

TAKING MORE TRICKS WHEN PLAYING WITHOUT A TRUMP SUIT

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BRIDGE LINGO

Major Suits → Hearts and spades are called the *major suits* because each trick above six counts 30 points and it only takes ten tricks to earn a game score.

Minor Suits → Diamonds and clubs are called the *minor suits* because each trick above six only counts 20 points and it takes eleven tricks to earn a game score.

Stopper → A *stopper* is a card or a combination of cards that can "stop" opponents from taking tricks in the suit. For example, an **A** is a definite stopper and a **KQ** combination is a definite stopper. A singleton **K** is not a stopper because the King will fall if the Ace is played. The **Kx** combination is counted as a stopper but it is not a definite stopper unless the lead comes from your left hand opponent. Likewise, the **Qx** combination is not a stopper but the **Qxx** combination is counted as a stopper.

Suit Fit → The number of cards in a suit from the combined hands in the partnership. For example, if declarer has five hearts and the dummy has four hearts, the partnership has a nine-card heart fit.

BIDDING GUIDELINES

After the declarer has been identified and declarer's partner tables the dummy hand, declarer must evaluate the combined hands and bid a contract. Declarer's ultimate goal is to make a contract that will score the most points for the partnership. The scoring rules show the following:

- A given number of tricks in no trump has a slightly higher score than the same number of tricks in a major suit which has a much higher score than the same number of tricks in a minor suit.
- Making a game contract earns a bonus score six times greater than the bonus score for making a part score contract.

This suggests declarer should look at the combined hands to see if it possible to make a game in no trump or a major suit.

Recall the following trump suit guideline:

- *Suit Guideline:* If the partnership has at least eight combined cards in a suit it is usually easier to make a suit contract instead of a no trump contract.
Exception: If the eight-card combined suit fit is in a minor suit (diamonds or clubs) and the combined hands have enough high card points to make a game, it may be easier to take nine tricks in no trump instead of eleven tricks in the minor suit.

Also recall the following game score point guideline:

• *Point Guideline:*

It usually takes at least 26 combined high card points to make a no trump or a major suit game contract.

It usually takes at least 28 high card points to make a minor suit game contract.

These guidelines are satisfactory for many deals and they are a good place to start the process of finding the best contract. But there are some deals where it is:

- possible to make a no trump contract with an eight-card or longer suit fit.
- impossible to make a suit contract with an eight-card or longer suit fit.
- possible to make a suit contract with less than an eight-card suit fit.

and there are deals where it is:

- possible to make a game contract with fewer than 26 high card points
- impossible to make a game contract with more than 26 high card points

For example, the deal on the right does not have an eight-card suit fit so the *suit guideline* suggests a no trump contract. The combined hands do have 26 (16+10) total HCP so the *point guideline* suggests a game contract. Declarer must take nine tricks to make a no trump game contract but the combined hands have no way to stop the defenders from taking at least four heart tricks and one spade trick to defeat a no trump game score contract.

WEST - DECLARER	EAST - DUMMY
♠ Q 8 7	♠ K J 4 2
♥ T 3 2	♥ 5 4
♦ A J 9	♦ K Q 8 7
♣ A K Q 4	♣ J 7 6

The next deal on the right does not have an eight-card suit fit so the *suit guideline* suggests a no trump contract. The combined hands only have 24 (15+9) total HCP so the *point guideline* suggests a part score contract. But declarer only has four losers, the four Aces so, if there is no trump suit, declarer can take nine tricks to make a no trump game score contract.

WEST - DUMMY	EAST - DECLARER
♠ J T 4 2	♠ K Q 8
♥ Q 4	♥ K J T 5
♦ K 9 8 2	♦ Q J T
♣ Q J 7	♣ K 6 4

Finally, the deal on the right has an eight-card suit fit in hearts so the *suit guideline* suggests a heart suit contract. But the combined hands only have 22 (8+14) total HCP so the *point guideline* suggests a part score contract. But if hearts are trump, declarer only has three losers, a heart to the ♥A, a diamond to the ♦A, and the singleton club. So declarer can take the ten tricks needed to make a heart suit game score contract.

WEST - DUMMY	EAST - DECLARER
♠ A J 7 4	♠ K Q 8 2
♥ 8 4 2	♥ K Q J T 9
♦ K 9 2	♦ Q J 7
♣ 7 5 2	♣ 6

CONFIRMING A NO TRUMP CONTRACT

This means that declarer should spend some time to confirm and, if necessary, adjust the contract target suggested by the *suit guideline* and *point guideline*. This is especially important if your point count is close to suggesting a try for a game.

If the initial target is a no trump contract, declarer should:

1. Count sure winners in the combined hands.
2. Look for ways to create additional winners by:
 - ✓ Promoting high cards.
 - ✓ Developing a long suit.
 - ✓ Finessing an opponent's high card.

The remainder of this document explains these steps in detail. The best way to confirm a trump suit contract is covered next week.

DECLARER PLAY

LISTEN TO THE BIDDING

You can increase your chances of making any contract if you know the location of any missing high cards. The defender that announced the largest high card point count is more likely to have the missing high cards than the defender that announced the smallest high card point count.

COUNTING WINNERS

When you are playing a no trump contract, your objective is to take at least the number of tricks that are required to make the contract. Since there is no pesky trump suit to interfere with your winners, the first step in confirming a no trump contract is to count the sure winners in each suit of your combined hands and then add up the counts to get the total number of sure winners.

A sure winner is any trick that you can take without giving up the lead. For example, there are four sure tricks in the left and the middle, but there are no sure tricks on the right because you may have to give up the lead to the missing Ace before you can take a trick in the suit.

4 SURE TRICKS
A K Q J
7 5 3 2

4 SURE TRICKS
A K 5 2
Q J 7 3

NO SURE TRICKS
K Q J T
7 6 4 2

The maximum number of sure winners is the length of the suit on the long side if you can take a trick to get to the long side. For example:

3 SURE TRICKS
A K 2 <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 5px auto;"/> Q J

4 or 5 SURE TRICKS
A K Q 5 3 <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 5px auto;"/> J T

2 or 3 SURE TRICKS
A K <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 5px auto;"/> Q 8 7 6

In the example in the middle, you can count five sure tricks only if you have a sure trick in another suit to get to the long side. If not, then you only have four sure tricks because the missing six cards might be split five-one or six-zero. In the example on the right, you can count three sure tricks only if you can get to the long side to lead the Queen.

If opponents will not have any high cards left after you play your high cards, you can count the length of the suit on the long side as winners. Suppose, for example, that you are missing only four cards in a suit:

5 SURE TRICKS
A K J 3 2 <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 5px auto;"/> Q 6 4 3

6 SURE TRICKS
A Q 3 <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 5px auto;"/> K J 8 6 4 2

5 SURE TRICKS
A Q 3 <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 5px auto;"/> K 8 6 4 3 2

In the example on the right, you will probably take six tricks but you can only count five sure tricks because the missing **JT97** may all be in one hand.

EXAMPLE — COUNTING WINNERS							
WEST - DECLARER		East	South	West	North	EAST - DUMMY	
♠ A Q 3		11		16		♠ K 8 4	
♥ 8 6 5			7			♥ J 4 3 2	
♦ A Q T 8		Declaring: East-West					♦ K J 9
♣ A 8 7						♣ K T 4	

Listen: South has 54% [$7/(7+6) = 7/13$] and North has 46% of the missing HCP.

Pause: You do not have an eight-card or longer suit fit so the *suit guideline* suggests a no trump contract. You have 27 (16+11) total HCP so the *point guideline* suggests a game score contract. You must take at least 9 tricks to make a no trump game.

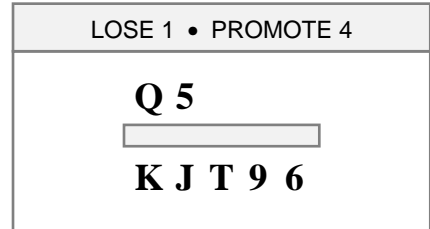
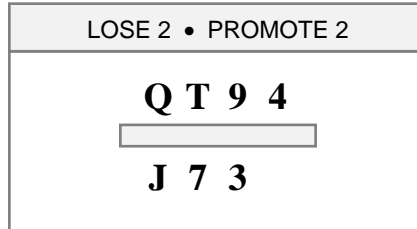
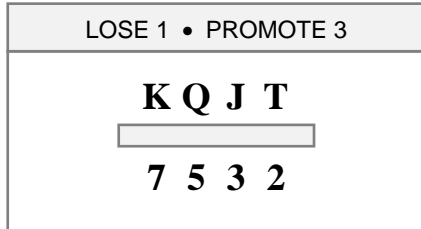
Look: You have 9 sure winners (3 ♠ + 0 ♥ + 4 ♦ + 2 ♣).

Analyze: Hearts are a potential problem because the ♥J432 is a weak stopper but even if you lose four heart tricks you will still take nine tricks to earn a game score bonus.

Contract: Bid the no trump game.

PROMOTING HIGH CARDS

You can promote high cards that are in a sequence by using the force of your high cards to drive out opponents' higher cards. This is the most common method for developing extra winners. It is also the most certain method when a trump suit can not interfere with your plan. However, your plan must allow for the fact that **you must give up the lead to promote your high cards**.



In the right hand example you must **play the high card from the short side first**. Then if the Ace does not fall, lead the low card toward the long side. You must also preserve another way to take a trick on the long side because an experienced defender will hold up the Ace in an effort to strand your extra winners.

EXAMPLE — PROMOTING HIGH CARDS							
WEST - DECLARER		North	East	South	West	EAST - DUMMY	
♠ K Q 9 7		4		7		♠ A 6 2	
♥ A K 6			12		17	♥ 9 7 4	
♦ 9 6 4		Declaring: East-West					♦ A K T 2
♣ K Q 4						♣ J 6 3	

Listen: South has 64% [$7/(7+4) = 7/11$] and North has 36% of the missing HCP.

Pause: You do not have an eight-card or longer suit fit so the *suit guideline* suggests a no trump contract. You have 29 (17+12) total HCP so the *point guideline* suggests a game score contract. You must take at least 9 tricks to make a no trump game.

Look: You only have 7 sure winners (3 ♠ + 2 ♥ + 2 ♦ + 0 ♣).

Analyze: You can promote two clubs by losing one trick. You can afford the loser because you have two stoppers in the other three suits.

Contract: Bid the no trump game.

LOSING TRICKS

You must lose one or more tricks to promote high cards in a suit. In general, you want to **lose these tricks early** while you still have stoppers in the other suits.

TAKE YOUR LOSSES EARLY

Since opponents are trying to establish their long suit, you may not be able to afford all of the losses. Be sure to consider the number tricks that you can afford to lose.

DEVELOPING LONG SUITS

In no trump, a long suit has the potential to take extra tricks. The more cards your partnership holds the fewer the opponents hold and after the suit is played several times opponents might not have any cards left. Your remaining cards, whether high or low, become winners.

Successful development of a long suit often depends on how the missing cards are distributed between the opponents. The distribution table on the right can be summarized by:

MISSING CARD DISTRIBUTION				
<u>MISS</u>	<u>MOST LIKELY</u>		<u>NEXT LIKELY</u>	
	<u>SPLIT</u>	<u>PERC</u>	<u>SPLIT</u>	<u>PERC</u>
3	2-1	78%	3-0	22%
4	3-1	50%	2-2	41%
5	3-2	68%	4-1	28%
6	4-2	48%	3-3	35%
7	4-3	62%	5-2	31%
8	5-3	47%	4-4	33%
9	5-4	59%	6-3	31%

*Most of the time, missing cards will divide unevenly
but as close to even as possible.*

For example, five missing cards will most often split 3-2 (68%) while six missing cards will most often split 4-2 (49%) with the next most probable split being 3-3 (35%).

3 SURE TRICKS • MOST LIKELY 1 EXTRA TRICK				
<p>Opponents have five cards in this suit. Since the most likely split is 3-2 (68%), this suit will probably take one extra trick. But, if the split is 4-1 (28%) or 5-0 (4%) you will not have an extra winner.</p>	<table style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="font-size: 24pt; font-weight: bold;">A K Q 4</td></tr> <tr><td style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 15px; margin: 5px auto;"></td></tr> <tr><td style="font-size: 24pt; font-weight: bold;">7 6 3 2</td></tr> </table>	A K Q 4		7 6 3 2
A K Q 4				
7 6 3 2				

2 SURE TRICKS • MOST LIKELY 1 EXTRA TRICK				
<p>Since opponents five cards are most likely split 3-2 (68%), this suit will probably take one extra trick. But, you will have to lose one trick to develop the extra winner. Plan to lose that trick early while you still have control of the other suits.</p>	<table style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="font-size: 24pt; font-weight: bold;">A K 5 4</td></tr> <tr><td style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 15px; margin: 5px auto;"></td></tr> <tr><td style="font-size: 24pt; font-weight: bold;">7 6 3 2</td></tr> </table>	A K 5 4		7 6 3 2
A K 5 4				
7 6 3 2				

2 SURE TRICKS • MOST LIKELY 2 EXTRA TRICKS				
<p>Opponents five cards are most likely split 3-2 (68%). Your 5-3 split gives you a good chance to take two extra tricks and a very good chance to take at least one extra trick. But you will have to lose one or two tricks so take your losses early.</p>	<table style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="font-size: 24pt; font-weight: bold;">A 9 7 5 4</td></tr> <tr><td style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 15px; margin: 5px auto;"></td></tr> <tr><td style="font-size: 24pt; font-weight: bold;">K 6 3</td></tr> </table>	A 9 7 5 4		K 6 3
A 9 7 5 4				
K 6 3				

3 SURE TRICKS • MOST LIKELY NO EXTRA TRICKS				
<p>Since opponents six cards are most likely split 4-2 (49%), you will probably not take any extra tricks. But the missing cards might be split 3-3 (35%) so an extra trick is possible if there is no other way to take a needed winner.</p>	<table style="margin: auto;"> <tr> <td style="font-size: 1.2em;">A Q 3 2</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 15px; margin: 5px auto;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="font-size: 1.2em;">K 6 4</td> </tr> </table>	A Q 3 2		K 6 4
A Q 3 2				
K 6 4				

Remember that the defense is probably trying to develop their long suit and the opening lead will often give you a clue about the distribution of the lead suit. Developing your long suit is often a race between you and the defense. If you must lose a trick to develop a suit, be sure that you lose it before the defense has established their suit.

LENGTH REQUIREMENTS

If you need to develop a long suit, focus on the suit(s) with the longest combined length and/or the biggest uneven split. For example, your chances of developing extra tricks are:

- better for a combined length of eight with a 5-3 split than for a combined length of eight with a 4-4 split.
- better for a combined length of seven with a 5-2 split than for a combined length of eight with a 4-4 split.
- zero for a combined length of six with a 3-3 split but greater than zero for a combined length of six with a 5-1 split.

EXAMPLE — DEVELOPING A LONG SUIT																					
WEST - DECLARER	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <th style="width: 12.5%;">South</th> <th style="width: 12.5%;">West</th> <th style="width: 12.5%;">North</th> <th style="width: 12.5%;">East</th> </tr> <tr> <td>7</td> <td></td> <td>7</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>12</td> <td></td> <td>14</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="4">Declaring: East-West</td> </tr> </table>				South	West	North	East	7		7			12		14	Declaring: East-West				EAST - DUMMY
South	West	North	East																		
7		7																			
	12		14																		
Declaring: East-West																					
♠ K 6 ♥ A 8 5 ♦ A 7 6 4 3 ♣ K 6 3					♠ A 4 3 2 ♥ J 9 2 ♦ K 5 2 ♣ A 8 4																

Listen: South has 50% [$7/(7+7) = 7/14$] and North has 50% of the missing HCP.

Pause: You have an eight-card diamond fit so the *suit guideline* suggests a diamond contract. You only have 26 total HCP so the *point guideline* for a minor suit suggests a part score contract. But 26 HCP is enough to suggest a look at the possibility of making a no trump game contract. You must take at least 9 tricks to make a no trump game.

Look: You only have 7 sure winners (2 ♠ + 1 ♥ + 2 ♦ + 2 ♣).

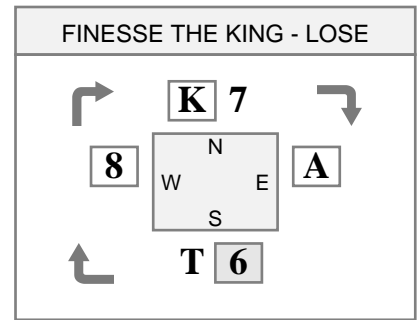
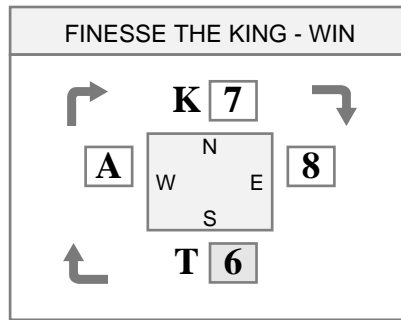
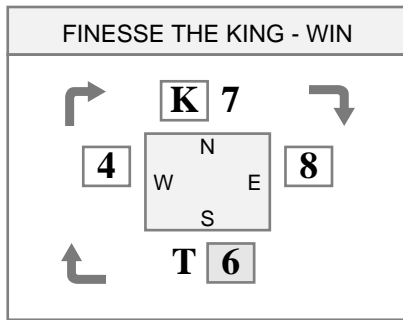
Analyze: There is a 68% chance that the 5 missing diamonds are split 3-2. If so, you can develop two more winners in the diamond suit by losing one diamond trick. You can afford the loss if you lose the diamond trick before defender's drive out your ♥A and ♥J.

Contract: Because a game score bonus is six times greater than a part score bonus, take the 2 to 1 odds (68% win vs 32% lose) and gamble on a try for the no trump game.

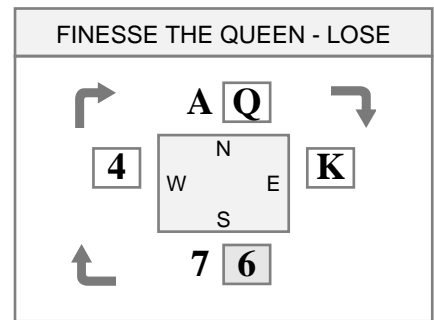
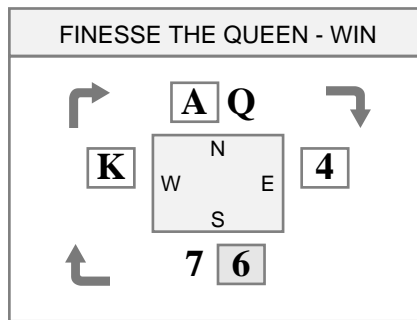
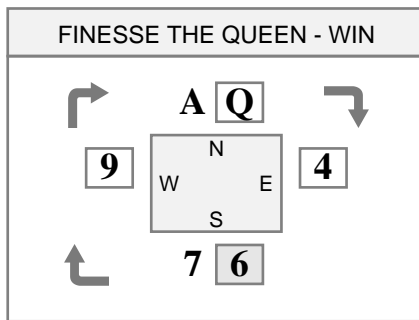
FINESSING OPPONENTS HIGH CARDS

A *finesse* is any play in which you attempt to take a trick with a high card when one of your opponents has a higher card. A successful finesse depends on finding a specific card in a specific place.

The most common attempt to finesse begins with a lead of a low card toward the hand that contains the card you want to finesse. Suppose South is on lead and wants to finesse the King against the Ace. South should **lead a low card, the 6, toward the King**:



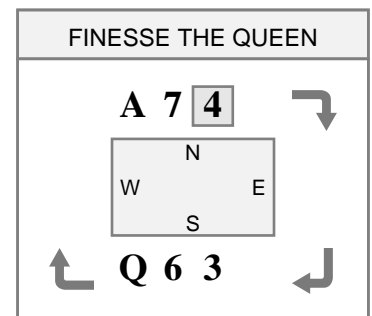
Now suppose South is on lead and wants to finesse the Queen against the King. South should **lead a low card toward the Queen**:



Note that the success of both of these finesses depends on West having the missing high card. If the missing card is in the East, the finesse fails.

In the example on the right, you might be able to take two tricks if you **lead a low card toward the Queen** to finesse against the King. If you try to finesse by leading the Queen toward the Ace you will only be able to take one trick because:

- **either** West will play the King to force your Ace.
- **or** East will play the King to take the trick.



EXAMPLE — FINESSING OPPONENTS HIGH CARDS						
WEST - DECLARER	East	South	West	North	EAST - DUMMY	
♠ K 8 5	11	9	16	4	♠ A 6 3	
♥ A Q 7 5	Declaring: East-West				♥ 6 4	
♦ Q J 8					♦ A K 6 3	
♣ A 3 5					♣ 8 7 4 2	

Listen: South has 69% [$9/(9+4) = 9/13$] and North has 31% of the missing **HCP**.

Pause: You do not have an eight-card or longer suit fit so the *suit guideline* suggests a no trump contract. You 27 (16+11) total **HCP** so the *point guideline* suggests a game score contract. You must take at least 9 tricks to make a no trump game.

Look: You only have 8 sure winners (2 ♠ + 1 ♥ + 4 ♦ + 1 ♣).

Analyze: Because South has 69% of defender's high card points, there is a good chance you can lead a low card from dummy to finesse against the ♥K and take the ninth trick.

Contract: Since the odds are in your favor (69% win vs 31% lose), bid the no trump game to try for the huge game score bonus.

DEFENDER PLAY

OPENING LEADS AGAINST NO TRUMP

The defending partnership's goal is to take enough tricks to defeat declarer's contract. One of the best strategies to accomplish this goal is to develop a partnership's long suit. Thus, the most common opening leads against a no trump contract are:

- **A card from your longest and strongest suit:**
 - a. **Top of connecting high cards in a three-card sequence or broken sequence.**

The sequence should usually be in a four-card or longer suit.

- ✓ Top of a sequence: A K Q x; K Q J x; Q J T x; J T 9 x
- ✓ Top of a broken sequence: A K J x; K Q T x; Q J 9 x; J T 8 x
- ✓ Top of an interior sequence: A Q J 9; K J T 8; Q T 9 7;

Leading the high card tells partner you have the next lower card in the suit.

- b. **Fourth highest card in your longest and strongest suit.**

- ✓ Fourth highest: Q J 8 4; K J 7 5 3; A K 9 4; K T 6 5 2

Leading the relatively low spot card tells partner you have at least one high card in the suit.

- **Top of nothing** (usually a 9, 8, or 7).

Leading the relatively high spot card tells partner that your high card points, if any, are in the other suits.

OPENING LEAD EXAMPLE 1				OPENING LEAD EXAMPLE 2					
WEST - DUMMY	East	South	West	North	NORTH - LEADER	NO TRUMP GAME CONTRACT			
♠ J T 4 2 ♥ Q 4 ♦ K 9 8 2 ♣ Q J 7	15	8	9	8	♠ J 7 2 ♥ 9 8 2 ♦ T 5 4 ♣ Q J T 9				
NO TRUMP GAME CONTRACT	SOUTH - LEADER				East	South	West	North	EAST - DUMMY
	♠ 9 6 5 ♥ 8 6 3 2 ♦ A 7 4 ♣ A T 8	11	9	16	4	♠ A 6 3 ♥ 6 4 ♦ A K 6 3 ♣ 8 7 4 2			
					Declaring: East-West				

Example 1: You do not have a high card sequence or a high card in a four-card suit so the best lead is probably *top of nothing* in dummy's short heart suit. Lead the ♥8 to tell your partner that your eight high card points are in the other suits.

Example 2: You have two connecting high cards in a four-card solid sequence. Lead the ♣Q, top of the connecting high cards. This should be an ideal lead because the dummy has weak clubs and your partner has nine high card points. This lead tells your partner that you do not have the ♣K but you do have the ♣J. If partner has the ♣A or ♣K, your partnership might be able to defeat the game contract.

PLAYING GUIDELINES

When you are a defender, you should usually (but not always) follow these guidelines:

- **Return partner's opening lead.** Remember your partner's opening lead and if it was an honor or fourth highest, lead that suit at your first opportunity.
- **Second hand low.** When declarer is on your right and leads a low card, you should usually play a low card.
- **Third hand high.** When your partner leads a low card and dummy plays low, you should usually play a high card, but only as high as necessary.
- **Cover an honor with an honor.** When declarer leads an honor and you are in the second seat with a higher honor, you should usually play the honor.
- **Lead through broken strength toward weakness.** When the dummy is on your left and has a broken suit, your best lead will often be a card in dummy's broken suit. The most obvious example is a lead toward dummy's AQ in the hope that your partner has the K.