

U3ABC07 Practice Session: 1NT Openers and Responses Including Transfers OR Playing Techniques

Welcome!

Here is a list of all the hands that you could play in today's Practice Session. It tells you useful stuff about them, like the cards in each hand, the High Card Points, the "correct" bidding and lead.

This is your third week of bidding with Acoll, and today's practice session offered you a choice:

- If you wanted more practice with **1NT openers and responses including Transfers**, you could play hands 1-8
- If you were happy that you'd mastered **1NT openers and responses including Transfers**, you could play hands 9-16, to focus on playing techniques

So, if you're reading this (dear reader), you'll probably want to look at either the first half OR the second half of this commentary, depending on the path you chose.

Remember, we're here to help it all make sense. You will make mistakes, but we're always happy to explain or answer questions. You're playing with other people who are just starting out, too. Let's have fun together!

-Ed

Boards 1 – 8: 1NT Openers and Responses Including Transfers

These boards are about bidding when your partner opens with a No Trump bid but you don't want to play in No Trumps, you want to play in a **Suit Contract**! Yes, it's Week 2 and it's already time to start disagreeing with your partner.

Bridge bidding isn't always a cosy chat with your partner, sometimes it's a **negotiation**. But it is still a civilised process, not a tantrum. You suggest a suit contract to your partner, but you might not get your way.

To make game in a MAJOR (Hearts or Spades), you need at least 25 points and at least EIGHT trumps i.e. eight cards in your trump suit, Hearts or Spades. These might be split evenly (4 in each hand) or not (5-3, 6-2 or even 7-1). When you have this magic number of trumps, we call it a **Fit**.

If you don't have a fit, you may have to play in No Trumps, or a minor suit (Clubs or Diamonds). If you don't have 25 points, you will probably have to settle for a part score.

When your partner opens 1NT, you know they have a **Balanced Hand** and 12-14 **High Card Points**, but a balanced hand can include two, three, four, or even five Hearts or Spades. You know what's in your hand, the purpose of the bidding is to tell partner what you've got and/or find out what they've got – so one of you is in a good position to choose the right contract.

But why are we ignoring the minor suits? To make game in NT (3NT) you need to make nine tricks; to make game in a major (4H or 4S) you need to make ten tricks; to make game in a minor (5C or 5D) you need to make eleven tricks. 11 tricks are a lot harder to make than 10 – and major games score a bit more too!

So most of the time we try to play in No Trumps or a MAJOR, because they score more points, more easily!

Red Suit Transfers

There are several ways to respond to 1NT to indicate that you want to play in the majors, Hearts or Spades; today we're focussing on the use of Red Suit Transfers, which you use when you have exactly FIVE or SIX cards in a major. This starts off easy:

1. Partner opens 1NT
2. You respond 2D if you want to play in Hearts OR 2H if you want to play in Spades
3. Partner MUST bid 2H or 2S as requested

What happens next depends on how many trumps you have and how many points you have; the Transfer is just the first step in the negotiation. Your crucial SECOND bid tells your partner:

- Whether you've got 5 trumps (rebid NT) or 6 trumps (rebid in H/S)
- Whether you've got enough points for game (bid game), maybe enough (bid one less than game – a **Game Invitation**), or definitely not enough (pass)

Partner (the 1NT opener) does not bid again unless you made a Game Invitation after the transfer (3H, 3S or 2NT); they pass with 12-13 points but raise you to game (4H, 4S or 3NT) with 14 points.

Shortage Points

When you start bidding, you evaluate your hand by adding up its High Card Points (HCPs): 4 for an Ace, 3 for a King, etc. You need 12-14 HCPs to open 1NT, for example. When you're in a suit contract with a fit (a total of at least 8 trumps) you can add Shortage Points (SPs) if you expect to be Dummy (not Declarer). Add:

- 3 Shortage Points for a void
- 2 Shortage Points for a singleton
- 1 Shortage Point for a doubleton

(Some people value shortages more than this, but for now, please use these values.)

So, if you choose a suit contract, you may have more points than in No Trumps! It sounds a bit daft, but it works because in a suit contract you can ruff short suits. But remember, to count SPs:

- You need a fit
- You need to play in the suit with a fit
- You expect to be Dummy
- You need at least 3 trumps

If you end up in No Trumps, those SPs will disappear. Your shortages become a liability not an asset, in No Trumps! (Your long suit may still earn extra tricks in NT, but it's a bit less reliable.)

Additional (Advanced) Discussion

In these notes, **anything in green** is a bit more advanced, so it's optional reading for the more adventurous and curious!

The Hands and Bidding for Boards 1-8

North	East	South	West
1NT	Pass	Pass	Pass
	♠ AK3		
	♥ QJ		
	♦ A753		
	♣ 9873		
♠ 76		♠ QJT982	
♥ 98642		♥ 53	
♦ KQJT		♦ 84	
♣ AJ		♣ KQ2	
	♠ 54		
	♥ AKT7		
	♦ 962		
	♣ T654		

Board: 1 Dealer: North Lead: ♠Q #3

North has a balanced hand and 14 HCP. While in principle they could open 1D and plan to rebid 2C if partner responds, 1NT is a more descriptive bid, as it gives partner their point count and shape straight away.

The 1NT opening bid shows 12-14 HCP and a balanced hand.

South has just 7 HCP. With a maximum total point count of 21, they know there's no chance of game, and pass.

ADDITIONAL (ADVANCED) DISCUSSION

South has a 4-card Heart suit that they might be tempted to bid, but it's probably just as useful in NT, so they pass. 1NT should also be easier to make than 2H because it's one less trick. (With a 5-card Heart suit, they have a much better reason to bid it.)

East South West North

1NT Pass 4♥ Pass

Pass Pass

♠ J6432
♥ K83
♦ KQJ4
♣ 9

♠ 9
♥ AQJT652
♦ A7
♣ JT5

♠ AK7
♥ 74
♦ T852
♣ KQ87

♠ QT85
♥ 9
♦ 963
♣ A6432

Board: 2 Dealer: East Lead: ♣9 #15

East opens 1NT. West has 7 Hearts and 12 HCP, so they know they have a good fit (partner must have 2 as they bid 1NT, so that's 9 Hearts or more) and the partnership has 24-26 HCP.

With their fit, 3 Shortage Points as described in the introduction, 2 for the Singleton Spade and one for the Doubleton Diamond, the total points are 27-29, more than enough for game.

West doesn't need to negotiate with partner, they know that 4H is almost certain, so they bid it right away. No need for a Transfer.

Additional (Advanced) Discussion

It isn't a terrible idea to bid 2D to transfer to Hearts, but it's not a good idea, for three main reasons:

1. You already know 4H is the best contract
2. A sequence like 1NT 2D 2H encourages the opposition to bid and they might find a good contract if you let them in
3. If you use a Transfer, your hand will be Dummy, showing the Defence your finessing holding in Hearts (AQJ); why help them?

South West North East

1NT Pass 2NT Pass

Pass Pass

♠ KQ5
♥ 65
♦ K732
♣ QJT3

♠ T73
♥ A94
♦ QJT86
♣ 97

♠ J42
♥ KQT872
♦
♣ K865

♠ A986
♥ J3
♦ A954
♣ A42

Board: 3 Dealer: South Lead: ♦Q #136

South has 13 HCP and a balanced hand, so opens 1NT, showing 12-14 HCP and a balanced hand.

North has 11 HCP and a balanced hand. This isn't quite enough to be sure of making 3NT, as that requires 25 HCP. They bid 2NT to tell partner they have 11-12 HCP, asking them to bid 3NT if they have the maximum 14 HCP.

South does not have the maximum 14 HCP, so they cannot raise to 3NT and must pass 2NT.

ADDITIONAL (ADVANCED) DISCUSSION

Notice that the 1NT and 2NT point counts are not precise, they are ranges (12-14 and 11-12) so if you opened 1NT with 13 points and partner replied 2NT, you might have 24 points or 25 points in total; if you're feeling optimistic you might try your luck with 3NT!

25 points does NOT guarantee that you'll make 3NT, but you probably will. Bridge is a game, not a science.

West North East South

1NT Pass 2NT Pass

Pass Pass

♠ T73
♥ AT42
♦ QJT8
♣ 97

♠ A986
♥ 83
♦ A954
♣ A42

♠ KQ5
♥ 65
♦ K732
♣ QJT3

♠ J42
♥ KQJ97

Board: 4 Dealer: West Lead: ♦Q #578

West has 12 HCP and a balanced hand, so opens 1NT, showing 12-14 HCP and a balanced hand.

East has 11 HCP and a balanced hand. This isn't quite enough to be sure of making 3NT, as that requires a total of 25 HCP. So they bid 2NT to tell partner they have 11-12 HCP, asking them to bid 3NT if they have the maximum 14 HCP.

West does not have the maximum 14 HCP, so they cannot raise to 3NT and must pass 2NT.

♦ 6
♣ K865

North	East	South	West
1NT	Pass	2NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass
	♠ A93		
	♥ T74		
	♦ A72		
	♣ KQT6		
♠ QJT62			♠ 75
♥ Q5			♥ AK62
♦ J986			♦ KT4
♣ 87			♣ 9532
	♠ K84		
	♥ J983		
	♦ Q53		
	♣ AJ4		

Board: 5 Dealer: North Lead: ♥2 #640

North has 13 HCP and a balanced hand, so opens 1NT, showing 12-14 HCP and a balanced hand.

South has 11 HCP and a fairly balanced hand. This isn't quite enough to be sure of making 3NT, as that requires 25 HCP. They bid 2NT to tell partner they have 11-12 HCP, asking them to bid 3NT if they have the maximum 14 HCP.

North does not have the maximum 14 HCP, so they should pass 2NT, but with 13 HCP, a promising Club suit, and two tens, they decide to risk 3NT.

ADDITIONAL (ADVANCED) DISCUSSION

North has bent the rules slightly here, as tens aren't really worth half a point each – but it's this sort of nuanced decision that makes Bridge a game rather than a maths problem. Which were you, an optimist or a pessimist?

East	South	West	North
1NT	Pass	2♦	Pass
2♥	Pass	4♥	Pass
Pass	Pass		
	♠ A9873		
	♥ 2		
	♦ T953		
	♣ K87		
♠ JT4			♠ KQ65
♥ AKT765			♥ QJ4
♦ 7			♦ KQ6
♣ A63			♣ J54
	♠ 2		
	♥ 983		
	♦ AJ842		
	♣ QT92		

Board: 6 Dealer: East Lead: ♠2 #1342

East opens 1NT. West has 6 Hearts and 12 HCP, so they start by bidding 2D, asking partner to bid 2H. South bids 2H as requested, what does West bid next?

They have 12 HCP, and partner has 12-14, so the partnership has 24-26. You need 25 points for 4H, but West bids 4H anyway.

Is that rash? They're in a suit contract with a fit (they have 6 Hearts, partner must have 2 as they bid 1NT, so that's 8 Hearts, a FIT). When you have a fit, you can add Shortage Points as described in the introduction. With a Singleton Diamond, West can add 2 Shortage Points to the 24-26 HCP total, making 26-28 points. Game on!

South	West	North	East
1NT	Pass	2♦	Pass
2♥	Pass	3NT	Pass
4♥	Pass	Pass	Pass
	♠ JT3		
	♥ A9876		
	♦ 2		
	♣ AKJ8		
♠ K952			♠ A6
♥ 5			♥ JT32
♦ KQT65			♦ J987
♣ T95			♣ 763
	♠ Q874		
	♥ KQ4		
	♦ A43		

Board: 7 Dealer: South Lead: ♦K #1641

South opens 1NT. North has 5 Hearts and 13 HCP, so they start by bidding 2D, asking partner to transfer to 2H. When South bids 2H as requested, what does North bid next?

North has 13 HCP, and partner has 12-14, so the partnership has 25-27. You need 25 points for 3NT or 4H, but which is the better contract? North bids 3NT to tell partner:

- I have exactly 5 Hearts
- We have enough points for game in NT or Hearts
- You decide!

(That's what 3NT means in this situation, after the Transfer to Hearts – it has other meanings in other situations!)

Yes, it's a proper dialogue. South can pass to play in 3NT or bid 4H to play in 4H. With just two Hearts, they'd pass 3NT, as they've only got a 5-2 fit, not enough. With three Hearts, they would probably bid

♣ Q42

4H unless they hate the idea for some reason; with four or more Hearts, they would bid 4H.

With three good Hearts, South is happy to bid 4H, game. (This type of bid, choosing between two options offered by partner, is sometimes called a **Preference Bid**.)

Additional (Advanced) Discussion

South only has three Hearts and a very balanced 4333 hand (so not much chance of ruffing anything), so they could pass 3NT - but they have two good Honours (K & Q) in Hearts, so they decided on 4H.

I wonder which you chose - some people prefer playing in a suit, some people prefer No Trumps. I like cheese.

West	North	East	South
1NT	Pass	2♦	Pass
2♥	Pass	4♥	Pass
Pass	Pass		

♠ AQ42
♥ 8
♦ J985
♣ JT98

♠ K53
♥ J62
♦ K74
♣ AK76

♠ J6
♥ AK7543
♦ A63
♣ 42

♠ T987
♥ QT9
♦ QT2
♣ Q53

Board: 8 Dealer: West Lead: ♣J #3658

West opens with 1NT. East has 6 Hearts and 12 HCP, so they start by bidding 2D, asking (OK, telling) partner to bid 2H. When West bids 2H as requested, what does East bid next?

East has 12 HCP, and partner has 12-14, so the partnership has 24-26. You need 25 points for 4H, but East bids 4H even though not certain that they have enough HCP for game. Are they mad?

They're in a suit contract with a fit (they have 6 Hearts, partner must have 2 as they bid 1NT, so that's 8 Hearts, a FIT). When you have a fit, you can add Shortage Points as described in the introduction. With two Doubletons, East can add 2 Shortage Points to their guaranteed total of 24 HCPs, making a total of at least 26 points. Game on!

Boards 9 – 16: Playing Techniques

The bidding commentary for these boards is fairly short as we wanted you to focus on playing rather than bidding.

You have been introduced to a variety of “fancy” playing techniques in this course, including:

- Finessing (Declarer)
- Cross-ruffing (Declarer)
- Holding up/Ducking (Declarer and Defence)
- Choosing an Opening Lead (Defence)
- Choosing a Lead (Defence)
- Interpreting a Lead (Defence)
- Signalling (Defence)
- Third hand high – or low (Defence)

These hands are designed to give you more practice in these techniques. Some of these hands are quite tricky, requiring some careful analysis to find the right strategy. PLEASE don't feel bad if some of this in-depth analysis baffles you, just have a go at understanding it if you can. Even just getting a better feel for the potential of these techniques will prove useful. Eventually!

In most of your practice sessions, Declarer has had a very easy ride, as they can make the recommended contract with careful play (and a bit of luck). With these eight Boards, the Defence finally gets their turn: with the correct strategy, they can get Declarer down in every one of these contracts. Revenge may not come easy, but it's worth it.

North	East	South	West
1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass
3♠	Pass	4♠	Pass
Pass	Pass		
	♠ AKT5		
	♥ K972		
	♦ AJ		
	♣ Q64		
♠ J8		♠ 96	
♥ Q643		♥ T5	
♦ T75		♦ K9842	
♣ K983		♣ AJ72	
	♠ Q7432		
	♥ AJ8		
	♦ Q63		
	♣ T5		

Board: 9 Dealer: North Lead: ♣3 #101

The Bidding: with 4 Hearts and 4 Spades, North follows the rules and opens Hearts, to allow partner to bid Spades at the 1-level, if they have 4+. When South bids 1S (showing 4+ Spades and 6+ HCP), North knows they have a fit and enough points for game if partner more than the minimum, so jumps to 3S – and South is happy to raise to 4S with 9 HCP, a 5-card suit and a Doubleton.

The Play: West leads ♣3, their fourth highest card in a suit with an Honour. Declarer sensibly decides to play low from Dummy, as it's VERY unlikely West has led away from Ace and King. Which card should East play?

East assumes that West has led their fourth highest, so they must have an Honour in Clubs: ♣K or ♣T. Or – possibly – both (although that's a risky lead). If partner has ♣T then Declarer has ♣K, and playing ♣3 will force it out. If partner has ♣K then playing ♣J will win the trick. Playing the Ace is tempting, but ♣J is better; keep the Ace to play on Declarer's Queen!

If West's ♣3 lead was fourth highest, you know they have exactly four, as you have ♣2, so Declarer has two Clubs, so they haven't got a singleton ♣K (the only situation in which playing ♣J is bad).

So East's ♣J wins the first trick and they lead another low club towards West's ♣K. What should West lead now? A Diamond looks best (leading through the AJ, although a third round of Clubs is also tempting. Let's assume they lead a Club, which Declarer ruffs.

Declarer should draw trumps ASAP in most trump contracts (unless they have a good reason not to, such as needing to cross-ruff) so they do. After two rounds of trumps Declarer leads a low Diamond towards Dummy's AJ, hoping West has the King, they play Dummy's ♦J but the finesse loses to East's ♦K.

East knows not to lead Clubs again, as Declarer and Dummy are both

void – that would give them a **ruff and discard**. Hearts or Diamonds? Diamonds are a lot safer, as leading towards Dummy's ♥K might help Declarer (indeed, it would give them a **free finesse**, a finesse that could not fail). So, lead a Diamond; this sort of lead is called a **passive lead**; it's safe!

Declarer wins the Diamond trick with Dummy's Ace but can't avoid losing another trick in Hearts to go one down.

Key points in the Defence:

- East correctly interpreting West's fourth-highest opening lead in Clubs, so they played the Jack, not the Ace on the first round
- East making the safe lead of a Diamond towards Dummy's bare Ace, rather than potentially helping Declarer by leading a Heart

Additional (Advanced) Discussion

When interpreting partner's opening lead, East made a reasonable assumption, that it was their fourth highest Club, but it was an **assumption**. It could have been a singleton, or their only safe lead, from 3 small Clubs.

East knew it couldn't be the top card signalling they have a Doubleton, hoping for a ruff, because East had the 2.

There's another signalling convention called MUD (middle, up, down) that says with 3 small cards, you play the middle one first, then the top, then the bottom. If you were using MUD, the 3 of Clubs couldn't come from 3 cards either.

Note that if you lead from 4 or more cards without an Honour (in this context, a Ten is an Honour, sheesh), you do NOT play the fourth highest, you play the second highest. Or the top of a sequence – signalling often isn't entirely clear!

Partnerships have to agree (and disclose) which **lead signals** and **discard signals** they use. There are loads to choose from. They are NOT supposed to be secret signals! So whenever your partner signals to you (or vice versa), you're signalling to Declarer too.

When I play, I usually only use very basic signals.

East	South	West	North
1NT	Pass	3NT	Pass
Pass	Pass		
	♠ J98742		
	♥ 975		
	♦ 73		
	♣ 86		
♠ 653			♠ AK
♥ A84			♥ KQJ6
♦ QJT64			♦ 952
♣ AK			♣ T973
	♠ QT		
	♥ T32		
	♦ AK8		
	♣ QJ542		

Board: 10 Dealer: East Lead: ♣4 #510

The Bidding: East's opening bid shows a 12-14 point balanced hand; West's raise to 3NT shows 13+ points, without a 4+ card major. East could have up to around 17 points; any more than that and they would probably have at least explored a slam.

The Play: South chooses the opening lead of ♣4, fourth highest of their longest suit, which must also include an Honour (defined as A, K, Q, J or T in this case). They have 12 HCP, so know that their partner has at most 3 HCP, quite possibly 0.

Declarer wins the opening lead in Dummy with ♣A. They can see eight top tricks (2 Clubs, 4 Hearts, 2 Spades). To make the contract they just need to set up their Diamonds by flushing out AK while they still have entries in Dummy. Actually, they just need ONE Diamond trick to make the contract. Clubs may be a problem as they have only one stop left (the King), which will be removed the next time Clubs are led.

Declarer crosses to hand with ♥K and continues with ♦2. Should South play high or low? They might be tempted to duck (hold up), to try to deny Declarer an entry to the long Diamonds, once set up – but you have a much more promising strategy here: you have almost set up your Clubs, just need to flush out that King which is sat there on the table. Once that’s gone, you will almost certainly have three Club tricks to add to your ♦AK, defeating the contract. So...

South should play their ♦A on the third trick and lead another low Club, flushing out ♣A. Declarer can make eight tricks but not nine; as soon as they lead another Diamond (as they must), you’ll cash your King and three more Clubs, defeating contract.

Key points in the Defence:

- South’s opening lead of a low card from their long Club suit; was key; if they had led the Queen, they would have one less winner
- South’s recognizing that they had to play Ace of Diamonds immediately, rather than duck

Additional (Advanced) Discussion

This strategy is not 100% certain! For example: Declarer could have five Clubs, in which case you won’t make that fifth Club trick, they will. Or they could have three winners in Spades (AKQ or AKJ). But it’s still your best chance of defeating the contract; if you duck the first Diamond, they can make the Queen and cash their other winners.

Note also that if Clubs were split slightly differently, the opening lead of a low Club could give Declarer the contract. For example: If Dummy had AKx opposite Txx.

Still, without seeing the other hands (!) or other information, the lead of your fourth highest card in your longest suit is usually your best bet. Just don’t bet money on it!

South	West	North	East
1NT	Pass	3NT	Pass
Pass	Pass		
	♠ K76		
	♥ 53		
	♦ Q7		
	♣ AKJT65		
♠ 953		♠ T42	
♥ KJ842		♥ A97	
♦ T8		♦ A65432	
♣ 873		♣ Q	
	♠ AQJ8		
	♥ QT6		
	♦ KJ9		
	♣ 942		

Board: 11 Dealer: South Lead: ♥4 #216

The Bidding: South’s opening bid shows a 12-14 point balanced hand; North’s raise to 3NT shows 13+ points, without a 4+ card major. North could have up to around 17 points; any more than that and they would probably have at least explored a slam.

The Play: West has a long suit with an honour (well, two), so leads their fourth highest, ♥4.

East wins with ♥A and dutifully returns ♥9. Declarer plays ♥T and West plays ♥J. West knows the only remaining Hearts are the Queen and 7. If East had the Queen, they would have led that back (to unblock) so South probably has it, but who has the 7? West can’t tell, so just hopes that East has it and leads ♥K. Declarer’s ♥Q falls and West can cash two small Hearts to defeat the contract.

East has to discard on the last two Hearts. To encourage a Diamond lead (to their Ace), East should play ♦6 followed by ♦2. This **high-low signal** also known as **Petering** (no idea why) tells partner you want that suit lead. So West leads a Diamond, East plays their ♦A and the contract goes two down.

If West leads a Spade instead of a Diamond, Declarer gets the lead and can discard all their losing diamonds on Dummy’s long Club suit,

only going one down. It's just one trick difference, but small score differences can make a big difference when playing Duplicate Bridge. And it's quite fun being quite mean.

Key points in the Defence:

- West's opening lead of a low card from their long Heart suit gave the Defence three quick tricks because partner had the Ace; if West had led any other suit, Declarer would have romped home, discarding all their Heart losers on Dummy's Clubs
- East high-low signals encouraged East to make the correct lead (of a Diamond) to take another trick off Declarer before they could discard their losing Diamonds

Additional (Advanced) Discussion

The Heart lead could be a mistake, as leading away from KJx is risky. For example: if the Ace is in Dummy and Declarer ducks, they'd get a cheap trick (winning with the Ten) AND would know where the K and J were, making playing Hearts a lot simpler.

No playing strategy will work all the time, sometimes you just need to be lucky. A passive lead like a Club would be better some of the time – with an unhelpful bidding sequence like 1NT-3NT the opposition haven't provided many clues.

West	North	East	South
1NT	Pass	3NT	Pass
Pass	Pass		
	♠ 953		
	♥ KJ842		
	♦ T8		
	♣ 873		
♠ JT8		♠ K76	
♥ QT76		♥ 53	
♦ AKJ3		♦ Q7	
♣ Q2		♣ AKJT65	
	♠ AQ42		
	♥ A9		
	♦ 96542		
	♣ 94		

Board: 12 Dealer: West Lead: ♥4 #217

The Bidding: West's opening bid shows a 12-14 point balanced hand; North's raise to 3NT shows 13+ points, without a 4+ card major. North could have up to around 17 points; any more than that and they would probably have at least explored a slam.

The Play: North has a long suit with an honour (well, two), so leads their fourth highest, ♥4.

South wins with ♥A and dutifully returns ♥9. Declarer plays ♥T and West plays ♥J. West knows the only remaining Hearts are the Queen and 7. If East had the Queen, they would have led that back (to unblock) so South probably has it, but who has the 7? North can't tell, so just hopes that South has it and leads ♥K.

Darn. Declarer's ♥Q does not fall so Declarer still has it. North could continue with a fourth Heart to set up their fifth, but is that a good idea? Apart from anything else, North doesn't have an entry, so they are very unlikely to get a chance to play that fifth Heart. They need a better plan.

On the third round of Hearts, South had to discard a card. They really wanted North to lead a Spade, could they increase the probability of that? Yes. North isn't daft, and can see that leading a Club is most likely going to help Declarer – that's a 6-card suit in Dummy headed by AKJ! So South should discard ♦2. This is as low as it gets, so it's (probably) a signal that South does NOT have any interest in Diamonds – so if North is paying attention, they will lead a Spade.

If North does lead a Spade, South will make the Ace and Queen whatever is played from Dummy, and the contract goes down.

Key points in the Defence:

- North's opening lead of a low card from their long Heart suit

- gave the Defence three Quick tricks because partner had the Ace
- South's discard of a discouraging low Diamond encouraged North to lead Spades and get the contract down

Additional (Advanced) Discussion

Again, the Heart lead could be a mistake, as leading away from KJx is risky. For example: if the Ace is in Dummy and Declarer ducks, they'd get a cheap trick (winning with the Ten) AND would know where the K and J were, making playing Hearts a lot simpler.

No playing strategy will work all the time, sometimes you just need to be lucky. A passive lead like a Spade would be better some of the time – with an unhelpful bidding sequence like 1NT-3NT the opposition haven't provided many clues.

North	East	South	West
1NT	Pass	3NT	Pass
Pass	Pass		
	♠ A53		
	♥ J86		
	♦ A53		
	♣ K765		
♠ 642			♠ T987
♥ AQ72			♥ K43
♦ QT7			♦ 62
♣ T92			♣ J843
	♠ KQJ		
	♥ T95		
	♦ KJ984		
	♣ AQ		

Board: 13 Dealer: North Lead: ♠T #229

The Bidding: North's opening bid shows a 12-14 point balanced hand; South's raise to 3NT shows 13+ points, without a 4+ card major. South could have up to around 17 points; any more than that and they would probably have at least explored a slam.

The Play: East has two 4-card suits, and no other promising lead, so which should they lead? In Spades, they have a solid sequence, which is much safer than heading fourth highest Club, so they lead ♠T. This is passive (safe) and might even yield a trick (if partner has any of the Honours).

When West sees East's opening lead and Dummy goes down, they know Declarer has 12-14 HCP (as they opened 1NT) and can see 16 HCP in Dummy. That's 28-30 HCP. West has 8 HCP, so East must have 2-4 HCP.

East's lead can't be fourth highest, so is probably top of a 3-card sequence, T98 and most likely their longest suit, so T98x or T98xx (North must have two Spades as they opened 1NT).

Declarer can see eight top tricks (three Spades, two Diamonds, and three Clubs); they need at least one more trick to make the contract. With 28 HCP they might expect to make more! That extra trick will probably come from Diamonds, from a successful finesse or maybe simply setting up the long suit.

Declarer's main concern is the Heart suit, they can easily lose 4 tricks in Hearts – more if they split badly – which means their contract goes down if they also lose to the ♦Q. A simple finesse like this works around 50% of the time, but it's your best bet. Tricky!

Declarer wins the first trick in Dummy. Fingers crossed, they play a diamond to ♦A (hoping the Queen drops), then returns a low Diamond towards dummy's ♦J for the finesse. The finesse fails and West wins with ♦Q.

Now West has to decide what to lead to trick 4. Which suit, Clubs or Hearts or Spades?

West's count of points at trick 1 indicates that East has at best 4 HCP: an Ace, or a King and a Jack, or two Queens. But you can see all four Queens. If East has ♣K a club lead will help Declarer (as they have AQ in Dummy over that King). If East has ♠A that's a trick, but there's no chance of defeating the contract; nothing left in the tank!

So how about a Heart lead? If East has ♥Kxx you can get the contract down, with a bit of luck, by making four Hearts. So West should lead ♥2, fourth highest from a suit with an Honour. If Declarer has ♥K in their hand, they would have finessed you anyway, so you're not giving anything away.

Hurrah! East has the critical ♥K and wins the trick, dutifully returning a Heart. West wins ♥Q and ♥A, then the thirteenth Heart, to make five tricks in total and take the contract down.

Phew, all that thinking was worth it in the end.

Key points in the Defence:

- East's passive opening lead didn't give anything away
- West's careful analysis of the situation after winning with the Queen of Diamonds led them to make the only lead with a chance of defeating the contract, a low Heart. And it did!

If you can see only one way to defeat (or make) a contract, it's usually worth taking it – even if it's pretty unlikely.

Additional (Advanced) Discussion

Of course, on this occasion, there was a much easier way to defeat the contract: if East leads a low Heart (from ♥K43) then the Defence makes four Hearts at the start and defeats the contract when West wins with ♦Q. But you don't in general lead away from Kxx!

East	South	West	North
Pass	1♣	1♥	1♠
Pass	3♠	Pass	4♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	
	♠AQJT6		
	♥J95		
	♦J43		
	♣T9		
♠94			♠752
♥K8763			♥AT4
♦765			♦T98
♣AQJ			♣8643
	♠K83		
	♥Q2		
	♦AKQ2		
	♣K752		

Board: 14 Dealer: East Lead: ♦T #134

The Bidding: With 17 HCP and a balanced hand, South opens 1♣ intending to rebid 2NT; West overcalls with 1♥ - with five wimpy Hearts and most of their 10 HCP in the opponents' suit this is a dubious decision. North's 1♠ bid suggests a 5-card suit, so South can jump to 1♠ with just three trumps and 17 HCP. North's 4♠ bid looks fine with the fit and around 26 HCP.

The Play: East makes a safe lead of the ♦T, top of a three-card sequence.

Declarer can see 9 top tricks (five Spades and four Diamonds), so just needs to make a Heart or a Club; by no means certain. Unfortunately, Defence could easily make four tricks (two Clubs and two Hearts) before they do so. So Declarer's plan is to draw trumps, run the Diamonds and discard a losing Club from hand on the fourth Diamond.

Considering that West overcalled, they should have most of the "missing" 14 HCP.

Declarer wins the Diamond lead in Dummy and draws three rounds of trumps. They continue with ♦J and two more top Diamonds, discarding ♣9 from hand. So far so good!

Declarer leads a low club from Dummy, which West wins with ♣J. West needs three more tricks to defeat the contract. What should West lead next, at trick 9, a Club or a Heart?

West knows that North started with 5 Spades and 3 Diamonds and at least one Club – how many Clubs and Hearts have they got left? On the fourth round of Diamonds, East discarded a Club. If they had started with five Hearts, they would have discarded a Heart, not a

Club. So Declarer should have 2 or 3 Hearts.

Why was East's opening lead a Diamond, not a Heart, the suit that West had bid? This suggests that East has ♥A, as many players are reluctant to underlead an Ace in a trump contract. Besides, if Declarer has ♥A then they will make their contract whatever you do.

If West leads a Club, there's a risk of giving away a trick. If they lead the Ace and Declarer ruffs it, that sets up their King in Dummy, BUT they have no entries to get to it! So the lead of the Ace of Clubs is safe. If they lead a low Club, and Declarer doesn't ruff it, Dummy's King will win an extra trick.

If West leads a Heart, it's more complicated. You can see the Queen in Dummy, which will fall after two rounds of Hearts. If East has the Ace, you will make two Heart tricks. Can you make three? It all depends on who has the Jack. If partner has AJx, then you could play the King and lead a low Heart to make all three; easy. If Declarer has Jxx, whatever Heart you lead you will set up their Jack. So a Heart lead may be safe, may not be safe. You want to make Declarer lead a Heart!

So for the ninth trick, somewhat bizarrely West must lead the Ace of Clubs. Declarer ruffs it (setting up Dummy's King, which they can't reach) and now, whatever Heart Declarer leads, they will lose all three Heart tricks for one down.

Phew, all that thinking was worth it in the end. Does your head hurt too?

Key points in the Defence:

- East's passive opening lead of a Club was lucky, avoiding the tricky Heart suit
- West's careful analysis of the situation after winning with the Queen of Clubs led them to make the only lead with a chance of defeating the contract, surprisingly, the Ace of Clubs. And it did!

Sometimes you need to think quite hard to see the chink in Declarer's armour – and choose a surprising-looking tactic.

Additional (Advanced) Discussion

On this occasion, there was a much easier way to defeat the contract. If East leads a Club at the start, West can cash two Club tricks (Ace and Queen). If they return a Heart, they'll make two Heart tricks too (Ace and King), getting the contract down in the first four tricks before Declarer can discard their losing Club.

Sometimes, you don't have to think hard, you just need to choose the right lead from two seemingly identical leads. You need luck.

If I were East, my opening lead would have been the Ace of Hearts, followed by a low Heart. Partner has bid Hearts, it's a reasonable lead. West would then make the Ace of Clubs and Declarer would make their contract. On this occasion, that would be a losing strategy – but I don't have many headaches.

South	West	North	East
1NT	Pass	3NT	Pass
Pass	Pass		

Board: 15 Dealer: South Lead: ♠8 #370

The Bidding: South's opening bid shows a 12-14 point balanced hand; North's raise to 3NT shows 13+ points, without a 4+ card major. North could have up to around 17 points; any more than that

♠ KJ6	
♥ 96	
♦ AJ976	
♣ A98	
♠ 98542	♠ A7
♥ AT3	♥ Q7542
♦ 53	♦ QT4
♣ Q52	♣ J63
♠ QT3	
♥ KJ8	
♦ K82	
♣ KT74	

and they would probably have at least explored a slam.

The Play: West has a 5-card Spade suit which has no Honours, so their opening lead is ♠8. This is a passive (safe) lead and might yield a trick or two (if partner has any of the Honours). Remember that if your long suit does not include any Honours, you lead second-highest and NOT fourth highest.

When Dummy goes down, Declarer can see just four top tricks (two Diamonds, two Hearts); the missing 5 tricks will have to come from Spades (two tricks after the Ace has been flushed out) and Diamonds (two or three tricks from length, depending on the finesse/drop of the Queen).

If Diamonds are unkind, Declarer will need to make a trick from Hearts, which is challenging with ♥KJ8 opposite ♥96; perhaps the Defence will be kind enough to lead a heart up to your KJ?

Declarer's basic plan is to try the Diamonds as soon as they can (while they still have stops in the other suits) and only try for a Heart trick if they have to! Maybe they'll get a present.

When Dummy goes down, East can start to plan their Defence. Declarer has 12-14 points and Dummy has 13. East has 9 points so West can only have 4-6. Hearts look fairly promising, but partner has opened with a Spade, hmm.

Declarer plays dummy's ♠J at trick 1 and East wins with ♠A. Declarer follows suit with ♠3. What should East lead now?

Usually you would return partner's suit, but East uses the **Rule of 11** to evaluate West's holding, assuming the lead was fourth highest. When you subtract the lead's value (8) from 11 you get 3, so there should be three cards higher than the 8 in the other three hands, if that was fourth highest. East can see ♠A in their own hand and ♠KJ in Dummy, meaning Declarer has no Spades higher than ♠8 and West has ♠QT98. But with those cards, West would have lead ♠T, the **top of an interior sequence**. So West's lead isn't fourth highest (with an Honour). It might be a risky lead from ♠QT8 (maybe the other suits are riskier?) but West probably has ♠98xx(x).

Even if West has five spades they will still need two entries to set them up, as they' need to flush out two Honours. So, instead of the almost instinctive return of partner's suit, East decides that the Defence is more likely to prevail in Hearts, hoping West has three or four.

So East leads ♥4 (fourth highest isn't just for opening leads, it's for the first lead of any suit). Declarer plays ♥J and West wins with ♥A. West reads partner's lead and supports their decision, returning ♥T (to unblock and help flush out Declarer's Honours), which Declarer allows to hold, hoping to cut off communications.

West leads their third and final Heart, flushing out declarer's ♥K. Declarer carries on with Diamonds, but the finesse fails to East's ♦Q. East then cashes their two remaining Hearts to defeat the contract by two tricks.

Key points in the Defence:

- East's careful analysis of West's opening lead of a Spade showed that they didn't have an Honour so Spades were unlikely to be the key to defeating the contract, and switched to Hearts, which did

- West's understanding of East's switch to Hearts and willingness to change tactics (rather than stubbornly persist with their Spades) was vital

It's good to have a plan, but sometimes it needs to change.

West	North	East	South
1NT	Pass	3NT	Pass
Pass	Pass		
	♠ 62		
	♥ QT8		
	♦ A98642		
	♣ 42		
♠ A84		♠ K93	
♥ A752		♥ K64	
♦ J5		♦ Q7	
♣ KJ65		♣ AQ973	
	♠ QJT75		
	♥ J93		
	♦ KT3		
	♣ T8		

Board: 16 Dealer: West Lead: ♦6 #248

The Bidding: West's opening bid shows a 12-14 point balanced hand; East's raise to 3NT shows 13+ points, without a 4+ card major. North could have up to around 17 points; any more than that and they would probably have at least explored a slam.

The Play: North has a 6-card suit headed by the Ace, as well as a reasonable chance of an entry in Hearts. They lead ♦6, fourth-highest in their long suit; the Ace may prove crucial later, as an entry.

When Dummy goes down, Declarer can plan their play. They can see an easy nine top tricks (two Spades, two Hearts, and five Clubs) once they get the lead. But of course they could easily lose the first five tricks (or more!) in Diamonds before that happens. They play ♦6 on the opening lead and hope for the best...

Now, South knows that Declarer has 12-14 points from their 1NT bid and can see that Dummy has 14. South has 7, so North must have 5-7 points.

South next tries to analyse North's Diamond lead. North might have led second highest from a long suit with no Honour, from ♦96xx(x); they probably wouldn't lead from a shorter minor suit against this auction. The defence has little chance of defeating the contract if Declarer's hidden Diamonds are strong.

So South assumes that North's ♦6 lead is fourth highest, applies **The Rule of 11**: $11 - 6 = 5$, calculating that there are five higher cards in the other three hands. South can see four of them (K, Q, T and 7), so Declarer must have exactly one, the "missing" ♦A or ♦J.

Now, if Declarer started with ♦Ax(x...) they would surely have played Dummy's ♦Q on trick 1, since they can't make a trick with it later. South can therefore deduce that Declarer's has the Jack, not the Ace.

If partner has the Ace, South can't lose by playing ♦K on the first trick, which holds. They can then continue another Diamond, ♦T to unblock, and North wins the next five tricks in Diamonds as Declarer feared, to go two down.

Key points in the Defence:

- North's lead of their fourth highest Diamond was key
- South's careful analysis of the lead allowed them to play the correct card, ♦K on the first trick to set up all those Diamond tricks
- South's lead to the second trick of ♦T was also important, unblocking so that North could keep the lead and run their Diamonds

Synopsis

Commentary Synopsis				
			Hand #	Declarer / Defender
Subject	Bidding Sequence			
1NT Openers and Responses including Transfers				
1	N	1NT	3	Declarer
2	E	1NT, 4H	15	Declarer
3	S	1NT, 2NT	136	Declarer
4	W	1NT, 2NT	578	Declarer
5	N	1NT, 2NT, 3NT	640	Declarer
6	E	1NT, 2D, 2H, 4H	1342	Declarer
7	S	1NT, 2D, 2H	1641	Declarer
8	W	1NT, 2D, 2H, 4H	3658	Declarer
Playing Techniques				
9	N	Finesse	101	Defender
10	E	Top of a run	510	Defender
11	S	4th Highest	216	Defender
12	W	4th Highest & Switch	217	Defender
13	N	Top of a run	229	Defender
14	E	Finesse	134	Defender
15	S	4th Highest (switch)	370	Defender
16	W	4th Highest (complex)	248	Defender
u3aBC07 Rev 1.0				