

THE FINESSE

ABOUT THE DEALS

You may be either Opener or Responder, but you will always be in the South position.

The first page of each Deal shows your hand, dummy's hand, the bidding, the opening lead and early play. You are asked to study the Deal and mentally devise a Plan to make the contract. When you have your Plan in your mind click **NEXT**.

The subsequent page will then appear telling you what you should have done and perhaps giving you a chance to continue with the Plan by again clicking **NEXT**.

On the final page of each Deal all four hands will be shown.

FINESSE LESSON

Probably everybody reading this already knows what a Finesse is and uses them regularly. But a Lesson has to start somewhere, so here goes.

A Finesse is nothing more than an attempt to win a trick with a card which is not the highest one in the suit. It does its magic by being in the right position.

Look at the suit arrangement below.

♦ A Q x
♦ K x x  ♦ x x x x
 ♦ x x x

Only a complete beginner in the South position would try to win two tricks by playing dummy's ♦A and hoping that a kindly opponent would put the ♦K underneath it. Any South who had played a few times would know that to win two tricks she must lead a small ♦x from her hand and play the ♦Q when West plays a low card.

That is a Finesse. A winning one as it happens.

Switch the ♦K from West to East.

♦ A Q x
♦ x x x  ♦ K x x x
 ♦ x x x

Again you have to lead a small ♦x and put on the ♦Q when West plays low.
That is a losing Finesse.

Here is an important fact about the Simple Finesse:

A SIMPLE FINESSE SUCCEEDS HALF
THE TIME AND FAILS THE OTHER HALF

Look at those same suit arrangements from a different perspective.

♦ K x x
 ♦ A Q x [REDACTED] ♦ x x x x
 ♦ x x x

This time South just hopes to win a single trick in the ♦ suit, and she won't do so by leading dummy's ♦K and hoping it sneaks through. No, she must lead a small ♦x from her hand toward the ♦K. If West plays a low card the ♦K will win the trick, and if West plays the ♦A then dummy's ♦K will live to win a later trick.

A FINESSE WORKS BY LEADING TOWARD HIGH CARDS

The Simple Finesse:

We've already talked about a Simple Finesse without actually defining it. It is just a finesse which attempts to outfox a single card.

The ♦ A Q x and the ♦ K x x above are both examples of a Simple Finesse. Here is another.

♠ K 10 4
 ♠ ? [REDACTED] ♠ ?
 ♠ Q 6 3

Now obviously you must lose the ♠A, so your modest goal is to try to win 2 tricks. If West holds the ♠J you can succeed with a Simple Finesse. Lead the ♠3 from your hand and when West plays a low card you insert dummy's ♠10. Either it will win the trick, leaving you and dummy with the ♠K ♠Q combination to drive out the ♠A, or else East will take the ♠10 with his ♠A, leaving you with two high ♠ tricks. Notice that you didn't care who held the ♠A, you just wanted West to hold the ♠J.

One more (of the thousands possible) before we leave the topic. This one is also a finesse of a Jack.

♥ Q 10 2
 ♥ ? [REDACTED] ♥ ?
 ♥ 5 4 3

Things are getting desperate when you need a trick from this combination! Leading a small card with the intention of playing the ♥Q really is desperate - West would have to hold both the ♥A K for this to work. A better finesse would be to play West for the ♥J and just one of the high honors. So you lead a low card and insert the ♥10, hoping that East must play the ♥A or ♥K to win the trick. Then, later, you play a low card from your hand toward the ♥Q, hoping that West has the other high honor.

Leading a High Card:

Sometimes you will have such good intermediate cards than you don't have to lead a low one for the finesse.

♣ Q 10 8 6
 ♣ ? [REDACTED] ♣ ?
 ♣ A J 9 5

Here you want to win all four ♣ tricks so you will finesse East for the ♣K. But suppose you could only get to dummy one time? No problem. You lead the ♣Q and when East doesn't cover you underplay your ♣J. Still in dummy you play your ♣10, and if East plays low again you underplay your ♣9. You get the idea.

The Double Finesse:

Look at this:

♠ A Q 2
♥ A Q 2

♠ ? [redacted] ♠ ?
♥ ? [redacted] ♥ ?

♠ 5 4 3
♥ 5 4 3

This is **NOT** a Double Finesse, it is two Simple Finesses. But the principle is the same. If you need four tricks here you have to hope that West holds both Kings. Not likely, it will only happen one fourth of the time. But if you only need three tricks you are in luck. That means that West has to hold either of the Kings (or both) and that will happen three fourths of the time.

Compare that arrangement to this one:

♠ A Q 10
[redacted]
♠ ?

♠ 5 4 3

You play a low card from your hand and finesse the ♠10. If East has to win with the ♠K then you have your two tricks. But even if he wins with the ♠J you still have another chance to get back to your hand and try to finesse West out of his ♠K. If East had both honors you were just unlucky. But if West had both of them you should leave the Bridge table and go to Vegas.

Here is another Double Finesse situation:

♦ A J 10
[redacted]
♦ ?

♦ 5 4 3

This one doesn't look as good because dummy has the ♦J instead of the ♦Q. And sure enough, there is zero chance of making all three tricks here. But, when you are only looking to make two tricks you still have a 75% chance of success.

First finesse the ♦10, and when that loses to one of the big ones try another finesse with the ♦J. You will win two tricks whenever West started with either the ♦K, the ♦Q, or both of them.

The Deep Finesse:

This is sort of between a Simple and a Double Finesse:

♣ A J 9
[redacted]
♣ ?

♣ 5 4 3

Here you hope to win two tricks. If you finesse the ♣J you would win two tricks only when West started with ♣ K Q (x). The better way to play this combination is to lead low toward the ♣9, hoping that West started with either ♣ K 10 x or ♣ Q 10 x.

If you look back at the final example in the Simple Finesse section you will see that it was actually a Deep Finesse. Sometimes the plays overlap the names.

The Two-way Finesse:

The Two-way Finesse is almost always trying to guess a missing Queen.

♥ A J 2

♥ ? [] ♥ ?

♥ K 10 3

Of course you want all three tricks. Since you can finesse either opponent you should think about the bidding (if any), the opening lead, and any other inferences you might discover to help you decide which way to finesse. If you don't have any clues whatsoever, just pick one and finesse in that direction for a 50% chance.

The Ruffing Finesse:

Most of the time each of the finesse types can be used both in Notrump and Suit contracts.

The Ruffing Finesse can obviously only be used at Suit contracts.

♠ K Q J 2

♥ A 8 6 2

♦ ? [] ♦ ?
♥ ? ♥ ?

♠ --

♥ K Q J 3

With ♥s as trump you play the ♠K from dummy. If East puts on the ♠A you will ruff, establishing several ♠ winners in dummy. If East plays low you will discard a loser from some other suit.

The Chinese Finesse:

I have no idea how this play got its name. It is more correctly called a Pseudo-Finesse because it isn't a finesse at all, it is just a trick.

First look at this:

♣ A 7 3

♣ ? [] ♣ ?
♣ Q J 9

You can always win two tricks with this holding. But if you lead the ♣Q West may decide to cover with his ♣K. You could then win the ♣A, finesse East for the ♣10 and perhaps take all three tricks. West can prevent you from doing this simply by not covering your ♣Q but covering the ♣J if you lead it next.

But suppose this is your holding:

♣ A 7 3

♣ ? [] ♣ ?
♣ Q 6

If you suspect West holds the ♣K you can try to trick him by leading your ♣Q. This is the Chinese Finesse. If he fears you have ♣ Q J 9 he may duck and wait to cover your ♣J when you lead it.

20 Practice Deals will be worth more than another 1000 words.

Deal 1