

Opening Leads

Choosing the Card

Once you have chosen the suit to lead based upon the Opponent's and Partner's bidding, coupled with your own specific hand, there is a specific card to lead from the chosen suit. The specific card chosen is standardized for your particular collection of cards and form which specific contract is being played; i.e., a Suit contract or a No-Trump contract.

Cards Selected for Lead Against a No-Trump Contract

The normal lead Against a No-Trump contract is from a long suit, hoping to establish the lesser cards in your holdings of that suit.

(1) When the suit is headed by a sequence of three or more cards that include one or more honors, lead an honor from the sequential part, as follows:

- a) Lead the **A** from **AKQ**. b) Lead the **Q** from **QJ10**; etc.

(2) From a broken sequence - not quite as safe but still very good - again lead the top card as follows:

- a) Lead the **A** from **AKJx**. b) Lead the **Q** from **QJ9xx**; etc.

(3) From an interior sequence – carries the highest risk amongst the sequential holdings – lead the highest card of the touching honors as follows:

- a) Lead the **Q** from **AQJ**. c) Lead the **J** from **KJT**
b) Lead the **T** from **AT9**. d) Lead the **T** from **QT9**; etc.

The purpose of the sequence lead is two-fold:

- a) To facilitate setting up the long cards in the suit by driving out Declarer's stoppers and preventing him/her from winning the first trick cheaply.
b) To give Partner an explanation of the possible cards you hold at the top of your suit.

(4) Without the proper sequence of honors at the top of the suit, normally lead fourth-best (i.e., the fourth highest card). For example, choose the five from **KJ85**, **AK953**, or **87652**.

The purposes of leading 4th best, absent a three or more card sequence are:

- a) Ordinarily the 4th best will be a small card, which by definition says that you like the suit that you are leading. Doing so encourages Partner to assist you in the development of the suit.
b) From the next card played by you in the suit, Partner can usually ascertain just how long your actual suit is.
c) All 4th best suit leads allow you to utilize the "**Rule of 11.**"

(5) Typically, a small spot-card lead suggests something of value in the suit; i.e., a suit of three or more cards headed by an Ace, King, or Queen. A high spot-card, on the other hand, suggests a doubleton lead or 2nd highest from three or more pieces without a high honor..

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Cards Selected for Lead Against a Suit Contract

Against a suit contract there are two important differences from No-Trump leads.

- (1) The lead of an honor promises only two or more cards in sequence, rather than three. The principal concern is usually only the first two tricks in the suit, since typically someone is likely to be void by the third trick played in the suit.
 - a) Lead the **K** from **KQ75**. b) Lead the **Q** from **QJ63**; etc.
- (2) From Ace-high suits, the lead is not 4th best. Under-leading from an Ace runs the risk that the Opponents might win the first trick in one hand and have a singleton in the other. Therefore, if you must lead from an A-high suit, such as **Axxxx**, start with the Ace. (It might be trumped if you save it for later).

Cards Selected for Lead in a Suit Bid by Partner

Failure to lead a card in the suit bid by Partner implies that:

- 1) You are void in Partner's bid suit
- 2) You have a better alternative – (not) "I hope it is better, but it is better!"

When you lead a suit bid by Partner, there are no significant variations in choosing the card. Thus, it is usually incorrect to lead an honor, unless it is from a singleton, a doubleton, or a sequence of honors. Against a NT contract assuming you hold an honor in Partner's bid suit (not a doubleton or singleton), it is important to lead a low card from three or more cards headed by an Ace, King or a Queen,

- a. To announce something of value in the suit.
- b. To keep that value behind Declarer on a subsequent lead from Partner.

How Partner Interprets a Spot-Card Led

Against a Suit Contract

- a) A spot-card lead could be from a singleton or doubleton, looking for a Ruff. Partner will have to judge from the visible cards in his/her hand and from the Dummy, whether the lead is likely to be from a short suit or a long one.
- b) A low spot card, by Partnership agreement, shows something of value in the suit (a King or a Queen), but denies both the Ace and a 2-honor sequence at the top.
- c) A high spot-card, (2nd from the top), led from three or more cards in a suit, is generally "**top-of-nothing**". From three spot-cards it is probably best to lead (**M**iddle – **U**p – **D**own) ("**MUD**") so that Partner will not be misled that you have either led from an honor or from a doubleton.