

When you are a defender:

1. Cover an honor with an honor only when there is a chance to promote a card in your own hand or in partner's hand.
2. When declarer leads from touching honors (such as QJ, J10) cover the second honor unless you are short in the suit, in which case you should cover the first honor.
3. "Second hand low" is a good rule *most* of the time. As with almost all things in bridge, there are exceptions.
4. In suit contracts, consider leading a trump when the auction suggests that the opponents have cross-ruffing possibilities. But avoid leading a singleton trump and don't lead trump just because you are afraid to lead something else.
5. If you're going to be ruffing declarer's tricks, try to ruff out his winners, not his losers. This is particularly important to the defender who plays second to the trick.
6. If dummy has a long suit that can be established, good defenders will attempt to knock out dummy's entries before the suit can be set up.
7. Do not overruff automatically. By not doing so, you often increase the chances of developing more trump tricks. Thus with a natural trump trick, don't necessarily overruff unless you want to gain the lead or hope to get a second ruff.
8. If you are ruffing and declarer is overruffing, you may ruff high to promote a trick for partner.
9. Do not signal unnecessarily. Instead, when discarding, pitch cards that do you no good and serve to show no interest in that suit.
10. When the opponents' bidding indicates that they have balanced hands, it's often best to defend passively. Make safe leads and don't break new suits. On the other hand, it generally pays to be aggressive if the bidding indicates the opponents have long suits that will produce a lot of tricks.

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Eddie Kantar's Bridge Tips — Defensive (Edited 2/16/09)

1. Don't lead a trump when the opponents are misfitted.
2. If partner is marked with a singleton trump, there is no point in leading a trump from Kxx because neither of you will be able to continue the suit. Try another lead and hope partner will find the trump switch, if necessary.
3. Deceptive leads in the trump suit include the 9 from 109x and the jack from QJ doubleton.
4. When dummy has shown a long side suit plus trump support, a trump lead is desirable if you have dummy's long suit bottled up; otherwise it is the worst lead in the world!
5. Do not lead a singleton vs. a voluntarily bid small slam if you have an ace. Partner can't have the ace and you will probably be helping declarer no end by placing the missing honors in partner's hand.
6. On the other hand, a singleton lead against a small slam when you don't have an ace has a much better chance of succeeding. With a little luck partner will have the ace of your singleton suit or the ace of trumps.
7. You do not lead the same against 3NT (or 4NT) as you do against 6NT. For example, say you have: S. K10764 H. Q84 D. Q76 C. 83--If the bidding goes 1NT- pass- 3NT (or 4NT) - all pass, you have an automatic spade lead. However if the bidding goes 1NT-pass-6NT- all pass, a spade lead is horrible. Why? The opponents presumably have about 33 HCP to contract for 6NT which means your partner is busted. There is no point in leading away from an honor. Lead a club and hope to make two tricks if declarer finesses into you.
8. When leading partner's suit against suit or notrump with three or four small, lead high if you have supported the suit, low if you haven't.
9. After leading high from three small in partner's supported suit, (862) play the middle one next. Lead the 8 and then the 6. If you have not supported, lead the 2. Leading high in an unsupported suit shows shortness.
10. After leading low from four small in partner's unsupported suit, (8632) play your lowest one next. Lead the 2 and then the 3. This assumes you have not supported the suit. If you have supported, lead the 8.
11. If you have led high from four small, play your lowest one next. With 8632, lead the 8 and then play the 2. In all of these cases, your second card is present count.

12. When partner doubles a slam contract after having bid a suit, do NOT lead partner's suit or a trump. . Partner usually has a void (or an outside AK), it's your job to figure out which and make the killing lead!
13. Be on the qui vive (alert) to double artificial bids (Stayman, Jacoby Transfers, cuebids and Blackwood responses) if you want the lead in that suit. These are all Lead Directing Doubles. Very important not to fall asleep at the switches if you can make a lead directing double.
14. To make a Lead Directing Double at a low level, particularly the two level, you need five or six cards in the suit headed by at least three honor cards. To double an artificial bid made at the four level or higher, all you need is strength in the suit, not length (KQx), even QJx if the bid to your right shows the ace.
15. When leading an unbid suit at notrump with four cards not headed by an honor, it is too misleading to lead low which shows strength, You are better placed to lead your highest or next highest card. If your highest card is an eight or lower, lead high. If your highest card is a nine or a ten, lead your second highest card. Lead the 8 from 8543, but lead the 6 from 9642. Lead the 7 from 10732 if you want another suit returned.
16. Make sure you discuss with your partner what you are going to lead from AKx(x) against a suit contract. Whichever you decide upon, lead the other from AK doubleton.
17. Be advised that if you lead the A from AKx(x) vs. a suit contract, that is a trick one convention only. During the rest of the hand, the king is led from the AKx(x). The reason being that after trick one a defender is likely to want to lead an ace without the king and does not want partner to think that he has the king. If you are on lead against a spade contract with S. xx H. xxx D. AKxx C. AKxx and declarer to lead the DA, if you next decide to lead a club, lead the king. If you lead the ace, you deny the king. (This is the second trick, remember).
18. If you and your partner have decided to lead ace from ace-king, be advised that the king is still led at trick one when:
 - (1) The suit has been supported by EITHER player.
 - (2) Partner has bid the suit and you have not supported.
 - (3) The contract is at the five level or higher.
 - (4) You have AK doubleton.
19. You and partner might try leading the queen from the AKQ vs. a suit contract. Assuming partner can read the lead (almost always can), third hand gives count. There are two advantages to this lead:
 - (1) The opening leader can tell how many tricks in the suit can be cashed.
 - (2) If you lead ace from ace-king, partner knows you can't have the queen when you lead an ace.
20. Lead inferences

If partner doesn't lead your suit, assume partner:

 - (1) Is void
 - (2) Is leading a singleton
 - (3) Is leading top of a sequence
 - (4) Has the ace and fears declarer has the king (particularly true if partner has supported the suit.)
 - (5) Has forgotten the bidding
21. Before making your opening lead, add your HCP to declarer's estimated HCP. For example say you have 10 HCP and RHO opens 1NT (15-17) and winds up playing 3NT dummy also having 10 HCP. Take declarer's middle count, 16, and add that to dummy's 10 HCP telling you that the opponents are playing 3NT with 26 HCP give or take a point. That 26 added to your 10 HCP tells you that partner has 4 HCP. Say you lead a suit and partner plays the ace. Don't look around for any more high card points in partner's hand because if you do, you will be sorely dissatisfied. O.K partner may have a jack. Making a habit of doing this will turn you into a better defensive player, much better.