Leads and Signals

- All things being equal, we tend to be on defense about half the time; and leading about half of this time

- Opening lead frequently sets up the pattern on defense

- Cooperation between partners on defense is extremely important
  - Don’t try to set your opponents all by yourself; enlist your partner in the effort by signaling what you hold
  - Watch what partner plays and infer defensive approach he is suggesting and cooperate
Leading

- The key to selecting an opening lead is to listen to the auction and infer what that says about everyone’s hand
  - Has your partner bid --> Possible indication of suit to lead
  - Have the opponents bid easily and swiftly to game with no interference and you have near an opening hand --> your partner has nothing and the defense is “up to you”
  - Have the opponents struggled and found a secondary place to play --> They may not have enough trump and a trump lead might be appropriate
  - Do you have “Connected Honors (I.e., an AK)” --> then you might want to lead the honor to see what dummy has and then make your “real” lead
  - Do you have a series (I.e., QJT9) -- If you can lead enough times, you can eventually drive out their honors
Example hand

Practice Hand #1

North Deals
None Vul

♠️ K 9 8 4
❤️ A 7 3
♦️ 6
♣️ A Q 9 6 3

EW 5♦️; NS 3♥️; EW 2♣️; NS 1N; NS 2♠️; Par −300; NS 5♥️ × −2

West North East South
1 ♦️ Pass 1 ♥️
Dbl1 Pass 4 ♥️

All pass
1. Takeout
2. Support Redouble
4 ♥️ by South
Lead: ♠️ 8
Down 1

What to lead? NS bid game freely therefore they have about 26 hcp. I have about 13 hcp. Therefore partner has no points (at best about a queen). He likely will never get in!

1. Diamond lead will rarely work; partner won’t be able to give me ruff and I may set up opponents suit.
2. Don’t really want to lead trump since I have control of that suit.
3. Hate leading away from tenace (i.e., the AQ of clubs) -- will likely give away a trick.
4. Means spade lead the only possible lead (but also hate leading away from king).
Example hand  -  Solved

North Deals
None Vul

Practice Hand #1

♠️ A 7 3
♥️ J 8 2
♦️ A Q J 8 4 3
♣️ J

♠️ K 9 8 4
♥️ A 7 3
♦️ 6
♣️ A Q 9 6 3

♠️ J 6 2
♥️ K Q 9 6 5 4
♦️ K 7
♣️ K 2

EW 5♠️; NS 3♥️; EW 2♠️; NS 1♥️; NS 2♠️; Par −300; NS 5♥️ x 2

West       North       East       South
1 ♠️      Pass       1 ♥️
Dbl¹       Rdbl²      Pass       4 ♥️
All pass

What to lead? NS bid game freely therefore they have about 26 hcp. I have about 13 hcp. Therefore partner has no points (at best about a queen). He likely will never get in!

1. Diamond lead will rarely work; partner won't be able to give me ruff and I may set up opponents suit.
2. Don't really want to lead trump since I have control of that suit.
3. Hate leading away from tenace (i.e., the AQ of clubs) -- will likely give away a trick.
4. Means spade lead the only possible lead (but also hate leading away from king).
Types of Leads

- Aggressive/Active -- Use if opponents have side source of tricks
- Tapping -- Use when you have length in trump suit; try to make opponents use their trump by ruffing your long suit
- High roller leads -- Very aggressive and gambling leads; usually want to use only in team games where payoff for gamble is large; can backfire in pairs games
- NT contracts -- usually call for aggressive leads so tricks don’t get away (timing can be very important at NT)
- Passive leads -- When it is clear that opponents will really have to work to make contract (make them earn every trick)
- Trump leads -- Can be both passive and aggressive (try not to finesse partner though)
- Pattern leads and leads from “Nothing” (fourth best, third and fifth, MUD, BOSTON, etc.)
Signals

- Partner has made an opening lead -- How do I tell him what to do next?
- Opponent has played a suit and I can’t follow suit -- How do I tell partner what to play when he gets the lead?
- I know partner can ruff a card I play -- How do I tell him how to get back to me for a second ruff?
- How to tell partner how many cards I have in a suit

- All these are examples of “Signaling” (i.e., telling partner what to play next)
  - Typical signaling methods: Standard, Upside down, Lavinthal (discards only), Odd/Even (discards only)
- Also need to discuss “primary” signal to partner’s lead (attitude, count, or suit preference)
Signals

Practice Hand #2

South Deals
None Vul

♠ 10 5 2
♥ Q 8 4
♦ A J 7 5 3
♣ 6 4

♠ A Q J 6 3
♥ A K 7
♦ 10 8 4
♣ Q 2

West  North  East  South
Pass  2 ♥  Pass  4 ♥
All pass
4 ♥ by North
Lead: ♦ K
Down 1 — NS −50

Partner leads the KD. After declarer plays 4D from dummy, what do you play?
Signals

South Deals
None Vul

Practice Hand #2

North

West

1 ♠

Pass

All pass

4 ♥ by North

Lead: ♦️ K

Down 1 — NS -50

Why the lead of the KD?
I am really weak. Opponents had no problem bidding game, I'll never take any club tricks. Not clear spades or hearts will do anything but finesse partner. So make aggressive lead of KD!
Leads and Signals

Response to partner’s opening lead:
   a) Always play upside down attitude (high card discourages suit and low encourages) unless:
   b) If it’s obvious that continuation of suit will be taken by them, then change to suit preference signal (high card – higher non trump suit, low card – lower non trump suit).

My opening lead:
   a) Per the convention card for honors and/or series (i.e., top of series or internal series) against suit and NT contracts.
   b) If not honor or series lead (per above), start of normal count sequence (right side up – high-low indicates even number of cards) with 3rd or 5th best card against suit contract.
   c) If not honor or series lead (per above), 4th best against NT.

After opening lead:
   a) If partner breaks new suit, then give upside down attitude signal.
   b) If opponents break new suit, then start normal count sequence.
   c) If I break new suit, then start normal count sequence with 3rd or 5th best (unless honor/series).

Count:
Use normal count at all times. High-Low means even number and Low-High means odd number in suit. However, attitude is primary signal to leads.

“Ten Denies”:
The lead of a ten implicitly denies holding any cards higher than that. The lead of a 9 implies a higher card.

BOSTON Leads:
During the play, leading a low card will imply that I have “something” in a suit. Leading a high card will imply that I have “nothing”.

Discards:
Always upside down suit preference (e.g., low card means I like suit and high card means I don’t like suit).

Trump Suit Preference (TSP) signals:
a) If I am initially on lead and don’t lead a trump, there are two suits remaining (i.e., non-led and non-trump). These are the two suits that the TSP will apply to. (Note, you will have given me an attitude signal on my lead.) If I do lead a trump initially, there will be some ambiguity about the TSP signals.

b) When declarer plays trump, discards are not count but are suit preference signals. If I discard trump in the order high-low, it says I like the higher non-trump suit better. If I discard low-high, it says I like the lower non-trump suit better.

c) Note: extend to conditions where I lead a trump. If I lead a high trump, says I like the higher ranking suit (i.e., I’m starting a hi-lo). If I lead a low trump, it means I like the lower suit (This does not necessarily mean I will lead a trump, but if I do its suit preference.)

d) As with any signal, sometimes my play will be forced and sometimes I don’t like any suit so the preference signal will not be worth much. However, I’ll always show the one I like the best. Also, there will be times when I want to win the trump trick or cover an honor and these won’t necessarily be TSP signals. (Many of these non-nominal conditions will be apparent at the table.)

Notes:
a) Playing a low card (encouraging) doesn’t mean that I have a winner in that suit and it doesn’t demand that you lead it again immediately. It does mean that I would pick for you to lead that suit given no other information.

b) Playing high (or low) doesn’t necessarily mean anything regarding any other suit (e.g., I don’t use coded 2-way signals).

c) If I lead and get an encouraging signal, then take a winner in a second suit before playing a low card to your winner, I will almost always be void in the second suit.

d) If I give you an obvious ruff (in early rounds) with a low card, then I am suggesting you return the lower non-trump suit. If I give you a ruff with a high card, then I am suggesting you return the higher non-trump suit. (In later rounds, play is likely just a forced play).

e) In later rounds of play, my card may be a forced play so be careful of inferring meaning.

f) During the play of the hand, I should be very careful about new discards if there is a risk that partner will change their line of play because of my discard (i.e., when they are doing what I want tend to not give encouraging signals; give discouraging ones instead). (E.g. if we are defending a NT hand and I have a bunch of winners if partner gets in and leads my original suit, be extremely careful about giving an encouraging signal in a second suit. Partner may switch to that if I do.)

o Suggest you and partner take time to clearly note exactly how you want to play defense and mark on convention card (see below)