

Lesson 12 – Gerber Convention (4♣)

The Blackwood Convention is used to initiate and investigate slam possibilities when a suit contract has been agreed on. The Gerber Convention is used to bid to slam in a NT contract. Before investigating Slam possibilities, it should be determined that you and Partner hold about 30 points or more. See Bidding Chart listed under the lessons in Step 1. Also review Blackwood, Lesson 11, if necessary. A good foundation in Blackwood will help when learning Gerber.

Small Slam = taking 12 tricks

Grand Slam = taking 13 tricks

Blackwood Convention is initiated by the bid of **4NT**.

Gerber Convention is initiated by the bid of **4♣**, with some qualifiers.

Important:

Many partners have an understanding that **4NT** is **always** Blackwood.

Some partners may have an agreement that **4♣** is always Gerber. However, sometimes this agreement also stipulates that **4♣** is always Gerber **except** when clubs has been bid as a suit. (You must consider that **2♣** opening bid is not a suit; **2♣** response after 1NT opening or **3♣** response after 2NT opening is not a suit.) You and your partner should discuss and agree on these kinds of bidding conventions.

As you become more proficient at playing bridge, you will find there are many decisions to be made about bidding. If you have a regular partner, many of these bids are based on “partnership agreement.” If you play with many different partners, you should have an idea of the more common bridge conventions.

Often, Gerber is initiated after a 1NT opening bid. Then the jump to **4♣** is clear. It always means Gerber, in this case.

Usually, you can take 13 tricks if you have all the Aces and Kings, 12 tricks if you have all the Aces and Kings except one, and if you are missing two of them (i.e., two Aces, two Kings or one of each), you may be able to make only 11 tricks. This is also dependent on distribution (e.g. voids, singletons, long suits, etc.). With a void in one hand and the “magic” 9 trump together, sometimes Slam can be made with fewer than 30 HCPs.

A bid of **4♣** initiates Gerber and is asking Partner for Aces. Once the process is started, precise answers are essential.

Partner responds according to how many Aces are in his/her hand. Just like Blackwood, the bids go up the line.

4♦ = 0 or all 4 Aces (1 bid higher up the rank than **4♣**)

4♥ = 1 Ace

4♠ = 2 Aces

4NT = 3 Aces

If it is determined that an Ace is missing, usually the initiator will get out of Gerber and bid NT at the next lowest level possible. Remember, NT was the contract agreed upon before Gerber was started so Partner should know that a NT bid will end the bidding.

If it is determined that the partnership possesses all 4 Aces, then the initiator will continue by asking for Kings. That is, by bidding **5♣**.

Partner will answer according to how many Kings he/she has:

5♦ = 0 or all 4 Kings

5♥ = 1 King

5♠ = 2 Kings

5NT = 3 Kings

From this answer, the initiator will bid NT again at the appropriate level. That is the signal to indicate a final bid.

Usually, with all Aces and all Kings, the contract will be **7NT**.

Usually, with the partnership missing one Ace or one King, the contract will end at the **6NT**.

Usually, with the partnership missing two Aces or two Kings or one of each, the contract should go no higher than the **5NT**.

Distribution (e.g., long suits, voids and singletons) is also an important factor. For example, one King could be missing, but if one partner has touching honors and can run one or two long suits, avoiding the suit where the King is missing, a Slam can still be possible.

Here is a sample bidding auction to show how Gerber is used:

Player	Bid	Explanation
North	2♣	North has 22 pts
South	2♦	South has 11 pts, so initially answers 2♦ ("waiting" – indicating 3+ pts) South holds 2 Aces and 1 King.
North	2NT	North is showing 22-24 pts and a balanced hand
South	4♣	Gerber – asking for Aces (2♣ opening bid was a conventional bid, does not mean the club suit; therefore, 4♣ means Gerber)
North	4♠	North indicates 2 Aces (all 4 Aces are in the partnership)
South	5♣	Gerber – asking for Kings
North	5♠	North has 2 Kings (one King is missing)
South	6NT	With all 4 Aces and missing 1 King, 6NT should be makeable

And another one:

Player	Bid	Explanation
East	1NT	East has 15-17 pts.
West	4♣	West has 18 pts, no 4-card major and a balanced hand, with 2 Aces and 3 Kings
East	4♥	East has 1 Ace (one Ace is missing)
West	5♣	Even though 1 Ace is missing, West will ask for Kings since the contract can still end at 5NT if one King is also missing.
East	4♦	No Kings. (One Ace and one King are missing.)
West	5NT	This is a cut-off bid in NT.

Similar, but slightly different:

Player	Bid	Explanation
East	1NT	East has 15 pts.
West	4♣	West has 18 pts, no 4-card major and a balanced hand, with 2 Aces and 2 Kings
East	4♠	East indicates 2 Aces, so all Aces are in the partnership
West	5♣	Gerber, asking for Kings
East	5♥	East indicates 1 King, so they are missing 1 King
West	6NT	This is a good judgment, should make 12 tricks – nothing is guaranteed, as it also depends on distribution

Gerber is meant to be used to determine the level of a NT contract. Sometimes, however, it can be used to investigate Slam even when you and your partner have agreed to a suit contract. You can do this only if you have a partnership agreement where you both know that 4♣ means Gerber unless clubs was bid as a suit. If your partner may, for any reason, think that you actually meant to bid 4♣ as a club suit, then you cannot use it for Gerber.

(Also, be aware that the use of some other conventions may make it impossible to use 4♣ to initiate Gerber after a bid of a suit, but beginners are not likely to be using these more advanced conventions.)

Question: Why would you use Gerber instead of Blackwood for a suit contract?

Answer: Because it keeps the bidding at a lower level.

Compare these two scenarios:

Player	Bid	Explanation
North	1♠	19 HCPs – 3 Aces, no Kings, 3 Queens and a Jack
South	3♠	indicating 10+ points and minimum 3-card spade support, could be using Dummy points to raise the bid, but maybe not
North	4♣	Gerber – asking for Aces
South	4♦	no Aces
North	4♠	missing 1 Ace, it's best not to ask for Kings; can now stop at game level (4♠) without bidding any higher

Compare it to the same game but using Blackwood:

Player	Bid	Explanation
North	1♠	19 HCPs – 3 Aces, no Kings, 3 Queens and a Jack
South	3♠	indicating 10+ points and minimum 3-card spade support, could be using Dummy points to raise the bid, but maybe not
North	4NT	Blackwood – asking for Aces
South	5♣	no Aces
North	5♠	Missing 1 Ace, it's best not to ask for Kings; 5♠ is now the lowest bid in suit agreed on, which may be too high. With 29 points, they may make 11 tricks, but 4♠ is a safer contract, since there is no difference in scores when bidding 4♠ making 11 tricks compared to bidding 5♠ and making 11 tricks, but there is a difference when bidding 4♠ making 10 tricks compared to bidding 5♠ and making 10 tricks (opponents will benefit).