

Opening the bidding with borderline hands

We all know that you should open with 12-13 HCP.

What about slightly weaker hands of 10 or 11HCP?

When should you open these hands?

With these types of hands you need to carefully evaluate the trick taking potential of your hand.

Look at more than HCP.

With borderline hands in 1st or 2nd seat use the Rule of 20 as a guide:

Add the number of cards in your two longest suits to your HCP. When the total is 20 or more open at the 1 level.

Also look at your hand's good features and its bad features.

Positive hand features: Add 1 point

- At least 2 ½ 'quick tricks'
- Intermediate cards – lots of 9s and 10s
- Suits with multiple honours – AKJ, KQJx, AQTx, QJT
- A long 7 card suit headed by AKQ
- A two suited hand – 6 card suit and a 4 card suit.

Negative hand features: Subtract 1 point

- Singleton KQ or J
- Doubleton KQ, KJ, QJ, Qx, Jx
- No aces
- Q and J making up half your HCP
- No long suits

What are quick tricks?

AKQ = in the same suit = 3

AK in the same suit = 2

AQ in the same suit = 1 ½

A or KQ in the same suit = 1

Kx = ½

It is also useful when deciding whether or not to open a marginal hand to think about what you will rebid if your partner changes suit. Make sure you are comfortable with any rebid you may have to make. Remember, if your partner makes a forcing bid in response to your weakish opening you can't now chicken out and decide to pass! You must bid because partner could have a good hand.

Sound openings in 1st and 2nd seat is recommended. Get in early!

With borderline hands in 3rd seat

In 3rd seat open as usual with a normal strength hand.

With sub-opening values 9-11/12 HCP open if opening the bidding serves a useful purpose (given partner has already passed game is unlikely).

Reasons for opening light in 3rd seat:

1. Your bid has some obstructive value – it makes life difficult for your LHO.
2. If you are defending it may help with your defence - tells your partner what to lead.
3. May give you a part score or a good sacrifice.

Some **guidelines** include:

- Consider whether you will be comfortable with partner's likely response – if not pass.
- You should have a good suit, as partner is likely to lead your suit if you are defending. Suit quality of 7 or more (number of cards in the suit plus the number of honours in the suit = SQ).
- Prefer opening 1S or 1H to a minor, even a 4 card major suit headed by AKQ at favourable vulnerability.
- Watch vulnerability closely – if vulnerable, an opening bid promises a good 5 card suit.

If your partner opens in 3rd seat, how do you know if it is weak or a full strength opening?

You can use a convention called **Reverse Drury** – after a 1H or 1S opening in 3rd seat, with 10 points and a fit, 2C asks partner if they have a light or full opening (means the same as if you have bid 3 of partner's major). A rebid of the major by opener shows a light opening. 2D is artificial and shows a full opening. All other responses to 2C also show a full opening. As you no longer need a jump to 3 of partner's suit to show 10-12, these jump raises become weak and pre-emptive. **Note:** Drury is off if your RHO doubles or overcalls.

Borderline hands in 4th seat

After 3 passes open as you usually would with full opening values 12/13+ points (sometimes with a poor 12 count and no major suit passing can be a good option).

If you have less than a full opener, you know that no-one has opening strength and the only question is if you can get a positive part score.

As the opposition are likely to compete, the spade suit is important as the pair with the spades is most likely to win the auction and get a positive score.

Use the Rule of 15 as a guide: Add your HCP and the number of cards in your spade suit (often called Pearson points). If it equals 15 or more open the bidding. If not pass.