



Making a Plan

- ♣ You are declarer in a Suit Contract
- ♣ The lead is turned over
- ♣ Dummy is exposed on the table
- ♣ NOW STOP AND THINK.

Look at your trump holding

How many trumps? How many have opponents? What likely split?
Are there missing honours in the trump suit? How should the cards be played?

How many winners are there in trumps?

Are there any reasons to delay clearing trumps? (The answer is usually "no")

Look at each side suit

How many winners in each?

Missing honours?

How to play the suit?

Can short suits be cleared so you can trump?



Look at the lead

An honour promises the next e.g. King promises the Queen

A low value card invites return, suggesting an honour

Middle ranking card may be a singleton, or top of a doubleton, looks for strength in partner's hand

A trump suggests reluctance to lead from any side suit, may be nothing there, may be some unsupported honours



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Clearing Trumps

In most trump contracts you will play enough rounds in trumps to take away all the opponents trumps at the earliest opportunity.

Dummy

A 10 9 8

Declarer

K Q 7 6 5 4

10 trumps, with A, K, Q; Opponents have three trumps

Likely split is 1:2, clear in 2 rounds

Worst case the split is 0:3, clear 3 rounds

(If Ace missing, play the same. Don't delay clearing because you must lose a trick or two)

Holding nine in the suit, play for the "drop"

Dummy

A 9 8 7

Declarer

K 6 5 4 3

9 trumps, with A, K

Opponents have 4 trumps, including the Queen and Jack, the less likely split is 2:2, and then the QJ will fall. If the suit is split 3:1, the Q or J is now going to win a trick whatever you do.



Split (lonely) Honours

Dummy

A 9 8 7

Declarer

K 6 5 4

8 trumps, with A, K; Opponents have 5 trumps, likely split is 3:2. You are going to have to lose 1 trump trick, but try and make sure you don't lose 2 trump tricks - win two rounds of trumps with A K.

The Finesse

8 Trumps, Queen Missing

Dummy

A K J 10

Declarer

8 7 5 4

Declarer & Dummy have eight trumps, with A, K;

Defence has 5 trumps, including the Queen.

The likely split is 3:2, the Queen is more likely to be among three cards than two so the chance it will fall on the first two tricks in the suit is less than 50%. The finesse gives a better chance of not losing a trick to the Queen. It works 50% of the time.

Play a low card from Declarer towards the gap, make sure you spot the Q if played, if not play the Jack from Dummy and cross fingers. If the Queen is your left-hand side, the Jack will win the trick, and Declarer can clear remaining trumps by returning the lead to Declarer's hand and finessing again.



8 Trumps, King Missing

Dummy

A 8 5 4

Declarer

Q J 10 7

Declarer & Dummy have eight trumps, missing the King;
Defence has 5 trumps, including the King

The finesse gives the only chance of avoiding losing a trick to the King. It works 50% of the time.

Play the Queen from Declarer towards the Ace, make sure you spot the King if played and cover it with the Ace, if not, play low from Dummy and cross fingers. If the King is on declarers left, the Queen will win the trick, and Declarer can lead the Jack. If the King is in the hand on Declarer's right, it is almost certain to win a trick whatever Declarer does, but it is usually best to try the finesse.





Reasons to delay trump clearing

In most trump contracts you will play enough rounds in trumps to take away all the opponents' trumps at the earliest opportunity, but there are exceptions....

Chance to ruff in the short suit

Dummy

♠ A 7

♥ 6

Declarer

♠ K Q J 10 5 4

♥ A 4

In theory, you can only win as many tricks as you have in the longest suit.

Occasionally you get a chance to beat this rule!

In this hand Spades are trumps. In Declarer, you have the "long" suit of 6 Spades giving you the chance to win 6 tricks in Spades.

However if you play a Heart first, winning with the Ace, and then play a small Heart, you can trump it with the 7. You now have 7 winners from the Spades!



You have a low number of high value trumps

Dummy

♠ A J 10

♥ 6

♦ A 7 6 5 3

Declarer

♠ K Q 9 8

♥ A 4 3 2

♦ 4

Spades are trumps. If you play your trumps against each other you will make four tricks.

However, if you play a Diamond trick first, win with the Ace, and then play a Heart trick, winning with the Ace. You can now lead a red card from one hand and trump in the other making seven tricks from your trumps. You won't get overtrumped because you have the biggest trumps. This play is called a cross-ruff.

You can discard a loser

Dummy

♠ J 10 3 2

♥ 6

♦ 6 5 3

Declarer

♠ K Q 9 8

♥ A K 3 2

♦ 8 7 4



In this hand, Spades are trumps. When you play trumps against each other you will lose a trick, and so the lead.

You hold five hearts, so the defence have eight. It's very unlikely that either defender has a singleton. Play a heart trick, winning with the A♥, then play the K♥ discarding a diamond from dummy. You have now reduced the number of losing diamond tricks from 3 to 2.



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NOTES

Opponents have:	Distribution	% Odds
7	4-3	62
	5-2	30
	6-1	7
	7-0	1
6	3-3	35
	4-2	48
	5-1	15
	6-0	2
5	3-2	68
	4-1	28
	5-0	4
4	2-2    	41
	3-1	50
	4-0	9
3	2-1	78
	3-0	22





Opponents have:	Distribution	% Odds
2	1-1	52
	2-0	48

Try and remember...

If opponents have an odd number of cards in your suit they are most likely to split fairly evenly e.g. 5 cards split into 2&3

If opponents have an even number of cards in your suit they are most likely to split unevenly e.g. 6 cards split into 4&2

Looking for missing queens: "Eight Ever; Nine Never" (Finesse)

But these are only statistics.

If it really matters, count the cards in the suit carefully as they are played. Often it's crucial to note that third "complete" round in a suit - the last one, wherever it is, is now a master.

Look at the spot value of the card - and consider the opponents' count signals - it may give you a clue how the cards lie

If it all goes wrong, remember it's the same for everyone sitting in your seat with your cards 😊