

U3A Improver Bridge

Lesson 10: Third Hand Play

This lesson covers the play by the defender in third seat when partner has made a lead of a small card; dummy is on your right with declarer's hand concealed on your left.

There is an axiom that goes, "play low in the second seat – play high in the third seat."

General rules are:

1. Play the "lowest of equals" over dummy cards – playing the higher of two touching honours misleads partner into thinking the Declarer holds the lower of a touching sequence.
2. When appropriate, keep a "cover card" (usually higher honour card) over the visible card in dummy.

Let's look at some illustrative examples – this discussion assumes fourth-best leads.

4 3 2

A 10 9 8 7 K J 5

Q 6

West leads the **10**, the top of a sequence. East must go up with the **King**, otherwise declarer South will win the trick and switch to another suit.

K 9 7

A 8 3 2 Q 10 4

J 6 5

West leads the **2**, the fourth best and promising a four card suit (otherwise West would lead a higher card, holding 5). After declarer plays the **7** from dummy, East must play **Queen**, otherwise South unnecessarily wins a cheap trick.

8 7 6

K 10 4 3 Q 9 2

A J 5

West leads the **3**, the fourth best - as East, you can deduce this fact since you hold the **2**; if West held 5+ cards, the lead would have been a card above the **3**. In third seat, East must play the **Queen**, again third hand high in order to hold the declarer to one winner.

Now let's look at a few hands involving dummy finesses.

Q 8

A 7 6 5 4 3

K 10 9

J 2

West leads the **5** to dummy's **8**. East must play the **King** – third hand high.

Incidentally, did you use the Rule of 11 here? Here the formula is: $11 - 5 = 6$.

So after the lead of the **5**, the remaining 3 hands have 6 cards above the **5**. Sitting in the East seat, we can count 5 of the 6 so declarer South has only one card above the leader's **5**. Playing the **King** ensures the defenders get all their tricks.

Now let's modify the hand slightly.

Q 8 2

A 7 6 5 4

K J 9

10 3

After West's lead of the **5** to dummy's **8**, East must play the Jack, not the King. **This is an example of "low from equals"** – since the dummy's **Queen** is pinned, playing the **Jack** will win a trick just as effectively as the **King** and still keep the looming honour over the **Queen** later in the hand. It would be wasteful to play the **King** on the first trick and potentially give the opponents an undeserved trick later in the hand.

Q 8 7

9 2

A J 10 6 5

K 4 3

During the auction East bids a long suit, so West leads the **9** – probably from a doubleton. East may play a low card since the only outstanding honour above the leader's **9** is the Ace. Here's an exception to playing third hand high. East should keep a "cover card" – the **Ace** honour over dummy's **Queen**. In addition to keeping the important cover card, West can deduce that East has the **Jack and 10**.