

# When to Draw Trumps

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## Golden Rule

In a suit contract, draw trumps as soon as you can, unless there is a good reason not to.

The main reasons for not doing so are:

- to ruff in the short hand (the hand with fewer trumps)
- to quickly discard losers
- to utilise scarce entries

## Ruffing in the short hand

We prefer to play in 4♥ or 4♠ rather than 3NT because we will likely make an extra trick in a suit contract.

This trick comes from making our trumps separately, which we do by “ruffing in the short hand”.

So if we are declarer in a suit contract, we should look to take advantage of the opportunity. Sometimes this affects when we draw trumps so we need to consider it from the very outset.

## An example:

	North
	♠ 4
	♥ 862
Contract: 4♥	♦ T6543
Lead: 2♠	♣ AK52
	South (Declarer)
	♠ A53
	♥ AKQJ4
	♦ A98
	♣ JT

The only way to avoid 2 losing spades is to ruff them on table (the hand with least trumps). You must do this before drawing trumps, otherwise there will be no trumps left on table to ruff with. Win the A♠, ruff a small spade on table, come back to hand with a heart (which still leaves a heart on table) and ruff a second spade for 11 tricks.

## Should I finesse?

	North
	♠ 4
	♥ 86
Contract: 4♥	♦ QJ765
Lead: 2♠	♣ Q5432

	South
	♠ A53
	♥ AKQJ4
	♦ A98
	♣ J6

Here you cannot come back to hand with a trump, because you need to ruff with both on the table. After A♠ - spade ruff, the only way back to hand is with a diamond. Should you finesse against K♦?

No! If it fails you will get a heart return, taking out your last trump on table. You will but then lose 2 clubs, K♦ and a spade. 1 down. If you don't finesse, you will definitely lose the K♦ but you will still be able to ruff the last spade in dummy. You can still lead Q♦ and hope it is covered by the king, but don't finesse.

If the contract was 5♥ instead, you would finesse, because the only way to make 11 tricks is if the finesse is right. If the T♦ is also nicely placed you can make all 13!

## Equal Length Trumps

If you have the same number of trumps in each hand, and need to ruff some losers before drawing trumps, you can do the ruffing in either hand. Once you have ruffed in one hand that hand becomes "the short hand".

	North
	♠ 4
	♥ T962
Contract: 4♥	♦ T6543
Lead: 2♠	♣ AK52

	South
	♠ A53
	♥ AKQJ
	♦ A98
	♣ JT

Here you can ruff in either hand (Spades in North, Clubs in South). Choose to ruff in North as (1) South's trumps are all masters, and (2) You have less spades than clubs, so the likelihood of an over-ruff is reduced. Also, ruff with the T and 9 rather than the 6 and 2 to eliminate an over-ruff. Do NOT be tempted to ruff twice in each hand, as that will leave you with 2 trumps in each hand, and one opponent will then have more than you (so you can't draw them).

## Discarding Losers

Contract: 4♥  
Lead: K♠

North

♠ A32  
♥ T962  
♦ T65  
♣ AKQ

South

♠ 765  
♥ KQJ753  
♦ 432  
♣ -

Win the A♠, discard three diamonds (or two spades and a diamond) on the clubs and then draw trumps. If you don't, opponents will win A♥ and then take three diamond tricks.

## Limited Entries

Contract: 6♥  
Lead: K♠

North

♠ A832  
♥ 62  
♦ T652  
♣ 357

South

♠ 7  
♥ KQJ543  
♦ AQ  
♣ AKQJ

You are going to lose A♥, so the only way to make the contract is if the diamond finesse works. You only have one entry to Dummy (A♠), so you have to take the finesse now rather than after drawing trumps.

Contract: 7♥  
Lead: 3♥

North

♠ J74  
♥ AK  
♦ 32  
♣ AKT732

South

♠ A  
♥ QJT9876  
♦ A754  
♣ J

What a "brave" contract! You can only make it if hearts are 2-2 and clubs 3-3. Win the heart, play A♣ and ruff a small club. Cross back to the K♥ and then throw your losing spades on the long clubs.

## Hand from the session

Contract: 6♥  
Lead: K♠

North

♠ 52  
♥ A54  
♦ AKT943  
♣ 72

South

♠ AT7  
♥ KQJT7  
♦ 65  
♣ A65

You have 4 losers in the black suits. You can ruff 2 of them, but that still leaves 2 losers and a failed contract (assuming the opposition don't lead back trumps when they get the lead).

The only way to make the contract is to hope the diamonds break 3-3 (and the hearts 3-2) and throw 3 of your losers on the long diamonds. To do this you must delay drawing trumps as the A♥ is your only entry to table to access the long diamonds. Win the A♠, play A♦, K♦ and ruff a ♦ (with the T♥), and if they do split 3-3, play K♥, Q♥ and cross to the A♥ to draw the last trump, then run the long diamonds, discarding 3 losers from your hand.

Note:

If the contract were 4♥, you will play differently. You can guarantee one ruff on table, which will give you 10 tricks, and eliminates the risk of the diamonds not splitting 3-3. Remember to ruff with the A♥ to avoid an over-ruff!

Here's the full hand:

	North	
	♠ 52	
	♥ A54	
	♦ AKT943	
	♣ 72	
West		East
♠ KQ98		♠ J643
♥ 982		♥ 63
♦ 72		♦ QJ8
♣ KQ43		♣ JT98
	South	
	♠ AT7	
	♥ KQJT7	
	♦ 65	
	♣ A65	