



Defensive Play and Opening Leads

Defense is the hardest part of bridge. You have to make the opening lead before seeing dummy. During the play of the hand you don't get to see your partner's hand, you only get to see the dummy, so coordinating the defense with your partner can be guess work.

The opening lead is the chance to get the defense off to the best possible start, but you have limited information. The only information you have is the bidding, and the cards you hold in your hand. Don't ignore the bidding when choosing your lead!

Think about the hand

To start with, what is the final contract? This tells you how many tricks are needed to defeat the hand. If the opponents are in 4♥ then you need to take 4 tricks to set the contract. Try to think where these tricks may come from:

- Do I have ruffing values?
- Can I promote winners?
- Does an unbid suit have potential?
- Can I develop my long suit in a Notrump contract?
- Think about the trick potential for your hand.
- Think about what card's you need partner to hold in order to defeat the contract.

Think about the bidding

When your partner has bid, that is frequently a good lead. Partner is showing a good suit when they overcalled. Other clues you can gather from the bidding:

- Have the opponents stretched to bid a contract? Try not to give up any tricks, don't setup tricks for declarer. You should plan a conservative defense.
- Has dummy shown a long, strong suit? This calls for an aggressive defense. Try to take tricks before they disappear on dummies long suit winners.
- Has dummy supported declarer's second suit? This means dummy is probably short in declarer's first suit, so a trump lead is called for to cut down on ruff's.
- How many points does the declaring side likely have? Add that to your points to estimate how many points partner is likely to have.

Think about Declarer's Plan

Once you can see dummy, you should start considering what declarer's plan will be and how you can counter the plan:

- If dummy has a short suit, declarer may be planning to ruff losers. The defensive counter is to lead trump as often as possible.
- If dummy has extra winners, declarer may be planning to pitch his losers on winners in dummy. The defensive count is to cash side suit winners before declarer can discard them.
- If it looks like declarer will be finessing, avoid leading away from unsupported honors.

Bottom Of Something Top Of Nothing

When you are leading a suit that partner did not bid, then you should follow the guideline of **B**ottom **o**f **S**omething, **T**op **o**f **N**othing. This is best remembered by the initial letters, BOSTON. If you lead a low spot card, you are promising an honor (something). If you lead a high spot card you are promising that you don't have an honor in the suit. The following are examples:

- ♠ K 7 6 Lead the ♠6, **B**ottom **o**f **S**omething
- ♥ Q T 4 2 Lead the ♥2, **B**ottom **o**f **S**omething
- ♦ J 5 3 Lead the ♦3, **B**ottom **o**f **S**omething
- ♣ K J 8 7 Lead the ♣7, **B**ottom **o**f **S**omething
- ♠ 8 4 2 Lead the ♠8, **T**op **o**f **N**othing
- ♥ 8 7 6 5 4 Lead the ♥8, **T**op **o**f **N**othing
- ♦ K 9 8 5 Lead the ♦5, **B**ottom **o**f **S**omething

Leading Partner's Suit

When you lead partner's suit, there are guidelines that you should follow. This helps partner visualize how the suit is divided. There are two cases, if you supported the suit, or if you did not support the suit.

If you supported partner's suit, then partner already has a count on how the suit is divided. In this case you want to revert to BOSTON, leading a low card promises an honor, leading a high card shows that you have no honors.

If you did not support partner's suit, then you must give partner count in the suit. If you have a doubleton, you should lead the top card. If you have 3 or more cards in partner's suit lead a low card. This helps partner by giving them a count on the cards you hold in their suit.

Honor Sequence Leads

Honor sequence leads are a great lead! They rarely give up anything, and they tend to promote tricks for the defense. An honor sequence is simply touching honors. Against a notrump contract, you should have either 3 touching honors, or two touching honors, a single gap and then a third honor. The following are the honor sequence leads (lead the bold underlined card):

♠KQJ32 ♠QJT32 ♠KQT32 ♠JT932 ♠QJ932 ♠JT832 ♠AKQ2

Playing in a suit contract, you only need two cards for an honor sequence lead. Having fewer cards in the suit is better, because that means declarer may not be able to ruff your promoted winners. All of the above are honor sequences against a suit contract, in addition the following are honor sequences:

♠KQx ♠QJx ♠AKx

Interior Sequence Leads

An interior sequence is when you hold a top honor card in a suit, then there is a gap and then you hold a sequence of honor cards. You don't lead your top card, instead you lead the top of the interior sequence. This is frequently a good lead, particularly against a notrump contract. The following are the interior sequence leads, you would lead the bold, underlined card:

Notrump only (never underlead an Ace in a suit contract)

♠AJT54 ♠AT954

Both Suit and Notrump contracts

♠KJT54 ♠KT954 ♠QT954

Aggressive or Passive?

An aggressive lead is one that is attacking. It either works well, or fails miserably. An aggressive lead is leading away from an honor in a suit in hope that partner also has something in the suit. When dummy has shown a long strong suit, an aggressive lead is called for. You need to try and take your tricks before they go away on dummy's long suit winners.

A passive lead is one that is unlikely to give up a trick. Examples are an honor sequence lead or a lead from a suit where you have no honors. A trump lead is usually passive as well. When the opponents stretch to bid a contract, a passive lead is best. Let declarer setup their own tricks.

Fourth Best Leads

In a notrump contract if partner has not bid, you will frequently want to lead your longest suit. When you do lead your longest suit, you want to lead your fourth best card. Typically you will have an honor card in your suit, so you want to lead Bottom of Something. When you select the card to lead, select the fourth best:

- ♠K 7 6 5 3 2 Lead the ♠5
- ♥Q T 4 3 2 Lead the ♥3
- ♦J 9 8 7 5 3 2 Lead the ♦7

- ♣KJ865 Lead the ♣6

RULE of 11

The rule of 11 is used by the partner of the opening leader (3rd hand). If partner leads a low spot card, you assume it is a fourth best lead. Subtract the card value from 11 and the resulting number is the number of cards higher than the led card in dummy and the other two hands.

Example:

	♠Q82	
♠KJ973		♠A105
	♠??	

Partner has led the ♠7 in a notrump contract. Using the rule of 11, you know this means there are four (11-7=4) cards higher than the ♠7, in the dummy, your hand and declarer's hand. Since you can see all four cards (dummies ♠Q and ♠8, and your ♠A and ♠10, you know that declarer does not have any card higher than the ♠7! Therefore if declarer plays low from dummy, you can play the ♠T, winning the trick, and then cash the ♠A and finally lead your ♠5 to let partner cash out the rest of the spade suit!

When to lead Trump

There are times when you should always lead a trump. These are:

1. Your partner has passed your takeout double, converting it to a penalty double.
2. Dummy has given preference to opener's second suit, for example on the auction:

West	North	East	South
1♥	pass	1NT	pass
2♣	All pass		

You can expect dummy will be short in hearts, and so declarer will be ruffing their losing hearts in dummy. Lead a trump to cut down on dummies ruffing power.

3. When you and partner have most of the high card strength, and the opponents have "sacrificed". You should lead trump as much as possible to cut down on ruffing values.

Opening Lead Guidelines

The following are guidelines in order of preference for opening leads, when you have no other information:

1. Partner's suit. Use the guidelines given above.
2. Leading a singleton against a suit contract.
3. Lead an honor sequence (see above).
4. An unbid suit.
5. Your longest suit (against notrump contracts). When you lead your longest suit, you should lead your fourth best card.
6. Trump

Leads to avoid

The following are guidelines of leads to try and avoid:

1. The opponent's suit (unless it is a singleton).
2. Never lead away from an Ace in a suit contract. It is OK to lead away from an Ace in a notrump contract when it is your longest suit.
3. Avoid leading away from an unprotected honor unless the bidding calls for an aggressive lead.

4. Avoid leading a doubleton unless it is partner's bid suit