

Hand Counting Practice Aid

Instructions:

Learn to count out a hand the easy way -- by **patterning**. Look at your hand when you first pick it up. Don't just count high card points, but also count out your shape: 4432, 5431, 6421, 4333, etc. There are 14 of those patterns that will make up 96% of the hands that you hold. The goal is to make those hand patterns as familiar as your times tables were when you were in school, or the ingredients for your favorite recipe are to you today..

The magic is that just as there are only so many hand patterns or ways that 13 cards can be distributed into the four suits in your hand, there are only so many ways that 13 cards of one suit can be distributed into four hands around the table. The common patterns are the same -- 14 suit patterns or distributions that come up the same as 14 hand patterns do, 96% of the time.. When those hand patterns are 'natural' to you, then you'll start to 'feel' the distributions around the table intuitively.

*As defender, as soon as the auction is over, make a guess about declarer's hand shape. Your guess may not be exactly right, but that picture of declarer's hand will help you make a better lead (if you're on lead), and start planning the defense no matter which defender you are. Once you see dummy and opening lead, refine your guess about declarer's shape and strength. Also remember that *your last chance to ask for a review is before you play to trick 1.**

As soon as you see the dummy, you will be looking at your 13 cards and dummy's 13 cards -- *half of the 52 cards in the deck*. The auction will give you additional clues and cues: "She opened 1S, so she's got at least five spades." "He raised his partner's diamonds so he has at least four diamonds." "She bid NT, so she doesn't have a singleton."

Use the chart below by putting your hand pattern in the column under your seating position. The auction may allow you to put an initial guess (West overcalls 2D, you can put a 5(+) for West's diamonds). When you see the dummy, you fill in the suit pattern for that hand. As cards are played, you can firm up the other two hands -- when S shows out of hearts, you know the distribution of all four hands for the heart suit!

At the end of the hand, *each column* and *each row* will add up to 13 -- Thirteen cards in each hand, thirteen cards in each suit.

PLEASE NOTE: *The charts below are to be used ONLY in practice settings (you against a robot or you with friends who are practicing for fun and they know you are working on this). The laws of bridge explicitly prohibit using memory aids in any tournament or ACBL game. Please respect that!* This is a great exercise to practice with robots, or your best P and robots on BBO.

Suppose you sit North and pick up ♠AKJxx, ♥Qxx, ♦Kx, ♣xxx -- fill in the chart like this:

	North	East	South	West
Spades	5			
Hearts	3			
Diamonds	2			
Clubs	3			

The auction starts with your 1S bid, and continues:

1S P 2S X
P 3C (all pass)

Dummy hits with X, AJxx, Axxx, KJxx, and you put Dummy's cards and partner's expected 3 spades in the chart. You also note that East needs at least four clubs for his 3C bid:

	North	East	South	West
Spades	5		3(+)	1
Hearts	3			4
Diamonds	2			4
Clubs	3	4(+)		4

You'll continue to think about suits around the table as people follow suit or show out.

From the chart above, we can fill in two entries in the next chart: We know that East has at most four spades, and that South has at most two clubs:

	North	East	South	West
Spades	5	3/4	3(+)	1
Hearts	3			4
Diamonds	2			4
Clubs	3	4(+)	Max 2	4

In fact, partner's count signal in spades will let you complete the spade row, and declarer will let you fill in the club row pretty soon..

	North	East	South	West
Spades	5	3	4	1
Hearts	3			4
Diamonds	2			4
Clubs	3	5	1	4

When you see either South or East show out of either red suit, you'll have a complete count on the hand, and be able to fill out the remaining four boxes (remember, every row adds up to 13, every column adds up to 13). This will let you know which suit to hold and discard at the end of a hand -- no more guessing which red card declarer has left!

Reference: The 14 most common hand patterns:

4-4-3-2	21.5%		6-3-3-1	3.5%
5-3-3-2	15.5%		5-5-2-1	3.2%
5-4-3-1	12.9%		4-4-4-1	3.0%
5-4-2-2	10.6%		7-3-2-1	1.9%
4-3-3-3	10.5%		6-4-3-0	1.3%
6-3-2-2	5.6%		5-4-4-0	1.2%
6-4-2-1	4.7%		5-5-3-0	0.9%

All other six- and seven-card distributions are about 1.5% each.

All 8- to 10-card suits together are about 0.9%

	North	East	South	West
Spades				
Hearts				
Diamonds				
Clubs				

	North	East	South	West
Spades				
Hearts				
Diamonds				
Clubs				

	North	East	South	West
Spades				
Hearts				
Diamonds				
Clubs				

	North	East	South	West
Spades				
Hearts				
Diamonds				
Clubs				

	North	East	South	West
Spades				
Hearts				
Diamonds				
Clubs				

	North	East	South	West
Spades				
Hearts				
Diamonds				
Clubs				

	North	East	South	West
Spades				
Hearts				
Diamonds				
Clubs				

	North	East	South	West
Spades				
Hearts				
Diamonds				
Clubs				