

## IMPROVING YOUR JUDGEMENT – LOSING TRICK COUNT (LTC)

Losing Trick Count can help you estimate the trick taking potential of your hand:

- Count one loser for each missing ace, king, and queen starting with the ace.
- No suit can have more than 3 losers.
- With fewer than 3 cards in the suit, stop counting losers when you run out of cards.

A flaw in LTC is valuing aces, kings, and queens equally. To be more accurate, it's wise to compensate by adding  $\frac{1}{2}$  loser for every queen more than aces (but ignore singleton and doubleton queens in this adjustment). Likewise, hands that are rich in aces adjust to fewer losers by subtracting  $\frac{1}{2}$  loser for every ace more than queens.

### EXAMPLE 1

♠ 4	With a singleton, you have only 1 spade loser. Then you hope to trump.
♥ 5 2	Both hearts are losers.
♦ K Q J 7 6	In long suits, count a loser for every ace, king or queen that is missing.
♣ A J 9 5 3	You have 1 diamond loser and 2 club losers.

### EXAMPLE 2

♠ K	With the ace missing, you have 1 spade loser.
♥ Q 2	Both hearts are losers – the ace-king are missing.
♦ J 7 6 3 2	Count 3 diamond losers with the ace, king, and queen missing.
♣ A J 9 5 3	The missing ♣K and ♣Q give you 2 club losers.

### EXAMPLE 3

♠ A Q J 9 8 7 6	This hand counts to 7 losers but is not a 1♠ opening.
♥ 4 2	Open with a preemptive bid of 3♠.
♦ 2	Distributional hands do not have that many losers. This is what makes you safe
♣ 9 5 3	at a high level when all you have is a long, strong suit.

## LOSERS AND HAND EVALUATION

**Losing Trick Count works best when you have a fit.** Some players also estimate losers in a close decision about opening the bidding without knowing about a fit (but you must be *close* to 13 points). Losing Trick Count helps you place your hand in the proper range – minimum, medium, or maximum – in close decisions after a fit is found.

	Opener's hand	Responder's Hand
Minimum Hand	13-15 points, usually 7 LTC	6-10- points; 9 or more LTC*
Medium Hand	16-18 points; usually 6 LTC	10+ to 12 points; usually 8 LTC*
Maximum Hand	19-21 points; usually 5 LTC	13+ points; usually 7 or less LTC
Strong Two Opening	22+ points; 4 or less LTC	

\* Note that the minimum and medium responding categories overlap. Losing trick count will help you use your judgment with 10 points.

## HOW HIGH?

If you know partner's strength category, you also know what partner's LTC is. To determine the level your side can afford to bid to, add your LTC to partner's and subtract the total from 18. Your partner will be disappointed when your hand provides more losers than your bidding described. You might not bid enough if your hand has fewer losers than you described.