


## Signaling Methods

Unlike declarer play, defense is a cooperative undertaking between two partners, and some method of communication is necessary. This is done with various signaling agreements in the play of the cards. The attitude signal and the count signal are by far the most important, and they are used at all contracts — notrump or suit. Accurate defense requires a thorough understanding of these tools.

### The Count Signal

The count signal is less widely used than the attitude signal, but it is crucial to skillful defense. A high card (or high-low sequence) shows an *even* number of cards in that suit; i.e., two, four or six. A low card (or up-the-line sequence) shows an *odd* number of cards in that suit; i.e., three, five or seven. In order not to confuse the count signal with the attitude signal it is necessary to have distinct conditions under which it applies. The basic rule is: **The count signal applies when following to a suit that was led by declarer.**

3 NT by South

<p>♠Q 10 4 ♥J 10 6 3 ♦9 7 6 2 ♣10 2</p>		<p>♠A 9 5 ♥9 7 5 ♦A 8 5 ♣Q 9 6 4</p>
<p>♠J 7 3 ♥8 4 ♦K J 10 3 ♣J 8 5 3</p>	<p>♠K 8 6 2 ♥A K Q 2 ♦Q 4 ♣A K 7</p>	


Lead: ♥3

South wins the opening heart lead and leads the ♦Q. West has four diamonds (an even number) so he should play the *seven* to begin a high-low sequence. (The seven is better than the six on the general principle of making signals as easy to read as possible.) East ducks this trick.

East should win the ♦A on the *second* round based on this logic: West's high-low must be from two or four cards. If four cards, declarer will have two and he will be shut out from dummy; if two cards, declarer will have four (the same as in dummy) so a further holdup is useless.

Note that if East holds up the ♦A twice (as many players would do), declarer can make 3 NT easily by switching to spades. Actually, the contract can always be made, but declarer must play well and guess the ending. Don't give it to him!

4 ♠ by South

<p>♠K 5 3 ♥8 7 4 ♦5 3 ♣K Q 8 7 6</p>		<p>♠J 7 2 ♥J 10 9 ♦9 7 6 4 ♣A J 10</p>
<p>♠Q 8 ♥Q 6 3 2 ♦A J 8 2 ♣9 5 2</p>	<p>♠A 10 9 6 4 ♥A K 5 ♦K Q 10 ♣4 3</p>	

Lead: ♥2

On the heart lead East plays the nine and South wins the ace. At trick two declarer leads the ♣3; West should play the two, his lowest card to indicate an odd number of clubs, and dummy plays the king.

If East wins the ♣A, declarer is able to establish and use the club suit — the ♣Q would become a key entry to ruff a club. Instead East should duck since he knows from his partner's signal that declarer cannot have a singleton club.

Assume declarer next leads the ♦3 from dummy. East plays the seven (count), South the king and West wins the ace. West leads another heart to force out the king, and declarer must fail.

4 ♠ by South

♠A 4 3		♠6 2
♥A 9 6 4		♥8 2
♦J 10 9 5		♦K Q 8 7 4
♣3 2		♣Q 10 9 8

♠Q 10 9 8 7  
 ♥K 5 3  
 ♦3 2  
 ♣A K 5

Lead: ♦J

Dummy wins the ♦A and East plays the eight. A spade is led to the 10 which West ducks (a good play), then the ♥3; six, 10, *eight*. Observe that East's ♦8 was attitude because West led diamonds, and the ♥8 was count because declarer led hearts.

Declarer now must fail. If he continues hearts, West can win the ♥A and give East a ruff. If he leads a second trump, West can win the ♠A and *return a third trump* to remove dummy's entry (West then will hold up his ♥A until the third round).

### Signaling with an Honor

It is absurd to throw away a trick, so the use of an honor (A,K,Q,J,10) as a signal shows enough strength in the suit to safely play the honor. Typically this requires a sequence of touching cards. **When signaling with an honor, play the *highest* of equal cards. Hence, an honor signal denies the card immediately above it.** Many players misuse the honor signal when holding a doubleton. **Do not high-low with 10-x or J-x unless you are sure it will not cost a trick. Further, it is accepted practice *never* to high-low with Q-x.**

3 ♠ by South

♠Q 10 8		♠7 5 2
♥8 4 3		♥Q J 10 5
♦A 10 8 4		♦K Q 2
♣J 9 5		♣6 4 2

♠A K J 9 6  
 ♥7 6  
 ♦J 7 5  
 ♣A K 10

Lead: ♥K

On the ♥K lead East drops the *queen*. West would rather have East on lead (to get a club lead through declarer) so he leads the ♥2 to East's 10. East reasons that declarer will have no more hearts so he shifts to the ♣6 — note that *leading* a high card (top of nothing) during the play is not the same as *signaling* with a high card.

Eventually, East will gain the lead in diamonds and lead a second club to establish West's ♣Q before declarer is able to set up dummy's long diamond.

**The Trump Echo** Count is shown differently in the trump suit — the practice is reversed. Playing high-low (a trump echo) shows an odd number, usually three. Playing up-the-line shows two or four.