G U E S S I N G   A   Q U E E N

II. Tip #1: Count the missing high card points

When an opponent opens the bidding or overcalls, you have a lot of information about the placement of the high cards. A helpful technique for visualizing the missing points is suggested by Mike Lawrence in his book on "How to Read Your Opponent's Cards." It is to add your high card points to dummy's and subtract that total from 40; this gives you the total high card points available to the opponents. Now, as the play progresses, subtract each honor card you see from the total; sometimes you will know where all the remaining high cards are by trick three or four.

Exercise 1

For example, you open 1?, your opponent overcalls 1NT (16-18) and your partner bids 2? which ends the auction. A club is led and right hand opponent plays the K. You add your points to dummy's and the total is 21.

How many points are left? _____ Who has the missing queen? _____

Exercise 2.

South	West	North	East
		1♣	Pass
1♠	Pass	2♠	All Pass

North
♠AJ102
♥52
♦K32
♣KQ76

South
♠K987
♥976
♦9875
♣A2

West leads the ♦J, you play low and it holds. Now the ♦10, ♦3, ♦Q, ♦7. East cashes the ♦A, then plays the ♥K and ♥Q, followed by a small club.

Who has the Q of spades? _____

Exercise 3.

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

North
♠K982
♥Q9832
♦K3
♣76

South
♠AJ1043
♥KJ6
♦A54
♣85

West leads the ♦Q to dummy's ♦K

     Who has the Q of spades? _____

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III. Tip #2: Shortness is more likely to be with the overcaller

The adage *finesse with 8 ever, 9 never, is no longer valid when an opponent overcalls.* Since overcaller already has 5 or more cards in one suit, there is less room in her hand for other cards. Missing four cards including the trump queen, it is better odds to play the overcaller for a singleton, thus take a finesse against her partner, rather than to play for the drop. When missing five cards, finesse against overcaller's partner, since, again, the trump shortness is more likely to be in the overcaller's hand.

Exercise 4.

A.	South	West	North	East
			1♣	Pass
	1♠	2♦	3♠	Pass
	4♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

B.	South	West	North	East
	---	---	1♥	Pass
	1♠	2♦	Pass	Pass
	2♠	Pass	3♠	Pass
	4♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

North
♠KJ102
♥ 5
♦A87
♣KQJ65

South
♠A9873
♥A76
♦932
♣32

How do you play the spades?

_____

North
♠K102
♥AJ987
♦53
♣AQ8

South
♠AJ9873
♥102
♦987
♣K6

How do you play the spades?

_____

This last tip about shortness applies even more so to an opponent who overcalls or opens with a preempt. However, a preempter frequently has a singleton, so *when a preempter leads her own suit, her singleton is in trumps, but when she leads a side suit **that** is her singleton and she will usually have two or more trumps.*

I 3. Tip #3: To find the Queen of trump: Consider the opening lead

If you get a trump lead, the opening leader almost surely doesn't have the queen of trump. Conversely, *when you don't get a trump lead, opening leader may well have the queen.* This is particularly true on auctions where a trump lead is likely because the opponents want to cut down the ruffs in dummy. Another time they lead trumps is when there is no attractive alternative and cutting ruffs could be useful. Here are a few example auctions:

Auctions where dummy will be ruffing:

You	Partner		You	Partner
1♠	1NT		1♦	1♠
2♥			2♣	3♣

Auctions with possibly no attractive alternate:

You	Partner		You	Partner
1♠	3♠		1♠	2♠
4♠				

Still another inference from opening lead occurs *when they lead an obvious short suit, then they are likely to have trump length*, and therefore the missing trump honor.

Exercise 5.	South	North	**Exercise 6.**	South	North
	1♠	1NT		1♦	1♠
	2♥			2♣	3♣

North		North
♠32		♠A10542
♥KJ102		♥Q7
♦872		♦Q3
♣K765		♣K1097

South		South
♠AK876		♠2
♥A987		♥ K87
♦Q5		♦AJ876
♣Q2		♣AJ65

Who do you play for the queen of trump,

A._____ If West leads the ♥3? _____
B._____ If West leads the ♣8? _____
C._____ If West leads the ♦4? _____

I 3. Tip #4: To find the Queen in a side suit, find that suit's distribution

You will often see expert players delay the play in a side suit until as late as possible in the hand. That is because they are trying to find out how many cards each player has in the suit in question. For example if you have a suit of AJ10 opposite K32, who would you play for the missing queen if one opponent has 5 cards in the suit and the other only 2? What if one player has 4 and the other 3? So now you ask "but how can you know this?" The answer is by counting out the hand.

Let us say you are in a contract of 4 hearts and your RHO leads their singleton club, gets a ruff, and turns out to have started with 4 trumps. That's 5 of his 13 cards. If you subsequently discover he has only 3 spades, how many diamonds does he have?

Now it is not always this clear cut, sometimes you have to guess whether his remaining 8 cards are divided 4-4 or 5-3. Clues from the bidding can help with this.

Exercise 7.   South West North East

1♦	1♠	1NT	Pass
2♣	2♥	3♣	All Pass

North
♠A1054
♥107
♦K32
♣K1097

South
♠2
♥K87
♦AJ1096
♣AQ65

   Here the auction tells you that West most likely has 5 Spades and 4 Hearts. Possibly 6 Spades. When West leads the K of Spades and East does not high low, it suggests that East has 3 Spades and was too weak to raise so West has only 5 of them. Now we draw trump and ...

   Who is most likely to have the Q of Diamonds if

A. West has 3 Clubs?

B. And if West has 2 Clubs?

C. What if West has only 1 Club?

A good way to learn to count the hand is to get the interactive CD for your computer by Mike Lawrence called "counting."

•ANSWERS

1.   **A.**   16 pts are left
         B.   The player who overcalled 1NT

2.   West. East has shown up with 11 points and passed over 1?; she probably would have bid with more points (either overcalling or doubling) so play West for the ?Q

3.   Probably West, West cannot have the ♣AK or ♣KQ because then she would have lead a high♣, so she has the ♣AQ and East probably has the ♣K. If she had the ♠Q as well, she would have responded to 1♣.

4.   Play partner of overcaller for the ♠Q
         A.   K then run the J
         B.   K then run the 10

5.   **6.**
   A. East   (West lead trump)   **A.** West   (West did not lead trump)
   B. West   (West lead shortness)   **B.** East   (West did lead a trump)
   C. West   (West did not lead trump)   **C.** West   (West lead shortness)

7.**A**. East (West has 1 diamond and East has 4)
8.**B**. East (West has 2 diamonds and East has 3)
9.**C**. West (West has 3 diamonds and East has 2)