

25 Tips For Better Matchpoint Scores

1. Play slowly to the first trick. Don't allow your opponent's (or partner) to bully you into rushing your first play. Analyze the opening lead. Review the auction. Try to envision a picture of the unseen hands. Make a plan of attack (or defense). You will find you actually play faster, not to mention better, overall if you play slowly to the first trick.
2. Be conservative in the early rounds of constructive auctions. Have 2½ tricks for an opening bid; six or more points to respond (however, see #5). The time to "take a flyer" is your last bid, not your first. When a suit *looks* like a four-card suit (♠86432), treat it as one (do not open 1♠). Conversely, a four-card suit (♥AKQJ) that looks like a five-card suit may be treated as one.
3. Do not overcall with a bad hand *and* a bad suit.
4. When the hand looks like it belongs to the opponents, don't hesitate to get in their way. Most partnerships today will arrive at a reasonable contract with no opposition bidding. When preempting, or raising partner's preempt, bid as high as you are willing to go at once.
5. Pay more attention to distribution and fits and less attention to "points." With good fit(s), bid a lot. Defend, do not declare, misfit hands. When your distribution is 5-5, come alive. With 6-4, bid some more!
6. When making a close decision, count your aces as 4½ points. Never pass your partner's opening bid when you have an ace, even if you have nothing else.
7. On defense, avoid breaking new suits for declarer. It is usually to declarer's advantage when the defense leads a new suit.
8. Be a good partner and a good opponent. Trust your partner, not the opponents. Lead partner's suit, even when the enemy bids notrump. Return his leads; don't be a hand hog. Compliment his good play and ignore mistakes. If you must discuss something, mark the hand on your card and discuss it after the session is complete. You never want partner to play one hand while brooding about a previous one. Leave your opponents smiling, not fighting. You want them at their best when their next opponents (your real competition) come to their table.
9. Open 1NT on all balanced (4-3-3-3, 4-4-3-2, 5-3-3-2) hands containing 15, 16 or 17 HCP. 1NT is the most descriptive (and therefore best) opening bid in our arsenal.
10. Learn splinter bids.
11. Almost never sell out to a suit contract at the one-level, and seldom at the two-level. This does not apply to notrump contracts. Only balance *once* per auction. If the opponents bid one more, you have accomplished your purpose. Never hang partner for balancing by raising his bid. Remember, he has already bid your hand!
12. The five-level belongs to the opponent's. When you have pushed them to the five-level, let them play it there.
13. Avoid leading doubleton honors or a singleton trump. Never lead away from an ace against a suit contract. Try to avoid leading from Axxx and Jxxx against notrump.

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14. When declaring, don't automatically lead trumps at trick two. See if some other business should be attended to first. Check to see if you need to keep a trump in dummy as an entry later in the hand. Remember, it is correct to draw trumps first on only about 50% of all hands.
15. Do not misapply suit preference signals (most people do). Suit preference signals apply only in very limited situations. Most signals are come-ons.
16. When bidding a slam, bid the safest one. Don't worry about the extra ten points for notrump. You will beat many people who will not bid slam at all, and sometimes a trump contract will make an overtrick that will beat six notrump anyway. You do not want to go down and lose to those people who didn't bid slam.
17. Use Blackwood (and Gerber) sparingly. Don't ask for aces when you hold a void or two quick losers in any suit. Learn to cue bid.
18. Get in the habit of applying the rule of eleven to the opening lead, whether you are declaring or defending.
19. Do not allow the opponents to intimidate you. Some will try. I know this is easier said than done, but remember, Rich said, "Many talk a good game; very few actually play one!"
20. Be disciplined with weak two-bids in first- or second-seat.
21. You are *not required to open light* in third-seat. Have a reason (a suit you want led) for opening light in third-seat. Freely open good four-card majors in third-seat. Anything goes with weak two-bids in third-seat.
22. Try to reveal your hand when defending and conceal it when declaring. When attempting to win a trick, play low from equals on defense; play high from equals when declaring.
23. Don't bypass three notrump for 5♣ or 5♦. If you must play in the minor, bid four or six! If you are convinced 3NT will go down, any plus score (130 or 150) will beat the people getting a minus score in 3NT – you do not need to bid game. If 3NT makes four it will beat 5♣ and 5♦, even if you make six.
24. Lead singletons versus slams and strongly bid game contracts. You are unlikely to beat these contracts on power alone – hope a ruff can do the job. Avoid singleton leads against other contracts. They give away more tricks than they gain.
25. Lead a trump against grand slams. They are unlikely to bid seven with a possible trump loser. You need only one trick to beat the contract, don't break a side suit for declarer.