

Introduction

Slams are very exciting to bid and play but note they constitute about 5% of all deals, ie one per duplicate session. Until you are a strong player, don't bid borderline slams, you will get a decent score for bidding game on such hands.

When your partnership holds ____ pts, you should consider a small slam, and with ____ pts, go for all of the tricks, called a "grand slam". When you are considering a slam, you need to be sure that you have the required number of aces. You do not wish to be in a small slam missing 2 Aces. Typically, after a trump suit is agreed, one player asks for Aces by bidding 4NT. This is called the "Blackwood" convention. The purpose of Blackwood is, when you have already determined that a slam is likely, to ensure you are not missing two Aces.

Roman Key Card Blackwood

Most open players now use a more informational form of Blackwood, called Roman Key-Card. The King of the agreed trump suit is as critical as an Ace, so "key cards" mean the 4 Aces and the K of the trump suit, hence 5 key cards. Add to this the fact that the asker can always distinguish how many key cards are held if the two possible answers are 3 key cards apart. So 0 or 3, and 1 or 4 key cards can be shown with only 2 bids, leaving two bids available when holding 2 Aces. The most commonly used version is called 1430 Roman Keycard Blackwood.

- 5 Clubs (14) - 1 or 4 key cards (4 Aces and K of assumed trump suit)
- 5 Diamonds (30) - 0 or 3 key cards
- 5 Hearts - 2 key cards, but without the Q of trump suit
- 5 Spades - 2 key cards, but with Q of trump

Consider the following hand

S AJ10xxx	S KQxx
H A	H Qx
D KJxx	D Qx
C Qx	C AKxxx
1S	3C
3D	4S
4NT	5S ->showing _____
6S	Pass

When not to use Blackwood = CueBidding

Notice in the example hand, you have 2nd round control of every suit. This means that you can take the 1st or 2nd trick in any suit led by the opponents. If you do not have this, you should not use Blackwood (“cue-bid” instead). A “control” is either an Ace or a King, or a void or singleton.

- Now consider holding S KQJxxx H AKx D xx C AQ. Bidding goes 1S – 3S and you bid 4NT for Aces. If partner responds 5 Clubs to your 4NT 1430Blackwood bid, he has _____ Ace(s). If he has the Ace of Spades, the opponents might have the AK of Diamonds and take them right away. If, however, he has the Ace of Diamonds, you have a good chance of making 6 Spades, hmm??

So what then does one do here to determine if a slam should be bid?

Answer: **Cue-bid**. Over 3 Spades, bid your first control, so bid 4 Clubs.

- If partner also is interested in slam and has a diamond control, he will bid 4 Diamonds. If he does, you now know your side has first round control of diamonds. You can now proceed by bidding the slam, or better yet, now use Blackwood to check for Aces/Kings.
- If partner instead bids 4 Spades, denying the a diamond control (or hearts), settle for your game and bid _____
- Cue-bidding has the following advantages over “Blasting with Blackwood”
 - Both players participate in whether to go slammin’
 - Blackwood forces you to the five-level
 - After cue-bidding, you still may be able to use Blackwood

Gerber Convention

1NT – 4NT is an invitation to 6NT. So is 2NT – 4NT. So is 1C-1H-2NT-4NT. Opener is expected to bid 6NT with the upper of his range. So how do you check for Aces over NT if you cannot use Blackwood? The other Ace-asking bid is called **Gerber**. This is used **directly over** a NT bid. The bid to ask for Aces is 4 Clubs. Responder shows aces up the line....

Partner bids 1 NT and you hold S x H KQJxxxx D Ax C KQx

(Note you can value this hand at 15 HCP + 3 for spade length = 18 pts. Partner's minimum of 15+18 = 33; the small slam number. Adding 3 pts for spade length is actually undervaluing them, worth even more.)

Bid 4 Clubs (Gerber)

- If partner bids 4D (0 Aces) or 4H (1 Ace), sign off in 4 Hearts
- If partner bids 4S (2 Aces), bid 6 Hearts
- If partner bids 4NT (3 Aces), bid 5 Clubs, which asks for Kings. If partner has a King, you can count 13 tricks so bid 7 NT (or 7 Hearts)

Remember, Gerber is used over a NT bid, Blackwood when a trump suit is agreed or just suits are being bid.

Blackwood or Gerber?

- 4NT is Blackwood if the partnership has agreed on a trump suit.
- 4♣ is Gerber if the last bid was a natural 1NT or 2NT.
- After Stayman or a Jacoby transfer bid, a jump to 4♣ is Gerber and 4NT is quantitative.

1D - 1S

1D - 3H

1S - 2NT

2NT - 4C Gerber

4H - 4NT Blackwood

4NT – Pass/6NT

1NT - 2C

1NT - 2D (transfer)

2H - 4NT Invite to 6NT

2H - 4NT Invite to 6NT with 5 Hearts

When Gr 4 Math works better than Ace-Asking

To make a small slam, ____ pts are typically required, and ____ pts for a grand slam. Sometimes, a little math is all you need to decide what to bid.

Your partner opens 2 NT, showing ____ to ____ HCPs

You hold S Axx H Kxx D QJxx C KJx.

You have ____ HCPs, so your side has ____ to ____ total HCPs, so confidently bid _____. (Can you be off 2 Aces?)

Jacoby 2NT Forcing Major Raise

With the increase of pre-emptive bids by opponents and by the opening side (ie, 1S-4S), it has become even more important and effective to quickly show a good hand with a strong fit for opener's major. Jacoby 2NT is a bid of 2NT in response to a 1st or 2nd seat major opening by partner. The bid (ie, 1H – 2NT)

- Shows 4+ cards of trump support (not 3)
- Shows 13+ dummy points
- Is forcing to the major game and allows investigation of slam
- Takes away the natural meaning of 2NT; 11-12 pts and a balanced hand (see below)

Rebids by the opener are as follows;

- Bid a good 2nd 5-card suit (2 of top 3 honours) at the 4-level
 - If you have an A,K or Q in partner's 2nd suit, that becomes a great asset
- Bid a singleton or void at the 3-level
 - This allows responder to see if his high cards are well-placed.
 - Holding Axxx (or xxx) of a suit opposite partner's singleton is ideal and makes a slam more likely. Holding lower honours, ie KQx, indicates wasted values and discourages a slam
- If neither of the above
 - Bid directly to the game with a bare minimum hand (Bid 4 Hearts)
 - Bid 3NT with more than a bare minimum (good 14-16 pts)
 - Rebid your suit at the 3-level with 17+ pts (Bid 3 Hearts)

Here is this convention in action. Note the 2NT and rebid by opener must be Alerted

S	KQJxx	S	Axxx
H	AQx	H	Kx
D	x	D	Axxx
C	Qxxx	C	KJx

1S	2NT
3D	4NT (1430 RKCBlackwood)
5S	6S (5S shows _____)

Now consider holding the same responder hand and varying rebids by opener

Responder
 S Axxx
 H Kx
 D Axxx
 C KJx

1 Spade

2NT

Opener's (shows _____)
 rebid

Responder rebids

1. 3C _____
2. 3H _____
3. 4S _____
4. 3NT _____
5. 3S _____
6. 4C _____
7. 4D _____

- 4S
- 4S
- Pass
- 4D (slam try, cuebid Ace)
- 4NT
- 4D (slam try, cuebid, hoping partner bids 4 H)
- 4S (you have Kings, not Aces in partner's short suits)

This convention does not apply when...

- Responder has passed originally (unlikely to need this convention)
- There is a direct overcall or double over opening bid

Also note that the standard meaning of 2NT, that being 11-12 balanced, must now be shown in another way. Bid a new suit, then rebid 2NT.

For example, 1H – 2C
 2D – 2NT

Splinter Bids

A splinter bid is a forcing raise of partner's major opening. It is bid by making a double-jump in a new suit. For example; 1S - 4D. This bid is forcing to game and invites slam investigation.

It shows

- 13-16 dummy points
- At least 4 trump
- A singleton or a void (not A or K) in the bid suit

You hold S AJxx H Kxxx D x C KQxx

Partner opens 1 Spade, next player passes. You bid 4D, which your partner alerts.

What holdings in opener's hand make for slam interest based on partner's splinter.

Consider the above hand, and opener having the following diamond holding

- Holding Axx, you know you can win the Ace and ruff the other 2 diamonds = slam interest (KQJ Ds not needed, so becomes a 34 HCP deck)
- Holding xxx, you know you can lose one diamond, but then ruff all the rest = slam interest (AKQJ Ds not needed, so becomes a 30 HCP deck w 1 loser)

In both of the above, you also know all of your high cards in other suits mesh well with partners and are all working

- In contrast, holding KQx in partner's short suit, your 2nd round control is redundant with partner's singleton, meaning the worth of your 5 pts in diamonds is reduced = no slam interest

A splinter can also be made by the opening bidder.

Consider holding S AQJx H Axxx D KQJx C x

You open a Diamond, partner bids 1 Spade, you splinter 4C. This would require a maximum rebid hand (19-21 dummy pts).

A splinter can come up in other situations, where a jump bid makes no sense as a natural bid

Consider holding S KQxx H Kxx D x C AJT9x

Partner opens 1N, you bid 2C

Partner bids 2S, you bid 4D showing 4 Spades, a singleton/void in Diamonds and slam interest. If partner is not interested, they sign off in 4S. If interested, cue bid (ie, 4H) or Blackwood. Note this is clearly a splinter, as 3D is a forcing bid showing diamonds.

Fourth Suit Forcing

Modern bidding has put an emphasis on precise, but often non-forcing bids, to be able to describe the most common hands quickly. Consider the following auctions (opponents are silent)

1C – 1H – 2C – 3H which is non-forcing, showing 6 hts and about 11 pts

1D – 1S – 2C – 3S same as above

1C – 1H – 1S – 3C which is non-forcing, showing 5+ clubs and about 11 pts

Consider the following hands where you need to force the bidding

Responder	Opener	Responder
S KQxxx	1D	1S
H Qx	2C	?
D Axx		
C Kxx		

Responder has pts for game, but 2S/3S not forcing and you only have five, not 6. You would love to know if partner has 3 spades (to make an 8-card fit). The way to find out is to bid 4th suit forcing, hence 2H. If partner has 3 spades, they will bid 2S, and you can jump to 4S. If partner bids 2NT, showing a heart stopper, bid 3NT.

Responder	Opener	Responder
S Axx	1C	1H
H KQxxxx	1S	?
D xx		
C Ax		

You have a re-biddable heart suit but 2H/3H are not forcing. You cannot jump to 4H as partner may just have a singleton or void. To establish a game forcing auction, bid 2D, fourth suit forcing. Over partner's rebid, now bid 3H, which partner will now take as a 6-card Ht suit and a forcing hand. Partner can now raise to 4H with 2 hearts, or do otherwise (3NT with a diamond stopper)

Responder	Opener	Responder
S QJxx	1D	1S
H xxx	2C	?
D Kxx		
C AKx		

You would like to play NT with this balanced hand but you do not have a heart stopper (the unbid suit). Bidding 3NT would be guaranteeing a heart stopper. Perhaps partner has a heart stopper, so you need to make a forcing bid to give him a chance to show this, so bid 2H 4th suit forcing. If partner bids 2NT, raise to 3NT. If partner instead bids anything else, best to raise diamonds, since you cannot afford to play NT.

Remember: Because this is an artificial bid, when the bid is made, partner must either say "Alert" or show the Alert card, warning your opponents of your partner's non-natural bid.

Also: I recommend you play fourth suit forcing as forcing to game, but note that some players play it as forcing for one round, not necessarily to game.

How does 4th suit forcing help bid slams?

So many bids are focused on bidding a game or a partscore, so there are not a lot of bids left to help bid slams. 4th suit forcing is one such bid.

You hold S KJTx H Ax D Kxxx C AJx.

Partner opens 1C, you bid 1D, partner bids 1S. You could just jump to 4S but you are too strong for that, with 17 dummy points versus just 13 and a nice club fit as well. You also have lots of controls (Aces, Kings). How do you suggest a slam here? Note you are not quite strong enough to bid the slam on your own, so we need a bid that asks partner if they have extras. Bid 2H (4th suit forcing). Then over partner's next bid, jump to 4S. Partner should realize you must have extras, otherwise you would have just bid 4S directly over 1S.

Let's say partner has a minimum hand, say S Axxx H Qxx D AJxx c Qx. Over this auction, partner would pass 4S.

However say partner has extra HCPs, say S AQxx H Kxx D Ax C KTxx. Over your 4S, partner can now bid Blackwood, and then bid the very nice slam

Hand Evaluation (in general & for Slam Bidding)

In addition to good bidding tools, the key to bidding slams is judgement, and especially proper hand evaluation. As an auction proceeds, your hand can change significantly in value, and this can be pivotal to whether a slam should be bid or not. First let's look at what makes a hand better as you are making your first bid with it.

Points, Schmoints!: Your hand is better than conventional point count value if it has

- Aces and tens versus quacks (queens and jacks). Aces are undervalued at 4 pts and 10s at zero. Queens and Jacks are overvalued. If you have significantly more A/10s than QJs, add a pt, subtract if the opposite.
 - S A10xx H x D J109x C Axxx upgrade this hand by 1 pt.
 - S QJ H Kxxxx D Jx C KQxx downgrade this hand, don't open it
- Honours in long suits, not short ones
 - S AKxxx H xx D KQ10x C xx all working, upgrade 1 pt.
 - S Kxxxx H Qx D Kxxx C KJ 13 starting pts (12 + 1) but downgrade due to 1) honour doubletons 2) no Ace or 10 3) weak suits so PASS! Give partner the Qxx Spades and Axx Diamond, which hand plays better?
- Quick Tricks; Ace is one, AK together is two, Kx is a half
- Intermediate cards, starring 10s (of course ☺)
 - Try playing AJ64 opposite 7532
 - Now try playing AJ64 opposite 10987, dare I rest my case?
- Having a good side suit, ie, AKxx or AJ10x, etc. Such a suit provides lots of options for the 3rd & 4th cards to be good, trumpable in dummy, or good for discards

Which hand do you think is worth more?

- 1) S KQ632 H A D QJ42 C QJ6
- 2) S AJ1096 H 3 D A1096 C A92

Re-evaluating your hand after support from partner

You hold S Q109xxx H x D K10xx C Ax

Bidding goes	Partner	You
	1D	1S
	4S	?

You have $9+2 = 11$ starting pts, partner is showing 20 pt hand, $11+20=31 (< 33)$, so sign off in 4 Spades. Wrong. You have 2 more spades than you might, wonderful fit for partner's first suit, 2nd rd control in all side suits and good intermediates: keep bidding, slam is very likely

Starting points (HCP+length) does not do justice, once a fit has been found, to 1) extra trumps, ie 6th or 7th card in trump suit or to 2) shortness in declarer's hand. So, Marty Bergen suggests adding points accordingly

- Add 1 more pt for 6th trump and another 1 for 7th trump. Thus a 7 card suit would get starting 3 extra length pts PLUS 2 more for 5
- Count 2 for a singleton, 4 for a void (dummy shortness is the best but declarer shortness, especially when holding lots of trumps, are also valuable).

Now try this one: You hold S A976543 H 5 D 2 C AK105

Partner opens 1D, you bid 1S, partner bids 2S, do you bid 4S ?

Let's see what Marty Bergen would assign this hand

Starting points: $11 \text{ HCP} + 3 \text{ for length} = 14$

Now once partner raises spades, add

- 1 for significantly more A10s than Quacks
- 2 more for 6th + 7th spade
- 2 for each singleton = 4
- 1 for good 4-card side suit

For a total hand value of 20 "Bergen" points. Since $20+13=33$, check for Aces w KeyCard Blackwood and probably bid this great slam

WHAT A GAME!

Email w any questions.