

Bid Your Slams!

When one member of the partnership shows a strong balanced hand in the bidding, his or her partner will be the first to visualize the possibility of a slam. That person is the captain of the bidding. When one member of the partnership shows a *strong unbalanced* hand in the bidding, either partner may be the first to visualize a slam possibility. Although bidding tools may differ when investigating trump slams, the basic art is the same.

- **One partner must realize that a slam is a possibility.**
- **That partner determines what information is necessary to test the slam.**
- **If that partner knows what question(s) to ask, he or she does so.**
- **If that partner does not know what question to ask, he or she temporizes by making a descriptive and forcing bid.**
- It's imperative that you and your partner know what bids are forcing and to what level. A simple rule of thumb: *When in doubt, it's forcing.*

You Hold a Strong Single-suited Hand

When the bridge gods deal you a strong, single-suited hand, visualizing a slam may be very easy. Consider this example hand. The trump suit is self-evident. Partner's heart holding is irrelevant because your own holding is sufficient. What must partner hold for you to take twelve tricks? What must partner hold for you to take thirteen tricks? How will you determine the best contract?

Example 1. ♠3
Your hand: ♥AKQ76543
 ♦AKQ
 ♣8

Slam bidding is a three-step process

- Visualize the possibility that a slam contract would be successful;
- Determine the correct *strain*;
- Determine the correct *level*.

In this example, the correct *strain* is obvious; your eight-card heart suit is self-sufficient. Your diamond holding should allow you to take eleven tricks in a heart contract without any help from partner. If partner holds one ace, you will take twelve tricks; and if partner holds two aces, you should take all thirteen tricks. The time-honored method of asking partner how many aces he or she holds is *Blackwood*, the bid of **4NT**, usually a jump, after a suit is bid naturally. With this hand, you are confident of eleven tricks on your own. Why not start the bidding **4NT** and place the contract after partner's response?¹

☞ **Principle:** When partner holds a strong single-suited hand, high card points are irrelevant. Your honor cards in partner's suit are valuable, but only *controls*, aces and kings, in the side suits will help partner.

This is an extreme example. More frequently, you hold a strong hand that may be sufficient for a trump game or slam contract if partner's holding supports yours. If not, even a game contract might fail. To confirm a fit and determine the proper level, most players open these hands with a **2C** bid, *strong, artificial, and forcing*.

- *The opening bid of 2C forces the partnership to the level of 2NT or three of a Major suit.*

¹ Examples in this paper assume your partnership plays *keycard Blackwood*. If no suit has been mentioned, the partnership should revert to standard Blackwood responses. Many ace-asking variations exist. Investigate the variations and discuss their use with your partner. Note also that the ACBL alert chart requires that opening ace-asking bids be alerted.

- The response of **2D** is waiting or negative. It tends to show no interest in slam and possibly no prospect for game. Responder may pass after the level of **2NT** or **3 Major** is reached (but see the next point).²
- Opener will show a five-card or longer suit at his second bid. *Each new suit by opener is forcing for one round.*
- Opener's rebid of **2NT** shows a balanced hand with 22-24 HCP and tends to deny a five-card suit. Responder may pass with no points. *Stayman* and *transfer bids* will apply after the **2NT** rebid by opener.
- Responder may show a positive response by bidding a five-card or longer suit (**2H**, **2S**, **3C**, or **3D**) or by bidding **2NT** (usually 8-10 HCP, balanced hand) or **3NT** (usually 11-13 HCP, balanced hand). *Any positive response is forcing to game and indicates that a slam may be possible.*

Example 2. ♠AQJT864
 Your hand: ♥A9
 ♦K2
 ♣KT

You open the auction **2C**. Partner responds **3D** (positive response, usually at least five diamonds). You show your suit by bidding **3S** and partner responds **3NT**.

- What does partner's hand look like?
- What is the correct *strain*?
- Is a slam possible?

Partner has transferred control of this auction to you after completing the description of his hand – balanced, five diamonds, and less than three spades. The positive response shows some values and should guarantee at least one control. The safest game contract is **4S**, but if that's your next bid, partner will pass. Before making your next bid, visualize partner's possible controls.

- If partner holds no aces, eleven tricks are the maximum. Partner better have at least one king for that positive response!
- If partner holds one ace, a small slam is likely to depend on a finesse.
- If partner holds one ace and the king of trumps, a small slam is a good bet.
- If partner holds two aces, the small slam is a good bet, and a grand slam will depend on at least one finesse.
- If partner holds three *keycards*, the small slam is assured and the grand slam may depend on the heart king.

Your partner's response to *keycard Blackwood*, **4NT**, should solve your problem and help you place the contract. What will you bid after these responses? Do you see any problems?

1. **5C** showing 0 or 3 *keycards*
2. **5D** showing 1 (or 4) *keycards*
3. **5H** showing 2 (or 5) *keycards without the Queen of trumps*
4. **5S** showing 2 (or 5) *keycards with the Queen of trumps*

² There are many variations in responses to the strong **2C** opening and passionate advocates of each method. These variations include *step responses*, *double negative*, *second negative*, and the automatic **2D** for all hands. **Warning! Personal opinion:** Most of these variations do not allow responder to describe his or her hand until the three- or four-level is reached. Visualizing slams requires that the probable strain is identified first, something that can be very difficult if responder's shape is unknown. The automatic **2D** response avoids this problem, but locating *keycards* may be more dangerous if opener is worried that responder holds nothing helpful.

☞ **Principle:** When one partner has shown a strong, suit-oriented hand, the bid of **4NT** is usually treated as a *Blackwood* ace-asking bid. Because the king of trumps is such a valuable card, *keycard responses* are essential for accurate slam bidding.

You Hold a Strong Two-suited Hand

When holding a strong two-suited hand, you must first determine which suit should be the trump suit, and then determine partner's key holdings in the side suits. These hands are usually best described with a *jump shift*: open the bidding at the one-level in one suit and jump shift to the other suit with your next bid.³ Be careful, though. Partner is not forced to respond to a one-level opening bid and the opponents may not have enough high cards or suit length to overcall. If you hold more than 20 HCP or five or more spades, open the bidding **2C** and hope to show your two suits quickly.

Example 3. ♠AKQ853
Your hand: ♥7
 ♦AKQ974
 ♣---

You might plan to open **1S** and jump shift to show this strong two-suiter; however, you cannot risk partner passing your **1S** opening bid when the opponents may not be able to make a two-level overcall. You open the auction **2C**, then bid **2S** over partner's **2D** response.

- Can partner pass your **2S** bid?

In the above hand, you are missing 22 HCP, but only four of those are critical, the ace of hearts. If partner has a fit for one of your two suits, you want to play a six-level contract in that suit. You want to play a seven-level contract in spades or diamonds *if partner holds the ace of hearts*. If you use *Blackwood* and bid **4NT**, what do you do if partner's response is **5D**? Partner has one ace, but is it the ace of clubs or the ace of hearts? When holding a void or two quick losing tricks in an unbid side suit, *Blackwood* is not your best option. Use a *cue-bid sequence* instead.⁴ When one hand is known to be strong and a trump suit has been agreed upon, subsequent bids in new suits, usually at the four-level, show first-round controls, *cheapest ace or void*. The next round of bidding, usually at the five-level, shows second-round controls, *cheapest king or singleton*. Consider this auction using the example hand:

2C (strong, artificial, forcing) **2D** (negative or waiting response)
2S (suit) **3S** (three-card plus support)
4C (cheapest first-round control) **4H** (first-round control of hearts - denies void in diamonds)
7S (no need for further information)

☞ **Principle:** Trump slams frequently depend upon specific card holdings, not on numbers of aces or kings alone. Even *keycard Blackwood* cannot always determine specific cards. Use *cue-bid sequences* to determine the location of specific aces and kings.

☞ **Principle:** *Blackwood* responses may cause problems when investigating minor suit slams. If partner's response forces the partnership to the six-level missing two aces, there are two options. A

³ Many players no longer play *strong jump shifts*. They choose to play *weak jump shifts* at all times. **Warning! Personal opinion:** With many partners, I do play weak jump shifts in competition, but when the opponents are not bidding, a weak jump shift only preempts partner. Most partnerships also overuse the bid. Hands in which a jump shift is necessary in reaching a slam contract occur more frequently than those in which responder's hand is so weak that only a weak jump shift will allow the partnership to play a safe contract. For those that do play weak jump shifts in all situations, remember to alert the bid if there is no competition from the opponents.

⁴ *Exclusion Blackwood* is a variation used by some partnerships when asking for aces with a void in a side suit. **Warning! Personal observation:** I had this variation on my card for more than five years. The opportunity to use it came up only once, and we would have gotten to the correct level without it. I took it off my card long ago.

five-level bid in a new suit by the Blackwood bidder asks partner to bid **5NT**. If **5NT** is a safe contract, use this option. Otherwise, bid the slam confidently. You may get lucky. Consider using a cue-bid sequence to locate missing controls instead.⁵

The Five-Level Major Suit Bid

You suspect that a spade slam contract is a possibility, but you don't know how to communicate that possibility to partner. You follow partner's **4S** bid with a bid of **5S**. What do you expect partner to do? **When investigating major suit slams, a five-level bid of the trump suit must have some meaning.** If you and partner are using this bid as an all-purpose slam try, be aware that what you are really doing is "passing the buck." Partner must make a slam decision, but does not know what factors to consider when making that decision.

Example 4. ♠QT74
 Your hand: ♥—
 ♦AKQ8543
 ♣AK

Although a case could be made for opening this hand **1D**, planning to follow this with a jump shift into the spade suit, you open the bidding **2C**. Surprise! Partner responds **2S**. You know that a slam is a good possibility.

- What information do you need to know about partner's hand?

There are only two cards that are relevant in partner's hand – the ace and king of spades. If you choose to ask partner how many keycards partner holds, and the answer is three, you have no problem. If partner's answer is two, however, it's not safe to assume those two cards are the top trump honors. In a constructive auction, standard bidding reserves the five-level bid of a major trump suit to ask partner for trump quality. Partner is requested to take one of these actions:

- **Pass** with none of the top three trump honors;
- **Bid six of the major** with one of the top three trump honors;
- **Bid seven of the major** with two of the top three trump honors.

☞ **Principle:** It is usually right to bid five of the major trump suit when *the only question you need to ask partner* is, "How good are your trumps?"

Partner Opened the Bidding!

You hold a strong hand, but partner dealt and opened the bidding. Visions of slam arise immediately, but investigate carefully. Consider this example.

Example 5. ♠J4
 Your hand: ♥A6
 ♦AT832
 ♣AKJ6

Partner deals and opens the bidding **1S**. You have a good hand and slam may be possible, but . . .

- Do you know what the correct strain should be?
- Do you know what question(s) to ask partner?

When you have no specific question to ask partner, and you don't know what the correct strain should be, you cannot take control of the auction. Make descriptive, forcing bids and listen to partner's response.

☞ **Principle:** *A jump shift is unconditionally forcing to game and demands control of the auction.* Reserve the *jump shift* only for those hands in which the probable strain is known.

⁵ After minor suit agreement has occurred, some partnerships play a Blackwood variant such as *Minorwood* or *Redwood*. **Warning! Personal observation:** Both these variants once appeared on my convention card, but they have long since disappeared. I use *keycard Blackwood (1430)* or cue-bid sequences, even when investigating minor suit slams.

With the above hand, simply bid **2D**. In a standard auction, this bid shows at least ten high card points, at least four diamonds, and is forcing for one round.⁶ Partner's next bid may give you enough information to take control of the auction.

Example 6. ♠AJ4
 Your hand: ♥A6
 ♦AKT832
 ♣86

Partner deals and opens the bidding **1S**. You know the correct strain and a slam is very likely.

- What action should you take?
- Would *keycard Blackwood* be a good response?

In the above example, you know that a spade slam is a good possibility. You and your partner are playing *keycard Blackwood*, so you bid **4NT** and partner responds **5D** showing one keycard. You sign off in **6S**. The opponents cash the ♣AK at tricks one and two. *OOPS!* Perhaps you should have been more cautious. First, show your strength by bidding **3D**, a jump shift, with your first bid. Support partner's spade suit with your second bid. Now, partner can take intelligent action.

☞ **Principle:** Asking for keycards when you hold two immediate losers in an unbid suit may be a dangerous action. Show your strength and support, but leave further action to partner.

Bidding Slams Based on Fits

Beginning bridge players are always told that an opening hand opposite an opening hand should result in a game contract. What they seldom hear, however, is that when no trump fit is found, a game contract may fail. More experienced bridge players realize this, but even they fail to take advantage of the corollary. ***An opening hand opposite an opening hand may result in a trump slam contract if the two hands fit together well.*** In standard bidding, the key to bidding these "fit slams" is a concept called *bidding out your pattern*. These auctions can be difficult to create, so become familiar with two bidding conventions that help describe these excellent trump fits: the *splinter bid* and the *Jacoby 2NT major suit raise*. Both conventions are game forcing and show slam interest. ***Don't play these conventions without discussing them with your partner first.***

☞ **Principle:** When evaluating trump slam possibilities, remember that the better the fit, the fewer the high card points required. The corollary is: *be cautious in slam bidding when a good fit does not exist.*

Super Trump Fits

Partner opened the bidding, you hold an opening hand, and you know that the partnership has at least nine trumps. Slam may be a possibility and probably depends on partner's exact distribution and side suit controls. If you are the partner who first recognizes the slam possibility, your bids must be forcing and must either elicit specific information from partner or convey specific information to partner.

Example 7a. ♠3
 Your hand: ♥AKQ6
 ♦A6532
 ♣974

Partner opens the bidding **1H**. A slam may be possible, even if partner holds a minimum opening hand.

- How can you safely investigate?
- Is a slam likely if partner's opening bid were **1S**?

⁶ If your partnership plays two-over-one, this two-over-one response is game forcing. **Warning! Personal opinion:** I like the two-over-one system. Establishing a game-force at the two-level allows the communication that's sometimes essential in investigating close slam contracts.

What are the positive features in this hand? (1) Four wonderful trumps; (2) a singleton spade; and (3) a five-card side suit headed by the ace.

What are the weaknesses in this hand? (1) Three losing clubs; (2) the five-card diamond suit doesn't look like a great source of tricks.

- **Standard auction:** With three immediate losers in the club suit, *Blackwood* is not a safe auction. Bid **2D** and plan to keep the bidding open until you can visualize partner's hand. Keep in mind, though, that partner's trumps are terrible! If you simply jump to **4H** with your second bid, partner will pass.

☞ **Principle:** Do not invite game or slam contracts when your trumps are great. Trump quality is one of the factors partner considers when accepting invitations. Partner will devalue his or her hand if the trump suit is poor.

Jacoby 2NT Response

Hands of opening strength and at least four-card trump support opposite a partner who has opened one of a Major suit are very strong playing hands. If your hand fits this description and you want to control the auction, consider using the *Jacoby 2NT response*.

- Partner opens **1H** or **1S**.
- You respond **2NT**, which must be *alerted* as conventional, is *forcing to game*, shows *at least four-card trump support* and a hand you were planning to open, *and* you ask partner to describe his *distribution* and his strength with his next bid.
- Partner responds:
 - **3C, 3D, 3H** (after **1S**), or **3S** (after **1H**) showing a singleton or void in the suit bid.
 - **3 of the opening major** showing extra trumps and extra values and implying no short suit.
 - **3NT** shows a balanced hand with extra values.
 - **4C, 4D, or 4H** (after **1S**) shows a good, trick-taking five-card suit.
 - **4 of the opening Major** shows a minimum opening hand with no extra distribution.
- All the preceding bids must be *alerted*!

Responding **2NT** to partner's opening **1H** bid is one of the options possible with the example hand.

1. What would you bid after partner's **3C** response?
2. What would you bid after partner's **3NT** response?
3. What would you bid after partner's **4H** response?

☞ **Principle:** The *Jacoby 2NT* response both describes and asks for specific information. The **2NT** bidder is usually the partner who must control the auction. It may not be the best choice if you don't know what to do over partner's likely responses.

The Splinter Bid

The *splinter bid*, a *double jump shift* in your short suit, allows you to describe with one bid a hand with game-forcing values, four or more trumps, and a singleton or void in the bid suit. Note that the splinter bid is a conventional bid that requires an *alert* or a *delayed alert*.⁷ Unlike the *Jacoby 2NT* bid, splinter bids can be used to show minor suit fits and can be used by responder or opener. Take another look at the example hand from opener's point of view.

⁷ If the splinter bid is a three-level bid, it must be alerted immediately. If the splinter bid is responder's first bid, it must be alerted immediately. If the splinter bid is a four-level bid *and* it is made at or after opener's second turn to bid, it requires a *delayed alert*. Inform the opponents at the end of the auction before the opening lead is made.

Example 7b. ♠872
 Your hand: ♥JT975
 ♦KQ
 ♣AK2

You open this lovely hand **1H**. Partner's response, **3S**, shows a singleton spade, opening values, and four or more hearts.

- Is a slam likely?
- What do you plan to bid?

☞ **Principle:** A splinter bid is descriptive only. The player making this bid usually passes control of the auction to partner.

☞ **Principle:** Bids other than the trump suit after the splinter bid or opener's response to Jacoby **2NT** are usually treated as *cue bids* showing first-round control of that suit.

Example 8a. ♠AQT3
 Your hand: ♥A5
 ♦8
 ♣KQJT86

In the example hand, you as dealer open the bidding **1C**. Your partner responds **1S**. Your hand, already a good hand, just became a game-forcing hand opposite a partner with only four spades and six high card points. Opposite a partner with the appropriate cards, there are excellent slam prospects, but how do you tell partner?

Possible standard auction: 1C Pass 1S Pass
 4S Pass ??

This tells partner your hand contains four spades and about twenty support points. Partner may explore for slam with general values, but will pass with the majority of hands.

Standard splinter auction: 1C Pass 1S Pass
 4D! Pass ??

Splinter variation: 1C Pass 1S Pass
 4C! Pass ??

Opener's double jump in the original suit shows a very specific hand type. Opener is promising a hand with a six-card or longer suit with at most one loser, four-card trump support for responder's suit, and at least twenty support points. This bid must be alerted.

Example 8b. ♠K8652
 Partner's hand: ♥3
 ♦T743
 ♣A72

If this were your hand, can you visualize the slam possibilities after opener's splinter response?

Two-suited Fits

You and partner both hold opening hands and the bidding has uncovered a *two-suited fit*, at least eight cards in each of two suits. With the proper controls, these hands are likely to take twelve or thirteen tricks.

Example 9. ♠AQT93
 Your hand: ♥KQ86
 ♦6
 ♣K75

You open the bidding **1S** and partner responds **2H**. You raise to **3H** and partner now bids **3S**. You and partner both know that a two-suited fit exists.

- Should slam be investigated?
- If so, what information do you need?

☞ **Principle:** When the partnership has agreed on a trump suit, but neither hand is known to be strong, bids in new suits are treated as *game tries*. Game tries are forcing bids, game-seeking, and in certain sequences may be slam-seeking. The type of game tries played must be discussed.⁸ Without discussion, game tries are natural, but may show a three-card fragment.

☞ **Principle:** When choosing the trump suit, remember that a hand played in a 4-4 trump fit frequently takes one trick more than the hand played in a 5-3 trump fit.

Consider the bidding from the example hand. Partner's **2H** bid shows at least four hearts and at least ten high card points. His **3S** rebid promises at least three spades and game-forcing values.⁹ Partner has made no effort to take control of the bidding. Your next call is very important.

- **4S** shows game interest only and sets the trump suit.
- **4H** shows game interest only and sets the trump suit.
- In a game-forcing auction after trump suit agreement, the bid of a new suit is commonly treated in one of two ways: as a *cue bid* showing first round control in the bid suit, or as a natural suit bid showing at least three cards in the bid suit. *Regardless of treatment, this new suit is forcing and slam-seeking.*¹⁰
- **4NT** is Blackwood. If the partnership is using *keycard Blackwood*, the trump suit is the last naturally bid suit or the last agreed-upon suit, spades in this auction. Because the king of the second suit is also very important, many players consider it a *sixth keycard* when responding. The Blackwood responses are the same, regardless of the addition of a sixth keycard.¹¹
- **Pass** is not an option.

☞ **Principle:** Fit slams depend upon exact patterns and controls. They are difficult to bid with standard methods unless the partnership understands the concepts of forcing bids and pattern-showing auctions.

The Reverse Bid

A *reverse bid* is a two-level rebid by opener in a suit higher ranked than his opening suit. This bid shows a hand of no trump opening strength, about 15 to 18 high card points, with unbalanced distribution, a singleton or void. Reverse bid auctions may be the most confusing auctions in existence. Navigating them successfully usually requires much partnership discussion. The following points present simple reverse bidding principles, but there are many variations in use.¹²

- A reverse bid is a *one round force*.
- The auction must proceed until a three-level contract is reached.
- All new suits by responder are forcing for one round.

⁸ Possible options include *help-suit game tries*, *short-suit game tries*, and *Kokish game tries*. Unless the game try tends to promise at least three cards in the bid suit, it must be alerted.

⁹ Regional variations exist in which the **2H** bid promises five hearts. When a two-suited fit exists, even a normally invitational hand becomes game forcing. This bid may be played as invitational, but only if the partnership has agreed on this treatment. Note that when playing two-over-one, partner's initial **2H** bid establishes a game-force. In game-forcing sequences, direct jumps to game show minimum values.

¹⁰ Without discussion, I assume the new suit bid shows first-round control. This assumption is stronger if the cue-bidder is known to hold a strong hand.

¹¹ The partnership must agree on the best method to set the trump suit when using *keycard Blackwood* and on whether or not to consider the sixth keycard after the auction has revealed a two-suited fit.

¹² The definition of what constitutes a reverse bid may change in some two-over-one system sequences. Discuss these with your partner.

- Opener's third bid completes the description of his or her hand. It usually indicates a *three-card suit*.

Example 10. ♠AK76
 Your hand: ♥43
 ♦Q853
 ♣K97

Partner opens the bidding **1C**. You plan to search for a game level contract, probably in spades or no trump. You elect to respond **1S**. Partner now rebids **2D**.

- Do you see any slam possibilities?

Partner's rebid of **2D** is a *reverse bid* and indicates a hand that is unbalanced and contains one trick more than an opening hand. You are the partner who should now see the possibility of a slam, and the most important information you need from partner is his exact distribution. If partner holds a singleton heart, the slam is assured. If partner's singleton is in spades, problems may exist with the slam contract. Continue the description of your hand. Bid **2NT** to show your shape and allow partner to complete his pattern.

Auction 1:	1C	1S	Auction 2:	1C	1S
	2D	2NT		2D	2NT
	3S*			3H*	

Partner's hand in Auction 1 probably contains three spades, one heart, four diamonds, and five clubs. The two hands combined have only one possible heart loser, so a Blackwood bid is a safe option. The second auction shows the same minor suit distribution, but partner now holds three hearts and one spade. If you feel slam is unlikely, bid **3NT**. If you want to make a *mild slam try*, bid **4D**. Partner can now cue bid or ask for aces with **4NT**.

Slam Bidding in Competitive Auctions

If the opponents compete when you and partner are investigating slam possibilities, they usually hold highly distributional hands. In fact, opponents may *jam the auction* very quickly to the five-level, removing many tools from your bidding arsenal. Alternative tools exist to handle most competitive problems.

Problem 1:	North	East	South	West
	1S	3D	4D	

The **4D** bid is a *cue bid*. In competitive auctions, cue bids are considered one-round forces. Partner has a good hand, wants to let you know that fact, and wants more information from you. *If you and partner have agreed upon a trump suit, a cue bid of the opponent's suit shows first round control of that suit.*

Problem 2:	North	East	South	West
	1S	Pass	2S	4D
	4NT	5D	?	

Partner obviously has a good hand and is interested in slam despite your single raise. The **4NT** is *Blackwood*, but the **5D** bid has taken away your responses. Most players play **DOPI** in this situation. The acronym stands for "Double with zero; pass with one." This has been modified to handle keycard Blackwood responses to mean "Double with a first level response; pass with the second level." Assume you and partner are playing *keycard Blackwood*, in the given example,

- **Double** if you hold zero or three keycards. (Could you hold three keycards in this example?)
- **Pass** if you hold one or four keycards.
- Bid the next level with two keycards without the queen of trumps. In this sequence, bid **5H**.
- With two keycards and the queen of trumps, bid another level higher. In this sequence, bid **5S**.

There is a rationale behind these responses. With no keycards in responder's hand, the partnership may have difficulty making a high-level contract. The biggest score may be obtained by setting the opponents in a doubled contract. With one keycard in responder's hand, the partnership will be safe at the five-level if partner chooses to compete and will set the opponents easily if partner chooses to double. Holding two keycards, slam is a good possibility.

Problem 3:	North	East	South	West
	3D	3S	Pass	4S
	Pass	5S		

Partner just made a free bid of the major trump suit at the five-level. Obviously partner is interested in a slam contract, but what is partner's question? If this were a constructive auction, partner would be asking about trump quality, but this is a *competitive auction*. **In a competitive auction, freely bidding five of a major trump suit asks partner for controls in the opponent's suit.** Partner should take one of the following actions:

- **Bid seven of the major** with first and second round control of the opponent's suit;
- **Bid six of the major** with first round control or a singleton in the opponent's suit;
- **Bid six of the major** with a *sure* second round control;
- **Pass** without first or second round control of the opponent's suit.

Problem 4:	North	East	South	West
	3D	3S	4D	4S
	5D	5S		

Does partner's **5S** bid ask for controls in the diamond suit? No. The **5S** bid is not a *free bid*. North's bid has forced partner to bid at the five-level. If you pass and partner takes twelve tricks, compliment the opponents on their excellent bidding. If you choose to bid **6S** and partner goes down, compliment the opponents. There is no foolproof bidding system, especially when the opponents enter the fray.

The Slam-bidding Process: Summary

- Good partnership communication in slam bidding is imperative, but miscommunication does occur, even in the best of partnerships. When discussing a miscommunication *after* the game, the proper phrase is **not**, "**You** should have done;" it is, "**What should we do in this situation next time?**"
- Determine the correct *strain* first; then determine the best level.
- If you know slam is possible *and* you know what question(s) to ask, *take control of the auction* and ask your question.
- If you know slam is possible *but* do not know what question(s) to ask, *simply make descriptive and forcing bids*.
- If partner's bid asks you a question, partner has control of the auction. Simply answer partner's questions.
- If partner's bid is descriptive and forcing, respond with a further description of your hand, *unless you are ready to take control of the auction*.

☞ ***Final principle: Although conventions may be useful, visualization and judgment will always be the most important elements in successful bidding, whether part-score, game, or slam.***

Slam-bidding Tools: A Summary

- **4C** is *Gerber* if:
 - it's a jump after a no trump bid; *or*
 - partner opened **1NT** or **2NT** *and* no suit has been agreed upon, i.e. bid and raised.
 - **4C** *may* be *Gerber* if:
 - partner opened **3NT** and you and your partner have agreed to use **4C** as *Gerber* in this auction.
 - **4C** is *not Gerber* if:
 - neither partner has bid no trump; *or*
 - clubs were bid naturally, it is not a jump, *and* neither player has shown a strong hand.
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- **4NT** is *quantitative* if:
 - partner opened **1NT** or **2NT** and no suit has been agreed upon; *or*
 - partner signs off in **3NT** and no suit has been agreed upon.

Note that some partnerships respond to the bid of 4NT as if it were (keycard) Blackwood if they intend to accept the invitation to slam.

- **4NT** is (*keycard*) *Blackwood* if:
 - it's a jump and neither partner has shown a balanced hand by bidding no trump; *or*
 - a suit has been bid and raised; *or*
 - one partner is known to hold a strong, suit-oriented hand.
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- A bid in a new suit is a *cue bid* showing suit controls if:
 - at least one hand is known to be strong *and* a trump suit has been agreed upon; *or*
 - a game-forcing auction has been established *and* a trump suit has been agreed upon *and* the partnership has agreed to this treatment.

Implication: Partner is investigating a slam, but holds a void or two immediate losers in an unbid suit.

- A bid in a new suit shows a real suit or suit fragment if:
 - no suit has been agreed upon; *or*
 - a game-forcing auction has *not* been established, *but* a trump suit has been set *and* the partnership plays no conventional game tries; the bid is forcing for one round.
- A bid in a new suit may be a *fragment* (three cards) if:
 - the bidder has already shown two other suits.

Implication: Partner is investigating a fit slam and wishes to show a singleton or void in his or her unbid suit.

- In a competitive auction, the bid of the opponents' suit is a *cue bid*.
 - It shows strength and asks for a further description of partner's hand *if no suit has been agreed upon*. Suit agreement is implied if the cue bid is at a high level.
 - It shows first round control of the opponents' suit *if trump suit agreement exists*.
- A *jump shift* shows where the muscle is, not where the suit is. It guarantees a real suit only when it's responder's first bid. *It is unconditionally game forcing!*

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- A *five-level trump bid* asks trump quality if:
 - it is a major suit *and* there has been no competition.

Implication: Partner has control of all other suits *and* a likely source of tricks.

- A *five-level trump bid* asks for controls in the opponents' suit if:
 - it is a major suit *and* it is a *free bid*, i.e. not forced by the competition.

Implication: Partner has two losing tricks in the opponents' suit.

Practicing Your Slam-bidding

Slam hands occur infrequently, so it's not easy to become comfortable with the fine judgment required or the specialized bidding tools. There is a way for you and your partner to practice, however. First, remove all twos through fives in the deck. Then deal thirteen cards to you and partner and bid as if the opponents are passing throughout. This greatly increases the likelihood of a slam and allows you and partner to practice bidding with strong hands.

Useful Conventions

Warning! Personal opinion: Playing too many conventions may actually interfere with a player's ability to visualize hands, but some conventions have proven their value in bidding – and avoiding – close games and slams.

- If your partnership does not play some form of *keycard Blackwood*, add it to your bidding arsenal. The *1430* version has two slight advantages: it allows an extra queen ask and it's easier to remember. Add the concept of a *sixth keycard* when the Blackwood bidder has shown a two-suited hand. Of course, *Gerber* is necessary. A *keycard* variation may be helpful, but when and how it's used must be carefully discussed.
- Locating shortness is essential in accurately bidding fit slams. *Splinter bids* and the *Jacoby 2NT response* to a major suit opening are very effective tools in describing both distribution and strength. I recommend adding them to your bidding arsenal.
- To visualize a slam, it's sometimes necessary to make a temporizing and forcing bid. That bid is not always easy to find. *New minor forcing* and *fourth suit forcing* help solve this problem.

There are many ace-asking tools that you can add to Blackwood and Gerber. In my opinion, they have limited utility, but each variation has strong advocates. Possibilities include, but are not limited to, *Exclusion Blackwood*, *Minorwood*, *Redwood*, *Doublewood*, and *Rolling Blackwood*. Use a *Google* search or look them up in a convention book.

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Slam-seeking Auctions After 1NT Opening Bids

So many people asked questions about no trump bidding sequences after the last lecture that I am writing out the agreements I had with my favorite two-over-one partners. You and your partner may use these or any other sequence you deem reasonable after due consideration. If you play puppet Stayman and Smolen, discuss sequences with your partner. In all sequences, assume the opponents have passed.

Quantitative Raises

- 1NT-2NT// Pass with minimum; bid 3NT with maximum
- 1NT-3NT// Pass
- 1NT-4NT// Pass with minimum; bid 6NT with maximum
- 1NT-5NT// Bid 6NT with minimum; bid 7NT with maximum
- 1NT-6NT// Pass
- 1NT-7NT// Pass ☺

Slam-seeking After Stayman Auctions

- 1NT-2C// 2D-4NT (quantitative)// Pass with minimum; standard Blackwood response with maximum
- 1NT-2C// 2D-4C (Gerber asking number of aces)
- 1NT-2C// 2H-4NT (quantitative denying four hearts, promising four spades)//
 - Without four spades, pass with minimum; bid 6NT with maximum
 - With four spades, bid 5S with minimum; respond *keycard Blackwood for spades* with maximum*
- 1NT-2C// 2H-4C (*keycard Gerber for hearts*; responder knows correct strain)
- 1NT-2C// 2H-5NT (quantitative denying four hearts, promising four spades)//
 - Without four spades, bid 6NT with minimum; bid 7NT with maximum
 - With four spades, bid 6S with minimum; bid 7S with maximum
- 1NT-2C// 2S-4NT (quantitative denying four spades, promising four hearts)//
 - Pass with minimum; respond *keycard Blackwood for hearts* with maximum
 - Note that there is no four-card major suit fit in this auction, because opener has denied four hearts with the 2S response to Stayman
- 1NT-2C// 2S-4C (*keycard Gerber for spades*; responder knows correct strain)
- 1NT-2C// 2S-5NT (quantitative denying four spades, promising four hearts)//
 - Bid 6NT with minimum; bid 7NT with maximum
 - Note that there is no four-card major suit fit in this auction, because opener has denied four hearts with the 2S response to Stayman

Slam-seeking After Transfer Auctions

- 1NT-2D!// 2H-4NT (quantitative)//
 - With two hearts, pass with minimum; bid 6NT with maximum
 - With three hearts, bid 5H with minimum; respond *keycard Blackwood for hearts* with maximum**
- 1NT-2D!// 2H-4C (*keycard Gerber for hearts*; responder knows correct strain)
- 1NT-2D!// 3H! (super accept) – 4NT (*keycard Blackwood for hearts*)
- Use the same system after a transfer to spades.

* Bid 6S if the *keycard* response was 5S (two with the queen).

** Bid 6H if the *keycard* response was 5H (two without the queen)