

Lesson 6 – Re-evaluating Using Dummy Points

Experienced bridge players will continually re-evaluate their hands based on the bidding and other factors. ATeacherFirst website uses a very simple way which is effective, easy to learn for beginners and works relatively well. As you learn more and gain experience, you can use other ways to reevaluate your hand, some that may be more precise than this.

High Card Points (HCP) are always counted. The allocation for distribution points can change. Here are the recommendations with the reasoning behind it. When you understand the reasons for your decisions, the logic will help you reason out other, more complicated, situations.

Evaluate your hand for distribution as follows:

How to count:	Why?
When first evaluating your hand, add points for length. Give 1 pt for the 5 th card in a suit, 1 pt for the 6 th card, etc.	Long suits will take more tricks both in a trump suit and in No Trump. Little cards can take tricks. "Fits take tricks!"
When you realize you will be the dummy hand (i.e., you will support your partner's suit which makes your partner the declarer and your hand becomes the dummy), count pts for shortness in suits other than trump.	When your partner starts to play the hand and as soon as your dummy hand is void in a suit, your partner can use the dummy's trump to cross-ruff, thereby taking more tricks without pulling trump and often trumping the opponent's high cards. Because of dummy's shortness in side suits (not trump), partner may be able to ruff in dummy's hand first and afterwards pull 2 of opponent's trump for every 1 of his/her trump.
Do not count dummy points (shortness points) until you know with certainty your hand will be the dummy and the contract is certain to be in a trump suit.	Shortness does not add strength in NT contracts. In fact, shortness is a liability. If you haven't yet found an 8-card fit in a trump suit, you should assume that a NT contract is still a possibility, so do not count dummy points.

Always remember your goals for bidding. Your first goal is to find a fit (8+ cards) in a major suit. If that is not possible, your next goal is to see if you can safely be in a NT contract. Without 8 cards in a major, NT gives the next best contract, but you need to have stoppers in all suits to make it a safe NT contract. The least desirable option is to be in a minor suit contract, but sometimes that is where you should end up.

Sometimes it is much more advantageous to be in a NT contract even when you have found an 8-card fit in a minor suit. NT contracts give you a higher score per trick. The only time you should settle for a minor suit contract is (1) after you have ruled out a good fit in a major contract and (2) one suit or more does not have stoppers which would allow the opponents to run a long suit in a NT contract and take too many tricks which you cannot stop.

When your partner opens the bidding in a major suit, you know s/he has 5 cards in the major. With 3 cards in your partner's major and possibly 0 points, you have found your 8-card fit and you may be able to respond to support your partner. Before you decide on your bid, you should realize that your hand will become Dummy, so re-evaluate your hand based on Dummy Points. By doing so, you will know whether to pass, raise the bid to the 2 Level, the 3 Level or to Game based on the minimum opening hand promised from partner (12–15 points).

Short suits are worth extra points because your partner will be able to trump from the Dummy hand as soon as the hand is void in a side suit. For example, your little 2 in a trump suit can take an opponent's ♣Ace if you are void in clubs. Please note that the Declarer (the first person to bid the suit) does not count Dummy Points. Only the player whose hand will be exposed as Dummy is the one who counts Dummy points.

To count Dummy Points:

- 1) As always, count HCP for honor cards (Ace, King, Queen, Jack).
- 2) Do not count points for length in a suit.
- 3) Instead, count Dummy Points in side suits other than trump – 4-5 points for a void, 2-3 pts for a singleton, 1 pt for a doubleton. (Many beginner books suggest 5 pts for a void, 3 for a singleton, 1 for a doubleton. For a beginner, it might be wise to be slightly more cautious and use the 4/2/1 point count as it is more conservative. Overall, use your judgment.)
- 4) Dummy points can be used for a minor suit as well, once you've established for certainty that your contract is settled in a minor and not in NT. A minor suit game contract requires 29 pts. Never count Dummy Points in a NT contract. That is why it is wiser to wait to count Dummy Points in a minor suit trump until it is certain that NT will not be the final contract.
- 5) Usually, I will also add 1 point for each trump card above the 3 in a major that I need to support my partner. Example: If I have 4 cards in spades and my partner opened with 1♠ to show 5, I will consider giving my hand 1 extra point. I only do that when I'm close to the next range level (e.g., I have 9 pts and need 10 to show a medium-range response).

As responder, how much should you raise your partner's opening bid of a major suit when you know there is an 8-card fit in that major (♠ or ♥)?

With 6-9 points (minimum), bid 2♠ or 2♥.

With 10-12 points (medium), bid 3♠ or 3♥.

An alternative is to first bid a different suit at the 2 level (forcing) and then bid 3♠ or 3♥.

With 13+ points (maximum), you know you should be in Game. Bid another suit first (forcing), then jump to 4♠ or 4♥ (Game Level). If you are playing with all beginners at the table and they do not understand that a change of suit is forcing, you should immediately jump to 4♠ or 4♥ and not take a chance that you won't reach game.

Here are some examples:

Example 1: Your partner opens 1♥. To start with, you count 3 points for this hand — not enough to respond to your partner's opening bid. Now that you know there is a fit in hearts and therefore you can support your partner in Hearts, re-evaluate and count Dummy Points — 3 HCP plus 2-3 for the singleton and 1 extra point for the 4th heart. That gives you 6-7 points, so you respond 2♥. If your partner opens 1♠, you respond 2♠, using the same re-evaluation, because you have 4 spades for support.



Example 2: Your partner opens 1♠. To start with, you count 5 HCP for this hand — normally not enough to respond to an opening bid. Now that you know you have a fit in spades, you count Dummy Points because you have support for your partner in spades. Count 5 HCP plus 1 for the doubleton = 6 points. Your bid is 2♠. Your hand will become the Dummy Hand. If your partner opens 1♥, you should pass with just 5 points and no fit in hearts.



Example 3: Your partner opens 1♥. To start with, you count 10 pts for this hand — 8 HCP plus 1 point for the 5th card in spades and 1 for the 5th card in diamonds. Now you can count Dummy Points because you will support your partner in Hearts (you have 3 hearts for support). You will re-evaluate using Dummy Points. Remember, when you count Dummy Points, you do not count length in a side suit as extra points. Instead, you switch and add points for voids, singletons and doubletons. This hand is now worth 12 points — 8 HCP as before, plus 4-5 extra points for a void in clubs. You might not have quite enough for Game Level if your partner opened with the minimum 12 pts. Considering the void and the two long suits, you are close to game level. First bid 1♠ (forcing). Next, plan to jump to 4♥, depending on what your partner bids next.



You may be wondering, "Why not jump immediately to 4♥?" Experienced players do not jump so fast, unless the opponents start bidding and make it difficult. Then, it may be advantageous to jump to 4♥. By bidding another suit in between, you are showing strength. Experienced players consider a jump to 4♥ to be a weak bid and a message to opener that slam is probably not an option. By bidding another suit, you both know that a change of suit in the first round is forcing, so there is no fear of Opener passing — Opener must bid again. Responder will still get a chance to bid in support of hearts. If you wish to bid like a beginner (and that's not so bad when you are a beginner), then jump to 4♥ with this hand. If you wish to bid like a more experienced player, bid another suit first, then jump to 4♥ in the next round.

If you are following these lessons step by step, you have not learned how to bid to slam level yet. For now, be pleased to get to game level and make a slam. You will soon learn how to recognize slam possibilities and how to get there.

If partner opens 1♠, your hand becomes slightly stronger. With 8 HCP and 5-card support (you have 10 trump together) and a void, you definitely have the strength for game. You can still bid 2♦ (forcing), then jump to 4♠. If you were weak, you could use The Law of Total Tricks and jump to 4♠ immediately because you have a minimum of 10 spades together. With 8 HCP and points for the void, this is not a weak responding hand!

Example 4: Your partner opens 1♥. To start with, count 5 points (3 HCP plus 1 each for the 5th and 6th card in spades). Now that you know you have support for your partner (3+ cards in hearts), re-evaluate and count 3 HCP as before, no points for the extra cards in spades, but 1 point for the doubleton in diamonds and 2-3 points for the singleton in clubs = 6-7 pts. Consider adding 1 extra point for the 9th trump, though it makes no difference to your decision in this case. With 6 to 9 points, respond 2♥.



If Partner opens 1♠, this hand can be evaluated quite differently. Count 3 HCP as before, 1 extra pt for the doubleton, 2-3 for the singleton and add 2 for the extra length in spades. Experience will also show you that sometimes you can be "trump rich." Extra trumps in the dummy hand are not worth as much when not combined with singletons, doubletons and voids. If you have 5 trump, for example, and the shape of the other suits is 3-3-2 cards, relatively balanced, the extra trump are not as valuable. In that case, dummy point count gives you only 1 extra point for the doubleton.

With 8-9 points, the response would be 2♠. However, with this hand, I would jump to 4♠ using the Law of Total Tricks. There's 11 trump together, a void and a singleton. That is worth a game level bid. The opponents are less likely to bid over 4♠ and it could be that they have most of the HCP, since this hand has only 3 HCP. I would rather take this contract to game level with the risk of going down than let the opponents find their game in another suit.

Example 5: Let's consider if partner opens 1♥. You have 4-card heart support and over 6 points, so you will respond to your partner in hearts and your hand will become the Dummy Hand. Since you have a doubleton in clubs, re-evaluate and now you have 10 points, or 11 points if you count the extra trump. With 10-12 pts, raise the level to 3. Your bid will be 3♥. You don't have a 5-card suit for an



intervening bid, but some may bid 2♦ (forcing) and then 3♥. Some will use the jump to 3♥ to show a 4-card heart suit. In any case, you should make sure you bid 3♥, either on this bid or the next bid.

If partner opens 1♠, your count is 10 points (counting 1 pt for the doubleton) and you should bid 3♠, either on this bid or the next bid.

Here is an example of a hand that requires more careful consideration:

Your partner opens 1♥. You have 7 HCP and, because you have 3-card heart support, you can count Dummy pts. How many pts do you give to the King singleton? Is it worth a hefty 5-6 points (3 HCP for the King and 2-3 for the singleton)? If the opponents have the Ace, the King will not take a trick. However, the singleton does make the weak hearts more valuable for cross-ruffing. This hand is still worth a response of 2♥, but be cautious. Don't give too much added strength to shortness when the short suits are a singleton King or a doubleton with a Queen.



Finally, one more example. This time you are the Opener with this hand:

Your opening bid is 1♥. You have 16 HCP plus 2 pts for length in hearts. Partner responds 1♠. What do you do next? Of course, you like your hearts. If you rebid 3♥ to show extra length and extra strength, partner can pass. You have found your 8-card fit in a major suit, spades. Be happy with that! Your partner may have no hearts or maybe 1 heart and will still not be able to support your 3♥ rebid, showing 6 hearts. Accept that you will support your partner and you will now be the dummy.



Before you rebid, count dummy points: add 4-5 for the void; do not count the 2 pts for length in hearts. You now have 16 HCP, plus 4-5 dummy pts = 20-21 pts. As soon as you agree with your partner's suit, you will be showing your range of points. This is the 2nd round now, so you must show your points. Your 20 pts combined with partner's minimum of 6 points equals game, so bid 4♠. If opponents lead a diamond, which is quite likely, your dummy hand will be able to take the first trick, even if they lead the ♦Ace. If your partner has the ♦Ace, then s/he will be able to take the trick and discard a losing club or heart from dummy. See how much stronger your hand becomes with a void!

If your partner has more than just a minimum responding hand (6-9 pts), s/he will now know your point count quite accurately and can consider how much higher to bid. However, if slam level is not there, it's better to stay at game level and not go higher. Now you should be ready to try the Lesson 6 Quiz and check your answers.