

## LOSING TRICK COUNT

The Losing Trick Count **used in conjunction** with the standard point count, is a method of evaluating the trick taking potential of two combined hands. It primarily quantifies the ‘shape’ of the hand, and is merely a different but more formal way of adding points for length, singletons, or voids.

It should only be used when a fit has been established. Moreover I personally restrict its use to immediate responses to partner’s opening bid, and to opener’s rebid if partner has supported the suit. At higher levels, trump solidity, cue-bids, controls bids, etc. are more valuable in determining the slam potential of hands.

### Mechanics

1. Count losers.
2. Add to partner’s losers.
3. Subtract total from 18 – the answer gives the level at which you can expect to play **with the fit as trumps**.

### Counting Losers

- **Only the first three cards in any suit can be losers**
- **Only the Ace, King, and Queen are winners**
- **‘Droppable Honours’ count as losers (i.e. singleton King, or doubleton Queen)**

However there are modifications to be made with three card or more suits containing the Queen.

- if the Q is in the trump suit – no modification
- if the Q is supported by the A, K, or J – no modification
- if the Q is not supported by any of the above – add ½ loser

(many people consider Q10x to be only 2 losers, but this is splitting hairs).

Opinions vary with AJ10. I consider this to be a 1 loser suit.

Any ‘½ s’ are then rounded upwards – i.e. 6½ becomes 7.

Also beware of ace-less or king-less hands (I would add ½ loser for a hand with no ace nor king).

Examples (assume responding to five card major 1♠ opener):

a)	♠ K75	b)	♠ A754	c)	♠ Q752	d)	♠ Q752	e)	♠ 872
	♥ A7		♥ 6		♥ A		♥ A		♥ A8
	♦ 9873		♦ Q97653		♦ K973		♦ Q973		♦ Q764
	♣ 7532		♣ Q4		♣ 8742		♣ J742		♣ J742

- a) Spades – 2 loser; Hearts – 1; Diamonds – 3; Clubs – 3: TOTAL – 9 losers.
- b) Spades – 2 loser; Hearts – 1; Diamonds – 2½; Clubs – 2: TOTAL – 7½ (i.e. 8) losers.
- c) Spades – 2 loser; Hearts – 0; Diamonds – 2; Clubs – 3: TOTAL – 7 losers.
- d) Spades – 2 loser; Hearts – 0; Diamonds – 2½; Clubs – 3: TOTAL – 7½ (i.e. 8) losers.
- e) Spades – 3 loser; Hearts – 1; Diamonds – 2½; Clubs – 3: TOTAL – 9½ (i.e. 10) losers.

### Adding To Partner’s Losers

When using the standard point count in evaluating hands, a 12 point opener will normally have a

maximum of a 7 loser hand, and responder should assume this. So, as responder, if you evaluate your hand as a 9 loser hand, this gives a total of 16 losers etc.

### Subtract From 18

With the above example (16 losers), this gives  $18 - 16 = 2$ , so responder should support at the '2' level. Of course, if opener has less than a seven loser hand, he would raise accordingly; so with a six loser hand he may raise to the three level ( $6 + \text{responder's assumed } 9 = 15$ ;  $18 - 15 = 3$ ); and with a five loser hand he may raise to the four level (in practice he would probably use trial bids to assess whether to be in a game).

Looking at examples(a) – (e) above, responder should bid as follows.

- a) – 2♠ (9 losers + assumed 7 losers = 16;  $18 - 16 = 2$ )
- b) – 3♠ (combined 15 losers). Standard limit bids would dictate only 2♠, but this doesn't take account of the shape.
- c) – 4♠ (only 9 hcp. but again shape would give a good play for 10 tricks)
- d) – 3♠ (similar to, and the same points as (c), but the Q♦ has less trick taking potential than K♦)
- e) – 2♠. Ltc would indicate a limit of only 1♠ with 10 losers ( $10 + 7 = 17$ ;  $18 - 17 = 1$ ), but you can't really pass with a 7count, and you have added a full loser for the '½' loser (but don't be surprised if 2♠ goes one off if opener has a minimum).

### Other Examples

a)     ♠ AK962 ♥ 7 ♦ A854 ♣ Q52  ♠ QJ84 ♥ Q852 ♦ Q ♣ J863	b)     ♠ AK762 ♥ 7 ♦ A8542 ♣ A5  ♠ QJ84 ♥ Q852 ♦ Q ♣ J863	c)     ♠ AKQ32 ♥ A643 ♦ 752 ♣ 9  ♠ 8654 ♥ K95 ♦ 8 ♣ A10862	d)     ♠ AQ754 ♥ 843 ♦ A53 ♣ K5  ♠ K942 ♥ 5 ♦ K97642 ♣ 86
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- a) 1♠ - 2♠ (9 losers) (½ loser added for ace-less/king-less hand); pass ( $6 \frac{1}{2}$  - i.e. 7 losers):  $9 + 7 = 16$ ;  $18 - 16 = 2♠$ . You should eventually lose one heart, one diamond, three clubs (unless the opposition are kind to you with the club suit).
- b) 1♠ - 2♠ (9 losers); 4♠ (5 losers):  $9 + 5 = 14$ ;  $18 - 14 = 4♠$ . Similar to (a) but the slightly better club situation in opener's hand gives rise to only 5 losers.
- c) 1♠ - 3♠ (8 losers); 4♠ (6 losers);  $8 + 6 = 14$ ;  $18 - 14 = 4♠$ . Only a combined 20 count, but ltc. enables the excellent shape to be taken into account. Two diamond ruffs lead to ten tricks.
- d) 1♠ - 4♠ (7 losers). Not a certainty. Also the bid makes it more difficult for the opposition to find their heart fit.

With all the above examples (with the possible exception of (c) and (d) whereby using pure limit bids responder would only bid 2♠), you may reach the same correct contracts without ltc, but a ltc. check just gives that extra assurance.

### Summary

The ltc. should be used as a **guideline**, particularly at lower levels in determining whether to raise to the two or three level, or as opener whether to try for game (possibly via a trial bid). Don't go to excesses with the ltc.