

Planning Declarer Play in Suit Contracts

The trump suit provides Declarer with an extra method for taking tricks, namely, by ruffing. In addition, it is usually an excellent source of entries, as well as a means for controlling side suits that have no other stoppers.

In a suit contract it is usually easier and more illuminating to plan the hand by counting losers rather than winners. Count the sure losers first. These are the cashable tricks that can be scored by the Opponents, whenever they get the lead.

Count the possible losers next. These are the ones that may or may not materialize, as you try to develop your suits. Preventing the possible losers from becoming actual losers is often your primary task during the play.

There are Three Common Ways to Avoid Possible Losers:

- 1) By ruffing them
- 2) By taking finesses
- 3) By discarding. Occasionally, you might also be able to discard sure losers, if the Opponents have been lax in taking their tricks.

Declarer Has Two Special Plays That Are Unique to Suit Contracts:

1) The ruffing finesse, which is a technique for promoting winners in a suit that contains a sequence of honors opposite a void: lead an honor and be prepared to trump the trick, if it is covered by a higher honor.

2) The “**cross-ruff**” which is a strategy for using your trump cards individually by ruffing long-suit losers in both hands.

Finally, as the defenders attack, declarer has to adjust to the circumstances:

- a) If they threaten to create winners for themselves, Declarer has to find fast discards.
- b) If they lead trumps, Declarer has to locate an alternate source of tricks (usually long-suit winners) to take care of the losers.
- c) If they lead a singleton, Declarer has to draw trumps as quickly as possible.
- d) If they try to force Declarer to ruff and perhaps lose control of the trump suit, Declarer can either refuse to ruff (and discard a loser) or accept the force and cross-ruff the rest of the hand.