

ODDS AND EVENS – SIMPLIFIED

This signalling system is used to indicate your preference for Partner to lead to you when the opportunity arises. Basically, you choose a suit you would like to have returned to you.

It goes like this:

REMEMBER: Odd = ENCOURAGE Even = PREFER ANOTHER SUIT

EXAMPLE: the contract is 4 Spades.

You have this hand - ♠T ♥AKT7 ♦654 ♣K7652 **(NOTE: T = 10)**

Partner led a Diamond, which Declarer won in hand with the King, then started to play out the Spades. You followed to the first one but now you have to make a decision about which suit you can afford to discard from and at the same time, tell Partner which suit you want to be led to you. That comes down to Hearts (because you have the AKT) and Clubs because you have the King.

Think: What does Dummy look like?

Suppose it looks like this - ♠J95 ♥J832 ♦7 ♣AQJT3

It's obvious – you will be wanting a Club lead because your King is sitting over the Queen. The Hearts can wait.

To ask Partner to lead a Club to you, which card must you discard on that second Spade trick?

This is an ENCOURAGE situation so you discard an odd card – in this case it has to be the ♣7.

If that King was not in Dummy you would have called for a Heart lead. Which card would you play now?

You have two or three choices.

A Diamond – okay, as long as it is EVEN.

A Club – good idea, as long as it is EVEN.

You could always pitch the ♥7 which is ODD and ENCOURAGING but that wouldn't be clever because Dummy has 4 Hearts and so do you. There's always a chance the ♥Q could fall and promote your Jack.

So it's simple really, if you do three things:

1. Remember the rules – Odd = Encourage and Even = Discourage.
2. WATCH every card your Partner plays, in case he's signalling for a suit, and expect your partner to return the favour.
3. Consider all the options, keeping in mind what cards you hold, what you see in Dummy, how the bidding went, and which suits have been played.

This simple technique is designed to streamline your defence. If you can lead the right suit to each other your trick tally will improve, and so will your partner's mood!!! It's not rocket science, just commonsense!

Finally, don't be discouraged or confused if you don't have the right card to signal with. It happens. And if your hand is worthless, discard evens that you think you don't need.

SIGNALLING - ODDS AND EVENS for suit preference

A critical part of defence in Bridge is the art of signalling to your partner where your strengths are, if any. This can only be done by card play since gestures and talking are forbidden. This is a simple and excellent way of communicating your preferences to your partner, and takes very little time to get used to.

You can't always have the cards you need to make a signal, but that's not a big problem.

You should signal with your FIRST DISCARD when you are unable to follow suit. Basically, signalling means letting your partner (and the opponents too, of course) know which suit you are hoping to win tricks in, if your partner gets the lead and can play that suit to you. It removes a lot of the guesswork, especially if you didn't bid (the bidding tells a lot about your hand). Of course, you might have bid Diamonds with ♦JT9876 but if you're defending you might not want the suit led to you because you're not going to win any quick tricks in it. Signalling also tells partner which suit you are not interested in or can't risk having led to you.

There are several systems of signalling, but the simplest to remember is **ODDS AND EVENS**. It works like this:

You only have to remember that your FIRST DISCARD of an ODD (3,5,7,9) card indicates a preference for the suit you played. An EVEN (2,4,6,8, 10) card indicates you have no interest in the suit.

REMEMBER:
Odd = ENCOURAGE
Even = PREFER ANOTHER SUIT

e.g. If you discard the ♠3 you are telling your partner you'd like a spade lead to come up to you. But if you discard the ♠2 you would rather not receive a spade lead. Either you have nothing of value in spades, or perhaps you hold the King which would probably lose to the Ace.

An example:

You are defending a contract of 4 Hearts. Declarer won the opening lead – let's say it was a club, then led a trump. Now he leads a second trump, and your hand is down to

♠K76 ♥- ♦KQ7543 ♣76

You must discard something. Assuming that Declarer on your left has the Ace of spades, the best you can hope for is a diamond trick or two. So it makes sense to discard the ♦3 to encourage a lead of that suit.

However, if you are defending a contract of 3NT you certainly don't want to let go a diamond, especially as the KS could be an entry to that suit. So you should definitely discard the ♣6 to make it clear you don't want a club switch from partner.

This entails some planning ahead – **on the lead of a club you must play the 7, retaining the 6 for your signal when Hearts are started.**

Another example:

If you hold ♠T ♥AKT7 ♦654 ♣K762 **(NOTE: T = 10)**

and as the contract is 4 Spades, you will need to discard on the second round of trumps.

Dummy has ♠95 ♥J832 ♦7 ♣AQJT3

Clearly, you stand to make three tricks if declarer has 2 hearts and 2 clubs in his hand. So the lead of either suit is fine with you. To guarantee a club lead from partner, you should discard the ♣7. But if you want a heart lead, you might play the ♥7. It's ambiguous, but partner could lead either a heart or a club and you would not be unhappy. The only lead that you don't need is a diamond.

The beauty of this system is that it generally allows you to keep all the cards in your best suit if you can signal in another suit. In No Trumps this is critical to the success of your campaign.

When you play or defend a hand, it goes without saying that you must watch every card that is played. When using a signalling system this is critical, because your partner's first discard can convey so much information. So you must always watch for it, and then stop to think what it means. Say to yourself, for example, "Odd spade means he likes Spades," or "Even diamond means he's not interested in diamonds." Remember here that a negative signal means your partner is probably calling for the lead of another suit; the bidding, the play so far and the cards you see in your hand and in dummy will help to point you in the right direction if and when you get the lead.

The other thing to remember is that the stronger hand of your partnership is likely to win more tricks. If your hand is totally weak and valueless it's fairly pointless to signal, but you should do it anyway, just to be consistent. The best suit to signal might be dummy's strongest, because it's less likely to cost your side a trick.

Always remember to **watch your partner's cards** so when the signal comes you're able to catch its meaning, even if you can never get the lead to play to him.

NOTE: if you have followed suit all the way for 5 or 6 tricks or more, your first discard is far less likely to be a signal, and partner need not read too much into it. By that time you might just be discarding cards you can actually spare. So a negative discard is likely to be most helpful at that point. It may help if partner gets the lead and plays to your hand.

QUIZ 1

1. You are defending a contract of 3NT. Partner led a small club which declarer has won and is now running a long diamond suit. What should your first discard be in each case?

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|----|--------|-------|-----|-------|
| a. | ♠A86 | ♥QJ74 | ♦5 | ♣8654 |
| b. | ♠AKJ76 | ♥T976 | ♦Q9 | ♣3 |
| c. | ♠AQT3 | ♥KJ53 | ♦T8 | ♣6 |

2. You are defending a contract of 3 Hearts. Your opening lead was ♦A followed by ♦K to which partner discarded the ♣8. You will play a third diamond for him to ruff, but what should you play if you win the lead again?

BTW: If your opponents ask you what signals you use, tell them Odds and Evens and leave it at that unless they ask for clarification. You don't have to give an interpretation of the signal until you're asked for it.

QUIZ ANSWERS

1. a) Your best suit is Hearts so hang onto those and indicate with an odd Club (you did keep the 4 for an even signal for Hearts, didn't you?) or if you can't use a Club, play the 8 of spades, indicating higher of other suits. The 6 would indicate the lower.
1. b) This had better be the Spade 10. It's even and shouts Hearts!
1. c) You're a bit stuck here. Base your decision on the bidding and the Dummy. If you're sitting over an honour, choose the 3 of that suit.
2. 8 of Clubs looks like an encouragement and as the unbid suits is Spades, that must be it. Adjust your lead to fit in with what you see in your hand and Dummy.