

F901 Play of the Hand: Lesson 1 Handout

1. Planning your play

Most common mistake: failing to plan before playing to the opening lead.

Step 1: How many tricks do you need to make (defeat) the contract?

Step 2: Where are your quick winners/losers? Assess hand from declarer's viewpoint. Count winners in NT, losers in suit contract. If you have enough to make the contract, take them and run.

Step 3: Where can you develop the rest? If you don't have enough winners or too many losers:

- a. Promote high cards
- b. Develop a long suit
- c. Finesse
- d. Ruff losers in dummy
- e. Discard losers on dummy's winners

Step 4: Which alternative should you try first? Which is most likely to succeed? Analyze opponent's likely hands: Did the bidding tell you anything? How will their cards likely split? An even number of missing cards will divide unevenly; an odd number will divide as evenly as possible. If Plan A fails, will you still be able to try Plan B? Do you have enough entries to accomplish the plan?

2. Developing Tricks – Promotion and Length

Promote high cards by losing a trick to a higher card

Develop long suits, preferably unevenly divided. First deal with trumps, then your second suit.

3. Opening leads: first select suit, then the card.

Against NT, it's a race to set up your longest suit before declarer does. If partner has bid and you have nothing better to do, lead it. If opponents have bid a suit, avoid leading it. If nothing leaps out at you, choose your longest & strongest suit. If you have very few entries to your hand and a weak suit, try to guess which is your partner's longest suit. Lead the top of a 3-card sequence of honors, the top of an interior broken sequence (e.g. J from K J 10 9 2); otherwise the fourth from the top.

Rule of 11: Subtract the lead card from 11. The result is the number of cards outstanding higher than the lead. By looking at dummy and your hand, you may be able to see if declarer has a higher card than you. E.g. 8 led, J in dummy, you have Q 9 6. Declarer plays low from dummy, but your 9 wins).

Against a suit contract, forget about setting up your long suit. Declarer will be able to trump you. You need to find the safest lead.

- If partner bid, lead that suit.
- If you have a suit with a 3-card honor sequence, lead the top of it.
- If you have a singleton, lead it.
- For a doubleton or a weak suit, lead the highest card.
- Never lead away from an ace. Avoid leading away from a K or Q.
- Avoid leading any suit declarer bid.
- Lead a suit that dummy bid only if you are not apt to finesse yourself.
- If the bidding suggested that declarer might use dummy's trumps to ruff, you might opt to lead a trump.

Once your partner has made the opening lead, you should analyze what it tells you. In most cases, when you win a trick you should return your partner's opening lead. To help you remember what suit it was, some people move that suit to the far left (or right) of their hand.

4. Some General Guidelines:

2d hand low, 3rd hand high. Lead thru strength to weakness. Cover an honor with an honor.

Play the high card from the short hand first

Draw trumps as soon as you can before cashing side-suit winners

5. Next week: Chapter 3, The Finesse. Read pp.76-95