

3 "Signals" to Partner on Defense

Bruce Thompson

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1. (Virtually) **every card played** when on defense *should* signal information to Partner.
2. **Opening leads** can communicate **specific** card holdings. For example, leading the Ace tells Partner you have the King, or a singleton, but almost certainly A,K, and that (1) you will play the King second, and (2) you are demanding that Partner tells you whether Partner can take the 3rd trick, either with the Queen, or by trumping. Leading the Queen (1) claims the Jack, or (2) a Queen small doubleton, or (3) a Queen singleton. [**During play**, when you are not on lead, ***lead up*** rather than down; for example, holding the Ace King, play the King first.]
3. On defense you communicate 1 of 3 things: (1) *Attitude* toward the suit (I like it, or I don't like it), (2) *Count* in the suit at the time of the signal (even count, or odd count), or (3) *Suit Preference*.
4. **All signals** are based on **Partnership agreement** regarding how to read the play of *High versus Low cards*, and subsequent "echo" cards played in the same suit by the same Partner (e.g., first the 8 of Hearts, and the next time the 3 of Hearts).
5. Sometimes a high card won't be detected by Partner until an "echo" card is played. For example, first

playing the 8 of Spades, and subsequently playing the 2 of Spades, is a clear "Hi-Low" signal. But playing first the 4 of Spades, and subsequently the 2 of Spades, also sends a "Hi-Low" signal, though Partner may not initially realize this until the second card in the suit is played.

6. For **Attitude** many Partnerships signal "I like this suit" by playing "Hi-Low." Other Partnerships play Inverted or "Upside-Down" signals, with "Low" = "Yes", and "Hi" = "No" the **first time** an Attitude signal is sent in a suit.
7. For **Suit Count** on the first play of a suit most Partnerships play "High" = "Even" count, and "Low" = "Odd" count in the suit *at the time the signal is sent*.
8. For **Suit Preference** (e.g., when giving Partner a **Ruff**), "Hi" = higher suit (1) **not** including trump, and (2) **not** including the non-Trump suit in which you are giving Partner a Ruff.
9. It can sometimes be difficult to know when Partner is showing you Count versus Attitude, and sometimes Partner does not have the correct cards with which to clearly signal.

Suit Preference

1. This is communicated only when you are *clearly not* "signaling" "attitude" or "count".
2. Show Partner "Suit preference", for example, when (1) you are giving Partner a ruff against a Suit contract or (2) in Suit contracts when Dummy has a void or singleton in a "side" Suit and also holds Trump cards.¹

¹ For more information see the "Esther Bridge Dialog Lesson #38: **How and When on Defense to Show Partner Your 'Suit Lead Preference'**":

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

Suit Count

1. On your *Partner's* **every lead of a New Suit**, show Partner your Suit Count.
2. On *Declarer's* **every lead of a New Suit**, show Partner your count.
3. If *Dummy* is going to win the trick **with less than the Queen**, show Partner Suit Count.

Suit Attitude

1. If *Dummy* is going to win the trick **with the Queen or higher**, show Partner Attitude.
2. On the first Discard on a lead from the Dummy, show Partner your Attitude.

Other Principles

1. Always lead high from a Doubleton.
2. Only cover an Honor when your Partnership and your opponents have an **equal number of Touching Honors**.
3. When the Dummy *first comes down*, **immediately** make your plan on what you will do against every High lead in each of the Dummy's suits if you are playing immediately after the Dummy.

Also see Esther's article about Defense in the Summer/Fall, 2024 issue of the Journal of the American Bridge Teachers' Association:

<https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/ABTA 3.pdf>