



Well-known teacher and player Jerry Helms answers your bridge questions. Send your questions to askjerry@jerryhelms.com.

Dear Jerry: What does it mean when partner opens a weak two-bid after three passes?

—R.D., Washington, DC

Dear R.D.: In fourth position, you should not open unless you have a reasonable expectation for a plus score. That should eliminate any minimal weak two-bids that you might have opened in first, second, or third position. I play that a fourth-seat weak two-bid shows about 11–13 high-card points with a good six-card suit. A hand that would not accept a game invitation by partner if you had opened at the one level.

Here is an example of hand that I would open 2♠ in fourth position:

♠ K Q J 10 8 4
♥ J 7
♦ Q 4
♣ Q J 5

And here is a hand I would open 2♥ after three passes:

♠ Q 8
♥ A Q J 7 5 3
♦ K
♣ J 10 8 5

Notice that both these hands have excellent playing strength. You expect to take at least eight tricks opposite some scattered values in partner's hand. At the same time, neither hand has a lot of quick tricks—aces and kings.

In fourth seat, left-hand opponent's opening pass, combined with right-hand opponent's failure to open in third seat—where it is common to open a little 'light'—marks partner

with a fair share of the missing high-card strength. You want to be in the auction in a 'constructive-obstructive' way!

Constructively, you are describing your hand and warning partner that you hold a lot of quacks—queens and jacks—and therefore not to get too excited with near opening values. Obstructively, you are forcing the opponents to come in at the two or three level if they want to compete. No one-level overcalls or takeout doubles.

Notice also that both the above examples fit with the Rule of 15 that is commonly used as a guideline when deciding whether to open a borderline hand in fourth position or simply pass the deal out.

RULE (GUIDELINE) OF 15

In fourth seat, add your high-card points to the number of spades you hold. If the total is 15 or more, open the bidding. If not, pass.



Dear Jerry: My partner opened 2♣ and the next opponent overcalled 2♦. What should I have done with this hand?

♠ A J 3
♥ Q 9 8 5
♦ 9 6 2
♣ 10 7 4

With 7 points, I didn't want to pass since we should have at least game, but I couldn't bid notrump with no stopper in diamonds. I chose to bid 2♥, but this didn't work well since we ended up playing in a 4-3 fit.

—C. J., Houston, TX

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DEAR CJ: As always, having a partnership agreement in these types of situations is important. Any agreement is better than no agreement. My preference is the following:

- Pass: Game-forcing. At least a king or two queens. No good five-card or longer suit.
- Double: Artificial negative. Typically 0–3 points in queens and jacks.
- New suit: Game-forcing. A five-card or longer suit, headed by at least a queen.

If you double, showing a weak hand, you must still bid again if partner bids a suit below game. You can only pass if partner limits the hand by rebidding in notrump or bidding a game.

In non-competitive auctions, I would want a better five-card suit than one headed by the queen to make a positive response. In competitive auctions, however, it's usually best to start bidding your suits immediately when holding reasonable values to avoid being pre-empted by the opponents.

With the actual hand you held, you would simply pass, letting partner know you have game-going values but waiting to see what partner has to say. If the opponents get too frisky, partner will have some idea of the type of hand you have.

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