

Opening Lead Out Of Turn: Which Option Should You Choose?

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If an opening lead is made out of turn, the first thing to do is call the director. The director will tell declarer that he has five options and will list them so that declarer can choose the one he wants. Declarer's eyes usually start to glaze over somewhere in the middle of this. Therefore, the purpose of this lesson is to list the five options, explain how each of them works, and give some guidelines about when you might want to choose each one.

Of course, the option that you choose will depend upon many factors: What the contract is; your holding in the suit that was led; partner's suspected holding in the suit that was led; etc. But please note that it is strictly declarer's choice of which option to choose. Declarer is not allowed to confer with his partner.

For convenience, this lesson will use the acronym OOTOL for "out-of-turn opening lead".

Option 1: Accept the opening lead and see dummy before playing from your hand.

So the OOTOL will stay as the opening lead. Next, your partner will put his hand down as dummy. You then play a card from your hand and play will continue normally from there.

When to accept this option:

- "Goldwater's" rule says that if your opponent isn't smart enough to know whose lead it is, he probably isn't smart enough to have made a good opening lead.
- You like the card/suit that was led and would like the lead of that suit to come through your hand and up to dummy. Example: You have Queen – Jack - Ten of the suit and suspect that partner might have the Ace.

Option 2: Accept the opening lead and become the dummy, making your partner the declarer.

Again, the OOTOL will stay as the opening lead. The next thing to happen is that you put your hand down as dummy. Your partner, who is now the declarer, will call a card from dummy and play will continue normally from there.

When to accept this option:

- Partner's hand is stronger than yours. Therefore, the hand may play better if partner's hand is the concealed hand.
- The same reasons as for option 1.

For these first two options, the OOTOL stays as the opening lead. For the remaining three options, the opening lead is made by your LHO.

Option 3: Have LHO lead, and require him to lead a card of the OOTOL suit. If you choose this option, the OOTOL card is picked up and put back into RHO's hand. LHO must lead a card from that suit, and RHO may play any card from that suit. In other words, RHO does not have to play the card that was led out of turn. This option lasts for one trick only: If LHO retains the lead, he may lead any suit to start the second trick. One caveat with this option: If LHO doesn't have a card of the OOTOL suit, then he may lead anything he likes. You don't get to choose another option!

When to accept this option:

- You like the suit that was led, but you'd like the lead to come from your left and up to your hand. Example: You have Ace – Queen of the suit and would like the lead to come from your left, into your tenace.

Option 4: Have LHO lead, and forbid him to lead a card of the OOTOL suit. If you choose this option, the OOTOL card is picked up and put back into RHO's hand. LHO must lead a card from any other suit. This restriction lasts for as long as LHO retains the lead. Once LHO loses the lead, then either opponent may lead any suit whenever they regain the lead. Whenever the OOTOL suit is led, RHO may play any card from that suit.

When to accept this option:

- You are weak in the suit that was led and would prefer the lead of any other suit. The hope is that preventing the lead of that suit will give you the time you need to dispose of your losers in that suit.

Option 5: Have LHO lead anything he wants, and leave the OOTOL card on the table as a penalty card. If you choose this option, RHO must play the OOTOL card at the first legal opportunity. So whenever the OOTOL suit is led, that is the card that RHO must play. If RHO cannot follow suit, that is the card he must discard. If you choose this option, the director will stay at the table until the penalty card is played.

When to accept this option:

- Having an opponent's penalty card on the table can be a big advantage: You can, at least to some extent, dictate when that card will be played. For example, if LHO chooses to lead the OOTOL suit, you know that this is the card that RHO will play. If LHO leads a different suit, then you can lead the OOTOL suit when you want to, forcing RHO to play that card. Or you may be able to run a long suit, forcing RHO to discard the OOTOL card when he can no longer follow suit.

Last word: Remember to always make your opening lead face down, and make sure that an OPPONENT confirms that it is your lead. This is the BEST way to avoid making an opening lead out of turn.