There is no doubt defense is the most difficult part of bridge. When you are declaring a contract, you get to see the dummy before playing to the first trick. You have a decided advantage since only you are able to see the combined assets for your side. Not so if you are defending. You cannot see the combined assets for your side (or their side); you have to visualize hidden hands before making the opening lead. More on this later

I plan to cover the following topics (and sub-topics), probably one per class, starting with the “Opening Lead”.

1. Opening Lead
2. Signaling
   - Attitude, count and suit preference, in that order
   - Trump Suit Preference
   - “Present” count and “Present” leads
   - Unusual carding
3. Types of defense
   - Active
   - Neutral
   - Passive
4. Defensive plays:
   - What is the declarer up to?
   - Improve partner’s defense
   - Ducking or holdup plays
   - Cash-out situations
   - Unblocking plays
   - Surrounding plays
   - Discarding
   - Deceptive plays
   - Killing the dummy
   - Frozen suits
5. Winning options and losing options
6. Trump promotion
7. Ruff and discard
8. Unusual or desperate defense
Part 2 – Defensive signals

The correct order of defensive signals is Attitude first, and then Count with Suit Preference coming last.

Attitude Signals

1. Attitude signal either encourages or discourages the suit led. Using “Upside Down Count and Attitude” (UDCA), a low card encourages and a high card discourages but there is no hard and fast dividing line between encouraging and discouraging cards. A 7 could be encouraging and a 4 discouraging! It all depends on what you see in dummy, what is in your hand and the card that the declarer plays on that trick. You must evaluate partner’s signal based on what you know. It will help you defend better.

2. When partner leads a suit, giving attitude may be important to partner but again, depending on what you see in dummy your carding may be count or suit preference. More on that later.

3. When you cannot follow suit, a discard from another suit also shows attitude. This allows partner to figure out where you don’t have anything and by inference where your values should be (if that is even possible based on the bidding).

4. If you discourage in the suit led, the card you throw may have suit preference connotations if attitude is irrelevant. The same is true for your discards. A low discard may be suit preference if you can only have worthless cards in that suit.

5. If partner leads an honor, she usually promises the next lower honor. Therefore, your attitude signal is for a higher honor, or for the lower honor just below what partner has promised. For example, partner leads a king, it asks for attitude for the ace (or the jack). If you have neither, give count. An exception occurs when dummy has one or two cards in that suit (or dummy has length). Then again, your carding is probably suit preference.

6. You can also encourage without holding any honor cards in that suit if you want partner to keep leading that suit. Dummy’s holding may make it obvious to partner that you don’t have any higher honor in that suit but want the suit continued.

7. For example, you may have doubleton in that suit and wish to ruff the 3rd round. Using UDCA, play the lowest card to encourage partner to continue the suit and obtain a ruff later. This works well if partner leads an ace (A from AK) or king (from KQ or KQJ) but not so much if partner starts with the queen (usually from QJ10). Then, the chances of getting a ruff on the 3rd round are pretty remote.
8. You may also give attitude because you want partner to cash out all the winners in that suit, and go on to the next hand! Those are the only tricks you think the defense has on that hand.

9. **Encouraging attitude** can also be shown by **dropping an honor** under partner’s honor. For example, in the middle of the hand, partner is about to win a trick with the ace; you should drop the king if you have KQJ(xx) (three touching honors, or more). You should discard the same way by throwing away the king from KQJ(xx).

10. The same type of plays can be made from QJ10(xx). For example, declarer plays the ace, drop the Q to tell partner you *don’t have the king* but you do have J10(xx).

11. You don’t need three touching honors if partner’s plays the ace when defending against a trump contract. You can drop the queen from QJ(x) or singleton Q. The assumption is that you have agreed to lead ace from AK so partner’s ace promised the king. You tell partner that she has a way to get to your hand by leading low to your jack (or you ruff) if and when necessary. Partner may desire a switch to another suit. As you may imagine, the card partner returns to your jack carries a suit preference connotation so that you know the correct return.

12. The same play of dropping the queen should be made if declarer plays a card off dummy and partner plays the king. Your queen tells partner that you also have the jack (and probably the 10).
Count Signals

1. Looking at dummy and/or based on the bidding, if attitude is irrelevant and partner will know, give count. Otherwise, your carding may confuse partner and your defensive prospects may suffer.

   For example, partner leads the ace or the king and dummy has two or three small cards then attitude is relevant and you must show it.

   But if dummy has Qxx then you must give count, which essentially tells partner whether her king is cashable. Partner may not play the king right away but at least she can count it as a defensive trick later.

   If your count tells partner that declarer has singleton, then partner will not try to cash the king but switch to something else that looks safe.

   In the next section, we will see how your carding is suit preference if dummy is strong in the suit partner leads. In the same example as above, partner leads the ace and dummy has KQ(x). Then, both attitude and count is irrelevant; suit preference takes precedence.

2. Playing UDCA, a low card shows an even number, 2 or 4 usually.

3. A higher card shows 3 or 5.

4. It is not possible to show a singleton by playing a specific card.

5. When the declarer (or dummy) leads a suit, it is also customary to give count. However, there may be situations where partner knows you have values in that suit (or you should), then attitude comes first.

   Count signal is very important from partner’s point of view in many instances; it allows her to figure out declarer’s holding in that suit and may hold-up winning a trick, for example, until the declarer (or dummy) is out.

   Your count signal may also help partner to win a trick immediately and switch to another suit to help the defense.

   Sometimes count signal simply allows partner to figure out declarer’s distribution in that suit, and by inference, the rest of his hand. Similarly, it also allows partner to figure out the rest of your hand.
"Present" Count and "Present" Leads

I strongly recommend that you follow your carding methods based on what you presently see in your hand (not what you started with). For example, do not follow the advice you may have heard, “To continue a suit that was led before, lead the original 4th best”. Really? That is a lot more difficult to do than play a card based on what you see in your hand.

Suit Preference Signals

1. These are the most misused or misunderstood signals in bridge. Even if you knew that the card partner played carries suit preference connotation, it is still up to you. If you win a trick later, it is still up to your to decide what to do. That decision may depend on what you see in your hand and the dummy. You may decide not to return the suit that partner suggested.

2. If both attitude and count are irrelevant, any card you play will carry suit preference connotation.

   a. A low card means partner can safely return the lower of the two remaining suits (exclude trumps and the suit being played at that time).

   b. A higher card says, partner can lead the higher of the two suits.

   c. Please note that partner sometimes has to figure out your reason for wanting a particular suit returned.

      i. Your suit preference signal does not guarantee that you have a winner in that suit. You may have picked one suit over the other purely based on safety. Return of the other suit is bad for the defense.

      ii. Based on the bidding, partner may know, or should know, that you can’t have any points; therefore, you are not showing attitude or count in the suit that is led.

      iii. Sometimes, you want a particular suit returned because you are short in that suit and are in a position to ruff the 2nd round. For example, partner plays ace and another for you to score a ruff. Rank of the card you just ruffed tells you which suit to return. After you return that suit, partner may win that ace and give you a second ruff.

      iv. Even if partner does not have the ace, she may be able to get back in later, and give you that second ruff.
3. Trump suit preference is gaining popularity. It helps the defense when your partner is enlightened enough to play it well. What I mean is that there are several pre-requisites before you can use trumps as suit preference.

   a. You need more than one trump! And partner should know that you probably have more than one trump.

   b. They need to be small. If you have a doubleton honor, that may be a winning trick later; you are not going to follow suit with that honor just to show suit preference for a higher side suit.

   c. Partner must be reasonably sure that you have points. Then, your trump suit preference will mean something useful because she can place where in your hand, some of those missing points should be.

   d. If you are not supposed to have any values (partner will know it too based on the bidding), then use your small trumps to show relative length in the side suits; low to show longer lower suit, high to show longer higher suit. This will be important to partner who may come under pressure having to make discards!

   e. Even if partner takes it the other way, it may be that you showed which suit is safe for partner to return, if needed.

   f. My recommendation is NOT to play the old advice of “Trump Echo”, which is similar to Upside Down Count (high trump shows three trumps, low trump shows two or four).
Unusual Carding Situations

1. None of these guidelines are true 100% of the time (but when it comes to bridge, what is?)

2. Defending against NT, if partner leads the king and you are looking at the queen in your hand, you should drop it under partner’s king. Why would partner lead the king without the queen? She probably has AKJ10(x)! If you don’t have the queen, give count.

3. The same is true about the lead of the queen without the jack; partner should have the KQ109(x). You are expected to drop the jack if you have it; otherwise, give count.

4. Leading an ace against NT is also a strong lead but there is no guarantee that partner led from a strong suit. It could be a short suit lead trying to establish winners in your hand or it could be from a long suit headed by AK. When dummy comes down, you have to figure that out. If you drop the queen under partner’s ace, you promise the jack (you may also have the 10).

5. Defending against NT, if you can’t beat the card played from the dummy (usually a honor), give count. Failure to beat dummy’s card pretty much denies any higher honor in your hand.

6. During the play, if you lead a higher looking spot card in any suit, you discourage it. By contrast, if you lead low, partner will assume you do not have any objection if partner returns that suit later. The only exception occurs when you know that partner knows that you can’t have any points.

7. Based on what you see in dummy, both attitude and count may become irrelevant. Then give suit preference if partner knows you have a few points.

8. Do not signal with a card that could cost you a trick. It doesn’t matter whether you are giving attitude, count or suit preference. This may seem obvious but I have seen players throw the jack to discourage (playing UDCA) only to find out they have lost a trick! It is worse if you play standard signals; if you throw the 9 to encourage, you may have lost a defensive trick. This is another reason why UDCA is superior.

9. Playing UDCA, the 2nd card you play is always suit preference. You play the 8 to discourage from 862. Partner knows you have two cards lower than the 8 and can probably figure out which ones! Playing the 6 on the second round will be suit preference for the higher suit and the 2 for the lower suit.

10. Please note that if attitude is important, and partner knows it, then you may have to play the 8 from 862 (don’t like it) or the 2 (like it). What you see in dummy is usually a good indicator whether attitude is relevant.
Defensive signals – Extra Tidbits

Uncertainty runs rampant in Bridge. Even the pros don’t know how to handle hands that come up daily and bidding sequences that leave them guessing what to do. However, defensive signaling should never be one of those uncertain situations. Both you and your partner ought to know which signal is relevant in any situation: Attitude, Count or Suit Preference. You ought to be able to trust partner’s signals, and partner should be able to count on yours.

- It is strongly recommended to always signal on the opening lead.
- In the middle of the hand, there may be some justification for false-carding. In other words, it is not always appropriate to signal honestly, especially with a strong defensive hand.
- It is not mandatory to follow your partner’s signals if you think leading that suit is not safe, or there is no benefit to the defense, in the context of the whole hand.
- It is generally profitable to signal as much as possible against less experienced players. Against good players, you may false-card on occasion provided your partner is not going to be confused.
- Although not absolutely necessary, when giving Upside Down Count from four small, it may be better to signal 2\textsuperscript{nd} lowest then 3\textsuperscript{rd} lowest (second from top) suggesting to partner that you started with four.
- By contrast, signaling with the two lowest cards should, in theory, promise a small doubleton, not four small.
- UDCA is recommended for one more reason: It reduces the possibility of false carding by the declarer, making your signal more clear to partner.
- Defending against slam contracts, it makes sense to forget attitude signals since you are not likely to defeat the contract by several tricks. Giving count is more important against slams. However, it may even be better to keep the declarer in the dark as to how the side suits are breaking. In other words, don’t always give count signal unless (or except)
  - It is going to help partner more than the declarer. For example, partner is able to decide which suit to discard (or hold on to).
  - When following suit to partner’s opening lead.
  - If partner is going to win the trick.
- It doesn’t always work out this way, but if partner discards in the suit she led initially, chances are she does not want that suit returned if you ever win a trick later. Maybe there is another suit more useful to the defense.