

TEST YOUR
BRIDGE TECHNIQUE

DEFENDING SUIT CONTRACTS

David Bird • Tim Bourke

♠ QJ64
♥ AQJ3
♦ 65
♣ 952

♣Q led

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K1053
♥ 96
♦ A7
♣ A8763

PLANNING THE DEFENSE AGAINST A SUIT CONTRACT

Were you hoping to buy a book that would show you how easy defense can be? Sorry about that! Even impecunious bridge writers, hoping to promote their books, cannot pretend that there is a set of magic formulae to guide you to the winning defense. Of course there are some excellent general guidelines, taught to beginners. When you are past that stage you have to do two things: you must count and you must think. You count to gather evidence, and you must think in order to determine the best chance of defeating the contract. (This will be the aim throughout this book. Imagine that you are defending at IMPs or rubber bridge, rather than trying to save an overtrick in a matchpoint pairs event.)

Let's look at counting first. What do you count? This is the list:

High-card points. If declarer has indicated his point-count range during the auction (by bidding, or passing), you keep a count on the points he shows and deduce what remaining cards he might hold.

Shape. As soon as possible, you attempt to gain a 'count of the hand'. This means discovering how many cards each player holds in a suit. The more you play bridge, the more you will appreciate how important this is.

Tricks. You count how many certain tricks declarer has, also how many the defenders have. For example, if you can count three certain tricks for the defenders, you will need two more to beat 3NT.

It's time for a hand. Let's look at a typical defense that many players would get wrong. It's not difficult if you are prepared to count.

♠ A Q 9 7 2
 ♥ Q 9 6
 ♦ 3
 ♣ 10 9 6 5

 Lead: ♦ 6



♠ 4
 ♥ A J 4
 ♦ A Q J 9 7 5
 ♣ J 8 3

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			1NT
pass	2♥*	3♦	3♠
pass	4♠	all pass	

South opens a 15-17 point 1NT and reaches 4♠ after a transfer sequence. West leads the ♦6 and you win with the ♦A, declarer following with the ♦4. What is your plan for the defense?

Let's count points first. Dummy holds 8 points, you have 13 and declarer has 15-17. How many points does this leave for your partner? To make the total up to 40 he will hold between 2 and 4 points. If he holds the ♦K the situation is hopeless for the defense, so assume that declarer holds that card.

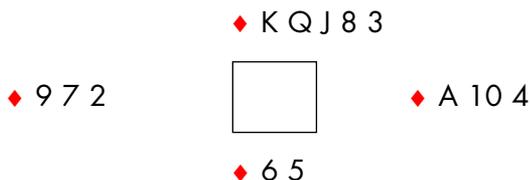
Now let's count tricks. You can see two tricks with your minor-suit aces and will therefore need two more tricks to beat the game. What chances can you see of achieving this aim?

One possibility is to find partner with the ♥K. When he holds this card, a switch to the ♥4 is likely to give you three heart tricks — enough to beat the contract.

Suppose next that declarer holds the ♥K. What will the defensive prospects be if you switch to a club at Trick 2? Since you cannot score more than one trick in hearts (declarer can discard one of dummy's hearts on his ♦K), you will need two club tricks to beat the contract. For this to be possible, West must hold at least ♣K-Q-x. By counting points, as we did above, you know that West cannot hold more than 4 points!

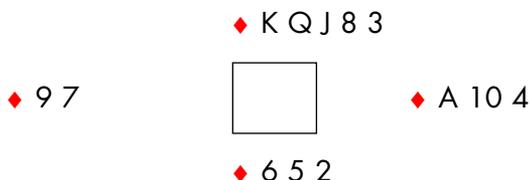
So, the correct defense is to switch to a low heart. It is the only real chance of breaking the contract. If declarer turns up with the ♥K you can be fairly sure that the contract was unbeatable.

Before we talk about counting shape we need to discuss how you should signal in defense. It is fairly standard across the bridge-playing world to signal ‘count’ when declarer plays a suit. A high spot card shows an even number of cards in the suit and a low spot card shows an odd number. Suppose declarer is playing in 4♠ and has this diamond suit:



Declarer leads a diamond towards dummy and West follows with the ♦2 to show that he has an odd number of diamonds. Placing West with three diamonds and declarer with two, East may decide to hold up the ace for one round. When dummy has no entry in another suit, this will restrict declarer to one diamond trick.

This is an alternative lie of the suit:

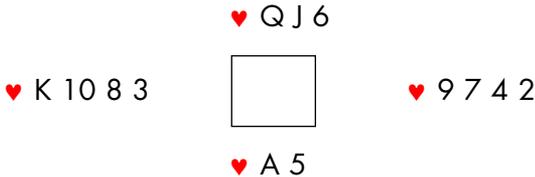


Now West plays the ♦9 on the first round. It is a useful understanding to have with your partner that from four cards you will signal with the second-best card followed by the fourth-best. Note that in practice you can nearly always tell from the bidding or from the lengths displayed in the other suits whether partner holds four cards or two. On that basis West’s ♦9 cannot be from a four-card holding and suggests a doubleton. East will hold up both on the first round and the second round. Declarer will then score only two diamond tricks rather than four.

Such signaling is common practice and we move now to a more interesting, and perhaps controversial, area. How should you signal when your partner leads a suit and you do not need to attempt to win the trick by playing high in third seat? Many players use

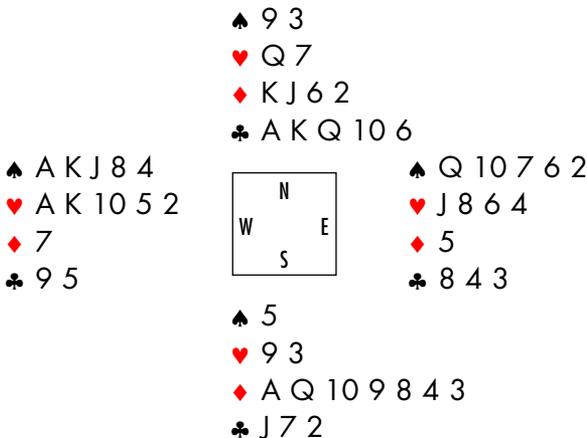
‘attitude signals’ in such a situation — a high card to encourage a continuation and a low card to discourage. This can be useful in some situations. In others there is advantage to be gained by using count signals. Many experts around the world do indeed prefer to use count signals.

Suppose you lead the ♥3 against 4♠ and this is the lie of the suit:



Not one of your brightest efforts and dummy’s ♥Q wins the trick. Do you need partner to give you the ♥2, to tell you that you have made an unfortunate lead? No! You know that already. You would much prefer that he told you something useful — his count in the suit. In this case he would play the ♥7 (second best from four) and you would be part way towards building up a complete count of the hand. Not only that, if you were stuck for an exit card later in the play, you would be grateful to know that declarer’s ♥A was now bare and you could safely play a heart.

Count signals can also assist you when you need to cash the setting tricks against a contract. Suppose you are West here:



WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
4♦*	5♦	pass	3♦
dbl	all pass		pass

Your 4♦ bid showed a two-suiter in the majors. You lead the ♠K and partner plays the ♠2, declarer following with the ♠7. What now? If you are playing count signals, you know that partner has an odd number of spades. It is dangerous to play the ♠K next because declarer might ruff, draw trumps and run the club suit. At Trick 2 you lead the ♥K and partner signals with the ♥8. He is showing an even number of hearts. Counting around the table, you therefore know that declarer has one remaining heart and that a second top heart played from your hand will escape unruffed. You continue with the ♥A and beat the contract.

Here is another deal where a count signal from partner will guide you to the correct defense:

♠ 5	♠ Q 10 9 8 3 2	♠ 7									
♥ 10 8 6	♥ A K 7	♥ Q J 9 3 2									
♦ K 9 4	♦ 6 2	♦ J 10 7 5 3									
♣ K Q J 8 7 4	♣ 10 3	♣ 6 2									
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	N										
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	♠ A K J 6 4										
	♥ 5 4										
	♦ A Q 8										
	♣ A 9 5										

You lead the ♣K against 6♠. Declarer wins with the ♣A, draws trumps and eliminates the hearts (by playing the ace and king and ruffing the third round). He then plays the ♣9 to your jack. What will you do next?

If declarer began with ♣A-9 doubleton, a club return will give him a ruff-and-sluff (he will be able to throw a diamond from dummy

and ruff in his hand, easily making the contract). Your only option is to play a diamond, hoping that East holds the $\spadesuit Q$. If instead declarer began with $\clubsuit A-9-5$, you can safely play the $\clubsuit Q$ now and live to score a trick with your $\spadesuit K$. Which is it to be?

There is no guess if you play count signals. When the cards lie as in the diagram, East will have played the $\clubsuit 6$ followed by the $\clubsuit 2$. You will then be able to place him with two clubs, leaving declarer with three cards in the suit. You will therefore exit with the $\clubsuit Q$ and beat the game.

When East started with $\clubsuit 6-5-2$ he would play the $\clubsuit 2$ on the first round and follow with a higher card. Knowing that declarer had indeed started with only two clubs, you would exit in diamonds. This would beat the contract when East held the $\spadesuit Q$. As in many situations you are spared a guess if you play count signals. If you play attitude signals, you have to guess.

We have looked at the potential benefits of count signals. No doubt you currently play attitude signals when partner leads to a suit. When do you think this type of signal is most useful? One situation is where you have led from $A-K-x-x$ and would like partner to encourage if he has the queen or a doubleton. Another is when you have led from $Q-J-9-x$ and dummy wins with the ace. You would like partner to tell you if he holds the king.

Attitude signals are indisputably strong opposite an ace or queen lead. Some players reckon that count signals work best opposite a king lead. Hoping to get the best of both worlds, they play a method of opening leads known as: 'ace (or queen) for attitude, king for count'. In other words when they lead an ace or a queen to a trick partner is expected to give an attitude signal. When they lead a king they want partner to give a count signal.

How does this method work? Suppose you are on lead against $4\heartsuit$ and hold $\spadesuit A-K-5-2$. You lead the $\spadesuit A$ because you want partner to encourage or discourage the lead. If instead you were on lead against a five- or six-level contract, you would lead the $\spadesuit K$ because it would be more important for you to know how many rounds would stand up.

There are advantages and disadvantages in every signaling method and it is not our intention to persuade you one way or the other.

Nevertheless, we will have to put this book on a firm foundation by using a fixed method of signaling throughout. We will assume that the defenders are using attitude signals when partner leads a suit, except when a king is led. In that case they will signal count. It is for you to decide, at the end of the book, if you were impressed by the method. Signaling will not be relevant on most of the problems anyway. The emphasis will be on thinking logically and counting.

We will assume the use of ‘count discards’ also. Using this scheme, you discard from the suit that you can best afford, usually one that you do not want partner to lead. At the same time, you show your count in this suit. A discard of the ♥8, for example, indicates lack of interest in hearts and an even number of cards in that suit.¹

Well, all too soon we have reached the end of our introductory section. Count, think, signal to help your partner, and stay awake! What could be easier than defending perfectly? Unfortunately, almost everything...

1. There are many different discarding methods and we recognize this one may not be to your preference. However, we had to pick something!

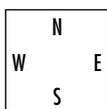
Problem 1

[To Solution](#)



Lead: ♣Q

♠ Q J 6 4
♥ A Q J 3
♦ 6 5
♣ 9 5 2



♠ K 10 5 3
♥ 9 6
♦ A 7
♣ A 8 7 6 3

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			1 ♦
pass	1 ♥	pass	3 ♦
pass	3 ♠	pass	5 ♦
all pass			

West, your partner, leads the ♣Q. You win with the ace and the king falls from South. How will you continue?

Problem 2

[To Solution](#)



Lead: ♠J

♠ K Q 5 2
♥ J 9 6
♦ 10 5
♣ A K Q 8



♠ 10 9 8 7 3
♥ A 8
♦ A 8 3
♣ J 9 2

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	1NT	pass	4 ♥
all pass			

Your partner leads the ♠J, won by dummy's ♠K. Three top clubs come next, South following once and then throwing the ♦9 and the ♦J. He then leads a low trump from dummy. How will you defend?

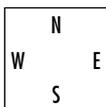
Problem 3

[To Solution](#)



Lead: ♠9

♠ K 10 4
♥ 9 8 3
♦ K J 2
♣ K J 5 3



♠ A Q J 5 3 2
♥ J 2
♦ A 10 6
♣ 8 6

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
		1 ♠	2 ♥
pass	2 ♠*	pass	4 ♥
all pass			

West leads the ♠9 (he would lead the middle card from 9-x-x). The ♠10 is played from dummy and you win with the ♠J. What now?

Problem 4

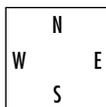
[To Solution](#)



Lead: ♥2

♠ 8 6 3
♥ 9 6 4 3
♦ J 7
♣ A K 7 5

♠ K 9 2
♥ 2
♦ Q 8 6 5 3 2
♣ J 10 3



WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
		2 ♥*	dbl
pass	3 ♣*	pass	3 ♠
pass	4 ♠	all pass	

North's 3♣ shows around 8-10 points. You lead the ♥2 to partner's king. He continues with the ♥A, dropping South's ♥Q, and then plays the ♥J. South ruffs with the ♠Q. What is your plan for the defense?

SOLUTION TO PROBLEM 1

<p>♠ 9 7 ♥ 10 8 7 4 2 ♦ 8 3 ♣ Q J 10 4</p>	<p>♠ Q J 6 4 ♥ A Q J 3 ♦ 6 5 ♣ 9 5 2</p>	<p>♠ K 10 5 3 ♥ 9 6 ♦ A 7 ♣ A 8 7 6 3</p>	<p>♠ A 8 2 ♥ K 5 ♦ K Q J 10 9 4 2 ♣ K</p>
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	N	
W		E
	S	

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			1 ♦
pass	1 ♥	pass	3 ♦
pass	3 ♠	pass	5 ♦
all pass			

3NT would have been hopeless and North-South bid well to reach 5♦ instead. You are sitting East and your partner leads the ♣Q. You win with the ace and the king falls from declarer. What next?

South, who made a jump rebid, is almost certain to hold the 16 points that are missing outside the club suit. Even if he holds only six diamonds, you can count five diamond tricks, two spade tricks with the finesse, and four heart tricks — a total of eleven. Your best hope is to cut declarer off from the dummy, which can be done if he holds only two hearts. At Trick 2, you return a heart, won with the king. When the king of trumps is led, you win immediately (so that you still have a trump left) and return your remaining heart, which declarer must win

in the dummy. Deprived of four heart tricks, declarer will now lead the spade queen. Should you cover or not?

If you do cover, declarer will simply win with the ♠A, draw trumps and return to dummy with the ♠J to enjoy the remaining heart winners. Play low and declarer will have no way to make the contract. He will doubtless try his luck with a third round of hearts, which you will ruff.

<p>♠ J ♥ K 5 ♦ Q 7 6 4 2 ♣ 10 7 5 4 3</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: 80px; margin: 0 auto;"> <p style="margin: 0;">N</p> <p style="margin: 0;">W E</p> <p style="margin: 0;">S</p> </div>	<p>♠ K Q 5 2 ♥ J 9 6 ♦ 10 5 ♣ A K Q 8</p>	<p>♠ 10 9 8 7 3 ♥ A 8 ♦ A 8 3 ♣ J 9 2</p>
	<p>♠ A 6 4 ♥ Q 10 7 4 3 2 ♦ K J 9 ♣ 6</p>		

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
all pass	1NT	pass	4♥

With no particular reason to place the contract in the North hand, South spurns a transfer response and leaps directly to 4♥. Sitting East, you see your partner lead the ♠J. This is almost certain to be a singleton, since you can see the ♠10-9 in your hand and a doubleton jack is one of the worst leads in the game. Declarer wins with dummy's king and cashes three clubs, following once and then discarding the nine and jack of diamonds. He then leads a low trump from dummy. How will you defend?

When the deal arose in an international match between France and Belgium, both East players made the same mistake. They rose with the trump ace to give their partner a spade ruff. West ruffed all right but the ruff was with the king and the defenders scored only three tricks, allowing the game to make.

As East, you should count the tricks available to the defense. You will score the trump ace, a spade ruff and (you hope) the ♦A. How can you score a fourth trick? You cannot hope to give partner two spade ruffs, after rising with the ♥A. South surely has a six-card trump suit

for his bid and that leaves West with only two trumps. The contract can be beaten only if your partner can win the first trump and cross in diamonds for a spade ruff. You should therefore play low on the first trump. Another benefit from defending in this way is that declarer may finesse into partner's ♥Q-x.

(Declarer could have made the contract by playing a fourth round of clubs, throwing his last diamond. This would have broken the link between the defenders and allowed him to make the game.)

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TEST YOUR DEFENSIVE PLAY!

This book is designed to accompany *Planning in Defense*, Book 10 in the *Bridge Technique* series.

Defending a bridge contract is not an easy business. No part of the game requires more attention, hard work, and clear thinking. Is it worth the effort? Certainly, if you like to win as often as possible and want to acquire a reputation as a tough player to face. Remember, if bridge were an easy game to play, it would not have such a huge world-wide following.

The basic principles of defending suit contracts 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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