

# Cardiff Bridge Tutors

## **How to Bid Slams: a Starter Kit.**

## What are slams?

There are two types of slam:-

- **Small Slams** – where you take 12 tricks
- **Grand Slams** – where you take 13 tricks

You can bid slams in both suit and No Trump contracts.

## Why should I bid a slam, doesn't bidding game give me a bonus?

Yes it does, but bidding and making a small slam gives you 500 bonus points and a grand slam gives you a 1000 bonus points.

Usually a hand that may be bid as a slam will be a certainty in game. When you start the slam bidding process you are risking that certainty.

However, bidding, playing and making a slam is very exciting!

As there is risk involved a large number of conventions have grown up to try and minimise that risk. We will look at some of them. **It is as important to know when to stop trying for a slam as it is to recognise that you should start bidding for a slam!**

## How do you recognise that you should try to bid a slam?

There are two indicators to potential slams:-

1. **Lots of points**
2. **Lots of distribution**

### 1. Lots of points.

This typically means that the partnership has

- 33 HCP for a small slam in No Trumps
- 37 HCP for a grand slam in No Trumps
- 32 HCP for a small slam in a suit contract
- 36 HCP for a grand slam in a suit contract.

### 2. Lots of Distribution.

**You can recognise this by using the Losing Trick Count.**

- A total of 12 losers indicates a small slam
- A total of 11 losers indicates a grand slam.

**If you haven't mastered the Losing Trick Count it is time to read the booklet!**

## So, can I just bid a slam if I have good points or good distribution?

With some exceptions the answer is NO!

You need to establish **first and second round controls** (think Aces and Kings)

You need to know that you have Aces and Kings so that the opposition don't just lead an Ace and King and ruin your small slam.

It is in establishing these controls that so many conventions have grown up. There are also conventions to use when bidding No Trump slams.

## What conventions are there?

There are too many to cover! We want to get you started in bidding slams and so we will concentrate on a "starter kit":-

- **Quantitative Raise**  
Used after a 1 or 2NT opening where you have the opportunity of bidding a slam in NT.
- **Blackwood**  
Used to establish first and second round controls.  
  
There are many variations of Blackwood but we will concentrate on basic Blackwood.
- **Gerber**  
Used after a NT bid has been made between the partnership
- **Cue Bids**  
Used to establish which first and second round controls the partnership has when the hand has voids.

At this point you may think that it is all too complicated but if you start with Blackwood then you can expand as you gain confidence.

## What should be in your slam bidding starter kit?

Stage One.

- The Losing Trick Count
- Blackwood

Stage Two.

- Quantitative Raises
- Gerber

Stage Three.

- Cue Bidding

**After Stage One you will be able to bid slams, the other stages help you to be more accurate in your bidding.**

## Stage One – The Losing Trick Count and Blackwood.

### The Losing Trick Count.

In order to recognise slams based on distribution you will need to have mastered the Losing Trick Count and be able to recognise how many losers the partnership has. If you can only use the Losing Trick Count when your partnership opens and immediately agrees a trump suit then you must read the **How to use the Losing Trick Count** booklet before you try to bid slams.

### Blackwood.

**Blackwood is a convention used after a trump suit has been agreed** and you are trying to establish whether you have sufficient first and second round controls. (Think Aces and Kings)

**You do not use Blackwood if you have a void or a side suit without an Ace or King.**

### **Asking For Aces.**

You use an artificial bid of 4NT to ask your partner how many Aces they have.

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

**Blackwood.**  
Partner, how many Aces do you have?

Response to 4NT Blackwood	Meaning
5♣	0 or 4 Aces
5♦	1 Ace
5♥	2 Aces
5♠	3 Aces

Example

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	4♠	Pass
4NT	Pass	5♥	

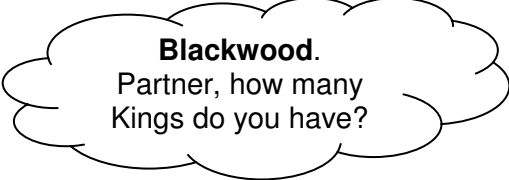
**I have 2 Aces**

If your partnership held all four Aces and you thought that a grand slam was possible you might want to ask how many Kings partner had. **However, you can stop using Blackwood after asking for Aces by bidding your trump suit.**

## Asking For Kings.

You use an artificial bid of 5NT to ask your partner how many Kings they have.

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	4♠	Pass
4NT	Pass	5♥	Pass
5NT			



**Blackwood.**  
Partner, how many Kings do you have?

Response to 5NT Blackwood	Meaning
6♣	0 or 4 Kings
6♦	1 King
6♥	2 Kings
6♠	3 Kings

Example

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



**I have 1 King**

### The purpose of Blackwood.

Blackwood tells you how many Aces/Kings your partnership holds.

It can therefore tell you when a slam cannot be made as well as when it can.

Knowing when to escape from a slam is important.

If you have all four Aces and all four Kings then a grand slam is very likely.

If you have four Aces and three Kings then settle for a small slam.

If you have two Aces missing then escape from the slam by bidding your Trump suit at the five level.

If you have all four Aces and three Kings then you may already be too high to escape!

**When you start out why not confine yourself to bidding small slams?**

## **Blackwood Summary.**

### **Use Blackwood when -**

- **You have agreed a SUIT.**
- **You think that a slam is possible.**
  - **(Losing Trick Count or HCP)**
- **To ask for Aces (and Kings)**

### **Don't use Blackwood when -**

- **You have a NT contract.**
- **You have a side suit without Ace/King.**
- **You have a void.**

## Some examples using Blackwood.

Example 1.

<p>♠ 82 ♥ J1043 ♦ 542 ♣ AQ105</p> <p>♠ KQJ1094     ♠ A653 ♥ AKQ86        ♥ 752 ♦ A                ♦ QJ10 ♣ 2                ♣ K86</p> <p>♠ 7 ♥ 9 ♦ K98763 ♣ J9743</p>	<p>Board 4 : Dealer West : All vulnerable</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>West(19)</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>North(7)</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>East(10)</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>South(4)</i></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2♠</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>4♠</td> <td>Pass</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4NT</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>5♦</td> <td>Pass</td> </tr> <tr> <td>6♠</td> <td>All Pass</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>East agrees the ♠ suit and West initiates Blackwood (4NT). East shows 1 Ace.</p> <p>With an Ace missing West escapes from the sequence by bidding 6♠.</p>	<i>West(19)</i>	<i>North(7)</i>	<i>East(10)</i>	<i>South(4)</i>	2♠	Pass	4♠	Pass	4NT	Pass	5♦	Pass	6♠	All Pass		
<i>West(19)</i>	<i>North(7)</i>	<i>East(10)</i>	<i>South(4)</i>														
2♠	Pass	4♠	Pass														
4NT	Pass	5♦	Pass														
6♠	All Pass																

Example 2.

<p>♠ 83 ♥ J96 ♦ 64 ♣ Q107654</p> <p>♠ 65                ♠ AKQJ ♥ A752            ♥ KQ10843 ♦ 10932           ♦ QJ ♣ AK8             ♣ 2</p> <p>♠ 109742 ♥ - ♦ AK875 ♣ J93</p>	<p>Board 2 : Dealer East : NS vulnerable</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>West(11)</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>North(3)</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>East(18)</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>South(8)</i></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td>1♥</td> <td>Pass</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3♥</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>4NT</td> <td>Pass</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5♥</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>6♥</td> <td>All Pass</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>With an Ace missing E/W settle for a small slam. What will South lead?</p> <p>The A♦ and then the K♦.</p> <p>The slam fails!</p> <p>With East having only four losers it was a reasonable assumption to try a slam except that there are no controls in ♦s</p>	<i>West(11)</i>	<i>North(3)</i>	<i>East(18)</i>	<i>South(8)</i>			1♥	Pass	3♥	Pass	4NT	Pass	5♥	Pass	6♥	All Pass
<i>West(11)</i>	<i>North(3)</i>	<i>East(18)</i>	<i>South(8)</i>														
		1♥	Pass														
3♥	Pass	4NT	Pass														
5♥	Pass	6♥	All Pass														

The second example shows a misuse of Blackwood and a shortcoming of the convention.

Without a first or second round control in ♦ East shouldn't have used Blackwood. Blackwood tells you how many Aces but not which ones.

If West had the A♦ rather than A♣ or A♥ then the story would be different.

**If it is important to know which Aces/Kings are held you must use another method.**

## Stage Two – Quantitative Raises and Gerber.

You will remember that we use Blackwood for Trump suit contracts but not in No Trumps.

In No Trump contracts we have two conventions available to us.

### Quantitative Raises.

We use these when partner has opened 1 or 2NT and we believe that we may have enough points to bid a slam in NT.

We know that we need 33 HCP to make a small slam in NT (37 HCP for a grand slam) and Quantitative Raises are just about doing the arithmetic to see if we hold enough points.

*After a 1NT opening.*

West	North	East	South
1NT	Pass	4NT	

East's 4NT cannot be Blackwood because we don't haven't agreed a suit and we don't use Blackwood in NT contracts.

It is a Quantitative raise.

It means "Partner, I have 19 points. Do you have maximum in the 1NT range (14)?"

If West had 14 points they would bid 6NT immediately.

If they had less they would pass and E/W would play in 4NT rather than 3NT.

*After a 2NT opening.*

West	North	East	South
2NT	Pass	4NT	

Here East has 11 points and is asking West if they are at maximum (22 HCP).

With 22 HCP West would bid 6NT and with less they would pass.



## Gerber.

Gerber was originally intended to be used in No Trump contracts to establish controls.

It is now often misused as an alternative to Blackwood.

This leads to bidding misunderstandings and many experts frown on the use of Gerber.

However, if you use it as originally intended it works well.

The most often quoted reason for using Gerber is that **“it keeps it low”** and **“it is good for finding slams in minor suits”** but using Cue Bidding has both of these advantages without the risk of misunderstandings.

If you use Gerber in suit contracts you will not be able to use many other conventions such as Cue Bidding and Splinters.

Use it once your partnership has agreed a No Trump contract and it will serve you well!

## **How does Gerber work?**

Gerber works like Blackwood by allowing you to ask for how many Aces and Kings your partner has.

It uses an artificial 4♣ bid in the way that Blackwood uses 4NT.

Obviously, starting at 4♣ the responses are different and we'll look at those now.

Let's look at the Gerber bids and responses.

Bid	Response
4♣ asking for Aces	4♦ 0 or 4 Aces
	4♥ 1 Aces
	4♠ 2 Aces
	4NT 3 Aces
5♣ asking for Kings	5♦ 0 or 4 Kings
	5♥ 1 Kings
	5♠ 2 Kings
	5NT 3 Kings

Now have a look at these hands and bidding sequence.

<p>♠ KQ85 ♥ AK1092 ♦ K4 ♣ A5</p> <p>♠ 10976      ♠ 42 ♥ 865          ♥ J743 ♦ 52            ♦ J8763 ♣ KJ107       ♣ 32</p> <p>♠ AJ3 ♥ Q ♦ AQ109 ♣ Q9864</p>	<p>Board 17 : Dealer North : Love all</p> <p><b>Points:</b> <b>West(4)    North(19)    East(2)    South(15)</b></p> <p>Pass      1♥      Pass      2♦             <b>3NT</b></p> <p><b>We are in a No Trump contract and so we can use Gerber.</b></p>
---	--

1.  
Gerber  
Asking for  
Aces

3.  
Gerber  
Asking for  
Kinas

West	North	East	South
	1♥	Pass	2♦
Pass	3NT	Pass	4♣
Pass	4♥	Pass	5♣
Pass	5♠	Pass	6NT
All Pass			

2.  
4♥ shows  
2 Aces

4.  
5♠ shows  
3 Kings

After North's rebid of 3NT South knows that the partnership holds 34 HCP, enough for a small slam.

With a bare Q♥ south feels nervous about bidding 6NT immediately and so initiates Gerber with a 4♣ bid.

North's reply shows 2 Aces and so the partnership must have first round control in ♥s and ♣s.

With no Aces missing South asks for Kings with the 5♣ bid.

The reply shows 3 Kings and with one King missing South signs off at 6NT.

**This example shows the benefit of Gerber to escape from a slam.**

<p>           ♠ KQ8            ♥ AK109            ♦ QJ64            ♣ A5            ♠ 10976      ♠ 542            ♥ 865          ♥ J743            ♦ 52            ♦ K873            ♣ K1097       ♣ 32            ♠ AJ3            ♥ Q2            ♦ A109            ♣ QJ864         </p>	<p>Board 1 : Dealer North : Love all</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left;"><b>West(3)</b></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><b>North(19)</b></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><b>East(4)</b></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><b>South(14)</b></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td></td> <td>1♥</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>2♣</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Pass</td> <td>3NT</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>4♣</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Pass</td> <td>4♥</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>5♣</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Pass</td> <td>5♥</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>5NT</td> </tr> <tr> <td>All Pass</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	<b>West(3)</b>	<b>North(19)</b>	<b>East(4)</b>	<b>South(14)</b>		1♥	Pass	2♣	Pass	3NT	Pass	4♣	Pass	4♥	Pass	5♣	Pass	5♥	Pass	5NT	All Pass			
<b>West(3)</b>	<b>North(19)</b>	<b>East(4)</b>	<b>South(14)</b>																						
	1♥	Pass	2♣																						
Pass	3NT	Pass	4♣																						
Pass	4♥	Pass	5♣																						
Pass	5♥	Pass	5NT																						
All Pass																									

**Q.** How does North know that South's 4♣ bid isn't just a raise of their opening bid?

**A.** Because they play Gerber and 4♣ after a NT contract must be asking for Aces.

North's 3NT shows 19 points and with 14 held by South then the combined 33 is an indicator of a small slam in NT.

When North replies 4♥ then South knows that they hold all 4 Aces and asks for Kings.

North's 5♥ shows 2 Kings and with 2 Kings missing then they stop at 5NT.

Why? The points indicate enough for 6NT but the results of Gerber show that a finesse would be needed for this to make. Against the best defence this might not be possible.

Bidding this hand with Blackwood would result in 6NT and not give you the option.

## Stage Three - Cue Bidding.

When we looked at Blackwood we found that there were situations where it didn't work well.

- Where there is a void
- Where you have a side suit not covered by an Ace or King
- Where you need to know which Aces and/or Kings your partner has.
- When you are bidding slams in Minors.

We have also looked at which conventions to use when the contract is in No Trumps.

Finally, we are going to look at Cue Bidding.

Why have I left it to the end? Because it isn't easy!

With Blackwood you have one person in control (the person who bid 4NT) but with Cue Bidding both partners are responsible for making decisions.

Cue Bidding needs a lot of practise and for that reason I have prepared a set of exercises for your partnership to work through.

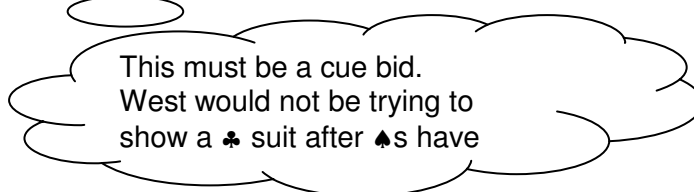
Bernard McGee says *"Cue bidding is not easy and if at all possible I try not to use it!"*

However, he still uses it when the conditions are right.

### What is a Cue bid?

It is a bid of a new suit at a high level when a suit has already been agreed.

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	4♠	Pass
5♣			



The bid shows that West has a first round control in ♣s.

First round control means that if that suit is led then it can be taken.

So West must be saying that they either:-

- Have the A♣
- Have a void in ♣s and can ruff.

West is also asking "What suits can you control, Partner?"

This is the difference in Cue bidding – Partner must interpret why Cue bidding is being used, what controls are held in the opposite hand and answer. Either partner may call an end to the auction.

Let's look at the hand that caused West to Cue bid.

<p>♠ 1076 ♥ KJ85 ♦ 104 ♣ 10982</p> <p>♠ KQJ432      ♠ A985 ♥ Q42            ♥ A76 ♦ KQ3            ♦ J92 ♣ A                ♣ KJ3</p> <p>♠ - ♥ 1093 ♦ A8765 ♣ Q7654</p>	<p>Board 4 : Dealer West : All vulnerable</p> <p><b>West(17)   North(4)   East(12)   South(7)</b></p> <p>1♠            Pass            4♠            Pass</p> <p>5♣</p>
---	---

West has a 3<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> loser hand (the unsupported Q is an extra half loser but with a singleton Ace you can deduct a loser) and assuming East has a seven loser hand then a slam is a possibility.

However, West has a weak side suit. They don't have first or second round control in ♥s.

If East didn't have a control in ♥s then the opposition could lead the A♥ and K♥ and the slam is defeated.

West needs to know if East has the Ace of ♥. A reply of one or two Aces to Blackwood would be no help at all.

West has to know that the ♥ suit is controlled before attempting the slam.

West's 5♣ bid said "I have first round control of ♣s, what can you control?"

East must answer the question by bidding the "cheapest" suit they can ie bid up the line.

Let's carry the bidding on.

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	4♠	Pass
5♣	Pass	5♥	

East hasn't control of ♦s and so bids 5♥s saying "I can't control ♦s but I can control ♥s".

West now knows that the ♥ suit is covered and that they can make a small slam (they haven't got the A♦ and so could lose a trick to that) and they would bid 6♠.

That was fairly straight forward but it can be more difficult than that.

Let's look at another hand.

<p>♠ 1076 ♥ KJ85 ♦ 104 ♣ 10982</p> <p>♠ KQJ432      ♠ A985 ♥ Q42            ♥ 76 ♦ KQ3            ♦ AJ92 ♣ A                ♣ QJ3</p> <p>♠ - ♥ A1093 ♦ 8765 ♣ K7654</p>	<p>Board 4 : Dealer West : All vulnerable</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>West(17)</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>North(4)</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>East(12)</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>South(7)</i></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1♠</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>3♠</td> <td>Pass</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4♣</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>4♦</td> <td>Pass</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5♣</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>5♠</td> <td>All Pass</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	<i>West(17)</i>	<i>North(4)</i>	<i>East(12)</i>	<i>South(7)</i>	1♠	Pass	3♠	Pass	4♣	Pass	4♦	Pass	5♣	Pass	5♠	All Pass
<i>West(17)</i>	<i>North(4)</i>	<i>East(12)</i>	<i>South(7)</i>														
1♠	Pass	3♠	Pass														
4♣	Pass	4♦	Pass														
5♣	Pass	5♠	All Pass														

We'll start from the first Cue bid.

West's 5♣s says they have first round control ♣s.

East's 5♦s says they have first round control of ♦s.

West can't control ♥s and if they bid ♠s then the auction will end but East may still be able to control ♥s because they are bidding up the line.

West bids 5♣s saying "I can't control ♥s but I have second round control in ♣s( they would ruff a second ♣)".

West can do this as when it is obvious that the state of first round controls is known (here that ♥s isn't controlled) then they can start the bidding for second round controls.

The responsibility lies with East. They know that the ♥ suit cannot be controlled and can't bid anything but their ♠s. East signs off in 5♠.

## Summary of Cue Bidding.

Cue bidding needs both partners participation. They will need to practise their bidding in order to draw the correct conclusions.

Use Cue Bidding:-

- Where there is a void
- Where you have a side suit not covered by an Ace or King
- Where you need to know which Aces and/or Kings your partner has.
- When you are bidding slams in Minors.

It is better to use Blackwood if you don't need to Cue bid