

## When to Lead Trump

One of Defenders' main advantage is that they make the opening lead. Choosing the right lead depends on many factors- what the contract is, who has bid what during the auction, and the specific cards in the leader's hand.

Before making the opening lead, the leader SHOULD ALWAYS TAKE THESE STEPS:

- Estimate how many points does partner have? Use rule of 14.
- Estimate how many trump does partner have?
- From the bidding, project what will the dummy look like?

### Bad advice:

- Always lead trump.
- When in doubt, lead trump.
- If nothing better, lead trump.

Leading trump gives the timing advantage to the declarer. Defenders should only lead trump when it will help with the defense.

Example. You are on lead against 4♠ (the bidding went 1♠-2♠-3♠-4♠)

♠ 73

♥ KQ987

♦ A7

♣ 8762

There is no indication that a trump lead is beneficial, so lead the K♥. Declarer wins, pulls trump, and starts to set up dummy's long diamonds. Your A♦ wins, Q♥ wins, and declarer gets the rest of the tricks. 4♠ making 5 for an average board. If you lead trump, declarer wins and pulls trump, sets up diamonds by giving up the A♦. You play the K♥, and declarer wins. He discards his remaining heart loser on the diamonds and takes the rest of the tricks. 4♠ making 6 for a bottom board for the defense.

Defense did not get the tricks they were entitled to because of timing. Leading trump when it is not called for helps the declarer. Always try to find a lead that will help your side.

So when is a trump lead called for? Here are some situations.

**1. Declarer is two-suited and dummy is short in one of them.**

Opponents bid the following hand:

W	N	E	S
			1♠
P	1NT*	P	2♣ (* forcing)
P	P	P	

Let's examine the bidding. South showed 2 suits in this bidding sequence. He has 5 spades to open (does not have 6 or would have rebid spades). He does not have 4 hearts which would have been a preferred rebid. He has at least 3 clubs, perhaps 4. North will be dummy and does not have 3 spades (would have supported spades on first or second call). North probably does not have 2 spades, since 2♠ would be his logical second bid on this sequence, placing the contract on a 5-2 spade holding. So North has 0 or 1 spades, and South will likely need to ruff losing spades in dummy to make his contract. West considers this and determines that a trump lead is best. Play the A♣ and another club. When West gets in with the A♠, lead another club. South will have several losers in the spade suit. Any other lead will allow South to make the contract by cross ruffing spades and hearts.

Here is the full deal:

**North - Dummy**

♠ 3  
♥ A876  
♦ 7432  
♣ Q982

**West**

♠ AQJ86  
♥ JT9  
♦ QT  
♣ A63

**East**

♠ 52  
♥ KQ542  
♦ K965  
♣ 75

**South - Declarer**

♠ KT974  
♥ 3  
♦ AJ8  
♣ KJT4

## 2. Opponents have sacrificed.

Bidding goes as follows:

W	N	E	S
1♠	2NT	4♠	5♦
X	P	P	P

West is on lead and considers the bidding. North has shown length in both minor suits, so she must be short in the majors. South may need to ruff some majors in dummy to make the contract. West leads a diamond. East wins with the A♦ and plays another diamond. Now, South is sunk. South has three trump left in each hand, not enough trump to set up clubs or hearts, and will lose at least one additional trick.

If West had led the A♠, South will win the next trick and make the contract by cross ruffing clubs and hearts, losing only the A♦ to take 11 tricks.

### North - Dummy

♠ 7  
♥ 5  
♦ KQ873  
♣ A87643

### West

♠ AK652  
♥ 3  
♦ 54  
♣ KQJT

### East

♠ QJT9  
♥ KQJ764  
♦ A6  
♣ 95

### South - Declarer

♠ 843  
♥ AT982  
♦ JT92  
♣ 2

### 3. You have a clear advantage in power.

Bidding goes as follows:

W	N	E	S
1NT	P	2♣	2♠
P	P	X	P
P	P		

West is on lead and holds the following hand. East's double is clearly for penalty. Defenders have somewhere between 23-26 HCPs, and East believes South is going to have problems making his contract. South might have long spades, but EW have an abundance of tricks. While neither West nor East might have spade power, leading a trump will reduce South's ability to ruff anything in dummy. Just one or two ruffs may be all that South needs to make 8 tricks.

♠ Q92  
♥ KQT  
♦ KQJ2  
♣ AT3

### 4. Partner converts takeout double to penalty.

Bidding goes as follows:

W	N	E	S
		P	1♦
X	P	P	P

West is on lead and holds the following hand. He intended the Double to be for takeout. East passed, converting the Double to penalty, so she clearly has a lot of diamonds. Best lead is a diamond to diminish South's playing ability. Normally, leading a singleton trump helps declarer, but in this case it is necessary.

♠ QJT2  
♥ KJ76  
♦ 8  
♣ AK63

## 5. When an Aggressive lead might help Declarer

Opponents reach 6S on this sequence:

W	N	E	S
		P	1♠
P	2NT	P	4♠
P	4NT	P	5♥
P	6♠	P	P
P			

West is on lead and holds:

♠ 652

♥ QJ6

♦ Q54

♣ K643

Based on the bidding, West knows that East is broke. The only hope of setting the contract is for two of West's honors to win tricks. This may or may not happen, but it will be less likely if West leads away from any of the honors. Best lead is a passive lead of a trump (spades).

Notes- some examples were taken from online material created by Karen Walker, Audrey Grant, and Debbie Hoveland.