

Signals

As with opening leads, the cards you play when you are not on lead mean something – they can communicate information to your partner, if you play them correctly. The cards you play are the part of defending over which you have the most control, so use them well. Let me say to begin with that you don't always hold the correct cards to convey the information you want to tell your partner. This lesson is intended to show you how to signal correctly when you do have the right cards to do so.

There are three types of signals. You should be familiar with each and use the appropriate type correctly.

Attitude – Attitude signals are by far the most widely used type of signal. 95% of your signals will be attitude. This type of signal tells partner whether you like or don't like the lead – whether you have a positive or negative attitude about it. If you like the lead and want to encourage the continuation of the suit, play the highest card you can afford to get rid of, if not, the lowest card.

Count – If, and only if, it is clear that that you wouldn't be signaling your like or dislike of the lead, the card you play can indicate the number of cards you have in a suit. A high-low shows an even number. A low-high shows an odd number.

Suit Preference – This is the most difficult signaling method to use. In this case the card you play is intended to tell partner which of two suits (not including the suit lead or the trump suit) you want partner to lead. The mechanics are simple: You play a "high" card to indicate the higher ranking suit and a "low" card to indicate the lower ranking. The trick is knowing when the signal applies. Two of the most common situations in which it can apply are:

1.
O/L: DA

♠	A K 7 3
♥	4 2
♦	10 6 3
♣	8 6 5 2

If, against a heart contract, you hold this hand. Partner leads the Diamond Ace and there is a singleton on the board. It is unlikely that partner continue the suit so providing an attitude or count signal will not really help. Clearly you want a spade lead. As partner will be looking for information as to what suit to lead at trick 2, you play the D10. This says, "Lead the higher of the 2 remaining suits, i.e., spades". On the other hand, if you held the AK of clubs you would play the 3 to signal the lower of the 2 suits.

2.
4H
O/L: C

♠	7 6 5
♥	10 4
♦	A 9 6 4
♣	A 10 6 2

Another useful time to give a suit preference is when you are about to give partner a ruff and would like to give him another one. You would want to give him information as to how to get back to his hand to do so. Against a 4H contract, you hold this hand and, after winning the Club Ace, know that you can give partner a ruff or two. To tell partner which suit to return after the ruff, lead the Club 2. This says, "Lead the lower of the 2 remaining suits, diamonds".

Discarding

A "discard" is the play of a card not of the suit which is lead. As in the case of signaling when you follow suit, your discards can be used to convey valuable information to your partner about your hand.

There are a number of schemes for discarding, three of which I will cover.

1. Standard Discards

Standard discards operate much in the same way as standard signals. A high-low encourages the lead of the suit you led; a low-high discourages the lead of the suit.

2. Odd-Even Discards

In this technique, **on the 1st discard only**, a play of an odd card encourages partner to lead the suit of the discard; the play of an even card discourages a lead in the suit. If you have no preference, discard an even card. You do not want to fool your partner into thinking you have something in the suit.

With this technique, you can inferentially encourage the lead of one suit by discouraging the lead of another.

Of course, there are times when you don't have the correct cards to use this technique. You want to encourage but have only even cards or visa versa. Clearly this can happen but that is not a reason to abandon signals. First, you have to have the right cards to use any of the signaling techniques. Secondly, I use this method with most of my partners and I have found that in the vast majority of the times I have the right cards to use it effectively.

3. Lavinthal Discards

The problem with the above techniques is that you are discarding a suit with high cards and/or length which could turn into tricks for the defense during the play. Wouldn't it be better to indicate a suit preference by discarding a suit which is not likely to generate tricks for your side? Thus Lavinthal discards:

On the 1st discard only, discard a suit you **don't** want lead. The size of the discard indicates the suit preference between two suits (excluding the suit lead and suit you discard). To indicate the higher ranking suit, pitch the highest card in a side suit you can spare. A low card in a side suit would indicate the lower ranking suit. To illustrate, you hold:

S-A Q J 10 5 H-4

D-9 7 2

C-8 6 5 3

Declarer leads hearts twice. You would like partner to lead a spade but a discard of the Spade 5 is discouraging, and you really don't want to discard the potentially valuable Spade 10. Using Lavinthal discards, you pitch the Diamond 9 or Club 8. This says I want a spade lead.