

When to Duck?

Bridge is a game of tactics and planning! It is common for beginners when declarer, or defending, to cash any tricks when they are on lead, but that is losing tactics for a defender unless you are taking the setting tricks, and even then there could be exceptions.

When you are declarer and you have the Ace of the opening lead, you normally have many options to give you the best way to make your contract. Obviously if it is a singleton you must win, but if not, you can choose to duck at trick one! If you have 2 or more small cards you can actually duck at trick two as well, but it is normal to at least win trick 3.

There are many reasons for ducking, the simplest being to reduce communication between the defenders. If you are playing NT and the lead is a King (top of a sequence of 3) and you win the first round, if RHO wins a trick they probably will have another card in the suit led and can lead it for LHO to win their tricks. If you win the second round and RHO started out with a doubleton, they will have to lead another suit. Likewise if they had a 3-card holding in the suit led and you take the third round, they will also have to lead another suit.

Another common reason to duck the opening lead of a King is when you have A_x in the suit. If the suit is continued, you have 2 tricks, and if a new suit is led you have tempo.

You are playing in a suit contract and LHO leads a suit in which you have A_{xx} and dummy two small. Assuming that dummy has fewer trumps than declarer, if you win and return the suit looking for a ruff, the defenders may be able to lead trumps to prevent your ruff. Thus duck the first round, win the next, and ruff in dummy, then go about drawing trumps.

If you have the King of the opening lead your options are more limited, but if the opening lead is the Queen, and you have K_{xx}, you can consider ducking, but beware as that may be your only chance to take a trick in that suit, as in a NT contract the lead of the Queen only denies the King, and the opening leader could have A_QJ_{xx}.

Another time to duck is when you are defending! In a NT contract if you lead from A_{xxxx} or K_{xxxx} and partner wins the first trick and returns the suit with dummy holding a doubleton, if you have a sure entry, win and set up your suit. However, if you do not have an entry, duck and hope partner gets in again to lead your suit which will then take 3 more tricks.

If you are defending a suit contract and partner leads what could be the top of a doubleton, if you have an entry, win and return the suit, guiding partner as to your entry, but if not, duck the first trick, but encourage. When partner wins a trick, providing trumps have not been drawn, they can lead the suit again and then you can give them a ruff.

	6		<p>On the adjacent board NS arrive in 3NT and North is declarer, faced with the opening lead of the D3. Holding 7 top tricks. Declarer must make use of the Club suit, but the diamonds are a potential worry, so what to do? If the diamonds are 4-3, there is no real problem, so allow for a possible 5-2 break by ducking at trick 1! West continues with the DT and now is the time to try to set up the Clubs, but use an avoidance play by returning to hand with the HA and lead a club to dummy, inserting the C7. This loses to the safe hand of West, who can do no better than leading a major suit, won in hand to test the Clubs (CA first so you can finesse against West if East shows out). When the Clubs break you have 9 tricks. If West leads a Spade into the dummy, that will be 10 tricks.</p>
	AQ9		
	K875		
	KT864		
Q9432		A8	
763		T842	
QT		J9432	
QJ3		52	
	KJT75		
	KJ5		
	A6		
	A97		

	64		<p>On the adjacent board EW arrive in 3NT with West the declarer, and North leads the D3, won by South who returns the D4! West plays the DQ and if North wins this and returns a Diamond, there is no way that they can regain the lead to cash their tricks as West can set up the Clubs, cashing 3 Spades along the way to discard Heart losers. Thus North plays an encouraging D2, hoping South can get in and lead another diamond. How does South know to lead a Diamond when they win the CK? By trusting North's initial lead of the D3 showing an Honour, reinforced by the encouraging D2 under the DQ.</p>
	J832		
	K9732		
	JT		
KQ9752		A	
4		AKT97	
QJT		85	
A76		Q9843	
	JT83		
	Q65		
	A64		
	K52		