

Losing Trick Count

The standard High Card Point Count (4-3-2-1) works well for balanced hands. It is inadequate, however, for very distributional hands. The more distributional your hand is, the more you should rely on Losing Trick Count rather than HCP. However, do not apply LTC **UNTIL** you have a fit with your partner.

In Losing Trick Count (LTC), you **can never have more than three losers in any suit**. (So, xxx has the same 3 losers as xxxxxx.) You can never have more losers than you have cards in the suit. (Thus, xx has only 2 losers.) **Each Ace, King, or Queen that you are missing in a suit counts as a loser**. Therefore, AKx has one loser. AKxx has one loser. AKxxx has one loser. AKxxxx has one loser. AKxxxxx has one loser. AQx has one loser. AQxx has one loser. AQxxx has one loser and AQxxxxx has one loser. Etc.

The “average” opening hand has around 7 to 8 losers. (Example, AKxx Kxxx Qxx Jx has 1 spade loser; 2 heart losers; 2 diamond losers; and 2 club losers.) A hand with more than 8 losers should probably not be opened, e.g., KJx KJxx QJ Jxxx. A no trump opening hand generally has around 5-6 losers, e.g., AQxx KQxx Ax Qxx. A jump shift hand will usually have 4 to 5 losers. A hand just below opening will generally have 8 losers (10-12 HCP often), while a minimum responding hand (7-9 HCP) will usually have 9 losers.

Most people open 2C with 22 or more HCP. However, **you should also open 2C when you have a 3 to 5 loser hand** (but you do not want to open at game, e.g., 4H, 4S, 5C, 5D). The idea is, when you have only 3 to 5 losers, two queens or a queen and a king in partner’s hand could be enough for you to make game, but partner may not bid with that little. An example of a hand that would open 2C based on LTC would be: AKxxxx Ax AQxx VOID. Although you “only” have 17 HCP, you have a 3-loser hand. If partner has the queen of spades and King of diamonds, you are odds-on to make 6 spades.

LTC count helps you to appreciate those “**6-5, come alive**” hands and explains why Eddie Kantar says 14 HCP (if all in your long suits) is good enough to reverse with a 6-5 hand. For example: AKxxxx AKxxx x x, is a 4-loser hand—for superior to the average opening hand even though you “only” have 14 HCP.

If partner gives you a simple raise (1S-P-2S), usually s/he **will cover about 2 to 2½ of your losers**. If partner gives you a **limit raise (1S-P-3S)**, usually s/he **will cover about 3 to 3½ of your losers**. Thus, to make a help suit (or other) game try after one of a major and two of a major, you generally have 6 losers. If you have 4 or 5 losers, just bid game. (This is the rationale behind bidding game when you have a decent 5-5 or 6-5 hand. For example, AKxxx AQxxx x xx has 5 losers. If partner covers two of your losers, you will make game.) After a limit raise, you can go to game with 6 losers, expecting partner to cover 3 of them. (You can also try with 7 losers if you like your hand.) [Some 6 loser hands (lots of queens) aren’t that great, so make the game try first.]

Another way to work with LTC is to add your losers to partner’s likely number of losers (based on bidding). Subtract that total from 24. The answer is the number of tricks you and your partner are likely to take. Thus, if you have 6 losers and partner gives a limit raise (usually showing 8 losers), the total is 14. Subtracting 14 from 24 leaves 10—so go ahead and bid the game.

In regard to preempts, a 3-level preempt should show about 7 losers non-vul; 6 losers vulnerable. A 4-level preempt shows about 6 losers non-vul and 5 losers vul. A 5-level preempt indicates about 5 losers non-vul and 4 losers vulnerable. When contemplating a raise of partner’s preempt, count 1 trick for Ace, King or Queen of trumps. Count one trick for singleton with trump support & two tricks for void with trump support. In side suits, count AKQ as 3 tricks; AK as 2 tricks; AQ as 1½ tricks; A or KQ as 1 trick; Kx as ½ a trick and Q-high as 0 tricks.

For more details on all of the above, see *The Modern Losing Trick Count* by Ron Klinger.

Please note: Losing Trick Count is used in the bidding process. **It is not the same as counting your winners and losers when playing the hand.** In the play of the hand, AQx (if partner has xxx) has two possible losers—depending on the location of the King.