Leading against a suit contract

When leading against a suit contract you need to decide whether you make an 'active lead' or a 'passive lead'. Unlike leading against no trumps, leading your long suit might not be helpful.

Active leads are leading from a king or a queen or leading an ace.

A passive lead is leading a trump, a suit head by an honour sequence or a suit the opponents have bid.

In a suit contract declarer has two ways to get rid of their losers: trump them in dummy or discarding them on a side suit.

If you think declarer is going to ruff in dummy – lead a trump. If they are going draw trumps then run a side suit, make an active lead.

Which suit to lead?

Here are some things to consider when deciding which suit to lead.

- What clues are there from the bidding? Did they stagger into game? Did they avoid no trumps indicating a weakness in one suit?
- Did partner bid?
- Do you have a short suit?
- What is your trump holding? Do you have a natural trump trick? Do you have small trumps that can be used for ruffing?
- Do you have a sequence headed by an honour? A perfect lead.

When to lead a trump

When declarer has bid two suits and dummy prefers the second

When you have winners in declarer's first bid suit, lead a trump to protect your winners.

West - You	**North**	**East**	**South**
			1S
Pass	1NT	Pass	2H

You hold: AJ98, 862, A93, JT6.

Dummy is likely to have shortage in spades and probably three card heart support. Lead a heart to cut down dummy's ruffing potential.

Partner passes your take out double

When partner passes your one-level take out double, they are showing length and strength in the opponent's suit.

West - You	North	East	South
			1H
Double	All pass		

You hold: KQ93, 42, AJ83, QT5.

Lead a heart. Partner should have really good hearts, something like QJT97 or KJT964.

Your side has most of the points yet they have the contract

West - You	North	East	South
		1NT	2S
3NT	4S	Double	All pass

You hold: 52, AJ5, Q983, K943.

When you have the balance of points, where are declarer's tricks going to come from? Most likely they will have a distributional hand with a void or singleton and lots of trumps with which to ruff and cross ruff.

Lead a trump to cut down dummy's ruffing power.

Dummy makes a single raise and you have honours in every other suit

West - You	North	East	South
			1S
Pass	2S	All pass	

You hold: 942, AT8, Q743, KT3.

From the bidding you know that dummy does not have a strong hand and is likely to have three trumps and probably a side suit doubleton. In the absence of a sequence or a short suit lead, lead a trump.

When not to lead a trump

When the opponents have a misfit

West - You	North	East	South
			1S
Pass	1NT	Pass	2S
Pass	3D	Pass	3S
All pass			

You hold: J86, K843, A72, JT8.

Dummy is likely to have a trump void and partner may have a spade honour. Lead the jack of clubs.

When dummy has a threatening side suit plus trump support

West - You	North	East	South
			1S
Pass	2C	Pass	2S
Pass	4S	All pass	

When dummy has shown a long suit it is likely that declarer will use that suit to discard their losers in hand. This calls for an attacking lead. If you have the choice between two suits and one of those suits is headed by the ace lead the suit without the ace.

If you know declarer cannot set up the long suit in dummy (because you have a strong holding in that suit) lead a trump to cut down dummy's ruffing ability (with a long suit they are also likely to have a short suit).

When you have a short suit

Leading from a short suit can be a good lead when you have a trump entry and a trump suit that looks like Ax, Axx, Axx, Kxx or Kxxx (the trump entry is to try to get back into partner's hand so partner can give you a ruff).

Don't lead a short suit if you will have to ruff with a natural trump trick; for example, your trump holding is KQT, QJT or JTxx.

Against a freely bid 4S contract you hold: A65, 92, Q743, JT43. Lead the 9H.

When partner is marked with a short suit

When the bidding suggests partner has a short suit lead that suit.

West - You	North	East	South
			1D
Pass	2D	Pass	2S
Pass	3D	Pass	3S
Pass	4S		

You hold: A, J9432, 832, A942. South has shown 6 diamonds so partner must have a diamond void. Lead the 2 of diamonds asking for a club return.

When you opponents have avoided no trumps

When the opponents have looked for no trumps but end up playing in a minor suit contract because of a weakness in one suit, lead that suit!

When partner has bid

When partner has bid, particularly when they have overcalled, lead their suit unless you have a good suit of your own, like AKQx, KQJx or AKJx.

When partner has not overcalled

When the bidding shows that partner must have some values and they had the opportunity to overcall at the one level but did not, partner's strength must be in another suit.

West - You	North	East	South
	1D		1H
Pass	2H	Pass	3H
Pass	4H	All pass	

You hold: T84, T52, 9432, K84.

Partner has not overcalled spades so their strength must be in the minors. Lead a club.

Which card to lead

Leading the correct card in a suit helps partner work out where the missing honours in the suit are and how many cards you might have in the suit led. Be consistent by using these standard leads:

Any two cards - lead the higher card, known as 'top of a doubleton'.

Three cards headed by one honour - lead low, unless the honour is the ace (maybe find another suit to lead if you hold an unsupported ace).

Three small cards in an unbid suit – can either lead 'top of nothing' or 'MUD' middle, up down. Top of nothing is simplest but could be confusing with a doubleton.

Four or more cards headed by an honour (or two non-consecutive honours) - lead fourth highest.

Touching honours – top of touching honours; eg., king from KQxx, queen from QJxx etc.

Suits headed by AK – can lead either the ace or the king, subject to partnership agreement. Since leading the king can show KQ, leading the ace is simplest.

These notes are taken from the excellent book *Eddie Kantar Teaches Modern Bridge Defence* by Eddie Kantar (1999).