

Keep Counting!

Counting is a major aspect of bridge and as well as counting each suit as it is played it is very important to keep counting high card points throughout the play of the hand.

After the following bidding:

West	Partner	East	You
Pass	Pass	Pass	1♣
Pass	3♣	All Pass	

You, as South end up as declarer with the hands below:

♠ T 8 7
♥ 9 6 5
♦ A K
♣ K 7 4 3 2

♠ A K Q J
♥ 8 7 4 2
♦ J 9
♣ Q 6 5

West leads the J♥. East wins with the Q♥ and cashes the A♥ and K♥ (everyone following), then shifts to a ♠. How should you continue?

You've lost the first three tricks and now can only afford to lose one ♣ trick - notice your very poor spot card holding in the suit. What do you need to happen to avoid more than one loser? Clearly you need a friendly 3-2 trump split and one opponent to hold specifically ace-doubleton.

Which opponent is more likely to have that distribution? If you've been doing your HCP counting you know that East started with 9 HCP in the ♥ suit – and East passed in 3rd seat. So clearly you can deduce that West must have the A♣. This points the way for you. At trick five, lead a low ♣ towards dummy's K. When this wins, as you knew it would, return a low ♣ and play low from your hand. When West's A♣ appears, give yourself a pat on the back for thoughtful play.

Here are all four hands:

♠ T 8 7
♥ 9 6 5
♦ A K
♣ K 7 4 3 2

♠ 6 4 3
♥ J T 3
♦ Q T 6 5 2
♣ A 8

♠ 9 5 2
♥ A K Q
♦ 8 7 4 3
♣ J T 9

♠ A K Q J
♥ 8 7 4 2
♦ J 9
♣ Q 6 5

Here's a very similar problem, where counting HCP steers you towards the best play.

The bidding goes as follows:

West	Partner	East	You
Pass	Pass	Pass	1♠
Pass	3♠	Pass	4♠

All pass

West leads the three top clubs against your 4♠ contract, and here are the hands.

♠ Q T 9 4
♥ K J T 9
♦ A 2
♣ T 4 3

♠ 8 5 2
♥ ? 5
♦ 9 7 4 3
♣ A K Q 6

♠ 7
♥ ?? 6 3 2
♦ 8 6 5
♣ 8 7 5 2

♠ A K J 6 3

♥ 7 4

♦ K Q J T

♣ J 9

You ruff the third ♣, draw trumps in three rounds, then cash your four ♦ tricks, discarding two low ♥s from dummy.

You can only afford one more loser and now it's time to bite the bullet and lead ♥s and make a decision on what to play from dummy. Clearly, if both the missing A-Q are in the East hand sitting over your K-J in dummy, there is nothing you can do and you'll just go one down and move on to the next hand.

But if the missing ♥ honours are split, then you theoretically have a pure guess whether to play the K or the J from dummy after leading low from your hand.

Do you finesse dummy's jack or go up with the king? Why?

From the first three tricks you learned that West started with 9 HCP in ♣s – and passed in first seat. Obviously, **West does not have the A♥**, but there is hope he might have the Q♥. So call for the jack from dummy. When West has to win that trick with the ace, you are home.

A few things to remember about the opponents bidding:

If an opponent passes before any bids have been made, then the most points he can have should be 11

If an opponent passes his partners bid of one of a suit then he must have less than 5 HCP

In **Summary**, as declarer there are lots of things to count ; counting cards, counting points, counting tricks, winners and losers!

Start at trick one by counting your HCP together with what you can see in dummy so you know how many points your opponents have between them.

Think about the bidding and try to place your missing honours and think about what the opening lead could mean.

Keep Counting!