



LOOK AT YOUR HOLDING IN EACH SUIT

It is normal, and expected, that all the players, but especially declarer, will take time to consider the opening lead and the dummy hand exposed on the table.

In this time, declarer should look at each suit across both hands, and plan the general approach and the key questions and the plays to answer them.

Suit by suit

Any suit in which you have eight or more cards between the two hands is a vital 'source of tricks'. This is still true even if many high cards are missing.

You will be keen to play this suit (or these suits) early, even if you must lose a trick or two creating the opportunity to win tricks. All the statistics and the finesse techniques in the notes on playing trump suits, apply to playing these long suits.

Declarers are often advised to take their losers early. This is to 'establish' winners in your friendly, many-carded, suits.

Any suit in which you have five or less cards is an enemy suit. Even if you hold top cards in this suit, don't play it yourself early. You need these cards for getting the lead back when you give it



away. If there are still some left at the end, win those tricks before giving up ('exiting').

Suits with six or seven cards are problematic, the defence have too many of them. Where you have seven cards, the six missing ones are likely to split 4 and 2. The danger is that opponents will take the last trick(s) in these suits. Sometimes you must play these suits to try to make your contract. This is especially true in 1NT, the most challenging and enjoyable contract.

The defence

The defence will probably lead one of these suits and will keep attacking them. The challenge is to establish winners in your suits before the establish winners in theirs ('tempo').

Control the play for as long as you can

While you have the high cards ('controls') in all suits, you can afford to give away tricks. Look at the cards you have left and ask yourself what will happen when the defence switch to their favoured suits (your enemy suits). If you will get the lead back, then keep working on your friendly suits giving away tricks if you need to. When it becomes dangerous to give away tricks because the defence have a suit with many winners for them, it's time to take ('cash') your remaining high cards and exit.



LOOK AT THE LEAD

- ♣ An honour card promises the next two cards e.g. King promises the Queen and the Jack.
- ♣ A low value card invites return, suggesting an honour; it is usually the fourth highest, so if it is a 2, that defender probably had a holding of four.
- ♣ You are entitled to ask the partner not leading what they understand from partner's lead.

The rule of eleven

If the opening lead against a no-trump contract is a low card, it will usually be 'fourth highest'. Declarer and defenders can use this information to do some "counting" based on the rule of eleven.

Subtract the value of the card led from 11. The result is the number of cards HIGHER than the card led that Dummy, Declarer and the other defender hold between them.

For instance, if the card led is a six, Dummy, declarer and the other defender will have five (11-6) cards between them higher than the six.

If, for instance, declarer can see four cards higher than the six in his hand and in dummy, then there is just one card higher than the six in the other defender's hand. The defender can equally use the 'rule of eleven' to count how many cards higher than the six are in declarer's hand.



MAKE A PLAN

- ♣ Take your losers early, try finesses, force out Aces.
- ♣ Run your long suits
- ♣ Cash in anything left

Communication

Communication is the process of playing tricks to transfer the lead from dummy to declarer's hand or back again. You may need to do this to try finesses, or to lead low cards to high cards when trying to force Aces out. Cards that win tricks and transfer the lead are often called "entries". Try to keep your 'entries' until you have established enough tricks for your contract.

High Cards from Short Suit First

In No Trumps Contracts you may find yourself with a solid set of top cards in a suit. Often you need to play the high ones from the short suit first to make sure of maximising the wins.

Dummy	Declarer
J 2	A K Q 4

Start by playing the 4 from Declarer and the J from Dummy.

Now the lead is in dummy and you can play the 2 and win it with the Ace. The lead is now with Declarer - the K and Q can be played to win tricks. If the A and K had been played first, the J and 2 would have gone with them. The 4 might not have been a winner then!

Hold-up play: Protecting a "lonely Ace"

The defence usually lead from their long suits, where they hope you are short of cards.

For example

	Dummy	
	A 3 2	
LHO		RHO
K J 10 7 6		Q 9 8
	Declarer	
	5 4	

The defender leads the 7, there is a chance the holding is five cards in the suit, and his partner has three. Your plan is to lose the first two rounds and hold back the Ace.

After three rounds

	Dummy	
	-	
LHO		RHO
J 10		-
	Declarer	
	-	

Your left-hand defender has two cards this suit. If he gets the lead, he will win tricks with them. This has become the "danger" hand.

Where you must take risks of losing tricks,

for example with a finesse, you will pick the route that allows the Right-Hand Opponent to win. (If possible!)



SOME STATISTICS

In Summary:

Even number of cards missing usually divide inconveniently.

Odd number of cards missing usually divide reasonably.

Often you need to consider this when making your plans, especially when playing 1NT.

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
2	1-1	52
	2-0	48