

## Standard leads or Paul's leads?

Defence is very difficult, you will not always get it right.

You can find or buy books on standard leading systems and, to be honest, it doesn't really matter what you play as long as your partnership understands what it is playing.

I am going to present three different leading systems:

### 1. British standard

Leads are 4th from a good suit and 2nd from a poor suit, top of an honour sequence. The leads are the same in suits and no trump and only differ in partner's suit when leading from three small.

A lot of Scottish players play the lead of the ace or queen for an attitude signal and the lead of the king for count. Most misplay this system as they never lead the queen from KQx and I prefer all honour leads to require an attitude signal.

### 2. American standard

Leads are low from an odd suit and 3rd from an even suit (known as 3rd and 5th) **against a suit contract**, top of an honour sequence. The leads against no trump are 4th from a good suit and 2nd from a poor suit.

### 3. Paul's system

I play a Polish method (although not the most popular Polish style). It is very different as you lead small from a non-honour doubleton and high from bad suits. Leads are low from an odd suit and 3rd from an even suit (known as 3rd and 5th) and the honour leads are encoded.

The principle behind the leads is that a low card is encouraging: it is either from an honour or looking for a ruff.

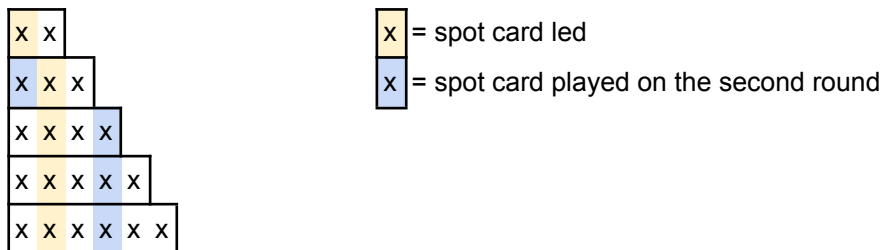
Encoded honour leads are a religious issue within bridge: you either love them or hate them, because they give information to declarer as well as your partner. We've been playing these methods for more than a decade and are happy with them.

You do not need to use any of these suggestions but can combine your favourite method of leading from length with your favourite method of honour leads.

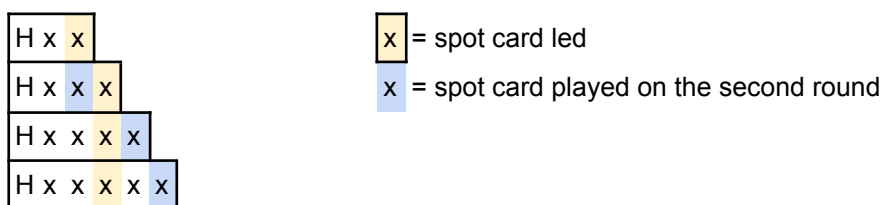
Partnership understanding is key. Just discussing this topic and watching your partner's signals will improve your game.

## Standard UK leads

### Leads from small cards only (second best from bad)



### Leads from an honour (fourth best)



### Leads from honour sequences (top of honour sequence)

H H	AK KQ QJ J10 109	Wanting a ruff, then lead the lower honour
H H H	AKQ KQJ QJ10 J109	
H H h	AKJ KQ10 QJ9	
H h h	AQJ KJ10 K109 Q109	Do not underlead an ace against a suit contract

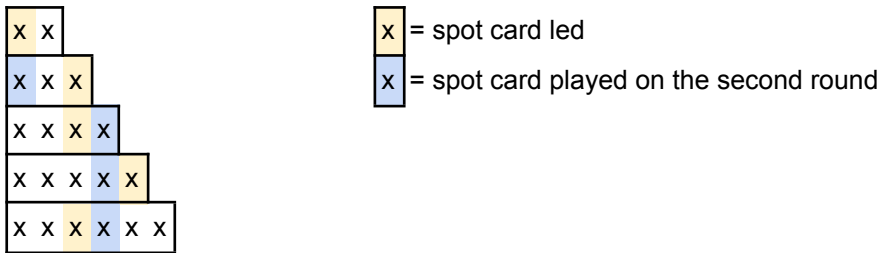
### WBF System Card description

Lead	Vs. Suit	Vs. NT
Ace	AKx(+) Ax(+) AKQ(+) AKJ AKJ10(+) [AKx(+)]	AKx(+) Ax(+) AK AKJ AKJ10(+) AKQx [AKx(+)]
King	AK <sup>1</sup> KQx(+) KQJ(+) KQ10(+)	KQ KQx(+) KQ10(+) KQJx(+)
Queen	KQ <sup>1</sup> QJ10(+) QJx(+)	QJ QJx(+) KQ109(+) AQJx(+)
Jack	QJ <sup>1</sup> J109 J10x(+) KJ10x(+)	J10 J109 J10x(+) (A/K)J10x
10	J10 <sup>1</sup> 109x(+) 109x(+) (K/Q)109(+)	109x(+) (A/K/Q)109x
9	9x	9x
Hi-X	Sx xSx(+)	Sx xSx(+)
Lo-X	HxS HxxS(+)	HxS HxxS(+)

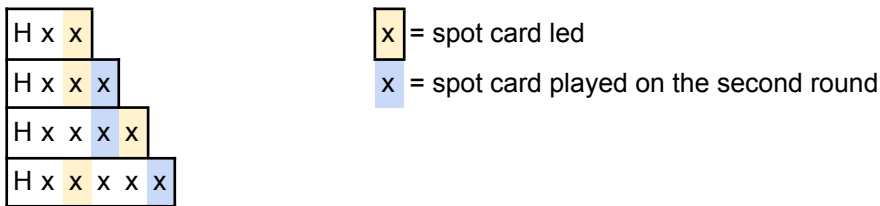
<sup>1</sup>If seeking ruff, otherwise top

# Standard American leads

## Leads from small cards only (third and low)



## Leads from an honour (3rd and low against suits, 4th against no trump)



## Leads from honour sequences (top of honour sequence)

H H	AK KQ QJ J10 109	Wanting a ruff, then lead the lower honour
H H H	AKQ KQJ QJ10 J109	
H H h	AKJ KQ10 QJ9	
H h h	AQJ KJ10 K109 Q109	Do not underlead an ace against a suit contract

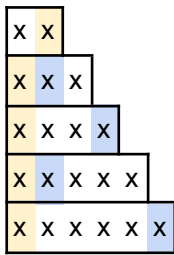
## WBF System Card description

Lead	Vs. Suit	Vs. NT
Ace	AKx(+) Ax(+) AKQ(+) AKJ AKJ10(+) [AKx(+)]	AKx(+) Ax(+) AK AKJ AKJ10(+) AKQx [AKx(+)]
King	AK <sup>1</sup> KQx(+) KQJ(+) KQ10(+)	KQ KQx(+) KQ10(+) KQJx(+)
Queen	KQ <sup>1</sup> QJ10(+) QJx(+)	QJ QJx(+) KQ109(+) AQJx(+)
Jack	QJ <sup>1</sup> J109 J10x(+) KJ10x(+)	J10 J109 J10x(+) (A/K)J10x
10	J10 <sup>1</sup> 109x(+) 109x(+) (K/Q)109(+)	109x(+) (A/K/Q)109x
9	9x	9x
Hi-X	Sx	Sx xSx(+)
Lo-X	xxS xxSx xxxxS HxS HxxS(+)	HxS HxxS(+)

<sup>1</sup>If seeking ruff, otherwise top

## Paul's leads

### Leads from small cards only (low from doubleton, top from bad)



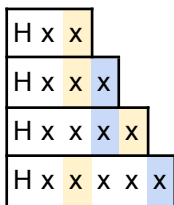
x = spot card led  
 x = spot card played on the second round

If the highest card may cost a trick, lead second  
 We do this when the top card is a 10

Meaning of spot leads:

- low = active lead – from an honour or a doubleton for ruffing
- high = passive lead – from poor spot cards (at least three)

### Leads from an honour (3rd and 5th, 4th from six)



x = spot card led  
 x = spot card played on the second round

### Leads from honour sequences (encoded)

H H	AK KQ QJ J10 109	Wanting a ruff, then lead the lower honour
H H H	AKQ KQJ QJ10 J109	
H H h	AKJ KQ10 QJ9	
H h h	AQJ KJ10 K109 Q109	Do not underlead an ace against a suit contract

### WBF System Card description

Lead	Vs. Suit	Vs. NT
Ace	AKx(+) Ax(+) AKQ(+)	AKx(+) Ax(+) AK
King	AK <sup>1</sup> AKJ AKJ10(+) KQx(+) KQJ(+) [AKx(+)]	KQ AKJ AKJ10(+) KQx(+) AKQx [AKx(+)]
Queen	KQ <sup>1</sup> KQ10(+) QJ10(+) QJx(+)	QJ KQ10(+) KQJx(+) QJx(+)
Jack	QJ <sup>1</sup> J109 J10x(+) AQJx(+) QJ10(+) QJ9(+)	J10 J109 J10x(+) AQJx(+) QJ10(+) QJ9(+)
10	J10 <sup>1</sup> 109x(+) (A/K)J10x(+) 109x(+) [10xx(+)]	109x(+) (A/K)J10x [10xx(+)]
9	109 (A/K/Q)109x 9xx(+)	109 (A/K/Q)109x 9xx(+)
Hi-X	Sxx Sxxx Sxxxx 10Sx(+)	Sxx Sxxx Sxxxx 10Sx(+)
Lo-X	xS HxS HxSx HxxxS HxxSxx	xS HxS HxSx HxxxS HxxSxx

<sup>1</sup>If seeking ruff, otherwise top

## Subsequent leads in the hand

As you defend a hand, you pick up additional information with every trick. At some point you will need to switch to a new suit, how do you lead?

In principle, you should play ATTITUDE leads. So a low card says that you like the suit and a high card says that you do not like the suit. I think this means that you should lead a LOW card if you have a doubleton and are looking for a ruff, so from three (or more) small lead the HIGHEST card to deny interest. This will be a change for most of you, but you want to distinguish between two and three small cards.

In terms of honour leads, I recommend you use the same leading system that you use for the initial lead *if you are leading through declarer*. If you are leading through the dummy, then normally it will be an attitude lead.

## Returning partner's suit

Whether you are turning your partner's suit at trick two or later in the hand, you will normally wish to give some idea of your count and attitude with the card you return. Unfortunately you can only return one card and you cannot give two signals (it is not approved to give a big thumbs up when you return the suit).

On any individual hand there may be a good reason for not obeying the following rules: perhaps you need to unblock the suit; perhaps you cannot afford to play the card you should because it will cost a trick. Bridge sense always comes above the rules.

Holding a doubleton initially, you have no choice which card to play. Even though you will now have a singleton, play it in tempo rather than quickly.

With a three-card holding originally, return the HIGHER of the remaining cards. For example, if your partner leads a low spade and you hold ♠A63, win the ace and return the ♠6.

With a longer holding, I was always taught to return fourth best. For example, if your partner leads a low spade and you hold ♠A643, win the ace and return the ♠3. Similarly with ♠A6432, return the ♠3. The expert community is divided on the best return holding five originally: many prefer the return of the ♠2 as an attitude signal. The answer is to have an agreement and stick to it. In essence, whatever will make it easiest for your partner.

## General signalling rules

Make sure your partnership has an understanding.

It is important to appreciate that signals provide information and are not commands. You are trying to help your partner make the right decision. If you only have two cards with which to signal, then you have to give a positive or negative signal when you want to say, "I don't care": try to make the least bad signal.

Never signal with a card that may be important on the hand. One of Scotland's weaker international players is always signalling with 10s that proves cost tricks later in the hand!

Make the clearest signal you can.

If you do not want your partner to switch, then show encouragement on their lead. This might be the least bad option!

Remember that your partner may have limited options when signalling: perhaps it is too costly to play the card that they'd like to play. Not every card is a signal!

It is very popular for Scottish players to show their count religiously on declarer's lead. I suggest it would be better for you to play the following:

- Show attitude when partner leads
- Show suit preference when declarer leads

Only show count on the declarer's lead when the dummy has a long suit without an entry, so your partner needs to know how often to duck

## Signals

There are three main styles:

1. Standard (*HELO*) - high encourages or shows an even number
2. Reverse (*udca*) - low encourages or shows an even number
3. Other (*uda*) - low encourages or shows an odd number

To be honest it makes little difference what you play, it is how you play that matters. I've been playing reverse signals for decades and am comfortable with that. Most junior pairs, and many top pairs, play (3) with reverse attitude and standard count. Most club players, if they play anything, play standard.

I do believe you should signal with the clearest possible card, without using an important card in the context of a hand. If you hold ♥8764, then you can afford the ♥8 or ♥4 for your signal and you should not be playing any other card.

Note that the odd/even signalling style, where an odd card is encouraging and an even card is suit preference, is not permitted in the tournaments you will play; however it is a permitted discard system.

*This is because people tend to hesitate when they do not have a card with the parity for the signal they wish to give and this creates too much unauthorised information: for example, hesitating when you wish to encourage but only have even cards. For discarding though, people often think on the first discard so it is permitted.*

### **Trump signals**

I was originally taught that you played high-low in trumps if you were looking for a ruff, but this comes up infrequently and I now play suit preference signals in their trump suit: so a high trump suggests a higher suit and a low trump suggests a lower suit.

### **Suit preference signals**

The standard method of suit preference signals is that a HIGH card suggests the higher of possible suits and a LOW card suggests the lower of possible suits.

For example, if the choice is between hearts and clubs, a HIGH spade suggests hearts and a LOW spade suggests clubs.

Some partnerships play different methods.

### **Discards**

There are hundreds of discard systems and it matters little which you play.

I recommend that you play reverse attitude for the first discard. Remember that you can always discourage in another suit rather than encourage in the suit you need.