

# Hand Evaluation 1 Balanced Hands

Mini-lesson April 2026

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## Opening One in a Suit

- Today we will take look at evaluating balanced hands
- When we open 1 in a suit we could have either a **balanced hand** or an **unbalanced hand**
- The requirements for opening these two types of hand are **quite different**, so we will look at them in separate lessons

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## Balanced Hand Suit Openings

- We define Balanced Hands as those with the shape 4-3-3-3, 4-4-3-2, or 5-3-3-2
- That is, no voids or singletons and at most one doubleton
- **13+ hcp**: Open all balanced hands with 13 or more hcp – no exceptions

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## 12 hcp Balanced Hands

- When we go to a beginners' class we learn that we need **13 total points** to open (i.e., we count high-card-points *plus* length points, e.g., 1 extra for a 5-card suit)
- That's fine, but what if we have a hand with *no* long suit (thus 4-3-3-3 or 4-4-3-2 shape) and just **12 hcp**? Should any of these be opened?
- The modern style would be to open **most** (but not all) of these too
- *Experience has shown that the side that gets an opening bid in first has the advantage in a competitive auction*

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## Not All 12 hcp Hands Are Equal

- What sort of 12 hcp hand would I choose *not to open*?
- An ace-less balanced hand full of “quacks” (i.e., queens and jacks)
- The following hand is truly horrible:  
**A.** ♠ QJ2    ♥ QJ9    ♦ QJ73    ♣ QJ4
- I would pass this hand in a heartbeat!

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## Not All 12 hcp Hands Are Equal

- Compare hand A with this 12 hcp hand:  
**B.** ♠ K52    ♥ K98    ♦ K753    ♣ K64
- This is certainly not a *great* hand – still no aces and no length or shortages
- But it’s still a *far sight better* than the awful “quack” hand A above
- This I would open 1♦
- In the 4-3-2-1 point count system we all learn when we first take up bridge – Aces and Kings are actually **undervalued**, and Queens and Jacks **overvalued**

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## 11 hcp Balanced Hands

- Are there any *balanced hands with less than 12 hcp* that could be opened?
- Generally, no, but there is one exception
- Look at this hand:  
 C. ♠ A K 5 2 ♥ 9 8 7 ♦ A 7 5 ♣ 8 6 4
- Because there is an *ace and a king combined in one suit* the hand gains a little muscle
- This is where understanding **Quick Tricks** is important

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## Quick Tricks

- Here is a refresher on how to count Quick Tricks (or QTs)
- A = 1
- AK = 2
- AQ = 1½
- Kx = ½ (i.e., as long as the K is not singleton)
- KQ = 1

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## Counting Quick Tricks

- Thus, you can see that hand C above has a total of *three* QTs
- How many QTs in hand B (four isolated kings)?  
*Two*
- And in hand A (only queens and jacks)?  
*Zero!*

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## Importance of QTs

- Why are quick tricks an important consideration when it comes to opening?
- Because, they directly translate to potential defensive tricks
- If you open the bidding and the opponents bid too aggressively, your partner is entitled to double them based on your defensive values

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## Summary for Balanced Hands

- To summarise which balanced hands to open:
- 13+ hcp – all
- 12 hcp – open if hand has 2 or more QTs
- 11 hcp – open if hand has 3 QTs

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## Third Seat Openings

- All of the above discussion applies to considerations for opening in **first** or **second** seat
- In **third** seat the requirements can be relaxed a little and one can open a bit light
- Because your partner is already a passed hand, it's less likely that partner will want to get too high if you open on the light side
- Partner has trouble forcing the bidding as a passed hand, so you can quit the auction easily

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## Third Seat Openings - 1

- Two types of hand are commonly opened light in third seat.

1. A balanced hand with support for either major, such as:

♠ K 6 5 2   ♥ A J 7   ♦ Q 7 5 4   ♣ 6 2

- Open 1♦ and pass partner's response. You've found a fit and you won't get in trouble if you quit now. Your subsequent silence tells your story

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## Third Seat Openings

2. A hand with a **good major suit** you'd like partner to lead:

♠ A Q J 5 2   ♥ K 7   ♦ 7 5 4   ♣ 6 3 2

- Major-suit openers, especially spades, have the added benefit of using up more bidding room which would otherwise be available to the opponents
- Open 1♠. If partner bids a new suit, you will pass. Partner should remember that you may have opened light

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Next Lesson – Evaluation for  
Unbalanced Hands