

# Defense: Opening Leads, Guidelines, Concepts

## ANSWER KEY

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### Opening Leads Against a Suit Contract

Recall the best leads defending a suit contract, w some detail

- A from AKxx
  - This is such a good lead that, as declarer or defender, missing AK of a suit, you should assume the opener leader does not have both cards
- Top of a sequence; ie, from KQJx, lead the \_\_\_\_
  - The higher the better, ie, K from KQxx better than Q from QJxx
  - Unlike NT, leading (top of a) **two**-card sequence is okay
- Partner's suit
  - If you have raised partner's suit, hence showing 3 or more, lead
    - Normally, except with 3 or 4 small, lead high. Partner already knows you have 3+, more interested in whether you have an honour
  - If you have not raised partner's suit, lead normally but
    - Holding 3 small, lead low to give partner sense of your length in her suit, even though you don't have an honour. Note this contradicts BOSTON (BottomOfSomethingTopOfNothing)
  - With two touching honours (and also with more), lead top of sequence, ie J from J10x
    - With better fish to fry .....Partner overcalled hearts. You are holding S KQJTx H 94 D xxx C Txx Lead \_KS
- Singleton
  - Partner may have the Ace in your suit, or have a trump entry and can give you a ruff then.
  - Good bet when you have a trump entry and you might be able to get partner on lead w another suit. ie, holding S Axx H Qxxx D x C Jxxxx, defending 4 Spades.
  - Best not to lead a singleton when you will be giving up a natural trump trick by ruffing. Holding QJ109 of trumps, no point trying to get a ruff (instead play a forcing defense (later), to shorten declarer's trumps)

- Give priority of leading your partner's suit over a singleton in another suit, unless there is a strong chance of getting a ruff.
- Avoid leading opponent's suits
- Consider leading the unbid suit
- Fourth best card in a long suit with at least one honour (ten or higher) or two "broken" honours
  - Select the suit with the best chance of establishing a trick for you side. This means the less your partner needs, the better the lead. Consider..
    - Q1074 lead the 4; if partner has A,K, or J, lead is helpful or at worst, does not give away a trick
    - KJ63 lead the 3; partner needs A or Q to work. If not, your lead probably just gave up a trick.
    - In contrast, the following 4<sup>th</sup>-best (or 3<sup>rd</sup> best) leads have limited chance of success but may be the best you can do leading from a tough hand
      - Q9xx; Kxxx; Jxxx
- If you have any number of small cards but no honour, lead the highest
  - Holding 7532 lead the 7
  - This alerts partner that you have no honour in this suit and to play accordingly. Consider the following

	Q6 <u>4</u>	
<u>7</u> 532	AJ8	K10 <u>9</u>

Partner leads the 7, dummy plays the 4. East, knowing partner has no honours, plays the 9, declarer wins with J. However, declarer now has two tricks, not three. If East had played the K, declarer wins all three tricks.

- Lead the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest if the highest one may be a winner later
  - you hold 9643, lead the 6. Good thing as dummy holds AK108 so your 9 may be useful later stopping dummy's 8 from being good

- Avoid leads that may easily give up a trick
  - Axxx; AQxx
    - Do not lead an A with spaces; Aces are meant to take Queens and Kings. Exception: Ace from A doubleton is okay, probably best if in partner's suit
    - Do not lead away from an Ace

Other leads to avoid

- Doubletons (exc in partner's suit)
    - Need too much to be true to work out; more likely to pick up partner's Qxx and save declarer guessing a finesse
  - Doubleton honour, ie, Q from Qx (unless partner bid suit)
    - Partner will think you have the Jack or perhaps a singleton Q. It also offers up the Q for free unless you luck out and find partner with magic honours like KJ
  - Three small; which do you lead? Yeech! – avoid suit probably best
- When to lead trump
    - Forget “~~when in doubt ....~~”. Lead trump when you wish to reduce declarer's ability to ....
      - cross-ruff or
      - make extra tricks by ruffing in the short hand (usually dummy).
    - Clues that a trump lead is best
      - Opponents are bidding a contract with less than normal HCP.
      - You have length/strength in declarer's side suit.
      - Consider the following auction, you hold

S 10xx H AQ10xx D xx C Qxx

You

1S	P	2C	2D
2H	P	4S	

You have hearts behind declarer's 2H bid, and Declarer will probably need to ruff hearts in dummy. Partner has bid at two-level (10+HCPs) so the opponent's HCPs are less than 25; hence they are counting on distributional tricks. Lead a low spade.

## Opening Leads against NT

Against NT, your objective is less to win fast tricks and more to develop long (slow) tricks. Best leads with details ...

- Nothing like just cashing lots of winners. Holding top tricks (on a lucky day) rip it from the top!..... S AKQJxx (Even 4th best works here, LOL)
- Next best is a suit needing to knock out just one declarer stopper
  - Holding KQJ10xx, lead the K. Declarer will almost certainly hold up with the Ace, so hopefully you can get in w a side suit, and cash em.
  - From KQJxx, lead the K; QJ10xx, lead the Q
- Semi-solid sequence leads means a 2-card sequence, one card missing, then the next card, ie KQ10, etc. Leading from such a suit requires signaling from partner to determine how/whether to proceed.
  - From KQ10xx, lead the K. Partner should signal high to show the Jack (or Ace), and you can continue the suit. If partner plays a discouraging low spot, declarer is holding up with AJx and you should probably stop playing this suit. If partner has Ax (doubleton), she must overtake to unblock the suit. If partner has Jx, they should dump the Jack to show it to you.
  - Note that with AKJxx, lead the A and see what partner plays.
- An **interior** sequence is a sequence with one higher honour, such as AJ109x. Lead the top of the sequence part, so here lead the J. The logic is you can afford and need a high card to force out declarer's high card(s), not needing to count on partner to provide a high card (nice if they can, however)
  - With K109xx, lead the T; with KJ10xx, lead the J
  - From AQJxx, lead the Q. You are prepared to surrender a trick to the King, but you then likely have 4 winners. This also increases the chance that partner can lead suit back, just needing a 2<sup>nd</sup> one.

{For following mini-hands, **Shaded card** is led, underlined cards are played}

- With less than three semi-solid honours, lead your 4<sup>th</sup> best ....
  - From AKxxx, lead the 4<sup>th</sup> highest. Declarer is likely to have one stopper and by forcing her to take it early, this leaves your partner with a card in this suit to return later. Consider

	J <u>5</u> 3	
AK7 <u>4</u> 2		9 <u>8</u>
	<u>Q</u> 65	

- From AQ1074, lead the 7
- From K1082, lead the 2
- From QJ73, lead the 3 (Need 3 in sequence in NT)

### Rule of Eleven

Partner having lead 4<sup>th</sup> best, subtract the card led from 11, and the answer indicates how many cards higher than the led card exist in the hands of the three players other than the leader.

	Q <u>9</u> 2	
AJ8 <u>6</u> 3		K107    ?
	54	

Subtract 6 from 11 = 5; Thus 5 cards above a 6 in your hand and declarer's cards. You have 3, dummy has 2, hence declarer has none. Play the \_\_\_\_\_

- Leading partner's suit. Same rules as above for suits
- Once in a while, you will make a short suit lead, hoping to find partner with a strong holding in the suit. Consider such a lead when
  - You have a weak hand and almost no chance of setting up your best suit. Since you are weak, partner will have high cards/entries. Your best suit is very weak
    - Ex. Holding S Jxx H 85 D 9xxx C Jxxx,  
bidding = 1NT-3NT; consider leading the 8 Hearts

- The opponent's bidding implies partner may have length in a suit, ie
  - 1C – 1D – 1NT Neither opponent seems to have much in the majors. If you have only two cards in a major, partner may have 5, even 6, so lead top of this 2-card suit

## Defensive Play Rules/Guidelines

Defense is the hardest part of the game, since, unlike the declarer, you don't get to see all the assets of your side. Let's look at a few key guidelines

### Playing from a sequence

- As you know, **lead** the top of a sequence. However, when **following** suit, play the bottom of a sequence. LTFB (Let The Fun Begin) –or- FoLLOW
  - Holding QJ10x of a suit, **follow** with the 10. This means you may have the Jack (and Q) but you definitely don't have the 9.

### Third Hand High

- If you are in third position, you are the last to play for your side. Assuming partner has led a low card, you almost always play high. This forces declarer to win with a high card (not a cheap low one) and hopefully establishes a winner in partner's hand.

	983		
Q1074		K52	(3 <sup>rd</sup> )
	AJ65		

### Second Hand Low

- If you are in 2<sup>nd</sup> position, your partner gets to play after you, so typically you play a low card. Contributing a high card usually helps declarer.

	KJxx	
(2 <sup>nd</sup> ) Qxx		A10xx
	xx	

Playing low makes declarer guess K or J, playing Q makes it easy.

- However, some situations do require playing high in 2<sup>nd</sup> seat

	K85	
?	<u>A</u> xxxx	QJ10x
	<u>X</u>	

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“Splitting” honours ensures declarer does not get a cheap trick

	A10x	
?	Q <u>J</u> x	xxx
	K <u>x</u> x	

When you can afford to play an honour to force declarer to play high, do so.

### Cover an honour with an honour

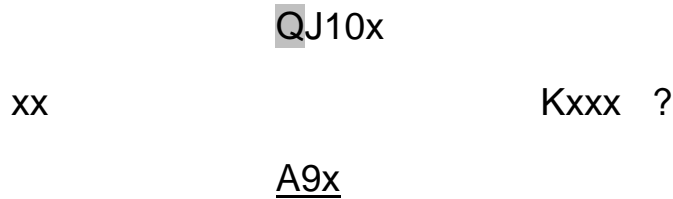
- When an honour is led/played, typically you cover it if you have the next higher honour

	<u>Q</u> 63	
10xxx		<u>K</u> xx
	<u>A</u> Jx	

The wrong play: Dummy leads the Q planning to finesse your King. If you play low, the Q will win. Next a low card is led, and declarer wins two more tricks by finessing your K with the AJ.

The right play: Cover the Q with your K. Declarer wins the A, then his Jack is good, but your partner’s 10 is now high and declarer is held to two tricks, not all three.

- When you can see that partner has no card to promote (like the 10 above), don't cover.



When the Q is led, do not cover, since you can see that the opponents have all the honours except the Ace. If partner has the Ace, he can win the trick. If declarer has it, you have nothing to gain by covering the Q.

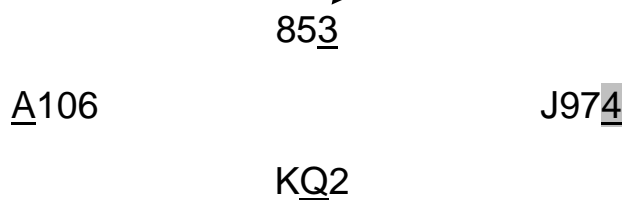
So, when do you cover, when do you not? In general, cover the last honour. Consider QJ9 opposite Axx {WBd}

### Leads by position

- Try to trap the declarer's individual high cards by leading through them, where partner gets to play after declarer commits to a high card ("heft on your left"). If partner has the missing high cards, great. If not, nothing given away.



- Similarly, leading to a weak suit holding in 4<sup>th</sup> position is a safe lead. East is on lead. Lead a suit when cards are "light on your right"





## Some additional situations

Q85

? AJ93

10xx

K74

As West, who has the King? If partner, he will beat the Q with it. If South has the King, you can beat it with your Ace when he plays it next time. If you rise with your Ace, note declarer gets 2 tricks instead of one. Hence, play small (remember, Aces are meant to take Ks/Qs)

Q85

? AJ9x

10xx

K74

Here, as the King has been led, beat it with your Ace. If you don't, declarer will lead up to his Queen later, getting 2 tricks instead of 1.

Remember: High cards are meant to take other high cards, ie, Aces take Kings, etc. This is why you should not play a "lonely" Ace (without K) on opening lead, nor lead away from an Ace.

## Signaling w your Cards: Attitude

Within the led suit: To show partner the next honour

973

AK85

Q74 ? 1. Play 7

J102

But holding

962 ? 2. Play 2

Within the led suit: To get a ruff

Q74

AK1092

83

Play \_8\_

J65

With two cards in the suit, East shows this by playing the 8 on the opening lead of the Ace by West. On the continuance of the King, East now completes the doubleton signal by playing the 3. West now knows to play a third heart, which East ruffs.

When discarding:

If declarer is playing a suit you have no cards left in but you cannot trump, you now **discard**. The card you discard can send a message to partner.

- Play a high spot card in a suit to encourage partner to lead that suit when he next gets in. Play a low spot to discourage that suit
  - Declarer is in 4 Hearts and is drawing trump. You hold S xxx H x D AK852 C Q932. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> heart lead, when you no longer have any hearts, play the 8 Diamonds
- Play low spots in suits you don't want led.
- If you cannot afford to encourage in one suit, discourage in the other ones
  - Declarer is in 4 Hearts and is drawing trump. You hold S 8652 H x D KQJ C J9743.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> heart leads, play the 2 Spades, then the 3 Clubs. This tells partner you may wish a diamond lead

- Note that "low" or "high" spot is a relative term. If you wish to discourage with 876, the 6 is your lowest spot. Similarly with AK42 in a suit, the 4 is encouraging.

### Signaling w your Cards: Count

When **your partner leads** a suit, your card, unless you are playing third hand high, shows **attitude**, ie, you like the suit or not. When the **declarer leads**, your card shows **count**. You help your partner learn the number of cards you have in the suit by playing..

- Lowest card with an odd number of cards in the suit, ie 3 from 1073 or 2 from Q9742

### Defensive Techniques

## Defensive Duck to Strand winners

**Ducking** as a defender means to not take a high card until declarer has no more of that suit and has no way back to winners. Consider the following, declarer having no outside entries to dummy

	KQ86 <u>5</u>	
<u>7</u> 4		A9 <u>3</u>
	<u>J</u> 102	

Declarer leads the J, partner plays the 7 (start of high-low to show a doubleton), dummy plays low. If you take the Ace, declarer can now use her other spot cards to get to 4 tricks in dummy. So, hold-up the Ace, declining to take it. When declarer next plays the 10, partner completes “even” count by playing the 4, so again hold-up, as declarer has 3 cards in the suit. Finally on the next play, you win your Ace, as declarer plays their last card in the suit, mission accomplished.

## Defensive Ducking to maintain communication w partner

Just as declarer can duck a trick to preserve an entry, so can the defense. Defending NT, when your partner has no likely outside entry to his good suit, ducking a trick can do the job. Consider...

	K <u>J</u> 6	
A108 <u>4</u> 2		<u>Q</u> 75
	93	

West leads the 4 against 3NT. Declarer tries the Jack, which you beat with the Q. You return the 7 (higher of two remaining cards, or highest remaining from original 3 cards). If partner takes the Ace and then clears the suit, he will have no way of getting in to cash his 2 winners. So, instead, West ducks the 2<sup>nd</sup> spade trick. Now, when East gets in later, he has his 3<sup>rd</sup> spade to lead to partner so West can cash three long spade winners.

## Active Defense

Active Defense means that the defenders must actively take or establish their side's tricks quickly, rather than sit back and "wait for them" (passive). The two most common examples are when declarer has a significant source of side tricks and will throw any losers on them. Hence the defense must cash their tricks right away.

Opponents are in 4 Spades, the bidding was

W	N	E	S
P	P	P	1S
2H	3S	P	4S

S xxx  
 H xxx  
 D AKQJx  
 C xx

S x  
 H AK109x  
 D xxx  
 C Kxxx

S xxx  
 H 852  
 D xxx  
 C Axxx

S AKQ10xx  
 H Qx  
 D xx  
 C QJx

You (West) lead the A Hts, then the K, partner playing 2, 5. What do you play next?

\_\_4<sup>th</sup> best Club\_\_. Why? \_Declarer will throw all his club losers on the huge diamond suit; must find any club winners immediately\_

## Passive Defense

Often, however, the best defense is to not shift to new suits. In general, shifting to a new suit gives the opposition half a trick on average. Typically declarer appears to lack a long suit (that could provide pitches) and has relatively balanced distribution. Consider being declarer holding Qxx opposite Jxx in a side suit. Try to make a trick with this holding..... Give up yet?

Now consider South playing 5 Hearts, you are West on defense

S AQx  
H Kxxx  
D Jxx  
C 10xx

S J1062  
H xx  
D A10xx  
C Qxx

S 853  
H xx  
D Qxxx  
C 8652

S Kxx  
H AQJxx  
D Kx  
C AKJ

You lead the J Spades. Declarer wins with the Ace, partner plays the 3 (who has the K Spades? = \_Declarer\_). Declarer draws two rounds of trump, cashes K Sp, A Cl, Q Sp, then leads a club to the Jack. You win your Queen, now what?

## Forcing Defense

Having more trumps than the defenders is what allows declarer to maintain control of a hand. If you can reduce declarer's trumps, you may cause declarer to lose control of the hand. Typically this will happen when the trump suit divides badly. If declarer, for example, is in a 5-3 major fit, and the defender's trumps split 4-1, one of the defenders has only one less trump than declarer. Forcing declarer to trump once, in the long hand, means that defender now has the same trump length as the declarer. The other necessary ingredient is defenders need a strong suit, and must consistently play that suit to force declarer to ruff with the long trump hand.

Consider the following hand – 4 Spades by South, KH Lead

	S Qxx	
	H xxx	
	D Qxx	
	C Kxxx	
S 10xxx		S x
H KQJxx		H A8xx
D xx		D Axxx
C Jx		C Q10xx
	S AKJxx	
	H x	
	D KJ10x	
	C Axx	

Declarer has only 3 losers, and 10 winners, but try to make the hand with constant heart leads by the defense. (play at tables)

## Counting out the hands

Good defenders determine the cards remaining in hidden hands (declarer, partner) by counting the cards they know of and using the bidding clues. Here are a few bidding situations where high card points are known to be in a certain range.

- Declarer opens 1NT and has already shown up with 14, therefore cannot have a missing Ace
- Partner passed your opening bid, and played an Ace at trick one, therefore has at most one jack left in his hand

Consider the following example:

```
W  N  E  S
1H  P  P  1S
P   2S  P  4S
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```
S J84
H J2
D KQ106
C 8743
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```
S 73
H KQ10865
D A9
C K96
```

```
S 62
H A973
D 8754
C 105
```

```
S AKQ1095
H 4
D J32
C AQJ
```

You lead K Hts, which partner overtakes with Ace. Partner plays back 3 Hts, which declarer ruffs. Declarer draws trump, then leads the J of Ds. You win your Ace, now what ? Do you switch to a club or exit a diamond?

You should play D9 because partner cannot have the A or Q of Clubs. If he did, he would have 6+ pts and would not have passed your opening bid.

“After dummy appears, you have more information to go on when making your PLAN. Be sure to look at the whole picture before automatically following a guideline such as returning your partner’s lead. Focus on how you can get enough tricks to defeat the contract.” AGrantDefenseCh8

### Using the bidding to find the best lead

W N E S  
1S P 2H P  
3H P 4S AP

You hold: S xx H Axxx D JT9x C Q9x                      What do you lead?

Lead the AH because opponents have shown 8 hearts (5+3), hence partner only has one; lead the Ace and give partner a heart ruff; What a game!!\_

WHAT ♠ GAME!!