

October 21st - Losing Trick Count (LTC)

When you start learning to play bridge you are taught how to calculate the number of points in a hand - Ace = 4, King = 3, Queen = 2 and Jack = 1. The more you play the more you realise that the other factor that determines the strength of your hand is distribution - whether or not you have a balanced hand. Losing Trick Count is a way of assessing this aspect of your hand. This document is an introduction - there are whole books written on this subject.

Two important points:

- You should not use LTC unless you have a trump fit with partner
- It isn't effective in no-trump contracts where points are much more important

There are three steps in the process.

1. Calculate the number of losing tricks in your hand

Do this for each suit in turn. Each suit can have a maximum of three losers - ignore the thirteenth card.

- In each suit with three or more cards, assume three losers then deduct one for each of the ace, king or queen that you hold. For example Qxx is two losers, AQx is one loser.
- With two cards in a suit count two losers and deduct one for holding the ace or king - if you have both there are no losers
- With one card in a suit count one loser unless it is the ace
- With a void there are no losers

Add the numbers for each of the four suits together to get your Losing Trick Count

A sample hand:

♠ A J 8 7 5 - two losers

♥ Q 3 - two losers

♦ K 7 - one loser

♣ Q 10 9 3 - two losers

Total is seven losers

2. Estimate how many losers partner has

A simple table for this is:

Approx Points	Typical bid	Expected losers
12-14	Opening bid	7
15-16	Shows strength with their second bid	6
Opening pre-empt		7
Minimum responding hand (6-9)	Raises 1 of a suit to the two level	9
Intermediate responding hand (10-12)	Raises 1 of a suit to the three level	8

3. Calculate how many tricks you can make

Add your losing trick count to the one you expect your partner to have. Take that number away from 24. The result is the number of tricks you should make. For example you open 1♠ and partner raises to 2♠. You have five losers, two less than would be expected for your bid. You estimate partner has nine. $24 - (5 + 9) = 10$ so you can bid game. (Some people use $18 - (5 + 9) = 4$ so you can make four spades.)