

FIRST LEADS

1. General principles

Leads form the most powerful weapon in defence, and understanding partner's lead is an important step in formulating a defence to a contract. The choice of lead is really divided into two processes

- which suit to lead
- which card in the chosen suit to lead

The choice of suit is affected by the opponents' bidding, and whether you or partner has bid. The choice of card then depends on your holding.

Leads can be classified into useful categories:

- TOP card from a touching sequence e.g. QJ1086, AK75, 10987
- LOWEST card from a suit holding a single honour e.g. K762, Q985, A853
- LOWEST card from a broken sequence e.g. KJ84, AQ96,
- MIDDLE card from three or more 'nothing' cards e.g. 1074, 854
- from a singleton or doubleton e.g. 54, 6, (highest from doubleton)

An honour card is defined as A, K, or Q, (not the J).

The middle card lead is often referred to as MUD (middle up down). The play of a second card in this suit enables you to show that it is not a doubleton.

These classifications hold for the opening lead and for subsequent leads by defenders, but of course as the hand progresses the choices for defenders get less and less. Almost never underlead an ace against an uncontested suit contract. If you have to underlead an honour card, then a king is usually the best choice.

2. When partner has bid

It is prudent to lead partner's suit except

- when you have a solid suit of your own
- when the opponents have repeatedly bid no-trumps indicating that this suit is well covered. When you *lead partner's suit* the following guidelines are useful:

Against a suit contract

- Lead any honour card from a short suit (2 or less)
- Lead a low card from 3 or more holding an honour, except if it is the ace!
- Lead the ace if you hold 3 or more cards

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- Lead a middle card from a 'nothing' holding

Against no-trumps, the leads are the same except you:

- Lead a low card from 3 or more holding any honour

3. When partner has not bid but you have.

Lead in *order of usefulness* from the following holdings

- top of sequence
- middle card from 'nothing'
- lowest from single honour sequence
- singleton/doubleton, only with good trumps

4. Which suit to lead when only your opponents have bid

If only no trumps have bid (i.e. 1NT ...3NT) then lead *in order* of preference:

- top of sequence
- lowest from single honour sequence (so called 4th highest)
- lowest card from a broken sequence, or 2nd card from say AJ104 (an internal sequence)
- MUD lead

If the final contract is in a suit *try not to lead*:

- declarer's suits unless from a solid sequence headed by at least the Q
- dummy's first suit
- from a doubleton unless it is unbid or you have a definite trump trick

When all four suits are bid or you hold all four kings

It is normally better to lead a suit bid by dummy than a suit bid by declarer when all four suits are bid. However if the 4th suit bid is conventional (asking partner to bid no-trumps with a guard in the 4th suit. *It should be alerted*) then this suit is often a good suit to lead because it often does not contain four cards. Holding four kings against a suit contract underleading the king of trumps is usually the best choice

5. Leads against slams

It is important not to give away tricks by your lead. Therefore tops of sequences work far best (e.g. K from KQ). You need quick tricks against slams. If you have no such sequence, then avoid underleading an honour card

6. When to lead trumps

Trumps should be led when it is clear from the bidding that dummy does *not hold four trumps*, and has a shortage in one of declarer's suits. This is done to reduce the number of dummy trump tricks by cross ruffing. Otherwise avoid leading a singleton trump or from a doubleton honour card

7. Leading from an Ace doubleton

This is a popular lead that often helps declarer more than the defence. If partner has the K then you can get a ruff. However if partner does not hold the K, then declarer's K or Q is not likely to fall under your A. This lead is useful only if it is partner's suit (then it *should* be led), or when you have a high expectation that partner's hand can be reached and you have a trump trick.

8. After the initial lead

If you are attacking a new suit, and you hold no strong suit, the general principle is to lead through dummy's strength if you are on declarer's left, and up to dummy's weakness if you are on declarer's right. This means you lead through strength from both sides of dummy..

9. Understanding partner's lead

If you use the classification of leads set out in 'General Principles' then it is likely that you can identify cards held by partner.

Against no trumps

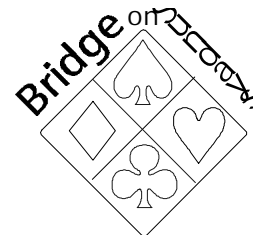
- a high card is likely to be from a sequence of honours
- a small card is likely to be from four or more cards to an honour
- a middle card is likely to be from a 'worthless sequence'
- a J or 10 lead is likely from a non honour sequence or internal sequence

Understanding partners lead is the key to whether the suit should be led back when you gain the lead. A middle card can be the higher card from a doubleton and it can be difficult to distinguish between a 'MUD' lead and a doubleton.

10. Returning partner's initial lead

Far too many players just play back the suit led by partner when they first win a trick. Use the understanding of the lead type to decide whether to return partner's initial lead or switch

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Leads

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