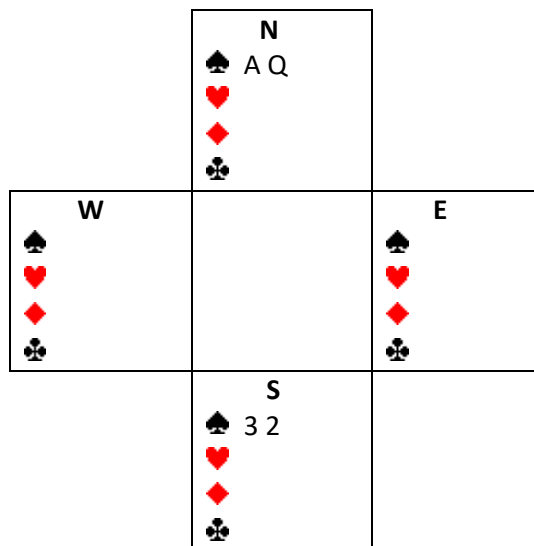


**FINESSE**

- Is a Card Play Technique
- Is a manoeuvre that involves surrounding/trapping an important missing card
- Is commonly used, much-needed and much-loathed
- There are 5 types of Finesses often defined as DIRECT, INDIRECT, BACKWARD, RUFFING, OBLIGATORY

**DIRECT FINESSE** - In this lesson we will mostly look at a basic, straightforward Direct Finesse. You will need to use this type of finesse often.

**Example:** You are South. You need to win both the Ace of Spades and the Queen of Spades in order to make your contract. What do you do?



If you play your Ace first & then your Queen, you are almost certain to win only one trick.

What do you do instead? **FINESSE YOUR QUEEN**

- PLAY SMALL FROM SOUTH'S HAND TOWARDS NORTH'S ♠AQ
- YOU ARE HOPING THE ♠K IS IN WEST'S HAND (50% CHANCE)

Three main things can happen:

1. **West plays the ♠K:** You cover with the Ace and then play your Queen – your problems are solved
2. **West *doesn't* play the ♠K:** You still play the Queen and then win the Ace.
3. **East plays the King:** That's OK. You now won't win your two tricks but at least you gave it a go. You had a 50-50 chance<sup>1</sup>. That's life.

<sup>1</sup> In the absence of any other information, it is 50-50 as to which opposition hand has the missing card.  
Mini Lesson - Bridge Beginners

## EXAMPLES

**You need two spade tricks to make your contract. What do you do?**

Lead the ♠2 from South's hand towards each of these holdings, then

**N**

♠ A Q

**S**

♠ 3 2

Insert the Q & hope East has the K.

You are trying to finesse your Q.

**N**

♠ A K J

**S**

♠ 4 3 2

Insert your Jack, wishfully dreaming that

East has the ♠Q. 50% of the time your wish will come true.

**You lead the ♥2 from North's hand:-**

**N**

♥ 3 2

**S**

♥ K 5

Play the King. Half the time, East will have the A and your King will win.

**N**

♥ 4 3 2

**S**

♥ K Q 5

Play your King, which will win 50% of the time. If the K wins, reenter the North hand and lead another small Spade towards the Queen. If East plays the Ace, you play small, if East plays small, you win with the Queen.

You can see how the idea is to skirt or manoeuvre around the crucial missing card.

**Some trickier ones:**

**N**

♦ Q 3 2

**S**

♦ K 10 4

You finesse the 10. Half the time, East will have the Jack in which case your 10 will either win or else at least force West to have to play the big Ace in order to capture it.

**N**

♦ J 10 9

**S**

♦ K 3 2

In order to win two tricks you must hope that East has the Q. If West has the A and Q, there's nothing you can do about it anyway. Play the J first. If East plays low, you play low. Then reenter North's hand when you can and play the 10 and so on.

If a finesse doesn't work, C'est la vie! There was a 50-50 chance and you took it. That's better than not trying to finesse at all & giving yourself 0% chance.

## FAQ's

### **Why is a finesse "much-loathed? Is 50-50 chance very good?**

Karpin says "Nobody became a great bridge player on 50% chances". 50-50 though is better than 20-80 stacked against you. As you get better at Bridge, you will learn to look at alternative lines of play first, that might offer a better percentage chance of success. Often you will find there are none.

### **Why do it then? Why learn finessing as a staple part of card play?**

The fact is, you will need to finesse a lot. More often than not, there is no better alternative. With a 50-50 chance, if it doesn't work at least you gave it your best shot.

### **Why do I "chicken out"?**

It's a bit nerve-wracking purposefully playing towards a card that you have a 50-50 chance of losing ...but, NERVES OF STEEL. Bite the bullet and give it a burl. If you have nothing to lose, and succeeding is the only way to get your contract, it is usually well worth the try.

### **Why do other people get so lucky? I always end up going to bed with my King if I hold it up.**

You will probably find it wasn't just a lucky guess. There are certain odds about when finessing is worth trying and when it is better to go for a drop or different line of play – more on that in Improver Lessons.

### **What if I have two possible finesse suits - does it matter which one I try first?**

Yes, it often does matter. More on this in Improver Lessons but for now just choose one and try it.

## **ANSWERS - PRACTICE HANDS ON PAGE 4**

**HAND 1** Play a small spade towards Dummy's Queen.

**HAND 2** Go over to Dummy and play a small spade towards your Queen.

**HAND 3** Lead small to your 10. If E wins with a high honour, finesse the Jack next time. You will win two tricks whenever West was dealt the Q-10 or K-10. Finessing the J first will only win two tricks if West was dealt K-Q - one chance only. Two chances are better than one.

**HAND 4** Lead small to your 9. If it loses, that's OK. Get back to your hand and lead towards the Q. Reasoning is as per Hand 3.

**HAND 5** Play the ♦J. With touching honours it is OK to lead one. If West doesn't cover with the Queen let the Jack go around.

**HAND 6** Cash the ♠A first. Then lead a small spade from Dummy towards your ♠Q. If the King is in East's hand, your Q wins eventually. Otherwise C'est la vie! It is futile to just lead the ♠Q.

### **References and further reading:**

Cotter, P and Rimington, D. (1982). *Bridge Play Technique*. Robert Hale Limited: London.

Hayden, Dorothy (1969). *Winning Declarer Play*. Robert Hale & Company: London

Karpin, Fred L. (1972). *The Finesse*. Prentice-Hall.

Marsden, Paul. (2011). *The Principles of Card Play*. Hamilton Publishing Company: Australia

**PRACTICE HANDS** You are Declarer in South and must play the suit first.  
 What is the best way of increasing your chances to make two tricks?

