

Lesson 5 – Opening Leads

After the contract has been reached, the LHO (left-hand opponent) of the Declarer makes the opening lead. After the lead card is placed on the table, the Dummy hand is shown. The opening lead often has a significant effect on the outcome of the game. Opening leads come with no guarantees. Even experienced bridge players will not always be right.

Usually, you should lead the suit your partner bid, unless you have a good reason not to.

Usually, you should avoid leading the suit your opponents bid.

Usually, you lead from your longest, strongest suit (or a singleton vs. a trump contract). First, choose the suit, then choose the card from that suit. Here are some guidelines:

Against a No Trump Contract:

1. Lead from your longest and strongest suit.
2. Lead the top card of three or more touching honors.
3. Lead the 4th highest card (counting down from the top card).
4. Lead from the top of an interior sequence. (E.g., King/**Jack**/Ten – lead the Jack.)
5. Lead the “top of nothing” (E.g., with highest card 10 or under, lead from the top.)
6. Avoid leading away from an unsupported King (no Ace or Queen), unless you can lead MUD (see #5 below).

Against a Trump Contract:

1. Lead a singleton. If partner can take the trick and return your lead, you can ruff with a small trump. If partner bid a suit and you choose not to lead that suit to your partner, that could be a signal that you are leading a singleton.
2. Lead the highest card from a suit with a sequence of two or more touching honors.
3. Lead high/low from a **doubleton**.
4. With Ace/King or King/Queen plus more cards in that suit, lead the **King** first, then the Ace or Queen next. Usually, leading a King promises either the Ace or Queen.
5. Lead MUD (Middle/Up/Down) from a 3-card suit headed by an honor. (E.g., with King/**Ten**/5, lead the Ten first; if it wins, then the King; if it wins, then the 5.)

Why not lead an Ace?

1. Aces are best used when they take opponent’s honor cards. If you lead an unsupported Ace (no King), you may be helping your opponents to build their suit.
2. An Ace can be an entry back into your hand after building a different suit.

When should you lead an Ace?

1. If leading from a doubleton, lead the Ace. Lead the high card from a doubleton.
2. A singleton Ace can be a good lead. It may unblock your partner’s suit.
3. In a slam contract — it might be the only trick you get.
4. If you have a long suit (5 cards or more) with an unsupported Ace and you decide that’s your best suit to lead against a trump contract, lead the Ace, rather than a low card. If you lead low, it may be the opponent’s short suit. Opponents might win the trick with a singleton King, for example, or another high card, and then they may be void or able to discard cards in that suit to trump your Ace later.
5. An advantage of leading an Ace is that it **usually** takes the first trick. Then you can see the dummy hand to decide what is best to lead next towards your partner.
6. Against a NT contract, leading an Ace is not usually a good idea, unless the contract is at a slam level.

What is a *tenace* and how should it affect your strategy?

1. A tenace (pronounced "tennis") is a combination of two honor cards with a gap (e.g., Ace/Queen or King/Jack).
2. When you are on lead, it is usually a poor strategy to lead away from a tenace. You would like the lead to come around toward your hand from your partner or left-hand opponent. Examples:
 - a. Right-hand opponent has the King and you have the Ace/Queen. You would like to capture his King. If the lead comes around to you, you can win with the Queen if the King has not been played and your Ace could take another trick. If the King is played, take it with the Ace and then your Queen becomes a winner, unless the opponents are now void and the contract is a trump suit.
 - b. Right-hand opponent has the Ace and you have the King/Jack. You would like to win a trick with the King. If left-hand opponent has the Ace/Queen, your King/Jack is not very helpful.
3. After the first trick is taken and dummy hand is exposed you may see a tenace in the dummy hand. You and your partner should be using this to your advantage.
 - a. If the dummy is to your left and you see a tenace, that suit could be a good lead towards your partner.
 - b. This also applies to your partner, if s/he is on lead and the dummy is on your right. If s/he has no other good lead, that may be a good suit to lead towards you.
4. Sometimes you may be stuck. You may have no other good lead, so leading away from a tenace is what you must do. If that's the case, lead the Ace of the Ace/Queen.

Some other tips:

1. Sometimes you have the Ace and it's later in the game. No one has played that suit and you are on lead. It could be that your partner has the King and doesn't want to lead away from it. So, play your Ace before it gets trumped. There is the chance that your partner has the King and is also avoiding a lead from that suit.
2. Sometimes it happens, that partners have the Ace and King and never take a trick with either one, because neither wants to lead away from a suit with one unsupported high card. Against a trump suit, the Declarer may discard that suit from one hand and can then trump your high cards because you waited too long.
3. Don't wait too long to play your Ace, even when you know your partner does not have the King. Against a NT contract, if Declarer plays the King, then the Queen, and you avoid playing your Ace, the Declarer may switch to another suit and your Ace never takes a trick. It takes much skill to know how long to hold back playing an Ace. However, if you see that Declarer is having difficulty reaching the dummy hand to run a long suit, it may be a good strategy to hold back on the Ace. But that may be in vain. If the Declarer has another entry to dummy, he can keep playing that suit until you play the Ace, so you may have been better off to take the trick and lead a suit where your partner may still be able to get another trick.