

LESSON 2

Opening Leads Against Suit Contracts



General Concepts

General Introduction

Group Activities

Sample Deals



GENERAL CONCEPTS

Defense

The opening lead against trump contracts

- Choosing the suit
 - Partner's suit
 - Your suit – look for strength before length
 - The unbid suits
 - Short suits
 - Long suits
 - Leading a trump
- Choosing the card
 - Partner's suit
 - Top of a doubleton, top of a two-card or longer sequence
 - Otherwise low
 - Exception: not leading away from an ace
 - Other suits
 - Top of a two-card or longer sequence
 - Top of a doubleton
 - Otherwise low (fourth highest)
 - Exception: not leading away from an ace

Bidding

Review of responses to opening suit bids at the one level, the two level, and the three level

Play of the Hand

Review of declarer's PLAN as it applies to suit contracts

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

It is often a good idea to set the stage by making reference to the points covered in the previous lesson. There are similarities and differences between the choice of leads against notrump contracts and suit contracts. One or two sentences will suffice.

“When you are defending against a notrump contract, you generally proceed under the assumption that your high cards — your aces and kings — probably are not enough to defeat the contract. Instead, you look for length in a suit, so that one or more low cards can take over the limelight and be developed into the winner(s) needed to defeat the contract.

“We will look at leading against a suit contract. Many of the guidelines for selecting the actual card you lead from the suit you have chosen are the same as they are against a notrump contract. When selecting the suit to lead, however, there are some new considerations. You no longer focus your attention entirely on long suits. After all, declarer chose to play in a trump suit, so that you would not be able to enjoy winners in your long suits. The presence of a trump suit has a great influence on the way declarer plays and it also influences the way the defenders try to defeat the contract.

“The focus now shifts to the strength of your suits – the high cards you hold. You want to try to take the tricks to which you are entitled before declarer can ruff your high cards or discard cards that would lose to your high cards. In a suit contract, declarer usually plans to ruff some of the losers in the dummy or discard same on winners in other suits. Of course, two can play that game. The defenders have a chance to ruff declarer’s winners in a suit contract, so short suits can become a source of tricks for the defenders.

“Let’s start by considering how the defender on opening lead against a suit contract chooses the suit that produces the best chance of defeating the contract.”

GROUP ACTIVITIES

EXERCISE ONE: Strength Versus Length

Introduction

“Leading away from a suit in which you have high cards can often cost a trick. To see this, lay out the following cards in the spade suit:

	♠ 4 2	
♠ K J 9 7 3	■	♠ 10 8 5
	♠ A Q 6	

“Let’s first suppose East and West are defending against a notrump contract. How many tricks will South (declarer) take if South is the one to play this suit? (One. If South finesses with the ♠Q, it loses to West’s ♠K.) It would obviously be better for the defense if East could lead this suit, through declarer’s ♠A and ♠Q, to trap the ♠Q. If West leads against a notrump contract, however, West might well lead the ♠7, fourth highest from the long suit. Is this necessarily a bad start for the defense?”

Help the students see that the defense still develops three winners in the suit by driving out the ♠A and ♠Q, even though West *sacrificed* a trick on opening lead. This may well be enough to defeat the contract since declarer can’t stop the defenders from taking their winners once they are established and the defenders get the lead.

“Leading from a long suit against a notrump contract is usually the best idea even if you sacrifice a trick in the process. Often you will be more than compensated by the number of tricks you end up developing in the suit. You do not always have the luxury of sitting back and waiting for partner or declarer to lead the suit for you. Declarer will be going busily about the business of establishing winners in *declarer’s* long suits.

“Now let’s suppose you are defending a suit contract with the West hand. Let’s say hearts is the trump suit. Is it still a good idea to lead a spade? (No.) Why not?”

Help the students see that declarer can win the first trick with the ♠Q, take the ♠A and ruff the ♠6 with one of dummy’s trumps.

“How many losers did declarer start with in the spade suit? (Two.) If you lead a spade, how many losers does declarer end up with? (None.) Why does it do you no good to establish your remaining spades as winners? (Declarer can ruff them.) Notice that declarer would approach this suit in a trump contract from the point of losers rather than winners. When you defend, you must be careful not to lead a suit that will help declarer eliminate some losers in the suit.

“As pointed out in the previous lesson, the defenders can’t see into each other’s hands. That’s why imagination, or visualization, has to play an important part. Let’s take a look at the entire layout of some suits in the first exercise and see whether or not you should lead them against a suit contract. When you are actually defending, you will have to imagine the layout of the remaining cards, but we may be able to establish some recognizable general principles.”

Instructions

“Compare what would happen if you led each of the suits in exercise one against a notrump contract and against a suit contract (assuming another suit is trumps). Look at the number of winners you are likely to get if you lead the suit and the number of tricks you sacrifice by leading the suit. Would you normally lead the suit against a notrump contract, a suit contract or both?”

In doing the exercise, tell the students to assume that they would lead the same card against a suit contract as a notrump contract — top of a sequence or low. Keep an eye on the discussion and don’t let the students become confused. If it seems that they can’t follow the examples based on their knowledge from the previous lesson (leading against notrump contracts), then work with the group as a whole.

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	DECLARER A 7 3																		

Vs. Notrump

1) 3; 1; Yes 2) 2; 0; No 3) 4; 1; Yes 4) 2; 0; Yes

Vs. Suit

1) 0; 1; No 2) 2; 0; Yes 3) 1; 1; No 4) 1; 0; Yes

Follow-up

The discussion following the exercise might go something like this:

“In the first example, when you lead the suit (fourth highest), declarer takes two tricks with the ace and queen, rather than one. Against a notrump contract, you are willing to sacrifice one trick since you end up developing three tricks. Against a suit contract, however, you will have sacrificed that trick in vain. Declarer would end up with no losers in the suit, rather than the one declarer started with. Declarer can ruff any further leads of the suit in hand. In conclusion, you would want to lead this suit against a notrump contract, but not against a suit contract.

“In the second example, you can take two tricks by leading the suit against a notrump contract, but declarer also gets two tricks. By leading this suit, you actually are helping declarer develop an extra winner. It usually will be best to avoid leading this suit. Keep your high cards as later entries to your long suit and make declarer do the work of developing an extra trick in the suit. Against a trump contract, declarer already has two losers in this suit (since it divides 3–3). By leading the suit, you are not helping declarer, since you are getting only the tricks to which you are entitled. This is a good suit to lead against a suit contract. If you wait too long, declarer may be able to discard some of the losers in hand.

“Against a notrump contract, you give declarer a trick by leading the suit in the third example, but in doing so, you develop four tricks. You may not be able to wait for partner to get in and lead the suit, so this is a good choice of suits to lead against a notrump contract. Against a suit contract, you give declarer an extra trick. Declarer started with two losers but ends up with only one if you lead the suit. It is better to wait until declarer or partner leads the suit. Then you take the two tricks to which you are entitled.

“In the last example, you can develop two tricks in the suit against a notrump contract without sacrificing any, so this is a good choice of suits to lead. Against a suit contract, you can promote one trick in the suit without sacrificing any. Since declarer starts with one loser, this type of suit is good to lead against a suit contract as well as a notrump contract. You want to develop your winner before declarer can discard the loser.”

Conclusion

“Against a suit contract, the emphasis is on developing tricks from your strong suits rather than long suits. You want to avoid leading a suit which sacrifices a trick. The best choice of suits is often the one in which the partnership has combined strength. Since you can’t see partner’s hand, suits in which you have a strong sequence are usually safe to lead.”

EXERCISE TWO: Utilizing the Trump Suit

Introduction

“Although declarer’s trump suit usually works to declarer’s advantage, the defenders can sometimes use the trump suit to their advantage by ruffing declarer’s winners. Leading a short suit — a singleton or doubleton, hoping partner can return the suit for you to ruff — is often a good choice against a suit contract.

“Many players, including experienced players, almost always lead a singleton against a suit contract. This is not always the best choice since leading a singleton involves some risk. You may be helping declarer establish one of declarer’s suits. Let’s look at the type of conditions that make the lead of a singleton effective. Construct the following hand face up on the table:

♠ 8 7 4
♥ 3
♦ J 8 7 3
♣ 10 8 6 5 2

“You are on lead after the bidding has gone 1 ♠ on your right, 2 ♠ on your left and 4 ♠ on your right. Your diamond and club suits are not particularly appealing, so you might consider leading your singleton heart. For this to work, partner must be able to win a trick before all of your trumps are drawn and lead a heart for you to ruff. Let’s see if that is a good possibility. How many points do the opponents have? (At least 25 combined points, but probably fewer than 33 since they did not bid to a slam contract.) How many points do you have? (1 HCP plus 1 for the five-card club suit.) About how many points do you expect partner to have? (About 8 to 15.) Is it reasonable to expect partner to be able to take the first trick or an early trump trick so that partner can lead a heart for you to ruff? (Yes.) So, this would be a good time to lead the singleton heart. You hope partner will win the first trick and lead a heart for you to ruff. If partner has another entry, you might be able to get a second ruff and defeat the contract, despite your lack of high cards.

“Now let’s change the hand slightly and exchange your spades for the king, the queen and the jack:

♠ K Q J
♥ 3
♦ J 8 7 3
♣ 10 8 6 5 2

“There are enough high cards missing that you still could expect partner to win a trick and give you a ruff if you lead your singleton, but will that gain anything for your side? (No, you expect two trump tricks anyway.) There is not much point in leading a singleton when you have natural trump tricks. You would be better off to lead another suit in an attempt to create tricks

for the defense elsewhere.

“Put back the three low spades and exchange one of the low diamonds for the \spadesuit A and two of the low clubs for the \clubsuit A and the \clubsuit K:

\spadesuit 8 7 4
 \heartsuit 3
 \diamondsuit A J 8 7
 \clubsuit A K 10 8 6

“Can you expect partner to have enough strength to win an early trick and give you a ruff before trumps are drawn? (No. Partner can have very few points since you have 12 HCPs and the opponents have at least 25 points.) In this situation, leading your singleton would be a poor choice. If partner can win a trick, you are likely to defeat the contract anyway, and you might just help declarer find some missing card such as the \diamondsuit Q. You have a much better choice in the \clubsuit A. If that card wins the trick, you can reconsider leading your singleton after looking at the dummy. More likely, you may be able to give your partner a ruff if partner is short in clubs!

“Finally, let’s exchange the \diamondsuit A for another low trump and the \clubsuit 6 for the \clubsuit Q.

\spadesuit 8 7 4 2
 \heartsuit 3
 \diamondsuit J 8 7
 \clubsuit A K Q 10 8

“The singleton heart may hold some appeal, but when you have a lot of trumps, there is another consideration. How many trumps is declarer likely to have? (About five.) If you start leading your high clubs, either they will take tricks or declarer may have to ruff in hand to stop you from taking tricks. How many trumps would declarer have left if declarer started with five and had to ruff one of your club winners? (Four.) So, if it’s necessary to draw all of your trumps, how many will be left? (None.) When declarer has no trumps left and your side regains the lead, you will be able to take any winners you have and declarer will be powerless to stop you. Declarer might lose control. So, when you have a lot of trumps, it is often a good idea to lead your long suit, rather than your short suit, and hope to run declarer out of trumps. If you can force declarer to ruff a couple of times, you may end up with more trumps than declarer has.

“Now that we have looked at why you might lead a singleton and why you might not, let’s see if we can put the knowledge into practice.”

Instructions

“You are defending a contract of 4♠ with no other suits bid during the auction. What would be the advantage of leading a diamond rather than a club on each of the hands in Exercise Two?”

1)	♠ 8 6 5	2)	♠ Q J 9 8	3)	♠ 8 6 5 2
	♥ J 9 4		♥ J 9 4 2		♥ J 9 4
	♦ 4		♦ Q J 10 9		♦ A K Q J 9
	♣ Q 9 7 6 4 2		♣ 5		♣ 3

1) Try for a Ruff 2) Natural trump tricks 3) Long trumps

Follow-up

Have a student from one of your groups report the conclusion that the group reached. Did they decide that the singleton was the best lead or not? The discussion should have been something like this:

“On the first hand, you would lead your singleton diamond, hoping for a ruff. Your club suit does not look too promising, since even if partner has some help, you won’t be able to take too many tricks before declarer can ruff. Partner is marked with some strength because you are weak, so there is a good chance of winning a couple of tricks and giving you one or more ruffs.

“On the second hand, there is no point in looking for ruffs by leading your singleton since you are likely to have a couple of natural trump tricks anyway. Leading diamonds to try to establish one or more winners in that suit is better.

“On the third hand, you have four trumps. Leading your diamond winners is probably better. If you can force declarer to ruff, you may end up with more trumps than declarer has. If you lead the ♦ A, you could always switch to another suit after seeing the dummy. If you start by leading your singleton club, you may be too late.”

Conclusion

“Often a singleton is a good lead against a suit contract. Before you automatically lead a singleton just because you have one, however, consider two things: (1) whether you can reasonably expect your partner to be able to lead the suit before declarer pulls your trump cards, and (2) whether you will gain anything if partner can lead the suit. You are probably better off to look elsewhere for your tricks, if you have natural trump tricks or a lot of trumps.”

EXERCISE THREE: Leading Trumps

Introduction

“You may have heard the expression *when in doubt, lead trumps*. The opposite sentiment is probably more accurate. You should lead trumps only when you have a reason for doing so.

“There are two main reasons for leading a trump. The first is that declarer often should want to ruff some losers in the dummy and there must be trumps in the dummy to do that. By leading trumps, you will start eliminating dummy’s trumps. If you regain the lead, you may be able to lead trumps again — declarer may never be able to ruff enough losers.

“The other reason for leading a trump is because leads in all of the other suits appear to be unsafe. As we saw earlier, you try to avoid giving up a trick when defending against a suit contract since you may never get the trick back. If the opponents have shown strength in all of the outside suits, it may be best to make the passive lead of a trump, hoping to give nothing away. That way you leave all of the work to declarer.

“Otherwise, you should avoid leading a trump since it probably will help declarer. Remember that declarer usually wants to draw your trumps before going about the business of taking the winners and discarding losers. Having the opening lead can be an advantage for your side. Do not lead a trump if there is anything better to do.

“How do you know if declarer is planning to ruff some losers in the dummy? While you can’t always be sure, your ears can give you a good clue. Listen to what the opponents bid and try to construct a picture of their hands. Let’s see how you do this. We’ll try to draw a picture of the opponents’ hands on the table by listening to their auction. First, suppose one opponent opens the bidding 1♥. How many hearts is that opponent likely to have? (At least five.) So let’s put five hearts face down on the table in front of your opponent. We put them face down because we aren’t really interested in which hearts they are.”

Have the students put five cards face down in front of one of the players (*e.g.*, South). This is the start of a “hand” they are going to construct.

“Now suppose the opponent’s partner responds 1♠. How many spades does that bid show? (At least four.) So let’s put four spades face down in front of partner. Now the opener rebids 2♣. How many clubs does opener have? (At least four.) So put four clubs face down in front of opener. Suppose responder then raises to 3♣. How many clubs does that show? (At least four.) Put four clubs in front of responder. Let’s suppose opener passes, rejecting responder’s invitation, and the final contract is 3♣. Let’s fill out the hands using our imagination. Suppose we give opener two spades and two diamonds to complete opener’s hand. We can’t be sure, but it helps with our picture. Put those cards in opener’s hand. We need five more cards for

responder. Responder didn't seem too interested in opener's heart suit, even though opener showed a five-card suit. Let's give responder two hearts and three diamonds."

The hands on the table should now look like this (with all cards face down):

RESPONDER (DUMMY)

♠ X X X X

♥ X X

♦ X X X

♣ X X X X



OPENER (DECLARER)

♠ X X

♥ X X X X X

♦ X X

♣ X X X X

"We have managed to construct a mental picture of the opponents' hands from the auction. Some auctions will give us more information, some less. You can see how useful this can be. Is declarer likely to have some losers to ruff in the dummy? (Yes, in the heart suit.) Might it be a good idea to lead a trump? (Yes, to try to prevent declarer from ruffing all of the heart losers in the dummy.) It would be an especially good idea if we had a lot of high hearts. Dummy might even have a singleton or a void.

"Let's get some more practice listening to the auction and constructing a mental picture of the opponents' hands."

Instructions

This exercise may be too difficult for your class. You may want to treat it as a “Finer Point” which some students can look at outside of class time.

“For each of the auctions in Exercise Three, put down a possible suit distribution for both declarer’s hand and the dummy (using X’s to represent the cards). On which auctions might leading a trump prevent declarer from ruffing losers in the dummy?”

1)	NORTH (DUMMY)	EAST (PARTNER)	SOUTH (DECLARER)	WEST (YOU)
	Pass	Pass	1 ♥	Pass
	1 NT	Pass	2 ♦	Pass
	Pass	Pass		

2)	NORTH (DUMMY)	EAST (PARTNER)	SOUTH (DECLARER)	WEST (YOU)
	1 ♦	Pass	1 ♠	Pass
	2 ♣	Pass	2 ♥	Pass
	3 ♥	Pass	4 ♥	Pass
	Pass	Pass		

3)	NORTH (DUMMY)	EAST (PARTNER)	SOUTH (DECLARER)	WEST (YOU)
			1 ♠	Pass
	2 ♣	Pass	3 ♣	Pass
	3 ♠	Pass	4 ♠	Pass
	Pass	Pass		

1) DUMMY	2) DUMMY	3) DUMMY
♠ X X (X)	♠ —	♠ X X X
♥ X (X)	♥ X X X X	♥ (X) (X) (X)
♦ X X X X	♦ X X X X (X)	♦ (X) (X)
♣ X X X X	♣ X X X X	♣ X X X X (X)
■	■	■
DECLARER	DECLARER	DECLARER
♠ (X) (X)	♠ X X X X X	♠ X X X X X
♥ X X X X X	♥ X X X X	♥ (X) (X)
♦ X X X X	♦ (X) (X)	♦ (X) (X)
♣ (X) (X)	♣ (X) (X)	♣ X X X X

Lead a trump?

1) Yes

2) Yes

3) No

Follow-up

The players may want to use the cards to construct the hands on the table, rather than writing them down. Let them experiment, but be ready to help them, since the concept is probably quite new to them. There is bound to be some variety, but the main point should be clear, and the players should be able to see which auctions might induce them to lead a trump. Make sure they see why a trump lead is unlikely to work on the last auction, where the opponents have a fit in two suits. Declarer is likely to be able to discard one or more losers if there is enough time.

Conclusion

“As you start paying more attention to the opponents’ auction before choosing your opening lead, you will start to recognize the opportunities for leading trumps to prevent declarer from ruffing losers. Otherwise, lead a trump only if everything else looks too dangerous. Try not to be ‘in doubt’ when you choose to lead a trump.”

EXERCISE FOUR: Choosing the Suit

Introduction

“As we have just seen, sometimes the bidding gives you ideas about what suit to choose for the opening lead. If your partner has bid a suit, either against a notrump or a suit contract, you usually choose that suit to lead. Otherwise, an unbid suit is still a good choice. A suit with a strong sequence offers a good chance to promote winners for your side. Leading from a strong sequence is usually safer than leading away from an honor, hoping that partner has something in the suit. If nothing else looks attractive, you can lead a trump.”

Instructions

“You are on lead against 4♥ with the hand in Exercise Four.

♠ Q 9 2
♥ 8 6 3
♦ K Q 8 2
♣ Q 7 2

“Which suit would you lead under each of these conditions:

- 1) Your partner overcalled in clubs during the auction.
- 2) The only suit bid during the auction was hearts.
- 3) The opponents bid all four suits during the auction.
- 4) The opponents bid hearts and diamonds during the auction.”

1) Club 2) Diamond 3) Heart 4) Club or Spade

Follow-up

Have a student from each group report which suit was chosen and why. At this point, we are not concerned with the specific card chosen, merely the suit. The discussion should have gone something like this:

“If partner bid clubs, you should lead a club if there is nothing clearly better to do. If the only suit bid was hearts, you would look at the unbid suits. The strong holding in diamonds suggests a diamond lead, rather than a spade or a club, where you will need help from partner — and may not find it. If the opponents have bid both hearts and diamonds, you should avoid those suits and lead one of the unbid suits, either spades or clubs. Your guess is as good as mine as to which suit will work out better, but you have to give one of them a try.”

Conclusion

“When you make the opening lead, it may seem as if all you have to go on are the 13 cards you are looking at. After all, you are the only player who has to choose a card without first seeing the dummy. The bidding, however, often makes your decision easier. If partner has bid a suit, you can lead that suit. Otherwise, you tend to lead an unbid suit, preferably one with touching high cards. Sometimes, a singleton or a trump may be attractive.”

EXERCISE FIVE: Choosing the Card

Introduction

“Once you have decided on the suit to lead, the next decision is to choose the card. There are two main differences between leading against a suit and a notrump contract. Against a notrump contract, you lead the top of a three-card or longer sequence; otherwise you lead a low card (fourth highest). Against a suit contract, you lead the top of two-card or longer sequences. To see why, lay out the following cards in the heart suit:

	DUMMY	
	♥ 10 3	
OPENING LEADER	■	EAST
♥ K Q 8 6		♥ 7 5 4 2
	DECLARER	
	♥ A J 9	

“Suppose spades are trump. What happens if West leads a low heart? (Declarer ends up with no losers in the suit.) Would this have been such a disaster against a notrump contract? (No. Declarer gets two tricks, but the defenders can still establish two tricks.)

“The other difference concerning the choice of cards against notrump and suit contracts is that you do not want to lead away from an ace against a suit contract. Lay out the following cards:

	DUMMY	
	♥ Q	
OPENING LEADER	■	EAST
♥ A 10 8 7 3		♥ J 5 4 2
	DECLARER	
	♥ K 9 6	

“Would there be any harm in leading a low heart against a notrump contract? (No. Declarer is entitled to one trick.) What might happen if you led a low heart against a suit contract? (Declarer might end up with no losers in the suit. After winning the ♥Q, declarer can ruff the remaining hearts in dummy.) If you lead the suit, it is better to lead the ace than a low card. Let’s try some more examples.”

Instructions

“In each of the examples in Exercise Five, which would be the best card to lead from the suit against a notrump contract? Which would be the best card against a suit contract?”

1)

	DUMMY	
	7 5 3	
YOU	■	PARTNER
A K 8 4 2		10 6
	DECLARER	
	Q J 9	

2)

	DUMMY	
	8	
YOU	■	PARTNER
A J 10 9 3		7 5 4 2
	DECLARER	
	K Q 6	

3)

	DUMMY	
	6 4	
YOU	■	PARTNER
K Q 9 7 3		10 5
	DECLARER	
	A J 8 2	

1) 4 (low); Ace 2) Jack; Ace 3) 7 (low); King

Follow-up

Depending on how much time you have, you can either explain what would be led against a notrump contract and a suit contract or have one of the students report the thoughts of the group. The explanation could be something like this:

“In the first example, if you lead the two high cards against a notrump contract and then lead the suit again, you have established two winners. Note, however, that there may be no entry to them if partner next gets the lead. Since declarer is entitled to one trick, leading a low card costs nothing and avoids stranding your winners. Against a suit contract, however, leading a low card would give declarer an undeserved trick. Declarer may even be able to discard some losers and you may not get either your ace or your king. By leading the ace, the king and then another one, partner will be able to ruff, so declarer will lose three tricks in the suit.

“In the second example, you would lead the top of your interior sequence, the jack, against a notrump contract. Declarer can win the queen, but if partner gets in to lead the suit back, you end up taking four tricks since declarer’s king is trapped. Against a suit contract, however, you may never get a trick with your ace if you lead the jack. Declarer will win the first trick with the queen and may be able to ruff the remaining two cards in the dummy. If you lead the suit, the ace is safer, although you probably would be better off selecting a different suit to lead.

“In the last example, you would lead a low card against a notrump contract. Declarer gets two tricks in the suit, but you eventually establish three winners. Against a suit contract, however, the king is a better choice. It prevents declarer from escaping with no losers in the suit, and if declarer wins the ace and leads the suit again, your partner may be able to ruff (overruffing the dummy).”

Conclusion

“When leading against a suit contract, choose the top card of a two-card or longer sequence. If your suit is headed by an ace, lead the ace rather than away from it.”

EXERCISE SIX: Putting It All Together**Introduction**

“Now that we have seen some suggestions about choosing the suit to lead against a trump contract and choosing the card within the suit, let’s put it all together. When you’re on lead against a contract of 4♥, what sort of things should you consider before making the opening lead?”

Help the students come up with suggestions that cover the various choices: leading partner’s suit, avoiding leading the opponents’ suits, favoring strong sequences in the unbid suits, considering a singleton if partner can get the lead before declarer draws trumps, leading a trump if it sounds as though declarer will want to ruff losers in the dummy or if everything else looks dangerous, leading a long suit if you think you can force declarer to use up all of the trumps and lose control, leading the top of touching high cards, avoiding leading away from an ace. Encourage the students to treat the suggestions as ideas to keep in mind when leading against a suit contract rather than a list of rules which has to be memorized.

“When making the opening lead, always review the auction to see if there are any clues to guide you. You usually concentrate on the unbid suits. Once you choose the suit, it only remains to choose the appropriate card in the suit.”

Instructions

“The auction proceeds:

NORTH (Dummy)	EAST (Partner)	SOUTH (Declarer)	WEST (You)
		1♣	Pass
1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♠	Pass	4♠	Pass
Pass	Pass		

“Which card would you lead from each of the hands in Exercise Six?”

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| 1) ♠ Q 7 4
♥ J 8 3
♦ Q J 6 2
♣ J 10 8 | 2) ♠ J 9 2
♥ J 7 5
♦ A J 9 7 5
♣ Q 4 | 3) ♠ K 8
♥ Q 9 7
♦ Q 10 8 3 2
♣ Q 5 4 |
| 1) <u>♦ Q</u> | 2) <u>♦ A</u> | 3) <u>♦ 3</u> |
| 4) ♠ A 9 3
♥ 10 8 5 3 2
♦ 6
♣ J 8 6 5 | 5) ♠ 8 6 4
♥ J 9 3 2
♦ K 5
♣ Q 8 7 4 | 6) ♠ 7 5 3
♥ A 10 5
♦ A Q 10
♣ K 10 4 2 |
| 4) <u>♦ 6</u> | 5) <u>♦ K</u> | 6) <u>♠ 3</u> |

Follow-up

You'll be able to judge whether your class would be better off discussing the examples in groups or whether you should lead the discussion and guide the students through each example with statements such as: "You like the club suit but the opponents bid clubs, and "What other suit might be a good choice?"

If students have independently discussed the examples, you could read out the answers, asking if there is any group which disagrees and then bringing up that example for discussion. For example:

"The only unbid suit is diamonds, so you should look at that suit first. In the first hand, you have a two-card sequence and can lead the top card, the \spadesuit Q. On the second hand, diamonds is probably still the best choice, but you would lead the \spadesuit A rather than fourth highest. One advantage of leading an ace is that you get to see the dummy before deciding on your next move. On the third hand, you have no sequence, so lead low, the \spadesuit 3, fourth highest. On the fourth hand, the conditions are right to lead your singleton diamond. You can win a trump trick before declarer can draw trumps and there is a good chance to get a ruff. On the fifth hand, a diamond still looks best. Lead the \spadesuit K, top of your doubleton. You hope partner will have the \spadesuit A or \spadesuit Q, and you may be able to get a ruff. In the last hand, leading a diamond is not so attractive. With all of the strength you have, partner is unlikely to have the \spadesuit K, so you may be helping declarer. Lead a trump and leave the work to declarer."

Conclusion

"When you are leading, use the information that the bidding gives you. Generally it is a good idea to lead your partner's suit and to avoid the opponents' suits. Favor your strong sequences. You also should consider the lead of a singleton or a trump. Make your best effort and remember that choosing the best lead is a guess at any time. Even world champions sometimes would love to play the deal over again with a different opening lead."

EXERCISE SEVEN: Review of Responses to Opening Bids in a Suit**Introduction**

The lesson concentrates on opening leads against trump contracts. A comprehensive review of responding to opening suit bids is not expected. On the other hand, since students will be bidding the hands, this exercise can serve to quickly remind the students of a few points.

“When partner opens the bidding, you are usually the captain and it is your job to keep an eye on the final contract. An opening suit bid at the one level shows a hand with 13 to 21 points. As responder, you would like more information from your partner, a clearer description of both the strength and distribution of partner’s hand.

“If partner opens 1♥ or 1♠, showing a five-card suit, your first priority is to show support if you have three or more cards. With 6 to 9 dummy points, raise to the two level. With 10 or 11 points, (1) raise to the three level, if you are playing limit raises, or (2) bid a new suit, planning to raise partner next round, if you are playing forcing raises. With 12 or more points, (1) raise to the three level, if you are playing forcing raises, or (2) bid a new suit, planning to raise partner to game next round, if you are playing limit raises. If you can’t raise partner’s major, bid a new suit at the one level, if you can. If you can’t, you’ll have to bid 1NT with only 6 to 9 points, but you can bid a new suit at the two level with 10 or more points.

“After an opening bid of 2♣, you should remember that partner alone has enough points for game (or close to it). When partner opens 2♣ and you have fewer than 8 points, always respond 2♦. Other responses to a 2♣ opening are natural positive bids, promising at least 8 points and two of the top three honors in the suit mentioned.

“After an opening two- or three-level preemptive bid, showing a weak hand, you should remember that responding is more about counting tricks than counting points. Try to visualize partner’s hand and estimate the outcome of various contracts.”

Instructions

“What would you respond with each of the hands in Exercise Seven if partner opened 1♥? If partner opened 2♣? If partner opened 3♥?”

1) ♠ Q 7 6 4 3
♥ 8 5
♦ 7 4 2
♣ J 8 6

2) ♠ K Q 7 6 5
♥ Q 8
♦ J 9 2
♣ 10 6 4

3) ♠ A J 8 3
♥ Q 8 6 2
♦ Q J 9
♣ J 6

1) Pass; 2♦; Pass 2) 1♠; 2♠; Pass 3) 1♠ (3♥); 2NT; Pass

Follow-up

Discuss the answers with the group to move the exercise along. It shouldn't take more than 10 minutes. The *Bidding in the 21st Century* text introduces limit raises, but when discussing the third hand, you may want to explain that many partnerships play forcing raises.

Conclusion

“When partner opens one of a suit, you are in the position of captain but need more information from partner. Pass with fewer than 6 points. With support for partner's major, you can raise the suit to the appropriate level. Otherwise, bid a new suit. With 6 to 9 points, you are too weak to bid a new suit at the two level. You have to respond 1NT if you can't bid a suit at the one level. When partner opens 2♣, you are forced to reply even with no points. With 8 or more points, you can raise with support or bid your own suit. When partner opens two or three of a suit, you need to decide how well your hand fits together with partner's hand before you bid. Remember, the purpose of a preemptive bid is to interfere with the opponents' bidding.”

EXERCISE EIGHT: Review of Declarer's Plan**Introduction**

“When playing in a suit contract, you always start by going through declarer's PLAN:

1. *Pause to consider your objectives.*
2. *Look at your winners and losers.*
3. *Analyze your alternatives.*
4. *Now put it all together.*

“In a suit contract, the emphasis is on losers. Consider your objective in terms of losers, count the number of losers you have and then determine how you can eliminate any losers.”

Instructions

“Go through the four steps of declarer's PLAN to decide how to play the deal in exercise eight in a contract of 4♥ after the opening lead of the ♣K.”

	Dummy
	♠ Q
	♥ J 7 5 3
	♦ A K 5 2
	♣ 7 6 4 2
	■
	Declarer
	♠ A 9 5
	♥ Q 10 9 8 6
	♦ Q 3
	♣ A 8 3
Lead	
♣ K	

Follow-up

Following through the four steps of declarer's PLAN, you might say something like this:

“The first step is ‘Pause to consider your objectives.’ In a suit contract, the objective is considered in terms of losers. How many losers can you afford in a contract of 4♥? (Three.) The next step is ‘Look at your winners and losers.’ In a suit contract, you look at your losers. How many losers are there? (Six: two in spades, two in hearts and two in clubs.) That is three too many, so you move on to the third step, ‘Analyze your alternatives.’ How can you get rid of some of those losers? (The two spade losers can be ruffed in dummy and one of the club losers can be discarded on the extra diamond winner in dummy.) The final step of the plan is ‘Now put it all together.’ One of the decisions in putting everything together is whether or not to start by drawing trumps. Is drawing trumps right away a good idea on this deal? (No. You would have to give up the lead to draw trumps and there are too many quick losers. Declarer will have to discard a club loser before drawing trumps. Declarer also needs two of dummy's trumps to ruff the spade losers. Declarer should plan to do this before all of the trumps are drawn.)”

Conclusion

“When declarer goes through the PLAN, it focuses declarer's attention in the right direction. In this deal, for example, declarer may be tempted to take the first trick and start drawing trumps. Making the PLAN tells declarer there are too many quick losers, and declarer has to get rid of one before giving the lead to the opponents.”

SAMPLE DEALS

EXERCISE NINE: Leading Partner's Suit

Introduction

There is nothing difficult about this deal, but it does show how well the defenders can do when the opener leads partner's suit. You might discuss only the bidding with all of the hands face up on the table. Then have the students pick up their hands, bid again and play the hand. West is presented with a tempting sequence in clubs. If West leads one, declarer makes the contract.

Instructions

“Turn up the cards on the first pre-dealt deal. Put each hand dummy style at the edge of the table in front of each player.”

(E-Z Deal Cards #2, Deal 1)

Dealer: North	♠ Q 7 6 2 ♥ K J 5 ♦ Q J 10 8 ♣ A 6				
♠ 9 3 ♥ 9 6 2 ♦ 4 3 2 ♣ Q J 10 9 3	<table border="1" style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	♠ 10 ♥ A Q 10 8 4 ♦ A K 7 5 ♣ 8 5 2
N					
W E					
S					
	♠ A K J 8 5 4 ♥ 7 3 ♦ 9 6 ♣ K 7 4				

The Bidding

“What would North open the bidding? (1♦.) How can East describe the hand? (Overcall 1♥.) What does South bid? (1♠.) West passes. What re-bid does North make to show support for partner's suit? (2♠.) East passes. How many points does South have? (13, 11 HCPs plus 2 for the six-card suit.) At what level does the partnership belong? (Game.) Is there a Golden Fit? (Yes, spades.) What does South rebid? (4♠.) How does the auction proceed from there? (Pass, pass, pass.) What is the contract? (4♠.) Who is the declarer? (South.)”

The Defense

“Which player makes the opening lead? (West.) What would the opening lead be? (♥2.) Why? How does East plan to defeat the contract? (Two heart tricks and two diamond tricks.)”

The Play

“Review the steps in declarer’s PLAN. How does declarer plan to make the contract? (Declarer can afford three losers. There are two heart losers, two diamond losers and one club loser. Declarer can try the heart finesse and/or plan to promote an extra diamond winner in dummy on which to discard a heart loser. The club loser can be ruffed in dummy.)”

Conclusion

“Leading partner’s suit not only promotes a good relationship between you and partner, but it is often the only way to defeat the contract.”

The Play

“Review the steps in declarer’s PLAN. How does declarer plan to make the contract? (Declarer has one spade loser, two diamond losers and one club loser. Declarer plans to take the spade finesse, hoping to eliminate the spade loser.)”

The possibility of an end play (to get South to lead a spade) will not occur to students at this level. If declarer does lead back a diamond before taking the spade finesse, South can safely lead a club after taking a second diamond trick. The reason for leading a club rather than a spade can be explained using the same reasoning for not leading a spade in the first place. Leading through strength will be explained in a later lesson. The deal is constructed so that South will not give declarer a ruff and discard if thrown in with a diamond and so that North would win the third round of clubs if that suit is played. Of course, if declarer somehow chooses to play three rounds of clubs after drawing trumps, North may lead back a diamond rather than a spade. It is unlikely, however, that this line of play will occur at any of the tables.

Conclusion

“Against a trump contract, you don’t look so much at your long suit for the source of tricks that you need to defeat the contract. Instead, you look at your stronger suits. In this deal, a diamond was safer than a spade lead, although you would tend to lead a spade against a notrump contract.”

EXERCISE ELEVEN: Leading a Trump

Introduction

It's a good idea to keep this deal face up on the table while you go over not just the bidding but the opening lead and the play. It can be difficult for the students to picture how drawing trumps can work out well for the defenders when that is supposed to be a priority for declarer.

“This deal is a good example of when it is best for the defenders to lead a trump. First of all, let's look at the bidding and see what kind of picture this gives the defenders. Then we'll look at what happens when the defenders lead trumps.”

Instructions

“Turn up the cards on the third pre-dealt deal. Put each hand dummy style at the edge of the table in front of each player.”

(E-Z Deal Cards #2, Deal 3)

Dealer: South	♠ K 9 8 6 5										
	♥ K J 10 6										
	♦ K 8 3										
	♣ A										
♠ 7 4 2	<table border="1"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ A Q J 10
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ A 5		♥ 7 4 2									
♦ J 10 6 2		♦ Q 7 4									
♣ K Q 8 5		♣ 10 9 7									
	♠ 3										
	♥ Q 9 8 3										
	♦ A 9 5										
	♣ J 6 4 3 2										

The Bidding

“South and West pass. What is North's opening bid? (1♠.) East passes. Without support for partner's suit and no suit that can be bid at the one level, what does South respond? (1NT.) West passes. Can North conveniently show a second suit? (Yes, 2♥.) East passes. Which suit does South prefer? (Hearts.) What does South do? (Pass.) What is the contract? (2♥.) Who is the declarer? (North.)”

The Defense

“Who makes the opening lead? (East.) After listening to the auction, what would the opening lead be? (A trump.) Why? (Dummy is likely to be short in spades and declarer will want to ruff the spade losers in dummy.) What does East plan to do when back in the lead? (Lead another trump.) How can West help? (Lead back a trump after winning the ♥A.)”

The Play

“Review the steps in declarer’s PLAN. How does declarer plan to make the contract? (Declarer has five spade losers, one heart loser and one diamond loser. Declarer plans to give up a spade trick and ruff one or more spade losers in the dummy.)”

Conclusion

“When you think declarer would like to use dummy’s trumps to ruff losers, it is a good idea to lead trumps. The bidding often indicates this when declarer bids two suits and responder doesn’t like one of them.”

The Play

“Review the steps in declarer’s PLAN. How does declarer plan to make the contract? (Draw trumps after driving out the ♠A and then promote the diamond suit by driving out the ♦A.) How many losers does declarer expect to have when the dummy goes down? (Two, the ♠A and the ♦A.) What can go wrong? (The defenders may ruff some of declarer’s winners if trumps can’t be drawn quickly enough.)”

Conclusion

“When you can reasonably expect partner to get the lead and give you a ruff, a singleton can be a good lead. The fewer points you have, the more points you can expect from your partner.”