




Basic suit preference signals used in ruffing situations. ACOL version

VB#22 Year 2 Suit preference signals (ruffing) Part 1	Contract: 4S
ACOL	By: East
Date: 07/10/2015	Board #: 1
Dealer: North	Vulnerable: None
Play this hand online!	

	North	
	♠ 53	
	♥ Q87	
	♦ AT643	
	♣ A73	
West		East
♠ AJT		♠ KQ8742
♥ K95		♥ A3
♦ K975		♦ QJ8
♣ K95		♣ Q8
	South	
	♠ 96	
	♥ JT642	
	♦ 2	
	♣ JT642	

The two series of six deals in this edition of V-Blue (this one and another to be found elsewhere) are on signalling in defence.

In this section we show you how to tell your partner *which suit* you want led. This is called "Suit Preference" signalling and in these cases applies in the situation when the defenders are seeking ruffs.

Everything revolves around the connection between the ranking of the suits (Spades-Hearts-Diamonds-Clubs in that order) and the rank of the card you lead when giving a ruff (is it a high card or a low card?) The higher the card, the more it is tied to the higher ranking suit.

In practice there are only two suits to choose from so all you have to do is to decide whether partner has led a high card or a low card.

Clear? Of course not – which is why we have many illustrative examples.

Hand 1. We set the scene with a classic specimen. How do you know what to lead at an early stage of the defence?

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

Lead: ♦ 2

East-West bid confidently and rapidly to 4♠ and you have a heap of rubbish to lead from. Your only hope to take some tricks is via some ruffs so you lead your singleton ♦2, even though it is dummy's suit.

West puts down a balanced hand but you can see that it lacks Aces. If North has two of them then we have a chance here – although one of those Aces will have to be the ♦A.

To our delight, North plays the ♦A and returns a Diamond. Note that East is up to his old tricks again, playing the ♦J at trick one in an attempt to deflect partner from the winning defence. He's a sly one all right...

Anyway, we trump the Diamond return and have reached the crossroads. How do we put partner on lead at trick three so that he can lead another Diamond? Should we lead a Club or a Heart? *How can we tell?* Should we just toss a coin?

Now, remember that partner is on our side here and is trying to help us. **Bridge is a partnership game.** North has read our lead as a singleton and is doing all he can to send us a signal. **How?**

Well, in these circumstances the card he returns is a **suit-preference signal**. Forget all that stuff in No-trumps about returning the higher card from a doubleton and the original fourth-highest otherwise. When ruffs are in the air that goes out of the window and over the rooftops.

If partner returns a **low** Diamond he is directing our attention to the **lower-ranking** of the remaining suits. A **high card** would show interest in the **higher-ranking** suit. Here (as always in these situations) there are only two suits to consider. Trumps are excluded and you have no Diamonds, so you only have Hearts and Clubs to think about.

Partner's low Diamond return (the ♦3 is the lowest he can have – you led the ♦2, don't forget) is therefore directing your attention to Clubs. Had he wanted you to lead a Heart he would have returned his highest remaining

Diamond. We don't know what that is, but it certainly isn't the ♦3.

So you play a Club at trick three and not a Heart. Whether you lead the ♣J or a low Club is immaterial. Partner takes the ♣A and flashes back a third round of Diamonds, ruffed by your last trump. That has four tricks banked before East can do anything but grimace and 4♠ is one down. Declarer moodily rakes in the rest.


[Footnote. *You may have noted that 3NT is an easy contract on the East-West cards. Can West be blamed for bidding 4♠? We don't think so*].



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Basic suit preference signals used in ruffing situations. ACOL version

VB#22 Year 2 Suit preference signals (ruffing) Part 1	Contract: 4S
ACOL	By: West
Date: 07/10/2015	Board #: 2
Dealer: South	Vulnerable: N / S
Play this hand online!	

	North	
	♠ 96	
	♥ JT642	
	♦ 2	
	♣ JT642	
West		East
♠ KQ8742		♠ AJT
♥ Q8		♥ K95
♦ QJ8		♦ K975
♣ A3		♣ K95
	South	
	♠ 53	
	♥ A73	
	♦ AT643	
	♣ Q87	

This deal bears some similarities to Hand 1.

Note, though, that you are not on opening lead. So you have to **Read the Lead** and plan the defence.

Can you make partner's life easy?

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

Lead: ♦ 2

East-West bid quickly to 4♣ and partner leads the ♦2, through dummy's suit. Dummy may look a little familiar and you may wonder if this is Hand 1 again. That's not the point, though. How do you **Read the Lead** and how do you plan the defence against 4♣?

Leading dummy's suit is usually poor bridge – why has partner done this? The answer can only be because he has a singleton. So you can see a way to defeat 4♣ if you can give North two Diamond ruffs.

You take the ♦A and West gives you momentary pause for thought by dropping the ♦J on this. Is it possible that this is a true card, West having a singleton and North having ♦Q 8 2? In theory, yes – but why lead away from the Queen through dummy's suit? North might lead from ♥Q x x or ♣Q x x on this hand as they are *unbid suits* but to lead a suit bid by the opponents would be an extraordinary thing to do.

So you give West a contemptuous look for his subterfuge and return a Diamond – but **which Diamond?** This is the crucial card of this hand. You need partner to ruff this trick and to play back a Heart at trick three and not a Club. How can you tell him to do that?

A low Diamond will not get the job done – partner will surely return the lower-ranking suit (Clubs in this case). You must paint the picture in the brightest colours and that means leading the ♦10. North can hardly help himself now. He ruffs the Diamond and, with a flare-path brightly lit, plays a Heart to your ♥A. A further Diamond ruff completes declarer's ruin.


One down. Bad luck, West.



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Basic suit preference signals used in ruffing situations. ACOL version

VB#22 Year 2 Suit preference signals (ruffing) Part 1 ACOL	Contract: 2H By: East
Date: 07/10/2015	Board #: 3
Dealer: East	Vulnerable: E / W
Play this hand online!	

	North	
	♠ JT943	
	♥ QJ	
	♦ T	
	♣ K8752	
West		East
♠ Q62		♠ AK
♥ K762		♥ AT953
♦ J754		♦ Q863
♣ Q6		♣ JT
	South	
	♠ 875	
	♥ 84	
	♦ AK92	
	♣ A943	

You are back on opening lead. True, you are defending against a modest part-score but that doesn't mean you should doze off and let declarer escape with more tricks than are his due.

How can you make life easy for partner?

West	North	East	South
-	-	1♥	P
2♥	P	P	P

Lead: ♦ A

East-West bid to 2♥ and there the matter rests. You might have *protected* with a take-out Double when 2♥ came round to you but decided not to with three low Spades. Maybe that was a sensible decision.

As South you have an easy lead of the ♦A and see partner's ♦10. This is obviously a strong "come-on" signal (you can't tell at trick one that it's a singleton, of course). So you continue with the ♦K and partner throws away a Spade. What next? Well, you must give partner a Diamond ruff at trick three but to beat 2♥ you must give him two ruffs. How can you ensure that partner plays a Club when on lead and not a Spade?

The answer (as in the previous two deals) is by using a **suit-preference signal**. Here, the ♦2 at trick three directs partner's attention towards Clubs, the lower-ranking of the two remaining suits. Leading the ♦9 would have suggested a Spade return.

Without this guiding light partner would certainly have ruffed the Diamond and returned a "safe" Spade. From his perspective a Club lead is dangerous, away from the ♣K around to dummy's ♣Q. However, if he trusts you, a Club is what he has to lead.


A Club to your ♣A, another Diamond ruff and the ♣K has declarer one down. Tough luck, East.



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Basic suit preference signals used in ruffing situations. ACOL version

VB#22 Year 2 Suit preference signals (ruffing) Part 1	Contract: 2H
ACOL	By: West
Date: 07/10/2015	Board #: 4
Dealer: South	Vulnerable: All
Play this hand online!	

	North	
	♠ A75	
	♥ 84	
	♦ AK92	
	♣ 8743	
West		East
♠ JT		♠ Q62
♥ AT953		♥ K762
♦ Q863		♦ J754
♣ AK		♣ Q6
	South	
	♠ K9843	
	♥ QJ	
	♦ T	
	♣ JT952	

This deal bears some similarities to Hand 3.

Note, though, that you are not on opening lead. So you have to **Read the Lead** and plan the defence.

Can you read the messages partner is sending you?

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	P
1♥	P	2♥	P
P	P		

Lead: ♦ A

East-West bid to 2♥ and there the matter rests. Partner might have protected with a take-out Double when 2♥ came round to him but he chose not to.

North leads the ♦A and you make an involuntary encouragement signal with the ♦10 (you may be fortunate on this deal that your singleton Diamond isn't the ♦2!)

Partner cashes the ♦K, on which you pitch a low Club, and continues with the ♦9. You naturally ruff that and have to decide what to do next. Well, partner's Diamond is a **suit-preference signal** indicating his preference between the two remaining suits (Clubs and Spades in this instance). As the ♦9 is partner's highest Diamond you follow orders and lead a Spade, the higher-ranking suit.

Partner takes the ♠A, gives you a second Diamond ruff and the ♠K takes your sixth and final defensive trick.

One down. Tough bananas, West.



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Basic suit preference signals used in ruffing situations. ACOL version

VB#22 Year 2 Suit preference signals (ruffing) Part 1 ACOL	Contract: 4H By: West
Date: 07/10/2015	Board #: 5
Dealer: West	Vulnerable: N / S
Play this hand online!	

West	North	East	South
1♥	P	3♥	P
4♥	P	P	P

Lead: ♠ 5

East-West bid this one to 4♥ after an invitational sequence of 1♥ – 3♥ – 4♥. Partner leads the ♠5 and we contemplate the dummy. What defence do we have to take four tricks?

	North	
	♠ 5	
	♥ 963	
	♦ J9542	
	♣ JT53	
West		East
♠ KQ8		♠ J943
♥ QT872		♥ AKJ5
♦ K		♦ T83
♣ AK94		♣ Q2
	South	
	♠ AT762	
	♥ 4	
	♦ AQ76	
	♣ 876	

Can you **Read the Lead** here?

If so, can you plan an accurate defence?

When we **Read the Lead** at the end of trick one, we get a glimmer of hope. On the first Spade declarer plays the ♠8. This minor error on West's part opens our eyes to the entire defence. Partner simply cannot be leading from a Spade honour. It cannot be the top of a worthless doubleton (we can see the ♠4, ♠3 and ♠2), and if it's from a three-card holding it's from ♠K Q 5. Impossible – North would lead the ♠K from that combination if he chose to lead the suit. This way we can identify the lead – it's a singleton, sure as eggs is eggs. We know we can give partner two ruffs to go with our two aces.

We take trick one with the Ace and at trick two, we need to lead a high Spade to draw partner's attention to the higher-ranking of the remaining suits (by which we mean Diamonds rather than Clubs). To do this we lead the lead the ♠10 (and not a mealy-mouthed ♠7 or ♠6 or something equally wishy-washy).

This suit-preference signal asks (make that "demands") that partner returns a Diamond and here he shows that he is awake and paying due care and attention. At trick four, we give him a second ruff, and the contract goes down before the declarer ever settles down to a proper *Think and Count* of his own.

Never mind, West, that's life. Better luck next time, eh?


[Note: *Although it might have made no difference on this deal West should have played the ♠K under your ♠A at trick one. He has tricks to burn, you'll note, so this costs him nothing. The reason for doing this is that it might deflect you from your correct defence as it opens up the possibility that North started with ♠Q × ×. Now you might switch suits and play something else.*]



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Basic suit preference signals used in ruffing situations. ACOL version

VB#22 Year 2 Suit preference signals (ruffing) Part 1 ACOL	Contract: 4H By: East
Date: 07/10/2015	Board #: 6
Dealer: East	Vulnerable: E / W
Play this hand online!	

	North	
	♠ A432	
	♥ 32	
	♦ A74	
	♣ Q753	
West		East
♠ KQT86		♠ J97
♥ T54		♥ AKQJ96
♦ K95		♦ Q8
♣ K8		♣ A9
	South	
	♠ 5	
	♥ 87	
	♦ JT632	
	♣ JT642	

A deal which you should defend accurately now that you understand the principles of *suit-preference signals*.

However, when it was dealt the actual North-South pair had an "accident".

Oops!

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

Lead: ♠ 5

A deal with a story behind it. South was one of those aggressive players who plays at high speed, with great inaccuracy and blames his partner when things go wrong. Have you met him at the bridge table yet? Believe us – you will!

East-West bid to 4♥, naturally enough, and South led his singleton Spade.

North won and, reading the lead correctly as a singleton, returned a "high" Spade as a suit-preference signal for a Diamond (the higher of the two remaining suits – Diamonds and Clubs). Meanwhile, East followed with the ♠9 and ♠J in an attempt to put up a smokescreen.

It was unfortunate that the highest Spade that North could lead at trick two was the lowly ♠4 and South, who hadn't been paying sufficient attention to the small cards, assumed that it was North's lowest Spade... a Club switch at trick three was not a success and declarer quickly claimed an overtrick.

If South had kept his eyes open and his mind clear he would have noticed that the ♠3 and ♠2 were missing and might have asked himself where they were. Had he done so he might have come to the right conclusion. If North had wanted a Club then he certainly had a lower Spade than the ♠4 to lead at trick two.

There is no guarantee that North has the ♦A, of course, but a Club switch cannot be right. As the cards lie, a Diamond lead at trick three rather than a Club beats 4♥ by a trick.

As it was, all South could do was to blame his partner. "Couldn't you have led back a higher Spade?" he demanded. North knew the form with this particular South. "Sorry, partner", he replied, with due contrition.