

Signals and Discards

Defence is probably the hardest discipline to both learn and to employ effectively as you try to improve your Bridge game.

As declarer you have the obvious advantage when playing the hand of seeing both your cards and those of partner now exposed as the dummy.

As a defender, no such luxury is available, and so you must endeavour to work together with your partner to pass information about your hand.

Perhaps the two most important features of your hand to your defending partner are:

- Where your strength lies
- &
- What 'shape' your hand is [how many cards you have in each suit]

The importance of these two features to your partner is to help with:

- a) How many cards you have in that suit
- b) If it is safe to continue leading the suit [can declarer 'ruff' this suit?]
- c) Whether you have winning high cards in that suit

The way a partnership communicates information about strength and shape is through an agreed system of:

SIGNALS [when following to the suit led]

And

DISCARDS [when throwing away on a suit partner has led]

There are multitudes of signal and discard systems out there, with some being broadly similar albeit with a different name. In this session we will cover some of the more common, and hopefully easy to learn.

Signals

Two common signals and potentially the most useful to improvers are:

Attitude Signals

This shows the liking 'or not' of partner towards the suit led.

The simplest method is to use the High-Low Signal

[Or as many refer to it as "High for Yeah..." Low for Neigh..."]

Count Signals

Count signals, [often shown on a convention card as DISTRIBUTION], suggests to your partner the number of cards held in the suit led.

The approach is to play a high card at the first opportunity, intending to play a low card when next following to that suit, this will indicate to partner you have an **EVEN** number of cards in the suit,

So, conversely, playing a low card at the first opportunity, intending to follow with a high card when next following suit, suggests you started with an **ODD** number of cards in the suit being led.

[Note, Count Signals do not give the exact number of cards held, just if it is an even or odd number of cards, it is then up to partner to figure out what the most likely number is]

Mixing Attitude and Count

If you are happy with both the above approaches, and want to extend your use of Attitude and Count Signals, it is possible to combine them.

How you do this is for you to agree with partner, but a simple approach that works well, is to use an Attitude signal if partner leads an Ace or Queen, and a Count signal if they lead a King.

Discards

The purpose of a discard system is to try and alert your partner to where you think the defence should be trying to target its attack.

You could adopt a simple approach of throwing a low card from a poor suit, and a high card from a good suit, but sometimes this can cause as much damage to your hand as it does good, so an alternative approach is to try to use a 'side suit' to indicate your preference.

With most discard systems; you are suggesting a suit [very rarely the Trump suit if defending a Trump Contract] that should be led when the opportunity arises. You do this by throwing / discarding a specific card.

Of the available discard systems, the more common include:

Lavinthal or McKenney

Using this method, the suits are 'ranked' from low to high; Clubs; Diamonds; Hearts and Spades...

How it works

So, the card you discard can be either:

- A 'high' card – this suggests you want the higher ranking of the 'other' two suits [the 'other suits' being not the discard suit]

OR

- A 'low' card – this suggests you want the lower of the 'other' suits

An Example

If either Declarer or your Partner were to lead a suit you are void in, let's say for this example, a Spade.

If you discard a 'Low' **Diamond**, you are suggesting a Club lead...

If you discard a 'High' Club, you are suggesting a **Heart** lead...

Revolving

Revolving discards use a similar approach to McKenney, where a discard suggests a suit to lead; chosen from the suits other than the suit you are void in and the suit being discarded.

The difference between Revolving and McKenney is that the suits are thought of as 'clock face', running clockwise from Clubs, through **Diamonds** and **Hearts**, to Spades.

How it works

A low card in a Revolving style, suggests an anti-clockwise [suit 'below'] switch, whilst a high card, suggests a clockwise [suit above] switch.

An Example

In this approach, and using the same example we had for McKenney, if either Declarer or your Partner were to lead a Spade...

If you discard a 'Low' **Diamond**, you are suggesting partner works out to move 'anti-clockwise' and make a Club lead...

If you discard a 'High' Club, you are suggesting partner moves 'clockwise' and again makes a **Diamond** lead...

Contrasting McKenney and Revolving

Some players suggest that Revolving provides more card options than McKenney, but perhaps the more valuable aspect of Revolving is the increased potential to suggest a 'Neutral' discard.

Using McKenney, it is a matter for you and partner to try and reach a reasonable agreement on what card suggests 'neutral' and no strong preference for a specific suit to be led.

Ultimately, as with most approaches and systems in Bridge, nothing is foolproof, or else we would all be playing the same 'Perfect' system.

For more ideas on 'Neutral' discards see the section on the next page.

Dodds

The final discard system we will consider is DODDS, where the discard of an 'Even' card suggests a liking for the suit being discarded, whilst the discard of an 'Odd' card suggests a liking for the suit of the same colour.

An Example

Using Dodds and our previous example, if either Declarer or your Partner were to lead a Spade...

If you discard an 'Even' **Diamond**, you are suggesting partner leads a **Diamond**...

If you discard an 'Odd' **Diamond**, you are suggesting partner leads the suit of that colour, a **Heart**...

Neutral discards

One thing that you may like to consider when deciding on an approach to discard systems is how to deal with situations when you want to suggest you have no strong preference for any suit.

Some discard systems lend themselves better to 'neutral' discards than others, for example in REVOLVING, and referring back again to our example hand:

If you were to discard a 'high' **Heart** on the Spade lead, Revolving would suggest to partner you wanted the next 'clockwise' suit 'Spades'. Obviously this cannot be the case as you are discarding on Spades, so it is reasonable for partner to assume this is your 'Neutral' discard.

And Finally

Whichever system for signals and discards you try, and each has its merits and advocates, just make sure you and your partner are on the same wavelength.