



## Ask Jerry

Well-known teacher and player **Jerry Helms** answers your bridge questions.  
Send your questions to [askjerry@jerryhelms.com](mailto:askjerry@jerryhelms.com).

**Dear Jerry:** What is an Equal Honor Signal?

—A. V., Toronto, ON

**Dear A. V.:** The term ‘Equal Honor’ was introduced by Eddie Kantar. Suppose you hold the ♦K–Q–J. All three of your honors are ‘equal’ in the sense that you could use any one of them to drive out the opponent’s ♦A if your side doesn’t hold it. In theory, it won’t matter whether you lead the ♦K, ♦Q, or ♦J. Any one of them will do the job.

Of course, there are guidelines about equal honors, especially when you are on defense. If you are on lead, you would lead the ♦K from a holding headed by the ♦K–Q–J, the top of touching—or equal—cards. If partner leads a low diamond and there are low diamonds in the dummy, you would play the ♦J, only as high as necessary.

The ‘equal honors’ can be divided between the partnership. Consider this layout:


WEST		EAST
♦ Q J 5 3		♦ K 10 6 2

West’s ♦Q–J are equal honors, but East’s ♦K is an equal honor from the partnership perspective since it has the same power as West’s ♦Q or ♦J. In fact, East’s ♦10 is also an equal honor since it has the same effect as West’s ♦Q or ♦J.

Since the defenders’ honors are often split between the partnership, it is useful for the defenders to be able to exchange information about holding equal honors. You’ve already seen one way. When you lead the ♦K, partner will expect you to hold the ♦Q and not the ♦A because you lead the top of equals.

Now consider this situation. You are defending against a notrump contract and partner leads the ♦Q.


Three low diamonds appear in dummy, and you hold the ♦K–7–2:

NORTH (DUMMY)		
	♦ 6 4 3	
WEST		EAST (YOU)
♦ Q		♦ K 7 2

You expect partner to hold the ♦J, and likely the ♦10 or ♦9 as well. Partner is presumably leading from a solid sequence headed by the ♦Q–J–10 or a broken sequence headed by the ♦Q–J–9.

You want to let partner know about the equal honor, the ♦K, so you make an ‘equal honor signal’ by playing the ♦7. This is really just your standard attitude signal. You are sending the message: “I like what you’ve led. Keep leading the suit. I have some help for you—an equal honor.”

Now let’s suppose partner again leads the ♦Q and this is the layout:


NORTH (DUMMY)		
	♦ 6 4 3	
WEST		EAST (YOU)
♦ Q		♦ 10 7 2

Since you hold the ♦10, you expect partner has led from a suit headed by the ♦Q–J–9, a broken sequence.

Unless you have some reason for partner to switch to a different suit, you would again play the ♦7, your ‘equal honor signal.’ You want to tell partner that it is safe to continue leading the suit.

If you didn’t make an encouraging signal and declarer won the first trick with the ♦K, partner would be afraid to lead the suit again upon gaining the lead. Partner would assume that declarer still held the ♦A–10.


Let’s change the layout again. You are again defending against a notrump contract. This time, partner leads the ♦K, and this is the layout you see when dummy hits:

NORTH (DUMMY)		
	♦ 6 4 3	
WEST		EAST (YOU)
♦ K		♦ 7 5 2

This time, you are going to make a discouraging signal by playing the ♦2. You are sending the message that you don’t have an equal honor, “Don’t lead the suit again on my account.”

Does that mean that partner should stop leading the suit if the ♦K wins the trick? Certainly not. If partner’s diamonds are headed by the ♦K–Q–J, partner is going to continue leading the suit no matter what you say.

However, suppose this is the actual layout of the diamond suit:

NORTH (DUMMY)		
	♦ 6 4 3	
WEST		EAST (YOU)
♦ K Q 10 9		♦ 7 5 2
SOUTH (DECLARER)		
♦ A J 8		

Declarer has made a nice play by holding up the ♦A on the first trick. If your partner continues leading the suit, declarer will get a trick with both the ♦A and ♦J. The technical name for declarer’s play is a Bath Coup.

However, thanks to the ‘equal honor signal’ your partner won’t be fooled. Your play of the ♦2 denies an equal honor, so partner knows exactly who holds the ♦A and ♦J.

So whether you call it an equal honor signal or just an attitude signal, make sure you use it. —JH ♦

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