

STANDARD DISCARD SIGNALS by Maritha Pottenger

When you are out of one suit and must discard something else, the card you discard gives information to partner. There are many & varied systems, but none is perfect. If it was, we would all use it!

First Discard in a suit is ATTITUDE: high—you like that suit; low—you don't like that suit.

Generally you discard **something high in a suit you like when defending suit contracts**. That is because time is usually of the essence to get partner to make the correct switch. In suit contracts, your 8's and other high spot cards are unlikely to be promoted to winners because by that time, Declarer or Dummy is out of that suit and will be ruffing it. [Upside reverses this: lowest card is encouraging.]

Example: Suppose you are defending 3S and partner leads the Queen of diamonds. Your hand: 83 K943 1072 Q853. Dummy holds Axx A52 xxx J10xx. When partner led the Queen, you signaled with the 7—encouraging because your 10 is a touching honor with partner's QJx(x) holding. Since you play **Trump Suit Preference**, you play the 8 of spades first, followed by the 3 of spades to show “good stuff” in the higher side suit. **On the third round of trumps, you play the 9 of hearts because you desperately want a heart shift, and do NOT want partner to try a club.**

In No Trump, you usually discard LOW in what you do NOT want. That is because discarding a high spot card (8's and 9's) in NT may be letting go of an eventual winner (had you kept it). Example: the opponents are playing in 2NT and your partner leads the Jack of spades. Dummy hits with: 54 K52 K52 QJxxx. Your hand is: 732 AQJ4 864 952. **On partner's Jack of spades lead, you deposited the 2 of spades to say: “I don't like it. I have NO help for you.”** Declarer won the King of spades and cashed the Ace and King of clubs and played a club to Dummy. **On the 4th round of clubs, you should discard the 4 of diamonds—your LOWEST diamond—to say: “Do NOT play a diamond if you get the lead.”** On the 5th round of clubs, you discard the 7 of spades—giving COUNT (two remaining) since your 2 (at trick #1) already told partner you DON'T like spades. By saying “NO” to two suits, you are telling partner: **“Lead a heart!”** Declarer started with KQx xxx QJxx Akx; and partner started with AJ10xx 953 A43 xx. Partner can discard a discouraging heart on the 3rd round of clubs (the 3). When s/he sees your discouraging diamond, partner will know that you have something in hearts, so s/he can discard an encouraging diamond on the 4th round of clubs (the 4) followed by a lower card in diamonds (the 3) to confirm that the first card was HIGH [in context] and hence encouraging.

If you discard a small card in a suit, but your second discard in that suit is an even smaller card, then you are encouraging partner to lead that suit because you played HIGH first and low second. (Sometimes your high spot cards are **too** valuable to risk signaling with them, or the **ONLY** cards you have to signal with are two low ones such as 32 or 43.)***

As soon as Declarer plays diamonds, partner grabs the Ace. S/he plays the 9 of hearts—top of nothing—and you win with the Jack. You return your spade—finessing Declarer's remaining Qx with partner holding the A10xx behind. Partner cashes 4 spades and returns his/her last heart, and your side takes (theoretically) 1 diamond; 3 hearts; 4 spades—except that Declarer already had 6 tricks (1 spade and 5 clubs), so you can only take the remaining 7 tricks for down 2.

*****Technically, your first discard in a suit is ATTITUDE and your second discard in the SAME**

suit is supposed to be COUNT. However, you are allowed to do “high-low” in terms of discards to confirm an encouraging attitude signal if necessary in situations like this. So, partner's second diamond does NOT promise 3 or 5 remaining diamonds, but confirms possession of a good diamond card.