

DEFENSE at DUPLICATE – DUMMY EVALUATION

Phase III. The Dummy Appears. Once in view, the 13 cards in Dummy answer many of the questions the opening leader had and confirm or negate her assumptions about a Defense Plan. It also partially completes both defenders' estimate of length and strength in partner's and Declarer's hands.

We read that "the dummy could drastically change the Defensive Style on the first trick" and here we'll see why. If it's flat, defenders may be able to go Passive and make Declarer take his tricks, but few extra ones in Dummy other than HCP tricks.

But dummy may not have shown shortness in Defenders' suit nor bid her decent 5-card side suit: she may have simply raised Declarer's suit to some level. But, when it hits the table, all 3 hidden hands might see the hand change – maybe drastically.

Defenders may have to switch to Active Style, meaning take their Aces and Kings right away to prevent them being ruffed away or see Declarer pitch his losers on dummy's side suit.

Declarer's "losers" are, of course, Defenders' winners – if they collect them in time.

FLAT, NEUTRAL AND DANGEROUS DUMMYS

A. A Balanced Dummy (Flat)

Against a flat dummy; i.e., one with no 4+ card suit that can be set up for declarer discards, the Defenders' Style should be Passive. Lead so as to not break new suits. Defenders' Plan should be to sit back and wait for Declarer to lead their suits, as she has few other choices with a flat dummy.

B. A Dummy with Ruffing Power but Little Else (Neutral)

Against this dummy, Defenders should lead trumps whenever they can. Trumping losers is the only way declarer can make extra tricks in dummy, beyond HCP tricks, so lead trumps to neutralize the dummy.

Forget about "not finessing my partner". Get those trumps off the table ASAP.

C. A Dummy with a Long Side Suit

C1. A usable side-suit. If it's clear the dummy's side suit will be a home for Declarer's losers, then Defenders must get their tricks before they go away: lead away from Kings, lay down Aces, all the things you "should never do" may then be the "right" things to do. Active defense is the clear choice facing a long dummy side suit.

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C2. A long but not solid side-suit. If a defender knows the long side suit won't be used as a place to dump Declarer's losers, he should play it as a Flat or Ruffing Power Only dummy. He could know that if he has multiple stoppers in the suit: for example, ♣QT98 behind the dummy's long Clubs. Passive defense works best here.

EXAMPLES

A. A Flat (Balanced) Dummy. Contract: 2♠.

Dummy

♠A965

♥A64

♦J72

♣T54

West

♠73

Lead the ♥King. Don't lead away from high cards.

♥KQT5

When it holds, switch to a trump.

♦A854

A passive defense is "right" because the flat dummy has little

♣Q72

added value.

B. A Ruffing Power Only Dummy. Contract: 4♠.

Dummy

♠A45

♥82

♦6543

♣K765

West

♠3

Lead: ♦Queen. East's ♦Ace wins and he returns a Heart, West

♥KJ95

winning as East finessed thru Declarer's Hearts.

♦QJT9

West then leads a Spade to minimize Heart ruffs in dummy.

♣QT82

Declarer may lose a Diamond, 2 Hearts and a Spade, going off 1.

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C. A Side-suit Dummy. (Dummy is North)

Dummy C.1 East hand #1 at 4♠

♠Q7	♠T93	East wins the opening lead with his ♥Ace,
♥74	♥A85	then should switch to the ♦J before Declarer's
♦8632	♦JT5	Diamond losers go on dummy's long Clubs.
♣AKJ94	♣8765	An Active defense because of dummy's strong Clubs.

C-2. East hand #2 at 4♠

♠T93 East wins the ♥Ace then should switch to a trump.
♥A85 Declarer's losers won't go away on dummy's Clubs because
♦JT5 East has them well stopped, and trump leads are
♣QT83 Passive, preventing Heart ruffs. Wait for your winners.

DEFENSE at DUPLICATE – UPSIDE DOWN CARDING

WHAT IS “UPSIDE DOWN CARDING?”

Upside Down Count, Attitude, Discards, etc. are usually the opposite of “Standard”. Generally, a “high” card is positive in Standard Carding, and a “low” one is negative.

In Upside-Down carding, the opposite applies: the lower a card you lead or play to a trick or discard, the better you like that suit; and the opposite is true: playing or discarding a “high” card means you don’t have anything to compete with in that suit, or you don’t want it led by partner for some reason.

The question of “Is partner’s card a High card or a Low card or a Middling one?” applies in upside-down carding just as it does in Standard: “is that ♣7 a high, low or neutral card?”

“It depends” is always the answer: it depends on the other cards in the suit visible in your hand and the dummy and previously played in the suit. Look at the cards in dummy and your hand and recall what has been played before in that suit: Simple, no? Welcome to Duplicate.

Upside-Down Count Carding: A first round play of a “low” card followed by a higher one on the 2nd round shows an even number of cards and the opposite: Lo-Hi shows even count and Hi – Lo shows odd count. (Not Recommended by Bob: Play Standard Hi-Low for even and Lo – Hi for odd count.) It’s a Partnership Agreement; not a clearly winning defensive technique”) Note that it takes 2 rounds of the suit to be played to complete the signal, just as it does in Standard Carding.

Upside-Down Attitude Carding: A first round play of a “Low” card led by partner is positive, suggesting a continuation of the suit and the initial play of a “High” card is negative: “No help in this suit, partner” and a middling card says “Eh”. So, a ♣3 played to a ♣A lead says “Keep leading Clubs, Partner: I have the ♣Q.” but a ♣8 says the opposite: “Partner, I have no help in Clubs”, and a ♣6 suggests “Eh” I don’t care one way or the other”.

Upside-Down Discards: a “low” First Discard says “Partner, I have stuff in this suit: please lead it”. A “High” discard says the opposite: “Please don’t lead this suit”, and, so, of course, a middling card says “Eh: I have cards in this suit, but no sure winners”.

Leads: Leads are similar to Standard leads, playing Upside-Down Carding. The lead of a “Low” card says you have some HCP strength in that suit, and the lead of a “High” one says the opposite. aka Boston. (Bottom of Something; Top of Nothing) .

Honor card leads show a Standard 3+ card Honor Card sequence: e.g., the lead of the ♣Q show the ♣J and ♣10(x) as well.

DEFENSE at DUPLICATE – UPSIDE DOWN CARDING

Journalist Leads. When leading suits with broken honors, use Journalist Leads, although technically the name now is “Coded 9s, 10s and Jacks”. Don’t use the bold leads as printed on ACBL convention cards. (See Journalist Leads below)

Suit Preference Signals. When a discard or other play is Suit Preference, the Upside-Down technique does NOT apply: the Standard technique is in effect.

What is “Suit Preference?” When, for example, dummy ruffs the suit lead by partner, and you then play in 3rd seat, assuming it is not a First Discard, it is Suit Preference. It says “There’s no future in your suit, partner, but, if you can lead the suit indicated by my card, please do so: If I play a “High” card in the suit that dummy ruffed, then I want the higher ranking of “the other 2 suits”: i.e.; Not trump or your suit, or, if I play a “Low” card, please lead the lower of the other two suits.

Odd – Even First Discards (*Not recommended*)

A common, but not recommended, variation for a First Discard is called “Odd-Even”, where a first discard of an odd card (3,5,7) means “Ok, I like this suit, partner: please lead it when you can. Then, of course, the discard of an even card says the opposite: “Please don’t lead this Evil suit partner”. With Even discards, the size of the card can be Suit Preference: an 8, for example, could mean the higher of “the other two suits” and a 2 could mean the opposite. A nice advantage for Odd – Even First Discards: two messages with one card.

The reason I don’t recommend Odd – Even is that, in my experience when playing it, too often I had only Odd cards when I didn’t want it to be returned, or the opposite: only Even ones when I did want it returned. And, also too often, I had only one Even card, indicating “Evil” but it was a 10. That definitely looks like a suit preference for the higher of “the other two suits”, and a 10 may become a trick or a pusher or a threat card, and I didn’t want to waste it.

A MAJOR CAUTION !

Playing Upside Down (or Standard, for that matter) DO NOT just lazily play the lowest card you have in the suit led. As you see above, the size of a card can be a signal to partner. Consider that possibility before you play any card while simply following suit: “What might partner think if I play a “High” card? A “Low” one? With a choice, play middling cards as a habit to avoid any possible misinterpretation by partner.

DEFENSE at DUPLICATE – LEADS

“Standards”, whether the ACBL’s or Bob’s or yours are guidelines – they are not real “Standards”, meaning something you always do. “Where are we in this hand and What has gone on so far?” is more important than a “Standard” lead table.

Context is it in every hand of duplicate.

What to Lead? Who Bid? The first contextual issue as we start to play a hand, is “Did either or both defenders bid? If so, has the suit been raised? What to lead if partner did? Or didn’t?”

How many ways could a “Yes” answer to any of these questions change the logic of what we lead or what we play or signal in 3rd seat? If there’s been a defensive suit bid and raised, can’t we arrive at the count all around the table quickly once the dummy comes down – probably even before 3rd seat plays? Can an overcall vs. a balancing bid be a different looking suit? Could it make a difference? Of course: Overcalls have HCP in them; balances or a responses to partner’s double may or may not have any HCP.

The original “Journalist” leads were introduced in the 1960’s but are unused now in favor of the “Two or None” style described below, called “Coded 9s, 10s, and Jacks”.

Journalist leads aren’t the “required lead” at any time: they are leads from broken honor suits when good Standard or upside down-leads aren’t available. For example, lead the top of an honor sequence, not a Journalist lead, if you have the choice:

The ♠K from ♠KQJ(x). Or lead your partner’s bid suit.

Standard Leads. Standard leads in Notrump or Suit contracts are printed on the front of the ACBL convention card, and you must use them as printed unless you modify the Leads table on your convention cards. Coded Nine’s, Tens and Jacks are such modifications. Write those words under “Defensive Carding – Standard Except ■:” on the convention card.

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WHAT ARE JOURNALIST LEADS?

When you read the “Leads” section of the ACBL convention card, you see that many of the examples are suits with broken honor sequences, like ♣AJ109 or ♣KT9(x).

Journalist leads are a superior way to handle broken honor suits. As far back as the 1960’s, Eddie Kantar recognized that Standard leads in mixed suits fail to convey as much information as they might, and especially fail to show the power of Tens and Nines as “pushers” in broken honor suits.

Journalist users believe the standard lead from ♣KT9(x) – the Ten – is improved upon by leading the 9 instead because of Journalist “rules” about the leading of a 9 or a 10.

Here’s both the “Rules for Journalist Leads”. That’s all there are: just two.

- (1) “Jack Denies” means the lead of a Jack denies any higher honors in that suit. A “Coded J” lead. The Ten is often implied, but is not promised.
- (2) “9 or 10 Implies” (guarantees) either zero or two higher honors but not in sequence. The Standard ♣KT9(x) lead becomes ♣KT9(x) i.e.; lead the 9, showing 2 or no higher honors. It’s the “Coded Nines and Tens” part. The lead of a 9 implies but doesn’t guarantee the 10, plus an Ace, King or Queen, but not the Jack if it’s a 3-card sequence: i.e., lead the ♠J from ♠JT9(x) – not the ♠9. It’s the top of an honor sequence, but still denies any higher honor. (It’s a good “pusher” too.)

Journalist leads are explained with a simple phrase: “Jack Denies; 9 or 10 Implies”. That’s both Journalist Lead rules in just 6 words. (not “Journalistic”, by the way: “Journalist”). Ok, so it’s easy to remember; so what? Why are Journalist leads better than the Standard ones printed on the ACBL Convention Card.?

As you’ll see below, it makes the lead of a 9, 10 or Jack more meaningful to partner. Here’s a couple of examples of why?

1. West leads the ♠9 as an opening lead, dummy has ♠653 and East has the ♠KTx. What honors could West have in Clubs? If she has two higher honors, they are the ♠AQ or the ♠AJ. In that case, East should play her ♠K

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and lead the ♠10 back, possibly capturing Declarer's ♠Q or ♠J. If the ♠9 is the "top of nothing" in Clubs, then declarer has the ♠AQJ(x) and the chance for defensive tricks in Clubs is zero.

2. West leads the ♠Ten; dummy has ♠Jxxx and East has the ♠KQ9x. East can see 4 honors, meaning West can't have two higher ones, so the complete picture in Spades is totally clear to East. West's ♠Ten lead was a "Coded Ten" lead, denying any higher Spade honor. In this example, East has the ♠9 too, so dummy's ♠J is "smothered": it won't become a trick.

Usually, 3rd seat immediately knows the exact distribution of honors, as she sees her hand and the dummy and can mentally place 2 or zero honors in the leader's hand. Often, the bidding will tell whether it's even possible that the leader has 2 higher honors. Declarer also knows how Journalist leads work, however, he (South) doesn't know whether the missing honors are in the West or East hand, whereas East does know where they are. So, the defense may keep an opening lead advantage.

The bottom line about Journalist Leads, at a suit or no-trump contract, is that the defense can make an informative lead from a broken honor suit. If 3rd hand sees there's no future in that suit, she can mentally change the Defensive Plan.

Another consideration for Journalist leads are whether they are used when defenders have bid the suit, and if the partner of the bidder has raised it. I feel the advantages of Journalist leads remain if defenders have bid and / or raised the suit. There are differences if leading from the top of a doubleton or a singleton in partner's suit.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR OPENING LEADS

These are NOT in any recommended sequence - - - you must "figure it out" from the bidding. Don't forget that it's often "right" to lead trump if you can't "figure it out".

- The top of honor sequences. It starts a Passive Defense Style attack. (♦KQJx)
- An Ace against a suit slam contract, but not against a Notrump slam.
- Your partner's suit. If partner has bid a suit, lead it unless you can name a specific reason not to, or are void in her suit.

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- Don't lead highest of partner's suit from honor third – ♣K83, for example:
Lead the ♣3; not the ♣K.
- 4th from your longest/strongest suit at Notrump, unless you have a totally trick free hand. If so, lead the top card in your shortest suit to maybe find partner's suit.
- The right card. Low from three to an honor (A or K or Q of partner's suit) – high from any doubleton, including an honor doubleton in partner's suit, like ♣Kx; middle from three small. Next time, play the next highest, giving count as three. Know the lead chart on the convention card if using standard count signals. Using Upside Down Count signals, lead the middle, then the lower one to show odd count.
- A Jack or 10 or 9 to show a Coded Lead.
- An 8,7,6 to show "almost top of nothing", the 2nd highest: 7 from 8762- not the 8.
- Through strength. Lead suits that the dummy has bid -- those where he has some strength. If his suit is solid, you've lost nothing. Example: Lead thru ♦AQ8xx on your left so partner can make his ♦King or ♦Jack.
- Toward "worthless suits in dummy". Lead toward ♣9xx in dummy on your right. The ♣10 is best. ("With Dummy on the Right, Lead the Weakest Thing in Sight")
- Lead Trump. If other leads will hurt your defense, lead trump. If you suspect a ruffing plan by declarer, lead trumps every chance you get. If declarer has bid two suits, lead trumps so he can't ruff all his second suit losers.
- To remove entries from dummy. Lead dummy's bid suits to get them off the board before the trump is out and perhaps you'll stop a running side suit. Sacrifice an honor to remove the only entry to a side suit in the dummy.
- To pin declarer in dummy. With a stiff ♥AK in dummy, lead a Heart. It costs nothing to defenders, but declarer must then lead away from dummy.

DON'T LEAD

- New suits. Don't lead an unbid suit: it's often a sure loser for the defense.
- Away from an Ace, King or Queen. Sometimes you can't help it, but try not to. Much better is to lead trump, holding high honors in all other suits.

OPENING LEADS AGAINST NOTRUMP CONTRACTS

The most important piece of information to your partner is to know if you have honors in the suit you lead. (Assuming you or partner has not bid the suit). If you show honors, your partner should consider dropping her honors to unblock your suit. (See *Unblocking*)

- Lead of an Ace: Shows suit strength or length, including the King of the suit.
- Lead of a King: Either from an honor sequence like ♣KQJ(xx) or from ♦AK.
- Lead of a Queen: The top of a QJT(x) sequence.
- Lead of a Jack: “Jack denies” there is no higher honor in the suit. JT_x but not KJT(x)
The lead of a Jack may suggest the Ten is behind it, but there’s no guarantee.
- Lead of a Ten: “Two or None higher” – a “Journalist or Coded” lead.
- Lead of a Nine: Either two higher honors (often including the Ten) or none.
- Don’t lead 9’s or 8’s as top of nothing from 4+ card suits. They are too valuable as they can become 4th round tricks. With ♦9742, lead the ♦7, not the ♦9 if you must lead Diamonds. If dummy has 4 Diamonds, keep length with the dummy.

OPENING LEADS AGAINST SUIT CONTRACTS

- When Partner Has Bid: Don’t automatically lead your highest card in partner’s suit. The exception is with 2 cards (a doubleton) in partner’s suit: lead (♣K_x, ♦Q_x, ♠9_x).
- Lead partner’s Ace if you have it, regardless of your length. Never lead away from it.
- With 3 to a major honor in partner’s suit, lead your lowest (♣K_{xx}, ♦Q_{xx}, ♠T_{xx})
- With touching honors in partner’s suit, lead the higher regardless of length (♣KQ_x, ♠QJ_{xx}, ♦JT_x), but with AK(x) in partner’s suit, lead the King. When it wins, partner will know who has the Ace.
- With 3 or 4 small (8_{xx}) lead low if you have supported partner’s suit, otherwise high.
Exceptions: (i.e., not first leading partner’s suit .)
 - With a side suit honor sequence, lead it instead of partner’s suit. (♦KQJ, ♠QJT9)
 - With AK(x) in a side suit, lead the Ace to see the dummy, then lead her suit at the 2nd trick if nothing interesting appears. She then knows how to get back to you – to the King of your suit. Always win the opening lead if you can.

When Partner Hasn’t Bid: Don’t lead a low side-suit doubleton, hoping for who knows what? - Best is Ace or King from AK(x) to see the dummy before making the 2nd lead.

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- Next best is from an honor sequence: (♣KQJ, ♥QJT9)
- Agree with partner never to lead away from an unsupported Ace.
If you lead low in a suit, you don't have the Ace of that suit, Period.
- Avoid leading suits partner could have overcalled at the 1-level but didn't.
- If Declarer can trump losers, lead trump. Trump is the least likely to be a bad lead.
- Coded Leads – J's, 10's and 9's.

LEADS DURING THE PLAY

The opening lead is the first shot fired by the defense to try to beat a contract. Logically, the leads thereafter should continue the attack. However, sometimes there needs to be a switch in defensive tactics. Either defender can switch because:

- Declarer is trying to ruff tricks in the dummy: lead trump.
- Declarer is void in your suit in both hands - - give him no sluff-and-ruffs, please.
- Declarer is about to run a solid suit to pitch his losers -- take your quick tricks at once.
- Partner has bid a suit that hasn't been lead.

Defensive Lead "Don'ts":

- Don't lead new suits: make declarer start a new suit - - if you break a suit, it's an advantage to the declarer. Lead trump instead.
- Don't allow declarer to sluff-and-ruff.
- Don't "try something else" because the opening lead wasn't too successful.

Defensive Lead "Do's":

- Lead the suit your partner bid - - perhaps she has something in that suit?
- Once you start the top of a 3+ card honor sequence, continue leading it, but not if you're missing the 3rd highest: ♣KQ10(x). Declarer is doing a Bath Coup with ♣AJx.
- Lead trump on the opening lead if declarer has opened a suit but plays in another; and keep leading trump later. She probably has losers in her original suit to ruff.
- Lead through strength (a broken suit on your left) or toward weakness (on your right)
- Lead (and play) any card you are known to hold, like the next lower after your opening "almost top-of nothing" lead.

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- Lead to pin declarer on the board so she must lead away from dummy into your hand.
- If the dummy is on your right, lead a card just higher than it holds so as to maybe keep the lead. Example: Lead the ♦10 toward ♦9xx in dummy on your right.
- Try to help partner not have to lead into dummy tenaces (♣AQTXX). You should lead thru such suits: "Through Strength on your Left".

DEFENSE at DUPLICATE – DISCARDS

DISCARDING GUIDELINES

Discarding is an art, like many other things in bridge. Some generalities follow, independent of the bidding, which is always very relevant in duplicate. Keep equal length with dummy's suits. If you hold ♠K642 and dummy has ♠AQ53, don't discard any Spades until dummy does so first.

Signal with cards in short suits, not suits with equal length with dummy. Discard the highest of an honor sequence, guaranteeing partner you have the lower ones. With ♦QJT9, discard the ♦Q, not the ♦9. He should know you aren't wasting honors. Know how to discard negatively. Know how to tell partner "Don't lead such and such a suit". Example: Discard a 7 or 8, playing Upside Down First Discards, assuming partner can "figure it out", or use Suit Preference to point to a specific side suit.

Use the Rule of Eleven when partner leads 4th best. How? Subtract the card led from 11 to get the key number. Partner's lead of a 7 tells you there are 4 cards outstanding between the dummy, your hand and declarer's hand. So how many does Declarer have in her hand higher than a 7? It's east for partner to figure it out with the Rule of Eleven. Discard cards that Declarer knows you have, not new suits. If you bid Clubs, discard Clubs unless you need to signal something in another suit.

Don't discard the last card in your partner's suit until you know you will never get on lead again in the hand.

Don't discard 9's, 8's or 7's in 4+ card suits: they may become stoppers or pushers or even trick-takers.

Don't endplay yourself. If the dummy has sure winners, get cards of that suit out of your hand ASAP so you don't get end-played.

Don't discard at random: every discard tells declarer something, so tell it over and over – don't tell her more things.

Always falsecard when it can't mislead partner. With ♣QJT9 in a side suit, discard the Jack first.

DEFENSE at DUPLICATE – DISCARDS

Weak hands tell all; strong hands don't. Strong hands don't need to tell their weak partners anything accurate on defense, because it also tells the declarer. Deceive!

BLOCKING

What is "Blocking"? Blocking occurs when a hand has to take a trick but then can't lead the suit back to partner because it has no low card to lead. East has ♠T98765 and West has ♠AKJ. West can win 2 or 3 Spade tricks, but can't get back to East's hand to run more Spade tricks except in another suit. This is an unavoidable block because of the way the cards were dealt. Unblocking is the art of avoiding the blocking of a suit that you and your partner can run if played right. Examples:

- Partner leads the ♠K against NT and you have the ♠A7. Overtake with the ♣Ace and lead the ♠7 back to partner's ♠QTxx, setting up her Spade suit and maybe finessing declarer's ♠J. If you duck the King, you'll win the 2nd Spade trick and can't get back to partner in Spades.

- Partner leads the ♥4 and you have ♥AJ82. Win the ♥A first and then lead the ♥J. You must get out of partner's way, so he can run his Hearts if you later get in to lead them to him with the ♥2. If partner gets in again and leads the ♥Queen or ♥10 or ♥9, drop your ♥8 under her card, so she can keep the lead. If you get in, lead your ♥8, not your ♥2, to get your high spot cards out of her way.

- Partner opens the ♥K against NT and you have ♥J82. Play your ♥J to show him where all the high cards in Hearts are, and unblocking a high Heart so you can lead a smaller one back to him if you get in. Don't follow with your ♥2 from ♥J82 -- you will probably block his suit from running. Play the ♥8 next. Keep the ♥2. How? Partner's ♥K is taken by Declarer's ♥A and you will later win the third round of Hearts but then can't lead them back. Because partner won't know you have the ♥J, he will take the ♥Q on the second round. You could unblock the ♥J under the ♥Queen, but why make it hard on your partner? Start to unblock at your first opportunity.

When is there a Blocking situation? When partner leads a suit showing length and strength, try to visualize her cards before you play your first card. Visualize what will be the situation on the second or third round of that suit and play your cards to get out of her way.

COUNTING

COUNTING

Duplicate bidding and play, on defense or as declarer, is all about counting. You must count everything, all the time, to be a decent player / defender / declarer / partner.

- High Cards around the table. The bidding went: 1NT – P – 3NT and you have 5 HCP. How many HCP does your partner have? You know declarer's range and can see the dummy, so partner has . . . ?.
- Suit distribution. The bidding goes [2♠ – P – 4♠], with 3 Spades in the dummy. You have the ♠7, so your partner has how many Spades?
- Defensive distribution. Opening leader leads the ♥2 into your 3NT contract. How many Hearts does she have? Her partner?
- Declarer's distribution. With Spades as trump, declarer has 8 cards in her hand that aren't Spades. What could they be?
- Anyone's distribution. If you can figure out either your partner's or declarer's distribution, you know all 52 cards, distribution-wise.
- Number of cards already played and still unplayed in a suit. Going around twice takes 8: you can see yours and dummy's remaining cards in each suit, so . . .
- Number of a suit in partner's hand. Declarer opened 1♥ and plays 3NT. How many Hearts does your partner hold?
- Tricks. Count before the first dummy card is played. As either Declarer or Defender, how many tricks are you short? Where might additional ones come from?
- Number of cards your partner holds. He plays high-low in Diamonds. How many has he? How many has declarer?
- Score for making / going down X tricks. Down two not vulnerable is better or worse than letting opponents make 3 Clubs?
- Discovery. North leads ♦A, ♦K, ♦Q but didn't open. Can she have the ♣Ace? The ♠King?

COUNTING

Practice Counting

Practice counting “everything” for just 2 rounds per session. In a month, you will be a better bridge player. Then step it up to 4 rounds, etc.

Counting constantly keeps you focused on the hand: not dinner.

Or start with just one hand: count Declarer’s total distribution for a session.

Then, during another session, count partner’s distribution or HCP.

It will soon become a habit -- a winning defensive habit for you.

Before you play the first card in a hand, try to estimate everyone’s HCP, mentally write them down and afterwards see how close you were during the play - - it’s easy to be within a point or two with just a little practice.

Once you get this habit in place, move on to something else as described above.

DEFENDER PLAY PROBLEMS

- Answers follow

	North		North	East	South	West
<i>Hand #1</i>	♣ K		-	-	-	1♠
			2♣	P	3♣ or 2♠	3♦
West		East	P	3♠	All pass	
		♠ QJ86	Your partner, North, leads the ♣King against West's 3 Spade contract. How do you signal her to lead Hearts?			
		♥ Q83				
		♦ Q64				
		♣ 876				
	South (you)					
	♠ 742					
	♥ AKJ					
	♦ T873					
	♣ A32					

Answer: _____

	North		North	East	South	West
<i>Hand #2</i>	♠ K		-	-	1♠	2♥
			2♠	3♦	P	3♥
West		East	P	4♥	All pass	
		♠ J5	Your partner, against all advice, always leads the highest card in your suit. (♠K) How do you beat this contract?			
		♥ KT				
		♦ A9852				
		♣ KJ85				
	South (you)					
	♠ AQT63					
	♥ A8					
	♦ J73					
	♣ T73					

Answer: _____

DEFENDER PLAY PROBLEMS

	North ♣4		North -	East -	South -	West 1♥
Hand #3			P	3♥	P	4♥
West		East	All pass			
		♠ AK ♥ QT94 ♦ QT3 ♣ J963	Your partner, North, leads the ♣4.			
	South		How should you, South, plan the defense?			
	♠ QT874 ♥ 632 ♦ 76 ♣ A52					

Answer: _____

	North ♣ 52		North P	East 1♠	South P	West 2NT*
Hand #4			P	4♥	P	4♠
West		East	All pass			
		♠ 3 ♦ T ♣ 4	You lead the ♣Q, winning.			
	South (you)		Then you lead the ♣Jack, dummy's ♣King is covered by the partner's ♣Ace and East ruffs. Declarer then leads the ♦Ten.			
	♠ T742 ♥ 7 ♦ A86 ♣ QJT98		What is your defensive plan?			

* = Strong Spade raise in an opening hand.

Answer: _____

DEFENDER PLAY PROBLEMS

ANSWERS

	North		
	♣ K	North	East
<i>Hand #1</i>		-	-
		2♣	P
West	East	P	3♠
	♠ QJ86	All pass	
	♥ Q83	Your partner, North, leads the	
	♦ Q64	♣King against West's 3♠ contract.	
	♣ 876		
	South		
	♠ 742	How do you signal him to lead	
	♥ AKJ	Hearts?	
	♦ T873		
	♣ A32		

Overtake the ♣K, play the ♥Ace then return a Club to his ♠Q, killing the ♥Queen when he leads another Heart through Dummy.

Signals don't always have to be subtle.

When you can see how to tell your partner something with no chance of error on his part, do it.

DEFENDER PLAY PROBLEMS

	North	North	East	South	West
<i>Hand #2</i>	♠ K	-	-	1♠	2♥
		2♠	3♦	P	3♥
West		P	4♥	All pass	
	East ♠ J5 ♥ KT ♦ A9852 ♣ KJ85	Your partner unfortunately always leads the highest card in your suit.			
	South (you) ♠ AQT63 ♥ A8 ♦ J73 ♣ T73	How do you beat this contract?			

Overtake the ♠K and lead a LOW Heart, retaining a trump tempo. To play ♥Ace and another Heart would prevent a Spade ruff in dummy, but it would let declarer pitch his 3rd Spade on dummy's long Club. You must prevent both the ruff of declarer's 3rd Spade and a pitch on Clubs, so you must keep your tempo by NOT playing ♥Ace and a Heart. You'll get in with the ♥A and win your 3rd Spade for down 1.

DEFENDER PLAY PROBLEMS

	North	North	East	South	West
<i>Hand #3</i>	♣ 4	-	-	-	1♥
		P	3♥	P	4♥
West		All pass			
	East	Your partner opens the ♣ 4.			
	♠ AK				
	♥ QT94				
	♦ QT3				
	♣ J963				
	South (you)	How should you, South, plan the defense?			
	♠ QT874				
	♥ 632				
	♦ 76				
	♣ A52				

Take the ♣Ace and return the ♦7, looking for a 3rd round ruff. Spades and Hearts are hopeless on the bidding and the dummy, and you have only this one tempo to attack. If you blindly return a Club, you will set up dummy's ♣Jack. Partner must have a Diamond trick (♦Ace or ♦King) and the ♥Ace or ♥King to beat this contract.

DEFENDER PLAY PROBLEMS

	North	North	East	South	West
<i>Hand #4</i>	♣ 5A2	P	1♠	P	3NT*
		P	4♥	P	4♠
West		East	All pass		
♠ AQJ		♠ 3	You lead the ♣Q, winning.		
♥ QJT		♦ T	Then lead the ♣Jack, dummy's		
♦ KJ53		♣ 4	♣King covered by the partner's		
♣ K63			♣Ace and East ruffs. Declarer then		
	South		leads the ♦ Ten.		
	(you)		What is your defense plan?		
	♠ T742				
	♥ 7				
	♦ A86				
	♣ QJT98				

Declarer is trying to steal a 10th trick with the ♦ King. Take your ♦ Ace. Count – Count – Count! Your partner can't have the ♦ Queen because there's no points left for her. Why? You and she have already played 7 HCP, you have 4 more and dummy had 17, so Declarer must have all the other 12.

This means he has no other side suit losers. Lead another Club, forcing him to ruff again. You will then have more trumps than him. He might then lose control of the hand.