Declarer is South in all four suit-combination problems below.

1. (a) How should one play the trump suit KQ643 opposite dummy’s 1087 for one loser? (b) What is the best line and by how much does one’s chance decline from (a) if the 7 is used first for ruffing?

2. In 3NT with other suits well stopped, North has ♠J10732 and South ♠A6, needing 3 tricks in the suit. How to play when the defence knows that South doesn’t have 3-card support for spades?

3. (a) How should declarer play K982 (in dummy) opposite A54 for 3 tricks? (b) What about shuffling the pips: K952 and A84?

4. How best to play the trump suit – A6 in dummy and Q98542 in hand, for at most one loser?

In each problem, give the best line of play for the objective stated together with the chance of success. In answering, assume, in the genre of Eric Crowhurst’s analyses in the Bridge Encyclopedia, that side entries are abundant, there is no information on the opponents’ hands and that the defence knows declarer’s objective.

Answers:

1. (a) Play low toward the K. On this lead one can anticipate deceptive play from East; if he has J9 it is better for him to insert the J (tempting declarer to finesse West for the 9). With other holdings, East plays low. Suppose the K holds.
   - If the 9 appears from West, decline the finesse of the 10 on trick two. He is more likely to have been dealt J9 than bare. Just play low toward the Q, ducking only if East plays the A.
   - If the J appears on trick 1 from West, claim.
   - If West plays x and East follows, play low from dummy toward the Q, covering East’s card.

   Suppose the K is taken by the A.
   - Since East is more likely to have been dealt J9 than bare, decline the finesse against West’s 9 if East plays the J on trick 1. Cash the 10 and then the Q.
   - Otherwise, play the Q on trick two, hoping to drop the J doubleton
   The chance of success is 50.30%.

   (b) Here the chance drops 13% to 37.30%, due to the obvious loss of the 10’s power. The doubleton J cases fail, except for J9 (where the 6 rises in stature) and AJ onside. Single J with West also fails due to a lost finesse position.

2. Play the A, then lead the 6, playing low from dummy. Follow this with the J. This picks up all 3-3 breaks and the 4-2 or 2-4 cases where the doubleton contains an honour. (64.6%)

3. (a) Play the A. If the 10, J or Q appears from East, finesse twice (covering any honour from West). Otherwise, play the K next, hoping for a 3-3 break or West to have a bare QJ, Q10 or J10. (47.07%)

   (b) Play the A, then K, then 9. This succeeds if the suit is 3-3 or either player has QJ, Q10 or J10 bare. (45.22%)

   3 A West with Ax does not know if he is defending against KQ9xx or KQ6xx. If the former, ducking a random proportion of the time with Ax is best. So the mere fact that the K holds and both players follow with x, does not confirm that the A is onside; it may be Ax offside. On trick two, a low card is led from dummy; if the 9 appears from East should one play West for Ax and duck? No, it is more likely that he was dealt Jx (where the x is a mandatory first play) than Ax with the random choice of x or A. If East plays the J, the same issues are in play but now the comparison is between 9x and Ax randomised. So, it is better for declarer to proceed as stated rather than duck trick two.

3 East doesn’t know South’s precise holding, but he can reason that his J9 is dead against KQxxx and irrelevant against AKxxx. Declarer would fail anyway if he held any worse holding.
4. The A first, then low toward the Q, inserting the 9 if West played the J or 10 on trick 1 and East has played two low cards. If both follow low on trick 1 and East plays the J or 10 to trick 2, cover rather than duck (hoping that East was dealt KJx or K10x rather than J10x). Other plays follow common sense. (43.52%)