



Adventures in Bridge, Inc.

Leaders in Bridge Entertainment and Education

PO Box 14915 ♠ Tallahassee, FL 32317

info@advinbridge.com ♠ 850 570 6459

www.advinbridge.com

(63) Defensive Agreements: Discards

Date: September 2013 © AiB

Level: Intermediate / Advanced

Robert S. Todd

robert@advinbridge.com

General

When a suit is led (either by partner or the Declarer) that we no longer hold any cards in then we cannot follow suit and we are forced to play a card in another suit – called a *Discard*. These discards are valuable and we should NOT just play “the closest useless card to our thumb.” We want to use these discards to communicate with partner.

The standard agreement is to use discards as Attitude signals. That is, we play a high card to encourage in a suit and a low card to discourage in a suit. One thing to remember is that when making a signal we always have to “play bridge first.” That means, that we cannot give up a trick trying to make a signal. Always play the clearest card that *you can afford*. There is a natural balance (pull) between trying to make things as clear as possible for partner and not giving up a trick. This is a part of discarding that takes some experience in order to judge best.

First Discard

The first discard is the most important. It is the most important because it is the one that partner is most likely to be paying attention to (unfortunately this is usually true.) The first discard is what you have chosen to tell partner about at your first opportunity – who knows when you are going to get chance to make another discard.

Just as with any Attitude signal while following suit, the first discard may not be easy to interpret – sometimes a card that is intended to be encouraging does not look high and sometimes a card that is intended to be discouraging does not look low. The way that we overcome this problem is by making a second discard in the same suit. We can use the second card to clarify the first card (by helping partner understand it relative to our first card.)

Example

If we are making an encouraging signal from A432, we play the 4 first and then the 2. Partner will then know that the 4 was intended as a high card – Encouraging. This is how we use our second discard to clarify our original signal.



More than Just the First Discard – The First Discard in Each Suit

The first discard gives (or tries to give) our Attitude in the suit in which we are discarding. But it is more than just our first discard that gives this information, our Attitude, to partner. Each time that we discard in a new suit we have an opportunity to provide partner with some information about how we feel about that suit. So we don't just make an attitude signal in one suit, we make it each time that we discard in a new suit. This is important to keep in mind. Do not get lazy and start randomly discarding. Remember, Partner is watching, so try to help them defend the hand by showing them where you have values.

Advanced Inferences

Order of Action

Now that we know that we need to discard carefully in each suit (because partner will be looking for an attitude signal with each new card) we should think about the order of our cards. If partner is paying attention they might notice that our first discard was encouraging in ♣ and our second discard was discouraging in ♦. They might ask themselves (and they should) - Why didn't we discourage in ♦ first and encourage in ♣ second instead? Why did Partner play the cards in the order they played them?

This is an excellent question and one with a simple answer. By choosing the order in which we play our cards we let partner know how much we like a suit. If we really like a suit we will try to start by encouraging that suit as soon as we possibly can - with our first discard. But if we only like a suit a bit, then we will not be in such a hurry to encourage in that suit. We will start by discouraging in another suit and encouraging in our suit with a later discard. You can apply this general idea in many ways, but many partnerships have a specific agreement that they only encourage with their first discard if they have an Ace or King in a suit. If they have a Queen in a suit, then they start by discouraging in another suit and then encouraging in this suit later. You do not have to have such a specific agreement with your partner, but the important thing is to keep in mind that the order that you play your cards in matters – so don't waste your opportunities to communicate effectively with partner.

Other Cards

After we make a count or attitude signal with our first play to a suit we will need to make to know what the meaning is of the card we play to the second round of the suit. Generally, when we play to the second round of the suit we clarify our first play (making it so that partner can clearly read the card that we played) and we give "Remainder Count." That is, we give count (in the standard way) for the cards that we have remaining in our hand.

In situations where Remainder Count would not be useful to partner then we may want to use our plays of these subsequent cards (second round of suit or later) as other signals that might be helpful to partner. The most common and useful agreement is to use these extra cards as suit preference signals – small cards for small suits and large cards for large suits.



Alternative Agreements

Some players play different agreements for their discards – different from standard carding or standard signals. If you play Upside-Down Count and Attitude as your carding then you will usually play Upside-Down Attitude for your first discard (and all of your subsequent discards.) But there are other conventional discarding systems as well. These are special discards that players use for their first discards only.

Note: For players that play these special discards, all of their subsequent discards are attitude discards.

Lavinthal Discards

This is a *negative discarding system*. When playing Lavinthal First Discards the first discard is always in a suit that they do not like. The size of the card does not matter for Attitude. Instead, the size of the card is used as suit preference between the other suits.

Example

If Declarer leads a ♣ and we discard a ♦. Then we do not like ♦ and we want to tell partner whether we like ♥ or ♠. We use a low ♦ to say we like ♥ (the lower suit) and a high ♦ to say we like ♠ (the higher suit.)

Note: One of the problems with Lavinthal discards is that you always have to pick a suit that you want to encourage in. Thus, you lose the ability to give context (order of discards) as you do in standard or upside-down carding.

Odd-Even Discards

Odd-Even (also called *Italian*) Discards use some of the same ideas as Lavinthal Discards, but are a bit more sophisticated. With Odd-Even First Discards we use Odd cards to encourage in a suit (if we discard an Odd card in a suit we like that suit) and we use Even cards like Lavinthal (if we discard in Even card we do not like that suit and we are giving suit preference for the other suits – low card for low suit, high card for high suit.) This carding system is quite popular in Europe.

Note: One of the problems with Odd-Even discards is that you are not always dealt the correct cards (sometimes all your cards are Odd in the suit you don't like) and this can lead to not being able to make a useful signal.



Conclusion

As you can see from our discussion, discarding is not a simple thing. It is something that we have to pay attention to and make use of – watch partner’s cards. Most players pay attention to their partner’s first discard, but we need to make sure and do more than that – each discard is important. We need to observe each discard that partner makes and we need to put some thought into analyzing the order in which they choose to discard. If we do this, we will learn to communicate better with partner.

It is important for every bridge player to learn to play a natural carding system (standard or Upside-Down) before adopting special agreements about our first discard. These special discards can serve as a crutch and prevent us from progressing into the details of card reading (interpreting partner’s card) and subtle communication with partner. We need to learn to card effectively and clearly with each of our signals and practice is the best way to get better at it!