

LEADS – LISTENING TO
THE AUCTION

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Introduction

The opening lead is probably the hardest part of bridge because you have sometimes very little information to go on so it is good to follow some basic rules:-

Most of us play standard leads – What should we lead in general with not a lot to guide us.

If Partner has bid a suit then it is most likely the best thing to do to lead it - especially if you have shortage in his suit and the opposition are playing in a trump suit.

If partner has not bid then we would look to lead top of a sequence say QJ10x.

Do we have a singleton with the opposition playing in a suit contract then we should consider that.

Failing that we should probably lead fourth highest from a unbid suit containing an honour as this is the likely way to set up some tricks. (**N.B. never underlead an Ace against suit contracts**).

If neither of those scenarios present themselves then I would lead 2nd highest from a bad suit – 10xxx or worse (some would treat the 10 as an honour and lead fourth highest)

However this session is aimed at looking at when you should deviate from the norm and lead say a) an unsupported ace, b) a short suit against no trumps, c) trumps, d) when to get active or passive.

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When to Lead Trumps Number 1

It is invariable correct to lead a trump when the opposition alight in their second suit at the two or three level.

Hand 1

♠ KQ109
♥ 974
♦ K65
♣ 987

Hand 2

♠ 102
♥ K97
♦ KJ1098
♣ 987

Auction

South

1♠
2♣

North

1NT
All Pass

North obviously has poor hand with very few spades and better clubs so South will be looking to ruff spades in dummy. This is obvious with hand 1 but with hand 2 it looks like partner has a lot of spades so we should lead trumps in both cases.

On a good day the full layout will be this: -

♠ 5
♥ Q1083
♦ Q7432
♣ Q65

♠ AJ643
♥ A2
♦ A8
♣ J1043

♠ 872
♥ KJ65
♦ J109
♣ AK2

If you lead a trump the likelihood is that declarer will only make 4 or 5 tricks but look at the difference if you lead K♠ declarer will now get 3 ruffs in dummy (your partner overruffs the third round but declarer's J♠ is established for another trick and declarer will probably escape for one off.

♠ KQ109
♥ 974
♦ K65
♣ 987

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When to Lead Trumps Number 2

It is also normally right to lead trumps when the opposition protect and partner makes a penalty double.

| North | South | Auction | North | East | South | West |
|---------|---------|-------------------------|-------|--------|-------|------|
| ♠ AQ983 | ♠ 1072 | | 1♠ | Pass | 2♠ | Pass |
| ♥ K32 | ♥ 987 | | Pass | 2NT(1) | Pass | 3♦ |
| ♦ 3 | ♦ KQ102 | | Pass | Pass | X(2) | |
| ♣ QJ32 | ♣ A104 | 1) Minors 2) Penalty | | | | |

The full layout may be like this: -

| | | |
|---------|---------|---------|
| ♠ KJ65 | ♠ AQ983 | ♠ 4 |
| ♥ AJ106 | ♥ K32 | ♥ Q5 |
| ♦ 865 | ♦ 3 | ♦ AJ974 |
| ♣ 8 | ♣ QJ32 | ♣ K9765 |
| | ♠ 1072 | |
| | ♥ 987 | |
| | ♦ KQ102 | |
| | ♣ A104 | |

The opposition have decided to protect here and don't want you to play in 2♠ so you need to punish them for their foolhardiness – You have the majority of points so the likely way that east-west are going to make tricks is by ruffing clubs in the west hand and Majors in the east hand so we need to stop this by leading trumps.

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Active or passive? Part 1

What do I mean here – well should I make an aggressive lead as we need to set up tricks or should we try to lead something that is unlikely to give too much away.

Take the following example you are West on lead after this Auction

Hand 1

♠ KJ82

♥ K32

♦ KQ5

♣ 987

♠ KJ82

♥ K32

♦ KQ5

♣ 987

Auction

South
1NT

North
3NT

So what are you going to lead?

How many points has partner got?

♠ 109

♥ A10

♦ J7432

♣ AKQJ

♠ AQ76

♥ QJ3

♦ A10

♣ 5432

♠ 543

♥ 97654

♦ 986

♣ 105

That is right not a lot 0-2 points at best.

On a really good day he will have 2 when the opposition have bid 12 opposite 12 to 3NT, but most likely he will have nothing. If you lead from your 4 card suit you will invariably give a trick away unless you get lucky and find Partner with the 10♠.

This is a hand to go passive on and lead a ♣.

The layout maybe as opposite.

LEADS LISTENING TO THE AUCTION

Active or passive? Part 2

What do I mean here – well should I make an aggressive lead as we need to set up tricks or should we try to lead something that is unlikely to give too much away.

Take the following example you are West on lead after this Auction

Hand 1

♠ KJ82

♥ KQJ

♦ 54

♣ Q987

♠ 10

♥ A10652

♦ J32

♣ J1065

♠ KJ82

♥ KQJ

♦ 54

♣ Q987

♠ A9543

♥ 9874

♦ 9

♣ A32

♠ Q76

♥ 3

♦ AKQ10876

♣ K4

Auction

South

1♦

3NT (1)

North

1♥

1) Long running minor too good to open 3NT

So what are you going to lead?

Looking at our hand we know if declarer gets in he is going to make an awful lot of diamond tricks. So we need to grab our tricks if we have any very quickly.

This is a hand to go active on and lead a ♠.

The layout maybe as opposite.

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When to lead an unsupported Ace – Part 1

What do I mean here – well when you have a holding such as A742 and lead the Ace. When should I do this?

Take the following example you are West on lead after this Auction

Hand 1

♠ 32
♥ KQJ
♦ A742
♣ A432

♠ QJ8
♥ A542
♦ K10986
♣ K

♠ 32
♥ KQ3
♦ A742
♣ A432

♠ AK1095
♥ J
♦ QJ52
♣ QJ8

Auction

South

1♠
3♦

North

2♦
4♠

So what are you going to lead?

Looking at our hand we know partner is likely to be ruffing diamonds as the opposition seem to have 8 between them. So we should lead the A♦ and follow it up with the 2♦ to get partner to play a club for another ruff. The KQ hearts can wait.

The layout maybe as opposite.

Look what would happen if you did not lead the A♦

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When to lead an Unsupported Ace – Part 2

When Partner pre-empts and you have a long suit of your own which he does not support?

Take the following example you are West on lead after this Auction Love all

♠ AJ10987
♥ 93
♦ 1032
♣ K2

♠ KQ5
♥ J105
♦ 54
♣ AQ1094

♠ 632
♥ AKQ654
♦ A
♣ J87

Hand 1
♠ AJ10987
♥ 93
♦ 1032
♣ K2

Auction

Partner

South

You

North

3♦

3♥

3♠ (1)

4♥

All Pass

1) On the way to 4♦

So what are going to lead?

Looking at our hand we know partner is likely to be short in spades as he has not attempted to sacrifice in 4♠. So we should chance our arm with the A♠ and another hoping partner can ruff. We won't beat the contract but we will save that all important overtrick.

The layout maybe as opposite.

If you don't lead the A♠ declarer will make 12 tricks.

♠ 4
♥ 87
♦ KQJ9876
♣ 653

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Leading a short suit against no trumps – Part 1

General it may well be right to lead a short suit (especially a major) against no trumps when a) the opposition haven't looked for a major suit and b) when you have very little so there is little chance for you to enjoy your suit.

Take the following example you are West on lead after this Auction
Love all

| Hand 1 | Auction | Partner | South | You | North |
|---------|---------|----------|-------|------|-------|
| ♠ 92 | | Pass | 1NT | Pass | 3NT |
| ♥ QJ987 | | All Pass | | | |
| ♦ 1032 | | | | | |
| ♣ 987 | | | | | |

♠ Q108
♥ A102
♦ 54
♣ AKQ109

♠ 92
♥ QJ987
♦ 1032
♣ 987

♠ 763
♥ K3
♦ AKQ87
♣ J32

♠ AKJ54
♥ 652
♦ J96
♣ 65

Looking at our hand it is very unlikely that we will be able to get our heart suit going, we will need partner to have K♥ or A♥ and an outside entry which he can get in with before declarer runs off 9 or more tricks. So it best to look elsewhere for a lead. North hasn't looked for a major suit fit so will probably not have a 4 card major, but partner may have so I would lead 9♠

The layout maybe as opposite. If you lead the Q♥ declarer will make all 13 tricks, if you lead 9♠ he makes only 8 tricks!

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Leading a short suit against no trumps – Part 2

When Partner doubles 3NT

Take the following example you are West on lead after this Auction
Love all

♠ 92
♥ QJ987
♦ 1032
♣ 987

♠ J853
♥ 106
♦ J4
♣ AK1062

♠ 76
♥ K3
♦ AKQ87
♣ QJ43

Hand 1

♠ 92
♥ QJ987
♦ 1032
♣ 987

♠ AKQ104
♥ A542
♦ J96
♣ 5

| Auction | Partner | South | You | North |
|---------|---------|----------|------|-------|
| | Pass | 1♦ | Pass | 1♠ |
| | Pass | 1NT | Pass | 3NT |
| | X | All Pass | | |

What is Partner trying to tell us with his double

Traditionally this is played as a conventional double ask partner to lead dummy's first bid suit - As you can see from the diagram East is desperate for a spade through dummy's presumed J♠ and he doubles to get you to do this.

The layout maybe as opposite. If you lead the Q♥ declarer will make 9 tricks assuming East does not duck it! If you lead 9♠ he makes only 7 tricks!