

ALEX'S BRIDGE TIP

	1S / Pass
S K532	
H AQJ5	
D 87	
C 975	1H / 2C

When in doubt, lead a trump. We hear this adage often. If you are leading a trump because you are in doubt, 90% of the time, it will be wrong. Making a decision to lead a trump is based on many things. Sometimes, it is a nice, safe, passive lead that gives nothing away and may cut down on dummy's ruffing power, when the opponents have found a fit.

It is an especially good lead when you have strength in opponent's first bid suit and dummy chooses the second bid suit to be trump. See above hand. Dummy is North and has shown 6-9 points (maybe 10) and has shown a preference for Clubs. This means that dummy likely has 3 or 4 Clubs and a singleton Heart. What will Declarer plan to do to dispose of her losing Hearts which are in her hand? YOU (sitting West with above hand) know that Declarer's Hearts are crummy because you have excellent Hearts yourself. Declarer plans to ruff Hearts in dummy with dummy's Clubs. This is a prime example of when to lead trump. Lead a Club.

Here is another situation where it is right to lead a trump:

	3H / 5C
S AQ5	
H 654	
D K864	
C Q52	
	1H / 4NT / 6H

You are West, on lead against 6H. NS got to 6H so must have 33 points, less some points for distribution, so let's say 31 or 32 HCP. You, West, have 11 HCP. Don't forget to always use the Rule of 40 before making an opening lead. Add all those points up and you will see that partner (East) cannot be expected to hold a single HCP in her hand. If you lead the Spade Ace, South's Spade King will be now good. If you lead a small Diamond, it will be right into Declarer's Diamond AQ. If you lead a small Club, it may be right into Declarer's AKJ. So, in other words, you will be giving Declarer a free finesse by underleading an honour or by leading the S Ace. The correct lead here is the passive lead of a Heart (Trump). It gives nothing away i.e. it does not help the enemy.

BARBARA'S BRIDGE TIP:

As Responder to the opening bid of 1NT or 2NT, we must never at any time in the auction bid a four-card suit. This is why Stayman was invented. This way, we show a four card major by inference only. So yes, you know this.

But what will you bid if you have both a four-card major and a five-card major also.

e.g. You hear partner open 1NT and you have:

S A876

H KJ642

D 32

C 54

Do you have a four-card major? Yes. So whenever you OWN a four-card major, use Stayman (provided you are not 4-3-3-3).

1NT - 2C

If opener now bids either 2H or 2S, you will now bid 4 of that major because you have found a fit.

If opener bids 2D, you now bid 2H. Partner will know that you may never bid 2H holding a 4 card major so will know you have five Hearts. Then why, she will ask herself, did you not use a Jacoby Transfer in the first place?

Aha! You must have had four Spades and five Hearts! Hence the 2C Stayman bid first. AND you are promising 8 or 9 HCP. Opener will now decide where the contract will be played.

One more example:

S AJ985

H QJ85

D K6

C 92

Partner opens 1NT and you bid 2C. Opener bids 2D (no 4-card major) but this time you have to show partner that you have 10 or more HCP so you bid 3S. This shows five Spades and four Hearts (with only five Spades, you would have made a Transfer). 3S shows five Spades, four Hearts and 10 or more HCP and is forcing.

One more:

You open 1NT with this hand:

S AK87

H 432

D AJ108

C A8

Partner responds 2D. You bid 2H and partner now bids 3NT. Is this a shut-out bid? Do you pass? Or what do you bid?

You will bid 4H as partner has already shown you a five-card Heart suit and she is offering you a choice between playing this hand in 3NT or in 4H. NOT, you really should bid 4H: You WILL bid 4H. You may need a Club ruff and you can score 420 in 4H instead of 400 for making 3NT. This is not your decision to make. You are not entitled to an opinion. Partner may have three small Clubs, for example and 3NT will then be at great risk on a Club start.

TEST YOUR OPENING BIDS (Answers are below)

You are the dealer. What do you bid with the following hands?

A.

S 98763

H AKQJ10

D K3

C 4

B.

S A542

H Q876

D A52

C K6

C.

S AJ8

H AKJ52

D K65

C J7

D.

S A72

H Q864

D AQ7

C Q86

E.

S A542

H 432

D AKQ

C 542

ANSWERS:

A. 1S. With two five-card suits or two six-card suits, bid the higher ranking one first, always. Regardless of quality of suit or number of points you hold. Your next bid will likely be 2H, offering partner a choice of trump suit. Your 2H bid does not promise a five-card suit, only a four-card suit.

If instead you choose to start with 1H and partner responds 2C (for example), then you cannot now bid 2S, as that would be a reverse bid promising 17 or more points and MORE Hearts than Spades.

So try to get over this fixation of quality when opening with one of a suit.

B. 1D. With no five card suit, you must open with one of a minor. Choose your longest minor. Not better minor. And if you play that opening with 1D shows a 4-card suit, then it is time to change that. You will only ever have to open with 1D with a three-card suit 4% of the time and it is only when you have 4-4 in the majors 4-4-3-2. Two four card majors, three Diamonds and two Clubs. So get over it!

C. Open 1NT. If you open 1H and partner now bids 1S, you have no way to now show partner that you have 16 HCP. What ever you bid next will be a lie.

D. With no five card suit, you must open with one of a minor. With 3-3- in the minors, open 1C. Always. It affords you the most economical rebid. So it is not "Better Minor". Learn this by rote: With 4-4- in the minors, open 1D and with 3-3- in the minors, open 1C.

E. Read above D. Open 1C. If you start with 1D instead and partner responds 2C, now what? You will have to bid 3C as you should not bid NT with 3 small Hearts. And now the auction is so high. You cannot now bid 2S as that is a Reverse. Start with 1C and you will never have a rebid issue. Partner responds 1D or 1H,, now you bid 1S and you are happily still at the one-level.