

Printable Version: **Suit Slam Bidding**

Many players are deficient in the area of slam bidding, usually because of improper learning and copying the bad habits of others. Some players even believe that all slam tries begin with *Blackwood* — hardly; it is just one of the available tools. This lesson explains the proper way to try for a suit slam, and also an improved version of the Blackwood convention known as “key-card” Blackwood.

General Approach

Before soaring into the slam zone your first task is to locate the best trump fit, a combined holding of at least eight cards in a suit. This is done with your normal methods, although you must be careful that each bid you make is *forcing* — you wouldn’t want partner to pass at a low level.

1. Once you have agreed on a desirable trump fit, you then must decide how high to bid. The next player to bid should proceed as follows:
2. Revalue your hand and assess the point-count situation. If the partnership total may reach 33 points (distribution included), a slam is possible.
3. If slam is out of range, bid game in your suit (or 3 NT if desirable with a minor-suit fit). This is a sign-off attempt.
4. If slam is possible, bid an *unbid* or enemy-bid suit beyond 3 NT (or 3♠ if hearts is the agreed suit). This is a control-bid and it is forcing.

Control-Bids (In casual discussion a control-bid is often called a “cue-bid.” Technically, however, a bid is a cue-bid only if the named suit was shown by an opponent). The control-bid is the cornerstone of accurate suit slam bidding. It is like ringing a bell to announce, “I am interested in slam in our agreed trump suit.” Normal procedure is to bid a suit in which you hold first-round control. **The initial control-bid implies the ace in the suit bid.**

What comes next? Let’s cross to the other side of the table. Here is what you should usually do when partner announces slam interest by making a control-bid:

1. If you have minimum values or don’t like your hand, *return to the trump suit* at the cheapest level. This discourages partner.
2. If you have better than minimum values or like your hand, *make a control-bid* of your own. This encourages partner.


Carefully compare examples 1-3; then compare examples 4-6. ♠♣♥♦

1.)	♠AK865	<table border="1"><tr><td>N</td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td>S</td></tr></table>	N	W	E	S	♠QJ93	
N								
W	E							
S								
	♥2		♥KJ8					
	♦A K109		♦Q42					
	♣543		♣A98					
West	North	East	South					
1♠	Pass	3♠	Pass					
4♦	Pass	4♠						


West announces slam interest with 4♦.
East has a minimum for his jump raise so he discourages by bidding 4♠.

2.)	♠AK865	<table border="1"><tr><td>N</td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td>S</td></tr></table>	N	W	E	S	♠QJ93	
N								
W	E							
S								
	♥2		♥AK8					
	♦AK109		♦Q42					
	♣543		♣Q109					
West	North	East	South					
1♠	Pass	3♠	Pass					
4♦	Pass	4♥	Pass					
		4♠						


This time East does not have an absolute minimum so he cooperates by showing the ♥ A. West returns to 4♠ implying his slam interest is mild and East passes.

3.) ♠AK865 ♥2 ♦AK109 ♣543		♠QJ93 ♥AK 8 ♦Q42 ♣A98		
West	North	East	South	
1♠	Pass	3♠	Pass	
4♦	Pass	4♥	Pass	
4♠	Pass	5♣	Pass	
5♦	Pass	6♠		


Here East has a tiptop maximum so he continues to bid beyond 4♠ to reach the laydown slam. Note that 5♦ shows second-round control (king or singleton) since first-round control was already shown.

5.) ♠AKQ65 ♥A82 ♦Q108 ♣43		♠3 ♥KQ9654 ♦43 ♣AK72		
West	North	East	South	
1♠	Pass	2♥	Pass	
3♥	Pass	4♣	Pass	
4♠	Pass	5♣	Pass	
5♥				

West now has a better hand so he continues with 4♠ (a control-bid since hearts are agreed). East shows second-round control in clubs. West signs off in 5♥ because he has no diamond control; nor does East.

4.) ♠AQ865 ♥A 8 2 ♦Q 10 8 ♣4 3		♠3 ♥KQ965 4 ♦43 ♣AK72		
West	North	East	South	
1♠	Pass	2♥	Pass	
3♥	Pass	4♣	Pass	
4♥				


East indicates slam interest with 4♣. West has a bare minimum opening bid so he discourages by returning to 4♥.

6.) ♠AKQ65 ♥A832 ♦10 ♣543		♠3 ♥KQ9654 ♦43 ♣AK72		
West	North	East	South	
1♠	Pass	2♥	Pass	
3♥	Pass	4♣	Pass	
4♠	Pass	5♣	Pass	
6♥				


West's singleton prevents the opponents from winning two diamonds so he takes the final push to slam.

Implied Trump Fit

Generally, a control-bid can be made only *after* a suit is raised, but there are several logical exceptions to this: **If a player has shown a *balanced hand* and later bids an unbid suit beyond 3 NT, this is a control-bid implying a fit in partner's last bid suit.**

1.) ♠AQ8543 ♥K83 ♦A6 ♣Q6		♠K62 ♥AQ42 ♦KQJ ♣832		
West	North	East	South	
1♠	Pass	2NT	Pass	
3♠	Pass	4♥	Pass	
5♦	Pass	5♠		

East's 4♥ could not be a natural bid to play; it shows the ♥ A and implies a "good raise to 4♠." The slam probe fizzles when neither player has club control.

2.) ♠Q6 ♥K10 98532 ♦AK3 ♣10		♠AK4 ♥QJ ♦9872 ♣AJ74		
West	North	East	South	
1♥	Pass	2N	Pass	
3♥	Pass	4♣	Pass	
4♦	Pass	4♠	Pass	
6♥				

East's 4♣ bid agrees hearts by inference, then two more control-bids lead to the excellent slam.

A cue-bid in the enemy suit beyond 3 NT shows the ace, singleton or void and implies a fit in partner's last bid suit.

♠AK974
♥K82
♦AJ94
♣2



♠J82
♥A10
♦Q8653
♣K93

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♠	Pass	2 ♦	3 ♣
4 ♣	Pass	4 ♠	

West's 4♣ cue-bid is a "strong diamond raise" with ♣ control. East, discouraged by the ♣K, signs off in 4♠.

Key-Card Blackwood

The best of the many ace-asking conventions is "key-card" Blackwood. The basic concept is to count the *king of trumps* — always an important card — just like an ace. Thus there are *five* key cards, and your partnership needs at least four of them to warrant bidding a slam. RKB also helps locate the trump Queen. This convention is identical to [1430 Blackwood](#) excepting the first two responses are reversed (14 - 30 as opposed to 03 - 14).

The following rules determine which suit is the key suit:

1. If one suit is raised, that suit is the key suit.
2. If two suits are raised, the *higher suit* is the key suit.
3. If no suit is raised, the *last suit* bid by your side is the key suit.

The following comes from: http://www.bridgehands.com/R/Roman_Key_Card_Blackwood.htm

After determining trump, the Roman Keycard Blackwood initiator bids 4 Notrump, with the following responses:	
Response	Meaning
5♣	0 or 3 keys
5♦	1 or 4 keys
5♥	2 (or 5) keys without the trump Queen
5♠	2 (or 5) keys with the trump Queen

Note: several methods are used show Voids, non-trump Kings, and the trump Queen (with other than 2 keys). See elow.

After 5C or 5D responses, the Roman Keycard Blackwood initiator may bid the cheapest non-trump call to inquire the presence of the trump Queen. Some partnership agreements return to trump to deny the trump Queen while others play the treatment reversed. One common treatment to show *useful* voids includes:

Response	Meaning
5N	Even number of keycards
6 level of void suit	Odd number of keycards, bidding the void suit
6 level in trump suit	Odd number with a useful void in a suit above trump

Assuming the presence of all keycards and the trump Queen, the Roman Keycard Blackwood initiator may explore Grand Slam with extra values. Several methods are practiced by players including:

Method	Treatment
Specific King Ask (up the line)	After the partnership discovers they hold all keycards and the trump Queen, the applicable partner ("the one who knows, goes") makes a bid at the 6 level corresponding to the rank of the lowest King held. The partnership makes successive King rank bids up the line, skipping the rank of missing Kings or returning to 6 in the trump suit (obviously a major) lacking further Kings to disclose.
Blackwood	Initiator bids 5 Notrump Show Kings as in regular Blackwood style: 0-4 = first step 1 = second step 2 = third step 3 = fourth step
Blackwood minus trump King	Same as above, but subtract the previously disclosed trump King

References:

 Lesson 3M by Richard Pavlicek:

<http://www.rpbridge.net/3m00.htm>

Roman Keycard Blackwood:

http://www.bridgehands.com/R/Roman_Key_Card_Blackwood.htm