

# Opening Leads Against Trump Suit Contracts

*Bridge Lesson — Study Guide*

## Overview: Passive vs. Aggressive Leads

When considering which of the four suits to lead, your primary thought should be whether to make a **passive** or an **aggressive** lead — based on whether you judge there is urgency to establish tricks quickly, or whether you can afford to wait.

**Passive lead.** Your primary aim is to avoid giving away a trick through your lead. Choose the top of a sequence, a low card from a broken suit, or possibly even a trump — any holding unlikely to jeopardize a trick. A passive lead is right when you judge there is no urgency to establish tricks quickly.

**Aggressive lead.** A lead from strength, aimed at establishing your side's tricks before declarer can dispose of his losers. You must get your tricks quickly or you will not get them at all. This is indicated when you suspect that dummy or declarer holds a long, strong side suit on which losers can be discarded.

## Passive Leads Examples

### Hand 1

#### The Auction

South	West	North	East
1♠	Pass	3♠	Pass
4♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

**Contract:** 4♠ by South. You are West on lead.

#### Your Hand (West)

♠ Q 6 3  
♥ Q J 9  
♦ K 9 5 2  
♣ J 10 9

**What is your opening lead?**

#### Recommended Lead

♣ J (Jack of Clubs) — Top of an interior sequence (J–10–9)

#### Analysis

**Why clubs?** The J–10–9 of clubs is a solid three-card sequence. Leading the jack is safe because the jack can only lose to the queen—and if partner holds the queen, the lead establishes tricks. More importantly, it is very unlikely to give declarer a trick he could not have won on his own.

**Why not the ♥Q?** The ♥Q–J–9 looks tempting, but it is a broken sequence with a dangerous gap. Dummy could easily hold ♥K–10–x, with declarer holding ♥A–x–x. In that layout, the queen lead drives out the ace, declarer later finesses your J–9 through the 10, and you score nothing in hearts instead of at least one trick.

**Why not from the ♦K or a trump?** The ♦ is an active lead that may find partner with the ace or queen, but it risks giving a free finesse to declarer if he holds A–J or A–Q. A trump lead gives nothing away but also accomplishes little when the auction shows no significant ruffing threat in dummy.

**Key principle:** Against a game-level trump contract reached by a simple raise (no side suits mentioned), prefer a safe, sequence lead. You need tricks from all four suits; there is no rush to attack aggressively and risk handing declarer a trick he cannot make on his own.

---

## Hand 2

### The Auction

South	West	North	East
1♥	Pass	2♥	Pass
Pass			

**Contract:** 2♥ by South. You are West on lead.

### Your Hand (West)

♠ A J 6 3  
♥ Q 8 4  
♦ Q 9 5  
♣ J 6 2

### What is your opening lead?

### Recommended Lead

♦ 5 (Five of Diamonds) or ♣ 2 (Two of Clubs) — Passive leads from broken honors

### Analysis

**Eliminating the dangerous leads.** Two suits can be immediately ruled out. A trump from ♥Q–8–4 risks giving declarer a free finesse and costs a natural trump trick. A spade from ♠A–J–6–3 gives away nothing immediately but risks blowing a spade trick if declarer holds ♠K–x–x and dummy ♠Q–x–x. Neither suit has an unguarded or sequential honor that makes the lead safe.

**Why a small diamond or small club?** Both ♦Q–9–5 and ♣J–6–2 contain a broken honor that makes leading the honor itself dangerous. Instead, lead low from either suit to keep your honor intact and let partner's holding in that suit do the work. The ♦5 and ♣2 is the lowest from H–x–x. Either lead is passive and unlikely to concede a trick that declarer could not have developed on his own.

**Choosing between them.** Against a part-score heart contract (2♥) there is no urgency to set up tricks quickly. A small club (♣2) is marginally safer because the J–6–2 has no honor worth protecting at trick one; a small diamond (♦5) is equally acceptable and may be preferred if you want to suggest length to partner. Either is a sound, standard choice.

**Key principle:** When no suit offers a safe honor or sequence lead, choose the suit where you can lead low without unguarding your honor. Do not lead from a broken honor at the top — lead small and preserve your trick-taking potential.

---

## Hand 3

### The Auction

South	West	North	East
1♠	Pass	2♠	Pass
Pass			

**Contract:** 2♠ by South. You are West on lead.

### Your Hand (West)

♠ 10 9 8  
♥ Q 8 4  
♦ A 7 5 2  
♣ K 7 3

### What is your opening lead?

### Recommended Lead

♠ 10 (Ten of Spades) — Top of a sequence in the trump suit

### Analysis

**Why a trump lead?** With ♠10–9–8 you hold a solid three-card sequence in the trump suit itself. This is the rare case where a trump lead is not only safe but actively constructive: it removes one of dummy's trumps, limits declarer's ruffing potential, and gives nothing away because the 10 is the top of a complete sequence.

**Why not a side suit?** Every side suit contains a broken honor that makes leading it dangerous. The ♥Q–8–4 risks giving declarer a free finesse. Leading the ♦A prematurely squanders an entry; leading low from ♦A–7–5–2 may cost a trick depending on how the suit is distributed. We typically do not under lead an A against a suit contract. I really mean never. The ♣K–7–3 is equally risky if declarer holds the ace and dummy the jack. None of these suits offers a safe starting point.

**Key principle:** A trump lead is normally avoided because it can cost a natural trump trick. The exception is when you hold a sequence in trumps (10–9–8 or similar) and every side suit is too dangerous to lead. In that case, leading the top of your trump sequence is the standout choice: you attack declarer's ruffing entries at no cost to yourself.

---

## Hand 4

### The Auction

South	West	North	East
1♣	Pass	1♥	Pass
1♠	Pass	3♠	Pass
4♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

**Contract:** 4♠ by South. You are West on lead. (North bid hearts.)

### Your Hand (West)

♠ 7  
♥ Q J 10 9  
♦ A 7 5 2  
♣ J 6 4 3

**What is your opening lead?**

### Recommended Lead

♥ Q (Queen of Hearts) Top of a four-card sequence in dummy's suit

### Analysis

**Leading their suit — the exception.** As a rule you avoid leading a suit the opponents have bid, because they are likely to hold the high cards and you risk walking into their strength. The exception is when you hold a four-card or longer sequence headed by the queen or better (Q–J–10–9 here). A solid sequence neutralizes declarer's length in the suit and sets up tricks for your side without giving away anything extra.

**Why not the singleton trump (♠7)?** A singleton trump is almost always a poor opening lead. Far from gaining a ruff (declarer holds the long trumps), it simply removes a trump from your hand while potentially finessing partner out of a natural trump trick. Partner might hold ♠K–x–x or ♠Q–x–x; your singleton lead through those holdings does nothing but help declarer pick them up cheaply.

**Why not diamonds or clubs?** The ♦A is tempting but wastes the ace without establishing tricks. The ♣J–6–4–3 offers no sequence and no attractive lead as south has bid this suit. Hearts is simply the best option here.

**Key principles:** (1) Leading the opponent's suit is acceptable — even desirable — when you hold a four-card sequence (Q–J–10–9 or better) and have no good alternative. (2) A singleton trump is usually a poor opening lead: it risks finessing partner out of a natural trump trick rather than gaining anything for your side.

---

## Hand 5

## The Auction

North	East	South	West
1♣	Pass	1♦	Pass
1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass
3♠	Pass	3NT	Pass
4♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

**Contract:** 4♠ by South. You are West on lead. All four suits were bid by the opponents.

## Your Hand (West)

♠ J 6  
♥ Q J 7 4  
♦ A J 10 8  
♣ Q 9 2

**What is your opening lead?**

## Recommended Lead

**♥ 4 (Four of Hearts) Fourth highest from dummy's suit, not the queen**

## Analysis

**All four suits bid — a passive lead is required.** When the opponents have shown strength in every suit during the auction, there is no safe attacking lead. Every suit risks blowing a trick. The goal shifts from establishing tricks to doing as little damage as possible.

**Lead from dummy's suit, not declarer's.** It is generally better to lead from a suit bid by dummy (North) than one bid by declarer (South). Declarer's suits tend to be longer and better supported; dummy's suit is more likely to be led up to declarer's honors rather than through them. Here North bid hearts and clubs; South bid diamonds and spades. Hearts (♥Q–J–7–4) is therefore preferable to clubs (♣Q–9–2) or diamonds (♦A–J–10–8).

**Why fourth highest, not the queen?** When dummy has bid the suit, leading the queen can be a trap. Declarer will read the queen lead as top of Q–J and, knowing dummy's length, will eventually finesse dummy's 10 to create an extra winner and discard a losing club. By leading the ♥4 (fourth highest), you conceal the queen–jack and give declarer an immediate guess. Dummy wins the ace or king at trick one, and declarer's subsequent handling of the suit is now more likely to go wrong.

## The Full Deal

### North (Dummy)

♠ Q 9 8 2  
♥ A K 10 5  
♦ 9 3  
♣ K 7 4

### West (You)

♠ J 6

### East (Partner)

♠ K 10 5

♥ Q J 7 4  
 ♦ A J 10 8  
 ♣ Q 9 2

♥ 9 8 2  
 ♦ 7 6 4  
 ♣ 10 8 6 3

**South (Declarer)**

♠ 7 4 3  
 ♥ 6 3  
 ♦ K Q 5 2  
 ♣ A J 5

**Declarer’s position.** South has four potential losers: two spades (♠K and one more), one diamond (♦A), and one club (♣Q). The contract can be made on any lead — but the ♥4 lead makes declarer’s task hardest.

**Why the ♥Q lead is worse for the defense.** If you lead the ♥Q, declarer reads it as top of Q–J and knows the full heart layout. He will eventually lead hearts from dummy and finesse the 10, creating an extra heart winner on which he discards his losing club. Your ♥Q lead hands declarer the road map he needs.

**Why the ♥4 lead gives declarer a problem.** Dummy wins trick one with the ace or king of hearts. Declarer now does not know where the missing heart honors sit. He has many other lines to try and may well choose one that fails. While it is true he could finesse dummy’s ♥10 at trick one, that is a low-percentage play when other chances are available. The ♥4 lead leaves the picture murky and gives declarer room to go wrong.

**Key principles:** (1) When all four suits are bid, choose a passive lead from dummy’s suit rather than declarer’s. (2) When dummy has bid the suit you are leading, use fourth highest rather than the top honor — concealing your holding gives declarer a guess and may induce a losing line of play.

**Hand 6**

**The Auction**

North	East	South	West
1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass
1NT	Pass	3♦	Pass
3♠	Pass	4♠	Pass
Pass			

**Contract:** 4♠ by South. You are West on lead. (South bid spades and diamonds; North bid hearts.)

**Your Hand (West)**

♠ K 9 4  
 ♥ J 10  
 ♦ J 9 4 3  
 ♣ 10 7 4 2

## What is your opening lead?

### Recommended Lead

♥ J (Jack of Hearts) — Top of a J–10 sequence, despite North having bid hearts

### Analysis

**Eliminating spades and diamonds.** South bid both spades (trumps) and diamonds with a strong jump to 3♦, making those suits dangerous to lead from. That narrows the choice to hearts or clubs.

**Hearts over clubs.** The choice is between the ♥J–10 doubleton and a small club from ♣10–7–4–2. Although North bid hearts, the J–10 is a touching sequence — a safe, structured lead that cannot cost a trick. The club holding has no sequence and no entry value. The ♥J is the cleaner choice and immediately informs partner of your exact holding.

### The Full Deal

#### North (Dummy)

♠ 8 7 6  
♥ 8 7 6 5 4  
♦ A 2  
♣ A K Q

#### West (You)

♠ K 9 4  
♥ J 10  
♦ J 9 4 3  
♣ 10 7 4 2

#### East (Partner)

♠ 10 2  
♥ A K Q 9  
♦ 10 6 5  
♣ J 9 8 3

#### South (Declarer)

♠ A Q J 5 3  
♥ 3 2  
♦ K Q 8 7  
♣ 6 5

### How the Play Goes

**Trick 1 — ♥J led.** East overtakes the jack with the ♥Q, which holds. This tells West that East also holds the ace and king of hearts.

**Tricks 2 and 3 — hearts continued.** East cashes the ♥A (trick 2), then plays the ♥K (trick 3), which declarer ruffs with the ♠J. The defence has taken two tricks.

**The critical decision — duck the ♠K.** Declarer now draws trumps. There is no way partner can hold the ♦K (South showed a powerful diamond suit with the jump to 3♦), so the defence cannot count on a diamond trick. West must score two trump tricks to beat the contract. When declarer leads spades, West must duck the king — discarding and trusting that partner holds the ♠10. Because East does hold ♠10–2, the duck promotes West's ♠9 into a second trump trick, setting the contract.

**Why not take the ♠K immediately?** If West wins the ♠K at the first opportunity, declarer concedes only the two heart tricks already taken and the king of spades — exactly three

losers — and makes the contract. Taking the king too soon surrenders the chance to promote a second trump trick.

**Key principles:** (1) A J-10 doubleton is a safe lead even in a suit bid by dummy — the sequence cannot cost a trick. (2) After establishing the defence's winners with the opening lead, count your tricks and plan ahead. Here, ducking the trump king is the only way to score the two trump tricks needed to set the contract.