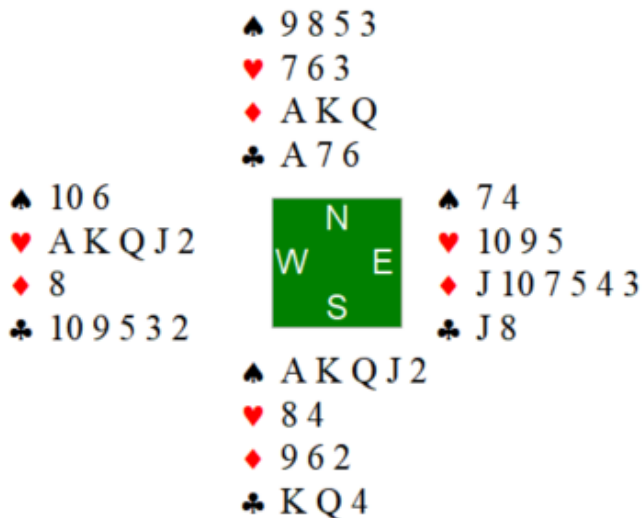




Suit Contracts vs. Notrump Contracts

In a notrump contract, we are concerned with winners, we count sure winners, and then we see where we can establish other winners to take enough tricks to make our contract. In a suit contract, winners are still important, and we must establish winners to make our contract but being able to ruff changes things. Let's look at an example hand and see how it would play in 3NT and then how it would play in a suit contract. It is a very instructive example. It shows how trumps can be used to neutralize the opponent's long suit, and a short suit becomes an asset, not a liability.



Case 1: 3NT NT by South. Lead: ♥A.

West leads the ♥A and can play 4 more hearts, winning the first 5 tricks, and defeating the contract by 1 trick. Even though South has 11 winners, they must discard some of those winners on the play of the heart suit.

Case 2: 4♠ declared by South. Lead: ♥A.

Declarer only has two heart losers, because on the third heart trick declarer will have no more hearts and can ruff the trick (or over-ruff if East happens to be out of hearts as well).

Plan: I will ruff the third heart trick and then I will play high trump drawing all the defenders trumps. Then I will play my sure winners in the other suits and will take 11 tricks.

So, in 3NT declarer will only take 8 tricks, and in 4♠ declarer will take 11 tricks!

Strategy in Suit Contracts vs Notrump Contracts

In a notrump contract we are concerned with winners, sure winners and establishing winners.

In a suit contract we count our losers, and then decide how to take care of the losers, by using a finesse, ruffing them, or discarding them on a long suit.

The hand with the longest trump is called the master hand, and we always, always, count losers with respect to the master hand. This is typically the declarer's hand. If the two hands have an equal number of trump, the master hand is the hand with the strongest trumps. The hand with fewer trump is called the short hand. The following table summarizes how declarer should plan the play of the hand.

Suit Contracts	Notrump Contracts
Count your LOSERS	Count your WINNERS
Figure out how to get rid of excess losers	Figure out how to create needed winners
Make a plan	Make a plan
Execute the plan	Execute the plan

Remember to always plan a suit contract with respect to the master hand. Losers in the short hand do not matter, only losers in the master hand. So why do we count losers? It is because the power of the trump suit negates the defenses long suits. Losers are tricks you know you must lose.

Examples:

KQJ opposite 432 = 1 loser

AK2 opposite 654 = 1 loser

We can think in terms of two types of losers, immediate losers (or "fast" losers). These are losers that your opponents can take whenever they have the lead. Eventual losers (or "slow" losers) are losers that your opponents can take only after they promote their high cards. So, in the first example above you have 1 fast loser, in the second example you have 1 slow loser.

Examples: How many losers are in your hand, sitting West?

(You) ♠ A 9 2		(Dummy) ♠ 6 4 3	Two slow losers in the West hand. The ♠A prevents West from having any immediate losers.
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(You) ♠ 7 5 3		(Dummy) ♠ A K 8	One eventual loser in the West hand. East's high Spades "cover" two of the small cards in the West hand.
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(You) ♠ 8 2		(Dummy) ♠ 9 4 3	Two immediate losers in the West hand. By the time those two tricks are lost, West can trump any other Spade trick.
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In making a plan, count losers from the perspective of the "long trump" or master hand.

As Declarer, how do I count losers?

Decide which hand – your own hand or the Dummy hand – is the "long trump" or master hand.

- When one hand has more trump cards than the other, the hand with more trump cards is the master hand.
- When both hands have the same number of trump cards, the hand with stronger trump cards is the master hand.

Then, **in the master hand only**, count suit by suit (including trump!):

- Count the number of tricks you must lose because they are not top cards
- Look to see if the losers can be covered by top cards in the Dummy hand
- It's okay to account for promotion in a long suit
- Add the number of losers across all suits

Other than Promotion, don't think about how to eliminate losers YET! (We'll do that soon.)

Practice counting losers

In the following examples the contract is always 4♥ by West:

Your Hand	Dummy Hand	
♠ 943 ♥ AQJT6 ♦ K4 ♣ AQ7	♠ AK62 ♥ 854 ♦ AQ5 ♣ 863	Your hand is the master hand Count 4 losers total: 1♠ (slow), 1♥(slow), 2♣(slow)
♠ AK62 ♥ 654 ♦ A5432 ♣ 8	♠ 943 ♥ AQJT6 ♦ K6 ♣ AQ7	Dummy hand is the master hand Count 4 losers total: 1♠ (slow), 1♥(slow), 2♣(slow)
♠ 943 ♥ AQJT6 ♦ K6 ♣ AQ7	♠ AK6 ♥ 654 ♦ A543 ♣ 863	Your hand is the master hand Count 4 losers total: 1♠ (slow), 1♥(slow), 2♣(slow)
♠ AK6 ♥ 875 ♦ QJT9 ♣ K53	♠ 943 ♥ AQJT6 ♦ 84 ♣ A97	Dummy hand is the master hand Count 5 losers total: 1♠ (slow), 1♥(slow), 2♦(fast), 1♣(slow)

Do I have too many losers?

For any contract, we know how many tricks you need to win... just add 6 to the number in the contract. To know how many losers you can afford, subtract the number of tricks from 13.

Contract Level	Tricks Needed	Maximum losers
1	7	6
2	8	5
3	9	4
4	10	3
5	11	2
6	12	1
7	13	0

Or if you want a “magic” formula:

- Take 7 and subtract the number in the contract...
- that's the number of tricks you can afford to lose

What if I have too many losers?

If you have counted more losers than you can afford, you need to work to eliminate some of the losers from the long-trump hand. We can use the same tools as in a notrump contract to eliminate losers, promotion, developing long suits and finessing. We will learn more tools in future lessons.

Drawing Trump

When you are playing in a suit contract your first job is to draw trump. This is usually the right thing to do. Since you have more trump than your opponents, usually you can draw their trump by leading trump two or three times. Once they have no more trumps, they can not ruff your winners, but you should still have trump so you can ruff their winners!