

LARS & KNUT BLAKSET

Play Better Bridge

All About Declarer Play:

Part 1

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Foreword

Dear bridge player:

I have literally lost count of the number of times I have witnessed two otherwise agreeable bridge partners exchange icy and dishonest dialogues such as the one below. I made this one up for the occasion; but it is nevertheless very authentic and I am very confident that, within a few seconds, you will be nodding your head in agreement.

“3NT down two, do you agree?” East, a strong player with a big ego, is addressing a shame-faced declarer, a much weaker player who has just butchered a lay-down contract in the most spectacular fashion; first by blocking a critical suit and then by missing an obvious endplay against East. The poor man, his discomfort visible to all, confirms with a nod. The silence surrounding the table is palpable, but then after a few awkward seconds, dummy finally breaks the silence.

“Nice try, partner”, he lies; hoping that neither his tone of voice nor his facial expression betray the competing emotions of anger, shock and disbelief he is feeling inside. The declarer does not reply right away. He is fingering the bridgemate trying to look busy, very well aware that dummy’s “nice try” is a flagrant lie meant to boost his morale.

But he is not aware of the real issue at hand, which is the undeniable fact that he went down in 3NT, for the simple reason that he is a bad card player. And he is a bad card player because he has shown little or no interest in studying the many card-playing techniques that you need to know if you want to become a winning player. Instead almost his entire focus has been on bidding. And this he has in common with a majority of bridge players. Most

experts recognize the truth in this statement. Many club players alas do not. They might be good bidders but as long as they show minimum interest in becoming better card players, they will keep on losing winnable contracts. This is how the postmortem ended, declarer is finally about to confront dummy: Thanks, partner! What an excellent contract; your fit-bid after my support double was a stroke of genius, just bad luck we ran into such an unfortunate lie of the cards.”

Knowing that his nice partner will not react to this monumental lie, declarer passes the bridgemate to an impatient East, who is unable to hide his eagerness to approve the result, and just as unable to suppress a completely unwarranted reply to declarer’s comments about the Contract: “Unfortunate lie of the cards...? Come on, that contract was a slam-dunk. First you blocked the spades, then you failed to endplay me in hearts...!”

East is shaking his head in disbelief, when he leaves the table. His behavior is of course totally unacceptable; he should have his mouth washed in soap as well as suffer some disciplinary actions, but that shouldn’t keep us all from acknowledging a simple fact of life, a fact made abundantly clear by East’s rude remarks.

It is true that bidding is the single most important element in bridge, but it is just as true, that ending up in the right contract does not help a lot, if you do not know how to play the cards properly! And this is why two books solely dedicated to ‘how to play the cards’, are a gift to bridge players who have a genuine interest in becoming better card players.

I enjoyed reading them, and you know what? I even learned a thing or two ☺

Dennis Bilde

Ballebo, Denmark

ACBL Player of the year 2018

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Introduction

Hundreds of truly great and inspiring bridge books have been published over the last 60-70 years. It was a couple of excellent books that made the two of us aware of the very existence of this beautiful card game more than 40 years ago. It actually happened by accident. Knut, at that time a 16-year old passionate chess player, had gone to the local library hoping to find chess literature about the 'Ruy Lopez' opening. He was out of luck, but next to the section with chess books, there was a much smaller, almost minuscule number of books about a card game named 'Bridge'. Knut got curious, never having heard about this weird-sounding card game, and grabbed the book closest to his hands. Little did he know that this very mundane act was to define the rest of his life. The English title of the book was "Contract Bridge Complete", written by an author by the name of Charles H. Goren. He opened the book and started reading and kept on reading. Standing mesmerized in the library, oblivious to his surroundings, Knut kept on reading until many hours later a kind librarian informed him that the library was about to close for the day.

"I still vividly recall that day at the library. It was my first encounter with bridge, and I was instantly hooked. My early love for chess was a thing of the past, the future belonged to bridge", Knut remember hastily grabbing one other book on his way out. "It was a Danish book by the ingenious name of "Bridge", written by Svend Novrup. I have to admit, that neither of the two books found their way back to the library. And Lars...? Well, he got at least as passionate about the game as I, and within a few months we had scores of books."

So, no doubt about it. Bridge books have through the years in so many different ways had a huge and tangible impact on bridge

players; and very often even the game itself. It is, however, our firm belief that there exists what only can be described as an imbalance in the available bridge literature. The fact of the matter is that quite a substantial number of published bridge books today narrowly have their focus on some of the many aspects of bidding, while a vast majority of the rest are too advanced for the average player, and therefore have zero to little appeal for the normal club player. Bridge books are de facto dedicated to the less than five percent of players who like to spend big chunks of their spare time studying the intricacies of their beloved hobby. This leaves the 95 percent who prioritize differently in a void. While it is true that most club players enjoy the lessons offered by their teacher in conjunction with weekly play, and also true that a select few will read a bridge book now and again, we know, from our club players at the Blakset Bridge Centre (2000+), that for years they have yearned for non-expert books solely focused on one topic: ‘how to play the cards’.

Believe it or not, such books didn’t exist. Now they do, and we have called them: “PLAY BETTER BRIDGE – all about declarer play”

We have striven to write these books in such a way, that they can be used by you for the rest of your bridge-playing life. Think of them as your personal encyclopedia of how best to declare your bridge contracts. We start from the very beginning, explaining the most basic elements of the game for the absolute beginner. Gradually the content gets harder and more advanced, and at the end even experienced tournament players will find these books useful.

We guarantee that you will be a much improved bridge player, no matter your current skill level, if you study the contents of these books thoroughly.

Lars Blakset & Knut Blakset
November 2023
Copenhagen

Chapter 1

Suit Combinations

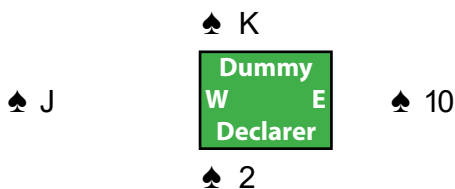
A. Preliminary Exercise – Tricks

Conditions: For clarity we assume in this chapter that we play in no-trumps. In chapter three you can read about the meaning of having a trump suit.



Start by taking a deck of cards and sort it so you have 13 cards in one of the suits. If you find it difficult to understand the examples in the book you may put the cards from the examples on the table in front of you so you can play the cards yourself.

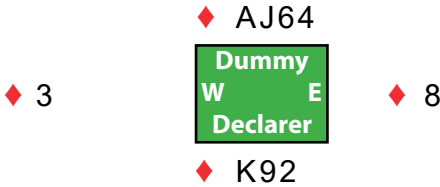
Let us start by defining a trick. When all four players in due order have played one card it is a trick. The side (North/South or East/West) with the highest card has won the trick. We show this in the diagram below, which illustrates a bridge table with the four hands. The abbreviations in the diagram are the four sides (the four players). Instead of N (North) and S (South) you might see Dummy (North) or Declarer (South). In all the diagrams in the book we expect South to be declarer. That means that North is always the dummy who puts down the cards on the table for everyone to see. E and W are abbreviations for East and West.



N/S win this trick, since the ♠K is the highest card in the trick. The

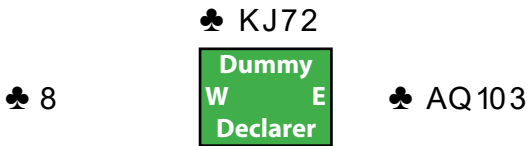
lead to the next trick must come from the hand that won the trick. In this case it means that North has to lead to the next trick.

A basic principle in bridge is to win the trick as cheaply as possible, e.g.:



If West leads the ♦3, South will normally ask for a small diamond (♦4) from the table. When East puts in the ♦8, South wins the trick cheaply with the ♦9 and saves the ♦K for a later trick.

When, as in this example, you are the last to play to the trick, it is fairly easy to see how big a card you have to play to win the trick. It becomes a little more difficult, if you are the second (the lead is from dummy or declarer) or third player (partner leads). One example:



You are East. If partner (West) leads the ♣8 and declarer asks for the ♣2 from dummy, you must as East save your energy and play the ♣10 because you can clearly see that the ♣10 will be the highest card in the trick. Too easy you say? Well – we have seen again and again new bridge players winning with the ace just to be sure! If declarer asks for the jack you will play the queen, and if he tries the king you will beat it with the ace.

P.S. This example is the only one in the entire book where you are defending, but it illustrates the principle of winning the trick as cheaply as possible.



Basic rule: Win the trick as cheaply as possible!

As a newcomer it is easiest to see that the highest cards in the suit (the honour cards) take the tricks. You refer to this as “top tricks”.

This is defined as the sure tricks you can take here and now without any risk of interference from the opponents.

Consider in the following examples how many top tricks you have.

- 1) ♠A4 2) ♠K42 3) ♠AQ7
- | | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| ♠A4 | ♠K42 | ♠AQ7 |
| Dummy
Declarer | Dummy
Declarer | Dummy
Declarer |
| ♠32 | ♠A7 | ♠K54 |

Ex. 1) One top trick: The ace.

Ex. 2) Two top tricks: The king and the ace. The king is not the highest card in the deck but it counts as a top trick, because we also hold the ace.

Ex. 3) Three top tricks. We have the three highest honour cards. Which one of the three honours should you play first? In principle this is of no importance because from declarer's point of view they are all of equal size. The most important thing is that you do not waste two honours in the same trick e.g. playing the queen from dummy and the king from your hand. We hope that you have reached a stage in bridge where this is easy for you: You do not need several high cards in the same trick.

Many bridge players would tend to win with the lowest of equal cards (here the queen) in order to make it clear how many (top) tricks you still have left in the suit – when you are looking at the king and the ace it is quite easy to see that you have two sure tricks left. If you take the first trick with the ace, you might have problems remembering later in the play whether the ace has been played, and you might become uncertain if the queen and the king are the highest cards left.

- 4) ♠KJ3 5) ♠AQ65 6) ♠AKQJ10
- | | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| ♠KJ3 | ♠AQ65 | ♠AKQJ10 |
| Dummy
Declarer | Dummy
Declarer | Dummy
Declarer |
| ♠AQ7 | ♠KJ10 | ♠65 |

Ex. 4) Three top tricks. We have the four highest cards in the suit, but sadly they only provides three tricks, since we have to follow suit and hence must play a card both from dummy and our hand on every trick.

You can never get more tricks in a suit than the highest number of cards you have in one of the hands.

OK... not entirely true when we come to playing with a trump suit but that is many pages from now and is not an issue at this point!

Ex. 5) Four top tricks. We have the five highest cards including the 10, but when our seven cards are divided 4-3 there cannot be more than four tricks.

Ex. 6) Five top tricks. Exactly the same cards as in the previous example, but now we have a five-card suit in dummy which gives us five tricks. Already at this early point we will ask you to observe the difference between example 5) and 6).



The more cards in a suit the better.

7) ♠AK

Dummy
Declarer

♠QJ

8) ♠KQJ10

Dummy
Declarer

♠853

9) ♠AK4

Dummy
Declarer

♠QJ65

Ex. 7) Two top tricks. Sad but true! We have all four honours (thus all 10 HCP) in the suit but they fall at the same time so the result is only two tricks.

Ex. 8) Zero top tricks! Remember, that it only counts for top tricks if you can take them here and now without interference from the opponents. Without the ace we cannot count any top tricks. It is correct that we can get three tricks in the suit. We will get back to this very soon.

Ex. 9) Four top tricks. The purpose of this example is to show the most convenient order to take your top tricks. If you would like to have your four tricks here and now you must start by cashing the ace and king. Then you play the four to get home to the queen and jack. If you accidentally win the first trick in your hand with the jack, you will be forced to win the next two tricks with the ace and king in dummy. The queen is now left in your hand. As the highest card left in the suit it is a sure trick, but since the lead is in dummy we cannot immediately get the trick. More about this issue in Chapter 5: Blockages.



Playing the honours from the shortest hand first makes it easier to take your tricks.

The time has come to have a closer look at the small cards instead of the honour cards. Can you win a trick with a deuce? YES, if there are no more cards left in the suit. Even an insignificant card such as the ♣2 will win a trick, if nobody else in the game holds a club. This is because you can never win the trick (in no-trump at least) if you cannot play the same suit as the leader. You must follow suit! Imagine that you hold: AKQJ1098765432 in a suit and you are allowed to lead. You can start with the ace or the two as you please. You are guaranteed to get all 13 tricks since nobody can follow suit.

How many tricks do you have in view in the following examples?

- | | | | | | |
|-----|-----------------|-----|-----------------|-----|-----------------|
| 10) | ♠AQJ62 | 11) | ♠AQ642 | 12) | ♠AQ75 |
| | Dummy | | Dummy | | Dummy |
| | Declarer | | Declarer | | Declarer |
| | ♠K53 | | ♠K53 | | ♠K42 |

Ex. 10) Four or five tricks. You have four top tricks with the AKQJ. The fifth trick in the suit might (easily...) come from the last card in dummy, the six, if E/W are out of cards in the suit when the six is played.

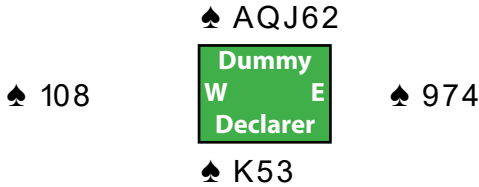
Ex. 11) Three, four or five tricks. Three top tricks and possibly two tricks more, if E/W cannot follow suit after the AKQ have been taken. Then the six and the four are the last cards in the suit.

Ex. 12) Three or four tricks. After the AKQ you hope that the seven is the last card in the suit.

In all three examples you depend on a specific distribution of the opponents' cards, so your top cards can draw all the missing ones.

It is a good and basic principle in these situations to count the number of cards left in the suit, instead of trying to remember all the specific cards that have fallen. No experienced player will try to remember in example 10 if the 10, the 9, the 8 and the 7 are all gone to make sure if the six now is the highest card in the suit. Instead they will count if the remaining cards in the suit have fallen, so the six is the last card in the suit – which means for sure that it also is the highest card!

Start by counting the number of cards combined in dummy and in your hand. In example 10) you have a total of eight cards, so the opponents have a total of five cards. When you play your high cards you just have to keep an eye on whether the opponents follow suit. The complete distribution of the suit might be like this common layout:



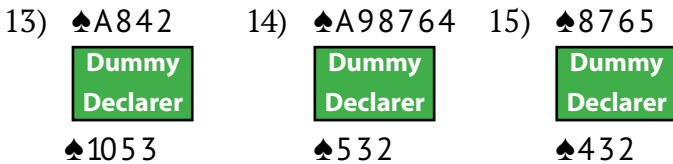
When you take the king followed by the ace and the queen, E/W have played five cards in the suit so you have complete control. You might even show this by playing the six before the jack, even if that might make your partner nervous!

?! **Only count the missing cards in a suit – no need to count to 13.**

In example 11) you are missing the jack but that is of no consequence if the suit is evenly divided. As long as one of the opponents holds three cards in the suit thereby leaving two cards with partner, these five cards are all drawn when you cash the three honours leaving you with the last two tricks and five in all.

In example 12) you only have a total of seven cards in the suit leaving six cards with the opponents. When you take your ace, king, and queen you must look after/count if both East and West follow suit on every trick. If the answer is yes then the seven is necessarily the last card in the suit and worth a trick.

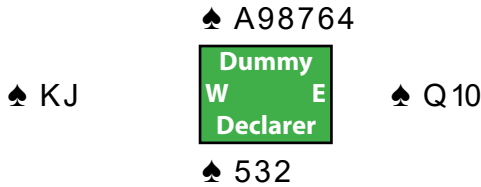
More examples:



Ex. 13) One to two tricks. One sure trick with the ace. If you are lucky you also get a trick with the last card in dummy. In this

situation “lucky” means that you are depending on a specific lie of the opponents’ cards. If East and West each have three cards each in the suit you will get an extra trick. Look in the next section about setting up tricks.

Ex. 14) Three to five tricks. Again, you only have one top trick but by virtue of the total number of cards in the suit it is always possible to get more tricks when the opponents show out. You may be so lucky, that the four missing cards are nicely divided for you:



Take the ace and then play the four. All their big cards fall together, and you have four more tricks with the small cards in dummy. You can easily imagine what happens to your tricks if West has KQJ instead of KJ. Now he must get two tricks in the suit. Or even worse if one of the opponents holds KQJ10 – now you must lose three tricks and settle for three tricks for yourself.

Ex. 15) Zero or one trick. It certainly does not look promising with the seven smallest cards in the suit, and very few players would look here in the search for tricks. Nonetheless it is important to understand the trick-taking potential in dummy’s fourth card of the suit. If the suit breaks 3-3 and AKQJ109 are all gone in three rounds, then the last card in the suit is worth a trick.

In the above examples we have talked a little about the distribution of the opponents’ cards and how you might be more or less lucky. The distribution of the 13 cards is of course an exact statistical discipline, and the subject is described in several books. We will not bore you with a lot of theory and formulas, but it is necessary to show understanding for a few common distributions, since it might be crucial for selecting the right line of play.

The following table shows the likely distribution of the opponents’ cards. Do not worry: This is the only table in the book so do not despair!

Table 1. Distribution probabilities

No. of opponents cards	Distribution	Percentage probability	Easier to remember
2	1-1	52.00	50
	2-0	48.00	50
3	2-1	78.00	80
	3-0	22.00	20
4	2-2	40.70	40
	3-1	49.74	50
	4-0	9.56	10
5	3-2	67.83	70
	4-1	28.26	30
	5-0	3.91	5
6	3-3	35.53	35
	4-2	48.45	50
	5-1	14.53	15
	6-0	1.49	
7	4-3	62.18	60
	5-2	30.52	30
	6-1	6.78	
	7-0	0.52	
8	4-4	32.72	30
	5-3	47.12	50
	6-2	17.14	
	7-1	2.86	
	8-0	0.16	

Even very skillful players cannot remember these numbers and definitely not with two decimal places. It is more than enough if you look at the last column with the rounded numbers.

Warning: Do not get frightened about these numbers! Use them only at this point to get an idea about when you are “lucky” or “unlucky”. By the way: There are millions of “unlucky” bridge players out there... some of them because they have not read this book ☺

Have another look at example 14:

♠A98764


Dummy
Declarer

♠532

From the table you can now see that the chance of getting five tricks is – without decimals – 41% (their four cards are distributed 2-2), the chance for four tricks is 50% (their cards are 3-1), and the risk of only three tricks is 10% (their cards are distributed 4-0).

In the same way you can check example 10 with AQJ62 opposite K53. You are very unlucky if you do not get all five tricks because their five cards are distributed 5-0 in only 4% of the cases.

One observation is worth noticing already now. When the opponents have an even number of cards in the suit (4, 6 or 8), the cards are evenly divided in less than 50% of the cases. This is not true in the rare case, when there are only two cards missing.

 ***The opponents' cards are not normally evenly distributed if you are missing an even number.***

B. Establishing Tricks

It is rare to see a contract making in just top tricks. You almost always have to work for your food by setting up tricks in one or more suits. Let us look at some simple examples, where you have no top tricks to begin with. How many tricks can you set up?

1) ♠KQ

Dummy
Declarer

♠32

2) ♠K6

Dummy
Declarer

♠Q2

3) ♠KQJ

Dummy
Declarer

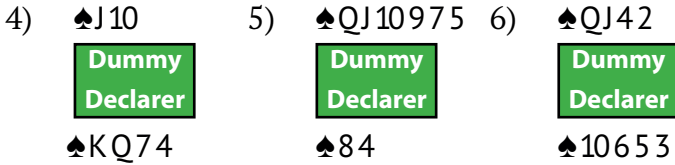
♠853

Ex. 1) One trick. Play the king. East or West can take the ace but now the queen is good (= established for a trick). The opponent with the ace is not obliged to use this card at once, but even if an opponent ducks or plays low with the ace (= the ace is held back) the result is the same: One trick for you.

Ex. 2) One trick. Same situation as the previous example – only with the honour cards distributed one in each hand. What not to do: Play the two to the six...or the queen to the king?! No one will

do that you say? Well – we have seen things like that happen many times in our careers as bridge teachers!

Ex. 3) Two tricks. No matter when the defence chooses to play the ace you always get two tricks, because you have the next three highest cards in the suit.



Ex. 4) Three tricks. We have the four second highest cards in the suit, and there is a four-card suit in one of the hands, so we can always get three tricks when the ace is squeezed out. Two things to notice:

a) Do not start with the king or queen from hand since you “crash” one of your own important cards in dummy.

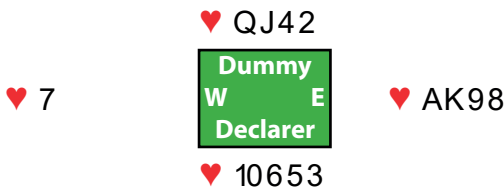
b) Appreciate the benefit of the 4-2 division of your suit. If your six cards were divided 3-3, you would only get two tricks.

Ex. 5) Four tricks. No matter how the missing cards are distributed we can remove the ace and the king and then have four tricks left in dummy. Not bad to get four tricks in a suit where we only have three HCP – remember the value of long suits!



The more cards in a suit – the more tricks you get.

Ex. 6) One or two tricks. When we are missing the nine we are not guaranteed more than one trick. If the cards of E/W are distributed 3-2 (68% according to the table two pages ago) there are no problems, but the layout might be something like this:



Maybe South plays the three to the seven, jack and the king. If declarer next time plays the two from the table, East will restrain himself and put in the eight instead of rising with the ace. South

gets the trick with the 10, but now East with A9 has a so-called tenace over dummy's Q4.

7)	♠J9874	8)	♠98742	9)	♠8742
	<div style="background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 2px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block;">Dummy Declarer</div>		<div style="background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 2px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block;">Dummy Declarer</div>		<div style="background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 2px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block;">Dummy Declarer</div>
	♠1053		♠65		♠653

Ex. 7) Two tricks. With J10987 you hold five cards of equal strength. Three of them are used to force out AKQ. The last two provide two tricks. Slowly but surely!



You distinguish between quick tricks (top tricks: aces and kings) and slow tricks.

Ex. 8) Zero to two tricks. We play the suit repeatedly and hope that the missing six cards fall nicely. If the suit is distributed 3-3 (36%) we get two tricks. If the suit breaks 4-2 (48%) we get one trick, and if we are unlucky and catch a 5-1 or 6-0 break (16%) we get zero tricks.

Ex. 9) We have seen this one before but it is very important to understand that even the most lousy suits with no honours can produce a trick. We play the suit three times and hope for a 3-3 break (36%).

In practical play you hopefully have better suits to attack, but it is important to know the principle. If the opponents play the suit for you (not unlikely) you also have to pay attention as if they both follow three times they thereby help you to set up a trick.

10)	♠A764	11)	♠A765	12)	♠AQJ10
	<div style="background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 2px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block;">Dummy Declarer</div>		<div style="background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 2px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block;">Dummy Declarer</div>		<div style="background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 2px; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block;">Dummy Declarer</div>
	♠K85		♠K842		♠643

Ex. 10) Two or three tricks. It is very often a combination of top tricks and the possibility of setting up tricks. We have two tricks guaranteed and might be lucky to get one more if their cards are divided 3-3. Either you can cash the ace and the king and continue the suit, or you can start by giving up a trick (= ducking the suit) by playing low from both hands. There might be tactical considerations

regarding which plan to choose, but that is much too advanced at this point.

Ex. 11) Two or three tricks. Almost the same layout as ex. 10, but missing only five cards in the suit the odds of ending up with three tricks heavily increase. The chance for a 3-2 break is 68%. To put it in plain English: It is a good chance!

It is not important to remember the exact number of 68%. What you should try to remember is that the odds are well over fifty-fifty – that might be essential later in this book.

Ex. 12) Three tricks. QJ10 can for sure force out the king, so with the ace you have three safe tricks.

Could you get all four tricks? If you take the ace and the king drops (5-1 distribution with the king alone) you are extremely lucky (a little more than 2%), or the opponents are either hard of hearing or very nice ☺. There is however another way of playing this suit which is explained in a short while under “Finesses”.

13)	♠K1083	14)	♠A54	15)	♠KQ1098
	Dummy		Dummy		Dummy
	Declarer		Declarer		Declarer
	♠J94		♠QJ72		♠J

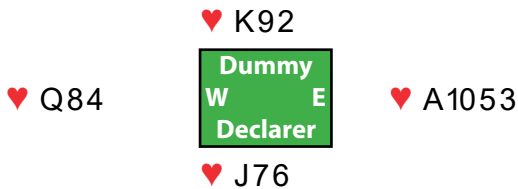
Ex. 13) Two tricks. The 10 and the 9 are important cards. Together with the king and the jack they guarantee two tricks after forcing out the queen and the ace. And as we will learn soon there is a hope of getting three tricks, if we play this combination correctly.

Ex. 14) Two or three tricks. After having cashed the ace you can always set up an extra trick with the queen and jack combined. Getting three tricks depends on both how lucky you are (the suit breaks 3-3) and on how you play the suit.

Ex. 15) Four tricks. With all the high cards below the ace four tricks are secure. To be sure of getting your tricks immediately you must play carefully: You must overtake the jack with the queen! Even if a defender holds back the ace, you can continue with a high card from dummy. More about this topic in Chapter 5 about blocking plays.

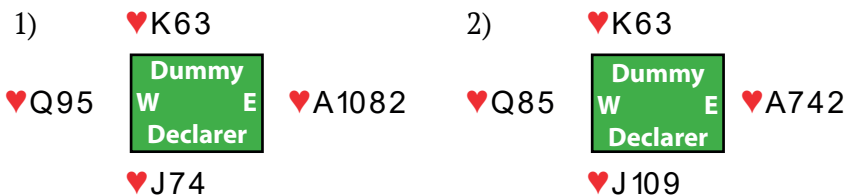
C. The Principle of Promotion

Exactly as you advance in the military to higher ranks, cards can be promoted. If an ace is cashed the king automatically becomes the highest card in the suit. The more high cards that fall in one trick the quicker the underlying cards will increase in value. If a trick goes J -> Q -> K -> A, the 10 is now of golden value. And if the next trick in the suit goes 7 -> 8 -> 9 -> 10, a card as humble as the six has suddenly become the biggest one. It might sound unrealistic but look at this example:



South plays the jack from his hand. West plays the queen (he is a strong defender!), the king is played from dummy and East wins with the ace. Next time South plays the seven to the eight, the nine from dummy and the 10 from East. The six is now the highest card and worth a trick.

The more equal cards you have available, the less you have to concern yourself about promotion. Take a look at these examples:



Ex. 1) If Declarer tries the jack from his hand, West will cover with the queen (honour on honour). This promotes the 10 in East and the nine in West to decisive cards for the defence no matter when South tries dummy's king. The result is zero tricks for declarer if he has to play the suit himself. Note the difference if one of the defenders opens the suit. If West has the lead and plays the five you play low from the North hand. If East takes the ace you get a trick with the king later on. Otherwise you score a trick immediately with the jack. If East opens the suit you always get a trick with the king.



It might be a disadvantage to open a suit yourself.

Ex. 2) You have the ten and the nine in your hand which makes the situation totally different – to your advantage. The jack is led as before and West will most likely play the queen in the hope of promoting something for partner. East can take North’s king with the ace, but the 109 are now the highest cards and two sure tricks. It will not help West to play low on the jack. Declarer plays low from dummy and East can let the jack hold the trick or take the ace. No matter what, the 10 is played next time and West’s queen is finessed. Many more finesses follow!

The 10 is an especially valuable card, but as shown also the nine might be of great importance. 10’s and 9’s are called middle or intermediate cards. They are not honours but they have more value than small cards.

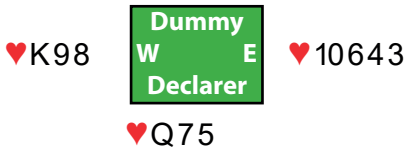


Learn to appreciate middle cards: 10’s and 9’s.

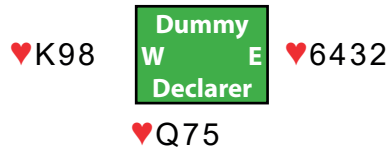
You can count a 10 as ½ HCP!

More examples where the 10 is a very important card:

3) ♥AJ2



4) ♥AJ10

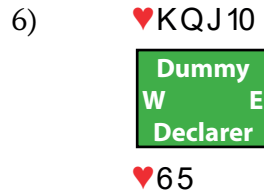
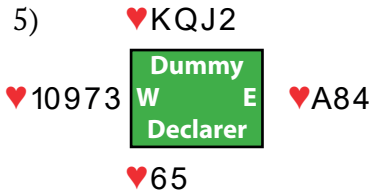


Ex. 3) If the defence is accurate you get only two tricks. If the queen is led West covers with the king thereby promoting the 10 in partners hand: You can win with the ace and take the jack, but the 10 is left as the highest card.

If declarer starts with a small card, West also plays small. You can finesse the jack and cash the ace, but West is not in a friendly mood so he plays the nine under the ace and keeps his king. Only two tricks for you.

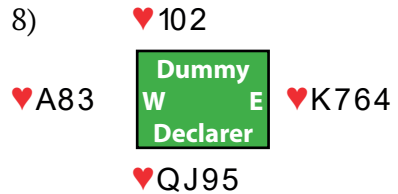
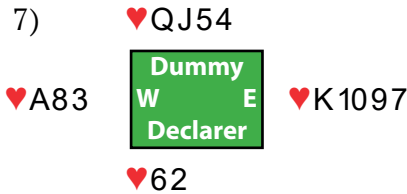
Ex. 4) The presence of the 10 makes a big difference. Now South faces no risk by playing the queen from hand. If West tries the king, it is easy to grab the ace and now J10 are high. If West plays low you ask for the 10 and next time you play low for a finesse

with the jack.



Ex. 5) No matter what you try you will end up with two tricks. Whenever a high card is played from dummy East wins with the ace. West holds on to the suit and will score the last trick with the 10.

Ex. 6) It should be easy to see that the four equal cards in dummy ensure three tricks. The only question is when East or West wants to take the ace.



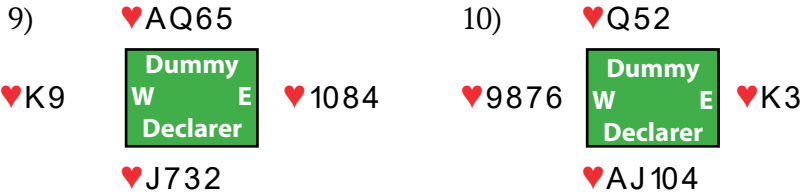
Ex. 7) When we have to play the suit ourselves it is not easy to set up a trick. Let us say that you start with the queen from dummy. East plays the seven, and West wins with the king. Now East has K109 over dummy's jack: Zero tricks for declarer.

By playing the suit correctly we can get one trick. Start by playing a small card to the jack and king. Later you play from hand again up towards the queen. When West holds the ace he cannot prevent you scoring a trick with the queen now or later. Much more about this in section E about leading towards honours.

Ex. 8) We do not need to play smartly to get two tricks. Start with the 10 from dummy which will force out one of the missing top honours. Then the three equals in your hand – QJ9 – guarantee two tricks.

When we hold "solid" suits with a number of equal cards we have gradually seen quite a few examples where it is easy to set up tricks. Problems arise when the suits are not solid. The important issue here is not to waste our honours needlessly. Put another way we must try to play so the opponents' honour cards only catch our small cards.

Easier said than done but a couple of examples show the principle:



Ex. 9) The first condition is to lead from the hand. If you start from dummy West is the last to play a card, so he will always score a trick with his king. If you cash the ace, West will get the king on the next trick. If you start by playing a small card from dummy towards the jack, West will immediately score his king. If you are not 100% in agreement with this you should put the cards on the table and play the trick. If that does not help we recommend another hobby ☺.

The correct play is to start with the two from your hand. Should West be so kind as to play the king you take it with the ace, and the queen and the jack will take care of the remaining cards in the suit. West will normally play small. Now you finesse with the queen and then cash the ace. When the king falls under the ace the jack is high.

If you make the totally understandable mistake of starting with the jack, West should cover with the king. You win the ace but the 10 is promoted into a trick, because three honours went on the same trick.

Ex. 10) Very difficult! If you start with dummy's queen East can get value out of his king by covering it. When the AKQ go on the first trick West's nine is promoted into a trick on the fourth round of the suit. Try instead the effect of leading the four from dummy to the 10. When you later play a small card from dummy intending to finesse the jack, the king falls without covering any card of value and you end up with all four tricks.



Get the opponents honours to drop without wasting your own honours under theirs.

“Finally, a comprehensive book about declarer play for the non-expert.” Zia Mahmood

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KNUT BLAKSET (b.1960) and his younger brother, **LARS BLAKSET** (b.1961), are Danish bridge royalty. The prodigious brothers have been a dominating factor in Danish bridge for more than four decades and are universally recognized to be among the best bridge players ever to come out of Denmark.

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