

## The standard leads

First, decide which suit to lead and then select the right card in the suit.

Again, there is the good news and the bad news. The good news is that there are standard leads from set holdings and the bad news is that you have to learn them. The learning will be easier if you know the reasons why good practice means selecting the standard card. By now, you know that you have been directed to lead the king from, say, K Q J 4. But why? Any one of the top three cards would do the job of driving out the ace. As declarer, choose which you will, but as a defender you must lead the king. Standard leads are all about telling your partner what cards you probably hold and, even more importantly, what cards you certainly do not hold. Leading the queen would give the message that you do not hold the king. The jack would deny holding the queen. However, put that same suit (K Q J 4) in the hand of the partner on lead and the right action is reversed. A small card in the suit is led . . . the partner must play the jack. Playing the king would deny the queen. Playing the queen would deny the jack.

You will appreciate that the card selected may differ, depending whether you are defending against a no trump contract or a suit contract. The objectives are different.

Suit holding	Vs NT	Vs suit	Comments
K Q J 4 Q J 10 4 J 10 9 4	K Q J	K Q J	Attacking and safe against both suit and no trump contracts.
K Q 4 2	2	K	With only two touching honours, lead fourth highest against a NT contract (hoping for more than one trick), but against a suit contract, be certain of making one trick.
K Q 10 2 Q J 9 2	K Q	K Q	Two touching honours, missing the next, holding the third honour or the nine.
A J 10 4 2 K J 10 4 2	J J	Avoid Avoid	Top of an interior sequence. Too likely to give a trick away against a suit, but an attractive, attacking lead against NT.
A K J 5 2	K	A	Ace from ace king, against a suit contract. It will, if neither a singleton nor partner's bid suit, virtually guarantee holding the king as well. See next page
A K 5 4 2	4	A	Fourth highest against NT (looking to establish the suit while partner retains a card to lead).
A K 4 2 A K	2 Avoid	A K	Against a suit contract, the king, followed by the ace, shows a doubleton, looking for a ruff.
10 2	10	10	The highest of any doubleton (if not the trump suit). When leading a trump, always lead your lowest, unless they are all equals (in which case lead the top).
A 4 3 2 H 3 2 H = any	2 2	A 2	Can be risky, unless partner has bid this suit. But, if so, lead the lowest from three or more cards which include an honour. But, if the honour is the ace, either lead the ace or prefer another suit.
8 7 4	7	7	With three worthless cards, lead the middle card, called MUD (Middle, Up, Down) because you lead the seven and next play the eight.
8 7 5 4	7(4)	7	Four worthless cards. Lead the second highest. One exception: against NT, if it is the suit you want partner to return, play fourth highest.