

## Defensive Carding

In bridge, "carding" refers to partnership agreements about the meaning of cards used to communicate with partner while playing defense. Carding includes both signals and discards.

**Signals** are used when following suit. There are three main kinds of defensive signals.

### Attitude Signals

Attitude signals are by far the most common. Attitude signals tell partner if you like or don't like a suit. In most cases, if you like a suit partner has led, you'd play *the highest card you can spare* in that suit. If you don't like the suit or don't want it continued, you'd play your lowest card in the suit. (Note: Some people by partnership agreement play upside-down attitude, which means a low card is encouraging and a high card is discouraging.)

### Count Signals

Count signals tell how many cards you have in the suit led and help partner figure out your distribution – and, consequently, that of the opponents. When a suit is led, to show an even number of cards in the suit, play high-low. To show an odd number of cards in the suit, play low-high. For example, the ♠K is led. Which card would you play first with ♠10972? Which card would you play first with ♠1092?

### Suit Preference Signals

Suit-preference signals tell which *other* suit you want partner to lead when you don't want her to continue with the same suit. You can use suit-preference signals:

- **when partner leads and dummy has a singleton or void in the suit led.** In that case, your attitude signal is not for the suit led, but for one of the other suits. A high card in the suit asks partner to lead the higher of the side suits. A low card asks for the lower side suit. ("Side suits" are the two suits that are neither the suit led nor trump.) Partner leads the ♥A. Dummy has a singleton heart. With ♠AK54 ♥864 ♦J986 ♣93, which heart do you play?
- **when giving partner a ruff.** Against 4♥, partner leads the ♦10 (from the bidding, probably a singleton). You take the ace. With ♠A54 ♥764 ♦A9862 ♣93, which diamond do you lead for partner to trump? If you play the 9, you're telling partner to come back to you in the highest-ranking remaining side suit. If you play the 2, you're telling partner to come back to you in the lowest-ranking side suit.
- **when setting up a long suit against opponent's notrump contract.** Against 3NT, you lead fourth highest from ♥A10987. Partner wins the ♥K and returns the ♥3. LHO plays the ♥J and you win the ♥A. Which heart do you lead to knock out declarer's ♥Q if you have the ♠A? Which heart do you lead if you have the ♣A?

**Discards** are cards you throw away when you can't follow suit or trump a trick. Discards can be used to tell partner which suit to lead (or not lead) at her next opportunity. Informational discards are only used at a defender's **first** chance to discard. Partnerships use a variety of different types of discards. The most common are

### Attitude Discards

- A **low card** in a suit tells partner not to lead the discarded suit.
- A **high card** in a suit tells partner to lead the discarded suit.

### Odd-Even Discards

- An **odd** card (9, 7, 5, 3) encourages the discarded suit.
- An **even** card (8, 6, 4, 2) discourages the discarded suit.
- A **high even** card shows preference for the higher side suit.
- A **low even** card shows preference for the lower side suit.

### Lavinthal Discards

- All discards deny interest in the suit discarded.
- A high card shows preference for the higher side suit.
- A low card shows preference for the lower side suit.

### Upside Down Attitude Discards

- A **low card** in a suit encourages the discarded suit.
- A **high card** in a suit tells discourages the discarded suit.

### Defensive Carding Tips

- Attitude signals are most important. If you have to choose between signaling count or attitude, choose attitude.
- Play as obvious a card as you can spare. Don't expect partner to know that your 5 is a high card because you also have the 2.
- Don't make defensive signals with cards that could potentially take a trick.
- If you have nothing to signal, try to discard an innocuous middle card - a 5 or a 6.
- Don't expect to always have exactly the card you need to signal. Just do your best.
- Agree with your partner about which carding system(s) you're playing.
- The discard system you use is less important than agreeing to a system with your partner and using it consistently.
- Always pay attention to your partner's defensive signals!!