

Understanding Pairs Scoring – Matchpoint Scoring

Scoring a hand in bridge.

In bygone times we scored manually on travellers (slips of paper) so everyone had to understand how to score. Now we use Bridgemates or online software to play bridge so the art of scoring is often lost on newer players. It is, however, very important to understand scoring as it will often determine whether you should bid to the next level or not.

Trick Scores

♠ or ♥	30 points per trick above 6
♣ or ♦	20 points per trick above 6
NT	40 points for the first trick above 6 and then 30 points for each extra trick

Bonuses

Part-score (less than game ie <100 points)	50 points
Non-vulnerable Game	300 points
Vulnerable Game	500 points

Scoring a hand is similar to bidding. If you bid and make 1S you must take 7 tricks, when you score the hand it is scored as 80 points ($1 \times 30 + 50$ points for the part-score contract). The first 6 tricks do not count towards the score.

Bonuses are awarded if you reach game (100 points) on your tricks taken. So 3NT or 4 hearts/spades or 5 clubs/diamonds are considered game scores and are awarded game bonuses depending on vulnerability. Contracts of less than game only get a 50 point bonus.

For example, 4 Spades (vulnerable) making 10 tricks scores 620 points ($4 \times 30 + 500$).

If the contract goes off, the opposition gets the points as penalties. In an un-doubled non-vulnerable contract it is calculated as 50 points for each trick that the contract is short. If the pair bidding the contract are vulnerable, the opposition gets 100 points for each under-trick when the contract does not make. If the contract is doubled the penalties increase (non-vul 100, 300, 500 or vul 200, 500, 800 for 1, 2 and 3 tricks short).

Here is an example of how knowing how to score helps you make a decision on whether to bid or pass. Say the opponents bid 2S over your 2D bid. If you think you can make 2D and the opponents can probably make 2S then bidding 3D (not vulnerable) will give the opposition 50 points if you can only make 8 tricks. If you pass and the opponents make their 8 tricks in spades then they receive 110 points. If they double your 3D and you make 8 tricks you are still better off as the opposition will get 100 points instead of 110. If you are vulnerable, this obviously changes your thinking as one off doubled is now worth 200 points, so passing opponent's 2S may be the prudent action.

Scoring a bridge session

In the above section we looked at how to score a single hand. This section is about how the total bridge session is scored and how each pair is ranked by a percentage at the end.

Most of the bridge sessions that we play are scored using matchpoints. Matchpoints are allocated for each board based on each pair's relative position in the score list. Two matchpoints are allocated for each pair with a lower score and one matchpoint for each pair that has the same score. Below are some examples .

Pairs		Contract		Scores		MPs	
NS	EW	Bid	By Ld	NS	EW	NS	EW
7	8	4S	S DA	620		8	0
5	6	4S-1	S S4		100	2	6
1	2	4S-1	S HK		100	2	6
11	12	4S-1	S H4		100	2	6
3	4	3S	S D6	140		6	2

If you look at the board from a N/S perspective, pair 7 got the highest score of +620 so they get 8 MP (2 for each pair below them). Pair 3 were next on +140 so they get 6 MP (3x2). Pairs 1, 5 & 11 get 2 MP each (2 x 1) as they had the same score as two other pair and no-one below them. E/W are scored the similarly. At each round the board has a value of 8 MP shared between N/S and E/W.

Pairs		Contract		Scores		MPs	
NS	EW	Bid	By Ld	NS	EW	NS	EW
5	7	3C	S S8	110		3	5
9	8	3C+2	S S8	150		7	1
12	2	3C+2	S H5	150		7	1
4	6	3C	S H4	110		3	5
1	3	5C-2	S S8		100	0	8

In this example, N/S pair 9 & 12 have the best score of +150 so each receive 7 MP (3x2 + 1x1). Pairs 5 & 4 get 3 MP (1x2 + 1x1). Pair 1 finished at the bottom and is scored with 0 MP. E/W once again receives similar treatment with pair 3 getting 8 MP etc.

At the end of the session, the Matchpoints are tallied for each pair. The following table is from a Tuesday (21-Sep) session of 5½ tables 11 rounds by 2 boards.

Pair	Board																						Pair	Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22		
1	4	2	4	1	0	3	6	8	5	2	1	4	8	0	4	2	5	2		4	0	1	65	
2	4	6	4	4	0	5	1	4	2	0	1	8	4	1			5	2	0	0	4	2	2	57
3	4	6	4	4	3	0	7	8			8	0	0	8	1	6	4	4	6	0	8	4	3	85
4	4	2	4	1	6	8		0	8	7	4	0	3	1	0	1	2	3	3	4	6	4	67	
5	8	2	4	4	3	2	6	2	8	0	0	8	2	3	2	4		8	8	4	8	5	86	
6	0	6	4	7	8	3	6	6	3	4	4	2	8	5	7	2	1	2	3	6		6	87	
7	4	8	4	7	5	8	7	4	8	6			6	5	4	6	7	6	0	3	4	2	7	104
8	4	0	4	4		2	6	3	6	4	6	2	1	8	8	3	6	5	5	0	4	8		81
9		4	4	8	5	2	2	6	8	6	6	6	7	7	8	4	4	8	5	8	8	9		116
11	0	2	4	4	2	0	1	0	0	2	7	0		6	4	3	6	5	2	0	0	11		48
12	8	6		5	6	2	0	5	4	2	2	4	7	0	0	7	6	2	8	4	6	12		84

In this session all pairs had a 2 board sit-out, so everyone had the opportunity to play 20 boards. We also know that each board was played 5 times so the max MP score for each board is 8MP. Therefore the maximum achievable score is 20 boards x 8MP = 160MP. In other words, if one pair was able to get an absolute top score on every board they would receive 160MP.

The tallied matchpoint score for each pair is then expressed as a percentage of the maximum score. In our example, pair 9 scored the highest score with 116MP which represents a percentage of 72.5% (116/160). Pair 7 were next with 65% (104/160), etc

In sessions where all pairs do not play the same number of boards the scores are factored (adjusted) to achieve an even playing field.

For more explanation click on this link to a YouTube video by Pete Hollands (a professional Melbourne player/teacher):

[How Bridge Scoring Works](#)