# Counting at Bridge

**What can you count?**
- Distribution (single suit or whole hand)
- Points
- Tricks (to make/set contract)

**What does counting help you with?**
- Bidding decisions (what can partner have?)
- Defense:
    - What suit to attack?
    - Should I hold up & how long?
- Offense
    - Who has (or is likely to have) the missing "Q" (or K or A or…)
    - Can somebody be endplayed (or squeezed)?

**What helps you count?**
- Bidding (or lack thereof)
    - What values has each player shown?
    - What is known about suit lengths?
- Opening lead (or what wasn't led)
    - What HCP (honors) are implied by the lead? By what was NOT led?
    - What length is implied by the lead?
    - Know opponent's lead conventions
- Dummy's values and distribution (plus bidding & lead)
    - On defense
    - How many points can partner have (especially easy on NT auctions)?
    - How many cards can partner have in each suit (especially ones that were bid)?
    - On offense
    - How many points are out and how are they likely divided?
    - How many cards are missing in each suit and how are they likely divided
- Prior plays in the hand
    - Refine distribution based on new information
    - Refine location of high cards based on points shown
    - On defense: Make inferences based on the way declarer is playing the hand
    - On offense: Use discovery plays to get more information
- Count and attitude signals
    - On offense, know defenders' signaling conventions
    - On defense, watch partner's signals (but be aware that declarer is watching, too)
- Advanced: Place cards where they need to be in order to make/set contract and base further counts from there
    - But don't make irrational assumptions

# Some Easy Distribution Inferences

**Bidding:**
- 1N  or 2N opener
  - Immediately: no singleton (99.9% of time) and no void
  - After Stayman: information about 4 card majors (explicit by opener; implied by responder)
    - But be careful to know if bidding Stayman promises a 4 card major
  - After transfer & passed in NT: opener has only 2 of major; responder has exactly 5 of major
- Preemptive opener
  - 2 level: Usually 6 card suit (may be 5 or a dreadful 7)
  - 3 level: Usually 7 card suit (may be 6 or a dreadful 8)
- Major opener (playing 5 card majors, at least 5)
- Overcalls (usually at least 5)
- 1N response to a minor: no 4+ card major (usually – should be always!)
- And lots more (support doubles, negative doubles, Jacoby 2N auctions,…)

**Lead:**
- Against NT, playing 4th best with no useful information from bidding (e.g. 1n-3n)
  - Lowest card (2 or lowest card not in your hand & dummy)
  - Usually exactly 4 cards in that suit
  - Usually implies no suit longer than 4 cards (or would have led that)
  - General: Rule of 11 works for both declarer & defender
- High spot card: Usually doubleton unless playing top of nothing from 3 small
- Low card in leader's bid suit: check the leads.  If they lead 4th best you can make a good inference about the length.  Ditto if they lead 3rd & 5th.

# Some Easy Point Count Inferences

**Bidding:**
- 1N  or 2N opener or 2N rebid
  - Point count well-defined and after seeing dummy can place hidden hand's count within a 3 point range
- Opponent opens and responder makes a 2/1 bid (playing 2/1 game force)
  - If there is no reason to believe the hands are very distributional, subtract your point count from 25 to get a reasonable guess at partner's values before the opening lead
- Declarer opened a suit and the dummy is exposed:
  - If declarer showed no extras, assume about 12 high card points for her hand, add your points and dummy's points and subtract from 40 to that to get a rough idea of partner's values (it's a range – declarer can be anywhere from 10 with a void to 14 balanced)
  - If declarer showed extras, increase your guess about his hand and make the same calculation as above.
  - This also applies for declarer when one of the defenders opened the bidding (for distributing the points between defenders)
- One defender opened a suit and the other failed to respond (with no interference): The defender who didn't respond has fewer than 6 HCP…and likely fewer than 5 unless she's 3-3-3-4 or short in opener's suit.

**Lead:**
- Honor (assuming it's not partner's bid suit):
  - Assume the implied touching honor (e.g. if K, assume you know 5 of leader's points)
- High spot card: Usually the missing points in that suit are in the hand you can't see (not the leader)
- As declarer in a suit contract: If missing high touching honors in a suit (e.g. AK or KQ), and it was not led, assume that leader's partner has either one or both of those honors. This assumes:
  - Bidding did not indicate a different lead
  - Another high honor combination was not led
  - A singleton was not led

# Good Habits

**Declarer:**
- As soon as you see the opening lead & dummy:
  - How many points are outstanding (i.e. in defenders' hands)?
  - Based on bidding, how are they likely to be distributed?
  - Based on bidding & lead, what is the likely distribution of hand?
  - Does the lead yield any information about what leader does or doesn't hold?
- Refine this information as the hand progresses and more information is available

**Defender:**
- As soon as you see the opening lead & dummy:
  - How many points are likely in partner's hand?
  - Based on bidding, what is declarer's likely distribution (& what is partner's)
  - Does the lead yield any information about what partner does or doesn't hold?
- Refine this information as the hand progresses and more information is available
  - Pay attention to partner's signals
    - Watch spots carefully – sometimes a 7 or 8 is low!
  - Pay attention to declarer's line of play
    - Is declarer trying to set up discards or ruffs?
    - Is declarer avoiding a suit?
    - Is declarer not playing a suit you would expect her to play?
    - Is declarer not taking "obvious" ruffs in short trump hand?
- Give partner as much help as you can by signaling (but be sure that it is information that partner needs to know – don't help declarer unnecessarily). Err on the side of being honest unless you are positive partner doesn't need the information.

# Problems

1. **Silence speaks volumes:**

| W | N | E | S |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1S | P | P | 2H |
| P | 2S | p | 3H |

|  |  |
|---|---|
| xxx | Trick 1: Clubs: K, x, x, x |
| AQxx | Trick 2: Clubs: Q, x, x, x |
| A8x | Trick 3: Clubs: J, x, A, x |
| xxx | Trick 4: Spades: x, K, A, x |
| KC led | Trick 5: Spades: J, x, x Q |
|  | Tricks 6-8: trump are drawn, East has 1, West has 3 |
| KQ |  |
| KJxxx | How should you play diamonds? |
| KJx |  |
| xxx |  |

## 2. Finding the Q: What wasn't bid?  (from Mike Lawrence):

| W | N | E | S |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1D | * | P | 2H |

|  |  |
|---|---|
| QJ10 | Trick 1: Diamonds: K, A, x, x |
| KQxx | Trick 2: Hearts: K x, x,A |
| Axx | Trick 3: Diamonds: Q, x,x, x |
| 109x | Trick 4: Diamonds: J, x, x, x |
| KD led | Trick 5: Hearts: x, Q, xC, x |
|  | Trick 6: Hearts: x, xC, J, x |
| Kxx | Trick 7: Spades: x, x, Q, x |
| J10xxx | Trick 8: Spades: 10, x, K, A |
| 10xx | Trick 9: Spades:  x, J, x, x |
| KJ |  |
|  |  |
|  | Where are the Q & A of clubs? |

3. **Negative inferences abound (from Mike Lawrence):**

| W | N | E | S | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | P | P | 1S | |
| P | 4D | p | 4S | 4D was a splinter |

|  | AJ10x | | Trick 1: Hearts: 10, x, x, x |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Qxx | | Trick 2: Hearts: x, x, J, x |
| | x | | Trick 3: Hearts: K, x, x, x |
| | QJ10xx | | Trick 4: Clubs: x, x, Q, x |

10H led

How should you play spades?

K9xxx
xxx
----
AK9xx

4. **Lead implication - take your only chance (from Mike Lawrence):**

| W | N | E | S |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1S | P | P | 2H |
| P | 3H | P | 4H |

xxx     Trick 1: Diamonds: x, x, x, 10
Q10xx
Ax      Where is the KH?
Kxxx

2D led

Jx
AJxxx
KQ10xx
Q

5. **Discovery play based on point count (from Mike Lawrence):**

| W | N | E | S |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1S | P | 2S | 3H |
| P | 4H | | |

```
        xxx                 Trick 1: Spades: A, x, x, x  East's spot is encouraging
        AJx                 Trick 2: Spades: K, x, x, x
        Qx                  Trick 3: Spades: x, x, Q, xH
        J10xxx
AS led                      How can you improve your guess in hearts?

        xx
        K9xxxxx
        KJx
        AK
```

6. **Discovery play based on distribution (from Mike Lawrence):**

| W | N | E | S | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2S | * | P | 4H | Note that EW are not vulnerable |
| P | 4N | P | 5D (1 or 4) | |
| P | 7H | | | Could/should have checked for QH first! |

```
        Ax                  Analysis: Only likely place to pitch losing spade is 4th diamond
        AK9x                  (QJ doubleton of clubs is possible, but unlikely)
        Kxx                 Trick 1: Spades: K, A, x, x
        AK10x               Trick 2: Hearts: A, x, x, x
KS led                      Trick 3: Hearts: x, x, Q, x

        xx                  How can you improve your guess in diamonds?
        QJxxx
        AQ10x
        xx
```

7. **How long to hold up - the importance of signaling**

| W | N | E | S |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | 1C |
| P | 1D | P | 2N |
| P | 3N | | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Ax | JS led |
| | xxx | Trick 1: Spades: J, x, K, x |
| | QJ10xx | Trick 2: Spades: x, x, x, A |
| | Qxx | Trick 3: Diamonds: x, x, K, x |
| J109xx | | Trick 4: Diamonds: x, ??? |
| 10xx | | |
| Axx | | Should West duck again or win this trick? |
| 109 | | What did partner play at trick 3 – it better have shown count! |

8. **Inference on defense (from Mike Lawrence):**

| W | N | E | S |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | P |
| P | 1C | P | 1S |
| P | 1N | P | 2H |
| P | 3H | P | 4H |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Jx | Small diamond led |
| | Q8xx | Trick 1: Diamonds: x, x, x, J |
| | Qxx | Trick 2: Hearts: x, x, Q, x |
| | AKQx | Trick 3: Hearts: x, x, K, A |
| Kxxx | | |
| Ax | | What should West do now? |
| K10xx | | |
| xxx | | |

**9. Endplay based on known distribution (from Mike Lawrence):**

| W | N | E | S |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1H | P | 4H | 4S |

|  | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Axxx | Trick 1: Hearts: K, x, x, x |
| | xx | Trick 2: Hearts: Q, x, x, x |
| | KQx | Trick 3: Diamonds: x, K, x, x |
| | Axxx | Trick 4: Spades: x, x, K, x |
| KH led | | Trick 5: Spades: x, J,  A, xH |
| | | |
| | K109xx | Spades haven't split so you need to avoid a club loser |
| | xx | Initial thought: play diamonds & if West ruffs in hope he has |
| | AJxx | to lead away from KC.  If he doesn't, throw him in with a trump |
| | Qx | with same hope. |
| | | |
| | | Trick 6: Diamonds: Q, x, x, x |
| | | Trick 7: Diamonds: x, xC, A, x |
| | | |
| | | Rethink your plan.  What should you do now? |

**10. Lots of implications (from Mike Lawrence):**

| W | N | E | S |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1C | P | 1H | 2D |
| * | 3D | | The double is a support double |

|  | | |
|---|---|---|
| | xx | Trick 1: Clubs: A, x, x, J |
| | xxxx | Trick 2: Clubs: K, x, xH, x |
| | Axx | Trick 3: Clubs: x, 9, xD, x |
| | Q9xx | Trick 4: Spades: K, x, x, x (no rush to win this) |
| AC led | | Trick 5: Hearts: J, A, x, x |
| | | Tricks 6-7: AS and ruff a spade |
| | Axx | |
| | A | How should you play diamonds? |
| | KJT9x | |
| | 10xxx | |

# Counting at Bridge - Solutions

1. To locate the QD, remember the bidding and East's point count:

   - With AC, singleton heart and QD, East would surely have responded

     - Most people would have responded with AC, singleton and 3 spades

   - Play AK of diamonds and drop West's doubleton queen

     - West has 5 spades (bid) and showed up with 3 hearts & 3 clubs, so has only 2 diamonds

2. To locate the clubs, note the point count implied:

   - West has shown up with a balanced hand and 14 HCP

     - Either 4-3-4-2 or 3-3-4-3

     - A spades, A hearts, KQJ diamonds = 14

   - If West has the AQ (you'd be doomed), he would have opened 2N (14+6=20)

   - If East has the AQ (you'd be golden), but he would have responded

   - If West has the Q, but not the A, he would have opened 1N (14+2=16)

   - Therefore, West must have the A, but not the Q (14+4=18)

3. From bidding (East didn't open) and opening lead:

   - East has the AKJ of hearts (A by assumption since 10 was led)

   - West did not lead a diamond (a clear lead with AK) so East must have either the A or K

   - 8 points in hearts + 3 (or 4) points in diamonds=11 or 12 points

   - If East has the QS, that would be 13-14 points and East would have opened

   - Therefore West must have the QS

4. From bidding (East didn't respond) and opening lead:

   - If West had AK of spades, he would have led one so East must have at least the KS

   - If East had the KH as well as the K (or A) of spades, she would have responded

   - Therefore West must have the KH – you're probably in trouble

   - Play for your only chance: a singleton KH in the West hand (play the AH & hope the K drops)

5. If you can locate the AD, you have a good chance at locating the QH

- There are 18 high card points available to the defense (offense has 22)

- East is known to have 2 (QS)

- If East has the AD, West must have the remaining points (Including QH) for her opening bid

- If West has the AD, East must have the QH (& the QC) for his 2S response

- So play diamonds to find out who has the A and place the QH in the other hand

6. If you can work out the distribution in clubs, it might tell you the diamond distribution

- Play the AK of clubs (all follow – QJ are not doubleton)

- Ruff a club

  - If West doesn't follow, West had 2H,2C, and 6S from opening bid = 10 so play for 3-3 diamonds

  o If West had opened with a 5 card suit, you're doomed anyway unless East has Jx of diamonds

  - If West follows, assuming 6 spades, you know that the longer diamonds are with East

  o Finesse East for the JD and keep your fingers crossed

7. You should base your play on partner's signal

- If partner showed an odd number of diamonds, win this trick as declarer started with 2 (if declarer has 4, there's nothing you can do)

- If partner showed an even number of diamonds, duck again as declarer started with 3

- In either case, you need to hope partner's paltry remaining values include the KC so the Q is not a dummy entry

8. Count points and distribution

- Points:

  - South (declarer) passed and has shown 9 points (AJ diamonds, K hearts). If South had the AS she would have opened the bidding (13 HCP)

  - Therefore partner has the AS

- Distribution:

  - South bid spades before hearts, so must have at least 5 spades

  - If South has 5 spades, partner has 2 so lead a low spade and hope that partner has a trump higher than dummy so you can score AS, KS, and a spade ruff to beat the contract.

9. Count distribution

- West has 5 hearts from bidding, 3 spades and 4 diamonds – hence 1 club

- You can now guarantee your contract

  - Play your last diamond, cash your AC, eliminating West's club, and put West in with a trump

  - West will have to give you a ruff and a sluff

10. Count distribution

- How must spades be divided?

  - If West has 5 spades, he would have opened 1S, not 1C

  - If East has 5 spades, she would have responded 1S, not 1H

  - Therefore spades must be divided 4-4

- You know West's complete distribution

  - West has 3 hearts from bidding, showed 4 clubs in the play & must have 4 spades

- That leaves 2 diamonds

- East ruffed a club at trick 3, so there are 4 diamonds remaining and they must split 2-2