

A First Book of Bridge Problems



Patrick O'Connor

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A pair of round-rimmed glasses is placed on a bridge score sheet. The score sheet has a table with columns labeled '1', '2', '3', '4', '5' and a row labeled 'ROUND'. Below the table, the numbers '875', '72', and '577' are visible. To the right of the score sheet is a card game illustration showing two players at a table. The background is a soft-focus image of a white pitcher.

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Introduction

This is not a ‘how to play bridge’ book. It is a book of problems for novices who have completed an introductory course on bridge and may be already playing in club duplicates or supervised sessions. Experienced players recognize certain standard situations without having to think about it, whereas a novice will spend a lot of mental effort trying to work them out. The book will help the novice player to develop their skill at recognizing these situations.

The book comprises fifty problems, presented in approximate order of difficulty. The idea is to present bridge hands as you, the reader, would encounter them playing at the table. Each deal has a single theme. Unlike a textbook, where topics are introduced systematically, this book will give you no clue as to what type of play is required.

Planning the play at the first trick is emphasized in the book. Good players always pause after dummy comes down to plan the hand. Weak players tend to rush in without thinking. To this end there is a brief initial chapter entitled ‘Planning the Hand’.

South is always the declarer in these problems. Most of the time you are declarer but sometimes you are a defender sitting East or West. The bidding system is very standard and is summarized on [p. 111](#). The bidding is not usually relevant to the play of the hand but it is given as a reinforcement of standard bidding. If you play another system it doesn’t affect the problems, which are all about the play. Where points are mentioned, they are high-card points — you may add points for distribution if you wish using whatever method you were taught.

Each problem is presented with two of the four hands shown. There are several question points within the problem where the reader can attempt a solution or read further. The full deal is shown overleaf with the solution. The key point of each problem is spelled out at the end.

On [p. 113](#) you will find a glossary of common bridge terms in case you are not familiar with any of the jargon in the book.

Finally, there are themes and key points for each of the problems listed on [pp. 115-119](#). These enable you to look up a theme and find the problem(s) in which it occurs, or to see the key points of each problem.

I hope you enjoy the book.

Planning the Hand

Planning the play in notrump

These are the steps to planning the play in a notrump contract:

- Count your winners
- Decide whether you need to develop tricks
- Don't be afraid to give up the lead
- In general, establish your extra tricks before cashing sure tricks
- Plan your entries

An example of counting your winners:

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

South is in 3NT. West leads the ♣Q.

Look at both hands, suit by suit. In spades, you have the ace, king and queen that could win you three separate tricks. You might make two more tricks with the nine and the eight but this is not certain so you can't count them as winners. They may have to be developed. In hearts you have one immediate winner — the ace. In diamonds you have no winners! Tricky here — you won't have any certain winners until you have lost a trick to the ace but after that the remaining high cards will be winners. In clubs you have two winners. So you have six winners and must develop three more to make 3NT.

How can you develop three more tricks? Looking at spades, the opponents have five between them. About two thirds of the time one person will have three spades and the other two. Roughly a quarter of the time they split 4-1, but a 5-0 split is pretty uncommon. It doesn't hurt to remember these numbers. If they split 3-2 this will give you five spade tricks but still only eight winners in total.

The best bet is the diamond suit. As mentioned above, once you knock out the \heartsuit A you will have three winners, which is just what you need. So you plan to lead a diamond immediately when you get in and keep leading them until the ace appears. This will give you nine tricks. Then if the spades break 3-2 you will get two extra tricks as a bonus.

Planning the play in a suit contract

These are the steps in planning the play in a suit contract:

- Count your losers
- Decide whether you need to develop tricks
- Consider trumping losers in the short hand
- Draw trumps first unless you need to dispose of losers beforehand
- Don't be afraid to give up the lead
- Plan your entries

An example of counting your losers:

\spadesuit	J 10 2
\heartsuit	K 10 9 5
\diamondsuit	A 8 4 2
\clubsuit	7 3
\spadesuit	A K Q 4 3
\heartsuit	A 7 4
\diamondsuit	7 6
\clubsuit	A J 10

South is in $4\spadesuit$. West leads the \heartsuit K.

Find the hand with more trumps — in this case it is South. It is known as the long trump hand. Consider only losers in the long hand. In spades the ace,

king and queen will take tricks and the jack and ten in the short hand will take care of the four and three in the long hand, so no losers in spades. In hearts the ace will take a trick and the seven and four are losers, but the king will take care of one of them so you only have one loser. In diamonds the seven and six are losers but the ace will take care of one of them so you only have one loser. In clubs you have the ace plus two losers, neither of which can be covered by the short hand. So you have four losers — one in hearts, one in diamonds and two in clubs and you need to eliminate one of them to make your contract.

There are thirteen tricks in a deal. Take your four losers from thirteen and you get nine. That is, you expect to take nine tricks in 4♠. But you need ten, so you have to eliminate one of your losers.

Can you trump a loser in the short hand? Yes — since you have three clubs in the long hand, South, and only two in the short hand, North, you could trump one in the short hand. The next thing to consider is whether you can safely draw trumps first. If there is no reason to delay, you should always draw trumps first. In this case if you draw trumps there will be none left in dummy to trump a club. So you plan to lead the ♣A and then another club. When you regain the lead, you will be able to draw a round or two of trumps leaving one in dummy and then trump your losing club. This will give you ten tricks and your contract.

There are other possibilities here but trumping a loser in dummy is the best bet to eliminate a loser.

PROBLEM 1

To Answer

You are South, declarer in 1NT.

♠ A K 9
 ♥ 4 3 2
 ♦ 4 3 2
 ♣ 5 4 3 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 4 3 2
 ♥ A K 9
 ♦ A K 9
 ♣ Q J 10 6

West	North	East	South
all pass			1NT

You open 1NT (15-17 points) with your balanced hand. North, who also has a balanced hand and needs at least 8 points to invite to game, passes.

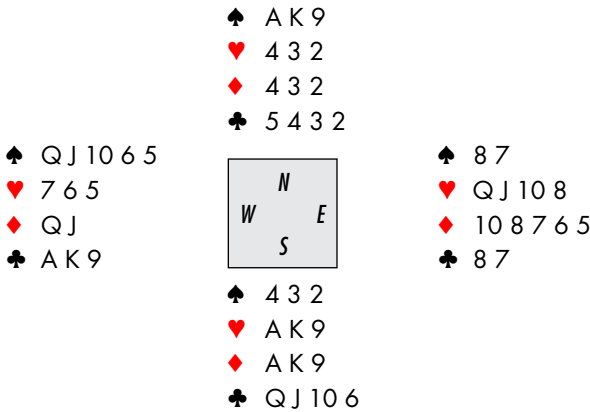
West leads the ♠Q. How will you make seven tricks?

Analysis

The first thing to do in notrump is to count your winners. You have two each in spades, hearts and diamonds. You need one more trick to make your contract.

West has probably led the ♠Q from a four-card or longer suit headed by the ♠QJ10, with the plan of taking several spade tricks after your ace and king have been knocked out. There are no extra tricks in spades available for you.

What is the best way to proceed?



No matter what you do in hearts or diamonds there is no way to make a third trick in either suit. Look at the diamond suit — if you play the ace and king, the queen and jack will drop but East will control the third round with the ten. In hearts you can lead small ones from dummy towards your ♥AK9 but East will play an honor each time so your nine will never win a trick.

The only suit that will yield a seventh trick is clubs, and all you have to do is knock out the opponents’ ace and king. You have to lose some tricks in spades, but you can still make your contract if you establish your club suit before you cash the winners in hearts and diamonds.

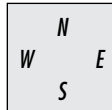
So win the opening lead with the ♠A in dummy and lead a small club to your ♣Q. West will take the ♣K and probably continue with the ♠J. Take this in dummy with the ♠K and lead another club to your ♣J. West will win this with the ♣A and cash three spade tricks: you will follow suit to the first and discard the ♥9 and ♦9 on the next two. Now your ♣10 and ♣6 will be good, giving you eight tricks.

Key Point

Develop tricks in suits where you hold more cards than the opponents.

You are South playing in 3NT.

♠ A K 10 8
 ♥ A K 10 7
 ♦ 8 3 2
 ♣ 5 4



♠ Q J 6
 ♥ Q J 3
 ♦ A J 4
 ♣ A 8 6 2

West	North	East	South
pass	2♣	pass	1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	2♦

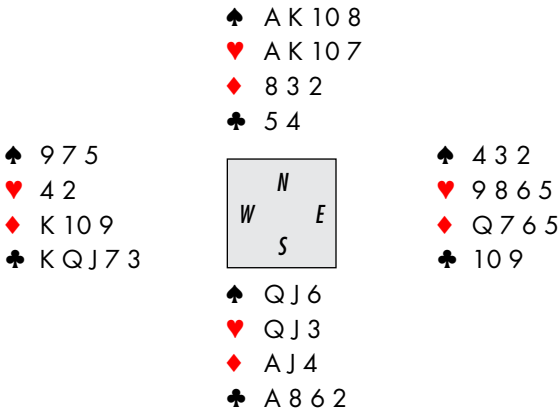
You open 1NT (15-17 points) and partner bids 2♣ (the Stayman convention) to see whether you have a four-card major. You reply 2♦, showing no four-card major. Partner, who has a good hand and doesn't want to miss out on game, bids 3NT.

West leads the ♣K. How do you plan to play the hand?

Analysis

As everyone tells you, it is important to plan the play at Trick 1. In notrump, the first thing to do is to count your winners. You have four in spades, four in hearts and the two minor aces — that's ten tricks.

So what's the problem? Why not start by cashing the nice major aces and kings in dummy?



If you cash the aces and kings of spades and hearts before thinking, you will not be able to take the fourth trick in either major. The third round in either suit will put the lead in your hand with no way to get back to dummy. The suits will be blocked. You will end up with only eight tricks.

The key to unblocking is to cash the winners from the hand with fewer cards in the suit first. So take the opening lead with the ♣A in your hand. Then cash the ♠Q and ♠J before crossing to dummy by playing the six to the ace. Then you can play the ♠K. Play the hearts in a similar fashion and collect your ten tricks.

Key Point

Play high honors from the short side first to unblock a suit.

Practice Your Declarer Play

Planning the play of a bridge hand is a whole lot easier if you are in a classroom and you know the topic — you are supposed to look for a finesse to take, or a loser you can ruff in dummy. But no one gives you such helpful hints when you're actually playing. You're on your own. It's a whole different situation.

This book of beginner-level play problems lets you practice in the comfort of your own armchair — with no opponents waiting impatiently for you to play a card. Work through each one, decide on your line of play, and then turn the page to check it against the solution. Each deal is fully explained, in simple, clear language, so it's easy to understand what you should do and, more importantly, why.



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