

Example hands 1 to 4.

Hand 1. Dealer North

Love All

♠ K 5 2			
♥ A Q 10			
♦ 10 9 3			
♣ K Q 6 4			
♠ Q 8 7 4		♠ J 10 9	
♥ 8 6		♥ K J 9 5 2	
♦ Q 8		♦ A 5 2	
♣ J 10 7 3 2		♣ 9 5	
		♠ A 6 3	
		♥ 7 4 3	
		♦ K J 7 6 4	
		♣ A 8	

West	North	East	South
	1NT	Pass	3NT
Pass	Pass	Pass	
3NT by North		Opening lead: ♥5	

North plays in 3NT and East has to find an opening lead. Nothing difficult here – a low Heart defeats 3NT without any real problem. North has no option but to play on dummy's Diamonds; when the finesse loses to the ♦Q, a Heart return sets up East's long suit with an entry to cash them. Some (misguided) players won't lead away from a King (why not?), some dislike leading from tenace holdings of any form, arguing that it often gives away cheap tricks. Well, here it does, North making trick one with the ♥10. However, that cheap trick comes back with interest when West returns a Heart as East's long suit is set up for three tricks. The passive ♠J lead gives away nothing, but it would concede the contract! North would make two Spades, one Heart, three Diamonds and three Clubs.

Hand 2. Dealer East

North-South Game

♠ Q 8 7 4			
♥ 8 6 5			
♦ Q 8 7			
♣ A J 10			
♠ K 6 3		♠ A 5 2	
♥ 7 4 3		♥ A Q 10	
♦ K J 6 4		♦ 10 9 3	
♣ K 8 2		♣ Q 6 4 3	
		♠ J 10 9	
		♥ K J 9 2	
		♦ A 5 2	
		♣ 9 7 5	

West	North	East	South
		1NT	Pass
Pass	Pass		
1NT by East		Opening lead: ♠J	

Compare and contrast; Hands 1 and 2 provide an interesting juxtaposition. Here, East plays in 1NT and South has to find a lead with a similar hand to the East cards on Hand 1 (you may also note the similarity between North, Hand 1 and East, Hand 2). Against No-trumps it is generally right to lead from a decent five-card suit. It is less rewarding to lead from a four-card suit, especially against 1NT where there is less of a compelling reason to set up your suit quickly. Here, the lead of a Heart gives declarer an immediate cheap trick – and a cakewalk to his contract. A passive Spade lead, on the other hand, allows the defence to beat the hand. Declarer can only manage two Spades, one Heart, two Diamonds and one Club if North-South do sensible things.

Hand 3. Dealer South

♠ A 8 3			
♥ K 6 4			
♦ A J 6 2			
♣ J 5 2			
♠ Q 10 7 6		♠ J 9 5 2	
♥ J 9		♥ Q 8 7 3 2	
♦ 10 8 5		♦ K Q 4	
♣ A 10 7 6		♣ 8	
		♠ K 4	
		♥ A 10 5	
		♦ 9 7 3	
		♣ K Q 9 4 3	

West	North	East	South
			1NT
Pass	3NT	All Pass	
3NT by South		Opening lead: ♠6	

North-South reach 3NT after an unrevealing bidding sequence and West has to lead. Some might lead a Club as it's West's best suit but that's poor tactics for a number of reasons. One is that Clubs could easily be declarer's (or dummy's) long suit – as is the case here – another is that it best to lead from a Queen or a King and keep a side-suit Ace back as an entry. Also, it is generally better tactics to lead a major-suit rather than a minor-suit. Here, a low Club lead hands the contract to South on a silver platter as declarer would set up Clubs to make two Spades, two Hearts, one Diamond and four Clubs. After a Spade lead, the unfortunate 4-1 Club break means that South can't quite come to the requisite nine tricks.

Hand 4. Dealer West

♠ J 5 2			
♥ 9 8 5 3			
♦ A 9 6			
♣ J 10 4			
♠ A Q 6		♠ K 8 4	
♥ Q 4 2		♥ K J 7	
♦ K 8		♦ 7 5 3	
♣ K 9 8 5 3		♣ A Q 6 2	
		♠ 10 9 7 3	
		♥ A 10 6	
		♦ Q J 10 4 2	
		♣ 7	

West	North	East	South
1NT	Pass	3NT	Pass
Pass	Pass		
3NT by West		Opening lead: ♥8	

This deal illustrates the principle that you should lead the second-highest card from a suit in which you have no interest. Against 3NT, North has to lead something, so tries his longest suit. In order not to get his partner flogging a dead horse, and playing Hearts at every opportunity, North leads the ♥8 to say that his suit is a poor one and that South should only continue with it if it suits him. Here, South can recognise that the ♥8 cannot be fourth highest (there aren't three Hearts higher than the ♥8 that North can hold) so he wins the ♥A and, abandoning the suit as a lost cause, switches to something more promising. That would be the ♦Q, and North-South can take the next five tricks for two down.

Example hands 5 to 8.

Hand 5. Dealer North

North-South Game		♠ Q 7 4									
		♥ K J 8									
		♦ Q 6 4 2									
		♣ 9 6 5									
♠ J 5 3	<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr></table>		N		W		E		S		♠ 10 9 6 2
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ A 10 9 7 5		♥ Q 6 2									
♦ J		♦ 10 9 8 7 3									
♣ A J 4 2		♣ 7									
		♠ A K 8									
		♥ 4 3									
		♦ A K 5									
		♣ K Q 10 8 3									

West	North	East	South
	Pass	Pass	1♣
1♥	1NT	Pass	3NT
3NT by North		Opening lead: ♥2	

North plays in 3NT after South's 1♣ opening bid has been overcalled by 1♥. East should lead a Heart against 3NT, of course, as it is normal practice to lead partner's suit. *Which card*, though? Long ago (at the time when dinosaurs roamed the Earth) it was fashionable to lead "top of partner's suit". The reason why that was abandoned should become clear on this deal – should East lead the ♥Q, declarer would have two Heart tricks and nine in all (three Spades, two Hearts, three Diamonds and one Club). After the ♥2 lead to the ♥A and a Heart return, 3NT has no price. Even if North should play the ♥K at trick two, blocking the suit, he still doesn't have nine tricks; East-West can set up enough tricks to beat him

Hand 6. Dealer East

East-West Game		♠ Q J 8 7 3									
		♥ A 6									
		♦ Q 7 5 2									
		♣ A 2									
♠ 5 4 2	<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr></table>		N		W		E		S		♠ A K 6
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ 9 5 2		♥ K Q J 10									
♦ K 10 3		♦ A 9 6									
♣ Q 9 6 4		♣ K J 8									
		♠ 10 9									
		♥ 8 7 4 3									
		♦ J 8 4									
		♣ 10 7 5 3									

West	North	East	South
		2NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass
3NT by East		Opening lead: ♠10	

South's prospects of taking any tricks against 3NT with that heap of junk look bleak – if his side is to defeat the contract then it has to be North that does the damage. After all, South's contribution to the defence is likely to be minimal with a solitary Jack. In cases like this it is a waste of time leading your own "suit" – life is too short for South to expect to develop his feeble Clubs (or Hearts). Best in these cases is to *play for your partner's hand* – a phrase that means lead the suit you suspect partner may have length and strength in. Here, the short-suit lead of the ♠10 scores a goal as North can develop the Spade suit and gain the lead with his two Aces as declarer attempts to set up some tricks in Hearts and Clubs.

Hand 7. Dealer South

Game All				♠ 7 6 3									
				♥ A Q 6 2									
				♦ Q 8 5									
				♣ K 8 2									
♠ A Q J 5 4		<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr></table>		N		W		E		S		♠ 8 2	
	N												
W		E											
	S												
♥ J 10 8 7			♥ K 5 4										
♦ 3			♦ 10 9 7 6 4 2										
♣ Q 6 3			♣ J 5										
				♠ K 10 9									
				♥ 9 3									
				♦ A K J									
				♣ A 10 9 7 4									

West	North	East	South
			1♣
1♣	Dble	Pass	1NT
Pass	3NT	All Pass	
3NT by South		Opening lead: ♠Q	

South plays in 3NT after West sticks in a cheeky 1♣ overcall, vulnerable. West should lead a Spade against 3NT, but which card? The fourth-highest Spade would be disastrous. Declarer would win the ♠9 and could keep East off lead by crossing to dummy with the ♦Q and playing a Club to the ♠9. West could take the ♠Q but that would be that; South would take the ♥A on a Heart switch and cash enough winners for his contract (one Spade, one Heart, three Diamonds and four Clubs). The right lead is the ♠Q. If South takes that, he doesn't have enough winners – if he ducks a Club, a Spade return sees him down. If he ducks the ♠Q at trick one, the ♥J switch at trick two is fatal. Play it through and see.

Hand 8. Dealer West

Love All		♠ A 4									
		♥ 5 3 2									
		♦ 9 6 4									
		♣ A Q J 5 4									
♠ J 10 9 7	<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr></table>		N		W		E		S		♠ K Q 2
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ A 8 6		♥ K 9 7									
♦ A J 8 3		♦ K Q 7									
♣ K 6		♣ 10 9 7 3									
		♠ 8 6 5 3									
		♥ Q J 10 4									
		♦ 10 5 2									
		♣ 8 2									

West	North	East	South
1NT	Pass	3NT	Pass
Pass	Pass		
3NT by West		Opening lead: ♣A	

West reaches 3NT in time-honoured fashion and North has to find an opening lead. It may seem obvious to lead the ♣Q (see Hand 7) but that's not the right lead on this deal. For sure, the ♣5 wins the coconut here but that's freakish and you get no marks for style with that one. The correct lead, when holding a sure outside entry, is the ♣A. Should dummy turn up with three low Clubs then you could continue with the ♣Q. As it is, you must continue with a *low* Club at trick two, hoping to bring down the King on air. Now 3NT has no price.

Note that if West started with ♣K × × then no lead or subsequent defence would have been successful.