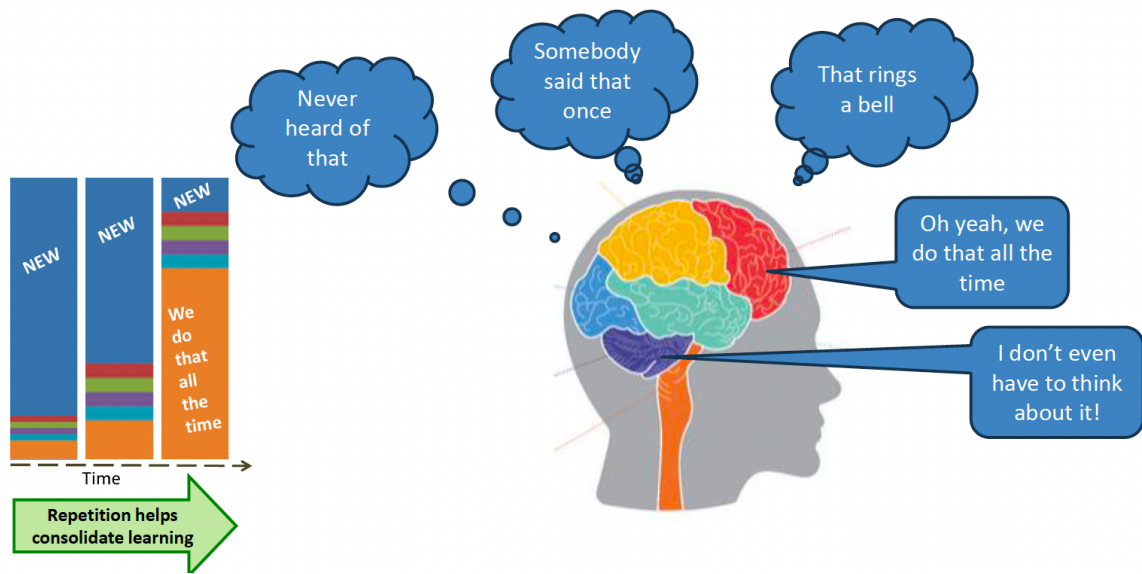


HOW WE LEARN BRIDGE



INTRODUCTION TO DEFENCE WORKSHOP

11 November 2024



OPENING LEADS

This quote from Krzysztof Martens, the world's leading Bridge coach, sums up how we approach defence Krzysztof is Polish so excuse the odd English from time to time...

“The Opening lead is the least liked part of bridge. This is the consequence of a sad fact that most players lead poorly. And much as we are able to tolerate or even get to like shortcomings in our character, accepting intellectual weaknesses goes against human nature. Hence our aversion to defensive play.

To be sure, good players lead better than weak players, but the level of opening leading always lags behind declarer play or bidding skills. It is common for many players to treat hands in which they defend with some sort of impatience. In the next hand we will bid to a distributional slam or a light game, or we will pre-empt opponents out of their optimum contract – in a word, we will perform a number of brilliant moves bringing us a lot of points or money and providing us with an opportunity to show the real strength of our play. For the time being, however, we have to defend. The contract seems cold, declarer looks as if two overtricks were just a matter of time, and so we lead through dummy's strength, or lead trumps, or the highest from a sequence, because this is what routine tells us to do. If, by some unfortunate decree of fate, in a match we constantly get worse cards than the opponents or we defend more often than we declare in a tournament, we routinely let the tricks go time and again on the opening lead, complaining about the bad luck and restlessly waiting for a better hand.

Winning defence does not require exceptional skills or knowledge. Mistakes in this element of bridge, usually very simple, can most often be attributed to laziness – negligence to count up to 40 HCP, thirteen cards or tricks. Another common cause of defensive disasters is failure to draw conclusions from the bidding, or partner's and declarer's actions. Compared with bidding or declarer play, the defensive problems are less obvious, good technique less useful and routine sometimes even harmful. High level of defence can be achieved through clear and simple logical thinking.”

OPENING LEADS SUMMARY – WHICH CARD?

An honour is an Ace, King, Queen or Jack. The ten is also sometimes regarded as an honour – BUT a 9 is NOT an honour.

1. TOP OF SEQUENCE

A sequence has to include at least one honour. This is the most effective lead if you happen to have these good cards:

- When leading against a suit contract, a sequence is TWO cards e.g. top of AK654, JT3, KQ54, etc.
- When leading against NT the sequence needs to be at least THREE cards, e.g. top of KQJx, JT9X, QJT_x, T98_{xx}, etc.

2. FOURTH highest card of your longest and strongest suit

Fourth Highest from a strong suit is the most common lead especially against a NT contract.

To lead 4th highest you need a STRONG suit i.e. a suit with at least one honour and hopefully some texture.

3. SECOND highest from ‘rubbish’ when you have at least 3 cards

The 987654 are regarded as ‘rags’, rubbish, or PIPs as there are no honours. If you have nothing much or would blow a trick leading anything else you can lead your 2nd highest of a suit of 3 or more cards with no honour i.e. from 8654 lead the 6.

Note: The next time you play this suit, remember to play the highest card so that partner knows you have rubbish and doesn't mistake your lead for a doubleton ie if you led the 6 from 8654, the next time you need to play a card in this suit play the 8.

4. Leading a singleton or top of a doubleton

Leading a singleton or top of a doubleton if you have three or more trumps can also be an effective lead against a SUIT contract. Your partner may give you a ruff. You are unlikely to lead a short suit against a NT contract unless your partner had bid the suit.

5. Leading with an Ace

It is generally best not to lead from a suit with an unsupported Ace against a suit contract i.e. Ace without a King (Ax is ok as it is a doubleton) BUT if you do need to lead from a suit that has an unsupported Ace, you should lead the Ace.

BUT against a NT contract you would lead 4th highest from an unsupported Ace.

Note: When defending a contract, it is often best to play the cards according to these principles ie don't just apply to the opening lead but any time you have won a trick in the defence and need to play a card.

QUIZ 1 Opening Lead – Which Card?

Name:

- A. In standard methods, assuming you must lead this sequence which is the correct lead against a **NT Contract**?

1	8643	11	J864	21	QJ85	31	KJ943	41	AQ875
2	86432	12	J987	22	QJT3	32	KJ743	42	AJ65
3	9876	13	JT52	23	QJT87	33	KQ653	43	AQ742
4	98765	14	JT4	24	QJ7652	34	KQT3	44	AK53
5	6532	15	JT93	25	Q8764	35	KQJ43	45	AK987
6	9752	16	Q753	26	K852	36	A874	46	AKJ73
7	9854	17	QT84	27	K8	37	AT75	47	AKQ5
8	975	18	QJT4	28	KT832	38	A985	48	A98742
9	96	19	QJ72	29	KT532	39	AJ96	49	AJ987
10	965432	20	Q5	30	KJ752	40	AJ	50	AK752

CIRCLE THE CORRECT ANSWER IN EACH INSTANCE FOR THE TABLE ABOVE

- B. Assuming you are defending a **suit contract** what would you lead if you must lead this sequence?

1	8643	11	J864	21	QJ85	31	KJ943	41	AQ875
2	86432	12	J987	22	QJT3	32	KJ743	42	AJ65
3	9876	13	JT52	23	QJ987	33	KQ653	43	AQ742
4	98765	14	JT4	24	QJ7652	34	KQT32	44	AK53
5	6532	15	JT93	25	Q8764	35	KQJ43	45	AK987
6	9752	16	Q753	26	K852	36	A874	46	AKJ73
7	T985	17	QT84	27	K8	37	AT75	47	AKQ5
8	975	18	QJT4	28	KT832	38	A985	48	A98742
9	96	19	QJ72	29	KT532	39	AJ96	49	AJ987
10	965432	20	Q9	30	KJ752	40	AJ	50	AK752

CIRCLE THE CORRECT ANSWER IN EACH INSTANCE FOR THE TABLE ABOVE

NOTE:

- An honour is an Ace, King, Queen, Jack or Ten
- A sequence must contain at least ONE honour
- The 10 is usually regarded as an honour by expert players. However, you and your partner may play the 10 as rubbish.

After the Opening Lead

We play HIGH = Discourage and Low = Encourage

- Communicate to partner that you like or dislike the card they played so they know whether to continue if they win the trick or get in later. If you play your LOWEST card it indicates that you like the suit. If you play your highest card that is not an honour eg a 9 or 10 it indicates that you do not wish partner to continue the suit.
- What do you play if you win a trick. Usually just apply the opening lead principles ie lead like you would the opening lead.
- What if you run out of the suit that declarer or partner plays? First priority is to discard a suit that is rubbish by playing the highest card to discourage that suit. If you have an inexperienced partner, you may play a low card to encourage your partner to play that suit if they win a trick.

Want to know more about Defence:

Read "Introduction to Declarer's Play" by Edwin P. Kantar – in the Mollymook Bridge Club Library:

- Tells you all about the declarer card play that they never taught you in Beginners lessons;
- Read one chapter per week. Read chapter's 1 and 2 followed by chapters 8 and 9;
- Save the rest for later when you are more experienced.