

Basic Leads Versus Suit Contracts”



By Kitty Cooper

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A recent question I received was, “How do you decide what to lead against a suit contract? I never know when to lead a trump.”

Against suit contracts, your objective is to spoil declarer’s plan with your lead. So listen to the bidding and look at your hand. Try to imagine what dummy will look like and how declarer is planning to take tricks. Figure out the approximate number of points that the opponents have (include their hesitations in this calculation). Add your points to theirs and subtract that total from 40; this gives you partner’s approximate high card point holding and lets you know if partner can hold any high cards or not. If not, then don’t lead from an unsupported honor.

If you have the ace-king of a side suit you normally lead one to see if you can give partner a ruff or take the first three tricks when partner has the queen. Otherwise think through these questions:

1) *Did partner suggest a lead by bidding a suit or doubling?*

Oblige your partner unless you have a strong reason to do otherwise. You cannot go wrong in the post-mortem by leading his suit. Maintaining partnership harmony is one of the keys to success at bridge.

2) *Do you have four or more trumps?*

Lead your longest and strongest suit. If you can make declarer ruff twice you will usually have more trumps than he and control of the hand. However this strategy will not work when both dummy and declarer have four trumps.

3) *Is dummy coming down with a strong side suit that will be a source of tricks?*

Make an active lead: lead an ace or from a king in a side suit, aiming to cash whatever winners your side has quickly before they go away on dummy’s suit.

4) *Can you possibly get a ruff?*

Lead your singleton or doubleton. This works best if you have a high trump honor to get in with before trumps are drawn; the idea being that you can next put partner in to give you a ruff. It also works when partner has the ace of trump. Additionally, it can work well when you are weak, so that partner can have many entries. This is not a good lead when partner is known to be very weak.

The great Italian card player [Benito Garazzo](#) was known to give the advice to always lead a singleton against a suit contract. In 2012, the bridge theorist and writer David Bird published a book on opening leads versus suits based on computer simulations which found that leading doubletons was far more successful than he had realized.

5) *Is declarer planning to take ruffs in dummy?*

Lead a trump. It is usually fine to lead one from the King to length but less so from the Queen or even the Jack.

6) *Is dummy weak?*

Make a passive lead; don’t help declarer by leading from an honor. Lead from a sequence or maybe lead a trump.

7) *Have they bid three suits and finally agreed on one?*

Probably you should lead the fourth suit to cash those winners, but if their trump fit is good, and neither side suit is running, then a trump is the right lead.

8) *None of the above?*

Then lead top of a sequence or try to develop tricks for your side by leading from a queen (or rarely a king). Or you can lead a trump. Two provisos: don't underlead an ace and don't lead a singleton trump.

The problem with leading a singleton trump is that the suit may be breaking badly and now you have solved that problem for declarer, so you better be right when you do this!

The expert advice is to lead a trump against a grand slam so as not to give anything away. A long time ago, my dear late husband Steve led his singleton trump against a 7♣ contract. He did not realize the opponents had had a bidding misunderstanding and dummy had no clubs. He found me with Jxxx. That was not a good result!

This article was co-authored by Kitty's husband, the late Steve Cooper, and previously appeared in the District 17 newsletter. ♣