

Opening Leads Against a No Trump Contract

No Trump is a Race: Which side can set up and cash extra winners in their long suits before the other side reaches the finish line. (A beginner playing 3NT wins 8 tricks early and loses 5 tricks late. An expert playing 3NT loses 4 tricks early and wins 9 tricks late.)

1. Lead a suit that partner has bid.

If you have supported partner, make an “attitude” lead (low from something, high from nothing). If you have not supported partner, make a “count” lead (high from two, low otherwise).

2. Lead an honor from an honor sequence in a long suit.

Lead an honor when you have 3 honors in a long suit, 2 of which are touching. Lead the top of 3 touching honors (A from AKQ, K from KQJ, etc). Otherwise lead the top of the touching pair (K from KQT, J from KJT, J from JT8). This may give away a trick at first, but you are usually compensated with extra tricks later on. If you have no other good lead, leading the top with only 2 honors (touching) might be OK. (Leading an honor sequence in a short suit does not help set up any extra tricks.)

3. Lead a low card from your longest and strongest suit.

It is OK to lead away from an Ace or King against no trump. Leading the 2 from AQ942 is a good lead. You give up a trick now, but partner will know to lead this suit when he/she wins the lead. Declarer cannot trump your small cards at no trump.

4. Lead a major suit rather than a minor suit.

If the opponents are playing in NT, they generally don't have an 8 card major suit fit. You and partner are likely to have more cards in the majors than in the minors.

5. Try to find partner's suit if you have few points and no promising suit.

There is no point setting up your long suit if you have no outside Aces or Kings to regain the lead. If you have 5 points or less, try to find partner's long suit. Partner is likely to be long where you are short. Try leading a 1 or 2 card major. On a good day, you will find partner with 5 of them. Lead your highest card in the short suit to (a) tell partner you have nothing in this suit and (b) to unblock the suit.

6. It is generally bad to lead a suit the opponents have bid.

If they have shown all 4 suits, lead “thru” dummy's weaker (second) suit.

7. Rule of 11.

If you lead 4th best from a long suit, subtracting its value from 11 gives the number of higher cards in the other 3 hands. Partner can look at his/her cards and dummy's cards to determine how many declarer has. Declarer can do the same to determine how many your partner has.

Opening Leads Memory Aid: BOSTON – Bottom Of Something, Top Of Nothing