

THE DOG THAT DIDN'T BARK (NEGATIVE INFERENCES from Paul Foster)
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Negative inferences are harder to spot in bridge because they require paying attention to what did NOT happen at the table. It is helpful to ask yourself some of the following questions:

- 1) **What did my partner NOT bid?** For example, when Declarer opens 1D and Responder jumps to 3NT and you have a very bad hand, the odds are that your partner has some stuff. Partner did NOT overcall, so it is likely that partner does not have length or strength in hearts or spades, but could have reasonable clubs (and not want to go to 2 level) or diamonds behind the opening bidder.
- 2) **Did partner fail to double an artificial bid?** (Opportunities abound to double transfer bids, Stayman, cue bids, answers to ask-asking, etc.) When partner fails to make such a lead directing double, you should look elsewhere on defense.
- 3) **Did partner pass up an opportunity to make a negative, responsive, or support double?** If so, inferences about partner's distribution are available!
- 4) **Why didn't partner lead my suit?** There are three primary reasons: (a) partner is void; (b) partner has the Ace and knows that I do NOT guarantee the King; (c) partner has an "automatic" lead in another suit such as Ace from AK or King from KQJ.
- 5) **Why didn't partner lead his suit?** The usual answer is that partner has a vulnerable holding (or the Ace without the King) in his/her suit. Other possibilities are that partner has led a singleton, has an "automatic lead" in another suit, or felt the auction demanded the lead of a particular suit (e.g., trumps to cut down on cross-ruff).
- 6) **Why didn't partner lead the unbid suit?** Often, partner has the Ace without the King in that suit, or an "automatic" lead in a different suit. Perhaps the auction demanded the lead of a particular suit, or partner has led a singleton
- 7) **Why aren't opponents playing no trumps instead of a suit contract?** The usual answer is that one suit is wide open and you should be leading that suit.
- 8) **Why isn't Declarer pulling trumps right away?** The answers are many. Sometimes Declarer wants to ruff something in the short trump hand or is hoping for a cross ruff. In those cases, you should lead trump at every opportunity. Sometimes Declarer needs to establish a long suit before pulling trumps for timing reasons, or needs to develop a quick discard. Sometimes Declarer has horrible trumps and hopes you will break the suit for him. Analyze!
- 9) **Why isn't Declarer running a long suit in no trump?** If it is long and strong (e.g., AQJ10x), assume Declarer has the missing honor if he goes after another suit. If it is long and weak, (e.g., J8542, Declarer may have a poor holding in that suit (e.g., xx). Sometimes Declarer does not have time to develop his longest suit (because your side will get too many tricks before he can establish his long suit). Sometimes Declarer cannot run his long suit because that would squeeze his hand. If the long suit in dummy has no outside entries and Declarer is short in that suit, it can sometimes be right to play that suit and force Declarer to run it or abandon it!
- 10) **Why is Declarer avoiding a suit?** Usually Declarer avoids suits that are weaker. Sometimes Declarer is hoping to end play you so that you have to break that suit for him.
- 11) **Why didn't Declarer make an "obvious" play?** For example, your partner leads a suit against no trump, and Declarer has Qx in dummy and plays LOW from dummy. You are looking at K10xx in the suit. (or A10xx in the suit). The normal play would be Queen from the Dummy. If Declarer has Ace, Queen is a "now or never" chance to win the trick. If Declarer has Kxx, playing the queen wins when partner has led from the Ace and then avoidance play keeps you from leading through Declarer's King. Conclusion: Play your high honor. Declarer does NOT have the Ace or King! If you play 10, Declarer might win a trick with Jx opposite Qx!!