

The background of the entire cover features a light blue gradient with numerous small, white, sparkling particles. Several playing cards are scattered across the surface. In the upper half, the Ace of Hearts is prominent, showing a large red heart in the center. To its right, the Ace of Diamonds is partially visible. In the lower half, the Ace of Clubs is on the left, and the Ace of Spades is on the right. Other cards, including a King of Spades and a Queen of Spades, are also partially visible at the edges.

AUTHOR OF GETTING INTO THE BIDDING

DEFENDING AT BRIDGE

A FIRST COURSE

BILL TREBLE



 **AUTHOR OF *GETTING INTO THE BIDDING***

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A FIRST COURSE

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INTRODUCTION

Students have often asked me which aspect of bridge is the most important for improving your game fairly quickly. Is it bidding, declarer play or defense? My vote is for defense, which is also the toughest to master. Most players have access to the same resources for learning how to bid a hand. A few hands over the course of an evening might require some delicate bidding judgment, but on the majority of them, using those tools will get you to the optimum contract. On the declarer play front, you have the luxury of seeing both your hand and your partner's before you play to the first trick. Also, the opening lead will have given you some information. Knowing how many tricks you need to win or can afford to lose, plus some familiarity with the mathematical probabilities, will give you a decent chance of fulfilling your objective if you're in the right contract.

When you're defending a hand, the only cards you see before the start of play are the thirteen that you have. When dummy hits after you've chosen your lead, you'll see another hand, but unlike declarer you will not know exactly what your partner has. Consequently, you need to communicate (legally!) with your partner. You'll have to send accurate messages through the cards you play and also be able to interpret what partner is trying to tell you through what he contributes on each trick during the hand.

For about three or four years after I started to play bridge, I had my moments but didn't achieve a real consistency in my results. At that point, I decided that since I was apt to be on defense on half of the boards over a normal session, that was where I ought to be directing a substantial portion of my energies. Once I did that, the quality of my game took a significant leap forward.

There have been many books written on both defense and opening leads that I've drawn upon for the course material and can suggest for additional reading. They are:

<i>Eddie Kantar Teaches Modern Bridge Defense</i>	Eddie Kantar
<i>Eddie Kantar Teaches Advanced Bridge Defense</i>	Eddie Kantar
<i>How to Defend a Bridge Hand</i>	William S. Root
<i>Defensive Play at Bridge: A Quizbook</i>	Barbara Seagram & David Bird
<i>Winning Bridge Conventions Series: Defensive Carding and Opening Leads</i>	Patty Tucker
<i>The Pocket Guide to Defense</i>	Barbara Seagram & David Bird
<i>The Complete Book of Opening Leads</i>	Robert Ewen
<i>Opening Leads</i>	Mike Lawrence

LESSON 1

OPENING LEADS – THE BASICS

The cornerstone of effective defense is the opening lead. While successful defense remains an ongoing process even after that first card is played, the choice of lead can either substantially increase or reduce your chances of defeating their contract.

There are three separate aspects to choosing a good opening lead. Each of them will be dealt with in turn in the first three lessons in this book.

1. You must play a card that sends a useful message to your partner.
2. You must be conscious of what your objective is going to be, against both suit and notrump contracts.
3. Perhaps the most crucial — you must use the information from the opponents' auction to help guide your final decision.

In this first lesson, we're going to focus on the first of these — which card you should lead from a given holding. On some hands, you can afford to lead an honor card, while on others you should be starting out with a low one. How can you know for sure whether you should be going big or small on the opening lead?

LEADING FROM SEQUENCES

A sequence consists of at least two cards that are touching in rank, including one or more honor card. They come in four varieties.

Perfect sequence

Three or more touching honors. This will be a very attractive choice for an opening lead, as you can either take or quickly promote tricks even if partner has little or no help. Here are some illustrations, showing just the top cards since the leader might have other small ones to go with them:

AKQ	KQJ	QJ10	J109
-----	-----	------	------

When you have a sequence to lead from, play the highest of your touching cards. While it may not matter to you which card you play, remember that partner does not have the gift of x-ray vision. You are sending partner a message — when you lead an honor, you have the next card below it in sequence, and perhaps the one below that. For example, if you lead the queen, partner will know you also have the jack and possibly the ten as well.

Broken sequence

In this case, you'll have two touching cards and the next highest but one after that. Below are some typical broken-sequence holdings:

AKJ	KQ10	QJ9	J108
-----	------	-----	------

Again, there is enough strength in these layouts for you to be leading the top card, as it could be very productive and there is little risk involved.

Interior sequence

This variation is the opposite of the broken sequence, in that it consists of a top card that is not supported and two touching honors below it. Here are some examples:

KJ10	K109	Q109
AQJ	AJ10	A109

The principle with the interior sequence is to lead the top of your adjoining honors, not the very highest card. So from KJ10, for example, you would lead the jack.

You'll notice I have the examples on two lines, and that's because it's fine to lead from the interior sequences headed by the king or queen against either a suit or notrump contract. From the holdings that contain the ace, you can adopt a similar policy against notrump contracts *only*. If they are playing in a suit contract, it's not a good idea to underlead the ace and you should probably avoid leading the suit at all — you are too likely to give away a trick unnecessarily.

Two-card sequences

Here you'll still have two adjacent cards, but nothing much of consequence below them. They are nice to have, and you can often consider leading from those suits, but there are fewer guarantees of producing tricks. (The exception, of course, is leading an honor from AKx(x) against a suit contract, which is almost always a good choice.) Here are a few examples:

KQx(x...) QJx(x...) J10x(x...) 109x(x...)

Against suit contracts you should lead high from this kind of holding. Against notrump, where the objectives are a little different, it is usually better to lead a low card (see below).

GUIDELINES FOR WHEN TO LEAD FROM SEQUENCES

Against suit contracts, regardless of length, leading from a perfect, broken or two-card sequence is worth serious consideration. So is leading from an interior sequence if it is headed by the king or queen. As mentioned above, you should avoid leading from interior sequences headed by the ace against suit contracts, as either leading or underleading an ace may prove to be quite costly. In those cases, you're better off looking for another suit to start off with.

Against notrump contracts, assuming you have at least four cards in the suit, you'll have a decent chance of success leading from a perfect or a broken sequence. The same applies to an interior sequence, even the one including the ace as you will take a trick with that card later on the vast majority of the hands.

Against notrump the best policy is to lead a small card from a holding headed by a two-card sequence, rather than the top honor. You'll need some help from partner for the lead to be effective, and if he has it, you'd rather put him in a situation where he has to play the high card right away.

To illustrate why this is a better course to follow, let's consider the holding below in the West chair. You have nothing much in the way of high cards outside of your long suit.

♥ A K 7 6 4

If the opponents are in a 4♠ contract, it's obvious to lead the ♥A. You may be able to take the first two tricks and, on a good day, partner may be able to trump the third round of the suit.

Now let's say the auction has gone:

RHO	LHO
1NT	3NT

To be sure, you can take your two heart winners right off the top, but will you be getting anything besides that? Here are two layouts where the answer would be no:

	Q J 10	
A K 7 6 4	<div></div>	8 5 2
	9 3	

With the way the cards are sitting here, partner has no help in hearts but will return your suit if he gets in, so you can eventually take four heart tricks by leading a small card from your two-card sequence. If you lead the ace and king, on the other hand, it restricts the number of tricks you can win to two, as there won't be any communication between the two hands after the top hearts are played.

	J 9 5	
A K 7 6 4	<div></div>	Q 3
	10 8 2	

It gets worse in this example, where a low heart lead results in five quick winners for the defense. But if the ♥A is played instead, the suit is *blocked*. West can lead a small heart now, and East can win the second trick with the queen, but he has no more hearts to return. And if West plays the ♥K on the second round, his partner's queen falls under it: declarer now miraculously has a winner (the ♥J) in a suit where he was missing the top three cards.

WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE A SEQUENCE

Alas, the card gods sometimes aren't so obliging as to deal you a perfect or even a two-card sequence. A fair number of times, your long suit will consist of holdings such as:

Q9652

K8752

Q1064

J985

KJ962

These can still be worthwhile suits to lead. That said, you can't afford to lead an honor as you really don't have much of an idea about where the length and strength is in the other three hands. From these holdings, you should lead one of the small cards. You're still trying to do something constructive, as you might be able to build some immediate tricks once the first round has been played, and if they're in a notrump contract, you could be well on your way to establishing long-suit winners for your side.

Let's survey five holdings in the diamond suit and choose which of them has the most potential. Assume that they're in 3NT.

1. ♦ K 6 4 3
2. ♦ K 7 6 4 3
3. ♦ K 10 8 4
4. ♦ K J 9 7
5. ♦ K J 9 6 5

If you lead from holding #1, you'll be holding your breath. It could be good for your side, but very much hinges on what partner has in diamonds. With the second holding, at least you have a fifth card and a potential extra trick. Holding #3 has a useful spot card (the ten), and that could help establish tricks if partner has as little as the jack. Our fourth exhibit is better yet, as you'll be quite happy if partner has the ace or queen of your suit. And finally, in #5, you have the extra length to go with your honors.

The recommended lead when you have a long suit is the fourth-best card. It may not seem particularly relevant whether you start out with that or the lowest card in the suit, but it is an agreement that enables partner to apply a useful tool when playing to the first trick and deciding whether to continue the suit or look elsewhere for tricks. More on that in a subsequent lesson.

Are there any exceptions to the "lead fourth best from longest and strongest" guideline? There is one for sure, and arguably a second.

- You can underlead the ace of a long suit against notrump, but not against a suit contract.

Suppose you're in possession of ♥A10765. If the contract is 3NT and the suit hasn't been bid, you should start with the ♥6, because some honors might appear on the first trick and you'll be well placed to take tricks later on in the deal. But if they're in 4♠ instead, there might be a singleton heart lurking in either declarer's hand or dummy, so it would not be advisable to lead a small card — declarer might score an undeserved king, and you might never take a trick with your ace.

- From a poor four-card suit, there is a contingent of players that will lead highest or second-highest.

To illustrate, let's say the auction has gone 1NT-3NT and you're on lead with:

♠ 9 8 6 5 ♥ Q 7 ♦ A 6 4 3 ♣ K 10 5

Hearts and clubs aren't really options — you don't have enough cards in those suits to have much prospect of building tricks in them — so that leaves a spade or a diamond. Some would go ahead and lead a diamond, but others might lead a spade because responder has denied major-suit length, not having used the Stayman convention. A spade could be the right way to go, but the glitch is that partner may return the suit expecting more in the way of high-card strength. A way to let him know that you have some length but an unremarkable suit is to lead a high spot card rather than a low one. Since partner is familiar with the fourth-highest axiom, he should be able to clue in on what you have in the suit because of your abnormally high card.

This leads us into an acronym that Barbara Seagram and other bridge teachers use, namely BOSTON. That means Bottom Of Something, Top Of Nothing. That can be helpful advice, but sometimes gets misinterpreted, most notably when people lead small from perfect or interior sequences rather than an honor card. So a bit of clarification is in order. 'Bottom of something' refers to leads from broken holdings rather than sequences. 'Top of nothing' arises mainly in leading from four small and also when playing up to dummy's weakness later on in the hand.

Now it is time to try some practice hands and get some experience applying these ideas in real life.

HAND 1

South dealer

	♠ K 3 2										
	♥ A 8										
	♦ Q 6 5 4										
	♣ Q J 7 2										
♠ 10 9 7 4		♠ J 8 6									
♥ 10 6 5 4 2		♥ 9 7 3									
♦ A 3		♦ J 10 9									
♣ K 3		♣ A 8 5 4									
	<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr></table>		N		W		E		S		
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠ A Q 5										
	♥ K Q J										
	♦ K 8 7 2										
	♣ 10 9 6										

West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

With 10 HCP, responder has enough to raise to game after partner's 1NT opening.

THE PLAY

Declarer has six major-suit tricks, and the club and diamond suits offer chances for developing the three additional winners he needs. He'll start by driving out the ♣A and ♣K to set up two more tricks there, and then establish a diamond trick.

West's hearts seem pretty nondescript, but a lead of a small card from the five-card suit will defeat the contract. As long as the defense keeps playing the suit throughout the hand, they'll eventually create two heart tricks to go with their two club winners and the ♦A.

Long suits are fertile ground to develop tricks of your own when the opponents are in a notrump contract.

HAND 2

East dealer

♠ K 8	♠ A 9 4 3	♠ 10 5
♥ A Q 10 9	♥ K 6 5	♥ J 8 7 4 2
♦ 8 4 3	♦ A K J 7	♦ Q 10 6
♣ K Q 10 8	♣ J 9	♣ A 6 2
	<div> <div>N</div> <div>W E</div> <div>S</div> </div>	
	♠ Q J 7 6 2	
	♥ 3	
	♦ 9 5 2	
	♣ 7 5 4 3	

West	North	East	South
		pass	pass
1♣	dbl	1♥	pass
2♥	dbl	pass	2♠
3♥	all pass		

North's double has no effect on East, who is still able to bid 1♥. After opener raises, North with his 16 HCP doubles again. It's still for takeout, and South is being asked to choose between the unbid suits. He duly bids 2♠, and East-West then compete to 3♥.

THE PLAY

Whether the contract succeeds or fails depends upon the opening lead. South's best and longest suit is spades, so that figures to be the best choice. In a suit contract, you can begin with the honor from a two-card sequence, so South leads the ♠Q. Dummy's ♠K is trapped and the defenders will take two spades, the ♦A and ♦K, and an eventual trump trick with the ♥K.

If South does not lead a spade honor, declarer can eventually ditch his second card in the suit on the long club after trumps are drawn, because South will never regain the lead. If North leads spades from his side, declarer's ♠K will take a trick.

HAND 3

North dealer

♠ 5 2
♥ 9 4 3 2
♦ Q 10 6
♣ 9 7 4 3

♠ K Q 6 4 3
♥ Q 10 8 7
♦ A 3
♣ Q 2

W

N

E

S

♠ 9 8 7
♥ K J
♦ J 8 2
♣ A K J 10 6

♠ A J 10
♥ A 6 5
♦ K 9 7 5 4
♣ 8 5

West	North	East	South
	1♠	pass	2♣
pass	2♥	pass	4♠
all pass			

To show a game-going hand with support and a good suit of his own, responder bids 2♣ and then jumps to game in opener’s major.

THE PLAY

Once again, the opening lead is pivotal to the result of the hand. East has two probable trump winners and the ♥A, but where can the defense find more tricks? His other high card is in diamonds, and the opponents have bid every suit but that one. That might be a productive lead, then, and since he doesn’t have an honor sequence he leads the ♦5, his fourth-best card.

If declarer has enough time, he can eventually shed his losing diamond on one of the club winners. But a diamond lead will set up a fourth trick for the defense right away along with their ♥A and two spades.

HAND 4

West Dealer

	♠ K J 10 6	
	♥ J 7 4 2	
	♦ 10 6 5	
	♣ 8 6	
♠ 9 8 4		♠ Q 3 2
♥ K 9 8		♥ Q 10 6
♦ Q J 4		♦ A K 9 3 2
♣ A K Q 7		♣ J 4
	♠ A 7 5	
	♥ A 5 3	
	♦ 8 7	
	♣ 10 9 5 3 2	



West	North	East	South
1NT	pass	3NT	all pass

With 12 HCP and a good five-card suit, responder knows his side has the values for game and rockets into 3NT.

THE PLAY

North has two four-card suits to choose from as his lead, but the spades are much stronger and that looks to be the way to go.

If you remember from earlier in the lesson, the KJ10 is an *interior* sequence. From these holdings, you lead not the top card, but the higher of the touching honors, in this case the jack.

Even when the jack is led, South must let it ride if declarer plays low from dummy. While he can't be sure who has the missing king, playing the ace immediately would allow the queen to score, so he should hold that card back for later.

No matter what West does, the defenders will take four spades and the ♥A for down one.

HAND 5

West dealer

♠ K 8
♥ A K 5
♦ J 10 9 8
♣ 8 4 3 2

♠ A Q
♥ 7 3 2
♦ A Q 5 2
♣ A J 9 6

N

W E

S

♠ 9 6 4 2
♥ Q 10 8 4
♦ K 4 3
♣ 7 5

♠ J 10 7 5 3
♥ J 9 6
♦ 7 6
♣ K Q 10

West	North	East	South
pass	1NT	all pass	

North opens 1NT in second seat and gets to play it there, as West has 11 HCP but too balanced a hand to compete.

THE PLAY

With only a two-card sequence, East leads the ♠5, fourth-best from his long suit.

West plays the ♠K and declarer wins the trick with the ace. He can play the top diamonds off at any time, but elects to try and develop tricks in the heart suit while there is an entry to dummy. Declarer plays a low heart to the ten and the king, whereupon a second spade comes back. Hoping that the opening leader has the remaining high heart, North plays another round of the suit without success, as East's ♥9 forces the queen and ace. Now West switches to a club, dummy's weakness, and East gets in either now or later to run his spades from the top.

If East had started with the ♠J, dummy's ♠9 would have become a third winner in the suit and prevented the defenders from taking more spade tricks.

HAND 6

East dealer

♠ K J 10	♠ Q 4 3	♠ A 9 8 6 5
♥ A J 3 2	♥ Q 7 5	♥ K 9 4
♦ Q 8 7	♦ A K 6 5	♦ 9 4
♣ K 6 3	♣ 7 5 2	♣ A Q 10



♠ 7 2
♥ 10 8 6
♦ J 10 3 2
♣ J 9 8 4

West	North	East	South
		1♠	pass
2♣	pass	3♣	pass
4♠	all pass		

West's 2♣ response may seem peculiar, but a 2♥ response promises five of them, and a jump to 3♠ would show invitational rather than game-forcing values. So responder creates a forcing situation by bidding a minor suit at the two-level, which leaves the door open for a heart contract if partner has four and can rebid them.

Opener could rebid 2NT, but it seems more descriptive to raise clubs with good three-card support. West then jumps to game in partner's major, ending the bidding.

THE PLAY

While you should have at least a broken sequence to lead an honor against a notrump contract, when you're defending against a suit, leading the top of a two-card sequence is perfectly all right.

Why the distinction? When you're leading against notrump, you hope to set up tricks in your long suit, so you'd like partner to contribute a high card if he has one. In a suit contract, you won't often get length tricks, so the objective is to take whatever quick tricks you're entitled to.

If South leads the ♦J through dummy's queen, North-South can play three rounds of the suit, forcing declarer to ruff. As the cards lie, there is no way to avoid a heart loser and East must guess who has the ♠Q. Maybe he'll get it right, but at least you've given him a problem.

On a small diamond lead, North might take the ace and king, as he is not certain who has the jack. That allows declarer to pitch a heart on the ♦Q, and now ten tricks are assured even if he loses a trump.

HAND 7

South dealer

♠ A 8 5

♥ J 10 6 3 2

♦ 9 5 4

♣ J 3

♠ Q 9 2

♥ Q 8

♦ K Q J 6

♣ Q 9 6 2

♠ 7 4 3

♥ K 7 4

♦ 10 8 3

♣ K 10 8 5

W

N

E

S

♠ K J 10 6

♥ A 9 5

♦ A 7 2

♣ A 7 4

West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

The auction is fairly routine, with South opening a strong notrump and responder leaping to game with 12 HCP and no four-card major.

THE PLAY

West’s long suit is hearts and once again he has just a two-card sequence, so he leads the ♥3 rather than the ♥J.

If declarer knew the actual layout, he would play the eight from dummy. But most times, that will fetch the ten or jack from East, and dummy’s queen will never score. So he is going to play the queen, in hopes that the opening leader has the king. Here East plays the king and now South has to duck twice, win the third round of hearts and drive out the ♠A, hoping that his RHO has that card and is out of hearts. Alas, West takes the spade trick and two more heart winners defeat the contract.

If West had led the ♥J, declarer would have been much happier. He would cover with the ♥Q and because of the ♥9 and ♥8 in the two hands, he would have had a second winner in the suit.

HAND 8

East dealer

	♠ J 7 6 2	
	♥ J 8 4 3	
	♦ J 9	
	♣ 5 4 2	
♠ A Q 3	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> NE </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> WS </div> </div>	♠ K 9 4
♥ K 10 7		♥ A Q 6
♦ 10 8 6 4		♦ A 5 3
♣ J 8 6		♣ K 10 9 7
	♠ 10 8 5	
	♥ 9 5 2	
	♦ K Q 7 2	
	♣ A Q 3	

West	North	East	South
		1NT	pass
3NT	all pass		

Nothing fancy in the bidding here, your standard 1NT-3NT auction.

THE PLAY

Partner can't have a lot, so South has nothing better to do than lead a diamond. With only a two-card sequence, the choice should be fourth-best rather than one of the honor cards. This is especially true of an auction where the opponents haven't used Stayman to look for a major-suit fit and partner could well be short in your minor.

In fact, South has led a suit where the opponents have more cards than his side does. However, it's still the only way to beat the contract. If declarer plays low from dummy, partner inserts the nine, since it's an equal card to the jack with the ten visible on the table. Even if declarer refuses the first two diamonds, South will eventually get in with the ♣A and ♣Q to promote his fourth diamond as the setting trick.

If South leads a high diamond, dummy's ♦10 becomes a second winner and declarer will successfully go after clubs for the extra tricks he needs.

LESSON 2

OPENING LEADS – OBJECTIVES

In the first lesson, we talked about the proper card to lead from various holdings. Now it's time to widen the discussion to what the general defensive plan should be and how that helps us determine which suit to lead. We'll also see how that choice might be influenced by whether the opponents wind up in a notrump or suit contract.

NOTRUMP CONTRACTS

If the opponents are in 3NT, they will typically have in the neighborhood of twice the high-card points as your side does. That being the case, you likely won't have enough quick winners to defeat the contract.

The defenders will therefore need to look for additional tricks, and leading your longest suit is often the best route to getting them.

Sometimes you will have equal length in two or more suits and have to decide which one to start out with. Occasionally, you'll have both a long suit and a high-card sequence to choose from. Or they might have bid your suit(s), making that option less attractive.

Here are some examples from *Eddie Kantar Teaches Modern Bridge Defense*, with you on lead as West. The auction has gone:

West	North	East	South
			1NT
pass	2NT	pass	3NT
all pass			

Which card would you pick for your opening lead in each case?

- a) ♠ Q 10 8 4 ♥ Q 7 5 4 ♦ Q 4 ♣ J 8 7
- b) ♠ A J 10 8 5 ♥ K 5 ♦ 5 4 3 ♣ 10 9 7
- c) ♠ Q J 10 8 ♥ Q 9 7 5 3 ♦ Q 5 ♣ 10 3
- d) ♠ J 6 5 4 ♥ A 2 ♦ Q 10 9 8 ♣ J 4 3
- e) ♠ A 7 6 5 ♥ J 10 3 2 ♦ 8 7 6 ♣ K 6

And the answers are:

- a) ♠4. Equal length in the majors, but holding the ten in the spade suit makes it a better choice — if partner has the ♠J, you are well on your way to setting up a couple of winners.
- b) ♠J. Here you have an interior sequence, so an honor should be led, the higher of your touching cards.
- c) ♠Q. The hearts are longer, but you have a perfect sequence in your four-card suit, so you should fire out a top spade instead.
- d) ♦10. Another interior sequence, so we again play the higher of the equal cards. If partner has any of the remaining high cards in diamonds, we should be able to establish tricks for our side.
- e) ♥2. Four to the jack-ten is a trifle more appealing than four to the ace, since any top card partner has will be helpful, so a heart lead is better than a spade. Experience has shown that, against notrump contracts, a low card from a two-card sequence works better than the lead of an honor

Now for another set of examples with a somewhat longer auction by the opponents:

West	North	East	South
			1♣
pass	1♥	pass	1NT
pass	2NT	pass	3NT
all pass			

What would you lead from each of the following holdings?

- a) ♠876 ♥Q432 ♦J108 ♣543
- b) ♠A5 ♥J10982 ♦863 ♣K76
- c) ♠K543 ♥543 ♦Q1072 ♣A3
- d) ♠KQ109 ♥765 ♦J76 ♣832

And our answers here are:

- a) ♦J. Hearts is our long suit, but we know North has at least four of them so that lead may not be all that effective. We have a broken sequence in diamonds and that is an unbid suit.
- b) ♥J. In this case, our spots are so good that we should still lead our best suit, even though they've been mentioned on our left.

- c) ♦2. An equal-length choice between diamonds and spades, but having two honors in the minor suit is the deciding factor.
- d) ♠K. This should convey some key information to partner, as the normal lead from a two-card sequence is a small card. As well as the top two cards, you're showing an additional honor, either the jack or the ten.

Now, one more auction for the road before we move on:

West	North	East	South
			1♦
pass	1♥	pass	1NT
pass	2NT	all pass	

As West, you're in possession of these trinkets and have to select a lead in each case:

- a) ♠J 10 9 6 ♥9 5 4 ♦K 6 ♣A J 4 3
- b) ♠Q 7 6 2 ♥8 5 ♦J 9 8 ♣A Q J 9

Nothing's for sure until you see all four hands, but here's our take:

- a) ♠J. You have more high honors in clubs, but a perfect sequence like the one you have in spades is usually a good lead for your side.
- b) ♣Q. This lead will only give up a trick if declarer has the king rather than partner or dummy. The bright side is that even if that is the layout, you'll be setting up two and maybe three tricks for your side.

SUIT CONTRACTS

If the opponents have settled into a trump contract, the landscape changes to some extent. That's mainly because, unlike defending notrump contracts, you won't often be able to score tricks with small cards from long suits. Those small cards that are winners in notrump will be ruffed by declarer as soon as he runs out of cards in that suit.

So instead of trying to set up long card winners that you can cash later on, the emphasis now becomes taking or developing tricks quickly. To illustrate, let's give you the following hand:

♠ Q 3 ♥ 9 7 ♦ J 9 8 6 5 4 ♣ K Q 8

If the opponents wind up in 3NT, leading the fourth-best diamond is definitely worth considering, as you'll need to manufacture tricks other than the ones you may have in clubs.

However, the bidding has gone 1♠-3♠; 4♠. Now a diamond lead doesn't rate to produce anything immediate in the way of tricks, as you're missing a lot of high cards and even if partner has strength there, either declarer or dummy is apt to have shortness.

What other possibilities are there? Your queen of trumps may win a trick, depending on whether the opponents have an eight- or nine-card fit. Other than that, the club suit is just about the only hope of getting tricks for your side. With a two-card sequence of honor cards, a reasonably effective lead would be the top card, the ♣K. If partner has the ace, you can rattle off some tricks in that suit on the go. Even if declarer wins the first trick, you'll have promoted your queen to a winner.

There are three main types of leads against suit contracts. Two of them are active, and the other is more preventative in nature. To give ourselves a tour, we'll continue to use this auction as our starting point:

West	North	East	South
			1♠
pass	3♠	pass	4♠
all pass			

The alternatives you'll have are:

Lead from strength

You might have a sequence to lead from, or a four-card suit that might be an effective lead. Hands that would qualify for these types of leads would be:

♠ 6 4 ♥ A K 7 ♦ 10 6 5 2 ♣ Q 8 4 3

♠ Q 4 3 ♥ A 9 7 ♦ Q J 9 ♣ 8 7 5 2

♠ 3 ♥ J 7 6 4 ♦ A 9 6 2 ♣ Q 10 8 7

The first hand is a snap, you have the ♥AK to lead, and an opportunity to see partner's card before playing to the second trick.

On the second example, you'll never be leading a trump as that might cost a trick. So might a heart from the unsupported ace. That leaves diamonds and clubs, and two honors in the diamond suit makes the ♦Q a decent lead. If partner has a top card, you're well on your way to getting some tricks there.

The third example is a little tougher. The singleton trump is dangerous, as you could easily give up a trick by leading through partner's longer trump holding. If we eliminate the unsupported ♦A, that leaves only a heart or club. Leading from four to the jack is another lead that's more likely to cost than gain, so we are left with the club suit. At least we have the ten to help support the queen, so the ♣7 it will have to be.

Lead from shortness

By "shortness", we mean a singleton. Doubleton leads are more of a hit-and-miss proposition, and you won't have enough successes to justify them.

Leading from shortness is also an aggressive tactic. The opponents have named a trump suit because they have an adequate fit of eight or more cards; one or both of them might have shortness in a suit that makes them worry about playing a notrump contract. You can sometimes use that choice to your benefit, attempting to get one or even two ruffs by playing an unbid suit. This is a hand that might prompt you go that route:

♠ 6 5 2 ♥ A 7 5 4 ♦ 2 ♣ J 8 7 6 3

A trump is too wishy-washy. A club isn't likely to accomplish much because the suit is so weak. As mentioned in the first lesson, you won't normally get rich by leading or underleading an unsupported ace against a suit contract. But a diamond lead might create an extra trick for your side out of thin air, as partner is going to have around 8-9 HCP and may well have the ♦A or a high card in the trump suit. In either case, you'll be able to trump the second round of diamonds.

Lead a trump

There are two primary reasons for making this type of lead:

- a) You're trying to prevent declarer from ruffing losers, or...
- b) Nothing else is attractive, so you're trying to avoid giving up a trick on the lead.

A hand that might contemplate a trump lead on the above auction would be:

♠ 8 3 ♥ Q 9 6 ♦ A J 8 2 ♣ Q 7 5 4

Hearts are only a three-card suit, and a diamond from an unsupported ace will seldom be a good lead. There are no good spot cards in the four-card club suit, so that leaves a trump as the only palatable alternative. Trump leads, in contrast with the other two options, are not very enterprising. Sometimes, though, it's the auction rather than an unappealing hand that makes it a good choice, as we'll see in the next lesson.

When you don't have a sequence holding or shortness

What's the best strategy on lead against a suit contract if you aren't fortunate enough to have been dealt a sequence? This question has sparked a lively debate amongst bridge teachers, authors and top players, without a consensus being reached.

Look at these suit combinations:

KJ43 Q976 J863 K1084 Q432 10872

You could reasonably lead from any of these holdings against a notrump contract. Should we do the same against suits?

There are two schools of thought. Mike Lawrence and Eddie Kantar, amongst others, feel that it works out best in the long run to lead from the suits headed by the king or queen, rather than the weaker holdings. If partner has any help, then you can quickly build tricks for your side. They represent the active opening leaders.

Bill Root and some other authors are more hesitant about leading from those suits, as they're worried about giving declarer a cheap trick if partner has neither of the missing honors. They prefer to lead from the suits headed by the jack or ten, trying not to yield an extra trick to declarer. These players are more conservative in their approach.


I regard being on lead as an opportunity to do something constructive. That said, I'm not going to kid you and say I've been 100% or anywhere close. You'll have both successes and failures whichever style of lead you adopt. Over time you'll discover your comfort zone. An important element of knowing whether to be aggressive or somewhat passive on the opening lead is the auction itself, and we'll look at those aspects of the decision in the next lesson.

HAND 1

South Dealer

♠ Q 10 8
♥ 8 7 5
♦ A K 10
♣ Q J 9 8

♠ A 6 5 2
♥ K J 9 3 2
♦ 8 4
♣ 7 2



♠ K J 9 4 3
♥ 6 4
♦ Q J 5
♣ A K 3

♠ 7
 ♥ A Q 10
 ♦ 9 7 6 3 2
 ♣ 10 6 5 4

West	North	East	South
			1♠
pass	2♣	pass	3♣
pass	4♠	all pass	

While South has a balanced minimum, with good three-card support and a small doubleton in hearts the raise to 3♣ is slightly more descriptive than 2NT. Not that it mattered to North, who was going to place the contract in 4♠ anyway, after first showing 11+ HCP with his two-level response.

THE PLAY

Hearts is one of the unbid suits and West has a couple of honors in his long suit, so that's definitely a reasonable lead.

East takes the ♥A and returns his partner's suit. On the third round, declarer ruffs and then plays on spades as the minor suits are solid once the trumps are gone.

Unfortunately, the 4-1 break means the contract has to go down if West does not grab the ace prematurely. When partner follows on the first round, West has a count on the trump suit and can therefore play low on the first two spades and take the next one. With dummy now out of trumps, a fourth heart cooks declarer's goose as he has just the one spade left. He has to ruff the heart, and now West's remaining spade has become a winner as it is the only trump still in the game.

Without a heart lead, South can draw trumps without losing control of the hand and make his contract.

HAND 2

West dealer

	♠ 8 5 2	
	♥ 10 8 5	
	♦ Q 9 7 2	
	♣ A K 2	
♠ A Q 9		♠ K J 7 4
♥ J 7		♥ K Q 6 3
♦ A 6 5		♦ K 8 3
♣ Q 10 8 6 5		♣ J 9
	♠ 10 6 3	
	♥ A 9 4 2	
	♦ J 10 4	
	♣ 7 4 3	



West	North	East	South
1♣	pass	1♥	pass
1NT	pass	3NT	all pass

Opener's 1NT rebid shows a balanced minimum without either heart support or a four-card spade suit. Responder has 13 HCP as well, and since there is no possibility of an eight-card major-suit fit, he settles for the notrump game.

THE PLAY

Spades and diamonds are the unbid suits, and with a stronger holding in the minor, North leads his fourth-best, the ♦2.

This will dislodge one of the high cards in diamonds, and declarer cannot reach his objective without the defense being able to get enough tricks to defeat the contract first. There are six immediate tricks, and driving out the ♥A only gets South up to eight. The only way to develop three additional winners is to play on the club suit. However, North can win with one of his high cards and persist with diamonds, knocking out declarer's remaining honor. Now the defense has two diamond tricks to cash along with the ♣A and ♣K and the ♥A.

We are going to revisit this deal in a later lesson, as there are a couple of interesting points to the defense as the play develops.

HAND 3

North dealer

♠ A 8 6	♠ Q J 10	♠ K 9 7 4 3
♥ A 8 5 4	♥ Q J 10 2	♥ 9 3
♦ 7 6 5 3	♦ A K 10	♦ 4 2
♣ 10 3	♣ Q J 8	♣ K 9 7 4

W

N

E

S

♠ 5 2
♥ K 7 6
♦ Q J 9 8
♣ A 6 5 2

West	North	East	South
	1NT	pass	3NT
all pass			

Pretty straightforward bidding here, as North opens 1NT, and responder puts him in the notrump game, having 10 HCP and no major-suit interest.

THE PLAY

East leads the ♠4, fourth-best from longest and strongest. West takes the ace and plays back another round of the suit.

Opening leader should realize at the second trick that declarer has the ♠QJ10, as West has not returned an honor card.

Since declarer has a certain stopper and East doesn't have a guaranteed entry to cash the winners in his long suit, it's best to let declarer have the second spade trick. The hope is that West will be able to regain the lead and have a third spade to play. Then East can take the ♠K along with the fourth and fifth spade.

North will indeed have to surrender the lead, going after the heart suit to promote three additional winners. West takes the ♥A and then plays another spade, with a happy result for his side.

If the defenders take the ♠A and ♠K immediately and then play a third round, the contract is ironclad as the hand with the ♥A won't have any spades left when he wins a trick with that card.

HAND 4

East dealer

<p>♠ Q 7 ♥ K Q J 9 7 ♦ 10 7 6 ♣ A 9 6</p>	<p>♠ K 10 2 ♥ A 4 2 ♦ K 8 5 3 ♣ 10 7 4</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: 60px; margin: 0 auto;"> <p style="margin: 0;">N</p> <p style="margin: 0;">W E</p> <p style="margin: 0;">S</p> </div> <p>♠ J 5 ♥ 8 6 5 3 ♦ Q J 9 ♣ K 8 3 2</p>	<p>♠ A 9 8 6 4 3 ♥ 10 ♦ A 4 2 ♣ Q J 5</p>
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West	North	East	South
		1♠	pass
2♥	pass	2♣	pass
4♠	all pass		

With 12 HCP, West has enough to respond at the two-level in his long suit. When opener shows extra length in his major, he duly bids game.

THE PLAY

The two unbid suits are diamonds and clubs. South has a broken sequence in one and an unsupported king in the other, so a top diamond is the more attractive lead.

Declarer will not be pleased to have his ♦A knocked out so quickly, as the contract is now doomed. He'll try and steal a heart trick, but North takes the ace and the defenders rattle off two diamonds. After that, they'll get at least one and most likely two trump tricks.

Without a diamond lead, declarer will have time to establish two heart winners for discards and make the contract.

HAND 5

West dealer

♠ K Q 8 7 5 2
♥ 8
♦ J 6 5
♣ A 9 7

♠ A J 9 4
♥ Q 7 3
♦ K 10 4 3
♣ Q 5

♠ 6 3
♥ K J 10 9 6
♦ A 9 2
♣ J 10 8

♠ 10
♥ A 5 4 2
♦ Q 8 7
♣ K 6 4 3 2

N

W

E

S

West	North	East	South
2♠	pass	pass	dbl
all pass			

South’s double in passout chair may appear to be rather skimpy, but letting the opponents play undisturbed at the two-level is usually not the road to success, especially at duplicate bridge. Because East hasn’t tried for game, North should have opening values but a hand not suited to immediate action. The South hand contains enough offensive potential in whatever suit North chooses as trumps, and a couple of defensive tricks if partner elects to convert the double for penalties.

North is looking at three likely trump tricks plus some additional high cards, so his expectation is that he’ll be able to defeat 2♠ handily.

THE PLAY

Let’s start by eliminating the ♣Q as an opening lead. This is not the route North should go, as he would be trying for ruffs that he doesn’t need, having natural tricks in the trump suit.

Partner’s takeout double has shown interest in hearts, so that lead might work, but a diamond is superior. It can easily build tricks for the defense, and might also start the process of shortening declarer’s trumps if he is forced to ruff. This is referred to as a ‘forcing defense’.

Here, if North leads a diamond, it will enable the defense to score two tricks in the suit, regardless of whether declarer rises with the ace. The defense will also get three trumps, a club and a heart for down two.

HAND 6

♠ K 10 8 7
♥ 6 5 3 2
♦ J 4
♣ Q 7 5

♠ 6 5 3 2
♥ K 10 9
♦ 8 7
♣ K 10 4 3

♠ Q 9 4
♥ A 8
♦ 9 6 5 3 2
♣ A J 9

♠ A J
♥ Q J 7 4
♦ A K Q 10
♣ 8 6 2

W N E S

West	North	East	South
			1NT
all pass			

THE PLAY

You should assume, in the lack of evidence to the contrary, that partner might have a card that's of some help in developing tricks for your side. In this case, as little as the ♠Q or ♠J will get West nicely started towards that objective.

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Conversely, on a heart lead, East-West will get just the one heart and have actually played one of the opponents' best suits. South will end up taking three hearts, four diamonds and the ♠A and will make an overtrick.

HAND 7

West dealer

♠ J 9 6 4 2

♥ A 6

♦ K Q 7

♣ Q 4 2

♠ Q 10 8 7

♥ K J 9 3

♦ A 3

♣ J 10 7

♠ A 5 3

♥ Q 8 5

♦ 10 8 6 4 2

♣ A K

♠ K

♥ 10 7 4 2

♦ J 9 5

♣ 9 8 6 5 3

N

W E

S

West	North	East	South
1♠	pass	2♦	pass
2NT	pass	4♠	all pass

West opens his marginal 12-count, after which East makes a 2/1 response and then places the contract in 4♠.

THE PLAY

With the opponents in game, there isn't room for much more than a queen or king in South's hand. Should North start out with a heart from his KJ9x, hoping partner has the queen of that suit?

The answer is no, at least not right away. He can expect to have at least two trump tricks and the ♦A is also probably a winner. Since he will gain the lead several times over the course of the hand, North can lead the ♣J. If dummy's diamonds look threatening, he'll get a chance to switch to hearts later on.

On the lead of the ♣J, declarer has no hope of making 4♠. He'll lose three trumps, a heart and one or two diamonds. On a heart lead, declarer will go up with the queen and thus avoid a loser in that suit.

HAND 8

North dealer

	♠ A Q 9 6 4 2	
	♥ 9 5	
	♦ Q 7 2	
	♣ K 4	
♠ 10 5		♠ 8 7
♥ 8 4 3		♥ A 6 2
♦ A 9 8		♦ K J 6 3
♣ 10 7 6 5 2		♣ J 9 8 3
	♠ K J 3	
	♥ K Q J 10 7	
	♦ 10 5 4	
	♣ A Q	

West	North	East	South
	1♠	pass	2♥
pass	2♠	pass	3♠
pass	4♠	all pass	

North-South are playing 2/1, whereby the 2♥ response creates a game force and the subsequent raise to 3♠ (rather than 4♠) indicates a willingness to try for slam. North has a minimum hand for his opening bid and therefore does not cooperate, signing off in 4♠.

THE PLAY

Which of the two minor suits should East lead? He has more honor cards in diamonds, but some players are not wild about leading from kings against suit contracts. The spot cards are better in clubs, but will that suit produce tricks quickly enough to defeat the contract?

On this hand, a diamond lead will beat the contract right away as West rises and plays back another, and the defense collects the first three tricks plus ♥A.

However, the defense can still prevail even after a club lead, as we'll find out in Lesson 4, when the topic of signaling will take center stage.

LESSON 3

OPENING LEADS – PAYING ATTENTION TO THE BIDDING

We've focused thus far on the technical aspects of opening leads and what you're trying to accomplish against both suit and notrump contracts. Those are certainly key factors in becoming effective with the initial salvo. However, before getting locked into a certain routine and blindly following the guidelines we've described, you also need to consider the auction, as it may provide vital clues as to what the path to glory will be for your side.

Before plunging into the heart of the matter, we'll touch upon three kinds of leads that are sometimes chosen against suit contracts, namely a trump, a singleton or a doubleton. When there isn't an automatic choice from looking at the hand, players tend to drift towards these leads as alternatives. While they can sometimes produce a good result, on the whole they're somewhat overused. The basis for selecting them should be a *logical reason*, not a feeling of uncertainty. We'll try and offer some clarity on when those leads are advisable.

SINGLETON LEADS

When the opponents are in a suit contract and you're itching to lead your singleton, you should pause to ask yourself two questions:

- Do you need the ruff?
- Are you likely to get it?

Let's take the following auction as a backdrop and then look at specific examples:

West	North	East	South
			1♥
pass	2♥	pass	4♥
all pass			

You're West, so you're on lead. What should your choice be from each of these hands?

♠ 10 9 8 6 4 ♥ K 7 2 ♦ 5 ♣ Q 6 5 3

The ♦5. Your ♥K has a fair chance of being a winner, but you'd also like to score a ruff with a low trump. Partner rates to have about 7-9 HCP, so you should be able to reach his hand to get another diamond back at some point.

♠ K 6 5 2 ♥ Q J 9 7 ♦ 3 ♣ 10 8 7 4

A club. With this hand, you're a virtual lock to have two natural trump tricks, so you don't need a ruff. You don't want to take a big position with a spade lead when declarer might be struggling for tricks. Because you know declarer is about to get a nasty surprise in the trump suit, you can afford to sit back for now and let him do his own work.

♠ 8 6 5 3 2 ♥ A J 8 ♦ K Q 9 5 ♣ 4

The ♦K. With 10 HCP in your hand, partner won't have much in the way of values, so getting a ruff is a long shot. Besides, your ♥J may win a trick anyway as you're sitting behind declarer's five-card suit. A top diamond will likely create a trick for your side, and perhaps more if partner has the ace or jack.

♠ Q 9 7 4 ♥ 10 6 4 ♦ J 9 5 4 3 ♣ 7

The ♣7. The diamonds are too humble for a lead of that suit to accomplish much, and the spades are only slightly better. With you having a paltry 3 HCP, there is cause for optimism that you can reach partner's hand for at least one ruff and maybe even two.

♠ K J 7 5 3 ♥ A 6 2 ♦ A 10 9 4 ♣ 8

The ♠5. With 12 HCP in your hand, all partner can be expected to have is a measly 2 or 3 HCP. So hoping you can get a club ruff is a pipe dream. However, partner’s meager assets could include the ♠10 or ♠Q. If you can’t stand leading away from a king, a low trump would be the second choice. But a club won’t gain anything for your side and can only help declarer.

TRUMP LEADS

In Mike Lawrence’s book on opening leads, he describes an episode in which he was watching Lew Mathe, one of the all-time greats. Mathe’s partner led a trump, which didn’t turn out very well for their side, and Lew was visibly annoyed. He explained that there was one and only one time that leading trumps is correct. His partner asked what it was and the reply was, “When it is right!”

Your reaction might be that it was a flippant answer. It wasn’t. What Lew was saying was that he wanted his partner to think. What he meant was that a trump shouldn’t be led unless there was a compelling reason to do so. He hated hearing partner say, “I didn’t know what to lead, so I led a trump.”

So the next time you find yourself reaching for a trump, ask yourself whether you are doing so because you *know* it will be a good lead, or because you don’t know what else to do.

Even seemingly harmless trump leads from 10xx, Jxx or Jxx can turn out to be a complete disaster. Here is an example from actual play:

♠ J 6 4

♥ J 7 2

♦ Q 8 7

♣ K 10 8 5

♠ Q 8 2

♥ K Q 8 3

♦ 9 6 2

♣ 9 6 4

♠ K 9

♥ A 10 9 6 4

♦ 10 5 3

♣ Q 7 2

N

E

W

S

♠ A 10 7 5 3

♥ 5

♦ A K J 4

♣ A J 3

West	North	East	South
			1♠
pass	2♠	pass	4♠
all pass			

Now I grant you, the West hand is no picnic to lead from. The player holding those cards felt that discretion was the better part of valor and led a trump, not expecting it to cost.

Well, it certainly did. Declarer played low from dummy at Trick 1, and East rose with the king — the nine would have been better, but here he had no winning play. Declarer took the ace and played a heart to the second trick. East won the ♥A and switched to a club, which South won. Now declarer led the ♠10, and when West played low, he let it ride. After all, East could not have the ♠J or he would have played it on the first trick instead of the king. That pinned East's ♠9, and the trump suit was brought in without the loss of a single trick. Now declarer was able to discard a club on his heart winner. The only losers were a heart, a club and a diamond as 4♠ made on the nose.

If declarer has to play the trump suit on his own, he'll probably begin with a small card from hand and put up the queen. That will be pounced upon with the king and West now gets his jack. The defenders have a good chance of winning two trump tricks instead of none at all.

So what should West lead? I'd have led a small club from my ♣K1085, hoping partner had something to contribute. That would have seen the queen and ace go on the first trick, and East would have returned another club when he won the ♥A. The 4♠ contract would have gone down a bunch.

Even if West is nervous about leading away from the ♣K and leads a heart, the defense may lose a potential club trick but 4♠ will still go down.

This tale ended sadly because West led a trump out of resignation rather than conviction. However, a trump lead can easily be the best choice in a trio of auctions:

- 1. When partner leaves in your one-level takeout double. That usually means he has an excellent five- or six-card holding in their suit, and you should lead one so declarer's trumps can be drawn and he can't score cheap ruffs.
- 2. When responder bids 1NT over a major-suit opening and then leaves partner in his second suit. For example:

West	North	East	South
			1♠
pass	1NT	pass	2♦
all pass			

Opener will likely be unbalanced and responder is almost a cinch to have a singleton in the first-bid suit as he has not taken a preference back to the major. The opponents are likely to embark on a crossruff if you don't lead trumps.

3. If you can tell from the bidding that the opponents are taking a sacrifice rather than bidding to make. A good example is this sequence, with East-West vulnerable:

West	North	East	South
		1♥	1♠
2♣	2♠	3♦	3♠
4♥	4♠	dbl	all pass

East-West have bid game in hearts voluntarily, showing the minor suits along the way. The North hand, having gone on to 4♠, probably has four trumps and shortness somewhere.

In this auction, East-West have bid all three other suits, so there cannot be a source of tricks for North-South other than in the trump suit. The defense might be able to curtail or prevent a cross-ruff by leading a trump.

DOUBLETON LEADS

If you lead from a doubleton, the card you play on the first trick should be the higher of your two small ones, as it sends a dual message to partner. It will deny high-card strength in the suit and also give count, a subject we'll talk more about in a later lesson.

Is it a good policy to lead from a doubleton against a suit contract? It's reasonable to do so in three cases:

- Partner has bid the suit.
- If it's the *only* unbid suit and you have no other lead that stands out.
- If you have a high card (ace or king) in the trump suit and you have no decent alternative.

The following deal is a good case study of how the defense can falter even when the doubleton lead can produce a ruff for your side.

	♠ J 10 3	
	♥ 9 6 2	
	♦ Q 10 7 3	
	♣ A 8 5	
♠ 9 6 5 2		♠ Q 8 7 4
♥ A 7 3		♥ 8 5
♦ 8 6		♦ A 9 4 2
♣ Q 10 9 3		♣ K 7 4
	<div> <div>N</div> <div>W E</div> <div>S</div> </div>	
	♠ A K	
	♥ K Q J 10 4	
	♦ K J 5	
	♣ J 6 2	

West	North	East	South
			1♥
pass	2♥	pass	4♥
all pass			

West had the ace of trumps as a quick reentry, so he elected to lead from his doubleton diamond in the hope of getting a ruff. That would have been a success if East had ducked the first round, encouraging by playing the nine. But what happened instead was that partner assumed the lead was a singleton, taking the first trick with the ace and leading another diamond back. Declarer now won and began to draw trumps. Upon taking the ♥A, West had no way of getting to partner's hand and when South regained the lead, he played two more rounds of hearts and then used dummy's fourth diamond to shed a losing club.

The diamond lead wasn't awful, but with an interior sequence in the club suit, leading clubs would also have been a reasonable option, and there would have been no chance for the defense to go wrong as the cards lay.

Take away the ♣109 from the club suit, making your holding there the ♣Q543, and that suit becomes somewhat less attractive. Now just about anything might pan out, including the top of your doubleton.

USING THE BIDDING TO HELP YOU MAKE THE RIGHT OPENING LEAD

You've already gained a lot of knowledge to help you choose the opening lead. You've found out what a sequence is, and that it is a good holding for defensive purposes. You know that you can lead a

small card from a long and decent suit if you don't hold some kind of sequence. We've also talked about the objectives of the defenders against notrump and suit contracts.

Now we'll discover how, aside from the cards you see in your hand, the opponents' bidding might influence you somewhat in terms of what you're going to lead.

Let's take this hand as our first example:

♠ Q J 9 3 ♥ 7 4 2 ♦ Q J 7 2 ♣ A 8

If the auction goes 1NT-3NT, you'll probably try a spade rather than a diamond because of the ♠9, which gives you a broken sequence rather than a two-card sequence.

Suppose this has been the auction, though:

West	North	East	South
			1NT
pass	2♥	pass	2♠
pass	3NT	all pass	

North's 2♥ was a Jacoby transfer, promising at least five spades. The subsequent 3NT bid offered a choice of games, and opener passed.

The information you have now is that there are exactly five spades on your left, and two on your right. If opener had three of them, he'd have gone back to 4♠.

When the opponents have more spades than you do, that is no longer going to be a very productive lead. But there is another four-card suit, diamonds, that you can start out with, and maybe partner will have something of value to contribute.

Along similar lines, we have another seemingly equal choice which can be resolved by thinking about the auction the opponents have had:

♠ 7 6 ♥ K J 4 3 2 ♦ 2 ♣ K J 4 3 2

If the auction had gone 1NT-3NT, dummy could have club length, but probably won't have four hearts. Why? LHO did not make a Stayman enquiry. That tilts the odds slightly in favor of a heart lead. If instead the bidding had gone:

West	North	East	South
			1NT
pass	2♣	pass	2♠
pass	3NT	all pass	

it would be a different story. Here responder has used Stayman to ask for a major, and then bid 3NT when opener showed spades. Ergo, North will have four hearts and a lead of that suit will likely be an exercise in futility. Fortunately, there's another option with the club suit.

Here's another hand to consider:

♠ K Q 6 ♥ J 10 9 3 2 ♦ J 2 ♣ 7 4 3

On a 1NT-3NT auction, the ♥J would be an automatic lead. You have a perfect sequence and it's your longest suit to boot.

Suppose, however, that you're on lead after the bidding has gone:

West	North	East	South
	3♣	pass	3NT
all pass			

The information you have now is that LHO has seven good clubs; his partner likely has some degree of fit in clubs along with enough strength to give 3NT a shot.

If declarer doesn't lose five tricks early, he'll almost certainly make his game. A heart could work, but needs multiple honor cards from partner. A spade, by contrast, will set up tricks quickly if partner has the jack or the ace, and you might hit the jackpot if the entire deal is:

	♠ 5 4		
	♥ Q 8		
	♦ 8 7		
	♣ A Q J 10 9 8 2		
♠ K Q 6			♠ A 9 8 3 2
♥ J 10 9 3 2			♥ K 6 5
♦ J 2			♦ Q 10 9 5
♣ 7 4 3			♣ 5
	♠ J 10 7		
	♥ A 7 4		
	♦ A K 6 4 3		
	♣ K 6		

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Here the defense takes the first five spade tricks and declarer gets the rest.

So was South's 3NT bid foolish? Not at all: it was a reasonable gamble and if you had led a heart, he'd have taken the first ten tricks. Besides, if North's outside queen had been in spades instead of hearts, 3NT could not have been defeated on any lead.

Here's another hand that doesn't have a sequence in a long suit to lead from:

♠ K J 6 ♥ 10 9 8 ♦ A Q 10 2 ♣ Q 7 6

The auction this time has gone:

West	North	East	South
			1NT
pass	2NT	pass	3NT
all pass			

With you looking at 12 HCP and the opponents having bid a game, partner has a queen or king at best. Unless that card is in diamonds, a lead of that suit is only going to help declarer. Between the four suits, the only lead that probably won't give up a trick is the ♥10. Since the opponents have limped into game, the best plan is to sit back, relax, and let declarer take all of his losing finesses into you.

And yet another collection of scattered values:

♠ 8 6 5 2 ♥ K J 8 3 ♦ 10 6 ♣ Q 10 9

What's your vote if the auction goes:

West	North	East	South
			1♠
pass	2♣	pass	3♣
pass	4♠	all pass	

The opponents have a double fit, so it's essential to get after your tricks quickly before your potential winners vanish on dummy's clubs. You should go on the attack with the ♥3.

Suppose, however, that the bidding has proceeded:

West	North	East	South
			1♠
pass	1NT	pass	2♥
all pass			

As we mentioned earlier, a trump can be a good lead in this kind of auction, but not here: your hearts are too good and your spades too lousy. Declarer probably won't need spade ruffs in dummy, his suit will be just fine without them. That leaves a minor suit, and because of the interior sequence in clubs, that will usually be the most productive lead.

If you thought that last hand you got dealt was kind of shabby, the next one is really the dregs:

♠ Q 9 ♥ 8 6 2 ♦ J 7 5 4 ♣ 9 6 5 3

Rather than zone out, however, you still need to think about the auction as it may offer you something of a clue:

West	North	East	South
			1♠
pass	1NT	pass	2♥
all pass			

The opponents haven't even tried for game, so partner must have 12-14 HCP. Why, then has he remained silent? It's entirely possible that your RHO has opened his best suit, spades.

The auction tends to confirm this. North will have just one or two spades, because he hasn't raised. As for hearts, dummy will have four of them, or three with shortness in spades.

Try and picture in your mind what declarer is going to do in the 2♥ contract. In addition to his quick winners, he'll trump spades in dummy and minor-suit cards in his hand. The layout of the cards is such that neither of you will be able to overruff.

The way you can nip South's plan in the bud is to lead a trump. Now, if your side wins a trick later on, you can persist with another round of hearts, and declarer won't have quite as much fun trumping back and forth.

♠ Q 9 ♥ 8 6 2 ♦ J 7 5 4 ♣ 9 6 5 3

In this auction, the opponents have agreed on the trump suit right away:

West	North	East	South
			1♠
pass	2♠	pass	4♠
all pass			

You have far less information about the opponents' distribution here, other than that dummy will have at least three spades and about 6-9 HCP. As for the other suits, you're in the dark as to who has what.

The one suit you won't be leading is a spade, as you're fondly hoping to score a trick with your queen. Which of the other three suits is going to be most beneficial for your side? You can't really tell for certain.

Since the opening lead is a shot in the dark, you'd get votes from experts for any of a heart, diamond or club. My preference is for one of the long suits, because if you opt for a heart instead, whichever one you choose is going to be tough for partner to read.

There is a considerable difference of opinion about what to lead from three small in an unbid suit. With the 862 of hearts in our current hand, some experts lead the eight, others the deuce, and still others the six! Leading the six is a convention called MUD (Middle, Up, Down).

Whichever card you lead, confusion is apt to result. If you lead the eight, partner may think you have a doubleton, but at least he knows you don't have an honor. If you lead the deuce, partner may think you have an honor, but at least he knows you don't have a doubleton. Finally, if you lead the six, who knows what partner will think?

My advice is to shy away from leading from three small unless nothing else looks remotely feasible. Also, if you're in a regular partnership, you should have a chat with partner and get his take on what card he thinks ought to be led from three small. Any agreement is better than no agreement at all.

HAND 1

North dealer

	♠ 7 6 3	
	♥ K 10	
	♦ A J	
	♣ A K Q 7 5 4	
♠ K J 2		♠ A 10 9 4
♥ 7 6		♥ Q J 5
♦ 9 8 5 3 2		♦ Q 6 4
♣ J 10 9		♣ 8 6 3
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ Q 8 5	
	♥ A 9 8 4 3 2	
	♦ K 10 7	
	♣ 2	

West	North	East	South
	1♣	pass	1♥
pass	3♣	pass	3♥
pass	4♥	all pass	

After North shows 16-18, responder suggests extra length in hearts and opener carries on to game in that suit.

THE PLAY

Lead the ♠2. The bidding tells you that dummy has a powerful club suit and, given time, declarer is going to use them to discard some of his losers. This is clearly a time to attack and play from strength rather than automatically lead a diamond. That suit is completely lacking in honor cards and there's not much chance of taking tricks in it quickly.

On a spade lead, you'll get three immediate tricks and a heart later on for down one. Anything else, and declarer will draw two trumps and play four rounds of clubs, pitching all of his spades, to make twelve tricks. Quite a difference.

HAND 2

West dealer

♠ A K 9
♥ 9 8 7
♦ K 10 8 3
♣ A 9 4

♠ 8 6 5
♥ J 4 3 2
♦ J 6 5
♣ 8 3 2

♠ J 10 3
♥ K 6
♦ A 9 7 2
♣ K Q 10 7

♠ Q 7 4 2
♥ A Q 10 5
♦ Q 4
♣ J 6 5

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West	North	East	South
1♦	pass	1♥	pass
1NT	pass	2NT	pass
3NT	all pass		

East responds up-the-line with his two four-card majors, and when opener shows a minimum balanced hand without support or four spades, he invites game in notrump. West, with the top of his range, accepts and goes on to 3NT.

THE PLAY

There is surely no upside to a heart lead, with East having bid the suit. You have to try and find partner’s strength, which may be in spades and clubs. Is it a straight guess or is there a way of figuring it out?

There are subtle clues from the bidding that point towards a club lead. Partner could have as many as 10-12 HCP, but hasn’t overcalled spades or made a takeout double of 1♥. The absence of a bid suggests that he will be longer and/or stronger in the minor suit, clubs.

Once you settle on a club, the card you pick should be the ♣8, the highest card you have. South indeed has clubs and points, but had no safe way to enter the auction. A club lead through dummy’s Jxx will produce three tricks along with the ♦A and ♥K for down one.

If the lead is anything else, declarer will finesse twice in hearts and end up with four spades, three hearts, a diamond and the ♣A to make his contract.

HAND 3

South dealer

	♠ Q J 9 7 5	
	♥ A K Q	
	♦ A J 9	
	♣ Q 8	
♠ K 6		♠ 8 3 2
♥ 10 6		♥ 9 8 5 4 2
♦ K Q 8 6 5		♦ 4
♣ J 9 5 2		♣ A 7 6 3
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ A 10 4	
	♥ J 7 3	
	♦ 10 7 3 2	
	♣ K 10 4	

West	North	East	South
			pass
pass	1♠	pass	2♠
pass	4♠	all pass	

North opens 1♠ and then goes right to game with his 19 HCP when partner agrees trumps and shows minimum responding values.

THE PLAY

Remember when you're considering the lead of a singleton, to ask yourself the two questions we mentioned earlier in the lesson: do you need a ruff and are you likely to get it?

The answer to both questions is 'yes'. You're unlikely to get any trump tricks unless you can negotiate one or more diamond ruffs. Also, because you have just the one ace, there is room in partner's hand for about 8-10 points.

On a diamond lead, your hopes will eventually come to fruition. West will play a diamond honor and declarer will win with the ace. From that point, declarer will either finesse in trumps or play ace and another, trying to prevent the ruff. But it won't matter what he does, as West takes his ♠K and then plays his diamond winner and a third round of the suit. You collect your third trump via a ruff and then play the ♣A to scuttle their contract.

HAND 4

East dealer

♠ A 10 8
♥ 7 3
♦ 9 6 2
♣ A K J 5 4

♠ 6 3
♥ 9 4
♦ K J 10 8
♣ Q 10 9 7 2

♠ K Q 9 7 4
♥ K J 6 5 2
♦ A 3
♣ 8

♠ J 5 2
♥ A Q 10 8
♦ Q 7 5 4
♣ 6 3

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West	North	East	South
		1♠	pass
2♣	pass	2♥	pass
4♠	all pass		

A fairly typical auction when responder has opening values of his own. He introduces his long suit at the two-level and then bids game in opener’s major at his next turn.

THE PLAY

This hand calls for some deep but logical thinking by both sides.

While the unbid suit is diamonds, South has a very good holding in opener’s second suit that could take as many as four tricks. Not only are the hearts sitting badly for declarer, partner is likely sitting over dummy with length in the club suit. Because of that, South’s hand is ideal for a trump lead, to prevent any heart ruffs in dummy.

After a spade is led at Trick 1, East is doomed to failure. South gets in twice in the heart suit to continue with a second and third trump. All declarer gets is five spades, three minor suit tricks and a long heart.

Without a spade lead, declarer can make the hand if he is careful not to draw trumps too quickly. Let’s say South begins with a diamond. East takes the ace and then plays his two top clubs to shed the diamond loser. Now he tests the hearts, playing a low one to the jack and queen. South wins and shifts to a trump, but it’s too late as declarer will be able to ruff the third heart and that’s all he needs to make the contract.

HAND 5

East dealer

♠ 10 3	♠ J 8 7	♠ A K 5 2
♥ 9 6 5 3	♥ Q 10 8 7	♥ A
♦ J 7 4 2	♦ A 8 6	♦ K Q 10 5 3
♣ A Q 8	♣ J 9 7	♣ K 6 3

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♠ Q 9 6 4	
♥ K J 4 2	
♦ 9	
♣ 10 5 4 2	

West	North	East	South
1♥	pass	1♦	pass
2NT	pass	2♠	pass
		3NT	all pass

After East's 1♥ response, opener jumps to 2♠ with his 18 HCP and two good suits.

West could support diamonds, but has a double stopper in the unbid suit, clubs, and shows that feature with 2NT. Even if he had supported partner's suit instead, all roads were going to lead to 3NT as that would have been opener's third bid.

The one suit North is not going to lead is a diamond, knowing that LHO has at least five of them. But which of the other three suits should he go with? Hearts and spades have been mentioned in the auction, and clubs are the only unbid suit, although the opponents seem to have values there also from their willingness to play notrump.

You know dummy is going to have a strong unbalanced hand since he jumped in a suit rather than notrump. Where is his shortness going to be? He will have very few hearts, at most a small doubleton and in all likelihood a singleton or void. Why? If opener had three-card support, he would have bid 3♥ over 2NT, offering a choice of games.

Since North has a modicum of strength in hearts and can deduce that will be dummy's shortness, he can try the fourth-best card from his long suit since partner may well have some high cards there. On this deal that strikes gold and, while a heart lead doesn't beat 3NT, it will hold the contract to nine tricks for a very good score in a pairs game, since declarer can knock out the ♦A and get ten tricks on any other lead.

An interesting feature of this hand is that East-West are cold for 6♦, but very few pairs will bid it, especially at matchpoints where notrump is frequently the game of choice.

HAND 6

North dealer

♠ K J 6 2

♥ A K 9 7

♦ K 9 6 5 3

♣ —

♠ Q 10 7

♥ J 8 4 2

♦ A 2

♣ A 4 3 2

♠ A 9 8 3

♥ 6

♦ Q 8 7

♣ Q 8 7 6 5

♠ 5 4

♥ Q 10 5 3

♦ J 10 4

♣ K J 10 9

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West	North	East	South
	1♦	pass	1♥
pass	3♥	all pass	

With the void in clubs and good four-card support, the North hand is strong enough for a jump raise to 3♥.

Responder has 7 HCP, and some ten-spots thrown in. At teams, he might be tempted to go on to 4♥, but playing matchpoints it doesn't pay to stretch for razor-thin games.

THE PLAY

A trump lead might blow a possible trick in that suit and is not an option for West. Similarly, the ♦A will likely help declarer rather than benefit the defense. That leaves a choice between the black suits.

There is an old bridge expression, “Aces were made to capture kings.” Essentially, it means that leading or subsequently playing unsupported aces is usually not a good idea unless you can tell for certain from the opponents’ bidding that’s where their weakness is.

It turns out that leading a spade doesn't cost, as declarer plays the jack from dummy; East takes the ace and returns a second one. Now South can still take nine tricks in hearts, but he'll have to play the hand skillfully to achieve that result. On any other lead, declarer's task is much simpler.

South dealer

♠ 5	♠ A K J 10 9 8 7	♠ 6 2
♥ Q 6 5	♥ 3 2	♥ K 9 8 7
♦ A 7 6 2	♦ 4 3	♦ J 9 5
♣ Q 8 4 3 2	♣ A 6	♣ 10 9 7 5

W

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♠ Q 4 3
♥ A J 10 4
♦ K Q 10 8
♣ K J

West	North	East	South
			1NT
pass	4♣	pass	4♥
pass	6♠	all pass	

THE PLAY

North clearly has six or seven spades from the bidding, so the defense can't expect a trump trick.

That will beat the slam as you develop a heart trick to go along with partner's ♦A. On the ♣10 lead, declarer pulls trumps and is able to go after diamonds for a twelfth trick. With your ♦J laying favorably, the ♦10 becomes a winner upon which he can discard his second heart.

THE PLAY

The unbid suits are diamonds and spades. Should West go on the attack with a spade or make a less enterprising but possibly safer lead of a diamond?

Once again, the bidding points the way for the opening leader. With West holding ♣J5 sitting in front of a six-card suit, dummy's clubs are likely to set up quickly for discards. Since opener has suggested hearts, he likely has one or both of the other suits unstopped, and responder seemed willing to play in hearts rather than notrump. A spade lead is not all that likely to cost and you may be able to take immediate tricks in that suit.

Indeed, you are able to take the first two tricks in spades, along with the ♦A and ♥K for down one. The defense can always take four tricks, even on a diamond lead, but what if East trustingly returns a diamond at Trick 2? Then South wins and plays another high diamond, tossing a spade from dummy and making his contract.

LESSON 4

SIGNALING IN A SUIT CONTRACT

Ask the average player what he knows about signaling and he usually tells you that he high-lows with a doubleton, a deuce asks for a club shift, anything above a six is a signal, anything below a seven is not, and a smile from partner is the equivalent of an encouraging signal. No wonder we have so many traffic accidents — nobody knows how to signal!

Eddie Kantar

There are many types of signals, but the three that get the most ink in bridge literature are attitude, count and suit preference. Count and suit preference are used in certain situations, but the big dog of signals is attitude, and that is what you generally try to show when partner has made the opening lead.

If the opponents are in a trump contract, you may want to encourage partner to keep playing the suit he's led for a variety of reasons. You might have a high honor in that suit. Sometimes you could even have two honors. Another situation where you're happy with the lead is when you have shortness and can get a ruff if the suit is continued.

With that in mind, we're now set to embark on our journey of signaling, and discuss how to go about it.

1. THE HIGH-LOW WITH A DOUBLETON

A fairly common signal is the high-low with a doubleton. The most easily-recognized situation is one like the following:

♠ A K 9 5 3	♠ Q 8 6	♠ 10 2
	<div></div>	
	♠ J 7 4	

West leads the ♠A against a suit contract, and you begin a high-low by playing the ten. When you follow with the deuce under the king, your partner knows you are now void, and can trump the third round. In this case, the high-low was obvious because of the size

of the first card, the ten. However, there are other cases in which the high-low is not as obvious, and the opening leader needs to pay close attention in order to recognize it:

	♠ Q 10 4	
♠ A K 9 5 3	<div></div>	♠ 6 2
	♠ J 8 7	

Here, the six doesn't appear to be a doubleton, but there is one lower card, the deuce. When South plays the ♠7 to the first round of the suit, it would seem that's his lowest card, which in fact means that East has the ♠2 and ergo, a doubleton, since he would not high-low with three or more spades.

Is it ever right not to high-low with a doubleton? Yes, there are a couple of situations in which a high-low would possibly cost a trick:

	♠ A 10 9	
♠ K Q 7 6 5	<div></div>	♠ J 4
	♠ 8 3 2	

Your partner leads the ♠K and declarer flies with the ♠A. If you were to play your jack, starting a high-low, you would be giving South a second trick in the suit with dummy's ♠109. Unless you know you can get the lead in the trump suit quickly enough to ruff the third round, you can't afford to play high-low.

Here is another layout where you shouldn't begin with a high-low:

	♠ 9 7 4	
♠ A K 8 3	<div></div>	♠ Q 6
	♠ J 10 5 2	

Partner leads the ace and you have the doubleton queen. As we will soon find out, dropping the queen when partner shows the AK *guarantees the jack*. Therefore, unless the jack is visible in dummy, you simply cannot high-low with the doubleton queen. Partner will often lead low to your assumed jack, which will be disastrous.

Change the spades around a bit, and now there will be no confusion about the drop of the queen:

♠ A K 9 3 2	♠ J 7 4 <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 15px; width: 80px; margin: 0 auto;"></div> ♠ 10 8 6	♠ Q 5
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In this case, the jack is visible in dummy, so partner cannot misread your intentions. You must have either a singleton or doubleton queen.

2. DROPPING THE QUEEN UNDER THE ACE TO SHOW THE JACK

To see how this operates, take a look at the club suit below:

♣ A K 7 4	♣ 5 3 <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 15px; width: 80px; margin: 0 auto;"></div> ♣ 10 9 8	♣ Q J 6 2
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West leads the ♣A, which shows the king as we lead the top card in a sequence. East plays the ♣Q to the first trick, promising the jack.

Why go out of your way to play such a high card? The intent is to tell partner that he can underlead his remaining honor and get to your hand if he needs you to play another suit. Other cards you play might not be interpreted as showing that you have the queen of partner's suit. When we get to the example hands, we'll find out how it can allow our side to defeat a contract because partner knows how your hand can be reached.

3. THE EQUAL-HONOR SIGNAL

Another common attitude signal is the equal-honor signal, which is occasionally confused with the high-low doubleton signal. Although they operate in a similar manner, there are a few slight differences.

As the name suggests, the signal is used when partner leads an honor card and you have an honor of equal value.

There are a couple of slight differences between equal-honor and doubleton signals. With a doubleton, you play the higher of your two cards. With an equal honor, you play the highest spot card *you can afford*. Moreover, based on what dummy has in the suit led, there are some cases where you wouldn't automatically show the doubleton, whereas you'll convey the message that you hold an equal honor the vast majority of the time.

♠ A 2	♠ Q J 10 9		♠ K 8 4 3
	♠ 7 6 5		

West leads the ♠A and you have an equal honor, the king. Apparently partner is short in spades, as the ace is not often led against game or partscore contracts unless the opening leader is looking for a possible ruff. East will therefore signal with the eight, asking partner to continue the suit.

♥ A K 9 4	♥ J 7 3		♥ Q 6 2
	♥ 10 8 5		

West leads the ♥A, and you begin a high-low with the six as you have an equal honor, the queen. If partner continues with the king, you play the deuce, completing the high-low. West cannot always be sure whether you are signaling with a queen or a doubleton, but the effect is the same as he can play the suit a third time, knowing that you will either be ruffing or producing the queen.

The equal-honor signal is a valuable tool for the defense, but there are a couple of situations where you might not automatically use it. One is if you want another suit led, as we'll discover when we get to the "Common Sense Signal". The other is when there is a danger of establishing a trick in the dummy, as we see here:

♦ A K 7 3	♦ J 10 9 4		♦ Q 8 2
	♦ 6 5		

When partner leads the ♦A, play the deuce. If you play the eight, he will continue with the king and when you follow with the two, he'll try and give you a ruff. Instead, it will be declarer trumping the third round and now dummy's fourth card becomes a trick.

A sensible guideline to follow is that when dummy has considerable length, the high-low is generally reserved for a doubleton to avoid setting up winners in dummy. After all, *someone* is going to be out of cards in the suit by the third round and you want partner to know whether it's you or declarer.

This isn't a blanket rule, though, for you may have the same number of cards as dummy, with yours being better:

♣ A K 2	♣ J 7 5 4 [] ♣ 9 6	♣ Q 10 8 3
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West leads the ♣A and you can afford to signal with the eight because your spots are better than dummy's. Partner will continue the suit, knowing that you either have a doubleton or enough strength to cover dummy's holding.

Now let's consider some examples where opening leader has a sequence but does not have the ace of his suit.

♠ K Q 8 7	♠ J 3 2 [] ♠ 10 6 5	♠ A 9 4
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Here East has an equal *higher* honor, the ace. He therefore signals with the nine, telling partner it's a good idea to play the suit again.

♠ K Q 10 8	♠ A 3 2 [] ♠ 9 6 5	♠ J 7 4
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While East doesn't hold the ace, he again has an equal honor, the jack. If a *low* card is played from dummy, East signals with the seven to convey the good news. That way, partner will know that it's safe to continue the suit without giving declarer a trick.

Compare that to a different layout of the suit:

♠ K Q 10 8	♠ A 3 2 [] ♠ J 7 6 5	♠ 9 4
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When there are three cards in dummy and you can't get an immediate ruff, you should not high-low with a doubleton, only with an equal honor. If you play the nine to the first trick, partner will assume that you have the jack and continue with a low spade, with distressing results when declarer plays low and wins the trick.

♥ K Q 7 3 2	♥ 10 8 6 <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 15px; margin: 5px auto;"></div> ♥ J 9 5	♥ A 4
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In this case, East has an equal honor but playing low would block the suit. He would win his ace on the second round, but the defense would have no immediate way to cash their third heart trick. So he overtakes the king with the ace and plays his low card back. West wins and returns a third round for East to ruff.

When the queen is led, the king is considered an equal honor.

♦ Q J 9 2	♦ 10 4 3 <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 15px; margin: 5px auto;"></div> ♦ A 8 6	♦ K 7 5
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On the lead of the queen, East signals with the seven to show an equal honor. Assuming South wins the ace, West should know partner has the king. That's because the doubleton signal should only be given if the higher honors are visible in dummy, or if it will soon be obvious that the declaring side has both top honors. Otherwise, the opening leader would not be able to distinguish whether the signal was from a doubleton or an equal honor. In ambiguous cases, when the *queen* is led, the equal honor signal prevails.

♣ Q J 10 6 3	♣ A 9 2 <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 15px; margin: 5px auto;"></div> ♣ K 7 4	♣ 8 5
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At this point, if the deuce is played from dummy, East can safely signal his doubleton with the eight, because he knows South is going to take the trick and partner will not be misled by the signal.

On the other hand, if the ace is played from dummy, East usually plays the five because opening leader needs to know where the king is. Playing the eight would indicate an equal honor.

We've gone through a lot of examples here, and there's a fair amount of confusion on which of the two signals (doubleton or equal honor) partner is using when he plays a high spot card at Trick 1 against a suit contract. Let's boil it down to a straight question and answer:

Question: In what situations will a high spot card signal a doubleton?

Answer: When there is a chance for an immediate ruff, play high from a doubleton. Otherwise, third hand must play his card according to equal-honor principles (high means he has one, low means he doesn't). Either way, when the opening leader sees an encouraging high spot card, he should continue the suit.

4. THE SUIT-PREFERENCE SIGNAL

This is a gem of a signal that can allow the defense to beat contracts as if they can see all the cards. It's also the one that has created the most havoc amongst your typical players because they insist on using it even when it doesn't apply!

An example of this signal in action will help:

♠ A K J 6 2

♥ 5 3 2

♦ —

♣ Q J 10 8 7

♠ Q 7 5

♥ K 10 7

♦ A K Q 10 2

♣ 4 2

♠ 10 4

♥ 6 4

♦ J 9 7 5 3

♣ 9 6 5 3

♠ 9 8 3

♥ A Q J 9 8

♦ 8 6 4

♣ A K

N

W

E

S

West	North	East	South
1♠	2♦	pass	1♥
pass	4♥	all pass	2♥

Opener had a choice of raising diamonds or repeating the good five-card suit. Although the hand is a balanced minimum, he couldn't bid 2NT without a stopper in the enemy suit.

West leads the ♠A and East plays the top card of his doubleton as he can get an immediate ruff. West takes the ♠K and can follow with a third spade for partner to trump — but which spade should he play? Does it matter? Yes, it matters a lot. With two small clubs on the table, East is very likely to return a club, hoping to find the ace in partner's hand. The opening leader is chafing in his seat with

the diamond void, knowing that suit is the one that he wants played back.

Since West is known to have three spades left, he can steer partner in the right direction by playing the *jack* of spades at Trick 3. Effective defense is built on absolute trust, and the top card of his remaining spades is a signal to partner that West is craving to have the higher of the remaining suits, diamonds, played back ASAP. The defense now wins the first four tricks and scuttles the contract.

However, the things to keep in mind about suit preference are:

- It occurs on the second trick or later, when a ruff is being given, and...
- It is *never* in effect on the first trick, where either a doubleton or equal-honor signal will be given.

There are a couple of exceptions to the latter stipulation, but they happen rarely and we'll touch upon them briefly in the final lesson rather than divert our attention from the basic premise.

This next hand will serve as an illustration as to how a pair can get their signals crossed. The contract is 4♥ by North-South.

♠ A K 10 3	♠ Q J 7	♠ 8 6 4 2
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 15px;"></div>	
	♠ 9 5	

West leads the ♠A, and East contributes the deuce. Remember, suit preference isn't going to happen on the first trick. So partner is not asking for a club shift. He is simply announcing a lack of interest in a spade continuation and probably has some honors outside of spades, but *not necessarily in clubs*. His stuff may just as easily be in diamonds. As a general reference point, a low card played under partner's honor lead merely implies that a shift could be in order, but does not say to which suit.

5. THE COUNT SIGNAL

The next two signals that we'll talk about usually occur in a suit that declarer is playing rather than one the defense has led or continued.

With the count signal, when declarer attacks a side suit, the defenders tell each other how many cards they have in the suit. This is what is done with the various possible holdings:

1. High-low with a doubleton
2. Low from three or five cards
3. Second-highest followed by a lower one with four.

The count signal is an option that the defense can use to good effect at certain times, but on other hands, giving count is needless and would only help declarer. Two examples will illustrate its proper use. Let's say the contract is 4♠ by South, and hearts is led by declarer:

♥ 8 7 5 3	♥ K Q J 10 2 <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 80px; height: 15px; margin: 5px auto;"></div> ♥ 6 4	♥ A 9
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Potentially, declarer can take four heart tricks once the ace is gone. But suppose there are no entries to dummy outside the heart suit? Then by taking his ace on the second round, East can hold declarer to one heart trick. How will he know to do that? West will give him a count signal.

South leads the ♥6 towards dummy's honors. West isn't sure who has the ♥A, but it could be East, in which case the proper signal will let him know when he can take it. He plays the ♥7, his second-highest card, on the first round of the suit. Then partner will know he likely has four, and will hold back on his ace until the next heart is played. Now declarer has no immediate way to cash his remaining tricks unless he has a way to get to dummy in another suit.

However, remember that declarer can see your count signals as well as partner. Dedicated countaholics will give the show away on this layout:

♥ J 9 6 3	♥ Q 10 5 4 <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 80px; height: 15px; margin: 5px auto;"></div> ♥ A K 7	♥ 8 2
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When South plays the ♥A and ♥K, West will be giving declarer a helping hand if he plays the 9-6 to give count. When he then follows to the third round, declarer will certainly get the message and deftly finesse the ten to garner four tricks in the suit.

To sum up, the count signal is used on a need-to-know basis only. On the first example it was essential information, whereas on the second, there was nothing to gain and everything to lose by showing count.

6. THE TRUMP ECHO

The trump echo ('echo' is another word for a high-low signal) is a high-low in the trump suit used when the possibility of scoring a ruff exists. Playing your small trumps in that order indicates possession of a third trump. Going up-the-line suggests only two cards in the trump suit. In the following example, spades are trumps and West has led a heart, which appears to be a short suit. Declarer has won the first round of hearts and is now trying to draw trumps:

	♠ A 8 6	
	♥ K Q 9 7	
♠ 10 7 4		♠ K 5
♥ 3		♥ 10 8 6 5
	♠ Q J 9 3 2	
	♥ A J 4 2	

South plays a spade to the ace and then another trump, East winning the king. Meanwhile, West has played the ♠7 and then the ♠4. The trump echo shows a third trump in opening leader's hand, and East can now try to give partner a heart ruff.

Suppose the distribution of the suits in the four hands was:

	♠ A 8 6	
	♥ K Q 9 7 4	
♠ 7 4		♠ K 10
♥ 3		♥ 10 8 6 5
	♠ Q J 9 5 3 2	
	♥ A J 2	

Now West plays the ♠4 and then the ♠7 on the first two rounds of trumps. Because of the failure to echo, East knows partner has just the two spades and now has to look for tricks in other suits.

7. THE COMMON-SENSE SIGNAL

While all the signals described above have their places in bridge life, there are hands where the defense has to visualize how the hand can be defeated and take that into account in how they're going to signal. For instance, take a look at this deal:

West	North	East	South
	pass	1♥	1♠
2♥	2♠	all pass	

The contract can only be defeated if West switches to diamonds after the first trick, and East has to play the low heart to steer him in that direction.

HAND 1

South dealer

♠ AKJ
 ♥ 10 3
 ♦ 6 5 4 3
 ♣ Q 9 8 3

♠ 9 8 7
 ♥ J 9 7 6
 ♦ A Q J 10
 ♣ 6 5

♠ 10 5 4 3
 ♥ 5 2
 ♦ 9 8 7
 ♣ A 10 4 2

♠ Q 6 2
 ♥ AKQ 8 4
 ♦ K 2
 ♣ K J 7

W N E S

West	North	East	South
			1♥
pass	2♥	pass	4♥
all pass			

With 18 HCP and a good five-card suit, South has enough to venture the 4♥ game once partner makes the the single raise.

THE PLAY

West leads the ♠A, the top card from his broken sequence.

Since East has neither a doubleton nor an equal honor (the queen), he plays the ♠3 on the first trick, signifying no interest in the suit being continued.

With a pretty good diamond holding on board staring West in the face, he shifts to a club, hoping partner will have the ace or king. East wins and returns another spade, as partner is known to have the king. South's queen is trapped and the defenders take three spades and the ♣A for down one.

HAND 2

West dealer

♠ A 2
♥ A Q 10 9
♦ A Q J 10 7
♣ 5 3

♠ 9 7 6
♥ 5 4
♦ K 9 8 3
♣ Q J 6 2

N

W E

S

♠ K J 10 8 4
♥ 3 2
♦ 6 4
♣ A K 7 4

♠ Q 5 3
♥ K J 8 7 6
♦ 5 2
♣ 10 9 8

West	North	East	South
1♦	pass	1♥	1♠
4♥	all pass		

West’s jump to 4♥ seems a bit exuberant with only 17 HCP, but with the powerful red-suit holdings, it is certainly justified.

THE PLAY

Although South has bid spades, he has a sequence in clubs and leads his top card, the ace.

North can now make use of a signal mentioned earlier in the lesson, dropping the queen to show that he has the jack to go with it. This is a key piece of knowledge for the opening leader, who doesn’t know who has the ♠Q and may need partner to play the first round of the suit.

South therefore underleads his remaining clubs at Trick 2 with absolute confidence, knowing that his partner is going to win the trick. When North takes the ♣J, he will abide by the dictum of leading partner’s suit, and return a spade.

Now declarer has zero chance of making the contract regardless of what he plays to the third trick. He’ll win the ♠A, draw trumps, and, crossing his fingers, take the diamond finesse. Alas, North wins the ♦K and plays back another spade for the defense to take the setting trick.

HAND 3

North dealer
N-S vulnerable

	♠ K 3	
	♥ A K J 10 8 6 3	
	♦ 2	
	♣ A 10 3	
♠ A 9 8 7 6 2		♠ 5
♥ 4		♥ Q 9 5
♦ A 10 5		♦ 7 6 4 3
♣ Q 9 4		♣ J 8 7 6 2
	<div> <div>N</div> <div>W E</div> <div>S</div> </div>	
	♠ Q J 10 4	
	♥ 7 2	
	♦ K Q J 9 8	
	♣ K 5	

West	North	East	South
	1♥	pass	2♦
2♠	4♥	all pass	

Once responder shows 11 or more points with his two-level response, opener bids game in his long suit. West's 2♠ overcall in a live, strength-showing auction was a bit cheeky, but he was feeling his oats.

THE PLAY

East duly leads his singleton spade, partner wins the ace and declarer plays the king — unblocking the suit and also hoping to obscure the position. However, one look at dummy tells West that he needs to hope partner can ruff the next spade. At the same time, he wants to tell partner where the entry back to his hand is, and this is a classic example of the suit-preference signal. He will play back the *nine* of spades, indicating he has the ace of the *higher*-ranking suit, diamonds. East takes his spade ruff, trustingly plays a diamond to partner's ace, and now a third round of spades spells defeat for North. It won't matter whether declarer trumps with a medium heart or a top one, the ♥Q will be promoted into a trick.

HAND 4

East dealer

♠ K 10 7 3 2

♥ 10 7 4

♦ A J 10

♣ A J

♠ 9 4

♥ K Q 9 6

♦ K 8 4 2

♣ Q 7 3

♠ Q J 8 6

♥ A 5 2

♦ Q 9

♣ K 9 8 2

W

N

E

S

♠ A 5

♥ J 8 3

♦ 7 6 5 3

♣ 10 6 5 4

West	North	East	South
1♠	pass	1♣	pass
4♠	all pass	2♠	pass

Responder, with 13 HCP, sails into game when opener supports his major.

THE PLAY

North leads the ♥K and declarer plays low from dummy.

South knows his partner has the queen and he has an equal honor, the jack. Because he very much wants a heart continuation, he plays the highest card he can afford, the eight. That will suffice to defeat the contract, as the defense will get two hearts, a diamond and a trump.

If South does not use the equal-honor signal, the opening leader may switch to a diamond or a club, both of which give declarer a free trick.

HAND 5

North dealer

	♠ A Q 8 7 6 3 2	
	♥ K 7	
	♦ Q 10 9 2	
	♣ —	
♠ 10 5 4	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> NE </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> WS </div> </div>	♠ K J
♥ 4 2		♥ A Q 9 8 5 3
♦ 8 3		♦ A K 7 6
♣ Q 10 9 8 7 3		♣ 4
	♠ 9	
	♥ J 10 6	
	♦ J 5 4	
	♣ A K J 6 5 2	

West	North	East	South
	1♠	2♥	pass
pass	2♠	3♦	pass
3♥	3♠	all pass	

North and East both have very distributional hands and take further bids despite no signs of life from partner.

South has both a decent hand and suit, but can't take action when RHO overcalls as 3♣ would be forcing and require a much better hand than he has.

East has enough to introduce the diamond suit when opener comes back in with 2♠, although he is not going to receive much help from partner, as it turns out.

North's 3♠ is somewhat dubious. His red-suit holdings aren't that great with LHO having bid both of them. Also, partner might have competed to 3♠ himself with any degree of fit and points.

THE PLAY

East will lead the ♦A from his two-card sequence. West plays the eight from his doubleton, as he can ruff the third round. Partner continues with the ♦K and then leads the seven, the highest of his remaining cards in the suit, to ask for a heart shift. West ruffs the diamond, and now back comes a heart through the king and two tricks in that suit for the defense. The fourth diamond completes the massacre as West gets another ruff with his ten-spot.

HAND 6

West dealer

♠ —
♥ K 9 8 4
♦ A Q 8 7
♣ Q 9 7 6 2

♠ A K Q 9 5 3
♥ 6 5
♦ 10 5
♣ A K 3

♠ J 10 7 4 2
♥ 2
♦ K 6 4 3
♣ J 10 5

♠ 8 6
♥ A Q J 10 7 3
♦ J 9 2
♣ 8 4

N

W

S

E

West	North	East	South
1♠	dbl	4♠	5♥
all pass			

After West’s opening bid and North’s takeout double, responder jumps to 4♠ as a two-way action. With his distribution, the contract could make, and the opponents might be cold for 4♥ their way.

South has little defense against 4♠, and knows his side has a ten-card heart fit, and thus goes on to 5♥.

West takes his chances on defense, knowing 5♠ will go down at least a trick, while he has two tricks for sure against 5♥, and a spade may cash or his side might get a club ruff.

THE PLAY

West is not sure a top spade will live, and starts out with the ♣A.

When dummy hits with the guarded ♣Q, East’s first duty is to give a count signal in the suit. He therefore plays the five, which partner can tell shows an odd number when declarer follows with the four.

Looking at the spade void and knowing that taking the second club will make dummy’s suit good, West switches to a diamond in the hope that partner has the king behind the ace. This is the only defense to beat the contract, as otherwise declarer will draw trumps and toss his diamonds away on the clubs.

HAND 7

South dealer

♠ A 10 9 4	♠ J 3	♠ K Q 8 7 6 5
♥ 10 5	♥ 3 2	♥ A K 4
♦ 9 8 5 4 3 2	♦ A 7 6	♦ K J 10
♣ J	♣ 10 9 8 7 6 3	♣ 2

W

N

E

S

♠ 2
♥ Q J 9 8 7 6
♦ Q
♣ A K Q 5 4

West	North	East	South
			1♥
pass	pass	1♠	2♣
4♠	5♣	dbl	all pass

After a quiet start to the auction, the bidding soars to great heights after East balances with 1♠. Opener shows his second suit, West jumps to game, and North ventures on to 5♣, on the principle that “If it ain’t a good bid, it’s a good sacrifice”.

THE PLAY

The lead will be the ♠A, and the normal result will be that trick and a couple of hearts for the defense, putting the contract down one. However, some imaginative signaling by East can produce a second under-trick.

East can picture declarer being 6-5 in hearts and clubs for his bidding. So there will be no tricks besides the three obvious ones unless partner's club is higher than the ones he sees in dummy.

The key here is to convince partner to shift to hearts, a suit that dealer has bid. So East can't afford the ♠8, which West is going to take as encouraging, or the ♠K, which promises the card directly below it. Since the jack is in dummy, however, playing the *queen* cannot be misunderstood — it ostensibly denies the king and also acts as a suit-preference for the higher of the remaining suits. If West gets the message he will play the ♥10 now. East takes the ace and king and plays a third heart. And voila! The ♣J scores as a fourth trick for the defense.

HAND 8

East dealer

♠ J 8 6 5
♥ K 8 3
♦ 10 5 4
♣ K 9 7

♠ 10 3 2
♥ J 7 5 4
♦ A 7
♣ A 6 4 2



♠ K Q 7 4
♥ A 6
♦ Q 9 8 3
♣ Q 10 5

♠ A 9
♥ Q 10 9 2
♦ K J 6 2
♣ J 8 3

West	North	East	South
1♠	pass	1♦ 2♠	pass all pass

West has just enough to respond, and while it's good news that partner is able to support his major, he has no game aspirations and is happy to have located a playable trump suit.

THE PLAY

Neither of North's two long suits contains an honor sequence, so there is no clear indication of what the best lead is for his side.

Our North decides to lead the ♦A, hoping to score a trump trick for his side. When dummy appears, South likes the lead, but needs to find a way of showing interest and getting partner to continue the suit.

He cannot spare the jack, as that would sacrifice a natural diamond trick, while the two looks as if he doesn't care for the lead. The best he can manage is the six, the most encouraging card he can afford.

North takes careful note of the cards that have appeared to the first trick, to which West has played the ♦4. There is only one lower card missing, the ♦2, and if declarer had it, that would probably have been his play to the first trick. Therefore, partner's card might not be as discouraging as it looks and it may be that he actually likes diamonds.

If North continues with the suit he's led, partner will take the next two tricks and then play a fourth diamond. Now the defense scores a couple of trump tricks regardless of whether declarer ruffs low or high. In all, East-West will take three diamonds, two spades and the ♣A.

LESSON 5

MORE SIGNALING AND SECOND-HAND PLAY

In the previous lesson, we covered a lot of ground on the topic of signaling against suit contracts. Now we'll turn our attention to how to signal in notrump contracts, and then move on to second-hand play. I'm sure you've heard the expressions "cover an honor with an honor" and "second hand low". But are they absolute rules, or just general guidelines that are followed most of the time, with the occasional exception?

SIGNALING AGAINST NOTRUMP CONTRACTS

Some of the signals that are used by the defense against suit contracts are not applicable if the opponents play in notrump. That statement includes (obviously) the trump echo; however, there's also much less use for suit preference, since you won't be playing a card that you expect partner to ruff. The doubleton signal is not such a priority for the same reason: there isn't a trump suit.

The main signals in use against notrump contracts are *attitude*, which is similar to equal-honor in basic principles, and *count*.

Any time partner leads his suit against notrump and you have the jack or better, you should be at least mildly enthusiastic, as those honors may be helpful cards in establishing long-suit winners in his hand.

When partner leads an honor, or when the first trick is won in dummy with the ace, king or queen, the card you play should indicate whether you're excited or not that happy with partner's lead.

When partner leads a low card and dummy takes the first trick cheaply, with the jack or a lower card, your attitude towards the suit is known as you were unable to beat dummy's card. You still have a role to play, however, and that is to give your count in the suit. That will tell the opening leader how many remaining cards both you and declarer will have.

If partner leads the queen against notrump, it will either be from QJ10 or QJ9, with or without extended length. All partner wants to know when he leads the queen is whether or not you have a high

honor. In this case, the significant honors are the ace, king and ten. The general rule, therefore, is to signal if you have one of those cards and play low if you don't. If you have one of those honors but only two of the suit, you should usually play the top card at once.

Dummy
 ♠ 7 5 2

♠Q has been led

N

W E

S

♠ 10 8 3 , 10 3
 ♠ K 8 3 , K 3
 ♠ A 8 3 , A 3

With each of the three-card holdings above, East plays the eight. With the doubleton holdings, he plays the honor card, to get out of partner's way and avoid blocking the suit.

Dummy
 ♠ 7 5 4

♠Q has been led

♠ 8 3 2, 8 2

It doesn't matter whether East has two or three cards when they are all small, he plays low with both holdings to deny an honor.

Often, partner's lead of a low spot card is fourth best. Normally, the problem will not be one of signaling, because third hand tries to win the trick or force a high honor by playing third hand high. However, when the *dummy* wins the trick, third hand can make an intelligent signal.

- There are two possibilities when dummy takes the trick:
1. The trick will be taken with an ace or king, or...
 2. The trick will be taken with a lower card

In the first case, signal only if you have a high honor.

♥ J 10 4 3 2

♥ A 7
 ♥ K 8 5

♥ Q 9 6

West leads the ♥3. If dummy plays the ace, East contributes the nine to indicate the possession of either the king or queen.

♥ A J 10 4 3


♥ K 7
 ♥ Q 8 5

♥ 9 6 2

Declarer puts up the king because that is the only way he'll have a potential second stopper in hearts. If he plays low, East's nine forces the queen and the suit is all set to run for the defense.

When the king is played from dummy, East follows with the deuce and the opening leader knows that declarer has the remaining honor. To capture it and run the suit, he will have to find a way over to partner's hand for a lead through.

If dummy wins the trick with a card lower than the king and third hand has nothing better than the ten, he gives a count signal.

♦ K 8 7 4 3	♦ Q J 10	♦ 9 6 2
		
	♦ A 5	

West leads the ♦4 and any of dummy's cards will win the trick. East, who cannot beat the card that's played, gives a count signal. He does this by playing high-low with a doubleton, low from three or five, or second highest from four.


The moment West sees the deuce, he knows that East has one or three diamonds, and should be able to tell from the auction which it is most of the time. If he gets the lead, he can then play another small diamond, knowing declarer will have to play the ace.

Another one:

♣ A Q 8 4 3	♣ J 10 9	♣ 7 5
		
	♣ K 6 2	

West leads the ♣4, and East, who cannot beat dummy's card, gives a count signal with the seven, showing a doubleton. Opening leader now knows the exact number of clubs each player has, and that declarer still has the guarded king. Once again, he'll have to try to get over to the East hand for his partner to play the next round of clubs.

This one is not quite as straightforward:

♠ K 10 8 3	♠ Q 4	♠ J 9 2
		
	♠ A 7 6 5	

West leads the ♠3, and declarer rises with dummy's queen. East can't have the king or ace because he hasn't played either of them to the first trick, but the jack is a relevant card. If South has it, West is unable to continue the suit. The East hand should therefore

play the nine, to signal that he has an honor, although not one of the top ones. Notice that West should not misinterpret the ♠9 as a count signal — it would be East’s highest spot card, indicating a doubleton. That would leave South with five spades, something that would be known from the auction (and West would not be leading the suit!).

	♥ Q 8	
♥ K 9 6 4 3	<div></div>	♥ J 10 2
	♥ A 7 5	

West leads the ♥4. When declarer goes up with the queen, East plays the *jack*, the higher of his equal honors. That tells partner that he also has the ten to go with it. If West regains the lead he can safely play another round of hearts, knowing the only high card South has left is the ace.

WHEN AN HONOR IS LED: TO COVER OR NOT TO COVER?

Second hand play is one of the most difficult areas of defense for most players. They learn the rules “cover an honor with an honor” and “second hand low”, but soon find out there are a fair number of exceptions; they are baffled when to do which. To add to this, second hand should try as much as possible to play “in tempo” when he makes the decision, since hesitating and then making the right play may be no better than making the wrong play. Hesitations not only give declarer information that he can use to your detriment, but they place your partner in an awkward ethical position, since partner is not allowed to use information from such a hesitation.

To get started, here is a suit combination that illustrates the merits of covering an honor with an honor and playing second hand low.

Dummy		You
♠ J 7 6		♠ A 9 2
<div></div>		

If declarer leads the jack from the dummy, cover with the ace; if he plays a low card from table, follow with the two. Here’s the full layout in spades.

♠ K 10 4	♠ J 7 6		♠ A 9 2
	♠ Q 8 5 3		

When the jack is led from dummy, taking your ace leaves partner in control, sitting over declarer's queen with the K10. If you duck, partner wins his king, but declarer can later lead from dummy again, and his queen will take a trick. If declarer leads low from dummy, however, it's important not to play the ace, but to keep it to prevent the jack from taking a trick later.

Now let's move over to the other side of the table, with you now sitting in the West chair:

	Dummy
You	♠ J 7 6
♠ K 10 4	

If declarer leads the queen from his hand, cover with the king. If he leads a low card, play the four. Again, here's the full layout of the spade suit for all four hands; this time I'll leave it to you to work out why it's right to play the king on the queen, but to duck if declarer leads low from hand.

♠ K 10 4	♠ J 7 6		♠ A 9 2
	♠ Q 8 5 3		

If West and East play as described above, declarer must always lose three spade tricks.

It's generally easier for second hand to know whether to apply the "cover an honor with an honor" rule when the honor is led from declarer's hand and dummy is on the left. The reason for covering is to promote some secondary card or cards for you or partner. If there is no chance of gaining a trick by playing your honor, do not cover. Here are a few exhibits to guide us along:

West (you)	♥ A K 10 9
♥ Q 7 6	
	♥ J led

There is no reason for West to cover. Obviously, he cannot promote anything for himself, and dummy's spot cards are so imposing that

he won't be able to promote anything for his partner. But change one card:

West (you)	♥ A K 10 8
♥ Q 7 6	<div></div>
	♥ J led

Because a key spot card is missing, you should cover. If declarer has that card, it won't matter, but if partner has ♥9xxx, he has a potential trick.

Sometimes whether you cover or not depends both on your holding and whether or not declarer has bid the suit. Let's suppose in the example below that declarer has opened 1♠ and winds up in 3NT:

	♠ A 6
♠ K 7 5 2	<div></div>
♠ K 5	
	♠ Q led

With Kxxx you should duck because you know partner only has two. The only potential trick your side has in the suit is the king, and if you cover you aren't going to get it.

With the doubleton king you should cover, as it will be a dead duck if you play low on the first round. Partner will likely have four spades, so by covering you might build a trick in his hand.

When dummy leads the suit from your right, it's a bit tougher. You don't have the privilege of having seen a card from declarer's hand, although you might be able to draw some inferences from the bidding. Aside from that, you follow these principles:

- 1. You cover only if a trick can possibly be promoted for you or your partner, and as usual length considerations are vital.
- 2. If there are two or more equal cards in dummy, second hand covers the *last* equal, not the first one.

To see why you should follow the latter piece of advice, consider the diamond suit in the following example:

	♦ J 10 4	
♦ K 9 8	<div></div>	♦ Q 6 3
	♦ A 7 5 2	

When the jack is led from dummy, you don't know what South or West have. However, rather than cover the first honor, you save your queen for the last high card.

If you cover immediately, declarer wins and plays another diamond towards dummy, getting a second trick with dummy's ten. If you play low, South lets it run to partner's king and then you are certain to get a second trick in the suit (play low to the four but cover the ten on the next round of the suit).

Here's a quick run-through on situations where an honor is led by the declaring side, with dummy at the top:

1. Q32

K76

Cover with the king. You assume declarer has the ace and probably the jack, but partner might have the ten, in which case it can be promoted into a trick.

2. QJ9

K62

Play the two. If you cover and declarer has the ace but not the ten, he will be able to win an extra trick by taking the ace and finessing dummy's nine. So you should not cover the queen, but will cover on the second round if the jack is led.

3. QJ3

K2

Cover with the king. The difference from the previous example is that you won't have a small card to play on the next round of the suit, so you might as well sacrifice your king for the noble cause of possibly building a trick in partner's hand.

4. 1054

Q72

Just the one honor in dummy so you'll cover when it is played. If declarer has AJ8 or KJ8, he can win only one trick if you cover, but two if you don't.

5. A62
 K83 Q

Play the three. Declarer is unlikely to lead the queen without the jack. So do not cover the queen, but cover on the second round if the jack is led. With the slightly better holdings of K9x or K10x, you can afford to cover on the first round.

6. AJ4 *Cover with the king.* If partner has the ten, you
K62 ☐ gain a trick. If declarer has the ten, it won't
 Q matter whether or not you cover.

7. AJ4 *Cover with the king.* You gain a trick if partner
K62 ☐ holds Q9x. If declarer has the queen or nine, it
 10 makes no difference whether or not you cover.

8. AK97 *Cover with the queen.* You save a trick if
Q42 ☐ partner has the ten. If declarer has it, he always
 J gets four tricks in the suit.

9. A43 *Play the five.* Declarer will usually have J10, in
Q85 ☐ which case you give him a second trick by
 J covering — he only gets one if you save your
 honor for the remaining high card. Declarer
 might also be on what we call a “fishing
 expedition” with the KJ10 in his hand, hoping to
 induce a cover. But if you follow the principle of
 covering the second equal but not the first, and
 do it in tempo, you'll get the best result in either
 case.

10. K107 *Play the five* when declarer leads the ten from
 ☐ J65 dummy. Declarer likely has good intermediates
 such as A98x or Q98x when he leads the ten
 from dummy. This has all the earmarks of
 another fishing expedition, and you'll only be
 helping the enemy cause if you play the honor.

Before leaving the topic of whether or not to cover, the trump suit needs to be addressed. As a general principle, *do not* cover an honor when declarer is playing on trumps unless your high card is a singleton. Here is an example of how he might be testing the waters. You are West and hearts are trumps, with South having opened 1♥:

♥ Q 8	♥ A 9 7 6 <input type="checkbox"/>	♥ 5 4
	♥ K J 10 3 2	

Declarer shoots the jack out of his hand. You have three choices, two wrong and one that is right. If you cover, or hesitate before playing low, declarer will bring in the trump suit without losing a trick. However, if you've read the advice above and know that you

should play low smoothly in trumps no matter what, then South might rise with dummy's ace and finesse your partner for the queen.

The tactic declarer adopted is a common ploy, but all's fair in love and war, and especially bridge.


SECOND HAND LOW: ALWAYS OR MOSTLY?

The idea of playing second hand low is based on a sound principle, namely that your honors are saved to capture the opponents' honors, not small cards. Here is a situation where many players "jump the gun" rather than think out what might be happening in the suit that's being played:

♣ A Q 8 4	(you)
	♣ K 10 6 3

South leads the four from dummy. Before you automatically play the king, think about who might have the jack. If it's declarer, you'll give him a third trick in the suit by rising, as he can then score the jack, queen and ace separately. And if partner holds the missing honor, he'll be able to win and your K10 will still be poised over dummy's remaining cards. You should definitely be playing second hand low in this case.

However, for every rule there's the occasional exception. Suppose declarer is playing a notrump contract and this is what you see in the diamond suit:

♦ J 10 9 6	(you)
	♦ K 7 3

Declarer leads the ♦6 from dummy. The missing cards are the queen and the ace. If South had the ace or the ace-queen, he would be playing the jack from dummy's perfect sequence, intending to finesse. Since he's failed to do this, the most likely holding is the queen in his hand, with partner having the ace.

If that assumption is correct, you might want to take your king and lead back whatever suit partner led at Trick 1, preserving his honor as an entry card.

Now for some more rapid-fire examples, with dummy at the top:

1. 842
A73 *Play the three.* Declarer might be leading up to the king, but he could have KJ, KJx or KJ9, in which case you'd be doing him a favor by rising with the ace when he'd be otherwise on a guess.

2. Q86
KJ2 *Play the two.* Yes, you could guarantee a trick by inserting the jack, but declarer probably has some length in the suit and intends to keep playing on it. By following the "second hand low" adage, you might well score two tricks if declarer has either of A9xx or A10xx.

3. 752
QJ3 *Play the three.* Whatever honors declarer has lie behind you, so he can win the same number of tricks in the suit whether or not you split your honors. If declarer is trying to score a trick with the king, he'll put it up and partner will take the ace. But he is just as apt to hold something like K10x, in which case playing an honor will guarantee him a trick, or K108x, where he may well finesse the eight on the first round of the suit.

4. A42
QJ3 *Play the queen (or the jack).* If you play low and declarer has K10x(x), he can win a third trick by finessing the ten. With the ace (or king) in dummy, you should split your honors.

5. A75
K83 *Play the three promptly* (unless one trick is enough to beat the contract). If declarer has the queen, he is going to win a trick with it regardless of whether or not you play the king. But he may have Q10x and guess to play the ten, or he might not have the queen at all (J10xx is also a possibility).

6. Q107
K43
5 *Play the three.* If declarer has Axx and you play low without hesitating, he will have to guess whether to play the ten or the queen. If you are thinking he may have Ax and you will lose your king, you have forgotten that the

goal is to limit the declarer to as few tricks as possible. If you play the king, that could well give him two tricks, whereas if you follow low, he could misguess.

7. A107 *Play the queen (or the jack).* Unless partner has
 QJ5 ☐ the king, the most you can get in the suit is one
 4 trick. So you might as well make certain of it.

8. KQ72 *Play the three.* Most players would rush in with
 AJ943 ☐ the ace for fear declarer has a singleton. That
 6 would be the right play if you see that it will beat
 the contract, but your goal is to limit declarer to
 as few tricks as possible. Assuming he has an
 entry to dummy in another suit, then even if his
 six is a lonely boy, he can win two tricks if you
 win the ace, but only one if you play low. The
 other merit of ducking is that declarer must get
 back to hand to play the suit again.

HAND 1

South dealer

♠ A K Q J	♠ 7 4 2	♠ 8 6
♥ 10 8 7	♥ Q J 9 2	♥ K 6 5
♦ J 9 8 7	♦ A 5 3	♦ 10 4 2
♣ 3 2	♣ K 7 6	♣ 10 9 8 5 4



♠ 10 9 5 3
♥ A 4 3
♦ K Q 6
♣ A Q J

West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

Looking for a 4-4 heart fit via Stayman was an option for responder, but a sizeable contingent of players just bid the notrump game if their shape is 4-3-3-3 because of the lack of ruffing potential. In this case, the final destination was going to be 3NT no matter how the bidding went.

THE PLAY

West is enchanted to have an automatic lead and takes four spade tricks right off the bat. East will throw two small diamonds, so the opening leader shifts to his doubleton club as a heart doesn't seem too appealing with the strength in dummy.

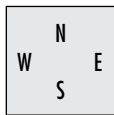
South wins the club in dummy and plays the ♥Q. East sees the queen and the jack, so he follows the rule of covering the *last* equal honor he can see and plays low. If declarer leads the jack next, East covers and West's ten becomes high. Notice that if East covers the queen, South wins and finesses dummy's nine on the way back — to lose no heart tricks and make his contract.

HAND 3

North dealer

♠ A 9 3
♥ Q J 10 6
♦ Q 8 7 6
♣ A K

♠ J 7 4
♥ 8 7 5 3
♦ K 5
♣ Q 7 5 3



♠ K 10 8 5 2
♥ 4 2
♦ A 3 2
♣ J 8 6

♠ Q 6
♥ A K 9
♦ J 10 9 4
♣ 10 9 4 2

West	North	East	South
	1NT	pass	3NT
all pass			

With 10 HCP and good spots, South has an easy raise to game when partner opens 1NT.

THE PLAY

East leads a fourth-best spade and declarer rises hopefully with the queen, breathing a sigh of relief when it takes the trick. Meanwhile, West should encourage because he has the ♠J — he signals with the highest card he can afford, the seven.

However, declarer still has only eight winners; two spades, four hearts and two top clubs. The diamond suit offers the best chances for the ninth trick.

Declarer cagily plays a low diamond from dummy, hoping that the honors are split and that he will lose the first trick in the suit to East rather than West.

West should smell a rat, though. Why hasn't declarer played a top diamond from dummy to finesse? Because of that, you can eliminate the ace or ace-queen of the suit as his possible holdings. Ergo, North has the queen and East the ace.

Once that conclusion is reached, West needs to realize this hand is an exception to “second hand low” and rise with the $\heartsuit K$. Not surprisingly, it holds the trick, and now he continues with the $\spadesuit J$ and a third spade (when his jack is allowed to win) to drive out the ace. Declarer is

If West had ducked the first round of diamonds and East had taken the ace, the contract would have made. Declarer waits until the third round to win the spade and then drives out the $\spadesuit K$ — West has no spades left in his hand to return.

East dealer

East dealer

♠	A 8 5
♥	7 6 4
♦	9 8 7 6
♣	Q 7 6

♠ 10 7 2
♥ A 8 3 2
♦ A K Q 2
♣ 10 9



♠ K Q 9 3
♥ Q 5
♦ 10 4 3
♣ 5 4 3 2

♠ J 6 4
♥ K J 10 9
♦ J 5
♣ A K J 8

West bids his suits up-the-line in response to partner's 1♣ opening and then leaps to game in East's second suit, hearts.

South leads the ♠K (the unbid suit) and strikes gold. North wins the ace and returns the suit, the defense collecting the first three tricks. At Trick 4, South shifts to a small diamond. Declarer wins in hand and now plays the ♥J. If South is not ready for this play, the defense crumbles. Like I said a few paragraphs ago, there is no thought required in the trump suit on the vast majority of hands.

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HAND 5

East dealer

♠ Q 10 8 6 3 2		♠ A J 7
♥ A		♥ 3
♦ J 8 4		♦ Q 5 2
♣ 9 6 4		♣ K Q 10 8 7 2
	<div> <div>N</div> <div>W E</div> <div>S</div> </div>	
		♠ —
		♥ Q J 9 8 6 5 4
		♦ A 10 9 6 3
		♣ A
		♠ K 9 5 4
		♥ K 10 7 2
		♦ K 7
		♣ J 5 3

West	North	East	South
1♠	2♣	1♥	pass
pass	pass	2♦	3♣
		4♥	all pass

Once partner squeaks out a response, East intends to drive to game, offering a choice between his red suits. He introduces the diamonds and then leaps to 4♥ at his next turn. Although West has three of opener's second suit, the singleton ace should be adequate opposite what must be a seven-card suit, so he leaves the contract in 4♥.

THE PLAY

South lead a low club from his three to an honor in partner's suit; North plays the queen, which loses to declarer's ace.

East then goes to dummy with the ♥A and leads the ♦J. Should North play the queen, using the "cover an honor with an honor" principle?

There are two reasons he should not. The first is that with 7-4 in the reds, opener would have repeated the hearts at his second turn rather than bid a mediocre four-card diamond suit. Since he's brought the diamond suit into the picture before jumping in his original suit, that's a strong indication that he has at least five diamonds, and to play the ♦Q would not promote a winner in partner's hand.

More importantly, though, East is in dummy for the first and probably the last time. If he loses this trick, he won't be able to get back there for a second finesse in the diamond suit.

If North covers the jack with the queen, declarer wins and makes the contract, losing two hearts and a diamond. If he ducks, East lets it ride to the king; at some point later in the hand, the defense gets a second diamond trick to go with South's two heart winners for down one.

HAND 6

North dealer

♠ K Q 5

♥ 9 2

♦ 10 9 6 4

♣ J 9 6 4

♠ A J 9 7 2

♥ A K

♦ A K Q J

♣ Q 3

♠ 10 3

♥ Q 10 8 5 4 3

♦ 8 7 2

♣ 10 8

W

N

E

S

♠ 8 6 4

♥ J 7 6

♦ 5 3

♣ A K 7 5 2

West	North	East	South
	2♣	pass	3♣
pass	3♠	pass	4♠
pass	4NT	pass	5♣
pass	6♠	all pass	

South's 3♣ response to partner's strong two-bid showed a five-card or longer suit to at least two of the top three honors. When he then supports North's spades, opener asks for keycards and then bids the slam.

THE PLAY

East leads a heart, the only suit he has any strength in.

North is somewhat disappointed that partner does not have even the ♠10, as that card would have made the slam a far better proposition. However, there are still chances to pick up the trump suit for just the one loser. He goes to dummy with a club and plays a small trump towards his hand.

At this point, he has two choices. One is to play West for the ♠K and ♠Q and insert the jack from his hand if West plays low. The other

Second hand low is usually good advice, and never more so than when declarer is playing on trumps.

West	North	East	South
			1NT
pass	2♣	pass	2♥
pass	3NT	all pass	

that South could win the king to try and confuse the issue in the heart suit, but many declarers will routinely take the trick with the lower of the two honors. Declarer now plays the ♣A and then a low club towards the queen-jack.

From the play to the first trick, West knows declarer holds the ♥K and ♥Q, as partner would have risen with the king if he had it. The club suit will provide five tricks as South has the ♠A to get there. So upon winning the ♣K, does West shift to a diamond or a spade?

The key for the defense is not to win the ♣K on the second round. West knows partner is going to show out on the third round, so this is a yet another instance of playing second hand low, so you can watch partner’s discard on the third club.

East will shed the ♦2 (a low, discouraging attitude card) when you finally take the ♣K, so you can tell that if he has any high cards at all, they will be in the spade suit.

If West switches to a spade, the defense can get a trick in that suit before declarer can set up diamonds and they will hold South to nine tricks. If West plays anything else, declarer can work on his diamond suit for a tenth winner.

HAND 8

West dealer

♠ J 10 9 7
♥ 8 5 4
♦ Q 9 6 5
♣ K 9

♠ A 3 2
♥ Q 9
♦ A 10 8 2
♣ A 5 4 2

N

W

E

S

♠ Q 8 4
♥ 10 6 3 2
♦ K 4
♣ Q 10 8 7

♠ K 6 5
♥ A K J 7
♦ J 7 3
♣ J 6 3

West	North	East	South
1♦	pass	1♥	pass
1NT	pass	3NT	all pass

With 13 HCP, responder has enough to bid game once partner shows a minimum balanced hand without four-card heart support.

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THE PLAY

North has a perfect sequence to lead from, and starts out with the ♠J. South, of course, encourages by playing the ♠8. While letting the first spade hold is an option, a club shift may be worrisome so declarer wins the ♠A in hand.

In all, South has eight guaranteed winners: two spades, four hearts and the minor-suit aces. The combined holding in diamonds offers some play for a second trick in that suit, and he plays a low one towards dummy's jack.

According to second-hand low principles, North should resist the urge to go up with his queen and play small. Since declarer has opened 1♦, he will probably get a diamond trick at some point during the hand. While West might be leading away from the ace-king of his suit, it's more likely that he has just one of those cards and partner has the other.

If North plays low, the contract will likely go down as declarer will play the jack from dummy and South will win with the king. Now declarer can't manufacture a second diamond trick. Rising with the ♦Q makes declarer's task easier as he can now easily develop a second trick in the suit for his ninth trick.

LESSON 6

THIRD-HAND PLAY

Unlike the opening leader, who has only his thirteen cards and the bidding to guide him in the first card he plays, his partner has a great deal of information at his disposal. If you are third to play to the first trick, you will have seen partner's opening lead, and can draw some conclusions about his high cards and/or distribution. Dummy will have come down, and you'll be seeing what that hand contains. The card declarer calls for from dummy at Trick 1 may provide additional clues as to what he himself might have in the suit. Finally, there is your own hand and the assistance it might provide in defeating the contract.

There are two fairly common expressions that you may have heard that relate to third hand play. One is the "Rule of Eleven", which is a reliable formula for establishing how many cards declarer possesses that are higher than the one led. The other is "third hand high", which is a sound principle as it will be your last chance either to win the trick or to force declarer to spend a high card. How high you are going to play, though, will depend on a number of factors, such as what you see in dummy and how the bidding has gone.

THE RULE OF ELEVEN

You might wonder about the emphasis we've played on leading fourth-best from long suits containing one or more high cards that are not touching in rank. The reason is that if you do so, third hand can apply a mathematical calculation to determine what declarer (often referred to as the "closed hand") will have in that suit.

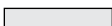
Here's how the Rule of Eleven works:

- If the ace, king, queen and jack had numbers, the cards in a suit would be numbered from two to fourteen.
- If partner has been well-trained to lead fourth-best, he'll have three higher cards, so that brings fourteen down to eleven for the remaining three hands.
- Now, whatever card is led, subtract that number from eleven, and that will tell you how many higher cards there will be in the other three hands (dummy, yourself and declarer).

Here is an example of how you can use the formula to discover quite a bit about the suit that's been led. The contract is 3NT and partner leads the ♥7. What you see is:

	♥ K 5 3	(you)
♥7 led		♥ A J 9 2

Subtract the number of the card led from eleven and what do you have? $11 - 7 = 4$, so the other three hands will have four higher cards. When you look at your hand and dummy, all four higher cards are accounted for. Declarer won't be able to top the seven because he has only low cards. So if declarer plays low from dummy, you can confidently play the *two* of hearts, knowing that partner's seven will hold the first trick. Now we can look at the hearts in all four hands:

	♥ K 5 3	
♥ Q 10 8 7		♥ A J 9 2
	♥ 6 4	

Partner will continue with another heart at Trick 2 and your side will take four quick tricks in the suit. Without the Rule of Eleven as your guide, you might play a high card instead. The ace would give declarer an undeserved trick; the jack would win but now you'd have to get back to partner's hand for your side to lead through dummy's king a second time.

Let's look at some more examples of the Rule of Eleven calculation:

	♦ A 5 2	
♦7 led	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 15px; margin: 0 auto;"></div>	♦ K 10

By subtracting partner's card from eleven, we know that there are four higher cards in the other three hands. We're looking at two of them and there's another one in dummy. Declarer therefore has one higher card than the seven.

	♣ K 7 4	
♣5 led	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 15px; margin: 0 auto;"></div>	♣ A J 8 2

Partner has led the five, and we again subtract that from eleven, yielding a count of six higher cards between the other three hands. Two are in dummy, and three are visible in your hand. That leaves one higher card in declarer's hand, the ♣Q, ♣10 or ♣9. The odds are 2:1 in favor of the jack holding the trick.

	♠ 4	
♠5 led	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 15px; margin: 0 auto;"></div>	♠ J 10 6 3

Again the count is six higher cards in the other three hands (11-5). With dummy having a low card, you have three of them and so does declarer.

THIRD HAND HIGH

There are two basic situations that will confront third hand once the lead is made and dummy comes down. They are:

1. There are no honor cards in dummy
2. There will be one or more honors in the dummy

We'll address each of these cases in some detail, and finally touch upon a few of the scenarios that would be an exception to what you'd normally do.

There is nothing to speak of in dummy

The advice that Eddie Kantar gives when dummy has nothing but low cards is:


Generally, third hand plays high when partner leads low, and there are no honor cards in dummy. With two or three cards of equal rank, third hand plays the lower or lowest of equals.

A typical example would be this kind of layout:

	♠ 9 4 3	
♠ A 10 7 2		♠ K J 6
	♠ Q 8 5	

Assume West leads the ♠2 against a notrump contract. East plays the king rather than the jack. If he plays the top card and returns the jack, South will take no spade tricks.

Here's an example of a play from equals, although you might have to think a moment to realize that you are holding 'equals'.

	♥ 10 8	
♥ K 6 4 3 2		♥ J 9 7
	♥ A Q 5	

West leads the ♥3, his fourth-best. If dummy had two small cards, East would play the highest card he could to the first trick, his jack. Here, though, the nine is the equal of the jack, as you can see the ten on board. If declarer plays the eight from dummy, your nine will force him to win the trick with the queen or a higher card.

	♦ 9 6 4	
♦ K 10 5 3 2		♦ Q J
	♦ A 8 7	

In this example, West leads the ♦3 and you're going to play the lower of your touching honors, the jack. When declarer wins the ace, that marks you with the queen as South would have taken the trick with a lower honor if he had it.

You might think that it makes no difference to you which of the two honors is played. There is partner to think of, however, and the assumptions he is going to make about the layout of the cards. We'll make a slight alteration to the East and South hands to illustrate:

♦ K 10 5 3 2	♦ 9 6 4 ♦ A J 8	♦ Q 7
--------------	--------------------	-------

Again, West leads the ♦3. If East held these cards, the queen (third hand high) would be the card played to the first trick. Now, however, West cannot play diamonds again from his side and needs to find a way to partner's hand for a second round of the suit.

If third hand is in the habit of playing the lower of touching high cards on the first trick, West knows that partner won't have the companion honor when he plays the queen. South will have the jack, then, and the next lead of the suit will have to come from the East hand. Otherwise South will get an extra trick.

Wait a minute, though. Haven't we learned so far to play the *higher* of touching cards? Why the switch all of a sudden? Isn't defending a hand tough enough already without introducing an element of confusion?

There is an inherent logic behind it, however. Here's the gist of it in a nutshell:

- When you're on opening lead, playing the highest of touching cards conveys vital information to partner that will be useful for what the third hand is going to play.
- As third hand, when you cannot beat dummy's card, you should play the top card if you have something like QJ, J10 or even 109. By so doing, you help partner to know where the lower honors are.
- If you are third hand and it's fairly clear that neither partner or dummy is going to win the trick, *then* is when you play the lower of touching high cards. Now when declarer has to expend a top honor to win the first trick, partner is in the know about what the other three hands are likely to have.

In the next section, there will be several more examples of why the lower of touching high cards in third seat will be helpful for the defense.

When dummy has some high cards in the suit led

When dummy contains one or more honors in the suit partner leads and declarer plays low, it's no longer as automatic to put up your highest card right away. Ideally, you'd like to save it for when the honor is played from dummy. What is the best way for third hand to proceed without giving up a trick unnecessarily?

Once again, Kantar has good advice for us. Here it is:

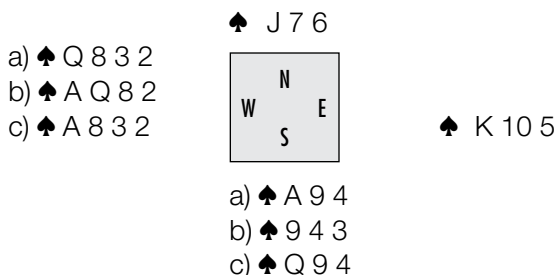
When dummy has one honor card and third hand has a higher honor card, third hand normally saves it unless the honor is played from dummy. However, third hand must have a card as high as the nine to insert if the honor is not played from dummy.

An important exception to this rule is that when dummy has the jack or the ten and third hand has the ace, he should play that card.

To assist in the translation, here are a couple of examples, with the opponents playing a notrump contract.



West should have at least one honor in spades as the lead was a small one. Because there is an honor in dummy and East has a relevant spot besides the king, he should put in the ten if dummy plays low. To see why, we'll look at three layouts that are consistent with partner's opening lead:




In layout a), East needs to put in the ten to hold declarer to one winner. If he puts up the king instead, South wins the ace and dummy's jack eventually becomes a trick.

In example b), opening leader has both missing honors and the ten will take the first trick, after which East can then play the king and a small one to run the suit.

In exhibit c), declarer wins the first trick if East puts in the ten, but was always entitled to a spade winner once the suit was led. The defense still gets the king and ace, plus a third spade trick to boot.


Note that because the opponents are playing in notrump, it's fine for West to underlead the ace of his long suit. That would not be the case if North-South were playing a suit contract.

Not having the ten affects the play at Trick 1 by the third hand. Again, they have settled into a notrump contract:

	♥ J 7 6	
♥ A 10 4 3		♥ K 8 2
	♥ Q 9 5	

West leads the three, dummy plays low and East goes up with the king because he does not have a card as high as the nine to insert.


On the next one, the opponents are still playing in notrump and this is how the cards have been dealt:

	♦ J 6 5	
♦ K Q 4 2		♦ A 9 3
	♦ 10 8 7	

Going back to something we covered in the first lesson, from a two-card sequence you'd lead the top card against a suit contract but a low one against notrump. So when West leads the ♦2 here, that's why East goes up with the ace, to allow for that possibility.

If North-South were playing in a suit contract, the lead would have been the king and East would then give an equal-honor signal with the nine.

Now imagine the opponents have arrived in a 4♠ contract. West leads the ♣5, and South calls for a small card from the dummy:

	♣ Q 4 3	
♣5 led		♣ A 10 6

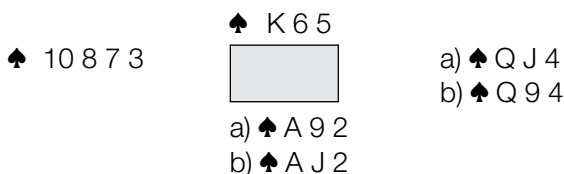
If you were defending a notrump contract, the Kantar rule has you playing the ten, saving the ace for when the queen is played from dummy. In a trump contract, it's not quite so clear-cut. Here are the four possibilities:

1. Partner has led from the king-jack, in which case the ten would win the trick.

2. The opening lead was from the jack, in which case you definitely want to put in the ten to prevent declarer from scoring tricks with both the king and the queen.
3. The lead was from five to the king with declarer having a doubleton jack. In that layout, you'd have to fly with the ace to keep declarer from winning a trick he's not entitled to.
4. The lead was from four to the king, with the declarer having three to the jack. Now, unless declarer has pitches available in another suit, it doesn't hurt to put in the ten, as you'll still get the ace and king later on.

As you can see, it's a bit trickier against a suit contract, although the ten remains a slight favorite to be the correct play.

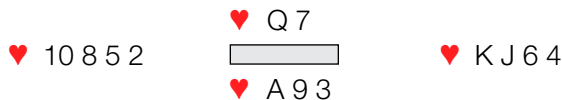
Going back to the idea of playing the lower of equal high cards when you are the third hand, here are a couple more examples to illustrate the concept:



With QJ4, East plays the lower of touching honors and when South has to win the ace, opening leader can assume the queen is in partner's hand.

In b), where third hand has just the queen of partner's suit, he plays it and now when declarer takes the ace, West should know South has the jack also. That's because East would have played the lower equal if he had both missing honors.

And finally, at least for this section, we have:



Although East does not have touching honors, the king and the jack become equivalent cards once you see the queen in dummy. If declarer rises with the queen, you cover with the king. If he instead plays low, you'll put in the jack, which is going to hold the trick or force the ace.

Exceptions to third hand high

We’ve seen that you don’t automatically play third hand high when you see a high card on the dummy, particularly against notrump contracts. Just as in playing a hand, when you’re defending it’s important to give sufficient thought to the card you play to the first trick. There are a number of factors to consider.

On each of the next four hands, there is a logical reason for not blindly following the “third hand high” principle.

For our initial example, you are sitting East with the following cards:

♠ 7 4 3 ♥ 7 6 ♦ A K J 10 5 4 ♣ 8 2

The bidding has gone:

West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	2♦ all pass	2NT

Partner leads the ♦8 and this is what you see as dummy hits:

♦8 led

♠ K J 2
♥ A Q 5
♦ 7 6
♣ Q J 10 9 4

N

W E

S

(you)

♠ 7 4 3
♥ 7 6
♦ A K J 10 5 4
♣ 8 2

Why is this an exception to ‘third hand high’? The bidding and the lead tells you a couple of things about the diamond suit. To have a full stopper, declarer will have the guarded queen in your long suit. Partner’s lead of the ♦8 also suggests that he doesn’t have three of them or an honor in the suit.

If you take the first two tricks with the ace and king and then continue with another diamond, you won’t get any more tricks in the suit as your hand lacks an entry. However, you *can* beat the contract if partner has another diamond and is able to regain the lead at some point during the hand. To do this, you put in the ♦10 or ♦J on the first trick, forcing declarer to win the queen. Now, assuming partner has a second diamond, you’ll be in position to run the diamond suit if he wins a trick later on.

It turns out that declarer has only eight immediate tricks and needs a successful club finesse to make his game. When he plays the queen from dummy and runs it, partner takes the king and leads his last diamond to scuttle the contract.

For our next case study, you are first to bid with:

♠ 4 2 ♥ Q 10 7 5 2 ♦ K Q 10 ♣ A Q 6

Naturally you open 1♥, but LHO overcalls in spades and they wind up in a 3♠ contract. Partner trustingly leads the ♥8 and these are the cards you see in that suit:

	♥ 6 5	
♥8 led	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 80px; height: 15px;"></div>	♥ Q 10 7 5 2

Why is this an exception to ‘third hand high’? You know from the lead and dummy that South has the AKJ9 of your suit, so going up with the queen is futile and partner will perhaps assume that you have a stronger holding like the KQ if you play third hand high. To clarify the situation, you should discourage with the ♥2. When South wins the trick cheaply, partner will realize that your values are located in other suits and will look for greener pastures.

In our third exhibit, the opponents land in a 4♠ contract, with partner leading clubs:

	♣ 7 2	
♣4 led	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 80px; height: 15px;"></div>	♣ K J 8 3

Why is this an exception to ‘third hand high’? With you having the king and jack, the question is where the other two high cards are located. Declarer will have the ace, as partner would not underlead that card in a suit contract. How can we know who has the queen? Rising all the way with your king won’t help you to find out, but the play of the jack will. If South wins with the ace, the queen must be in partner’s hand, but if declarer takes your jack with the queen, you’ll have to look for tricks in the other suits.

For the last example, I’ll display everyone’s cards so that we can follow the reasoning:

West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

Why is this an exception to ‘third hand high’? If partner has led from the $\spadesuit K$, the queen will hold the first trick and you’ll be in position to run the suit immediately.

If partner has led from the jack and declarer has the king, you want to force him to win that trick immediately and not be able to hold up. Playing the queen will accomplish that as West might easily have the ace and if that is the case, he can't afford to let you hold the trick and lead another spade through the king.

We've covered a lot of ground and hands on the "third hand high" subject matter. What all of it boils down to is this:

- Lesson 6: Third-Hand Play
- 105**

RAPID-FIRE THIRD HAND QUIZ

1. You are East defending a notrump contract. Partner leads the three of hearts, and South calls for the five from dummy. What do you play with each of the following holdings?

	Dummy	(you)
	♥ 9 7 5	a) ♥ K J 2
♥3 led	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="text-align: center;">N</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; padding: 0 10px;">W E</div> <div style="text-align: center;">S</div> </div>	b) ♥ A J 8 4
		c) ♥ K Q 8
		d) ♥ K 10 8
		e) ♥ 10 8 4
		f) ♥ Q J 10 2
		g) ♥ K J 10 8
		h) ♥ Q J

SOLUTIONS

- a) The king. Third hand high when there are no honors in dummy.
- b) The ace. Same as (a).
- c) The queen. With equal high cards, third hand plays the lower or lowest equal.
- d) The king. Same as (a).
- e) The eight. With the nine in dummy, the eight is as good as the ten.
- f) The ten. Lowest of equal high cards.
- g) The king. Same as (a).
- h) The jack. Same as (c).

2. You are East defending a suit contract and partner leads the ♥3 (spades are trumps). Declarer calls for the four from dummy. Which heart would you normally play from each of the following holdings?

♥3 led

Dummy	(you)
♥ K 8 4	a) ♥ A J 9
	b) ♥ Q 10 7
	c) ♥ A 5
	d) ♥ Q J 6 2
	e) ♥ A Q J
	f) ♥ J 10
	g) ♥ A Q 10 2
	h) ♥ J 9 5

W

E

S

N

SOLUTIONS

- a) The jack. When third hand has an honor higher than dummy's face card, he usually plays his next highest card, if it is a nine or better.
- b) The queen. When third hand has no card higher than dummy's honor, he plays as if there were only small cards in the dummy.
- c) The ace. With no card as high as the nine to insert, third hand plays high, even though he has an honor card higher than the dummy.
- d) The jack. Lowest of equal high cards.
- e) The jack. Always win a trick on defense with the lower or lowest equal. If you play the queen, partner may not continue the suit, assuming declarer will have the jack.
- f) The ten. Lower equal even with a doubleton.
- g) The queen. Partner likely has the jack, but there is no reason to take a chance.
- h) The jack. Same as (b). With no card that beats dummy's honor, play high.

HAND 1

South dealer

♠ A J 7 6 3
 ♥ 8 5 4
 ♦ 8 7 5
 ♣ 7 4

♠ 9 8
 ♥ J 10 9 2
 ♦ A K J 2
 ♣ Q 6 5

♠ Q 10 5
 ♥ A 7 6
 ♦ 4 3
 ♣ J 10 9 3 2

♠ K 4 2
 ♥ K Q 3
 ♦ Q 10 9 6
 ♣ A K 8

N
 W E
 S

West	North	East	South
			1NT
pass	2♣	pass	2♦
pass	3NT	all pass	

North has enough values for game, and looks for a heart fit via a Stayman enquiry, settling for 3NT when opener denies a major suit.

THE PLAY

West leads the ♠6. South wins East's queen in hand with the king, crosses over to the ♦K, and then leads the ♥J from dummy. East should recognize this is *not* the time to play second hand low, and ought to rise with the ace. He then returns the ♠10, allowing West to run the suit.

How does East know partner's spades are good? The Rule of Eleven tells him. East subtracts the card his partner has led (the six) from eleven, giving him an answer of five. This means that there are five cards above the six in the three remaining hands. East can see two of those cards in dummy and two in his own hand. That leaves South with but one card higher than the six, and that was played on the first trick.

The bidding also gives East a fair idea of how many spades partner and declarer have. Because South denied a four-card major, that means he has two or three spades only, leaving five or six in the West hand.

HAND 2

East dealer

♠ A K 9
♥ 7 5
♦ 8 7 6 5 4
♣ K J 9

♠ 8 7 6 5
♥ J 8 6
♦ 3 2
♣ A 4 3 2



♠ Q J 10
♥ A K 10
♦ Q J 10 9
♣ Q 10 7

♠ 4 3 2
♥ Q 9 4 3 2
♦ A K
♣ 8 6 5

West

North

East

South

3NT

all pass

1NT

pass

With a balanced 11 HCP and no interest in the majors, West has a routine raise to 3NT.

THE PLAY

South leads the ♥3 and, seeing only low cards in dummy, North plays the jack, third hand high. Declarer wins the first trick with the king.

Despite the abundance of high-card points, East only has five immediate tricks. Three diamond winners can be established once the ace and king are driven out, so declarer plays the ♦Q to start the process.

South knows from the play to the first trick that declarer has the ♥10 along with his ace-king. That's because if partner had the jack *and* ten, he would have played the lower of equal cards.

To continue hearts without giving declarer an extra trick, South needs to get over to partner's hand. Since dummy has the top two spades, South switches to a club. How does North know that after winning the ♣A, his partner wants him to go back to hearts? There are two clues: dummy's strong clubs, and also South's club card — South should lead the *eight* to deny anything higher. A low club shift by South would suggest staying with that suit, and not reverting to hearts. If North rises with the ♣A to play back another heart, declarer cannot come to more than seven tricks.

HAND 3

North dealer

	♠ A 9 5	
	♥ A K 5	
	♦ J 5 4	
	♣ A K Q 8	
♠ K 10 2		♠ Q 8 6 3
♥ Q J 10 9		♥ 8 6 4
♦ A 7 6 3		♦ 8 2
♣ 10 2		♣ J 9 7 4
	♠ J 7 4	
	♥ 7 3 2	
	♦ K Q 10 9	
	♣ 6 5 3	

West	North	East	South
all pass	2NT	pass	3NT

With 6 HCP, South has enough to raise to game when opener shows 20-21 HCP and a balanced hand.

THE PLAY

East leads the ♠3 and declarer plays the four from dummy. Since West has a good enough spot card in the led suit, he inserts the ten, saving the king for dummy's jack. This will hold North to just the one spade trick.

Declarer waits until the third round to take the ♠A, and then attempts to drive out the ♦A and set up three tricks in that suit. The defense often gives count in the suit declarer is playing if it doesn't cost to do so, and East begins a high-low with the ♦8, showing an even number.

West can now infer that declarer has three diamonds, and waits until the third round to take the ace. Declarer will take a spade, two hearts, two diamonds and three clubs, but with the fourth diamond stranded and clubs breaking 4-2, all he can manage is eight tricks.

HAND 4

North dealer

♠ K 10 8 7 3
♥ Q 8
♦ A 3 2
♣ A 10 2

♠ Q J
♥ 9 6 5
♦ K J 9 8 5 4
♣ K 5



♠ 9 5 2
♥ J 10 7 2
♦ 6
♣ 8 7 6 4 3

♠ A 6 4
♥ A K 4 3
♦ Q 10 7
♣ Q J 9

West	North	East	South
3NT	1♠ all pass	1NT	pass

The only difference between a 1NT opening and a 1NT overcall is that for the latter action, you need a high card in the suit that the opponents have bid.

West's 10 HCP and six good-looking diamonds is more than enough to bid the notrump game.

THE PLAY

If South had a spade honor, he would start proceedings with a low card in partner's suit. Otherwise, the proper lead is the highest spot card you have — here South leads the ♠9.

This is a great example of looking at dummy before you automatically play third hand high. Declarer is marked with the ♠A, so going up with the king provides him with an entry to the West hand for the six-card diamond suit once the ace is knocked out.

North can prevent this by playing the *eight* of spades on the first trick (ducking but also encouraging). Dummy's honor wins the first trick, and East now plays on diamonds, hoping the defense slips up and grabs the ace prematurely. North ducks the first trick in the suit and also the second when partner shows out. When he finally takes the ace on the third round, he then plays the ♠K, squashing dummy's queen, and then a third spade. Declarer gets two tricks in every suit, but winds up one trick short of his goal.

HAND 5

West dealer

	♠ J 3	
	♥ K Q 7	
	♦ 4 3 2	
	♣ K J 10 8 6	
♠ A K 8		♠ 9 7 4 2
♥ A J 10 4 3		♥ 6 5
♦ A 6 5		♦ J 10 9
♣ 9 2		♣ A 5 4 3
	<div> <div>W</div> <div>N</div> <div>E</div> <div>S</div> </div>	
	♠ Q 10 6 5	
	♥ 9 8 2	
	♦ K Q 8 7	
	♣ Q 7	

West	North	East	South
1NT	all pass		

West is part of the contingent that believes you should always open 1NT with a balanced 15-17 HCP, even if you have a five-card major.

THE PLAY

North leads the ♣J from his interior sequence, the highest of his touching cards. Declarer plays small from table.

South needs to overtake the jack with his queen to avoid blocking the suit. Since there is no high spot card that could be a possible second trick in dummy, this play cannot cost. When the queen holds, South plays another club and the defense persists with their suit until declarer finally takes the ace. Now there aren't many tricks for West as the hearts won't set up quickly. The defense will be able to take four clubs, two hearts and a diamond at least.

If South plays low on the club, the defense can still manage the same tricks if North plays his king at Trick 2 to gobble up the queen, but in the heat of the moment, he might not do that. Then South will win the second club and will be stuck in his own hand; now he will have to break suits to declarer's advantage in an effort to get back to partner's hand.

HAND 6

South dealer

♠ A 9 7 6 2

♥ K J 10 3

♦ J 8

♣ 10 2

♠ K 5 4

♥ A 5

♦ K 7 4 2

♣ K Q 7 4

W

N

E

S

♠ J 10 3

♥ 8 7 6 4

♦ 6 5

♣ A 9 8 5

♠ Q 8

♥ Q 9 2

♦ A Q 10 9 3

♣ J 6 3

West	North	East	South
1NT	pass	3NT	pass
			all pass

With 11 HCP and a good five-card diamond suit, East has an automatic raise to game when partner opens 1NT.

THE PLAY

North could lead either of his majors, but goes with the longer one, and starts with his fourth-best spade, the six. That hits declarer’s weakness. He goes up with the queen, so that if North gains the lead he can’t play another spade without yielding a trick to the king.

The spotlight now falls on South, who can apply the Rule of Eleven and realize that West has only one card higher than the six. The math is $11 - 6 = 5$, and he can see four of those cards between dummy and his own hand. He therefore plays the jack for two reasons. It tells partner that is the highest card he owns, while promising the ten. Also, he wants to avoid blocking partner’s long suit and enable him to take his winners.

Declarer has a spade, a heart and five diamonds, with only the club suit offering the potential for two extra tricks. He plays a club at Trick 2 and continues them until South’s ace is driven out.

Now, assuming South has played the ♠J at Trick 1, he can lead his remaining honor, the ten, and the way is clear for North to run his long suit regardless of whether or not declarer plays the king.

If South plays a low spade on the first round, he will be stuck in his own hand on the third spade and the contract then makes.

HAND 7

North dealer

	♠ A 7 6	
	♥ J 5 4 2	
	♦ K 9	
	♣ K Q 6 3	
♠ K Q 10		♠ 8 5 3 2
♥ Q 8 3		♥ K 10 7 6
♦ 10 5 4		♦ J 8 7 2
♣ A J 8 5		♣ 4
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ J 9 4	
	♥ A 9	
	♦ A Q 6 3	
	♣ 10 9 7 2	

West	North	East	South
	1♣	pass	2NT
all pass			

Nowadays, a 2NT response to a minor-suit opening denies a four-card major and shows a good 10 to a bad 12 HCP. Opener, with an unremarkable 13-count, passes.

THE PLAY

Although West's longest suit is clubs, the suit has been bid on his left and declarer may also have some length in the suit, not having bid either major. So he begins with the ♠K, the best of his three-card holdings.

South plays low from dummy and East now can signal on the first trick. With nothing higher than the eight in spades, he plays the deuce. Because of the play to the first trick, West knows that declarer has the ♠J and he can't persist in the suit without giving South an extra trick.

After a bit of soul-searching, West decides to switch to a heart. Declarer plays low from the dummy and East must consider the likely position in the suit. Partner would seem to have an honor in the suit, having played a low one. It's definitely not the time for third hand high, as the king should be preserved to capture the jack. Consider the three possibilities. If West has the ace-queen, the ten will hold the trick. If he owns just the queen, then the ten will force the ace. Finally, if the shift was from the ace, declarer will have the queen and a heart trick he can take right away, but you'll still get your tricks later on.

Playing the ♥10 will defeat the contract. Declarer will play low, win the second heart trick and go after clubs, but unless West rises with the ace prematurely, all he can get are three diamonds, two clubs and the major-suit aces.

HAND 8

South dealer

♠ K 10 7 2

♥ Q 10 6

♦ 9 7

♣ 10 8 5 2

N
E

W
S

♠ J 8 4

♥ K 7 4

♦ K J 10 6 4

♣ A J

♠ Q 9 3

♥ 8 2

♦ A 8 5 2

♣ Q 9 4 3

♠ A 6 5

♥ A J 9 5 3

♦ Q 3

♣ K 7 6

West	North	East	South
			1♥
pass	2♦	pass	2NT
pass	4♥	all pass	

The bidding is fairly straightforward, as responder advertises his decent side suit by bidding a 2♦ and then supporting partner's hearts at his next turn. Meanwhile, opener has shown a balanced hand with his 2NT rebid.

THE PLAY

West has no picnic on the opening lead, as either black suit is quite reasonable. However, with dummy having shown a long suit prior to raising the major, that's an indicator that an attacking lead might be required. West decides on the ♠2

Declarer plays low and East is on the spot as to what to do on the first trick. He can eliminate partner having the ♠A as he would not underlead that card against a suit contract. So if partner has any spade honor, it will be the king. Also, the lead of the two would suggest that

he only has four spades and therefore declarer will be in possession of three cards in that suit.

Going up with the ♠Q is conceding two spades to the opponents, as South will take whatever honor he has and later score another trick with dummy's jack. East needs to insert the nine in an attempt to keep declarer to one trick, hoping that partner has the ten. As it turns out, this will result in the defense getting four tricks with two spades, a heart and the ♦A.

If the opening lead had been a club, declarer would have won in hand, play two high trumps and then forced out the ♦A, establishing winners for black-suit discards from his hand.

LESSON 7

THE MIDGAME: DISCARDS, NEW AND OLD SUITS

The process of defending effectively goes on throughout the course of a hand, and there are three important aspects that will often spell the difference between success and failure. They are:

1. The first discard — what it signifies.
2. When a new suit is played, what story the card tells.
3. When you return partner's suit, telling him how many you have left.

DISCARDS

A discard is a card that you throw away when you cannot follow suit either to what declarer has led or to the suit your fellow defender is playing. It is important to use your discards to attempt to convey information to partner.

Attitude discards are the most common form of signaling. If you are using standard signals, a discard of a high spot card encourages the suit and a low card discourages it. It is only the *first* discard that we have to pay any real attention to. Any further discards tend to be neutral and pass no specific message.

Kantar has a good list of the do's and don'ts of discarding.

DO

- Make your discards clear. A high-low indicates that (1) you have strength in the suit discarded, or (2) you intend to keep that suit and partner should keep another while declarer is running off his long suit.

A low-high suggests no interest in the suit you've pitched and that it will be up to partner to guard that suit if need be.

- Keep the same length as dummy when discarding; particularly when dummy has four cards of some consequence, you should normally also try to keep four.
- Discard the top card from an honor sequence; e.g., when holding the QJ109, discard the queen for total clarity.
- Sometimes it will be obvious from dummy that you cannot have real interest in a suit, for example when dummy's holding is KQJ10xx. Then you can give a count signal in that suit when discarding. If partner has the missing ace, that will help him to know when to take it.
- Discard on a "need to know" basis, remembering that declarer will be paying close attention to your discards as well. In some cases, especially in a trump contract, it's best to discard from suits declarer knows you hold. For example, if you have a long suit and partner has shown out during the play, declarer knows your exact length, so it is to your advantage to discard from that suit rather than give declarer any more information about your hand.


DON'T

- Don't discard your last card in any suit partner has led unless you have absolutely no way of ever getting the lead later in the hand.
- Against a notrump contract, as a rule, don't discard from any suit you want partner to lead. It is much more advantageous to discard a low card from a suit or suits that you *do not* want partner to lead, thus saving your good cards in the suit you do want.

A variation of this occurs when you discard from a suit that you've already led, and one that partner is likely to return. Generally, if you discard from your own suit, it means you want partner to shift to another.

- Don't waste high spot cards or honor cards to signal partner if it might cost a trick later on. This is a common error made by inexperienced players.
- Don't discard down to a singleton or void unless defending against a suit contract and there is a chance for a ruff. Once you show out of a suit, declarer knows your partner's exact holding.
- Don't worry about telling your partner about every important card you own if you are the player that has the strong hand. Partner will not be involved too much in the defense and you will simply be helping declarer. On the other hand, if you have the weaker of the partnership holdings, you should go out of your way to give clear signals.

Now we can move on to a few examples of discarding technique. Declarer is playing spades and you are about to show out. These are the hearts and clubs you see in your hand and the dummy:

♥ K 7 6	
♣ J 9 5	(you)
	♥ A Q 10 9
	♣ 8 6 3

What would you discard if they were in 2NT? How about if they were in 3♠?

If the opponents are in notrump, the East hand should pitch the ♣3, keeping the fourth heart around as a possible extra trick. Encouraging with the ♥10 will get West to play a heart eventually, but you might have discarded the setting trick.

If they are playing in spades, then you won't get a fourth heart trick, so you can afford to discard one: you should play the ten to make it clear to partner that you want him to play a heart through if he gets the lead.

The *encouraging* discard tends to be used more often in suit contracts. If they are playing in notrump, you'll try and steer partner in the right direction by pitching low cards in the suits you have no interest in.

The following hand illustrates how an extra trick can be gained by discouraging in one suit rather than encouraging in another:

	♠ Q 10 7	
	♥ 7 6 5	
	♦ 7 4	
	♣ J 10 9 5 4	
♠ 9 8		♠ 6 5 4 3 2
♥ K 9 3		♥ A Q 8 4
♦ J 8 6 3 2		♦ 10 5
♣ A 3 2		♣ 8 6
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ A K J	
	♥ J 10 2	
	♦ A K Q 9	
	♣ K Q 7	

West	North	East	South
			2♣
pass	2♦	pass	2NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

South's 2♣ opening is strong, either game in his own hand or 22+ HCP and balanced distribution. Responder usually bids 2♦, allowing opener to describe the nature of his hand. The 2NT bid showed 22-24 HCP. North's hand is meager but he has just enough to get the partnership assets up to 25 or 26 HCP, which should be enough for game to have a chance.

West leads the ♦3. East plays the ten and declarer wins the king, hiding his queen because he wants to avoid a heart shift and would like diamonds continued. With small cards in dummy, East should have played his highest diamond, which means South has all the top cards in the suit.

South plays the ♣K, which West ducks, and East begins a count signal with the eight. West now assumes two clubs in partner's hand and three in South's, so he holds up on the ♣Q as well. On the third club, West finally takes the ace and East can make a helpful discard. Should it be a low spade or a high heart?

Throwing the ♠2 is best — by far. It clearly indicates that East doesn't like spades at all. West might be nervous about shifting to a heart, but there is no future in either minor suit and partner has warned him off spades. So he comes back with a small heart (the "Bottom Of Something" portion of BOSTON) and the defense collects four hearts plus the ♣A for down one.

If East discards the ♥8, the good news is that partner will return a heart, but the bad news is that the discard also happens to be the setting trick.

When declarer is playing a long suit, it's usually best for the defender to wait as long as possible before taking his winner. Then you won't have to guess what suit to play next, as partner will give you his vote with his discard. Taking the ♣A earlier on this hand would have put West on a straight guess as to which major to return.

Next is a hand where the defender is able to make an encouraging discard:

♠ 3 2

♥ Q 9 8 7

♦ A K Q 5

♣ K 3 2

♠ Q 9 8

♥ K J

♦ J 7 4 3

♣ J 10 7 5

W
N
E

S

♠ A K J 10 4

♥ A 10

♦ 9 6 2

♣ Q 9 6

♠ 7 6 5

♥ 6 5 4 3 2

♦ 10 8

♣ A 8 4


West	North	East	South
dbl	2♠	all pass	1♠

West leads his ace and then the other two high diamonds as partner high-lows to show a doubleton. On the third trick, East has to make a discard, and it should be the ♣8. That tells West to lead a club at his first opportunity. As a side benefit, it also shortens East's supply of clubs, whereby he might be able to get a ruff.

At Trick 4, West shifts to the ♣2 (bottom of something) which goes to partner's ace. East then returns a club to the king and voila! He gets to ruff the third round of clubs and the contract goes down one.

Keeping parity

Keeping parity means keeping equal length with a suit that you can see in dummy if you can beat one of the cards. Here are some examples:

a) ♠ A K Q 9
b) ♠ A K Q 4 (you)
  ♠ 7 5 3 2

If you are looking at (a) in dummy, you can discard a spade with no worries, as all of the cards you see can beat your humble seven-spot. However, if what greets your eyes is (b), then you may have to keep your fourth spade, as the layout of the suit could be:

♠ J 10 8 ♠ A K Q 4 ♠ 7 5 3 2
  ♠ 9 6


Because South has the equivalent of two small in dummy's suit, dummy's fourth spade will not win a trick unless you pitch one from your seemingly worthless holding.

Other times, you may not see all the honors in dummy as you did here, but the principle remains the same:

a) ♥ K Q 9 4
b) ♥ K Q 7 4 (you)
  ♥ 8 6 5 3

If the ace is in partner's hand, you can afford a heart discard as your eight will not be a factor. You need to cater to the possibility, though, that South has ace and a small heart. You can toss a heart with the (a) dummy, as your highest card will not beat the nine. With the slightly weaker suit in (b), you need to retain all of your hearts as the eight is capable of beating the seven.

Keeping parity with *declarer's* known suit is also important, although you don't have the benefit of seeing what he has as you do in the case of dummy's long suit. For the next example, assume that during the auction South has opened 1♣ and then bid spades, so he should have exactly four of his second suit:

- a) ♠ A 8 5
 b) ♠ 8 5 3
 c) ♠ 5 3
 d) ♠ 3
- (you)
 ♠ 10 9 7 4
- 


When dummy has three to the ace, you definitely cannot afford to let go of a spade as partner will only have two of them. The same applies with (b), although dummy no longer has the top card. If you discard a spade, three rounds of the suit will establish South's fourth card as a winner. In case (c), partner has three spades and could well be in possession of a high card, but the fact remains that pitching a spade still might allow declarer to get an extra trick in the suit. With (d), partner will have four of declarer's spades too, so you may be able to afford the discard here as long as he can guard the suit.

RETURNING PARTNER'S SUIT

Third hand's responsibility to return the proper card in the suit partner has led cannot be minimized. The rule is simple, yet many players go through a lifetime without knowing it.

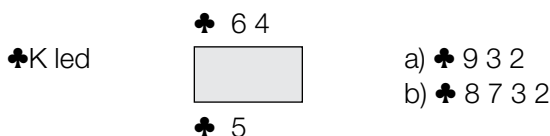
When returning partner's suit, with two cards remaining lead the higher; with three or more cards left, play the original fourth highest.

To further examine the process, let's say we're faced with this situation:

- ♦6 led
- ♦ 7 5
- 
- a) ♦ A 10 3
 b) ♦ A 10 3 2
 c) ♦ A 10 4 3 2

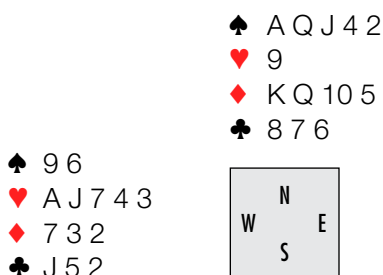
West leads the ♦6 (against either a suit or notrump contract) and East wins the ace. When East returns a diamond, he plays back: the ten in the first case, the deuce in the second, and the three in the third.

Even when holding worthless cards, third hand is expected to follow this principle when returning opening leader's suit:



West leads the king against notrump and dummy plays the four; East plays the deuce and declarer the five. West shifts and East subsequently gets the lead. In the first case, with the 93 remaining, East should lead the nine, the higher of his two remaining cards. In the second case, having already played his lowest card, East's proper return is the three, his lowest remaining card.

Now let's put ourselves in opening leader's chair to find out how useful the information about partner's count in a suit can be:



West	North	East	South
	1♠	pass	2NT
pass	3♦	pass	3NT
all pass			

You lead the ♥4, partner plays the king and declarer the five. Partner returns the ♥8 and declarer plays the ten. In order to find out how many hearts your partner and declarer have, you must pay close attention to the spot cards. With the five hearts you're looking at and just the one in dummy, there are seven left. Does East have four and South three, or vice-versa?

First off, declarer has the ♥Q since partner would have played that card at Trick 1 if he had it. You've just seen the ♥10 as well on the second trick. The eight is the highest of the remaining hearts. How many does partner have? He started with just three of them, because if he held another heart, he would have played back his original fourth best. Since declarer's queen is still guarded, West can't play another round without giving declarer a trick that he's not entitled to.

The layout of the heart suit amongst the four players is:

♥ A J 7 4 3	♥ 9 [] ♥ Q 10 6 5	♥ K 8 2
-------------	--------------------------	---------

As you see, East returned the card he was supposed to, and West won the with the jack. But he must now abandon hearts for the time being, hoping that partner can get in to play a third round through declarer.

Switch a heart over from declarer to the East hand and we now have:

♥ A J 7 4 3	♥ 9 [] ♥ Q 10 5	♥ K 8 6 2
-------------	------------------------	-----------

Now partner returns not the ♥8 but the ♥2, his original fourth-best, and the opening leader knows that South began with only three of the suit. He can win with the jack and now play the ace, knowing the queen will drop. East, though, must be careful to play the ♥8 on the third round so that the suit won't block.

PLAYING A NEW SUIT

At some times, during the course of a hand, the defenders may switch gears and start to play a different suit than the one that was originally led. There are four primary reasons for going a different route. They are:

1. Dummy might have a very strong holding in the suit led
2. Opening leader can tell from partner's third-hand play that declarer has the suit well-stopped
3. Third hand can tell from the lead that partner's long suit is not really strong (a card that suggests "top of nothing")
4. Dummy has a holding of two small or three small in a suit declarer has not bid.


A word of advice first, though, before we plunge into this topic. Returning the suit partner has led is normally the best policy, as partners do not like to be overruled. Therefore, you need to be absolutely sure there is no future in continuing the original plan of attack in order to start breaking other suits.

If you *are* going to lead a new suit, then assuming you don't have a sequence it is right to lead fourth highest in most cases, or your

lowest card from three to an honor. You would, for example, lead the three from J953 or Q73, just as you would on opening lead.

From a worthless three-card or longer suit, it is often right to lead the highest spot card you can spare. There is a fair amount of confusion about the BOSTON principle (Bottom Of Something, Top Of Nothing). It's used very rarely on opening lead, primarily when you're leading from an honorless four-card suit against a notrump contract. It's when the defense plays a new suit later on during the hand that it takes center stage. A lead of a low spot card in the new suit implies you have some strength in the suit and a willingness to have partner return it. If instead you make a high spot-card lead, that suggests you have no honor cards in the suit. With a perfect, broken or interior sequence, you'd do the same as if you'd been on opening lead, playing the higher of your touching honors.

We can now look at some examples of where the defense might lead a new suit:

♠ Q 5 4	(you)
	a. ♠ 9 6 3
	b. ♠ K 10 3
	c. ♠ K 8 6 3

South is in a contract of 3NT and hasn't mentioned spades during the bidding, so your partner does not have five of them because if he did that would have been the original lead.

If East gains the lead and plays a spade, his first card on (a) should be the nine (Top Of Nothing). Now if partner has something like AJ10x or even AJ8x, he'll know declarer has the missing honors and will not play the ace immediately, saving that card to play on declarer's honors on the next lead through.

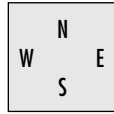
From holdings (b) and (c) you'd shift to the ♠3, promising some honors in the suit. Partner will know that you have a high card, likely the king sitting over dummy's queen, and can now play the ace if he has it.

Here is another hand where it's essential to convey the right message when playing a new suit:

♠ A K 3
 ♥ K Q J 8
 ♦ Q J 8 4
 ♣ K 10

(you)

♠ 9
 ♥ A 9 4 3
 ♦ 9 7 5 2
 ♣ A Q 7 6



West	North	East	South
	1♦	pass	1♠
pass	2NT	pass	4♠
all pass			

The contract is 4♠, and partner leads the ♥2; you take dummy's jack with your ace. West's lead could be a singleton but is more likely to be from 10xxx given how the bidding has progressed.

You would like to get partner on lead to shift to a club, and need to play back a diamond in the hope that he has the ace or king. However, to deny any high-card strength, you should lead the *nine* to discourage a return of the suit. Now, with little obvious future in the red suits, West ought to be able to figure out that he should return a club through dummy's king.

If East had stronger diamonds, as in the next layout, and wanted partner to continue playing them, he'd return a low one.

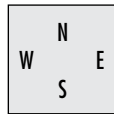
♠ A K 3
 ♥ K Q J 8
 ♦ Q J 8 4
 ♣ K 10

♠ 5 4
 ♥ 10 7 5 2
 ♦ A 6
 ♣ 9 8 5 3 2

(you)

♠ 9
 ♥ A 9 4 3
 ♦ K 9 7 2
 ♣ Q 7 6 4

♠ Q J 10 8 7 6 2
 ♥ 6
 ♦ 10 5 3
 ♣ A J



This time, you'll return the ♦2 after winning the first trick with the ♥A. Because you've led a small card in the new suit, partner will realize you have the king and return a diamond to get his ruff.

Now we're perched in the West chair, having led the ♥J against 3NT:

	♠ K J 4
	♥ A K 2
	♦ A Q J 9 7
	♣ 10 5
West (you)	
♠ 9 5 3	
♥ J 10 9 4	
♦ 8 4	
♣ K J 9 3	

	N	
W		E
	S	

South takes the ♥Q in hand and runs the ♦10, losing to your partner's king.

Partner returns a club, on which declarer plays the four, and your jack takes the trick. What do you do now (a) if partner's club was the eight, and (b) if it was the two?

If East plays back the ♣8, he is denying anything higher, so continuing the suit would be giving declarer a freebie trick. Since they have your hearts well stopped, you'd try a spade switch, again playing the highest to deny anything of consequence in the suit.

If instead partner returns the ♣2, you can assume he has the queen or ace, and can play back the suit in the knowledge that it won't help declarer. The full hand is:

	♠ K J 4	
	♥ A K 2	
	♦ A Q J 9 7	
	♣ 10 5	
♠ 9 5 3		♠ 8 7 6 2
♥ J 10 9 4		♥ 8 5 3
♦ 8 4		♦ K 6 3
♣ K J 9 3		♣ A 6 2
	♠ A Q 10	
	♥ Q 7 6	
	♦ 10 5 2	
	♣ Q 8 7 4	

	N	
W		E
	S	

Since you have the ♣9, you can pick declarer clean in the suit, as you win the jack on the first round and then lead the three to partner's ace. On a third club, your ♣K9 is sitting over the ♣Q8 in the South hand. The defense gets four clubs and the ♦K for down one, whereas switching to a spade or another heart enables declarer to make 3NT with an overtrick.

HAND 1

West dealer

♠ 3 2	♠ 10 6 5	♠ Q 4
♥ K Q 10 8	♥ 9 7 4	♥ A 5
♦ 10 6 5	♦ A K Q J 9	♦ 8 7 4 3 2
♣ Q 8 7 2	♣ 4 3	♣ 10 9 6 5
	<div>W N E S</div>	
	♠ A K J 9 8 7	
	♥ J 6 3 2	
	♦ —	
	♣ A K J	

West	North	East	South
pass	pass	pass	1♠
pass	2♦	pass	3♠
pass	4♠	all pass	

The normal procedure would be for opener to introduce the four-card heart suit and then repeat the spades to show six of them. However, because North was a passed hand, South decided to jump in spades, showing 16-18 points and a good six-card or longer suit.

THE PLAY

West leads the ♥K. East cannot afford to block the suit by playing low, so he overtakes with the ace and plays back his remaining heart. Regardless of what declarer plays, West takes the second and third round of the suit with the queen and ten, and watches for partner's discard. East might not be able to overruff dummy, and if not, the only hope is that he has the ♣A for the setting trick.

East *does* have a spade that can beat the ten, so he discards the ♣5, the lowest one he has. The opening leader can now tell that partner doesn't want clubs, as he's looking at the two, while dummy has the three and four. West duly plays the fourth heart, and the defense scores an overruff with the ♠Q for the setting trick.

HAND 2

North dealer

	♠ Q 7 6 5	
	♥ J 9 7 5	
	♦ A 6	
	♣ 9 6 4	
♠ 10 9		♠ A 8
♥ A 6 3 2		♥ K Q 10
♦ Q J 10 9 5		♦ K 8 7 2
♣ K 2		♣ A J 7 3
	<div> <div>W</div> <div>N</div> <div>S</div> <div>E</div> </div>	
	♠ K J 4 3 2	
	♥ 8 4	
	♦ 4 3	
	♣ Q 10 8 5	

West	North	East	South
	pass	1NT	pass
2♣	pass	2♦	pass
3NT	all pass		

West has enough points for game, and looks for an eight-card heart fit with a Stayman enquiry. East denies a major, and responder places the contract in 3NT.

THE PLAY

South leads the ♠3, and North goes up with the queen, third hand high. Without a third spade, there is no point in declarer's ducking, so all East can do is win the first trick and play on diamonds until North takes the ace, hoping the defense can't untangle their tricks.

North takes the first diamond trick with the ace, and returns the five of his partner's suit, taken by one of the honors in the South hand. Since declarer has produced the eight on the second round, the only missing cards are the six and the seven. From the play to the second trick, you know opener can't have started with more than two spades. Why is that? He's denied a four-card major. At the same time, if North had just two spades left, he'd play the higher one back. Since his lowest card has been returned, partner has the two outstanding spades and you have to be careful at the next trick. Your third spade has to be a low one, allowing partner to win. Then he returns his final spade, and you

If South had carelessly won the third spade, North would have taken the fourth round of the suit and have no way to cash that last spade in South's hand. In order to avoid this calamity, opening leader has to be alert to the remaining spot cards and the order in which they are played.

South dealer

♠ 9 8 7 6
♥ K 9 3
♦ A K J
♣ 7 5 2

♠ A K Q
♥ Q 10 6 2
♦ 7 5 3
♣ A Q 9

♠ J 5 2
♥ A J 8 5
♦ 10 4 2
♣ 10 8 4

♠ 10 4 3
♥ 7 4
♦ Q 9 8 6
♣ K J 6 3

W N E S

West	North	East	South
pass	1NT	all pass	pass

THE PLAY

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HAND 4

♠ K J 7	♠ 5	♠ Q 10 9 8 6 4
♥ K J 9 6 2	♥ A 10 7 3	♥ Q 4
♦ A 6	♦ 8 4 3 2	♦ K Q
♣ 6 3 2	♣ Q J 10 9	♣ A 7 5

♠ A 3 2

♥ 8 5

♦ J 10 9 7 5

♣ K 8 4

West	North	East	South
		1♠	pass
2♥	pass	2♠	pass
4♠	all pass		

THE PLAY

On the second round of spades, North has the spots to leave no doubt as to the suit he would like played, and should discard the *queen*

of clubs, showing that card and everything directly below it. South can now confidently lead a club away from his king in the knowledge that partner has a solid holding in the suit. Once the ace is knocked out, the defenders will take two clubs along with their two major-suit aces for down one.

This hand is a good example of a situation where an encouraging discard is needed, as it would be tough for South to find a club switch without it.

HAND 5

West dealer

		♠ A 6 5 3	
		♥ 8	
		♦ 10 7 5 3	
		♣ K 8 4 2	
♠ K 10 2	<div> <div>N</div> <div>W E</div> <div>S</div> </div>	♠ Q J 9 7 4	
♥ A Q 10 9 6 2		♥ K J 3	
♦ K Q		♦ J 9 2	
♣ Q 9		♣ 10 7	
		♠ 8	
		♥ 7 5 4	
		♦ A 8 6 4	
		♣ A J 6 5 3	

West	North	East	South
1♥	pass	2♥	all pass

West is close to making a game try but he has too many honors in his short suits and not many single raises will be able to provide what he needs.

THE PLAY

Although clubs are North's better minor, the lack of relevant spot cards may deter him from leading that suit. A fair number of players would lead a diamond rather than a club.

On a diamond lead, South wins the ace and returns his singleton spade, hoping for a ruff. Partner takes the ace and now returns his lowest spade, the three. This implies a high card in clubs rather than diamonds, the suit he led. Upon collecting his first ruff, South can now

The suit-preference signal by North in giving the spade ruff was necessary to steer partner in the right direction as he might have otherwise returned a diamond.

North dealer

♠ 7 6
♥ 7 5 2
♦ K Q 10 8
♣ A 7 5 4

♠ K Q J 5 4 2
♥ 8 4
♦ 5 2
♣ 10 8 6

♠ A 10 3
♥ A Q
♦ J 7 4 3
♣ K Q 9 2

♠ 9 8
♥ K J 10 9 6 3
♦ A 9 6
♣ J 3

W N E S

West	North	East	South
	2♠	2NT	pass
3NT	all pass		

With 16 HCP and a stopper in the enemy suit, East has enough to venture a 2NT overcall of North's weak two-bid. West has 9 HCP, all in his two long suits, and he carries on to game.

THE PLAY

South leads the ♠9, the top card from his doubleton in partner's suit. North plays the jack and declarer has to duck, otherwise South will be able to get to his partner's established suit when he takes the ♦A.

North has a count on the spades and should recognize that it is futile to keep on playing the suit, as he has no entry to take his winners. Because dummy has sources of tricks in both diamonds and clubs, it looks as though hearts is the only suit where North-South might be able

to make some headway. North has to make the most of his sole opportunity to be on lead and must fire back a heart at Trick 2. Declarer puts in the queen hopefully, but South wins and plays back the jack to drive out the ace. East only has six tricks and when he plays on diamonds to establish winners there, South wins with the ace and takes the rest of his hearts for down three.

If North is on auto-pilot and plays a second spade instead of switching to hearts, declarer wins and can bring home his contract by playing on diamonds. South wins his ace at some point, but has no spade to return.

HAND 7

West dealer

♠ A Q 7

♥ J 9 7 3 2

♦ 6 5 2

♣ A Q

♠ K J

♥ Q 4

♦ A Q 10 3

♣ J 7 6 5 4

♠ 10 9 3 2

♥ 10 6 5

♦ 9 8 7 4

♣ K 2

W

N

E

S

♠ 8 6 5 4

♥ A K 8

♦ K J

♣ 10 9 8 3

West	North	East	South
1♥	pass	pass	1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

North’s hand contains 13 HCP, but the clubs are so feeble that an immediate two-level overcall is quite risky, so he passes for now.

A direct 1NT overcall is 15-17 HCP, but the same action when an opening bid is passed around does not have to be that strong. The range most partnerships agree upon for a balancing 1NT is 11-14 HCP. Now North has enough to bid game.

THE PLAY

West leads the ♥3, which declarer wins with the queen in dummy and next plays a club. This is one of the cases where it is a good idea for East to disregard the second-hand low axiom and fly with the ♣K. He expects partner to have the ace and may have to take the first trick in the suit to play back a heart.

However, West knows that declarer has both the ♥A and ♥K, since partner wasn't able to beat the queen on the first trick. Left to his own devices, South will give up a second club and then take four diamonds, three clubs and three hearts.

Can you imagine a layout where 3NT can be defeated? Yes, if East has the ♠109 with length. East will probably have at least four spades as South hasn't overcalled in that suit. It's a faint hope, but there is no other suit where the defense is likely to get tricks. So West overtakes the ♣K with his ace and then plays the ♠A and ♠Q.

West's dream scenario comes true as partner indeed has the necessary cards and East-West can take two clubs and three spades. If East's ♣K is allowed to hold the trick, he will in all likelihood return a heart, which is not at all troublesome for declarer.

HAND 8

South dealer

♠ A 8 5
♥ K 8 5 4 2
♦ 9 2
♣ 7 5 2

♠ K 10 4
♥ 9 6
♦ Q 7 5
♣ A J 10 6 3

♠ J 7 6 3
♥ Q J 3
♦ 10 6 4 3
♣ K 4

W N
S E

♠ Q 9 2
♥ A 10 7
♦ A K J 8
♣ Q 9 8

West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

With 10 HCP and a good five-card suit, North sails into game after partner’s 1NT opening.

THE PLAY

West leads his fourth-best heart and East puts in the jack, the lower of his touching honors. Declarer ducks the first two hearts but wins the third, and then takes the club finesse, losing to the king. Now East has to guess which of the pointed suits to return.

On the third round of hearts, West has three cards to choose from: the king, the eight and the five. His final two hearts will be the last ones in the game, so it really doesn’t matter which card he plays under the ace. It is a perfect opportunity to send partner a message. Since he can get back in with a spade, he should play a high heart — the king! Don’t be subtle with suit preference when you don’t have to be — don’t give partner a chance to go wrong. If instead West had the ♦A, then he should play his lowest heart — the five.

If East had returned a diamond rather than a spade after winning the ♣K, declarer would have had nine tricks — four tricks in each minor plus the ♥A.

LESSON 8

AUCTION-DEPENDENT LEADS AND FINAL HANDS

In the first three lessons, we laid the groundwork for making effective opening leads. We discussed how to choose the right card from various holdings, and talked about how paying attention to the opponents' bidding can point you towards an effective opening lead.

From there, we branched out into other aspects of defensive play, focusing on what to do when you are third to play to a trick. We also looked at defensive strategy later in the hand, well after the opening lead. With that foundation of skills in place, let's now go back to the first trick and explore whether it can ever be right to lead an unsupported ace. Also, we'll touch on the lead-directing double, which is a way for the partner of the opening leader to convey a message about the suit he wants led.

Another important aspect of defending a hand well is being able to estimate the likely tricks for both your side and theirs, and to envision how the play will likely go once you see the dummy. This will be illustrated in our ten example hands for this lesson.

LEADING AN UNSUPPORTED ACE: NEVER OR SELDOM?

Mike Lawrence, in his book *Opening Leads*, expresses a distaste for leading unsupported aces, and for good reason. The “having a look at dummy” justification for doing so is extremely overrated. The basic fact of the matter is that aces are meant to capture honor cards, and to start out with one without getting anything in return is not a very good policy.

There are, however, three situations in which a lead of an unsupported ace can be a productive endeavor.

1) If the opponents are in five of a minor and it's the unbid suit

Presumably your adversaries would have ended up or at least tried for a 3NT contract if they had a stopper in that suit. For example, suppose you're in the West seat with these cards:

♠ J 4 3 2 ♥ A Q 5 2 ♦ 6 5 ♣ 10 9 8

And the bidding goes:

West	North	East	South
			1♦
pass	2♣	pass	3♦
pass	3♠	pass	5♦
all pass			

When opener jumped to 3♦, he showed 16-18 points with a good six-card or longer diamond suit. Responder introduced his spades, evidently hoping opener could bid 3NT. Instead, South bid 5♦. If he had the guarded ♥K, he would have opted for the notrump game. That card will either be in dummy or, far more likely, in partner's hand. So leading the ♥A will not cost a trick and could easily result in your side taking a few hearts right off the bat. If you fail to get after the hearts immediately, dummy might have club winners that South will be able to toss his losers on.

That was an auction where the bidding has implied that the opponents are weak in the only unbid suit. Contrast that with this bidding sequence:

West	North	East	South
			1♠
pass	3♠	pass	4♠
all pass			

♠ J 4 3 2 ♥ A Q 5 2 ♦ 6 5 ♣ 10 9 8

Here you can make no relatively safe assumption about where the ♥K might be. The opponents have established a major-suit fit so they are not going to settle in 3NT instead.

Since you have a fairly safe lead available with the ♣10, you don't need to be a hero by playing the ♥A. You might well take a trick with the jack of trumps at some point and can then switch to hearts if neither minor has turned out to be all that promising.

2) The opponent on your right has preempted

The rationale here is that RHO will have a good, long suit with not much if anything in the other three suits. Assuming that to be the case, the other three kings will probably either be in partner's hand or turn up in the dummy. Either way, the ace lead isn't likely to cost.

If the auction has proceeded:

West	North	East	South
pass	4♠	all pass	2♠

Dummy could have any of these:

- excellent fit and distribution, and has bid game either to make or to prevent your side from finding the best spot,
- a whole bunch of high-card points, or...
- a source of tricks in a long suit.

It's only in the third case that the result will depend upon your lead. In general, if you have a sequence lead that will produce immediate tricks, go with that choice. If you don't have a trick-generating lead, then you might try the unsupported ace to "have a look". Two examples would be:

♠ 4 2 ♥ K Q 10 8 ♦ A 7 2 ♣ J 6 5 3

Here there is no reason to lead anything but the ♥K, as you can make some hay in that suit right away. Compare that hand to:

♠ 4 2 ♥ J 10 5 ♦ A 7 3 2 ♣ K 9 6 5

The heart sequence here isn't as likely to develop quick tricks for your side. While there are no guarantees in life, some players might elect to start out with the ♦A, after which the sight of dummy and/or what partner contributes to the first trick may tell you how to proceed from there.

3) *The opponents have bid all the way to a slam*

This is a direct quote from Eddie Kantar: “Against slams, leading aces usually works out best, particularly at tournament bridge where you might even lose your winner if you don’t lead it.”

Some players are reluctant to lead an ace even against a slam, but since Mr. Kantar has probably defended more contracts than anyone in recorded history, I’d tend to believe him on leading aces versus slam contracts.

UNDERLEADING AN ACE

This will be short and sweet. It’s perfectly all right to underlead an ace against a notrump contract (except for a slam), as you aren’t going to lose that card. If the opponents are playing in a suit, you don’t underlead an ace. Period.

LEAD-DIRECTING DOUBLES

During an auction, there are any number of opportunities to make “lead-directing doubles”. Since there are a whole bunch of them, some are more common than others, I’ll list the ones that occur most frequently:

- a) Doubles of Stayman and Jacoby transfers are lead-directing. The same would apply to a strong and artificial 2♣ opening. One thing to bear in mind is that they promise both length *and* strength. The doubler should not have significant strength in any of the other suits. Partner isn’t going to be very impressed if he leads what you told him to, only to find out after they make it that his normal lead would have beaten the contract.

Here are some examples. If the auction goes:

West	North	East	South
pass	2♣	?	1NT

What would you do on each of these three hands as East?

♠ A 8 5 ♥ 4 ♦ 9 8 3 2 ♣ K Q J 9 5

Double. Whether the opponents wind up in 4♥ or 3NT, you absolutely want partner to lead a club as that represents the best opportunity to defeat the contract.

♠ A 10 3 ♥ 4 ♦ Q 9 3 2 ♣ Q 10 7 6 5

Pass. Assuming either opener or responder shows hearts during the Stayman auction, you have enough honors in the other three suits to be happy with anything your partner leads. A double of an artificial bid suggests that is the *only* lead you are interested in, and that isn't the case here.

♠ 7 5 ♥ 4 ♦ A J 10 8 ♣ K Q J 9 8 6

Bid 3♣. Granted, you could double, but that would allow the opponents sufficient room to get to their best contract. You have enough distribution that you shouldn't get killed if they double you, and you are taking a level of bidding space away from the opponents.

- b) At higher levels, doubles of Blackwood and Gerber responses or of cuebids are lead-directing. Take this bidding sequence, for instance:

West	North	East	South
			1♥
pass	3♥	pass	3♠
pass	4♦	?	

Opener's 3♠ and responder's 4♦ were cuebids, since hearts is the agreed trump suit. At this point, East would make a lead-directing double on a hand like:

♠ 9 5 4 ♥ A 3 ♦ K Q 9 8 ♣ 7 6 4 2

but not on:

♠ Q 7 5 ♥ 10 4 ♦ Q 8 7 6 3 ♣ K 4 2

On this latter collection, with a high card in every unbid suit, you'll have something for partner whatever he leads. This isn't the time to ask for a diamond lead because it's not such a priority as on the first hand.

- c) Doubles of 3NT are also lead-directing. I could list about a dozen auctions for this category, but here are the most common ones:

West	North	East	South
			1♣
pass	1♥	2♦	2NT
pass	3NT	dbl	

Since East has bid, his double simply says “I think they’re going down if you lead my suit.” His hand might be:

♠ 7 ♥ A J 3 ♦ Q J 10 9 7 4 ♣ A 6 3

With an ace in each of their suits, East expects to defeat 3NT if partner leads a diamond. He doesn’t want West to be put off because the opponents have promised diamond stoppers.

The next auction is a little different:

West	North	East	South
	1♥	pass	pass
2♣	2♦	2NT	pass
3NT	dbl		

Here doubler has bid two suits. Which one does partner lead? Since East is known to have at least five hearts and might only have four diamonds, partner is more apt to lead the major. Opener’s double would tell West to lead the *second* of his two suits, diamonds in this case. East’s hand might be:

♠ A 3 ♥ J 10 8 5 2 ♦ K Q 10 9 8 ♣ A

He’s opened 1♥ in accordance with the bidding principle of starting out with the higher-ranking of two five-card suits. At this point, however, what he really wants is a diamond lead.

West	North	East	South
			1♣
pass	1♥	pass	1NT
pass	3NT	dbl	

Here, East hasn't taken a bid prior to his double. What gives? What he's asking for here is a lead of *dummy's* suit, hearts. His hand is something like:

♠ 6 3 ♥ A Q J 10 9 ♦ 9 2 ♣ A 10 8 4

East planned to bid hearts naturally, but when North responded in that suit, he couldn't take immediate action as it would have been too risky. His double of 3NT instructs partner to lead dummy's first-bid suit, hearts, with the expectation of taking four hearts and the ♣A for at least a one-trick set.

Finally, there is an "out of the blue" double of 3NT, where no suit has been mentioned by either side. Suppose the auction goes:

West	North	East	South
			1NT
pass	3NT	dbl	

Assuming the opponents have not miscounted, they are going to have the 25-26 HCP generally required to make their contract, so the double must be based on a running suit or a one-loser suit with a side entry. Rather than lead the traditional fourth-best from longest and strongest, you should try to deduce from your hand what partner's source of tricks is. Suppose your hand is:

♠ Q 9 7 2 ♥ 5 2 ♦ 8 6 3 ♣ 10 9 8 6

Without any noise from partner, you'd have led a spade or a club. The double implies a good, long suit that you cannot possibly know about because he hasn't had the chance to bid it. From what you're staring at that suit is likely to be hearts, since you know from North's failure to use Stayman that dummy is probably not going to have a four-card major.

However, change your hand to:

♠ 9 7 2 ♥ 5 4 2 ♦ Q 8 6 3 ♣ 10 8 6

and now it's not so easy to figure out. Partner could have any of spades, hearts or clubs, although the suit he wants led will probably be a major more often than not. Now the opening lead boils down to an absolute guess.

- d) Doubles of slams. These are a bit more complicated. Sometimes the opponents may be well beyond their depth, and the lead isn't going to matter. However, if they haven't gone totally insane, partner's double will be asking for a specific lead.

Here are the do's and don'ts in this scenario, assuming the opponents wind up in a suit contract:

- Do not lead a trump.
- Do not lead any suit that you or partner have bid.
- If there is only one unbid suit, do not lead it. That is the expected lead, and if partner wants that lead, he will pass.

Now for the do's:

- If partner has made a preemptive bid and then doubles a slam, it is usually because he has a void somewhere. A great player like you can usually figure out where the void is by looking at your hand.
- When partner hasn't acted and the opponents have only bid one suit (other than trump), lead that suit.
- When in doubt, lead dummy's first-bid suit.

An example of a lead-directing double against a slam came up recently. West held a good distributional hand:

♠ 7 5 ♥ A K Q 10 8 7 6 3 ♦ K Q 4 ♣ —

The bidding went:

West (you)	North	East	South
	1♦	pass	1♠
4♥	5♣	pass	5♦
pass	6♦	pass	pass
?			

Your partner is on lead. Declarer is missing both the king and queen of his trump suit and has still gone on to 6♦. It's very likely from the bidding that he is void in hearts, so it seems unlikely you're going to take a heart trick along with your sure trump winner.

This is where the lead-directing double is useful, because you *will* defeat 6♦ on a club lead regardless of how many hearts North

has. You'll be able to ruff in with the ♦4 at Trick 1, and you'll still have the king and queen of trumps.

The message sent by the double is, "Don't lead hearts". It's usually based on a void and whichever of partner's black suits is longer is the one you'll probably have none of.

The double here gives you an excellent chance of beating the contract immediately, as partner will work out to lead a club the vast majority of the time. The only time he's in a guess situation is when he has an equal number of spades and clubs.

EXAMPLE HANDS: COUNTING YOUR TRICKS AND THEIRS

When you defend a hand, once the opening lead is made, you'll have three sources of information:

1. the card partner has led, which tells you a fair amount about everyone's holdings in that suit,
2. what you see in dummy, and
3. how the bidding has gone, which is going to tell you quite a bit about what declarer might have.

Each of our hands will illustrate how you can use this information, some early in the play and others later on.

HAND 1

South dealer

♠ A J 7 3
 ♥ 8 7 2
 ♦ Q
 ♣ K J 8 6 4

♠ 10 8 4
 ♥ K Q 6
 ♦ A K J 10
 ♣ 7 5 2

♠ 6
 ♥ J 9 4
 ♦ 9 8 6 4 3 2
 ♣ Q 9 3

♠ K Q 9 5 2
 ♥ A 10 5 3
 ♦ 7 5
 ♣ A 10

W N E S

West	North	East	South
			1♠
pass	2♦	pass	2♥
pass	4♠	all pass	

Whenever responder has a fit with opener's major and the values for an opening bid, he should bid his longest suit first and then jump to game. That will allow the partnership to consider a slam if opener has a better than average hand (17+ points).

THE PLAY

The objective for the defense is somehow to get the four tricks needed to beat 4♠. West tries to visualize a layout where it can be accomplished, and he knows a couple of things from his own hand and the bidding, namely:

Partner can only have 3-4 HCP, as he has 11 and they are in game.

Prospects are not good for scoring tricks in the red suits, hearts and diamonds.

The singleton $\heartsuit Q$ will fall on the first round of the suit and West's three small hearts mean that either declarer will have all the top winners in that suit or any finesses that need to be taken will succeed.

In all likelihood, the defense will need to get the required four tricks out of the spade and club suits. Leading the singleton diamond is likely to be an exercise in futility, as there isn't much chance of partner holding

the ace. In clubs, either the queen or ace from partner will help create tricks in that suit.

If West starts out with the ♣6, fourth best from his long suit, it goes to the queen and declarer's ace. South goes to dummy in a red suit and plays a low trump to one of his honors, taken by the ace. West now cashes the ♣K and persists with the jack, bringing South down to the same number of trumps when he ruffs. When another round of spades is played, declarer gets the bad news and has no winning option. If he forces out the jack with a third trump, dummy is out of spades and a fourth club promotes a trump for West when South has to ruff again. If instead he abandons the trump suit, West scores a ruff on the second round of diamonds.

This hand illustrates how you can gauge how much partner has from the bidding, and thus get an accurate read on which suits are the best source of developing tricks for your side.

HAND 2

East dealer

♠ 9 6

♥ K Q 10 9 7 6 5

♦ K J 10

♣ 5

♠ Q 8 7 5 2

♥ 4

♦ Q 8 5 3 2

♣ Q 6

♠ J 4 3

♥ A J 8

♦ 7 6

♣ A K J 10 8

W

N

E

S

♠ A K 10

♥ 3 2

♦ A 9 4

♣ 9 7 4 3 2

West	North	East	South
1♥	pass	1♣	pass
4♥	all pass	1NT	pass

1NT is the correct rebid on the East hand according to most books as opener's hand is a balanced 12-14 with no four-card major. However, at the table, some players would either repeat the clubs or choose the three-card raise in hearts because of concerns about the small dou-

bleton in diamonds. It makes no difference to the final contract here, though, as West is going to insist on hearts as the trump suit.

THE PLAY

North has two five card suits and begins with the ♠5, his fourth best. South wins the first couple of tricks with the ♠K and ♠A and now has to pause and consider the entire landscape. Where are two more tricks for the defense coming from?

Hearts? No, because the opponents have at least a nine-card fit, so there's no possible loser for declarer in that suit.

Clubs? No again, because no matter where the remaining three cards are, dummy will have at least four tricks in that suit.

Spades? Here South needs to use the information from the opening lead. Since North played the five (fourth-best) and then the two, he has five of them. Declarer is now out of spades and will be ruffing the next one played.

The only way to defeat the contract, then, is to get two diamond tricks. If North has the ♦K, there will be no problem. But the queen may also be sufficient. South plays back a small diamond (Bottom of Something) and West is now on a guess. If he goes up with the king, the game makes. Having seen South play the ♠AK already, however, he might assume North has the ♦A and put in the jack. That loses to the queen and another diamond is returned, taken with your ace.

Now, earlier in the lesson, I warned that you shouldn't underlead aces against suit contracts. That relates mainly to opening leads. Later on in the hand, when you have more information to go by, you occasionally have to resort to desperate measures, as is the case here.

HAND 3

South dealer

♠ A J 6 3
♥ 10 9 8 7
♦ J 6 2
♣ 7 5

♠ Q 9 4
♥ J 6 4 3
♦ A K 10
♣ A 8 3

♠ K 10 8 2
♥ 5 2
♦ Q 8 7 5 3
♣ K 2

♠ 7 5
♥ A K Q
♦ 9 4
♣ Q J 10 9 6 4

N

W

S

E

West	North	East	South
			1♣
pass	1♥	pass	2♣
pass	3NT	all pass	

Some players might opt for an immediate jump in notrump, but North correctly looks for a 4-4 heart fit before settling into the notrump game.

THE PLAY

With a couple of possible entries, East starts out with the ♦5 from his long suit. That goes to the jack and declarer’s king. South then goes to dummy with a heart and runs the ♣Q in a losing finesse.

East has a pretty accurate read on the hand at this point.. He sees three heart winners in dummy and the club suit will provide five more. What’s the scoop in diamonds? North must have an original holding of ♦AK10, since the jack partner contributed on the first trick was his highest card (with both the jack and the ten West would have played the ten).

Since declarer has more than enough tricks if he regains the lead, East must turn to the spade suit in his attempt to beat the contract. He switches to the ♠2, and partner takes the ace.

The question for West now is whether to persist in spades or revert to diamonds, since partner’s original lead could have been from a stronger suit. The answer lies in the spot card played to the last trick. Partner’s low spade (Bottom of Something) indicates that he’d very much like you

If West heeds the message of partner's low card and continues spades, the defense nets four tricks in that suit plus the ♣K for down one. If he goes back to diamonds, the contract makes with two overtricks.

Fast dealer

♠ A J 9 5	♠ Q 8 4	♠ 7 3
♥ Q 10 9	♥ 4 3 2	♥ K J 7 5
♦ K Q 3	♦ 7 6	♦ A J 10 9 4
♣ J 9 8	♣ A 10 7 5 3	♣ K 2

♠ K 10 6 2
♥ A 8 6
♦ 8 5 2
♣ Q 6 4

West	North	East	South
		1♦	pass
1♠	pass	2♦	pass
3NT	all pass		

West doesn't have a full club stopper, but since he has 13 HCP the partnership should be in game. There can't be an eight-card major-suit fit and the hand is too balanced for there to be a sure eleven tricks in diamonds, so responder ventures 3NT and awaits the opening lead.

THE PLAY

You lead the ♣5 and declarer plays low from dummy, guaranteeing that he will have a stopper in that suit. South takes the queen and plays back the six, the higher of the remaining two cards.

Before automatically grabbing the ace, you need to realize that declarer has the remaining high card because if partner started life with both the queen and jack, he would have played the lower of his touching honors at Trick 1.

It's possible declarer started with four clubs and South only two, but if that is the case, your side won't be able to defeat 3NT. However, if partner has a third club and a quick entry, you'll then be able to score five tricks, but only if you duck the second round of the suit.

West has a club, a spade and five diamonds, but needs to get additional tricks in the heart suit. He will force out the ♥A, in the hope that clubs are 4-4, but partner wins and plays his last club, whereupon you take the ace along with the two low cards for down one.

HAND 5

West dealer

	♠ 8 5 2	
	♥ 10 8 5	
	♦ Q 9 7 2	
	♣ A K 2	
♠ A Q 9		♠ K J 7 4
♥ J 7		♥ K Q 6 3
♦ A 6 5		♦ K 8 3
♣ Q 10 8 6 5		♣ J 9
	♠ 10 6 3	
	♥ A 9 4 2	
	♦ J 10 4	
	♣ 7 4 3	

West	North	East	South
1♣	pass	1♥	pass
1NT	pass	3NT	all pass

Opener's 1NT rebid shows a balanced minimum without either heart support or a four-card spade suit. Responder has 13 HCP as well, and since there is no possibility of an eight-card major-suit fit, he leaps to the notrump game.

THE PLAY

This hand originally appeared in Lesson 2 of this book. Here, it will illustrate the complete process of defending a hand effectively.

The first aspect is how the opening lead may differ if the opponents are playing in notrump rather than a suit contract. If they were in 4♥ or 4♠, for example, the ♣A would be an automatic lead. Here, though, they've reached 3NT and the defense needs to find three other tricks. It's also a suit declarer has bid, so that's another strike against it. In fact, a top club will make declarer's job easy as he'll play the suit back and develop three extra winners very quickly. It's better to lead unbid suits against notrump, hence North selects the ♦2 as the opening salvo.

West plays low from dummy on the first trick and the second critical point in the hand comes when South plays his card. He goes up with an honor, of course, following the principle of third hand high. Unlike when you are making the opening lead, or when the first trick has already been won on table, however, you play the *lower* of touching honors when declarer calls for a small card from dummy. If South played the jack, partner would assume that declarer had the ten-spot and play accordingly. However, when the ten drives out the ace, he'll realize South has the jack as well since West was unable to win the first trick with a lower card.

Declarer has only six quick winners and has to go after clubs for three additional tricks. North takes the first club and continues with another round of diamonds, so the defenders now will have two diamond winners to go with the ♣AK.

When North plays the fourth diamond, South can make an informative discard and leaves no margin for error, signaling with the ♥9, the highest spot card he can afford. North will trustingly lead one and the defense will prevail, getting five tricks before declarer can collect his nine.

HAND 6

East dealer

♠ K J 8	♠ A Q 10 6 3	♠ 9 5 4
♥ Q 10 7 2	♥ A 4 3	♥ K J 9 6
♦ K 9 7	♦ J 10 8 5	♦ A
♣ J 9 2	♣ 6	♣ K Q 10 8 3
	<div>W N E S</div>	
	♠ 7 2	
	♥ 8 5	
	♦ Q 6 4 3 2	
	♣ A 7 5 4	

West	North	East	South
		1♣	pass
1♥	1♠	2♥	all pass

North has a good enough suit and distribution to overcall 1♠, but partner doesn't have enough of a fit to compete after opener supports West's hearts.

THE PLAY

Not knowing where the ♠K is, North can't really lead either major, so the choices are trying the ♦J from the broken sequence, or firing out the singleton club in an attempt to get a ruff. Since the opponents have lingered in a partscore, there is enough room for about 5-7 HCP in partner's hand, so he leads the ♣6.

Indeed, South has the ♣A and knows from dummy that partner is likely short in clubs. However, he must also do two things before automatically returning a club at Trick 2. First is to consider why the overcaller hasn't led his own suit and the next is to figure out a way to come to the six tricks needed to defeat the contract.

If North had either the AK or KQJ of his suit, that would surely have been his lead. Since he began with a club instead, his spades will be headed by the KQ or AQ.

What is the outlook for taking tricks? The defense has the ♣A, there will be none in diamonds and probably just the one natural heart trick,

if that. Tallying it all up, they'll need two spade tricks plus a heart and a ruff in each hand to defeat them in 2♥.

If South returns a club, his side gets an immediate ruff but will be unable to negotiate its winners in the spade suit. He'll never get back on lead and after drawing trumps, declarer will be able to pitch spades on dummy's club winners.

To get the maximum harvest of tricks, South must return partner's suit at Trick 2 (usually a good policy to follow). He'll play the ♠7, the top card from his doubleton. Declarer will likely try the jack, whereupon partner takes the ♠Q and ♠A and leads a third spade (the three, to emphasize that he wants a club back). South trumps the third spade, and with business taken care of in the spade suit, *now* he can give partner his club ruff to defeat their contract.

This hand is a good one to illustrate the necessary process of counting the tricks you have to take, and also of reasoning out why partner did not lead the suit he bid.

HAND 7

East dealer

♠ 8 5 2
♥ K 7 3
♦ Q 9 7 5 4
♣ 10 6

♠ K Q J 10 7 6
♥ 8 5
♦ 8 3
♣ A 9 3

♠ A 9
♥ Q J 6 4
♦ A K 10
♣ K Q J 5

♠ 4 3
♥ A 10 9 2
♦ J 6 2
♣ 8 7 4 2

W

N

E

S

West	North	East	South
3NT	dbl	2NT all pass	pass

Opposite partner’s 20-21 points, West’s five-count brings his side’s total up to at least 25, which should be enough to give 3NT some kind of play.

North doubles to announce a long suit and suggest that partner try to find it rather than make his normal lead. While declarer might have enough tricks in the red suits to make the contract, it’s a chance he has to take to steer partner onto the right track.

THE PLAY

From the South hand, it’s fairly safe to assume that partner’s suit is spades, and he therefore leads the ♠4, top of the doubleton. This will beat the contract three tricks, as declarer can only manage the ♠A and five diamonds before having to give up the lead.

Without the double and the spade lead, declarer can make the contract by forcing out the ♣A, taking five diamonds, three clubs and one spade.

HAND 8

West dealer

	♠ 7 6 5 4	
	♥ J 6 4	
	♦ 9 6 3	
	♣ 9 5 2	
♠ A K J 2		♠ Q 10 9
♥ K 5		♥ A 9 8 3
♦ K Q J 5		♦ 8 7 4 2
♣ J 10 6		♣ 7 3
	♠ 8 3	
	♥ Q 10 7 2	
	♦ A 10	
	♣ A K Q 8 4	



West	North	East	South
1♦	pass	1♥	2♣
dbl	all pass		

West was going to jump to 2NT on his second bid, until South stuck his nose in with the 2♣ overcall. Although it wouldn't seem 100% obvious at first glance, opener should double. With 18 HCP in his hand and responder showing at least six, the opponents are at the two-level on a combined 16 HCP or perhaps even less.

THE PLAY

West has two sequences, and picks the one with the quick winners, leading the ♠A. East plays the ten, which is either going to be a doubleton or an equal honor. Now comes the ♥K, on which East encourages with the ♥8, followed by another heart to the ace.

When East plays back a third round of hearts, it will be his highest one, the nine, to suggest his encouragement in spades was based on holding the queen. West takes his ruff and then returns a low spade. A fourth heart allows him to score the ♣10, and best of all, there is no way to avoid a diamond loser so the defense scores a trick there as well, for a nifty two-trick set when no game makes their way.

Although South came to grief, there was nothing wrong with his action. He won't often get doubled and it takes pinpoint defense for East-West to get all the tricks they're entitled to.

HAND 9

West dealer

♠ 5
♥ A 2
♦ Q 10 7 6 5
♣ K 9 6 5 2

♠ A K 8 7 3 2
♥ Q 7
♦ 8 3 2
♣ A 8

N

W E

S

♠ J 10 6
♥ K J 8 6 5
♦ A J 9
♣ 7 3

♠ Q 9 4
♥ 10 9 4 3
♦ K 4
♣ Q J 10 4

West	North	East	South
pass	1♠	pass	3♠
pass	4♠	all pass	

South makes an invitational raise and opener has a tough decision to make. The sixth spade is good, but the point-count is minimum and who knows what the queen-doubleton of hearts is worth. Opener takes the plunge as he is playing teams and he knows the pair at the other table are aggressive bidders.

THE PLAY

East leads the ♣Q. Declarer wins with the ace and then plays the ♥Q at Trick 2.

As West takes his ace, he takes stock of the number of tricks the defense is likely to have. They should get another club, and his singleton trump suggests that partner might have a trick there, but that still only adds up to three. North can establish a long heart in dummy with the ♦A as a way to get there.

So West has to focus on diamonds for a possible trick, hoping that partner has the king and needing to dislodge the ace. He cashes the ♣K and returns a diamond at Trick 4. Declarer now plays off the ♠AK and finds out there is going to be a trump loser. He has to depend on the hearts to break so that he can discard both his diamond losers, but when West shows out on the third round of hearts, the contract has to go down.

HAND 10

East dealer

	♠ J 10 9 6	
	♥ K J 7	
	♦ 8 6 4	
	♣ 10 8 6	
♠ 7 5 4 3		♠ A
♥ 9		♥ 10 8 6 5 3 2
♦ A 7 5 3 2		♦ K 9
♣ K 5 2		♣ 9 7 4 3
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ K Q 8 2	
	♥ A Q 4	
	♦ Q J 10	
	♣ A Q J	

West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	pass	2NT
		all pass	

With 5 HCP, it will be right far more often than not to bid game when partner opens 2NT. The only question for the North hand is whether to look for a spade fit with Stayman or just to bid 3NT. With his balanced distribution, he decides nine tricks could well be easier than ten.

THE PLAY

Does West lead a fourth-best diamond or go with the less enterprising but perhaps safer choice of a spade? With the ♣K as a nearly certain entry, he starts out with a diamond.

East wins and plays a second diamond back, and West takes his ace and clears the suit by leading back the ♦2 — suit preference for clubs. Declarer needs two pieces of good fortune to succeed now: East has to have both the ♠A and the ♣K. When he plays on spades, his first prayer is answered and now he has three more tricks to get up to eight. But he still needs the club finesse and when that loses, 3NT goes down.

Does that mean North should have bid 3♣ and eventually played in the 4-4 spade fit? Actually, 4♠ produces an even worse result for North-South. The lead will be a heart, and when East gets in with the ♠A he plays back his highest heart to show a card in diamonds. The defenders will get a spade, the ♦AK, two heart ruffs and the ♣K for down three.

THE BASICS OF DEFENSE

No bells or whistles, just the plain, simple stuff to get you started on the road to becoming a good defender. In eight easy lessons, this book covers the things you really need to know: opening leads and signaling against notrump and suit contracts, second- and third-hand play, the Rule of Eleven, discards, and basic strategy. Quizzes and example hands make the whole process of learning both fun and productive.

Praise for Bill Treble's *'Getting into the Bidding'*

An excellent intermediate-level book covering contested auctions. The focus is on providing a foundation for choosing and using methods – which are available, which are popular, and what are the trade-offs among them. - The Bridge World



BILL TREBLE lives in Winnipeg, Canada, and teaches bridge with his wife, Sue. He is an expert player and two-time winner of the Canadian Open Pairs Championship, in 2000 and 2002. Sue feels Bill would be a better player if he paid more attention to the advice in his own books.

