

Audrey Grant Bridge Basics Defense

**Defensive Play
Defensive Signals
Opening Leads**

Mark Ducharme

mark.r.ducharme@gmail.com

(603) 321-1696

Defensive Strategy

As a defender, you go through a similar plan as declarer

Step 1: calculate how many tricks you need to defeat the contract

Step 2: determine your winning/ sure tricks

Step 3: develop extra winners. As the partnership exchanges information through the cards played, possible sources of extra tricks will become more apparent.

Defensive Strategy

As a defender, you go through a similar plan as declarer

How many tricks are needed?

How many sure tricks do we have?

Where can the extra tricks come from?

How do we put it all together?

Defensive Signals

Declarer has the advantage of seeing all 26 cards in his control. The defenders cannot see each other's cards so they must signal by playing specific cards to help paint a picture of your hand to partner.

3 types of signals:

Attitude

Count

Suit Preference

Defensive Signals – Attitude

Attitude – the most important signal is whether you like a particular suit.

A high card played or discarded in a suit indicates you would like the suit returned. A low card indicates you would prefer that partner switch to another suit.

High Cards Encourage

Low Cards Discourage

Defensive Signals – Attitude

High Cards Encourage

Low Cards Discourage

	North - Dummy	
	♠ K 7 5	
West		East
♠ Q		♠ A 8 2

Partner, west leads the Queen of spades (which promises the Jack and probably the ten. Declarer plays low from Dummy.

Which card does east play to encourage partner to lead the suit again?

The eight of spades. **(High Card Encourages)**

Defensive Signals - Attitude

High Cards Encourage

Low Cards Discourage

	North - Dummy	
	♠ K 7 5	
West		East
♠ Q		♠ 6 4 3

Partner, west leads the Queen of spades (which promises the Jack and probably the ten. Declarer plays low from Dummy.

Which card does east play to encourage partner to lead the suit again?

The three of spades. **(Low Card Discourages)**

Defensive Signals - Attitude

High Cards Encourage - Low Cards Discourage

	North - Dummy	
♠	K 7 5	
		East
		♠ A Q 8 4

Declarer, South is drawing Trumps (hearts), and you have none.

How do you show partner you want a spade lead?

By the card you discard!

Which card does east play to encourage partner to lead the suit?

The eight of spades. (High Card Encourages)

Defensive Signals - Attitude

High Cards Encourage - Low Cards Discourage

	North - Dummy	
♠	K 7 5	
		East
		♠ 8 3 2

Declarer, South is drawing Trumps, and you have none.

How do you show partner you do not want a spade lead?

By the card you discard!

Which card does east play to encourage partner to lead the suit?

The two of spades. **(Low Card Encourages)**

Defensive Signals – Attitude

High Cards Encourage - Low Cards Discourage

How High is high?

How Low is low?

The general guideline is you play as high a card as possible without sacrificing a potential trick. (9, 8, 6)

A low card would be a (4,3,2)

Defensive Signals – Attitude

High Cards Encourage - Low Cards Discourage

How High is high?

How Low is low?

Partner must be alert as you will not always have the right card to make the best signal.

Partner must look at the “spot cards” in his own hand and in dummy to make a determination as to whether your card may actually be a “high” or “low” card.

Defensive Signals – Count

Count – When you clearly do not want to show attitude, you may give partner a count signal instead.

High – Low shows an “even” number of cards in a suit

Low – High shows an “odd” number of cards in a suit

North - Dummy

♠ Q 7 5

West

♠ A

East

♠ 6 4

♥ 5 2

The opponents are in four hearts, your partner leads the Ace of which promises the King. **How do you signal partner on this lead?**

Defensive Signals - Count

High – Low shows an “even” number of cards in a suit

Low – High shows an “odd” number of cards in a suit

North - Dummy

♠ Q 7 5

West

♠ A

East

♠ 6 4

♥ 5 2

The opponents are in four hearts, your partner leads the Ace of Spades which promises the King. **How do you signal partner on this lead?**

You play the 6 then the 4, this tells partner to lead the spade for the third time so you can trump the Queen.

High/ Low – even number of cards in a suit

Low/ High – odd number of cards in a suit

Defensive Signals – Suit Preference

A **rare signal**, but one that advanced players use to indicate to partner which suit to lead when partner has a choice of two possible suits.

For example

Defensive Signals – Suit Preference

The contract is 4 hearts – you want a club lead after
Partner (west) leads the Ace of spades

Dummy (North)

♠ 4
♥ 9 8 7 6
♦ Q J 5 3 2
♣ K J 5 3

How do you signal partner to lead a club?

Defensive Signals – Suit Preference

The contract is 4 hearts – you want a club lead
Partner (west) leads the Ace of spades

Dummy (North)

♠ 4
♥ 9 8 7 6
♦ Q J 5 3 2
♣ K J 5 3

You discard your lowest spade. This is not an attitude signal (discouraging) as it is obvious that you do not want a spade lead with the singleton in Dummy.

The low card is a suit preference signal. It says to lead the lowest of the 2 remaining suits (trumps excluded).

Defensive Signals – Suit Preference

The contract is 4 hearts – you want a club lead
Partner (west) leads the Ace of spades

You discard your lowest spade. This is not an attitude signal (discouraging) as it is obvious that you do not want a spade lead with the singleton in Dummy.

The low card is a suit preference signal.

- **A low card says to play the lowest of the two remaining suits (not spades and not trumps).**
- **A high card says to play the higher of the two remaining suits.**

Opening Leads

Choose the Suit ---- Choose the Card

**Principles differ when you are defending against
a no trump contract or a suited contract.**

Opening Leads – Against No Trump

The general idea when defending against No Trump contracts is to try and establish the longest combined suit in the defender's hands. You can use high cards in other suits to regain the lead in order to take the established winners.

It's a "race" between defenders and declarer to set up their longest and strongest suits

Opening Leads – Against No Trump

Choose The Suit:

- Lead **Partner's Bid Suit**, unless you clearly have a better suit to lead
- Otherwise lead your **longest** suit
- With suits of equal length, lead your **strongest** suit

Fourth best from your longest and strongest suit!

Opening Leads – Against No Trump

Choosing the Card:

Lead the **top of three touching honors**

Leading an honor promises the honor beneath it

You don't want the opponents to get a cheap trick by leading low from a sequence

Examples:

K Q J 3 2

Q J 10 7

J 10 9 5 2

10 9 8 4 2

Opening Leads – Against No Trump

Choosing the Card:

Lead the **top of a broken sequence**

A broken sequence is one in which you have the two top cards, but are missing the card before the next highest card.

Examples:

K Q 10 3 2

Q J 9 7

J 10 8 5 2

10 9 7 4 2

Opening Leads – Against No Trump

Choosing the Card:

Lead the **top of a interior sequence**

An interior sequence is one in which you have a high card followed by a gap of one or more cards and then two or more touching honor cards.

Examples:

K J 10 5

A 10 9 8

Q 10 9 6

Opening Leads – Against No Trump

Choosing the Card:

Lead fourth from your longest and strongest

Examples:

K 8 6 3

A K 8 7 3

A J 7 6 2

A K 7 3

K Q 7 2

A J 8 7 5 2

Opening Leads – Against No Trump

Leading Partner's Suit

Choosing the Card:

- Lead a singleton (no choice)
- Lead the top card of a doubleton
- Lead the top of two or more touching honors
- Lead **low from an honor**
- Lead **the middle of three small cards (MUD)**

Examples:

K 9 6

8 7 3

Q 2

Q J 3

Opening Leads – Against No Trump

Leading Partner's Suit

Choosing the Card:

Lead low from an honor

Examples:

K 9 6

A 3 2

A J 2

Q 3 2

Note: In a suited contract, you NEVER underlead an Ace!

Opening Leads – Against No Trump

Leading Partner's Suit

Choosing the Card:

MUD – Middle/ Up / Down – Top of Nothing!

Examples:

8 7 3
6 5 4
9 6 2

Lead the middle card first, then play the higher card on the second opportunity. Partner should not expect you to have any honor in this suit.

Opening Leads – Against No Trump Summary

Fourth from Longest and Strongest

Top of a Sequence of Three Honors

Low from an Honor

Middle / Up / Down (MUD) – Top of Nothing

Also known as BOSTON

(Bottom Of Something, Top Of Nothing)

Opening Leads – Against A Suited Contract

It is less likely that you will take tricks with small cards in long suits, even if you can establish them as winners.

Declarer has the trump suit to stop your long suits.

Instead, look to take tricks with your side's high cards or make use of the trump suit itself.

It is more important to make a safe lead, one that does not give away tricks. You want to avoid sacrificing one of your high cards in hope of eventually developing a long suit.

You want to look for your side's strength rather than length.

Opening Leads – Against A Suited Contract

Choosing the Suit:

- **Partner's Suit** – If partner has opened the bidding, or overcalled, partner's suit is a good choice
- An **unbid** suit – You usually want to **avoid** a suit bid by the opponents.
- A suit with **two or more touching cards** headed by an honor
- A **short suit (singleton)** hoping to trump one of declarer's good tricks.

Opening Leads – Against A Suited Contract

What do you lead against a contract of 4 spades?

♠ Q 8 7

♥ Q 8 2

♦ K Q 9 7

♣ Q 7 6

- If partner bid hearts, lead the 2 of hearts (**low from an honor**)
- If partner has not bid, the best choice is probably the **King of diamonds** as it will set up a trick in the diamond suit.
- If the opponents have bid diamonds and spades in the auction, it is probably best to lead an unbid suit (hearts and clubs).

Opening Leads – Against A Suited Contract

Leading a singleton

Only lead a short suit if you have reason to believe your side can win a trick before declarer can draw trump.

Do not lead a short suit when you have long trumps. Instead, lead your own best suit in hopes of forcing declarer to ruff your best suit and you may end up having more trumps than declarer.

Opening Leads – Against A Suited Contract

Leading Trump

If the lead of every other suit looks dangerous, a trump lead may avoid giving declarer any help and preserve your high cards for later.

It is good to lead trumps if it is likely that declarer will want to trump losers in dummy.

Opening Leads – Against A Suited Contract

Choosing the Card:

- Top of two touching honors:

♠ K 8 3; **♣** Q 7 5 3; **♥** J 8 5; **♦** 10 9; **10** 9 6; 7 **6** 2

- Top of a doubleton (honor):

♠ 2 ; **♠** K; - lead the top of a doubleton honor
♣ 2 ; **♥** 3 ; - avoid leading this suit unless
partner has bid this suit

Opening Leads – Against A Suited Contract

Choosing the Card:

- Do not lead a small card in a suit holding an Ace (**never underlead an Ace**). If you choose, or must lead a suit, then play the **Ace**.
- Dummy may hold a singleton king in your suit and leading the Ace may give opponents an easy trick. Your ace may end up being trumped.
- Aces are meant to take Kings and Queens.

Opening Leads – Against A Suited Contract

Choosing the Card:

- With three small cards in a suit and no honor, it is standard for a beginner to lead:

**Top of Nothing
MUD – Middle/up/down)**

For example, holding 9 8 7 in a suit, lead the 8 then play the 9 on the next trick).

Partner should not expect you to hold an honor in this suit.

This lead should discourage partner from returning the suit.

Opening Leads – Against A Suited Contract

Choosing the Card:

- Lead **Low from an Honor**

K 7 **2**

Q 8 **2**

J 6 **4**

△ 5 2 (never underlead an Ace)

Opening Leads – Against A Suited Contract

Choosing the Card:

- It is standard to lead fourth best from a four card suit, unless the suit is headed by a sequence:

K 7 6 2

Q 8 7 2

K Q 3 2

A 5 3 2 (never underlead an Ace)

Leading to Subsequent Tricks

North (Dummy)

♠ K J 8

♥ 9 8

♦ A Q 6

♣ J 10 9 8

West

East

Leading from East:

Lead up to weakness: As the **heart and club** suits are the weak suits, a lead in one of these suits is a good lead. It is less likely to finesse partner.

Leading from West:

Lead through Strength: If you are West, a lead of the **spade or diamond** suit would be less likely to finesse partner.

Defensive Play – Third Hand Play

General Guideline – If partner leads a small card, play as high a card as necessary to try and win the trick

With touching honors, play the lower of the touching honors.

When there is an honor in dummy, third hand should usually save his highest card to capture dummy's honor.

Defensive Play – Third Hand Play

Play as high a card as necessary to try and win the trick

Contract is 3 NT in the south

	North - Dummy	
	♠ 9 5	
West		East
♠ 4		♠ K J 3

Partner (west), leads the 4 of spades, dummy plays the five, East plays the **King of Spades** (third hand high as necessary)

This is the complete layout

	North - Dummy	
	♠ 9 5	
West		East
♠ A 10 8 4 2	Declarer	♠ K J 3
	♠ Q 7 6	

East goes up with the King, then plays the Jack of spades, then the 3 of spades if declarer does not cover with the Queen. Defenders take all five tricks with this line of play.

Defensive Play – Third Hand Play

Play as high a card as necessary to try and win the trick

Contract is 3 NT in the south

	North - Dummy	
	♠ 9 5	
West		East
♠ Q 10 8 4 2	Declarer	♠ K J 3
	♠ A 7 6	

Even if declarer has the Ace, the defenders get four tricks with the proper line of play.

Defensive Play – Third Hand Play

Play as high a card as necessary to try and win the trick

Contract is 3 NT in the south

	North - Dummy	
	♠ 7 3 2	
West		East
♠ 4		♠ K 10 6

Partner (west), leads the 4 of spades, dummy plays the two, East plays the **King of Spades** (third hand high as necessary)

This is the complete layout

	North - Dummy	
	♠ 7 3 2	
West	Declarer	East
♠ Q 9 8 4	♠ A J 5	♠ K 10 6

East goes up with the King, declarer wins with the Ace. West must now wait for either east to lead his ten of spades or declarer to lead this suit which will result in the defenders taking 3 tricks in this suit.

Defensive Play – Third Hand Play

Touching Honors

**General Guideline – With touching honors,
Defender should play the lower of the touching honors.**

For example, defender in the third seat to play holds the following:

♠ Q J 10 4

Partner holds the ♠ K 8 6 2. Partner (west) leads the 2 of spades. Declarer plays low from dummy and then east plays the 10 of spades.

When declarer wins the trick with the **Ace of spades**, West can safely assume that partner holds both the Jack and Queen of spades as declarer would have played one of these lower cards to win the trick had he held such a card.

Defensive Play – Third Hand Play

Play the lower of touching honors

Contract is 3 NT in the south

North - Dummy

♠ 7 3

West

♠ K 8 6 2

East

♠ Q J 10 4

Partner (west), leads the 2 of spades, dummy plays the three, East plays the **Ten of Spades** (lower of touching honors), and Declarer wins the trick by playing the Ace of spades. Your side will get 3 tricks in spades

Defensive Play – Third Hand Play

Play the lower of touching honors

Contract is 3 NT in the south

This is the complete layout

	North - Dummy	
	♠ 7 3	
West		East
♠ K 8 6 2	Declarer	♠ Q J 10 4
	♠ A 9 5	

West leads the 2 of spades, north plays the three
and west plays the 10 of spades .

As declarer has to play the Ace to capture the ten of
spades (as opposed to the Queen or Jack), west can
conclude that partner holds the queen and jack of spades.

Defensive Play – Third Hand Play

Play the lower of touching honors

Contract is 3 NT in the south

Another example - the complete layout

	North - Dummy	
	♠ 9 2	
West	Declarer	East
♠ K 10 7 4 3	♠ A 8 5	♠ Q J 6

West leads the 4 of spades, dummy plays the nine and east plays the jack of spades. Declarer wins the trick with the Ace.

As declarer had to play the Ace to capture the Jack of spades (as opposed to the Queen), west can conclude that partner holds the queen of spades.

Defensive Play – Third Hand Play

Play the lower of touching honors

Contract is 3 NT in the south

Another example - the complete layout

	North - Dummy	
	♠ 9 2	
West		East
♠ K 10 7 5 3	Declarer	♠ Q 8 6
	♠ A J 4	

West leads the 5 of spades, dummy plays the 9, east covers with the queen and declarer wins with the Ace.

As partner played the Queen and not the Jack of spades, a touching honor, west can conclude that declarer holds the jack of spades.

West must wait for a lead from East to capture the jack and take the remaining tricks.

Defensive Play – Third Hand Play

Save your highest card to cover dummy's honor

**General Guideline – When there is an honor in dummy,
third hand should usually save his highest
card to capture dummy's honor**

Defensive Play – Third Hand Play

Save your highest card to cover dummy's honor

	North - Dummy	
	♠ Q 7 5	
West		East
♠ 3		♠ K J 6

West leads the 3 of spades, north plays the five, east must play the Jack of Spades, as high as necessary to win the trick.

East must retain the King to take the queen. East must be patient and await another lead to capture the queen.

Defensive Play – Third Hand Play

Save your highest card to cover dummy's honor

Another example

	North - Dummy	
	♠ Q 7 5	
West		East
♠ 3		♠ K 10 6

West leads the 3 of spades, north plays the five, east must play the ten of Spades, as high as necessary to win the trick.

East must retain the King to take the queen. East must be patient and await another lead to capture the queen.

Defensive Play – Third Hand Play

Save your highest card to cover dummy's honor

The complete layout

	North - Dummy	
	♠ Q 7 5	
West		East
♠ A J 8 3	Declarer	♠ K 10 6
	♠ 9 4 2	

West leads the 3 of spades, north plays the five, east must play the ten of Spades, as high as necessary to win the trick.

East must retain the King to take the queen. If East had played the King at trick 1, the opponents would have made a trick with the queen which they don't deserve.

Defensive Play – Third Hand Play

Save your highest card to cover dummy's honor

Another example

	North - Dummy	
	♠ K 7 2	
West		East
♠ 10 9 5 3	Declarer	♠ A J 4
	♠ Q 8 6	

West leads the 3 of spades, north plays the two, east must play the jack of Spades, as high as necessary to win the trick.

East must retain the Ace to take the king. East must be patient and await another lead from west to capture the Ace.

If East had played the Ace at trick 1, the opponents would have made two tricks in the spade suit. With this line of defense, the opponents will only get 1 trick (queen of spades) in the suit.

Defensive Play – Third Hand Play

Rule of 11

When partner leads his fourth – best card, his partner can subtract the face value from that card from eleven, to determine exactly how many cards declarer has which are higher than the card that was led.

Example

North - Dummy

♠ K 5 4

West

♠ 7

East

♠ A J 9 6

Rule of 11 – East subtracts 7 from 11 and gets four. East sees one card higher than the 7, (the King) in Dummy. East has 3 cards higher than the seven in his own hand. East can safely win this trick with the 9 knowing that partner has the queen and the ten.

Defensive Play – Third Hand Play

Rule of 11

The complete layout

	North - Dummy	
	♠ K 5 4	
West		East
♠ Q 10 8 7	Declarer	♠ A J 9 6
	♠ 3 2	

Using the rule of 11, East can win the first trick with the 9 of spades. East must wait for another lead of this suit from West and the defenders can win all 4 tricks with this hand.

Defensive Play – Second Hand Play

Second Hand Play – If declarer leads a card from his hand or from dummy and you are the second person to play to the trick, it is important to remember that your partner gets to play last.

Defensive Play – Second Hand Play

If declarer leads a small card, play second hand low

If declarer leads an honor, it is usually right for second hand to cover with a higher card if it may promote a trick for your side.

If declarer has touching honors in dummy and leads the high card, cover the second of touching honors (unless you have a doubleton, then cover the first card)

The goal is to make declarer use 2 honors to get your 1 honor.

Defensive Play – Second Hand Play

Example

North – 2nd hand

♠ A 10 2

Declarer (West)

♠ 3

Dummy (East)

♠ Q 7 6

**Declarer (west) leads the 3 of spades
North (second hand) must play low.
The proper card for North to play is the 2 of spades.**

Defensive Play – Second Hand Play

Example – The complete layout

	North – 2 nd hand	
	♠ A 10 2	
Declarer (West)		Dummy (East)
♠ K 9 3	South	♠ Q 7 6
	♠ J 8 5 4	

Declarer (west) leads the 3 of spades, North (2nd hand) plays the two of spades. East wins the trick with the Queen.

By playing the two of spades, dummy will win the trick with the Queen, but it is the last trick declarer will get. South must lead the spade suit at the next opportunity and North will capture the king and the ten of spades.

If North (2nd hand) had played the Ace, declarer would have won 2 tricks with the King and Queen of spades.

Defensive Play – Second Hand Play

Example

North – dummy

♠ Q 7 2

(West)

♠ K 9 5

(East)

Declarer

♠ J 6 4

♠ A 10 8 3

Declarer leads the 2 of spades from dummy. East (second hand) must play low. Declarer plays the Jack of spades which is captured by the king. East must wait for a spade return to capture the Queen.

Defenders take all 4 tricks with this line of play.

Note: if East had taken his Ace at trick 1, the defenders would have won an undeserving trick with the queen of spades.

Defensive Play – Second Hand Play

Cover an Honor with an Honor

Example – The complete layout

	North – dummy	
	♠ Q 7 2	
(West)		(East)
♠	Declarer	♠ K J 10 3
	♠ A 9 5	

Declarer leads the Queen from dummy. East must cover with the king to promote the jack and 10 to good tricks.

You are making declarer use 2 honors to take your 1 honor.

Defensive Play – Second Hand Play

Cover an Honor with an Honor

Example – The complete layout

	North – dummy	
	♠ J 6 4	
(West)		(East)
♠ 10 9 7	Declarer	♠ K 5 2
	♠ A Q 8 3	

Declarer leads the 4 of spades from dummy. East must play low with the 2 of spades.

If declarer were to lead the Jack, east must play the king to promote west's 10 of spades to a good trick.

Defensive Play – Second Hand Play

Cover an Honor with an Honor

Touching Honors

Example – The complete layout

North – dummy

♠ Q J 8 7

(West)

♠ 10 5 3

(East)

♠ K 4 2

Declarer

♠ A 9 6

Declarer leads the Queen of spades from dummy. East must play low with the 2 of spades. If declarer leads the jack, east must cover (the second of touching honors) with the king.

If East had played his king at trick 1, declarer could have finessed west and make 2 additional tricks. By holding back for one trick, west's 10 is now promoted.

Defensive Play – Second Hand Play

Cover an Honor with an Honor

Touching honors when holding a doubleton

Example – The complete layout

	North – dummy	
	♠ Q J 8 5	
(West)		(East)
♠ 10 9 3	Declarer	♠ K 2
	♠ A 7 6 4	

Declarer leads the Queen of spades from dummy. East must cover with the king of spades. With a doubleton, east must cover immediately to force declarer to use two honors to win on trick.

This is the only hope to promote partner's ten.