How Timecard Rounding Rules Change Paid Hours

> Rounding a clock-in or clock-out time to the nearest 15 minutes is not neutral, since the specific rounding rule determines whether it favors the employer, the employee, or neither on average.

Many timecard systems round raw clock-in and clock-out times to a fixed interval (commonly the nearest 5, 6, or 15 minutes) rather than paying to the exact minute. This is a real, common, and often legally permitted practice, but the specific rounding rule matters. Round-to-nearest is symmetric on average, while round-always-down (paid time only ever rounds in the employer's favor) or round-always-up produce a systematic, non-random bias over many timecards even though any single entry only moves by a few minutes.

Clock-in at 8:47, rounding to nearest 15 minutes



Nearest and always-down happen to agree for this one entry, but always-down neve
employee on a late clock-in, while nearest does roughly half the time across many e

The same raw clock-in time produces different paid start times depending on the specific rounding rule applied.

Why "nearest" rounding is not the same as "fair" rounding

Round-to-nearest is unbiased in the sense that a large number of independent, randomly timed clock-ins round up about as often as they round down, so the net effect across many entries tends toward zero. A directional rule (always down for clock-in, always up for clock-out, or the reverse) has no such cancellation. It applies the same direction every time, which produces a small but real and one-directional gap between raw worked time and paid time, accumulating over many shifts and many employees.

The compounding effect across a pay period

A single rounding adjustment of a few minutes is easy to dismiss as immaterial, but a systematic (non-nearest) rounding rule applied to both a clock-in and a clock-out on every shift, across every

shift in a pay period, across every employee on a schedule, adds up to a measurable total. Whether that total favors the employer or the employee depends entirely on which direction each of the two roundings (in and out) goes, not on the rounding interval's size alone.

What the Rounding Impact Calculator shows

The Rounding Impact Calculator takes a set of raw clock-in and clock-out times, applies a chosen rounding rule and interval, and reports the total paid-hours difference against the unrounded total, so the real size and direction of the effect is visible directly rather than assumed to be negligible.

Key takeaway. Round-to-nearest rounding tends to cancel out over many entries. A directional rounding rule does not, and its net effect (in either direction) should be checked against actual timecard data rather than assumed to be too small to matter.

Frequently asked

Is timecard rounding itself always allowed?

WhenMath does not make legal or payroll-compliance determinations. Whether a specific rounding practice is permitted depends on the applicable employment law and any collective agreement in force, which varies by jurisdiction. Confirm the applicable rule with a qualified source before relying on rounded totals for pay.

What rounding interval is most common?

Nearest-5-minute, nearest-6-minute (a tenth of an hour), and nearest-15-minute are all in common use. The specific interval is set by whatever timekeeping system or policy is actually in force, not by a universal standard.

Does rounding affect overtime calculations too?

Yes, since overtime thresholds are usually evaluated against the rounded total, not the raw one, a rounding rule that shifts total hours across an overtime threshold changes the overtime outcome for that period. See the Overtime Threshold Calculator for that specific check.

WhenMath is a browser-local calculation tool, not a legal, payroll, or scheduling authority. This guide explains a calculation convention; it is educational, not a determination that any specific contract, employer, or jurisdiction follows it.