Hold-up plays - Summary Sheet

Establishing or disrupting communications

A hold-up play is when you decline to take a trick at the first opportunity as you strive to either set up a suit for yourself, or alternatively to make it difficult for your opponents to set up a suit.

Declarer play – setting up a suit

Suppose you have a long suit to set up but a shortage of entries.
This might occur in a no trump contract, or in a suit contract once trumps have been cleared.

	W
♠	A K Q 7 6
♥	A K
♦	9 5
♣	A K 5 3

	E
♠	5 4 2
♥	7
♦	A K 8 7 3 2
♣	7 6 4

The contract is 6♠. By West. Opponents lead a Club.
You must count on trumps splitting 3-2.
Given this you can count 11 tricks. The extra trick(s) will have to come from a long Diamond, but if you lead off ♦AK the opponents will block the suit on the third round and you will not be able to get back to it.
Take the Club lead then clear trumps in 3 rounds. Now lead a Diamond from hand and play **small** from dummy. When you get back in, lead your second Diamond to the Ace or King on table. With any luck the opposing honours will drop and the long Diamonds will provide a parking place for your losing Clubs.

Declarer in no trumps

Sometimes you can disrupt the defence's communications by ducking once or twice.

	W
♠	A K Q 7 6
♥	K Q 4
♦	Q 5
♣	A 5 3

	E
♠	5 4
♥	8 7 5 2
♦	A K 7 3 2
♣	7 6

The contract is 3NT by West and North leads the ♣Q.
You can count 7 top tricks with a likely further long trick in Diamonds and a further trick to set up in Hearts together with the possibility of long spades, but if you take the ♣A now the opponents will get in with the ♥A and may well be able to take 4 club tricks in total to set the contract.
Duck 2 rounds of clubs – take the third round and then lead ♥K.
If the clubs split 4-4 you have no problem.
If the clubs split 5-3 there is a good chance that the ♥A will be in the hand with short clubs in which case he will not be able to return to his partner's hand to make the remaining club tricks. You will then have 8 tricks with various squeeze possibilities in the other three suits.

Note the rule of thumb – '**RULE OF 7**' – duck once with 6 cards or twice with 5 cards.

Defence – stopping declarer's suit

If declarer looks as though he might have to set up a long suit (usually on table) you may be able to kill the suit by holding up once or twice.

	E
♠	5 4 2
♥	7 4 3
♦	A K J 8 5 2
♣	7 6

West is playing in 4♠ and starts by clearing trumps in 3 rounds. Then he leads a small Diamond to the Jack.
If you take that trick with the Queen he will probably have a second diamond to get to the rest of the suit.
Duck the first round of the suit. He can then take the A and K, but if he only started with 2 diamonds he will never get to take the 2 small ones on table.

	S
♠	J T 3
♥	A 6 5 2
♦	Q 7 4 3
♣	T 4