

## Gambling 3NT

Nowadays hardly anybody opens a "natural" 3NT (which would show a balanced hand with 25-27 high card points), since this is very rare and leaves no room to explore major suit fits. Most players now use the 3NT opening as a pre-emptive bid, to show a hand with a long solid running minor suit and little or nothing in the other suits. You might have opened preemptively with 4 of the minor, but the gamble is that if partner has the right cards, 3NT might be a good contract. The bid does not come up very often, but it can be very useful when you have the right hand.

### Requirements for a Gambling 3NT

Your suit must be solid – this means seven cards headed by the AKQJ. With eight cards in the suit you may drop the requirement for having the jack. Partnership agreements vary with regard to the rest of the hand, but the most common agreement is that you should have not more than a queen outside of the long suit:

e.g. ♠J98 ♥10 ♦AKQJ963 ♣53,  
or ♠Q8 ♥104 ♦6 ♣AKQ98653

The purpose of the bid is threefold:

- 1) Pre-emptive – to make it difficult for the opponents to find a fit in a major.
- 2) Descriptive – it tells your partner exactly what you have.
- 3) Gambling – if partner has a suitable hand, you might have a good shot at making 3NT.

### Responses to the Gambling 3NT

The principal value in opening the gambling 3NT is that responder knows precisely what opener's hand is – you should be able to make a decision quite easily without asking any questions. Most of the time the decision will just be whether you want to play in 3NT or in partner's minor suit, but very occasionally you will want to bid game, or even slam in partner's suit, or possibly bid your own suit (though it's extremely unlikely that your suit will be better than partner's!). So – what are your possible responses:

1. PASS. Knowing that partner has a sure source of 7 tricks, you only need two tricks yourself for 3NT to make. However, you also need to know that the opponents aren't going to make 5 tricks in their suit first! In theory you should have all the side suits stopped in order to pass, but are you prepared to accept the gamble if one of the stops is a little thin?
2. 4♣ 'Pass or Correct'. This simply says that you don't fancy playing 3NT, and that you'd rather play in partner's minor. Opener should 'Pass' if clubs is the suit, or 'Correct' to 4♦ if it's diamonds. **Even if you know that partner's suit must be diamonds, you should still bid 4♣**, as 4♦ has another meaning.
3. 5♣/6♣/7♣ Also 'Pass or Correct'. Opener passes with clubs, or converts to diamonds at that level.
4. 4♥/♠ Natural with a long suit – to play.

Only very rarely, when you are exploring a slam, will you need to know a little more about partner's shape. Advanced partnerships might like to add the following conventional responses to their armoury:

5. 4NT Not asking for Aces – you know partner has precisely one! This bid asks partner if he has extra length in the suit. 'Partner, we have 11 tricks, assuming that you have 7, but if you have 8, I want to play in small slam'.
6. 5NT Similarly, this asks partner to bid the Grand Slam if he has the extra card.
7. 4♦ What is your shortage? Opener replies:
  - 4♥/♠ Singleton or void in ♥/♠
  - 4NT No shortage, i.e. 2 cards in each of the other three suits (7-2-2-2)
  - 5♣/♦ This is my suit, i.e. my shortage is in the minor I didn't bid

Note that you bid the major in which you have the shortage, but bid the minor in which you don't have the shortage. This is to avoid taking the bidding above 5♣ when that might be your best final contract.

## Examples

Your partner has opened 3NT (Gambling) and you hold:

1) ♠A73 ♥A952 ♦A963 ♣53

Pass. 3NT is certain to make with an overtrick.

Replace one of the red-suit aces with a king and it's still a very good bet.

2) ♠AK1076 ♥103 ♦QJ963 ♣5

Bid 4♣ which has a good chance of making, whereas 3NT hasn't.

3) ♠A10432 ♥87 ♦964 ♣AKQ

Bid 5♣ which partner will convert to 5♦, which should make after opponents take the first two tricks in hearts.

4) ♠J83 ♥AKJ109762 ♦10 ♣5

Bid 4♥ - it's likely to be easier to make ten tricks in hearts than 11 in clubs or diamonds.

5) ♠AK8 ♥A963 ♦106 ♣A753

You have 11 top tricks if partner has seven diamonds. Bid 4NT to ask him to bid 6♦ if he has eight diamonds.

6) ♠A ♥QJ52 ♦AKQJ ♣8753

Bid 4♦ to find out where partner's shortage is. If he is short in hearts then slam is on.

Footnote: The name Gambling actually refers to the original version of the convention, rarely played these days, where a requirement was that the opener should have stoppers in at least two of the outside suits, whereas the modern style is to have at most a queen outside.

## OVERCALLS

why overcall?

- To indicate a lead
- To send a message to partner that the hand has poor defensive values ( except vs. no trump contracts )
- Pave the way for a possible sacrifice.

Requirements :-

\* **Overcalled suit must be good to very good.**

\* **Points are irrelevant.**

Once you have overcalled, never rebid the suit opposite a silent partner. If, having overcalled, you feel that you need to bid the suit again, this is an admission that you made the incorrect bid to start with.

If you have a hand which falls between a simple overcall & a jump ( intermediate ) overcall, go for the jump, especially if the suit is very good.

The following examples may serve to help.

Opposition Open	OVERCALL TYPE	when	NON VULNERABLE	VULNERABLE
1♣ : bid 1♠	= One Level Overcall		QJTXXX XX KX XXX 4.5 tricks	AQJTX XX KJX XXX 5.5 tricks
1♥ : bid 2♦	= Next Level Overcall		XX XX KQJTX KX 5.5 tricks	XX XX AQJTX ATX 6.5 tricks
1♥ : bid 2♠	= Intermediate Jump Overcall		AQJXXX XX KQX XX 6.5 tricks	AKJTX XX KQXX X 7 tricks
1♦ : bid 3♠	= Double Jump Overcall ( no defensive tricks )		KQJXXXX XX XX XX 6 tricks	AKQJXXX XX X XXX 7 tricks

Although a vulnerable double jump to 3 Spades appears an overbid, consider the alternatives. We have heard, if not admired, opponents who overcall at the one level, then the two level, followed by the three level (and then get doubled for penalties). An immediate 3S is far less likely to get doubled.

If you have defensive tricks, eg you hold 4 in oppo suit, then you are probably better to pass. If you hold a generally good hand except for oppo suit then X for take out. Doubles normally show general strength – except oppo suit – and overcalls generally show single suit. Overcallers partner should NOT bid a different suit unless extremely strong but as he can rely on overcaller suit he may well wish so support that suit even if holding very few cards in it.

NOTE: - the above sets out the general principles – in practice you might overcall on SLIGHTLY inferior hands to these examples but if you follow these guidelines you will be correct more often!

## HAND EVALUATION

Good hand evaluation, and re-evaluation as the auction continues, is essential to accurate bidding yet it is surprising how many players slavishly adhere to the A = 4; K = 3; Q = 2; J = 1 hcp's method and put going down in many contracts as simply "bad luck". Do you *really* believe that four jacks = 1 Ace?

Look at these hands:-

AJxx Qxx Kxx KQx

If you play a strong 15-17 NT will you open this 1NT? Many world class players (strong NT) will downgrade this hand and **not** open it 1NT because of its absolutely flat shape. If you play a 12-14 NT will you open it 1♠? This hand is barely worth 14 hcp's – in fact it's worth 13.5

KQxxx AK Qxxxx x

What about this? Its actually worth 15.65

AKxxxxx xx Axx x

This is a strong hand - worth 16.80

Jxxx AJx Jxxx KJ = 8.60 (if you counted 11hcp's and thought about opening . . . . .)

xxx Jx AKxxxxxx void = 15.40 (you wouldn't open this 3♦ - would you?)

KJTxxxxx Kx xx A = 16.70 (far too strong for a 2♠ or 3♠ opening!)

A very useful hand evaluator is known as Kaplan and Rubens (KnR) – try out some more hands at <http://www.jeff-goldsmith.org/cgi-bin/knr.cgi?>

## THE LOSING TRICK COUNT (A common sense approach)

A critical point arises in any auction when you support your partner's suit. At this stage you can stop feeling your way to the best denomination and start to judge how many tricks you can make. There is another, more subtle, difference as well as is illustrated by hand (a) below.

(a) WEST	EAST	WEST	EAST
♠ A Q 7 4 3 2	♠ K 9 8 5	1♠	2♠
♥ 9	♥ Q J 8 7	Pass	
♦ A K 8 6 5	♦ 10 7		
♣ 4	♣ 9 8 6		

Is there anything particularly unreasonable about this auction, after all West has only 13 high card points (HCP) and East only 6? Even if West counts 3 'length' points and tentatively makes a game try with 3♦ East is hardly likely to accept it. So we seem to have a reasonable auction, with a most unsatisfactory result because East/West can easily make 11 tricks in spades. Rather than just accept this as bad luck, we should look again at whether the point count is an accurate way of evaluating distributional hands, once a fit has been found with partner. The losing trick count (LTC), as described below gives you a much better way.

### Counting your losers

Consider only the first three cards in a suit; longer cards are always counted as winners. There are never more than 3 losers in a suit as the fourth card always has the potential to take a trick.

With three or more cards in a suit, count the ace, king and queen as winners- any other card is a loser.

With only two cards in a suit, count only the ace and king as winners.

With a singleton count only the ace as a winner. Any other card is a loser.

With a void you have no losers.

A little refinement is clearly necessary, after all, the above table would count Q 3 2 and A J 10 each as two losers. With Q 3 2 you have little chance of a winner if partner has three small cards in the suit, whereas with A J 10 you have an excellent chance of two winners if partner has three small cards. The traditional solution is to count A J 10 as only one loser but a queen unsupported by another honour card as 3 losers, but in my opinion this ignores lots of other combinations where the LTC overestimates or underestimates the strength. I think a broader approach using common sense and judgement is needed.

*Some combinations where the 'official' number of losers underestimates the strength:*

A Q doubleton    A J 10    or    A K J tripleton    I call these 'plus values'

A singleton king is a plus value

Some combinations where the 'official' number of losers overestimates the strength: K 2  
doubleton Q 3 2 tripletton I call these 'minus' values

If the hand has significantly more plus values than minus values, subtract a loser. If the hand has significantly more minus values than plus values, add a loser

Suppose you open 1♦ and your partner responds 1♠. Since you have found an 8-card spade fit you can use the LTC. Using the raw losing trick count, hands (b) and (c). each seem to have 6 losers. However (a) is full of plus values: it would be a distortion to bid less than 4♠. The only debate is whether it would qualify as a 4-loser or 5-loser hand. On the other hand (c) was a sub-minimum opening bid when you made it and is only just about raised to the status of minimum opening bid by finding a spade fit. Treat it as a 7-loser hand: worth only 2♠. Of course most hands have some plus values and some minus values, so no adjustment is needed.

(b) ♠ A J 10 8	(c) ♠ Q 10 3 2
♥ 3 2	♥ J 2
♦ A K J 10 4	♦ K Q 6 5 4
♣ A J	♣ K 3

The LTC should not be used as a security blanket. It is not an excuse to throw sensitivity and judgement out of the window. In the following auction you can assume that West is showing 5 diamonds and 4 spades

West	East
1♦	1♠
3♠	?

How do you regard these two hands?

(d) ♠ K 9 4 3 2	(e) ♠ K 9 4 3 2
♥ 8 4 2	♥ Q J 2
♦ Q J 2	♦ 8 4 2
♣ 5 3	♣ 5 3

Both have 9 losers but it is clearcut to bid 4♠ with (d) but pass with (e). If your partner has just four cards outside diamonds and spades, it is likely that the ♥Q J 2 will be at least partially wasted in (e). Equally a holding of three-small in your partner's suit is the worst possible. However in (d) all your cards are working well: you have no wasted values

Of course it is also worth listening to your opponents' bidding. If there is an overcall on your right in a suit where you have K 2 your holding is probably one loser, but if the overcall is on your left it is likely to be two losers

If hands (b), (c), (d), and (e) confuse you, perhaps the solution is not to use the LTC on balanced hands. It is on unbalanced hands (like (a)) where the LTC gives a more accurate guide than the point count. On balanced hands a properly used LTC will give a similar result to a point count (properly adjusted in the light of the bidding). Perhaps the point count is easier to use.

### Assessing Partner's losers

This is no more difficult than assessing partner's points and is done on the basis of the strength revealed in the bidding. The critical number to remember is SEVEN. That is the number of losers

in a sound opening hand, and you work up and down from there- the stronger the hand, the fewer the losers.

Here are some examples of the losers you can expect from partner's bid.

*A minimum response (usually 6-9 HCP) has 9 or 10 losers.* With such a hand responder might raise opener's suit to the two level.

*An intermediate (or jump) response (usually 10-12 HCP) has 8 losers.* With such a hand responder might jump raise opener's suit to the three level.

*A sound minimum opening bid (usually 12-15 HCP) or a strong response (13+ HCP) has 7 losers.* With such a hand opener might give a single raise in responder's suit.

*A strong opening bid (usually 16-18 HCP) has 5 or 6 losers.*

With such a hand opener might give a jump raise to partner's suit.

*A very strong opening bid (usually 19-21 HCP) has 4-5 losers*

**A minimum overcall has 8 losers**

**A minimum 2-level overcall has 7 losers**

**A minimum takeout double has 7 losers**

### Assessing the total number of losers.

If you have found a fit of at least 8 cards with partner and your hand is unbalanced it is time to abandon the point count and start to apply the losing trick count as follows:

1. Count your losers.
2. Add partner's estimated losers.
3. Deduct the total from 24 to give the number of tricks you expect to make. A good aide-memoire is to realise that 14 losers normally makes 10 tricks in a major suit: ie. game.

(f) West East 1♥ 2♥ ?	(g) West East 1♥ 3♥ ?	(h) West East 1♦ 1♥ 2♥ ?	(i) West East 1♦ 1♥ 3♥ ?
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In (f) West assumes East has 9 losers. With 6 or 7 losers West passes.

In (g) West assumes East has 8 losers. With 7 losers West passes. With 6 losers West bids 4♥.

With (h) East assumes West has 7 losers. With 7 losers East will ensure game is reached. With 9 losers East will pass. With 8 losers East may make a game try. It might depend on how his hand fits a 1♦ opening bid.

With (i) East assumes West has 6 losers. With 8 losers East will proceed to game.

Note that in (f) and (h) the heart raiser may have only 3 hearts, so it would be inappropriate to use the LTC with just 4 hearts. A no-trump continuation may be more appropriate.

Note also that the LTC works best in the area of assessing whether to bid game. It is less accurate in the slam zone where control cards are so important. The LTC might give an indication as to whether there is the potential for 12 tricks but there is no point quoting the LTC if you are missing two aces, or they start by cashing the A K in a suit.

We will finish with some examples: We start by re-examine examining hand (a)

(a) West ♠ A Q 7 4 3 2 ♥ 9 ♦ A K 8 6 5 ♣ 4	East ♠ K 9 8 5 ♥ Q J 8 7 ♦ 10 7 ♣ 9 8 6
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East raises West's opening bid of 1♠ to 2♠. West now counts losers, a total of 4 (one in each suit). East's losers are estimated as 9 or 10. Suppose West is pessimistic and assumes that East has 10 losers. West adds 4 to 10 and deducts the total from 24, leaving a total of 10. Even on the pessimistic assumption that East has 10 losers West can envisage 10 tricks, so he jumps to 4♠.

(j)	West	East	
1 loser	♠ A K J 5	♠ Q 10 4 3 2	2 losers
1 loser	♥ K Q 10 6 4 3	♥ 9 5	2 losers
2 losers	♦ 9 7	♦ A 5 3	2 losers
1 loser	♣ 7	♣ 9 6 2	3 losers
5 losers			9 losers

South	West	North	East
	1♥	P	1♠
P	4♠	All Pass	

(k)	West	East	
1 loser	♠ A Q 3 2	♠ K 9 8 6 5 4	2 losers
3 losers	♥ J 7 4 3	♥ K Q 2	1 loser
1 loser	♦ 3	♦ 8 6	2 losers
2 losers	♣ A J 3 2	♣ 8 4	2 losers
7 losers (minimum take-out double)			7 losers

South	West	North	East
1♦	Dbl	P	4♠

(l)	West	East	
0 loser	♠ A K Q 4 2	♠ J 8 6 4	3 losers
3 losers	♥ J 7 5	♥ A K Q 6	0 loser
2 losers	♦ 9 3	♦ K 7 5 2	2 losers
3 losers	♣ 8 5 4	♣ 6	1 loser
8 losers (minimum 1-level overcall)			6 losers

## SUIT COMBINATIONS

Ever wondered how you should play K 10 x x opposite A 9 x x?

Or what about K 10 x x x opposite J x x?

Club players frequently come across hands that they had difficulty with in determining how to play the suit. Of course if you have information from your opponents who may have bid during the auction then that has to be taken into account but against silent opps its more of a problem. Write the hand down (if your club does not have hand records) and then use these when you get home!! Click on this link to find out more:

[http://www.bridgehands.com/S/Suit\\_Combinations.htm](http://www.bridgehands.com/S/Suit_Combinations.htm)

and also download Suitplay from <http://home.planet.nl/~narcis45/SuitPlay/>

## SPEED UP!!

There are many simple things you can do to speed up your play and to speed up the overall time taken to complete an event:-

1. If you are NORTH always complete the traveller and then place it in the middle of the table (East and others to check it) BEFORE filling in your own score card
2. If you are on LEAD then make your lead, ask any questions etc BEFORE you write down the contract on your score card
3. WHATEVER the movement ALWAYS take a note of who you are following and at the end of the round move quickly to their table
4. Do not gather up your cards until EVERYONE has agreed the result
5. If you take a longer than average time over one board then make sure you take less than average time on the next. Remember - everyone plays the same boards, so has the same problems!
6. Do NOT ask the meanings of an alert during an auction unless you have a GOOD reason for asking (curiosity is NOT a good reason). It is also against the Laws to do so. Wait until the end of the auction.
7. When you leave the table pass the boards down to the next table; do not leave them behind!

## MISBID

Your right hand opponent opens 1NT and you bid 2♣ with this hand:

♠6 ♥ K 6 5 ♦ A 8 7 ♣ A K 7 6 4 3

You are jolted out of your complacency when your partner alerts this and you remember you are playing Landy, so 2♣ shows the major suits. Partner bids 2♥. What do you do now?

The only sources of authorised information under Law 16 are calls, plays and mannerisms of opponents. Partner's alert (or answer to an opponent's question) is unauthorised information to you. You must continue bidding believing that your 2♣ was natural, therefore although you know 2♥ was just an attempt to choose between your assumed major suits, you must bid as though he has responded to your natural 2♣ with a natural 2♥. This is difficult because you know very well this will lead you to a stupid contract.

To bid anything less than 4♥ is unacceptable, after all 4♥ is where you would want to play opposite:

♠ 8 7 4 ♥ A Q 9 7 3 2 ♦ 9 3 2 ♣ 8

In real life players bid 3♣ to try to tell partner they have clubs. Partner is not allowed to 'field' this misbid. If 3♣ is passed out they must not be surprised when the director adjusts the score to 4♥ doubled, going an embarrassing number off.

See also INCORRECT EXPLANATION – often players confuse the two!