

# The Game of Bridge

Terence Reese



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**Terence Reese**



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# Foreword

A book for beginners written by Terence Reese really requires no explanation but there are so many on the subject that this one, even by the master, needs a certain introduction.

The purpose of this book is to provide a complete and objective account of how to become acquainted with the fascinating game of bridge. Reese is not concerned simply to give rules of thumb, as were so many authors both before and after him. He is concerned with providing a basic handbook of bridge that tells players the reasons for certain lines of bidding and play. The principles of strategy, starting with the fundamentals and working up to some quite advanced points are explained and no rules are laid down without the reasons for them being explained. Here you will find not only what to do but why you should do it.

*The Game of Bridge* is the basic book of any bridge player's library. It is the one I learnt from.

*Mark Horton*  
Editor  
Better Bridge Now

**PART I**  
**LEARNING TO PLAY**

# 1

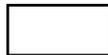
## Winning Tricks at No-trumps

Most books on bridge start with the bidding, but really 'Three No-Trumps' and 'Four Spades' cannot have much meaning until one knows how tricks are won and lost and what sort of cards are needed to land such a contract.

To make Three No-Trumps, as I expect you know, you have to win nine tricks. When there are no trumps, all the suits have equal rank in the play. We will begin by looking at various combinations in a single suit that may be held by declarer and dummy.

North (Dummy)

K 7 4



A Q 3

South (Declarer)

A simple combination that will win three tricks, no more, no less. If declarer has the lead he can play the ace, king and queen in turn and in any order.

Now add an extra low card:

North (Dummy)

K 7 4 2

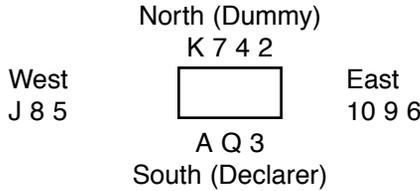


A Q 3

South (Declarer)

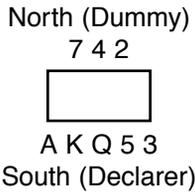
There are three top tricks, as before, but now the fourth card in the dummy represents a possible low-card trick, as it is called. Whether South will, in fact, make a fourth trick will depend on the distribution of the remainder

of the suit. He will hope for a 3-3 break, as occurs in the following diagram:



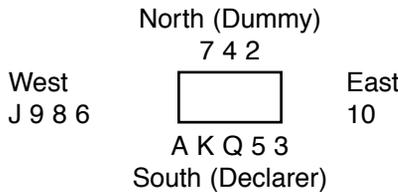
After the ace, king and queen have been played off, North's last card, often referred to as the 'thirteenth', will be a winner. Clearly, had the suit broken 4-2 against him, declarer would have made only his three top tricks.

Give declarer eight cards in the two hands, including the ace, king and queen, and his prospects of establishing low-card tricks will be much greater:



Now South will run all five tricks without loss when the adverse distribution is 3-2. Though it is looking ahead to a rather more advanced subject, it is worth mentioning at this point that the odds are well in favour of a 3-2 break of five outstanding cards, but are against a 3-3 break of six cards.

This last diagram brings us to another common way of establishing low-card tricks. Suppose that the full distribution were:



On the second round East would show out (that is, show void). Now South would know that he could not run five tricks, but at the same time he could be sure of establishing one long card. West must be allowed to win the third or fourth round, but South will make the remainder.

In the next example, declarer knows that he must lose at least one trick however well the cards may be breaking against him.

North (Dummy)  
 K 8 7 5 3  
  
 A 6 4  
 South (Declarer)

With five cards outstanding, including the queen, jack and ten, South cannot hope for more than four tricks. At no-trumps, if he were playing to establish this suit, he would probably give up either the first or second round, playing low from both hands. The technical name for that very common manoeuvre is 'ducking'. There are two reasons why, on most occasions, it would be better to duck an early round than to play out the ace and king: one is that by playing off the top cards you would set up two winners for the opponents if the distribution were 4-1; the other, that by playing the ace and ducking the next round you retain a high card as entry to dummy.

You may, by this time, be experiencing the slight impatience of a learner at golf who has to practise the grip and stance and wonders when he can have a hit at the ball. So, here is a full hand to play in Six No-Trumps which will give you the chance to combine some of the elements of play that we have been studying:

♠ A 7 6  
 ♥ K 4 2  
 ♦ A K 7 5 3  
 ♣ K 5

♣ J led

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K Q  
 ♥ A 8 5 3  
 ♦ 6 4 2  
 ♣ A Q 6 3

The contract being Six No-Trumps, you have to make twelve tricks. West leads the jack of clubs, which does you no harm.

The first step, always, in planning the play at no-trumps is to count the certain winners. On this hand they number, in top cards, three in spades, two in hearts, two in diamonds, and three in clubs. That is ten tricks, so two more are needed. There are no other high cards that can win the extra tricks, but there are chances of finding the additional tricks in the long suit, diamonds. You have eight cards in the two hands, which means there

are five against you. If they break 3-2 you can establish the suit for the loss of one trick.

That type of calculation is immediate and automatic for a player of any experience, and it is best to train yourself from the first to recognise the trick-taking potential of various simple combinations. Do not form the habit of counting up the cards of each suit as they are played. That advice is the opposite to that usually given to beginners, but the truth is that a player who has to tot up the cards after each round of a suit will never develop such talent as he may possess.

To return to our hand, South quickly assesses that he can make twelve tricks so long as he can find the diamonds breaking 3-2 against him. He must, however, take care that the opponents do not make more than one trick in the meantime. It would be very foolish to play off the aces, kings and queens in the other suits before giving up a diamond, for if that were done the enemy would have winners to cash when they gained the lead in diamonds.

The only other possible trap into which declarer could fall would be to make his winners in the wrong order. For example, suppose that he were to take the first club in hand with the queen and duck a diamond. Now the defence plays a heart and South puts on the ace. The situation is now:

♠	A 7 6									
♥	K 4									
♦	A K 7 5									
♣	K									
<table border="1" style="margin: 0 auto;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>			N		W		E		S	
	N									
W		E								
	S									
♠	K Q									
♥	8 5 3									
♦	6 4									
♣	A 6 3									

South needs the rest of the tricks, and if the diamonds are breaking he has them safely enough. But suppose he were to make the mistake of playing off the king and queen of spades while in hand; then, in effect, he would be depriving himself of a club winner, for after crossing to dummy to make the winners there he would not be able to cash the king of clubs and then return to the ace of clubs.

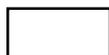
There is no short rule that will enable a player to avoid this kind of entry trouble. In the position above, the singleton honour in clubs on the table, and the high spades alone in the South hand, are signs that some care is needed in the matter of going from hand to hand.

## Winning tricks by promotion

We turn now to another way of establishing tricks that occurs in the play of almost every hand. This is by forcing out enemy high cards, so that cards of second and third rank held by declarer will be exalted to winning rank. As before, we will begin with the simplest example:

North (Dummy)

7 6 3



K Q J

South (Declarer)

By forcing out the ace, declarer can be sure of establishing two winners. If the opponents do not play their ace on the first round of the suit, South can play a second round.

In the next example there are two adverse winners to be forced out.

North (Dummy)

10 7 6



Q J 9 4 2

South (Declarer)

Now both ace and king must be conceded to the opponents but when those cards have gone South will have three winners to make.

You should be ready by now to follow the play of a complete hand on which South has to make Three No-Trumps.

	♠ K Q 8										
	♥ K 5 4										
	♦ 10 9 6 2										
	♣ A 5 3										
♠ 10 6 4 3	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ J 9 5
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ 9 7		♥ J 10 8 3									
♦ K 7 5		♦ A 4 3									
♣ Q J 10 4		♣ 9 8 2									
	♠ A 7 2										
	♥ A Q 6 2										
	♦ Q J 8										
	♣ K 7 6										

South being the declarer, West has to lead. As we shall see later when we come to study defence, it is generally sound policy for the defending side

to begin with its own longest and strongest suit. On the present hand, unless clubs had been bid against him, West would normally lead the queen of clubs, choosing the top card from a sequence.

Following the prescribed practice South begins by counting his certain winners. There are three in spades, three in hearts, and two in clubs. There is a possibility of an extra trick in hearts, should that suit break 3-3. Given time, there is a certainty of two extra tricks in diamonds, once the ace and king have been forced out. We say 'given time' because at the beginning of the play South cannot be sure that he will have time to establish his diamonds before the opponents run the five tricks they need to defeat the contract.

The next stage of the general assessment that should be made at the first trick is to examine where danger lies. The weakness on this hand is evident: it is in the club suit, which the opponents have led.

Whether the opponents will be too fast and too strong in clubs to allow South to develop his diamonds at leisure cannot be determined at this point: it depends on whether the clubs are 5-2 or 4-3 and on how many entries are held by the player who has the long suit.

Having passed through the necessary and invariable stages of the planning (count the winners, look for other possible tricks, study the dangers), South is ready to consider his play to the first trick. Here we come to another pillar of play in no-trumps, the hold-up. While declarer could capture the club lead in either hand, it is better to allow the opponents to hold the first trick. The exact purpose of that manoeuvre – not actually essential to the winning of this contract – will be understood more clearly in later examples, so I will not digress now.

South lets the queen of clubs win, then, and takes the next club (for West will probably continue the suit) on the table. It would be possible, but by no means good play, to lead off three top hearts now to discover whether that suit was breaking and would provide the ninth trick. But since declarer still has a stopper in clubs, the hearts can wait; diamonds should come first.

To the third trick declarer leads a low diamond from the table. The best defence now is for East to go up with the ace of diamonds and lead his third club. By playing the ace of diamonds, East preserves his partner's entry in the suit. That is good play, because West has the long club and it would not suit the defence for West's entry in diamonds to be knocked out before the club trick had been established.

When this third round of clubs has been played, and won by the king, declarer must consider once again whether to seek his extra trick from hearts or diamonds. If it looked as though one opponent held two good

clubs and the remaining entry in diamonds, he would be right to abandon the diamonds, but that possibility is in fact ruled out. Both opponents having followed to three rounds of clubs, there can be only one left. (That sort of calculation, I repeat, should be automatic. It should not be necessary to count up that twelve cards have gone – you should know instinctively that after three rounds, to which everyone has followed, there is just one card left.)

If diamonds are continued, what is the worst that can happen? The opponents have made one club (the first trick) and the ace of diamonds. If they make the king of diamonds and the thirteenth club, that will be four tricks in all and the contract will be safe.

As the cards lie, it would not affect the result if South were to cash three top hearts before leading the second diamond. That is only because the long heart is held by East and not by the player who has the diamond entry. It would, however, have been fatal for South to play the top hearts at the beginning of the hand: then East would have cashed a heart winner when in with the ace of diamonds, and that would have meant five tricks for the defence – two diamonds, two clubs and a heart.

Before leaving this had, we can perhaps look again at the hold-up in clubs, which up to now may appear to you not to have been very significant. Nevertheless, one advantage appeared when you won the third round of clubs, in that you then knew more about the distribution than you would have done if you had won the first round of clubs with the king and the second with the ace. Had you done that, you would not have been able to tell whether the suit was distributed 5-2 or 4-3, and that would lessen the confidence with which you were able to plan the rest of the play.

The hold-up would have been of real importance had the club suit been distributed as follows:

	A 5 3	
Q J 10 8 4		9 2
	K 7 6	

Now suppose that South wins the first club and plays on diamonds as before. East goes up with his ace and leads a second club, clearing the suit. South can hold up now, but it is too late: West has the second entry in diamonds, together with sufficient tricks in clubs to beat the contract.

A hold-up at the first trick makes all the difference. When East comes in with the ace of diamonds he has no clubs to lead, so declarer stays a move ahead.

This is not an altogether elementary example of hold-up play, so do not despair if it takes you a little while to master the point. The play appears in a simpler form in the next section.

## Winning tricks by finesse

We have been concerned so far with the winning of tricks by force. Declarer has either had the top cards or has forced out top cards held by the opposition. Another way of coming to extra tricks is by taking advantage of the positional factor. This is the play known as a finesse, and this is the simplest form:

	A Q	
K 6		7 3
	5 4	

South leads the five from hand, West plays the six, and the queen is played from dummy. Owing to the favourable position of the king, the queen holds: the finesse has won.

The ace-queen holding in this example is called a tenace, and so, in a looser sense, is West's king-six. The two holdings have this in common, that it is more profitable to lead towards them than away from them. Obviously, in the present example, if he first lead were made from North, only the ace would take a trick.

This principle of leading towards honours rather than away from them has very wide application. North's holding in the next diagram would not be described as a tenace, but it is equally important to lead the suit from the other hand.

	K Q 7 3	
A 8 5		J 10 2
	9 6 4	

So long as he leads twice from his own hand South can make three tricks from this combination. He begins by leading the four; West, as a rule, will play low, and the king will win. South then returns to hand in another suit and lead the six. West will probably take his ace now, and owing to the favourable break the king and seven will be good for two more tricks.

	Q J 7 3	
K 10 5		A 9 2
	8 6 4	

Here, again, South must lead up to dummy's honours. On the first round South leads the four, fetching the five, jack and ace. When next in, South leads again towards the Q-7-3 and eventually makes both the queen and the long card.

Declarer will often have to finesse twice against the same card. These are two parallel examples:

(i)                    6 4 2 A 9 7 3            Q 8 5 K J 10	(ii)                    6 4 2 10 9 7 3            K 8 5 A Q J
--	---

In (i) South leads twice from the dummy in order to profit from the position of the queen. In (ii) he finesses twice against the king, making all three tricks.

A finesse can also be taken against two cards. The following diagrams present what are known as double finesses:

(iii)                    A Q 10 K J 4                9 7 6 2 8 5 3	(iv)                    K J 7 A Q 6 3                10 8 4 9 5 2
--	---

In (iii) the play is to lead the three and finesse the ten if West plays low. Should the ten lose to the jack, South will try a finesse of the queen next time. As the cards lie in the diagram, the ten will hold, and a subsequent finesse of the queen will produce three tricks.

In (iv) the play is substantially the same, though here, of course, one trick must be conceded to the ace.

Still more common is the combination finesse in which the player expects to lose the first round of the battle but prepares the way for a second finesse that is more likely to succeed. This is the basic position:

A J 10
K 6 4                    Q 9 5 3
8 7 2

South begins with a finesse of the ten, which will be captured by the queen. On the next round the finesse of the jack will win. As anyone who is used to odds will understand, this combination finesse represents a 3:1 on chance of establishing a second trick, for it will fail only when both cards, the king and queen, are held by East.

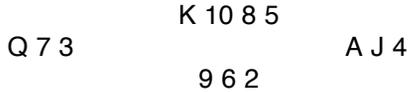
Many plays of this sort begin with a deep finesse. Thus, in the example above, give North the nine instead of the ten.

A J 9 4
K 10 5                    Q 8 3
7 6 2

South leads the two and West, we will say, follows with the five. Now South could put in the jack, a play that would gain if West had K-Q-x (the x standing for any small card). A better chance, however, is to begin with the deep finesse of the nine. That will lose to the queen, but on the next round a finesse of the jack will succeed; with the suit breaking 3-3, South

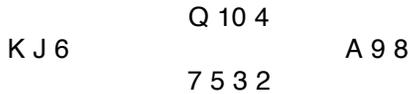
will win three tricks. The finesse of the nine with this combination gains when West has K-10-x or Q-10-x, and that, self-evidently, is a better chance than that he should have K-Q-x.

Another combination finesse that begins with a deep play is seen in this example:



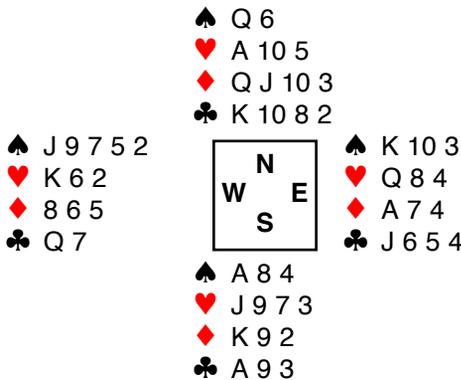
On the first round South should finesse dummy's eight. That loses to the jack. When next in, South leads a low card again and West plays the seven. In a sense it is a guess whether South should try the king or the ten now, but the superior play, by far, is to finesse low a second time. This method of playing the suit by way of two deep finesses gains whenever West has queen or jack, loses only when East has both those cards.

A combination finesse also arises from this frequent holding:



The best chance to develop a high-card trick from dummy's holding is to play West for the jack ad at least one of the top honours. As the cards lie, the finesse of the ten loses to the ace. On the next round South leads through West's king-jack up to dummy's queen-four. Given time, South will make the queen and the 'thirteenth' as well.

You will be impatient, by now, to play another full deal on which you can try out your new-found techniques.



The contract is again Three No-Trumps by South. As we remarked before, it is generally sound tactics for the defence to open its longest suit. On this

occasion West would lead spades, and the conventional lead from such a holding is the fourth highest card – the five.

Although, on a hand of this type, not much progress can be made in the way of counting certain winners, declarer should not neglect to make a general survey when the dummy goes down. The certain tricks in top cards number only four. There are, however, three sure winners in diamonds once the ace has been forced out. The hearts also present possibilities. This combination of A-10-x opposite J-9 has the same potential value as A-J-10 opposite x-x-x; it may well be possible to develop the suit for the loss of only one trick.

As to clubs, there too we can see the chance of an extra trick, though there will probably not be time to develop it.

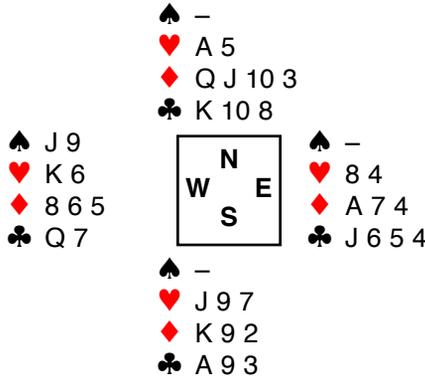
Finally, if West has led away from the king of spades the queen will hold in dummy. The queen should be played for that reason, and South cannot proceed far with any plan until he has discovered the fate of that card. As the cards lie, the queen is covered by East's king.

(You may think that South would have done better to play low from dummy – that East would have had to put on the king just the same. But that is not so: East would finesse the ten, keeping his high card to kill the honour on the table.)

When East plays the king of spades on the queen at trick one South recognises that he must hold up the ace. He will have to develop tricks in the other suits and he must hope that West (who probably has the long spades) does not hold the ace of diamonds. In the hope of exhausting the short hand of spades he holds up his ace until the third round.

On this third spade a discard has to be made from dummy, and it is fairly obvious that a club is the card that can best be spared.

Now the question is whether to play on hearts or diamonds next. The diamonds will produce three certain tricks, it is true, but the hearts have to be developed as well, and South will probably have to lead them twice from his own hand; in addition, he may want eventually to be in his own hand to play off the thirteenth. Diamonds, on the other hand, can be led equally well from North or South. The right play at trick four, therefore, is to lead the three of hearts and finesse dummy's ten. Let us observe the position after that finesse has lost to the queen:

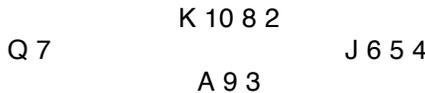


East, who is on lead, cannot profitably attack clubs, and his most likely play is a small diamond. He may entertain a slight hope of finding his partner with the king; in any event, the play is safe.

South puts in the nine of diamonds, which holds the trick, and pursues the hearts, leading the jack from hand. West may cover this with the king; if he does not, South will run the jack, then play another heart to the ace. The last heart will be good now, and all that South has to do is drive out the ace of diamonds. He will make, in the end, one spade, three hearts, three diamonds and two clubs.

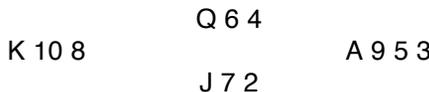
## Letting the other side lead

The club distribution on the last hand introduces a new principle – namely, that it often pays to let the opponents be the first to attack a suit. The clubs, you may recall, were originally as follows:



Suppose that East, who had the lead several times, had opened up the clubs. He would have led a low card, South would play low, and West’s queen would be won by the king. That would leave South with a major tenace, the ace-nine, over East’s jack-six. South, in fact, would make three tricks in the suit without loss. If he has to attack the suit himself he cannot make three tricks without conceding a trick to the jack.

The same principle applies to weaker holdings. In the next diagram declarer and dummy have the cards previously held by the defenders.



If declarer has to attack this suit he will make no tricks as the cards lie. If either East or West has to play first, then South will make one trick however the cards lie. Suppose, for example, that West leads the ten; dummy plays low, and if East goes up with the ace, the queen and jack will be equals against the king.

In that last example an extra trick is certain whichever opponent has to lead. With the next, very common, holding, the extra trick is certain if West has to lead, only probable if the lead comes from East.

J 6 4

A 10 5

If declarer has to attack this suit himself he will usually make two tricks only if East holds both king and queen.

If West opens up the suit, then South is assured of two tricks. He must play low from dummy, the queen or king will force the ace, and the jack and ten will then be worth a second trick.

If East leads, South will play low and West may win with the queen or king. That will leave South with a finesse position against the other honour. He will make a second trick unless both king and queen were over him from the first.

There are numerous combinations of this sort, on which the chance of an extra trick is at any rate improved by forcing the opponents to lead. Many of the tactical manoeuvres described in Part IV are designed towards that end.

## Technique in finessing

Declarer sometimes has a close decision whether to take a finesse or to play for the drop of outstanding honours. This is a combination that you will have to tackle hundreds of times in your bridge career:

7 6 2

A K J 9 8 3

You can either play for the queen to drop in two rounds or you can take a finesse of the jack. This will be the winning play if East has Q-x-x.

There is an old saying, 'Eight ever, nine never', meaning that with eight cards missing the queen declarer should finesse, but with nine cards not. The first part of that saying is more true than the second. With nine cards the odds do just favour the play for the drop, but in practical play there are often indications that point to a 3-1 break.

One mistake to avoid with this combination is the finesse on the first round. The ace or king should be laid down first, for West may have a singleton queen. That is equally true when only eight cards are held, or even fewer:



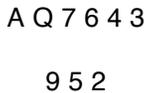
It is apparent that if declarer leads low and finesses the jack he will make only two tricks. Playing off the king first, he brings down the singleton queen;

Another element of safety appears in the following examples:



In example (i) the missing cards are J-x-x-x. Declarer must lay down the ace or queen first, for then he can be sure of picking up the jack, whichever opponent shows void. The second example is different, for here, if East has J-10-x-x, declarer can do nothing about it. He should therefore lay down the king first, so that if necessary he can pick up West's J-10-x-x.

In another group of safety plays, the play varies according to how many tricks are required.



Suppose that South needed all six tricks. He would have to finesse the queen, playing for West to hold K-x. But suppose that South could afford to lose one trick: then he would have to play differently, as will be seen from a comparison of these two diagrams:



If the cards lie as in (iii), then a finesse of the queen will bring in five tricks and so will the play of the ace, to be followed later by a lead up to the Q-7-6-4-3. In (iv) the finesse of the queen will be fatal. So the safety play, when five tricks are needed, is to lay down the ace on the first round.

Safety plays of this sort have numerous variations. In the average text-book they occupy more space than their practical importance deserves. There can be no question, however, about the importance of another form

of safety – that of leading a low card for a finesse in situations like the following:

(v)	A Q 10 4		(vi)	A J 7 3 2
	K 6	9 7 3 2		K 8
	J 8 5			Q 5 4

In example (v) it will cost South a trick if he leads the jack either on the first round or the second. West will cover the jack with the king and East's nine will win the fourth round. Similarly, in (vi) it can only lose to lead the queen. West will cover and East's ten will be promoted.

## When a finesse is not the best play

There are some situations in which a finesse is playable but not the best way of establishing tricks. For example:

A 7 4

Q J 6 3

South can lead the queen here, and if his object is to make two tricks without losing the lead that will be the right play. But if he wants to make three tricks the finesse is a mistake: it is better to play the ace and then up to the queen-jack. Study these two distributions:

(vii)	A 7 4		(viii)	A 7 4
	K 8 5	10 9 2		10 9 5 2
	Q J 6 3			K 8
				Q J 6 3

In (vii) the cards are placed as favourably as they can be, but South cannot make more than three tricks. Suppose that he leads the queen: West will cover the honour on this round or the next, and the defence will win the third round. The same tricks would be made if declarer played the ace and then towards the queen-jack.

In (viii) declarer will again make three tricks if he plays the ace and then up to the honours; but if he leads the queen and finesses he will finish with only two tricks.

The next example would also deceive an inexperienced player:

	A Q 7 3
10 8 5 4	K 9 6
	J 2

To make three tricks, the maximum, South must begin with a low card from the table. It will not help East to put up the king, beating the air. So the jack wins and South leads back a low card to the A-Q-7. He does not

finesse the queen, for he can place East with the king; he ducks, playing the seven, and on the next round East's king falls under the ace. If South begins by leading the jack here, he makes a trick fewer.

The general principle, then, is that a high card should not be led for a finesse except when the intermediate cards are so strong that declarer can afford a cover by the defence (with Q-9-x opposite A-J-10-x, for example). When there is no finesse at all, follow the general policy of leading towards honour cards. If the cards lie well you can make three tricks with as moderate a holding as the following:

	A 5 3	
10 8 7		K J 9
	Q 6 4 2	

A low card away from the ace (the ace can be played first, but it is usually well to keep that control) wins three tricks when the king is in front of the queen and the suit breaks evenly. To lead the queen from hand with this combination would be a real beginner's mistake, and at page 17 you are no longer a beginner.



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