

# Modified Losing Trick Count (MLTC)

High Card Points (HCP) are so easy to count that they have popularity because of their simplicity. Another method of hand evaluation is known as the Losing Trick Count. Many of my evaluation techniques and bids are based more on losing trick count than they are based on high card points. I have adopted the less publicized version of losing trick count known as New Losing Trick Count or as I am going to call it throughout the rest of this document as Modified Losing Trick Count (MLTC). I first learned of this technique when I was doing research and writing seminars on Losing Trick Count. There was an article in *The Bridge World May 2003; A New Losing Trick Count by Johannes Koelman*. When I read about this improvement I was immediately sold!

Whether or not you've heard about Losing Trick Count, I suggest that you forget what you think you know! Losing Trick Count essentially evaluated each of the following hands to be equals:

Partner opens 1♠ and you hold

Ex. 1

♠A982

♥A43

♦A52

♣A109

Ex. 2

♠K982

♥K43

♦K52

♣K109

Ex.3

♠Q982

♥Q43

♦Q52

♣Q109

Ex. 4

♠A982

♥K43

♦Q52

♣K109

A cursory glance will tell you that these hands are nothing close to equal and you may want to immediately throw out the notion of LTC! How could any evaluation method think Ex.1 and Ex. 3 have the same evaluation? I was disgusted by the evaluation method and knew it needed major tweaking. Once I read about MLTC everything became crystal clear and now Modified Losing Trick Count is a spectacular method for hand evaluation.

Here's how it works:

When you and your partner have found a fit of at least 8 cards, you may then and only then apply MLTC. You count your modified losers and add them to partner's modified losers and then subtract the total from 25. **Yes, I said 25!** (Another difference from the older LTC) This will give you an extremely accurate assessment of the number of tricks you can likely take on the hand. MLTC takes into account all aspects of a hand into one easy to compute number. This number is the maximum potential for the hand assuming normal breaks and finesses working about ½ the time. It's a simple to compute formula that is much more accurate than HCP evaluation. Remember that this number is the likely maximum potential. If finesses are off and trump break poorly, then you won't take the maximum potential.

You count only the first three cards in each suit. For each suit missing an Ace, you have 1 ½ modified losers. For each suit missing a King, you have 1 modified loser and for each suit missing a queen, you have ½ a modified loser. If the suit is only 2 cards in length, then only the missing Ace and/or King will be counted. If the suit is a singleton, only the missing Ace is counted. If you have a void, there are no modified losers in a suit with a void.

Assume ♠ are trump and you have located a fit. Count your modified losers:

Ex. 5	MLTC	Ex. 6	MLTC
♠K874	2	♠A943	1.5
♥AQ43	1	♥5	1.5
♦1084	3	♦A75	1.5
♣KQ	1.5	♣AQ1032	1
Total	7.5	Total	5.5

Both examples have 14 HCP but example 6 has 2 fewer losers. Those 2 fewer losers will likely lead to 2 additional tricks when you play the hand in a spade contract. This examples shows how different HCP and MLTC can be. Think for a moment... Which dummy is likely to be better for partner? Example 6 of course!

More examples of counting MLTC (not trump suit specific):

Ex. 7	MLTC	Ex. 8	MLTC	Ex. 9	MLTC
♠AJ754	1.5	♠QJ109	2.5	♠A	0
♥K4	1.5	♥AK762	0.5	♥KQJ104	1.5
♦8765	3	♦432	3	♦65432	3
♣AQ	1	♣K	1.5	♣AJ	1
7 modified losers		7.5 modified losers		5.5 modified losers	

## Modified Losing Trick Counts by Holding

Holding	MTLC
Void	0
A	0
K	1.5
Q	1.5
J	1.5
X	1.5
Ax	1
Kx	1.5
Qx	2.5
Jx	2.5
AQ	1.0
AJ	1.0
AT	1.0
KQ	1.5
KJ	1.5
QJ	2.5
Xx	2.5
AKJ	0.5
AKx	0.5
AQJ	1
AQT	1
AQx	1
AJT	1.5
AJx	1.5
AT9	1.5
Axx	1.5
KQJ	1.5
KQT	1.5
KQx	1.5
KJT	2
KJx	2
KT9	2
KTx	2
Kxx	2
QJT	2.5
QJx	2.5
QT9	2.5
QTx	2.5
Qxx	2.5
Xxx	3

Any 3 card or longer suit without the A, K, or Q counts 3 modified losers.

I included all the different cases to suggest that I don't make adjustments for the interior spot cards like the Jack the ten and the nine. I recognize that it may be more accurate to assess AQ doubleton as only ½ a loser instead of one full loser but as you learn MLTC it's easier not to make adjustments now and handle possible adjustments later.

## Common Numbers for MLTC

### Openers Hands:

Minimum Opening Hand	7 or 7½ modified losers
Above Average Opening Hand	6 or 6½ modified losers
Excellent Opening Hand	5 or 5½ modified losers

### Responder's hands:

Game Forcing Raise (FG)	7½ modified losers
Slam Invitational FG Raise	6 or 6½ modified losers
Likely Slam Raise (FG)	5 or 5½ modified losers
Limit Raise	8 or 8½ modified losers
Simple Raise	9 or 9½ modified losers

You should only use MLTC once an eight-card or longer fit is located. Let me REPEAT! You should only use MLTC once an eight-card or longer fit is located.

When partner opens the bidding we usually force to game with an opening hand ourselves. We usually think that an opening hand opposite an opening hand should equal game. This is still true using MLTC. 7½ losers plus 7½ losers equals 15 modern losers.  $25 - 15 = 10$  so the likely maximum for the hand is 10 tricks. In a major suit, 10 tricks are game. A slam is predicted if you have 5 or 5½ losers opposite partner's opener.  $25 - 13 = 12$ . MLTC is that simple and that accurate!

I do not suggest that you completely quit using your HCP evaluations. I just think you should add this tool so that whenever a bid is close and you're not sure which bid to make, you have a great backup tool that is reliable and easy.

A big issue one might have is "how is a singleton more than one loser"? Think about how much of declarer play is about timing. When you are missing an ace, you are losing more than just a trick. You are losing timing because the king, queen and jack that you hold won't be able to take immediate tricks. You will have to drive out the ace first. The idea of 1.5 losers for a singleton should be within your grasp!