

**LEADING THROUGH STRENGTH AND TO WEAKNESS:
SOMETIMES YOU HAVE TO BREAK THESE “RULES” by Maritha Pottenger**

Position is very important in defending a bridge hand. It is quite common that only one defender can attack one suit from his/her side of the table, and the other defender must attack a different suit from her/his side of the table. That is because you generally want to lead through strength and to weakness so that your defensive partner will have honors well placed BEHIND Declarer's strength or BEHIND Dummy's strength. In effect, one defender is finessing Declarer for her partner and the other defender is finessing Dummy for his partner. However, there are times when these principles are not advisable.

Do NOT Lead to Weakness if that would Do Declarer's Work for Him/Her.

When Dummy is very weak, with few entries, you may not want to lead to weakness. That may allow Declarer to take finesses for which s/he does not have the entries if left alone to struggle. This is particularly true if you have a minor honor in the suit that is very weak in dummy. Leading from Qxxx or Jxxx when you are behind Dummy and Dummy has three small cards is dangerous if Declarer has KJ10 or AJ10 in first situation or KQ10 in second situation. If Dummy lacks the entries to finesse twice in these suits, you are actually HELPING Declarer by “leading to weakness.” It would be better to lead something else. The ideal “not helping Declarer out” suit would be the “tap” suit—forcing Declarer to ruff in the long trump hand—or the suit in which you or your partner are developing length tricks in no trump. Otherwise, top of nothing, or a trump, or returning the same suit as was led—generally passive defense—may be best.

DO Lead TO Strength if You Can Cut Declarer's Communications.

Sometimes Dummy comes down with a long, strong suit which is an obvious source of tricks for Declarer. If Dummy is lacking in entries *and the bidding suggests that Declarer is very short in that suit*, it might be best to lead that suit EARLY—before Declarer can pull trumps. That way, you or your partner can trump in BEFORE Declarer discards all of his/her losers. An example would be a Dummy that sports AKQJxxx in a suit and you have 10xxx. If you are *sure* that Declarer has only one or two cards in the suit, lead the suit BEFORE Declarer has a chance to pull trumps. Partner will trump the 2nd or 3rd round **before** Declarer discards all his/her losers.

Leading to Strength is Sometimes Essential to Remove a Vital Entry from Dummy.

When Dummy has a long suit that is about to be developed and you hold the Ace, you intend to hold up the Ace until Declarer is out of that suit, to cut Declarer off from Dummy. If Dummy has one other entry, you must try to destroy that entry immediately so it cannot be used to later get back to the long suit. (If the 2nd entry is an Ace, you would lead your King to force that entry out. If the 2nd entry is a KQx and you have the A10x(x), you would lead that suit, hoping your partner has the Jack to force ½ of the royal marriage. Then your A10(x) will prevent the other half of the royal marriage from ever being an entry.

An example would be opponents who reach 3NT. Your partner leads the 3 of spades and Dummy hits with: 54 A3 KQJ109 5432. Your hand is: A62 KJ1092 A54 87. Since you lead 4th-best, you know that Declarer has 4 spades along with your partner's 4 spades. Partner did NOT lead from any sequence or interior sequence, so partner's spades are NOT going to be good enough to set the contract if you return a spade now and again when in which the Ace of diamonds. However, Declarer is unlikely to get enough tricks without Dummy's diamond suit. Hope that Declarer has no more than three diamonds and put the King of hearts on the table. If Declarer ducks, continue with your Jack of hearts. On a good day, Declarer's hand is KJ9x Qxxx xx AKQ (and s/he goes down 2 when you win the second round of diamonds based on partner's count card) OR KJ9x Qxx xxx AKQ (and Declarer goes down 1 as you must duck twice in diamonds)

Leading to Strength is Necessary to Create One More Winner for the Defense

Sometimes defenders can see that they must take a risk in order to develop the setting trick. A defender behind Dummy might have to lead into AJ10 from Qxx or from Kxx—hoping that partner has the other key honor—if that is the only chance for the setting trick. (You usually have an idea from your hand, the honors in Dummy, and the bidding, whether this is your last shot for another defensive trick.) In IMPS this risk is mandatory.