

Tips on Counting for Beginners

Counting is the key to bridge together with understating the shape of your hand.

1. Counting Points

The first thing you asses is whether your hand is balanced hand e.g. 4432 type with no void, singleton or 2 doubletons or unbalanced e.g. 5422 type. Then count your high card points (hcp). *Don't count by card, count by suit.*

(i)	(ii)	(iii)
♠ AKQ5	♠ KQ532	♠ QJ763
♥ Q53	♥ 86	♥ 9
♦ AK5	♦ AQJ3	♦ AJ3
♣ 842	♣ Q3	♣ 8765

- (i) Balanced hand. There are 10hcp in each suit. Starting with the strongest suit, ♠AKQ all bar one (9), ♦AK is (7) and ♥Q is (2). **Total 18hcp.** Not too difficult.
- (ii) Unbalanced (2 doubletons). ♦AQJ (7) only K missing, ♠KQ (5) and ♣Q (1) **Total 13hcp**
- (iii) Unbalanced. ♦AJ (5), ♠QJ (3) **Total 7hcp**

Quickest way to count!!

2. Counting Trumps

The key is counting to 13. Again don't count individual cards count in "rounds of 4 cards" e.g. if everyone follows for three rounds (12) then there is only one card missing. If someone shows out on the second round then there are still 6 cards out between partner, defender and yourself.

Partner	You
♠ Q64	♠ AK853

There are 5 cards missing. What is the most likely split 3:2 or 2:3. Usually lead from the short hand ♠Q and ♠3 draws two trump, ♠4 to ♠A draws another two and since you have the ♠K you know whatever defenders hold you win it.

You only need to count to 5

3. Counting Winners – 1.

In any contract whether you are declarer or defender it is key to count your tricks and how many extra you need to make or defeat your contract. *After the lead*, when declarer as soon as dummy goes down, count how many top tricks you have before you lose the lead and then how many others you need to make your contract. *The lead can often make a difference* e.g. A lead of ♥3 to you as declarer into ♥ AQJ converts 1 “top” trick into at least 2.

Suits without the A count as zero, with A count 1 “top” trick, with AK count 2 and AKQ count 3. Even if you have AQJ this only counts 1 “top trick” since you can lose to the missing K.

How many top tricks do EW have in 3NT, and how do they plan the play?

West	East
♠ AQ4	♠ KJ53
♥ 97	♥ AK
♦ QJ942	♦ 1053
♣ KJ4	♣ Q1063

South leads 3♥ against 3NT

You have 6 top tricks: ♠AKQJ and 2 hearts ♥AK. Since you don't have the ♦A or ♣A you don't have any top tricks in these suits. You must get out the ♣A to make the other three tricks from your ♣KQJ10 BUT must do that immediately while you have the ♥'s stopped. If you tried to make the long ♦'s the opponents would take out your second heart and then make all their hearts, getting in with the ♣A or ♦A or K. Get rid of the ♣A.

4. Counting Winners – 2

Too many players concentrate on losers in suit contracts. **You should concentrate on winners!** We will discuss losers in the next article. Count winners and plan the play in this hand.

If it helps use a pack of cards and play them using the hands illustrated below:

West	East
♠ A8542	♠ 3
♥ AQ103	♥ KJ92
♦ A42	♦ K53
♣ 3	♣ AQ752

South leads ♦J against 6♥

There are 8 top tricks: ♠A, ♥AKQJ, ♦AK and ♣A. However, an alternative way to look at it is that you have 4 tricks outside trump, so provided you can make 8 tricks in trump you can make 12 tricks. This can be done with cross-ruffs. Take the first trick with the ♦A and then the second with the ♦K. When cross-ruffing take your top tricks in the side suits before they can discard on these suits. So ♠A and ♣A, ruff ♣2 with ♥3, ♠2 ♥2 and just continue cross ruffing. There is no problem of being over-ruffed since you have the 6 highest hearts ♥AKQJ10 and 9. So you make 8 trump tricks separately and lose only the last ♦.

If South had found the worst possible lead of a ♥ then that takes away 2 of your hearts and you only have 11 tricks. You have no choice then and must take the club finesse through ♣AQ in order to discard the losing ♦. Even if it doesn't work you still will make 11 tricks by discarding the losing ♦ on the ♣A.