

Learning: The Count Signal

Part 2 of a 3-part series on basic defensive signals

The count signal is probably the easiest to use, but you likely won't use it much until your bridge skills evolve to the point where you regularly try to determine Declarer's distribution. (You should definitely strive to do this.) The mechanics are simple -- when declarer or dummy leads, a high card followed by a low card shows an even number and low/high shows odd.

Board 2 ♠ A 4
East ♥ 8 5 4
Deals ♦ K Q J 10 5
N-S Vul ♣ 9 7 2

♠ K 8 7 3
♥ J 3
♦ A 9 2
♣ 8 5 4 3

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1 N
Pass	3 N	All pass	

Trick	Lead	2nd	3rd	4th
1. W	♠ J	4	<u>K</u>	5
2. E	♠ 3	6	9	<u>A</u>

Dummy now leads the ♦K. You hold up as you know declarer started with at least 2 diamonds. What do you then play on the ♦Q continuation?

If Declarer has 3 diamonds, you need to hold up another round to kill the last 2 diamonds in dummy. This might be the entire hand.

Board 2 - A ♠ A 4
East Deals ♥ 8 5 4
N-S Vul ♦ K Q J 10 5
 ♣ 9 7 2

♠ J 10 9 2
♥ Q 10 9 6
♦ 8 3
♣ Q J 6

♠ K 8 7 3
♥ J 3
♦ A 9 2
♣ 8 5 4 3

♠ Q 6 5
♥ A K 7 2
♦ 7 6 4
♣ A K 10

You want to win the 3rd round of diamonds. Declarer wins only 2 diamonds and is limited to 2 tricks in each suit – down 1.

But the entire board might look like 2-B.

Board 2 - B ♠ A 4
East Deals ♥ 8 5 4
N-S Vul ♦ K Q J 10 5
 ♣ 9 7 2

♠ J 10 9 2
♥ Q 10 9 6
♦ 8 7 3
♣ A 6

♠ K 8 7 3
♥ J 3
♦ A 9 2
♣ 8 5 4 3

♠ Q 6 5
♥ A K 7 2
♦ 6 4
♣ K Q J 10

Holding up twice lets Declarer steal the contract. She switches to clubs and takes 3 tricks in that suit and 2 in each of the others. If you had taken the second diamond trick, Declarer is limited to 2 tricks in each suit.

How do you know what to do?

Just like you "talk" to partner during the bidding (using your agreements rather than words, of course), you communicate with partner in the play as well. You use the order in which you play the cards as your "language".

In 2-A, you note that partner played the ♦8 on the first diamond. That is obviously high, so you "count" on partner for 2 rather than 3 diamonds. You then know Declarer has 3 and you therefore must hold up twice. (Yes, the ♦8 could be a singleton, but then South has 4 and it hardly matters when you take your ace.

Similarly in 2-B, partner plays the ♦3 on the king. You cleverly calculate this must be partner's lowest, and his playing up the line means he has 3. Since Declarer must then have 2, you know it is safe – and in this case necessary – to take the 2nd diamond.

Bridge is so much easier when you let your partner help you with the tough decisions!

The source for all hands in this lesson is *Partnership Defense in Bridge*, by Kit Woolsey, pp 5-10. [This is a great book on defense but aimed at experienced players.]

Thanks to [Marty Nathan](#) for this 3-part lesson series. Contact Marty (mjnathan@comcast.net) or your bridge teacher with any questions.

Part 1: [The Attitude Signal](#)

Part 3: [The Suit Preference Signal](#)