

Defence

Before you touch your hand on opening lead (potentially the most dangerous card played on each bridge hand, since it is played with the least information), review the auction, picture dummy, declarer and partners hand as best you can, and anticipate how declarer is going to play the hand.

90% of defence is pure logic problem of deducing partner's hand, declarer's hand and counting everything that can be counted from the information available. About 10% of the time you will need input from partner in the form of a count, attitude or suit preference signal. The signals will generally be useless if you haven't done your share of the thinking.

Here are some revealing auctions:

3NT(!)- PPP. When you ask, you are informed that declarer has a 7 card minor headed by the AKQ, and no aces or kings outside. How should you defend?

1S-1N

2H-P

Your hand is KJT9 4 AQ43 9872. How is declarer going to play this hand? How should you defend?

1N-6N. How do you defend?

1N-2N

3N. How do you defend?

1H-2H

3H-4H. How do you defend?

1H-3H

4C-4H. How do you defend?

1C-3N

6C. How do you defend?

1N-3N

You have no points. How do you defend?

2H-2N

3C-3N. 3C shows a feature, and ostensibly a non-min.

How do you defend?

Major modes of defence: Passive vs active.

A passive defence is called for when the declaring side has overbid, or in a tenuous contract. Often each time a side breaks a suit it will cost them a trick. The general rules for passive defence are to avoid breaking suits, make safe exits, and don't do any of declarer's work. Typical scenarios: the declaring side has struggled to game, and doesn't appear to want to be there (use facial expressions, and comments like "Well here goes nothing" if necessary, they are authorised information to your side).

An active defence is called for when the declaring side has shown confidence in the bidding, or has refused a game or slam try. They will almost certainly make their contract, and your tricks will disappear if you don't set them up and take them quickly. This is particularly important at matchpoints where overtricks are the name of the game.

Before you lead - how many points does partner have from the auction (this might be within an eight point range btw, especially vs 3NT). Did they try for game or slam? Have they confidently bid game and you have 14 points, or have they not looked for slam when you have 0? The bidding and the balance of points between the defenders will often tell you whether to defend passively or actively.

Honesty, dishonesty and full disclosure on defence:

- You are required to **have** a carding system (standard or upside-down) and discarding system (standard or upside-down attitude, lavinthal or odd-even), and you are required to disclose it.
- You not required to **follow** it when it is not relevant to your side. It is very common (perhaps even standard) at high level bridge for both defenders to give false count to convince declarer that a suit is not running.

Ethical behaviour on defence:

- False count, false attitude, false suit preference are legitimate techniques at bridge, since they are signals given through cards played (and fully authorised information for both sides).
- Facial "attitude" signals and comments are unauthorised information for the defending side, but authorised (table presence) for the declaring side. You may not use unauthorised information on defence, and there are strong penalties for doing so.
- As a defender you may **not** hesitate with a singleton, or with a relevant card in the suit suggesting that you have it. If you do and you realised you have paused, you have an ethical obligation to announce "I have no problem with the trick".
- If this is trick one, every player is entitled to a few minutes of thought. 3rd hand should play her card only when ready to do so, and don't feel pressured to turn it over until you have concluded your thoughts.

NT defense:

NT defense is usually conceptually simple - it is often a race between the two sides who have 9 and 5 tricks to see who can get there first, and 4th highest of your longest and strongest is the old fashioned maxim.

Passive Defence at NT:

How to defend when one defender has the majority of the points:

You should card (ie give correct attitude, count and suit preference) honestly and accurately when it matters (and experience will reveal when it does). A clear case where it doesn't is when one of the defenders has no points and the other has 14. It should be clear before the opening lead to both partners, that the 0 count is never taking a trick, and therefore never leading, unless on opening lead. The correct defence is for the strong hand to card randomly (confusing declarer, since carding is irrelevant to partner), and the weak hand to give very, very accurate count for partner for the strong hand to figure out what cards to keep. If you have 14 or 0 points, defend passively (ie lead their bid suits, or through dummy, or whatever partner has bid).

Active Defence at NT:

If the points are roughly divided, the race is on to get our tricks set up first, and an active defence is called for. You would never lead from KJxxx of a suit, in a passive defence situation, but defending actively, you gamble that partner has the A or the Q to set up your suit before it goes away. If you are good or lucky, this lead will set the contract, if not you will look silly. And most of the room will face the same choice. Active defence involves risk, without which there can be no reward.

Killing the entry at NT:

The third major technique of notrump defense is "killing the entry". The classic auction is:

2H-2N

3C*-3N * = feature.

Considering the auction there are a few questions: why the 2N bid? why the final 3N bid, instead of the more likely 4H? You might ask before the opening lead whether they have suit quality agreements in this seat and vulnerability, but be prepared for the likely answer of "we're first time partners and we have no such agreements", or better still a blank stare.

So again - potentially loads of info from the auction. Dummy has a heart suit and a club card. Couple of options for the defence - we try to cash our 5 diamond tricks, we try to attack spades, since responder didn't try to play spades, or we say that declarer's plan was to set up the hearts and use the club card as an entry. Declarer has one heart exactly, or they would be in 4H, so regardless of my hand, I would probably lead a club on this auction, and perhaps a high one to kill something like K8, hoping to knockout the entry to the hearts immediately.

Suit contract defence:

Way more complicated - no one really bids NT unless they intend to make it.

You need to predict before the opening lead, how declarer is going to play the hand, and select a defensive mode accordingly. As 3rd hand, bear in mind that partner has made best attempt at this decision, but if dummy is unexpected, you might need to switch modes quickly.

Suit contracts are different, there are more options for declarer, and - while 3 general moods apply to NT defence, many more apply to suits:

- passive (in a bad 4H trying to make 4 not 3)

- active (in a good 4H trying to make 6 not 5)
- cutting down on the declaring side's ruffs (check the auction - do they both have shortness somewhere)
- second suit as a likely source of tricks (check the auction)
- cross ruff by the defending sides (check the auction - do we both have shortness)

A weak auction (or an auction where there is a severe imbalance between declarer and dummy) calls for a passive defence. Lead from sequences, or lead trump.

A strong auction calls for an active defence. Underlead honours (K, Q or J), try to set up your tricks before they go away.

You were dealt AK of the same suit for a reason - to lead it.

Never ever underlead an ace at a suit contract.

Try not to "dry lead" an ace (without the king), unless there is no other palatable lead.

3rd hand at trick one:

Third hand usually plays high, hoping to win the the trick.

Should I play the A or 9 from A94? As are meant to take Ks and Qs. 8s and 9s become important later. Play the A at trick 1 as last resort, when an immediate switch is called for. Playing the A at trick 1 has the potential to set up K and Q as tricks when only one is deserved. If dummy has the K or Q, and you have the 8?, 9 or T, it is probably right to insert the minor honour (89TJ). Kantar's red book has an entire chapter on this, but you can often figure it out at the table.

Covering and honour with an honour is generally a good idea when there is the potential to promote a card in your own or in partner's hand. With Kxxx in your hand and QJTxxx on the board, never cover since the A is going to pop and there is nothing to promote.

Further defence is all about thinking, and adding new information as it becomes available. Partner leads a 2 (showing 4 and you win the A from a doubleton). Do you mechanically return the suit? The answer, count, count, count! It might be right to mechanically return the suit, but you should return to the auction, re-construct partner's hand and figure out whether to switch to a trump, switch to a different suit, or return partner's suit, perhaps trying to get a ruff.

Mid hand defence:

Give attitude when partner leads a suit (unless attitude is clear, then give count).

Give count when declarer leads a suit (unless count is clear then give suit preference).

Give suit preference when there is a visible or imputable shortness in someones hand.

When leading mid-hand, the lead of a small card requests a continuation of the suit lead. The lead of a large spot card suggests a switch.

At some point in the hand, it will be right for the defence to "cash-out", i.e. take their remaining tricks before they go away. Figure out when this is.

Always win a trick with the cheapest card possible (ie you have AKQxxx, play the Q – the K denies the Q or Q from KQxx)

Second hand generally plays low

When giving partner a ruff, your spot card is suit preference.

Whenever a card could be suit preference, it is.

I suggest Kantar's "Basic Bridge Defense" (the red book in the library) for a thorough treatment on defensive carding, and it's sequel "Advanced Bridge Defense".