

## FOURTH SUIT FORCING

The modern technique is to use a bid in the fourth suit as a one-round force.

N	S	In this sequence, for example, South's rebid
1H	1S	of 2D is in the fourth suit and is, therefore,
2C	2D	forcing.

Fourth-suit forcing is a forward going and constructive move to be used when the hand contains no honest and natural rebid yet, on the combined values, responder feels that game should be on provided the best final contract is found. Most particularly it can be used when responder suspects that the best final denomination will be No Trumps provided partner can produce at least a partial stop in the fourth, as yet unbid, suit. Note that in a sequence such as above, if South held a good stop in diamonds he could make his rebid in No trumps. A bid in the fourth suit, therefore, does not show a good holding in that suit, but asks whether partner can do anything about it.

When replying to a fourth-suit bid, remember that your partner is seeking a game contract, and will be anxious for you to clarify your hand, if possible even further than your original rebid has done. If you can guard the fourth suit, then give priority to a bid in No Trumps at the appropriate level. Don't bid a mere 2NT if, for example, you hold something like 16 points and a good stop in the fourth suit. If you cannot oblige with a bid in No Trumps, then perhaps you can show some support for your partner's suit, either at the lowest available level or by a jump bid if strong enough. Otherwise repeat your own choice of trump suit.

The player who makes the fourth-suit bid should hold a minimum of Qx or Jxx in the suit so, partner, holding a partial guard in the suit himself will provide a stop in the suit.

The following examples will give you a sound knowledge of how to use the convention.

S K86	N	S
H Q9	1S	2C
D K105	2D	2H
C AK1074		
South		

South's first response is routine but clearly, when North rebids 2D, he has no sound natural rebid although he wants to play in game. South therefore, uses the fourth-suit forcing conventional rebid, asking North whether he can supply a guard of any sorts in hearts so that the partnership can play in 3NT.

S J7	N	S
H AJ107	1S	2C
D 74	2D	3NT
C AK1074		
South		

Compare this next example where South himself holds an excellent heart stop and so rebids 3NT (the value of the hand). It would be pointless for South to rebid in hearts - the partnership would merely be bidding against each other, one holding spades and diamonds, the other clubs and hearts.

S Q8	N	S
H AJ5	1C	1D
D A10963	1H	1S
C J94		
South		

Here again South's first response is routine but he has no sound natural rebid. A raise in clubs or hearts may well be passed when game is cold, or could prove disastrously wrong; the alternative of a rebid of 2NT, the count which the hand is worth, could be equally disastrous if no sure stop in spades is held. The answer is to use a fourth-suit forcing bid of 1S asking for help in this department, not showing it. As these simple fourth-suit bids are forcing for one round only, the auction can be allowed to develop to game or dropped short of it, according to North's next bid.

Compare these next two examples.

S Q107	N	S
H 862	1C	1D
D AQ873	1H	1NT
C J6		
South		

Here South has just the values to keep the bidding open for another round by a simple rebid of 1NT.

S J109	N	S
H K86	1C	1D
D AQ873	1H	1S
C A6		
South		

A different situation arises here, as game is probably available if the right fit is found. A fourth-suit forcing rebid of 1S will allow North to clarify his hand - if he rebids in hearts South will raise to 4H. If he rebids in No Trumps South will raise to 3NT.

To underline the point don't use it in this situation:

S 965	N	S
H KJ8	1C	1D
D AQ1085	1S	2NT
C Q7		
South		

The hand contains a natural rebid. 2NT shows the point count and the heart stop, whereas 2H would ask for the heart stop.

S AQ1074	N	S
H AJ1098	1D	1S
D Q2	2C	2H
C 7	2NT	4H
South		

Here South has a genuine strong two-suiter in the majors, and you might think that using this convention you would be in difficulties. What he does, however, is to make his natural first-round response of 1S and then to bid what North will undoubtedly take as a fourth-suit force of 2H. If North confirms a stop (which here equals a fit) in hearts by bidding 2NT, South can take out into 4H, showing his two-suited hand. If North merely rebids one of his minors at the three-level, again South can take out into hearts to show a two-suiter, but only at the three-level, asking for preference for his two suits.

S KQ975	N	S
H Q10754	1D	1S
D J6	2C	2D
C 6		
South		

Compare this next example, however, which is not strong enough to bid in this way. South cannot indicate game ambitions by a fourth-suit forcing bid of 2H and a subsequent conversion to 3H, as North would be entitled to expect a much stronger hand than South actually holds. Probably his safest course, therefore, is to give simple preference to 2D.

S Q3	N	S
H 87	1H	2C
D 96	2D	2S
C AKQJ1076		
South		

If you 'shoot' 3NT on the second round, it is obvious the opponents will lead a spade and you may lose the first five tricks. You may get away with it but that will not make it good bidding. The best course is to bid a fourth-suit 2S, and if your partner can assist with a spade stop then 3NT will be fairly secure. Failing that you can always play in clubs.

So far we have only looked at bids in the fourth suit at the two-level, which are used as a one-round force. Note that they do not promise another bid on the next round, and the auction may be dropped after partner's response, with no further effort to reach game if that is the wisest course. There are, however, two other situations which must be mentioned.

S KJ1085	N	S
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H A6	1H	1S
D 96	2D	3C
C AQ109		
South		

First, a bid in the fourth suit at the three-level promises at least one further bid. Here, South is a little strong and shapely for a second-round rebid of 3NT, so makes use of the fourth-suit forcing bid of 3C as being the best means of exploring the final contract.

S KJ1085	N	S
H A6	1H	1S
D 96	2C	3D
C AQ109		
South		

Secondly, we come to a jump bid in the fourth-suit. You will notice that South has exactly the same hand as before but that North's rebid is 2C, not 2D as previously. A lesser hand as we have seen before could be bid by way of a fourth-suit force of 2D. One method is to treat the jump in the fourth-suit as a mild slam try with opener's second bid suit as the agreed trump suit. North can now start cue-bidding if he accepts the invitation. Failing this he should make his own most natural rebid.

Let us now have a look at some examples from the other side of the table. The example hands now are North's and he is selecting his rebid when his partner has used a fourth-suit forcing bid.

North		
S KQ754	N	S
H K108	1S	2C
D AJ107	2D	2H
C 4	2NT	

Although somewhat minimum for his opening bid, North has no reason to refuse the information that he has a guard in hearts and should, therefore, respond to the fourth-suit bid with 2NT.

North		
S KQJ54	N	S
H K108	1S	2C
D AJ107	2D	2H
C 4	3NT	

North's hand here is just a little bit stronger. Remembering that South, by his fourth-suit bid is suggesting a game contract, North should bid 3NT, and not a mere 2NT.

North		
S KQ1095	N	S
H AQ986	1S	2D

<b>D J107</b>	<b>2H</b>	<b>3C</b>
<b>C ---</b>	<b>3D</b>	

The fourth-suit bid at the three-level is forcing and also promises one further bid. Clearly North cannot confirm a club stop for a No Trump contract so, having bid his hand accurately, he should show some support for South's diamonds by bidding 3D.

North

<b>S KQ1095</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>S</b>
<b>H AQ986</b>	<b>1S</b>	<b>2D</b>
<b>D A107</b>	<b>2H</b>	<b>3C</b>
<b>C ---</b>	<b>4D</b>	

This time North, facing a partner who is strong enough to show game ambitions, is himself too good for a mere 3D. He should bid 4D which by-passes the 3NT level and allows South to select the best suit game. Remember South has promised a further bid, so 4D will not be passed.

One final point. A raise of the fourth suit promises four-card support in that suit. Just in case the fourth-suit bidder happens to hold four cards in the suit and used the convention as a one-round force.

North

<b>S AJ108</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>S</b>
<b>H 6</b>	<b>1D</b>	<b>1H</b>
<b>D AKJ6</b>	<b>1S</b>	<b>2C</b>
<b>C QJ108</b>	<b>3C</b>	

North has opened one of the suit below the singleton. With four-card support, and providing it does not by-pass the 3NT level, prefer a single raise in the fourth suit. South's 2C bid may not - and probably is not - showing a genuine suit, but as the partnership is going to game anyway, there is no harm in showing your distribution.

North

<b>S AKJ7</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>S</b>
<b>H AKJ8</b>	<b>1S</b>	<b>2D</b>
<b>D 6</b>	<b>2H</b>	<b>3C</b>
<b>C 9754</b>	<b>3NT</b>	

Treating the hand as a two-suiter, North opened 1S since the clubs are of interest in support if they are bid opposite. The three-level fourth-suit bid, promising another bid, also finds four-card support, but here a raise in clubs would cut out the 3NT level. North should, therefore, rebid 3NT.