to be top of nothing, if North gets in again, they will push another heart through the Queen - ten to South's AJ. Instead – try the effect of playing the Queen. If you had a third heart then South wouldn't dare return the suit, so will switch – and you have gained a tempo. This is the position as South sees it after the first trick is won with the Ace.

K2 T3 – if he leads the suit, you will make both the King and the Ten.

An important part of deception (toujours l'audace) is to remember that the defence don't know what you have! – at least initially.

Suppose your stopper in a suit is AX – there is no point holding up. Go up with the Ace on the first round. The defenders may think you have a second stop in the suit – since you would have held up had you had three cards in it.

Concealing Strength or Weakness.

An excellent way to conceal strength is to duck a round

(All hands taken from “Clever Bridge Tricks” – Brian Senior)

J963	A5 KQ872	T4	West leads the three against your no-trump contract (having concealed the suit). Since the suit is splitting 4-2 we have a loser. When West plays the 10, we play the 7 (suggesting that West has a 5-card suit with the 3 and 2). East is almost certain to knock out the Ace.
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AK4	87532	In either of these cases you have a certain loser. Why show that you hold both the Ace and the King? Duck the first round – if entries permit. Remember – good players will note where your strength is (or appears to be!)
K3	A8752	

Sometimes combining hiding strength and concealing weakness go together.

S AKQ5	S J83	Against 4 hearts, North leads the King of diamonds. If you have not bid them, why not throw a spade instead of a club on the Ace? When the defence get in, they may try and take spade tricks rather than club tricks – now two clubs go on the spades and you only lose two clubs and the Ace of trumps.
H KJT4	H Q98765	
D A8	D –	
C 963	C T742	

Deliberately playing on your weak suit may persuade opponents to think that it is in fact your strong suit!

S T62	North bid diamonds and South hearts then 2NT and the final contract is 3NT by South. West led a small club which you won with the Jack. Obviously, you have 4 spade tricks and a diamond to lose at least – and when you lose the diamond trick the defence will almost certainly switch to a spade.	
H AK		
D AT873		
C K62		
S KJ53	S A984	But what if you pretend you have spades? Cross to dummy with a heart and ‘finesse’ the Queen of spades (no hesitating). West will win and may in fact switch to a diamond (you have shown “AJ” of clubs and the “AQ” of spades – that is 11 points (and you bid 2NT only as South suggesting 11 or 12 points so you obviously have nothing in diamonds). (Note that West won’t have the AK of spades, or he would probably have led one and whether he has KJ or AJ your play to set up spades looks eminently plausible. If East has the AK, he might even duck!
H 76	H QT53	
D J42	D Q6	
C QT73	C 984	
S Q7		
H 9842		
D K95		
C AJ5		

Persuading opponents to (not) cover.

There is a simple rule here. Play a high card if you want opponents to cover, play a lower card if you wish them to duck.

S KQJT8	S 7652	Against your 4-spade contract, North leads the 2 of diamonds to South’s nine and your Jack. You want to avoid a diamond ruff so would prefer that the player with the Ace of trumps holds up a round. If you lead the King, then the Ace will be played – try the effect of leading the Queen. The player with the Ace may be nervous about dropping partner’s singleton king!
H 85	H QJ	
D AKJT3	D 754	
C 7	C A963	Oh – and don’t show off by winning/ leading cheapest card. Your object is usually to HIDE your strength,

S KQT9	S AJ63	Against 4 spades, North leads a club. Declarer can see four losers (1 heart, 1 diamond and 2 clubs). If declarer leads the nine of diamonds (or indeed any but the King) North may not want to waste the Ace. Here the nine may be best – on the previous hand North knows you hold good spades as you bid the suit so the lead of the ten looks ‘fishy’!
H 7	H KQ863	
D KQJT9	D 5	
C A74	C 832	

Declarer can often make use of the defender’s attitude of ‘cover an honour/ nine with an honour’ to crash honours.

AK752	964	If you lead the nine South may cover with four cards to two honours – crashing partner’s singleton other honour.
AKQ742	T63	It costs nothing to lead the ten. South may cover with J985 and you can then pick up the suit. (Entries permitting)
AT98542	J63	If you lead the Jack South may cover with Q7 or K7 – again felling partner’s King or Queen.

(If trying to crash honours – lead through the hand that you think has the greater length.)

Stealing a trick by “finessing”.

NB: you must NOT hesitate when “deciding” what card to play, as if pretending you have a choice.

S Q7	S 832	Against your no-trump game (no suit having been bid) a low heart is led. Naturally you win with the King – to hide the Queen from North and you note you have 8 tricks. You could try ‘finessing’ the Queen of spades as above – but a better line is to run the Jack of diamonds.
H KQ5	H A76	
D QJ4	D KT97	
C AQ763	C KJ2	If North has the Ace, they may duck thinking you have a guess.

S K873	S A964	The Queen of diamonds is led against 4 spades, you duck and win the second diamond and cash two top spades to which all follow (phew!)
H AQ5	H KJT4	if the player with the long trump has 3+ hearts you are OK as you can throw a diamond loser on the fourth round. If South has only two hearts and the long trump there is an additional chance. Play the Ace and King of hearts and now lead the Jack as if taking a ruffing finesse against the Queen. South might duck (not wanting to ruff a loser) – so you win with the Queen, cross to the AC and play the top heart.
D A76	D 832	
C 742	C A9	

The Phantom entry-creation play.

K3	JT764	If East has no entry to the long suit, try the effect of playing the King in the first, or Queen in the second.
AQ	JT764	The defence will almost certainly duck to stop you getting to dummy. As usual, do this ASAP to make it look the suit is important.

S KJ5	S 72	North leads the six of spades to the Queen and King. You have 8 tricks and can set up another in hearts BUT if South has the Ace of Hearts he will probably win and lead a spade through. Try the effect of cashing the AK of clubs only THEN playing the King of hearts. If South thinks that you are trying to create an entry to the clubs (and North does not show out) he may duck to prevent you from getting there with the Queen of hearts. https://tinyurl.com/3rh8kkm4
H KT5	H Q76	
D AK4	D 953	
C AK97	C QJT85	

Play your cards Right – 18: Deceiving Declarer (Defence)

You can deceive **ONLY** by the cards played and calls **MADE**. You cannot deceive by **HOW** you play and make them. For instance, you cannot pretend to think when you only have one option. Unlike declarer, you also have a partner to consider. Is your deception more likely to benefit your side or declarer?

Concealing Low Cards – obligatory false cards.

Declarers expect defenders (unless signalling) to play their lowest cards. If you play a high card, it suggests your partner has the lower cards. ('Bots' on BBO do this all the time – they ALWAYS play the highest card they can afford.)

	QJ843		This is the trump suit and North leads the Queen. If East plays the two then declarer might go for the drop of the King. By playing the 9, declarer will finesse since if West has the King they also have the two and the King won't drop – and the finesse captures K9.
	92		
T96	J54	K2	A small card is led from North. East naturally ducks and declarer wins with the Queen. If West plays small, declarer's only chance is that the King is doubleton – and so will play the Ace. If West plays the nine, declarer might try and pin the ten by leading the Jack – and lose a trick.
	AQ873		
	AJ543	T2	South leads the King and will probably finesse the Jack next time. But – what if you play the ten? South may think you have QT doubleton and play the Ace.
J943	AQT5	2	Normally declarer will play small to the Ace, back to the King and finesse the Jack if needed. But suppose you go up with the nine on the first round. Now it looks like it could be a singleton (or J9 doubleton) and declarer plays the Queen preparing to finesse (and lose a trick).
	K876		

Deceiving partner

By hiding your strength in a suit, not only might you deceive declarer, but you may encourage partner to switch.

S K5	Partner leads a small club against 3NT. You don't really want partner to continue the suit so instead of playing the Jack (the usual card), you play the Queen. If declarer wins with the King they will probably regard the AT as two tricks. If the Queen wins then you can return the Jack.
H 8742	
D KQ6	
C AT53	The point is: you would like a spade switch – and you are more likely to get it if partner thinks S AJT98 that the club suit has no prospects.
	H 63
	D T82
	C QJ6

The fake count signal.

By pretending to be short in a suit you might be able to persuade declarer to expend a high trump when they can't afford it. This is relatively obvious if you hold a good trump holding – but it can work if you only have a singleton or void in trumps – in that case it is partner that gains.

S 84	East opened 4 spades and South bid 5 Diamonds. West led the ten of spades and when East H AK63 led a second top spade (to which South followed!) played the nine. East thought that West could D 9752 overruff third spade (to East, South has the two remember) and so led a third round. Fearing an C A74 overruff South ruffed the third spade with the King of Diamonds, hoping that the two outstanding diamonds would split 1=1.
S T92	
H 872	
D QJ	(If you have a five card suit, try leading the lowest, it might persuade declarer to pursue a different line of play if they think they only have 2 or 3 losers instead of the 3 or 4 they actually do have.)
C J9632	

(If you have doubleton honours e.g. KQ or QJ vary which one you play – players won't then know whether you have a singleton or doubleton. If you always play the King from KQ then when you play the Queen, you won't have the King.)

The fake suit preference Signal.

When you make a suit-preference signal e.g. when setting up a suit, you usually tell partner what suit you would like returned. Unfortunately, you also tell declarer. This might tell him which suit to play on. If you make a false suit-preference signal, however, declarer might play on the suit you want him to.

S AQJT Partner leads a club against 3NT – you cash the AK (to which all follow) and then play a third
H 87 round to set up the suit. You have a choice: you could play the Jack (asking for a Spade) or the 2
D AQJT (asking for a diamond). The point is: if you ask for a spade then declarer will play on diamonds.
C 874

S K7 But suppose you ask for a diamond. A good declarer will note this and will then play on spades -
H T53 exactly what you want them to do. (Poor declarers won't notice so you might as well be honest). It is
D 432 true that a very good declarer may decide you are good enough to make such a false signal – but this
C AKJ2 gets us into game theory – where you should make a false signal about 1/3rd of the time!

Plan ahead.

No one really likes baring honours but remember: declarer cannot see what cards you have. If you must bare an honour do it early on – declarers assume (rightly) that defenders will delay the critical discard until the last moment so you should try and make that last discard from an innocuous suit.

S 63 Against 3NT West leads the 2 of spades and your jack falls to the King. Declarer now runs the Jack of
H 94 diamonds.
D AQ752

C J63 It is clear that if you win with the King then declarer is going to make a lot of diamond tricks. But if
S J875 you duck smoothly (hesitation is the killer for many defensive deceptions: plan what you will do in
H 863 each suit at trick one), then declarer will almost certainly repeat the finesse – which wins if West has
D K8 the King doubleton or tripleton. Playing the Ace only wins if East held K8 and was clever enough to
C Q742 duck. Now the diamonds are dead if South only had two.

The same logic applies if you have QXX and declarer runs the ten towards AKJXX. If a finesse works the first-time declarer will usually think that it will win the second. As you see, this is not necessarily the case.

Playing the card you are known, or shortly will be known, to hold.

This is basically the principle of not giving the opponent any more information than necessary.

AQ74 South finesses the Queen and cashes the Ace. West should drop the King on the Ace. If he
KJ5 T632 plays the Jack then South knows that he can get back to his hand by ruffing low. If the King
98 falls then South might ruff high or waste an entry getting back to his hand.

S K843 Against 4 spades West led the King of hearts and, when South ducked, the Queen. Declarer
H 752 led the Ace of Spades – and West played the Queen since he knew it would fall on the King.
D AQJT6 Declarer intended to play the top two trumps and then set up the diamonds – but the fall of
C 5 the Queen persuaded him that the trumps were 4-1.

S QT S J72
H KQJ8 H 93 Declarer therefore decided to set up the diamonds while he had trump control. He finessed
D 94 D K732 the first time, came back to hand and repeated the finesse. East, who knew South only had 4
C QT863 C K974 spades (he had opened 1NT and rebid 2 spades to Stayman), and that West therefore had two
S A965 won the second diamond and gave his partner a diamond ruff. West cashed the Jack of hearts
H AT64 and declarer still had to lose a trick to the Jack of spades.
D 85
C AJ2

Defensive deception basically consists of scrambling defensive communication hoping declarer picks up the wrong vibes. You often need a good declarer for this to work. Plan ahead and don't look uncomfortable when trying to pull off a piece of deception – or desperation. <https://tinyurl.com/3rh8kkm4>

Play your cards Right – 19: Introduction to Squeeze Play (Declarer)

Squeezes are often regarded as the province of the expert – but that is only because most players never bother to learn how to execute them. Squeezes aren't really that difficult! The principle is that one, or both, defenders are in a situation where they need all the cards in their hand to protect against losing tricks in declarer's or dummy's hand – but must discard one. It does not matter WHY the card is required – just that it is. Let's start off with some definitions:

- A single menace: is a single card in a suit which forces one opponent to keep a higher one.
- An extended menace is two or more cards in a suit (At least one of which is a winner) forcing an opponent to keep the same number of cards in the suit. The purpose of the winning card(s) is to serve as an entry.
- The squeeze card (which will be in the hand opposite the extended menace) is the card that forces a discard.
- Busy: a card is said to be "busy" if it is needed by a defender to prevent declarer making a trick.

For normal squeezes – four conditions must exist (and for which declarer tries to set up): The acronym is "BLUE"

- **B**usy: All the cards in a defender's hand must be busy i.e. serve some purpose, and not discardable.
- **L**osers: Declarer must be a position where they have one loser – i.e. win all the tricks bar one.
- **U**pper: At least one of the menaces must be in the hand opposite the squeeze card.
- **E**nter: Declarer must be able to get to the upper hand – usually via the extended menace.

The memory (pseudo) squeeze – should not work but all too often does.

You have come across this many times – declarer plays off all his cards, keeping a loser and hopes that the defenders throw the wrong card at the end. Careful signals and discards can defeat this – but note that Declarer has ONE loser. In many cases declarer has the potential for an actual squeeze but misplays the hand – losing entries opposite the squeeze cards.

The positional Squeeze (works against one opponent only – the one to play after the squeeze card)

A positional squeeze exists when both the single and the extended menace are in the Upper hand. It only works against the defender who must play immediately after the squeeze card is led.

S A2		When South plays the Ace of Diamonds (The squeeze card), West must either throw the
H 2		Ace of Hearts (setting up the 2 in Dummy (the single menace) or one of the spades
D –		meaning that they will all fall when declarer plays the 3 to the Ace.
C –		Declarer of course waits to see which card West plays before discarding.
S KQ	S J	
H A	H –	Note that this squeeze does not work if the East and West hands are switched over. East
D –	D K	(holding S KQ and HA) waits to see which card North discards before making his own discard.
C –	C A	
	S 3	
	H –	
	D A	
	C 2	

The automatic Squeeze (works against either opponent)

In an automatic squeeze the single menace is in the same hand as the squeeze card. Either defender is squeezed.

S A2		When South plays the Ace of Diamonds, he simply throws the five of clubs from dummy - and
H –		east is squeezed into either giving up control of spades or setting up the two of hearts.
D –		
C 5		It is perfectly possible for both squeezes to happen at the same time (or even different times)
S J	S KQ	one player is squeezed in two suits and the other player is then squeezed in a different suit. When
H –	H A	this happens then the squeeze becomes
D K	D –	
C A	C –	
	S 3	
	H 2	
	D A	
	C	

The double Squeeze (works against both opponents)

S A2		In this position, there is a positional squeeze against West in Spades and Hearts. On the AC West must
H 2		keep the Ace of hearts and so throws a spade. Dummy now throws the 2 of hearts which has
D -		served its purpose – and East now has control of Spades and Diamonds – the JT of spades,
C -		which initially were ‘idle’ have now become ‘busy’. East must now either throw the Ace of
S KQ	S JT	diamonds (setting up South’s two) or also throw a spade setting up dummy’s 2.
H A	H -	
D -	D A	There are more complicated squeezes, but then the more critical the position of the cards become
C -	C -	– and hence the rarer the squeeze. In books potential squeezes always work! In real life many fail.
S 3		
H -		The hardest part for squeeze play is recognising the potential! If you need an extra trick, you should
D 2		start thinking. “What are my threat cards?” and “How do I get to the position of needing all the tricks
C A		bar one?”. In squeeze play ducking tricks to get to the correct position is “rectification of the count.”

S AKQJ84	S 732	Against 6NT, north leads a club. You note you have 11 top tricks (6 spades, 3 hearts and 2 aces)
H A64	H KQ83	The obvious chance for a 12 th trick is the 4 th heart – but there is an extra chance. If you knew
D AJ	D 8652	nothing of squeeze play you would simply cash all your winners and hope the hearts break
C A5	C 96	(or the defence throw one by mistake.)

When dummy goes down, declarer should be thinking. “I have 11 tricks. If the hearts don’t break, then dummy’s hearts form an extended menace (communication) and it is possible that the Jack of Diamonds will be a single menace. For a squeeze to operate I need to be able to take all the tricks but one. So, I must DUCK this club. That leaves me in a position to take 11 out of the remaining 12 tricks.” Since the single and extended menaces are in opposite hands then a squeeze will work against either opponent.

H JT98		This is the end position if North has 4 hearts and the King of Diamonds left – he has just thrown
D K		the Queen on the last trick. When the four of spades is played North must either abandon
S 4		protection in Hearts or allow west to make the Jack of diamonds.
H A64	H KQ83	
D J	D 8	
	Irrelevant	

The Vienna Coup – setting up a loser to change a positional squeeze to an automatic squeeze

The requirement for a single menace sometimes means that you must set up a trick for the opponents (at least temporarily). This exhibits the principle of getting rid of all unnecessary tricks before you do the squeeze.

S A5		In theory when South cashes the Ace and King of diamonds, East is squeezed into giving up
H AKQ6		protection in spades or hearts. In fact North has to play the five of spades on the diamond and
D 8		there is now no way for South to get back to the Queen of Spades – so East can throw a spade
	S K4	in safety. In effect the Ace of Spades has blocked the suit.
	H JT93	
	D 4	Now imagine that South plays a spade to the Ace first – setting up the King for East. All east’s
S Q7		cards are still “busy” so when South plays the AK of diamonds East is genuinely squeezed- but
H 872		this time the single menace is still accessible – the suit has been unblocked. It does not matter
D AK		how all an opponent’s cards are “busy” – just that they are.

Isolating a menace

A single menace is only effective if it is against one opponent. If you play a suit often enough e.g. by ruffing it, you may set up a situation where instead of both opponents, only one now has control of the suit. This is known as “Isolating the menace”.

Summary: <https://tinyurl.com/3rh8kkm4>

There is no doubt that squeeze play is one of the more complicated aspects of card-play (we are after all nearing the end of the series), but many squeezes are missed because declarer doesn’t think of the requirements for one. The key points are:

- Can I get into a position of needing all the tricks bar one?
- What cards are, or could become single or extended menaces? And - how do I keep access to them?
- What will be my squeeze card?

There are squeezes where one player is guarding three suits rather than just two and, once they release control in one suit then they can be squeezed again in the remaining two suits – thus gaining TWO tricks. This is for information purposes only.

Play your cards Right – 20: Squeeze defence and other (Defence)

Well, this is the last article on defending and is basically in three parts.

- Defending against Squeezes
- Leading against slams.
- Selecting discards

Squeeze defence

If you remember a squeeze requires four key factors - **BLUE**

- **B**usy – a defender must require all their cards – and have none they can discard
- **L**osers – declarer must be able to win all the tricks bar one.
- **U**pper – there must be a menace opposite the Squeeze card
- **E**nter - there must be an entry to the menace – usually it is the extended menace.

If you can break up any of the above, then the squeeze will not (usually) work.

Busy

The rule here is: if you are protecting one suit then you should try and make sure that your partner is protecting another – and vice versa. So, if declarer leads a suit, then you must consider whether you should try and win it (and leave partner with the duty of protecting it) or your partner should win it (and the job then falls to you).

Losers

There is a general rule against 3NT contracts (at IMPS) – don't win the fourth trick unless you can see where the fifth trick is coming from – you may rectify the count and enable declarer to squeeze partner – or squeeze partner yourself – a suicide squeeze. The same also applies to Small slams – don't win a trick unless you know where the next one is coming from. If declarer has, for example KQJ in dummy and you have the Ace, then if you win one of the first two rounds declarer might have rectified the count. If you duck twice then the count hasn't been rectified – and declarer cannot duck the third round if you have four – since you can then win the fourth round.

Upper

The danger here is that you can see that dummy has a card in a suit that you are protecting. In other words, it is a single menace against you. One effective way is to keep playing the suit until declarer must play that card from dummy (called 'killing the menace').

Entry

Now when you look at dummy you can see entries to a suit with winners and losers. Those losers are potential extended menaces. To prevent them remaining a threat you play the suit so that declarer has no more of them left. With no cards in the suit to lead, there is now no longer an extended menace.

- | | |
|---------|--|
| S K653 | South opens 4 Hearts: West cashes two minor suit Aces and exits with the Queen of spades |
| H A8 | South wins with the Ace and takes the heart finesse, which you win with the King. Now what. |
| D 975 | |
| C Q852 | South has lost three tricks, so if he has nine tricks then the count is rectified for a squeeze. |
| S 72 | East should also realise that the Queen of clubs is a single menace against West's King and that |
| H K6 | East cannot help West with the Spades i.e. the K65 of spades is an extended menace against |
| D JT832 | West. The conditions for a squeeze exist – fortunately East can remove the link to dummy by |
| C 7643 | playing a spade. South shows out when exiting from dummy and West will know what to keep. |

(If the Queen of clubs was now bare, east could lead a club killing that menace – but killing the link is better)

Leading against Slams

- If you have an Ace then at pairs you should almost always lead it – since the chances are great that declarer can make 13 tricks in the other suits. This is vital if two long suits have been shown or the contract is 6NT.
- At IMPS it is slightly better to try and set up a second trick before you lose your Ace – you hope to win with the Ace and cash the trick you set up. Try leading the Queen from QXX for instance. First of all, partner might have the King – and you set up the Queen – or partner might have the Jack and declarer may decide to play you for it. After all you might lead the Queen from QJX. With no Ace a passive lead is probably best.
- Obviously, the bidding is important. The declaring side will have given lots of information – by preference you would lead an unbid suit: unless partner doubles (Lightner) asking for an unusual lead.

Discarding

More games and slams are thrown by careless discarding than are made by good card play by declarer. Remember that declarer does not usually have all the missing cards – partner can have some strength – and if you count points visible you can get a reasonable picture of how much. (And when declarer plays their high cards, what they are!)

Keep Winners

Your hand will consist of cards that are certain winners, cards that are certain losers, and cards that may or may not be needed. Obviously throw losers but be prepared to throw cards that may or may not be needed in the hope that partner can help. If you have QJX in a suit for instance, partner might have TXX. And, as previously mentioned, if you DO have to bare a potential guard/ winner – do it early. Declarer will not know what you have done.

Protect against threat cards – the four-candle manoeuvre.

If dummy has four cards in a suit, then, by simple arithmetic, if you have four and South has two then partner can only have three – which means you are the only defender guarding against that fourth card. Keep length with dummy. Similarly, if declarer has bid a suit, then you must try and keep length with him. If you must guard against both the fourth card in dummy AND whatever declarer has, then keep protection against the actual threats that you can see and hope that partner can help against the other threats.

If you have two short suits, throw away the second short suit on partner's winners in the first

Not only do you cause declarer some communication problems, but you might also even get a ruff!

S J983 My partner had bid hearts against 3 spades, and I led the King. Partner overtook, cashed the Queen
H KJ and played a third round (declarer following in dummy and in hand). I threw the Jack of clubs and
D T8532 partner then led the Ace and gave me a ruff -one down. Elsewhere two pairs made 9 and two pairs
C J2 made 10 tricks (the AQT72 of spades lay above me so I had no natural trump trick).

Summary of Defence at bridge – a few platitudes.

- What is good for declarer is bad for the defence – and vice versa.
- When dummy goes down – work out how it will help declarer and try and stop it.
- Trump leads are usually a poor choice: make them if other leads are too dangerous or declarer plans a x-ruff.
- Lead up to weakness – and then through strength. Beware of suits when dummy has two high cards in it.
- Don't waste high cards – you don't have many of them! Try and keep communication open with partner.
- When declarer has his extra tricks set up then you must cash out. Take risks when doing so.
- In most cases, initial leads and defensive play are geared to be passive – i.e. not throw tricks at declarer.
- Counting points and shape are the sine=qua=non of defence. Take the effort to do so.
- Defence is co-operative. In no trumps look for the best suit held by the partnership for instance.
- If defenders do not signal by how they play their cards, they put themselves at a tremendous disadvantage.
- Don't waste trumps/ ruff losers – if you have four, consider trying to get declarer to ruff and weaken them.
- Don't win tricks too soon! You may set up winners for declarer. If declarer has no way to throw away losers in a suit, then you DON'T have to lead it. Declarer may lose an extra trick if they must lead the suit themselves.
- **Defence is the weakest part of a bridge-players game – yet you defend twice as often as you declare. Improving your defence is the quickest and best way to improve your results at the bridge table.**

Play your cards Right – 21: Trump reduction Plays (Declarer)

This is the last article. Over the last 20 weeks I have provided ten articles on both declarer play and defensive play.

Every bridge hand is unique: every bridge hand is an IQ test. Both defenders and declarers must look at the situation and apply the right technique. Some (finessing/ leading up to high cards for instance) occur in virtually every hand, whilst in other hands wrong technique goes unpunished (or even rewarded). My aim has been to make you aware of more bridge techniques and, furthermore, how to recognise when they occur: you have lots of trumps and want the opponents to lead a suit – plan an endplay. You are one trick short and hold cards dangerous to the opponents - plan a squeeze. Short of entries? How to create them and use them wisely. The problem you will have is: how to recognise these situations and react to them. Amazingly in all the years I have TD, partnered or just been around to help, not one player has ever asked me “How should I play this hand/ suit?” Are you all expert card players?

All articles can be found at: <https://tinyurl.com/3rh8kkm4> in Word format. Anyway, onto the last article.

Introduction to trump reduction plays. Why you may need to reduce your trumps.

Usually when you need to finesse in trumps, you lead a trump through the opponent. However, in some circumstances you don't have to.

S 32 This is trick 12 and hearts are trumps. You have no trumps in dummy, but a spade is just as
H effective since West must play a trump anyway – and you play the A or Q accordingly.
 S –
 H KJ This position arises because East has nothing, but trumps left. However, consider the following
S – positions.
H AQ

S 432
H - When you lead a spade from dummy, East does not have to play a heart – but you must.
 S –
 H KJ You win trick 11 with the Ten of Hearts and must now lead from the AQ into East's KJ and
 D 3 East won a trick. Basically, **you had too many trumps!** What you should have done earlier (if
S – possible) was to ruff a trick with the aim of **Reducing your trumps to the same number as**
H AQT your opponent. (This is like trump elopement discussed many weeks ago.)

A defender with lots of trumps can find themselves in the same position.

S 76543 It may appear that declarer has two losing spades (the 98) and two losing hearts (as the
KJ9 lie behind the AQT BUT when declarer plays a spade, West must ruff his partner's winner and
H – return a trump into the AQT. Declarer now plays the second spade: again, West must ruff
S – S AKQJT return a trump into declarer's tenace.
and H KJ975
H KJ975 return a trump into declarer's tenace.
S 98
H AQT All of which goes to show that you should always be alert if you have a lot of trumps.

The preparatory ruff

To ruff trumps in the long trump hand, you need to be able to get to the other hand to lead a card you can ruff. This takes entries, so if you win the first trick in dummy and have a void, it is almost mandatory to ruff at trick 2 if there is any danger of being left with too many trumps. That way you haven't wasted the Entry.

Counting entries

If you need to ruff to reduce your trumps to the same number as the player sitting under you (or one less for a player sitting over you) then you need ONE MORE ENTRY than the number of times that you will need to ruff.

The Grand Coup

(This originated in Whist – when you don't know what partner has). Despite its literal grand name, it is nothing more than reducing the number of trumps you hold by ruffing winners.

S 63 West leads the Ace and another diamond against 6 spades. South takes two rounds of trumps
H AK5 since a 3-2 split makes the contract a certainty and finds East has 4 of them with the Jack
D Q6 apparently protected.
C AKQ874

S 9 S J752 Since South has two more trumps than East he needs to ruff twice and return to dummy. That
H J62 H QT873 will require 3 entries. One of them will be in clubs, the other two will be in hearts.

D A98432 D JT

C JT5 C 62 Declarer plays three rounds of clubs – East follows twice – and ruffs the third round (1st ruff)
S AKQT84 He then crosses to the Ace of Hearts and ruffs another club. (2nd ruff). He now has the QT of
H 94 spades left, a heart and the King of Diamonds, whereas Dummy has the K5 of hearts and Q8
D K75 of clubs. Declarer crosses to the King of hearts and plays a club winner. If East discards, then
C 93 declarer throws the diamond 'winner' leaving him in dummy with the QT over the J7.

Trump elopement (sort of) – or an endplay in trumps.

When you have a trump tenace left in your hand, it is usually a bad idea to cash the top card. If you can reduce your trumps sufficiently then eventually an opponent will have to win and lead a trump for you.

S K74 S A652 Against three hearts the defence start with clubs, West ruffing the third round. West plays a
H KJT63 H A4 heart to the Ace and then leads the 4 and finesses the Jack, which wins. Now West could play
D K85 D A743 the King hoping the hearts split 3-3, but there is no need! All he must do is cash his top tricks
C 84 C J65 and then exit with a small card in Spades or Diamonds. Assuming South has the Queen of hearts
then declarer MUST make both the King and the ten. The moral of the story of course is that declarer should not risk
setting up a loser for the defence and, surprise, surprise, he can avoid that by losing some tricks elsewhere.

Trump reduction plays by defence.

The defence must also be aware of the dangers of having too many trumps.

S QJ4 East opened 1 spade and South overcalled with 2H (marginal on a poor suit and flat hand)
H 654 After two passes East re-opened with a balancing double and West left it in. West led the King
D A832 of hearts: South won, cashed two diamonds ending in dummy and led the Queen of spades:
C 974 East ducked so South ruffed a diamond, cashed the Ace of spades and led another one.

S 96 S KT853

H KQJ93 H - West should be aware that a) he has more hearts than declarer and b) he has a tenace position

D Q96 D T754 (The J9 sitting over declarer's T8). This should be a trigger – he must reduce his trumps to the

C T82 C AKQ5 same number as South – and he can only do that by ruffing this spade. Once he does that
it

S A72 is plain sailing: East takes three club tricks and at the end West is sitting pretty with QJ9 of
H AT872 hearts over declarer's T87. Had he not ruffed he would have had to ruff the third club and
D KJ allow declarer to make the ten by having to lead back.
C J63

To force or not to force, that is the question?

We discussed the advantage of forcing declarer to lose trump control by making them ruff. How does this compare? Well in this situation the defence has potential extra trump tricks by strength (the finesse) rather than just length and declarer can also make enough tricks in the other suits to endplay the defender.

Conclusion: Bidding is judgement – Card play is technique.

Well, that's it. 21 weeks split between declarer and defensive play. You may regard this as a primer: the topics cover well over 95% (in my estimate) of possible situations that may occur at the bridge table and will help you avoid making bad plays and losing unnecessary tricks. As Arnold Palmer said: **"The more I practise, the luckier I get"**.