The

George's

Defense

I **by G. Eric Shugart**

Edited and Reviewed by G. Peter Shugart

(Bridge Agreement signed on 8/8/2026)

Introduction

There are three distinct aspects of the game of bridge.

a) The bidding system that you and your partner have agreed upon.
b) The play of the hand when you are declarer.
c) The defense of the hand when you are not the declarer.

A 4th defensive aspect, which is really a subset of the first, would be defensive bidding which is not discussed in this paper. However, I did include a brief discussion of our preemptive agreements in an Appendix.

There are thousands of books written about this game and almost unlimited information about this game on line. In my opinion, most partnerships spend most of their time learning their bidding system and considerably less time on the defense.

However, since you and your partner will be on defense 50% of the time, it is important that your partnership also have defensive agreements on what the cards you play mean, whether you are leading, following suit or discarding. This report focusses on the aspect of the cards you lead or play.

Specifically, this is a document that explains much of the defensive carding that Peter and I use, which we have called the George's System. The document is meant as a something that a serious partnership could consider. It does assume the reader knows the basics of bridge and knows how to bid and play a hand.

The first defense topic the paper looks at is the '***opening lead***'. After all the bidding is over and assuming the opponents have won the contract, you (or your partner) will make the opening lead. The specific card you lead can give your partner information. The opening lead discussion that follows are

a) You are leading a suit that your partner has shown
b) You are defending a No-Trump contract
c) You are defending a suit contract
d) Trump leads

The second defense topic looks at the cards you play either when partner leads, or declarer leads. This discussion is split between whether you are following suit or making a discard.

The Opening Lead

Opening leads when partner has made a bid

During the bidding auction, your partner may have shown a suit. There are three ways he might have shown the suit: he may have opened the suit; he may have overcalled with a suit; he may have doubled an artificial bid.

Assume that the opponents have won the contract, that you are on opening lead and that you have decided to lead your partner's suit.

Here is the algorithm to memorize in terms of priorities:

1) If you have a singleton, lead it
2) If you have the Ace but not the King, lead it - do not underlead an Ace.
3) If you have AK or KQ, lead the King and look for partner's attitude signal (more on that later) on whether to continue or to switch suits.
4) If you have touching honors, lead the top one. *(*Honors are Ten through Ace)
5) If you have 10, 9, x, lead the 9
6) With Hx, lead H and partner will figure out if you have touching honors or Hx or H

This leaves xx xxx xxxx Hxx Hxxx to consider

For these situations, your lead is dependent upon whether or not you supported partner's suit in the bidding auction.

If you supported Partners suit: give attitude

If you supported partner's suit, he knows you have 3 or more cards in his suit. He doesn't know if you have 3 or 4 (or even 5) little ones or something of value. The card you lead will give *your attitude* toward his suit. A high card tells him that you don't have any good cards in his suit whereas a low card suggests that you do. This is called an *upside-down attitude signal.*

For example, if you held 864, and had supported your partner, you would lead the 8. If you had Q72, you would lead low, or the 2 to tell him you have an honor

As another example, assume you had supported partner's suit and consider if you had K 10 8 vs a holding of 8 5 3. In both cases you would lead the 8. Why? With K 10 8 you lead your lowest card to show you have something of value. With 8 5 3 you play your highest card to deny anything of value. It will be up to your partner to figure out what your lead of an 8 meant from looking at his hand, looking at the dummy, and thinking about how the bidding went.

(The above example makes an important point. A high card or a low card is a relative thing, not an absolute thing. If the only cards in the suit that you have are the 3 and the 2, the 3 is a high card. Among K 10 8, the 8 is a low card)

It is necessary to decide where the cut-off is for having a 'good' card or not having one. Peter and I have agreed having a 10 or better is a good card.

By agreement, with 10 9 x, whether you supported or did not support his suit, the George's Defense leads the 9, promising the 10 (or a singleton).

What to lead with K 10 9 or Q 10 9? Lead the 9.

Note that if you held A52, you would play the Ace; do not underlead an Ace of partner's suit

If you did not support Partners suit: give count

When you did not support your partner's suit, most of the time you will hold 2 cards, but you may have 3 or 4. Perhaps the bidding got too high to allow you to show support or perhaps you only have 3 high card points (HCP). *When you did not show partner support, count becomes much more important than attitude*.

Why is count important? Partner can see how many cards he has in the suit, can see how many are in dummy, and if he knows your count then he can determine how many cards the Declarer has in the suit and can plan his play accordingly

While it would be nice if you could just tell partner that you have 2, 3, 4 or even 5 cards in his suit, we are limited to be able to only tell him whether you have an odd count or an even count and must leave it to your partner to figure it out.

When you lead a low card, you show partner that you have an even count. When you lead a high card, you show an odd number of cards. This method of giving count is called *upside-down count*

Assuming that you did not support your partner, we can look at several examples.

You hold 982: while you could lead the 9 or 8, Peter and I lead 2nd from top (the 8) to show odd count

You hold the 9853. With these four cards, lead the 3 to show even count

K 10 8 4. lead the 4 to show an even count

Q 9 2 Peter and I lead 2nd from top (the 9)

K 3. With Hx, we would lead the H and partner will have to deduce that you have a doubleton. *This is the exception to us giving count*

5 3 Here we lead the 3 to show even count

With Q J 7, what card do you lead if you did not support his suit? Hint: with touching honors, lead the top one.

By our algorithm, with 10 9 x, whether you supported or did not support his suit, the George's Defense leads the 9, promising the 10 (or a singleton). If you did not support then the 9 also shows an odd count.

Memorize the algorithm and remember that these attitude and count signals are only applicable when you hold one of xx xxx xxxx Hxx Hxxx in your partner's suit

Should You Lead your partner's suit?

Generally, it is a good idea to lead your partner's suit if not for the simple reason that if you get a bad score, your partner cannot blame you for the opening lead. Moreover, against a No-Trump contract, it's almost universal that you should lead his suit *especially* if your partner had thrown in an overcall, which promises both length and strength in his suit.

There are however some reasons why you might choose not to lead partner's *suit against a suit contract*

One reason is where you have the Ace and King of a different suit. You can play the King and get a look at the dummy, see partner's signal (more on that later) and then decide whether to lead partner's suit on the 2nd lead or continue with the Ace.

When you make an opening lead, you are leading around to the declarer. When you have the Ace of your partner's suit and suspect that the declarer has the King or Queen from the bidding (maybe he bid 1NT over your partner's opening 1H bid), leading the Ace may cost you the hand. You may want to lead a different suit and hope when partner gets in, he leads his suit to capture declarer's King or Queen with your Ace.

Another reason that you might not lead partner's suit is if you have control of trump (say A, x) and a singleton in a different suit. You might lead the singleton (causing partner to wonder why you didn't lead his suit). Then when you get back in with your Ace of trumps, your hope is to lead partner's suit, he wins and enables you to cash a trump trick.

Another possible reason is that you have a solid suit of your own – say a suit headed by the King, Queen, Jack.

And a trivial reason why you might not lead his suit is because you are void.

In summary, most of the time you will strive to lead partner's suit and if you do, the card you chose to lead will tell him about your holding in his suit.

Opening Lead Against a NT contract

We now cover the meaning of our opening lead against a NT contract when both partners have been silent throughout the auction.

The main idea behind defending most NT games is to set up one of the partnership's long suits. Typically, the partnership attempts to knock out Declarer high cards in the suit being attacked so that one of you can win the remaining tricks in that suit. Unless the Declarer can take all his tricks off the top, you often have the luxury of time to create winners out of your partnerships' long suits.

As you already know from the previous section, you will almost lead partner's suit against a NT contract with few exceptions. However, here we are assuming partner has been silent throughout the auction.

The opening lead is called a *'blind'* lead. You don't have a lot of information. Maybe the bidding went 1NT-3NT. Both opponents likely have balanced hands and between them 24-28 HCP. You do know how many HCP are in your hand and so you can infer how many HCP your partner is likely to have. You will have to choose a suit in your hand that you think has the most likelihood of the partnership taking the most tricks.

Unless you are leading your partner's suit, you almost *always* be leading from a suit that is at least 4 cards. It would be very unusual to make a blind lead of a singleton or doubleton or even a triplet against NT

The George's Defense uses *Journalist Leads* which can be Googled and have the following meanings:

Leading an Ace is a powerful lead which suggests you have a strong running suit and you want your partner to '*unblock'* (get out of the way) by playing a King, Queen, or Jack. If your partner doesn't have one of these, partner should give you his 'count' of how many cards he has in that suit.

Typically leading an Ace would show a 5-card suit (or possibly a 4-card suit headed by the Ace, King, Queen. Some examples:

A K J 7 5 A Q J 6 2

If partner can 'unblock' then you can quickly run off 5 winning tricks. If partner cannot unblock, he will give count. Why? Because you know how many cards you hold, how many are in dummy and then can deduce how many are in Declarer's hand to decide whether to continue attacking the suit or change tactics.

Reminder from above: Peter and I play upside count and attitude (UDCA) so that with an odd number of cards, we play a high card and with an even number of cards, we play a low card.

Leading a King tells partner that you have either the Ace or Queen and asks partner: "should I play it or switch to a different suit?" Your partner should give you an attitude signal to tell you what he thinks.

(Reminder: Peter and I play that with a low card encourages continuation of the suit while a high card discourages continuation of the suit led). Some examples of where a King lead would be correct:

A K 4 2 K Q 5 4 3 A K J 4

(If we consider leading from A K J 4 vs leading from A K J 6 4., the King is the right lead in the first instance, but in the latter, the Ace is the right lead.)

Leading a Queen is also a powerful lead and asks partner to play the Jack or give attitude. Examples:

K, Q,10, x, x Q, J, x, x K, Q,10, x A, Q, J, x A Q 10 x

Leading a Jack simply shows holding the 10 and no higher card such as:

J 10 8 7 2 J 10 4 2 J 10 9

Leading a Ten is a powerful lead and shows holding either a Jack or 9 along with a higher Honor card**:** such as

A J 10 4 K 10 9 4 K J 10 9 3

Leading a Nine shows holding a ten and no higher honor card such as: 10 9 8 4

I think of the Jack and nine as 'cousins' since both basically send the same message to partner

Finally, we come to **leads of 2 through 8**. Leading one of these cards suggests a 4+ card suit, but it is an attitude lead. A low spot card is making a suggestion that this is a good suit to try and set up due to having some length and some top cards in the suit. A high spot card suggests length (4+) but no help in the suit with honors.

K J 8 4 2……. lead the 2 suggesting that this is a suit we might want to attack

8 4 3 2……. lead the 8 suggesting I have 4 cards, but nothing good in this suit

Consider: 9 8 7 4 2…what do you lead? The answer is that it depends. A 5-card suit can be an awesome suit against a no-trump contract, because after two rounds, your partnership may have all remaining high cards in the suit and have 3 winners. The question becomes; do you have a way to get back in your hand to capitalize? If you do, then lead the 2, suggesting to partner "let's attack this suit "

If you don't think you can get back in with the lead, then you would lead the 8 (Why not the 9? Because the 9 promises the 10 and nothing higher)

Opening lead against NT final comments

I haven't really focused on *what* suit to pick when defending a NT contract other to imply you want to lead length. The discussion thus far has been, what meaning the card you lead has to your partner.

Some general guidelines can be presented:

1) Three card sequences are strong leads: Q, J, 10 -lead top of a sequence
2) If your partner overcalled in the auction, he should have a solid 5 card suit
3) If your partner opened a Major, he may not have a good suit, but he has length
4) Look for your longest and strongest suit and lead low (but see 5)
5) If your longest and strongest suit looks like 9 7 5 2, lead the 7 to show length but not strength (don't lead the 9)
6) Avoid leading singletons or doubleton's unless it's partner's suit
7) Did the manner in which the opponents got to their bid tell you anything about where they might be weak or short?

Here's some more examples of what card to lead against a NT contract (assuming a blind lead)

Q J 10 3	lead the Queen, top of a 3-card sequence
Q J 8 7 2	lead the 2 (4+ card suits headed by two honors, tend to lead low)
Q J 7	lead the Q (with a 3-card sequence headed by two honors, tend to lead top)
9 8 7	lead the 8 (the 9 implies the 10)
A K Q x	Do you want count or attitude? depends upon the rest of your hand
A 4	Find a different suit to lead

Opening leads against a suit contract.

Now we switch to the blind opening lead against a suit contract. For example, the opponents bid 1S-4S. Against suit contracts, you don't have the luxury of time to set up a long suit. Declarer is likely to trump your cards in short order. The strategy against suit contracts is to take your tricks early. Giving up 'tempo' (the lead to declarer) can be costly.

The message you send your partner about your opening lead is completely different than the meaning of your lead against a NT contract. And for now, we assume that you are NOT making a trump lead (this discussion comes later) and that you are not leading partner's suit.

Fortunately, once you have chosen what suit to lead, there's not much memorization as to what card to lead from that suit.

Honor Leads – we *lead the second of touching Honors, unless it is a doubleton or singleton:*

When Partner leads:	You know his holding is:
Ace	A or Ax
King	AKx(x) or Kx or K
Queen	KQx(x) or Qx or Q
Jack	QJx(x) or Jx or J
Ten	J,10x(x) or 10x or 10 or K J 10

To reiterate: *with touching honors, we lead the second one unless it is a doubleton or singleton*

The lead of spot cards 2 -8 is always a *count* signal

a) With 2 cards, lead high-low
b) With an odd number of cards, lead the lowest (which will be either the Rule of 12* or Rule of 10 *)
c) With an even number of cards, lead 3rd best (Rule of 12*)

Examples:

9 7 3 …lead the 3

Q 8 7 4…. lead the 7

8 2……..lead the 8

A 6 3……lead the Ace, never underlead an Ace against a suit contract.

Consider what card you lead if your holding is 864 vs if your holding is 42. In both cases you lead the 4. Or consider what card you from KJ9 vs holding 92. In both cases here you lead the 9.

While your opening lead of a spot card may appear to have some ambiguity, when partner inspects the dummy, looks at his own hand and then does a mental review of the bidding, often he can glean what the meaning of your opening lead was

The lead of the ambiguous 9.

The lead of the 9 has 3 possibilities:

a) It promises the 10, possibly part of an interior sequence e.g. Q 10 9 x (x), 10 9, 10 9 3
b) It's a singleton or top of a doubleton (e.g. 9 3)
c) It shows KJ9 or KJ9x or KJ9xxx or even KJ9xxxxx (3rd from even, low from odd)

Rule of 12

The Rule of 12 works like this: leading 3rd down from, say, Q 10 8 6, we would lead the 8. Take 12-8 = 4. This tells partner there are 4 cards higher than the 8 that you don't know the whereabouts of. (Specifically, the A K J and 9 in this example).

Partner can look at his hand, let's say he has the Ace and Jack, and let's say the dummy has the 9. From this, he will know that the declarer has one card higher than the 8. Partner won't know if Declarer has the Ace, Queen or Ten, but he knows Declarer only has one of them. He then can plan his play accordingly.

Rule of 11 applies when you lead 4th best and Rule of 10 applies when you lead 5th best. A majority of partnerships lead 4th down when defending a NT contract (and also against a suit contract as well. Use this fact to your advantage)

When partner leads a spot card, let's say the 6. You consider the possibilities:

a) Singleton
b) Top of doubleton …6x
c) Low from 3……e.g. Q 9 6 – Rule of 12
d) Low from 5…. e.g. K J 8 7 6…Rule of 10
e) 3rd from even – Rule of 12

Some of these possibilities might be readily eliminated by inspection of your hand and the dummy. It may take a second lead of the suit to narrow it down.

Concluding Comments on Opening Lead against a Suit contract

The first step in choosing what card to lead is to choose which *suit* to lead. Once you have made that decision, the above discussion tells you which *card* to lead in that suit. The following gives some guidance on how to choose which suit to lead against a suit contract.

Tempo and some considerations

Tempo is important and refers to who is controlling the lead. If you have the opening lead, you have the tempo. *Against suit contracts, you generally want to get your tricks early and so giving up tempo can be costly.* If the declarer gains tempo, he can drain opponent's trump and then maybe run a long suit or start trumping back and forth between his hand or the dummy.

More later on when to lead trump on opening lead, but generally leading trump will give up tempo, and leading a singleton trump may actually hurt your partner who might have some trump length.

Leading worthless doubletons can also be suicidal and give up tempo. If you are short in the suit then the odds favor that the opponents have length and can draw trump and gain tricks through their long side suit. We ***rarely l***ead worthless doubletons unless we have trump control.

Leading from xxx is also usually not a great lead

A *sequence*, defined as 3 cards in a row can be great leads. Q J 10 4……. we would lead the Jack against suit contract (2nd of touching honors) and the Queen against NT.

Against a suit contract, you would *never* want to lead away from the sequence (the 4 in the above example)

A broken sequence is what it sounds like and if possible, tend to try and avoid leading that suit. If we must we would not lead an x:

K, J, 10, x, (x) lead the 10

K, 10, 9, x lead the 9

Q, 10, 9, lead the 9

Leading a singleton has the risks discussed about leading worthless doubletons. If you have trump control, there is less risk.

Underleading an Ace is almost unheard of against a suit contract.

Leading an Ace is rare as Aces are meant to capture Kings and Queens.

Trump Leads

Against a suit contract, you do have the option of leading trump. Trump leads are passive and likely to give up tempo. One expert wrote that trump leads are wrong 50% of the time and correct 20% of the time. The thing to keep in mind is: *You should lead trump when you actually see a reason to do so.*

Lets' go through some reasons where you wouldn't want to lead trump (generally):

1) Don't lead a singleton trump because Partner is likely to have 3 or 4 and you squeeze him. There is one exception: If you double a bid at the one level and partner leaves it in, then your lead of a trump is mandatory.
2) Don't lead trump if you have 4 of them. Develop high card tricks and wait for your ruffs
3) Don't lead a trump if it endangers a potential trump trick. Jxx and 10xx are good holdings.
4) Don't lead a trump if their bidding suggests strength and tricks; giving up tempo may cost you time to set up your own
5) Don't lead trump after forcing NT where opponents have stopped at 2M or 2S

Here are some situations where a trump lead might work out (and might not):

1) When opponents have made a sacrifice and you clearly have the HCP. They are hoping to trump your HCP
2) When they have bid garbage Stayman, they are showing minimal values and hoping to ruff Clubs.
3) When Opener has shown two suits and partner goes back to one, they may suggest shortness
4) When you have a longer trump suit than declarer, particularly in a minor suit (but see #2 above)
5) When opponents are 4-4 or 4-3 and you have 4 or more (but see #2 above)
6) When making a side suit lead might finesse your partner, especially if declarer opened 2C or 2NT
7) If based upon the bidding you realize that your partner's hand is a complete bust, then leading a side suit might finesse yourself
8) When holding a sequence such as QJ10, these cards aren't particularly useful for ruffing.
9) Against a Precision 2D bid

What trump card should you lead?

Generally, if you are going to lead trump, it is going to be from 2 or 3 small cards. It would be very rare to lead H or Hx or HHx.

We attempt to give a suit preference signal when we lead trump by the order in which we play our trump.

For example, assume Spades are trump and you hold the 7 and the 2. By leading the 7 and then later playing the 2 on the second lead of trump, this would indicate a possible desire for a lead of one of the higher-ranking suits, Hearts or Diamonds. Conversely, leading the 2 first and then playing the 7 might indicate a desire for a lead of one of the lower ranking suits or Clubs or Diamonds in this example. (The choice of which of the two suits might be desired is often obvious from looking at your hand and the dummy).

Playing high then low is a much stronger signal than playing low first than high. Sometimes you just want to lead trump without meaning to give a signal and in that case you would lead low. This method of signaling requires that the partner is following the order in which you played your trump else the signaling method does no good.

Although this section was discussing the opening lead of trump, we also apply this suit preference signaling method when Declarer starts running trump. For example, against a Spade contract, you lead a Heart, Declarer takes it with the Ace of Hearts and then starts running trump. When all you hold are the 7 and 2, the comments above about hold regarding the order in which you play.

Beyond Opening Leads

After the opening lead has been made, a lot more information is known. From the bidding, you may know that the declarer has 5H and 4 Diamonds; you know your 13 cards: you see the dummy's 13 cards so distribution of at least 35 cards are known in this example. Maybe your partner also threw in a bid so you know 5 or 6 of his cards. You may have also received an attitude signal from your partner on your opening lead.

The leads that you or your partner might make after the opening lead will take all the above into account. There is a lot more known after the opening lead has been made. For this reason, subsequent leads do NOT entirely follow the same algorithm's discussed regarding the opening lead.

Generally, against a No-Trump contract, if you introduce a new suit with a spot card (2-9), that will be an attitude lead.

Generally, against a suit contract, if you introduce a new suit with a spot card (2-9), you are either leading 3rd down from an even holding (Rule of 12) or low from an odd holding AND do not have touching honors.

Generally, against both a No-Trump or suit contract, the lead of a (new suit) honor card (10 through Queen) shows the card just underneath the honor card, e.g. leading a Queen shows the Jack. With the exception of the King, we do not lead 2nd of touching honors .

Generally, leading a (new suit) King promises the Ace or Queen

Generally, leading a (new suit) Ace is a bad idea

I say *generally,* because you may be leading in response to a signal your partner gave you and/or basing your lead upon what you see in dummy and recall from the bidding

Done with leads, now on to carding!!!

Before leaving this topic, there are write-ups on how to lead against slam contracts vs. non-slam contracts. This is a subject that I haven't ever examined – mostly because slams are rare so it has been low on the priority list. I mention this here just to make you aware that there are potential differences and agreements that exist and perhaps this subject should be examined at some point.

Defensive Carding

The card you play in response to Partner's or Declarer's lead, can tell your Partner information. It may tell him the count of how many cards you have in the suit led. It may tell him your attitude: whether or not you like the suit he led. The card you play may even tell Partner which suit you would like led (or not led).

Attitude Signals when Partner leads

Attitude signals were discussed earlier: if we want to encourage continuation of a suit partner led, we play a low card and if we want to discourage continuation we play a high card. Partner has to deduce whether the card you played was high or low or not a signal at all. Some examples follow:

On the opening lead, Partner leads the King against a 3NT contract which promises the Ace or Queen. You have A92 so you play the 2 to encourage him to play the Queen. If you had instead, 982, you'd play the 9 which suggests that he switch suits

We already saw that against a NT contract if partner's opening leads was the Q, he wants you to play the Jack if you have it, else give an attitude signal regarding the suit.

Sometimes you cannot provide an attitude signal to Partner's opening lead. Partner leads the 5 of Clubs and Dummy plays the 6. With J 8 4 in your hand, you will need to cover and play your Jack which would not be an attitude signal.

The most common place to give an attitude signal is on Partner's opening lead.

Attitude signals can also be made after the opening lead has been made. As an example, defending a 4 Spade contact, Partner leads the King of Hearts and you discourage continuation with a 9. Partner's King takes the trick (meaning he has the Ace), but he switches to leading the 5 of Diamonds and the Dummy takes the 5 of Diamonds with the Ace. You happen to have the King of Diamonds, so here is a great opportunity to play a low Diamond to let your partner know you liked his Diamond lead. With no good cards in Diamonds, you'd play a high Diamond.

The above example illustrates that when your Partner (or you) introduces a new suit *for the first time*, you may have an opportunity to give an attitude signal.

It should be noted that sometimes you just don't have the right or obvious card to give an attitude signal to Parner's lead. Maybe all you have is 2,3. Playing the 3 to discourage is the right card, but Partner may have a hard time discerning that the 3 was a 'high' card.

And as a reminder, there are two very specific circumstances where you do not give attitude to partner's opening lead and both are when you are defending NT:

1) If partner leads the Ace, he is asking you to unblock or give count
2) If partner leads the Queen, he is demanding that you play the Jack (only if you do not have the Jack, then you give attitude)

Summarizing: When one of the Partners introduces a (non-trump) suit for the first time, the other Partner will be striving to give an attitude signal.

Would you ever give an attitude signal when Declarer or the Dummy leads a card?
No, not when following suit.

Count Signals when Declarer (or Dummy) Leads a Non-Trump Suit

Count signals were also discussed earlier: if we want to show an odd count, we play a high card, We play a low card when we want to show an even count. Partner has to deduce whether the card you played was high or low or not a signal at all.

One example that we saw of giving count was when Partner leads the Ace against a no-trump contract, he wants you to unblock your King, Queen or Jack if you have one of them, else give count.

Another example that we reviewed earlier is if you are leading Partner's suit that you did NOT support, you give count.

However, *the most likely* time that you will give count is when either Declarer (or Dummy) leads a non-trump suit for the first time.

Typically, the Partner who plays second will strive to give count. For example, against a Heart contract, if Declarer leads the 5 of Spades, and I next play the 2 of Spades then my Partner can assume that I have an even count of Spades.

Sometimes, the Partner who plays 4th can also give count. If Declarer or Dummy leads the Ace of a non-trump suit, then both Partners have an opportunity to give each other count.

Sometimes you cannot or should not give count to Declarer's lead. For example, Declarer leads the Q of Clubs and you have the King. More often than not you will need to cover the Queen with your King

Signals when Declarer (or Dummy) Leads Trump

Count signals and attitude signals are not important when Declarer is running trump. If possible, the partnership will want to take one of Declarer's lead of trump with a higher one. But more often than not, you will hold 2 or 3 little trump cards. What Peter and I strive. to do is give a suit-preference signal by the order in which we play our trump. This is exactly analogous to the situation where we have decided to make an opening lead of trump. A high trump might indicate a desire for a higher-ranking suit to be led and vice versa. As stated earlier, your Partner is (should be) playing very close attention to the card you play and then comparing it to the card you play later.

Signaling when following Declarer's trump lead is not always possible so the partnership needs to take the trump card play with a grain of salt. For example, if I have the Q-2 of trump, I'm likely not in a position to give a suit preference signal.

When you cannot follow suit

The preceding sections all assumed that you or your Partner were following suit.

We now consider the case where a suit is led and you do not have a card in that suit. Here you can play any card in your hand and we assume you can't trump the trick or that we are defending a NT contract.

Here the discard you make can convey to partner information about your attitude toward the other suits, i.e. give a suit-preference signal. We use a method called Revolving Discards

Revolving Discards

This method orders the suits alphabetically: Clubs, then Diamonds then Hearts then Spades then Clubs again. When a suit is led that your Partner is out of, say Hearts, you look at the magnitude and suit of his discard. Say he plays the 2 of Diamonds. This is calling for the lower ranking of the remaining two suits (Clubs). The fact that he used a Diamond to signal for a Club lead says nothing about Diamonds other than he didn't signal for a Diamond lead.

If partner instead had played a low spade, say the 3, he is calling for a Diamond lead and his Spade discard says nothing about Spades.

Note that there are two different ways to call for a suit. In the example above, both a high Spade and a low Diamond discard suggest a Club lead would be nice.

Subsequent Discards

After the Partner has made his first (revolving discard), he may be able to make subsequent discards. Subsequent discards' will show attitude follow the familiar upside-down method discussed early.

For example, assume Declarer runs 4 rounds of trump where you only had a singleton. On the first discard, you pitch the 10 of Clubs indicating that you'd like a Diamond lead. on the second discard, you play a low Club (UDCA) indicating that you would also like a Club lead. On the 3rd discard you play the 9 of Clubs. The 9 of Clubs is NOT a signal; you already told him you'd like a Club lead.

Wrapping It Up

The preceding write up describes the George's Defense in its entirety. A key to a successful defense is that both partners are on the same page as to their leads and discards.

UDCA is very common. Standard leads, Standard counts, and Standard attitude are common. Odd/even discards are very common. Leading 3rd from even, low from odd is common as is leading 4th down on length leads

Journalist leads are not common. The George's algorithm for when leading his partner's suit is not common. Leading or playing trump in an attempt to give a suit preference signal is not common. Revolving discards are not common.

What specific agreements a partnership has is not as important that both partners have the same understanding of what the cards being played mean.

Some subtleties

There are a few situations which come up regularly as you play the game, that need to be reviewed:

1) Suppose that you see the Ace and Queen in the dummy and that you are behind the dummy and do not have the King. Usually, you do not want this suit led and it would be a mistake to signal this fact. Would you really want to tell the Declarer that you do not have the King? Maybe your partner actually has the King and you don't want to give the Declarer an easy finesse. It usually is best to not give any signal about this suit and let the Declarer guess where the King is, assuming he doesn't have it. Sometimes, it even might be a great tactic to tell partner and Declarer that you actually want this suit led. If your partner has the King, you may have just protected him from a finesse by your lie. But a word of caution: if you lie to your partner and he gets in the lead, he may very well lead the suit thinking that you have the King. Lesson here is don't just blindly signal. What you are telling your partner with your card play, you are also telling the astute declarer information about your hand and the lay of the cards
2) There is one important exception to the general rule of trying to give an attitude signal to partner's introduction of a new suit. As an example, against a 4H contract suppose on the opening lead, Partner leads a King of Spades to a singleton or void in the dummy. Now it is obvious that you are not interested in a continuation of Spades (because dummy will trump Spades). A high or low attitude signal is pointless to give. Instead, we can give a *suit preference* signal. Since we don't want a Spade lead and we don't want a trump (Heart) lead, this leaves two suits: Clubs and Diamonds. Here, playing a low Spade suggests you might like a Club lead and a high Spade suggests you'd like the higher-ranking suit (Diamonds).
3) Against a suit contract, partner leads a card to your Ace that you know or suspect was a singleton. You return a card in that suit for him to trump. But what card? Lead a relatively high card to suggest that he return back to you the higher-ranking non-trump suit and lead a low card to suggest he return back to you on the lower ranking suit. Maybe he can get back in your hand so that you can lead another card for him to trump,
4) Don't always signal when it will help the opponents and not your partner (which is a generalization of the first example)

Standard Leads

Most partnerships play standard leads as shown below (left two-most column) for specific combinations of cards. The bold red letter is what is considered standard leads for these combinations. Note that most players do not have a separate algorithm for when leading Partner's suit like the George's Defense. The table also shows the George's Defense leads and where different from Standard are highlighted Blue

For length leads (e.g. K 8 5 3) defending against NT, George's leads are 'attitude leads' as you have seen. Our leads against suit contracts are 3rd from even (Rule of 12) else low from odd. There is another very common lead people make and that is 4th down (Rule of 11).

When someone says they play 'standard leads', it will not be clear from this statement how they lead from length and whether they differ their lead when NT vs Suits. Here you would look at their convention card or ask when the card is played.

Standard Leads	Standard Leads	The George's Leads	
Against suits	Against NT	Against suits	Against NT
xx	**x**x	**x**x	**x**x
xx**x**	**x**xx	xx**x**	**x**xx
xxx**x**	**x**xxx	xx**x**x	**x**xxx
xxx**x**x	xxx**x**x	xxxx**x**	depends
HHx -touching	**10** 9 x x	H**H**x -touching	10 **9** x x
10 9 x	**10** 9 x	10 **9** x	10 **9** x
K Q 10 9	K **Q** 10 9	K **Q** 10 9	K **Q** 10 9
Q **10** 9 x	Q **10** 9 x	Q 10 **9** x	Q **10** 9 x
J 10 9 (top of sequence example)	**J** 10 9	J **10** 9	**J** 10 9
Broken sequences:	Leads Containing Ace	Brok. Seq.	L.C Ace
K **J** 10 x	A **K** J x	K J **10** x	depends
K **10** 9 x	A **J** 10 9	K 10 **9**	A J **10** 9
Q **10** 9 x	A **Q** J x	Q 10 **9** x	depends
	A **10** 9 x		A **10** 9 x

Other Discard Methods

As discussed, The George's Defense uses Revolving Discards on the 1st discard and then upside-down attitude on subsequent discards.

There are three other common methods in use.

Standard Discards are exactly opposite of UDCA (upside down count and attitude). A high card either is encouraging or shows an even count depending upon what the situation is. A low card is either discouraging or shows an odd count.

Odd-Even Discards: An odd discard suggests to partner that you might like that suit led. An even discard discourages the suit discarded. Furthermore, a high even card shows encouragement for a higher-ranking suit (not trump) and a low even card shows encouragement for the lower ranking suit (not trump)

Lavinthal Discards are similar to Revolving Discards, best seen by example. Assume hearts are trump and you show out of trump and discard a low Diamond. This would suggest you would like the lower ranking of the two other suits or Clubs. If you had pitched a high Spade, this would say you would like the higher ranking of the other two suits or Diamonds. (Note in this last example, a high Spade asks for a Club lead under Revolving Discards)

All methods have their advantages and disadvantages and in each, sometimes you don't have the right card to send the message that you want. You can read more about these methods by Googling them

Preemptive Bidding

One aspect of defense occurs during the bidding process. In this process you sometimes make a determination that you are better off making a sacrifice rather than allowing the opponents to make their bid. You make this decision because you believe that if the opponents make their bid that that will get more points compared to the points they will get by setting your contract.

One subset of making a sacrifice is making a pre-emptive bid. The methodology Peter and I use to make our bid is as follows:

The preemptive bidder counts up the number of tricks that he thinks he will take based upon his own hand, if his suit is trump, and assuming the outstanding trump are distributed evenly among the other three players.

Consider a hand that looks like this: QJxxxxx Jxx Axx x. Here this hand looks to take 6 tricks assuming the outstanding trump are split 2-2-2 among the other players

Once the player has this number in mind, he adds to that number, the number of tricks that he wants to get from his partner's hand. The number of tricks he will add depends upon his partnership's vulnerability vs the opponents. With unfavourability, he will add 2 tricks to his total, with equal vulnerability he adds 3, and with favorable vulnerability he adds 4. Assuming in the above example the partnership has favorable vulnerability, he would add 4 to 6 to yield 10 tricks and make a preemptive bid of 4 of his suits.

That's it. He is done bidding. He has told his partner exactly how many tricks that he thinks he can take in his own hand. His partner will then take control of the auction, perhaps by increasing the preempt if the opponents make a higher bid.

As far as the preemptive bidder goes, there are certain adjustments and considerations:

1) If partner has already passed, the number of tricks the preemptive bidder will add to his initial count is reduced by 1. In other words, he will add either 1,2, or 3 tricks depending on vulnerabilities and not 2,3 or 4
2) If the preemptive bidder is in 1st or 2nd seat, he will not preempt if he holds a 4+ card Major as a side suit
3) A preemptive bid is weak with little in the way of defense, especially in 1st or 2nd seat. HCP should be less than 10.
4) In 3rd or 4th seat, #2 and #3 can be relaxed as partner has already passed and game is out of reach
5) The preemptive bid is made at the *first opportunity* to make a bid. It can be made after the opponents have opened and is recognized by making a jump in the bidding.

6) You don't make a preemptive bid if partner has made a bid

If everything goes correct, the partner of the preemptive bidder has a good idea of how may tricks his partner thinks he can take and can make his bids accordingly. He looks at his hand and counts up how any tricks that he can take if the suit partner name is trump.

Consider, in the above example if partners hand was: xx AKx Axx xxx Here it seems partner of the preemptive bidder will take 3 tricks and therefore he expects the partnership to get set by one trick.

As the preemptive bidder has made his one and only bid, the rest of the bidding falls upon his partner.

1) If the partner of the preemptor has a void a singleton, he should reduce the total count by 1 because the preemptor was assuming a uniform distribution of outstanding trump
2) More often times than not, it is a losing effort to change the suit that partner preempted with. In general, the preemptive bidder's hand is going to be fairly useless outside of his suit and will have low HCPs in his hand. If the partner is going to make a bid, he should strive to simply raise the preemptive bidder's suit than going off on his own

We should talk about asking bids if partner preempted you…Gamma and BETA

Practice Ideas

The best way to learn opening leads is going to be through practice. Flashcards can also be useful. In the beginning, Peter and I would just quickly look at 8 bridge hands (almost daily) and practice and *discuss* what our opening leads would be against various contracts. After a few weeks, it starts to click. When you and your partner are on the same page with your leads, the defense can shine.

A real good review might be to consider the following 4 cases and consider what the lead of the X of Spades would mean in each case. I worked up the answer as if X is the 8 of Spades.

Case 1: You had overcalled 1S against a 3NT or 4H contract, partner had supported your Spades and has led the 8 of Spades.

Partner has showed at least 3 card support for your suit. He does not have the Ace; he does not have touching honors (reminder: a 10 is an honor); he does not have H,8.

The 8 is an attitude signal. If the 8 is a low card he is telling you he has something 'good'; maybe he has K, J,8. If the 8 is a high card, it's telling you he doesn't have any good cards in your suit; maybe he has 8,5,2. You have to look at your hand, the board and try to determine if the 8 was a positive or negative signal.

Case 2 You had overcalled 1S against a 3NT or 4H contract, partner had not supported your spades and has led the 8 of Spades.

The lead of the 8 of Spades denies the Ace, denies touching honors, and denies Hx (a 10 is an honor). Therefore, the lead of an 8 could be a singleton or is a ***count*** *signal: low for an even count which in this case is a 9,8 doubleton and high for an odd count. With an odd count, we play the second highest card so could be something like J,8,2 or something like 9,8,7,6,5*

Case 3 Bidding has gone 1NT-3NT and Partner has led the 8 of Spades

Against a NT contract, the blind 8 of Spades lead is an attitude lead. If the 8 is a high card (by inspection of your hand and the dummy), Partner is showing 4+ Spades, with nothing really good in the suit

Case 4: Bidding has gone 1H -4H and Partner has led the 8 of Spades of Spades

Against a suit contract, the blind lead of an 8 is either 3rd down from even (Rule of 12) or low from odd, assuming the 8 is not a singleton or half of a doubleton such as 8, 2

****

You may realize that the leads of any spot card (2-8) are very similar to one another as to their meaning in Cases 1-4 above. They are usually giving some kind of count or attitude signal.

Where things get more interesting is what do the leads of 9,10, J, Q, K or Ace mean in each of the 4 Cases. You and your partner should try and make sure you have the same understanding for each Case and each card.