

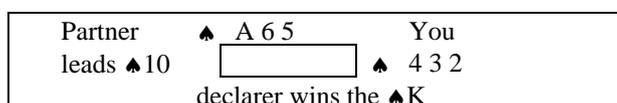
Every time you play a card you send a message to all the players around the table. Obvious messages are ‘I hold a card in this suit’ or ‘I have no more cards in the suit led’ but other messages can be rather more subtle.

Declarer is on his own – there isn’t anybody he has to help do the right thing. But defenders have to work together to beat the contract and should try to pass useful information by the cards they play. The very first signal made by a defender is the opening lead. For that reason, we do not select a card at random but have agreements as to which card will be led from certain holdings. For example the opponents bid 1NT – 3NT (or declarer announces 13 points and says ‘game in no trump’ at MiniBridge) and your partner leads the ♠Q. What is partner trying to tell you with that lead? Things like:

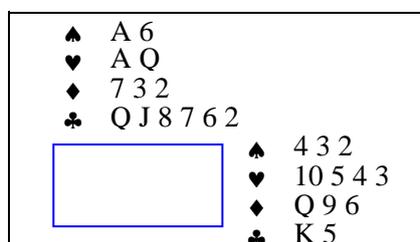
- ❖ Spades is probably my best suit, because we usually lead our best suit against no trumps.
- ❖ I do not have the ♠K, as I would lead my higher card from touching honours (though I might have the ace).
- ❖ My ♠Q guarantees the ♠J and almost certainly the ♠10 or ♠9. I would have led a low card from Q J 7 4.

Is this information any use to the leader’s partner. Well it should be! Defence is all about building up a picture of the unseen hands and using this picture to work out how the contract can be beaten. Suppose declarer wins the trick with the ace. Well, you know your side will have to drive out the king before partner has winners to cash. So if you can win a trick quickly and return spades, that will help partner.

Look at the cards in your hand and in dummy and you may be able to work out the unseen cards.



Look at the diagram. You can see eight of the thirteen cards. Who has the missing ones, ♠ Q J 9 8 7? Declarer won the first trick with the ♠ K. What can you deduce? Partner does not have the ♠ J or it would have been led instead of the ten. If declarer had the ♠ K J, the first trick would have been won with the ♠ J. So declarer must have ♠ K Q J and partner ♠ 10 9 8 7. If we get the lead, we should probably switch to another suit as it’s going to take a long time to set up a spade winner for the defence. But we do know that six of the 1NT bidder’s points are tied up in spades, which only leaves 6 to 8 points in the other three suits. All that from just one card.



Consider this hand. South is in 3NT, after opening 1NT and being raised directly to 3NT by North. Partner leads the ♠10, won by declarer with the ♠K. Declarer plays the ♣A, then the ♣2 to the ♣J. Partner plays the ♣9 than ♣3 – a signal to show just two clubs, which means declarer has three clubs. You win your ♣K. After being thankful that this declarer has not yet learned the finesse, what suit do you play now?

Well it looks like declarer has three spade tricks, five clubs and one heart trick, nine in total. Declarer has shown ten points in spades and clubs, which only leaves a maximum of four points in the red suits. Maybe those points are all in diamonds, but maybe declarer holds just the ♦K or ♦J. Switch to the diamond queen (it must be the queen so you can retain the lead to play another diamond through the king). You beat declarer when the opening hand is as shown. Returning a spade to dummy’s blank ace looks tempting, but declarer can enter hand with the ♣10, cash the ♠Q and go back to dummy on the ♥A to cash the clubs.

- ♠ K Q J
- ♥ J 9 8 7
- ♦ K 8 4
- ♣ A 10 4

**Summary of leads against no trumps**

- ❖ **When leading from a sequence of honours, lead the top card. It tells partner about your holding in the suit.**
- ❖ **The lead of a king against no trumps shows a strong holding. It asks partner to unblock an honour if one is held.**
- ❖ **When leading against no trumps, try to lead the best suit that is held by your side.**
- ❖ **Against no trumps, lead the fourth one down from the top if the suit has an honour.**
- ❖ **From suits without an honour lead the second one down.**
- ❖ **If opponents bid your best suit strongly, try something different – for example, top of a doubleton might hit partner’s best suit.**