

Opening Leads

Defense, in general, is accepted to be the hardest part of the game so the Opening Lead often is the most important card you will play on a board. So it's worth giving it some thought.

The proper opening lead depends on the cards you hold as well the type (Suit/No Trump) and the level of contract to be defeated. Any information gathered from the bidding (from bids made and NOT made) of your partner and your opponents will also guide you in your decision.

The TWO decisions to make (in sequence) are:

1. Which SUIT to lead?
2. Which CARD (in chosen suit) to lead?

There really is one correct answer: As each hand is different, you must work it out. The bidding provides many clues. Factors to consider:

General Lead Factors:

1. Did partner bid a suit? Or make a lead directing double?
2. Which suits did the opponents bid? Specifically Declarer's and Dummy's suits
3. How high is the contract? If in game, how easy was to reach it? **TIP: Try a passive lead when opponents' bidding indicates weak holding.** Did they make an attempt for slam? If so, you might want to take your tricks as soon as you can
4. How are the points distributed between Declarer and Dummy? Avoid leading to strength. **TIP: Try a passive lead when declarer is strong and dummy is weak.**
5. Distribution of points between you and partner. Who is likely to have the entries? If partner has most entries, you may have to sacrifice an honor to establish his/her lower cards while entries are still there.
6. Does dummy figure to have a long suit? How is that suit breaking? **TIP: Try an attacking lead if you think suit is breaking evenly.**

AVOID LEADING

1. Long suits bid by opponents
2. Leading a singleton trump (unless you **know** partner has a long trump stack as passing your takeout double, or opponents made a high-level sacrifice with few honors - planning to cross-ruff, etc)
3. Away from an Ace (under-leading) in a long suit or one that declarer may hold the King
4. Suits that partner could have indicated during bidding but refused to do so
5. An Ace of a suit if opponent may be void

SUIT TO LEAD AGAINST NO TRUMP CONTRACTS

1. Attacking Leads

As a general rule make an attacking move by opening the suit that promises to be the longest and the strongest suit in your and your partner's **COMBINED HAND**

- If your partner did not bid, lead **your** longest and strongest suit
- If your partner bid a suit, **generally lead partner's suit** , even if you have a suit of your own.
- You may lead your OWN long and strong suit IF:
 - Partner has raised your suit
 - Singleton in partner's suit and a strong suit of your own
 - You have a long and strong suit and enough entries to beat contract without much help from partner.

TIP: When not sure whether your own suit or your partner's is best in the COMBINED HAND, lead your partner's suit.

2. Protecting Leads

When neither your partner or you have bid a suit or when there is no attractive attacking lead; the best protecting leads are those that are safe and will not endanger the high cards in your hand

You may not want to lead from your longest suit if:

- Your longest suit is 4 cards headed by only one honour
- Your longest suit is weak and you do not have enough entries to cash long suit even if you establish winners.
- Your longest suit may have been bid by declarer

Safe Leads:

- Worthless 4-card suit
- Worthless 3-card suit

Non Desirable but sometimes unavoidable lead from:

- A low doubleton. **TIP: Avoid a doubleton headed by an honor**
- A three-card suit headed by touching honors

3. When Partner DOUBLES

When Partner Doubles 3NT Try one of the following leads if none apply then lead your normal lead.

- If your partner bid a suit lead partner's suit
- If you bid and partner did not, lead your suit
- If neither you nor partner bid, lead dummy's first bid suit (off when suit has been rebid or raised.

OPENING LEADS AGAINST SUIT CONTRACTS

1. Attacking Leads

As a general rule make an attacking move by opening the suit that promises to build trick quickly while not unnecessarily sacrificing high cards.

- Lead a suit you bid and partner raised (no matter how its headed)
- Lead partner's suit regardless how your cards in the suit are headed.
- Lead a 4-card or longer suit headed by A, K or by a solid se
- With 4 or more of their trump, lead your strongest and longest suit as in No Trump.

Less Desirable Leads

- 4-card or longer suits headed by only two touching honors (except A,K sequence).
- 4-card or longer suit headed by a single honor

2. Short Suit (Ruffing) Leads

Occasionally, a good ruffing lead will help defeat contract if you can trump a trick before declarer pulls trump

1. Leading a singleton in your partner's suit is often a good ruffing lead.
2. Leading a singleton A or a doubleton A, K in a suit your partner DID NOT bid may end up as a good ruffing lead if:
 - Your partner HAS bid meaning he might have a good quick entry to lead the suit back for you to ruff, or;
 - You have a sure stopper (hopefully first round) in the trump suit. (Meaning you can get the lead back quickly and lead your partner suit again while you still have a trump left to rough with)
3. You have at least one "extra" trump. (There is no point in roughing if that will give away a natural trump trick)
4. When you hold 4 or more trump it is usually best to lead from your longest suit (not your shortest) and force declarer to rough as often as you can while you keep control of the trump suit

3. Protecting Leads

Often your hand does not contain good attacking leads or a good ruffing lead so a protecting lead or generally a short suit lead may be the answer.

1. Lead a low doubleton NOT headed by an honor.
2. Lead a worthless 3-card suit (includes leads from J 10 x, or 10 9 x)
3. Lead a worthless 4-card suit

Less desirable but acceptable protecting leads include:

- From a 3-card suit headed by TWO touching honors
- Trump lead if you hold 2 or 3 low trumps **TIP: Avoid a trump lead if it is a singleton or if you have 4 or more trump**
- When the bidding indicates that dummy has a short suit, a trump lead is one of the best (if not a required) protecting lead

LEADS AGAINST SLAM CONTRACTS

Although most previous suggestions still apply, frequently, the suit you would lead from in a slam contract is not necessarily the same suit you would lead from against a mere game contract. **TIP: usually a lead from a long suit does not cut it as you don't have time to establish winners.**

1. Leads Against Small Slams

- If you hold the A or an honor in the trump suit which you expect to take a trick, try an opening lead that would establish an immediate second round winner in a side suit.
- In No trump contracts, lead of an A is seldom helpful. Try holding it back for an entry while you establish a second round winner.
- In a suit contract, if you (or suspect that partner may) have a trump trick, Lead the A, so it does not get trumped on second round.
- If you cannot visualize the establishment of a second round winner, a protecting lead is often the answer. **TIP: Avoid leading a trump as a protecting lead**

Desperation leads:

- A singleton might work if partner has the A and gives you a rough.
- With a lucky break and in a suit leading away from a doubleton headed by K or Q might work if partner shows up with an equal honor.

2. Leads Against Grand Slams

- Attacking leads in grand slam contracts are extremely rare since the opportunity to establish a second round winner is probably not there.
- If you have an A, think twice before leading it will likely to be trumped.
- A desperation lead is also a poor gamble partner needs to have the right honor. In a grand slam that is not very likely

A protecting lead is likely the best against grand slams (Make the declarer work for every trick)

3. When Partner Doubles a Slam Contract.

Since good players normally do not recklessly go beyond game, you can not hope to set the contract down more than a trick. So Doubling is risky but can have its rewards if the right lead would set the contract.

When partner doubles a slam contract, DO NOT LEAD AS YOU NORMALLY WOULD.

- DO NOT lead a suit that you have bid
 - DO NOT lead a suit that partner has bid
 - DO NOT lead trump
1. When Dummy has bid, lead dummy's suit. If dummy has bid more than one suit, lead dummy's first bid suit.
 2. When Dummy has not bid a suit but declarer has bid more than one suit, Lead Declarer's side suit (hopefully partner is looking for a rough)
 3. Make an unusual lead such as an unbid suit. (Partner likely has a void somewhere)
 4. Against a doubled No Trump slam, the double almost always asks for the lead of dummy's first bid suit.

Which CARD (in the chosen suit) to lead -

Length	Holding	Defender's	
		Lead versus Notrump	Lead versus Suit
... ..2	A x through x x	High	High
3	A x x, A 10 x	Low	Ace
	A Q x, A J x	Middle	Ace
	A K x	See a.	See a.
	K Q x, Q J x, J 10 x, 10 9 x	High	High
	K J x, K 10 x, Q 10 x	Low	Low
	K x x, Q x x, J x x, 10 x x	Low	Low
	x x x	High	Low, MUD, etc
4	A K 10 x, A K x x, K Q x x	High	High
	A K J x, A K 10 9, K Q x x	Low	King
	A Q J x, A J x x, A 10 x x, A x x x	Low	Ace
	A J 10 x, A 10 x x	2nd Best	Ace
	K Q J x, Q J 10 x, J 10 9 x, 10 9 8 x	High	High
	K Q 10 x, Q J 9 x, J 10 8 x, 10 9 7 x	High	High
	K J x x, J 10 x x, Q 10 x x	Low	Low
	K x x x, Q x x x, J x x x, 10 x x x	Low	Low
	Q J x x, J 10 x x, 10 9 x x	Low	Low
5	A K J 10 x	Ace	-
	A K J x x	King	-
	A J 10 9 x, A J 10 8 x, K J 10 9 x, K J 10 8 x	2nd Best	-
	A J 10 x x, K J 10 x x	2nd Best	-
	A 10 9 x x, K 10 9 x x, Q 10 9 x x	Low	-
	K 10 9 8 x, K 10 9 7 x, Q 10 9 8 x, Q 10 9 7 x	2nd Best	-
	K Q J 10 x, K Q J 9 x, Q J 10 9 x, Q J 10 8 x	High	-
	K Q J x x, K Q 10 x x, Q J 10 x x, J 10 9 x x	High	-
	K Q 10 9 x, K 10 9 7 x, Q 10 9 8 x, Q 10 9 7 x	2nd Best	-
	K 10 9 8 x, K 10 9 7 x, Q 10 9 8 x, Q 10 9 7 x	Low	-
	10 9 8 7 x, 10 9 8 6 x, 10 9 7 6 x	High	-
	J 10 8 x x, 10 9 8 x x, 10 9 7 x x	Low	-
	J 10 9 8 x, J 10 9 7 x, J 10 8 7 x	High	-

a. Depending on partnership agreement, leads may be either the Ace or King.