

# What is a “Standard” Lead Agreement?

Provided by Neil H. Timm

Many partnerships play "Standard" leads in bridge with 4 or more cards the lead is most often the 4<sup>th</sup> best card both against NT and suit contracts. With a doubleton they lead their high card. If one leads low from two, it requires a pre-alert.

With only three cards there is NO STANDARD lead, it is normally determined by partnership agreement.

If partner bids, what is a standard lead? There again is NO STANDARD.

In the early days of bridge many recommended that partner lead his highest card so that partner may try to locate honors in the suit bid with or without support. Others recommend a card high with a supported bid and low card lead if the bid is not supported. There is no standard; however, low from an honor and top of nothing is a common agreement (e.g. return the suit if the low is a low card and do not return it if a high spot card is led).

Many experts have given up standard leads and play Upside Down Count and Attitude (UDCA) leads with 3rd/5th suit leads versus suits (3 from 4 and low from 5+) and use attitude leads versus NT (e.g. BOSTON – Bottom of Something and Top of Nothing).

Whether the opponents use 4<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, or 5<sup>th</sup> best leads, one may use the rule of 15 to determine the number of cards remaining in the suit. The rule goes:  $15-4=11$ ,  $15-5=10$ , and  $15-3=12$ , cards higher in the other hands.

With a suit headed by AK most agree it is best to lead the King where an Ace lead asks for attitude and a King lead asks for count and a Q lead asks for attitude. Playing Low-High honors (e.g. KA/QJ/KQ) shows a doubleton.

A Q lead against NT normally asks partner to unblock the Jack (e.g. from KQ109 – or some may lead the 10 playing coded 9's and 10's which show 0/2 higher honors or strong 10 leads); not having the Jack it asks for attitude so holding the Ace partner would encourage and without it discourage (planning “standard” high encourages and low discourages or playing UDCA low encourages and high discourages. Other queen leads against suit contract may be from QJT<sub>x</sub>, QJ9, AQJ, KQ.

Of course there are many other “NON STANDARD” lead agreements such as Rusinow leads, Journalist leads, MUD leads, coded 9's and 10's and many others. In general a 10 is never considered an honor when leading unless it is part of an internal sequence. Hence a suit without an honor has spot cards of 10 or less!

Playing “standard” leads, one leads the Jack from J109<sub>xx</sub> and also from KJ10<sub>xx</sub> this why many play Journalist leads where a J lead denies an honor and 10 shows 0/2 honors.

## COMMON "STANDARD" LEADS

### [A] Suits you don't mind leading

Holding	Against NT	Against Suit Contract
A K Q J (or more) <sup>1</sup>	A	A
A K Q x x x <sup>1</sup>	A	A
A K Q x x	K	A
A K Q x	K	A
A K x	K	A
A K	K	K <sup>2</sup>
A K J 10 (or more) <sup>1</sup>	A	A
A K J x	K	A
A K J x x (or more) <sup>1</sup>	A	A
A K 10 x (or more)	x <sup>3</sup>	A
A K x x (or more)	x <sup>3</sup>	A
A K 10 9 x	10	A
A Q J x x	Q	A
K Q J x (or more)	K	K
K Q 10 x x	K	K
K Q x x (or more)	x <sup>3</sup>	K
Q J 10 x (or more)	Q	Q
Q J 9 x (or more)	Q	Q
Q J x x (or more)	x <sup>3</sup>	x <sup>3</sup>

J 10 9 x (or more)	J	J
J 10 8 x (or more)	J	J
J 10 x x (or more)	x <sup>3</sup>	x <sup>3</sup>
10 9 8	10	10
10 9 x x	x <sup>3</sup>	10

**[B] Suits you don't want to lead**

A lead from any of these tenace or unsupported honor holdings is more likely to give a trick away than gain one. But sometimes there is no sensible alternative. In which case the standard leads are:

<b>Holding</b>	<b>Against NT</b>	<b>Against Suit Contract</b>
A Q 10 9 x	10	A
A Q x x (or more)	x	A
A J 10 x (or more)	J	A
A 10 9 x (or more)	10	A
K J 10 x (or more)	J	J
K 10 9 x (or more)	10	10
Q 10 9 x (or more)	10	10
A x x (or more)	x <sup>4</sup>	A
K J x (or more)	x	x
K x x (or more)	x	x
Q 10 x (or more)	x	x
A J x (or more)	x	A
J x x (or more)	x	x
10 x x (or more)	x	x

x x x x

second highest

second highest

## Notes

1. Important convention. When leading against NT, the **Ace** demands that partner **unblock** by throwing his highest card on the first round. On the three holdings flagged, which is precisely what you want. And on the other holdings it *usually* isn't.
2. Notice: against suit contracts you lead A from a suit headed by AK, but you lead K from AK doubleton.
3. A lead of x from a four-card or longer holding should normally be fourth highest.
4. A lead of x from three-to-an-unsupported-honor should normally be lowest.

## Standard Defensive Signals

### [A] Encouragement/Discouragement

An unnecessarily high card is encouraging; an unnecessarily low one is discouraging.

High-low is encouraging, low-high is discouraging.

### [B] Standard Length

Play low-high to show an odd number and high-Low is even.

*Except in the trump suit* where it's the other way round: low-high with a doubleton. High-low tells partner that you have a trump left for (e.g.) ruffing purposes.

This is rare so many now use Trump Suit Preference as an echo to partner for the other suits: discarding the higher card as part of a high-low echo shows interest in the higher ranking suit while playing a low-high echo indicates a desire to play a lower ranking suit.

### [C] Suit Preference

Suit preference signals apply when partner is going to switch, or when he will have a choice of suits next time he is on lead. The decision is almost always between two suits only, because you can rule out the suit being presently led, and you can (almost always) rule out trumps. An unnecessarily high card indicates the higher-ranking suit, and an unnecessarily low card indicates the lower-ranking suit.

It is important not to confuse these signals with encouraging/discouraging signals. So *only* use them when it is *obvious* that another suit is wanted.

## **LEADING PARTNER'S SUIT AGAINST NT**

The basic principles are:

From any doubleton, lead the top.

From a worthless tripleton, lead the top

From three to an honor (or tenace), lead low

From four or more, lead fourth highest

From any holding with touching honors, lead the top.

### **The Logic of Standard Leads against NT**

#### **[A] Sequence Leads**

Lead top from any suit headed by a sequence (3 consecutive cards)

#### **[B] Semi-sequence Leads**

Lead top from any suit headed by a semi-sequence (e.g. **K Q 10**, **Q J 9**, **J 10 8**). Not quite so attractive, as they can easily cost a trick.

#### **[C] Internal Sequence leads**

Lead the top of the internal sequence (A **Q J**, J from **K J 10**, **Q 10 9**, **A J 10**, **K 10 9**, etc.).

Notice that the lead of any honor (apart from the Ace) promises the honor below.

#### **[D] Three to an honor or tenace**

Lead low

#### **[E] Four or more to an honor or tenace**

Lead fourth best.

#### **[F] Worthless doubleton**

High-Low

#### **[G] Singleton**

Almost never