

**W**hat is a finesse? It is an attempt to win a trick with a card that is *not* the highest card in the suit played. This is done by leading from one hand then, after one opponent has played, selecting your play from the opposite hand.

As declarer you will have to play many different card combinations. In order to get the most tricks out of what you are dealt, it is essential to develop a solid understanding of finessing technique.

### Lead Toward Strength

The most important principle in finessing is to make an opponent play *before* you play one of your high cards. You should lead toward your strength:

- Lead from the weaker hand toward the stronger hand.

1.                    K J 5            South leads

W	N	E
S		

4 3 2

Lead the two. If West plays low, play the jack. If this loses to the queen (or wins), you will later lead the three to the king.

Observe that your success depends on the location of the ace and queen. If West holds both, you can win two tricks; but if East holds both, you cannot win any trick. You will win one trick in the event the honors are divided (West has the queen, East has the ace; or vice versa).

2.                    A J 10            South leads

W	N	E
S		

4 3 2

Lead the two. If West plays low, play the 10 (or jack). This will probably lose to the queen or king. Later you will lead the three and, if West plays low, play the jack.

By this process you will win a second trick if West has either the queen or king (or both), making you a strong favorite.

### Two-Way Finesse

Sometimes you have strength in each hand, giving you the option to try a finesse against either opponent. Deciding *which way* may be a guess or you may have a clue from the bidding or previous play.

3.                    A 10 3            Either leads

W	N	E
S		

K J 2

If you think West has the queen, win the king then lead the two and play the 10 if West plays low. If instead you think East has the queen, win the ace then lead the three and play the jack if East plays low.

Note that you can always win three tricks if you guess right.

4.                    Q 9 5 4            Either leads

W	N	E
S		

K 10 3 2

You must always lose to the ace, but the location of the jack is critical. If you think West has the jack, lead the four to the king; whether it wins or loses, next lead the two and play the nine if West plays low. If instead you think East has the jack, lead the two to the queen; then lead the four and play the 10 if East plays low.

- When your length in a suit is unequally divided, it is usually desirable to save the honor(s) in the longer hand until later. Lead toward the shorter hand first.

5.                    Q 2                    South leads

W	N	E
S		

A 10 4 3

Lead the three. If West plays low, play the queen. If this loses to the king, you will later lead the two and play the 10 if East plays low.

This sequence of plays will establish a trick if West has the king or if East has the jack—two chances—whereas leading the suit first from the North hand would give you only one chance.

### Playing for the Drop

In some cases your length in a suit is great enough to warrant trying to drop an enemy honor card. Here is a general rule to determine whether to finesse or play for the drop:

- If the missing honor must fall under your high cards *if both opponents follow suit*, then try to drop it; do not finesse.



Did you try to drop it or use finesse?



Neither! I went to the beauty parlor.

6.                    5 4 3 2            Either leads

W	N	E
S		

A K J 7 6

If both follow to the ace and king, the queen must fall; so the “percentage play” is to cash the ace and king. Of course, there is no guarantee this will work (one opponent may show out); but it is the better play unless you suspect that East has length.

7.                    5 4 3 2            Either leads

W	N	E
S		

A K J 7

Here is the same holding with one less card. If you cash the top cards and both follow, *there will still be an outstanding card*; hence the queen is not obliged to fall. Therefore, you should finesse. The proper play is cash the king (or ace) first, then cross to North in a different suit and lead the three; if East plays low, play the jack.

8.                    A K 10 2            Either leads

W	N	E
S		

Q 4 3

If all follow to your top cards, the jack must fall so you should not plan to finesse. Cash the king (or ace) then the queen; next lead the four and play the ace (unless East has previously shown out).