

Hand Evaluation

Using Marty Bergen's Adjust-3 Method

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Hand Evaluation - Introduction

Let's look at two hands:

WHAT WOULD YOU BID WITH EACH OF THE FOLLOWING HANDS?

Hand AA: ♠K43 ♥A73 ♦AK1092 ♣32

Hand BB: ♠QJ6 ♥QJ7 ♦KQ73 ♣ KJ2

Counting HCP, open Hand AA 1♦ with 14 HCP, and again counting HCP open Hand BB with 15 HCP 1NT!

IF THESE ARE YOUR ANSWERS --- You are mistaken, in reality Hand AA should be opened 1NT and Hand BB should be opened 1♦!

In this example we will see that Hand AA is actually stronger than Hand BB, so that in fact Hand AA should be opened 1NT and Hand BB should be opened 1♦!

Following Marty Bergen (2008) in his book "Slam Bidding Made Easier" let's look at two more hands

Hand CC: ♠KQ632 ♥A ♦QJ42 ♣QJ6

Hand DD: ♠AJ1096 ♥7 ♦A1096 ♣ A92

Clearly one would open both hands playing the 2/1 Game Force System 1♠, RIGHT!

But which hand do you consider stronger????

Counting HCP one may say that Hand CC is stronger with 15 HCP and that Hand DD is weaker with only 13 HCP.

IF THIS IS YOUR POSITION --- YOU ARE AGAIN MISTAKEN, THE CORRECT ANSWER IS HAND DD!

Why is Hand DD actually stronger than Hand CC? Because Aces and 10's are undervalued cards while Q's and J's are overvalued cards!

(1) Observe that Hand CC has 5 queens and jacks, overrated cards and a singleton ace with only 1.5 quick tricks!

(2) Hand DD has 3 quick tricks (twice as many as hand CC) and four underrated A's and 10's.

These two examples should suggest that the value of a hand COULDN'T be determined by only HCP. In reality you must consider five Qualities of a hand:

(1) HCP

(2) Over- and Under-rated honors

(3) Suit Length

(4) Dubious Honor Doubletons'

(5) Suit Quality

This is only a start --- In addition you have to consider Dummy/Support Points and Bergen Points to reach the correct contract level.

Based on a survey of experts as reported in the book "Precision Today" by Berkowitz and Manley (2010), bidding based upon hand evaluation is 80% of the game. While play of the hand and defense are also very important, you will never succeed if you are in the wrong contract!

Determining the value of Your Hand

To evaluate the value of your hand, the standard/traditional method promoted by Charles Goren in the late 1940s is to assign values to the honor cards:

Honor	Value
Ace	4
King	3
Queen	2
Jack	1
Ten	0

10

The evaluation method is referred to as 4-3-2-1-0 point count system. Using this method, one observes that a bridge deck contains a total of 40 High Card Points (HCP). Hence, an "average" hand consists of 10 HCP. While the method of assignment is accurate, a computer analysis of bridge hands shows that the point count system (4-3-2-1-0) tends to undervalue aces and tens and to overvalue queens and jacks. Only kings are correctly valued. Using only HCP, a hand with at least 12 HCP is usually opened (some even open 11 point hands – in third seat you may only need 10).

To compensate for the over and under valuation using the “standard/traditional” method, Marty Bergen (2008), ten-time national champion, developed the ADJUST-3 Method. His book, “Slam Bidding Made Easier” published by Bergen Books, devotes the first hundred pages to his proposed method. Why adjust three? Because the accuracy of the HCP in a hand depends on the difference of overvalued and undervalued honors by the value of three.

Let’s see how the process works. With a dealt hand, one goes through six simple steps to employ the Adjust-3 Method:

- Step 1: Add up your HCP using the table presented earlier
- Step 2: Count the number of aces and 10s (undervalued honors).
- Step 3: Count the number of queens and jacks (overvalued honors).
- Step 4: Subtract the smaller number from the larger number.
- Step 5: Evaluate the difference:
 - If between 0-2, make no adjustment
 - If within the range 3-5, adjust by 1 point
 - If 6+ (rare), adjust by 2 points
- Step 6: If the number of aces and 10s is more, add;
 - If the number of queens and jacks is more, subtract

We next apply the method to a few examples.

Hand 1	Hand 2	Hand 3	Hand 4	Hand 5
♠AKQ105	♠AK10	♠A67	♠A104	♠K78
♥10982	♥KJ3	♥KQ54	♥10543	♥AQ9852
♦6	♦J1052	♦Q7	♦KJ67	♦A109
♣J67	♣567	♦J678	♣K10	♣A

- Hand 1: 10 HCP
3 (undervalued) 10A10; 2 (overvalued) honors QJ
3-2=1; no adjustment
The adjusted total for the hand is 10
- Hand 2: 12 HCP
3 aces and 10s (undervalued); 2 Js (overvalued)
3-2= 1 no adjustment, but skewed in undervalued honors
The adjusted total for the hand is 12
- Hand 3: 12 HCP
3 queens and jacks (overvalued); 1 ace (undervalued)
3-1=2 no adjustment, but skewed in overvalued honors
The adjusted total for the hand is 12
- Hand 4: 11 HCP
4 undervalued honors; 1 overvalued honor

4-1=3; add 1 HCP; more overvalued honors
The adjusted total for the hand is 12

Hand 5: 17 HCP
4 undervalued honors; 1 overvalued honor
4-1=3; add 1 HCP; more undervalued honors
The adjusted total for the hand is 18

Using the Adjust-3 method of hand evaluation, one would consider opening hands two-five. However, is there more to the story? Yes. Clearly, if a suit includes AKxxx and another suit contains Axxx, one may take two tricks with the first and only one with the second. Thus, in addition to HCP, one must consider suit length.

After the Adjust-3 process, you must apply the following rule to modify your points for suit length:

ADD FOR SUIT LENGTH

1 additional point for a 5-card suit
2 additional points for a 6-card suit
3 additional points for a 7-card suit, etc.

In summary, add one additional point for each card in a suit over four.

However, in addition to suit length, one has to consider dubious honors since they are OVER-VALUED.

Subtract ONE point for hands with the following doubletons or singleton honors

DOUBLETONS: AJ, KQ, KJ, QJ, Qx, Jx (1, ½, 0 quick tricks)

SINGLETONS: K, Q, J (½ or 0 quick tricks)

Note that the doubletons AK, AQ are not included in the above; they include an Ace and one of top 2 honors, 2 or 1½ quick tricks) And, Ax and Kx are also excluded.

Lastly, you must adjust for QUALITY SUITS - a suit with 3+ of the top **five** honor cards (AKQJ10).

ADD ONE ADDITIONAL POINT FOR EACH QUALITY SUIT.

In summary, one proceeds through the following steps to obtain the total value of a hand.

Step 1: HCP
Step 2: Adjust-3 (add or subtract)
Step 3: Suit Length (add for length)
Step 4: Dubious Honors (subtract)

Step 5: Suit Quality (add)
 Step 6: Total Starting Points

Completing steps 1-4, one has what Mr. Bergen calls “starting points.” **To open the bidding in the game of bridge (one of a suit), a hand is opened if it has at least twelve starting points.** There is more to a hand than simply high card points (HCP).

One final comment, in a suit contract, if your shape is 4-3-3-3, 5-3-3-2, or 6-3-2-2, or 7-2-2-2, you should downgrade your hand one point for “flatness.” Or in Notrump contracts also subtract a point if shape is 4-3-3-3.

Returning to Hands 1-5, we apply the process outlined above.

Hand 1	Hand 2	Hand 3	Hand 4	Hand 5
♠AKQ105	♠AK10	♠A67	♠A104	♠K78
♥10982	♥KJ3	♥KQ54	♥10543	♥AQ9852
♦6	♦J1052	♦Q7	♦KJ67	♦A109
♣J67	♣567	♦J68	♣K10	♣A

Hand 1:	HCP	10
	Adjust -3	0
	Suit Length	add 1
	Dubious Honors	none
	Suit Quality	add 1
	Starting points	12

Hand 2:	HCP	12
	Adjust -3	0
	Suit Length	none
	Dubious Honors	none
	Suit Quality	none
	Flatness	-1
	Starting points	11

Hand 3:	HCP	12
	Adjust -3	0
	Suit Length	none
	Dubious Honors	subtract 1
	Suit Quality	none
	Starting points	11

Hand 4:	HCP	11
	Adjust -3	1
	Suit Length	none
	Dubious Honors	none
	Suit Quality	none

	Starting points	12
Hand 5:	HCP	17
	Adjust -3	1
	Suit Length	add 2
	Dubious Honors	none
	Suit Quality	none
	Starting points	20

Counting only HCP, one would have opened hands 2, 3, and 5; however, using Bergen's "starting points" method, open hands 1 and 5. Also observe that these hands have at least **TWO QUICK TRICKS**.

BASIC RULE: Open a bridge hand one of a suit with at least 12-21 starting points and two quick tricks (in the first or second seat----there are exceptions in the third and fourth seats).

The first step at the bridge table is that all players evaluate their hands; the process begins by the person designated DEALER. The person with twelve starting points opens the auction by bidding (there are exceptions called pre-emptive bids and strong two-level bids).

As the auction progresses, the value of your hand may increase or decrease depending upon what you learn from your partner and your opponents. To keep the process simple at this juncture, suppose one person has a sufficient number of "starter points" to open a hand one of a suit with no interference.

Dummy Points

When partner opens one of a **major** and you have three-card support, you have found a fit in the major, playing the 2/1 Game Force System. If you win the major suit contract, you will become dummy and partner will play the hand. When you have a short-suit or two, you must reevaluate your hand.

The dummy hand reevaluation process is used when partner opens a major; it does not apply to minor suit or notrump openings. Conversely, if opener opens a minor and partner (responder) bids a major, opener must reevaluate his starting points with a major suit fit. Thus, the reevaluation process may be done by responder when opener opens a major and a fit is found or by opener when opening a minor and partner bids a major (with 4+ cards) and opener has a four-card major, a fit has also been found; **the "dummy" reevaluation process may be employed by opener or responder.**

The short-suit Dummy Points are evaluated as follows:

Doubleton	1 point each, always
Singleton	2 points each, but 3 each with 4+ trump
Void	equal to the value of the number of trumps in hand

When considering starting points, short-suit points are not counted (except for dubious honor doubletons/singletons). Remember, shortness is not helpful in notrump contracts, and you do not know if your partnership will find a major suit fit. **Thus, never count for shortness when you open the bidding.** Except for dubious doubletons or singletons, you must ignore suit shortness when calculating starting points. However, with a fit in a major suit, this is not the case.

Dummy Points = Starter Points + Short-suit Points

Let's look at a few examples, when your partner opens 1♠ and you hold the following hands.

Hand A: ♠ AJ62 ♥ 6542 ♦void ♣ AK987

Hand B: ♠ AQ67 ♥ 678 ♦AK10432 ♣void

Hand C: ♠ KQJ32 ♥ 1098 ♦7 ♣ J987

Hand D: ♠ 9876 ♥ AK ♦ 75 ♣AQ1084

Hand E: ♠ 10986 ♥ K ♦ 753 ♣ Q9432

Hand F: ♠ 102 ♥ J64 ♦ KQJ ♣ KQ1098

First, you must calculate starter points. After calculating starting points, add to the total Dummy Points. The analysis for the five hands follows.

Hand A: 12 HCP + [Undervalued Honors = 2 – Overvalued Honors = 1] = 1; no adjustment + 1 for suit length, no dubious doubletons, no points for suit quality; hence, the total number of starter points = 13. To establish Dummy Points, add four points for the void. There are no singletons or doubletons. Thus in Hand (A) now has seventeen Dummy Points.

Hand B: 13 HCP + [Undervalued Honors = 3 – Overvalued Honors = 1] = 2; no adjustment + 2 for suit length, no dubious doubleton, 1 point for suit quality; hence, the total number of starter points = 16. However, you have one doubleton (1 more point) and a void (3 more points). Thus, for Hand (B) we now have twenty Dummy Points.

Hand C: 7 HCP + [Undervalued Honors = 1 – Overvalued Honors = 3] = -2; no adjustment + 1 for length + 0 for dubious doubleton honors + 1 for quality suits. Hand (C) has nine starter points. With five trumps, the singleton is worth three points; the hand has twelve Dummy Points.

Hand D: 13 HCP + [Undervalued Honors = 3 – Overvalued Honors = 1] = 2; no adjustment + 1 length points + 0 for dubious doubletons (note that the AK does not qualify) + 1 for suit quality. Total starter points = 15. Hand (D) has two doubletons, add 2 points. The total for the hand, Dummy Points = 16.

Hand E: $5 \text{ HCP} + [\text{Undervalued Honors} = 1 - \text{Overvalued Honors} = 1] = 0$; no adjustment + 1 length point – 1 for the dubious king singleton + no quality; total of five starter points. With the singleton king and four trumps, add 4. Dummy Points = $5 + 3 = 8$.

Hand F: $12 \text{ HCP} + [\text{Undervalued Honors} = 2 - \text{Overvalued Honors} = 4] = -2$; no adjustment + 1 length point -0 dubious honor doubleton + 1 quality suits. Total starting points = 14. Furthermore, as dummy, you must add 1 point for the doubleton. The total number of Dummy Points = 15.

In review:

Hand A = 13 starter points + 4 shortness points = 17 Dummy Points
Hand B = 16 starter points + 4 shortness points = 20 Dummy Points
Hand C = 9 starter points + 3 shortness points = 12 Dummy Points
Hand D = 15 starter points + 1 shortness points = 16 Dummy Points
Hand E = 05 starter points + 4 shortness points = 8 Dummy Points
Hand F = 14 starter points + 1 shortness points = 15 Dummy Points

When responding to your partner, you always must reevaluate your starter points and convert them to DUMMY POINTS with a fit.

Minor Suit Dummy Points

With a minor suit opening (one club or one diamond), the reevaluation process is considerably different. When partner opens in a minor suit, you do not know if the length of the suit is 5+, 4, or 3. Furthermore, game in a minor is often difficult to make. You do not in general support a minor suit opening with only four cards. Instead, you should show a four-card major suit. Remember, your goal is to discover a major suit game, which may happen if you and partner are 4-4 in the majors. When partner opens a minor or notrump, **dummy points=starting points**.

The bidding goals have a hierarchy: (1) Major suit fit, (2) Notrump, and (3) Minor suit. **Never reevaluate your hand with a minor suit opening or notrump. Shortness does not count until a fit is established in a suit (major or minor).**

Hand Evaluation – Bergen Points

When you have a fit, a major, minor, or notrump, the value of your hand (as opener) will often increase.

Recall that as opener, you only considered your starting points that EXCLUDED short-suit points. And, while you did account for suit length, you may have additional value for the extra trump length. And finally, while you accounted for quality suits, the value of these may also increase when finding a fit.

These observations suggest that your Starting Points must be modified with a fit. It works as follows.

Bergen Points (the final hand evaluation)

Step 1: Extra Trump Length (with 6+ trumps, add 1 for each trump after 5)

Add 1 Point 6 card suit
2 Points 7 card suit, etc.

Step 2: Side Suits (for a 4-card or 5-card suit)

Add 1 point for each

Step 3: Short-Suit Points (Used with suit contracts only NOT notrump)

Add 1 extra point for 2 or 3 doubletons, **not each** (Note this is not the same as the Dummy short-suit point procedure)
2 extra points for a singleton
4 extra points for a void (some use # of trumps)

Adding the above aspects of your hand to your starting points, your total points are called Bergen Points. This total is now used to determine if you have twenty-six points (Bergen Points + Dummy Points) for game in a major, twenty-six points for notrump [Bergen Points (steps 1 and 2) + Partner's Starting Points), twenty-nine points for game in a minor (Bergen Points + Partner's Starting Points), or thirty-three points for a slam (notrump or suit).

In notrump, you cannot count shortness; hence, only steps 1 and 2 above are used to count Bergen Points.

Let's apply the process to Hands 1, 2, and 5 with 12, 12, and 19 starting points, respectively. And suppose we have found a fit in spades, for hands 1 and 2 and hearts for hand 5.

Hand 1	Hand 2	Hand 5
♠AKQ105	♠AK10	♠K78
♥10982	♥KJ3	♥AQ9852
♦6	♦J105	♦A109
♣J67	♣567	♣A

To calculate Bergen Points for hand 1, you add 2 points for the singleton. Thus, hand 1 has 12 starting + 2 short-suit points = 14.

Because hand 2 is balanced, there is no adjustment Starting Point= Bergen Points.

For hand 5, you add 1 more point for 6 trumps and 2 more points for the ace singleton. Hence, Bergen Points = $19 + 2 = 21$.

LET'S LOOK AT AN EXAMPLE, suppose you hold the following hand

♠AK42 ♥ KQ632 ♦ AK109 ♣void

And you open the bidding 1♥.

Partner next bids 3♥ showing a limit raise in hearts 10-12 Dummy Points.

How do you evaluate your hand? Do you have game or Slam?

19 HCP

Adjust-3 no adjustment (3 overvalues; 1 under value)

Length points: Add 1

Quality Suit: Add 1

Starting Points: 21

However, finding a fit in hearts, OPENER must reevaluate his hand.

Short-suit: Add 4 points for void

Side Suits: Add 1 point (4-card diamond suit)

Bergen Points Total= 26 points

Because your partner bids 3♥, you now know, upon reevaluation, that you may have a slam in hearts. Without the reevaluation, you may have only bid game! Re-evaluation is an important step in hand evaluation.

Hand Evaluation From Bergen's Book Pages 82-84

With a Heart fit (Limit Raise 10-12 Dummy Points) how many Starting and Bergen Points do you have for each hand?

1. ♠A10 ♥ AK7652 ♦ 3 ♣ AJ109

2. ♠KQ ♥ AKJ64 ♦ K763 ♣ Q3

3. ♠AJ4 ♥ KQ872 ♦ AQ1093 ♣ void

With a Spade fit (Limit Raise 10-12 Dummy Points) how many Starting and Bergen Points do you have for each hand?

4. ♠Q74 ♥ QJ7 ♦ K76 ♣ KQ72

5. ♠K97654 ♥ AK5 ♦ 985 ♣ 5

Answers Follow

(1) 20 Starting and 24 Bergen Points (20 +2short suit+1for 6th trump+1side suit=24) you have 24+10=34 points

(2) 17 Starting and 19 Bergen Points (17+1doubleton+1for 4card suit =19) after the limit raise Bid game; you have 12+19=31 points

(3) 19 Starting and 24 Bergen Points (19+4void+1for 5card diamond= 24 after the limit raise again bid slam

(4) 12 Starting and 12 Bergen Points after the limit raise PASS

(5) 12 Starting and 15 Bergen Points (12+2singleton+1for 6th trump =15) after the limit raise Bid game.