

LET's examine some well known safety plays, and consider when they are appropriate. Having seen them you might recognise them if you meet them at the table, but the most important part of the exercise is to develop your powers to think in the right way. Assume you have as many entries to both hands as you need unless you are told otherwise. If you find it difficult to envisage the plays described try using playing cards.

I start with four suit combinations considered in isolation. In (a), (b) and (c) your objective is to make as many tricks as possible.



With (a) your only problem will come if spades break 4-0. You will be able to pick up four spades in either hand provided you start with the ♠A or ♠K.



Hand (b) demonstrates the principle described in the first article in this series. If you promote all the honours by one you get (a), so the suit should be played in the same way as (a). Start with the ♥K or ♥Q from the North hand and you will be able to play the hand for just one loser if either defender has ♥A 10 6 5



At first sight combination (c) appears like (a), but since you are now missing the ♦J and ♦10 you can no longer avoid a diamond loser if East has ♦J 10 7 6. You can cope if West has this holding by taking two finesses, provided you start by cashing the ♦Q. As you see over and over again, attention to detail is crucial when working out how to handle even the most mundane looking suit combinations.

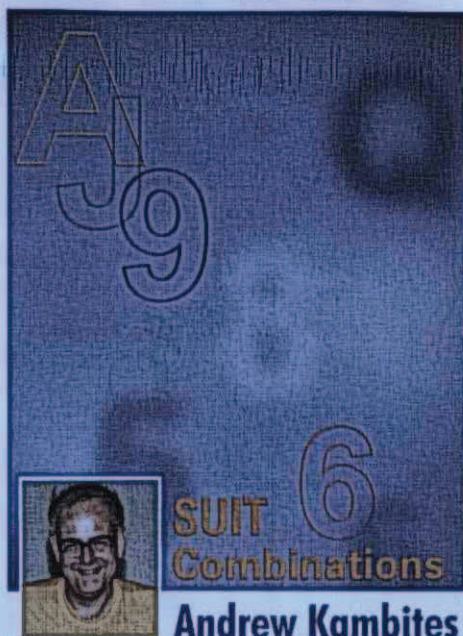
With (d) it depends on how many losers you can afford. Can you see the safety play if you can afford one loser?



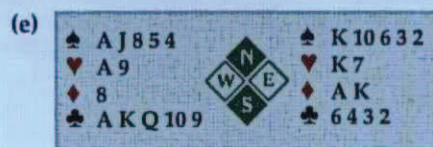
Clearly your only problem will occur if either defender has ♣QJ32. You should lead a low card from either hand, say the ♣6 towards the North hand.

If West follows suit with a low card you should insert a small card from North.

If West shows out rise with North's ♣A and return the ♣4. East must split his honours to stop you taking a cheap trick with the ♣7. You win this with your ♣K and drive out East's remaining honour.

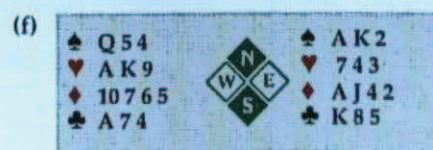


In example (e) after an uncontested auction you arrive in 6♣. North leads the ♥Q, which you win with your ♥A. You can cope with either defender holding ♠Q 9 7, but if spades are breaking 3-0 you will have to guess which defender has them.



The key to this lies in the club suit. You can cope with South having ♠J 8 7 5, but if North has this holding you have a club loser. Therefore assume North has this holding, as this represents the only danger. In that case if anybody has ♠Q 9 7 it is more likely to be South, so tackle trumps by first cashing East's ♠K.

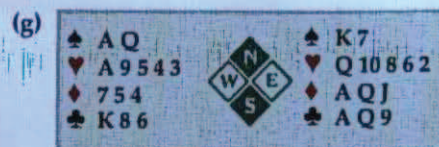
In hand (f) you are in 3NT on the lead of the ♠J. How should you tackle the diamonds?



If you needed three diamond tricks you might consider leading a low diamond from West towards East's ♦J, and if that lost you would subsequently cash the ♦A. That would give you three tricks if North started with ♦K Q x, Q x or K x. Unfortunately you would be held to one trick if North held ♦Q 9 8 3 and South started with the singleton ♦K.

Here you only need two diamond tricks for your contract, and you have no reason to fear losing the lead twice. You can guarantee two tricks by first cashing East's ♦A and then leading towards your ♦10. If the suit is breaking 4-1 either West's ♦10 or East's ♦J are poised over the defender's ♦K Q x.

In hand (g) the contract is 6♥. North leads the ♠J. How should you play to give yourself the best chance of success?

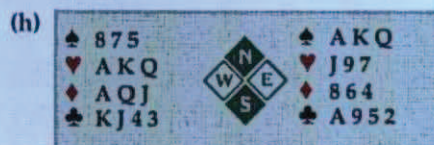


If you need to avoid a trump loser your best chance is to cash the ♥A, hoping the ♥K is singleton. Unfortunately if South has ♥K J 7 cashing the ♥A leaves you with two heart losers.

Alternatively you can 'safety play' the trumps for one loser by leading a low heart from East and inserting West's ♥9 if South follows with the ♥7.

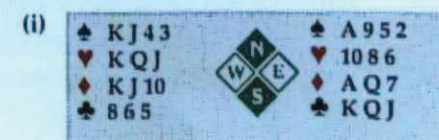
Which play should you try? It depends on whether or not you have a diamond loser! Win the ♠Q and finesse East's ♦Q. If it wins you can be fairly safe in assuming North has the ♦K (unless South is Zia Mahmood!). In that case you can afford the safety play in hearts.

Example (h), where you are in 6NT with North leading the ♠J, features a similar theme. How would you play?



You should win the ♠A and take a diamond finesse at trick 2. If it wins, re-enter dummy with a spade for another diamond finesse, just to make sure. If you have three diamond tricks you only need three club tricks, and there is a foolproof safety play for three tricks. Continue by cashing the ♣K and lead the ♣3, inserting dummy's ♣9 if North follows with a second low club. Alternatively, if North shows out on the first or second round of clubs rise with East's ♣A and lead a club back towards West's ♣J.

Finally, take a close look at example (i). The contract is 4♣ and North leads the ♥9. Somewhat to your surprise your ♥K wins.



West	North	East	South
INT	No	2♣	No
2♣	No	4♣	

Yes, there is a safety play in the trump suit. Alternatively you might be greedy and cash the ♣A followed by a finesse of the ♠J. If you try either you risk a second heart being played to South's ♥A, followed by a heart ruff! North has led from a doubleton, and South has withheld the ♥A in order to preserve an entry to his hand. South, with ♥A 7 4 3 2 knows North has led a doubleton (not a singleton) because of your answer to the Stayman enquiry (denying four hearts). Your top priority is to prevent a ruff, so cash your ♣A and ♣K and hope for the best. Sometimes safety plays just aren't safe!