



Use the Rule of 22

Some seventy years ago, Culbertson and Goren vied for the position as the leading authority on the game. The former believed in valuing hands using honour tricks, while the latter believed in the 4-3-2-1 point count. We all know, from how we value our hands today, who won that battle. Even so, honour tricks did not die completely. A close relation, the quick trick, came to the fore. In Acol, a key benchmark for an artificial 2♣ opening is five quick tricks in a powerful game-going hand.

Quick tricks are slightly less generous (and simpler!) than honour tricks. The scale for quick tricks is as follows:

- 2 quick tricks: A-K in a suit
- 1.5 quick tricks: A-Q in a suit
- 1 quick trick: A or K-Q in a suit
- 0.5 quick tricks: K in a suit

Quick tricks, by their nature, tend to be of use whatever the trump suit is. They make tricks if the opponents pick the trump suit and are useful in dummy. They also reflect the fact that honours in combination are worth more than scattered honours and that the 4-3-2-1 count tends to undervalue aces and overvalue jacks.

Hand A	Hand B
♠ Q J 6 4	♠ A K 6 4
♥ Q J 5	♥ K Q 5
♦ Q J 5	♦ 9 5 2
♣ Q J 5	♣ 8 5 2

Even without quick tricks, I hope you can see the difference between these two hands. Hand A should be an automatic pass as dealer, while B is an equally clear opening. Both hands have a poor 4-3-3-3 shape and both have 12 points in high cards. What sets them apart is their quick tricks. Hand A has none, while B has three (two in spades and one in hearts).

Suppose partner has a bust. With hand A, you may well make only one trick – your Q-J-x in whatever suit the other side chooses as trumps. With hand B, you are likely to make three tricks no matter what the trump suit is.

Just about whatever hand your partner holds, hand A will yield fewer tricks than hand B. In the suits in which your Q-J-x holdings face length, you might run into an opposing ruff. In the suits in which these holdings face a shortage, your high cards will be useless as your partner could ruff anyway. If you play in no-trumps, again Q-J-x is a poor holding. You cannot hold up with this type of holding. Nor can you run tricks quickly. All ways on, hand B has a higher and surer potential than A.

That was an extreme example. On a normal type of hand, you may need to use the *Rule of 22* to decide whether the hand is good enough for an opening bid. What do you count in looking for this magical figure of 22? You count your points in high cards, the length of your two longest suits and your quick tricks. You then add these together. One name for this method is the HLQT count, where H stands for high cards, L for length and QT for quick tricks.

Hand C	Hand D
♠ K J 9 4 3 2	♠ A J 9 4 3 2
♥ Q J 5 4 2	♥ A 9 5 4 2
♦ Void	♦ Void
♣ Q 5	♣ 9 5

What is the HLQT for hand C? If you count the club holding generously as two points, it comes to 20.5. This is 9 points in high cards, 11 cards in the two longest suits and 0.5 quick tricks.

What is the HLQT for hand D? It is 22: 9 in high cards, 11 cards in the longest suits and 2 quick tricks.

The HLQT counts tell you that hand D is a clear-cut opening even if you are vulnerable, while hand C falls short of the requirement.

Ron Klinger, who is as synonymous with HLQT as Harrison-Gray is with the losing trick count, suggests a slight relaxation when non-vulnerable. If you have a suitable opening bid and rebid, you can then open with an HLQT of 21.5 or even 21. You can open a fraction lighter because partner is less likely to press for game and, if you go down, you do so at 50 a time.

Hand E	Hand F
♠ K Q J 9 4	♠ J 9 6 4
♥ 9 6 5	♥ K 10 8 5 2
♦ A 10 5 2	♦ A Q
♣ 5	♣ 9 5

Both E and F have an HLQT of 21: 10 points in high cards, 9 cards in the two longest suits and two quick tricks. With E, feel free to open 1♠ non-vulnerable. You have an easy rebid of 2♦ over 2♣ or you can raise a response of 2♦ or 2♥. Moreover, if the deal belongs to the opponents, you are happy with a spade lead. A shaded opening has far less to commend it on hand F. For one thing, you are quite likely to have to rebid your moderate five-card suit. For another, the hand simply has less playing strength. Hand E has seven losers (one spade, three hearts, two diamonds and one club) while F has seven and a half losers (three spades, two hearts, two clubs and a half in diamonds).

Yes, counting quick tricks takes a tiny bit of extra mental effort. It is a case of the more you put in the more you get out. The more angles from which you view your hand, the better the chance you will assess it accurately. For close opening bids, follow the *Rule of 22*. ■