



Lesson 20 - Defensive Guidelines

Defense is the hardest part of bridge. To help new students we have a number of guidelines that are right about 75% of the time. As you gain experience playing bridge you will start to understand when these guidelines should not be followed.

Guideline 1: Second hand low

Remember that declarer cannot see the cards you hold. Frequently declarer may have a choice of cards to play, and may go wrong. By playing a low card you give declarer a chance to go wrong and give your partner a chance to win the trick.

Example 1.1: Dummy leads the spade 3.

	Dummy	
	♠ Q 5 3	
♠ K 9 7 2		♠ A 10 6
	♠ J 8 4	

If you play the ♠A (high) declarer is guaranteed to win a spade trick with either the ♠Q or ♠J. If you play second hand low (the ♠6), declarer cannot win a spade trick, the defense will take all four spade tricks.

Example 1.2: Dummy leads the heart 3

	Dummy	
	♥ Q 5 3	
♥ J 9 7 4		♥ A 10 2
	♥ K 8 6	

If you play the ♥A (high) declarer is guaranteed to win two heart tricks with the ♥K and ♥Q. If you play second hand low declarer will only win one heart trick.

Guideline 2: Splitting Honors as 2nd hand – play the lower of two touching honors

When you hold touching honors and you are playing before a **higher** honor in dummy it is often right to split your honors to promote a trick. When you split honors you play the lower ranking one to help partner understand the situation. If dummy does not have a higher honor, or if you are playing before declarer, you should revert to guideline 1 and play low.

Example 2.1: Declarer leads the club 4

	♣ A 10 5	
♣ Q J 8 2		♣ 7 6 3
	♣ K 9 4	

If you play low declarer may play the ♣T from dummy and win 3 club tricks. If you play the ♣J it forces the ♣A and guarantees a club trick for the defense.

Example 2.2: Declarer leads the ♣3 from dummy

	Dummy	
	♣ 7 6 3	
♣ 9 5 4		♣ Q J 8 2
	♣ A K 10	

You do not know what honors declarer is holding, so “second hand low” is best. True you can play the Jack to force the ♣K but later declarer can finesse your queen. Better to make declarer guess how to play.

Guideline 3: "Cover an Honor with an Honor" is usually correct, but only if you have a chance to create a trick for your side.

Example 3.1: Declarer leads the ♠J from dummy.

	♠ J 9 6	
♠ 10 8 3 2		♠ K 7 4
	♠ A Q 5	

If you play low declarer will finesse again and win 3 spade tricks. If you cover the Jack with the King (cover an honor with an honor) partner's ten will win the third trick. Here since you cannot see who holds the ♠T, it is right to cover the honor.

Example 3.2: Declarer leads the ♥Q from dummy.

	♥ Q J T	
♥ 10 8 6 3		♥ K 5 2
	♥ A 7	

In this case, if you cover the ♥Q with the ♥K you can see declarer's ♥J and ♥T in dummy are winners. Covering can not promote a trick for the defense. If you just play low twice, declarer will be forced to play the ♥A and your ♥K will control the suit. You can't know that declarer will be forced to play the ♥A, but it is your only hope.

Guideline 4: When partner leads low, 3rd hand should play high when dummy has all low cards

When partner leads a small card and there are only small cards in dummy play your highest honor card, unless you have an honor sequence. When you have an honor sequence play the lowest card of in the sequence. Playing the lowest card of an honor sequence is important to help partner understand where the high cards are. You can use dummy's cards in your honor sequence! Since you will always play after dummy, you will know what card to play. You play high for two reasons:

1. You may win the trick for your side.
2. You may force declarer to play a higher honor, and setup an honor card in your partner's hand.

Example 4.1: Playing your top honor when there is no honor in dummy

	♠ 8 5 3	
♠ K J 7 4 2		♠ A 6
	♠ Q 10 9	

When you play the ♠A, you win the trick and can then lead a spade through declarer's hand. This enables partner to cash four more spade tricks.

Example 4.2: Playing your top honor when there is no honor in dummy

	♥ 7 5	
♥ Q 10 8 3		♥ K 9 4 2
	♥ A J 6	

Defending against a spade contract partner leads the ♥3 – play the ♥K forcing the ♥A from declarer. When you later gain the lead you can lead the ♥2 and the defense will win 3 heart tricks.

Example 4.3: Playing the lowest of equal honors

♦ 8 3 2
♦ K 10 7 5 ♦ Q J 4
♦ A 9 6

Defending against a notrump contract your partner leads the ♦5 - play the ♦J, when declarer wins the ♦A, partner will know you have the ♦Q (otherwise why didn't declarer win with the ♦Q?) If you play the ♦Q it denies holding the ♦J, so partner will think declarer has the ♦J.

Example 4.4: Playing the lowest of equal honors

♦ J 3 2
♦ K 8 7 5 ♦ Q 10 4
♦ A 9 6

Defending against a notrump contract your partner leads the ♦5 and declarer plays the ♦2 you should play the ♦T. When the ♦J of diamonds is not played then the ♦Q and ♦T are equals so the ♦T is the lowest of touching honors. If dummy plays the ♦J you cover with the ♦Q (honor covers an honor).

Guideline 5: When partner leads low, 3rd hand should play a lower honor when dummy has an honor you can cover

When dummy has a high card that you can beat, only play your high honor when declarer plays the high card from dummy. If declarer plays low in dummy, it is usually better to play a lower honor card, and save your highest honor to cover dummy's honor.

Example 5.1: Saving a higher honor when there is an honor in dummy

♣ Q 7 5
♣ K 9 8 3 ♣ A J 2
♣ 10 6 4

Defending against a notrump contract your partner leads the ♣3 and Declarer plays the ♣5 from dummy – play the ♣J. Save your ♣A to play when declarer plays the ♣Q from dummy. By playing this way the defense will take all 4 club tricks on the layout above. If instead you play the ♣A, the defense will only take 3 club tricks.

Example 5.2: Saving a higher honor when there is an honor in dummy

♠ J 5 3
♠ Q 10 7 2 ♠ K 9 6
♠ A 8 7

Defending against a suit contract your partner, West, leads the ♠2 and declarer plays the ♠3. You should play the ♠9, saving the ♠K to cover the ♠J. The ♠9 is not quite an honor, but you should treat it as such in this case.

Guideline 6: When partner leads a low card use the Rule of Eleven

When partner leads 4th best subtract that card from 11. The result will be the number of cards in dummy, your hand, and declarer's hand that are higher than the card led. Whenever partner leads a low card, you should do this calculation.

Example 6.1 Using the rule of 11

	♥ K 7 2	
♥ Q 10 8 6		♥ A J 9 3
	♥ 5 4	

Partner leads the ♥6. Using the rule of 11, you know there are 5 cards higher ($11 - 6 = 5$) than the 6 in dummy, your hand and declarer's hand. Since you can see the A K J 9 7 in dummy and your hand, you know declarer has only lower hearts! Play the ♥3 to leave partner on lead.

Example 6.2 Using the rule of 11

	♦ Q 9 4	
♦ 10 8 7 5		♦ A J 6
	♦ K 3 2	

Partner leads the ♦5. You know there are 6 cards higher ($11 - 5 = 6$) than the 5 in dummy, your hand and declarer's hand. Since you can see the A Q J 9 6, you know declarer has only one card higher, play the ♦6 declarer's higher card is likely to be the ♦K.

Guideline 7: When partner leads an honor play a high spot card to encourage partner to continue the suit, play a low spot card when you have no help in the suit. If you have an honor with shortness in the suit, overtake (or unblock).

Example 7.1 Unblocking an honor

	♣ 8 5 3	
♣ Q J 10 7 4		♣ K 2
	♣ A 9 6	

Defending against a notrump contract your partner leads the ♣Q. You should play ♣K to keep from blocking the ♣ suit. If you play the ♣2, declarer will duck the first trick, and then when you play the ♣K on the second trick, declarer will duck again and then you can no longer continue clubs. If instead you play the ♣K on the first trick, south will most likely hold up his ♣A, and then you can continue with the ♣2 which allows partner to win the trick (assuming declarer again holds up the ♣A). Your partner can then continue with a third round of clubs clearing the suit.

Example 7.2 Unblocking an honor

♣ A 5 3
♣ Q J 10 7 4 ♣ K 2
♣ 9 8 6

Defending against a notrump contract your partner, West, leads the ♣Q. Declarer plays the ♣A from dummy. You should unblock by playing the ♣K underneath dummy's ♣A. If you do not, then you will be forced to win the second round of clubs and will not be able to continue the suit. By unblocking your partner will win the second round of clubs and can continue the suit.

Example 7.3 Signaling encouragement

♣ 8 5 3
♣ Q J 9 4 ♣ K 7 2
♣ A T 6

Defending against a notrump contract your partner leads the ♣Q. You should play ♣7 to encourage partner. If declarer ducks the first trick, partner can continue clubs by leading the ♣4, and now you can play the ♣K. If declarer ducks a second time, you can finally play your ♣2 which clears the club suit for partner. You would also signal encouragement holding the ♣T. Remember when partner leads an honor; it is an honor sequence (QJT or QJ9).

Example 7.4 Signaling discouragement

♣ K 5 3
♣ Q J 9 4 ♣ 8 7 2
♣ A T 6

Defending against a notrump contract your partner leads the ♣Q. You should play ♣2 to discourage partner. Assuming declarer wins the first trick, partner will know that a club continuation must come from your side since declarer must have the ♣A and ♣T.