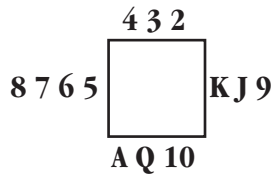


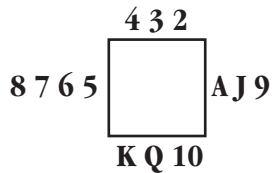
The Basic Finesses

When playing to a trick, the most advantageous position is to be last to play. If you can't win the trick, you can play your lowest card, and if you can win the trick, you may not have use your highest card. In the hand just below, South wants to be in the advantageous position of "last to play":



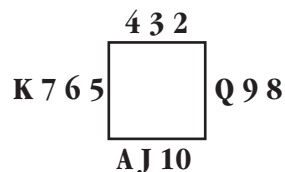
If South can play last to this trick, she can win with the lowest possible card. Then, if she can play last again, she will again be able to win the lowest possible card, and she will end up winning three tricks in this suit. If, however, South had to play first to the suit each time, then she could win only one trick in the suit, while East, who would be playing last, would win two tricks.

The same principal of advantage to the last to play appears in the following example:



If South can play last and then play last again, she will win two tricks, since East will have to decide either to play her ace or to duck in advance of South's play. But if South must always lead first, then South will win but one trick and East, who plays last, will win two.

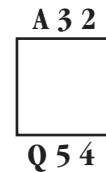
Even if you are only the third to play, you still maintain much of the same advantage as last to play:



If South can lead this suit from dummy, then she plays the jack when East plays low, losing

the trick to West's king. But now when South leads from dummy again, she gets to play after East and can win her 10 if East fails to play the queen. By leading from dummy and playing next to last, South wins two of the three tricks. But if South had played the suit from her own hand, being only first to play, then she would win only her ace. Her opponents, however, by virtue of playing later, will win both the king and the queen.

Let us say that, with the following cards, South would like to take two of the three tricks:



The ace, of course, can be won in any circumstance. If we want to win the queen also, then we should draw from observations we have just made and try to play the queen as the third hand to play to the trick. So we should lead a small card from the North. Now we will get to play after East plays, so that if East has the king and plays it, our queen will stand ready to win a trick later. Or, if East has the king and does not play it, then when we play the queen it will be higher than any card in the West hand, and we will win our trick immediately.

Notice that with the cards above, we will never win two tricks in the suit if we lead the queen from the South hand so that it is the first card to the trick. Now if East has the king, he will be playing last, and he will capture South's queen. Or, if the king is in the West hand, West will play the king on top of the queen, which will compel North's ace. Now North and South cannot win any more tricks in the suit because East and West hold all the high cards remaining.

Notice how very difficult it is to win a trick with a card that you lead (unless it is absolutely the highest card). Instead, you must seek to play your card in as late a position as possible, attempting to compel the player who

holds the higher card to make her play before you make yours.



If you lead the king, you will never win it. But if you lead from the North hand, putting the king in 3rd position, then you will win the king as long as East has the ace. If West has the ace, then you can never win a trick in this suit unless West decides to lead this suit from her hand.

Some students will raise the following cards as an example when the principle of late position isn't true. However, their point is mistaken:



Here they will say it is right to lead the queen first, not third, in order to trap the king if West has it. But in fact, nothing is gained by leading the queen first. When the queen is led, West plays the king atop it, compelling North's ace. Now South can take the jack next, but the third trick will go to East and West. The same result is attained even if the first play comes from the North hand. East and West will always win one trick with this combination of cards, while North and South will always win two.

The next hand, however, can gain a trick for North and South if the queen is led first:

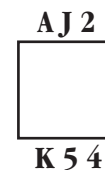


This time, if West has the king, it is trapped when South plays the queen first. If West ducks, the queen will hold and South will table the jack, with the exact same pressure. But if West covers South's lead of the queen with the king, losing to North's ace, then South's jack and 10 will

both be promoted, and both will win tricks.

The hand we have just seen is a variety of finesse. The hands that we saw earlier, when we sought to play in 3rd position are also examples of finesses. Most finesses rely on the advantage of late position, but some other finesses rely on trapping a missing honor while promoting the rest of the suit. But all of the finesses work only when some higher card is missing and when we subsequently find that is located in a friendly position.

Many people say that finesses always begin with a wish.



If you want to win three tricks in this suit, then the first thing you must do is wish. You must wish that the missing queen is in the West hand. Then, you will lead from the South hand, compelling West to make their play ahead of the North hand. If West plays the queen, win the ace and your king and jack are both good. But if West plays low, call for dummy's jack, which will beat any card in the East hand. Of course, if your wish is not granted, and if East actually possesses the queen, then you would not be able to win three cards in this suit.

Sometimes you are afforded flexibility in the nature of your wish.



In the previous hand you could only wish that West held the missing queen. But in this hand you can wish that either player has it. If you wish that East has it, then you play low from the North hand and play the 10 if East plays low. If your wish comes true, you'll win three tricks. But you could have wished that West had the queen, in which case you would have played low from the South hand and called for the jack

if West played low. If you make your wish in this case arbitrarily, then the advantage of the flexibility doesn't amount to much. But if something has made you believe that one or the other opponent probably has the missing card, then your flexible wish-making can be very powerful. If, for instance, East had opened the bidding and West had failed to respond, then East would be far more likely than West to hold any missing high card. Therefore wishing for East to hold the missing card would be a wish more likely to come true.

An even greater advantage exists when you hold the following cards:



This is similar to the prior holding in that you can wish for either East or West to hold the missing queen. But with this holding you also get a chance to "test" West. Most players learn that it is generally right to "cover an honor with an honor." In other words, if you lead the jack, an honor, West should cover it with the queen if she has it (covering an honor with an honor). So, if you lead the jack and West plays low, there is a suggestion that West does not have the queen. Therefore you could overtake your jack with dummy's king and lead low toward your A10, supposing now that East has the missing queen. Of course this play may not work, but the cards allow you the advantage of trying this idea.

Several very common finesses arise when you don't have control of the first trick:

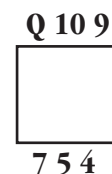


If you need or want two tricks from this suit, then you must wish that West has the queen. In that case, when you play low from South, you can play North's jack, hoping that East will have

to produce the Ace. Later you can reenter the South hand and lead toward the king and 10, trapping West's queen.

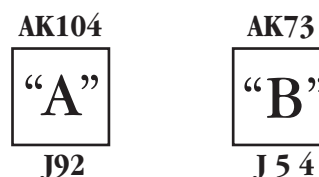
If, with the cards above, you needed to win only one trick, then you would have a choice of plays. If you thought that West had the queen, then you would play the suit as we just described. But if you thought that West had the ace, then you would lead toward the KJ10 and call for king if West played low.

Here is another similar play when you hold neither the king nor the ace:



Chances may look bleak for you to win any tricks in this suit, but it is nonetheless possible for you to do so provided that West holds the jack. Play low toward North and insert the 9 if West plays low. This will compel the king or Ace from East. Later you can repeat this procedure and one of North's cards will be in position to win the third round of this suit.

A common error in finessing can be demonstrated from the examples below:



With set "A" the jack should be led from South hoping to trap the queen if West holds it. But with set "B" it is incorrect to lead the jack from South. In example "A" the declarer also has the 10 and 9, so if West plays the queen atop the jack, then declarer's 10 and 9 are promoted to winning status. But with set "B" if West plays the queen atop the jack, then declarer can still win only the ace and king. This is an important distinction that you should understand clearly.

Practice

In each example below, determine the maximum number of tricks that are possible with each set of cards and explain how to play each, indicating your “wish” in each case.

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|----|---|---|---|---|---|----|---|----|---|----|---|---|
| ① | A | ② | K | ③ | K | ④ | A | ⑤ | A | ⑥ | K | ⑦ | Q | ⑧ | K |
| | Q | | J | | Q | | 7 | | J | | J | | J | | 7 |
| | 3 | | 10 | | 3 | | 2 | | 10 | | 10 | | 10 | | 2 |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| 7 | 7 | 7 | Q | 7 | A | A | Q |
| 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 10 |
| 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |

1. Two tricks are possible if you lead low from South, playing the queen if West plays low. Your wish is that West has the king.
2. Two tricks are possible if you lead low from South, playing the jack if West plays low. Your wish is that West holds the queen.
3. Two tricks are possible if you lead low from South, playing the king if West plays low. Your wish is that West holds the ace.
4. Two tricks are possible if you lead low from North, playing the queen if East plays low. Your wish is that East has the king. Note that leading the queen from South is incorrect. If West has the king, she will play it atop the queen, forcing North’s ace. Now you would have no chance at all for any further tricks in the suit.
5. Two tricks are possible if you lead low from South, playing the jack if West plays low. You will probably lose a trick to East, but then later you lead low from South again and play the 10 if West plays low. You are wishing that West has either the king or the queen (or both).
6. Three tricks are possible if you can guess which opponent has the queen. If you guess that West has the queen, then lead low from South and play the jack if West plays low. Or, if you guess that East has the queen, then lead the jack from North and play low from South if East plays low. Or, to help you make the proper guess, start by leading the jack from North, hoping that East will cover with the queen if she has it. Then, if she doesn’t cover, overtake your jack with South’s ace and lead low toward the K10, playing the 10 if West plays low, wishing that West has the queen.
7. Three tricks are possible if you lead the queen from North, playing low if East plays low. Your wish is that East has the king.
8. Two tricks are possible if you lead low from South, playing the king if West plays low. Whether or not the king wins, you will next lead low from North, playing the 10 if East plays low. Your wish is that East has the jack.