

MiniBridge – Suit Contracts and Playing the Hand

Choosing a Major suit contract

Last lesson we learnt that Declarer should, wherever possible, choose a **SUIT FIT** in a **MAJOR SUIT** (♥ or ♠), when you have 8 or more cards in that suit between the two hands.

- With a suit fit you expect to make more tricks than in no trumps
- A Major suit contract scores better than a minor suit (♣ or ♦) contract
- Game in a Major suit is 4♥ or 4♠, i.e. a contract for 10 or more tricks
- Bid game in a Major suit when you have an 8+ suit fit and 25+ point. (OR bid 3NT game in NT with 25+ HCP and no fit.)
- Game in a minor suit is 5♣ or 5♦ which requires 11+ tricks

Tip: In a suit fit, hands with “good distribution” play better than balanced hands. Side-suit shortages such as voids (no cards in a suit), singletons (just 1 card) or even doubletons provide extra control. With a useful singleton or void, you can often bid a level higher. Later in this course you may learn you can add extra points for good distributional values.

Playing the hand: Playing honour in short hand first and drawing trumps

Play the honour from the short hand first

Does it matter how you play the honours as you establish a suit? – often the answer is **yes**. In the example below (Board 4 of the Module 1 practice hands), after establishing the three ♦ tricks, you **must** play ♠Q **first**, then cross over to the other winning ♠ honours in Dummy.

Contract 3NT by WEST – lead ♥3 by NORTH, ♥4 from Dummy and ♥J from SOUTH.

WEST	EAST
♠ Q5	♠ AKJ3
♥ AK5	♥ 764
♦ QJ102	♦ K54
♣ A932	♣ J84

After winning the ♥ lead and establishing ♦ tricks, if you play ♠ A or ♠ K first then cross back to the ♠ Q, you will be cut off from dummy and will not be able to enjoy all the ♠ winners.

Playing in a suit contract and drawing trumps

When you are playing in a suit contract, once you gain the lead you should normally aim to play on trumps to get rid of the opponents' trumps – so that they can't use them to trump your winners. This is called **DRAWING TRUMPS**.

WEST	EAST
♠ K5	♠ AQ10963
♥ AK5	♥ 76
♦ QJ102	♦ K54
♣ A932	♣ J8

Contract 4♠ by WEST – lead ♥Q by NORTH

After winning the ♥ Q lead in hand, Declarer should efficiently go about drawing trumps. Play the honour in the short hand first, i.e. the ♠K first, and then cross to Dummy with the next ♠ trick to the ♠Q or ♠A and then the 3rd round of ♠s will eliminate all the opponents' trumps, if they followed to the first 2 rounds (count to 13 to confirm they are all gone).

Playing the hand: *Leading towards strength & finessing*

Lead towards honours

You are South in each example

(a)	K 8		You need one trick in this suit. Lead a small card towards the king. You hope the ace is on your left. If the ace is played, the king is now a winner. If the ace is not played, you will play the king and hope the ace is in the West hand.
A Q 7 4	♦	J 10 9 2	
	6 5 3		
(b)	K Q 8		You need 2 tricks in this suit. Lead a small card towards the KQ. You hope the ace is on your left. If the ace is played, the KQ are now winners. If the ace is not played, the king will win. Now you must return to the South hand in another suit to play towards the queen. NB: If you lead the king first you can never make 2 tricks.
A 7 4 2	♦	J 10 9 5	
	6 3		
(c)	K J 4		You need at least 1 trick in this suit. Lead towards the KJ4. You hope at least one of the honours (ace or queen) is in the West hand. If no honour appears, try the jack. This may lose to the ace or queen. If it loses to the ace, you established a trick with the king. If it loses to the queen, return to the South hand and play towards the king.
A 8 5 2	♦	Q 10 9	
	7 6 3		

The finesse

The principle is the same. You play towards a lower honour hoping to establish it as a winner. Again we look for the **missing honour to be favourably placed**.

(a)	A Q 7		You need 2 tricks in this suit. Lead a low card towards the queen hoping the king is in the West hand.
K 6 4	♦	J 10 9 2	
	8 5 3		
(b)	A 10 9 2		You need 4 tricks in this suit. The king needs to be in the West hand. Play the queen. If it is covered by the king you now have 4 tricks. If the king is not played, play low from dummy and continue to repeat this finesse with the jack.
K 6 3	♦	8 7 5	
	Q J 4		

(c)	A J 10						
	Q 6 3	♦		K 7 5 2			
				9 8 4			
You need 2 tricks in this suit. Lead a small card towards the 10. This will lose to the King. When you regain the lead, return to the South hand and lead towards the jack. This is called a double finesse.							
(d)	Q 3 2						
	K 9 6	♦		J 10 7 5			
				A 8 4			
You need 2 tricks in this suit. Play the ace first and then play towards the queen hoping West has the king.							

Drawing trumps with a finesse

Sometimes you can eliminate a potential loser in the trump suit by taking a finesse as you are drawing trumps.

WEST	EAST
♠ AQJ953	♠ 64
♥ 75	♥ AK6
♦ QJ2	♦ K1054
♣ A2	♣ J864

Contract 4♠ by WEST – lead ♥Q by NORTH

As Declarer you plan the play and want to draw trumps as efficiently as possible, but without losing the opportunity to make an extra trick by finessing the SOUTH's ♠K, if they happen to have that card. Win the ♥A or ♥K on the first trick then lead a small ♠ from dummy and if SOUTH plays low, insert the ♠Q or ♠J. If this wins, it looks like you have successfully finessed SOUTH's ♠K.

If the finesse was successful, it is worth repeating the process again to avoid losing to the ♠K. To do this you will need to get the lead back to the dummy hand to repeat the lead towards the ♠ honours in hand. Before drawing the 2nd round of trumps, cross to the other top ♥ honour and lead dummy's remaining small ♠ towards the honours in your hand to repeat the finesse.

Defending the hand: *More on leads and third hand play*

More general guidance on leads:

The defenders aim to establish tricks in their longest or strongest suits. This especially applies to leading vs NT contracts.

Which suit?

1. You learnt in Module 1 that when you have a sequence of honours, to lead the top card of the sequence. This may win or establish tricks for your side that you can win later.
2. If you don't have a sequence, lead low from a long suit that you have one or more honours in (**low=like**).
3. Against NT contracts you normally lead your longest and strongest suit. But if you choose to lead a suit with no honours in it, lead your highest card (**high=hate**).
4. Avoid leading unsupported honours (i.e. with no sequence), this often gives away trick(s).

Leading – which card?

The recommended lead against a no trump (NT) contract is **bold underlined**

1. Lead top of a sequence of 3 or more honours. Sometimes, a top card from a sequence of 2 honours is a good lead, especially against a suit contract:

KQJ3 QJ97 **KQ109 J1097 **AKJ10 **AK95******

2. Lead a low card - a low card promises one or more honour(s) without a good sequence:

AJ87**5** KJ3**2** Q108**6** Q6**4** J86**4**

3. Lead top from small cards - a high card denies an honour:

8742 654 **83**

Tip: Later we learn more about leads in different situations, including against suit contracts. A consolidated list of recommended leads will be provided later in supplementary notes.

Defence Tip: What to play when your partner leads low (third hand play):

When your partner leads an honour, this normally promises to be the top of a sequence, holding the card immediately below the one they led plus denying the one above. Use logic to decide what to play when your partner leads an honour (often you will just play a low card).

When partner **leads a low card**, they promise honour(s) in that suit (i.e. they like it), but with no honour sequence. A reminder phrase for this is: **low=like**

Therefore, when your **partner leads low**, you will be playing **3rd to the trick** and **you should play a high card** to promote your partner's honour(s). The reminder phrase for this is: **3rd hand high**

However, note that when playing **3rd to the trick**, play **lowest of equal cards** (e.g. lowest with a sequence of touching honours). See the following examples:

You are South in each following example after your partner has made the opening lead:

<p>(a)</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>❖</p> <p>K 9 4</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>8 6 5</p> </div> </div>	<p>Your partner leads the 3 of this suit against a NT contract and Declarer plays low from Dummy on your right. You should play the K. Partner has probably led from the A or Q or both & playing the K will either win or promote a trick for your partner.</p>
<p>(b)</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>❖</p> <p>K Q 4</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>8 7 6</p> </div> </div>	<p>Your partner leads the 5 of this suit against a NT contract and Declarer plays low from Dummy on your right. You should play the Q, the lowest of your touching honours, which are "equals". This is important because if you play the K, your partner will expect that you don't have the Q & they will think declarer has the Q.</p>
<p>(c)</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>❖</p> <p>Q 10 4</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>J 9 5</p> </div> </div>	<p>Your partner leads the 2 of this suit against a NT contract and Declarer plays the 9 from Dummy on your right. You should play the 10, as when you are playing after the J 9 5 in Dummy, the 10 has the same power as the Q. If your 10 forces Declarer to play the A of the suit, then most likely your partner has the K & you have established 2 tricks in this suit.</p>

Module 2 Quiz

Card Play Techniques

In all questions below, West is the declarer and East is dummy.

1. You are playing in 3NT. North leads ♥Q. You have to win the opening lead. What is your plan to make 9 tricks, and which card is best to play at trick two?

West	East
♠ QJ85	♠ K104
♥ AK	♥ 762
♦ A843	♦ K75
♣ K72	♣ A542

*MiniBridge
contract choice
explained:*

*West has 17 HCP & East has 10.
West gets to be Declarer – they look
for a suit fit. There is no fit, so they choose
to play in notrumps (NT). With >25 HCP
they choose the game contract of 3NT.*

2. How do you play the ♠ suit for the number of tricks indicated? You have entries in other suits to both hands.

(a)		(b)		(c)		(d)	
West	East	West	East	West	East	West	East
♠ KQ7	♠ 432	♠ AQ	♠ 74	♠ 753	♠ AQJ986	♠ J8	♠ AK1097
2 tricks		2 tricks		6 tricks		5 tricks	

(a)

(b)

(c)

(d)

3. How do you play the ♠ suit for the number of tricks indicated? Assume East has the lead and entries are limited.

(a)		(b)		(c)	
West	East	West	East	West	East
♠ A9752	♠ QJ106	♠ AJ72	♠ K843	♠ A4	♠ KJ6532
5 tricks		4 tricks		6 tricks	

(a)

(b)

(c)

4. You are in 1NT. North leads the ♦Q. You win the first trick. What is your plan and which card do you play to trick two?

West	East	Bidding	West	East
♠ 762	♠ 84		1NT	All pass
♥ J754	♥ 1032			
♦ AK53	♦ 972			
♣ K7	♣ AQJ63			

Module 2 Quiz – Model Answers

In all questions below, West is the declarer and East is dummy.

5. You are playing in 3NT. North leads ♥Q. You have to win the opening lead. What is your plan to make 9 tricks, and which card is best to play at trick two?

West	East
♠ QJ85	♠ K104
♥ AK	♥ 762
♦ A843	♦ K75
♣ K72	♣ A542

*MiniBridge
contract choice
explained:*

*West has 17 HCP & East has 10.
West gets to be Declarer – they look
for a suit fit. There is no fit, so they choose
to play in notrumps (NT). With >25 HCP
they choose the game contract of 3NT.*

Count your winners – there are 6 in A's and K's outside the ♠ suit. Before taking Aces or Kings, you need to drive out the ♠A to win an extra 3 tricks in ♠. If you do not play ♠s soon after getting the lead, you are unlikely to make 9 tricks. So your plan is to play on ♠s – leading the ♠5 towards the K or 10.

6. How do you play the ♠ suit for the number of tricks indicated? You have entries in other suits to both hands.

(a)		(b)		(c)		(d)	
West	East	West	East	West	East	West	East
♠ KQ7	♠ 432	♠ AQ	♠ 74	♠ 753	♠ AQJ986	♠ J8	♠ AK1097
2 tricks		2 tricks		6 tricks		5 tricks	

- (a) Lead towards the spade honours twice, hoping South has the Ace
 (b) Lead towards the ♠Q (finesse) hoping South has the ♠K
 (c) Take the spade finesse twice leading towards the ♠ AQJ986 hoping North has the ♠K
 (d) Lead the ♠J towards dummy to finesse the ♠Q hoping North has it and run it, unless covered.

7. How do you play the ♠ suit for the number of tricks indicated? Assume East has the lead and entries are limited.

(a)		(b)		(c)	
West	East	West	East	West	East
♠ A9752	♠ QJ106	♠ AJ72	♠ K843	♠ A4	♠ KJ6532
5 tricks		4 tricks		6 tricks	

- (a) Finesse South for the ♠K, by leading the ♠Q first
 (b) Cash the ♠K first, then back to the ♠J to finesse the ♠Q
 (c) Lead towards the ♠10. If it wins, return to hand and repeat the finesse.

8. You are in 1NT. North leads the ♦Q. You win the first trick. What is your plan and which card do you play to trick two?

West	East	Bidding	West	East
♠ 762	♠ 84		1NT	All pass
♥ J754	♥ 1032			
♦ AK53	♦ 972			
♣ K7	♣ AQJ63			

Play your longest suit first by playing ♣K first. This is so you do not cut communications with dummy (apply the rule to play the honour in the short hand first).