

# The Exciting World of Bridge – Lesson 10

## Promoting Tricks

### Introduction

Last time we looked at two ways of eliminating losers that are used exclusively in trump contracts, ruffing losers and throwing away losers on winners. We also talked briefly about “8 ever, 9 never” and extending that principle to when we need to find a king or a jack.

This week we are going to talk about two more ways of developing extra tricks. These two ways, promotion and length, can apply at both suit contracts and notrump contracts. We will also delve a little deeper into how suits divide at the same time extending our discussion from last week on when to play for a card to drop and when to finesse for it.

### Promotion

This is a basic premise but one that needs to be thoroughly understood in order to improve your Declarer play. Promotion is when you have cards in a suit that will eventually be winners but they can't be counted as winners until you knock out high card(s) from the defenders' hands. Let's look at some examples:

N - ♥KQJT    S - ♥xxxx

There is a trick-taking potential in this suit, but no sure tricks. In order to enjoy your winners, play the suit and drive out the opponents' ♥A. It's a good trade. They get one trick, and you get three tricks. The cards are evenly divided between the two hands, so it doesn't matter in which order the cards are played.

N - ♥Kx        S - ♥Qx

You have only two high cards, but you can develop one trick by driving out the opponents' ♥A with your ♥K or ♥Q.

N - ♥JT98    S - ♥xxxx

This time you have to be more patient. You will have to give up the lead three times but eventually you will develop a trick.

N - ♥QTx      S - ♥Jxx

Notice that the high cards don't have to be on the same side of the table. Play one of your high cards, either the queen, jack or 10, to drive out one of the opponents' high cards. Then play the suit again. You can promote one trick in the suit.

The more high cards you have in a suit, the more potential the suit has for taking tricks - even when the opponents have one or two higher cards. Sometimes a lot of patience is

required in order to develop winners. Don't be afraid of losing the lead to the opponents, if it will help you develop the tricks you need.

### High Card From the Short Side First

You have heard me say this again and again. Let's look at why it's so important to always remember it. We'll assume for this exercise that the only suits that matter are diamonds and clubs. Here's the layout (South is Declarer, North is Dummy):

N - ♦KJT982 ♣A32

W - ♦73 ♣KT6

E - ♦A65 ♣QJ74

S - ♦Q4 ♣985

Let's try playing these suits in a few different ways. First try winning the first trick in diamonds with a high card from Dummy, the ♦K. Assume the opponent (East) doesn't play the ♦A. Now play a small card from the Dummy to the ♦Q in Declarer's hand - again East doesn't play the ♦A.

So far, Declarer has won two tricks. After the ace is driven out, there will be three more good tricks in the Dummy, if Declarer can get to them. Declarer can get to Dummy with the ♣A and play diamonds again to drive out the ♦A. Now there are diamond winners in the Dummy, but they are stranded with no way to get to them.

Let's see what else might happen. Suppose we start by leading the ♦K. East takes the ♦A while we play a small card from the Declarer's hand. Now East leads back a club to drive out Dummy's ♣A. We can play a small diamond over to our ♦Q, but the rest of our winners are again stranded in the Dummy. This time we took only one trick in the suit!

The best way is to start by playing the ♦Q, the high card from the short side. If East wins the ♦A, we'll have no trouble taking the rest of the tricks. If East doesn't play the ace, we can lead the suit again to drive out the ace. Even if East refuses to take the ♦A a second time, we're now in the Dummy. We can lead diamonds one more time, forcing East to take the ace.

Now our remaining diamonds are winners, and we have our carefully preserved ♣A so we can get to them. What a difference! We get five diamond tricks instead of two.

By starting with the high card from the short side when promoting winners, you increase your chances of not stranding a suit - that means you won't be looking across the table, wondering how you're going to get to winners on the other side.

## The Division of The Opponents' Cards

Have you ever wondered how the opponents' cards were divided but been afraid to peek? Here's a helpful guideline, so you don't have to look:

If there are an even number of cards outstanding in a suit then the cards tend to be slightly unevenly divided. For example, if the opponents have six cards, they would probably be divided 4–2, rather than 3–3.

If there are an odd number of cards outstanding in a suit then the cards tend to be divided as evenly as possible. If the opponents had five cards, they would probably be divided 3–2, rather than 4–1.

The only exception to this rule is when there are 2 cards outstanding. In this case they are slightly favoured to be divided 1-1, not 2-0. This is actually part of the "8 ever, 9 never" principle.

### "8 Ever, 9 Never" Extended

This phrase relates to when we are "looking" for a queen. When we have a total of 8 cards or less in the suit, the odds favour finessing. When we have 9 or more, it's better to play for it to drop. Similarly, there are numbers for when we are "looking" for a king or a jack.

	Finesse	Drop
King	10 or less	11 or more
Queen	8 or less	9 or more
Jack	6 or less	7 or more

You will note that our "rhyme" just shifts up or down by 2 when we are looking for the other honours.

## Developing Tricks Through Length

Let's see how to put our knowledge of the likely division of the opponents' cards to work. Long suits are wonderful. The more cards in a suit your side holds, the fewer the opponents have. That means that after the suit has been played a few times and the opponents have no cards left, your cards (no matter how small they are) will be winners.

It helps to decide how many tricks you can expect from your long suits by considering how many cards the opponents hold. Then estimate how they might be divided - an odd number of cards divides as evenly as possible and an even number of cards divides slightly unevenly.

Let's look at some examples:

- 1) AKxx opposite xxxx – assuming the missing cards divide 3-2 we can promote a third winner.

- 2) Axxx opposite KQx – if the cards divide 4-2 we will only get the three winners we started with. However, if we are lucky enough that they split 3-3, we get a fourth winner.
- 3) Axxxx opposite Kxx – with a 3-2 split we can get four winners from this suit.
- 4) Kxxxxx opposite Ax – with a 3-2 split we get 5 winners from this suit. Even an unlucky 4-1 split could get us extra winners.
- 5) AKxxx opposite xxxx – if the missing cards divide 3-1 as expected, we will get four winners from this suit. If we get a lucky 2-2 split, then we get five winners.

Long suits are a good source of tricks if you are willing to be patient. Often you have to give the lead to the opponents once or even several times in an effort to turn a small card into a winner. Think about how the opponents' cards are likely to be divided, then play your long suit and see what happens.

### Stranding a Suit

Here's another useful trick you can write down and put under the magnet on your fridge.

When a suit is unevenly divided between your hand and the Dummy, sometimes you have to be careful about the order in which you play the cards. You don't want to find yourself with winners you can't take. Put the diamond suit face-up on the table as follows:

North (Dummy)	
♦AK432	
West ♦QJ9	East ♦T8
South (Declarer)	
♦765	

Suppose the only high cards in the dummy are in the diamond suit. You want to develop winners, taking advantage of your length in this suit. If you play the ♦A and ♦K, you'll have to give up the third trick to the opponents. Unfortunately, by the time the suit has been played three times, there are no diamonds left in Declarer's hand. There are two good diamonds in the Dummy, but they are stranded.

Now see what happens if you lose the first diamond trick to the opponents. Play the ♦5 from your hand and the ♦2 from the Dummy. You lose this trick, but now there are still two diamonds in declarer's hand to get to the good tricks in Dummy.

Giving a trick to the opponents which you could have won is called ducking. Ducking tricks can be very useful when trying to establish long suits. In this example, you could have ducked either the first trick or the second trick to the opponents.

Let's look at some examples. Assuming there are no high cards in the Dummy other than the ones in this suit, how would you play the following layouts in order to avoid stranding your established winners in the Dummy? How many tricks would you expect to take? How would you expect the opponents' cards to be divided?

- 1) AKxxx opposite xxx – You should duck once. We're expecting to take four tricks with the expected 3-2 split.
- 2) Axxxx opposite Kxx – Again duck once. We're expecting the same as the last example.
- 3) AKxxxx opposite xx – Duck once. We expect five tricks and a 3-2 break.
- 4) Axxxx opposite xxx – Duck twice. We are hoping for 3 winners with a 3-2 break.
- 5) Axxx opposite Kxx – Duck once. While we expect a 4-2 split, we are hoping for the missing cards to split 3-3 which will give us a third winner.

When you have a limited number of winners in the Dummy, it may be necessary to take your losses very early in a suit - even to lose the first trick. You must make certain you have cards left in Declarer's hand in that suit, so you can get to the winners you worked so hard to establish in the Dummy.