

Eliminations and Endplays

A basic truth in card play is that it is always better for you if the opponents lead a suit first. There are several in which you are no better off, but none in which you are worse. Therefore, a good technique is to try and get the opponents to lead suits for you. When you can force them to do so, this is called an endplay.

The opponents are, of course, trying not to help you out. So their goal is to not lead suits that will help you. So the core of this technique is to remove all other options from the opponents and force them to help you out. A simple checklist for this approach is as follows:

1. Identify a suit that you want an opponent to lead
2. Remove all of their other options
3. Force that opponent on lead

That's the play process. The planning process usually requires you to identify the exit card before embarking on this strategy.

So when planning it's

1. Identify the opportunity
2. Locate the exit card
3. Eliminate their other options
4. Use the exit card

Here's a standard example:

North Deals
E-W Vul

♠ Q 10 3 2
♥ A 3 2
♦ Q 3 2
♣ 4 3 2

♥ Q

♠ A K J 5 4
♥ K 4
♦ J 5 4
♣ A K 5

4 ♠ by South

<i>Trick</i>	<i>Lead</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>4th</i>
1. W	♥ Q	?		

Won NS=0 EW=0

Step 1. Identify the opportunity. Spades, Hearts and Clubs either have no losers or you cannot do anything about them. However Diamonds are a classic. If you lead the suit you have to hope for something good to happen. If they lead the suit you have a trick 100% of the time.

Step 2. Locate the exit card. That's the small club.

Step 3. Remove their other options

North Deals
E-W Vul

♠ Q 10
♥ A 3
♦ Q 3 2
♣ 4 3 2

♠ 3
♠ 8 ♠ 9
♠ K

♠ J 5 4
♥ 4
♦ J 5 4
♣ A K 5

4 ♠ by South

<i>Trick</i>	<i>Lead</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>4th</i>
1. W	♥ Q	2	5	<u>K</u>
2. S	♠ A	6	2	7
3. S	♠ K	8	3	9

Won NS=3 EW=0

Remove the spades from their hands by drawing trump.

North Deals
E-W Vul

♠ Q 10
♥ —
♦ Q 3 2
♣ 4 3 2

♥ 3
♥ 10 ♥ 8
♠ 4

♠ J 5
♥ —
♦ J 5 4
♣ A K 5

4 ♠ by South

<i>Trick</i>	<i>Lead</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>4th</i>
1. W	♥ Q	2	5	<u>K</u>
2. S	♠ <u>A</u>	6	2	7
3. S	♠ <u>K</u>	8	3	9
4. S	♥ 4	7	<u>A</u>	6
5. N	♥ 3	8	♠ <u>4</u>	10

Won NS=5 EW=0

Remove the hearts from your hands by cashing the ♥ A and ruffing the last heart.

North Deals
E-W Vul

♠ Q 10
♥ —
♦ Q 3 2
♣ 4



♠ J 5
♥ —
♦ J 5 4
♣ 5

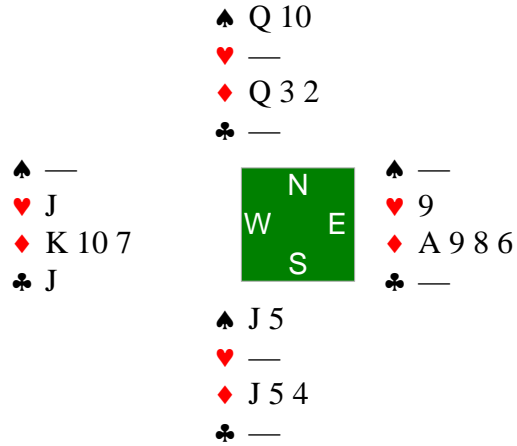
4 ♠ by South

<i>Trick</i>	<i>Lead</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>4th</i>
1. W	♥ Q	2	5	<u>K</u>
2. S	♠ <u>A</u>	6	2	7
3. S	♠ <u>K</u>	8	3	9
4. S	♥ 4	7	<u>A</u>	6
5. N	♥ 3	8	♠ <u>4</u>	10
6. S	♣ <u>A</u>	6	2	9
7. S	♣ <u>K</u>	7	3	10
8. S	?			

Won NS=7 EW=0

Next cash the ♣ AK and all of your winners are cashed and now you just need to force an opponent on lead. You can do this by exiting with a small club. Whoever wins the trick must either give you a ruff and sluff by leading a club or a heart of else give you a diamond trick by leading a diamond.

North Deals
E-W Vul



4 ♠ by South

<i>Trick</i>	<i>Lead</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>4th</i>
1. W	♥ Q	2	5	<u>K</u>
2. S	♠ <u>A</u>	6	2	7
3. S	♠ <u>K</u>	8	3	9
4. S	♥ 4	7	<u>A</u>	6
5. N	♥ 3	8	♠ <u>4</u>	10
6. S	♣ <u>A</u>	6	2	9
7. S	♣ <u>K</u>	7	3	10
8. S	♣ 5	8	4	<u>Q</u>

In this case East is forced to surrender the crucial 10th trick.

Suits that you want the opponents to lead come in two basic varieties, those in which either opponent leading is beneficial and those in which only one opponent's lead is helpful.

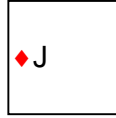
Examples of such suits include

AJx	Qxx	Kxx	xxx	J10x	KJx
KTx	Jxx	Jxx	Kxx	Axx	xxx

Board 1

West Deals
None Vul

♠ K 9 6 4
♥ Q 7
♦ K Q 6
♣ K J 10 3



♠ A Q 8 7 5 2
♥ 10 4
♦ 9 3
♣ A 6 2

<i>North</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♣	1 ♠
2 ♠	4 ♠
Pass	

4 ♠ by South

<i>Trick</i>	<i>Lead</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>4th</i>
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1. W	♦ J	?		
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Won NS=0 EW=0

You aren't in control yet, but it's still a good idea to think at trick 1. In this case you have 2 heart losers, 1 diamond loser and need to guess the clubs. Maybe the opponents will solve the club situation for you by leading it at trick 2!

Board 1

West Deals
None Vul

♠	K 9 6 4
♥	Q 7
♦	6
♣	K J 10 3

♦	K
♦	10 ♦ 2
♦	9

♠	A Q 8 7 5 2
♥	10 4
♦	—
♣	A 6 2

4 ♠ by South

<i>Trick</i>	<i>Lead</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>4th</i>
1. W	♦ J	Q	<u>A</u>	3
2. E	♦ 2	9	10	<u>K</u>

Won NS=1 EW=1

No such luck, but they didn't cash their heart winners, so you can still endplay the opponents by losing a trick.

1. Identify the opportunity

clubs

2. Locate the exit card

The heart suit

3. Eliminate the side cards

draw trump and then ruff the last diamond

4. Exit with your loser

Surrender your hearts

Board 1
 West Deals
 None Vul

♠ —	♠ 9 6	♠ —
♥ A J 9 6	♥ Q 7	♥ K 8 5 3
♦ 7	♦ —	♦ 5
♣ Q 8 5	♣ K J 10 3	♣ 9 7 4

♠ Q 8 7
♥ 4
♦ —
♣ A 6 2

<i>North</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♣	1 ♠
2 ♠	4 ♠
Pass	

4 ♠ by South

<i>Trick</i>	<i>Lead</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>4th</i>
1. W	♦ J	Q	<u>A</u>	3
2. E	♦ 2	9	10	<u>K</u>
3. N	♠ 4	10	<u>A</u>	3
4. S	♠ 2	J	<u>K</u>	♥ 2
5. N	♦ 6	4	<u>♠ 5</u>	8
6. S	♥ 10	-	-	-

No matter who wins this trick, they will be forced to eventually lead clubs or give you a ruff and sluff.

Board 2

East Deals

E-W Vul

♠ K 9 7 6 4

♥ 6 4

♦ J 7 3

♣ Q 8 2

♥ Q

♠ A J 10 8 3

♥ A 3

♦ Q 5 2

♣ A K 5

North

South

1 ♠

2 ♠

4 ♠

Pass

4 ♠ by South

<i>Trick</i>	<i>Lead</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>4th</i>
1. W	♥ Q	?		

Won NS=0 EW=0

First count your losers. 1 heart, 3 diamonds and possibly a spade.

Then notice the mirror distribution. In such cases there's no possibility of pitching any losers without help. Maybe there's an endplay?

1. Identify the opportunity

Diamonds

2. Locate the Exit card

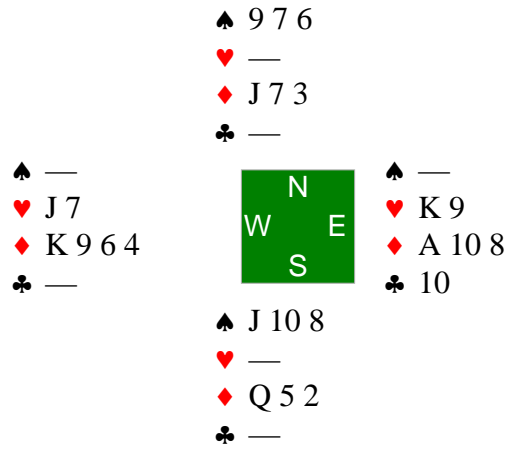
the small heart

3. Remove the other options

Draw trump, cash clubs.

4. Exit with the heart.

Board 2
 East Deals
 E-W Vul



<i>North</i>	<i>South</i>
2 ♠	1 ♠
Pass	4 ♠

4 ♠ by South

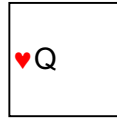
<i>Trick</i>	<i>Lead</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>4th</i>
1. W	♥ Q	4	2	<u>A</u>
2. S	<u>♠ A</u>	2	4	5
3. S	♠ 3	Q	<u>K</u>	♥ 5
4. N	<u>♣ Q</u>	3	5	4
5. N	♣ 8	6	<u>A</u>	7
6. S	<u>♣ K</u>	J	2	9
7. S	♥ 3	<u>10</u>	6	8

In this case it is west who's endplayed into giving you the extra trick.

Board 3

North Deals
None Vul

♠ K 9 7 6 4
♥ 6 4
♦ K 10 3
♣ K 8 2



♠ A J 10 8 3
♥ A 3
♦ A J 7
♣ A Q 5

<i>North</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass	2 N
3 ♥!	4 ♣
4 ♥	4 ♠
4 N	5 ♣
6 ♠	Pass

6 ♠ by South

<i>Trick</i>	<i>Lead</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>4th</i>
1. W	♥ Q	?		

Won NS=0 EW=0

This is a suit contract so count your losers. 0 spades, 1 heart, 1 diamond and 0 clubs.

Once again it's mirror distribution, so you can either guess diamonds or let the opponents solve it for you.

1. Identify the opportunity

Diamonds

2. Locate the exit card

The small heart

3. Eliminate their exits

Draw trump. Cash clubs.

4. Use your exit card

Board 3
 North Deals
 None Vul

♠ —	♠ 9 7 6	♠ —
♥ J 7	♥ —	♥ K 9
♦ 9 6 2	♦ K 10 3	♦ Q 8 5 4
♣ J	♣ —	♣ —

N
W E
S

♠ J 10 8
♥ —
♦ A J 7
♣ —

<i>North</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass	2 N
3 ♥!	4 ♣
4 ♥	4 ♠
4 N	5 ♣
6 ♠	Pass

6 ♠ by South

<i>Trick</i>	<i>Lead</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>4th</i>
1. W	♥ Q	4	2	<u>A</u>
2. S	♠ <u>A</u>	5	4	2
3. S	♠ 3	♥ 8	<u>K</u>	Q
4. N	♣ <u>K</u>	4	5	3
5. N	♣ 8	6	<u>Q</u>	7
6. S	♣ <u>A</u>	9	2	10
7. S	♥ 3	<u>10</u>	6	5

Easy peasy once you've noticed the opportunity.

Board 4

West Deals
Both Vul

♠ J 5 4
♥ K J 9 8
♦ 9 4 3
♣ K 8 2



♠ Q 8 7
♥ A Q 7 6 4
♦ K 5 2
♣ A 5

2 ♥ by South

Here's a slightly more complicated example. First and foremost, count your losers.

Spades 3, Hearts 0, diamonds 3, clubs 0.

You could just hope that the diamond finesse is on, but why settle for a 50% chance?

1. Identify the opportunity

There are two. Spades and diamonds. Spades works when either hand wins the trick and diamonds only works when West does. So Spades is the better choice.

2. Locate the exit card

In this case it's diamonds.

3. Remove their options

Draw trump and cash and get rid of clubs.

This one is a little more advanced. If you draw trump first, and then eliminate clubs you will end up in your hand and won't be able to take the club finesse. So delay drawing trump and get rid of the clubs first. Cash 1 heart so that you know they aren't 4-0 and you will be able to exit

Board 4

West Deals

Both Vul

♠ J 5 4
♥ K J 9
♦ 9 4 3
♣ K 8

♥ 8
♥ 2 ♥ 3
♥ A

♠ Q 8 7
♥ Q 7 6 4
♦ K 5 2
♣ 5

2 ♥ by South

<i>Trick</i>	<i>Lead</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>4th</i>
1. W	♣ 9	2	10	<u>A</u>
2. S	♥ <u>A</u>	2	8	3

Won NS=2 EW=0

This one is a little more advanced. If you draw trump first, and then eliminate clubs you will end up in your hand and won't be able to take the club finesse. So delay drawing trump and get rid of the clubs first. Cash 1 heart so that you know they aren't 4-0 and you will be able to exit

Board 4

West Deals

Both Vul

♠ J 5 4
♥ K J 9
♦ 9 4 3
♣ —

♣ 8
♠ 3 ♣ J
♥ Q

♠ Q 8 7
♥ 7 6 4
♦ K 5 2
♣ —

2 ♥ by South

<i>Trick</i>	<i>Lead</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>4th</i>
1. W	♣ 9	2	10	<u>A</u>
2. S	<u>♥ A</u>	2	8	3
3. S	♣ 5	7	<u>K</u>	3
4. N	♣ 8	J	<u>♥ Q</u>	♠ 3

Won NS=4 EW=0

Next get rid of clubs and don't forget to ruff high!

Board 4
 West Deals
 Both Vul

♠ J 5 4
♥ 9
♦ 9 4 3
♣ —



♠ Q 8 7
 ♥ 7
 ♦ K 5 2
 ♣ —

2 ♥ by South

Trick	Lead	2nd	3rd	4th
1. W	♣ 9	2	10	<u>A</u>
2. S	<u>♥ A</u>	2	8	3
3. S	♣ 5	7	<u>K</u>	3
4. N	♣ 8	J	<u>♥ Q</u>	♠ 3
5. S	♥ 4	5	<u>J</u>	♣ 4
6. N	<u>♥ K</u>	♣ 6	6	10
7. N	?			

Won NS=6 EW=0

Draw trump and end in dummy.

Board 4
 West Deals
 Both Vul

♠ K 10 9	♠ J 5 4	♠ A 6 2			
♥ —	♥ 9	♥ —			
♦ A 8 7 6	♦ 9 4	♦ J 10			
♣ —	♣ —	♣ Q			
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N					
W E					
S					
	♠ Q 8 7				
	♥ 7				
	♦ K 5 2				
	♣ —				

2 ♥ by South

<i>Trick</i>	<i>Lead</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>4th</i>
1. W	♣ 9	2	10	<u>A</u>
2. S	<u>♥ A</u>	2	8	3
3. S	♣ 5	7	<u>K</u>	3
4. N	♣ 8	J	<u>♥ Q</u>	♠ 3
5. S	♥ 4	5	<u>J</u>	♣ 4
6. N	<u>♥ K</u>	♣ 6	6	10
7. N	♦ 3	Q	-	-

Now when you exit the diamond you can try the finesse at the same time.