

When Not To Use The Rule Of 7

By Henry Jackson

Thanks to Phillip Alder

- Phillip Alder's series of articles on Holdup Plays appeared in the Bridge Bulletin from August to December 2016.
- Some example hands in this presentation were taken from his articles.

Know When to Fold Them!

Lead is the Heart 3 – Rule Says 1 Time

Dlr: South ♠ K J 10

Vul: None ♥ 7 6 4

♦ Q 4

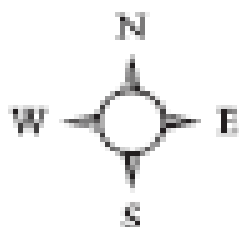
♣ A 10 8 7 4

♠ 7 5 3 2

♥ K J 9 3 2

♦ 10 5

♣ 6 3



♠ 8 4

♥ Q 5

♦ K J 9 8 6 3

♣ K 5 2

♠ A Q 9 6

♥ A 10 8

♦ A 7 2

♣ Q J 9

The Rule Says 1 Time

- West leads the heart 3 and Declarer ducks East's Q. Here the rule is correct.
- If Declarer ignores the rule and ducks the next heart, West will (should!) abandon hearts because he has no entry.
- The diamond shift dooms the contract.
- Declarer should win trick to and take the SAFE club finesse.
- If it loses and East has a 3rd heart, only 3 hearts and a club will be lost.

He Who Hesitates

Lead is the Heart 2. The Rules Says 2 Times.

1.

♠ 10 6 3

♥ 8 4

♦ A Q J 8 7

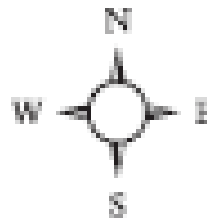
♣ K 10 9

♠ 8 7 4

♥ K J 5 2

♦ 6 5 3 2

♣ 8 3



♠ K Q J 9

♥ Q 7 6 3

♦ K 4

♣ 6 5 2

♠ A 5 2

♥ A 10 9

♦ 10 9

♣ A Q J 7 4

The Rule Says 2 Times

- West leads the heart 2 against 3NT. Only 8 tricks can be taken immediately.
- If Declarer blindly follows the rule, East will (should) switch to a spade and Declarer will lose 3 spades, 1 heart and a diamond!
- Declarer should see the danger of a spade shift and hope that the heart 2 is fourth best by grabbing trick 1 and working on diamonds.
- Note that Defenders are tricky and some lead 3rd or 5th best. Some even lead low from a doubleton!

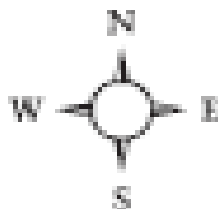
Gather Intelligence First

Lead is the Spade K. The Rule Says 2 Times.

2.

♠ A 7 4
♥ J 10 9
♦ K Q J 10
♣ 6 5 3

♠ K Q J 10 9
♥ 6 3
♦ 7 4 3
♣ Q 9 4



♠ 8 5
♥ 8 7 5 4 2
♦ 9 6 2
♣ A 10 8

♠ 6 3 2
♥ A K Q
♦ A 8 5
♣ K J 7 2

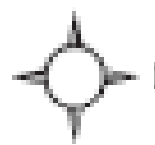
The Rule Again Says 2

- Declarer has only 8 top tricks.
- Declarer must try the K or J of clubs for his 9th trick – but which one?
- If Declarer blindly follows the rule, he must guess which club to play.
- If Declarer waits until the 3rd trick, he will know that West has 5 spades and do his best by playing the club K for the 9th trick.

Look For A Blocking Opportunity

Lead is the Spade 6. The Rule Says 1 Time.

| | | |
|-------------|------------|------------|
| | ♠ A 4 | |
| | ♥ Q J 6 | |
| | ♦ K 9 5 4 | |
| | ♣ K 7 3 2 | |
| ♠ K J 7 6 3 | | ♠ Q 8 |
| ♥ 8 5 4 | | ♥ 10 9 7 3 |
| ♦ 7 2 | | ♦ 8 6 3 |
| ♣ A 9 5 | | ♣ J 10 8 6 |
| | | |
| | ♠ 10 9 5 2 | |
| | ♥ A K 2 | |
| | ♦ A Q J 10 | |
| | ♣ Q 4 | |

N
W  E
S

A Block In Time Saves ...

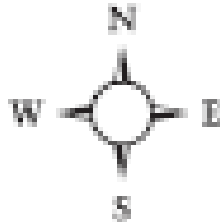
- West leads the spade 6 against 3NT.
- If South blindly follows the rule and ducks the first round, the opponents will set up spades and take 3 more when West gets in with the club A.
- Looking at the spots and knowing that East must have a spade honor (West did not lead the K), South can block the suit by winning the 1st trick! This limits his losers to 3 spades and a club.

What About When You Have 2 Stoppers?

- 1.** If you have to lose the lead only once before being able to run for home, grab trick one, give the opponents the trick they are due, and saunter or sprint – according to choice – to the finish line.
- 2.** If you have two high cards to drive out, usually it is right to duck trick one.

Example with 2 Stoppers

Lead is Heart 6. Rules Says 1 Time.

| | | |
|-------------|--|------------|
| | ♠ J 7 4 | |
| | ♥ A 5 2 | |
| | ♦ Q J 10 | |
| | ♣ K Q 3 2 | |
| ♠ A 8 3 | | ♠ 10 9 6 5 |
| ♥ J 9 7 6 4 |  | ♥ Q 8 |
| ♦ 5 3 2 | | ♦ 9 8 6 4 |
| ♣ 9 4 | | ♣ A 7 6 |
| | ♠ K Q 2 | |
| | ♥ K 10 3 | |
| | ♦ A K 7 | |
| | ♣ J 10 8 5 | |

Ducking 1 Time is Correct

- After winning the 2nd heart, work on clubs.
- East wins, but is out of hearts.
- Win his shift and drive out the spade A.
- Note that if East has a 3rd heart, they are splitting 4-3 and you lose only two hearts, a spade and a club.
- If you win the 1st trick and drive out West's spade A, that works but it's normal to work on the longer clubs first.

Look At Their Card First

Lead is Heart 2. The Rule says 2 times.

1.

♠ 10 6 3

♥ 8 4

♦ A Q J 8 7

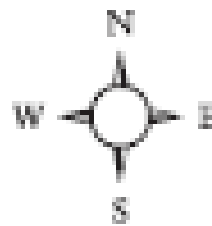
♣ K 10 9

♠ 8 7 4

♥ K J 5 2

♦ 6 5 3 2

♣ 8 3



♠ K Q J 9

♥ Q 7 6 3

♦ K 4

♣ 6 5 2

♠ A 5 2

♥ A 10 9

♦ 10 9

♣ A Q J 7 4

What Could Go Wrong?

- If West has led 4th best, you can never cut communications in hearts. Ignore the rule!
- Win the 1st trick and take the diamond finesse!
- If it loses, you will lose 3 hearts and a diamond.
- If you duck trick 1, East will (should) switch to a spade and when the diamond finesse loses, you will lose 1 heart, 3 spades and a diamond!
- **Note.** If they are playing 3rd/5th leads consider using the rule!

Conclusions

- The **Rule of Seven** works in simple situations, but you must always **THINK**.
- Always count your sure tricks before playing to the first trick.
- Listen to the bidding for clues and check the opponent's cards for unusual lead practices or lengths required for suit openings.
- Have a plan before playing to the first trick.