

Counting Cards

Counting a hand can come in several different forms. This can include counting the number of cards in each suit, counting high card points in the hidden hands or counting winners and losers. I will talk about:

1. Counting the hand which focuses on figuring out how many cards each player holds in a suit, and
2. Counting high cards to get clues where missing cards are located.

Tips for counting distribution.

1. There are 13 cards in each hand and 13 cards in each suit. But there are several methods to make counting easier that you don't have to subtract from 13. First, memorize the common patterns of the 13 cards in a suit.—4432, 4333, 4441, 5332, 5431, 6322, 7321, etc. Get so you think in the patterns
2. Concentrate on how the unseen cards divide. For example, think of the 5 unseen cards as 3-2, 4-1, or 5-0.
3. As a suit is played, you can either count up from the number of cards that you originally saw or count down from the number of missing cards, whichever is easier.
4. Review the bidding. This will give a picture of each player's hand. This review should include what a player didn't bid as well as what he bid.
5. Study the opening lead. Some conclusions can be gained from the opening lead.
6. Focus your count on just one unseen hand. Usually this will be the one that provided the most information in the bidding but can be the one with the opening lead.
7. Try to hold off critical decisions until you get a better count.
8. Watch partner's and the opponent's signals. But beware of false cards.
9. Don't try to do too much.

Counting high cards is similar to counting distribution as numbers 3 through 9 above apply to high card counting as well.

Sample Hands:

1. Dummy (North)
S K9765
H Q7
D J95
C J64

You (East)
S J1086
H A65
D A742
C A3

Bidding

South	North
1D	1S
1NT	Pass

Opening lead: C2

1. What is South's distribution?
2. How many points does partner have?
3. What should you lead after winning the CA?

2. West	East	Bidding			
S AKQJ109	S 76	North	East	South	West
H 2	H Q763	4H	P	P	4S
D KQ	D J10	P	P	P	
C 7653	C AQ1084				

North leads the AH, South follows, and then North leads the 9D. South takes the A and returns the D2. North trumps and continues with the 10H. Dummy's queen is trumped by South and overruffed by West. West draws trumps finding that South started with 4 and North 1. How should West play the clubs?

3. West	East
S AJ8	S KQ10
H A93	H 82
D KQJ	D A97
C KJ87	C A10942

North opens 3 hearts and West ends up in 6NT. North opens the HK and West wins after South follows with the 7. How should West play the clubs?

4. West	East	Bidding			
S K5	S 9842	South	West	North	East
H 53	H Q962	1C	1D	1H	2D
D KQ873	D J109	DBL	3D	P	P
C AK74	C Q6	P			

South's double is a support double showing exactly 3 hearts. North opens the JH to the queen and king. South returns a trump. North takes the Ace and returns a trump. South follows and you win in your hand. What is South's distribution? Is it safe to play 3 rounds of clubs and trump the 4th? Is it safe to lead low to the king of spades?

5. West	East	Bidding			
S AQJ76	S K1098	West	North	East	South
H J104	H Q8	1S	P	3S	P
D K4	D A75	4S	P	P	P
C A97	C KJ10				

North opens the ace and king of hearts and follows with a low heart when South discards a diamond on the second heart. South returns a diamond to the king; North follows. West draws trumps. North started with 3. Play the rest of the hand.