



### Defence Play

While declarer is planning how to make the contract, defenders should be planning their play reading the auction, looking at dummy and their own hand.

Many of the techniques declarer uses are mirrored by the defence. For example, in no trumps, declarer's friendly suits are the defenders unfriendly suits.

Unlike declarer play a defender can't see partner's hand. Using the card play they communicate and work with partner.

### Choosing the Opening Lead

The opening lead is the key choice for the defence. A good opening lead will help to establish tricks and will provide essential information, and suggestion of tactics to partner.

#### Lead a suit partner has bid

The defence begins in the auction. Sometimes partner has bid in the auction identifying a promising suit in their hand.

If partner has bid a suit, and if you have a card in that suit, then your opening lead will be a card in that suit.

Help your partner to establish cards in the suit by leading the highest honour. If it has no honour, then choose a card that hints at the count. For example lead the higher of two small cards to hint at a holding of two, and follow up with the lower card to confirm the count of two. Maybe you can trump a third?



### Opening leads in No Trumps

If you have a touching honour sequence of at least **three** lead the highest card, eg from J 10 9 8 6, lead the Jack; your partner can then deduce that you have no higher card in that suit.

Often lead the fourth highest of your longest and strongest suit, providing there is at least one card of 10 upwards in the suit. For example with K 8 7 6 2, lead the six. Against No Trumps you may lead from a suit with Ace and not much else.

If you have no suit meeting the above, pick a suit with at least four cards, but no honour, and lead the second highest.

Avoid leading out your winners immediately as this may establish tricks for declarer. For instance, with ♠ 8 3 2 ♥ A 4 3 ♦ 10 9 8 7 6 ♣ A 6. Do not lead out your aces. Lead the ♦ 10.

### Opening leads in suit contracts

Top of a sequence of honours of at least **two**, is often a safe lead, For example, the King from K Q 7 6 4, the King from K Q 9 7, or the Queen from Q J 8 5.

Side suit singleton. The top card of a doubleton, particularly if holding some trumps.

**Long unbid suits are dangerous**, lead a small card if you have the King or Queen. From Q 9 6 3 lead the three, with K 7 2 lead the 2. Do not underlead an ace, e.g. if you have A 10 7 3, lead from another suit. This means that you **will avoid** leading from a suit with an Ace and not much else.

Sometimes a trump lead is best.



## On Seeing Dummy...

From the auction, and from the cards in dummy, and in their own hand, it will be possible to estimate partner's HCPs. It may be possible to guess what high cards partner holds and further plan the defence.

## Other Defence Principles

### Second player plays low

If Declarer leads a low card from his hand towards Dummy, do not 'rush in' with a high card. Eg,

Dummy

♥ K J

Second Player

♥ A 4

Declarer leads

♥ 6

Declarer may be missing the Queen and Ace and must guess the position of both cards. If second player rushes in with the ♥A, you let declarer know where the cards are. If you play the ♥4, declarer may guess wrongly and finesse the ♥J which will lose to your partner's ♥Q.

You will then win your ♥A later.



### Third player plays high

If your partner leads a low card, play a high card from your hand to force a high card from declarer's hand. This may promote one or more of partner's cards. E.g.

#### Dummy

♥ 9 7 4

#### Partner leads

♥ 3

#### Third Hand

♥ Q 8 6

Play the ♥Q. If partner has led from, say, ♥ K J 5 3, then your ♥Q will force out declarer's ♥A, setting up partner's ♥ K J 5 as winners.

If you have a touching sequence of two or more cards that are the "highest" in the suit:

#### Dummy

♥ 9 7 4

#### Partner leads

♥ 3

#### Third Hand

♥ Q J 6

Play the J♥. The card you play "denies" the card below it, so your partner knows you do not have the 10♥, but you may have the Q♥, especially if declarer plays the K♥ or A♥.



### Returning partners' suit

With the lead later in the hand, is usually good to return partners' suit if you can. It is very important in no-trumps to return partners' suit to establish that long suit. Even if your own cards in this suit are poor, help to establish partners' suit.

### Lead through Dummy's strength

During the play of the hand, you may be leading having seen Dummy. Your choice of lead will depend on the cards in Dummy. It often pays to lead "through" gaps in high cards in Dummy in the hope that partner's high cards can win.

#### Dummy

♥ K J 5

#### With the lead

♥ 8 7 6

#### Third Hand

♥ A Q ??

If declarer has the high cards, then you have not lost anything.

#### Dummy

♥ A K 5

#### With the lead

♥ 8 7 6

#### Third Hand

♥ Q x x ??



Leading through dummy's ♥ A K 5 is unlikely to give away tricks and just might establish partner's Queen.

### Lead up to Dummy's weakness

If you are leading through Declarer, then it is often better to lead a suit in which Dummy is weak. Eg.

#### Dummy

♥ 7 4 2

#### With the lead

♥ 9 8 6

Hearts are a good choice here. Your partner's high cards in this suit may beat Declarer's high cards or declarer may be forced to play high establishing partner's high cards.

Avoid leading to suits in dummy that have "gaps".

#### Dummy

♠ A

♥ K J 7

#### With the lead

♠ 3 2

♥ 9 8 6

Leading a Heart you may "free finesse" your partner's A♥ or Q♥ or even both. A spade lead to the A♠ will put the lead into



dummy. Declarer may have to lead the Heart suit. That gives your partner the chance to win with high hearts.

### Hold up play in Defence

This is the same principle as hold-up play when you are Declarer and most often applies in no-trump contracts. An example:

#### Dummy

♦ K Q J 10 9

#### Second Player

♦ A 4 3

#### Declarer leads

♦ 7

In this example, Declarer has no entry to Dummy in Spades, Hearts or Clubs but is looking for tricks in the Diamond suit. At this point you may not know how many diamonds Declarer has, but by assuming Declarer has two or three Diamonds, then refusing to play your ♦ A until the third round will restrict Declarer to just two Diamond tricks. If you play your ♦ A on the first round, Declarer will make four Diamond tricks.



### Signalling when following suit

When you are following suit you may have a message for partner about that suit. Sometimes you can use the cards you choose to get that message across. The simplest and most common method is to follow with a **H**igh card to **E**ncourage partner to lead that suit, or to follow with a **L**ow value card to **D**iscourage partner from leading that suit. This is sometimes abbreviated as H-E-L-D. High cards are anything above a six; low cards are anything below a six; six itself is ambiguous and is often used to signal "don't care".

#### Dummy

♣ A 5 3

#### With the lead

♣ 8 7 6

#### Third Hand

♣ K Q 9 2

Partner leads a club hoping to establish high cards in your hand. Dummy plays the Ace. You now follow with the 9♣, a high, encouraging card asking partner to lead clubs again if on lead.

#### Dummy

♣ A 5 3

#### With the lead

♣ 8 7 6

#### Third Hand

♣ 9 4 2

This time follow with the 2♣, a low, discouraging card.





### Learn and agree on a discard system

Discards are used to show "suit preference". You cannot follow the current suit, so partner knows you have none. Your choice of discard should tell partner about another suit you like, or possibly, one you don't like.

There are many discard systems. A simple one to start with is like the above for following suit. Follow with a **H**igh card to **E**ncourage partner to lead that suit, or to follow with a **L**ow value card to **D**iscourage partner from leading that suit.

### Dummy

♦ A 10 9 8

### Second Player plays

♦ 3

### Fourth Discards

♠ A Q 8 3

♦ -

### Declarer leads

♦ 7

Fourth player discards 8♠ to encourage partner to lead spades if they get the chance.



### Defence Play Summary

- Plan the defence while declarer plans the contract
- Estimate strength of partner's hand
- Use the opening lead to
  - give partner information and
  - establish tricks
- Look at the opening lead,
  - work out what it says,
  - remember it
- Second Hand Plays Low
- Third Hand Plays High
- Later in the hand:
  - return partner's suit;
  - lead through dummy's strength;
  - lead through declarer up to dummy's weakness;
  - avoid leading through declarer to "gaps" in dummy;
  - don't worry about giving declarer obvious tricks.
- Signal when following suit, if you can, to show whether you like or dislike that suit
- Learn and use a discard system
- Remember common sense always applies, if it seems wrong to follow the guideline, then follow your judgement