



# WHEN TO LEAD

# TRUMP

*On opening lead*

Lecture Presented at Palo Alto Bridge  
Center February 19, 2026



*Debbie Rosenberg 2026*



# PLAN FOR THIS SESSION

---

Become familiar  
with situations  
where the auction  
calls for a trump  
lead

Choose the  
opening lead  
together on  
several specific  
hands/auctions

## It is not always clear whether to lead trump

---

Experts often disagree on the best opening lead.

---

There are some situations where a trump is the standout lead and virtually all experts would lead trump.

---

There are also situations where it is clearly wrong to lead trump.

---

Then there are many deals in between where experts would disagree on whether to lead trump.

---

My main goal today is to help you master the clear situations.

Consider a trump lead when an opponent has shown a two-suited hand

**The trump lead is particularly attractive when you have strength in the other suit.**

Specific situations where it is fairly routine to lead trump include:

- **Our side opens 1N and they show a 2-suiter.**
- **Against 2m after the specific auction 1M-1N(Forcing), 2m-all pass.**

Dummy usually has a singleton or void in the major because they did not take a preference.

*In this auction I've heard it said, only half-jokingly, that you should lead trump first and look at your hand later.*

# Lead a trump when partner passes your takeout double of a 1-level opening.

---

For example (1 ♣) X (P) P, (P),

This auction screams for a trump lead because you expect partner's trumps to be better and likely longer than declarer's. You want to help partner draw trump.

You are effectively defending the way you would play if you were declarer.

NOTE: This logic does not extend to higher levels. For example, after (3 ♣) X all pass a trump would usually be a poor lead.

Other times a trump lead can be attractive include:

Dummy has a known or likely short suit and you have strength in that suit

Your side has an overwhelming majority of the high card strength, and the opponents have a fit. Their main source of tricks is likely to be crossruffing. This is often a case where they are sacrificing and your side has doubled them on power.

# A trump lead is “unattractive” when:

- Declarer has a long trump suit and there is no reason to think dummy has a fit.

DO NOT LEAD TRUMP WHEN DUMMY MAY BE VOID

- The opening leader has a singleton trump, or other holding such as Qxx where leading a trump is likely to blow a trick. In such cases tend to lead trump only in standout trump lead auctions.
- After a transfer auction, when RHO has opened with NT. Here the long trumps are in dummy, but declarer is also likely to have some strength. You are likely to compromise partner's trump holding.
- Dummy is known to have a long suit, i.e. source of tricks, and you have no strength in that suit.

DO NOT  
LEAD  
TRUMP

When dummy may be void

When you are likely to lose  
your natural trump  
trick(s).

Sometimes  
we lead  
trump to be  
“passive”  
with no  
other good  
lead.

A trump lead is most likely to be “safe” from:

- A solid 3-card sequence such as KQJ or QJT
- Four small. Leading from xxxx is usually safe as long as the opponents are known to have at least an 8-card fit.
- Three small IF the opponents are known to have a 9-card fit. Leading from xxx is likely to be safe when partner has only a singleton.

Leading from xx is questionable. If the opponents are known to have at least 9 it probably won't help them. If they have only 8 you are more likely to help them, especially when declarer has bid NT and dummy has the length (usually a transfer auction).

A trump lead is particularly UNSAFE with a singleton, or a holding such as Qxx or Jx.

# EXAMPLES

---

Let's examine a few specific hands and auctions to determine our opening lead.

**EXAMPLE 1.**

EAST DEALER

NONE VUL

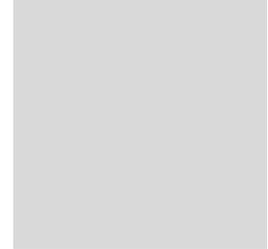
	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			1NT	P
P		2♣ (Majors)	P	2♥
P		P	P	

♠ K2

♥ 532

♦ 9432

♣ QJT3



Your lead to 2♥?

**EXAMPLE 1**  
**ANSWER**

♠ K2

♥ 532

♦ 9432

♣ QJT3

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
		1NT	P
P	2♣*	P	2♥
P	P	P	
	*Majors		

Answer: This is a standout trump lead situation, despite the attractive sequence in clubs. Dummy has both majors and declarer chose hearts. You can imagine declarer ruffing spades in their hand, which you can't overruff. Your side has the balance of power so it is not likely there is a big hurry to get your side suit tricks.

**EXAMPLE 2**

EAST DEALER

NS VUL

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
		1♥	X
XX	P	P	2♣
X	P	P	P

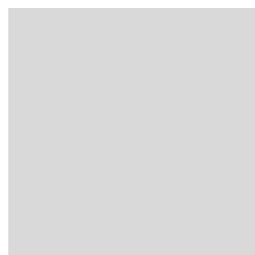
♠ KJ85

♥ 5

♦ J943

♣ AJT3

Your lead to 2♣X?



**EXAMPLE 2**  
**ANSWER**

♠ KJ85  
♥ 5  
♦ J943  
♣ AJT3

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
		1♥	X
XX	P	P	2♣
X	P	P	P

Answer: Lead a heart. While this auction does make a trump lead somewhat attractive, you would prefer trumps be led by partner.

**EXAMPLE 3**

SOUTH  
DEALER

BOTH VUL

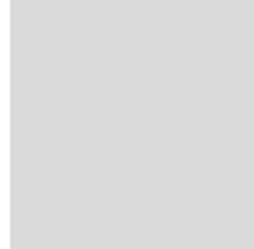
WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			1♦
X	P	P	P

♠ QJ83

♥ AQ83

♦ 5

♣ KJT3



Your lead to 1♦ X?

**EXAMPLE 3**  
**ANSWER**

♠ QJ83  
♥ AQ83  
♦ 5  
♣ KJT3

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			1♦
X	P	P	P

Answer: Lead a trump. This is a clear trump lead auction. The logic is that partner's diamonds rate to be longer and stronger than declarer's when they pass your double at the ONE level. Partner may be able to DRAW TRUMP and you want to help.

This is an exception to avoiding a trump lead when dummy is likely to be short in trump, as well as an exception to avoiding leading a singleton trump.

**EXAMPLE 4**

SOUTH  
DEALER

E-W VUL

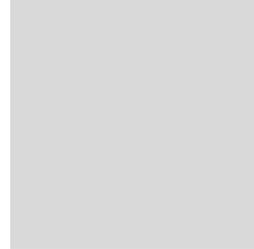
WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			2♠
X	P	P	P

♠ 3

♥ AQ83

♦ KJ32

♣ QJT3



Your lead to 2♠ X?

**EXAMPLE 4**  
**ANSWER**

♠ 3

♥ AQ83

♦ KJ32

♣ QJT3

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			2♠
X	P	P	P

Answer: Lead the ♣Q.

This is NOT a trump lead auction. The logic that applies when partner passed your double at the ONE level does not apply at higher levels. While partner must have a "trump stack" to pass your takeout double, they are not expected to be longer and stronger than declarer's trumps. Partner is unlikely to be able to draw trump and a trump lead into declarer is more likely to help declarer.

**EXAMPLE 5**

NORTH  
DEALER

BOTH VUL

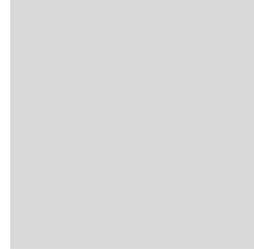
WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	1♠	1NT	2♥
P	P	P	

♠JT43

♥865

♦J932

♣54



Your lead to 2♥?

**EXAMPLE 5**  
**ANSWER**

♠ JT43

♥ 865

♦ J932

♣ 54

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	1♠	1NT	2♥
P	P	P	

Answer: Lead the ♣5.

This is NOT a trump lead auction. Declarer has indicated long hearts, usually 6+, and there is no reason to think the dummy has any fit for hearts. You do have strength in the side suit (spades), but declarer will be ruffing spades with the long trumps.

When partner opens or overcalls 1NT, consider leading a doubleton in an unbid suit. As a rule, I shy away from doubleton leads, but here partner is likely to have enough strength to get in and give you a ruff before declarer can draw trump.

**EXAMPLE 6**SOUTH  
DEALER

NONE VUL

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	*Forcing		1♠
P	1NT*	P	2♦
P	P	P	

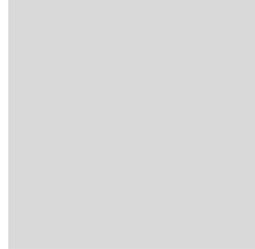
♠ QJT43

♥ KJ86

♦ 95

♣ QJ

Your lead to 2♦?



**EXAMPLE 6**  
**ANSWER**

♠ QJT43  
♥ KJ86  
♦ 95  
♣ QJ

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	*Forcing		1♠
P	1NT*	P	2♦
P	P	P	

Answer: Lead the ♦5 (top of a doubleton is not a thing when leading trump) .

This is a STANDOUT trump lead auction as mentioned earlier. Specifically 1M-1N(F), 2m-P. Dummy usually has a singleton or void in the major.

The trump lead here is even more attractive due to strength in the major.

**EXAMPLE 7**NORTH  
DEALER

E-W VUL

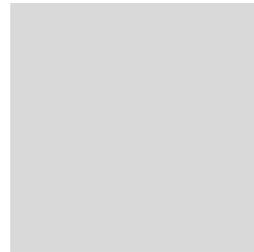
	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
		P	1♦	2♣
	2♥	3♣	4♥	5♣
	X	P	P	P

♠AQ8

♥KJ863

♦J9

♣532



Your lead to 5♣X?

**EXAMPLE 7**  
**ANSWER**

♠AQ8

♥KJ863

♦J9

♣532

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	P	1♦	2♣
2♥	3♣	4♥	5♣
X	P	P	P

Answer: Lead a club.

**When your side has the majority of high cards and the opponents are sacrificing it is often best to lead a trump.** This is most clear when, as is the case for West above, you know your side has at least some values in all the side suits. Where are the opponents going to get tricks except from ruffing? See the next slide for the full deal.

**EXAMPLE 7**  
**FULL DEAL**

N Dealer  
E-W VUL

♠54  
♥QT7  
♦86543  
♣AJ6

♠AQ8  
♥KJ863  
♦J9  
♣532

♠KT72  
♥A954  
♦KQT2  
♣8

♠J963  
♥2  
♦A7  
♣KQT974

Suggested Auction

P 1♦ 2♣ 2♥  
3♣ 4♥ 5♣ X  
P P P

At favorable vulnerability, it seems reasonable for South to sacrifice against 4♥, which would have made. However, superb defense can get South down 4, for +800. This excellent defense begins with a trump lead.\*

If West starts with a trump, then continues trump at every opportunity, declarer won't get even one ruff in dummy and can be held to just her six clubs and the diamond ace. On the other hand, if the defense does not lead or shift to trump early, declarer may get two ruffs in dummy and go down only 2 for =300.

\*A heart lead and trump shift also works, but a diamond lead does not.

IF YOU HAVE  
RARELY OR  
NEVER BEEN  
LEADING TRUMP  
ON OPENING  
LEAD, START AT  
LEAST  
CONSIDERING IT

---

While today's lesson focused on the opening lead, often trump leading defenses are clearer after we see dummy. Be open to trump switches after the opening lead.

---

Sometimes switching to trump can be an effective defense to cut down on declarer's ruffing ability. Other times a trump switch is the best passive defense, to avoid giving anything away.