

DISCARDS

First let us be clear that discards are NOT signals. **Signals** are made when you are following suit. **Discards** are what you throw away when you cannot follow suit and cannot trump.

Discards tell partner what you would like him to lead (and not lead) the next time he has the opportunity. You may have already told him this with a signal, **in which case the signal takes preference**, and the discard only helps to complete a picture of your hand in partner's mind. So be careful always in what you discard. Never assume that because you have already signalled, the discard becomes unimportant!

If, you start to make a high-low ATTITUDE signal which is not obvious, then complete the signal with your first discard. For example you have Q543 in hearts and partner leads the jack. Declarer wins with the ace in dummy, you play the 5 and declarer plays the 2. Declarer now plays another suit and you have to discard. The first discard should be the 3H, to show partner the 5H was encouraging – NOT to say you don't want a heart led! This is where many defences fail at the first hurdle.

If this problem does not apply, your first discard should tell partner what you want, and subsequent discards are used to fill in the picture - such as what else you have of interest, or what you don't want. Sometimes you do not have the right card to pass the correct information and must say first what you don't want. This will tend to leave partner with a choice of two suits, and therefore a 50% chance of guessing wrong. **It is obvious that you should therefore choose a discard system which eliminates this risk as much as possible.**

Sometimes you have a very poor hand, and don't really want anything led. In this case do a damage limitation exercise by trying to work out, from dummy's holding and the bidding, which suit will do the least harm, and signal positively for that suit. For example you may know that any finesse declarer takes through partner into dummy will succeed, (dummy may hold AKJxx in a suit) so play a discard which asks for that suit. At worst you will lose nothing, at best you may encourage declarer to try to drop your non-existent queen, rather than take the finesse! Partner, holding the queen, will know what you are doing, and draw the inference that you have nothing worthwhile in your hand.

A summary of discard systems.

In all the following systems, a low card is 2345(6), and a high card (6)789T. There is no such thing as a neutral card. Playing a high honour shows the top of a sequence of 3 honours.

Natural. A low card indicates you do not want that suit, and a high card that you want the suit led. This does not work because you waste a potentially important card and deplete the suit length to get what you want. You also give a 50% choice to partner by playing a low card.

Reverse-natural. At least here you don't waste a high card, but you still deplete suit length, and a 9 or 10 in a suit you don't value might mean the world to partner's holding in that suit! So leave this option well alone.

Dodds. Popular but just as bad. An even card asks for that suit (so you deplete it), and an odd card gives partner a 2-way guess again. Sounds fancier than natural, but that's all it has going for it!

Reverse Dodds or "Roman". This time odd is encouraging and even gives the guess. As you have to state this on your convention card or explain if the opponents ask, it confuses only poor opponents (and often a poor partner as well!).

Dodds/Roman can be made better by making the unwanted option directional – A high odd card (7 or 9) asks for the higher of the other two suits and a low one (3 or 5) for the lower suit. For example the 7 of hearts discarded on a diamond asks for a spade, and the 3 of hearts asks for a club. Note you could also ask for a spade by discarding the 7 or 9 of clubs if you did not have either of these cards in the heart suit. This modification cuts out the 50% guess, but still depletes the suit you want led. **More importantly it introduces a new principle of not having to discard the suit you want to ask for.**

McKenney. Here you never discard the suit you want led. So if you discard one of the two suits you don't want led, then you can define which of the remaining two you want. Simply, a high card asks for the higher of the other two suits and a low card the lower. You have run out of trumps, which are **hearts**. **If you want a spade you discard either a high diamond or a high club. If you want a club, a low diamond or low spade will do the trick. If you want a diamond, a low club or a high spade asks for it.**

This works quite well, but runs into problems if you don't want anything because every discard has a meaning. Also note that in any example the options are high-high or low-low two out of three times, **so you cannot distinguish between what you really want and what you appear to want.** Only one discard system does this and therefore has the ability to eliminate all ambiguity.

Revolving. Here a high discard asks for the next suit up and a low discard for the next suit down in the revolving order C<>D<>H<>S<>C<>D<>H<>S. So in our previous example where **hearts** are trumps you signal for a spade with a high diamond OR a low club and for a club with a low diamond OR high spade. But you can also signal for a diamond with a low spade OR high club. **This seems confusing so think of a circle where you can choose clockwise or anti-clockwise.**

C
S D
H

Now note that this time each suit asked for has a high choice and a low choice, so you can now agree with partner to make a high card a positive ask (must lead what I am asking for) and a low card just a suggestion or damage limitation exercise. In our example a high diamond says "lead a spade"; a low club says, "I don't want anything,

but if you are stuck a spade seems best to me. I may have an honour in spades but this is finesseable if you don't have the card above or below it".

Play what you like, but if you can understand and manage revolving, your success in defence will double overnight – principally because for some obscure reason hardly anybody else plays it, and applied carefully it cannot go wrong.

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OTHER USES OF SIGNALS.

Suit preference (McKenney) signals.

Sometimes partner leads a suit in a trump contract (usually the ace or king) and finds a shortage (singleton or void) in dummy. In this case an attitude signal is of no use. Instead you play a McKenney-type signal. **A high card (789) asks partner to switch to the higher of the other two suits. A low card (234) asks for the lower suit.** It is best here to leave the 5 and 6 as neutral. You may think it is safest to let dummy trump the next lead rather than partner to give an extra trick with a bad switch. So you play the 5 or 6 if you have it, and partner will not switch at trick two. Alternatively you may agree that the 5 or 6 asks for a trump lead. You may have the ace and be able to take out two of dummy's trumps and cut down the ruffs.

This also applies if you know the singleton or void is in declarer's hand. How do you know? Partner may have overcalled and you may have supported. Then when dummy comes down he has 4 cards in your suit. In particular this is where the 5 and 6 are important. You may have 4 small trumps and the best way to defeat the contract is to shorten declarer's trump suit by ruffing, so he loses control of the hand.

Now let us assume partner is leading his long suit for you to trump. How do you get back to his hand so he can do it again? Easy. If he leads a high card (7 up) for you to trump he is asking you to lead back the higher of the other two suits. If he leads a low card (2-6) you lead back the lower of the other two suits. **If he cannot get in again he must still do this as he wants you to lead the suit which does the defence the least damage.**

Smith Peters.

This is not the name of a bridge player. A **peter** is a high-low signal - you peter to give a count signal on declarer's lead. However, sometimes you need to give partner different information.

- 1) Declarer is in 3NT. Partner leads the 2 from J962 and dummy has three low cards. You play the queen and declarer takes the ace. Who has the king and the ten? You know but partner doesn't. So you must tell him. If he regains the lead before you is it safe for him to continue the suit? So when declarer plays to trick 2 you now play high-low NOT to show an even number, but to tell partner you have the king OR ten and it is O.K. for him to continue with another small card

- in his suit when he gets in. You have not been able to give an attitude signal to say this because you were forced to play high at trick 1. Now if you play low-high you are telling partner declarer has both the king and ten and another lead from partner will cost a trick. Declarer started with AKTx. But declarer should hold up with only the ace at trick 1? Not me! If I know the lead is from a 4-card suit (as above) and I have Ax or Axx it is no advantage to hold up. If I take the ace confidently and the defenders do not play Smith Peters I know my LHO will believe I have the king as well (with AKx I could hold up the second round).
- 2) Sometimes the lead is deliberately deceiving. You may lead the 7 from Q9752, not hoping to gain, but hoping it will not cost a trick as you are denying an honour. You may lead the queen from AQJTx because you think partner has only 2 cards and you need to force out declarer's king at trick 1. You may lead the 10 from KT9x for similar reasons, particularly if dummy has bid the suit. But now you find dummy has bid a poor suit and you want partner to lead the suit back, and you have deceived partner as well as declarer. So play a Smith Peter in declarer's suit. When declarer leads out the AKQ partner will know you are not giving count, and that he must lead back your original suit at his first opportunity.

Smith Peters will take preference over count signals in the obvious cases when **they are made by the partner of the player on lead**. This is logical as that player is now playing 4th to declarer's lead at trick 2, so his partner will not benefit from a count signal as he has already played.

In the case where the player on lead wants his suit returned it may not be obvious, if he is playing second to declarer at trick 2, if his high-low is showing count or a Smith Peter. But if dummy wins the first trick then he is in 4th seat to the 2nd trick and a Smith Peter is more obvious.

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