

Signals for Success

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American Contract
Bridge League



Preference Signal

The preference signal is used to show a preference for one of the two suits outside the trump suit and the suit being led.

1. A relatively high card shows a preference for the higher-ranking suit outside the trump suit and the suit being led.
2. A relatively low card shows a preference for the lower-ranking suit outside the trump suit and the suit being led.



The suit preference signal at trick one

In rare instances, the card you play when partner makes the opening lead against a suit contract will be a *suit preference signal*.

- ♠ If partner's card is likely to hold the first trick and dummy will take the next trick in that suit, your first card may be a *suit preference signal*. Play a low card in the suit to tell partner to switch to the lower of the remaining suits, excluding the trump suit.
- ♠ The play of a high card in partner's suit may be a *suit preference signal* asking partner to switch to the higher of the remaining suits, excluding the trump suit. It may also be an **attitude signal** telling partner to continue that suit, regardless of dummy's holding.

The opening leader, if in doubt, should assume that a high card is an *attitude signal* requesting the continuation of the suit. **Attitude signals take precedence over suit preference signals.**

Hand 5.

	♠A82		
	♥KQ5		
	♦KJ5		
	♣KJ83		
♠		♠83	
♥A		♥T42	
♦		♦8642	
♣		♣AQT4	

Contract: **4S** (South)
Partner's ♥A lead may not be best for your side.
He will win this trick, and then, what should he do?

Hand 5. Partner doesn't need an attitude signal from you to tell him a heart continuation may be useless. You want to tell him what suit to switch to, if possible. You do your best and play the ♥2. This card asks him to switch to the lower of the outside suits – clubs. Without this *suit preference signal*, partner's next play is simply a guess. What heart would you play at trick one if your clubs and diamonds were reversed?

- ♠ In situations where both attitude and count in a suit are known, the card you play can be a suit preference signal. A high card would suggest the higher of the outside suits; a low card suggests the lower; a middle card would tell partner you have no preference. Note that this is an advanced concept. Add it to your repertoire when you are comfortable with more basic signaling.

Suit Preference Signals When Partner Trumps

When you lead a card for Partner to trump, your spot card is a **suit preference signal** suggesting what suit to lead back. A high spot card suggests the higher ranking suit. A low spot card suggests the lower ranking suit. Like this...

example 11 – an obvious singleton

<i>Partner</i>		
	♠	
	♥ <u>4</u>	
	♦	
	♣	
<i>Declarer</i>		<i>Dummy</i>
♠		♠ A J 6 2
♥ <u>5</u>		♥ K Q 8
♦		♦ 9 7 5
♣		♣ 9 7 5
<i>You</i>		
	♠ T 7	
	♥ <u>A</u> J 9 6 3 2	
	♦ A T 8	
	♣ J 8	

The contract is 4♠.

Partner leads the ♥4, and you win with your ♥A.

How do you know Partner's ♥4 is a singleton? [show answer](#)

Which heart do you return? [show answer](#)

Partner returns the ♦3. You asked for a diamond, so the choice of suit doesn't tell you anything. But what does Partner's choice of a low spot card mean? [show answer](#)

In *EXAMPLE 3*, below your Partner leads the A ♠ against a 4 Heart contract. Your Partner will not continue Spades and will make a switch to one of the two Preferred suits: Clubs or Diamonds. (Not trump and not the suit being led.) But which one will your Partner choose? You can help him out with a Suit Preference Signal.

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

Play the 10 ♠ on your Partner's lead of the A ♠. The high 10 says: "*Partner lead the higher ranking of the two Preferred suits which is Diamonds.*" If Partner sees and reads the signal the hand will most likely be set.

Example: Leading a Suit

Suit-preference signals are sometimes also employed when leading a suit. This is most commonly done when giving partner a ruff. In the following deal, your side is defending 2♠. Partner's lead is the ♥T.

North	
♠K52	
♥Q43	
♦9863	You
♣KQ8	♠QT
	♥AK975
	♦A72
	♣764

West	North	You	South
Pass	Pass	1♥	1♠
Pass	2♠	Pass	Pass
Pass			

You win the ♥K and cash the ♥A, partner following suit with the ♥6. It looks like he started life with a heart doubleton and can now get a ruff. Which heart do you return?

This is a suit-preference situation. From the bidding, partner knows you have three hearts at your disposal. The highest card, namely the ♥9, would ask partner to return the highest remaining side suit, i.e. diamonds. The lowest card, the ♥5, would ask for the lowest suit returned, i.e. clubs. And the middle card? Playing the ♥7 would mean that you don't have a preference, and that partner should make his best return based on his own judgment.

In the actual hand, you want a diamond return, so you lead the ♥9. Declarer follows suit, partner ruffs with the ♠4, and duly returns the ♦J. Now you can take your ace and lead a fourth round of hearts to create a trump promotion.



The full deal:

	Dummy	
	♠K52	
	♥Q43	
Partner	♦9863	You
♠J74	♣KQ8	♠QT
♥T6		♥AK975
♦JT5	Declarer	♦A72
♣JT953	♠A9863	♣764
	♥J82	
	♦KQ4	
	♣A2	

Partner can ruff the fourth round of hearts with the ♠J, forcing declarer to overruff with the ♠K. This promotes your ♠QT holding into another defensive trick. Declarer makes his contract on the nose, without an overtrick.

Left to his own devices, partner could have easily returned the ♣J at trick 4 instead. The suit-preference signal took the guesswork out of his decision.