



## Intermediate- Lesson 28

### Resumé -Play in Defence

We spent the last 3 lessons looking at play in defence – a really important aspect of bridge, as on about half of the hands you ever play, DEFENCE is what you will be doing.

We talked about the principles of communicating with your partner in defence, by careful choice of the cards you play, even – or even especially - the lowly spot cards (the 2 to the 9). By having a system agreed with partner, you can convey information often vital to a successful defence.

I talked about 5 concepts in defence:

- 1 Remember the bidding.
- 2 Signal with the cards you play to give partner as much useful information as you can, and pay attention to the cards partner plays.
- 3 What signals mean is different depending on whether it's a trick led by a defender, or it's a trick led by declarer or dummy.
- 4 Signalling can convey one of 3 types of information
  - Attitude to the suit led: whether you like it or not
  - Count: how many cards you hold of the suit led
  - Suit preference: which other suit would you like partner to switch to?
- 5 Signalling merely conveys information, not an instruction to partner to do something. Partner can see her own hand, so will have information you do not.

Let's refresh how it all works.

I've said that a card you play can signal one of three possible things. But how do we tell **which** piece of information a card is indicating?

When **you or partner** leads a suit, the card led shows **attitude** to that suit

When **declarer or dummy** lead a suit, a card played by a defender shows **count** in that suit

If attitude or count can't be meaningful, a card played by a defender should be interpreted as indicating **suit preference**.

#### Signalling ATTITUDE with spot cards

If **YOU** are leading a suit, a high spot card says you don't hold any honours in the suit (high for hate). Leading a low spot card says you like that suit and are indicating something useful in that suit (low for like). Your partner will take it that you'd like the suit led back.

But if **PARTNER** leads to a trick, and you don't have to contribute to winning the trick, a high spot card is encouraging (high means "aye"- I like this suit).

A low spot card is discouraging – I don't have anything in this suit (low means no).

Sometimes you won't have a suitable card to make your signal obvious, so you do your best. Often you will, and it's great to have good partnership communications in defence.

### Signalling COUNT with spot cards

When declarer or dummy has led a suit, you should take care to play your cards in the right order to give your partner the count:

- If you hold two cards, play high then low. That's called a "peter" - (as in petering out = getting less)
- If you hold an odd number of cards, play low first, then next lowest.
- If you hold 4 cards, play second highest, then third highest. Because the second card you play is lower than the first, it's also a peter. You "peter" with your middle two cards.

Partner knows when you play high then low, you have an even number, and when you play low then high, you have an odd number. This comes most often into its own when partner needs to know whether you have 2 or 3 cards in a suit.

You need to get into the habit of playing your spot cards in the right order, and to paying attention to the cards partner plays. Statement of the obvious: signalling won't work if you and partner don't notice the spot cards each other plays!!

### Signalling SUIT PREFERENCE with spot cards

Sometimes it will be obvious from the way the cards lie that attitude or count are not meaningful. In such cases, SUIT PREFERENCE is what makes sense.

Here are examples of a SUIT PREFERENCE signal:

#### Example 1

The bidding has gone 1♠ by South, 4♠ by North, all pass, and partner leads ♦A.

Dummy is tabled, and you see

♠	A 9 4 2
♥	K 8 3 2
♦	6
♣	K 8 5 2

Here's your hand, sitting East

♠	K 3
♥	A Q 7 6
♦	9 7 4 2
♣	7 5 4

You place ♦K with partner for the ♦A lead (she knows not to lead an unsupported Ace). But partner isn't going to continue with ♦K at trick 2 – dummy will ruff. **You are keen for a switch to a heart, NOT a club!**

Then you can win both your ♥A and ♥Q, and wait for the setting trick with your ♠K.

Don't just woodenly play ♦2 at trick 1. Play a HIGH SPOT CARD! The ♦9.

Your signal can't be about your attitude to diamonds, as it is irrelevant seeing dummy's singleton— so it MUST be suit preference. "Partner, please switch to the HIGHER of the other two suits (other than trumps and diamonds)"

Partner sees your signal, and duly plays a heart at trick 2. Without your signal, she might well have played a club, and declarer would make her contract.

Example 2:

This time the contract is 4♥ by South. Partner leads ♠7

North (dummy)

♠A Q J 10

♥A Q 4 3

♦7 5

♣7 5 4

East (you)

♠K 9 8 3 2

♥6 2

♦J 9 8

♣A J 10

Declarer tries ♠10 from dummy. Seeing the 4 good spades in dummy, and holding 5 spades yourself, you read partner's lead as a singleton. You win ♠K and return a spade for partner to ruff. But WHICH spade?

If you'd held ♦A rather than ♣A, you'd lead back ♠9, saying "after you ruff my spade, lead back a diamond" (the higher of the other two suits). I will win and give you a second spade ruff." Here it's more subtle. You lead back ♠2, saying "please lead the LOWER of the other two suits".

Partner ruffs your 2♠ and leads back a club. You win your ♣A and lead back a spade for a second ruff. Contract 1 down.

### Discarding

The most obvious opportunity to give suit preference is when **discarding** – when you are out of the suit which is led. Since you are not following suit, the card you play cannot be showing attitude or count in the suit led. It must be suit preference. When discarding

- A **low** spot card of the suit you play indicates you **don't like** that suit
- A **high** spot card of the suit you play indicates you **do like** that suit – you'd like partner to lead it – you have something useful

That means our system gives you a choice, either a negative "I don't like THIS suit" or a positive "I DO like THIS suit". You are more likely to be able to convey correct information than if you use an artificial system. I don't recommend artificial systems, as they often cause more problems than they solve.

Note that the first discard you make in a suit conveys signalling information about your suit preference, and any subsequent discard in the same suit is less relevant.

But beware

- Don't give up your guard in a suit- say dummy has a 4-card suit, and you also have 4 of the same suit- unless your cards are ALL smaller than dummy's. If you discard that suit, you might well be presenting declarer with an extra trick.
- Don't use a potential trick winning card to give a signal.
- When partner discards and you read their suit preference signal, it is merely information, not a command to lead that suit immediately you are next on lead. You might well have something better to do first.

In summary, when you're discarding, don't just woodenly throw away a low card you think you don't need. Think carefully what information, if any, you want to give your partner. Give your partner the best chance of getting it right and reduce the need for her to have to make a guess.

## Opening Leads

The opening lead is often crucial in determining whether your defence will succeed, or whether declarer will prevail. But there is little to go on, simply the bidding, and your own hand. Dummy hasn't been tabled yet, so you don't have that information to help you. Often you will be faced with a guess, and sometimes it will work out well, sometimes badly. However, it's a good idea to understand what leads are likely to be best, and which to avoid.

### General ideas about OPENING LEADS

- The card you lead will provide a signal to partner – what other cards you might hold in the suit you lead, and whether you like the suit and want partner to lead it back if she gains the lead.
- Choice usually depends on whether you are defending against a suit contract, or a NT contract.
- Against a suit contract, if you and your partner have a lot of cards in one suit, you are unlikely to take many tricks in it, as declarer will soon be ruffing in.
- But against NT, establishing your long suit is exactly what you DO want to do, as it's very often how you can defeat the contract.

### Opening leads against suit contracts.

Good opening leads, in priority order, are

- Ace from a suit headed by AK (if you lead an A, partner will place you with the K). This will usually give you a "free" look at dummy, so you can best decide what to lead to trick 2.
- Singleton in an outside suit (ie not trumps) PROVIDED you have some trumps in your hand, so you have the prospect of ruffing further tricks in this suit.
- A trump.
- Top from two touching honours. This is usually fine against a suit contract, but note that against a NT contract, it is generally best to lead an honour only if holding 3 high cards in a 4+ card suit (K from KQJ or KQ10, or top of a broken sequence, ie Q from AQJ).
- If you have nothing else better, lead a highish spot card from a poor suit, one you'd rather partner didn't lead back to you. When *LEADING* a spot card to a trick: *low for like, high for hate*.

Bad leads (worst first) are

- Away from an Ace: eg leading the 3 from A 9 8 3. **This is ALMOST ALWAYS A CARDINAL SIN!**
- An unsupported Ace: eg leading the A from A 4 3 (though might be best against a slam)
- Away from a King: eg leading the 3 from K 4 3 (but might well be right to lead the 3 if partner has bid the suit)
- An unsupported King: eg leading the K from K 4 3

Leads to be wary of:

- Top of a doubleton. In old-fashioned bridge, was a popular choice, but it doesn't work out well often enough. But if partner has bid that suit, DO consider that lead.
- A card from a 4-card suit with one honour. Beware of "frozen" suits: a suit where the 4 honours are split, one in each of the 4 hands. The first side to lead a frozen suit will usually give away a trick.

## Opening leads against NT contracts

First think about which SUIT to lead, then choose which card

- Partner's suit: If partner has bid a suit, you will need a good reason not to lead it.
- Your own good suit: If you have a useful holding – a long suit with the likelihood of being able to access it to cash the long cards – choose that suit.
- Unbid suit: If partner hasn't bid, but opponents have bid some suits but not others, and you have no useful holding in your own hand, choose an unbid suit.
- Sometimes there will be other inferences: eg if they bid 1NT-3NT, there was no Stayman, and so no attempt to find a major suit fit. They probably have minor suit length. If you have a toss up between leading a major or a minor, choose a major!
- Long, poor suit: if you have no good lead – eg you hold honours in short suits, have no information to work out which suit is likely to be partner's best, and have a long suit of rubbish, it will be safer to lead the long suit.

Now, which card?

Always do your best to help partner work out what's going on.

Normally lead 4th highest from your best suit (of which more in a minute), but if you've chosen to lead a short suit -for example because you've chosen to lead partner's bid suit, or a suit you've worked out is likely to be partner's best (eg an unbid suit):

- With 2 cards, lead higher first (high-low = peter)
- With 3 cards including one honour (A, K, Q or J) lead small
- With 3 small cards lead middle-up-down (MUD)
- If you've chosen to lead a long, poor suit, lead a high spot card (high for hate). Partner will usually be able to work out it's not "4th highest" of a good suit (eg using Rule of 11).

### Rule of 11

Rule of 11 is a very useful way, specially in defending against a NT contract, to work out where the high cards lie in a suit- it helps you decide how best to play that suit. It depends on the assumption that the lead is 4th highest. It says: subtract the card led from 11, and that's the number of cards higher than the card led, in the 3 hands other than the hand making the lead.

So, for example, partner leads the ♣8. If it were the 4th highest, there would be exactly 3 clubs higher than the 8 not in partner's hand. If you can see more than 3 clubs in in dummy and in your own hand higher than the ♣8, the ♣8 was not 4th highest- it MUST be high from rubbish.

But say partner leads the ♣5: you work on the assumption there are 6 cards higher than the ♣5 not in partner's hand. If you can see 5 of those in dummy and your own hand, declarer has only 1 card higher than the ♣5 in her own hand. See how useful that knowledge can be!

Returning now to which card to lead in the suit you've chosen to lead, against a NT contract; say it's a good long suit of your own (4+ cards, with one or more high cards):

The usual choice will be 4th highest. Look at these possible suits

♦ K 9 7 5 3

♦ Q 10 6 4 3

♦ A 9 5 4 2 (Yes, it's perfectly OK to underlead an A or a K against NT. It is only a no-no against a suit contract.)

In each case, you will lead the 4th highest. It helps partner work out the lie of the suit and how best to play it, using Rule of 11.

But what about honour leads – where you hold more than one high card in the suit? Which card to lead?  
 I want us to consider here BOTH suit contracts AND NT contracts

The general guidelines are

Against a suit contract:

lead top of two touching honours (eg ♥K from ♥K Q 6 4 2, ♥Q from ♥Q J 7 5 3)

lead top of an interior sequence (eg ♣J from ♣K J 10 5 2)

BUT against a NT contract, you want to hold 3 “high” cards in the suit to lead a high card. With only two high cards, it is usually better to lead 4th highest. Note that “high” cards here can include the 10 and the 9.

Let’s look at some examples

	against a suit contract	against a NT contract
♥K Q J 6 3	♥K	♥K
♣K Q 6 3 2	♣K	♣3
♦K Q 10 3 2	♦K	♦K
♠Q J 9 7 2	♠Q	♠Q
	against a suit contract	against a NT contract
♥K J 9 3 2	♥3	♥3
♣Q J 7 5 2	♣Q	♣5
♦K J 10 3 2	♦J	♦J
♠A J 10 6 2	♠A??	♠J

In that spade suit, against a suit contract, NEVER anything but the A, and then only in special circumstances eg against a slam. Choose a different suit to lead. If you lead the Jack you **100%** do NOT hold the Ace.

One of the few rules never (almost) to break: do not underlead an A against a suit contract.

This lesson is a brief recap of the main points in our lessons on defence, Lessons 25-27.  
 Those lessons explain the concepts in more detail and include some illustrative examples.

