

Counting “Fit” Points

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The correct assessment of Fit points is one of the most critical elements of accurate hand evaluation – yet it is perhaps the most misunderstood and may be the most “mistreated” of all point count elements since it has never been “taught” properly.

Fit assessment consists of THREE elements: 1) Fit points for the number of cards in a suit, 2) Honor card points in any suit with a Fit, and 3) Distribution points for short side suits with a trump Fit.

1. **Fit points:** In their 1995 book on Hand Evaluation, J-R. Vernes and B. Charles, two renowned statisticians, state that statistical data shows that going from a 7 to 8 cards fit increases the average number of tricks made in any suit by 0.45 tricks, and by 0.55 tricks when going from 8 to 9.

Translating their findings into points means that 1 fit point should be added for an 8-card fit, and 2 fit points should be added for a 9-card fit, etc. Furthermore, these fit points apply to all suits, not just the trump suit, and to all contracts, including NT contracts.

This is at variance with most traditional point count methods which attribute only one additional point for a 9-card Fit and only in the trump suit, and none for an 8-card Fit, in any suit.

2. **Honor "card" points:** 1 point should also be added for a King, a Queen or a Jack, including K 10 x, Q J x, Q 10 x and J 10 x, in each suit that has a Fit of 8 cards or more.

And here too, adding these additional points applies to all suits, not just trumps, and to all contracts, including NT contracts.

This is at variance with the Goren/Work HCP method which only adds 1 point for these honors in only the trump suit.

Let’s look at a few hands:

Opener Responder

♠xx	♠AJx
♥xxx	♥Ax
♦AKx	♦QJxxx
♣AQxxx	♣Kxx

Using Goren/Work HCP (4321), opener has 14HL points and Responder has 16HL points.

And the bidding may go:

1♦	2♦* (inverted)
3♣	3NT
Pass	Pass

Using the Optimal Point Count (OPC) method, opener has 15 HL points and Responder has 17 HL points.

However, we must also add 1 point for the 8-card ♦ fit + 2 points for the 8-card ♣ fit with the King gives these 2 hands a total of 35 HLF points (34 points without the “wasted” ♠J). The points for a 6 NT slam.

In this example from a recent tournament, not a single pair found the 6NT contract and only three pairs bid and made 6♦.

Let’s consider the following example:

Opener	Responder
♠Ax	♠Jxx
♥xxx	♥Axx
♦AQ10xxx	♦Kxx
♣xx	♣Axxx

Using Goren/Work HCP, opener has 12HL points and Responder has 12 HL points (or 11 if one deducts for “flatness”).

The bidding may go:

1♦	2NT
Pass	Pass

Using the Optimal Point Count (OPC) method, opener has 14HL points (with no King) and Responder has 10.5 HL (with 4333 & no Q: -2 points).

However, adding 2 points for the 9-card \spadesuit fit and 1 for the \spadesuit K, both hands contain 25HLF after adjusting for wasted honors. Enough points for 3NT.

3. Distribution-Fit points : In his 1966 book, Modern Competitive Bidding, J-R. Vernes states : "Statistics show that the distributional value of a short suit in a hand with a trump fit varies depending upon two variables
A) the number of cards in the short suit (doubleton, singleton or void), and
B) the number of trumps held in that suit (2, 3 or 4 cards) allowing one or more ruffs. Thus, the trump support hand should count its distribution-fit points as the difference between its number of trumps and the number of cards it holds in its shortest suit".

These distribution-Fit points must be added to the Fit points and to the Honor card points.

One may conclude then that a doubleton in the support hand with 4 trumps counts 2 points, NOT 1, and that a void counts 4 points, NOT 5. This is again at variance with the Goren/Work method of 5-3-1 for the same short suits.

To illustrate consider the example:

Opener	Responder
\spadesuit KQxxx	\spadesuit A10xx
\heartsuit Axxx	\heartsuit Kx
\diamondsuit A	\diamondsuit Jxxx
\clubsuit Jxx	\clubsuit xxx

Half the field missed the game in spades since the bidding went 1 \spadesuit - 2 \spadesuit - Pass.

However, adding 2 points for the 9-card spade fit and 2 points for the heart doubleton with four trumps, Responder could bid 3 \spadesuit not 2 \spadesuit and game would be reached.

One last example, from a tournament in which not a single pair found the 6 NT contract.

Opener	Responder
\spadesuit Ax	\spadesuit xxx
\heartsuit xxx	\heartsuit AKQx
\diamondsuit Kxxxx	\diamondsuit AQx
\clubsuit AQx	\clubsuit Kxx

Using Goren/Work method Opener has 14HL points and Responder has 17HD support points (4333).

Using the OPC method Opener has 15HL points and Responder has 19 HD points (adding 1 point for the 8-card diamond fit) or 34 total points, enough for 6NT not 31 HL points a.k.a. Goren/Work.