

Bridge Today University

Basic Defense 104, with David Huggett

SAMPLE  
First 11 pages of 21 pages

Lesson 1 – Opening Leads

Hello! Welcome to this first lesson on defensive methods. Throughout the course we shall study some age-old problems that can cause headaches to the uninitiated, but are not really so scary once a few basic principles have been learned. Many people wrongly assume that defense is boring and is something to be suffered until the next hand comes along, but just think about it for a moment: When you defend a hand, you and your partner are working together. Sometimes that's difficult, but, believe me, you get a real sense of achievement when you and partner combine forces to defeat a difficult contract. In addition, whereas you will declare the hand about 1/4 the time (and be dummy about 1/4 the time), you will be on defense about HALF the time. Therefore, if you can defend well, you have a chance to earn good scores HALF the time!

Lets start with the defensive side's opening gambit: The Opening Lead. First we will discuss leads against notrump.

When selecting the opening lead against the opposition's notrump contract, there are two questions to ask yourself:

1. Which suit should I lead?
2. Which card from that suit should I play?

Sometimes the answer to the first question is not clear, but the answer to the second should be automatic. Let's imagine at this stage that the opposition have reached 3NT after the auction 1NT - 3NT and that you have to find a lead. Which suit would you pick, holding:

K J 8 5 3  
Q 6 2  
8 7 5  
Q 5

Certainly you would like to choose a suit that declarer is short in, because after a while, if things go according to plan, you will hopefully be able to take tricks in that suit with low cards. It seems logical that declarer's shortest suit will tend be your longest!

K J 8 5 3  
 Q 6 2  
 8 7 5  
 Q 5

That's it, you're going to lead a spade, but which one? Can you imagine how frustrating partner would find it if you led the king one day, the eight the next, and the five on Thanksgiving? He'd have no idea what you were leading from, so, in order to be consistent, we make the rule that with a long suit of four or more cards, WE LEAD THE FOURTH HIGHEST. On the hand above, we lead the five – just count four down from the top.

You can see right away that if your partner leads the TWO against a notrump contract, he has a four-card suit:

? ? ? 2

Since there is no card lower than the two, a fourth-best lead of the two indicates a four-card suit, whereas:

? ? ? 4

If partner leads the 4, it could be his lowest card from a four-card suit, but it might be "fourth-best" from:

? ? ? 4 3 (a five-card suit), OR

? ? ? 4 3 2 (a six-card suit).

One exception to the fourth-best from a long suit rule is that when you have a SEQUENCE of high cards, like KQJ65, you lead the highest. It would be dangerous to lead the six, because declarer might have started with ATx and win a "cheap" trick with the ten.

(dummy)

8 7 4

(you)

K Q J 6 5

(your partner)

9 3

(declarer)

A T 2

Declarer is entitled to only one trick in this suit, but a fourth-best lead by you would present him with a second trick. So rule number two is:

FROM A SEQUENCE OF CARDS, LEAD THE HIGHEST. The lead of an honor always denies the one above it and promises the one below (but not necessary more than one below). For example, with:

Q J T 7 4, OR

Q J 9 7 4, lead the QUEEN.

With:

K Q J 8 4 2, OR

K Q 9 8 4 2, lead the KING.

Suppose you have a "gap" in the suit:

A J T 9 4

K J T 9 3

Q T 9 8 4

Touching honors that begin after the highest card in the suit are called "an interior sequence," and the basic rule remains the same: The lead of an honor denies the one above, and promises the one below. (By the way, we classify the ten as an honor.)

NOTE: When you're leading from a suit headed by the ace-king, many people lead the king, reserving the ace-lead for a special hand. However, in this course we are going to lead the ace. The lead of the ace is consistent with our other touching-honor leads (i.e., high from touching honors), and consistent with the popular lead of the ace from ace-king against SUIT contracts. This is the one lead I'm teaching you that isn't "standard," and should be discussed with your partners.

From A K 9 8 3, lead the ACE.

From K Q 9 8 3, lead the KING.

From A Q J 9 3, lead the QUEEN.

From K J T 8 3, lead the JACK.

From K T 9 8 3, lead the TEN.

From K 9 8 4 3, lead the FOUR (the 9-8 are not touching "honors").

Another exception to leading fourth-best from our longest suit occurs when partner has opened the bidding or overcalled a suit. In this case, it's a good idea to lead partner's suit.

a) From a doubleton in partner's suit, lead high, be it a spot card or an honor:

With 74 in partner's suit, lead the 7;

with Q4 in partner's suit, lead the queen.

b) From three or more cards in partner's suit, lead your lowest card from three, and fourth best from more than three:

With 9 7 2 in partner's suit, lead the 2;

with Q 7 2 in partner's suit, again lead the two;

with Q 8 7 4 2 in partner's suit, lead the four.

It's usually a mistake to lead your longest suit if you know that either declarer or dummy is long in that suit too. Suppose declarer opens the bidding with 1S and ends up declaring 3NT. You hold:

K J 7 6 4  
J T 9  
Q 6  
K 4 2

The lead of the S6 is likely to be to declarer's advantage, and the sad truth is that you are unlikely to be able to establish your long suit. Instead, try to find a "safe" lead. What would you lead?

I bet you picked the jack of hearts, and if so, well done, for that would be the expert choice.

If you do decide to lead from a suit of less than four cards, just follow the scheme we laid out when leading partner's suit - with one exception. When leading from three small in a suit partner has bid, we lead LOW; when leading from three small in an unbid suit, we lead HIGH. So, if you choose to lead a heart from 8 6 4, lead the FOUR if partner has bid hearts, and lead the EIGHT if nobody has bid hearts.

Summary – Leads against Notrump

First Choice – Lead partner's suit, high from two, low from three or more.

Second Choice – Lead your longest suit (unless the opposition has shown length in your suit). Lead high from a sequence, or fourth best.

Third Choice – When partner hasn't bid and the opponents have length in your best suit, lead high from a sequence in a three-card suit, or high from three small.

\*\*\*\*\*

QUESTION #1: What if I have two five-card suits, or two four-card suits to choose from?

Answer: Lead from the stronger suit. With:

A J x x  
Q x x x  
x x x  
x x

lead your fourth-best SPADE. With:

Q x x x x  
A J x x x  
x  
x x

lead your fourth-best HEART.

The stronger your suit, the less you need from partner to establish it.

QUESTION #2: What if my five-card suit is weak, and my four-card suit is strong?

Answer: If there is a big disparity, lead your four-card suit. For example, with

J x x x x  
 K Q J x  
 x x  
 x x

Lead the HK (top of touching honors). However, with:

Q T x x x  
 K J x x  
 x x  
 x x

Lead your fourth-best SPADE. When in doubt, length comes before strength.

QUESTION #3: What if my long suit is very weak?

Answer: Lead SECOND HIGHEST from a weak (i.e., honorless) four- or five-card suit. Why? Because if your suit is weak, there may be no future in it. Partner will know your suit is weak from the high spot-card that you lead, and he will feel comfortable about shifting to his own suit when he gets in. Suppose you hold:

T 8 6 5 3  
 K J 4  
 Q 4 3  
 Q 5

A spade is your normal lead, but if partner gains the lead and would like to play back a different suit, that's OK with you. Therefore, lead the EIGHT of spades. The whole hand:

(dummy)  
 A 7 4  
 9 8 3  
 K T 9 8 7  
 A 2

(you)	(partner)
T 8 6 5 3	9 2
K J 4	A 7 6 2
Q 4 3	A 2
Q 5	9 7 6 4 2

(declarer)  
 K Q J  
 Q T 5  
 J 5 2  
 K J T 8

Declarer wins your opening spade lead and plays the jack of diamonds to partner's ace. If partner returns a spade, declarer takes three spades, four diamonds and four clubs (when your queen falls under the ace-king), making 11 tricks. If however, you lead the EIGHT of spades, inviting partner to shift, he wins the DA and returns a low heart. Your side now takes four hearts and one diamond, setting their 3NT contract by one trick.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### QUIZ (1)

The bidding has gone 1NT - 3NT from the opposition and you are on lead. What do you lead?

(1)

K T 7 6 3  
 A 5 4  
 7 6 3  
 T 4

(2)

Q 5 4 3 2  
 Q J T 9  
 A 5  
 6 2

(3)

6 5 4  
 A J T 9 3  
 K 6 3  
 J 7

(4)

7 6 4  
 Q 4  
 Q T 8 6  
 Q T 7 6

Now your partner has opened 1H, but your right hand opponent overcalled with 1NT which was raised to 3NT. What do you lead?

(5)

J T 9 8 4  
 Q 6 2  
 9 8 5  
 7 3

(6)

J 9 7 5 2  
 7 2  
 Q 5 2  
 T 9 5

This time the opposition have bid:

Declarer Dummy

1 H        1 S  
 1 NT      3 NT

and you are on lead. What do you lead?



(7)

9 6 3  
 K J 8 3 2  
 J T 9  
 A 3

(8)

A Q T 3  
 J 7 6 3  
 9 8 3  
 6 4

SOLUTIONS (1)

The bidding has gone 1NT - 3NT from the opposition and you are on lead.  
 What do you lead?

(1)

K T 7 6 3  
 A 5 4  
 7 6 3  
 T 4

Lead the six of spades, 4th highest from the long suit.

(2)

Q 5 4 3 2  
 Q J T 9  
 A 5  
 6 2

This time you have a choice between the two majors. The hearts are of a much better quality, however, so lead the queen of hearts.

(3)

6 5 4  
 A J T 9 3  
 K 6 3  
 J 7

Lead the jack of hearts, top of an "interior sequence."

(4)

7 6 4  
 Q 4  
 Q T 8 6  
 Q T 7 6

Lead the six of diamonds. The diamond are marginally better than the clubs!

Now your partner has opened 1H, but your right hand opponent overcalled with 1NT which was raised to 3NT. What do you lead?

(5)

J T 9 8 4  
 Q 6 2  
 9 8 5  
 7 3

Lead the two of hearts. The jack of spades might turn out well, but you will never hear the end of it if it doesn't!

(6)

J 9 7 5 2  
 7 2  
 Q 5 2  
 T 9 5

Again, best to lead partner's suit; lead the seven of hearts.

This time the opposition have bid:

Declarer Dummy

1 H        1 S  
 1 NT      3 NT

and you are on lead. What do you lead?

(7)

9 6 3  
 K J 8 3 2  
 J T 9  
 A 3

A heart lead will most likely play into declarer's hands. Don't give anything away; lead the jack of diamonds.

(8)

A Q T 3  
 J 7 6 3  
 9 8 3  
 6 4

Both a spade and a heart are likely to be disastrous. Try a short suit lead of the nine of diamonds.

\*\*\*\*\*

So far we have considered the case where the opponents are playing in a notrump contract. Should they be playing in a suit contract, whether it be 1C or 7S, there are two important points that must be fully realized:

1. Once we decide upon a suit, the card we choose from that suit is exactly the same as if we were leading against a notrump contract, with one exception:

If we decide to lead from three small, we lead the MIDDLE card (and not the high or low card). This is called MUD because first we lead the middle card, and then latter we follow with the higher card (so that partner doesn't mistakenly think we have a doubleton), and finally we will play the lowest card. Thus, Middle-Up-Down, or MUD.

2. Our objectives when we lead against a suit contract ARE TOTALLY DIFFERENT THAN WHEN WE LEAD AGAINST A NOTRUMP CONTRACT!

What do we mean by that? Against notrump, we don't mind giving away a trick on the opening lead because by doing so we have a chance to establish a suit that we can later cash to our advantage. In other words, we speculate to accumulate. But that doesn't apply against a suit contract. It's no good having a set-up suit because when we try to cash it, declarer will trump in and go about his business. For example: