



Playing a suit contract

In a suit contract we count our losers, and then decide how to take care of the losers, by using a finesse, ruffing them, or discarding them on a long suit.

The hand with the longest trump is called the master hand, and we always, always, count losers with respect to the master hand. This is typically declarer's hand. If the two hands have an equal number of trump, the master hand is the hand with the strongest trumps. The hand with fewer trump is called the short hand. The following table summarizes how declarer should plan the play of the hand.

Suit Contracts
Count your LOSERS
Figure out how to get rid of excess losers
Make a plan
Execute the plan

Remember to always plan a suit contract with respect to the master hand. Losers in the short hand do not matter, only losers in the master hand. So why do we count losers? It is because the power of the trump suit negates the defenses long suits. Losers are tricks you know you must lose.

What if I have too many losers?

If you have counted more losers than you can afford, you need to work to eliminate some of the losers from the long-trump hand. We can use the same tools as in a notrump contract to eliminate losers, promotion, developing long suits and finessing. However, in a trump contract we have two new tools:

- Ruffing losers in the short hand
- Taking a ruffing finesse

We will take a look at each of these two new techniques.

Ruffing losers in the short hand

Ruffing in the master hand does not help eliminate losers. You may need to do this to control a suit that the defenders have lots of high cards in, but to eliminate losers you must ruff one of the master hands losers, as in the example hand below.

Your Hand	Dummy Hand	
♠ QT4 ♥ AQT42 ♦ 863 ♣ AT	♠ AK7 ♥ K9763 ♦ T742 ♣ 6	Your hand is the master hand Count 4 losers total: 3 ♦ (fast), 1 ♣(slow)

In a contract of 4♥, you have one loser too many. What's your plan?

There is not much you can do about the diamonds, in fact the defense is likely to lead a diamond and cash the first three diamond tricks. The ♠A will cover the singleton club in the dummy hand (short hand). After that, you can ruff your losing ♣T in dummy.

Plan: I will lose the first 3 diamonds. If diamonds are continued, I will ruff the fourth diamond in the master hand. I will draw trump, and then I will play the ♠A and ruff a club in the short hand. I will end up taking 5 trump in the master hand, 3 spades, the ♠A and a club ruff in dummy for 10 total tricks.

To ruff losers in the short-trump hand, look for these conditions:

- You have some losers in a particular suit
- You have more cards of that suit in the master hand than in the short hand
- You have enough trumps in the short hand to be able to ruff the losers from the master hand
- You have some way to get the lead into the master hand after you have created a void in the short hand

You gain an extra trick when you ruff a loser in the short hand. **In general, you do not gain a trick when you ruff a loser in the master hand.**

The Ruffing Finesse

In a suit contract we can use trump to provide a way to neutralize high cards that are favorably located by taking a ruffing finesse. This example shows how it works.

	♠ A Q J T	
	♥ A 8 6 2	
♠ ??		♠ ??
♥ ??		♥ ??
	♠ 2	
	♥ K Q J 3	

You could take the simple finesse against the ♠K in the West hand. This gains 1 extra trick if the ♠K is favorably placed. However, if declarer leads the ♠2 and takes the ♠A in dummy, the ♠Q can now be led. If the ♠K is favorably placed in the East hand, declarer can develop two extra tricks! If East plays the ♠K, declarer can ruff in his hand, and the ♠J and ♠T have been promoted to winners without losing a trick. If East plays low, then declarer can discard a loser from another suit, and then repeat the ruffing finesse with the ♠J.

Defensive Tip

In a suit contract when the dummy has a short suit, as a defender you should expect that declarer will be trying to ruff losers in that suit in dummy. The defensive counter measure is to lead trump when possible, to cut down on the number of times that declarer can ruff.