

Safety Plays



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A SAFETY PLAY in contract bridge has many varieties and covers a wide range of techniques. Sometimes it involves plays in which declarer increases the chances for fulfilling the contract in favor of gaining an overtrick. The Declarer uses safety plays to cope with potentially unfavorable layouts of the opponent's cards. In so doing, declarer attempts to ensure the contract even in worst-case scenarios.

Taking a SAFETY PLAY is done to ensure one's contract against the worst possible distribution of the opponents' cards. There are basically three types of safety plays: 1), those that guard against adverse breaks without sacrificing any advantage, and 2), those plays that deliberately sacrifice a trick that might possibly be won in order to guard against the loss of two tricks and 3), those that refuse an immediate finesse to avoid getting a ruff.

♠752	
♥742	
♦AK932	
♣108	
♠109	♠864
♥K983	♥J106
♦108	♦QJ4
♣AK742	♣J963
♠AKQJ3	
♥AQ5	
♦765	
♣Q5	

Sensible bridge technique requires ensuring contracts rather than risking them.

South has gotten to 4♠, West cashes ♣A, ♣K and switches to the ♠10. Declarer needs 10 tricks and sees 5 Spades, 1 Heart and 2 Diamonds. Four Diamond tricks will ensure the contract. The expected Diamond split is 3-2. Declarer should pull trump followed by taking a safety play in

diamonds playing a small diamond from the declaring hand and losing it. If Diamonds divide normally, you make the contract. If not, try the Heart finesse as a last resort.

PROVIDING FOR THE 4-0 BREAK: Safety plays that give up nothing.

A10xx KQxxx

A10xx KQ98x

A9xx KQ8xx

In each of the above card combinations, the safety play is not to play the Ace first but to play the King first to guard against a 4-0 split.

NINE-CARD FITS MISSING THE Q(J): Using the principle of restricted choice.

1. 98x AK10xxx

2. A10xx K98xx

3. KJxx A9xxx

In each of these combinations, the safety play is to finesse. You make this decision based upon the distribution of the remaining suits. If Dummy and Declarer are both distributed, you should count on a bad split in all suits. It is prudent to recognize that now and then the suit might break well for you but statistically when you see two suits that have wild distribution, you do better to assume that the remaining suits will break badly as well.

EIGHT-CARD FITS MISSING TWO HONORS: You must first determine how many tricks you need in these suits (or how greedy you are for all of them since these plays deliberately concede a trick to avoid the possibility of losing two in the event of a 4-1 break).

Jxx AK9xx

10xx AK8xx

xxx AQJxx

The best play with these suit holdings is again to finesse. Playing the suit from the top will most often result badly.

♠J94

♥K87

♦K32

♣AK42

♠K32

♥Q6

♦QJ

♣QJ10987

♠87

♥J10954

♦109765

♣5

♠AQ1065

♥A32

♦A84

♣63

WEST NORTH EAST SOUTH

			1♠
2♣	3♣	P	3♠
P	4♠	P	P
P			

4♠ by South

REFUSING A FINESSE TO AVOID A RUFF AND MANAGING DUMMY TO AVOID AN EXTRA LOSER:

The contract is 4♠, with West having over called 2♣. South bid 1♠, West overcalled 2♣, North bid 4♠. Opening lead is the ♣Q.

If you win the top Club and the Spade finesse fails, a Club will be returned for a ruff. Then you lose 1 Spade, a club ruff, 1 Heart and 1 Diamond. Start Spades from the top to avoid a Spade ruff. This is a safety play.

DUCKING SAFETY PLAYS TO MAINTAIN COMMUNICATION:

Assume that these suits are in a dummy that contains no outside entries.

AK10xxxx xx

AKJ9xxx xx

In the first example, you lead toward dummy and the jack pops out. In the second example, a small card comes out when you lead toward dummy. You must DUCK! ♣