

DECLARER PLAY - WEEK 1
INTRODUCTION AND BIDDING REVIEW

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Although there are differences in the way that no trump and suit contracts are played, the basic strategy is the same for both:

1. LISTEN TO OPPONENTS BIDS

Opponents' bids (or lack of bids) will give you clues about the most likely location of key cards and the distribution of missing cards and high card points.

2. OBSERVE THE OPENING LEAD

The opening lead will often give you clues about the defensive strategy, the location of key cards, the distribution of suits, and the opponent that is the most dangerous to your plan. The opening lead may also "make the contract" by giving you a chance to take a trick with a card that might have been a loser.

3. PLAN YOUR OFFENSE

The type of contract determines the way the plan should be developed:

NO TRUMP CONTRACTS	SUIT CONTRACTS
a. Consider the number of tricks you must win.	Consider the number of tricks you can afford to lose.
b. Count sure winners in the combined hands.	Count losers in the hand with the longest trump suit, <i>the master hand.</i>
c. Analyze ways to develop needed winners: <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Promote your high cards.✓ Develop your long suits.✓ Finesse opponents' high cards.	Analyze ways to eliminate extra losers: <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Ruff your losers.✓ Finesse opponents' high cards.✓ Discard losers on extra winners created by:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promoting high cards• Developing long suits.

4. EXECUTE YOUR PLAN

If the plan begins to fail, pause and develop a new plan based on the number of tricks that remain, the cards that were played and the cards that remain.

5. WATCH DEFENDERS PLAY

Opponents will often follow a number of defensive guidelines that you might use to your advantage. Also look for defensive signals to give you clues about the location of key cards or the distribution of missing cards.

6. KEEP TRACK OF CARDS PLAYED

Learn to count and keep track of the cards that are played in every suit, but if that is difficult, at least count and track the cards played in any suit that is part of your plan.

COURSE BIDDING SYSTEM

The examples, exercises, and answers that you will see in this course are based on a variation of the *Standard American* bidding system that includes the following partnership agreements and conventions:

<p><u>OPENING THE BIDDING</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Better (Longer) Minor ✓ Five Card Majors ✓ Strong Two Clubs ✓ Weak Twos ✓ Preemptive Threes <p><u>RESPONDING TO NO TRUMP</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Major Suit Stayman ✓ Major Suit Transfers ✓ Quantitative Four No Trump <p><u>RESPONDING TO SUITS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Strong Jump Shifts ✓ Major Suit Limit Raise ✓ Jacoby Two No Trump 	<p><u>REBIDS BY OPENER</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Reverses ✓ Help Suit Game Try <p><u>CONFIRMING A SLAM</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Blackwood for Suit Contracts ✓ Gerber for No Trump Contracts <p><u>COMPETING WITH OPPONENTS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Simple Overcalls ✓ Weak Jump Overcalls ✓ Takeout Doubles ✓ Negative Doubles ✓ Lead Directing Doubles
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We will assume that your partnership and your opponents partnership follows this variation of *Standard American*.

Bids in *Standard American* communicate the strength and shape of the hand. Strength is evaluated by assigning points:

- **High Card Points (HCP):** A = 4, K = 3, Q = 2, J = 1.
Use common sense when counting HCP. An Ace is always worth four HCP but a singleton King is not worth three HCP unless it is in partner's suit.
- **Long Suit Distribution Points (LSP):** 5 Card = 1, 6 Card = 2, 7 Card = 3.
- **Short Suit Distribution Points (SSP):** Doubleton = 1, Singleton = 3, Void = 5.

There are three combinations of these point values:

- **High Card Points (HCP):** Use when driving toward a no trump contract.
- **Declarer Points (HCP + LSP):** Use when driving toward a suit contract and you will be the declarer.
- **Dummy Points (HCP + SSP):** Use when driving toward a suit contract and you will be the dummy with at least three card support for partner's suit.

Use the point count system to start the evaluation of your hand but alter the evaluation with every bid, including passes.

NO TRUMP CONTRACT DEFENSIVE STRATEGIES

The defense will most often use some combination of the following strategies in an attempt to thwart your plan to make a no trump contract:

- **Develop their long suit by driving out your stopper(s) in the suit.**

This means that you must not deploy your stoppers in their suit before you have established your own suits.

- **Hold up playing their high cards in your long suit.**

This means that you must carefully manage your entries to and from the dummy to ensure that after you have driven out defenders' high cards, your remaining cards are not stranded in a hand with no alternate entry.

NO TRUMP CONTRACT OPENING LEADS

The most common opening leads against a no trump contract are:

- **Partner's bid suit.**

This is usually defenders' longest suit and they will try to develop it.

- ✓ **Top of a doubleton**
- ✓ **Top of touching honors**
- ✓ **Top of three or four spot cards**
- ✓ **Bottom from three or four with an honor**

- **Leader's own suit.**

This may or may not be defenders' longest suit.

- ✓ **Top of connecting honors in a three card sequence or broken sequence.** Promises the next lower card in the suit. Most defenders will lead the **K** from an **AKQ** sequence. *Some defenders will lead the **K** from an **AKJ** sequence or the **Q** from a **KQT** sequence (see their convention card).*
- ✓ **Fourth highest card in the longest and strongest suit.** Promises at least one honor. *Some defenders will lead third or fifth highest (see their convention card).*
- ✓ **Top of nothing (usually a 9, 8, or 7).**

DECLARER'S RULE OF 11

When left hand opponent's opening lead is fourth highest:

- a. Subtract the size of the lead card from 11
- b. Subtract the number of higher cards you see in the dummy
- c. Subtract the number of higher cards you see in your hand

The result is the number of higher cards in your right hand opponent's hand.

A negative number means the lead was top of nothing.

NO TRUMP EXAMPLE 1 • LISTEN AND OBSERVE

- **South opens 1NT (invitational):** Limits hand to 15-17 high card points with balanced distribution and stoppers in at least three suits. *North says "15-17" immediately.*
- **North responds 2♣ (artificial Stayman, forcing):** Indicates at least 8 high card points and at least one four card major.
- **South replies 2♥:** Shows a four card heart suit. Does not deny a four card spade suit.
- **North rebids 2NT (invitational):** Limits hand to 8-9 high card points, denies four hearts, promises four spades.
- **South passes:** South is at the low end of the opening no trump range and has only one stopper in the doubleton diamond suit.

The ♦Q should be the top of connecting honors in a three card (possibly broken) sequence. West should have the ♦J and because dummy has the ♦T West should have the ♦9. East should have the ♦K.

NORTH - DUMMY

♦ T 4 3

East	South	West	North
Pass	1NT	Pass	2♣
Pass	2♥	Pass	2NT
Pass	Pass	Pass	

SOUTH - DECLARER

♠ Q 6 2

♥ K 9 4 3

♦ A 7

♣ A Q 9 2

Opening Lead ♦Q

NO TRUMP EXAMPLE 2 • LISTEN AND OBSERVE

- **North passes:** Limits hand to 0-12 declarer points without the shape to open a preemptive two or three.
- **South opens 1NT (invitational):** Limits hand to 15-17 high card points with balanced distribution and stoppers in at least three suits. *North says "15-17" immediately.*
- **North responds 2♥ (artificial transfer, forcing):** Promises at least five spades but says nothing about the strength of the hand. *South says "transfer" immediately.*
- **South replies 2♠.**
- **North rebids 2NT (invitational):** Shows exactly five spades and limits hand to 8-9 card points.
- **South bids 3NT (signoff):** South has enough high card points to bid a game. Since the partnership does not have an eight card spade fit, South prefers to play in no trump.

The ♥6 should be fourth highest in West's longest and strongest suit. West should have the ♥Q. The rule of eleven tells us East has no hearts higher than the six.

$$11 - 6 \text{ lead} = 5 - 2 \text{ dummy} = 3 - 3 \text{ hand} = 0$$

NORTH - DUMMY

♥ J 9

North	East	South	West
Pass	Pass	1NT	Pass
2♥	Pass	2♠	Pass
2NT	Pass	3NT	Pass
Pass	Pass		

SOUTH - DECLARER

♠ 7 6

♥ A K 7

♦ A K 8 4

♣ K 7 6 2

Opening Lead ♥6

NO TRUMP EXAMPLE 3 • LISTEN AND OBSERVE

- **South opens 1♦ (invitational):** Limits hand to 13-21 declarer points with no five card major, and probably four or more diamonds but it may only be three.
 - **North responds 1♥ (new suit forcing):** Shows at least 6 points and at least four hearts.
 - **East overcalls 1♠ (invitational):** Shows at least 9 declarer points and at least five spades.
 - **South rebids 1NT (invitational):** Limits hand to 13-16 points without support for partner's hearts. But the ♠KJT sequence following East's spades should provide two stoppers in spades.
 - **North rebids 3NT (signoff):** North must have enough high card points to ensure a game in no trump.
- The ♠6 is probably the highest card in partner's suit. East has five or six spades including the ♠AQ98 and West either has one more spade or is now void in spades.

NORTH - DUMMY

♠ 4 2

South	West	North	East
1♦	Pass	1♥	1♠
1NT	Pass	3NT	Pass
Pass	Pass		

SOUTH - DECLARER

♠ K J T 7

♥ Q 6

♦ A J 5 2

♣ Q 8 6

Opening Lead ♠6

SUIT CONTRACT DEFENSIVE STRATEGIES

The defense will most often use some combination of the following strategies in an attempt to thwart your plan to make a suit contract:

- **Take their winners in their long suit(s) early.**
This will often prevent you from discarding your losers in their suit(s).
- **Play their short suit(s) early.**
This may allow them to ruff one or more leads in the suit before you can draw their trump.
- **Lead trump.**
This will reduce your ruffing power against their long suit(s).

SUIT CONTRACT OPENING LEADS

The most common opening leads against a suit contract are:

- **Partner's bid suit.**

This is usually defenders' longest suit and they will try to take their winners early to prevent you from discarding your losers in the suit.

- ✓ **The Ace**
- ✓ **Top of a doubleton**
- ✓ **Top of touching honors**
- ✓ **Top of three card or longer support if the suit was raised**
- ✓ **Bottom of three card or longer support if suit was not raised**

- **Leader's own suit.**

This may or may not be defender's longest suit.

- ✓ **Top of connecting honors (an attacking lead).** Promises the next lower card in the suit. *Some defenders will lead the K from an AK combination.*
- ✓ **Top of a doubleton.** Starts a *high-low* signal to indicate the doubleton.
- ✓ **A singleton.** Effective if the bidding suggests that partner might be able to take the trick and return the suit for a ruff.
- ✓ **Fourth highest in an unbid suit (a passive lead).** Promises at least one honor. *Some defenders will lead third or fifth highest.*
- ✓ **A trump.** Effective if the bidding suggests **either** that declarer has all or most of the top honors **or** that declarer might need ruffing power in the dummy.

SUIT EXAMPLE 1 • LISTEN AND OBSERVE

- **North opens 1♦ (invitational):** Limits hand to 13-21 declarer points without a five card major and probably four or more diamonds but it may only be three.
- **South responds 1♠ (new suit forcing):** Shows at least 6 points and at least four spades. *South has 14 high card points and knows the partnership has at least 27 total points, enough for a game.*
- **North responds 2♠ (invitational):** Limits hand to 13-16 dummy points with four-card spade support.
- **South rebids 4♠ (signoff):** With 15 declarer points, an eight-card spade fit, and no stoppers in hearts or clubs, South bids the spade game contract.

The ♥K, an attacking lead, should be the top of connecting honors. West should have the ♥Q and might also have the ♥A. If not, East has the ♥A. Defenders will take the first three tricks.

NORTH - DUMMY

♥ J 6 4

West	North	East	South
Pass	1♦	Pass	1♠
Pass	2♠	Pass	4♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	

SOUTH - DECLARER

♠ A Q 8 5

♥ T 8 5

♦ A K J 8

♣ 7 4

Opening Lead ♥K

SUIT EXAMPLE 2 • LISTEN AND OBSERVE

- **East opens a weak 2♥ (invitational):** Limits hand to 7-12 declarer points with at least six hearts including two of the top four honors.
- **South overcalls 2♠ (invitational):** Limits the hand to 11-17 declarer points (two level overcall) with at least five spades.
- **North responds 3♠ (invitational):** North must have at least three spades and should have ten or more dummy points to advance the overcall to the three level. This bid invites South to bid a game in spades.
- **South rebids 4♠ (signoff):** South has enough strength to bid the game.

The ♥9 is probably the highest card in partner's suit. East should have the ♥QJxxx and may have a seventh heart but West probably has the other two hearts.

NORTH - DUMMY

♥ K 6

East	South	West	North
2♥	2♠	Pass	3♠
Pass	4♠	Pass	Pass
Pass			

SOUTH - DECLARER

♠ K Q J 5 4

♥ A T

♦ A Q T

♣ T 7 3

Opening Lead ♥9

SUIT EXAMPLE 3 • LISTEN AND OBSERVE

- **South opens 1NT (invitational):** Limits hand to 15-17 high card points with balanced distribution and stoppers in at least three suits. *North says "15 to 17" immediately.*
- **North responds 2♥ (artificial transfer, forcing):** Promises at least five spades but says nothing about the strength of the hand. *South says "transfer" immediately.*
- **South replies 2♠.**
- **North rebids 2NT (invitational):** Shows exactly five spades and limits the hand to 8-9 high card points.
- **South bids 4♠ (signoff):** South has enough high card points to bid a game. Since the partnership has an eight card spade fit and South has a worthless club doubleton, South prefers to play in spades.

The ♣A should be the top of connecting honors. West should also have the ♣K. Opponents will take the first two tricks.

NORTH - DUMMY

♣ 7 6

East	South	West	North
Pass	1NT	Pass	2♥
Pass	2♠	Pass	2NT
Pass	4♠	Pass	Pass
Pass			

SOUTH - DECLARER

♠ Q J 9

♥ A K 7 4

♦ A K 6 3

♣ 9 8

Opening Lead ♣A

DEFENSIVE PLAY

The defense will usually, but not always, follow these rules of thumb:

- **Return partner's opening lead.**
The first lead from the defender to the right of the declarer will usually be a card from the same suit as the opening lead.
- **Second hand low.**
When declarer leads a low card the defender in the second seat will usually play low.
- **Third hand high.**
When a defender leads a low card and declarer plays low, defender's partner will usually play the highest card in the suit.
- **Cover an honor with an honor.**
When declarer leads an honor the defender in the second seat with a higher honor will usually play the honor.
- **Lead through broken strength toward weakness.**
The defender to the left of the declarer will often lead through the broken suit in the dummy. The most obvious example is a lead toward dummy's **AQ**.
- **Communicate with attitude signals.**
When a defender follows suit, an unnecessary high card encourages partner to continue the suit while the lowest possible card indicates no interest in the suit.
- **Communicate with preference signals.**
When a defender discards, an unnecessary high card in a suit encourages partner to lead that suit while the lowest possible card in a suit indicates no interest in that suit.

OPENING LEAD SECTION • ACBL CONVENTION CARD																																																																						
<p>The ACBL convention card shows the King as the standard lead from the AK combination.</p> <p>In this illustration the Ace is circled to indicate that this player always leads the top of connecting honors.</p> <p>Similarly, the King is circled for the KQ combination under no trump leads.</p>	<p>LEADS (circle card led, if not in bold)</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center;">versus Suits</td> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center;">versus Notrump</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">x x</td> <td style="text-align: center;">x x x x</td> <td style="text-align: center;">x x</td> <td style="text-align: center;">x x x x</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">x x x</td> <td style="text-align: center;">x x x x x</td> <td style="text-align: center;">x x x</td> <td style="text-align: center;">x x x x x</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">(A)K x</td> <td style="text-align: center;">T 9 x</td> <td style="text-align: center;">(A)K J x</td> <td style="text-align: center;">A Q J x</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">K Q x</td> <td style="text-align: center;">K J T x</td> <td style="text-align: center;">A J T 9</td> <td style="text-align: center;">A T 9 x</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Q J x</td> <td style="text-align: center;">K T 9 x</td> <td style="text-align: center;">K Q J x</td> <td style="text-align: center;">(K)Q T 9</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">J T 9</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Q T 9 x</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Q J T x</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Q T 9 x</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">K Q T 9</td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">J T 9 x</td> <td style="text-align: center;">T 9 x x</td> </tr> </table> <p style="text-align: center;">LENGTH LEADS:</p> <table style="width: 100%; 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