

LEADS AGAINST SUIT CONTRACTS

Leading on Your Own

When leading a suit that partner has not bid:

-- Lead second best from a sequence headed by an honor:

K from AKx, AKQ, AKJ (but ace from AK), or KQ doubleton

Q from KQx, KQ10, KQJ, (and AKQ if partner has raised)

J from QJx, QJ9, QJ10, QJ

10 from J10x, J108, J109, J10

9 from 109x, 1097, 1098, 109

Leading second from a sequence has some advantages, but one consequence is that the lead of the honor from Qx, Jx, or 10x (unattractive leads in any case) must be especially avoided. The result could be disastrous if you lead the honor and partner plays you for the next higher honor.

The reason for leading the queen from the AKQ in a suit partner has raised is to let him show the jack if he has it. He signals this possibly valuable entry by playing second highest (or the jack from J10) when he sees your queen. If the king were led, he would need the queen to play a high card. Don't lead the queen if partner has not raised the suit, as it then becomes more likely you will want to know his length in the suit.

-- Lead top from doubleton ace or king.

-- Lead low from weak doubletons. This includes Qx, Jx, and 10x but lead the queen from Qx if dummy has shown a strong hand (and declarer a weak one). Of course it is better not to lead from such holdings at all. Lead high from a weak doubleton if not interested in a ruff (e.g., you have QJ10 of trumps). In partner's suit only, lead the 10 from 10x.

-- Lead top from three small, play the middle card next. If the top card is a 9, lead the middle card as the 9 looks like a lead from 109. Besides, leading the 9 without the 8 could cost a trick (e.g., declarer has A8x and J10 doubleton is in dummy). On the second round play the card below the one led, denying an original doubleton.

-- Lead fourth-best from an honor (which includes the 10), lowest from three to the queen or better.

-- Lead the middle card from 9xx, 10xx, and Jxx (even J98). Leading from jack-third, especially from J98 (the 9 usually promises the 10), is dangerous and should be avoided.

-- From four or more small cards, usually lead "top of nothing," but lead second-best if the top card is the 9.

-- From an interior sequence, lead the top of the sequence:

J from KJ10 10 from K109 or Q109

Usually an interior sequence must be headed by an honor if the top of the sequence is to be led. Lead the 8, not the 9, from Q98 or K98. The 9 strongly implies a lead from 109... The only exception is the lead of the 9 from J98, not an attractive lead in any case. Playing 8, then 9, promises third round control, either a doubleton or from the king or queen.

For an explanation of why the top of an interior sequence is led, see the chapter “Marvin vs Journalist” at the end of this book.

Some comments about opening suit leads:

When the jack is led and the queen is visible, partner must have KJ10.

The lead of the 10 shows K, Q, or J. If you can see:

K and Q, partner has J

K and J, partner has Q

Q and J, partner has K

Situations that are bad for the system (none is necessarily fatal):

| | | |
|------|-------------|-------------|
| | xxxx | |
| ?J10 | | Axxx |
| | ?x | |

West leads the jack. East wins ace but doesn't know whether to continue or switch. Does West have QJ10 or KJ10? (But a lead from KJ10 is rare.)

| | | |
|----------|-------------------|-------------|
| | Qxx or Kxx | |
| ?109 (x) | | Axxx |
| | ?x (x) | |

West leads the 10 and East has to decide whether or not to duck. Who has what? In deciding, East must consider that declarer will always get one trick in the suit if he has Jx or Jxx, whereas playing the ace will probably cost a trick if declarer has the king or queen. The decision must be made on the basis of whether it looks like tricks must be grabbed fast or not, and whether partner is likely to have an entry (to lead through again, when the lead is from J109).

Leading Partner's Suit

When leading a suit partner has shown, lead the top of a sequence (but king from AKx). Rusinow is not used in partner's suit. Lead the honor from any doubleton honor (including 10x). Otherwise lead the card you would have led if partner had not bid the suit.

Suits that partner has “shown” include those shown by a transfer, unusual notrump, etc., and a major suit the possession of which is strongly implied by a takeout double of the other major suit.

Occasionally, for tactical reasons, an unsupported high honor may be led when holding three or more cards in the suit. The most common reason is to get a look at the dummy while holding the lead. A good time for this is when the high card in partner's suit is your only likely winner, and partner may need a lead of some other suit through dummy. A high lead may work well when dummy has bid notrump, indicating a stopper in partner's suit. Leading the queen from Qxx(x) may catch a king in dummy. Do this only when you have raised the suit.

Leading Trumps

Lead low from two small.

Lead high from a doubleton jack, but this is led only when a trump *must* be led.

Lead middle from three unless the middle card is an important one (e.g., lead x from J9x). After leading the middle card, usually play the lowest card next, following the convention of high-lowing in trumps when holding three.

Lead fourth-best from four or more small cards, just as you play lowest card from four trumps when following suit.

Lead top of a sequence unless deception is involved (e.g., lead 9 from 109x). From J10x leading the jack could cost a trick if partner has the singleton queen (ace in dummy) or singleton king (queen in dummy) while leading low could cost a trick if dummy has Qx or Kx and partner has Ax. You have to judge which situation might apply.