

LEADS, LEADS, LEADS

The auction:

West	North	East	South
			1♠
Pass	1NT	Pass	2♥
All Pass			

You are West, on lead:

♠ A Q 10 6
♥ 7 3
♦ K Q J 4
♣ J 8 7

You should lead a heart, without any thought. Those diamonds can wait.

The reason you should lead a heart is in the auction. North has given false preference, choosing hearts ahead of spades. You already knew from the 1NT response that North was short in spades, but the pass of 2♥ reveals either a singleton or void in spades with three or four hearts. You want to limit dummy's ability to trump spades. When you think about it, your spades give you this information too (but you don't need good spades to lead a trump here; your partner may be holding the good spades instead).

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

If you lead a heart, your partner's Queen forces declarer's Ace. Declarer will probably cross to dummy with a club to the King, then lead a spade towards hand. You win the spade lead and lead a second heart. Partner wins the ♥K and continues your good work by leading a third heart. Now declarer has no ruffs available in dummy. They will make 3 hearts, 1 diamond and 2 clubs: down 2.

On the other hand, if you lead a diamond, declarer will make a lot of extra trump tricks. They win the ♦A and lead a spade, which you win. You probably realise you should have led a heart, so switch to trumps now, but it's too late. Declarer wins the Ace, then trumps a spade in dummy. A diamond is ruffed in hand, and another spade is trumped in dummy (dummy now has no more trumps). Another diamond is trumped in hand, then the ♣A and ♣K are cashed. That is already 8 tricks, and declarer can lead another diamond from dummy, eloping with the ♥J (if East trumps with the ♥K, the Jack becomes a winner; if East discards, declarer's ♥J can be used), for 9 tricks.

One of the hugely successful lead 'rules' is to lead a trump when opener has bid two suits and responder leaves them in the second-bid suit.

Other classic examples for such a trump lead are auctions such as:

EXAMPLE 1

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	2♥ (1)	Pass	2NT (asks minor)
Pass	3♦	All Pass	

(1) Weak hand with 5 hearts + 4+ minor

South has denied any interest in hearts and has asked North to bid their minor. Lead a trump to stop the heart ruffs.

EXAMPLE 2

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1♥	2♥ (1)	Pass
3♣ (2)	Pass	3♦	All Pass

(1) Michaels Cue Bid showing 5 spades + 5+ minor

(2) Pass or correct – to find partner's minor suit

West has shown no interest in spades, but is keen to play in the minor. Lead a trump to stop any spade ruffs.

EXAMPLE 3

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1NT	2NT (1)	Pass	3♦
All Pass			

(1) North's 2NT overall showed at least 5-5 in the minors

South's 3♦ response showed far more interest in diamonds than clubs. It is best to lead a diamond, to prevent club ruffs. (If South had bid 3♣ there is less inference about the length of the suits, but a club lead will still be best more often than not.)

You are West and on lead against South's 4♠:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1♠
Pass	2♠	Pass	4♠
All Pass			

- ♠ K J 5 4
- ♥ Q 8 7 6 5
- ♦ 3
- ♣ A 6 5

Did you lead the ♦3? If so, the contract will make.

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

Partner will, in all likelihood, read your lead as a length card, and play their ♦K, establishing declarer's suit. Declarer will lose 2 spades and the ♣A, making 10 tricks.

When you hold four decent trumps, you are supposed to lead your long suit. The recommended lead on this hand is the ♥6. Now you will gain trump control of the hand. Declarer wins the ♥A, then tries a diamond finesse. However, having no re-entry to dummy to establish the suit, they will have problems from this point onwards.

When you regain the lead, you continue with your heart attack. Once declarer has trumped once, you have equal trump length. The contract will fail – usually by one trick. *(By the way, if they try the spade finesse instead, the hand really disintegrates for declarer.)*

Barbara Travis

www.bridgewithbarbara.com

P.S. If you want more information about when to lead trumps and when not to lead shortages, feel free to send me an email and I'll forward it to you.