

# Bridge Theory for the Practitioners

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## 25. A Complete Set of Questions

Whether one is declaring or defending a hand, one always needs to ask a *complete* set of questions before deciding on a line of play. What will be this complete set of questions? Let's consider declarer play first. (This week's general topic is declarer play for my column). A set of complete questions might look like these:

- Have I *visualized* the layout of the defenders' hands (both in terms of high card points and distribution) consistent with the bidding or the absence of it?
- Have I noted the opening lead and the card played by the opening leader's partner at trick-1 very carefully? Often the choice of the opening lead tells a great story. Also, the opening leader's partner usually makes an honest play so early in the game.
- Have I *updated* my view of the hand as the play evolved i.e. does the play so far is consistent with my original picture of the hand?
- Have I considered the *consequence* and not just the probability of being successful in the play that I am going to make now?

I faced the problem below in the most recent Kansas City Regional in a Bracket-A Knockout match. In my 3NT contract, I have at least nine tricks in the other suits as long as I can handle the opening lead and not lose the first five tricks. The opening lead was Q of diamonds and this was the lay out

K 6 4 (dummy)

8 3 2 (my hand)

Immediately I am concerned. I do not want to lose 5 tricks in this suit. I have a safe play at trick one so I duck and play the 4. Righty plays the T of diamonds. I check their card and they play standard carding whatever that means. I play the 2 from hand and wait anxiously. The Jack of D is fired at me now. What shall I do? Play the King or duck again?

Possible defenders' hands I was considering at first are:

1) QJ9x                      ATx

Or

2) QJ9xx

AT

If it is the first layout, doesn't matter what I do. They take only 4 D tricks.

If it is the 2<sup>nd</sup> layout it does not matter what I do. The suit gets blocked.

So I was pretty happy that I don't have to make any choice of play. Then I asked myself, is that all? Am I asking a *complete* set of questions? What if the layout is

AQJ9x

Tx

Then if I carelessly duck, the A comes next and they take the first five tricks. On the other hand if the layout is

QJ

AT9xx

and I carelessly cover then they take the first 5 tricks. I considered the situation for some more time and decided that the Q lead from QJ doubleton is unlikely as the opening leader then would had the choice of leading a major suit from length. So I decided to play the King which *won!* *Voila!* Note that I would get set if I ducked at trick-2.

When I was just getting ready to crow about how well I played tackling a brilliant opening lead, I learnt that the exact same opening lead and play happened at the other table for a push board.

Here is another hand where asking a complete set of questions is necessary to bring the slam home.

Dummy:	J T 8 6	6 3	K T 7	A K Q 4
You:	A K Q 9 3	A Q 4	J 9 6 4	3

You are in 6S and the opponents are silent throughout. The opening lead is a small heart. You like the lead immediately and realize that now you just have to play D correctly to lose only one trick in that suit.

How do you play the D suit? There are choices. You can play the J from hand hoping for a cover and if no cover happens then you can rule out the Q with lefty. The other possibility is to run the 9 from hand and hoping that lefty has AQx. There are also possibilities of a stiff honor in either hand. **However, is that the complete set of questions?** Is there a possibility that Lefty is *void* in

Ds? Well, that is a low probability but the **consequence** will be really bad if unattended. Is there any way we can check for that? And if so can we protect the contract against that layout?

The answer to both questions is yes. But you have to be technically solid. To gather as much information as you can, you play thusly.

Trick 1.	Win A of H when King is played by Righty.
Trick 2 and 3.	Draw trumps. They both follow.
Trick 4.	Cash Q of H and ruff a H. Righty discards a D. So Lefty has 6 Hs.
Trick 5 -7.	Cash 3 Cs and discard two Ds from hand. They both follow.

So at this point Righty has showed up with 2 Ss, 2 Hs, 3 Cs. We need more info. How many Cs does Righty have? To check that out, you play the 4<sup>th</sup> C from dummy intending to ruff but, Righty now discards a D. So, what is Righty's hand? We now know *precisely*. He had 2 Ss, 2 Hs, 3 Cs and thus must have all 6 Ds. This means Lefty had no D to begin with. *Revelation!*

What is the right play though with this revelation? Lefty started with a 2605 distribution and now has left with no Ss. With this *update* of the layout you do not ruff the 4<sup>th</sup> C any longer but let it go after discarding a D. Lefty wins but must give you a ruff and a sluff .

6S made with style and technique.

**Reference:** The last hand is from *Hidden Side of Bridge* by Terence Reese and David Bird.