

Lesson 1 – Playing a NT Contract

Note: The complete layout of the four hands for this game is shown at the end of this lesson so the cards can be set up for practice with 4 players.

Bidding:

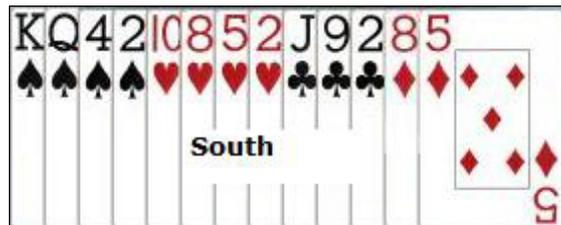
North is the dealer.



North has 16 HCPs, a balanced hand (no voids, no singletons and only 1 doubleton) and no 5-card major.

North opens 1NT.

East and West pass throughout.



South has 6 HCPs and no 5-card major. South passes.

The final contract is **1NT by North**. This is often the dreaded 1NT. It can be difficult to make 7 tricks and sometimes the contract will not make. However, some strategy will help.

Playing the Hand:

East is on lead. East leads from his longest, strongest suit, which is diamonds. East leads the ♦3, the 4th highest in that suit.

The Dummy hand (South) comes down and North will pause to consider his strategy. It turns out that a lead in diamonds is to his advantage. East is leading towards North's tenace*! What luck! North should be aware that the opponent's longest suit is diamonds and North has only two stoppers in diamonds.

tenace* (pronounced "tennis") – two honor cards with a gap (e.g. A/Q, K/J); it's best to have the lead come around **towards a *tenace*, rather than leading away **from** a *tenace*.

When playing a NT hand, the first thing to do is count your winners. Because of the lead, North can see 5 immediate winners: A♠ K♠ Q♠ and A♦ Q♦. North needs 2 more winners.

The next thing North should do is to look at his longest suit which is hearts (8 cards). If the hearts split evenly (3-2), North will get 1 more winner with his 4th heart.

His best strategy is to start by leading a low heart toward the ♥10. So that's what he will do.

So the ♦3 is led, North plays the ♦5 or ♦8 from Dummy. West will likely play the ♦10 and North will take it with the ♦Q. If West plays the ♦K, then North will take it with the ♦A. If West plays the ♦7, then North will take it with the ♦9.

Trick #1✓ — (The ✓ notation after a trick indicates a winner for Declarer and the X indicates a lost trick.)

Then North leads the ♥6. East must take the trick with either the A♥ or the Q♥. A low heart is played from Dummy.

Trick #2X.

It's difficult to say how the game will be played after this. Perhaps East will lead another low diamond. In that case, North will again take the trick, overtaking whichever card West plays.

Trick #3✓

North will still concentrate on the hearts. He will lead low again, towards the ♥10 in Dummy. East has to play his remaining heart and will take the trick.

Trick #4X.

Now East may decide to play another diamond. If he does, he will end up with one winning diamond trick, but he needs to get the lead to play it. Depending on how the hand has been played, he might win a trick with his Jack.

Trick #5✓.

North can now play his two winning heart tricks.

Trick #6✓

Trick #7✓

North has won 5 tricks and needs 2 more to make the contract. He has 3 spade winners. E/W should get 2 more tricks after that (A♣ and K♣). North could make 8 tricks, losing 5, depending on how E/W discard their cards. The results are difficult to predict exactly, but with the heart strategy, North should make his contract.



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