



Bridge Cardplay: An Easy Guide

**PLAYING
SAFELY**

David Bird & Marc Smith

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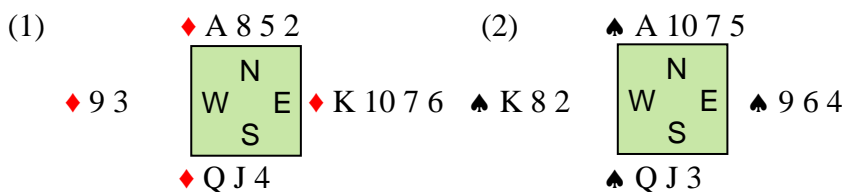
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1.

Playing a single suit correctly

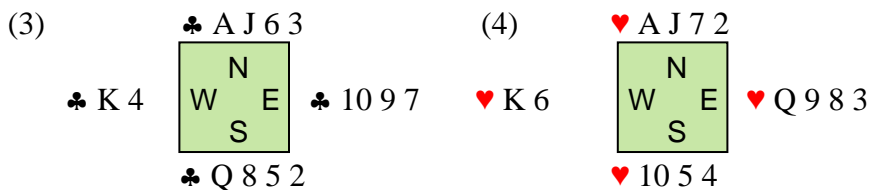
There is an optimal way to play every suit combination. You can check the most promising line by seeing which defensive holdings you can succeed against. Let's see two examples:



In position (1), you should lead twice towards the South hand, which allows you to score both the queen and jack when East holds the king. If you play this way and West wins the ♦Q with the ♦K, you will still make three diamond tricks when the suit breaks 3-3.

The alternative line of leading the ♦Q from your hand is demonstrably worse. West will cover with the king, if he has it, and you will make three tricks only when the suit breaks 3-3. Your chance of making three tricks would be 36%, instead of 68%.

When you also hold the ten, as in (2), the best play changes. You can afford to lead the ♠Q, hoping to 'trap' the ♠K with West. If he covers the queen, or the jack on the second round, you win three tricks with your honors; if the suit breaks 3-3, you will make a total of four tricks.



In (3), you lead towards the ♣J. The finesse wins and the ♣A then drops West's ♣K. The only chance of making all four tricks was to find

West with ♣Kx. If you mistakenly started with the ♣Q, covered by the king and ace, you would make only three tricks.

Similarly, in (4), you should lead the ♥4 to the ♥J. East wins with the ♥Q and dummy's ace then drops West's ♥K. Your ♥10 will be good for a second trick. If you mistakenly led the ♥10 first, covered by the king and ace, you would score only one heart trick.

When you are uncertain whether to lead an honor or a low card for a finesse, ask yourself: Will I be happy if I lead an honor and it is covered? Only in position (2) will your answer be 'Yes'.

When players use the term 'safety play' within a single suit, they are not thinking of positions such as we have just seen. They have in mind a situation where you are willing to sacrifice a possible overtrick to give yourself the best chance of making a contract. Look at this deal:

	♠ 8 7 5 ♥ 8 7 ♦ K Q J 8 ♣ 10 8 5 2		
♠ Q 4 ♥ Q J 5 2 ♦ 10 6 4 3 ♣ J 7 4	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto; display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> N </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> W E </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: center; width: 100%;"> S </div> </div>	♠ 10 9 6 2 ♥ K 9 6 4 ♦ 9 5 ♣ K Q 9	
	♠ A K J 3 ♥ A 10 3 ♦ A 7 2 ♣ A 6 3		
West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	2NT

West leads ♥2. When this is the fourth-best card in the suit, hearts must be breaking 4-4. You decide to play on this assumption and win the first round of hearts. (To hold up would gain nothing against a 4-4 break, and a club switch might be dangerous anyway.)

You have eight tricks and need a third spade trick for the game. If you cross to the ♦J and finesse the ♠J successfully, you will make at least nine tricks, ten if the spades break 3-3. If the finesse loses, you

Quiz Hands

1.

♠ 9 5
♥ A 8 6
♦ K J 5 4
♣ Q 10 6 4

♠ 2 led



♠ A 8 7 4
♥ 9 7 4
♦ A 9
♣ A K J 4

After bidding of 1NT–3NT. West leads the ♥K. How will you plan the play?

2.

♠ Q 7
♥ K J 5
♦ A 7 3 2
♣ K 7 4 2

♠ 3 led



♠ A K J
♥ A Q 6 2
♦ K 10 6 5
♣ A 8

After a crisp auction of 2NT–6NT, how will you maximize your prospects?

Answer to Quiz Hand 1

	♠ 9 5		
	♥ A 8 6		
	♦ K J 5 4		
	♣ Q 10 6 4		
♠ Q J 6 2 ♥ J 10 3 2 ♦ 8 6 2 ♣ 8 7	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block; text-align: center;"> N W E S </div>	♠ K 10 3 ♥ K Q 5 ♦ Q 10 7 3 ♣ 9 5 2	
	♠ A 8 7 4		
	♥ 9 7 4		
	♦ A 9		
	♣ A K J 4		

West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

How will you play 3NT when the ♠2 is led?

You have eight top tricks available and will need one extra trick from the diamond suit. Should you hold up the ♠A? No. West's ♠2 lead suggests only four spades. Apart from that, you do not want to risk a switch to hearts.

You win immediately with the ♠A and must look for the best play to create an extra diamond trick. If you simply play the ♦A and lead the ♦9 for a finesse of dummy's ♦J, your prospects will be little better than 50%. Instead, you should cross to dummy with a club and lead low to the ♦9. Your first chance is that East will hold the ♦10; whether the ♦9 wins or it forces the ♦Q from West, you will have your ninth trick.

If no luck comes from this quarter, the ♦9 losing to the ♦10, you will have a second chance. One of the defenders may have started with three diamonds including the queen. It will then fall in two more rounds, setting up dummy's ♦J as the game-going trick. By combining two chances in this way, you give yourself around a 70% chance.

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Whether you are just setting out to discover the wonderful game of bridge, or have played for some time, your success will be limited without a sound understanding of the basic techniques of cardplay.

In this series, two of the game's top writers explain clearly the various cardplay skills that you will need. Every booklet contains six chapters – each ending with a short Quiz.

The topics covered in this tenth book, on Playing Safely, are:

- Playing a single suit correctly
- Single-suit safety plays
- Surviving bad breaks
- Avoiding ruffs and promotions
- Seeking extra chances
- Safety plays at matchpoints



DAVID BIRD (Southampton, UK) is the world's most prolific bridge writer, with over 150 bridge books to his name. Known for the clarity of his writing and explanations, he has won the American Bridge Teachers' Association Book of the Year Award a record nine times. His celebrated humorous fiction series, featuring the cantankerous Abbot, has run for over 45 years.



MARC SMITH (Southampton, UK) is the author, with Barbara Seagram, of the world's best-selling bridge book in the past sixty years, *25 Bridge Conventions You Should Know*. He has written many other bridge books and played successfully in several international championships. He is a popular online bridge teacher, conducting classes at all levels of play.



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