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Eight general deals for VBlue, year 2. Although a mixed set of hands there is a theme running through these deals - that of how to play trump contracts. SA version. Updated winter 2015/16.

Y2 VBlue #12 Eight General Hands SA	Contract: 4S
Date: 03/07/2016	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North		
	♠ AJ98		
	♥ K963		
	♦ T		
	♣ AK84		
West		East	
♠ 3		♠ 7542	
♥ Q75		♥ AT2	
♦ 742		♦ KQJ95	
♣ T97653		♣ J	
	South		
	♠ KQT6		
	♥ J84		
	♦ A863		
	♣ Q2		

This series of eight deals is our General Series, often a random mixture of hands. Here, though, there is something of a theme to them; all the deals are played in suit contracts.

We won't explain any further, we will just tell you that you will be declarer in all of these hands.

Hand 1 is a real-life hand from a recent local event.

It was played thirteen times and many declarers (how shall we put it?) failed to cover themselves with glory.

West	North	East	South
-	1♣	1♦	1♠
P	3♠	P	4♠
P	P	P	

Lead: ♦ 4

This real-life hand turned up in a duplicate pairs event where many declarers failed to make 4♠.

Bidding.

North opens 1♣ as dealer and East interjects 1♦. We bid 1♠ (we haven't the right shape to make a negative Double), and North raises that strongly to the three-level.

Well, with 12 points we aren't going to let this one languish in a part-score – we confidently advance to game.

Play.

West leads a Diamond (naturally enough, given that East bid them), and we settle down to **Count and Plan**.

If we look at losers everything appears to be rosy. There are no Spade losers, some Heart losers (that may depend on the location of the Heart honors), three Diamond losers, some of which can be ruffed on table, and no Club losers.

It's very easy to see that as two or three losers and proceed in blasé fashion. Easy, but wrong. A count of winners is essential and beneficial.

We can see just eight tricks on top (four Spades, one Diamond and three Clubs). So two more need to be found, and they can only come from ruffs. Declaring without due care and attention many South players carelessly drew two rounds of trumps with the ♠A J before realizing they needed Diamond ruffs. A Club to the ♣Q was followed by a Diamond ruff and the ♠A.

Disaster! East ruffed and returned a trump, simultaneously removing any more ruffs while trapping declarer in his own hand. After that declarer was relieved to make a miserable eight tricks.

Butchery, sheer butchery.

Correct play is to take stock and make a plan before playing a card (ever heard of **Count-**

Plan-Execute? Well – VuBridge users have, for sure, but some of these declarers clearly had not).

Diamond ruffs are essential so we should do the necessary at trick two. Then it's a case of returning to hand (with a trump) and taking a second ruff. It is easy then to cash dummy's last trump, cross to the ♣Q and draw the remaining trumps. That's eight tricks and the ♣A K remain for ten.


Just five declarers (out of thirteen) made 4♣ on this deal. Five declarers failed and three declarers managed to play in a ridiculous (and unsuccessful) 3NT.



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Y2 VBlue #12 Eight General Hands SA	Contract: 4S
Date: 03/07/2016	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

	North	
	♠ A52	
	♥ 87532	
	♦ KQ6	
	♣ A2	
West		East
♠ 73		♠ QJ8
♥ JT94		♥ Q
♦ T842		♦ A9
♣ 973		♣ KQJT854
	South	
	♠ KT964	
	♥ AK6	
	♦ J753	
	♣ 6	

This is another real life deal where some declarers mistimed the hand and went down.

Can you do better?

West	North	East	South
-	-	1♣	1♠
P	2♣	3♣	P
P	4♣	P	P
P			

Lead: ♣ 7

This is another real-life deal where some experienced players took their eyes off the ball.

Bidding.

East opens 1♣ as dealer and we have a perfectly respectable overcall of 1♠. West Passes on his dismal collection.

North, having a good hand in response to our overcall, shows it by bidding the opponents' suit – he makes a cue-bid of 2♣. He could simply raise to 4♠ immediately, but that bid should really be reserved for hands with long Spades and not much else.

East is not one to give up easily – he competes with 3♣, relieving us of the responsibility of finding a second bid. When that gets round to North he cuts the cackle and gets to the point – a raise to 4♠.

Play.

(Everyone reached 4♠ by some means or another and all Wests led a Club).

We survey the dummy, thank partner for his contributions to date and take time out to **Count** and **Plan**.

Losers? At least one trump, one Heart and (possibly) two Diamonds.

Winners? Four Spades (on a good day – with a 3-2 break), two Hearts, two Diamonds and a Club.

The problem is to dispose of the losing Diamond, always assuming that the suit breaks 4-2. Some declarers decided that they would set up dummy's Hearts and relied on a 3-2 break. Unlucky, maybe, but we really need Spades to split 3-2 so asking for another 3-2 break is pushing our luck a little.

Correct timing is to cash one high Spade (the ♠A for choice) and then develop the side suit by leading the ♦K. East has to take that with the Ace and plug away in Clubs.

We ruff that, cash the other top trump (the ♠K, as it happens) and then play off the Diamonds, ruffing the last one on table. It is of no consequence whether any of the master Diamonds gets ruffed, nor does it matter if the fourth round of Diamonds gets over-ruffed. East has a boss trump – he can have the trick whenever it gives him the greatest pleasure.

We can only ever lose one trump, one Heart and one Diamond – we make the rest.


Many players went down by cashing two trumps before playing Diamonds. Now East could take his ♦A and cash the boss Spade. This removes the last trump from the table and gives declarer a fourth-round Diamond loser.



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Y2 VBlue #12 Eight General Hands SA	Contract: 4S
Date: 03/07/2016	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

	North	
	♠ A764	
	♥ KJ96	
	♦ 92	
	♣ K63	
West		East
♠ T8		♠ Q93
♥ T753		♥ 42
♦ KJ74		♦ T8653
♣ QJT		♣ A98
	South	
	♠ KJ52	
	♥ AQ8	
	♦ AQ	
	♣ 7542	

You play in a decent contract here but the first few tricks go badly for you.

What is the best chance to make the hand?

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	1NT
P	2♣	P	2♠
P	4♠	P	P
P			

Lead: ♣ Q

Bidding.

As dealer we open 1NT on a 4-4-3-2 hand with 16 points.

North asks for majors with a 2♣ Stayman enquiry and then raises our 2♠ response to game.

Play.

West finds the irritating ♣Q lead against 4♠ and we have to think about our prospects. We have to **Count** and **Plan**.

The ♣K is looking precariously placed – the ♣A is sure to be wrong after this lead.

Sure enough, the defenders rapidly cash three tricks in that suit. What next? Well, with enough winners in the red suits, the whole deal depends on picking up trumps successfully. If we can find the ♠Q then the contract would make. If not – it won't. It really is that simple.

East returns a Diamond at trick four and we are well-advised not to take the finesse (if we could pick up trumps we can later throw our second Diamond away). So it's all down to the Spades – what is the percentage play in that suit?

Well, you may have heard of **Eight Ever, Nine Never**, an old bridge aphorism that suggests that we should finesse for a missing Queen when we have eight cards and play for the drop when we have nine cards. How much weight you place on all of these adages (and there are plenty of them, believe us!) is up to you but certainly the percentage play in Spades is to cash the ♠A and to finesse the ♠J.

On this layout the percentage play is the successful play – we pick up the Queen of Spades successfully and extract all of the opponents trumps without loss. After that the hand is easy.

West tries a desperate con-play on this deal – did you notice? On the ♠A he dropped the ♠10, hoping to look like a man who started with ♠Q

10 alone. We shouldn't trust our opponents when they start shenanigans like this.

Trust in the odds – not in the opponents!



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Y2 VBlue #12 Eight General Hands SA	Contract: 4S By: South
Date: 03/07/2016	Board #: 4
Dealer: West	Vulnerable: All
Play this hand online!	

West	North	East	South
P	P	P	1NT
P	2♣	P	2♠
P	4♠	P	P
P			

Lead: ♥ Q

This deal has echoes of the previous deal (Hand 3)

Bidding.

After three Passes we open 1NT on a 4-4-3-2 hand with 16 points.

North asks for majors with a 2♣ Stayman enquiry and then raises our 2♠ response to game.

Play.

As in Hand 3 we have a trump suit of eight cards missing the ♠Q. Should we attempt to draw trumps on this deal in the same manner that we did on Hand 3?

Well, counting our tricks is not a bad idea (actually, it's essential!), and here it gives us an alternative play. On Hand 3 we needed to pick the trump suit up for four tricks – here we don't. We do, however, need to make five trump tricks to make our contract. (That's because we have five top tricks in the outside suits). Five Spade tricks might be achieved by making four trumps and one ruff in dummy but easier is to aim for three trumps and two ruffs on table.

So the **Plan** is to cash the ♠A K. As long as trumps are 3-2 (well within the odds) the contract is home and dry. As so often, the right play is to ignore the defenders' boss trump and go about our business.

So, the play in detail. West leads the ♥Q so we take the ♥A and cash the two top trumps. When everyone follows (and the ♠Q remains at large), we ruff two Clubs on table (♣K, ♣A, ruff a Club, Diamond to hand, ruff a Club). Now we cash the ♦K and claim one of the remaining trumps as our tenth trick.

Note what would happen if we were to play the ♠A and finesse the ♠J. West would take his ♠Q and would play another trump. Now we would be unable to ruff two Clubs in dummy.

One off.

North

♠ A764
♥ 873
♦ K964
♣ K6

West

♠ Q98
♥ QJT9
♦ Q7
♣ J982



East

♠ T2
♥ K64
♦ JT852
♣ QT4

South

♠ KJ53
♥ A52
♦ A3
♣ A753

The trump suit here is similar to that of Hand 3.


Is there any reason to play the suit differently?



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Y2 VBlue #12 Eight General Hands SA	Contract: 4S By: South
Date: 03/07/2016	Board #: 5
Dealer: North	Vulnerable: All
Play this hand online!	

	North	
	♠ A92	
	♥ KQ42	
	♦ Q42	
	♣ T53	
West		East
♠ 8		♠ QT4
♥ 873		♥ JT96
♦ A7		♦ 98653
♣ AKJ8642		♣ 9
	South	
	♠ KJ7653	
	♥ A5	
	♦ KJT	
	♣ Q7	

What is the percentage play on this deal?

With some obvious top losers you cannot afford a trump loser.

West	North	East	South
-	P	P	1♠
2♣	X	P	2♠
3♣	3♠	P	4♠
P	P	P	

Lead: ♣ A

Bidding.

After two Passes we open 1♠ and West overcalls 2♣.

North makes a negative Double (to show four Hearts), and we repeat our Spades.

West is not giving up easily – he competes further with 3♣. Partner contests with 3♠, giving us a problem. Unsure whether that is a game try or a competitive gesture, we decide to go on to game.

Play.

West leads the ♣A and we have to **Count** our tricks and make a suitable **Plan**.

We see immediately that we have three unavoidable losers (the ♣A K and the ♦A) so must avoid losing a Spade trick; that much is obvious.

We can only act as a spectator for the first three tricks – West cashes the ♣A K (East pitching a Diamond), and then tries his luck with the ♦A and another Diamond. Finally on lead we have to decide what to do next.

Well, we have enough tricks if we can pick up the trumps. We cash the ♠A and play another Spade and note that East follows with a low Spade and then the ♠10. Do we finesse or play for the drop?

If we look at the Spade suit purely on its own the odds are very close but (as most textbooks will tell us) it is fractionally better to play the ♠K, playing for the ♠Q to drop. This is where **Eight Ever, Nine Never** comes from, suggesting that we should never finesse when we have nine cards missing the Queen.

Never? Never say “**Never**”. The odds can be swayed quite dramatically by our knowledge of the opponent’s hands. Here, West is known to have seven Clubs (East showed out at trick two, remember), and also has played two rounds of Diamonds. After following to the ♠A

he has only three missing cards. East on the other hand, is known to have one Club, three Diamonds and two Spades. He has seven unidentified cards. The odds, therefore, are as high as 7-3 in favor of playing East for any missing card. That makes the finesse a 70% shot, rather than odds against.

On this layout, playing the ♠J is successful and 4♠ is easily wrapped up.



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Y2 VBlue #12 Eight General Hands SA	Contract: 4S By: South
Date: 03/07/2016	Board #: 6
Dealer: East	Vulnerable: All
Play this hand online!	

West	North	East	South
-	-	3♣	3♣
P	4♠	P	P
P			

Lead: ♣ 9

This deal has echoes of the previous one – Hand 5.

Bidding.

As dealer, East opens with a preemptive 3♣. We enter the fray with 3♠ and North raises that to 4♠.

Play.

West leads a Club (of course), and we prepare our **Count** and **Plan**.

The defenders cash the ♣A K (West showing up with a singleton), and then play two rounds of Diamonds. Although we have tricks to burn in the red suits we have lost the first three tricks; we have to pull the trumps in without loss to make our contract. How should we play?

Well, if West has ♠Q 10 × we have no chance. East is highly unlikely to have a holding of ♠Q 10 × (he is known to have seven Clubs and at least two Diamonds). So it looks as though we will have to play for trumps 2-2. However there is a small extra chance that may come to our rescue if we cash the ♠A first.

Here, East drops the ♠10, allowing the possibility of finessing the ♠9 in dummy. Well, is it right to play a Spade to the ♠9 or to play a Spade to the ♠K?

The arguments are identical to Hand 5 – East has only three unknown cards as against seven unknown cards in the West hand so taking the finesse is more than twice as good as playing East for ♠Q 10 alone. After the ♠9 has held it is a simple matter to extract the last trump and run off the remaining winners.

North

♠ K92
♥ KQ4
♦ QJT42
♣ T8

West

♠ Q84
♥ 98632
♦ A853
♣ 9



East

♠ T
♥ JT7
♦ 96
♣ AKJ7642

South

♠ AJ7653
♥ A5
♦ K7
♣ Q53

Another deal where you have to find the percentage play in the trump suit.


Does the early play give you any clues?



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Y2 VBlue #12 Eight General Hands SA	Contract: 4S By: South
Date: 03/07/2016	Board #: 7
Dealer: South	Vulnerable: All
Play this hand online!	

	North	
	♠ T9	
	♥ J4	
	♦ J64	
	♣ KJ6542	
West		East
♠ QJ82		♠ 76
♥ T873		♥ 96
♦ KQT3		♦ A9852
♣ 9		♣ QT87
	South	
	♠ AK543	
	♥ AKQ52	
	♦ 7	
	♣ A3	

Here you pick up a lovely hand. Having bid to a decent contract you have to be careful with the play.

Any ideas?

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	1♠
P	1NT	P	3♥
P	3♠	P	4♥
P	4♠	P	P
P			

Lead: ♦ K

Bidding.

We have a lovely hand here, a 5-5-1-2, 20-point monster. There is little alternative to opening 1♠ – the hand is too thin to contemplate 2♣. If partner were to Pass 1♠ – well, tough bananas.

As it is, North dredges up 1NT, so we show the power of the hand by jumping to 3♥. North gives watery preference to 3♠ (don't assume this is enthusiasm for Spades – we put a gun at his temple and forced him to bid).

Determined to play this hand in game, we bid 4♥, forcing a choice between Hearts and Spades at the four-level. North, hating the whole affair, nobly puts us back to our first suit.

Play.

[Note: 4♠ is no thing of beauty but what game is better? It is often right (when holding two equal length suits) to play in the weaker one. Here 4♠ is better than 4♥].

West kicks off with the ♦K lead. Holding such commanding trumps he is not interested in leading his singleton Club and getting Club ruffs. This defense is a powerful one as it forces us to trump a Diamond at trick two and shortens our trumps, making our holding vulnerable. What now? It's time to **Count** and **Plan**.

Well, the technique on this deal is a useful (and common) one. We should cash the ♠A K (leaving two boss trumps out) and play on the solid side-suit. By running off the Hearts we are allowing East-West to take their master trumps by ruffing – as they do so, our baby trumps are promoted to winning rank.


West ruffs the fifth Heart and plays yet another Diamond but we ruff and play the ♣A and a Club to the ♣K. Again West ruffs but our ♠5 scores the decisive tenth trick.



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Y2 VBlue #12 Eight General Hands SA	Contract: 4S By: South
Date: 03/07/2016	Board #: 8
Dealer: West	Vulnerable: All
Play this hand online!	

	North		
	♠ KT53		
	♥ AK94		
	♦ AK83		
	♣ Q		
West		East	
♠ 9876		♠ 2	
♥ Q6		♥ JT872	
♦ 97		♦ QJT6	
♣ AJT73		♣ K52	
	South		
	♠ AQJ4		
	♥ 53		
	♦ 542		
	♣ 9864		

You have a poor hand here but that doesn't stop partner propelling you into a game.

How easy is it to bring in the requisite number of tricks?

West	North	East	South
P	1♦	P	1♠
P	4♠	P	P
P			

Lead: ♠ 9

Bidding.

West Passes as dealer and North opens 1♦. When we show our four-card major with 1♠ North wastes no time in raising to 4♠.

We hope and trust he has a good hand...

Play.

West leads a trump against 4♠ and we study the powerful 4-4-4-1 hand that is dummy. Time to **Count** tricks and make a **Plan**.

Losers? No trumps, no Hearts, one Diamond and four Clubs. Well, there is just a singleton Club on table, so there aren't really four Club losers, some can be eradicated by ruffing.

Winners? We can count eight tricks (four Spades and two Ace-King combinations), so need two extra tricks from somewhere. These can only come from ruffs.

Having diagnosed the need for ruffs (and counting insufficient winners), we know that drawing trumps is assuredly not the right play. Accordingly, we win the Spade lead in hand and immediately play a Club, creating a void on table.

Annoyingly, West wins that and leads another trump, forcing us to play with care. We should be planning a **crossruff** at this point and we need to keep high trumps in hand. The ♠5 is perfectly high enough for one Club ruff so that can stay in dummy. So we take dummy's ♠10 and cash the red-suit winners.

Now taking the ♦A K and the ♥A K is essential play. Why? Well, suppose we were to play off the ♥A K and ruff a Heart prematurely. Now West would chuck away a Diamond and we'd never be able to make the ♦A K.

Having taken the precaution of cashing **outside winners before embarking on a crossruff** we are home and dry. We simply ruff two Hearts in hand and two Clubs in dummy, happily conceding the last two tricks.

We make, in all, six trump tricks, two Hearts and two Diamonds.