

TIPS 56-80: Declarer play

TIP 56:

Apply the Even Suit Break Test when deciding whether to play for the drop or to finesse.

Some hands require no more than a key suit be handled to best advantage. You need to know the correct technique for handling basic card combinations. Once the correct technique is second nature, you can progress to judging when to depart from the 'book' play.

The Even Suit Break Test

Step 1: Assume the missing cards divide as even as possible.

Step 2: Assume the missing honour is with the longer holding if there is an odd number of cards missing. If the even-break is 3-2, place the missing key card with the 3-card holding; if the even-break is 2-1, assume the missing card is doubleton, not singleton.

Step 3: Check whether the missing honour will drop if you play your suit from the top and the even-break occurs. If the honour placed with the longer holding will not drop, take the finesse.

Of course, the play based on this approach will not work all the time but it gives you the best chance for success if you do not have any inkling as to which opponent holds the missing honour.

Should you finesse or play for the drop with these combinations:

Dummy	(1) 8 6 5 4	(2) 8 6 5 4 3	(3) 8 6 5 4 3
Declarer	A Q 9 7 2	A Q 9 7 2	A Q J 9 7 2

Solutions: (1) 4 cards missing – even-break 2-2 – king figures to be doubleton – king unlikely to fall under the ace – take the finesse.

(2) 3 cards missing – even-break 2-1 – king figures to be doubleton – king unlikely to fall under the ace – take the finesse.

(3) 2 cards missing – even-break 1-1 – king likely to be singleton – probably will fall under the ace – play the ace rather than finesse.

What is the best play with these combinations?

Dummy	(4) A 6 4 2	(5) A 6 4 2	(6) 9 8 6 4 2
Declarer	K J 7 3	K J 7 5 3	A K J 5 3

Solutions: (4) 5 cards missing – even-break 3-2 – queen will be with the singleton more often than the doubleton – queen is thus unlikely to fall if you play ace and king – best is to finesse: ace first, then low to the jack. When finessing for a queen, it is usual to finesse on the second round of the suit (ace or king first, finesse on the next round).

(5) 4 cards missing – even-break 2-2 – queen likely to be doubleton – queen is thus likely to fall if you play ace and king – reject the finesse.

(6) 3 cards missing – even-break 2-1 – queen likely to be doubleton – do not finesse on the first round (could lose to queen singleton). Play the ace: if all follow, the queen will fall under the king; if LHO shows out, cross to dummy in another suit and finesse the jack; if RHO shows out, you have a loser . . . somebody up there does not like you.

How do you manage these holdings to give yourself the best chance of avoiding a loser?

Dummy	(7) 8 4	(8) 8 4	(9) 4
Declarer	A K Q 10 6 2	A K Q 10 6	A K Q 10 2

Solutions: (7) 5 cards missing – even-break 3-2 – jack likely to be tripleton – play ace, king, queen – do not finesse the ten.

(8) 6 cards missing – even-break 3-3 – jack likely to be tripleton – play ace, king, queen – do not finesse the ten.

(9) 7 cards missing – even-break is 4-3 – J-x-x-x is more likely than J-x-x. The jack is therefore not likely to drop if you play ace, king, queen. The best chance for maximum tricks is to finesse the ten.

Caution: The correct technique for one particular suit may not be the correct approach to the whole hand. Other considerations may apply.