

## Common sense Discarding

Let me start with an obvious statement. Discarding correctly can be difficult: very, very difficult. Even the top players occasionally make a discard that turns out to be fatal to the defensive prospects. At club level declarer is in 7NT with twelve top tricks. He starts playing his cards quickly. So do the defenders. Clues that might help them discard correctly are coming all the time but somehow the task of analysing them seems too intimidating.

My first piece of advice is this. You set the pace. Don't be hurried. Try to work out what is going on. You won't necessarily get everything right but I am sure your discarding will improve.

I will start by giving some general advice.

1) *It is dangerous to discard from a holding with an isolated honour.* To discard from ♠ J-3-2 might find partner with ♠ Q-6. To discard from ♠ 10-3-2 might find partner with ♠ Q-J. Discarding from ♠ A-3-2 and ♠ K-3-2 is often safer than discarding from ♠ Q-3-2 or ♠ J-3-2

2) It is dangerous to discard from a 4-card holding if dummy has four or declarer might have four. It may never have occurred to you that a holding like ♠ 6-4-3-2 might be a vital fourth round stopper but look at the layout in diagram i).

Diagram i)

	♠ A K Q 5	
♠ J 10 7		♠ 6 4 3 2
	♠ 9 8	

The fact that East's highest spade beats dummy's lowest spade is the source of the danger. Of course I have deliberately invented an extreme example, however be aware that holdings like ♥ 10-7-3-2 are very likely to be a stopper when combined with partner's holding.

3) It is dangerous to discard from rubbish if declarer might have a guess in the suit. Maybe he is missing the queen, or the jack. Look at the layout in diagram ii). Declarer plays off the ♥ K and ♥ Q. The defenders both follow in the order low-high. Declarer now has to guess whether to finesse dummy's ♥ 10 or play for the drop. If East has discarded a heart then he will show out when declarer cashes the second heart honour in his hand and declarer will have a marked finesse.

Diagram ii)

♥ A 10 3 2  
♥ J 9 7 5                      ♥ 6 4  
♥ K Q 8

By now you will feel that you haven't got a hope. Just about the only thing that seems to provide you with a safe discard is the fifth card from a 5-card suit. Even that only saves you for one round.

At this stage I need to be more reassuring. A lot of discarding is simply common sense and if you think logically you can get it right without any agreed system. In diagram iii) you lead the ♣J against 7♠. Declarer wins the ♣K in his hand and starts to draw trumps. Immediately you need to find a discard.

Diagram iii)

North  
♠ A Q 9 8  
♥ K 6  
♦ A K 6 4  
♣ A Q 2

West

♠ 5  
♥ J 9 3 2  
♦ J 9 3 2  
♣ J 10 9 8

North	South
	1♠
4NT	5♦
5NT	6♥
7♠	End

1♠ shows 5 spades.

4NT and 5NT are Blackwood bids.

South has shown an ace and two kings.

This hand is about counting declarer's tricks. He has five spade tricks, the ♥A-K, the ♦A-K and ♣A-K-Q. That makes twelve. Why is he playing the hand out rather than claiming thirteen tricks?

If declarer had six spades, the sixth one would be his thirteenth trick.

If declarer had three hearts, with or without the queen, he would have a thirteenth trick by ruffing a heart in dummy.

If declarer had four clubs he would have a thirteenth trick by ruffing a club in dummy.

If declarer had the  $\spadesuit Q$  then it would be his thirteenth trick. By now we can write down declarer's hand.

$\spadesuit$  K J 10 7 6       $\heartsuit$  A Q       $\diamondsuit$  10 8 7       $\clubsuit$  K 4 3

It really doesn't matter what you discard as long as you hang on to at least three diamonds. This really isn't difficult if you count tricks and interpret declarer's line of play. It would be far harder if he was in 7NT because you could not draw inferences about the failure to take a ruff in dummy.

In diagram i) your partner leads a trump against 4 $\spadesuit$ . You take the  $\spadesuit A$  and return your  $\spadesuit 6$ . Declarer wins this and ducks a heart. West wins with the  $\heartsuit 9$  and perseveres with a third trump. At this stage you can comfortably discard your fifth club. Declarer wins trick 3 and ducks another heart which your partner takes with the  $\heartsuit 10$ . Partner continues with the  $\heartsuit K$  and you must find a discard. What is your plan?

Diagram i)

North	
$\spadesuit$ 8 4 2	
$\heartsuit$ 5 3	
$\diamondsuit$ A 4 3 2	
$\clubsuit$ K 4 3 2	
	East
	$\spadesuit$ A 6
	$\heartsuit$ 7 4
	$\diamondsuit$ Q J 10 9
	$\clubsuit$ Q J 10 9 5

North	South
	1 $\spadesuit$
2 $\spadesuit$	3 $\heartsuit$
4 $\spadesuit$	End

3 $\heartsuit$  shows four hearts

This is really easy. Declarer has hand A

Hand A

$\spadesuit$  K Q J 10 9       $\heartsuit$  A 8 6 2       $\diamondsuit$  K 6       $\clubsuit$  A 8

You are sitting after dummy's two 4-card suits and you have a chunky 4-card holding in each one. All you need to do is to discard whichever suit declarer discards from dummy.

Suppose you make the wrong discard, for example dummy discards a diamond and you discard a club. Declarer then makes his tenth trick by cashing the ♣A, crossing to dummy with the ♣K and ruffing your last club away. A little club has been established in dummy and declarer can use it to discard his remaining losing heart.

*Principle: When discarding after dummy, try to keep the same length as dummy.*

You might ask what would have happened if you had been sitting in front of dummy. In that case you are discarding before dummy and are helpless. If any discard is fatal you are being squeezed.

In diagram ii) your partner delights you by leading the ♦J against 3NT. Declarer withholds dummy's ♦A for two rounds and then takes the ♦A, West and South starting with three diamonds. Declarer then leads a low heart from dummy. You correctly play low and declarer's ♥K wins. Declarer now cashes the ♠A and ♠Q. East plays the ♠6 and ♠8 and I hope you played the ♠5 and ♠7. This is good defence: both defencers have an even number of spades, a suit in which declarer has a critical guess, but both have followed up the line rather than showing count. Now a third spade is taken in dummy with the ♠K and you have to make a discard.

Diagram ii)

North

♠ K 10 4 3

♥ Q 10 2

♦ A 7 6

♣ A Q 2

East

♠ 7 5

♥ A J 9

♦ K Q 8 5

♣ 10 9 8 7

North

2♣

3NT

South

1NT

2♦

End

You need to count declarer's shape. His 2♦ response to Stayman denied a 4-card major and he started with only three diamonds. Therefore he must have at least four

clubs. Counting points: he has shown the ♠A Q and ♥K. He must hold the ♣K for his 1NT opening bid. However if he had the ♣J he could claim nine tricks, so you can write down his hand.

♠ A Q 2      ♥ K 7 5      ♦ 4 3 2      ♣ K 6 5 3

To give yourself any chance you must discard your diamond winner. It might be painful but *it is often necessary to discard a winner in order to hang on to a guard*. Declarer can still make his contract by playing four rounds of clubs (discarding a spade from dummy), This throws you in with the ♣10 to lead from your ♥A, but in real life declarers do not always do the right thing. At least make it hard for him.

*Principle: It is frequently right to discard defensively.* Defenders cherish their winners. It is really painful for East to discard his diamond winner after feeling such a thrill when partner led the suit, but he must keep his defensive club holding to give the defence any chance of success.

### **A suggested discarding system**

So far we have done well without any system at all. However you do need a discarding system. I would suggest the following methods:

McKenney (or suit preference) discards have the advantage over straight attitude because you don't have to throw a high card in your best suit to encourage. A fairly high card in another suit can sometimes more easily be afforded. Your first discard might be a McKenney signal. Note the word 'might'. If it isn't a McKenney signal then it means nothing. Subsequent discards show original count.

Suppose declarer is running a long spade suit.

- 1) Your partner discards the ♥9 followed by the ♣4 and ♣6. The ♥9 is showing values in diamonds (the higher ranking side suit) and he started with an odd number of clubs (low-high on tricks 2 and 3)
- 2) Your partner discards the ♣2 followed by the ♣6 and ♣4. He is showing values in diamonds (the lower ranking suit) and started with an even number of clubs (high-low on tricks 2 and 3).
- 3) Your partner discards the ♣4 followed by the ♣2 and ♣6. He is showing no suit preference. The ♣4 might look small but when he follows it with the ♣2 it is clear that he has deliberately gone out of his way not to play his lowest club on the 'suit preference' trick. So is the ♣4 a high club? If he had wanted to play a high club he would have started with the ♣6. His ♣4 simply says nothing. However he started with an odd number of clubs (low-high on tricks 2 and 3).

Now I am going to suggest that, give or take the situations when you believe a true signal might help declarer more than your partner, you keep to your agreed system. I see lots of players who agree a system of signals and discards with partner and then 'improvise'. They invent a bit of system and justify it by saying: 'I tell partner what he needs to know'. There is a problem with that approach. Partner doesn't see it in the same way and confusion takes over. To perform at their best the vast majority of bridge players need predictability.

Try out the system on diagram i).

Diagram i)                      North  
 ♠ K J 3  
 ♥ A 4 3 2  
 ♦ K J 6  
 ♣ 6 5 4

West  
 ♠ 9 7 6  
 ♥ 10 8  
 ♦ 9 2  
 ♣ A K Q J 3 2

West	North	East	South
			1♥
2♣	3♥	End	

You cash ♣A-K-Q, partner following suit with ♣8 and then discarding the ♦10 and ♠2. What should you do next?

The ♦10 discard is a clear signal asking for a spade switch. It is necessary to switch to a spade because declarer has:

♠ 10 4                      ♥ K Q 9 7 6 5                      ♦ A Q                      ♣ 10 9 7

Any other continuation by you at trick 4 allows declarer to draw trumps and discard a spade loser on dummy's third diamond.

If partner had urgently wanted a diamond switch he would have had to discard the lowest spade he could afford at trick 2.

You lead the ♦6 against 6NT. Declarer plays low from dummy and your partner wins the ♦K. He then returns the ♣Q. Declarer wins the ♣A and plays off three rounds of diamonds, the ♦Q followed by the ♦A and ♦J. East started with ♦K-4 doubleton and

has discarded the ♣2 and ♥2 on the diamonds. You played for time by discarding your singleton club on the fourth diamond. Declarer threw the ♣4 on his fourth diamond. Now South now plays the ♣K and you must find a more painful discard.

Diagram i)

North
♠ A 9 5
♥ 9 6 5
♦ A J 10 7
♣ K 6 5

West

♠ J 10 8 7
♥ J 10 8 7
♦ 8 6 5 2
♣ 9

South	North
2NT	6NT

You had better get this right. Counting points it is obvious that declarer has all the missing high cards. Therefore he has eleven obvious tricks: the ♠ A-K-Q, ♥ A-K-Q, three diamonds and the ♣A-K. Unless he has a 4-card major he has no chance because your partner will take a club trick. However you must assume declarer does have a 4-card major and you must hang on to your guard. Which 4-card major does he hold? He has not played a major so your partner has not had a chance to make a count signal in the majors. However watch partner's discards. Declarer has hand A:

Hand A

♠ K Q 3 2	♥ A K Q	♦ Q 9 3	♣ A 4 3
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Keeping to the agreed system East has discarded the lowest club and the lowest heart. The first discard (the ♣2) has no practical significance because his honour cards are known.

However his next discard is the ♥2. He started with an odd number of hearts, presumably three, so declarer has only three hearts and you can safely discard your fourth heart on the ♣K.