21 BASIC SIGNALS in DEFENCE

Defence would be a lot easier if you could see partners hand – as declarer can see dummy.

'Signalling' is an attempt to communicate between defenders by the careful play of the cards they hold.
There are signalling conventions to:

- Indicate whether you 'like' a particular suit = ATTITUDE

- Indicate how many cards you hold in a suit = COUNT

- Indicate which suit your partner can get back to your hand with

- Show suit preference

In the remainder of this paper, South is declarer and your side is defending – partner is West and you are East.

ATTITUDE - 'Do I like this suit?'
There are 2 options for this convention :
- 'high to encourage' or
- 'low to encourage' - Most people now play **LOW to ENCOURAGE** because it preserves a higher card which may be important in the play.
When partner (W) leads an honour in a suit, you ENCOURAGE the continuation of that suit by playing your lowest card – if you have nothing to offer in that suit, play the highest card you can afford.
Sometimes you will have little choice if you don't hold suitable cards, and the signal may be hard to interpret. It may be clearer after the second trick in that suit is played.

e.g.   10 6 2
     Leads Q   K 8 7 **3**   the 3 encourages – partner can see it is low

                       10 6 5
     Leads Q   **4** 3 2   you play the 4 – partner may not be able to tell whether this is high or low, but on the next round when you play the 2, the 4 was obviously high to discourage!

Or   **A** 7 5
     Leads 6   Q 4 3 **2**   Partner presumably has an honour,
Declarer plays the A – you play the 2 to encourage – saying you too have an honour.

SPECIAL SITUATION
Partner leads an Ace (promising the King) – the discard of the Queen PROMISES that you can win the next trick – either the Q is a singleton, or you have the J as well!

A K x x   **Q** J x
A Q x

Partner leads the A you play the Q! partner will then lead x to your J (NOT play the K) – hoping that you will be able to work out that he/she wants you to switch to the suit in which his A Q is sitting over Declarer's K.

An excellent example of using attitude signals – contract 2 S

```
                    10 8
                    A  6 3
                    K Q 10 9 3
                    A Q 10
A Q 5                           6 2
J 10 9 4                        K Q 8 2
A 6                             8 7 3 2
9 8 7 4                         K J 5
                    K J 9 7 4 3
                    7 5
                    J 4
                    6 3 2
```

Partner leads J hearts, covered by the A. While you have excellent hearts, you desperately want partner to play clubs through dummy, so play the 8 Hearts! – discouraging hearts. When partner gets the lead – you want them to work out that you want clubs! When you win with a club you don't cash your top hearts but lead the 2 back to partners 10 (which they promised when they led the J) so that they can lead another club. – defenders get 2 spade tricks, 1 heart, 2 clubs and 1 diamond – taking the contract off 1!

COUNT

Sometimes partner will be more interested in how many cards you hold in a suit, rather than their quality. This will normally be the case when they are leading honours from a sequence, or when declarer is trying to set up a long suit in dummy and does not have outside entries.

```
                    Q J 4
        A K 10 8 3              9 7 6 2
                    5
```
Partner leads the A – looking at dummy it is obvious to him that you have no high cards in the suit – 'attitude' is not helpful – what is important is for him/her to know is **how many cards you have in the suit**.
Again, there are 2 COUNT conventions used :
'Natural' Count where a high then low card = an EVEN number OR
'Reverse' Count where a LOW then HIGHER card = EVEN number, while HIGH then LOWER = ODD number of cards.
In the above example you would play the 2 (it will have to be an even number – or singleton) – partner will have to try and work out whether you have 2 or 4 – probably by

recalling the bidding. (You have to learn to remember the bidding by the opponents for these clues). If partner gets it correct, they will not continue with the K as they will have worked out that it will be trumped.

Whenever partner leads a K, from a sequence, you normally give COUNT in preference to attitude. (When they lead an Ace – give ATTITUDE)

Also give COUNT when declarer is trying to set up a long suit in dummy and there is no outside entry.

$$K \ Q \ 10 \ 8 \ 3$$

6 4   A 9 5

J 7 2   You need to know when to take your A – it MUST be when declarer leads their LAST card in that suit – how can you tell? – Your partner has to be alert and give Count. When declarer first leads say the 2, partner must play the 4, then the 6 = even number – you will know declarer has 3 cards and will take your Ace on the 3rd round.
However if partner held 7 6 4 and declarer J 2, on the first round partner will play the 7 and then the 4 = an ODD number – so Declarer can only have 2 cards and you take the Ace on the second round – Declarer can never get to dummy again!

SUIT PREFERENCE ON FIRST DISCARD

When Declarer or your Partner is 'running' a suit and you can't follow, you use **your 1st discard to show your suit preference.**

Again there are different conventions, the easiest being : **Low to Encourage - High to Discourage that suit.**
Sometimes you may not be able to afford to discard a card in your best suit, so you will need to discourage a different suit – a negative rather than a positive signal.
*Be careful not to signal such that Declarer is 'tipped off' in a finesse situation e.g. if dummy holds A Q 10 and you hold 8 3 2, don't signal that this suit is weak from your point of view.

You and partner have to be very vigilant in defence, looking for signals – whether the first card they play is encouraging, and particularly whether they play low - high or high - low giving count. Also be on the look out for their first discard and work out what it means – you are allowed to stop and think about the cards played at the time – don't rush! You too have to think about each card you play – should you be giving count, showing preference etc.
It is wise to pre-plan which card you are going to play as early in the hand as you possibly can – don't wait until that trick has commenced.