

## “The Rule of Seven (7)”

**Holdup** is a play in contract bridge, whereby the declarer ducks one or more tricks to opponents, usually in notrump contracts, in order to cut their communications. The primary purpose of holdup is to give as many tricks to opponents as needed to exhaust all the cards in the suit from one of their hands. If that hand regains the lead, it will not be able to put the partner on lead to cash its tricks. Holdup is one of basic techniques in play. **Take the number of cards you hold in the defenders' suit, subtract from seven, and duck that many tricks.**

### Example

		♠ J 10 7		
		♥ 10 8 3 2		
		♦ A 5 3		
		♣ K J 10		
♠ Q 9 6		N	♠ 5 4 3 2	
♥ 7 5 4		W E	♥ Q J 6	
♦ K Q J 10 9		S	♦ 7 4 2	
♣ 8 3			♣ A 7 4	
		♠ A K 8		
		♥ A K 9		
		♦ 8 6		
		♣ Q 9 6 5 2		

South is playing a contract of three notrump, and West leads the king of diamonds. There are nine needed tricks: two spades, two hearts, one diamond and four clubs. However, if the declarer wins the ace of diamonds at trick one and drives out the ace of clubs, the defenders will cash four diamond tricks to set the contract.

South can assure the contract (provided the ace of clubs is with East) by holding up the ace of diamonds: (s)he plays low to the first two diamond tricks (known as [ducking](#)) and wins the ace of diamonds on the third trick. Now,

when East wins the ace of clubs, (s)he has no diamonds left to play. If West holds the ace of clubs, the contract is impossible to make. If, on the other hand, East had a diamond, that would mean that diamonds were originally split 4-4 and defenders could only cash three tricks in the suit, so the contract wasn't endangered.

In the hand above, there are five diamonds in the combined North-South hands, and declarer must duck two tricks (winning the third). If there were an additional diamond in either the North or South hand, for a total of six, then declarer need only duck one trick (winning the second). This is because if West has five diamonds (and North-South six), then East will have only two and will be out of diamonds after two rounds of the suit. If East does have three diamonds, then West will have only four and the defenders can cash only two additional diamond tricks (for a total of three) upon winning the ace of clubs. This rule, of course, assumes you are playing in 3 NT. It can be generalized for all notrump contracts as follows: **Add four to the rank of the contract and subtract the number of cards you hold in the suit.**

Of course, the Rule of 7 should not be used when the declarer can maximize tricks by immediately taking winners (quick tricks, avoiding suicide squeeze, dangerous opponent marked with cards, etc).