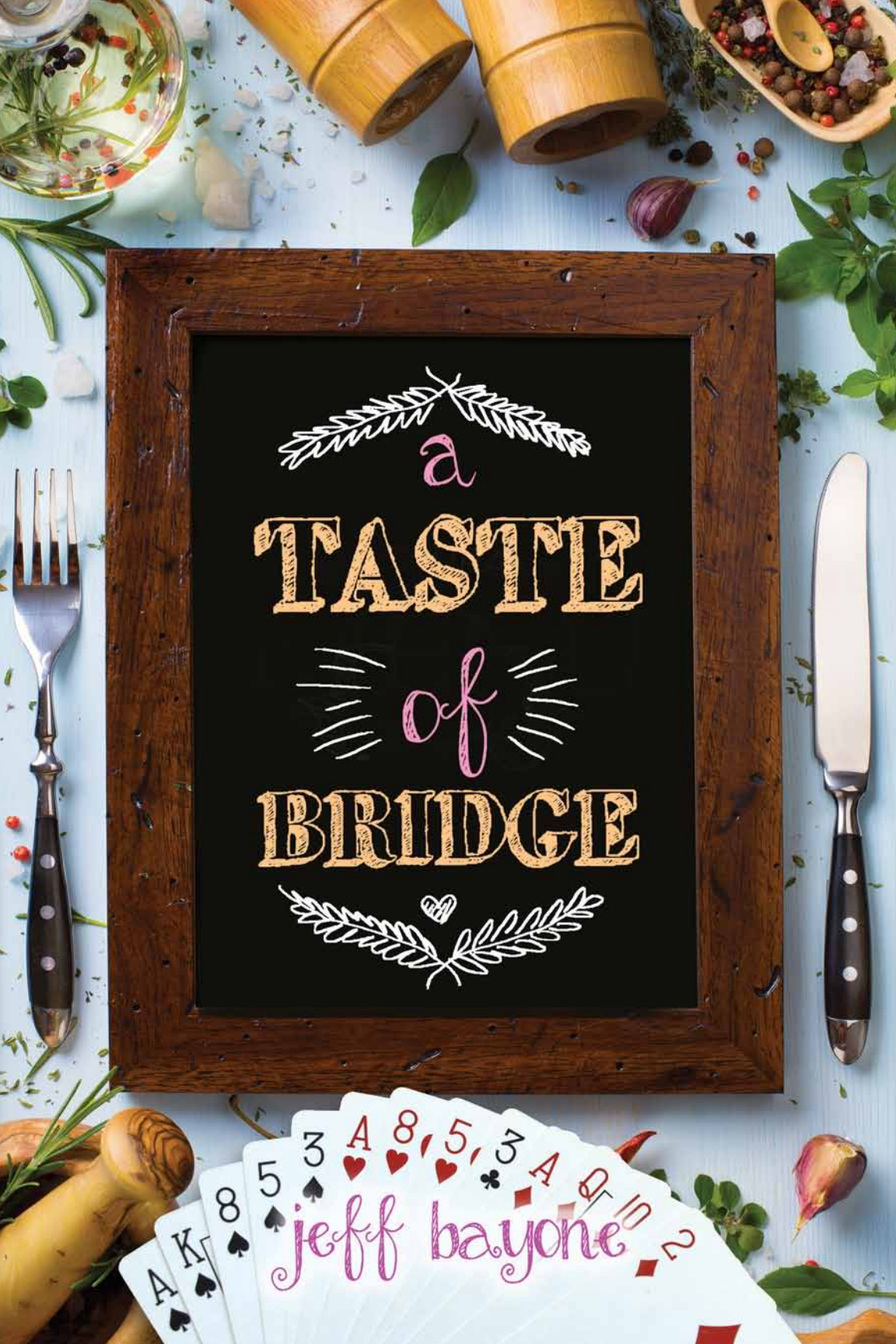
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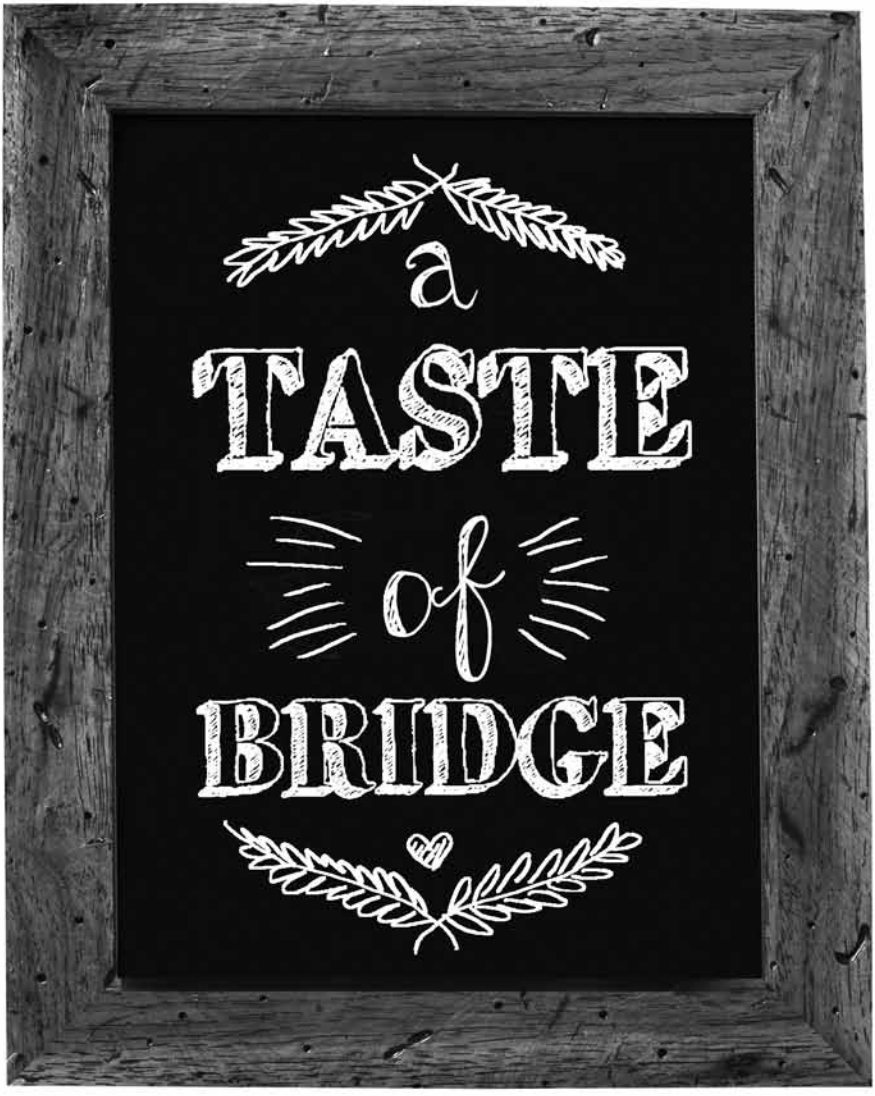

Master Point Press • Toronto

I'd like to dedicate this book to you and every student of the game who came before you. May your questions, struggles, and insights continue to make us better at what we do.

Jeff and Barbara Bayone and the entire Honors Bridge Club staff

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Email: info@masterpointpress.com
Websites: www.masterpointpress.com
www.ebooksbridge.com
www.teachbridge.com
www.bridgeblogging.com

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Bayone, Jeff, author
A taste of bridge / Jeff Bayone.

Issued in print and electronic formats.
ISBN 978-1-77140-034-3 (softcover).--ISBN 978-1-55494-635-8 (PDF).--ISBN 978-1-55494-680-8 (HTML).--ISBN 978-1-77140-879-0 (Kindle)

1. Contract bridge. I. Title.

GV1282.3.B39 2017 795.41'5 C2017-903363-8
C2017-903364-6

Editor Ray Lee
Cover and interior design Olena S. Sullivan/New Mediatrix
Interior format/copy editing Sally Sparrow

foreword

A taste of Häagen Dazs (or Ben & Jerry's) ice cream.
A taste of the good life.
A taste of Heaven.
A taste of your own medicine.

A session of bridge is usually all of these. An individual hand takes between five and ten minutes to play. Every hand is an adventure, and it happens so fast. A champion on one, a goat on the next. Sometimes a taste of Heaven, sometimes not. Bridge is fast-paced, exciting, and takes no prisoners; it's the perfect game for these times.

You're almost there. It's a big step, getting involved in something brand new. Let me tell you how Betsy Lerner, in her book, *The Bridge Ladies*, described her first foray into the game. It was when she attended a class at her local bridge club. Her words: 'I was nervous and full of anxiety and went home thoroughly discouraged and completely energized. But I also had fun, felt stimulated. I felt an immediate affinity for the game.' The local bridge club she attended was our club. My wife and I taught her.

There must be dozens of books for people who want to learn to play bridge. How do you decide if this is the one? Is this the book for you? *A Taste of Bridge* is Honors Bridge Club's beginner course. It's been tinkered with, kicked around, and field-tested for over thirty years. It has introduced thousands to the game. The course is fun and it works! It has helped build Honors into the largest-ever bridge club in the country.

I rest my case.

You've probably heard a friend say something like, 'Oh, bridge is so complicated.' Well let me assure you, it is! It's complicated — but not hard. There are just so many parts to the game. Each on its own is easy. It's the putting it all together that's the complicated part. I've uncomplicated it as much as possible and done it, I hope you will agree, in a very readable way.

Skim the first few pages. If you like the feel, the approach and the explanations, know that's what you will be getting throughout the book.

I took great pains to build slowly and carefully, to ensure that your foundation is as solid as possible, and, especially, to make certain that I would not be losing you along the way.

The book is made up of lots of short chapters. Twenty-eight in all. Reading two or three chapters in one sitting (while you're on your way home, perhaps) should take less than an hour. That's how it was designed. Two weeks on the train and you'll be a bridge player.

Not!

You'll be just about where you would expect yourself to be had you decided to take up the piano, or Chinese, or tennis. I would hope that somewhere, early on, you'd begin to be awed at bridge's beauty and logic. It's a winning combination. After that, the rest, from my perspective, is easy.

Here is a breakdown of how I see you working on the book.

Session	Chapters
1.	1 - 3
2.	4 - 5
3.	6 - 7
4.	8 - 9
5.	10 - 11
6.	12 - 13
7.	14 - 16
8.	17 - 18
9.	19 - 21
10.	22 - 23
11.	24
12.	25-26
13.	27

Twelve practice hands follow in Chapter 28.

Perhaps you already know that Bill Gates and Warren Buffett don't generally have time for games, but bridge is the exception. Do you happen to share their taste *for* bridge?

Let's find out!

Jeff Bayone
June 2017

contents

Chapter 1

getting started

Thinking back to your carefree childhood days, do you remember playing a card game called War? For those of you who never heard of the game, or if you can't remember that far back, this is how it would have gone:

A deck of cards was split in two, half was placed face down in front of you and the other half placed face down in front of your buddy. You would each then pick the top card from your pile and turn it over. Whoever had the higher card would win. The winner would take the two cards and put them at the bottom of his pile. You didn't know it at the time, but the two cards, one contributed from each player, constituted a **trick**. There are fifty-two cards in a deck, therefore twenty-six tricks. The game ended when someone won all the cards by taking tricks.

Like War, bridge is a game of tricks. But unlike War, in bridge you get to see your cards before you play them and you decide for yourself which card to play. It's no longer just plain luck that wins tricks. Planning, vision, common sense, logic, experience, and even imagination, now all play roles in determining the outcome.

It takes four people to play bridge. Each trick consists of four cards. With fifty-two cards in the deck, that means there are thirteen tricks in the game. The object of the game, in its most basic terms, is to win as many tricks as you can. A bridge hand ends when all thirteen tricks have been played.

Before we go any further, it's not a bad idea for you to get a deck of bridge cards — or poker playing cards if you must. Bridge cards are the same as poker playing cards except they are smaller in size. This makes it easier to hold and view thirteen cards at one time.

BASIC TERMS

Lawyers, cooks, the police, musicians — all have their own unique language. It should come as no surprise that bridge players do, too. Let's listen to one of them discussing a hand played earlier in the day:

'Remember board six? Your LHO doubled you in four hearts. I believe you held stiff queen, ace king sixth, four baby, king-jack tight. You dropped the doubleton queen of diamonds offside to make an overtrick! Don't you think his partner should have pulled to four spades?'

Yes, we really do talk that way. And soon you will too.

Let's begin.

We'll start with a few basic terms. In a standard deck of fifty-two cards, there are four suits: spades, hearts, diamonds, and clubs. Each suit consists of thirteen cards. Let's examine one suit, say diamonds. Spread them out. Notice that some of these diamond cards have diamond spots in the center. The two, for example, has two diamond spots, the three has three spots, etc., all the way up to the ten, the highest one of these numbered cards, which has ten spots. Now, whether these spots happen to be shaped like spades, hearts, diamonds, or clubs, do you know what we call these cards? **Spot cards**! (Did you really think this was rocket science?)

Next come three cards with faces on them — the jack (J), the queen (Q), and the king (K) — the **face cards**. The ace (A) is simply the ace and it is the most powerful and highest-ranking card in the suit. In order of strength, strongest to weakest, we have the ace, the king, the queen, the jack, the ten, the nine, etc., all the way down to the lowly deuce (the two). The ace beats any other card in the suit, the king beats every other card but the ace and so on down to the two, which loses to every card in the suit. The five highest cards, the ace, the three face cards, and that highest spot card, the ten, hold an esteemed position. They are your **honors**, as in our club's name, Honors Bridge Club.

Chapter 2

setting up

Bridge is played by four people sitting around a table. The person opposite you is your partner. You work together as a team. The players to your left and right are your opponents. They also work as a team. At the bridge table you always have one friend and two opponents.

In order to discuss the various players at the table, let's give them names. We'll base the names on where they are sitting. Assigning each seat a direction, we refer to one team as North-South and the other as East-West. (This is purely for convenience — you don't have to figure out which wall in your living room is North before you start playing!)

Bridge is played in a clockwise direction, so, for example, if we start with North, the order of play will be North, East, South, and then West.

North

West **East**

South

From South's vantage, North is his partner. West is his left-hand opponent (**LHO**); East is his right-hand opponent (**RHO**).

Let's begin. Our players will decide on partnerships, and then one of them will deal.

PICKING PARTNERS

There are two ways to decide who plays with whom in a bridge game:

Formal method: each person picks a card out of the deck. The person with the highest card sits wherever he or she wants, whoever drew the next highest card becomes that person's partner, and the other two players become the opposing pair.

Informal method: everyone sits wherever they want. Whoever sits across from you at the table is your partner.

DEALING THE CARDS

Who deals first?

Formal method: the person who drew the highest card deals first.

Informal method: whoever wants to deal gets to deal.

The **dealer** shuffles the cards and deals one card at a time around the table in a clockwise direction starting with the person to the dealer's left (LHO), until all fifty-two cards are distributed. This will produce four hands of thirteen cards each.

Now each player picks up his cards and arranges them into suits, alternating colors so as to be able to distinguish between them. Something like this:

THE PLAY

Whenever you see a description of a bridge game in a newspaper or book, you get to see all four hands at once. There are no secrets. But when you're playing a real game of bridge, three of the four hands are hidden. One hand is actually visible to all the players. This open hand is called the dummy and it goes on the table at the start of play. The person who sits behind the dummy hand is not involved in the play (I'll explain how the dummy is determined in a later chapter). The person across from the dummy plays both his own cards and those of the dummy. This person is called the declarer. The two other players are called the defenders. These three players look at their hands and the dummy hand, open on the table, and attempt to visualize what cards each of the other

players are holding. Then they decide how and when they should play the cards in their own hands to give themselves the best chance to make as many tricks as they can. In essence, they become bridge detectives.

This is how a complete deal might be displayed in your local newspaper's bridge column:

North
♠ A K Q
♥ A Q 5
♦ Q 8 7 3
♣ Q 6 2

West
♠ J 10 9 7 4
♥ 10 8 2
♦ 5
♣ J 9 8 4

East
♠ 8 6
♥ J 9 7 4
♦ A 9 6 2
♣ 10 7 3

South
♠ 5 3 2
♥ K 6 3
♦ K J 10 4
♣ A K 5

The order of the suits displayed is important. They are displayed the same way we say them... spades first (at the top), followed by hearts, then diamonds, and then clubs. (Reverse alphabetical order, if you will: S, H, D, C).

For consistency, as far as this book is concerned, North will always be the dummy. The declarer therefore will always be South. (It's just easier to look at a diagram the 'right way up'.) That makes East and West the defenders. Also, since bridge is not gender-linked, and to avoid arguments about pronouns, in this book East and West will always be men, and North and South will always be women.

Let's talk about this hand as bridge players would. Even if you can't play yet, isn't half the battle sounding like you know what you're doing?

When describing a suit, we always name the top cards from the highest one down to a nine, but rarely mention the smaller cards. Small spot cards are less important and so are usually mentioned simply as part of the total number of cards in the suit. For example, North's diamond **holding** would be 'queen fourth'. That means the queen in a four-card holding, or the queen with three small cards (like North's ♦Q873).

When you have a suit with only one card we call it a **singleton** — in bridgese, it is said to be **stiff** (like West's ♦5). Two-card suits are **doubletons** (East's ♠86). When describing suits with only honor cards (North's ♠AKQ) we use the word 'tight'. We always say the suits in the

same order: spades, hearts, diamonds, clubs (there's a reason for that, which we'll talk about a little later).

Putting this all together, North's hand would be: 'Ace, king, queen, tight; ace, queen third; queen fourth; queen third'. West's would be: 'Jack, ten, nine fifth; ten third; stiff five; and jack, nine fourth'.

Now you're ready for your first bridge joke.

Four bridge playing friends are on safari. One day the leader of the group steps into quicksand. By the time his friends get to him, the quicksand is already up to the poor man's neck. (See where this is going?)

He yells out, 'Quick, give me a hand!'

'Okay,' says his friend, 'you're looking at ace, king third; two little...'

Back to business.

To start the play, the person to the left of the declarer always makes the **opening lead** — he or she plays the very first card of the hand

After the opening lead is faced, the dummy comes down. Now what?

I know fifty-two cards are a lot to contend with. Where do you begin? What are you supposed to do? What should you be thinking about?

Hyperventilating yet?

Allow me to simplify the learning process. I'll ease you in rather than throw you in. Instead of starting with fifty-two cards, we'll start with four cards, just one to a player. Instead of twenty-six hidden cards, we'll have no hidden cards.

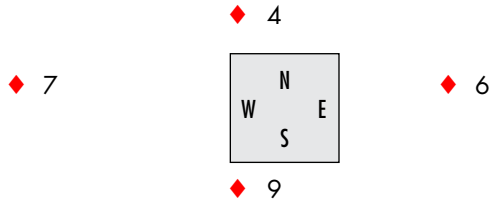
Feeling better?

Chapter 3

taking tricks with high cards

Each player is dealt thirteen cards. A trick is completed when one card from each player has been played. That means there are exactly thirteen tricks available to both partnerships. Each partnership will win their share. In the following chapters we will look at several ways tricks can be won.

From your deck of cards take out the four, six, seven and nine of diamonds. Give yourself (South) the nine, give North the four, East the six, and West the seven, like so:



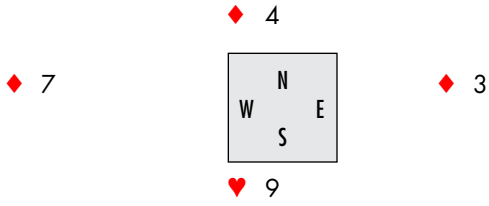
On this trick, West, one of your opponents, happens to be the first person to play a card. We say West is **on lead**. West plays his ♦7, which means he puts it face up in the middle of the table. Going in a clockwise direction, the person who plays next would be North. She plays her ♦4. So far, West is winning the trick as he has the higher card. East now contributes the six, no change. But now South gleefully produces the nine, the highest card played to the trick. South **takes** or **wins** the trick.

Look at the cards again. Couldn't you have guessed right away that South would win the trick, simply because she happened to hold the highest card? Yes, but it isn't just South who wins. North wins as well, because North and South are partners.

FOLLOWING SUIT

What if more than one suit is involved in the trick? Let's look at an example in which the highest card on the table *doesn't* win a trick:

Exchange your ♦9 for the ♥9:



Once again let's have West on lead. Do you think East-West will win the trick?

West leads the seven, North plays the four, and East plays the three. So far West is winning. But then South plays her nine, thinking that she is going to win the trick. After all, she produced the highest card to this trick, right?

Wrong. Even though the nine is a higher card than West's seven, it cannot win the trick. Why? *Because only cards in the suit that's led can win the trick.* That ♥9 is not stronger than West's ♦7; in fact, it's irrelevant in this battle, which was announced with West's lead to be a battle of diamonds. If you cannot **follow suit**, you must play a card of another suit. In bridge language, you have to find a card to **discard**.

This brings us to…

BASIC BRIDGE RULE

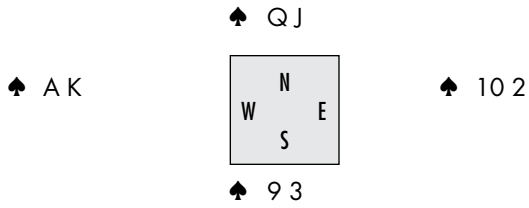
If you can follow suit, you must follow suit. If you cannot, you must choose a card from any other suit and discard it.

Working with the same cards, who would win the trick if South were on lead?

South would. No other player has a heart higher than the card that South led. No one else even has a card in that suit. In fact, if South's ♥9 were the mere ♥2, it would still win the trick, beating out all the other cards.

CHOOSING A CARD TO LEAD

Now we'll make things a little more challenging by adding a few more cards. Lay out the ♠AKQJ10932 on the table like this:

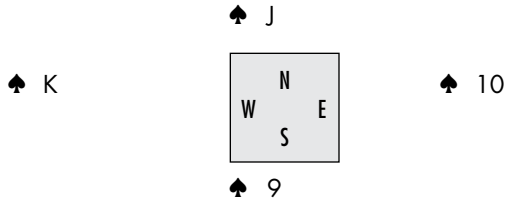


Let's say that North is on lead with the ♠QJ tight (honor cards without a spot card). How does she choose which card to play first?

When two cards are right next to each other like this, in sequence, they are of equal strength. Here's why. From North's point of view, what are the only cards that can beat her ♠Q? The ♠A and the ♠K. And what are the only cards that can beat her ♠J? Again, the ♠A and the ♠K. Therefore, when this suit gets played there is no difference between the queen and the jack.

However, when you're on lead and holding two cards in sequence like this, you should lead the higher of the two cards (we'll learn why later). North will lead her queen. East's cards are both lower than the queen, but he still has a choice. Should he play the ten or the two? Since he knows that neither of his cards will be able to win this trick, he should play the two and save the more powerful ten for a subsequent round where it may have a chance of winning a trick. South follows with the three, and West will play his ace or king, which will win the trick (since West is not on lead, he is not restricted to playing the higher of these two sequential cards). West collects the cards and places them face down in front of him.

The remaining cards now look like this:

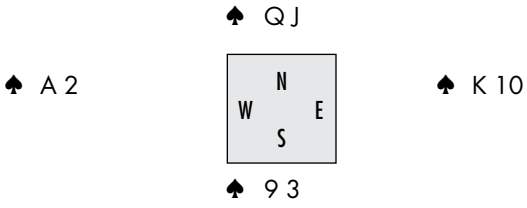


BASIC BRIDGE RULE

Whoever wins the trick gets to lead to the next trick.

West won the last trick and now leads the king, which is the new highest card now the ace is gone. That wins the second trick. We call the highest card left in a suit the **master card**. Until the ace gets played, it is always the master card for nothing can beat it. And once it gets played the next highest card left, in this case the king, gets promoted to be the new master card.

Now, let's switch the two and the king in the previous example.

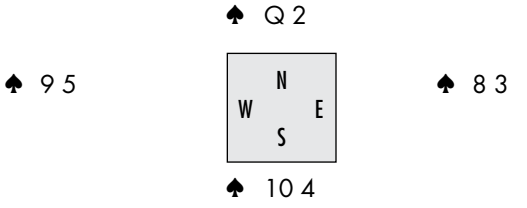


If North leads her queen, can East-West win two tricks?

East-West are a team, a partnership. In the previous example West had the ace and king, and East had the ten and two. The cards may be switched around now, but together, East and West still hold the two highest cards. (For this example, we'll assume that everyone can see every card.) So when North leads her queen, East has a choice. If he chooses to play, or commit, his king, then what will West do when his turn comes? He will see that his partner's king is higher than either of the opponents' cards. That king has already won this trick for the partnership, so West will play his deuce and save his ace for the following trick.

So the answer to the question is yes. If everyone plays as well as they can, East-West will win both tricks.

Let's look at one more example of how high cards win tricks. Lay out eight cards like this:

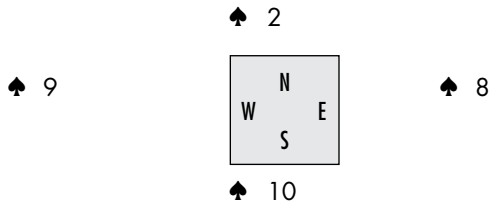


With North on lead, can North-South win both tricks?

The ace and king are gone, so the queen is the new master card, and it must win. It can't be helped: the master card will take a trick. So if North leads her queen, South will

save her ten and contribute the four. North's queen will win the first trick.

The cards now look like this:

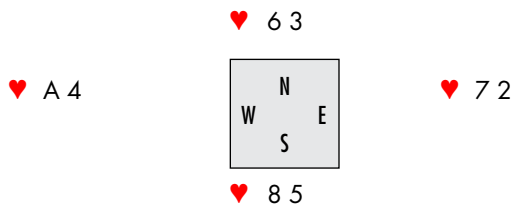


North is on lead again, since her queen took the first trick. When the cards are played, South's ten, the new master card, will take the second trick.

If you were able to figure this out without touching the cards, good for you. You have just exercised what we refer to as your ability to *visualize* the cards. If you needed to play the cards to answer the question, that's fine for now. But try laying the cards out again, this time doing all the work in your head rather than by physically playing out the cards.

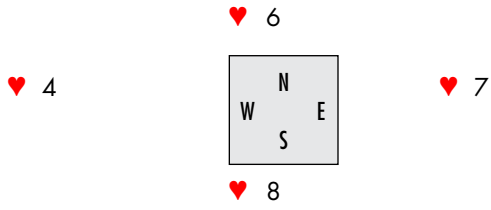
The process of visualization is crucial. In bridge, as in most games, once you make your move, you've made your move. If you're unhappy with the outcome, you cannot take it back and try another card. 'Look (visualize) before you leap (play)' is a good bridge adage.

Try this visualization exercise:



West is on lead and plays the ace. Who wins the first trick? Who wins the next?

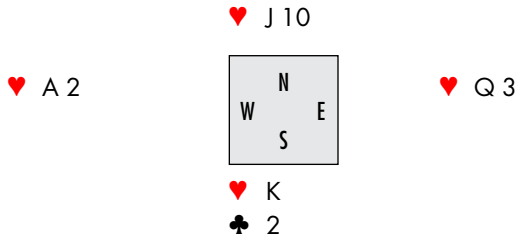
The ace, being the master card, wins the first trick, no problem. Now the cards look like this:



The new master card, South's eight, will take the second trick.

Believe it or not, memory plays less of a role than you might think. In the previous example, the trick is not to memorize the ♥A ♥4 ♥6 ♥3 ♥7 ♥2 ♥8 ♥5 as random cards. Rather try remembering the *story* of the two tricks. The ace of hearts took the first trick; the new master card, the lowly ♥8, took the second. See how much easier that is?

Let's look at another example with more than one suit involved:



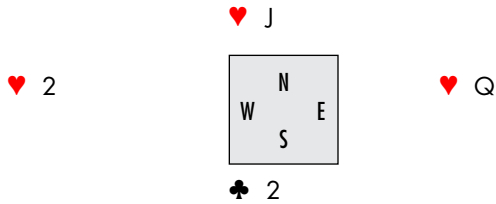
If West leads his ace, how many tricks will East-West win?

Try to visualize the outcome without touching the cards.

East-West will win both tricks.

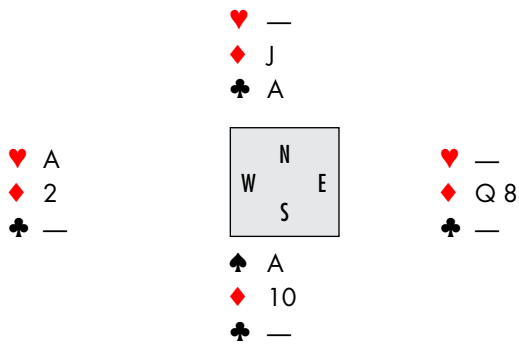
Trick 1: West leads with his ace, North plays her ten, East plays his three, and South must follow suit and contribute her king.

This is what the cards will look like at the start of Trick 2:



The new master card is East's queen. West, having won the first trick, is on lead. East will win this second trick with the new master card, the queen.

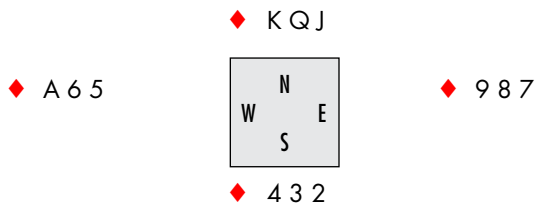
Now let's work with three different suits. Are you ready for this?



This time let's suppose that East is on lead. If East decides to lead the ♦Q, who will win the first trick? How about the second trick?

East's queen will **hold the lead** — in other words, it will win the trick and he will still be on lead. He will also win the second trick with the ♦8. Even though North, South, and West are all holding aces, they are unable to follow suit on a diamond lead. East's ♦8 will beat them all!

STOPPERS



Let's have North be on lead. Remember — when leading from a **sequence**, lead the top card. North selects the ♦K. How many tricks do you think North-South will eventually win? What did leading the king accomplish?

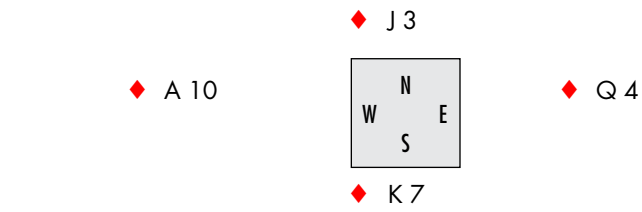
What North's ♦K did was drive the opponents' ace from the table. As soon as that happened, both of North's remaining cards were **promoted** to winners — they both became the new master cards in this suit. At the start of this trick West's ace was preventing that from happening. We call the ace a **stopper**, a card that is standing in the way of an opponent's trick-taking ability.

Here are two more new bridge terms to add to your vocabulary:

A **quick trick** is a card that can win a trick immediately. In the example above, West's ace is a quick trick, because it can win the first trick without a problem.

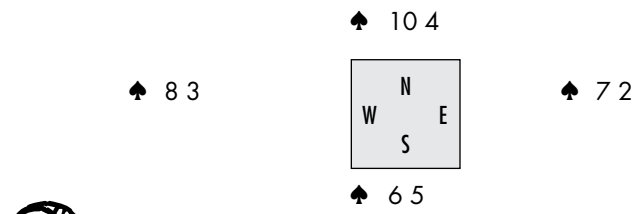
Potential is the ability to *develop* tricks in a suit. Potential represents the possibility of promoting cards of lesser rank to master-card strength. In the above example, North-South have no quick tricks, but they do have two potential tricks (two **slow tricks**). Before the queen and the jack become real tricks, North needs to knock out West's stopper, the ace. East-West, on the other hand, have one quick trick in the suit but no slow winners: no potential, no ability to win any subsequent tricks in the suit.

Describing the players' holdings in the above example, we would say that East-West have one quick trick but no potential for additional tricks, and North-South have no quick tricks but two potential tricks.



With West on lead, how many tricks can East-West win?

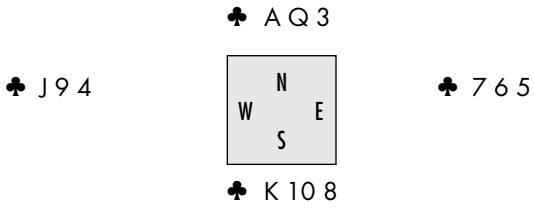
West has a choice of leads. West has the master card, the ace. South has the next highest card, the king. After West's ace is gone, South's king will be promoted to be the new master card. So whether West leads the ace or the ten, West will win one trick and South will win the other.



With North on lead, how many tricks can North-South win?

This is actually the same scenario as the previous exercise, except with lower spot cards. North-South win the first trick with the master card, the ♠10. East-West win the next

with the ♠8, the card promoted to be the master card after the ♠10 is played.

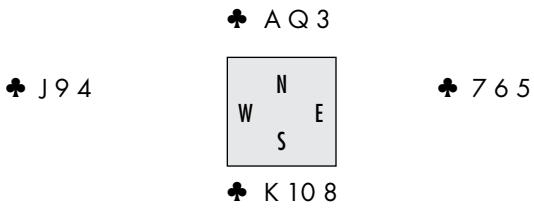


North is on lead. How many tricks can North-South win?

Three. In this example, the three highest cards are held by North-South. If we switched South's king and North's three, you would immediately see that North would win all three tricks:

North and South work as a partnership. An experienced player sees the North-South combination of cards as a group. This is another example of visualization. As combinations of cards get more difficult, you will increasingly need to fall back on the technique of planning how the cards are going to work together before you play them.

TRANSPORTATION



Lay out these cards face up on the table. As an exercise, play the three North cards in random order and see how this affects the play of the South cards. If we start with North's ♣3, the trick might go like this:

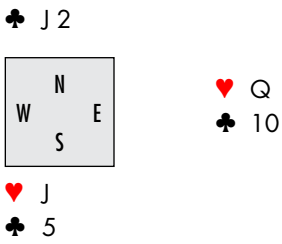
Trick 1. N ♣3 E ♣5 S ♣**K** W ♣4
Trick 2. S ♣8 W ♣9 N ♣**A** E ♣6
Trick 3. N ♣**Q** E ♣7 S ♣10 W ♣J

See how the lead travels to the South hand on the first trick, with South winning the first trick and taking the lead away from North? Then the lead travels back to the North hand, with North taking the second trick with the ♣A. It is as if there is an invisible bridge between the two hands that allows the lead to shuttle back and forth between the two partners. The ability to move back and forth between the two hands is so central to the game that bridge may owe its very name to the concept.

East is on lead. How many tricks can East-West make?

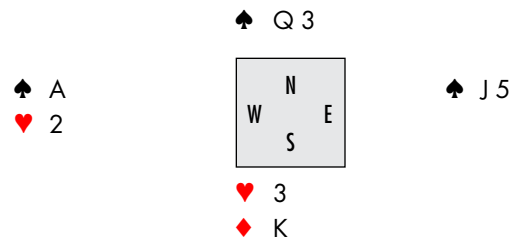
You know that East will win the first two tricks, since East is holding the ace and king. Visualize how the cards will look at the start of the third trick and you will have your answer:

East will still be on lead. North will win that third trick. East-West will win only those first two tricks.



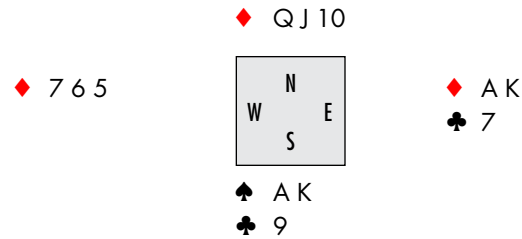
With South on lead, can North-South win two tricks?

Only if she leads the ♣5! If she leads the ♥J, even though it's her higher card, East will win with the ♥Q. Visualize what happens if South leads the ♣5. West cannot follow suit, so he discards the ♦3. North, seeing East's ♣10 on her left, goes up with her ♣J to win this trick. East must now follow suit with that ♣10. North's ♣2 is the only remaining club, and since she will be on lead at Trick 2, the ♣2 will win the second trick.



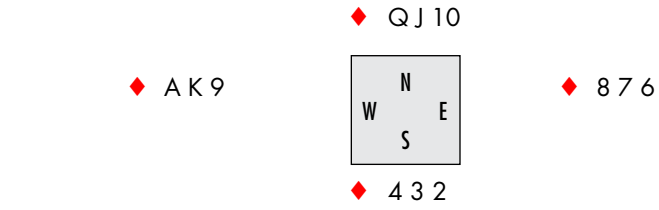
West leads the ♠A. What should South discard on this trick?

The ♦K! Even though it beats the tar out of the lowly ♥3, what card will West be leading at Trick 2? That's right, the ♥2. To beat the ♥2, she needs to save a heart, any heart. So yes, South should save the ♥3.



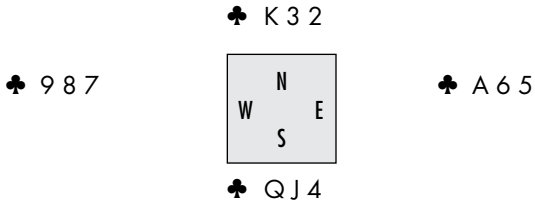
West leads the ♦7. What should South not discard?

The ♣9. Visualize the three-trick sequence. After East's ♦A and ♦K win the first two tricks, East will be on lead with only the ♣7 left. Save the ♣9 to beat the ♣7. Discard both the ♠A and the ♠K.



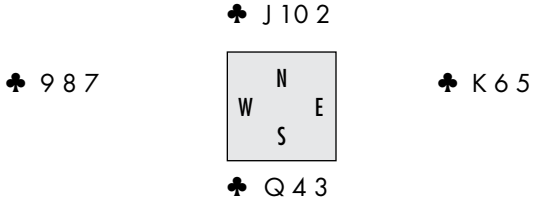
Which pair has more potential in this suit, North-South or East-West?

North-South. While it is true that East-West have the two master cards and can win two quick tricks, their lesser cards offer no hope of winning a third trick. East-West have two quick tricks and zero potential tricks. North-South, on the other hand, have no quick tricks, but they do own the next three highest cards after the ace and king, and therefore have the ability to win a slow trick, the third trick in the suit. Slow winners, those that eventually become promoted to master cards, are another way of looking at what it is to have potential.

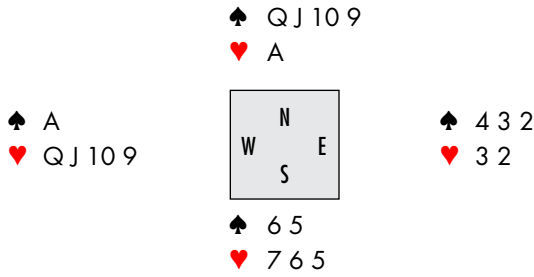


How many *potential* tricks do North-South have?

Two. After East's ace is played, North-South have all the remaining high cards.



The North-South cards are arranged slightly differently in this setup, but they still have two potential tricks. East-West have one quick trick and no potential tricks.



How many tricks can East-West win with West on lead? (Think this through before touching the cards.)

West should lead the ♥Q (top of a sequence), driving the opponent's ♥A stopper from the table and promoting his ♥J, ♥10, and ♥9 to winners.

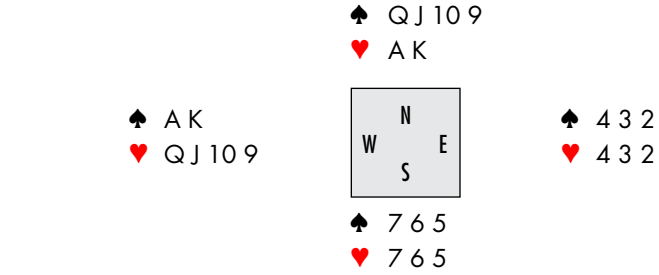
When North tries to promote spade winners for herself, she must lose the lead to West's ♠A stopper. West then takes his three heart winners. West wins one spade and three hearts.

What would have happened if West had first led the ♠A, then switched to hearts? He would have found out that his side would win only that first trick. By spending his quick trick too soon, West (a) promoted all of North's spades to winners immediately and (b) deprived himself of an **entry** back to his hearts once they were promoted to winners.

BASIC BRIDGE RULE

Develop your side's potential before your stoppers are spent.

They are needed both to stop the opponents from playing and **cashing** (winning) their slow-trick winners, and to provide entries to your hand once you've **established** (set up) slow-trick winners for yourself.



West is on lead. How many tricks can East-West win?

Four. Again, West must lead with his potential, in this example, hearts.

Trick 1: the ♥Q forces out one of North's stoppers (say the ♥K).

Trick 2: North now switches to the suit that offers her side the most potential, in this case spades. Her ♠Q knocks out one of West's stoppers (say the ♠K).

Trick 3: West now shifts back to hearts, flushing out his opponent's last stopper.

Trick 4: The opponents lead a spade, and West regains the lead with the ♠A. At Tricks 5 and 6 he plays and wins with those two promoted (established) hearts. West takes two spade tricks and two heart tricks.

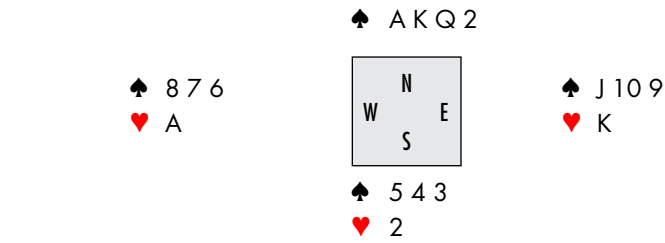
Back up and visualize what would happen if West first led one of his two spade stoppers. It would then be too late to switch to hearts and hope to set up tricks in that suit. Say West leads the ♠A, winning the first trick, then switches to the ♥Q. North wins with the ♥K, plays back a spade, and gets rid of West's last stopper. West continues hearts, but North immediately wins with her ♥A stopper and then cashes her two spade winners. West wins only the two quick tricks he had from the start.

Where did he go wrong? He played one of his stoppers too soon, so he was beaten to the punch. North was able to set up her potential winners before West was able to set up his. In bridge terms, we say that by cashing a winner too soon, West **lost a tempo**, and it cost him dearly.

Chapter 4

length takes tricks

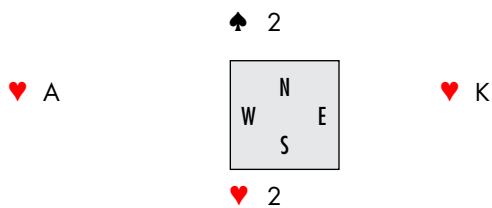
Now that you've begun to see how high cards take tricks, I'd like to introduce you to a second powerful way of taking tricks: **length** or **long-suit tricks**.



With North on lead, how many tricks can North-South win?

Please focus on North's ♠2. This is the first time you have been presented with a complete thirteen-card suit. Thirteen cannot be divided evenly four ways: 4-3-3-3 is as evenly as it gets. Here, North has four spades. Everyone else has three spades and one other card, a heart.

If North were to play off the ♠A, the ♠K, and then the ♠Q, the three other players would each have to follow suit all three times. At Trick 4 this is what would be left in everyone's hand:



With North still on lead, her last card, the ♠2, would win the trick, as everyone else would be discarding a heart.

Length often makes Goliaths of low-ranking cards.

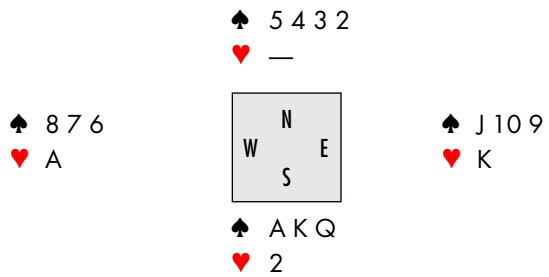
How the thirteen cards of a particular suit are distributed among the four players around the table is central to bridge thinking. We refer to it as the **shape of the suit**. How thirteen cards of a particular player's hand are distributed among the four suits is referred to as the **shape of the hand**.

In both cases thirteen cards are divided four ways. This is key. Learning the 'sound' of the ways thirteen divides into four is a big first step toward being able to 'see', hold, and remember all fifty-two cards in the deck. We've heard one sound so far, 4-3-3-3, which is said as 'four-three-three-three' or 'four-triple-three'. When North played off her top three cards, how was she supposed to remember whether her last card, that little deuce, was the last one remaining?

You can do it two ways. The first has you thinking something like this: 'Four cards were played to the first trick (four on the first), everyone followed to the second trick (four on the second), four cards were played on the third (four on the third). Let's see: that's four, plus four, is eight. Eight plus four is twelve. Yep. I have the last one left.'

That works. But how about this instead? After playing off your ace, king, and queen you note that everyone followed to all three tricks. Everyone but you started with three cards in that suit. That's the 3-3-3 part of the sound 4-3-3-3. If you've said 4-3-3-3 about a million times you will know that your fourth card is the only one left. Another benefit of putting three cards in everyone's hand is that you're on your way to being able to construct all the hands at the table. What you'll be doing with this information remains to be seen, but let me tell you, it's huge.

Taking tricks with length is not always quite this straightforward. Many times the suits don't prove to be cooperative. Here is a particularly nasty example:



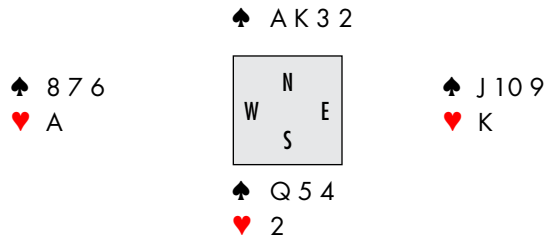
The honors in the South hand are alone (tight), stripped of any spot cards.

With either North or South on lead, how many tricks can North-South take?

Only three. South will take the first three tricks with her powerful three-card spade suit. But she can't win another. Visualize that fourth trick. Who has the lead? Since she won the last trick, South will still hold the lead. North's ♠5 is a winner, as it's the lone remaining spade, but it is in the wrong hand. South can't get there from here.

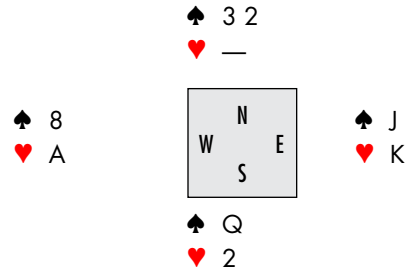
When a suit is divided so that the partnership cannot enjoy the fruits of its length, we say that suit is **blocked**. In this example, the spade suit was 'naturally blocked', that is, the players themselves played no part in it, the cards were simply dealt that way. North-South were naturally blocked from reaching their fourth spade trick.

Sometimes we must take pains not to block a suit accidently.



Starting in the North hand, how would you play this combination of cards to get the most out of your four-card spade suit?

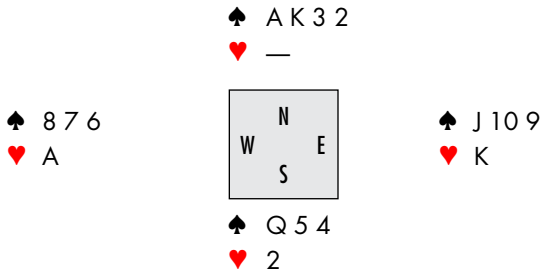
Visualize what happens if North plays the ♠A first followed by the ♠K. Which cards remain? Is this what you visualized?



The lead is still in the North hand. But it doesn't matter any longer which hand you are in. You've already blocked the suit. At Trick 3, North will play the ♠2 over to South's ♠Q and then the lead will be stuck in the South hand with only that losing ♥2 left. The winning ♠3 will be left stranded in the North hand.

Had the game been called 'abandonment', you would be playing just fine. But the game is called bridge. A good player learns to keep an imaginary bridge open between the two hands.

Let's do it correctly.



With North again on lead, there are two possible sequences that work:

1. First, try playing just one of the honors, say the ♠A. At the second trick, instead of cashing the other high card, play a low spade from the North hand and, using South's ♠Q, bridge across to partner's hand. At Trick 3, bridge back to the North hand. This way North-South will win all four tricks. The opponents never have a chance to cash their quick trick because they never get the lead.
2. You could accomplish the same thing by *not* playing either the ♠A or the ♠K immediately. At your first opportunity, lead a low spade toward the ♠Q in the South hand. Then bridge back to North's ♠AK at Trick 2.

The first time this hand was played, South got stuck in the wrong hand after that ♠Q won the third trick. The 'long' ♠2 never got a chance to win the fourth trick.

In the second and third examples you used a carefully preserved spade spot card as a reentry to North's hand. This transportation card allowed you to bridge back to North's ♠K and once there you were in the correct hand, at the right time (Trick 4) to make good use of your long spade. You won all four tricks.

Keep the lines of communication open between you and your partner.

When playing suits of different lengths, always save an honor card, an entry, to the longer suit, for as long as possible. Or put more succinctly:

BASIC BRIDGE RULE

Play your honors from the short side first.

♥ K 2
♣ 3 2

♥ 6 5
♣ A K

N
W E
S

♥ 10 9 8 7
♣ —

♥ A Q J 3
♣ —

You are South and you're on lead. Can you make four tricks? (Hint: be careful not to block your suit.)

Yes. Unblock your honor from the short side first. You do this by playing your spot card (the ♥3) to North's ♥K. Then use North's ♥2 to bridge back to your hand. If you played your ace, queen or jack first, then bridged over to North's ♥K, how were you planning on getting back to South's high (winning) hearts?

♥ K J 10 2

♥ 5 4
♣ A K

N
W E
S

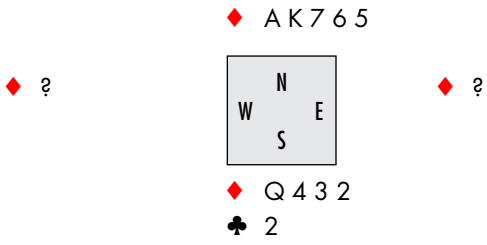
♥ 9 8 7 6

♥ A Q
♣ 3 2

Again, you are South. Can you make four tricks?

Yes. Notice North and East both have four heart cards. Three of North's cards are higher ranking than any of East's. Only North's ♥2 would lose to any of East's hearts. Your ace covers North's only loser. Your ♥Q will provide the transportation between the two hands. At Trick 1, play your ♥A (unblocking it, getting it out of the way). North's losing ♥2 gets played under it. Next play your ♥Q, **overtaking** it with North's king. Now that you are in the North hand, your ♥J and ♥10 will win the remaining two tricks.

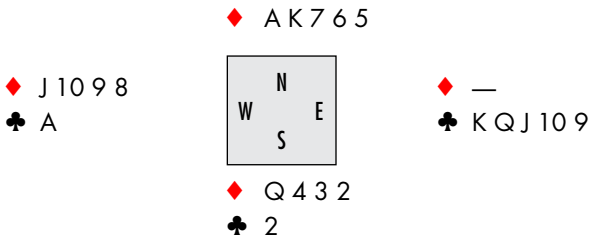
It may feel funny to play an honor from one hand and overtake it with an honor from your partner's hand, but in this case it's the only way that access could have been provided between the two hands. Besides, you own all five of the highest cards. In essence they all have the same rank.



You are North. How must West's and East's diamonds be divided in order for you and your partner to make five diamond tricks?

Between you and your partner you have nine diamonds, including the three master cards. If the remaining diamonds divide 2-2 or 3-1, your high cards will take care of them all. Only if one of the opponents has all four of the missing diamonds could you be prevented from taking five tricks with this combination of cards.

Laying out the cards we see:



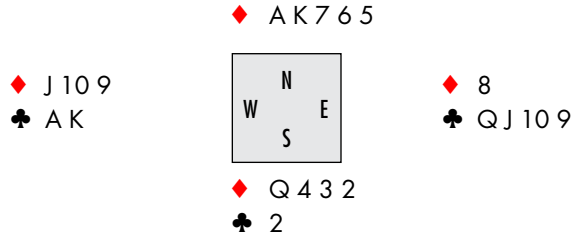
In this scenario, we'll give West all of the remaining diamonds. Once North-South cash the ♦A, ♦K and ♦Q, West will be able to win the next diamond trick, and can then cash his good club.

Before we go on, say to yourself the shape of the diamond suit as we find it here.

The suit is divided 5-4-4-0. When saying the shapes, always say them the same way so that the sound becomes familiar. Say them longest to shortest: 5-4-4-0.

To 4-3-3-3, we'll add 5-4-4-0.

What if the cards were more evenly distributed, say like this?



Here the diamonds are 5-4-3-1.

After playing three rounds (three tricks), North-South's ♦A, ♦K and ♦Q will have wiped out all of East-West's diamonds. North will then be in position to win two more diamond tricks with their five-card suit.

Add 5-4-3-1 to your list.

1. ♦ A K 8 2

N
W E
S

♦ Q 5 4

2. ♦ A K 4 3 2

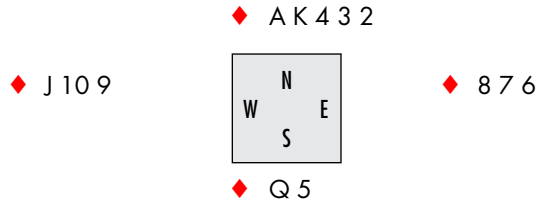
N
W E
S

♦ Q 5

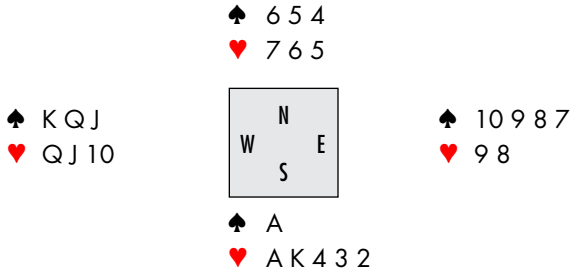
Which of these two suits do you think has more potential?

The correct answer is #2. Both suits contain seven cards between the two hands. Both have the top three honors. But #1 has only four cards in its long suit. Even if the opponents' diamonds divide evenly (three each), that would leave North with only one extra trick (the fourth diamond).

If the opponents' six diamonds divide evenly in case #2, as they do in the diagram below, North-South will be able to make two extra tricks (the fourth and fifth diamonds).



Say to yourself the shape of the diamond suit here. Say *5-3-3-2.*



With South on lead, how many tricks can North-South win?

Five. Where are your tricks coming from? First assess the North-South potential in spades. There is none. You do, however, have one quick trick there, the ♠A. How about hearts? There are two quick tricks in hearts (the ace and the king), plus North-South have length potential. After all, you do have eight hearts between you.

This is how a plan (a strategy) might be hatched to make use of that length.

Don't touch that spade ace, you'll be needing it later. Start by trying to develop the suit that offers *your side* potential. Here, it is hearts. You can begin by cashing the ace and king, then letting West win the third heart trick. West started with the ♥QJ10 so, by force, you must give him his trick. By doing this, by losing the lead, don't you give up control?

True, you are giving up the lead, but what can West do with his precious lead? With only spades left in his hand he's got to come back to you. You *still* have that carefully preserved spade ace, the same spade ace you didn't play before you embarked on setting up (establishing) long-suit heart tricks for your side. Once you have regained the lead, you'll go ahead and cash those two long-suit heart tricks that you worked to establish. Your trick total is now not just the two aces and the king, for a total of three, but rather five… those three master cards plus the two long-suit tricks.

Sometimes you have to give a little to get a lot in return. Remember the story of the tortoise and the hare? It's the same story in bridge: it's not who wins the most tricks right away; it's who has won the most tricks at the very end of the hand.

Before we leave this chapter, say the shapes one more time, please:

4-3-3-3 5-3-3-2 5-4-3-1 5-4-4-0

Chapter 5

hands on: playing bridge

Now we come to the really exciting part. It's time for you to play your first bridge hand!

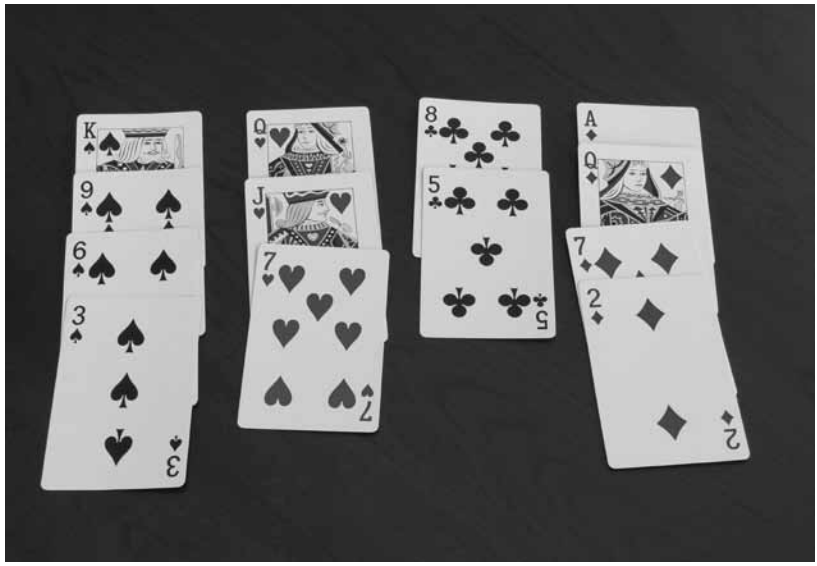
We will have you be the declarer, the person who sits opposite the dummy hand, the open hand on the table. Just as in a real game, you will be able to see twenty-six cards, those in your own hand and those in the dummy. And, just as in a real game, the opponents' cards will be hidden from your view.

Unlike the opponents, who work together, you alone will be doing the thinking for your partnership. Your partner says and does nothing to influence your play.

Your play is guided by logic and, in some cases, by the limits of your imagination.

A NOTE ON THE MECHANICS

It is only after an opponent makes the opening lead that the dummy hand comes down. It is placed face up, or faced, on the table. This is how a dummy hand might look when it's put down:



The cards are arranged by suit in four columns, and the columns alternate black-red-black-red, or red-black-red-black, done simply to avoid confusing spades with clubs and hearts with diamonds. The highest card in each suit is laid down first, then come all the rest of the cards in that suit in descending order.

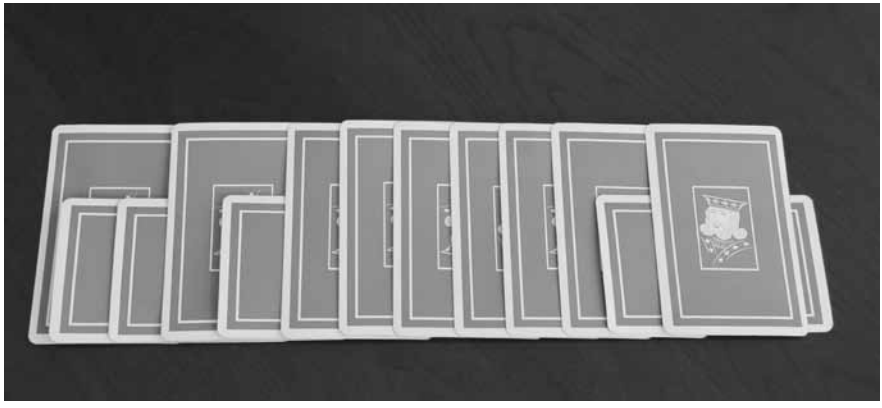
In a home game, the three players would play their cards by placing them, one at a time, in the center of the table. Whoever won the trick would take the four cards, place them face down in front of him and lead to the next trick. (Usually one defender would keep all the tricks for their side.)

For learning purposes, there is a better way of playing the cards, a method that allows you to review a hand after it is played.

Instead of placing the cards in the middle of the table, each player faces the card he intends to play to a particular trick and places it right in front of him at the edge of the table. When the trick is over, the side that won the trick would place their card face down vertically in front of them; the side that lost the trick would place their card face down horizontally in front of them. In this manner, you and your partner would have precisely the same pattern of used cards in front of you. At the end of the hand, counting winners and losers will be easy to do.

Even in a social, non-lesson format, most players now prefer this method as it allows them to go over the hand should they wish to.

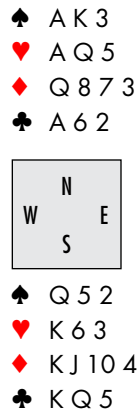
At the end of a hand the tricks might be laid out something like this:



For your first bridge hand, let's have your goal be to make twelve of the thirteen possible tricks.

Let's have you be South. Since you are to declare the hand, that will put West (the person to your left) on lead.

If you find it easier to follow the discussion, get a deck of cards and actually lay them out on a table like the diagram below.



West selects the ♠J as his opening foray. After this opening lead, your partner, North, tables the dummy. (In print, dummy is shown this way with each suit's cards going from high to low, left to right.)

When the dummy comes down, that's the time to sound out its shape. Say 4-3-3-3. When you first pick up your hand and finish sorting it into suits, say its shape too. Also 4-3-3-3. Sound familiar? It should be — 4-3-3-3 was the sound of the way several of the suits broke in the last chapter. Thirteen cards in a suit, four players. Thirteen cards in a bridge hand, four suits. Keeping track of every card would be next to impossible without this beautiful symmetry. With it, ordinary people are able to remember extraordinary amounts of information. A picture is worth a thousand words. Good bridge players form a picture of everyone's hand and play as if they are seeing everyone's cards.

Obviously, this doesn't come right away. But if you prepare the ground, when the time comes, you will be ready to make use of it.

Getting back to the hand at hand: your job is to take twelve of the thirteen tricks. The stakes are high: if the defenders take more than one trick they will defeat you.

Where to begin?

Why not take stock by counting how many quick tricks you have? If you have twelve quick tricks (twelve tricks 'off the top'), there will be no problem. All you need to do then is cash them.

With four suits, you have four different places where you can win tricks. You must look at each suit separately and then view the hand as a whole.

Let's start with your spade holdings.

Dummy
♠ A K 3

Declarer
♠ Q 5 2

Here you have three top winners: dummy's ♠AK and your ♠Q. You are going to make three tricks, no more and no less. There is no potential, no possibility of a fourth trick in the suit since both hands contain only three cards.

What about the opponents? Between them, they hold seven cards in this suit. (There are thirteen cards in each suit and you have six of them.) Here your opponents actually have some length potential. One of them must have at least four spades. If you went ahead and played your ace, king and queen, you would certainly make three tricks, but you would also be setting up (establishing) a long-suit trick for your opponents. Your ♠AKQ are quick tricks; you can take them whenever you want. Quick tricks in suits that have no potential are referred to as **stoppers** because all they do is stop the opponents' potential from being realized. A suit that has potential only for the opponents is *their* suit.

The heart and club suits on this hand are carbon copies of the spade suit; the honor cards are just configured differently. In each of these suits you also have three quick tricks and no potential. Combined, you will win nine of the twelve tricks you need from these three suits.

Where are you going to get the remaining three tricks? They'd better come from diamonds. Let's take a look at your diamond holdings:

Dummy
♦ Q 8 7 3

Declarer
♦ K J 10 4

In this suit you do not have the master card. In order to start taking tricks with your high honors, you must **knock out** the opponents' ♦A.

You can't take that trick, but you can get their master card out of the way. Between the dummy and the declarer you have the next four highest cards. Any of them can be used to force out the opponents' ♦A, leaving you with three promoted tricks. Remember that these three tricks are called slow tricks for a reason: they take a little time to set up. If you add these three to your nine quick tricks, that will give you the twelve you require.

Now that we've gone over each suit separately, you can view the hand in its entirety and try to come up with a plan, a strategy, which will allow you to take twelve tricks. So what is the plan? *Go after your potential first*. Before cashing your nine quick tricks, which aren't going anywhere, you should first establish those extra three tricks.

West led the ♠J. The dummy came down and you, the declarer, went through the thinking process described above. Your plan is to win the first trick and then drive out the opponents' ♦A. Then will you be able to cash all your twelve winners without danger.

Let's see what would happen if you took a different approach. Say you were impatient to start taking winners. You might win the ♠J with your ♠A and immediately cash your ♠K and ♠Q winners. Then you turn your attention to the work that must be done, creating three more diamond tricks. So you play your ♦K, driving out West's ♦A. Good. You've now established the three diamond winners you need, which will bring you to your goal of twelve tricks.

West, however, has other plans. Let me show you West's original thirteen cards:

♠J 10 9 6 4 ♥7 4 2 ♦A 5 ♣J 8 7

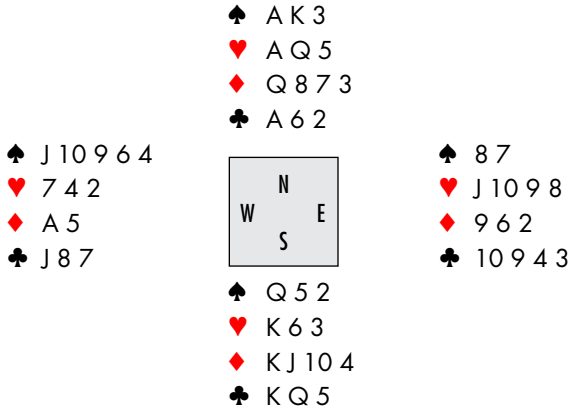
West led the ♠J, a card from a suit that offered his side potential. Yes, his ♦A was a sure trick, but he needed two tricks to defeat you. With his ♠J lead, he was hoping to build a second winner for his side.

By winning the ♠A and excitedly cashing the ♠K and ♠Q, you wound up establishing West's ♠10 and ♠9. You promoted them to master cards. To West's surprise and delight, you then produced the ♦K. He grabbed his ♦A and… bang, bang, down came his two established spades, sending you to a quick two-trick defeat. See what went wrong?

Instead of immediately going about the business of establishing tricks for *your side*, you went ahead and established tricks for *their side*. Your ♠K and ♠Q were supposed to act as shields, protecting you from attack by all the opponents' little spades. It was the other side's job to knock them out, not yours.

The moral of the story is this: don't put off until tomorrow what should be done today. Go after your potential first. Quick tricks and stoppers get played later.

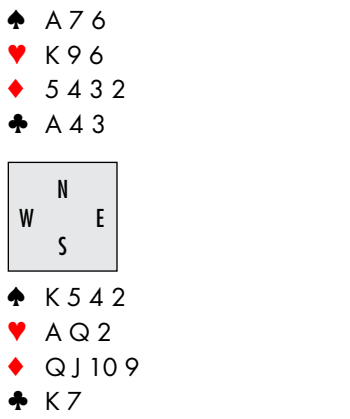
The entire hand:



PRACTICE HAND #2

So far we know that a declarer can take tricks with high cards or with length. With the defenders, it's the same. The techniques for making and creating tricks for the defense are the same as for the declarer. The cards themselves don't know if they are playing or defending.

Let's see how defenders work together to prevent declarer from reaching her goal of nine tricks on the following hand:



Let's have West lead the ♣J.

The South hand's shape (I know you forgot to say it) is new to us, 4-4-3-2. It is far and away the most common way that thirteen cards divide into four. Why? I haven't a clue. But every time a hand is dealt, more often than not, at least one of the hands will have this 4-4-3-2 shape *and* one of the four suits will break this way too.

We will begin by analyzing the hand from declarer's point of view. Where are her nine tricks coming from? A count of her quick tricks yields:

2 spade tricks (A, K)
3 heart tricks (A, K, Q)
0 diamond tricks
2 club tricks (A, K)

So 7 total quick tricks. Declarer needs two more tricks. One might come from spades. The North-South hands have seven spades between them, which means the opponents have six. If those six spades are divided evenly, three to an opponent, declarer might be able to establish a long-suit spade trick. That would bring the total to eight. She would still need to look elsewhere for one more trick. What about looking for a suit that could yield both those needed tricks?

The only suit left is diamonds. The declarer holds the ♦QJ109 sequence. If she can drive out the opponents' two stoppers, the ♦A and the ♦K, her remaining diamonds will be promoted to winners.

That's the plan. Declarer should go straight to diamonds.

Can the defenders counter this?

The declarer has a path to nine tricks, but if the defenders can take their five tricks before the declarer sets up her nine, then she'll be defeated. There are thirteen total tricks. Five tricks by the defense would leave only eight for the declarer.

As often happens, this hand becomes a race. Will the defenders be able to take their five tricks before declarer takes her nine?

Let's find out.

The defenders have the immediate advantage in that they get to make the opening lead.

Let's now take a look at West's hand:

♠ Q 8 ♥ J 7 5 ♦ K 8 7 ♣ J 10 9 6 5 (5-3-3-2)

On opening lead, West has to make what is called a **blind lead**, meaning he hasn't been given the opportunity of seeing the dummy yet. Dummy gets faced only after the opening lead is made. As a defender, West has to rely on experience and logic. The declarer's advantage is that she will immediately get to see all twenty-six cards at her disposal: her thirteen,

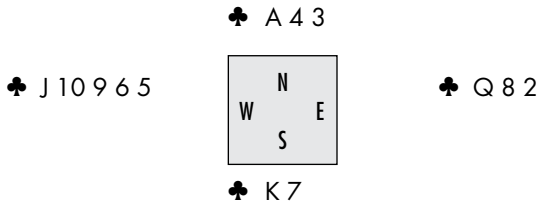
and when dummy is tabled, her partner's thirteen. Neither defender will get to see his partner's cards until they are played. Advantage: declarer.

The one big advantage that the defenders have is that they get to go first. They get to make the opening lead. They need to choose wisely.

Just as declarer goes about first trying to establish her potential, so it is with the defenders. If West is going to win the race, his side will need five tricks. Maybe his ♦K and ♠Q will take two tricks, but chances are East-West will have to develop a few tricks of their own. From West's point of view, which suit offers his side the most potential?

Clubs. He has five of them and they contain a sequence headed by the jack. West considers where the three remaining higher cards might be. There are two opponents and one partner. If each person has one of the honors, then the declaring side has only two. With his opening club lead, he hopes to drive out one of those honors. When he or his partner regain the lead, they can continue with another club and drive out the declarer's remaining stopper. If they get the lead a third time, they will be able to defeat the declarer by cashing their three promoted club tricks. The defenders hope to take those three club tricks along with the two tricks that enabled them to get the lead each time.

Let's have a look at the actual club layout of all four hands:



(5-3-3-2)

We've established that West is going to lead his longest suit. Now he must decide which card to lead.

Does it matter?

Now is as good a time as any for a general discussion of **opening leads**.

Before we move on, one more time please:

4-3-3-3 4-4-3-2 5-3-3-2 5-4-3-1 5-4-4-0

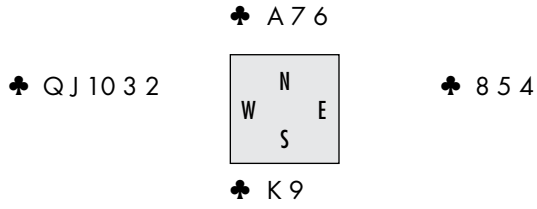
Chapter 6

opening leads

Say you find yourself on opening lead and decide to lead a club from the holding below. Which club should you lead?

♣ Q J 10 3 2

Let's set up one possible layout of how the remaining clubs might be divided around the table:



See what happens if you, West, lead either spot card, the ♣3 or the ♣2:

Trick 1: ♣ 3 , ♣ 6 , ♣ 8 , ♣ **9**

South will win a trick with the ♣9 and still retain the ♣A and ♣K. North-South will win three tricks in the suit: the ♣A, the ♣K, and the ♣9.

Let's replay this trick, this time taking care to lead a card from your three-card sequence (♣QJ10). Since we've suggested earlier that when leading from an honor sequence we lead the top card, let's continue doing that and select the ♣Q. This time the first trick will look like this:

Trick 1: ♣ Q , ♣ 7 , ♣ 4 , ♣ **K**

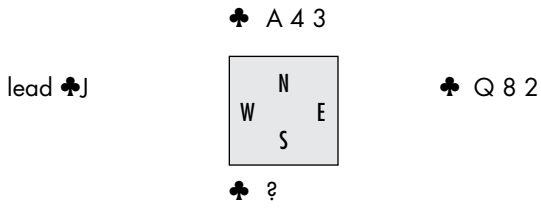
See the difference? South could not win this first trick cheaply. Visualize what now happens the next time this suit is played. Your ♣J will drive out the remaining North-South stopper (the ♣A), which will promote your ♣10 to the master card. Should your side regain the lead, you will be ready to cash that card and also be in position to add the ♣3 and the ♣2 to your side's total, both becoming tricks through sheer force of length.

When you have an honor sequence, lead it. That way no little card can randomly sneak in and win a trick your side should not have lost. The only cards that can beat the ♣Q, ♣J or ♣10 are the ♣A and ♣K. Force declarer to use one of them to win this first trick.

What if you don't have a nice sequence? Let's here define a sequence as three cards in a row. (This will be modified somewhat later on in the book.) Say, instead, you have ♣Q642. Which card should you lead? In the previous example you had a reason to lead the queen and let it lose. You knew you were moving toward the promotion of the other cards in the sequence. You did not mind losing that queen, since you had the jack and ten backing it up. But with ♣Q642, what purpose would the loss of the queen serve? What card do you hold that would then be promoted should the queen lose? The answer is none. It certainly wouldn't have the effect of getting your next highest card, the ♣6, much closer to becoming a master card.

On opening lead, when you do not have a sequence, but have an honor in the suit (A, K, Q, or J)) test the waters with a low card, in this case the ♣2. If it loses, it doesn't matter much. It wasn't going to take a trick anyway. Save your unsupported honors (that is, honors that are not in a sequence) for later.

Now let's get back to the suit in the hand at the end of the last chapter. West is on lead with ♣J10965. Now you know to lead the ♣J from this holding. The dummy comes down. Let's turn our attention to West's partner, East, and see what information is available to him at this moment.



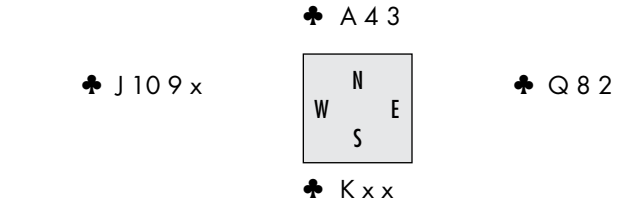
East sees seven club cards: his own three, the dummy's three, and his partner's lead. From this he deduces the following:

1. His partner, West, selected clubs as the suit with the most potential from his point of view.
2. West therefore has to have four or more clubs. Potential is length. The shortest your long suit can be is four. West's club holding therefore must be at least four cards long.
3. West led the ♣J, an honor. It must be backed up by at least two other honor cards in sequence, otherwise he would have led low. His choice of the jack made it clear to his partner that he

also held the ten and the nine, but *not* the queen! (Lead top of a sequence.)

Putting all this information together, East can form a picture of his partner's club holding and then use that picture to figure out the declarer's holding. Here is what he comes up with.

Partner could have led from ♣J109x (with x being any spot card), or ♣J109xx. The weakest of these holdings is ♣J109x. But even if West has led from that holding, declarer can have no better than ♣Kxx, as East holds the queen. East-West have at least two tricks in potential in this club suit. East visualizes the situation to be no worse than:



(4-3-3-3)

Between East and West they hold the ♣QJ1098x2. The opponents have only the ♣AK to stop them. This is clearly the defenders' suit. Why? Potential! With West's opening lead, East and West are well on the road to establishing two long-suit winners for themselves. They expect the ♣J to drive out either declarer's ♣K or dummy's ♣A, leaving only one card to stop them from taking tricks for themselves in this suit.

Notice how East was able to use West's ♣J to 'see' all thirteen cards in that suit. Defenders do this all the time. They can't look at declarer's hand, so they rely on each other for information that allows them to visualize the missing cards.

Now comes my favorite part of the defense. East, having formed a picture of what's going on in the club suit, must now transmit what he knows to West. Remember, West made a *blind opening lead* of the ♣J. It turns out he has hit gold. East isn't allowed to give a thumbs-up signal. He can't even smile. He can, however, transmit his approval by having his cards speak for him.

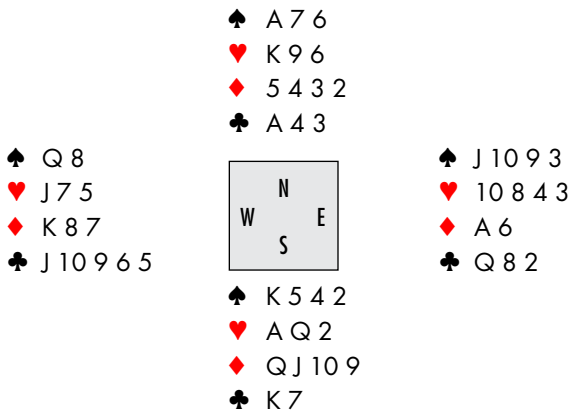
East is holding the ♣Q82. East has two spot cards, neither of which will be involved in the winning or losing of this trick. Defenders have learned how to make use of these idle cards. To show encouragement, East signals West to keep playing this suit by following with a high spot card. In this case he will play the ♣8. Had East instead played the ♣2, he would have signaled displeasure with his partner's choice of lead.

BASIC BRIDGE RULE

When your partner leads an honor: Your high spot card says, I like your lead. Your low spot card says, I don't like your lead.

As defenders, when your partner leads, a card played by you that is not involved in the winning or losing of the trick is used to **signal** information to your partner. Here West's ♣J is going to be the card involved in the winning or losing of the trick. East's spot card should therefore be taken by partner as an **attitude signal**. 'Eight, I like your lead.' What if you were instead dealt ♣Q32? Play the ♣3! Signal that you love the lead. You've got to make the best of the hand you're dealt! Will partner be able to read this card as a 'high' spot? Maybe, although probably not. But the ♣2 would definitely send the wrong signal.

Now both defenders are on the same page. They are on the right path to preventing the declarer from getting to her goal of nine tricks. The race has begun. Will declarer establish nine tricks before the defenders grab five? We've seen that the declarer has seven quick tricks: two spades, three hearts and two clubs. In order to make the extra two tricks needed to get to nine, she must go after diamonds. Let's now follow the play showing the complete hand:

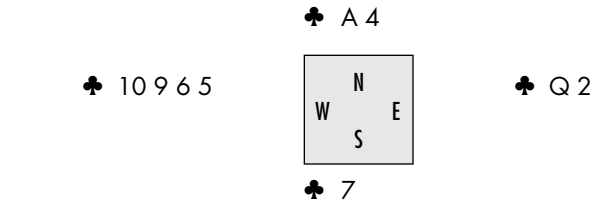


Trick 1: West ♣J, ♣3, ♣8, ♣K
Trick 2: South ♦Q, ♦7, ♦2, ♦A

East now finds himself on lead and intends on switching back to partner's suit. Should he play the ♣Q or the ♣2 and why?

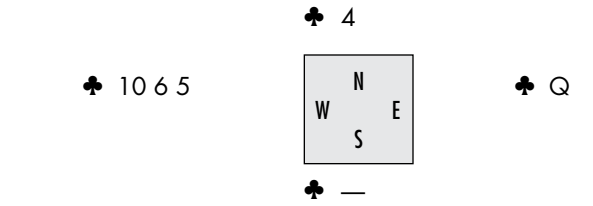
Taking a page from declarer: when playing a suit of different lengths, it is usually right to play the honor from the *short* side first.

Visualize what will happen if East plays back the ♣2, instead of the ♣Q:



East ♣2, ♣7, ♣9, ♣A

After North's ace takes the trick the suit will look like this:



The next time clubs are played, East's queen will win the trick. Partner will be all set to cash his two established club tricks, but there's a problem. He's not on lead. East's queen has blocked the suit.

Backing up, with just two clubs left, the queen and the two, East should **unblock** his queen and save the spot card, in case he needs it to bridge across to his partner's hand.

Try replaying the hand with anything other than a club lead, a club continuation, and the unblocking of the ♣Q. You'll see that declarer will have the time to go about setting up the nine tricks she needs.

Much success in life is due to timing. A lot of bridge is, too.

Chapter 7

getting to carnegie hall — practice, practice, practice

(Note: There are more practice hands at the end of the book)

HAND #1

♠ 6 4
♥ 7 6
♦ Q J 9 3
♣ K Q 10 9 4

N
W E
S

♠ A K 7 3
♥ A K 5
♦ A K 2
♣ J 6 3

(Dummy: 5-4-2-2 — a new sound.)

You, South, are the declarer. West is on lead. The ♠Q is led. You need twelve tricks.

Your first step is to count how many tricks you have. If the number comes to less than twelve, you'll have to look around for possible ways to develop those extra tricks.

On the lead of the ♠Q you have: two quick tricks in spades, two in hearts, four in diamonds, and none in clubs. That comes to eight, four short of what you need. There's work to be done.

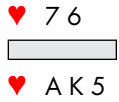
Where are the tricks you need going to come from?

Look at each suit's potential and try to find places where you might win those four tricks.

Any potential here?

No. You have six cards between you, the opponents have seven, one of them must also have four or more spades.

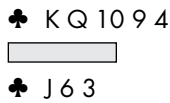
How about hearts?



Your ♥A and ♥K are quick trick winners. No potential there.

This is your suit. You have the four master diamonds, the ♦AKQJ, between your hand and dummy. The longer of the two hands contains four diamonds. This suit will provide you with four tricks. But you must take care to play this suit so that you don't strand that fourth diamond by accident. Remember to cash your honors from the short hand (the ♦AK) first. Then use your ♦2 to 'bridge' across to dummy's ♦QJ. You will make four tricks in this suit. But you've already counted these in your quick trick total of eight. Unfortunately for you, this beautiful suit offers no potential. You were dealt four tricks, and that's all you are going to make.

You're still looking for four more tricks, and you're down to your last suit.



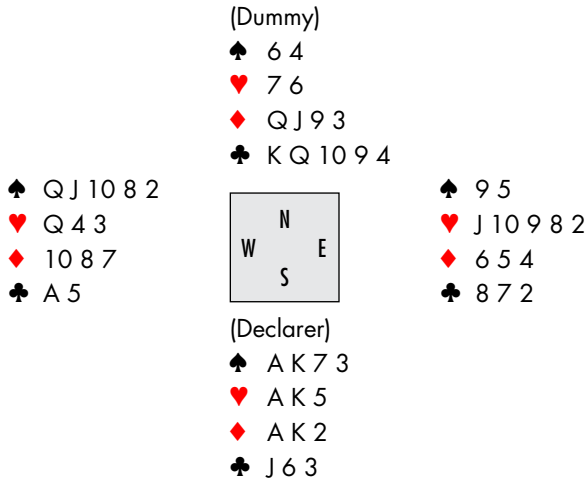
This is where you will strike gold. See how South's ♣J solidifies North's holding (♣KQ**J**1094)? After you drive out the opponent's ♣A stopper, you will have promoted the four tricks you needed to reach your total of twelve. Again, be careful to play the ♣J from your three-card suit before crossing over to the long hand.

You started with eight winners. You need four more tricks to get to twelve and all four tricks can come from this one source.

So how will you proceed?

Now that you've analyzed the four suits and found where your tricks are going to be coming from, you need to make a plan that will allow you to take those tricks. You must go after your potential tricks as soon as possible. You must also be aware of the order in which you need to play your club and diamond winners, taking care to cash the honors from the short side first in each case.

Here is the hand in its entirety:



(Say the shape of the spade suit around the table: 5-4-2-2. That's also dummy's shape, the new one we just introduced.)

The play might go like this (the player on lead to each trick is indicated in parentheses):

Trick 1: (W) ♠Q ♠4 ♠5 ♠A
Trick 2: (S) ♣J ♣A ♣4 ♣2
Trick 3: (W) ♠J ♠6 ♠9 ♠K
Trick 4: (S) ♦A ♦7 ♦3 ♦4
Trick 5: (S) ♦K ♦8 ♦9 ♦5
Trick 6: (S) ♦2 ♦10 ♦Q ♦6
Trick 7: (N) ♦J ♣7 ♠3 ♣5
Tricks 8 - 11: four winning clubs
Tricks 12 - 13: the ♥A and ♥K

You wind up with two spades, two hearts, four diamonds and four clubs for a total of twelve tricks!

HAND #2

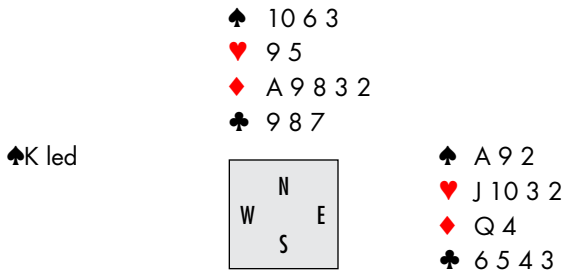
We will begin this next hand by analyzing it from the defenders' perspective. You are one of those defenders and on this hand you're sitting East. Here's your hand:

♠ A 9 2 ♥ J 10 3 2 ♦ Q 4 ♣ 6 5 4 3

The declarer is trying to make at least seven tricks.

Your partner leads the ♠K.

The dummy is tabled and you see:



Partner led the ♠K and the dummy came down. Not much there. The ♦A is the only card worth mentioning, but it is part of a five-card suit. There is some length potential there. Let's get back to studying what partner led and what implications it holds.

From partner's ♠K lead, what can you deduce about declarer's holding?

To figure out what declarer has, you first have to figure out what your partner has. His king lead must indicate that he also possesses the queen and (probably) the jack. It also suggests that he has at least one spot card to go along with the three honors. Partner should try to lead his longest suit in an attempt to establish long-suit tricks. The shortest a long suit can be is four cards. Therefore, partner should have led from KQJx or longer.

If partner led from four spades, dummy's three and your three leave how many small spades in declarer's hand?

It's important that you remember how you arrived at declarer's total. Before continuing, did you get three as the answer? That would be correct.

How do bridge players count to thirteen?

They don't! They 'shape' the suit. They say the sound of the three suit holdings they know about and finish with the 'missing' sound.

Try your hardest not to think this way:

'Let's see, I have three spades, dummy has three, partner led from four. That's 4 plus 3 is 7, 7 plus 3, makes 10. Now subtract 10 from 13. That leaves 3. Got it. Declarer started with three spades.'

Instead, try your hardest to think about it this way:

Start by saying what you know already about the shapes of the three known spade holdings. You already know they split 4-3-3. If, at every point where 4-3-3-3 has appeared, you've already said to yourself, 'Four-three-three-three', then when you now hear 'four-three-three' can you hear yourself finishing it with the very comforting 'three' sound: 4-3-3-3.

When you hear 4-3-3, think 3.

When you hear 5-3-3, think 2.

If I say 4-4-3, you say 2.

So, imagine some months from now I happen to meet you on the street. If the first three words out of my mouth are 'Four-three-three' and you could not stop yourself from saying 'three' silently to yourself, then I'd say you were well on your way to mastering this game.

Now you know why I've asked you to say the shapes every chance you get. Say it until the sound of thirteen cards dividing four ways becomes part of you. 'Four-triple-three, four-four-three-two, etc...' The longer you play, the more meaningful these shapes will get.

Back to the hand.

Do you like partner's lead?

Yes, you do. You have the ace and you know that between the two of you, you can take at least four tricks. If partner's lead is from a five-card suit, all the better. Declarer will only have two. That sound is 5-3-3-*two*.

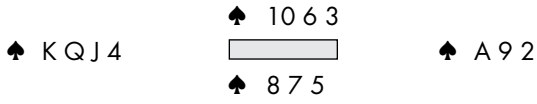
Does it matter what card you play to this trick?

Yes! Play the ♠9 to show that you like the lead and to urge partner to continue the suit. Partner will expect you to use your idle spot cards to signal him.

From your play of the ♠9, partner realizes that he has hit gold. Knowing you have the ace, he then **underleads** his queen and jack, saving them for later. In other words, he leads a low spot card instead of one of his honors.

Win partner's ♠4 with your ace and return your remaining spade (the ♠2).

Here is the actual spade layout:

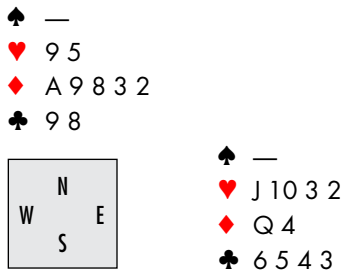


Your partner wins the return and cashes one more spade.

Declarer *discards* the ♣7 from dummy.

On this spade you also must find a discard. Declarer will also have to find a discard from her hand. She'll get to discard after seeing what you chose to throw away.

You are free to discard any one of your ten remaining cards. This is your hand and the dummy's just before you must discard:



First, you must keep the ♦Q and the ♦4 because diamonds is declarer's long and potentially dangerous suit. This is where she hopes to develop tricks for her side. Don't give her any help. Besides, the queen is your highest card.

So it comes down to hearts or clubs.

Of these two suits, which offers less of a chance of taking a trick? The clubs appear truly worthless. While the ♥J might eventually take a trick, it is hard to imagine the ♣6 capturing anything. You therefore decide to discard a club; to show your partner your displeasure with the suit, you discard a low one, the ♣3.

On this same trick declarer lets go the ♥4.

Your partner now plays the ♣Q.

Let's switch gears and take declarer's seat. Let's now look at what's been occupying declarer's thoughts all this time.

The declarer needs to make at least seven of the remaining nine tricks. After the defenders have won those first four spades, dummy and declarer are left with:

♠ —
♥ 9 5
♦ A 9 8 3 2
♣ 9 8

♠ —
♥ A K 6
♦ K 6 5
♣ A K 2

Declarer can count on six quick tricks:

Two hearts — no potential
Two clubs — no potential
Two diamonds — length potential

What is the right strategy?

When you have suits with no potential leave them be. You might use them for transportation but otherwise you need to go after the suits that have possibilities of yielding additional tricks. If you cash your quick trick winners too early you may be setting up winners in those suits for the opponents to grab later on should they regain the lead.

After your side cashed four spades, West switched to the ♣Q. Declarer is now set to take over. Winning this trick with the ♣A or ♣K, she sets her sights on diamonds. It is the only suit that offers any potential. She needs to develop at least one long-suit trick from this holding:

♦ A 9 8 3 2

♦ K 6 5

Declarer must visualize how the remaining diamonds may be divided between the two opponents. She hopes the five missing diamonds are divided evenly: three in one hand, two in the other. (They will divide that way about two-thirds of the time.) If they do, then it will be possible to create two extra tricks in this suit, dummy's fourth and fifth diamonds. Why? Because after three rounds of the suit have been played, North will be the only one left with any diamonds.

Between them, the opponents have three big cards, the ♦QJ10. Declarer has only two higher cards, her ♦K and the dummy's ♦A. Do you see that she must lose a trick in this suit? This is key. When declarer realizes she *must* lose a trick, the one she chooses to lose could be important.

Which one should she lose?

Look how weak the dummy is. The only possible entry to dummy's long diamonds is the ♦A itself. This determines declarer's strategy. Once those long diamonds are established, she will still have to get to them, otherwise, they will serve no useful purpose. When honors are split between two suits, as they are here, it is generally correct to cash the honor from the short suit first. Never more important than here.

Why? Because we need that ♦A to be there in dummy as an anchor. It needs to be there to allow us to bridge across to those remaining diamonds at the right time.

So, let's start by playing the ♦K. Here is one possible complete layout of the suit:

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

If we need the suit to be 5-3-3-2, we assume it is.

Trick 6: (S) ♦K, ♦7, ♦2, ♦4

Trick 7: (S) ♦5, ♦10 and STOP!

You have to lose a trick in the suit... this is the one to lose! Keep that ♦6 and that ♦A for the *next* trick. If you don't, if you play your ace too soon, this will be the situation after two diamond tricks have been played:

♠ —
♥ 9 5
♦ 9 8 3
♣ 9
♠ —
♥ A K 6
♦ 6
♣ K 2

The lead will be in the dummy. The opponents will still have the ♦J, stopping the suit. You can play a diamond now, setting up those remaining two diamonds, but how will you get back there? Dummy is entryless.

Look at the situation if you hold back your ♦A, giving the opponents that *second* diamond trick instead:

♠ —
♥ 9 5
♦ A 9 8
♣ 9

♠ —
♥ A K 6
♦ 6
♣ A 2

Okay, you've given up the lead. But you haven't given up control. Since you have not yet played any of your stoppers in the other two suits, you are able to take back the lead no matter what card the opponents play back at you. And after winning *any* return, you can now reach those established diamonds using that carefully preserved ♦6 to cross to the ♦A in the dummy. You will come to two hearts, two clubs, and four diamonds, for a total of eight tricks.

Here's the entire hand:

♠ 10 6 3
♥ 9 5
♦ A 9 8 3 2
♣ 9 8 7

♠ K Q J 4
♥ Q 8 7
♦ J 10 7
♣ Q J 10

♠ A 9 2
♥ J 10 3 2
♦ Q 4
♣ 6 5 4 3

♠ 8 7 5
♥ A K 6 4
♦ K 6 5
♣ A K 2

BASIC BRIDGE RULE

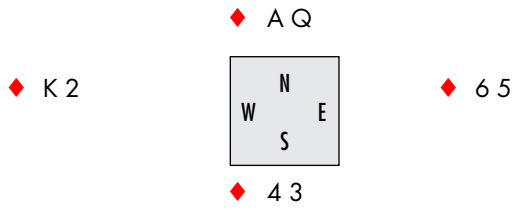
When you must lose a trick in a suit, lose it early. Keep communications (the bridge) open between the two hands.

Chapter 8

finesses win tricks

We know that high cards and length win tricks. A third powerful way to make tricks involves using a little finesse!

Let's say we are down to the last two cards in everyone's hand and they are all diamonds:



In this example, we will assume that each player can see the other players' cards.

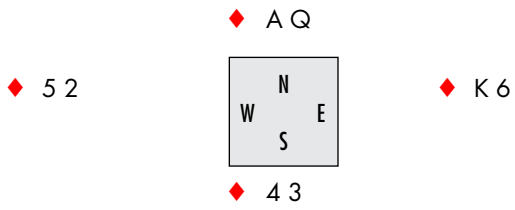
With South on lead, how many tricks can North-South take?

Two. South leads a spot card, say the ♦3, and West, seeing the ♦A on his left, decides not to use his ♦K at this time, following instead with the ♦2.

This leaves North with a choice. She can certainly win the trick by bludgeoning that little deuce with her ♦A, but she could use a little **finesse**. If she can win this trick more cheaply with her queen, she will still be able to win the next trick with the ♦A that she held in reserve. In order to win two tricks she should **finesse the queen** and leave the ace in place to capture West's king on the next trick.

To **take a finesse** is to try to win a trick with a card you hold that is lower in rank than one the opponents hold. Notice the word *try*. In this example, if East instead of West held the king, and the queen was finessed, it would lose to East's king.

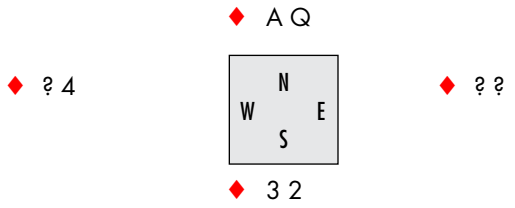
Here's what that would look like:



South is on lead and plays the ♦3. West follows with the ♦2. North finesses the queen and East wins the trick with his king.

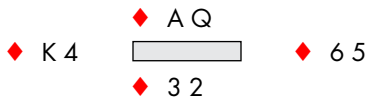
Why would North play the queen? Because when bridge is actually played, two of the four hands are always hidden. Often, players have to guess what to do. In this example, we could see all the cards, so we knew ahead of time that the finesse would fail.

Look how different things are when the opponents' cards are hidden:

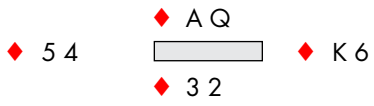


You are North. With two tricks remaining, let's assume you know that everyone is left with two diamonds. You also know that either East or West has the king. South, your partner, leads the ♦2. West contributes the ♦4. Should you finesse the ♦Q? Here are the two possible scenarios:

Example 1



Example 2



In Example 1, if you finesse the queen and West has the king, you'll win two tricks. If you don't finesse the queen, you'll limit yourself to one trick.

In Example 2, where East has the king, if you finesse the queen you'll only win one trick. But if you don't finesse the queen, you'll also win only one trick. Notice that when East has the king, you can't gain (or lose) by finessing the queen.

How often do finesses work? Half the time. As we've just seen, taking a finesse will win whenever West has the king and will lose when-

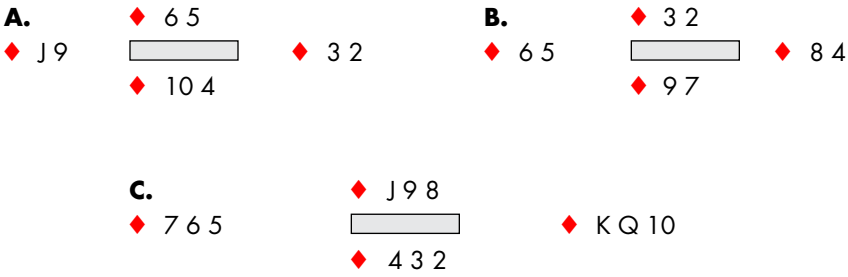
ever East has the king. It's a 50-50 proposition. However, if you banged down the ace at your first opportunity, knowing both opponents each had two diamonds, it would not matter which one had the king: you would be limiting yourself to one trick *all the time*.

TENACE ANYONE?

Let's take a look at just the West and North positions from this example:

Note that North's ace-queen 'surround' West's king. North is holding one card immediately higher in rank than West's king and one card immediately lower in rank. In bridge terms, this surround formation is called a **tenace** position (pronounced 'tennis', from a Spanish word meaning 'pincers'). North's tenace position has the power to capture the king every time West plays a card before North. If West plays the king, North plays the ace. If West plays the four, North finesses the queen, saving the ace to capture West's king the next time around.

Can you pick out the tenace positions below? Which card are you trying to capture?



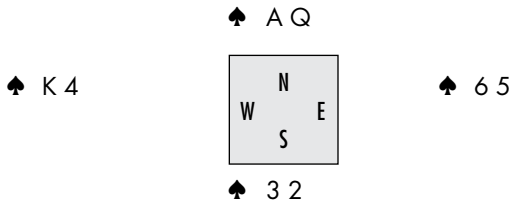
A. The J-9 is the tenace. The 10 is the card you're surrounding.
B. The 9-7 is the tenace. The 8 is the card you're hoping to capture.
C. The Q-10 is the tenace. The J is the card you are trying to capture.

Simply having a tenace position is not enough to guarantee success. Two conditions must be met:

1. The card that you are attempting to surround must be in the *correct* hand.
2. You must be in the *correct* hand to take the finesse. You must force the hand with the card you are trying to surround to play *before* you play from your tenace position. They act, you react.

Condition 1

Take out your deck, we'll use the spade suit in the next few examples. Set up the following cards:

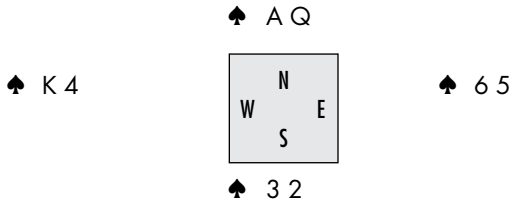


Humor me. Let's have South be on lead. Place her three in the middle of the table. Place West's king on top of the three. Have North follow by playing her ace. Put it on top of the pile and *stop*.

Where is the king? Is it *over* or *under* the ace? It's under the ace. That's how bridge players refer to the position of an important card that they hold. Is it over or under other important cards that the opponents hold? In this case if you were North, you would say West's king lay under your ace. His king is *un*favorably placed for him, favorably placed for you. For a tenace position to be effective, the card you are trying to surround must lie *under* your tenace position.

Condition 2

You must be in the 'correct' hand to take the finesse.



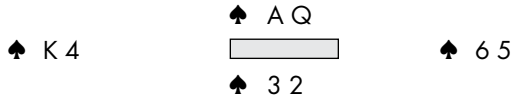
West sees that his king is unfavorably placed. If you are North and you are on lead, can you capture it? Try it.

The answer is no. If you play your ace, West will play the four and save his king for your queen.

In bridge terms, why can't you capture West's king?

It's because West acts *after* you. He sees your ace on the table and *reacts* accordingly.

So in order for you to take a successful finesse you've got to force an opponent to commit before you do. To do that, you must lead from the hand *opposite* the tenace position, which in this case would be South.



Lead the two or the three.

When you lead from the South hand, West must decide whether or not to commit his king. Whichever he chooses, North is now favorably placed to react accordingly.

A finesse does not always require the presence of a tenace position. By definition, finessing is simply trying to win a trick with a card you have that's lower ranking than one the opponents have.

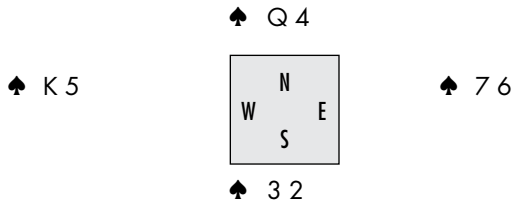
Consider this position:

Say you are South, and it's your lead. You are hoping to make a trick with North's king. Will you be successful? The answer is yes. When you lead the two or the three, West has two choices. He can either play the five and let North win the first trick by finessing the king, or commit the ace right away and have North take the king on the next trick. In either case North is in the catbird seat. She simply has to sit back and wait to see what West does.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

To appreciate the importance of being placed favorably (over) or unfavorably (under), observe the relative strength of North's queen in these two examples:

A.



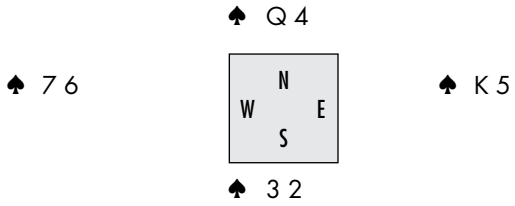
1. If East is on lead, will North's queen win a trick?
2. If South is on lead, will North's queen win a trick?
3. If West is on lead, will North's queen win a trick?
4. If North is on lead, will North's queen win a trick?

The answer to 1, 2 and 3 is yes. North's queen wins a trick because in each case West's king must commit first. Sitting over the king, North's queen is favorably placed. Only in case 4, when North is on lead and must commit the queen before West has taken action, will the queen not score a trick.

Results: North's favorably placed queen takes a trick three out of four times.

Now switch the East and West cards…

B.



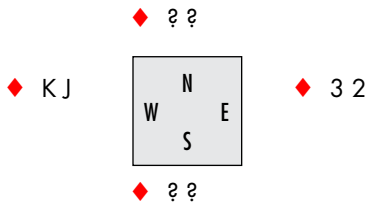
1. If South is on lead, will North's queen win a trick?
2. If West is on lead, will North's queen win a trick?
3. If North is on lead, will North's queen win a trick?
4. If East is on lead, will North's queen win a trick?

The answer to 1, 2 and 3 is now no. North's queen, lying *under* East's king, is now unfavorably placed. Only when East is on lead, and must play first, will North's queen make a trick.

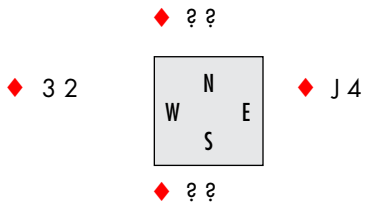
Results: North's unfavorably placed queen takes a trick only in one out of four cases.

In each of the following examples place the ♦Q7 and the ♦65 in the North and South hands so that the required number of tricks can be made. Indicate whether you or your partner would need to be on lead.

A.
You are West.
You need two tricks.

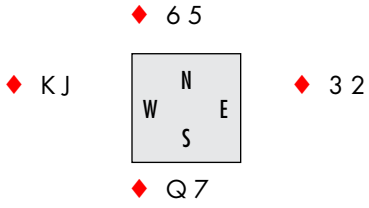


B.
You are East.
You need one trick.

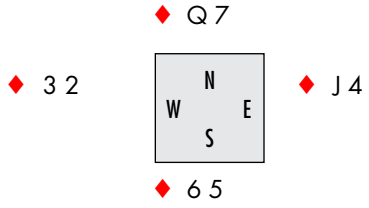


ANSWERS:

A.



B.



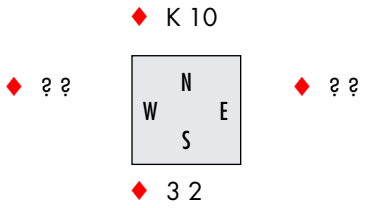
A. Place the queen *under* the ♦KJ (South). Your partner, East, must be on lead to force the queen to commit first. It doesn't matter where the spot cards go.

B. Place the queen *under* the ♦J4 (North). West must be on lead to force the queen to commit first.

In the next two examples, place the ♦Q7 and the ♦65 in the East-West hands. Does North or South need to be on lead in each case?

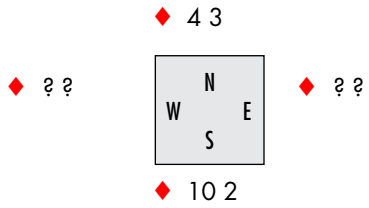
C.

You are North.
You need two tricks.



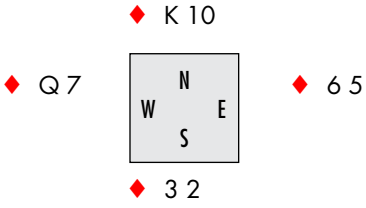
D.

You are South.
You need one trick.

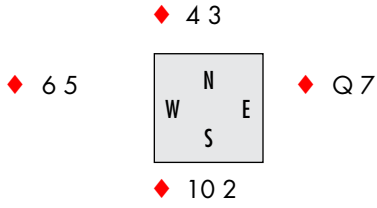


ANSWERS:

C.



D.



C. Place the queen *under* North's ♦K10. South must lead through West's queen.

D. Place the queen *under* South's ♦102. North must be on lead.

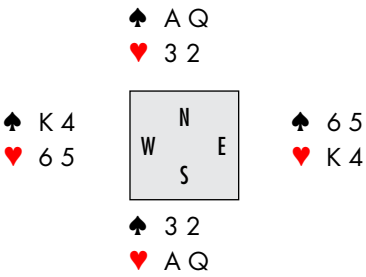
In examples B and D your opponent's queen is the master card. This card *must win a trick*. You are hoping to make a trick with your lesser card.

In examples A and C you have a tenace position. You have the master card, your opponent has the second-highest card, and you have the third-highest card. What you are trying to do is surround your opponent's card and deny him a trick.

TESTING YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF FINESSING

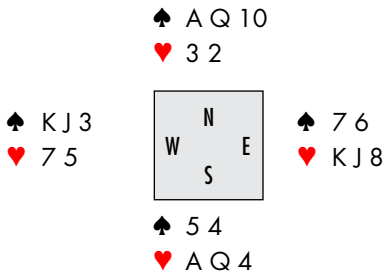
1.

You, South, are on lead.
Can you make all four tricks?

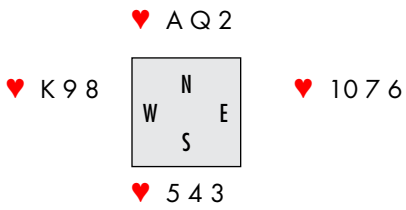


2.

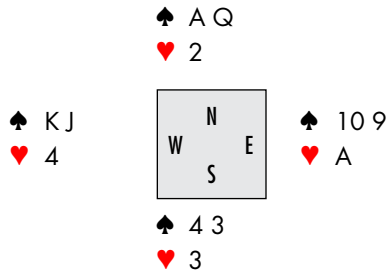
You are either North or South.
Can you make all five tricks?



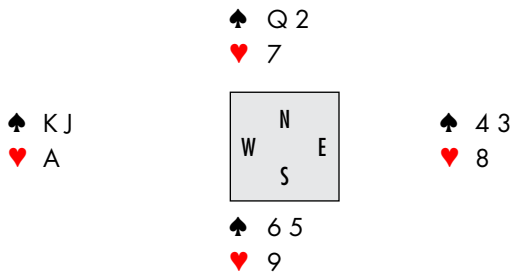
3a.
North is on lead.
Can she make two tricks?



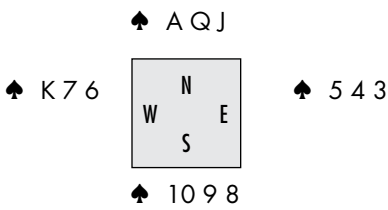
3b.
North is on lead.
Can she make two tricks?



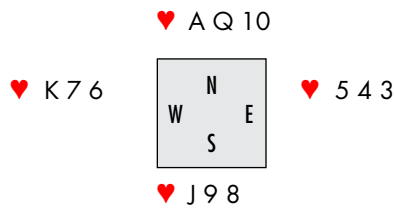
3c.
North is on lead.
Can she make one trick?



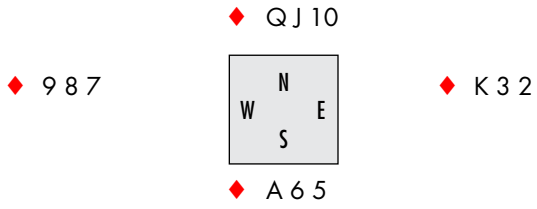
4a.
South is on lead.
Can North-South make three tricks?



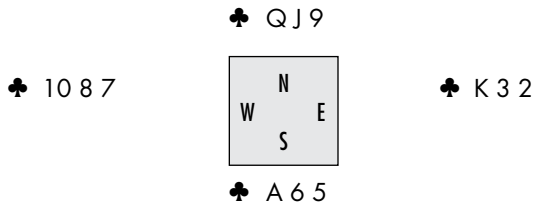
4b.
South is on lead.
Can North-South make three tricks?



5.
North is on lead.
Can North-South make three tricks?

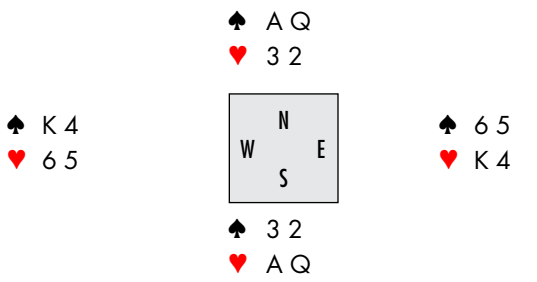


6. *Extra credit.*
North is on lead.
If everyone makes their best play, can North-South make all three tricks?



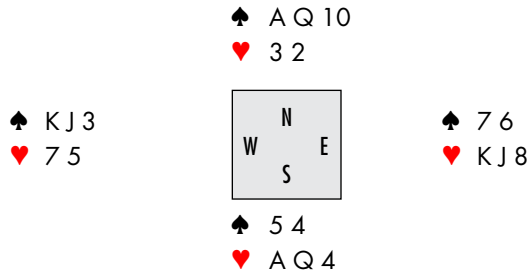
Answers:

1.



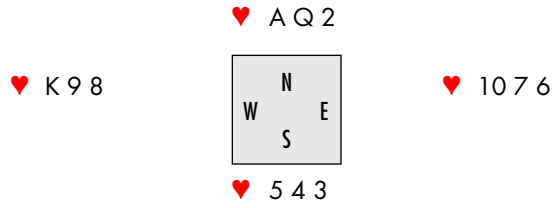
This is a transportation issue. Lead a spade toward North's ♠AQ, finessing if West plays low. At Trick 2 you have two options, both of which are fine: either cash your other high spade and then lead a heart intending to finesse the queen if East does not play the king, or vice versa.

2.



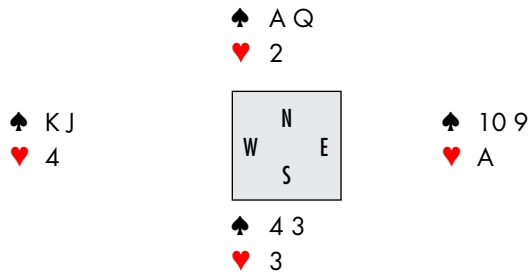
This is a fun position. Lead a low spade, planning to **double finesse** if West plays low. This is the sequence: (1) ♠4 to the ♠10; (2) ♥2 to the ♥Q; (3) ♠5 to the ♠Q; (4) Now remember to cash the ♠A, and discard the losing ♥4; and finally (5) ♥3 back to your ♥A. That's five tricks. Notice how the lead keeps moving back and forth between North and South. It's the concept of *communication* in action.

3a.



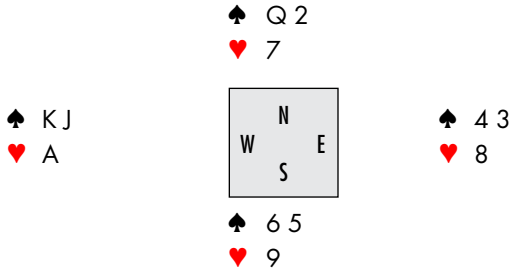
Your ♥Q is the key card. In order to win two tricks, it *must* take a trick. Remember, to take a finesse you must position yourself so that you do not lead the card you are trying to finesse. You must lead *toward* that card, forcing the player with the higher card to commit first. Lead the ♥2! It's a certain loser anyway. When East or West wins this trick, he will have to lead up to your ♥AQ tenace.

3b.



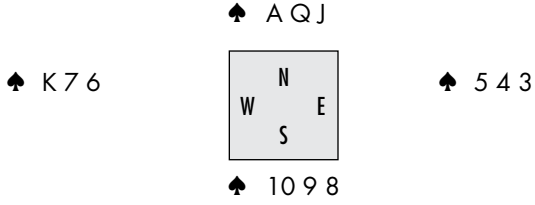
Different look, same idea, same results. You can't break your tenace position, so lead your ♥2. Make them come to you.

3c.



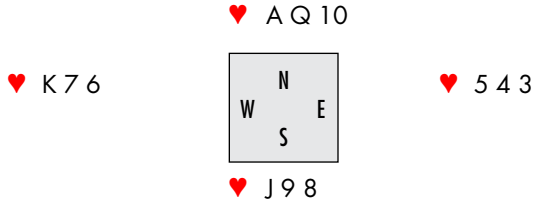
Different look again. In this case you don't have a tenace position, but you still need someone other than you to be leading spades (to **break** the spade suit). Get out of your hand by leading the ♥7. When they lead spades, your queen will take the first or second trick in that suit. Try it!

4a.



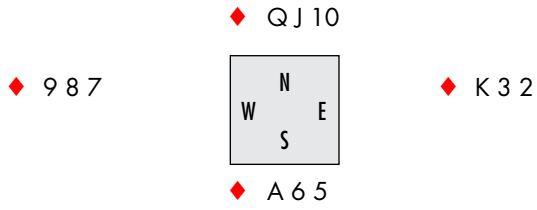
You can't make three tricks unless West is very helpful. While it is true that West's king is finessable (it is unfavorably placed under North's ace-queen), watch what happens when the finesse is taken and West doesn't play the king. Who wins the trick? North *has to* because her three cards are all higher than South's. She then has to lead away from her ♠AQ and West's king takes a trick.

4b.



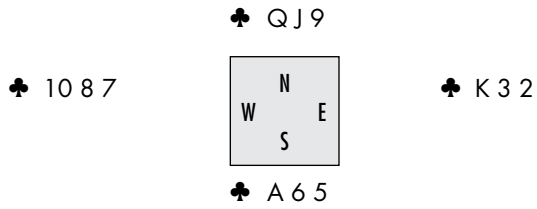
Now three tricks can be made, but only if South starts by leading her jack. If South leads the jack and North plays the ten under the jack, the lead will stay in the South hand. (If West plays the king, your queen and ten will become winners.) At the second trick, West is trapped in a simple tenace position and the next two tricks go to North's AQ.

5.



Lead the queen, trapping the king between a rock — your QJ10 sequence — and a hard place — South's ace. Notice that here again you can lead the card you are planning to finesse because you do not care if East covers it. Your remaining cards will all be promoted to winners.

6.



First, if the ♣9 is led, East simply ducks it — he will not play the king. To win this trick, South would have to spend her ace, otherwise West's ♣10 would win. If the queen is led, North-South can only make all three tricks if East plays his king on this trick. If he holds off and covers the jack on the next round, he and his partner will have to win a trick. Try it.

BASIC BRIDGE RULE

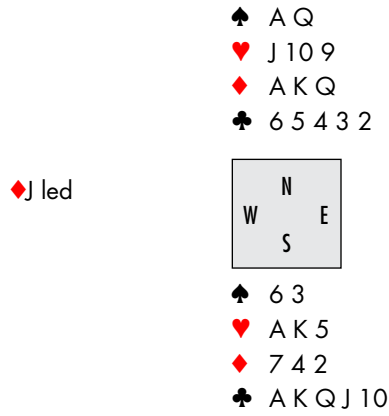
When you see two or more cards in sequence, and can cover only one of them, cover the last of those cards.

Chapter 9

practice, practice

HAND #1

You are South. You need *all thirteen* tricks! West leads the ♦J.



Both hands are 5-3-3-2. More than that, the two hands have what we call 'mirror' distribution. Each 5-3-3-2 shape contains the same number of each suit. This is never good for the declarer. There are few options open to her.

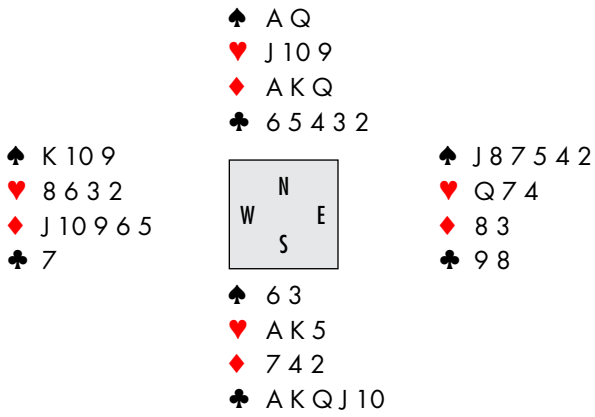
Counting quick tricks: one spade, two hearts, three diamonds and five clubs. Not bad. Eleven. But we need thirteen. Nothing to do in clubs or diamonds. In both spades and hearts we have tenace positions. In the North hand, the ♠AQ potentially surrounds West's king. We must also hope to find East holding the ♥Q so it too will be caught between a rock and a hard place.

We must take care to attack each of these suits by leading from the correct hand.

BASIC BRIDGE RULE

We always want to lead from weakness toward strength.

Winning the diamond lead perforce in the North hand positions us for the first of our two finesses. We pass one of our three hearts (they are all of equal value) through East. For argument's sake, let's lead the jack. Our plan here is to 'let the jack ride' should East follow low. He does and our jack holds the trick. We are half way home. We still need to tackle spades. We cross to South's hand with a club, so we can lead a spade through West and up to our ace-queen tenace. When we try the queen, it too wins! All thirteen tricks are ours. We just have to take them. There is actually no way to lose any of them, every card is now a winner. To save time, what we can do here is **claim** the rest of the tricks by saying, 'I claim,' or 'The rest are mine,' and showing everyone our hand.



This is the entire hand. East's shape was 6-3-2-2. We haven't seen (or heard) that one yet. What about the club suit? 5-5-2-1, also new.

What were our chances of success? Not very high. Each finesse rated to win 1/2 the time. A half of a half is a quarter. Not great, but did we have any choice?

HAND #2

You are South. You are trying to make nine or more tricks. West leads the ♣Q.

♠ J 8 4
♥ A K J
♦ 8 7 4 3
♣ 7 4 2

♣Q lead

N
W E
S

♠ A 6 3 2
♥ Q 5 4
♦ A Q J 10
♣ A 5

West leads the ♣Q, and the dummy comes down. (Say the North-South shapes please.) Plan the play.

What does West's lead tell you?

He's leading from length and strength. He should be holding four or five clubs and probably a solid queen, jack, ten sequence.

If West's lead was from part of an original four-card holding, then clubs are going to be dividing **4-4**-3-2, with each defender having four clubs. East-West will be able to take three club tricks the minute they gain the lead.

If he is leading from five, the suit is splitting **5-3**, and you will lose four tricks when they gain the lead.

Counting quick tricks gets you only to six: one spade, three hearts, one club and one diamond. So you may have an even bigger problem than worrying about those clubs, namely, where are all those extra tricks going to be coming from?

If you are to come to nine tricks you are going to have to develop three more diamond tricks for your side. While this is happening, you don't want to turn the lead over to their side. In order for this to occur, East *must* hold the ♦K. So, mentally *place it there* and play accordingly.

FROM WEAKNESS TOWARD STRENGTH

In order to capture East's king with your ace, you'll need to be leading from the North hand, from the *weak* diamonds, through East and into the South hand, the *strong* diamond holding.

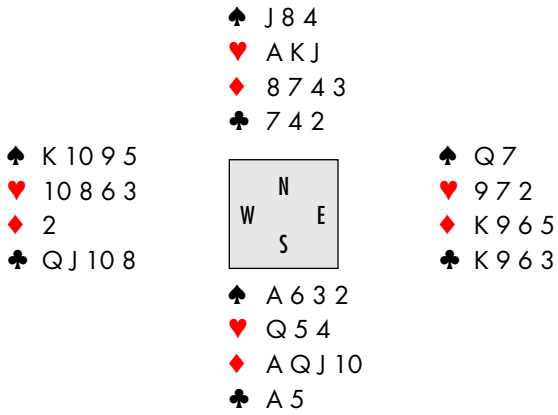
Win the club lead, cross to dummy with a heart, play any diamond and, when East follows low, try any of the three cards that is not an ace. Even when this wins, you're not home yet. You need to repeat the process. Cross to dummy with another heart (you should probably cross over with the queen, overtaking it with the ace or king just to be sure you don't wind up with the only two hearts left being South's queen and dummy's jack. You may need to bridge over one more time, so plan for it. Sure enough, when you do repeat the diamond finesse, West shows out (has no more diamonds)!

How many diamonds does East still have?

What was the original shape of the diamonds around the table? You started with 4, dummy 4, West 1. Say 4-4-1-, then say 4-4-*four*-1. 'Counting' this way allows you to quickly realize that East also started with a four-card suit and therefore still has two diamonds left, one being the king. There is still work to be done. We must cross to dummy *a third time* and take the finesse for *a third time*.

After three winning finesses, you'll have made four diamonds and five other quick tricks.

The four hands looked like this:



Can you 'see' the 4-4-4-1 shape of the diamonds around the table? How about the 4-4-3-2 shape of the clubs?

While we're at it, please say '4-4-4-1' again because that's also the shape of West's hand.

Bridge hands are thirteen cards divided four ways.

Bridge suits are the same: thirteen divided four ways.

Only nine shapes make up over 85% of all bridge distributions. They can be divided into three groups of three.

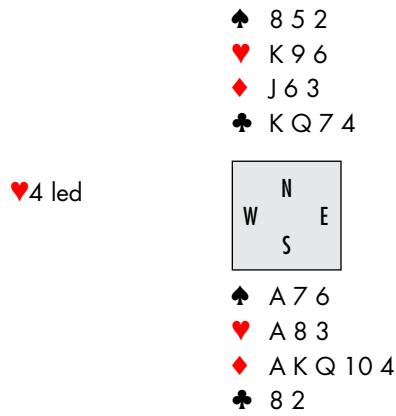
The 4s	The 5s	The 6s
4-3-3-3	5-3-3-2	6-3-2-2
4-4-3-2	5-4-2-2	6-3-3-1
4-4-4-1	5-4-3-1	6-4-2-1

Before you go to bed, count shape, not sheep. Say the 'fours', followed by the 'fives', followed by the 'sixes', always in the same order, always the same way. This is your bridge mantra. Nothing else will help you understand this game better and have you progress faster than owning these nine shapes. This is as young as you will ever be; any reason not to start the mantra tonight?

'Now I lay me down to sleep, 4-3-3-3, 4-4-3-2...'.

HAND #3

You are South. Your goal this time is ten tricks. The lead is the ♥4.



Take stock. You have one spade trick, two hearts, five diamonds and, for the moment zero quick tricks in clubs. That's eight. You can easily make a ninth trick by playing the ♣K, driving out the ace and promoting your queen. But you need ten tricks. You'll need to try to get two tricks from your ♣KQ combination.

THE STRATEGY

This is a chapter on finessing, on trying to make a trick with a card you have that's lower-ranking than one the opponents have. The club suit provides no tenace, no surround position, to lead through. This is the other kind of finesse. The opponents have the ace, the master card. You have the next two highest cards. You must hope that West has the ace and force him to spend it on one of South's small clubs, all the while, keeping your king and queen out of harm's way.

With this in mind, you can choose to win the heart lead in dummy or in your hand. Win in your hand, since you want to start leading clubs from there, through West, forcing him to act first.

At Trick 2 lead one of your small clubs. If West plays the ace, play low and you've got ten tricks. Both of dummy's club honors, now winners, when added to the eight tricks you started with, will get you to the ten you are trying to make.

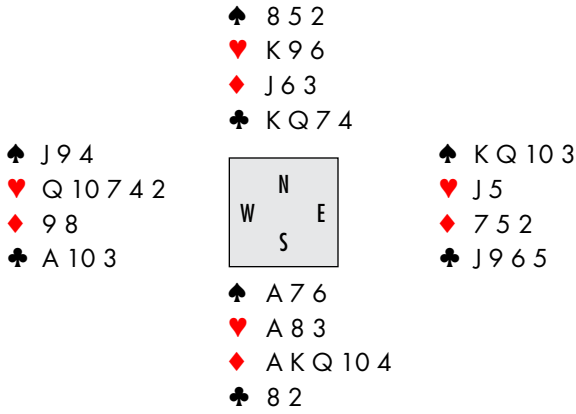
No such luck. West chooses not to make it that easy. He **ducks** this trick, allowing you to win with one of your two club honors.

In dummy now, which club should you lead?

That was a trick question. You still don't want to be leading clubs *from* the North hand but *to* the North hand. You need to repeat the process of forcing West to act before you do. Return to the South hand and lead another club. No matter what West does, he's toast.

If East had been holding the ♣A, you were going to be down one trick. The chances of success here were 50%.

This was the original layout.



The ♥4 lead was from a broken five-card suit. When leading from a broken suit headed by an honor, conventional wisdom is to lead the fourth highest card. If you are so inclined, you might Google the 'Rule of eleven' to learn the logic behind this.

Chapter 10

something entirely new — trumps!

Let's take this opportunity to present a bridge fantasy. Imagine you are holding this hand:

♥ A K Q J 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

If you play three hours a day, every day, then once in about 170,000 years you will get a one-suited hand like this. Of course, people are living longer these days...

Continuing the fantasy — if you were on lead, would it matter which card you choose to play? It wouldn't. You'd win all thirteen tricks

Now here's a bridge nightmare. Same hand, but you are not on lead. How many tricks will you win now? None. Zero. Zip. Nada. What you'd be doing is making thirteen discards. Your one-in-a zillion hand will be absolutely useless.

But what if I told you that before beginning play, a special wild-card suit had been selected and that this suit was hearts?

What powers would this wild-card suit have?

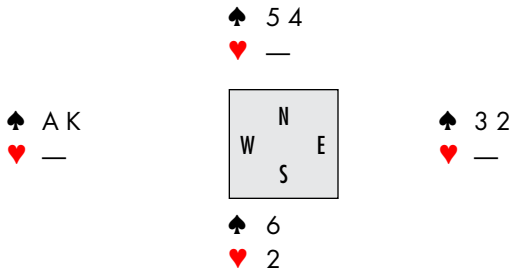
SPECIAL QUALITIES THAT THE TRUMP SUIT POSSESSES

If a card of a different suit is led and you can't follow suit (which in this fantasy case will be at the very first trick), instead of having to *discard* one of those lovely hearts, you *play* one — and it wins the trick!

With no wild-card suit, when the ♠A is led, North and East will follow suit, and South will discard her losing ♥2.

With hearts wild, when South plays her ♥2 to the trick, what she's doing is using it to **trump** the ace. Now that hearts are wild, that lowly ♥2 automatically outranks a card of any other suit and takes the trick.

The wild-card suit in bridge is called the **trump suit**. When playing a card of the trump suit on a card of another suit we say we are **trumping** it or **ruffing** it.



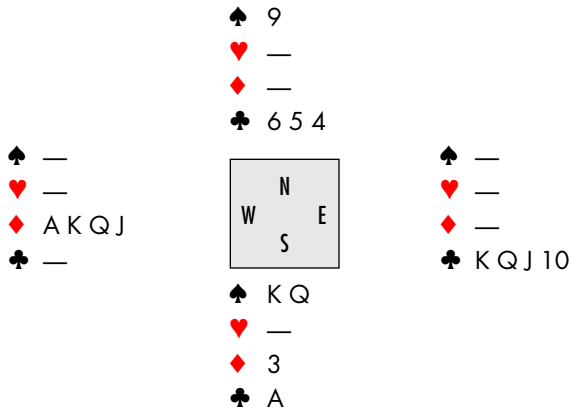
Once again, hearts are trumps and West leads his ♠A. This time, South cannot trump the ♠A with her ♥2 because she is bound by the first rule of bridge, which is that *you must follow suit* if you can. South must wait until she no longer has any spades (until she is **void** in spades) before she can use her ♥2. On the subsequent lead of the ♠K, South, now void in spades, can trump (ruff) the ♠K with her ♥2, winning the trick.

About three-quarters of all bridge hands are played with a trump suit. How this comes about we'll explore shortly. Cards within a trump suit work exactly like cards in any other suit. The ace of trumps beats the king of trumps, the six of trumps loses to the nine of trumps, etc. So if two players ruff on the same trick, the one playing the higher trump card wins the trick — we say he has **overruffed** the other player.

1. A TRUMP SUIT LETS YOU TURN LOSERS INTO WINNERS!

EXAMPLE 1A

South leads. Spades are trumps.



Playing as we have until now with no trump suit, or in **notrump**, how many tricks will South win if she is on lead? How many will she lose?

If she plays the ♣A and her two spade honors to the first three tricks, she will win those three tricks and lose only the ♦3.

Now what about with spades as trumps? How many tricks will South win now?

South's hand is high (all her cards are winners) except for the ♦3. But North is void in diamonds and has a trump. This combination allows South to trump her losing ♦3 with North's ♠9, turning the losing ♦3 into a winner. Trumping is optional — you trump only if you want to. But in this case it makes sense because it allows North-South to win a trick they would otherwise lose.

Here's how the play might go:

Trick 1: [S] ♦3, ♦J, **♠9,** ♣10

In bridge language, South leads the ♦3, West covers with his ♦J, North trumps the ♦J with the ♠9 and East discards the ♣10. Trick 1 is won by North. She (N) is on lead for the next trick.

Trick 2: [N] ♣4, ♣J, ♣A, ♦Q

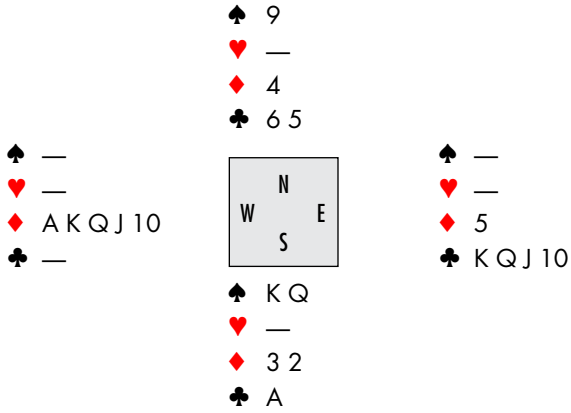
South's ♣A wins Trick 2, with West discarding the ♦Q.

Tricks 3 and 4 are won with South's ♠K and ♠Q. As they are the only wild cards left, they are automatically winners.

As a result, South makes four tricks, actually turning her diamond loser into a winner. With spades as trumps, she makes one more trick than she would have had she been playing in notrump.

EXAMPLE 1B

South on lead. Spades are trumps.



This is the same hand as before except that everyone has one more diamond. What must South do in order to be able to trump one of her losing diamonds?

South must create a void in the North hand. To do this she simply plays a diamond at Trick 1, allowing the opponents to win the trick. After all, what's theirs is theirs. (Don't be afraid of letting go of the lead if it will help you later.) After one trick, the cards look like the previous example, only this time West will be on lead.

Follow the play:

Trick 1: [S] ♦2, ♦10, ♦4, ♦5 (South was on lead; West won the trick.)

Trick 2: [W] ♦A, ♠9, ♣10, ♦3 (West was on lead; North wins this trick by trumping the ♦A.)

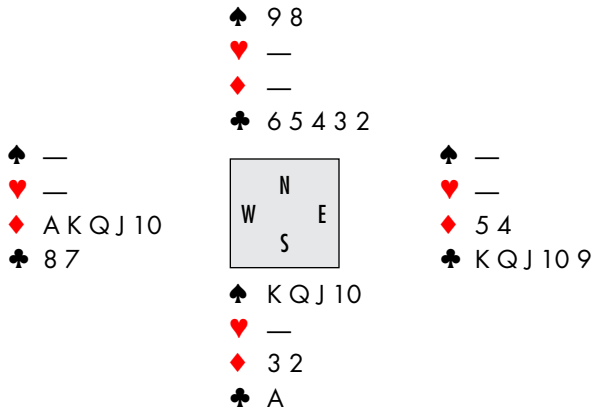
Tricks 3 - 5: [N] South wins all three tricks with her spade and club winners. North-South take four tricks and lose one.

BASIC BRIDGE RULE

Remember: In order to trump a card you must first create a void in the suit you are planning to trump.

EXAMPLE 2

South on lead. Spades are trumps.



If this hand were being played in notrump and South were on lead, how many tricks would she have to lose?

Two. After cashing her four spade winners and one club winner, she would have to give West his two high diamonds.

If spades are trumps, does South lose any diamond tricks at all?

South has two losing diamonds. North has a void in diamonds and two trumps, a winning combination. South's plan is to trump one of her diamonds right away with one of North's trumps, then return to her hand to trump the other one. This is how the play would go:

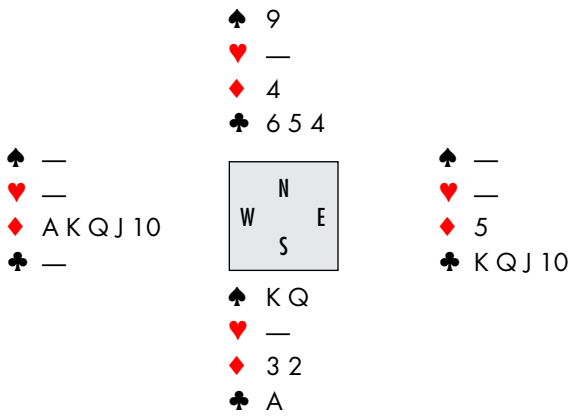
Trick 1: [S] ♦2, ♦10, **♠8**, ♦4
Trick 2: [N] ♣2, ♣9, **♣A**, ♣7
Trick 3: [S] ♦3, ♦J, **♠9**, ♦5

Tricks 4-7 are won by South's KQJ10 of trumps. Note that it would be wrong to play trumps before South went about the business of trumping her two diamond losers. After two rounds of spades, the North hand would no longer have any trumps to take care of those diamonds. This idea of having the right number of trumps and using them at the right time is called **trump management.**

2. Your trumps prevent the opponents from running their long suit

EXAMPLE 3

East or West on lead



Playing in notrump with East or West on lead, how many tricks will North-South win?

They cannot win a trick. If West leads, he'll take all five diamond tricks. If East leads and starts with his singleton ♦5, his partner will again win all five tricks. In either case, North-South will be powerless to prevent it.

What happens when spades become trumps?

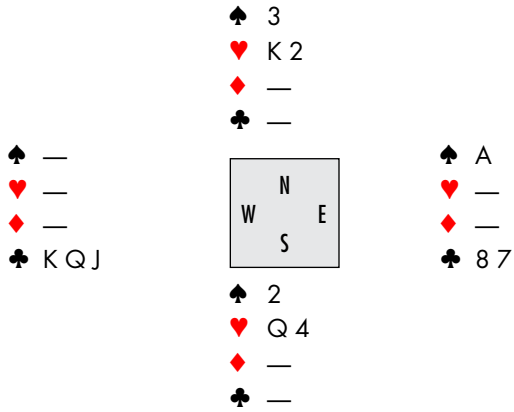
Now it won't matter who's on lead: East-West will win just one trick. When they try to cash a second diamond, North trumps it, gaining control of the play. North-South win the remaining tricks.

3. A TRUMP SUIT CAN ALLOW YOU TO DISCARD A LOSING CARD IN ONE OF THE HANDS

When both hands of a partnership have trump cards, things get really interesting. Here's one of my favorite examples:

EXAMPLE 4

Hearts are trumps



With North, East or South on lead, North-South will lose a spade trick. But if West is on lead, they won't. Here's why.

First way:

Trick 1: West leads the ♣K, North discards (**sluffs**) her losing spade. East follows with a club and then South ruffs that king with her ♥4.

Tricks 2 and 3: South's ♥Q and North's ♥K win the next two tricks.

Second way:

Trick 1: Again West leads the ♣K; this time dummy trumps it with the ♥2 while declarer sluffs (discards) her losing spade.

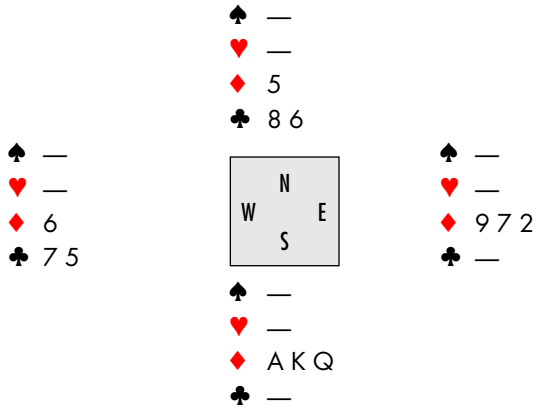
We call what happened in this example giving an opponent **a ruff and a sluff** — usually not a good thing for the side giving it.

Chapter 11

exercises in trump management

HAND 1

South on lead. Clubs are trumps.



With South on lead and clubs as trumps, how many tricks do you think North-South will win?

All three. Watch how North's trumps work. North holds a tenace position over West.

Trick 1: [S] ♦A, 6, 5, 2.

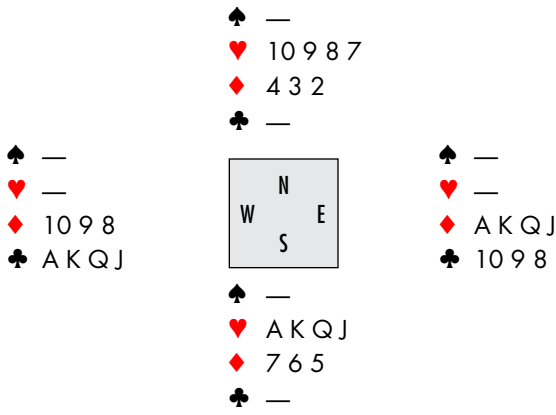
Tricks 2 and 3: [S] ♦K led by South. West is caught. Whichever card he uses to trump, North will be able to overruff him — she will play a higher trump, and that wins the trick. She will also win the third trick with her remaining club, which will be higher than West's.

How many tricks will North-South win with North on lead?

All three if declarer first uses her ♦5 to bridge back to her hand so that South will be on lead at Trick 2 and again catch West under North's tenace position. If instead, at Trick 1, North plays her ♣8, she will eventually lose a trick to West's ♣7 — the highest remaining trump.

HAND 2

South on lead. Hearts are trumps.

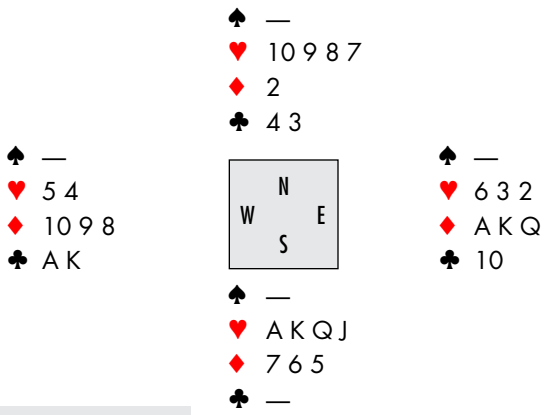


How many tricks will North-South win?

Just four. They will have to lose three diamonds. What can they do with them? They can't trump them, nor can they discard them. The North-South hands have what we refer to as 'mirror distribution' — they both have the same numbers of cards in each suit (four hearts and three diamonds). Seldom a good thing, as it leaves one with few options.

HAND 3

South on lead. Hearts are trumps.



Before you play, visualize. Should you play all your trumps right away?

No, at least not more than two of them. Why? Because some of them have work to do. You do want to try to extract, or **draw**, the oppo-

nents' trumps, as otherwise they may be able to trump in and win a trick you don't want them to. However, if you begin by playing four rounds of hearts, you'll be left with three losing diamonds. Before drawing the opponents' trumps, you should plan to ruff two of your losing diamonds. In order to do that, you must create a void in one of the hands. Now's the time. Give the opponents their one diamond trick. That can't be helped. Whatever they return will turn control back over to you and allow you to go about your task of trumping those two diamonds. Even if they lead back a trump, you'll still have enough hearts left to look after your diamonds.

Say the first trick goes like this: [S] ♦5, ♦8, ♦2, ♦**Q**.

Now the North-South hands will look like this:

This is how the hand plays out.

Trick 2: Whatever East returns, North or South will win it and begin to ruff each other's losing cards with their high trumps.

Trick 3: North leads a club, which gets trumped in the South hand.

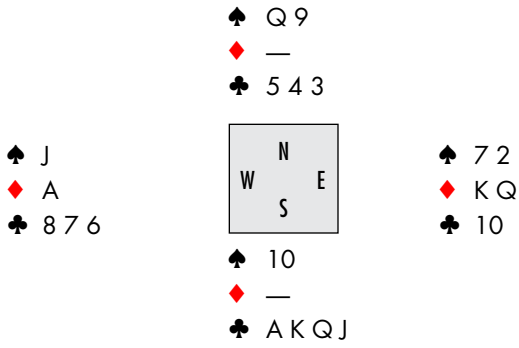
Trick 4: South leads diamond, which gets trumped in the North hand.

Tricks 5 and 6. Repeat the process.

This technique of trumping back and forth is called **crossruffing**.

HAND 4

South on lead. Spades are trumps.



Can South make all five tricks?

Yes. But she must be careful. South's cards outside the trump suit (the ♣AKQJ) are all winners, but if South isn't careful, East and West might get to trump one or two of them. In order to avoid this, South must draw all of the opponents' trumps.

At Trick 1, South plays the ♠10, West plays the ♠J, and North the ♠Q. East follows with the ♠2.

Trick 2: North continues with the ♠9, drawing out East's remaining trump. Only now is it safe for South to play her winning clubs.

When should you draw trumps?

While there is no easy answer, my rule of thumb is to ask yourself two questions:

Do I have any losers that need to be trumped?

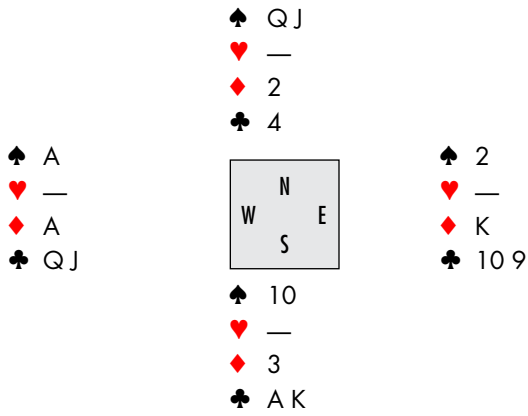
Do I need to discard any losers right away?

If the answer to both questions is no, most often it's right to draw trumps.

Here's an example of a hand where the question of when to draw trumps comes into play:

HAND 5

North on lead. Spades are trumps.



Should North draw trumps immediately?

No. North has a trump loser and a diamond loser. North can't trump her diamond loser right now as both hands each have a diamond. Can you see how to create a diamond void?

Here's the plan: North should try to discard that losing ♦2 on South's second club (the ♣A or ♣K). Then a trump from North will take care of the losing ♦3 in the South hand. The play will go like this:

Trick 1: [N] ♣4, ♣9, ♣A, ♣J
Trick 2: [S] ♣K, ♣Q, ♦2, ♣10
Trick 3: [S] ♦3, ♦A, ♠J, ♦K
Trick 4: [N] ♠Q, ♠2, ♠10, ♠A

The ♠A wins the only trick for East-West.

When playing in a trump suit, the central question for declarer is this: Why, since I (usually!) have so many more trumps then they do, don't I take out their trumps? If you can't come up with a reason, it's probably right to draw their trumps.

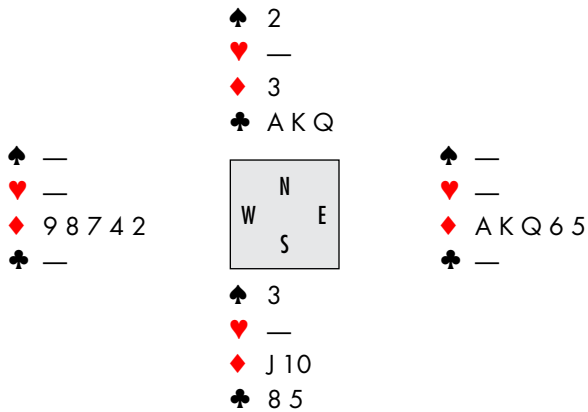
Chapter 12

play and defense with trumps

Playing and defending without a trump suit is based mainly on the idea of trying to establish long suits in the hope of taking tricks with the low cards in those suits. On defense, for example, it is often enough for the opening leader simply to lead his longest suit.

But the existence of a trump suit changes all that.

Because of the controlling nature of trumps, defenders rarely get to promote and cash their long-suit winners. For instance, look at this partial hand:



South is the declarer. Playing in notrump, if either East or West were on lead at this point, they would take the remaining five tricks.

This would not be so if spades were trumps. East's ♦A would still win the first trick. But North would trump the diamond continuation with her ♠2 and take the remaining tricks with high clubs and South's trump.

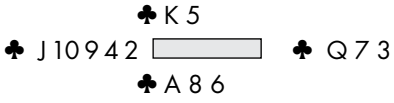
This thinking is important when planning an opening lead.

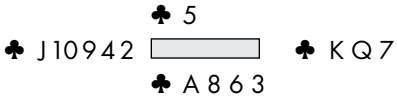
Say you're on lead and you're playing without a trump suit. Here's your hand:

♠ Q 3 ♥ 8 7 4 ♦ K Q J ♣ J 10 9 4 2

Clubs would normally be your best shot at developing long-suit tricks. Length takes tricks at notrump. Lead the ♣J specifically, because it's the top card of the sequence.

Now let's say you're on lead with the same hand, but this time spades are trumps. Should this change your thinking? Yes. The club suit is no longer as attractive as before. Your length actually works against you. The more clubs you have, the fewer the declaring side probably has. When you have five cards in a suit, one of the hands around the table must have two or fewer (5-3-3-**2**). This fact translates to your side not being able to develop many club tricks. For example, the clubs might be divided one of these two ways:





In both of these layouts, the defenders will have no winning club tricks available to them if, for example, spades are trumps.

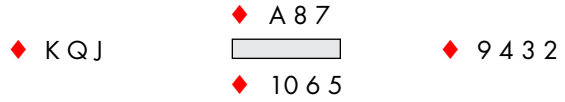
This is all too common. Most of the time it is one of the opponents who will be short in the suit you are leading. That is often because they are long in the suit they named as trumps and therefore have fewer cards remaining in the other three suits. Or they may have decided not to play in notrump for a reason — perhaps they knew that they had a club suit weakness.

Here's your hand again:

♠ Q 3 ♥ 8 7 4 ♦ K Q J ♣ J 10 9 4 2

Your diamond suit is a more attractive lead when the opponents have named a trump suit. It is only three cards long and needs little help from your partner to start taking tricks. There is a good chance for your side to take two or three tricks in this suit.

Let's see how this could happen:



After your ♦K knocks out declarer's stopper, if your side regains the lead you will be in position to cash two tricks.

Even a lead from even a less powerful three-card sequence may have devastating results for the declarer:

This is the layout every defender hopes for when they table that ♦Q. North's ♦K is sandwiched between West's ♦QJ10 sequence and his partner's ♦A. It's caught between a rock and a hard place. In this case the defense will take three quick tricks.

Another reason for leading a diamond here rather than a club is that your diamonds are stronger than your clubs. The fact that your high card in the club suit is the jack means that it could take two or three rounds to build a trick in this suit. That is often more than enough time for declare to figure out how to discard a potential club loser on a winner in another suit.

Another lead problem:

♠Q 9 7 3 ♥5 ♦8 6 4 ♣K J 9 6 2

How is your choice of leads affected by whether you're playing in notrump or with, say, diamonds as trumps?

Let's first consider leading when nothing is trumps. Lead from your longest and strongest suit. Lead a club! Without a sequence, choose one of your smaller ones. Don't needlessly put one of your unsupported honors in harm's way this early in the hand. Scout around with a spot card. In these situations, the convention is to lead the fourth highest card in your suit. Here the ♣K is the highest, and the ♣6 is your fourth highest. Your lead should be the ♣6.

Now let's consider your lead selection with this same hand, only this time diamonds are trumps.

With diamonds as trumps, it may take too long to build a trick in clubs or even in spades. But, if you happen to hit your partner with just the right heart holding, something very good could happen.

Say this is the heart layout:

(you)	♥ Q J 8	
♥ 5		♥ A 9 7 4 2
	♥ K 10 6 3	

If you lead your singleton ♥5, partner will step up with his ♥A and play one right back, allowing you to ruff with one of your little diamonds. That just created a trick for your side. Defense is just the flip side of declarer play. Whatever methods are available to declarer are also available to defenders. Just as declarer uses his shortness to create winners from losers, so do defenders.

Benito Garozzo, a veteran of the famous Italian Blue Team, a bridge squad that won the World Championship for a record nine straight years, is credited with saying, 'If my partner is on opening lead in a hand involving a trump suit, and doesn't lead a singleton, then he didn't have one to begin with.' That's how basic the lead of a singleton is to trump suit defenses.

This last example should focus your attention on the potential defenders have when they hold small trump cards. These trumps are pesky little devils that can often prove dangerous, even fatal, to careless declarers.

BASIC BRIDGE RULE

Remember, as declarer, unless you have a good reason not to, then draw the opponents' trumps.

I can't stress this enough. When playing with a trump suit, declarer's number one question should always be, 'Do I have a good reason for not drawing my opponents' trumps?'

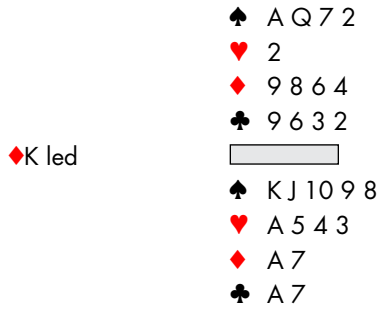
Chapter 13

playing hands in a trump suit

There are more practice hands in the final chapter. Here, let's look at a couple of hands that illustrate situations where it would be wrong to draw the opponents' trumps immediately.

HAND 1

You are South. You must make at least ten tricks. Spades are trumps. West leads the ♦K.



When you first look at a hand that will be played with a trump suit, it is often a good idea to try and see how many tricks you might be able to make if the hand in question were being played in notrump. In this example you'd count five spade winners and those three other aces for a total of eight tricks. None of the spot cards you hold in the other suits would come into play.

When playing with a trump suit, things change. Let's focus on the heart suit. In notrump, besides the ace, the remaining hearts are of no value to us. The opponents have more of them and all of the stronger ones.

But this is not notrump.

Do you see how we can turn those three losing hearts in the South hand into winners?

We can plan on trumping them with the spades in the dummy. Here's how the play would go. We will win the first trick with the ♦A. We will *delay* drawing our opponents' trumps because we need our own trumps to serve a more important purpose. At Trick 2, we will play our ♥A, voiding dummy of hearts. Then we'll trump one of those three heart losers, say the ♥3, using dummy's ♠2. This will create a trick out of thin air! We will have turned a loser into a winner. Returning to our hand with, say, the ♣A, we then trump another heart, this time with dummy's ♠7. Trumping that third small heart requires that we bridge back to our hand once again. This time we can make the unusual play of using one of dummy's trumps to accomplish that. We'll lead the ♠Q and overtake it with declarer's ♠K! This will put us in position to trump our third heart.

In this fashion we wind up with the five spade tricks that we started with, along with those three aces, *and* the three extra tricks we made by trumping those three hearts in the dummy. That brings the total to eleven tricks, one more than the ten tricks we were attempting to make. We lose only the ♦7 and the ♣7. We managed to turn three losers into three winners. This is a powerful demonstration of the ability of a trump suit to create tricks.

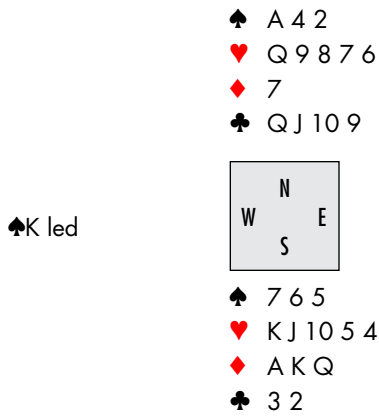
BASIC BRIDGE RULE

Delay drawing trumps if you need to ruff losers.

HAND 2

Let's look at another deal where not drawing trumps at your first opportunity is the winning move. Once again you need to make at least ten tricks to be successful.

Hearts are trumps. You are South. Your LHO (left hand opponent) leads the ♠K.



Playing in notrump, after the ♠K lead, we would have a hard time coming anywhere close to making ten tricks. This hand would become a race that the defending side would almost certainly win. At first it looks like we should be able to make the ♠A, the ♦AKQ, and, once we knocked out the opponents' heart stopper (their ace), we would be able to add four heart tricks to our collection. But knocking out that ace would mean we would have to lose the lead. There's the rub. When the opponents regained control of the play, they would get to cash as many spade tricks as they have left. In total the opponents would win the ♥A, the ♣A and ♣K, and a bunch of spades. That might come close to equaling the number of tricks our side will win on this hand.

Playing with a trump suit affords us plays that have not been previously available to us. Take a look.

Right now, it looks like we will lose five tricks: the ♣AK, the trump ace, and, as soon as the opponents gain the lead, two spades. We can't take ten tricks if they take five.

But let's focus on dummy's losing spades and declarer's three top (winning) diamonds. Watch this.

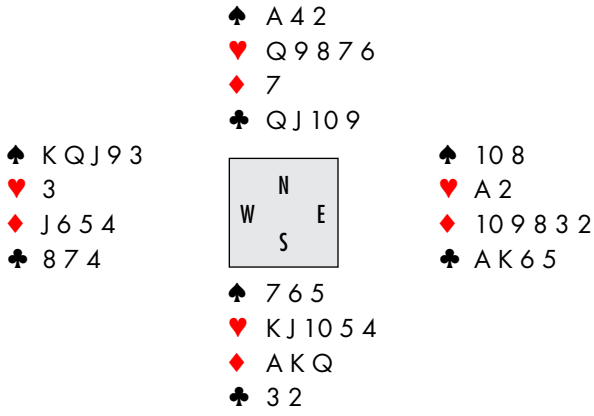
Trick 1. Win the ♠A.

Trick 2. Using your ♦7, bridge across to your ♦A, ♦K, or ♦Q.

Tricks 3 and 4. Play your remaining two winning diamonds. Don't trump them. Use them to take care of those two losing spades. *Discard those spades on your diamond winners.*

With a newly created spade void in dummy, at Trick 5, play one of South's losing spades and trump it in the dummy. *Now* start to draw trumps. You will be able to ruff your last remaining spade at your leisure. You will lose only two clubs and the ace of trumps. You will win one spade, three diamonds, and six trump tricks (four in declarer's hand and two in the dummy by ruffing diamonds) for a total of ten tricks.

The complete deal:



By discarding dummy's two small spades on your two winning diamonds, you created a spade void. You were then able to trump two spades in the dummy, eliminating two losers and, in the process, creating two winners.

BASIC BRIDGE RULE

Delay drawing trumps if that may allow the opponents to get in before you discard your losers.

I like to say: 'Draw trumps as soon as you can. Not necessarily right away.'

Chapter 14

the auction

Like the long-running TV series 'Law and Order', bridge is divided into two separate but equal parts.

Until now, we've been studying how play of the cards works: tricks, promotion, finessing, setting up long suits, trumping losers, discarding losers.

But before the play even begins, all four players get a chance to talk about their respective hands during a period known as the **auction**. It is during this time that the declarer, the dummy and the opening leader are determined, along with details such as how many tricks each side will be trying to make, whether the hand will be played in notrump or, if there is to be a trump suit, what suit that will be.

THE AUCTION PART 1

Let's say you pick up the following hand:

Hand 1

♠ A K 5 ♥ A K 4 ♦ K Q J 10 9 3 ♣ 2

If you could name diamonds as trumps, you would be pretty excited about this hand. After all, even without a partner, your trick-taking potential would be around nine (2 spade tricks + 2 heart tricks + 5 diamond tricks + 0 club tricks = 9).

Now suppose you picked up this hand:

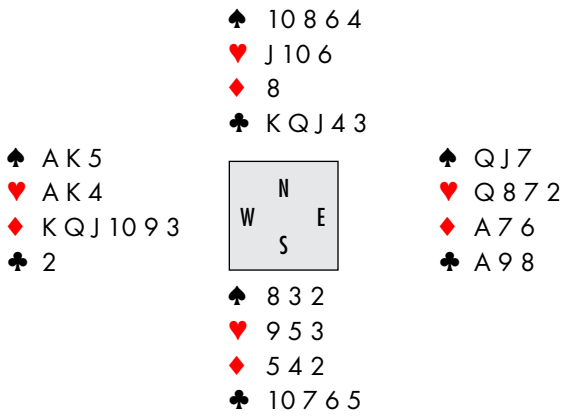
Hand 2

♠ 8 3 2 ♥ 9 5 3 ♦ 5 4 2 ♣ 10 7 6 5

What's the trick-taking potential here? Right around zero. You wouldn't be sure which suit to name as trumps, because even if it were clubs, where you have some length, those cards aren't high enough to guarantee much trick-taking ability anyway.

So which hand do you think would be more valuable to a bridge player? Hand 1, of course: it could be worth nine tricks, as opposed to Hand 2's zero tricks.

In the complete deal below we'll give West Hand 1 and South Hand 2.

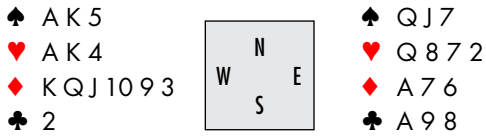


Let's look at how each player might view his cards.

West knows that getting to name diamonds trumps would be hugely beneficial for his side. North's thinking mirror's West's, except that he likes clubs. East is holding five honor cards. He likes his hand, but no suit readily suggests itself as a trump suit. He decides he might like to play this hand in notrump. Now South takes a look at her cards

She's probably thinking, 'Maybe I should switch to mahjong'.

If you put the East-West hands side by side you'll see that they can make all thirteen tricks!



Together, East-West have three spade tricks, three hearts, six diamonds and one club. That comes to thirteen.

Taking thirteen tricks is a very big deal in bridge. When we get to scoring you will see that the value of promising to make thirteen tricks (which is called a **grand slam**) and succeeding is huge and dwarfs every other scoring play. All you and your partner have to do is look at the hands, count up the tricks, and go for it. Of course there's a catch. You have to commit to going for the grand slam *without seeing each other's cards.*

What if East and West don't commit to taking all thirteen tricks? Well, their score will end up being less, maybe a whole lot less. In the extreme, they may misjudge their combined strength so badly that they end up with only 140 points, about 6% of the value of the grand slam.

How do East and West predict how many tricks they will make if they can't see each other's cards? The answer is by talking to each other and telling each other about their respective hands. We call this conversation the auction, and the 'words' they use, the **bidding**.

In the above example, West would like to say 'Partner, I happen to have three spades and three hearts, including the ace and king of each suit, six solid diamonds missing the ace, and a singleton club.' East would like to reply, 'Excellent, I'm looking at queen jack third, queen fourth, ace third and ace third.' (Bridge speak.)

Simple. So what's the problem?

Bridge bidding rules prohibit some of the aforementioned words from being spoken during the auction. Words such as ace, king, queen and jack are on the list of disallowed words. So are phrases like 'three cards in a suit', 'a singleton club', and 'six solid diamonds'.

In point of fact, the auction period allows for only a few more than a dozen words.

They must be some wonderful words!

Not really. Here are twelve of them:

Group 1: One, two, three, four, five, six, seven
Group 2: Clubs, diamonds, hearts, spades, notrump

There are only three other words that make up the entire bridge vocabulary and one of them is 'pass' (in Britain they say 'no bid'), which simply means, 'At this point in the auction I choose not to say anything.'

Each time it is your turn to speak, if you so choose, what you say (your **bid**) must include only one word from Group 1 along with only one from Group 2. For example: 'one spade' or 'two diamonds' or 'four notrump': a number from one to seven, followed by one of the four suits or the word notrump.

Believe it or not, by using these few words properly, and in the right order, you and your partner will be able to create a bridge language that will enable you to describe virtually every imaginable combination of twenty-six cards divided equally between two hands.

If you think of bidding as a language, then learning to bid is like learning a foreign language.

Bidding and play: these two equally important aspects of the game require totally different thought processes. It has something to do with left side and right side of the brain: language skills and spatial relations skills. This factor makes life interesting. Very few people possess equal ability in both areas.

The bidding

If both sides were dealt an equal number of aces, kings, queens and so on, all the way down to the tiny deuces, then both sides might be expected to make the same number of tricks. But thirteen tricks can't be divided equally. Seven to six is about as even as we can get.

The focus will be on exactly which partnership will make that pivotal seventh trick. When talking about the number of tricks a side is going to attempt to make, bridge players discount the first six tricks (after all, anyone can make six). Making those first six tricks is referred to as **making book**. The fight is over the seventh trick. That trick is the first truly crucial one. That's the one-level in bridge, book (six tricks) plus one trick. The two-level requires eight tricks, book plus two. The three-level requires that nine tricks be won (book plus three is nine).

How many possible levels are there in the game of bridge?

Seven. There are thirteen possible tricks, so counting up from six leaves us with seven levels, 13 – 6 = 7.

To start, let's first pretend we're at a typical auction and the bidding is about to begin on something of sudden interest to us all, a deck of brightly colored playing cards! Before we begin, we'll put some constraints on the bidding:

- The opening bid has to be at least one dollar.
- All subsequent bids must be in increments of twenty cents.
- Only four people will be involved in the auction. Their names will be South, West, North, and East.
- They can bid only when it's their turn.

Now let's hear how the auction for those brightly colored cards might sound. Let's have South start the bidding, and have the bidding proceed clockwise, just like the play.

South: I don't want to bid at this point. I'll pass.
West: I'll open the bidding with $1.
North: I'll bid $1.20.
East: Okay, then I'll offer $1.40.
South: Even though I passed at first, what I've heard here has changed my mind. I'll step in now with a bid of $2.
West: I'll bid $1.80.
Auctioneer: Um… our last bid was $2. You can't call out $1.80. Your bid is insufficient.

West: Oops, sorry. Guess I wasn't paying attention. I'll change that to $2.20.
North: $2.40.
East: I'll pass.
South: I'll pass too.
West: Too rich for my blood. Pass.
Auctioneer: Only four participants and three are passing at this level. That ends the auction. North, with the highest bid, wins the cards.

Winning the auction in a game of bridge doesn't mean you'll find yourself walking away with brand new merchandise. Since that's not the case, what exactly is it that you're bidding for, and what is it that you hope to win?

We have seen that the declarer attempts to make some predetermined number of tricks in one of five strains: spades, hearts, diamonds, clubs or notrump. The defenders try to prevent that from happening. As we shall also see in the section on scoring, should declarer be successful, that player (and her partner) will be rewarded accordingly. If she isn't, then the defenders score points.

What it basically comes down to is this: the more tricks the declaring side contracts for and makes, the greater will be their reward. The more the declaring side falls short of making its **contract**, the greater will be their opponents' reward.

You are actually bidding on two things:

- Where?
- At what level?

Where?

If you could see your partner's hand you would be in an excellent position to know whether your side possessed a lot of cards in one specific suit. You would then have the option of naming that suit as trumps. This ability to name the strain the hand is to be played in is crucial, as the number of tricks available to your side is largely determined by the amount of trumps your side holds. Getting to name the trump suit is a huge advantage. Alternately you may find that you have no great numerical advantage in any suit, so that the best place to play would be in a notrump contract.

At what level?

The way the scoring works, the higher the number of tricks you contract for, the greater will be your reward if you are successful. One-level contracts, requiring seven tricks, start as low as 20 points. Seven-level

contracts, requiring that declarer take all thirteen tricks, can be worth more than 100 times that.

THE AUCTION PART 2

A bridge auction has many of the similarities and constraints shown in the fictitious auction above. At least four distinct guidelines govern the bidding:

- To open the auction, a predetermined minimum bid or higher must be entered.
- The players have to make their bids in a certain order, in this case, clockwise around the table.
- Each bid must be higher than the previous one.
- The auction ends when a bid is followed by three consecutive passes (or rarely, when no one bids at all!).

The lowest level contract in bridge (the one-level) requires that seven tricks be made, book plus one. When you enter a bid, you must understand that what you're doing is announcing to the table that, if you or your partner is declarer, your side intends to take more tricks than the opponents (a total of seven or more) and that you are going to try to take them in one particular strain.

Your bid, therefore, has two parts to it.

The first half of the bid states how many tricks the declaring side will be contracting for.

The second part tells what strain they would like to play in.

A typical **opening bid** (the first bid in the auction) might sound like this: 'One heart', which translates to, 'With hearts as trumps, I think our side can make seven tricks'. That doesn't mean that you have to be looking at seven tricks in your own hand. Bridge is a partnership game. When you bid, you are exchanging useful information with your partner. What you're saying with your bid of one heart is, 'Partner, if you have your share of the remaining hearts and high cards, then, combined with the hearts and high cards in my hand, we should be able to make at least seven tricks.'

For example, the hand you might have for a one heart opening bid might look like this:

♠A 7 2 ♥K Q J 10 5 ♦K 9 ♣4 3 2

With hearts as trumps, you can't guarantee that you'll make seven tricks. But if your partner has his or her share of the remaining eight

hearts (two or three of them) and a few honor cards, then, together, the two of you should have a reasonable chance of success.

Let's now assign you a direction — North, for argument's sake — and make you the dealer. As **dealer**, you get to bid first. If you want to bid, and in this case you do, then you open the auction with a bid of one heart (we'll write this as 1♥ from now on). From this point on, throughout the life of the auction, you will be referred to as the **opening bidder**.

The auction so far:

West	North	East	South
	1♥		

We progress in a clockwise fashion. East gets to speak next. Let's give East the following hand:

♠J 5 4 ♥9 4 ♦J 8 7 4 ♣Q 8 6 5

As you can see, East has no long suit, no aces, no kings and only one queen. East should have no expectation of his side being able to take more tricks than the opponents no matter what strain they might play in. Therefore, he should not get involved at this time. He should say, 'I pass' or 'Pass'. So:

West	North	East	South
	1♥	pass	

This is South's hand:

♠K Q 9 6 3 ♥3 2 ♦A 10 6 5 ♣7 3

South, as it turns out, has her share of the honor cards and a lot of spades. She heard you announce, with your 1♥ opening bid, that, all things being equal, you think your side can take more than half the tricks. But although you like hearts, South has only two little ones. Maybe the two of you would be better off if spades were trumps. South would like to offer that possibility to you and see if you concur. How does she do that?

Let's refer again to our make-believe auction. The bidding started at $1 and rose in increments of 20 cents. There were five possible bids below $2: $1, $1.20, $1.40, $1.60, and $1.80. Bridge also allows for five possible bids between the two levels. Those bids are the four suits and notrump, and each of them has its 'value' — that is, they have a specific

ranking order in the bidding. Bridge's equivalent to the $1 bid, the lowest possible bid, is *one club*, the lowest level (one) and the lowest-ranking suit (clubs). Next up the scale comes *one diamond*, followed in order by *one heart*, and finally *one spade*. (Now you know why we show the suits in that order in bridge diagrams.) While the spade suit is the highest-ranking of the suits, it is not the highest ranking strain. That honor goes to notrump.

In all, there are five possible places to play. From lowest to highest, there is an easy way to remember the order: alphabetically. The order is C, D, H, S, T... **C**lubs, **D**iamonds, **H**earts, **S**pades, no**T**rump.

MONEY BIDS	**BRIDGE equivalency BIDS**
$1	= 1♣
$1.20	= 1♦
$1.40	= 1♥
$1.60	= 1♠
$1.80	= 1NT

One notrump (highest)
One spade
One heart
One diamond
One club (lowest)

Which bid is higher, 1♠ or 2♣?

Any two-level bid must be higher than any one-level bid. ($2 is higher than $1.80.)

Which is a higher bid, four hearts or four diamonds?

Four hearts. On any level, from one to seven, the heart suit outranks the diamond suit.

Our auction so far has been:

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
	1♥	pass	

Now, let's take another look at how South can enter the auction. South's hand, once again, is:

♠ K Q 9 6 3 ♥ 3 2 ♦ A 10 6 5 ♣ 7 3

How can South tell her partner that she likes spades and has her share of the remaining honors?

She can bid 1♠. Spades are higher-ranking than hearts. This bid conveys a specific message to North: 'I am long in spades and have some valuable cards.'

West	North	East	South
	1♥	pass	1♠

Bridge auctions can come in many shapes and sizes from astoundingly complex to ridiculously simple. Here are a few examples that may give you an appreciation of what's to come.

1.

West	North	East	South
pass	pass	1♥	pass
2♥	pass	pass	pass

The winning bid in this auction is 2♥. East and West have contracted for eight tricks (book plus two) with hearts as trumps. Who opened the auction? East. Passing doesn't count. The auction ended after three players passed (we'll write that as 'all pass' from now on).

In this auction, who would be the declarer (i.e. who plays the hand)?

Here, East introduced the heart suit. Therefore, no matter how many times, or how high, West bids hearts, if the contract winds up with hearts as trumps, as it did here, East will be the declarer and play the cards, and West will put the dummy down and watch the hand being played.

BASIC BRIDGE RULE

The declarer is the first person who introduced the strain that the hand is ultimately played in.

2.

West	North	East	South
1♣	1♠	1NT	2♠
all pass			

In this example North-South bought the contract for 2♠.

Who is the declarer?

North. After all, it was North who bid spades first.

How many tricks do East and West need to make in order to beat this contract?

Six. North-South need to make eight tricks. Therefore, to defeat that effort, to keep North-South from fulfilling their contract, East-West have to make six tricks. If they make six tricks, North-South can't make eight (13 – 6 = 7).

3.

West	North	East	South
			pass
pass	1♦	1♠	3♦
pass	3NT	all pass	

Who plays the hand and how many tricks are needed?

North plays the hand. North was the only one who bid notrump, the place this hand will be played. Nine tricks will be needed, book plus three.

4.

West	North	East	South
1NT	pass	2♥	pass
2♠	pass	3♣	pass
4♣	pass	4NT	pass
5♦	pass	5NT	pass
6♦	pass	7♠	all pass

East-West have contracted for all thirteen tricks. If successful, they will have bid and made a grand slam.

Who plays this hand?

Look back to see who first introduced spades. It was West, with his second bid. West will be the declarer.

Example 4 was a complex auction, with five rounds of bidding.

Here are two of the simplest auctions.

5.

West	North	East	South
	1NT	all pass	

A one-bid auction: North-South contracted for seven tricks with no suit as trumps.

6.

West	North	East	South
			all pass

No one bids. Nobody opens the bidding. In this case, the hands get reshuffled and dealt again. This is the only time that three passes don't end an auction — here it takes four!

Let's formalize the elements of the auction and give you the bridge terms that you'll be using. Here's an auction written out, and what follows is a step-by-step description of the process:

West	North	East	South
	pass	1♠	pass
2♠	pass	3♦	pass
4♠	all pass		

North, the dealer, starts the auction with a **call** of pass.

East **opens** the auction with a **bid** of 1♠. Notice that bids name a number and a strain. Bids and passes are both 'calls'. A call, the more general term, is any action taken during the auction. For the life of this auction, East, not North (who passed), will be referred to as the **opening bidder**.

South also passes. West **raises** to 2♠ in response to his partner's opening bid. He is the **responder** and will be referred to as such for the rest of the auction.

North passes. Now East's 3♦ bid is called his **rebid**. After each player makes their initial bid, every subsequent bid by that player is a rebid.

After another pass by South, West rebids 4♠, which ends the auction as the three other players all pass.

Notice the skipping of a level. After East bid 3♦, West could have bid spades at the three-level (3♠) but chose to **jump raise**.

East will declare the hand since he introduced spades. South will make the opening lead. The person to the declarer's left always makes the opening lead. After South leads, the dummy hand will be faced.

Let's review the auction as seasoned players would:

'North-South passed throughout. East opened 1♠, West raised to 2♠. East then tried 3♦, and West jumped to 4♠, which ended the auction.'

Chapter 15

evaluating bridge hands: the point-count system

By looking at some sample hands, you can get a sense of the **value** of your holdings and begin to learn how to bid accordingly:

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

Between A and B, which hand would you rather be dealt? Which 'feels' stronger to you? What you really want to know is, which has more trick-taking potential? Pretty obviously, the answer is Hand B — look at all those aces and kings.

But it's not always that clear-cut. Imagine being dealt each of these three hands:

C. ♠Q J 9 5 ♥K J 9 8 ♦Q 8 4 ♣Q J
D. ♠A 8 7 5 ♥A 9 8 3 ♦A 7 4 ♣9 2
E. ♠K Q J 5 ♥K Q J 3 ♦9 7 4 ♣9 2

Which of these hands feels strongest to you?

Hand C contains the most honor cards (seven: one king, three queens, three jacks), but if I asked you how many tricks you would expect to make from this collection, you'd be hard-pressed to name even one sure winner. After all, there are a lot of honor cards missing from Hand C that can beat even its highest-ranking cards.

Hand D contains the fewest number of honors, three, but they're all aces. That means Hand D will take three sure tricks.

Hand E has six honor cards, and they're in two KQJ sequences. You have no sure tricks; but potentially, if you could drive out your opponents' ♠A and ♥A, then you'd be able to promote four tricks for yourself: two in spades, two in hearts. If, of course…

So which hand feels strongest?

From the time when bridge developed out of whist back in the late 1800s, through the early part of the twentieth century, bidding was poorly defined, cumbersome and based largely on 'feel' ('Feels like, may-

be, together we can take eight tricks'). Of course, 'feel' comes from experience. You can't teach experience. The bidding part of the game was very frustrating and a huge turn-off for new players. As a result, bridge was slow to become popular.

In the early 1900s, an American, Milton Work, revolutionized the bidding by making it simpler and more logical than ever before. He did it by popularizing the now universally accepted **point-count** method for evaluating bridge hands. (Thirty years later, Charles Goren would add the finishing touches to this system.) Work's system was so easy to understand and apply that, in less than a decade, his new point-count system turned bridge from a stuffy, egghead, intellectual pursuit, practiced by only a few, into the most popular card game in history with over 40 million devotees!

The essence of the point-count system is so simple that it seems almost hard to believe it works as well as it does. Yet, once mastered, it can predict with a fair amount of accuracy how many tricks you and your partner will probably be able to make.

Bidding systems had always focused their attention on the four highest-ranking cards, the ace, king, queen and jack. It was common knowledge that these sixteen cards were responsible for winning the preponderance of tricks on any given hand (eight or nine out of the thirteen available). But, as we discussed, these older systems were cumbersome, inaccurate and relied heavily on feel.

What Work's system did was to uncover a simple relationship between the values of these four honor cards. His goal was to make it easy to evaluate hands that contained random combinations of each of these sixteen cards. The method assigns different weights to these cards. He began with the simplest numbers: one, two, three and four, with the jack, the weakest, given the weight (or value) of one, the queen two, the king three, and the ace four.

Ace	**=**	**4 points**
King	**=**	**3 points**
Queen	**=**	**2 points**
Jack	**=**	**1 point**

Notice that 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 = 10. Each suit's points added up to the nice, easily familiar and very workable number, ten. With four suits in the deck and ten points per suit, there would be forty **high-card points** in total. With thirteen possible tricks, each trick would then be worth right around 3 points.

I'm sure at this early stage Mr. Work didn't think much of what would come of these simple and random designations. But he had to

begin somewhere, and these numbers were really the easiest to work with. At the very least, it was a place to start.

So imagine his surprise when he realized that this simple system of his actually enabled him to predict, with quite good accuracy, the total number of tricks available to each side on most bridge hands.

One, two, three, four… Add up the combined **high-card points (HCP)** that each partnership holds and, eureka! Out comes a number that gives you a good idea of how many tricks each partnership can make! It doesn't even matter much what combination of aces, kings, queens and jacks went into the mix; the only thing that is important is the point-count total itself.

Believe it or not, with modifications, the point-count system to which Milton Work gave his name has worked for over a century. It's the system we've used ever since! (By the way, modern computer simulations have put more accurate values to these four honor cards. You ready? Ace = 4.3, King = 3, Queen = 1.8, Jack = 0.8. Not bad, Mr. Work.)

Before we go on, let's try out the point-count system on a real hand:

	♠	♥	♦	♣	
North:	A	9	K	Q	
	K	8	3	9	
	7	5		8	
	4	2			
	7	*0*	*3*	*2*	*= 12*

	♠	♥	♦	♣	
South:	Q	K	J	A	
	J	7	10	K	
	9	6	4	5	
	2				
	3	*3*	*1*	*7*	*= 14*

North: 7 HCP in spades
0 HCP in hearts
3 HCP in diamonds
2 HCP in clubs
= 12 HCP in total

South: 3 + 3 + 1 + 7 = 14 HCP

North + South = 12 + 14 = 26 total high-card points

Now try this one for yourself:

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

How many high-card points are there between the North and South hands?

Counting will reveal that, as with the first hand, there are once again 26 HCP. Here it is, step by step:

North: 3 + 7 + 4 + 3 = 17
South: 4 + 0 + 2 + 3 = 9
North + South = 17 + 9 = 26

Even though the hands in these two examples look totally different, what Work's point-count system predicts is that since both North-South pairs have, between them, the same number of high-card points (HCP), both pairs will take about the same number of tricks.

Let's go back now and look at the three hands that you were asked to think about at the start of this section. Using your newly-acquired skills of evaluation, you can now order those hands, strongest to weakest, rather than simply asking, 'Which feels the strongest?'

C. ♠ Q J 9 5 ♥ K J 9 8 ♦ Q 8 4 ♣ Q J
D. ♠ A 8 7 5 ♥ A 9 8 3 ♦ A 7 4 ♣ 9 2
E. ♠ K Q J 5 ♥ K Q J 3 ♦ 9 7 4 ♣ 9 2

Our new point count method finds that each hand contains the same HCP total of 12. Surprise! They are all of equal strength!*

* Modern players know that Hand D, the one containing three aces, is actually worth close to 13 points. But why quibble?

How many points will a partnership need to make a given number of tricks?

With a total of 40 HCP and thirteen possible tricks, it is now relatively easy to predict just how many points are needed for each level. We mentioned earlier that 40 divided by 13 equals about 3. What this means is that each trick is worth about 3 points. If you wanted to make, say, nine tricks, then between the two of you, you would need to have about 27 HCP: 9 x 3 = 27. This figure is actually very close to the numbers we use today: 26 for the average player, 25 for the expert player.

One, two, three, four.

I told you it was ridiculously simple. In its simplicity lies its beauty and appeal. Any first grader can add to ten. What clarity this system afforded. And what fun! Imagine being able to communicate with your partner in a language that was all of a sudden so easy to learn and so easy to understand.

Bridge had always been acknowledged as the most exciting card game to play. When Work came along with his new 'Work Point-count' system, it also became the most exciting card game to bid. Bridge's one-two punch (bid it, play it) quickly knocked out the competition. Converts from every other card game rushed to embrace bridge.

Chapter 16

understanding the point-count system

If we take the 40 high-card points in the deck, then randomly count out any combination of honors totaling 20 HCP and give it to one partnership, say North-South, and give the other partnership the remaining 20 HCP, *in notrump*, which partnership do you think would make more tricks?

According to Work's point-count system, knowing the number of HCP each partnership has is enough in itself to know how many tricks each side would make. If both sides have the same number of HCP, that would imply both sides would be able to take the same number of tricks.

With thirteen tricks in total and two pairs vying for those tricks, that would come to an even 6½ tricks each.

Each side *should* take 6½ tricks, but of course you can't divide thirteen tricks evenly in real life. We know that each side should have no trouble making six tricks (making book). The fight would be over the seventh trick. We could expect it to be a toss-up as to who gets that seventh trick. Perhaps it would depend on the lead, or on a favorable tenace position. But just based on the number of HCP we wouldn't be able to predict who would make the seventh trick.

What would we have to do, according to the point-count system, to ensure that one side, rather than the other, makes that seventh trick? The answer is that we'd have to give that side the equivalent of one *sure* trick more in HCP. And what is the equivalent of a *sure* trick? In the simplest terms, one of the four aces. In a notrump contract, an ace, being the master card, will always win a trick. An ace has a 4-point value. So, in order to ensure that one side makes that seventh trick, we have to give one side 4 points more than the other side.

ALGEBRA QUIZ 1

(Don't worry, there isn't a second one):

If both sides have a combined total of 40 HCP, and one side has 4 points more than the other, how many points would each side have?

The answer is that one side would have 22, the other 18. As 22 - 18 = 4, there's your 4-point difference.

To see whether you and your partner can make seven tricks *in notrump*, add up your combined high-card points. If the total comes to 22, then you'll probably succeed. If it comes to less, you'll be in a dogfight.

Let's take it up a level.

In notrump, if you wanted to make eight tricks, or two tricks more than book, what is the required point total now?

You would need the equivalent of *two* aces, or two *sure* tricks more than the opponents. Two aces = 8 HCP. You'd need 24 points. That would leave your opponents with 16, since 24 -16 = an 8-point difference.

We will do it one more time, not just for practice, but also to introduce you to the single most important number in bridge!

In notrump, if you wanted to make nine tricks or three tricks more than book, how many HCP do you think you would need?

26 HCP. To make three tricks more than book you would need the equivalent of three *sure* tricks more in ammunition than your opponents. Three aces = 3 tricks = 12 HCP. You would have 26, they would have 14, a 12-point difference.

Twenty-six: there it is, the most important number in bridge.

We will see why that is shortly.

THE NOTRUMP BIDDING BOX			
Number of tricks in notrump you and your partner want to make	HCP you and your partner need	HCP your opponents will be left with	Points needed over opponents
Seven tricks (the one-level: 1NT)	22 points	18 points	4 (one trick)
Eight tricks (the two-level: 2NT)	24 points	16 points	8 (two tricks)
Nine tricks (the three-level: 3NT)	26 points	14 points	12 (three tricks)

If bidding notrump hands simply requires that we know the combined point count of the two hands involved, then all we need to do is figure out how to tell each other how many points we each have and, using simple arithmetic, add the two together and come up with the right bid to fit the total.

For example, count your points in the hand below:

♠ A 7 6 3 ♥ A 5 2 ♦ K J 9 ♣ K J 10

Did you get 16? Now if you have 16 HCP, how many HCP does your partner need to make a one-level notrump contract (1NT)?

The one-level requires your side to make one trick over book. In total, you'll need 4 points more than the opponents. Between you and your partner your side will need 22 HCP. If you bring 16 points to the table, your partner would need to bring 6.

His hand might be:

♠ K 8 ♥ Q 10 3 ♦ 10 8 7 2 ♣ J 8 5 2

What if you wanted to attempt a two-level contract?

You and your partner would need two *sure* tricks more than book. Two *sure* tricks is 8 HCP. Your side would need 8 HCP more than their side. That translates to your side needing 24 combined HCP to their 16 HCP. So in order for your partnership to total 24 HCP, if you bring 16 points to the table, your partner would need to bring 8 HCP.

His hand might be:

♠K 8 2 ♥J 10 3 ♦Q 8 7 2 ♣Q 8 5

You may have noticed that word 'sure' in the phrase 'sure tricks' has been emphasized throughout this discussion. To ensure that one side makes the extra trick, I used the *sure* 4-point value of the ace.

There is an easier way to come really close to these numbers. I've already introduced it. It's as logical as the sure trick method, but it's faster and easier to use. There is a small rounding off factor, but if you can live with it here it is:

> There are 40 high-card points in the deck and 13 possible tricks. 40 divided by 13 comes really, really close to 3 points a trick (rounding off).

Using this method you can quickly and effortlessly make fairly accurate estimations. For example, how many HCP will it take to make, say, eight tricks? Let's see: 8 x 3 = 24. Easy!

By using 3 as the point value of a trick, you will seldom be off by more than a point in your guesstimations. Whenever possible, use this tool to check to see if a contract you're thinking of attempting makes sense.

Chapter 17

notrump bidding

Before going any further, using a deck of cards, I'd like you to make up a bridge hand that meets the following two requirements:

The hand you come up with must contain 15, 16, or 17 HCP — no more, no less.

The hand cannot contain a void (a suit with no cards), nor can it have any singletons (a suit with only one card), nor more than one doubleton (a suit with only two cards).

Give it a go please.

Which of the following hands would meet these two requirements? Remember to sound out the shapes before counting the HCP.

1.
♠ A K 5
♥ A 7 2
♦ K 8 5 4
♣ Q 10 6

2.
♠ 9 8 7 6
♥ A K 5
♦ A 10 7 2
♣ K J

3.
♠ A K J 7 5 4 2
♥ A K 5
♦ 9 6
♣ 7

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

5.
♠ K 9
♥ A Q 3
♦ J 9 8 4 2
♣ K Q 7

6.
♠ A K 9
♥ A Q 5 4
♦ K J 6 2
♣ K 9

7.
♠ A K 4 2
♥ A 3
♦ 9 5
♣ A J 8 6 5

8.
♠ A Q 4
♥ K J 7 6
♦ K J 3
♣ Q 9 6 3

Answers:

1: Yes	16 HCP	No void, no singleton, no doubleton: 4-3-3-3
2: Yes	15 HCP	Only one doubleton: 4-4-3-2
3: No	15 HCP	One singleton: 7-3-2-1
4: No	13 HCP	The distribution is fine: 4-3-3-3
5: Yes	15 HCP	The distribution is fine: 5-3-3-2
6: No	20 HCP	The distribution is fine: 4-4-3-2
7. No	16 HCP	Two doubletons.
8. No	16 HCP	Wrong shape — 14 cards! Did 4-4-3-3 sound right to you?

Now look carefully at Hand 1:

♠ A K 5 ♥ A 7 2 ♦ K 8 5 4 ♣ Q 10 6

See how *evenly* the cards are distributed. We call this a **flat hand**. It is 4-3-3-3 or simply 'four-triple-three'.

Now examine Hand 2:

♠ 9 8 7 6 ♥ A K 5 ♦ A 10 7 2 ♣ K J

The distribution of this hand is 4-4-3-2. We can turn it into a 4-3-3-3 hand by simply changing one card. Let's make the spade ♠6 the ♣6 instead, or have the ♦2 become the ♣2.

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

4-4-3-2 becomes 4-3-3-3.

Look at Hand 5:

♠ K 9 ♥ A Q 3 ♦ J 9 8 4 2 ♣ K Q 7

Here the distribution is 5-3-3-2. What card can we move in order to make this a flat, 4-3-3-3 hand? Change any diamond into a spade.

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

A 5-3-3-2 hand turns into a 4-3-3-3 hand.

The flattest hand possible in bridge has a 4-3-3-3 shape. The next two flattest hands, 4-4-3-2 and 5-3-3-2 are only one card removed from being perfectly flat themselves.

Here's Hand #1 again:

♠ A K 5 ♥ A 7 2 ♦ K 8 5 4 ♣ Q 10 6

Which suit stands out among these as special? If you could name one of them as trumps, which would you choose? You might guess to pick the four-card suit, but wouldn't it depend on how many cards of that suit your partner held? If your partner held zero, one or two diamonds, the opponents would actually have more of this suit than your side.

Let's say for a moment that you went ahead and named your four-card diamond suit as trumps. Okay, which of the remaining three suits would you be likely to want to ruff? Remember, to ruff something you must first be void in that suit. All your other non-trump suits (**side suits**) have three cards in them. That's a lot of work to do to create a void. There really isn't much likelihood of creating extra tricks this way.

What strain comes to mind when you have no obvious trump suit and nothing to trump in your hand?

You should think in terms of suggesting that you play this hand in notrump.

Here's how it's done. This hand is 4-3-3-3, one of the three notrump shapes. It also contains 16 HCP. That fits within the 3-point range we talked about at the top of the chapter. If you satisfy both of these requirements, then, provided no one before you has entered a bid, when it's your turn to speak, you can open the auction with a bid of 1NT.

Look at all the information you've conveyed to everyone at the table (the opponents are listening in):

With this one bid you have narrowed the number of HCP in your hand, which could have anywhere from 0 to almost 40 points, down to a three-point range: 15-17. (A 3-point range, notice: the range of a trick.)

You have also narrowed the distribution of your hand from thirty-six possible shapes, down to only three… 4-3-3-3, 4-4-3-2 and 5-3-3-2.

Now that you've communicated to your partner what you're holding in your hand, what does he or she do with that information?

Chapter 18

notrump bidding and scoring

Let's finish the auction we began in the previous chapter.

You, West, opened the bidding 1NT. Let's say it was followed by three passes. An opening bid followed by three passes ends the auction. You have just contracted for seven tricks with nothing as trumps. Your left-hand opponent (LHO), North, leads a card, dummy is tabled, you play out the hand and, when the smoke clears, you have made your contract!

What now?

Time to score it up!

Okay. What's the score for bidding and making a 1NT contract?

Bridge scoring works on the metric system — 100 is a really important number, as you'll see shortly. Making this 1NT contract happens to be worth 40 points. You contracted for seven tricks and you made seven tricks. Every subsequent trick you *contract for and make* in a notrump strain is worth 30 points.

- **Contracting for** and making 1NT = 40 points
- **Contracting for** and making 2NT would then be worth 40 + 30 = 70 points.
- **Contracting for** and making 3NT would get you to 100 points.

100 points! This is your main goal. Bidding and making a 100-point contract earns you a huge bonus. So big that it actually is the driving force behind the bidding.

Bidding and making a 3NT contract gets you a 500-point bonus! That's right, 500 points. This bonus is called the **game** bonus. A game is any contract worth at least 100 points. There are two other bonus levels. Had you contracted for and made twelve tricks (**slam**), that is, all but one trick, that would have got you an additional bonus of 750 points on top of the game bonus. All thirteen tricks, bid and made, is called a **grand slam**, and that would get you 1500 points on top of the game bonus.

Rule 1 about bonuses: you've got to be 'in it' to 'win it'. If your auction had not brought you to 3NT, had you and your partner stopped in say 1NT, even though you made those nine tricks, your score would have simply been 40 +30 +30 or a mere 100 points, just the trick value.

No bonus would have been awarded. The words 'contracting for' were carefully written above in bold face for that reason. Bridge rewards daring. See why that 500-point bonus drives the auction? If nine tricks can be made, if 'game' is a possibility, we need to be sure we get there.

What happens when you contract for some number of tricks and fail to make them?

For every trick you miss by, every **undertrick**, the opponents are awarded 100 points.

Now that we have some idea of the pluses and minuses involved, let's see if we can appreciate what goes into your partner's thinking when he hears you open 1NT.

Your 1NT bid says to him that you have one of three possible suit distributions (4-3-3-3, 4-4-3-2 or 5-3-3-2) and one of only three possible totals of high-card points (15, 16, or 17). From the notrump bidding box, 26 was the combined number of HCP your partnership needed in order to be able to have a good chance at making nine tricks. Let's review how we got to that number.

With the 40 HCP divided equally, no side is assured more than six tricks (book): 20-20.

When one side has the equivalent of an ace (4 points) more than the other, that side should be able to make one trick more than book: 22-18.

When one side has the equivalent of two aces (8 points) more than the other, that side should be able to make two tricks more than book: 24-16.

When one side has the equivalent of three aces (12 points) more than the other, that side should be able to make three tricks more than book: 26-14.

22 HCP = 7 tricks
24 HCP = 8 tricks
26 HCP = 9 tricks

These numbers refer to the number of HCP needed to make the corresponding number of tricks when playing in notrump.

Here's some practice:

How do we say a seven-trick contract with nothing as trumps?

1NT.

How do we say a nine-trick contract with nothing as trumps?

3NT.

A 1NT opening bid shows a hand with 15, 16, or 17 HCP.

When you open 1NT, what is the minimum number of HCP your partner would need to be holding in order to guarantee that the partnership will have the 26 HCP needed to contract for game?

Since you could be holding as few as 15 HCP, in order to reach 26 your partner would need to have at least 11 HCP: 11+ 15 = 26.

For example:

♠K 9 6 ♥K 10 5 ♦A 8 4 2 ♣J 7 3

If you, West, open the bidding with 1NT, and your LHO (left hand opponent) passes, your partner, with these 11 HCP, should raise you to game, to 3NT.

Why the eagerness to jump to 3NT? As I've said, it's all about the bonus. This is good strategy and good bidding. If you don't raise your partner's 1NT bid, and he subsequently makes nine tricks, your side will not get those extra 500 points.

THE HARSH REALITY

Okay, time to prepare you for real life at the bridge table. Having 26 combined points does not *ensure* that you will make nine tricks. If it did, there would be no need to play out the hand. Using our '3 points is a trick' method, we can calculate quickly that 27 points is closer to what's needed to ensure the contract: 3 x 9 = 27. Looks like you're at least a point short.

In reality, what 26 points does give you is about a 50-50 shot at nine tricks. Every additional HCP increases your chances significantly. So why take a chance with only 26 points and a 50-50 proposition? Why not wait until you have 27 or even 30 HCP, when the percentages for success will be in the high 90s?

Let's take a lesson from the casino.

How do you make a small fortune in Vegas? Start with a large one. No, not that lesson.

Are you familiar with roulette? A wheel that contains an equal number of red and black spaces is spun in one direction. A ball is spun in the other. When the ball comes to a stop, it will land in either a red or a black square. You bet either red or black, so it's a 50-50 proposition.

The casino pays you accordingly. Let's say you bet $10 on black. If it stops on black, you win. The house matches your bet, and you come away with $20. If it comes up red you lose, and they take your money.

What would happen if the odds changed? Imagine if when you won, instead of paying you an extra $10, they paid you an extra $30. Trust me, if that were the case, you wouldn't be reading this book right now. You'd be in a line several blocks long waiting to take the house's money.

Won't happen.

In bridge it happens all the time!

That's the significance of the 500-point bonus. It's well worth the risk because the payoff is so high.

Take a look at the difference between two partnerships who are bidding on their 26-point hands. Pair A is comprised of two timid souls who just can't stand to lose. They hate to take any risk at all, preferring to go plus whenever they can. Pair B are two players who always play the odds. If the odds say bid, they bid. Let's follow their separate strategies over two hands, where each pair has exactly 26 HCP, and compare how they fare.

On both hands, conservative Pair A stays out of danger. Rather than bid 3NT and risk defeat, they stop in 1NT; they know they're a shoo-in to make it because 1NT only requires 22 HCP and they have 26. And since making nine tricks with only 26 HCP is only a 50-50 proposition, true to form, the first time around they make only eight tricks; the second time they are dealt 26, it being a 50-50 proposition, they make nine tricks. They are happy; they went plus both times. This is what their score would look like:

Hand 1: bidding 1NT, making 8 tricks: 40 + 30	+ 70 points
Hand 2: bidding 1NT, making 9 tricks: 40 + 30 + 30	+ 100 points
Total	+ 170 points

Pair B, on the other hand, bid 3NT both times. On both hands they make the same number of tricks as Pair A:

Hand 1: bidding 3NT, making 8 tricks: one undertrick	- 100 points
Hand 2: bidding 3NT, making 9 tricks: 100 + 500 bonus	+ 600 points
Total	+ 500 points

Pair B did almost three times as well as Pair A! On a 50-50 shot they got 3:1 odds. Turns out not to be such a gamble at all.

The takeaway is this: because of the bonus, every time your side has 26 HCP you must look for game.

You may be wondering why some 3NT contracts make and some fail. There are many reasons. If you need to take one or two finesses to get to nine tricks and they fail, chances are you'll go down. If the opponents lead a long suit and they're able to knock out your stopper(s) quickly, chances are you'll go down. If you need a key suit to split evenly in order to establish long-suit winners, and it does, chances are you'll make. And of course if you play poorly, chances are you'll go down.

RESPONDING TO YOUR PARTNER'S BID OF 1NT

Say your partner opens the bidding 1NT. You know that he has 15-17 HCP. What is the *least* number of points you need so that between you and your partner you have enough points to make a game possible?

The partnership needs a minimum of 26 combined points. The very most he can have is 17. So the least you must hold to have a chance of reaching 26 would be 9.

17 + 9 = 26

When your partner opens 1NT, 9 is the minimum number of points you need to start thinking about bidding a game. If you have fewer than 9 points, 26 combined points is out of reach and you should choose to pass.

If you had the following hands, and your partner opened 1NT, what would your response be?

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

You would have to pass on all of them. None of these hands contains even the minimum 9 points you need to have any chance of reaching 26 combined HCP.

What if you have exactly 9 points? If your partner has 17, you want to be in game. If your partner has only 15 or 16 points, then you don't.

15 + 9 = 24 (no) 16 + 9 = 25 (no) 17 + 9 = 26 (yes)

When you have exactly 9 HCP, you need to know if partner has exactly 17. How do you say, 'Partner, do you have 17 points?' There is a bid that asks this question.

What bid might that be? Did you guess 2NT? That's right. A bid of 2NT says, 'Partner, I'd like to bid 3NT, but I'm just not strong enough. I'm close but I need you to be at the top of your range, at 17.'

I suspect there are some of you wondering right now how you know what that 2NT bid means. If you are the opening 1NT bidder, and your partner raises you to 2NT, how are you supposed to know that your partner was **inviting** you to bid 3NT and not just telling you that, as a partnership, you can make 2NT?

Think about the scoring. How many total scoring points do you receive for bidding and making 2NT? The answer is 70.

How many points do you get for bidding 1NT and making it with one overtrick? Again the answer is 70.

It's the same total. In neither case are you eligible for the 500-point game bonus, so does it make sense to bid 2NT over 1NT unless there is something else going on? Eight tricks are harder to make then seven. When you respond 2NT, you've got your sights set on something greater, the 500-point bonus. When you raise to 2NT you're not hoping to play there. You're hoping your partner will come back with a 3NT bid.

If your partner opens the bidding with 1NT and you have 9 points, raise to 2NT. If your partner *doesn't* have 17 points, he'll pass and you will play in 2NT. (Remember, it takes 24 points to make 2NT. Even if your partner has only 15 or 16, when you add your 9 points, you'll still have the 24 or 25 points needed to make 2NT.)

To review, when your partner bids 1NT:

- If you have 11 or more points, *go for the game* (bid 3NT).
- If you have exactly 9 points, *invite the game* (bid 2NT).
- If you have fewer than 9 points, *let your partner play in 1NT* (pass).

There's a number missing from this equation. What do you do if your partner bids 1NT and you have 10 points?

Because of the equities involved, you must gamble and bid 3NT. There just isn't another bridge bid available between 1NT and 3NT. If you have 10 points and your partner has 15, 16 or 17, here are the totals you might have:

15 + 10 = 25 16 + 10 = 26 17 + 10 = 27

A 26-point total is the 50-50 spot. If you have 10 points, then two out of three times you will have enough ammunition to make a game. One in

three times you'll have only 25 combined points, and you will be a distinct underdog. There will be only about a 40% chance of success, but even then the 500-point bonus just about covers that.

MEMORY AND BIDDING

These are the four bridge auctions we've discussed so far:

Opener	Responder
1NT	pass

Opener	Responder
1NT	2NT
pass	

Opener	Responder
1NT	2NT
3NT	pass

Opener	Responder
1NT	3NT
pass	

Bridge auctions can get really complicated. When the opponents start getting into the bidding too, the total number of auctions possible becomes astronomical. There are more possible bridge auctions than there are stars in our galaxy. For this reason alone, you need to start thinking about memorizing as little as possible. Instead, focus on understanding the logic behind the bids. Otherwise, a time will come when the weight of all the things you have tried to commit to memory will make them collapse like a house of cards.

With this in mind, here's what needs to be memorized to this point:

15-17 The number of HCP needed to open 1NT.
26 The number of points needed in a partnership to try for game.

That's it! Have you done that already? If not, now's the time.

In the rest of the book you will be asked to memorize numbers only a couple more times.

Before we go any farther, make sure you understand the logic behind the responses to partner's opening 1NT bid: why it is logical to pass with 0-8 points, invite game with 9, and bid 3NT with 10 or more.

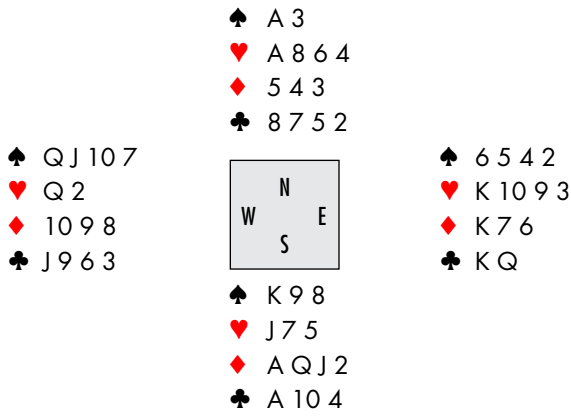
If you have to reread this section, do it before continuing. These bids are your building blocks. Own them. Everything that comes from now on is built on them.

How often do you think you'll have exactly 9 HCP when your partner opens 1NT?

Actually, quite often. There are 40 points in the deck. Partner's average 1NT is 16 HCP. That leaves 24 HCP for the other three players: on average, 8 each.

Chapter 19

practice in bidding and playing the hand



THE AUCTION

South deals and says (to herself) 4-3-3-3, a notrump shape. Then she counts her HCP: 15, a 1NT number.

When you are dealt a notrump hand, you have to find a reason *not* to open 1NT. Here, there is none. Not only does South have a perfect notrump shape, but she has high cards in every suit (which is not essential, but it can't hurt).

South opens 1NT. West passes.

North hears her partner open 1NT. She has two aces, or 8 HCP. Even if South has 17, she won't make it to 26 (17 + 8 = 25). Close, but no cigar. Unable to reach 26, North passes.

East also passes, ending the auction.

The person who first named the strain in which the hand will be played becomes the declarer. That was South. The dummy will be South's partner, North. The person sitting to the left of the declarer makes the opening lead, in this case it is West. With his opening lead, West starts the defense for his side. He must choose his lead carefully.

Where do you look for tricks in a notrump contract?

Length: try to develop long-suit tricks for your side.

The defenders need at least seven tricks to defeat a 1NT contract. High cards alone are almost never enough. Through fairly accurate bidding, most declarers find that they have about the right number of HCP needed to come mighty close to making what they bid. To defeat them, it usually takes a combination of high cards and length. The high cards can take care of themselves. The defenders' strategy should be to try to set up long-suit tricks for themselves. In this example, West has to choose between two four-card suits. His spade suit is the stronger of the two, plus it contains a three-card honor sequence. If the ♠Q and ♠J can eliminate the opponents' ♠A and ♠K, then his ♠10 will be promoted to the master card and his ♠7 may take a long-suit trick. The spade suit offers East-West two tricks in potential, an excellent choice for an attacking opening lead. He leads the ♠Q, the top of the sequence, and the dummy comes down.

THE STRATEGY

Let's turn our attention to declarer, who takes stock of the situation, concentrating first on the card led and the information it carries, not only to defender's partner, but to her as well. When she sees that ♠Q she should be thinking, 'It looks to be the top of a sequence in a four- or five-card suit.' The good news is that she has two stoppers, the ♠A and the ♠K. She visualizes West's spade holding as ♠QJ10x or ♠QJ10xx (the x's stand for any low spot card).

South knows she has two sure tricks in spades, but the opponents have all the potential in this suit on their side. Once those two stoppers are gone, there will be nothing to prevent East-West from cashing their winning spades.

Turning to hearts, she has one more than the opponents, seven to their six. Though she is missing the ♥KQ109, the suit has some potential. If the missing six cards are divided evenly, her fourth heart will provide one long-suit trick. Statistically, an even 3-3 split occurs a little over 1/3 of the time (easy to remember), so developing a long-suit trick here offers declarer only about a one-in-three chance of success.

South's club suit also contains seven cards and is also divided 4-3. She has the ♣A, a quick trick, but again only a one-in-three chance of establishing a long-suit trick.

Diamonds, a girl's best friend! Again she has only a 4-3 fit, again she has the ace, and again only a one-in-three chance of establishing a

long-suit trick. But here the suit has internal strength, two other honors. Here there is more than just length potential.

Analyzing each suit is one thing. Remembering the conclusions reached in each situation, and then coming up with an overall plan, is something else. To begin, separate quick tricks from potential tricks and concentrate on not using those sure winners until you have tried to develop the extra tricks needed to fulfill your contract.

There are five quick tricks: two spades, one heart, one diamond, and one club. South has contracted for 1NT, which requires seven tricks, so she needs two more. She plans to look to her diamonds to develop those additional tricks.

Let's look again at the North-South diamond holdings:

♦ 5 4 3

♦ A Q J 2

Is South hoping to find the missing ♦K in the East or West hand?

Another way of asking this question is, 'Does South want the missing king to be over or under the ♦AQJ tenace?'

She would like to find East with that ♦K, sitting right under her surround position, her tenace, because then it would be finessable. If West held the ♦K, that card would be well positioned to capture South's ♦Q or ♦J. If the ♦K is with East, it will be trapped under South's tenace position, providing declarer takes care to lead diamonds *twice* from the dummy, through the East hand. With this in mind declarer should win the opening spade lead in dummy.

As an aside, look at the amount of thinking involved *before* declarer played even one card. A plan (the strategy) had to be made. It always amuses me that beginning players often play so much faster than experts to the first trick.

THE TECHNIQUE

All that's left now is carrying out the strategy, the plan.

Trick 1: West leads the ♠Q and declarer wins this trick in dummy, in the hand opposite her tenace position. Her plan is to start leading diamonds from North's weak diamond holding, through East, so why not start by winning that first trick in the North hand?

Trick 2: Declarer leads the ♦3 from the dummy, East plays the ♦7, and she finesses the ♦J successfully as West follows with the ♦6.

Trick 3: Now what? Which diamond should she play next? She shouldn't play any diamond, at least not from her hand. She needs to repeat the finesse by bridging back to dummy and starting the whole process over. Declarer uses North's ♥A for that (transportation) purpose.

Trick 4: Now the lead is back in the North hand. A diamond spot card is again led from the weak hand toward the strong hand, the hand with the tenace position. East plays the ♦8, and South successfully repeats the finesse, this time using her ♦Q, as West follows with the ♦10.

South now has three diamond tricks to go along with her four outside winners and can fulfill her 1NT contract.

In order to carry out her plan South needed to take two successful finesses, each requiring that she start by leading a diamond from the dummy. To do that she needed to have two entries to the North hand. Before playing even one trick she needed to think through the whole sequence of plays and make sure her plan was not flawed. The more experienced you get, the easier it will be to visualize this whole series of plays.

BASIC BRIDGE RULE

When taking a finesse, remember to lead from the weak hand to the strong hand.

♦ 5 4 3

♦ 10 9 8 ♦ K 7 6

♦ A Q J 2

This was the way the diamond suit actually split around the table. After two finesses, South cashed the ♦A and dropped the ♦K. When she saw that both opponents followed to that third trick she realized that the suit had broken 4-3-3-3 around the table and was able to take a fourth trick with her ♦2.

Chapter 20

the point-count system and length

The point-count method we've used so far, the one devised around 1915 and poplarized by Milton Work, got a fine-tuning some thirty years later. Charles Goren, perhaps the most famous name in bridge history, brought **distribution** into the equation, completing the bidding point-count framework. Goren's original method added points for short suits: doubletons, singletons and voids. Modern players, though, consider it more logical to add points for long suits — suits longer than four cards. These are called **length points (LP)**.

Which of these hands do you think offers more potential?

1. ♠ 9 7 3
   ♥ 8 6 4
   ♦ 9 8 2
   ♣ A K 9 7

2. ♠ 9 7 3
   ♥ 8 6
   ♦ 9 8
   ♣ A K 9 7 6 5

If you're holding Hand 1 with 7 HCP, and your partner opens 1NT, you should pass. But Hand 2 has a good long six-card club suit to go along with the 7 HCP. Visualize your partner's hand. Since he opened with a notrump bid, you know he has at least two clubs (he can't have a singleton or void — he is 4-3-3-3, 4-4-3-2 or 5-3-3-2). He might even have three or four clubs. There is a strong possibility that your club suit will produce lots of tricks.

When your club holding is AK9765, and your partner is known to have two or more clubs, let's look at several ways the club suit may be laid out around the table:

Possibility 1

This distribution will produce six tricks.

Possibility 2

This layout will also produce six tricks.

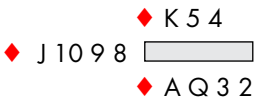
At its core, bridge is a game of tricks. Points were devised to make it easier for you to evaluate your hand. But don't lose sight of the forest for the trees. In the end it's all about the tricks! When your partner opens 1NT and you know your hand might provide five or six tricks for him, his 15, 16 or 17 HCP should be more than enough to provide the three or four additional tricks you'll need to make game.

Adding points for long suits takes the trick-taking power of length into account. At this time, all you have to do is add one point for each card in a suit after the first four. With just four cards, chances are quite high that another player will also have four or more cards in that suit. But once you have one hand holding a five-card suit, it becomes highly unlikely that any of the other three players would also have five.

ADDING THESE LENGTH POINTS TO THE EQUATION

In the following examples, you and your partner sit North-South. How many diamond tricks will you take? How about your opponents?

A.



B.

C.

A. You will take three tricks; the opponents will take one.
B. You will take five tricks; the opponents will take none.
C. You will take four tricks; they will take one.

Okay — a quick quiz. Counting HCP *and* LP (length points) in the hands below, how would you respond to your partner's opening bid of 1NT? Your choices are pass, 2NT or 3NT.

A.	**B.**	**C.**
♠ K 5 3	♠ Q 5 3	♠ Q J
♥ 7 5 4	♥ K 4	♥ K 5 4
♦ K Q 10 3 2	♦ 3 2	♦ 4 3 2
♣ 5 2	♣ K J 7 6 4 2	♣ J 10 9 4 2

Answers

A. Invite with 2NT. You have 8 HCP + 1 LP = 9 total points (TP). Your partner could have 17 points. If he does, your total will come to 26. By bidding 2NT, you ask your partner to bid 3NT only if he has 17 points.
B. Jump to 3NT. You have 9 HCP + 2 LP = 11 TP. Even if your partner has 15 HCP, the fewest he can have to open 1NT, you still have enough to reach 26.
C. Pass. You have 7 HCP + 1 LP = 8 TP. Even if your partner has 17 points, 17 + 8 = 25, you still won't be able to reach 26.

NOTRUMP REVIEW: OPENING AND RESPONDING

The following six hands may or may not be 1NT opening hands. Remember the two criteria: a 3-point range (add LP now you know about them) and only three possible distributions. In the following examples, count the points first. If they come to 15, 16, or 17, then *say* the distribution. If you hear yourself saying 'four-triple-three' (4-3-3-3), 'four-four-three-two' (4-4-3-2), or 'five-three-three-two' (5-3-3-2), you know you've got a notrump opening.

Are the following 1NT opening hands?

1.	**2.**	**3.**
♠ A K 6 3	♠ A 6 3 2	♠ A K 9
♥ K 8	♥ K 9	♥ K J 6 3
♦ K Q 7 4	♦ A K 8 4 3	♦ 9 8 7
♣ K 5 4	♣ Q 5	♣ Q 7 6

4.
♠ A Q 6 3
♥ Q J 7 4
♦ 7
♣ K Q J 9

5.
♠ K Q 9 4
♥ A J 9 2
♦ A K 4
♣ 3 2

6.
♠ A K 7
♥ K J 6
♦ Q J 2
♣ Q 7 6

Answers

1. No. Right distribution (4-4-3-2), but too many HCP (18) for 1NT.
2. No. Right number of HCP + LP (17), but wrong distribution (two doubletons).
3. No. Right distribution (4-3-3-3), but too few HCP (13).
4. No. Wrong distribution: a singleton is not allowed. 15 HCP.
5. Yes. Right HCP (17); right distribution (4-4-3-2).
6. No. Say the shape: 3-3-3-3. That's twelve cards! Did I get you again? You would be surprised how often hands get played with one person having too few or too many cards. This embarrassing moment will never happen to you if you take the time to sound out the distribution.

Now imagine that your partner opens 1NT. If each of the following hands were yours, how would you respond? Again, your choices for the time being are limited to pass, 2NT and 3NT.

7.
♠ Q J 9 4
♥ 7 5
♦ A K 8 7
♣ A 9 4

8.
♠ Q 8 7 6
♥ Q 7 4 2
♦ Q 10 3
♣ Q 7

9.
♠ Q J 9
♥ 7 5
♦ A 10 9 8 4
♣ J 9 3

10.
♠ K Q 7
♥ A K Q
♦ 8 7 6
♣ 5 4 3 2

11.
♠ Q 7
♥ Q 6
♦ J 7 6 5
♣ 10 8 7 4 2

12.
♠ 7 3
♥ 8 4
♦ 9 5
♣ A K 9 8 7 6 2

7. 3NT. Your partner has 15-17 points, you have 14. Together you have 29-31 points, which should produce an easy game.
8. Pass. You only have 8 points. Even if your partner has 17, you cannot reach 26.
9. 2NT. Your 8 HCP + 1 LP = 9 points. Invite your partner to bid 3NT, because if he has 17, you want to be in game.
10. 3NT. You'll make game with this hand on sheer power. Does it matter that you have no high cards in diamonds or clubs? No, it

doesn't. Partner has 15-17, and you have most of the high cards in spades and hearts. Where do you think partner's are? They have to be mostly in diamonds and clubs, no?

11. Pass. With 5 HCP and 1 LP, you might not even make 1NT.
12. 7-2-2-2, a new shape. At first glance this looks like a pass, but with those long strong clubs, you should bid 3NT. Partner has at least two or three clubs to go with your seven. Between the two of you, your clubs alone might produce seven tricks. His 15-17 points should produce the other two tricks. For those of you who have already fallen under the spell of counting points (though, let's hope, not to the exclusion of everything else), in terms of points, this seven-card club holding would add up this way: 7 HCP and 3 LP. With 10 TP the correct response would be 3NT. Isn't it nice that it is consistent?

Chapter 21

hands to play

In each of these examples, try to:

Bid the North-South hands.

Study West's opening lead, then plan your play.

HAND 1

Dealer South

♠ A Q J 5
♥ 8 7 3
♦ 7 5 2
♣ 9 6 4

♦K led

♠ K 6
♥ A 9 6 4
♦ A 9 3
♣ A 8 7 5

THE BIDDING

Think it through. Start with South's shape. It is 4-4-3-2. Remember always to say it longest to shortest, so the sound of thirteen cards divided four ways becomes very familiar. Next, count the HCP: they come to 15. Right shape, right HCP (15-17) for a 1NT opening bid. Open 1NT.

Let's have West pass.

Same process with North: 4-3-3-3 and 7 HCP. With no extra points for length, North adds her 7 to the maximum of 17 that partner could have for her 1NT opening bid. The total falls short of the 26 needed to try for game. North passes.

East also passes.

A bid followed by three passes ends the auction. 1NT by South becomes the final contract.

Here is the whole auction in a diagram:

West	North	East	South
			1NT
all pass			

THE PLAY: UNBLOCKING

Since South is the declarer, West makes the opening lead and chooses the ♦K.

Before dummy comes down, what does everyone already know about West's diamond holding?

They know that he has at least four diamonds, three of which should be in sequence, headed by the ♦K.

North tables the dummy. Say dummy's shape: 4-3-3-3.

THE STRATEGY

You are the declarer. To start, identify your sure winners, the tricks you're starting with. Three bare aces in hearts, diamonds and clubs. What about spades? With four in length and the top four honors between the two hands you will make four spade tricks, provided you take care to cash (unblock) the ♠K first before using your remaining spot card to bridge over to North's holding. You should take three aces and four spade tricks for your required total of seven. There is little chance for an eighth trick, especially if West began with five diamonds.

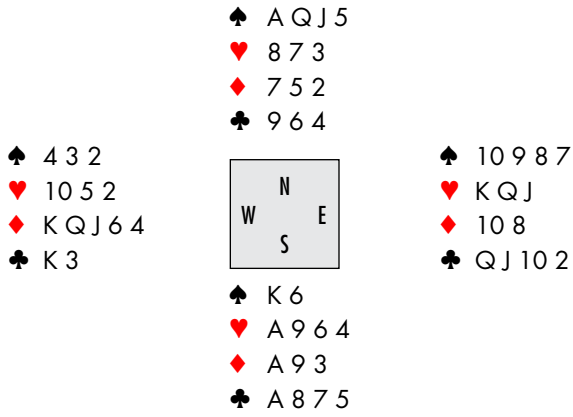
THE TECHNIQUE (HOW WILL YOU DO IT?)

Win the first trick. When tackling the spade suit, think 'honors from the short side first'. The North hand has three honors in a row, the South hand one. The North hand has its 'ducks in a row'. Get the 'odd duck' out of the way first.

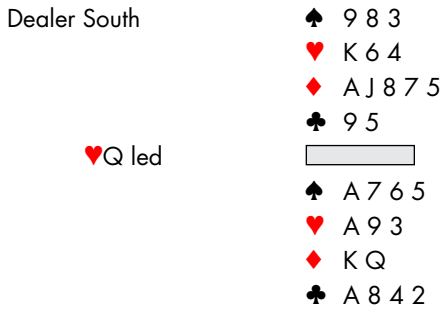
Trick 2 should contain the ♠K.

Trick 3: Use that remaining ♠6 to bridge across to those ducks… er, spades. Seven tricks are now yours.

The complete hand was:



HAND 2



THE BIDDING

South is 4-4-3-2, has 17 HCP and no LP. She opens 1NT. West passes. North is 5-3-3-2, one of the three notrump shapes, and has 8 HCP plus 1 LP for that fifth diamond. With 9 TP there is a possibility of 26 combined points provided South is at the top of her range. North invites by bidding 2NT. South does have 17 points and accepts by bidding 3NT. So 3NT by South becomes the final contract.

West	North	East	South
			1NT
pass	2NT	pass	3NT
all pass			

THE PLAY: TRANSPORTATION AND UNBLOCKING

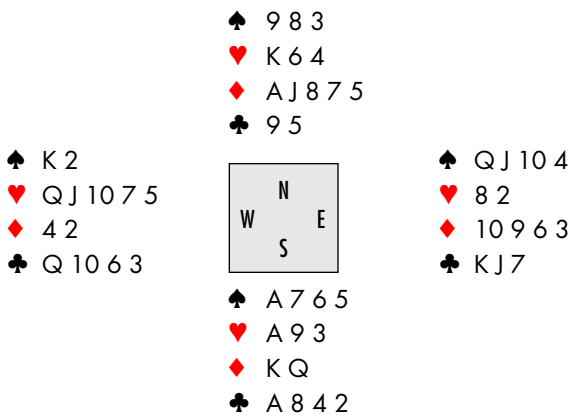
West leads the ♥Q, indicating a sequence and at least four cards in the suit.

Dummy is tabled. Say 5-3-3-2. Your strategy starts by counting your sure winners first: one spade, two hearts, one club. That comes to only four. Five more are needed. Careful planning will produce all five of those tricks from diamonds. I did say 'careful planning': look before you leap. Your play to this first trick happens to be crucial. Which card should you use to win the first trick, dummy's ♥K or declarer's ♥A? Take your time and try planning out the first few tricks.

As with Hand 1, it is critical to unblock your honors. But this hand presents an additional problem. Your thought process should go something like this: 'I will win the opening lead *somewhere*. I intend to unblock my ♦K and ♦Q by playing them to the second and third tricks. Then I'll play my ♦A and ♦J... Oh, I need to able to get to them, don't I?'

Have you noticed the problem? How will you get over to dummy's diamonds after you clear out your ♦K and ♦Q? Let's see, does the dummy have an **outside entry** (that is, an entry outside of diamonds)? Yes: the ♥K, which you now realize must be carefully preserved until it's needed for that purpose. Therefore, at Trick 1, having done all that thinking, you let the ♥Q lead come around to your ♥A, winning it in your hand. Then you unblock your two diamond honors and cross to dummy with that carefully preserved heart king!

The complete hand was:



If you win that first trick in dummy you will have to **overtake** your diamond king or queen with dummy's ace in order to get over there. This will allow East's four-card holding to the ten to win a trick, and you'll only get three diamond tricks rather than five.

HAND 3

Dealer South

♠ A
♥ 8 6 3
♦ A K 9 7 4
♣ 7 6 5 2

♠3 led

♠ K 9 5 4
♥ A Q 7
♦ 6 5 2
♣ A K 8

THE BIDDING

South has an absolutely flat, four-triple-three hand with 16 HCP so she opens 1NT. North has a 5-4-3-1 shape: not a notrump shape. But that singleton happens to be an ace, which she hopes will balance out the obvious flaw in her distribution. Anyway, as responder, she's not restricted as much by shape as opener. So with 11 HCP and 1 LP, she should raise directly to 3NT since 26+ plus points are assured. She must not invite with 2NT, as that bid would show exactly 9 points and express doubt about the right contract.

West	North	East	South
			1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

THE PLAY: TRANSPORTATION AND DUCKING

West leads the ♠3, and the dummy comes down.

What is West leading from?

He's leading from length, at least four or five cards, but doesn't have a sequence. He could have something like ♠Q1083, or ♠Q10832.

BASIC BRIDGE RULE

When leading from a suit of four or more cards containing an honor, if you don't have a sequence, it is best to lead your fourth highest card.

Dummy comes down; plan the play. Say dummy's shape first, 5-4-3-1. Then start by counting your winners.

THE STRATEGY

Again, we have an entry problem. In order to get to nine tricks, we must establish our long diamond suit. This is no surprise. In notrump contracts, establishing a long suit is often the central theme for declarer. It is almost always the central theme for the defenders too.

The lead of the ♠3 unfortunately deprives declarer of a vital entry to the North hand. After the first trick, the only cards that will permit the declarer to bridge across to the North hand are the ♦A and ♦K. The underlying principle is this: when faced with a hand that has no outside entry, you'll have to use the honor cards in the suit you are trying to establish as entries.

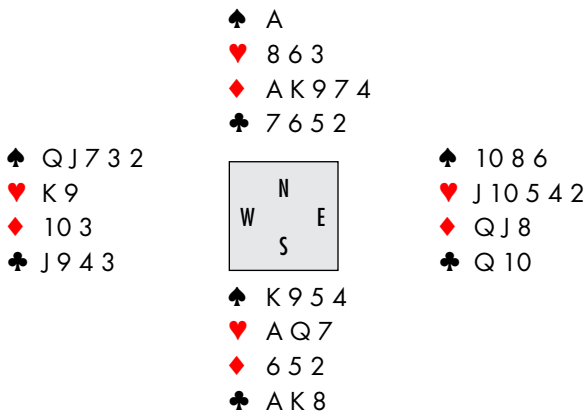
THE TECHNIQUE

Hint: when you have to lose a trick lose it right away.

After winning the first trick with the ♠A, give the opponents what is theirs. If the outstanding five diamonds are divided 3-2, they are entitled to a diamond trick. So give it to them, right away. At Trick 2, **duck** a diamond by playing a small diamond from both your hand and dummy's. You're hoping the outstanding diamonds divide as evenly as they can, 3 opposite 2, which they will about two thirds of the time. Good odds. You'll then still have the carefully preserved ♦A and ♦K, which will win the second and third round of this suit and will place you in the dummy, ready to cash your long-suit winners.

All told, you'll take four diamond tricks, two spade tricks, one heart trick and two club tricks. (If you get the chance, you might even be able to finesse that ♥Q. But be careful: do it only if losing the finesse cannot possibly cost you the contract.)

Here was the complete deal:



If, instead of ducking that first diamond trick, you play off your ♦A and ♦K, then give East-West their diamond winner, how will you be able to bridge across to those two beautifully established diamonds in the now entryless dummy?

When you absolutely have to lose a trick in a suit, think about when you should lose it.

HAND 4

Dealer South

♠ A 7 6 2
♥ 7 5 4
♦ A 6 3
♣ K 4 3

♦Q led

♠ K 5
♥ Q J 2
♦ K 4 2
♣ A Q 10 5 2

THE BIDDING: SHORT AND SWEET

With a 5-3-3-2 shape, 15 HCP, and 1 LP, South opens 1NT. With 11 HCP, and 4-3-3-3 shape, North raises directly to 3NT.

West	North	East	South
			1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

THE PLAY: THE FINESSE

The ♦Q is led, presumably from four or more diamonds headed by a sequence. Dummy appears and, after you say 4-3-3-3 to yourself, you begin to take stock by counting your winners.

With just two spades and two diamond winners, it is clear we need as many clubs as we can make. Five would be nice. Otherwise we will have to tackle the heart suit and try to build a slow winner there before the opponents are able to come to five tricks themselves.

5-**3**-3-**2** or 5-**4**-3-**1**

We have eight clubs; the opponents have five. The club suit may be 5-3-3-2 or 5-4-3-1 around the table. If the opponents' outstanding clubs split 3-2, your ♣AKQ will wipe them all out. But what if the suit breaks 4-1,

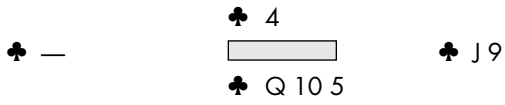
which it will about a quarter of the time? (Easy to remember.) Will we still be able to bring home five club tricks?

That will depend on whether East or West holds the four-card suit.

First, let's say it's East.

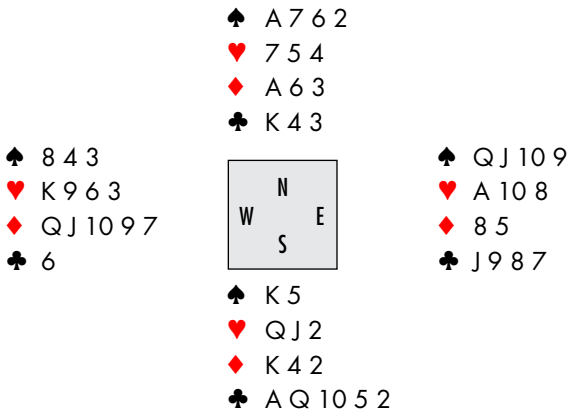
We can win the ♦Q lead in either hand. When establishing a long suit (clubs), it is usually right to cash your winner in the suit from the short hand (North) first. At Trick 2, we play the ♣K; then at Trick 3 we play a small club to our ♣A. On this trick, West cannot follow suit, and discards the ♠3.

Time to regroup. Can we still make all five club tricks, without losing one, even though East started with four clubs, one of which is the jack? This is where visualization comes into play. Can you see the layout of the cards as they are now after two club tricks have been played? Can you 'see' East's holding? It is the ♣J and one other club. If we now play the ♣Q, we will be establishing a trick for him. Here's the layout of remaining clubs:



We have a tenace position with our ♣Q and ♣10 and it is sitting over East's ♣J. In order for the tenace to be effective, we must force East to commit before us. In other words, East must play a card before we decide whether to play our ♣Q or ♣10. To force this, instead of cashing our ♣Q, we should reenter dummy with the ♠A to lead a club *through* that doubleton jack-nine.

This was the complete deal:



You end up making two spade tricks, two diamond tricks and five club tricks, for a total of nine tricks. The club suit broke 5-4-3-1. The opponents' clubs were 4-1. See it?

Now, what if West held the four clubs? Then you would go down.

Try making five tricks after reversing the East-West club holdings. With the jack-nine now sitting *over* your queen-ten, it will no longer be possible.

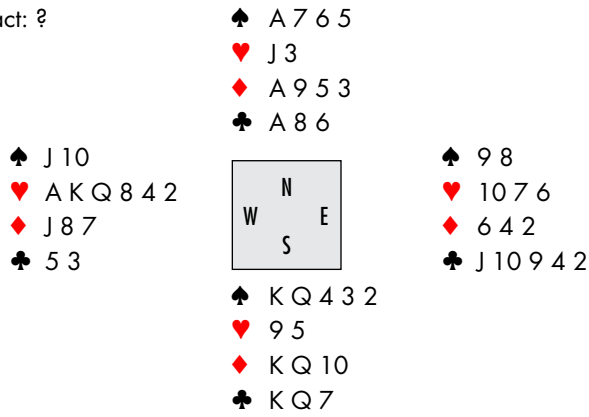
Chapter 22

major- and minor-suit scoring

Here's a classic example of the difference between playing in a notrump contract and then playing that same deal in a trump contract.

HAND 1

Declarer: South
Contract: ?

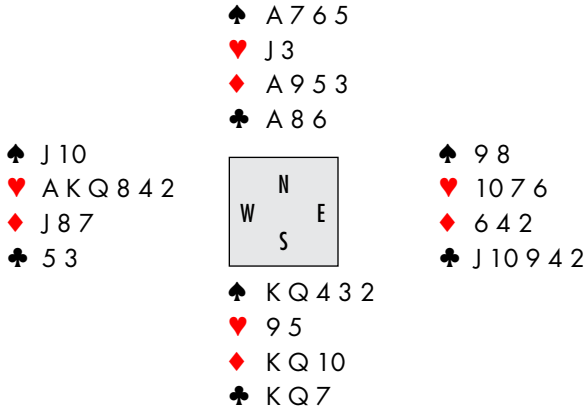


With 28 HCP and 1 LP (29 TP), North-South found themselves in 3NT after South opened 1NT and North, with 13 HCP, raised to game. On lead, West could not believe his good fortune and quickly cashed six heart winners, setting the contract two tricks and going plus 200 points. The declarer was left to bemoan the fact that without this lead she could have made twelve tricks: five spades, four diamonds (as you see, the suit broke 4-3-3-3), and three clubs. Was notrump the best strain for her side?

Playing in notrump, she was unable to prevent the opponents from 'running' their six heart tricks. What if, somewhere in the bidding, she and her partner could 'see' this potential problem and instead steer the contract into one with a trump suit? The opponents would be able to cash only two hearts, not six, before declarer would be able to trump in and take control of the play.

If North-South could choose to name a suit trumps on this hand, logic would dictate that they look to their longest combined holding. With nine spades, that suit would fit the bill.

With spades as trumps, let's see how differently the play would go.



Trick 1: West leads the ♥A, everyone follows.

Trick 2: West continues with the ♥K, and everyone again follows.

Trick 3: Basically, it's over for East-West.

Declarer will win any West continuation, either by trumping a third heart, or by using one of her aces or kings to capture any other suit West may have chosen to switch to at Trick 3.

Once on lead, South will immediately draw trumps. With the suit breaking 5-4-**2-2**, this will take but two rounds. Then it will be safe to cash her outside winners (outside of trumps). In practice, what happens *after she draws trumps* is, she claims the rest of the tricks by facing her hand and saying, 'I have two trump tricks already, and I will make three more spades, at least three diamonds, and three clubs, for a total of eleven tricks.'

With spades as trumps, her side would score over 600 points instead of the 200 point loss they experienced playing in 3NT. That's a difference of more than 800 points.

It's time to take a closer look at suit bidding and scoring.

You've already done the hardest part, notrump scoring. With 40 points allotted for the first seven tricks and 30 points for each trick above that, notrump scoring is actually more complicated than suit scoring.

The four suits are grouped into the **minors (m)**, diamonds and clubs, and the **majors (M)**, spades and hearts. The majors are more important than the minors for this reason: majors score higher than minors.

Each trick in the minors, above the first six, is worth 20 points. The score progresses: 20, 40, 60, 80, 100. It takes book plus *five* (6+5), eleven tricks, to get to the game bonus level of 100. Looking at it another way, it leaves room for only two losers. Games in the minor suits are tough to make.

Each trick in the majors is worth 30 points. The score progresses 30, 60, 90,120. At 30 points a trick, it is impossible to reach 100 on the nose. In order to get credit for the game bonus of 100, you must go past it, to 120. Still, it only takes book plus *four* (6+4), or ten tricks, to get credit for a game in the majors. That leaves room for three losers, 50% more than are allowed in the minors.

When we talked about notrump bidding, we said that what drove the bidding was the search for the game bonus.

Let's compare game contracts:

- **3NT** requires 9 tricks and is worth 100 points + 500 bonus = 600 points.
- **4M** (4♠ or 4♥) requires 10 tricks and is worth 120 points + 500 bonus = 620 points.
- **5m** (5♦ or 5♣) requires 11 tricks and is worth 100 points + 500 bonus = 600 points.

From experience, I would guess that when a game contract is reached, 45% of the time that contract will be 3NT, 45% of the time it will be four of a major (4M), and maybe (and I'm probably being generous) 10% of the time it will be five of a minor (5m). While we don't ignore minor-suit bidding (minor-suit contracts below game, called **partscores**, are important), the fact that we rarely search for the game bonus in a minor suit suggests that, at least initially, we should place more emphasis on notrump and major-suit bidding. After all, 90% of the time, that's where the game bonus will be found.

Let's compare the two most common game contracts, 3NT and 4M. First a question.

Given the option of playing in a contract of 3NT or a contract of four of a major, which would you choose?

Games in notrump require only nine tricks. That's their big advantage. But while it is true that major-suit games require one additional trick, it is actually often easier to make ten tricks in a trump contract, if the trump suit you selected contains eight or more cards.

There are several reasons why this is so:

- When playing in a trump suit, you will always have the ability to stop an opponent's long-running suit. In the example above,

the opponents rammed six hearts home against 3NT. You were powerless to stop it. Playing in a trump contract, that can't happen. This power alone often more than makes up for the one-trick difference.

There's more.

- As we have seen, playing in a trump contract often affords you the opportunity of creating one or more extra tricks. This can be accomplished by trumping losers, usually in the dummy, but sometimes even in the declarer's hand.

Still more:

- In a trump contract, you can discard losers, an ability that you don't have in notrump.

Lastly:

- Earlier in the book I pointed out that the number 26 was the most important number in bridge bidding. Now we'll begin to see why. Not only is it the number of points (HCP plus length points) needed to make 3NT; it is also the exact number of points (HCP plus length plus *something else*) that you need to make 4♥ or 4♠. That *something else*, which we'll talk about shortly, when added to the HCP and LP, makes it easier to reach that 26 total in a major suit than in notrump. Basically, in a suit contract, three ingredients get added to the mix, rather than just two.

Given the choice between playing in 3NT or four of a major, where an eight-card or longer trump fit exists, it is almost always preferable to play in the major.

Chapter 23

major-suit bidding

What happens when a hand gets **passed out**? That is, what happens when all four players say 'pass'?

The hand is reshuffled and the same person deals again.

I've never been at a table, after a hand was passed out, where the players didn't gab about how many points they each had. Let's listen in on one unfortunate pair.

North: 'By the way, partner, out of curiosity, how many points did you have just now?'

South: 'Oh, I think it was thirteen. Yeah, thirteen, but I didn't like them. How about you? What about you?'

North: 'Yikes! I had thirteen points too!'

See what happened? North-South just threw away a chance at a 500-point game bonus! 26 or more points for one side comes around about every third hand. They may be waiting for the next five or six hands before their side will have another shot at game.

In a bridge game, this should never happen. Any time a player picks up 13 or more points, half of the points needed to produce game, they *must* open the bidding or risk the same fate that just befell this North-South pair.

Open the bidding with 13 or more points

The only opening bid we've learned so far is 1NT, and the minimum number of points necessary to make that bid is 15. So what do you do when you have only 13 or 14 points, or you have more than that but don't have the right shape to open 1NT?

You open with something else! Usually that 'something else' is one of a suit: 1♠, 1♥, 1♦ or 1♣. How do you choose which?

Up until the mid-1950s, it was very simple. You looked at your hand and bid your longest and strongest suit. After all, it seemed the sensible thing to do. Let's say your hand was:

♠ A 7 6 ♥ Q 10 5 ♦ A 9 2 ♣ K J 8 7

With 14 points, you *had* to open, but you couldn't open 1NT (you didn't have enough points). So you opened 1♣. All that said to your partner

was, 'Partner, I have 13 or more points and clubs is my longest suit and for some reason I couldn't open 1NT.'

Or let's say you picked up:

♠ A K 6 ♥ 3 ♦ K 9 8 5 2 ♣ A Q 10 7

You had 16 HCP, plus 1 for length. You'd have liked to open 1NT, as the point-count suggests, but that singleton heart prevented that: 5-4-3-1 is not a notrump shape. Instead, you would open 1♦, indicating that you had at least 13 points, with diamonds being your best suit.

BASIC BRIDGE RULE

When opening one of a suit, bid your longest suit first, however weak it may seem: *length before strength.*

This nice and simple system changed forever toward the end of the 1950s when a few bridge experts began to suggest that it was fine to open one of a minor with a four-card or longer suit, but that when opening one of a major suit, 1♠ or 1♥, it was preferable to have at least *five* cards in the suit. By the 1970s and 1980s, the majority of players in North America had adopted the five-card major approach.

Let's see how this new wrinkle affects your choice of opening bids. Say you are dealt the following hand:

♠ A Q 7 5 2 ♥ K Q 2 ♦ A 3 ♣ K 10 9

It's 5-3-3-2 with 18 HCP and 1 length point. You're eager to start the auction. Your bid of one spade says, 'Partner, I have 13 or more points, and *at least a five-card spade suit*.'

But on other hands, your choice of bids may not be so obvious. Look over the following hands and think about what opening bid you might select.

♠ K Q 10 5 ♥ A 10 ♦ J 7 4 2 ♣ K J 4

This is 4-4-3-2, 14 HCP. You have two four-card suits and your spades are stronger. You're a point too weak to open 1NT. But you can't open

1♠ because you don't have five of them. And you can't pass because you have too many points.

Open 1♦, your other four-card suit.

♠ A Q 9 5 ♥ A Q J 6 ♦ K 4 ♣ Q 10 3

What do you do with this gem? You have a 4-4-3-2 hand with 18 HCP. Of course you must open the bidding. But you're too strong for 1NT. You can't open one of a major either since neither suit is at least five cards long.

Look to your minors. They're called that for a reason. Since they are less important, we can and do take liberties with them. Your correct opening bid on this hand, believe it or not, is 1♣! Here's what it simply conveys to your partner: 'I have 13 or more points but couldn't open 1NT or 1♠ or 1♥. I have at least three clubs.'

BASIC BRIDGE RULE

As a general practice, you should open 1♣ any time you have three cards in both minors and are forced to open one of them.

For example, on this hand:

♠ A Q 9 ♥ Q J 7 4 ♦ K 10 4 ♣ Q 7 2

even though your diamond suit is stronger than your clubs, it's better to open 1♣. Your opening 1♣ bid will tip your partner off to the fact that you may have only three clubs. If every time you are 3-3 in the minors you always open 1♣, then 1♦ opening bids will strongly suggest a four-card or longer suit.

- When you open 1♣, you *promise* three or more.
- When you open 1♦, you *almost always* have four or more.
- When you open 1♠ or 1♥, you *guarantee* five or more.

♠ K 9 4 ♥ K Q 3 ♦ A 9 5 4 2 ♣ K 9

Were you lulled into a 1♦ bid? With a five-card suit, it's tempting. But look more closely, and remember the order of bids to consider. Count your points: 15 HCP + 1 LP = 16 TP. As soon as you say 16, a bell should

go off: 'Can I open 1NT?' With 16 points and a 5-3-3-2 distribution, you can, and should, open the bidding 1NT.

If it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it's a duck. If you have 15, 16 or 17 points and the right shape, it's a 1NT opening bid. That's often true even if the five-card suit is a major!

Now, one last rule to complete your beginner's course on opening bids and to further ensure that you and your partner will read each other well:

BASIC BRIDGE RULE

When you have two five-card suits, open the higher-ranking one first.

♠ A 7 ♥ Q J 9 4 2 ♦ A Q 10 7 5 ♣ 9

This hand is 5-5-2-1, 13 HCP + 2 LP. What should you open? You should bid 1♥, your higher-ranking suit, even though your diamonds are slightly stronger.

Armed with this information, look over each of the hands below, decide whether you have an opening bid and, if so, what that opening bid should be.

Hand 1:	♠ A K 10 7 4 ♥ A J 9 6 ♦ 8 7 ♣ 9 4
Hand 2:	♠ K 9 ♥ K Q 7 ♦ Q J 5 ♣ A J 9 7 3
Hand 3:	♠ J 9 8 4 2 ♥ K 9 3 ♦ A K Q 7 ♣ 9
Hand 4:	♠ A 5 ♥ K Q 7 ♦ A Q 8 4 ♣ K J 10 3
Hand 5:	♠ A 2 ♥ 4 3 ♦ K 7 ♣ A Q 10 9 7 5 2
Hand 6:	♠ A 9 8 6 4 ♥ K 6 5 ♦ A Q 3 ♣ K 7

Hand 1: 5-4-2-2 with 12 HCP + 1 LP. That's 13 TP. You should open the bidding. Open 1♠.

Hand 2. 16 HCP + 1 LP and 5-3-3-2 shape (one of the three notrump shapes). Open 1NT.

Hand 3: You have 13 HCP + 1 LP — that's 14 points, so you have to open. You have four beautiful diamonds; but it's length before strength. Open 1♠ even with that crummy holding.

Hand 4: 4-4-3-2, 19 HCP. You're too strong to open 1NT. With two four-card minors, opening either 1♦ or 1♣ is acceptable.

Hand 5: 7-2-2-2, 13 HCP + 3 LP. Open 1♣. For the moment partner won't know how many clubs you have, but subsequent club bids will tip him off.

Hand 6: 5-3-3-2, 16 HCP + 1LP. Open 1NT even with that five-card major.

If you look at all six hands on the page, you'll see that, unlike 1NT opening bids, suit opening bids come in all shapes and sizes. This prompts an obvious question. How is your partner supposed to tell what on earth your hand looks like when you could make an opening bid of 1♣ with either of these hands:

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

Even an opening bid of 1♥ could be made with vastly different hands.

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

So how does partner know? The answer to this question is the key to what bidding is all about.

'Bidding is the exchange of useful information,' says Marty Bergen, one of the gurus of modern bidding.

During the auction, the players try to describe their hands to each other *in a series of bids*. We like to say they try to 'paint a picture' of their hands. The opening bid is important, but it's only the first sentence of a conversation between partners that will take place throughout the auction. On the basis of information exchanged during that conversation, they try to find the contract that will produce the greatest reward for their side.

Here, for instance, is our most descriptive auction to date:

West	North	East	South
	1NT	pass	2NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

This is the conversation that's taken place:

North (opening bid): 'My cards are evenly distributed, and I have 15, 16 or 17 points.'

South (response): 'Well, I have 9 points. Do you have 17?'

North (rebid): 'Yes, I do! Together we have 26 points. Let's try for that 500-point bonus.'

Let's look at some real-life auctions.

As the opening bidder, how might you plan to paint an accurate picture of your hand for your partner using a series of bids?

♠A 3 2 ♥4 ♦A Q 10 9 7 5 2 ♣K 4

7-3-2-1, 13 HCP, 3 LP. You are first to speak. Now, is there an outstanding feature of your hand, something that your partner might be very interested in knowing? Sure, your wonderful seven-card diamond suit. You open 1♦. Your 1♦ opening bid did not convey very much in the way of specific information. All your partner knows is that you have four or more diamonds and 13 or more points. With your second bid, your rebid, you start painting the picture of a hand rich in diamonds. You should plan on rebidding your diamond suit (bidding diamonds again) to emphasize its importance.

♠A Q J 7 5 ♥K Q J 4 2 ♦10 9 ♣10

5-5-2-1, 13 HCP, 2 LP. With two five-card suits, it is correct to open the higher of the two. Open 1♠. Plan on bringing the other five-card suit into the discussion with your next bid. Having already shown five spades, what other important feature about your hand might your partner be interested in knowing about? Obviously, it's your heart suit, so you will plan to bid hearts at your second turn.

An opening bid of 1NT consists of two parts: a very distinctive shape and a very narrowly defined HCP range. This is not true of an opening bid of one of a suit. As we've seen, suit openings tend to be more vague in these areas. But that's okay, they're supposed to be. They're intended only as starting points. When an auction begins with one of a suit, it is expected that it might take two or three subsequent bids to fully describe the strength and shape of a hand. As an example:

♠K 9 ♥A Q 9 8 4 ♦A K 3 ♣Q 10 5

When you open this hand with a bid of 1♥, you do so with the intention of eventually being able to describe to your partner a hand with five hearts, a notrump shape, and too many points to open 1NT. No one bid in bridge could be expected to say all that. But a series of bids just might.

Opening bids of one of a suit do have an upper limit and hence a definite range. An opening bid of 1NT has a 3-point range. A one-of-a-suit bid has an 8 point range.

BASIC BRIDGE RULE

An opening bid of 1♠, 1♥, 1♦ or 1♣ is defined as from 13 to 20 points.

The good news is that 13 and 20 are easy markers to remember: 13 is half of the number of points you need to make game (26); and 20 is half of the total number of points in the deck (40). I like to say, 'Two halves make the whole range'. This and the 1NT bid are the only two opening ranges you'll need to remember for the rest of the book.

These ranges are the building blocks of bidding. They are bridge's axioms, and as such they must be committed to memory. These two ranges, along with the 3-point value of a trick and the number 26, will be all you'll need to know to be able to construct a series of bids that will enable you and your partner to describe almost every hand imaginable.

So please commit these two ranges to memory:

- To open 1NT, you must have from 15-17 points.
- To open 1 of a suit, you must have from 13-20 points.

Pointwise, which is stronger, an opening bid of 1NT or an opening bid of one of a suit?

It's a trick question! No matter which you chose, you got it right. An opening bid of one of a suit can be weaker than an opening 1NT bid (if the hand has 13 or 14 points), equal to it (with 15-17 points) or stronger than it (with 18-20 points).

- Opening range for one of a suit: 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20
- Opening range for 1NT: 15 16 17

Remember, though, that to open 1NT you also need to have the right shape.

Chapter 24

more major-suit bidding

THE TRUMP FIT

There's an old saying, 'You can never be too thin or too rich.' You can never have too many wild cards either. One of the criteria that goes into your decision to play a hand in a trump suit or not is: Does your side have *a lot* of one particular suit? If the answer is yes, then you might try steering the contract into that strain.

Now, what constitutes 'a lot'? Seven, eight, nine? More?

Seven is the smallest number of cards your side can have to hold more cards in the suit than your opponents. Just one more. That's too close for comfort. Seven versus six. But take one from their side and add it to yours, and things change dramatically. Now you have three wild cards more than they do. Your eight to their five.

BASIC BRIDGE RULE

The minimum number of cards in a suit your partnership needs in order to begin to consider naming that suit as trumps is eight.

If your partner opens 1♠, showing five spades, you have to bring three to the table to guarantee that eight-card fit. That three-card holding is often referred to as **minimum trump support** for partner.

Having an eight-card fit gives you a comfortable majority of the suit, but still not a commanding one. Often the five outstanding trumps don't break as evenly as you hope. Let's say you found a 4-4 trump fit. Now it is true that two out of three times the remaining five cards will break 3-2. But one-third of the time they will break 4-1, or even 5- 0. In these instances one opponent will start out with as many or more trumps than either you or your partner.

A nine-card trump fit is considered to be perfect. Only four trumps are outstanding.

Close to 90% of the time the outstanding four trumps will break either 2-2 or 3-1. And that's easily handled when you're holding at least one five-card or longer suit.

WEAK, INVITATIONAL AND STRONG BIDS

So far, here are the four basic things we know about major-suit bidding:

- We know that when partner opens one of a major, he *guarantees* a five-card or longer suit.
- We know that, between us, we always want to try to find an eight-card or longer major-suit fit.
- We know that when partner opens one of a major, he has between 13 and 20 points (HCP + length points).
- We know that the easiest road to game is a 4♠ or a 4♥ contract (4 x 30 = 120 points).

As responder to partner's opening 1♠ or 1♥ bid, what can you do with all this information?

Say you pick up:

♠ K 9 4 2 ♥ 8 7 ♦ A Q 7 6 ♣ A 10 3

And partner opens 1♠.

You have 13 HCP, no LP. That would have been enough for you to have opened the bidding yourself had your partner passed. But partner opened, showing 13-plus points too. Your 13 points added to his minimum of 13 comes to, at the very least, the 26 points needed for game. Two opening bids facing one another should produce a game.

You have four spades. Partner's 1♠ bid guaranteed five-plus spades. Together you have at least nine. That's the perfect fit. You're going to game in spades.

Remember, you earn 30 points a trick in the majors. Game requires we reach 100: 30 + 30 + 30 + 30 = 120. A four-level contract brings you to that 100+ point total. The game contract in spades is 4♠ and that would be how you would respond with this hand after partner's opening 1♠ bid.

West	North	East	South
	1♠	pass	4♠

One spade — four spades. Your 4♠ bid tells partner that, between you, you have at least eight spades and 26 points. When raising your partner's major suit, not only are you agreeing on where the hand should be played, in that major, but you're also saying how many points you have.

WHERE AND HOW HIGH?

These are the two elements that make up the final contract in any bridge auction. What strain should we play in and how many tricks should we contract for?

Here's your hand for our next example:

♠K942 ♥87 ♦A765 ♣1093

You have 7 HCP and no length points: 7 total points. Like life, bridge doesn't always deal you a good hand. You've got to make the most of what you've got. So let's figure out how to do just that.

Again partner opened one spade. With this poor collection of cards, should you respond at all?

West	North	East	South
	1♠	pass	?

When partner opened 1NT, do you remember what you did when you held between 0 and 8 points? You passed because your 8 points or less, when combined with partner's 15-17, could *never* come to 26; there was no chance of game so you passed. It's the possibility of game, remote as it may be, that keeps the bidding open. With 9 points, you invited further research into the possibility of game by responding 2NT, urging partner to bid game if he was at the top of his notrump range (17 points).

The same principles apply here in major-suit bidding. If there is absolutely no possibility of game, pass. If there is a chance at game, invite your partner by bidding something.

So, with your measly 7 points, is there any possibility of game when partner opens one spade?

Actually, there is. He didn't open 1NT. He's not limited to 15-17 points. He could have as many as 20 points (13 to 20) and, for those of you not too mathematically challenged, 20 plus 7 equals more than 26.

Now, how likely is it that your partner has 19 or 20 points? Not very. But look at it this way. The fewer points you have, the more he could have! Be optimistic. Invite partner to bid game if he has maximum values for his bid.

So the message you want to get across is, 'I have good news and bad news. I have enough spades for us to play in our major-suit fit, which provides the easiest path to game, but my hand stinks. It is very weak with just enough points to keep the auction open.' What bid might say that to partner?

The 'cheapest' spade raise is 2♠, and that's the bid you make here. Bidding 2♠ says, 'Partner, I like spades but bear in mind that this weakest of responses could be based on as few as 6 points because you could have as many as 20.'

As we did with notrump bidding, let's build a major-suit bidding box to reflect what we know already.

THE MAJOR-SUIT BIDDING BOX			
Opener	Responder has 3+ trumps and:	Responder's bid:	Reason
1M	0-5 points	pass	no chance at 26
1M	6-? points	2M	outside chance at game
1M	?-12 points	?	?
1M	13-? points	4M	13 + 13 = 26, enough for game

So:

1♠ – pass	Shows 0-5 points.
1♠ – 2♠	Shows 6 to some as yet undetermined number of points
1♠ – 4♠	Shows 13 to also some undetermined number.

Let's logically fill in those remaining question marks.

When your partner opens 1♠, what is the most number of points you can have and not jump to game?

Twelve. If you had 13 points, you would be able to guarantee 26 combined points and would bid game yourself.

What bid sounds like, 'Partner we're very close to 4♠?'

You guessed it… 3♠. How brilliant is that? Bidding 3♠ says, 'I can't guarantee game, but I could have as many as 12 points.'

Okay, if 12 is the maximum for that 3♠ bid, what's the minimum? How far down does it have to go before a 3♠ bid become a 2♠ bid?

The difference between a 2♠, eight-trick contract and a 3♠, nine-trick contract is a trick, and a trick is 3 points. There's your answer. Most bridge ranges average 3 points. With anywhere from 12 down to 10 points, jump raise your partner from one to three.

What's left? If 0 - 5 is pass and 10 - 12 is 3♠, then 2♠ must be 6 -9.

1. ♠K765 ♥54 ♦AK97 ♣K93
2. ♠K765 ♥54 ♦AK97 ♣1093
3. ♠K765 ♥54 ♦K972 ♣1093

Hand 1 is a 4♠ response: 13 - 15

Hand 2 is a 3♠ response: 10 - 12

Hand 3 is a 2♠ response: 6 - 9

BASIC BRIDGE RULE

When raising your partner's suit, tell your partner how many points you have by the level you raise to.

We're done!

THE COMPLETED MAJOR-SUIT BIDDING BOX			
Opener	Responder has 3+ trumps and:	Responder's bid:	Reason
1M	0-5 points	pass	no chance at 26
1M	6-9 points	2M	outside chance
1M	10-12 points	3M	close
1M	13-15	4M	13 + 13 = 26

The three major-suit ranges can be referred to this way:

Hate: 1M — 2M	6 - 9 points	weak
Like: 1M — 3M	10-12 points	invitational
Love: 1M — 4M	13-15 points	strong

With 6-9 you *hate* your hand. You don't even have your fair share of the 10-point average you expect to have every time you pick up a hand (40 points, 4 players).

With 10-12 you *like* your hand. You have your fair share of the points.

With 13-15 you *love* your hand. Your side is going to game.

Weak, invitational, forcing.

Hate, like, love.

Use whichever works for you.

PRACTICE HAND

South deals.

♠ A 8 7 6
♥ K 9 5
♦ A 5 4
♣ 7 6 3

♠ K Q J 5 4
♥ A 8
♦ K Q 9 7
♣ 10 9

South has 15 HCP + 1 LP = 16 TP and a 5-4-2-2 shape. With two doubletons, two potential weaknesses, she should try first to suggest something other than a notrump contract. She chooses to open 1♠. West and East will pass throughout. North, with 11 HCP and four-card support for partner's known five-card suit, raises to 3♠ to show invitational values. This says, 'Partner we are really close to game.' With her 16 points (3 points or one trick more than she promised) the opening bidder should eagerly accept the invite and go on to game. Her rebid is 4♠. Three passes follow, ending the auction.

Here is how the bidding looks:

West	North	East	South
			1♠
pass	3♠	pass	4♠
all pass			

Play the hand out and try to determine how many tricks you can expect to make.

All told, North-South should come to at least ten tricks. Five spades, two hearts, three diamonds and no clubs. South's fourth diamond will become the partnership's eleventh trick if the diamonds split 4-3-3-3 around the table, or if declarer can trump that fourth diamond in dummy.

Game is bid and can be made, most probably with an overtrick.

Chapter 25

look out for shorty

South deals.

♠ A Q 7 6
♥ A 8 5 2
♦ 9
♣ 8 7 6 5

♠ K J 5 4 2
♥ 7 6
♦ A 7 3
♣ A 9 4

The bidding proceeds:

West	North	East	South
			1♠
pass	3♠	all pass	

With 12 HCP and 1 LP, just the 13 TP minimum needed to open, South bids 1♠. North, looking at 10 HCP and four-card support, raises to 3♠. South passes, because 13 when added to 10, 11 or 12 can't make 26.

In practice, declarer should come to ten tricks: five spades, one heart, one diamond and one club *plus two diamond ruffs in dummy*. She should lose one heart and two clubs.

Should she be happy with her result? The partnership stopped in three but made four. It's a disaster. They missed the bonus! Their score for 3♠ making four is 120. Had they been in 4♠ and made the same ten tricks, their score would be 620, reflecting the 500-point game bonus.

When North counted to 10 points and bid accordingly, she did not add any point value for the powerful trick-taking ability of the combination of having four-card trump support and a side-suit singleton.

THE VALUE OF SHORTNESS

In this example, declarer made good use of the shortness in the dummy. That singleton diamond enabled her to trump two diamonds. That actually turned two potential losers into two winning tricks. If, as we have stated, it normally takes about 26 points to make ten tricks in a trump contract, then on average, it takes 2.6 points to make one trick when trumps are involved. We created two tricks using dummy's singleton: 2.6 x 2 = 5.2 points. That singleton diamond, in this example, was worth a full 5.2 points!

Is shortness always worth points? And if so, why haven't we been taking account of it all along?

Let's say we played this hand in notrump. What suit do you think the opponents would lead? Against notrump contracts, it's correct for them to lead their longest suit; the opponents' longest suit is always your shortest, and vice versa. The opponents would attack with diamonds. Is having that singleton diamond in a notrump contract a good thing? Is it a plus or a minus? It's a big minus: the diamond weakness here will kill any attempt by your side to make a notrump game.

Just the opposite is true when playing in a suit contract. Shortness often provides you the opportunity to create tricks. In this example shortness created two tricks for you. It most definitely had value.

Will shortness always be valuable in a trump contract? Look at these two situations. In each case, hearts are trumps:

1.

♥ 7 6 5
♦ 2

♥ A K Q
♦ A K

2.

♥ 7 6 5
♦ 2

♥ A K Q
♦ 5

Example 1. Will you want to trump either of your two winning diamonds?

Example 2. Is a singleton opposite a singleton valuable?

But both of these examples are extremes. In most cases, shortness indeed has value. Look at the following examples. Once again, hearts are trumps:

A. ♥ 7 6 5
♦ 3 2

♥ A K Q
♦ 6 5 4

B. ♥ 7 6 5
♦ 2

♥ A K Q
♦ 6 5 4

C. ♥ 7 6 5
♦ —

♥ A K Q
♦ 6 5 4

In Example A, one diamond can potentially be trumped. In B, two can be trumped and in C all three can be trumped.

With the trump suit again hearts, which of the following trump holdings would you prefer?

D. ♥ 7 6 5 4
♦ 2

♥ A K Q J
♦ 6 5 4 3

E. ♥ 7 6 5
♦ 2

♥ A K Q J
♦ 6 5 4 3

F. ♥ 7 6
♦ 2

♥ A K Q J
♦ 6 5 4 3

Four trumps are better than three trumps, and three trumps are better than two. In each case, you would start by giving up a diamond in order to create a diamond void in the dummy. Seeing that it's your intention to ruff diamonds, your opponents should try to thwart your plan by returning a trump every time they gain the lead, thereby diminishing dummy's trump holding and lessening your ability to ruff your losers. But even with the defenders firing back a trump as soon as they can, having started with four trumps, as in D, you would still have three trumps left and could potentially ruff all three of your remaining diamonds. But this can't be said of E or F. The longer dummy's trump holding, the better!

Whole books have been devoted to discussing the exact value of these various holdings. But there's a quick, easy, and very accurate way to remember the value of singletons and voids in dummy's hand.

BASIC BRIDGE RULE

Subtract the number of cards in dummy's short suit from the number of trumps that dummy has.

In D, you have four trumps and a singleton: 4 – 1 = 3. That's the trick-taking value of the singleton. E has 3 – 1 = 2. F has 2 – 1 = 1.

So what's the value of a void if your trump holding is ♥A42? That void is worth 3 – 0 = 3 points. And if you have ♥A543 and a diamond void, that holding is worth 4 – 0 = 4 points.

Doubletons get little respect. They are worth 1 point and that is only when they're accompanied by *four* trumps or more. In a hand containing ♥A42 (hearts are trumps) and ♦76, that doubleton diamond would have no value: With only three trumps you may not be able to both draw the opponents' outstanding trumps and ruff losers yourself. But if the hand contained ♥A432 and ♦76, you would count that doubleton as 1 point. If the hand contained ♥A432 and two doubletons, you would still only count 1 point for shortness.

BASIC BRIDGE RULE

If your hand will be dummy in a trump contract, then in addition to high-card points (HCP) and length points (LP) you must also consider the value of shortness points (SP).

Now we know *how* and *why* to count shortness points.

But when?

Here's the key: Count shortness only after you are absolutely certain that the hand is going to be played in a trump suit. In a notrump contract, as we've seen, shortness doesn't count for anything; it's often a weakness, never a strength.

But once you and your partner have agreed on a trump fit then, and only then, can you tally up those shortness points and evaluate your hand *as dummy* accordingly.

Listen to the opening bid and consider the value of the singleton heart. In these two instances:

♠K976 ♥7 ♦J864 ♣A1042

First case: Your partner opens the bidding 1♠. How many points, if any, do you now count for your heart shortness?

Second case: Your partner opens the bidding 1♥. Do you count for shortness? If so, what's the value?

Here are the answers.

First case: Count your singleton heart, since you know you'll be playing in spades. 4 – 1 = 3 points. Count 3 points for shortness. Adding 3 SP to your 8 HCP brings you to 11 TP. Instead of raising your partner's

1♠ bid to the two-level, as you would with 8 points, you now know to factor in the trick-taking potential of that singleton (3 SP). With 11 TP, jump to 3♠.

Second case: Do not add any SP for your singleton. Your partner opened 1♥ and you have only one heart. This hand has the makings of a badly fitting hand (a **misfit**). You may end up playing this hand in notrump, where your shortness will have no value.

Let's go back to the example hand at the beginning of this chapter that got us started on this in the first place:

♠ A Q 7 6
♥ A 8 5 2
♦ 9
♣ 8 7 6 5

♠ K J 5 4 2
♥ 7 6
♦ A 7 3
♣ A 9 4

This was the hand on which North-South failed to reach game yet easily made ten tricks.

When South opens 1♠, North immediately understands that with at least a nine-card major-suit fit she will be playing this hand in spades. Evaluating North's hand simply in terms of high cards is now no longer appropriate. Adding 3 points for the singleton diamond brings North's total to 13 points *in support of spades*. With 13 points, she knows to jump directly to game, so 4♠ is the bid to make. Ten tricks will again be made, but this time, the partnership will be in game and earn the bonus.

One you have found a major-suit fit, you can combine high-card points and length points with points for shortness in the hand that will be dummy. With three ways of adding points, getting to that magic 26 total is easier in major-suit bidding than through notrump bidding where only two types of points are counted.

BASIC BRIDGE RULE

The easiest path to game is to locate and play in your eight-card (or longer) major-suit fit.

CREATING TRICKS BY TRUMPING

You find yourself in 7♠, your first Grand Slam.

The lead is the ♦K.

Here's the hand:

♠ A 6 5
♥ 2
♦ A 5 4 3 2
♣ 5 4 3 2

♠ K Q J 10 9 8 7
♥ A 4 3
♦ 6
♣ A K

Let's make a plan.

Whenever we are in a trump contract and one hand has substantially more trumps than the other, count your winners and losers from the long trump suit side.

BASIC BRIDGE RULE

Count your winners and losers from the long trump suit side.

South counts seven spade tricks, one heart, one diamond (dummy's ace) and two clubs. That's eleven so far. Two more tricks can be made by ruffing those two little hearts in dummy for a grand total of thirteen.

This is an extreme example of counting from the long trump suit side, but I want to make a point. When South ruffs both of her losing hearts in the dummy, she creates two tricks. She started with seven trump tricks, and winds up with nine. This happens when you trump losers *with the shorter trump holding*.

Would that same creation of tricks occur if South had won that opening diamond lead and immediately ruffed one of North's losing diamonds in her hand? Let's see:

Trick 1: Win the ♦A in dummy and take stock: eleven winners.

Trick 2: Ruff one of those diamonds in the long trump hand. We just ruffed something so, by all accounts, we should now have twelve tricks. But do we? Before we ruffed the diamond, we had eleven tricks: one heart, one diamond, two clubs and seven spade tricks. How many tricks

do we have now? We have one heart, one diamond, two clubs and six + one spades; the same, eleven. What we did was use one of the seven trump tricks we already counted in the long hand to ruff one of those diamonds. We are swimming upstream, going nowhere fast. If we go back to dummy and ruff another diamond, the same thing will happen. We will now have 5 + 2 = the same seven trump tricks.

When we ruffed in the dummy, in the short hand, we *added* one to the seven we already counted. When we ruffed a second time in the short hand, we *added* a second trick, 7 + 2.

In order to create tricks, look to have two shortnesses in the same hand: a shorter trump suit and a short side suit.

An important strategy when you find yourself defending, which will be half the time

Because ruffing with the long trump holding doesn't result in extra tricks, it is often a good tactic for the defenders to force the declarer (the long hand) to ruff. Sometimes shortening declarer's trump holding creates severe problems for her, especially when one of the defenders has long trumps (four or more).

Chapter 26

hands on play

In each of the practice hands that follow, I want you to:

Bid the North-South cards.

Look at West's opening lead, then plan the play.

Hint: in trump contracts, the key is to understand that you need to draw the opponents' trumps as soon as you can, but *not* necessarily right away.

HAND 1

South deals:

♠ J 8 7
♥ 5 2
♦ A 9 8 7
♣ A 8 4 3

♥Q is led

♠ A K Q 3 2
♥ A 9 4 3
♦ 4 3
♣ 10 5

South's hand is 5-4-2-2, 13 HCP + 1 LP. She opens 1♠.

North has trump support. With her three spades and South's guaranteed five, eight or more trumps are assured. She will raise opener's 1♠ bid to some number of spades. Why will she agree right away on spades without first looking around for somewhere else to play? Because the objective is to look for game and she knows that game in a major is the easiest one to make. Agreeing on a major-suit fit is half the battle. North found the easiest path to game as soon as South opened 1♠. That satisfied the 'Where?' part. All that is now left is the 'How high?' part. Between North and South, do they have enough firepower, enough points, to attempt a four-level contract?

North has 9 HCP, 0 LP and 0 SP (doubletons only count for a point when you have four or more trumps). With 9 TP North can only raise South's 1♠ opening to the two-level, no further.

South's hand comes to only 14 TP, and when this is added to North's announced 9-point maximum, 26 is out of reach. Pass.

West	North	East	South
			1♠
pass	2♠	all pass	

The contract becomes 2♠. West leads the ♥Q.

Plan the play.

In a trump contract, when a partnership's trump holdings are unequal, remember to view the proceedings from the hand with the longer trumps. This makes it easier to identify losers and count winners. Let's count South's winners. Barring a disastrous 5-0 trump break, she should start with five spade tricks and the three outside aces. Those are her quick tricks, the ones she would win even if this hand were being played in notrump.

Next, she should look around for additional ways of making tricks. One of the ways of creating tricks is to ruff losers in the short hand. She sees that doubleton heart in dummy opposite her four-card heart holding. This inequality is just what she is looking for. Her plan should be to create a void in dummy by playing her heart ace, followed by a low heart. Then, when she regains the lead, she will be able to ruff one or both of her remaining hearts.

Now let's play the hand.

South wins the ♥A, and then sends one right back, voiding the dummy. One opponent wins that trick and… does what?

The defenders should be thinking, 'What's declarer's plan? Did she draw trumps right away? No. She needs those trumps for something. She's planning on using those trumps to ruff her losing hearts.'

How do you stop an elephant from charging?
Take away her credit cards.
How do you stop a declarer from ruffing?
Take away her trumps.

The defenders should play back a trump. Those small trumps are probably not going to do their side any good anyway, so the defense should start shortening dummy's ability to ruff by returning a trump.

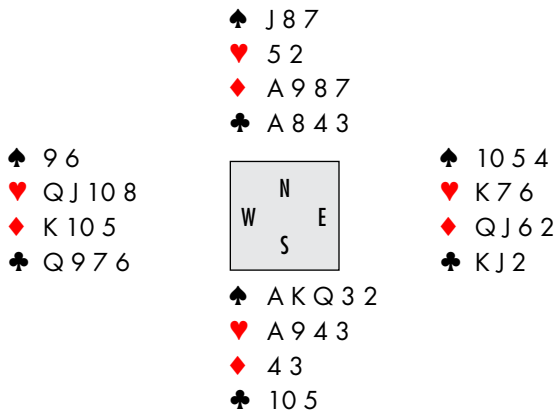
Let's get back to declarer.

Declarer should win the trump return with the ♠A, ♠K or ♠Q in her hand to be in position to ruff a heart in dummy. Which she does.

After ruffing that heart, this will be the situation:

The lead is now in the North hand. There is one trump left with which to ruff that last losing heart. But notice that declarer is in the wrong hand and has no quick way back to the hand that holds the heart. So what can she do to try to get back there? Say she plays dummy's ♦A and follows it with a low diamond, planning on trumping the third diamond to get back to her hand. One of the two opponents should win that second diamond trick and play back another trump, killing dummy's last spade and with it the ability to ruff that last heart. That would be good, solid defense on their part. The opponents would have managed to hold declarer to five spade tricks in hand, three aces, and only one ruff in the dummy, for a total of nine tricks. Lucky for declarer she didn't overbid to game. She would have been **set** (gone down). If the defenders had not realized what was going on and not shot back trumps at both opportunities, declarer would have made an additional trick.

The full hand was:



This is a good illustration of why we do not count doubletons as shortness points when we hold only three trumps. Too often you don't get to use those trumps to their fullest.

COUNTING LOSERS

Planning trump contracts requires that we also identify our losers. It will not help us to make 4♠ if we have lost four tricks before we can get our ten winners set up. However, there are ways of eliminating losers in trump contracts that are just not available when the hand is played in notrump — I'm thinking discarding and ruffing. By identifying your losers, you may be able to devise a plan that will allow you to eliminate one or more of them by ruffing them or discarding them. My suggestion is that you try to look at trump hands both ways. Count winners first, then identify losers and see what you can do to get rid of them.

With this in mind, let's go back and count the losers in the hand we just played.

Identify your losers *from the long trump suit side,* the same way you did with winners. You have two little diamond losers in the South hand. One can be covered by the ♦A in the North hand. The other is still a loser. Same situation in clubs. Both face length in the dummy, so the second card in each suit is a loser. The four-card heart suit has one winner and three possible losers; the dummy, however, contains only two hearts, which affords South the possibility, after losing one heart, of trumping two hearts in the dummy. South might make as many as five spades, three aces and two ruffs in the dummy, for a total of ten tricks. So at Tricks 1 and 2, play the ace then lead another heart.

The plan is the same as before, you just get to it a different way.

HAND 2

South deals
Contract 4♥
♠ 9 8 2
♥ Q 6 3
♦ K 9 6
♣ K J 10 4

♠Q is led

♠ A 7 6
♥ A K J 10 4
♦ A 8 3
♣ Q 2

The ♠Q is led and dummy comes down. Did you remember to say the shape?

Declarer is 5-3-3-2 with 18 HCP and 1 LP, 19 points. That's the right shape but too many points for an opening bid of 1NT. Instead, she opens 1♥. Even with this many points, 1♥ is enough. That shows up to 20 points. North, holding 9 points (9 HCP, 0 LP, 0 SP) and three-card trump support raises to 2♥. With her 19 points and North's 6 – 9, South

takes the chance that North didn't raise on a dead minimum of 6 points and jumps to 4♥.

Note: with 18 points, South would invite with a bid of 3♥. This would ask North to take a second look at her hand. North (responder) told opener that she had a weak hand (6-9). South would want responder to clarify. Is it *really* weak, 6 or 7, or *relatively strong*, 8 or 9? (Everything's relative.) With 6 or 7 she would not accept opener's invitation and would pass 3♠. But with the 9 points she has here she would bid on to 4♠. Another way of looking at how North could come to this conclusion is that she can't have more than those 9 points for her single raise. If South's inviting, she has the goods.

West	North	East	South
			1♥
pass	2♥	pass	4♥
all pass			

The ♠Q is led. You need ten tricks, plan the play.

That ♠Q is a good lead for the defense. It will knock out your spade stopper. As soon as they regain the lead, the opponents will cash two spade tricks. Your club suit can provide two discards (as you hold four cards opposite two cards), but that will be too late to help you with your spade problem. In order to set up those two club winners, you'll have to surrender the lead to the opponents' ♣A. As soon as that happens, they'll cash their two good spade tricks.

Let's look at your other holdings.

Count your winners: one spade trick, five heart tricks, two diamond tricks and three club tricks — that makes eleven. We know you have two spade losers and you are also going to lose to the ♣A. That's all you can spare. But you may also lose one diamond trick, and that makes four possible losers. On this hand it looks like you have eleven winners and four losers. That's fifteen tricks, more than there are in the deck! Don't panic, this often happens with trump contracts.

If you don't have the time to discard the spade losers, how about the diamond loser? Can you discard that diamond on one of your eleven winners? Yes. The club suit, which did not offer you immediate spade help, will provide you with a slow diamond discard if you can establish the suit before you have to use your ♦A and ♦K stoppers.

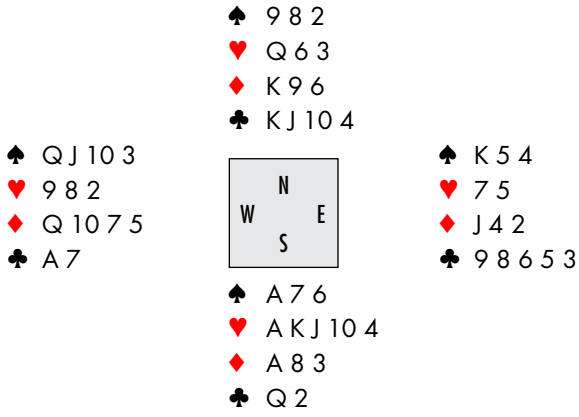
Put all this information together (the strategy) and decide whether you should draw trumps now or later. Ask yourself two questions: 1) Do you need to trump losers in the dummy? The answer is no. 2) Can you discard any spade losers before the opponents can cash them? Again, no. In that case you'd better draw trumps now so that the opponents

won't be able to ruff any of your good club tricks when you finally get around to playing that suit.

There's the technique. Win the first trick. Play three rounds of hearts (the missing five hearts split evenly, 3-2). Then drive out the opponents' ♣A. Start by playing the ♣Q, the honor from the short side, so as not to block the suit. You will have plenty of time to discard your losing diamond on a good club.

When all's said and done, you will win one spade trick, five heart tricks, two diamond tricks and two club tricks. The losing diamond will go away on the clubs. This is a good illustration of approaching a hand from both counting winners and identifying losers perspectives.

Here's the complete layout of the hand:

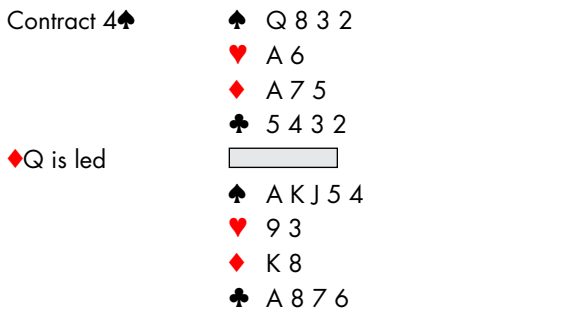


If you had not drawn trumps when you did, West would have been able to ruff that third club. That would have been the defenders' fourth trick.

HAND 3

Contract 4♠

♦Q is led



South deals. She has 15 HCP + 1 LP, but her 5-4-2-2 shape precludes opening 1NT. Instead, South opens 1♠.

Bingo! North knows instantly that a beautiful nine-card major fit exists. All that's left for the partnership is to determine how many points they have between them. North has 10 HCP and 1SP (that doubleton heart along with those four trumps). That's too strong for a single raise to 2♠ (6-9). North must jump to 3♠ to show partner 10-12 points. And with 16 points, South contracts for game, raising to 4♠.

West	North	East	South
			1♠
pass	3♠	pass	4♠
all pass			

The opening lead is the ♦Q. Plan the play.

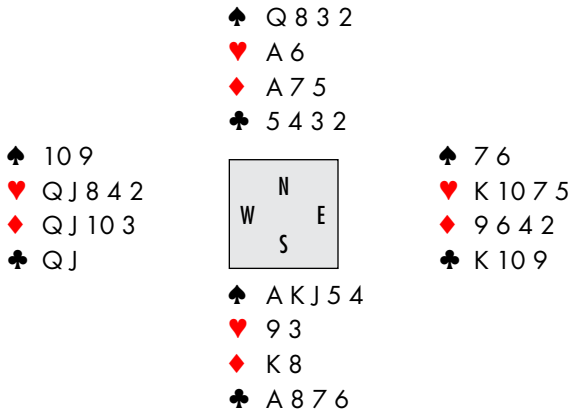
Take stock: declarer has five spade tricks, one heart trick, two diamond tricks and one club trick for a total of nine winners. As for losers, they're looking at one heart and three clubs. That's one too many losers and one too few winners. Declarer has to find a way to turn a loser into a winner.

Nothing can be done about the heart loser, as there are two hearts in each hand. That second heart can't be trumped and there are no outside winners on which to discard it. South can ruff dummy's third diamond, but that won't produce an extra trick because the ruff will be in the long hand. Therefore, if this contract is going to be made, it will be up to the club suit to provide that extra trick.

North-South have eight clubs, the opponents have five. If those five clubs split evenly, 3-2 (as they rate to 2/3 of the time), then the fourth club in each hand will be promoted, through length, to a winner.

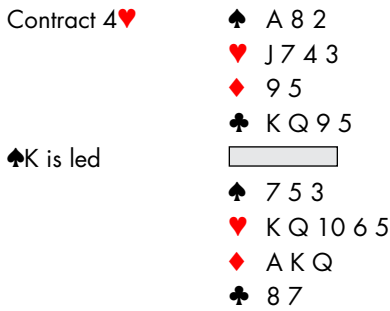
Having thought through the hand (strategy), declarer now puts the plan into action (technique). After winning the ♦Q lead, what's the first question one should ask? Should trumps be drawn? The answer here is yes. Draw trumps as soon as you can. Your plan did not include ruffing anything, nor did it include discarding anything. So win the diamond lead with either the ♦A or ♦K and draw two rounds of trumps with your high spades. You find that both opponents follow to both spades. Say 5-4-**2-2**. Done with drawing trumps. Now tackle clubs. Play the ♣A and a small club. Win any return and drive out the opponents' last club. If the club suit breaks 4-4-**3-2** around the table, you will have your ten tricks.

The complete hand was:



Notice that the ♦Q led by West was not from his longest suit, as it might have been against a notrump contract, but rather from a shorter, stronger suit.

HAND 4



South deals. She is looking at a 5-3-3-2 distribution. With a notrump shape and 15 TP (14 HCP plus 1 LP) she could open 1NT, but with all her points in just two suits, she elects to open 1♥ instead. Bridge rules are rarely hard and fast. They tend to work about 85% of the time. It's that other 15% that make bridge so challenging and so much fun. Tend to think of the rules as guidelines. Knowing when to bend the rules is one of the things that sets expert players apart.

North has 10 HCP. On learning that her side has at least a nine-card heart fit and will be playing in hearts, she adds one point for the doubleton diamond (since she has four trumps), bringing the total to 11 points. With four-card trump support and 11 points, North jumps to 3♥.

Now South, has a decision to make. With 14 HCP and 1 LP (15 TP) she adds this to partners' announced 10, 11 or 12 points. The partnership will meet that 26-point threshold two out of three times. As the

song goes, 'Two out of three ain't bad.' South takes the push and tries for game.

West	North	East	South
			1♥
pass	3♥	pass	4♥
all pass			

The ♠K is led. Plan the play.

Count declarer's tricks. She has one spade, four hearts, three diamonds and one club (the ♣KQ in dummy must eventually take at least one trick). That comes to nine winners. How about losers? There are two spades, one heart and one club loser. Four in all.

Nine winners, four losers. Looks like a loser needs to be turned into a winner.

Once again a good lead has got the opponents off to a great start. If declarer tries to draw trumps right away, the defense will take the ace of trumps and immediately cash two spade winners. Declarer will still have a club loser to go with the three tricks she has already lost. She's looking at being set one trick.

Is there any way to avoid this?

Look to those three diamond winners. They face only two diamond cards in the dummy. This length inequality could provide a quick and necessary discard.

Draw trumps as soon as you can. Here declarer can't do it right away, though. Work must be done first. She must win the first trick with the ♠A and play diamonds immediately. She has to get a little lucky here. She has to hope that both opponents have to follow to all three diamond winners, since otherwise one of them will be ruffed. If that happens, she can console herself with the fact that she took her best and only shot at making the hand. The outstanding eight diamonds rate to break 4-4 or 5-3 almost 80% of the time, so it's a good bet.

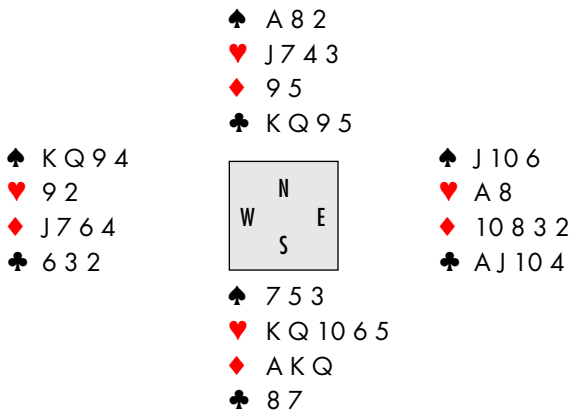
On the third diamond, South plans on discarding dummy's ♠2, eliminating a loser *and* creating an eventual tenth winner. How? After drawing the opponent's trumps, she will ruff one of her remaining spade losers in the short hand, creating that badly needed tenth trick.

All told, the opponents will win one spade, one heart and one club, and South will make her 4♥ contract.

BASIC BRIDGE RULE

Draw trumps as soon as you can. Not necessarily right away.

The complete hand was:



Note that the opening ♠K lead was not from a three-card sequence. A two-card sequence against a suit contract is enough. Against a suit contract, you should be mainly interested in the first two rounds of the suit, as subsequent rounds are likely to get ruffed by somebody.

By the way, on West's ♠K lead, when declarer calls for the dummy's ♠A, East should signal his desire for this suit to be continued by playing the ♠J! Playing a high card under partner's honor says 'I like the lead', while playing a low card says 'I hate it'. East knows that partner must have led from ♠KQ, a two-card sequence, and since East is looking at the next two sequential cards and sees the ace and two little spades in the dummy, he should signal to his partner that it is both safe and desirous for West to continue the suit should he win a trick. From West's point of view, seeing East's dramatic ♠J discard can mean only one thing: that he holds the ♠10 too. Otherwise, he couldn't afford to signal with what might be a potential trick.

BASIC BRIDGE RULE

Always try to signal with the most dramatic card possible.

Chapter 27

how cards work in defense

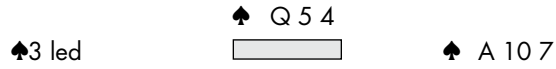
Being a defender is much harder than being declarer. You can't see your partner's hand, and there are many situations where you have to figure out what partner has before deciding what card to play yourself. We're going to take a short look at two scenarios, and ask you which card you should play.

THIRD-HAND PLAY

When are you 'third hand'? When partner leads to a trick: partner leads (first hand), dummy plays next (second hand), your turn (third hand). There are two cases to think about.

1) When there is an honor in dummy

Suppose the contract is 3NT. Partner chooses to lead the ♠3. Dummy hits with the ♠Q54. Declarer calls for the ♠4. You hold the ♠A107. Which card should you play?



What is declarer's holding? That's one question you need to answer before making your selection. Let's work it out. Presumably partner has led his fourth best spade and has an honor in the suit. Without an honor card, partner should have led a relatively high spot card to indicate that spades is his longest suit, but he doesn't have an honor in the suit. So partner should have either the ♠K or the ♠J or even both.

Here are three holdings that partner could have:

(a) ♠ J 9 6 3 (b) ♠ K 9 6 3 2 (c) ♠ K J 9 3

What would that leave declarer with?

(a) ♠ K 8 2 (b) ♠ J 8 (c) ♠ 8 6 2

Now let's try each of our three cards, the ♠A, ♠10, ♠7 and analyze the results.

a)

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

Partner led the ♠3, dummy followed with the ♠4.

Playing the ♠A wins the trick, but at what cost? Declarer will now win two tricks in the suit with her king and dummy's queen.

Playing the ♠7 loses to declarer's ♠8. Declarer will win a second trick with either her king or queen.

Now try inserting the ♠10, holding back the ace to take dummy's queen later. Declarer's ♠K wins this trick. But how will declarer ever win a second trick in spades? Your ♠A still lies over her ♠Q. If declarer plays a spade to the queen your side will win three tricks in the suit. If your partner gains the lead and shoots through his ♠J or ♠9, dummy's ♠Q will be caught between a rock and a hard place. Again your side will win three spade tricks.

By inserting your ♠10 you saved your ace for the card it is meant to capture. Your ♠A can never take declarer's ♠K. That card gets played *after* you play your ace. Why on earth would declarer ever play her king when she sees your ace on the table? No, save the ace for the queen.

What we have here is a surround (tenace) position. Your ♠A10, coupled with partner's ♠J, has dummy's queen surrounded. Play the ♠10, the bottom half of the tenace position. The ♠7 was much too low to do much good. But it didn't do any worse than when you played your ♠A.

Save the ace for the queen, insert the ten.

Now look at examples (b) and (c) for yourself, trying each of your three cards and seeing what happens. You will find that inserting the ♠10 can never hurt. It may not gain, but it will never cost your side a trick. That queen in dummy must never be allowed to take a trick. That's what your ace is for. Save it until declarer plays it.

2) When there is nothing in dummy

When your partner leads a low spot card and there is nothing of value in the dummy, play your highest card. It's that simple. What you are hoping to do is trap a card in declarer's hand under your partner's tenace position.

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

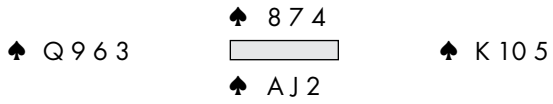
Trick 1. (W) ♠3, 4, K, 2

Trick 2. (E) ♠10, Q, A, 7

Trick 3 (W) ♠J, 8, 5, 6

If you play your ♠10 on the first round, declarer makes a trick with her ♠Q.

But I know what you're saying — what if declarer had the ace? Well, then your king was *never* going to win a trick anyway.



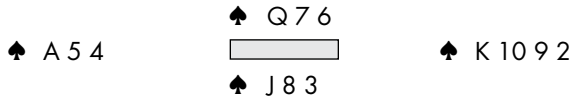
Here the ♠K loses to the ♠A but declarer's ♠J never takes a trick. It is caught under your partner's ♠Q9 tenace. If you tried your ♠10, because you didn't want to *waste* your ♠K, you just threw a trick declarer's way. She makes an extra trick with her ♠J. Remember, your king will eventually lose to declarer's ace anyway.

SECOND-HAND PLAY

Dummy or declarer leads (first hand), and you are next to play (second hand).

The contract is 3NT.

At some point declarer leads the ♠3 from her hand. Do you rise with the ♠A? I let you see all four hands to show you that this situation is similar to third-hand play decisions. Save your ♠A for declarer's ♠K. If you rise with your ace, both the queen in dummy and the king in declarer's hand will take tricks. Try to get some value for your ace.



Again, declarer leads the ♠3, and it's the same thing even if declarer doesn't have the ♠K. Playing the ace on 'air' costs a trick. Save it for whatever honor card declarer might have.

EXERCISES

Do you or don't you play your honor? Here I'll let you see all thirteen cards in the suit. Even so, it's not all that easy. Takes practice. But knowing the concept behind the play will guide you in the right direction.

In each example assume the contract is 3NT, and decide what card you are going to play.

1.

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

West leads the ♠J, dummy plays (a) the ♠Q, (b) the ♠4. As East, what do you do?

(a) **Cover** the ♠Q with your ♠A. That's what your ace is for, that queen in dummy. You're never going to get the king. It plays after you.

(b) Play your ♠8, a high spot card signaling, 'Partner, I love your lead'. Don't try to be cute and play the ♠7, play the highest spot you can afford. What if your two-card spade holding included just the ♠7 and ♠8? The seven would say, 'I hate your lead', wouldn't it? I'm sure partner will be smart enough to figure that out!

2.

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

Here the ♠7 is the right card to lead. Second highest when you don't have an honor. The ten is only considered an honor when it is with a higher honor (♠K1075 for example). So West leads the ♠7. What is your plan as East?

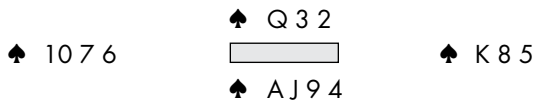
Play the jack here if declarer calls for a spot card, and cover the queen with the ace when you get the chance.

3.

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

You are West, and declarer leads the ♠7. Did you play your ace? What was the rush?

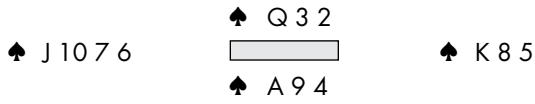
4.



When North leads the ♠Q, should you *waste* your king as East? You'd better! Trick 1: Queen, king, ace, six. Look how **covering an honor with an honor** helped promote that ♠10 to the master card for your partner. If you play low on that queen you'll see that partner's ten gets wiped out later.

What were you holding back that king for anyway? It's never going to get a shot at anything more valuable than that queen.

Worse. What if this were the situation?

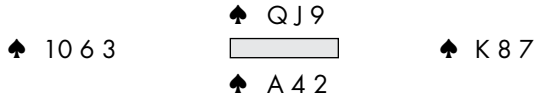


Now if you don't cover the queen, declarer gets a second trick she was never entitled to.

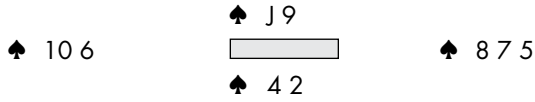
BASIC BRIDGE RULE

Cover an honor with an honor if there is a chance of promoting a card for you or your partner.

5.



This one is hard. North leads the ♠Q. Do you cover an honor with an honor here? Yes, you do. But not that one! When you can cover touching honors, save your honor for the last one in the sequence. Watch what happens if you mistakenly cover that queen. Declarer wins with her ace, and here's what will be left:



Now declarer can lead up to her J9 tenace, and your partner will not be able to prevent her from taking two more tricks in spades.

If you had let the ♠Q go by unmolested, this would have been the situation:

Your king is still there waiting patiently for that jack to be played. And when it is, you will cover and promote partner's ten. Declarer only gets two spade tricks.

Chapter 28

in closing

This final chapter consists of twelve of my favorite teaching hands. But before tackling these last twelve hands, please review the material I have laid out for you below.

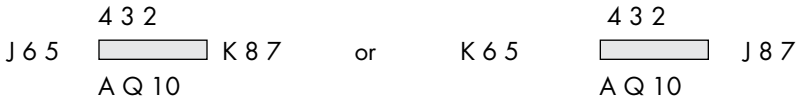
Throughout the book, I've tried to show how beautifully logical this game is. Any time you find yourself resorting to memorizing something, be it a bidding range or a type of play, it probably means you don't as yet fully understand the principle behind it. We discourage 'cheat sheets' in our novice supervised play sessions at Honors Bridge Club for that reason. We encourage our students to try to come up with the answer logically. In the long run, memory will only get you so far anyway. There are millions of possible bridge auctions. As far as the play goes, the rules work only about 85% of the time. The fun part is knowing when to break those rules. Besides, memorizing is work and bridge is supposed to be a game. Bridge is meant to be fun, not torture. It's not golf.

A TASTE OF THE ODDS

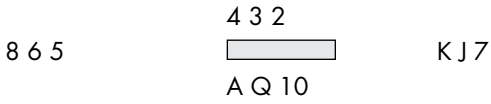
What are your chances of success? When faced with a choice of plays, understanding these few percentages will allow you to make the correct decision.

The chance of a finesse giving you one extra trick is 50%.

The chance of a double finesse giving you one extra trick is 75% (50% plus 50% of 50%).



The chance of a double finesse giving you two extra tricks is 25% (50% minus 50% of 50%).



Here is the way I learned to remember the odds below. Look at the way the fractions associated with these distributions closely approximate the actual percentages.

If you are missing six cards:
The suit will break 3-3 about 1/3 of the time (36%)
It will break 4-2 about 2/4 the time (48%)
If you are missing five cards:
3-2 will be 2/3 the time (68%)
4-1 will be 1/4 the time (28%)
And if this isn't easy enough for you, try this:
An even number of outstanding cards rate to break unevenly.
Six will break 4-2 more often than 3-3.
An odd number of outstanding cards rate to break evenly.
Five will break more often 3-2 than 4-1.

Another important rule:
If you are looking for the queen of a suit and you are missing four cards (you are in a *nine*-card fit)... Play the ace, then the king. Don't finesse.

If you are missing five cards (you have an *eight*-card fit)... Take the finesse.

An even easier way to remember this last one:

Nine *never*... Eight *ever*.

A TASTE OF BIDDING

1NT = 15-17 points.

Pass your partner with 0-8.

Raise your partner to 2NT with 9.

Double raise your partner to game with 10+

Bid a slam (6NT) with 18+.†

1♥ or 1♠ = 13 to 20 points.

Pass your partner with 0-5 points.

With trump support:

Raise your partner to 2♥ or 2♠ with 6-9.

Jump raise your partner to 3♥ or 3♠ with 10-12.

Raise your partner to game, 4♥ or 4♠, with 13-5.

Bid a slam, 6♥ or 6♠ with 19+ points.‡

A TASTE OF BRIDGE

What follows are a dozen of my favorite teaching hands.

Some are straightforward. Some are challenging. Some are just fun. Come back to them from time to time. Play them over and over until you can say, 'I know this hand, I know what I'm supposed to do. I 'see' it all clearly, right from the get-go.'

On every one of these examples, first say the shape of each of the four hands, longest to shortest, then the shape of each suit, again longest to shortest.

That will come to about 100 times.

I've said these shapes about a million times, still do. So has every other good player in the world. It's what we do because we know bridge thinking is all about shape. You may not see it now, may not see it for a while, but when you do, when you have that first 'aha' moment, chills will go down your spine and you will be thanking me for the rest of your bridge days.

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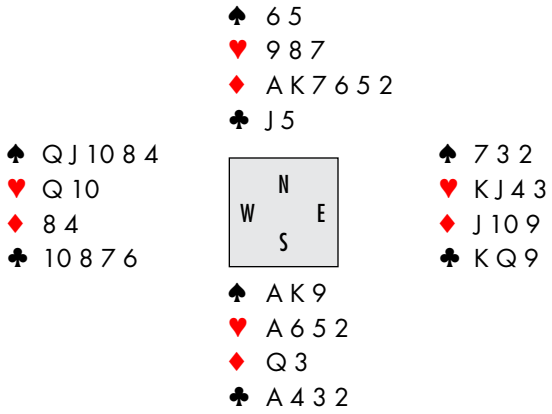
† Yes, I know we didn't talk about these, they are only here for completeness. Think slam in notrump with 33+ combined points, and in a major with 32.

HAND 1

Honors from the short side first.



West	North	East	South
			1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

The lead is the ♠Q

The bidding; Why does North raise to 3NT with only 8 HCP?

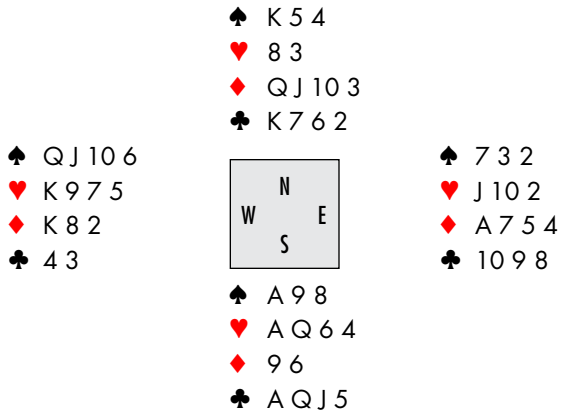
Remember to add one length point for each card above four. That would bring the total to 10 points.

More to the point. Bridge is tricks. North's six-card suit, headed by that ace and king, may supply six tricks on their own. After all, isn't South known to have at least two or three diamonds?

Key play: Remember to play the honor from the short side first. That diamond queen must be got out of the way before dummy's ace and king get played. After all, won't you need one of those two honors as an anchor, a bridge, to the diamond length in dummy?

Win the opening lead and cash the ♦Q. Then follow with a small diamond. When the suit breaks 6-3-**2-2** you're home.

Sometimes a nine is an honor.



West	North	East	South
			1NT
pass	2NT	pass	3NT
all pass			

The lead is the ♠Q.

You have seven sure tricks. One extra might come from a successful finesse in hearts. But you'd still need one more. Two extra can be made in diamonds by driving out the opponent's ace and king stoppers and promoting those lesser honors to master cards.

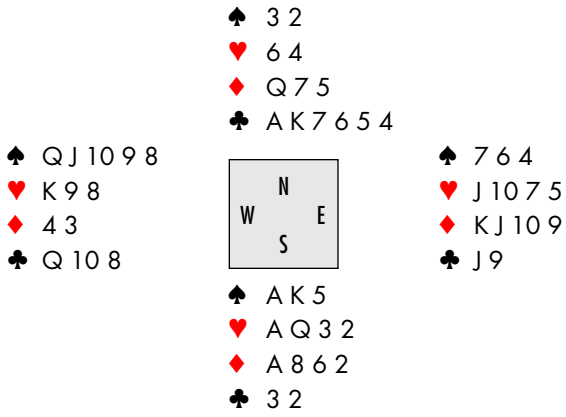
This part of the thinking is called the *strategy*. It's the 'making a plan' part of what goes into every hand. Putting the plan into practice is the tactical part, or the *technique*. On this hand you have to take care with the technique. The ♦Q, ♦J and ♦10 are all in one hand. The ♦9, an equal card to these honors, is in the other hand. Three 'ducks in a row', one 'odd duck'. Start the diamonds by playing the ♦9 first.

BASIC BRIDGE RULE

Play your honors (even nines) from the short side first.

HAND 3

Say the shape of the North hand.



West	North	East	South
			1NT
pass	3NT[1]	all pass	

1. North has 11 points: 9 HCP + 2 LP.

The lead is the ♠Q. Be really cautious here.

The strategy: Outside of clubs you only have four sure winners. You need five from those clubs. Say the shape of the North hand. It's 6-3-2-2. How do you want the club suit to be divided around the table? Say that shape. It's also 6-3-2-2. If the opponents' clubs split 3-2, as they will 2/3 of the time, then they'll make one trick and you'll make five. Since you can't possibly make all six club tricks without losing one, the one you 'give' to the opponents should be the first one.

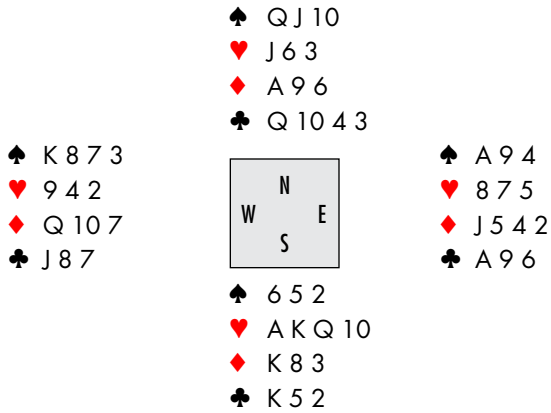
BASIC BRIDGE RULE

When you have to lose a trick in a suit, lose it right away.

The technique: Win the opening spade and, at Trick 2, play a low club from each hand. The ace and king will now bring down the opponents' remaining clubs.

HAND 4

The 'mandatory' finesse. Or, 'Don't spit in the wind'.



West	North	East	South
			1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

The lead is the ♠3 (fourth best from an honor).

The strategy: You have four heart winners and two diamond winners. The ♠QJ10 must also take a trick eventually. That comes to seven. Two more needed. But you won't be able to wring another trick from any of these first three suits. Those two other tricks must come from clubs.

Turning our attention to losers, we need to look more closely at the ♠3 lead. If the ♠3 is the fourth best spade in West's hand, can he have led from a five-card suit? Who has the ♠2? You do! If the ♠3 is opener's fourth best card, he can't have a fifth best. Spades therefore will be breaking 4-3. Your ♠QJ10 combination will take a spade trick, leaving three for the opponents. You can still afford to lose one more trick, but only one.

Looking at your none-too-robust club holding may leave you somewhat downhearted. But cheer up. Funny thing about broken-down suits like this: they may actually not be as feeble as they seem.

The technique: Do you see your queen-ten tenace position in clubs? Remember to try to keep it for as long as you can. Before the opponents can cash their three spade tricks, they will have to give you one. When

you are in dummy with the ♠Q, lead a low club away from your tenace position, toward your king.

What should East do? If he rises with his ace, that will be the fourth and final trick for his side. Your ♣K and ♣Q will provide you with the two tricks you need to fulfill your contract.

East should try to get something of value with his ace: dummy's queen, for example. When that low club is led, he should hold back his ace. In bridge parlance we say he plays 'second hand low'. The first hand is the leader, the first card played to a trick. The second hand is the second card played to the trick. Second position usually follows suit with one of their lower cards. East therefore follows with the ♣6.

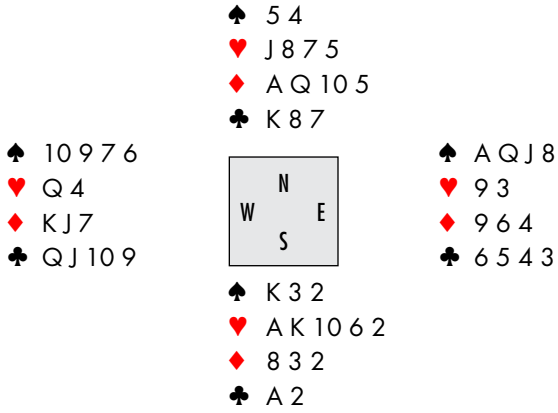
You go up with your ♣K and it wins the trick. Who has the ace? Exactly. Now comes the really good part. Lead a low club back toward your queen-ten and when West follows low, *do not play the queen!* You know where the ace is, so you need to hope the jack's not there too. Don't go 'spitting in the wind'. The ace is on your right for sure, so why not try finessing your ten?

Success! The ace takes dummy's ten and your carefully preserved queen gets to take out West's jack later on.

One club and three spades are all you lose. And you accomplished all this with only 25 HCP and not a single length point.

HAND 5

Three finesses, not four.



West	North	East	South
			1♥
pass	3♥	pass	4♥
all pass			

The lead is the ♣Q.

The strategy: Start by counting your winners and potential losers from the perspective of the long trump hand. In this case, that's South. Looking at each suit individually we find that she has:

- Clubs: Two tricks and no losers.
- Diamonds: One trick and maybe two losers.
- Hearts: Four or five heart tricks (you're missing the queen); maybe one loser, maybe none.
- Spades: Maybe one winner, maybe none. Who knows how many losers?

There's lots of work to be done. After tackling the suits individually we will then try to put all that information together. Suit by suit, here's the plan.

Clubs: Nothing needed here, we have only two clubs in the long trump hand and the ♣A and ♣K between the two hands. Two winners, no losers.

Hearts: 'Eight ever, *nine never*.' When missing the queen, *do not* finesse when you hold nine combined cards in the suit. We intend to play the ♥A and ♥K, going with the odds, and hoping to drop the ♥Q singleton or doubleton.

Spades: Finesse the king. Hope the ace is on your right. Then plan on trumping that third spade in the short hand. This will eliminate a loser and create a winner.

Diamonds: We are missing two important cards. Why not hope they will both be with our LHO? Costs us nothing. If they are both on our left, we will not lose a trick in the suit. If only one is there we will capture it eventually and lose only one trick. If both are with our RHO, then we will unfortunately always lose two diamond tricks.

The technique: The play might go something like this.

Trick 1. Win with the ♣A.

Tricks 2 and 3. Draw trumps. The queen drops doubleton. The suit broke 5-4-**2-2.**

Trick 4. Lead to the ♦AQ105, gently covering whatever card LHO plays. If he plays small, try the ♦10. Here it wins the trick, so you'll later finesse against his king.

Trick 5. In dummy, it's now right to try the spade finesse. Lead toward your king, and if RHO plays low, go up with it. It wins too.

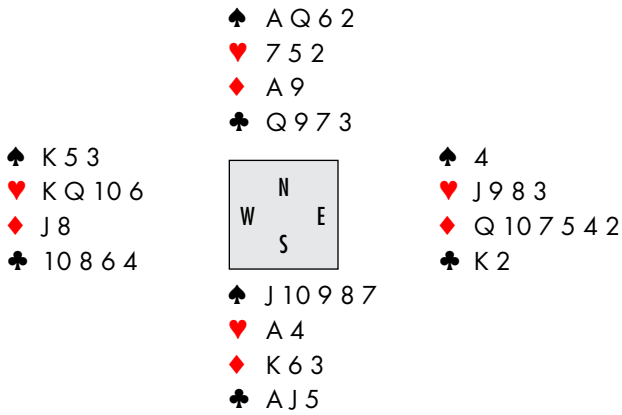
Trick 6. Another diamond now, putting in the queen if RHO does not produce the king.

The rest of the hand requires that you just trump your third spade at some point. All in all, when the smoke clears, you will have lost only one trick, a spade.

Now, for fun, reverse the East and West hands and replay the hand on a club lead. You will lose both diamond finesses and two spade tricks. Instead of making two overtricks, you will actually go down on the hand.

HAND 6

Grand Slam! Make all thirteen tricks.



West	North	East	South
			1♠
pass	4♠[1]	all pass	

1. North has 12 HCP + 1SP for the doubleton diamond.

The lead is the ♥K.

On the lead of the king, East should signal his approval of hearts. He has the jack, the card West needs to know about, because it is an equal honor to West's known queen. East does this by playing the highest card he can afford, in this case the ♥9.

This hand is fun if you're not a defender.

Win the heart lead. Then lead a spade intending to finesse. If West doesn't produce the king, and he shouldn't, *let that spade ride.* When it wins, you will still be in your hand to repeat the finesse. After capturing West's ♠K, turn your attention to clubs. Lead a small one from dummy, finessing the jack. Now bang down the ace. Yippee! East's king falls. Now lead that ♣5 through West's ♣108 and carefully cover whichever club he chooses to play.

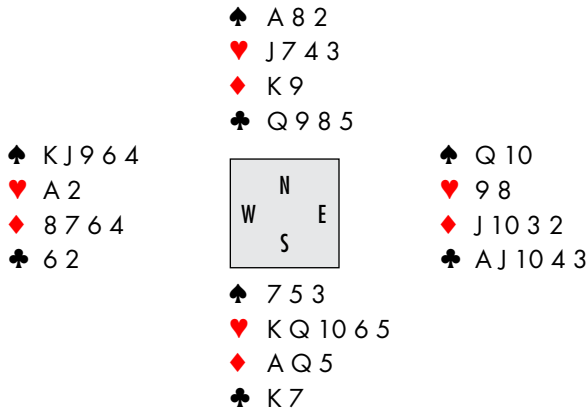
All told, you make 5 spades, 4 clubs, 3 diamonds (two plus a diamond ruff in dummy) and 1 heart. Let's see: 5 and 4 and 3 and 1... sounds like 5-4-3-1 to me, and we know that comes to thirteen. You won every trick there was to take!

So should you have bid your grand slam? Definitely not! Once again, reverse the East and West hands and replay the hand. You might lose one spade, one heart and one club and barely make the hand.

DISCARDING

HAND 7

Draw trumps as soon as you can.



West	North	East	South
			1♥
pass	3♥	pass	4♥
all pass			

The lead is the ♠6.

As West you find yourself on lead. You choose the ♠6, fourth from an honor. When you don't have a sequence, this is often a good attacking lead. You don't need much help from partner to start building a trick or two in the suit. Here you strike gold. Declarer's stopper is knocked out and your side is all set to cash two spade winners as soon as you get the lead. And you will do that soon enough. After all, you have the most important card in the deck, the ace of trumps.

But before you finish patting yourself on the back, declarer throws a monkey wrench into your plan. Rather than starting on trumps im-

mediately, she chooses instead to play on diamonds, first by unblocking dummy's ♦K. Next comes that ♦9 over to her queen, and on her ♦A she discards one of what you hoped would be spade losers — tricks for your side. Only now does she play a trump. Too late for your side. Declarer loses only one heart, one club and *one* spade.

BASIC BRIDGE RULE

Draw trumps as soon as you can, not necessarily right away.

HAND 8

No time like the present.

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

West	North	East	South
			1♥
pass	3♥	pass	4♥
all pass			

The lead is the ♦Q.

Once again, winners and losers: nine winners, four losers.

We cannot do anything about our three quick (off the top) spade and club losers. A place must be found for our slow diamond loser. We also need to worry about creating a tenth trick somewhere. Turns out, they both go together.

The strategy: The ♠KQJ are what we call tight, just the three of them with no accompanying spot cards. They face only two spades in dummy. Inequality in bridge is a good thing. Gives us options: ruffing or discarding. Here it turns out to be both.

After winning the opening lead, *somewhere to be determined,* we will draw trumps, then drive out the opponents' spade ace. This will establish one of our spades for a needed diamond discard.

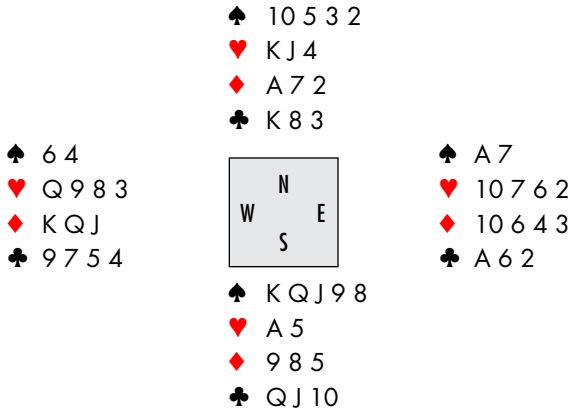
Once we discard a diamond from dummy, from the short trump suit side, we will then be able to ruff our losing diamond in dummy, which we know will create a trick (our tenth).

The technique: We need to see far ahead. Try to plan it out in your head first. (Every teacher says that, including me. Dumb. Where else were you going to plan it?) Because you can't take a trick back (once it's played it's played), seeing several tricks ahead is crucial.

The plan is to discard a diamond on a high spade. In order to do this, you will need to get to the side where the winning high spade will be. The diamond that will get you there is the ace. You may need that card later. Win the first trick with dummy's ♦K.

Draw trumps in two rounds (5-4-**2-2**) and drive out the opponents' ♠A. When you next get the chance, play off your ♠QJ and on the ♠J discard that losing diamond. Your tenth trick comes from ruffing a diamond with one of dummy's short trumps.

Desperate times.



West	North	East	South
			1♠
pass	3♠	pass	4♠
all pass			

The lead is the ♦K.

This is what we like to refer to as a 'thin' game, meaning we arrived here with the absolute minimum values. You really had no excuse for accepting partner's invitation, but sometimes you just feel lucky.

Okay, now we're in it, we have to play it. Counting: nine winners, four losers. And, after the lead, those losers are all quick ones. As soon as an opponent wins a trick, we're cooked.

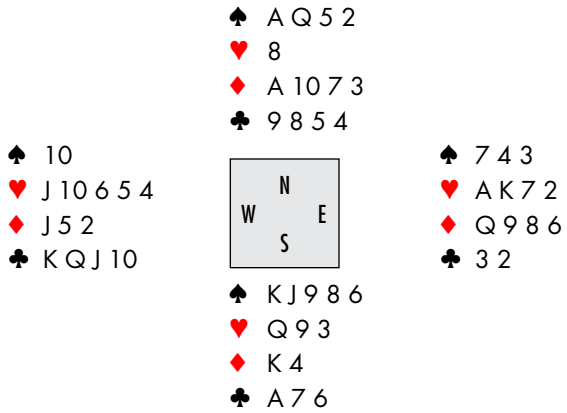
The strategy: We need to eliminate one of those four losers. Their ace of trumps is never going away, so it's between clubs and diamonds. If we found a way to discard one club in either hand, we would still have a losing club. But discarding a diamond would eliminate a loser.

The technique: Where can we 'park' at least one diamond loser? Look for side suits with unequal lengths. Only hearts: three opposite two. But we don't have the ace, the king *and* the queen. We only have the ace, king, and *jack*. Once again we must fall back on, 'You've got to play the hand you're dealt'. Win the opening lead. Play a heart to your ace, and a heart back through your king-jack tenace. Stick in the jack. It wins! Discard one of your losing diamonds on the ♥K. Ten winners, three losers. Piece of cake!

If the finesse lost, you'd have gone down one extra trick.

HAND 10

Draw trumps as soon as you can.



West	North	East	South
			1♠
pass	4♠[1]	all pass	

1. 10 HCP + 3SP.

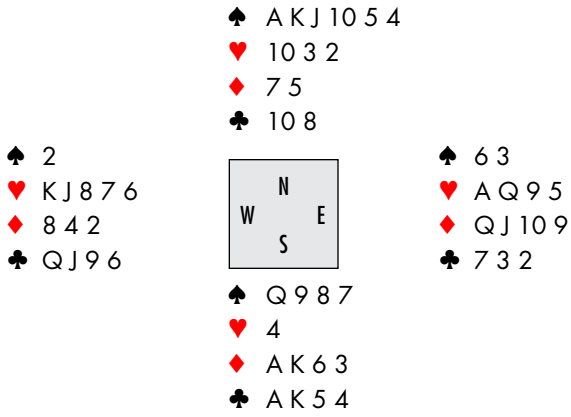
The lead is the ♣K.

Eight winners. Five losers: two clubs and three hearts.
North's shape: 4-4-4-1.

The strategy: *Three* heart losers — really? By now I hope you appreciate the power of that beautiful singleton heart in dummy along with those four wonderful trumps. Five trumps in your hand means any time you trump with dummy's short trumps you'll be creating tricks.

The technique: Win the opening lead and give the opponents a heart (that queen's just there to distract you — it's worthless as a queen, but as a heart to be ruffed, it's gold. *After* trumping those two losing hearts, draw trumps. Eight plus two (ruffs in dummy) equals ten winners. Five minus two (heart ruffs in dummy) equals three losers.

Five losers to worry about.



The contract is 6♠, a small slam. The auction is way beyond the scope of this book, so we'll ignore it.

The opening lead is the ♣Q. Plan the play.

North's shape: 6-3-2-2.

South's shape: 4-4-4-1.

The strategy: Count your winners and losers from the *long trump side.*

Surprise — for the first time the long trumps are in the dummy.

Analyze the hand from the dummy's perspective.

Look at it this way. In declarer's hand (South this time), there are only four trumps; you have nine other cards to worry about. You have to contend with 1 heart loser, 2 diamond losers and two club losers. Five losers. But if you count from dummy's side, outside of trumps, you only have seven cards to worry about.

Let's look at those seven.

No losers in clubs or diamonds. They are both covered by the ace and king of their respective suits. What about your three little hearts? Those are the only three cards to focus on. Three losers rather than five.

There's only one heart in South's hand, and there are four trumps. See a plan there?

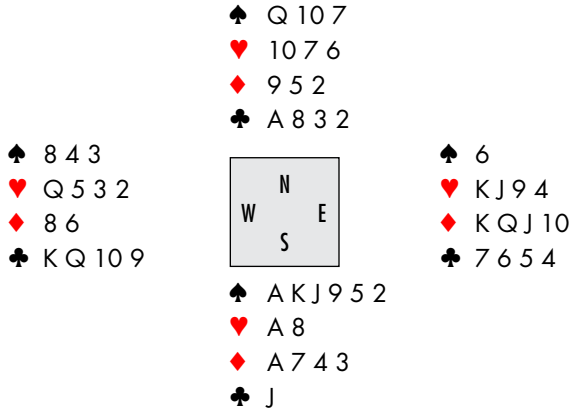
The technique: Win the opening lead. Test the trumps. If both players follow to the first round, draw the last trump. Then give them a heart. Plan on ruffing the other two. If one player shows out (cannot

follow suit) the first time you play spades, leave the other two trumps outstanding until you have ruffed both of your losing hearts.

Twelve tricks, bid and made... 1430 points. Not a bad day's work.

HAND 12

Where's 'shorty'?



When you looked at South's hand, I know the first thing you did was say, 6-4-2-1. Even if you didn't, pretend you did. Humor me.

West	North	East	South
			1♠
pass	2♠	pass	4♠
all pass			

The lead is the ♣K.

I leave you with one of my favorite teaching hands. I'm not even going to give you a hint or the answer. I have that much confidence in you. (You can email me if you have to.)

You start with six trump tricks and three aces. As you can see, the diamond suit is not breaking 3-3, so the fourth diamond will not win a length trick.

Where is that tenth trick going to come from?

Hint: I told you, no hints. Okay, just one. What's the caption for this hand? Which is dummy's short suit?

afterword

I hope you enjoyed this book as much as I enjoyed bringing it to you. It's the product of forty years of teaching and collaborating with dozens of talented and dedicated players turned bridge teachers. For the most part, they simply wanted to share their joy of the game with others.

Thank you, Master Point Press, for allowing us the opportunity to reach an audience well beyond the borders of New York City.

If you've begun to enjoy the thinking and planning that go into every action you take at the bridge table, know that it just keeps getting better. We've only scratched the surface. It really gets interesting after you know all the bids, know how the cards work, and know how to communicate effectively with a partner. Then situations start to arise like this: I know that they know that I know that....

A lifetime adventure awaits.

Where you go from here is a good question. There are numerous great advanced beginner books out there. Books by Barbara Seagram and Audrey Grant are the ones we stock at the club. In the USA, Baron Barclay Bridge Supplies has a huge catalog of books and bridge accessories for sale. The American Contract Bridge League (ACBL), the parent organization for North America, has a website listing clubs throughout the country. Quality instructors will be found at almost all of them. Online, the list is too long to mention, and will probably be out of date by the time this book gets to print. Most offer free trials, some even offer endless free play. The American Bridge Teachers' Association can also help you find an instructor in your area.

Contact information for me can be found on our website, honorsbridgeclub.org, or by emailing us at honorsbridge@gmail.com.

In closing: may all your finesses work, and may all your opponents' suits break evenly for you. They never do for me, but that's a different book.

JEFF BAYONE has owned and operated New York's Manhattan Bridge Club and its successor, Honors Bridge Club, for over forty years, where he has taught or supervised the teaching of over 6000 novice and intermediate players. His Honors Bridge Club is the largest in North America. He is a Life Master many times over, and has won numerous regional and sectional victories, including the National Non-Life Master Pairs in Las Vegas. He lives in New York City.

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Betsy Lerner, author of the *New York Times* bestseller *The Bridge Ladies*

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