



St Annes Bridge Club

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The opening lead – basic principles

There's good news, and bad news, and worse news!

The good news is that, as the defender on lead (i.e. the one on declarer's left) you get to fire the first shot in this battle, and it could give your side a critical advantage.

The bad news is that you might select the wrong lead, presenting declarer with a trick (or even a contract) that he could not otherwise make.

The worse news is that whole books have been written about opening leads.

The defenders' task

The defence has to win a certain minimum number of tricks to defeat the contract. They are at a distinct disadvantage compared to declarer. He can see his side's total combined assets. The defenders have to co-operate together in a defensive plan without being able to see each other's hands.

This means that the opening lead serves two objectives:

- To win, or to make progress towards winning, tricks for the defence. Also, sometimes as important, not to give declarer tricks that he would not otherwise be able to make.
- To give partner information about what is in your hand.

Having decided which suit to lead, you then have to choose which card to play.

From certain combinations of cards we always lead a particular card. These are known as **standard leads** and they are not difficult to learn.

As partner knows the standard leads too, he can draw useful inferences about your hand from the card you lead.

Sometimes you wish to lead a particular suit, but your holding in that suit make it dangerous. You may have to think again, but this does not alter the fact that you should select which suit to lead first and then the card.

The standard leads

With a sequence of cards including at least one honour card, the standard practice is to lead the highest card in the sequence. Although the trick-winning potential of the cards may be the same, selecting the right card gives partner information about your hand.

From a long suit without a sequence, when headed by an honour (includes 10), the standard practice is to lead the fourth highest in the suit. You will learn why this is helpful to the leader's partner another time. For now, just get into the habit!

If you only have small cards in a suit (and still decide that is the suit to lead) then again there are standard leads to help you, depending on how many cards you hold in the suit.

Leading against no trump contracts

Against no trump contracts the main considerations when selecting your lead are:

- The suit bid by partner. If partner has bid, it is nearly always a good idea to lead his suit.
- The suits not bid. In particular, since there is a high priority on looking for a major suit contract, then if declarer's side has not bid a major suit it is often right to lead it.
- Your own best suit. In the absence of indications to the contrary, this may well be your side's best hope.

Standard leads at no trumps

Holding	Lead	Comment
A K Q	A	promises the king
K Q J	K	promises the queen, denies the ace
K Q 10		
Q J 10	Q	promises the jack, denies the king
Q J 9		
J 10 9	J	promises the 10, denies the queen
J 10 8		

Standard leads at no trumps

Holding	Lead	Comment
A Q J	Q	still promising the J, denying the K
A J 10	J	
K J 10		
A 10 9		Known as leading from an interior sequence but the principle remains the same.
K 10 9	10	
Q 10 9		

Standard leads at no trumps

Holding	Lead	Comment
H x x x (x)(x)	4 th highest	When you cannot lead from a sequence
H H x x (x)(x)	4 th highest	
x x x x	2 nd highest	play the 4 th highest next time
x x x	2 nd highest	play the highest next (MUD)
x x	highest	lead the highest card from a doubleton

Table Quiz

1

West (you)	North	East	South
pass	1 ♠	pass	2 ♦
pass	3 ♣	pass	3NT

What do you know about spades?

N has 5 spades

S has 2 spades or less

Table Quiz

2

West (you)	North	East	South
pass	1 ♣	pass	1 ♥
pass	3 ♣	pass	3 ♦
pass	3NT		

What do you know about the distribution?

N has 6 clubs and 16+pts hasn't got 4 spades or 3 hearts

S has 5 hearts and no spade stop

Table Quiz

3

West (you)	North	East	South
pass	1 ♣	pass	1 ♥
pass	1 ♠	pass	2NT
pass	3 ♠	pass	3NT

What do you know about the distribution?

North has 5 spades and 6+clubs

South has 2 spades or less and can stop diamonds

Table Quiz

4

West (you)	North	East	South
pass	1 ♠	pass	1NT
pass	2 ♠	pass	pass





How many spades has North?

6

S may only have 1S
so 6 card suit
needed to rebid S

Table Quiz 5

West

 K J 10 9 6
 4
 Q J 10 8 3
 K 6

South bids 1 NT which North raises to 3NT. What should West lead ?

Q 

Table Quiz 6

West



J 10



8 7 6 5 4 3 2



J 10



J 10

South bids 1 NT which North raises to 3NT. What should West lead ?



Leading against a suit contract

The existence of a trump suit complicates matters. It is no use leading a small card from a long suit hoping to establish winners in the suit later on if, by then, declarer or dummy has no more and can ruff your winners. Winners need to be established more quickly.

Suits headed by a combination of high honours, such as KQJ or QJ10 are particularly attractive, as they are safe as well as active.

As before, if partner has bid a suit, then you need a good reason not to lead it.

Leading from honours against a trump contract are sometimes different.

In particular, do not lead a low card from a suit that includes the ace. If you do, when you come to try to take a trick later on with your ace it might be ruffed (of course, this could not happen at no trumps).

Against a trump contract:

AKx(x)(x) lead the ace

KQx(x)(x) lead the king

Axx(x)(x) lead another suit (but if you must lead this
suit, lead the ace)

As with no trump contracts leads against suit contracts

x x x x	2nd highest	play the 4th highest next time
x x x	2nd highest	play the highest next (MUD)
x x	highest	lead the highest card from a doubleton

Table Quiz

West (you)	North	East	South
pass	1 ♣	pass	1 ♠
pass	3 ♠	pass	4 ♠

1. ■

♠	J 6 2
♥	J 7
♦	Q J 7 6
♣	Q J 9 6

Q ♦

Table Quiz

West (you)	North	East	South
pass	1 ♣	pass	1 ♠
pass	3 ♠	pass	4 ♠

2.

♠	J 6
♥	Q 6 3
♦	J 10 9
♣	J 9 7 5 3

J ♦

Table Quiz

West (you)	North	East	South
pass	1 ♣	pass	1 ♠
pass	3 ♠	pass	4 ♠

3.

♠	A 6 2
♥	8 7 5 3 2
♦	5
♣	9 7 6 5

5 ♦

Table Quiz

West (you)	North	East	South
pass	1 ♣	pass	1 ♠
pass	3 ♠	pass	4 ♠

4.





♠	5 3 2
♥	K J 6 3
♦	K J 6 3
♣	9 7

3 ♠

Table Quiz

West (you)	North	East	South
pass	1 ♣	pass	1 ♠
pass	3 ♠	pass	4 ♠

5.

	A 6
	8 5 3 2
	Q J 10 9
	J 10 9

Q 

HAND 1

North

♠ A 10 3
♥ K 7 6 2
♦ A J 6
♣ J 7 5

1 NT

pass

West

♠ 9 7
♥ 9 8 5 3
♦ 10 9 7
♣ 10 9 8 3

pass

East

♠ K Q J 6 5
♥ A 4
♦ 8 5 3
♣ 6 4 2

pass

South

♠ 8 4 2
♥ Q J 10
♦ K Q 4 2
♣ A K Q

3 NT

pass

HAND 2

North

♠ Q 9
♥ 9 8 5 3
♦ 10 9 7
♣ 10 9 8 3

pass

West

♠ 8 7 2
♥ Q J 10
♦ K Q 4 2
♣ A K Q

3 NT

East

♠ A 10 3
♥ K 7 6 2
♦ A J 6
♣ J 7 5

1 NT

pass

South

♠ K J 6 5 4
♥ A 4
♦ 8 5 3
♣ 6 4 2

pass

pass

HAND 3

West

♠ 9 7
♥ 9 8 7 3
♦ 10 9 2
♣ 10 6 3 2

pass

pass

North

♠ 8 4 2
♥ J 10 5 4
♦ A 7 4
♣ K Q J

1 H

pass

pass

East

♠ K Q J 6 5
♥ A 6
♦ 8 5 3
♣ 9 5 4

1 S

pass

South

♠ A 10 3
♥ K Q 2
♦ K Q J 6
♣ A 8 7

1 D

3NT

HAND 4

West

♠ A 4 3
♥ A K Q
♦ 8 5 4
♣ A Q 4 3

1 C

3 NT

North

♠ 8 7
♥ J 10 9
♦ Q 9 6
♣ K J 9 8 7

pass

pass

East

♠ K 6 5 2
♥ 7 4 3
♦ A K 7
♣ 6 5 2

1 S

pass

South

♠ Q J 10 9
♥ 8 6 5 2
♦ J 10 3 2
♣ 10

pass

pass

Homework

- Review pgs 77 - 83
- Learn standard leads (Pg 83)
- Read ahead Pgs 84 - 88