

Counting Your Hand — Hand Evaluation

Before you can bid, you need to know what your hand is worth. High card points first, every hand. Shape — length and shortage — only counts once you have found a fit.

1 High card points — count these first

CARD	POINTS
Ace	4
King	3
Queen	2
Jack	1

Ten in each suit, **40 in the pack**; a dead-average hand is 10. **12 is where an opening bid begins.** Tens count nothing — but a ten sitting with other honours (A-J-10, K-Q-10) makes a suit noticeably better.

2 Length points — only with a trump fit

TRUMPS HELD	ADD
5 cards	+1
6 cards	+2
7 cards	+3

Extra trumps win extra tricks. **Count length only in the agreed trump suit, once you have found a fit — never in a side suit, and never before the fit.**

3 Shortage points — only with a trump fit

HOLDING	ADD
Doubleton (two cards)	+1
Singleton (one card)	+2
Void (none)	+3

A short suit is worth something only because your trumps can ruff it — so count shortages **only when you hold support for partner's suit**, in the other suits. Never for a no-trump contract.

THE MAGIC EIGHT

Shape only starts to count once your side holds **eight or more cards in one suit** — the fit that makes it a safe trump suit. Before a fit: high card points only. Once partner's suit is your trump suit: high card points, plus **shortage** points in the other suits, plus a point for each trump beyond four. Length points in a *side* suit are not added on top.

4 Balanced or not?

Your **shape** is the number of cards in each suit, longest first — 4-4-3-2, 5-3-3-1. A hand is **balanced** if it is **4-3-3-3, 4-4-3-2 or 5-3-3-2**: no singleton, no void, at most one doubleton. Balanced hands are no-trump hands; everything else wants a trump suit.

5 What the total buys you

COMBINED POINTS	EXPECT TO MAKE
20–24	a part-score — 7 to 9 tricks
25–32	a game — 3NT, 4♥ / 4♠, 5♣ / 5♦
33–36	a small slam — 12 tricks
37+	a grand slam — 13 tricks

Add your points to what partner's bids have promised. Most bidding decisions come down to one sum: **can we reach 25?**

6 Three hands, counted

♠ K J 8 4 · ♥ A 7 3 · ♦ Q 10 6 2 · ♣ 9 5

3+1+4+2 = **10 HCP**, balanced (4-4-3-2). Not an opening bid. If partner opens, you have a raise or a no-trump response.

♠ A Q 9 7 5 2 · ♥ K 4 · ♦ 8 · ♣ K J 6 3

4+2+3+3+1 = **13 HCP**: an opening bid, and spades is the suit to show. When partner supports spades you have a fit, so add 2 for the six-card spades = **15**.

♠ 6 · ♥ Q 9 6 4 · ♦ A 8 5 3 · ♣ K 7 4 2

Partner opened 1♥. **9 HCP**, and with four-card heart support add **2 for the singleton spade** = **11** — the difference between a single raise and a jump raise.

