

Opening Leads

Which Suit?

To Suit Contracts:

You usually want to make a "safe" opening lead that will set up tricks for your side without giving declarer extra tricks. Your general order of preference can be:

1. A singleton (hoping partner can lead the suit back for you to trump).
2. A suit partner has bid. **Lead low** if you have 3+ cards; **lead high** from 2 cards.
3. A suit that offers a good attacking combination -- two or more touching honors (KQ10x, QJ10, AKxx, J109).
4. Your longest suit. **Lead low** if you don't have touching honors.
5. A suit the opponents have not bid.
6. If there are no unbid suits, choose a suit that **dummy** has bid.
7. Lead trumps if you have no other safe lead **OR** if declarer has shown a two-suited hand. This may prevent declarer from using dummy's trumps separately.

When leading to a suit contract, *AVOID*:

- Leading an unsupported ace if you have another safe lead.
- Underleading an ace (don't lead a small card from a suit headed by the ace).
- Underleading broken honor combinations (KJxx, Q10x) unless it's in partner's suit.
- Leading a suit declarer has bid (unless you're leading trumps).

To Notrump Contracts:

You usually want to make an attacking opening lead to set up tricks in your long suit. **Lead the fourth-best card** (count down from the top) from your longest and strongest suit **unless**:

1. Partner has bid a suit. You should then lead his suit.
2. Your long suit is one the opponents have bid. You should choose your longest unbid suit or a suit dummy has bid.
3. Your long suit has three or more touching honors (KQJx, QJ10x, AQJ10x, J109x, etc.). You should lead an honor to be sure you force declarer to win with the highest card possible.

When leading to a notrump contract, *AVOID*:

- Leading a short suit, unless it's the suit partner has bid.
- Leading aces or "unprotected" high cards, especially ones in your short suits.
- Leading a suit declarer has bid.

Which Card?

- From all **AK** combinations, lead the **King**. (many lead Ace from Ace King)
- From all other suits with touching honors, lead the **top honor**: **KQ5** **J109**
QJ103 **10985** **KJ1054**
- From a 4-card-or-longer suit without touching honors, lead the **fourth-best card**:
K9743 **10752** **J87643**
- From a 3-card suit without touching honors, lead the **lowest card**: **J96** **Q43**
865
- From a 2-card suit, lead the **top card**: **82** **J7** **Q10**

AT THE TABLE

The opponents have bid 1S-3S-4S. What is your opening lead?

♠632 ♥942 ♦KQJ7 ♣A43

King of Diamonds. Lead the top card from an attacking combination. Even if declarer has the ace, you'll set up tricks you can take later. Don't lead the club ace—that's more likely to set up tricks for declarer.

♠Q6 ♥Q92 ♦K104 ♣J6543

4 of Clubs. When no other lead looks safe, lead from your longest suit (the 4th card down). Declarer may be short in this suit, so your lead is unlikely to help him.

Your LHO opens 1C, partner overcalls 1S and RHO bids 2H. LHO jumps to 4H. What is your lead?

♠1072 ♥642 ♦9843 ♣KQ8

2 of spades. You should almost always lead the suit partner overcalls (with 3 or more, lead low). Although a KQ is sometimes a good attacking combination, it isn't here because you know clubs is LHO's suit.

♠K4 ♥943 ♦AJ8 ♣87532

King of Spades. Since partner has shown strength in spades, leading an unprotected honor is safe. If your king holds the trick, you'll lead the spade 4 to partner's ace and be able to trump the third round. From your high-low leads, partner will know you have only 2 spades.

♠5432 ♥A74 ♦4 ♣108543

4 of Diamonds. This is an exception to the rule about leading partner's suit. Partner will know you had a good reason for not leading spades. If he has the diamond ace, he'll lead one back for you to trump. If partner can't win the first diamond lead, you'll have another chance later. When you win the ace of trumps, you can try to get partner on lead with a spade.

The opponents have bid 1NT-3NT. What is your opening lead?

♠QJ1082 ♥K43 ♦A5 ♣10543

Queen of Spades. You should plan to keep attacking spades whenever you're on lead. Even if declarer has the AK, there's a good chance you can set up and "run" your suit later.

♠AK8 ♥854 ♦75 ♣KJ542

4 of Clubs. You have no sequence, so lead the 4th best card and hope partner has fillers. Resist the temptation to cash the spades. You'll need them as entries to run your club suit.

♠95 ♥43 ♦K10976 ♣AQ102

Ten of Diamonds. Lead your longer suit, even though the clubs are stronger. To force out an honor, lead the top of an "interior" sequence.

Partner opens 1C, RHO bids 1H, you bid 1S. LHO bids 2H and all pass. What is your opening lead?

♠KJ43 ♥843 ♦AJ2 ♣854

3 of Hearts. You could lead a club (partner's suit), but a trump is better for two reasons: **(1)** It's safe (partner didn't promise great honor strength in clubs, and a spade or diamond could give up a trick); **(2)** Your side has most of the high-cards, so declarer may have to trump losers in dummy to make his contract. A trump lead will take one of his trumps out of dummy right away.

♠AK743 ♥86 ♦J532 ♣105

King of Spades. An AK is usually a good lead because it lets you look at dummy and decide what to do next. Here, you're hoping partner has only one or two spades (a good possibility, since he didn't raise) and can trump the third round. Depending on dummy's spade holding and partner's signal (he'll play a high card if he has a doubleton, a low card if he has three), you can decide whether to continue with the spade ace or to switch suits. If you decide to switch to partner's suit (clubs), lead the 10 (the top card to show 2). If partner has the AK of clubs, you may get to trump the third round of that suit.