



Trump Management

The problem of when to lead trump (or when NOT to lead trump) is one of the more difficult for beginning players to solve correctly.

In a suit contract, declarer needs to:

ESTABLISH THE TRUMP SUIT AT THE RIGHT TIME.

More mistakes occur from failing to lead trumps at the right time (or by leading trumps at the wrong time) than most all other forms of poor declarer play.

Low trump cards are established (made high trumps) in exactly the same ways that regular suit cards are established at no-trump: through attrition of higher cards in that suit. If you hold the high trumps to start with, you can lead them until the Opponents have no more. If you do not hold the high trumps originally but do have the greater trump length, you can still lead trumps in order to exhaust the Opponents' trump cards, so that your remaining trump cards become high.

To lead trumps (or to consider leading trumps until it is clear that the lead should be postponed) might be the most important decision in suit play. Before calling for dummy's first card, declarer should identify IF trump should be drawn immediately.

About 50% of the time, trump should be drawn ASAP.

Leading trumps should be postponed ONLY when the reason for doing so is clear.

Generally speaking, unless some good reason exists for not leading them, trumps should always be led as soon as possible by the Declarer.

Even though drawing the last trump may not seem advantageous, nevertheless a good purpose is served in establishing definite control cards. If all but one of the Opponents' trumps have been eliminated *and* this last lone trump is a small card, it is usually still advisable to get rid of it as quickly as possible – even if you have to use two of your own trumps (one from your hand and one from dummy) to do so. Usually, nothing is gained by waiting. Plus, if you wait, the Opponent may find an opportunity to use his small trump to some advantage. But if the one outstanding trump is higher than all of yours, there is usually no good reason for you to waste two of your trumps in disposing of it.

Example:

	♦ 7 5 2	
♦ Q T 9		♦ J 8
	♦ A K 6 4 3	

Diamonds are trump; you lead your Ace and King, dropping all the adverse trumps except the Queen, which remains in West's hand (and is high – it must win a trick no matter what you do).

In order to eliminate that Queen you must waste one of the trumps left in your hand and also the last trump in Dummy. Yet you do not eliminate a possible adverse trick; you merely sacrifice two of your trumps unnecessarily to an outstanding trump (which can never be worth more or less than 1 trick).

Under these circumstances, it is usually better to lead other suits and allow West to win the Queen when he can (hopefully by trumping a side suit trick). As always there is an exception (diagram in lecture).

The situation is different when there are two outstanding trumps, both high. Here there is always a chance that they will be divided between the Opponents and therefore fall together *if another round of trump is played*. If they fall on the same trick, the

opponents win only 1 trick, but if they are allowed to remain outstanding, they might win separate tricks. Consider the following suit layouts:

♥ Q T 4	♥ 9 2	♥ J 7 6	♥ Q J 3	♥ 5	♥ T 9 6
	♥ A K 8 5 3		♥ A K 8 7 4 2		

The proper play in both instances is to lead the Ace and King of hearts followed by a small heart on the third round. If the adverse trump divide 3-3, as in these examples, this play assures you of losing a single trump trick. Even if the adverse trumps are not divided 3-3, nothing is lost by this mode of play (diagram in lecture).

A common occurrence which necessitates postponement of the trump lead is a finessing situation which must be taken advantage of while entries are still available (diagram in lecture).

Another time to delay leading trump is when you need to ruff one or more side suit cards. In that case, you need to exhaust the short suit in dummy *before* drawing trumps, so you can ruff the remaining losers (diagram in lecture).

Yet another time to delay leading trump is when the opponents can make you exhaust all your trumps before you establish your side suit winners. This is known as "losing control" or "tapping declarer." If the opponents are able to exhaust you of all of your trumps, they can force you to effectively finish playing the hand as a no trump contract, where the opponents can cash the cards in their long side suits because you are no longer able to trump them. Although this can occur on any hand, the most common time this occurs is when you have 4 trump in each hand (diagram in lecture).

There are times when you should not lead trumps at the very first chance, though it is still true that you should lead them as soon as the time is right. Remember: only put off leading trumps when you have a good and sufficient reason for doing so – when you

gain some advantage to compensate for the risk you run by letting an Opponent hold onto outstanding trump longer than you can help.