



When we start to learn bridge, we learn a few slogans to guide us. For example: *Cover an honour with an honour. Second hand plays low, third hand plays high. In finessing, eight ever, nine never. When in doubt lead trumps. Always return partner's suit.* (these last two never were very good advice).

These are useful guides when we start, but there are no 'always' and no 'nevers' in bridge. You will find that there are many important ifs and buts that you must also learn. This series of articles will attempt to clarify the ifs and the buts. First, we'll discuss :

### **Cover an honour with an honour.**

The big proviso: **But only if it may promote a defensive trick for one's side.**

Here is an obvious example where you would not follow the slogan. Declarer (LHO) has opened a weak two in spades and his partner has raised to 4S. Declarer wins the opening lead on the table and leads the SJ from dummy. Do you cover?

J108

K75 (you)

How many spades does partner hold? One only. There is no way that playing the king could ever promote a trick for your side, and indeed it may cost dearly. If partner's singleton is an honour, playing the king will be disastrous. The play will go J,K,A,Q (thus presenting declarer with a no loser suit). Or it could be worse: J, K, small, A. Partner will love you for compressing two certain tricks into one.

K9 (you)

J

AQ1053

In a NT contract, West leads the DJ. You are North. Both your diamonds are doomed, so is there any point in covering? Perhaps not, but partner just may hold 8xxx and will take the fourth trick. So cover – there is nothing to lose and just a possibility of gain.

There are less obvious situations. In a club side suit dummy holds QJ93. You hold K52. Declarer leads the Q from dummy. Do you cover?

The answer is No. Let's look at what could happen.

#1

1086

A74

QJ93

K53 (you)

You cover the Q with the King, Ace from declarer, who then plays small to the 9, finessing partner out of his ten. Declarer eventually collects four tricks in the suit. But, if you don't cover, declarer must lose a trick however he plays So the rule is: ***When you are looking at touching honours, don't cover the first time, but cover the second time.***

Change the layout a little.

#2 1086  
A74 QJ932  
K5 (you)

Now your King is doubleton, and declarer leads the CQ. You still mustn't cover. If declarer needs five tricks in this suit and you cover with the King, he has no choice but to finesse with the 9 to the next trick. But if you hold off with the King, look at declarer's problem. The layout may be:

1086 or 108  
1) (2)  
K5 K65

He has to pick either the King or the 10 to be doubleton if he wants to make 5 tricks in the suit. In (1) he must lead small from the table (dropping the doubleton King), in (2) he must lead the Queen, thus pinning the doubleton ten. To make life harder for him, an alert partner holding the 1086 will play the 8 to trick 1 to give the impression of the 10 being doubleton. Declarer may still get it right, but at least you have made him guess. And sometimes he will guess wrongly. That's the aim of the game.

What if your suit was the doubleton K10? In this case, cover the first time. Partner holds nothing to protect. If you are lucky, declarer may finesse the 9 into your hand on the next trick

Often you don't have the luxury of seeing the hand on lead. Example:

#3 A43 Q  
K75

Declarer, the closed hand leads the Q. Do you cover? Technically declarer should not be leading the Q unless he also has the J. Bearing in mind #1 above, if you cover you may be establishing a no loser suit for declarer. However, declarers don't always play correctly, and I would cover because we may be establishing a defensive trick. Otherwise you may find yourself in the position of North in the next hand.

#4 Q642 K82 J109 A753

West was an experienced player playing against experienced players. He needed to salvage two tricks from this suit. The normal way to play this combination is to hope for the King to be on your right and to lead small from the table. But he had good reason from the bidding to place the HK in the North hand. So he led the HQ from hand. North ‘knew’ that West, to play this way, had to hold the HJ and possibly the H9, and that he should hold off covering until the second round. So he ‘correctly’ held off allowing West to ‘steal’ his two tricks in hearts. This is a deceptive tactic that would work only against good players.

This is what we used to call a ‘Chinese’ finesse. These days, this would be a very un-PC term, but I don’t know what the language police today would call it. Whatever, it’s best to **cover an honour unless you can actually see the touching honours.**