

DEFENCE 7

OPENING LEADS AGAINST SUIT CONTRACTS

The following suggestions are general and assume that the bidding does not point you to a different lead. If the opposition bid a suit, obviously that makes it much less likely that leading that suit will be a good idea. Also remember that most bridge rules are not set in concrete and need to be broken some of the time.

Intermediate or improving players tend to underestimate the value of making a safe or passive opening lead. Remember when you are defending a contract and the opposition has declared the contract, the opposition usually has more high card points than you do. This increases the likelihood that you will finesse yourself (or partner) or otherwise give declarer a free trick on the opening lead. The problem becomes very acute when the opposition has far more high card points than you do. That is why much of the time a passive/safe lead against a game contract is good.

Let's start with the leads that are usually **bad**, and usually should be avoided:

- (1) **Leading a singleton trump** (usually you will finesse your unfortunate partner),
- (2) **Leading a suit bid by the opposition,**
- (3) **Underleading an ace** (if declarer has a singleton K, you've just lost your trick)
- (4) **Leading an ace when you don't have the king.** This goes back to the fact that the opposition are much more likely than your partner to have the missing honours in the suit led. Aces were made to capture honours, particularly kings, not 2s. Look at the effect of leading an ace on these hands:

	K65	
A43		J1098
	Q72	

If you lead the ace here, declarer will make K and Q for 2 tricks. However, if you wait quietly for declarer or partner to lead the suit and capture the queen under your ace, you hold declarer to 1 trick in the suit.

964

A1085

QJ72

K3

Here if you lead the ace, declarer will make his king. If you wait for declarer or partner to lead the suit, declarer won't make any tricks.

(5) **Doubleton honours such as Kx, Qx or Jx (unless partner has bid the suit).** Honours were meant to capture other honours, not to fall uselessly under higher honours. Declarer may also finesse incorrectly and allow your honour to make. Don't help him/her!

What about leads that are usually **good**:

- (1) **Leading partner's suit.**
- (2) **Leading a suit headed by AK or more top honours.**
- (3) **A suit headed by 3 or more cards in a solid sequence (eg KQJx, QJ109, J109).**
- (4) **A suit headed by 2 consecutive cards, and the next card in the sequence is missing by exactly one place (eg KQ109, QJ9, J108)**
- (5) **Leading a singleton.**

But what if you have none of the above? There is a 2011 book by David Bird and Taf Anthias called “Winning Suit Contract Leads”. The authors have used computer simulations over 5000 hands to assess different leads in different situations. Their conclusions have turned the considered wisdom on its head in a number of situations. Here’s some of their general conclusions:

- (1) **Prefer to lead a small card doubleton rather than a suit with just one honour.** (This harks back to not finessing yourself, as well as the chance for a ruff/s).
- (2) **Prefer to lead a suit with no honours rather than a suit with only one honour.**
- (3) **If you have to lead a suit with only one honour, prefer to lead away from a jack than a queen, and a queen than a king.**
- (4) **Leading away from KJxx or KJ10x was generally worse than leading away from Kxxx.**
- (5) **Leading an ace from AQ or AJ was generally bad (even when partner has bid the suit).**
- (6) **Leading an ace where there were no other honours in the suit wasn’t as bad as has been thought, particularly as a singleton or doubleton, or at matchpoints.**