

Safety Plays (1)

The term safety play is applied primarily to situations where declarer plays a combination of cards in a way which

- aims to achieve sufficient tricks from the suit to achieve the contract while sometimes risking the loss of an overtrick and/or
- aims to cater for a specific adverse layout of the opponent's cards, typically where one opponent has all or most of the outstanding cards.

Declarer first needs to consider four points

- What is the minimum total of tricks required from the suit to achieve the contract? To assess this it may be necessary to test other suits first (eg to discover whether a finesse works or not).
- Is there a safety play which guarantees or increases the chances of achieving that total? In particular is there a specific adverse layout of the opponents' cards which you can guard against? It may be possible to guard against an adverse holding with one opponent or sometimes both opponents.
- If the safety play involves the possible loss of an overtrick is it worth it? The risk is usually less worthwhile with teams scoring as overtricks count for little.
- Is there any information from the play or bidding that would influence the use of a safety play?

There are numerous safety plays for different combinations of cards taking account of the trick target and the situation with entries. It is not possible to memorise all of them but it is worth learning some of the more common ones. Some examples are given below assuming that there are plentiful entries and that there is nothing in the bidding or play to indicate the opponents' holdings. If entries are restricted some of the safety plays shown below are clearly not possible. Use of safety plays may also have to be curtailed if there is an obvious risk of a ruff by the opponents

1 AQ10x
Jxx

Lead low from the south hand and finesse. Guards against Kx with east, allowing east to win the fourth round with the 9

2 AJ10xxx.
9x

Lead low from south and finesse unless west plays an honour. Guards against a singleton honour with west.

3 AQ8xx
Jxxx

If you need five tricks lead low from the south hand and finesse the queen. If you need four tricks lead the jack and run it unless west covers. Guards against K109x with west

4 AJxxx AJxx AJxx
 K9x K9xxx K9xx

If you can afford to lose one trick cash the ace then lead a low card towards the K9. Play K if east is void or plays an honour, otherwise the nine. Proof against Q10xx in either hand. Also works if Ace and King are the opposite way round.

5 AQxxx.
 xxxx

If you need five tricks finesse the queen. If you need four play the ace and then lead up to the queen. Guards against a singleton king with east.

6 KJxx AKJx AJxx
 Axx xxx Kxx

If you need four tricks finesse the jack. If you need three tricks play AK and lead towards the jack. Guarantees three tricks unless east has Q10xx

7 A10xxx
 K9xx

If five tricks are needed play AK. If four tricks are required lead low towards the other hand beating the next card as cheaply as possible. Guards against QJxx with either opponent.

8 Kxx
 A10xxx

Play the king and follow with a low card from north. Finesse the 10 if east plays low. Guards against QJxx with east.

9 AK9xx
 Jxx

If you need four tricks play ace and a low card from north. Guards against Q10xx in either hand

10 AK9x
 Jxxx

Play the ace and lead low towards the jack. Ensures three tricks if either opponent has Q10xx.

11 AQ9xx
 Kxxx

Play the K and follow with a low card. If east is void finesse the 9. Ensures five tricks if west holds J10xx

12 AJ10xxx
x

If you need five tricks finesse the 10 or jack, playing west for KQx. If you need four tricks play the ace and then a low card. Ensures four tricks when the suit is 3-3 and when either opponent has a doubleton honour

13 QJxx
A9xxx

For four tricks lead low from the south hand. Guards against K1087 in either hand

14 A109xxx
Qxxx

If you can afford to lose one trick play low from north towards the queen. Guards against KJx with either opponent

Question 1

	S 9xx	
	H xx	
	D 9x	
	C AJ109xx	
S K108x		S Qx
H J109xx		H xxx
D 3		D J8xxx
C xxx		C KQx
	S AJxx	
	H AKQ	
	D AKQ10x	
	C x	

You are in 3NT. West leads the jack of hearts. How do you guarantee the contract against any distribution? **Answer.** At trick two lead low towards the nine of diamonds. This guarantees four diamond tricks on any layout, which is sufficient for the contract.

Question 2

	S A976	
	H AJ	
	D A1072	
	C Q52	
S ---		S J10xx
H 10xxx		H xxx
D KQ9xx		D xxx
C Jxx		C 10xx
	S KQ852	
	H KQ97	
	D 3	
	C AK3	

You are in 7 spades. West leads the King of diamonds. How do you play the trumps?
Answer. You can succeed against J10xx with east but not with west. You therefore start with the ace. If west is void you finesse twice against the J10. If you start with the king or queen you can no longer do the double finesse.

Question 3

	S AQx	
	H K10xx	
	D AKx	
	C Qxx	
S 10xxx		S KJxx
H Qx		H Jx
D Jxxx		D 9xx
C Jxx		C 10xxx
	S xx	
	H A9xxx	
	D Qxx	
	C AKx	

You are in six hearts. West leads a low club. How do you play the hand to maximise your chances? **Answer** There is a safety play to secure four heart tricks (see item 7 above) but if the spade finesse fails you will need five heart tricks. You therefore take the spade finesse first. When it fails you must play for a 2-2 trump split.

Question 4

	S K4	
	H K43	
	D A10987	
	C A42	
S QJ32		S----
H J9		H 108765
D KQJ6		D 543
C 987		C QJ1065
	S A1098765	
	H AQ2	
	D 2	
	C K3	

You are in 6 spades. West leads the king of diamonds. How do you guard against losing more than one spade? **Answer.** Lead a low spade from hand and duck if west does not cover. Guards against QJ32 in either hand.

Question 5

	S A94	
	H xxx	
	D AQx	
	C Axxx	
S -----		S K10xx
H Jxxxx		H Kxx
D Jxxxx		D 109
C Qxx		C Jxxx
	S QJ7532	
	H AQ	
	D Kxx	
	C Kx	

You are in six spades. West leads a small club. How do you manage the trump suit?
Answer. You first need to take the heart finesse to discover how many trump tricks you require. When the finesse succeeds you can afford a safety play to make five trump tricks. Lead low from dummy and play the queen if east plays low or is void. This caters for K10xx in either hand.

Question 6

	S KJ8x	
	H xxx	
	D Axx	
	C Axx	
S A109x		S ----
H KQx		H Axxx
D Jxx		D 10xxxx
C Jxx		C 10xx
	S Qxxxx	
	H xxx	
	D KQ	
	C KQx	

You are in three spades. West leads king and queen of hearts then a low heart. East takes the ace and leads a diamond. How do you set about the trump suit?
Answer. If east has A109x of trumps he must make two tricks but if west has them you can hold him to one trick by a double finesse against the 109. You must therefore start with the queen of spades. If this reveals four trumps with west you still have chance to take the double finesse

Safety Plays (2)

The term safety play most commonly refers to the play of a combination of cards to achieve a required trick count. In a wider sense, however, the term can apply to any situation where you anticipate a problem and use a specific play to address it. This section will look two further types of safety play in trump contracts.

1 Maintaining control of trumps.

This involves ensuring that you do not run out of trumps prematurely, allowing the opponents to cash tricks in other suits. This is a problem which occurs especially when the opponents can keep forcing you to ruff and when your trump holding is not particularly strong. You can often maintain control by some combination of

- refusing to ruff or overruff and discarding a loser instead.
- leading a low trump initially
- relying on dummy to deal with a forcing defence.

Example 1

	S xxx	
	H Ax	
	D KJ9xx	
	C 109x	
S J9		S KQxxx
H 9xxxx		H x
D xx		D xx
C AKxx		C QJxxx
	S A10x	
	H KQJ10x	
	D AQ10x	
	C x	

You are in 4 Hearts and west leads AK of clubs. If you ruff and try to draw trumps you will be badly placed if they split 5-1. The opponents will make two spades, a trump and one or more clubs. Instead you discard a spade loser on the king of clubs and another spade loser if the opponents lead a third round. If they persist with clubs dummy can ruff. You can then draw trumps unless they split 6-0.

Example 2

	S Axx	
	H xxx	
	D QJxx	
	C Kxx	
S xx		S 9xxx
H AKQx		H xxxx
D 10x		D 9xx
C J9xx		C Q10x
	S KQJ10	
	H xx	
	D AKxx	
	C Axx	

You are in 4 spades and west leads AKQ of hearts. Your trump holding is precarious. If you ruff the queen of hearts you will need precisely a 3-3 trump split. You therefore discard a club loser and dummy can cover any heart continuation. You win trick four and make all the remaining tricks as long as spades are no worse than 4-2.

Example 3

	S Q9x	
	H K10xx	
	D KJxx	
	C Qx	
S xxxx		S x
H 109x		H QJx
D xx		D Axx
C AKxx		C 10xxxxx
	S AKJ10x	
	H A87	
	D Q109x	
	C J	

You are in 4 spades. West opened one club and leads AK. If you ruff the king you will need all your trumps to draw the opponents' trumps if they split 4-1. They will then cash further clubs when they get in with ace of diamonds. Instead you discard a losing heart. If the opponents lead another club dummy can take care of that. You then run four rounds of trumps and drive out the ace of diamonds. You still have a trump left if the opponents lead another club. This fails only if trumps split 5-0

Example 4.

	S 10x	
	H 10xx	
	D KQJ10x	
	C 108x	
S KJxx		S 9xx
H x		H J9xx
D 9xxx		D xx
C AKQx		C xxxx
	S AQxx	
	H AKQxx	
	D A7	
	C 9x	

You are in 4 hearts after west opened one club. West leads AKQ of clubs. This time you cannot afford to discard on the queen because you may have a trump loser as well. You therefore ruff the queen. If you now play AKQ of trumps and run the diamonds you will probably be defeated if trumps split 4-1. An opponent with a long trump will ruff the second round of diamonds cutting you adrift from dummy and leaving you with one or more losers in the black suits. You avoid this problem by leading the ace and then a **low** trump which you can afford to lose. If the opponents persist with leading clubs dummy can ruff. You then draw trumps and run the diamonds. This fails only if trumps are 5-0

Example 5

	S Qxx	
	H Axxxx	
	D AKx	
	C Ax	
S AKxxxx		S 10x
H J109		H 8
D xx		D QJ109x
C Qx		C J109xx
	S J9	
	H KQxx	
	D xxx	
	C Kxxx	

You are in 4 hearts. West leads AKx of spades and east ruffs the third round with the eight. If you overruff you need the remaining trumps to split 2-1. Instead you discard a losing diamond. You now have no losers and can draw trumps against any distribution

2 Averting a ruff or overruff

There are various situations where you can take countermeasures to prevent a ruff or overruff. Some examples are given below

A Don't take unnecessary risks

	S J8x	
	H 9xxx	
	D KQx	
	C Qxx	
S Ax		S xx
H QJ10xx		H xx
D xx		D J109xxx
C AJxx		C xxx
	S KQ109xx	
	H A8	
	D A4	
	C K106	

You are in four spades.. West leads the queen of hearts. Before leading trumps you take the opportunity to cash AKQ of diamonds and discard your losing heart but west has a doubleton diamond and ruffs the queen. Now you will not make your contract unless you manage to make two club tricks. You did not need to take this risk because you had five trumps, three diamonds, one heart and one club as long as you led trumps immediately. You may decide the risk is worthwhile at pairs scoring.

B Avoid an overruff

	S A3	
	H Axxx	
	D xxxxx	
	C K10	
S Q10xxx		S J9
H QJx		H xxxx
D KJx		D Q9xx
C xx		C Jxx
	S K8xx	
	H Kx	
	D A	
	C AQ98xx	

You are in 6 clubs. West leads the queen of hearts. You need to ruff your losing spades in dummy before trumps are drawn but east may overruff the 10 and lead a trump leaving you with a spade loser. The answer is to ruff the first losing spade with the king and the second one with the ten. If east overruffs the ten he can then do no harm.

	S Jxx	
	H Kxx	
	D A9x	
	C KJxx	
S 109xx		S x
H Jx		H AQ10xxx
D K8xxx		D Q10x
C 10x		C 9xx
	S AKQxx	
	H xx	
	D Jx	
	C AQxx	

You are in 4 spades after east opened a weak 2 hearts. West leads the jack of hearts which you cover. East plays the ace, queen and ten. If you ruff low you will be overruffed. If you ruff high you will be unable to draw trumps if they split 4-1. You avoid this by discarding your losing diamond.

C Protect master cards

	S Axxx	
	H Kx	
	D AQxx	
	C AKx	
S KQJ1098xx		S---
H xx		H QJ10xxx
D x		D xx
C Jx		C Qxxxx
	S x	
	H Axx	
	D KJ109xx	
	C xxx	

West opens 3 spades and you end up in 6 diamonds. West leads the king of spades. You play the ace but east ruffs and you still have a losing club. You should have protected the ace by playing low at trick one. You can ruff any spade continuation in hand and you then have twelve tricks. (Six diamonds, two clubs, two hearts, one spade, one heart ruff.)

	S xx	
	H QJ9	
	D xxxx	
	C Axxx	
S Q10xxx		S J
H xx		H xx
D xxx		D KQJxx
C KQx		C J109xx
	S AKxxx	
	H AK108xx	
	D A	
	C x	

You are in 6 hearts and west leads a club. If spades are 3-3 or 4-2 you can cash AK spades and ruff the losing spades in dummy, making 13 tricks. If spades are 5-1 how do you prevent the K from being ruffed? You simply lead the ace of spades and then a low spade which you can afford to lose. If the opponents then lead a trump you still have two trumps in dummy to take care of the losing spades.

Question 1

S ---	
H 754	
D Q8642	
C KQJ75	
S AK642	S QJ109
H 3	H J1098
D K1095	D AJ7
C 932	C 108
	S 7853
	H AKQ62
	D 3
	C A64

You are in 4 hearts and west leads the ace of spades. How do you play to make your contract with maximum safety? Would you play differently in a pairs competition? **Answer.** There is a temptation to ruff a spade, play a club to the ace, ruff another spade, then try to draw trumps and cash four more clubs—12 tricks on 21 points! This requires trumps to split 3-2, a 68% chance and you might decide to risk this in a pairs competition. If trumps split 4-1, however, the opponents will cash two spades and a diamond when they get in with the fourth heart. A much safer play is to lead a low heart at trick 2. Dummy can cope with any spade continuation but the opponents will probably play another trump. You can then draw trumps making four hearts, one spade ruff and five clubs. This fails only on a 5-0 trump or club split.

Question 2

	S Qxx
	H xx
	D 10x
	C AQJxxx
S J109	S Kxx
H J10xx	H xx
D AKxx	D Q9xxxx
C xx	C 10x
	S Axxx
	H AKQxx
	D J
	C K8x

You are in four hearts. West leads AK of diamonds. You ruff because the opponents might now establish a spade winner and you could have a trump loser as well. Can you now protect yourself against a 4-2 trump split? **Answer.** Yes. Lead a low heart so that dummy can take care of any diamond continuation. You win any return and make an overtrick with four trumps, six clubs and a spade. If you start with AKQ of hearts west will ruff the third round of clubs and establish two further tricks in spades or diamonds.

Question 3

	S 9xxx	
	H xxx	
	D AKJ108x	
	C ---	
S J10xx		S x
H Q10		H J9xxx
D 9x		D xxx
C KQJxx		C Axxx
	S AKQ6	
	H AKx	
	D Qx	
	C 10xxx	

You are in six spades. West leads the king of clubs and you ruff in dummy. If trumps split 3-2 the contract is easy. Can you succeed against a 4-1 split? **Answer** Yes. Simply duck either the first or second round of trumps so that dummy still has a trump left to cater for any club continuation. You then win any return and make three trumps, a club ruff, two hearts and six diamonds.

Question 4

	S xxx	
	H xxx	
	D xx	
	C AKQxx	
S xx		S J10xx
H Jxx		H Q109
D AKxxx		D QJ10x
C 10xx		C 9x
	S AKQx	
	H AKxx	
	D xx	
	C Jxx	

You are in a precarious 4S contract. West leads AK of diamonds and switches to a trump. How do you play to cater for a 4-2 trump split? **Answer.** You duck the first or second round of trumps so that dummy can ruff any diamond continuation. You win any return and draw the remaining trumps, making three trumps, two hearts and five clubs.

Question 5.

	S 9x	
	H 10xxx	
	D AKxx	
	C Axx	
S 10xxx		S 87
H AKJxx		H 98
D xx		D J1098
C 9x		C QJ10xx
	S AKQJ6	
	H Qx	
	D Qxx	
	C Kxx	

You are in 4 spades. West leads AK of hearts then a low heart. East ruffs the third round with the eight. How do you play? **Answer.** Although your trumps look solid you will go down if you overruff and west has four trumps. You will lose two hearts, a trump and a club. Instead you simply discard a losing club at trick three. This costs nothing even if trumps split 3-3.

Question 6

	S Kxxx	
	H Ax	
	D Axx	
	C Axxx	
S AQ10xxx		S x
H x		H xxx
D Qxx		D KJxxx
C xxx		C KQJx
	S Jx	
	H KQJ1098x	
	D xx	
	C 109	

You are in 4 hearts after west opened with a weak 2 spades. West leads AQ of spades. How do you play? **Answer.** You can tell from the bidding that east has a singleton spade but you cannot afford to let him ruff the king of spades. You therefore duck the second trick. If west persists with spades you can ruff in hand and make seven trumps, two aces and the king of spades

Question 7

	S AQ10	
	H 10xxx	
	D Axxx	
	C xx	
S xx		S xx
H QJ9		H Kxxxx
D Kxx		D QJ10xx
C Q109xx		C J
	S KJ9876	
	H A	
	D 3	
	C AKxxx	

You are in six spades west leads a heart. You appear to have thirteen tricks (Ace of hearts, ace of diamonds, ace and king of clubs, three club ruffs in dummy and six spades in hand.) What could go wrong and how can you guard against it? What is your plan if west's opening lead is a trump instead of a heart? **Answer.** You cannot draw trumps first as you need to ruff three clubs in dummy. If you play AK of clubs and find them splitting 5-1 an opponent will ruff the king and may lead a trump, leaving you with only eleven tricks as you can no longer ruff all your losing clubs. The solution is to play the ace of clubs then a low one. An opponent will win and lead a trump but you now need only two trumps in dummy to ruff losing clubs and your trumps are all high. You therefore make AK of clubs, two club ruffs, six trumps in hand and the two red aces. (If the opponents lead a trump initially you play the ace of clubs, cross to the ace of diamonds and lead a club towards the king. If east ruffs you play a low club, win any return and ruff your two losing clubs in dummy. This is not a perfect safety play as it does not work if east has a third trump to lead or if west has the singleton club.)