

HIGH-LOW SIGNALS by Maritha Pottenger

The high-low signal by defenders is used in several different situations:

- 1) When signaling “**attitude**” (“I like it” or “I don’t like it”), a high-low signal is a come-on signal: “I like it, partner. Do it again.”
- 2) When signaling **count**, a high-low signal shows an even number of cards in that suit. Note that when partner leads an Ace-King (against a suit) and you hold a doubleton, a high-low signal is both count and attitude—asking partner to continue the suit so that you can trump the third round of that suit.
- 3) When **discarding**, a high-low signal is again an encouraging signal: “I like this suit, partner. Please lead it if you get the chance.”

Many times, you only have a chance to give the “high” part of a high-low signal. Partner must infer that the low would follow, and defend accordingly.

Signaling **high for attitude** shows either: **equal honors** (if partner led an honor); an **honor** or two **behind dummy** (if dummy takes the trick); a **doubleton** with a desire to trump the third round of a suit; or “**false encouragement**” when you have a terrible hand and cannot stand for partner to shift to another suit. (Breaking new suits often helps Declarer.)

For example, if partner leads an Ace (promising King), a high card should show either the queen (equal honor) or a doubleton and desire to trump the 3rd round of the suit. Occasionally, it will be false encouragement (cannot stand a shift).

If partner leads a King (promising Queen), a high card shows either the Ace or the Jack (equal honors) or both. With a doubleton, you must decide whether to signal high-low or not. Many people would NOT signal high-low unless they had trump control (Axx, for example) and have some reasonable expectation of getting a ruff. Occasionally, your high signal will be false encouragement.

If partner leads a Queen (promising Jack), a high card shows either the King or 10 (equal honors) or both. Playing attitude as your primary signal, you would *not* show a doubleton in this situation.

If partner leads a suit and dummy takes the trick, but you have strength behind dummy, signal high. For example, partner leads 9 of hearts (showing either a doubleton, “top of nothing” from three small cards, or something like 98xx) and dummy has AQ43 while you hold KJ72. If Declarer takes the Ace, play your 7 (high) to signal encouragement of that suit: “I like it, partner. Do it again.”

Most of the time, you **signal count when following suit to a suit that Declarer led**. It is particularly vital to give your partner count in situations when Declarer is setting up a long suit in dummy and dummy has few entries. If partner holds an Ace or King in that suit, s/he needs to know how long to hold up to “kill” dummy. For example, playing in 1NT, dummy has xxx xx KQJxx Jxx. It is vital to give partner count in the diamond suit. If partner has the Ace of diamonds, s/he needs to know how many rounds to duck in order to exhaust Declarer of any diamonds (cutting communication between Declarer and Dummy).

When **discarding**, a high card says: “I like this suit. Please lead it if you get the chance.” (A low card says you have no interest in the suit or you would prefer partner led something else.)

False Encouragement is sometimes essential when you have a very weak hand. For example, partner leads the Ace of hearts against 4S and dummy comes down with Q109x Qxx AJxx Qx while you hold x 9742 8xxx Jxxx. If partner shifts to any other suit, s/he could easily give away a trick. Signal false encouragement: **high** with the 7. Partner will cash King and continue with a heart. You are usually not giving Declarer anything s/he couldn't get anyway.