

**"Some of Rhoda Walsh's
'Rhoda's Rules' for Leading on Defense"**

Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen¹

To return to the "Esther Bridge Lessons," CLICK:

<https://esther-bridge.com/index.html>

To return to the "Esther Bridge 'Pop' Quizzes", CLICK:

<https://esther-bridge.com/quiz.html>

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 "**Some of Rhoda Walsh's 'Rhoda's Rules' for Leading on Defense**". 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 "warm and caring"!

Bruce: Errr, well, sorry again about that, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther.

Esther: Well, Bruce. Please try to exercise at least a modicum of empathy, assuming you have at least the limited capacity to do so. Can you imagine how relentlessly all the other girls in grades K through 4 of my elementary school years relentlessly, endlessly tormented me about my last name, Klinktoast-Houstonhousen?

Bruce: Well, yes, sorry again, Esther! Well, Esther, at the start would you tell us a little bit about who this **Rhoda Walsh** person is?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. Rhoda

© Copyright, Bruce Thompson, 2026. All rights reserved.

¹ As noted in an article in the Winter/Spring, 2024 article in The American Bridge Teachers' Association (ABTA) Journal, https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/ABTA_1_24.pdf, Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen in fact is a hypothetical, and not a real person! So this article was really, really written by **Bruce Thompson**.

Walsh (1933 -) is an American bridge player who resides in Los Angeles. She is an attorney. She has won **12** North American Bridge Championships and was Runner-up in **6** North American Bridge Championships. She is now currently inactive in curating her "Rhoda's Rules" bridge website:

<https://rhodasrules.com>

However, her website is still online and includes numerous "Rhoda's Rules" as well as numerous "Bridge Stories".

Rhoda's website includes 300 "Rhoda's Rules". I am not going to summarize even only all her "Rules" dealing only with leading as a Defender. But I will highlight several partly as an attempt to familiarize you with her general defensive thinking and her website.

Bruce: Well, Esther, what is the 1st "Rhoda's Rule" that you wish to present?

Esther: Well, Bruce, here is her "Rhoda's Rules #1":

Rule #1: Avoid Opening Lead from Jxx[x]

“Rule: On opening lead against [a] suit or notrump [contract], whenever possible, avoid leading from [J]ack third or [J]ack fourth. This lead tends to blow a [T]rick.

Rationale: If your partner has the [Q]ueen doubleton or longer, you are lending [D]eclarer a helping hand in picking up the [S]uit with *no losers.*” (italics added)

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther, what is the 2nd "Rhoda's Rule" that you wish to present?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. Here is another "Rhoda's Rules":

Rule #2: Avoid Opening Lead from Kxx[x]

“Rule: On opening lead against [a] suit contract, if the declarer has opened *one notrump* or *two notrump* and wound up in a [S]uit contract, do **not** lead from a **king**. This lead often tends to blow a [T]rick.

Rationale: This strong bidding indicates that [D]eclarer is very likely to have *both* the ace and the queen of the [S]uit, either in hand or between the [D]eclarer's hand and dummy.

Note: This Rule also applies to [1] [D]eclarer's two notrump jump rebid after opening one of a [S]uit, or [2] after

a two club opening bid followed by a notrump rebid.” (bold in original, italics added)

Bruce: Well, Esther, do you have another “Rhoda’s Rule” you wish to present?

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes indeed!

Rule #12: Lead Trump When Dummy Has [Side Suit] Shortness!

“**Rule:** When defending [against] a **suit** contract, if you gain the lead and dummy has shortness in a side [S]uit (*doubleton or fewer*), ask yourself if there is any reason to not lead trump. No reason? Lead Trump!

Rationale: You will potentially, and most probably, be cutting back on declarer’s ability to trump away a loser or two.” (bold in original, italics added)

Bruce: OK, Esther, how about another of “Rhoda’s Rules”?

Esther: Well, Bruce, sure.

Rule #27: Lead Your Singleton!

“**Rule:** Against a suit contract, unless there are clear indications to do otherwise (for example, *the auction shouts out for a trump lead*), always lead your side [S]uit singleton on opening lead, even if it is in a [S]uit bid by the opponents.

Rationale: It is often your best or only shot to defeat the contract. Bob Hamman says, ‘If I don’t lead a singleton, it’s because I don’t have one!’” You will potentially, and most probably, be cutting back on declarer’s ability to trump away a loser or two.” (italics added)

Bruce: Wow, Esther, these “Rhoda’s Rules” are pretty good! Do you have another that you would like to discuss?

Esther: Well, Bruce, of course.

Rule #26: Lead 4th Best or From a Sequence?

“**Rule:** Whenever holding a *three or more card sequence*, whether solid *or* broken, *always* lead from the sequence, *not* fourth best. For example, from QT942, lead the ten, not the four. [From J,T,9,5 lead the jack.]

Rationale: This strategy [1] prevents declarer from winning a trick cheaply and [2] helps partner read your holding in the [S]uit.” (italics added)

Bruce: OK, Esther, do you have another of “Rhoda’s Rules”?

Esther: Well, Bruce, of course.

**Rule #28: When Is It OK to Lead
a Side Suit Bid by an Opponent?**

“**Rule:** It is best to *strongly avoid* leading a side suit bid by either opponent, *unless* you are leading a singleton. That is typically the *only* time that a lead in their suit will pay off.

Rationale: Partner will be able to trust that your lead is a singleton [since you are *obviously* leading a Suit bid by the opponents] and act accordingly [to later return your initial lead]. Also, leading an opponent’s side [S]uit when holding two or more cards in that suit helps declarer set up the [S]uit for discards.” (italics added)

Bruce: OK, Esther, another?

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes indeed.

**Rule #105: What is Your Best Lead
vs. a 1NT-3NT Auction?**

“**Rule:** It is considered *standard expert* practice to lead a major against this particular [1NT-3NT] auction. **Exception:** If you have a classic lead in a minor, lead your minor. I make my choice based primarily on my overall strength. I lead my longest, strongest major. Lacking strength, I lead my best three card major in hopes of hitting a five card holding in partner’s hand.

Rationale: Inasmuch as responder failed to use Stayman or Jacoby Transfer, the odds are that the dummy will have *no four or more card major*; thus, the lead of a major is most likely to bring in tricks for your side. Why the three card [S]uit when holding a weak hand? Because your lack of strength means you are unlikely to have the entries necessary to both set up and cash the long cards in your [S]uit. Better to find partner’s [S]uit since the extra strength there will permit the setting up and cashing of her long [S]uit.” (italics added)

Bruce: Well, Esther, could you give us one more of "Rhoda's Rules"?

Esther: Well, Bruce, of course.

Rule #113: Mandatory Trump Lead #3

Rule: When an **overcaller** is left playing in his *second* bid [S]uit, the auction *screams* for a trump lead. Thus, you lead a trump *regardless* of your trump holdings.

Rationale: Typically, dummy will be quite short in declarer's *first* overcalled [S]uit. Thus, a trump lead is very likely to reduce declarer's *ability to ruff* [in the dummy] the losers in his first [bid] [S]uit." (italics added)

Bruce: Well, Esther, thanks so much indeed for presenting some of "Rhoda's Rules"!

Esther: Well, Bruce, you are indeed welcome! My pleasure!

You may also be interested in "Esther Bridge Dialogue Lesson #170": "Some of Rhoda Walsh's '*Rhoda's Rules*' for Bridge Bidding":

https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/RR_bid.pdf