

INTERMEDIATE PLUS COURSE

Lesson Three: The Losing Trick Count

We NO LONGER count points for singletons or voids in our hand but we do have The Rule of 20 for light openings with distribution. **However when we have support for partner's suit we can use the Losing Trick Count (LTC)**, which is the modern style of adding on points for singletons or voids, when we have an 8+ card fit with partner. Both Opener and Responder can use the LTC (not overcallers). To use LTC one must have BOTH:

- 4+ card support for partner
- An Unbalanced Hand

What are Losing Tricks? They are the Aces, Kings and Queens you are missing. Say Partner opens 1♥, how many Losing Tricks have you got as Responder:

♠ 87	2 Losing Tricks	♠ -	0 Losing Tricks
♥ A9832	2 Losing Tricks	♥ 9876	3 Losing Tricks
♦ 6	1 Losing Trick	♦ KQ109876	1 Losing Trick
♣ KJ1087	2 Losing Tricks	♣ K6	1 Losing Trick

Total: 7 Losing Tricks

Total: 5 Losing Tricks

In the first example, the fit is in ♥s, so we only have two losers in ♠s as we will trump the third round. Also in the diamond suit, we will trump the second round, so just one loser.

How does LTC work? We must assume **7 Losing Tricks (LTs)** for an Opener, so add our own losing tricks as Responder, take away from the Magic number which is **18** and bid to that level – easier than it sounds. Partner opens 1♥, what would you respond with:

♠ 8	1 LT	We have 7 Losing Tricks as Responder. Because we have an UNBALANCED hand AND 4+ card support we can use the LTC. So assume 7 LTs from opener, add it to our 7 LTs = 14, subtract from 18 = 4♥.
♥ Q1065	2 LTs	
♦ J1054	3 LTs	
♣ AK98	1 LT	

♠ 98	2 LTs	We have 8 Losing Tricks, so assume 7 for Opener, add them together = 15 and subtract from 18 = 3♥.
♥ J8743	3 LTs	
♦ K8	1 LT	
♣ Q432	2 LTs	

♠ KQ6	We CANNOT use the LTC as we have a BALANCED hand, so it doesn't work. Just bid a normal 2♥, showing 6 – 9 points and 4+ card support (sometimes 3+ card support).
♥ QJ76	
♦ 7642	
♣ 76	

♠ 5	Again we CANNOT use LTC as we only have 3 card support for partner so bid 2♦. Remember that to raise to 3♥ or 4♥ would ALWAYS promise 4+ card support.
♥ KJ5	
♦ K10765	
♣ K873	

Losing Trick Count from Opener

This works in the same way as for responder but Opener needs to know how many Losing Tricks to expect from Responder. Say we open 1♥ and Responder bids:

- 1♠ If Opener has a spade fit then Opener now assumes **9 Losing Tricks** for responder (as responder may only have 6+ points)
- 2♥ Opener assumes **9 Losing Tricks** (as responder has 6 – 9 pts)
- 2♦ Opener assumes 8 Losing Tricks (responder is showing 10+ points)
- 3♥ Opener assumes 8 Losing Tricks
- 4♥ Opener assumes 7 Losing Tricks

Opener can then take action accordingly but must have 4+ card support AND an unbalanced hand. Say we open 1♥ and partner responds with 2♥, what would you (opener) bid next with:

- | | |
|---------|--|
| ♠ A8 | Opener has 5 Losing Tricks here and responder showed us 9 Losing |
| ♥ AJ763 | Tricks so $5 + 9 = 14$, subtract from 18, and that leaves 4♥. |
| ♦ KQ87 | |
| ♣ K4 | |
| | |
| ♠ Q8 | Opener has 7 Losing Tricks, partner has 9 Losing Tricks, so $7 + 9 = 16$, |
| ♥ KQ876 | subtract from 18 = 2♥, so Pass. |
| ♦ A983 | |
| ♣ Q7 | |
| | |
| ♠ KQ7 | We have a balanced hand so can't use LTC. Instead bid 2NT showing |
| ♥ AK65 | 17/18 points and inviting game. Remember that partner might have |
| ♦ K32 | only 3♥s so 3NT will be our best game if partner has 7 – 9 points and |
| ♣ Q98 | only 3♥s. |

Let's look at both hands using the LTC together:

Opener	Responder	Opener	Responder
♠ AK76	♠ QJ832	1 ♥	1 ♠
♥ K432	♥ AQ6	3 ♠	4 ♠
♦ A1087	♦ 2	Pass	
♣ 5	♣ 7654		

Opener bids 1♥ (exception from the rule with 4♥s and 4♠s) and responder bids 1♠. Opener has 6 LTs, assumes 9 LTs for responder's 1♠, so bids 3♠ ($6 + 9 - 18 = 3♠$). Responder has 7 LTs so is easily good enough for 4♠. Notice how accurate the Losing Trick count is: only 23 combined points but 4♠ is unbeatable.

Appendix

Sometimes the Losing Trick Count will tell us to go to 5♥ or 5♠. Ignore this as the 5 level is no mans land so bid 4♥ or 4♠ instead. The same goes if it tells us to go to the 6 level as the LTC is accurate mainly for games and below. Use one's judgement. The LTC works well with minors as well but be cautious if it tells you to bid 4♣ or 4♦ as this will miss out on 3NT. Normally downgrade to 3♣ or 3♦ so we don't miss out on 3NT.