

Slam Bidding and Modified Scroll Bids

By Neil H. Timm

In this Bridge Bit, I explore more fully Slam bidding techniques, some old and some perhaps new. To reach a small slam, the partnership should have roughly thirty-three Bergen points. In addition to a trump fit and count, slams require controls (aces, kings, voids, and singletons). The more controls between the partners, the easier the slam. To evaluate whether or not the partnership has the required controls, one uses cuebids with perhaps the 5NT trump ask bid (Grand Slam Force), and Blackwood Conventions. Blackwood Conventions reveal how many aces and kings, while cuebidding or control showing bids reveal where they reside.

To make a slam, one usually requires first-round control in three suits and second round control in the fourth suit. It is possible to make a slam missing two aces, provided the missing ace is opposite a void, and the second missing ace is replaced by or is opposite a second-round control (a king or a singleton).

When looking for a possible slam, one often asks the following questions.

- 1. What cards should my partner have to be able to make a slam?**
- 2. How may I obtain the required information?**
- 3. Are there any bidding techniques or conventions that I can use to obtain the required information?**
- 4. If my partner does not have the required cards for a slam, can I stop short of slam, and if not is the risk of going down worth it?**

We shall review techniques to help the partnership find the required information for making a slam! However, with some hands one needs only to count points to reach a slam.

To see this, consider the following auction:

Partner opens 1♣ and you bid 1♠ with the following cards: ♠K1087542 ♥7 ♦43 ♣A76

Partner bids 4♠, showing at least 19+ points! Do you pass? **NO**

You have 7HCP, but with re-evaluation you have 7HCP + 3 length points +3 for singleton heart (with 4+ spades)+ 1 for the doubleton = 14 Dummy Points;

Having at least $19/20+14=33/34$ points, YOU MUST bid SIX!

FAST ARRIVAL DOSE NOT ALWAYS MEAN PASS!

For this hand you may just bid the slam or if in doubt, use some form of Blackwood, the 5NT ask or cue bids to investigate for slam!

We will review several Blackwood Methods, the 5NT trumps ask and look at introduce cue bidding.

Partner Opens 1♠ and you have the same hand: ♠K1087542 ♥7 ♦43 ♣A76, what is your bid?

With a fit, you have 13 Dummy/Support points, and a singleton heart, bid 3♥, a concealed/ambiguous splinter. Now you need methods to investigate slam.

In the first example, partner (the weak hand) may initiate the investigation for slam while in the second; the Opener (the strong hand) will investigate for slam. Either partner may initiate the investigation. The person who initiates the investigation is called the captain.

The Blackwood Convention

The most used and perhaps the most abused convention in bridge is the original Blackwood Convention developed by Easley Blackwood Sr. because many believe it will handle all situations. It does not. While the convention **does not** require knowing the trump suit, it does require that one knows whether or not slam is possible. The convention augments this knowledge by helping one find the number of aces and kings.

The convention should not be used when:

- (1) Holding two or more cards in an unbid suit with no ace or king (e.g., xx, Qx, Jx).**
- (2) Holding a void.**
- (3) One has a slam invitational hand (e.g., 1NT facing 1NT hands).**

To use the convention, the captain bids 4NT which is the asking partner for the number of aces held.

The responses are:

- 5♣ 0 ace or all 4 aces
- 5♦ 1 ace
- 5♥ 2 aces
- 5♠ 3 aces

If two aces are missing, the captain signs off in five of a suit. If one ace is missing, one may bid 6NT or six of a suit. If spades is not trump, the bid of 5♠ asks partner to sign-off in 5NT.

What do you do if you have a void? **Do not count it as an ace.** With an even number of aces (two or four) bid 5NT and with an odd number (one or three) bid the suit at the six-level. If you have no aces and a void (ignore the void), bid 5♣ since the void may be in a suit in which your partner has an ace.

Knowing you have all the aces, 5NT is the king's ask; the responses are:

- 6♣ 0 king or all 4 kings

- 6♦ 1 king
- 6♥ 2 kings
- 6♠ 3 kings

Having all the aces and kings, one is in the grand slam zone; it requires about thirty-seven Bergen points.

The major problem with the Blackwood Convention is you have no way of knowing about the ace and king of trump and the specific location of aces are unknown. To solve these shortcomings, one uses the Roman Keycard Blackwood Convention (RKCB), cuebids with perhaps the 5NT trump ask or Exclusion Keycard Blackwood.

Roman Keycard Blackwood (RKCB) Convention - 1430

The most authoritative book, in my opinion, on the RCKB convention is by Eddie Kantar (2008), “Roman Keycard Blackwood the Final Word” 5th Edition, Master Point Press, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

To use the RKCB Convention, one must have agreed upon a trump suit. Knowing the trump suit, there are two Roman Keycard Conventions known as 1430 and 3014. When the strong hand asks, Kantar recommends that one play the 1430 version (marked as 1430 on the convention card); if the weak hand asks, he recommends 3014 (marked as RCK on the convention card). While Kantar has several criteria to determine which hand is considered strong and which is the weak hand, because more often than not the strong hand usually asks, we recommend always using the 1430 Roman Keycard Convention. Let’s not get too complicated.

When using the RKCB Convention, there are now five keycards, the four aces, and the king of trump. Another keycard is the queen of trump. If you do not use kickback (to be explained later), the 1430 RKCB ask is again 4NT. The responses are:

- 5♣ 1 or 4 keycards (the 14 step)
- 5♦ 3 or 0 keycards (the 30 step)
- 5♥ 2 (or 5) keycards without the queen of trump in the agreed upon suit
- 5♠ 2 (or 5) keycards with the queen of trump in the agreed upon suit

When one responds five clubs or five diamonds, the queen ask may be needed. After the response five clubs, the bid of 5♦ is the queen ask (**when hearts or spades are the agreed upon trump suit**). After the bid of five diamonds, the bid of 5♥ is the queen asks.

Queen Ask

After five clubs and five diamonds, the queen asks are: 5♦ and 5♥ (the next step bids)

Responding to the 5♦ ask

(1) If you **do not** hold the queen, responder **returns to the agreed upon suit at the five- level.**

(2) 5NT shows the queen, but no outside king!

(3) With both (Q of trump and one or two kings), bid at the six-level of the lowest ranking king.

Responding to the 5♥ ask

(1) If you do not hold the queen, pass.

(2) 5NT shows the queen, but no outside king!

(3) With the queen and a king in the lower ranking suit, bid the suit at the sixth level (e.g. 6♣/6♦).

(4) If you have the Queen and a higher ranking king, return to the six-level of the agreed upon suit, 6♥.

King Ask

Knowing you hold all the aces and king-queen of trump (note some players do not require holding the queen), **5NT is the specific king's ask!**

The specific kings ask is needed for a grand slam try in the agreed upon suit or notrump; it tells partner that we have all the key cards.

Responses are:

(1) Return to the agreed upon trump suit at the six-level denies any kings.

(2) With two kings, bid the cheapest at the six-level (below agreed upon trump suit); if the second king is of higher rank, bid 6NT.

(3) With three kings, bid 7NT.

To find a second king below the trump suit, bid the suit. Without the second king, responder bids the trump suit at the six-level. With the king, jump to 7 in the agreed suit.

Playing 1430 RKCB, the standard is to use the specific king ask; however, some still may play the number of kings from “Blackwood” excluding the trump suit –YOU BETTER ASK your partner.

Responding with voids

Using the 1430 convention, and have a void the responses to 4NT are:

5NT = 2 or 4 an even number of keycards with a void (with 0, bid 5♦-- ignore the void).

6 of suit below the trump suit = odd number keycards (1 or 3)

6 trump suit = odd number of keycards (1 or 3) with a void in higher ranking suit

Over Interference DOP1-ROP1 or DEPO

When the opponents interfere, most players play DOP1/ROP1. Another option is to use DEPO. While most do not use both, I recommend the use of both which depends on the level of interference.

If the opponents interfere at the five levels with a bid, use DOP1,

Double	No Keycards
Pass	One Keycard
1 st Step suit above	Two keycards
2 nd Step up	Three keycards

If the opponents interfere at the five levels with a double, use ROP1,

Re-Double	No Keycards
Pass	One Keycard
1 st Step suit above	Two keycards
2 nd Step up	Three keycards

If the opponents interfere at the **six-levels**, use DEPO,

Double	Even Number of keycards (0, 2, 4)
Pass	Odd Number of keycards (1, 3)

Kickback and Minorwood

Kickback/Redwood

When the agreed upon suit is a minor, the use of 4NT as a keycard ask will often get the responses too high. To avoid this problem, some use Roman Keycard Blackwood with kickback.

It works as follows: if clubs is trump, then 4♦ is used to ask. If diamonds is trump, the 4♥ is used to ask. If hearts is trump, either 4♠ (in order to avoid problems with the queen ask) or 4NT is sometimes used to ask. When spades is trump, one always uses 4NT to ask.

One responds to the ask using each suit in order. For example, suppose the agreed upon suit is diamonds now 4♥ is RKCB; the responses are:

4♠	1 or 4 keycards (the 14 step)	1 st step
4NT	3 or 0 keycards (the 30 step)	2 nd step
5♣	2 (or 5) keycards w/o queen of trump in agreed suit	3 rd step

5♦ 2 (or 5) keycards with queen of trump in agreed suit 4th step

What is the queen ask? After 4♠, it is 4NT and after 4NT, it is 5♣! Note that with no queen, you again return to the five-level of the agreed upon trump suit. If you have the queen, bid six. It works! All extensions follow.

Instead of playing Kickback or Redwood, some partnerships play **Minorwood**. The Minorwood Convention uses four of the agreed minor for the RKCB ask.

For example, in the auction 1♦ - 2♦, the bid of 4♦ is Minorwood; it is used instead of 4♥, kickback, or redwood. It can also be played in a sequence when kickback may be confusing. The use of both kickback and minorwood bids are sometimes called “Bothwood”.

Minorwood

Over 4♣

4♦	1 or 4 keycards (the 14 step)	1 st step
4♥	3 or 0 keycards (the 30 step)	2 nd step
4♠	2 (or 5) keycards w/o queen of trump in agreed suit	3 rd step
4NT	2 (or 5) keycards with queen of trump in agreed suit	4 th step

Over 4♦

4♥	1 or 4 keycards (the 14 step)	1 st step
4♠	3 or 0 keycards (the 30 step)	2 nd step
4NT	2 (or 5) keycards w/o queen of trump in agreed suit	3 rd step
5♣	2(or 5) keycards with queen of trump in agreed suit	4 th step

Responding to 2NT with both Minors (Options for Slam in a Minor)

Option 1

Opener

2NT (20-21)
3NT (you pick)

Responder

3♠ (4+ cards in Minors with Slam interest)
4♦/4♣ (Minorwood for suit bid)

Option 2

Opener

2NT (20-21)
4♣ (I like clubs) OR
4♦ (I like diamonds)

Responder

3♠ (4+ cards in Minors with Slam interest)
4♦ (Minorwood for clubs – Note bid other Minor)
4♥ (Minorwood for diamonds)

Option3

Opener

2NT (20-21)

4♥/4♠ (I like clubs/diamonds

And Keycard bid for minor)

Responder

3♠ (4+ cards in Minors with Slam interest)

Reponds keycards for clubs/diamonds

Slam Bidding with No Agreed Upon Suit

When playing 1430 RKC, how should one proceed if there is not a prior agreement on the trump suit? Some recommend that

- (1) it should always be the last-bid suit
- (2) one should not play any form of RKC, but instead just use Blackwood as an ace only ask (no keycards)
- (3) RKC be used only if the last-bid suit is a minor (opener or responder) but not a major and others recomentd
- (4) that it is the last-bid suit of the responder.

What is your agreement?

The approach you use must be discussed with your partner when you make out your convention card. There is no “best” or standard approach. However, let’s consider a few examples. Suppose you open one spade and partner responds two hearts (a 2/1 response), and as opener, you hold the hand:

♠AKQJ763 ♥4 ♦KQ53 ♣7

If you play the last-bid suit, you cannot bid 4NT. You might try three spades and then 4NT, but if partner bids four hearts over three spades, you are back to square one.

The last-bid suit works whenever you have a fit for the last-bid suit. But if you do not, it usually does not work. We consider an example.

Opener

♠KQJ863

♥KT942

♦Q8

♣Void

Responder

♠A2

♥J7

♦AK5

♣AKQJ104

The bidding goes:

Opener	Responder
1♠	2♣
2♥	3♦
3♥	4NT
6♣	7NT
Pass	

Responder leaps to 4NT to ask for keycards. Since the last-bid suit was hearts, opener bids 6♣ which shows an odd number of keycards, the king of hearts and a void in clubs. Thinking that the one keycard is the ace of hearts, responder bids a grand slam, 7NT. whose fault? The fault was that they lacked a mutual agreement as to what 4NT means when there is no agreed upon suit.

If you play the last-bid suit, you will only survive a 4NT ask when you intend to play in your own suit as long as you hold the king of the last-bid suit. Partner is forced to answer only aces! In the above example, responder did not hold the king. Because there was no agreed upon suit, one would bid 5♣ (zero keycards). Partner would bid 6NT.

The above example suggests that one use Blackwood if there is no agreed upon suit.

If you do not have an agreed upon suit, you can play Blackwood or agree that one may play the last-bid minor suit of opener or responder.

My suggestions are:

1. Use Keycard after any four-level bid.
2. All Kickback auctions are RKCB.
3. If two suits are agreed upon, the **FIRST SUIT BID** is trumps for RKCB purposes.
4. When none of the previous applies, use Blackwood as ace only asks.

EXAMPLES OF RKCB

Slam 1

Opener	♠A7 ♥AQ65 ♦84 ♣AKQ98
Responder	♠KQ5 ♥K843 ♦KQJ6 ♣7

Opener	Responder
1♣	1♥
4♥	4NT (for hearts)
5♦ (0/3)	5♥ (queen ask)
6♣ (Q with K♣)	6♥

The opener has 19 HCP + 1 length – 1 dubious doubleton = 19 starting points. Responder has fourteen starting points. Opener bids 1♣, responder bids 1♥. Finding a fit, opener reevaluates his hand. He has 19 starting + 2 doubletons = 21 Dummy Points and bids 4♥; we have game. Finding the heart fit, responder bids 4NT (alternatively, he could use kickback and ask by

bidding 4♠). The response of 5♦ shows 0 or 3 keycards. The bid of 5♥ is the queen asks. The bid of 6♣ shows the queen of hearts and the club king. Opener bids the slam 6♥.

In this example, we did not use kickback. We should have because it may be difficult to determine if the bid of 5♥ is sign-off or queen ask. Instead of bidding 4NT, suppose one bids 4♠; we would then have:

Opener	Responder
1♣	1♥
4♥	4♠ (RKCB for hearts)
5♣ (0/3)	5♦ (Queen ask)
6♣ (Q with K♣)	6♥

Now, 5♣ shows 0 or 3 keycards and 5♦ becomes the queen ask. Denying the queen, the bid would be 5♥, which is short of game. However, 6♣ shows the queen plus the king of clubs. Responder again bids 6♥.

Slam 2

Opener	♠AJ7 ♥AQJ753 ♦AQ4 ♣7
Responder	♠K5 ♥K1084 ♦8765 ♣AK9

Opener	Responder
1♥	2NT* (Jacoby)
4NT	5♥ (two keycards)
5NT	6♣ (king of clubs)
6♦ (second king ask)	6♥ (no bid small slam)

Opener has 18 HCP + 2 length points + 1 quality suit = 21 points. Responder has thirteen starting points.

After the bid of 1♥, responder bids 2NT* (Jacoby). Instead of showing his singleton, he bids 4NT. With two keycards, the bid is 5♥. Opener has the queen of trump, bids 5NT (I have them all, bid shows interest in Grand Slam), which is the specific king ask. With the king of clubs, responder bids 6♣. The bid of 6♦ is the second king's ask. Without the king, responder signs off in the heart slam.

Slam 3

Opener	♠AJ7 ♥AQJ753 ♦AQ98 ♣ void
Responder	♠K5 ♥K1084 ♦8765 ♣AK9

You have the same hand, but now you have a void. You cannot bid 4NT with a void. However, you have two options, cuebidding or using another convention called Exclusion Keycard Blackwood (EKCB).

Exclusion Roman Keycard Blackwood (EKCB) Convention

The convention is only played when a known major suit agreement is a major and you know you are in the region of slam. For example, after a Jacoby 2NT bid, a concealed splinter bid, or perhaps a Swiss bid. The convention may also be played whenever the last-bid suit is a major (with or without an agreement). The convention is initiated by an unusual jump to the five levels above game in your void suit. You are asking for keycards for the agreed upon major or the last-bid major excluding the void suit. Partner does not count the ace in the void suit bid; now there are only four keycards, three aces and a king. **There is no such thing as 1430 or 3014 EKCB.** The responses are steps above the bid suit.

Responses to EKCB

First Step	0 keycards
Second Step	1 keycard
Third Step	2 keycards without the queen
Fourth Step	2 keycards with the queen
Fifth Step	3 keycards (very unusual)

The only exception to a five-level bid is that one may use 4♠ if you agree that hearts is trump at the two-level. However, you cannot do this if you play kickback. Thus, I would only recommend that it be used with bids at the five-level.

As with 1430 RKCB, the bid of 5NT is again the specific king ask. The next step after a 0 or 1, including the void suit (but excluding 5NT), is the queen ask. Finally, the bid of any suit that is not the queen ask is the SSA.

What do you do after an EKCB ask with a void? You must always ignore it.

Returning to our Slam 3 example, opener bids 5♣ (EKCB). Excluding the club suit, responder has one keycard (king of hearts) and bids 5♦. Partner with all the aces and a void in clubs knows it is the king of hearts. Having the queen, what next? He bids 5NT which is again the specific king ask, without the king of diamonds, partner again signs off in six hearts.

Double Agreement Roman Keycard Blackwood (DRKCB)

With a double agreement, there are now six keycards (four aces and two kings), NOT FIVE, so we have what are called Double agreement 1430 Roman Keycard Blackwood (DRKCB). We consider DRKCB responses for some double agreements.

1. Major-Major Agreements

a) Opener	Responder	b) Opener	Responder
1♠	2♥	1♥	2♠
3♣	3♠	3♠	4♥
4♥	4NT	4NT	

Then 4NT is a DRKCB ask.

When responding to DRKCB asks, there are now six keycards. And, **there are no void-showing responses**. The first two responses (5♣ and 5♦) of DRKCB are the same as 1430 RKCB; however, there are now three queens showing responses:

5♥	2 with neither queen
5♠	2 with one queen
5NT	2 with both queens

Note that in the second step (5♠), you do not know which queen. However, if partner makes a first or second step response to a DRKCB ask (5♣ and 5♦), unless the asker has both of the agreed-upon suit queens, the queen situation is unknown. To now ask about queens, the asker uses the next available “free bid” step, excluding the trump suits, but including 4NT for a queen ask. The four-response steps now become:

1 st step	2 with no queen
2 nd step	2 with lower-ranking queen only
3 rd step	2 higher-ranking queen only
4 th step	2 both queens

When investigating a small slam in double-agreement sequences, you are looking to have at least five of the six missing keycards plus at least one queen of the agreed upon suits.

We now consider two **major-major** examples.

(A) Opener	Responder	Comments
♠A10732	♠KJ5	
♥A982	♥KQJ63	
♦K2	♦A94	
♣Q7	♣A5	
1♠	2♥	(1) Double Agreement
3♥	3♠ (1)	(2) DRKCB
4♥	4NT (2)	(3) 2 with neither queen
5♥ (3)	6♥ (4)	(4) Q♠ is missing

(B) Opener	Responder	Comments
♠A8732	♠KJ5	
♥AQ95	♥KJ632	
♦A2	♦K94	
♣A5	♣Q7	
1♠	2♥	(1) Double Agreement
3♥	3♠ (1)	(2) DRKCB

4♥	4NT (2)	(3) 1 or 4 keycards
5♣ (3)	5♦ (4)	(4) Queen ask with double agreement
5NT (5)	6♥ (6)	(5) Q♥ (2 nd step, lower-ranking queen)
		(6) Q♠ is missing

Note that if the response in example (B) was 5♦ (0 or 3) instead of 5♣, one could not ask for the missing queen! No “free-bid” step is available for a queen asks since one must bypass all five-level bids. The five-level bids are sign-offs and 5NT is the king ask. Queen asks are more easily used with kickback DRKCB sequences.

Quantitative Bids

When one opens 1NT or 2NT, a jump bid to 4NT is usually quantitative; it is asking partner if he is at the top of his bid. If he is, he should bid 6NT, otherwise, pass. While it is most often played when opening notrump, it may also be used with strong suit bid responses.

Examples of some common Quantitative bidding sequences follow.

1NT - 4NT Partner passes with a minimum or bids 6NT

1NT - 2♦/2♥ Jacoby Transfer to hearts/spades

2♥/2♠ - 4NT Quantitative, partner passes or bids on with extras values/length

2♣ - 2♦ Semi-positive

3NT - 4NT Quantitative, partner passes with a minimum or 6NT with good values

1♣ - 1♠

2♦ - 2♥ Reverse by opener showing 17+ points, fourth suit forcing

3NT - 4NT Quantitative, partner passes with a minimum or 6NT with good values

1NT - 2♣ Stayman

2♥ - 4NT Quantitative, partner passes or bids 6NT

1x - 1y

1NT - 4NT Quantitative, partner passes or bids 6NT

1M - 2m

2NT - 4NT Quantitative, partner passes or bids 6NT

1NT - 2♣

2♦ - 4NT Quantitative partner passes or bids 6NT

2NT - 3♣ Stayman

3♠ - 4NT Quantitative partner passes or bids 6NT

Grand Slam Force after 1NT – Is the bid of 5NT. It may be used after a notrump opening or after one has agreed upon a suit.

To use the bid after a one notrump opening requires 20+ HCP. If opener is at the top of his bid, 17 HCP, he bids 7NT; otherwise he bids 6NT.

Baron Bids after 4NT

After an invitational quantitative 4NT bid, opener need not bid 6NT since finding 12 tricks may be difficult. It is often better to play slam in a suit which allows you to ruff losers. If you have four losers you may not want to play in notrump, but a suit. Since the bid of 4NT invites a slam, any bid by the opener says “I accept” the invitation to slam, and is forcing; one may also stop in 5NT. Instead of bidding 6NT, one usually bids 4-card suits up-the-line which allows the partnership two chances to find a suit fit.

Let’s look at an example:

West	East
♠54	♠AK7
♥K67	♥QJ9
♦KQJ2	♦A10985
♣AK54	♣J2

In this example, West has 4 losers and the bidding goes 1NT – 4NT; since East has 15HCP and a 5-card suit, he invites slam. With four losers, East accepts by bidding 5♣, the cheapest 4-card suit. East does not like clubs, but is happy to bid 4♦. West likes his quality diamond suit and his two small spades are only an asset in a suit contract. Hence, he bids 6♦. In six diamonds, west can ruff a spade for the 12th trick; if the contract was in 6NT, only 11 tricks can be made.

Let’s consider a second example.

West	East
♠AKJ	♠Q72
♥AQ67	♥K9
♦A102	♦K752
♣KJ106	♣Q842

In this case, the bidding goes:

2♣	2♦ (ace or king)
2NT	4NT
5♣ (Baron)	6♣

Finally suppose we have the following hand.

West	East
------	------

♠AJ2	♠KQ43
♥KQ87	♥52
♦KQ6	♦AJ103
♣AK8	♣J102

Here the bidding goes:

2NT	3♣ (Stayman)
3♥	4NT
6NT	

Scroll Bids (Modified)

With Bergen Raises

When playing Bergen Raises, some use concealed/ambiguous splinter bids. Recall that when opening a major, a jump into the other major indicates a singleton somewhere and four-card support with 13+HCP. For example, if one opens one heart, then three spades indicates 13+HCP with four hearts and a singleton somewhere; if one opens one spade, then a response of three hearts shows four spades, 13+HCP and a singleton somewhere.

To locate the singleton, the opener uses scroll asking bids. Thus, the bidding goes: 1♥ - 3♠, 3NT or 1♠ - 3♥, 3♠. The responses after the 3NT scroll asks are: 4♣, 4♦, 4♠ which shows singletons in either clubs, diamonds, or spades, respectively; and the corresponding responses after bidding 3♠ are: 3NT=♣, 4♣=♦, and 4♦=♥, the suit below the singleton.

How do you indicate not a singleton, but a VOID when using the concealed/ambiguous splinter bids?

To show either a singleton or a void, one continues with a scroll bid. Then up-the-line bids are used to show a singleton or VOID and simultaneously provides one with information about keycards for the agreed upon suit. After hearing the response to the asking scroll bids (3NT or 3♠), one uses the next sequential up-the-line bid to determine the nature of the shortage. The responses are: Step 1 (the next cheapest bid) says it is a singleton, and Steps 2-5, the next four bids, indicate one has a void and simultaneously shows keycards.

To illustrate, suppose we are playing 1430 RKCB. And the bidding goes: 1♥ - 3♠, 3NT and one hears the response 4♣. To ask about the nature of the shortage (singleton or void), one uses the next sequential up-the-line bid to ask, bids 4♦. The responses for showing a singleton and/or associated keycards for the major suit (hearts) with a void are:

4♥	club singleton (next cheapest step)
4♠	club void with 1 or 4 keycards (step 2)
4NT	club void with 0 or 3 keycards (step 3)
5♣	club void with 2 keycards w/o the queen (step 4)
5♦	club void with 2 keycards with the queen (step 5)

If you play 0314 RKC, you merely interchange steps 2 and 3 above.

In a similar situation, after hearing 4♦, one would use the up-the-line bid of 4♥ to ask about the nature of the shortage. Now, 4♠ shows a singleton diamond and the keycard steps 2-5 are: 4NT, 5♣, 5♦, and 5♥. After hearing the response 4♠, the up-the-line asking bid is 4NT. Then, 5♣=singleton in spades and the keycard steps (2-5) are: 5♦, 5♥, 5♠, 5NT.

Opening one spade, to show a singleton somewhere with 13+HCP and four-card support is 3♥. After hearing the bid of 3♠, one indicates a singleton with the bids 3NT=♣, 4♣=♦, and 4♥=♠. To ask about the nature of the shortage, one again uses the up-the-line bids: 4♣, 4♦, and 4♠. Again, the next cheapest up-the-line bid indicates a singleton and steps 2-5 are used to show a void and simultaneously keycards for the major suit spades. To illustrate, following the bid of 4♣, the shortage bid is 4♦. The responses follow.

- 4♥ diamond singleton (next cheapest step)
- 4♠ diamond void with 1 or 4 keycards (step 2)
- 4NT diamond void with 0 or 3 keycards (step 3)
- 5♣ diamond void with 2 keycards w/o the queen (step 4)
- 5♦ diamond void with 2 keycards with the queen (step 5)

The responses to the shortage bids of 4♥ and 4♠ follow similarly.

To illustrate how the bid may be used, we consider an example.

Opener

♠AQJ762
♥3
♦9872
♣KQ

Responder

♠K984
♥AQ92
♦void
♣A7632

Opener

1♠
3♠ (shortage asking bid)
4♦ (modified scroll ask)
5NT (Spec King Ask)
7♠

Responder

3♥ (shortness somewhere)
4♣ (singleton/void in diamonds)
4NT (void in diamonds with 0 or 3 keycards)
6♠ (none)

Using the sequential scroll bids and up-the-line shortage bids, adapted from bids suggested by the Australian champion George Smolanko for splinter bids, allows one to further investigate the nature of the shortage, a singleton, or a void with information about the keycards in the agreed upon major suit.

Observe that the scroll bids and up-the-line shortage bids may also be used with the Jacoby 2NT response to a major. If you play that, a three-level bid denotes a singleton or a void and a four-level bid shows a strong (not a void) five-card suit; however, now one uses “modified” scroll-like bids to ask about shortage with Keycard responses.

Note: For the bidding sequence 1♥ - 3♠, the scroll ask is 3NT; however, with a spade void it is often better to use 4♥ to show the spade void with a minimum hand. This allows the opening bidder to pass the heart game with no slam interest. In addition, for consistency between the two methods, after the scroll ask of 3♠, one may define 3NT=♥, 4♣=clubs, and 4♦=diamonds.

After Jacoby 2NT

When playing Jacoby 2NT after a major suit opening, the three-level bid by responder is alerted and says that one has a singleton or void in the suit bid. **The bid of 2NT in response to partner's opening bid of one of a major shows at least four trump and 13+ points in support of the major suit. And, in response to the bid of 2NT, opener's bid at the three levels shows a singleton or a void.**

What does responder do next?

With a minimum and no interest based on opener's response, responder usually jumps to game in the agreed suit. All other bids show at least some slam interest. Responder's new suit bids are often cuebids looking for slam.

Are there other options?

Yes, one can use modified Scroll bids!

Let's look at two bidding sequences:

(A) 1♠ - 2NT - 3♣/3♦/3♥ which shows a singleton or a void in the suit bid.

(B) 1♥ - 2NT - 3♣/3♦/3♠ which shows a singleton or a void in the suit bid.

To determine whether or not partner has a singleton or a void, one bids as follows.

For sequence (A), one bids: 4♣/4♦/4♥, and for sequence (B), one bids: 4♣/4♦/4♠. A scroll-up bid at the four levels. Do you have a singleton or a void?

Responses become:

Next cheapest bid shows a singleton

(Step 2) shows 1 or 4 keycards with a void

(Step 3) shows 0 or 3 keycards with a void

(Step 4) shows 2 keycards without and a void

(Step 5) shows 2 keycards with the queen and a void

Thus, one is easily able to determine singleton and void with Keycard Blackwood. Let's look at an example:

Opening one 1♠ and responding 2NT, suppose partner hears the bid 3♥ that shows a singleton or void in hearts. After hearing the bid of 3♥, one next bids 4♥ to ask whether it is a singleton heart or a void (**note, the bid of 4♠ is a sign-off**).

The responses follow.

- 4♠ heart singleton (next cheapest step)
- 4NT heart void with 1 or 4 keycards (step 2)
- 5♣ heart void with 0 or 3 keycards (step 3)
- 5♦ heart void with 2 keycards without the queen (step 4)
- 5♥ heart void with 2 keycards with the queen (step 5)

Similarly, opening one 1♥, the responses after hearing for example 3♠ (a spade singleton or void), and one would bid 4♠.

The responses follow.

- 5♣ spade singleton (next cheapest step)
- 5♦ spade void with 1 or 4 keycards (step 2)
- 5NT spade void with 0 or 3 keycards (step 3)
- 5♥ spade void with 2 keycards without the queen (step 4)
- 5♠ spade void with 2 keycards with the queen (step 5)

Note that the asking bids and responses provide all the information required to bid slam or to sign off at the five-level, below slam.

Note: Instead of using scroll bids, some partnerships after showing a singleton/void will make a second cue bid of the suit to show a void.

After Jacoby 2NT- Examples

We now consider two examples of the method when responder bids Jacoby 2NT after a bid of a major.

Dealer East N-S

vulnerable

		♠ J9	
		♥ A984	
		♦ J109	
		♣ Q1087	
♠ K10642	N W E S	♠ AQ875	
♥ 10762		♥ 3	
♦ AQ		♦ K765	
♣ A3		♣ K42	
		♠ 3	
		♥ KQJ5	
		♦ 6432	
		♣ J965	

Suggested Bidding:

West	North	East	South
		1♠	Pass
2NT*	Pass	3♥*	Pass
4♥*	Pass	4♠*	Pass
4NT	Pass	5♣	Pass
6♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

*Alerts

West's 2NT is Jacoby 2NT, showing a game-forcing raise with at least four spades.

The bid of 3♥* shows a singleton or void. Hearing shortness, and with four hearts, east bids 4♥* to ask whether or not west has a singleton or a void. The first level bid of 4♠* shows a singleton. Now, west bids 4NT (Keycard Blackwood) to ask about keycards. The response (5♣) shows one or four; with an ace missing, west signs off in 6♠.

We next consider an example with a minor suit void:

Dealer North N-S Vulnerable

		♠ KJ832	
		♥ A92	
		♦ Void	
		♣ AJ1084	
♠ Q9		N W E S	♠ 5
♥ 10764			♥ J83
♦ A965			♦ KQJ103
♣ 97			♣ Q653
		♠ A10764	
		♥ KQ5	
		♦ 872	
		♣ K2	

For this example, the bidding goes:

North	East	South	West
1♠	Pass	2NT*	Pass
3♦*	Pass	4♦*	Pass
4NT*	Pass	5NT	Pass
6♣	Pass	7♠	All pass

*Alerts

Counting high card values and length, north has thirteen HCP and two length points or fifteen starter points and opens 1♠. South has only twelve starter points, however, hearing a major suit bid, reevaluates to thirteen Dummy Points, counting the doubleton, and uses the Jacoby 2NT bid that opener alerts. Opener now bids 3♦ to show the diamond singleton/void. Hearing the shortness bid and with three diamonds, south has slam interest and bids 4♦* to see if north has a singleton or a void, knowing game is ensured. North's response of 4NT (step 3) shows 0 or 3 keycards. South now asks about kings by bidding 5NT, 6♣ shows the king of clubs. North bids 7♠, a grand slam (with only twenty-five HCP).

Can you reach the slam without the Modified Scroll Bids? Perhaps; the bidding may go:

North	East	South	West
1♠	Pass	2NT*	Pass
3♦*	Pass	4NT	Pass
6♦	Pass	6♠	Pass
Pass	Pass		

*Alerts

The bid of 4NT is Keycard Blackwood and 6♦ shows an odd number of keycards with a void in diamonds. Yes, one can now bid 6♠, but note that getting to the grand slam is difficult.

If you do not play Keycard Blackwood, just Blackwood, Eddie Kantar recommends bidding 5NT with a void and two aces. Again, getting to seven spades is difficult.

If south does not bid 4NT, but instead bids four spades, in neither case would one reach the slam.

The use of “Scroll Bids” should enhance the convention card for those who use Bergen Raises (Reverse Bergen Raises or Combined Bergen Raises) playing 2/1, Standard American, or Precision.

After a Bergen Raise (Combined or Reverse) – Example

You hold the following hand ♠ KQ762 ♥ Q742 ♦KQ4 ♣A

You open the bidding 1♠ and playing combined Bergen raises partner bids 3♣* showing 7 – 10 dummy points. Not knowing the exact values, you bid 3♦* to ask, and partner next bids 3♥* showing four spades and 10-12 dummy points.

Alternatively playing Reverse Bergen, the bid of 3♣* shows 10-12 dummy points and 3♦* is used to ask if partner has exactly 12 dummy points. If he does, he bids at the 4-level of the major; if not, he responds at the 3-level.

Not playing Bergen, you bid 3♠* to show a limit raise in spades.

Are you interested in slam?

In May 2008, Marty Bergen asked 60 experienced bridge players this question and found that five would bid 4♠ at matchpoints, but investigate slam in IMPS or a team game, 26 would sign-off in fours spades, and 29 would investigate slam. What would you do?

You know partner has 10 -12 dummy points. What about your hand?

You have 16 HCP plus one point for length, subtracting a point for the dubious ace; you have only 16 starting points. However, with a fit you may add two points for the singleton and one more for the good side suit. You have 19 Bergen points. Adding 19 to 12 yields only 31 total points; short of the required 33 points required for slam.

Hence do not investigate slam! The complete deal follows

Dealer South N-S Vulnerable

	♠ 9543	
	♥ A3	
	♦ A1065	
	♣ K75	
♠ A108	N W E S	♠ J
♥ J86		♥ K1095
♦ 83		♦ J972
♣ QJ1032		♣ 9864
	♠ KQ762	
	♥ Q742	
	♦ KQ4	
	♣ A	

If you were to bid slam, West would lead the ♣Q and 6♠ is down two. Declarer loses two spades and one heart.

Think before investigating slam, an overbid usually leads to a bad result.

Roman Keycard Gerber (RKCG)

When is 4♣ asking for aces (Gerber)? When is 4NT asking for aces (1430 RKCB)? When is 4♣ a cuebid or a splinter? When is 4NT quantitative? What is 4♣ after a transfer or after Stayman?

These are all questions partnerships must discuss. In general, most partners tend to play Gerber over first and last notrump bids. That means if one opens 1NT or 2NT or if in the bidding sequence one bids 2NT or 3NT, the bid of 4♣ is Gerber.

However, if one agrees on a major, the bid of 4♣ is usually a cue bid and not Gerber.

Partnerships that do not play Kickback bids may use 1430 Keycard Gerber after for example after an ambiguous splinter bid. The responses to the bid follow 1430 RKCB.

Responses to 4♣ RKCG

4♦ 1 or 4 keycards

- 4♥ 0 or 3 keycards
- 4♠ 2 keycards without the queen
- 4NT 2 keycards with the queen

To show a void with two or four keycards, bid 5NT; with an odd number of keycards, bid the void at the six-level. There is no Queen ask bid for this convention.

King Ask in RKCG

After a response to the number of keycards, the next step in Keycard Gerber is the king ask (Progressive Gerber bid). It requests the number of kings, excluding the trump suit. The steps are respectively 0, 1, 2, 3 etc.

Roman Keycard Blackwood over Preempts

When your partner preempts, there are ways to investigate the hand further. For two-level preempts, one may bid 2NT to ask your partner for a feature or you may use the Ogust Convention. Or, you may play Modified Ogust, Two-step Ogust, Roudinesco rebids, Romex rebids, the McCabe Adjunct Convention, etc.

What method do you employ if your partner bids at the three-level and you have a very good hand? A convention that is similar to the 2NT asks is the Ogust 3NT ask. The responses are

- 4♣* minimum, 1 top honor (BAD/WEAK Hand and BAD/STRONG Suit)
- 4♦* minimum, 2 top honors (BAD/WEAK Hand and GOOD/STRONG Suit)
- 4♥* maximum, 1 top honor (GOOD/STRONG Hand and BAD/WEAK Suit)
- 4♠* maximum, 2 top honors (GOOD/STRONG Hand and GOOD/STRONG Suit)
- 4NT* all 3 honors, A-K-Q-x-x-x and little else

However, a disadvantage of this approach is that 3NT is no longer to play!

Alternatively, you may also employ the Roth Four Club Convention. It is usually a slam-try allowing one to assess the partnership's prospects for slam without going beyond a safe contract.

After the three-level bid, partner bids 4♣ which is artificial and asks partner to describe his hand further. Recall that the responses go like this:

- 4♦ bad hand, bad suit.
- 4♥ bad hand, good suit (2 of the top 3 honors in the preempt suit).
- 4♠ good hand (1 or 2 honors outside the preempt suit), bad suit.
- 4NT good hand, good suit.

The responses are similar to Ogust but use different steps.

Need better information regarding the trump suit. Then, another option is to use 4♣ as RKCB [used with weak two bids (2♦/2♥/2♠) and three level (3♦/3♥/3♠) bids]. The bid of 4NT should not be used since it may get the auction too high.

The responses are:

- 4♦ first step 0 keycards in the agreed suit
- 4♥ second step, 1 keycard without the Queen
- 4♠ third step, 1 keycard with the Queen
- 4NT fourth step, 2 keycards without the Queen
- 5♣ fifth step, 2 keycards with the Queen

The only step in which the queen is not known is the first-step. The next bid of 4♥ is the Queen ask --- 4♠ = no and 4NT = yes.

After the preemptive bid of 3♣, the bid of 4♣ is natural and advances the preempt; a jump to 4♦ is RKCB for clubs.

Let's look at an example.

Opener	Responder
♠ A 7	♠ K 2
♥ K 10 9 8 7 6 5	♥ A Q 2
♦ 7	♦ A Q 6 5 4 2
♣ 3 4 5	♣ A 7

3♥	4♣ (1430 RKCB for hearts)
4NT (2 w/o)	5♦ (SSA for diamonds, skipped the Queen ask bid of 5♣)
6♥ (singleton ♦)	7♥

Grand Slam Force after Suit Agreement (TRUMP ASKING BIDS) – A jump bid of 5NT is used to enquire about partner's top three trump honors. With 2 or more trump controls, responder makes a Grand Slam call in the trump suit. Otherwise, the responder signs off in a Small Slam.

1S - 3S;
5N - ?

4H - 5N;

1S - 2D;
3S - 5N;

SIMPLE METHOD

Step	Meaning
1 st 6♣	No Trump Honors
2 nd 6♦	One Trump Honor
4 th 6♥	Two Trump Honors

5th 6♠ Three Trump Honor

COMPLICATE METHOD

Step	Meaning
1 st 6♣	No Trump Honors
2 nd 6♦	Queen of Trump
4 th 6♥	Ace or King of trump with only 3
5 th 6NT	Ace or King with Extras
6 th 7♣	both Ace and King with support for partner's suit

Pick A Slam (Grand Slam Force after NO Suit Agreement) - Without a known fit or when opponents' interfere with the auction, a jump bid of **5 Notrump** may be used to ask partner to pick the best slam suit.

1C - 1S;
2D - 5N; (2D) - 3S - (4D) - 5N;

Cue – Bidding Overview

Cue bids are used in slam bidding to show first or second round controls. The bids are made after one agrees upon the trump suit. And the bids are made up-the-line; if a suit is skipped it means one does not have a control in the suit skipped, the denial cue bid! Cue bids are used:

1. When one has a void or singleton.
2. When one has controls in all but one suit.
3. When you needs to know whether partner holds a specific king or ace.
4. When you plan on using the 5NT trump ask bid, it is usually preceded by cue bids.
5. When you have both a void and a singleton.

Opener	Responder
♠ A Q9832	♠ K 764
♥ A3	♥ K42
♦ KQ832	♦ A 5
♣ Void	♣ 8632
1♠	3♠ (limit raise)
4♣ (Cue bid)	4♦ (Cue bid)
4♥ (Cue bid)	5♥ (second-round cue bid)
5NT (Trump ASK)	6♦ (one trump honor)

7♠

PASS

Example from Ron Klinger (2001) "Cue-Bidding to Slams" Page 51

The Gerber Convention

After the bid of notrump 1NT, 2NT, or 3NT, the bid of 4♣ is known as the Gerber Convention. It was devised by John Gerber of Houston, Texas in 1938. It asks partner about the number of aces and subsequently about the number of kings. When using Gerber, remember that you should not use the convention if (1) you have a void, (2) you have worthless doubletons (e.g., Qx, Jx, xx) in an unbid suit, and (3) you need to know if partner has controls in a specific suit.

The responses to the 4♣ Gerber ask are:

4♦ shows 0 aces or 4 aces

4♥ shows 1 ace

4♠ shows 2 aces

4NT shows 3 aces

Having all the aces, you may next ask for the number of kings by bidding 5NT. The responses are:

5♦ shows 0 aces or 4 aces

5♥ shows 1 ace

5♠ shows 2 aces

5NT shows 3 aces

Slam Bidding Strategies per Ron Klinger

Small Slam ---- Assuming the values for a small slam is present.

1. If two key cards are missing, do not bid slam.
2. If one key card is missing, but the trump queen is held, bid a small slam.
3. If one key card is missing and the trump queen are both missing, bid six with ten trumps or with nine trumps including the jack? Do not bid slam with nine trumps not holding the jack or with fewer than nine trumps.

Small Slam ---- Assuming the values for a great slam is present.

1. Holding ten trumps, you should hold all five key cards but need not have the trump queen.
2. With nine trumps or fewer, you need all five key cards plus the queen of trump.

3. If you can count 13 tricks bid seven. With 13 winners in high cards, bid 7NT. With a strong suit and no losers in the first three round of any suit, bid seven. Check this by a Control asks to ensure no loser in the first three rounds of a suit outside of trump.

Slam Bidding Practice

Problems from Bergen's Book Pages 119-122

Bid each of the following Hands

1. Opener	Responder
♠ Q83	♠ J742
♥ J9732	♥ A KQ2
♦ KQ10	♦ 5
♣ AJ	♣ KQ64

2. Opener	Responder
♠ A3	♠ 92
♥ A7542	♥ KJ63
♦ A1087	♦ K2
♣ 86	♣ KQ753

3. Opener	Responder
♠ AJ876	♠ KQ32
♥ 2	♥ J97
♦ 72	♦ A6
♣ AQ975	♣ KJ43

4. Opener	Responder
♠ AQ9753	♠ K642
♥ VOID	♥ AK6
♦ KQ76	♦ A5
♣ K85	♣ 7642

5. Opener	Responder
♠ KQ965	♠ A8742
♥ K	♥ 1076
♦ KQ1043	♦ AJ6
♣ 84	♣ AK

Answers: 1(4♥), 2(4♥), 3(6♠), 4(6♠), 5(6♠)

Much of the material presented in this Bridge Bit is based upon my book:

Neil H. Timm (2014) “2/1 Game Force a Modern Approach” - For Beginning and Intermediate Players With Chapters on Precision and Fantunes”, 4thEdition. Trafford Publishing.

This book covers both the basic and advanced features of the Two-Over-One (2/1) Game Force bidding system which include Bergen and Combined Bergen Raises, inverted minor suit raises with criss-cross and flip-flop, cue bidding, modified scroll bids, and many more methods not used in Standard American or Precision.

Also see the following books on slam bidding:

- (1) Marty Bergen (2008) Book “Slam Bidding Made Easier,**
- (2) Irwin S. Landow (2009) “Win Bridge Tournaments with Innovative Slam Bidding”,**
- (3) Eddie Kantar (2008) “Roman Keycard Blackwood – The Final Word”,**
- (4) Ron Klinger (2001) “Cue-Bidding to Slams”,**
- (5) Ron Kinger (1998) “Practical Slam Bidding”.**