



Clearing Trumps first is usually best

In most trump contracts declarer will:

- ♣ Get the lead
- ♣ play enough trumps to take away all the opponents trumps
- ♣ win/develop tricks in the side suits and exit.

However, there are situations where you make more tricks by delaying the clearing of trumps.

Chance to ruff in the short suit

Dummy

♠ A 7

♥ 6

Declarer

♠ K Q J 10 5 4

♥ A 4 3

1. In theory, you can only win as many tricks as you have in the longest suit out of declarer and dummy.

2. Occasionally you get a chance to beat this rule!

3. 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.

4. However, if you play a Heart trick first, winning with the Ace, and then play a small Heart, you can trump it with the A. You have now got 7 winners out of the Spades!



You have a low number of high value trumps and shortages in one or both side suits

Dummy

♠ A J 10

♥ 6

♦ A 7 6 5 3

1. In this hand Spades are trumps. If you play your trumps against each other, you will make four tricks.

2. However, play a Heart trick first, winning with the Ace, and then play a Diamond trick, winning with the Ace.

Declarer

♠ K Q 9 8

♥ A 4 3 2

♦ 4

You can now lead a red card from one hand and trump in the other making seven tricks from your trumps. You will not get overtrumped because you have the biggest trumps.



Chance to get rid of a loser

Dummy

♠ Q 7 5 4

♥ A K Q

♦ A 7 6 5 3

1. In this hand Spades are trumps.

2. Declarer may not win the first trump round. Once the spades are cleared, there is a loser in Diamonds

3. However, we have five hearts altogether, including the top three. Opponents have 8 hearts and a four-four or five-three distribution is highly likely (Probability of 80%).

Declarer

♠ K 10 9 8

♥ 3 2

♦ 4 3

4. Before clearing trumps play the AH and KH, then QH discarding a Diamond from Declarer's Hand.

5. Now play trumps



Bad Trump Splits

1. In this hand Spades are trumps.

Dummy

♠ A 7 5 4

♥ A K Q J

♦ A 7 6 5 3

2. On clearing 2 rounds of trumps you discover a 4:1 split

3. However, we have six hearts altogether, including the top three. Opponents have 7 hearts and a four-three distribution is highly likely.

Declarer

♠ K Q 9 8

♥ 3 2

♦ 4 2

4. Before clearing further trumps play the AH and KH, then QH discarding a Diamond from Declarer's Hand. Then JH discarding any other losers.

5. If the defence trump in, you may be able to overtrump, if you can't, they only have one trump more to clear two of yours. This should leave you with at least the last trump, possibly the last two, and some control.

6. Now play trumps



Summary

Three situations where delaying clearing trumps is appropriate:

1. You can ruff a side suit in the short trump suit.
(Ruffing in the long trump suit gains nothing and risks losing control of the trumps.)
2. You can discard a loser on winners in another side suit.
3. You can set up a cross ruff and win more tricks playing your trumps one at a time. To avoid being over-ruffed you need to have most of the high cards in trumps.

You may choose to stop clearing trumps when there is a bad split. You may regain control by forcing the opponents to use their trumps.

Declarer

♠ 9 8 7 5 4

You should clear trumps even if one, or several, big ones are missing.

Try finesses if available to maximise your chances but always clear the trumps.

Dummy

♠ 10 6 3 2

Here, opponents have the top four trumps. Play trumps and theirs will fall on each other. You might only lose two tricks.

Avoid trumps and opponents may get to trump in four times. You lost four tricks.

You're in this contract because you have HCPs in the other suits, protect them by clearing trumps.