

# THE LOSING TRICK COUNT (LTC)



This method of hand evaluation assesses the trick taking potential of two hands combined, especially in a suit contract. It is best used when the partnership has found a fit in a suit to play as trumps, with at least eight trumps between the two hands and at least four trumps in each hand. Usually this fit will be in a major, because when we have a fit in a minor suit we prefer to play in No Trumps. However if do want to play in a minor suit, you can use it then too.

Once an 8+ card fit has been found, you must:

- Count your losers
- Add your partner's losers
- Subtract the total from 18

The result gives the level at which you can expect to play with the fit suit as trumps.

## Counting losing tricks (losers):

- Only use it when you have an 8+ card fit.
- Only the first three cards in any suit can be losers.
- Only the ace, king and queen are winners.
- 'Droppable Honours' count as losers (i.e. a singleton king or a doubleton queen)
- The queen counts as half a loser except when combination with ace, king or jack.

♠ A <u>J</u> <u>10</u> 9 8 5 (2)
♥ Q <u>J</u> <u>10</u> 8 (2)
♦ <u>K</u> (1)
♣ <u>8</u> <u>6</u> (2)

7 losers  
11 HCP

♠ K Q <u>10</u> 9 4 (1)
♥ Q <u>J</u> <u>10</u> (2)
♦ K <u>2</u> (1)
♣ Q <u>8</u> <u>6</u> (2 ½)

6 ½ losers  
13 HCP

♠ A <u>J</u> <u>10</u> 2 (2)
♥ Q <u>J</u> <u>10</u> (2)
♦ K <u>J</u> <u>3</u> (2)
♣ A <u>J</u> <u>8</u> (2)

7 losers  
17 HCP

♠ K Q <u>10</u> 9 7 4 (1)
♥ <u>5</u> (1)
♦ K <u>2</u> (1)
♣ Q <u>J</u> <u>9</u> 8 6 (2)

5 losers  
11 HCP

## Refinements:

- With no aces, deduct ½ a loser. With no aces and no kings, deduct a full loser.

♠ K <u>J</u> <u>10</u> 9 8 5 (2)
♥ Q <u>J</u> <u>10</u> 8 (2)
♦ <u>K</u> (1)
♣ <u>8</u> <u>6</u> (2)

7 ½ losers  
(7 underlined +  
½ for 'No Aces')  
10 HCP

♠ Q <u>J</u> <u>10</u> 9 (2)
♥ Q <u>J</u> <u>10</u> (2)
♦ Q <u>5</u> <u>2</u> (2 ½)
♣ Q <u>8</u> <u>6</u> (2 ½)

10 losers.  
(7 underlined ½ + ½  
for two unsupported  
queens + 1 for no  
aces or kings)  
10 HCP

- If partner has opened 1NT, assume he has 8 losers.

## Using the Losing Trick Count

Once you have found a fit, use the Losing Trick Count to assess your own hand. You then need to make an initial assumption about how many losing tricks your partner has. If he has opened the bidding at the 1 level, assume he has 7 losers (or 8 losers if he has opened 1NT). If he has given a minimum response to your opening bid, assume he has 9 losers. If he has more than the base assumptions he will reflect this in his subsequent bidding.

- Minimum Opener = Assume 7 losers
- Minimum Responder = Assume 9 losers

Once you have added your own losers and partner's losers together, you take the total away from 18 and the answer is what you should bid. For example, with 15 losers you can safely bid at the 3 level.

### Example 1.

<b>West</b>	<b>East</b>	<b>West</b>	<b>East</b>
♠ K 4 3 2	♠ A 8 7 6	1♥	1♠
♥ A K 4 3 2	♥ 8 5	?	
♦ K 3 2	♦ A Q 7 6		
♣ 2	♣ 10 5 3		

West opens 1♥. East bids 1♠. West now knows they have a fit. West counts his losers (6). He shows his extra strength by bidding one level higher than minimum, i.e. 3♠. (Using the maths of the LTC, he knows that if partner is minimum with 9 losers then they have a combined 15 losers (6+9), and 18-15 = 3, so he can bid 3♠.)

East now knows they have a fit, and that partner has only 6 losers. East has 8 losers, not the 9 that partner will have assumed. They have 14 losers in total, so East bids 4♠.

### Example 2.

<b>West</b>	<b>East</b>	<b>West</b>	<b>East</b>
♠ K 4 3 2	♠ A Q 7 6 5	1♥	1♠
♥ A K	♥ 8 5	4♠	?
♦ A K 8 5 4	♦ 3 2		
♣ 3 2	♣ A K 5 4		

West has found a fit and assumes partner has 9 losers. West has 5 losers. 18-14 = 4, so he bids 4♠. East works out that West must have only 5 losers for his bid, but East only has 6 losers, not 9. They have 11 losers (5 + 6) between them. 18-11 = 7, a potential grand slam!!! So East should bid 4NT (Blackwood).

**Example 3.**

<b>West</b> ♠ A 8 6 4 ♥ K Q 3 ♦ Q J 6 ♣ 9 8 7	<b>East</b> ♠ K Q 9 2 ♥ A 9 7 6 ♦ 8 2 ♣ Q J 3	<b>West</b> <b>East</b> 1NT    2♣ 2♠    ?
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Hands that are opened with a weak no trump will often be very weak in terms of losers (8 or 9 losers). If you find a fit using Stayman, you must take into account that your partner may have just such a weak hand:

Here East has 7 losing tricks and might be tempted to bid 4♠ after a fit has been found. East assumes West has 8 losers and bids 3♠. West knows that East has assumed he has 8 losers, and as that is indeed what West has, he passes. If West has 7 losers, he will raise to 3♠.

It is vital that both partners agree that the base assumption for a 1NT opening bid is to assume 8 losers, and if opener has only 7 losers he shows this extra strength in his subsequent bidding.

**Example 4.**

<b>West</b> ♠ K 4 2 ♥ A 10 8 6 4 ♦ A K 3 2 ♣ 9	<b>East</b> ♠ 9 7 5 ♥ 9 7 6 5 3 2 ♦ - ♣ A J 7 5	<b>West</b> <b>East</b> 1♥    3♥ ?
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East has a fit and just 8 losers. He bids 3♥. West has 8 losers so bids game. The partnership has only 18 HCP but East's hand is massive. He can count 5 distribution points for his void so has invitational points. The LTC arrives at the same conclusion.