

The Joy of Counting

How do I get to the next level?

- Recently, a lot of people have been asking me this question.
- Usually, they expect it's about learning some secret as declarer.
- Or maybe learning to be a better defender.
- Or maybe it's learning a cool new convention.

These can help. But, there's something bigger:

- COUNTING!

Are you kidding me?

Counting affects 100% of hands

- Declarer play only impacts 25%.
- Defense only impacts 50%.
- A typical convention gets used on less than 10% of hands.

Counting – Level 1

You're already doing some counting.

- You count winners.
- You count losers.
- You count tricks.

This is a good starting point.

Counting – Level 2

This is what most people think of as “counting:”

- distribution by suit for each hand
- high-card points for each hand

WARNING: When you start doing this, your results may suffer.

Counting – Level 3

Factoring in the rest of the information:

- What was bid?
- What wasn't bid?
- What does the lead tell me?
- What does the discard mean?

Figuring Out Opponents' Distribution

West

♠K 8 6 2

♥Q 8

♦A K Q 10

♣Q 5 4

East

♠Q 10 5

♥A 7 5

♦8 5 3

♣A 7 3 2

North leads the ♦6.

You win the first three diamonds and both opponents follow.

Bidding

South	West	North	East
1♦	1NT	Pass	3NT
All Pass			

Figuring Out Opponents' Distribution

West

♠K 8 6 2

♥Q 8

♦A K Q 10

♣Q 5 4

East

♠Q 10 5

♥A 7 5

♦8 5 3

♣A 7 3 2

What is South's distribution?

- South has exactly three♦.
- The only time we open 1♦ with exactly three♦ is...

What is North's distribution?

Bidding			
South	West	North	East
1♦	1NT	Pass	3NT
All Pass			

Suit	West	East	South	North	Total
♠	4	3	4	2	13
♥	2	3	4	4	13
♦	4	3	3	3	13
♣	3	4	2	4	13
Total	13	13	13	13	52

Figuring Out Opponents' Distribution

North

♠K 8 7 6 2

♥8 3

♦Q 6 4

♣Q 5 4

West leads the ♣2

East

♠J 10 5 3

♥A 7 5

♦A 8 5 3

♣A 7

Bidding

South

1♦

1NT

North

1♠

Pass

Figuring Out Opponents' Distribution

North

♠K 8 7 6 2

♥8 3

♦Q 6 4

♣Q 5 4

East

♠J 10 5 3

♥A 7 5

♦A 8 5 3

♣A 7

Bidding

South	North
1♦	1♠
1NT	Pass

What do we know about South's hand?

- Does NOT have 4+♠ - would have supported.
- MUST have 4+♦ - opening ♦ bid without 4+♠.
- Has 12 – 14 points (1NT rebid).
- This means partner has 6 – 8 points.

Figuring Out Opponents' Distribution

North

♠K 8 7 6 2

♥8 3

♦Q 6 4

♣Q 5 4

What do we know about clubs?

- West has four – the ♣2 has to be her 4th best.
- So South also has 4 clubs.

East

♠J 10 5 3

♥A 7 5

♦A 8 5 3

♣A 7

Bidding

South	North
1♦	1♠
1NT	

Suit	North	East	South	West	Total
♠	5	4			13
♥	2	3			13
♦	3	4			13
♣	3	2	4	4	13
Total	13	13	13	13	52

Figuring Out Opponents' Distribution

North

♠K 8 7 6 2

♥8 3

♦Q 6 4

♣Q 5 4

East

♠J 10 5 3

♥A 7 5

♦A 8 5 3

♣A 7

Bidding

South	North
1♦	1♠
1NT	

What do we know about hearts?

- If West had 5+, she probably would have bid them.
- If South had 5+, he would have bid them.
- So they must be 4 - 4.

Suit	North	East	South	West	Total
♠	5	4			13
♥	2	3	4	4	13
♦	3	4			13
♣	3	2	4	4	13
Total	13	13	13	13	52

Figuring Out Opponents' Distribution

North

♠K 8 7 6 2

♥8 3

♦Q 6 4

♣Q 5 4

What do we know about diamonds?

- South has 4+.
- So West has 2 or fewer.

East

♠J 10 5 3

♥A 7 5

♦A 8 5 3

♣A 7

Bidding

South	North
1♦	1♠
1NT	

Suit	North	East	South	West	Total
♠	5	4			13
♥	2	3	4	4	13
♦	3	4	4+	2-	13
♣	3	2	4	4	13
Total	13	13	13	13	52

Figuring Out Opponents' Distribution

North

♠K 8 7 6 2

♥8 3

♦Q 6 4

♣Q 5 4

What do we know about spades?

- South has 0 – 1.
- So we should lead a spade to trick 2.

East

♠J 10 5 3

♥A 7 5

♦A 8 5 3

♣A 7

Bidding

South	North
1♦	1♠
1NT	

Suit	North	East	South	West	Total
♠	5	4	1-	3+	13
♥	2	3	4	4	13
♦	3	4	4+	2-	13
♣	3	2	4	4	13
Total	13	13	13	13	52

Discovery Play

West

♠K 10 8 6 2

♥J 7 4

♦K 7

♣A J 4

East

♠A Q 5

♥8 5 2

♦A 8 5 3

♣K 10 3

North leads the ♥6.

South wins the first three tricks with the ♥A K Q.

North discards two low clubs.

South returns a ♠.

You draw trump in three rounds.

North discards another low club.

Bidding

South	West	North	East
1♥	1♠	Pass	4♠
All Pass			

Discovery Play

West

♠K 10 8 6 2
♥J 7 4
♦K 7
♣A J 4

East

♠A Q 5
♥8 5 2
♦A 8 5 3
♣K 10 3

How should we attack clubs?

- Need three ♣ tricks to go with five♠ and two♦.
- Can finesse ♣ in either direction.

Bidding			
South	West	North	East
1♥	1♠	Pass	4♠
All Pass			

Suit	West	East	South	North	Total
♠	5	3	3	2	13
♥	3	3	6	1	13
♦	2	4	???	???	13
♣	3	3	???	xxx+?	13
Total	13	13	13	13	52

Discovery Play

West

♠K 10 8 6 2

♥J 7 4

♦K 7

♣A J 4

East

♠A Q 5

♥8 5 2

♦A 8 5 3

♣K 10 3

Answer: get more information about ♦ first

- Cash ♦K, then♦A, and then ruff a♦.
- When South follows to all three ♦tricks , you don't need to guess.

Bidding			
South	West	North	East
1♥	1♠	Pass	4♠
All Pass			

Suit	West	East	South	North	Total
♠	5	3	3	2	13
♥	3	3	6	1	13
♦	2	4	3+	???	13
♣	3	3	1-	xxx+?	13
Total	13	13	13	13	52

Counting – Level 4

Actual spot cards played

- This is for expert level players only!

How should I go about improving?

Like any bridge skill, it's important to start slowly.

1. Start by counting when you're dummy.
2. When dummy comes down, do a quick estimate of what you know.
3. Walk through BBO movies of old hands, one trick at a time.
4. Play free daily games against the robots.
5. Count a single suit.
6. Move to the whole hand.