# Counting as Declarer

## There are lots of things to count!

- Counting #s of cards: Number of cards out in a suit, hand shapes
- Counting points
- Counting tricks: your winners and losers, your opponents' winners and losers

## Counting cards

- Instead of counting to 13 every time, focus on *how many cards the opponents started with* and *how they break*.
    - Ex. If you have an 8 card trump fit, there are 5 cards out. If RHO (right-hand opponent) shows out on the second round, you know that the trumps are splitting 4-1 with LHO (left-hand opponent) having 4.
- Know your hand shapes really well (4333, 4432, 4441, etc.). This is the distribution of not only each hand, **but how a suit splits around the table**. The better you know these shapes, the easier they are to remember.
    - Ex. If I have 5 spades, LHO has 4, dummy has 3, and RHO has 1, I would remember that spades are distributed 5431.
    - There is a great simple game to practice this on [bridgewinners.com](bridgewinners.com). Click on the first tab that says explore. Then, under games, click BBO Counting Game.
- Start by counting 1 suit.
    - At the end of every hand (when you have time), try to write down the distribution of one suit. (I would write something like ♠5431.) You can't always figure it out, especially when there's a claim.
    - **Your bridge will probably temporarily get WORSE.** That's OK.

## Counting points

- Counting HCP is good because there are always exactly 40 HCP in the deck.
- At trick 1, I add my HCP and dummy's HCP so I know how many points the defenders have between them.
- Try to remember who had the big cards (aces and kings). Losing a queen or two isn't ideal, but counting is hard.
- If you can, it's also good to think about an opponent's shape combined with strength—their points including distribution points.
    - Ex. RHO made a simple raise of 2♥ over their partner's 1♥ opening. Normally, we'd assume that RHO can have up to a bad 10 HCP. If you find out early in the play that RHO has a singleton, this changes. They would invite with about 9 HCP, so now we can assume that RHO has at most 8 HCP.

## Common inferences

*Negative inferences:* Make assumptions about the opponents' hands based on things they didn't do. Your opponent's hand needs to make sense in the context of the bidding (or lack thereof).

**Your opponents give information from what they *didn't* bid.**
1. If your opponent opens 1m, they don't have 5 cards in a major.
2. If your opponent opens 1♥, they don't have 5♠.
3. If they opened 1♦ and show up with only 3 diamonds, they are 4432 (if your opponents are playing standard).
4. If someone opens 1 of a suit and you find that they are balanced, their point count is not in one of their NT ranges.

**Your opponents' passes mean almost as much as their bids do.**
5. A PASSED HAND HAS AT MOST 11 POINTS!
   ○ Remember that not *overcalling* does not make someone a passed hand. If you open 1♠ and LHO passed, they could still easily have 14 HCP with no good bid.
6. If you open 1♦, LHO won't have 5 decent spades if they've shown up with some points.

**You can get inferences from the lead as well.**
● Why did your opponent make the lead they did?
   ○ If opening leader didn't lead the A or K at trick 1, they probably don't have AK in a side suit. (With some exceptions.)
   ○ If your opponent made an unattractive lead (leading away from a J or Q, for example), they usually don't have a better one, like a sequence in a side suit.

## Using these inferences in the play

● I start thinking about shape at trick 1. When dummy comes down, you're allowed to think for a minute or so and formulate a plan.
   ○ I figure out how many points the opponents have between them.
   ○ I figure out how many of each suit the opponents have between them.
   ○ I consider any inferences I have from the bidding. **Try to remember just one inference that seems the most likely to be useful later.**
   ○ Then I go through the usual steps of making a plan: counting losers/winners, etc.
● **When an opponent shows out in a suit, you know how many in the suit they started with AND how many their partner started with.** You know the whole suit!
● **You can locate honors based on counting HCP.** If a passed hand has already shown up with 10 points, they likely don't have another Q.
● **You can figure out how to play suits based on shape.**
   ○ If one player is known to have a lot of cards in the other suits, they are more likely to be short. Finesse **through** the person with more cards—they're more likely to have the missing honor.

# Hands

**D**

**N  North**
♠ 2
♥ 643
♦ 86
♣ AK108632

**W  West**
♠ AJ98
♥ A9
♦ 10972
♣ 954

**S  South**
♠ Q1043
♥ 82
♦ AKJ543
♣ Q

| W | N | E | S |
|---|---|---|---|
|   | 3♣ | 3♥ | P |
| 4♥ | P | P | P |

4♥ E          NS: 0 EW: 0

**Lead:** ♣Q

**Key idea:** When North shows up with 7 clubs and 3 hearts, you know they have short spades. ♠K and then leading towards the ♠9 the best play. BONUS: To get more information on the shape, declarer can afford to lead one round of diamonds after pulling trump. South will play another diamond, and then North is marked as 1327, and the play is 100%

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**D**

**N  North**
♠ Q654
♥ KJ10
♦ 865
♣ K65

**W  West**
♠ J10
♥ Q9874
♦ 92
♣ J1074

**E  East**
♠ 32
♥ 32
♦ AK1074
♣ Q932

**S  South**
♠ AK987
♥ A65
♦ QJ3
♣ A8

| W | N | E | S |
|---|---|---|---|
|   |   | P | 1♠ |
| P | 2♠ | P | 4♠ |
| P | P | P |   |

4♠ S          NS: 0 EW: 0

**Lead:** ♦9

**Key idea:** Declarer needs to find the ♥Q. At trick 3, declarer sees that West started with 2 diamonds and East 5, and after pulling trump, each defender started with 2 spades. West has 9 cards in the round suits, and East only 6, so declarer should play West for the Q of diamonds.
*(This concept is called Vacant Spaces.)*

## Board 1

**N  North**
♠ 9
♥ J9632
♦ 2
♣ J87643

**D**

**W  West**
♠ AK10532
♥ 4
♦ 1054
♣ AQ9

**E  East**
♠ Q7
♥ A75
♦ Q98763
♣ K10

**S  South**
♠ J864
♥ KQ108
♦ AKJ
♣ 52

| W | N | E | S |
|---|---|---|---|
|   |   |   | 1♦ |
| 1♠ | P | 1NT | P |
| 3♠ | P | 4♠ | P |
| P | P |   |   |

4♠ W          NS: 0 EW: 0

**Lead:** ♦2

**Key idea:** When North leads a diamond, South can only have 3 diamonds. The only time South would open 1♦ with 3 is when they're 4432. We know the whole shape at trick 1! North is 1516. This means that in trumps, we should cash the Q and **lead to the ten.**

## Board 2

**N  North**
♠ Q82
♥ 75
♦ AK864
♣ AQ5

**D**

**W  West**
♠ 1075
♥ AKJ3
♦ 53
♣ K1084

**E  East**
♠ AK9
♥ 1092
♦ J972
♣ J93

**S  South**
♠ J643
♥ Q864
♦ Q10
♣ 762

| W | N | E | S |
|---|---|---|---|
| P | 1NT | P | P |
| P |   |   |   |

1NT N          NS: 0 EW: 0

**Lead:** ♥T

**Key idea:** On the run of the 4 hearts, we see West show up with the AKJ of hearts. When West shifts to a club and the Q holds, we know West has the ♣K. That is 11 HCP, and West is a passed hand. East has the rest of the points, so the right play in diamonds is **low to the ten.**