



## Play (continued)

**5 - All Focus is Making the Contract** - While overtricks are fun they are a distant second in terms of priority. Make the contract first and then go in search of extra tricks if you wish.

**6 - Lead Towards Honors** - It is much superior to lead towards an honor in the opposite hand then to lead an honor. Often the opponent's higher honor can be forced without surrendering an honor. Similarly only lead an honor if you want the defense to cover it with a higher honor. This would occur if you had a suit topped by a sequence.

**7 - Trump in the Short-Hand** - Trumping in the short-hand turns a loser into a winner. Trumping in the long-hand will win the trick but it is not an extra trick. Do you need to use the trumps in the dummy to trump losers? If so, pulling trump might not be a great idea. Do not pull trump and then make a plan. Make a plan first.

**8 - Avoid Blocking Suits** - Look carefully at the cards in both hands before playing a suit. Get the equal honors played from the short-side first to keep the path clear for all the winners. This includes the trump suit and when working to trap honors by a combination of promotion and finesse.

**9 - Consider All the Opportunities** - When making a plan for the play do not stop at the first opportunity. Consider all the suits before choosing the one or combination that will give you the best chance. Sometimes two lesser chances taking together is better than a different single chance.

**10 - Do Not Win a Trick Until You Know What You Intend to do Next** - Many contracts are scuttled because declarer won the first trick in the wrong hand. One way to avoid this is to avoid winning a trick until you know exactly what you intend to play to the next trick. This will assure that whenever possible you are in the right hand to do what you need to do.

## Defense

**1 - Lead Partner's Bid Suit** - Right or wrong partner expects you to lead their suit. If you do not lead their suit, you better be right or you will not win the post mortem discussion!

**2 - Understand and Apply the Rules for Mechanics of Opening Lead** - Once the suit has been selected the proper card to lead is purely mechanical. Learn and apply the guidelines. Lead the top of a sequence or fourth best without a sequence. What constitutes a sequence changes depending upon the type of contract.

## No-trump Contract

Complete Sequence - With three or more cards in a row beginning with an honor card, lead the highest card. (Examples: **AKQ3, KQJ7, QJ104, J1092, 10985**)

Incomplete Sequence - Looks just like the Complete Sequence above except the third card is short by one, lead the highest card. (Examples: **AKJ5, KQ106, QJ94, J1083, 10973**)

Interior Sequence - An honor with a one or two card gap, and then a second honor and the card directly below it. Lead the top of the interior. (Examples: **AJ104, A1095, KJ106, K1092, Q1097**).

All Other - Fourth best. (Examples: **A1063, K8654, Q9854, 10653, J854**)

## Trump Contract

Sequence - With two or more cards in a row beginning with an honor card, lead the higher card. (Examples: **KQx, QJ95, AK85, J10754, 1096**)

Interior Sequence - An honor with a one or two card gap, and then a second honor and the card directly below it. Lead the top of the interior. (Examples: **AJ104, A1095, KJ106, K1092, Q1097**).

Do not lead away from a lone A in an unbid suit - Lead another suit and attempt to later capture something with your ace rather than nothing.

All Other - Low from three or fourth best. (Examples: **1063, K8654, Q9854, 10653, J54**)

## Leading Partner's Suit

Lead the A if you have it, keep to our policy of not leading away from aces. Lead the top of a sequence (**J106, 1094, QJ6, KQ65**). Lead the higher from two (Example: **J7, Q6, K7, 84**). Lead low from three or four.

**3 - Try to Capture Declarer's Honors** - Whenever possible try to capture a K or Q with your A, and a Q or J with your K. Make declarer pay a price for playing one of your honor cards.

**4 - Play Carefully as Third-Hand** - Play high but only as high as necessary. Work to capture honors from declarer. Third-hand is a great communication tool and partner is watching carefully to see what you play. I estimate that 50% of the time the layout of the suit can be determined after third-hand play to the first trick.

**5 - Keep Suit Parity** - Identify the suits that your hand must guard. If dummy holds 4 hearts and you hold 4 hearts then you must keep parity (same length) with the dummy. If they discard one, then you can discard one. This might apply to declarer's hand as well as a suit was advertised during the bidding but not visible as in the dummy.

**6 - Opposition to Declarer's Plan** - At least 50% of defense is identifying declarer's plan and putting up obstacles to it. If declarer is not pulling trump then perhaps you should be leading trump. Continuously ask yourself what is declarer doing and how can I stop them?

**7 - Know Your Objective** - Just as declarer makes a plan, so should the defenders. If the contract is 3NT then your goal is 5 tricks. If the contract is 6♠ then your goal is 2 tricks. Look at the facts. What did partner lead, in what suit are the tricks for the defense coming?

**8 - Always Take the Setting Trick** - Setting the contract one trick is 99% of the goal. It is great to set them two, but the key trick is the setting trick. Pass it up and you might not get another chance.

**9 - Do Not Be Quick to Shift the Attack** - Developing tricks for the defense is a process. It often takes more than one lead to establish your suit or develop your winner(s). Be hesitant to shift. Persistence is the key to a winning strategy for the defenders.

**10 - Partner is Your Only Friend** - When not sure what is happening, trust partner. Partner is the only person at the table that is on your side. Accept the facts you know. If partner leads the Q then they hold the J. If partner signals for a heart lead then hold something valuable in hearts. Working as a team, as defenders are required to do, can be a challenge. Try to make easier and clear to partner what you have and what you are trying to accomplish.

# Ten Commandments



## The Pareto Principle

The Pareto principle (also known as the 80/20 rule) states that, for many events, roughly 80% of the effects come from 20% of the causes. This can be applied to bridge skills. A small handful of good techniques likely are responsible for 80% of your bridge results. The Ten Commandments will often save the day or keep you just out of trouble, if followed. Are there exceptions? Absolutely. But these techniques should be the default method unless something extraordinary tells you differently.

## Bidding

**1 - Understand and Remember Your Job** - If you are the opener you are the crew and your job is describer. All of your bids tell a story about your hand. Opener follows the priorities and instructions of responder. If you are the responder then you are the captain. Your bids do not show, instead they set priorities, ask questions, and give instructions. Captain is trying to answer only two questions.

What level? (partscore, game, slam)  
What denomination? (trump fit or no-trump)

I estimate 50% of bidding errors are a result of one or both players forgetting their job.

**2 - Correctly Evaluate the Distribution** - The key to accurate bidding is proper evaluation. When you first look at a bridge hand the length method is used. The hand strength is the high card points (HCP) plus one point for every fifth card or longer. Count all the high cards including queens and jacks and even if they are singleton. At the moment in the auction that you become aware that the partnership has a major suit fit you switch to using the shortness method. This is true for both players, opener and responder. The shortness method awards 5 points for a void, 3 points for a singleton, and 1 point for a doubleton. You can use one method or the other but not both at the same time. Switching to the shortness method will never decrease the value of your hand.

**3 - Trust the Point Count** - As captain add the value of your hand to the known range of opener's strength to determine the level question. If you are assured of 25+ points together bid game either in the known fit or no-trump. If the values are short of 25 then retreat to the best partscore available

**4 - Finding a Fit is the Secret** - When it comes to the denomination question it is a search for an eight-card fit. With eight cards together you have a 3 card advantage over the number held by the opposition. Holding a nine-card fit you have a 5 card advantage. The greater the fit the more aggressive you can be in close decisions. Hands with a fit in two suits often play above the predicted potential. Hands that are misfits often play below the predicted potential.

**5 - It Is All About the Major Suits** - When it comes to the denomination question it is a search for an eight-card major suit fit. Once that possibility has been eliminated then other contracts can be considered. Opener starts with 1♥ or 1♠ holding a five-card suit or greater. Responder responds with 1♥ or 1♠ on only a four-card suit or longer.

**6 - No-trump is Always Plan B** - If the hand is a partscore then a fit in any suit (clubs, diamonds, hearts, spades) is preferred over no-trump. If the hand is a game hand, then any major suit fit first and no-trump second. If the hand is slam hand then any fit (clubs, diamonds, hearts, spades) is first choice and no-trump second. No-trump is always Plan B There are more ways to take tricks or dispose of losers in a trump contract than in a no-trump contract. More ways translates directly into more tricks and greater success.

**7 - Responder's Bids Do Not Show** - Responder's bids are all designed to gather the information needed to answer the two questions. As an example, opener starts with 1♣ and responder bids 1♥. Responder is not "showing" four hearts. Instead the mind set should be that responder is setting the highest priority for opener to confirm a heart fit if one exists. In the example opener would need four hearts to confirm a fit. If opener fails to confirm a fit then responder will proceed on the basis that opener cannot hold more than three hearts. The crew's job is to follow orders.

**8 - Forcing, Invitational, and Signoff Only Apply to Responder's Bids** - A new suit by responder is forcing. A bid of a previously bid suit is invitational by responder. Bids of 1NT and 2NT are invitational. Game level bids are signoffs or a choice of game contracts.

**9 - Follow the Balanced Hand Ladder** - Opener has a bidding plan for every balanced hand. The only reason not to follow through is the discovery of a major suit fit.

12-14 HCP - open 1 of a suit and rebid NT  
15-17 HCP - open 1NT  
18-19 HCP - open 1 of a suit and jump rebid NT  
20-21 HCP - open 2NT  
22-23 HCP - open 2♣ and rebid 2NT  
24-25 HCP - open 3NT  
26-27 HCP - open 2♣ and rebid 3NT

**10 - Follow Partnership Agreements Religiously** - Follow your agreements to the letter. If you and partner have agreed to have two of the top three honors when you open a weak two-bid, then have them. If you are dealt

♠KJ10964 ♥7 ♦865 ♣QJ6

and you want to open 2♠, I understand the desire to open a weak two-bid, but you must stay disciplined. After the hand you can discuss with partner the idea of changing the agreement, but while the agreement exists, stick to it. Anything else erodes partnership trust and confidence.

## Play

**1 - Work the Plan** - Before playing a single card from dummy work the plan and decide what your task list includes. In your mind's voice ask yourself these questions.

No-trump Contract

How many winners do I need?  
How many winners do I already have?  
Which suits offer potential to develop new winners?  
Select the suit/suits to work on and how to play each.

Trump Contract

How many losers can I afford?  
How many losers do I have?  
Which losers can be eliminated and how?  
Select the suit/suits to work on and how to play each.

**2 - Develop Winners or Eliminate Losers First** - Do not mindlessly cash winners. Instead work the plan, Develop your winners or work to dispose of losers as the first priority. Cashing tricks is for the point in the hand when the contract is assured.

**3 - Take the Safe Path** - Pull trump as early as possible. The longer trumps are left in the defender's hands the greater the risk. Some hands require a delay until a task, such as trumping in the short-hand, is completed. If so, then back to pulling trump when the task is finished.

**4 - Count and Recount Your Tricks** - Things change and facts become apparent as the play progresses. At least at the end of each task stop and count winners/losers again. It may provide a fresh perspective. Ask yourself if the current facts and situation require an alteration to the original plan? Perhaps the trump suit or key suit has proven to be very favorable. Does that change the plan? I have seen on many occasions, players take a finesse and go down when they had enough sure winners to make the contract. The game is difficult enough without going down on hands you have already made.