

Washington Bridge League

Play with Finesse

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What is a finesse? A finesse is a play intended to take a trick with a card lower than the opponents card. In this article, we will look at some common finesse positions. Here is the simplest example of a finesse:

<u>North</u>		
♣ AQ		
<u>West</u>		<u>East</u>
♣ K9		♣ JT
<u>South</u>		
♣ 32		

In this layout, with the lead in the South hand, South need to get two tricks. I would lead the two from the South hand. If the west hand plays low, South would “finesse” the queen. If West holds the king, then the queen will win the trick. If the hand is as follows, the queen would lose to the king. South would thus be held to one trick.

<u>North</u>		
♣ AQ		
<u>West</u>		<u>East</u>
♣ J9		♣ KT
<u>South</u>		
♣ 32		

Finesses can be taken with lower cards as well. Consider the following position:

<u>North</u>		
♣ KJ		
<u>West</u>		<u>East</u>
♣ Q9		♣ T8
<u>South</u>		
♣ 32		

South can lead the two toward the king jack combination and finesse the jack if West plays small. If the queen is in the West hand, South will take two tricks.

Try these other combinations:

<u>North</u>	
♣ AQJ	
<u>South</u>	
♣ 432	

In this instance, South needs three tricks. South can lead the two and finesse the jack. If it wins, South must return to his hand and lead another low card to the queen. By repeating the finesse, South can take three tricks in the suit.

<u>North</u>	
♣ AKJ	
<u>South</u>	
♣ 432	

This time, South is missing the queen rather than the king. Lead a low card to the jack. If the queen is in the West hand, South will win three tricks.

<u>North</u>	
♣ AQT	
<u>South</u>	
♣ 432	

This one is a little more complicated. If South needs three tricks from the suit, South must lead the two to the ten. If the ten wins, South must return to hand in another suit, and lead low, this time playing the queen. If the suit is distributed as below, South will win three tricks. If West has either the king or the jack, South will win two tricks. Only when East holds both the king and the jack, South will be limited to one trick.

<u>North</u>		
♣ AQT		
<u>West</u>		<u>East</u>
♣ KJ8		♣ 654
<u>South</u>		
♣ 732		

Notice that it would be no good to play low to the queen the first time. If you try that play, the hand will then look like this.

<u>North</u>		
♣ AT		
<u>West</u>		<u>East</u>
♣ KJ		♣ 65
♣ 73		

When South returns to hand and plays a second round, West's king or jack will force out the ace, and limit South to two tricks. The play of the ten on the first round is called a double finesse, as we are finessing against two cards. Here's a different sort of double finesse.

<u>North</u>	
♣ AJT	
<u>South</u>	
♣ 432	

In this instance South should lead low to the ten (or jack). If this wins, South has two tricks. If this loses to the king or queen, South can later enter their hand, and try another low card towards the AJ. For instance, suppose the hand is as follows.

<u>North</u>		
♣ AJT		
<u>West</u>		<u>East</u>
♣ K87		♣ Q54
<u>South</u>		
♣ 932		

After the first round of the suit, the hand would look like this:

<u>North</u>		
♣ AJ		
<u>West</u>		<u>East</u>
♣ K8		♣ 54
<u>South</u>		
♣ 93		

South can lead the 3 and finesse the jack to assure two winners. There are many other types of finesses. In a future article I will explore finesses further.