

Welcome newcomers

By **Leslie Shafer**

This is the first of 10 articles dedicated to all the newcomers and intermediate players attending the Summer NABC in New Orleans. There's so much for you to see and do that at the end of some of these columns, I'm going to give you a Field Trip Assignment – something for you to attend, participate in or view.

Attending a huge tournament can leave one very energetic and breathless with excitement. I often have trouble during an NABC getting a good night's sleep. I lie in bed, seeing face cards and long suits jump at me from the shadows in my room. After a bad game, I sometimes wish for my trusty bridge crossbow to skewer all the hallucinations into silence. After a good game, however, the romance returns with a passion resembling one's first true love, including heart palpitations and the excitement of expectancy. In view of my love/hate relationship, I thought I'd give you my Top 10 list of what I love (and hate) about bridge. You'll see more complete diatribes on some of these topics in this NABC Daily Bulletin column here in New Orleans.

What I love

1. I love it when my partner encourages me or gives me compliments, such as, "Nice hand, pard. Thanks!" or "Nicely played."
2. I love it when the opponents are silent throughout the auction. If only I could use the Stop card to keep them from bidding ... (Just kidding – don't do that.)
3. I love it when partner raises my suit or makes an opening lead of my bid suit.
4. I love it when my partner opens 1NT or 2NT – I usually know instantly what level we should be at and what denomination to play it in. Thanks, Pard!
5. I love using cuebids in competition to show a good raise of partner's opening bid or overcall. It has the advantage of sometimes pushing the auction up so high that the opponents don't bid again. See No. 2. What I hate
6. I hate it when I have three opponents at the table or if one of them starts giving me a lesson on how I should have bid or played the last hand. Believe me, if I misplay a hand, I know instantly by the look on someone's face (usually my own). I hope my partner will watch my back and say "I would've played it the same way, Pard." See No. 1.
7. I hate it when the opponents have found a fit in a low-level contract. In the balancing seat (when my pass would end the auction), I'll either bid my suit or double (asking my partner to bid his suit) but I absolutely will not let them play in a fit at the two-level.
8. I hate that there is no way to scientifically bid a freakishly distributional hand. I just bid what I think I can make, shooting from the hip, cowboy style.
9. I hate that pauses for thought are sometimes necessary in this game. However, "deer in the headlight" pauses are just dithering. The length of time you spend agonizing over a certain bid or play will not increase your chances of success. Trust me.
10. I hate getting the poor result I usually deserve when I try to do something brilliant. Maybe I should just aim for the middle ground (especially when vulnerable) and let the opponents try to be brilliant.

VIP Field Trip Assignment: Jerry Helms is giving a free workshop on Saturday, July 24, 9:45 a.m. - Noon. Jerry is one dynamic presenter you just can't miss. Well known for his humor and ability to mind-meld with his audience, you'll be amazed at how Jerry can turn learning bridge into so much fun. He is the Pied Piper of bridge students at all levels. (I'll be there wearing my I Love Jerry button.) If you're a bridge teacher reading this, it would behoove you to attend and see this well-loved bridge professional in action.

Long-Term Field Trip Assignment: Make it a point to attend at least one celebrity speaker's presentation in the I/N room each day. They usually start 45 minutes before your game begins. Every speaker will present you with at least one silver bullet that you can start using immediately to improve your game. By the time you leave this tournament, I expect you to have your six-shooters fully loaded.

On your best behavior

By Leslie Shafer

More than half a century ago, bridge was a genteel game. Even Miss Manners got into the act by declaring, "Never double your hostess for penalties." In fact, if you didn't know how to play bridge, you were considered a social pariah. My, how times have changed. A very charming player at my club, the late Rossi Lindstrom, was the queen of our little bridge arena. After asking about my grandchildren, making appreciative sighs of how beautiful they were, she proceeded to, shall we say, bludgeon me with her formidable bridge skills. She was so sweet, I usually never knew how badly she had beaten me until I saw the scores at the end of the game.

A competitive sport can bring out the best or the worst in anyone. In the bridge world, we need the former disposition and must work very hard to present our best face at all times. Easier said than done, I know. At a local club, there were times when I was brutalized by a venomous player (I even wanted to nominate some of them to be a member of the Throw Them Off the Bridge Plane organization). As time passed, my opinions grew less strident and I learned to tolerate their passion and colorfulness at the table. I was reminded of the infamous comedian Don Rickles – insulting to everyone, but we laughed and enjoyed his strange view of the world.

So let's discuss how to handle good or bad results in a way that won't upset the victims . . . er, other players.

1. How to be a nice opponent: Introduce yourselves and say something nice to your new opponents immediately upon arrival. Bend over backwards to compliment them on their bidding or defense, if warranted. Wish them good luck on departure.

2. How to be gracious: Compliment your partner every time dummy comes down. Say, "Nice hand, Pard. Thanks!" As appropriate, compliment the declarer. Say, "Nicely played." If you get a good board because of the opponents' bad bidding or play, just score it up and keep your mouth shut. The bridge goddess will not give you any more gifts if you show you're incapable of receiving them with grace. If you must gloat, write down in your convention card the letter "G" for gift. When I was a newcomer, I arrived at the table of the elder Mike Cappelletti – yes, that Cappelletti. I noticed him putting a big "F" next to his score from the last board. I laughingly asked him if that stood for "fix" or something else. Of course, he just smiled.

3. How to be forgiving: If partner makes a mistake, ask yourself, "What could I have done to prevent this misunderstanding? How can I make this easier for partner?" Instead of playing the blame game, try playing the it-might-be-my-fault game. If your lips are actually moving and words are about to escape, those words better be, "I would've done the same thing, pard."

4. Discussing bad results: If I can get misty-eyed when a contestant wins a car on The Price is Right, you can only imagine the humiliation I'd feel if my partner were to ever criticize me in front of an opponent. Others are not so sensitive, but it is still important to talk about results at the table. Time must pass for you to get better perspective and give your partner a chance to get his breath back. I suggest you both write notes on the inside of your convention card that you can bring up after the game is finished, preferably over a nice mellowing glass of wine.

5. Don't be a result merchant! Sometimes I get a bad-looking result and I'm later surprised to find out it was duplicated at several tables, earning an average score. Minus 800 always seems atrocious, but it might actually be a good score if the opponents missed a slam. You won't get the results until the game is finished, so why waste your breath until that defining moment arrives? Just circle the board number inside your card to remind yourself to check on it.

VIP Field Trip Assignment: Barbara Seagram is presenting a free bridge workshop on Sunday, July 25, 10 a.m. - Noon. Barbara is a very popular bridge teacher from Ontario. Many of my students adore her 25 Conventions You Should Know, 25 Ways to Take More Tricks, Practice Your Slam Bidding and many more of her books. This is your chance to meet an author who can make bridge lessons leap off the printed page! Hmmm. An autographed copy of one of her books for your bridge library at home sounds very impressive.

I hate finesses!

By Leslie Shafer

As declarer, you should always pause before playing to trick one to make a plan. Depending on the contract, the questions you ask yourself are slightly different.

In notrump contracts:

- 1) Count your sure winners, ones you can take without losing the lead;
- 2) compare that total to how many tricks you need. "I see seven tricks, but I need two more to make 3NT."

In suit contracts: 1) Count your losers; 2) Compare that total with the number of losers you can tolerate. "I see five losers, but can only have three losers since I'm in a 4♥ contract."

"One of the most popular ways of getting more winners (in notrump) or eliminating losers (in a suit contract) is by finessing. Basically, you lead toward the card you wish was a winner. Most of my students are so darned proud of actually seeing a possible finesse, that they feel obliged to try it. An expert's view of a finesse is different: "Oh no, a finesse. I hate finesses! Let me keep looking for another way to get extra tricks. If there's no other way, I might have to take the darned finesse."

Here's a deal with a very tasty-looking finesse.

	NORTH ♠ Q J 5 3 ♥ A Q J 4 ♦ 6 5 ♣ A K J		Contract: 6NT Opening Lead: ♥10.
WEST ♠ 8 7 6 2 ♥ 10 9 8 7 6 ♦ K 9 2 ♣ 6		EAST ♠ A 9 ♥ 3 2 ♦ 8 7 4 3 ♣ 8 7 4 3 2	
	SOUTH ♠ K 10 4 ♥ K 5 ♦ A Q J 10 ♣ Q 10 9 5		

Step 1: Count your sure winners. There are nine: four hearts, one diamond and four clubs.

Step 2: How many more do you need? Three.

Step 3: Where can you find those extra three tricks? When I gave this deal to my Monday class, some of the declarers were so mesmerized by their ♦A Q J 10 that they felt compelled to finesse! When the finesse failed they had only 11 tricks and went down. The proper suit to develop was spades. Simply force out the ♠A and there is a net gain of three tricks for 12 total.

A strange thing happened at two tables: declarer properly played the spade suit after winning the opening heart trick but when East switched to a diamond after winning the ♠A, declarer finessed and went down! The lure of that diamond finesse was still there even after they had developed 12 tricks!

On the next deal, it's more difficult to find the alternative to the obvious finesse:

	NORTH ♠ J 10 5 ♥ K 9 8 ♦ K 7 ♣ 6 5 4 3 2		Contract: 6♥ Opening Lead: ♦J.
WEST ♠ Q 7 3 2 ♥ 6 ♦ J 10 9 8 3 ♣ K 9 8		EAST ♠ 9 8 6 ♥ 5 4 ♦ Q 6 5 2 ♣ A Q J 10	
	SOUTH ♠ A K 4 ♥ A Q J 10 7 3 2 ♦ A 4 ♣ 7		

Step 1: Count your losers. Two: one spade and one club.

Step 2: How many losers can you tolerate? One.

Step 3: How can you eliminate one loser? One way to get rid of a loser is to take the spade finesse, a 50% chance. The expert would also see the ugly club suit as a way to develop an extra winner to toss the spade loser on. Even if you have ugly children, you still love them. If the seven missing clubs divide 4-3 (a 62% chance) it can be done provided there are enough entries to dummy. South must be careful to win the diamond lead in hand, preserving dummy's ♦K as a later entry, and immediately lose a club trick. Even if the defenders continue with a diamond, declarer can ruff a club high and get to dummy two more times with trumps to ruff clubs. When the clubs divide 4-3, dummy's ♦K or ♥K will be an entry to the established club. If the clubs had not split, the spade finesse would still be available.

Bad splits

By Leslie Shafer

When declarer is cashing a suit, he must watch how the missing cards are distributed. Running an eight-card suit in notrump, declarer expects the missing cards to split 3-2, but a 4-1 or 5-0 split is possible. Is there a way to take out insurance? First, let's look at how the missing cards usually divide:*

An odd number of missing cards usually divides as evenly as possible (without ripping up any cards).*

An even number of missing cards usually does not divide evenly.

Missing	Expected	Missing	Expected
	Split (%)		Split (%)
4	3-1 (50%)	3	2-1 (78%)
6	4-2 (48%)	5	3-2 (68%)
8	5-3 (47%)	7	4-3 (62%)

So: Even splits odd; and odd splits even.

Many students assume the expected divisions always occur and play the suit quickly. However, experienced players use more care, in case there's a bad split. The experts have developed better ways to handle bad news than mere mortals (the rest of us).

Here are some examples:

Dummy	♦Q 5 4	Missing five diamonds, the expected split is 3-2
Declarer	♦A K 10 7 2	

However, an expert will ask himself, "What if the split is 4-1? Can I recover?" Dummy lacks the proper spot cards to finesse West if he has four to the jack, but if East has ♦J 9 6 3, he can be finessed. So, play the ♦A first (all following), then lead the ♦2 over to the queen. If West shows out, you can still finesse East by leading the 4 back toward your remaining ♦K 10 7.

Playing a high honor from the side that has two of them first is sometimes essential. Consider this layout:

Dummy	♦Q 9 5 4	2If there is a 4-0 split, you can run the suit regardless of which opponent has all four spades.
Declarer	♦A K 10 7 2	Play the ♠A first. If one of the opponents shows out, you can finesse either one because you still have Q-9 in dummy and K-10 in your hand. Bravo!

By the way, be very careful when examining the opponents' cards. Sometimes when they can't follow to that first spade trick, they try to fool you by playing a low club. They're hoping you will see only the color, not the actual suit symbol and fail to notice the bad split. Very sneaky, huh? But absolutely legal, I do it all the time. The late, great Alfred Sheinwold said: "If you can't follow suit, follow color."

Q: Is there a skill you can develop to let you suspect there is a bad split?

A: Listen to the auction for clues! Did an opponent make a three- or four-level preempt? The preemptor will often have either a void or singleton in your long suit. The auction has told you not to expect normal splits!

There are conventional bids your opponents use that will also warn you that there will be bad splits, e.g., a Michaels cuebid, the Unusual 2NT and some conventions used to interfere over your 1NT opening show at least 5-5 distribution in two suits. That leaves only three cards in the other two suits, so they must have either a singleton or a void.

The goal is to play your long suits in a manner that gives you a chance to recover from a bad split. Good luck at the table today and start overcoming those bad breaks instead of clutching your chest in agony when they happen.

The Stop card

By Leslie Shafer

I think it's important to focus on etiquette from time to time. Bridge players should place this facet of bridge high on their lists of "must do's." Specifically, I want to address the issue of using the Stop card from the bidding box.

When do I use the Stop card?

The Stop card is used before there is a jump in the bidding. The rules state that if you use it at all, you must use it all the time (for every jump bid, regardless of whether it is weak or strong). It asks the next person to wait about 10 seconds before making a call.

How do I use the Stop card?

Before making your jump bid (weak or strong) pull out the Stop card while saying, "I'm about to make a skip bid, please wait 10 seconds." The Stop card should remain face up on the table while saying this. Make your jump bid - and here is where it gets kind of hinky. Some opponents think they are allowed to bid as soon as the card is returned to the bidding box! They are supposed to be pretending to study their hand for the full 10 seconds regardless of whether the skip bidder has picked up the Stop card.

Many students will make comments such as "Can I bid yet?" or "Are you going to put that away?" very quickly after the Stop card is used. This could give their partner unauthorized information as they sure do seem anxious to make their call. These are not appropriate comments. Other students seem to ignore the Stop card when it is used, passing or bidding quickly. To me, this is a greater offense.

What are the reasons for using the Stop card?

A jump bid can sometimes give the next bidder a problem as he would have to make a call at a higher level than he was expecting. The Stop card allows him to take a bit of extra time to make up his mind about whether to bid without giving his partner unauthorized information. What if the next bidder has no problem and just wants to pass? A quick pass would give his partner a clear picture of weakness (again, unauthorized information because it is being relayed by the quickness of the pass). The Stop card makes the next bidder slow down so that his partner will not gain any information from the tempo of the bid.

How long must I keep the Stop card on the table before returning it to the bidding box?

Unfortunately, the language used in the Laws of Duplicate Bridge seems ambiguous. I've seen instructions on the use of the Stop card vary among directors and teachers, and even by geography.

I prefer to leave the Stop card face up on the table for the full 10 seconds. I've seen other players return the Stop card to the bidding box quickly. Many students think it's okay to go ahead and bid if the Stop card is not there anymore, but that is not true. You're expected to wait for the full 10 seconds after your right-hand opponent makes a skip bid.

There are some partnerships who don't use the Stop card at all, and that's fine - it's their decision. If your opponent jumps in the bidding, but doesn't use the Stop card, you are still supposed to wait 10 seconds! At a local club game, Studmuffin once correctly waited around 10 seconds before passing after his RHO opened 3♣. The skip bidder (who had not used the Stop card) then called the director to report an alleged hesitation. The director ruled in our favor and explained why. You are always supposed to pause after someone jumps.

Important Note: The skip-bid warning is not used to inform your own partner that you are about to jump! Your partner is supposed to ignore the Stop card completely. The Stop card asks that the next bidder pause to: (1) give him a few moments in case he wasn't expecting to make his decision at that level; and (2) not give away information to his partner about his holding by the speed of his action. I once heard a student complain to her partner after they missed their slam, "Didn't you see my Stop card? I used it so you would know I was jumping!" This is so wrong. We use the Stop card to warn our opponent, not our partner

Where are all the points?

By Leslie Shafer

Almost 20 years ago, my husband (wisely waiting until after we were married) urged me to learn his beloved game. He had been playing for 30 years (having learned to play at the age of nine from his parents, avid social bridge players). Practicing with my in-laws every Friday night at home, it was very disconcerting to the rest of us when, at trick three, Studmuffin would lean back in his chair and calmly recite what cards we held and how many points we had. How do people do that? At the time, it seemed like magic, the sort of thing you'd expect from Einstein or Houdini. However, I learned the secret to it and will share this highly confidential information with you. Burn this article after reading it - you don't want it falling into the wrong hands (i.e., your opponents).

I was kibitzing my student Janice at a club game. This was the auction:

	NORTH ♠ K J 5 ♥ 8 6 4 ♦ J 9 3 ♣ K J 10 6		Bidding S W N E 1 NT Pass 3 NT All Pass
WEST ♠ 7 2 ♥ A Q 10 3 2 ♦ Q 8 2 ♣ Q 3 2		EAST ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	Lead > 4 th Best Heart
	SOUTH ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣		

Declarer played the ♥4 from dummy and won East's 7 with the jack. South led a low spade to dummy's king and led the ♦J. East and South both played low diamonds and Janice won her ♦Q. Not wanting to help declarer find the ♣Q by leading a club, Janice desperately cashed her ♥A, hoping declarer had started with the doubleton ♥K J. This was not a success. Here's the full deal:

	NORTH ♠ K J 5 ♥ 8 6 4 ♦ J 9 3 ♣ K J 10 6	
WEST ♠ 7 2 ♥ A Q 10 3 2 ♦ Q 8 2 ♣ Q 3 2		EAST ♠ 10 9 6 4 ♥ 9 7 ♦ 7 5 4 ♣ A 9 5 4
	SOUTH ♠ A Q 8 3 ♥ K J 5 ♦ A K 10 6 ♣ 8 7	

Poor Janice, if only she had known to lead a club to her partner's ♣A at trick four, East would have returned her last heart and set declarer two tricks! As it was, declarer made an overtrick by finessing in clubs later in the deal. At the risk of losing my magician's license by revealing the secret, here's how Janice could have known at Trick 3 where all the missing high cards were:

Since North-South were playing 15-17 opening 1NT, South had shown 16 or 17 points by accepting North's game invitation. By adding the high-card points in her hand (10) to North-South's (26) and subtracting from the total in the deck (40), Janice should have known that East had 4 HCP. Janice trusted her partner to realize the importance of East leading hearts through the declarer's hand, so East didn't have the ♠A (she would have won dummy's ♠K at trick two) or the ♦A or ♦K (East would have played either of them on dummy's ♦J at trick three). Finally, if East had the ♥K, she would have played it at trick one.

Knowing 15 of declarer's HCP (♠A, ♥K J, ♦A K) Janice can mentally place the ♣A in East's hand because if South also had the ♣A, he would have started with 19 HCP, too many points to open 1NT.

Magic? No, just logic

When not to pull trumps

By Leslie Shafer

There are only two inviolable rules in bridge: 1) If you can follow suit, you must, and 2) if your partner offers you a breath mint, you must take it. What about high card from the short side? Using Jacoby transfers? Needing at least 8 points before you can use Stayman? I'd rather call all these rules you're learning strong suggestions. There's not one rule in bridge that I don't have the right to break as long as I have a reason (as opposed to the laws of bridge, which I can't violate). There are exceptions to almost every rule.

Beginners learn that drawing trumps is one of their highest priorities. But there are exceptions. I'm going to list the top four reasons why you would not pull trumps immediately.

1) **You need to ruff losers in the dummy.** When I see shortness (doubleton, singleton or void) in the dummy, I tend to want to ruff my losers first and pull trumps later. I get extra trump tricks by ruffing in the short trump side (usually the dummy). If I pull trumps first, there usually won't be enough left in dummy to ruff my losers. (After a Jacoby transfer, declarer's hand is the short trump side, so that's where you'd look for ruffing opportunities.)

2) **You need to crossruff.** When there is short suit in dummy and a different short suit in declarer's hand, I'd probably want to trump back and forth and score my trumps separately (one at a time). If I were to pull trumps, I'd use two trumps on every trick. If you do decide to crossruff, it is important to cash your side-suit tricks early. You are not pulling trumps, so the opponents will still have a few trumps towards the end of the play. If you attempt to cash your side ♠A and ♠K at the end of the deal, most likely the opponents will be able to ruff them.

3) **You have too many quick losers:** Look at the following deal:

	NORTH ♠ 10 7 2 ♥ Q J 9 3 ♦ Q 7 ♣ K Q 4 3		Lead > West leads the ♠J against South's 4♥.
WEST ♠ 9 4 3 ♥ A 5 ♦ J 9 5 3 ♣ J 10 9 7		EAST ♠ K Q J 5 ♥ 4 2 ♦ 10 6 4 2 ♣ A 6 5	
	SOUTH ♠ A 8 6 ♥ K 10 8 7 6 ♦ A K 8 ♣ 8 2		

The ♠J is led to dummy's ♠Q and East's ♠A. East shifts to the ♠K, which declarer wins with the ace. There are now two quick spade losers, one sure trump loser and you've already lost a club trick. If you lead trump, the opponents will take their ♥A and cash two spade tricks. Down one! Ask yourself: "If I try to pull trumps and they get the lead, can they hurt me?" If the answer is yes, then don't start on trumps. Rather, find a way to get rid of at least one of your spade losers before pulling trumps. Play the diamonds instead: ♦Q, ♦K, ♦A. On the ♦A, throw a spade from dummy and - poof! - a spade loser disappears. Once that is done, you can play trump (letting the opponents take their ♥A because they can now only cash one spade).

4. **You need the trump suit to provide entries to dummy.** Suppose you need to lead a side suit from the dummy to take two finesses and the only high cards in the dummy are in the trump suit! If you pull trumps first, you may not be able to get back to dummy enough times to finesse in your side suit. Use the dummy's trumps as entries to take those finesses. After you have taken the finesse you can finish drawing trumps

Staying out of trouble

By Leslie Shafer

Help prevent partner's revoke. My side is defending and declarer is pulling trumps (spades). My partner fails to follow to the first trump trick. I immediately look him in the eye and say, "No spades, partner?" If he does find a spade, he can correct the revoke immediately, saving our side from a one- or two-trick penalty. The card he tried to play initially becomes a penalty card, which may or may not cost our side. If I don't protect my partner from revoking, then I should take partial responsibility for the revoke. The dummy is also allowed to protect declarer in this manner. However, if the revoking side has played to the next trick, the revoke can no longer be corrected. So make it part of your routine to double check with your partner next time he fails to follow suit.

Don't save your opponents from revoking. Playing at the club recently, I was defending and did not follow to a trump trick. The declarer, my opponent, asked me, "No spades?" And sure enough, I found a spade and corrected my play to the trick. My original played card became a penalty card, but it turned out to not cost our side anything. Had the declarer let my revoke become established, there would have been a one- or two-trick penalty and his side would have benefitted from my mistake. You are under no obligation to protect your opponents. Let them make their mistakes.

Stop sacrificing when vulnerable. I must've tried this about 100 times in my first five years of playing bridge. It worked twice. The opponents will usually double you for penalties (especially after reading this column) and you'll sometimes go for minus 800 or more. Let them have their game. Even a below-average matchpoint result is better than a zero.

Stop rescuing your partner. Many of you are still rebidding 2NT as a further denial of support for partner's long suit. If both of you have minimum hands, you need to stop below 2NT.

Return partner's opening lead as soon as you can. If you don't, you'd better have a good explanation ready for the post mortem.

Don't lead "ace from space." Leading an ace from a suit headed by the A-K is very powerful. Leading an unsupported ace as an opening lead is rarely the right move. The bridge goddess invented aces to capture kings and queens. When you lead an ace, all you're going to get is the 2, 3 and 4. Hold onto those aces until an opponent attempts to win a trick with a king or queen, then pounce on it. If you or your partner has the jack or 10 of that suit, it'll be that much closer to being a winner!

Don't lead singleton honors. When the declarer is missing a king or queen in a certain suit, he often will finesse for that card, and I've scored many a singleton honor for that reason. But leading it (in an attempt to get a ruff later) only puts it out there, begging to be captured. It's different if partner has bid that suit. As responder, don't jump on your first bid unless you absolutely, positively, know what the trump suit is going to be. Keep the bidding low (a new suit would be forcing) to get more information from your partner about his hand. Regarding final contracts: If you don't know, go slow.

Stop misusing Blackwood and Gerber. Anyone can bid a slam - just reach into your bidding box, pull it out and lay it on the table. Your goal should be to bid a good slam (one that makes) and to stay out of a bad slam (one that goes down). Blackwood and Gerber should be used to make sure your side isn't missing two aces before going to slam. You should be willing to continue to slam missing only one ace. Don't use Blackwood or Gerber as a shoehorn to wiggle your way into a slam. Use the conventions to wiggle your way out of bidding bad slams.

Don't lead a doubleton unless your partner bid the suit. This is one of the most abused opening leads ever. It's probably my sixth choice of possible opening leads. By the time you've created a void in your hand, the declarer has pulled your trumps and all you've done is set up his side suit for him.

Don't lead a singleton if your partner is broke. And how would you know he's broke? Add up the points around the table. If the opponents are in a game contract, you can assume they have around 26 HCP. If you're looking at 13 HCP in your own hand, that would leave your partner with one lousy, stinkin' point. He's never getting the lead to give you a ruff, so why bother leading your singleton?

As responder, use the proper rebids after a Jacoby Transfer. The transfer shows at least a five-card major, so don't bid the suit again unless you have six or more! In response to partner's 1NT opening bid, your plan should be to:

With a five-card major

0-7 HCP: transfer and pass.

8-9 HCP: transfer and bid 2NT.

10+ HCP: transfer and bid 3NT.

With a six-card major

0-7 HCP: transfer and pass.

8-9 HCP: transfer and raise to three of your major.

10+ HCP: transfer and bid game in your major.

Judgment decisions

By Leslie Shafer

Partner opens 1NT (15-17). The stronger you are, the greater the chances that partner can get to your hand to take finesses or utilize your long suits. 3NT can often be made with 25 combined points, which is why we advise responder to bid game with 10 more high-card points.

Responder's 9-point hand is worth an invitation, but the weaker the hand is, the less valuable it becomes to declarer. When opening a 16-18 1NT was the norm, responder was told to invite with any 8-point hand. Is this still true playing 15-17? Students need judgment skills to decide how to handle responder's balanced 8-point hands. There are good 8s and bad 8s. How can you tell the difference?

Upgrades to look for

1) A five-card or longer suit that might be a source of tricks in a notrump contract. Add points for length. Here are some good 8-point hands (notice the chunky five-card suit in the following examples): ♠9 7 3 ♥7 4 2 ♦A J 8 4 2 ♣K 5 ---♠ 9 7 3 ♥J 4 2 ♦9 5 ♣A K 7 4 2

2) Hands with 10s and 9s and a higher honor in the same suit should be upgraded. These cards add texture and could be useful to declarer. In the following example, there's a high honor along with a matching 10 and 9 in the diamond suit. ♠10 7 3 ♥J 7 ♦A 10 9 5 ♣K 5 4 2

Downgrades to consider

1) A flat (4-3-3-3) hand.

2) A hand with low spot cards (2s, 3s, 4s, etc.).

3) A "quacky" hand (lots of queens and jacks). Quacks are overvalued in the 4-3-2-1 point-count system.

4) A hand with no aces.

Here's a quiz to test your judgment. Partner opens 1NT. What is your call?

A. ♠9 7 3 ♥Q 7 2 ♦Q J 5 2 ♣Q J 5

B. ♠ 9 7 ♥A 10 9 ♦K 10 9 3 2 ♣10 9 4

Hand A: With all quacks, flat distribution, no good spot cards and no aces, this hand looks more like 6 ½ points. Just pass.

Hand B: This hand has only 7 HCP, but once you upgrade for the chunky five-card diamond suit and the good spot cards, it's worth a raise to 2NT.

Let's look at how judgment is used by the opener when his partner has raised 1NT to 2NT. If the 1NT opener is at the bottom of his range (15) he should pass. If he's at the top of his range (17), he should accept the invitation and bid 3NT. What if he's right in the middle with 16? Time to use judgment. The same upgrades and downgrades that the responder utilizes can be used by the opener. Let's look at some examples of 16 HCP hands:

A. ♠A J 6 ♥A Q J 8 5 ♦K 6 2 ♣J 10

B. ♠Q J 2 ♥A Q 4 3 ♦Q J 3 ♣K J 2

Hand A: More points in aces and kings than in quacks and a chunky five-card suit: accept the game invitation and bid 3NT.

Hand B: Flat (4-3-3-3) distribution, lots of quacks and all low spot cards: try not to pass too quickly