

Counting on Defense

Good defense at bridge involves work. Specifically, it involves counting. We all learned to count in kindergarten and adding and subtracting with numbers up to 40 should be a skill we learned by 3rd grade. If we want to take the most tricks we can on any given hand we need to practice this skill along with applying higher level reasoning – deductions and inferences.

The four things to count on any given bridge hand are:

1. The HCP
2. The tricks
3. The distribution of each suit
4. The distribution of each hand

Along with this, it's a good idea to try and keep track of which is the highest card in a suit at any time.

Let's start with what is probably the first skill you learned when playing bridge, which is to count your HCP. When you're on defense you have one big advantage and that's the auction. The opponent's must have bid and therefore revealed something about their hands.

Some auctions are highly revealing as to HCP and shape and some are much less so. Consider

- a) 1N-2N b) (3♥)-4♠ c) 1♠-3♠-4♠ d) 1N-3N

- a) Most revealing.

Declarer has 15 (or 14 or a bad 16) and dummy has 9 (or a good 8)

- b) Quite wide ranging.

Declarer has lots of spades and dummy didn't want to look for slam. Hard to tell much more from the auction

- c) Moderately revealing.

Declarer has at least 14 (or a good 13) and probably not 19 or more. Dummy has a narrow range, say 10-11 with 4 spades or 11-12 with 3 spades

- d) Moderately revealing.

Declarer has 15-17. Dummy has 10-15.

The good news is that the wide ranging hand of dummy will be revealed after the opening lead.

Add your HCP, dummy's HCP and declarer's *minimum* HCP.
Subtract this from 40 to obtain partner's *maximum* HCP.