

Defence

Defence is the hardest part of the game and requires cooperation between both partners to succeed, if the contract is to be beaten. The reason for this is that as a defender you can only see your hand and dummy, and have to try and work out the other two hands and a strategy from the opening lead, the bidding, declarer's play, and partner's signals.

Opening Lead - The opening lead is the start to a successful defence, and thus should have some meaning or structure.

- Three honours in sequence are often a good start, unless they are Declarer's suit, and if partner has overcalled, that is normally a suggestion as to what to lead, which is why I do not overcall in a suit that does not have at least 1 of the top 3 honours.
- In a suit contract, top of two touching honours in sequence, but in Notrumps, 4th highest unless you only have 3 cards in the suit.
- In the absence of touching honours or partner's overcall, 4th (or 3rd if only holding 3 cards in the suit) highest of a suit with at least 1 honour is an old stand-by, especially at Notrumps.
- It is normally losing tactics to lead away from an Ace in a suit contract. If the suit is to be led lead the Ace.
- The lead of a singleton can often be effective, but if it is a suit not bid by partner, it often ruins partner's control in the suit, so only recommended if you have at least 2 trumps.
- Less effective, is the lead of the top card of a doubleton, but unless it is partner's suit it is better to have at least 3 trumps. This was despised in olden times and called the 'sneak'.
- Any lead of a low card promises at least 3 to an honour. If you do not have an honour, lead the 2nd highest or top of any doubleton. This also applies during the play of the hand.

Signals – Signals are how you communicate with partner while Declarer is playing the hand. There are many different versions and it is important to agree with partner what version you are playing.

- On the opening lead signal to partner whether you like or dislike the opening lead. You can play high or low encouraging, but I have generally found that low encouraging is more efficient and often easier to read.
- When dummy has a long suit and no entries, especially at Notrumps, it is important to signal length to partner so they know when to take the Ace or King and try and deny Declarer entry to dummy and the rest of the suit. Either high-low to show an even number (standard), or low-high (reverse) and the opposite to show an odd number. Whatever you are comfortable with, but reverse count is becoming more popular.
- When discarding, the card that you discard first can tell partner which suit you are interested in, and as usual there are many ways to signal:- low encourage, high encourage (not as popular), McKenny and Revolving all have their moments. My preference is for McKenny or Revolving, as you discard a suit that you do not like to indicate precisely which suit you do.
- McKenny Discards – Discard of a high card in a suit indicates the higher ranking of the other 2 suits and vice versa for a low card.
- Revolving Discards – Discard of a high card indicates the higher ranking of the remaining 2 suits, but if it is a Spade (or a Heart when Spades are trumps), revolve around to Clubs. If it is a low Club, revolve up to Spades (or Hearts if Spades are trumps). Always miss the trump suit.