

# Larry Teaches Opening Leads

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By Larry Cohen

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# INTRODUCTION

The Opening Lead is the worst part of bridge. Way too much depends on it. On too many deals, if a heart is led, the contract is laydown, but a diamond lead would have set it. The Opening Lead is *too* important.

Opening leads often boil down to just a guess. I think it would be a better game if you could see the dummy *before* making your opening lead. Really. It would eliminate some of the guesswork and increase the amount of skill and analysis required.

Nobody can make the right lead on every deal. In fact, some of the most famous cheating scandals in the history of the game involved the conveyance of opening-lead assistance. If an expert could make the right lead on every deal, he would win every tournament he entered. But, he would also come under scrutiny for surely doing something nefarious.

There are some rather lengthy books on opening leads, but most of my readers prefer the short-and-sweet version. I think there is enough material here to cover at least 95% of this important topic.

In this book, I can't get you to make the right lead on every deal. Nobody can. My goal is to have you make the correct lead when the information is there to do so. Certain auctions require specific opening leads. Certain suit combinations require a specific card in that suit to be led. Sometimes, sadly, it is just a guess.

At times, I will make a distinction between leads against suit contracts or leads against notrump. If I don't specify, then assume the advice is good for either.

If I can increase your percentage of selecting the correct lead from 40% to 70%, then I have accomplished my goal in writing this book.



# THE BEST OPENING LEADS

We'll start out easy. There are two situations where it is pretty clear which suit to lead. They are:

- 1) Sequences (three honors or more in a row)
- 2) Partner's Suit

## 1) SEQUENCES

### THREE-CARD SEQUENCES

Who wouldn't want to lead a suit headed by AKQ, KQJ or QJ10? They are very safe leads and also are attacking—the best of all worlds. Even suits headed by J109 and 1098 are attractive.

In such situations we lead the top of the sequence—yes, even from AKQ. We will discuss that situation later in more detail when we talk about leading suits headed by the ace-king.

Why the highest? What difference does it make since they are all equal? It is to help your partner. For example, consider that you are East in each situation below:

	<b>NORTH</b>	
	♠ K87	
<b>WEST</b>		<b>EAST</b>
♠ J (lead)		♠ 654

Partner leads the ♠J, won by declarer's ace. What do you know? Declarer has the ace-queen. If you get on lead, you know there is no hope for a defensive spade trick.

	<b>NORTH</b>	
	♠ K87	
<b>WEST</b>		<b>EAST</b>
♠ Q (lead)		♠ 654

Partner leads the ♠Q won by declarer's ace. What do you know? This time, declarer has only the ace and if you get on lead, you might consider

leading another spade to set up a defensive trick in case declarer started, with, say ♠A92.

	<b>NORTH</b>	
	♠ A87	
<b>WEST</b>		<b>EAST</b>
♠ J (lead)		♠ 654

Partner leads the ♠J, won by declarer's ace. What do you know? Declarer has the king-queen. If you get on lead, you know there is no hope for a defensive spade trick.

	<b>NORTH</b>	
	♠ A87	
<b>WEST</b>		<b>EAST</b>
♠ K (lead)		♠ 654

Partner leads the ♠K won by declarer's ace. What do you know? This time, partner has the ♠Q (and likely the ♠J), so you want to continue spades when you get in.

## TWO-CARD SEQUENCES

If you were to look up the definition of "sequence" it wouldn't be clear if the requirements are at least 3 cards in a row or 2 in a row. Not all bridge theorists consider only two in a row to be a "sequence," but by the pure definition of the word, I believe it is. However, a 2-card sequence is not as attractive a lead option as the safer 3-card sequence. Suppose you lead the ♠Q from ♠QJ6 against 4♥. This lead has many ways to win. If partner has the king or ten, the partnership combined has a 3-card "sequence" (though not in the same hand), so it will be effective. Even if partner has the ace, it is likely to be a good lead. But, on your bad days, the layout is:

	<b>NORTH</b>	
	♠ A104	
<b>WEST</b>		<b>EAST</b>
♠ QJ6		♠ 9832
	<b>SOUTH</b>	
	♠ K75	

Declarer, maybe with a smile on his face, will win the ♠K and then finesse dummy's ♠10 to take all 3 spade tricks. Without the spade lead, he'd be entitled to make only the ♠A and ♠K.

Similarly, the king from KQ5 is good if partner has the ace or jack, but disastrous in this layout: