

I OPENING LEADS

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Making a good opening lead can be the difference between setting the opponent's contract and letting it make. A poor opening lead can let declarer make extra tricks, which is not a good strategy at duplicate.

The key to selecting an opening lead is to have an objective. Against notrump contracts your objective is to build tricks for your side, while against suits your objective is to spoil declarer's plan.

1. Leading against Notrump: Try to set up tricks for your side

The most likely way to develop tricks is by setting up your sides longest combined suit. This is why you have always been advised to lead fourth from your longest and strongest. A notrump contract is frequently a race between declarer and defenders to see who can set up their tricks first.

If your long suit has a sequence, you lead the highest card from it. The lead of a high card tells partner that you have a sequence of three honors (or a semi-sequence such as KQ10 or QJ9). With a broken sequence, such as AQJ or KJ10, you lead top of the internal sequence. The other time you would lead an honor is from a doubleton in partner's suit.

Exercise 1. Consider the following hands, what would you lead against 3NT ?

♠KQJ109	♠A32	♠AK3	♠A65
♥A43	♥J1098	♥KJ1098	♥A2
♦43	♦Q765	♦32	♦97654
♣987	♣A5	♣765	♣A43

Hopefully someone asked how the auction went. The opening lead you select should be very influenced by the bidding. Assume for the above problems, that your side was silent, the opener bid 1NT, and was raised to 3NT.

Frequently there is more bidding than in the above examples. Normally we try to lead suits that our side can be expected to hold. This means we usually avoid leading suits that

the opponents have bid or implied in the bidding, particularly declarer's suit. Remember, the objective is to lead our side's most likely suit for developing tricks.

A set of guidelines for finding our best suit against a NT contract are, in priority order:

1. *If partner has bid a suit, lead it.*
2. **Lead our own longest and strongest suit**, if the opponents haven't bid it.
3. **Lead an unbid suit** if our side was quiet.
4. **Lead dummy's second suit**, especially if we are short in it (2 or 3 cards) so that partner may have strength in that suit over the dummy.

There are some obvious exceptions to these guidelines:

- If partner has opened one of a minor, lead a good long suit of your own.
- If you have a superb suit with four or five honors in sequence, lead it even if the opponents have bid it (e.g. KQJ109).

Exercise 2. See if you lead the same card from the following hand on the four different auctions shown, your side is quiet and the opponents bids as follows:

	A.		B.		C.		D.
♠QJ98	1NT 3NT		1NT 2♣		1♦ 1♠		1♦ 1♥
♥1095			2♥ 3NT		1NT 3NT		1♠ 2NT
♦K1085							3NT
♣J3							

Exercise 3. Lead from these hands

A.	B.	C.
1♣ 1♥ 1♠ Pass	1♥ Pass 1♠ Pass	1♦ Pass 1♥ Pass
2♣ Pass 2NT Pass	2♣ Pass 2NT Pass	2♣ Pass 2NT Pass
Pass Pass	3NT Pass Pass Pass	3NT Pass Pass Pass

♠987
♥102
♦QJ1096
♣J54

♠K1065
♥74
♦K63
♣A953

♠Q4
♥KQJ108
♦K43
♣732

II. Against suit contracts, spoil declarer's plan with your lead

Listen to the bidding and look at your own hand. Try to imagine what dummy will look like and how declarer is planning to take tricks.

Figure out the approximate number of points that the opponents have (include their hesitations in this calculation). Add your points to theirs and subtract that total from forty; this gives you partner's approximate high card point holding.

- **Did partner suggest a lead by bidding a suit or doubling?**
 - Oblige your partner unless you have a strong reason to do otherwise.
- **Do you have 4 or more trumps ?**
 - Lead your longest and strongest suit - if you can make declarer ruff twice you will usually have more trumps than she and control of the hand.
- **Is dummy coming down with a strong side suit ?**
 - Make an active lead: lead an ace or from a king in a side suit, cash whatever winners your side has quickly before they go away on dummy's suit.
- **Can you possibly get a ruff ?**
 - Lead your singleton or doubleton (especially if you have a high trump honor to get in with before trump are drawn and then maybe you can put partner in to give you a ruff). This is not a good lead when partner is known to be very weak.
- **Is declarer planning to take ruffs in dummy ?**
 - Lead a trump.
- **Is dummy going to be weak ?**
 - Make a passive lead, don't help declarer by leading from an honor. Lead from a sequence or maybe lead a trump.
- **Have they bid three suits and finally agreed on one ?**

Probably you should lead the fourth suit to cash those winners, but if their trump fit is good, and neither side suit is running, then a trump is the right lead (look at your hand).

III. Which card do you lead ?

versus Notrump	versus suits
<u>xx</u>	<u>xx</u>
<u>Hx</u>	<u>Hx</u>
<u>xxx</u>	<u>xxx</u>
<u>Hxx</u>	<u>Hxx</u>
<u>xxxx</u>	<u>xxxx</u>
<u>xxxxx</u>	<u>xxxxx</u>
<u>Hxxx</u>	<u>Hxxx</u>
<u>HHxx+</u>	<u>HHxx</u>
<u>HHH(x+)</u>	<u>HHH(x+)</u>

Leading from a 3 card holding:

Normally **lead lowest versus suits and highest with three small ones versus notrump** (thus lowest from an honor).

This is because *the important message for partner in a suit contract is that you cannot get a ruff*, whereas against NT the message is "I don't really have anything in this suit" or "I have an honor card"

The exception is when partner has bid the suit, then you always lead low from three if you have not raised.

When partner has bid a suit, the important information is how many you have. If you have raised partner when she has not shown six or more (so that you are expected to have three or more), then lead low from honor third, but high from three small, even versus a suit. Here the message of a high spot card is "I have 3 small cards in your suit," since you cannot have a doubleton.

When leading from three trump, lead your highest non-honor card.

That is because traditionally a high low signal in trump says that you have three cards thus still have a trump to ruff with.

Exercise 3. Try these problems, given the auction what do you lead ?

A.	B.	C.	D.	E.
1♠ 2♥	1♠ 1NT	1♠ 2♦	1♠ 2♥	2♣ 2♦
3♣ 3♥	2♣	2♠ 3♣	3♥ 3♠	2♥ 4♥
4♥		3NT 4♠	4♥	

Exercise 4. Try leading from these hands:

Exercise 4. Lead from these hands

A.	B.	C.
1♠ Pass 2♠ Pass	1♥ Pass 1NT Pass	1♠ Pass 3♠ Pass
4♠ Pass Pass Pass	2♦ Pass 2♥ Pass	4♠ Pass Pass Pass
	Pass Pass	

♠654
♥K102
♦Q1076
♣K54

♠A32
♥Q982
♦63
♣Q976

♠K54
♥3
♦J10963
♣Q632

E.	F..
1♠ Pass 1NT Pass	1♠ Pass 3♣ Pass
2♥ Pass 4♥ Pass	3♠ Pass 4♠ Pass
	Pass Pass

♠KJ96
♥632
♦A3
♣Q753

♠732
♥9852
♦K763
♣Q9

Answers next page ...

	A.	B.	C.	D.	E.	F.
1.	♠K	♥J	♥J	♦5		
2.	♠Q	♦5	♥10			
3.	♥10	♦3	♥K			
4.	♦	♣	♠	♣/♦	♥	
5.	♠6	♥2	♥3	♥6	♦3	