

Most people think Standard English is only a bidding system. But a system is all the agreements a partnership needs, which includes leads and signals.

Defending a hand is hard work but the defence has one big advantage – the opening lead. It is the first shot in the battle for tricks. Defenders try to attack at declarer’s weakest point. They also try to pass information to partner by the card they choose to lead.

Lets look at an example from last week’s class:

- ♠ 10 3 2
- ♥ K Q 10 9
- ♦ 9 4
- ♣ Q 10 7 4

The bidding was the same at every table. An opening bid of 1♠, on your right, was raised directly to 4♠ and everybody passed. Or at MiniBridge you would be defending game in spades. I watched Peter fingering the ♥Q and asked him why he was choosing that particular card. Well he thought it was right to try and set up some tricks and the queen was a good deceptive card that might fool declarer.

Trying to set up tricks was a good idea and hearts is clearly a good suit to try. But why choose any particular card – does it matter? A defender cannot very easily confuse declarer, because declarer can see dummy and knows his sides combined assets. But the lead of the ♥Q does not send very useful information to partner, whereas the ♥K does. We lead the top of a sequence of cards so that partner will know that we not only have the king, we have the queen too and quite possibly the jack or ten as well. If partner gains the lead, he will know that we can cash some heart winners.

- ♠ 10 3 2
- ♥ K Q 10 9
- ♦ 9 4
- ♣ Q 10 6 4

At the next table Maggie had a different idea. She thought she would try and get a diamond ruff, after all partner might have the ace and king. So she led the ♦4.

Now trying for a diamond ruff is not silly, though perhaps a bit optimistic, but will partner know when they see the ♦4 that this was the purpose of your lead?

In general the lead of a low card like the four is from a holding with both length and some strength. We would choose the ♣4 if we decided a club was the correct lead on the hand. However the correct lead from a holding of just two cards is the top card – in this case the ♦9. This says that no honour is held in the suit and suggests either a singleton or a doubleton. In fact it was a winning lead. Dummy held ♦ K 8 2 and partner had ♦ A Q 10 3. Dummy played low, partner won the queen but not realising the position switched to another suit and the opportunity to ruff was lost.

At the third table, Sue decided a trump was a good idea and chose the ten. It did not matter on this hand which card was chosen, but as a general rule we lead our lowest trump from this 3-card holding. Finally at the fourth table Andy thought a heart might give a trick if dummy had the ♥J and declarer had the ♥A, so he decided on a club. Having made the decision he pulled out the six because it was nearest his thumb. I asked his partner what holding he thought his partner might have. After a lot of thought, she said it could be the middle card from three, it could be a doubleton or singleton, or it could be the fourth highest (the fourth one from the top) in a long suit. The six is a very hard card to read.

Right or wrong, I was pleased that everybody had a reason for the suit they chose but we need to do a bit more work on which card in the suit we should choose.

Standard leads that we make against suit contracts

Note that some leads would be different against no trumps

A K Q 3, A K J 6 4, A K 6	lead the ace from A K holdings
A K alone	except lead the K then the A, to show AK doubleton
K Q J 4, K Q 10 6, K Q 6 5 4	lead the king from K Q holdings
Q J 10 5 3, Q J 9 2	lead the queen from Q J holdings
J 10 9 6, J 10 3, K J 10 7 4	lead the jack from J 10 or K J 10 holdings
10 2, 9 3, 8 4, 7 2	lead the higher card from a doubleton
8 7 4, 9 5 2	lead the middle card from three, play the top card next time
8 7 6 4	lead the second highest from a poor 4-card suit and play the bottom card next time
K 6 5 3, Q 9 8 3, J 7 5 3, K J 5 3	lead the fourth highest, i.e. the 3, from 1 or 2 honours
A 6 5 4, A J 10 6	lead the ace if you must, but better to try another suit, as we don’t normally underlead aces against suit contracts