



# Conventional Wisdom

## Filling out the convention card — part 21

When the opponents preempt, what does double by your side mean? Does it matter how high the opposing preempt is? And what do bids by the partner of the doubler mean? Preempting is much more common in the modern game, so discussing common preemptive auctions with your regular partners is a good idea.

This section of the convention card allows your opponents to see what your methods are for battling preempts.

### Takeout thru

The most popular way to play a double of a preempt is takeout, asking partner to bid his best suit. It makes sense to play this way for a simple reason: When the opponents announce that they have a long suit by preempting, it's more likely you'll be short in their suit. Playing double as takeout is practical. So when the auction begins, for example, 3 $\heartsuit$  by right-hand opponent and you hold:

$\spadesuit A K 7 5$   $\heartsuit 6$   $\diamond A 5 4 3$   $\clubsuit K J 7 2$ , double would be the textbook action.

How high should you extend this idea? Say RHO preempts 5 $\clubsuit$  and you hold:

$\spadesuit A 6 4$   $\heartsuit J 5 4 3$   $\diamond A K 9$   $\clubsuit 7 4 2$ .

You hope to beat 5 $\clubsuit$  with the  $\spadesuit A$  and the  $\diamond A K$ . If you double, though, will partner think it's takeout and bid a suit at the five level?

To prevent this sort of misunderstanding at high levels, most partnerships establish a limit for the takeout double of preempts. A common one is 4 $\spadesuit$ . If the opponents open 4 $\spadesuit$  or higher, double is penalty. If the opening is 4 $\heartsuit$  or lower, double is takeout.

Whatever your partnership decides the limit should be, check the "Takeout" box and write the limit in the blank provided after "thru."



**Other:** If you have any other special agreements, such as ways to show strong two-suited hands over a preempt (e.g., Roman jump overcalls), write it in the space provided and Alert the opponents.

### Penalty

If you prefer to play that a double of a preempt is penalty-oriented instead, check the red box and Alert the opponents. This treatment is sufficiently rare in duplicate bridge that it requires an Alert.

### VS Opening Preempts Double Is

Takeout  thru \_\_\_\_\_ Penalty

Conv. Takeout:

Lebensohl 2NT Response

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### Conv. Takeout

Pairs who play that double is for penalty will need some way to show a takeout-oriented hand. Some prefer notrump at the cheapest level, while others prefer a particular suit at the cheapest level. If you play this way, write in your conventional takeout bid and Alert the opponents when you use it.

**ALERT**

### Lebensohl 2NT Response

Say LHO open 2 $\spadesuit$  (weak) and partner makes a takeout double. RHO passes and you hold:

$\spadesuit 9 7$   $\heartsuit A 7 4$   $\diamond 8 6 3$   $\clubsuit K Q 8 6 4$ .

You would happily respond 3 $\clubsuit$  with this hand. But what if you held

$\spadesuit 9 7$   $\heartsuit 8 7 4$   $\diamond 8 6 3$   $\clubsuit Q 9 8 6 4$ ?

Yuck! You still prefer clubs since it's your longest suit, but if you bid 3 $\clubsuit$  with this hand too, how will partner know if you have the first hand or the second one? In an effort to combat weak two-bids, the treatment known as "lebensohl 2NT" was developed. It works like this: when partner makes a takeout double of a weak two-bid and your natural reply would be on the three level, you can show a bad hand (fewer, say, than 8 high-card points) by bidding 2NT first. This is a warning to partner that you have a weak hand, and commands him to bid 3 $\clubsuit$ . When partner obeys, you may pass (if clubs is your suit) or bid your own suit. The corollary is that when you bid directly to the three level, you're showing a good hand. This method (which must be Alerted) allows the doubler to know if partner has a weak hand.

Experienced  
Players

# Conventional Wisdom



## Filling out the convention card — part 22

### Leads

This section of the convention card allows you to outline your opening-lead agreements. Although this is a useful tool for your partnership to improve understanding in the opening-lead department, remember that this section is in fact for the benefit of your opponents so that they will know what your methods are.

**Circle card led, if not in bold** In this section, circle the card your partnership has agreed to lead from the list of common holdings, unless that card is already in bold-face type. The cards in bold represent the “standard” lead from a particular holding, but your partnership is free to deviate from the standard treatment as long as you indicate it on the convention card. If, for example, your partnership has agreed to lead the ace from ace–king, circle the letter “A” on the line that reads “A K x.” Note that this section is divided into two parts: one for leads versus suit contracts, the other for leads versus notrump contracts. This allows partnerships who vary their lead agreements in each of these cases — a common occurrence — to show it on the convention card.



This section refers to opening leads only, and not to defensive leads made later in the play.

### ALERT

What's that red “x” on the top line? It's for partnerships that prefer to lead low from a doubleton. If your partnership has this agreement, circle the RED “x” and pre-Alert opponents that you play this method at the beginning of each round. (A pre-Alert is an announcement made to the opponents before the auction begins on the first board of a round. In this case, it would be something such as, “We lead low from doubletons on defense.”)

#### LEADS (circle card led, if not in bold)

	versus Suits	versus Notrump
x x	x x x x	x x
x x x	x x x x x	x x x
A K x	T 9 x	A K J x
K Q x	K J T x	A J T 9
Q J x	K T 9 x	K Q J x
J T 9	Q T 9 x	Q J T x
K Q T 9		Q T 9 x
	J T 9 x	T 9 x x

#### LENGTH LEADS:

4th Best	vs SUITS <input type="checkbox"/>	vs NT <input type="checkbox"/>
3rd/5th Best	vs SUITS <input type="checkbox"/>	vs NT <input type="checkbox"/>

#### Primary signal to partner's leads

Attitude  Count  Suit preference

**Length Leads** Check the appropriate box(es) in this section. If you lead fourth-best, for example, against suit and notrump contracts, check both boxes on the “4th Best” line.

#### Primary signal to partner's leads

When your partner makes the opening lead, dummy is displayed and you (being a good partner) must signal partner as to the best way for him to proceed. This is called your primary signal. There are several ways to go about this:

- You can, for example, indicate that you like the opening lead by playing a high card (in standard methods). Or you can play low to show disinterest in partner's suit. These are “attitude” signals.
- Your partnership may prefer to give “count” on the opening lead, which in standard, requires that you begin a high-low signal to show an even number of cards in the suit led. To show an odd number, play low first then high on the next trick.
- You could play that a low card asks the opening leader to switch to a lower-ranking suit, while a high card asks for a switch to a higher-ranking one. This approach is called “suit preference.”

Of course, each deal is different, and good defenders will know whether attitude, count or suit preference should apply depending on what the dummy looks like and what the auction has been. You should check the box, however, that fits your general defensive approach.



# Conventional Wisdom

## Filling out the convention card — part 23

### Standard

"Standard" methods look like this:

- Attitude: a high card in a suit signals encouragement, while a low one is discouraging.
- Count: playing a high card followed by a low one in the same suit typically shows an even number of cards in that suit. Low-high shows an odd number. (Note that most standard players reverse this scheme in the trump suit.)
- Suit preference: playing a low card shows a preference for the lower-ranking non-trump suit. Against notrump contracts, a low card shows interest in the lower-ranking suit if declarer/dummy has a known strong suit.

Relevant exceptions should be described in the lines provided after the "Except" box.

### DEFENSIVE CARDING

This section allows your opponents to see at a glance what your defensive carding methods are. It is arranged in two columns: one for suit contracts and one for notrump contracts. This is because you may wish to use one defensive strategy versus suits and a different one versus notrump declarers.

#### DEFENSIVE CARDING vs SUITS vs NT

Standard:    
Except:

Upside-Down:  
count    
attitude

#### FIRST DISCARD

Lavinthal    
Odd/Even

#### OTHER CARDING

Smith Echo    
Trump Suit Pref.    
Foster Echo

PLEASE ASK

### Upside-Down

- Attitude: a low card in a suit signals encouragement, while a high one is discouraging.
- Count: playing a low card followed by a high one in the same suit typically shows an even number of cards in that suit. High-low shows an odd number.
- Suit preference: most upside-down practitioners use standard suit preference for simplicity and logic: low cards correspond to lower-ranking suits, high cards to higher-ranking suits.



You may use any combination of standard and upside-down that you wish, as long as you clearly indicate your methods on the convention card. For example, you may play standard count and upside-down attitude.

### First Discard

You may use your first opportunity to discard to carry a message to partner. Here are two popular approaches:

- Lavinthal: Discard the suit you don't like, but a low discard says you like the lower-ranking of the remaining non-trump suits, while a high discard says you like the higher-ranking one. If spades are trumps, for example, a high heart discard would say you like diamonds.
- Odd/Even: An odd discard (the 3, 5, 7 or 9) says you like the suit you just discarded from, while an even one says you don't.

### Special Carding, Please Ask

If you have any other unusual agreements or have special defensive methods that you don't have enough room to describe elsewhere on the card, check this box. (Note that the ACBL convention charts permit only certain types of carding schemes. If you're unsure if your methods are permitted, consult the appropriate chart before play.)

### Other Carding

Here are some other common, but advanced techniques:

- Smith Echo: In this method, either defender shows encouragement for the suit initially led by "echoing" (playing high-low) on declarer's run of a long suit in dummy or in his hand. Failing to echo means you'd prefer a switch to a different suit. This assumes that you do not have to give count in the suit declarer plays on, in which case the Smith echo would not apply.
- Trump Suit Preference: If you play a high trump the first time declarer plays the suit, it shows interest in the higher-ranking non-trump suit. A low trump indicates preference for the lower-ranking suit. If hearts are trumps, for example, and you play the 10 from 10-6-2 when declarer plays the ♥A, it shows that you like spades.
- Foster Echo: Some defenders agree to play that the partner of the opening leader follows suit with his second-highest card when he can't beat dummy's card or the card that was led.





# Conventional Wisdom

## **Filling out the convention card — part 24 (conclusion)**

## Putting it all together

Some general guidelines about the use of the convention card are presented here, along with an example of a properly filled-out card. (Yours may be different, of course!)

## The purpose of the convention card

Although the convention card is a great way for you and your partner to discuss your methods and refresh your memories as to what your agreements are if you haven't played together in awhile, remember that the convention card exists for the convenience of your opponents. The opponents may wish to look at your card at the beginning of a round to get a general idea of what your methods are, they might want to see what your opening lead agreements are when they declare or they may wish to look at your card during the auction to see what your agreements are without asking you to explain them verbally.



 Note: Just as you should ask questions during the auction only when it is your turn, you should look at an opponent's card only when it is your turn to bid.

**Where should the convention card be placed during play?**

Since the card is for the benefit of the opponents, it should remain in a place that they can easily access it, *i.e.*, on the table. When bidding boxes are in use, it can be difficult to find enough room for the boxes, the convention cards, score slips, boards and snacks/drinks. Some players find it helpful to fold their convention cards in half to help conserve space, while others keep non-essential items (food) off of the table. Whatever your approach, avoid practices such as sitting on the card. Make it easy for your opponents to pick up and read your card.

## Properly filled out cards

We've all encountered pairs who have either no convention cards or blank cards with the words "Standard" scribbled at the top. This is inappropriate and not in the spirit of the game. If you haven't got time to properly fill out the convention card, you haven't got time to play. It is also required that both partners — not just one — have properly filled-out cards.



Both players must have identically filled-out convention cards. It is not permitted for one partner to make calls that mean one thing while the same call from his or her partner means something else.

**Looking at your own convention card during the auction or play**

The Laws forbid access to written memory aids during any phase of the game, and this includes your own convention card. Your convention cards are for the opponents' use, not yours. Note that clubs may relax this rule, however, especially if new players are participating, to assist them in learning. Experienced players may wish to overlook a newcomer's dependence on the card. All players should be aware, however, that the card is not a memory crutch. Newcomers may be given a pass, but others should refrain from peeking at the card during the bidding or play.

## Active ethics

**ACTIVE CITIES**  
Be proactive in making sure your opponents understand your explanations. Don't use jargon or convention names when explaining calls. If an opponent looks confused at your explanation, rephrase. Keep your explanations simple, direct and open — the same way that your methods should appear on your convention card.