PLAYING SET CONTRACTS

Playing with a dummy (not meaning your partner)

The opening lead is made.
Declarer's partner then lays his/her hand on the table for all to see – he/she will take no further part in the hand except to play the cards as instructed and to collect and point the cards at the end of each trick.

Planning the strategy and the play

Once the opening lead has been made and dummy tabled everyone should then take a few moments to plan their strategy and their play.
Play then continues at a steady pace.

The process of planning will take a lifetime to master but it is a habit to get into now.

Declarer
How many tricks do I need to make?
how many tricks can I count?
how might I make any more?
what can I read into the lead (he led the King – has he got the Queen)?
are there any dangers (has he led a singleton, or can they run 6 tricks if they get in)?
do I need to take my tricks in any particular order?
Can I get back and fore between the two hands so as to make my tricks?
What do I do next?

Leader's partner
Do I like the lead – should I encourage or discourage?
What can I read into partner's lead – might it be a singleton or the top of an honours sequence?
If I get in what should I do?
How can I make declarer's life difficult?

Defence tactics

Can you set up enough tricks to take the contract down?
Did partner's lead suggest a defensive strategy?
Can I scupper declarer's plan - (e.g.i) if he clears a short suit in dummy he might be planning to take a ruffing trick – perhaps I should start removing trumps – (e.g.ii) is he trying to set up a long suit in dummy – perhaps I can try removing his side-suit entries?
Lacking any other great plan always consider returning partner's suit – he might have some tricks set up, or he might be waiting to trump in.

Signalling
This is a way for defenders to communicate with each other.
The easiest form of signal is 'attitude' – particularly on partner's lead.
In particular, a high card (typically 7,8,9) says 'I like the suit, please lead it again' – and a low card (typically 2,3,4) says 'not great – try something else.
If you have no strong opinions on the matter then follow with an intermediate card.
(N.B. – sometimes you won't have much choice – just do the best you can.)

Elementary scoring

(**N.B. – this is a very simplified introductory version**.)
Score 'trick points' for tricks bid and made (above 6) and overtricks.
Hearts and spades score 30 trick points for each trick made – clubs and diamonds score 20 points each – and no trumps score 40 for the first trick and and 30 each for any others.
Any tricks short of the contract will score a penalty of 50 per trick.

So a contract of 2♦ making 9 tricks will score 3 x 20 = 60;
A contract of 2♥ making 10 tricks will score 4 x 30 = 120;
A contract of 3NT making 9 tricks will score 40 + 30 + 30 = 100;
A contract of 4♠ making 9 tricks (1 short) will score -50.