

***When in doubt, lead trumps.***

This was never good advice for defenders. In deciding what to lead, be decisive. Decide your tactics, then choose your lead card.

In general there are two types of defence. We might call them active and passive. In active defence you make an aggressive lead – your aim is to get your necessary quota of tricks before declarer can get his quota. So you may lead from touching honours, or from a suit with high card strength, or from a shortage looking for an early ruff. With passive defence you make a ‘negative’ lead and let declarer

struggle to set up his quota in which process he may have to lose enough tricks to your side.

How do you decide on defensive tactics? One author has said that, in choosing your tactics and making your opening lead, there are three rules you should follow:

Rule 1: Listen to the bidding.

Rule 2: Listen to the bidding.

Rule 3: Listen to the bidding.

Do you get the message?

Here is one sort of hand where you should lead trumps, not because you are in doubt but because you see it as the best lead.

You hold ♠ KJ7 ♥ 64 ♦ AQ85 ♣ J732 You are on lead against 4H. What do you lead? You know that partner doesn't hold much – perhaps 4 HCP at best. You have 4 possible defensive tricks in spades and diamonds provided declarer (and not you) opens those suits. You decide to lead a trump – not because you are in doubt, but because you have decided that a passive defence is the best tactic. You may be finessing through any trump honour partner may have, but this is a finesse declarer can find for himself. The plan is to lead a trump while you can, then later a club (least likely to give anything away), and hope to make your H and D honours.

There are many situations where you will lead a trump, not as a passive or ‘when in doubt’ lead, but as an attacking lead to cut down dummy's ruffing power or prevent a cross-ruff situation. Indeed there are many hands in which a trump lead is almost mandatory. Let's look at some examples.

#1. West East

1♦ 1NT

2♣ 2♦

East has shown a clear preference for diamonds. West will be making extra tricks by ruffing clubs in dummy. Lead a trump.

But not;

#2 West East

1♠ 1NT

2♣ 2♠

Here East is not preferring ♠ to ♣; he is simply showing his 5 - 2 ♠ fit rather than a perhaps 4 - 3 ♣ fit.

#3	West	North	East	South
	2NT*	X	4♣	All pass

* = 5/5 in minors, 10-12 HCP. East has shown a strong preference for clubs. Lead a club rather than one of partner's suits. Stop an EW cross ruff. When your side has the balance of HCP, it's good practice to get rid of their trumps and revert the hand to NT as soon as possible.

#4 West North East South

1♠ 2♠* 3♠ 4♥

All pass

* = Michaels cue showing 5-5 in ♥ and a minor. Lead a ♥. Stop South from using his short trumps for ruffing.

#5 West North East South

1NT 2♣* All pass

* = two suiter ♣ and another. Lead a club. South has shown some sort of preference or at least tolerance for clubs

#6 Here is an excellent example. You hold this hand as South:

♠52 ♥5 ♦9542 ♣AK10953, and hear the following auction:

West East

1♥ 1♠

2♦ 2♠

3♠ 4♠

West has at least nine cards in the reds. East's 2S bid is not forcing, but West has invited game. West's distribution has to be 5-4-3-1 with a singleton club. He is hoping for some club ruffs in his hand. So a good defence is to lead trumps to stop the ruffs.

Here is the full hand. East was optimistic but how many players can resist a game invitation holding a 6 card suit?

	♠63		East can make 6 top tricks in trumps and a top ♠ and a ♥. He needs to lead a club before he can start ruffing. Now you win the club lead and lead your last trump. Now he can make just one club ruff and is limited to 9 tricks.
	♥KJ1087		
	♦AJ108		
	♣Q7		
♠K109		♠AQJ746	
♥AQ764		♥92	
♦KQ62		♦7	You may have been tempted to cash a top club before switching to a trump. To succumb to that temptation would have been disastrous. Your club winner cannot run away, and you have lost the tempo. You needed to lead trumps twice to defeat this contract.
♣8		♣J642	
	♠52		
	♥5		
	♦9542		
	♣AK10953		

Q: When should I not lead trumps at the opening lead?

A: When the bidding suggests that declarer or dummy has a strong side suit which can take care of their losers. In this case, make an attacking lead.

Against a small slam. It is better usually to make an attacking lead, unless you assess that declarer needs some ruffs. On the other hand, against a grand slam the recommendation is to lead a trump. The supposition is that trumps are likely to be solid, and you don't want to help declarer in finding a side suit card.

Q: When should I lead trumps on the opening lead?

A: When one of the declaring sides has shown two suits, and his partner has given a strong preference for the trump suit. This is particularly important in competitive hands with both sides bidding and your side holding the balance of points, when a trump lead is almost mandatory.