

Slam Bidding – From A to Z

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Article 3: Cue bidding

Before going on to cue bidding, I would like to add one other very useful tool when responding to a key card ask – when you **hold a void**. The standard treatment is to jump in the suit you are void in with one key card (jump to six of a suit if your void is above the trump suit). With two key cards, bid the 5th step. Here are examples to demonstrate how this works:

Example 1:

North	South
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1♥	2♣
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2♦	2♥
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4NT	?
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1. ♠xxxx ♥AJx ♦- ♣AKxxxxx **bid 5NT** (By the way, this is not a 1♠ response). Partner can now bid 6♦ which says, 'If this is your void, bid 7♥'.
2. ♠- ♥AJx ♦xxxx ♣AKxxxxx **bid 6♥**, showing a void in spades, the higher ranking suit.

The general rule is not to show a void in partner's primary suit, but if in their second suit, show the void.

This can also work when the minor is the agreed suit. Here is an example with Redwood:

Example 2:

North	South
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1♥	2♣
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3♣	4♦ Redwood
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?	
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1. ♠xxxx ♥AKJxx ♦- ♣AJxx bid 5♦, the fifth step, showing two key cards and a void.
2. ♠- ♥AKJxx ♦Kxxx ♣J10xx bid 5♠, showing one key card and a spade void.

Cue bidding

You may ask: Why do I need to worry about cue bidding when I can just ask for key cards, etc...?

The answer is asking for key cards is one of a number of slam bidding tools. Think of a real tool chest. If you need to hammer a nail, you don't use a screwdriver! If all you need to know is about aces and kings, great, use Keycard. But sometimes you need other questions answered.

Maybe you know the ace of diamonds is good, but the ace of clubs is bad. A Keycard ask will not solve this problem. Or, you may want to know if partner likes their hand, in light of the bidding to date. As we all know there are good minimum opening bids and bad opening bids. You would open 1♠ with both ♠AKxxxx ♥xx ♦Axxx ♣x and ♠K9xxx ♥AKJ ♦Q10x ♣Axx, but the former is a much better hand.

What bids are slam tries?

When a major suit has been agreed in a game forcing auction, any bid below four of that major is at least a mild slam try.

Why not in in minor auctions?

Because It is often right to investigate whether 3NT is a better choice than five of a minor. It is easier to take nine tricks than eleven. This is especially true at matchpoints, where you would always prefer to play game in notrump, due to the scoring for each trick in notrump is higher. Therefore a new suit below 3NT is initially showing a stopper, trying for 3NT. However if you bid 3NT, and partner now bids the agreed minor, the three level bid was a cuebid all along.

Let's look at a few auctions:

Example 1:

North	South
1♠	2♣ Game forcing.
2♦	2♠

Example 2:

North	South
1♠	2♣ Game forcing.
2♠	3♠

Example 3:

North	South
1♠	2♣ Game forcing.
2♦	3♦

Example 4:

North	South
1♣	1♥
1♠	2♦ 4 th suit forcing
2NT	3♣

All of these auctions have two things in common...

- The auction is game forcing.
- A suit has been agreed upon below the game level.

...and several important differences:

- In **Example 1** there are two levels in which to investigate. This is important, and I will explain why in a minute.
- In **Example 2**, there is only level in which to investigate.
- In **Examples 3 and 4**, a minor suit has been agreed.

There are a number of general guidelines that are commonly followed to help decide whether to investigate slam:

- Bidding game usually shows no interest in investigating slam.
- A jump to game in a game forcing auction is the weakest bid possible. So in **Example 1**, a bid of 4♠ would be a red light by North, showing a very weak opener. Maybe something like ♠109xxx ♥KQ ♦AJxx ♣xx. This is called the **Principle of Fast Arrival**. A new suit would be a cue bid in that suit, a green light. While a bid of 3♠ would be a yellow light, showing at least some interest, without anything to conveniently cue bid.

What does a cue bid show?

A cue bid shows a control in the suit bid, usually a first round control (ace or void), but sometimes a 2nd round control (king or singleton). A cue bid in one of partner's suit shows the ace or king only. This is logical, as shortness in partner's other suit is not usually desirable.

Can you cue bid a king first?

My suggestion is no. It is my experience that a partnership agree to only cue bid 1st round controls (usually aces) first.

What other rules are there for cue bidding?

- You cue bid your lowest ace. Skipping a suit, denies the ace in that suit. The same principle applies for subsequent cue bids.
- A cue bid below game does not necessarily promise a lot, or even any, extra values. It is simply stating I have the ace in this suit, and am not embarrassed about my opening bid. So let's revisit example 2:

Example 2:

North	South
1♠	2♣ Game forcing.
2♠	3♠

I would cue bid 4♦ (Green light) with ♠AKxxxx ♥xx ♦Axx ♣x, but sign off (yellow light) 4♠ with ♠KJxxxx ♥QJ10 ♦Axx ♣x.

Combining cue bidding and key card ask on the same hand.

Sometimes you can combine cue bidding and a Keycard ask on the same hand. You might initiate a cue bidding sequence first, seeing whether partner likes their hand, and what is their cheapest first round control.

The difference between agreeing a suit and taking a preference

Take a look at these two auctions:

Example 5

North	South
1♠	2♣ Game forcing.
2♠	3♠

Example 6

North	South
1♠	2♣ Game forcing.
2♠	2NT
3♦	3♠

Here, South is simply showing some spade supports, here a doubleton.

Setting the Trump Suit

This can be tricky, and it is important to have some sort of partnership agreements. Example 5 is easy. But sometimes there needs to be several rounds of bidding before you can feel reasonably confident of which suit should be trump.

A frequent type of auction is when you support partner's suit, and then partner returns the favour, by supporting yours.

Example 7

North	South
1♠	2♣ Game forcing.
3♣	3♠

3♠ says I have three card support, and ostensibly sets trump. Any new suit is a cuebid, agreeing spades. However, North can overrule partner by bidding 4♣, which says, 'I know you have three spades, but clubs are trump. Cuebid (or Keycard) if you are interested in a club slam.'

Sometimes you will have a suit that can play opposite a singleton, or even a void. The way you tell partner that this suit is trump, is by jumping in that suit in a game forcing auction:

Example 8

North	South
1♠	2♣ Game forcing.
3♠	

Example 9

North	South
1♠	2♣ Game forcing.
2 any	4♣

These auction shows an independent suit, sets trump and invites partner to cue bid. All suit bids are cue bids.

Setting the Trump Suit – a Special Tool

Sometimes you don't know which suit should be trump, and sounds like partner may not be sure either. If you think you have enough values for slam, a jump to 5NT has a specific meaning:

'I think we belong in slam, pick a suit you think is the best.'

Some judgement is required. You have to determine how good of suit do you have, compared to what you think you showed, and how is your support for partner's suit. For example if partner has rebid a major twice, and you have a singleton queen or king that should be enough support to choose this suit as trump. However, if your suit is AKQJxx, that is the winner, as it a favourite to have no losers, even opposite a void!

Next month – Slam Bidding Part 4: I will have a quiz, covering the principles found in the first three articles. Subsequent instalments:

- Slam bidding Part 5. Example hands and auctions, and determining whether cue bidding is advisable.
- Slam Bidding Part 6. Covering the remaining slam bidding tools: Grand Slam Force, Forcing Pass, and other specialized slam bids.