



# Adventures in Bridge

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## *This Week in Bridge*

### **(308) Upside-Down Count and Attitude – Return Count**

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Level: 5

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#### **General**

We normally give count when the opponents lead a suit (and we are not involved in winning the trick), but there are other times that we give count as well. One of those is when we have already played a suit and we are playing this suit again. The most common of these situations is when we are returning the suit that partner has led – called *Return Count*. Let's see how we can use the card we return to communicate to partner how many cards we have remaining in their suit.

#### **Return Count**

Imagine that partner's opening lead is a ♠ and our holding is ♠A92. We win the opening lead with our ♠A and now plan to return the suit. What do we play from ♠92 that we now have remaining? In this situation, we return the ♠9, because we have a doubleton remaining. When we are returning a suit (giving return count) we do so in the "standard" way. This is true if we are playing standard count or upside-down count.

One of the reasons that it is important to play standard return count is that if we have a holding like T2 and lead low from that holding, with the 2, then we will be left with just the Ten remaining and this could block the suit.

#### *Example 1*

	874	
K9653		AT2
	QJ	

We see how leading the Ten unblocks the suit; this is an important reason to play standard return count (top of a doubleton) and not upside-down return count (low from a doubleton), blocking the suit.



### Example 2

Let's look at how we make return count.

- A874 Win the Ace and return the 4 – low from 874, 3-cards remaining.
- AJ74 Win the Ace and return the 4 – low from J74, 3-cards remaining.

When we have 4-cards as our original holding, then after we have played to trick 1, we have 3-cards remaining. We return low in this suit, giving partner standard return count. This low card is a “count” return (showing either 3 or 1 remaining) not an attitude card, showing an honor. As you can see from the examples above, we return the same card when we have 874 and J74 remaining.

### Example 3

T3  
KJ62            A874  
                  Q95

Return count, playing the 4, is helpful here. When West wins the Jack at trick 2, they can see that opener started with only Qxx (3-cards) and they can now “run” their suit – immediately cashing 4 tricks.

### Exceptions to Return Count

There are times where our holding in the suit requires us to return a card other than the traditional standard count card. This is traditionally the case when we have 3-cards remaining and the top two make a sequence.

### Example 4

Let's look at what we return from some holdings where we need to lie about our return count:

- AQJx Win the Ace and return the Queen.
- AJTx Win the Ace and return the Jack.
- KJTx Win the King and return the Jack.
- K98x Win the King and return the 9.

There are several reasons why we return the high cards in these situations. One is to ensure that declarer does not win the trick cheaply (see example below).

In the first case in example 4, if declarer started with KTx, we need to play back the Queen, not low. If we lead back low, the declarer will win the Ten at trick 2.



Another reason that we may choose to return a high card when our remaining holding is 3-cards (violating our return count agreements) is to unblock the suit.

*Example 5*

85  
K7643      AJ92  
QT

If we win the Ace at trick 1 and return the 2 (playing the normal card for return count) then we will block the suit. We will be forced to win the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> round of the suit in our hand (the short side) and we will not be able to take all five of our side's tricks right off the top.

**Later Return Count**

These agreements and concepts are basically unchanged even if we return partner's suit at a time other than trick 2 (when we gain the lead later in the hand).

*Example 6*

85  
Q7643      KJ92  
AT

At trick 1 our King loses to declarer's Ace. If we gain the lead later in the hand, we would normally return the 2 (giving standard count), but here we must violate these agreements in order to unblock the suit.

*Note: All of these agreements (and plays) can be used in other suits that we "return", not just the one that partner has led.*

**Conclusion**

When we are returning partner's lead, it is important for us to be on the same page with partner about the meaning of our card. When returning a suit partner has led, we generally give count (called return count) in the standard way (even when playing upside-down regular count). By leading low from remaining 3-cards and top of a doubleton (normally) we also unblock the suit most of the time. There are times that we must violate this agreement (when we have too many high spot cards) in order to unblock the suit, but our general goal is to help partner to visualize the distribution of the hand. Make sure to discuss these situations with partner so that both of you are on the same page.