



Ask Jerry

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Dear Jerry,

A simple question: When should you lead trump?

Pamela P.

Hi, Pamela,

A simple answer: The late Lew Mathe, a noted bridge expert who had a tendency to be hard on partners and sometimes opponents, reportedly once said, "Never lead a trump unless it's

right!"

There are several situations that make trump leads either somewhat mandatory or at least advisable.

- If you make a takeout double of a one-level suit opening bid on your right, and partner passes, converting your intended takeout into a penalty action, don't think ... lead a trump!

Your partner passed the takeout double because of length and strength in opener's suit. By leading a trump, you minimize declarer's ability to use his low trumps on the high cards you hold in the outside suits.

- Defending a grand slam, unless you have a clear-cut, constructive, top-of-sequence holding, lead a trump.

Your goal defending a grand slam is to take a trick – just one. Holding K-Q-(x), Q-J-10 or J-10-9-x in any suit, lead it. Do not lead from a broken holding or a collection of low cards that might potentially finesse your partner. When the opponents bid a grand, they may not have all 13 top tricks but are rarely worried about a trump loser. By leading a trump, you're saying to declarer, "What's yours is yours, but can you take the rest?"

- With length and strength in right-hand opponent's first-bid suit that does not become trump, tend to lead a trump.

Say you hold:

♠A Q 10 9 5 ♥9 3 2 ♦Q J 10 ♣8 6,
and hear the following auction:

<i>RHO</i>	<i>You</i>	<i>LHO</i>	<i>Partner</i>
1♠	Pass	1NT	Pass
2♥	All Pass		

- Try to "think and then lead" as opposed to leading and then thinking. Dummy rates to have at most two spades but three or more hearts. How do you know this? Because the auction tells you that LHO clearly prefers hearts to spades. With your spades over declarer's, lead a trump to prevent your spade winners from being ruffed in dummy. Avoid reflexively leading from the diamond sequence.

- Holding virtually all of the high-card strength your side possesses, and lacking a top-of-sequence option, tend to lead a trump.

For example, you hold:

♠K J 7 2 ♥8 7 4 ♦A Q 6 ♣Q J 8.

The auction is this:

<i>RHO</i>	<i>You</i>	<i>LHO</i>	<i>Partner</i>
1♥	Pass	2♥	Pass
3♥	Pass	4♥	All Pass

Using your superior math skills, add the 13 HCP you can see to the probable 25 HCP announced by the opponents. Partner is broke, so go passive and lead a trump.

I never met Lew Mathe, but I believe he would approve of the above. ■