

Law of Restricted Choice

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<http://watsongallery.ca/bridge/aaDeclarerPlay/RestrictedChoice.pdf>

The Law or Principle of Restricted Choice

Restricted Choice states that when two touching honours are missing, it is a higher percentage (much better than than 50-50) that the honours are split.

So why is this principle called restricted choice? It is because when one defender plays one of the missing touching honours, he has made a restricted choice. He had to play the honour he played because he did not have the other. He had a choice of only one card so his choice was restricted. In essence restricted choice is an oxymoron because chances are the player did not make a choice.

Therefore declarer should play the other defender to have the other touching card.

Example 1:

North: ♠A32 ♥AKQ5 ♦AK10 ♣932
South: ♠K54 ♥832 ♦6543 ♣AKQ

N	E	S	W
2NT	P	6NT	All Pass

The Jack of hearts was led against 6NT.

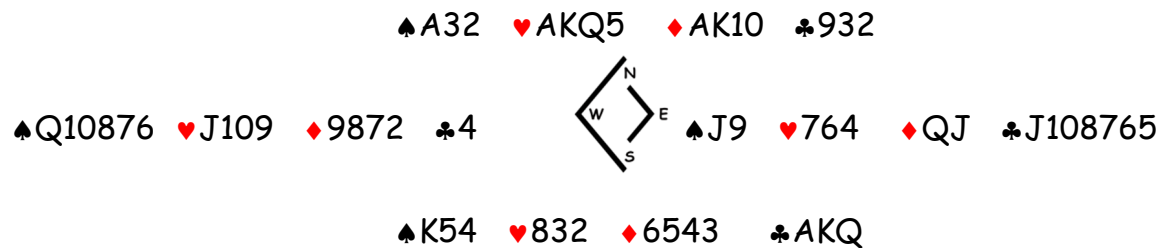
East drops the Queen of diamonds under the ace. How do you play the suit? The Law of restricted choice says that you finesse West out of his jack.

So how do you proceed?

Lose a spade then cash the two top spades, the remaining top hearts and then finally the three top clubs. If someone shows out of any suit, you can get a count of the hand.

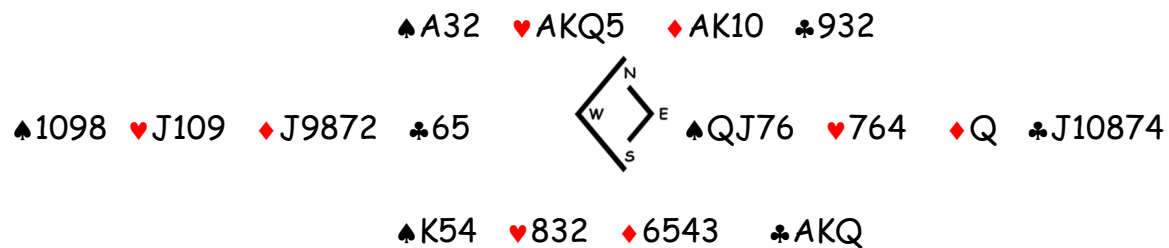
If East has two Diamonds then cash the king ♦. If either East has one Diamond or you cannot get an accurate count of the hand then finesse West for the Jack.

The full deal (You can get an accurate count):



Note: It would be folly for East to drop the queen ♦ under the ace ♦ holding ♦Qx. So when East is known to have two Diamonds, he must have the Queen and the Jack.

An Alternate full deal (You cannot get an accurate count):



If West has ♠10987 he could discard the 8 the 9 then the 10 and you do not know if West has four Spades and four Diamonds and East has three Spades and two Diamonds OR West has three Spades and five Diamonds giving East four Spades and a stiff ♦Queen. You do not know for sure, so fall back on the principle of restricted choice and finesse West out of his Diamond Jack.

Example 2:

North: ♠KQ52 ♥K5 ♦K4 ♣AK963

South: ♠AJ73 ♥A1063 ♦J103 ♣Q2

The Queen♥ was led against 6♠N. A terrible lead. East has four trump and four hearts and drops the jack of clubs under the ace. West discards three diamonds (972) on the spades

S	W	N	E
1♦	P	2♣	P
2NT	P	3♠	P
4♠	P	4NT	P
5♥	P	6NT	All Pass

With four cards to play:

The heart holding is known, but whether East has no clubs left is not known except the Jack fell under the ace.

		♠---	♥---	♦K4	♣K9	(6♣ was discarded on a heart.)		
♠---	♥-----	♦AQ	♣108		♠---	♥J	♦865	♣---
		♠---	♥6	♦J103	♣---			

Declarer plays the jack♦ from dummy and West plays the ace♦ and then exits with the 8♣. Do you finesse him? Yes. Restricted choice states that since East dropped the jack, his partner must have the ten. Ignore the fact that you would not been able to take the club finesse had the defender not led it.

Restricted choice works with spots. West discarded the 9♦ so East has the 8♦.

Further Restricted Choice Applications

If an opponent chooses to lead a suit with nothing in it (especially against slam), they have done so because they were restricted to do so. They did not want to lead away from an honour. Leading from an honour only works when partner also has an honour in that suit. Is that likely or really unlikely? Did everybody at the table know the answer? You decide. While you are deciding, finesse them for a key honour in one of the other suits.

Often trump is led to protect holdings in every other suit. One has led trump sometimes because they are restricted to do so. One never (yes never) leads from an honour (solitary honour or broken honours) on opening lead when declarer has declared herself to have a 2NT opener or higher. Honour sequences are an obvious exception.

One also rarely leads from solitary or broken honours in a four-card suit when declarer has opened 1NT. One will do so from a five-card suit with a side entry always. When a good player has led their own suit at No Trump, assume they have a side entry.

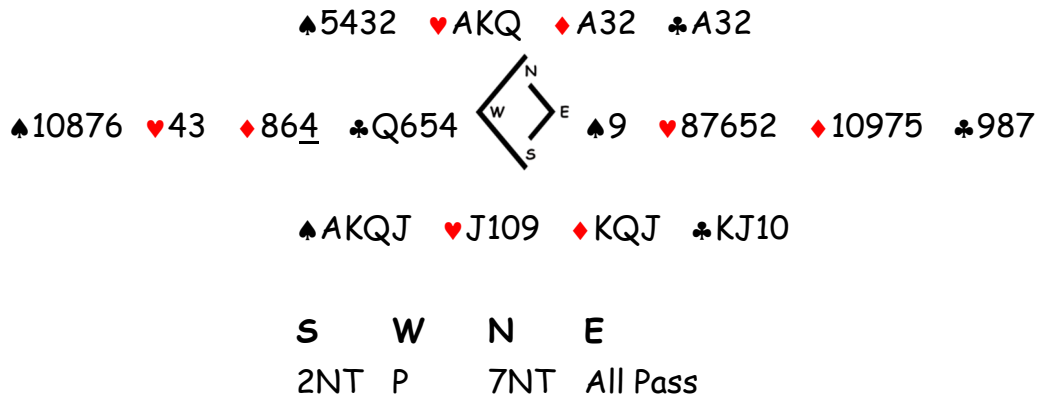
Restricted choice also applies when a defender has led from a four card suit. They were restricted to do so because they did not have a five-card suit at any contract. And anyone without a five-card suit cannot have a void. When cashing the top honours in your suit, prepare yourself for a void in the partner's hand.

Example 3

North and South bid the majors and arrives in 6NT by South. West leads a club from a dead suit (topless suit) at 6NT and you can finesse either defender for the ♦ Queen. Use restricted choice and finesse West for the Queen. He led a club because he was restricted to lead from a dead suit because he had only one dead minor.

Example 4

RestrictedChoicePrinciple-BM-4C-14

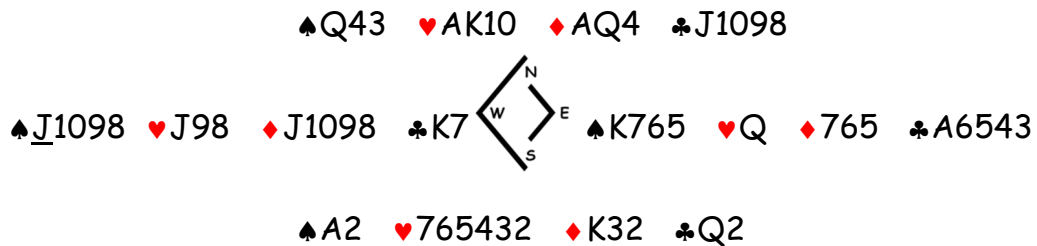


West leads ♦4 against 7NT. See why the ♣ lead is a bad lead. It goes right into a holding that is a two-way finesse. To defeat 7NT, one needs only one trick and leading from a Queen may be alright against a small slam but too risky against 7. After all, who are most likely to holding the outstanding ♣ honours? The people who have declared they have 37 HCP's bidding 2NT and 7NT.

When a player chooses to lead from three or four small cards in ♦'s, he was restricted to do so because he did have a similar holding in ♣'s.

Example 5

RestrictedChoicePrinciple-BM-3C-5



♠Jack was led against 4♥. When the ♥Queen falls, use restricted choice and finesse West for the Jack. When the choice is in the trump suit, one cannot explore other suits to get a count of the ♥ suit because of the risk of ruffs.

Bridge Master 2000 Examples:

3B-5, 3B-10, 3C-5(example 5), 3C-14 (example 4)