

Opening Leads 1 (January 11, 2021)

The bidding is over and you find yourself on lead. You must decide which suit to lead and the proper card within that suit to lead. The bidding will be your best clue in making that all IMPORTANT decision.

LEAD CATEGORIES:

1. FORCING LEAD

You (or you suspect that your partner does) hold length in the trump suit. Your objective is to shorten the declarer's trump suit by leading your longest suit and forcing him to use his trumps to cover losers. Each time you or your partner gains the lead, you should continue to lead that suit. Eventually, you will have more trumps than declarer. He is helpless to stop you from taking all the remaining tricks!

In the following example, the bidding has proceeded as follows:

N	E	S	W
1D	P	1S	P
1NT	P	2H	P
3H	P	4H	P
P	P		

You are West and hold the following hand:

K43
J965
7
AJ1075

What is your best opening lead? Why?

Here, you hold length in the trump suit (J965 of hearts). Your objective is to force declarer to use up his trumps covering club losers. Lead the ace of clubs and keep leading clubs each time either you or partner gains the lead. After declarer ruffs a couple of times, you will hold more trumps than he.

Why not lead the single diamond seven?

2. ATTACKING LEAD

- a. Suit Contract: You suspect that the dummy has a long side suit on which declarer plans to dump his losers. You must try to cash out your winners before they disappear.
- b. No Trump Contract: In NT contracts, it's usually a race between your side and the declarer as to who can establish his long suit first. You want to give your side a leg up on the race by making an attacking lead, i. e., usually fourth best in your longest, strongest suit.

In the following hand, the bidding has proceeded as follows:

N	E	S	W
		1NT	P
2NT	P	3NT	P
P	P		

You are West and hold the following hand:

K85
86432
J109
A6

What is your opening lead? Why?

Here, you want to lead a heart (!), either the three of hearts (or, six if you lead second highest from four or five small cards). While the hearts are abysmally weak, an attack in your long suit is clearly indicated. If your partner has some strength in hearts, it may be possible to establish several tricks while you have the entries in the king of spades and the ace of clubs to run the heart suit.

3. PASSIVE LEAD:

Such leads are called “safe” leads because you don't give the declarer a trick that he is not going to get anyway.

In the following hand, the bidding has proceeded as follows:

N	E	S	W
		1NT	P
2NT	P	3NT	P
P	P		

You are West and hold the following hand:

109
Q1076
K103
AJ109

What is your opening lead? Why?

Here, you want to make a passive lead. The lead of a heart, diamond or club may give away a trick to the declarer. It is usually undesirable to lead from broken holdings of less than five card length. Since the opponents don't have much excess strength (recall the crawling no trump bidding sequence), you should avoid making any lead that will present the declarer with his ninth trick. Lead the 10 of spades.

PRACTICE EXERCISES

1. The bidding has proceeded as follows:

N	E	S	W
1C	1H	1S	P
2S	P	4S	X
P	P	P	

You are West and hold the following hand:

QJ9x
x
KQJ10x
Jxx

What is your opening lead? Why?

King of Diamonds; not, the singleton heart (which is your natural inclination to lead).

Your trump holding is so strong that you don't want to obtain heart ruffs. You are more interested in forcing the declarer to use his trumps. Your long, strong diamond suit offers a very good chance to establish that objective. This hand calls for a FORCING LEAD.

2. The bidding has proceeded as follows:

N	E	S	W
		1S	P
2C	P	2H	P
2S	P	3S	P
4S	P	P	P

You are West and hold the following hand:

1085
AJ9x
Q9xx
xx

What is your opening lead? Why?

The five of spades is your best lead. Your hearts are strong and dummy figures to be short in hearts. An immediate trump lead should cut down dummy's ruffing power. NOTE: When leading trumps it is almost always right to lead low from three small because you might get the chance to overtrump either dummy or declarer with your higher trump. This type of lead would best fall under the category of an ATTACKING LEAD.

3. The bidding has proceeded as follows:

N	E	S	W
		1NT	P
2C	P	2D	P
6N	P	P	P

You are West and hold the following hand:

xx
xxx
Jxxx
Qxxx

What is your opening lead? Why?

If ever a passive lead is called for, it is in this hand. The key is NOT to lead either a diamond or club; so, your choices lie between a spade or a heart. Usually, the tripleton is the better of the two to lead.

Let's look at the complete hand:

	A109x		
	KJx		
	AQx		
	AJx		
xx		Qxxx	
xxx		10xxx	
Jxxx		xxx	
Qxxx		xxx	
	KJx		
	AQx		
	K10xx		
	K10x		

If you lead either the diamond or the club, you hand the declarer his contract. This is a classic example of the PASSIVE LEAD.

Concluding Remarks: Before making your opening lead recall (repeat again) the bidding. It is your best clue in making that all IMPORTANT decision.

