

Bridge tips

Inspired by Eddie Kantar

General tips

For beginners/intermediate players

1. Never, but never forget you are playing with a partner. It pays to consider what things may look like from partner's point of view, particularly when you are privy to information that partner isn't.
2. You cannot defend properly unless you remember the bidding.
3. You cannot defend properly unless you count.
4. You cannot expect your partner to defend properly if you make faces or show other signs of disapproval.
5. Keep one goal in mind: DEFEATING THE CONTRACT. Do not worry about overtricks unless you are defending a doubled contract or are playing Tournament Bridge.
6. The figure to focus on during the defense is the number of tricks you need at any given moment to defeat the contract. Defense is based on this figure.
7. Give your opening lead a little consideration. The fate of many a contract is determined by that one card. Use the bidding as a guide.
8. Make sure you and your partner are on the same wave length concerning leads and signaling conventions.
9. Don't compound a crime. If you, or more likely partner, has made an error, do not lose your cool. Many contracts can still be beaten after one defensive error, seldom after TWO.
10. If partner makes a nice play, a kind word or two at the end of the hand goes a long way.
11. If you can see the winning defense, take charge. Don't put additional pressure on partner if you don't have to.
12. As declarer, being able to take a trick with one of two equal cards, take the trick with the higher equal. The exception is at notrump when you have an AK stopper.
13. Defend passively if side suit tricks cannot get away; defend aggressively if they can. Reread this tip!
14. The bidding is the key to defensive strategy and to a great extent influences the play of the hand. Treat the bidding as you would a best friend.
15. Take your time before playing third hand to the first trick. It is often times the most important play you will make in the entire hand.

For advanced/expert players

1. You cannot defend properly unless you know what system the opponents are playing.
2. You cannot defend properly unless you watch the cards, particularly the little fellows.
3. A player who hesitates during the bidding is likely to have a problem hand. Keep the hesitation in mind.
4. The speed of the play, may be a clue to declarer's problem. When playing a 4-3 trump fit, play usually slows to a crawl.
5. When two possible defenses present themselves to defeat a contract, both equally likely, select the simpler. (Unless you are looking to make an appearance in a newspaper column.)
6. Keep partner's skill level in mind. Lead a weaker player by the hand.
7. Watch partner's spot card signals. The stronger your partner, the more meaningful they are.
8. Try not to guard against non-existent or highly unlikely dangers; guard only against those that are consistent with the bidding and play.
9. As declarer when leading a suit that has equal honors, lead the higher or the highest if you want it covered, lead the second highest if you don't want it covered. It works like a charm.
10. As declarer, play cards you are known to hold if it cannot cost you a trick. For example, if a queen is led, dummy has small cards, you have KJ doubleton and the ace is played on your right, play the king. NOT the jack.
11. As declarer, assuming the opponents are playing standard leads and standard signaling, concealing cards lower than the one that has been led or lower than the one played by your RHO confuses the count plus the meaning of the signal.
12. If you and partner lead Ace from Ace-King be forewarned that it is a trick one strategy only. After trick one the king is led from ace-king combinations. Also, the king is led from the ace-king in any supported suit or in any suit partner has bid, supported or not. It is also led when defending contracts at the five level or higher. The reason for this is that the ace is often led without the king at such a high level.
13. When signaling discouragement with equal spot cards, signal with the higher equal. With 987, signal with the 9. If you signal with the 8, you deny the nine!

Leading

Opening lead vs. suit

The card you select as your opening lead is probably the most important card you are going to play during the entire defense. Therefore, you should give it a little thought. Your focus should be on the likely distribution around the table (easier when there is mucho bidding), declarer's likely strength and the degree of trump fit that the bidding seems to indicate.

Of major concern is whether you should be making an aggressive or a passive opening lead. Again you must go back to the bidding to help you out.

- ♥ Does the dummy figure to have a long side suit?
- ♥ If there is a long side suit, how is it breaking? If it appears to be breaking evenly, make an attacking lead. If you have it well under control, a trump lead is usually best. Why? Because when dummy has a long suit it also has a short suit. Since the long suit cannot be established, declarer will try to use dummy's trumps for ruffing. Each trump you lead is one less loser that declarer can trump.
- ♥ Should I be looking for a ruff? Lead a short suit, particularly with a trump holdings that look like Kxx, Ax (x), but not with QJx or J10xx where ruffing costs you a natural trump trick.
- ♥ Should I be looking to give partner a ruff? This can work out well if you have a quick trump entry facing a partner who is marked with shortness in a side suit.
- ♥ Should I be trying to shorten the declarer's trump holding? This is usually a good idea when holding 4 trumps. If declarer has 5 trumps, say, and you can make declarer ruff twice, you will have more trumps than declarer.
- ♥ Should I just be sitting back and waiting for my tricks rather than attacking here, there, and everywhere? This is what you do against a balanced dummy where declarer cannot set up a long suit and will eventually lose any slow losers they have. Avoid breaking new suits unless it is safe to do so.
- ♥ Should I be leading a trump to cut down on ruffs in the dummy? Declarer has bid two suits, winds up in the second suit, and you have length and strength in the first suit. This is a good time to lead a trump.
- ♥ Has partner passed a low level takeout double? A trump lead is quasi- mandatory in this case. Partner must have a very strong trump holding to pass a low level takeout double. You should be looking to draw declarer's trumps so he can't make his little ones by ruffing.

Trump leads

- ♥ Don't even think of leading a trump when the opponents are in the throes of a misfit.
- ♥ Holding a balanced hand with broken strength in each suit, a trump lead from two or three small when dummy has given a single raise is usually best.
- ♥ With a strong sequence in trump (KQJ, QJ109), a trump lead is usually best.
- ♥ If partner is marked with a singleton trump, there is no point in leading a trump from Kxx because neither of you will be able to continue the suit. Try another lead and hope that partner will find the trump switch, if necessary.

Leading partner's suit

- ♥ With a terribly weak hand and having supported partner's suit with Qxx(x) or Kxx(x), lead the honor in case you need to switch to another suit. If you lead low, you may never get in again.
- ♥ With the ace and any length, lead the ace unless you feel you must get partner in at once to: (1) give you a ruff; (2) the dummy has bid notrump and you think dummy has the king. Underleads of aces when they don't work out require a very special relationship with partner.