


The Finesse Part 1

Board 1
North Deals
None Vul

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

Auction Commentary: Holding 12 HCP and a 5-card suit, North opens the 13-point hand. South has a "limit raise." (The standard definition of a limit raise is 10-12 HCP with support. Agreements vary on whether this support is 3+ pieces or 4+ pieces. Have this conversation with partner.) South jumps 1-level to 3♥ to say, "I almost have enough to go to game in your suit, partner." Since North has nothing extra, they don't go higher.

Opening Lead: ♦ A (promising the ♦ K)

Planning the Play: Counting losers in a suit contract, Declarer finds 2 ♦s, which will be lost right now, and *some amount of* ♥s. "Some amount" now needs to be held to just 2 in order to make the contract. With 9 pieces, we're missing 4. We know that statistically, these rate to break 3-1. So the plan will rely on a working finesse. A finesse aims to win a card even when the opponents hold a higher one. So, we're going to lead TOWARD that ♥ K, and hope that West holds the ♥ A.

When East shifts on trick #3, plan to win that trick in the Dummy. That way you can properly lead TOWARD the card you want to take the trick. (And if you forget, thankfully you have another way to get there, as both black suits offer entries.)

Takeaway: Actually, the best way to play the hand to lose at most two tricks is to not take the ♥ K on the first trump trick if East ducks. This is to guard against a singleton Ace behind the King. First round you can lead low from hand, and lead toward the ♥ K on the second round. This costs a trick if the trumps are split 2-2 with the ♥ A in front of the ♥ K, but it will guarantee no more than 2 losers!

Of course, if you are in 4♥, then you have to lead toward the ♥ K on the first round, hoping for ♥ Ax in front of the King!

Board 2
 East Deals
 N-S Vul

The Finesse Part 1

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

Auction Commentary: As in Board #1, Responder has support for partner's suit, and 10-12 HCP. This is a textbook limit raise, so West bids 3♠ to show it. Holding 2 doubletons, East upgrades and tries game.


Opening Lead: ♦ Q (top of sequence)

Planning the Play: Counting losers before playing even ONE CARD from Dummy, Declarer finds 2 ♦s, 1 ♣ and 1 ♠. (The hope of making that ♦ K went out the window as soon as South led the ♦ Q -- South doesn't have the ♦ A, or they'd have chosen a different lead. This means that North has the ♦ A behind our ♦ K.) There is no other place to park the ♣ loser, so we will need to take the ♠ finesse and hope that the ♠ K is with North. At trick #3, make sure your next move is to travel to Dummy to take this finesse.

Planning the Defense: After the 2nd ♦ trick is won in North, North must be careful to switch to a different suit. If you play a third ♦, East will be able to discard a small ♣ from her hand, and ruff the trick in the Dummy. Giving the opponents a "ruff and a sluff" is an egregious defensive mistake, as it will cause your side to lose the ability to win a ♣ trick. Only make these plays if you are CERTAIN that partner is also void, and can overruff!

Board 3
 South Deals
 E-W Vul

The Finesse Part 1

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

Auction Commentary: North has that "weak freak" hand! It shows 5+ cards in partner's suit, (promising at least a 10-card fit), typically an unbalanced hand, and has no more than 7 HCP. South is disappointed -- even with that monster hand, slam will not be possible. So South passes.*

Opening Lead: ♣ Q (top of sequence)

Planning the Play: South counts losers in a suit contract: 2 ♥s, 1 ♦ and 1 ♣. Where can we park a loser? On the ♣ lead, you know you won't avoid that loser. As soon as they get in they'll lead another one. The only hope is the ♥ finesse, leading TOWARD the ♥ K and hoping it's in the East. Travel to the Dummy with the trump suit. (And if you got a "bad" break, both on one side, pull the second one.) Then lay a ♥ on the table and cross your fingers. We know that finesses have only a 50% chance of winning. Let's hope today's your lucky day. Remember, though, that if East plays small, you MUST insert the ♥ K anyway, hoping that East ducked. The opponents will give you every chance to fail. Don't fall for it :)

And if the ♥ A is in West, it means you were never, ever making the ♥ K anyway. IN that case, nobody can make this contract!

Takeaway: * THIS is why a Responder cannot jump directly to game with a strong hand! Opener will interpret the jump to game as weak, and if Responder's hand is strong, you will have missed a slam. Remember -- SLOW SHOWS. ;)

Board 4
 East Deals
 Both Vul

The Finesse Part 1

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



<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		1 ♥	Pass
1 ♠	Pass	2 ♣	Pass
4 ♥	Pass	Pass	Pass
4 ♥ by East			

Auction Commentary: When East opens, West knows they belong in at least 4♥. But West can't jump directly there, because that would show a "weak freak" hand, with no more than 7 HCP. Fortunately, all West needs to do is change suits, and East will have to bid again. West doesn't need to be worried that partner will pass, because EVERY TIME a Responder changes suits, it's forcing for one round. Opener must bid again (unless the opponent sticks a bid in, in which case Opener can pass with a bare minimum). When Opener didn't jump-shift into those ♣s, West knows there's nothing more than game. 4♥ it is!

Opening Lead: ♦ Q

Planning the Play: East counts losers - 2 ♦s, 1 ♣ and maybe the ♥ Q. Too many. Declarer will ruff the 3rd ♦. There is no plan here outside the placement of the ♥ Q. Should we play the ♥ A and the ♥ K and hope she falls? Or should we try the ♥ finesse?

You may have heard this phrase: "Eight Ever, Nine Never." This was created to help you with this decision when you are missing the Queen. When you have 8 pieces in a suit, you should try the finesse. When you have 9+ pieces in the suit, you should cash the top 2 and watch for the Queen to drop. In planning that finesse, you need to be in Dummy to lead toward the ♥ AJ in your hand. When that wins, next play the ♥ AK, and hope the division of the suit is as you expect: 3-2.

Then you must drive out the ♣ A, making sure to use the ♣ K as bait :) This way you unblock the suit, affording you ease of transportation to the ♣ QJ10.

Now all that's left is the celebrating :)