

**TEST YOUR
BRIDGE TECHNIQUE**

SAFETY PLAYS

David Bird • Tim Bourke

♠ Q 9 6 4 2
♥ A 6 3
♦ 6
♣ K 9 6 5

♥10 led

♠ A J 8 7 3
♥ K 4
♦ A 9
♣ A J 4 2

HOW TO PERFORM A SAFETY PLAY

There are several possible meanings of the term ‘safety play’. In the context of a single suit, it refers to the safest way to obtain the required number of tricks. Look at this spade holding, for example:

♠ A J 6 2



♠ K 7 4

If you need all four spade tricks, you cash the ♠K and then finesse the ♠J. You will succeed when West holds the ♠Q and the suit breaks 3-3. If instead you need only three spade tricks to make your contract, you should employ a safety play. You cash the ♠A and the ♠K and lead towards the jack on the third round if the queen has not already fallen. This is safer than following the original four-trick line because you will now make the contract when East started with ♠Q-x.

A ‘perfect safety play’ within a single suit is one that guarantees success however the defenders’ cards lie. This is an easy example:

♥ A Q 10 7 3



♥ K 9 6 2

To ensure that you score a full five tricks from the suit, you begin by cashing the ace (or queen). If either defender shows up with ♥J-8-5-4, you will be able to finesse against the jack. If you mistakenly cashed the ♥K on the first round, you would lose a trick when East held all four missing hearts.

If you're familiar with that one, you no doubt know this position, which does not offer a perfect safety play:

♥ A Q 9 6 2



♥ K 8 5 4

You cannot pick up the suit without loss if East holds ♥J-10-7-3. To ensure that you are successful when West has this holding, you must cash the ♥K on the first round. With ♥A-Q-9 sitting over West's remaining ♥J-10-7, you will be able to score all five tricks.

The last two examples act as a reminder that there are few general rules when it comes to safety plays. Suppose, for example, that you thought it was a good rule to 'start with an honor from the hand containing two honors'. You would be right on the first combination and wrong on the second.

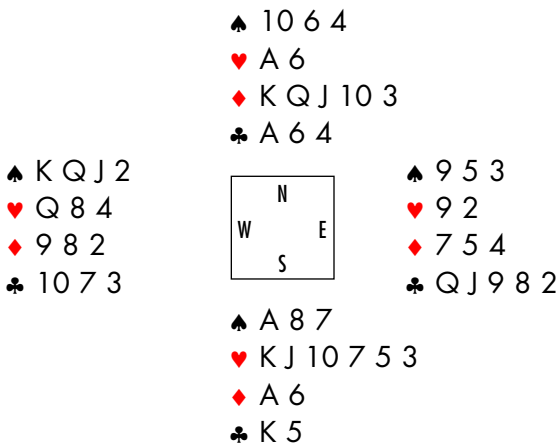
When the term 'safety play' is used in the context of a whole deal, it merely means the safest way to play a contract — the line that will give you the greatest chance of success. Sometimes this involves spotting an 'extra chance', one that will increase the chance offered by your main line. Here is a straightforward example:

	♠ K 10 5 4										
	♥ A Q 6										
	♦ 10 8 6 2										
	♣ K Q										
♠ 8 2	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100px; height: 100px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ 3
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♥ J 9 4 2		♥ K 10 8 3									
♦ Q J 5		♦ 9 7 4 3									
♣ J 10 9 5		♣ A 7 6 4									
	♠ A Q J 9 7 6										
	♥ 7 5										
	♦ A K										
	♣ 8 3 2										

West leads the ♣J against your contract of 6♠. You cannot avoid losing a club trick and it may seem that you will have to rely on the heart finesse. Quite possibly you will, but there is a small extra chance that you can investigate first. Suppose East wins the first trick and returns a diamond. You win with the ♦A, draw trumps and cash the ♦K, the ♦J falling from West. It costs you nothing to cross to the ♣Q and ruff a third round of diamonds. West's queen tumbles to the baize and your ♦10 is good! You can discard your heart loser and make the slam without having to take the heart finesse.

As you see, this was an 'extra chance'. If neither defender turned out to hold ♦Q-J-x, as would usually be the case, you would fall back on the heart finesse.

Sometimes you do best to start with the second-best play in one suit — one that does not risk losing the lead and allowing the defenders to cash a winner. If the first chance does not pay off, you pursue a chance in a different suit. By combining these two chances, you increase the total prospect of making the contract. On this next deal you combine the second-best play in the trump suit with the chance of obtaining a discard on one of the side suits:



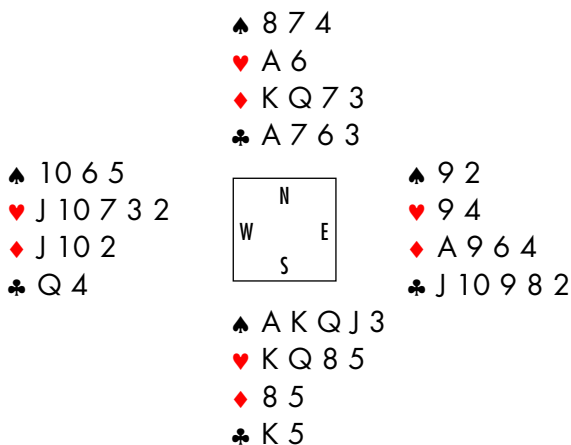
West leads the ♠K against your small slam in hearts. You win with the ♠A and must now decide how to play the trump suit. Normally you would cash the ace and then finesse the jack. This is the play that gives

you the best chance of scoring six trump tricks. However, it's not the best idea when considering the contract as a whole. If you take a trump finesse and it loses, West will put you down two by cashing two spade tricks. A safer line of play is to start by cashing the ace and king of trumps. This is the second-best way to play the trumps, looking at that suit in isolation. If it fails, though, you will still be on lead and can seek a second chance — you may be able to throw your spade losers on dummy's diamond suit.

When the cards lie as in the diagram, the ♥Q will not fall in two rounds. However, when you turn to diamonds, West will have to follow to three rounds and you will have time to throw both your spade losers.

The best chance in the trump suit alone (to play the ♥A and finesse the ♥J) gives you a 40% chance of picking up the trumps without loss. Playing the ♥A and ♥K instead only gives you a 33% chance of doing so; however, this leaves you with such a high probability of being able to discard both your spade losers that the combined chance comes to a substantial 63%.

Another form of safety play involves minimizing the risk of an adverse ruff. Would you have spotted the winning play on this deal?



You bid to a small slam in spades and West leads the ♦J, covered by the king and ace. How will you play when East returns the ♣J?

You win the club switch and see that a heart ruff will bring your total to twelve tricks. You cannot draw all the trumps before taking the heart ruff, of course, because this would exhaust dummy's trumps. Suppose you play the ace and king of hearts immediately and ruff a low heart in dummy. Hearts break 5-2 and East will overruff with the ♠9. Unlucky, yes, but there was no need to go down! As you no doubt realized, you lose nothing by drawing two rounds of trumps before taking the heart ruff. By good fortune this removes East's trump holding. When you ruff the third heart, East will not be able to overruff.

This was another example of an extra-chance play. Your main chance of success was that hearts would break 4-3 and that both defenders would have to follow as you ruffed the third round of hearts. The extra chance was that a defender would have only two hearts but you could still achieve your ruff because he held only two trumps.

Well, you get the general idea. Safety plays may involve a single suit or your overall plan for playing a contract. The purpose is always to maximize your chance of making the contract. Sometimes you have to surrender the chance of an extra 20 or 30 for an overtrick in order to give yourself a greater chance of the main prize – the game or slam bonus.

We're nearing the time when you can to test your own ability in this area. Nervous, are you? There is no need to be. No one is watching and if you do happen to miss the best line in some slam there will be no need to offer an explanation to your teammates! If any problem proves too tricky, the answer will be explained on the pages that follow. Next time you venture to the bridge table, you will surely find that your play is considerably safer than it was previously. Good luck!

Problem 1

[To Solution](#)

♠ Q 9 6 4 2

♥ A 6 3

♦ 6

♣ K 9 6 5

♥ 10 led

♠ A J 8 7 3

♥ K 4

♦ A 9

♣ A J 4 2

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			1 ♠
pass	4 ♦ *	pass	6 ♠
all pass			

West leads the ♥ 10. What is your plan for maximum safety?

Problem 2

[To Solution](#)

♠ J 3

♥ A Q 7

♦ A 9 7 3 2

♣ K 7 3

♦ K led

♠ A Q 8 7 6 2

♥ K 5 4

♦ 6

♣ A Q 4

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			1 ♠
pass	2 ♦	pass	3 ♠
pass	4NT	pass	5 ♠
pass	6 ♠	all pass	

West leads the ♦ K: plan the play.

Problem 3

[To Solution](#)

♠ J 9 4 2
♥ A K 4
♦ A Q 6
♣ A 8 4

♥ 10 led

♠ A Q 8 5
♥ Q J 8 3
♦ K 4 2
♣ K 5

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	6NT	all pass	1NT

West leads the ♥10 against 6NT. How will you play the contract?

Problem 4

[To Solution](#)

♠ 7 3
♥ A K 9 5
♦ A J
♣ A J 10 8 7

♠ 4 led

♠ A K 5
♥ 7 3 2
♦ 7 6 5 2
♣ Q 4 3

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	1♣ 3NT	pass all pass	1NT

West leads the ♠4 and East plays the ♠J. How will you play?

SOLUTION TO PROBLEM 1

<p>♠ —</p> <p>♥ 10 9 5</p> <p>♦ K J 7 5 4 2</p> <p>♣ Q 10 7 3</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: 60px; margin: 0 auto;"> <p style="margin: 0;">N</p> <p style="margin: 0;">W E</p> <p style="margin: 0;">S</p> </div>	<p>♠ Q 9 6 4 2</p> <p>♥ A 6 3</p> <p>♦ 6</p> <p>♣ K 9 6 5</p>	<p>♠ K 10 5</p> <p>♥ Q J 8 7 2</p> <p>♦ Q 10 8 3</p> <p>♣ 8</p>
		<p>♠ A J 8 7 3</p> <p>♥ K 4</p> <p>♦ A 9</p> <p>♣ A J 4 2</p>	

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	4♦*	pass	1♠
all pass			6♠

North's splinter bid of 4♦ shows a sound game raise with at most one diamond. How will you play the slam when West leads the ♥10?

There are possible losers in both the black suits. Let's look at the trump suit first. With three cards missing, you will finesse East for the king, but should you lead a low card or the queen? It will make no difference if East has a singleton or doubleton king. When he has all three missing spades, you will lose a trick in the suit if you begin with a low card to the jack. It is therefore essential that you lead the queen on the first round. If East plays low, run the card. If instead he covers with the king, win with the ace. When West discards on the trick, you will return to dummy with a diamond ruff to finesse against the ♠10 on the second round.

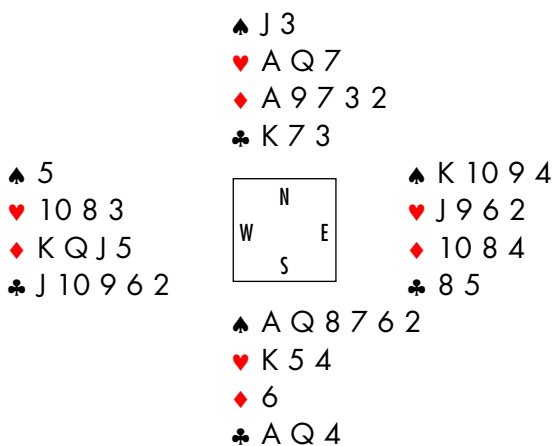
What is the best play in clubs? It depends on what happened in trumps. If you lost a trump trick (either because West held the ♠K or because you missed the safety play against K-10-x), you cannot afford a club loser. When aiming for a full four club tricks, the safety play is a low card to the jack on the first round. Note that it would be a

mistake to cash the ♣K first. This would not help you against a singleton ♣Q with West — you would still have to lose a club trick — and it would cost you the contract when East held the singleton ♣Q.

If you manage to pick up the trumps for no loser, there is in fact a ‘perfect safety play’ that will guarantee the three club tricks that you need for the contract. Cash the ♣A on the first round and then lead towards the ♣K-9-6, intending to finesse the ♣9 if West follows with a low spot card. If West shows out on the second round, rise with the ♣K and lead back towards your ♣J.

Alternatively, you could cash the ♣4 and lead towards the jack to guarantee three tricks, but this needlessly loses a trick when West was dealt ♣Q-x.

SOLUTION TO PROBLEM 2



WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	2♦	pass	1♠
pass	4NT	pass	3♠
pass	6♠	all pass	5♠

West leads the ♦K against your spade slam. What is your plan for maximum safety?

The side suits are solid and you can therefore concentrate your entire effort on determining the safest play in the trump suit, where you can afford just one loser. What is it to be? With many similar combinations you do best to cash the ace first. It doesn't look very promising here. If you drop a singleton ♠K, all will be well. Apart from that case, you will usually lose two trump tricks when the suit breaks 4-1. (You might manage to recover with a trump coup when West holds a singleton ♠10 or ♠9.)

How about leading dummy's ♠3 to your ♠Q on the first round? If West holds a singleton ♠10 or ♠9, you could succeed by leading the ♠J on the next round. Given the layout in the diagram, however, you will go down. East's remaining ♠K-10-9 will be worth two tricks.

The best play is to lead dummy's ♠J on the first round. If West wins with the ♠K, you will need a 3-2 spade break. When the cards lie as in the diagram, the ♠J will be covered by the king and ace. Only the ♠5 falls from West and you re-enter dummy to lead the second round of trumps. When East produces the ♠4 over dummy's ♠3, the safety play is to cover with your ♠6. West shows out and you lose just one trump trick to East's remaining ♠10-9. If the deep finesse of the ♠6 had lost, the suit would be breaking 3-2, allowing you to draw the last trump with your queen.

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TEST YOUR SAFETY PLAY!

This book is designed to accompany *Safety Plays*, Book 3 in the *Bridge Technique* series.

Why should you want to polish your safety play technique? There are two very good reasons. The first is that by applying them at the table, you will make more contracts than you did before. A more important advantage is that you will, perhaps, begin to approach each problem at the table as though it were a problem in a book. More often than you expect, you will reap a big reward for a little extra effort.

The basic principles of safety plays are straightforward, but applying them is not always so easy. Rest assured that some serious challenges await you in these pages!



DAVID BIRD has written more than fifty previous books, including the award-winning *Bridge Technique* series (with Marc Smith). A regular contributor to many bridge magazines, he lives near Southampton, England.



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