

DEMYSTIFYING DEFENSE



PATRICK O'CONNOR
FROM THE AUTHOR OF 'A FIRST BOOK OF BRIDGE PROBLEMS'

DEMYSTIFYING DEFENSE



PATRICK O'CONNOR

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Master Point Press
214 Merton St. Suite 205
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M4S 1A6
(647)956-4933

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Introduction

This book is all about defense. At first, defense is a mystery for bridge players. The aim of this book is to demystify it gradually.

There's no question that defense is generally regarded to be the most challenging aspect of bridge. When dummy is tabled the declarer can see all the assets of his side and can count potential winners and losers, whereas a defender can see dummy and only half his side's assets. Also, during the play, declarer has sole charge of his assets, whereas defenders must combine effectively to execute a successful defense.

The book starts with introductory chapters on Opening Leads, Third-Hand Play and Second-Hand Play, each with a quiz at the end. Then follows a chapter on Defensive Signals.

The main part of the book comprises 40 'over the shoulder' deals where I invite you to defend with me, trick by trick, via questions and answers.

The deals are presented in approximate order of difficulty. The idea is to present defensive situations as you, the reader, would encounter them playing at the table. The hands are untitled so there is no clue as to what type of play is required.

South is always the declarer in these problems. As a defender you are either West or East. The bidding is shown because it is very important for the defenders to listen carefully to it — it contains a great deal of useful information. The bidding system used in this book is very standard.

On [p. 129](#) you will find a glossary of common bridge terms in case you are not familiar with any of the jargon in the book.

Finally, the themes for each of the deals are listed on [p. 133](#).

I hope you enjoy the book.

Patrick O'Connor

March, 2018

1. Opening Leads

The defense gets to fire the first shot and it is important to make it a good one. It is impossible to make perfect leads all the time, but there are guidelines you can follow. The first thing to do is listen to the bidding. The opponents may have bid several suits along the way. Your partner may have bid a suit or supported your suit. All calls give you some information about the hand.

Think about the bidding. If an opponent passed in first seat it indicates less than an opening hand. If the next player also passes you can say roughly that both first and second seat have 10 or fewer points each. So where are the rest? Say a player opens the bidding with 1♥. This is the equivalent of saying to partner, 'I have at least an opening hand with five hearts and I don't have five spades or six of a minor. Please tell me about your hand with a particular reference to a fit in hearts.' There are numerous possibilities for opening bids or passes. The trick is to get into the habit of mentally translating them and acting on the given information.

Against a Notrump Contract

The play and defense of notrump contracts usually involves developing tricks in long suits. It is a race between declarer and the defenders to see who can develop their side's tricks first.

Often there is information from the bidding telling which suits the opponents hold. You usually need to look elsewhere for your side's suits. Keep an eye open for suits that they didn't bid, even by inference. For example, if an opponent doesn't use Stayman, that suggests no great length in the majors.

Selecting the suit

The first task is to select a suit to lead. If partner has bid a suit, it is attractive to lead it. Usually you avoid leading suits bid by declarer or dummy. If your side hasn't bid, there may be just one unbid suit and this is usually a good choice. If there is a choice of unbid suits, your holding in those suits may indicate which one to select. For example, if you have a suit headed by a sequence of honors this would be a good choice. If declarer and dummy have only bid notrump, it is usually best to lead a major.

Leads from a four-card suit with one or two non-adjacent honors are potentially dangerous because partner may have nothing in the suit and the lead may allow declarer to win a cheap trick. It may be better to make a passive lead, which is a lead from a worthless three- or four-card suit with no honors, hoping not to give a trick away.

Make a passive lead against 6NT or 7NT — unless of course you can defeat the contract straight away!

Selecting the card

The second task is to select a card to lead from the chosen suit. The standard leads are:

Top of a sequence of adjacent honor cards

For example: AK, KQ, QJ, J10.

It is better if there are three or more cards in sequence or a near sequence:

AKQx, AKJx, KQJx, KQ10x, QJ10x, QJ9x, J109x, J108x

Lead the top card from these holdings. These are attacking leads but will not give declarer cheap tricks.

Second highest when you have an internal sequence in which there is a gap after the highest card

AJ10x, A109x, KJ10x, K109x, Q109x

Fourth highest from a four-card or longer suit headed by an honor

e.g. the 5 from K10852

Low from three cards to an honor

e.g. the 6 from Q86

Top of three or four small cards

e.g. the 8 from 8642

Top of a doubleton

e.g. the 8 from 86

Against a Suit Contract

Defeating a suit contract usually depends on making quick tricks. The guidelines are much the same as above but there are extra considerations when leading against a suit contract.

You might consider leading a singleton in order to get a ruff. This would be particularly attractive in a suit that partner has bid.

Depending on the auction you may decide to lead a trump to reduce declarer's ruffing power. This would be indicated, for example, when you have a strong holding in declarer's second suit, and you know he is going to want to ruff that suit in dummy.

Do not underlead an ace against a suit contract. Also avoid leading an ace unless it is accompanied by a king. Both these leads are very likely to help declarer.

Opening Lead Quiz

You are West for all these problems.

1. After the following auction, which suit do you lead? Which card in the suit?

West	North	East	South
pass	pass	pass	1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

We know that declarer has 15-17 high-card points (HCP) and responder (North) has enough to raise to game, say 10-12 HCP. Looks like they have 25-30 HCP, leaving 10-15 for our side. We also note that North didn't use the Stayman convention so he probably doesn't have a four-card major.

- a) ♠ K J 3 2 ♥ Q J 10 9 ♦ 10 9 8 ♣ J 2
b) ♠ K J 9 3 2 ♥ Q 9 2 ♦ Q J 2 ♣ 9 7
c) ♠ A K ♥ 10 9 ♦ Q 10 4 3 ♣ Q J 10 9 8

2. After the following auction, which card do you lead in partner's suit?

West	North	East	South
pass	pass	1♥	1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

What do we know? Partner has an opening hand that may include as little as 11 HCP with good distribution. Declarer has shown 15-17 HCP with a heart stopper and responder has enough to raise to game, at least 10 HCP. There has to be a good reason to lead anything other than partner's suit.

- a) ♠ J 10 3 2 ♥ Q 7 6 5 ♦ 10 9 8 ♣ J 2
b) ♠ J 9 8 3 2 ♥ 10 8 2 ♦ Q J 2 ♣ 9 7
c) ♠ 10 4 ♥ J 10 3 ♦ 10 7 4 3 ♣ Q 10 6 2
d) ♠ J 10 ♥ 9 7 5 3 ♦ 10 7 4 3 ♣ Q 10 6

- e) ♠ J10 ♥ 975 ♦ 10743 ♣ Q1062
 f) ♠ J104 ♥ 92 ♦ 10743 ♣ Q1062
 g) ♠ AKQ109 ♥ 9 ♦ 10743 ♣ Q106

3. After the following auction, which suit do you lead? Which card in the suit?

West	North	East	South
			1♣
pass	1♥	pass	1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

South's rebid of 1NT shows a minimum opening of 12-14 HCP and denies four hearts. North shows at least four hearts and enough for game, approximately 13+ HCP.

- a) ♠ KJ32 ♥ Q76 ♦ QJ108 ♣ J2
 b) ♠ KJ932 ♥ K92 ♦ Q102 ♣ 97
 c) ♠ A10 ♥ 9753 ♦ Q1043 ♣ Q106

4. After the following auction, what do you lead?

West	North	East	South
			1♠
pass	2♠	pass	4♠
all pass			

What do we know? South needed five spades for the opening bid and North's response shows 6-9 points (including distribution) and at least three spades. Therefore South's rebid shows 18+ points. Looks like our side had better try to set up our suits.

- a) ♠ J32 ♥ Q1076 ♦ KQ108 ♣ J2
 b) ♠ 983 ♥ KJ942 ♦ Q1072 ♣ 7
 c) ♠ 83 ♥ K753 ♦ Q1043 ♣ Q106

5. After the following auction, what do you lead?

West	North	East	South
			1♠
pass	1NT	pass	2♣
all pass			

South's bids show a minimum opener with five spades and at least four clubs. North has shown 6-9 points, no spade fit and a preference for clubs. A 2♠ bid by North would have shown a preference for spades but no extra strength.

a) ♠ 10 2 ♥ A 10 7 6 ♦ K Q 10 8 ♣ 10 3 2

Opening Lead Quiz Answers

1.
 - a) Hearts. The honor sequence is better than the spade suit with non-adjacent honors. Lead the ♥Q.
 - b) Spades, because it is a five-card suit. Lead the ♠3, the fourth highest.
 - c) Clubs. Go for the honor sequence. Lead the ♣Q. You want to establish the club suit and the spades will provide entries to cash the clubs.

2.
 - a) ♥5, the fourth highest from an honor.
 - b) ♥2, lowest from three to an honor.
 - c) ♥J, top of a sequence.
 - d) ♥9, top of four small.
 - e) ♥9, top of three small.
 - f) ♥9, top of a doubleton.
 - g) ♠A. There is a good reason to not lead partner's suit. You are hoping to take the first five tricks in spades.

3. Because the other suits have been bid, it is a choice between spades and diamonds.
 - a) ♦Q. The diamond sequence is much better than the broken spades.
 - b) ♠3. The fourth best is good from a five-card suit.
 - c) ♦3. The best of a bad lot.

4.
 - a) ♦K. An honor sequence is always a good lead.
 - b) ♣7. Lead the singleton to try to get a ruff.
 - c) ♠3. The trump lead is the safest here. It is better than leading away from honors.

5.
 - a) ♣2. Declarer will want to ruff spades in dummy. Try to minimize that.

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PATRICK O'CONNOR (Australia) is the author of two previous books: *A First Book of Bridge Problems* and *A Second Book of Bridge Problems*.

