

Defending No Trump Contracts

Long Suits and Short Suits

- A long suit has at least four cards.
- All other suits are short suits.
- A four-card suit is a poor long suit.

When you lead a low card from a long suit, you may give up a trick. In return, you hope to score tricks with the fourth, fifth and maybe more cards in the suit.

Leading from a Perfect Honour Sequence

♠ A K Q 4 2	♥ K Q J 7 3	♦ Q J T 5 4	♣ J T 9 8 7
Lead the ace.	Lead the king.	Lead the queen	Lead the jack

Leading from an almost Perfect Honour Sequence

♠ A K J 4 2	♥ K Q T 7 3	♦ Q J 9 5 4	♣ J T 8 7 2
Lead the ace.	Lead the king.	Lead the queen	Lead the jack

With no Honour Sequence

"Fourth highest of longest and strongest."

♠ A K 8 4 2	♥ K Q 9 7 3	♦ Q 9 5 4 3	♣ 9 8 7 6 2
Lead the four.	Lead the seven.	Lead the four	Lead the six

Rule of Eleven

When your partner leads the fourth highest...

- Say your partner leads ♣6
- Subtract the number of the card (six) from eleven. That gives five.
- There are five clubs outside partner's hand that beat the six.

- See how many of those are in dummy.
- See how many of those are in your hand.
- Declarer will have the rest.

AQxx compared with AQxxx

When you lead from either of these suits, most likely you will be giving a cheap trick to declarer. With the four-card suit, it is possible but not likely you will get that trick back with the fourth card in the suit. With the five-card suit, there is a good chance you will make two extra tricks.

Leading the five-card suit is a good investment. Leading the four-card suit is not.

Leading from a Short Suit or a Bad Suit

Why lead from a short suit or a bad suit?

- You have a bad hand and are trying to find partner's suit
- You want to get partner on lead
- The opponents have bid your long suit
- You can't think of anything better

Telling Partner about your Suit

If you lead a low card, your message is "Please return my suit. Most likely, I have an honour."

If you lead a high(ish) card, your message is "Don't return my suit. Try something else."

Short Suit Leads

From a doubleton, lead the higher card.

From three rubbish cards, lead a high card.

With three to a single honour, lead a small card.





With three cards and two adjacent honours, lead the higher honour.

With three cards and two non-adjacent honours, lead the lower honour.

Internal Honour Sequences

From AQJxx, lead the queen. In other cases, there are two methods in common use: standard and journalist. Using the standard method, lead the highest card of the internal sequence. Using the journalist method, lead the **second**-highest of the internal sequence.

Examples:

	 A J T 4 2	 K J T 7 3	 A T 9 5 4	 K T 9 8 7
Standard	Lead the jack.	Lead the jack.	Lead the ten	Lead the ten
Journalist	Lead the ten	Lead the ten	Lead the nine	Lead the nine

Deal 1

	North	
	♠ 9 6 ♥ Q J T 4 ♦ A 9 5 ♣ A K Q 3	
West		East
♠ K T 3 ♥ 9 8 ♦ J 8 6 2 ♣ J T 7 5		♠ Q 8 7 4 2 ♥ A 7 5 3 ♦ Q T ♣ 9 4
	South	
	♠ A J 5 ♥ K 6 2 ♦ K 7 4 3 ♣ 8 6 2	

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

East should lead the ♠4. "Fourth highest of longest and strongest."

West will interpret the low card as low from an honour. That honour must be the queen.

When west returns spades, the higher of the remaining cards must be led. This will prevent the spade suit becoming blocked.

Deal 2

	North	
	♠ A K 6 5 4 ♥ 9 8 5 ♦ J 7 ♣ Q T 3	
West		East
♠ Q 3 ♥ A 4 3 ♦ A T 9 6 3 ♣ 7 6 5		♠ 8 2 ♥ K T 7 2 ♦ K Q 5 2 ♣ A K 9
	South	
	♠ J T 9 7 ♥ Q J 6 ♦ 8 4 ♣ J 8 4 2	

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

South leads ♠J, top of a sequence. West covers with the queen and North wins the trick with the king. For the time being, North is unsure whether the lead is from a sequence or a doubleton but returns a low spade anyway.

South wins the second spade with the nine and is careful to return the seven rather than the ten.

North must avoid blocking the spade suit. Partner has shown ♠ J 9 7. With that holding South would have led the seven at the opening lead. Therefore, South must also have the ten. (If South had led back the ten instead of the seven, North would not know who had the seven. It would be a guess whether to overtake or allow the ten to win.)

North allows the ♠7 to win and then overtakes South's ten with the ace. The play of the ♠6 is the fifth trick for the defence and that beats the contract.

Deal 3

	North	
	♠ 4 ♥ K ♦ A K J T 9 8 6 4 3 ♣ J T	
West		East
♠ A 9 8 7 6 ♥ A 8 4 ♦ 7 5 ♣ 7 5 2		♠ J 2 ♥ Q J T 6 5 ♦ Q ♣ Q 9 6 4 3
	South	
	♠ K Q T 5 3 ♥ 9 7 3 2 ♦ 2 ♣ A K 8	

West	North	East	South
	1♦	Pass	1♠
Pass	2♦	Pass	2♥
Pass	3♦	Pass	3NT All pass

This hand is decided by the opening lead. A club, the unbid suit is tempting. It is doubtful though that East's clubs will be good enough to beat the contract.

Where they have shown a long suit, an attacking lead is needed. Try the ace of hearts since South has shown five spades.

The king of hearts falls under the ace and when east signals encouragement for hearts, the speculative 3NT is doomed.

Deal 4

	North	
	♠ A Q 9 4 ♥ 7 4 2 ♦ J 9 5 ♣ 7 4 3	
West		East
♠ K 8 6 ♥ A K 9 ♦ K Q 6 3 ♣ T 6 2		♠ 7 5 2 ♥ T 6 3 ♦ A 8 7 ♣ K Q J 5
	South	
	♠ J T 3 ♥ Q J 8 5 ♦ T 4 2 ♣ A 9 8	

West	North	East	South
1NT	Pass	3NT	All Pass

As we learned earlier, the lead of a four-card suit headed by AQ is unattractive. It is likely that West, the 1NT bidder has the king and North would dearly like partner to lead the suit.

To try and get partner on lead, North starts with a heart (the other major). The correct lead is the seven, a high card from a poor suit.

Declarer wins the trick and starts working on clubs. Sooner or later, South will win the ace and must decide what to return. Since partner's lead denied good hearts, it must be a diamond or a spade. Looking at dummy, spades looks more likely. If South plays the ♠J, partner will be delighted.