

WINNING BRIDGE CONVENTIONS

DEFENSIVE CARDING & OPENING LEADS

Patty Tucker



An Honors eBook from Master Point Press

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Master Point Press
331 Douglas Ave.
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
M5M 1H2 (416) 781-0351
Email: info@masterpointpress.com
www.masterpointpress.com
www.bridgeblogging.com
www.teachbridge.com
www.ebooksbridge.com

ISBN: 978-1-55494-547-4

Editing: Patty Tucker, Shaleen Baze and Frances Daves

Layout: Natalie Hynson

Cover Design: Olena S. Sullivan/New Mediatrix

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Introduction

Bidding conventions are the single most widely taught bridge classes in the country. New players are fascinated by the variety of gimmicks they can learn to improve their game. Bridge conversations about a new bid, or twist to an old bid, that players credit with improving their results are common.

Once they have a little experience under their belt new players then turn to play of the hand...something they can learn and excel at all alone.

The last tool players usually learn is defense. Players spend half their bridge life defending and the majority of players only spend a tenth of their time (or less) working on their defense. On the convention card, used at a duplicate game, only the bottom fourth of the back cover of the card covers your partnership's defensive agreements.

So why does defense come last? Why is defense the last thing most people learn and the aspect of the game they talk least about?

I think the reasons are manifold.

- It takes two people, working in concert, to be successful.

- Though there are some rules and guidelines you can follow; it can't be memorized, **it must be thought through on every hand.**
- Every hand can potentially present a different problem.

In other words...it's hard. All bridge players **will** make mistakes, wrong decisions, misread a hand and lead partner astray. It's unfortunate but also unavoidable. Accept it and realize that though there are some exercises in logic that can be worked through as an individual, you and your partner will have to work together to improve your defense.

Just remember that you and your partner are on the same side. You both want the same result ...defeat your opponents. Share the ideas and techniques in this book with your partner, work through it together and go out and win!

Defensive Carding

Overview

There are three aspects to Defensive Carding:

- Technique;
- Rules; and
- Logic/Communication/Intuition.

2nd and 3rd hand play will round out our discussions of the basics of beginning defense.

Technique is the “rules” of how and when defensive carding is used to convey information to your partner and contains three components called “signals”. The carding signals are:

- Attitude;
- Count; and
- Suit Preference.

Rules are specific things you memorize and follow:

- Opening Leads;
- Rule of Eleven; and
- Present Count.

Logic/Communication/Intuition are the steps, theory and thought processes that will help you and partner accurately and profitably defend a hand.

- Logic is decisions you make based on your knowledge of the hand determined by the bidding, opening lead, probabilities and play.
- Communication is not only how you give information (the act of signaling), but which information you choose to tell partner.
- Intuition is decisions you make based on your knowledge of your partner, how the hand is being played by the declarer and your knowledge of your opponent's tendencies and proficiency.

You must pay attention to the bids that are made, the cards that are led and the cards that are played (yes, even those small ones that until now you thought didn't matter) in order to become an effective defender.

Our last step will be to put all of this information together and decide your best line of defense.

Opening Leads

Opening Leads

Opening leads are one of the most difficult choices you will make in defending a bridge hand. You have two decisions to make:

- What suit to lead? and
- Which card to lead in that suit?

In general:

- If partner has bid a suit, lead that suit.
- If partner has not bid a suit, leading a suit that the opponents have not bid is recommended.
- In a No Trump auction, if the opponents have not bid Stayman or made a Jacoby Transfer bid, and your suits are similar in length and strength, lead a major suit in preference over a minor suit.

After you have picked a suit to lead, follow the rules below. If partner did not bid a suit, I tend to favor standard and aggressive leads rather than passive leads.

Aggressive leads are:

- Top of touching honors (Ace, King, Queen, Jack and Ten);
- “Fourth from your Longest and Strongest”;
- Low from an honor;
- Singletons (occasionally);

- Never under-lead an Ace. Never lead an Ace without the King, lead another suit. If you have to lead the suit that has an Ace with no King, lead the Ace; and
- Lead high from shortness (2 or less), low from length (3 or more).

Top of touching honors means that, from any two honors which are next to each other in the order of high cards, you would lead the top card. Example (card to lead is underlined):

AK, KQ, 109

Fourth from your longest and strongest suit means that, from your best suit you would count from the top and lead the fourth card down. Example:

From K 10 8 5 2 you would lead the 5.

Low from an honor means that in a suit that contains an honor, but does not have four cards in it, you would lead low from that honor. Example:

From Q 7 3 you would lead the 3.

Singletons can work very well, but usually work best when you have a trump control (a trump high enough that you feel you have a chance to win a trump trick

with while you still have trumps left in your hand).
Example:

If you have the A 5 2 of trumps, you might lead your singleton in another suit because even if partner does not have the Ace of your singleton, you will be able to win a trick with your Ace of trumps and hopefully be able to play a card that partner can win, and then lead the suit you originally led allowing you to trump one of declarer's winners.

Against a NT contract only two things change concerning opening leads:

- You may under-lead an Ace. Do not lead the Ace unless you have four of the top five honors; and
- You must have a sequence (three touching honors or two top honors, missing one and the next honor) to lead an honor. Example: QJ10, KQJ, QJ9 or KQ10

The card you should lead from each of these holdings is bolded/underlined (“x” signifies any small cards 2 thru 8).

Against a Suit Contract	Against a No Trump Contract
K Q x	K Q x or with K Q x x
Q J x x	Q J x x or with Q J x
J 10 x x	J 10 x x or with J 10 x
10 9 x	10 9 x x or with 10 9 x
K J 10 x	K J 10 x
Q 10 9 x	Q 10 9 x
K 10 9 x	K 10 9 x
K Q J	K Q J x
A K x	A K x or with A K x x
A and any other cards, except the AK	A x x x or with A K J x
<u>A Q J x, lead another suit</u>	A Q J x
x x x or with x x or with x x x x or with x x x x x	x x x or with x x or with x x x x or with x x x x x
A K J 10	A K J 10 or with A K J x *

*Against a No-Trump contract the lead of an Ace (unless the suit was bid by partner) demands that partner play an honor (K, Q or J) if they hold one. If

they have no honor to play, partner should tell you whether they have an even or odd number of cards in the suit (this is called “Count” and is discussed in a later chapter). Playing your honor is called an “unblocking play”. This is similar to the idea in declarer play, of playing the high card from the hand from shortness. The idea is to get rid of your high card so that partner will be able to retain the lead and take tricks with his smaller cards in the suit.

The lead of a King asks partner to tell you whether or not they like the suit led (this is called “Attitude” and is discussed in a later chapter).

In general, if you have only two touching honors and length (four or more cards), lead low. If you have only two touching honors and shortness (3 or less) lead top from your touching honors with the exception that you should lead king when holding AK.

Opening Leads

Board 1

North Deals

None Vul

	♠ K 8		
	♥ K Q 6 3		
	♦ 8 4 3		
	♣ A Q 10 8		
♠ Q J 7 6 2	<div style="display: inline-block; background-color: #006400; color: white; padding: 10px; border: 1px solid black;"> N W E S </div>	♠ A 10 4 3	
♥ 10		♥ A 9 5	
♦ 9 2		♦ A K 10 7	
♣ 7 5 4 3 2		♣ J 9	
	♠ 9 5		
	♥ J 8 7 4 2		
	♦ Q J 6 5		
	♣ K 6		

West	North	East	South
	1 ♣	Dbl	1 ♥
Pass	2 ♥	Dbl	Pass
2 ♠	Pass	Pass	3 ♥
Pass	Pass	Pass	

Opening Lead: ♠Q, top of touching honors.

East's double is a take out double showing shortness in clubs, an opening hand and at least three cards in every other suit.

East's second double is still a take-out double, asking partner to bid and promising 4 spades and 4 diamonds or a really strong hand.

West picks spades and North competes to 3♥.

Opening Leads

Board 2

East Deals

N-S Vul

	♠ 9 7 6		
	♥ J 6		
	♦ A J 4 2		
	♣ K 6 5 2		
♠ A K 10 8 4	<div style="display: inline-block; background-color: #006400; color: white; padding: 10px; border: 1px solid black;"> N W E S </div>	♠ Q J 5 2	
♥ 8 7 5		♥ Q 3 2	
♦ K 7		♦ Q 10 6 5	
♣ Q 10 3		♣ 9 4	
	♠ 3		
	♥ A K 10 9 4		
	♦ 9 8 3		
	♣ A J 8 7		

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1 ♥
1 ♠	Dbl	2 ♠	3 ♣
Pass	Pass	Pass	

Opening Lead: ♠A, top of touching honors.


North's double is a negative double. It promises 4+ clubs and 4+ diamonds and at least six points. Once East raises to 2♠, South does not have to bid. Since South is short in spades and has four clubs he will bid 3♣.

Opening Leads

Board 3

South Deals

E-W Vul

	♠ K 10 9 7		
	♥ A 7 3		
	♦ 10		
	♣ A J 9 6 2		
♠ A 6 4		♠ 8 5	
♥ 6 5		♥ K 10 8 2	
♦ Q 8 7 5 2		♦ A J 4 3	
♣ 7 5 4		♣ K Q 10	
	♠ Q J 3 2		
	♥ Q J 9 4		
	♦ K 9 6		
	♣ 8 3		

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			Pass
Pass	1 ♣	Pass	1 ♠
Pass	2 ♠	Dbl	Pass
3 ♦	3 ♠	Pass	Pass
Pass			

Opening Lead: ♦5, fourth from your longest and strongest suit.

East must pass the first time because he does not have at least three spades and cannot make a take-out double.

After South bids spades, West can double showing 4+ hearts and 4+ diamonds. West picks diamonds, North competes to 3♠.

Opening Leads

Board 4

West Deals

Both Vul

	♠ K 8 4		
	♥ K 7 4 3		
	♦ J 10 8 7 2		
	♣ 5		
♠ 7 5 3	<div style="display: inline-block; background-color: #006400; color: white; padding: 5px; border: 1px solid black;"> N W E S </div>	♠ A Q J 9 2	
♥ J 2		♥ 8 5	
♦ Q 6 4		♦ A 3	
♣ 10 9 8 3 2		♣ Q 7 6 4	
	♠ 10 6		
	♥ A Q 10 9 6		
	♦ K 9 5		
	♣ A K J		

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass	Pass	1 ♠	2 ♥
Pass	3 ♥	Pass	4 ♥
Pass	Pass	Pass	

Opening Lead: ♠3, partner's suit and within that suit, low from length.

South bids game after partner's raise in hearts.

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Bridge students quickly discover that 'basic bidding' will only get them so far. To improve it is necessary to master a certain number of bidding conventions, and be prepared both to play them and to play against them. Each of the books in this series covers a number of useful conventions, explaining them carefully along with numerous examples and quizzes to help the reader understand what is being learned.

Included in this book: Opening Leads, Attitude, Count, Suit Preference, Rule of Eleven, Present Count, 3rd Hand Play, 2nd Hand Play, Logic/Communication/Intuition and Review Hands.



PATTY TUCKER (Dunwoody, Georgia) is an ABTA Master Bridge Teacher and co-founder of Whirlwind Bridge and Atlanta Junior Bridge. Her success at the bridge table culminated in her victory in the 2000 Baldwin Flight A North American Open Pairs with long-time bridge partner Kevin Collins. Patty and Kevin were married in 2006.