



Ask Jerry

Well-known teacher and player **Jerry Helms** answers your bridge questions.
Send your questions to askjerry@jerryhelms.com.

Dear Jerry: Partner opens 1NT and I bid 2♦, transferring partner to hearts. Partner will now be the declarer and I will be the dummy. Can I count dummy points for shortness?

—S. S., Boca Raton, FL

Dear S. S.: No. That's the short answer. When we start playing bridge, we are taught to count dummy points when we revalue our hand for shortness.

DUMMY POINTS

Void	5 points
Singleton	3 points
Doubleton	1 point

The idea is that shortness is likely to be valuable when we have support for partner's suit. Partner may be able to ruff losers in our hand—the dummy—to gain one or more tricks. So we count dummy points when planning to raise partner's suit. We also count dummy points when planning to make a takeout double since our hand will presumably be the dummy after partner picks a suit.

A problem arises when we start getting involved in transfer bids. Now the dummy will be the hand with the long trump suit. It will be declarer who holds fewer trumps. In general, nothing is gained by trumping in the hand with the longer trumps. A trick is gained only by ruffing in the hand with fewer trumps. So shortness will be of value only in declarer's hand.

To see this, suppose we hold this hand as North. Partner opens 1NT and we transfer partner to hearts and then bid game:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			1NT
Pass	2♦	Pass	2♥
Pass	4♥	All Pass	

So our partner is now the declarer in the 4♥ contract. Suppose these are the combined hands:

Contract:	♠ K 8 4
4♥	♥ A J 8 7 6 3
	♦ 9 7 4
	♣ 3
	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> NE </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> WS </div>
	♠ A 9
	♥ K Q 5
	♦ A 8 5 2
	♣ Q 7 4 2

As declarer, South starts with nine tricks: two spades, six hearts, and a diamond. Where is the tenth trick going to come from?

Declarer can ruff one of dummy's spades in the South hand. That gains a trick because declarer will now get seven heart tricks to go with the two spade tricks and a diamond.

So it is declarer's shortness that is actually of value in this situation, even though declarer is technically not the dummy.

What about North's shortness in clubs? It has value in that it prevents the defenders from taking more than one club trick, but ruffing a club—or even two or three clubs in the North hand doesn't gain any tricks. North started with six heart tricks and will still provide six heart tricks after ruffing one or more clubs.

So North's real value comes from the extra length in hearts, and that is taken into account by adding length points for the six-card suit. That's why North has enough strength to take the partnership to game: 8 high-card points plus 2 length points for the six-card suit.

The situation is quite different when responder uses Stayman and then finds a major-suit fit. Now responder can count dummy points.

The worst distribution for a suit contract is 4–3–3–3. As an example, consider these combined hands:

Contract:	♠ K Q 10 4
3♠?	♥ 5 4 2
	♦ A 6 3
	♣ 8 6 2
	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> NE </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> WS </div>
	♠ A J 8 3
	♥ A 8 3
	♦ 7 5 2
	♣ A K 9

If South opens 1NT and North uses the Stayman convention to find the spade fit, even an invitational raise to 3♠ will get the partnership too high. There are only eight tricks: four spades, a heart, a diamond, and two clubs. The 'mirrored' balanced hands provide no ruffing possibilities.

Now let's leave the high cards the same, but give both North and South a little distribution:

Contract:	♠ K Q 10 4
4♠	♥ 5 4 2
	♦ A 6 4 3
	♣ 8 6
	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> NE </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> WS </div>
	♠ A J 8 3
	♥ A 8
	♦ 7 5 2
	♣ A K 9 3

North can add a dummy point for the doubleton club and go right to game after finding the spade fit. With a little added distribution, ten tricks should be possible. Declarer can ruff two clubs in the North hand to score six spade tricks to go with a heart, a diamond, and two clubs.

So count dummy points after using Stayman, but not after a transfer.—JH

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