

Opening New Suits

One of the tricks to playing winning bridge is to try to not give the opponents an easy game. Particularly when they are declaring they will be scratching around for their required number of tricks. Sometimes they will be short a trick and in those situations, it is important we not gift them a trick they could not have earned themselves.

One of the common mistakes we can make is to open a new suit (ie to be the first to play it). There are a lot of card combinations where whichever side opens the suit will make one trick less than if they wait for the opposition to play it first. In general, even if it looks like our opening lead hasn't paid immediate dividends, it is often right to keep plugging away at the same suit or to play a suit Declarer is going to win anyway. It may not earn us any tricks, but if it doesn't give a trick away that will work out well for us in the end. Some examples will make this clearer.

In the following hands Declarer is south (at the bottom of the page) Dummy is North and the Defenders are sitting East-West. Consider the problem declarer has when tackling the following suits. Then look at what happens if the Defenders play the suit first:

♠ AJ4	♥ QT2
♠ ?862	♥ ?72
♠ ?73	♥ ?863
♠ KT5	♥ K94

Who has the Queen/Nine?

Who has the Ace/Jack?

♦ Q32	♣ K54
♦ K97	♣ Q96
♦ AT86	♣ AT87
♦ J54	♣ J32

Whoever plays either of these suits first loses a trick.

Challenge Yourself - the following is pretty tricky, but shows how we might apply these principles in a full hand

Imagine we are defending Three Spades after North Deals and we hear the following auction, then lead the Two of Hearts:

1C:3S

2H:Pass 1H:Pass

1S:Pass

♠ Q32
♥ K432
♦ 863
♣ Q96

♠ KJT9
♥ 95
♦ AKT9
♣ K54

Suppose our partner wins the opening lead with the Ace of Hearts and then plays the seven of Hearts back which Declarer ruffs.

Declarer then plays the Ace of Spades (your partner follows) and then the King (on which you partner discards a Heart). Declarer then plays a third round of trumps and you are on lead with the Queen (your second trick in defence). What should you play next?

We know declarer had six cards in the majors and therefore seven in the minors. Does either minor suit pose a risk? YES! The club suit here might be as our example suit above – if we wait we will get three club tricks and defeat the contract. But if we play a club we will only get two and they will make their three Spades. We should exit the six of Diamonds.