

A Brief Discussion on Signalling Methods

On defense, you do get to see dummy, but you have the disadvantage that you do not know all of your side's assets and you need to coordinate with your partner. One of the ways in which we communicate on defense is through signalling. Much like in the auction we are primarily trying to tell partner about our hand.

First and foremost we are going to try to play a card that will help us win the trick. That is most commonly an honor, so we reserve honors for being played because they are efforts to win the trick and do not signal with them.

Principle #1 Only signal with spot cards. Honors are too likely to win tricks on their own and should not be used for signalling purposes.

3 main signals:

1. Attitude
2. Count
3. Suit Preference

Upside Down vs Standard

Standard agreements for those 3 signals are:

Attitude - High then low = **encouraging**, low then high **discouraging**

Count - High then low = **even**, low then high = **odd**

Suit Preference - High then low = **higher** of suits other than the one being played, Low then high = **lower** of the suits other than the one being played

Upside down agreements simply reverse all of those meanings.

Attitude - High then low = **Discouraging**, low then high **encouraging**

Count - High then low = **odd**, low then high = **even**

Suit Preference - High then low = **lower** of suits other than the one being played, Low then high = **higher** of the suits other than the one being played

Almost everyone uses standard suit preference. Most players use upside down attitude. Players seem to be divided on whether to use standard or upside down count.

The benefits of upside down attitude are relatively easy to see. From KQ92 we would rather keep the 9 than the 2. From 7653 we don't really care which cards we keep so the 7 is as easy to surrender as the 3.

You'll note that in all of the above signals we are using the size of the card in order to convey the meaning. Quite often that is ambiguous and hard for partner to read until the second card is played. This leads us to our second principle,

Principle #2 Make the clearest signal for your partner. From 7632 discard the 7 to show a high signal and the 2 to show a low signal. Do not signal with the 6 or 3 unless you do not have something clear to say. Be wary of signalling with cards that might be useful (typically in suits with 4 or more cards) so from 9632 signal with the 6 rather than 9.

In order to give information more rapidly to partner people have tried to come up with systems that can enable you to make a clear signal with only 1 card.

Odd/Even discarding

This uses the value of the card to convey a signal. Odd = Encouraging, Even = discouraging. (As a fringe benefit the even card can also be used to convey suit preference if you have a choice of even card)

The main pro to this is that I can give a clear signal in one play. Whereas when I am playing based on size the 3 from K32 is "high" and the 8 from K98 is "low". While the 3 is clearly odd and the 2 is clearly even.

The main downsides are you might not have an even or odd card in a suit (K97 or K42) and the card you are playing might be valuable for taking a trick later (K942) if you have to play an odd card.

On the whole, being able to make clear signals is very useful when you have something clear to say.

Lavinthal Discards

This assumes that when you are discarding a suit you don't like the suit. So your attitude is discouraging. This enables you to simultaneously give suit preference whenever you have more than one spot card in the suit you are discarding.

You can see that this is useful when discarding from say 864. You clearly don't care about this suit and can tell partner that and what other suit you have some cards in at the same time.

The pro to this is that you can rapidly give more than one piece of information.

The downside is that sometimes you like all of the suits you might discard and sometimes discarding from your worthless suit tells declarer how to play that suit.

Trump Suit Preference

When the opponents are leading trump, you rarely want to give your partner attitude or count. If you like the trump suit then life is already good and your partner rarely needs to know your count in the suit. Instead you can tell partner which of the other suits you like by playing your cards in the appropriate order.