

Lebensohl Conventions

Lebensohl has two applications: (1) Countering interference after a 1NT opening bid and (2) Countering Opponent's Weak-Two Opening or Overcall. 2NT is a special bid in either of these.

Over Interfering Weak-Two Bid

Lebensohl applies when Partner Doubles a Weak-Two Opening bid. The assumption is that the Doubler has 12+ HCP, i.e. an opening hand. The Lebensohl bid in this case is used to show the strength of one's hand but hinges on the 2NT Call. The Advancer's (Doubler's partner) call will show 1 of 3 types of hands BAD(0-7HCP), GAME-FORCE(12+) and INVITATIONAL(8-11HCP). We might note that the Opener's Partner has not yet bid or has Passed.

Bad (0-7) We show our best suit at 2-level – it's a sign-off, if 2-level is not available bid 2N which is a relay requiring Partner to bid 3♣. Your second bid is your suit or pass if it is ♠'s.

Game-Force (12+) Jump bidding a new suit implies Game-force. If you have a balanced hand you might be interested in Game in No-Trump and Lebensohl gives you two ways of trying to get there:

- ◆ if you have a stopper in Opener's suit, bid NT twice. Ex. 2♥ – X – P – 2NT; P – 3♣ – P – 3NT;
- ◆ if you don't have a stopper in the bid suit jump to 3NT. Ex. 2♥ – X – P – 3NT; the jump denies a stopper in ♥'s and asks Partner to Pass the bid 3N with a stopper. Without a stopper Partner is forced into a scramble bid, bidding 4-Card suits up the line.

Invitational (8-11) This is where it gets interesting you have two choices based on the Opener's suit. **No jumping!!**

- ◆ If your suit is lower than Opener's, skip the Lebensohl 2NT and bid your suit at the 3-level. Example: 2♥ – X – P – 3♦, or if your suit is ♠'s you would bid 3♠. No Jump to bid a Minor after a Major. You can sign-off by bidding a higher ranking suit at the 2-level: 2♥ – X – P – 2♠.
- ◆ If your suit is a higher suit than Opener's: By-pass 2-level sign-off and bid 2N and after Partner's 3♣ relay, Bid your suit at the 3-level. The fact that you could have bid the suit at the 2-level and didn't shows an invitational (8-11) hand. **No jumping!!** You went through 2N to get to 3-level.

Over Interfering Overcall of 1NT (Capelletti, DONT etc...)

There are 4 types of Responding bids when Partner Opens 1NT and there is an intervening interference bid (like Capelletti, DONT...): **Natural, Double, Game-force, Special(2NT)**.

Natural: Any 2-level bid **except** 2NT. This bid shows a minimum response (6-9 HCP) with little interest in Game. Non-forcing, it shows a natural 5+ Card suit.

Double: Partnership agreement necessary. Choose between (1) stolen bid or (2) Penalty. If **Penalty** there are 3 types of hands the penalty Double shows.

- Too weak to invite Game, ex: after 1N – 2♥ – X, holding ♠Q2 ♥KQ43 ♦762 ♣965 you are too weak to invite Game but here you have a holding menacing to overcaller.
- Too unbalanced to invite Game, but have points ex: holding ♠AQ2 ♥9 ♦AJT52 ♣J965, and the bidding goes 1N – 2♠ – X You're not a menace but what would you do if Partner bids ♥'s or NT?
- Based on Vulnerability conditions a Penalty Double looks profitable, ex: the bidding starts 1N – 2♠ – X and you are holding ♠Q2 ♥95 ♦QT52 ♣AJ965.

Game-force: With 10+ HCP, Game is possible.

- 3NT shows a hand that would normally bid 3NT **BUT** it denies a stopper in Overcalled suit. Without a stopper Opener is expected to escape to cheapest suit.
- A Cue bid of Overcalled Minor suit is Stayman, Ex: 1N – 2♦ – 3♦ shows at least 1 4-Card Major and 10+ HCP. This is a modified Stayman. See below
- Any other 3-level bid shows 5+ Card suit and is Game-forcing.

Note: **slow shows!** A bid of 3NT denies a stopper in Overcalled suit; Bidding 2NT first and then 3NT shows stopper and Game invitational values (see SPECIAL REPNSES).

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After Responder's Indicated Game-Force

Responder Jumps to 3NT Shows 10+ without stopper

- Opener can Pass with stopper
- Without stopper Opener starts scramble bid up-the-line of 4-Card suits.

Cue-bid of OverCalled suit: modified Stayman responses apply

- 3♣, then a 3♦ rebid by opener denies a 4-card major. A 3♥ rebid shows 4+ ♥'s (and does not deny 4♠'s), while a 3♠ rebid shows 4+♠'s (and denies 4♥'s), i.e. it is the the standard stayman only at the 3-level rather than the 2-level
- 3♦ shows both Majors, Opener must rebid 3♥ or 3♠ with 4-Card Major or 3NT with no 4-Card Major.
- 3♥ – opener must rebid 3♠ with a 4-Card ♠ suit or 3NT with no 4-Card Major.
- 3♠ – opener must rebid 4♥ with a 4-Card ♥ suit or 3NT with no 4-Card Major.

Game-forcing jump to 3-level:

- Opener's rebids and all other bids are natural. e.g. 1N – 2♦ – 3♥

Special: An almost all-purpose bid that is the essence of the Lebensohl Convention.

Responder bids 2NT to show several hand types. **Requires a 3♣ relay bid by Opener.**

After responder bids 2NT and the next opponent passes, opener **must** rebid 3♣. This is artificial and asks responder to clarify his hand type. These are the types of hands that should use 2NT:

- TYPE 1 – A Hand with stopper in Opponents suit and will stop at 3NT. (see above note).
- TYPE 2 – A Stayman-like hand with Game-invite HCP's and a stopper in Opponents suit.
- TYPE 3 – A One-suited hand that is either invitational to Game or a hand that wants to sign-off in at the 3-level.

Special – Responder's Lebensohl 2NT (might not be Game-Force) Opener relay bids 3♣

- Type 1 – 3N is Natural to play and implies a stopper in OverCalled suit. Slow shows (stopper).
- Type 2 – cue bid of OverCalled suit is Stayman-like, Game-force **and** implies stopper in Opponents suit. Opener can bid 3NT without 4-Card Major or 3 of 4-Card Major. Responder then bids 3N or 4 of Major
- Type 3 Pass indicates 6+ ♣'s and less than invitational bid. This is a sign off bid!
- Type 3 – 3♦, 3♥, 3♠ If responder was unable to bid the suit at the 2-level and rather bid 2NT, this is a sign-off bid. Responder likely has 8-9HCP and 5+Card suit. *This situation occurs when Overcalled suit is higher than Responder's suit.*
- Type 3 – 3♦, 3♥, 3♠ If responder was able to bid the suit at the 2-level and rather bid 2NT, this is an invitational bid – *example* 1N – 2♦ – 2N – P; 3♣ – P – 3♥... the Responder's first bid

could have been 2♥ rather than 2N thus the 3♥ bid invites the Opener to bid either 3N or with four ♥'s to bid 4♥. *This occurs when Overcalled suit is lower than Responders suit.*

Note: Over an interfering conventional bid, such as DONT or Cappelletti; Lebensohl in ON, ignore the fact of a second suit and proceed normally.

Let's look a 3 Cases: Partner Opens 1NT and RHO Overcalls 2♣

Hand 1	Hand 2	Hand 3
♠83	♠7	♠A4
♥864	♥AQ84	♥K83
♦52	♦75	♦Q95
♣KJT863	♣QJ8743	♣AQ763

Hand 1: you surely don't want to try to defend 2♣, and since Partner has 2+♣ A low-level ♣ contract seems to be desirable. We want Partner to bid ♣'s. Bidding 2N forces Partner to do that and you will Pass.

Hand 2: You have game going HCP and would be happy with a ♣, ♥, or NT game. Lebensohl makes exploration for these easy. You start with a forcing 3♣. If Partner responds with ♥'s you're happy, if P rebids 3♦ you can show your ♥ suit, and then Partner can choose between NT (with a ♠ stopper), ♥, or ♣.

Hand 3: You have a ♠ stopper and game-going, possibly slam. 3N would indicate game-going but denies stopper, you cannot cue ♠'s that's stayman. 3♣ is game-force response, showing 5+♣. How you proceed from here depends on Partners rebid, but remember if you rebid 3N that shows stopper and Partner my pass. If Partner rebids 3N (probably has stopper) you could bid 4NT quantitative! If Partner rebids a red suit you could cue bid ♠'s asking for a stopper. In any case partner should be well suited to determine where to go. If Partner choses 3N you can always bid 4♣ ace/key-card asking. **The Finesse – Finding another Trick**

As important as POTH is to success at the Bridge table beginners tend to focus on the complexities of bidding. There are some complex playing maneuvers such as End Plays and Squeezes that require experience and forward planning but the basic techniques, and there are only 6, are rather easily mastered. The 6 are (1) Suit development, (2) Finesse, (3) Hold-up plays, (4) Ducking, (5) Unblocking and (6) Dummy Reversal. Some techniques (3 and 4) are primarily used to protect the declarer from defensive assaults. Unblocking is used to make sure Declarer is able to get "all her tricks". The three primary methods to "gain a trick" are Ruffing in the short hand, Finessing and Development. To determine which technique should be used one must PLAN the POTH starting with the very first trick. Keep in mind that the finesse is a 50-50 proposition, while the other two choices generally give a higher probability of success.

Competent defenders make strategic opening leads that can usually say something about their hand. They know they are telling the declarer but more important is the fact that they are telling their Partner - it's the an important way defenders have of trying to overcome the advantage Declarer has in seeing and controlling two hands. Competent Declarers know they need to "read the lead"!

PLAN/ARCH The very first action by Declarer should be to Make a PLAN: **P**ause figure out what to do, **L**oser Count (Trump contracts), **A**nalyze the alternatives, **N**exus – make the connections. ARCH is a part of alternative **A**nalysis: **A**nalyze the lead – read the lead, **R**evue the Bidding, **C**ount winners/losers, **H**ow do I make the Hand. There's another: CRAP: **C**ount, **R**evue, **A**nalyze, **P**lan.

Example: You are missing the AK or KQ of a suit but that suit is not the suit of the Opening Lead. You know LHO doesn't hold either the AK or KQ of that suit. If it is a suit contract he doesn't have an empty A in the suit led. If the lead is a low card (2,3,4 or 5) you know he has an honor (not the A) in that suit and probably has 3 or more cards in that suit. If the lead is a middling card (7,8,9) you know he likely doesn't have an honor and probably doesn't have more than 3 cards in the suit. There is a lot of information in the

opening lead. ANALYZE THE LEAD.

Next: You count your winners (No-Trump contract) and find you have one less winner than what you need – or count your losers and find you have one (or more) than you can afford. You must look to see if there is any possibility to employ one or more of our techniques for gaining a trick.. Look for 7+ card suits (especially those divided (5-2) that provide a hope for suit development. Suit development offers an almost “fault-free” method of gaining a trick – if the opponents holdings in our “long suits” are “balanced” i.e. 3-3 for our 7-card holdings, or 3-2 for our 8-card suits then we can gain a trick and only have to be careful, if there are losers in those suits, that we do not lose control of the hand when we concede a trick in the effort to develop a suit. COUNT.

Look for short-suits in the dummy. Example: you hold xxx and dummy has xx you might possibly gain a trick by trumping that suit in the dummy. Note: Dummy normally is the hand shorter in trump and thusly you can only gain a trick by using trump in the short-trump hand to cover a loser. HOW.

FINESSE Now we come to the magic of finessing. By now we should know what a tenace is. TENACE == any multiple honor holding where there is a missing intermediate honor. Example holding only AQ and some spot cards in a suit either as Axx opposite Qxxx or AQxx opposite xxx. The middle card (the K) is missing. Similarly holding both the A and the J in a suit is a Tenace as is a Axx Txxx. Despite the fact that the name comes from the A-T type holding, that particular Tenace can rarely profit from the finesse. All other Tenace holdings give promise of an extra trick from the technique of finessing. There are 3 basic ways to finesse.

The SIMPLE FINESSE arises from the maneuver of leading toward the lower ranking honor hoping that the missing honor is held by the hand that must play before the hand holding that lower honor. We will look first at the “classic” simple finesse, a missing K when the AQ is held in just one hand. AQx opposite xxx. In “the Count” this holding has 2 losers, i.e. only 1 sure winner – the A. But if we lead toward the Q from the xxx holding the next player should be reticent to play the K, if he holds it, because the A will kill the K and promote the Q to a winner. A sure way to make a 2-loser (1-winner) holding into a 2-winner holding. This realization holds whether the AQx is visible or in the hidden hand. It is also viable if the two honors are in different hands. So long as we remember that the technique only works if we are leading “small” toward the lesser honor. Note: one never leads the card that one wants to “make into a winner”; doing so is sure suicide. Consider a Axx Qxx holding. If we lead the Q, mistakenly thinking that if the K gets played we can kill it with the A – we’ve error-ed. It is true A’s are K killers but we have not gained a trick. There are still two losers in the suit. Just what we started with. Here’s another example of the simple finesse: you hold Kxx opposite xx in a suit. This time there is no Tenace but if the A is in the hand that plays before the hand holding the K then the K can be made into a winner simply by leading toward it. Leading toward the card we hope to make a winner – the same situation as in the Tenace holding. We play the card we hope to make a winner after we and one opponent has played. The hope-for winner is the card being finessed. Another way to look at the finesse is to say we only want to give one opponent a chance to capture that honor – if we lead it we’ve given both opponents the opportunity.

With no knowledge of the location of the Card we are finessing against the finesse becomes purely a 50-50 proposition. Either it works because the card is where we hope it is or it doesn’t; but we may gain some help even if the finesse fails. In determining what the opponents hold we now have a better certainty on how many points the player who defeats our attempt has.

We’ve noted that one should not lead an honor we hope to make a winner. There is at least one exception. When we have transportation problems we are sometimes forced into leading the honor but we can only gain a trick if that honor has a “backup”. Consider this holding: AQJ opposite xxx. We might be able to make this 2 sure-trick holding into a 3 trick holding by leading small toward the AQJ, first by playing the J and if it is successful returning to the hand originally holding xxx and repeat the finesse. But if the holding is divided differently say QJx opposite Axx. The first time we lead x toward the QJx it will succeed but LHO certainly will not let it happen a second time. You can gain 1 trick but not 2.

FREE FINESSE Consider the following holding AJx opposite KTx. We have a situation in which we can finesse in either direction – a two-way finesse. We can lead low toward either the AJ and finesse the J or low toward the KT and finesse the T. There are times when we are forced to make that 50-50 attempt; but if we can induce an opponent into leading that suit we get what is known as a free finesse. If either opponent leads this suit we can, in the second hand, play the smaller card (effectively ducking) and wait for the third hand to play, winning the trick by killing the missing honor with our higher honor or freely play the lower honor. It is for this reason that when on defense we are admonished thusly: *when the Board is on your right, never lead a suit in which the board holds a Tenace*. This particular example is also referred to as a two-way finesse.

DOUBLE FINESSE Also called a deep finesse this occurs when there are two touching honors missing. For example: you hold AJT opposite xxx. There are four possible cases

LHO holds and	RHO holds
KQx(x)	xxx(x)
xxx(x)	KQx(x) or
Kxx(x)	Qxx(x) or
Qxx(x)	Kxx(x).

As always a finesse is executed by leading small toward the lesser honor. Hence the first time the finesse is attempted there is only a 1 in 4 (the first combination) chance that it will succeed. The second time the finesse is attempted, if the first attempt failed there is a 3 in 4 chance that it will succeed. That is by finessing in the same direction we have a 75% chance of gaining a trick. We have just lost a trick we couldn't win anyway in order to give ourselves a 75% chance of gaining a trick. The phenomenon on which this case is, in the field of statistics, called restricted choice. If we do not repeat the finesse, that is if we chicken out and play the A on the second round, we have reduced our success rate to 24%.

CONTINUING FINESSE All of the finessing situation we have looked at so far require that if the finesse is to be executed a second time, it requires that we return to the original hand that led small toward the lower ranking honor. We now consider the following AQxx opposite JTxx. Here we are trying to finesse around the K, for the finesse the K has to be in the hand that plays before the AQ holding but that does not mean we need to follow the same procedure of leading small toward the Q. We can now repeat the finesse without having to separately return to the originating hand. By leading first the J and then the T prior to leading the small, the lead is automatically in the hand necessary to have the lead for the repeat finesse.

OBLIGATORY FINESSE This situation commonly arises in a Trump suit but can also arise in a No-Trump contract or in an outside suit. It comes about when we have the K and Q in two opposing hands missing the 3 remaining honors. Consider the following Kxxx opposite Qxxx. An 8-card fit for which we hope that the outstanding 5 cards are split “normally”, i.e. 3-2 and that the A is a part of the Doubleton. As is usual the finesse starts with the lead of a small toward an honor we want to 'make good'. If the finesse is successful we then lead small toward the other honor with the intention of ducking. Let's look at the defensive holding where this works: Ax opposite JTx. When the first finesse works one hand is left with the bare A and the other with JT. On the second round we play small on small and the opponents are forced to play an honor on an honor, and that will be on the only losing trick we will have in that suit.

RUFFING FINESSE This is the only finesse where the card you hope to make good is led. You hold KQJT_x or any continuous honor holding where there is a single higher honor outstanding, e.g. the A has been played and the K is outstanding and you hold QJ_x or QJT_x and have a void in the opposing hand. Knowing or hoping that the outstanding honor is in the hand following the honors, you

lead the honor and 'let it ride' if that higher honor doesn't materialize or ruff if it does.

BACKWARD FINESSE This situation arises when you know, for example through bidding and/or suit count, that a particular card – the one you want to finesse around is in a particular hand. Consider holding AJxx opposite Kxx. The Q is the card you are finessing around and the normal finessing situation would be to lead small toward the J, but in this case you know the Q is in the hand that follows the hand holding AJxx. Here you would lead the J and play small if the Q isn't played. The Backward finesse is then a case where you actually lead the card to be finessed. This can only be a successful move when you actually gain a trick by executing it. If the K were not in the hand toward which you led the J you would not gain a trick. You are only sacrificing the J.

Last Look You have KJ52 opposite Q43 and need three tricks in this suit. You have two chances to get your 3 tricks. You hold 7 cards, if the remaining 6 are split 3-3 you have an long suit trick and two natural tricks. Otherwise, if the 5-2 split is such that the A doubleton is on-side i.e. playing before the KJ52. In the same vein you hold Axxx opposite QJx, if leading x toward the J works, do it again and if the K is in the second hand to play you have three tricks.

When you hold 8 trump, the Magic-8, always try for 6 trump tricks (gained by trumping in the short trump holding) then you will only need 2 additional tricks (for a 2-level contract) or 3 (for a 3-level contract) or 4 tricks (for a 4-level contract) in all the other suits. Those tricks being gained through High Card strength, finesses, or promotion. Note that if you Trump are divided 4-4 you can still get 6 trump tricks by only drawing 2 rounds of trump, and use the remainder to trump other suits. The potential of winning 6 tricks in one suit is a reason for the *magic-8* reference.

Rule of 7

The Hold-up play is integral to POTH, especially in NoTrump contracts where you can lose control of a suit. This rule tell you how many times you should hold-up in the suit of the Opening leader. Count the total (Dummy and your hand) number of cards you hold in the and subtract it from 7, that tell you how many times to hold-up so as to exhaust the non-leader of cards to return. Make note that the opening leader might then be considered the "Danger Hand".