

Bridge Theory for the Practitioners

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9. Splitting Headache

Next few weeks I will go over some common defensive problems, such as when to cover an honor with an honor, when to split honors etc. Most bridge players know these (although there will be some surprises on your way soon), but the real issue is to execute them *smoothly*. A slightest hesitation might give away the position completely. For this reason, it is extremely important to plan ahead by looking at the dummy carefully, much before declarer actually attacks that suit.

Example 1.

Dummy holds:	A T x
Your holding (second hand)	Q J x
Declarer leads to you	low card

In this situation, you must split honors and make sure that you get at least one trick (just in case declarer has K9x and plays the T).

Example 2.

Dummy holds:	A x x x
Your holding (second hand)	Q J x
Declarer leads to you	low card

In this situation, you must **not** split honors. Play small. Why? Because you do not see either the K or the T, and it is possible that your partner has one of them. Just imagine how *happy* your partner will be when you play the J, dummy the A and your partner's stiff K drops! Would you want to be in the same room with your partner after that play?

Not splitting the honors will be **wrong** in this case only when declarer has both K and T, a holding like KT9x. But then, will the declarer play the suit this way? Of course, there is always a small chance that this particular declarer is extremely smart. He places both Q and J with you and is playing a small card from hand holding KT9x just to fool you. In that case, more power to him.

Example 3.

Dummy holds:	A K T
Your holding (second hand)	Q J x
Declarer leads to you	low card

In this situation, you must **not** split honors. Play a small card **smoothly**. Why? Because splitting

will not help you in this case. The declarer will play the A, come back to his hand, and finesse you out of your other honor. Your only hope in this situation is to play a small card smoothly, so that you do not give away the position. This is where planning becomes important. You need to plan ahead right after the dummy hits the board and declarer has not yet attacked the suit. If you are able to play the small card smoothly, the declarer might decide to play the A. (A strong declarer, however, should consider the *corollary*: play the T, even though the defender has not split honors.)

For rule lovers, all these can be summed up in one simple rule: *Split Even*. Split your touching honors when there are an even number of honors (two) in dummy and do not split when there are an odd number of honors (one or three) in dummy.