



## Counting the Hand: Distribution



1. There are two different ways that we can count distribution. We can count either:
  - Distribution of a suit. For example, we do this instinctively in the trump suit when we are drawing trumps. We count them as they appear.
  - Distribution, or shape, of one opponent's hand.
2. Some inferences are readily available from the bidding. If you draw these inferences, it can help you in the play or the defense of the hand.
  - An opening No Trump bidder does not have a singleton, a void or a six-card suit.
  - A responder who employs the Stayman convention has four cards in one or both majors.
  - A responder who raises a minor suit does not have a four-card major suit.
  - A weak two-bidder has exactly a six-card suit.
  - A 1H or 1S opener typically has at least a five-card suit.
  - If the opponents have opened and raised a major suit and you and your partner have five cards in the suit, the opponents' major suit is divided 5-3.
3. Other inferences can be drawn during the play of the hand:
  - When a player shows out in a suit, you can count the exact distribution of the suit.
  - There are 13 cards in each suit. If the distribution of a suit is known for three hands, then the fourth hand has the remaining cards in that suit.

### Play inferences (cont'd.):

- Each player has 13 cards. If you know the distribution of three suits in a player's hand, then you know the distribution of the fourth suit as well.
  - If an opening leader against a No Trump contract leads a deuce (two), she does not have a five-card suit.
  - If an opening leader leads a low card, she does not have an honor sequence in the suit.
  - If an opening leader leads a low card, she has either a singleton, or three or more cards in the suit.
4. When the necessary information is not readily available, you should try to make a discovery play. This is simply any line of play that is designed to reveal information about the hidden hands so that you will learn how to play a critical suit.
5. Try this example. You have arrived in a contract of 7 No Trump. How do you arrange to win all the tricks?

	<u>North</u>
	♠AQ5
Contract: 7 NT	♥K105
	♦K42
Opening lead: D 9	♣AJ87

	<u>South</u>
	♠KJ4
	♥AJ9
	♦AQ10
	♣KQ103

As declarer you can count 3 spades, 3 diamonds, 4 clubs and at least 2 hearts. Your thirteenth trick will have to come from “guessing” the location of the heart queen. Which way should you guess it?

**Answer:** It's best to play the other suits first (discovery play). In the course of cashing your winners, you discover that West has exactly 2 spades, 2 diamonds and 3 clubs. Therefore her six remaining cards must all be hearts. In that case, East has only one heart. You can now claim. Cash the heart ace and, if East doesn't play the queen, finesse against West for the missing queen.

6. As a defender, it is usually productive to try to count the distribution of declarer's hand. You can do this based on clues from the bidding, as well as clues from the play to the early tricks.
7. Remember to give count signals as a defender when you are following to a suit led by declarer's side.
  - With an even number of cards, play high-low (but do not signal with a high card that may waste a trick).
  - With an odd number of cards, play low-high.

Count signals are particularly useful when you are trying to determine when to win your ace in a suit. In this example, imagine that you are East.

Example:

	<u>North</u>	
	♠732	
Contract: 3 NT	♥A4	
Opening lead: H J	♦QJ1085	<u>East</u>
	♣653	♠J6
		♥K752
		♦A76
		♣J1098

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
Pass	3 NT	All Pass	2 NT

Your partner leads the jack of hearts. You win the first trick with the king and return a heart to drive out dummy's ace; declarer follows suit with low hearts. Your goal now should be to limit declarer to as few diamond tricks as possible:

- if she has Kxxx, you can't stop her from winning 4 diamond tricks;
  - if she has Kxx, you can limit her to two tricks by holding up your ace twice;
  - if she has Kx, you can limit her to one trick by winning the 2<sup>nd</sup> round.
- So which will it be? You need to know how many diamonds declarer has. She won't tell you, but your partner will! She will give you a count signal.

At trick three, declarer leads a low diamond from dummy to her king and your partner plays the three. Then declarer leads the two of diamonds and partner plays the four. There is one missing diamond and you now know that your partner holds it, since she played low-high (odd number). So win your ace now. You will hold declarer to eight tricks.

(cont'd.) The whole deal:

	<u>North</u>	
	♠732	
	♥A4	
<u>West</u>	♦QJ1085	<u>East</u>
♠Q1085	♣653	♠J6
♥J1096		♥K752
♦943	<u>South</u>	♦A76
♣74	♠AK94	♣J1098
	♥Q83	
	♦K2	
	♣AKQ2	

Since neither clubs nor spades divide three-three, declarer can win only eight tricks (2 spades, 2 hearts, one diamond and 3 clubs). If you did not play count signals and ducked the second diamond lead to guard against declarer's having three diamonds, she would make her contract.