Lesson 3 – Student Notes

Declarer play in a suit contract

In this lesson we explore playing in a suit contract. Up until now, all the suits have had equal value. The highest card in the led suit wins the trick. In a suit contract there is a "master" suit – the **Trump** suit. If a trump card is played on a trick it **overtakes** cards in the plain suits. Players still have to follow suit if they have a card in the led suit, but if not, they may choose to play a trump. The highest trump card played in a trick wins the trick. If a player puts on a trump card, we say that he has **ruffed**. The card is a **trump**, the act of playing a trump card is called **ruffing**.

As in the previous lesson, you will need your copies of **Assess Your Hand Lessons 1-3** and **When You Are Responder Lessons 1-3** bidding crib sheets plus a third crib sheet on **Lead Effectiveness Against a Suit Contract.**

Declarer assess your hand. Count winners & Losers

When Declarer sees dummy he makes a plan. The starting point is to count both winners and losers.

Are there enough winners for Declarer to fulfil his contract? If not he needs to set about establishing extra tricks.

Are there too many losers – if so then do you need to deal with those losers straight away or can you wait?

Count winners

Example 1.   In a diamond contract how many winners are there with here?

♠ K 5 3	♠ A 6 2
♥ A 5 3	♥ K 4 2
♦ K J T 8 3 2	♦ A Q 7
♣ 5	♣ J T 9 8
Declarer (West)	Dummy (East)

spades	2, the ace and king
hearts	2, the ace and king
diamonds	6
clubs	0
Total	**10**

Example 2.   In a spade contract how many winners are there here?

♠ **A K Q 3 2**   ♠ **6 5 4**
♥ **9 8**   ♥ **K Q J**
♦ **A Q**   ♦ **9 8 3**
♣ **K 8 4 3**   ♣ **A Q 5 2**
Declarer (West)   Dummy (East)

♠ - this depends on the distribution of the cards in the defenders' hands. If they are divided 3:2, then there are 5 winners. If you are unlucky and one defender holds all 5 outstanding cards in the suit then there will only be 3 winners.

♥ - 0 at the moment

♦ - 1 or 2 depending on the finesse. If North has the King, then there is only one winner. If South has it is possible for there to be 2 winners.

♣ - 3   total = 10 as a maximum but in the worst case only 7

It is easy to understand why it is necessary to count winners. Enough winners are needed if the contract is to succeed.

It is not so easy to understand why declarer should count losers.   The count of losers highlights dangers and pit falls.

Count losers

Example 1.   In a spade contract how many losers are there with here?

♠ **K Q J 9 8**   ♠ **T 7 6 5**
♥ **9 8 5**   ♥ **K Q J**
♦ **K**   ♦ **9 8 3**
♣ **K 8 3 2**   ♣ **A Q 5**
Declarer (West)   Dummy (East)

♠ – 1, the ace

♥ – 1, the ace

♦ – 3 unless there are trumps in West for ruffing the 2nd and 3rd rounds

♣ – 1 unless there is a trump still in East to ruff the 4th round.

Total = 6

Example 2.   In a spade contract how many losers are there with here?

♠ A K Q 3 2	♠ 6 5 4
♥ 9 8 5	♥ K Q J
♦ A Q	♦ 9 8 3
♣ K 8 3	♣ A Q 5 2
Declarer (West)	Dummy (East)

♠ - possibly 0 if the defenders' trumps are divided 3:2 between their two hands. However, if one opponent holds 4 trumps there will be 1 trump loser and if one opponent holds all 5 outstanding trumps there will be 2 losers.

♥ - 1, the ace

♦ - possibly 0 if the finesse is successful and South holds ♦K. If North has ♦K then there is 1 loser.

♣ - 1 unless there is a trump remaining in East to ruff the 4th round

Total - could be only 2 but in the worst case could be 6

The count of losers helps you to think about the possible pitfalls in a hand – hope for the best but prepare for the worst!

Draw trumps

When playing in a suit contract, declarer's first aim is to draw out the opponents trump cards if you can. In other words to **draw trump**. Once you have achieved this, you know that your winning cards in plain suits will not be overtaken by a defenders' ruff.

When you draw trumps always **COUNT** so you know when the defenders' trumps are exhausted. Once you have achieved this stop playing the trump

suit. Keep hold of your trumps for ruffing. Always count **downwards**. See how many trumps you have between declarer's and dummy's hands and work out how many the defenders hold between their two hands. For example, you have 8 cards in the trump suit so the defenders have 5 between their two hands. Both defenders follow suit on the first round of trumps you play, so there are now 3 out against you. Watch to see if both follow suit on the second round….. and so on.

THE DEFAULT PLAN is to draw trumps if it is safe to do so.
Don't delay drawing trumps because your trumps are weak. For example, in this hand

	♠ Q J 7 5 4 ♥ A Q T ♦ J T 9 8 2 ♣ -	Dealer W
♠ A 2 ♥ K 5 4 3 ♦ A K 5 3 ♣ K Q 3	N W E S	♠ K 3 ♥ 9 8 7 2 ♦ Q 6 4 ♣ A J 8 2
	♠ T 9 8 6 ♥ J 6 ♦ 7 ♣ T 9 7 6 5 4	

West in **heart** game - 4♥ (so needs to win 10 tricks)
Lead from North - ♠Q

West has 9 tricks in high cards outside the trumps suit so only needs a single trump trick. He must lose an unknown number of tricks in the trump suit. If the defender's trumps are divided 3:2 then there is a chance. He will lose 3 high trumps. It is essential that Declarer avoids also losing a ruff in the defence's short trump hand i.e. South on this occasion. Therefore, he must take out trumps as soon as possible.
Don't be put off by the poor quality of your trump suit **hearts!**

Where can extra tricks come from?

Identify a work suit

As in NT there might be a Work Suit in which extra tricks can be established.

1 Force out defenders' high cards

2 Establish extra tricks using the power of the length of the suit.

To achieve the latter, it might be possible to use a ruff.

Establishing extra tricks by ruffing

In a suit contract, you can add to the winning trick count by ruffing.

Try this slightly different hand. You are in 4♥ on a spade lead.

♠ A 7 3 2	♠ 9
♥ A Q J T 6 5	♥ K 4 2
♦ -	♦ K J 8 7 4
♣ A 7 3 2	♣ K 8 5 4
You (Declarer - West)	Dummy (East)

Count winners

1 ♠

6 ♥

0 ♦

2 ♣

Total: 9 winners

You need 1 more winner.

You could add to your trick tally by ruffing?

Try ruffing a ♦ in West's hand.

Now count your winners

1 ♠

1 ruff of a ♦

5 ♥ (you have used 1♥ for the ♦ ruff)

0 ♦

2 ♣

Total: 9 winners

You would still have only 9 winners. You have already counted 6 winning hearts in your hand. You have not added to your trick count. You have used one heart to ruff with and now have only 5 hearts left in the West hand.

If you ruff a spade however, you are ruffing in dummy's hand. Your winning trick count is now

    1 ♠

    6 ♥ in the West hand

    1 ♠ ruff in East

    0 ♦

    2 ♣

    Total: 10 winners

LOOK FOR RUFFS IN THE SHORT HAND.

By the short hand, I mean the hand in which you have the fewer number of trumps.

Look at hand 6 in the hand Document

How many ruffs are needed?

How many ruffs are needed?

South is in 6 ♥ – 12 tricks needed

West leads the ♣ A which wins the trick and he continues with the ♣K. Now what?

♠ A Q J 4 ♥ K 6 5 2 ♦ 4 ♣ 8 6 3 2	One trick lost already so all the remaining tricks are needed. Count winners **outside the trump suit** (♥) Winners - 4 ♠ and ♦ A = 5 7 tricks needed from the trump suit Where will those come from?
N W E S	**5♥** in South plus
♠ K 8 3 ♥ A Q 7 4 3 ♦ A 9 5 2 ♣ J	**2♥** for ruffs of ♦ in North (the short hand)

Delaying drawing trumps

Counting losers as well as winners

Example 1   In a ♠ contract first count winners.

♠ **A K J T 9 8 2**   ♠ **Q 3**

♥ **9 8 2**   ♥ **K**

♦ **A**   ♦ **Q 7 6 3 2**

♣ **A 4 3**   ♣ **T 7 5 2**

Declarer (West)   Dummy (East)

♠ - 7

♥ - 0 (no hope of making a trick with that King).

♦ - 1

♣ - 1

Total = 9. One more needed.

Now count losers

♠ - 0

♥ - 3 unless it is possible to ruff in Dummy (East).

♦ - 4 unless it is possible to ruff in West

♣ - 2 definite plus a third if it is not possible to ruff in West's hand.

Total = far too many!

The count of winners looks almost OK **but** count of losers looks bad**.**

The issue is the ability to ruff. There are plenty of trumps (♠) in the West hand so the ♦ and ♣ situation is not critical.   However, East holds only 2 spades, and these will be exhausted if declarer draws trumps. Declarer needs to lose the inevitable ♥ loser straight away, win the defender's return lead and ruff **a heart** in East while East still holds a spade.

This is a ruff in the "short" hand. This ruff gives the 10th winner!

Example 2.   In a ♥ contract, count winners and losers assuming an initial ♠ lead.

♠ 8 7 3 2   ♠ A

♥ A Q J T 6 5   ♥ K 4 2

♦ -   ♦ K J 9 7 4

♣ K Q 8   ♣ J T 8 4

West (Declarer)   East (Dummy)

West is in ♥**4** so needs to take 10 tricks

Count losers

♠ - 0 (**provided** you can ruff in East)

♥ - 0

♦ - 0 (**provided** you can ruff in West)

♣ - 1

That all looks great.   Check by counting winners.

Count winners

♠ - 1

♥ - 6 total in West's hand

♦ - 0

♣ - 0 (once the ♣A is forced out there will be 3 club winners)

Total is only 7 winners - not so great.
A **Work suit** is needed which is clubs.

But…You must lose a club to the ♣A in order to establish the extra winners.
There will then be 3 club winners. However, what will happen if trumps are
drawn first requiring 3 rounds? There will be no hearts in the Dummy to ruff
the spade losers.
(**Look for ruffs in the "Short" hand**)

Do the work to establish your work suit clubs before drawing trumps on this
hand.

Ruffing in the "long" hand is dangerous.

West is in 4♥ so needs to take 10 tricks on lead of ♦K

♠ A 4 2	♠ 6 2
♥ Q J T 3 2	♥ A K 5 4
♦ T 9 3	♦ A 8 3 2
♣ 6 2	♣ A K 3
West (Declarer)	East (Dummy)

Count losers

♠ - 1 provided there are trumps in East for ruffing 3rd round.

♥ - 0

♦ - 2 definite plus a 3rd if West is out of trumps to ruff the 4th round.

♣ - 0 provided there are trumps in West for ruffing 3rd round.

Count winners

♠ - 1

♥ -5

♦ - 1, the Ace

♣ - 2, the Ace and King

Total 9. 1 more needed

The correct way to tackle this hand is to cash ♠ A, lose a spade trick, ruff the 3rd round of spades in the "short" hand i.e. ruff a spade in East. It is counterintuitive to lose a trick. When playing in No Trumps it is necessary to "do the work first" before cashing obvious winners. The same applies when playing in a suit contract - "do the work first".

The temptation is to cash ♣A and ♣K and ruff a 3rd club in West. These are tricks that will be won anyway, no work involved setting them up! However, this play involves shortening the trumps in the "long" hand West which started with 5 hearts. Now when the defenders get in, they will cash their diamond winners and continue diamonds! If the trumps are divided 4:0, West runs out of trumps!

Ruffs in the "long" hand are **unproductive** (They don't add to the final trick tally), **unnecessary** (long trump hand cards will win tricks anyway) and can be **dangerous**.

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SUMMARY

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1 In a suit contract begin by counting **winners.**
2 **Draw trumps** if it safe to do so (see 7 below)
3 Always **count the trump** suit.
4 Look for a **work suit** in the same way as you would in NT
   - Extra tricks may come from the power of high cards
   - Extra tricks may come from the power of a long suit
   - Unlike in NT, a ruff may be possible to help establish a long suit.
5 Sometimes you can make extra tricks by ruffing. Look for **ruffs in the "short" hand.** That means, ruff in the hand where you have fewer trumps.
6 How many ruffs are needed? Count outside winners (winners in the non-trump suits). The additional tricks may need to come from the trump suit. If there are not enough trumps in the long trump hand to provide these (by cashing the trump suit), then ruffs in the "short hand" are needed.
7 **Count losers** as well as winners when assessing the hand.
   If drawing trumps will exhaust one hand's trumps, there will be no trumps remaining to ruff losers. The ruffs will need to be taken before trumps are drawn.