

# SLAM BIDDING

## Requirements for a slam

When we are first taught bridge, we are told that we need 25+ HCP to make a game and 33+ HCP to make a slam - as we gain in experience, we find that the 25 and 33 “barriers” tend to be less true for suit contracts, but generally remain so for NT contracts, e.g. in contracts with trumps, suits can be set up by “ruffing them good” - shape is often as important as HCP

## Slam Bidding in No Trumps

### Quantitative Raises

Why use quantitative raises ?

Because you can find out if you are good enough for a slam & stop in 4NT if you are not

Generally most pairs use a ‘Blackwood’ 4NT as a slam enquiry asking for Aces which works very well in most circumstances - however if you use this over 1 & 2NT openers and get the wrong answer how do you stop ?

For example 1NT – 4NT – 5♦ (only one ace - 2 missing) how can you stop on the 5 level (5NT would be asking for kings) ?

Much better to use 1/2NT - 4♣ as Ace asking (Gerber) & 4NT as quantitative

### Example

#### You

♠ K 10 3  
♥ A K 6  
♦ Q J 4 2  
♣ Q 9 8

#### Partner

♠ A Q 5 4  
♥ Q 8 7 2  
♦ A K 5  
♣ J 10 6 4

The bidding goes :

1NT - 4NT - PASS

4NT is Quantitative (asking opener to bid 6NT if maximum) - with only 15HCP opener should pass - note only 11 tricks can be made

The most common sequences are 1NT – 4NT or 2NT – 4NT both of which ask opener to bid 6NT with maximum of his original range and to pass with a minimum

Typically responder will have 16HCP in the first example & 11HCP in the second example

What does opener do with mid-range of his original bid (e.g. 1NT opener with 16HCP or 2NT opener with 21HCP if playing 20-22)?

In these cases he has to decide whether it is a good 16 or 21 and upgrade or downgrade accordingly

Look for goodish 5 card suits and/or filling cards 10's, 9's & 8's, particularly if they are together with and backing up honour cards (e.g. Q,10,9,8 or J,10,9,8 combinations are worth much more than the HCP you have included), however be careful and if in doubt err on the cautious side

After all you can always blame partner for giving you a difficult decision to make !!

Grand slams can also be reached via a quantitative bid: e.g. 1NT – 5NT or 2NT – 5NT both of which ask opener to bid 7NT with maximum of his original range and to bid 6NT with a minimum. **These bids cannot be passed.**

Typically responder will have 20/21HCP in the first example & 15/16HCP in the second example

**Finally a word of warning** - if you normally play 4NT as asking for Aces make sure you agree with partner when the bid is quantitative and when it is asking for Aces – best to keep things simple and only use it as direct jump from a 1 or 2NT opener

# SLAM BIDDING

## Gerber

Gerber was the first widely used ace asking bid (4♣) and whilst many still play this as their only method of asking for Aces the majority of players prefer to have 4♣ available for other bids (natural perhaps or as a splinter or cue bid) and have adopted 4NT as their asking bid

However when using quantitative raises Gerber is best used in conjunction with them when you could be missing two Aces but may have a NT slam with a combined 31/32HCP (perhaps with a long good minor suit e.g. K,Q,J,10,9,5)

When 4♣ is Gerber as opposed to something else is a matter of partnership agreement It is best to keep things simple and we would recommend the auctions 1NT – 4♣ or 2NT – 4♣ as being Gerber because they are the main two instances and the easiest to remember

If you are playing Benji then 2♣-2♦-2NT followed by 4♣ or perhaps 2♦-2♥-2NT (showing a specific range) followed by 4♣ should also apply

The standard Gerber responses to 4♣ Ace asking are: -

4♦ showing zero or four Aces

4♥ showing one Ace

4♠ showing two Aces

4NT showing three Aces

After the above 5♣ asks for Kings, responses are:

5♦ showing zero Kings

5♥ showing one King

5♠ showing two Kings

5NT showing three Kings

6♣ showing four Kings

## Slam Bidding in a Suit

How to identify hands with slam potential - when opener has a very strong hand, e.g. a 2♠ opening, a jump rebid in NT or a reverse - AND - critically, when you have a good trump fit (at least an 8 card fit), with no losers AND/OR when one hand has a long, strong suit outside trumps, as a source of tricks AND/OR when responder can make a game forcing bid

### Example

♠ K 6 4  
♥ A K 6 3 2  
♦ A K Q 10  
♣ 9

### Example

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

You open 1♥ and partner bids 3♥

This is nice hand 19HCP .....

....only 4 losers & a good side suit..... GO SLAMMING !!

Same bidding but now compare..

a balanced hand with a poor trump suit and no ruffing values  
This hand may play best in 3NT

You think you may have a slam on...so what next ? - to make a small slam, you need first round control of three suits and at least second round control of the fourth suit - you mustn't have two fast losers anywhere - having a good trump fit and investigating potential losers (or lack of them) are the critical elements in getting to a successful slam

There are many ways of identifying possible fast losers in potential suit slam - Blackwood and its variants are the usual methods taught to learners, but we will also look at several others

# SLAM BIDDING

## Blackwood

Blackwood with all its variants uses stepped ('up the line') responses

The original version uses 4NT as Ace asking - responses being :

5♣ showing zero or four Aces

5♦ one Ace

5♥ two Aces

5♠ three Aces

5NT then asks for kings and confirms unequivocally that **you have all 4 Aces** as the responses take you to the slam level, so if you ask you must be looking for a grand slam, this may seem obvious but it is important - again simple stepped responses (i.e. bids up the line) are used to show 0,1,2,3,4 kings.

## Roman Key Card Blackwood

RKCB values the King of trumps as an Ace and is now possibly the most widely used Ace asking convention

As part of the convention the Queen of trumps (the sixth most important card in a trump contract) can also be located

Before using the convention it is important to make sure trumps are agreed - if there is any doubt the last suit bid naturally is the agreed trump suit for the time being.

It is quite possible to use key card in an agreed trump suit and then set the contract in another suit or no trumps - as long as the instigator of the 4NT bid knows where he is going, his partner does not need to know.

It is quite important for one of the partnership at some stage in the auction to become the 'boss' and take over the auction to instigate the RKCB asking bid, it is better (if possible) for the stronger hand to be doing the asking

The responses to the 4NT RKCB Ace asking bid are :

5♣ showing zero or three of five Aces

5♦ one or four of five Aces

5♥ two or five of five Aces **without the Queen of trumps**

5♠ two or five of five Aces **with the Queen of trumps**

Note: some partnerships swop the 5♣ & 5♦ responses round (i.e. 5♣ showing 1 or 4 & 5♦ showing 0 or 3) - if you are defending check which way round the opposition are playing it)

After the 5♣ or 5♦ response the next suit up the line asks if the responder holds the Q of trumps (e.g. if ♠'s are the agreed suit : 4NT – 5♣ – 5♦ or 4NT – 5♦ – 5♥)

A sign off in the agreed trump suit would deny the Q whereas any other bid would show the Q and the first available outside control (usually a King)

## Cue bidding: an alternative to or addition to Blackwood and its variants

Cue bidding is the showing of controls, once a suit has been agreed

It is usual to show first round controls; an ace or a void (some systems show first or second round controls; if you are new to cue bidding, we suggest you stick to first round controls only)

A cue bid forces the partnership to game and shows an interest in a slam

You cue bid "up the line"; if you skip a suit, you are denying a control in that suit

# SLAM BIDDING

## Cue bidding: an alternative to or addition to Blackwood and its variants

You never cue bid the agreed trump suit; bidding the trump suit in a cue bidding sequence is a sign off

### Example

<u>You</u>	<u>Partner</u>	<u>The bidding goes: -</u>	
♠ -	♠ Q 5 4	2♥	3♥
♥ A K J 10 8 6	♥ Q 7 3 2	3♠ (cue)	4♦ (cue)
♦ K Q J 10 4 2	♦ A 5 3	6♥	
♣ 2	♣ 10 6 4		

The two cue bids force the partnership to game. Note that 4NT by opener (after the 3♥ bid) would not tell him which Ace responder held...♣ or ♦ A would be fine, but ♠ A ??

You must discuss cue bidding with your regular partner - cue bidding is not for everyone and getting it wrong (e.g. mistaking a cue bid for a suit) can be very expensive - you not only miss the slam, you end up in the wrong suit and miss the game

A cue bid says: "I am interested in slam - I have this control - please tell me if you have any controls" - you cannot pass a cue bid

## Splinters

A splinter bid is a double jump in a new suit - it shows a singleton or void, plus at least 4 card support for opener's bid suit - it agrees trumps and is a sort of advanced cue bid

Do not splinter if your singleton is an ace, a king or a queen - a singleton jack is just about permissible

The splinter shows the values for game (usually 13+)...at least

A splinter bid helps opener to gauge the level of the contract and is often followed by cue bidding

The following are all splinter bids: -

<u>You</u>	<u>Partner</u>
1♥	3♠
1♥	4♣
1♥	4♦

### Example

You  
♠ A K Q 10 8 6  
♥ 9 7  
♦ A 4  
♣ 6 3 2

You open 1♠ - this is a nice hand, but not spectacular - Partner now bids 4♣, a splinter showing four spades with you, and a singleton or void in clubs...how do you rate the hand now?

This hand now looks a candidate for a slam; cue bid the ♦A.