

Bridge Reference

Counting the hand, reading distribution from the play, and standard defensive signals.

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WHAT THIS TRAINS

These drills cover the **play phase and counting skills** only: four hands are dealt, a trump strain (or no-trump) is set directly, and tricks are played out so you can practise counting suits, reading distribution, and interpreting partner's signals. The full bidding auction and scoring are a future addition.

COUNTING THE HAND

HCP

High-card points (Milton Work count): A = 4, K = 3, Q = 2, J = 1. Spot cards are worth 0.

40 total

The whole deck holds **40 HCP**. An average hand is 10; opening values start around 12–13. Knowing the total lets you infer the points still unseen.

Shape

A hand's **distribution** is its four suit lengths, e.g. 4-4-3-2 or a balanced 4-3-3-3. They always sum to 13. Long suits and short suits drive both the play and the defence.

Count suits

As cards fall, **count each suit**. There are 13 of every suit; once you know how many have appeared and how many you hold, you know exactly how many are still out in the other three hands.

READING DISTRIBUTION FROM THE PLAY

Follow suit

You **must follow the led suit** if you hold it. Only a player who is *void* may play another suit.

Void

So when a player **discards or ruffs off the led suit**, they have revealed a **void** — they hold none of that suit. This is the single most powerful read in defence.

Trump

In a suit contract the **trump suit** beats every other suit: the highest trump played wins the trick. A trump played off the led suit is a **ruff**. In No-Trump, only the led suit can win.

Shape out

Each void and each suit count narrows a hidden hand. Place one suit and the rest of a player's **shape** — and where the missing high cards sit — comes into focus.

STANDARD DEFENSIVE SIGNALS

Attitude

When partner plays a card to a suit, a **high spot card encourages** (“I like this suit, continue it”) and a **low spot card discourages** (“switch”). Standard “high-encourage” attitude.

Count

Two cards show **count**: a **high-low** echo signals an even number of cards in the suit; **low-high** signals an odd number.

Why

Reading partner’s attitude and count tells you which suits to continue and lets you count out the whole deal — turning four hidden hands into one you can largely see.

System

These are **Standard American** signals — the most common conventions. Other partnerships agree on variants (e.g. upside-down signals), but high-encourage / high-low = even is the default taught here.