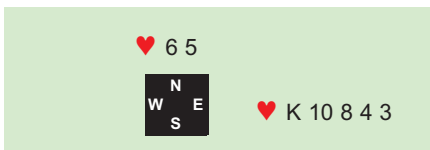


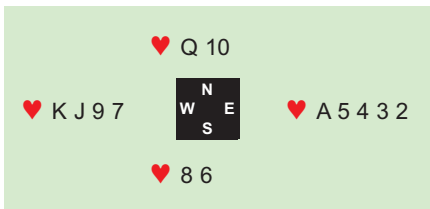
# Discards: Sending a Message



Last time we talked about how to discard without giving tricks away. This time we will address the perhaps more interesting topic of how to send a signal to partner as you do so. If you have played in a club or a tournament, you may be aware that there are a variety of discard systems in use. To simplify the discussion for this month, we will consider the original method, known variously as attitude, natural or rubber bridge discards. The methodology is similar to following to partner's lead: a high card encourages the suit and a low card discourages it.

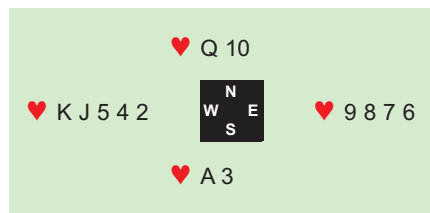


Suppose you are East here (though the same system applies to both defenders) and that declarer has led some other suit of which you are void. If you want to encourage hearts, you discard the eight or, if you think you can afford it, the ten. If you wish to discourage hearts (perhaps you have an ace-queen over dummy's king in another suit), you throw the three.



High and low are relative terms. From a holding of A-5-4-3-2, the play of the five is a high card. Partner should work this out by noticing that the two, three and four are all missing. So, unless declarer holds all three of those cards, your five is high.

**To encourage, discard the highest spot card that you can afford.**

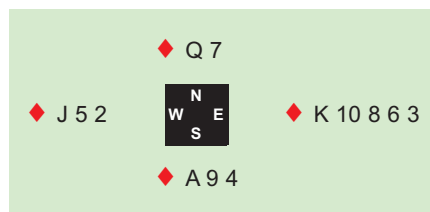


Similarly, the discard of the six from 9-8-7-6 is a low and hence discouraging card. This signal is slightly harder to read. Partner has to work out that, with the nine, eight and seven all missing, you would have spared a higher card to encourage.

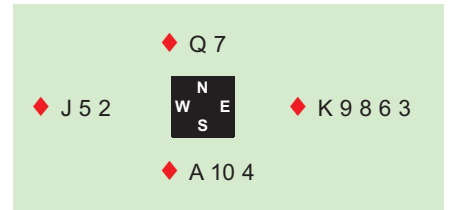
**When you want to discourage, discard your lowest card.**



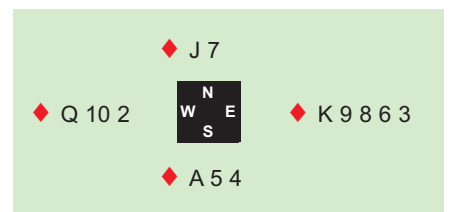
The next step is deciding how strong a holding you need to justify signalling encouragement. With the king-jack over dummy's queen, a diamond switch is likely to be productive and normally you will discard an encouraging nine.



Now you cannot be so sure that a diamond switch will get you anywhere because declarer might have the ace and jack. Even so, it is still normally right to ask for this suit, which you do by discarding the eight. If, as in the diagram, partner has the jack, a switch through dummy will set up a trick (or two if dummy is short of trumps). Note that you cannot spare the ten. With the ten gone, the suit would be frozen (a 'frozen' suit is one that neither side can lead without setting up a trick for the other).



Having weakened your holding further, it is risky to ask for diamonds. If, as shown, partner has the jack without the ten, it is better for your side not to open up the suit. If dummy plays low, you will have to put up the king to stop the ten from scoring and then the queen will be good on the second round. Unfortunately, it would also be risky to discourage diamonds by discarding the three. Partner might have the ace or both the jack and ten and want to know whether you have the king. If you can spare a card in some other suit, it might be better to discard a card from that other suit. Partner may be able to work out that your failure to discard a diamond means you have the sort of holding with which you do not know whether you want the suit led.



When dummy has a jack-high suit or no picture cards in it at all, you need less strength yourself for it to be reasonably safe to ask for the suit. Many holdings that include either the ace or the king will suffice for it to be a sensible suit for partner to lead. If declarer has the ace-queen over your king, the finesse was right anyway. Discarding the nine is normally fine with this East holding.

*Continued on page 30* ►

## POTTAGE ON DEFENCE continued from page 29

	♦ J 7										
♦ A 10 2	<table style="margin: auto; text-align: center;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♦ Q 9 8 6 3
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♦ K 5 4										

Holding the queen you cannot be sure whether it is a good idea to have the suit led. If partner has the king, a switch to the suit will set up a winner for later. When, as shown above, declarer has the king, your side does best to leave the suit alone.

*Let's look  
at a few full deals*

The time has come to consider four suits instead of one, and why not be West for a change.

	♠ A K 3										
	♥ K 7										
	♦ A Q J 9 6 5										
	♣ 9 4										
♠ J 8 2	<table style="margin: auto; text-align: center;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ Q J 9 8 4											
♦ 4											
♣ A J 10 5											

North opens 1♦, South responds 1NT and North raises to 3NT.

You lead the queen of hearts, which the king wins. Declarer comes to hand with the queen of spades and leads the ten of diamonds. This holds the trick and a second round of diamonds follows. What do you discard?

You have a good heart suit, it is true, but your lead of the queen already showed that. In any case, you know (though partner may not) that declarer has the ace left and so can still stop the suit. With all those winners in dummy, the only hope is that your partner can get in with the king of diamonds and that your side runs four club tricks. You must make a choice. Do you discard a low heart to discourage hearts or do you discard a high club to encourage clubs?

Since you do not expect to make any more heart tricks, it is clear that you can spare any heart. Can you say the same about the jack of clubs? If partner has

four clubs to the king then you can spare a club. If, however, partner has only three clubs, you must hang on to all your clubs. You cannot possibly take four club tricks if neither you nor your partner still has four clubs, and South's failure to respond 1♥ or 1♠ makes it likely that this is the case. Accordingly, you should discard the four of hearts.

This is the full deal:

	♠ A K 3										
	♥ K 7										
	♦ A Q J 9 6 5										
	♣ 9 4										
♠ J 8 2	<table style="margin: auto; text-align: center;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ 10 7 6 4
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ Q J 9 8 4		♥ 10 6 3									
♦ 4		♦ K 8 3									
♣ A J 10 5		♣ K 8 2									
	♠ Q 9 5										
	♥ A 5 2										
	♦ 10 7 2										
	♣ Q 7 6 3										

You will win the two of clubs switch with the ten and continue with the five to partner's king. Another club lead through South's queen leaves you with the two winners you need to set the contract.

	♠ 9 7 5 2										
	♥ K J 6										
	♦ K 8										
	♣ K J 10 2										
	♠ Q										
	♥ A Q 9 7										
	♦ A 10 5 4										
	♣ 9 8 6 4										
<table style="margin: auto; text-align: center;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S			
	N										
W		E									
	S										

This time you are back as East. You do not get much chance in the bidding because South opens 1♠ and North raises to 3♠. South then advances to 4♠.

Partner leads the seven of clubs, which the king wins, as you play the four and South the queen. On the first round of trumps, South's ace captures your queen. Then partner plays the king on the second round. What do you discard?

This time you might theoretically want any of three suits. If your four of clubs was an encouraging card from A-4-3, it could be right for partner to play a second club to score a ruff on the third round.

On your actual hand, you want a heart and, if you had the ace-queen of diamonds, you would want a diamond. Since the club ruff possibility is unlikely (with outside entries you would have no need to duck the first club), you could try to ask for a heart indirectly by discouraging diamonds. It is clearer, however, since you have the chance, to ask for hearts directly. You do this by discarding the nine of hearts.

The full deal is:

	♠ 9 7 5 2										
	♥ K J 6										
	♦ K 8										
	♣ K J 10 2										
♠ K 6 4	<table style="margin: auto; text-align: center;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ Q
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ 8 4 3 2		♥ A Q 9 7									
♦ 9 7 6 2		♦ A 10 5 4									
♣ 7 5		♣ 9 8 6 4									
	♠ A J 10 8 3										
	♥ 10 5										
	♦ Q J 3										
	♣ A Q 3										

Sometimes you need to think about which suit to ask for. Try the East cards again here:

	♠ J 10 5										
	♥ J 6										
	♦ A J 8 4										
	♣ K 9 6 2										
	♠ Q 9										
	♥ 7										
	♦ K 10 7 6 5										
	♣ A J 8 5 4										
<table style="margin: auto; text-align: center;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S			
	N										
W		E									
	S										

Partner, West, opens 3♥. Two passes follow and after South reopens with 3♠, North raises to 4♠ to end the bidding.

Partner leads the king of hearts, which loses to the ace. Declarer cashes the ace of trumps, to which all follow low, and continues with a second round to partner's king. What do you discard on the queen of hearts, which comes next?

The king of diamonds sitting over the ace is well placed, as is your club holding with the king in dummy. Which suit do you want more?

Well, if South has the queen of clubs a club switch may not do you much good. However, a diamond switch should work well whoever holds the queen.

*Continued on page 31* ►

## POTTAGE ON DEFENCE continued from page 30

True, declarer may hold a singleton diamond, but a singleton club is equally possible. Therefore, you want to signal for diamonds. You probably want to keep the ten of diamonds, so you could throw the diamond seven. Alternatively, since partner knows you cannot ruff the third round of hearts (you would not have dropped the queen of spades if you could help it), you might achieve the same aim by discarding the four of clubs.

**The rule is: make an encouraging discard if you can afford to do so – this is generally clearer than discouraging another suit.**

Rather than risk that partner takes the club four as a suggestion for a passive heart exit, discard the seven of diamonds. This is the full deal:

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

If partner plays a third round of hearts or switches to the ten of clubs, you will not defeat the contract against competent opposition. Rather than take the diamond finesse, declarer will play on clubs, forcing you to win the second round. You will then face the unpleasant choice of setting up the nine of clubs (or the king of clubs if the nine has gone) or leading into the diamond tenace.

### Discarding honours

You may recall that earlier I touched on the possibility of discarding the jack from A-J-10-x. The discard of any honour promises the honour next below and, for the discard to be safe, invariably other strength in the suit.

**The rule is that you discard the card you would have led, the top card from a sequence and the highest touching card from an interior sequence.**

♦ K 5 2	N W E S	♦ Q J 10 8 6
♦ 9 7 ♦ A 4 3		

As East, you might discard the queen here to show the sequence. In this case, the discard does not specifically encourage (or discourage) the suit. West will feel inclined to lead the suit when holding the king, as illustrated, but not when holding the ace. Even with neither of these cards, it may be reassuring to know that you have the suit wrapped up and therefore that it will be safe to discard from it.

♦ A Q J 10 6	N W E S	♦ 8 5 2
♦ 9 7 ♦ K 4 3		

When you are the opening leader and discard the queen, you are more likely to have A-Q-J than Q-J-10 for the simple reason that with the latter holding you might have led the suit initially.

### A last example

For our final example, please return to the East seat.

Partner deals and opens 3♥. Two passes follow and South's reopening bid of 3♠ ends the auction. Partner leads the ace

of hearts and continues with the king. What do you discard?

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

To encourage a club switch you might discard the 'highest' of your spot cards, the three. Alas, even the most observant of partners may fail to see the significance of this. Since you can be sure (unless South has a singleton ace) that a club switch will defeat the contract, it is worth investing in a more conspicuous discard to ensure that the message gets across. Discard the king of clubs.

This is the full deal:

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

You can guess what would happen if you do not so dramatically draw attention to the club suit.

Unaware that you would be ruffing with a natural trump trick, partner surely continues with a third round of hearts. As the cards lie, and as you might well have predicted, this allows declarer to discard a club and make the contract. ■

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