

INTRODUCTION TO SIGNALS


The Attitude Signal

The general idea of the attitude signal is simple.

When partner leads and you are not trying to win the trick, a high card says you like the suit and can stand a continuation. A low card is discouraging and suggests a shift.

Board 1 ♠ J 9 6 4
 South Deals ♥ A 7
 None Vul ♦ K Q J 8
 ♣ J 10 6

♠ 8 7
 ♥ Q 9 6 2
 ♦ 7 5 2
 ♣ A K 4 3



West	North	East	South
			1 ♠
Pass	3 ♠	Pass	4 ♠
All pass			


Lead: ♣ A

Your ♣ A (or the king, if that's your agreement) wins. How do you continue?

Why not get partner's input? If he signals encouragement with a high card, you probably ought to continue.

Board 1 - A ♠ J 9 6 4
 South Deals ♥ A 7
 None Vul ♦ K Q J 8
 ♣ J 10 6

♠ 8 7
 ♥ Q 9 6 2
 ♦ 7 5 2
 ♣ A K 4 3



♠ A
 ♥ 10 8 5 4 3
 ♦ 10 9 4 3
 ♣ Q 8 5


♠ K Q 10 5 3 2
 ♥ K J
 ♦ A 6
 ♣ 9 7 2

If this were the complete hand, partner would play the ♣ 8. You could tell this was high and would continue with the king and another for down 1. Any other lead lets Declarer pitch a club loser on a diamond.

But suppose this were the layout.

Board 1 - B ♠ J 9 6 4
 South Deals ♥ A 7
 None Vul ♦ K Q J 8
 ♣ J 10 6

♠ 8 7
 ♥ Q 9 6 2
 ♦ 7 5 2
 ♣ A K 4 3



♠ 3
 ♥ K 10 8 4 3
 ♦ A 9 4
 ♣ 9 8 7 5

♠ A K Q 10 5 2
 ♥ J 5
 ♦ 10 6 3
 ♣ Q 2

Here partner would play the ♣ 5, which you can tell is the lowest. This does not tell you what you should lead. It just says partner doesn't like clubs. [Reread this paragraph after you study Suit Preference in Board 3. The ♣ 5 is NOT suit preference.] Of course, it's pretty clear there is no hope in diamonds. If partner has the ♦ A, it isn't going anywhere. So your best hope is hearts.

This switch lets you collect your heart trick before Declarer can pitch his heart loser on either the ♣ J or a diamond.

One other note. While this hand does not illustrate it, **your first discard** in a suit – no matter which side is leading – is usually an attitude signal toward the suit discarded. A high discard says you like the suit. Discarding a low card in a suit implies you don't like it. For example, if you discard a high club when hearts are lead, you think partner ought to lead clubs.


The source for all hands in this lesson is *Partnership Defense in Bridge*, by Kit Woolsey, pp 5-10. [This is a great book on defense but aimed at experienced players.] The commentary however is mine, so don't blame Mr. Woolsey if you disagree with the analysis.

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The Count Signal

The count signal is probably the easiest to use, but you likely won't use it much until your bridge skills evolve to the point where you regularly try to determine Declarer's distribution. (You should definitely strive to do this.) The mechanics are simple -- **when declarer or dummy leads**, a high card followed by a low card shows an even number and low/high shows odd. Memory Aid: "High" and "Even" have four letters; "Low" and "Odd" have three.

Board 2 ♠ A 4
 East Deals ♥ 8 5 4
 N-S Vul ♦ K Q J 10 5
 ♣ 9 7 2

	♠ K 8 7 3 ♥ J 3 ♦ A 9 2 ♣ 8 5 4 3
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<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		Pass	1 N
Pass	3 N	All pass	

<i>Trick</i>	<i>Lead</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>4th</i>
1. W	♠ J	4	<u>K</u>	5

Dummy now leads the ♦ K. You hold up as you know declarer started with at least two diamonds. What do you then play on the ♦ Q continuation?

If Declarer has three diamonds, you need to hold up another round to kill the last two diamonds in dummy. This might be the entire hand.

Board 2 - A ♠ A 4
 East Deals ♥ 8 5 4
 N-S Vul ♦ K Q J 10 5
 ♣ 9 7 2

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

♠ Q 6 5
 ♥ A K 7 2
 ♦ 7 6 4
 ♣ A K 10

You want to win the third round of diamonds.

Declarer wins only two diamonds and is limited to two tricks in each suit – down 1. But the entire board might look like 2-B.

Board 2 - B ♠ A 4
 East Deals ♥ 8 5 4
 N-S Vul ♦ K Q J 10 5
 ♣ 9 7 2

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

♠ Q 6 5
 ♥ A K 7 2
 ♦ 6 4
 ♣ K Q J 10

Holding up twice lets Declarer steal the contract. She switches to clubs and takes three tricks in that suit and two in each of the others. If you had taken the second diamond trick, Declarer is limited to two tricks in each suit.

How do you know what to do?

Just like you "talk" to partner during the bidding, you communicate with partner in the play as well. You use the order in which you play the cards as your "language".

In 2-A, you note that partner played the ♦ 8 on the first diamond trick. That is obviously high, so you "count" on partner for two diamonds rather than three. You then know Declarer has three and you therefore must hold up twice. (Yes, the ♦ 8 could be a singleton, but then South has four and it hardly matters when you take your ace.)

Similarly in 2-B, partner plays the ♦ 3 on the king. You cleverly calculate this must be partner's lowest, and playing up the line means he has three. Since Declarer must then have two, you know it is safe – and necessary – to take the second diamond.

Bridge is so much easier when you let your partner help you with the tough decisions!

INTRODUCTION TO SIGNALS

The Suit Preference Signal

Board 3
 South Deals ♠ K J 9 4
 ♥ K Q 3
 E-W Vul ♦ Q 10 3 2
 ♣ K 5

♠ 8 3 2
 ♥ 9
 ♦ J 8 5 4
 ♣ 10 7 4 3 2



West	North	East	South
Pass	3 ♠ ¹	Pass	1 ♠
All pass			4 ♠

1. Old fashioned Game Forcing

While leads of singletons are much abused, this one is near perfect. You have no other decent lead and partner is bound to have lots of points. A first round control in hearts or 1st or 2nd in spades is not too much to wish for.

Trick	Lead	2nd	3rd	4th
1. W	♥ 9	K	<u>A</u>	8

What a nice partner, winning the ♥ A. She leads a heart back and you ruff. Now what? You'd like another ruff and clubs seems less risky than diamonds. Not so good, however, if this is the rest of the board.

Board 3 - A
 South Deals ♠ K J 9 4
 ♥ K Q 3
 Both Vul ♦ Q 10 3 2
 ♣ K 5

♠ 8 3 2
 ♥ 9
 ♦ J 8 5 4
 ♣ 10 7 4 3 2



♠ A Q 10 7 6
 ♥ J 8 6
 ♦ K 7
 ♣ A Q 8

Clearly a diamond return beats the contract. But the layout might just as easily have been:

Board 3 - B
 South Deals ♠ K J 9 4
 ♥ K Q 3
 E-W Vul ♦ Q 10 3 2
 ♣ K 5

♠ 8 3 2
 ♥ 9
 ♦ J 8 5 4
 ♣ 10 7 4 3 2



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

How does West know what to lead? He lets partner tell him, using the Suit Preference Signal. **When giving partner a ruff**, a high card – the ♥ 10 in 3-A – says lead back the higher suit, diamonds. (Trumps and the suit being ruffed are obviously excluded from consideration).. A low card – the ♥ 2 in 3-B – asks for the lower suit, in this hand clubs. There are other suit preference situations but giving a ruff is the basic one.

Signals have definite priorities -

If a signal can be ATTITUDE, it is.

Next is COUNT. If that makes no sense...

The signal is SUIT PREFERENCE.

Thus when partner leads, your signal is primarily attitude toward the suit lead. When you discard, your signal is attitude toward the suit discarded.

When the opponents lead, attitude makes no sense. (Why work on the same suit where Declarer is looking for tricks?) Thus the signal is now count.

If neither attitude nor count make sense, the signal would be suit preference. In Board 3, West certainly doesn't care what partner thinks about hearts or how many she has. When giving partner a ruff, the signal is suit preference.

CAUTION: Not every card played is a signal. Remember, the rules say partner has to play something.