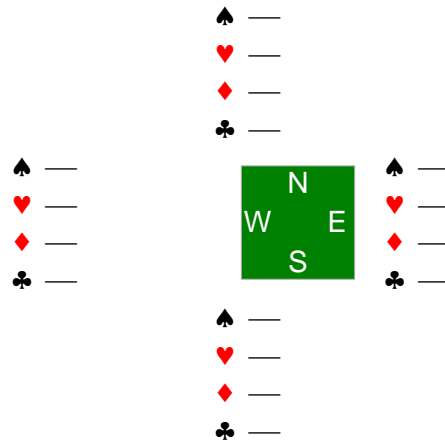


North Deals
None Vul



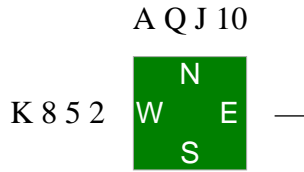
Over the long term, you will be a declarer 25% of the time, your partner will be declarer 25% of the time, and you will be a defender 50% of the time. Defense is hard, but the better you are at defense, the better you will score in a game.

Declarer play is easier than defender play. As declarer, you normally have more points and more trumps than the defenders. You have all sorts of tools to make your contracts- finesses, ruffing in dummy, setting up long suits, end plays, squeezes, and more. Declarer gets to play 26 cards, and partner is not involved in the play- it is all you.

On defense, you only get to play 13 cards. You have to rely on partner to help with the defense. You have to communicate with partner, and you have to count points and suits. The rules for defense are not as clear- play second hand low (except when you must play second hand high) and play third hand high (except when third hand must duck the trick). The one big advantage the defense has is that they get to make the opening lead.

Some leads are killers that set a contract. Some are neutral, and some are just plain bad. On the following hands, we will focus on what the bad leads are. **What is a bad lead?** A bad lead is one that gives declarer more tricks than they deserve.

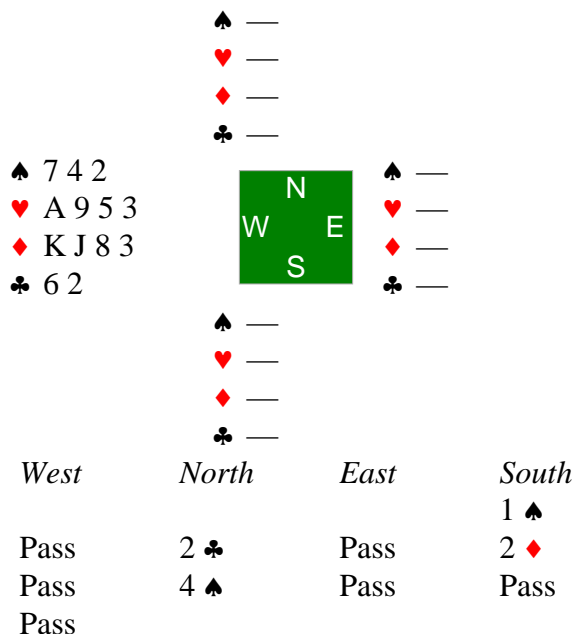
Before making an opening lead, you should try to visualize partner's hand- how many points could she have, and how many trumps could she have. If opponents are in game, start with the "rule of 14." Give the opponents 26 HCPs, so your side has 14 HCPs. If you have 8 HCPs, then partner should have around 6. If opponents reach 4 ♠ on a normal auction and you have 3 trumps, then partner has at most 2.



<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1 NT
Pass	3 NT	Pass	Pass
Pass			

Has this ever happened to you? You lead your 4th best spade against 3 NT, and the dummy comes down with great spades. You think- wow, that was a bad lead. Not true. It may not be the best lead, but you didn't give anything away. Your K♠ was always finessable, and Declarer was always entitled to those spade tricks.

Board 1



NS reach 4 ♠ after a 2/1 auction. West is on lead.

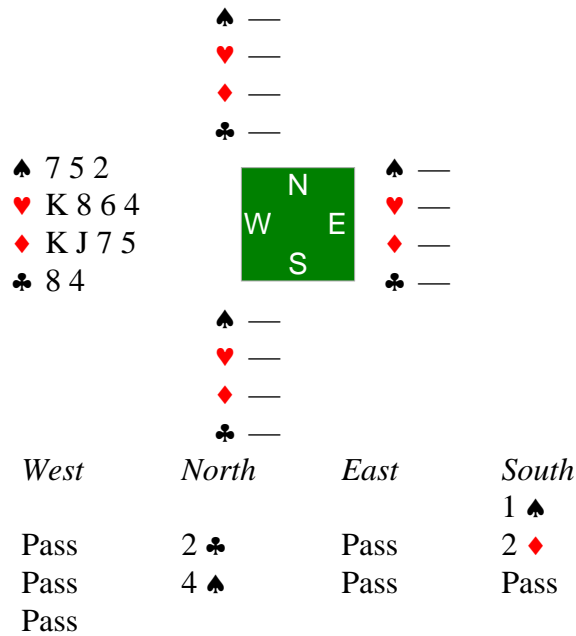
The worst opening lead in bridge is underleading an Ace (leading a low ♥) against a suit contract. The declarer may likely have the K♥, giving her a trick she may not deserve.

Note: It is entirely fine to lead the 3 ♥ against a No-trump contract. This rule is only for suit contracts. Also, on some hands, it may be appropriate to underlead the A♥ later in the play depending on partner's signals.

The second worst opening lead in bridge is to lead an unsupported Ace (leading the A♥ without having the K♥). Again, this could give declarer a trick she does not deserve. If dummy has Q32♥ and declarer has K65♥, that should only be good for one trick. Leading the A♥ gives the declarer two tricks.

On this hand, the least damaging opening lead might be a spade. It is likely that partner only has two trump (and maybe only 1). If one is the A♠, it will always win. If it is a finessable honor, declarer will likely figure it out.

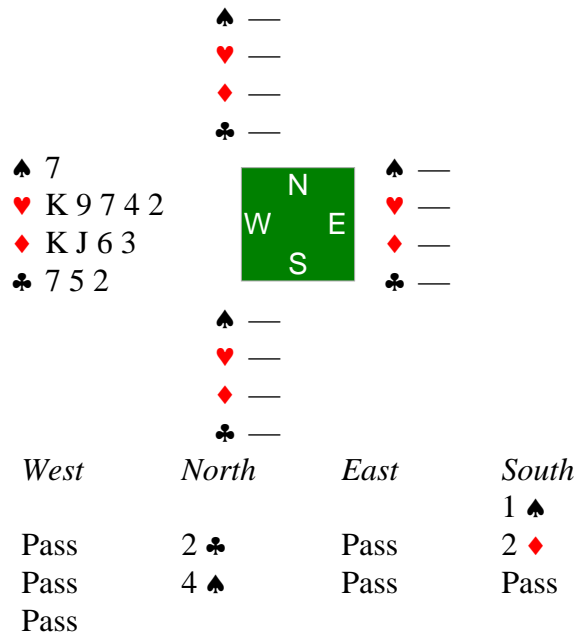
Board 2



A poor lead is leading high from a worthless doubleton (8♣). The only time this can work for the defense is if partner has the AK♣, or perhaps one of those honors plus the A♠, and can give West a ruff. On this hand, that layout is unlikely. For one thing, North bid 2♣ in a 2/1 auction, so it is not likely that East can have those cards. Leading from shortness without getting the ruff usually helps the declarer set up a long suit for discards. What is the likelihood that leading a doubleton club will result in West getting a ruff? Not very likely.

On this hand, leading trump could be a safe lead (see previous hand discussion). Leading the 4♥ could also work to set up a trick for the defense (partner could have the A♥ or Q♥ given that neither North or South bid that suit).

Board 3

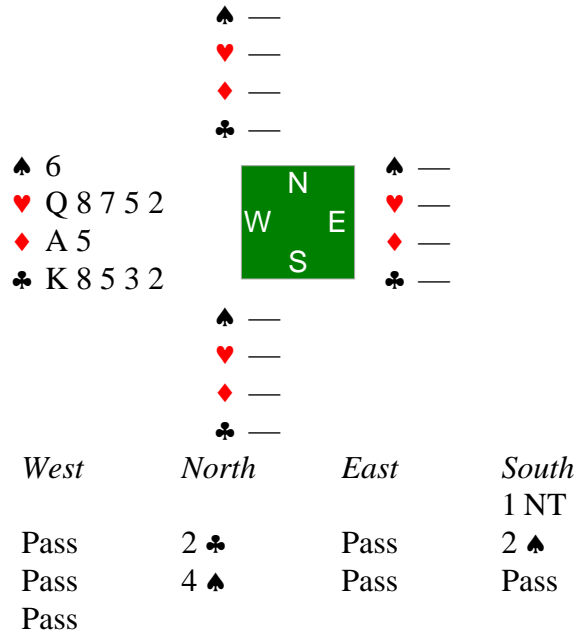


On this hand, West leading a singleton trump, the 7 ♠, would be a poor choice. It is possible that partner could have 4 trump cards. If she has an honor, the trump lead helps declarer finesse that honor. Once declarer discovers the 4-1 trump split, it will make it easier for her to figure out how to play the hand.

Leading from the KJ ♦ is also a poor choice. That combination may capture declarer's Q ♦, or partner's Q ♦ might knock out declarer's A ♦.

A good lead on this hand could be 4th best heart, 4 ♥.

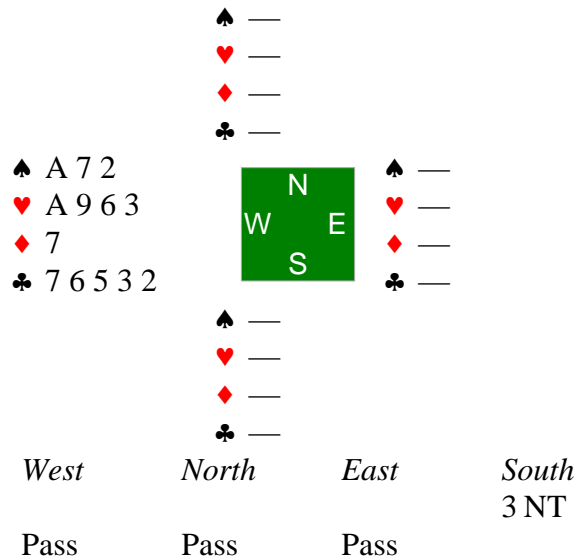
Board 4



NS reach 4 ♠ after a Stayman sequence.

We have seen that leading a singleton trump may not be a good lead, and leading or underleading the A ♦ may also be bad. Which major should we lead? West should note that East did not double North's 2 ♣ Stayman bid (doubling an artificial bid is leading directing). With this inference (what partner did NOT do when they had a chance to), a better lead might be 5 ♥.

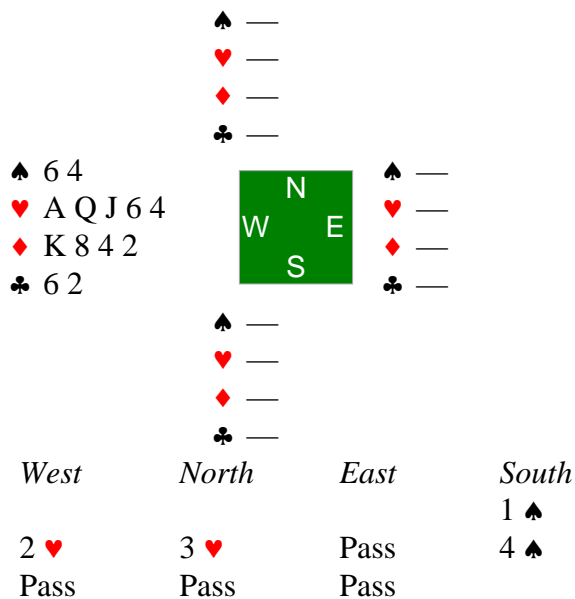
Board 5



South's 3 NT opening bid was Alerted as gambling no-trump. This means South has a long solid minor that should take 7 or more tricks, but no stoppers outside the suit. North's pass must assure stoppers in the other suits.

West's goal is to not allow declarer to get in and run the tricks in their long minor suit (likely ♦ since West has long ♣s). This is the time to lead Aces to see what partner has to say. Lead the A♠ and see if partner encourages or discourages. If partner discourages, next lead the A♥ and see what partner has to say. We are hoping that partner has KJxxx in one of the majors and that North has Qxx as the stopper. Five tricks for the defense- down one!

Board 6

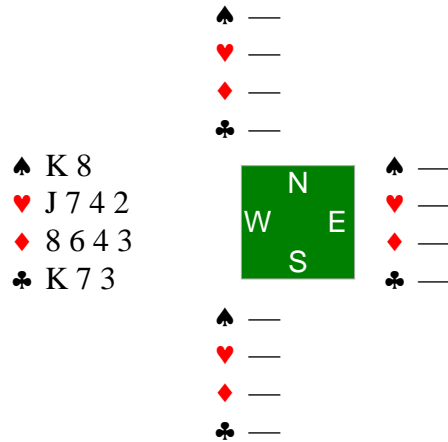


NS get to 4 ♠ after a cue bid of West's overcall. On this hand, West's worst lead would be a heart. The AQ♥ holding is in a perfect position to take tricks if declarer has the K♥.

A better lead might be the 2 ♦. East has at most 5 HCPs. East could have the Q♦ to knock out declarer's A♦ and set up a trick. East also could have the A♦ and win the first trick.

If East does win the first trick with the A♦, what should they return? **NOT Another ♦!** A good rule to look out for is that if partner did not lead the suit they overcalled with, they do not have a sequence of touching honors. They are waiting for partner to lead the suit for them. You can imagine the cards where East wins the A♦, plays a heart to capture South's K♥, West wins and plays a second ♥ and their good K♦. Four tricks for the defense- down one!

Board 7

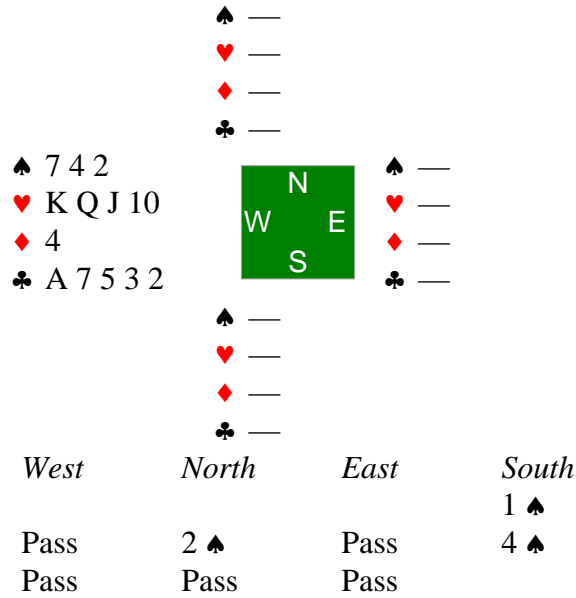


<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1 ♠
Pass	1 NT	2 ♣	Pass
Pass	2 ♠	Pass	4 ♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	

NS reach 4S, and this time East pipes in with a 2 ♣ overcall. An overcall at the two level should show a good 5+ card suit and at least 10 HCPs.

West should strongly consider leading partner's suit. Which card? Best is to lead the 3 ♣ from this holding. Although some players would like West to lead their highest club, that is not proper. Leading the K ♣ should show a holding like Kx ♣ or KQx ♣. Leading low is best because partner might have the A ♣ and your K ♣ could capture declarer's ♣ honor.

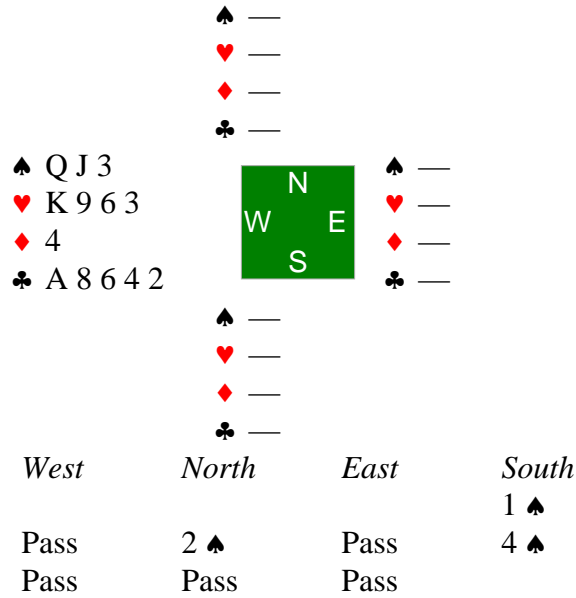
Board 8



There is a bridge saying that goes "If your partner didn't lead a singleton, they don't have one." Often, a singleton can be a good lead. But this only works if partner has a high honor somewhere that they will be able to get on lead and give you a ruff before declarer draws trump.

In this case, leading the 4 ♦ would be a poor lead. East has, at most, 4 HCPs. You could be lucky and catch her with the A ♦, but more likely she has a smattering of Qs and Js. It is better to lead the K ♥ and try to set up some winners for the defense.

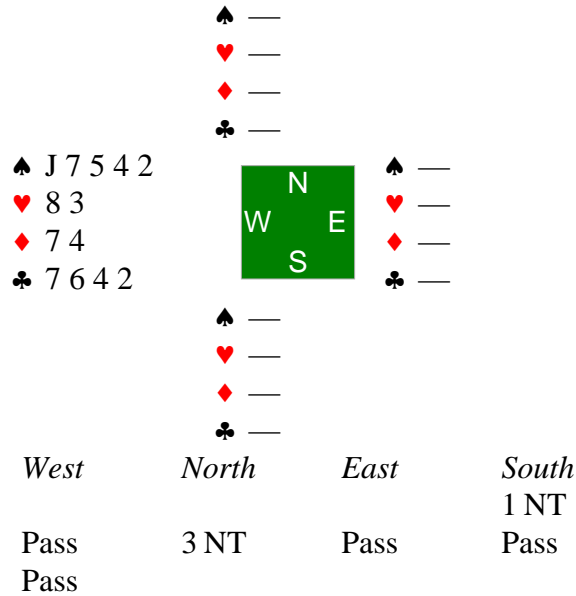
Board 9



West has the same number of points as the previous hand, but in a different layout. East is still mainly broke. Will a singleton lead work for the defense?

West's trump holding should result in EW getting one trump trick (called a natural trump trick). If West manages to get a ♦ ruff, EW still only gets one trump trick. So leading the singleton does not provide any additional tricks. It may help to set up declarer's ♦ suit where she can later discard other suits. A better lead would be the 3 ♥ to try to establish a winner in that suit.

Board 10



Remember the guideline about leads against No-trump? Lead the 4th best from your longest and strongest suit. That would be the 4 ♠, but it would be a poor lead in this case. Even if East somehow had two winners in the suit, South might hold up and take the third spade trick. East would no longer have any spades, and West will never get in again to play the good spades in her hand.

It is better to lead something else. First, West should note that East probably has a pretty good hand- at least 12 points. North, as responder, did not bid Stayman, asking South about the majors, nor did she transfer showing a 5+ card major. Maybe East has strength and length in the majors. With this rotten hand, West should lead the 8 ♥ to try to find partner.