

All Kinds of Finesses

When we play a bridge hand, we usually have a bunch of tricks “off the top” meaning tricks we can just cash straight from trick one as immediate winners. Beginners will tend to take these quickly. Experts tend to take them last!

Beyond that, we will probably need to develop extra tricks to make our contract and we typically do this in one of three ways:

- via length (playing off our long suit until the opponents have none left, making all our little cards winners)
- via promotion (driving out the high honours like the Ace and promoting the secondary honours into tricks)
- via a finesse – the topic of today’s lecture.

A finesse involves winning a trick without playing the strongest card you have in that suit. It usually requires what is known as a **tenace** (a series of big cards including a “gap” preventing it from being a sequence. We play the cards in such a way that if a key missing honour is in the opponent’s hand who has to play first, they will not be able to utilise it. Let’s look at a few examples (dummy is the top hand, declarer’s hand is at the bottom. Most of the cards aren’t shown)

The simple finesse:

♠ AQ42	♥ 94	♦ AK52	♣ QJT93
♠ 75	♥ KJ	♦ JT3	♣ A62

Here (as usual) the trick is simply to **lead towards your honours**. If the first defender to play plays a low card, conserve your highest card and try and win with a cheaper alternative. Half the time it will work.....half the time it won’t.

Leading up to an honour:

♠ A32	♥ 4	♦ QT2	♣ QJ52
♠ Q84	♥ K2	♦ 53	♣ 764

We don’t always have the luxury of having both the best and third best cards. Nonetheless, leading **towards an honour** is way, way better than leading away from it.

The double finesse:

♠ 542	♥ AQT	♦ T98	♣ AT92
♠ AJT	♥ 9832	♦ AQ2	♣ Q43

A finesse occurs when we are missing more than one key honour. We can often play in such a way that we will gain a trick provided only one of two is with the defender who has to play second by **leading towards our picture cards**.

Two Way Finesses (these are hard – we have to THINK!):

♠ AJ2	♥ J62	♦ J43	♣ A93
♠ KT5	♥ K54	♦ Q52	♣ KQT85

Two way finesses occur a lot and are often the key to whether a hand makes or doesn’t. There are chapters and chapters written on how to get them right. The key things to remember are to make yourself think....Where are the missing honours likely to be? And then make yourself play by **leading towards your picture cards**.