

Defense – The Basics

Third Hand Play (partner has led the suit):

- Play "**Third Hand High**" rule to set up potential tricks for your side. Play the highest card necessary to force declarer or dummy to win with its high card.
- Always play the **lowest of touching cards** to give partner the most information about your strength. (Play the J from QJx; the 9 from J109.)
- If you're playing after dummy, be sure to **bracket** your honors if dummy plays low. (Play the J from KJx if dummy plays low from Qxx.)

Second Hand Play (declarer or dummy is leading the suit):

- If an honor is led and you're next to play, follow the "**Cover-an-Honor with-an-Honor**" rule -- if declarer or dummy leads an honor (10 through Ace), play your higher honor on it if you have one. This forces declarer to use two of his honors to capture one of yours.
- With most other holdings, follow the "**Second-Hand Low**" rule -- if you're in doubt about which card to play, choose a low card. The main exceptions to this rule are:

1 - You have a sequence of honors (KQJx, QJ10xx, etc.) and want to be sure you force declarer to win a high card. In this case, play the **lowest** of your touching honors.

2 - You're covering an honor with an honor, or playing your ace to win a king or queen.

3 - You're reasonably sure your ace will be trumped later if you don't take it now.

Leading After the First Trick:

- If partner made the opening lead -- and if you're in doubt about what to do when you gain the lead later in the hand -- return partner's suit. This is an especially valuable guideline to follow when defending notrump contracts.
- If you want to switch suits, choose to lead **through** strength and **up to** weakness. Ideally, you want the opponent who holds the most strength in a suit to be the **second** hand to play to the trick. You want the hand with weakness in the suit to be **fourth** to play to the trick.
- Don't be afraid to lead a suit that you know declarer will trump -- you can sometimes weaken his trump holding by doing so.
- Don't be afraid to lead a trump. If it appears that your other possible leads will risk giving declarer a trick, a trump can sometimes serve as a safe exit.
- **Don't** lead a suit if **both** declarer and dummy are void. This is called a "ruff -and-sluff", and it often gives up trick by letting declarer trump in one hand and throw a loser from the other hand.

Harmonic

Gloria and I invented a harmonic to help remember which honor to play in a sequence. It goes "**H**appy **L**ibrarians **L**ove **L**icorice." Where **HLLL** is how you play touching honor sequences in 1st through 4th seat. In first seat one plays the K from KQJ, in 2-4th one plays the J from KQJ.

Signals

To defend a bridge hand well, you need to be alert to -- and be able to process -- all the clues that are available. Some clues come from the bidding, which often gives you a general picture of who holds the length and strength in each suit. Your best source of information, though, is your partner, who can give you **Attitude and Count** during the play. These signals are used by both defenders to exchange information about their length and honor holding in each suit. Here's how they work:

Attitude Signals

You can tell partner whether or not you "like" a suit by the size of the card you play when discarding the suit **or** when following suit to a trick you are not winning. A high card is a "come-on" signal -- it tells partner you have a possible trick in the suit (you have a high honor, or will be able to trump the third round of the suit) and that he should lead it again. A low card tells him you have no potential tricks in the suit (no honors, no shortness) and that he should consider leading a different suit.

Count Signals

When following suit or discarding, playing **high, then low** in the same suit tells partner you have an **even** number of cards in that suit. Playing **low, then high** shows an **odd** number of cards. If you're defending a suit contract, this signal tells partner whether or not you can trump the third round of a suit. In suit and notrump contracts, your count signal also helps partner determine how many cards declarer holds in the suit. This can be very valuable information if partner needs to know how long he should hold up winning an ace, for example.

There is a third type of signal called Suit Preference. Included in our attitude signals is a basic form of suit preference, when you are discarding a suit, you give attitude, which tells partner if you like or dislike the suit you are discarding. This tells partner your Suit Preference. There are several other specific Suit Preference situations, which we will not go into here.

Priorities:

One should always give signals in this order, Attitude, Count, Suit Preference. So if my first card in the suit is Attitude, my Second Card will be Count. Some times partner already knows my attitude on a suit from the bidding, or because declaring is playing the suit, then my first discard is Count. This is one of the more complicated aspects of the game, and something every the experts still have problems with. When in doubt assume attitude when your side is leading the suit, and count when the opponents are leading the suit.

Basic Attitude and Count Examples

Your partner leads the $\heartsuit Q$, and you hold $\heartsuit K95$. Play the 9, encouraging. Partner will know you have either the A or K or both, and continue the suit to knock out declarer's A.

Your partner leads the $\clubsuit 4$, and you hold $\clubsuit J65$. Dummy plays a low card. You must play the $\clubsuit J$ by the "third hand high" rule, and this is NOT an attitude signal. If you "signalled" with the 5, declarer could win the trick with a low card, an undeserved trick that you can't afford to give up. Your partner will probably deduce that the jack is your highest club and not continue the suit.

Your partner leads the $\spadesuit Q$ and you hold $\spadesuit A932$. The dummy has $\spadesuit 65$. Your partner must have led from $\spadesuit QJT$ in NT or QJ if it is a suit contract. In NT you want to encourage partner to continue the suit, so play the 9. Declarer has the king and will probably take it. If you play the 3 to signal, partner doesn't see the 2 and might think declarer has it. The 9 is a clear encouraging signal. You found declarer's weak suit, and you want partner to keep playing it. If it's a suit contract, what to do is a little hard. What if partner has lots of spades, it might be right to play the A.

Your partner leads the $\heartsuit 5$, and dummy plays the $\heartsuit K$. You have $Q63$, so signal with the 6. Partner will know you don't have the $\heartsuit A$, or you would have played it.

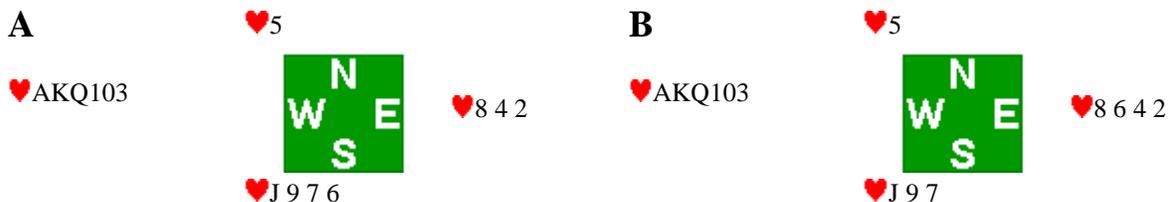
If your only good suit is the $\clubsuit AK4$, you cannot give an encouraging signal in clubs, because the 4 could be interpreted as discouraging. You must discard low cards in other suits, and hope that your partner is steered towards clubs.

If you have two good suits, it is best to discard a low card in the third suit, because you don't care which of your suit partner leads. If you do have a strong preference, encourage in that suit if possible.

Sometimes you can't safely discard from a suit because it would mean giving declarer an extra trick. If dummy has the $\spadesuit AKQ4$, and you have $\spadesuit J983$, that Jack is a trick, so you can't afford to discourage that suit. In this example, partner won't lead it anyway, but you get the idea. Learn to recognize which of your suits are stopping declarer from running winners.

If the opponents are playing in NT and dummy has $\clubsuit KQJT98$ and you have $\clubsuit 72$ the first time clubs are played you should play the 7 and then the 2 the second round. This tells partner you have an even number of clubs, which can help them plan the defense.

Looking at the heart suit in these two examples:



The opponents are playing in NT, and West leads the $\heartsuit A$. East not having an honor should play the 2 to discourage. West will continue with the Q, showing the K of hearts. In example A East wants west to switch to another suit in hopes that East will get in later to play a heart through the J9 in south hand. In example B East wants West to continue playing hearts from the top, the count signal here will allow West to know what to do. In example A East second heart should be the 8, showing an even amount of cards remaining. In example B East should play the 4 showing an odd number of cards remaining in the heart suit. West will always know what to do.