Cardiff Bridge Tutors

The Losing Trick Count

Keith Butler

The Losing Trick Count and Shortage points.

When you first learn Bridge you are told that when you have found and agreed an eight card suit as trumps then you can add Shortage points to your High Card Points for Voids, Singletons and Doubletons.

The problem comes in knowing how many points to add (and sometimes in remembering to do it!).

Here are some of the values that are advocated:

	Optimistic	EBU	Pessimistic
Void	5	“Ace”	3
Singleton	3	“King”	2
Doubleton	1	-	1

So which do you choose?

The Losing Trick Count is an alternative to Shortage points and has a clear set of rules to follow.

It is my favourite Bridge Gizmo!

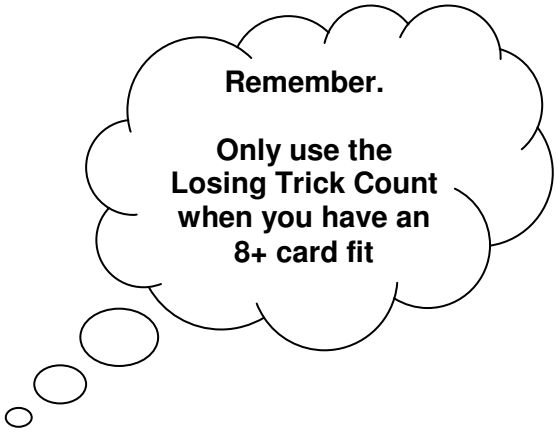
The Losing Trick Count.

When to use the Losing Trick Count.

As for Shortage points you only use it when an eight card (minimum) trump suit has been agreed.

You do not use it in No Trump contracts.

Those are the first two rules mastered!

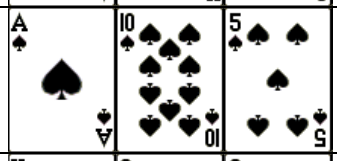


How to use the Losing Trick Count.

1. Counting Losers.

You need to count your losers in **each suit**.

- You cannot have more than three losers in a suit.
- You cannot have more losers than cards in a suit eg a Singleton can have at most one loser
- Look at the top three cards in the suit and count back in this sequence
    - If you don't have the Ace add a loser
    - If you don't have the King add a loser
    - If you don't have the Queen add a loser

	This suit has no Losers as it has the Ace, King and Queen
	This suit has two losers. We have the Ace but not the King or Queen
	This suit has one loser. We don't have the Ace but we have the King and Queen
	This suit has one loser. We don't have the Ace and have no more cards in the suit.
	This suit has one loser. We only count the top three cards and so ignore the 3♥. We don't have the Ace but have the King and Queen.

Now let's look at all four suits in a hand and calculate the total losers for the hand.

♠	K Q 7 3
♥	A K
♦	J 7 3
♣	Q J 9 4

We have:-

1 loser in ♠
0 losers in ♥
3 losers in ♦
2 losers in ♣

A total of 6 losers.

Here are some exercises on counting your losers for you to try.

2. Exercise in counting Losers.

<table>
<tr>
<td>

♠KJ742
♥KQ
♦K5
♣K652
♠Q10 ♠A5
♥J9765 ♥A10 4
♦Q42 ♦109863
♣A109 ♣874
♠9863
♥832
♦AJ7
♣QJ3
</td>
<td>
Board 1 : Dealer North : Love all

<table>
<tr><td colspan="4">Calculate the number of losers for each player</td></tr>
<tr><td>North</td><td>East</td><td>South</td><td>West</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
</table>

Contract:
</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>

♠4
♥AQJ54
♦109653
♣108
♠K765 ♠AQJ32
♥86 ♥K7
♦AJ8 ♦KQ4
♣9543 ♣762
♠1098
♥10932
♦72
♣AKQJ
</td>
<td>
Board 2 : Dealer East : NS vulnerable

<table>
<tr><td colspan="4">Calculate the number of losers for each player</td></tr>
<tr><td>North</td><td>East</td><td>South</td><td>West</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
</table>

Contract:
</td>
</tr>
</table>

Remember.

Only count top 3 cards in a suit.
You cannot have more losers than cards in a suit.
Ace, King, Queen are not losers.

3. Answers to Exercise in counting Losers.

<table>
<tr>
<td>

♠KJ742
♥KQ
♦K5
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♠Q10 ♠A5
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<table>
<tr><td colspan="4">Calculate the number of losers for each player</td></tr>
<tr><td>North</td><td>East</td><td>South</td><td>West</td></tr>
<tr><td>6</td><td>9</td><td>10</td><td>9</td></tr>
</table>
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♠4
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Board 2 : Dealer East : NS vulnerable

<table>
<tr><td colspan="4">Calculate the number of losers for each player</td></tr>
<tr><td>North</td><td>East</td><td>South</td><td>West</td></tr>
<tr><td>7</td><td>6</td><td>8</td><td>9</td></tr>
</table>
</td>
</tr>
</table>

4. The Losing Trick Count in action.

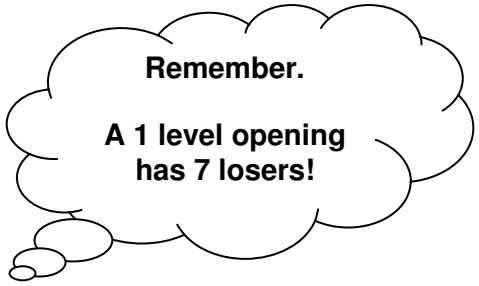
Remember, you only use the Losing Trick Count once you have found an eight (or more) card fit and these are your Trump suit.

The Losing Trick Count works by

- Adding the losers from Opener's hand to the losers in Responder's hand.
- Subtracting that total from 18
- This is the level to which you may bid in that suit

But how on earth can Responder know how many losers Opener has?

Obviously they can't, but **an opening bid of a suit at the one level normally has seven losers** and they can work on this assumption. If it is wrong the Opener can correct it later.



Example 1.

Here are Opener's and Responders hands:

Opener's Hand		Responder's Hand	
♠	A Q 9 5 3	♠	K 8 6 4 2
♥	A 7	♥	10 3 2
♦	K 9 6	♦	4
♣	10 6 4	♣	K Q 7 5

1. Opener bids 1♠
2. Responder knows that they will be playing in a ♠ contract but at what level?
3. Assume Opener has 7 losers.
4. Responder counts their losers:-
    1. ♠ 2 losers (No Ace or Queen)
    2. ♥ 3 losers (No Ace, King or Queen)
    3. ♦ 1 loser (No Ace, King or Queen-cannot have more losers than cards in the suit)
    4. ♣ 1 loser (No Ace)
5. A total of 7 losers for responder
6. Add Opener's and Responder's losers = 14
7. 18 – 14 **bid 4♠**

5. What if Opener had fewer losers than seven?

It is important that Responder bids to the maximum of their Losing Trick Count to show precisely how many losers they have. If the Losing Trick Count comes out at 3 then don't bid 2 to be safe!

The reason is that Responder worked on the assumption that Opener had 7 losers but they might have less (sometimes a lot less) and they can "correct" the bid.

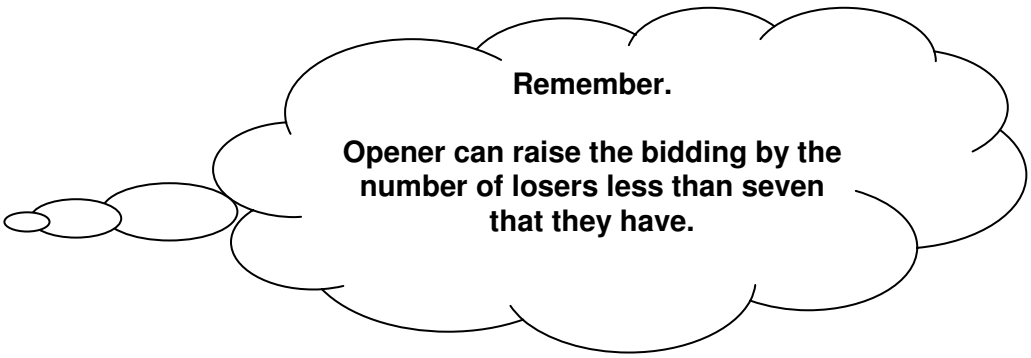
Example 2.

I have changed the hands in Example 1. It has the same number of points as before but count the losers now!

Opener's Hand		Responder's Hand	
♠	A Q 9 7 5 3	♠	K 8 6 4 2
♥	A	♥	10 3 2
♦	K 9	♦	4
♣	10 6 4 2	♣	K Q 7 5

1. Opener bids 1♠
2. Responder knows that they will be playing in a ♠ contract but at what level?
3. Assume Opener has 7 losers.
4. Responder counts their losers:-
    1. ♠ 2 losers (No Ace or Queen)
    2. ♥ 3 losers (No Ace, King or Queen)
    3. ♦ 1 loser (No Ace, King or Queen-cannot have more losers than cards in the suit)
    4. ♣ 1 loser (No Ace)
5. A total of 7 losers for responder
6. Add Opener's and Responder's losers = 14
7. 18 – 14 bid 4♠
8. Opener has only 5 losers.

    With fewer losers than seven you can increase the bid. With 2 fewer losers Opener can increase the bid by 2! Before bidding 6♠ they would start the process of looking to bid a small slam using their method of finding controls (Blackwood, Cue Bidding etc.) It is an excellent indicator of when a slam might be available.



6. What if Responder changes suit?

So far we have looked at Responder immediately agreeing Opener's suit but that doesn't happen often. However, you can still use the Losing Trick Count if Partner changes suit.

The hands are shown below and East has 12 points and is holding 5♥ and 4♠s.

The bidding is now:

East	North	West	South
1♥	Pass	1♠	

East wants to agree West's suit but at what level?

Can the Losing Trick Count still be used?

Yes, but now East needs to make an assumption about the number of losers in West's hand in order to reply.

The number of losers for a change of suit at the one level is 9.

Here are the hands:

East's Hand		West's Hand	
♠	A Q 9 7	♠	K 8 6 4 2
♥	A Q 7 3 2	♥	10 3
♦	9 8	♦	5 4 2
♣	10 6	♣	K 9 7

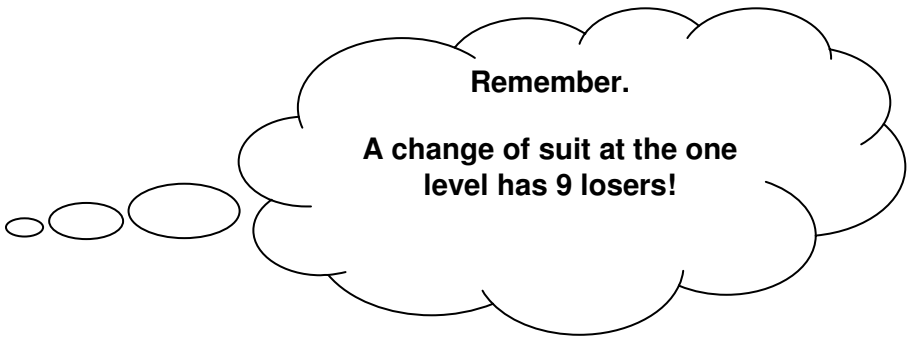
East assumes that West has 9 losers and adds their losers:

♠ 1 ♥ 1 ♦ 2 ♣ 2 = 6 losers

East calculates 18 – (9 +6) = 3 and bids 3♠s

Why bid 3♠s rather than 2♠?

Because West may have fewer than 9 losers and can correct the bidding!



7. What if Responder replies at the two level?

East	North	West	South
1♥	1♠	2♣	

The process is exactly the same but Opener now assumes 8 losers are held by Responder.

Remember.

A change of suit at the two level has 8 losers!

8. What if Opener jump shifts?

East	North	West	South
1♣	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♥			

The process is exactly the same but Responder now assumes 6 losers are held rather than 7.

Remember.

Opener's jump shift has 6 losers!

9. What about openings at higher levels and overcalls?

Once again the process is identical but you use different values for the assumptions.

These tables summarise the assumed number of losers for each type of bid and response.

Responding to Partner's Overcall:

7	Losers that **Responder** assumes Overcaller has to make a **two** level overcall
8	Losers that **Responder** assumes Overcaller has to make a **one** level overcall

Weak Two Openings:

8	Losers that **Responder** assumes Opener has to make a Weak Two opening

Strong Two Openings:

4	Losers **Responder** assumes Opener has to make a Strong Two opening

10. Some fine tuning.

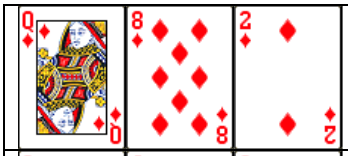
The Losing Trick Count isn't perfect but is a very valuable tool. It works best when hands are very distributional and less well the close they become to being balanced.

It also needs some fine tuning for the following circumstances.

9 or more trumps between the partnership	**Deduct** a loser.
Singleton Ace	**Deduct** a loser

No Ace in your hand	**Add** half a loser
An unsupported Queen	**Add** half a loser

If the Queen is not supported by the Ace and King and you don't have the Jack of that suit then she is unsupported.

	This Queen is unsupported and you should count $2^1/_2$ losers for this suit
	This Queen is supported and you count 2 losers for this suit.

Conclusion.

The Losing Trick Count is an excellent tool for hand evaluation.

It works best where hands are very distributional and exercise a little caution the closer a hand is to being balanced.

It doesn't guarantee success, you still have to plan. Success may well depend upon finesses and a sensible ruffing strategy.

It remains my favourite Bridge gizmo.

"Magic numbers"

Here is a table of the number of Losing Tricks that you assume.

Opening and Responding:

The only numbers you have to remember are 6, 7, 8 and 9!

7	Losers that **Responder** assumes Opener has for a one level opening
6	Losers that **Responder** assumes Opener has if they jump raise
8	Losers that **Opener** assumes Responder has to when they change suit at **two** level
9	Losers that **Opener** assumes Responder has change suit at **one** level or minimum raise in Opener's suit

Responding to Partner's Overcall:

The only numbers you have to remember are 7 and 8.

7	Losers that **Responder** assumes Overcaller has to make a **two** level overcall
8	Losers that **Responder** assumes Overcaller has to make a **one** level overcall

Weak Two Openings:

8	Losers that **Responder** assumes Opener has to make a Weak Two opening

Strong Two Openings:

4	Losers **Responder** assumes Opener has to make a Strong Two opening

Fine tuning:

-1	Deduct a loser if you have 9 or more trumps between the partnership.
-1	Deduct a loser if you have a singleton Ace
+1/2	Add half a loser if your hand does not have an Ace
+1/2	Add half a loser for an unsupported Queen