



THE ROAD TO SUCCESS:

LEARNING TO COUNT with Joan Butts

Thursday, January 11 Great Room, Rex SFOB

If you really want to improve your declarer play, aim to "count" hands. It's a fact of life that you can't move to the next skill level until you do this. The bad news is...it's NOT easy. It requires a lot of concentration. But the good news is that practice makes perfect and these tips will help.

What do we mean by "**counting**"?

It's working out the distribution of the opponent's hand/s by mentally remembering the cards they play as each trick is completed, and therefore working out the defenders' shapes. If you start trying to count a hand and then you forget or lose the count, leave it and start again on the next hand. Don't be frustrated and give up, because the more you try the easier it will become.

As declarer, the most important things to consider are:

1) **Always count the trump suit.**

As soon as dummy goes down, make a special note of how many trumps your side has. Say you have six and dummy has three. That's nine. Keep that information stored away, but then focus mainly on how many trumps are **missing** and how they will be distributed.

If you have nine between you and dummy, and four are missing, you usually hope they will split 2-2, but more likely 3-1, and hopefully not 4-0. As you play trumps, watch to see how the four trumps fall in the opponents' hands.



2) Some suits are more important than others.

It's hard work to count every suit. With experience you will recognize when dummy comes down which suits you need to count; the trump suit always, as already mentioned, and often your other long suit.

3) Remembering the bidding will give you clues in counting.

Let's say West opened a pre-emptive 3♥. They are likely to hold seven of them. Subtract from thirteen the number of hearts you see in your hand and dummy. Then you know how many hearts East has. And Hold that Thought!

4) The best way to get a count is when an opponent shows out in a suit.

Make a mental note of how many their partner has or had. And Hold that Thought!

5) Counting will help you make the right play at the right time.

Try to play the "easy" suits first to get a count on the "difficult" suits. If you've kept a count as you went along it will often help you know how to play an important suit at the end.

The real trouble with counting is that sometimes we FORGET as we go along, and the more tricks that are played the harder it is to remember the distributions. Our minds tend to focus on how to play suit combinations etc, and we are sometimes surprised at the cards the defenders play, and we lose the thread of the count. But practice makes perfect, so please keep trying on every hand. Success will be guaranteed and you'll feel great satisfaction!

COUNTING WITH JOAN BUTTS



Board 1

North Deals
None Vul

♠ 3 2 ♥ A K Q 10 4 2 ♦ Q J 10 ♣ 8 4	<table style="border: 1px solid black; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	♠ Q 6 5 4 ♥ 9 6 5 ♦ A K 4 ♣ A 10 3	♠ 9 8 ♥ 8 ♦ 7 6 5 3 2 ♣ Q 9 7 6 2
N						
W E						
S						
		♠ A K J 10 7 ♥ J 7 3 ♦ 9 8 ♣ K J 5				

West	North	East	South
	1 ♣	Pass	1 ♠
2 ♥	2 ♠	Pass	4 ♠
All pass			

Bidding: North, with 13 hcp and a balanced hand opens 1 ♣. East passes, South bids 1 ♠, and West overcalls 2 ♥. North raises partner's suit, and South bids game in spades.

Lead: ♥ A.

Play: West leads the ♥ A, cashes two more hearts, and then switches to the ♦ Q. After winning the diamond switch, declarer draws trumps. Declarer needs to find the ♣ Q to make the contract.

At this point of the hand declarer knows that:

West had six hearts, East had one heart;
Both West and East had two spades.

Declarer now plays the ♦ K, and ruffs the third diamond with both defenders following.

Both West and East had three+ diamonds.

West can have two clubs at most.
East has at least five clubs.

The odds favour East holding the ♣ Q, so declarer plays a club to the Ace, followed by a club towards the king-jack covering whatever East plays.

Board 2

East Deals
N-S Vul

♠ J 10 9 8 ♥ 4 2 ♦ 4 ♣ 9 8 7 4 3 2	<table style="border: 1px solid black; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	♠ K 7 6 3 2 ♥ 7 3 ♦ K J 3 2 ♣ Q 5	♠ — ♥ A K J 10 9 8 5 ♦ Q 7 6 5 ♣ J 10
N						
W E						
S						
		♠ A Q 5 4 ♥ Q 6 ♦ A 10 9 8 ♣ A K 6				

West	North	East	South
		4 ♥	Dbf
Pass	4 ♠	All pass	

Bidding: East opens 4 ♥, and South doubles. West passes, and North bids 4 ♠.

Lead: ♥ A.

Play: Two rounds of hearts is followed by a club switch. Declarer wins and plays a trump, discovering the 4-0 break.

Declarer needs to find the ♦ Q to make the contract.

After drawing three rounds of spades, and then three rounds of clubs, what do you know about East's hand, which is easier to count.

East had no spades.
East had seven hearts.
East had two clubs.

That's nine cards, and leaves East with four diamonds. Declarer and dummy also had four diamonds, leaving West with a singleton.

Declarer can guarantee the contract by playing the ♦ K and then playing the ♦ J intending to finesse for the queen against East.

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Board 3

South Deals
E-W Vul

♠ 10 9 8 6 3 ♥ 9 5 3 ♦ 7 ♣ 6 5 4 2	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ A 5 ♥ 8 7 6 2 ♦ Q 9 5 4 3 2 ♣ 9	♠ Q J 2 ♥ K Q J ♦ K J 8 ♣ A Q J 8
	N											
W		E										
	S											

West	North	East	South
Pass	6 NT	All pass	2 NT

Bidding: South with a balanced 20 high card points opens 2 NT. North with 14 points raises directly to 6 NT.

Lead: ♠ 10.

Play: There are eleven top tricks and declarer needs to find the ♦ Q for the twelfth.

Try and find out as much as possible about the hand before deciding on the diamond suit. The defenders will win the first or second round of spades, and declarer will play all their heart and club winners, and then their third spade.

This will reveal the West had five spades, three hearts, and four clubs. West has either one diamond or the last heart.

East had two spades, three hearts, and one club. East has at least six diamonds.

The odds favour East holding the ♦ Q, so declarer plays the ♦ A, followed by a diamond towards the king-jack covering whatever East plays.

Board 4

West Deals
Both Vul

♠ A K Q 6 2 ♥ 6 4 3 ♦ K 5 ♣ 10 6 5	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ J 4 ♥ A Q 10 8 ♦ 7 6 4 2 ♣ A K 9	♠ 9 8 7 ♥ 5 2 ♦ J 10 9 8 ♣ 8 4 3 2
	N											
W		E										
	S											

West	North	East	South
1 ♠	Dbl	Pass	4 ♥
All pass			

Bidding: West opens 1 ♠, North doubles, East passes, and South bids game in hearts.

Lead: ♠ A.

Play: West leads three rounds of spades and declarer ruffs the third round and draws trumps.

South, missing both the ♦ K and ♦ J can afford one diamond loser but not two. Do you take the finesse?

West opened, and there were only fourteen points missing. West is certain to have ♦ K and it's offside. Is there anything that declarer can do?

If declarer draws trumps and cashes three clubs, West shows turns up with five spades, three hearts, and at least three clubs. West has at most two diamonds, likely to be ♦ Kx.

Declarer can ensure a second diamond trick by playing the ♦ A, followed by a small one. The ♦ Q for the third round.