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What suit? Which card? When defending a contract you must make these two major decisions before making the opening lead. You must select the suit to lead, and then decide which card in that suit is “correct.” Some opening lead problems are very easy, others border on pure guesswork. Many on sheer courage. Although leading is not a precise art, study these guidelines and follow them. You should rarely be “lost.”

Standard Opening Leads Versus Suit Contracts

☞ THE TOP OF a sequence rarely costs a trick. The most attractive sequences are at least *three* cards together: AKQ, KQJx, QJ10x, or J109x. These are “attacking” leads designed to start forcing declarer to play his high cards early, establishing tricks for you later.

☞ IN THE ABSENCE of a sequence to lead, another standard attacking lead is to start with a low card* from a holding of three, four or five cards in a suit headed by one (or two) honors: Ex: Q1054, K9732, J652, or Q96432. You will notice there are no aces in these suggested suits. The theory here is to hopefully find partner with one or more honors in the suit led and develop fast tricks for you. *Tip: Do not lead low from aces vs. suits contracts.*

Timing is all important in defeating contracts.

- Timing means getting *our* tricks established before declarer gets *his* long suits going. Timing is especially critical when defending notrump, but attacking leads should normally be made against suit contracts as well. Not a game for the timid!
- Now you might say, “Well, isn’t leading an ace an attacking lead?” Yes it is, but unlike leading low from an honor which forces declarer to play his high cards early, the lead of an ace by you allows declarer to play his small cards on your ace, and saves *his* big cards to win your kings and queens. Simply stated, *aces were meant to capture kings and queens, not twos and threes.* In suit contracts, refrain from leading the ace, or, horrors, *underleading* an ace!
- Another form of “attacking” leads versus a *suit* contract is the lead of a singleton in the hopes of partner winning the trick and giving you a ruff. This type of defense works not only if partner can win that trick, but it also works if he can get in before declarer has extracted all your trumps. This lead of a singleton is deadly if it works, and devastating if it doesn’t, finessing partner or doing declarer’s work for him.
- A “passive” opening lead is leading from a worthless holding, or leading trump - *yuk!*

TIPS: ☞ IF PARTNER has bid a suit, or if he has *overcalled* in a suit, lead his suit!

☞ WHEN DEFENDING a notrump contract, lead fourth best from your longest suit, unless it is headed by a three-card sequence as above, then you will lead the top of course.

☞ When leading from a 3, 4, or 5 card suit headed by only one or two honors, lead low (fourth best), *not the honor!* The best card to lead is the *4th* best card in the suit.