

## Bridge Probabilities For A Nine Card Suit

The standard advice is [eight ever, nine never](#), meaning that if you hold just 8 of a suit then you should always try a finesse (by leading a low card from dummy, and then playing the King over the Queen, or the Jack if the Queen is not played). But if you hold 9 cards, then you should never finesse but instead just play for the drop (lead the Ace and then the King, hoping that the Queen will drop). [Some texts](#) say that the finesse has a 50% probability of success, while playing for the drop has a 53% probability.

In fact, playing for the finesse the "right" way has a 56.22% chance of success. Does that mean that you should play for the finesse? No, because playing for the drop the "right" way has a 57.92% chance of success.....

To avoid additional complications, suppose the suit in question is trump (so there's no way to win the Queen by trumping it, nor by any other strategy other than the finesse or the drop). And, assume declarer holds the Ace and King and Jack and Ten, and you have sufficient cards and entries to lead from declarer and from dummy as often as needed. Furthermore, assume that you have no information at all about your opponents' cards based on their bidding or previous play.

If you **simply finesse** on the first round, then in the absence of any other information, the probability that the RHO has the Queen is 50%. So, the probability that the finesse will succeed is **50%**. And, since we're assuming that you have enough cards and entries to repeat the finesse as necessary, this strategy has a 50% probability of success.

- By contrast, if you do a **simple play for the drop** by drawing two rounds with the Ace and King, then the chance the Queen will fall is 53.14%
- However, there's a **smarter finesse** strategy, of first drawing one round hoping to drop a Queen singleton, and then finessing on the second round if the Queen doesn't drop. This works out to a total of **56.22%** -- even better.
- Finally, consider the **smart play for the drop** strategy of first drawing one round, and then drawing a second round *unless* LHO showed a void. If LHO showed a void, then at that point, it is clear that playing the Ace-King consecutively is not going to cause the Queen to drop. So you should switch to the finesse strategy, which is now guaranteed to work (since we're assuming you can get back to dummy three times). This has a total success probability of **57.92%** -- best of all!

In summary, the probabilities of success are: **50% for the simple finesse**, **53.14% for the simple drop**, **56.22 for the smarter finesse**, and **57.92% for the smart drop**. So, it is indeed true that with a 9-card suit, and plenty of entries, and no information at all about your opponents, it is best to play (smartly) for the drop. But just barely, and only because you can switch to the finesse strategy if LHO is void.