

VALUING YOUR HAND

American Style Five Card Majors

HIGH CARD POINTS (HCP)

Ace=4, King=3, Queen=2, Jack=1

Count only High Card Points when opening or responding with balanced hands (No Trump Bids). Do not add long suit points or short suit points.

DISTRIBUTION POINTS

In addition to High Card Points we can add *distribution points* for long suits OR short suits:

1. Long Suit Points

For any suit with more than 4 cards, add a point for each card beyond the fourth card.

Count Long Suit Points when opening the bidding or when responding with a change of suit.

2. Short Suit Points (Also Called Dummy Points)

We count short suit points *only* when we have an 8 card or better fit with partner.

With 4 card or better support Void=5, Singleton=3, Doubleton=1

With only 3 card support Void=3, Singleton=2, Doubleton=1

Don't count Long Suit Points as well as Short Suit Points.

TOTAL POINTS

When we refer to Total Points we mean the total of

High Card Points and Long Suit Points

OR

High Card Point and Short Suit Points.

See above for when to count Long Suit Points and Short Suit Points. We never add BOTH Long Suit Points and Short Suit Points.

ADJUSTMENTS TO THE POINT COUNT

BASIC POINT COUNT

The values

Ace=4, King=3, Queen=2, Jack=1

are used to calculate a hand's high card points (HCP). In some situations it can be appropriate to add points for distribution. If so, the resulting number of points is sometimes known as the Total Points

While the Total Points generally give a good valuation of a hand, it doesn't take account of other pluses and minuses. Under some circumstances the Total Points should be adjusted upwards or downwards by one or two points.

SINGLETON HONOURS

Consider the following hand:

♠ K
♥ Q 9 8 3 2
♦ J 8 4 2
♣ A J 7

There are 11 HCPs, together with one length point. These 12 Total Points would generally qualify the hand for an opening bid. If you're using the rule of 20, then 11 HCPs + 5 hearts + 4 diamonds would also make the hand just strong enough.

But the above calculations don't take account of the position of the honour cards. Here we have a singleton king, for which the value is uncertain. If partner's spades happen to be something like ♠ Q J 9 8 4 or ♠ A Q 10 2, then our ♠ K could still be worth a full 3 points, but opposite ♠ 7 4 3 2 then our ♠ K would be worthless (except perhaps in defence).

It's often difficult to work out the value of a singleton honour, but a good rule of thumb is to deduct a point for a singleton jack, queen or king. This point may be reinstated if partner bids the suit.

For the above hand, the most realistic value for HCPs is 11, rather than 12. Whether you're counting length points or using the rule of 20, it's best not to open the bidding with this hand.

TWO HONOURS DOUBLETON

Similar considerations apply to a holding of QJ doubleton, which might be worth anything between 0 and 3 points, depending upon partner's holding. Again, a sound guideline is to deduct one point.

It's also worth bearing in mind that the doubletons KJ and KQ are not always worth their full 4 or 5 points. Deducting a full point is perhaps being a little cautious, but you should generally note this as a distinct minus feature.

INTERMEDIATE CARDS

Consider the following combined holdings:

North ♠ A J 2	North ♥ A J 2
South ♠ 5 4 3	South ♥ 10 9 3

One trick is certain in each suit, but a second spade trick is only possible if West has both of ♠KQ, which is approximately a 25% chance. By contrast, a second trick can be made in hearts if West has either or both of ♥KQ, approximately a 75% chance. Yet the basic point count yields a combined total of 5 for both suits.

The reason for this difference is the presence of the intermediate cards in the South hand. This is perhaps an extreme example, but it should be clear that tens and nines (and sometimes eights) can be a beneficial feature in a hand.

Tens and nines can be even more valuable when combined with one or more higher honours. In the second example above, if we move South's ♥ 10 to the North hand, we have the same 75% chance of a second trick even without South's ♥ 9.

Some authorities recommend adding half a point for each ten, but in practice most people prefer to avoid counting fractions of points. Also, this approach doesn't take account of the fact that an average hand contains one ten and one nine anyway.

A good rule of thumb is to add a point if you have three tens, or two tens and three nines. With slightly less than this, count this as a "plus feature", provided that most of the intermediate cards are accompanied by higher honours.

If you have no tens and no more than one nine, count this as a "minus feature".