



# Adventures in Bridge

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## *This Week in Bridge*

### **(388) NT Play: Finesses of Many Kinds**

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Level: 3 of 10 (1 of 6)

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#### **General**

When it comes to taking tricks, the immediate winners are the basics. Then come the winners that we can develop using Promotion, Length, or Finesse. Here we look in detail at the technique of finesse. A finesse is an act of taking a trick in a suit with a card that is not the “master” card in that suit. We do this by taking advantage of the location of the card that is higher-ranking (by finessing it). A finesse usually requires a tenace of honors that allows us take advantage of a favorably located honor of the opponents (a holding like AQ with the King in front of it). There are other kinds of finesses as well. Let’s look at this method in detail.

#### **Simple Finesse**

In a simple finesse we lead up towards two honors and try to produce an extra trick (or a first trick) that we could not take by leading that suit from the side that contains the honors. If the missing honor is “onside” (where we want it to be), we produce an additional trick. Here are some examples:

- AQ
- KJ
- AQJ    This finesse can be repeated.
- KJT    This finesse can be repeated.

We also can take a finesse when our honors are in different hands (a separated finesse). To do this, we usually need to be able to lead one of the honors and let it go. For this to work we need to have honors underneath (supporting honors) the one that we lead.

- Ax    QJ    We want the King onside.
- AKx   JTx   We want the Queen onside.
- Axx   QJT   We want the King onside.

A finesse is usually successful if a card is *onside* (“in front of” our high card) and not successful if the card is *offside* (“behind” our high card). Thus, finessing one specific card usually has about a 50% chance of success (without any other information on the hand).



## Leading Up to an Honor

A variation on a finesse (setting up an honor trick that is not certain to set up, depending on the location of another honor) is leading up towards an honor. Here are some examples:

- Axx Qxx We want the King onside (leading small up to the Q).
- xx Kx We want the Ace onside.
- xxx KQx We want the Ace onside and to lead up to our honors twice.

## Combining a Finesse with Knocking out a Stopper

There are also plays that combine a finesse with setting up tricks by knocking out an honor. This is sometimes called a *Repeatable Finesse* in that if it wins, we can repeat it to produce the maximum number of tricks, and even if it loses we will be left with winners.

- AQJT xxx 3 tricks for certain and 4 tricks if the finesse works.
- AKJT xx 3 tricks for certain and 4 tricks if the finesse works.
- AQJT x 3 tricks for certain and 4 tricks if Kx is onside.

## A Double Finesse

A *Double Finesse* is a finesse (leading up towards honors) that needs one (or both) of two missing honors onside. Here are some examples:

- AJT xxx If either the K or Q are onside we will have 2 tricks.
- AQT xxx If either the K or J are onside we will have 2 tricks (3 tricks if both are onside.)
- AKT9 xxx If either the Q or J are onside we will have 3 tricks (4 tricks if both are onside.)
- KT9 xxx If either the Q or J are onside we will have a trick.

Taking a double finesse usually has a good probability of success. It only requires one of two cards to be where we want it to be – usually about a 75% chance!

## Separated Double Finesse

If we have lots of good spot cards supporting our honors, then we can take a double finesse even if our honors are in separate hands. We will lead an honor (like we did in our previous split honors example) and we only need one of two (or both) of the missing honors onside for the finesse to develop extra tricks. Some examples:

- AQx T98 If the K or J is onside we get 2 tricks (3 if both are onside), about a 75% chance.
- AT9 Qxx If the K or J is onside we get 2 tricks, about a 75% chance.
- K76 T98 If either the Q or J is onside we get a trick, about a 75% chance.



## Two-Way Finesses

A *Two-Way Finesse* is usually just a simple finesse (though it can be a double finesse) that we can take through either player – we can lead up to either hand. The classic and very common example of this is a two-way finesse on the Queen of a suit.

- AJx KTx We can finesse either player for the Queen with this holding.

This two-way finesse can be complicated because we must guess which way to take it – we must guess which player we think has the Queen.

## Issues Related to Finesses

When we are considering using the techniques of finesse to try and develop additional tricks for our side there are many things to take into consideration. Some of these are:

- *Top Tricks vs. Potential Tricks* – Finesses are potential tricks that we are trying to develop into winners (they have a chance of becoming winners, but they are not certain to be winners). This is the big difference between a finesse and a developed trick, like knocking out the Ace when we have KQJ. Finesses have the potential to become extra tricks but are not a certainty.
- *Transportation* – In order to take a finesse, we need to be in the proper hand (usually to lead up to our tenace). Thus, a finesse requires transportation to the proper hand for proper execution.
- *Tempo* – A finesse has the danger of giving up the lead if it is not successful. We should keep this in mind, as we may not be able to take a finesse (or we may need to wait until we have tried other options first) if we cannot afford to give up the lead. An example of this occurs in notrump when the opponents have a long suit that they are getting ready to run (cash) on us. However, a finesse may not give up the lead if it is successful. In this way, it has an advantage over developing a winner by knocking out an Ace or other sure loser if the opponents have a long suit to run against us.
- *Loser* – Not only does a finesse risk giving up the lead, it also may give the opponents an extra trick if it loses. If we cannot afford to give up another trick then we may not be able to take a finesse, or we may need to try other options first, before risking losing a trick to a failed finesse.
- *Timing* – Taking a finesse can also be a part of a larger plan of playing the hand. The order in which we try to take our tricks can have to do with a lot of different things - Danger Hands, Transportation, Entries, Needing to Repeat a Finesse, and much more. *When* we take our finesse is a part of this larger plan. This is called the “Timing of the Hand” and is an important part of many finesse choices.



## Conclusion

There are many declarer play topics related to finesses that can help us make decisions about whether to take a finesse or which finesse to take: probability, controls, counting, etc. The important part of the discussion is for you to have a clear and simple understanding of a basic finesse -- how it works and what we need to consider when thinking about taking one. Make this a skill you have mastered and be able to simply apply it as part of your larger declarer play plan! This will become a core part of your trick-taking skills, even though it will eventually become your fallback plan, not your primary approach to developing additional winners!