

INTERMEDIATE PLUS COURSE

Lesson Four: Signals and Discards

Defence can be the most rewarding and satisfying part of Bridge; after all we spend at least half of our time defending contracts (depending on our luck with the cards). Defenders can send very important signals to partner with their “spot” cards – tens and below.

Signals

The general principle is that on partner’s lead – not declarer’s or dummy’s - we need to give an “ATTITUDE SIGNAL”, so a HIGH CARD means you want it continued and a LOW CARD means you don’t, or:

H. E. L. D

HIGH ENCOURAGING LOW DISCOURAGING

Assume you are defending 4♥ and partner leads A♠, what should you SIGNAL with:

♠ Q102	♠ 93	♠ 742	♠ Q5	♠ 9842
(♠ 10)	(♠ 9)	(♠ 2)	(♠ 5)	(♠ 4)

In the first two examples you played a high card because you want partner to continue with the ♠K and a third ♠ (remember when they lead an Ace, they must have the King also)

Defending No Trump contracts is slightly different as you can’t trump the third round. Defending 3NT, partner leads ♥K and dummy has ♥764:

♥ A92	♥ 92	♥ A2	♥ J92	♥ 9832	♥ J32
(♥ 9)	(♥ 2)	(♥ A)	(♥ 9)	(♥ 3)	(♥ 3)

Notice in example three how important it is to overtake partner’s ♥K with our ♥A to avoid blockage. Also in the last example we would love to give partner a high card but we only have low ones! Partners need to be aware of this as it makes life tricky and they have to look around at the other “spot” cards on the table for clues.

Let’s have a look at an example. The contract is 4♥ and partner leads ♠A:

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>(Dummy)</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">♠ 987 ♥ KQ76 ♦ AK43 ♣ 76</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">♠ 1062 ♥ 108 ♦ J1098 ♣ A1052</p>	<p>On partner’s ♠A lead, we Signal ♠2 to deny any interest in a ♠ continuation. Partner sees ♠2 and realises it would be very dangerous to continue, so switches to dummy’s weakest suit, ♣s.</p> <p>We win with ♣A and dutifully return ♠10 through declarer’s ♠Q5. Partner cashes ♠K and ♠J, so 4♥ is one down.</p> <p>Note how important it was to tell partner we hated ♠s as a continuation at trick two with ♠K would have gifted declarer Q♠ and 4♥.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">♠ <u>A</u>KJ3 ♥ 954 ♦ 7652 ♣ 98</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">♠ Q54 ♥ AJ32 ♦ Q ♣ KQJ43 <i>(Declarer)</i></p>	

Discards

When we have run out of a suit we have to make a discard from another suit and this can be very important for the defence. The two factors to consider are:

- Which suit to discard from
- Which card in that given suit

Generally one will discard from our longest suit and try to keep intact a fragile holding ie Jxxx or Qxx or Kx. It is also important to “Keep the same length as dummy” so if dummy has a four card suit then you should strive to keep the same four cards.

If you can afford to throw a high card then partner will see that as a discard of encouragement and equally if you throw a low card partner will see that as a suit you are not interested in.

DEFENCE DODO ALERT!

Do not automatically discard a high card if it shortens your holding as this will cost you a trick and sometimes the fate of the contract. You are defending 3NT and partner leads ♦Q:

♠KQJ109	
♥Q8	
♦AK96	
♣76	
♠A742	♠83
♥954	♥AKJ10
♦QJ103	♦82
♣94	♣108532
	♠65
	♥7632
	♦543
	♣AKQJ

Partner leads ♦Q, dummy’s ♦A and we Signal ♦2 to discourage. Declarer plays K♠ from dummy and partner correctly holds up the ♠A. Declarer persists with ♠Q and again partner withholds ♠A. Declarer plays ♠J and we would love to tell partner how much we want a heart switch but if we discard ♥10, it will cost us a vital trick. So Discard ♣2 and when partner wins ♠A, they should get the message that as you don’t want ♣s, they should try hearts! ♥9 is played and you happily cash four ♥ tricks for one down.

The Suit Preference Signal (Advanced users only!)

We have looked at signals on partner’s lead but imagine a scenario whereby you are about to give partner a ruff but want to tell them which suit to return. A HIGHER card will show the HIGHER ranking of the two remaining suits and a LOWER card will indicate the LOWER ranking of the two remaining suits. Let’s have a look at it in action: the contract is 4♥ and partner leads the 9♦:

♠KQ10	
♥KQ63	
♦K765	
♣64	
♠J832	♠9764
♥875	♥102
♦9	♦A10843
♣109872	♣A3
	♠A5
	♥AJ94
	♦QJ2
	♣KQJ5
	(Declarer)

Partner leads ♦9 which is either a singleton or doubleton so dummy plays ♦5 and we play ♦A, with declarer playing ♦2 (a good player would drop ♦Q to try and pretend she had the singleton) We will return a ♦ but would love to indicate a ♣ return so play ♦3, a “Suit Preference Signal” (had we wanted a ♠ return we would play ♦10). Partner trumps with ♥5 and dutifully plays ♣10. We win ♣A and play a third ♦ for partner to trump – the first four tricks to us. The S.P.S. only works in these trumping situations, so is quite rare.