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Opening Leads

Usually it is best to decide what suit to lead, and then decide which card to lead. If the auction does not favor a particular suit, then one usually picks the suit with the most attractive card combination, or the suit that avoids leading away from a tenace.

If the opponents have bid confidently, then a more aggressive lead is indicated. If they have just crawled into their contract (indicating they have little strength to spare) then a passive lead that does not give anything away is probably better. Many times, the best opening lead is the one that gives nothing away!

What Suit to Lead?

This is usually directed by the auction. The following are in rough order of preference.

- If partner has bid a suit, you should lead it unless you know looking at your hand something else is better.
- Leading long suits is less likely to give away a length trick, because you know that declarer is unlikely to have length. Leading from a long suit is particularly attractive at NT, and also good at suit because it may force declarer to ruff in his hand. Also, partner may be short and able to ruff at some point.
- A trump lead is often indicated when opponents have not shown a fit, and responder has taken a preference back to declarer's first suit. This usually means that responder has at most two of the trump suit, and one or two of declarer's second suit. Declarer is likely to use dummy's trumps to ruff his small cards in his second suit if you let him. Leading a trump cuts down dummy's ruffing power. BUT – Trump leads are rarely helpful if responder has freely supported declarer's suit.
- Leading a trump may be best if leading any other suit would likely give away a trick.
- It is usually wrong to lead declarer's second suit. Leading dummy's suit may be OK, because you are leading through strength, and because responders often bid bad 4 card suits (particularly majors).

Example of an auction indicating a trump lead.

Opener	Responder
1D	1H
2C	2D

Responder has fewer clubs than diamonds, and may have only 2 diamonds and one club. Leading a trump (diamonds) may prevent declarer from making his small trumps in dummy by ruffing losing clubs.

What Card to Lead?

General Rules

- Lead of a low spot card indicates an honor or a tenace, but not touching honors.
- Lead of a high spot card tends to deny an honor in that suit.

With touching honors, lead the highest touching honor. In each case below, the correct lead is underlined.

AK KQx KQJ QJ

With a sequence and an unconnected higher honor, lead the top of the sequence (usually at NT only):

AJ109 KJ109 Q109 K109 etc.

Note that the lead of an honor denies the next higher honor.

Difference between NT and suit leads.

In general, when leading a suit with two touching honors, at a suit contract lead the top honor, but at NT lead the fourth best. If you have a sequence of three honors, or two with a very long suit, lead the top honor at NT also.

When you lead the A at NT you are asking partner to drop the Q or J if he has it. Don't lead the A from a four-card suit unless you have AKQ!

What to lead at NT from a 6 or 7 card suit heading by the AK? Answer – it depends! Do you have an outside entry? Probably best to lead low. With a seven card suit and no outside entry, it may work out best to play A and K, and hope for a 7-2-2-2 distribution of the suit.

