

CONFIRMING A SLAM

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INTRODUCTION

A *control* is a holding that prevents the opponents from taking too many tricks in a suit:

- **First-Round Control**

A holding that prevents opponents from taking the first trick in the suit. An **Ace** is an obvious first-round control for any contract. For a suit contract a **void** is also a first-round control because declarer should be able to ruff the first lead in the suit. The example on the right has a first-round control in spades, the ♠A.

♠	A Q T 4
♥	9
♦	K J 5 3 2
♣	8 6 5

- **Second-Round Control**

A holding that can stop opponents from taking the second trick in the suit. Because a **King** can stop opponents from taking a second trick in the suit after the Ace is played, a King is a second-round control for any contract. For a suit contract a **singleton** is also a second-round control because declarer should be able to ruff the second lead in the suit. The example has a second-round control in hearts, the singleton, and a second-round control in diamonds, the ♦K.

In order to make a slam, a partnership needs enough strength (or strange distribution) to take the required number of tricks and the necessary controls to prevent opponents from taking enough tricks to defeat the contract:

- ✓ **Small Slam**

Declarer can afford to lose only one trick so the partnership must have first-round control in three suits and first or second-round control in the fourth suit.

- ✓ **Grand Slam**

Declarer can not afford to lose any tricks so the partnership must have first-round control in all four suits and usually also needs second-round control in at least three suits.

A partnership can use the following methods to find out if it has the necessary controls to make a slam:

In a suit contract

- Blackwood Convention
- Control-showing bids

In a no trump contract

- Gerber Convention

BLACKWOOD CONVENTION

Easley Blackwood designed a convention that can be used to answer the suit control questions to confirm that a possible suit slam is makeable.

HOW TO USE BLACKWOOD

One of the partners, who becomes the *Blackwood bidding captain*, bids an *artificial* 4NT to initiate the convention. This bid is forcing and directs the other partner to make one of the following *artificial* bids to communicate a count for Aces:

Number of Aces	0	1	2	3	4
Artificial Bid	5♣	5♦	5♥	5♠	5♣

The Blackwood bidding captain must then decide how to proceed:

- ✓ **Missing two Aces:** Any slam is unlikely. Set the final contract at the five level.
- ✓ **Missing one Ace:** A grand slam is unlikely. Bid six of the partnership's trump suit.
- ✓ **Having all four Aces:** If a decision between a small slam and a grand slam depends on the number of missing Kings, the Blackwood captain can rebid an *artificial* 5NT to direct partner to make one of the following *artificial* bids to communicate a count for Kings:

Number of Kings	0	1	2	3	4
Artificial Bid	6♣	6♦	6♥	6♠	6NT

The Blackwood captain sets the final contract at the six or seven level in the partnership's trump suit. In some cases the captain may be able to try a no trump contract to get the higher score.

WHEN TO USE BLACKWOOD

You should use the Blackwood convention **only when**:

- ✓ **Trump Fit:** You and your partner have agreed on a trump suit. This agreement can be reached by explicit bidding of the suit or by inference based on the suit bid before Blackwood is invoked.
- ✓ **Combined Strength or Shape:** You are reasonably certain that your partnership has **either** the combined points (about 33) **or** an unusual shape that is required to make a small slam.
- ✓ **Control:** You must answer one or more of the following questions:
 - Does the partnership have the necessary Aces and Kings to control the suits?
 - Should you bid the slam in the agreed on suit or should you try for a better score by bidding the slam in no trump.
 - Should you stop at a small slam or try for a grand slam?

WHEN NOT TO USE BLACKWOOD

Avoid Blackwood with:

- ✓ Two or more cards in an unbid suit without a first-round or second-round control in your hand.

Assume partner has first-round and/or second-round control in any suit that partner bid naturally.

- ✓ A void

You do not need to know if partner has an Ace in your void suit. Blackwood shows count, not location, of the Aces.

Do not use Blackwood to see if a slam is possible. If the bidding suggests a slam is possible, use Blackwood to verify that the possible slam is makeable.

MINOR TROUBLE WITH BLACKWOOD

Because the response to Blackwood 4NT is made at the five level, care must be taken if the partnership has agreed to play in a minor suit. For example:

- ✓ **Trump Fit:** Your jump to 4NT after partner bid a new suit signals an implicit agreement to play in clubs and interest in bidding a slam.
- ✓ **Combined Strength and Shape:** Your partner's *strong jump shift* to 3♣ implies 17+ declarer points. You have 17 dummy points (15 HCP + 1 ♥ SSP + 1 ♦ SSP) which means your partnership has at least 34 total points with a nine card trump fit.
- ✗ **Control:** Your 4NT initiated Blackwood and partner replied "one Ace." Since the partnership is missing two Aces, you do not want to bid a small slam. The problem is that you can no longer stop at 5♣!

SOUTH - YOU

♠ K Q T 8 4
♥ A 4
♦ K 8
♣ Q J T 8

South	West	North	East
1♠	Pass	3♣	Pass
4NT	Pass	5♦	Pass
??			

This suggests the following additional guideline:

Do not use Blackwood unless you have
 (a) *at least two Aces when clubs will be trump or*
 (b) *at least one Ace when diamonds will be trump.*

WHEN IS 4NT BLACKWOOD?

Both partners must clearly understand the situations in which 4NT is *Blackwood* versus those in which 4NT is *Quantitative* (invitational). The easiest guideline is:

4NT is *Blackwood* only if the partnership has agreed on a trump suit.

The trump agreement is:

- Explicit if both partners have bid the same suit.
- Implicit if the 4NT follows a **natural** bid of a **new suit**.

The following examples should help to clarify the guideline:

4NT EXAMPLE 1

South	West	North	East
1♠	Pass	3♠	Pass
4NT			

BLACKWOOD

Explicit Spade Fit

4NT EXAMPLE 2

South	West	North	East
1♥	Pass	2♦	Pass
3♦	Pass	4NT	

BLACKWOOD

Explicit Diamond Fit

4NT EXAMPLE 3

South	West	North	East
1NT	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♦	Pass	4NT	

QUANTITATIVE

No Suit Fit

4NT EXAMPLE 4

South	West	North	East
1NT	Pass	4NT	

QUANTITATIVE

No Suit Fit

4NT EXAMPLE 5

South	West	North	East
1♥	Pass	4NT	

BLACKWOOD

Implied Heart Fit

4NT EXAMPLE 6

South	West	North	East
1♥	Pass	2♦	Pass
3NT	Pass	4NT	

QUANTITATIVE

No Suit Fit

EXAMPLE 1: BLACKWOOD					
WEST	West	North	East	South	EAST
♠ K 5	1♦	Pass	1♥	Pass	♠ A J 7
♥ K J 6 2	3♥	Pass	4NT	Pass	♥ A Q T 9 8 3
♦ A T 8 6 3	5♥	Pass	5NT	Pass	♦ K 4
♣ A 9	6♥	Pass	7♥	Pass	♣ K 5
	Pass	Pass			

- **West:** Has an unbalanced hand with 16 declarer points (15 HCP + 1 ♦ LSP) and opens a better minor 1♦ to describe a hand with 13-21 declarer points, probably four but maybe only three diamonds and no five-card or longer major.
- **East:** Has 19 declarer points (17 HCP + 2 ♥ LSP). With a partnership total of at least 32 points, East is thinking slam. But first, East responds 1♥ to describe a hand with at least 6 dummy points and at least four hearts. This new suit bid forces West to bid again.

*East has enough points to make a **strong jump shift** to 2♥ but prefers to explore for a trump fit at a lower level.*

ALTERNATE BIDDING USING A JUMP SHIFT			
West	North	East	South
1♦	Pass	2♥	Pass
4NT	Pass	5♥	Pass
5NT	Pass	6♥	Pass
7♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

- **West:** Knows the partnership has an eight-card heart fit and East will be declarer for a heart contract. West revalues the hand to 17 dummy points (15 HCP + 1 ♠ SSP + 1 ♣ SSP). This gives the partnership 23-?? total points (17+6 to 17+??). West bids a *jump raise* to 3♥ to describe the shape and strength of the hand. This invites East to bid a game.
- **East:** Now knows the partnership has 34-35 (17+17 to 17+18) total points, enough for a small slam and almost enough for a grand slam. But the point total includes distribution points so the partnership might not have the necessary suit controls to make a slam. East bids an **artificial Blackwood 4NT** to confirm the partnership has all four Aces.
- **West:** Answers with an artificial 5♥ (*two Aces*).
- **East:** Given all four Aces, East now thinks that a grand slam might be possible. East bids an **artificial Blackwood 5NT** to ask for a count of Kings.
- **West:** Answers with an artificial 6♥ (*two Kings*).
- **East:** Given all the Aces and Kings, East decides to gamble on the on a 7♥ grand slam. *With at least a ten-card heart fit and all four Aces and Kings, East's only loser is a spade. East might want to **gamble** on 7NT hoping that either West has the ♠Q or that a finesse against the ♠Q would be successful. But playing in the suit improves the odds of making the grand slam because West might have a doubleton in spades which would allow East to ruff the losing spade in the dummy.*

CONTROL-SHOWING BIDS

Once a partnership has agreed on a trump suit, the bid of any other suit below game level is a *control-showing bid* that indicates *slow arrival* with an interest in a slam. For example, control bids can be used after:

- $1\heartsuit \rightarrow P \rightarrow 2NT \rightarrow \dots$ (*Jacoby 2N, agree on heart fit*)
- $1\spadesuit \rightarrow P \rightarrow 3\spadesuit \rightarrow \dots$ (*Limit raise, agree on spade fit*)
- $2\clubsuit \rightarrow P \rightarrow 2\diamond \rightarrow P \rightarrow 2\heartsuit \rightarrow P \rightarrow 3\heartsuit \rightarrow \dots$ (*Strong club opening, agree on heart fit*)

CONTROL SHOWING GUIDELINES

Both partners should understand and follow these guidelines when showing controls:

- ✓ Once one partner starts the control-showing process, the other partner is expected to cooperate below the game level regardless of the strength of the hand.
- ✓ Controls are rarely shown above the game level.
- ✓ Controls are typically shown *up the line*, cheapest first. Show a King before an Ace if you can bid the suit with the King at a lower level than the suit with the Ace.
- ✓ Controls are not shown in the agreed trump suit. If necessary, use Blackwood to verify first-round control in the trump suit.
- ✓ Either partner can stop the control-showing process by:
 - Bidding the agreed trump suit.
 - Jumping directly to a slam.
 - Initiating Blackwood.
- ✓ Because a control can be either first-round or second-round, use Blackwood to resolve any ambiguity about the controls.

Some partnerships prefer to only control-show Aces, especially after a limit raise.

BLACKWOOD VS CONTROL BIDS

Do not forget that your opponents are carefully listening to your bids:

- **Blackwood**

When you use Blackwood your partner's reply tells your opponents the number of suits your partner controls and the type of the control(s) (first-round or second-round) but it does not reveal the specific suits that are controlled.

- **Control-showing Bids**

When you use control-showing bids each bid tells your opponents the specific suit that is controlled and the specific hand that holds the control but it does not reveal the type of control.

The specific information broadcast by control-showing bids can help your opponents decide on which opening lead has the best chance to defeat the contract.

The following guidelines can help you make the decision:

- ✓ If you already hold first-round or second-round control in all of the suits and do not have a void, use Blackwood to confirm a possible slam is makeable.
- ✓ If you are missing two or more Aces and have an uncontrolled two-card or longer suit, use control-showing bids to see if partner can control the suit and then use Blackwood to confirm a possible slam is makeable.
- ✓ If you have a void, use control-showing bids.

Consider the following examples. Suppose your partner just bid **3♥** to show agreement on a heart trump fit and you believe the partnership has enough to consider a slam. How should you proceed?

HAND 1	HAND 2	HAND 3
<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto; padding: 2px 10px;">SOUTH</div> <p>♠ K 7 ♥ A K 9 4 3 ♦ K Q J ♣ A 7 4</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto; padding: 2px 10px;">SOUTH</div> <p>♠ K Q 5 ♥ A K 9 4 3 ♦ J 6 ♣ A K 7</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto; padding: 2px 10px;">SOUTH</div> <p>♠ K Q J 5 ♥ A K Q 8 6 4 3 ♦ ♣ K 4</p>

- **Hand 1:** You already have controls in all of the suits. All you need to know is the location of the missing Aces. Bid **4NT** to initiate Blackwood.
- **Hand 2:** You have an uncontrolled doubleton diamond. If you initiate Blackwood and partner only has one Ace it would not be safe to try the slam because partner's Ace might be the ♠A. Bid a slow arrival control-showing **3♠**, the cheapest bid you can make, to show a control in spades. If partner shows a control in diamonds, use Blackwood to confirm partner has at least one Ace.
- **Hand 3:** You do not have first-round control in spades and clubs. If partner has an Ace in either suit, you can try the slam. But if you initiate Blackwood and partner only has one Ace, that Ace could be the ♦A and it would not be safe to try the slam. Instead, bid a slow arrival control-showing **3♠**.
 - ✓ If partner replies **4♣** you know it must be the ♣A because you have the ♣K so you can try for the slam.
 - ✓ If partner replies **4♦** you know partner does not have the ♣A. But partner might have the ♠A. Since you should be able to make a **5♥** contract, you can initiate Blackwood. If partner shows two Aces, one of them must be the ♠A and you can bid the slam. If not you are missing the ♣A and the ♠A. Sign-off at **5♥**.
 - ✓ If partner replies **4♥**, partner does not have the ♣A or the ♦A. But partner might have the ♠A. Initiate Blackwood. If partner has one Ace it must be the ♠A and you can bid the slam. If not sign-off at **5♥**.

EXAMPLE 2: CONTROL BIDS					
WEST	East	South	West	North	EAST
♠ AK 9 5 4 2	Pass	Pass	1♠	Pass	♠ QT 6 3
♥ K 7	3♠	Pass	4♣	Pass	♥ A Q J 6
♦ 8 5	4♥	Pass	4♠	Pass	♦ 7 6
♣ AKQ	Pass	Pass			♣ J 7 5

- **West:** Has 21 declarer points (19 HCP + 2 ♠ LSP) and opens 1♠ to describe a hand with 13-21 declarer points and at least five spades.
- **East:** Has 11 dummy points (10 HCP + 1 ♦ SSP) and responds with a *limit raise* to 3♠.
- **West:** Knows the partnership has 31-33 (21+10 to 21+12) total points, borderline for a slam. But if East has a diamond control and a heart control, a slam is possible. Since *Blackwood* should not be used with a worthless doubleton in an unbid suit, West bids a *control-showing* 4♣.
- **East:** Because the partnership has agreed on a trump suit, East knows partner's 4♣ is a control bid. So, East rebids 4♥ to show a first or second round control in hearts. This bid denies a first or second round control in diamonds, a lower ranking suit.
- **West:** Without any control in diamonds, West has two sure losers. Since a slam is not possible, West signs-off at 4♠.

EXAMPLE 3: CONTROL BIDS					
WEST	South	West	North	East	EAST
♠ A	Pass	1♥	Pass	3♥	♠ J 6 3
♥ K J 9 8 5 4 2	Pass	3♠	Pass	4♣	♥ A T 6 3
♦ AKQ	Pass	4NT	Pass	5♦	♦ 7 5
♣ 8 5	Pass	6♥	Pass	Pass	♣ K Q 7 6
	Pass				

- **West:** Has 20 declarer points (17 HCP + 3 ♥ LSP) and opens 1♥ to describe a hand with 13-21 declarer points and at least five hearts.
- **East:** Has 11 dummy points (10 HCP + 1 ♦ SSP) and responds with a *limit raise* to 3♥.
- **West:** Knows the partnership has 30-32 (20+10 to 20+12) total points, borderline for a slam. But if East has a club control, a slam is possible. Since *Blackwood* should not be used with a worthless doubleton in an unbid suit, West bids a *control-showing* 3♠.
- **East:** Rebids 4♣ to show a first or second round control in clubs.
- **West:** Now that the partnership has a control in clubs, West confidently bids an *artificial Blackwood* 4NT to get an Ace count.
- **East:** Answers an *artificial* 5♦ to show just one Ace.
- **West:** Since the partnership is missing an Ace, West signs-off with 6♥.

GERBER 4♣

John Gerber designed a convention that can be used to answer the suit control questions to confirm that a no trump slam is makeable.

HOW TO USE GERBER

One of the partners, who becomes the *Gerber bidding captain*, makes a **jump** to an *artificial* bid of 4♣ to initiate the convention. This bid directs the captain's partner to make one of the following *artificial* bids to communicate a count for Aces:

Number of Aces	0	1	2	3	4
Artificial Bid	4♦	4♥	4♠	4NT	4♣

The Gerber bidding captain must then decide how to proceed:

- ✓ **Missing two Aces:** Any slam is unlikely. Set the final contract at the four or five level.
- ✓ **Missing one Ace:** A grand slam is unlikely. Set the final contract at the six level.
- ✓ **Having all four Aces:** If a decision between a small slam and a grand slam depends on the number of missing Kings, bid an *artificial* 5♣ to direct partner to make one of the following *artificial* bids to communicate a count for Kings:

Number of Kings	0	1	2	3	4
Artificial Bid	5♦	5♥	5♠	5NT	6♣

Set the final contract at the six or seven level.

WHEN TO USE GERBER

You can use the Gerber convention **only when**:

- ✓ **Trump Fit:** Your partner has made a *natural* one or two no trump bid that indicates the partnership does not have a trump suit fit.
- ✓ **Combined Strength:** You are certain that your partnership has at least the 32-33 combined high card points that are required to make a small slam.
- ✓ **Control:** You must explore to answer one or both of the following questions:
 - Does the partnership have the necessary Aces and Kings to control the suits?
 - Should you stop at a small slam or try for a grand slam?

Suppose your partner opens **1NT** (15-17 **HCP**) and you hold the hand on the right. You have 18 **HCP** so you know that your partnership has a combined 33-35 **HCP** which means a small slam is likely and a grand slam is possible. Since you are the captain of the bidding, how do you determine if your partnership should bid a small slam or a grand slam?

SOUTH - YOU			
♠ K 9 4			
♥ A K 3			
♦ K 9 4 2			
♣ K Q 6			
North	East	South	West
1NT	Pass	??	

- ✓ **Trump Fit:** With a balanced hand and no four card or longer major, you know the partnership should bid a no trump contract.
- ✓ **Combined Strength:** Your partnership has at least the 33 **HCP** needed for a small slam.
- ✗ **Control:** With a combined strength of at least 33 **HCP** your partnership should have at least three Aces and the necessary second-round controls for a small slam. But, if your partner has all three missing Aces, you should bid a **7NT** grand slam because the partnership would have the Ace and the King in all four suits.

You can not bid **4NT** to ask for Aces because your partner will think you are making an invitational Quantitative **4NT** bid and will pass with only 15 or 16 **HCP**.

Rebid an artificial **4♣** to ask your partner for an Ace count. If the answer is:

- ✓ **4♥ (one Ace):** Opponents have two Aces so a slam is not likely. Bid a sign-off **4NT**.
- ✓ **4♠ (two Aces):** Opponents have only one Ace so a small slam is makeable. Bid a sign-off **6NT**.
- ✓ **4NT (three Aces):** The partnership has first and second round control in all four suits. Bid a **7NT** grand slam.

Note that if partner answered **4♦** (no Aces), the partnership would have at most 28 **HCP** which would mean that either partner does not understand how and when Gerber is used or partner has less than 15 **HCP** and the opening **1NT** was a lie.

WHEN IS 4♣ GERBER?

Both partners must clearly understand the situations in which **4♣** is *Gerber*. The original Gerber guideline is:

Any jump to 4♣ over a natural 1NT or 2NT bid is Gerber.

Because there are some ambiguous bidding sequences that can arise when the Stayman convention is used, the following guideline should be added to the Gerber convention:

A bid of 4♣ after the Stayman convention is Gerber.

The following examples should help to clarify these guidelines:

4♣ EXAMPLE 1

South	West	North	East
1NT	Pass	4♣	

GERBER
*Club Jump After
A Natural No Trump*

4♣ EXAMPLE 2

South	West	North	East
2NT	Pass	4♣	

GERBER
*Club Jump After
A Natural No Trump*

4♣ EXAMPLE 3

South	West	North	East
1♦	Pass	2NT	Pass
4♣			

GERBER
*Club Jump After
A Natural No Trump*

4♣ EXAMPLE 4

South	West	North	East
1♣	Pass	1♥	Pass
1NT	Pass	4♣	

GERBER
*Club Jump After
A Natural No Trump*

4♣ EXAMPLE 5

South	West	North	East
1NT	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♠	Pass	4♣	

GERBER
*Four Clubs After
Stayman Convention*

4♣ EXAMPLE 6

South	West	North	East
1♠	Pass	2NT	Pass
4♣			

NOT GERBER
*Club Jump After
An Artificial Jacoby 2N*

EXAMPLE 4: GERBER

WEST		EAST
♠ KQ9	West North East South	♠ A6
♥ A7	1NT Pass 4♣ Pass	♥ KQJ9852
♦ AJ87	4♠ Pass 6♥ Pass	♦ 4
♣ J972	Pass Pass	♣ KQ6

- **West:** Has 15 HCP and opens 1NT to describe a balanced hand with 15-17 HCP and stoppers in at least three suits. *East says "15-17."*
- **East:** Knows the partnership has at least a nine card heart fit. With 18 declarer points (15 HCP + 3 ♥ LSP), East also knows the partnership has 33-35 (18+15 to 18+17) total points, enough to bid at least a small slam. East jumps to an artificial 4♣ to initiate the Gerber Convention to confirm that the partnership has at least three Aces.
- **West:** Answers an artificial 4♠ (two Aces).
- **East:** Since the partnership is missing an Ace, East has at least one loser and knows that a grand slam is not possible. But there is an excellent chance that West has the ♠K so East bids the 6♥ small slam.

**ALTERNATE BIDDING
JACOBY TRANSFER
AND BLACKWOOD**

West	North	East	South
1NT	Pass	2♦	Pass
2♥	Pass	4NT	Pass
5♥	Pass	6♥	Pass
Pass	Pass		

MODIFIED GERBER

Although Gerber was not designed to be used when a partnership has found a trump fit, some partnerships prefer to use Gerber when a trump fit *has* been found because the number of missing Aces can be discovered at the four level. This allows the Gerber captain to stop at the four or five level. In many situations it also allows the captain to ask for a count of Kings without committing the partnership to at least a small slam.

The guideline for the *Modified Gerber Convention* is:

Any jump to 4♣ is Gerber if, and only if, there were no natural club bids.

Most partnerships treat a 1♣ opening bid as semi-artificial instead of a natural bid as long as opener does not rebid clubs.

MODIFIED 4♣ EXAMPLE 1

South	West	North	East
2♠	Pass	4♣	

MODIFIED GERBER

*Club Jump After
No Natural Club Bid*

MODIFIED 4♣ EXAMPLE 2

South	West	North	East
1♦	Pass	1♥	Pass
2♥	Pass	4♣	

MODIFIED GERBER

*Club Jump After
No Natural Club Bid*

MODIFIED 4♣ EXAMPLE 3

South	West	North	East
1♥	Pass	2♣	Pass
4♣			

NOT GERBER

*Club Jump After
A Natural Club Bid*

MODIFIED 4♣ EXAMPLE 4

South	West	North	East
1♣	Pass	1♥	Pass
2♥	Pass	4♣	

MODIFIED GERBER

*Club Jump After
Better Minor 1♣*

MODIFIED 4♣ EXAMPLE 5

South	West	North	East
2♣	Pass	2♦	Pass
2♥	Pass	4♣	

MODIFIED GERBER

*Club Jump After
Artificial Strong 2♣*

MODIFIED 4♣ EXAMPLE 6

South	West	North	East
1♥	Pass	3♥	Pass
4♣			

NOT GERBER

Not A Club Jump