

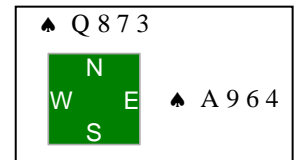
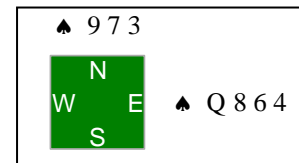
9: Defense - Second Hand Play

If the first card led to a trick is from your right, you are known as "second hand". This is so whether you sit in front of dummy or behind dummy. The same principles of second hand play apply regardless of whether the lead is from declarer's hand or from dummy. There are a couple of old maxims relating to second hand play: one is "Second hand low", the other is "Cover an honor with an honor". Both of these are useful guidelines, but neither of them will always be good advice.

Second Hand Low

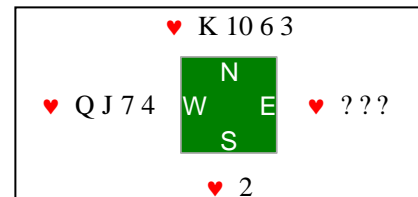
When a low card is led, as second hand you should usually play a low card. Let's look at a couple of examples that show why (N is dummy; you are E):

- Declarer leads the 3. Play low. Declarer may have KJ2 and will need to guess whether to play the King or the Jack. Or he might have the AK72; why sacrifice your Queen?
- Once again declarer leads the 3. Play low. If you play the Ace, and declarer has the King, he will score both the Ace and the Queen. If you keep your Ace sitting behind his Queen, the Queen will never win.
- Also, by playing low and so holding up your high card, you may create entry problems for declarer. Declarer often uses a hold-up play to disrupt defenders' communications. Defenders can sometimes use the same weapon against declarer.

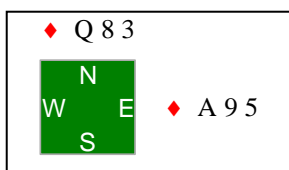


Exceptions to "Second Hand Low", when a low card is led

- If you can win the trick and you have the setting trick.
- If, in a suit contract, there is a danger, if you don't win the trick now, your Ace or King will never make later (declarer may ruff it out or discard his losers in the suit).
- When splitting your honors. Declarer leads the 2, and you are sitting West holding the cards shown at right. If you want to be sure of making at least one trick, play an honor. But, if partner has the Ace, you could make three Heart tricks by playing low. So your play really depends on how many tricks you need from the suit and who you think has the Ace.

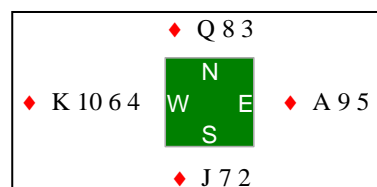


Cover an Honor with an Honor

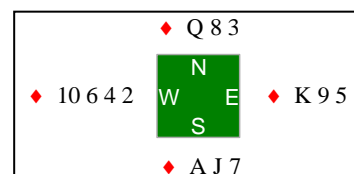


When an honor is led, and you are next to play, it is usually correct to play high - i.e. to cover the honor that is led with your higher honor. Declarer leads the Queen from dummy. Cover it with the

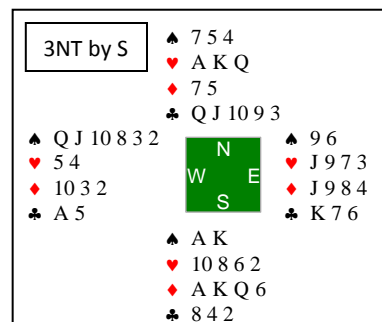
Ace. The full layout may look something like the diagram on the right. If you don't cover the Queen, partner will have to take the trick with the King. Later, declarer can lead toward the Jack and get an undeserved trick.



Let's look at a slight variation on the above situation. Again the Queen is led from dummy. You have the King - cover! This way, declarer wins just two tricks, the Ace and the Jack. If you don't cover, he will get three.



Another example, where you need to get on lead in a hurry to preserve partner's hoped for entry. Partner bid a weak 2 Spades, and leads the Queen. Declarer wins, gets to dummy and leads **any** club. Jump up with the King, it can't lose!



Exceptions to "Cover an Honor with an Honor"

- When there is no chance of promoting a trick for your side, for example when the Queen is led from QJ1098 and you hold K42.
- When the honor led is from touching honors, e.g. Queen from QJ9, as shown on the right. Here you should cover the **last of the touching honors**, when it is led. If you cover the Queen, declarer will win with the Ace and can later finesse your partner's Ten. Cover the Jack (the last touching honor) and he can't do this.
- When your honor will eventually be promoted, e.g. dummy leads Q from QJ10, and you hold K5432. Even if declarer has all the other cards in this suit, he can't capture your King.
- When partner's suit has to be so short that no promotion is possible. South opened the bidding with 1 Spade, showing at least 5 cards in the suit. Spades are trumps; declarer leads the Spade Jack from dummy. Don't cover! Partner has at most two cards in the suit. And if he has the singleton King, as in this diagram, covering the Jack will be too ugly for words!

