

Slam Bidding

There are two basic elements to bidding and subsequently making a good slam.

1. Sufficient Strength. The two hands must combine to be able to produce twelve (small slam) or thirteen (grand slam) tricks. This roughly equates to 33+ and 37+ points for the two types of slam **including distribution points in a suit contract**. These ranges are merely guidelines and are subject to.....
2. Controls. It's no good having twelve tricks available if the defence cash the first two tricks. In simple terms this means that a small slam requires a minimum of three aces (assuming no voids), and a grand slam requires all four aces.

Of the two elements, strength is by far the most important. Declarer may survive after a luck opening lead if the 'control' position is shaky, but if the strength is missing the slam will invariably fail.

Strength can be assessed in the general bidding approach where you should be able to learn of the combined strength of the two hands.

Other "gadgets" you might use to assess the strength of the hands are:

Quantitative bids in NT

Benji strong opening bids (2♣ and 2♦)

Jacoby 2NT convention

4th suit forcing convention

Controls can be checked using a variety of "gadgets". You should be able to use the following:

RKCB or (simple) Blackwood

Gerber

Splinter bids

Cue Bids

All of the ideas above are not mutually exclusive and you may be able to use two or more of the above ideas on the same hand.

Basic Strength

Opener

♠ K J 6 3

♥ K 8 4

♦ A 8 7

♣ J 8 3

Responder

♠ A Q 2

♥ A Q 6

♦ K Q J 4

♣ K 6 4

1NT (12-14)

6NT

Here the responder knows both hands are balanced and that, given that he has 21 points, the total of the two hand is 33-35. This means the small slam is reasonable and responder should bid it. Here, because opener is a bare minimum, it is not a certainty, but declarer has 11 top tricks and by leading first towards the ♠K and then (if it does not win the trick) towards the ♠J, the slam will make if either of the two missing club honours is well placed.

Opener

♠ 3

♥ A K J 8 4

♦ A 4 2

♣ A Q J 7

Responder

♠ A Q J

♥ Q 6 3 2

♦ K J 9 3

♣ 6 4

1♥

4♥

6♥

Here the opener knows there are four hearts opposite (at least) and about 13-15 points. There are no worries about controls and so opener should bid the slam. It will make if one of the finesses outside the trump suit is right (and indeed unless a trump is led) the contract may be given away by the opening lead.

Quantitative bids in NT

When there is an opening bid of 1NT or 2NT, responder can make a quantitative bid.

Over 1NT or 2NT, 4NT is **not** Blackwood; it says bid 6 with a maximum hand and pass with a minimum,

Similarly 5NT says bid 6NT with a minimum hand and 7NT with a maximum.

Opener	Responder
♠ A J 5 3	♠ K Q 7
♥ Q 8 4	♥ A 9 2
♦ K 4 2	♦ A Q T 4
♣ K J 7	♣ A 9 8
1NT	4NT
6NT	

Responder knows that the combined holding is 31-33 and wants to be in slam if partner is maximum. The slam is a fairly good one and will make if two of the following happen: the King of hearts is well placed or the club finesse succeeds or the diamonds split or the diamond Jack drops.

Strong Opening Bid

Opener	Responder
♠ A K 3	♠ Q J 7 2
♥ K J 8 4	♥ Q 6 3
♦ A K 2	♦ Q J 9 3
♣ A Q J	♣ 4 2
2♦	2♥
3NT	6NT

Here the responder knows of 25-26 balanced opposite, and so his 8 points make 33-34, enough for slam, and so he should bid it. Here the slam will make is the heart Ace is well placed, or if the hearts are 3-3 or if the club King is onside.

Jacoby 2NT

Opener	Responder
♠ Q J T 7 3	♠ A K 8 2
♥ K Q J	♥ 3
♦ Q J 5	♦ A K 9 3
♣ 8 5	♣ A J 4 2
1♠	2NT
4♠	6♠

Here the opener shows a minimum by bidding 4♠ and the responder knows there are about 31-32 points between the hands with a good fit so can bid the slam.

Controls

Once you have established there is enough strength for a slam you can then go on to look whether the opposition can cash two quick tricks before you can make your 12 (or 13).

Various methods can check for controls. Splinter bids are very useful too in establishing that the opponents cannot cash two tricks.

Splinter Bids

Opener	Responder
♠ A	♠ K Q 8
♥ K Q J 9 5	♥ A 8 7 3
♦ A K J 5	♦ Q T 8 7 2
♣ 8 6 4 2	♣ 9

1♥	4♣
6♥	

Here, responder shows a club shortage which enables the slam to be bid with ease. Opener knows that responder has enough for game and a that the opponents cannot cash two club tricks. The slam should make easily.

Gerber

If you are playing Gerber it is probably best to use it over a NT opening only:

Opener	Responder
♠ A 4 2	♠ K Q 8
♥ K J 3	♥ A 4
♦ K Q 5 2	♦ 7
♣ 7 5 4	♣ A K Q J 9 6
1NT	4♣
4♥	6NT

Here, the responder checks that there are not two Aces missing, and when he finds that opener has an Ace he can bid the small slam. The slam makes easily with 11 tricks on top and a twelfth coming from setting up a diamond.

Blackwood

The most common form of control asking bid is Blackwood. We would recommend you play RKCB, although simple Blackwood performs a similar role. Some people believe that you should not bid a slam without employing Blackwood, but this is, of course, incorrect (certainly the previous hands all illustrate this. Simple things to remember with Blackwood are that you must agree a suit before using Blackwood (sometimes by implication) and you should never use Blackwood if you have a void in your hand,

Opener	Responder
♠ A 4 2	♠ K Q T 8 6
♥ J T 3 2	♥ A K Q 9 4
♦ Q 5	♦ K 7
♣ A J 5 2	♣ 6

1NT	2♣
2♥	4NT
5♥	6♥

After a Stayman sequence the responder wants to be in a slam, but just checks that his side is not missing two Aces. The 5♥ response from opener shows two key cards (or two Aces) and responder can bid the slam, which should make fairly comfortably, losing only to the Ace of diamonds.

Cue Bidding

It is often possible to make a slam try by cue bidding a first round control which will then allow a dialogue to develop between the partners. A cue bid agrees a trump suit and shows first round control (usually the Ace, occasionally a void) in the suit bid.

Opener	Responder
♠ A J 4 2	♠ K T 7 5
♥ K 9 8 5 2	♥ A 4
♦ A 5	♦ K Q 2
♣ K 2	♣ A 6 4 3
1♥	1♣
3♣	4♣ (club Ace)
4♦ (diamond Ace)	4♥ (heart Ace)
5♣ (club King)	5♦ (diamond King)
5♥ (heart King)	6♣

In this hand spades are agreed and the two partners show each other where their controls lie. Responder knows he can ruff opener's heart losers. He might risk 7, but this depends on guessing the position of the spade Queen.

All of the above will tell you whether the right controls are there or not there and consequently whether to bid the slam or not.

Sometimes you can use more than one technique on the same hand:

Opener	Responder
♠ A K 9 4 2	♠ Q J T 5
♥ 7	♥ K 8 4
♦ 5 3	♦ A 9 7 2
♣ A K Q J 2	♣ 7 4
1♠	3♣
4♣ (club Ace)	4♦ (diamond Ace)
4NT	5♣ (1 or 4 Key Cards)
6♣	

Here opener learns there are not two top diamond losers when responder cue bids the Ace. He hopes to get rid of dummy's diamond losers on his clubs, so bids a sound slam.

Summary

You need sufficient strength for a slam. If both hands are very flat, then work on 33 points for 6NT (the opposition cannot have two Aces) and 37 points for 7NT (the opposition cannot have an Ace). If you have more shape or are going to play in a suit contract, then you may well need less high card points.

It is worth investigating slam possibilities if the combined total of the two hands is in the high twenties or better. In this case don't woodenly bid the game, but look for another bid which might show the possibility of a slam.

For a successful slam you need first round control in three of the suits and (at least) second round control in the fourth suit. Various methods are available to check on controls.

Twelve tricks can be made by one side or the other in roughly one in 10 deals so don't think that slams are that rare. Most sessions there are probably a couple of hands when you could bid a slam. A small slam is about twenty times more likely than a grand slam, so you do need to be extra confident if bidding 'The Grand'.