The Finesse

A Finesse is a card play technique to win an additional trick or tricks should there be a favourable position of cards in the hands of the opponents.

To finesse a card is to play that card.

West	East
♠ A Q	♠ 7 2

In the example, the Queen is finessed. The outstanding King is the card finessed against: the card the player hopes to capture by the finessing manoeuvre.

A finesse is said to be onside or on if the missing honour is favourably placed and offside or off if it is not.

Many finesses involve a tenace (a combination of non-touching honors in the same hand, not necessarily the A and 10),

For example: ♠A Q or ♠K J.

The term hook is a colloquialism for finesse.

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Direct and Indirect

A direct finesse is a finesse that gains a trick without losing one, as long as it is "on".

For example:

West	East
♥ A Q	♥ 5 2

If East (declarer) is on lead he can lead to the queen; that is, he leads a small spade and, if South plays low, plays the queen from dummy. If South is holding the king ("onside"), East-West will win two tricks. If the finesse is not tried, there will be only one winning trick from this heart holding. If South plays the king on the first trick, East-West win two tricks by covering with the ace.

An indirect finesse is a finesse that gains a trick - if it is on - but may involve losing a trick first. For example:

West	East
♦ K Q 3	♦ 7 2

East leads a diamond toward the king; if South holds the ace, the king will either win the current trick or will become the highest remaining diamond and win a later trick.

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Another kind of indirect finesse – "forked honours"

West	East
♦ Q 5 4 3	♦ A 7 6 2

The best play is a small card from the East hand, away from the Ace and towards the Queen. If South holds the King and plays it, West plays low, but there are now two masters in Diamonds. If South holds the King and plays low, West plays the Queen, and East still has the Ace. If South plays low, West plays the Queen and North plays the King. East still has the Ace.

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A double/deep finesse

is a finesse against two honours held by the opponents. Sometimes it can gain two tricks:

West	East
♠ *A* Q 10	♠ 7 4 3

East leads a spade twice.

East-West will take three spade tricks if South has both the king and the jack (probability about 25% in the absence of any information), two if North and South have one each (50%), but only one if North has both (25%).

Other times it can gain one trick:

West	East
♠ *A* J 10	♠ 7 4 3

East leads a spade twice.

East-West will take two spade tricks if South has either the king or the queen, or both (probability about 75% in the absence of any information), but only one if North has both (25%).

Similarly, a triple finesse is possible, with a holding such as A-Q-10-8. This would be a low-probability desperation play if four tricks are needed in the suit, but two or three will probably be made.

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Leading high for a finesse

If the combined hands have sufficient number of intermediate cards, lead a high card to retain the lead in the same hand if the finesse is on, and spare the valuable entries.

Example 1	Example 2	Example 3	Example 4	Example 5
♠ A Q 10	♠ A Q 4	♠ A 4 3	♠ A Q 4	♠ A 5 4
♠ J 4 3	♠ J 10 3	♠ Q J 10	♠ 10 9 8	♠ Q J 3

The ruffing finesse

is a variation of a finesse in trump contracts where the finessing player chooses to ruff or not, rather than choosing which card to play from a tenace.

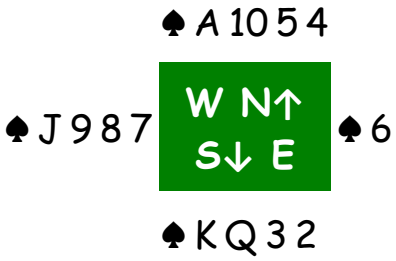
For example, diamonds are trumps here. The ace of spades is missing. Lead king of spades, if South plays the ace of spades, the West hand can trump. If South plays low, a heart is discarded from West. Loser played on a loser.

West	East
♠ -	♠ K Q 10
♥ 3 2	♥ A 4
♦ 10 9	♦ 6 5 4

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A marked finesse

is one that cannot lose, because the opponents' honor is known to be onside. In the example at right, if South begins by leading the king-queen, he learns on the second trick that East has no more spades. The finesse of the ten is now a sure thing.



A Free Finesse

Is one given by an unlucky lead by the defence.

For example, against 3NT by East.

West

♠ 7 4 3

East

♠ A Q 10

South

♠ K 9 8 2

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

("Eight Ever, Nine Never")

Dummy	Declarer
♠ A 9 8 7	♠ K J 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.

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A two-way finesse

The finesse is available in either hand.

Sometimes you already know that one of the opponents has winners, the "danger" hand, and the other may not be able to lead the right suit, the "safe" hand. You choose to take the finesse so that, if it fails, the safe hand gets the lead.

There be other clues; perhaps one of the opponents showed HCPs, or even a suit, during the auction.

Shorten the odds

West	East
♠ A 10 2	♠ K J 3

Start with the king of spades (or leading the 2 to the king) and then lead the jack; this makes three spade tricks if East has the singleton queen or if West has the queen, and if that's not the case, then East will be on lead. Or start with the ace and 10, making three tricks in the opposite situation, or leaving West on lead.

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And Count

West	East
♠ A K 10 3	♠ Q 9 5 4 2

This holding similarly presents a two-way finesse, but along with a suitable entry it will always produce 5 spade tricks no matter how the opponents' spades are placed. Play the ace on the first spade trick. If both opponents follow suit, the jack must drop and no finesse will be needed; if one opponent shows out, there is a marked finesse available against the other. For example, if East shows out, a small spade is played to the queen, and the K and 10 score via the marked finesse; finally the South hand is entered in another suit and the 13th spade is cashed (or if spades are trump, used for a ruff).

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But weaken the holding slightly and the finesse is no longer two-way:

West	East
♠ A K 8 3	♠ Q 9 5 4 2

Now the opponents have the jack and 10.

The ace is played first to check for 4-0 spades split.

Then, if they are 3-1, the play goes as before.

But if the spades split 4-0, someone has ♠J 10 7 6.

The lead can be transferred as needed, and the finesse taken once sucessfully once and the last honour conceded.

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