

Hand Evaluation

The 4-3-2-1 point count is easy to use, but doesn't take into account factors that may dramatically improve the value of a hand. Here are some tips that will help you make better decisions when you are wondering whether to "go low" or "go high".

Upgrade your hand if the hcp are mostly aces and kings.

Downgrade the hand if most of your points are queens or jacks (quacks).

An ace is worth more than 4 jacks or 2 queens.

A king is worth more than a queen + jack.

Concentration (2 or more honors in same suit) is much better than scattered hcp.

Compare the trick taking potential of these 4 hands:

Axxx	Axxx	AQxx	AKQJ
Kxx	Kxx	KJx	xxx
Qxx	QJx	xxx	xxx
Jxx	xxx	xxx	xxx

Tens and nines add substantial trick taking potential when combined with higher honors.

AJx opposite xxx = 25% chance of 2 tricks

AJT opposite xxx = 75% chance of 2 tricks

Axx opposite Qxx = 50% chance of 2 tricks

Axx opposite QT9 = 75% chance of 2 tricks

Points in long suits (yours or partner's) are more valuable than points in short suits.

You are the dealer and pick up AQxxx, KJxxx, xx, x. This is a clear 1♠ opening.

Change the hand to xxxxx, Jxxxx, AQ, K and it becomes a clear pass.

Long suits are especially powerful when headed by the ace.

Compare the potential of these 2 hands after partner's 1NT opening:

a) xxx, xxx, xx, AJTxx There is a certain entry to the long clubs.

b) xxx, xxx, Ax, JTxxx The opp's may knock out the entry before suit is set up.

Queens or kings in partner's long suit(s) have more value than the same cards outside partner's suit(s).

Compare these 2 hands after partner opens 1♠ and you raise to 2♠:

- a) Kxxx, Axxx, xxx, xx You have 2 cards that are known to be working. Cooperate enthusiastically with any forward move that partner makes.
- b) xxxx, Axxx, Kxx, xx The king on this hand is an uncertain value. It may be worth a full trick or it could be worth nothing at all. Proceed with caution.

Extra trumps = extra tricks

A nine-card trump fit will frequently produce an extra trick compared to an 8-card trump fit. When your partner makes a game try after you raise, go high when you have an unexpected extra trump.

Positional advantage (your side's high cards sitting over their high cards) means more finesses will win.

Let's say the bidding starts (1x)-1NT-(P)-? and you have a hand that would be invitational if partner opened 1NT. In this position you should force to game rather than invite with such a hand because your side has a significant positional advantage with the bulk of the opponents hcp sitting in front of your partner's strong hand.

Upgrade NT hands where minimal hcp give double stoppers.

Compare these 2 hands after they open 1♥ and you overcall 1NT:

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| a) ♠ Kxx | b) ♠ Kxx |
| ♥ AKxx | ♥ QJxx |
| ♦ QJx | ♦ QJx |
| ♣ QJx | ♣ AKx |

What would you do with each of these hands after partner makes an invitational raise to 2NT? Keep in mind that partner also knows about the "positional advantage" so his 2NT invite may be a hand that looks like Axx, xx, Kxxx, xxxx

Hand a) has 7 hcp tied up in the heart suit that is likely to produce only 2 tricks. This hand rejects the invite because on a heart lead there won't be enough time to set up tricks before the hearts run.

Hand b) has only 3 hcp in hearts but still has a double stopper. That frees up 4 hcp that can be used for developing tricks in partner's minor(s). This hand accepts the invite.

West	North	East	South	Board 1	North	
	1S	P	1NT	None Vul	S AQT76	
P	2H	P	?		H QJ62	
					D 4	
				West	C K93	East
				S J95		S 832
				H 874		H K
				D AQ9		D KJ85
				C AT64	South	C QJ752
					S K4	
					H AT953	
					D T7632	
					C 8	

South should raise directly to 4H. Note there is a play for game if North has as little as Axxxx, xxxx, xx, xx. Anytime you have a play for game opposite a sub-minimum in partner's hand don't bother inviting, just bid it.

West	North	East	South	Board 2	North	
		?		N-S Vul	S KQ63	
					H A54	
					D J43	
				West	C 864	East
				S T8542		S 97
				H Q32		H KT7
				D A76		D KQ9
				C J7	South	C AKQT5
					S AJ	
					H J986	
					D T852	
					C 932	

East should open 1C planning to show 18-19 balanced. This hand is too strong for a 15-17 NT opening because of the powerful 5-card club suit and no stray queens and no jacks.

West	North	East	South	Board 3	North	
			1NT	E-W Vul	S 32	
P	?				H 832	
					D 94	
				West	C AKT976	East
				S AT875		S K9
				H T6		H A9754
				D K76		D QT52
				C Q84	South	C 52
					S QJ64	
					H KQJ	
					D AJ83	
					C J3	

North should raise a 15-17 NT opening directly to 3NT. The north hand will produce 5 tricks anytime the opponents clubs are divided 3-2 and may produce 6 tricks when opener has either the club Queen or Jack or 3+ clubs.

West	North	East	South	Board 4	North	
1S	P	2NT	P	Both Vul	S QT	
3D*	P	4NT	P		H 9854	
?					D KQJ5	
				West	C 932	East
				S A97532		S KJ64
				H KJ63		H A
				D 4		D 873
				C A8	South	C KQJ64
					S 8	
					H QJT2	
					D AT962	
					C T75	

2NT = game forcing raise, with 4+ card support
3D = singleton or void
4NT = Keycard Blackwood

When East bids keycard, West's correct response is 2S showing 2 keycards plus the trump queen. There are only 3 trumps missing; a 78% chance the suit will split 2-1. Even when the suit splits 3-0 the suit may be played for no losers if partner has the jack.

West	North	East	South	Board 5		North	
	1S	P	2S	N-S Vul		S AKJ32	
P	3D*	P	?			H 95	
						D KJT4	
				West		C A3	East
				S T4			S 985
				H K863			H QJT
				D A973			D 862
				C Q85		South	C KJT4
						S Q76	
						H A742	
						D Q5	
						C 9762	

3D = natural game try
 South happily accepts a game try with 3 important cards.
 Both queens are known to be in partner's long suits and the
 outside ace is a sure value.

West	North	East	South	Board 6		North	
		1D	2D*	E-W Vul		S KT84	
3D	?					H Q976	
						D 42	
				West		C 875	East
				S J52			S 7
				H 5			H K82
				D QJT85			D AK973
				C AT94		South	C KJ32
						S AQ963	
						H AJT43	
						D 6	
						C Q6	

*2D = 5+5+ Majors
 North should bid 4S: both honor cards are in partner's long
 suits where they are working hard and North's length in the
 Majors means extra offense with a double fit for both
 sides.