

Count like a pro¹!

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¹ Results not guaranteed. Also, this is hard!

NIGHTMARE! What card do you hold onto?

N cwoffee	W	N	E	S
♠ 10	P	2♣	P	2♥
♥	P	2♥	P	2NT
♦	P	3♣	P	3♦
♣	P	3NT	P	P
	P			

	E Robot
♥ 8	♠ Q
♥ 10	♥
♣ J	♦ K
	♣

S kuhchung	
♠	
♥	
♦	
♣	

Select cards to play for all 4 players	
3NT S	NS: 10 EW: 1

You are East. Both cards in your hand are high. What do you discard?

Unfair? YES!

Did we do this to ourselves? Well...

Let he who has never wrongly discarded cast the first stone.

Counting is easy, right? It's just arithmetic!

Let's say this is your trump suit.

AKT8

QJ92

Do you do this?

$$4+4 = 8$$

So the opponents have 5.

Play the A and K. Both opponents followed. They played 4.
There's one out.

Or:

Play two rounds. Both follow.

T8

QJ

4 times 2 is 8. I see 4 more, that's 12. Someone has 1 left.

Now, just do this for every side suit too!



ARITHMETIC IS EXHAUSTING.

It is too hard to do this much math! Really!

- You are busy thinking about if a card is onside or offside.
- You are thinking about what you will play if you come in on defense.
- You are thinking and hoping for partner to hold certain cards, or perhaps certain length.
- You are thinking about what to signal.
- You are thinking about if you can afford to signal.
- You are trying to not scream at partner about the last board.
- You do not have the brainpower to do this much arithmetic. I absolve you of it.



How do pros count?

We don't do math.

We have it **memorized**. We call it **shape**.

4 numbers that add to 13 is a **shape**.

There are 13 cards in a suit. We can count a suit individually by using **shape**.

A hand has 13 cards. We can count out somebody else's hand by using **shape**.

Math takes important information, throws it into an immersion blender, and turns it into soup. That was information we needed!

Advantages of shape

Effective.

Stop forgetting what dummy looked like.

Visualization.

Lazy. Save energy for what really matters.

Practice Hand

[7NT](#)

Play as South.

Notes

1. Stop at trick 3. Count the spades
2. Stop at trick 6. Count the diamonds
3. Stop at trick 8. Count the clubs
4. What is the heart shape around the table?
5. How do you play hearts?

Information soup? Sounds yummy!



What did I mean when I said that arithmetic turns information into soup?

Chris's Opinion:

Aggregating the numbers (adding them all up) trains your mind to think **incorrectly** about bridge. It matters who had how many!

They didn't play the 8-card fit. They played the 5-3 fit (or whatever.) That is important information!

4 times 2 is 8, plus 3 is... **stop**.

Our suit was 5-2. RHO had 2. LHO had 4. They broke 4-2. The suit went 5-4-2-2.

Put what you know about their hands together. LHO had 4 of the side suit and 3 trumps. You've already counted half his hand.

Don't turn your information into soup!

This will help you **visualize** the hand. You will develop x-ray vision!



This is what a bridge hand looks like. No soup for you! (This one is 3334, by the way!)

Drilling your shapes

Chris, your memory is so good! I don't remember hands the way you do!

I PRACTICED. I DRILLED. NOBODY GOT GOOD WITHOUT WORKING ON IT!

But you can drill as you play.

Form this habit!

1. When you count your cards face down to make sure you have 13, do not count them one at a time!
 - a. Choose a shape for today. Count your cards face down in 4 piles that make a shape. E.g. 5-3-3-2.
 - b. Count every one of your hands this way for this session. Shuffle the numbers around too.
2. After you've sorted your hand, recite your shape to yourself.
3. When dummy comes down, mentally note dummy's shape.

Every deal has up to 3 opportunities to practice **shape**!

There are only about [20 shapes](#) (Hand Pattern Probabilities) that I think you need to remember. The others are too uncommon/weird.

You will get worse before you get better.

There is light at the end of the tunnel! Don't lose hope!



Practice Hand

[They tell us everything](#)

Notes

1. Don't play methods like this!
2. Let's practice counting.
3. Why is this relevant? It's nice to know you can exit a suit without ever giving a ruff a sluff, for example.



Take stock of everything!

General bridge advice: don't ask yourself "what should I do?"

First, pay attention to what you should know. Only after that does the question "what should I do?" have meaning.

We have many sources for the count:

1. The bidding
2. Partner's lead
3. Our count signals
4. Empathy!

Practice Hand (2 fer 1!)

[Link to hand](#)

Play from **east**.

The opponents lead 3rd best from even, low from odd.

Notes

1. Count your winners. We have 11 tricks, need 1 more. A heart ruff in dummy would be an easy 12
2. Take a guess at the diamond suit.
3. Trick 2 - oops. How did clubs break?
4. Trick 5 - how do spades break?
5. We know the two black suits. Refine your diamond guess if you haven't already.
6. How do hearts break?
7. How do you play?

Then replay the same hand as **north**.

Notes

1. Trick 1 - how are the diamonds?
2. Trick 2 - how are the clubs?
3. Trick 5 - how are the spades?
4. What is declarer's shape?
5. If you came up with the correct shape, that is already plenty good! Super duper extra bonus credit: **What do you play now?**

The cardinal sin of not counting

When somebody else (not you or dummy) shows out, it is a **sin** to not know how that suit divided!

- Eddie Kantar (paraphrased)



Form this habit!

When partner or declarer shows out:

1. Stop. (If you already played to the trick, keep your card face up. If everyone moves to quit the trick, ask to see the cards again and just focus on yourself.)
2. Get the count.
3. Turn the card over and proceed.

Practice Hand

[Count this](#)

Play from North.

Notes:

1. Trick 3 - How do the hearts divide?
2. Trick 5 - How do the diamonds divide?
3. At trick 8, we ruff a club.
4. How many spades *at most* does West have?

Practice Hand

[Extremely fast count](#)

Notes

Play as South.

Trick 1

1. How many hearts does declarer have? Use the bidding.
2. Where is the HQ?
3. How many clubs do you think declarer has? Use the auction. It's okay to guess. Did you guess 6? I did.

Trick 4

4. How many diamonds did declarer start with? And partner?
5. What do you think declarer's shape is now?
6. Do you think opener had 4 spades for this sequence?
7. Okay, so what do we think declarer's actual shape is?

This is not guaranteed, but this is what real bridge is like!

I counted but it didn't matter!

This happens.

The good news is, you're going to be so good at counting, it's automatic. It's just another day of playing bridge.

"Debbie, do you have any advice?"

"Count."

3 rounds later:

"Debbie, it's not working."

"So you're just going to give it up?"

Practice Hand

[Your reward for counting](#)

Play as North

Notes

1. Trick 1 - What is the heart position? Use the auction.
2. Trick 3 - What is the diamond position?
3. Trick 4 - Spade position?
4. Did you notice? You have a full count now! What are the clubs?
5. Finally, what is your line?

The play record does not take the best line. You can engineer an endplay from the position given at trick 4!

In fact, you can even play the spade suit a trick better. And *still* get the endplay.

At trick 5, win the CA, SA, HA to remove West's singleton heart, ruff the spade, then exit a club. West is endplayed!

In Conclusion

Counting is hard, but it is also fun.

The more you work at it, the easier it gets.

At some point, you get so good at it you even realize when you don't **need** to count.

But... just don't count when you play against me please. Take a break. You earned it. Thanks.