LOSING TRICK COUNT

The losing trick count is an alternative to counting points when assessing the trick-taking potential of your and your partner's hands. It is to be preferred to the point-count approach in one specific set of circumstances - if these circumstances do not all apply then prefer the simple point-count.

Use 'The Losing Trick Count' when:-

either you or your partner opened the bidding;
and you know that there is at least a 4-4 or a 5-3 suit fit;
and your hand is unbalanced.

Do not use 'The Losing Trick Count' if:-

yours is the overcalling side;
or an eight-card fit has not yet been established;
or your hand is balanced.

Counting your losing tricks

Simple count (once you are familiar with the idea then refine your counting method as shown below)

Count the losing tricks in each suit and then add up the total.
In each suit:-

a void counts as no losers;
any singleton which is not the ace is a loser;
in a doubleton, any card which is not the ace or king is a loser;
with three or more cards in a suit any of the top three cards which is not the ace, king or queen is a loser.

♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	Q T 6 5 J T 9 8 6 5 K 4 Q	**You LHO Pard RHO** 1♠ -	Partner opened the bidding; your hand is unbalanced; and you have at least a 4-4 spade fit; so count losing tricks.	Spades - 2 Hearts - 3 Diamonds - 1 Clubs - 1 **Losing trick count = 7**

Assessing partner's hand

If partner opened the bidding then assume (in the first place) that he has a losing trick count of 7.
If you opened the bidding then assume that partner has:-

a losing trick count of 9 for a raise to two, and
a losing trick count of 8 for a raise to three.

How high should you bid?

There is a maximum of twelve losing tricks in each hand - twenty four altogether.
Add your losing tricks to partner's assumed losing tricks.
Take the total from 24 to find how many tricks you hope to take
(or from 18 to see how many to bid.)

eg
Partner opens

Partner opens the bidding with one of a major.
You have four-card support in an unbalanced hand.
Assume that partner has 7 losers.

With 6 points and 9 or more losers raise to the two-level;
with 8 losers raise or force to the three-level (7 + 8 = 15 18 - 15 = 3);
with 7 losers raise or force to the four-level. (7 + 7 = 14 18 - 14 = 6);
and with 6 losers or better look for or bid a slam.

♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	T 9 6 5 J T 9 8 5 K 4 Q 6	**You LHO Pard RHO** 1♠ -	Partner opened the bidding, your hand is unbalanced, and you have at least a 4-4 spade fit. Losing trick count = 9. Assume partner has a losing trick count of 7. 9 + 7 = 16 18 - 16 = 2. Bid 2♠.

♠ Q T 6 5 ♥ J T 9 8 5 ♦ K 4 ♣ Q 6	**You LHO Pard RHO** 1♠ -	Partner opened the bidding, your hand is unbalanced, and you have at least a 4-4 spade fit. Losing trick count = 8. Assume partner has a losing trick count of 7. 8 + 7 = 15 18 - 15 = 3. Bid 3♠.

♠ Q T 6 5 ♥ J T 9 8 6 5 ♦ K 4 ♣ Q	**You LHO Pard RHO** 1♠ -	Partner opened the bidding, your hand is unbalanced, and you have at least a 4-4 spade fit. Losing trick count = 7. Assume partner has a losing trick count of 7 7 + 7 = 14 18 - 14 = 4. Either bid 4♠ or make a splinter bid of 4♣.

♠ A Q 6 5 ♥ Q T 9 8 6 ♦ K 5 ♣ A 4	**You LHO Pard RHO** 1♠ -	Partner opened the bidding, your hand is unbalanced, and you have at least a 4-4 spade fit. Losing trick count = 5. Assume partner has a losing trick count of 7 7 + 5 = 12 18 - 12 = 6. Either bid 6♠ or make a slam-try with 4NT (RKCB) or 2NT (Jacoby).

You opened

Assume that partner has 9 losers for a raise to the two-level, 8 losers for a raise to the three-level or seven losers for a high-card raise to the four-level.

With 7 losers, pass. (you are no better than you said already);
with 6 losers raise one level (or make a trial bid);
With 5 losers raise or force two levels.

♠ A Q 6 5 2 ♥ Q 7 ♦ K 8 5 4 ♣ A 4	**You LHO Pard RHO** 1♠ - 2♠ - ?	You have an unbalanced hand and at least an eight-card spade fit. Your losing trick count is 6. Assume that partner has a losing trick count of 9. 9 + 6 = 15 18 - 15 = 3 Force to 3♠ with a trial bid of 3♦.

♠ A Q 6 5 2 ♥ Q 7 ♦ K 8 5 4 ♣ A 4	**You LHO Pard RHO** 1♠ - 3♠ - ?	You have an unbalanced hand and at least an eight-card spade fit. Your losing trick count is 6. Assume that partner has a losing trick count of 8. 6 + 8 = 14 18 - 14 = 4 A slam is unlikely, so just bid 4♠.

♠ A K Q 5 2 ♥ Q 7 ♦ K 8 5 4 ♣ A 4	**You LHO Pard RHO** 1♠ - 2♠ - ?	You have an unbalanced hand and at least an eight-card spade fit. Your losing trick count is 5. Assume that partner has a losing trick count of 9. 5 + 9 = 14 18 - 14 = 4 A slam is unlikely, so just bid 4♠.

♠ A K Q 5 2 ♥ Q 7 ♦ K 8 5 4 ♣ A 4	**You LHO Pard RHO** 1♠ - 3♠ - ?	You have an unbalanced hand and at least an eight-card spade fit. Your losing trick count is 5. Assume that partner has a losing trick count of 8. 5 + 8 = 13 18 - 13 = 5 Make a slam-try such as 4NT (RKCB) or 4♦ (trial bid).

Refining the count

Unsupported queens tend to be losers, so count a queen as a loser unless it is supported by an honour (the 10 will do) in a three-card or longer holding, or partner has bid the suit.
A J T will usually lose just one trick as you take a repeated finesse, so count something like A J T 4 as just 1 loser.

♠ Q T 6 5 ♥ Q 8 6 5 3 2 ♦ K 4 ♣ Q	**You LHO Pard RHO** 1♠ -	Partner opened the bidding; your hand is unbalanced; and you have at least a 4-4 spade fit; so count losing tricks.	Spades - 2 (the Q is supported) Hearts - 3 (the queen is not supported). Diamonds - 1 Clubs - 1 **Losing trick count = 7**

♠ Q 7 6 5 ♥ A J T 5 3 2 ♦ 8 4 ♣ Q	**You LHO Pard RHO** 1♠ -	Partner opened the bidding; your hand is unbalanced; and you have at least a 4-4 spade fit; so count losing tricks.	Spades - 2 (the Q is supported by partner's bid) Hearts - 1 Diamonds - 2 Clubs - 1 **Losing trick count = 7**