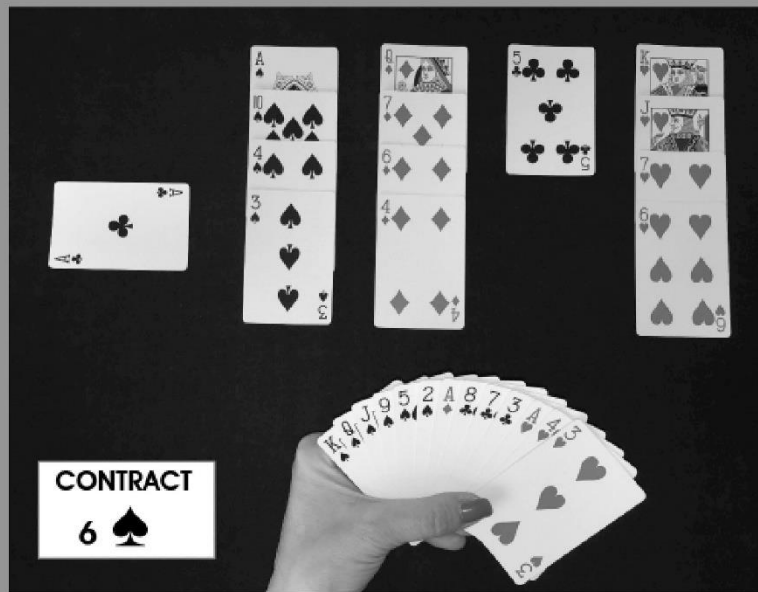


Larry Teaches



DECLARER PLAY At Suit Contracts

By Larry Cohen

25-Time National Bridge Champion, Best-Selling
Author and Popular Worldwide Lecturer

Editors: Patty Becker and Helen Nathan
Cover Credit: Dawn Ligon
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Introduction

Having taught “Intermediate Players” for more than 20 years, I’ve seen thousands of makeable contracts go down. I’m not talking about contracts needing a hexagonal squeeze or a strip and endplay. I’m talking about contracts that required no more than making and executing a basic plan.

That word “plan” had to be in the first paragraph of the book. Planning the play is essential to good declaring. All students have heard their teachers urge them to “make a plan.” *But, what is the plan?*

In this book, my goal is to clearly lay out “the plan.” A plan you can use for every deal you play. You must get in the habit of doing the same thing every single time dummy comes down. You need to develop a go-to routine. It has to work on not just your good days, but on the days when you are having trouble concentrating and staying focused.

You will be provided with a brief and simple trick-one checklist. Every deal in this book (and real life) involves approximately 30-60 seconds of planning at trick one. Don’t worry about slowing down the game. You will find quite the opposite. Spending a minute at trick one and then playing at a good pace for the rest of the deal is much better than playing quickly to trick one and then struggling at every trick thereafter.

Why a separate book on just suit contracts? Because the plan for notrump is completely different. At notrump, you count winners and worry about stoppers. In suit contracts, the thinking is more to the tune of “what tricks will I lose?” You don’t have to worry about stoppers because you have trump to keep the opponents from running a suit.

One sign of a competent declarer is to know if he has made the contract without having to look at the turned tricks. When play concludes, inexperienced players look at the orientation of the 13 turned tricks in front of them. They count through and determine if the contract was made or defeated. I want my readers to *know* if they have made their contract. If you are in 4♠ and lose ace-king-ace and later another trick, I want you to know you are down one.

I once had a student who disdained making a plan. She said, “Bridge is more fun and exciting if you don’t know what will happen.” If you agree with her, you’ve purchased the wrong book.

Planning the Play

Bridge teachers are required by law to instruct their students to **make a plan**. We instruct, and our students humor us by complying for the duration of the class. Soon after, they go back to their old habits. There is nothing more important than planning. Playing one trick at a time is a recipe for disaster. If you're worried about delaying the game by thinking, don't. The time will come back with interest, because you will have a better idea of where you are going for tricks 2-13.

So, the teacher said to make a plan. But how? It can be hard to engage the brain. Your wheels spin and instead of planning you are thinking about the temperature in the room, the scent of RHO's perfume, or why your partner put you in this silly contract. Focus. Focus! Studying bridge and reading books is great, but most important is to force yourself to concentrate. The time to use the most brainpower is at trick one to make a plan.

Here is a definitive and easy three-step method for making a plan in a suit contract:

- 1) Go through each suit! Count the tricks you will *lose*. Yes, lose. Not the tricks you will win. *You must do it from the point of view of the hand with the long trumps*—usually that will be your hand. Occasionally (like on a transfer auction), the long trumps will be in the dummy. If both hands have the same number of trumps, count from your hand's perspective.
- 2) If you have too many losers (for example, you are in 4♠ and see four losers), try to find a way to eliminate one (or more).
- 3) Decide whether your first move will be to draw trumps. Typically, when you have too many losers, you will have to postpone trump drawing. The opposite is also true. For example, they lead the ♥K against your 4♠. You count only three tricks you can lose. That indicates you should draw trumps and you won't go down.

For the rest of this chapter, we will focus on #1 above. We will go through each suit. Items #2 and then #3 will be the focus of the following chapters.

Going Through Each Suit

Here are some examples of counting the tricks you must lose. In all cases, assume that declarer is the long-trump hand. Use the cards in dummy and decide how many tricks declarer will lose.

	(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)
DUMMY	A4	AK3	A765	65	A74	Q42
DECLARER	J2	876	32	A102	9532	J53

In A, declarer's jack is useless; he must lose a trick in the suit.

In B, there is a trick to lose on the third round.

In C, you count only one loser—not worrying about dummy's 765.

In D, your ace is good, but the 10 and two are losers.

In E, you have to count three potential losers.

In F, if your side also had the 10, you could plan on knocking out the ace/king and losing only two tricks. But, as it is, you could lose three tricks.

Note: In the next chapter, we will be discussing what you can do about losers. As a sneak preview, note that in D, E and F, you have some hope for avoiding one of the losers. In D, the idea would be to trump the third round in dummy (if possible). In E, you can hope the six remaining cards split 3-3 (in which case you would lose only two tricks). You might even be able to trump the fourth round of the suit in dummy. In F, you can hope (from among several possibilities) the ace-king of the suit are in the same hand (or that the defense leads the suit).

Here are some combinations where we use the word "maybe":

	(G)	(H)	(I)	(J)	(K)	(L)
DUMMY	A43	KJ	AQ4	KQ2	AJ2	AJ2
DECLARER	QJ10	65	87	765	K73	K103

In G, assuming you can get to declarer's hand, you will lead the queen for a finesse. Think of this as "maybe one loser."

In H, again you want to lead from declarer's hand toward dummy. If the ace-queen are over the king-jack, you will lose two tricks. But, you can hope to lose only one trick (maybe with a good guess).

In I, you plan to take the finesse. So, you consider this as "maybe one." Remember that you don't deem dummy's (assuming dummy is the short-trump hand) third card in the suit to be relevant; you are looking at losers only from declarer's (the long trump) hand. Declarer will lose either one trick if the king is wrong or no tricks if the finesse wins.

In J, at least one trick has to be lost to the ace, but only one if LHO has the ace. Consider this to be one, maybe two losers, if RHO has the ace.

In K, there is only one way to finesse (low to the jack). If the finesse wins, no tricks will be lost, but think of it as "maybe one."

The position in L is better than in K; you can finesse either opponent for the queen. Later we will examine possible techniques in this situation, but you do have to figure that on a bad day you might lose a trick.

All of the above are side suits. Let's look at some trump suits and decide what you will lose:

	(M)	(N)	(O)	(P)	(Q)
DUMMY	A43	AQ54	7652	QJ2	765
DECLARER	KQ1065	K732	AK843	A10973	KQ842

Start your trump-suit planning by determining how many trumps are missing. In M, there are five missing. If the suit splits 3-2 you won't lose any tricks. Even if they are 4-1, you are okay unless LHO has four to the jack.

In N, there are five missing trumps and you hope they split 3-2. If they do, you won't lose any trump tricks.

In O, there are only four trumps missing. If they are 2-2 you won't lose any tricks. If they are 3-1 you will lose one trick and if they are 4-0, you will lose two tricks (and complain about your poor luck).

In P, you want to lead the queen from dummy, and on a good day you won't lose any trump tricks.

In Q, you want to lead from dummy toward your hand (possibly twice). If the ace is onside and the suit splits 3-2, you will lose only one trump trick. If they are 3-2 with the ace wrong, you will lose two trump tricks. If trumps split 4-1, you will lose at least two tricks.

Getting comfortable with counting up the losers (at trick one) will help you plan the play. Try yourself out with the following Quiz.

QUIZ

In each layout below, how many losers would you plan on (each suit shown is a "side suit"—not trump)? Assume you have entries to both hands. Assume the declarer is the "master hand"—the one with the long trumps.

	(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)
DUMMY	Q43	AQ3	5	8732	AK4	A42
DECLARER	K82	875	8732	5	6532	Q53

A) At least one, probably two. You can lead toward an honor and if it wins, duck the next round. You will get lucky if you start the suit from the hand whereby the next player has a singleton or doubleton ace. Against inexperienced defenders (who grab their aces prematurely), you might lose only one trick.

B) At least one, maybe two. You will take a finesse and depending on which opponent has the king, will lose one or two tricks. (Note: if you can afford a safety play, you can lay down the ace first and later lead up toward the queen—catering to a very unlikely singleton king offside.)

C) Four. Yes, you will hope to trump some of your little ones in the dummy, but for your initial planning, you have to count on four losers until you figure out how to get rid of some of them.

D) One. Make sure you understand the crucial difference between this and C.

E) One or two. Assuming trumps are drawn, you can play the ace, king and another. If the opposing cards are 3-3, you will lose only one trick. Alternatively,