

THE FIVE LINES OF DEFENSE

and how to use them

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The lines of defense are:

1. **The Force**

This is the most powerful line of defense, causing declarer to lose control of the hand. The goal is to gain control of declarer's own trump suit.

Conditions for forcing declarer:

- (a) Any time you or partner has four or more trumps,
- (b) Four-three trump contracts,
- (c) Any time the long hand can be forced early or
- (d) Declarer has a two-suiter.

The purpose of the forcing game is to make it impossible for declarer to draw trump and cash his side winners.

Lead the partnerships most powerful suit even if it means leading from holdings such as AQT, KJT or AJT. Take the risk because it often pays off and the rewards are great.

2. **Go Active**

Go active when tricks can disappear.

Conditions for Going Active

- (a) anytime tricks can go away.
- (b) declarer's side suit is breaking,
- (c) aggressive bidding (slam interest) and
- (d) long running suits (gambling 3NT).

An active defense usually means you have everything to gain and nothing to lose. Take high risks because any tricks you may have had are going to go away anyway.

North	East	South	West
	P	2 ♠	P
4 ♠.			

North

♠	A Q x x
♥	x
♦	A J x
♣	K Q J T x

East

♠	x x x
♥	A K x x x
♦	K x x
♣	x x

Partner leads a heart to your King. What is your next play? Lead a small diamond! If partner has the club Ace, this is your only chance for an extra trick on defense.

In some situations it is “cash out” time at trick one. Typically, this is when declarer has shown a long running suit or aggressive bidding showing slam interest. Defenders are wise to take whatever they have right away.

Once you are in the habit of analyzing the bidding and your hand, you can almost always tell when tricks are going away.

3. Remain Passive

There are a number of conditions which dictate remaining passive. When these conditions exist, do not snatch winners, break suits for declarer, or otherwise take him off the guess.

Conditions for Remaining Passive:

- no evidence of a strong side suit for declarer,
- declarer very strong, dummy weak,
- misfit, or bad split in key suits,
- no real suit to lead against NT or
- defending 6NT or grand slams.

The basic situation for going passive is the absence of any source of tricks on which declarer can throw his losers. Go passive when dummy is flat and weak. Simply return declarer's lead, or remove what little ruffing power there is in dummy.

Another time to take a passive approach is when opponents stagger into game. There is a good chance they don't have enough tricks unless you give them some on defense.

A most common occurrence is when you hold all the outstanding points. The auction is 2NT by RHO, 3NT by his partner. You have 13 HCPs. Knowing partner has one or two points at most, be as passive as possible.

4. Cut Down Ruffing Power

There are several conditions that should automatically trigger a trump lead. When these conditions arise you must lead trump, even if it costs a potential trump trick *e.g* Qxx.

- (a) Partial or total misfit
 - your side has a trump stack or
 - mere suit preference taken.
- (b) Bidding suggests dummy shortness
 - dummy bid two suits, raised third,
 - dummy denied NT due to flaw or
 - splinter bid.
- (c) You are strong in other suits
 - you control dummy's side suit,
 - you control all other suits or
 - opponents are sacrificing.

Lead trump when partner converts your one or two level double to penalty. The auction is:

North	East	South	West
3 ♠	1 ♥ Dble.	1 ♠	2 ♥

You hold:

♠ x
 ♥ J x x
 ♦ Q J x x x
 ♣ K J x x.

Lead your stiff trump. It is important to lead trumps early when declarer can ruff losers in dummy or take ruffing tricks in hand with his small trumps.

When your side has the balance of power, as in control over all three other suits or the opponents are sacrificing, reduce declarer's ruffing power.

Another example:

North	East	South	West
3 ♣	Dble	5 ♣	Dble.

Sometimes you can recover from the opening lead by switching to trumps.

Contract, 4 Spades:

North		East	
♠	K J	♠	x
♥	x x x x	♥	J x x
♦	x	♦	A J x x
♣	A Q T x x x	♣	K J 9 8 x x

Partner leads the diamond King. Overtake and switch to trump.

Two reasons to switch to trump?

5. Creating Trump Tricks

Conditions:

- (a) ruffing declarer's tricks:
 - you are short in an unbid suit
 - you are long in opponent's side suit, bid and raised
 - you have a weak hand and no better line of defense
- (b) promoting trump tricks of your own:
 - trump promotion or

- trump uppercut.

Go for ruffs under these conditions:

- no natural trump trick,
- when you have an entry (*e.g.* possession of a high trump honor) or
- desperate situation.

In a trump promotion play, declarer is placed in a position where he must ruff high, and this promotes a trump trick for the defenders. With Spades trump:

North

♠ A K J T x

East

♠ Q x

the lead of any suit that North and East can ruff will automatically promote East's Queen into a trick.

Another popular way to create a trump trick is by way of an "uppercut". Defender ruffs with his highest trump to weaken declarer's holding and create a trump trick for partner. Contract, 4 Spades:

Lead: Diamond Ace:

North

♠ A Q x
 ♥ Q 9
 ♦ Q x
 ♣ K J x x x x

West

♠ J T x
 ♥ x x
 ♦ A x x
 ♣ A Q x x x

East

♠ 9 x
 ♥ x x x x
 ♦ K J T x x x
 ♣ x

Two diamonds are taken, then East exits with his stiff club. Partner wins and leads a low one back knowing both East and South are void. Ruff with the Spade 9 and magically a trump trick is created for his partner!

Reference Material

1. *The Bridge Player's Comprehensive Guide to Defense* by Frank Stewart.
2. *How the Experts Win at Bridge* by Burt Hall & Lynn Rose-Hall.
3. *Becoming a Bridge Expert* by Frank Stewart.
4. *Killing Defense at Bridge* by Hugh Kelsey.
5. *Opening Leads* by Mike Lawrence.