

KRZYSZTOF
MARTENS

GUIDE DOG

PART II

GARSŲ PASAULIS
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Part 1:

HOW TO PLAY HONOR CARDS

As you will see this book has been designed with the idea that the partnership is playing 21st century bridge. That includes reverse signals, except where indicated. High cards are odd numbers or discouraging, low cards are even or encouraging. The same applies to our discards.

GUIDE DOG

*~ A friend to the blind who leads him through difficult
or dangerous situations...*

Bridge literature focuses mainly on bidding, the play of the hand and lead problems based on clues from the bidding, declarer's play up to a given moment and partner's plays. Usually the solution to the problems can be figured out by one player without needing cooperation from their partner.

Defensive agreements are limited to the first card led in a suit, the system of discarding, and giving count and attitude signals. However, there are other situations that can be encountered on defense that are only a guess without specific agreements.

In my opinion, it is impossible to reach a high level of play, without the ability to establish effective cooperation with your partner. The foundation of this is the precise exchange of information. It is also wise to give the kind of information that can only be sensibly used by your partner. We have to remember that declarer may also be watching our moves carefully.

A fundamental rule applies in this situation – the usefulness of a signal must be more to partner's advantage than to the opponents.

The exchange of information can be concerned with: the suit we attack – how do we signal honor cards and count in this suit; showing the quality or the length of the suit played by partner or declarer; showing honors or length in a side suit by discards when not following suit.

I define 7 areas that need to be understood for expert defense:

- 1) sequences
- 2) count leads
- 3) count signals
- 4) substitute count
- 5) complex count signals
- 6) suit preference
- 7) the play of honor cards.

Having a defined structure of defensive agreements and discards is not enough. Knowing when to use a particular signal and having the ability to draw the right conclusions is essential. The defenders' alphabet of signaling options is relatively modest. However, there is a never-ending discussion about when to direct the defense, show defensive intentions, or give accurate information about the location of high cards or the number of cards in a suit.

Active experimentation and independent creativity are the key. The nature of discards used must be elastic so that experimentation and creativity are possible. The context of a situation is also important. In the linguistic sense "context" means the dependency of the meaning of some fragment of speech on the meaning of the words preceding or following it. For example, the word "sea" we understand first and foremost as a huge amount of water, but the expression "a sea of sand" we understand as a desert, in other words an area devoid of water. The word "sea" in this particular phrase is a synonym for "immense area."

In the situational context of bridge communications, the important factors are: location in time and space, goals, plans, intentions and players' knowledge.

Building a bridge partnership is a complicated process. Undoubtedly, being innovative is a desired mental attitude for

Part 1: How To Play Honor Cards

both partners. Creative cooperation between them is essential. One has to learn that there is a division of labor on defense and accept refined methods. Specialization (assigning different roles) may be necessary depending on the predisposition of the players.

Dividing the partnership into one player that delivers information (the right information) and one player that gives orders (directing traffic – conveying suggestions and deciding the entire line of defense) isn't optimal, but in some cases effective.

Resolving problems with the help of a cooperative method requires a similar level of skill from both players. The result is a feeling that the partnership can co-create and shape their bridge world.

Keep in mind that all the hands presented here are from a pairs tournament where every trick is important.

THE CONCEPT OF LIMITED CONTEXT

Defense, which includes both the opening lead and later plays, is the least liked element of the game of bridge. It is a sad fact that the status quo is currently most players make poor leads.

As much as we are able to tolerate, or even like, our character foibles, to admit to our own insufficiencies of intellect is contradictory to human nature. Lack of motivation to improve the quality of defense can be seen at every level of bridge development – the ability to make good leads always runs behind the skills of bidding and declarer play. The mistakes that are often made are simple and the result of laziness – a refusal to count to 40 high card points, 13 cards and 13 tricks.

Compared to bidding and play problems, defense problems are less clear cut, correct techniques are less obviously useful, and routine play may not help and can even be harmful to one's results at the table.

The key to improving this situation is to create effective cooperation between the partners.

Bridge players have a tendency to generalize. Making agreements is very popular – first and foremost we play either count signals or attitude with elements of suit preference. Which method is best? Unfortunately, there's no correct answer to this question. Before giving an answer one should explain: "better for what?" or rather "more useful to do what?" There are some factors like:

- 1) Anticipating partner's needs (what kind of information will he need?)
- 2) The level and type of contract
- 3) The skill level of the opponents

Anticipating partner's needs is an unusually difficult aspect of defense. Everything depends on the context.

Part 1: How To Play Honor Cards

Let's imagine that the opening lead is against a no-trump contract. Depending on the circumstances a signal by the other defender:

- a) encourages or discourages a continuation
- b) shows an odd or even number of cards in the suit
- c) shows suit preference in the remaining suits.

Obviously, a professional pair should define the situations in which the various rules above should apply.

Some situations are obvious.

Against 3NT partner leads the ♠10, and the dummy comes down with

♠ A K Q J

Playing count or attitude signals doesn't make any sense. It would be extremely helpful for the other defender to show preference in the remaining suits.

Contexture – means in Latin – “weave” or “weld.”

The context imposes a certain area of mutual cooperation – analysis. The difficulty is for both partners to think alike. I call this “cooperative analysis”.

It requires each player to make an additional analysis from partner's point of view, taking into consideration information he has from the bidding and the play of the hand up to a particular moment.

The Concept Of Limited Context

On many hands the context will be very narrow.

For example:

W	N	E	S
1♥	3♥	4♥	Pass
Pass	Dbl	Pass...	

3♥ = shows a solid minor and asks for a stopper in hearts.

North having these cards:

♠ J 10
♥ 3
♦ A K Q J 8 6 5
♣ A Q J

may select the lead of the king of diamonds, wanting to draw partner's attention to the lower of the remaining two suits, that is, clubs.

♠ A Q
♥ 3
♦ A K Q J 8 6 5
♣ J 10 3

Here he might select the lead of the ace of diamonds, showing spade values.

In this example the context is known from the bidding – the solid diamond suit.

Partner will choose a count signal or may be able to follow partner's intentions and show suit preference.

The Concept Of Limited Context

♠ 5 4 2
 ♥ 6
 ♦ A K Q J 10 7 4
 ♣ A Q

♠ A Q 7
 ♥ A Q 10 8 7
 ♦ 8 2
 ♣ 8 7 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ J 10 9 8
 ♥ K J 10 4
 ♦ 6 3
 ♣ J 4 2

♠ K 6 3
 ♥ 9 5 3
 ♦ 9 5
 ♣ K 10 9 6 3

Lead: ♦K, showing club values.

South follows with the $\spadesuit 5$ and $\spadesuit 9$, also showing interest in clubs.

The purpose of the next book in the series “The University of Defense” – “Guide Dog” is to narrow the context. This means showing the circumstances in which a discard or another play changes in meaning depending on the needs of the particular hand.

Is there a discard that solves every type of problem that can be encountered on defense? The answer is ‘no’ – it is impossible beyond a certain level of complexity.

One model (attitude, count, suit preference) will not work on complicated hands, basically for two reasons.

First, it is difficult effectively to solve two conceptually remote lead problems using only one model. By “an effectively solution” I mean one that is correct, clear, and easy upon which to base analysis.

Second, some information in a concrete situation will not be useful and other information that the applied model doesn't recognize will be invaluable.

As it happens there is group of hands, one that is far from small in number, on which a more sophisticated method of conveying information is necessary – substitute and complex count.

The purpose of the concept of Limited Context is to help us untangle the kind of problem in this example.

EW vulnerable

W	N	E	S
1NT	Pass	2♦	Dbl
2♥	3♦	3♥	Pass...

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

♠ A Q J 9 ♥ A K Q ♦ 8 2 ♣ 7 5 3 2	N W E S	♠ 8 4 2 ♥ J 10 8 7 4 ♦ Q 3 ♣ A 10 9
--	--------------------------------	--

♠ 7 6 5
 ♥ 9 5 3
 ♦ A K 7 6 5
 ♣ Q J 3

Lead: $\spadesuit J$.

The play of honor cards by South on the first two tricks should show suit preference.

In many similar situations:

- a) first the king, and then the ace of diamonds suggests values in the lower of the remaining two suits. This is only a suggestion, because the defender may not have any other strength, and so he simply plays his honor cards in a natural way.
- b) winning the first trick with the ace of diamonds and then playing the king – definitely shows values in spades.

On this particular hand there are some special circumstances.

Both defenders anticipating the next stage of the defense expect a spade return to be logical. IN THIS CONTEXT an atypical play of honor cards (first the ace and then the king) is a kind of wake up call asking if it is necessary to change the seemingly obvious line of defense.

It means this – I’m proposing to shift to a club and not a spade. Partner (N)’s role at trick two is to reject the offer (♦10) or to accept it (♦4).

Bear in mind that if dummy’s spades are slightly better (or the clubs slightly worse) this inference may not be available, or not nearly so clear.

This narrowing down of the context of signaling is therefore one of the most important concepts to combat the complex scope of bridge problems. It assumes that there are clearly defined groups of defensive problems that are conceptually remote from each other.

For each such limited group of hands (the context) we create a separate model of discards (or plays). Information that is conveyed by a predefined action will change depending on the context – in reality depending on the need. Changing the background and circumstances of particular hands generate different needs, and this is the challenge I’m trying to address.

Part 1: How To Play Honor Cards

We will need both members of the partnership to be on the same page if our partnership is going to defend optimally.

For this reason, I think it is indispensable to create a context map, or in other words, a data bank of sets of similar defensive problems in which defined actions meet the concrete (and defined) needs of partner.

Obviously, in your career you're going to encounter many delicate, subtle defense problems the interpretation of which will be different for each partnership.

Such is the beauty and charm of bridge.

- a) information
- b) suit preference
- c) an alert to partner

1) Simple plays make partner's life easier.

W	N	E	S
	1 ♠	Pass	1NT
2 ♥	2 ♠	3 ♥	Pass...

♠ A K Q 10 8 7
♥ 6
♦ 10 9 7 2
♣ K 5

♠ 6 5
♥ A K 9 8 4 2
♦ K 4
♣ 7 3 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 4
♥ Q 5 3
♦ A 8 6 5
♣ Q J 10 9 8

♠ J 9 3 2
♥ J 10 7
♦ Q J 3
♣ A 6 4

Lead: ♠A and ♠K.

The simplest solution is to give important information – I have a sequence in clubs QJ109 by throwing the ♣Q.

North won't have any problem finding the right defense.

2) Information that contains a suggestion.

W	N	E	S
1♥	Pass	2NT	Pass
3♥	Pass	4♥	Pass...

2NT= invitational with a fit

♠ 5 4 3
♥ 7 6
♦ A K 8 7
♣ K 6 5 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 6
♥ 4 3
♦ Q J 6 2
♣ J 10 9 8 2

♠ K 10 8 7 2
♥ K 10 9 5
♦ 10 3
♣ A 7

♠ Q J 9
♥ A Q J 8 2
♦ 9 5 4
♣ Q 4

Information and suggestion. Let me in with the jack of diamonds and I'll play a club.

3) A high spot card doesn't always say anything about our intentions. The sequence of honor cards played is important.

W	N	E	S
		1♥	Pass
1♠	Pass	3♠	Pass
4♠	Pass...		

♠ 7 5
 ♥ 8
 ♦ J 10 6 3
 ♣ J 9 8 5 4 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

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

♠ A Q 4 2
 ♥ Q J 6 3 2
 ♦ K 5
 ♣ K 10

♠ 8 3
 ♥ A K 9
 ♦ 9 8 7 4 2
 ♣ A Q 6

South took the trick with the king of hearts, cashed the ace of hearts and played the ♥9. West played in order the: ♥5, ♥7, ♥10. Now what?

It's easy to make a mistake reading the ♥9 as suit preference for diamonds. The order of honor cards played in hearts (♥K, and then ♥A) however, points to clubs.

4) The order that high cards are played should show our intentions precisely.

	♠ 6										
	♥ J 10 3 2										
	♦ J 10 4 2										
	♣ J 10 7 6										
♠ 10 7 4	<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr></table>		N		W		E		S		♠ A 5 2
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ A Q 7 5 4		♥ K 9 6									
♦ A Q 9		♦ K 8 3									
♣ K 9		♣ 8 5 4 2									
	♠ K Q J 9 8 3										
	♥ 8										
	♦ 7 6 5										
	♣ A Q 3										

West ducks.

If I take the first trick with the king of spades and play the queen
– I show values in hearts.

If I take the first trick with the queen and play the jack – I show partner interest in diamonds.

If I take the first trick with the jack and play the queen – I like clubs.

In this example North would know where South's entry is (clubs) and wouldn't have any doubt which suit to discard from.

How To Play Honor Cards

6) Each card played means something. Yes, I know, it's tiring. It requires constant concentration, but it yields results.

W	N	E	S
	1♥	Dbl	2♦
2♠	3♥	3♠	Pass...

2♦ = constructive raise in hearts

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

Your lead: ♥K.

Partner plays the ♥2 signaling an even number of cards in the suit.

You should convey information or show your intentions on the second heart trick.

- a) Playing the queen of hearts – I know how to continue the defense.
- b) The jack of hearts – I don't have a clear concept for defending.
- c) ♥8 – asks partner to play a diamond through.
- d) ♥3 – asks partner to play a club through.

Part 1: How To Play Honor Cards

Which line of defense are you going to choose? There is no need to open diamonds. Having partner play a club through seems to be completely safe. At trick two the ♥3 would encourage partner to do that.

Let's imagine a slightly different layout:

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

Lead: ♥K.

South plays the ♥2, giving count (even).

This time the situation isn't as clear-cut.

- a) ♥Q – I know how to continue the defense.
- b) ♥10 – the highest spot card – play a diamond through.
- c) ♥3 – the lowest spot card – play a club through.
- d) ♥8 – a middle card – I don't have a clear line of defense.

The correct play is, of course, the ♥10.

This way we can take two diamond tricks before declarer has time to set up a long trick in clubs.

INFORMATIVE PLAY 1

Playing honor cards in a non-standard way shows important information. What exactly? It depends on the context of the hand.

W	N	E	S
		1 ♠	Pass
1NT	Pass	3 ♠	
3NT	Pass...		

♠ 9 6 4
 ♥ 10 9 8 6
 ♦ 3 2
 ♣ A 10 9 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A Q J 10 7 2
 ♥ K 4 2
 ♦ A J 4
 ♣ 6

Your lead: ♥10.

South plays the ♥5, a low card being encouraging. Declarer takes the trick with the queen of hearts and plays the ♦10, ducking in dummy. Partner wins the queen the diamonds and plays the queen of clubs. this holds the trick, but next partner plays the king of clubs, a surprising card. What is partner trying to tell us?

Part 1: How To Play Honor Cards

The full hand is:

	♠ 9 6 4										
	♥ 10 9 8 6										
	♦ 3 2										
	♣ A 10 9 2										
♠ K	<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr></table>		N		W		E		S		♠ A Q J 10 7 2
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ Q 3		♥ K 4 2									
♦ Q 10 9 7		♦ A J 4									
♣ J 8 7 5 4 3		♣ 6									
	♠ 8 5 3										
	♥ A J 7 5										
	♦ K 8 6 5										
	♣ K Q										

In this particular case the unusual play of the club honors shows the lack of a club spot card.

The defense is obvious now. We have to overtake with the ace of clubs and play a heart through.

INFORMATIVE PLAY 2

Discarding an honor is most often done to show a sequence. This can be invaluable information.

NS vulnerable

W	N	E	S
			3NT
Dbl	4♣	Pass	Pass
4♠	Pass	Pass	Dbl
Pass...			

3NT = a solid minor without a side stopper

Dbl = shows the possibility of being able to ruff something

♠ 7 2
 ♥ A 10 8 6 4 2
 ♦ K Q 4
 ♣ 9 2

	N		♠ Q 9 3
			♥ 9 7 5 3
W		E	♦ J 10 9
	S		♣ 6 5 4

Your lead: ♥A.

South plays the ♣10. How do you continue?

Part 1: How To Play Honor Cards

All four hands:

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

Thanks to the play of the ♣10 you can consider the ♣9 to be an unexpected entry. At trick two, play the ♥2. Partner ruffs and can safely play a club back to you. Partner ruffs the third round of hearts and plays a diamond through, which results in down three.

INFORMATIVE PLAY 3

This time you have to decide how to play your honor cards when on lead.

NS vulnerable

W	N	E	S
			1♦
2♠	4♥	4♠	Pass
Pass	Dbl	Pass...	

♠ 7 5
 ♥ A K Q 9 8 3
 ♦ K
 ♣ 8 5 4 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K 4 2
 ♥ 10 6 2
 ♦ 10 6 5 3
 ♣ A 10 6

Your lead: ♥Q.

The lead of the queen of hearts guaranteed the sequence AKQ or QJ. South followed with the ♥5, West played the ♥4. What next?

Part 1: How To Play Honor Cards

The full hand:

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

Now it is time to play the king of diamonds. South plays the nine of diamonds (discouraging in theory, but here showing a heart entry when the king holds the trick). The heart nine is played to the jack. Now, the next important play – the two of diamonds, without cashing the ace of diamonds first. North ruffs the diamond and plays a club.

Perfect defense by both defenders results in down three.

Note that after the routine lead of the ace of hearts, it would be difficult for South to consider the jack of hearts as a sure entry.

INFORMATIVE PLAY 4

The method of handling honor cards can work as a count signal in some situations.

W	N	E	S
1♣	1♦	2♦	Pass
2NT	Pass	3NT	Pass...

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

Lead: ♦K.

South plays the ♦8 (showing an odd number).

West ducks. Declarer takes the queen of diamonds with the ace and plays the ten of clubs, finessing. South wins the king of clubs, and...

Part 1: How To Play Honor Cards

All four hands:

	♠ Q J 8 7										
	♥ K J										
	♦ K Q J 10										
	♣ 7 3 2										
♠ A 10 5	<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr></table>		N		W		E		S		♠ K 6 4
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ A 7 5 2		♥ Q 6									
♦ A 9 2		♦ 6 4 3									
♣ 10 9 8		♣ A Q J 6 5									
	♠ 9 3 2										
	♥ 10 9 8 4 3										
	♦ 8 7 5										
	♣ K 4										

If South mechanically plays a diamond, North will find himself squeezed (or end-played, if he doesn't cash the fourth diamond).

Returning a heart instead of letting partner cash out the diamond suit would be fatal to the defense if the layout were slightly different:

	♠ Q 8 7 5										
	♥ K J										
	♦ K Q J 10 2										
	♣ 7 2										
♠ A J 10	<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr></table>		N		W		E		S		♠ K 6 4
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ A 7 5 2		♥ Q 6									
♦ A 9		♦ 6 4 3									
♣ 10 9 8 3		♣ A Q J 6 5									
	♠ 9 3 2										
	♥ 10 9 8 4 3										
	♦ 8 7 5										
	♣ K 4										

Informative Play 4

Declarer claims nine tricks, when the defense could have taken five tricks. What is the solution to this headache?

FROM SEQUENCES IN SUITS WITH AN ODD NUMBER OF CARDS WE LEAD THE HIGHEST AND FOLLOW WITH THE SECOND HIGHEST.

FROM SEQUENCES IN SUITS WITH AN EVEN NUMBER OF CARDS WE LEAD THE HIGHEST AND FOLLOW WITH THE THIRD HIGHEST.

However, you have to realize that this is not a universal solution and would only apply in situations when the information about the number of cards in the suit led is critical.

Otherwise the card would be suit-preference. I have to admit that as North I would not be thinking along these lines unless in top form! This example is particularly hard because if declarer has the club king we might have to signal so as to plan our discards.

INFORMATIVE PLAY 5

Playing honor cards to force partner to make an attitude signal, is a pill for all kinds of headaches.

NS vulnerable

The bidding:

W	N	E	S
1♠	Pass	2♠	Pass
4♠	Pass...		

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

Lead: ♣Q.

We failed to overcall 3♥ and accordingly attracted a different lead. Was that a good thing? Plan the defense to find out.

Informative Play 5

The full hand:

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

Lead: ♣Q.

We dealt with a similar problem earlier. It had to do with the first lead in a suit and the signal it would attract. Here we use the same method at trick three.

After winning the king of spades, we play the queen of hearts.

The encouraging ♥2, which guarantees possession of the jack, allows us to underlead in hearts to get a club ruff.

SUIT PREFERENCE 1

In many situations the way we play honor cards shows suit preference.

NS vulnerable

W	N	E	S
1♠	3♥	4♠	Pass...

3♥ = preemptive

♠ 7 5 4
♥ Q 9 8 7 2
♦ 6
♣ J 10 9 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A K 9 8
♥ K 4
♦ J 9 8 7 2
♣ K 3

Your lead: ♦6.

Partner wins the king of diamonds and cashes the ace of diamonds. What do you discard?

Suit Preference 1

In answer to this elusive question – we all say: a count signal in hearts?

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

The answer is we should “discard” a trump and play a club through.

The way South plays his diamond honors shows suit preference.

- a) ♦K, ♦A – clubs values
- b) ♦A, ♦K – hearts values

If instead of the queen of clubs partner had had a third diamond, then after ruffing the second diamond, and playing a club to partner’s ace we would still get a fourth trick with a second diamond ruff.

SUIT PREFERENCE 2

I'm going to keep repeating this until you get bored, that important information has to be conveyed at the earliest possible opportunity.

Both vulnerable

W	N	E	S
5♦	Dbl	Pass...	1♥

♠ K 10
♥ 8 7 6 3 2
♦ K 7
♣ A 10 4 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A Q 7 5 4 2
♥ Q 5 4
♦ 2
♣ 8 7 5

Your lead: ♥7.

Partner played the ♥10. West ruffed and played the ♦Q.

What do you do?

Suit Preference 2

Both defenders should realize that information about the club suit was conveyed at trick one.

Why the club suit? North will most likely win trick two and for him the most critical question is what does partner have in clubs? Should South anticipate the fact that West was going to ruff the first heart? He shouldn't even have to think about it. Conveying information that is useful for his partner and at the same time difficult for the declarer to read is an art that a real defender should know as soon as he's old enough to be weaned from his mother's milk. What did the ♥10 at trick one mean?

- a) Playing the ♥9 would show at least the king of clubs.
- b) Playing the ♥10 would show at least the queen of clubs.
- c) Playing the ♥J would deny a major club honor.

What's funny is that playing the jack of hearts would strongly suggest the possession of the ace of diamonds. Without the ace of diamonds it would be hard to imagine an opening bid. West's hand could look like this:

♠ 9
♥ —
♦ Q J 10 9 8 6 5 4 3
♣ K Q J

In the case of c) North should duck the queen of diamonds.

The conclusion from the play of the ten of hearts should be very clear to North:

- a) He shouldn't nervously rush to cash club tricks.
- b) It's hard to imagine a West hand without the ace of diamonds.

In this way the clever, although risky, deceptive play made by West won't pay off. We win the second trick with the king of diamonds and play a heart.

The full hand:

♠ K 10
 ♥ 8 7 6 3 2
 ♦ K 7
 ♣ A 10 4 3

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

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A Q 7 5 4 2
 ♥ Q 5 4
 ♦ 2
 ♣ 8 7 5

♠ J 8 3
 ♥ A K J 10 9
 ♦ 4
 ♣ Q J 9 6

If declarer had had three spades and one club the contract would have been made with an overtrick; but that's life.

SUIT PREFERENCE 3

It is rare to combine the idea of camouflage with suit preference.

EW vulnerable

W	N	E	S
			1♥
1♠	4♥	4♠	Pass
Pass	5♥	Pass	Pass
5♠	Pass...		

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

Lead: ♥7.

Declarer plays the ten of hearts from the dummy.

Plan the defense.

Part 1: How To Play Honor Cards

The full hand:

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

Lead: ♥7.

Declarer plays the ten of hearts from the dummy.

The key is what to play at trick one.

Playing the ace of hearts serves two purposes:

- a) Suggests values in diamonds.
- b) Camouflages the location of honor cards – If declarer places the king and jack of hearts with North there is a higher probability of the king of spades being with South (also a clue from the bidding).

Declarer, misled by the bidding and the play of honor cards at trick one, went to the dummy with the king of clubs and played the queen of spades.

Thanks to getting the information he needed, after North wins the ♠K, he can play the diamond queen.

Declarer might well lay down SA to avoid this scenario.

SUIT PREFERENCE 4

Playing honor cards wisely can make life much easier for partner.

EW vulnerable

W	N	E	S
1NT	Pass...		

N	
W	E
S	

♠ 10 5
♥ J 10 9 7
♦ K J 7 5
♣ 8 5 3

♠ A 8 7 3 2
♥ 8 4 2
♦ 8 3
♣ J 10 9

Lead: ♠K.

The first trick: ♠K, ♠5, ♠3, ♠6.

The second trick: ♠Q, ♠10, ♠2, ♠9.

At trick three partner plays the ♠J.

Plan the defense.

Excellent defense results in down two.

At a large tournament the contract of 1NT was played by West 64 times. 22 declarers made the contract (after the mechanical play of a club through).

44 declarers went down one. Not a single NS pair found the optimal solution leading to down two.

Why is it so difficult? The play of honor cards conveys necessary information on each hand. Identical interpretations on both sides of the table require that both partners are on the same wavelength. It is only possible with pairs who have played together thousands of deals.

Is it possible to create a “common language” faster?

Yes, but it requires hours of meticulous discussion between the partners.

SUIT PREFERENCE 5

Appearances are often deceptive. Sticking to hard and fast rules leads to success.

W	N	E	S
1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♥	Pass	3♥	Pass
4♥	Pass...		

♠ 9 8 7 2
 ♥ 6
 ♦ 8 7 2
 ♣ J 10 8 7 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A Q 10 3
 ♥ 9 2
 ♦ K 10 9 4 3
 ♣ Q 4

Your lead: ♣J.

Declarer plays the queen of clubs from the dummy which partner covers with the king of clubs. Partner returns the ♣9. Declarer follows with the ♣5 and the ♣6.

Plan the defense.

Suit Preference 5

The full hand:

Variation a)

		♠ 8 7 6 2											
		♥ 6											
		♦ 8 7 2											
		♣ J 10 8 7 3											
♠ K J ♥ A K Q J 10 8 ♦ 6 5 ♣ 6 5 2	<table style="border-collapse: collapse; margin: 0;"><tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr><tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr></table>		N		W		E		S		♠ A Q 10 3 ♥ 9 2 ♦ K 10 9 4 3 ♣ Q 4		
	N												
W		E											
	S												
		♠ 9 5 4											
		♥ 7 5 4 3											
		♦ A Q J											
		♣ A K 9											

Lead: ♣J.

Declarer plays the queen of clubs from the dummy which partner covers with the king of clubs. Partner returns the ♣9. Declarer follows with the ♣5 and the ♣6.

Note that by covering the jack of clubs with the queen declarer made the defenders' task easier. If declarer ducks the ♣J and South plays the ♣9 it would have considerably muddled the waters.

A careful defender (North) will notice that the ♣2 hasn't been played. The return of the ♣9 could be suit preference for spades (when South holds ♣AK92). However, appearances are often misleading.

Part 1: How To Play Honor Cards

The layout of cards could be slightly different:

Variation b)

		♠ 8 7 6 2									
		♥ 6									
		♦ 8 7 2									
		♣ J 10 8 7 3									
♠ J 4 ♥ A K Q J 10 8 ♦ Q J 5 ♣ 6 5	<table style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100%;"><tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr><tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr></table>		N		W		E		S		♠ A Q 10 3 ♥ 9 2 ♦ K 10 9 4 3 ♣ Q 4
	N										
W		E									
	S										
		♠ K 9 5									
		♥ 7 5 4 3									
		♦ A 6									
		♣ A K 9 2									

On this layout after winning the second club trick North should play a spade.

The solution to the problem is of course, the correct play of the honor cards at trick one and not the play of the spot card to suggest suit preference.

In Variation a) South should win the queen of clubs with the king to suggest a preference for a diamond return.

In Variation b) South should show his interest in spades by careful play of the correct club honor at trick one: winning the queen of clubs with the ace and returning the nine of clubs. It will be evident who has the king of clubs when West follows to the second club trick with a spot card.

ALERT 1

The unnatural discard of an honor calls for non-standard action.

W	N	E	S
		1♥	Pass
1♠	Pass	4♠	Pass...

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

Lead: ♣A.

Plan the defense.

Part 1: How To Play Honor Cards

The full hand:

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

Throw the ♣J, as a request for a change of attack, and also perhaps an unusual shift.

Shifting to a heart at trick two will lead to a ruff in that suit.

ALERT 2

It may not be that difficult to get partner to change his plan of attack.

W	N	E	S
			1 ♠
2 ♥	Pass	3 ♥	Pass...

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

Lead: ♠A.

Plan the defense.

Part 1: How To Play Honor Cards

The full hand:

Variation a)

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

Play the jack and partner will shift to... a diamond.

North will get in with a spade ruff and lead a second diamond through.

♠ A 4
♥ 9 8 5
♦ 7 3 2
♣ 9 8 4 3 2

♠ 8 6 5
♥ K Q J 10 6
♦ K 10
♣ A 7 5

♠ 10 7 2
♥ 4 3 2
♦ A J 4
♣ K J 10 6

♠ K Q J 9 3
♥ A 7
♦ Q 9 8 6 5
♣ Q

Not much – just play the king of spades, showing a sequence and suggesting a continuation. At trick three you will shift to a club yourself, get in with the ace of trumps, give partner a spade ruff and get a club ruff.

ALERT 3

The unusual play of honor cards here serves to alert partner and suggests a non-standard line of defense. North has to cooperate and has to make a thorough analysis.

None vulnerable

W	N	E	S
1♣	1♥	Dbl	2NT
2♠	Pass	4♠	Dbl
Pass...			

1♣ = Polish Club, with a 12-14PC balanced hand, which may include 4♦ and 2♣ (an opening 1♦ would promise 5 diamonds or 4441)

Dbl = transfer to spades

2NT = good hand with support in ♥.

♠ —										
♥ 10 9 8 7 6										
♦ A 8 7 4										
♣ Q 8 6 2										
<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr></table>			N		W		E		S	
	N									
W		E								
	S									
♠ A Q 10 6 5										
♥ 5 3										
♦ 6 5 3										
♣ A 7 5										

Your lead: ♥10.

South wins with the ♥A and next plays the ♥K. West follows with the ♥J and the ♥Q.

Plan the defense.

Alert 3

The full hand:

	♠ —										
	♥ 10 9 8 7 6										
	♦ A 8 7 4										
	♣ Q 8 6 2										
♠ K J 9 3	<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr></table>		N		W		E		S		♠ A Q 10 6 5
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ Q J		♥ 5 3									
♦ K Q J 10		♦ 6 5 3									
♣ 10 9 4		♣ A 7 5									
	♠ 8 7 4 2										
	♥ A K 4 2										
	♦ 9 2										
	♣ K J 3										

Your lead: ♥10.

South wins with the ♥A and next plays the ♥K. West follows with the ♥J and the ♥Q.

Playing honor cards is a real art. In this case it signaled a non-standard line of defense.

After cashing two heart tricks the routine play would be to lead a diamond. The unusual play of the heart honors shows interest in the club suit. Cooperation from North's side should show whether he can give help in the club suit. On the second heart trick that role is fulfilled by playing the ♥6, the smallest spot card in hearts. Note, that this problem is not typical and is a great exception to playing routinely. This is not a standard suit preference situation.

ALERT 4

Precise defense requires thorough analysis and agreements allowing for subtle maneuvering.

W	N	E	S
		1♦	1♠
2♥	Pass	3♣	Pass
4♥	Pass...		

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

Lead: ♠2 (playing 3rd and 5th).

Plan the defense.

Alert 4

The full hand:

		♠ 10 6 2									
		♥ 10 4 2									
		♦ 8 7 3 2									
		♣ K J 6									
♠ 8 7 3 ♥ K J 8 7 6 5 3 ♦ K J ♣ A	<table style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100%;"><tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr><tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr></table>		N		W		E		S		♠ Q J ♥ A ♦ A Q 10 9 4 ♣ Q 10 9 5 2
	N										
W		E									
	S										
		♠ A K 9 5 4									
		♥ Q 9									
		♦ 6 5									
		♣ 8 7 4 3									

Lead: ♠2 (playing 3rd and 5th).

You win the first trick and continue spades. On the third spade West pitches a club from the dummy instead of ruffing. The fate of this hand depends on who wins the third trick.

- 1) If North wins, the defense is finished.
- 2) If South wins, playing a fourth round of spades will promote a trump trick for the defense.

Unblocking the ♠10 sets the contract.

South should win the first spade trick with the ace and play the king. It is an atypical play that should alert North to unblock

ALERT 5

The context matters. Making partner's life easier should begin at the time we choose our first card to lead.

NS vulnerable

W	N	E	S
	1♦	Pass	1♥
1♠	2♥	3♥	Pass
4♠	Pass...		

3♥ = invitational with support

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

Lead: ♥A.

Plan the defense.

Alert 5

The full hand:

Variation a)

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

Lead: ♥A.

The situation South is in is a tricky one. Depending on which black ace partner has, we should direct partner's actions.

If North has the ♠A then it would be best to make the alarm-clock play of the ♥Q. North can shift to a diamond, which would lead to a ruff in that suit.

Part 1: How To Play Honor Cards

Variation b)

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

If North has the ♣A, then we should direct his interest to the club suit by playing in this order: the ♥9 (showing an odd count) and the ♥2 as suit preference for clubs.

How can we get out of this?

A slight suggestion might come from the choice of the first card led. A popular agreement against a suit contract is:

- 1) If an ace is led, partner gives attitude.
- 2) If a king is led, partner gives count.

Here we are dealing with a one-way exchange of information which is imposed by the choice of the card led.

If we adopt the concept of giving flexible count (an attitude signal is only given in clearly defined cases), other possibilities become available.

- a) The lead of the ace from (AKx..) directs the defense to the higher of the remaining suits.
- b) The lead of the king, to the lower.

This idea increases the level of cooperation between the partners.

This is an example of applied modern bridge that calls for a maximum two-way exchange of information.

To return to our problem in Variation b) partner might have led the ♥K if he had wanted to suggest the possession of the ♠A.

A fundamental question is whether even after the signal of the queen of hearts if North should still not play the ace of clubs and see partner's signal in this suit?

Imagination comes into play – maybe the queen of hearts means:

- 1) a void in diamonds? – playing the ace of clubs would mean the loss of a second ruff.
- 2) five hearts and the king of diamonds – cashing the ♠A would lead to the loss of a diamond trick.

A typical hand for South might be:

♠ 5
♥ Q 9 8 6 3 2
♦ K J
♣ 9 7 6 4

The context imposes a certain area of mutual cooperation – analysis. The difficulty is for both partners to think alike. I call this cooperative analysis.

Part 2:

ATTITUDE SIGNALS

Attitude signals are given to the suit partner has led. They convey our attitude about the future continuation of that suit. The weakness of this method is the lack of cooperation between the defenders. One of the defenders conveys only a suggestion and decides for himself the best line of defense. The lack of count information can also lead to confusion, and defenders have to make complex analyses right through to the very end of the play in order to correctly count out the shape of declarer's hand. Does this mean that we should give up using attitude signals?

There is a certain kind of hand where attitude signals are irreplaceable. In my opinion one should precisely specify particular types of bridge problems and use attitude signals only for these situations.

This is the first criterion that comes to mind. There has to be a situation that is so clear that we can give an encouraging or discouraging signal in tempo. In practice sometimes there are amazing scenes at the table related to a break in tempo before signaling.

After the lead and after the dummy comes down, the second defender noticeably hesitates before playing a card. The leader's partner has to analyze the whole hand and, usually without any

Part 2: Attitude Signals

helpful clues, suggest the best line of defense to his partner. The longer the leader's partner thinks before playing a card at trick one, the easier it is for the leader to realize what kind of dilemma his partner is facing. It's curious that hesitations made by the leader's partner are tolerated, because, in fact, they convey illegal information (assuming that an attitude signal is given). What exactly is the illegal information?

For example: "Partner this is not a typical situation. If the suggestion that I would like to convey to you was automatically easy, then my card would have been on the table long ago."

The leader then analyzes the hand, excludes all typical lines of defense, and takes into consideration that there may be an uncomfortable location of honor cards.

Is there a sensible way out of this? Yes: declarer should play to the first trick only after about 30 seconds. That should give the leader's partner enough time. In practice this doesn't happen nearly often enough.

Of course ethical problems are not confined to attitude signals. Let's imagine two similar situations when we use a count signal. Partner leads the ♥A against a spade contract:

- a) With two spot cards we make a fast count signal, showing an even number of cards.
- b) With four spot cards we signal an even number of cards after making a lengthy analysis.

This kind of play is rightfully considered a criminal act.

Another "criminal" version:

- 1) A signal made quickly is a count signal.
- 2) After a hesitation – it's suit preference.

Introduction

Keep in mind that all the hands presented here are from a pairs tournament, where every trick is important. The defenders will use the agreement that a small spot card encourages a continuation, and a high spot card discourages and suggests a switch.

DOUBT 1

After the first lead and after dummy comes down, the leader's partner goes into the tank and plays some card. He has to analyze the whole hand and usually without satisfactory clues, suggest the best line of defense.

W	N	E	S
		Pass	Pass
4♠	Pass...		

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

Lead: ♣A.

Since North might lead an unsupported ace against a high-level preempt it is necessary to play king from ace-king, just as we would in mid-hand. the ace asks for attitude, the king, be it from king-queen or ace-king, asks for count. Here partner elects to lead the ace for attitude.

What card do you play?

Doubt 1

a) I play the ♣6, to discourage and suggest a shift.

Watch out!! There is a danger that partner will shift to a diamond shift. Why?

Partner is going to make this kind of analysis:

Heart tricks are not going to run away, however diamonds might. The suggested shift must refer to the diamond suit. When in doubt, dummy's shorter suit is the "obvious shift".

South's expected hand:

♠ Q 3
♥ Q 5 4 3
♦ A 8 7 6
♣ 6 5 3

When this hand was played at the table South played the ♣6 after a long hesitation. At trick two North shifted to a heart, and South returned a diamond. Perfect defense. Nobody even thought of calling the director. The longer a defender thinks before playing to partner's lead at trick one, the easier it is for the leader to realize what dilemma his partner is facing.

Warned in such a way, North will make his own analysis, and will reject all the obvious layouts of honor cards.

b) If a discouraging signal could provoke a diamond shift, then we can play an enigmatic ♣5.

- 1) Partner plays the king of clubs. That's bad for us because now dummy has an extra club winner for a discard.
- 2) Maybe partner will consider playing a lower club at trick two, so South could win the second trick with the queen of clubs and play a diamond through. On this hand it won't change anything. Declarer will still make the contract.
- 3) Let's say the cards played to the first trick are: ♣A,2,5,10. There is a chance that partner will look at the layout of the club suit and will take into consideration the fact that the ♣6 did not appear. It's not so obvious – we would also

Part 2: Attitude Signals

play the ♣5 when holding the ♣65 doubleton, and a shift would turn out to be fatal (we would lose a club ruff).

It's much more comfortable to discourage partner with a noticeable lack of enthusiasm, which would turn his interest from diamonds to hearts. I believe playing this way is unethical, but in this I sometimes feel I stand alone.

VERSION II

Attitude signals require extreme concentration.

A complete analysis at trick one is very difficult, with the exception of the obvious situations which don't cause a problem.

W	N	E	S
		Pass	Pass
4♠	Pass...		

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

Lead: ♣A.

What do you play?

Routine play would be to encourage partner to continue the suit. However, having the ace of diamonds we would want to discourage partner, so he could shift to diamonds.

Note that encouraging a club continuation would let the contract make (if North plays a third round of clubs).

Maybe the secret is to play the three then two suggesting discouraging and suit-preference?

It is extremely important to remember the context of each hand. One must take into consideration all the factors for encouraging or discouraging a continuation.

♠ 4
♥ J 9 8 7
♦ K 10 5 4 3
♣ A K 9

♠ A K J 9 7 5 2
♥ Q
♦ A J 9
♣ Q 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 10 8 6 3
♥ K 10 6 2
♦ Q 2
♣ 8 7 4

♠ Q
♥ A 5 4 3
♦ 8 7 6
♣ J 10 6 3 2

Lead: ♣A.

In this case we have to encourage. Why? A diamond shift is dangerous. However, encouraging a club continuation may lead partner to underlead the king of clubs.

Doubt 1

That play would be optimal with a slightly different layout:

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

The only way to set the contract is to lead a low club to South's queen in order to lead a diamond through.

VERSION IV

Again an ethical problem appears.

W	N	E	S
		Pass	Pass
4♠	Pass...		

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

Lead: ♣A.

What do you play?

In this case you should discourage (♣6).

A lengthy analysis at trick one before discouraging might lead partner to the right defense – playing a heart.

More considerations on this example can be found in the chapter on count signals.

DOUBT 2

At one point in time Eric Kokish in “Bridge Today” 5-6/94 – spent a lot of time on how to resolve the following problem.

W	N	E	S
		1♦	Pass
1♠	Pass	2♣	Pass
4♠	Pass...		

The full deal:

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

You lead the king of hearts and partner encourages with the deuce. You continue the ♥4 to partner’s ace. Partner continues with the ♥8. You take the trick and...

Part 2: Attitude Signals

A)

♠	A K Q J 10 7 6 4
♥	J 6 3
♦	9
♣	6

B)

♠	A K Q J 10 7 6 4
♥	J 9 6 3
♦	9
♣	—

Which layout does West have? It's a guess.

An expert player who correctly solved the problem at the table was asked about this and said – partner having the ♥A82 could overtake the first heart trick to make my life easier. But what would have happened if North had led from a heart holding of ♥KQxx or KQ9x?

EW vulnerable

W	N	E	S
1♥	2♠	3♠	Pass
4♥	Pass...		

$3\spadesuit$ = forcing to game with support

♠ A K J 9 3 2
 ♥ 4 3
 ♦ 9 7 5
 ♣ 9 7

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

♠ 10 5
 ♥ A 8 7
 ♦ Q J 8 4
 ♣ J 10 8 6

Lead: ♠A.

The author of this problem proposed an elegant solution. We should play the ♠10 as a discouraging signal. We hope partner will find the right continuation, which will be to shift to a trump.

b)

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

♠ 10 5	N WE S	♠ 10 5
♥ K 8 7		♥ K 8 7
♦ Q 10 8 4		♦ Q 10 8 4
♣ J 10 8 6		♣ J 10 8 6

In this example we play the ♠5, encouraging. Partner plays three rounds of spades and we over-ruff. This is a typical example of black and white bridge theory.

Alas, problems at the bridge table are not always so obvious.

Where could we have doubts?

- 1) Very seldom does a defender possess two spot cards that are clearly distinguishable because they are at the far end of the high (9) or low (2) range. More often, a signal from a two-card combination will not be so clear, especially when a competent declarer falsecards.
- 2) Sometimes, the solution to the problem will depend on shifting to the correct minor suit, and not to try for an over-ruff or play the trump suit.

Doubt 3

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

Only playing a diamond at trick two will give the defenders a third trick. If North shifts to a trump or cashes a second spade, South will soon find himself squeezed in diamonds and clubs.

- 1) A more appropriate question might be: how would South signal if he had three spades?
 - a) Discouraging – partner takes the hint and plays a trump and...

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

Twelve tricks will be the only such score in the whole room.

b) Encouraging – North plays three rounds of spades.

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

This time everyone will be trying to figure out – how did declarer take 11 tricks in hearts?

Are there some hard and fast rules? Unfortunately, not.

One can only propose a solution that will be more effective than other solutions in the majority of cases. You can find further considerations on this example in the chapter on Count Signals.

MULTIPLE MEANINGS

Attitude signals require precise analysis, and their effectiveness depends a lot on the context. A signal with a dual meaning could lead to a major misunderstanding.

NS vulnerable

W	N	E	S
		1 ♣	Pass
1 ♠	Pass	2 ♠	Pass
4 ♠	Pass...		

N W E S	♠ K J 10 5 ♥ J 2 ♦ 9 7 5 ♣ A K 10 8
♠ A 7 4 3 ♥ 8 7 5 3 ♦ K 10 4 ♣ 5 3	

Lead: ♥A.

What do you play and what are your intentions (what kind of signal)?

This is an example where an attitude signal could be given as the only solution to the problem. After a closer look doubts unexpectedly arise.

Part 2: Attitude Signals

The full deal:

a)

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

Lead: ♥A.

At first glance playing an encouraging signal looks like a good idea to South. After cashing the king of hearts the situation becomes clear, and a third round of hearts giving a ruff and sluff establishes the setting trump trick. South holds up twice in spades, wins the third round with the ace and shortens declarer again with a fourth round of hearts.

Multiple Meanings

b) However, a lot depends on the context.

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

Lead: ♥A.

South plays the ♥3, encouraging. Thanks to this carding the defense becomes extremely obvious. North underleads the king of hearts to South's queen. South plays a diamond through.

Part 2: Attitude Signals

c) With this layout :

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

- 1) An encouraging signal – an attempt to reach partner with the queen of hearts ends up in complete disaster.
- 2) A discouraging signal – provokes a diamond shift.
- 3) Playing an unclear ♥5 or ♥7 leaves partner to struggle on his own.

Multiple Meanings

d) It's not at all clear that the best line of defense is playing three rounds of hearts.

♠ —											
♥ A K 10 9 4											
♦ Q 8 6 3 2											
♣ 9 6 4											
♠ Q 9 8 6 2	<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr></table>		N		W		E		S		♠ K J 10 5
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ Q 6		♥ J 2									
♦ A J		♦ 9 7 5									
♣ Q J 7 2		♣ A K 10 8									
♠ A 7 4 3											
♥ 8 7 5 3											
♦ K 10 4											
♣ 5 3											

South encourages a continuation.

With this layout a third round of hearts will allow declarer to make the contract.

e)

	♠ —										
	♥ A K 10 9 4										
	♦ Q 8 6 3 2										
	♣ 9 6 4										
♠ Q 7 6 4 2	<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr></table>		N		W		E		S		♠ K J 10 5
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ Q 8 6 5		♥ J 2									
♦ A		♦ 9 7 5									
♣ Q J 7		♣ A K 10 8									
	♠ A 9 8 3										
	♥ 7 3										
	♦ K J 10 4										
	♣ 5 3 2										

On this layout three rounds of hearts are necessary to establish a promotion.

Part 2: Attitude Signals

f) In this layout:

	♠ 6										
	♥ A K 10 9 4										
	♦ K 10 8 6										
	♣ 8 6 4										
♠ Q 9 8 3 2	<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr></table>		N		W		E		S		♠ K J 10 5
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ Q 6		♥ J 2									
♦ A Q J		♦ 9 7 5									
♣ Q J 9		♣ A K 10 8									
	♠ A 7 4										
	♥ 8 7 5 3										
	♦ 4 3 2										
	♣ 5 3 2										

A discouraging signal suggests a shift. This will lead to the loss of a trick if North shifts to a diamond.

For a change, an encouraging signal would lead North to play a low heart at trick two or three rounds of hearts for a ruff and a sluff.

Multiple Meanings

g)

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

In this situation after a discouraging signal a shift at trick two to a diamond kills the contract.

Since I have raised so many objections to standard signals, do I have a solution? Maybe the 'Obvious Shift' principle whereby I give muted encouragement when I don't want the obvious shift – the diamond in case (f) – followed by a reversing of my signal at trick two (hence following ♥5, then ♥3) might work?

In conclusion.

Encouraging attitude signals may have multiple meanings.

- 1) I want a promotion (overruff) – version e).
- 2) Tapping declarer is essential – a)
- 3) Showing an entry to partner – b)
- 4) I'm afraid of a shift – f)

How can we tell which version applies ?

DILEMMA

Attitude signals create very uncomfortable situations for defenders.

A declarer who plays quickly to the first trick magnifies the problem.

W	N	E	S
	1♦	Pass	Pass
1♥	Pass	2♦	Pass
3♣	Pass	4♥	Pass...

2♦ = +10PC with support

N E W S	♠ A 10 9 ♥ A 7 2 ♦ J 10 9 6 ♣ J 8 3
	♠ J 8 6 5 ♥ 8 6 3 ♦ Q 8 2 ♣ 6 5 2

Lead: ♦A.

What card do you play using attitude signals?

a)

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

We are faced with the situation, does South have:

a) ♦872? b) ♦Q82?

South plays the $\spadesuit 2$ – encouraging a diamond continuation.

North is faced with a dilemma – does partner have the queen or is he showing the ability to ruff the third round?

In my opinion there are very few bridge players in the world with South's hand who, if given only a few seconds, would be able to decide quickly whether or not to encourage a diamond continuation. One has to rethink the consequences of each action.

Undoubtedly, playing the $\spadesuit 2$, after a one-minute hesitation shows the queen. This kind of play makes a killing defense possible. At trick two North plays a diamond to South's queen and partner continues diamonds. After getting in with the king of clubs, North plays the fourth round of diamonds to remove the threat of a spade-diamond squeeze against North. Note, that the spade suit is frozen.

Changing only one card in South's hand (the jack of spades to the queen) would probably cause South to make a different signal at trick one.

♠ K 7 4 2
♥ 9 5
♦ A K 5 4
♣ K 9 4

♠ J 3
♥ K Q J 10 4
♦ 7 3
♣ A Q 10 7

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 10 9
♥ A 7 2
♦ J 10 9 6
♣ J 8 3

♠ Q 8 6 5
♥ 8 6 3
♦ Q 8 2
♣ 6 5 2

In this situation it makes sense to give a discouraging signal, since switching to a spade would work well for us.

Dilemma

c)

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

On this deal South doesn't have any problem.

The best line of defense is to take two diamond tricks, ruff the third round of diamonds and wait for a club trick.

PROPOSED METHOD 1

Key information should be conveyed at the earliest possible moment. This is the fundamental task of defenders.

W	N	E	S
	1♥	Pass	Pass
Dbl	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♥	Pass	2♠	Pass
5♣	Pass...		

	N		♠ Q 10 7 4 3
			♥ J 5 3
W		E	♦ J 3 2
	S		♣ 3 2
♠ J 7 6 5			
♥ 6 4 2			
♦ 9 8 6 4			
♣ 8 4			

Lead: ♥K, ♥A and ♥Q.

West ruffs the third round of hearts and plays two rounds of clubs.

What do you play?

Proposed Method 1

♠ K 9 8
♥ A K Q 10 7
♦ Q 10 5
♣ 7 5

♠ A
♥ 9 8
♦ A K 7
♣ A K Q J 10 9 6

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q 10 7 4 3
♥ J 5 3
♦ J 3 2
♣ 3 2

♠ J 7 6 5
♥ 6 4 2
♦ 9 8 6 4
♣ 8 4

The BRIDGE WORLD says:

North began with the three top hearts. Declarer ruffed and a parade of clubs followed. South wanted to give North information about spades and diamonds, but did not know how to accomplish this. Had he signaled weakness, he would have concealed count information, which is critical here.

Using BWSD the first discard in a suit describes strength (here South would discourage by playing a low spade or diamond) a second pitch from the same suit refers to present count.

Part 2: Attitude Signals

The proposed method has one fundamental drawback.

With this method the previous cards played in hearts and the trump suit, didn't have any meaning. Undoubtedly, we could solve the problem of locating key high cards during the plays to the first four tricks. South follows four times with spot cards. South can play them in different ways. The first card played in hearts in my opinion should unquestionably be count.

The second and third spot cards played could be used as suit preference or some other purpose. For example, substitute count. In this case, it won't be any surprise to partner that we don't have any honor cards, therefore, suit preference isn't useful. Count information that is given early enough can be critical to the defense.

A more difficult version of the problem:

W	N	E	S
	1♥	Pass	Pass
Dbl	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♥	Pass	3♣	Pass
4♠	Pass...		

♠ 6 2
♥ A K Q 10 7
♦ Q 10 5
♣ K 7 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 4 3
♥ J 5 3
♦ 9 3 2
♣ Q 10 9 3 2

Lead: ♥K, ♥A and ♥Q.

West ruffs and plays clubs.

Plan the defense.

Proposed Method 1

The full deal:

a)

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

Lead: ♥A, ♥K, and ♥Q.

West ruffs and plays a club.

North hops up with the king – he just blew the defense,

Part 2: Attitude Signals

b)

	♠ 6 2										
	♥ A K Q 10 7										
	♦ Q 10 5										
	♣ K 7 5										
♠ A K Q J 9 8	<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr></table>		N		W		E		S		♠ 4 3
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ 9 8		♥ J 5 3									
♦ A K 4		♦ 9 3 2									
♣ A 6		♣ Q 10 9 3 2									
	♠ 10 7 5										
	♥ 6 4 2										
	♦ J 8 7 6										
	♣ J 8 4										

Lead: ♥K, ♥A and ♥Q.

West ruffs and plays a club.

North had better hop up with the king if he wants to defeat the contract.

The solution to the problem is a substitute count signal referring to a key suit, in this case clubs, conveyed as early as possible.

The opportunity to give replacement count presents itself in the heart suit.

The first card played is a count signal in hearts (♥6).

The next two cards played in hearts should be used to show count in the club suit, which would allow North to solve the problem correctly in each layout.

PROPOSED METHOD 2

The following deal is from the Granovetters' Comprehensive 301 course which covers all aspects of the game. It illustrates the importance of thinking at trick one on defense.

NS vulnerable

W	N	E	S
4♥	Pass	6♥	Pass...

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

Lead: ♠2 (3rd and 5th).

Declarer takes the ace of spades.

What card do you play?

♠ Q 4 3
 ♥ A 2
 ♦ K J 10 7 3 2
 ♣ 3 2

♠ 9 2
 ♥ K J 10 9 8 7 6 4
 ♦ 5
 ♣ K 5

N
W E
S

♠ A J 10
♥ Q
♦ A 6
♣ A Q J 10 8 7 4

♠ K 8 7 6 5
♥ 5 3
♦ Q 9 8 5
♣ 9 6

How is South supposed to know what to do? Partner could have:

♠Q432 or ♠Q43?

Should he encourage or discourage?

If South shows an odd number of cards in spades, then North will know what to do.

MAKE PARTNER'S LIFE EASIER

When attitude signals are wonderful, it is often the case that a count signal wouldn't be useful in the same situation.

NS vulnerable

W	N	E	S
1♥	Pass	2NT	Pass
4♥	Pass...		

2NT= invitational with support

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

Lead: ♠Q.

What do you play?

Part 2: Attitude Signals

♠ Q 2
 ♥ A Q 7
 ♦ J 6
 ♣ J 9 7 6 5 2

♠ A J 10 7
 ♥ J 10 9 8 4
 ♦ A Q 4 2
 ♣ —

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 6 5
 ♥ K 6 5 3
 ♦ K 10 9 5
 ♣ K Q 3

♠ K 9 8 4 3
 ♥ 2
 ♦ 7 5 3
 ♣ A 10 8 4

Lead: ♠Q.

A routine count signal isn't helpful on this deal.

At trick two North will have to make a key decision. Our hero may duck a heart played by declarer, counting on a singleton jack (or 10) in partner's hand, or he may hope declarer misguesses the location of the heart honors and plays the king from the dummy. North might also hop up with the ace of hearts and hope declarer misguesses on the second round?

the next round of hearts with the ace and play the spade. His intentions are then clear.

Technically speaking, North can hop up with the ace of hearts on the first round of hearts and play a spade, but then the potential promotion will be harder for South to envision.

Note that declarer can make the winning play of ducking the queen of spades at trick one.

AN ENCOURAGING SIGNAL TO KEEP THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION OPEN

On hands where showing an honor in a suit is important to keep the lines of communication open, an attitude signal may be indispensable.

NS vulnerable

W	N	E	S
2♥	Pass	4♥	Pass...

	N		♠ A 3
W		E	♥ A Q 8 7
			♦ 7 5
	S		♣ K Q 10 8 3

♠ J 10 9 6 5
♥ 9
♦ Q 9 4 3
♣ A 6 5

Lead: ♦A.

What do you play?

A DISCOURAGING SIGNAL AS A SUGGESTION TO SHIFT 1

A discouraging signal not only gives information about values in the suit led, but also encourages partner to shift. Everything depends on the context.

W	N	E	S
2♥	Pass	4♥	Pass...

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 3

♥ A Q 8 7

♦ 7 5

♣ K Q 10 8 3

♠ K 10 9 6 5

♥ 9

♦ Q 9 4 3

♣ A 6 5

Lead: ♦A.

What do you play?

Doubts

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

In this situation it is right to encourage. Why? A discouraging signal may cause partner to shift to a spade. It looks like South is tremendously afraid to encourage diamonds. There is a threat that North will underlead his king. It's true that North doesn't need to on this hand, but we don't know the location of all the honor cards. Maybe a middle card is less committal?

A DISCOURAGING SIGNAL AS A SUGGESTION TO SHIFT 2

We should use a discouraging signal even if we have support for the suit led, if the situation requires it.

W	N	E	S
1 ♠	Pass	2 ♦	Pass
2 ♠	Pass	2NT	Pass
3 ♥	Pass	4 ♠	Pass...

3♥ = +6♠

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 10 5
♥ A Q
♦ K Q 10 9 7 5
♣ K 8

♠ 7 4 3
♥ K J 8 4
♦ 4 3
♣ A 6 5 3

Lead: ♣Q.

Declarer plays small from dummy.

What do you play?

The full deal:

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

Lead: ♣Q.

Neither a real count signal nor a false count signal solves the problem. It's true that a card showing an odd number of clubs may suggest a five-card suit and suggest a heart shift, but that's a subtle clue.

An encouraging or discouraging signal works well.

In this case we would discourage (♣6) a club continuation, and wait for a heart shift.

A Discouraging Signal As A Suggestion To Shift 2

But would the ♣6 always be readable?

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

In this situation the ♣6 would be interpreted as discouraging from ♣A6x and North would shift to a heart.

b)

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

Here South encourages (♣3) and partner continues clubs.

In these examples we're dealing with obvious situations.

We don't need to analyze, we can play a card in tempo.

What parameters make attitude signals irreplaceable? In my opinion, a thorough description of each case might allow us to define certain types of problems in which a partnership should use a mandatory attitude signal.

Other solution.

Even if you play encouraging/discouraging - when 'attitude' in the suit is known the signal is never attitude and always suit preference

(or count – if is important)

A TWO-IN-ONE SIGNAL

Attitude signals can be combined in certain situations with a suit preference signal.

W	N	E	S
	1♣	Dbl	2♠
3♥	Pass...		

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

Lead: ♠A.

What do you play?

The full deal:

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

♠ 10 9 8 7 4 3
♥ 3
♦ Q 8 4 3
♣ A 5

Lead: ♠A.

The question is how can we talk partner into playing a club?

We have at our disposal six spot cards. This seldom happens, but when it does, it requires a separate agreement.

- 1) There is a mechanical method which depends on a discouraging signal using an odd or even spot card.
 - a) the ♠3 encourages.
 - b) the ♠9 discourages and directs partner's interest to the club suit.
 - c) the ♠10 or the ♠8 discourages and directs partner's interest to the higher ranking side suit, in this case diamonds.
- 2) Another idea is a "flexible attitude signal."

In the situation at hand when we have the whole gamut of spot cards – of which partner is also aware – we play a middle card as encouraging, the highest spot-card as discouraging and asking for the higher-ranking side suit, or the lowest spot-card as discouraging and asking for the lower-ranking side suit.

Part 3:

COUNT SIGNALS

Count signals that are used intelligently and flexibly are very useful in the continuous war between the defenders and the declarer. The basic application of these signals is widely known. Among bridge theorists there is an ongoing debate about which lead method is superior.

Many adhere to the idea that defenders must first and foremost avoid making simple mistakes, and they should try to make life easier for each other. This requires giving partner precise information about the number of cards in each suit, and the location of honors or stoppers held.

Those who love precision argue that few declarers pay attention to the defenders' signals and even fewer players believe them. Professional players choose a middle road. They give information only where they think it is necessary, however, this sometimes leads to conflicting interpretations. Top American pairs use various signals depending on the lead position, and will honestly explain their signaling methods if asked, but few declarers bother to ask.

Some players in high-ranking events swear that they don't use count signals, but then when I've had opportunities to observe them on Vu-graph those supposedly "random" signals seem to match the number of cards held in a particular suit.

Part 3: Count Signals

When playing a match we have an opportunity to watch our opponents in action during the first few hands. We shouldn't be thinking about yesterday's events; this is the precise moment when we should be carefully watching the opponents' signaling habits. Any self-respecting captain should have an information bank of the characteristics of pairs from other teams with particular emphasis on their signaling tendencies. Leads that show count are becoming more popular but are still underappreciated and not fully worked out.

I'm a firm advocate of count signals that are intelligent, flexible and varied. Obviously, they can be limited to giving dry information. Count signals perfectly fulfill the role of attitude signals if there is a need for that. In special cases count signals can be combined with a suit preference signal. Flexible count signals can effectively suggest the best line of defense. The difficulty lies in the enormous meaning of the context.

Depending on the situation at hand my count signals may take on different meanings. It has been a fascinating activity for me to look for new ways to use count signals in all their subtleties and maneuvers.

Keep in mind that all the hands presented here are from a pairs tournament where every trick is important.

Hi-low means an odd number.

Low-hi means an even number.

Against a high-level contract (at least 5 level) it is necessary to play king from ace-king, just as we would in mid-hand. the ace asks for attitude, the king, be it from king-queen or ace-king, asks for count.

Part 3: Count Signals

♠ 10 9 7 5
 ♥ 9 6
 ♦ A K 4
 ♣ A K 10 5

♠ Q 8
 ♥ A K Q 10 8 7 3
 ♦ —
 ♣ Q 9 7 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A K J 4 2
 ♥ 4 2
 ♦ J 6 3
 ♣ J 8 4

♠ 6 3
 ♥ J 5
 ♦ Q 10 9 7 5 2
 ♣ 6 2

In this case, the defenders have to play three rounds of clubs. However, after taking two club tricks, North tried to cash the ace of diamonds.

Introduction

2) When declarer tries to set up a suit in the dummy without having an outside entry.

W	N	E	S
2NT	Pass	3NT	Pass...

♠ A Q 8
 ♥ A K Q 3
 ♦ Q 8 7 2
 ♣ K 3

♠ 10 7 5
 ♥ J 10 9 6
 ♦ A 5 4
 ♣ A 7 5

♠ J 4 2
 ♥ 4 2
 ♦ J 6 3
 ♣ Q J 10 8 4

♠ K 9 6 3
 ♥ 8 7 5
 ♦ K 10 9
 ♣ 9 6 2

N
S
W
E

The lead of the heart jack is taken by the king.

A count signal in clubs from South tells North to take the ace on the second round of clubs.

Introduction

b) Let us imagine a slightly different layout:

	♠ A J 10 7 5										
	♥ 10 6 3										
	♦ 9 5 4 2										
	♣ A										
♠ K 8 3 ♥ A K Q 9 ♦ 10 8 7 ♣ K 8 3	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100px; height: 100px; margin: auto;"> <tr> <td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr> <td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ Q 2 ♥ 4 2 ♦ A J 6 3 ♣ Q J 10 9 4
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠ 9 6 4										
	♥ J 8 7 5										
	♦ K Q										
	♣ 7 6 5 2										

Lead: ♠J.

Declarer wins the ♠Q and plays a club to the king.

Against a no-trump contract, defenders use their cards in the first suit played by declarer to express their preferences.

A count signal (♠9) and suit preference (♣2) convinces North to play a diamond and limits declarer to nine tricks.

dangerous, so we have to discourage that. Playing the ♣10 on the second round of clubs encourages a continuation, suggesting a doubleton.

b)

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

Lead: ♣A

In this case it is necessary to switch at trick 3.

We play the ♣2 at trick 1. Under the ♣K we play the ♣3.

This signal – as opposed to the ♣10 – calls for a shift to another suit. It could only be diamonds. Why? Declarer can pitch diamond losers on hearts. The opposite case (hearts on diamonds) isn't possible. It's very important to remember the context of the whole hand. Subtle changes in signaling have to be adapted to the needs of a particular hand.

Part 3: Count Signals

c)

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

Lead: ♣A.

South plays the ♣10 (showing an odd number). Under the ♣K – South plays the ♣2 as a suit preference signal, showing a diamond card.

♠ 4
♥ J 9 8 7
♦ K 9 5 4 3
♣ A K 9

♠ A K J 9 7 5 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

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

♠ Q
 ♥ A 5 4 3
 ♦ 8 7 6
 ♣ Q 10 6 3 2

South plays the ♣10 (showing an odd number).

Under the king of clubs South plays the $\clubsuit 6$, which shows values in hearts.

Part 3: Count Signals

c)

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

Lead: ♠A.

We play the ♠5 as a count signal. We can't overruff dummy's trump, and we also don't have the tempo to lead trumps a sufficient number of times to cut down dummy's ruffing power. We would like partner to shift to a diamond. Partner doesn't find the best shift, which is a diamond at trick two, so he plays a club. After ruffing a spade declarer executes a diamond-club squeeze. The result is 11 tricks. The defenders were unable to solve this defensive problem.

Proposed Method 2

♠ A K J 9 3 2
 ♥ 4 3
 ♦ 9 7 5
 ♣ 9 7

♠ 8 7
 ♥ A K 10 9 6 2
 ♦ J 4
 ♣ Q J 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q 4
 ♥ Q J 5
 ♦ A 8 6 3
 ♣ A 5 4 3

♠ 10 6 5
 ♥ 8 7
 ♦ K Q 10 2
 ♣ K 10 8 6

Lead: ♠A.

After having played the highest spot as a count signal, now we can make a suit preference signal (the ♠6 asking for a diamond shift, the ♠5 asking for a club shift).

Partner plays a diamond, and we can take four tricks.

EW vulnerable

When South has three cards in the suit we duplicate variation 4) and 5).

When South has a 4-card fit, we can combine the count signal with a suit preference signal. Note that with our play of the highest of three spot cards, partner can't see the two lower spot cards which lets him accurately read the signal.

A)

♠ A K J 9 3 2
 ♥ 4 3
 ♦ 9 7 5
 ♣ 9 7

♠ 8
 ♥ A K 10 9 8 6
 ♦ Q J 4 2
 ♣ Q 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 10 7 6 5
 ♥ 7 2
 ♦ K 10
 ♣ K J 10 8 6

♠ Q 4
 ♥ Q J 5
 ♦ A 8 6 3
 ♣ A 5 4 3

Lead: ♠A.

♠ K J
♥ —
♦ 9 5
♣ 9

♠ —
♥ 9
♦ Q
♣ 8 6 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ —
♥ —
♦ J 10 4
♣ J 10

♠ —
♥ —
♦ A 8 6
♣ A 5

PROTECT YOURSELF FROM FALLING INTO A TRAP

Here we consider the need for real count signals even in situations where they seem unnecessary. Obviously, we're applying the principle that signals should be helpful to partner and not to the declarer.

W	N	E	S
2♣	Pass	2♦	Pass
2NT	Pass	4NT	Pass
6♣	Pass...		

2♣ = game forcing

2♦ = waiting

2NT = +24PC

4NT = invitation

N E W S	♠ Q 10 9 ♥ A 10 8 ♦ 7 3 ♣ J 9 7 6 3
---	--

♠ 7 5 4
♥ J 9 7 6
♦ K Q 6 5 2
♣ 4

Lead: ♦10.

Declarer wins the queen with the ace and plays two rounds of trumps. North follows with the ♣2 and the ♣8, signaling that he has an honor in hearts not spades.

Now declarer plays three rounds of spades North showing four, and puts the jack of diamonds on the table.

What do you play?

Part 3: Count Signals

b) Let's imagine a slightly different layout:

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

An “obvious” heart return lets the contract make.

It's funny that a count signal would be needed when declarer plays the jack of diamonds. Knowing the diamond count in North's hand prevents South from falling into declarer's trap.

An expert declarer wouldn't even have to guess the location of the heart honors. Why?

FALSE CARD 1

I believe that count signals are more often useful in actual play than attitude signals, with the condition that the count signals used are flexible and can be applied to the needs at hand.

W	N	E	S
1♥	1♠	2♠	Pass
4♥	Pass...		

2♠ = at least invitational with a fit

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

Lead: ♠A.

Plan the defense.

False Card 1

♠ A K 10 8 6
♥ K 7
♦ 9 6
♣ 9 5 4 3

♠ 9 3
♥ A 6 5 3 2
♦ J 10 2
♣ A K Q

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q J 4
♥ J 10 9
♦ A K Q 7 3
♣ J 8

♠ 7 5 2
♥ Q 8 4
♦ 8 5 4
♣ 10 7 6 2

Lead: ♠A.

We have to hope partner has a trump honor.

This encourages partner to continue spades by suggesting a doubleton. It's true that partner is going to be surprised to see us follow to the third round of spades, but after winning the king of hearts partner will duly play a fourth round of spades, if he has his wits about him, promoting a trump trick for our side.

FALSE CARD 2

A flexible count signal should put partner on the right track.

W	N	E	S
2NT	Pass	3NT	Pass...

♠ K 10 8 6 2
 ♥ K 7 6
 ♦ A 9 6
 ♣ 5 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 9 4
 ♥ J 10 9
 ♦ Q 7 3
 ♣ Q J 8 7 2

This time we are on lead and make the normal lead of the ♠6.
 Partner plays the ♠7 as West takes the trick with the queen.
 West plays the ace of clubs and a club.

Plan the defense.

False Card 2

Here is the full deal:

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

Lead: ♠6.

Partner plays the ♠7 as West takes the trick with the jack. West plays the ace of clubs and a club.

A false count signal will guide partner to the best defense.

We play the ♣5 and ♣4, which causes partner to win the king of clubs on the second round of that suit. After a spade return, West is helpless.

An eighth trick can be manufactured with an end-play. But declarer would probably take the heart finesse and go down two.

Note that giving the real count in clubs would cause South to hold up in clubs. West would abandon clubs and switch to diamonds, and it wouldn't be difficult then for him to come to nine tricks.

FALSE CARD 3

Preventing declarer from figuring out which high cards partner has is one of the defender's tasks.

NS vulnerable

W	N	E	S
	1♥	Dbl	Pass
4♠	Pass...		

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

Lead: ♥A.

Plan the defense.

False Card 3

Here is the full deal:

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

Lead: ♥A.

On partner's lead and continuation you should play the ♥7 and the ♥2 showing an odd number of cards in the heart suit.

North doesn't have anything better to play than cashing the ace of clubs and leading a diamond (or a club).

This gives North a chance to take a trick with the king of spades.

Giving the true count signal in hearts should encourage partner to play a third round of hearts in case you have the spade jack, singleton or doubleton. When South is unable to overruff the ten of spades, the location of the king of spades would be known.

FALSE CARD 4

Count signals that are cleverly used can direct the defense in the desired direction.

W	N	E	S
		1♦	Pass
1♥	Pass	3♥	Pass
4♥	Pass...		

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

Lead: ♣A.

Plan the defense.

♠ 8 7 4 3 2
 ♥ 6
 ♦ 8 7 2
 ♣ A K 7 5

♠ K Q 5
 ♥ A Q 8 4 3
 ♦ 9 4
 ♣ 9 8 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A
 ♥ 10 7 5 2
 ♦ A Q J 3
 ♣ Q J 6 4

♠ J 10 9 6
 ♥ K J 9
 ♦ K 10 6 5
 ♣ 10 2

FALSE CARD 5

A false count signal can carry a message to wake up! – do something unusual.

W	N	E	S
1♥	1♠	2♥	Pass
4♥	Pass...		

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

Lead: ♠A.

Plan the defense.

False Card 5

♠ A K J 10 8
♥ 9 6
♦ A 10 7 5
♣ J 4

♠ Q 5
♥ A K Q J 10
♦ K Q 9 3
♣ A 9

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 9 7 4 2
♥ 8 4 2
♦ J 8 4 2
♣ K Q

♠ 6 3
♥ 7 5 3
♦ 6
♣ 10 8 7 6 5 3 2

Lead: ♠A.

Warned to try something unusual, North plays the ace of diamonds and a diamond hoping we will ruff. One down.

Ask yourself this? Was there any other chance?

The alternative was a passive defense.

Part 3: Count Signals

Let's imagine a slightly different layout.

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

In this situation playing the ace of diamonds would be fatal to the defense.

Obviously, with this layout South doesn't have any reason to give a false count signal in spades.

FALSE CARD 6

A count signal can give an added suggestion to switch. It can carry a message – don't be passive.

W	N	E	S
1♥	1♠	Dbl	2♠
4♥	Pass...		

N		♠ A 9 8
W	E	♥ 10 9 7
		♦ K 9 4 2
S		♣ Q 8 4

♠ J 7 2
♥ 8 4
♦ Q 10 6
♣ K 10 9 6 2

Lead: ♠K.

Declarer ducks.

Plan the defense.

Part 3: Count Signals

Here is the full deal:

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

Lead: ♠K.

Declarer ducks.

Obviously, here we should play the two of spades.

It won't be hard for partner to figure out that it is a false count signal. (We supported partner's suit, so we can't have a doubleton, given our limited HCP. If we had four spades, declarer wouldn't duck with a singleton.) Looking at his cards partner will be able to work out to play a club through the queen.

How would a passive defense turn out?

North would continue the spade attack. West would win, play two rounds of trumps and lead a diamond toward the king. North would probably miss his second chance by playing the ♦7, and declarer would play the ♦9.

You have to admit that it wouldn't be easy to hop up with the ace of diamonds and shift to a club.

Unless North does so, the defenders' four tricks would be compressed to three.

FALSE CARD 7

The question is: Will partner believe our count signal and not the opponents' bidding? Would he be able to read our intentions properly?

W	N	E	S
1♠	Pass	3♦	Pass
3♥	Pass	3♠	Pass
3NT	Pass	4♣	Pass
4♦	Pass	4♥	Pass
4NT	Pass	5♣	Pass
6♠	Pass...		

3♦ = any weak Splinter

3♥ = relay

3♠ = I have a void.

3NT = relay

4♣ = ♣ void

5♣ = 0-3 aces

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q 9 7 6 2

♥ K J 4 3 2

♦ Q 8 7

♣ —

♠ J 10 3

♥ 10 6

♦ 6 5 4 3

♣ K J 7 3

Lead: ♦K.

Plan the defense.

The full deal:

	♠ —										
	♥ Q 8 7										
	♦ A K J 10 2										
	♣ 9 8 6 4 2										
♠ A K 8 5 4 ♥ A 9 5 ♦ 9 ♣ A Q 10 5	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100px; height: 100px; margin: auto;"> <tr> <td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr> <td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ Q 9 7 6 2 ♥ K J 4 3 2 ♦ Q 8 7 ♣ —
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠ J 10 3										
	♥ 10 6										
	♦ 6 5 4 3										
	♣ K J 7 3										

Lead: ♦K.

The bidding indicates that declarer is short in diamonds (from the 4♦ cue bid). We know that partner is void in trumps. At trick two partner is faced with the problem of which suit to play. We should encourage him to play a heart.

A false count signal (the ♦6) should direct North's interest to the heart suit. This is neither easy nor safe. Partner may trust your count signal and not the opponents' bidding – particularly if Zia is West!

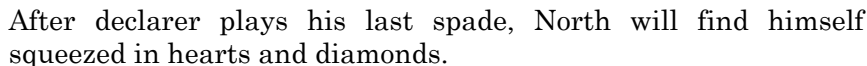
Note that with the routine play of a club, West will ruff his two remaining clubs and make the contract either by taking a winning heart finesse or executing a heart-diamond squeeze against North.

Playing a heart (the seven, to suggest holding the ♥876) with the ten appearing from South will put declarer to a guess.

Declarer lacks the transportation to ruff three clubs. Of course, taking a deep finesse on the first trump trick would provide enough entries, but is declarer brave enough for that? It's true

How would an inspired line of play look (bypassing the prosaic heart finesse)?

Declarer returns to his hand with a diamond ruff and...
comes to this end position:



INFORMATIVE PLAY 1

A count signal often gives useful or sometimes even essential information about declarer's shape.

None vulnerable

W	N	E	S
1NT	2♣	Dbl	Rdbl
3♦	Pass	Pass	Dbl
Pass...			

1NT= 12-14PC

2♣ = majors

Dbl = "I have something."

Rdbl= "I do, too."

♠ J 10 9 7 6
♥ K J 8 5
♦ K 6
♣ J 3

	N		♠ Q 8 4 3
			♥ Q 7 6
W		E	♦ A 10
	S		♣ 8 6 5 4

Your lead: ♣J.

Partner plays the king and the ace of clubs (declarer following to the second trick with the queen) and then the ♣9. West throws the ♥10. What do you play to the third club trick?

What will that signal mean?

Do you see any potential problem?

Part 3: Count Signals

Note that the declarer cleverly hid the four and deuce of hearts.

From South's point of view the five of hearts could have been played from a holding of ♥KJ542, and thus playing the ace of hearts at trick four led to the loss of a trick.

If you were in North's position, would you always play the jack of hearts as a clear count signal to show that you had five hearts?

INFORMATIVE PLAY 2

An informative count signal in a side suit can lead to a sensible and effective defense. Despite the fact that partner didn't give us the information we needed, we should be able to draw the right conclusion.

EW vulnerable

W	N	E	S
		Pass	Pass
4♥	Pass...		

♠ 9 6 4 3
 ♥ —
 ♦ Q J 10 9 3
 ♣ A J 6 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q J 8 7 2
 ♥ Q 7
 ♦ 2
 ♣ Q 10 9 7 3

Your lead: ♦Q.

Partner plays the ace and leads a heart. What do you play to this trick?

Informative Play 2

Let's imagine a slightly different layout:

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

In this situation not covering the queen of spades with the king would lead to the loss of a trick.

It is very difficult in practice to draw these negative inferences.

The lack of a spade discard by North suggests that he couldn't afford to get rid of a spade – thus he has three cards in that suit. This kind of play truly requires a lot of confidence in your partner.

Note also that throwing a spade from an original holding in North's hand of ♠543 would tell declarer how to play the spade suit correctly.

INFORMATIVE PLAY 3

A clever partner who anticipates how a deal will unfold from the earliest stages of the play of a hand, can convey information that will be useful later.

W	N	E	S
1♠	Pass	1NT	Pass
2♠	Pass	3♠	Pass
4♠	Pass...		

1NT= forcing

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

Lead: ♣A.

You play the ♣2. Partner takes the king of clubs, and declarer drops the queen. Partner plays the ♥6.

Plan the defense.

Informative Play 3

The full deal:

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

Lead: ♣A.

You play the ♣2. Partner takes the king of clubs and declarer drops the queen. Partner plays the ♥6.

You should win the ace of hearts and return the ♥2, West playing the jack. With this play you have given partner information about declarer's shape – 6♠-2♥-3♦-2♣. When declarer plays a diamond away from his hand partner can smoothly duck.

One has to admit that an attitude signal wouldn't work out well for this type of deal. A discouraging ♣10 at trick one would muddy the waters. Most likely North would play a heart and South would lead a club through. North would finish up by trying to cash a third round of clubs. Declarer's shape would still be a mystery to the defenders.

Don't forget, that playing in a pair game every trick counts.

Part 3: Count Signals

Let's imagine a slightly different layout:

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

Lead: ♣A.

You play the ♣2. Partner takes the king of clubs and declarer drops the queen. Partner plays the ♥6.

Now you should win the ace of hearts and return the ♥10 (count, showing an original three-card suit). Even when declarer drops the jack of hearts on the second round of hearts, it shouldn't help him.

When declarer leads a low diamond from his hand toward the queen, partner knows to hop up with the king.

INFORMATIVE PLAY 4

Informative plays can also be read by declarer. One has to keep this in mind.

NS vulnerable

W	N	E	S
1♥	Pass	2NT	Pass
3♥	Pass	4♣	Pass
4NT	Pass	5♣	Pass
6♥	Pass...		

2NT = game forcing with support

♠ A 8 6 2
♥ 4
♦ J 5 4 2
♣ 10 9 8 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ J 10 9 7
♥ K 10 6 3
♦ A K
♣ A Q 3

Your lead: ♣10.

Declarer wins the ace of clubs (partner playing the ♣7) and plays two rounds of hearts.

What discard do you make?

a)

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

Lead: ♣10.

Declarer wins the ace of clubs (partner playing the ♣7) and plays two rounds of hearts.

You might think that it doesn't matter what you discard, because everything comes down to a guess in the spade suit.

Remember that an expert declarer doesn't like to guess, he always analyzes and looks for additional clues.

If you pitch a spade (♠2) at trick three, an expert might be misled about the location of the spade honors. Why?

Informative Play 4

b) Let's imagine a slightly different layout:

	♠ Q 8 6 2										
	♥ 4										
	♦ J 5 4 2										
	♣ 10 9 8 2										
♠ K ♥ A Q J 8 5 2 ♦ Q 8 6 ♣ K J 5	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100px; height: 100px; margin: auto;"> <tr> <td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr> <td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ J 10 9 7 ♥ K 10 6 3 ♦ A K ♣ A Q 3
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠ A 5 4 3										
	♥ 9 7										
	♦ 10 9 7 3										
	♣ 7 6 4										

Lead: ♣9.

Declarer wins the ace and plays two rounds of hearts.

What information is critical to South? How many spades North has in his hand. Therefore, as North I discard the ♠2. The only problem for the defense is whether to fly with the ace of spades or not when a spade is led from the dummy.

When North discards the deuce of spades (in the original layout), it strongly suggests that the discard was meant to be a count signal to tell South whether or not to take the ace of spades. An expert declarer then places the location of the ace of spades in South's hand. Hence from A862 North must pitch a spade too.

THE CONCEPT OF “TWO-IN-ONE” (A COMBINED SIGNAL)

When a player can't follow suit, the concept of a “two-in-one” discard can sometimes be employed. There are two conditions that have to be satisfied.

We know we will be making at least two discards from a long suit, and we have at our disposal a whole range of spot cards. And partner knows that too.

For example:

Spades are trump.

After a trump lead declarer plays three rounds of trumps which gives us the opportunity to make two discards.

a)

♠	3
♥	8 7 6 5 3 2
♦	K Q 10
♣	J 8 2

We throw the ♥7 and ♥8, which simultaneously signals interest in the higher ranking suit of the two remaining side suits (that would be diamonds in this case) and an even number of cards in hearts.

b)

♠	3
♥	8 7 6 5 3 2
♦	J 8 2
♣	K Q 10

We throw the ♥2 and the ♥3, which simultaneously signals interest in the lower ranking suit of the two remaining side suits (that would be clubs in this case) and an even number of cards in hearts.

The Concept Of “Two-In-One” (A Combined Signal)

c)

♠ 3

♥ 8 7 6 5 3 2

♦ K 8 2

♣ K 10 2

We throw the ♥2 and the ♥8, which simultaneously signals values in both minors and an even number of cards in hearts.

A similar method works when you start life with an odd number in the discarded suit. Of course, it's only a model. Which suit we should interest partner in depends on the context of the actual hand.

TWO-IN-ONE SIGNAL 1

There are examples of applying the concept of “two-in-one” that can be rather subtle.

W	N	E	S
1NT	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♥	Pass	4♥	Pass...

1NT= 14-16PC

	N		♠ J 10 9 2
			♥ K J 9 2
W		E	♦ 10 6 4
	S		♣ A 9
♠ K 6 5			
♥ 3			
♦ K J 9 7			
♣ K 10 5 4 3			

Lead: ♥4.

West takes the trick with the ♥7 and plays the ace of hearts.
What do you discard on the second round of hearts?

Two-In-One Signal 1

The full deal:

	♠ Q 8 3										
	♥ Q 6 5 4										
	♦ Q 8 5										
	♣ J 8 2										
♠ A 7 4		♠ J 10 9 2									
♥ A 10 8 7		♥ K J 9 2									
♦ A 3 2		♦ 10 6 4									
♣ Q 7 6		♣ A 9									
	<table border="1" style="margin: auto; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr> <td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠ K 6 5										
	♥ 3										
	♦ K J 9 7										
	♣ K 10 5 4 3										

Lead: ♥4.

West takes the trick with the ♥7 and plays the ace of hearts. Declarer played a club to the ace in dummy. South threw the ♣4 on the second round of hearts and the ♣3 under the ace of clubs.

Here is a good example of the “two-in-one” signal.

Giving count with the smallest cards in a side suit shows an odd number of clubs and interest in diamonds.

Alas, after getting in with the queen of spades North didn’t believe that the declarer had deliberately played so badly and shifted to a club. Why was declarer’s play so bad?

- 1) West should try to win the first heart trick in dummy and play the jack of spades at trick two. At this stage of the hand it may not be that easy for North to switch to a diamond.
- 2) A sensible alternative would be to quickly establish the queen of clubs for a pitch before the opponents can open up diamonds.

Thanks to South’s discards, North knew declarer’s shape: 3♠-4♥-3♦-3♣.

Part 3: Count Signals

He imagined a slightly different layout of high cards.

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

Lead: ♥4.

West wins the lead in his hand. He plays the ace of hearts and a club to the ace in the dummy. Then West plays the jack of spades and finesses. One has to admit that this layout of high cards better fits declarer's line of play.

Two-In-One Signal 1

After North plays a club, this is the end position:

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

♠ K 6	N WE S	♠ 10 9 2
♥ —		♥ K J
♦ A J 9 7		♦ 10 6 4
♣ Q 10		♣ —

In this ending, according to the defenders' analysis, declarer would get to the dummy with a heart finesse, play two rounds of spades (finessing) and get back to the dummy with a heart to the long spade. However, the last three tricks will belong to South if he pitches three diamonds.

Nonetheless, there is something missing in this analysis, although it's true that it's not a major error to assume that the declarer won't find the winning line of play. West can ruff a club to get to the dummy. then he can play two rounds of spades (finessing) and get back to the dummy with a trump to cash the long spade. This way, regardless of how the defenders play, the king of diamonds will take a trick.

TWO-IN-ONE SIGNAL 2

The subtlety and versatility of discards can be very impressive.

NS vulnerable

N	E	S	W
1♥	2♦	3♥	4♠
Pass...			

1♥ = +4 cards

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

Lead: ♥A.

What do you play?

Two-In-One Signal 2

a)

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

Throw the queen of hearts! This discard will alert partner that South can ruff diamonds. North plays the ace of diamonds and gives him a diamond ruff.

b)

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

Here, I throw the ♥10. I have five hearts, and I make a neutral discard: "I don't have any other information to give you, partner." North cashes the ace of diamonds.

Part 3: Count Signals

c)

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

Here, I throw the ♥9, telling partner that I have five hearts and the king of clubs.

North plays a club at trick two.

d)

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

Now, I throw the ♥2, telling partner I have four hearts. North cashes the king of hearts, and I play the ♥9, telling partner about my king of clubs.

Playing a club at trick three gives the defense four tricks.

Two-In-One Signal 2

e)

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

Lead: ♥A.

I throw the ♥7, telling partner I have four hearts. North cashes the king of hearts, and I play the ♥10, denying the king of clubs.

At trick three, you hope partner will cash the ace of diamonds.

- a) ♥Q – This discard will alert partner that South can ruff diamonds.
- b) ♥10 – count (I have five hearts) -neutral discard.
- c) ♥9 – count (I have five hearts) – but it is lowest from ♥10 and ♥9 – suit preference for clubs. (♥7 – may be from ♥Q1097 – wrong count)

TWO-IN-ONE SIGNAL 3

A count signal can also serve as a suit preference signal.

W	N	E	S
4♠	Pass...		

♠ K 8
 ♥ Q 10 7 4 3
 ♦ A K Q 9
 ♣ J 4

	N		♠ 10 6
W		E	♥ A J 2
			♦ 5 4
	S		♣ Q 10 8 6 3 2

From the World Master Individual championship in Verona 2004 where standard count signals were mandatory.

Your lead: ♦A.

Partner plays the ♦3, and West plays the ♦8.

Plan the defense.

Two-In-One Signal 3

The full deal:

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

Lead: ♦A.

Partner plays the ♦3, and West plays the ♦8.

The first clue is easy – the two of diamonds is missing.

Here is the actual report from the Verona 2004 championship.

West North East South

De Falco Martens Zia Bocchi

4♠ Pass...

Dano de Falco opened his in-between hand with an aggressive four spades rather than the alternative of one spade and duly bought the contract.

Krzysztof Martens led the ace of diamonds, on which Norberto Bocchi played the three, then continued with the king, Bocchi playing the two, as de Falco followed with the ten and jack. It seemed clear that Bocchi had four diamonds and that he had petered with the bottom two cards to suggest a club switch. Sure enough, Martens switched to a club and now the contract had to fail by a trick; minus 50 and 5 MPs for North/South.

Part 3: Count Signals

At another table:

West North East South

Baldursson Gitelman Bompis Brogeland

1♠	2♥	Pass	3♥
3♠	4♥	Pass	Pass
4♠	Pass	Pass	Dbl
Pass...			

	♠ K 8 ♥ Q 10 7 4 3 ♦ A K Q 9 ♣ J 4							
♠ A Q J 9 5 4 3 ♥ K 8 ♦ J 10 8 ♣ 9	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100px; height: 100px; margin: auto;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; text-align: center; padding: 5px;">N</td> <td style="width: 50%;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 5px;">W</td> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 5px;">E</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 5px;">S</td> </tr> </table>	N		W	E		S	♠ 10 6 ♥ A J 2 ♦ 5 4 ♣ Q 10 8 6 3 2
N								
W	E							
	S							
	♠ 7 2 ♥ 9 6 5 ♦ 7 6 3 2 ♣ A K 7 5							

Just as Martens had, Fred Gitelman cashed a top diamond as well, but Boye Brogeland played the diamond two. Gitelman had seen his partner support hearts and for him the obvious switch was to a heart, not a club. Gitelman did not attempt to cash the second diamond but switched immediately to the ten of hearts. On this auction it was clear to play for the heart queen to be onside and Baldursson did so, winning the heart king, finessing the jack and pitching his club loser on the heart ace. Now he gave up a diamond and could not be prevented from ruffing his third diamond in dummy, losing just a trump trick for a fine plus 590 and 10 MPs.

TWO-IN-ONE SIGNAL 4

A straightforward count signal can convey precise information.

W	N	E	S
1♥	Pass	2♥	Pass
4♥	Pass...		

N		
W		E
S		

♠ 10 4

♥ 9 6 3

♦ K Q 7 6 3

♣ J 7 2

♠ J 9 8 3 2

♥ 5 2

♦ 9 5

♣ Q 9 8 6

Lead: ♦2 (4th best).

Declarer wins with the king of diamonds in dummy and plays a spade. What spade do you follow with?

Part 3: Count Signals

The full deal:

	♠ K 5										
	♥ K J 4										
	♦ J 10 4 2										
	♣ K 10 4 3										
♠ A Q 7 6 ♥ A Q 10 8 7 ♦ A 8 ♣ A 5	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100px; height: 100px; margin: auto;"> <tr> <td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr> <td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ 10 4 ♥ 9 6 3 ♦ K Q 7 6 3 ♣ J 7 2
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠ J 9 8 3 2										
	♥ 5 2										
	♦ 9 5										
	♣ Q 9 8 6										

Lead: ♦2 (4th best).

Declarer wins with the king of diamonds in dummy and plays a spade.

Using a defensive strategy based on count signals, we have to combine count information with a suit preference signal.

- 1) Following to the first two spade tricks with the ♠9 and then the ♠8 points partner to the diamond suit – perhaps for the reason that we wouldn't be able to offer any help in clubs.
- 2) Following to the first two spade tricks with the ♠3 and then the ♠2 would clearly show a club card (the king or ace).
- 3) Following to the first two spade tricks with the ♠9 and then the ♠2 would show a reluctant preference for clubs (the queen).

North is in control of the situation. At trick two he knows the shape of declarer's hand: 4♠ and 5♥. A diamond continuation seems safe. West plays the ace of spaces (partner plays the ♠2 confirming possession of the queen of clubs) and plays a spade. North ruffs with the jack of hearts and opens the club suit.

UNNECESSARY DISCARD 1

An unnecessary count signal may lead declarer to the correct line of play.

W	N	E	S
	1♦	1♠	3♦
5♥	Pass	6♥	Pass...

3♦ = preemptive

♠ A K J 3
♥ 7 4 2
♦ J 9 7 4
♣ A 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q 9 8 6 4 2
♥ J 9 8
♦ A
♣ J 8 4

Your lead: ♥2.

West plays the ♥9 (South throwing the ♣2) and ruffs a spade. West plays a diamond to the ace in the dummy and ruffs another spade.

Plan the defense.

Unnecessary Discard 1

This play might lead to this end position:

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

♠ 10	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100px; height: 100px; position: relative;"> <tr> <td style="position: absolute; top: 5px; right: 5px;">N</td> <td style="position: absolute; top: 50px; left: 5px;">W</td> <td style="position: absolute; top: 50px; right: 5px;">E</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="3" style="position: absolute; bottom: 5px; text-align: center;">S</td> </tr> </table>	N	W	E	S			♠ Q 9 8 6
N	W	E						
S								
♥ —		♥ J 8						
♦ 8 6 5		♦ —						
♣ Q 10 9 7 6		♣ J 8 4						

West plays three rounds of diamonds (pitching two clubs from dummy). Then West leads the ten of diamonds covered by North with the jack and ruffed in the dummy. When West leads the jack of clubs, South covers with the queen of clubs and declarer ducks. South is unable to lead trumps, and declarer can now ruff his king of clubs in the dummy.

Why wasn't declarer tempted to take his chances in the spade suit? After all North dropped the king of spades as he should have done.

The reason is because West believed that the card South played to the first round of spades was an accurate count signal, showing an odd number of spades. In fact, at trick one South already gave away the whole shape of his hand (the ♣2 showing six clubs and four diamonds shown during the auction).

UNNECESSARY DISCARD 2

Declarer's play wasn't too good on this hand, but accurate count signals from the defenders helped him out in the end.

W	N	E	S
1♥	Pass	2♥	Pass
4♥	Pass...		

N W E S	♠ Q 10 4 2 ♥ Q 8 2 ♦ A 9 ♣ J 7 4 2
--	--

♠ 9 8 7 6 3

♥ 9

♦ J 7 6 5

♣ K 6 5

Lead: ♠J.

West won the lead and played a heart to the queen in the dummy, winning. Then declarer finessed a club to his hand, cashed ♠K and led a heart towards the ♥8 in dummy. North played the jack of hearts, cashed the ace of hearts and played the king of diamonds.

Plan the defense.

Unnecessary Discard 2

The full deal:

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

Lead: ♠J.

West won the lead and played a heart to the queen in the dummy, winning. Then declarer finessed a club to his hand, cashed ♠K and led a heart towards the ♥8 in dummy. After the club finesse, it would have been better to play the ace of diamonds and a diamond. Fortunately, not all of our opponents play hands flawlessly.

North played the jack of hearts, cashed the ace of hearts and played the king of diamonds. Put yourself in declarer's position.

Unnecessary Discard 2

B) Let's imagine a slightly different layout:

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

Now, declarer must concentrate all his attention on North.

The end position is similar:

	♠ —	
	♥ —	
	♦ J 10 4	
	♣ 9 8	
♠ —	N W E S	♠ Q
♥ 10		♥ —
♦ Q 8 3		♦ 9
♣ A		♣ J 7 4
	♠ —	
	♥ —	
	♦ 6 5	
	♣ K 6 5	

The last heart squeezes North, who must pitch a club. Declarer plays the ace of clubs and a small diamond, endplaying North.

Note that in this layout (North holds four diamonds), declarer has to find North with the jack and ten of diamonds.

You would think that this hand is a double dummy problem. Declarer's life is made much easier by the defenders giving accurate count signals in all suits.

So, how should the hand be defended?

After the first few tricks, the defenders should realize that the hand is a tricky one to play. In this kind of situation the declarer will base his line of play on what he believes to be the layout of the whole hand, taken from the defenders' count signals. Skillful falsecarding can have a devastating effect. On this hand the key is not to give correct count in clubs and diamonds.

UNNECESSARY DISCARD 3

It's not always easy to realize that accurate count signals may help declarer more than they do partner.

W	N	E	S
1♠	Pass	2♥	Pass
2♠	Pass	4♦	Pass
4NT	Pass	5♥	Pass
6♠	Pass...		

4♦ = Splinter

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

Lead: ♠J.

West wins the ace and plays a heart.

What card do you play in hearts?

Part 3: Count Signals

The full deal:

	♠ J 10 9										
	♥ J 9 6 5										
	♦ A Q 10 3										
	♣ 9 5										
♠ Q 8 7 5 4 3		♠ A K 2									
♥ A		♥ K Q 10 4 2									
♦ J 8 7 5 2		♦ 6									
♣ A		♣ K J 8 7									
	<table border="1" style="margin: auto; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr> <td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠ 6										
	♥ 8 7 3										
	♦ K 9 4										
	♣ Q 10 6 4 3 2										

Lead: ♠J.

West wins the ace and plays a heart.

South throws the ♥8.

Declarer has a precise line of play based on his assumption that South has three hearts. Now, everything is easy. Declarer gives up a diamond. The defenders continue their attack by leading a second round of trumps.

Declarer plays the king of spades, returns to his hand with the ace of clubs, ruffs a diamond in dummy and takes three pitches on the ♥KQ and the ♣K. How does declarer get back to his hand to pull the last trump? Going against the odds, he plays a heart and not a club.

CAMOUFLAGE

When the defenders conceal the location of a key card, it has an effect on declarer's decisions.

W	N	E	S
			1♣
1♠	Pass	2♣	Pass
2NT	Pass	4♠	Pass...

2♣ = cue bid

2NT = good hand plus club stopper

N W E S	♠ K J 4 2 ♥ A J 4 2 ♦ K 6 3 ♣ 8 4
♠ A 3 ♥ Q 9 8 6 ♦ A 9 2 ♣ K 6 3 2	

Lead: ♠J.

Plan the defense.

Part 3: Count Signals

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

The defenders' work begins at trick one.

It's not entirely clear, although for sure this falsecard won't mislead partner. He won't have too much to do on this deal.

Declarer wins in the dummy and plays a heart. You play the ♥9, declarer ducking. Partner is unusually alert! He overtakes with his ♥10 and plays another heart.

Declarer wins the king of hearts in his hand, plays a spade to the dummy and a diamond to the queen.

Camouflage

This is the end position (after West has cashed the fourth trump and at some point the ace of clubs):

	♠ —										
	♥ ?										
	♦ J 10										
	♣ 10 ?										
♠ 10 ♥ 5 ♦ 8 7 ♣ —	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100px; height: 100px; margin: 0 auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ — ♥ A J ♦ K 6 ♣ —
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠ —										
	♥ Q ?										
	♦ A 9										
	♣ ?										

To the last trump North pitches the ♣10, carefully concealing the ♣5.

Declarer pitches a diamond from the dummy, and South pitches the ♦9. The location of two high cards is known: the queen of hearts and the ace of diamonds.

The question is, where is the ♣5?

Now, the false card at trick one begins to pay off. From declarer's point of view South had two spades, three diamonds (he pitched one on the last trump) and five clubs (declarer was watching and remembered the count signal in clubs at trick one). Therefore, hearts are splitting 3-3.

You say that declarer didn't play well (he had to guess the distribution)? It's true: here is the correct line of play.

The club jack is led, and declarer correctly cashes the queen and ace of clubs and leads a trump. South wins the ace and returns a trump, spades dividing two-two. South must have the diamond

Part 3: Count Signals

ace for his opening bid, and on that assumption declarer has a 100% play for his contract, with no guess.

West wins the trump return on the table and leads a diamond. South must duck, allowing declarer to win the diamond queen. Now, West plays a low diamond from both hands. If North wins and returns a heart, West wins the heart ace and leads the third round of diamonds which RHO must win. His return gives declarer the tenth trick.

This is all true, but because declarer didn't play well your defense was given the chance to shine.

Part 4:

SUBSTITUTE COUNT

In some situations count signals can be used that are a bit more complicated than the use of an echo to show even or odd count. This requires a considerably higher level of bridge sophistication. I am talking about substitute count.

The underlying idea is that an unnecessary count signal in one suit shows the number of cards in a different suit; but how does it work? At this point bridge theorists differ. The count may be:

- a) In the first led suit.
- b) If dummy has one side suit doubleton, count in that suit. This is a very sensible agreement. Why? Giving count in a suit that the dummy has a tripleton may solve declarer's problems in that suit.

W: ♦A1043 E: ♦KQ5

Knowing that South has an even number of cards in this suit is invaluable to the declarer.

You ask, how is declarer going to know?

It's true, these days nobody asks at the table if the defenders are using substitute count signals. Very few pairs have such agreements, but this is going to change. Professional bridge is constantly making progress. In the next 15 years or so these kinds of agreements will have to be on the convention card.

Part 4: Substitute Count

Count in a suit where dummy has a doubleton slightly decreases the usefulness of the count information to the declarer. the existence of a potential finesse is far less likely

- c) If there are two doubletons in the dummy, count is given in the higher ranking suit.
- d) We eliminate one suit where we know count to be unimportant, and the count signal relates to the higher ranking of the remaining two suits.

Most often the choice of the key suit on a deal will not be the result of a specific agreement, but from both defenders' understanding of the defensive situation.

This requires a thorough discussion by the partners, as well as substantial bridge knowledge and analytical skills.

WISHFUL THINKING

The defenders' discards should convey information that is needed at a particular time. In my opinion, however, it is a good idea to stick to basic agreements, if there aren't enough clues to interpret a specific discard in a way other than in the normal way.

W	N	E	S
1NT	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♦	Pass	3NT	Pass...

♠ A J 9 6 5

♥ 7 6 2

♦ J 9 8 7

♣ K

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 7 3

♥ A 10 9 3

♦ A K 2

♣ J 9 7 5

Your lead: ♠6.

South plays the ♠10 and West wins with the king of spades. Declarer plays the queen of hearts from his hand and overtakes with the ace in dummy, South playing the ♥4. Declarer leads the ♣9. You win the singleton ♣K. To the club trick partner plays:

- a) the ♣8 OR
- b) the ♣2

Plan the defense in both cases.

a)

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

Your lead: ♠6.

South plays the ♠10 and West wins with the king of spades. Declarer plays the queen of hearts from his hand and overtakes with the ace in dummy, South playing the ♥4. Declarer leads the ♣9. You win the singleton ♣K.

What did partner's carding mean?

I am a great believer in hard and fast rules.

In my opinion the following agreement works well: that against a no-trump contract, the card played in the suit declarer attacks first shows suit preference. I am not going to advocate playing Smith Echoes though I acknowledge their potential value.

With this agreement in place partner's play of the ♥4 to the first heart trick says – I don't have help for you in spades. What kind of help are we talking about?

Let's imagine a slightly different layout:

	♠ K 9 8 6										
	♥ 7 6 2										
	♦ J 9 8 7										
	♣ A Q										
♠ A Q 5 ♥ K Q J ♦ Q 5 4 ♣ K 10 6 4	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100px; height: 100px; margin: auto;"> <tr> <td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr> <td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ 7 3 ♥ A 10 9 3 ♦ A K 2 ♣ J 9 7 5
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠ J 10 4 2										
	♥ 8 5 4										
	♦ 10 6 3										
	♣ 8 3 2										

In this case the only defense that limits West to 9 tricks is to lead a second spade. North can be convinced that it is safe to lead another spade by South's play of the ♥8 to the first heart trick.

Why am I emphasizing this so much?

There are a lot of firm believers in substitute count, who would show count in spades when following to the play in hearts.

In my opinion it is a good idea to have basic agreements, if there aren't enough clues that a signal should be interpreted other than in the usual way.

Let's return to our problem in a).

By playing the ♣8 partner is telling us he had an odd (original) number of spades. Cashing the ace of spades would give declarer a free trick.

After getting in with the king of clubs, we passively lead a diamond which holds declarer to ten tricks.

Part 4: Substitute Count

b)

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

Your lead: ♠6.

South plays the ♠10 and West wins with the king of spades. Declarer plays the queen of hearts from his hand and overtakes with the ace in dummy, South playing the ♥4. Declarer leads the ♣9. You win the singleton ♣K.

What did partner's carding mean?

The play of the ♥4 (S/P) to the first heart trick says to partner – I don't have help for you in spades.

It's time for substitute count in the club suit.

Playing the ♣2 shows an original even number of spades which enables North to cash the ace of spades.

COOPERATION

The key to optimal defense is cooperation in conveying the important information that will direct the analysis of both defenders and keeps them on the right track.

W	N	E	S
			1 ♦
4 ♥	Pass...		

N W E S	♠ K J 10 8 5 2 ♥ — ♦ K 7 3 2 ♣ K 4 2
---	---

♠ A 7 3
♥ K 4
♦ A 9 8 5
♣ J 9 7 5

Lead: ♦Q.

The queen and jack of diamonds take the first two tricks, West playing the ♦6 and the ♦10. North plays a third round of diamonds. West ruffs, plays the ace of hearts, and puts the queen of hearts on the table. North follows in hearts with:

- a) the ♥3 and the ♥5.
- b) the ♥5 and the ♥3.

What does this mean?

Plan the defense.

a)

♠ —
 ♥ A Q J 9 8 7 6 2
 ♦ 10 6
 ♣ A Q 8

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q 9 6 4
 ♥ 10 5 3
 ♦ Q J 4
 ♣ 10 6 3

♠ K J 10 8 5 2
 ♥ —
 ♦ K 7 3 2
 ♣ K 4 2

♠ A 7 3
 ♥ K 4
 ♦ A 9 8 5
 ♣ J 9 7 5

For what reason?

In this way both defenders' knowledge about the hand has been greatly increased.

North should realize that his partner will have a problem as to which of two options he should play:

- 1) Should he first cash the ace of spades and then play for a trump promotion?
- 2) Or should he play for a trump promotion without cashing the ace of spades.

The key to being able to solve this problem is substitute count (in hearts) for the spade suit.

At this stage of the hand no other signals are needed.

By playing the ♥3 and the ♥5 North shows an even number of cards in spades. The winning defense is to play for the trump promotion without cashing the ace of spades.

♠ Q 9 6
♥ 10 5 3
♦ Q J 4
♣ 10 8 6 3

♠ 4
♥ A Q J 9 8 7 6 2
♦ 10 6
♣ A Q

♠ K J 10 8 5 2
 ♥ —
 ♦ K 7 3 2
 ♣ K 4 2

♠ A 7 3
♥ K 4
♦ A 9 8 5
♣ J 9 7 5

North plays the ♥5 and the ♥3, showing an odd number of cards in spades.

At a major tournament down one gave NS – 57%.

Down two – 89%.

CONFIRMING A COUNT SIGNAL

There are some situations when the first card played by partner in a key suit is hard to read. A declarer who plays his spot cards deceptively can create a situation like the one following.

NS vulnerable

W	N	E	S
			1♦
1NT	Pass	2NT	Pass
3NT	Pass...		

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

Lead: ♠J.

You play the queen of spades and West after some hesitation ducks.

You come up with the play of a low club, West playing the ♣9 and partner the ♣8.

Now, declarer cashes four heart tricks (♥AKQ10).

Plan the defense.

Confirming A Count Signal

a)

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

In this variation you should pitch two diamonds on the last two rounds of hearts.

Declarer plays a club which you duck, and West can now win no more than nine tricks. It's true West had a better line of play. He should overtake the ♣9 in the dummy and play a spade.

This way South can't avoid being end-played, but we do not always play have to against experts, do we? Note the clever play made by West, the ♣9, concealing the two lower spot cards.

b)

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

In this variation South should pitch a diamond and a club. How to solve this dilemma? On the heart suit partner should confirm his count signal in clubs. If partner shows an even (original) count in clubs in variation a) we should pitch two diamonds. In variation b) partner signals an odd number of clubs and we can calmly pitch a club and a diamond. Mentally, these signals are very difficult.

It's relatively easy to apply substitute count in variation a) – it's almost impossible in variation b).

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

At a certain phase of a hand in play it should become clear to both defenders that there is only one important piece of information to convey.

NS vulnerable

W	N	E	S
	1♥	Dbl	3♦
4♠	Dbl	Pass...	

3♦ = natural + fit

♠ Q 6
♥ A J 10 7 6 2
♦ 2
♣ A 9 7 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A K J
♥ Q 8
♦ Q 10 7 5 3
♣ K Q 5

Your lead: ♦2.

South wins the ace of diamonds and returns the ♦9. West plays the king of diamonds on the second trick.

Plan the defense.

Part 4: Substitute Count

Partner is showing possession of the king of hearts, but is it third? Or fourth?

There is an extra undertrick at stake.

We cash the ace of clubs. In this suit partner should give us a count signal... in hearts.

a)

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

To the ace of clubs South plays the ♣8 showing an odd number of hearts.

We play the ace of hearts and a heart. South plays another diamond, which we ruff with the queen of spades – down three.

Important Information

b)

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

To the ace of clubs South plays the ♣2 showing an even number of hearts. We play a heart to the king. South plays another diamond for us to ruff – down two.

SUBTLE DISCARD 1

Substitute count doesn't always reveal exact count in a side suit. It says simply that we have an odd or even number.

NS vulnerable

W	N	E	S
2NT	Pass	3♣	Pass
3NT	Pass	6NT	Pass...

3NT = denies a four-card major

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

Lead: ♥10.

Declarer wins with the king of hearts in his hand and plays the queen of hearts, North following with the ♥6. Declarer cashes four spade tricks.

Partner follows with the ♠8,2,4,6. What information is partner showing with his carding?

You pitch two diamonds. To the fourth spade trick declarer pitches the ♥4.

What do you pitch to the third and fourth heart tricks?

Subtle Discard 1

The full hand:

Variation a)

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

Lead: ♥10.

Declarer wins with the king of hearts in his hand and plays the queen of hearts, North following with the ♥6. Declarer cashes four spade tricks.

Partner follows with the ♠8,2,4,6. What information is partner showing with his carding?

You pitch two diamonds. To the fourth spade trick declarer pitches the ♥4.

What do you pitch to the third and fourth heart tricks?

A suit preference signal is given at the first opportunity. The ♥6 (first – suit preference) was the smallest spot card available in partner's hand and showed a club card.

The ♠8 fulfills the role of substitute count, showing an odd count in diamonds.

Part 4: Substitute Count

Why in diamonds? We have the agreement that the first substitute count signal is given to the doubleton in dummy. Is this all there is to the problem?

An odd number of diamonds mean either one or three.

Thorough analysis would show that partner can play his remaining three spade spots in a particular way.

A clever expert can see that partner could play his remaining spot cards in a particular way.

- a) playing the spade spots up the line, the ♠2 and the ♠4, means that partner's clubs are longer than his diamonds.
- b) playing the second and third spade spots down the line, ♠6 and the ♠4, means that partner's diamonds are longer than his clubs.
- c) playing the middle spade spots (the ♠4 and the ♠2) means partner's minors are the same length.

Undoubtedly, this is the optimal method to convey the needed information, but it is difficult to use. It requires a good deal of concentration from both defenders.

Some pairs will work out the problem mechanically. Pitching small spade spots up the line means – I'll keep clubs you have to worry about diamonds.

Is this easy but rather primitive method enough?

Subtle Discard 1

Variation b)

	♠ 8 6 4 2										
	♥ 10 9 8 6										
	♦ 6 5 2										
	♣ Q 10										
♠ Q J 5	<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr></table>		N		W		E		S		♠ A K 10 9
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ K Q 4		♥ A J 5 3									
♦ A 10		♦ K 7									
♣ A K 8 6 4		♣ 5 3 2									
	♠ 7 3										
	♥ 7 3										
	♦ Q J 9 8 4 3										
	♣ J 9 7										

Lead: ♥10.

Declarer wins with the king of hearts in his hand and plays the queen of hearts, North following with the ♥6. Declarer cashes four spade tricks.

Partner follows with the ♠8,6,4,2. What information is partner showing with his carding? You pitch two diamonds. Declarer plays the ♥4 to the fourth spade trick. What do you pitch on the third and fourth heart tricks?

A suit preference signal is given at the first opportunity. The ♥6 was the smallest spot card available in partner's hand and showed a club card. The ♠8 fulfills the role of substitute count, showing an odd count in diamonds. An odd number of diamonds mean either one or three.

The play of the remaining three spade spot cards down the line means North's diamonds are longer than his clubs. In this way South knows the answer to the problem – what to pitch on the last two heart tricks – two more diamonds!!!

Playing spade cards up the line according to the rule that “I have something in clubs, you worry about diamonds” doesn't work this time.

Variation c)

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

Note that in this situation pitching three diamonds and a meaningless club spot card is fatal to the defense. Declarer will be able to read the layout of the hand.

SUBTLE DISCARD 2

Substitute count should be combined with a clear suit preference signal. A clear suit preference signal could relate to “not-so-clear” values.

EW vulnerable

W	N	E	S
2♦	Dbl	2♠	Pass
2NT	Pass	3NT	Pass...

2♦ = weak preempt in ♥ or ♠, or 18-19PC balanced hand

2♠ = pass or correct

♠ K Q J
♥ A Q J 2
♦ J 9 7 5
♣ 6 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 6 5
♥ K 9 7 6
♦ 8 3 2
♣ 8 7 4

Your lead: ♠K.

Declarer ducks spades twice, South signaling an even number of cards. Declarer wins the third round of spades perforce with the ace in the dummy and cashes four clubs tricks.

Plan the defense.

Part 4: Substitute Count

Partner should give substitute count in clubs for the shortest suit in the dummy – that is diamonds.

Variation a)

South shows an odd number of diamonds. Why is this information critical?

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

If West's shape is 3334, North should pitch a heart and a diamond and calmly wait for two heart tricks.

Subtle Discard 2

Partner shows an even number of diamonds to the first club trick (by playing the ♣5).

South plays the ♣10 to the second club trick, showing weak diamonds and relatively strong hearts. The situation is clear. We can recreate West's hand quite precisely.

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

On the next two club tricks North pitches two hearts. The defense becomes obvious – win the heart lead with the ace and play the queen of hearts.

Part 4: Substitute Count

Variation c)

Partner shows an even number of diamonds to the first club trick (by playing the ♣5).

South plays the ♠8 to the second club trick, showing weak hearts and relatively strong diamonds.

Declarer, unfortunately, has the ♥10.

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

On the next two club tricks North pitches two hearts. When declarer leads a heart towards dummy North ducks, wins the second heart and gets out of his hand safely with a diamond.

SUBTLE DISCARD 3

I love this game, and I adore the nuances of bridge. They occur most often on defense.

W	N	E	S
			1 ♦
4 ♥	Pass...		

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

Lead: ♦10.

You win the king and cash the ace of diamonds, West follows to the second diamond with the jack, partner with the ♦9.

Plan the defense.

Part 4: Substitute Count

♠ K 8 6 5
 ♥ 6 3
 ♦ 10 9 8 3
 ♣ 10 6 5

♠ A J 4
 ♥ A K Q 8 7 4 2
 ♦ J 2
 ♣ 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 7 3 2
 ♥ J 10 5
 ♦ Q 6
 ♣ A Q 9 7 2

♠ Q 10 9
 ♥ 9
 ♦ A K 7 5 4
 ♣ K J 8 3

Lead: ♦10.

What does partner's signal in diamonds mean?

Other professionals believe that the $\spadesuit 9$ is suit preference, showing values in spades.

Taking one of the entries to dummy out early prevents declarer from setting up the fifth club.

b)

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

Lead: ♦10.

South wins the king, cashes the ace of diamonds, West following with the jack and...

On this layout shifting to a heart would let declarer set up the fifth club for a spade pitch. South should open up spades and after getting in with the king of clubs he can then cash the setting trick.

How to find the right solution?

To the second diamond trick, North should give a substitute count signal in the critical suit – in this case clubs.

In variation b) North plays the ♦3, showing an even number of clubs. Accordingly, South shifts to a spade and after getting in with the king of clubs cashes a spade trick.

In variation a) North plays the ♦9 to the second diamond trick, showing an odd number of clubs (3) which tells South shift to a heart to cut declarer's communications.

Is it possible to play at this level?

One more time I will emphasize that it requires excellent understanding on the part of both defenders of partner's dilemma, and how to adjust the defensive carding to meet partner's need for information on a particular hand. It is very difficult and requires an enormous amount from the partnership, in the form of concentration and hard work at the table from both players.

“TWO-IN-ONE” (A COMBINED SIGNAL)

In some situations it is possible to combine a substitute count signal with a suit preference signal. However, playing spot cards in a very precise manner is too tiring for many bridge players.

W	N	E	S
	1♥	1♠	Pass
2♥	Pass	2♠	Pass
3♣	Pass	3♦	Pass
3NT	Pass...		

♠ A 5
 ♥ A Q 6 5 2
 ♦ Q 4 3
 ♣ Q 7 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

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

Your lead: ♥5.

Partner plays the jack, West wins with the king and plays the king of spades.

Plan the defense.

Part 4: Substitute Count

Variation a)

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

Partner plays the jack, West wins with the king and plays the king of spades.

We duck, West plays the queen of spades and we win the ace.

The card played to declarer's first attack suit is suit preference.

South's first spade card played is the ♠2 (S/P), meaning I don't have help (♥Q, ♥9) for you in hearts.

On the second round of hearts South plays the ♠6 (as the lover of the two remaining spades), which means an even number of hearts.

We can cash four heart tricks.

South has to remember to unblock the heart suit, but that isn't too hard.

“Two-In-One” (A Combined Signal)

Variation b)

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

In this case we apply the concept of a “two in one signal,” combining substitute count with suit preference.

South plays the ♠7, showing that he has the ♥9.

This time the ♠6 – as the higher of the two remaining spades shows an odd (original) number of hearts.

Part 4: Substitute Count

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

Playing the ♠2 and the ♠7 says I don't have anything in hearts, and I have an odd number of cards in that suit.

DIFFICULTY IN INTERPRETING THE SIGNALS

Flexible discards greatly increase the level of the defense, but there are difficulties in interpretation.

After the dummy comes down it is sometimes hard not to show our surprise.

W	N	E	S
	1♥	Dbl	Pass
2NT	Pass	3NT	Pass...

♠ K J 5 2
♥ A Q 9 7 3
♦ A 3
♣ J 6

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 6 4 3
♥ 6
♦ K Q 10 5 4
♣ Q 10 2

Your lead: ♥7.

South plays the jack, West wins with the king, and plays the two of diamonds to the king (South playing the ♦6).

Next, West plays the queen of clubs from the dummy and a club to the nine. Partner ducked the queen of clubs after a hesitation and followed to the club tricks with the ♣5 and the ♣4.

Plan the defense.

Part 4: Substitute Count

The full hand:

	♠ K J 5 2										
	♥ A Q 9 7 3										
	♦ A 3										
	♣ J 6										
♠ Q 9		♠ A 6 4 3									
♥ K 10 8 4		♥ 6									
♦ 8 2		♦ K Q 10 5 4									
♣ A 9 8 7 3		♣ Q 10 2									
	<table border="1" style="margin: auto; text-align: center;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠ 10 8 7										
	♥ J 5 2										
	♦ J 9 7 6										
	♣ K 5 4										

Your lead: ♥7.

South plays the jack, West wins with the king, and West plays the two of diamonds to the king (South playing the ♦6). Next West plays the queen of clubs from the dummy and a club to the nine. Partner ducked the queen of clubs after a hesitation and followed to the club tricks with the ♣5 and the ♣4.

Note, that declarer wasn't so cleverly when he played the deuce of diamonds instead of the eight. Hiding the deuce could mess up the defenders.

What did South's spot cards played in diamonds and clubs mean?

Flexible signals can elevate the level of defense, but can also cause difficulties in interpretation.

According to our hard and fast rules (to which there are of course, exceptions) the ♦6, as the smallest card in this suit, was a suit preference signal denying help in hearts.

South's play in clubs was the second attempt to show relevant information to North – substitute count in hearts – showing an odd (original) number of hearts in South's hand.

Thanks to this kind of signaling planning the defense isn't difficult. Declarer's shape is probably 2=4=2=5. We should lead the king of spades. This play accomplishes two things. It cuts declarer off the diamond tricks in dummy and sets up the setting trick in spades. Note, that giving up a spade trick is only declarer's eighth trick – he gets four club tricks, one diamond, one heart and two spades.

Part 5:

COMPLEX COUNT

‘Complex Count’ is based on a simple observation:

- A) Each player’s hand is made up of one even suit and three odd suits or
- B) One odd suit and three even suits.

As a result of the fact that ‘Complex Count’ precludes giving a suit preference signal, it is used only by the defender who doesn’t have any other information to convey.

Simply put, a very weak hand has a responsibility to show ‘Complex Count’.

The suit in which ‘Complex Count’ is given is either the trump suit or the first suit declarer attacks.

Playing cards in the order low-high shows a hand dominated by even suits, meaning three evens and one odd.

Playing cards in the order high-low shows a hand dominated by odd suits, meaning three odds and one even.

One of the great advantages of giving ‘Complex Count’ is camouflage.

The defender who has all the strength knows that his partner is weak and reads the signal as ‘Complex Count’.

Part 5: Complex Count

From declarer's point of view the signal is suit preference just as in 95% of all the other hands where a suit preference signal takes priority over showing 'Complex Count'.

NOTE:

'Complex Count' shouldn't be used when a player who has a very weak hand has already given count in a suit. In this situation the weak hand's next signal is substitute count. This is more useful.

EXCEPTIONAL INFORMATION

Knowing that partner's hand is even-suit oriented or odd-suit oriented allows for a depth of analysis that is unattainable for pairs who use standard count signals.

W	N	E	S
1NT	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♥	Pass	3♥	Pass
Pass...			

1NT= 15-17 PC

2♥ = denies four spades

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

Lead: ♠J.

Declarer wins the ace of clubs and plays the jack of hearts. You duck the jack and win the next round of hearts with the ace, partner playing the ♥4 and the ♥2.

Plan the defense.

Part 5: Complex Count

Variation A)

You realize that partner doesn't have any high cards other than the jack of clubs and maybe the jack of spades. Thus, partner's play in the heart suit shows a hand that is odd-suit oriented. (3 odds and 1 even).

Note, that substitute count in this situation wouldn't make any sense.

You know which suit North has that is even – the trump suit.

The rest of partner's suits are odd.

You know how many spades North has – 3 (1 and 5 are impossible).

a) North has this shape: 3♠-2♥-3♦-5♣

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

There is a danger that declarer will be able to pitch a spade from dummy on the fourth diamond FROM his hand. We have to open UP spades immediately.

In a teams game the required play is clear. We shift to a small spade.

Exceptional Information

Why a small spade? In case partner has the ♠10 (and the declarer doesn't work out to insert the jack of spades).

At a pairs tournament we have two options:

- 1) Shifting to a small spade – it seems to be a reasonable risk, although it could result in a complete zero.
- 2) Shifting to the queen of spades – we can safely take advantage of the chance that partner has the jack of spades. We leave open another option that comes at a risk.

Let's follow declarer's likely play. West will probably win the ace of spades, on which partner may give us a helpful signal, return to hand with a heart and play a diamond to the queen. Now, it's time for the defenders to cooperate.

- 1) North plays the ♦3, which means that we can't count on him for any help in spades. We cash the king of spades.
- 2) North plays the ♦9 and we confidently play a small spade (West will think that we have led from a spade holding of Q10x).

b) North has this shape: 3♠-2♥-5♦-3♣

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

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K Q 5 3
♥ A 7 5
♦ K 10 4
♣ Q 8 7

Part 5: Complex Count

There is an identical theme to the hand.

We have to open spades at once, because of the risk of a spade pitch on the fourth club.

Exceptional Information

Variation B)

W	N	E	S
1NT	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♥	Pass	3♥	Pass
Pass...			

1NT = 14-16 PC

2♥ = denies four spades

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

Lead: ♣J.

Declarer wins the ace of clubs and plays the jack of hearts. You duck the jack and win the next round of hearts with the ace, partner playing the ♥2 and the ♥4.

Plan the defense.

Part 5: Complex Count

Partner's play in the heart suit shows a hand that is even-suit oriented. (three evens and one odd).

You know of one even suit in North's hand – the trump suit.

a) North's odd suit is spades. North's shape is: 3♠-2♥-4♦-4♣.

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

We should forget about making an active or attacking lead.

We return the queen of clubs, and start the battle for down one.

Of course declarer should make. Strip minors and endplay South, then guess spade.

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

♠ K Q 5 3
♥ A 7 5
♦ K 10 4
♣ Q 8 7

c) North's odd suit is clubs. North has the shape: 4♠-2♥-4♦-3♣.

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

We return a club. Unfortunately, only an original diamond lead would have been the killer but it is too late now.

Summary

‘Complex Count’ gives an unprecedented piece of information.

It is very helpful to the defender who has a lot of high cards in his hand and can't count on getting any help from his partner. It enables him to make a precise analysis of the hand and plan his line of defense.

In the cases presented above when partner's ‘Complex Count’ showed an odd-suit oriented hand, it obligated us to open the spade suit immediately.

In the other examples when North had an even-suit oriented hand, we had to return a club. Be honest: you have to admit that without this handy little device South would be groping in the dark.

I love this game!

A SIGH OF RELIEF

‘Complex Count’ relieves us of having to guess.

NS vulnerable

W	N	E	S
2NT	Pass	3♦	Pass
3♠	Pass	4♣	Pass
4♦	Pass	6♥	Pass...

3♦ = transfer

3♠ = cue bid, max- with good support

♠ K 10 8 5 3 2

♥ 4

♦ K 10 8 7 5

♣ Q

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ J 4

♥ A J 8 6 3

♦ Q 2

♣ K J 8 3

Lead: ♥4.

Declarer pulls two rounds of trump, South following with the ♥7 and the ♥5, and plays a club to the ♣10 (partner plays the ♣7).

Plan the defense.

A Sigh Of Relief

Variation B)

♠ K 10 8 5 3 2

♥ 4

♦ K 10 8 7 5

♣ Q

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ J 4

♥ A J 8 6 3

♦ Q 2

♣ K J 8 3

Lead: ♥4.

Declarer pulls two rounds of trump, South following with the ♥5 and the ♥7, and plays a club to the ♣10 (partner plays the ♣7).

Plan the defense.

Part 5: Complex Count

By playing the hearts low-high South showed that he has an even-suit oriented hand, or three evens and one odd.

South's play of the ♣7 shows an odd number of clubs. Spades and diamonds have to be an even number of cards.

Declarer's shape is clear: 3♠-5♥-2♦-3♣.

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

Now, after winning the queen of clubs, it is safe to exit with a diamond.

SUBTLE DISCARDS

This is undoubtedly a higher stage of development to which the civilized world (of bridge) will reach only in the next few decades (or at least decade and a half).

W	N	E	S
1NT	Pass	3NT	Pass...

♠ A 5 3 2
 ♥ A 9
 ♦ J 8 7 5
 ♣ Q J 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 10 8 4
 ♥ K Q J 8
 ♦ K 6 2
 ♣ K 9 3

Your lead: ♠2.

Declarer wins partner's ♠J with the queen and plays a heart to the king and a heart to the ten in his hand. You win the ace of hearts and play the ace of spades and a spade. Spades divide evenly (3-3-3). West cashes the two heart tricks in dummy. First you pitch the thirteenth spade.

Partner follows to the fourth round of hearts as declarer pitches a club.

What do you discard?

Part 5: Complex Count

Since partner, has no points in his hand, he should play ‘Complex Count’ to the first suit declarer attacks.

Variation A-1)

South plays the ♥5 and the ♥4, showing an odd-suit oriented hand. we now know the number of hearts and spades in South’s hand.

Does this solve all of our problems?

The two middle heart cards played (South had an original heart holding of ♥6543) also gives the information that his minor suit length is the same.

Now we know declarer’s shape: 3♠-3♥-3♦-4♣.

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

On the fourth heart we can freely pitch a diamond.

Variation A-2)

South follows in hearts with the ♥4 and the ♥3, showing an odd-suit oriented hand. We now know the number of hearts and spades in South's hand.

By playing the two lowest hearts (South had an original heart holding of ♥6543), South shows that he has a longer lower-ranking suit – in this case clubs.

West's shape is known to be: 3♠-3♥-5♦-2♣.

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

Part 5: Complex Count

We come to this end position:

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

On the fourth heart, West cleverly pitches a club.

Thanks to the precise information we have, we can also pitch a club.

Subtle Discards

Variation B)

♠ A 5 3 2
 ♥ A 9
 ♦ J 8 7 5
 ♣ Q J 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 10 8 4
 ♥ K Q J 8
 ♦ K 6 2
 ♣ K 9 3

Your lead: ♠2.

Declarer wins partner's ♠J with the queen and plays a heart to the king and a heart to the ten in his hand. You win the ace of hearts and play the ace of spades and a spade. Spades divide evenly (3-3-3). West cashes the two heart tricks in dummy. First, you pitch the thirteenth spade.

Partner follows to the fourth round of hearts, as declarer pitches a club.

Partner plays from an original heart holding of ♥6543:

- 1) the ♥3 and the ♥4
- 2) the ♥5 and the ♥6

What do you discard in B-1) and B-2)?

Part 5: Complex Count

Variation B-1)

South plays the ♥3 and the ♥4, showing an even-suit oriented hand. We now know the number of hearts and spades in South's hand.

The two lowest heart cards played (South had an original heart holding of ♥6543) shows that he has a longer lower-ranking suit – in this case clubs.

West's shape is: 3♠-3♥-4♦-3♣.

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

On the fourth heart we pitch a club, hoping that partner will have the ♣10.

Variation B-2)

South plays the ♥5 and the ♥6, showing an even-suit oriented hand. we now know the number of hearts and spades in South's hand.

The two highest heart cards played (South had an original heart holding of ♥6543) shows that he has a longer higher-ranking suit – in this case diamonds.

West's shape is: 3♠-3♥-2♦-5♣.

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

On the fourth heart we have to pitch a diamond.

A SUBTLE OPENING LEAD

At the first trick, if we happen to decide on a trump lead, we can give partner information about the shape of the rest of our hand.

EW vulnerable

W	N	E	S
		1♣	Dbl
1♥	Pass	2♥	Pass
4♥	Pass...		

1♥ = natural, forcing

Variation A)

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

Lead: ♥2.

Declarer overtakes the heart in dummy with the jack of hearts and plays the second red jack, the ♦J.

Leading a singleton trump isn't recommended.

Thanks to 'Complex Count' (in the trump suit), you already know at trick one that partner has an even-suit oriented hand. North follows to the diamond trick with the ♦8, showing an odd number.

Plan the defense.

A Subtle Opening Lead

You can recreate West's hand.

♠ ?xx
♥ KJxx
♦ J109x
♣ AK

Why doesn't declarer's shape look more like this?

♠ x
♥ KJxx
♦ J109x
♣ AKxx

As a result of analyzing partner's lead, if he had had

♠ xxxxxx
♥ xx
♦ xxx
♣ xx

he would have had a more attractive lead in the club suit.

It's obviously time to lead a spade from the ace and queen. There's no reason to wait. Why?

Part 5: Complex Count

The full hand:

	♠ J 7 5 4										
	♥ 6 2										
	♦ 8 7 2										
	♣ 8 5 3 2										
♠ 10 3 2		♠ K 9 6									
♥ K J 4 3		♥ A Q 10 9									
♦ J 10 9 4		♦ K 5									
♣ A K		♣ J 7 6 4									
	<table border="1"> <tr> <td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr> <td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠ A Q 8										
	♥ 8 7 5										
	♦ A Q 6 3										
	♣ Q 10 9										

Let's follow the likely play of the next few tricks.

After winning the queen of diamonds we get out passively with a heart. West cashes the ace and king of clubs and gets out with a diamond. Again you get out with a heart. A club is ruffed and on two good diamonds declarer pitches two spades from dummy.

A Subtle Opening Lead

Variation B)

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

Lead: ♥6.

Declarer overtakes the heart in dummy with the jack of hearts and plays the second red jack, the ♦J.

Leading a singleton trump isn't recommended.

Thanks to 'Complex Count' (in the trump suit), you already know at trick one that partner has an odd-suit oriented hand. Note, that the ♥6 is the highest missing spot card, from looking at your hand and dummy. North follows to the diamond trick with the ♦8, showing an odd number.

You can recreate West's hand.

♠ xx
 ♥ KJxx
 ♦ J109x
 ♣ AKx

You play a heart and wait for the two tricks coming to you in the black suits.

DOUBT

‘Complex Count’ shouldn’t be used when one defender who has no high cards has already managed to give count in a suit. In this situation we give substitute count. It is more useful. Why?

NS vulnerable

W	N	E	S
	1♥	Pass	Pass
Dbl	Rdbl	3♦	3♥
3NT	Pass...		

♠ K 8 2
♥ A K J 9 8
♦ A K 3
♣ 10 6

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ J 9 6
♥ 6
♦ Q J 10 9 8 4 2
♣ 8 2

Your lead: ♥A.

South plays the ♥3 (even count), West plays the ♥2.

You decide to cash the king and ace of diamonds. On the second diamond trick declarer pitches the queen of spades.

Plan the defense.

♠ K 8 2
♥ A K J 9 8
♦ A K 3
♣ 10 6

♠ A Q 7
♥ Q 10 2
♦ 6
♣ A K Q J 9 7

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 10 5 4 3
♥ 7 5 4 3
♦ 7 5
♣ 5 4 3

♠ J 9 6
♥ 6
♦ Q J 10 9 8 4 2
♣ 8 2

Part 5: Complex Count

Most often the choice of the key suit on the hand won't be the result of a specific agreement, but from the defenders' understanding of the situation.

This requires a thorough discussion between the partners, a lot of bridge knowledge and analytical abilities.

In this case the agreement is applied that substitute count is given to the shorter of the two remaining suits in dummy. The doubleton in the dummy is the club suit.

By playing to the diamond suit with the ♦7 and the ♦5 South shows an odd number of cards in clubs. We can work out declarer's shape.

♠ AQx
♥ Qxx
♦ 6
♣ AKQJxx

It's safe to give declarer a heart trick. At trick thirteen we'll get the setting trick with the king of spades.

Lazily playing the ♣10 will let declarer make ten tricks.

We have to realize that even if partner happens to have a higher club spot card than the ♣8 it's not possible to set the contract two. After cashing the clubs, we won't be able to avoid being endplayed.

Doubt

Variation B)

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

Your lead: ♥A.

South plays the ♥3 (even count), West plays the ♥2.

You decide to cash the ace and king of diamonds. On the second diamond trick declarer pitches the queen of spades. Partner follows to the diamonds with the ♦5 and the ♦7. South is showing an even number of clubs.

We can recreate West's hand.

♠ AQ
 ♥ Qxx
 ♦ x
 ♣ AKQJxxx

Now, we can calmly get out of our hand with a spade.