

PRINCIPLE OF RESTRICTED CHOICE

When missing QJxx and a top honour falls under your top honour, presume that it is a singleton.

♠KT543

♠ x?

♠Q?

♠A87

Suppose you are playing 7S and these are your trumps. You bang down the Ace and the Queen falls on your right. How do you plan to play the trumps?

With 9 trumps, it seems logical to play for the trumps to be 2-2. i.e., Play the King on the second trick. After all, “eight ever, nine never”. That is what we would do if neither missing honour had appeared.

That is not the case here.

There are two possible reasons for that Queen’s appearance. It could be a singleton or it could be the doubleton Queen-Jack. Both of these possibilities are about equally likely. So, it would seem that it is a 50-50 bet whether to play for the singleton Queen or the doubleton QJ.

However, on half of the occasions when the QJ is with East, East will elect to play the Jack. So, the chances of that Queen having come from QJ is just half of the chances of it being a singleton Queen.

This oddity is commonly called “**Restricted Choice**” – not a particularly well-named phenomenon.

So, this chestnut is true. It is a much better chance to finesse the Ten on the second round of trumps. Of course, the same situation applies if the Jack appears.

You probably don’t find this a very convincing argument. Try this reasoning: -

You set your computer to generate several hundred random deals when you hold the above N-S trumps. You search through the deals and, sure enough, you find 10 deals where East has the singleton Queen. Looking further, you find 10 deals where East has the doubleton QJ.

Now, let’s suppose that the Queen is played half of the time from the deals which contain the QJ doubleton.

So, the deal which we are looking at from the top of the page comes from: -

10 deals with singleton Queen

5 deals with doubleton QJ

It follows that the chances of that Queen being singleton is 10 out of 15 or 66%.

The chances of that Queen coming from the QJ doubleton is 33%.

Therefore - When one opponent plays a critical card in a suit, play his partner to have the adjacent card in the same suit.

Further explanation from bridge author Larry Cohen - **Restricted Choice** is one of the most simple, yet mind-boggling areas of card play. Rather than reading words, look at this typical example:

North

♠ K 10 5 4

South

♠ A 7 6 3 2

You lay down your ♠A and LHO (West) follows low and the queen drops from RHO (East). You play a small spade from hand and West follows low. Should you put up the ♠K and hope East started with ♠QJ doubleton? Or, should you finesse dummy's 10, playing for West to have started with ♠J98?

The theory of [restricted choice](#) says you should finesse—don't play for the drop. Two times out of three, the honour that dropped from East will be a singleton. Only one time in three will it be from queen-jack doubleton.

Why? Many of you will be happier if you stop reading now. Just be aware that, when missing queen-jack-low-low, and an honour drops on the first round, play it to be a singleton. **End of story.**

For anyone still reading, here is why it works. When East (in the example above) plays the queen, you should assume he played it because he had to play it. (That is where the term "restricted" comes into this discussion.) If he had been dealt queen-jack doubleton, he might have played the jack (half the time). When the queen plops onto the table, it is more likely that it appeared because **East's choice was restricted**. He had no other card he could have played. If he had been dealt queen-jack doubleton, he would have had the freedom to play the queen 50% of the time and the jack 50% of the time.

Conclusion

The principle of restricted choice says that the play of a particular card decreases the probability its player holds the equivalent card. However the percentages in real life may not appear to be the same as those in theory, as declarer all you can do is to play the odds!