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:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>W</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1S</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>2H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>2S</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>3H</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 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
- KJx
- xxx

**How should you play diamonds?**

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>W</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1D</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>2H</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 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):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>W</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td></td>
<td>1S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>4D</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>4S</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**4D was a splinter**

- **Trick 1:** Hearts: 10, x, x, x
- **Trick 2:** Hearts: x, x, J, x
- **Trick 3:** Hearts: K, x, x, x
- **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):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>W</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1S</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td></td>
<td>2H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>3H</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>4H</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Trick 1:** Diamonds: x, x, x, 10

- xxx
- Q10xx
- Ax
- Kxxx

2D led

- Jx
- AJxxx
- KQ10xx
- Q
5. Discovery play based on point count (from Mike Lawrence):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>W</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1S</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>2S</td>
<td>3H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>4H</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Trick 1: Spades: A, x, x, x  East’s spot is encouraging
AJx
Qx
J10xx

How can you improve your guess in hearts?

xx
K9xxxx
KJx
AK

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>W</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2S</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>4H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>4N</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>5D (1 or 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>7H</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that EW are not vulnerable

Analysis: Only likely place to pitch losing spade is 4th diamond
AK9x
(KJ 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

How can you improve your guess in diamonds?

xx
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, A
Qxx       Trick 3: Diamonds: x, x, K, x
J109xx
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       1N   P       1S

P       3H   P       4H

Jx       Small diamond led
Q8xx     Trick 1: Diamonds: x, x, J
Qxx     Trick 2: Hearts: x, x, Q, x
AKQx     Trick 3: Hearts: x, x, K, A
Kxxx
Ax
K10xx
xxx
9. Endplay based on known distribution (from Mike Lawrence):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>W</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1H</td>
<td>P 1H P 4H</td>
<td>4S</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Axxx  
xx  
KQx  
Axxx  

KH led  

Trick 1: Hearts: K, x, x, x
Trick 2: Hearts: Q, x, x, x
Trick 3: Diamonds: x, K, x, x
Trick 4: Spades: x, x, K, x
K109xx  
xx  
AJxx  
Qx

Spades haven’t split so you need to avoid a club loser
Initial thought: play diamonds & if West ruffs in hope he has
   to lead away from KC. If he doesn’t, throw him in with a trump
   with same hope.

Trick 5: Spades: x, J, A, xH
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):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>W</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1C</td>
<td>P 1H 2D</td>
<td>3D</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The double is a support double

xx  
xxxx  
Axx  
Q9xx  

AC led  

Trick 1: Clubs: A, x, x, J
Trick 2: Clubs: K, x, xH, x
Trick 3: Clubs: x, 9, xD, x
Trick 4: Spades: K, x, x, x (no rush to win this)

Trick 5: Hearts: J, A, x, x
Tricks 6-7: AS and ruff a spade

Axx  
A  
KJ9x  
10xxx

How should you play diamonds?
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
       - 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
       - 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