

## COUNT SIGNALS by Maritha Pottenger

**Standard count signals are given when either Declarer leads a suit, or a suit is led from Dummy.** In such cases, attitude does NOT apply. You are giving count to your partner. Standard count is to play your lowest card from 3 or 5 cards; your second-highest from 4 cards (unless you think it is too valuable—in which case you play your 3<sup>rd</sup>-highest); your top card from a doubleton (unless you feel it is too valuable—often a 10 or higher doubleton is not played first round). Remember, some players use upside-down count and attitude. Check the convention cards of your opponents! The high-low signal is also called an echo.

**When you and your partner know Declarer's count in a suit** (based on the bidding), **it is not necessary to give count to each other.** You both already have a count on that suit. Giving count would only help Declarer (if s/he pays attention).

**Giving count is vital when Declarer is attacking a side suit** (perhaps in dummy) and you or your partner must **figure out how many rounds to duck your Ace** (to exhaust Declarer of cards in that suit) to cut the link between Declarer and Dummy.

**If your partner has bid a suit and you have supported that suit,** you will usually have 3 or 4 cards in the suit. If partner leads a high honor, your first card would normally be attitude (high if you have the equal honor). If the equal honor is visible in dummy (e.g., partner leads Ace from AKxxx[x] and Qxx is in dummy), your first card should be count (high from 4; low from 3 cards). If the equal honor(s) are visible in dummy and partner know your count from the bidding (perhaps you made a Bergen raise promising 4 trumps), your first card can now be **suit preference!**

**If the opponents are playing at the 5 or the 6 level, lead the KING** (not the Ace) from AK combinations. This **asks partner to give count** in the suit (so you know whether or not your Ace will cash). Particularly when the queen shows up in dummy, your partner should know that attitude is irrelevant and count is what matters. **WHENEVER attitude is irrelevant, count is next in the hierarchy.**

**When partner shows out of a suit** (so Declarer knows your exact count in that suit), **give count** immediately so partner knows what is happening. First discard in a suit is attitude; second discard in same suit: **COUNT.**

**When you lead the Ace of a suit you bid** (and partner did not support), and **KQx(x) shows up in dummy,** **partner gives count.** Many times, that will tell you whether or not you can give partner a ruff.

**When you return a suit partner led, your card is CURRENT COUNT:** low from 3 (or 5, etc.) remaining cards; high from 2 or 4 remaining cards.

### The Trump Echo

Signaling in the opponents' trump suit is the reverse of normal signaling. You play high low (middle-down-up) with three cards and low high with two cards. This allows you to preserve your highest trump for the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> round (and a possible over-ruff of Dummy or Declarer) and helps partner to count the hand. Some players only echo in trump (to show 3) when they feel it is vital information for partner to have (usually because they can trump something). Giving count does help partner count out the hand. Obviously, you would not give count if it sacrifices an unnecessarily high card (e.g., J102—go ahead and play the 2 the 1<sup>st</sup> round) or if it helps Declarer identify a vulnerable trump holding (do NOT echo from 3 to the queen—Declarer may place the Queen with you because you have the longer trump holding).

**NOTE:** If your partnership plays **Trump Suit Preference** (which I highly recommend), you do NOT play trump echo. **A high spot card in their trump suit, played by either of the defenders, shows honors in a higher side suit.** A low trump spot *might* show honors in a lower side suit—or simply nothing better to play.