

TRAVIS-T(ip) #8

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HOW TO FINESSE PROPERLY

There are lots of ways by which people misuse the finesse. I'll start by showing some wrong plays where people think they are finessing and then I'll move on to how to finesse correctly on these hands.

EXAMPLE 1

You hold **A Q J 2**
opposite

8 6 3

One error people make is to lead the Queen first. No matter what happens, the opponents will make the King. Another error is people lead the 3 towards the AQJ2 and take a finesse for the King; however now they lead from dummy.

Finessing comes down to a few simple questions:

Q1: Where do you want the missing honour to be?

Q2: Which hand do you need to lead the suit from?

Q3: Are you in the right hand? (If not, defer leading the suit until you reach the correct hand.)

Regarding Question 1, we would like the King to be with 'West' so that it can be made powerless by utilising the AQJ. So we want to lead from the 'South' hand in order to finesse the King. If we are in the South hand we can proceed with the finesse but if we are in the North hand then we need to postpone leading this suit until we get to the correct hand.

Once we are in the South hand, we can lead towards the AQJ and finesse by playing the Jack, unless the King has been played by West. But now we have to remember that finesses can be repeated, and to do this we need to return to the South hand before leading this suit again, and repeating our finesse.

EXAMPLE 2

You hold **A 6 2**
opposite

K J 7

People think that they need to lead the Jack with this holding. If West plays the Queen, though, you have a loser in this suit. If East has the Queen, he will win the trick.

Finesses are not about just leading a bare honour. If you lead the Jack you should have the 10 as its back-up card. Leading bare honours (as we will see in further examples) just helps to create additional losers.

In this instance, the critical missing honour is obviously the Queen, but you want the Queen to be 'before' the KJ holding (which is called a 'tenace'). You should lead to the Ace (if you are not in the North hand) then lead back towards the KJ tenace, hoping the Queen is with East. If East plays low you finesse the Jack; if East plays the Queen you win your three tricks.

EXAMPLE 3

You hold **Q 5 4**
opposite

A 6 2

You want two tricks in this suit, so how should you play? Many players lead the Q, hoping that East has the King and doesn't cover, in which case you will win your two tricks. If East has learnt to cover an honour with an honour then you cannot possibly win. And if West has the King you are also on a losing plan.

However, if West has the King, you can generate your two tricks. You actually have to hope that LHO (West) has the King. Then you can lead the Ace, and back towards the Queen, making your two tricks.

EXAMPLE 4

You hold **J 4 3 2**
opposite

A Q 6 5

Going back to the finessing questions, you want the King to be with East and you want to lead from North towards the AQ in South. Having done that groundwork, don't get this combination wrong. I constantly see people lead the Jack in this position. That's wrong.

If East has the King, they will cover and that will make the 10 or 9 into a winner no matter who has it (since the opponents have 5 cards in the suit). You will definitely lose one card in this suit.

If you want to play this suit for no losers, you must rely on East to hold the King, and specifically the King-doubleton. Therefore you need to lead a low card from North towards your AQ, finessing the Queen if East plays low. Assuming the finesse works, you just need to cash the Ace next, hoping the King falls. If it doesn't then you were destined to lose a trick regardless, but at least you played it correctly.

EXAMPLE 5

It's totally different if you have honours with 'back-up support'. You can play an honour like the Jack if you also have the 10 to provide support to your honour.

Here's a favourite hand to play, where you have support cards with your honours:

A 10 2

A Q J 2

J 4 3 2

A 2

opposite

Q J 9 6 5 3

5 3

A Q 10

5 4

You are playing in 4S on a club lead.

Dummy has no short suits where you need to trump losers so you can start by drawing trumps.

Q1: Where do you want the SK to be? 'In front' of the Ace (West), so leading the Queen will make the King useless.

Q2: Which hand do you want to lead from? South, so leading the Queen will make the King useless.

Q3: Which hand are you in? North – so you need to postpone leading trumps until you reach South.

If you lead a trump at trick 2, you will lose to the SK. Leading the SA makes the King into a winner (unless it is a singleton). Leading low means you will definitely lose a trick to the SK no matter who holds the King.

This means that you need to get to the South hand before leading trumps. How can you reach the South hand – diamonds. In diamonds you are also missing the DK. Going through the finessing questions again, you realise you want East to hold the DK, so you can finesse on the way to reaching your hand. Best is to lead a low diamond towards your AQ10, so you can finesse the 10 unless East has played the King. (If you lead the DJ and it is ducked, you are still in dummy and you don't really want to repeat the finesse and have the opponents trump.)

So let's lead a small diamond to the D10 and it wins. Now we are in hand and we can try the spade finesse... This time, because we have the Q J 10 and 9 we can lead a high spade, remaining in hand to repeat the finesse should it work. Lead the SQ, only playing the Ace if West covers the Queen. Don't panic if West plays low, just continue with the finesse!

The SQ wins, so you can take the finesse again. This time dummy has only the SA10 left, so you might as well lead a small spade towards the A10. If West plays low you finesse again, but if West plays the King you will win with the Ace. Assuming West plays low again and East shows out, you remove the last trump. Now you are in the North hand with the SA.

What do you want to do next – play hearts or diamonds? Well, that answer depends on which hand you are in. Looking at the heart suit, you realise you want to lead hearts from South, playing for West to hold the King (in front of the AQJ); we have already established that in diamonds you want East to hold the King, so you want to lead diamonds from North in order to repeat your finesse of the King. My example had the lead in the North hand which means you want to lead diamonds towards your AQ. Take the finesse, and now you are in South's hand.

When in South, you want to lead hearts towards the AQJ to finesse, so you should do that now or else you will have problems returning to your hand. You play the HJ (unless West plays the HK, which would simplify your hand play) but now you would like to repeat this finesse. Remember you can only do that by returning to your hand – with the diamonds, to your DA. Now you take the heart finesse again, and then you use the HA to discard your club loser.

Congratulations – you have just made all 13 tricks. You started the hand with all four Kings missing, so if you just cashed your Aces you would go down. By finessing you made three Kings totally ineffective and then you were able to discard your loser in the other suit.

Notice, too, the effect of having back-up honours to support those other honours.

EXAMPLE 6

K Q 2

opposite

8 6 5

If you lead the King you will make one trick only.

If you want to win two tricks in this suit you need to plan where you want the Ace to be – with 'West'. If West holds the Ace, you can make two tricks, but only if you lead towards the KQ2 twice. For this to happen, you need to enter the South hand to lead the suit and, if West plays low, you play the Queen. If the Queen wins, you need to return to the South hand to lead towards the now K2 in order to make the second trick.

EXAMPLE 7

A K 6 5

opposite

J 3 2

Leading the Jack will not gain you a trick unless West falls into the category of 'never covering an honour with an honour'. If West covers the Jack with the Queen, you only have two tricks in the suit, and if East has the Queen your lead of the Jack achieved nothing.

If you want to win three tricks in this suit you have two options. One option is to cash the Ace and King, hoping for a doubleton Queen (which is anti-percentage but the correct line when you cannot afford to lose the lead). The better alternative, if you can afford to lose the lead, is to lead a small card FROM the AK65 towards the J32. If East holds the Queen – no matter how many – your Jack becomes an additional winner.

And finally, let's consider **double finesses**.

EXAMPLE 8

A J 10

opposite

7 6 3

If you cash the Ace you will have two losers.

If you want to create a second winner in this suit you need to finesse TWICE, a double finesse. The double finesse is based on the idea that you should play 'West' (on this hand) for at least one of the missing honours. As such, you must lead from the 763, and take a finesse of the 10 if West plays low. Unless West has both honours, East will win this trick. Then when you get back to the South hand you lead towards the now AJ and plan to finesse again unless the missing honour appears from West's hand. This will give you the extra trick in this suit whenever West holds the King or the Queen or both the King and Queen (75% of the time).

Remember, your opponents won't just play their honour for you when they hold the key missing card in front of a tenace (finesse position) so you have to learn to finesse properly and to repeat finesses.