

Giving count by Sandra Landy

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We have been looking at how to use the cards we play to tell partner what we think of their lead. A high card says we like the lead and a low one denies interest. We use the same method when we are discarding, a high card shows we have useful cards in the suit thrown, a small card shows nothing of interest.

High-low is not always used as an attitude signal. When following to the suit declarer is playing we normally give a count signal. A high card followed by a low card shows an even number of cards. A low card followed by a higher card shows an odd number of cards in the suit. Here is an example of a count signal in use.

♠6 4 3	West North East South
♥A	1♥
♦9 8 7 2	pass 2♣ pass 3NT
♣K Q 10 7 5	all pass

♠9 5 2	♠J 8 7
♥K Q J 10	♥7 4 3 2
♦J 4 3	♦Q 10 5
♣A 6 3	♣9 8 2
♥9 8 6 5	
♦A K 6	
♣J 4	

N/S reach 3NT and despite South's opening bid of 1♥ you lead the ♥K. The king is a strong lead asking partner to play an honour if he has one or to give a count signal otherwise. The ♥A wins the first trick and East plays the ♥7 – that's the highest card that can be spared and it makes the high-low signal, showing that East has an even number of hearts, really clear.

Trick 2 goes ♣5, ♣2, ♣J, ♣3. You correctly duck the first trick; you are not obliged to win a trick just because you can. To trick 3 South leads the ♣4, should you play your ♣A this time? Looking at all four hands it's easy to see that South has only two clubs, so it's right to win the second club, but how could you know this at the table?

The answer lies in the card East played on the first round of clubs. It was the ♣2. That means that East has an odd number of clubs, one or three or five. If East has one, South has four clubs and it doesn't matter when you take your ace. East can't have five clubs, because you have just seen South produce a second club. So East must have three clubs and South only two. Win your ♣A and cash three heart winners. Whether you play diamonds or spades next, South must lose a diamond and go one down.

But if you duck the second club or take the first one, South makes nine tricks – 4 spades, 1 heart, 2 diamonds and 2 clubs.

Giving a count signal works in a suit contract too.

North (Dummy)

		West	North	East	South
	♠6 4				
	♥A 7 3 2				1♠
	♦9 8		pass	2♣	pass
West	♣K Q J 8 5		all pass		
	♠Q 10 5 3				
	♥K Q J 9				
	♦5 4 3 2				
	♣6				

You are West; it's your lead to 4♠. A nice easy one for once. You lead the ♥K, the top of a sequence, which will set up winners for E/W even if N/S have the ♥A. And that lead is a signal to partner that you have the ♥Q as well as the ♥K. Dummy wins the ♥A, partner plays the ♥4 and declarer the ♥5. Partner probably only has three hearts, with ♥10 8 5 4 partner would play an encouraging ♥8 since it's safe for you to continue hearts when he has four. Declarer cashes the ♠A dropping partner's ♠9 and ♠K on which partner throws the ♣2. Your ♠Q 10 will now always win two tricks

Declarer plays the ♣A to your ♣6, dummy's ♣5 and partner's ♣3. Declarer now leads the ♣10, do you trump it now or wait a bit? Did you notice partner's signal? Partner threw the ♣2 on the spade and then played the ♣3. Partner is surely trying to show you FIVE clubs with that low-high signal. If partner has five clubs, South can only have two clubs. If you throw a loser on the second club, South will be in dummy and can throw his heart loser on a club winner. So you must ruff the second club and play your top hearts. South will ruff the third heart but as he cannot get to dummy to throw his diamonds away on the three club winners and 4♠ goes down.

Now that was quite a complicated piece of thinking to follow. Get out a pack of cards, make up the complete deal and play the hand through. If you don't ruff the second club, South will play the ♣J from dummy and lead the ♣K throwing his little heart. He still loses two spades and the ♦A, but has ten tricks. Here is the complete deal.

♠6 4	
♥A 7 3 2	
♦9 8	
♣K Q J 8 5	
♠Q 10 5 3	♠9
♥K Q J 9	♥10 8 4
♦5 4 3 2	♦A 10 7 6
♣6	♣9 7 4 3 2
	♣A K J 8 7 2
	♥6 5
	♦K Q J
	♣A 10

Signalling Rules

Give the agreed signal even if you can't tell how partner will use the information.
When playing a high card, signal with the largest card you can afford.
Watch the cards your partner plays.
When declarer is playing a suit, we play count signals.

A high-low signal shows an even number.

A low-high signal shows an odd number.

On your lead, when either you or dummy are winning the trick, a high card shows attitude.

A high card says 'I have something useful'

A low card says 'I can't help you in this suit.'