Tips for Defense

Defense is considered the hardest part of bridge because you don’t know the full strength of the partnership. Here are some general guidelines that may help you improve your game.

- **Opening Lead**—This is your side’s advantage as you get the first “salvo”
  There are many books on the topic. Generally, lead your partners suit it s/he bid.
  Lead the top of a 3 card or longer sequence against no trump. Do not lead an unsupported Ace. Do not underlead an Ace in a suit contract. Lead 4th best of longest and strongest against notrump. Lead trump if it sounds like the opponents don’t really have a good fit.

- **Counting**. Now that dummy has faced her/his cards you must plan just like declarer.
  Start by counting points. The bidding should give you a good approximation of their points.
  Add your points and subtract from 40. This gives you an approximation of partner’s points. If partner can have only 2-3 points she doesn’t have the Ace you were hoping she had.

- **Count distribution**. Review the bidding. You should have a pretty reliable view of the distribution once dummy is faced.
  Example: Opener  Responder
  
  
  1♥  1♠
  2♦  3♦
  3NT  Pass
  
  Declarer is presumed to have five hearts and four diamonds. If partner’s lead (♣2, say) gives you a count in that suit, you will have a count on the hand at trick one!

- **Signals**. Be sure to agree with partner as to what kind of signals you are using. This is your way to communicate. Once you have agreed, be sure to look at partner’s discards.

- **When discarding**. Keep length parity with the dummy. If dummy has four cards in a suit (A-K-Q-8), and you have four cards (9-4-3-2) one of which (the 9) could conceivably take a trick, be careful about discarding from that suit. Don’t!

- **When there is a short side suit in dummy and declarer draws all of dummy’s trumps, the inference is that declarer doesn’t have any losers in that suit to ruff. Translation: It is safe to discard that suit.

- **When declarer ignores a strong suit in dummy lacking one honor, assume declarer has the honor. If he doesn’t, that would be the first suit he would be leading. If you see something like the K-Q-J-10-(x) or A-Q-J-10-(x) in dummy and declarer plays other suits, assume declarer has the missing honor.

- **When defending a suit contract, there are two main techniques declarer uses to garner extra tricks**: (1) setting up a long suit in dummy, (2) ruffing losers in the dummy. If dummy comes down with a long and a short suit and you have the long suit blocked, lead trumps because the long suit is not usable. If it appears that the long suit is usable, play an attacking defense going for outside tricks quickly. If the dummy comes down balanced, declarer has no place to get rid of losers and will eventually lose them, therefore you and partner should adopt a passive defense. Avoid breaking new suits if possible. Let them have what they have coming. Sit back and wait for your tricks.

- **The best time to lead a short suit is with trump control. A-x-(x) or K-x-x are great trump holdings to lead from shortness. However, if ruffing will cost you a trump trick, leads from shortness with trump holdings such as J-10-x-x, Q-J-9-x or K-Q-9-x are counter productive.**