



## Ask Jerry

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Dear Jerry,

**My new duplicate partner is insistent that we move on from using standard discards. He thinks Lavinthal or odd-even discards are both superior. What do you think?**

**Bert**

Hi Bert,

Before I offer an opinion, let's make sure we are on the same page. The options you are considering involve attitude signals and have nothing to do with count. A discard is defined as the first card played when you cannot follow suit.

Playing standard, the discard of a higher than necessary card signals encouragement in that suit. The discard of a low card discourages that suit. These signals can be used throughout the play of the hand.

Lavinthal discards, introduced to the world by Hy Lavinthal in the 1930s, are a method to reflect suit preference. On your first discard, the suit discarded excludes that suit from consideration. The size of the discard expresses interest in one of the two remaining suits (the only ones left in your hand!).

Example:

A spade is led, and you discard the ♣2. You don't like clubs, but you do like the lower ranking of the two possibilities, in this case, diamonds, which rank lower than hearts. If instead, you had discarded the ♥9, on a spade, you don't like hearts, but you do like the higher of the two possibilities, dia-

monds, rather than clubs.

Odd-even signals are also about your first discard only. If you discard any odd card, irrespective of its size, you show interest in that suit. If you discard an even card, you deny interest in that suit, and the size of your even card expresses interest in one of the other two suits. A high even discard asks for the higher of the remaining options, while the lower asks for the lower option. This is somewhat similar to Lavinthal.

Both Lavinthal and odd-even have undeniable merit, in some situations. For one, you don't have to discard a potential length winner to signal encouragement. Also, the first discard using either of these is a clear, unambiguous message when you want it to be. Despite this, I am not a fan of either. My principal objections:

1. It is very difficult to play these signals and be 100% ethical. At the table, when I encounter a pair using odd-even signals, and they choose their first discard in tempo, I and their partner both know it means exactly what they want. A massive problem arises when the discarder is dealt either all odd, or all even spot cards, and none of these convey the message he wishes to send. The slight tempo break by even the most ethical player is often obvious. Translation: I don't really mean the signal the card says I am sending.

2. At times, you may wish to make a neutral discard. It's your turn, and you don't have any real preference between the higher- or lower-ranking suits. Perhaps I just know from my holding, I don't want a club shift. I just want partner to do what's right based on his holding and analysis. Playing either Lavinthal or odd-even, your first discard is never neutral, it always means something. Actually, I have heard people explain, "6's are neutral." I guess these players always find a 6 in their hand somewhere!

For newer players, I advocate first learning to use standard discards, and incorporating both count and attitude signals. I think the bigger problem for many players is not the signaling method they choose, but learning to understand which signal they should be sending – attitude, count or suit preference.

For the record, I am a big believer in the merits of upside-down count and attitude (UDCA). Despite this, I still think new players should start with standard and then move forward. ■

*An error in a bidding diagram appeared in February's Ask Jerry column. The last example hand shown should have opened 1♣.*