

Opening Leads and Signals

When you lead an honour against a suit contract and win the trick you have to make a decision about whether to continue the suit or switch to another suit. The recommended approach is for opening leader's partner to play a low card to encourage a continuation and a high card to suggest a switch to another suit. Let's look at some examples.

		8 6 5		
		N		
K Q 10 9	W	E		7 4 2
		S		
		A J 3		

West leads king. South will probably play a low card at trick one and if West continues the suit declarer will make both their ace and jack. East should play a card that will discourage West from continuing the suit. For most partnerships a high card discourages a continuation, so East should play the 7 at trick one.


		8 7 6		
		N		
K Q 10 9	W	E		4
		S		
		5		

West leads the king, dummy plays low, East contributes the 4 and declarer plays the 5. West may be tempted to continue the suit – after all, the 4 looks like a low card – but if West looks carefully they can see all the spot cards higher than the 4. The only cards missing are the A, J, 3 and 2. In this context the 4 is actually a high card.

		J 10 5		
		N		
A K 8 7	W	E		6 4
		S		
		Q 9 3 2		


West leads the ace against a suit contract. East wants their partner to continue with the king and then a third round which they can trump, so they play their lowest card, the 4. However, if declarer plays the 9 it is not obvious to West whether their partner has played their lowest card from 6-4 or their highest card from 4-3-2

South Deals

	♠ 7 6	
	♥ A Q 3	
	♦ 9 8 6 2	
	♣ K 8 6 3	
♠ AKJ32		♠ Q 10 9 8
♥ 9 6 5		♥ K 10 4 2
♦ 10 3		♦ 7 5
♣ 10 9 5		♣ J 7 4
	♠ 5 4	
	♥ J 8 7	
	♦ AKQJ4	
	♣ AQ2	

South opens 1 NT and becomes declarer in 3 NT. West's opening lead is the A♠. If spades are continued the defence will take the first five tricks. If West switches to another suit at trick two the contract will make. East must help West out by playing their lowest spade at trick 1, and West must watch the pips and realise that the 8♠ may be partner's lowest card in the suit.

South Deals

	♠ 7 4	
	♥ A Q 3 2	
	♦ 8 7 2	
	♣ K 8 6 3	
♠ AKJ86		♠ 5 3 2
♥ 10 9		♥ K J 6 4
♦ 9 6 5 3		♦ 10
♣ 5 4		♣ Q J 10 9 7
	♠ Q 10 9	
	♥ 8 7 5	
	♦ AKQJ4	
	♣ A 2	

South opens 1 NT and becomes declarer in 3 NT. West's opening lead is the A♠. If West continues spades the Q♠ will be declarer's 9th trick and the contract will make. If West switches to a different suit at trick 2 the contract will fail. East must help West out by playing their highest spade at trick 1, discouraging a continuation of the spade suit. East's highest spade is the 5♠. West must keep a close eye on the spade cards in their own hand and in dummy, and also the spade which declarer plays at trick one, if they are to find the correct defence.