

# Cardiff Bridge Tutors

## **How to improve Declarer play**

### ***Part 1 – Making a plan***

## Becoming a SWOT.

We all know that we should make a plan but we frequently fail to do it, and we always have “good” reasons:-

- The hands look so simple, it is obvious!
  - The easier the hand looks to play the more careful you need to be!
- I didn't want to hold up the opposition!
  - They won't feel the same about you and if they become frustrated then its their game that is likely to suffer!

**So, after Defender has played their first card and dummy is on the table make your plan.**

**Don't call for a card until you have done this.**

**If Dummy “helpfully” plays their singleton in that suit on your behalf ask for it to be returned.**

Take your time, don't feel pressurised to hurry and plan identifying your:-

<b>S</b> trengths	Your top winners
<b>W</b> eaknesses	The number of tricks you are short; weak suits
<b>O</b> pportunities	Long suits, establishing winners, discarding losers
<b>T</b> hreats	What might go wrong (bad splits, “danger” hands, blocking)

**Plan in this way for both Trump and No Trump contracts.**

## Strengths.

Strengths are your top winners.

Top winners are those that are certain to make in their own right, not dependent upon the fall of another card.

Let's look at some examples of top winners.

East is Declarer and West is Dummy.

East	West	Top winners
♠ A K 3 2	♠ Q J 6 4	East has the Ace and King – 2 winners West then has Q and J - another 2 winners A total of 4 winners in this suit

East	West	Top winners
♠ K Q 3 2	♠ J 10 6 4	These hands have no <b>certain</b> winners. You may well have winners in these hands but they are not <b>top</b> winners!

You repeat this process for each suit and total up your top winners.

So let's look at a few examples of calculating all of our top winners.

East	West	Top winners
♠ A K	♠ Q J	Only the Ace and King are winners as the Queen and Jack will fall when you play them 2 top winners.
♥ K 7 5	♥ Q J 10	No top winners
♦ A 7 5 3	♦ K 10 8 2	The Ace and King are top winners 2 top winners.
♣ 9 7 5 3	♣ A K Q J	The Ace, King, Queen and Jack are top winners. 4 top winners.

**These hands contribute 8 top winners.**

### Exercise in counting top winners.

Calculate the top winners for these hands.

The answers are on the next page

East	West	Top winners
♠ A K	♠ Q J	
♥ K 7 5	♥ Q J 10	
♦ A 7 5 3	♦ K 8 6 4	
♣ 9 7 5 3	♣ A K Q J	

East	West	Top winners
♠ A K	♠ Q J 9	
♥ A K	♥ Q J 10 9	
♦ A K Q	♦ 10 8 6 2	
♣ J 9 7 5 3	♣ 8 6 4 2	

### Answers to exercise in counting top winners.

Calculate the top winners for these hands.

East	West	Top winners
♠ A K	♠ Q J	Only the Ace and King are winners as the Queen and Jack will fall when you play them 2 top winners.
♥ K 7 5	♥ Q J 10	No top winners
♦ A 7 5 3	♦ K 8 6 4	2 top winners
♣ 9 7 5 3	♣ A K Q J	4 top winners A total of 8 top winners.

The second question shows a further point.

You can only count winners if you have an entry to make them.

This hand looks strong and you may think that those Queens and Jacks are top winners – but how can you cross to make them?

East	West	Top winners
♠ A K	♠ Q J 9	2
♥ A K	♥ Q J 10 9	2
♦ A K Q	♦ 10 8 6 2	3
♣ J 9 7 5 3	♣ 8 6 4 2	Only 7 top winners

**You must check that you have entries to the hand to establish your top winners.**

## Weaknesses.

Weaknesses are the number of tricks you are short of your contract after you have counted your top winners and weak suits that your opponents will attack.

Let's think about this example:

The Bidding went:

East	North	West	South
1NT	Pass	3NT	All Pass

Here are the hands:

East	West	Top winners
♠ A K	♠ Q J	2 top winners.
♥ K 7 5	♥ Q J 10	No top winners
♦ A 7 5 3	♦ K 8 6 4	2 top winners
♣ 9 7 5 3	♣ A K Q J	4 top winners

The bidding is impeccable but with only 8 top winners E/W are 1 trick short.

This is the Weakness.

## Opportunities.

Opportunities are suits where you may make extra tricks.

These will include:

- Tricks that can definitely be developed
- Tricks that depend on distribution (the odds of how the opposition's cards are split)
- Tricks that depend on finesses.

You need to inspect each suit for these opportunities.

Let's look at an example:

The Bidding has gone:

East	North	West	South
1♠	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♠	Pass	3♠	Pass
4♠			

Here are the hands:

East	West	Top winners
♠ A 10 9 8 7 6	♠ K Q J	6 top winners.
♥ 8 5 4	♥ J 7 3	No top winners
♦ A J	♦ 3 2	1 top winner
♣ A 5	♣ K 6 4 3 2	2 top winners

Strengths                      9 top winners

Weaknesses                    1 trick short

Opportunities                 Only in ♣s

2 extra tricks if opposition hold 3-3 and 1 if they split 4-2

## Threats.

Threats are anything that may go wrong.

Typically you need to check:

- Can I preserve entries to hands?
- Shortage of stoppers in NT contracts
- Not drawing trumps and they ruff a winner
- Drawing too many rounds of trumps

Let's continue with the previous example and complete the Threats.

The Bidding has gone:

East	North	West	South
1♠	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♠	Pass	3♠	Pass
4♠			

Here are the hands:

East	West	Top winners
♠ A 10 9 8 7 6	♠ K Q J	6 top winners.
♥ 8 5 4	♥ J 7 3	No top winners
♦ A J	♦ 3 2	1 top winner
♣ A 5	♣ K 6 4 3 2	2 top winners

Strengths                      9 top winners

Weaknesses                    1 trick short

Opportunities                 Only in ♣s

2 extra tricks if opposition hold 3-3 and 1 if they split 4-2

Discarding losers

### Threats

**Not many entries to West's hand only K♣ and ♠s**

**The ♠s should split 3-1 so be careful on how many rounds of trumps you draw.**



**Plan:**

1. If ♥s are lead you will lose three tricks immediately but they will then switch to ♦s (if they lead ♥s again you can ruff).
2. Win A♦, AK♣ and then ruff the 2♣
3. Cross to dummy's J♠ (drawing one round of trumps)
4. If ♣s are split 4-2 then you can ruff your ♣ lead.
5. Draw the remaining trumps with KQ♠
6. The 6♣s is now a master so throw a losing ♦