

## Losing Trick Count (LTC)

**LTC** This method of hand evaluation is used in situations where a trump suit has been established and where shape and fit are more significant than high card points (HCP) in determining the optimum level of the contract.

The method is based upon the number of 'losing tricks' in your hand (known) and in partner's hand (estimated from their bid), and then determining the appropriate level at which to support partner's suit.

**Step1 Count the losing tricks in your hand;** Any one suit has a maximum of 3 losing tricks. For each suit, including the potential trump suit, count one for a missing Ace, King or Queen in that suit, as follows;

Suit shape	Losing tricks
Void	<b>0.</b>
Singleton	Holding the Ace = <b>0</b> , otherwise count <b>1</b> , even if it is a singleton K!
Doubleton	Holding both Ace and K = <b>0</b> . Holding one but not the other = <b>1</b> , otherwise count <b>2</b> , even if it is a doubleton QJ!
3+ cards	Holding Ace, K and Q = <b>0</b> , else count <b>1</b> for <b>each</b> missing Ace, K or Q. <i>Thus, holding at best Jxx, count <b>3</b>.</i>

Add the number of losing tricks in each suit to determine the LTC value for your hand. *For a weak opening hand, the value will typically be, LTC=7.*

**Examples (counting)**

Hand 1	
♠ K 5 2	2
♥ Q 6 5 4	2
♦ 10 5 3	3
♣ Q 10 9	2

(9)

Hand 2	
♠ K 6 2	2
♥ 9 8 7 5 3	3
♦ A 9 5 4 3	2
♣ void	0

(7)

Hand 3	
♠ K 6 5	2
♥ K Q 6 5	1
♦ J 10 9	3
♣ A 9 7	2

(8)

**Step2 Estimate the ‘losing tricks’ in partner’s hand;** This will depend upon how partner has participated in the auction for you to agree the suit and to make an assumption of the LTC in partner’s hand.

Typically, if you are intending to support partner’s opening 1♥ suit, it is reasonable to assume partner has a hand with, at worst, LTC = 7\*. Furthermore, partner knows you have made this assumption and can, with a hand that has less than 7 losing tricks, make a suitable re-bid.

*\*See below for table of assumed LTC values to use for partner’s other bids.*

**Step2 Rule of 18;** Add the LTC values of your hand and partner’s hand, then subtract from 18. The result will give you an accurate guide as to the correct level of raise in that suit.

## Examples (Rule of 18)

Partner has opened the bidding with 1♥. Holding the same hands from the above examples;

Hand 1	Hand 2	Hand 3
You; LTC=9 <sup>counted</sup>	You; LTC=7 <sup>counted</sup>	You; LTC=8 <sup>counted</sup>
Partner; LTC=7 <sup>estimate</sup>	Partner; LTC=7 <sup>estimate</sup>	Partner; LTC=7 <sup>estimate</sup>
Rule of 18; $18-9-7=2$	Rule of 18; $18-7-7=4$	Rule of 18; $18-8-7=3$
Bid; 2♥	Bid; 4♥	Bid; 3♥

You are making a bid that shows the limit of your hand. However, partner will now know your LTC, and if holding less than your estimate of 7 losing tricks, can recalculate the Rule of 18 to consider advancing to a game contract or even to investigate a slam contract.

## Usage and limitations

- Do not use this method for NT contracts.
- It is best used on major suits with an 8+card fit, as a means to get to the game level where HCP alone would not.
- It is not so effective on minor suits (where a NT game contract could be a better outcome).
- When the Rule of 18 suggests a slam bid, progress the bidding via Blackwood or similar.
- Some partnerships limit its usage to supporting partner's opening bid.
- *To raise partner's major opening bid to the 2-level may be the best choice with only three trumps and 9 losing tricks. To raise to the 3-level or higher you must have at least four trumps.*

**\*Assumed LTC values for initial estimate of partner's hand**

Partner as opener	
Acol 1-level suit	7
Weak 2 suit (non-vul)	7-8
Weak 2 suit (vuln)	7
Pre-empt 3-level suit	7
Strong 2 suit	3-4
Acol 2♣	2-3
Jump raise	5
Jump shift ...on re-bid	4

Partner as responder	
Min raise	9
Jump raise	8
New suit 1-level	9
New suit 2-level	8
Jump shift	7
Partner as over-caller	
1-level & 5-card suit	8
2-level	7