

# **BRIDGE – BEGINNER’S LESSONS III - 26**

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## **Declarer Play - Planning the Play of the Hand**

### **Finesses**

**Definition:** A “*finesse*” is an attempt to win a trick with a card that is not a sure winner. It is usually accomplished with an honor. It operates by forcing one Opponent to commit a card before you do, thereby isolating the other Opponent as the only defender with an opportunity to top your possible winner.

If you play a spot card up to an **AQ** combination and second hand commits a low card to the trick, you can take a “finesse” with the **Queen**, which will win whenever the second Player, rather than the fourth one, holds the **King**.

#### **Three basic ways to initiate a “finesse”**

**A. You lead a spot card up to one or more honors in the opposite hand.** Always play from the weaker holding up to the stronger holding. Try to take the trick by playing one of the lesser honors that the last-to-play Opponent might not be able to beat.

With **Kx** opposite **xx**, if you would have led first from the hand with the **Kx**, you will always lose two tricks, whether you lead the **King** and lose to the **Ace** now, or lead the spot card and lose the **King** to the **Ace** later. By leading a spot card up to the **Kx**, however, you will win a trick, whenever the second hand holds the **Ace**.

**B. You lead an honor toward one or more higher honors in the opposite hand.** Never lead an honor, unless you have a sufficient number of touching honors to back up the lead, because, if the honor led is covered by a higher honor from the second player, you will be forced to contribute another, yet higher, honor in order to win the trick, thereby “wasting” two honors on the same play.

With **Qx** opposite **Axx**, if you start by leading the **Queen**, correct defense will always hold you to one trick with the **Ace**. Either the **Queen** will be covered by the **King** from second hand or be lost to the **King** in fourth hand. Lacking the **Jack**, you should lead a spot card up to the **Queen**, hoping that the second hand holds the **King**.

Whenever you lead an honor for a finesse, you need an extra honor in your combined holding to win potentially as many tricks as you might have won, if all your honors had been located in just one hand. If the lead is not covered by second hand, try to win the trick by letting the lead “ride”, i.e., by playing low as third hand.

With **AQJ** opposite **xxx**, you can win up to three tricks by finessing twice against the **King**, but with **QJx** opposite **Axx**, you can never win three tricks legitimately by trying the finesse. If you lead the **Queen** and it is covered by the second Player, you will be forced to use up two of your honors on the same trick. You would need an extra honor in the latter case, namely, the **Ten**, to have an honest play for three tricks.

**C. The Opponents lead the suit for you.** If possible, let the Opponents lead the suit. This gives you two chances to play to the trick as both second and fourth hand, whereas your Opponents would have only one chance remaining. Try to win either by playing a card that the next Opponent might not be able to beat or by letting the lead ride around to an honor in your "last-to-play" hand.

With **AJx** opposite **KTx**, if you were to play the suit yourself, you would have to guess the location of the **Queen** in order to make three tricks. If, however, the Opponents lead the suit and you play low as second hand, you are guaranteed to make three tricks as their leading the suit has given you a "**free finesse.**"

## Types of Finesses

1. **The Simple Finesse:** A simple finesse involves a combination of cards in a particular suit that is missing just one honor to form a solid sequence of honors. It is an attempt to establish one of the lesser honor cards (i.e., one that ranks below the missing honor) as a winner.

**Examples:** (AQ opposite **xx**) (Qxx opposite **Axx**)

### Basic Conditions for Success:

- a. The lead must come from the proper side of the table.
- b. The Opponent holding the missing honor must play second to the trick.

2. **The Double (Deep) Finesse:** A double finesse is a play that involves a broken sequence of honors, missing exactly two of them to form a solid sequence. A double finesse is one against two missing honors. Like the simple finesse, the double finesse is designed to establish at least one of the lesser honor cards as a winner. Unlike the simple finesse, it usually requires two finessing-type plays, before you can generate an extra trick.

**Examples:** (AJT opposite **xxx**) (AKT9 opposite **xxx**)

### How the Double Finesse Works:

- a. Mechanically, the double finesse operates like the simple finesse, by leading through an Opponent's hand up to one of your honor combinations, except that usually it must be done twice.
- b. Since you are missing two honors, the first finesse has two chances to lose and thus is likely to do so. A failed first finesse, however, reduces the second play to nothing more than a simple finesse against the one remaining, missing honor.
- c. The only way the second finesse will also fail is for the fourth-hand Opponent to hold both missing honors, which is but a 24% chance. Therefore, the double finesse will produce at least one extra winner 76% of the time.

3. **The Continuing Finesse:** The play of the cards such that the finesse, once begun, can be continued repeatedly from the same hand without the need to return to that first hand to repeat the process. It is used when no further re-entry cards are available to return to the origin of the finesse, or when one does not wish to use up additional entries in order to continue the finesse. **Example:** (J92 opposite AQT3)

4. **The Two-Way Finesse:** A finesse which takes place under the conditions where you can finesse either Opponent for a missing honor.

(With AJx opposite KTx, you can play for three tricks, by taking a simple finesse for the missing Queen with either the Ten or the Jack.)

(Likewise, you can finesse two ways for a missing Jack with either KQ9X opposite ATxx, or K9x opposite QTx.)

5. **The Obligatory Finesse:** A play where you first attempt and win a finesse in one hand, knowing it may not work, but intending to repeat it in the other hand if it succeeds.

(With Kxxx opposite Qxxx, suppose you lead a spot card up to the King, which holds the trick. When you lead a spot card back, do not play the Queen, which will almost certainly lose to the Ace and create a third-round loser as well. Instead, play a spot card and hope that the Ace will appear anyway, since it might have been doubleton originally, thereby making the Queen high for the third round.)

6. **The Ruffing Finesse:** Takes place when playing in a trump contract and you have a combination of honors, usually in sequence, opposite a void.

(With the KQJT opposite a void, lead the King. If it is covered by the Ace, trump the trick, and the QJT will be high. Otherwise, let the King "ride," throw off an eventual losing trick if one exists, and, if it loses to the Ace in the 4<sup>th</sup> hand, again the QJT will be high. If the King actually wins the trick, presumably the second player holds the Ace, and you can repeat the finesse.)

7. **The Backwards Finesse:** A Finesse which occurs when you lead an honor which you normally would have finessed, thereby creating an alternative, but superior, finessing position.

(With AJ9 opposite Kxx, the normal play is to finesse the Jack, but if you know, say, from the bidding, that the finesse must lose, you have a better play. Lead the Jack, and if it is not covered, let it "ride." If it is covered, win the trick with the King, return a spot card up to the remaining A9, and finesse the 9. Obviously, the Queen and the Ten must be well-placed for this play to work.)