

Hand evaluation - High card points (HCP)

Basic HCP

This basic evaluation method of a hand's strength assigns values to the top four honour cards as follows;

Honour	HCP value
Ace	4 points
King	3 points
Queen	2 points
Jack	1 point

Evaluating a hand on this basis determines 40 hcp in each deal. The method is simple and practical, and is used by most established bidding systems.

In particular:

- 12 hcp in your hand is generally considered suitable for opening the bidding
- 25 chcp (combined points of the partnership) is sufficient for a NT game contract
- 33 chcp is sufficient for a NT small slam contract. (At most, 1 ace is missing!)

Limitations (*when considering opening the bidding*)

- You should **half** the value of a singleton honour unless it is the ace.
- You can **reduce** your hcp, by 1 point, if your hand has no aces.

Examples

♠ Q J 10	3	(13)	HCP evaluation identifies sufficient points to open. (1NT)
♥ A K 8 4	7		
♦ J 4 3	1		
♣ Q 10 7	2		
♠ K	1½	(13)	HCP is reduced for the singleton K♠. HCP evaluation identifies insufficient points to open. (PASS)
♥ A Q 4 2	5		
♦ K 9 8 7	3		
♣ Q 9 5 2	2		
♠ K J	4	(21)	HCP evaluation identifies sufficient points to open. (2NT).
♥ A Q 2	6		
♦ K J 8 7 3	5		
♣ A J 9 2	5		
♠ 10 9	0	(11)	HCP evaluation identifies insufficient points to open. (However, for a marginal and unbalanced hand, the Basic HCP is best supplemented with further evaluation. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply the 'Rule of 20', or ... • Adjust HCP point count for shape. See below).
♥ Void	0		
♦ K Q 9 7 6	5		
♣ A Q 10 9 8 6	6		

Adjusted HCP

An enhanced basic HCP evaluation method that adjusts the point count for **suit length** and **suit shortness**, as follows.

Suit-length points	
5-card suit	1 point
6-card suit	2 points
7-card suit	3 points
Etc	max 5

Suit-shortness points		
<i>With trump support of 3/4+ cards</i>		
	3-cards	4+cards
Void	3 points	5 points
Singleton	2 points	3 points
Doubleton	1 point	1 point

Suit length points; Long suits have a value beyond the basic HCP held.

Suit shortness points; Once a trump suit has been agreed/IMPLIED, ruffing potential, as represented by short suits, becomes more significant than long suits.

Usage Summary;

- When intending to make a bid in a suit and there is no agreed trump suit, add length points to your basic HCP.
- When intending to support an agreed trump suit, add shortness points to your basic HCP.
- However, when making a bid in NT with intent to play, value basic HCP only.

Adjusted HCP Example

If opening the bidding with this hand (*from 4th example above*) ...

♠	10 9	0	
♥	Void	0	(11)
♦	K Q 9 7 6	5+1	(14)
♣	A Q 10 9 8 6	6+2	

HCP is adjusted for suit length.
Here, the adjusted HCP evaluation identifies sufficient points to open. (1♣)

If supporting (say) a minor suit opening bid by partner (*with the same hand*) ...

♠	10 9	+1	
♥	Void	+5	(11)
♦	K Q 9 7 6	5	(17)
♣	A Q 10 9 8 6	6	

HCP is adjusted for suit shortness.
Now, the adjusted HCP evaluation identifies sufficient points to jump bid to a new suit.

This example demonstrates that a hand's HCP valuation will alter as the bidding progresses.

Re-evaluate your hand after each bid.

If supporting partner in a major suit, a secondary method, 'Losing Trick Count', provides a more precise hand assessment, with a guide to follow-up bidding.