

## Opening Leads Against Suit Contracts

The opening lead is often the most important play made by the defense. Tricks are gained or lost on the opening lead. It's all about timing. You need to take your top tricks or set up your potential tricks before the opponents can set up theirs.

When deciding on your opening lead, the first thing you should do is review the bidding. In the process of exchanging information with each other, the opponents are also giving you information about their hands. What can you learn from what they bid? If, for example, the opponents bid three suits and don't bid NT, they may very well be weak in the unbid suit. If they each bid a different suit and finally settle reluctantly in a third suit, declarer might be planning to cross ruff the hand. That kind of information can and should direct your opening leads.

### Which suit should you lead?

If partner has bid a major, overcalled a major or minor, or doubled an artificial bid by the opponents, lacking other attractive options, partner's suit should be your first consideration. (Note: You can never be criticized for leading partner's suit -- even if it turns out to be the wrong lead!)

### If you decide to lead partner's suit, which card should you lead?

- low from a three- or four-card suit headed by an honor
- low from a three- or four-card suit not headed by an honor
- high from a three-card suit not headed by an honor *if you've supported partner's suit*
- high-low from a doubleton.

### What should you lead if partner hasn't bid?

If partner hasn't bid or has bid a minor that might not be a "real" suit, you're on your own. Most often you should choose to lead an unbid suit, rather than one of the opponents' suits. These are all possible lead choices -- if they make sense based on the auction.

- a singleton. This works best if you have an early trump winner, another trump or two, and a reasonable hope of getting to partner when you regain the lead.
- \*Ace from AK and at least one other card in the suit, for example AKx. (\*Or lead the K from AKx if that's your partnership agreement.)
- the top card from solid or nearly-solid honor sequences. With Q J 10 6 or Q J 9 5, lead the queen; with J 10 9 8 3 or J 10 8 7, lead the Jack, and so on. Note: Holdings such as Q J 5 3 or 10 9 3 2 are not solid or nearly solid.
- the top of an **interior sequence**. With K J 10 9 4, the King is not part of the sequence since you don't hold the Queen, but you do have a 3-card interior sequence (J 10 9). Lead the Jack.
- low from a three- or four-card suit headed by an honor
- low from a three- or four-card suit not headed by an honor
- 4<sup>th</sup> best from a longer suit
- the *top* card from any doubleton, such as 8, 5 or A, 3

### What Shouldn't You Lead?

As I've said, every auction is different, so there are very few absolute rules when leading, but you should avoid leading

- the opponents' suits. Your goal is to set up your suits early, not theirs.
- a doubleton honor -- unless it's in partner's suit
- K from KQx. (K from KQJ is usually an excellent lead.)
- away from a King
- a singleton when you have four or more trump
- a singleton or doubleton when you'd be trumping with a natural trump trick (QJ10, for example)
- a trump -- without a very good reason. (A good reason might be that opponents have bid 3 suits and settled on the third and you have length in declarer's first suit. Declarer might be planning a cross ruff.)
- away from a tenace, such as AQx or KJ10
- away from an Ace on opening lead\*
- an unsupported Ace (no King) -- unless it's a doubleton (\*Note: If your only reasonable choice of a lead is a suit containing an unsupported Ace, lead the Ace, rather than leading away from the Ace.)

## Quick Quiz

1.	N	E	S	W
	1♦	X	Pass	
	1♥	Pass	3♥	Pass
	4♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

What is your opening lead with:

♠KQ32

♥Q86

♦AJ109

♣73

2.	N	E	S	W
	1♣	Pass	1♠	Pass
	2♠	Pass	4♠	Pass
	Pass	Pass		

What is your opening lead with:

♠2

♥K862

♦A432

♣Q732

3.	N	E	S	W
	1♥	Pass	3♥	Pass
	4♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

What is your opening lead with

♠5

♥986

♦QJ1076

♣8743

4.	N	E	S	W
				1♠
	Pass	1NT	Pass	3♣
	Pass	Pass	Pass	

What is your opening lead with

♠AQ109

♥QJ10

♦K92

♣J73

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## Answer Sheet

1. The lead of the ♣7 protects your honors in the other three suits and leads toward any club honors your partner might have.
2. The higher the honor you lead away from, the more likely you are to give away a trick. So the ♣2 is your safest lead.
3. You could lead the ♦Q from touching honors, but with three small trump, the singleton spade could be a better lead. Your hand is so weak, partner could easily have a spade winner or an early heart winner and be able to give you a spade ruff.
4. Based on your hand, declarer has a lot of spades he's going to want to trump. Lead clubs at every opportunity.

The examples for this lesson were taken from BridgeBears.com For more information about the best leads on these hands, go to <http://www.bridgebears.com/bridge-card-game/defense/openingleads.html>.