

**Esther Discusses "(1) General Principles and
(2) Exceptions Thereto
for Leading Against Opponents' NT Contracts"¹**

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Bruce: Today, we are honored to have with us Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, Quintuple Gold Emerald Life Master (20 Million+ ACBL MasterPoints), who will talk us through "**(1) General Principles and (2) Exceptions Thereto for Leading Against Opponents' NT Contracts**". Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, thanks for taking the time to be with us today!

Esther: D**n it, Bruce! How many times do I have to tell you to **NEVER, ever** call me Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen! Always, **ALWAYS, ALWAYS** instead call me, Esther, because I am so caring, and warm!

Bruce: Errr, well, sorry again about that, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther. Well, in any case, I wonder if you would first summarize some **General Principles** for you deciding what you should lead against your RHO's **NT** contract?

Esther: Well, my *gracious giver*, before I give you some **General Principles** that can help you select your lead against **NT** contracts, I want to emphasize that before you lead you must first think about everything you have learned from the auction.

1. If Opponents bid a Suit and Opponent Responder "supported" the bid Suit, or an Opponent bid and rebid a Suit, that bid Suit is the "danger" Suit that you want to avoid. And if an Opponent bid and rebid a Suit, that Opponent is likely the "Danger" Opponent who you want to try to keep out of the lead.

¹ Many of the ideas presented here are summarized in Andrew Simmons' excellent article, "**Opening Leads Against No Trump Contracts**", posted on the Israeli "Bridge Tips" website: <https://bridge-tips.co.il/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Opening-Leads-Against-No-Trump-Contracts.pdf>

2. Even before the LHO Dummy comes down, if your LHO Opponent bid **1NT** and everyone then PASSEd, you know that the Dummy holds <8-9 HCPs.² Once Dummy comes down add together (1) your HCPs, (2) Dummy's HCPs, and (3) Declarer's ~16 HCPs to estimate how many HCPs Partner likely holds.
3. If your RHO opened **1NT** and your LHO Responder bid **3NT**, your LHO likely does not hold 4 cards in either Major and leading a Major might be helpful, if you hold a "long" Major. In general, *all things equal* leading a Major against an **NT** contract may be preferred over leading a Minor. Of course, your LHO Opponent may have opened **1NT** holding a 5-card Major.
4. If your RHO Opponent opened **1NT**, and LHO Responder bid **2C Stayman**, and your RHO Opener then denies 4 or 4+ cards in either Major, you know that (1) LHO Responder holds *exactly* 4 cards³ in one Major or both, or is 5-4 or 4-5 in the Majors, and (2) RHO Opener holds *no more* than 3 cards in *both* Majors, so the lead of a Major *all things equal* is appealing.

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther... Are you actually being nice to me?

Esther: Well, my *inquisitive interlocutor*, of course I am being "nice" to you! Why wouldn't I be "nice" to you?

Bruce: Errr, well, OK. Now some **General Principles** for you deciding what you should lead against your RHO's **NT** contract?

Esther: Well, my *galloping gourmet*, I will certainly try to help you. Here are some **General Principles**, in rank order of precedence, for selecting your lead when sitting LHO to the Declarer against a **NT** contract:

² If LHO Responder held ~10 HCPs and no 4+ cards in a Major, Responder would bid **3NT**. If Responder held 8-9 HCPs and no 4+ cards in a Major, Responder would bid **2NT** as "invitational" to a **3NT** contract if Opener is at the "top" of his opening bid. However, if LHO Responder was 5-4 or 4-5 in the Majors with Honors in both Majors, Responder would bid **2C Stayman** to try to find a *highly likely* "fit" in one of the Majors.

³ If LHO Responder held 5 or 5+ cards in a single Major, rather than bid **2C Stayman**, LHO Responder instead would have executed a Jacoby Transfer to show his "length" in a *specific* Major.

1. If Partner has bid during the auction, lead Partner's bid Suit. If you hold an Honor in Partner's bid Suit, by Partnership Agreement lead your Honor to either win the Trick, or "promote" Partner's lower Honor in the Suit.

Also, if Partner made a "**Lead Directing DOUBLE**"⁴, lead the Suit that Partner DOUBLED. A "**Lead Directing DOUBLE**" is made against an "artificial" bid by an Opponent, such as Partner's DOUBLE of your LHO's Stayman or Jacoby Transfer bid after your RHO opens with a **NT** bid. This DOUBLE is generally safe because Opponents likely hold the preponderance of the HCPs and are *unlikely* to leave Partner's DOUBLE of their "artificial" bid "on". For example, if your RHO opens **1NT**, you PASS, your LHO bids **2C!**, and Partner DOUBLES, Partner is saying to you, "Please lead a Club to me at your first opportunity to do so."

2. If the Opponents bid a Suit during the auction, generally you do not want to lead the Suit Opponents bid. It will be *especially damaging* to lead a Suit bid by your Declarer RHO because the Declarer can then likely win the Trick with the lowest possible card in his "long" Suit.
3. If you hold 3 "touching" Honors in an unbid Suit, especially with 4+ cards in the Suit, by Partnership Agreement either lead (1) your "top" Honor thus promising the "touching" Honors or a "tenace", or (2) M.U.D. ("Middle, Up, Down").
4. If you feel you must lead an Honor from a "long" Suit you hold that has been bid by Opponents, lead this bid Suit against Opponents' **NT** contract *only* if you feel it is very likely that your **4th** highest card in the Suit is higher than the Opponents' **4th** highest card in the Suit (e.g., you hold K,Q,J,9,3 or Q,J,T,9,2).
5. If your "longest and strongest" Suit has not been bid by your Opponents, and you do not hold "touching" Honors (e.g., K,Q,J,x,x) or a "tenace" (e.g., K,Q,T,x), lead the **4th** from the "top" of this Suit so that Partner can use the "**Rule of 11**"⁵ to determine

⁴ Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons", see: "Convention #14: 6 'Not-for-Penalty' DOUBLES": <https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/double.pdf>

⁵ Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons", see: "Lesson #25: 40 or So Bridge Bidding/Play 'Rules'":

exactly how many cards higher than the face value of your led card the Declarer holds.

Some Exceptional Situations

Editor's Note. This Section is a bit more complex than the previous Section of this "Esther Bridge Lesson" and some Novice or less experienced bridge players may wish to either skim or skip this Section until a later date.

Bruce: Well, OK, Ms. Klink..., errr, I mean, Esther. Are there any **exceptional situations** that may arise that also affect how I should lead against Opponents' **NT** contract?

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes indeed. The following situations each assume that both you and Partner have **PASS**ed at every turn.

1. **You hold 2 Suits with roughly equal strength.** In general,
 - a. Lead the Suit with the *most* Honors.
 - b. Lead the Suit with "touching" (e.g., Q,J,T,x,x) rather than "split" (e.g., K,J,9,x,x) Honors.
 - c. If the 2 Suits are roughly equal in terms of Honors, lead the Suit with low cards that are higher (e.g., 9,8,7 versus 4,3,2).
 - d. If your "long" Suits are an unbid Major and an unbid Minor, lead the Major Suit that is roughly equal to your Minor Suit.
 - e. When both "roughly equal" Suits hold 1 or more Honors, and 1 Suit is headed by the Ace, lead from the Suit not holding the Ace so that you can use your Ace later to regain the lead and continue attacking with whichever of your 2 "long" Suits then seems more favorable.
2. **One Opponent has shown a "long" Suit that Opponents are likely going to try to "run".** For example, perhaps with you and Partner **PASS**ing at each turn the bidding proceeded:

LHO	RHO
1C	1S
3C	3NT

This situation demands an "active" or "attacking" lead that attempts to take "quick" "winners" rather than that a "passive" lead that attempts to "promote" future "winners." For example, if you hold:

♠ J 8 7 3 2 ♥ T 9 8 ♦ K Q 9 ♣ Q 5 (8),

then lead your Diamond King.

3. **You hold a "tenace" with 4 cards (e.g., A,Q,x,x) as against A,Q,x,x,x.** When you hold A,Q,x,x do not lead "low" from this Suit because the most Tricks you can take is 3, and 3 is unlikely. However, when you hold an Ace Queen "tenace" with 5 cards, leading 4th from the "top" of this Suit is instead quite a good play.
4. **Your Hand is "weak", your "long" Suit is poor, and the auction (LHO: 1NT, RHO: 2NT, LHO: 3NT with you and Partner PASSing at each turn) leads you to believe that Partner has considerable HCPs.** When you know that Partner has some strength, make a lead that tries to find and "promote" Partner's "longest and strongest" Suit. For example, if you hold:

♠ K 8 3 ♥ T 6 ♦ 9 8 4 ♣ 9 8 5 4 3 (3),

then lead your Heart Ten. Lead the "top" of any Doubleton Major (e.g., Q,5, or J,7) in this situation in the hope that Partner holds "length" in this unbid Major Suit. After all, when you are "short" in a Suit those cards have to be somewhere, and they may be held by Partner!