

BARBARA SEAGRAM & DAVID BIRD



BRIDGE

25

WAYS TO TAKE MORE
TRICKS AS DECLARER



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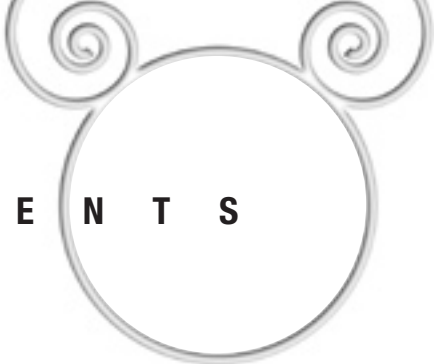
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To my children, Heather & Christopher. How did I ever get so lucky?

Barbara Seagram

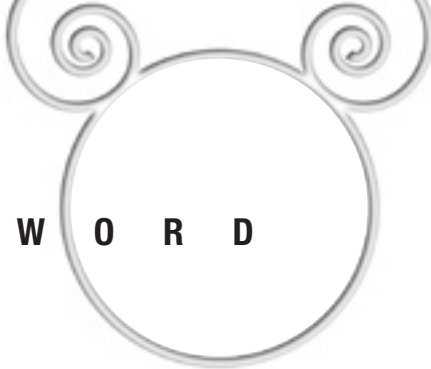
For my two children — Claire and James. I'm proud of you both!

David Bird



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F O R E W O R D

I predict that this book will become one of the most well-used books you own. Barbara Seagram and David Bird have clearly formed one of those things that all bridge players strive to achieve — a successful partnership — and they demonstrate the effectiveness of that partnership in this book. David has provided the bridge expertise and insightfulness of a true expert while Barbara displays a knack for teaching the game that few possess.

From the very first chapter, they tackle subject matter that seems to confuse many beginning and intermediate bridge players. And they do it in a way that is easily comprehensible. At each point of every chapter readers are taken through the steps they should be considering as they tackle the various problems. Additionally, the lessons are layered so that readers become more adept at identifying just what type of problem they are facing on a given hand. It is clear to me that most advanced players don't remember what a struggle it was to learn the material covered in this book. And how once it had been learned, they needed constant review to solidify that knowledge.

During a recent mentoring program, a student told my wife: 'I know I'm supposed to be thinking — I just don't know what I'm supposed to be thinking about!' Digesting this book will solve one of the major problems faced by these students; I know that these are topics that have frequently left my own students befuddled and convinced that they will never get them. I am looking forward to using this material as a textbook in my own classes. It has been so long since teachers have had such a textbook available!

This book is must reading for you and your favorite partner. But you are going to need two copies between you, because you won't want to be without your own!

*Alan LeBendig,
December 2002*



I N T R O D U C T I O N

For some readers, we realize, this may be your very first bridge book.

First, may we congratulate you. What a great choice you made! Secondly, we need to point out a few things that all bridge books and bridge columns have in common. The declarer always sits South, with the opening lead made by West. The hand diagrams will therefore match your experience at the bridge table when you are declarer. The dummy is ahead of you and the opening lead is made by the player to your left.

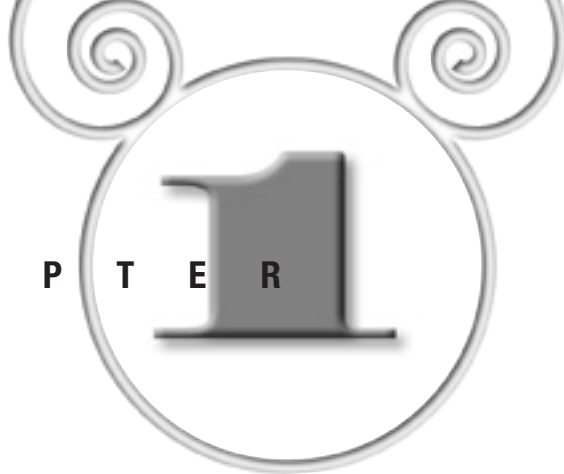
Bridge is more technical than a game such as Blackjack and has its own terminology. There is no need for you to be worried about this. We will explain all technical terms, the first time they are used. If you come across any term that you do not understand you can look it up in the Glossary at the end of the book.

Finally, perhaps you are not sure that bridge is the right pastime for you and are wondering if you should have bought that book on open-water kayaking instead. Have no such doubts. Bridge is the finest game in the world, with a vast army of players who will become your immediate friends the moment you meet them.

Right, it's time to turn the page and get reading!

Barbara Seagram and David Bird

C H A P T E R

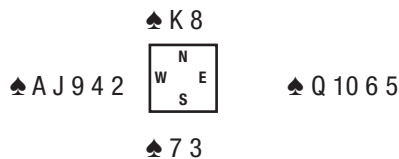


THE SIMPLE FINESSE



A very common lead with inexperienced players is the lead of a queen in a suit from hand up to a guarded ace in the other hand, not holding the knave or ten in either hand. What can be gained by it? *W. Dalton. Practical Bridge. 1908*

One of the most important techniques in cardplay is also one of the simplest — you lead towards a high card that you are hoping to make. Look at this familiar layout:



To score a trick with the king you must lead from the South hand, towards dummy's king. If West plays his ace, the king will become good. If instead he plays low, you will rise with dummy's king and it will win the trick. You have a 50% chance of success. You will score a trick when West holds the ace but not when East has it.

If you mistakenly lead the suit from dummy, you will have practically no chance of making the king. The defenders will win the first round cheaply and the ace will capture dummy's king on the second round.

Sometimes you have to lead twice towards the honors in a suit:



Hoping to score both the king and the queen, you lead towards the dummy. If West rises with the ace, the king and queen become good. If he plays low, the king will win and you will return to the South hand in some different suit to lead towards the queen. It makes no difference when West decides to take the ace — you will score two tricks. Once again this has a 50% chance of success. If East held the ♥A, you would make only one trick.

Look back at the diagram. What would happen if you made the mistake of leading the king from dummy instead? West would win with the ace and you would score only one heart trick.

There is no reason why the lead towards a high card should be on the first round of the suit. Look at these two combinations:



In position (1) you play the ace on the first round and then lead towards the queen, the honor that you hope will give you a second trick. The queen will score when East holds the king. In position (2) you cash the ace and king and then lead towards the jack on the third round. You will score a third trick in three cases: when the queen falls on the first two rounds, when West holds the queen and when the suit breaks 3-3 (making your last diamond a winner).

Sometimes the honor that you lead towards is accompanied by a higher non-touching honor. This is the most familiar form of the play known as a **finesse**:



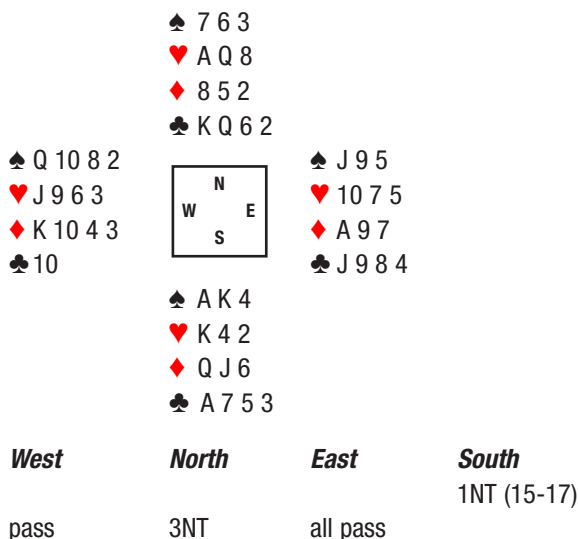
In (3) you lead low to the queen, hoping that West holds the king. In (4) you play the ace on the first round and then lead low to the jack. You hope that West holds the queen.

Even when you hold only the queen you can sometimes set up a trick:



You lead low from dummy and East has to rise with the ace or king to prevent you from scoring an immediate trick with the queen. When you regain the lead, you cross to dummy in a different suit and lead again towards the queen. East has to rise with his remaining top honor and your queen is now good. You were lucky to find East with both top honors, yes, but if you had led the suit from the South hand you would have wasted this piece of good fortune.

Let's see a whole deal where you can make the contract by leading towards high cards.



West leads a fourth-best ♠2 against your contract of 3NT. You can count eight top tricks (two spades, three hearts and three clubs). If clubs break 3-2 you will have a fourth trick in that suit, which will give you the contract.

You win the spade lead and test the club suit by playing the ace and king. Bad news comes when West shows out on the second round. You have only eight tricks now. Where can you find a ninth? You must hope to make a diamond trick by leading twice towards the queen and jack. You will succeed unless West holds both the ace and king. At Trick 4 you lead a diamond from dummy. East plays low and your queen loses to West's king. You win the next spade trick and cross to dummy with the ♥A, to lead a second round of diamonds. East plays low and you rise with the jack. This time you are in luck. East holds the missing ace and your jack wins the trick. You now have nine tricks.

Note how important it was to lead **towards** those diamond honors. What would have happened if you had led the queen from your hand on the first round? East would have won with the ace and, with West's K-10 sitting over your J-6, you would fail to score a diamond trick. Down one!

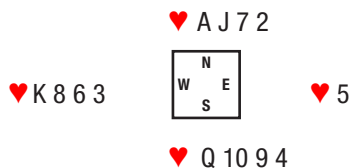
Finessing by leading a high card

Until now, we have led a low card towards the combination that we wanted to finesse. Sometimes you lead a high card:



You lead the diamond queen, playing low from dummy unless the king appears. If the queen wins the first round, West playing low, you will lead the jack next. Any time that West chooses to play his king, the guillotine will fall — you will win with dummy's ace.

This position is similar:



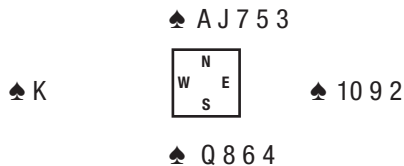
If you start with a low card to the jack, you will be in the wrong hand to repeat the finesse. (You would have to return to your hand in a different suit.) It is more convenient to lead the ♥Q on the first round.

In the previous two positions you do not mind in the slightest if the honor you lead is covered by the defender in second seat. Why is that? Because you hold sufficient neighboring cards to take the remaining tricks if the opponents cover. The next combination does not pass this test:



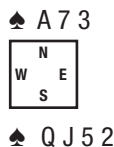
Your only chance of four tricks is to find West with a doubleton king. You should play low to the queen on the first round and then cash the ace. If you mistakenly lead the jack on the first round, you will squander your good fortune. West will cover when he holds a doubleton king and East will score an undeserved trick.

This position is similar:



You cannot afford to lead the queen. It will be covered by the king and ace and once again East will score an undeserved trick. Lead a low card instead, intending to finesse dummy's jack, and all will be well. Dummy's ace will capture the stiff king on the first round and you will score all five tricks.

Many players go wrong on this simple-looking combination:



How would you give yourself the best chance of three tricks?

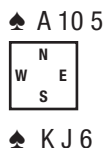
You often see players leading the queen from the South hand, but there is little point in it. If East wins with the king, you will need a 3-3 break to make three tricks (only a 36% chance). If instead West holds the king, he will cover at some stage and again you will need a 3-3 break.

A much better idea is to cash the ace and lead twice towards the queen-jack. You then make three tricks not only when the suit breaks 3-3 but also when East holds the king (or West has a singleton king). By playing the suit correctly, you increase your chance from 36% to a massive 68%.

Give yourself one more neighboring card, making the South holding Q-J-10-5, and the situation would change. With three tricks now assured, you could afford to lead the queen and play low from dummy if West did not produce the king. You would then score all four tricks when West held K-x-x.

The two-way finesse

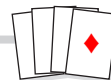
Sometimes you have what is known as a 'two-way finesse':



If you think that West has the missing queen, you will finesse dummy's ten. If instead you think that East holds the queen, you will finesse the jack. Unless there is a specific clue from the bidding, you should play the other suits first,

BY THE WAY

The term 'stiff king' means a king that is unaccompanied by any smaller cards. It is alternatively known as a 'singleton king' or a 'bare king'.



trying to discover which defender holds the majority of the missing spades. You will then finesse that player for the queen.

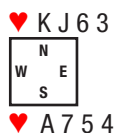
This position is similar:



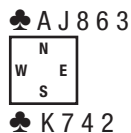
You are bound to lose one trick to the ace but you can finesse either defender for the missing jack. Again you would play on the other suits and place the missing jack in the hand of the defender who appeared to hold more hearts.

Should I finesse or play for the drop?

When you are missing the queen, there is an easy-to-remember rule that tells you whether to finesse or play for the drop: *Eight ever, nine never*. What does that mean? It means you should finesse when you hold eight cards between the hands but not when you hold nine cards.



Here you hold eight cards. You should cash the ace first, in case East holds a singleton queen, and then play low to the jack. *Eight ever*. A finesse is a 50-50 proposition but the queen will fall in two rounds only 33% of the time if you play the ace and king instead.



You now have nine cards between the two hands and should play the king first. Unless East shows out, you then play low to the ace. *Nine never*.

The odds are strongly in favor of a finesse with a combined holding of eight cards. With nine cards, the odds are only marginally in favor of playing for the drop. Suppose, in the last position, that your right-hand opponent has already shown up with a long suit elsewhere. He is likely to be shorter than his partner in clubs, so you would finesse West for the ♣Q.

When you are missing the king, you should finesse when you hold ten or fewer cards between the hands and play for the drop with eleven cards.

♠ A J 9 8 4 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q 10 7 6

With a combined holding of ten cards you lead the queen and run it if West plays low. (The argument ‘West would have covered if he held the king, so I might as well hope for a singleton king with East’ applies only against very weak defenders. A good player would not dream of covering from K-x or K-x-x if you have bid that suit.) Give yourself a fifth spade in the South hand, making it eleven spades between the two hands, and you should play for the drop.

Should I cash a high card before finessing?

With some combinations you should try to drop a possible singleton honor before taking a finesse in the suit:

♥ A K 9 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♥ J 10 5 3

You have a combined holding of eight cards, so the odds favor a finesse against the queen rather than playing for the drop. However, by playing dummy’s ace before taking a finesse, you avoid losing to a singleton queen with East.

What do you make of this combination, which looks similar?

♦ A K J 10 9 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♦ 6 4

Again you have eight cards and intend to finesse West for the queen. Should you cash the ace first, in case East holds a singleton queen?

You should not cash the ace first. You would pick up a singleton queen with East, yes, but you would lose out when East held a singleton eight, seven, five or two. (Only one subsequent finesse would be possible and you would not be able to pick up West’s Q-x-x-x.) This is a reminder that you have to think at this game, not merely apply a set of rules!

Summary

- ✓ By leading towards any honor that is not a winner, you increase the chance of scoring a trick with it. Lead towards a king, for example, and you score a trick whenever the king sits over the defender's ace.
- ✓ When you hold a combination of honors, for example K-Q-x or A-Q-J-x, you may need to lead towards them twice.

THE SIMPLE FINESSE

NOW TRY THESE...

To Answers

1)

♠ 7 6 5 2
♥ 10 6 3
♦ 8 5 2
♣ K 8 6

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A K
♥ A K Q J 4
♦ K Q 7
♣ A Q 5

West leads the ♠Q against 6NT. How will you play the slam?

2)

♠ A Q 7 2
♥ Q 5 3
♦ 10 8 6 3
♣ 7 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K J 9
♥ A 8 7 2
♦ A 7 5 4
♣ A K

West leads the ♣Q against 3NT. How will you play the hand?

3)

♠ A
♥ 8 6 4 3
♦ 8 7 4 2
♣ A 7 6 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K 7 6 3
♥ A K
♦ Q J 5
♣ K Q J 8

West leads the ♠2 against 3NT. How will you play the hand?