

Board 3
 South Deals
 E-W Vul

Finer Points of a Finesse

	♠ Q 9 8 7					
	♥ 5 4					
	♦ Q 5 3 2					
	♣ J 8 7					
♠ 4	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	♠ 10 3	
N						
W E						
S						
♥ A Q J 8 6 3		♥ K 10 9 7				
♦ A 8 6		♦ K J 10 7 4				
♣ 10 3 2		♣ K 6				
	♠ A K J 6 5 2					
	♥ 2					
	♦ 9					
	♣ A Q 9 5 4					
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>			
			1 ♠			
2 ♥	3 ♠	4 ♥	4 ♠			
All pass						
4 ♠ by South						

Auction Commentary: Responder's jump to the 3-level after an overcall is weak, 6/8 HCP, and promises 4-card trump support. (Holding a known 9 pieces in trumps, we should block them out at the 3-level.) Opener goes to game with that terrific shape.

Opening Lead: ♥ A

Planning the Play: Counting losers in a trump contract, Declarer finds 1 ♥ loser, 1 loser in ♦s, and a ♣. When they play a second ♥ trick, ruff it and draw trumps, ending in dummy. Lead a small ♣ toward the ♣ Q, and when that works, play the ♣ A hoping for the ♣ K to drop doubleton. If you instead choose to exit the dummy with the ♣ J, when they cover with the ♣ K, and you play the ♣ A, you will promote their ♣ 10. If you play for the ♣ K to drop like this, you'll make an overtrick :)

Takeaway: When you hold 8 pieces in a suit, you expect the 5 missing piece to divide 3-2. But when you are missing both the King and the 10, playing for the drop of the King will afford you an extra trick when it works!

Finessing and Covering Honors

Board 5
North Deals
N-S Vul

	♠ A K 10 8 2											
	♥ A Q J											
	♦ A Q 2											
	♣ K 7											
♠ Q 7	<table border="1" style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ 9 5 4 3	
	N											
W		E										
	S											
♥ 5 4 3 2		♥ 10 8 7										
♦ J 9 7 5		♦ 8 4 3										
♣ 8 3 2		♣ Q J 10										
	♠ J 6											
	♥ K 9 6											
	♦ K 10 6											
	♣ A 9 6 5 4											

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	2 ♣	Pass	2 ♦
Pass	2 N	Pass	6 N
All pass			
6 N by North			

Auction Commentary: Responder cannot bid 3♦ with only one honor in the suit, and bids 2♦ (waiting) to hear opener's rebid. Once opener has shown 22-24 HCP, the math says SLAM!

Opening Lead: ♣ Q

Planning the Play: In a NT contract, count sure winners. There are 2♠ winners, 3♥s, 3♦s, and 2♣s. The ♠ suit offers the best chance for extra tricks. (Yes, the ♣ suit is equal length and distribution as the ♠s, but the spots are better in the ♠ suit.) A finesse is required to bring the ♠ suit home.

Win the first trick with the ♣ A in dummy, so you can start your suit. Lay the ♠ J on the table. West does not see the ♠ 10, so West must cover the honor with the honor - play the ♠ Q, which will cause Declarer to win with the ♠ A or K. Yes, they're going to make the contract, but if West doesn't cover the ♠ J with the ♠ Q, they'll make all 13 tricks.

Takeaway: The rule of thumb is when you're defending, if Declarer puts an honor on the table and you hold a higher honor (that you're not going to be able to cash), look around for the card just beneath the one Declarer played. If you don't see it, cover their honor with yours in hopes of promoting something in partner's hand.

Finessing, pay attention to Entries

Board 9

North Deals

E-W Vul

♠ 5 3		♠ K J 7 4									
♥ K Q J 7 4		♥ 8 6									
♦ K 9 5		♦ A Q J 10									
♣ Q J 10		♣ A 7 6									
♠ A Q 10 2	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ K J 7 4
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ A 9		♥ 8 6									
♦ 7 4 3 2		♦ A Q J 10									
♣ 9 3 2		♣ A 7 6									
♠ 9 8 6											
♥ 10 5 3 2											
♦ 8 6											
♣ K 8 5 4											

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1 ♥	Dbl	Pass
2 ♠	Pass	4 ♠	All pass
4 ♠ by West			

Auction Commentary: East's takeout double promises at least 3 pieces in the other suits, and is short in opener's suit. When the advancer jumps the reply, and sets the strain, it shows 9-11 points, and at least 4 pieces in ♠s. After that jump, East can add the hands together and find game.

Opening Lead: ♥ K

Planning the Play: Counting losers in a suit contract, Declarer sees 1 ♥ loser, potentially 1 ♦ loser, and 2 ♣ losers. This hand will depend on the disposition of the ♦ K -- let's hope it's with North, (who opened the hand and it's likely the 3 HCP are there).

There is a twist here, though. If that finesse succeeds, Declarer needs to return to hand to take the finesse again. The only taxi to the West hand is in the trump suit. So the plan will be to win trick one, and then draw only 2 rounds of trumps, ending in your hand. We need to guard against a 4/1 ♦ split, so finesse North now. When it works, draw the last round of trumps back to your hand and finesse again. Then use the trump suit to get back to your hand for the third finesse. When the ♦ K appears now, your ♦s provide 4 tricks. Losing only a ♥ and 2 ♣s, you make the contract.

Takeaway: Let's face it, planning the play is not sexy. But it's necessary. If you don't plan here, and you dive in drawing trumps (like a "good Declarer does") without planning the transportation for your needed finesse, you may just fail. They forced your ♥ A out at trick 1 -- you need to be able to be in your hand for 3 finesses. THINK before you even play to trick #1! It might be too late to postpone the planning till later!

Board 10
 East Deals
 Both Vul

Finessing with the right card

♠ A 8 6 3		♠ —			
♥ K 3		♥ A J 8 6 4			
♦ Q 10 9 5		♦ K 7 4 3			
♣ 9 8 5		♣ A Q J 3			
♠ J 10 9 4 2	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	♠ —
N					
W E					
S					
♥ Q 7 2		♥ A J 8 6 4			
♦ A 6		♦ K 7 4 3			
♣ 7 6 4		♣ A Q J 3			
♠ K Q 7 5					
♥ 10 9 5					
♦ J 8 2					
♣ K 10 2					

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		1 ♥	Pass
2 ♥	Pass	4 ♥	All pass
4 ♥ by East			

Auction Commentary: Responder's 2♥ call limits their hand to 6-9 points right away. Opener needs to take charge. Once the trump suit fit is found, East can add 5 points for the ♠ void and bid game.

Opening Lead: ♠ K

Planning the Play: If trumps divide 3-2 as expected, losers are 1♥, 2♦s and 1♣ if they break 3/3. There are not enough entries to do the ♣ finesse. And Declarer can't ruff ♦s until testing the trumps suit.

Trick one needs to be ruffed in hand. Then travel to dummy's ♦A, and plan the trump finesse. **YOU CANNOT LAY THE ♥Q ON THE TABLE, BECAUSE YOU DO NOT OWN THE ♥10.** Instead, play a small ♥ toward your ♥J, and hope that the trump King is doubleton, and next play the ♥A (crossing your fingers). When it drops, draw the last trump. Losers will be 2♦s, and just 1♣ with a lucky break of 3/3 in ♣S.

Takeaway: Remember that the trump suit doesn't have those meaty intermediate spots. And we'll need that ♥Q to ruff a ♦ if the ♥K doesn't drop. PLAN, PLAN, PLAN.