

Winning Bridge Leads

By Neil H. Timm

One of the most important and hardest tasks in the game of Bridge is the Lead. This Bridge Bit sets out some simple Rules you must remember.

Leads depend on the contract: Notrump; Suits; Slams; and No fit

No Trump Leads playing 15-17

In general you want to make an aggressive lead when playing in notrump. However, the bidding may determine the lead!

In General:

1. Partner has bid a suit. You should then lead his suit, low from and honor or top of nothing.
2. Your long suit is one the opponents have bid. You should choose your longest unbid suit or a suit dummy has bid, lead through strength.
3. Your long suit has three or more touching honors (KQJx, QJ10x, AQJ10x, J109x, etc.). You should lead the top honor to be sure you force declarer to win with the highest card possible. DO NOT lead 4th best.
4. Leading from three cards is better than leading from four cards with a weak hand.
5. When leading a unbid suit at notrump with four cards not headed by an honor, it is too misleading to lead low which shows strength. It is better to lead your highest or next highest card. If your highest card is an eight or lower, lead high. If your highest card is a nine or a ten, lead your second highest card. Lead the 8 from 8543, but lead the 6 from 9642. Lead the 7 from 10732 if you want another suit returned.

If the bidding has gone 1NT-3NT, only lead 4th best major with a 5-card major suit; otherwise ALWAYS lead your shortest major even if you have a 4-card major. Yes, and even if you have a 5-card minor. This also applies if the opponents are playing in 1NT.

If the bidding goes (a) 1x-1y-3NT lead through strength, the highest card in the your bid suit, and if it goes (b) 1y-3NT, also lead through the y suit bid with your highest card. If you are on the other side of NT bidder, lead low from an unbid suit or a doubleton.

If the opponents have transferred into a major after 1NT, lead the other major.

If the bidding goes 1M-1NT, lead the other major.

The bidding has got 1NT-2NT-3NT or 2NT- 3NT, make a passive lead. Never lead 4th best.

Against 6NT, be passive by leading spot cards. Never lead away from A, K, or Q and do not lead a sequence with touching honors.

A/K/Q leads against NT

A/Q asks for **Attitude** (with Ace leads we are looking for the Queen – best to unblock, but do not unblock with a Queen lead).

K leads asks for **count**. The King lead is usually from a broken sequence (KQJ.., KQ10..), or a strong suit headed by the ace and king (e.g., AKJ10, AKJ93, AKQ104). It asks you to unblock any high honor.

Lead of the jack against NT

The jack is usually the top of a sequence, with nothing higher. The jack may also be led from QJ9.., asking partner to play the 10 if he has it. When partner cannot see the 10, he will think the lead is from a jack-high sequence.

Lead of the 10 against NT

The 10 lead usually shows strength: an interior sequence headed by the jack or 10, or a QJ10 sequence. It can also be the right lead from (e.g. AQJ10, KJ10.., AJ10.., AQ109.., AK109.., K109.., A109.., Q109.., QJ10.., AQJ10.., etc.)

Lead of the 9 against NT

Shows no higher honor.

Leads of the 7/8 against NT

Usually either 4th best or worthless sequence

Note if you lead 4th best the opponents will use the Rule of 11, giving them information. Better to lead 3rd best, even though they may use the rule of 12. If you lead 5th best, they can use the rule of 10. For these rules they subtract the spot lead from 11 (4th), 12 (3rd), or 10 (5th).

Suit Leads

In general you want to make a passive lead when playing in a suit contract. However, the bidding may again determine the lead!

In General:

1. Lead a singleton or doubleton, even if partner has bid a suit.

2. Lead a suit the opponents have not bid.
3. If all suits have been bid, lead through strength.
4. Your long suit has three or more touching honors (KQJx, QJ10x, AQJ10x, J109x, etc.). Lead top honor.
5. If partner has bid, lead low from three and high from two.
6. Do not lead from A, K, or Q; instead lead a trump. And with three trumps, lead low holding the Ace of trump.

If the bidding has gone 1M-2M-4M or 1M-4M, lead an unsupported ace. And do not lead away from an honor, lead trump. Or lead a singleton or doubleton. With Kx or Qx in a suit, lead low – more likely to find partner with an honor.

If the opponents have splintered and reached game, lead your weakest side suit. Do not lead trump.

Leads against a major part score 1M-2M. Lead top of sequence but prefer a singleton lead to a sequence lead. Lead trump instead of leading away from an honor. With Qxx lead low, or lead high from a worthless doubleton.

If the opponents have sacrificed, it is best to lead partners suit, NOT the OPPONENTS.

Leads against Suit Slams

Be **passive** not aggressive, side suit singletons are best. But do not lead a singleton with a natural trump trick.

In match points lead an ace, but not in IMPS; do not lead an ace if the opponents have indicated a side suit ace. Better to lead a worthless doubleton.

Only lead a trump, when any other lead forces you to lead away from an A, K, or Q.

An Ace lead is less likely to gain two tricks in the suit if the opponents used cue bidding to reach their slam, more like if Blackwood was used.

Only be aggressive with touching sequence honor leads (QJxx, KQx, AJ109xx, etc.).

Trump Leads

Never lead trump if the opponents have a misfit or partner is marked with a singleton.

Lead trump with a strong trump sequence (KQJ, QJ109), or to avoid leading away from A, K, or Q in all other suits.

In general trump leads are poor leads.

The above recommendations are based on the findings in two books and based upon over 100,000 simulations of bridge hands. The books are by David Bird and Taf Anthias, published by Master Point Press: “Winning Notrump Leads” and “Winning Suit Contract Leads” published in 2011 and 2012, respectively.