

Standard leads

You need an agreed system of opening leads to be a good defender

The opening lead

- Defenders are usually trying to establish their tricks before declarer establishes theirs
- Defenders have the advantage of the opening lead
- If you are on opening lead, you must decide *which suit to lead* and *what card to lead* from that suit

Which suit?

- *Listen to the bidding.* Has partner bid? What does the opposition's bidding say about their hand?
- Generally a passive lead is safest (e.g. top of sequence) but if the bidding indicates that declarer will be able to dispose of their losers then make an active lead
- *LSD:* L = Length, a source of tricks for declarer calls for an aggressive lead
S = Shortage, calls for a trump lead
D = Dead, indicating a 4,3,3,3 hand calls for a passive lead (Kantar)

Which card?

- Will vary between a suit contract and a no-trump contract
- Your choice of lead conveys information to your partner
- For example, where the missing honour cards are or the length of your suit

Table of leads

- Shows which card to lead from various suit combinations
- When your partner leads, try to work out where the missing honours are in the suit led

Which suit?

- If partner has bid, lead their suit unless you have a good reason not to
- Can you lead the top of a sequence ♠QJ1052, lead ♠Q
- Lead low from an honour in your longest suit ♥Q108, lead ♥8
- Lead trumps if the bidding suggests declarer will cross ruff. You're forcing declarer to play two trumps at once instead of one
- Lead your long suit if you hold four or more trumps. It will often force declarer, and you might take control
- With three small trumps, consider leading a short suit: a singleton or a doubleton, hoping for a ruff
- Lead suits that have not been bid by the declaring side

Which card? If it's your own suit, lead the

- Top card of a sequence or a near sequence of three or more cards. From ♠KQJ52 or ♠KQ1054 lead ♠K in both no trumps and suits. However, with ♠KQ432 lead ♠K if defending a suit contract, or lead ♠4 if defending no trumps. Phew!
- Top card of interior sequence, with ♠KJ1085 lead ♠J
- Fourth best if no sequence, with ♠K8753 lead ♠5. Use the **Rule of 11** if the lead is fourth highest, for example if the ♠5 is led, subtract 5 from 11 = 6, to tell you there are 6 cards higher than the ♠5 in the other hands. This can guide the defence to knowing whether to continue or switch, and helps the defender in third seat know how high to play to the first trick.
- Low from three cards to an honour, with ♠Q72 lead the ♠2
- Top card of a doubleton, with ♠106 lead the ♠10
- Don't lead away from an Ace when defending a suit contract ♠A864. It's better to lead another suit. In NT, lead 4th highest, with ♠A864 lead ♠4
- With three small cards such as ♠973 lead low unless you have raised partner's suit in the bidding, when the 9 would be more helpful.