

This lesson pertains to two related areas: slam bidding in notrump (6 NT or 7 NT), and investigating a *suit* slam after your side has already bid notrump. It is essential to have a firm understanding of the available tools.

You should be familiar with the point-count requirements of 33-36 points to bid a slam (any six-bid) or 37+ points to bid a grand slam.

Quantitative Bidding

An important aspect of bidding is the quantitative nature of notrump bids once your partner has already bid notrump (as a natural bid) and no major suit is agreed. These bids are summarized below:

Quantitative Notrump Bids	
2 NT	Invitational to game
3 NT	Sign-off
4 NT	Invitational to slam
5 NT	Forcing to slam
6 NT	Sign-off

The point-count system is very accurate when balanced hands are concerned. This can simplify the bidding of many strong hands:

1. ♠ A K 7 ♠ Q J 6 3
 ♥ K J 4 ♥ Q 9 3
 ♦ A K 3 ♦ 10 8 2
 ♣ A Q J 5 ♣ K 8 3
- 3 NT Pass 6 NT

The bidding may not be elegant, but there is no better auction. Opener shows 25-26 HCP and responder adds his own 8 HCP to determine that 33 HCP are held. The only thing easier than the bidding is the play.

It is interesting to note that if you replace the ♠ J with the two, reducing the total to 32 HCP, the slam then becomes inferior—you would need a 3-3 spade break which is only a 36% chance. A similar case exists if you replace the ♣ J or the ♥ J with a low card of the same suit.

Natural 4 NT Bid

Many players are brainwashed by Blackwood—whenever they hear 4 NT they answer aces—because they learned bridge by *copying the bad habits of others*. Unfortunately, the natural (quantitative) 4 NT bid is crucial to accurate bidding. If you belong to the “Blackwood camp” I suggest you repeat *100 times*:

- 4 NT is not always Blackwood.

Even experts do not exactly agree when 4 NT should be natural. Here is the rule I use, based on 36 years of bridge playing:

- 4 NT is natural if your side has made a natural notrump bid and no *major* suit is agreed.

Conversely, 4 NT is Blackwood if your side has never bid notrump naturally or if a major suit is agreed. Exception: An *overcall* of 4 NT after an enemy bid is a special case (it is for takeout).

2. ♠ 8 4 ♠ A K Q 2
 ♥ K Q 5 3 ♥ A 2
 ♦ K J 6 2 ♦ 8 5 3
 ♣ A 7 4 ♣ K Q J 3
- 1 ♦ Pass 1 ♠ Pass
 1 NT Pass 4 NT Pass
 Pass

The 1 NT rebid shows 12-14 HCP and 4 NT is invitational to slam. Opener uses good judgment to pass.

3. ♠ A J 2 ♠ K Q 8 4
 ♥ K Q 8 6 ♥ 4 3
 ♦ K Q 4 ♦ A J 6 2
 ♣ A K 8 ♣ J 10 2
- 2 NT Pass 3 ♣ Pass
 3 ♥ Pass 4 NT Pass
 6 NT

Responder first uses Stayman to check for a spade fit, then invites slam with 4 NT. Opener, having shown 20-22 HCP, has the tiptop maximum so he accepts.

4. ♠ K 8 3 ♠ A 10 4
 ♥ A K J 9 8 ♥ 2
 ♦ 2 ♦ K Q J 10 9 4
 ♣ A K 9 3 ♣ J 5 2
- 1 ♥ Pass 2 ♦ Pass
 3 ♣ Pass 3 NT Pass
 4 NT Pass 6 ♦

Opener invites with 4 NT. Responder is low on point count but high on playing strength, so he accepts the invitation by bidding slam in his self-sufficient suit.

4 NT Discouraging

In examples 2-4 the natural 4 NT bid was made by the *partner* of the original notrump bidder; hence it was a slam invitation. A different meaning should be apparent from the other side of the table:

- If the original notrump bidder retreats to 4 NT, it discourages slam (assuming no major raise).

5. ♠ K Q J 7 ♠ 4
 ♥ K 5 2 ♥ A Q 8 4
 ♦ A Q J 7 ♦ 8 6 2
 ♣ A 4 ♣ K J 9 7 6
- 2 NT Pass 3 ♣ Pass
 3 ♠ Pass 4 ♣ Pass
 4 NT Pass Pass

Responder first uses Stayman and then bids 4 ♣ (natural) to try for slam. Opener's bid of 4 NT suggests minimum values and no club fit. If opener wished to encourage slam, he could bid an unbid suit (a control-bid), 5 NT (pick a slam) or 6 ♣.

6. ♠ K J 10 8 ♠ 2
 ♥ K Q J ♥ A 8 4
 ♦ A 8 7 4 ♦ K 9 6 3
 ♣ A 5 ♣ K J 10 8 2
- 1 ♦ Pass 2 ♣ Pass
 3 NT Pass 4 ♦ Pass
 4 NT Pass Pass

Opener's heavy values in the major suits make slam unlikely so he discourages with 4 NT. Note the importance of being able to stop in 4 NT rather than 5 ♦.

Forcing 5 NT Bid

The classic meaning of a 5 NT response to a notrump opening bid is to invite a grand slam. Opener is supposed to bid 6 NT if minimum or 7 NT if maximum. Since I can't remember the last time I used this bid, I will not waste your time with an example. (If you get these hands a lot, I recommend you play money bridge for *big bucks*.)

5 NT "Pick a Slam"

A far more practical use of 5 NT occurs when both notrump and a suit have been bid:

- 5 NT is forcing and asks partner to pick a slam, provided your side has bid notrump, at least one real suit has been shown, and no major suit is agreed.

7. ♠ K 10 9 6 ♠ A Q J 4
 ♥ A K 9 3 ♥ 8 2
 ♦ A 4 ♦ Q 8 6 2
 ♣ K Q J ♣ A 8 2

2 NT Pass 3 ♣ Pass
 3 ♥ Pass 5 NT Pass
 6 ♠

After using Stayman responder has the strength to bid 6 NT, but that would preclude playing in 6 ♠ if opener also held four spades. The problem is neatly solved with 5 NT.

8. ♠ A Q J 4 ♠ K 8 2
 ♥ 10 2 ♥ A K 9 7 4
 ♦ K Q 10 3 ♦ A 8 4
 ♣ Q J 10 ♣ K 3

1 NT Pass 2 ♦* Pass
 2 ♥ Pass 5 NT Pass
 6 NT

*Jacoby transfer bid. After showing five hearts, responder next bids 5 NT (forcing) to ask opener to choose between 6 ♥ and 6 NT. Opener lacks heart support so he prefers notrump.

The Gerber Convention

In situations where 4 NT would be natural it may be possible to ask for aces with the Gerber 4 ♣ bid. The following rule dictates exactly when 4 ♣ is Gerber.

- If partner has bid notrump as a natural bid, a jump bid of 4 ♣ is Gerber to ask for aces.

Important: The Gerber bid *must be a jump*. Hence, on some auctions there is no ace-asking bid available.

The responses to Gerber are by steps, as in regular Blackwood:

Responses to Gerber	
0 or 4 aces	4 ♦
1 ace	4 ♥
2 aces	4 ♠
3 aces	4 NT

9. ♠ 4 ♠ K Q 8
 ♥ K 7 4 ♥ Q J 9
 ♦ A K J 9 8 6 4 ♦ 10 5 2
 ♣ K 2 ♣ A Q 9 3

1 ♦ Pass 2 NT Pass
 4 ♣ Pass 4 ♥ Pass
 4 NT Pass Pass

Opener asks for aces with 4 ♣ and discovers that two are missing. Opener could sign off in 5 ♦ but prefers to play 4 NT to try for a better score at matchpoints.

10. ♠ A K 8 ♠ 4
 ♥ Q J 6 5 ♥ A K 9 4
 ♦ A 2 ♦ K J 8 5 4 3
 ♣ Q 7 6 2 ♣ K 3

1 NT Pass 2 ♣ Pass
 2 ♥ Pass 4 ♣ Pass
 4 ♠ Pass 6 ♥

After finding the heart fit with Stayman, responder has enough distributional points to warrant a slam bid; but it is possible that two aces are missing so he uses Gerber to check for aces.

Gerber in Action:

1 NT	Pass	4 ♣	Pass
5 ♣!	Pass	6 ♥	Pass
7 ♣!	Pass		Collapse



Sorry, dear... you bid clubs first.

Geez!



11. ♠ A K 8 4 3 ♠ —
 ♥ A J 5 ♥ 4 3 2
 ♦ J 3 ♦ A Q 10 6 5
 ♣ A J 10 ♣ K Q 9 5 4

1 ♠ Pass 2 ♦ Pass
 3 NT Pass 4 ♣ Pass
 4 ♥ Pass 6 ♣

Not Gerber! Since 4 ♣ is not a jump, it is a *natural* bid (forcing). Opener's 4 ♥ is a control-bid (promising the ♥ A), so responder is encouraged to bid the slam.

Asking for Kings

If the Gerber bidder continues to 5 ♣ at his next turn, it guarantees that all the aces are held and that a grand slam is possible. This asks for kings in the same manner that 4 ♣ asked for aces, except the bidding is one level higher. (Note that 4 NT by Gerber bidder is always a sign-off in notrump.)

Over 5 ♣ the Gerber responder is allowed to bid a grand slam directly with an exceptional hand instead of answering how many kings.

12. ♠ A J 9 7 ♠ K
 ♥ A J 8 ♥ K 7
 ♦ K 3 ♦ A Q 8 6 5 4 2
 ♣ A J 8 7 ♣ K 6 2

1 ♣ Pass 1 ♦ Pass
 2 NT Pass 4 ♣ Pass
 4 NT Pass 5 ♣ Pass
 5 ♥ Pass 7 NT

Responder's 4 ♣ bid is Gerber. Opener shows the three missing aces, so responder asks for kings with 5 ♣. The 5 ♥ response shows one king. Responder now can count 13 tricks barring a 4-0 diamond break.