

# Fourth Suit Forcing

How do you bid certain types of hand when you are stuck for a bid?

What should you bid as responder when you have the values for game but don't know which game to try?

♠ K Q 10 5 4

♥ Q 2

♦ J 10 4

♣ A Q 10

Partner	You
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1♥	1♠
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2♣	
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Partner has shown an opening hand with (at least) 5 hearts and (at least) 4 clubs.

With 14 points you want to be in game - but which game should you bid?

A rebid 2♠ or 3♠ is not forcing - partner could pass. Jumping to 4♠ gets you to game but partner may only have one spade and 4♠ would go down.

A raise to 2♥ or 3♥ is also not forcing. To jump to 4♥ suggests you have better heart support and 4♥ could go down if partner has five weaker hearts, say ♥K 6 5 4 3.

A raise to 3♣ is not forcing. It shows four clubs and fewer points. 2NT would show about eleven points and can be passed. 3NT would show your 14 point hand better, but 3NT is not a good bid when you have nothing in diamonds. Diamonds are the suit the defenders are most likely to lead, since they are the unbid suit. If your clubs and diamond holdings were reversed, 3NT would be a very good bid.

What we need is a bid that says to partner 'I have a hand that wants to go to game, but I don't know which game we should bid. Please will you tell me a bit more about your hand, so we can decide together.' A bid of the only suit that has not been bid, in this case 2♦, is used to ask this question. It is a convention called 'Fourth Suit Forcing'. A 2♦ bid shows at least game invitational values; say 12+ points, and a hand that doesn't know where to go. It asks opener for further information.

A fourth suit forcing bid shows at least game invitational values, say at least 12+ points.

It can be at the two or three level.

It shows a hand that does not know where to go.

It asks opener for further information.

Opener must try to describe his hand further.

Often the fourth suit forcing bidder is looking towards NT.

If opener can stop the fourth suit he should bid NT.

If he has extra length in his own suits he can repeat one or other to show this.

If he has secondary support for partner's suit he can show this.

Opener must show if he has more than a minimum by making a stronger response, often by jumping the bidding.

♠ 2

♥ A K 6 5 3

♦ K 9 7

♣ K 8 5 3

Partner

1♥

2♣

♠ K Q 10 5 4

♥ Q 2

♦ J 10 4

♣ A Q 10

You

1♠

2♦

This hand has shown its hearts and clubs. The extra information it can give is that it has a diamond stopper, so opener should bid 2NT and now you can bid 3NT. With a slightly better hand, say ♦K Q 2, opener should jump straight to 3NT

♠ J 6 2

♥ A K 6 5 3

♦ 2

♣ K J 5 3

Partner

1♥

2♣

♠ K Q 10 5 4

♥ Q 2

♦ J 10 4

♣ A Q 10

You

1♠

2♦

This hand has shown its five hearts and four clubs. But it has got three spades, your first bid suit, and opener should bid 2♠ to show them. Responder can now bid 4♠. With better spades, say ♠ A 4 2, opener can jump to 3♠ or 4♠.

♠ 2

♥ A K J 5 3

♦ 9 7

♣ K J 8 5 3

Partner

1♥

2♣

♠ K Q 10 5 4

♥ Q 2

♦ J 10 4

♣ A Q 10

You

1♠

2♦

This hand can't bid no trumps without a diamond stop. It can't support spades, but it can show the extra shape by bidding 3♣. Knowing partner is 5-5 in hearts and clubs, you would bid 4♥ with the hand above.

♠ J 2

♥ A K 10 6 5 3

♦ 7

♣ K J 5 3

Partner

1♥

2♣

♠ K Q 10 5 4

♥ Q 2

♦ J 10 4

♣ A Q 10

You

1♠

2♦

This hand has shown its five hearts and four clubs. But it has got six good hearts so opener can bid 3♥ to show the extra length and you would be happy to bid 4♥.

♠ A 6

♥ A J 6 5 3

♦ 9 7

♣ K J 5 3

Partner

1♥

2♣

♠ K Q 10 5 4

♥ Q 2

♦ J 10 4

♣ A Q 10

You

1♠

2♦

With a good doubleton in spades, this hand should bid 2♠. Nearly always the 2♦ bidder will have five spades and game in spades is a possibility. This hand provides a diamond stopper in a suit contract, as it can ruff the third round of diamonds.

♠ J 6

♥ A K 6 5 3

♦ 9 7

♣ K J 5 3

Partner

1♥

2♣

♠ K Q 10 5 4

♥ Q 2

♦ J 10 4

♣ A Q 10

You

1♠

2♦

With nothing extra to show, opener makes the weakest response possible by bidding 2♥, which responder can pass. With the 14 point hand above you

would bid 4♥ but with fewer points, say without ♥Q, you would pass 2♥.

How forcing is "fourth suit forcing"?

It certainly forces the opener to bid again.

When the fourth suit is bid at the two level responder may pass if opener makes a minimum rebid.

This allows responder to try for game with a good 11 or 12 points and then pass when opener is minimum.

Over a Fourth Suit bid of 2♦, rebids of 2♥, 2♠ and 2NT show minimum opening bids. Any other response by opener, which shows extra values, is forcing to game. If responder bids again over opener's minimum response then the auction is also forcing to game.

♠ 10

♥ K Q 7

♦ K Q 9 7 3

♣ A J 5 3

Partner

1♦

2♣

3NT

♠ K J 9 5 4

♥ J 2

♦ A J 10 4

♣ Q 4

You

1♠

2♥

Despite having four diamonds, you used a Fourth Suit Forcing 2♥ bid. Perhaps Partner would be able to show some spade support, since 4♠ means only having to make ten tricks and 4♠ scores better than 5♦, an important consideration when playing pairs. With 15 points and good cards in hearts, Partner was able to jump to 3NT. If he had only bid 2NT, you would have passed and a good game would have been missed.

♠ 6

♥ A J 6 5 3

♦ A 3 2

♣ A Q 7 5

Partner

1♥

2♣

♠ A K Q 5 4

♥ 2

♦ K Q J 10 4

♣ 10 4

You

1♠

?

Some people tried 3NT because they had diamonds well stopped. Someone bid 2♦ and passed opener's 3NT. Another jumped to 4♠. All the contracts made eleven tricks. But with a strong two-suiter, like the one shown, responder can jump to 3♦. Partner raises to 4♦ and the excellent 6♦ slam will be reached.

♠ Q 10 8 6

♥ A K 6 5

♦ (void)

♣ A J 7 5 2

Partner

1♣

1♥

♠ K J 5 4

♥ 7 2

♦ A J 10 4 3

♣ Q 9

You

1♦

?

A Fourth Suit Forcing bid can be made at the two or three level, but not at the one level, where it is natural.

Here 2♠ would be fourth suit forcing.

Many chose a 2NT rebid rather than 1♠. 3NT went down on ♥Q lead, since defenders don't always lead the unbid suit!

### Remember

When three suits have been bid, a bid in the fourth suit at the two or three level is not natural. (So it should be alerted).

Very often responder is looking for a stopper in the fourth suit for 3NT.

A fourth suit bidder will have at least a good 11 points, usually more.

Unless responder passes a minimum response by opener, the partnership is forced to game.

With better than a minimum hand, opener must make a stronger response.

	♠ A K 9 5 2	
	♥ J 7	
	♦ 10 8 4	
	♣ K Q 7	
♠ J 6		♠ Q 10 8 7 3
♥ K 10 4 2	S/All	♥ 5 3
♦ Q 7 5	EXAMPLE	♦ A J 9 3
♣ 6 4 3 2		♣ J 10
	♠ 4	
	♥ A Q 9 8 6	
	♦ K 7 2	
	♣ A 9 8 5	

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

Opening 1♥ and rebidding 2♣ guarantees 5 hearts. 2♦ is fourth suit forcing. It shows at least invitational values (10+) but might be a lot stronger. 2NT shows a minimum opening with a diamond stopper. South is not worried about his spade weakness because North has bid spades. North has enough for game.



	♠ 8	
	♥ A Q 10 6 5	
	♦ 9 8 4	
	♣ A Q 3 2	
♠ 10 9 3 2	N/-	♠ Q J 4
♥ 8 4 2	BOARD 1	♥ K 9 7
♦ A J 7 6 3		♦ Q 5
♣ K		♣ J 10 7 6 4
	♠ A K 7 6 5	
	♥ J 3	
	♦ K 10 2	
	♣ 9 8 5	

Board 1 : Dealer North : Love all

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1♥	Pass	1♠
Pass	2♣	Pass	2NT

All Pass

Opening 1♥ and rebidding 2♣ guarantees 5 hearts. 2NT shows 10-12 points and a diamond stopper. South has no need to use the fourth suit (2♦) because he has a perfectly good natural bid available.

	♠ 9 7 5 3 2	
	♥ 9 7	
	♦ 2	
	♣ K Q 9 8 7	
♠ A 8	E/NS	♠ K Q J 10 6
♥ A 3 2	BOARD 2	♥ K Q J 5 4
♦ K Q 9 4 3		♦ A 6
♣ 6 5 4		♣ 2
	♠ 4	
	♥ 10 8 6	
	♦ J 10 8 7 5	
	♣ A J 10 3	

Board 2 : Dealer East : NS vulnerable

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

Opening 1 ♠ and rebidding 2 ♥ guarantees 5 spades and 4 hearts. 3 ♣ is fourth suit forcing, game forcing because the fourth suit was bid at the three level. 3 ♥ shows a fifth heart which West is happy to support. Blackwood allows East to bid an easy slam.

	♠ A K 7 6 5	
	♥ J 3	
	♦ 10 3 2	
	♣ K 9 8	
♠ Q J 4	S/EW	♠ 10 9 3 2
♥ K 10 7	BOARD 3	♥ 8 4
♦ Q 5 4		♦ A K J 7 6
♣ Q 10 7 6		♣ 5 4
	♠ 8	
	♥ A Q 9 6 5 2	
	♦ 9 8	
	♣ A J 3 2	

Board 3 : Dealer South : EW vulnerable

West	North	East	South
			1♥
Pass	1♠	Pass	2♣
Pass	2♦	Pass	2♥
All Pass			

Opening 1♥ and rebidding 2♣ guarantees 5 hearts. 2♦ is fourth suit forcing. It shows at least invitational values (10+) but might be a lot stronger. 2♥ shows a minimum opening and suggests a sixth heart (though sometimes South may have no choice but to continue with 2♥ with a 5-card suit).

	♠ Q 10 4 3	
	♥ 10 9 8 4	
	♦ 10 9 6 5	
	♣ 7	
♠ K 8 7	W/All	♠ 9 5 2
♥ A Q J 2	BOARD 4	♥ K 7 6
♦ J		♦ A Q 7 3 2
♣ K Q 9 8 6		♣ A 2
	♠ A J 6	
	♥ 5 3	
	♦ K 8 4	
	♣ J 10 5 4 3	

Board 4 : Dealer West : All vulnerable

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♣	Pass	1♦	Pass
1♥	Pass	2♠	Pass
3NT	All Pass		

Opening 1♣ and rebidding 1♥ suggests 5 clubs and 4 hearts (though opener could be 4-4-1-4 with a singleton diamond). 2♠ is fourth suit forcing. It shows at least invitational values (10+) but might be a lot stronger. West has a spade stopper and better than minimum opening, hence 3NT.

	♠ A K 7 6 5	
	♥ J 3	
	♦ 10 3 2	
	♣ K 9 8	
♠ J 4	N/NS	♠ 9 3 2
♥ K 10 7 2	BOARD 5	♥ 8 4
♦ Q 5 4		♦ A K J 8 7 6
♣ 10 7 6 2		♣ 5 4
	♠ Q 10 8	
	♥ A Q 9 6 5	
	♦ 9	
	♣ A Q J 3	

Board 5 : Dealer North : NS vulnerable

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1♠	Pass	2♥
Pass	2♠	Pass	4♠
All Pass			

North just has the values for an opening bid, justified by the quality of the spade suit. When North rebids Two Spades, there is no need for South to use Fourth Suit Forcing. The eight spade fit has been identified, and South should jump straight to game.

	♠ Q 10 9 3 2	
	♥ 8 4	
	♦ A J 7 6	
	♣ Q J	
♠ A K 7 6 5	E/EW	♠ 8
♥ J 3	BOARD 6	♥ A Q 9 6 5
♦ 10 3 2		♦ K 9 8
♣ K 10 7		♣ A 5 4 3
	♠ J 4	
	♥ K 10 7 2	
	♦ Q 5 4	
	♣ 9 8 6 2	

Board 6 : Dealer East : EW vulnerable

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		1♥	Pass
1♠	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♦	Pass	2NT	All Pass

Opening 1♥ and rebidding 2♣ guarantees 5 hearts. 2♦ is fourth suit forcing. It shows at least invitational values (10+) but might be a lot stronger. 2NT shows a minimum opening with a diamond stopper. East is not worried about his spade weakness because West has bid spades.

	♠ 4 2	
	♥ A 3	
	♦ K 9 4	
	♣ A K Q 9 8 7	
♠ K 9 3	S/All	♠ J 10 7
♥ K 9 7 4 2	BOARD 7	♥ Q J 10 8
♦ J 10 6		♦ 5 3 2
♣ 4 3		♣ 10 6 5
	♠ A Q 8 6 5	
	♥ 6 5	
	♦ A Q 8 7	
	♣ J 2	

Board 7 : Dealer South : All vulnerable

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

Opening 1♠ and rebidding 2♦ guarantees 5 spades and 4 diamonds. 2♥ is fourth suit forcing. South has little choice but to bid 2♠. 3♣ is game forcing (North had bid 2♥ which was initially only forcing for only one round but when he bids on the auction becomes game forcing). Hearing that North has excellent clubs, South is happy to give support, leading to the good slam.

	♠ 7 4	
	♥ 10 8 7	
	♦ Q 8 5 4	
	♣ 8 6 5 2	
♠ 8 2	W/-	♠ A K J 6 5
♥ A Q 9 6 5	BOARD 8	♥ J 3
♦ 9		♦ 10 3 2
♣ A Q 9 4 3		♣ K J 10
	♠ Q 10 9 3	
	♥ K 4 2	
	♦ A K J 7 6	
	♣ 7	

Board 8 : Dealer West : Love all

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♣	Pass	2♦	Pass
3♣	Pass	5♣	All Pass

Opening 1♥ and rebidding 2♣ guarantees 5 hearts. 2♦ is fourth suit forcing. It shows at least invitational values (10+) but might be a lot stronger. 3♣ shows a fifth club: at least 5-5 shape in hearts and clubs. 3♣ can be passed but East decides to try game in clubs.