

Discards - sending a message to partner

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.

There are a variety of discard systems in use. We will consider the original method in detail, known as **attitude or natural discards**. The methodology is similar to the signaling concept when following to partner's lead: a **high card encourages the suit, and a low card discourages it**. At the end I will cover a few other methods.

When you are forced to make a discard, a high card is an encouragement to partner to lead that suit. Conversely a small one discourages a lead of that suit.

♥ 6 5

♥ K 10 8 4 3

Suppose you are East here (though the same system applies to both defenders) and that declarer has led some other suit of which you are void. If you want to encourage ♥s, you discard the eight or, if you think you can afford it, the ten. If you wish to discourage ♥s (perhaps you have an ace-queen over dummy's king in another suit), you throw the three.

♥ Q 10
♥ K J 9 7
♥ 8 6

♥ A 5 4 3 2

High and low are relative terms. From a holding of A-5-4-3-2, the play of the five is a high card. The partner should work this out by noticing that the two, three and four are all missing. So, unless declarer holds all three of those cards, your five is high.

To encourage, discard the highest spot card that you can afford.

♥ K J 5 4 2 ♥ Q 10
 ♥ A 3 ♥ 9 8 7 6

Similarly, the discard of the six from 9-8-7-6 is a low and hence discouraging card. This signal is slightly harder to read. Your partner has to work out that, with the nine, eight and seven all missing, you would have spared a higher card to encourage.

When you want to discourage, discard your lowest card.

♦ 6 5 2 ♦ Q 7
 ♦ A 10 4 ♦ K J 9 8 3

The next step is deciding how strong a holding you need to justify signaling encouragement, with the king-jack over dummy's queen, a ♦ switch is likely to be productive and normally you will discard an encouraging ♦9.

♦ J 5 2 ♦ Q 7
 ♦ A 9 4 ♦ K 10 8 6 3

Now you cannot be so sure that a ♦ switch will get you anywhere because declarer might have the ace and jack. Even so, it is still normally right to ask for this suit, which you do by discarding the eight. If, as in the diagram, partner has the jack, a switch through dummy will set up a trick (or two if dummy is short of trumps). Note that you cannot discard the ten. With the ten gone, the suit would be frozen (a 'frozen' suit is one that neither side can lead without setting up a trick for the other side).

♦ J 5 2 ♦ Q 7
 ♦ A 10 4 ♦ K 9 8 6 3

Having weakened your holding further, it is risky to ask for ♦s. If, as shown, your partner has the jack without the ten, it is better for your side not to open up the suit. If dummy plays low, you will have to put up the king to stop the ten from scoring and then the queen will be good on the second round. Unfortunately, it would also be risky to discourage ♦s by discarding the three. Partner might have the ace or both the jack and ten and want to know whether you have the king. If you can spare a card in some other suit, it might be better to discard a card from that other suit. Partner may be able to work out that your failure to discard a ♦ means you have the sort of holding with which you do not know whether you want the suit led.

♦ J 7
 ♦ Q 10 2 ♦ K 9 8 6 3
 ♦ A 5 4

When dummy has a jack-high suit or no picture cards in it at all, you need less strength yourself for it to be reasonably safe to ask for the suit. Many holdings that include either the ace or the king will suffice for it to be a sensible suit for partner to lead. If declarer has the ace-queen over your king, the finesse was right anyway. Discarding the nine is normally fine with this East holding.

♦ J 7
 ♦ A 10 2 ♦ Q 9 8 6 3
 ♦ K 5 4

Holding the queen, you cannot be sure whether it is a good idea to have the suit led. If partner has the king, a switch to the suit will set up a winner for later. When, as shown above, declarer has the king, your side does best to leave the suit alone.

Example 1:

In a contract of 4♠, by South, partner leads a trump. Declarer wins and plays another trump. What do you discard?

♠ 9753
 ♥ 973
 ♦ KJ3
 ♣ KJ3

♠ 2
 ♥ 86
 ♦ AQ1082
 ♣ 109752

When partner gets the lead, you want him to lead ♦s so you discard the ♦8.

Example 2:

In a contract of 4♠, by South, partner leads a trump. Declarer wins and plays another trump. What do you discard?

♠ 9753
 ♥ 973
 ♦ KJ3
 ♣ KJ3

♠ 2
 ♥ 642
 ♦ AQ32
 ♣ 109752

When partner gets the lead, you want him to lead ♦s but your highest ♦ that you can afford to discard is the 3. This probably wouldn't persuade partner to lead a ♦ unless you had a second discard when you could discard the ♦2. The best discard would be the ♣2. This

certainly would deter partner from leading a ♣. Partner would now have to decide whether to lead a ♥ or a ♦. He may be able to work out that a ♦ is required from other information available to him (for example: bidding, his own holding, or the play of suits by declarer etc).

Example 3: Board 1, Dealer N. Both NV

You are West; North opens 1♦, South responds 1NT and North raises to 3NT.

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                ♠ A K 3
                ♥ K 7
                ♦ A Q J 9 6 5
                ♣ 9 4

♠ J 8 2
♥ Q J 9 8 4
♦ 4
♣ A J 10 5

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You lead the queen of ♥s, which the king wins. Declarer comes to hand with the queen of ♠s and leads the ten of ♦s. This holds the trick (East should be in no hurry to win with the king, win the 2nd round after seeing partner's discard) and a second round of ♦s follows. What do you discard?

You have a good ♥ suit, it is true, but your lead of the queen already showed that. In any case, you know (though partner may not) that declarer has the ace left and so can still stop the suit. With all those winners in dummy, the only hope is that your partner can get in with the king of ♦s and that your side runs four ♣ tricks. You must make a choice. Do you discard a low ♥ to discourage ♥s or do you discard a high ♣ to encourage ♣s? Since you do not expect to make any more ♥ tricks, you can spare any ♥. Can you say the same about the jack of ♣s? If partner has four ♣s to the king, then you can spare a ♣. If, however, partner has only three ♣s, you must hang on to all your ♣s. You cannot possibly take four ♣ tricks if neither you nor your partner still has four ♣s, and South's failure to respond 1♥ or 1♠ makes it likely that this is the case. **Accordingly, you should discard the four of ♥s.** This is the full deal:

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                ♠ A K 3
                ♥ K 7
                ♦ A Q J 9 6 5
                ♣ 9 4

♠ J 8 2
♥ Q J 9 8 4
♦ 4
♣ A J 10 5

                ♠ 10 7 6 4
                ♥ 10 6 3
                ♦ K 8 3
                ♣ K 8 2

                ♠ Q 9 5
                ♥ A 5 2
                ♦ 10 7 2
                ♣ Q 7 6 3

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You will win the two of ♣s switch with the ten and continue with the five to partner's king. Another ♣ lead through South's queen leaves you with the two winners you need to set the contract.

Example 4: Board 3, Dealer S, E/W Vul

♦	♠ 9 7 5 2	
	♥ K J 6	
	♦ K 8	
	♣ K J 10 2	
		♠ Q
		♥ A Q 9 7
		♦ A 10 5 4
		♣ 9 8 6 4

You, East, do not get much chance in the bidding because South opens 1♠ and North raises to 3♠. South then advances to 4♠.

Partner leads the seven of ♣s, which the king wins, as you play the four and South the queen.

On the first round of trumps, South's ace captures your queen. Then partner wins the king on the second round. What do you discard?

This time you might theoretically want any of three suits. If your four of ♣s was an encouraging card from A-4-3, it could be right for partner to play a second ♣ to score a ruff on the third round. On your actual hand, you want a ♥ and, if you had the ace-queen of ♦s, you would want a ♦. Since the ♣ ruff possibility is unlikely (with outside entries you would have no need to duck the first ♣), you could try to ask for a ♥ indirectly by discouraging ♦s. It is clearer, however, since you have the chance, to ask for ♥s directly. **You do this by discarding the nine of ♥s.** The full deal is:

	♠ 9 7 5 2	
	♥ K J 6	
	♦ K 8	
	♣ K J 10 2	
♠ K 6 4		♠ Q
♥ 8 4 3 2		♥ A Q 9 7
♦ 9 7 6 2		♦ A 10 5 4
♣ 7 5		♣ 9 8 6 4
	♠ A J 10 8 3	
	♥ 10 5	
	♦ Q J 3	
	♣ A Q 3	

Example 5: Board 4: Dealer West, Both Vul

Sometimes you need to think about which suit to ask for. Try the East cards here:

♠ J 10 5	
♥ J 6	
♦ A J 8 4	
♣ K 9 6 2	
	♠ Q 9
	♥ 7
	♦ K 10 7 6 5
	♣ A J 8 5 4

Partner, West, opens the bidding with 3♥. Two passes follow and after South reopens with 3♠, North raises to 4♠ to end the bidding. Partner leads the king of ♥s, which loses to the ace. Declarer cashes the ace of trumps, to which all follow low, and continues with a second round to partner's king. What do you discard on the queen of ♥s, which comes next? The king of ♦s sitting over the ace is well placed, as is your ♣ holding with the king in dummy. Which suit do you want more? Well, if South has the queen of ♣s a ♣ switch may not do you much good. However, a ♦ switch should work well whoever holds the queen.

True, declarer may hold a singleton ♦, but a singleton ♣ is equally possible. Therefore, you want to signal for ♦s. You probably want to keep the ten of ♦s, so you could throw the ♦ seven. Alternatively, since partner knows you cannot ruff the third round of ♥s (you would not have dropped the queen of ♠s if you could help it), you might achieve the same aim by discarding the four of ♣s.

The rule is: make an encouraging discard if you can afford to do so – this is generally clearer than discouraging another suit.

Rather than risk that partner takes the ♣ four as a suggestion for a passive ♥ exit, **discard the seven of ♦s**. This is the full deal:

♠ J 10 5	
♥ J 6	
♦ A J 8 4	
♣ K 9 6 2	
♠ K 6	♠ Q 9
♥ K Q 10 8 4 3 2	♥ 7
♦ 9 2	♦ K 10 7 6 5
♣ 10 7	♣ A J 8 5 4
	♠ A 8 7 4 3 2
	♥ A 9 5
	♦ Q 3
	♣ Q 3

If partner plays a third round of ♥s or switches to the ten of ♣s, you will not defeat the contract against competent opposition. Rather than take the ♦ finesse, declarer will play on ♣s, forcing you to win the second round. You will then face the unpleasant choice of setting up the nine of ♣s (or the king of ♣s if the nine has gone) or leading into the ♦ tenace.

Discarding honours

The discard of any honour promises the honour next below and, for the discard to be safe, invariably other strength in the suit. Discarding the jack from AJ10x guarantees the 10.

The rule is that you discard the card you would have led, the top card from a sequence and the highest touching card from an interior sequence.

♦ 9 7
 ♦ K 5 2 ♦ Q J 10 8 6
 ♦ A 4 3

As East, you might discard the queen here to show the sequence. In this case, the discard does not specifically encourage (or discourage) the suit. West will feel inclined to lead the suit when holding the king, as illustrated, but not when holding the ace. Even with neither of these cards, it may be reassuring to know that you have the suit wrapped up and therefore that it will be safe to discard from it.

♦ 9 7
 ♦ A Q J 10 6 ♦ 8 5 2
 ♦ K 4 3

When you are the opening leader and discard the queen, you are more likely to have AQJ than QJ10 for the simple reason that with the latter holding you might have led the suit initially.

Example 6: Board 8: West dealer, Both NV

For our final example, you are East. Partner deals and opens 3♥. Two passes follow and South's reopening bid of 3♠ ends the auction. Partner leads the ace of ♥s and continues with the king. What do you discard?

♠ Q 9 5
 ♥ Q 10 6
 ♦ J 10 8
 ♣ 9 8 6 4
 ♠ A K
 ♥ 7
 ♦ Q 7 6 5 4
 ♣ K Q J 3 2

To encourage a ♣ switch you might discard the ‘highest’ of your spot cards, the three. Alas, even the most observant of partners may fail to see the significance of this. Since you can be sure (unless South has a singleton ace) that a ♣ switch will defeat the contract, it is worth investing in a more conspicuous discard to ensure that the message gets across. **Discard the king of ♣s.** This is the full deal:

	♠ Q 9 5	
	♥ Q 10 6	
	♦ J 10 8	
	♣ 9 8 6 4	
♠ 6 3		♠ A K
♥ A K 9 8 4 3 2		♥ 7
♦ 9 2		♦ Q 7 6 5 4
♣ 7 5		♣ <u>K</u> Q J 3 2
	♠ J 10 8 7 4 2	
	♥ J 5	
	♦ A K 3	
	♣ A 10	

You can guess what would happen if you do not so dramatically draw attention to the ♣ suit. Unaware that you would be ruffing with a natural trump trick, partner surely continues with a third round of ♥s. As the cards lie, and as you might well have predicted, this allows declarer to discard a ♣ and make the contract.

Other popular discard systems

Other than the standard natural discard system that I’ve outlined above, there are a few others, namely:

- **Italian** (sometimes known as odd-even discards or Roman discards)

Many players use the Italian style, where an odd discard encourages in that suit and an even card discourages and has a suit-preference signal:

- **High even** card indicates interest in the **higher** side-suit, and
- **Low even** card indicates interest in the **lower** side-suit

However you may find yourself having all odd cards in the suit you want to discard! In this case you throw a high odd card first followed by a low odd card. Some people dislike this method of discarding because of this.

Contract 3NT by South

♠ AQ5		
♥ 32		
♦ KQ63		
♣ AT74		
♠ 732		♠ KJ86
♥ KT54		♥ A876
♦ T4		♦ 982
♣ Q652		♣ 83
♠ T94		
♥ QJ9		
♦ AJ75		
♣ KJ9		

Opening Lead: ♥4

West led the ♥4 won by the ♥Ace. The ♥6 was returned to the ♥King and West exited with a third heart. South now played off four rounds of diamonds. On the third diamond West's odd-even pitch of the ♠2 showed no interest in spades but suggested clubs. On the fourth diamond East's odd-even pitch of the ♣8 said that East didn't like clubs but did like spades. These odd-even discards gave away the whole hand. Declarer now knew how to play the clubs and knew to refuse to take any spade finesse.

Another example: Dealer: North Contract 6♥

	♠ K9643	
	♥ Q984	
	♦ AQ	
	♣ AQ	
♠ J75		♠ 82
♥ 1062		♥ A
♦ K10753		♦ J842
♣ 95		♣ K107632
	♠ AQT	
	♥ KJ753	
	♦ 96	
	♣ J84	

Opening Lead ♥10

In this example, the obvious problem, for declarer, is whether to take the club finesse or the diamond finesse. If East's first pitch is the ♣3, doesn't that increase the odds that you will take the right finesse? On this particular hand it's hard for East to false-card because there are only even cards in the diamond suit. Incidentally, if East had the opportunity to double cue-bids of both clubs and diamonds and didn't, it may affect declarer's play. However, it seems that a double of a club cue-bid to suggest a

club lead have been better than using an odd-even discard during the play of the hand?

Of course East could lie and discard an even club as this would not affect his partner. Often it is correct to discard rubbish rather than encourage partner to a particular suit.

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

• 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

Considering 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 other 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 don't want to suggest a 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**. And remember that:

- Sometimes you want to encourage partner to a particular suit but
- Sometimes it is better just to throw cards that are of no use.