Opening Leads

When the opponents have opened the bidding they are usually at an advantage. Firstly, they usually have more than half of the HCPs, meaning they have more assets and are more likely to win more tricks. But crucially, declarer is able to see both hands on their side – and is able to choose which card their partner (the dummy) will play to best benefit them.

As defenders, by following a few simple rules, we can help our partner determine where our high cards lie and with a bit of imagination and practise we can use this information to work together to try and defeat declarer's contract.

What suit to lead?

The first thing we need to decide when we make the opening lead is which suit we are going to begin play with. In many ways it is the most difficult play to get right each hand, since we cannot yet see dummy, the way we can with every other card we play. We have only two sources of information to guide us – our own hand and the auction.

Some guidelines to help make the choice are as follows:

1. Avoid leading the opponents' suits. If they bid them, they have lots of them and they are likely to lead them at some point. Your high cards in their suit are likely to win tricks if you wait patiently.
2. Lead your partner's suit – if she stuck her neck out and bid during the opponents auction, she should have a good, five card suit. Even if you don't win the first trick, you may well be able to win later tricks in that suit.
3. If you have a good suit of your own, you should consider starting with that suit at trick one (provided it isn't the opponents suit! See tip one).
4. If the opponents have bid a couple of suits, you don't have a good suit of your own and your partner hasn't bid, it can often be right to lead the unbid suit. Partner has probably got *something* there, she may just not have been able to bid it.
5. If you choose to lead a singleton (hoping to score a ruff later) you should be confident your partner has an *entry*. If you suspect you hold all the points for the defending side, your partner won't be able to get in to lead you the suit you want to ruff later.

What card to lead?

Having settled on which suit you are going to lead, you should adopt a consistent set of rules about what card to lead from various holdings. By always following these rules, your partner will learn to deduce and astonishing amount of information, just from your opening lead.

Suppose we have chosen out suit and are now looking at a collection of cards within that suit. With the following holdings, lead the underlined card (note that if the suit includes the Ace and not the King, the rules change – see the asterisk).

Leading Agreements

If you hold	*You should lead*	*Example (best lead is underlined)*			
A sequence of honours	Top of the sequence	KQT85	AK43	JT98	QJ654
A doubleton	Top of the doubleton	A2	96	Q2	T9
Four plus with an honour*	Fourth highest	K8732	Q763	J9873	KJ93
Three with an honour*	Third highest	K83	Q62	J85	K98
Three small cards	Middle-Up-Down (MUD)	T84	642	853	T93
Four small cards	Second-then-Third	9754	8652	5432	T875
An interior sequence	Top of the interior sequence	KJT9	AQJT3	KT984	AJT92
A trump	When leading trumps, whatever your holding, lead the lowest.				
*If the Honour is an Ace	This is often a poor choice when defending against a suit contract. If you do choose to lead this against a suit contract, lead the Ace.				