



Adventures in Bridge

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This Week in Bridge

(332) Evaluate and Keep Re-Evaluating

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Level: 1

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General

Now that we have discussed how to approach our hand evaluation process before the auction begins and have started to think about how to make use of much of the information that is available to us as the bidding proceeds around the table, we want to put all these things together to give us a good process for hand evaluation. The most important thing we can do to practice good hand evaluation is to keep our mind active, to make sure not to get lazy. That means that we need to keep evaluating and re-evaluating our hand, not just count our points once and be stuck with that number for the rest of the auction. Our “total points” do not stay as a fixed number throughout the auction. That number should float up and down as we learn more and more information about the layout of the cards. Continued re-evaluation is the essence of good hand evaluation.

Hand Evaluation Process

Let’s pull together the things that we have been discussing and develop a procedure to follow to help us evaluate and continue to re-evaluate our hands.

- Before the Auction Begins
 - We start by counting our *High Card Points* (HCP).
 - We then make adjustments for *Length Points* – upgrade for decent long suits.
 - We also make adjustments for *Short Honors* - downgrades.

- After the Auction Begins
 - We re-evaluate our cards as partner bids. We upgrade for *Fitting Honors* and downgrade for *Misfitting Honors*.
 - If we find a fit, then we can upgrade for *Support Points* – shortness upgrade if we are the short trump side (aka ruffing values.)
 - When the opponents bid, we also consider our *Positional Values* – upgrades and downgrades for where our honors sit relative to the opponents’ honors.



Notrump vs. Suit Contracts

To continue thinking about how different types of honors have different uses in different situations, let's discuss how our hand evaluation changes in notrump vs. suit contracts.

When we have a Major suit fit, we know that we are likely headed for a suit contract. In this situation, we will focus on our losers (in a suit contract we count losers.)

- Jacks are of far less value in suit contracts (they do not help us get rid of losers.)
- Queens may help us reduce our number of losers. It is not clear - sometimes they are useful and sometimes they are not.
- Soft values, like Q's and J's, in the opponents' suits are not particularly useful in a suit contract, but they may be stoppers in a notrump contact. These honors are more valuable when located in our sides' long suits.
- Aces and Kings are the most useful cards in suit contracts. These cards reduce our number of losers and are of the most value!

When we have a minor suit fit, we will likely be headed toward 3NT (not 5-minor - if we find ourselves frequently playing in 5-minor, we need to rethink our bidding philosophies and agreements.) When we are focusing on playing in notrump, we want to count our winners – 3NT is a race.

- Jacks are not likely to help us take a trick (be a winner), but they will slow the opponents down. They can help stop a suit and that helps us stay in the race.
- Queens are excellent cards at notrump. For being worth only two points, they do a great job of playing both offense and defense. A Queen may take a trick in one of our suits (say, on a finesse) or a Queen may be a slow stopper that prevents the opponents from taking too many tricks in their suit. They are particularly useful when combined with other honors, like QJxx or QTxx in the opponents' suits. Although these holdings do not use many HCP, they are often two stoppers.
- Aces and Kings are always valuable cards, but most of their extra value in notrump comes from addition length points. These honors help us set up our long suits.

Conclusion

All the hand evaluation information we have discussed is important, but the most important thing to take away from this is to keep working at re-evaluating your hand. Don't just evaluate your hand once. Develop an evaluation process and repeat it. It is easy to miss something, so repeating it will help you "double check your work" and allow you to consider all the new information that you have received. Work hard and keep thinking - that is how you become better at this difficult part of the game.