

U3ABD06: Session Overview

Welcome!

To help clarify some points covered in the MiniBridge video course, this Session Overview describes how to choose (and interpret) an Opening Lead, and provides some additional hints on playing in Defence. These topics - opening leads and defence - are the main focus of this week's practice hands.

I hope it helps!

-Ed

Advanced topics

Anything in green is a bit advanced and you can ignore it for now - but if you're keen, it's worth knowing.

This Week

In this week's practice session, you had a chance to practice:

- Choosing the opening lead against a NT contract
- Choosing the opening lead against a Suit contract
- How to interpret your Partner's opening lead
- Playing in Defence

There's a lot more to playing in Defence of course, but the right opening lead is often the key to defeating the contract, so it's a great place to start. Literally.

Leading against a NT Contract

A NT contract is often a race between Declarer and Defence setting up their long suits.

Your aim with the opening lead is to:

- Start setting up tricks for the Defence
- Avoid helping Declarer
- Give Partner helpful information about your hand

Leading against a NT contract, best first:

1. **Top of sequence:** If you have a sequence of three or more touching cards headed by an Honour, lead the highest one. For example:
 - From KQJ2 lead the King
 - From T982 lead the Ten

This tells partner you have the next two cards below it but don't have the card above it. (We count the Ten as an Honour in this situation.) But see **Aces** below.

2. **Longest suit:** If you don't have a 3-card sequence headed by an Honour, lead your longest suit. If your suit includes an Honour, lead your fourth highest card; if your suit does not include an Honour, lead your second highest card. For example:
 - From K 9 8 4 2 lead the 4

- From 9 8 7 6 2 lead the 8

So if you lead a low card, this tells partner this is your longest suit and you probably have an Honour in it; if you lead a high card (but not an Honour) this tells partner this is your longest suit and you probably do NOT have an Honour in it. Partner can check their own hand and Dummy to see which is more likely. (Later on in the course we'll show how to use the Rule of 11 to analyse partner's lead.)

3. **Aces:** You should NOT lead an unsupported Ace (e.g. Axxx) against a NT contract but leading the Ace from AKxx is OK; it gives you a look at dummy and shouldn't help Declarer. Leading the Ace from AKQx is even better. Leading the fourth highest from Axxx is fine too - if it's your longest suit.

Leading against a Suit Contract

Your priority against a Suit contract is usually to set up and make top tricks before Declarer sets up a long suit to discard their losers on. You may also have a chance to ruff or even cross-ruff in Defence, but unlike NT, it's rare that you will be able to set up a long suit, as Declarer has trumps - so you don't focus on setting up your long suit.

Leading against a suit contract, best first:

1. **Top of sequence:** If you have a sequence of two or more touching cards headed by an Honour, lead the highest one. For example:
 - From KQ2 lead the King
 - From T92 lead the Ten

In a suit contract the lead of an Honour tells partner you have the next card below it but don't have the card above it. (We count the Ten as an Honour in this situation.) NOTE that in a trump contract you lead the top of a sequence of just TWO cards; in NT you only lead the top of a sequence of THREE cards.

2. **Away from an Honour:** If you have an Honour in a suit, lead a low card from that suit. Partner will do their best to force out Declarer's Honours, to promote yours. But see **Aces**, below.
3. **Longest suit:** If you have a long suit, you can try to set it up. If your suit includes an Honour, lead your fourth highest card; if your suit does not include an Honour, lead your second highest card. Exactly as described for NT, but this tactic is less effective against a suit contract unless Declarer is short of trumps.
4. **Singleton:** If you have a singleton, you can lead it hoping to get a ruff later. BUT never lead a singleton Honour - too much risk of giving Declarer a cheap trick.
5. **Doubleton:** If you have a doubleton, you can lead it hoping to get a ruff later. Signal partner by playing High-Low: play your higher card first and play your lower card second. But Declarer sees signals too. BUT never lead an Honour from a doubleton; too much risk of giving Declarer a cheap trick.
6. **Otherwise:** If none of the above appeal, lead from a 3-card suit with no Honours, by playing Middle Up Down to show partner you have just three.

Aces: You should NOT lead an unsupported Ace (e.g. Axxx) against a suit contract but leading the Ace from AKxx is OK; it gives you a look at dummy and shouldn't help

Declarer. Leading the Ace from AKQx is even better. NEVER lead a low card from Axxx in a suit contract; you want to keep that Ace to put on Declarer's King and sometimes Declarer has a singleton King...

Interpreting Partner's opening lead

Remember that the TEN is considered an Honour when choosing a lead.

In general:

1. If Partner leads an Honour they have the next card below it (the next two in NT) but not the card above it
2. If Partner leads a low card they **probably** have an Honour in that suit
3. If Partner leads a high card (not an Honour) they **probably** do NOT have an Honour in that suit

Notice we say **probably** because it isn't always obvious whether a card is high or low, or partner might not have much choice. Partner's fourth highest card might be quite high; partner's second highest card might be quite low. Looking at the other cards in that suit in your hand and in Dummy should help. But some cards are easy to understand:

- A 2 or 3 can't be second highest from a 4+ suit with no Honours because there are 0 or 1 cards below it.
- A 9 can't be second highest from a 4+ suit with no Honours because all the cards above it are Honours (AKQJT)

Playing in Defence

Defence is a big part of playing Bridge! Here are a few tips to get you started. These are general rules, there will always be exceptions.

Playing second

If you're playing second (on Declarer's lead), the general rule is SECOND PLAYER PLAYS LOW SECOND. Keep your high cards to play on Declarer's high cards; partner will play fourth, it's likely they will prevent Declarer getting a cheap trick.

The exception is when Declarer leads an Honour; if you have a better card, play it. This will force Declarer to play TWO Honours to make a single trick and should help promote other cards you and your partner hold.

Playing third

If you're playing third (after your partner's lead), the general rule is to THIRD PLAYER PLAYS HIGH. This will help promote partner's cards and stop Declarer getting a cheap trick.

Don't overdo it though; only play as high as you need to. For example: if you can see KJ9x in Dummy and you have QT8x, play the 8.

If you have a choice of touching cards, they are all equivalent but play the lowest one; this helps partner by telling them you do not have the next lower card. For example: if you have JT9x, play the 9.

Playing fourth

This is usually straightforward enough: the general rule is WIN THE TRICK AS CHEAPLY AS YOU CAN. Obvious, eh?

Notice Partner's lead

Why did Partner lead that suit, that card - and not some other suit or card? It might be obvious, but sometimes a bit of thought will help you spot your Partner's plan and help you support it.

The simplest example of this is the opening lead against a NT contract: if it's an Honour, then it should be top of a sequence, otherwise it's their longest suit. If it's not an Honour it's either fourth highest (if they have an Honour) or second highest (if they don't) - decide which and you may be able to work out which Honour they have. You usually play high to help flush out the Declarer's stops in this suit - and lead it back to Partner when you get a chance.

In general, remember which suit partner led and lead it again when you get the chance.

Signals

WARNING: Signals are visible to both Partner AND Declarer, so may help the Defence or hinder it, and are often unclear.

Fourth highest: this is a convention that you lead your fourth highest card from a long suit if your suit includes an Honour. This will sometimes allow Partner to calculate which Honour you hold, by counting up their own cards and the cards they can see in Dummy. It will also indicate that you have an Honour in that suit. This doesn't always work and it isn't always obvious that you have lead fourth highest; it might be the middle card from three (MUD) or even the top card from a doubleton (high-low signal).

Second highest: the second part of this convention is that you lead your second highest card from a long suit if you don't have an Honour in it. This can tell Partner that you haven't got an Honour, and reduce the risk of giving away a trick - but it's quite hard to spot this signal.

High-low (or petering): this is a simple convention where you lead or play the top card from a Doubleton first, so that on the next round, when you play a lower card, Partner knows you had two. This is useful if Partner needs to count cards in a suit (typically in No Trumps) or in a Suit contract when you want Partner to lead the suit again to give you a ruff. This works fairly well as long as the higher card isn't an Honour; you don't usually lead an unsupported Honour (say Q from Qx) as it's likely to give away a trick - and you might well play a high card third in hand, to cover a card from Dummy.

MUD: this is a simple convention where, if you have three small cards (not Honours) you play the middle one, then the upper one, and then the lower (down) one; M-U-D. This is useful if Partner needs to count the cards in a suit (typically in No Trumps) but isn't always sensible or possible.

