

Leading the First Time Once the Contract is Set

Bruce Thompson

On average, in any given competition you and your Partner will be on defense about 50% of the Boards, and you will be on lead about 25% of the time. How well you play on defense is just as important as playing on offense with respect to how well you and your Partner place. And the lead you make in itself can be very important to determining your final result.

Your lead can result in you taking tricks that might otherwise be lost. And your lead communicates important information to your Partner that also may lead to additional tricks. Preferred leads are generally different against Suit contracts versus No Trump contracts.

Two very good books on leading are Opening Leads by Mike Lawrence (1996) and Opening Leads by Robert Ewen (1993). Easley Blackwood Sr.'s [yes, that Blackwood!] (1983) The Complete Book of Opening Leads is also worth a look.

Against Suit Contracts, In General Order of Importance

Non-Slam Suit Contracts

1. If your Partner bid a suit, or your Partner made a "Lead Directing Double," lead the suit your Partner bid or requested. A "Lead-Directing Double" is an obviously artificial and not-for-penalty Double made by Partner. For example, if you are sitting South, and East opens 1**NT**, and you Pass, and West bids 2**C** (Stayman), and Partner North Doubles, you know that (1) the Opponents hold roughly $16 + 9 =$ roughly 25 HCPs, and (2) West is not really showing Clubs, and thus Partner North cannot be Doubling for penalty against an artificial 2**C** bid that the opponents certainly will not play, and instead Partner is

requesting that you lead a Club. If you hold 2 cards in Partner's preferred suit, lead high; otherwise, lead low.

2. Leading a Singleton against a Suit contract can be very good, because ***your partner is expected as a General Rule to lead back to you at the first opportunity the suit you initially led***, and thus you may be able to trump one of Partner's losers (and the opponent's winner(s)), before all the Trump cards are pulled!
3. Lead high from "touching" honors (e.g., AKxx, KQTx, QJT). Leading the Ace **promises** holding either a Singleton, or A,K, so if you hold A,K, lead the Ace. Partner's "attitude" play on the Ace ("I like this suit", or "I do not like this suit") will answer the question, "Can Partner take the **third** trick in this suit either with the Queen, or instead by trumping the 3rd lead in the suit?"
4. Lead a suit that Dummy bid, if and only if Declarer did not support that suit, in the hopes that Partner can take an opponents' honor with a King or an Ace.
5. Lead a suit not bid by either partnership, in the hopes that Partner can take some tricks. If you hold a doubleton with one honor (e.g., Q,x or J,x), lead your honor to either take the trick, or knock out opponents' honor and possibly promote a winner for Partner.
6. Lead a *non-trump* suit in which you know both opponents are long, if you also are long, in the hope that Partner can now or later trump this suit.
7. Lead trump if (1) you have no better lead and (2) the Declarer has shown a two-suited hand, so that Declarer is less able to use Dummy's trump cards to trump losers in Declarer's long suit, thus dumping losers.
8. In general, when no other considerations suggest a preferred alternative (e.g., Partner always Passed, you do not have touching honors), lead **BOSTON** (the "Bottom of Something, and Top of Nothing").

Do not do the following:

1. Against (1) a suit and (2) non-slam contract, do **not** lead an Ace when you do not hold the King and the Ace is not a singleton. Always remember that "Aces are for

killing opponents' Kings," and not simply just for taking tricks.

2. Do not lead "away from an Ace" (i.e., low in a suit in which you hold the Ace) from a non-trump suit which your Partner did not bid and in which you hold the Ace and several lower cards. The Declarer may win with an unprotected King, and may even later trump your Ace.

Slam Suit Contracts

Against suit slam contracts, it may be best to take Ace winners early, especially in a suit that the opponents did not bid, in case Partner also has a winner, and before the Declarer can slough losers in the suit in order to later trump your Ace(s).

Against No Trump Contracts, In General Order of Importance

1. Lead the suit that your Partner bid. If, and only if, you supported your Partner in this suit during the auction, make an "attitude lead" by playing low from something, and high from nothing (i.e., *BOSTON*). If you did not support Partner in Partner's bid suit during the auction, make a "count lead". In a "count lead", a low card shows Partner that you hold an odd number of cards in the bid suit, and a high card shows Partner that you hold an even number of cards in the bid suit.
2. If Partner has not bid, lead the top of "touching" honors in a long suit (e.g. K,Q,xx, J,T,9,x).
3. If Partner has not bid or made a "Lead-Directing Double", and you do not hold "touching" honors, lead *4th from the top* of your "longest and strongest" suit, even if this suit is pretty weak. This allows your partner to employ The Most Important "Rule" of bridge:
The Rule of 11.

Rule of 11

The Rule of 11 applies in all cases (Trump or Suit contracts) that you know Partner is leading 4th from the top of a long suit. However, this usually only happens against No Trump contracts, and in No Trump contracts is the most common lead by the defenders. The Rule of 11 tells Partner (1) what is your longest suit, and (2) exactly how many

cards the Declarer holds that are higher than the led card. Of course, this lead also tells the Declarer how many cards you hold that are higher than the led card.

For example, if Partner leads the 6 of Clubs, and you haven't bid Clubs, you can be pretty sure that Partner is leading 4th from the top of Partner's longest suit. So, Clubs is Partner's longest suit. Once the Dummy comes down, if the Dummy has 2 Clubs higher than the 6, and you hold 1 Club higher than the 6, because $11 - 6 = 5$, and $5 - 2 - 1 = 2$, you now know that Declarer holds exactly 2 Clubs higher than the 6!