

The Rule of Fifteen

Open or Pass?

How often have you held a mediocre hand in fourth seat and, after three passes, wondered if you should open the bidding or pass the hand out? If you open, somebody will end up with a plus score and the other side will be minus. If you pass, nobody is plus or minus. Therefore, your decision whether to open or not should be based solely on the likelihood of obtaining a plus score.

Good players are loath to pass out a hand. Their rationale is that by passing a hand, they are giving up their advantage in the play of that hand, either as declarer or as defenders. However, even good players pass out hands when they think the odds are against going plus.

What factors should be taken into account when deciding whether to open or pass?

- With a full opening bid, even if minimum, you should go ahead and open the same as you would in any other seat. You are likely to have enough more power than the other side to make a plus score.
- With a marginal hand, say 11 or 12 points, ask yourself, “are they good points or bad points?” Aces and kings are good, queens and jacks are bad. If the number of queens and jacks in your hand outnumber the number of aces and kings, you should probably pass and go on to the next hand.
- Who owns the master suit? The side that has the spade suit can always compete without raising the level of the contract. If their opponents want to compete, they must contract for another trick. Therefore, you should be much more prone to bid when you own the spade suit and pass when you don't.

Cassino Points

For marginal hands, there is a simple rule to guide you. It is based on what we call “cassino count.” Cassino count (yes it's spelled right – it's named after a player by that name) is simply the number of high-card points added to the number of spades in your hand. For example:

Cassino Points	
♠Q32 ♥KJ53 ♦A865 ♣752	13 (10 HCP + 3 spades)
♠Q8532 ♥KJ5 ♦A85 ♣752	15 (10 HCP + 5 spades)

The Rule of 15

With a marginal hand in the pass-out seat, count up your cassino points. If the total is 15 or more, the indication is to open. With less than 15, pass.

The Rule of Fifteen

Important! Keep in mind, your hand **does not** re-evaluate to its cassino count.

Let's try a few hands. You are in fourth seat, after three passes. What do you do with the following hands?

♠Q32 Pass — mediocre hand, only 13 cassino points.
♥KJ53
♦A865
♣75

♠Q8532 1♠ — mediocre hand, but 15 cassino points.
♥KJ5
♦A8
♣752

♠A52 1♦ — you have a full opening bid (3 quick tricks). Forget casino count, it doesn't apply.
♥53
♦AK85
♣7542

♠KQJ932 2♠ — a rare “weak” two in fourth seat. Make your opponents compete at the three level if they decide to enter the fray.
♥75
♦A85
♣52

♠KJ93 Pass — despite your 15 cassino points. Have you ever seen a worse 11 points? You are not likely to make a plus score opposite a passed hand. Do not be a slave to the rule of 15.
♥QJ2
♦QJ85
♣J2