

### Signals and Discards in Defence

When partner leads a suit we normally play:

**H**igh

**E**ncouraging

**L**ow

**D**iscouraging

This generally works well, but what about when declarer plays a suit and we are defending. In general, we do not want to encourage a suit that declarer is playing on and so the above is not useful.

Instead we show length signals on declarers lead:

**H**igh

**E**ven

**L**ow

**O**dd

So if declarer leads a suit we show partner our length in it:

Obviously if we have a small singleton we must play it

With a small doubleton we "peter" to show an even number

With a small tripleton we play the smallest first to show an odd number

With four small, again we "peter" to show an even number (the expert will often play second highest on the first round and then third highest on the second round - in this way there is an attempt to distinguish two small from four small)

With five small we would play lowest first to show an odd number.

Why do we want to show length?

There are various ways in which this might help partner to plan the hand, for example it might tell partner when and if we are able to ruff a suit.

It is also often useful to partner, if he knows your length in a suit, so he knows how many times he needs to hold up an Ace.

### Suit Preference Signals

Sometimes we can show partner where our strength lies or where our entry is by use of suit preference signals. In this case it does not particularly matter which of our small cards we play, so we use the idea that if we play a high 'irrelevant' card it tells partner that our strength or entry lies in the higher of the other suits and if we play a low 'irrelevant' card it tells partner that our entry or strength is in the lower of the other suits.

You do need to watch the spot cards though. Sometimes it is not obvious whether partner's card is high or low - it is all relative.

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

On this hand North is the declarer in 2♠ after a simple auction where he opened 1♠ and South bid 2♠ which was passed out.

If we look at the North-South cards there are only four losers, two hearts and two diamonds (because the Ace is badly placed). If North cashes Ace and King of spades

there are no trump losers. However good defence will get this contract off. East should cash the top two hearts and then give his partner a ruff. Which card he plays on the third round is important though. He should play the 9 to show partner that is re-entry is in the higher of the other suits (diamonds rather than clubs). If instead he held the Ace of clubs, rather than diamonds, he should play the 2 to show partner that his entry is in the lower suit.

After West ruffs, he will return the Queen of diamonds. Whether North covers or not the defence will make two diamonds, two top hearts and two heart ruffs to defeat the contract by a trick.

### Discards

If declarer runs a long suit we have to discard from our hand. The general rule when discarding is to keep winners and throw losers. Unfortunately, it is not always obvious which cards will become winners later in the hand. Here are some general principles which may help:

**When discarding keep length with dummy.**

Suppose you can see four clubs in dummy and you also hold four clubs. Often you will need to retain all your clubs to prevent dummy's fourth card becoming a winner.

	♠ A Q 8 5 (dummy)	
♠ J 6 2		♠ 9 7 4 3 (you)
	♠ K T	

Here you must not discard a club or the 8 in dummy will become a winner after declarer has played three rounds of the suit.

**When discarding keep length with declarer and dummy's long suits**

Obviously it is more difficult to know what declarer's long suits are and how long they are (length signals from partner will help here), but you should try and do this.

Suppose this has been the auction:

North	South
	1NT
2♠	2♠
3NT	

Here South is the declarer. South has shown a 4-card spade suit, so you know they are there even though you cannot see them. If you hold four spades you must try to avoid discarding one until declarer has thrown one.

**When discarding try to keep small cards to protect your high cards**

Suppose you hold ♦ Q 8 5. Perhaps you know who holds the ace and king of diamonds, or maybe they are on view in dummy. You may well need to retain those two low diamonds (even though neither of them is likely to take a trick in its own right) to protect your queen. You do not want your queen to fall if the ace and king are played.

You should try, if possible, to keep two low cards to protect any honour - ace, king queen, jack or even the 10. Consider this suit:

	♠ Q 8 5 2 (dummy)	
♠ J T 7		♠ A 4 3 (you)
	♠ K 9 6	

Here your Ace of clubs is only going to take one trick so it appears that the 4 and 3 are unnecessary cards and can be discarded. However if you discard a club, declarer can play a low club from dummy towards his king and then duck on the second round. Without the discard the defence has two club tricks.

The King needs to be well protected too.

	♠ Q 8 7 5 (dummy)	
♠ T 6 2		♠ K 4 3 (you)
	♠ A J 9	

It is not too difficult to see that if East discards a low club, declarer can make three tricks by finessing his jack and then playing the ace next time.

In fact, both defenders have to protect their honour cards. If West discards one of his low clubs, declarer could lead ♠Q from dummy.

East has to cover, but then West's ♠10 falls on ♠J and declarer makes four tricks in the suit (assuming entries are no problem).

**Keep your long suit winners**

**When discarding, keep a card in partner's suit**

		♠ 8 7 4		
		♥ A J		
		♦ K 7 6		
		♣ A K T 7 3		
♠ Q 9 5				♠ A 6 3 2
♥ K T 8 7 5	West		East	♥ 9 6 3
♦ 5 4 2				♦ Q J 8
♣ 6 4				♣ Q 5 2
		♠ K J T		
		♥ Q 4 2		
		♦ A T 9 3		
		♣ J 9 8		
North	South			
1♠	2NT			
3NT				

As West you lead ♥7, dummy plays ♥J, partner ♥3 and declarer overtakes with ♥Q. He leads ♠J for a finesse, but partner wins and returns ♥9, setting up three winners for West.

How should the defenders discard if declarer cashes four club tricks?

West, who must find three discards on the clubs, must hang on to his heart winners. He hopes that East will get in and lead his third heart; East's signals have shown three cards in the suit. Also, confirming this, South did not respond 1♥ to his partner's opening bid, so does not hold four hearts. West should discard three diamonds, keeping his spade guard.

East has to discard twice. He must hold three diamonds, to stop the suit, plus his low heart (to lead to partner's winners) and ♠A. He throws ♠6 then ♠2 (HELD) to show something in spades. After the clubs, declarer leads ♠4 from dummy. East must rise with ♠A and lead his heart, to defeat the contract.

#### Signalling with your discard

We are back where we started. In the same way that we encourage on partners lead we can show the same information with a discard.

High

Encouraging

Low

Discouraging

Suppose you are East, defending a 3NT contract. You hold:

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

Dummy holds ♥ Q J only, so you know that you have heart tricks to make - if only partner leads a heart.

Partner disappoints you by leading a spade. Declarer wins and cashes four club tricks, on the last of which you have to find a discard.

Your hearts are so good that you can afford to discard one and still have enough winners to beat the contract. You give partner a clear signal by discarding ♥10 (HELD). Now when partner gains the lead he will surely lead a heart.

That last hand was fairly easy. You were able to spare a high card from the suit that you wanted led to give partner the message. However, sometimes you cannot afford to do this:

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

Again, dummy holds ♥ Q J only, so you know that you have four heart tricks to make if they are led.

Partner leads a spade. This time, though, you cannot afford the high heart discard, as this would leave you short of the winners needed to beat the contract.

The solution: when declarer cashes four club tricks, you discard a low diamond, showing that you do not want this suit. Partner will work out that, if you cannot help in spade and you do not like diamonds, then a heart is what you want.

Other things to remember:

Watch the low cards

When discarding, try to help partner as much as possible. When partner discards, try to work out what message he is giving.

#### Summary

- ☐ Your first discard shows your attitude in the suit that you discard. Play HELD: High encourages, low discourages
- ☐ A high card followed by a low card is a strong signal and says "I have something good in this suit". It also tells partner that it is safe to discard in that suit
- ☐ Use the highest card that you can spare for an encouraging signal
- ☐ Throw losers and keep winners - if you can
- ☐ Try to keep length with dummy's long suit and any suit bid by declarer
- ☐ Unless you have no entry, keep a card in partner's suit
- ☐ Watch partner's discards and note the suit partner is keeping
- ☐ Remember that the card partner uses when establishing his suit may be a suit preference signal.