

## Using Signals and Discards in Defence

ie Signals (when you're following suit) and Discards (when you can't follow suit)

Intelligent defence needs a large amount of cooperation between partners.

A major defensive tool for you and partner to use is an agreed system of legal signalling. *(This of course excludes sighing, eye-rolling, grimacing and fidgeting)*

Whether as declarer or as defender, you must always look at the opponents' card for leads and discards, and if there is something you do not understand, you are entitled to ask them to explain its meaning. Don't let someone else's signal be a plus for them simply because you are too shy to ask what it means.

- "What is your system of discards?" or
- "Do you have a system of discards" is the way to go, and, expect to be asked the same.

**NOTE** By partnership agreement there can be a plethora of signal methods - the most common one is covered in this article.

**A WORD OF ADVICE FOR NEW(ish) players - start slowly, keep it simple, until you gain in confidence. Introduce 1. and/or 3. - leave 2. until you're happy with the others.**

### Signals fall into 3 categories

1. Attitude - you like or dislike a lead from partner
2. Count - tell how many cards in a suit that partner holds
3. Suit-preference - tells what suit you'd like partner to switch to next

By default, a signal is for **attitude** unless the situation clearly warrants a count signal or suit-preference signal.

An **attitude** signal is the most common signal in bridge. A **high spot card** encourages the lead of a suit, whereas a **low spot card** discourages.

Attitude signals are used when following suit to partner's lead, or when making the first discard in a suit. Of the three types of defensive signals, attitude signals have the highest priority.

### General Signalling Rules:

1. Don't signal when it might help declarer more than partner.
2. Don't signal with a card that might take a trick
3. **Do** signal on the opening lead
4. Signals are guidelines, it is not mandatory to follow partner's signal.

**System Cards have a place to note down your signalling preferences**

**...read on for some expert explanation**

5. PLAY CONVENTIONS				
NT = versus No Trump		S = versus Suit		✓ or ✕ = versus all contracts
Leads	Sequences:	Overlead:	<input type="checkbox"/> All <input type="checkbox"/> All except AKs (+) <input type="checkbox"/> As:Attitude/K:Count	<input type="checkbox"/> Underlead
Four or more with an honour	<input type="checkbox"/> 4th highest <input type="checkbox"/> Attitude	<input type="checkbox"/> 3rd/Low <input type="checkbox"/> 2nd/4th		
From 4 small	<input type="checkbox"/> 2nd highest <input type="checkbox"/> 3rd highest <input type="checkbox"/> 4th highest			
From 3 cards (no honour)	<input type="checkbox"/> Top <input type="checkbox"/> Middle <input type="checkbox"/> Bottom			
In partner's suit	<input type="checkbox"/> Overlead <input type="checkbox"/> 4th <input type="checkbox"/> MUD			
Discards	<input type="checkbox"/> McKenney <input type="checkbox"/> Revolving	<input type="checkbox"/> High Encourage <input type="checkbox"/> Odd-Enc., Even-McKenney		
		<input type="checkbox"/> Low Encourage <input type="checkbox"/> Even-Enc., Odd-McKenney		
Count	<input type="checkbox"/> High-Low = Even <input type="checkbox"/> Low-High = Even			
Signal on partner's lead:	<input type="checkbox"/> Count <input type="checkbox"/> Suit Preference	<input type="checkbox"/> High Enc. <input type="checkbox"/> Low Enc.		
Show Priorities here:				
Signal on declarer's lead:	<input type="checkbox"/> Count <input type="checkbox"/> Suit Preference <input type="checkbox"/> Smith Echo			
Show Priorities here:				

## What's Standard?

by David Lindop

*This series is based on Grant Standard, a set of conventions and agreements that are in popular use today, such as 15-17 INT openings, five-card majors, and weak two-bids. A summary chart of Grant Standard and the corresponding convention card can be found at [www.AudreyGrant.com](http://www.AudreyGrant.com). The site also has Grant Basic, a simpler set of agreements.*

*Earlier articles in this series appeared in the Bridge Bulletin and can also be found under 'Articles' at [www.AudreyGrant.com](http://www.AudreyGrant.com).*

**W**e're going to wrap up this series by taking a look at standard defensive signals—a key aspect of the game.

Every card we play as a defender gives partner some information about our hand, starting with the opening lead. If we lead the ♠Q, for example, we are typically showing the ♠J and denying the ♠K, since we lead the top of touching cards.

If we lead the ♠2, we are typically showing a four-card suit, since we lead fourth best. Partner would also know we don't have a sequence in the suit, since we would have led the top of our touching cards if we held a sequence. If we are leading the ♠2 against a suit contract, partner can also assume that we don't hold the ♠A, since we rarely lead away from an ace against a suit contract.

So we are already exchanging a lot of information on defense through the cards we lead. However, there are three basic 'signals' with which we are expected to be familiar:

- Attitude
- Count
- Suit Preference

Attitude tends to be our primary signal, and it's also the first signal alphabetically. So let's start there.

## Defensive Signals

### Standard Attitude Signals

When partner leads a card, we play third to the trick. Sometimes, we have no choice about which card to play. For example:

	DUMMY					
	♥ A 6 5					
PARTNER		Us				
♥ 4	<table><tr><td>N</td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td>S</td></tr></table>	N	E	W	S	♥ Q 9 3
N	E					
W	S					

Partner leads the ♥4. If declarer plays low from dummy, we must play the ♥Q, third hand high, trying to win the trick for our side. The play of the ♥Q isn't a signal, although it does give partner some information. It tells partner that we don't hold the ♥J, since we would play the ♥J—**only as high as necessary**—if we held both the ♥Q and ♥J.

However, if declarer plays dummy's ♥A, we have a choice of cards that we can play. This is where we can make an attitude signal. The standard agreement is:

#### ATTITUDE SIGNAL

- A high card is encouraging.
- A low card is discouraging.

So we can play the ♥9 to encourage partner to lead the suit again, or we can play the ♥3 to discourage partner from leading the suit. Which signal should we send? That depends on the particular deal. We have to make a defensive plan based on our hand, what we see in the dummy, what information we have from the auction, and what we know from the cards played so far. The point is that the attitude signal is a tool. We still must decide how best to apply it.

When making an attitude signal, we do the best that we can. If we want to make an encouraging signal when we hold ♥Q-3-2, we have to play the ♥3—the highest card we can afford. If we want to make a discouraging signal with ♥9-8-7, we have to play the ♥7, our lowest card. It's up to partner to look at the other cards in the suit to determine which signal we are trying to send. It won't always be clear cut.

However, we should try to make the clearest possible signal. If we want to make an encouraging signal when holding ♥Q-8-7-4, we should play the ♥8, not the ♥7. We play the highest card we can afford.

### Attitude Discards

We can also send an attitude signal when discarding. Suppose declarer is drawing partner's trumps or running a long suit, and we have to make a discard. We can discard a high card in a suit that we would like partner to lead, or a low card in a suit we don't want partner to lead.

Defending is a complex business. **When choosing a signal, we must consider what information will be most useful to partner.** We don't want to give an encouraging signal simply because we hold strength in a suit. It may be more important to give a count signal (see later), to help partner know which suit to hold on to when declarer is taking tricks. We might also want to conceal our strength or weakness from declarer.

So we have to assess each situation, and hope that our partner is on the same wavelength. Partner should trust us to give the appropriate signal at the appropriate time, and we must likewise trust partner.

However, unless we have some other agreement, attitude signals take priority. Partner should assume a high card says we like the suit; a low card says we don't.

Click on  
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Joan Butts Challenge hand YouTube video  
Signalling while defending a bridge hand part 1  
Signalling while defending a bridge hand part 2

(3.08 minutes)

(14 minutes)

(13 minutes)