

Mini Lesson 3: Ace-Asking Bids (i.e. Slam Bidding)

When bidding your hands, you discover that your partnership has a combined 30+ points or more. You start thinking: “*Slam!*” But take your time. First ask how many aces partner holds.

- *Why ask?* To stay out of slams that do not make; e.g. when missing 2 aces. Missing only one ace, many partnerships may bid 6 anyway, but should not bid at the 7 level. So, the purpose of ace-asking bids is to put on the brakes if bad news is discovered.
- *When to ask:* When a partnership has 30+ points. You can expect to be safe at the 5 level, so there is no great harm in asking how many aces partner holds. You can still sign off at 5, if your partnership is missing two.

The following three conventions are used to ask about Aces and other high cards. They help you determine if a Small Slam, or even a Grand Slam, can be made.

1. Gerber is used when you or your partner have bid NT in the auction, and no suit fit has been found. It has an added benefit of starting at a lower level than 4NT. Gerber begins by one of the partners jumping to 4♣ where the club suit has not been bid by your side during the auction.

- *Why use Gerber?* It is a slam investigation that asks about Aces. It also reserves “4NT” as a quantitative bid over 1 NT openers.
- *When do you use Gerber?* Gerber is only used for no-trumps¹. Gerber is used after notrump openings, responses, and rebids. Thus,
 - An **immediate 4♣ response** to any no-trumps bid, or overcall, is Gerber.
 - A **jump rebid of 4♣** in response to any natural no-trump bid is Gerber.

Opener

Responder

1 or 2 NT

4♣

responder’s 4♣ is Gerber, a conventional inquiry that says nothing about clubs. It simply asks: “*Partner, how many Aces do you have?*” Partner answers your question with the following bids:

- 4♦ means “*all or none,*” i.e., zero or four. (It is usually very easy to tell.)
- 4♥ shows one Ace.
- 4♠ shows two Aces.
- 4NT shows three Aces.

¹ Some players in our Club use Gerber on suit contracts too. Be sure to ask, if you are unsure.

If it is determined that slam is “not in the cards,” then the initiator can get out of Gerber by bidding 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 asks to end the bidding.

But, if after hearing partner's response the bidder is still interested in slam, the Gerber bidder can **bid 5♣ to ask for kings**. Responses are the same as above.

2. Blackwood is the most recognized convention for slam bidding. It is used when either partner realizes the partnership has the combined strength to explore slam. You don't want to miss two Aces and be in a small slam, or miss one ace when in a grand slam. You need to know about missing Aces, so you bid **4NT** to ask your partner how many aces (s)he holds.

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
1♥	4NT

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- 5♦ shows one Ace.
- 5♥ shows two Aces.
- 5♠ shows three Aces.

After hearing partner's response, if the Blackwood bidder is contemplating a grand slam, (s)he can **bid 5NT to ask for kings**. Responses are the same... but remember, they are at the 6 level.

Other Considerations

- If 4NT is overcalled, there are methods to still answer. One method is DOPI, which stands for "Double = Zero aces, Pass = 1." The cheapest available suit bid shows two aces, the second-cheapest bid shows three aces, and the third-cheapest bid shows four.
- Blackwood should only be used if you can handle any response.
- *If you do overshoot the contract*, have a plan. For example, clubs are trumps and you need two aces to bid 6C, but partner responds 5♦, saying “I have 1 ace.” Obviously, you can't go to slam, and **5NT** would be *asking for kings*. One way to handle this is to bid a new (unbid) suit at the 5 level. This asks partner to bid 5NT, which you then pass.
- Remember, if you ask for Kings – responses are at the 6 level. Use this only if you are seriously considering Grand Slam!

3. 1430. Roman Key Card Blackwood, known sometimes as “1430,” evolved from regular Blackwood, but adds the trump King and Queen to the four Aces in the slam assessment. In the 1430 convention, there are five Key Cards. These include all four Aces and the King of Trump.

After you and Partner agree on a suit and you judge slam could be made if you only knew about some missing Key Cards, 1430 also begins the ask with **4NT**. It asks: “How many of the five Key Cards do you have, Partner?” Partner answers your question with the following bids:

- 5 ♣ shows 1 or 4 Key Cards; i.e., (14)
- 5 ♦ shows 3 or 0 Key Cards; i.e., (30)
- 5 ♥ shows 2 Key Cards, without the Queen of trump
- 5 ♠ shows 2 Key Cards, with the Queen of trump

As a safeguard, if your partner asked for your key cards and then stopped below slam, you pass if you have the lower number of key cards and bid the slam if you have the higher number. (Thus, if you responded 5 ♦, pass if you have zero key cards, and bid slam if you have three.)

King Ask. You would only use this if you were considering going to the 7 level. King Ask shows interest in Grand Slam and guarantees all five Key Cards. The bidder now wants to know about the three non-trump kings, and bids **5NT** = “King Ask.”

People respond to this differently. Some answer with the number of kings, not counting the king of trump (already accounted for). 6 ♣ means zero kings, 6 ♦ one king, 6 ♥ means two, and 6 ♠ means 3. Jim and I use specific king responses, as shown below, rather than the number of outside kings. *Why?* Because knowing about a particular king is more often critical to reaching Grand Slam than the number of kings. Responder bids the lowest ranking King. Let’s assume spades have been agreed upon as trump:

- 6 ♣ means “I have the ♣ King; may have another.”
- 6 ♦ means “I have the ♦ King; I do not have the ♣ King; I may have ♥ King.”
- 6 ♥ means “I have the ♥ King; I do not have the ♣ or ♦ King.”
- 6 ♠ denies an outside King.

Note: Your partnership should agree whether to just rebid your trump suit if the King you hold is in a suit above the agreed-upon trump suit. (Jim and I have agreed to bid a King even if above the trump suit. If hearts are trump and the lowest non-trump king we have is Spades, we bid 6 ♠. This means we only ask if having that higher King means we can make 7.)

Other Considerations

- 1430 should not be used if an unsatisfactory response (i.e. 5 ♥) drives your side too high.
- There are ways to ask about Trump Queens and about Voids, but they are for more advanced players than us.