

# THE DEFENDERS' GUIDE TO CARDING

©Pat Harrington

<b>YOU'RE LEADING</b>	
The opening lead – follow standard guidelines.	Usually descriptive – top of a sequence or a doubleton (but king from ace-king doubleton), a singleton, fourth best, or low from 3 cards (some prefer middle from 3 small.). But don't underlead an ace in a suit contract.
Leading a new suit later in the hand.	Attitude – low means you want the suit returned (Low Likes), a high spot card means you don't (High Hates). Still lead the top of a sequence. When returning partner's lead, lead as if you were leading the suit for the first time.
Leading to give your partner a ruff.	Suit preference. Remove the suit you are leading and trump from the picture and you are left with two suits. Lead your lowest card to ask for a return of the lower of those suits, lead high asking for the higher suit.
In NT, with a choice of cards to lead to knock out declarer's last stopper in your suit	Suit preference. Lead a high card to show an entry in a high-ranking suit and lead low with an entry in a low-ranking suit. Hopefully, dummy will have a suit that it will be obvious that you don't want led, so that suit and the suit you're leading are taken out of the picture.
<b>YOU'RE SECOND TO PLAY TO A TRICK</b>	
Take the setting trick.	Play a card that will win if you can set the contract, and this trick could go away.
Cover an honor with an honor.	Cover the LAST of touching cards unless there is no chance you can promote a trick for you or partner.
Splitting honors.	Sometimes you split <i>equal</i> honors to prevent declarer from winning a cheap trick.
Second hand low – usually a count signal.	If none of the above apply, play second hand low. If declarer is breaking a new suit and you think partner might need to know how many cards you hold in a non-trump suit, give count (low-high with an odd number of cards in the suit and high-low with an even number of cards in the suit.)
<b>YOU'RE THIRD TO PLAY TO A TRICK</b>	
Third hand as high as necessary.	Third hand high is your top priority to prevent declarer from winning a cheap trick. (Sometimes you might play a slightly lower card to keep a card still in dummy covered if you play after dummy – like a finesse.)
Unblock as third hand.	Use the high cards from the short side first. Holding a doubleton honor, play the honor to get out of partner's way – even when partner or dummy plays high.
Partner's card is winning and unblock isn't needed, show attitude.	Signal attitude by playing the highest card you can afford as long as that card won't cost a trick AND you want the suit partner led continued. Play your lowest card to discourage partner from leading that suit.
Dummy wins the trick – attitude is primary signal; but, in specific cases, count or suit preference instead.	Show attitude unless your attitude is already clear because dummy won a jack (or its equivalent) or lower. In that case, it's best to give count. (But you might agree on specific situations where suit preference is shown instead).
Dummy is ready to trump partner's led suit.	With no future in continuing this suit, <b>show suit preference</b> . Take trump and the suit led out of the picture, and play a high card to suggest a lead in the higher of the two remaining suits, and a low card for the lower of those suits.
When partner leads his last card in a short suit looking for a ruff.	Win the trick if you can; play third hand high when necessary. When neither of these is possible, show suit preference, telling partner how to reach your hand for a ruff in case he gets in first. With no entry, signal for the least damaging suit.
<b>YOU'RE FOURTH TO PLAY TO A TRICK</b>	
Win the trick when necessary!	If partner isn't winning the trick, win the trick as cheaply as you can, unless you have a good reason for holding up (usually has to do with communication.)
Give count otherwise.	When you can't win the trick, and you think partner needs to know how many cards you have in that suit, give remaining (or present) count – high-low with an even number of cards and low-high with an odd number of cards.