

TEST YOUR
BRIDGE TECHNIQUE

AVOIDANCE PLAY

David Bird • Tim Bourke

♠ 5 2
♥ A 8 7 6 3
♦ J 2
♣ Q 9 5 3

♣ J led

♠ K 10 8
♥ K Q J 9 5
♦ K Q 4
♣ A 2

WHAT IS AVOIDANCE PLAY?

The term ‘avoidance play’ may seem intimidating. In fact it means no more than preventing a particular defender from gaining the lead. Suppose you have \spadesuit K-7-2 in your hand and \spadesuit 8-5-3 in the dummy. Since it will not suit for your right-hand opponent (RHO) to lead a diamond through the king, you should arrange the play so that any tricks you have to lose are won by the other defender. Alternatively, you should make sure that if your RHO does win the lead in a different suit he pays a high price for doing so. For example, he may have to rise with an ace in the second seat, thereby allowing you to score an extra trick with your honors in that suit.

One of the simplest forms of avoidance play is to duck an honor lead made by the safe defender. Look at this deal:

	\spadesuit 8 3		
	\heartsuit 10 4		
	\diamondsuit 10 7 5 3		
	\clubsuit K J 9 6 2		
\spadesuit Q J 9 7 5			\spadesuit K 6 4 2
\heartsuit A 5			\heartsuit 8 7 3
\diamondsuit A Q 9 4			\diamondsuit J 8 6
\clubsuit 8 3			\clubsuit 10 7 4
	<div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: center; justify-content: center; gap: 10px;"> N W E S </div>		
	\spadesuit A 10		
	\heartsuit K Q J 9 6 2		
	\diamondsuit K 2		
	\clubsuit A Q 5		

You play in $4\heartsuit$ after West has opened the bidding with $1\spadesuit$. How will you play when West leads the \spadesuit Q?

Suppose you win the first trick with the \spadesuit A and play a trump. That’s no good. When West takes his \heartsuit A he will be able to cross to partner’s \spadesuit K. It will not take a genius in the East seat to switch to a

diamond and you will go down. The answer is to allow West's ♠Q to win the first trick. You don't mind West having the lead because he cannot attack the diamond suit effectively from his side of the table. You win the next spade and knock out the ace of trumps. The defenders are powerless. With no entry to the East hand, the best that West can do is to cash the ♦A to prevent you from discarding both diamonds and scoring an overtrick.

Another simple form of avoidance play is finesse (or duck) into the safe hand. That's what you need to do on this deal:

	♠ 5										
	♥ A Q J 4										
	♦ K 10 5 2										
	♣ 10 6 3 2										
♠ A J 10 9 2 ♥ 8 7 2 ♦ J 7 ♣ K 9 7	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 60px; height: 60px; 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		♠ 8 7 6 3 ♥ 9 6 5 ♦ Q 8 4 ♣ Q J 5
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠ K Q 4										
	♥ K 10 3										
	♦ A 9 6 3										
	♣ A 8 4										

West leads the ♠J against 3NT. You win with the ♠K and see that you have eight top tricks. East is the danger hand because if he gains the lead he can defeat the game by playing a spade through your remaining ♠Q-4. You must therefore attempt to set up an extra trick in diamonds without allowing East to gain the lead. You cross to the ♦K at Trick 2 and lead a low diamond towards your hand, covering East's ♦8 with the ♦9. West (the safe hand) wins the trick and cannot continue spades effectively. Nine tricks are yours.

Having seen these two deals, you may think that avoidance play is a complicated name for a simple type of play. It's true in a way, but there are many forms of this technique and some of them are far from easy to spot. Let's look at a typical hand where the dangerous defender can gain the lead, if he chooses, but he will have to pay too high a price for doing so.

<p>♠ 10 7 2 ♥ Q 10 3 ♦ J 9 8 5 ♣ 9 7 6</p>	<p>♠ 6 5 3 ♥ 9 8 5 ♦ Q 6 3 ♣ A Q J 3</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: 0 auto; display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> <div style="margin-bottom: 5px;">N</div> <div style="margin-bottom: 5px;">W E</div> <div style="margin-top: 5px;">S</div> </div>	<p>♠ Q J 9 8 4 ♥ A J 7 2 ♦ A 10 4 ♣ 4</p>
	<p>♠ A K ♥ K 6 4 ♦ K 7 2 ♣ K 10 8 5 2</p>		

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	3NT	1♠	1NT
		all pass	

West leads the ♠2 against 3NT, East playing the ♠J. You have seven top tricks in the black suits and must set up two further tricks in the red suits before East can enjoy his long cards in spades. How should you arrange the play?

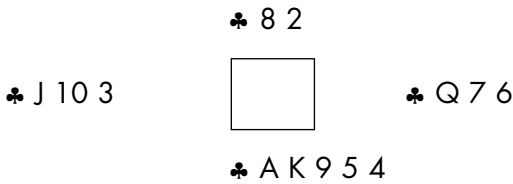
Suppose you lead a diamond to the queen at Trick 2. East will win with the ace and clear the spade suit. When you attempt to set up a ninth trick by leading towards the ♥K, East will leap in with the ace and cash three spade tricks to put you down one.

A better line of play is to cross to dummy with a club and lead a diamond towards your hand. East can win the lead if he chooses, by rising with the ace, but he will pay an unacceptable price. He will set up both the king and queen of diamonds, giving you the contract. What will happen if East plays low on the first round of diamonds? You will pocket the diamond trick, which you have achieved without surrendering the lead. You will then return to dummy with a club to lead towards the ♥K. In our layout, East does indeed hold the ♥A, as you fully expected after his opening bid, so you make the game.

Let's see another deal where you need to develop a suit without allowing a particular defender (the danger hand) to gain the lead.

king, but that would simply be good guesswork. When diamonds are breaking 3-2, there is no need to guess! You should return to dummy with the ♥A and lead a second round of diamonds towards your hand. If the king appears from East, you will duck. When East started with ♦K-x-x and he plays low on the second round, you will win with the ace and concede a third round to the safe (East) hand.

There are many similar positions where you can allow a high card to win in front of your higher honor. Let's see one more of them:



When West is the danger hand, you lead clubs twice towards the South hand. Your plan is to duck if East plays the ♣Q and otherwise to win the first two rounds and exit to his queen on the third round. It is not good enough to play ace, king and another club, of course, because East can unblock his ♣Q on the first or second round. West would then be able to win the third round.

We have looked at some of the basic ideas behind avoidance play. In the thirty-six problems that follow, you will encounter a wide variety of these plays. You will be able to test yourself, to see whether you are capable of employing such techniques at the table. If a particular problem defeats you, don't worry. After reading the answer and the explanation of the winning play, all similar deals will become easier in the future. Take a deep breath and... good luck!

Problem 1

[To Solution](#)

♠ 5 2
 ♥ A 8 7 6 3
 ♦ J 2
 ♣ Q 9 5 3

♠ J led

♠ K 10 8
 ♥ K Q J 9 5
 ♦ K Q 4
 ♣ A 2

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			1♥
1♠	3♥	pass	4♥
all pass			

West leads the ♣J against your heart game. How will you play?

Problem 2

[To Solution](#)

♠ Q 5 2
 ♥ K 8 3
 ♦ K Q J 5
 ♣ Q J 6

♥ 9 led

♠ K 10 6 4
 ♥ A 6 4
 ♦ 8 2
 ♣ A K 10 5

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
		1♥	dbl
pass	2♥	pass	2♠
pass	3♦	pass	3NT
all pass			

West leads the ♥9 against 3NT. How should you tackle the play?

Problem 3

[To Solution](#)

♥ 2 led

♠ A 3 2
♥ 8 5
♦ K Q J 7 6 2
♣ 6 5

♠ J 10 8 6
♥ A K
♦ 5
♣ A K 9 8 4 2

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			1 ♣
dbl	1 ♦	1 ♥	1 ♠
2 ♥	3 ♦	pass	3NT
all pass			

How will you play 3NT when West leads the ♥2?

Problem 4

[To Solution](#)

♦ K led

♠ K Q 7
♥ Q J 10 6
♦ 7 4 2
♣ 10 9 6

♠ A J 10 9 6 4
♥ A
♦ A 6 5
♣ K 7 2

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			1 ♠
dbl	2 ♠	pass	4 ♠
all pass			

West leads the ♦K against your spade game. How will you play?

SOLUTION TO PROBLEM 1

<p>♠ A Q 7 6 4 ♥ 4 ♦ A 9 8 5 3 ♣ J 7</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: 60px; margin: 0 auto;"> <p style="margin: 0;">N</p> <p style="margin: 0;">W E</p> <p style="margin: 0;">S</p> </div>	<p>♠ 5 2 ♥ A 8 7 6 3 ♦ J 2 ♣ Q 9 5 3</p>	<p>♠ J 9 3 ♥ 10 2 ♦ 10 7 6 ♣ K 10 8 6 4</p>
	<p>♠ K 10 8 ♥ K Q J 9 5 ♦ K Q 4 ♣ A 2</p>		

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1 ♠	3 ♥	pass	1 ♥
all pass			4 ♥

How will you plan the play when West leads the ♣J?

It is quite likely that West's clubs are headed by the J-10. Looking at the club suit in isolation, you would normally cover the ♣J lead with dummy's ♣Q. If this were covered in turn with the king and ace, you would subsequently lead towards dummy's ♣9, expecting to set up a second club trick. On this particular deal, however, an extra trick in clubs is worthless because you have no useful discard to make (neither your third spade, nor your third diamond is a loser anyway). It is more important to make sure that East does not gain the lead in clubs, which would allow him to lead a spade through your king.

You should therefore play a low card from dummy at Trick 1 and allow West's ♣J to win. From then on, the play will be straightforward. You will win the next round of clubs and draw trumps in two rounds. When you set up the diamonds it will be West, the safe hand, who

produces the ace. He cannot attack spades profitably from his side of the table, so your game is secure. If West does not play ace and another spade when he takes the diamond ace, you will discard one of dummy's spades on the third round of diamonds.

As you see, it would be fatal to play differently on the first trick. If you cover with the ♣Q, East will eventually gain the lead in clubs and you will lose two spades, one diamond and one club. The same fate awaits you if you play low from dummy and mistakenly win the first trick with your ace.

<p>♠ J 8 3 ♥ 9 5 ♦ 10 9 7 6 3 ♣ 8 7 2</p>	<p>♠ Q 5 2 ♥ K 8 3 ♦ K Q J 5 ♣ Q J 6</p>	<p>♠ A 9 7 ♥ Q J 10 7 2 ♦ A 4 ♣ 9 4 3</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 0 auto; width: 80px; text-align: center;"> N W E S </div> <p>♠ K 10 6 4 ♥ A 6 4 ♦ 8 2 ♣ A K 10 5</p>
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WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	2♥	1♥	dbl
pass	3♦	pass	2♠
all pass		pass	3NT

West leads the ♥9 against your 3NT contract. How should you tackle the play?

Suppose you win the heart lead and play a diamond. East will take the ace immediately and clear the heart suit. When you subsequently seek a ninth trick in spades, East will win with the ace and cash his remaining hearts to put you down one.

To have any chance of making nine tricks you must use an avoidance play. As we mentioned in the introduction, there are two basic types of avoidance play. In the first you try to prevent the danger hand from gaining the lead in a suit. In the second you cannot prevent the danger hand from gaining the lead but you make sure that he has to pay an unacceptably high price for doing so. This is an example of the second type.

You win the first trick with dummy's ♥K. (There is no point in a hold-up because you know from the bidding that East holds the two missing aces). You then lead a low spade from dummy. If East plays his ace on thin air, he will pay heavily for doing so. You will score three spade tricks, enough for the contract. If instead East plays low, you will pocket a spade trick with the king and turn to the diamond suit for the two extra tricks that you need.

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TEST YOUR AVOIDANCE PLAY!

This book is designed to accompany the *Bridge Technique* series.

The term avoidance play may seem intimidating, but in fact it means no more than preventing a particular defender from gaining the lead. You may think there is nothing particularly difficult about this, but of course, everything seems easy once you understand it yourself. There are plenty of players who would fail to make the majority of the contracts featured in this book.

The basic principles of avoidance play are straightforward, but applying them is not always so easy. Rest assured that some serious challenges await you in these pages!



DAVID BIRD has written more than fifty previous books, including the award-winning *Bridge Technique* series (with Marc Smith). A regular contributor to many bridge magazines, he lives near Southampton, England.



TIM BOURKE is a world-renowned collector of interesting bridge hands, whose previous books include *Countdown to Winning Bridge* (with Marc Smith) and *Saints & Sinners* (with David Bird). He lives in Canberra, Australia.

