

OPENING LEADS

Basic principles

Do you need to make an attacking lead, or a defensive one ? Has the bidding suggested strong hands with plenty of tricks (eg. 1S – 2H – 4H) ? Then find an attacking lead. If they have not shown strength (eg. 1H-2H-3H-4H), try not to give a trick away with your lead.

Have the opponents shown a trump fit ? Might they plan to make tricks by ruffing ? Eg. 1H – 1S – 2C – 2H, or 1H – 3H – 4H, or where one hand has shown a two suiter. Then consider leading a trump, even if you have an honour sequence elsewhere.

An attacking lead is one from honours in an unbid suit; a passive lead is often a trump (from 3 small), or a solid sequence (J1098)

Don't lead unsupported aces – this costs a trick far more often than it gains one. Just look at the hand records for any club night and you will see this confirmed. This is true even if you have bid the suit and your partner has supported.

Don't lead the opponents' suits for them, even if you do have a fairly good holding. For such a lead to be right, you should have solid cards, such as KQJ109.

If the opponents have bid every suit naturally, normally think about leading the responders second suit rather than either first bid suit or declarers second suit.

Try not to lead from Jxx(x) – this holding is particularly likely to cost a trick.

Leading a doubleton is usually poor, unless partner has bid the suit. Leading a singleton is OK, but not in declarers suit, as this will usually cost at least one trick.

Leading from 3 or 4 low cards is not a safe lead – usually just the opposite, as your partners cards are exposed to finessing, and you only gain if partner has a very strong holding in the suit.

When making an attacking lead, select the suit where your partner needs the least to make it effective. Choose a lead from KJ42 rather than K432, or Q1032 rather than Q432. If you have K765 and Q765, lead from the K765 – this is because you may still make the K later if partner is weak in the suit (declarer has AQJ), but the Q may not make a trick (declarer has AKJ).

When your partner has bid, usually lead their suit. If you have more than two cards, lead the lowest from 3 cards or the fourth highest if you have 4 or more. From three to an honour, lead low. If you lead an honour, it shows the card below or a doubleton.

If there is only one unbid suit (including a suit bid as fourth suit forcing), it is often right to consider leading it, unless you have a very good holding in another suit.

In a competitive auction when the opponents have outbid you (eg. Bidding 5H after you have bid 4S), always consider leading a trump. This sort of auction usually suggest they will try to make tricks by ruffing.

Against NT, with a choice of two suits of equal length, lead the one in which you do not have the A, as this can be an entry card. With A876 and Q1087, lead from the Q1087.

Play strong 10 leads against NT. A lead of a 10 shows an interior sequence – either A109, K109, Q109, AJ10, or KJ10. The lead of a J shows no higher card. This applies ONLY at trick 1.

Hands:

- 1) Consider this hand: KJ72, 863, J1095, A3

What do you lead when they have bid as shown ?

- a) 1H – 2H – 3H – 4H
- b) 1C – 1H – 2C – 3H – 4H
- c) 1H – 2NT – 4H

- 2) KQ, A984, J10865, J10

What do you lead against their contract of 4H ?

- 3) 10987, Q2, QJ96, 875

What do you lead against their contract of 3H ?

- 4) You hold: AK5, J95, QJ106, K43. The bidding has gone 1NT from you, 2C on your left, showing hearts and another suit, 2H on your right. What do you lead ?

Answers

- 1. a) 3H (safe and trying to cut down ruffs) b) 2S (need to attack) c) JD safe but trying to establish tricks
- 2. JD – try to force declarer when you have 4 trumps
- 3. 10S or QD are both sensible
- 4. 5H – when an opponent has shown a 2 suiter, usually lead trumps at every opportunity