

Opening Leads

based on Eddy Kantar "Introduction to Defender Play"

Bridge is a partnership game – the calls you make and the cards you play give information to your partner so you should agree leads with partner as well as bids.

Opening Leads against a No Trump contract

Which suit should you lead?

Your aim is to develop winners – in notrumps, there is no danger of your suit being trumped, so you try to choose the suit with the best chance of establishing winners.

- If the bidding has not shown a suit by opponents or partner then your own best (longest & strongest) suit is generally the best to lead.
- If partner has shown a suit then that is (usually) the best suit to lead.
- If opponents have shown one or more suits, these are usually best avoided.

Which card should you lead?

Honour Sequences:

- A, K, Q, J and 10 are **honour** cards.
- Three touching cards with at least the top an honour, such as **Q J 10** or **10 9 8** are honour sequences.
- A near sequence with two touching cards separated by 1 position from a lower card, such as **Q J 9** is also counted as an honour sequence.
- **Q 10 9** where the top two cards of the group are separated is **not** considered to be a sequence.
- An honour sequence can be **interior** such as **K J 10 9** where the interior sequence is **J 10 9**.

Suits of 4 or more cards:

- Headed by an honour sequence: lead **top of sequence**.
- Having an interior sequence: Lead **top of the interior sequence**.
- No honour sequence: Lead **4th highest** (4th card counting down from the top card in the suit).

3 Card suits:

- Honour sequence – lead **top of sequence**.
- Containing two touching honours: lead **top of touching honours**.
- Contains one or more non-touching honours – lead **low from an honour**.
- No honours – lead **top of nothing** – the highest card.

Doubleton:

- lead **top of a doubleton**.

Interpreting Partner's Opening Lead

- When Partner makes the opening lead (following agreed methods!) we can interpret the lead and play the best defense. Before playing to that lead, consider the bidding; the cards in dummy; and the card partner has led.
- If you have not indicated a suit preference in the bidding, the suit led is most likely partner's best of those not shown by the opposition – probably 4+ cards, maybe 3.
 - Partner leads an honour card – most likely the top of an honour sequence. The cards in Dummy and your own hand help you work out the likely holding in partner's and declarer's hands.
 - Partner leads a low card – most likely 4th highest of a suit with 4+ cards. The **rule of 11** helps to work out partner's and declarer's holdings.
 - Partner leads a highish non-honour card – most likely top of nothing. The lead of a 9 is always partner's highest in that suit.
- If you have shown a suit preference in the bidding and partner leads that suit, it is more likely that the lead may be from a 2 or 3 card suit or a singleton.

The Rule of 11:

- Partner's lead of a 4th highest card means that partner has exactly 3 cards greater than the led card in that suit.
- Subtract the face value of the card from 11 to give the number of cards greater than the led card in the other hands. Subtract the number of cards in your and dummy's hands greater than the led card to show how many declarer has.
- Example:
 - Partner leads the 7. 11-7 means that 4 cards greater than 7 are in the other 3 hands.
 - If you have say K 10 4 and Dummy holds Q 8 2 then that accounts for all 4 cards greater than 7, leaving no card higher than 7 held by declarer.
 - When dummy plays the 2, you take the trick with the 10 (knowing declarer can't beat that), cash the K, and return to partner with the 4 – allowing partner to take the remaining tricks in that suit.

Opening Leads against Trump Suit Contracts

“The main difference between a suit contract and notrump is that at a suit contract it no longer pays the defense to establish long suits, because either the declarer or the dummy will simply trump the tricks that the defense has established.” (Eddie Kantar. Introduction to Defender’s Play)

This means that long suits are less attractive as opening leads, and short suits (particularly singletons) are more attractive. Otherwise suit choice is more decided by the shape and strength of your hand, as well as the bidding.

- From a suit headed by A K – lead the A (leading say 4th highest from A K 7 4 2 would probably result in your A being trumped later). Lead of A from suits headed by A K or K from K Q are strong leads.
- From a suit headed by an unsupported A – avoid leading the suit – wait for the chance to capture the K or Q. But if you must lead the suit, lead the A.
- Leading the top of an unbid suits with an honour sequences is attractive.
- Leading short suits – holding less than 4 trumps and a side-suit singleton or A x doubleton, a short suit lead to try for a trump trick is attractive. You hope partner will get the lead and return it for a trump trick by you. If you hold a natural trump trick such as Q J 10 avoid short-suit leads, as trumping will replace your natural trump trick.
- Leading trumps can be attractive if you are holding 2 or 3 small trumps and it seems likely that declarer will want to trump losers in dummy.
- With a 4-card or longer trump holding it may be attractive to lead your own long suit so declarer has to trump, giving you trump control.
- *“You should remember that the two main ways declarer gets rid of losers are by trumping them in the short hand or discarding them on extra winners. As a defender you must ask yourself which declarer is going to do. If it appears that he is going to trump them in the short hand, then you should lead trumps. If it appears that he is going to discard them on a strong suit, you should attack the other suits quickly. You can’t always tell before the dummy comes down what declarer’s intentions will be, but after the dummy comes down you should be able to tell and this will guide your subsequent defense.” (Eddie Kantar. Introduction to Defender’s Play).*