

Leading questions by Sandra Landy

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Most players find bidding far more exciting than card play and failure to reach the best contract can lead to lengthy discussions. But try as I may I cannot get the same enthusiasm for that other area where the two partners must communicate – defensive card play.

The only way one defender can pass information to their partner is by the cards played.

Partners can have agreements about what it means to play a particular card in a particular situation. Of course if they have those agreements, they must take notice of the cards their partner plays.

The Opening Lead

Just last week, I played with a new player. She had, correctly, overcalled the opponent's 1♥ opening bid with 1♠, but the opponents still reached 4♥. The opening lead was the ♠10. I held ♠42 and dummy had ♠873. Declarer won the ♠A. I won a heart trick and had to decide what to play back. In the end I played a spade and was amazed to discover partner had started with ♠KQJ109. She explained she had led fourth highest – wasn't that correct?

My answer was NO. Our agreement is that we lead the top card of a sequence. From KQJ109 any card will do to drive out the ♠A. But the ♠K gives information to partner about the spade holding too, leading the ♠K shows a holding that includes the ♠Q and that makes it likely that spade tricks can be cashed by the defence, so partner can judge where the defensive tricks are coming from.

Honour leads in No Trumps

The aim of the opening lead to 3NT is to win five tricks before declarer can cash nine.

Sometimes we have to give up a trick to establish our winners. For that reason we normally lead our strongest suit. Where the honours held in the suit you are leading form a good sequence, it's usually the best suit to lead.

♠KQ962 ♠AQ962 ♠KJ962	Lead the ♠6. When suits have two honours, lead a low card. Most people agree to lead the fourth one down counting from the top. Maybe partner has a useful honour card. Partner will normally return the suit you lead if they win a trick.
♥AKQ2	Lead the ♥A. Play cards from the top down. The ♥2 will become a winner if neither opponent has four hearts. Do not lead a fourth highest ♥2 or declarer may win a trick with the ♥J.
♦QJ1098 ♦KJ1098 ♦KQ1092 ♦AQJ92 ♦QJ984	When honours are in sequence, lead the top one Lead the ♦Q Lead the ♦J Lead the ♦K Lead the ♦Q Lead the ♦Q
♣AJ1096	Lead the ♣J, the top card of an internal sequence. Perhaps declarer has the ♣KQ which must make one trick. But if partner gets in and returns clubs, you may have four winners to cash. Or maybe partner has the ♣K and you can cash five club tricks straightaway.

What should you play on partner's lead?

1. Partner leads the ♣J, dummy has two small clubs. You have ♣K74, what card should you play?
2. Partner leads the ♠6, dummy has two small spades. You have ♠K108, what card should you play?
3. Partner leads the ♦Q, dummy has three small diamonds. You have ♦A 6, what card should you play?

To check your answers look at the table above to check possible holdings for partner. It should guide you to selecting the best card, don't read on till you have decided!

On 1, play the ♣K. Your side can take the first five club tricks if partner has ♣AJ1096 and will always lose two tricks if partner only has ♣J10965.

On 2, play the ♠K, playing the ♠10 will allow declarer to win the ♠J when partner has ♠AQ962.

On 3, play the ♦A and return the ♦6. Set up partner's suit and hope partner can get on lead to cash the diamond winners.

The lead of a king against no trumps

Suppose you are on lead to 3NT with ♦AKJ105. Clearly this is the best suit to lead, as maybe your side can take the first five tricks. A fourth highest diamond could give an unnecessary trick to the ♦Q, so you try the ♦K to have a look.

Deal	You hold	Dummy has	Partner plays	Declarer plays
1	♦AKJ105	♦97	♦2	♦3
2	♦AKJ105	♦974	♦2	♦3
3	♦AKJ105	♦974	♦8	♦3

What you want to know is, how many diamonds does each player hold? Who has the ♦Q? If declarer has the ♦Q is it in a holding of two, three or four diamonds?

- If declarer has ♦Q3, you should play your ♦A next and the ♦Q will drop.
- If declarer has ♦Q43, you should switch to another suit and hope that partner gets the lead and can play back a diamond
- If declarer has ♦Q643, partner has a singleton diamond and you will have to give up a diamond to declarer's queen to establish your fifth diamond as a winner. Or maybe you should switch to another suit and not give a trick away.
- If partner has the ♦Q, you can carry on playing diamonds from the top or perhaps lead a low diamond to partner's queen.

Rule for king leads against no trumps

If partner leads a king, you play any honour you hold at trick one.

Without an honour, give a count signal.

Play high-low with 2 or 4 cards.

Play low-high with 3 cards.

With your problem shown, you know partner does not have the ♦Q.

On 1 partner has one or three diamonds. Declarer probably has ♦Qxx and switching to another suit makes sense.

On 2 partner has one or three diamonds and declarer either has ♦Qx or ♦Qxxx. Play the ♦A hoping the ♦Q drops.

On 3 partner has only one or two diamonds. Hope it is two. Switch to another suit and wait for partner to get the lead and play a diamond through declarer.

The examples below have been taken from a book called *Really Easy Defence* published by the EBU which covers all aspects of defence.

West holds	East has	East plays	Why
♥AKJ108	♥Q94	♥Q	Play honour
♥KQ1097	♥J42	♥J	Play honour
♥AKQ10	♥J42	♥J	Play honour
♥KQJ109	♥A3	♥A	Play honour
♥AKJ108	♥72	♥7	Show two
♥AKJ108	♥762	♥2	Show three
♥AKJ108	♥7642	♥6	Show four (or two)