

The Losing Tick Count

The Losing Trick Count (LTC) is a tool to guide you when partner opens 1♥/♠ and you have an eight card or better fit. It is popular in the United Kingdom where 4 card major suit openings are prevalent.

The most common method of raising partner is simply to add the high card points (6-9 = 2-level; 10-12 = 3-level; 13+ = go to game) but the LTC method is different and takes more account of distribution.

Playing the LTC you assess each suit in turn: -

- With 3 or more cards in the suit, consider just the top 3; the ace, king or queen are considered to be winners, any other card is a loser.
- With just 2 cards in the suit, only the ace or king are winners.
- With just 1 card, only an ace is a winner.
- A void has no winners (but more importantly no losers).

The LTC says that you subtract your losers from 17 and that is the number of tricks that you will make assuming that partner has opened with a minimal 7 loser hand. Alternatively, subtract the number of losers in your hand from 11 and bid to that level.

In the following examples we assume that partner has opened 1♠ which may be 4-cards.

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| ♠ KJ65 | 2 losers | There are 8 losers, so bid 3♠ (11-8) |
| ♥ Q432 | 2 losers | |
| ♦ 65 | 2 losers | |
| ♣ A54 | 2 losers | |

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| ♠ Q65 | 1 loser | There are 7 losers, so bid 4♠ (11-7) – via whatever mechanism you use to show a sound game raise |
| ♥ 432 | 2 losers | |
| ♦ 5 | 2 losers | |
| ♣ 54 | 2 losers | |

The scheme has its merits, but there are numerous adjustments that you have to make if you pay it seriously – for instance Qxx and Axx are both defined as one winner. I do not play the LTC, I simply look at the HCPs and do sensible adjustments for shape/distribution and other features as described in the booklet on hand evaluation.