

Practice Session for U3ABDa02: No Trumps in MiniBridge

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Introduction

Welcome!

Here is a description of all the hands that you could play in today's Practice Session. It includes details like the cards and points in each hand, the correct contract, and the best lead.

Don't feel bad if you chose a different contract or lead, or played it quite differently. You're just getting started, it's all new - of course it will take you a while to get the hang of all of it. Hopefully it will make a bit more sense with the detailed explanations given here.

We're here to help, share our enthusiasm for this great game. You will make mistakes, but we're always happy to nudge you in the right direction, explain, or answer questions. Remember, you're playing with people who are just starting out, too. Let's have fun together!

-Ed

Green Text

Anything in green is optional reading, so feel free to ignore it for now, or dive in if you're feeling brave.

Choosing a NT Contract

Today we're asking Declarer to choose a NT (No Trump) contract: either 1NT (a part score) or 3NT (a game contract). You take turns to be Dealer in MiniBridge (and Bridge). In MiniBridge, Dealer is always Declarer, so you take turns to choose and play contracts!

As Declarer, you can see your own hand and your partner's hand - **this week!** This is very helpful.

- To make 1NT, you need 21+ points and balanced hands
- To make 3NT, you need 25+ points and balanced hands

All the hands today are balanced hands. So just add up your points and your partner's points, and bid 1NT or 3NT; simple. Making a part score like 1NT gets a 50 point bonus; making a game like 3NT gets a 300 point bonus, so choose a game if you want those bonus points.

But what is a balanced hand? A balanced hand:

- Does not have a void or singleton in any suit
- Does not have more than one doubleton

Later, you'll see that with 8 or more cards in a suit, it's sometimes better to play in that suit rather than NT. But that's for later.

Playing a NT Contract

The hands are grouped for you to practice different playing techniques, as Declarer:

- Hands 1-4: Cashing Top Tricks (1NT)
- Hands 5-8: Cashing Top Tricks (3NT)
- Hands 9-12: Promoting High Cards
- Hands 13-16: Finessing High Cards
- Hands 17-20: Establishing Low Cards / Long Suits
- Hands 21-32: Trickier Contracts

The Hands

Cashing Top Tricks (1NT)

If you have enough top tricks - tricks that you can win right away - to make your contract, go ahead and do that! Don't worry about making extra tricks, make your contract. However, you need to get the lead first; with luck, your opponent's opening lead lets you do that right away.

North East South West

12 12 10 6

♠ T865

♥ A8

♦ AK3

♣ JT84

♠ 974

♥ 543

♦ 64

♣ AQ932

♠ KQJ

♥ KQJT76

♦ 987

♣ 6

♠ A32

♥ 92

♦ QJT52

♣ K75

Board: 1 Dealer: North Lead: ♥K #M3

North has 22 points (12+10); not the 25+ usually needed for a 3NT game, so should choose the 1NT part score: 7 tricks.

East leads ♥K (probably the top of a sequence, KQJ). You can take the lead immediately with the A♥ and have 7 top winners: 1♠, 1♥, 5♦, 0♣. So...

Take the first trick with the A♥ and immediately take your five diamond tricks. Remember to start with ♦A and ♦K (high cards from the short side first) so you don't get stuck in the wrong hand.

Take your seventh trick with the A♠ to make your contract; you might make another trick in Clubs or Spades, but probably won't.

Trying for extra tricks

Later in this course we'll start encouraging you to look for overtricks, extra tricks that you don't need for your contract; icing on the cake. For now, just concentrate on making your contract. Cake first, icing later.

East South West North

13 7 11 9

♠ A9875

♥ QT9

♦ K74

♣ 64

♠ KQ2

♥ 2

♦ 963

♣ KQJ875

♠ JT3

♥ AK6

♦ JT52

♣ AT9

♠ 64

♥ J87543

♦ AQ8

♣ 32

Board: 2 Dealer: East Lead: ♥5 #M4

East has 24 points (13+11); not quite the 25+ usually needed for a 3NT game, so should choose the 1NT part score: 7 tricks.

South leads 5H (probably fourth highest from their longest suit).

You can take the lead immediately with A♥ and have 8 top winners: 0♠, 2♥, 0♦, 6♣. So...

Win the opening lead with ♥A and cash ♣A and ♥K, then play dummy's clubs from the top, making 8 tricks. You can concede the last 5 tricks or try to make some more...

Conceding tricks

When we know we're not going to make any more tricks, we can be graceful (and speed the play up a bit) and concede the remaining tricks; it's a posh name for surrendering! Use the **Claim** button to do that: claim 0 tricks.

But I have nine Clubs!

That strong 9-card Club suit suggests you ought to play in Clubs, not NT. Tsk, we haven't even got to trump contracts yet! And, surprisingly, a No Trump contract is often better than a Club contract, even with 9 Clubs. We'll get to topics like this eventually, but for now, please take our word for it.

Trying for extra tricks

You CAN try to set up extra tricks, but you don't need extra tricks to make 1NT, SO PLEASE DON'T! But, if you were optimistic enough to bid 3NT...

You have ♠KQJ. If you lead them early on, once your opponent plays their Ace you have two "extra" Spade tricks. This is called **promoting**: making extra tricks with your high cards by driving out the opponents' higher card(s).

Promoting usually loses the lead. Is that safe? **Probably**. You still have a top heart to stop your opponents cashing tricks in that suit, and your diamonds (♦JTxx) are **probably** enough to stop your opponents making more than 3 tricks in that suit. If you're feeling lucky:

At trick 2 play a spade to dummy's ♠K. North will probably win with their Ace and return a heart to your ♥K; discard a diamond from dummy. Now you can cash ♠J and ♣A, then win six more tricks from dummy (♠Q and ♣KQJ87). You make ten tricks! As long as they don't play diamonds.

High Card Points are just a guide

On this hand your 24 points were enough for game in NT, mainly because of that long, solid, Club suit; you "just" need to promote ♠KQJ.

High Card Points are only a guide to choosing the best contract. Sometimes, you can make 3NT with as little as 21 HCP; sometimes you'll fail with as many as 28. But most of the time, 25 HCP and a balanced hand is enough.

South West North East

13 9 9 9

♠ A5	
♥ KJ87	
♦ 962	
♣ J543	
♠ QJT982	♠ 76
♥ 532	♥ T964
♦ 84	♦ KQJT
♣ AQ	♣ K62
	♠ K43
	♥ AQ
	♦ A753
	♣ T987

West North East South

17 7 6 10

	♠ QJ9854	
	♥ 74	
	♦ 98	
	♣ A72	
♠ AK2		♠ T
♥ AQ3		♥ KJT2
♦ A642		♦ J753
♣ T86		♣ J954
	♠ 763	
	♥ 9865	
	♦ KQT	
	♣ KQ3	

Board: 3 Dealer: South Lead: ♠Q #M5

South has 22 points (13+9); not the 25+ usually needed for a 3NT game, so should choose the 1NT part score: 7 tricks

West leads ♠Q (*probably top of a sequence, QJT*).

You could take the lead immediately with the ♠A and have 7 top winners: 2♠, 4♥, 1♦, 0♣. So...

BUT STOP! This hand is a little tricky: there's a trap waiting for you! To make four tricks from hearts you will need to play them carefully: cash ♥AQ first and then get to dummy to play ♥KJ. The only way to get to dummy is via its ♠A. So don't play dummy's ♠A on the first trick, win it with ♠K.

Phew! Play ♥AQ to "unblock" the suit. Lead a spade to dummy's ♠A and cash ♥KJ. Finally, lead a diamond to ♦A for your seven tricks.

Board: 4 Dealer: West Lead: ♠Q #M8

West has 23 points (17+6); not the 25+ usually needed for a 3NT game, so should choose the 1NT part score: 7 tricks

North leads the ♠Q (*probably top of a sequence, QJT*).

You can take the lead immediately with the ♠A and have 7 top winners: 2♠, 4♥, 1♦, 0♣. So...

Win the first trick with ♠A and play ♥AQ followed by ♥3 to cash the remaining hearts. Cash ♦A and ♠K for the contract - and concede the rest.

Cashing Top Tricks (3NT)

North East South West

21 1 12 6

♠ AK2
♥ A543
♦ AKQJ
♣ 32

♠ 7543
♥ Q2
♦ 987
♣ KJ97

♠ QJT9
♥ K6
♦ 543
♣ AQ65

♠ 86
♥ JT987
♦ T62
♣ T84

Board: 5 Dealer: North Lead: ♥J #M1

North has 33 points (21+12); more than the 25+ usually needed for a 3NT game, so should choose the 3NT game: 9 tricks

East leads ♥J (*probably top of a sequence, JT9*).

You can take the lead immediately with ♥K or ♥A and have eleven top winners: 4♠, 2♥, 4♦ and 1♣. So...

Cash your eleven top winners! The order of play doesn't really matter, but a good habit to get into is to always cash the Honours from the shorter hand, if they are split across both hands. So start playing spades by cashing ♠AK (from the "short hand"). It's a good habit because it reduces the risk of getting stuck in the wrong hand.

That's a lot of points

Indeed it is! 33 points is often enough to bid and make a Small Slam; 12 tricks. But we won't be bidding slams for a few weeks yet.

Trying for extra tricks

If you're feeling greedy, you can try to make an extra trick by using a technique called finessing. You finesse a missing Honour by hoping it's where you want it to be and playing accordingly. A simple finesse works 50% of the time and may involve extra risk. Later practice hands rely on finessing, but this hand doesn't. Anyway, to try to get a 12th trick by finessing...

Win the first trick with ♥K, cross to hand with ♦A and lead a club. If East plays low, play dummy's ♣Q, which will win if East holds ♣K. This is the (simple) finesse.

In practice West has the ♣K, the finesse fails and we only make eleven tricks. The finesse is worth trying on this hand, as long as we take it early on, while we still have stops in all the suits, so we can regain the lead if it loses and still make our eleven tricks.

East South West North

14 8 13 5

♠ 532
 ♥ Q642
 ♦ K987
 ♣ 32
 ♠ K7
 ♥ KJ8
 ♦ Q32
 ♣ KJ964
 ♠ A86
 ♥ A73
 ♦ T64
 ♣ AQT8
 ♠ QJT94
 ♥ T95
 ♦ AJ5
 ♣ 75

Board: 6 Dealer: East Lead: ♠Q #M2

East has 27 points (14+13); more than the 25+ usually needed for a 3NT game, so should choose the 3NT game: 9 tricks.

South leads ♠Q (probably top of a sequence, QJT).

You can take the lead immediately with ♠A and have 9 top winners: 2♠, 2♥, 0♦, 5♣. So...

Cash your 9 top winners. The order of play doesn't matter much, but a good habit to get into is to always cash the Honours from the short hand first, if they are split across both hands. So start playing clubs with ♣A and ♣Q. It's a good habit because it reduces the risk of getting stuck in the wrong hand.

Concede the last 4 tricks.

Trying for extra tricks

DON'T. You might be tempted to try a finesse: If you lead a heart towards dummy's ♥KJ and play the Jack, if South has ♥Q you'll make an extra trick, right? Yes...

But not a good idea on this hand. Your diamonds are so weak, if North has ♥Q you'll lose the trick AND the lead, and could easily lose 4 or more diamonds - and the contract.

So, the moral of the story is: don't risk the contract for the dubious bonus of an overtrick!

But I have 9 clubs!

That strong 9-card Club suit suggests you ought to play in Clubs, not NT. Tsk, we haven't even got to trump contracts yet! And, surprisingly, a No Trump contract is often better than a Club contract, even with 9 of them.

With this hand, you can make 9 tricks in 3NT, which scores a game bonus; in Clubs, you MIGHT make an extra trick, but you need to make 11 tricks to make game in clubs - so no game bonus for you!

We'll get to topics like this eventually.

South West North East

17 9 10 4

♠ T62
 ♥ T7
 ♦ K653
 ♣ AQJ6
 ♠ 94
 ♥ KQJ98
 ♦ QJ8
 ♣ T87
 ♠ 8753
 ♥ 654
 ♦ A7
 ♣ 5432
 ♠ AKQJ
 ♥ A32
 ♦ T942
 ♣ K9

Board: 7 Dealer: South Lead: ♥K #M6

South has 27 points (14+13); more than the 25+ usually needed for a 3NT game, so should choose the 3NT game: 9 tricks

West leads ♥K (probably top of a sequence, KQJ).

You can take the lead immediately with ♥A and have nine top winners: 4♠, 1♥, 0♦, 4♣. So...

Win the first trick with ♥A and cash ♣K then lead ♣9 to make dummy's 3 club tricks (always cash the Honours from the short hand first, if they are split across both hands). Cash your four spade tricks to make the contract.

You might make a diamond trick, but probably won't.

West North East South

16 8 9 7

♠ 32

♥ KQJT76

♦ Q65

♣ 75

♠ AQ

♥ 432

♦ J874

♣ AKQ6

♠ KJ74

♥ A

♦ T932

♣ J932

♠ T9865

♥ 985

♦ AK

♣ T84

Board: 8 Dealer: West Lead: ♥K #M7

West has 25 points (16+9); just enough for a 3NT game, so should choose the 3NT game: 9 tricks.

North leads ♥K (**probably top of a sequence, KQJ**).

You can take the lead immediately with ♥A and have nine top winners: 4♠, 1♥, 0♦, 4♣. So...

Win the first trick with ♥A (not much choice!). Now you have to be careful how you play, or you'll only make 2 spade tricks, not 4. **You only have one entry to dummy**. Play a spade to cash ♠AQ - as usual, play the Honours from the shorter hand first (to "unblock" the suit).

Now, we need to get back to dummy to cash ♠KJ. The only reliable way to do that is to lead ♣6 to dummy's ♣J. Now you can cash ♠KJ.

Cash ♣AKQ to make your contract and concede the rest.

If you play spades or clubs in the wrong order, you probably only make 7 tricks.

Promoting High Cards

If you don't have enough top tricks to make your contract, you have to be a bit more creative. The simplest method is to **promote** your high cards from the "runner up" position to winners, by getting your opponent to play their higher cards - usually by force. For example: if you have KQJ but not the Ace, these aren't top tricks, but lead the King to force out the Ace, and the Queen and Jack become winners.

If your opponent refuses to play their Ace on your King (this is called **ducking**) then lead the Queen. If they duck again, you've made your two tricks and should switch to another suit; they might have AT left, and leading the Jack would give them two tricks.

If you have a sequence like KQJx in one hand, it's even better to lead a low card towards it; your opponent may play their Ace without being forced to, leaving you with THREE winners. (It's a very simple finesse.)

North East South West

14 8 13 5

♠ A6

♥ QJT9

♦ AK62

♣ 643

♠ 973

♥ 854

♦ QJ8

♣ QT95

♠ QJT85

♥ A73

♦ T95

♣ J2

♠ K42

♥ K62

♦ 743

♣ AK87

Board: 9 Dealer: North Lead: ♠Q #M9

North has 27 points (14+13); enough for 3NT, so should choose the 3NT game: 9 tricks.

East leads ♠Q (probably top of a sequence, QJT).

You can see 6 top winners: 2♠, 0♥, 2♦, 2♣. You can take the lead immediately with ♠A or ♠K, but you need 3 more tricks!

Your hearts look good (KQJT9!), you're just missing the Ace. So if you drive out the ♥A, you'll **promote** your remaining high cards to make 3 Heart tricks - and the contract.

That sounds easy, but be careful. You will lose the lead when you do, so must do it right away, while you still have high cards in the other 3 suits (**stops**) to get the lead back. It's tempting to play your top tricks before playing hearts, but that would be a fatal mistake!

So take the first trick with ♠K and immediately lead ♥K from dummy (play high cards from the short hand, remember). If your opponent ducks (refuses to play their Ace), then simply keep playing hearts until they play the ♥A. Now, whatever your opponent leads (probably ♠J, trying to set up their long suit) you can win the trick and cash your remaining - promoted - hearts and top winners to make the contract.

Lose the lead sooner rather than later

As a general rule, if you have to lose the lead (or have to risk losing the lead) to make your contract, do it as soon as you can, while you still have high cards (stops) in all the suits, so you can get the lead back and take control again.

East South West North

15 10 7 8

	♠ 83		
	♥ K75		
	♦ KQ63		
	♣ 8754		
♠ Q74		♠ AK5	
♥ 94		♥ QJ632	
♦ 9875		♦ AT	
♣ KQT6		♣ J32	
	♠ JT962		
	♥ AT8		
	♦ J42		
	♣ A9		

Board: 10 Dealer: East Lead: ♠J #M12

East has 22 points (15+7), not the 25+ needed for 3NT, so should choose the 1NT part score: 7 tricks.

South leads ♠J (*probably top of a sequence, JT9*).

You can see 4 top winners 3♠, 0♥, 1♦, 0♣. You can take the lead immediately with ♠A or ♠K or ♠Q, but you need 3 more tricks!

You could try hearts: your 5-card suit could produce 3 tricks if you can drive out the Ace and King, but you'd lose the lead twice, and the suit has gaps.

Promoting your clubs is a lot safer: you have KQJT split across the two hands, no gaps! So you are certain to make 3 tricks in clubs and only need to lose the lead once, to the ♣A.

When you lose the lead you want to get it back right away, so must do so while you still have high cards in the other 3 suits (**stops**). It's tempting to play your top tricks before playing clubs, but that would be a mistake!

However, be careful what you play to the first trick! Dummy only has one entry outside clubs, ♠Q. You will need this entry if your opponent ducks two rounds of clubs and plays their Ace on the third round; you've made two club tricks, but dummy's fourth club (your third club trick) will be stranded if you have already played your only entry to dummy!

Yes, that IS a bit complicated! Did you spot the pitfall in time?

OK! Take the first trick with ♠A, then immediately lead ♣J from hand (while you still have stops in all the suits). Keep playing clubs until your opponent plays their Ace. You can then regain the lead whatever they play (probably ♠T), and cash the remaining Clubs and top tricks to make the contract.

South West North East

17	9	9	5
	♠ AK5		
	♥ 7532		
	♦ Q873		
	♣ 32		
♠ J97		♠ QT864	
♥ QJT8		♥ 96	
♦ J52		♦ T94	
♣ A64		♣ K75	
	♠ 32		
	♥ AK4		
	♦ AK6		
	♣ QJT98		

Board: 11 Dealer: South Lead: ♥Q #M13

South has 26 points (17+9); enough for 3NT, so should choose the 3NT game: 9 tricks

West leads ♥Q (probably top of a sequence, QJT).

You can take the lead immediately with the Ace or King, but can only see 7 top winners 2♠, 2♥, 3♦, 0♣. You need 2 more tricks.

Promoting your clubs is the solution: you have QJT98 in your hand, no gaps! So you are certain to make 3 tricks in clubs, you just need to lose the lead twice, to the ♣AK. A little worrying.

When you lose the lead you want to get it back right away, so must do so while you still have high cards in the other 3 suits (**stops**). It's tempting to play your top tricks before playing clubs, but that would be a mistake!

Win the first trick with ♥K and lead ♣Q. You'll lose the lead to the ♣A or ♣K and expect another heart lead. Win the second heart lead with ♥A and lead ♣J. If West wins the second club lead with their ♣A or ♣K they will be able to cash two heart tricks, but you will make the rest - and your contract.

If you're lucky, West plays their club winner on the first round so they will set up their hearts but never get the chance to cash them (because they don't get the lead again) and you make 11 tricks.

Is it safe?

You can work out that your strategy is safe, but it's complicated. West announced they had 9 points, so they can't have both ♣A and ♣K AND the ♥QJT; West must have one club honour, East must have the other. You have 7 hearts, so West could have 5 (potentially making 3 heart tricks), but then East would only have 1 heart, so when they play their club honour and get the lead, they can't lead hearts back, and West can't set up their long suit AND get a chance to cash them.

But don't bother; you don't have another strategy to try!

West North East South

13	14	8	5
	♠ A8		
	♥ QJT		
	♦ QJT84		
	♣ KJ3		
♠ Q76		♠ JT92	
♥ K6		♥ A53	
♦ A973		♦ K52	
♣ AT84		♣ 965	
	♠ K543		
	♥ 98742		
	♦ 6		
	♣ Q72		

Board: 12 Dealer: West Lead: ♦Q #M16

West has 21 points (13+8), not enough for 3NT, so should choose 1NT: 7 tricks.

North leads ♦Q (probably top of a sequence, QJT).

You can take the lead immediately with the Ace or King, but can only see 5 top winners: 0♠, 2♥, 2♦, 1♣. You need 2 more tricks.

Promoting your spades is the solution: you have QJT9 split between the two hands. So you are certain to make 2 tricks in spades, you just need to lose the lead twice, to the ♠AK. A little worrying.

When you lose the lead you want to get it back right away, so must do so while you still have high cards in the other 3 suits (**stops**). It's tempting to play your top tricks before playing spades, but that would be a mistake!

Win the first trick with ♦A and immediately lead ♠Q. If North wins and plays another diamond, win with the King and lead another spade to drive out ♠K. You now have two spade tricks to go with your five top winners.

Finessing High Cards

If you don't have enough top tricks to make your contract, you can try **finessing**. Finessing is the gentle art of being a bit optimistic! You use it when you've got some high cards (honours) but there's a gap; you lead towards the hand with the gap and play the lower honour, hoping that the missing honour is in the hand "before" the hand with the gap rather than after it. An example will help, I hope. A typical, simple finesse:

	North AQ	
West ??		East ??
	South xx	

To finesse, lead a low card towards the AQ in North's hand:

- If West plays the King, play the Ace and then the Queen for two tricks
- If West plays low, play the Queen, not the Ace. And cross your fingers! If West has the King, you will make the Queen and then the Ace for two tricks. If East has the King you will lose the Queen (and the lead) but should still make the Ace, for one trick.

When we talk about finessing, we name the "missing" high card. So we say, for example, we're "finessing the King of diamonds" if that's the card we don't have.

There are many different types of finesse, but most are like this one: they work some of the time, and fail some of the time. Notice that, unlike promoting, finessing only loses the lead some of the time (when the finesse fails) - and only delivers an extra trick some of the time (when the finesse succeeds)! It's more of a gamble.

North East South West

16	11	12	1
	♠ A53		
	♥ A84		
	♦ 975		
	♣ AKJT		
♠ T72		♠ QJ9	
♥ 532		♥ KQT97	
♦ JT42		♦ K83	
♣ 874		♣ 92	
	♠ K864		
	♥ J6		
	♦ AQ6		
	♣ Q653		

Board: 13 Dealer: North Lead: ♥K #M29

North has 28 points (16+12); enough to choose 3NT: 9 tricks

East leads ♥K (probably top of a sequence, KQT).

You can take the lead immediately with the Ace **but should you?** You can see eight top winners: 2♠, 1♥, 1♦ and 4♣. So you need one extra trick - and those hearts are a bit worrying.

Your best chance of an extra trick is in diamonds: if you take the finesse, it has a 50% chance of working. Not great odds.

But first, let's think about that opening lead. East has ♥KQT and probably more hearts; you only have 5, so your opponents have 8. Even if hearts split 4:4, that means East has 3 heart tricks - and they might have more. We're bound to lose a spade and a diamond - so we will really don't want East to make 3 or more heart tricks. All we can do about this is duck the first two rounds of hearts, taking the third round with our Ace - hoping that West has no more hearts after 3 rounds, so they can't lead them back to East.

So play a low heart on the first two rounds of hearts (♥KQ), then play ♥A on the third round.

At trick four, lead ♦5 towards dummy's ♦AQ and play your ♦Q unless East plays the ♦K. Fingers crossed (50% chance) East has the King and your Queen is a winner, phew.

Your first successful finesse! If you remembered that West announced they had just 1 points during the bidding, then you knew that finesse would work.

You can now play your top winners and make your contract.

Ducking

While we urge you to duck the first two heart leads on this hand, if the finesse fails it won't help much! There's a lot of hoping in this hand.

I would cash the 4 club tricks before trying the diamond finesse, because that would force your opponents to discard some cards, which might help.

East South West North

17	9	8	6
	♠ 43		
	♥ T9876		
	♦ K5		
	♣ KT83		
♠ K86		♠ A752	
♥ KJ		♥ AQ	
♦ J643		♦ T872	
♣ 6542		♣ AQJ	
	♠ QJT9		
	♥ 5432		
	♦ AQ9		
	♣ 97		

Board: 14 Dealer: East Lead: ♠Q #M30

East has 25 points (17+8), which is usually just enough for 3NT, but this is such a horrible hand! Your 10 points in hearts can only make two tricks; they aren't pulling their weight. So on this occasion, you should be a bit more cautious and choose a part score: 1NT: 7 tricks

South leads ♠Q (probably top of a sequence, QJT) so you can take the lead immediately with your Ace or King.

You have five top winners: 2♠, 2♥, 0♦ and 1♣. So you need 2 more tricks.

Your best chance of 2 extra tricks is to play the club finesse - twice!

You should try finesses right away, while you still have high cards (stops) in the other suits, so you can get the lead back if the finesse fails.

So win the first trick with ♠K in dummy so you can lead a club towards ♣AQJ in your hand. Assuming North plays a low club, play ♣J and cross your fingers! If this first finesse succeeds (it does), you're half way there.

Now you need to return to dummy so you can finesse a second time, to make the ♣Q. Lead ♥Q from your hand and play dummy's ♥K on it. Now lead another club towards the ♣AQ in you hand and play the ♣Q to take your second finesse - and second "extra" trick. Phew.

Now you take your remaining top tricks to make the contract.

South West North East

15 7 12 6

♠ K42	
♥ 876	
♦ 762	
♣ AKQ3	
♠ JT87	♠ Q6
♥ KQJ95	♥ T32
♦ 43	♦ K985
♣ 64	♣ JT75
	♠ A953
	♥ A4
	♦ AQJT
	♣ 982

Board: 15 Dealer: South Lead: ♥K #M31

South has 27 points (15+12); enough for 3NT: 9 tricks.

West leads ♥K (probably top of a sequence, KQJ) so you can take the lead immediately with ♥A - but should you?

You have seven top winners: 2♠, 1♥, 1♦ and 3♣. So you need two more tricks - and those hearts are a bit worrying.

Your best chance of 2 extra tricks is to play the diamond finesse - twice!

But first, let's think about that opening lead. West has ♥KQJ and probably more hearts; you only have 5, so your opponents have 8. Even if hearts split 4:4, that means West has 3 heart tricks - and they might have more. We don't want West to make lots of heart tricks. All we can do about this is duck the first round of hearts, taking the second round with our Ace - hoping this will make it harder for East to lead hearts back to their partner.

So... play a small heart on the ♥K, losing the first trick. West will lead another heart which you must win with ♥A.

You should try finesses right away, while you still have high cards (stops) in the other suits, so you can get the lead back if the finesse fails.

Lead a low club from your hand to the Ace in dummy so you can take the first finesse. Lead a low diamond towards the ♦AQJT in your hand. Assuming East plays a low diamond, play ♦T and cross your fingers! If this first finesse succeeds (it does), you're half way there.

Lead another low club from your hand to the King in dummy so you can take the second finesse. Lead a low diamond towards the ♦AQJ in your hand and play the ♦J to take your second finesse - and second "extra" trick. Phew.

You can now repeat the process to finesse the King of diamonds a third time. Take your remaining top tricks to make the contract and an overtrick.

West North East South

19 8 8 5

	♠ QT985	
	♥ T82	
	♦ KJT	
	♣ Q7	
♠ AK3		♠ 76
♥ AQ6		♥ KJ
♦ AQ63		♦ 8754
♣ 642		♣ KJT98
	♠ J42	
	♥ 97543	
	♦ 92	
	♣ A53	

Board: 16 Dealer: West Lead: ♠T #M34

West has 27 points (19+8), enough for 3NT: 9 tricks.

North leads ♠10 (probably top of a sequence, T98) so you can take the lead immediately with the Ace or King.

You can see six top winners: 2♠, 3♥, 1♦ and 0♣ so you need 3 more tricks.

Your best chance of 3 extra tricks is finessing the Queen of clubs. If North has it, you can make four club tricks - just losing one to the Ace. You've got 8 clubs, so your opponents only have 5.

So... win the first trick with your Ace and immediately lead a low club to the ♣8 in dummy. If the first finesse succeeds, return to dummy by leading ♥J and overtaking it with ♥Q and lead another low club towards the ♣9 for a second finesse.

This is a fairly complicated situation, a fairly risky strategy! If North has the Ace of clubs and South has the Queen, it doesn't work. If South has AQ it doesn't work! If North has AQ, it works. If North has the Queen and South has the Ace, it works.

Anyway, as the cards lie, North must play their ♣Q on the second round. Play the ♣K on the Queen and South will play their Ace and return a spade (partner's opening lead).

We win the spade return and lead another club, cash the rest of our winners, finishing with ten tricks.

Establishing Low Cards / Long Suits

If you don't have enough top tricks to make your contract, you can try **establishing** a long suit, to make even small cards into winners. To establish a long suit, you simply have to lead it several times, until your opponents have no more cards in that suit - or no more cards that are bigger than yours.

Establishing a long suit is easier and safer if you have the top honours, since you don't have to keep losing - and regaining - the lead. So a suit like AKQ432 should yield 6 tricks: 3 top tricks (AKQ) followed by 3 established low cards (432).

A more common situation is a suit like AKQ2; if you lead your three top tricks and everybody follows, you have established the 2 as a winner, because it's the **thirteenth** and last card.

North East South West

16 13 9 2

♠ J975

♥ AKQ

♦ KQJT

♣ 32

♠ T4

♥ J875

♦ 9876

♣ J84

♠ AKQ32

♥ T32

♦ A52

♣ T9

♠ 86

♥ 964

♦ 43

♣ AKQ765

Board: 17 Dealer: North Lead: ♠A #M17

North has 25 points (16+9), just enough for 3NT: 9 tricks.

East leads ♠A (**probably top of a sequence, AKQ..., but could be AK...**).

You can't get the lead yet, must wait to see what East does next. You can't implement a plan until you get the lead, but should still create a plan based on what you think will happen next (although it might have to change).

You expect East to lead ♠AKQ and another spade. If that happens (as it does) you can see 7 top winners: 1♠, 3♥, 0♦, 3♣ (counting your Jack of spades as a winner) and you will need two more tricks; if it doesn't, you might need 3 more tricks.

Your best chance of two or three more tricks is clubs: if they split 3:2, you can establish all 3 low clubs without losing the lead. So hang onto those clubs in dummy, don't throw any on East's spade tricks; throw away 2 hearts.

So... watch East make 3 spade tricks, then win the fourth round of spades with your Jack and implement your plan. If you counted spades, you'd realize North has one more spade left, they have another winner.

Lead a club to dummy's ♣A, then play the King and Queen; count the clubs as you go to make sure that your opponents have run out (they will) and you have successfully established your 3 little clubs. Play your 3 little clubs - discarding those diamond honours from your hand. Finally, lead a heart to your ♥AKQ to make 10 tricks and the contract.

But what about my diamonds?

It's tempting to play your ♦KQJT, surely that's a more reliable source of 3 tricks than hoping the clubs split 3:2? Yes it is, but if you lead a diamond you must lose the lead to the ♦A, and North must have it - as West announced just 2 points during the "bidding". So if you lead a diamond, North will win a fourth trick with their Ace and a fifth trick with their thirteenth spade. Oops!

Establishing the clubs is better, because it isn't guaranteed to fail!

East South West North

12 12 9 7

♠ 5

♥ AJT8

♦ 9864

♣ QT92

♠ 632

♥ 7642

♦ AKQT7

♣ 8

♠ A974

♥ Q95

♦ J

♣ AJ753

♠ KQJT8

♥ K3

♦ 532

♣ K64

Board: 18 Dealer: East Lead: ♠K #M20

East has 21 points (12+9), not enough for 3NT so choose 1NT: 7 tricks.

South leads ♠K (**probably top of a sequence, KQJ**).

You can take the lead immediately with the Ace, **but should you?**

You can see 6 top winners: 1♠, 0♥, 4♦, 1♣. You can't be sure of five diamond tricks from our combined ♦AKQT opposite the ♦J because you will have to overtake your Jack with Ace, King or Queen to get to dummy; you would need the diamonds to break 4:3 to establish your fifth, low diamond.

There isn't any obvious way to make an extra trick, so cross your fingers!

You could duck the spade lead up to 3 times, but there isn't much point; the diamond split is the key to this hand.

So take the first trick with ♠A and immediately lead the ♦J and overtake it with dummy's ♦Q. Now lead ♦A and ♦K and ♦T. Count the diamonds as you go; if your opponents both follow to the first three tricks, they have split 4:3 and you have successfully established your ♦7 as sixth trick. Lead a club to your Ace to make your seventh trick and the contract.

What if the diamonds don't split nicely?

We're not that cruel! But it's a good question.

If one of your opponents does not follow to the first three diamond tricks, your ♦7 is not going to be your fifth diamond winner. You should still play your 4 diamond winners (making 5 tricks), then lead a club towards ♣AJxxx in your hand and play the Ace (for your sixth trick), then lead a low club; you MIGHT get lucky and make the Jack eventually, or the ♥Q. But you probably won't; sometimes you just have to minimize your losses.

South West North East

14 7 13 6

♠ K54
♥ K72
♦ A4
♣ K5432

♠ J8
♥ QT985
♦ KJ93
♣ 98

♠ QT932
♥ J43
♦ T7
♣ QJT

♠ A76
♥ A6
♦ Q8652
♣ A76

Board: 19 Dealer: South Lead: ♥T #M22

South has 27 points (14+13), so chooses 3NT: 9 tricks

West leads ♥10 (probably top of a sequence, T98, or top of an internal sequence QT9).

You can take the lead immediately with the Ace or King. You can see seven top winners: 2♠, 2♥, 1♦, 2♣. So you need two more tricks.

The best way to get two more tricks is by establishing your small clubs. You have 8, so if they split 3:2, you'll lose the lead once and make 2 extra tricks.

You have 3 entries to dummy, so you can get back to cash those low clubs easily. You will lose the lead while establishing your clubs, so need to set them up NOW, while you still have high cards (stops) in all the suits.

Take the first trick with ♥A in your hand, play ♣A and then ♣7 to the ♣K. If both opponents follow (they do), they only have one more club. Play a third from dummy, losing the trick - and the lead. East will lead a Heart (partner's opening lead) which you can take with ♥K. You can now cash your established small clubs and remaining top tricks to make your contract.

What if the clubs don't split nicely?

We're not that cruel! But it's a good question.

If one of your opponents does not follow to the first club trick, you can only make two tricks in clubs, with the Ace and King. If you play both honours, you have promoted 3 club tricks for THEM. Nasty. Probably best to switch to diamonds immediately, playing the Ace and another towards the Queen, but don't play it - duck. With a lot of luck (!) you can make the Ace, Queen, and another diamond - and the contract. But you probably won't, it could go horribly wrong.

If one of your opponents does not follow to the second club trick, you can only make three tricks in clubs, with the Ace and King and fifth club. Play both honours, then lead a low club (which loses), then - when you regain the lead - do the same again. The next time you get the lead, you have established your thirteenth club and can probably make 8 tricks - or 9 if you're lucky. But you probably won't, it could go horribly wrong.

Both these strategies are risky; a definite Hail Mary. It's probably more sensible in both situations to take the money and run: cash your winners and accept you're going 2 down; better than 4 or 5 down. Just how optimistic (stubborn) are you?

West North East South

19 7 9 5

♠ 753
♥ A764
♦ 9
♣ QJT92

♠ Q92
♥ JT3
♦ AKQ54
♣ AK

♠ AK6
♥ Q985
♦ 632
♣ 876

♠ JT84
♥ K2
♦ JT87
♣ 543

Board: 20 Dealer: West Lead: ♣Q #M23

West has 28 points (19+9), so chooses 3NT: 9 tricks.

North leads ♣Q (**probably top of a sequence, QJT**).

You can take the lead immediately with the Ace or King. You can see eight top winners: 3♠, 0♥, 3♦ and 2♣. So you need one more trick.

Your best chance of extra tricks is establishing your low diamonds: if they split 3:2 you'll get 2 extra tricks without losing the lead; if they split 4:1 you'll make one extra trick, but must lose the lead once. If they split 5:0, you're in trouble.

You will lose the lead if diamonds split 4:1, so you need to set them up NOW, while you still have high cards (stops) in all the suits.

Take the first trick with ♣A. Lead ♦A and everybody follows (pew). Now lead ♦K and if either opponent doesn't follow (South doesn't), that's OK. Lead ♦Q for your fourth trick, then ♦4 which will be won by South - establishing your ♦5. When South leads a club (returning partner's opening lead), take it with your ♣K, cash ♦5 and your remaining top tricks to make the contract; don't touch Hearts until you have made your contract!

What about my hearts?

You COULD choose to promote your ♥QJT98 instead. This will always deliver two extra tricks, but you have to lose the lead twice - and that might allow North to establish their club suit, so you'd lose 3 clubs and 2 hearts. Oops.

If the diamonds split 5:0, promoting the hearts may be your only chance of making the contract. Is some chance better than no chance?

But if you get a 5:0 split in diamonds, it's probably safer to cut your losses: claim your 8 top tricks for 1 down. Going after the hearts might lose even more tricks. Feeling lucky?

Trickier Contracts (21-32)

These 12 hands are bit more awkward and not grouped by technique, so it was up to you to choose the right approach, no hints. How did you do?

North East South West

13	10	9	8
	♠ AK5		
	♥ T43		
	♦ 432		
	♣ AQT9		
♠ 87		♠ QJT96	
♥ KJ86		♥ Q97	
♦ KJ9		♦ QT8	
♣ 6432		♣ K8	
	♠ 432		
	♥ A52		
	♦ A765		
	♣ J75		

Board: 21 Dealer: North Lead: ♠Q #M10

North has 22 points (13+9) so should choose the 1NT part score: 7 tricks.

East leads ♠Q (top of sequence). We can see 5 top tricks: 2♠, 1♥, 1♦, 1♣.

The simplest way to make 7 tricks is to drive out ♣K before cashing the winners in other suits. Cash the ♣A and play another club. This ensures three club tricks. We make 2 spades, 1 heart, 1 diamond, and 3 clubs.

If you've already played a few MiniBridge hands you might spot a way to try for 8 tricks. After winning the first trick with ♠A, cross to dummy's ♦A and lead ♣J.

If West covers with ♣K, win with ♣A and you now have 8 tricks. If West plays low, play low from hand and you'll still be able make 8 tricks if West has ♣K. This is an example of a repeated finesse.

Before embarking on this approach it's important to check that it's OK to release dummy's ♦A before playing on clubs. On this hand it is: even if East has all six missing diamonds he'll be unable to cash more than five tricks and we'll still make our contract.

In practice East wins the first round of clubs with ♣K, so we have to be content with making our contract exactly.

East South West North

12	10	9	9
	♠ 87		
	♥ JT86		
	♦ KJ9		
	♣ A632		
♠ 432		♠ AK5	
♥ A52		♥ K43	
♦ A765		♦ 432	
♣ J75		♣ QT94	
	♠ QJT96		
	♥ Q97		
	♦ QT8		
	♣ K8		

Board: 22 Dealer: East Lead: ♠Q #M14

East has 21 points (12+9) so should choose the 1NT part score: 7 tricks.

South leads ♠Q. Our ♠AK, ♥AK and ♦A give us 5 top winners.

We can make 7 tricks by driving out ♣A and ♣K before cashing the winners in other suits.

Win ♠A and play ♣4 to West's ♣J at trick 2. Win the spade return with ♠K and play another club.

We make 2 spades, 2 hearts, 1 diamond, and 2 clubs.

Note: letting the opponents into the lead twice allows South to set up and then cash some spade winners, but we discard losing diamonds from both hands and can cash our established club winners when we regain the lead.

South West North East

17 8 4 11

♠ 32
 ♥ 642
 ♦ Q75
 ♣ Q7642
 ♠ QT987 ♠ AJ4
 ♥ AQ8 ♥ JT9
 ♦ 642 ♦ KJ98
 ♣ T3 ♣ J95
 ♠ K65
 ♥ K753
 ♦ AT3
 ♣ AK8

Board: 23 Dealer: South Lead: ♠T #M19

South has 21 points (17+4) so should choose the 1NT part score: 7 tricks.

West leads ♠10 (top of an internal sequence). East wins ♠A and returns ♠J, to set up spade winners.

We can see 5 top winners: 1♠, 0♥, 1♦, 3♣.

Our best chance is that the opponents' clubs break 3-2, and then there will be five club tricks to cash. Play the ♣A, ♣K and the ♣8 to dummy. Count the clubs played and South finds the ♣7 and ♣6 are winners. He therefore cashes these two extra tricks before winning his seventh trick with ♦A.

Note: it's important to start clubs by cashing ♣AK. If we use dummy's ♣Q at an earlier stage we'll lose access to the last two clubs.

In general, when playing a suit where one hand contains more cards than the other it's usually best to start with the honours from the short hand first. This avoids blocking the suit.

West North East South

15 9 11 5

♠ A82
 ♥ JT987
 ♦ A9
 ♣ 532
 ♠ KQJT ♠ 975
 ♥ AKQ ♥ 643
 ♦ 432 ♦ KQJ
 ♣ 864 ♣ AJT9
 ♠ 643
 ♥ 52
 ♦ T8765
 ♣ KQ7

Board: 24 Dealer: West Lead: ♥J #M15

West has 26 points (15+11) so should choose the 3NT game: 9 tricks.

North leads ♥J. We can see 4 top winners: 0♠, 3♥, 0♦, 1♣.

After winning the first trick in hand we should drive out ♠A. This sets up three spade winners.

If North plays another heart, we win and play on diamonds to drive out the ♦A to set up two diamond winners.

We make 3♠, 3♥, 2♦, and 1♣.

North East South West

20 9 8 3

♠ AQ6
 ♥ A97
 ♦ AJ4
 ♣ KQ53
 ♠ JT854 ♠ 32
 ♥ QT2 ♥ KJ864
 ♦ T9 ♦ 863
 ♣ 972 ♣ AJT
 ♠ K97
 ♥ 53
 ♦ KQ752
 ♣ 864

Board: 25 Dealer: North Lead: ♥6 #M18

North has 28 points (20+8) so should choose the 3NT game: 9 tricks.

East leads ♥6 (low from an honour in his longest suit). West plays ♥Q, which sets up four heart winners for E/W.

We can see 8 top winners: 3♠, 1♥, 4♦, 0♣. A club trick could be set up by driving out ♣A, but East can cash four heart winners to defeat us. Instead hope diamonds break 3-2 or 4-1. Cash the ♦A J and play ♦4 to dummy. Unless diamonds break 5-0 the fifth diamond will be the ninth trick.

East South West North

14 10 7 9

♠ 642
 ♥ KQ95
 ♦ K9
 ♣ JT64
 ♠ J53
 ♥ T842
 ♦ A542
 ♣ Q3
 ♠ AQ
 ♥ J73
 ♦ T87
 ♣ AK952
 ♠ KT987
 ♥ A6
 ♦ QJ63
 ♣ 87

Board: 26 Dealer: East Lead: ♠T #M21

East has 21 points (14+7) so should choose the 1NT part score: 7 tricks.

South leads ♠10 (top of sequence).

We can see six top winners: 2♠, 0♥, 1♦ and 3♣. We can count two spades on the opening lead.

We must hope for an extra trick from clubs.

Win the ♠Q, play ♣2 to ♣Q, and ♣3 to ♣A. Cash the ♣K. When South shows out, lose a club to North to set up the seventh trick. The ♠A is our entry to cash the club.

Cash the honour in the short hand first.

South West North East

14 5 7 14

♠ T874
 ♥ QJ63
 ♦ A9
 ♣ 873
 ♠ QJ62
 ♥ 72
 ♦ QT654
 ♣ 62
 ♠ AK
 ♥ AT98
 ♦ J32
 ♣ QT54
 ♠ 953
 ♥ K54
 ♦ K87
 ♣ AKJ9

Board: 27 Dealer: South Lead: ♦5 #M32

South has 21 points (14+7) so should choose the 1NT part score: 7 tricks.

West leads a low diamond as it is his longest suit and best chance to set up winners. We can see four top winners: 0♠, 0♥, 2♦ and 2♣.

Hearts will provide at least two more tricks.

Win ♦K and lead ♥K. When East refuses the trick, play a heart to ♥Q and East's ♥A. Win the next diamond with ♦A and cash ♥J.

When West shows out, we need another trick: the club finesse is the best chance. Lead ♣3 and play ♣J if East plays low.

West North East South

17 6 10 7

♠ 764
 ♥ 865
 ♦ 983
 ♣ KQJ7
 ♠ KQT5
 ♥ K74
 ♦ KQ4
 ♣ A93
 ♠ J92
 ♥ AJ32
 ♦ AT6
 ♣ T42
 ♠ A83
 ♥ QT9
 ♦ J752
 ♣ 865

Board: 28 Dealer: West Lead: ♣K #M11

West has 27 points (17+10) so should choose the 3NT game: 9 tricks.

North leads ♣K (top of sequence). We can see 6 top winners 0♠, 2♥, 3♦, 1♣.

We can set up three spade tricks by driving out the ♠A before cashing the winners in other suits.

We make 3 spades, 2 hearts, 3 diamonds, and 1 club.

If you've already played a few hands of MiniBridge you might be worried that the opponents would win too many club tricks when they're on lead with ♠A.

We can reduce the chance of this happening by allowing North's ♣K to win the first trick. It's OK to win the club continuation. This hold-up play (also known as "ducking") means that if North has five clubs South will have none left when he gains the lead with ♠A.

In practice North has only 4 clubs, so the hold-up play isn't required here.

North East South West

14	12	8	6
	♠ QJ3		
	♥ A96		
	♦ AK7		
	♣ T753		
♠ 98654		♠ AT7	
♥ K732		♥ J54	
♦ 32		♦ JT965	
♣ K9		♣ AQ	
	♠ K2		
	♥ QT8		
	♦ Q84		
	♣ J8642		

Board: 29 Dealer: North Lead: ♦J #M24

North has 22 points (14+8) so should choose the 1NT part score: 7 tricks.

East leads ♦J (top of sequence). We can see four top winners: 0♠, 1♥, 3♦ and 0♣.

After winning the first trick with ♦K we could drive out ♠A to set up two more tricks but three are needed.

We should therefore play on clubs, hoping that they break 2-2. We lose a club to East's ♣Q, win the diamond return with ♦A and try another club. When West has to play ♣K under East's ♣A we have our seven tricks.

We win East's diamond return with dummy's ♦Q as West shows out. If we've been counting the diamonds carefully we'll realise that East has only two left. We can therefore afford to knock out ♠A. East cashes his diamonds, but we discard hearts from both hands and claim the rest. Eight tricks made.

East South West North

21	9	5	5
	♠ 653		
	♥ 8743		
	♦ A6		
	♣ JT98		
♠ 87		♠ AT9	
♥ J62		♥ AKQ	
♦ KJT73		♦ Q985	
♣ 543		♣ AQ2	
	♠ KQJ42		
	♥ T95		
	♦ 42		
	♣ K76		

Board: 30 Dealer: East Lead: ♠K #M25

East has 26 points (21+5) so should choose the 3NT game: 9 tricks.

South leads ♠K (top of sequence). We can see five top winners: 1♠, 3♥, 0♦ and 1♣. The diamonds provide four more tricks by driving out the ♦A.

The danger is that when the defenders win the ♦A, they cash four spade winners. We can reduce the chance of this happening by refusing to take the ♠A until the third round. When we now play a diamond North wins ♦A but has no spade left to play. We make the contract by virtue of our hold-up play in spades.

If South has five spades and ♦A we can't make the contract whatever we do. And if North had been able to return a spade the suit would (presumably) be splitting 4-4 and we would still make our nine tricks.

South West North East

20	7	3	10
	♠ 74		
	♥ T32		
	♦ Q87		
	♣ J9742		
♠ KQJT5		♠ 982	
♥ 976		♥ AK8	
♦ J94		♦ T652	
♣ 63		♣ KT8	
	♠ A63		
	♥ QJ54		
	♦ AK3		
	♣ AQ5		

Board: 31 Dealer: South Lead: ♠K #M26

South has 23 points (20+3) so should choose the 1NT part score: 7 tricks.

West leads ♠K (top of sequence).

We can see five top tricks: 1♠, 0♥, 3♦ and 1♣.

Clubs can provide the extra tricks.

We should duck two rounds of spades, in case East has three. We know from the points that East has all the remaining high cards, so we play the ♣A and ♣Q to set up the clubs. The defence take two spades, two hearts and a club, but we have eight tricks.

West North East South

16 8 6 10

♠ K87
♥ K9863
♦ 872
♣ QT

♠ 932
♥ QJT
♦ AKQ5
♣ A42

♠ AQT4
♥ 742
♦ 43
♣ 9763

♠ J65
♥ A5
♦ JT96
♣ KJ85

Board: 32 Dealer: West Lead: ♥6 #M33

West has 22 points (16+6) so should choose the 1NT part score: 7 tricks.

North leads a low heart as it is his longest suit and best chance to set up winners.

South wins ♥A and returns ♥5. North wins ♥K and plays a third heart, which sets up two winners.

We can see six top winners: 1♠, 1♥, 3♦ and 1♣.

Spades could provide an extra trick if North has either ♠K or ♠J. Play ♠2 and put on ♠10. It loses to ♠J. Win the next trick, play ♠3 and put on the ♠Q, which wins.

When we cash ♠A both opponents follow suit. This means that dummy's ♠4 is good for an eighth trick.