

Eric Rodwell with Mark Horton

THE RODWELL FILES

SECRETS OF A BRIDGE CHAMPION

DOs and DON'Ts



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Eric Rodwell with Mark Horton

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FOREWORD

Eric Rodwell and his partner Jeff Meckstroth are the best-known pair in the world — ‘Meckwell’ is a neologism that is in every bridge player’s lexicon. Having reported their efforts for more years than I care to remember, I can safely say that they are also the most formidable partnership in the world. Brian Clough, a legend in English soccer, was once quoted as saying, ‘I wouldn’t say I was the best manager in the business, but I’m in the top one.’ So, here’s a question that I’ll answer for Jeff and Eric (they are far too modest to make such a claim):

‘Are they the best pair in the world?’

‘Perhaps not, but they’re in the top one.’

The theme of Peter Shaffer’s play *Amadeus* is Salieri’s envy of Mozart, a classic example of the inequality of inborn talent. The play contrasts Mozart’s genius with the more modest abilities of Salieri, which appear mediocre by comparison. As a journalist, I have been fortunate enough to be able to enjoy the company of many world-class bridge players and to discuss with them countless situations in bidding, play and defense. I am close enough to these stars to realize just how far away I am from achieving their level of play.

If you can’t play with (or against) the stars, the next-best thing is to study their methods and try to understand how they think about the game. However, it is very rare for a top-class player to tell you exactly how he or she does it. You will appreciate, then, the exceptional nature of this book, as someone who is surely one of the Bridge Immortals lets us in on his unique approach to play and defense. It has been my privilege to work with him as a researcher, sourcing and selecting example deals to illustrate the principles he describes.

To some extent bridge is a puzzle without an answer — I’ve been at it for forty years and I still have no idea how to play. This book represents one of the best opportunities you will ever have to get inside the mind of a champion — don’t fail to take it.

Mark Horton
March 2011

INTRODUCTION

Back in the 1980s I developed a series of notes on an approach to hand analysis and cardplay that I found useful. The methodology included giving my own names to many different types of plays, strategies, and analytical techniques — I had learned in college that giving unusual, even funny names to things makes them easier to remember.

I gave a digital copy of the notes (the original ‘Rodwell File’!) to Fred Gitelman, a promising Junior at the time, and it circulated amongst a small number of players in Toronto. One person who saw the notes was Ray Lee, who suggested to me many years ago that I turn them into a book. I resisted the idea, partly because I knew that my notes were a long way from becoming what I intended, which was a good book on advanced cardplay. Then at the Washington NABC in 2009, Ray approached me again, this time with the idea of adding Mark Horton to the project as a co-author. This idea excited me, as I didn’t really have time to research good examples to illustrate all the concepts.

Mark has done a marvelous job of finding all sorts of suitable deals, mostly from high-level play. In fact, when I got his material it occurred to me that the book could be made useful to a much wider range of players. So I wrote some new introductory chapters that establish the foundation for what is talked about later. For some time I had not been keeping records of hands I played, but during 2010 and 2011, with the book in mind, I collected interesting deals that illustrated the concepts and that in some cases introduced additional concepts. The combination of all these efforts is a larger book than we had first planned, but I believe a better one.

Most of the deals presented here are ‘real’ — they occurred and were played as described. I wish I had recorded more of my own deals but there are many good hands here involving other players. I have constructed some deals when none that we knew of from actual play illustrated the point properly. A few of them are randomly generated by my computer.

In some cases, I talk about a line of play or defense that was not actually selected at the table but that would have made things interesting, but I don’t then present it as a first-person account of a hand I actually played. In a few deals I made minor modifications to spot cards to make the deal more interesting.

Finally, the names. In some cases, the name is descriptive. In other cases it is just something that came into my mind, often somewhat silly as I think they stick in the mind better. I hope those few that are named after other players won’t offend anyone.

HOW THE BOOK IS ORGANIZED

The first two chapters in Part I set the groundwork for the more advanced concepts: how to develop tricks, entries, trump management, counting, calculating the odds, and the basics of squeezes and endplays. They move quickly, and are intended more as a refresher than a fundamental text. I recommend you study these chapters carefully unless you are at a level where it is all easy, and even then you should still skim them to make sure you can connect the later concepts properly. This part of the book ends with two important chapters on the analytical process: they describe the steps involved in selecting a line of play or defense, and include a checklist of ‘defogging’ questions to fall back on if you get stuck.

The rest of the book is largely concerned with identifying, naming and illustrating a wide variety of bridge plays and situations. Where I have invented names, they made sense to me at the time, and in most cases had something to do with the play itself. If you want to call them something else, be my guest: at least the wheels are turning for you and that should be beneficial.

There are numerous examples that just illustrate a principle, but others are presented as problems in declarer play or defense. The depth of the explanations does vary somewhat also, to accommodate varying levels of player. As I said earlier, the emphasis, wherever possible, is on real-life deals instead of the constructed layouts that fill most ‘solve these problems’ books. This has made our task both tougher and more interesting, as real deals sometimes don’t have a clear-cut answer. Quite a few of the examples involve me as a player, and in some cases I went wrong at the table. I tend to find the decisions I get wrong to be more interesting, and potentially more instructive, than those I get right.

WHO SHOULD READ THIS BOOK?

This book is for anyone who wants to understand, even partially, higher-level cardplay, or for anyone who just enjoys reading about it and appreciates its beauty. There are numerous books on bidding and conventions but I feel that cardplay technique is a more valuable subject to study, and that improvement in this area will help your scores quite a bit.

- *Experts*: I’m sure you will find this presentation different from anything you have encountered before, and the examples interesting and useful. I hope you find the names of things helpful as well.
- *Strong Regional players*: This book gives you the chance to improve the level of your play significantly.
- *Flight B players*: Depending on your innate ability and desire to delve into things, you can make enormous progress in cardplay.
- *Flight C and Club players*: Don’t be put off! You can learn more than you imagined was possible, and I predict you will have fun doing it.

If advanced cardplay concepts are difficult for you, just try to grasp what you can. Go over it again after a time and you will be able to learn more and more. If you are having trouble following the play from the text, I suggest using your own deck of cards to lay out the hand and follow the play trick for trick. I recommend reading the material in the order it is presented, but there is no reason you can't skip around if it suits you. Whatever your level, and however far you get into the book, you will get better results and more pleasure when you play. It is not necessary to understand everything in here to benefit from it. And in due time, you just might get there anyway!

As large as this book is, it isn't big enough to include everything you might wish to study about some topics (especially the more basic ones), and some suggestions for further reading are given in an Appendix. This book is intended to be many things: a textbook, a reference book, a book suitable for teachers to use, and a problem book — but most of all, I hope you'll find it to be entertainment. Enjoy!

Eric Rodwell
March 2011

PART 1

THE BUILDING BLOCKS

SOME BASIC IDEAS

This is a book about cardplay in bridge, which is a vast subject. Many of the concepts are, if not ‘advanced’, certainly beyond the basic level. I firmly believe that many of the ‘secrets’ of expert bridge can be understood by most players if they are willing to invest some time. And while far too many players get hung up in the fascination of bidding conventions, the game is usually won or lost in the cardplay, not the auction.

Let me start by saying that I believe strongly in having names and labels to attach to concepts. I find that having such labels makes the ideas easier to remember, and it certainly makes it easier to refer to them when writing, with some assurance that the reader and I both have the same thing in mind. I have invented terms for many of the specific cardplay techniques that appear in later chapters.

In the first two chapters I am going to review some of the more basic techniques to allow a larger audience to follow the later narrative. There will be a lot of later references to squeezes, endplays, trump promotions and the like, so I want to make sure everyone knows what I am talking about. Even if you think you are familiar with all this, I urge you to read through it quickly rather than skipping over it — if only so you have a grasp of the terminology. However, even in an area as basic as finessing, you may find I have something to say that is new to you.

CASHING SOLID TRICKS

The general principle is to cash your tricks in such a way as to allow the fluid ‘running’ of the suit. This is usually easier if you play the high card(s) from the short side first.

♠ A Q J 3
□
♠ K 2

Start with the king, then cash the ace, queen and jack.

If you have no small card to connect with the other hand (often called a *link card*), then you have a choice: either cash the winners in the short hand then use a side entry to the other winners, or overtake the last winner in the short hand.

(a) ♠ A J 3 2

 ♠ K Q

(b) ♥ A J 10 2

 ♥ K Q

In (a), to get the four tricks you have on top, cash the ♠KQ then cross to dummy in another suit to cash the ♠AJ. In (b), cash the ♥K then overtake the ♥Q with the ♥A to cash the ♥J10.

If your solid suit has a lot of cards in it (what is called a ‘good fit’), then running the solid suit forces the defenders to make a lot of discards. This can be useful in helping you figure out the distribution of the remaining suits, or as part of a legitimate line of play such as a squeeze. However, there is a downside — you lose your ability to communicate back and forth if you run the long suit, so you have to consider the matter on a case-by-case basis.

♦ A Q J 10 4 3

 ♦ K 9 8 5

Here you can run six diamond tricks, but you lose communication if you do so. Also, it is possible that discarding twice from your hand will be awkward.

If your solid suit is a short-suit fit, your high cards are not only entries but also *stoppers* in the suit that prevent the opponents from running this suit. It is less attractive to cash out this type of suit early in the play, unless you are trying for an endplay (where you force them to make a favorable lead).

(a) ♠ K 3

 ♠ A 2

(b) ♥ K Q 4

 ♥ A J 3

In (a), you have two winners, a.k.a. stoppers. When they lead a spade they knock out one of your stoppers. You can choose to win the first trick in either hand, and as with any choice you need to consider whether there is reason to pick one over the other. Do you want to be in a certain hand *now*? If not, then consider which hand might need the entry *later*, and play accordingly.

Example (b) has three winners, and a surplus high card, the ♥J. This means you can win two tricks in dummy, or two in hand. Another choice.

PROMOTING HIGH CARDS

Promoting high cards means driving out opponents' high card(s) so that your lower honors can become winners. In most respects this is like cashing solid suits except you have to lose the lead one or more times.

(a) ♠ K Q J

 ♠ 4 3 2

(b) ♥ K J 10 3

 ♥ Q 2

(c) ♦ K J 10 9 3

 ♦ Q

The spade suit in (a) above plays itself: when you knock out the ace you have promoted two winners. The position in (b) is best played by leading the ♥Q then the small one (high card from the short side first). In (c), the diamond suit can be played first as an overtake, ♦Q to the ♦K, then led from the top until they take the ♦A. Note that the lowest card, the ♦3, will be a winner if the suit divides 4-3. If you have enough entries to dummy (at least two, as they will duck the ace on the first round of the suit), you can play the ♦Q, then cross using an entry and lead the ♦K to guarantee four tricks.

You may have to knock out more than one stopper in your suit:

(a) ♠ Q J 10

 ♠ 5 4 2

(b) ♥ J 8 4 3

 ♥ 10 9 2

(c) ♦ J 10 9 8 3

 ♦ Q 2

In (a), spades must be led twice to knock out the two high cards and set up your one winner. The heart suit in (b) must be led three times. In (c), the diamond suit must knock out two winners, and in case they refuse to win an early trick, you should lead the ♦Q first. You will need at least one side entry to dummy and will need two entries if they duck the first diamond lead.

If you have honors split between the two hands you can choose which trick(s) you win in which hand (depending perhaps on when they choose to take their winners in the suit).

(a) ♠ K J 3

 ♠ Q 6 5

(b) ♥ Q 2

 ♥ K 3

In position (a), if you want to retain a late entry to hand, play the honors from dummy first. The defenders might thwart this plan by ducking the ♠A twice; in this case you have your two tricks and must now look elsewhere. In (b), say LHO leads low to his partner's ace. You can choose between playing low from hand and winning the next lead there, or unblocking the ♥K to win the next lead in dummy.

The high card(s) you knock out don't have to be the highest cards in the suit. Many such cases involve suits where a finesse ([see p. 20](#)) is a possibility.

(a) ♠ A K J 10

♠ 4 3

(b) ♥ Q J 2

♥ A 10 9 5 4

(c) ♦ A K Q 10 9 3

♦ 8 4

The spades in (a) can be developed for three tricks. You can cash the ♠AK, hoping the ♠Q will drop, then lead the ♠J to knock out the queen. You will need a side entry to dummy to cash the ♠10. If you have no entry, you can lead the ♠J the first time (if you are in the dummy).

The heart suit in (b) is best played by taking a finesse against the ♥K, but if you need only four tricks you can lead low from hand to the ♥Q, then follow by playing the ♥J. If you had ♥A10985 in hand, you could afford to lead the ♥A, unblocking the ♥Q, and continue with a low heart to the jack.

In (c), the diamond suit produces six tricks if the jack falls in three rounds. If a defender has four or five to the jack, you continue with the ♦10 to force out the ♦J, then your ♦9 and ♦3 are tricks. Of course you need a side entry to cash them; if you don't have one you can run the ♦8, or if stuck in dummy, lead the ♦10. These plays would make sense if you needed only five winners from the suit.

ESTABLISHING SMALL CARDS

Small cards become good if neither opponent has any cards left in the suit. You will develop the maximum number of tricks in such a suit when the opponents' cards are split as evenly as possible.

(a) ♠ A 8 7

♠ 9 6 5 4 3 2

(b) ♥ A K 7 6

♥ 5 4 3 2

(c) ♦ 9 7 6 5 4

♦ 8 3 2

In (a), you are only missing four spades, the ♠KQJ10. If they are split 2-2, playing ace and another establishes your four remaining small spades. If they are 3-1, you need to surrender another trick before your last three spades are good. If they are 4-0, then you need to come to hand and surrender a third spade trick to establish the two small spades.

In (b), you are missing ♥QJ1098. If they are divided 3-2, you can give one up and establish one small card. If they are 4-1 or 5-0, you can establish nothing. In order to avoid establishing two tricks for the opponents, you may consider losing an early trick in the suit (*ducking*), so that when you cash the ace next, you will know whether or not cashing the king will do you any good.

You have no top cards in (c), as you are missing ♦AKQJ10. You must surrender at least three tricks in the suit, depending on whether the split is 3-2, 4-1, or 5-0.

FINESSES

A *finesse* is an attempt to trap one or more high cards that one or both opponents hold. There are many variations. The simplest position is when you lead toward a medium-strength card.

(a) ♠ A Q 3

 ♠ 6 5 4

(b) ♥ Q 3 2

 ♥ A 8 7

In (a), you can lead low toward the ♠AQ, planning to cover the ♠K with the ♠A, and otherwise to play the ♠Q. This is a 50-50 chance, depending on the location of the ♠K. Note that you must lead *toward* your high cards to take advantage of the favorable location of the king. This is a sound principle to keep in mind for many situations. Leading toward your high cards is called **lobbing** (the same term as in tennis).

In (b), you can lead toward the ♥Q, with a 50-50 chance that the queen will be worth a trick. A difference from (a) is that with the ace in the opposite hand, West can take his king and score a fast trick even if you do end up with two tricks. Note that the beginner ‘finesse’ of leading the ♥Q can’t work because East can cover with the ♥K if he has it and you will have nothing left but small cards. This type of ‘hopeless finesse’ has been dubbed a *Chinese finesse*. I will be referring to this in later chapters.

The finesses above are not attractive since you gain at best one trick and help the opponents establish their tricks if the finesse doesn’t work, i.e. it is offside. You should prefer to finesse in suits where you are for sure promoting one or more high cards, or working toward establishing small cards:

(a) ♠ A Q J

 ♠ 4 3 2

(b) ♥ A Q 4 3

 ♥ 7 6 5

In (a), even if the finesse loses, you will establish a second trick. If the finesse works, you need to come back to hand to repeat the finesse to get your third trick. Of course, just because the finesse wins doesn’t mean a second finesse will work. A wily defender might duck his ♠K the first time to make you waste an entry to repeat the finesse.

In (b), you have the chance of a finesse and a 3-3 split. Whether the finesse wins or loses, you can try ducking the next lead, hoping that the ♥A will bring down the remaining cards.

The type of finesse I have been discussing where you lead toward your honor(s), I will name a **lobbing finesse**. However, if you have enough strength in a suit you can profitably lead an honor, which has the advantage of holding the lead for a repeated finesse.

(a) ♠ A Q 3
 []
 ♠ J 10 4

(b) ♥ Q 3 2
 []
 ♥ A J 10 9

(c) ♦ A J 10 3
 []
 ♦ Q 9 4

In (a), you have a surplus honor, the ♠10, so you can lead the ♠J. If West has the king and doesn't cover, you have retained the lead to repeat the finesse. Note that you have three cards in each hand. When you lead the ♠J, if West covers it goes jack, king, ace, and you spend two honors on the same trick. However, since you have one more honor (AQJ10) than cards in the suit you will still be able to take all the tricks when the ♠K is onside.

In (b), you lead the ♥Q from dummy. Note again you have five honors (you can count the ♥9 as an honor here since it touches the other cards you have, the ♥QJ10). If East covers you have four tricks. If East doesn't cover, you retain the lead for a second finesse. If you have no more dummy entries you will take four tricks if East has the ♥K along with no more than two small hearts.

Position (c) is a favorite in bridge books. Now you have the nine in the opposite hand, and can ensure four tricks without re-entering your hand if you lead that nine first. When it holds, you next lead the queen then finally low to the jack. If you lead the queen first, then your nine isn't high enough to hold the lead and you will have to waste an entry getting back to take a third finesse.

Finesses are often taken by defenders as well. However, since they can see only the dummy and not partner's holding, they are playing for a layout of the suit that is hypothetical.

(a) ♠ 4 3 2
 ♠ A Q 5 [] ♠ J 10 6
 ♠ K 9 8 7

(b) ♥ 4 3 2
 ♥ A Q 10 9 [] ♥ J 8 5
 ♥ K 7 6

In (a), East leads the ♠J to take a *defensive finesse*, as I call it. Whether South covers or not, the defenders take three spade tricks. Note, however, that this establishes the thirteenth spade for declarer, which might or might not matter.

In (b), if East is in (on lead) for the last time, he leads the ♥J if he needs three or more fast tricks in hearts. This time partner has just what is needed, the ♥AQ10.

This type of finesse, whether by declarer or defense, I will call a *pusher finesse* because you need to lead a card that either holds the trick or is covered, which is commonly called a *pusher*.

In most finessing situations you also have the option of 'playing for the drop', which means playing for the missing card to be offside but with few enough small cards accompanying it that the card will drop.

(a) ♠ A Q 9 2

 ♠ J 10 3

(b) ♥ A K J 10 8

 ♥ 9 7 6 5

In (a), you are missing six to the king, so the finesse is a much better chance than playing for the drop, which requires the ♠K to be singleton. I will be discussing basic odds calculations in Chapter 3, but I will tell you that the odds are basically 31:1 against playing for the drop, as opposed to 50-50 for the finesse.

In the suit shown in (b), you are missing only four cards and you have the ♥AK, so playing for the drop is a good chance. Most players would recognize that going for the drop is recommended by the rule ‘eight ever, nine never’. In any event, with no other information available, the odds for the drop are slightly better than for the finesse.

You can often combine playing for the drop with finessing:

(a) ♠ A J 10 4 3

 ♠ K 5 2

(b) ♥ A K J 3

 ♥ 7 6 5

In (a), cash the ♠K in case East has the singleton ♠Q, then finesse the ♠10. If East shows out you have to cross to hand again for another finesse. If that second entry isn’t available, you might prefer to lead directly to the ♠10, then back to the ♠K so you can finesse again. This gives up on RHO’s singleton ♠Q but gains when RHO has a small singleton, which is four times as likely.

In (b), you can cash the ♥A first in case there is stiff ♥Q, then finesse the ♥J (which means getting back to hand). If only three tricks are needed, you can cash the ♥AK in case RHO has doubleton ♥Q, then lob toward dummy’s ♥J. Of course, you would need appropriate entries in both hands for this play.

This type of play, cashing one or more winners in case something important drops, I have named **cash catering**. You are catering to a certain short-honor holding by cashing one or more winners before (presumably) finessing.

When missing the queen, and sometimes the jack, you often have a two-way finesse if you have higher cards in each hand.

(a) ♠ A J 10 3

 ♠ K 9 8 2

(b) ♥ A J 10 3

 ♥ K 5 4 2

(c) ♦ Q 10 9 3

 ♦ K 8 7 4

(d) ♣ A J

 ♣ K 10 5 4 3 2

In (a), you have a true two-way finesse. If you want to play West for the ♠Q you cash the ♠K (cash catering), unblocking the ♠10 from dummy, then run the ♠9. Note that you have ♠AKJ1098, six honors, so you can afford the unblock of the ♠10 (and a possible cover of the ♠9).

In (b), you are missing the ♥9 and ♥8, so while you can take a finesse either way, you can pick up four to the queen only in West's hand: you have only four valuable cards (♥AKJ10) so you can't afford anything getting covered. Cash the ♥K then finesse the ♥10; if West has queen-fourth, come to hand for another finesse. Of course, if you don't have the entries, you can start with a low card from hand to the ♥10, hoping to pick up ♥Q9xx outside. If you are stuck in dummy, you can't pick up any 4-1 splits (except stiff queen), so you give yourself just as good a chance by leading the ♥A and running the ♥J.

In (c), you are missing five to the ace-jack. You can finesse for the jack either way, or you can play for the drop. In either case, you would usually want to play a high honor first, which is like cash catering (picks up the stiff jack and the ace-jack doubleton). Since you have six important cards you can afford an unblock, say leading the ♦10 to your king, planning to run the ♦8 next.

In (d), you could finesse either opponent for the ♣Q, and leading low to dummy's jack appeals if having two dummy entries is crucial. In most cases, it is better to play to the ♣A (cash catering) and then run the ♣J, which also is playing the high card from the short side first.

Many positions involve finessing against more than one card.

(a) ♠ K J 2

 ♠ 7 6 5

(b) ♥ A Q 10

 ♥ 8 5 4 3

(c) ♦ 9 4 3

 ♦ A J 10 8

In (a), lead low from hand to the ♠J. If the ♠AQ are onside, you can repeat the finesse. If the ♠J forces the ace, you have developed one trick. If the ♠J loses to the ♠Q, come back to hand and lob toward the ♠K.

In (b), lead low to the ♥10. If that wins, you can cross again to finesse the ♥Q. If the ♥10 loses to the king, cash the ♥AQ, hoping for a 3-3 split (or ♥J9 doubleton) to make your ♥8 good. If the ♥10 loses to the ♥J, cross to hand to finesse the queen. In all cases you can hope your ♥8 will eventually get set up.

In (c), you have a finesse against touching cards, the ♦KQ. Easiest is to lead low the first time to the ♦J, probably losing. Then lead the ♦9 for a pusher finesse against the other honor.

Sometimes there will be a delayed finesse available.

(a) ♠ A K 9 2

 ♠ 8 7 6 5

(b) ♥ A K 3

 ♥ J 9 4 2

(c) ♦ K 3 2

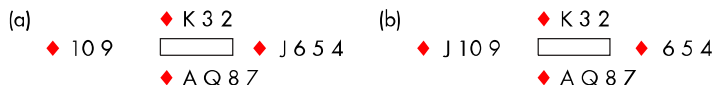
 ♦ A Q 8 7

In (a), lead up to the ♠A. If West plays an honor, you can win this trick and then lead low to your ♠8, setting up a finesse if he started with ♠QJ10x and split his honors (another example of the advantage of leading *toward* your high cards.) If West plays low, play the ♠A. If East plays an honor on this trick, again you should

lead low toward your ♠8, hoping West has the other two honors to set up a delayed finesse. In all cases, if the suit is 3-2 you have no need to finesse — you just drop the missing card and cash your ♠9.

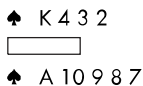
In (b), leading the ♥J is attempting a Chinese Finesse. Instead, cash the ♥AK; if nothing falls, lob toward your ♥J, hoping for one more trick. If the ♥10 falls, your ♥J9 are ‘equals’ against the ♥Q. If West has singleton or doubleton ♥Q, you can take a delayed finesse against East’s ♥10xxx(x). If East has a singleton or doubleton ♥Q, your ♥J becomes a trick. You should consider not cashing it right away; West must then keep his ♥10xxx(x) protected and you might be able to force him to lead away from it later in the hand (an *endplay*).

In (c), cash the ♦A and then lead low to the ♦K. You are missing ♦J109xxx originally. If a defender shows out you give up on the suit. If both follow but two of the big cards (♦J109) are still out, you try for a 3-3 split. The interesting case is when West plays two high cards (say the ♦10 and ♦9), making the layout one of these:



In the first case, you take a delayed finesse by playing a diamond to your eight. In the second case, you should avoid a delayed finesse. What should you do? It is all about the *percentage play*, i.e. the one that works most often. If West has ♦J109, he can play any two cards he wants, but with ♦J10, ♦J9 or ♦109 doubleton he must play the cards he was dealt. If you always finesse, you will win three times for every once you lose.

Terence Reese called this the *Principle of Restricted Choice*, i.e. when you are missing two or more touching cards and you have to guess whether to take a delayed finesse, assume the opponent’s play was restricted, not that they chose which card to play from equals.



Say you lead the ♠10. West plays the ♠Q, and you win with the king. Now when you lead the ♠2, East follows with the other remaining small card. Should you finesse or play for the drop?

The Principle of Restricted Choice says to assume West’s play was forced, i.e. play him for stiff ♠Q and finesse. This wins whenever West has a stiff honor (2 cases) and loses to ♠QJ doubleton (1 case) — giving you odds of about 2:1 in your favor. I’m fudging the math a little since the three cases aren’t equally likely, but as it happens, it’s not far off here.

There are many possible finessing positions. I suggest reading the excellent section on suit combinations in the *Official Encyclopedia of Bridge*.

RUFFING FINESSES

A ruffing finesse uses the power of the trump suit to complete the finesse.

```

♠ 2
♥ 7 6 5
[ ]
♠ A Q J 10
♥ A K Q 3 2

```

If hearts are trumps, you might try to ruff three spades in dummy, but that would require a 4-4 spade break and lots of entries to hand. Instead, you could lead the ♠A and run the ♠Q, taking a *ruffing finesse* against West. If West plays the ♠K, you ruff; if he does not, you discard from a side suit. Even if the finesse loses, you have established two more winners. If you think East has the ♠K, you can lead a spade from dummy to your queen and then ruff two more in dummy.

Restricted choice can come into play in a ruffing finesse position:

```

♠ 3 2
♥ J 3 2
[ ]
♠ A K 10 9 4
♥ A K Q 10 9 8

```

Hearts are trumps. You cash the ♠AK, and East drops the ♠J on the second round. What now?

Your best play now is to cash the ♥AK. If both follow, or if West has the last trump, you lead the ♠10, planning to take a ruffing finesse. Why not try to ruff out the ♠QJx from East? Because the Principle of Restricted Choice says don't play someone to have chosen from equals, play for their choice to have been restricted. If East has three trumps, then you have to play for spades to be 3-3 since he can ruff in if you successfully run the ♠10.

RUFFING LOSERS IN THE HAND WITH SHORTER TRUMPS

Dummy is normally the hand with shorter trumps, and in this case trumping losers in the dummy will gain you extra tricks.

(a) ♠ 8
♥ 4 3 2
[]
♠ A 4 3
♥ A K Q J 10

(b) ♦ A 4 3
♣ 4 3 2
[]
♦ 8
♣ A K Q J 10

Position (a) is simple. If hearts are trumps, you can trump both spade losers in dummy and get $5 + 2 = 7$ trump tricks. Conversely, in Position (b) with clubs trumps, it does you no good to trump the losing diamonds in hand. You still get only five trump tricks, and in fact might lose one if clubs divide 4-1.

Defenders are aware of this possibility and will usually find the trump switch if they see dummy with (typically) three trumps and a side-suit ruffing value (doubleton or less). You don't want to help them. In (a) above, if you don't have side entries to hand, don't lead any trumps. Cash the ♠A, ruff a spade, then cross in trumps to ruff the second spade. If you cash a high trump first, then after ruffing a spade there is only one trump left in dummy, and if you surrender the lead they will take it out with a trump switch.

TRUMP CONTROL

Establishing side-suit winners won't necessarily do you any good if there are enemy trumps out. If the defenders can ruff in and either cash too many tricks or prevent you from cashing yours, you have lost **trump control**. A number of the examples and principles that come later in the book deal with trump control but here I'll discuss a few basic ideas.

1. *Unless there is a reason not to (and there often is), draw all the outstanding trumps.*

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

You are in 7♣. You have eleven top tricks and can ruff two hearts in dummy to get to thirteen. However, you should not risk any ruffs or overruffs and should draw the two outstanding trumps before ruffing your hearts in dummy (or, preferably, claiming).

2. *With any suit combination, and your trump suit is a suit combination, study the position to see how many are out, and exactly what cards are missing (if they might be important).* I call this an **asset survey**.

On the previous deal, you were missing just two small trumps. I suggest noting how many total trumps you have, so if you have seven they have six, if you have eight they have five, etc. Then as you draw each round you can subtract from the original missing number.

The idea of an asset survey is not restricted to trump contracts, of course. Here's a deal from the 2011 Spring NABC:

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

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

Dealer South Neither Vul.			
West	North	East	South
			1♣ ⁱ
pass	1♦*	pass	1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	
1. Precision			

West leads the ♥2, attitude, showing interest in the heart suit. How do you play from here?

This hand was played by Jeff Meckstroth and typically, he saw the answer immediately: stick in the ♥7. This paid off as West had led from ♥Q982. Even so this gets you up to only seven tricks. Now what?

Since there was nothing great to do in other suits, he cashed the hearts to make East discard three times. East pitched an encouraging club and two discouraging spades. Jeff now tried the ♠10 — East covered with the jack and he won with the ace. Now, reading West for 4-4 in the majors, he led a low club from hand to the jack. When East won with the king and returned a low diamond, Jeff inserted another middle card: the nine. That was the end of the hand as the full deal was:

* Throughout, an artificial bid is indicated with an asterisk when the meaning is obvious.

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

East might have tried a sneaky ♦10 instead of a low one; if Jeff fell for that and covered with the queen he would probably go down — West could win and return a diamond, giving declarer a very difficult guess.

3. *If you can't draw all the trumps directly, you can either leave one or more 'master' (high) trump(s) out, or lead trumps to force them out.*

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

Suppose you are in 6♣ and the lead is the ♥Q, which you win with the ace. Cash two top trumps, claiming all the tricks if they split 3-2. If they are 4-1, you can simply continue with queen and another spade, surrendering the top trump. This gives you the trump control to run the club suit. In essence you are now playing in notrump.

If the lead is the ♦K, the situation is much worse if trumps are 4-1. You can't play as above since you will lose diamond tricks. Play the ♥AK and ruff a heart, return to hand with the ♠10, draw one more round of trumps, and lead high clubs, throwing diamonds. You will make your slam if the defender who has four trumps also has at least three clubs.

CROSSRUFF AND DUMMY REVERSAL

A *crossruff* means ruffing back and forth in both hands. This way you might score all your trumps separately. Crossruffing is most attractive when your trumps are high enough to stop overruffs and you have enough distribution to keep ruffing in each hand. You will lose trump control eventually, so you need to cash any side winners you hope to get early. Lew Stansby made 6♠ on a crossruff against Jeff Meckstroth and me on this deal:

♠	A Q 10 9
♥	A 5 4 3
♦	3
♣	A K Q 4
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 15px; margin: 2px 0;"></div>
♠	K J 4 3
♥	8
♦	A K 9 7 6 5
♣	10 3

North opened 1♣, and South responded 1♦. From there he got to 6♠ and I led a heart. Reasoning that neither defender was likely to have six hearts and not have bid at the one-level, he took the ♥A and ruffed a heart, led a club to the ace and ruffed another heart. Then he played a club to the king and a diamond to the ace. At this point he had scored four side-suit tricks and two heart ruffs, and he had six remaining high trumps. So he claimed six on a crossruff even though he could have tried to cash the ♣Q (which would have worked) or the ♦K (which would not). These plays risked suffering a ruff followed by a trump return which would kill one of the crossruff trump tricks.

Hands where you hope to run a long suit are not good candidates for a crossruff:

♠	A 8 7 6
♥	5
♦	A 4 3
♣	K Q J 9 8
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 15px; margin: 2px 0;"></div>
♠	K 5 4 3
♥	A 8 7 6
♦	2
♣	A 10 4 3

You are in 4♣ and they lead the ♥Q. You could crossruff hearts and diamonds for a while, but you wouldn't be able to get more than two club tricks without suffering a ruff. Better to try to maintain trump control. Cash the ♠AK and then run clubs. Even if trumps are 4-1 you will be able to take ten tricks.

A *dummy reversal* is a maneuver where you ruff in the long trump hand. If you are in a 5-3 fit, you need to ruff at least three times in the long trump hand to show any benefit from this play. If ruffing even once in dummy isn't practical, a dummy reversal might be the best approach:

♠ Q 10 9
 ♥ A 3 2
 ♦ A 5 4 3
 ♣ 8 6 5

 ♠ A K J 8 7
 ♥ K Q 5 4
 ♦ 2
 ♣ A K 3

Playing in 6♣, you have eleven top tricks. Hearts could be 3-3, or you could try to draw two rounds of trumps, hoping that you can then cash three heart tricks and ruff the fourth heart in dummy. If the lead is a diamond, you can try to ruff three diamonds in hand: ♦A, diamond ruff, ♠9, diamond ruff with the ♠K, ♥A, diamond ruff with the ♣A, then overtake the ♠J with the ♠Q and draw the last trump. This requires only a 3-2 trump break.

Here is a slightly modified deal from the 2011 Spring NABC in Orlando. The dummy reversal is easy to miss:

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

Dealer West
Neither Vul.

West	North	East	South
1♥	dbl	2♣ ¹	2♠
pass	pass	3♦	3♣
pass	pass	dbl	all pass

1. 9-11, artificial heart raise.

West leads the ♦2 to dummy's five and East's six, and East returns a trump to West's nine and dummy's queen. What next?

You are a step behind to ruff a heart in dummy, but with lots of small trumps in hand, a dummy reversal works perfectly: ruff a diamond, spade to the king and ace, ruff a diamond, club to the king, ruff the last diamond. Then lead good clubs — they can ruff in whenever they want, but you get 2+0+0+4, and three diamond ruffs in hand for nine tricks.

BASIC DEFENSIVE IDEAS

Later in the book, I'm going to discuss many exceptions to the 'standard' rules of defending. Before we get to the exceptions, though, it is worth going through a brief review of those standard rules and why they normally apply:

1. Second hand low

This gives partner, 'fourth hand', a chance to win the trick cheaply, or force 'third hand' to put up a big card.

(a)	♠ K 9 3	(b)	♥ J 5 4
♠ J 8 7 6	□	♥ A 9 3 2	□
♠ A 10 2		♥ Q 10 6	
♠ Q 5 4		♥ K 8 7	

In (a), when the ♠3 is led from dummy, play second hand low, the ♠2. This keeps your ♠A10 over dummy. 'Flying' with the ace is called 'beating air' because instead of capturing an honor with your ace, you get 'air' (small cards).

Similarly, in (b), when dummy leads low, play the ♥6. If you stick in the ♥10, it goes king, ace. Declarer can then finesse against partner's nine by running the eight.

2. Cover an honor with an honor

The 'second hand low' rule is not intended to apply to situations where an honor is led. In many situations, covering prevents a Chinese Finesse from succeeding. Generally, when a single honor is led, cover. If an honor is led from touching cards, wait to cover the last card in the sequence. Of course, all these rules presume that there is some potential benefit from covering.

(a)	♠ J 3 2	(b)	♥ J 10 3
♠ 10 9 4	□	♥ K 9 2	□
♠ Q 6 5		♥ Q 8 7 6	
♠ A K 8 7		♥ A 5 4	

In (a), when the ♠J is led, since there is only one honor in dummy, cover with the ♠Q. This promotes partner's ♠10. Declarer's lead of the ♠J is not a hopeless play: for example, since he has the ♠87, he can develop a third trick if East has ♠Q965.

In (b), when the ♥J is led, do not play the ♥Q. If you do, then declarer wins the ace and lobs toward the ♥10 for a second trick. When you duck the ♥J, partner wins the ♥K. If the ♥10 is led next, you do cover that because it is the last honor: declarer is held to one trick in the suit.

Here is a deal I played in the 2011 Gatlinburg Regional, having got to a seemingly hopeless 5♣:

♠ A J 10 8 7
 ♥ J 6 5 4
 ♦ A 3
 ♣ 5 3

 ♠ —
 ♥ K Q
 ♦ Q 9 8 5 4
 ♣ A Q 8 6 4 2

West led a heart to the ace and a heart came back to my king. Rather than give up, I tried leading the ♦Q, a Chinese finesse. Amazingly, West did not cover from K10x. Clubs were split 3-2 with the king onside, so I was able to finesse the trumps and ruff out the diamonds. Making +600!

I always say that covering an honor has a 'make a wish foundation', named after the charity of the same name. Either you are promoting something in your hand, or you are hoping to promote something in partner's hand. However, if partner can't have any length in the suit, you can't promote anything.

♠ 4 ♠ J 3 2 ♠ Q 7 6 5

 ♠ A K 10 9 8

Spades are trumps and you are East. The bidding has marked declarer with at least five spades, leaving West with a singleton or void, so covering the ♠J can't help. Indeed, it might be disastrous if partner has the stiff king. When you don't cover the ♠J, declarer might decide to play for the drop.

Here's a hand, dealt randomly by my computer, that illustrates that making the decision to play second hand low, or to cover an honor, is often not simple:

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

Dealer South
Both Vul.

West	North	East	South
pass	2NT*	pass	2♥
pass	4♥	all pass	3♠ ¹

1. Feature in spades.

You lead the ♣6, dummy plays low, and partner's ten is taken by the jack. How do you defend if declarer:

- a) leads the ♦9?
- b) leads the ♥Q?
- c) leads the ♣9?

- a) Declarer is marked with ♠AJ and reasonable hearts so he is surely missing the ♦K. Best to rise 'second hand high' to return a spade. Of course partner will need the ♠8, but just in case declarer might misguess, lead the ♠7. Rising is necessary because spades is a *half-frozen suit* (see p. 35) that only you can lead safely.
- b) It is instinctive to play low on the ♥Q, but on this deal it is right to cover. You want to take out a dummy entry and stick declarer in dummy so that he will be forced to lead another suit to you.
- c) This is tougher. If declarer has a stiff club you have a chance to beat him by rising ace and playing partner for a doubleton ♦K (switch to a low diamond). If declarer has two or three clubs, ducking is your best chance. Declarer's hand is

♠ A J 4 ♥ Q J 9 7 6 5 ♦ 9 3 ♣ 9 2

Only leading a club, and if you duck, leading back another low club from dummy, will make the hand for declarer. He can then ruff out your ace and draw trumps, ending in dummy.

3. Third hand high

This rule is designed to prevent fourth hand from winning a cheap trick.

	♠ 7 5 4	
♠ Q 10 6 2	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 20px; display: inline-block;"></div>	♠ K 9 3
	♠ A J 8	

When partner leads a low spade, you must play third hand high, the ♠K. Eventually you hope you can trap declarer's jack. If you play a lower card, this is called *finessing against partner*.

There are several common exceptions to this rule:

Partner leads an equivalent honor

<p>(a)</p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td></td> <td>♠ 5 4 3</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>♠ Q J 8 7</td> <td><div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 20px; display: inline-block;"></div></td> <td>♠ K 6 2</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>♠ A 10 9</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>		♠ 5 4 3		♠ Q J 8 7	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 20px; display: inline-block;"></div>	♠ K 6 2		♠ A 10 9		<p>(b)</p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td></td> <td>♥ 5 4 2</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>♥ Q J 10 9 3</td> <td><div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 20px; display: inline-block;"></div></td> <td>♥ K 7</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>♥ A 8 6</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>		♥ 5 4 2		♥ Q J 10 9 3	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 20px; display: inline-block;"></div>	♥ K 7		♥ A 8 6	
	♠ 5 4 3																		
♠ Q J 8 7	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 20px; display: inline-block;"></div>	♠ K 6 2																	
	♠ A 10 9																		
	♥ 5 4 2																		
♥ Q J 10 9 3	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 20px; display: inline-block;"></div>	♥ K 7																	
	♥ A 8 6																		

When partner leads the ♠Q in position (a), a card that is equal in rank to your king, play low (encouraging the lead). However, in (b), especially defending notrump, you should risk covering partner's ♥Q with the ♥K as an unblocking play.

Partner's honor is trapping an honor in dummy

	♠ K 4 3	
♠ J 10 9	<input type="text"/>	♠ A 8 7 6
	♠ Q 5 2	

When partner leads the ♠J and dummy plays low, you should also play low, saving your ace to trap the king.

You are finessing against dummy

If partner leads a small card and you have the king-jack over dummy's queen, you will of course stick in the jack if dummy plays low.

(a)	♠ Q 5 4	(b)	♥ Q 5 4
♠ J 9 3 2	<input type="text"/>	♠ K 10 6	♥ A J 3 2
	♠ A 8 7		♥ 9 8 7

In (a), when West leads the ♠2 and dummy plays the ♠4, stick in the ♠10 as a finesse against dummy. In position (b), the ♥10 wins the trick (against notrump, of course — partner will not have underled the ♥A against a suit contract). Even if declarer has the ♥AJ, it still saves a trick to stick in the ♥10. If declarer has the ♥J without the ♥A (again, possible only at notrump), it does no harm to stick in the ♥10.

4. Return partner's lead

This is primarily a rule for defending against notrump, where in most cases partner has led a long suit. Against suit contracts, partner's lead might be a singleton, in which case returning the lead for a ruff is normally a good idea. In other cases where it is apparent that there are no more tricks to take in the suit led, then you can consider a switch:

	♠ 4 3	
	♦ 8 7 6	
♠ Q led	<input type="text"/>	♠ A 8 7 6
		♦ J 10 9

If you are defending a heart contract and partner leads the ♠Q, you win the ♠A. Declarer is marked with the ♠K and dummy can trump further spade leads, so you switch to the ♦J, leading around into weakness and taking a defensive finesse. Partner is likely to have one or more diamond honors.

5. Choose between an active and a passive defense

It's not always necessary to get active on defense — indeed, getting active may be the only way for you to let declarer get home.

The concept of an *empty hand* versus a *full hand* is a useful one when you are trying to decide on an overall plan of defense. An *empty hand* is one in which declarer has no prospects for developing the tricks he needs; he can get there only with defensive help. A *full hand* is one in which declarer will get his tricks in due time if given the chance. This has relevance in determining defensive strategy (active or passive) but here let's just think about it in relation to whether or not to cash a stranded winner.

	♠ 5	
♠ A Q 9 6 4 2	<input type="text"/>	♠ 8 3
	♠ K J 10 7	

You lead the ♠6 to the eight and jack. Partner (when next in) returns the three to the ten and your queen. If the hand is *empty*, you must abandon the suit (or maybe duck the trick to retain a major tenace in the suit). If the hand is *full*, you might need to cash your trick and find the right switch.

You are probably familiar with the concept of a *frozen suit* — one that no one can afford to lead without helping the other side.

(a)	♠ K 10 9	(b)	♥ 10 4 3
♠ J 8 7 6	<input type="text"/>	♠ Q 3 2	♥ K 9 8 7
♠ A 5 4		♥ A J 6	♥ Q 5 2

In (a), if declarer leads spades he gets only two tricks. If either defender leads the suit, his partner's honor is captured and his own honor can be finessed.

In (b), if the defense leads hearts declarer gets two tricks. If declarer leads toward the ♥10, West plays second hand low and East captures the ♥10 with the ♥Q. If declarer leads low from dummy, East plays second hand low and West captures the ♥J with the ♥K. If dummy leads the ♥10, East covers an honor (single honor) with an honor and declarer still gets only one trick.

A suit that one player, but not his partner, can lead safely I have named a *half-frozen suit*. Invariably there is a tenace position that can be led *through* safely by one player, but not *into* by partner.

(a)	♠ A 6 5	(b)	♥ K J 3
♠ K 9 8 7	<input type="text"/>	♥ 10 4 2	<input type="text"/>
♠ Q 4 2	♠ J 10 3	♥ A 7 6	♥ Q 9 8 5

In (a), East, but not West, can lead the suit safely. When East leads the ♠J West will know that declarer has the ♠Q. In (b) West, but not East, can lead the suit safely. Note that in both cases the appropriate player is taking a defensive finesse. In the

second example, also, if West leads the two and declarer plays low from dummy, East must play West for the ten, not the ace.

A suit that can be picked up if you know the location of the cards I call a *guessing suit*.

(a)

♠ 9 8 7

♠ A 6 5

♠ K J 10 3

♠ Q 4 2

(b)

♥ 8 7 6

♥ Q 10 9 5

♥ K 4 3

♥ A J 2

East is unlikely to lead either of these suits. In (a) West should be warned by the presence of the ♠KJ10 in dummy that ‘breaking’ spades (i.e. leading a suit for the first time) might solve a guess for declarer. In (b), it is more appealing to try a defensive finesse, but on this layout it solves a guessing suit for declarer.

The problem for the defense is that it isn’t clear in many cases what type of suit they might be breaking because they can’t see declarer’s holding in the suit. So the question becomes, ‘Do I need to risk breaking suits, or can I defend passively?’ Breaking suits is called an ‘active’ defense. A lot of times it won’t be clear whether active or passive defense is called for, but sometimes it is obvious:

♠ 3 2

♥ A Q 8

♦ 9 7 6

♣ A Q J 10 8

♠ A 8 7 6 5

♥ 7 2

♦ Q 8 3

♣ 9 5 4

Dealer South
Neither Vul.

West	North	East	South
pass	2♣	pass	1♥
pass	4♥	all pass	2NT

Partner leads the ♠Q to your ace, and declarer plays the ♠4. What now?

Declarer has the ♠K, so no more tricks are available there. If a club finesse is needed it is onside. It is unlikely you can take a trump trick, so declarer will likely take 1 spade + 5 hearts + 5 clubs = 11 tricks. So even though diamonds is possibly a frozen suit (say declarer has ♦K10x), it doesn’t matter because declarer can pitch his diamond losers on the clubs.

Thus, you must try for three diamond tricks by leading the ♦Q. This is a pusher finesse, hoping partner has ♦AJ10(x). I should note that in many bridge problem books, that would be the end of it. Real-life deals are often more complicated. For example, it is just possible that declarer has this hand:

♠ K 4 ♥ J 9 5 4 3 ♦ A J 2 ♣ K 7 3

Now you still need to attack diamonds but you need to start by leading *low*. Partner wins the ♦10 and plays a diamond back to your queen. Declarer plays a heart to