

Suit Preference Signals



Seven Methods to Improve Your Discards

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The key to suit preference signals is to agree with your partner when they apply. As defender you have to decide when it is right to signal your partner knowing declarer is watching. False carding is certainly allowed, for example when your partner cannot get in. The following seven methods start with the basics and end with advanced agreements. Defenders in these examples use upside down discards (low encourages, high discourages) and count (echo with odd, up the line with even).

Other suit preference signals are standard – high for the higher suit and low for the lower suit.

1. First Discard

For ACBL events, defenders are only allowed to use suit preference discards on their first discard.

| | | |
|--------|---------|--------|
| | North | |
| | ♠8743 | |
| | ♥KQ87 | |
| | ♦106 | |
| | ♣A74 | |
| West | | East |
| ♠AJ92 | | ♠K5 |
| ♥542 | | ♥J1063 |
| ♦J9853 | | ♦Q72 |
| ♣5 | | ♣QJ62 |
| | South | |
| | ♠Q106 | |
| | ♥A9 | |
| | ♦AK4 | |
| | ♣K10983 | |

Auction:

| | | | |
|-------|------|-------|------|
| South | West | North | East |
| 1NT | Pass | 2♣ | Pass |
| 2♦ | Pass | 3NT | Pass |
| Pass | Pass | | |

Opening lead: ♦3

After the ♦3 lead is won by declarer's ♦K, a club is led to the ace followed by a low club. East is allowed to win the ♣J, but West discards the discouraging ♦8, asking for a spade to beat the contract. From East's vantage point, partner may have led from ♦AJxxx, which could be shown

with a high spade discard. The discouraging (high) diamond leads East to the winning defense of the ♠K and ♠5.

2. Dead Suit Discards

A dead suit is one in which the defense cannot win any more tricks.

| | | |
|---------|--------|-------|
| | North | |
| | ♠A643 | |
| | ♥AQ | |
| | ♦J973 | |
| | ♣J106 | |
| West | | East |
| ♠9 | | ♠K102 |
| ♥KJ9753 | | ♥1082 |
| ♦AQ10 | | ♦8742 |
| ♣753 | | ♣982 |
| | South | |
| | ♠QJ875 | |
| | ♥64 | |
| | ♦K6 | |
| | ♣AKQ4 | |

Auction:

| South | West | North | East |
|-------|------|-------|------|
| 1♠ | 2♥ | 3♥ | Pass |
| 4♠ | Pass | Pass | Pass |

Opening lead: ♥5

With the heart lead the defense can see there are no tricks in hearts, the dead suit. After the ♠A and a spade, East wins the king. West discards the ♥K to ask for the higher suit, diamonds, to hold the contract to four. If West holds the ♣AQ, the ♥3 is the correct discard

3. Second Card after Count

When declarer leads a suit in which the defender holds at least three cards, the second card played indicates the suit preference for the two remaining suits.

| | | |
|---------|-------|-------|
| | North | |
| | ♠K104 | |
| | ♥QJ73 | |
| | ♦86 | |
| | ♣KJ57 | |
| West | | East |
| ♠Q75 | | ♠982 |
| ♥K108 | | ♥A542 |
| ♦K10542 | | ♦Q73 |
| ♣98 | | ♣1063 |
| | South | |
| | ♠AJ63 | |
| | ♥96 | |
| | ♦AJ9 | |

♣AQ42

Auction:

| | | | |
|-------|------|-------|------|
| South | West | North | East |
| 1NT | Pass | 3NT | Pass |
| Pass | Pass | | |

Opening lead: ♦4

After the low diamond lead is won by the ace, declarer leads a spade to the king and finesses, losing to the ♠Q – the safe hand. East gives upside down count with the ♠9 showing an odd number of cards and then shows the heart entry with the ♠8, the highest of two remaining spades. A heart to the ace and a diamond return beats 3NT. Following with the ♠2 would show the ♣A. Partner will have an ace here unless the 1NT opener had only 14 hcp. In some cases, playing the lower card shows no preference.

4. Giving Partner a Ruff

When you expect partner to ruff a suit, you lead with suit preference to that trick.

| | | |
|--------|--------|--------|
| | North | |
| | ♠Q6 | |
| | ♥KJ98 | |
| | ♦Q52 | |
| | ♣QJ64 | |
| West | | East |
| ♠J9754 | | ♠1082 |
| ♥Q | | ♥5432 |
| ♦A109 | | ♦J8743 |
| ♣AK95 | | ♣8 |
| | South | |
| | ♠AK3 | |
| | ♥A1076 | |
| | ♦K6 | |
| | ♣10732 | |

Auction:

| | | | |
|-------|------|-------|------|
| South | West | North | East |
| 1♣ | Pass | 1♥ | Pass |
| 2♥ | Pass | 2NT | Pass |
| 4♥ | Pass | Pass | Pass |

Opening lead: ♣A or ♣K

West starts with the ♣AK and then leads the ♣5 to show an entry in the lower suit, diamonds, for the second ruff. The ♣9 would show a spade card

5. Playing Third Seat from AK

The order in which you play from an A-K combination is often showing suit preference. Playing king then ace shows either no preference or the lower of two suits, neither this suit nor trump.

North
♠876

| | | |
|--------|------------------------|---------|
| | ♥K65 ♦QJ93 ♣J106 | |
| West | | East |
| ♠10 | | ♠AK9542 |
| ♥Q1074 | | ♥AJ93 |
| ♦86542 | | ♦10 |
| ♣A75 | | ♣98 |
| | South | |
| | ♠QJ3 | |
| | ♥82 | |
| | ♦AK7 | |
| | ♣KQ432 | |

Auction:

| South | West | North | East |
|-------|------|-------|------|
| | | | 1♠ |
| 1NT | Pass | Pass | Pass |

Opening lead: ♠10

West leads a spade. By winning the ace and then the king, East asks for the higher suit, hearts. West asks for the club lead with the “upside down” ♣5, so West can lead the ♥Q.

6. Trump Suit Preference

When leading or following to the trump suit you can often give suit preference as long as you don't give up a trump trick.

| | | |
|--------|---------|---------|
| | North | |
| | ♠Q5 | |
| | ♥972 | |
| | ♦J973 | |
| | ♣KQ102 | |
| West | | East |
| ♠98432 | | ♠KJ1076 |
| ♥AJ3 | | ♥Q1084 |
| ♦862 | | ♦1054 |
| ♣93 | | ♣A |
| | South | |
| | ♠A | |
| | ♥K86 | |
| | ♦AKQ | |
| | ♣J87654 | |

Auction:

| South | West | North | East |
|-------|------|-------|------|
| 1♣ | Pass | 1NT | DBL |
| 2♣ | 3♠ | 4♣ | Pass |
| Pass | Pass | | |

Opening lead: ♠3

After the opening spade lead, declarer leads a club. Assuming West has at least two clubs, playing the ♣9 first shows cards in the higher suit, hearts. If West plays the ♣3, that would indicate no preference or cards in diamonds.

7. No More Tricks in a Suit

Against a suit contract when it becomes obvious the defenders can win no more tricks in a side suit, one or both defenders should give suit preference. Partner will give suit preference for the two remaining suits outside trump.

| | | |
|---------|--------|--------|
| | North | |
| | ♠A643 | |
| | ♥KQ | |
| | ♦Q1097 | |
| | ♣J109 | |
| West | | East |
| ♠9 | | ♠Q102 |
| ♥AJ1032 | | ♥98642 |
| ♦J65 | | ♦843 |
| ♣A654 | | ♣K8 |
| | South | |
| | ♠KJ875 | |
| | ♥7 | |
| | ♦AK2 | |
| | ♣Q732 | |

Auction:

| South | West | North | East |
|-------|------|-------|------|
| 1♠ | 2♥ | 3♥ | 4♥ |
| 4♠ | Pass | Pass | Pass |

Opening Lead: ♥A

On the ♥A lead East plays the ♥2, showing a club card. A low club to the ♣K and the ♣8 back to West's ♣A for a club ruff defeats the game.

Partnership

If you aren't currently playing some of these suit preference methods, give them a try with a partner who watches the cards, and can play in tempo.