

Opening leads are not an exact science. If you ask a number of top players what to lead on the same hand, you can get different answers ! There are also many lead options employed by partnerships, but until you can master the basic lead systems, don't get too fancy ! Leads can make or break a contract. Think very carefully, listen to the bidding, then make your selection. Here is a list of leads in some sort of preference:

1. Your partner's suit if they have overcalled. Just do standard leads as per your agreement, however, if you have 3 to an honour, lead low. Your partner will have to realise you may not be promising 4 of their suit, but you are promising an honour and that is what is important ! Lead high from a doubleton even if one is an honour, so partner knows there maybe an opportunity for a ruff.
2. Top of a sequence (including an internal sequence if you dare). The best lead in the book ! An example of a sequence is QJ10x and an internal sequence is AQJ10. In both cases, you would lead the Q.
3. 4th from your longest and strongest. Work out what this means: the denomination of the card lead from  $11 = ?$ . The answer means how many higher cards there are in the other 3 hands eg 5 from  $11 = 6$ . Therefore there are 6 cards higher than your partner's lead in the other 3 hands (including yours). You can see 2 of these hands and maybe a few of those 6 cards. Therefore you know how many higher cards are in Declarer's hand. If you have a choice between a 4th lead or top of a sequence, I prefer the sequence, as it is less likely to cost a trick.
4. MUD (Middle Up Down) of 3 "hopeless" cards. If you have 4 hopeless cards, I would still lead the second one, followed by a low card. This now says I have 2 or 4 cards of that suit, because  $MUD = 3$
5. Singletons versus a trump suit. Be careful though, as more often than not, singleton leads can set up the opposition's second suit rather than give you a ruff. AND you could be finessing your partner.
6. Top of a doubleton - although again (in my opinion), this can help the opposition for the same reasons as in No. 5

If undecided which suit to lead or nothing else is obvious, lead:

1. An unbid suit (especially a major against NT).
2. The second suit bid by dummy if all suits have been bid
3. Trumps if the opposition have agreed on this suit and you have 2 or 3 useless trumps. Trump leads are often a killer as they take ruffing power off the opposition. Another reason for leading a

trump is when Declarer has shown a second suit and you hold a few of that same suit. This means Declarer has to ruff a few, or they lose tricks to you. A trump lead will help your cause greatly. Avoid leading a singleton trump, or trumps if you hold the following: Jxx, Jx, K10x, A10x or Ax.

**Tip:** During the play, if you are stuck for a lead, look at dummy. Here is a good strategy: if you are leading through dummy (ie dummy is on your left), lead through a strong suit in dummy. If you are leading up to dummy (ie dummy is on your right), lead up to dummy's weaker suit.

**Whatever you do, before you start playing a session, agree with your partner what your leads are and stick to it !**

Leads not recommended

1. Underleading an Ace against a suit contract. You could easily be giving the opposition a trick with their singleton King. In fact, I would go so far as to say: **DO NOT underlead an Ace against a suit contract**
2. Leading an Ace when you do not have the King (unless it is partner's suit or you are stuck for a lead).
3. Leading away from broken honours ie AQxx or KJxx. The only exception is if it is your partner's suit, or if against NT and you have a 5 card suit that has not been bid eg AQ743
4. Leading a singleton or doubleton when you have 4 trumps. The trumps you hold are going to make life difficult for the Declarer when they are drawing trumps and the 4th one may well win a trick, so why do you need a ruff with a naturally winning trick ?
5. Leading a suit that has been bid by Declarer

What would you lead from these hands ?

1. The contract is **4H**: Q 6 3 2 9 6 3 8 2 Q 10 8 3
2. The contract is **3NT** and the majors have not been mentioned:  
Q 9 6 5 10 9 8 5 7 3 2 8 5 3
3. The contract is **4H**: Q J 10 9 8 3 Q 7 4 3 2 6 3
4. The contract is **3NT**: A 8 4 3 7 5 Q 7 4 3 2 9 3
5. The contract is **6NT**: 10 9 4 10 8 5 4 2 7 3 5 3 2
6. The contract is **4S**: Q 8 K J 5 3 10 4 J 8 5 3 2
7. The contract is **4S**: Q 4 3 A 9 7 3 10 9 4 9 6 2

## Answers:

1. **3♣** – 4th of longest and strongest (just). 2S is OK. I would definitely lead the 2S if it was against 3NT and spades have not been mentioned or inferred during the bidding.
2. **10♥** – top of a sequence and less costly
3. **Q♠** – top of a sequence less costly as leading a D may giveaway a trick to the J
4. **3♦** – the hand has an outside entry, so giving away diamonds now to eventually make some, is worthwhile. Leading a low S could remove your entry before the Ds are established.
5. **9♠** – MUD. 8H maybe ok, but 9S probably safer as it does not look like you will ever be in again to make your 5th heart.
6. **3C** – 4th of longest and strongest - do not lead a H as this suit has broken honours.
7. **9♦** – safe (passive) lead. AH should make later and take an honour in the process

## FAQ

AK and AKxxx: do I lead the A or the K ?

Some players lead a K if it is a doubleton and A if they hold more than 2. Therefore if your partner plays a K followed by the A, you know they only have two and if you get in, may give them a ruff. Another good option is: King asks for Count and A asks for Attitude signals from partner

AKJ32: what do I lead ?

v. NT – 3 if you do not have an outside entry, Ace if I have an outside entry (make sure you look at your partner's signal as to what to do next).

v. a suit – Ace. You have no other choice

I have a choice a 4th or top of a sequence, which is best ?

I prefer the sequence if I have a choice, as it is less likely to cost a trick. See examples 2 and 3. Whatever you do, **DO NOT** lead the 4th card from a sequence: eg 9 from QJ109 or 10 from AQJ10x. I have seen it done ! How is your partner expected to know you have better cards ?!!!



# LEADS

NOTES BY KAREN MARTELLETTI

Bridge is all about partnership understanding both in bidding and defending. Given you are likely to be defending twice as often as you are Declarer or Dummy, this is where the game can be won or lost ! Signals and discards are used to show your partner the best line of defence (not necessarily to show high cards).

#### Discards

There are quite a number of fancy and useful discards systems around. Don't get into them until you have mastered a simple discard system. It is preferable you discard what you don't want and hang onto the suit you do want, so you eventually win some tricks.

I suggest you start with either Attitude or Reverse Attitude.

**Attitude** = High card you like the suit you are discarding, low card you don't. This is the most basic system and probably what you were taught.

**Reverse Attitude** is the opposite. High card you don't like the suit you are discarding, low card you do. In order to remember, many say to themselves "Low I like". Personally I prefer this option, as you are not wasting a high card to encourage your partner. That high card may come in useful later on. PLEASE NOTE: in using Rev attitude, you play low if you have a doubleton and you want to encourage your partner. Playing high-low is discouraging !!! This may feel a bit odd to start with, but you will get the hang of it.

#### Signals

What are these ? This is another word for encouraging or discouraging your partner on their lead. For example, your partner leads an Ace of hearts and you have the King of hearts and want the suit continued. The basic way people play this, is as per the discards above - Attitude or Reverse Attitude. For this example (playing Reverse Attitude), you play the lowest heart you have to say "Partner, I like your lead !"

**Whatever you do, before you start playing a session, agree with your partner what your signals and discards are and stick to it !**

You need to understand your leads, discards and signals as it is likely people will ask about them during play. YOU MUST be honest with your answers.



# Sign language for Bridge Players !

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