

## Opening Leads against Suit Contracts

We decide what to lead against suit contracts the same way we decide what to lead against no trump contracts.

First, we pick the suit.  
Then, we pick which card in that suit.

Many of the guidelines for selecting the actual card you lead from the suit you have chosen are the same as they are against a notrump contract. But when selecting the suit to lead, there are some new considerations. You no longer focus your attention entirely on long suits. After all, declarer chose to play in a trump suit, so that you would not be able to enjoy winners in your long suits. The presence of a trump suit has a great influence on the way declarer plays and it also influences the way the defenders try to defeat the contract.

If partner suggested a lead, it is usually right to follow partner's suggestion, just as it was against no trump. But have these agreements about "which card" with your partner:  
-- If you raised partner, then lead low to show an honor, and high to deny one. (Remember BOSTON).  
-- If you did not raise partner, lead low from 3 or more, and lead high from a doubleton.

If partner hasn't suggested a lead, a singleton is often a good choice. Partner can either win the Ace and then give you a ruff, or, they can win an early trump trick and then give you a ruff. On a good day you can score two ruffs!

Doubletons are generally not good leads (unless partner has bid the suit). Occasionally, you will be able to score a ruff, but far more often you "solve" the suit for declarer. Do not rush to lead a doubleton, especially from an honor in a suit that partner has not bid.

If declarer has bid two suits, and you are strong in the non-trump suit, consider leading trumps. Declarer may well want to ruff these cards in the dummy, so this can be an effective defense.

When you have 4 or more cards in their trump suit, it is often right to lead your long suit, rather than your short one. If you can force declarer to ruff in their hand, (typically the hand with the long trumps), you may be able to end up with more trumps than declarer. (This is great for you, though unpleasant for them!)

If nothing seems attractive, lead an unbid suit, rather than one of the opponent's suits.

If you hold three small cards in the unbid suit, lead MUD (middle, up, down). So, from 862, lead the six. Then play the 8 on the second round so that partner knows you did not start with a doubleton. Remember, if this is a suit that partner has bid, then lead the 2 if you did not raise (to show count) and the 8 if you did raise (to deny an honor).

As before (and as always), it pays to reflect on the auction before making your decision. If you blindly lead from your KQ without remembering that the opponents bid that suit, you are likely to give away a trick. Likewise, a seemingly dangerous lead from KJxx may be the only way to set the contract. But if that is the unbid suit, you should likely be aggressive and go for it. Again, you're never going to get them all right. Just try to make the best educated guess that you can!

**Board 1**

North Deals  
None Vul

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

West	North	East	South
	1 ♠	Pass	2 ♦
Pass	3 ♦	Pass	3 ♠
Pass	4 ♠	All pass	

**Auction Commentary:** North raises to 3 ♦ because they don't have a heart stopper. South's 3 ♠ bid is forcing. North, with not much more than a minimum, simply bids game.

**Opening Lead:** Lead a 4th best 3 ♥. While the ♣ J looks attractive, it is generally better to lead our long suits rather than our doubletons when we hold 4 trumps, especially when they are headed by a high honor.

**Second Hand Commentary:** Declarer, remember second-hand low. East will never have the ♥ AK, but on a good day, they will have the ♥ J. If you waste dummy's ♥ Q, none of the days will be good.

**Third Hand Commentary:** It's crunch time. Does partner have the ♥ K? If you are playing BOSTON leads, you know that they do. Could partner have ♥ 32 doubleton? That would give declarer 5 hearts, and they would not raise diamonds. You expertly play ♥ J, winning the trick.

**Defensive Commentary:** Now what? How many trumps does partner have (no peeking). Since North did not rebid their spades, they only have five, marking partner with four. If we can make declarer ruff, they will have the same number of trumps as partner. If they have to ruff again?

Continue with the ♥ A. Partner should continue with the ♥ 2, confirming that they started with five. Either way, we play a 3rd heart, and declarer must ruff and start trumps.

Switch to East. We take declarer's ♠ K with the ♠ A and....they made it. Declarer was able to ruff the 4th heart in the dummy and claim. What could we have done? Duck, and duck again. Now what can declarer do? If they play a 3rd spade, we can win and play a 4th heart, and it's curtains. If they switch to other suits, we will score our small spade and our ♠ A. Curtains.

**Takeaway:** This is an important defensive strategy. We have "tapped out" the declarer. Another top for you.

**Board 4**

West Deals  
None Vul

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

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♣	Pass	1 ♠	Pass
2 ♠	Pass	4 ♠	All pass

**Auction Commentary:** Sometimes, you have to raise partner's major with 3. This is one of those times. Partner, with extra trump length and otherwise a minimum, jumps to game.

**Opening Lead:** 2 ♦ Do we lead unsupported aces? Not when teacher is looking. Do we lead the suits the opponents bid? Not a good plan. A diamond it is.

**Play Commentary:** Declarer's plan should be to draw trump and set up clubs. If the spades are 2-2, it is not complicated, but there is danger in playing three rounds of trumps before touching clubs. If the ♣ K is off-side, North can win and play back a diamond. If there are no more trumps in dummy, you will be down immediately. You should be taking the club finesse at trick 4, no matter what. In this case, they split 2-2, but don't congratulate yourself just yet.

**Defensive Commentary:** When North wins the ♣ K, if they continue diamonds, declarer will gleefully scamper home. Since there is only one more diamond in dummy, diamonds are good for at most one more trick. We must shift to hearts and trap declarer's king. One down. Life is good.

**Takeaway:** Always take a moment to ponder what you will do when trumps don't break favorably. It is not always a good idea to pull them all if you have losers which have not yet been dealt with. You can't pitch them if the defense wins them first.

**Board 8**

West Deals  
None Vul

	♠ 8 6 4		
	♥ 9 7 3		
	♦ 7 5 4 3		
	♣ A Q 9		
♠ 10 5		♠ Q 7 2	
♥ A K Q J 5		♥ 10 8 6	
♦ K Q		♦ A J 10 9 2	
♣ K 8 3 2		♣ 7 4	
	♠ A K J 9 3		
	♥ 4 2		
	♦ 8 6		
	♣ J 10 6 5		
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♥	Pass	2 ♥	2 ♠
4 ♥	All pass		

**Auction Commentary:** Bridge is a game for the bidders. South must step in with a 2 ♠ bid to make sure partner gets off to a good lead. Do not be afraid of being doubled. Trust me.

**Opening Lead Commentary:** North doesn't have to guess which suit to lead. Is this a BOSTON lead situation? **NO!** This is an exception. When we have not raised partner, we must give count when we lead. High from a doubleton, low from 3 or 4. When partner takes the first two spade tricks, it is critical that they know whether to play a third round, and they can only guess if you start with the ♠ 8 and continue with a lower one.

**Defensive Commentary:** South should take a moment and slow their breathing; they were undoubtedly nervous about following our advice about getting in there at the two level. Were they paying attention to partner's spot cards? If they were low-high, they have to shift to a club immediately. If they were high-low, they have to play a third round. Were you paying attention?

**Takeaway:** There are multiple things we have to pay attention to and do in order to get all of our tricks on defense. It's easier than it sounds, but the reward for the effort of paying attention is the admiration of your partner.