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♠ ♥ KLTC Bridge Club ♦ ♣

BRIDGE WORKSHOP

Expert Tips on Opening Leads

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EXPERT TIPS ON OPENING LEADS

Opening leads is an area where a lot of guesswork is involved. However, through the right thinking and analysis, sometimes you will make better ‘guesses’ more often than not!

In this workshop, we will cover the following topics:

- Trump leads: When and when not to lead a trump
- How should you lead against a slam?
- Should I lead partner’s suit?

TRUMP LEADS

Is leading a trump ever a good idea? That, of course, really depends on the opponent’s auction. However, more often than not, you should try to *avoid* leading a trump.

Let’s take a look at this example:

W	Partner	E	You
1NT	Pass	1♠	Pass
4♠	Pass	3♠	Pass
		Pass	Pass

South (You)
♠JT ♥KT862 ♦862 ♣A63

What would you lead?

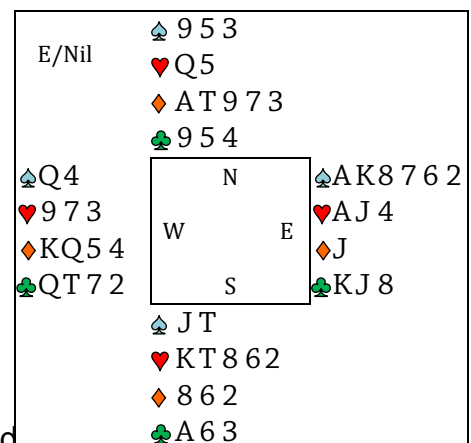
Although a trump ♠JT sequence may seem like a ‘safe’ lead, but it may just give away the tempo of the hand. For example, the full deal might look like this (diagram on the right):

On a trump lead, declarer can win with ♠A (saving the ♠Q for a later entry) and lead out the ♦J. This sets up dummy’s ♦KQ to be used to pitch two hearts.

On a heart lead however, declarer’s ♥A is forced out. If declarer now tries to play the ♦J, North can win and return a heart to finesse declarer’s ♥J. The defence will get four tricks via one diamond, two hearts, and one club.

The defenders have a big advantage and that is the opening lead.

By leading a trump, this will often give the tempo back to declarer.



How about this next example:

W	Partner	E	You
2♥	Pass	1♥	Pass
4♥	Pass	3♥	Pass
		Pass	Pass

South (You)
♠K752 ♥T43 ♦QT4 ♣J63

What would you lead?

Let’s take a look at the auction. The opponents have reached 4♥, though it looks like they’ve ‘crawled’ their way to 4♥ meaning they don’t have much to spare. Additionally, East didn’t make a game trial bid of 3♣ or 3♦, so it looks like East’s values are spread everywhere.

In this case, it's better to lead a passive trump and let declarer take finesses by himself! Leading a non-trump may just help declarer. For example, the full deal might look like this:

By leading a trump, North will win and switch to the ♠J. This gives the defence a good start.

On any non-trump lead, this will just help declarer. For example, a spade lead will go around to declarer's queen. A diamond lead will go to the ♦J-♦K-♦A and declarer can lead a diamond towards dummy's ♦T to set up a winner for a discard. A club lead will allow declarer to play the ♣T from dummy forcing North's ♣K.

E/Nil	♠ J T 9 4		
	♥ A		
	♦ K 8 5 3 2		
	♣ K 7 4		
♠ A 8 3		N	♠ Q 6
♥ J 8 5		W	♥ K Q 9 7 6 2
♦ J T 6			♦ A 7
♣ Q T 8 2		S	♣ A 9 5
	♠ K 7 5 2		
	♥ T 4 3		
	♦ Q 9 4		
	♣ J 6 3		

Here's another problem:

W	Partner	E	You
		1♠	Pass
1NT	Pass	2♦	Pass
Pass	Pass		

South (You)

♠KQJ6 ♥Q952 ♦K72 ♣87

What would you lead?

The auction tells us a lot of information West's pass of 2♦ suggests that he will likely be short in spades. With potential spade winners, you should now lead a trump! The full deal:

On a pedestrian heart lead, declarer will win, cash ♠A, and go on a cross-ruff eventually taking one spade, one heart, two clubs, two spade ruffs, and at least two heart ruffs.

On a trump lead, the defence will be able to draw three rounds of trumps. This leaves declarer with only six tricks!

E/Nil	♠ T 4 2		
	♥ K T 7		
	♦ A 8 6		
	♣ Q T 5 2		
♠ 5		N	♠ A 9 8 7 3
♥ J 8 6 4 3		W	♥ A
♦ J 5 3			♦ Q T 9 4
♣ K J 9 6		S	♣ A 4 3
	♠ K Q J 6		
	♥ Q 9 5 2		
	♦ K 7 2		
	♣ 8 7		

EXERCISES: (Note – the vulnerability is shown in the compass direction of the auction. White = Not Vul, Red = Vul)

W	N	E	You
		1♦	Pass
1♠	Pass	2♦	Pass
Pass	Pass		
(1a) South			
♠K765 ♥JT6 ♦QJ86 ♣75			

W	N	E	You
		1♥	Pass
1♠	Pass	2♣	Pass
Pass	Pass		
(2a) South			
♠865 ♥KQT9 ♦865 ♣Q95			

W	N	E	You
1♦	Pass	1♠	Pass
3♦	Pass	3♠	Pass
4♠	Pass	Pass	Pass
(3a) South			
♠K85 ♥KT4 ♦872 ♣9862			

LEADING AGAINST A SLAM

Whether you lead aggressively or passively against a slam is dependent on the opponent's auction. In general, **lead aggressively vs. a suit slam, and passively vs. a NT slam.**

For example:

W	Partner	E	You
		1♠	Pass
2♦	Pass	2♠	Pass
4NT	Pass	5♥	Pass
6♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

South (You) ♠987 ♥K853 ♦65 ♣T976
--

What would you lead?

It appears that the opponents are missing one keycard – or rather, we must assume partner has one key card if we are to hope to defeat this contract. Thus, if we lead passively say with a trump, the opponents are going to draw the trumps and seek to establish the diamonds.

In this case, we must lead aggressively. Since we have the ♥K, we need less help from partner in the hearts than the clubs, so we should lead a low heart! The full deal:

Declarer has an easy road to twelve tricks after a 'safe' trump or club lead. On the aggressive ♥3 lead, This sets up a heart trick for the defence before declarer can get the diamonds running.

What happens if declarer had the ♥Q and the heart lead went around to his ♥Q? It means that the contract probably could not have been defeated! With dummy's diamonds likely a source of tricks, declarer can set up that suit (to pitch his hearts), so the heart lead would not have costed anyway.

E/Nil	♠ 2 ♥ Q972 ♦ A94 ♣ J8542										
♠ AJ4 ♥ A4 ♦ KQJT72 ♣ K3	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ KQT653 ♥ JT6 ♦ 83 ♣ AQ
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠ 987 ♥ K853 ♦ 65 ♣ T976										

Try this problem:

W	Partner	E	You
		1NT	Pass
4NT	Pass	6NT	Pass
Pass	Pass		

South (You) ♠T96 ♥Q63 ♦65 ♣J8432
--

What would you lead?

Neither opponent showed any signs of a long suit. Therefore, there's no reason to go aggressive – instead, lead something passive. ♠10 seems like the most passive lead. Against 6NT, you should rarely lead away from an honour as you don't really need to set up a suit. A fourth-best club lead may give declarer his twelfth trick. The full deal:

A club lead here will give declarer his twelfth trick with the ♣10. On a passive spade lead, declarer will have trouble finding his twelfth trick as he will probably only take three spades, two hearts, three diamonds, and three clubs for eleven tricks.

E/Nil	♠ 85432 ♥ T974 ♦ KT9 ♣ 9										
♠ AK7 ♥ A82 ♦ A843 ♣ Q75	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ QJ ♥ KJ5 ♦ QJ72 ♣ AKT6
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠ T96 ♥ Q63 ♦ 65 ♣ J8432										

SHOULD I LEAD PARTNER'S SUIT?

You should almost always lead your partner's suit unless you have a very good reason not to. For example:

W	N	E	S
4♥	1♠ Pass	2♥ Pass	Pass Pass

South

♠74 ♥J75 ♦K543 ♣9853

Here, there's nothing more attractive than a spade lead. Not only is it partner's suit, but we have a doubleton so on a good day, partner has ♠AKxxx and we get a third round ruff!

Another example:

W	N	E	S
2♠	1♥ Pass	1♠ 4♠	2♥ End

South

♠K94 ♥Q75 ♦3 ♣J98753

Although it would be OK to lead a heart here, but the singleton diamond is much more attractive. Additionally, our ♠K will likely prevent declarer from drawing all of our trumps, and once we get in with the ♠K, we can switch to a heart so partner can give us a diamond ruff!

Next example:

W	N	E	S
3♣	1♦ Pass	X 3NT	Pass End

South

♠J765 ♥J52 ♦976 ♣753


What would you lead?

You may be considering between a spade or a diamond, and looking at the auction, you may be persuaded by East's 3NT bid (promising a diamond stopper) and end up deciding on a spade.

However, don't be dissuaded from the opponent's 3NT bid – just because they are promising a stopper doesn't mean the diamond suit has no future, in fact, it could be the *only way* to defeat the contract.

Imagine if this was the full layout:

Contract: ♠ Q 10
3NT/E ♥ A 9 4
♦ Q J 10 8 2
♣ Q J 4

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

♠ J 7 6 5
♥ J 5 2
♦ 9 7 6
♣ 7 5 3

Despite E/W holding two diamond stoppers, a diamond lead was required to defeat the contract as declarer does not have enough *time* to set up the clubs *and* to set up a heart.

You can visualise the play: Declarer wins the diamond lead with the ♦K and plays ♣A, ♣K and a club to North's ♣Q who continues with another diamond. All North needs to do now is to wait to get in with the ♥A to cash the now established diamond winners.

A spade lead however will only set up one spade winner for us, whilst declarer has all the time in the world to set up the

clubs, as well as the hearts.

Another example:

W	N	E	S	
3NT	1♠ Pass	1NT Pass	Pass Pass	South ♠4 ♥KT753 ♦543 ♣8632

What would you lead?

Should you lead partner's suit, or your own suit? This will now highly depend on whether your suit (and your hand) has potential or not. Here, with our hearts headed by the *king*, despite having no other entries to your hand, it would be best to lead a heart. If partner has ♥Axx, we can *duck* the second round of hearts to keep communication, and even if partner has ♥QJx, the opponents may only be able to hold up one round (i.e. they have ♥Ax doubleton).

Although we now know to not be dissuaded from the opponent's 1NT bid, when we only have a singleton spade, this dramatically increases the likelihood that they will have at least a double (sometimes triple) spade stopper!

Note that holding the ♥K was an important factor in making our opening lead decision. If our hand were instead: ♠4 ♥J9752 ♦543 ♣8632 then you should fall back on a spade lead, on the logic that it would be unlikely you will be able to get back to your hand (i.e. opponent can hold up two rounds with ♥Axx).

Summary

- Trump Leads: In general, steer away from trump leads! But:
 - Lead a trump if opponents have a 'crawling' auction with not much to spare
 - Lead a trump if responder gives preference to opener's *second* suit
- Leading vs. a small slam
 - Vs. suit slam: Lead aggressively
 - Vs. 6NT: Lead passively
- It is OK to lead partner's suit (often it's the winning lead) even if the opponents have announced a stopper(s) in that suit
- If you have a singleton in partner's suit, and a strong-ish 5-card suit of your own (headed by the ace or king), then you can consider leading your own suit

Board Analysis - Expert Tips on Opening Leads

Board 1
North Deals
None Vul

♠ K 4
♥ A K Q 6 5 2
♦ 10 5 3
♣ 7 6

♠ Q J 3 2
♥ 7 4
♦ 7 4
♣ A J 10 5 2

N
W E
S

♠ A 10 9 8
♥ 10 9 8
♦ Q 9 2
♣ Q 9 3

♠ 7 6 5
♥ J 3
♦ A K J 8 6
♣ K 8 4

West	North	East	South
	1 ♥	Pass	2 ♦
Pass	2 ♥	Pass	4 ♥
All pass			

Lead: ♣ 3.

South has responded 2 ♦, so there's a good chance that declarer can use the diamonds as a source of tricks. Between spades and clubs, East does best to avoid leading an unsupported ace, so ♣ 3 is probably best.

Play: On the ♣ 3 lead, West will finesse against dummy's ♣ K and switch to a spade.

Board 3
South Deals
E-W Vul

♠ 5
♥ J 8 6 4 3
♦ J 5 3
♣ K J 9 6

♠ K Q J 6
♥ Q 9 5 2
♦ K 7 2
♣ 8 7

N
W E
S

♠ 10 4 2
♥ K 10 7
♦ A 8 6
♣ Q 10 5 2

♠ A 9 8 7 3
♥ A
♦ Q 10 9 4
♣ A 4 3

West	North	East	South
	1 NT	Pass	1 ♠
Pass	1 NT	Pass	2 ♦
All pass			

Lead: ♦ 2.

North prefers the diamonds, and West has South's spades covered. The only way the contract can be made is if West *doesn't* lead a trump, which allows declarer to ruff a couple of spades in dummy.

Board 2
East Deals
N-S Vul

♠ 6 3 2
♥ A 8 6
♦ J 10 7
♣ A Q 8 6

♠ 4
♥ 10 9 4 2
♦ Q 9 6 2
♣ K J 5 4

N
W E
S

♠ A K J 9 5
♥ K Q J 7 3
♦ K 5
♣ 2

♠ Q 10 8 7
♥ 5
♦ A 8 4 3
♣ 10 9 7 3

West	North	East	South
	Pass	1 ♠	Pass
1 NT	Pass	3 ♥	Pass
4 ♥	All pass		

Lead: ♥ 5.

South has potential trick(s) in East's main suit, spades, and with West supporting the hearts, it is not a surprise that West is short in spades. South can reduce those ruffs by leading a trump.

Play: On a trump lead, North can play ♥ A and a heart. Declarer can win, cash ♠ A and ruff a spade, but he will have trouble getting back to his hand to ruff another spade.

Board 4
West Deals
Both Vul

♠ Q 10 9 8
♥ 10 9 7
♦ 8 7 4 2
♣ 7 4

♠ K J 5 3
♥ A 6 4
♦ Q 6
♣ A J 9 5

N
W E
S

♠ A 7
♥ K J 5
♦ A J 10 9
♣ K Q 10 3

♠ 6 4 2
♥ Q 8 3 2
♦ K 5 3
♣ 8 6 2

West	North	East	South
1 NT	Pass	6 NT	All pass

Lead: ♥ 10.

Against 6 NT, with no one showing any long suit, North should lead as passive as he can. The ♠ 10 can be dangerous as it might give declarer his 12th trick (and it does). The ♥ 10 is the safest lead here.

Play: On a heart lead, declarer will likely go down with all of the finesses losing.

Board Analysis - Expert Tips on Opening Leads

Board 5
North Deals
N-S Vul

♠ A
♥ J 10 9 4
♦ Q 8 5 3 2
♣ K 7 4

♠ J 8 5
♥ A 8 3
♦ J 10 6
♣ Q 10 8 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K Q 9 7 6 2
♥ Q 6
♦ A 7
♣ A 9 5

♠ 10 4 3
♥ K 7 5 2
♦ K 9 4
♣ J 6 3

West	North	East	South
	Pass	1 ♠	Pass
2 ♠	Pass	3 ♠	Pass
4 ♠	All pass		

Lead: ♠ 3.

N/S's auction doesn't sound very promising as it looks like they have both stretched to reach a thin game. South has scattered honours in all suits, so it's best to not give anything away by leading a passive trump. Let declarer take the finesses by himself.

Board 7
South Deals
Both Vul

♠ J 9 2
♥ J 8 4
♦ 9 4
♣ K Q 10 9 2

♠ K 8 3
♥ Q 6 3
♦ 10 8 7 6 3 2
♣ 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 6
♥ A K 10 9 7 2
♦ A 5
♣ 8 7 6 4

♠ A Q 10 7 5 4
♥ 5
♦ K Q J
♣ A J 3

West	North	East	South
			1 ♠
Pass	2 ♠	3 ♥	4 ♠
All pass			

Lead: ♣ 5. Whilst the ♥ 3 is OK given East bid them, West can still play a heart given that he will likely get back in with the ♠ K.

Play: Declarer wins the club in dummy and tries the spade finesse. When West wins ♠ K, a heart switch will allow East to win and play a club!

Board 6
East Deals
E-W Vul

♠ 7 5
♥ 10 9 8 3
♦ Q 8 6 4
♣ A 6 2

♠ Q J 10 8 6 2
♥ K Q
♦ A J 10 3
♣ 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A K 9 4
♥ A J
♦ 5 2
♣ K Q J 10 9

♠ 3
♥ 7 6 5 4 2
♦ K 9 7
♣ 8 7 4 3

West	North	East	South
		1 ♣	Pass
1 ♠	Pass	4 ♠	Pass
4 NT	Pass	5 ♥	Pass
6 ♠	All pass		

Lead: ♦ 4. Vs. a suit slam, you generally want to lead aggressively. The ♣ A, whilst it is aggressive, it is *too* aggressive! The idea is, you want to try to set up your second trick before taking your first trick. As North can see that the ♣ A is the "1st trick", the best he can do is to lead a diamond, hoping partner has the ♦ K, to build up that "2nd trick" before the 1st trick is taken.

Board 8
West Deals
None Vul

♠ K 8 6
♥ A K 7
♦ K Q 10
♣ A K 5 2

♠ Q 7 2
♥ Q J 10 8 3
♦ A J 5
♣ Q 9

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 9 4 3
♥ 6 5
♦ 8 4 2
♣ J 10 7 6 4

♠ A J 10 5
♥ 9 4 2
♦ 9 7 6 3
♣ 8 3

West	North	East	South
1 ♥	Dbl	Pass	1 ♠
Pass	2 NT	Pass	3 NT
All pass			

Bidding: North's X-then-jump-to-2NT shows 21-22 HCP.

Lead: ♥ 6. With West having all of the defensive assets, East should try to set up partner's suit, even if North has shown a very strong balanced hand.