



Bridge Cardplay: An Easy Guide

FINESSING

David Bird & Marc Smith

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www.masterpointpress.com
www.bridgeblogging.com
www.teachbridge.com
www.ebooksbridge.com

ISBN: 978-1-77140-333-7

Cover Design: Olena S. Sullivan/New Mediatrix

1 2 3 4 5 6 24 23 22 21

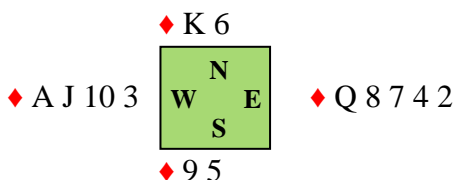
Contents

1. Leading towards honor cards.....	4
Quiz.....	9
2. Repeating a finesse.....	12
Quiz.....	17
3. Leading the right card for a finesse.....	20
Quiz.....	25
4. Double finesses.....	28
Quiz.....	33
5. Other types of finesse.....	36
Quiz.....	41
6. Deals with multiple finesses.....	44
Quiz.....	49

1.

Leading towards honor cards

An important early lesson to learn is that it's generally best to lead **towards** honors that you hope will win a trick for you. Look at the diamond position below. You're the declarer, sitting South with the ♦95. North is the dummy and East/West are the defenders. (This will be true for all the diagrams in this book, and in nearly all bridge books.)



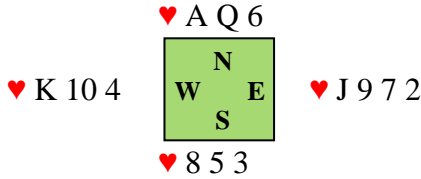
How would you play if you wanted to make a trick with the ♦K?

You lead a low card, the ♦5, **towards the high card** in the dummy. Let's say first that West follows with the ♦3. You play dummy's ♦K and this wins the trick.

Why did it win? Because the only higher card (the ♦♦A) was held by West, rather than East. In other words, you were lucky on this occasion. Next time you are in this situation, East may take the ♦K with the ♦A and you will not make a diamond trick.

You can see how hopeless it would be if you made the first lead from the North hand, away from the king. West would win the first round with the ♦10 and the second round with the ♦A. It is absolutely essential, to give yourself a chance, that you lead towards the high card. This is an example of the play known as a **finesse**. You lead towards a card, hoping that the player sitting over that card cannot beat it.

Next, we will see the most famous finessing position – one that you may have been shown on the first day that you were acquainted with the game:



How would you play this heart suit to give yourself a chance of two tricks?

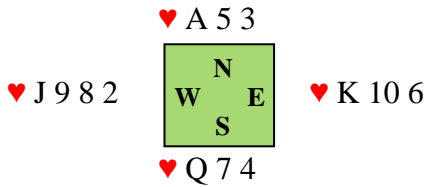
You are certain to win one trick with the ♥A, and you would like to win a second trick with the ♥Q. You can do this (surprise, surprise) by leading the ♥3 **towards** the ♥Q. West follows with the ♥4. You play the ♥Q from dummy and it wins the trick. Why was that? Because the ♥K, the only missing card that could beat the queen, was held by West. As on the previous page, when you were leading towards a king, you were lucky! You took a ‘winning finesse’.

Suppose the cards lay differently:



You lead the ♥3 to the ♥Q and East wins with the ♥K. There was nothing you could do about it, but you ‘took a losing finesse’. There is always an element of luck involved when you take a finesse. Some rate the mixture of skill with an element of luck as one of the game’s big attractions.

Let’s see a slightly different position, where you still hold the ace and queen.

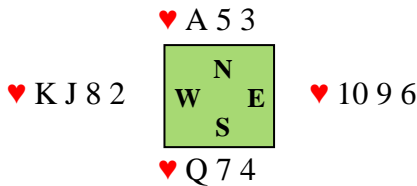


To have a chance of making a second heart trick with the ♥Q, you will need to lead **towards** it. If you happen to be in the South hand, you can cross to dummy by leading the ♥4 to the ♥A. You then lead the ♥3. If East decides to play his ♥K, you play the ♥7 from your hand. Your ♥Q will then make a trick on the third round.

If instead East plays the ♥10, you will play your ♥Q. Luck is with you and West cannot beat this card. You have made a second trick in the suit.

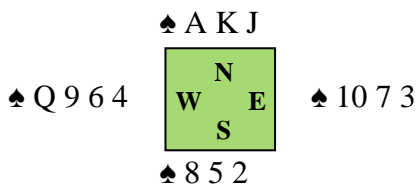
Again, you can see how hopeless it would be to lead the ♥Q instead. When the cards lay as in the diagram, East would win with the ♥K. You would end with just one trick from the ♥A.

Suppose instead that West held the missing king:



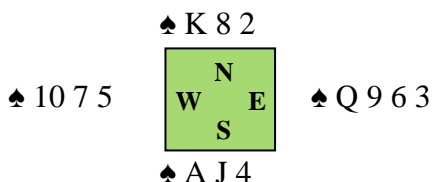
If you make the correct play – low to the ace and then lead towards the queen, you will be unlucky. To lead the ♥Q from your hand would be a hopeless prospect, a beginner’s mistake. West would cover with the ♥K and you would still finish with just one trick, from the ♥A.

The same principle applies when you are hoping to make an extra trick with a jack. Let’s see some examples:



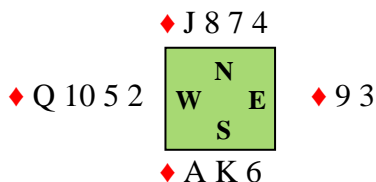
You lead a low card **towards** the jack. Because you are lucky and West holds the ♠Q, dummy's jack will win. Your finesse will be successful. As you see, leading the suit from North hand (ace, king and then the jack) would give you only two tricks instead of three.

This situation is just the same:



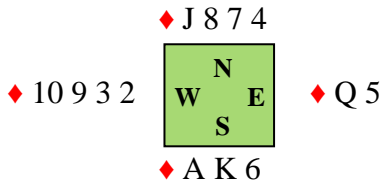
You lead the ♠4 to the king and then play the ♠2 to the jack. The queen is favorably placed for you, once again, and you make three tricks.

Let's see something a bit different:



You hope to make a trick with dummy's ♦J. First, you will play the ♦AK. On the third round, you lead the ♦6 **towards** the jack. Because West holds the ♦Q, the jack will score a trick (whether or not West plays the ♦Q on the third round).

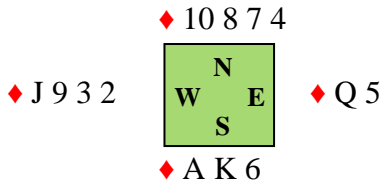
Why was it a good idea to play the ♦AK before leading to the ♦J? Because the defenders' cards might lie differently:



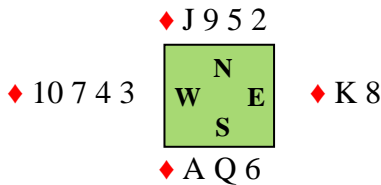
East's ♦Q falls on the second round of the suit and your ♦J is then good for a third trick.

Note also that if the defenders' diamonds are divided 3-3, you will make three tricks whichever defender holds the ♦Q. The thirteenth diamond, in dummy, will become good.

There are so many possibilities. Suppose dummy's cards are a little bit weaker:



Now the ♦A and ♦K drop the ♦Q and you make a third trick by leading towards the ♦10.



Here you lead the ♦2 from dummy and finesse the ♦Q successfully. You play the ♦A next and the ♦K appears from East. How lucky can you be? You finesse dummy's ♦9 on the third round and make four diamond tricks!