

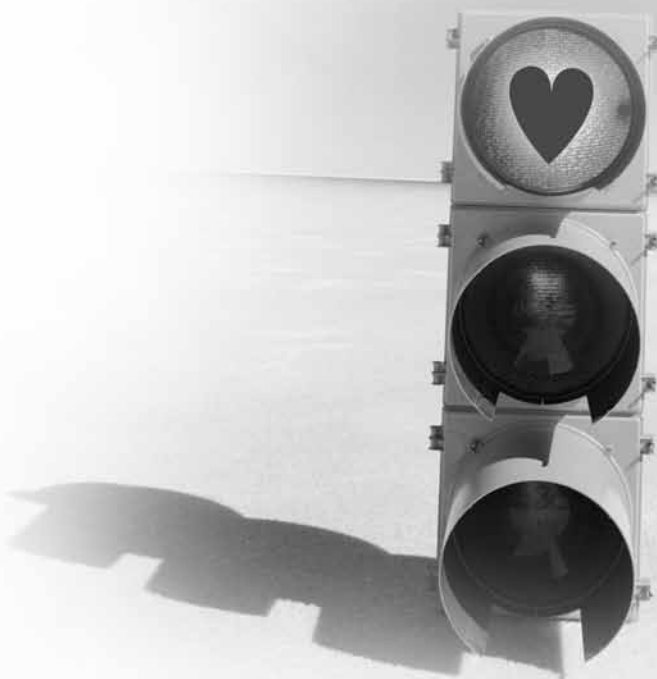
DEFENSIVE SIGNALING AT BRIDGE

DAVID BIRD



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D A V I D B I R D



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INTRODUCTION

There are two main ways of writing a book on defensive signaling. One is to present an encyclopedia of signaling methods, offering a range of options for each situation. The reader can then pick and choose from the splendid goods on the stall, creating his own signaling system. I have followed a different approach, recommending a single comprehensive system of signaling. When there is a worthwhile alternative, I mention this as an aside.

Suppose you ask a group of bridge players what is the purpose of a defensive signal. At least half of them will reply: 'It tells partner what to do.' This is not a good answer. It makes about as much sense as the dummy telling declarer what to do! How can a player know the best defense when he can see only half of the twenty-six cards owned by the partnership?

A defensive signal should say something about your own thirteen cards, to assist partner with his defense. For example, your partner leads a spade honor, and you have the opportunity to signal with a spot card in the suit. You will normally convey some message about your spade holding – either attitude (whether or not you would like a continuation) or count (whether you have an even or odd number of cards in the suit). Your partner must then decide how to defend, with one eye on his own thirteen cards. In military terms, think of your signal as a message from a reconnaissance patrol, not as an order to be followed.

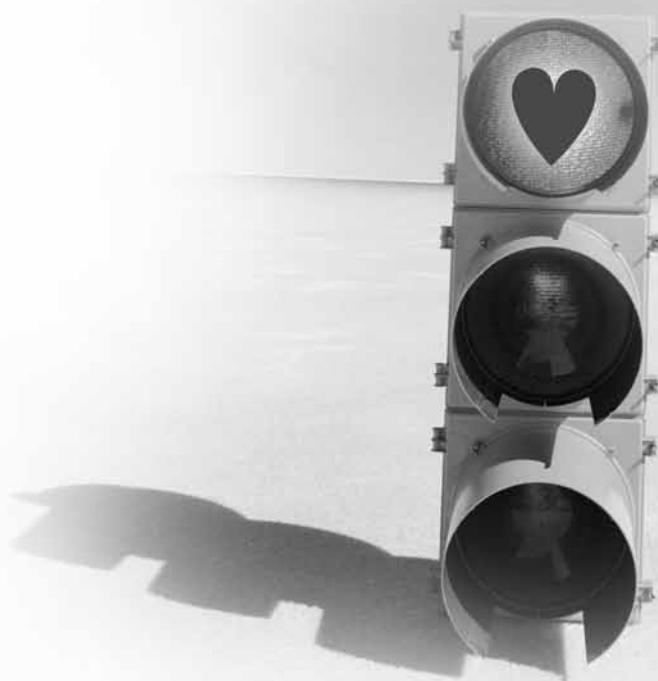
Most of the chapters are followed by a quiz. The answer to each signaling problem is followed by its full 52-card diagram to demonstrate the effectiveness of the recommended signal. To make the book a bit different from others of the same genre, I have finished with a chapter that looks at the signaling methods of eight world-class pairs.

My warm thanks are due to Maureen Dennison, who very kindly checked the text for me and made some valuable suggestions.

David Bird

P A R T 1

RECOMMENDED
SIGNALING
METHODS





THE BASICS OF SIGNALING

An effective signaling system makes full use of three different types of defensive signal. Let's take a look at them.

An attitude signal tells partner whether you would like him to continue that suit at his next opportunity. You play a high spot card to encourage him to continue, perhaps because you hold a useful honor in the suit. A low card would discourage a continuation.

A count signal tells partner whether you hold an even or odd number of cards in the suit led. You play a high spot card when you hold an even number of cards, a low spot card with an odd number of cards.

A suit preference signal is entirely different. It says nothing about the suit in which the signal is given; it directs partner's attention to one of two other suits. For example, if spades are trumps and you signal with a high club, you show interest in the higher of the other two suits: hearts. A low club would show interest in the lower remaining suit: diamonds.

The most important decision to make, when deciding what system of signals to play, is when to use attitude signals and when to use count signals. The most popular method, and one of the best, is to use attitude signals when partner leads to a trick, and count signals when declarer leads to a trick. Suit preference signals are used less often, in special situations where the other types of signal would not be helpful.

THE ATTITUDE SIGNAL

When partner leads a low card to a trick, you will often have to play a high card in an attempt to win the trick or at least force a higher card from the next player. In that case you will have no opportunity to signal. The situation is different when partner leads a high honor. Look at this deal:

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

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

West leads the ♦A, which is almost certainly from an ace-king combination. East can see that a continuation of the suit may set up declarer's ♦Q. He therefore follows with his lowest spot card, the ♦4, to say that (from the evidence he can see) he does not want a diamond continuation. West switches to the ♥10 and no damage has been done in the diamond suit. Declarer will draw two rounds of trumps and continue with three rounds of clubs, hoping to discard a diamond on the fourth round. Not today! East will ruff the third club and return a diamond for one down.

When East signals with the ♦4, he is not 'telling partner what to do'; he is merely giving the best advice he can when looking at his own cards. If West happens to hold the ♦AKQ he will doubtless continue diamonds anyway.

Suppose that East held ♦Q94 instead. He would then play an encouraging ♦9 on the first trick. West would continue with king and another diamond and the defenders would claim three tricks in the suit.

Similarly, East would play high from $\spadesuit 94$, again encouraging a diamond continuation. His intention on this occasion would be to ruff the third round.

THE COUNT SIGNAL

When declarer is playing a suit, it would be a waste of time to give an attitude signal. Why tell partner that you want the suit to be played (or not played) when declarer is already doing it! It therefore makes good sense to play count signals when declarer leads a suit and you do not have to attempt to win the trick.

If you are not familiar with this type of signal, you may wonder what use it can be. One general benefit is that it helps the defenders to ‘obtain a complete count’, in other words, to determine the shape of each player’s hand. Once this information has been gathered, defense becomes much easier. (We will look at some examples in a later chapter.)

There is one particular situation where a count signal carries a more direct benefit – when declarer has a long side suit in an otherwise entry-less dummy:

\spadesuit 10 9 8 4

\heartsuit 9 3 2

\diamondsuit J 10 5

\clubsuit 7 6 2

\spadesuit 7 6 2

\heartsuit 8 6 5

\diamondsuit 7 3

\clubsuit K Q 10 9 4

N
E

W
S

\spadesuit A K Q J

\heartsuit A 10 7

\diamondsuit A K 8 4

\clubsuit J 5

\spadesuit 5 3

\heartsuit K Q J 4

\diamondsuit Q 9 6 2

\clubsuit A 8 3

West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	2NT

You are sitting East on this deal and partner leads the $\spadesuit 10$, South winning with the $\spadesuit J$. What is your plan for the defense when declarer leads the $\clubsuit J$?

It is obvious to hold up your ♣A on the first round, otherwise declarer will score four club tricks and make the contract easily. Declarer continues with the ♣5 to dummy's ♣K. What should you do now?

The correct answer is: 'I haven't the faintest idea what to do, unless we are playing count signals!'

On the present deal, declarer has only two clubs. If you hold up the ♣A for second time, he will thank you kindly and score nine tricks. Win the second round of clubs, switching to the ♥K, and he will go one down.

Suppose that South held three clubs, with a trick fewer in spades — a hand like this:

♠ A K J 4 ♥ A 10 ♦ A K 8 4 ♣ J 7 5

Now the winning defense would be to hold up the ♣A for a second time, restricting declarer to two club tricks. If you failed to do so, he would score four club tricks and end with an overtrick.

You need to know how many clubs declarer holds. He is not going to tell you, so your partner must signal his own count in the suit. When the cards lie as in the full diagram, West will play the ♣2 on the first round and the ♣6 on the next round. Low-high means an odd number of clubs. So, he has three clubs and declarer only has two. You must therefore take the ♣A on the second round. When South holds the alternative hand with three clubs, West would play high-low to show his doubleton club and you would then hold up the ♣A until the third round. This is one of the most essential techniques of accurate defense.

THE SUIT PREFERENCE SIGNAL

There are various situations where the value of an attitude or count signal would be very limited and the most useful signal is to suggest a switch to partner. In other words, you give a suit preference signal. One such occasion is when you can take no further tricks in the suit that has been led:

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

Since East wants a switch to the lower of the other two side suits, he plays his lowest heart (the ♥3) on the first trick. Partner duly switches to a club and East wins with the ♣Q. He plays the ♦K next, to clear a diamond trick, and declarer can pack his bags.

To construct an effective signaling system, you must agree with your partner which type of signal is appropriate in any given situation. It is quite hopeless if one defender thinks he is giving an attitude signal but his partner reads it as suit preference! In the next few chapters we will be laying down some clear rules, aiming to avoid any such misunderstandings.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- An attitude signal tells partner whether you would welcome a continuation of the suit that has been led. A high card encourages a continuation; a low card discourages a continuation.
- A count signal tells partner whether you have an even or odd number of cards in the suit led. A high card shows an even number; a low card shows an odd number.
- A suit preference signal tells partner which of two other suits you would like him to play. A high card requests the higher suit; a low card requests the lower suit.
- A common agreement is to play attitude signals on partner's leads, count signals on declarer's leads.



ATTITUDE SIGNALS IN SUIT CONTRACTS

In this chapter we will look in detail at various situations in suit contracts where attitude signals work well. A subsequent chapter will deal with attitude signals in notrump contracts, where different considerations apply.

In these early chapters, we will assume that opening leads follow the style advocated in the Standard American Yellow Card (SAYC) system. From two or more touching honors, the top honor is led (the ace from A-K and the king from K-Q). From an interior sequence, the higher of touching cards is led (the jack from K-J-10, the ten from K-10-9). Otherwise, the defenders lead fourth best from a suit headed by at least one honor (for example, the three from K-10-8-3-2). From three low cards (9-6-2) the lowest card is led against a suit contract, the highest against a notrump contract. From four or more spot cards, the second best card is led (the seven from 9-7-4-2).

PARTNER LEADS LOW AND DUMMY WINS THE TRICK

Suppose partner leads a low card from a combination headed by one or more honors and the trick is won in the dummy. Partner may then need to know whether you hold an honor and you would welcome a continuation of the suit at a later stage. This is a common position:

♠ 8 3

♥ Q 10 7 2

♦ A Q 8 6

♣ A 6 4

♠ K J 6 4

♥ A 9

♦ 7 5 2

♣ K J 10 3

N
S
W
E

♠ A Q 10 9 7 5

♥ J 5

♦ K 9 4

♣ Q 5

♠ 2

♥ K 8 6 4 3

♦ J 10 3

♣ 9 8 7 2

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

West gives his side a chance by finding the excellent lead of the ♥2. Dummy wins with the ♥A and East follows with the ♥8, an attitude signal to encourage a further play in this suit. (Note that he signals with the highest affordable card, to make the signal as clear as possible.) Declarer draws trumps and forces out the ♣A. Because of East’s signal on the first trick, West continues with the ♥7 to East’s ♥K. A diamond switch then puts the contract one down.

Suppose East had held:

♠ 2 ♥ J 8 6 4 3 ♦ K 10 3 ♣ 9 8 7 2

instead. He would have played a discouraging ♥3 at Trick 1. When West won with the ♣A, he would know that East did not hold the ♥K; he would therefore switch to the ♦6, hoping that East held the ♦K and the defenders could score three diamond tricks.

When dummy wins the trick with the ace or king, you are likely to encourage when you hold the king or queen. This is only a general guide, since your decision may be dictated by your holdings in other suits.

PARTNER LEADS THE ACE, KING OR QUEEN

When partner leads one of the three top honors, you will usually have the opportunity to give an attitude signal. (The exception is when he leads a

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

(assumed to be from the ace-king) and you hold the queen of the suit or a doubleton. Sometimes, however, you encourage partner to cash his remaining honor because you will then have the setting tricks elsewhere. Take the East cards on this deal:

♠ 10 9 8 4
♥ 3
♦ J 10 5
♣ A K 7 6 2

♠ A Q 7 6
♥ Q 10 7 6
♦ 7 3
♣ Q 10 4

N
S
W
E

♠ K 2
♥ A 8 5 4 2
♦ A K 8 4
♣ J 5

♠ J 5 3
♥ K J 9
♦ Q 9 6 2
♣ 9 8 3

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

West leads the ♣A against the heart game. How should you signal in the East seat?

If you look only at your club holding, you will conclude that there is no reason to encourage a club continuation. You will discourage with the ♣3. What do you think West will do next? He may well switch to the ♠10, hoping that you have the ♠K over dummy's tenace and a spade trick can be set up before declarer establishes a discard on the ♣Q. Disaster! Declarer will win with the ♠K, draw one round of trumps with the ace and then play the ♠AQ to discard his remaining club. The game will be made.

You can see two certain trump tricks in your hand and should therefore encourage partner to continue clubs. He will play the ♣K, on which you will complete your high-low. When partner plays a third round of clubs, he will be surprised to see you follow suit. No matter! He will soon cheer up when you produce two trump tricks and the heart game is defeated.

So, remember that you often have to consider the deal as a whole before deciding whether to encourage partner's opening lead.

DO NOT ENCOURAGE WHEN A CONTINUATION IS DANGEROUS

Sometimes you have a useful honor in the suit that partner has led but a continuation may set up a winner in dummy. Look at the diamond suit here:

	♠ A Q 5	
	♥ J 7	
	♦ J 7 6 2	
	♣ A 9 3 2	
♠ 6 4		♠ 8 3
♥ 9 6 4 3		♥ K Q 10 5
♦ A K 9 4		♦ Q 8 3
♣ K 8 4		♣ Q 10 7 5
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: center;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> WNE </div> <div style="width: 100%; height: 100%; position: relative;"> <div style="position: absolute; top: 50%; left: 50%; transform: translate(-50%, -50%);">S</div> </div> </div> </div>	
	♠ K J 10 9 7 2	
	♥ A 8 2	
	♦ 10 5	
	♣ J 6	

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

West, your partner, leads the ♦A against South's 4♠. Suppose you encourage with the ♦8 and West continues with the ♦K. The contract will then be made. Even if West switches elsewhere at Trick 3, declarer will ruff a third round of diamonds subsequently. This will drop your ♦Q and dummy's ♦J will be established for a club discard.

Partner is quite likely to hold four diamonds and when the dummy holds ♦Jxxx you should encourage only when you hold a doubleton. On the present deal you will discourage with the ♦3. Suppose West then switches to a trump, won in the dummy, and declarer leads a second round of diamonds towards his hand. You will rise with the ♦Q, to prevent this card succumbing to a ruff on the next round, and the contract will be defeated.

Sometimes you have a favorable holding in the suit led but you can see that a switch to a different suit will be beneficial. That's the case here:

Again you are sitting East. Partner leads the ♣Q against the spade game and declarer plays low from dummy. How do you signal?

If you look only at the club suit, it may seem obvious to encourage with the ♣9. A continuation of the ♠J will allow the contract to succeed, however. Declarer will cover with the ♣K, won with your ♣A. It will no longer be possible for the defenders to score two diamond tricks because you cannot play diamonds effectively from your side of the table. Declarer will ruff your club return, draw trumps and discard a diamond loser on the fourth round of hearts.

At Trick 1 you should discourage a club continuation by playing the $\clubsuit 4$. West will switch to diamonds and the contract will then go one down.

Suppose your hand was:

♠ 3 ♥ 9 8 7 5 2 ♦ A 10 6 5 ♣ A 8 4

instead. The best chance of beating the contract would be that you could take three club tricks and a diamond. You would therefore encourage a club continuation by signaling with the $\clubsuit 8$.

Sometimes you cannot be certain what the best defense will be and you have to follow the probabilities. Take the East cards here:

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

If declarer has two or more spades, a spade switch at Trick 2 is likely to defeat the contract. It will set up your ♠K before declarer can establish a discard on dummy's club suit. This is the best chance for the defense and you should therefore play a discouraging ♦3 on partner's ♦Q lead.

If declarer held only one spade and $\spadesuit 754$ of diamonds, a diamond continuation would be the only way to beat the contract; you would then score three diamonds and one club. That is much less likely, however. Your partner would have to hold $\heartsuit QJ10$ tripleton. If instead he had led from something like $\heartsuit QJ5$, declarer would cover the $\heartsuit J$ continuation and his $\heartsuit 10$ would win the third round of the suit.

Once again we see that you should study the whole deal before deciding whether to give an encouraging attitude signal. No one said that bridge is an easy game! Those defenders who prefer to follow simple rules such as ‘encourage if you have a high card’ will never scale the heights.

You sometimes hear inexperienced players saying that ‘the seven or higher is encouraging’. They may even go further and say that the ‘two, three or four are discouraging and the five and six are neutral.’

There is not much sense in any of that, as I'm sure you realize. If partner has led the ♥A and you want to encourage from ♥Q42, you have to play

West	North	East	South
pass	4♠	all pass	1♠

At the table, West took one look at his partner's ♥4 and assumed it

Why was West's defense wrong? He should have asked himself: where

Suppose instead that declarer held the missing ♥2 and had played the

you that he was discouraging in hearts. You could switch to diamonds then if you wished. (We will see in a later chapter how partner can suggest whether you switch to a club or a diamond, by signaling suit preference with his two remaining spot cards on the second round of hearts.)

MAKING YOUR SIGNAL AS CLEAR AS POSSIBLE

When are making a discouraging attitude signal, it is obvious to play your lowest card in the suit. This will be the clearest signal available, even if it happens to be a relatively high card such as a seven.

Some players forget that they should also make their signals as clear as possible when they want to encourage. Suppose you want to encourage from ♣K942. Unless you think that playing the ♣9 might cost you a trick, this is the card that you should use for your signal. If you signal meanly with the ♣4, and partner can see the ♣3 in his own hand or the dummy, he may conclude that your card is a discouraging signal.

Take the East seat for this deal:

♠ 9 5 3

♥ Q 10 3

♦ K Q J 5

♣ A 6 3

♠ A Q 4

♥ K 2

♦ 9 7 6 4

♣ Q J 10 7

N

W E

S

♠ J 10 7 6 2

♥ 7 5

♦ 8 2

♣ K 9 4 2

♠ K 8

♥ A J 9 8 6 4

♦ A 10 3

♣ 8 5

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

West leads the ♣Q against South’s game in hearts. Declarer plays the ♣A from dummy and you have the opportunity to signal. Suppose you regard the ♣4 as appropriate and South’s ♣5 completes the trick. Declarer will run the ♥Q to partner’s ♥K and he will have to decide what to do.

The ♣2 has not yet been played, it is true. From partner's point of view, however, South may have started with ♣K52; he may have deliberately hidden the ♣2 to make your ♣4 (which would then be from ♣984) look like an encouraging signal. If partner concludes that you are more likely to hold the ♠K than the ♣K, he will play the ♠A next. Declarer will then make the contract.

Whether you think that partner should play a spade or a club in this scenario, there is no need to present him with such a problem. Signal clearly with the ♣9 at Trick 1. When the trump finesse loses, West will play the ♣7 to your ♣K and a spade switch will then beat the contract.

DO NOT SIGNAL WITH A CARD THAT MAY COST A TRICK

Sometimes you cannot afford to signal encouragement clearly because it may cost a trick to play the only available high card in the suit. East faced a predicament on this deal:

♠ 9 8 4 2

♥ 8 4

♦ Q J 6

♣ 10 8 7 2

♠ K J 6 3

♥ K 10 5

♦ K 7 3

♣ A J 4

N
S
W
E

♠ Q 5

♥ A Q J 7 3 2

♦ 9 8 5

♣ K 3

♠ A 10 7

♥ 9 6

♦ A 10 4 2

♣ Q 9 6 5

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

West leads the ♦Q against South's game in hearts and declarer plays low in the dummy. Which card should you play in the East seat?

You would very much like a diamond continuation. Suppose you are tempted to give a clear signal and play the ♦10 on the first trick. If partner

has led from $\spadesuit QJ9(x)$, all will be well. He will continue diamonds and the defense will score whatever diamond tricks are their due. Suppose instead that the layout is as in diagram. Disaster! Whether partner continues with the $\heartsuit J$ or the $\heartsuit 6$, declarer will win the third round of the suit with his $\heartsuit 9$. You cannot afford to waste the $\heartsuit 10$ and must therefore play the $\heartsuit 4$, even though partner may think it is a discouraging signal.

How will your partner react when he sees your $\heartsuit 4$ and declarer's $\heartsuit 5$? He should note that the $\heartsuit 2$ is missing. If you began with $\heartsuit A42$, the die is already cast; declarer's $\heartsuit 109$ will pick off his $\heartsuit J$ on the second round of the suit. If you began with $\heartsuit A1042$, a diamond continuation will work well. If instead you held $\heartsuit A942$, you would have discouraged with the $\heartsuit 2$, expecting partner to continue anyway if he held the $\heartsuit QJ10$. On that basis, West should continue diamonds.

DO NOT BLINDLY OBEY PARTNER'S ATTITUDE SIGNAL

When partner either encourages or discourages a lead that you have made, he is giving his best advice from the cards that he can see. He cannot always tell you what to do next because he does not know what cards you hold. Remember that partner's signal is only part of the information you must digest before considering what plays to make in defense.

Suppose you are West on this deal:

\spadesuit 6 3
 \heartsuit A 10 4
 \diamondsuit K Q J 6
 \clubsuit 9 8 4 2

\spadesuit K J 10 7 4
 \heartsuit K J 5
 \diamondsuit 9 7 3
 \clubsuit K 7

N
S
W
E

\spadesuit A Q 9 8 2
 \heartsuit Q 7
 \diamondsuit A 10 4
 \clubsuit Q 5 3

\spadesuit 5
 \heartsuit 9 8 6 3 2
 \diamondsuit 8 5 2
 \clubsuit A J 10 6

West	North	East	South
pass	4 \spadesuit	all pass	1 \spadesuit

You lead the ♦K against South's spade game. Partner follows with the ♦2 and declarer plays the ♦4. How will you continue?

You should not say to yourself: 'Partner has discouraged my diamond lead; what switch should I make?' Instead, you should ask: 'Partner has given a discouraging signal. What is his likely diamond holding?' Well, what is he likely to hold in diamonds?

If East held ♦A852 or ♦A52, he would have played his highest spot card as an encouraging signal. If instead he held ♦A2, he would have overtaken with the ♦A on the first trick and returned the ♦2, allowing the defense to score three diamond tricks.

So, sitting West, you can tell that declarer holds the ♦A and has decided to hold up for some reason. He probably holds ♦Axx and is hoping for a switch to a different suit; he will then be able to discard his remaining diamond loser on a heart.

Sitting West, you are the one who knows that you hold ♦KQJ6 rather than ♦KQ106. Without this knowledge, East cannot encourage a diamond continuation. So, lead the ♦Q to the second trick and you will beat the contract. The defenders will score two diamond tricks and two aces.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Most players, particularly in North America, use attitude signals when partner has led to a trick.
- A high attitude signal means that, from what you can see, you think it will be a good idea to continue the suit at the first opportunity. A low attitude signal has the opposite meaning.
- Remember that defensive signals should not be taken as a command. Partner is describing his own hand, helping you to decide what to do. Partner cannot always know what is best for the defense, because he can see only half of the cards held by the defenders.
- Make your signals as clear as possible, choosing the highest card you can afford for an encouraging signal.
- When reading partner's signal, look at your own hand and the dummy to see which spot cards may have been available for partner.

QUIZ on attitude signals in suit contracts

1.

♠ 8 5

♥ 8 6

♦ A K 8 4 3

♣ Q 10 5 4

♠ Q 10 4 3 2

♥ K J 10 2

♦ J 2

♣ A 6

N

W E

S

West	North	East	South
pass	4♠	all pass	1♠

You lead the ♦A, East playing the ♦5 and South the ♦7. How will you continue the defense?

2.

♠ 3

♥ Q J 8 6 3

♦ 8 3

♣ A 10 9 7 5

♠ A 8 2

♥ A 9 2

♦ A 7 2

♣ K Q 3 2

N

W E

S

West	North	East	South
pass	4♠	all pass	2♠

Your partner leads the ♦K against South’s spade game, dummy playing low. Which card do you play on the first trick?

3.

♠ Q J 6 4
♥ A 8
♦ 10 4 2
♣ Q J 5 3

To Answer

♠ 5 2
♥ Q J 9 2
♦ A Q 7 3
♣ A 8 4



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

You lead the ♥Q, dummy winning with the ♥A, and East playing the ♥3. Declarer plays the ace and queen of trumps, all following. He continues with the ♣3 to East's ♣2 and his ♣K. How will you defend?

4.

♠ 9 8 5 2
♥ A K
♦ J 3
♣ K Q J 9 5

To Answer

♠ A J
♥ J 9 3
♦ A K 10 8 7 2
♣ 8 2



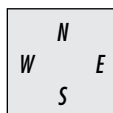
West	North	East	South
			1♠
2♦	3♦	pass	3♠
pass	4♠	all pass	

You lead the ♦A against the spade game, East playing the ♦4 and South the ♦5. What is your plan for the defense?

5.

♠ Q 6 4 3
♥ K J 8 2
♦ K 7
♣ Q 6 3

To Answer



♠ A 7
♥ 9 7 5 4
♦ Q 9 6 5
♣ J 8 7

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

Your partner leads the ♥A against South's game in spades. What is your plan for the defense?

6.

♠ Q J 8 6
♥ A 5
♦ 10 5 4
♣ Q J 10 6

To Answer

♠ 9
♥ Q J 10 4
♦ K Q 8 6
♣ A 8 5 4



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

North's 2NT shows a sound spade raise and you lead the ♥Q against the spade game. Declarer wins with dummy's ♥A, East playing the ♥2 and South the ♥7. Declarer draws trumps with the ace, king and queen, continuing with a club to the ♣K, as partner plays the ♣2. What is your plan for the defense?

Answers to the QUIZ

1. You lead the $\heartsuit A$ against $4\spadesuit$, partner playing the $\heartsuit 5$. This is the lowest diamond out, so you can read it as a discouraging signal. If declarer holds $\heartsuit Qxx$, you cannot afford to play the $\heartsuit K$ next. This would allow him to discard a club loser from dummy on the established $\heartsuit Q$. At Trick 2 you should switch to the $\clubsuit 4$, which will set up a fourth trick for the defense.

To Question

	\spadesuit Q 10 4 3 2	
	\heartsuit K J 10 2	
	\diamondsuit J 2	
	\clubsuit A 6	
\spadesuit 8 5		\spadesuit 7
\heartsuit 8 6		\heartsuit A 9 7 5 4
\diamondsuit A K 8 4 3		\diamondsuit 10 6 5
\clubsuit Q 10 5 4	<div> <div> <div>N</div> <div>W</div> <div>E</div> <div>S</div> </div> </div>	\clubsuit K J 9 7
	\spadesuit A K J 9 6	
	\heartsuit Q 3	
	\diamondsuit Q 9 7	
	\clubsuit 8 3 2	

2. West, your partner, leads the $\heartsuit K$ against $4\spadesuit$. Declarer plays low from the dummy. You should play the $\heartsuit 3$, a discouraging attitude card. If you mistakenly play the $\heartsuit 8$, West will continue with another diamond and declarer will score two diamond tricks, making the contract. Let's say that West switches to the $\heartsuit 4$. Declarer wins with the $\heartsuit K$ and leads a club to the $\clubsuit K$ and your $\clubsuit A$. What now? You must return the $\heartsuit 8$. Otherwise declarer can eliminate West's hearts and clubs and throw him in with a trump to lead from the $\heartsuit Q$.

To Question

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

3. Defending 4♠, you lead the ♥Q to dummy's ♥A, partner playing the ♥3. Declarer draws trumps with the ace and queen, continuing with the ♣3 to partner's ♣2 and his ♣K. You should win with the ♣A, just in case South's ♣K is a singleton. East's ♥3 attitude signal denies the ♥K, so there is no future in leading a low heart to partner for a diamond return. If you defend passively, declarer will score five spades, three clubs and the ♥AK. You should therefore switch to a low diamond, hoping that East holds the ♦K and you can take three diamond tricks.

To Question

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

4. Defending 4♠, you lead the ♦A, partner playing the ♦4. Although this is a discouraging card, you continue with the ♦K, partner playing the ♦6. Partner cannot hold the ♣A, after South's opening bid, so you need two trump tricks to beat the contract. The best chance is a third round of diamonds, even though this gives a ruff-and-discard! When declarer plays a trump to the king and your ace, you lead a fourth round of diamonds. East ruffs with the ♠10, overruffed with the ♠Q, and your ♠J becomes the setting trick. Remember that partner's attitude signal is not a command; it tells you something about his hand. You must then calculate the best defense.

To Question

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

	♠ K Q 7 6 3	
	♥ Q 7 6	
	♦ Q 5	
	♣ A 7 3	

	N	
W		E
	S	

5. West, your partner, leads the ♥A against 4♠. This is most likely to be from a doubleton holding. Since you hold the ace of trumps, you can see that a heart continuation will allow you to give partner a ruff. Despite your collection of spot cards in hearts, you therefore signal encouragement with the ♥9. Declarer wins the heart continuation in dummy and leads the ♠3. You rise with the trump ace (at the speed of light) and deliver a heart ruff. Partner's ♣A will then be the setting trick.

To Question

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

6. Sitting West, you lead the ♥Q against South's contract of 4♠. Dummy wins with the ♥A, East playing the ♥2 and declarer the ♥7. Declarer draws trumps in three rounds and continues with the ♣K, which you win with the ♣A. Partner has given you a discouraging signal in hearts, so a heart continuation will be fruitless. To beat the contract, you need to take three diamond tricks. You should therefore switch to the ♦6, which will avoid blocking the suit when East holds a doubleton ♦A.

To Question

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



COUNT SIGNALS IN SUIT CONTRACTS

Whether the contract is in a suit or notrump, you will generally signal your count when declarer leads to a trick. What is the benefit of such a signal? You let your partner know how many cards declarer holds in the suit. (Sometimes he may be uncertain whether declarer holds two cards or four, but the bidding or the logic of declarer's chosen line of play may resolve that problem.) This information may assist partner directly, allowing him to judge his play in the suit. It may also assist him indirectly, helping him to build a complete count of the hand.

That's enough general waffle on the subject! It is time to see some examples.

COUNT SIGNALS WHEN DECLARER PLAYS A SUIT

One tactic is common to both suit and notrump contracts: the hold-up when declarer plays a suit in an otherwise entry-less dummy. Here declarer is in 4♠. Sitting in the East seat, you must decide when to take your ♦A.

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

If declarer holds two diamonds, you should hold up the $\spadesuit A$ for one round. You would then win the second round of diamonds, restricting declarer to one diamond trick. But declarer cannot possibly hold two diamonds! Your partner's $\spadesuit 7$ is a count signal; it cannot be the lowest card from three because there is only one card missing (the $\spadesuit 8$) that is higher than the card he has already played.

So, you should take your ♦A immediately, preventing declarer from sneaking an undeserved diamond trick. You return a club to declarer's ♣A and he then leads the ♠K. How will you continue the defense?

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On the next deal, you use partner's count signal to prevent an entry, rather than to save a trick. Take the East cards here:

♠ J 8 2

♥ Q J 5

♦ 7 4 2

♣ Q 9 7 2

♠ 10 9 5 3

♥ 7 3

♦ Q J 10 8

♣ J 8 3

N

W E

S

♠ Q 7 6 4

♥ K 8

♦ K 9 5

♣ A 10 5 4

♠ A K

♥ A 10 9 6 4 2

♦ A 6 3

♣ K 6

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

Partner leads the ♦Q and you encourage with the ♦9. Let's say declarer wins the first round of diamonds and plays the ♣K. How will you defend when partner plays the ♣3 and dummy the ♣2?

The ♣3 is a count signal; it almost certainly indicates three cards in the suit, since West would probably have led a singleton club. You can therefore place declarer with two clubs. If you win the first round with your ♣A, declarer will be able to cross to dummy with the ♣Q and take a successful finesse in trumps. The contract will be made. To prevent this unattractive outcome, you must hold up your ♣A on the first round. Declarer will not then be able to cross to dummy. He will lose a trump trick in addition to his three losers in the side suits and go one down.

There are many situations where a count signal can guide your defense. On the next deal, West can identify a source of tricks for declarer, thanks to partner's count signal. This is the first step in locating the effective defense. Take the West cards and see how you fare:

West	North	East	South
pass	pass	3♦	3♥
pass	4♦	pass	6♥
all pass			

Partner has shown you three clubs, so declarer began with a doubleton queen. If you win with the ♣A and switch to a trump, you can be fairly certain that declarer will score five trump tricks, four clubs (with a finesse of the ♣10), two diamond ruffs and the ♠A. If instead you win with the ♣A and play back a club, declarer will finesse the ♣10 and score five trump tricks, two clubs, the ♠A and four diamond ruffs. The first move towards defeating the slam is to hold up the ♣A. Declarer continues with the ♣3. What then?

You rise with the ♣A. Suppose you continue with another diamond, forcing dummy to ruff, so he cannot ‘draw trumps, ending in the dummy’. The contract will still be made. Declarer will be able to ruff all four diamonds in the dummy. To beat the slam you must switch to a trump. Declarer can no longer ruff all his diamond losers. If instead he draws trumps and scores four club tricks, he will be one trick short.

In the previous chapter we saw that most players like to signal attitude when partner leads to a trick. Sometimes your attitude to the opening lead is apparent, or will be by the time the first trick is completed. In such a

situation you should signal count instead, rather than telling partner what he already knows. Let’s see a straightforward example of this:

♠ A 3 2

♥ 8 5 2

♦ Q 8 6 3

♣ Q 7 5

♠ 9 8 4

♥ A J 7

♦ A K 10 7

♣ J 10 4

♠ K J 6

♥ K Q 10 9 6 4

♦ J 4

♣ A K

♠ Q 10 7 5

♥ 3

♦ 9 5 2

♣ 9 8 6 3 2

N

W

E

S

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

West leads the ♦A against the heart game, drawing the ♦3, ♦2 and ♦4. There is no point in an attitude signal from East when West has led from a presumed ace-king combination and the queen is in dummy. East should therefore signal his count on the first round. East has shown an odd number of diamonds, so West can be sure that the ♦K will stand up. He duly cashes this card and subsequently scores two trump tricks to defeat the game.

Suppose instead that the diamond suit lay like this:

♦ Q 8 6 3

♦ A K 10 7

♦ J 9 5 2

♦ 4

East would now signal an even number of cards by playing the ♦9 (second highest from four cards). With South holding many more hearts than East, the odds would be high that East held four diamonds rather than two. West would therefore avoid playing a second top diamond, which would set up dummy’s ♦Q. In this way the defenders would beat the contract when declarer had a loser in one of the black suits.

Sometimes a count signal will tell partner which cards he needs to keep when declarer runs the trump suit. Take the West seat here:

<p>♠ 8 6 5 ♥ K 9 ♦ 10 6 5 3 ♣ 8 7 4 3</p>	<p>♠ Q 2 ♥ 8 6 3 ♦ Q 8 7 4 2 ♣ J 6 5</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: 80px; margin: 0 auto;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; padding: 2px;"> N E </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; padding: 2px;"> W S </div> </div>	<p>♠ 3 ♥ A Q J 7 5 ♦ K J 9 ♣ K Q 10 2</p>								
	<p>♠ A K J 10 9 7 4 ♥ 10 4 2 ♦ A ♣ A 9</p>										
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; background-color: #f0f0f0;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="padding: 5px;">West</th> <th style="padding: 5px;">North</th> <th style="padding: 5px;">East</th> <th style="padding: 5px;">South</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center; padding: 5px;">all pass</td> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 5px;">1♥</td> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 5px;">4♠</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>				West	North	East	South	all pass		1♥	4♠
West	North	East	South								
all pass		1♥	4♠								

You lead the ♥K, followed by the ♥9. East scores two more tricks in the suit and switches to the ♣K, which declarer wins with the ♣A. What is your plan for the defense?

An attitude signal in clubs would be completely pointless. Your partner clearly started with the ♣KQ and the ♣J is visible in the dummy. You should therefore give a count signal, playing the ♣7 (second best from four cards). Do you see how helpful this is? Partner now knows that declarer has a club loser in his hand. When declarer reels off seven rounds of trumps, East will maintain an iron grip on his ♣Q. He can afford to discard the ♦J9 on declarer's last two trumps because he knows that declarer has only one diamond (the ♦A) and will have to concede a club trick at the end.

On the next deal, your partner's count signal on the first trick eventually allows you to obtain a complete count on the deal.

	♠ J 10 8 2										
	♥ A K 5										
	♦ J 7										
	♣ K 8 7 2										
♠ 9 3	<table border="1" style="display: inline-table; vertical-align: middle;"> <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		♠ 7 6
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ J 7 4		♥ Q 10 9 8 6									
♦ K Q 10 8 2		♦ 9 6 4 3									
♣ Q 10 3		♣ 9 5									
	♠ A K Q 5 4										
	♥ 3 2										
	♦ A 5										
	♣ A J 6 4										

West	North	East	South
	1♣	pass	1♠
pass	2♠	pass	4♦
pass	4♥	pass	6♠
all pass			

Sitting West, you lead the ♦K. East plays the ♦6 and declarer wins with the ♦A. What do you make of East's ♦6?

An attitude signal from East would be a complete waste of time in this situation (the ♦J is dummy and declarer will surely win the first trick with the ♦A). You should therefore read the ♦6 as a count signal.

Declarer wins with the ♦A, draws trumps in two rounds and cashes the two top hearts. A heart ruff in his hand leaves these cards still to be played:

	♠ 10 8										
	♥ —										
	♦ J										
	♣ K 8 7 2										
♠ —	<table border="1" style="display: inline-table; vertical-align: middle;"> <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										
♥ —		♥ 10 9									
♦ Q 10 8 2		♦ 9 4 3									
♣ Q 10 3		♣ 9 5									
	♠ K 4										
	♥ —										
	♦ 5										
	♣ A J 6 4										

Declarer exits with the ♦5 to your ♦Q and East plays the ♦4, completing a high-low count signal. What should you do next?

If East began with only two diamonds, declarer's shape would be 5-2-4-2 and he would have claimed the contract long ago, ruffing two diamonds in dummy. (South's strong bidding marks him with the ♣A.) East has played the ♦6 and the ♦4, which would be the second-best and third-best card from a four-card holding. Declarer is known to have started with five spades and two hearts. His shape must therefore be 5-2-2-4. A diamond return will give a ruff-and-sluff, yes, but it will not surrender the contract! Declarer can discard the fourth club from one hand or the other but this will not help him at all.

Since a club return is far from safe, and would in fact give away the slam on this occasion, you exit with a third round of diamonds. Declarer has to take an eventual finesse of the ♣J and is one down when this fails.

SIGNAL PRIORITY WHEN PARTNER HAS LED

The time has come to discuss the important concept of 'signal priority'. As you know, there are three main types of signal: attitude, count and suit preference. In the situation where partner has led to a trick and you have the opportunity to signal, this is the ranking list in order of importance:

SIGNAL PRIORITY WHEN PARTNER LEADS

1st priority: attitude

2nd priority: count

3rd priority: suit preference

The top priority is to signal your attitude to partner's lead. We saw in the previous section that sometimes your attitude is obvious, or will be by the time the first trick is completed. In that case you signal count instead; you make the signal that has second priority.

The next chapter will describe some situations where both attitude and count signals would be of no value. You will then signal suit preference, giving the third-priority signal.

This is the mechanism by which you 'tell partner what he needs to know'. Matching your signals with partner's need-to-know is the main objective of an effective signaling system.

COUNT SIGNALS ON THE SECOND ROUND

Another opportunity to give a second-priority signal arises on the second round of a suit. Take the West cards on this deal:

♠ A 7

♥ 10 7 2

♦ Q J 9 5

♣ A K Q 7

♠ 8 5

♥ A K 5

♦ K 10 7 3

♣ J 9 5 2

♠ 9 4

♥ Q 9 6 3

♦ A 8 4 2

♣ 8 6 4

♠ K Q J 10 6 3 2

♥ J 8 4

♦ 6

♣ 10 3

N

W E

S

West	North	East	South
pass	4♠	all pass	3♠

You lead the ♥A and East encourages with the ♥9, which must show the ♥Q on this auction. After South’s pre-empt, East is a big favorite to hold the ♦A. Your best chance of beating the contract is to take two hearts and two diamonds, or three hearts and one diamond.

You continue with the ♥K and East plays the ♥3. East has already shown his attitude, so this is a second-priority (count) signal. His low card tells you that he has an odd number of hearts remaining. Whether or not South attempts to obscure the position by playing the ♥J on the second round, you know that a third heart will stand up. You lead the ♥5 to East’s ♥Q and he cashes the ♦A to set the contract.

How should East defend if you cash the ♥AK and then switch to the ♦3? He should win with the ♦A and return a diamond. In other words, he should trust you to take all the available heart tricks before switching to a different suit. In that way you would also defeat the contract when West held ♥AK85 and ♦K103.

**DO NOT SIGNAL COUNT WHEN DECLARER MAY HAVE
A GUESS TO MAKE**

Count signals are meant to help your partner. Sometimes you can judge that a signal will help declarer instead; you should then play your cards upwards, whatever your count may be. West gave a foolish count signal when this deal arose, in a match where I was sitting East at the other table:

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

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

West led the ♥A, East encouraging with the ♥9. The defenders continued hearts and declarer ruffed the third round. Declarer drew trumps in two rounds and led the ♣Q from his hand. Thinking of this and that, West saw no harm in signaling his count by playing the ♣5. He realized his mistake when declarer continued with the ♣A. In a belated attempt to disguise the situation, West followed with the ♣9 on this trick.

The much-amused declarer had sensed West’s embarrassment and was in no doubt about the lie of the cards, particularly after the ♣8 appeared from East. ‘I’m afraid you’re just going to have to play your four on the next trick,’ he informed the hapless West player. A finesse of dummy’s ♣10 duly landed the contract.

The deal arose some thirty years ago and the declarer has enjoyed telling the tale ever since. There is a serious lesson to be learned, though. Do not signal your count when this will help declarer to guess the suit correctly.

USING A COUNT SIGNAL IN ONE SUIT TO GUIDE THE GENERAL DEFENSE

One of the benefits of count signals is that they can allow the defenders to plan their general defense. Let's see a deal from the 2nd European Open, with teams from Hungary and France in opposition.

♠ J 10 7 3

♥ 8 7 6 5

♦ A J 8

♣ 8 6

♠ K 9 6 5

♥ 3 2

♦ K 9 7 2

♣ A 9 7

♠ A

♥ A K Q J 9

♦ 6 4 3

♣ K 5 4 2

♠ Q 8 4 2

♥ 10 4

♦ Q 10 5

♣ Q J 10 3

N

W E

S

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

West led the ♠5, declarer playing low from dummy. East wisely withheld his ♠Q and declarer won with the bare ♠A. One good chance of making the contract was to find the ♦KQ with the doubler. Without touching trumps, declarer led the ♦3 to dummy's ♦J, West signaling count with the ♦7.

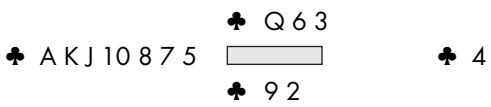
East won with the ♦Q and lost no time in switching to the ♣Q, drawing the ♣2 and ♣7 from the closed hands. He continued with the ♣J, drawing two more spot cards, and the contract could no longer be beaten! On any continuation, declarer would be able to ruff out West's ♣A and discard a diamond loser from dummy on the established ♣K.

How could East do better? He had no chance of reading West's ♣7 as a low count signal, because there were two lower spot cards missing. The key card was the ♦7 count signal in diamonds. This surely indicated four cards, leaving declarer with three. In that case it was safe for East to return the ♦5 at Trick 4. No damage would be done if declarer held the ♦K. If instead

West held that card, a second diamond trick could be established for the defense before declarer had a chance to establish a discard on the clubs.

COUNTERING DECLARER’S ATTEMPT TO SCRAMBLE A COUNT SIGNAL

Competent declarers will select their own spot cards carefully, in an attempt to make the defenders’ count signals more difficult to read. Suppose West has opened 3♣ and subsequently leads the ♣A against some suit contract. This is the club position:



East follows with the ♣4, which is an obvious singleton from declarer’s point of view. If declarer follows carelessly with the ♣2 on the first round, it will also be obvious to West that East holds only one club. Declarer should introduce an element of doubt into the situation by following with the ♣9. If West fears that East began with ♣42, he may switch elsewhere.

There was nothing much the defenders could do in the club position above, but look at this deal:

♠ K 3

♥ A K 10 9 5

♦ 6 5 3

♣ 8 7 4

♠ Q 9 5 4

♥ Q 6 2

♦ A K Q 10

♣ K 6

♠ 7

♥ 8 7 4

♦ 9 7 4 2

♣ A J 10 5 3

N

E

W

S

♠ A J 10 8 6 2

♥ J 3

♦ J 8

♣ Q 9 2

West	North	East	South
pass	4♠	all pass	2♠

Declarer's ♥J may look like a singleton but your partner's count signal was the ♥4 and he would not have played this card from ♥8742; he would have played a second-best ♥7. You therefore know that East holds ♥874 (or ♥42). You continue with the ♥K and declarer cannot thereafter avoid the loss of two black-suit tricks.

Top-class declarers employ a variety of deceptive plays, but many of these can be exposed with the use of count signals. Let's see a couple of examples. Take the East cards on this spade slam:

West	North	East	South
			1♠
pass	4NT	pass	5♥
pass	6♠	all pass	

Dummy's ♥A wins the trick and, sitting East, you signal encouragement with the ♥8. Declarer plays the ace and king of trumps and finds that he has a trump loser; he must then attempt to discard the ♥J on dummy's

diamond suit. He returns to his hand with the ♣A and leads a diamond to the queen, pretending that he is taking a finesse against West's ♦K. He continues with the ♦A, all following, and then leads the ♦2 from dummy. How should you react to what you have seen?

If declarer did indeed begin with ♦93, it would be foolish to ruff with your master trump; declarer would then throw a heart loser. You should take note of the count signal that West gave you in diamonds: the ♦6 followed by the ♦7. That shows three diamonds, leaving declarer with three diamonds! You should therefore ruff the third round of diamonds with the ♠Q. South will follow resignedly with the ♦K and you can then cash the ♥K to put the slam one down.

Suppose instead that you fell for the deception, discarding on the third round of diamonds. Declarer would win with the ♦K and cross to the ♣K to discard his heart loser on the fourth round of diamonds. Slam made!

On the next deal the wily declarer attempts a different type of deception. Take the East cards and see if you would have realized what was happening.

♠ 10 3
♥ Q 9 5
♦ A 9 6 5
♣ A J 7 3

♠ Q 9 6
♥ 6 2
♦ K J 8 7 2
♣ 8 6 4

♠ A K 8 7 2
♥ J 8
♦ Q 4
♣ K 9 5 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ J 5 4
♥ A K 10 7 4 3
♦ 10 3
♣ Q 10

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

West leads the ♠6 and, sitting East, you win with the ♠K. You cash the ♠A and switch to the ♦Q, aiming to set up a diamond trick before declarer can establish any discards on dummy's club suit. West signals encouragement with the ♦8 and the trick is won with dummy's ♦A. Declarer (who can place you with the ♣K after your opening bid) cashes the ♣A, dropping the

♣Q from his hand. How will you defend when he continues with the ♣3 from dummy?

If declarer began with a singleton ♣Q, as seems likely, you cannot afford to go in with the ♣K. Declarer would ruff and subsequently take a discard on dummy's established ♣J. There is one piece of evidence that tells you that declarer's ♣Q is not a singleton. On the first round of clubs your partner will have given a count signal, the ♣4 to show an odd number of clubs. So, declarer must have hidden a second club – presumably the ♣10. You rise with the ♣K, therefore, and claim the setting trick in diamonds.

DEFENDING AT THE FIVE-LEVEL OR HIGHER

When you are defending at the five- or six-level, it is much more likely that you will want to lead an ace that is not accompanied by the king. In such a situation you will want partner's attitude signal to reflect this fact. It is not much use if he encourages with the queen and declarer holds the king.

At such a level declarer is unlikely to have three top losers in a suit. When you hold an ace-king combination your principle interest will be whether the second winner will stand up. In other words, you will find a count signal more useful than an attitude signal.

Defending against a contract at the five-level or higher, you should follow this scheme:

An ace lead denies the king and asks partner for an attitude signal.

A king lead shows the A-K (or K-Q) and asks for a count signal.

Let's see a couple of deals where this method shows to good effect.

West	North	East	South
pass	6♣	all pass	3♣

At this level, partner's ♥6 is a count signal. Did he start with ♥9865? No, because he would signal with the second-best card from four. Knowing for sure that a second heart will stand up, you continue with the ♥A. South sheepishly produces the ♥5 and the slam is one down.

Suppose instead that East had started with ♥9865. He would signal count with the ♥8 and South would follow with the ♥J. With South holding an expected seven clubs to East's one, the odds would be high indeed that East held four hearts rather than two. West would avoid the mistake of playing a second heart, setting up dummy's ♥Q as a twelfth trick. He would switch to spades, in the hope that declarer could then score only seven clubs and the four top winners on view in the dummy.

Take the West cards on the next deal and see how you would have defended.

♠ A 9 6 3

♥ A J 9 7 2

♦ 6

♣ 8 4 3

♠ Q 2

♥ 8 6 3

♦ K Q 9 2

♣ A K Q 10

N
S
W
E

♠ K 8 5

♥ Q 4

♦ A J 10 8 5 4 3

♣ 9

♠ J 10 7 4

♥ K 10 5

♦ 7

♣ J 7 6 5 2

West	North	East	South
pass	5♦	all pass	3♦

Sitting West, you decide to lead the ♥A against South’s diamond game. East signals with the ♥10. How will you continue?

At a lower level East would expect you to hold the ♥AK after such a lead and would judge his attitude signal accordingly. At the five- or six-level, East must signal on the basis that you hold the unaccompanied ace. Since he has the ♥K, he encourages with the ♥10. What will your next move be?

Partner has the ♥K, yes, but maybe he holds four hearts and declarer will ruff a second round of hearts. Before committing yourself, you should play the ♠A, seeking an attitude signal in that suit. East plays the ♠4, clearly denying the ♠K. You switch back to hearts, leading the ♥7 to East’s ♥K, and the contract is beaten.

You get the general idea of defending at these high-levels, I’m sure. By a combination of attitude and count signals, you can give yourself a great chance of cashing your available tricks.

The method described in the previous section is equally effective against lower contracts where the declarer has indicated a seven-card or longer suit with a pre-emptive opening. Once again, the third round of a side suit is likely to be of little concern. You will want to know if a second round will stand up. You may also want to lead an ace when you do not also hold the king of the suit. Take the West cards here:

You lead the $\spadesuit K$ against South's $4\clubsuit$. Dummy wins with the $\spadesuit A$ and East plays the $\spadesuit 2$, which should be read as a count signal because South opened with a pre-empt. The main purpose of such a signal is to let West know how many diamonds (if any) can be cashed subsequently. When the $\heartsuit 6$ is led from dummy, East plays the $\heartsuit 8$ and South the $\heartsuit K$. East is showing either two hearts or four, almost certainly four since South has very long spades.

Suspecting that the ♥K is a singleton, you win with the ♥A immediately. You cash the ♦Q, taking the only available trick in that suit, and now need two club tricks. There is no need to switch to a club, however, since declarer has no entry to dummy. Exit passively with the ♦6 to East's ♦10 and declarer will have to play the club suit himself; the defenders will score two club tricks at the end.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- There is no point in giving an attitude signal when declarer leads a suit; the first-priority signal is a count signal. A high card shows an even number of cards and a low card an odd number. From four cards, you normally play the second-best card followed by the third-best.
- When declarer is establishing a side suit in a dummy that has (or may have) no outside entry, a count signal will allow your partner to judge when he should take his stopper in the suit.
- Similarly, a count signal may allow your partner to hold up a stopper to prevent declarer gaining access to dummy.
- In various situations a ‘signal priority’ applies. When partner leads to a trick, for example, the priority is: (1) attitude, (2) count and (3) suit preference. If your attitude is obvious from the cards in dummy (or will be by the time declarer has played), give a count signal instead. This may help your partner to judge how many winners, if any, can be cashed in the suit.
- When you signal for the second time in a suit, you will normally give whatever is the second-priority signal in that situation.
- Do not give a count signal when this may help declarer to guess whether he should finesse in the suit or play for the drop.

QUIZ on count signals in suit contracts

1.

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

To Answer

	N	
W		E
	S	

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

You lead the ♥K, East playing the ♥3 and declarer winning with the ♥A. Declarer continues with the ♠K to your ♠A, East playing the ♠7. How will you defend?

2.

♠ K Q 10 5
♥ 6 5 3
♦ J 8 2
♣ 10 9 6

To Answer

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 7 6 2
♥ —
♦ 9 7 5 4 3
♣ Q 8 7 2

West	North	East	South
			2♣
pass	2♦	pass	2♥
pass	3♥	pass	4♣
pass	4♠	pass	6♥
all pass			

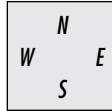
Your partner leads the ♦K. You signal count with the ♦3 and South wins the ♦A. Declarer plays the ♥AKQ and continues with the ♠3, to West's ♠4 and dummy's ♠K. How will you defend?

3.

♠ J 8 5
♥ A 9 5 2
♦ J 10 5
♣ J 6 5

To Answer

♠ A 9
♥ 10 6 4
♦ Q 9 8 6 2
♣ A Q 4



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

You lead the ♦6, won by dummy's ♦J, East playing the ♦3 and declarer the ♦4. What is your plan when declarer leads a trump to his ♠K?

4.

♠ K J 7 5
♥ 9 8 2
♦ K J 3
♣ Q J 7

To Answer



♠ 9
♥ 7 4 3
♦ A 7 6 2
♣ A 10 5 4 2

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

Your partner leads the ♥Q against South's game in spades. South wins with the ♥K and plays the ♣K, partner following with the ♣3. What is your plan for the defense?

5.

To Answer

♠ A 6 3
 ♥ Q 7 6
 ♦ J 9 4
 ♣ A K Q 6

♠ 9 2
 ♥ A 10 4
 ♦ A K 10 6 3
 ♣ 8 4 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

West	North	East	South
pass	4♠	all pass	3♠

You lead the ♦K against the spade game. East plays the ♦8 and South the ♦5. What is your plan for the defense?

6.

To Answer

♠ A 7 6
 ♥ Q 6 3
 ♦ A K 8 4 2
 ♣ A 6

♠ J 9 5
 ♥ K 7
 ♦ Q 9
 ♣ Q J 10 7 5 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

West	North	East	South
pass	6♥	all pass	3♥

West leads the ♠K to dummy's ♠A and (because the contract is at the five-level or higher) you signal count with the ♠5. Declarer leads the ♥3 to his ♥A, West playing the ♥J. He continues with the ♦A and ♦K, West playing the ♦7 and then the ♦3. How will you defend when the ♦2 is led from dummy?

Answers to the QUIZ

1. Defending 4♠, you lead the ♥K to the ♥6, ♥3 and ♥A. Declarer plays the ♠K to your ♠A and you must decide what to do next. Your partner knew that South would win with the ♥A, making an attitude signal redundant. His ♥3 therefore shows three hearts and tells you that the ♥Q will stand up. You do best to cash this card and continue with the ♥J, hoping to score two club tricks subsequently.

Suppose instead that East had signaled with the ♥8. Placing him with ♥9853, you would know that no heart trick was available. You would switch to the ace and another club, hoping that East held the ♣K and could give you a club ruff.

To Question

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

2. Declarer wins your partner's ♦K lead with the ♦A and draws trumps in three rounds. He then leads the ♠3 to West's ♠4 and dummy's ♠K. Even though declarer might well hold a second diamond, which would give the defenders a second trick to take, you should hold up the ♠A. Your partner's ♠4 is an odd count signal, which tells you that declarer has another spade in his hand. When declarer leads a second round of spades at some stage, you will take the ♠A. Eventually you will score a club trick for one down.

To Question

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

	♠ J 3
	♥ A K Q 10 9 7 2
	♦ A
	♣ A K 3

3. Sitting West, you lead the ♦6 against 4♠. Dummy's ♦J wins; partner plays the ♦3 and declarer the ♦4. East's attitude was obvious, when he could not beat dummy's ♦J, so the ♦3 is a count signal. It must be a singleton! (Declarer holds the ♦AK and the only missing card is the ♦7.) When declarer plays a trump to the king, you win with the ace and give partner a diamond ruff. Two club tricks and a second diamond ruff put the contract two down.

To Question

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

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

4. Your partner leads the ♥Q against 4♠. You discourage with the ♥3 and declarer wins with the ♥K. When he leads the ♣K, partner plays the ♣3. This is a count signal, showing three clubs and telling you that declarer has another club. You must hold up the ♣A to prevent declarer from taking a discard on the ♣QJ. At Trick 3, declarer leads the ♦Q, partner playing the ♦8. Partner has an even number of diamonds, so declarer has another diamond. You must hold up the ♦A too! When declarer clears one or other minor, you win with the ace and play a heart. The defenders will then score four tricks.

To Question

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

	♠ Q 10 8 6 4 3
	♥ A K 6
	♦ Q 9
	♣ K 6

5. After bidding of 3♠ – 4♠, you lead the ♦K from the West hand. This draws the ♦4, ♦8 and ♦5. Declarer opened with a pre-empt, so partner's ♦8 is a count signal, almost certainly from four cards. If you continue with the ♦K, declarer may ruff and subsequently discard some heart losers on dummy's clubs. You should therefore lead the ♥A next. When partner encourages with the ♥9, you continue with the ♥10. Two more heart tricks come the defenders' way and the game is defeated.

Are you beginning to feel that it might always be a good idea to show count on a king lead? If so, you will be interested to read Chapter 12!

To Question

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

6. After bidding of 3♥ - 6♥, West leads the ♠K. Declarer wins with the ♠A and plays a trump to his ace, dropping the jack from West. He continues with the ♦A and ♦K, West playing the ♦7 and then the ♦3. Declarer then leads the ♦2 from dummy. West has shown an even number of diamonds, so declarer cannot hold the bare ♦J at this stage and you have no reason to ruff. Make the mistake of ruffing and declarer will ditch the ♠8, landing the slam. Discard instead and you live to fight another day!

To Question

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



SUIT PREFERENCE SIGNALS IN A SUIT CONTRACT

So far we have looked at attitude signals and count signals, both of which give information about the suit that has been led to the trick. We now turn our attention to suit preference signals, where you suggest to partner which of two other suits he should play next.

This type of signal is sometimes called a Lavinthal or McKenney signal. Hy Lavinthal invented the method, way back in the 1930s, and William McKenney publicized it.

SUIT PREFERENCE SIGNAL

A high card suggests a switch to the higher of two other suits;

a low card suggests a switch to the lower of two other suits.

In a suit contract, the trump suit is excluded from this process. For example, if spades are trumps and you are giving a suit preference signal in hearts, you might play the ♥8 (a high card), to suggest a switch to diamonds, the higher of the remaining side suits. To suggest a club switch, you might play the ♥3 (a low card).

There are various situations where you can employ suit preference signals, alongside the standard usage of both attitude and count signals. This is the signal priority, remember, when partner has led to a trick:

SIGNAL PRIORITY WHEN PARTNER LEADS

1st priority: attitude

2nd priority: count

3rd priority: suit preference

When an attitude or count signal would be valueless at Trick 1, for one reason or another, you can signal suit preference. There will also be opportunities to show suit preference when you make your second signal in a suit or when you are leading to a trick yourself. In this chapter we will look at the most important suit preference situations.

SUIT PREFERENCE SIGNAL WHEN NO FURTHER TRICK CAN BE TAKEN

Sometimes it will be clear from the cards in the dummy that there can be no purpose in continuing the suit that has been led. For example, your partner may have led the ♥A (from ♥AK) against a spade game. If dummy goes down with a singleton heart and four trumps, you know that you cannot score any more heart tricks. Since an attitude or count signal would be largely a waste of time, it makes good sense to give a suit preference signal on the first trick. We saw an example of this back in Chapter 1, when the notion of suit preference was first mentioned. Here is another example:

♠ K Q J 10 2
♥ A 7 6
♦ 9 5
♣ K J 5

♠ A 3
♥ 5 4 3
♦ J 10 7
♣ A 10 7 4 3

N
E

W
S

♠ 5
♥ Q J 8
♦ A K Q 8 6 4 3
♣ Q 6

♠ 9 8 7 6 4
♥ K 10 9 2
♦ 2
♣ 9 8 2

West	North	East	South
1♠	dbl	3♠	1♦
pass	5♦	all pass	4♦

Sitting West, you lead the ♠K against South’s diamond game. Somewhat to your surprise, declarer plays low from dummy. Your partner contributes the ♠9 to the trick and declarer plays the ♠5. What should you do next?

At the table, West gave the matter little thought and played another spade. Declarer won in the dummy and discarded the ♣6 from his hand. He cashed the ♣A, ruffed a club in his hand, returned to dummy with the ♦J and ruffed another club high. When the club suit broke 3-3, declarer was able to discard two hearts from his hand and make the contract.

After declarer’s smart duck on the first trick, the defenders needed to score their two heart winners immediately. East’s ♠9 should be taken as a suit preference signal because there are no more tricks to be taken in the spade suit itself. The high spot card asks for a switch to the higher of the other two side suits, hearts in this case.

SUIT PREFERENCE SIGNAL WHEN ATTITUDE AND COUNT ARE POINTLESS

Let’s see some other situations where it is appropriate to signal suit preference (the third priority signal) on the first trick. One arises when partner’s opening lead may be a singleton honor:

♠ Q 10 8
♥ 10 7 6 5
♦ A
♣ J 9 7 5 4

♠ A 9 6
♥ K Q J 2
♦ Q 6
♣ Q 10 6 3

N
W E
S

♠ K J 7 5 3 2
♥ A 4
♦ 9 5 3
♣ K 2

♠ 4
♥ 9 8 3
♦ K J 10 8 7 4 2
♣ A 8

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

You are East this time and partner leads the ♦A against South’s spade game. How should you signal?

There is no need for an attitude signal. The ♦Q is in dummy and you are not the sort of reprobate who would open 3♦ on a jack-high suit. Even if you are, partner will be able to guess that you hold the ♦K on this

occasion. Nor is there any point whatsoever in a count signal. If partner began with $\heartsuit A$, he will surely lead his remaining diamond at Trick 2.

However, if the opening lead is a singleton, partner will be looking for a suit preference signal from you. Here you signal with the $\heartsuit 2$, suggesting a switch to the lower of the remaining side suits (if partner's $\heartsuit A$ is indeed a singleton). Noting your signal, West switches to a club. You win with the $\clubsuit A$ and cash the $\heartsuit K$. West will subsequently score a trump trick to beat the contract.

Look back to the moment when West switches to a club. Which club should he lead? It is an important principle of defense that you lead a high card to show no trick potential in a suit, a low card to indicate a holding with one or more useful honors. Here West should lead the $\clubsuit 9$ to make it clear that he is not looking for club tricks and wants a diamond return. Suppose instead that he had led the $\heartsuit A$ from $\heartsuit A95$, where no further tricks were available, and was now switching from $\clubsuit K974$. He would lead the $\clubsuit 4$ to suggest a club return. (This general guideline on leading high or low cards in defense has nothing to do with suit preference signals, of course.)

Until now, the suit preference signal has been given at Trick 1, when partner was on lead. When declarer leads to a trick this is the signal priority:

SIGNAL PRIORITY WHEN DECLARER LEADS

1st priority: count

2nd priority: suit preference

When a count signal would be valueless on the first round, you will signal suit preference instead. Let's see that mechanism in action:

♠ 10 9

♥ A Q 7 5 4

♦ K 9 2

♣ K 10 5

♠ J 7 4 3

♥ K J 9

♦ 6 5 4

♣ 9 3 2

N
S
W
E

♠ A K Q 8 5 2

♥ 6

♦ A J 10 7

♣ J 6

♠ 6

♥ 10 8 3 2

♦ Q 8 3

♣ A Q 8 7 4

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

Suppose, for the moment, that you are holding the East cards. Partner leads the ♠10 against the spade game. Declarer wins with the ♠A and leads the ♥6, West rising with the ♥A. What is your plan for the defense?

West could not care less what your count is in hearts. Indeed, he already knows that you hold four hearts from the bidding. What he needs is a suit-preference signal to guide his play on the next trick. You should therefore play the ♥2 on the first round of hearts, a suit-preference card to suggest a club switch.

An ill-advised diamond switch from West would have allowed declarer to make the contract, ditching a club loser on dummy’s ♥K. Noting your ♥2, West switches instead to the ♣5. The defenders pocket two club tricks, and an eventual trick in diamonds will defeat the contract.

SUIT PREFERENCE SIGNAL ON THE SECOND ROUND

When partner cashes two top winners in a suit, you may have the chance to give a suit preference signal on the second round.

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

You do best to cash the ♣K. There is no value in a (second priority) count signal on this trick, so partner will give you a suit preference signal. Here he wants a spade switch and will therefore play the ♣10 on the second round. You duly switch to a spade and two tricks in that suit defeat the contract. If instead East held the ♦AK, he would signal with his lowest remaining club, the ♣5. With no particular preference, he would play the ♣8.

On many other deals (you are right), the position will not be so clear. East may not know which signal will work out best and, even then, West may be unsure of which switch to make. Defense is difficult and the suit preference signal is merely an extra tool that will sometimes make the task easier.

SUIT PREFERENCE SIGNAL WHEN GIVING PARTNER A RUFF

Let’s look at something different – giving a suit-preference signal when you are leading to a trick. Suppose partner has led a side-suit singleton to your ace and you are about to give him a ruff in that suit. You can suggest which suit he should return by the card that you lead for the ruff. A high card will request the lead of the higher suit; a low card will request the lead of the lower suit.

This will be a familiar process to many readers, I realize, but let’s look at a quick example anyway. Take the East cards on this deal:

♠ A 10 4

♥ Q 9 5

♦ Q 7 3

♣ K Q J 6

♠ 7 6 2

♥ 3

♦ 9 8 6 5 4

♣ 10 8 4 2

N

W E

S

♠ K Q J 9 8 3

♥ K 7 4

♦ A J

♣ 5 3

♠ 5

♥ A J 10 8 6 2

♦ K 10 2

♣ A 9 7

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

Your partner leads the ♥3 and declarer plays low from dummy. How will you plan the defense?

It may seem natural to play the ♥10 on the first trick, but the contract will then be made with an overtrick. Declarer will win with the ♥K, draw trumps and set up the clubs. There are two good reasons why you should place your partner with a singleton ♥3 rather than ♥K73 or ♥K43. The first is that he might have raised you to 2♥ if he held three hearts to the king. A much more important reason is that you are very unlikely to beat the contract if partner has three hearts; you will score your two aces and be lucky to find even one more trick.

So, the correct defense is to rise with the ♥A on the first trick. You are going to return a heart, in the hope that partner can ruff. By choosing which heart you return, you can give a suit preference signal. This will tell partner which suit to play next. Here you hold the ♣A as a card of re-entry, so you return the ♥2, your lowest heart. Partner ruffs and duly returns a club. You win with the ♣A and give him a second ruff, beating the contract.

Suppose you held the ♦A instead. You would then lead a higher heart, the ♥J, to request a diamond return. Again the contract would be defeated, without any need for West to guess what to lead at Trick 3.

SUIT PREFERENCE SIGNAL WHEN CROSSING TO PARTNER'S HAND

When partner has supported your suit, it is quite common that the defense begins by cashing two tricks in this suit. If you cross to partner's hand on the second round, you will have the chance to give a suit preference signal.

♠ 8 4

♥ A K 8 4 2

♦ A Q 6

♣ 10 8 4

♠ J 9 2

♥ 9 6

♦ J 8 2

♣ J 9 6 3 2

N
S
W
E

♠ A K Q 10 7 6 5

♥ 10 5

♦ K 3

♣ A K

♠ 3

♥ Q J 7 3

♦ 10 9 7 5 4

♣ Q 7 5

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

Sitting West, you lead the ♥A against South's spade game. Your partner follows with the ♥Q, indicating the ♥QJ and inviting you to underlead on the second round. Which card will you play next from the West hand?

Your plan is to cross to partner's hand for a diamond return. To let partner know that you wish for a diamond return, you should lead the ♥8 next. You choose a high spot card to request a return in diamonds, the higher of the two remaining side suits. East duly wins with the ♥J and switches to the ♦10, allowing the defenders to score four tricks.

Suppose instead that declarer held ♦KQ and ♣AQ, with you holding the ♣K over South's tenace. You would then need a club return, to set up your ♣K before declarer could establish a discard in the diamond suit. At Trick 2 you would switch to the ♥2 — your lowest spot card — to request a club return.

SUIT PREFERENCE SIGNAL ON THE OPENING LEAD

One of the most spectacular plays in bridge is to underlead one or more top honors in the hope that partner can win and give you a ruff in another suit. When you do this, you should pass a suit preference signal, just in case East cannot tell where your void is. Take the West cards on this slam deal:

♠ —

♥ 8 6 3

♦ 10 6 2

♣ A K Q 8 7 5 2

♠ K Q 8 6

♥ A Q 7 5

♦ A K Q 5

♣ 6

♠ J 10 7 3 2

♥ —

♦ J 8 7 4 3

♣ J 9 4

♠ A 9 5 4

♥ K J 10 9 4 2

♦ 9

♣ 10 3

N

W E

S

West	North	East	South
3♣	dbl	pass	4♥
pass	4NT	pass	5♥
pass	6♥	all pass	

After this confident auction, West may consider that his best chance of beating the slam is to reach partner's hand for a spade ruff. This will be possible if East holds the ♣J. West has a choice of four spot cards to lead

and should choose the ♣8 to indicate that he wants a return in the higher of the remaining side suits.

When East's ♣J wins the trick, it will not be difficult for him to read the situation. You would not have risked underleading the ♣AKQ unless you had a void somewhere. The void must be in spades because you led a high spot card. He duly returns a spade and the slam is defeated.

Olivia Woo found a similar opening lead on this deal, from the 2008 Summer Congress in Brighton:

♠ —

♥ 9 6

♦ A Q 8 7 5 2

♣ Q 10 7 6 4

♠ A 10 9 5 4 3

♥ Q 4 2

♦ K 9

♣ K J

N
S
W
E

♠ K J 8

♥ A K J 10 8 7

♦ 10 6

♣ 3 2

♠ Q 7 6 2

♥ 5 3

♦ J 4 3

♣ A 9 8 5

West	North	East	South
	1♠	pass	2♥
2NT	3♥	5♣	5♥
all pass			

What lead would you have chosen from the West hand?

Olivia Woo led the ♣10, hoping that partner would be able to read this as a non-standard lead (and therefore a suit-preference card for a spade return). Since East held the ♣9, he could indeed tell that the lead was not from a sequence of some sort. Back came a spade, ruffed by West, and the ♦A was the setting trick.

**SUIT PREFERENCE SIGNAL BY VARYING THE PLAY
OF EQUAL HONORS**

When you are playing from touching honors in the third seat, it is universal practice to play the lower or lowest of touching honors. When you choose to vary that order, your partner can attach a suit-preference meaning to the play. East did well on this part-score deal:

♠ 4 2

♥ 9 7 5 3

♦ 9 8 6 5 4

♣ 9 6

♠ Q 10 3

♥ K J 4

♦ J 7 3

♣ J 7 5 2

♠ J 9 5

♥ A Q 6 2

♦ A 10 2

♣ A K 3

♠ A K 8 7 6

♥ 10 8

♦ K Q

♣ Q 10 8 4

N

W E

S

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

East decided not to contest any further and West led the ♣9, which East could read as a doubleton. Two rounds of clubs followed by a club ruff and a heart switch had every chance of beating the contract. Unfortunately, West had no way of knowing that East held only three clubs and might well read the ♣3 as a suit preference signal for a diamond switch. (The situation would be worse if declarer false-carded with the ♣4, ♣10 and ♣Q, giving the impression that East was choosing from ♣83 when giving the ruff.)

Fortunately a solution was at hand. East won the first trick with the ♣A, continuing with the ♣K. West ruffed the ♣3 on the next trick and took note of the fact that East had played the higher club honor first. He switched to a heart and the contract was beaten. On a diamond return, declarer would have been able to discard a heart on the third round of diamonds.

WAITING FOR A SUIT PREFERENCE SIGNAL

In situations where your partner has the opportunity to give you a suit preference signal on the second round, you may have to take steps to see such a signal before you have to make your big decision. In particular, you must sometimes hold up an ace to give partner the chance to signal. Take the West cards on this deal:

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

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

Sitting West, you lead a trump against the game in hearts. Declarer wins with dummy's ♥9 and leads the ♠5. Your partner plays the ♠2 and declarer the ♠J. What is your plan for the defense?

Suppose you win immediately with the ♠A. You will then have a guess to make. If your partner holds the ♦K, it is possible that the defenders can score three diamond tricks. If instead he holds the ♣A, you can switch to a club for a diamond return. Which is it to be?

There is no need to make this decision straight away. Your partner gave you a count signal of the ♠2 on the first round of spades. He surely holds three spades to declarer's two. You can therefore afford to hold up the ♠A for one round. Let's say that declarer continues with the ♠7 at Trick 3. You win with the ♠A and will now see a second-round suit preference signal from your partner. East plays the ♠6, which is his lower card from ♠96. How will you continue the defense?

Partner has suggested a club switch rather than a diamond switch. Hoping that he holds the ♣A, you switch to the ♣8. Remember that a high spot card lead shows a weak suit that you do not wish to be returned. East duly wins with the ♣A and switches to a diamond. Hurray! That's one contract that they didn't make.

SUIT PREFERENCE SIGNAL IN THE TRUMP SUIT

What does it mean when declarer draws trumps and a defender gives a high-low signal with two trump spot cards – a trump echo? The traditional meaning is that the defender holds three trumps; for many partnerships the trump echo also indicates the ability to take a ruff somewhere. Such a signal can work well but opportunities for its use are few and far between.

Many players now believe that it is more useful to pass a suit preference message in this context. It has to be admitted that some complications may arise. First of all, there may be three side suits in the reckoning. In order to assign a meaning to low-high and high-low trump signals, you must discount one of the three suits (perhaps because dummy has a strong holding, or declarer has indicated strength there in the bidding). Even when you have restricted the focus to two side suits, you may find that you have no interest in either suit. There are only two possible signals, so you cannot convey three different messages (higher suit, lower suit, no interest).

With that disclaimer behind us, let's see an example of suit preference in the trump suit:

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

Whether you take the ♠A on the first or second round, you will have a tricky decision what to do next. Your partner's ♦2 attitude signal has told you that he does not hold the ♦K. There are two main situations in which the contract can be beaten. If East holds the ♣K, you may be able to take three club tricks. Alternatively, if East holds the ♥A you can cross to that card for a club return. (A passive defense, exiting with a trump or a diamond, would also be good enough in that case).

Are you going to play partner for the ♣K or the ♥A? There are two reasons why he is more likely to hold the ♣K. The first is that he is slightly more likely to hold a king than an ace, since South accepted the game try. A more compelling reason is that if East holds more than one trump, he has chosen to play the lower of his trumps. If he held the ♥A, rather than the ♣K, he would have played the higher of his trumps.

Few things are certain in this world, but you should grit your teeth and switch to the ♣6. On this occasion your bravery is rewarded. East produces the black monarch and the contract is defeated.

Suppose East had played the ♠4 or ♠3 instead and you were uncertain if this was the higher or lower of a potential doubleton in trumps. You could hold off the ♠A for one round in order to see which card East played on the second round of trumps. (Yes, declarer could then play four rounds of hearts, ditching a club while you had to ruff with the ♠A. He is hardly likely to diagnose that!)

Here is another example, so that we can become familiar with the technique.

♠ K 10 2 ♥ 10 9 ♦ K 7 5 ♣ A 9 8 5 2	♠ Q 7 4 3 ♥ A J 7 5 ♦ Q 6 ♣ K J 4 <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 100px; margin: 10px auto; position: relative;"> <div style="position: absolute; top: 5px; left: 40px;">W</div> <div style="position: absolute; top: 5px; right: 40px;">E</div> <div style="position: absolute; bottom: 5px; left: 40px;">S</div> </div> ♠ J 6 ♥ K Q 8 4 3 ♦ A 9 4 3 ♣ Q 6	♠ A 9 8 5 ♥ 6 2 ♦ J 10 8 2 ♣ 10 7 3
--	---	--

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

Sitting East, you see your partner lead the ♥10. Declarer wins with the ♥Q and crosses to the ♥A, partner producing a second trump. He then plays a club to the queen and West's ace. How can West tell what he should do next?

Declarer is poised to take a discard on dummy's club honors and only a spade switch will beat the contract. You can advise your partner of this by playing high-low on the first two rounds of trumps, the ♥6 followed by the ♥2. This is a suit preference signal for spades, the higher of the remaining two side suits. West duly switches to spades and the defenders score two tricks in the suit. A subsequent trick in diamonds will then put the game one down.

A cunning declarer might have won the trump lead in dummy and played the ♣4 then, before playing a second round of trumps. Do you see the difference that this makes, as far as the defense is concerned? West will gain the lead in clubs before he has seen your card on the second round of trumps. With no way to tell whether your ♥6 is the start of a high-low, it will be dangerous for him to switch to a spade.

Partnerships that adopt a flexible approach to signaling would have an answer to such adroit declarer play. When the ♣4 was led, East would think along these lines: there's not much value in a count signal to partner here; I will play the ♣10 and hope he reads it as suit preference. A bit fancy, you may think. But that sort of signaling is commonplace at the top level.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- A suit preference signal indicates which of two suits you would like partner to play. In a suit contract, the trump suit is excluded from this process. A high card shows preference for the higher of two suits; a low card shows preference for the lower suit.
- In every situation there is an agreed signal priority. A suit preference signal is usually lowest in the priority list and will become appropriate only when there is no value in the higher-priority signals. For example, at Trick 1 your choice of spot card will indicate suit preference when it is clear from the cards in the dummy (perhaps a singleton) that no further tricks can be taken in the suit led.
- A suit preference signal is often possible on the second occasion that you signal in a particular suit. For example, if you showed your count on the first round, you can show suit preference on the second round.
- In some situations you can indicate suit preference by the card that you lead to a trick. The most frequent opportunity for this is when you are leading a card that you expect partner to ruff.
- It is also possible to show suit preference when following to the first two rounds of trumps.

QUIZ on suit preference signals in a suit

1.

♠ 7
♥ K J 9 3
♦ A Q 7 6
♣ K Q J 5

To Answer



♠ K 8 3
♥ 10 7 5 2
♦ 5
♣ A 8 7 6 2

West	North	East	South
3♣	4♠	5♠	1♦
all pass			6♦

Your partner leads the ♠A against South’s diamond slam. What is your plan for the defense?

2.

♠ A 10 8 6
♥ 6
♦ Q J 4 2
♣ K Q 5 4

To Answer

♠ 9 5 2
♥ A Q J 8 7 2
♦ 7
♣ J 9 8



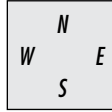
West	North	East	South
2♥	dbl	3♥	4♠
all pass			

You lead the ♦7 and partner wins with the ♦A. What is your plan for the defense when partner returns the ♦10?

3.

♠ Q 7 4 3
♥ Q 2
♦ Q 6 5
♣ A K J 7

To Answer



♠ 9 8 5
♥ 10 6 5 3
♦ 9 8 4 3 2
♣ 3

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

Your partner leads the ♥A against South's spade game and continues with the ♥K. Which cards do you play on the first two tricks?

4.

♠ Q J 9 2
♥ A K 6
♦ Q J 8 2
♣ 10 3

To Answer



♠ 7 4 3
♥ 7 4
♦ 10 7 5
♣ Q 9 7 6 5

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

Your partner leads the ♣A and you encourage with the ♣9. At Trick 2, West leads the ♣8, drawing the ♣10, ♣Q and ♣J. What is your plan for the defense?

5.

♠ Q 10 6 4
♥ Q 8 7 4
♦ K 7
♣ 6 4 3

To Answer

♠ J 9 2
♥ J 5 3
♦ A Q J 9 3
♣ 8 5



West	North	East	South
	pass	pass	1♣
1♦	dbl	4♦	5♣
all pass			

You lead the ♦A against the club game. What is your plan for the defense when partner plays the ♦10 and declarer the ♦5?

6.

♠ K 10 5 2
♥ Q J 3 2
♦ A Q 8 2
♣ 5

To Answer



♠ A 9 8 7 3
♥ A 10
♦ 6
♣ Q 9 7 6 3

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

North responds with a splinter bid of 4♣, showing a sound raise to game in hearts including at most one club. Your partner leads the ♠4, dummy playing low. What is your plan for the defense?

Answers to the QUIZ

1. Partner leads the ♠A. Dummy has only one spade, so there can be no point in a spade continuation. With no further trick to be taken in spades, the card that you play on the first trick will be taken as a suit preference signal. Since you want partner to switch to a club at Trick 2, you should signal with your lowest spade (the ♠3). A club switch is essential to beat the contract. On any other return, declarer will discard his clubs on dummy's hearts.

To Question

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

2. Defending 4♠, you lead the ♦7 to partner's ♦A. He returns the ♦10. This is a suit preference signal, suggesting an entry in the higher of the two outstanding side suits: hearts. You lead a low heart to partner's ♥K and a second diamond ruff then defeats the contract. If partner had held the ♣A instead of the ♥K, he would have returned the ♦5 to give you your ruff.

To Question

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

3. West, your partner, cashes the ♥A and ♥K against South's spade game. There is no point in giving an attitude signal on the first round, since you have supported hearts (thereby denying a doubleton) and the ♥Q is in dummy. You should therefore give a count signal, playing the ♥6. On the second round you have the chance to give a suit preference signal. You should play the ♥3, suggesting a club switch. West switches to the ♣2 and gives you a club ruff when in with the ♠A.

To Question

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

4. West leads the ♣A against South's 4♥ and, sitting East, you encourage with the ♣9. West continues with the ♣8 to your ♣Q, the ♣J appearing from South. Partner has led his higher spot card, the ♣8 from ♣84, so he is requesting a spade switch. You duly switch to a spade and the contract goes down, down, down!

To Question

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

5. Sitting West, you lead the ♦A against South's contract of 5♣. East plays the ♦10 and declarer plays the ♦5. You have no further tricks available in diamonds, so partner's card is a suit preference signal. He is asking for a spade switch, rather than a heart switch. You switch to the ♠2 and East quickly bags two spade tricks to defeat the contract. On any other continuation, South would have discarded a spade loser on the ♥Q. (He has a trump entry to dummy if you play another diamond at Trick 2.)

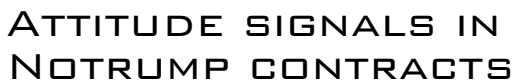
To Question

	♠ Q 10 6 4	
	♥ Q 8 7 4	
	♦ K 7	
	♣ 6 4 3	
♠ J 9 2	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center; width: 100px; height: 100px; position: relative;"> N S W E </div>	♠ A K 8 5
♥ J 5 3		♥ 10 9 6 2
♦ A Q J 9 3		♦ 10 6 4 2
♣ 8 5		♣ J
	♠ 7 3	
	♥ A K	
	♦ 8 5	
	♣ A K Q 10 9 7 2	

6. South arrives in 4♥ and your partner leads the ♠4, dummy playing low. Needing the card to be a singleton to have a chance of defeating the contract, you win with the ♠A. If you deliver a spade ruff immediately, there will be little chance of a fourth trick for the defense. Instead you should switch to your own singleton, the ♦6. You will win the first round of trumps and lead the ♠9 (a suit preference signal) for partner to ruff. He will return a diamond and your ruff in that suit will put the contract one down.

To Question

	♠ K 10 5 2	
	♥ Q J 3 2	
	♦ A Q 8 2	
	♣ 5	
♠ 4	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center; width: 100px; height: 100px; position: relative;"> N S W E </div>	♠ A 9 8 7 3
♥ 8 4		♥ A 10
♦ J 9 7 5 3		♦ 6
♣ K J 10 4 2		♣ Q 9 7 6 3
	♠ Q J 6	
	♥ K 9 7 6 5	
	♦ K 10 4	
	♣ A 8	



ATTITUDE SIGNAL WHEN DUMMY WINS THE TRICK

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

Diagram of a square table with four seats labeled N (North), S (South), E (East), and W (West).

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

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West leads the $\heartsuit 5$ against 3NT and dummy's $\heartsuit Q$ wins the trick. Sitting East, you should signal encouragement with the $\heartsuit 9$.

Declarer runs the $\clubsuit Q$ next and your partner wins with the $\clubsuit K$. Expecting you to hold the $\heartsuit J$ because of your high attitude signal, West continues with the $\heartsuit 3$. You play the $\heartsuit J$ and declarer allows this to hold. He wins the third round of diamonds and has only eight tricks available. He will have to play a spade at some stage, hoping that you hold the $\spadesuit A$. No such luck on this occasion; your partner will win with the $\spadesuit A$ and cash two diamonds to beat the contract.

Without your encouraging attitude signal at Trick 1, West would be nervous of continuing diamonds in case declarer had started with $\heartsuit AJ4$. He would probably switch to a low spade, hoping that you could win with the $\spadesuit K$ and lead a diamond through declarer's holding.

You may be wondering what would have happened if West's diamonds were headed by the ace and the suit lay like this:

	$\heartsuit Q 2$	
$\heartsuit A 10 8 5 3$	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 15px;"></div>	$\heartsuit J 9 6$
	$\heartsuit K 7 4$	

West leads the $\heartsuit 5$, as before; dummy's $\heartsuit Q$ wins and you signal encouragement with the $\heartsuit 9$. Declarer runs the $\clubsuit Q$ to West's $\clubsuit K$ and West must decide what to do next. This is a very instructive position. Although you have encouraged a diamond continuation, this is only a recommendation based on the cards that you can see. You do not know whether partner's honor is the ace or the king, so you cannot tell him what to do! West knows that declarer holds the $\heartsuit K$, since you did not cover dummy's $\heartsuit Q$. There is no reason to think that declarer began with only two diamonds and, once again, West's best chance would be to switch to a low spade. He would hope that you could win with the $\spadesuit K$ and return a diamond through declarer's $\heartsuit K$.

ATTITUDE SIGNAL WHEN PARTNER LEADS AN HONOR

When partner leads an honor against a notrump contract, he will want to know if he should continue the suit at his next opportunity. Suppose you are East on this deal:

♠ A 8 2

♥ K Q 10 4 2

♦ 10 5 3

♣ 8 6

♠ K Q 3

♥ 8 5

♦ A J 9 4

♣ K 10 3 2

♠ 10 9 7 5 4

♥ 9 6 3

♦ 7 6

♣ A 7 5

♠ J 6

♥ A J 7

♦ K Q 8 2

♣ Q J 9 4

N

W

E

S

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

Your partner leads the ♥K against 3NT. Since you do not hold the ♥A or the ♥J, you signal discouragement with the ♥3. Declarer’s ♥7 completes the first trick. Your ♥3 is not a command to switch elsewhere, of course. If partner’s hearts are headed by the ♥KQJ, he will doubtless continue the suit. As always, your attitude signal describes your own hand, with the aim of assisting partner’s decision between a continuation or a switch.

On the present occasion, West has led from the ♥KQ10 and knows from your signal that declarer still holds the ♥AJ. Hoping to find an entry to your hand, West switches brightly to the ♣8. You win with the ♣A and return a heart through declarer’s tenace to establish the suit. The contract is doomed. Declarer has only eight tricks and West will score the setting tricks in hearts when he eventually wins with the ♠A.

Remember that your decision whether to encourage is not based solely on your honor holding in the suit led. You are giving your opinion, from

what you can see, on whether a continuation would give the best chance of beating the contract. Look at this deal:

♠ AK3
♥ Q975
♦ 53
♣ J972

♠ 104
♥ A2
♦ AQJ10864
♣ K6

♠ 97652
♥ J104
♦ K7
♣ Q104

♠ QJ8
♥ K863
♦ 92
♣ A853

Diagram illustrating a bridge hand layout. The table is divided into four quadrants by a central square labeled N (North), S (South), E (East), and W (West). The hands are distributed as follows:

- North (♠): 10 4
- North (♥): A 2
- North (♦): A Q J 10 8 6 4
- North (♣): K 6
- South (♠): Q J 8
- South (♥): K 8 6 3
- South (♦): 9 2
- South (♣): A 8 5 3
- East (♠): 9 7 6 5 2
- East (♥): J 10 4
- East (♦): K 7
- East (♣): Q 10 4
- West (♠): A K 3
- West (♥): Q 9 7 5
- West (♦): 5 3
- West (♣): J 9 7 2

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

West leads the $\spadesuit A$, so that he can survey the situation and allow you to give an attitude signal. Sitting East, what signal will you give?

If you look only at your own nine-high spade holding, you might decide to discourage by playing the ♠2. West would doubtless switch to clubs, hoping to find you with ♣AQx, and the contract would be made.

If you consider the whole deal instead, you will see that a spade continuation will set up four spade tricks for the defense, even if it does allow declarer to score a trick from a holding like ♠Q83. When you gain the lead with the ♦K, as you surely will, the defenders will have a total of five tricks to cash. So, you should play the ♠7 at Trick 1, encouraging a spade continuation.

(We will see in the next chapter that many players in North America assign a special meaning to the lead of an ace: ‘Please unblock any honor you may hold, otherwise give a count signal’. This precludes the lead of the ♠A on deals like the one above. Nor is the lead of the ♠K ideal because East may not then know if West’s spades are headed by the A-K or K-Q.)

UNBLOCKING A DOUBLETON HONOR

When you hold a doubleton honor in the third seat, it is generally right to unblock this card. You should generally follow this path even when there is a risk that you may promote an extra trick in declarer’s hand. Take the East cards on this one:

♠ J 8 4 2

♥ Q J 9 6 2

♦ A Q

♣ 7 4

♠ K 9 6

♥ A 7 3

♦ 10 9 6 5

♣ K 3 2

♠ Q 10 7 3

♥ 10 4

♦ 4 3

♣ Q 10 8 6 5

W

N

E

S

♠ A 5

♥ K 8 5

♦ K J 8 7 2

♣ A J 9

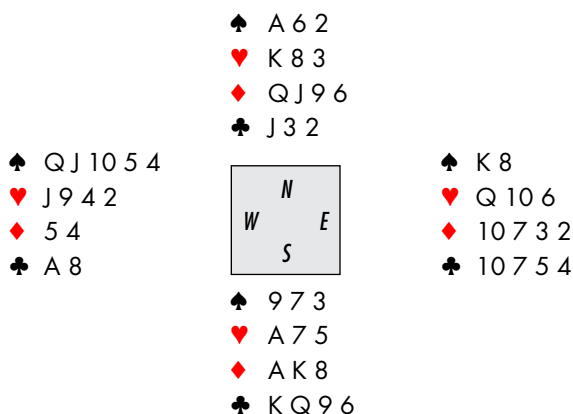
West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

West, your partner, leads the ♥Q against 3NT. Dummy wins with the ♥A and you must decide which of your cards to play. How do you see the position?

If you play the ♥4, a discouraging card, West will place declarer with ♥K105 and is unlikely to continue the suit when he wins the first round of diamonds. You should play the ♥10, to let your partner know that declarer does not hold this card. When declarer runs the ♦10 to the ♦Q, West will clear the heart suit and the game will go one down.

Similarly, you should unblock the ♥10 if declarer plays low from dummy at Trick 1. This might cost a trick if West has led from a four-card suit and South holds ♥K865. Don’t worry about that. The best chance of beating the contract is for your partner to score several heart tricks, so this is the direction to take.

Another reason to play a doubleton honor is to avoid a potential blockage in the suit that has been led. Look at the spade suit on this deal:



West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

West, your partner, leads the ♠Q against 3NT and declarer plays low from dummy. Suppose you mistakenly contribute the ♠8 to this trick. West will continue with another spade, yes, but declarer will duck again in dummy and you will have to win with the bare king. Whatever switch you then make, declarer will be able to establish two club tricks and make his contract.

To avoid such an outcome, you must play your ♠K on the first trick. You can then return the ♠8, clearing the spade suit, and partner will score enough spade tricks to beat the contract when he wins with the ♣A.

Look back to the full diagram and imagine that declarer rises with dummy's ♠A on the first trick. Again you must unblock the ♠K. This would give declarer a second spade stopper if he held ♠1073, partner having led from ♠QJ954. It cannot be helped. You would not beat the contract anyway by holding on to the king.

(Some players like to lead fourth best from QJ9xx, to avoid such problems when partner holds a doubleton honor. Give it a try! To beat the contract, you will probably need to find partner with the ace, king or ten anyway.)

ATTITUDE SIGNAL WHEN YOU COULD HAVE WON THE TRICK

When you have bid a suit, or made a lead-directing double, partner will often lead this suit from two or three spot cards. If your holding is something like AK972 it may then work well to duck the first round. By doing so, you can maintain communications.

If you decide to let dummy's card win the first round, you can make an attitude signal to let partner know whether he should continue the suit. That's what happens on the next deal, which you should view from the East seat.

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

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

West	North	East	South
	1♦	1♠	3NT

all pass

West leads the ♠8 against 3NT and the ♠J is played from dummy. What is your plan for the defense?

If you win this trick, the contract will easily be made. Whatever you do next, declarer will run the $\heartsuit Q$ when he gains the lead. The defenders will score no more than two top spades and a diamond.

To beat the game, you must allow dummy's ♠J to win the first trick. What is more, you should play the ♠9, an encouraging attitude signal to tell your partner that you would like a spade continuation. Declarer has only eight top tricks, including a spade already made. When he takes the diamond finesse, your partner will win and return his remaining spade. Your four spade tricks will then put the contract one down.

♠ 10 9 4 3
♥ 10 9 5
♦ K 5 3
♣ A 9 2

♠ A Q J 8 5
♥ K Q 2
♦ Q J 8
♣ K 6

♠ 7 2
♥ A J 7 4
♦ 7 4 2
♣ J 10 8 4

♠ K 6
♥ 8 6 3
♦ A 10 9 6
♣ Q 7 5 3

Diagram illustrating a bridge hand layout. The table is divided into four quadrants by a central square labeled N (North), S (South), E (East), and W (West). The hands are distributed as follows:

- North (N): ♠ A Q J 8 5, ♥ K Q 2, ♦ Q J 8, ♣ K 6
- South (S): ♠ 10 9 4 3, ♥ 10 9 5, ♦ K 5 3, ♣ A 9 2
- East (E): ♠ 7 2, ♥ A J 7 4, ♦ 7 4 2, ♣ J 10 8 4
- West (W): ♠ K 6, ♥ 8 6 3, ♦ A 10 9 6, ♣ Q 7 5 3

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

West leads the ♥10 against 3NT. (If only your partners were always so inspired!) What is your plan for the defense when declarer plays the ♥K from dummy?

If you win with the ♥A, the contract will be made. Declarer will hold up on the second round of hearts and communications between you and your partner will then be broken. Whether you play another heart or switch to clubs, declarer will be able to set up the diamond suit. He will lose just two hearts, one diamond and one club.

To beat the contract you must allow dummy's ♥K to win, signaling encouragement with the ♥7. At some stage declarer will have to run the ♦Q. Your partner will then win with the ♦K and play the ♥9. The defense will score three hearts, a diamond and a club to put 3NT one down.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

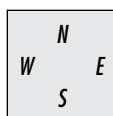
- An attitude signal tells partner whether you would welcome a continuation of the suit that has been led. A high card encourages a continuation; a low card discourages a continuation. This is the normal signal to make when partner leads to a trick at notrump.
- Although a high attitude signal will normally indicate a useful honor, you can sometimes judge to encourage when you have four or five low cards.
- When you hold a doubleton honor in the suit that partner has led, it will usually be best to play that honor on the first trick. By doing so, you will let partner know that you hold the card rather than declarer. You will also remove any risk of the suit becoming blocked.

QUIZ on attitude signals in notrump contracts

1.

♠ Q
♥ A Q 8 5
♦ A 6 4 2
♣ A K 3 2

To Answer



♠ K 9 7 5 4 3
♥ K 10 6
♦ K 9
♣ Q 7

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

Your partner (West) leads the ♠8 against 3NT, dummy playing the ♠Q. What card will you play on the first trick?

2.

♠ J 4 3
♥ A 7 2
♦ A 10 7
♣ J 10 8 4

To Answer

♠ Q 10 6 5
♥ K Q 10 5
♦ 6 3 2
♣ A 6



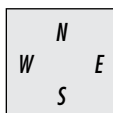
West	North	East	South
			1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

You lead the ♥K, drawing the ♥2, the ♥8 from partner, and South's ♥3. How will you defend?

3.

♠ K 7 2
♥ K 6
♦ Q J 4 3
♣ Q 9 5 4

To Answer



♠ J 10 6 4
♥ 10 7 2
♦ 9 6 5
♣ J 10 6

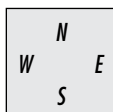
West	North	East	South
			1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

Your partner leads the ♥Q against South's 3NT and dummy wins with the ♥K. Which card will you play from the East hand?

4.

♠ A 10 9 7
♥ 5 2
♦ K Q 6
♣ K Q 10 7

To Answer



♠ K 8 4 2
♥ K 8 3
♦ A J 10 9 3
♣ 9

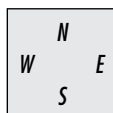
West	North	East	South
			1♣
pass	1♠	pass	1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

Your partner leads the ♥Q against South's 3NT. What is your plan for the defense?

5.

♠ K 6 4
♥ K J 6 3
♦ K 9 2
♣ K 10 7

To Answer



♠ A 8
♥ 9 8 4 2
♦ 10 5 4
♣ Q J 9 4

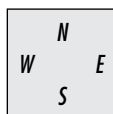
West	North	East	South
			1♦
pass	1♥	pass	1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

Your partner leads the ♠Q against South's 3NT and declarer plays the ♠4 from dummy. What is your plan for the defense?

6.

♠ A 6 2
♥ K 9 7 3
♦ Q 6 2
♣ 10 3 2

To Answer



♠ J 3
♥ Q J 6
♦ J 10 9 7 3
♣ 7 5 4

West	North	East	South
			1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

Your partner leads the ♠10, declarer playing low from dummy. Which card will you play on this trick? What is the reason for your play?

Answers to quiz

1. West leads the ♠8 against 3NT, dummy playing the ♠Q. The lead tells you that declarer holds the ♠AJ10. Nothing can therefore be achieved by covering with the ♠K. Nor do you want West to persevere with spades if he gains the lead. So, on the first trick you should play the ♠3, a discouraging attitude signal. When the cards lie as in the diagram, declarer cannot then make the contract.

To Question

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

2. You lead the ♥K against 3NT, Dummy plays low and your partner plays the ♥8, declarer following with the ♥3. What next? The ♥8 is an attitude signal. It is possible that your partner is discouraging from ♥98 and that declarer holds ♥J643. It is three times as likely that partner holds ♥J8x; he may also hold ♥J8xx. You should therefore continue with the ♥5 at Trick 2. Declarer cannot then avoid the loss of three hearts, one diamond and the ♣A.

To Question

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

3. West, your partner, leads the ♥Q against 3NT. Dummy wins with the ♥K, so partner knows that you do not hold the ♥A. However, he will be interested to hear whether you have the ♥10. Since you do, you should encourage with the ♥7. Declarer runs the ♦Q to the ♦K and West continues with the ♥4. Declarer allows your ♥10 to win and takes the third round of hearts. He is welcome to cash a total of eight tricks. When he eventually plays a club, West will score three tricks to beat the game. (You expect West's hearts to be headed by the ♥QJ9, but it is not safe to unblock the ♥10 since South might hold ♥A8xx.)

To Question

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

4. West, your partner, leads the ♥Q against 3NT. With the ♥K in your hand, you would normally encourage a heart continuation by signaling with the ♥8. South opened the bidding, however, so you know that West can hold little strength outside the ♥QJ. Pursuing hearts will succeed only when West happens to hold six hearts. It is better to discourage a heart continuation by playing the ♥3. If West finds the diamond switch, you can clear the diamond suit and beat the contract.

To Question

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

N

W
E

S

♠ Q J 3

♥ A 10 4

♦ 8 5 2

♣ A J 5 4

5. Sitting East, you see your partner lead the ♠Q against 3NT. The ♠4 is played from dummy and you must calculate which card to play. Suppose you play the ♠8, happy that this happens to be an encouraging signal. When West continues with the ♠J, declarer may decide to play low again from the dummy. (West is unlikely to hold ♠AQJxx because he did not overcall 1♠.) You will win with the bare ♠A and the contract will be made. A better idea is to overtake with the ♠A at Trick 1 and clear the spade suit. The defenders will then score four spades and the ♦A.

To Question

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

6. West, your partner, leads the ♠10 against 3NT and declarer plays low from dummy. You should play your ♠J on this trick, to let partner know the position of this card. Suppose you play the ♠3 instead. Declarer will win with the ♠Q and lead the ♣Q. When West wins the trick he is unlikely to continue spades. He will fear that declarer began with ♠QJx and that a spade continuation will give away an unnecessary trick.

To Question

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



COUNT SIGNALS IN NOTRUMP CONTRACTS

The recommended signal priority for notrump contracts is the same as that for suit contracts. The top priority signal is to show attitude on partner's leads and count on declarer's leads. In this chapter we will see how effective count signals can be when defending notrump contracts.

COUNT SIGNALS WHEN DECLARER PLAYS A SUIT

In the introductory chapter of this book, we saw how a count signal can let partner know when he should take a stopper. Here is a second example:

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

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

West leads the ♠Q and, sitting East, you signal discouragement with the ♠2. Declarer wins with the ♠A and leads the ♦3, West playing the ♦6 and dummy the ♦10. What is the diamond position?

The answer is that you cannot tell yet. West's ♦6 is a count signal, yes, but it might be from ♦64 or ♦976. It might also be a singleton, of course. Fortunately, you do not need to know the diamond position at the moment. You win the first round with the ♦Q and return the ♠6 (high from your remaining doubleton in the suit).

Let's say that declarer ducks the second round of spades, partner winning with the ♠10 and clearing the suit. Now comes the critical trick of the deal. Declarer leads the ♦9, partner playing the ♦4 and dummy the ♦J. Will you take your ♦A or not?

Partner's count signal tells you the answer. He has played the ♦6 followed by the ♦4, showing a doubleton. You therefore know that declarer had a third diamond (the ♦7) in his hand. If you win the second round of diamonds, declarer will be able to cross to dummy on the third round and score three diamond tricks! You therefore hold up the ♦A. Declarer will then make only one diamond trick instead of three. He has seven top winners in the other three suits but no hope of a ninth trick. One down!

If West held three diamonds instead, he would play low-high on the first two rounds. Sitting East, you would then capture the first two rounds of diamonds and declarer would score no diamond tricks at all. Such a defense would be necessary to beat the contract if South held ♥AKQ10. He would then have eight tricks outside diamonds and one diamond trick would give him the game.

On the next deal, West used his partner's count signal to make a somewhat brave hold-up play.

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

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

West led the ♥2 against 3NT. Declarer rose with dummy's ♥K and East signaled encouragement with the ♥9. When the ♦Q was led from dummy, East signaled count with the ♦3 and declarer played the ♦7. How would you have defended on the West cards?

West knew that declarer held three diamonds and therefore decided to hold up the ♦K, intending to block the diamond suit. Naturally this had to be done very smoothly, so that the position of the ♦K was not given away. Unaware of the situation, declarer continued with a diamond to the nine. West won with the king and made the fine return of the ♣K, a play known as the Merrimac Coup, to dislodge the entry to the blocked diamonds. Declarer could make only three clubs, two diamonds and three further winners in the majors and ended one down.

Suppose East had signaled with a high diamond instead. Whether he held two diamonds or four, there could be no benefit in West holding up the ♦K.

READING PARTNER'S COUNT SIGNAL — DOES HE HOLD FOUR CARDS OR THREE?

If partner gives a count signal with the ♣2, or the ♣3 when you can see the ♣2, you can be sure that he has an odd number of cards. Similarly, if he plays a high spot card such as the ♦8 or ♦7, you can often be certain that he has an even number of cards.

♠ A 5 3
♥ Q J 10 9 4
♦ 9 7 2
♣ 10 5

♠ K Q J 9
♥ 8 7 2
♦ J 5
♣ 8 7 4 3

♠ 10 8 4
♥ 6 5 3
♦ A K 6 4
♣ J 6 2

♠ 7 6 2
♥ A K
♦ Q 10 8 3
♣ A K Q 9

Diagram of a square table with North (N) at the top, South (S) at the bottom, West (W) on the left, and East (E) on the right.

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

You lead the ♥Q, partner playing a discouraging ♥3 and declarer winning with the ♥A. The ♠6 appears from the South hand. You play low and dummy's king wins, partner following with the ♠4. Declarer returns to his hand with the ♣A and leads the ♠7. Do you duck again or win?

You have only seen the first half of partner's count signal in spades. He has played the ♠4 and the ♠2 is still missing. Does East hold four spades or three?

As we saw in Chapter 3, you can solve many such problems by agreeing with your partner that you will show count from a four-card holding by starting with the second-highest card. If partner held ♠10842, he would play the ♠8 on the first round, intending to play the ♠4 (the third-best card) on the second round. On the present deal East's first card was the ♣4, so unless that card was a singleton you can be absolutely certain that he holds ♠1084. Declarer has three spades – he has hidden the ♠2 – and you will need to hold up the ♠A for one more round.

Restricted to only two spade tricks, declarer will have to develop the diamond suit. East will rise with the $\spadesuit K$ and clear the hearts, putting the contract one down.

COUNT SIGNALS WHEN YOUR ATTITUDE IS OBVIOUS

When your partner leads to a trick, whether in notrump or in a suit contract, this is the signal priority:

SIGNAL PRIORITY WHEN PARTNER LEADS

1st priority: attitude

2nd priority: count

3rd priority: suit preference

There is some value in an attitude signal when partner’s lead is won by the ace, king or queen in the dummy. It may then be useful to show that you hold a lesser honor. When dummy’s card is the jack or lower, the value of an attitude signal is decreased; it is more valuable to give count (the 2nd-priority signal) to let partner know how many cards declarer holds in the suit. This may allow partner to judge that he can subsequently drop a high card in declarer’s hand. Look at this deal:

♠ J 2

♥ J 10 6 2

♦ A 9 6 3

♣ A 7 6

♠ A Q 8 4 3

♥ 9 8 4

♦ 8 5

♣ Q 10 4

♠ K 6

♥ A 7 3

♦ K Q 4

♣ K J 8 3 2

♠ 10 9 7 5

♥ K Q 5

♦ J 10 7 2

♣ 9 5

N

W E

S

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

Sitting West, you lead the ♠4 against 3NT. The ♠J is played from dummy and East cannot beat this card. There is very little point in an attitude signal, telling West whether East holds the ♠10 (a relatively unimportant card). West already knows that East does not hold any card higher than the ♠J; if he did, he would have played it. Much more important is East's count and here he will play the ♠9, the second best card from four.

Declarer follows with the ♠6 from his hand and plays dummy's ♣A. He then finesses the ♣J, losing to your ♣Q. What should you do next?

East's ♠9 count signal tells you that he holds either four spades or two. Which do you think it is, on this occasion? East cannot hold only two spades because this would leave South with four spades, which he denied with his Stayman response. You should therefore lay down the ♠A in the full expectation that the ♠K will fall from South. When this proves to be the case, you cash the remainder of the spade suit, taking care to avoid a blockage.

Imagine for a moment that East had played the ♠5 at Trick 1, showing an odd number of spades. Knowing that the ♠K was still guarded in declarer's hand, you would have switched to the ♥9, hoping to find partner with the ♥A. If your wish were granted, partner would return a spade through declarer's guarded king.

On the deal we have just seen, there was no value in an attitude signal. East therefore showed his count, the second-priority signal. (In notrump contracts, as in suit contracts, there is sometimes no value in attitude or count; East will then give a suit preference signal, as we will see in the next chapter.)

This important topic demands another deal. Ease yourself into the West seat here:

West	North	East	South
			1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

You win the ♦10 with the ♦Q and turn your mind back to the spade suit. East's ♠3 was a count signal, since his attitude was obvious once he could not beat dummy's ♠Q. (The ♠J is in dummy and there would be little value in showing or denying the ♠10.) Either East began with three spades, which means that declarer's ♠A is now bare, or East began with a singleton ♠3. How do you read the spade suit?

There are two reasons to play East for three spades. First, partner gave a count signal of the $\heartsuit 7$ on the first round of diamonds. It is unlikely that declarer is playing on a three-card diamond suit at this early stage, so you should place East with two diamonds and declarer with five. In that case declarer is very likely to hold two spades rather than four. Even if this clue were not available, you would probably assume that declarer began with $\spadesuit A4$ because this would give you a fine chance of beating the contract!

You continue with the ♠5 at Trick 3 and this does indeed dislodge South's ♠A. Declarer has little option but to continue diamonds; you win with the ♦A and cash three spade tricks to put the game one down.

Suppose that East had signaled with the ♠9 on the first trick, implying that South held ♠Axx. A spade continuation would then be fruitless. Your best chance would be to switch to clubs, hoping that East could win with the ♣A and clear the spade suit before your ♦A was removed.

Your partner leads a low card against notrump and you win with a top honor. To help partner to read your holding, and consequently declarer's holding, you should indicate your count in the suit with the spot card that you return.

Let's see how this type of count signal can be useful.

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

Your first task is to read the heart position. Declarer cannot have started with ♥Q5. Your partner would then hold ♥AJ83 and would not have returned the ♥8. He would have returned the ♥3, to show a remaining count of three cards. So, declarer began with either ♥QJ5 or

♥QJ53. There are two reasons to assume that declarer began with only three hearts. The first is that this will give you a good chance of beating the contract. The second is that few declarers would think of playing the ♥5 on the first round from ♥QJ53.

To maintain communication with your partner in hearts, you should allow declarer's ♥Q to win the second trick. Declarer will have to take the club finesse. When your partner wins with the ♣K, he will return the ♥3 and that will be one down.

If you think this is basic stuff, well, you are right. But it is important basic stuff! Suppose West leads the ♦3 against 3NT and this is the diamond position:

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

East wins with the ♦A and returns the ♦2, South playing the ♦Q. Declarer cannot have started with ♦QJ4, since East would not have returned the ♦2 from an initial ♦A72. You should not therefore hold up your ♦K. Win and continue with the ♦10, which will pin dummy's ♦9 in the case where your partner began with ♦A2.

OPENING LEADS THAT CALL FOR AN UNBLOCK

Sometimes the player on lead has a very strong holding indeed and would like to demand an unblock from partner, should he hold any honor. Suppose you are on lead against 3NT and you hold ♣AKJ105. It is normal practice in North America to lead the ace from this holding. This says to partner: 'Please unblock any honor you may hold; otherwise give me a count signal so that I can tell how many cards declarer has in the suit.'

Looking at a couple of suit layouts will convince you how well this method works:

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

You lead the ♣A against 3NT and East unblocks the ♣Q, as requested. You bank four more club tricks at top speed and the contract is defeated.

Sometimes you can diagnose that declarer's honor is about to fall:

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

Again you lead the ♣A against 3NT. East follows with the ♣3, which means: 'I do not hold an honor, sorry, but I am giving you a count signal.' The ♣3 might be a singleton, yes, but if it is from three cards you can defeat the contract easily. You continue with the ♣K and this drops declarer's ♣Q. The remaining club tricks are yours.

Let's switch to full-deal format and see what may happen when you diagnose that declarer holds a guarded honor.

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

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

Sitting West, you lead the ♣A against 3NT. Partner follows with the ♣2, denying the ♣Q and showing an odd number of clubs. What will you do next?

If declarer gains the lead there is every chance that he can run nine tricks. You must therefore seek a quick entry to partner's hand. With good diamonds and the ♥A visible in the dummy, a spade switch represents your best chance. On this occasion partner does not let you down. He produces the ♠A and switches back to clubs, giving the defenders the first six tricks.

An opening lead of the queen carries the same ‘please unblock or give count’ message. Although it will usually be from a suit headed by the Q-J-10, Q-J-9 or A-Q-J, you may also lead the queen from a strong holding such as K-Q-10-9-3. Partner is then expected to unblock the jack if he holds it.

One word of warning: since an ace lead at notrump has the special meaning of requesting an unblock, you should not lead the ace from A-K-x or A-K-x-x. If you wish to make an exploratory lead from such a holding, you must start with the king; partner will then give you an attitude signal.

That is how ‘unblock or give count’ leads are played in North America, at any rate. As we will see in Chapter 12, Europeans prefer a different method where an ace or queen lead asks for an attitude signal, while a king lead asks for ‘unblock or give count’. (You would then lead the king from both A-K-J-10-x and K-Q-10-9-x.)

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- When declarer plays a suit, there would be little point in giving an attitude signal. It is commonly agreed that the defenders should signal count. You play high from a doubleton and your second-best card from four cards. With an odd number of cards, you play low.
- When partner leads a suit and your attitude is obvious from the cards in the dummy, or will become obvious by the time the trick is completed, you should signal count instead.
- When you are on lead against notrump and hold a strong suit such as A-K-J-10-6, you lead the ace. This has the special meaning of: ‘Please unblock an honor if you hold one, otherwise give count.’ Because the ace has this special meaning, you should not lead the ace from A-K-x. (However, see the [alternative method described in Chapter 12](#)).

QUIZ on count signals in notrump contracts

1.

♠ A 6 3
♥ K J
♦ K 10 6 4
♣ Q 10 9 3

To Answer



♠ J 9 8 2
♥ 10 8 4 3
♦ A J 8
♣ 6 4

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

Your partner leads the ♥5 against South's 3NT, declarer playing the ♥J from dummy. Which card will you play on this trick?

2.

♠ A K 7 3
♥ J 6
♦ K Q 2
♣ 10 8 7 3

To Answer

♠ J 8 5
♥ A 10 8 7 2
♦ A 6
♣ J 9 6



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

You lead the ♥7, drawing the ♥J, ♥3 and ♥5. How will you defend when declarer leads dummy's ♦K next?

3.

♠ 8 4
♥ K Q 6
♦ K 9 8 6 3
♣ Q 8 5

To Answer



♠ A 7
♥ J 9 8 5
♦ 10 5 2
♣ J 9 7 2

West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

Your partner leads the ♠K against South's 3NT. What is your plan for the defense?

4.

♠ J 9 3
♥ Q 2
♦ Q J 6 2
♣ A J 5 4

To Answer

♠ 10 6 2
♥ A J 10 4 3
♦ K 9 7
♣ 8 2



West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

You lead the ♥J against 3NT. Dummy wins with the ♥Q, partner playing the ♥8 and declarer the ♥6. Declarer runs the ♦Q to your ♦K. What is your plan for the defense?

5.

♠ 9 7 5 3
♥ A 8
♦ J 6 3 2
♣ K Q 6

To Answer



♠ K 4
♥ 10 7 5 3 2
♦ A 7
♣ J 9 5 3

West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

Your partner leads the ♠Q against South's 3NT. What is your plan for the defense? (Think beyond the play to the first trick.)

6.

♠ Q 8 5 2
♥ A 10 6
♦ 7 2
♣ A 6 4 3

To Answer

♠ 10 9 4
♥ 9 4
♦ A K Q 10 5
♣ J 10 5



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

You lead the ♦A against 3NT and partner plays the ♦9, declarer following with the ♦4. What is your plan for the defense?

Answers to quiz

- West leads the ♥5 against 3NT, dummy playing the ♥J. Your attitude will be obvious when you cannot beat dummy's card and you should therefore give a count signal. From four cards, you play the second-best card – here, the ♥8. If declarer plays a club next, West will win and beat the contract by clearing the hearts. If instead declarer leads a diamond from dummy at Trick 2 (hoping to sneak a trick in the suit), it will be your chance to shine. You must rise with the ♦A and return a heart.

To Question

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

- Defending 3NT, you lead the ♥7 to dummy's ♥J, partner playing the ♥3. Dummy's ♦K is played next. You should win with the ♦A and return the ♥2. Your partner's ♥3 was a count signal, so you can place him with three hearts. By continuing with a low heart, you preserve communications with partner in the suit. Declarer then has no way to score nine tricks before you score five. If instead you continued with ace and another heart, declarer could lead twice towards his clubs, ducking when the ♣Q appeared.

To Question

♠ AK73
♥ J6
♦ KQ2
♣ 10873

- If you fail to unblock the ♠A, you will have to win the second round of spades and switch elsewhere. Declarer can then establish the diamonds while he still has a spade stopper.

♠ 8 4
♥ K Q 6
♦ K 9 8 6 3
♣ Q 8 5

4. You lead the ♥J against 3NT. Dummy wins with the ♥Q, partner plays the ♥8 and declarer the ♥6. Declarer runs the ♦Q and you win with the ♦K. Since partner's attitude in hearts was obvious (he could not beat the queen, and your lead showed the ♥J10), his card was a count signal. The ♥8 would be the correct second-best signal from ♥9875. You continue with the ♥A, dropping the ♥K from South. Be careful now! If you play the ♥10 next, you will block the suit. Instead you should lead a low heart, so that partner can win and return the suit.

To Question

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

	N	
W		E
	S	

	♠ A 7 4
	♥ K 6
	♦ A 10 5 4
	♣ K Q 10 7

5. West leads the ♠Q against 3NT. Sitting West, you should follow with the ♠4. If instead you unblock the ♠K, this will promote dummy's ♠9 into a trick when declarer holds the ♠A (as expected). Declarer wins with the ♠A, hoping that the defenders' spades are blocked. He crosses to the ♣K and leads the ♦J. You must rise with the ♦A and cash the blocking ♠K. When your partner wins with the ♦K, he can score three spade tricks to put the game two down.

To Question

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

6. Sitting West, you lead the ♦A against 3NT. East signals with the ♦9. Your ace lead was an ‘unblock or give count’ request, so East has denied the ♦J and shown an even number of cards. Because he would signal with the second best card from ♦9863, you know that he holds a doubleton and that South therefore has ♦Jxxx. You must switch to a different suit, hoping that East will gain the lead at some stage and return a diamond. The ♠10 looks best but any switch will succeed. Even though clubs break 3-3, declarer has only eight tricks available.

To Question

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



SUIT PREFERENCE SIGNALS IN NOTRUMP CONTRACTS

Defense at notrump offers fewer opportunities for suit preference signals than when you are defending a suit contract. This chapter will therefore be shorter than some of the others. (“Thank goodness!” you may be saying.)

When defending against a suit contract, there are usually only two suits that you might reasonably want to indicate with your suit preference signal. The trump suit is excluded, you will remember. The situation may be different in notrump, where there may still be three suits in the reckoning. In this case you have to exclude one suit on the basis that the dummy’s holding is strong, or that declarer had indicated good values there during the bidding.

SUIT PREFERENCE WHEN YOUR ATTITUDE IS OBVIOUS AND COUNT IRRELEVANT

Sometimes partner leads a high card in a suit and dummy goes down with a powerful holding there. Since it is obvious that there is no future in persevering with the suit, it may be helpful for you to give a suit preference signal at Trick 1. Look at this deal:

♠ K 7 4 2

♥ A K 6

♦ 8 5 2

♣ 10 3 2

♠ Q J 9 5

♥ Q J 4 2

♦ K 7

♣ Q 8 4

♠ A 10 8

♥ 9 7 5

♦ A Q J 9 3

♣ A 6

♠ 6 3

♥ 10 8 3

♦ 10 6 4

♣ K J 9 7 5

N

W E

S

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

West decides to lead the ♥K, to see the dummy and allow partner to give an attitude signal in hearts. (Leading the ♥A would have asked for unblock or count, remember.) When the dummy appears, East’s attitude to the lead is obvious to all present! Rather than castigate partner with a discouraging ♥3, or show his count in the suit (which would be an equal waste of time), East should give a suit preference signal.

There are three suits other than hearts, of course, so the defenders must exclude one from the reckoning. Here, dummy’s spades are quite strong and East’s signal should be read as a preference between diamonds and clubs. He plays the ♥3, suggesting a club switch. West switches to the ♣2 and the contract is doomed, however declarer plays to this trick. When he crosses to the ♦K to take a spade finesse, the defenders will enjoy a total of seven tricks: four clubs, two hearts and a spade.

You get the idea, then. On partner's lead you normally signal attitude. If your attitude is obvious, the second priority is to signal your count. When your count cannot be of any interest to partner, you resort to the signal that normally has third priority: suit preference.

SUIT PREFERENCE SIGNAL ON THE SECOND ROUND

By the time you come to make your second signal in a suit, it will often be appropriate to show suit preference. This applies whether the first-round signal was attitude or count. Let's see some examples of that.

♠ 10 9 6
♥ K Q J 9 2
♦ 8 7 3
♣ 7 5

♠ Q 8 5
♥ 10 6
♦ A Q J 5 4
♣ J 6 4

N
S
W
E

♠ A K J 2
♥ A 7 4
♦ 10 9 2
♣ A 9 8

♠ 7 4 3
♥ 8 5 3
♦ K 6
♣ K Q 10 3 2

West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

Sitting West, you lead the ♥K against 3NT. East plays the ♥3, which is count signal (the ♥10 is in dummy, so partner knows you have led from ♥KQJ rather than ♥KQ10). You continue with the ♥Q, drawing the ♥10, ♥5 and ♥7. What next?

There is not much point in clearing the hearts because you hold no entry, so you should consider a switch to one of the black suits. Partner had a choice of spot cards to play on the second round of hearts and chose to play the ♥5 rather than the ♥8. This suggests that you should switch to clubs rather than spades. You follow partner's suggestion and switch to the ♣7. Partner produces the necessary goods in the minor suits and declarer tumbles to defeat.

Sometimes a blockage arises in the suit led by the defenders. On the second round of the suit the opening leader may have a chance to indicate the re-entry to his hand.

♠ J 10 8

♥ J 6

♦ Q J 10 8 4 2

♣ K 7

♠ A 9 5

♥ 8 7 3

♦ 7

♣ Q 9 8 5 4 3

N

W S E

♠ K 4 2

♥ K 9 5 4 2

♦ 6 5 3

♣ A J

♠ Q 7 6 3

♥ A Q 10

♦ A K 9

♣ 10 6 2

West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

West, your partner, leads the ♣5 against 3NT. Declarer plays the ♣K from dummy and you win with the ♣A. Your ♣J wins the next trick. What will you play at Trick 3?

The correct answer is: ‘I will have absolutely no idea what to do next unless my partner and I are playing suit preference signals here!’ Your partner knows that you may not hold another club. He should therefore give you a suit-preference signal on the second round of clubs. Here he will follow with the ♣9, requesting a spade switch. You switch to the ♠2 and the defense takes the first eight tricks for four down. As you see, a heart switch would have allowed declarer to make the contract.

If West had played the ♣3 on the second round, this would have requested a heart switch. Only spades and hearts are in the picture because declarer will surely need to play on diamonds himself, to bring the total to nine tricks.

Similarly, you can use a suit preference signal when driving out declarer’s stopper in the suit:

West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

Declarer holds off once more and you play the $\clubsuit J$ to clear the suit. When declarer runs the $\heartsuit Q$ to East's $\heartsuit K$, your partner will make the requested switch to spades. After this smooth defense, the game is one down – two down, if declarer rises with the $\spadesuit K$ on the first round. Without the benefit of suit preference signals in this situation, East would have to guess; on a heart return the game would be made.

If this type of signal is new to you, think how you would have signaled on the West cards when holding the ♥A instead of the ♠A. Since your entry was in the lower of the two possible suits, you would have led the ♣J at Trick 2, followed by the ♣Q at Trick 3.

SUIT PREFERENCE SIGNAL WHEN CROSSING TO PARTNER’S HAND

When the defenders are cashing winners in a suit, defending at notrump, they will often have the chance to pass a suit preference message. That’s what happened when this deal arose in a final played in London:

♠ Q 5

♥ 7 5

♦ J 6 5

♣ K Q 10 8 7 2

♠ A K 6 4

♥ 9 4 2

♦ Q 8 3 2

♣ A 4

♠ J 9 8 2

♥ 10 8 3

♦ K 10 7 4

♣ 6 3

♠ 10 7 3

♥ A K Q J 6

♦ A 9

♣ J 9 5

N

W E

S

West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

West made the bright start of the ♠K, East signaling encouragement with the ♠9. West continued with the ♠A, picking up dummy’s ♠Q, and then had a choice of spot cards to play on the third round of spades. In general, he might want to request an eventual switch to hearts, diamonds or clubs. On this occasion it was reasonable to discount clubs from the equation, because of dummy’s strong holding. West therefore played the ♠4 next, his lower remaining spade, to suggest a switch to diamonds, the lower of the red suits.

East scored two more spade tricks and duly switched to a diamond. The contract then had to go three down instead of just one down.

SUIT PREFERENCE SIGNAL WHEN DECLARER RUNS A SUIT

Suppose declarer is running a solid suit where you hold four cards and your partner has only one. Your partner will have to find three discards and may be hoping that you can give him some assistance. Since a count signal

will not be of any value, as you follow to declarer’s winners, you can pass a suit preference message instead. See how East can make life easy for his partner, defending 6NT on the following deal:

♠ A K 7

♥ 8 7 5

♦ A K 10 6

♣ A 5 3

♠ J 10 4 2

♥ Q J 10 4

♦ 3

♣ J 9 7 6

N

W E

S

♠ 8 5

♥ A K 6

♦ Q J 7 2

♣ K Q 8 2

♠ Q 9 6 3

♥ 9 3 2

♦ 9 8 5 4

♣ 10 4

West	North	East	South
pass	6NT	all pass	1NT

West leads the ♥Q against 6NT and, sitting East, you give a 1st-priority attitude signal, following with the ♥2. We will say that declarer ducks this trick, hoping to tighten the end position and perhaps benefit from a helpful club discard later. West continues with the ♥J and you give a 2nd-priority count signal playing the ♥9 to show your remaining count. Declarer wins with the ♥K and starts to play his diamond winners.

West follows to the ♦Q and it is you to play in the East seat. There is no value whatsoever in a count signal. You should follow with the ♦9 on the first round. This passes a suit preference message: ‘I can look after the spades, partner.’ When declarer leads a second round of diamonds your partner knows that he can discard spades, retaining his potentially useful club guard. Even if he is uncertain of the heart position (you might have held ♥92), the run of the diamond suit will cause him no problems. East will guard the spades and West will guard the clubs. The slam will go one down. As you see, a club discard from West would have been fatal.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Against notrump, just as against a suit contract, the signal priority when partner leads is: attitude, count and then suit preference. When your attitude to the opening lead is made obvious from the cards in dummy, and a count signal would be irrelevant, you can give a suit preference signal at Trick 1.
- When partner holds a doubleton such as A-K or K-Q in the suit that you have led, a blockage may occur. To tell partner how he can cross to your hand, you can make a suit preference signal on the second round. Suppose you hold ♣Q108652 and lead the ♣6 against 3NT, finding partner with the ♣AK. On the second round, you can play either the ♣8 or the ♣2 to pass a suit preference message.
- When the defenders are cashing winners in a suit that has been established, there will often be an opportunity to give a suit preference signal.
- Similarly, when declarer is cashing some winners, you may have the chance to signal suit preference as you follow suit.

QUIZ on suit preference signals at notrump

1.

♠ Q 9 3
♥ 8 2
♦ A Q 10 6 2
♣ K J 6

To Answer

♠ 10 6 2
♥ A J 9 4
♦ 8 7 4
♣ 8 4 2



West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

You lead the ♥4 to East's ♥K and South's ♥6. East returns the ♥3 to South's ♥10 and your ♥J. You continue with the ♥A, dropping South's ♥Q, followed by the ♥9. East, meanwhile, plays the ♥5 and ♥7. What will you do next?

2.

♠ A 6
♥ Q J 3
♦ J 10 7 6 3 2
♣ Q 3

To Answer



♠ K 8
♥ 10 8 7 4 2
♦ A
♣ 9 6 5 4 2

West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

Your partner leads the ♠Q, dummy playing low. You win with the ♠K and return the ♠8, West following with the ♠2. What is your plan for the defense when a diamond is led from dummy?

3.

♠ A 4
♥ Q J 8
♦ J 10 8 6 3
♣ K 10 6

To Answer

♠ J 10 9 8 3
♥ 4 2
♦ K 5
♣ A 7 5 4



West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

You lead the ♠J, dummy winning with the ♠A and East playing the ♠K. At Trick 2 declarer runs the ♦J. How will you defend?

4.

♠ Q 9 6 5
♥ Q 5 2
♦ K J 6
♣ K Q 2

To Answer

♠ K 10 2
♥ 7 6 4
♦ 7 4
♣ J 10 9 8 6



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

You lead the ♣J against 3NT, East winning dummy's ♣K with the ♣A. What is your plan for the defense when partner returns the ♣5 (the ♣3 and ♣7 appearing from South).

5.

♠ K 8 2
♥ 8 3
♦ Q J 9 7 2
♣ K 10 6

To Answer



♠ A Q 4
♥ A K 6
♦ 10 8
♣ 9 7 5 4 2

West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

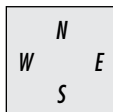
Your partner leads the ♥2 against 3NT. What is your plan for the defense?

6.

♠ 8 4 2
♥ K 7
♦ K J 2
♣ K 10 7 6 2

To Answer

♠ K 7 6 5 3
♥ 10 6
♦ A 7 4
♣ J 8 4



West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

You lead the ♠5 against 3NT, East winning with the ♠A and South playing the ♠9. East returns the ♠J, covered by South's ♠Q. What is your plan for the defense?

Answers to the QUIZ

1. Defending 3NT, you lead the ♥4 to partner's ♥K. He returns the ♥3 to South's ♥10 and your ♥J. You must hope that East has four hearts rather than two. You continue with the ♥A and ♥9, partner playing the ♥5 and then the ♥7. East's choice of spot cards on the third and fourth round of hearts indicates suit preference. Dummy holds the ♦A and there should be no pressing need for a diamond switch. The low-card signal therefore requests a club rather than a spade. You should switch to the ♣8.

To Question

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

2. West leads the ♠Q against 3NT, dummy playing low. You overtake with the ♠K (which costs nothing since it will fall anyway under the ♠A) and return the ♠8. On this trick West has the chance to make a suit preference signal. He plays the ♠2 to indicate a high card in clubs. Note that diamonds are out of the reckoning, since declarer will doubtless have to play on that suit to score nine tricks. When declarer leads a diamond from dummy, you win with the ♦A (partner might as well confirm his message by following with the ♦4!) and you switch to a club. West wins and scores his remaining spades for two down.

To Question

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

	♠ 7 5 4 3	
	♥ A K 6	
	♦ K Q 5	
	♣ K J 7	

3. Sitting West, you lead the ♠J against 3NT. Dummy's ♠A wins and East plays the ♠K. Declarer now runs the ♦J to your ♦K. It is possible that South began with ♠Q7652. Nevertheless, easily the best chance of defeating the contract is that East holds the ♠Q. You can choose which spot card you play to partner's ♠Q. Since your re-entry is in clubs, you lead the ♠3. East wins with the ♠Q and returns the ♣3, the defenders taking the contract two down.

To Question

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

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

4. Sitting West, you lead the ♣J against 3NT. The ♣K is played from dummy, East winning with the ♣A. East returns the ♣5 to South's ♣7 and you have the opportunity for a suit preference signal. You should play the ♣10, won by dummy's ♣Q. When declarer plays on diamonds, your partner will win with the ♦A and switch to spades, as suggested by your suit preference signal. Declarer cannot make more than his eight top tricks, whatever he does. If you were not playing suit preference signals and East switched to a heart instead, declarer would play all his red-suit winners, forcing you to discard from ♠K10 ♣1098. If you discarded a club, he would throw you in with a club to lead away from the ♠K.

To Question

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

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

5. West, your partner, leads the ♥2 against 3NT. Suppose you win with the ♥K, cash the ♥A and return the ♥6. West will win South's ♥J with the ♥Q and can tell that declarer holds the ♥10. Which black suit should he play, though? You should foresee this problem by winning the first heart with the ♥A, continuing with the ♥K and ♥6. Playing in this unusual order (the higher honor first) is suit preference for spades. Playing the ♥K first would have suggested a club switch. Declarer surely needs diamond tricks to make the contract, so that suit is ruled out.

To Question

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

6. Defending 3NT, you lead the ♠5 to East's ♠A. The ♠J is returned, South covering with the ♠Q. You win with the ♠K and cannot tell who holds the missing ♠10. In any case, you should return the ♠3 – a suit preference signal for diamonds. (Clubs are excluded from the reckoning, since declarer will surely need club tricks to reach his target. Diamonds is the lower of the remaining suits.) East wins with the ♠10 and duly returns a diamond to put the contract two down.

To Question

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



DISCARDING

One of the most important opportunities to signal arises when you cannot follow suit for the first time. You may then have a choice of three suits to discard. Within the chosen suit you can throw a high card or a low card. There are three basic types of discard, each of which has a large army of followers:

Attitude discards. A high card means that you like the suit of your discard. (If you throw the ♥8, for example, this shows something good in hearts and encourages partner to switch to that suit.)

Count discards. You discard from a suit that you do not want partner to play. From that suit you throw a high card when you have an even number of cards there, a low card when you have an odd number of cards. (If you throw the ♣9, you say that you are not interested in clubs and you have an even number of cards in that suit.)

Suit preference discards. You discard from a suit that you do not want partner to play. A high card means that you are interested in the higher of the other two suits. A low card means that you are interested in the lower of the other two suits. (If spades are trumps and you discard the ♦8 on the second round of trumps, you are showing an interest in hearts, the higher remaining side suit.) This method is known also as Lavinthal or McKenney.

With discards, just as with signals, the concept of ‘priority’ is important. Attitude discards are the most popular around the world, and this will be the first-priority discard in the great ‘recommended signaling system’ that we are gradually constructing. Here is the full priority list for discards:

SIGNAL PRIORITY WHEN DISCARDING

1st priority: attitude

2nd priority: count

3rd priority: suit preference

In this chapter we will see how you can pass a variety of messages by choosing your discards carefully.

ATTITUDE DISCARD TO SHOW A HIGH HONOR

By indicating that you hold a high card in a suit, you can often assist your partner’s defense. Take the East cards here:

♠ A Q 7 6

♥ J 6

♦ 10 8 5

♣ Q J 8 5

♠ 9 8

♥ Q 8 5 4

♦ A Q 3 2

♣ A 10 6

♠ 5

♥ A 9 7 3

♦ J 9 6 4

♣ 9 7 4 2

♠ K J 10 4 3 2

♥ K 10 2

♦ K 7

♣ K 3

N

W E

S

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

West leads the ♠9, declarer winning in his hand and drawing a second round of the suit. Sitting East, you have the chance to make an informative discard. You throw the ♥9, a clear positive attitude discard for hearts.

Declarer continues with the ♣K and West wins with the ♣A. Without any signal from you, he would have to guess whether to play you for the ♥A or the ♦K. Your emphatic request for a heart switch makes life easy for him. He switches to the ♥8, a high card to tell you that he does not want a heart return. (It is an important principle of defense, you will recall, that you lead a low card to suggest a suit headed by one or more honors – a suit that you would like to be returned. A high spot-card lead denies interest in that suit, just as it does on the opening lead.)

Message received, partner! You win with the ♥A and switch to the ♦4, defeating the contract.

On the next deal an attitude discard does not simply fall into West's lap. He has to take steps to seek such information.

♠ 10 9 8 4
♥ A 8 5
♦ K 10 6
♣ 10 9 4

♠ Q 7 6
♥ J 6 4 3
♦ 8 5 3
♣ K 6 2

N

W
E

S

♠ A K 3
♥ K Q 10 7 2
♦ Q 9 7
♣ A J

♠ J 5 2
♥ 9
♦ A J 4 2
♣ Q 8 7 5 3

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

Your partner leads the ♠10. You discourage with the ♠2 and declarer wins with the ♠A. When declarer plays the ♥K, West cleverly holds off the first round. He wants to see a discard from you, so that he knows what to do when he takes his trump trick. Declarer continues with the ♥Q and West wins with the ace. What do you discard in the East seat?

Prospects are not especially bright but you might be able to score some tricks in diamonds. Since the ♦4 may not look like an encouraging discard, you do best to discourage in clubs. (You have already shown your lack of interest in spades, at Trick 1.)

West notes your discard of the ♣3, discouraging clubs, and switches to the ♦6. You win with the ♦A and return the ♦2. Luck is with you on this occasion. The defenders score three diamond tricks and the contract is beaten.

Suppose West had won the first round of trumps, not waiting to see a discard from you. If he guessed to switch to the ♣10 next, the contract would have been made; declarer would discard a diamond on the third round of clubs. The result would be the same if West exited passively with a spade or a heart. Declarer would then finesse the ♣J.

ATTITUDE DISCARD TO DISCOURAGE A LOSING ALTERNATIVE DEFENSE

When partner may have a choice of defenses to play, you can deflect him from the losing defense with a discouraging attitude signal. West followed such a path on this deal:

♠ J 9 4 2

♥ A K 5

♦ J 6

♣ Q 10 7 3

♠ Q 6

♥ J 8 7 3

♦ K 9 5 4 2

♣ 8 2

N

W E

S

♠ A K 10 7 5 3

♥ Q 4

♦ A Q

♣ 9 5 4

♠ 8

♥ 10 9 6 2

♦ 10 8 7 3

♣ A K J 6

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

Sitting West, you lead the ♣8 against South’s spade game. This proves to be an inspired choice when East wins with the ♣J and cashes the ♣A and ♣K. What discard will you make on the third round of clubs?

A fourth round of clubs will promote your ♠Q into the setting trick. You know this but your partner doesn’t. From his point of view, you might

If your ♦K was the ♦A and you did not hold a promotable trump, you would discard a high diamond instead. Partner would then switch to a diamond.

On many deals it is of little interest to partner which high cards you may hold in defense. For example, he can maybe work out for himself that ‘partner must hold the ♦K or the contract is cold’. Do not make flashy attitude discards when this is likely to assist declarer more than your partner.

♠ 10 6 4
♥ 10 9
♦ KJ7 5 2
♣ AK7

♠ A Q 5
♥ K 5 3
♦ A Q 8
♣ Q 10 4 3

♠ KJ9 8 3
♥ 7 2
♦ 10 9 6 3
♣ 9 6

♠ 7 2
♥ A Q J 8 6 4
♦ 4
♣ 1 8 5 2

Diagram illustrating a bridge hand layout. The table is divided into four quadrants by a central square labeled 'N' (North), 'S' (South), 'E' (East), and 'W' (West). The hands are distributed as follows:

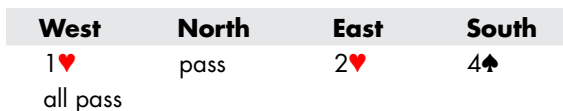
- North (♠): A Q 5, ♥ K 5 3, ♦ A Q 8, ♣ Q 10 4 3
- South (♠): 10 6 4, ♥ 10 9, ♦ KJ7 5 2, ♣ AK7
- East (♠): KJ9 8 3, ♥ 7 2, ♦ 10 9 6 3, ♣ 9 6
- West (♠): 7 2, ♥ A Q J 8 6 4, ♦ 4, ♣ 1 8 5 2

West led the ♣A and East signaled encouragement with the ♣9. West duly continued with king and another club, giving his partner a ruff. East exited safely with his last trump, declarer winning with the ♥A. When declarer led the ♥Q, drawing the last trump, East had a chance to discard. What card would you have chosen?

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You may be thinking that East's discard might have been a bluff and it would have been rather clever to throw the ♦9 instead, pretending to hold the ♦K in order to persuade declarer to finesse in spades instead. Do not get involved in such psychological games. There is no reason whatsoever why West should need to know that you hold the ♠K. (For one thing, South's weak-two opener means that there is no room for him to hold that card.) Just throw a low card from one of the suits and let declarer make his guess with no clue one way or the other.

We saw in an earlier chapter that it can be important for a defender to show count when declarer plays on a long suit in dummy. The other defender can then tell when he should take his ace in the suit. You will sometimes have the opportunity to give a count *discard* in such a suit! Would you have found the way to assist partner, holding the East cards below?



West leads the ♥K against South’s spade game. You follow with the ♥4 and declarer wins with the ace. Declarer draws trumps in three rounds and you have the chance to assist partner with a discard. What will it be?

If South holds ♣Ax, he will soon be claiming all thirteen tricks. If he holds a singleton ♣A, dummy’s club suit will be dead. The situation you have to worry about is that your partner holds ♣Ax. In that case he will have to decide when to take his ♣A. You can help him by discarding the ♣8. When West does hold the ♣A, he will realize that your card must be a count signal. (If West does not hold the ♣A, your discard is irrelevant.) Knowing that you have an even number of clubs, West will play his ♣A on the first round. Declarer will then have to lose three red-suit tricks and the game will fail.

You may have wondered whether declarer would do better to lead a club at Trick 2, before the defenders had any chance to signal. It’s an interesting point. If he held two clubs, though, he might be nervous of playing a club before drawing trumps. That would risk a defensive ruff when the clubs divided 4-1.

There is another situation where you can assist partner with a count discard – when you have the chance to discard in the suit that was led against a notrump contract:

♠ Q 10 2

♥ 9 4

♦ Q J 10 4

♣ J 9 7 3

♠ K 8 5

♥ K 10 8 6 3

♦ 9 6 5

♣ 8 6

N

W E

S

♠ 6 4 3

♥ Q 7 5 2

♦ 8 7 2

♣ K Q 10

♠ A J 9 7

♥ A J

♦ A K 3

♣ A 5 4 2

West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	2NT

West, your partner, leads the ♥6 against 3NT. You put up the ♥Q and declarer wins with the ♥A. Declarer continues with four rounds of

diamonds, partner following three times. What discard will you make on dummy's last diamond?

You could throw the ♠3, yes, to show no interest in that suit and to imply values in clubs. That would not tell partner what he needs to know. It is more useful for you to discard a heart, to let partner know the lie of that suit. Your remaining cards are the ♥752 and to show count you should discard the same card that you would have returned, had you been on lead. You should play high from a remaining doubleton (the ♥7 from ♥75, for example), and low from a remaining tripleton. Here you will discard the ♥2.

Declarer's next move is to run the ♠Q to partner's ♠K. Partner knows that you started with either four hearts or two hearts. If you began with only two hearts you would not discard your last card in the suit. Also, there would be precious little chance of beating the contract. West will therefore lay down the ♥K. Declarer's ♥J does indeed fall and West cashes three more heart tricks to beat the game.

Suppose you had begun with ♥Q75 instead. You would discard the ♥7 and West would know that declarer still had a guard on his ♥J. He would then switch to clubs, hoping that you held the ♣A and could lead a heart through South's remaining ♥J2.

DO NOT MAKE A DISCARD THAT MAY COST A TRICK

A small problem with standard attitude discards is that you may not be able to afford a high card in the suit that you would like partner to play. In such a case you should merely discourage in another suit. Usually there will be only two possible suits for partner's next play and this causes no problem. Look at this deal:

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

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

Sitting East, you see your partner lead the ♣7 against the spade game. Declarer wins with the ♣A, crosses to the ♠K and plays a second spade. What discard will you make?

You would like to encourage partner to play hearts. However, you cannot afford to throw the ♥10. If you waste this card, declarer will cover West's eventual switch to the ♥J and score a trick with his ♥9. Since the ♥3 would discourage hearts, you have no satisfactory heart to throw. Instead you should discard the ♦4. By discouraging diamonds, you tell partner that (so far as you can tell from your hand) a heart switch offers more promise.

Declarer rises with the ♠A and reverts to the club suit, hoping to discard a heart. Not today! West ruffs the third round of clubs and switches to the ♥J. Whether or not declarer covers with the ♥K, the defenders will score three heart tricks and defeat the contract.

DISCARDING TO LET PARTNER KNOW WHICH CARDS DECLARER HAS

Once the defenders have collected their 'book' (for example, three tricks against a major-suit game), the main purpose in discarding will be to help your partner know which cards he should keep. For example if you throw the ♣2, the ♣5 and then the ♣8, it will be clear that you have nothing in clubs and partner should retain his own guard in the suit. That much is obvious. Not so apparent, perhaps, is that by throwing all your cards in

partner's suit, you can let him know whether declarer still has a card there and he must therefore keep a guard against it. Take the East cards on this deal:

♠ K 7

♥ Q 7 5 3

♦ J 7 6 3

♣ K 7 6

♠ 6

♥ K J 10 9 6 2

♦ Q 9 5

♣ Q J 4

N

W E

S

♠ A Q J 10 9 3

♥ A 4

♦ A K

♣ 9 5 3

♠ 8 5 4 2

♥ 8

♦ 10 8 4 2

♣ A 10 8 2

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

West, your partner, tries his luck with the ♣Q. You encourage with the ♣8 and West persists with the ♣J. Knowing that you must hold the ♣A, declarer plays low from dummy again. West finds another club to play and you win the third trick with the ♣A. The defenders have their book. How will you continue the defense?

A fourth round of clubs can hardly produce any dividend, so you return the ♥8. Declarer wins with the ♥A and runs the trump suit. On the first five rounds of trumps, West follows once and then discards four hearts. His last four cards are the ♥K and the ♦Q95. What should he throw when declarer leads his last trump? Declarer has three cards left in his hand. If they include the ♥4, West must keep the ♥K and abandon his potential diamond guard. If instead declarer's last cards are ♦AKx, West must throw the ♥K and keep all three diamonds.

To let West know what to do, you must take some care with your discard on the penultimate round of trumps. If you began with the ♥84, you must throw the ♥4. West will then know that he can throw the ♥K. When the position is as shown in the diagram, you will not throw a heart and West should therefore assume that South holds the ♥4. Since you know that West started with 1-6-3-3 shape, you do best to throw the ♦8.

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Defensive Signaling

Whether partner reads this as attitude or count, he will surely beat the contract by keeping his ♥K.

RUFFING CAN BE BETTER THAN DISCARDING

Suppose partner cashes three winners in a suit and you follow to the first two rounds. On the third round, you have the opportunity to assist partner with an attitude discard. When you can see what needs to be done, it may be smarter play to ruff partner’s winner and make the required continuation yourself. Let’s see an example of that. Take the East cards here:

♠ J

♥ 9 5

♦ KJ 9 4

♣ J 9 8 7 5 2

♠ 8 5 2

♥ K Q 7 3

♦ 7 6 3

♣ Q 10 3

N

W E

S

♠ 6 4 3

♥ J 10 8 4 2

♦ A 2

♣ A 6 4

♠ A K Q 10 9 7

♥ A 6

♦ Q 10 8 5

♣ K

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

Your partner leads the ♦4 against South’s spade game. You win with the ♦A and return the suit, West winning declarer’s ♦10 with the ♦J. When West continues with the ♦K, you must consider which card to play. Any ideas?

Suppose you play the ♣6 (encouraging clubs) or the ♥2 (discouraging hearts). There is at least a chance that your partner will persist with a fourth round of diamonds, hoping that you can overruff dummy’s ♠8. When this proves not to be the case, declarer will draw trumps and dispose of his club loser on the heart suit. You are the only one who knows that you cannot overruff dummy’s ♠8. You should therefore ruff partner’s ♦K and cash the ♣A yourself.

Sometimes you must ruff partner’s winner because the required continuation can only be made from your side of the table:

♠ J 8 5

♥ Q 9 7 3

♦ A K J 3

♣ 9 5

♠ A K Q 9 3

♥ J 5

♦ 9 7 4

♣ A 8 2

N

W E

S

♠ 6 4

♥ 8 4

♦ 10 6 5 2

♣ Q J 6 4 3

♠ 10 7 2

♥ A K 10 6 2

♦ Q 8

♣ K 10 7

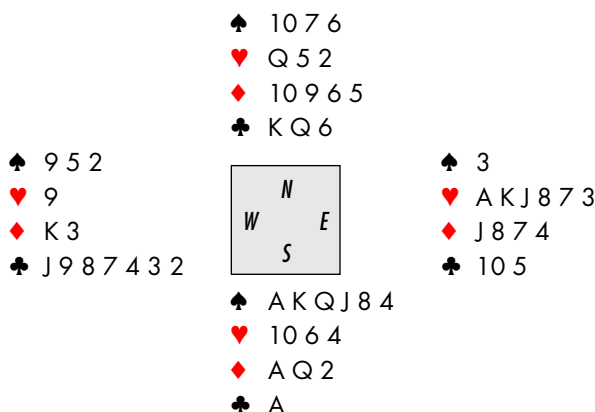
West	North	East	South
1♠	2♠	pass	1♥
all pass			3♥

The opponents stop in 3♥ and your partner, West, leads out the ♠A, ♠K and ♠Q. You play high-low on the first two rounds and must then choose a card on the third round. To beat the contract, it seems that you will need three spade tricks and two club tricks. If declarer holds the ♣K, you must lead clubs from your side of the table. You should therefore ruff partner’s ♠Q and switch to the ♣Q. Two club tricks duly materialize for the defense and the contract is beaten.

On some such deals, West should make life easy for partner by leading a low spade (rather than the queen) on the third round, forcing East to ruff. West might well have followed this path, but it could go wrong when East has to ruff from ♥K10 and this costs a natural trump trick.

DISCARDING TO FURTHER THE DEFENSE RATHER THAN TO SIGNAL

Passing a useful message to partner is only one aspect of discarding. Sometimes there is a direct benefit from discarding cards in a particular suit and this must take precedence. Would you have defended this deal correctly, sitting West?



West	North	East	South
		2♥	4♠

all pass

Sitting West, you lead the ♥9 against South's spade game. Partner wins with the ♥J and continues with the ♥A and ♥K. Which two discards will you make?

The original West player, who was not the sharpest knife in the drawer, discarded the ♣2 and ♣3. His intention was to make it clear that he had nothing of interest in clubs and would welcome a diamond switch. When East duly switched to a diamond, declarer made the game easily. He won with the ♦A, played two top trumps from his hand and cashed the ♣A. He then crossed to the ♠10 and discarded his two remaining diamonds on the ♣KQ.

West had a blind spot, of course. He should have thrown his two diamonds on partner's ♥AK. He could then have ruffed a diamond for the setting trick.

To get further mileage from this deal, suppose that West's hand had been:

♠ J 9 5 ♥ 9 ♦ K 7 3 ♣ J 10 8 5 3 2

Which two discards should he choose then?

He should discard the ♦3 and the ♣2. By discouraging both the minor suits, he would request a fourth round of hearts. This would promote West's ♠J and again the contract would be defeated.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

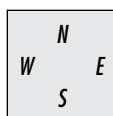
- When you are discarding, the signal priority is: attitude, count and then suit preference.
- Your first discard usually signals attitude in the suit that you are throwing. A high club discard would encourage partner to play clubs; a low heart discard would discourage a switch to hearts.
- Do not make a discard that may cost a trick. Holding $\spadesuit A103$, it is quite possible that you cannot afford an encouraging discard of the $\spadesuit 10$. In that case make a discouraging discard in another suit.
- When your attitude in a suit is already known, you can discard to show your count instead. Suppose partner leads a heart and you follow with the $\heartsuit 2$ as a discouraging signal. Subsequently, your first heart discard will indicate your remaining (residual) count in the suit.
- Do not give an attitude discard, showing a high card in a suit, unless you think that partner will value this knowledge. Remember that declarer has his eyes open too and may benefit from such information.

QUIZ on discarding

1.

♠ 10 9 7 4
♥ 6 5 2
♦ K 7
♣ K J 9 7

To Answer



♠ —
♥ J 8 7 3
♦ A Q J 9 4
♣ 10 8 3 2

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

Your partner leads the ♠6 against South's partscore of 2NT. What discard will you make?

2.

♠ 9 2
♥ K 9
♦ Q J 10 8 4 2
♣ K J 3

To Answer

♠ K 10 8 5 4
♥ 7 6 4
♦ K 9 6
♣ Q 8



West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

You lead the ♠5 and partner plays the ♠Q, South winning with the ♠A. What is your plan for the defense when declarer continues with the ♦A and the ♦3, East playing the ♦7 on the first round?

3.

♠ Q 9 7 5
 ♥ K J 6
 ♦ 8 6 3
 ♣ A K 10

To Answer

♠ 4 3
 ♥ 10 7 5 3 2
 ♦ 7 4
 ♣ Q 9 8 3

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

Your partner leads the ♦A and ♦K, on which you play high-low. What card will you play when West continues with the ♦Q?

4.

♠ K 7 5
 ♥ 9 8 4 2
 ♦ K 7
 ♣ K Q 10 6

To Answer

♠ A Q 4
 ♥ K 3
 ♦ 8 6 3 2
 ♣ 8 7 5 4

West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

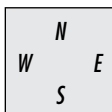
Your partner leads the ♥5 and you win with the ♥K. When you return the ♥3, South plays the ♥10 and West the ♥Q. What will you discard on partner's ♥A at Trick 3?

5.

♠ Q 7 5 2
♥ 10 8 4 2
♦ A 7
♣ 10 6 4

To Answer

♠ 9 4
♥ K J 7 5
♦ Q 9 6 3
♣ J 5 3



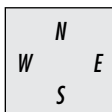
West	North	East	South
			1♠
pass	2♠	pass	4♠
all pass			

You lead the ♥5 against the spade game and partner rewards you by producing the ♥A. Back comes the ♥3 to South's ♥9 and your ♥J. When you play the ♥K, partner discards the ♣8. What is your plan for the defense?

6.

♠ K Q 2
♥ Q 9 6 4
♦ J 7 4
♣ K 6 3

To Answer



♠ 10 8 5 4
♥ 8 5 2
♦ 9 5
♣ A 10 4 2

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

Your partner leads the ♦A, followed by the ♦K and ♦Q. What discard will you make on the third round of diamonds?

Answers to the QUIZ

- West, who opened a weak 2♠, leads the ♠6 against 2NT. Dummy covers with the ♠7 and, sitting East, you must find a discard. Should you signal your diamond strength by throwing the ♦9? No, because you are likely to need five diamond tricks to beat the contract. Instead you should throw the ♥3, discouraging a switch to hearts (the other suit that partner might find tempting because dummy has a weak holding). When declarer plays a heart to set up his eighth trick, West will win and switch to diamonds.

To Question

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

	♠ A Q 5	
	♥ K Q 10 4	
	♦ 10 8 2	
	♣ A Q 5	

- Defending 3NT, you lead the ♠5 to partner's ♠Q. South wins with the ♠A and continues with ace and another diamond. There is little value in a hold up, so far as disrupting communications is concerned, since at least one of dummy's kings will provide an entry. Nevertheless, you should hold up so partner has a chance to signal when he began with two diamonds. You win the third round of diamonds, as partner throws the ♣10. You switch to the ♣8, allowing partner to win and return a spade through South's ♠J7.

To Question

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

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

3. West, your partner, begins the defense against 4♠ by cashing the ♦A and ♦K. You encourage by playing the ♦7 and the ♦4. When West continues with the ♦Q, you have the chance to make a helpful discard. Are you tempted to throw the ♣9, to show your ♣Q sitting over the ♣AK? This will merely help declarer, who has a guess whether to finesse in clubs or hearts. Instead you should throw a low heart or a low club, leaving declarer to make his own guess. Partner should realize that he has a safe exit in either black suit.

To Question

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

	♠ A K J 8 2	
	♥ A 8	
	♦ 10 9 5	
	♣ J 6 5	

4. West, your partner, leads the ♥5 against 3NT. You win with the ♥K and return the ♥3 to West's ♥Q. When he cashes the ♥A at Trick 3, you can see that a spade switch will beat the contract. You cannot discard the ♠4 because this will look like a discouraging card. Instead, you should throw the ♦2, discouraging in the other suit that West is likely to consider for his switch. Dummy's strong clubs make a switch to that suit unattractive.

To Question

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

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ J 10 3
♥ J 10 6
♦ A Q J 9 5
♣ A J

5. Sitting West, you lead the ♥5 against 4♠. East wins with the ♥A and returns the ♥3 to South's ♥9 and your ♥J. When you play the ♥K, East discards the ♣8. Suppose you regard partner's ♣8 as some sort of command for a club switch. Declarer will win with the ♣A, draw trumps and discard his club loser on the ♥10. At Trick 4, you should play a fourth round of hearts, allowing East to ruff dummy's ♥10. Declarer cannot avoid a subsequent club loser. (If East happens to hold the ♣A, it is barely possible that declarer can discard all the clubs from one hand or the other.)

To Question

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

6. West leads the ♦A against South's 4♥ and, sitting East, you encourage with the ♦9. West continues with the ♦K and the ♦Q and you must choose a discard on the third round. When the deal arose, East fondly imagined that West had only five diamonds; three rounds would then stand up and the ♣A would be the setting trick. He therefore signaled encouragement for clubs with the ♣10. Declarer ruffed the third diamond, drew trumps and ran the ♣9! This forced the ♣A and the game was made. You cannot afford to signal with a card that may have trick-taking potential. The best discard is the ♠4, showing no interest in spades.

To Question

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



SIGNALING WITH AN HONOR

Until now, we have been giving various splendid signals with spot cards. What does it mean when you make a grander gesture, assigning an honor to this purpose? It will usually show that you hold two or more honors, including the one below the card that you play. For example, if you signal with a queen this will show the jack and perhaps the ten as well.

ATTITUDE SIGNALS WITH AN HONOR

Suppose you hold the East cards in this position:

	♠ A 8 2	
♠ 10 5	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 15px;"></div>	♠ K Q J 9 3
	♠ 7 6 4	

You mentioned your spades during the auction and partner subsequently leads the ♠10 against South's contract in a different suit. When declarer calls for dummy's ♠A, your clearest signal is the ♠K. This promises the ♠Q and usually the ♠J, otherwise it is unlikely that you could afford such an extravagant signal. If instead you were to play the ♠Q, this would advise partner of the ♠QJ9 but warn him that you did not hold the ♠K.

Here you hold an interior sequence in the East seat:

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

West leads the ♦8 and declarer wins with dummy's ♦A. You signal with the ♦J, to let partner know that you hold the ♦KJ10. If instead your diamonds were ♦J10963, you would play the ♦3 to discourage a continuation of the suit.

Let's see a full deal where such a signal helps partner to find the winning defense.

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

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

West leads the ♥3 against the spade game. (Lowest from three small is the standard lead in North America, unless you have raised partner in that suit.) Dummy wins with the ♥A and you signal with the ♥Q from the East seat. Your partner can now place the ♥K with South.

Declarer runs the ♠Q and this loses to West's ♠K. Knowing that no trick is available in hearts, West switches to the ♦4. Declarer now loses one trump, two diamonds and a club, so the contract goes one down.

There is one special situation that is worth noting. Suppose that partner leads an ace against a suit contract, presumably from the ace-king, and your holding is headed by the queen-jack. You have the option of signaling with the queen on partner's ace. This promises the jack and invites partner to underlead the king on the next round, if he sees any purpose in doing so. Here is a typical example of such a signal:

♠ A 7

♥ 6 5 3

♦ A K 10 4 3

♣ K 7 4

♠ J 5 4 3

♥ A Q J 7

♦ 9 7 2

♣ J 8

N
S
W
E

♠ K Q 10 9 8 2

♥ K 4

♦ 8 6

♣ A Q 5

♠ 6

♥ 10 9 8 2

♦ Q J 5

♣ 10 9 6 3 2

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

Sitting West, you lead the ♦A. What do you make of it when your partner follows with the ♦Q?

He is showing the ♦Q and ♦J and inviting you to underlead on the next round. Seeing advantage in this, you continue with the ♦4 to partner's ♦J. East switches to a club, which would beat the contract immediately if you held the ♣AQ over South's ♣K. On this occasion the switch sets up your ♣K, which is also good enough to defeat the spade game because you have a trump trick as well.

(Declarer knows that West holds the ♣K because East has shown up with the ♦QJ and did not respond to 1♦. He therefore may rise with the ♣A and play four rounds of hearts, hoping to find West with three hearts and the singleton ♠A. A good try, yes, but not good enough on this occasion.)

Sometimes you can afford to follow with an honor to let partner know the lie of the remaining cards. Take the West cards here:

♠ 9 7 4 2
♥ 6 5
♦ J 4
♣ K 10 9 8 5

♠ 5 3
♥ A K 8 2
♦ K 9 7 5
♣ 7 3 2

♠ Q J 10 6
♥ 10 9 7 3
♦ A 2
♣ Q J 4

♠ A K 8
♥ Q J 4
♦ Q 10 8 6 3
♣ A 6

Diagram illustrating a bridge hand layout. The table is divided into four quadrants by a central square labeled N (North), S (South), E (East), and W (West). The hands are distributed as follows:

- North (♠): 9 7 4 2, ♥: 6 5, ♦: J 4, ♣: K 10 9 8 5
- South (♠): 5 3, ♥: A K 8 2, ♦: K 9 7 5, ♣: 7 3 2
- East (♠): Q J 10 6, ♥: 10 9 7 3, ♦: A 2, ♣: Q J 4
- West (♠): A K 8, ♥: Q J 4, ♦: Q 10 8 6 3, ♣: A 6

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

You lead the ♣10 against 3NT, East overtaking with the ♣J. This card wins the trick and East continues with the ♣Q to declarer's ♣A. Which card should you play to this trick?

Although you cannot be certain who holds the last missing club, you must hope that East holds this card. To leave him in no doubt as to the club position, you should follow with the ♣K under South's ♣A. The moment declarer plays a diamond, your partner will grab the ♦A and fire back his remaining club. Without your signal partner might conclude that declarer had held up at Trick 1 from ♣AK6. There is a chance that East might decide to switch to the ♠Q when he took his diamond trick. Even if you think it would be totally obvious for East to continue clubs, remember that no one ever went bankrupt because they made life easy for their bridge partner!

There is another useful situation where you can assist your partner. You are about to return his suit but want to let him know what he should do after cashing the available winners there. This can sometimes be achieved by cashing a high honor in a different suit before you revert to partner's suit.

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

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

Sitting East, you win your partner's ♦4 lead with the ♦A. How will you continue?

Your next move should be to play the ♣K. When this wins the trick, partner will know that you hold the ♣A as well. That is why the ♣K is a better card to play than the ♣A. The purpose of the play is to guide partner to a club return after he wins (you hope) the second round of diamonds.

You return the ♦2 to West's ♦K and his club return through dummy's queen allows the defenders to score the first five tricks.

SUIT PREFERENCE SIGNALS WITH AN HONOR

Except when you are indicating a sequence of honors, as we saw a few pages back, attitude and count signals are normally given with a spot card. When partner signals unexpectedly with an honor, you may construe this as a suit preference signal. Take the West cards here:

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

West	North	East	South
		3♥	4♠
all pass			

You lead the ♥Q against South's spade game and your partner signals with the ♥J. You should not interpret this as an attitude signal. If partner wanted to encourage hearts from a holding headed by the ♥KJ9, he would play his highest spot card, the ♥9. The honor signal is designed as a 'wake-up call'. It is a high suit preference signal, asking for a diamond switch.

Since you can visualize a trump promotion for your ♠J86, you will switch to the ♦9, which is also a suit preference signal. Partner ruffs and cashes the ♥A. He knows that you cannot hold the ♣A or you would have led your lowest diamond spot card for the ruff. He continues with a third round of hearts and this promotes your ♠J into the setting trick.

OVERTAKING CAN BE BETTER THAN SIGNALING

When you have bid a suit and partner subsequently leads an honor in that suit, you must bear in mind that it may be a singleton. In that case it may be necessary to overtake. If you give an encouraging signal instead, and find that the lead was a singleton, the only effect will be to increase partner's blood pressure. Take the East cards here:

♠ A K 6

♥ 9 3

♦ A Q J 9 3 2

♣ A 7

♠ Q 10 9 8 5

♥ Q

♦ 7 5

♣ 10 8 6 5 2

♠ J 3 2

♥ K 7 6 5

♦ 10 8 6

♣ K J 3

♠ 7 4

♥ A J 10 8 4 2

♦ K 4

♣ Q 9 4

N

W E

S

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

West leads the ♥Q against 3NT. If you play the ♥8 to encourage a continuation, do not be surprised if partner switches to a club! With no more hearts in his hand, what else can he do?

Since the ♥9 is in dummy, you can afford to overtake the ♥Q with the ♥A. You will then clear the heart suit, waiting to get in subsequently with the ♦K. You would play similarly if your hearts were ♥KJ10842, overtaking with the ♥K at Trick 1.

ATTITUDE DISCARDS WITH AN HONOR

What does it mean when you discard an honor? It shows a powerful honor holding that includes the card below the one you throw. You might throw the ♠K from ♠KQJ9. You might also throw the ♦Q from ♦AQJ sitting over dummy's ♦K. Suppose you hold the East cards here:

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

West	North	East	South
pass	4♥	all pass	1♥

Declarer wins the trump lead with the ♥10 and continues with a trump to dummy's ♥J. What discard will you make from the East hand?

Are you tempted to throw the ♠5, hoping that this will be read as encouraging for spades? Perhaps you prefer to discard the ♦4 or ♣6, discouraging one of those suits and hoping that partner will play a spade when he gains the lead. That's not the way to signal! You should throw the ♠A, making it clear that you have two spade tricks to cash.

At Trick 3 declarer will run the ♦Q, losing to the ♦K. West will switch to the ♠3 so that you can score your two tricks in the suit. Declarer cannot avoid the subsequent loss of a club trick and the contract goes one down.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- A signal with an honor suggests some sort of sequence including the honor below the one you have thrown. You might signal with the ♣Q from a holding headed by the ♣QJ10 or the ♣AQJ.
- Suppose partner leads a high spot card and dummy wins with the ace. You would signal with the king from K-Q-J, to alert partner that you had tricks to take there. A signal of the queen, from Q-J-10, would warn partner that declarer held the king.
- When partner leads the ace, from an A-K combination, you can signal with the queen (when also holding the jack) to suggest that partner should continue with a low card to your jack on the second round.
- Suppose you have bid hearts on a combination headed by the A-Q-J. If partner leads the king and you signal with the queen, this is not an attitude signal. (You would use your highest spot card for that purpose, or perhaps overtake with the ace.) It is a suit preference card, suggesting a switch to the higher non-trump suit. Similarly the play of your lowest spot card would be suit preference for a switch to the lower non-trump suit.

QUIZ on signaling with an honor

1.

♠ Q 10 6 4
♥ K 9 2
♦ 9 8 4 3
♣ J 3

To Answer



♠ 7
♥ J 10 5 4
♦ Q 2
♣ K 10 7 5 4 2

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

Your partner leads the ♦A against South's spade game. What is your plan for the defense?

2.

♠ 10 7 4 3
♥ 10 5
♦ Q 7 6 2
♣ A Q 7

To Answer

♠ K 8
♥ A K 9 6 2
♦ K 9 5
♣ J 6 4



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

You lead the ♥A against South's spade game and East plays the ♥Q. What is your plan for the defense?

3.

♠ Q 9 5
♥ K 4 2
♦ 8 6 2
♣ K 9 5 2

To Answer



♠ 7 4
♥ A Q 7
♦ A Q J 9 5 3
♣ 8 3

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

Your partner leads the ♦K against South’s spade game. What is your plan for the defense?

4.

♠ K 10 9 6
♥ 3
♦ A Q 10 9 8 6 5
♣ 5

To Answer



♠ A
♥ 2
♦ 7 4 3
♣ K J 10 8 7 6 3 2

West	North	East	South
		3♣	4♥
all pass			

Your partner leads the ♣4 against South’s contract of 4♥. Declarer wins your ♣K with the ♣A and leads the ♣9, West ruffing with the ♥6. What is your plan for the defense?

5.

♠ 4 2

♥ K J 10 2

♦ A K Q 3

♣ 9 7 5

♠ Q J 8 7 5

♥ Q 9

♦ 9 4 2

♣ K 10 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

To Answer

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

You lead the ♦A against the spade game. What is your plan for the defense when partner plays the ♦J and declarer the ♦7?

6.

♠ 10 5 4

♥ A 5 2

♦ K J 8 6

♣ K 8 3

♠ 9 2

♥ K Q J 10 8 3

♦ 5 4

♣ A Q 7

	N	
W		E
	S	

To Answer

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

Your partner leads the ♥9, declarer playing the ♥A from dummy. Which card will you play on this trick?

Answers to the QUIZ

1. West, your partner, leads the ♦A against South's 4♠. You must not signal with the ♦Q! This would carry the special meaning that you hold the ♦QJ, inviting partner to underlead on the second round. Your partner would indeed lead the ♦7 at Trick 2, hoping that you would win with the ♦J and return a club. A grateful declarer would win the diamond trick and make the contract. You should play the ♦2 at Trick 1. Expecting you to hold three diamonds, West will continue with the ♦K anyway, to drop South's last diamond. When your ♦Q appears, he will give you a diamond ruff.

To Question

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

2. Defending 4♠, you lead the ♥A. Partner signals with the ♥Q, which shows that he also holds the ♥J. You cross to his ♥J at Trick 2 and he switches to a diamond, setting up your ♦K. Declarer cannot avoid losing a trump and a diamond and goes one down.

Do you see what might happen if you play the ♥K at Trick 2? Declarer will win your club switch and play the ♠A (he can guess that you hold the ♠K because of your opening bid). He will then cash his remaining club winners and exit with a trump. You will then have to lead away from the ♦K or give a ruff-and-sluff!

To Question

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

3. West, your partner, leads the ♦K against South's 4♠. To encourage a diamond continuation, you would play a high spot card such as the ♦9. Here, you will signal with an honor instead, following with the ♦Q. This is a suit preference signal, requesting a switch to hearts, the higher remaining side suit. West switches to a heart and you score two hearts, followed by a second diamond. If West had continued diamonds, declarer would have been able to throw a heart loser on dummy's clubs.

To Question

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

4. You open a heavy 3♣ on the East cards, vulnerable against not. West leads the ♣4 to your king and South's ace. When South leads the ♣9, West ruffs with the ♥6. On this trick you should follow with the ♣J, a clear suit preference signal for spades. West leads the ♠2 to your ♠A, South dropping the ♠Q. You then return the ♣10, a suit preference signal for spades. West ruffs and leads the ♠3 for you to ruff with the ♥2. Another club ruff puts the game two down. (The deal comes from the 1997 European Championship.)

To Question

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

	♠ Q 5	
	♥ A Q J 8 7 5 4	
	♦ J	
	♣ A Q 9	

5. Sitting West, you open 1♦ and partner raises to 2♦. You lead the ♦A against South's eventual contract of 4♣ and East follows with the ♦J. East raised your diamonds, so he cannot hold a doubleton jack in the suit. His honor signal shows that he also holds the ♦10. He is telling you this in case you have led from the ♦AKQx and would like to cross to his hand at Trick 2. When you do choose to lead the ♦3 next, East wins with the ♦10 and switches to a heart. The ♥K and ♣A will now beat the contract. After any other defense, declarer will set up the clubs to discard a heart from dummy.

To Question

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

6. West, your partner, leads the ♥9 against South's spade game and the ♥A is played from dummy. Suppose you signal with the ♥K, to tell partner that you hold the ♥KQJ. When partner wins with the ♠A, he will probably play another heart. It will no longer be possible to score two club tricks and the game will be made. To direct your partner's attention to clubs, you should signal with the ♥3 at Trick 1. Since you are known to have several cards at your disposal for your attitude signal, the choice of the very lowest card (the ♥3) should be taken as suit preference for clubs.

To Question

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



SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED SIGNALING SYSTEM

HIGH HONOR LEADS		
	vs. Suit	vs. NT
Ace	AK(+)	Requests unblock otherwise count
King	KQ(+), AK(+) at five-level or higher	AKx(+), KQ(+)
Queen	QJ(+)	QJ(+), KQ10(+) requests unblock

The ‘+’ symbol indicates that you may hold extra cards in the suit. So, QJ(+) includes QJ, QJ7, QJ105.

SIGNALS IN ORDER OF PRIORITY				
		<i>Partner’s lead</i>	<i>Declarer’s lead</i>	<i>Discarding</i>
Suit:	1st	Attitude	Count	Attitude
	2nd	Count	Suit preference	Count
	3rd	Suit preference		Suit preference
NT:	1st	Attitude	Count	Attitude
	2nd	Count	Suit preference	Count
	3rd	Suit preference		Suit preference

We have covered the most important situations for defensive signaling and the time has come to present a summary. The tables on the previous page show the entries that you would make on an American Contract Bridge League (ACBL) convention card, in the section on leads, signals and discards.

You will normally give the signal that has first priority. If partner leads against a suit contract, for example, you will normally give an attitude signal. If your attitude is obvious, or will be by the time the first trick is completed, you will signal count (second priority) instead. In a situation where both attitude and count are deemed to be irrelevant, your signal will indicate suit preference.

If you have already made a first priority signal in a suit, your next signal in that suit will be a second priority signal. For example, if you have already signaled count on declarer's first lead of a new suit, your next signal in that suit will show suit preference.

STANDARD SUIT PREFERENCE SITUATIONS

There are several situations where a suit preference signal is given:

- when it is clear from the dummy's holding that no further trick can be taken in the suit that has been led,
- when giving partner a ruff,
- when winning from a combination such as A-K-x, suit preference may be indicated by the choice of honor,
- when following to declarer's plays in the trump suit,
- when declarer is running a suit,
- when the defenders are running a suit.

FURTHER NOTES

1. When declarer has pre-empted at the three-level or higher, the king is led from ace-king (for a count signal) and an ace lead (for attitude) denies the king.
2. When partner leads low and dummy wins with the queen or a higher card, the defender in this seat signals attitude. When dummy wins with the jack or lower card, the defender's attitude is known and his signal will show count.

P A R T 2

ALTERNATIVE SIGNALING METHODS





THE SMITH ECHO

The Smith echo (or Smith peter) is a very different type of signal from anything that we have seen so far. Invented by Geoffrey Smith, of Winchester in England, it is a high-low signal usually played only in notrump contracts. It applies when declarer wins the lead and makes his first play in a new suit. A defender may then have the option of signaling with a high card or a low card. The choice of card says nothing about the suit currently being played; instead it passes an attitude message about the suit that was led at Trick 1:

THE SMITH ECHO (ON DECLARER'S FIRST SUIT)

1. A high card played by the leader's partner means that he has an unexpectedly strong holding in the suit originally led.
2. A high card played by the opening leader means that he wants the original suit to be continued. A low card suggests that he has a more promising suit elsewhere and partner should consider a switch.

SMITH ECHO BY THE LEADER'S PARTNER

We will start with a deal where the leader's partner has an unexpectedly strong holding in the suit that has been led:

We will start with a deal where the leader's partner has an unexpectedly strong holding in the suit that has been led:

West leads the ♥6 and declarer wins East's ♥J with the ♥K. He crosses to dummy with a spade and runs the ♦Q to West's ♦K. What should West do next?

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Since East started with ♥QJx, he will play the ♦9 on the first round of diamonds. A Smith echo by the partner of the opening leader means that he is unexpectedly strong in the suit that was led. In this case, it will denote that East holds the ♥Q as well as the ♥J that he played on the first trick. West will continue with the ♥4 to East's ♥Q, and a heart return will put the game one down.

East used a Smith echo to good effect on the next deal, too. Take the East cards and see how you would defend:

♠ J 8 6 5 2

♥ 9 7 4

♦ J 5

♣ Q 5 4

♠ 9 3

♥ K J 3

♦ A 10 8 6 4

♣ J 6

N
S
W
E

♠ K 10 4

♥ A Q 6

♦ K 9 3

♣ A 10 7 2

♠ A Q 7

♥ 10 8 5 2

♦ Q 7 2

♣ K 9 8 3

West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

West leads the ♠5 against 3NT. Sitting East, what is your plan for the defense?

Suppose you play a normal ‘third hand high’, winning with the ♠A. When you continue with the ♠Q, declarer will break the communication between the defenders by allowing this card to win. After winning the third round of spades, he will play king and another diamond, planning to duck the trick into the safe (East) hand. West’s ♦J will force the ♦A, in fact, but all will be well for the contract when you win the third round of diamonds in the East seat. You will have no spade to return; declarer will win your club switch and claim nine tricks.

A better idea is to play a smooth ♠Q on the first trick. Declarer can hardly consider ducking now, because the lead might be from ♠AJ85(x). He will probably win, cross to the ♦A and attempt to duck a diamond into the West hand. On the first two rounds of diamonds, you must play the

♦7 and then the ♦2 (a Smith echo). When West wins the second diamond with the ♦J, he will know that you have an unexpected strong holding in spades – in other words ♠AQx instead of ♠Qx(x). His spade continuation will put the game one down.

Next we will see a deal where the leader's partner does not hold anything special in the suit that has been led:

♠ A 9 8 5 4

♥ K J 6

♦ 8 7 5

♣ K 9

♠ 7 2

♥ 10 9 2

♦ A Q 4

♣ Q J 10 6 5

N
E

W
S

♠ K Q 10

♥ Q 8 4

♦ K J 10 3

♣ A 8 4

♠ J 6 3

♥ A 7 5 3

♦ 9 6 2

♣ 7 3 2

West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

Sitting West, you lead the ♠5 to East's ♠J. Declarer wins with the ♠K and crosses to the ♦A, East playing the ♦2. What will you do next when declarer runs the ♣Q to your ♣K? (Don't answer too quickly. There is more to this deal than meets the eye.)

Partner's ♦2 tells you that he does not hold the ♠Q. You know also that East does not hold the ♠10, or he would have played that card at Trick 1. So, declarer holds ♠KQ10(x) and quite possibly a large number of tricks in the minors. The best chance of beating the contract is to find your partner with the ♥A, in which case you can take three heart tricks to beat the contract.

Pleased with his analysis, the original West player switched to the ♥6. He was even more pleased when East won with the ♥A. Events took a nasty turn when East switched back to spades and the contract could no longer be beaten. Who do you blame for the unsuccessful defense?

From East's point of view, the heart switch might well have been intended to put him on lead for a spade return through declarer's remaining

♠Qx. To let East know that the setting tricks would have to come from hearts, West should have cashed the ♠A before switching to the ♥6.

SMITH ECHO TO CLARIFY A COUNT SIGNAL

In the examples in the previous section, the Smith echo (or lack of one) informed partner whether a second high card was held in the suit that had been led. Another use of the Smith echo is to tell partner that you have a potentially useful number of low cards in the suit that he led. This may enable him to drop an honor from declarer’s hand. Look at the next deal from the East viewpoint.

♠ J 6
♥ 8 7 5
♦ K 7 4 3
♣ A 8 5 2

♠ A Q 10 5 2
♥ 10 4
♦ 10 8 6
♣ Q 9 7

N

W

E

S

♠ K 3
♥ A K 6 2
♦ A 9 5
♣ K J 6 4

♠ 9 8 7 4
♥ Q J 9 3
♦ Q J 2
♣ 10 3

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

West leads the ♠5 and the ♠J is played from dummy. Since you cannot beat dummy’s card (jack or lower), your attitude is deemed to be known. You follow with the ♠8 – a count signal to show an even number of spades. Declarer now needs four club tricks to make the contract. He plays dummy’s ♣A and continues with a club to the jack. Sitting East, you should play the ♣10 followed by the ♣3. This is a Smith echo to show something useful in spades. On this occasion you hold four spades rather than two, for your even-number count signal. When West wins with the ♣Q, he will reach speedily for the ♠A. South’s ♠K will tumble and the game will be beaten.

Suppose, on some different layout, that East had followed with the ♣3 and then the ♣10. West would then assume that East’s ♠8 was from a doubleton holding. He would switch elsewhere at Trick 4.

SMITH ECHO BY THE OPENING LEADER

Much of the time, the opening leader will be happy for his suit to be continued. (We are talking about the case where his opening lead has indicated a suit headed by at least one honor). He will therefore play high when declarer embarks on his own suit, giving a Smith echo to request a continuation of the suit led. Let’s see a full-deal example of that.

♠ 9 4

♥ K Q 7

♦ 9 4 3

♣ A J 10 4 3

♠ A J 8 5 3

♥ 10 9 6 4

♦ Q 8

♣ 5 2

♠ K Q 6

♥ A 5 3

♦ A J 6 5

♣ Q 8 6

♠ 10 7 2

♥ J 8 2

♦ K 10 7 2

♣ K 9 7

N

W E

S

West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

Your partner leads the ♠5 against 3NT and declarer wins your ♠10 with the ♠K. Declarer runs the ♣Q to you, partner contributing the ♣5. What is your plan for the defense?

You cannot yet tell whether partner’s ♣5 is the beginning of a high-low. You therefore do best to hold up the ♣K. Declarer continues with a club to the jack and partner completes an echo by playing the ♣2. What does this imply?

A Smith echo by the opening leader means that he wishes you to return his suit. You duly return the ♠7 and partner claims four spade tricks to beat the game.

Suppose instead that West had followed with the ♣8 on the second round, playing his clubs upwards. The lack of a Smith Echo would suggest a switch. Since there is just room for West to hold ♠QJ85 and ♦AJx, you would switch to the ♦2.

On the next deal West does indeed diagnose the need for a switch to a new suit:

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

West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

Sitting West, you lead the ♠5 against 3NT. Your partner plays the ♠Q and declarer wins with the ♠K. Declarer plays the ♣5 and you have the opportunity to make a Smith echo. Declarer probably holds the ♠A, so, you have no particular wish for a spade return if East is about to win this club trick. There is a risk that declarer would win a spade return with the ♠A and run enough tricks to make the contract.

If your partner happens to hold ♥Kxxx, you will be able to score four tricks in that suit and beat the contract. Nothing in this life is certain. From what you can see, though, it seems that a heart switch has a better chance of beating the contract than a spade continuation. You therefore play the ♣3 on the first round of clubs, your lowest spot card, to suggest a switch. When partner takes his ♣A, he will switch to hearts and the contract will be beaten.

If instead your opening lead was from ♠AJ752 or ♠A10752, you would play your top club (the ♣9) on the first round – a Smith echo. Partner would then continue spades.

I am sure you realize that bridge writers are an untrustworthy bunch, all too willing to present polished examples that make their recommended methods look good. You will encounter many deals where it is not very clear whether you should give a Smith echo. Such is life. It is just the same with ordinary attitude signals. Sometimes you have to guess whether it will work out better to encourage or discourage.

A WORD OF WARNING

Whenever you are reading a signal from across the table, you must ask yourself whether your partner was likely to hold sufficient cards to pass an accurate message. In the case of Smith echoes, it is quite possible that partner will be very short in the suit that declarer attacks first. He may even hold a singleton and be in no position to decide whether to play high or low. Look at this deal, from a national knock-out match:

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

West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	2NT

West led the ♥J, East discouraging with the ♥3 and South winning with the ♥Q. When declarer ran the ♣Q next, West produced the ♣3 on the trick. How should East defend?

From East's point of view, West hearts might be headed by the A-J-10, K-J-10 or J-10-9. Concluding from the 'lack of a Smith echo' that West was suggesting a switch, East returned the ♠K. Not the best! Declarer won with the ace and claimed an overtrick.

East should have been aware that his partner might hold a singleton in the club suit, in which case no value could be placed on the ♣3 as a signal. The best idea was to duck the first round of clubs, taking the slight risk that declarer would then have nine tricks to cash. As the cards lie, declarer would persist with clubs and West would then have a chance to signal. He would discard the ♠3, discouraging a switch to spades. When East gained the lead with his ♣K it would be clear to persist with hearts. The contract would then go one down.

WHEN A COUNT SIGNAL TAKES PRECEDENCE

One of the main uses of a count signal, you will recall, is to allow partner to take an ace at the right time when declarer plays on a long suit in dummy. Compared with this important task, the Smith echo is a bit of a luxury and must be foregone. Suppose you are East on this deal:

	♠ J 5 2	
	♥ 8 5	
	♦ 7 6 2	
	♣ K Q 10 9 3	
♠ 9 6		♠ Q 10 7 4 3
♥ A 10 7 6 4		♥ J 9 2
♦ J 9 5		♦ Q 8 3
♣ A 7 2		♣ 8 4
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: center;"> <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> </div>	
	♠ A K 8	
	♥ K Q 3	
	♦ A K 10 4	
	♣ J 6 5	

West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	2NT

West leads the ♥6 against 3NT, declarer winning East's ♥J with the ♥K. (It is generally right for declarer to win with the higher of touching honors. Here it keeps West in the dark as to who holds the ♥Q). Declarer continues with the ♣5, West playing low and dummy playing the ♣K. Which card will you play as East?

If it were just a question of deciding whether to give a Smith echo, nothing could be easier. You would play the ♣4 to say that you had nothing special in hearts (in particular, you did not hold the ♥Q). On this deal, though, West may hold the ♣A and will then need to know how many clubs you hold. You should therefore cast aside any thoughts of Smith echoes and play the ♣8 to show an even number of clubs.

Declarer re-enters his hand with the ♦A and continues with the ♣6. West now knows that this cannot be the second card from a doubleton. That would leave East with ♣J84 and he would not have given a count signal of the ♣8. West duly refuses to play his ♣A for the second time. Declarer wins the trick in the dummy and leads the ♦2 to the ♦8, ♦10

and West's $\spadesuit J$. Declarer has eight available tricks now, with the diamonds breaking 3-3. Provided that West does not present him with a ninth trick, by playing a heart now, the defenders will beat the contract. How should West read the situation, do you think?

If declarer began with $\spadesuit AKQ$ and $\heartsuit K9x$, the defenders can now score four heart tricks. If instead he holds $\spadesuit AKx$ and $\heartsuit KQx$, West needs to cash the $\clubsuit A$ and exit passively in spades. The latter situation is statistically more likely. Also, suppose East had started with $\heartsuit QJx$. Deprived of the opportunity to give a Smith echo in clubs, he might have given a Smith echo on the first round of diamonds!

POPULAR VARIATIONS OF THE SMITH ECHO

You will not be surprised to hear that some pairs prefer to use the 'reverse Smith echo'. A low card then encourages the continuation of the suit originally led; a high card discourages it.

Even more players favor the excellent hybrid scheme where a high card from the leader's partner encourages a continuation but a high card from the leader requests a switch. This has the advantage that you play low most of the time. A high card acts as a wake-up call to partner; it means that your holding is exceptional and he may therefore have to do something special on his next play.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

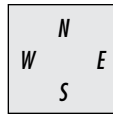
- A Smith echo is a signal made on declarer's first suit, when there is no pressing need to show count. It shows your attitude to the suit that was originally led by the defenders. A high card suggests that the suit should be continued.
- When the opening leader gives a Smith echo, he tells partner that his suit is strong and should be continued.
- When the other defender gives a Smith echo, he says that his holding is better than might be imagined. For example, he may have played the ♦J at Trick 1 when holding ♦QJx.
- Smith echoes are normally played only at notrump.

QUIZ on Smith echoes

1.

♠ Q J 10 2
♥ A 7 4
♦ Q 2
♣ A 7 6 2

To Answer



♠ A K 5
♥ Q 9 6 2
♦ J 7 5
♣ 10 9 3

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

Your partner leads the ♦10 against South's 3NT, dummy winning with the ♦Q as you signal encouragement with the ♦7. You win dummy's ♠Q with the ♠A, South playing the ♠4 and West the ♠3. What is your plan for the defense?

2.

♠ 10 3
♥ 8 2
♦ A J 7 5
♣ A J 10 7 6

To Answer

♠ A J 7 4
♥ J 10 7 6 3
♦ 6 3
♣ 8 2



West	North	East	South
			1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

You lead the ♥6 and declarer wins partner's ♥K with the ♥A. What is your plan for the defense when South leads the ♣Q?

3.

♠ A 8 6 3
♥ 7 5
♦ K 7 3
♣ A Q J 4

To Answer



♠ K Q 9 7
♥ 9 8 3 2
♦ 8 2
♣ 9 5 3

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

Your partner leads the ♥K against South’s 3NT. You discourage with the ♥2 and South wins with the ♥A. He crosses to the ♦K and leads another diamond. What is your plan for the defense?

Answers to the QUIZ

- West leads the $\spadesuit 10$ against 3NT, dummy winning with the $\spadesuit Q$. When the $\spadesuit Q$ is led to the next trick, you win with the $\spadesuit K$ and partner plays the $\spadesuit 3$. West has declined to give a Smith echo, suggesting that you should not continue diamonds. No doubt his diamonds are 10-high. If they were headed by the A-10-9 or K-10-9, he would have given a Smith echo. A heart switch offers the best chance and you should lead the $\heartsuit 2$ next. Your efforts are rewarded on this occasion and the contract goes one down.

To Question

\spadesuit 8 7 3	\spadesuit Q J 10 2	\spadesuit A K 5
\heartsuit K 10 5	\heartsuit A 7 4	\heartsuit Q 9 6 2
\diamondsuit 10 9 8 6 4	\diamondsuit Q 2	\diamondsuit J 7 5
\clubsuit J 5	\clubsuit A 7 6 2	\clubsuit 10 9 3

	<div> <div>N</div> <div>W E</div> <div>S</div> </div>	
\spadesuit 9 6 4		
\heartsuit J 8 3		
\diamondsuit A K 3		
\clubsuit K Q 8 4		

- Sitting West, you lead the $\heartsuit 6$ against 3NT. Declarer wins partner's $\heartsuit K$ with the $\heartsuit A$ and leads the $\clubsuit Q$ from his hand. If you had started with $\heartsuit Q10763$, you would have every hope that a heart return would defeat the contract. With your lesser holding in hearts, declarer is likely to have nine tricks after a heart return. You should follow with the $\clubsuit 2$, declining to give a Smith echo and suggesting that East switches elsewhere. When partner wins with the $\clubsuit K$, he will switch to spades. He needs to lead specifically the $\spadesuit Q$ to give the defenders four quick tricks in the suit.

To Question

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

3. West leads the ♥K to declarer's ♥A and, sitting East, you discourage with the ♥2. Declarer crosses to the ♦K and plays a diamond to his jack. You should play the ♦8 followed by the ♦2. Your high-low is a Smith echo, saying that you have a useful holding in hearts. You have already denied the ♥J at Trick 1. You are telling partner that you have enough low cards to suggest that the ♥J may fall. West continues with the ♥Q, dropping South's ♥J. He crosses to your ♥8 and two more heart tricks defeat the game.

To Question

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



ACE FOR ATTITUDE, KING FOR COUNT

In this chapter I will describe a method that has spread like wildfire across the United Kingdom and much of Europe. It works splendidly and few experts over here would be willing to ply their trade without it. (The USA megastars, Meckstroth and Rodwell, use it too!) The idea is that you choose which honor you lead from an A-K or K-Q combination, according to which signal you would like your partner to give:

Lead the ace (or queen) to request an attitude signal

Lead the king to request a count signal

The catchphrase is ‘ace for attitude, king for count’. Except when an ace or a queen has been led, you give a count signal on partner’s leads. (Contrary to the methods described earlier in this book, this includes the situation where dummy has won the trick with a high honor.)

‘If it’s that wonderful,’ you may be asking yourself, ‘why wasn’t it in the recommended signaling system presented in Chapter 10?’ The answer is that the method is not currently part of general practice in North America, the main audience for this book. My aim in Part I of the book was to help readers to get the best from the methods that are usually played in that part of the world.

Maybe you think that relying predominantly on count signals is a strange way to go. In recent world individual championships, where all players have to use the same signaling (and bidding) system, the declared method was ‘count signals throughout’. The theory behind this is that you can often tell the position of the high cards from the bidding or the play to the first trick; it is therefore more useful to know the suit lengths in the hidden hands.

Anyway, read this chapter and see what you think. It will then be entirely up to you whether you and your partner incorporate the method into your chosen signaling system.

LEADING FROM A-K AGAINST A SUIT CONTRACT

Normally you will lead the ace from A-K-x, so that partner can let you know about the queen of the suit. From A-K-x-x-x, you will lead the king, for count, because someone or other will be ruffing the third round. From A-K-x-x the decision is closer. Some players tend to lead the ace, others the king. It's time for a deal that illustrates the method:

♠ A 8 5 4

♥ K 9 6 5

♦ J 6 4

♣ Q J

♠ J 9

♥ 10 2

♦ A K 8 3 2

♣ A 10 7 2

N

W E

S

♠ K 10 6 3 2

♥ A 3

♦ Q 10 5

♣ K 5 4

♠ Q 7

♥ Q J 8 7 4

♦ 9 7

♣ 9 8 6 3

West	North	East	South
pass	3♠	all pass	1♠

Sitting West, you lead the ♦K to ask for a count signal. East plays the ♦9 and declarer the ♦5. You now know that East has precisely two diamonds. From ♦Q1097 he would have signaled his count with the second-best card, the ♦10. (From ♦Q97 he would have played the ♦7, of course, since he was asked for a count signal rather than an attitude signal.)

You cash the ♦A and continue with the ♦2, a suit preference signal for a club return. East ruffs with the ♠7 and returns the ♣9, a high card to indicate that he has no interest in the club suit. It is a fundamental part of good defense, remember, that a low-card switch suggests a holding headed by an honor – you would welcome a return of that suit. A high-card switch carries the opposite meaning: you have no honor in the suit led and are not inviting a further play in the suit.

Chapter 12: Ace for Attitude, King for Count

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West wins with the ♣A and knows from the high-card switch that South has the ♣K. If East happens to hold the ♥A, it is unlikely to run away. West therefore tries his luck with a fourth round of diamonds. East ruffs with the hoped-for ♠Q (yes!) and West's ♠J9 are promoted into the setting trick.

LEADING FROM A-K AGAINST A NOTRUMP CONTRACT

From a holding such as A-K-x-x, you will normally lead the ace, asking partner for an attitude signal. Sometimes you may choose to make the same lead from A-K-x, in case partner has some strong holding there:

♠ A 9 4

♥ J 6

♦ 9 8 3

♣ A J 9 8 3

♠ J 6 3

♥ Q 9 7 2

♦ A K 4

♣ 7 5 2

W

N

E

S

♠ K 10 8 5

♥ A K 8 3

♦ J 5

♣ K Q 4

♠ Q 7 2

♥ 10 5 4

♦ Q 10 7 6 2

♣ 10 6

West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

What would you lead from the West hand? You might strike gold with the ♥2 but it is more attractive to begin with the ♦A, seeking an attitude signal. Here, East will play an enthusiastic ♦10. You continue with king and another diamond, the first five tricks going to the defense. With three low diamonds in dummy, East would also encourage from a holding like J-9-7-6-2. He would expect the ♦Q to fall from declarer, should declarer hold that card.

Suppose next that the cards lay differently, with East holding nothing special in diamonds. He would discourage at Trick 1 and you would still have the chance to switch to hearts, hoping to find East at home in that suit.

As I see it, this is one area where there is a slight flaw in the North American method. Since it is common practice there for the lead of an ace to ask for unblock-or-count, players have to lead the king from A-K-x to ask for an attitude signal. Since the same lead would be made from K-Q-x, the other defender may not know whether to encourage when he holds the jack.

When the count-or-unblock honor card is led, the North American and European methods are equivalent. Take the West hand on this example, using ‘ace for attitude, king for count’.

♠ 9 8 4
♥ 10 8
♦ A K J 10 7
♣ J 7 5

♠ Q 10 7
♥ Q 5 4 2
♦ 9 4
♣ A Q 8 2

N
S
W
E

♠ A 5 3 2
♥ A K 9
♦ Q 5
♣ K 10 4 3

♠ K J 6
♥ J 7 6 3
♦ 8 6 3 2
♣ 9 6

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

You lead the ♦K, asking for unblock-or-count. If East holds the ♦Q he will play it. Here he will follow with the ♦6 – the second-best card from four – and declarer will play the ♦5. How should you read the situation?

East’s ♦6 may be from ♦62 or ♦63. It may also be the second-best card from ♦8632, in which case South’s ♦Q will fall on the second round. What thoughts should go through your mind as you consider these possibilities?

The fact that South showed a four-card major with his Stayman response slightly lessens the chance that he will hold four diamonds rather than two. A second point is that if East does hold ♦62, declarer will have dropped the ♦5 from ♦Q853. Few declarers are that clever!

The most important point, however, is this: it is unlikely that you can beat the contract when East holds a doubleton diamond. Even if you

Before we move on, imagine how West should view proceedings if East followed with the ♦2 on the first round, suggesting three low cards in the suit. West should then switch to one of the majors, hoping to find partner with an entry. That's because one diamond lead from East, through declarer's remaining ♦Qx, would beat the contract.

From a strong holding such as K-Q-10-9-x, you will lead the king. At notrump, this asks partner to unblock any honor he might hold, otherwise to give you a count signal. Let's see this method in action:

Sitting West, you lead the ♥K against 3NT. East follows with the ♥4 and declarer wins with the ♥A. He crosses to dummy with the ♣A and runs the ♦9 to you. How will you defend?

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If declarer began with ♥AJ75 he might have played low on the first trick, knowing that you could not continue hearts. Apart from that, it is attractive to play East for three hearts because you will then be able to beat the contract! You play the ♥Q and declarer ruefully produces the ♥J. Three more heart tricks are yours and another contract bites the dust.

Since the lead of a king has this special meaning, you must lead the queen from king-queen to request an attitude signal:

	♠ A 7 6	
♠ K Q 10 4	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 15px;"></div>	♠ J 8 2
	♠ 9 5 3	

You lead the ♠Q, declarer playing low from dummy. Partner plays the ♠8 and declarer follows with the ♠3. It is possible that East is discouraging from ♠98, but that would mean that declarer has played the ♠3 from ♠J532 (which few declarers do!) In any case, it is much more likely that the ♠8 is an encouraging card from ♠J8x or ♠J8xx. You continue with the ♠4 and set up three tricks for the defense.

The situation is the same when West has led the queen from a combination headed by the Q-J:

	♥ A 8 2	
♥ Q J 9 6	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 15px;"></div>	♥ K 7 4
	♥ 10 5 3	

West leads the ♥Q, asking for an attitude signal. Declarer plays low from dummy and East encourages with the ♥7. As you see, it causes no hardship that the lead may be from K-Q or Q-J. When East can see the king or jack in his own hand (or in the dummy), he will know which holding partner has. With no honor card, he will discourage anyway.

Suppose this is the situation:

	♦ 7 6 3	
♦ Q J 9 4	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 15px;"></div>	♦ A 8 2
	♦ K 10 5	

West leads the ♦Q and East cannot tell whether the lead is from the K-Q or the Q-J. At notrump, this does not matter. East encourages with the ♦8. If declarer holds up the ♦K, West will continue with the ♦4.

LEADING FROM K-Q AGAINST A SUIT CONTRACT

One of the advantages of a count signal is to let you how many tricks can be cashed in a side suit. West made good use of such information on this deal:

♠ 10 9 7

♥ A J 2

♦ A 7 3

♣ Q J 9 7

♠ K 3

♥ 10 8 6

♦ K Q J 6 5

♣ 8 6 4

N

W E

S

♠ 8 4

♥ K 9 7 5 3

♦ 10 8 2

♣ A 5 3

♠ A Q J 6 5 2

♥ Q 4

♦ 9 4

♣ K 10 2

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

West leads the ♦K against the spade game. Dummy wins with the ace and East signals count, as requested, playing the ♦2. Declarer runs the ♠10 to the king and West scores a second trick with the ♦Q. Without the benefit of count signals, West might be tempted to try his luck with the ♦J. As it is, he will switch to hearts. (East will play a suit-preference ♦10 on the second round of diamonds.) Declarer cannot then avoid the loss of a heart and a club, putting him one down.

When you lead the queen from K-Q-x(-x), asking for an attitude signal, it has to be admitted that a small problem may arise. Look at this layout:

♣ 10 9 5

♣ A 7 6 3

♣ K Q 8

♣ J 4 2

Suppose West leads the ♣Q against a major-suit game. East holds the ace of the suit but cannot see the king or the jack. He therefore has no idea whether West is leading from the K-Q or the Q-J. This would cause no

It is for this reason that some players use ‘ace for attitude, king for count’ only at notrump. Those who do use it against suit contracts sometimes lead the king from K-Q combinations, happy to make do with a count signal rather than risk giving partner an awkward decision. (Slightly messy, yes, but at least you can’t say that I brushed the matter under the carpet!)

Suppose declarer is playing in 3NT and has no stopper in one of the suits. You lead that suit, from a holding of A-K-Q-9. Do you think it will be straightforward to work out the best defense? It may not be as easy as you think! Look at this deal, played in a French tournament:

Playing ‘ace for attitude, king for count’, which spade honor should you lead from the West hand? The ♠K is not a good idea, because partner would then unblock the ♠J from ♠Jxx or ♠Jxxx and this could set up a trick for declarer. The best lead is the ♠Q, requesting an attitude signal.

Since East does not hold the ♠J (or any higher honor), he will discourage with the ♠2. West should then continue with the ♠A. On the second round East has the opportunity to give a count signal, showing his remaining count in the spade suit. He will play the ♠6, South following with the ♠7. The ♠6 shows an even number of cards remaining. Although it is possible that South has opened 1NT when holding five spades, it is much more likely that East began with five spades to South's three. Regardless of the relative probabilities, West should play East for five spades (rather than three) because this will defeat the contract. He continues with the ♠K, followed by the ♠9, and the contract goes two down.

What if East had been dealt ♠10642, with declarer holding ♠J753? In that case East would play the ♠4 on the second round, showing three remaining spades. West could now place declarer with an original four spades to the jack and would therefore seek an entry to the East hand. A club switch to the ♣A would allow East to return a third round of spades through declarer's ♠J and the contract would go one down. Cashing the three top spades would allow the contract to be made.

CASHING OUT AGAINST A SUIT CONTRACT

We saw in the main section of the book that it is common practice, in North America, to make slightly different opening leads against contracts at the five-level or higher. You lead the king from ace-king, asking for a count signal. An ace lead, which denies the king, requests a high attitude signal if partner holds the matching king.

When you play 'ace for attitude, king for count', you defend on these lines whatever the level of contract. The only difference is that when the contract is at the five-level or higher an ace lead will not be from the A-K.

Here is a typical defense at the four-level. Take the East cards and see how you fare:

all pass

You should lead the $\spadesuit K$ to the second trick, requesting a count signal. South will play the $\heartsuit 4$ and West will play the $\heartsuit 5$. With South holding so many more hearts than West, the odds are very high that West has three diamonds to South's one. Also, if West held a singleton diamond he might have led it. Concluding that only one diamond trick is available, you next play the $\spadesuit A$. Except at Trick 1, an ace lead denies the king and requests an attitude signal. West duly plays an encouraging $\spadesuit 9$ on this trick. Even if declarer attempts to deceive you by following with the $\spadesuit J$ on the first round, you should continue with another spade. Declarer has another spade and West's $\spadesuit K$ provides the setting trick.

Go back to Trick 2 and imagine that West had signaled with the ♦7 when you led the ♦K. You would then know that a second diamond trick was available. You would cash the ♦A followed by the ♠A, defeating the contract when declarer held two diamonds and a singleton spade.

COUNT SIGNALS WHEN A LOW CARD IS LED

In the main part of the book, attitude signals were recommended when partner leads a low card and dummy wins the trick with the ace, king or queen. There is nothing at all wrong with this method. Sometimes playing attitude works well, sometimes it is more helpful to be playing count. I will not try to persuade you one way or the other. Perhaps, however, you are thinking ‘How ridiculous to play count signals!’ In that case, let me show you a couple of situations where count signals work well.

♠ 10 8 5 2

♥ A 8 4

♦ A 7 5

♣ K 7 2

♠ A J

♥ 10 9 6 2

♦ K J 8 6 3

♣ 10 5

N

W

E

S

♠ K Q 9 7 4

♥ K Q 5 3

♦ 10 4

♣ J 3

♠ 6 3

♥ J 7

♦ Q 9 2

♣ A Q 9 8 6 4

West	North	East	South
			1♠
pass	3♠	all pass	

West leads the ♦6 against the partscore contract of 3♠, declarer winning with dummy’s ♦A. East, who is playing count signals (except when an ace or queen is led), follows with the ♦2; declarer plays the ♦4. What does West now know about the diamond position?

It is a reasonable assumption that declarer would have run the diamond lead to his hand if he held ♦Q4 or ♦Q1094. West can therefore place East with three diamonds headed by the queen. In other words, the count signal gives more information than an attitude signal would have done.

How does the play continue? Declarer plays a trump to the king and West’s ace. West cashes the ♦K and switches to the ♣10. East scores two tricks in the suit and leads a third round of clubs to promote West’s ♠J. The contract is one down. Note that East was not tempted to cash the ♦Q. He trusted his partner to have taken all the available diamond tricks. (If

West had started with $\heartsuit KJ86$, he would have led the $\heartsuit 8$ to East's $\heartsuit Q$ on the second round; West would win the diamond return and make his switch to clubs.)

SIGNALING COUNT FROM FOUR CARDS

I mentioned in an early chapter that with four cards you should show count with the second-best card, followed by the third-best. Why is this method recommended? After seeing two cards, your partner will nearly always be able to tell whether you hold two cards or four. It is better than playing second-best and then fourth-best because partner can make a deduction when the lowest spot card is still missing. Suppose this is the position:

	\spadesuit Q 5	
\spadesuit A K J 10 2	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 15px; background-color: #e0e0e0;"></div>	\spadesuit 8 3
	\spadesuit 9 7 6 4	

Sitting West, defending against a suit contract, you lead the $\spadesuit K$ (for count) and East plays the $\spadesuit 8$. When you continue with the $\spadesuit A$, East plays the $\spadesuit 3$. Do you know for sure whether East holds two spades or four?

The $\spadesuit 3$ is the lowest spot card out. So, whichever spot cards South may have played in an effort to confuse, you know that East cannot have played his second-best and third-best cards. He must therefore hold a doubleton.

However you distribute the six spot cards in the closed hands (or any other six spot cards that they might have held), there is only one situation where you cannot tell whether East holds two cards or four. The cards played by East must be the second- and third-best of those cards plus the two unseen cards. Not only that, declarer must also have falsecarded to hide the lowest card out. Let's see a full deal where South does manage to disguise the situation:

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

Can you read the diamond position? Declarer has selected his cards skillfully; East would have played the $\spadesuit 9$ and $\spadesuit 6$ (second-best, then third-best) from $\spadesuit Q962$, so he could hold either four cards or two. How will you continue on the West hand?

You should play the ♣A next, seeking an attitude signal. Partner knows from your lead of the ♣A, rather than the ♣K, that you do not hold the ♣K. Since he does not hold that card himself, he plays a discouraging ♣3. If East happens to hold the ♠A, that card can hardly run away. You therefore return to the diamond suit, leading a third round. Declarer ruffs with dummy's ♥J and (wonderful sight!) your partner overruffs with the ♥Q. Mission accomplished.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

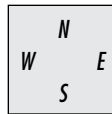
- The method known as ‘ace for attitude, king for count’ allows you to choose which honor you lead from A-K and K-Q combinations.
- The lead of an ace or queen asks partner to give an attitude signal. The lead of a king requests a count signal.
- Players using this method tend to favor count signals in situations where a top honor has not been led.
- A king lead against notrump asks partner to unblock any honor he holds and to give a count signal otherwise.
- At the five-level or higher, an ace lead denies possession of the king. You would always lead the king from A-K.

QUIZ on Ace for attitude, king for count

1.

♠ A K Q 9
♥ J 4
♦ Q 10 6
♣ A 7 5 2

To Answer



♠ 6 5 2
♥ 8 7 6 3
♦ A 9 5 3 2
♣ 10

West	North	East	South
3♥	5♣	all pass	3♣

Your partner leads the ♥K against South's game in clubs. What is your plan for the defense?

2.

♠ J 10 9 7
♥ 10 7 2
♦ A 3
♣ K J 9 7

To Answer

♠ 8 4
♥ A K Q 8 6
♦ Q J 6 2
♣ 6 5



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

You lead the ♥K, partner playing the ♥9. What is your plan for the defense?

3.

♠ K 9 7
♥ J 10 4
♦ Q 6 4
♣ A K Q 5

To Answer



♠ 6 5
♥ A K 7 6 3
♦ A K 2
♣ 10 7 4

West	North	East	South
pass	4♠	all pass	3♠

Your partner leads the ♦J, winning the first trick. He continues with the ♦7 to your ♦K, South playing the ♦3 and the ♦8. When you lead the ♥K, South plays the ♥8 and West the ♥5. What now?

Answers to the QUIZ

- West, who overcalled 3♥, leads the ♥K against South's contract of 5♣. Playing 'ace for attitude, king for count', you should play the ♥7 (the second highest from four cards). West will then expect you to hold four hearts — not two, because South has much longer clubs than you do. Playing another heart would be fatal now and West should switch to the ♦K, placing you with the ♦A. You show count with the ♦2 and West continues with a second diamond to beat the contract.

To Question

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

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ J 10 4
♥ 5
♦ 7 4
♣ K Q J 8 6 4 3

- After a 1♥ – 2♥ start to the auction, you lead the ♥K against South's spade game. 'King for count', so East's ♥9 tells you that he has four hearts. (It cannot be two because he raised you to 2♥.) Only one heart trick is available to the defense, so you must seek a full three tricks elsewhere. A club switch is the only realistic chance. Your partner shows up with the necessary cards, for once. He scores the ♣Q and ♣A and gives you a club ruff to defeat the contract.

To Question

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

3. West leads the ♦J against 4♠ and continues with the ♦7 to your ♦K. Uncertain whether another diamond will stand up, you switch to the ♥K, requesting a count signal. South plays the ♥8 (a false card, attempting to confuse you) and West the ♥5. From a holding of ♥Q952, West would have played his second-best card, the ♥9. You therefore know that the ♥A will stand up. Had you tried a third diamond instead, the contract would have been made.

To Question

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



UPSIDE-DOWN SIGNALS

Bridge players are an inventive bunch and you will often hear them saying: 'I wonder if it would be better playing it the other way round.'

The normal way to play attitude signals, as we have seen, is that a high card encourages and a low card discourages. You will not be surprised to hear that some bridge players, a large number in fact, play their attitude signals the other way round. A low card encourages and a high card discourages. This method is known as 'upside-down attitude signals' or 'reverse attitude signals'. Similarly, some players use upside-down count signals and even upside-down suit preference signals. (When you see UDCA on a convention card, this means that they play upside-down count and attitude signals.)

Is there any technical advantage of playing upside-down signals? When you hold ♠AK32 it is better to be playing reverse attitude, because you can signal encouragement with the ♠2. Yes, but next time you may hold ♠AK98. If you are playing reverse attitude, your partner may think that the ♠8 is discouraging. These situations cancel each other out. Nevertheless, it is generally agreed that there is a technical advantage to reverse attitude signals, as we will see in the next section. With count and suit preference signals, no real advantage is claimed for the upside-down method. Let's look at the three types of reverse signal in turn.

REVERSE ATTITUDE SIGNALS

An advantage claimed for reverse attitude signals is that you may not be able to afford a high card from the suit that you want to encourage. Suppose you hold ♥K1093 over dummy's ♥Q74. It may be that you cannot afford a standard attitude discard of the ♥10 or the ♥9. Playing reverse attitude, you can encourage a heart switch by discarding the ♥3.

When you have no interest in a suit, you are much more likely to have a high card available for a reverse-attitude discouraging signal. If you wish to discourage from $\spadesuit 9752$, for example, you can afford to play the $\spadesuit 9$ or the $\spadesuit 7$.

East was glad to be playing reverse attitude signals when this deal arose:

\spadesuit J 5 2
 \heartsuit 10 2
 \diamondsuit Q J 6 4
 \clubsuit 10 8 5 3

\spadesuit K 7 6 4
 \heartsuit Q 8 4
 \diamondsuit K 8 2
 \clubsuit K J 4

N
S
W
E

\spadesuit A 9
 \heartsuit A K J 9 7 3
 \diamondsuit 9 7 5
 \clubsuit Q 7

\spadesuit Q 10 8 3
 \heartsuit 6 5
 \diamondsuit A 10 3
 \clubsuit A 9 6 2

West	North	East	South
			1 \heartsuit
pass	1 \spadesuit	pass	2 \heartsuit
pass	4 \heartsuit	all pass	

West found the only lead to trouble the heart game, the $\diamondsuit Q$. Declarer played low from dummy. Sitting East, what signal would you make?

If you are playing normal attitude signals, you have a problem. You want to encourage a diamond continuation but you are not sure if you can afford the $\diamondsuit 10$. All would be well if West was leading from $\diamondsuit QJ9x$, since the $\diamondsuit J9$ would then be equals to lead through the $\diamondsuit K$. In the layout shown, though, it would give away the contract to play the $\diamondsuit 10$. If West then continued with the $\diamondsuit J$, covered by the $\diamondsuit K$ and $\diamondsuit A$, declarer's $\diamondsuit 9$ would win the third round of the suit.

There is no problem when you use reverse signals. You encourage with the $\diamondsuit 3$ and, a few seconds later, the defenders have four minor-suit tricks in the bag.

Suppose we change the deal so that East holds $\diamondsuit A93$ and South has $\diamondsuit 1075$. Playing reverse attitude, East would be able to afford the $\diamondsuit 9$ as a discouraging signal. This would not deter West from continuing if his lead was from $\diamondsuit QJ10x$; when his $\diamondsuit Q$ won the first trick, he would assume that East held the $\diamondsuit A$.

You get the general idea. It is more likely that you can afford to play a clear card when using reverse attitude, rather than normal attitude.

Another claimed advantage of reverse attitude is that it can be more difficult for declarer to mask your signal with a false card. See what happened here:

♠ Q 10 6 3

♥ Q 10 8 4

♦ 9 7 6

♣ K 7

♠ K 9 4 2

♥ 2

♦ K Q 10 3

♣ J 8 5 3

♠ 8

♥ A K J 9 7 3

♦ A J 5 2

♣ Q 9

♠ A J 7 5

♥ 6 5

♦ 8 4

♣ A 10 6 4 2

N

E

W

S

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

Playing standard leads, West led the ♦K to indicate a holding headed by the K-Q. East was using normal attitude signals; since he did not hold the ace or the jack, he discouraged with the ♦4. South cunningly followed with the ♦5 to make East’s card look like an encouraging signal.

West noted that the ♦2 was missing. From his point of view it was possible that his partner had started with ♦A42 or ♦J42. After a few seconds of weighing up the probabilities, he continued with the ♦3. Partner’s ♦8 was not exactly what he had been hoping to see. Declarer won with the ♦J and soon had ten tricks before him.

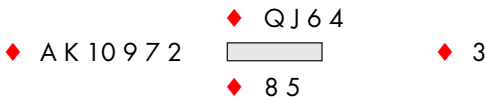
Playing reverse attitude signals, West would not face such a dilemma. Partner would discourage with the ♦8 and declarer would be powerless to disguise this signal. If he allowed the ♦K to win, playing the ♦5 or ♦2, West would not be tempted to continue the suit.

It may seem that reverse attitude signals have several advantages and no disadvantages, when compared with standard attitude. That is indeed the case and it’s why many players favor the method.

The only possible disadvantage of reverse signals is that it is quite a strain to switch methods after years of playing normal signals. It's possible that you will forget now and again, giving partner the wrong signal. Also, the strain of remembering to make a signal that will seem unnatural for a while may distract you from your general concentration on the defense.

REVERSE COUNT SIGNALS

The advantage claimed for reverse attitude signals (you may not be able to afford a high card when you want to encourage) has no such matching advantage when it comes to count signals. Standard count signals and reverse (upside-down) count signals are symmetrical. Look at this position:



West leads one of the top diamond honors (according to the partnership's agreed method) and East follows with the ♦3, South following with the ♦5. Playing standard count signals, West can be sure that the ♦3 is a singleton; it is the lowest spot card out. If East-West were playing reverse count signals, West would have no idea who held the singleton. The ♦3 would be the correct reverse-count card from ♦83. Does this illustrate an advantage for playing standard count? Of course not! Next time East will hold a singleton ♦8 and the reverse-count advocates will know that the card is a singleton; those playing standard count will have to guess. Everything is symmetrical.

One technical disadvantage of reverse count signals arises when you need to signal count from a holding of three cards, perhaps ♦Q103; you may not be able to afford the middle card (here the ♦10). Playing standard count signals, you are happy to follow with the ♦3. However, this is offset by the times when you hold a doubleton. You may not be able to afford the jack from ♠J3. When you hold four cards, such as ♠KJ62, it is likely that you can find a satisfactory card for your signal, whichever method you use.

On many deals declarer will attempt to disguise the signal that a defender has made. The declarer may find such disguise more difficult to achieve when he is unfamiliar with the signaling method being used. Look at this deal:

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

Next we will suppose that East-West are playing reverse count signals. Now declarer needs to follow with the ♥2, hoping that West will read the ♥5 as a reverse count signal from ♥95. For a declarer unfamiliar with reverse signals, such a deception becomes more difficult. In a match-point event, with short rounds, he may not even be aware what signals the defenders are playing. (Yes, I know they are meant to announce such methods before play starts, but...)

We have already seen how normal suit preference signals work. A high card points at the higher of two possible suits; a low card at the lower of two possible suits. When you play ‘upside-down suit preference’ or ‘reverse suit preference’, a low card points at the higher suit and a high card at the lower suit.

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illustration of the symmetrical nature of the two methods, take a look at this deal from the 2004 NEC Cup, where China Ladies faced Israel.

♠ 10 8 5 3

♥ A K Q 3

♦ Q 10 7

♣ Q 7

♠ Q J 9 7

♥ 9 7

♦ J

♣ K J 9 8 6 5

N

W

E

S

♠ 6 4 2

♥ 6 2

♦ A 9 8 6

♣ A 10 4 2

♠ A K

♥ J 10 8 5 4

♦ K 5 4 3 2

♣ 3

West	North	East	South
Wang	D. Yadlin	Yan	I. Yadlin
	1♦	pass	1♥
dbl	2♥	3♣	3♥
pass	4♥	all pass	

Both declarers played in 4♥ on the South cards and the early play was identical. The West players led the ♦J, East winning with the ♦A and returning the ♦6. This was a normal suit preference signal, a low card suggesting a club return. Both the declarers attempted to disguise the intention behind the ♦6 by following with the ♦5 on the second round. West ruffed and now had to guess whether East held ♦A643 (and wanted a spade return) or ♦A986 (and wanted a club return).

Wang Yanhong guessed correctly, crossing to her partner’s ♣A for a second diamond ruff to defeat the contract. At the other table, Michael Barel guessed incorrectly, switching to a spade and allowing an overtrick to be made.

Suppose the two East/West pairs had been playing reverse suit preference instead. East would then return the ♦9, a high diamond to indicate a switch to the lower side suit (clubs). There would then have been no way for declarer to disguise the signal. Does this demonstrate that reverse suit preference is a better method? Not at all! Reverse signals are clearer on this particular deal because East wants to point at the lower suit. Suppose East had held the ♠A instead of the ♣A. He would then have had

to signal with his lowest diamond, the ♦6, to ask for a spade return. Once again, declarer could have disguised the signal by following with the ♦5.

The conclusion is that there is no technical advantage in either method.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- There is some technical advantage in playing reverse attitude signals, where a low card encourages a continuation and a high card discourages. This is because you may not be able to afford a high card from a suit where you hold values. From a weak holding, you can generally afford to play a high card.
- There is no obvious advantage to reverse count signals or reverse suit preference signals (other than the dubious one that your opponents may be confused by the method).
- Do not switch to reverse signals merely to appear clever. After many years of playing standard signals, it is difficult to start signaling the other way round. Even if you manage to remember each time, it will be quite an effort and may distract you from concentrating on the defense as a whole.

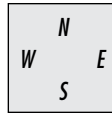
QUIZ on upside-down signals

1.

♠ Q 7 6
♥ J 5
♦ J 10 9 6 5
♣ K Q 6

To Answer

♠ 10 5
♥ 9 7 4
♦ A K 7
♣ A 9 4 3 2



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

You lead the ♦A against 4♣, partner playing the ♦2 and South the ♦3. What is your plan for the defense? (Assume for these three problems that you are playing all your signals upside-down)

2.

♠ K 7 6
♥ Q 5 2
♦ 10 9 6 5
♣ K Q 6

To Answer



♠ 3
♥ A J 9 8 7 3
♦ Q J 7
♣ A 10 5

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

Your partner leads the ♥K against South's game in spades. What is your plan for the defense?

3.

♠ 10 5 4
♥ 10 8 4
♦ 10 9 6 5 2
♣ A 9

To Answer

♠ K 9
♥ J 7 6 3
♦ Q 7
♣ J 8 6 5 3



West	North	East	South
			1♦
pass	3♦	dbl	5♦
all pass			

North's 3♦ is pre-emptive. You lead the ♠K, partner playing the ♠7 and declarer the ♠3. What is your plan for the defense?

Answers to the QUIZ

1. You lead the $\heartsuit A$ against $4\spadesuit$, East playing the $\heartsuit 2$ and declarer the $\heartsuit 3$. Partner's card is a reverse attitude signal, suggesting a doubleton in the suit. Pleased that you have deciphered the signal, let's suppose that you continue with king and another diamond, giving partner a ruff. He will have no idea which suit to return! If he switches to a heart, the contract will be made. You should therefore cash your $\clubsuit A$ before delivering the diamond ruff.

To Question

	\spadesuit Q 7 6	
	\heartsuit J 5	
	\diamondsuit J 10 9 6 5	
	\clubsuit K Q 6	
\spadesuit 10 5		\spadesuit 9 3
\heartsuit 9 7 4		\heartsuit Q 10 8 6 2
\diamondsuit A K 7		\diamondsuit 8 2
\clubsuit A 9 4 3 2		\clubsuit J 10 7 5
	<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;"> WE </div> <div style="text-align: center;">S</div> </div>	
	\spadesuit A K J 8 4 2	
	\heartsuit A K 3	
	\diamondsuit Q 4 3	
	\clubsuit 8	

2. West, your partner, leads the $\heartsuit K$ against South's spade game. He will hold either a singleton or a doubleton heart. With $\heartsuit Kx$, he will clearly continue with a second heart when the king wins. Your signal should reflect the case where he has no more hearts and will require guidance at Trick 2. You must give a (reverse) suit preference signal. You would like a club switch, so you should play your highest spot card, the $\heartsuit 9$. You win the club switch, cash the $\heartsuit A$ and give partner a heart ruff to defeat the contract.

To Question

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

3. Partner's ♠7 is reverse attitude. Since the ♠6 and ♠2 are missing, it is likely to be a discouraging signal. Suppose you continue spades, reasoning that East must have something useful there or South would have won the first trick. Your ♠9 will be covered by the ♠10, ♠J and ♠A. Declarer will draw trumps and set up a spade to ditch dummy's club loser! Instead you should switch to a club, beating the contract. Why is a club switch better than a heart switch? If declarer holds ♥Ax, there is little chance that he will be able to throw two hearts from dummy. A single club discard is possible, however, as we saw.

To Question

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



HOW THE CHAMPIONS SIGNAL

In this final chapter we will examine the signaling methods used by some of the world's most famous players. Since they devote their lives to the game, they can afford to play more complex methods than would be appropriate for most of us. Don't assume that you should start playing inverted Smith echoes just because Meckstroth and Rodwell favor that method. There is much good sense in the maxim 'simplest is best'.

MECKSTROTH AND RODWELL (USA)

Jeff Meckstroth and Eric Rodwell are regarded by many as the world's top pair. Multiple world champions, they are known for their intricate strong-club bidding system and the relentless pressure that they exert on their opponents. Although they have many special agreements (for example, they lead the lower of touching honors when they have indicated length in the suit during the bidding), this is a summary of their signaling methods:

HIGH HONOR LEADS		
	vs. Suit	vs. NT
Ace	AK(+), A+	AKx(+), AQx
King	AK, KQ(+)	KQ109(+), AKJxx, for count/ unblock.
Queen	QJ(+)	KQ weaker, AQJ, QJ(+)

SIGNALS IN ORDER OF PRIORITY				
		<i>Partner's lead</i>	<i>Declarer's lead</i>	<i>Discarding</i>
Suit:	1st	Reverse attitude	Reverse count	Reverse attitude
	2nd	Reverse count	Reverse suit pref.	Reverse count
	3rd	Reverse suit pref.		Reverse suit pref.
NT:	1st	Reverse attitude	Reverse Smith echo	Reverse attitude
	2nd	Reverse count	Reverse suit pref.	Reverse count
	3rd	Reverse suit pref.		Reverse suit pref.

As you see, all signals are played upside-down (reverse signals). Against notrump contracts, they play ‘ace for attitude, king for count’, the method commended in Chapter 11. Unusually, they play reverse Smith echoes in the trump suit when defending a suit contract. When they are ruffing, rather than merely following suit, a high trump indicates an odd number of trumps.

This example of a reverse suit preference signal comes from the first set of USA2’s Bermuda Bowl final win against Italy in 2009:

Both vul.
Dealer North

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

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 6
♥ Q 8
♦ J 7 5
♣ A J 10 6 4 3 2

West	North	East	South
Rodwell	Lauria	Meckstroth	Versace
	1♠	pass	1NT
all pass			

Rodwell led the ♥7 against 1NT. Meckstroth won with the ♥K and returned the ♥2, indicating his count in the heart suit. Rodwell won declarer's ♥Q with the ♥A and cashed the ♥J. On this trick Meckstroth had a choice of spot cards to play, the ♥6 or the ♥5, and could suggest a subsequent switch with a (reverse) suit preference signal.

Meckstroth played the ♥5 on the third round of the suit. The lower spot card suggested a switch to the higher of the two possible suits – diamonds rather than clubs. It was clear from the cards in the dummy that East could not want a spade switch. Rodwell duly switched to the ♦2, which would allow the defenders to score three diamond tricks if East held ♦KJ10. Meckstroth won with the ♦Q and returned the ♦8, the defenders scoring four diamond tricks to put 1NT two down.

As you see, East had no opportunity to suggest the best switch with a discard. Only by playing suit preference signals could East let partner know that he preferred a diamond switch to a club switch.

HELGEMO AND HELNESS (NORWAY)

The great Norwegian players, Geir Helgemo and Tor Helness, won the Bermuda Bowl in 2007 and have many other championships to their name, including several US Nationals. They favor a relatively straightforward signaling system, which is the same against both suit and notrump contracts. Their spot card leads are 3rd and 5th best throughout.

HIGH HONOR LEADS		
	vs. Suit	vs. NT
Ace	AK(+), A+	AKx(+)
King	AK, KQ(+)	KQ(+), AKQx
Queen	QJ(+)	QJ(+), AQJ(+), KQJ(+)

SIGNALS IN ORDER OF PRIORITY				
		<i>Partner's lead</i>	<i>Declarer's lead</i>	<i>Discarding</i>
Suit:	1st	Reverse attitude	Count	Reverse attitude
	2nd	Suit preference	Suit preference	Suit preference
	3rd	Count		Count
NT:	1st	Reverse attitude	Smith echo/ count	Reverse attitude
	2nd	Suit preference	Suit preference	Suit preference
	3rd	Count		Count

As you see, they use reverse signals only when indicating attitude. You will remember, from Chapter 13, that this is the only area where reverse signals carry a technical benefit.

Let's see Helgemo and Helness at their impressive best, defending against Italy's Bocchi and Duboin in the 1997 Bermuda Bowl.

Both vul.
Dealer East

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

	♠ 5 2	
	♥ A Q J 10 4	
	♦ A J 7	
	♣ Q 8 2	



West	North	East	South
<i>Helgemo</i>	<i>Duboin</i>	<i>Helness</i>	<i>Bocchi</i>
2♦	3♦	1♦	1♥
all pass		pass	4♥

Playing 3rd and 5th leads, Helgemo led the ♦8 to East's king and declarer's ace. Bocchi now erred by drawing one round of trumps with the ace before ruffing a diamond in dummy. He continued with a trump to the queen, exposing the 3-1 break, and another diamond ruff. With no quick entry to his hand to draw the last trump, declarer now had to broach the clubs while West still held a trump. When he led a low club from dummy, East rose with the king and West signaled his count by playing the ♣10. Sitting East, how would you have defended at this point?

Helness saw that if he continued with the ♣A and a third club, ruffed by West, declarer would then be able to discard a spade loser on the established ♣J. Instead of continuing clubs, he therefore switched to the ♠6. West produced the ♠K and declarer won with dummy's ♠A, continuing with a second round of clubs. Helness won with the ♣A and gave partner his club ruff. The ♠Q was then the setting trick.

LAURIA AND VERSACE (ITALY)

Lorenzo Lauria and Alfredo Versace are one of Europe’s most successful pairs, with many World and European championship wins. They favor 3rd and 5th leads against suit contracts, but a method known as ‘attitude leads’ against notrump (as we will see in a moment).

HIGH HONOR LEADS		
	vs. Suit	vs. NT
Ace	AK(+), A+	For attitude
King	AK, KQx(+)	For count or unblock
Queen	QJx(+)	KQ(+), QJ(+)

SIGNALS IN ORDER OF PRIORITY				
		<i>Partner’s lead</i>	<i>Declarer’s lead</i>	<i>Discarding</i>
Suit:	1st	Reverse attitude	Reverse count	Odd-even
	2nd	Reverse count	Suit preference	Reverse count
	3rd	Suit preference		
NT:	1st	Reverse attitude	Reverse count	Odd-even
	2nd	Reverse count	Suit preference	Reverse count
	3rd	Suit preference		

Lauria and Versace are the only pair in our list who use ‘odd-even discards’. The discard of an odd-numbered spot card (3, 5, 7, 9) is encouraging in that suit; an even-numbered spot card (2, 4, 6, 8, 10) is discouraging. You may wonder what you do when you wish to encourage but hold only even-numbered cards. You play the highest even card and hope that partner can read the position (the 8 from K-8-4-2). In effect, the ranking of the spot cards in terms of how strongly they encourage is: 3, 5, 7, 9, 10, 8, 6, 4, 2.

Against notrump only, they use ‘ace for attitude, king for count’, as described in [Chapter 12](#).

Let’s see the Italian maestros defending in the 2005 Bermuda Bowl final against their long-time rivals, the USA:

East-West vul.
Dealer North

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

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



West	North	East	South
Lauria	Meckstroth	Versace	Rodwell
	1♦	pass	1♥
pass	1♠	pass	2♣
pass	3♦	pass	3NT
all pass			

Lauria and Versace play ‘attitude opening leads’. What does that mean? It means that a low spot card lead, such as the ♠2, would show a good suit; it would usually suggest at least five cards to an honor. With four cards to an honor, they would not lead the bottom spot card but the third-best card. However, it not their style to lead from such suits at all. They prefer to make a neutral lead in a different suit.

Lauria decided to lead a spade against 3NT. From ♠10842, he would normally choose the ♠8 to indicate a weak suit. (You will recall that the idea of leading a low card to show strength and a high card to show weakness was mentioned frequently throughout this book.) Since spades had been bid, however, Lauria did not think he could afford to lead the ♠8. He led the ♠4 instead.

Rodwell played low from dummy and Versace then had a key play to make. His partner was unlikely to have led from ♠K1042 when spades had been bid against him. It was just possible that West had ♠K10864, but this was only one holding. He would lead the ♠4 from several shorter holdings that did not include the king (♠1042, ♠842, ♠642, ♠10842). His mind made up, Versace declined to put in the ♠J. He rose with the ♠A and switched to the ♥J, giving the Italians the first five tricks for one down.

At the other three tables of the Bermuda Bowl and Venice Cup finals, a spade was also led against 3NT. Versace was the only East to find the winning defense, aided by his partnership’s unusual opening lead methods.

LIU YI QIAN AND WENFEI WANG (CHINA)

After threatening to break through for several years, the Chinese women’s team eventually triumphed in the 2009 Venice Cup in São Paulo. Let’s see what defensive methods Liu and Wenfei employ:

HIGH HONOR LEADS		
	vs. Suit	vs. NT
Ace	AK(+), Ax(+)	For attitude
King	KQ(+), AK	For unblock or count
Queen	QJ(+), Qx	QJ(+), KQ(+)

SIGNALS IN ORDER OF PRIORITY				
		<i>Partner’s lead</i>	<i>Declarer’s lead</i>	<i>Discarding</i>
Suit:	1st	Reverse attitude	Reverse count	Reverse count
	2nd	Reverse count	Suit preference	Suit preference
	3rd	Suit preference		
NT:	1st	Reverse attitude	Smith echo	Reverse count
	2nd	Reverse count	Suit preference	Suit preference
	3rd	Suit preference		

As you see, they use ‘ace for attitude, king for count’ against notrump only. In that way they avoid the potential disadvantage of the two-way queen lead (K-Q or Q-J) against a suit contract. Against all contracts they use reverse count discards. In other words, they throw from a suit that they do not want, giving count in that suit at the same time. I have always liked this method, because you can pass an attitude and a count message with a single card.

Let’s see Liu and Wenfei defending their way to a game swing against France in the semi-finals of the 2009 Venice Cup.

North-South vul.
Dealer East

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

♠ Q J 7		
♥ K Q 8		
♦ K Q J 8 6		
♣ J 4		

	N	
W		E
	S	

West	North	East	South
<i>Liu</i>	<i>D'Ovidio</i>	<i>Wenfei</i>	<i>Allouche-Gaviard</i>
		pass	1NT
pass	2♠	pass	3♣
pass	4♣	pass	4♦
pass	4♥	pass	5♣
all pass			

North's 2♠ was a transfer to clubs. Liu had listened closely to the bidding. When the French pair cuebid in diamonds and hearts, subsequently stopping in 5♣, she diagnosed that a spade lead would be effective. Liu led the ♠2, playing 3rd and 5th leads against suit contracts. (They use 2nd and 4th against notrump). Wenfei won with the ♠A and continued with the ♠K. She reversed the normal order to indicate that she held a doubleton in the suit.

On the second round of spades, West had the chance to give a suit preference signal. She played her lowest remaining spade, the ♠4, to request a diamond return. East duly played back a diamond to partner's ace and a spade ruff put the game two down.

At the other table the bidding was a less revealing 1NT - 2♠ - 3♣ - 4♦ (splinter bid) - 5♣. The French West very reasonably led the ♥J and the contract was made.

HAMMAN AND ZIA (USA)

Bob Hamman and Zia Mahmood formed their partnership after the death of Hamman’s former partner, Paul Soloway. As part of the Nickell team, they won the 2009 Bermuda Bowl. Their signaling methods are quite close to those in our Recommended Signaling system (see [Chapter 10](#)) – in other words, they favor the signals used by most of the players in North America.

HIGH HONOR LEADS		
	vs. Suit	vs. NT
Ace	AK	Asks for count or unblock
King	AKx, KQx	Asks for attitude
Queen	QJx, AKQ	QJx(+), KQ109, demands unblock of the jack

SIGNALS IN ORDER OF PRIORITY				
		<i>Partner’s lead</i>	<i>Declarer’s lead</i>	<i>Discarding</i>
Suit:	1st	Attitude	Count	Attitude
	2nd	Count	Suit preference	Count
	3rd			
NT:	1st	Attitude	Smith echo	Attitude
	2nd	Count	Suit preference	Count
	3rd	Suit preference	Count	

Against notrump, the lead of an ace asks for unblock or a count signal; the lead of a king asks for an attitude signal. This method is widely played across the USA but is seemingly less effective than ‘ace for attitude, king for count’. When the king is led (from either A-K or K-Q) responder may not know whether to encourage with the jack. The queen is led from holdings such as Q-J-10-x, Q-J-x, A-Q-J-x, and also strong holdings involving the K-Q, such as K-Q-10-9-x. When partner holds the jack, the leader’s holding is known to be strong and he will unblock the card.

Let’s see an example of the Smith echo, from a round-robin match between USA2 and China in the 2009 Bermuda Bowl:

North-South vul.
Dealer East

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

♠ A K 10 5 3		
♥ A Q 10 6		
♦ K 8		
♣ K 8		



West	North	East	South
Zia	Wang	Hamman	Zhuang
		1♦	dbl
pass	2♣	pass	2♠
pass	3♣	pass	3♦
dbl	3♠	pass	3NT
all pass			

Zia led the ♦Q against 3NT. Hamman played the ♦7, an encouraging attitude signal, and declarer won with the ♦K. Declarer's only real hope was that East held ♠QJx and the spade suit could be brought in. When he led the ♥6 to dummy's ♥J, Zia made a Smith echo with the ♥8. This told partner that his diamonds were better than they might have been. It's true that he had doubled 3♦ during the auction but it still made good sense to use a Smith echo to confirm that the lead was from ♦QJ(x) rather than ♦Qx.

After a spade to the jack and ace, declarer led the ♥10 to dummy's ♥K. Zia's second signal in the suit was the ♥7. This was a suit preference signal, preferring diamonds to clubs and therefore denying a top card in clubs. The next spade went to the queen and ace. Declarer had three spade tricks, four heart tricks and one diamond, for a total of eight. When he eventually played a club, Hamman won with the ♣A and played the ♦A. This would have beaten the contract even if Zia held ♦QJ doubleton, since Hamman's ♦9 would beat declarer's ♦8 on the third round. Zia unblocked the ♦J under his partner's ♦A and Hamman claimed the remaining tricks in diamonds for one down.

On this particular deal, the defense would doubtless have gone the same way for a pair not employing the Smith echo. Nevertheless, you can see how effectively the method allows you to distinguish between Q-x and Q-J-x on the opening lead.

AUKEN AND VON ARNIM (GERMANY)

Sabine Auken and Daniela von Arnim have some claim to be the top women’s pair in the world. As with many European pairs, their signaling methods favor count rather than attitude.

HIGH HONOR LEADS		
	vs. Suit	vs. NT
Ace	AK, A(+)	Demands count (no unblock)
King	KQ, AK(+)	Demands attitude (unblock Q)
Queen	QJ, KQ(+), demands attitude	QJx(+),KQ109(+), demands unblock of the jack

SIGNALS IN ORDER OF PRIORITY				
		<i>Partner’s lead</i>	<i>Declarer’s lead</i>	<i>Discarding</i>
Suit:	1st	Reverse count	Reverse count	Reverse count
	2nd	Reverse attitude	Suit preference	Reverse attitude
	3rd	Suit preference		Suit preference
NT:	1st	Reverse count	Smith echo	Suit preference
	2nd	Reverse attitude	Reverse count	
	3rd	Suit preference		

Look first at the pair’s honor leads against a suit contract. When they hold two touching honors doubleton, they lead the higher honor (the king from K-Q doubleton, for example). Otherwise they lead the lower of touching honors.

When a high honor is led, the most common signal requested is for count. The two exceptions are that a queen lead against a suit asks for attitude, as does a king lead against notrump.

Let's enjoy a sparkling defense by Sabine Auken, playing in a regional tournament in Gatlinburg, Tennessee:

Dealer North

♠ A Q 7 5
♥ A 2
♦ 8
♣ A Q J 9 5 2

♠ 10 8 4
♥ 7
♦ Q J 10 5 2
♣ K 10 7 6



♠ K J 9 3
♥ K Q 10 3
♦ K 7 4 3
♣ 8

♠ 6 2
♥ J 9 8 6 5 4
♦ A 9 6
♣ 4 3

West	North	East	South
<i>von Arnim</i>		<i>Auken</i>	
	1♣	dbl	2♥
3♦	3♥	all pass	

Only one card was good enough to defeat the contract and, after five minutes of calculation, Auken found it. She returned the ♥10! If declarer wins with the ♥J, he can ruff a diamond only with the ♥A. This will revive East's ♥KQ, declarer eventually losing three trumps, one diamond and a spade.

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♥Q. She drew dummy’s last trump with the ♥K, cashed the ♦K and exited safely with a diamond. In due course, she scored the ♠K as the setting trick.

Look back to Trick 4, to the moment when Auken found the ♥10 return. It would not have been good enough to return the ♥K instead. Declarer would win with the ♥A, ruff a club in his hand, ruff a diamond with the ♥2 and establish the club suit with another ruff. He could then cross to the ♠A and discard the last diamond on a good club. The defense would score just three trump tricks and a spade.

TOWNSEND AND GOLD (ENGLAND)

Tom Townsend and David Gold were the anchor pair when England claimed the silver medals in the 2008 Beijing world championship, losing narrowly to Italy in the final. They rely predominantly on count signals, also favoring ‘ace for attitude, king for count’.

HIGH HONOR LEADS		
	vs. Suit	vs. NT
Ace	Demands attitude	High signal = ‘Play from the top’
King	AK/KQ, for count	AK/KQ for count
Queen	QJ/KQ, for attitude	QJ/KQ, for attitude

SIGNALS IN ORDER OF PRIORITY				
		<i>Partner’s lead</i>	<i>Declarer’s lead</i>	<i>Discarding</i>
Suit:	1st	Count	Count	Count
	2nd	Attitude	Suit preference	Attitude
	3rd	Suit preference		Suit preference
NT:	1st	Count	Count	Count
	2nd	Attitude	Suit preference	Attitude
	3rd	Suit preference		Suit preference

The England pair has a special agreement, defending at notrump, which handles this common situation:

♠ A K 6 3 ♠ 10 8 2
 ♠ Q 4 ♠ J 9 7 5

West leads the ♠A and East's ♠9 (a high card) requests partner to continue playing the suit from the top. The ♠K duly drops declarer's ♠Q and four tricks are taken.

If East held any three cards, he would play low instead, requesting a 'switch or underlead'. Unless any switch recommended itself, West would continue with the ♠3 and this would set up the thirteenth card in the suit. If East happened to hold ♠Qxx (where most pairs would encourage, requesting West to underlead at Trick 2), they would pick up all four tricks anyway. This is a novel idea, worthy of your consideration.

Let's see Townsend and Gold in international action, facing the Italian pairing of Nunes and Fantoni in Beijing.

Neither vul.
Dealer West

♠ 8 5 2
 ♥ 8 5
 ♦ A J 7 5 2
 ♣ K 8 7

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

N
W E
S

♠ K Q 9 4
 ♥ J 6 4 3
 ♦ K Q 9 8 3
 ♣ —

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

West	North	East	South
Gold	Fantoni	Townsend	Nunes
4♣	pass	pass	dbl
pass	4♦	dbl	4♥
pass	pass	dbl	all pass

Gold led the ♦6, declarer playing low from the dummy. Townsend won with the ♦Q and returned a suit preference ♦3 to give partner a ruff. Which card would you expect West to play next?

Partner had asked for a club and Gold returned the ♣2. This was suit preference for diamonds, letting partner know that he held another trump

for ruffing purposes. Townsend ruffed and returned the $\spadesuit 8$, yet another suit preference signal, asking for another club. To prevent West from scoring another diamond ruff, Nunes ruffed with the $\heartsuit A$. This promoted East's $\heartsuit J$ into a further trick for the defense and the England pair collected a penalty of 500 for three down.

CHAGAS AND BRANCO (BRAZIL)

Gabriel Chagas and Marcelo Branco were South America’s most successful pair for decades. Chagas has an immense record of success, including four different world championships (Bermuda Bowl 1989, Teams Olympiad 1976, World Open Pairs 1990 and World Transnational Teams 2001). He has also won the South American Championships on no fewer than twenty-eight occasions. Marcelo Branco partnered Chagas on most of these triumphs and is the only player to win the World Open Pairs twice, partnering Gabino Cintra to victory in 1978.

The Brazilians’ signaling methods favor count rather than attitude and, most unusually, they play normal count in some situations and reverse count in others. Let’s look at their convention card for some details:

HIGH HONOR LEADS				
		vs. Suit	vs. NT	
	Ace	AKx(+), A(+)	AKJ10x(+) for unblock of queen	
	King	AK, KQx(+)	AKx, KQ(J/10)x(+)	
	Queen	QJx(+)	QJx(+), KQ109, demands unblock of the jack	

SIGNALS IN ORDER OF PRIORITY				
		<i>Partner’s lead</i>	<i>Declarer’s lead</i>	<i>Discarding</i>
Suit:	1st	Count	Reverse count	Reverse count
	2nd	Attitude	Suit preference	Attitude
	3rd	Suit preference	Attitude	Suit preference
NT:	1st	Count	Reverse count	Reverse count
	2nd	Suit preference	Attitude	Attitude
	3rd	Attitude	Suit preference	Suit preference

Ace and queen leads (against notrump) ask for an unblock, the method popular in North America. One would imagine that a king lead asks for attitude, but there is no mention of this on their convention card.

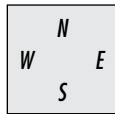
Back in 1992, Chagas and Branco were part of the Naturals team (with Forrester/Robson) in a challenge match against the Scientists team (Meckstroth/Rodwell, Hamman/Wolff). The match took place in a London's Hyde Park Hotel and I was lucky enough to watch the proceedings at the table. I remember to this day a great defense found by Chagas on the second board:

East-West vul.

Dealer North

♠ 5 3
♥ 8 6 4 3
♦ K J 8 5 3
♣ A 10

♠ A 6 4
♥ J 10 9 5
♦ 10 7
♣ Q 9 8 2



♠ K 7 2
♥ A 2
♦ 9 6 4 2
♣ K 7 4 3

♠ Q J 10 9 8
♥ K Q 7
♦ A Q
♣ J 6 5

West	North	East	South
<i>Chagas</i>	<i>Hamman</i>	<i>Branco</i>	<i>Wolff</i>
	pass	pass	1NT
pass	2♣	pass	2♠
pass	2NT	pass	3NT
all pass			

Chagas led the ♥J against 3NT, Branco winning with the ♥A. Declarer won the ♥2 return with the ♥K and could see eight top tricks (five diamonds unless the suit broke 5-1, two hearts and the ♣A). Hoping to set up some extra tricks in spades, Wolff led the ♠8 from his hand.

Chagas surveyed the scene. His partner's return of the ♥2 had denied an original holding of ♥AQ2, so there was clearly no future in the heart suit. Dummy's diamonds were fairly robust and might in fact be ready to run. Declarer was developing the spades, so the defenders would need to score some club tricks to beat the game.

Only one play was good enough on this trick and Chagas found it, rising with the ♠A! He switched to a low club, covered by the ten and East's king. Back came another club, removing dummy's ace, and declarer was now in trouble. To make the game he would need diamonds 3-3, because of the blockage, and hearts 3-3 too. Neither wish was granted and the contract went three down.

You can see what would have happened if Chagas had allowed the ♠8 to pass by. If Branco also played low, declarer would have his ninth trick. If instead he won with the ♠K, he would not be able to attack clubs from his side of the table. Declarer would win his return and set up the spades.

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DAVID BIRD (England) is one of the world's top bridge writers, with more than 100 books to his credit. His most recent MPP title, *Planning the Play of a Bridge Hand* (with Barbara Seagram), won the 2010 ABTA Book of the Year award.



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