

Finesses

Michael's Definition:

A finesse is a type of play that depends on the position of one or more honors in order to succeed. A finesse is NOT a guaranteed way of building extra tricks as it depends on the location of missing honors.

Examples of a finesse:

♠AQJ
♠543

Lead towards the Q. If it wins, lead towards the jack (assuming you have entries).

♠A87
♠QJ10

Lead the Q and if West plays low, play low. If it wins, do it again with the J.

♠AJ10
♠Q87

Lead the Q, not the 8. This keeps you in the South hand to repeat the finesse.

♠A82
♠Q43

Lead towards the Q. Leading the Q is useless—LHO can cover and you don't have the J. If you lead towards the Queen, you will take two tricks if RHO has the K.

♠A654
♠QJ10873

With three cards missing including the king, odds heavily favor finessing. If the suit splits 2-1, the King is going to be doubleton 66% of the time. If your LHO has all 3... well, I'll let you figure out the odds. Remember that the situations where RHO has Kx or Kxx are irrelevant because you will always lose a trick.

♠AQ43
♠J76

Leading the J will allow West to cover (or East to win if the finesse loses). Instead, lead low towards the Q. Now if the K was doubleton (and onside—in front of the A), you can take three tricks.

♠AKJ42
♠1095

If you have enough entries back and forth, you can start with the A or K. If you don't have entries to the 1095 hand, though, then start by leading the 10. A singleton Q is unlikely but not impossible.

♠AKJ1076
♠54

Here, we should NOT cash the A or K first. The reason is that you could no longer pick up Qxxx on sides. That is 4 times as likely as a singleton Q if we only consider the 4-1 positions (which is what we are deciding between). With 8 cards, we will definitely take a finesse for the Q.

♠AJ109
♠876

This is one of my favorite positions. You are going to take 3 tricks 75% of the time. Lead towards the J and then later lead low towards the 10/9. As long as West has at least one of the missing honors, you'll take an extra trick.

♠AQ105
♠432

Now we are much less likely to take 3 tricks. Still, the right way to play this combination is low to the 10.

♠A1098
♠Q54

We're back to missing the K and J. Here, if we lead the Q, you will pick up 3 tricks if West has either the K or J or both. Lead the Q and then if it loses to the K in RHO's hand, later you should lead towards the 10.

♠AK102
♠543

The best hope for 4 tricks is to lead towards the 10 and hope West started with BOTH the Q and J. This is a 25% chance. The odds that East started with exactly QJ are less. There's only one QJ doubleton position, but West could have QJ or QJx or QJxx or QJxxx or even QJxxxx!

♠AJ6
♠543

Here we'd have to hope West started with both the K and Q. Sometimes West will be kind enough to split the honors, but if they don't, we lead towards the J and pray.

♠AJ9
♠543

Our odds have improved! Now we can lead towards the 9 and if West has K or Q and 10, then we can get two tricks

Ruffing Finesse:

Contract is 4♥

♠AQJ ♥A ♦3
♠5 ♥543 ♦2

You could play towards the ♠Q and if it wins cash the Ace, but if it loses, you will lose a spade and a diamond. Better is to play the ♠A and then lead the ♠Q. If East plays low, discard your diamond. Even if you are wrong, now you will only lose one trick instead of two.