

Defensive Signaling Against Suit Contracts
Or
How To Give Your Partner Lots Of Attitude And Have Them Love You For It!

Upside-Down Count and Attitude (UDCA)

Attitude – The mechanics are very simple – the reverse of standard carding – play low if you like the suit led and high if you do not.

The main reason for playing UDCA is to preserve high cards in our better suits.

For example: Pitching the 9 from AQ92 could easily blow a trick. Pitching the 2 will not. Whereas, holding 972, the 9 is rarely relevant.

Remember – playing upside-down only applies to signaling, NOT to leading. We still lead standard, high from a doubleton, otherwise low.

Count – Play high from an odd number of cards in a suit and low from an even number – the reverse of standard carding.

Signaling Priority:

Signals should be given in the following order of priority:

1. Attitude – used when following to a suit which partner leads, or when discarding to indicate your interest in the suit
2. Count – used when following to a suit which declarer or dummy leads to indicate how many cards of that suit you hold
3. Suit preference – used when returning a suit for partner to ruff, when you have a known excess of cards in the suit in which you are giving the signal, or when there is a singleton in dummy on the opening lead to indicate in which suit you have entries or interest

A **special signal** occurs when partner leads an honor from the AK and you have the QJ. Playing the Q under the A tells partner that you hold the J (or the Q is singleton). Being absolutely certain there is a quick entry to your hand should she need it, allows partner to *underlead* her honor (K). This is especially useful when a switch to another suit, through declarer, is necessary for a successful defense.

**~Do not forget the principle of common sense and good bridge.
Never signal with a card that could cost a trick~**

As soon as one of the signals is presumed to be irrelevant, we move to the next lower priority. For example, when partner leads a suit, the AQ appears in dummy and declarer plays the Q. Your attitude is known if you can't play the K, so give count instead.

When to Give Attitude Signals - When defending a hand, the first order of priority is to let partner know whether you like her lead. Attitude signals occur most frequently when partner leads an honor card.

1. When partner leads an honor, you will use an attitude signal to either encourage (a low spot card) or discourage (a high spot card) a continuation.

Suppose partner leads one of the AKQ and you hold J94.

- a. Partner leads the A (from AKx) - discourage w/ the 9 because you don't have the Q
- b. Partner leads the K (from KQx) - encourage w/ the 4 because you hold the touching J. You would also encourage with A94.
- c. Partner leads the Q - What do you play now? Note that partner played the *unsupported* Q. She is likely to be short in the suit because you have the J. Therefore, you will give suit preference to tell partner how to get to your hand for a ruff. (See below)

~In the absence of good defensive carding, partner is often unable to tell whether it is right to continue a suit or switch.~

2. When your partner leads a small card and dummy wins the trick. If dummy wins with the A, let partner know whether or not you have the K with your attitude signal.
3. When you are discarding. Let partner know what to keep and what to switch to. Signal your attitude in another suit by playing low to encourage and high to discourage. Remember to make the clearest signals possible.

When to Give Count Signals - The second order of priority in defensive carding is to tell partner how the cards are distributed between the hands. A count signal indicates whether you have an odd or even number of cards in a suit. Using upside-down count, low indicates an even number and high indicates an odd number.

1. When Declarer plays a side suit - give count, don't give attitude. If declarer is playing a suit, your attitude is presumed.

♠ KQT5
♥ 852
♦ J82
♣ T97

♠ A762
♥
♦ 97543
♣ Q854

Against South's 6♥ contract, partner leads the ♦K, you play the ♦9, denying the A or Q. After drawing trump in three rounds, declarer leads the ♠4 toward dummy, partner playing the ♠9. Partner has shown an odd number of spades, so you should hold up on the ♠A until the next round, stranding the good spades in dummy. Now, whether your side has a cashing diamond trick or a club trick coming, you will set the contract.

2. When your attitude is known, give count. For example, when partner leads the A from AK, and dummy has Qxx she knows your attitude, so tell her how many cards you have in the suit. She will then know if the K will cash and can defend accordingly.
3. Remainder Count – After you have given partner attitude on the first round of a suit (or simply played high as third hand), the next card played should tell partner *how many cards you have left*. For example, when partner leads the ♥A and you have the ♥Q, you will give positive attitude by playing the ♥3. But, what card should you play next if partner plays the ♥K?

♠ A2
 ♥ T72
 ♦ QJ93
 ♣ AKQ4

♠ 86
 ♥ Q943
 ♦ A642
 ♣ 873

Play the ♥4, the low spot showing an odd number of *remaining cards in the suit*. When showing remaining count, we use **standard signals!!** Now partner knows whether your side has another cashing heart trick or has to find your defensive assets elsewhere.

4. Another **special case** – When defending a NT contract and partner leads an A (or the K more commonly today), he is doing so from a strong holding, such as AKJT(x) or AKQT(x). Your obligation is to **play the missing high honor if you have it OR to give count**. Partner will then know whether it is safe to continue the suit or to switch and hope you have an entry to lead through declarer's protected honor. Note that if you lead the K from holdings such as KQT9, the same principle applies, with an extension. If you have the A, **overtake** partner's K and return the suit!

When to Give Suit Preference Signals – How to tell partner where your high cards lie.

1. **Singleton in Dummy** – When partner leads an honor and a singleton appears in dummy, it is good practice to give a suit preference signal. Here is an example of how good defensive carding can lead you to the correct defense by using a suit preference signal.

♠ 7
♥ KJ93
♦ AQ76
♣ KQJ5

♠ K83
♥ T752
♦ 5
♣ A8762

The auction:

West	North	East	South
			1♦
3♠	4♠	5♠	6♦

Partner leads the ♠A. With the singleton in dummy, and therefore no further tricks for the defense in that suit, it is right to play the ♠3, your lowest spot card, asking for a club shift. Barring a club void in the South hand, you will defeat the slam. Note that if South's distribution is 2-3-7-1, or 2-2-7-2, declarer will be able to get rid of his club loser on the hearts. And, a contract that should have been set will be made. Make partner's task easy by guiding him to the right continuation.

2. In our suit

♠ Q743
♥ Q2
♦ Q65
♣ AKJ7

♠ 985
♥ T653
♦ 98432
♣ 3

The auction:

West	North	East	South
1♥	X	3♥	4♠
All pass			

Partner leads the ♥A and ♥K. With the ♥Q in dummy an attitude signal is pointless. Thus, you should give partner count in hearts, playing the ♥3 to show an even number. Since both your attitude and count have been communicated, you are now free to give partner a suit preference signal. (Remember the priorities - *attitude*, *count*, then *suit preference*). On the play of the ♥K, play the ♥5 (your lowest), suggesting a club switch. Partner will dutifully play a club and, when in with the ♠A, give you a club ruff to set the contract one trick.

3. When giving partner a ruff

♠ KT52
♥ QJ32
♦ AQ82
♣ 5

♠ A9873
♥ AT
♦
♣ Q97632

The auction has gone:

West	North	East	South
			1♥
P	4♣	P	4♥

Partner leads the ♠4. This is likely to be a singleton. In any event, you will play for that because there is not likely to be another defense that will set the contract. Win the ♠A and return the ♠9, asking partner to return the higher of the two suits. Be as clear as possible with your signal. With the ♦A in dummy and left to his own devices, partner is unlikely to return a diamond because he “knows” dummy will win the trick and your side will not enjoy a second spade ruff. Steer him clear of the likely club continuation with your clear signal of a high spade. If he trusts your ♠9, he will return the diamond and you will set the contract 2 tricks - ♠A, ♠ruff, ♦ruff, ♠ruff, ♥A. Well done!

4. In the trump suit – When following suit as declarer pulls trump, follow:

- High-low – to show something in the higher side suit
- Low-high – to show something in the lower side suit (or no preference)

5. When Declarer plays a suit - Once partner knows your attitude and count, use your remaining cards to signal suit preference. When declarer runs a side suit in which your attitude is presumed, remember that after you follow to the first card with count, the *next card* should be suit preference.

There are many other instances in which suit preference signals can be employed. And once you start using all the defensive signaling tools at your disposal, you will see how much fun good defense can really be! And, how happy you will you make your partner!

General principles

Attitude

When partner leads, encourage if you want partner to continue the suit, but don't be a slave to the signal - think first! Just because you have a good card in the suit led doesn't mean that you want partner to continue.

You may have the ability to ruff the suit partner led, but:

Can you over ruff dummy?

Would you be ruffing with a natural trump trick?

Is there a switch that you need partner to make first in order to get all your tricks?

Do you need partner to retain an entry for a later lead through dummy?

You may have the equal outstanding honor, but:

Will that set up a card for declarer?

Do you desperately need a switch?

~Think about what the best defense is before issuing your signal!~

Count

Give proper count when it is important for partner

Do not give count when all it will do is help declarer

Do not give count when declarer's length is known to both partners. Use that opportunity to make a suit preference signal

Sometimes you have to go the extra mile to make sure partner cannot make a mistake. For example, partner leads the A from AK and Qxx appears in dummy. You have 9432. DO NOT play the deuce to show four. Partner may interpret that as a doubleton. Play high and lie!

Don't blow a trick with a card - always play good bridge first

Suit Preference

It is the last signal in order of priority, except in certain obvious situations

Don't mindlessly follow suit when declarer is running her suit - use your cards to convey information about where your assets are by the order in which you follow suit

Use declarer's trump suit to your advantage by playing your spot cards purposefully

Suit preference signals are rarely commands - they are informative

A suit preference signal *is* a command when partner leads a clear card in a ruffing situation

When you have touching honors that you will play sequentially and have the luxury of not misleading partner, you can show suit preference. The two most common examples occur when:

- Partner leads and you have the A and K. The order in which you play them can convey where your outside assets lie.
- We have established a suit and only high cards remain, then they can be played in an order indicating where the outside assets lie.