9 - Planning the play

The auction has finished

The player on declarer's left makes an opening lead (see separate sheet), dummy lays their hand on the table, and **everyone** should pause – think – ask themselves a few questions - and make a plan.

Leader's partner

What does my partner's lead tell me about his holding in the suit?
Should I encourage or not?
Does he want me to lead it back (either now or later)?
Does dummy's holding indicate a line of defence – e.g. should I try to remove an entry or cut down on declarer's ruffing opportunities?

Declarer

Can I count enough tricks to make my contract?
Are there any immediate losers, and do I need to minimise these?
Should I clear trumps so as to make my other winners, or must I make a ruffing trick first?
Do I need to set up any extra tricks before I cash my winners (perhaps a long suit)?
What does the lead tell me about leader's holding in the suit?
Are there any suits in which I need to be in the right place to lead towards the high cards?
Have I got sufficient entries – must I take the tricks in a certain order so as to get to all of them and finish in the right place?

As the play develops

Do I need to modify the plan?
Can I remember which cards have gone and what is left?
Do I know which opponent has the missing cards?
Oh yes – and did you count tricks? (As the hand progresses it is sometimes easier to remember what is still left than what has gone.)