

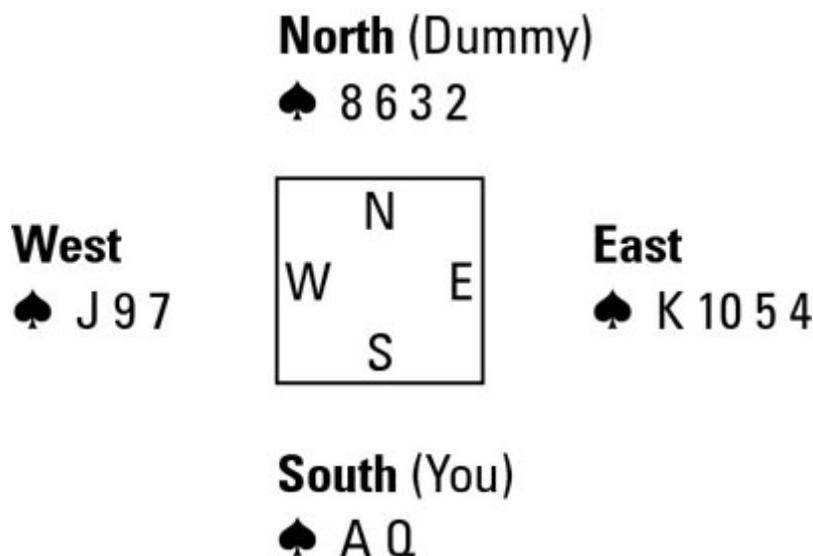
Finessing for extra tricks

A finesse position arises when your side holds a sequence of cards, but missing a key card which you wish to capture. The usual position is when declarer holds two or more key cards but missing a vital card which you hope to trap. Since the card can be in either of the two opposing hands, a finesse has a 50% chance of success. If you have to take two finesses the chance of one being successful is almost 75%, but it is evident that the chance of both being right is only 25%. You should finesse for a king with up to 10 combined cards in the suit. Remember the adage “eight ever, nine never”. This refers to finessing against a queen, i.e. with 8 cards in the suit between the two hand finesse unless you have extra information, with nine cards play for the drop.

How to Finesse a Queen Past a King in Bridge

A *finesse* in bridge is a technique for taking tricks with lower honour cards (jacks, queens, and kings) when your opponents have higher honour cards (queens, kings, and aces). You need to finesse your lower honour cards past your opponents' higher honours.

When you want to take tricks with lower honour cards, such as the king, queen, or jack, you need to lead from the side opposite the honour card with which you want to take a trick. Think of leading from weakness toward strength. If you want to take a trick with a queen, lead toward her.



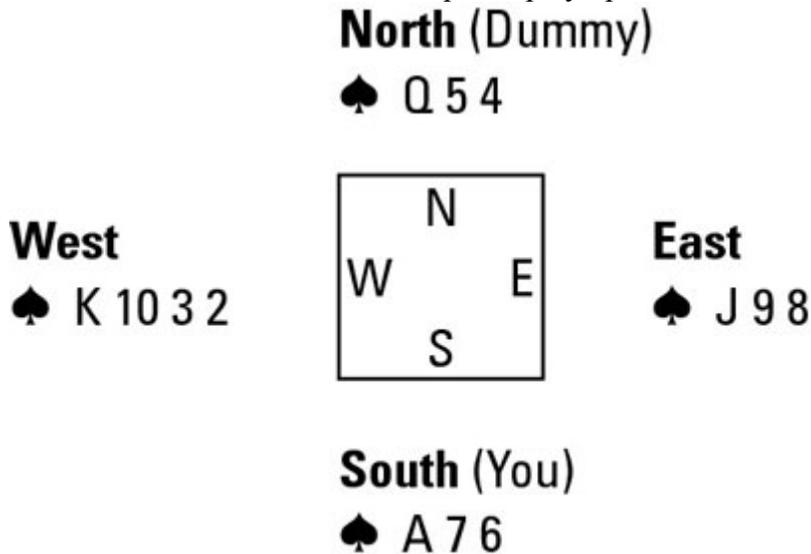
You want to take a trick with your ♠Q, but you don't know who has the ♠K. (Yes, you can see the ♠K in East's hand in the image, but if you were playing for real, you couldn't see that ♠K) Here's how this hand might play out:

You lead the ♠2. from the dummy, towards the AQ

Remember, with a finesse, you want to go from weakness toward strength. East, the second to play after the lead, usually plays his lowest card, the ♠4, so as not to give away any information about his hand. You, South, play the ♠Q, which wins the trick.

Your finesse works. If West (last to play to the trick) had the ♠K, your finesse would lose.

The next image shows another very common finesse involving the queen. This time, the ♠Q is in the dummy separated from the ♠A. Far too many players get this wrong. Begin by leading a low spade, the ♠6, from your hand, the hand opposite the ♠Q. You're hoping that West, the second hand, has the missing ♠K. In this case, West does have the ♠K. West has a couple of play options:

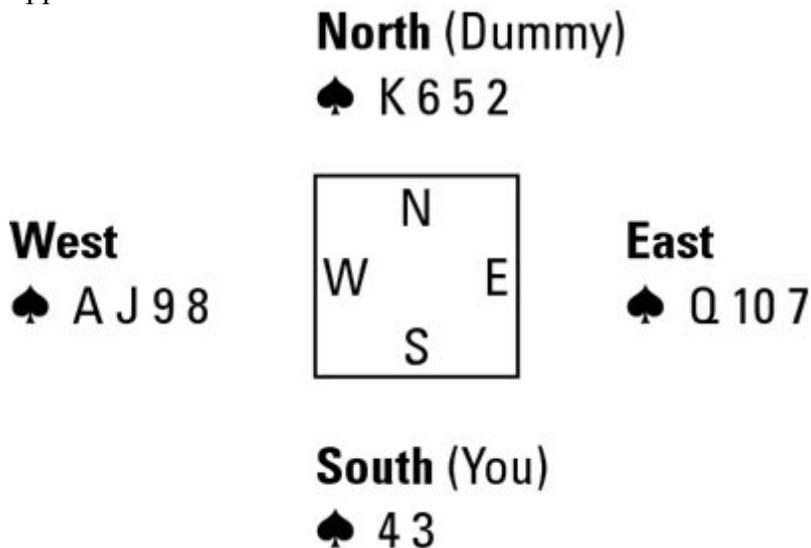


- If West plays a low spade, the ♠2, you take the trick with the ♠Q.
- If West takes the trick with the ♠K, your ♠Q becomes a later trick.

Of course, if East, fourth hand, has the ♠K, your finesse loses. The play of the Q from dummy instead of leading towards it, gives you one trick, only as good defenders will cover the Q with the K.

How to Finesse a King by an Ace in Bridge

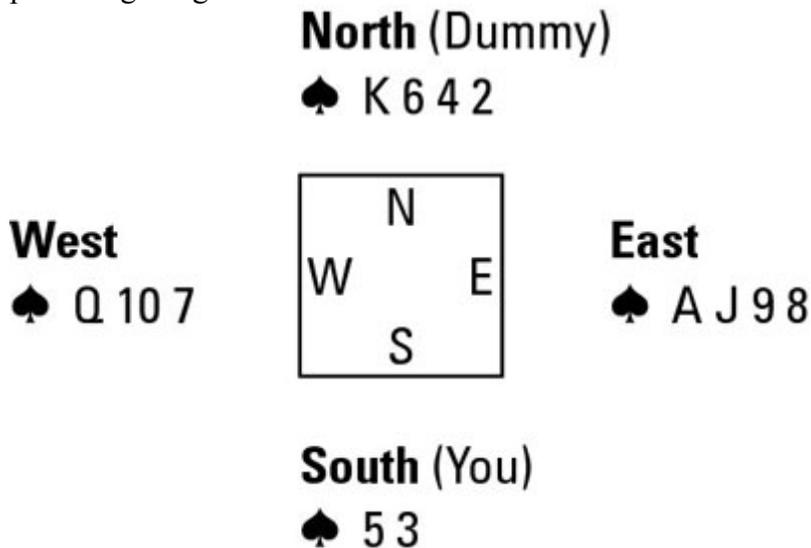
This image shows a classic finesse position. You have the ♠K in the dummy; your opponents have the ♠A. You want to take a trick with the ♠K.



Lead a low spade from your hand, the ♠3, from weakness toward strength. West happens to have the ♠A, so she can make one of two moves:

- If West plays the ♠A, your ♠K becomes a later sure trick because the king is now the highest-ranking remaining card in the spade suit.
- If West plays a low spade, the ♠8, you play the king and take a trick immediately with the ♠K.

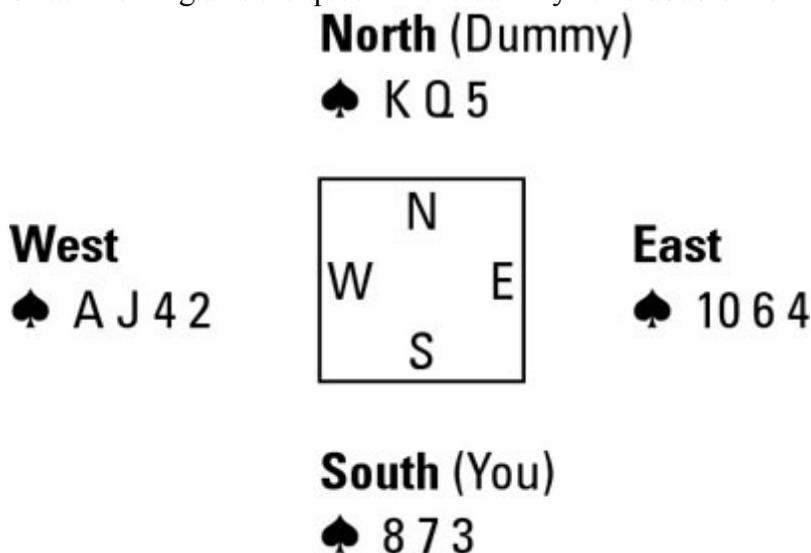
Your finesse works. No matter what West does, you take either an immediate or an eventual trick with the ♠K. Had you led the K from dummy you are bound to lose! Now check out this image, which presents a scenario just as likely as the one in the preceding image.



When you lead a low spade, the ♠3, and then play the ♠K in the dummy, East (the last to play to the trick) takes your ♠K with the A. Your ♠K doesn't take a trick. Your finesse has lost.

How to Finesse with the King and Queen in Bridge

Sometimes, the honour cards that you hold in a hand of bridge dictate that you lead from weakness toward strength twice, such as when you have both the king and queen in a suit. The only thing better than taking one finesse in a suit is taking two finesses in the same suit. The cards in this image show you a hand where you can pull this off... The king and the queen in the dummy have double the finessing power.



You need to take as many spade tricks as you can. Start by leading a low spade, the ♠3, from your hand, from weakness to strength. West can make your life easy or hard:

- West can simplify your life by playing the ♠A right away, a friendly play that immediately makes both the ♠K and the ♠Q in the dummy winning tricks for later use.
- West may think better of such a gift and play the ♠2, allowing you to take the trick with the ♠Q.

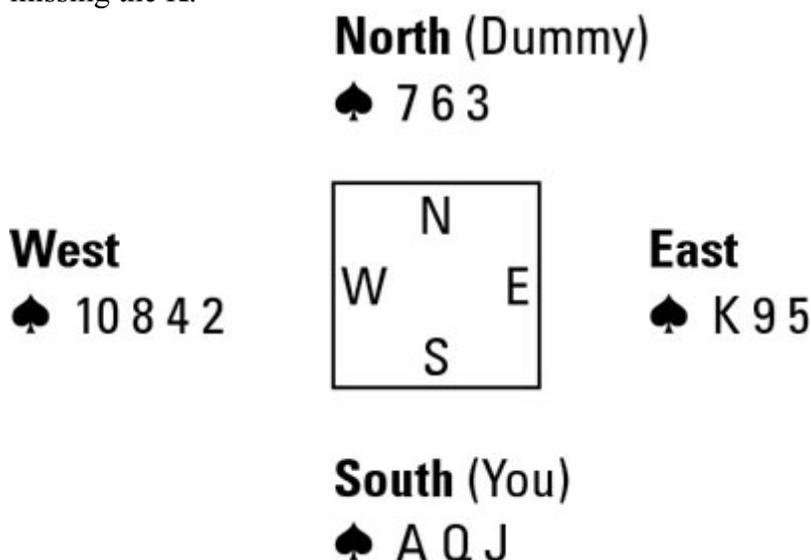
You took a trick with the ♠Q by leading toward it, and you must repeat the process if you want to take a trick with the ♠K. Return to your hand (South) in another suit and lead another low spade, the ♠7. Depending on how West plays, you get a trick now or later:

- If West takes the track with his ♠A, your ♠K becomes a later trick.
- If West plays low again, ♠4, you take the trick with the ♠K.

You prevail because West, second to play, has the missing honour. You wouldn't be so lucky if East had the ace of spades, then you would only make 1 trick in that suit

Finesse a Bridge Hand with a gap in Your Honour Cards

This image shows you a suit where you can repeat your finesse to great success. You have three honour cards in your hand (♠AQJ), but they aren't all equal, You are missing the K.



Lead a low spade, the ♠3, from the dummy (from weakness toward strength).

When East plays low, the ♠5, play the ♠Q to win the trick.

You remain with the ♠AJ in your hand. If you want to take a trick with the ♠J, return to the dummy in another suit and lead another low spade, the ♠6. When East plays low again with the ♠9, you play the ♠J and take the trick.

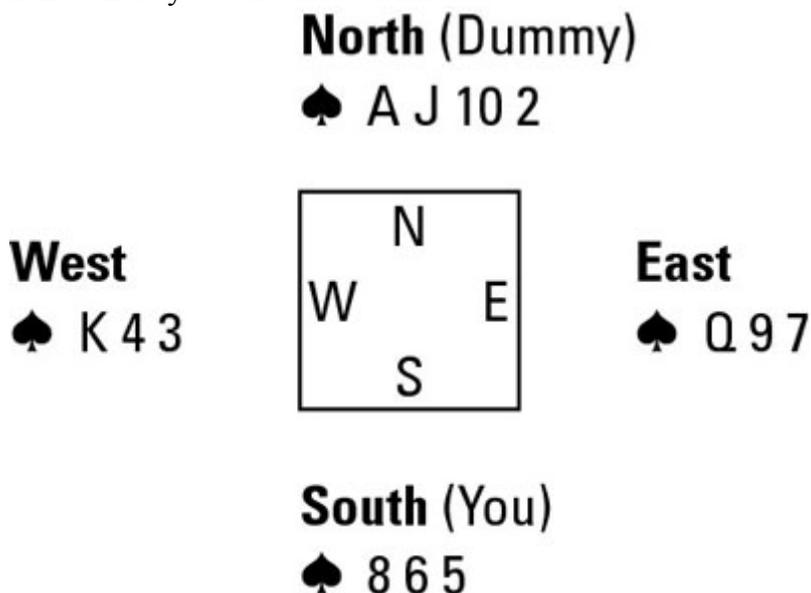
East plays the ♠K, which doesn't do her any good — you just zap it with your ♠A.

You just took three tricks in the suit.

When you have equal honours in your hand, such as the ♠QJ, play the higher equal first. It makes it much harder for the defenders to know which honour you're concealing. However, when you have equal honours in the dummy, the hand that both your opponents can see, which honour card you play first doesn't matter

How to Finesse against Split Honours in Bridge

Sometimes your opponents have two important honours in the suit that you want to attack in a hand of bridge. If those honours are split and each opponent has one honour, you can finesse those split honours, so you're playing for split honours. You have a chance to play for split honours with the cards shown in this image, a hand where you can take two finesses.



In this image, you have a powerful three-card honour combination in the dummy: the ♠AJ10. You normally attack suits with powerful honour combinations early. Because you're missing both the ♠K and the ♠Q, two important honours, hope that the honours are split between the two opposing hands:

Start by leading a low spade from your hand, the ♠5, weakness to strength.

West, second to play, sees that the dummy has a higher spade, the ♠A, than West has with the ♠K, so West properly plays low, the ♠3. You insert the ♠10 from the dummy. East wins the trick with the Q, as expected (split honours). After you regain the lead in another suit, you lead another low spade from your hand, the ♠6.

Once again, West properly plays low, the ♠4. You insert the ♠J from the dummy.

Success! Your second finesse has worked. The missing spade honours were split after all (the ♠K in one hand and the ♠Q in the other). Take the next trick by playing the ♠A. You have an odds on chance that one of your finesses will work

After both opponents follow, that little ♠2 in the dummy will become a trick because nobody has any more spades

Consider this combination of cards, with lead on declarer's left.

Dummy

♠K6 (dummy)

♠J93 (declarer)

If the opponents lead the suit, play low, to guarantee one trick whatever the distribution. However if you cannot afford to lose 2 tricks you must guess who has the A. If there has been bidding by opponents, this should help. Good players are unlikely to lead away from an ace in a suit contract, but frequently do against no-trumps.

When should you play the Ace first then take the finesse?

Unless you are concerned about losing control of the hand, it gives you an extra chance in these two combinations for example:

1. ♣KJ5 (dummy)

2. ♦Q72 (dummy)

♣A62 (declarer)

♦A54 (declarer)

Occasionally the missing Q will fall either on the ace or when you play the next card (combination 1). In any case playing the ace is best play, then finesse with the Jack

Occasionally the king will fall under the ace to save the finesse (combination 2). Only play the ace first if you can control the suit

Other finesse positions

1. ♦AJ43 (dummy)

2. ♦AQJ105 (dummy)

♦Q62 (declarer)

♦93

If you need to make 3 tricks, lead the 2 and play the J if the next player plays low. If it holds then place the ace and hope the king falls

With the second example, start with the 9 and if it holds, play the 3 and put the 10 on from dummy. Saves wasting entries

Most important

Finesses are not confined to trapping kings and queens but can be used against any cards, though the higher cards are the ones players meet most often. Players just starting, rarely finesse. Expert players seek other plays like setting up a long suit for discards, which give them a better chance than the 50% of a finesse.. However a majority of hands require one or more finesses, so master the above techniques.