

Mastering the Finesse

Part 1 – The Simple Finesse

By Mick Riccio

dynamick747@gmail.com



Before we can master the finesse, it is urgent that we practice this analytical pattern for every hand we play. Failure to do this is the main reason why players fail to make contracts that are otherwise makeable.

Another way of putting it: DON'T PLAY TOO FAST!

IDENTIFY YOUR GOAL

Always remember to tell yourself how many tricks you need to make your contract. Failure to do this is a sure way to go set.

ANALYZE THE LEAD CARD

Could it be a singleton? Is it the top of a sequence? Is it low from interest? Did someone bid that suit? Most people make lead choices with good reasons in mind. Try to imagine what that reason might be. This is often most revealing.

REVIEW THE BIDDING

Did the opponents bid? Did they make a takeout double? This practice will help you to determine where missing honor cards may be located. This could make the difference between success or failure.

IDENTIFY YOUR WINNERS AND LOSERS

Experts consider winners as those tricks you can take without surrendering the lead. In general it is crucial to count losers when playing a suit contract and to count winners when you play the contract in No Trump.

IDENTIFY YOUR ENTRIES

Also called transportation. Being aware of entries is most important when suits must be started from one side of the table rather than the other. It is also important if there is a long suit on one side of the table and you need to finish a suit. One of the worst things that can happen is to realize “you can't get there from here” when it is too late.

IDENTIFY THE DANGER

You do this by asking yourself “What could go wrong?”. If you let the enemy gain the lead too soon could you go set right away? Should you wait on pulling trump because you are missing the

King or the Ace of trump? Is there a suit that might let you eliminate losers before the opponents can get in and set you? You must consider these possible dangers before you play to the first card.

CONSIDER ALL YOUR OPTIONS

This series will present a variety of options that you might employ when trying to make your contract. The first one we will tackle is the finesse, but that is one of many. Should you pull trump right away or wait? Should you holdup on winning tricks to promote extra tricks for yourself? Could you discard losers before it is too late? Should you ruff losers in the Dummy before pulling trump? Can you establish a long running suit somewhere etc?

MAKE A PLAN

After you consider these initial points, make a plan and do not play to the first card led by the opponents until you have done so.

The concept of the finesse: In general, the finesse involves playing a small card toward a cluster of honors where one of the honors is missing. You hope that the missing honor is located favorably for you. Let's look at an example:

Finesse #1

	North	
	♠AKQJ72	
	♥A6	
	♦65	
	♣AQ5	
West		East
♠4		♠1083
♥KQ983		♥1042
♦KQ3		♦J1094
♣K1096		♣J84
	South	
	♠965	
	♥J75	
	♦A872	
	♣732	

	West	North	East	South
		1♠	P	2♠
	P	4♠	P	P
	P			

In this example, you have six Spade tricks, one Heart trick, one Diamond trick and one Club trick for a total of nine tricks. Lets look at this on the big screen. Where can the 10th trick come from? Only if West holds the ♣K can this contract be made. East leads the ♦J.

Do you have a problem? What is it? The finesse must be taken from South. Don't play too fast!!!

When is it right to lead a high card when taking a finesse?

In the next example you must ask yourself the important question:

Where do I want to be if the finesse succeeds? Let's look at another example:

Finesse #2

	North	
	♠J103	
	♥AQ6	
	♦AQJ8	
	♣1053	
West		East
♠2		♠Q97
♥K732		♥J9854
♦10632		♦K74
♣KQJ8		♣42
	South	
	♠AK8654	
	♥10	
	♦95	
	♣A976	

West	North	East	South
			1♠
P	2♦	P	2♠
P	4♠	P	P
P			

In this example, you need 10 tricks. You see that you have 5 Spade tricks, 1 Heart, 1 Diamond and 1 Club for a total of 9 tricks. If you win the first Club with the ♣A and then finesse the ♦K, you will go set when the Clubs are returned and a Club is ruffed.

You must win the ♣A, play a Heart to the ♥A and begin the finesse for the ♠Q by playing the ♠10. You can take the Diamond finesse later.

Sometimes a finesse must be taken more than once in order to make your contract. In the next example, you need 3 Diamond tricks to make your slam. You have a losing Club and 2 losing Diamonds.

Finesse #3

North
♠97542

	♥J3	
	♦873	
	♣A43	
West		East
♠QJ1083		♠K6
♥52		♥974
♦1062		♦K954
♣Q108		♣J972
	South	
	♠A	
	♥AKQ1086	
	♦AQJ	
	♣K65	

West	North	East	South
			2♣
P	2♦	P	4♥
P	4NT	P	5♠
P	6♥	P	P
P			

Win the ♠Q in your hand, cross to the Dummy with the ♥J, play a Diamond to the ♦J. Return to the Dummy with the ♣A, play a second Diamond to the ♦Q. Pull trump and claim, conceding one Club trick.

Sometimes one has to accept the fact that their options are limited. In Bridge, this is called the “Principle of Restricted Choice”. It really comes up a lot. At times like this we should not look for a rule but rather attempt a reasonable line of play and hope for the best.

Finesse #4

	North	
	♠K52	
	♥K63	
	♦7653	
	♣754	
West		East
♠QJ108		♠A764
♥2		♥J985
♦1082		♦J9
♣Q10632		♣KJ8
	South	

♠93
 ♥AQ1074
 ♦AKQ4
 ♣A9

West	North	East	South
			1♠
P	2♥	P	4♥
P	P	P	

When the ♠Q is led, you now realize that you have only one entry to the board—the ♥K. If you play to the ♥K first, you cannot finesse enough times to pick up the Jack if the trump split is bad. Play the ♥A, then the ♥K, finesse the ♥J.

Often one has to take a finesse in more than one suit. This frequently requires transportation to the Dummy in order to finesse two different suits. Frequently one must avoid pulling all the trump right away in order to do this. Consider this example.

Finesse #5

	North	
	♠965	
	♥K42	
	♦9842	
	♣A73	
West		East
♠K842		♠J1073
♥9		♥63
♦QJ7		♦A1063
♣QJ1085		♣K94
	South	
	♠AQ	
	♥AQJ10875	
	♦K5	
	♣62	

West	North	East	South
	P	P	1♥
P	2♥	P	4♥
P	P	P	

With the lead of the ♣Q, both Spades and Diamonds must be finessed from the Dummy. Only one of the finesses needs to work to make your 4 Heart contract. Use the ♥K to enter Dummy.

Having to finesse more than once is a very common phenomenon. For that reason I have included another hand that requires two finesses to make the contract. Let's watch this one in action as you get the ♣J lead against your 4♠ contract.

Finesse #6

North			
♠KQ			
♥107432			
♦863			
♣Q65			
West		East	
♠32		♠986	
♥Q965		♥KJ8	
♦1054		♦AJ92	
♣J1098		♣K42	
South			
♠AJ10754			
♥A			
♦KQ7			
♣A73			
West	North	East	South
			1♠
P	1NT	P	4♠
P	P	P	

In this example, you play a Diamond from the Dummy toward the ♦KQ7 in your hand. You must use trump to do this, and you must do it twice. If West has the ♦A, you may not make this hand.

In next month's D22Connection we will look at the Two Way Finesse. ♣