Counting Distribution & Reading Cards by Declarer   Etobicoke BC   Last revised: Apr 16 22

The hands for this course are in a separate pdf file. The hand that applies is indicated in this document with {} brackets, ie {Do Hand 3}.

Bridge is a very complex game. There are many, many clues as to where certain cards are. The challenge is knowing how to interpret bids and card play and then play or defend better as a result. Counting cards is a tough skill to develop, but it opens up a whole new world of information and allows the developing player to raise her game to the next level. When you have a two-way guess for a Queen, you currently probably flip a coin and finesse your friend. With proper counting and play, you will now often be able to determine the proper player to finesse, upgrading a 50% guess to say 75% or sometimes a 100% sure-thing.

Players can count two things, each being a topic in itself; 1) high card points and 2) shape. And both the declarer and the defenders can count high cards and shape. This lesson will focus on counting the **shape (distribution)** of the opponents' cards by the declarer. We will also include some hands where you count high cards (a la session 1) as a review of the most frequent situation.

Some basic principles

- Math says that if you are looking for who is more likely to have, for example, the QS, that card is more likely to be with the defender with more spades. If, for example, you determine that W has 6 spades and E has 2, then W is far more likely to have the Q as there are 6 cards that could be that Q vs only 2 cards in the other hand that could be that Q. So you finesse the player w the 6 cards. While this is by no means a guarantee, the math %'s heavily favour this decision.

How do you count shape?

- Your LHO has opened the bidding 1S and you end up playing the hand. You have 6 spades between you and dummy.

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Axx (dummy)

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1S opener = 5+ Spades	6 Spades ⇕	2 or less Spades

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KJT (Decl)

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- By the rule of 13, Spades are as follows: RHO has 13 – yours(6) – LHO's 5+ = 2- (or less) spades. Thus the odds of LHO having the Q are about 5:2. Throw in the fact that LHO bid 1S, hence has pts and likely to have the one missing honour, finessing LHO for the Q is mathematically quite likely to succeed. {Do Hand 2}

- Often the bidding (and early play) indicate one defender has less cards in a key suit and therefore is less likely to hold a missing honour. If you can determine, for example, that one opponent has 4 of a suit and his partner has 2 of that suit, odds are 4:2 that the opponent with 4 has the missing honour. {Do Hand 1}

Many of the clues for counting shape come from the bidding. Let's look at some examples of counting shape via the auction. This info is great 1) if you end up declaring 2) as defenders

1.   N E S W

        1D 1S 2C 2S

        3D P   P   P

        What do you know? _____

2.   N E S W

                   P

        P   P 1H 2C

        2H P   P   P

        What do you know? _____

(Partial hands to practice shape and HCP counting)

Tips for best card finding

- Play off all the other suits, leaving your guess suit as late as possible. This allows you to get more information. Sometimes you get lucky and the shape makes your guess 100%
  {Do Hand 6}

- Often you will not get a full shape count but the bidding will allow you almost as good an inference. If RHO preempted 3H, you can assign her 7 hts as you count. Long suit bids are especially helpful as they "mark" several cards in that hand, making your counting easier
  {Do Hand 3}   {Do Hand 7}
- High level play is to think what players did NOT do.
  - Opening lead is a low card in a side suit, yet leader's partner bid 1S ?
    - Why is leader making a lower priority 4th best lead?
      - Leader has no spades or
      - Leader has A spade

{Do Hand 9} {Do Hand 10}

WHAT A GAME!!