

This series is based on *Grant Standard*, a set of conventions and agreements that are in popular use today, such as 15-17 INT openings, five-card majors, and weak two-bids. A summary chart of *Grant Standard* and the corresponding convention card can be found at www.AudreyGrant.com. The site also has *Grant Basic*, a simpler set of agreements.

Earlier articles in this series appeared in the *Bridge Bulletin* and can also be found under 'Articles' at www.AudreyGrant.com.

We're going to wrap up this series by taking a look at standard defensive signals—a key aspect of the game.

Every card we play as a defender gives partner some information about our hand, starting with the opening lead. If we lead the ♠Q, for example, we are typically showing the ♠J and denying the ♠K, since we lead the top of touching cards.

If we lead the ♠2, we are typically showing a four-card suit, since we lead fourth best. Partner would also know we don't have a sequence in the suit, since we would have led the top of our touching cards if we held a sequence. If we are leading the ♠2 against a suit contract, partner can also assume that we don't hold the ♠A, since we rarely lead away from an ace against a suit contract.

So we are already exchanging a lot of information on defense through the cards we lead. However, there are three basic 'signals' with which we are expected to be familiar:

- Attitude
- Count
- Suit Preference

Attitude tends to be our primary signal, and it's also the first signal alphabetically. So let's start there.

Defensive Signals

Standard Attitude Signals

When partner leads a card, we play third to the trick. Sometimes, we have no choice about which card to play. For example:

	DUMMY					
	♥ A 6 5					
PARTNER	<table style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; display: inline-table;"> <tr><td style="padding: 0 5px;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 0 5px;">W</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 0 5px;">E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 0 5px;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W	E	S	Us
N						
W						
E						
S						
♥4		♥ Q 9 3				

Partner leads the ♥4. If declarer plays low from dummy, we must play the ♥Q, third hand high, trying to win the trick for our side. The play of the ♥Q isn't a signal, although it does give partner some information. It tells partner that we don't hold the ♥J, since we would play the ♥J—**only as high as necessary**—if we held both the ♥Q and ♥J.

However, if declarer plays dummy's ♥A, we have a choice of cards that we can play. This is where we can make an attitude signal. The standard agreement is:

ATTITUDE SIGNAL

- A high card is encouraging.
- A low card is discouraging.

So we can play the ♥9 to encourage partner to lead the suit again, or we can play the ♥3 to discourage partner from leading the suit. Which signal should we send? That depends on the particular deal. We have to make a defensive plan based on our hand, what we see in the dummy, what information we have from the auction, and what we know from the cards played so far. The point is that the attitude signal is a tool. We still must decide how best to apply it.

When making an attitude signal, we do the best that we can. If we want to make an encouraging signal when we hold ♥Q-3-2, we have to play the ♥3—the highest card we can afford. If we want to make a discouraging signal with ♥9-8-7, we have to play the ♥7, our lowest card. It's up to partner to look at the other cards in the suit to determine which signal we are trying to send. It won't always be clear cut.

However, we should try to make the clearest possible signal. If we want to make an encouraging signal when holding ♥Q-8-7-4, we should play the ♥8, not the ♥7. We play the highest card we can afford.

Attitude Discards

We can also send an attitude signal when discarding. Suppose declarer is drawing partner's trumps or running a long suit, and we have to make a discard. We can discard a high card in a suit that we would like partner to lead, or a low card in a suit we don't want partner to lead.

Defending is a complex business. **When choosing a signal, we must consider what information will be most useful to partner.** We don't want to give an encouraging signal simply because we hold strength in a suit. It may be more important to give a count signal (see later), to help partner know which suit to hold on to when declarer is taking tricks. We might also want to conceal our strength or weakness from declarer.

So we have to assess each situation, and hope that our partner is on the same wavelength. Partner should trust us to give the appropriate signal at the appropriate time, and we must likewise trust partner.

However, unless we have some other agreement, attitude signals take priority. Partner should assume a high card says we like the suit; a low card says we don't.

Standard Count Signals

When declarer is playing on a suit, an attitude signal doesn't usually make much sense. After all, it's declarer's suit! However, it may be important to tell partner *how many* cards we hold in the suit. Partner will then know how many cards declarer holds in the suit by subtracting the number of cards we hold, dummy holds, and partner holds from 13. That might help partner know when to take a winner in the suit, or whether to hold onto cards in the suit.

The standard agreement for giving a count signal is:

COUNT SIGNAL

- High-low shows an even number.
- Low-high shows an odd number.

For example, consider this layout:

DUMMY					
♦ K Q J 10 6					
Us	<table style="border: 1px solid green; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	PARTNER
N					
W E					
S					
♦ 9 7 2		♦ A 8 4			
DECLARER					
♦ 5 3					

When declarer leads a low diamond toward dummy, it's obvious that we don't want to encourage partner to lead the suit. So the situation becomes one of count, not attitude. We play the ♦2, starting a low-high to show an odd number.

We don't actually have to finish the low-high to show an odd number. As soon as partner sees the ♦2, the lowest outstanding diamond, partner knows we have an odd number. It can't be five, since there are only thirteen cards in the suit, but it could be one or three. Partner may have to rely on the auction or other considerations to decide which is more likely.

If partner assumes that we have three diamonds, that leaves declarer with exactly two diamonds. Partner doesn't have to take the ♦A on the first round of the suit, but can wait until the second round. This might be a good idea if there is no other entry to dummy. Declarer gets one diamond trick, but no more.

Count Discards

When we have the opportunity to discard, we may give partner a count signal in a suit, rather than attitude. This may be necessary to help our partner decide which cards to keep when declarer is running a long suit. Partner will have to recognize that the situation calls for count rather than attitude. Not always easy!

Remainder Count

Suppose declarer is playing in a heart contract and this is the club suit:

DUMMY					
♣ 10 6 3					
PARTNER	<table style="border: 1px solid green; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	Us
N					
W E					
S					
♣ K J 8 2		♣ Q 7 5 4			
DECLARER					
♣ A 9					

Partner leads the ♣2, we play the ♣Q, and declarer wins the ♣A. If we gain the lead, we'd lead back the ♣4, our original fourth best—also low from three remaining cards. If we have to discard a club before the suit is led again, we'd discard the ♣4, **low from three remaining cards**. Partner would then 'know' that there is only one club trick to take before declarer can ruff.

DUMMY					
♣ 10 6 3					
PARTNER	<table style="border: 1px solid green; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	Us
N					
W E					
S					
♣ K J 8 2		♣ Q 7 4			
DECLARER					
♣ A 9 5					

If this were the club layout, we would return the ♣7 on regaining the lead, top of our remaining doubleton. Similarly, if we had to discard a club, we would play the ♣7, **high from our remaining doubleton**. Partner could then know there are two club tricks to take before declarer can ruff.

Suit Preference Signals

When it is clear that neither attitude nor count apply, then we can send partner a suit preference signal.

SUIT PREFERENCE SIGNAL

- A high card shows preference for the 'obvious' higher-ranking suit.
- A low card shows preference for the 'obvious' lower-ranking suit.

This is easier to understand by looking at an example.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			1♥
Pass	3♥	Pass	4♥
Pass	Pass	Pass	
NORTH (DUMMY)			
♠ K 10 8 3			
♥ J 10 6 3			
♦ 4			
♣ K 10 6 2			
WEST (PARTNER)		EAST (US)	
♠ 9 5 4		♠ A Q 6 2	
♥ 8 4		♥ A	
♦ A K 10 8 5		♦ J 9 7 3 2	
♣ 9 5 4		♣ 8 7 3	
SOUTH (DECLARER)			
♠ J 7			
♥ K Q 9 7 5 2			
♦ Q 6			
♣ A Q J			

Against the opponent's 4♥ contract, partner leads the ♦A, and a singleton diamond comes down in dummy. This isn't an attitude situation. Even if we like diamonds, there's not much point in partner continuing the suit, since declarer will ruff in dummy. It's also not a situation that calls for a count signal. West is unlikely to be interested in how many diamonds we hold.

After winning the ♦A, partner is going to have to decide what to do next. This is where we can help out with a suit preference signal. On the ♦A, we should play the ♦J, a high card, showing preference for the higher-ranking of the 'obvious' suits. What are the 'obvious' suits? Spades and clubs. We eliminate the diamond suit and the trump suit in this case.

Assuming partner is on the same wavelength and leads a spade after we play the ♦J, we get two spades and the ♥A to defeat the contract. If partner leads anything else, declarer will be able to discard a spade loser on the extra club winner in dummy after drawing trumps.

If the spade and club suits were exchanged, we would play the ♦2, showing preference for the lower-ranking suit, clubs. If we had no preference for either suit, we'd play a middle diamond, leaving partner to decide how best to continue. ♠