

The tricks of the trade

In this section you will learn how tricks are won. It is essential reading for anyone who has not played a trick-taking game such as Euchre, Whist or Five Hundred, and it is worthwhile reading for all new players.

BRIDGE is a card game for four players, who sit down at a square table and form two partnerships. The partners sit opposite each other. They use an ordinary deck of 52 cards without jokers. The deck has four suits – ♠ (spades), ♥ (hearts), ♦ (diamonds) and ♣ (clubs).

The 13 cards of each suit are ranked from the ace (highest), king, queen, jack, ten, nine, eight and so on down to the two.

The cards are shuffled then dealt one at a time in a clockwise direction starting with the player to the left of the dealer. The full deck is dealt so each player starts with 13 cards.

You pick your cards up without showing anyone else and sort them into suits, perhaps placing them black-red-black-red for easier recognition. Now you are ready to go.

The bidding comes first – more about that shortly. Then the cards are played out one at a time until all 13 cards are gone. In the card play the two sides are trying to win as many *tricks* as they can.

Tricks

A trick is made up of four cards, one from each player. A designated player leads a card – any card – placing it face up on the table. Then the other three players in a clockwise rotation play a card, taking care to follow suit. In other words, play a card from the same suit as the one that is led.

When you can't follow suit you make a *discard*. You can always discard any card you like, usually a low one.

Each trick is won by the highest card in the suit that is led, unless a *trump* is played. The power of a trump suit is explained on page 4.

Here East-West are partners against North-South. The compass points are used for easy reference.

	North	
	♣ 3	
West		East
♣ A		♣ 4
	South	
	♣ 2	

Let's say West has the lead and leads the ♣A. The play proceeds in a clockwise direction. North plays the ♣3, East plays the ♣4 and South plays the ♣2. West, who played the highest club, wins the trick.

The winner of each trick leads to the next trick. So West gathers the four cards, turns them face down and leads to the next trick.

Since each player is dealt 13 cards, there are 13 tricks up for grabs. It doesn't matter which partner wins each trick – all that counts is the partnership total. You and your partner are a team, trying to win as many tricks as you can.

In the following examples West is always on lead. This is to make it easier to read – in real life, it could be any one of the four players.

	North	
	♣ 10 8 3	
West		East
♣ A K 7		♣ Q 9 4
	South	
	♣ J 6 2	

Again West leads the ♣A, North plays the ♣3, East the ♣4 and South the ♣2. There is no point in playing a higher card because you can't beat the ace. Next West leads the ♣K and everyone plays a low club once again. Then West leads the ♣7 and East wins the trick with the ♣Q.

	North	
	♦ 7 5 4	
West		East
♦ K Q J		♦ 9 8 6
	South	
	♦ A 10 2	

West leads a diamond, say the ♦K, and South takes the ace. This is a good move for East-West even though they lost the trick. When they next get the lead the ♦Q-J will be winners.

Third hand high

When partner leads a low card you should, in general, play a high card to prevent the fourth player winning the trick cheaply.

If your partner leads a low card you should generally play a high card

	North	
	♦ 7 4 3	
West		East
♦ K J 5		♦ Q 8 6
	South	
	♦ A 10 2	

West leads the ♦5 and North plays low. The third player, East in this case, should play the ♦Q. South can top the ♦Q with the ♦A but now West's ♦K-J are high. If East withholds the ♦Q, South wins a cheap trick with the ♦10.

Playing the queen like this is known as *third hand high*. It is good advice but do use your common sense:

	North	
	♦ 10 4 3	
West		East
♦ Q J 5		♦ K 8 6
	South	
	♦ A 9 2	

West leads the queen. Again East is the third hand but this time there is no point in playing high. You would only be beating partner's queen. Remember, it doesn't matter which partner wins the trick.

	North	
	♥ 10 9 5	
West		East
♥ K Q 2		♥ A 8 4
	South	
	♥ J 7 3	

This time West leads the ♥K and East plays low. Again, there is no point in beating partner's winner. Next West might lead the ♥2 and now East should play the ♥A, otherwise South will take the trick with the ♥J. The third lead of hearts is won by West with the ♥Q.

Second hand low

When you are the second player to the trick you generally play a low card. This gives partner the chance to win the trick cheaply.

If the player on your right leads a card, you should usually play a low card

	North	
	♦ A 4 3	
West		East
♦ Q 10 5		♦ 9 8 6
	South	
	♦ K J 7	

West leads the ♦5. As North, there is no rush to play the ♦A. You should play low – second hand low – to give South the chance to win the trick with a lower card. Here South wins the trick with the ♦J and the ♦A-K are still there for later.

The power of the trump suit

When a suit is named as trumps, a card from that suit will beat anything else. Only a higher trump beats a trump. Here is an example with hearts as trumps.

You don't have to trump in if you don't want to

	North	
	♠ J	
West		East
♠ 6		♠ A
	South	
	♥ 2	

West leads the ♠6 and East plays the ♠A. But South wins the trick with the ♥2 because hearts are trumps. You would say that South is trumping in. Two points come to mind:

1. South must be out of spades – you always have to follow suit if you can.
2. South was not obliged to trump in – you are always free to discard whatever you want.

You don't have to have a trump suit – sometimes a hand is played in *notrumps*. In *notrumps* no suit has priority. Each trick is won by the highest card in the suit that is led. In the last example on the previous page, nothing would have beaten the ♠A.

Which suit to lead

It generally pays to lead from a suit where you have a lot of cards – length matters. It also helps if the suit is strong.

Which card to lead

The *honour* cards are the A-K-Q-J-10. When your suit is headed by two or more honours in sequence, you should lead the top card of the sequence.

- ♥ K Q J 6 lead the king
- ♠ Q J 7 4 2 lead the queen
- ♣ A K 6 5 lead the ace
- ♥ J 10 8 4 lead the jack

When your suit is not headed by such a sequence, lead a low card.

- ♣ K J 7 4 lead a low card
- ♦ Q 10 8 5 2 lead a low card

A suit headed by a sequence makes an attractive lead. You might ask, why lead the top honour from a sequence – wouldn't the second best honour do just as well?

Yes, but by always leading the top honour from a sequence you give partner information that might be useful. You tell partner that you have the honour next in rank but not the one above.

Like this:

- | | |
|------|-----------|
| West | East |
| ♦ Q | ♦ A 9 8 6 |

Say you are East and partner leads the ♦Q. You immediately know that one of the opponents has the ♦K. It might be important to know this.

Lead from a long suit, choosing a low card unless you have a sequence headed by an honour