

SUIT PREFERENCE SIGNALS by Maritha Pottenger rev. 4/2020

Suit Preference signals are given when **attitude and count are irrelevant**. The suit in which you signal is ignored, and the trump suit is ignored—leaving two other suits. A **high card asks partner to switch to the higher-ranking** of those 2 suits. A **low card asks partner to switch to the lower-ranking** of those 2 suits. **There are eleven situations in which you and your partner should be absolutely clear that you are playing a card that is suit preference: ten in suit contracts (some of which also apply to no trump contracts); and one specifically in no trump contracts.**

Suit Preference Signals When Defending Against a Trump Suit Contract

- 1) When you are giving partner a ruff.** When partner leads a known singleton and you take the Ace, the size of the card you return for partner to ruff is suit preference. A high card asks partner to try a higher-ranking suit for you to get in and give another ruff. A low card asks partner to try a lower-ranking suit.
- 2) When partner leads a known singleton** and you do not have the Ace, your card is suit preference for where your entry (or possible entry) is for partner (if s/he has trump control) to try to get back to you for a ruff. (If, for example, partner led a heart that was clearly a singleton from the bidding and Dummy—with spades being trump—and you do not have the Ace of hearts but do have the Ace of diamonds, play a high heart.
- 3) When partner's lead has set up a bunch of potential discards in dummy** (e.g., partner leads Ace and dummy comes down with KQJx) in a suit that you have supported (so you have at least 3 cards from which to choose), your card is suit preference. If partner leads an Ace and Dummy has Kxx(x), your card is attitude (high if you have the queen) NOT suit preference. If partner leads an Ace (promising King as well) and dummy has Qxx(x), your card should be COUNT (so partner knows whether his/her King will cash or be ruffed), NOT suit preference.
- 4) When you have indicated 6 or more cards in the suit that your partner leads and partner has supported so only one trick is likely, your card is suit preference** (because you have so many cards from which to choose). Suppose your partner leads the Ace of a suit in which you made a Weak Two bid. If you play the King, you promise a solid suit (KQJxxx) and ask for a continuation. If you play a very high card that is not the King (queen, jack, ten or 9 usually), it asks partner to switch to the higher-ranking suit. If you play a middle spot (usually something like 8,7,6, or 5), you ask for a continuation (you cannot spare the King). If you play your lowest spot card, it asks for a shift to the lower-ranking suit. Partner must watch the spot cards! Sometimes the 6 is your lowest spot card in a 6-card suit!
- 5) When dummy has a singleton, your card is attitude first, NOT suit preference.** There will be times when you want partner to continue that suit. Perhaps if Dummy ruffs, you can promote a trump trick for yourself, e.g., Dummy holds AKQ of trumps and you have Jxx. Perhaps you cannot stand any shift from partner. **Playing a relatively high spot card asks partner to continue the suit (even though dummy has a singleton). When you want partner to shift to a suit, you simply play a LOW card (attitude), asking for a shift.** Partner is supposed to be able to work out (looking at dummy & his/her hand) which suit is the “obvious shift” and lead that one. If, however, you want partner to shift to a suit to which s/he would normally never shift (e.g., AKQJxx in dummy), you must play an exceptionally high card, usually an honor. An honor asks partner to shift to the suit that is unusual (generally because you will be trumping that seemingly impregnable suit)--the “alarm clock” signal. **When Dummy has a singleton and LOTS of decent trumps, so trump promotion is NOT an option, then your card is suit preference.**
- 6) When you have a known long suit, discards are suit preference.** When you have announced length (with a Weak Two or Weak three bid, for example), it is usually better to discard from your long suit—if you are sure you won't be able to win tricks with your suit. You give Declarer less information. However, discarding a high card from your long suit can show a little something in a higher side suit. Discarding a very low card can show something in a lower side suit. [In NT, if you are **sure** you are never getting in to cash your suit, discarding a middle card shows either a card in a middle side suit or NOTHING in the side suits.]

- 7) **Also, the order in which you cash your honors (usually against suits) is suit preference.** Ace/King/Queen shows higher side suit card. Queen/King/Ace shows lower side suit card. King/Queen/Ace OR King/Ace/Queen shows middle OR zero side suit cards.
- 8) When Declarer or Dummy initiates a suit, your first card is COUNT (unless you are winning the trick). Playing standard count where lowest card shows an odd number of cards, **your SECOND card can be suit preference.** So, from 842, playing the 2 followed by 4 would show something in lower side suit (or nothing). Playing the 2 followed by the 8 would show something in a higher side suit. As in Trump Suit Preference (request separate handout if you want it), the higher signals **definitely** show something. The lower signals **MAY** show something lower—or just nothing! This holds true in both trump suits and no trump.
- 9) When discarding in a suit, your first discard is attitude about that suit. Your second discard (in that same suit) is current count. **A third discard is suit preference.** [Again, if you are known to have a long suit with some “stuff” in it, your FIRST discard in that suit can be suit preference.]
- 10) **ANY TIME your attitude AND count are known or irrelevant—your card is suit preference.** As an example, your partner leads Queen (promising the Jack) and Dummy hits with the dreaded K109x. Declarer calls for a low card—so s/he clearly has the Ace. Your attitude is known—you have NO HELP for partner. Your count is irrelevant. If Declarer has another card with which to finesse partner on the second round, it won't help partner to know that. The **NEED TO KNOW information for partner is suit preference**—in which side suit do you have a card(s)! So, your card is **suit preference immediately.**

When dummy has a doubleton and your partner leads the Ace (promising King as well), your first card is attitude. Your **second** card is *suit preference*—unless your first signal showed a doubleton and a desire to overruff Dummy—or to force Dummy to ruff in situations when Dummy has xx of trumps and you hold Kxx behind Dummy.

Suit Preference Signal When Defending Against No Trump

Often, Declarer will duck (with only one or two stoppers in a suit), to exhaust one opponent of that suit. In such cases, **the individual with the long suit can make a suit preference play in selecting the specific card to play when knocking out Declarer's last stopper.** The card selected will tell partner where the player with the long suit has an entry (or a possible entry). There are 3 other suits, so the choices are: low card—lowest outstanding suit; middle card—middle outstanding suit (or nothing); high card—higher outstanding suit. Example: You lead King from KQJ82 in spades against a NT auction where Declarer denied a 4-card major. Dummy hits with two small spades. Declarer ducks the suit twice. You now know that Declarer's Ace is bare. The 2 of spades would tell partner to try to get to you in clubs. The Jack of spades would tell partner to try to get to you in hearts and the 8 of spades (middle) would suggest diamonds (or possibly nothing). If you have nothing, you can also give suit preference for a suit that is strong in Dummy to warn your partner that you have nothing. OR, you can try lying about the suit that is weakest in Dummy, hoping to “talk” Declarer out of taking a finesse in that suit. (However, you may also be fooling partner.) Choices, choices....

Many times, Dummy will have a suit that makes it clear you cannot have any entry there (e.g., AQ10x), so you can signal with either high or low for the TWO remaining choices of suits. In such cases, a middling card definitely shows NOTHING else of worth in your hand.