

THE LOSING TRICK COUNT

Accurate bidding is one of the secrets to success in the game of bridge. The **Losing Trick Count (LTC)** method of hand evaluation greatly increases one's ability to more accurately place most contracts.

The "Losing Trick Count" (LTC) is an adjunctive supplement to the high-card point count method of hand evaluation. Shape and fit are of more significance, and oft times even more accurate, than point-count in determining the optimum level for a makeable suit contract based upon the combined holdings; i.e., the Partnership's trick-taking capacity.

The LTC system of hand evaluation augments the high-card point-count method of assessing the number of tricks a Partnership is likely to win. Take the following for example: Most responding Players, following a 4 Spade re-bid by one's opening Partner would "**Pass**" this cold **6S**, 25 HCP hand.

<u>Opener (Partner)</u>	<u>Responder (You)</u>
1D	1S
4S	??
AQJX	KTXXXX
XX	X
AKJXX	XX
KX	AXXX

One must **not** envision the LTC as *replacing* the point-count system. Rather, it is used in *coordination* and *conjunction* with point-count in order to elicit a more accurate guide as to the potential of the Partnership's combined holding with respect to its trick-taking capacity. When considering using the LTC, one must consider the following constraints:

- 1) It is **not applicable** when considering a No-Trump Contract.
- 2) It is applicable only **after** a Trump fit has been established.
- 3) It is **unsuitable** for misfit hands where no fit exists.

The LTC Formula

- A. Count your losers
- B. Add Partner's losers
- C. Deduct this total from 24
- D. The answer is the number of tricks a Partnership can expect to win in the chosen suit contract

The LTC operates by deducting the computed losing tricks from the maximum possible total of twenty-four. Why deduct the total losers between both hands from 24? Since the maximum number of losers you count in any one suit, by this process, is three (3); and since there are, at most, four (4) suits in each hand, Partner's and yours; $3 \times 4 \times 2 = 24$.

Therefore: **LTC = Maximum losers (24) minus Computed Losing Tricks = The Tricks the Partnership can anticipate winning.** The LTC does **not** guarantee that one will, in fact, make the number of anticipated tricks. It represents the number of tricks one will win most of the time, assuming the suits break normally, and half of one's potential finesses work. Calculations within the LTC require two (2) stages. They are as follows:

A. CALCULATING YOUR LOSERS

1) Count losers **only** in the first three cards of each suit. The 4th, 5th, 6th, etc. cards in any suit are assumed to be winners. **There are never more than three losers in any suit, and there are never more losers in a suit than the number of cards held within that suit.** As ones HCP's increase, the number of losers decrease. As ones HCP's decrease, the number of losers increase. The more unbalanced the hand, losers decrease. The more balanced the hand, losers increase.

2) The basic method assumes that: an **Ace** will never be a loser, nor will a **King** in a 2-card or longer suit, nor will a **Queen**, if coupled ("guarded") with another honor in any 3-card or longer suit.

Thus:

- 3) **A 3-card (or longer) Suit** – **AKQ(x)** = 0 losers, **AQX(x)** or **KQX(x)** = 1 losing trick, **AJT(x)**, **AXX(x)**, **KXX(x)** = 2 losers, **QXX(x)**, or **XXX(x)** = 3 losing tricks and {**QXX(x)** + **QXX(x)** in 2 suits} = 5 losing tricks (2 ½ + 2 ½).
- 4) **A Doubleton** - **AK** = 0 losers, **AX**, **AQ**, **KX** or **KQ** = 1 loser, and **XX** = 2 losing tricks.
- 5) **A Singleton** - other than an **Ace** = 1 losing trick.
- 6) **A Void** = 0 losing tricks.
- 7) **An Unguarded Queen** (Ex: **QXX**) is considered as **one-half a loser**; a guarded or supported **Queen** (Ex: **QJX**, or **AQX**, or **KQX**, or **QTX**), is **not** counted as a loser; i.e., any **Queen** should be counted as a winner if it is supported by another honor.
- 8) **A Qxx(x) in a suit bid by Partner** = 2-Losers, **not** 3.

B. ASSESSING PARTNER'S LOSERS

Partner's losers may be determined through knowledge of Partner's strength as revealed through his/her bidding, based upon point-count. If you can tell how strong Partner's hand is one can calculate his/her losers. A simple calculation of Partner's losers based upon strength is as follows:

- a) Support for your opening bid with 6-10 HCP's, a **Constructive Raise** = **9 Losers**
- b) Just below a normal opening count with 10-12 HCP's, a **limit raise** with 10-12 HCP's, or a weak opening 2-bid = **8 Losers**
- c) A sound minimum **opening bid** with 13-15 HCP's, or a **Take-Out Double** = **7 Losers**
- d) A **strong opening bid** with 16-18 HCP's, or an **opening 1-NT** with 15-17 HCP's = **6 Losers** (An opening bid of **1-NT** can, on occasion, be 7 or even 8 Losers, dependent upon the distribution of the balanced hand)
- e) A very strong opening bid evidenced by a **jump-shift** re-bid holding 19-21 HCP's = **5 Losers**
- f) An **strong artificial and forcing opening "2C" bid** holding 22+ HCP's = **4 Losers**

LOSING TRICK COUNT ADJUSTMENTS

- 1) Subtract 1-Loser if there is a 10-card fit, or longer.
- 2) The above format is a broad overlook at the **LTC**. It is based upon a generalized raw count as indicated in the above-listed, referenced examples. Adjustments must be made in order to be even more accurate; such as adjustments and refinements to super-trump fits, the quality of Trump support, the presence or absence of controls and cover-cards, just to name a few. A furtherance of understanding of the **LTC** can be achieved by the reading of Ron Klinger's "The Modern Losing Trick Count", and Marty Bergen's "Points Schmoints", & "More Points Schmoints."