

Chapter 1 – Targeted Game Invitations: Using Losing Trick Count to determine if an Invitation to Game should be made

WHAT ARE “GOOD” HCP AND “BAD” HCP?

You may have heard people discussing “good points” and “bad points”, i.e., someone might announce a 1NT opening as a good 14 HCP to a bad 18 HCP. What makes HCP good or bad?

Scattered honors are far weaker than suits with combined honors - ♥K76 and ♦Q87 would be one example of a bad 5 HCP while ♥KQ6 and ♦987 would be one example of a good 5 HCP.



THE HCP SYSTEM

We typically think of Kings as accurately valued in the 4-3-2-1 HCP system. Aces are underrated while Queens and Jacks are overrated.

Consider ♠KQ7 ♥AK53 ♦9832 ♣98 versus ♠AJ10 ♥Q532 ♦QJ3 ♣Q4 and before you look at it too closely, let's assume your partner opened 1♠. Both hands have 12 HCP. Which hand is stronger? The hand with “married” concentrated honors is stronger than the hand with scattered honors.



LOSING TRICK COUNT AS A SECONDARY HAND EVALUATION TOOL

How can we distinguish between good and bad points? One way to do that is with Losing Trick Count. Losing Trick Count (LTC) considers missing Aces, Kings and Queens in each suit up to the number of cards in the suit. A Queen without

an accompanying honor (including the 10) does not lower the LTC unless it is the Queen of Trumps.

LTC is unique in that it is the only secondary hand evaluation method that tells you your hand may not be as good as the HCP indicates. See the Appendix to review how to calculate LTC.

OPENER'S 2ND BID ASSESSMENT (ASSUMING RESPONDER MAKES A SIMPLE RAISE):

Instead of evaluating your hand exclusively in terms of HCPs, a more accurate assessment of the strength of your hand is available if you also utilize LTC.

West	North	East	South
	1♥	P	2♥

If Responder bids a Simple Raise, what does it take for Opener to invite to game? What about bidding game (without inviting)?

Using a Simple Raise HCP range, Responder's bid shows 6-9 HCP and a LTC of 8-9. Traditionally, after a Simple Raise, you would invite with 16-17 HCP. Now that you are using LTC, you should consider inviting to game with a LTC of 6 and bid game outright with a LTC of 5 or less.

If you, as Opener, have 17 HCP with a LTC of 6 or 18-19 HCP (regardless of LTC), you should bid game (rather than invite to game). In Matchpoint scoring it is likely everyone will bid game, and with enough HCP for game and the opponents' cards in the right places, it may still make game even with a LTC that suggest you shouldn't bid game.

However, as Opener, with 13-16 HCP (12 HCP is just too low) you should let LTC be your guide:

- With a 5 or less LTC, bid game immediately
- With a LTC of 6, invite to game (see the invitation method later in this chapter)

- With a LTC of 7 or more, Pass - You may have opened a 12 HCP hand with a LTC more than 7, but you don't use LTC until you know that an 8-card (or greater) fit has been found. Remember, LTC is a secondary method.
- Exception: with 17 HCP, invite with a LTC of 7 or more and bid game with a LTC of 6 or less.

OPENER EXAMPLES AFTER A SIMPLE RAISE:

Remember that a Simple Raise corresponds to a LTC of 8-9.

<p>♠ AKQ843</p> <p>♥ 3</p> <p>♦ A986</p> <p>♣ 93</p>	<p>♠ AK10864</p> <p>♥ 9</p> <p>♦ AQJ8</p> <p>♣ 65</p>	<p>♠ AK1082</p> <p>♥ J642</p> <p>♦</p> <p>♣ AK75</p>
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These hands all have a LTC of 5 and are 13-16 HCP. After Responder makes a Simple Raise, Opener should simply bid game.

<p>♠ K10762</p> <p>♥ A732</p> <p>♦ AQ10</p> <p>♣ 6</p>	<p>♠ AQ952</p> <p>♥ A852</p> <p>♦ A</p> <p>♣ 642</p>	<p>♠ AKQ85</p> <p>♥ J2</p> <p>♦ J2</p> <p>♣ A743</p>
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These hands all have a LTC of 6 and are 13-16 HCP. After Responder makes a Simple Raise, Opener should invite to game.

♠ KQJ108
♥ KJ3
♦ K43
♣ 64

♠ A9632
♥ K5
♦ AJ103
♣ QJ

♠ AQJ75
♥ A108
♦ 82
♣ AJ4

These hands all have a LTC of 7 and are 13-16 HCP. After Responder makes a Simple Raise, Opener should Pass.

♠ AJ653
♥ A953
♦ A2
♣ A10

♠ AKJ75
♥ K97
♦ KQ10
♣ Q7

♠ AKQ53
♥ K85
♦ K2
♣ Q75

These hands all have a LTC of 6 and 17+ HCP. After Responder makes a Simple Raise, Opener should bid game. A 17 HCP hand should have a LTC of 6 to bid game directly. Hands with 18-19 HCP should bid game directly regardless of LTC because that is what everyone else will bid. You don't want to be the only pair that isn't in a game that might make. If it doesn't make it will be a flat board.

Chapter 1 – Targeted Invitations to Game

USING LOSING TRICK COUNT (LTC) ONCE A FIT IS FOUND

In the LTC Chapters (the first two chapters), we learned that the expected LTC for an opening hand is 7 or less. When Responder makes a Simple Raise (i.e., 1♠ - 2♠), Responder's LTC is expected to be 8-9. Game is a distinct possibility when the combined LTC is 14 or less. Opposite Responder's Simple Raise, Opener would need a LTC of 6 to consider game as a possibility – IF Responder has a LTC of 8 (instead of 9).

Game invitations, as discussed below, have the benefit of further describing your hand to Responder with the intent of helping Responder know if the hands will work well together.

The beauty of this approach is that it allows Responder to go beyond HCP and even LTC. Now he can see how well the two hands complement each other.

A NEW WAY TO INVITE TO GAME

When you began playing bridge, you learned to invite to game using 1-2-3. If Responder gives a simple raise and Opener has values he thinks are close to bidding game, Opener would bid 3 of the suit (i.e., 1♠ - 2♠ - 3♠). The decision was based purely on HCP – Opener would invite with 16-17 HCP with the hope that Responder would bid game if he had 8-9 HCP.

There are better ways to invite to game – ways that help Responder understand Opener's hand and therefore able to make a better decision.

Opener can bid a new suit showing "SOME" length (3-4 card holding) and strength (exactly 1 of the top 3 honors) in that suit. Opener is asking Responder to evaluate the updated description of Opener's hand, and if it fits well with Responder's hand, then bid game. If there is bidding space, Responder can show

a suit where he CAN help even if he cannot bid game with Opener's invitational suit.

There is always a chance that Opener doesn't need help in an outside suit but instead needs help in the trump suit. NOW we use the 1♠ - 2♠ - 3♠ method, but with a different meaning. Opener is asking Responder if he has honors in the trump suit or possibly outside Aces.

Which cards make these hands look better?

West	North	East	South
	1♠		2♠
	?		

♠ KQJ85
♥ 10
♦ A876
♣ K84

This hand only has 13 HCP but it also has a LTC of 6. A LTC of 6 would suggest, opposite Responder's Simple Raise, this hand should invite to game.

Without ANY help from Responder, you are going to lose a Spade, a Heart, 2-3 Diamonds and 2-3 Clubs.

If Responder had the ♣AQ, you wouldn't lose any Clubs. If partner had the ♦KQ, you wouldn't lose any Diamonds. Obviously, both the Ace of Spades and the Ace of Hearts would be helpful.

When you invite in a suit, it says "I have one of the top three honors in this suit and 2-3 Losers. Can you help me eliminate Losers in this suit?"

♠ A109652
♥ 3
♦ AK6
♣ K42

This hand has 14 HCP but it also has a LTC of 6. A LTC of 6 would suggest, opposite Responder's Simple Raise, this hand should invite to game.

With two missing honors in the trump suit (Spades), you should always invite in the trump suit (inviting in the trump suit says "I am missing at least two of the top three honors in the trump suit. If you have any of the top three trump honors, or non-trump Aces, it would help my hand make game."

Without ANY help from Responder, you are going to lose 2-3 Spades, a Heart, maybe a Diamond, and 1-3 Clubs.

If Responder had the ♠KQ, that would be GREAT. If Responder had either the Ace of Hearts or Clubs it would be really good.

HOW SHOULD YOU INVITE TO GAME WITH THESE HANDS? (All have a LTC of 6)

West	North	East	South
	1♠		2♠
	?		

♠ AKQ85
♥ J2
♦ J2
♣ A743

You have 15 HCP, where would HCP in your partner's hand be MOST EFFECTIVE? Clubs! You should invite in Clubs. Bid 3♣.

♠ A109652
♥ 3
♦ AK6
♣ K42

You have 14 HCP. Should you invite? Yes – your LTC is 6 (invitational). The A♥ and the A♣ would be a TREMENDOUS help, or maybe the KQ♠. Invite in Spades. It gives your partner a perfect description of where you are looking for help. Bid 3♠.

♠ AKQ1032
♥ 84
♦ QJ4
♣ QJ

You have 15 HCP. You certainly don't need help in Spades. You should invite in Diamonds. Bid 3♦.

♠ AK7652
♥ A
♦ A42
♣ J83

This one is tough. With 16 HCP I think you should invite, and the best choice to look for help is in Clubs. If you invite in Clubs, Responder can accept in Clubs or counter invite in Diamonds. If you invite in Diamonds Responder cannot counter in Clubs (forces to the 4-level). Bid 3♣.

♠ AKJ875
♥ 106
♦ A104
♣ K4

You have 15 HCP. Where should you invite? You should invite in Diamonds. Bid 3♦.

♠ AKQJ5
♥ 8
♦ A98
♣ Q753

This hand has 16 HCP. Clubs is the easy choice. Bid 3♣.

♠ K9876
♥ Q1042
♦ AQ
♣ KJ

This hand has 15 HCP. Technically, you could invite in Spades or Hearts but Spades would be the better choice. Bid 3♠.

♠ AQ8763
♥ 832
♦ A5
♣ K5

With 13 HCP, you should invite in Spades. Your 13 HCP is pushing the invitational envelope but if partner had the A♥ and the A♣ wouldn't that (along with your 9-card trump suit) make this hand game-worthy? You are obviously not missing 2 of the top 3 honors in Spades but inviting in Spades will allow partner to accept with the cards you need (two of A♥, A♣ or K♠). Bid 3♠.

♠ K9873
♥ AJ87
♦ K4
♣ A4

This hand has 15 HCP. You should invite in Spades. Bid 3♠.

♠ AK1043
♥ KJ
♦ 94
♣ AJ43

This hand has 16 HCP. You should invite in Clubs. Bid 3♣.

♠ QJ964
♥ K7
♦ K2
♣ K543

This hand only has 12 HCP. You shouldn't invite with this hand, even with the LTC of 6. Pass.

♠ A10842
♥ AKQ5
♦ J7
♣ Q3

This hand has 16 HCP. Invite in Spades. Bid 3♠.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO ACCEPT AN INVITATION TO GAME?

In general, it would be best if you have TWO significant cards (significance relative to how partner invited) to accept partner's invitation. ALWAYS keep in mind that ANY Ace is great and top honors in the trump suit are also great. Just don't ignore the issues with the suit where your partner is asking for help.

ACCEPTING AN INVITATION IN THE TRUMP SUIT

When Opener invites in the trump suit, expect him to have no more than one top honor in the suit (the Ace, King, and Queen are the top honors). To accept Opener's game invitation in the trump suit, Responder should have:

- Two top honors in the trump suit, or
- Two outside Aces, or
- One outside Ace and one top honor in the trump suit

ACCEPTING AN INVITATION IN A NON-TRUMP SUIT

When Opener invites in a non-trump suit you should expect him to have one of the top honors in the suit. If he has more than one top honor it likely wouldn't leave you with an ability to accept. To accept Opener's game invitation in a non-trump suit, Responder should have a way to limit losers in the suit – either with honors in the suit, or shortness and at least two significant cards outside the suit, specifically:

- Two top honors (the Ace King and Queen are the top honors) in the suit (if Responder holds 2 top honors in the suit with which Opener has invited, then there should be no losers in that suit) and the invitation should be accepted, or
- One top honor and shortness (Doubleton – expect to lose only one trick in the suit), or
- One top honor (in the invitation suit) and either an outside Ace or a top trump honor, or
- A Singleton or Void in the invitation suit and either an outside Ace or a top trump honor, or

- One top honor and at least a 4-card holding in the invitation suit, combined with a maximum HCP holding (i.e., 9+ HCP)

If Opener invites in a suit, the absolute worst holding you can have is 3 small cards in that suit, which will likely result in three immediate lost tricks.

There is still room to accept the invitation based on brute force alone – you are at the top of your HCP range (maybe you downgraded a 10 HCP hand) or perhaps have a very good LTC. When partner invites in a non-trump suit, you should know that there are issues in that suit; furthermore, you should know that your opponents are now aware of those issues.

TELLING PARTNER ABOUT HELP IN ANOTHER SUIT

If you do not have help in partner's suit, there is an opportunity to mention a suit where you DO have values as long as bidding that suit doesn't carry you to the next bidding level (should have 2 of the top 3 honors in at least a 3-card suit).

♠	1072
♥	AQJ10
♦	109
♣	J842

West	North	East	South
	1♠	P	2♠
P	3♦	P	3♥

Following Responder's Simple Raise, Opener makes a game invitation in Diamonds. Responder doesn't have any assistance in Diamonds but since he can show Hearts without passing 3♠, he can describe his values in the Heart suit. Opener can now make an assessment as to whether that information improves his hand.

RESPONDER'S BID AFTER A GAME INVITATION WITH SPADES AS TRUMP – the bidding began with 1♠ - 2♠ and then Opener invites to game. Where would you accept an invitation?

♠ 942
♥ AJ75
♦ QJ7
♣ 1075

What a dilemma! You have 8 HCP and a LTC of 10. However, if partner invited to game in Hearts, it would be difficult to decline. Honestly, accepting an invitation in Hearts is a stretch but you might do it.

♠ J84
♥ 9
♦ 10863
♣ AK762

Responder has 8 HCP and a LTC of 8. You should definitely accept an invitation in Clubs. You could also accept an invitation in Hearts (ability to ruff losers in Hearts). You should feign illness if partner invites in Diamonds.

♠ 763
♥ A93
♦ KQ7
♣ 10843

You have 9 HCP and a LTC of 9. The only game invitation you would accept is Diamonds. You would hide if partner invited in Clubs – do NOT mention your Diamonds. Think about it, if partner invited in Clubs – stop the bidding ASAP.

♠ Q92
♥ AQ82
♦ 752
♣ 943

You have 8 HCP and a LTC of 9. If partner invited in either Hearts or Spades (trump) you should accept. If Opener invited in Clubs or Diamonds, you should mention Hearts.

♠ K104
♥ 2
♦ 853
♣ K98532

You have 6 HCP and a LTC of 8. You must decline any invitation.

♠ A96
♥ J42
♦ 107
♣ Q10964

You have 7 HCP and a LTC of 9. The Ace of trumps is a valuable card to have but you shouldn't accept any invitation with this hand.

♠ Q106
 ♥ A4
 ♦ J109852
 ♣ 83

You have 7 HCP and a LTC of 8. The only invitations you would accept are Hearts and Spades (trump).

♠ Q32
 ♥ 105
 ♦ 109865
 ♣ AQ6

You have 8 HCP and a LTC of 9. You can accept invitations in either Clubs or Spades (trump).

♠ 742
 ♥ KQ6
 ♦ K942
 ♣ J92

You have 9 HCP and a LTC of 9. The only invitation you would instantly accept is in Hearts.

♠ J92
 ♥ Q7
 ♦ KJ743
 ♣ QJ3

You have 10 HCP and a LTC of 9. You should accept ANY game invitation with this hand (because of the HCP).

♠ 1043
 ♥ J76
 ♦ 75
 ♣ AQ1075

You have 7 HCP and a LTC of 9. Your hand is weak but if partner invited in Clubs you should accept.

♠ K63
 ♥ 753
 ♦ Q1032
 ♣ QJ8

You have 8 HCP and a LTC of 9. There isn't an invitation you would accept with this hand.

The whole point of inviting to game this way is to realize that HCP become more powerful when they COMPLEMENT partner's HCP. Until you use this method, you are only looking at the quantity of HCP, not how well they work with partner's hand.