

## Play of the Hand at a Suit Contract

**Make a plan.** The 3 most important things to improve your declarer play:

(1) make a plan, (2) make a plan, (3) make a plan.

**Before playing to trick 1:** Make your plan before playing to the first trick. If you win the opening lead on the wrong side, it may be too late to recover later.

**In a suit contract, count your losers.** Count them from the side that has the most trump. (If trump are equal, you choose which side, but count from only one side.) Count all cards that are not sure winners. For example, counting from the North side:

North	South	
A73	94	2 losers, the 7 & 3
A6	K9	0 losers, the 6 is covered by the K
K5	Q743	1 loser, Q forces out A, K then good, North has no more
K5	94	2 losers, the K is not a sure winner here
AK954	QT3	0 losers, opponent cards split 3-2 most of the time
AT9	K65	1 loser, the A & K will win, but the 3rd card is a loser.

### **Make a Plan to eliminate excess losers:**

There are usually too many losers. Look for ways to eliminate some. To eliminate losers:

- **Discard** a loser on an extra winning card on the other side.  
Example: A5 opposite KQ3: Play the A, lead the 5 to the K, discard a loser on the Q.
- **Ruff** a loser with a trump on the other side.  
Example: A32 opposite singleton 9: Play the A, ruff the 3 and the 2.
- **Finesse:** Lead a low card toward a high card for a 50% chance at making the high card.  
Example 1: Lead a low card towards a K. Half the time, the A is on the correct side.  
Example 2: Lead low towards AQ planning to use the Q unless the opponents play the K.
- **Set up a long suit**, then discard losers on the long suit. (A special case of **discard**.)  
Example 1: Jx opposite KQx: Play J, then low to K until opponents take their A.  
Example 2: 32 opposite AK954: Play A & K, then ruff the 4 hoping to set up the others.  
**Don't waste dummy's 5 card suit.** It is a valuable asset. Look for a way to use it.

**Quick Losers:** Opponents can win a trick right away.

**Slow Losers:** Opponents must knock out your high cards (1 or more) before they can win a trick.

North	South	
Q3	J4	2 quick losers
A6	94	0 quick losers; 1 slow loser
A84	K63	0 quick losers; 1 slow loser

Don't turn slow losers into quick losers by playing off your high cards too soon.

**Draw opponent trumps right away unless:**

- You need to ruff losers on the short trump side (usually the dummy).
- You need to eliminate some quick losers before you let the opponents win a trump trick.
- You need to keep a trump as an entry to the other side to cash some extra winners. (e.g. AK doubleton in a side suit opposite QJ32: need an entry to the QJ after cashing AK.)

**Ruffing on the short trump side produces an extra trick; ruffing on the long side does not.**

North	South
AKQ432	765

- You always score a trick with the trump 2. Using it to ruff does not produce an extra trick.
- Ruffing with the trump 5 produces an extra trick (6 trump tricks in your hand + the ruff).
- But sometimes you will want to trump on the long side to set up dummy's long suit.

**Entries:** You need entries to dummy to use the extra winners in dummy.

- Think about this before playing to trick 1.
- To establish a long suit in dummy by ruffing, you need one entry for each ruff plus one entry to get back to enjoy the long suit. (If you need to ruff twice, you need 3 entries.)

**Playing Tip for Finesses:**

- **With 4 of top 5: Play to capture the missing one high card.**  
(In other words: OK to use 2 high cards on the same trick.)  
With **Axxx** opposite **QJTxx**: lead Q towards A hoping to trap the K.
- **With 2 or 3 of the top 5: Play to make those high cards that you have.**  
(In other words: DO NOT use 2 high cards on the same trick.)  
With **Axxx** opposite **Qxxx**: play A (in case K is singleton), then low towards Q.  
With **Ax** opposite **KJx**: Play A first, then low towards KJ.

**Think:** When holding AKQ of Trump:

- **Pull trump immediately??**: Sometimes, should pull trump right away. So play trump AKQ.
- **Leave entry in dummy??**: Sometimes, you must leave a high trump in dummy as an entry to dummy. Pull only 2 rounds of trump, leaving a high trump in dummy as that entry.
- **High ruff in dummy??**: Sometimes, you need to ruff a suit in dummy with a high trump to avoid an overruff. May need to delay pulling all of the trump until after this high ruff.
- Think about these things when making your plan.