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Eight General Hands; SA version. Updated winter 2015

VB#7 Y1 General Hands SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North		
	♠ K7		
	♥ 84		
	♦ 7543		
	♣ KQ986		
West		East	
♠ Q9642		♠ JT5	
♥ 63		♥ JT972	
♦ A9		♦ KT6	
♣ A752		♣ 43	
	South		
	♠ A83		
	♥ AKQ5		
	♦ QJ82		
	♣ JT		

Here are eight general practice hands on the themes that we have been looking at in VuBridge. They are in no particular order, just enjoy them as they come...

Here, on Hand 1, you need to take care early in the piece.

Sometimes you do not have easy access from hand to hand so you need to Plan ahead.

West	North	East	South
-	P	P	1NT
P	2NT	P	3NT
P	P	P	

Lead: ♠ 4

Bidding.

We start out with a normal 1NT opening (17 points, 4·4·3·2 shape) which partner is happy to raise to 2NT with 8 points, despite his 5·4·2·2 pattern.

With a maximum No-trump we simply have to accept the invitation and bid game

Play.

West leads the ♠4 (fourth best from a broken suit) and we already have our first crucial decision – to win in dummy or in the closed hand?

The answer to that is not so straightforward as we need to consider the hand as a *whole*.

No doubt, our source of extra tricks will come from Clubs as they are almost all equals bar the ♣A. We have five *top tricks* so need four Club tricks to total nine. We can see, therefore, that if we set up Clubs for four tricks we will make our contract: four Clubs, three Hearts and two Spades.

To avoid having the Clubs stranded on the table with no access to them we must preserve the ♠K in dummy, to be used later as a sort of stepping stone.

This proves to be an important play because, after winning the ♠A and leading out the ♣J, the opponents do their hardest to upset our plans – they allow the ♣J to win.

We next lead the ♣10 but here's where we need to be careful. Since the awkward opponents might duck another round of Clubs we must remember to *overtake* the ♣10 with one of dummy's honors. We can afford to do this because the ♣9 8 solidify the suit.

If we didn't overtake the second Club in dummy we'd be stuck in the closed hand, unable to play another round of Clubs. Dummy only has one means of access (the ♠K) and we cannot afford to waste it.

We need to persist with the Club attack until

West finally parts with his ♣A (on the third round of the suit as it happens). After that it's plain sailing as we win the Spade return, cash the remaining Clubs and "hit and run" with our top Hearts.


We happily claim our contract with the ♠A K, the ♥A K Q and four Club tricks.



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VB#7 Y1 General Hands SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North		
	♠ A75		
	♥ 642		
	♦ KQ75		
	♣ J64		
West		East	
♠ 982		♠ JT4	
♥ KQJT3		♥ 9	
♦ T94		♦ J82	
♣ K7		♣ AT9832	
	South		
	♠ KQ63		
	♥ A875		
	♦ A63		
	♣ Q5		

Counting in bridge is an important skill to have.

It can be difficult at times, but there are different ways to count that can make your life much easier.

Try this deal out, for instance.

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	1NT
P	3NT	P	P
P			

Lead: ♥ K

Bidding.

The bidding is swift and routine. We open 1NT with 15 points and partner raises to game with his 10 points.

Play.

West leads the ♥K to our 3NT contract and we must **Plan** the play.

From the outset we can **count** seven top tricks. (Three Spades, one Heart and three Diamonds). Prospects for "extras" don't look bright in Hearts and Clubs, so we are left hoping that Spades and Diamonds will bring in an additional trick each.

How might that happen? Well, we have seven cards combined in both Spades and Diamonds. We also have the three top honors in both suits, so we have to hope to establish a fourth round winner in both suits.

Can that work? Yes, if lady luck smiles on us. With a seven-card fit in Diamonds and in Spades it leaves the opponents with six cards in both suits. A lucky 3-3 break would leave the last, "long" card a winner after the three top honors have been played off. Here we need two 3-3 breaks... That's more than "lucky". The opponents will regard it as outrageous fortune.

It may seem a little difficult to keep track of the specific cards that are played but there is a better solution than counting cards after they have been played. Here, we should do our counting in advance (so to speak). We need a 3-3 break (actually two of them) so we should realize that both opponents need to follow suit to three rounds. If one of them shows out on the first, second or third round then the baby Spade (or Diamond) has not grown up into a winner.

For instance, when playing Diamonds we cash the Ace then the King-Queen and watch what happens. If both opponents follow to all three rounds of the suit we can be sure that dummy's ♦7 is a winner.

So, after winning the ♥A, we should start by cashing the ♦A (why the ♦A first? *Play the high*

cards from the short suit first) and follow with the ♦Q then the ♦K. When both opponents follow to the third round of the suit we are confident that the "thirteener", the ♦7, is a fourth round winner.

Note what happens on the last Diamond, by the way. Did anyone pitch a Spade? This is important because that's our next port of call and, if we miss a vital discard, we may miscount the Spade suit.

Next, we turn our attention to Spades by cashing the Ace first, followed by the Queen then the King. Why take the ♠A first? *Play the honors...* yeah, you've got it. Do both opponents follow to three rounds of Spades? **No!** However, we have been eagle-eyed and spotted that the ♠2 was dumped by West on the ♦7.


The ♠6 has duly grown up into a mature winner and needs to be cashed, pronto. That's the ninth (and final) trick. The rest belong to the frustrated defenders, who must have thought that victory was theirs.

On this deal, we need both Spades **and** Diamonds to split 3-3 in order to obtain two additional tricks to our seven top tricks. Two 3-3 breaks on one hand represents a 6-1 shot against us. Still, when Lady Luck walks past she must be embraced...



Eight General Hands; SA version. Updated winter 2015

VB#7 Y1 General Hands SA	Contract: 1N
Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North	
	♠ J5	
	♥ KQJ2	
	♦ T64	
	♣ 7642	
West		East
♠ T9843		♠ 72
♥ 9763		♥ A84
♦ A92		♦ KJ3
♣ Q		♣ KT853
	South	
	♠ AKQ6	
	♥ T5	
	♦ Q875	
	♣ AJ9	

Low-level contracts can be the most difficult ones to play.

How should you tackle a miserable part-score here?

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	1NT
P	P	P	

Lead: ♠ T

Bidding.

We open 1NT (16 points, 4·4·3·2 shape) as dealer and that becomes the final contract.

Play.

Some say that 1NT is the most difficult contract to play because every suit counts and needs to be carefully handled.

West leads the ♠10 and before we rush to play this miserable little part-score, we must first count our top tricks. We have four top Spades and the ♣A for a total of five *top tricks*.

Now, it is usually correct to *play the honors from the short side first* but on this hand, in Spades, we have an exception to that rule.

To make "extras" we can easily force out the ♥A, setting up three slow Heart tricks. However, what if the opponents do not take the ♥A on the first round of Hearts? How might we gain access to the table? The only sure way across to dummy is via the ♠J so we mustn't squander that card at trick one.

Instead, we must win the opening lead in the closed hand and play the ♥10. If the opponents refuse to take the Ace we play another Heart and can keep playing the suit until the ♥A goes. The opponents do take the Ace on the second round of Hearts (note how this disconnects the North-South hands in Hearts. Good defense!) and innocently return a Spade. Now we use the ♠J as access to dummy to enjoy two more Heart winners.

Note: Because we have the ♣A in hand we can afford to **block** the Spade suit as we later return with that Ace to cash the remaining Spade tricks.


Who'd have thought it? A deceptively simple 1NT contract turned out to be a bit of a mind-boggler.



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Eight General Hands; SA version. Updated winter 2015

VB#7 Y1 General Hands SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 24/03/2016	By: West
Dealer: West	Board #: 4
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North	
	♠ KJ872	
	♥ 972	
	♦ K3	
	♣ 963	
West		East
♠ QT4		♠ 63
♥ K4		♥ AQJT5
♦ A865		♦ 742
♣ KQJ2		♣ AT8
	South	
	♠ A95	
	♥ 863	
	♦ QJT9	
	♣ 754	

Defense contains difficult skills to master.

Not only do you have to worry about your own hand but you need full co-operation from partner.

Here is one such case. Do you return partner's suit, or do you switch to another suit?

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

Lead: ♠ 7

Bidding.

The opponents have a by-now-familiar auction to 3NT. West opens 1NT, East forces to game by jumping to 3♥ and West denies Heart support by insisting on No-trumps.

Play.

Partner fishes out the ♠7 against 3NT. Although the ♠7 looks like a fairly high card, we may assume that partner will have striven to lead from his longest and strongest suit.

Upon winning the opening lead with our ♠A, what should we return?

The ♦Q looks enticing, very seductive indeed, so is that what we should lead back? **No!** We know from the opening lead that partner's strength (and length) lies in Spades.

When defending we should adopt the standard practice of *returning partner's suit*. After we have done so here, partner's ♠K J gobble up declarer's remaining ♠Q 10 and the defense take the first five tricks. One down before West gets his foot in the door.

What would have happened had we switched to the ♦Q at trick two?

Declarer would have taken his Ace and proceeded to take five Hearts and four Clubs in rapid succession for an overtrick. Partner (rather like Britain's Queen Victoria) would not have been amused.


A sound general rule here is to lead back partner's suit unless it is obvious **not** to do so. If we do decide to shift to another suit we had better have a good reason for doing so...

One further point. Although it matters little on this deal it is the right play to lead back the higher card from a doubleton. When we have the ♠9 4 left at trick two we should lead the ♠9 rather than the ♠4. On some deals (trust us!) that will be important.



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VB#7 Y1 General Hands SA	Contract: 4S
Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 5
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North		
	♠ Q7		
	♥ A74		
	♦ AKQ65		
	♣ Q86		
West		East	
♠ 8		♠ JT94	
♥ KQJ3		♥ T92	
♦ T432		♦ J97	
♣ 9753		♣ AJT	
	South		
	♠ AK6532		
	♥ 865		
	♦ 8		
	♣ K42		

Sometimes your opponents get off to a great start by finding the best opening lead.

Annoying as that can be, you have to focus on how you can combat it.

Can you find a counterplay here?

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

Lead: ♥ K

Bidding.

Over partner's 1NT opening bid we can easily work out that our side belongs in a game contract. We have 10 points and partner has 15-17, so the minimum number of points our side has is 25. But which game should we be in?

We *could* bid 3♣ to show that we have enough for game but there is no point. That would offer partner a choice between 4♣ and 3NT. Do we really want to play this hand in 3NT?

Partner's 1NT opening promised a balanced hand and must, therefore, have at least two Spades; so, knowing that our side will have (at least) an eight-card Spade fit, we proceed directly to 4♠.

Play.

West leads the ♥K and we first assess our options. This awkward lead automatically sets up two Heart tricks for the defense and, with a top Club to lose, we have three quick losers to start off with.

There might be other potential losers too, for instance, Spades could split in an unfriendly manner of 4-1 (as we can see with hindsight). So what's the best way to limit those (potential) losers down to three or fewer?

No doubt our secret weapon (our **source of tricks**) is dummy's Diamond suit.

What we should do is to win the opening Heart lead and draw three rounds of trumps. If trumps break 3-2 then we would have six Spades, one Heart, three Diamonds, and one Club for a total of **eleven** tricks.

When trumps *don't* break (as on this deal) then, after drawing the third round of trumps, we **should not** play another round of trumps – otherwise East would win, cash two Hearts and the ♣A and your contract would be down before we knew it.

After drawing the third round of trumps we immediately turn our attention to Diamonds

by cashing the top three honors discarding the two Heart losers from the closed hand.

East is forced to follow suit to all three rounds of Diamonds so, eventually, the only losers that we have are a Spade and two Clubs.


Put another way, we make five Spades, one Heart, three Diamonds and a Club.



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VB#7 Y1 General Hands SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 6
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North		
	♠ KQJ75		
	♥ K8		
	♦ 8532		
	♣ Q3		
West		East	
♠ 83		♠ A942	
♥ QT632		♥ J94	
♦ QJ64		♦ 7	
♣ J2		♣ KT974	
	South		
	♠ T6		
	♥ A75		
	♦ AKT9		
	♣ A865		

Playing quickly and confidently may be good when things go well but playing quickly and failing is not good bridge.

Remember to take your time and do some planning at trick one before you play, so you can prevent any unwanted mistakes.

This deal sets a good example of how thinking and planning can prevail.

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

Lead: ♥ 3

Bidding.

We open 1NT in second seat (15 points, 4-4-3-2 shape) and partner has a small problem with a game-going hand (11 points) and 5-4-2-2 shape. Deciding that the only two games in town are 3NT and 4♠ he jumps to 3♠, trying to elicit support in that quarter. Since we have only a doubleton Spade we sign off in 3NT.

Play.

West leads the ♥3 against our 3NT and the first thing we should be doing is **Counting** and **Planning**.

We can count five *top tricks* (two Hearts, two Diamonds and one Club) and therefore need to set up four additional tricks. Some extras might be obtained either from Spades or Diamonds but, given that Spades offers us better prospects than does Diamonds, the natural choice is to play on Spades.

Before planning the timing of our play, we should be thinking about *how* we should tackle the Spade suit. We have the ♠K, ♠Q, ♠J, and ♠10 and we can force our way to at least three tricks by knocking out our opponent's ♠A. A 3-3 or 4-2 break would allow us to take four Spade tricks. There is, however, a slight if familiar catch.

With the Spade honors spread between the closed hand and dummy, we must remember to *play the honors from the short side first*. In effect, we should first lead the ♠10 and follow it up by leading a small one to one of dummy's Spade pictures.

So... what about the *timing*? On the ♥3 lead, should we win this trick in dummy or in the closed hand? Since we might need access to the table to cash those winning Spades we should preserve the ♥K on table and win the opening Heart lead in hand.

Then we play the ♠10 (which is allowed to win; no surprise there) and follow with a Spade to dummy's ♠J (which forces the ♠A).

A Heart return (nothing is any better for the defense) is taken by the ♥A and we are in the right place at the right time to cash three Spade winners. Yes, three. The fall of the opponents' Spades allows the ♠7 to grow up into a winner – essentially, it's the only Spade in town.

Now we are in Easy Street. Having taken two Hearts and four Spades we just need to wrap things up by taking the three top tricks we have in hand – the ♦A K and the ♣A.

*Notice, in passing, how effective the defense of **not** taking Aces can be. You need to store that one in your mind for future use.*



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VB#7 Y1 General Hands SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 7
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

North

♠ KJ8
♥ K93
♦ 9752
♣ K42

West

♠ 743
♥ JT64
♦ AJT
♣ QJ6



East

♠ T952
♥ 852
♦ KQ
♣ T875

South

♠ AQ6
♥ AQ7
♦ 8643
♣ A93

On this deal, you will need to make a desperation play.

When all hopes appear to be slim, never give up but keep fighting!

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	1NT
P	3NT	P	P
P			

Lead: ♥ 4

Bidding.

We open 1NT with a flat 16 points and partner raises to 3NT with a balanced 10-count. Routine stuff.

Play.

West leads the ♥4 and we stop to **Count** our tricks and make a **Plan**. At first we might think the prospects for this one are bleak. With three top tricks in Spades and in Hearts and two top Clubs we can only see eight tricks. Where could a ninth trick possibly come from?

Generating an extra trick in Spades or Hearts is impossible, getting an extra Club winner almost so. We are left with our ugly looking Diamond suit. It's not all bad news, though. We do have an eight-card fit in Diamonds; and, if the suit were to split 3-2, we'd have some hope of setting up a (very slow) Diamond trick.

However, because we need to give up the lead three times in Diamonds, we need to get started on the suit as soon as possible. So, after winning the Heart lead (in either hand – we chose the ♥Q), we must immediately play a Diamond. East wins the trick and returns a Heart so we win it and push out another Diamond.

The opponents persist with the – ahem – Heart-attack, whereupon we play yet another Diamond. This sets up a baby Diamond on table (well, the ♦9 as it happens) as a winner. West triumphantly cashes his last Heart (on which we ditch Clubs from both hands) and then we have the rest.

Sometimes we don't have the *strength* (suit quality), but having *length* can also generate tricks for us. Note that the opponents' ♦A K Q J 10 are worth just three tricks for them.



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Eight General Hands; SA version. Updated winter 2015

VB#7 Y1 General Hands SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 24/03/2016	By: East
Dealer: West	Board #: 8
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

North

♠ A95
♥ 863
♦ QJT9
♣ 754

West

♠ 63
♥ AQJT5
♦ 742
♣ AT8



East

♠ QT4
♥ K4
♦ A865
♣ KQJ2

South

♠ KJ872
♥ 972
♦ K3
♣ 963

Counting is a technique that is not only limited to the declarer, but to the defense as well.

Better put your counting hat on, as you will be doing some here.

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

Lead: ♠ 7

Bidding.

East opens 1NT (a balanced 15 points) and West, holding 11 points and a fine Heart suit, jumps to 3♥. Unable to offer any support there East repeats No-trumps.

Play.

Against East's 3NT, we lead the ♠7, the time-honored *fourth best from our longest and strongest*.

Upon seeing dummy's weakness in Spades, we hope that partner can either contribute the ♠A or the ♠Q (or both) to help establish our suit.

As luck would have it, partner (often *such* a disappointment!) surprises us with the ♠A. Not only that, but he returns the ♠9 to declarer's ♠10 and our ♠J. As we cash the ♠K, dropping declarer's ♠Q, we know that the remaining ♠8 2 have become winners.

To confirm that, we can do a quick recount of the number of Spades played after the third trick.

When partner wins the opening lead with the ♠A and returns a Spade to our Jack, we can see that dummy, partner and declarer have contributed six Spade cards in total. We started off with five Spades, so there remain only two Spades (there being only thirteen Spades in the deck, remember...)

As we cash the ♠K we feel the warm glow of contentment as partner follows with the ♠4 as we know declarer's ♠Q will fall, leaving our baby Spades as masters.

This deal may look oddly familiar – and so it should, because it's Hand 4 rotated 180°

This deal, coupled with Hand 4, illustrates the importance of the defenders co-operating together as one to achieve their one and only goal: *to defeat declarer's contract*.

