Slam Bidding

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

Board 1 : Dealer North : Love all

West	***North***	***East***	***South***
	Pass	Pass	Pass
2♦ (1)	Pass	2♥ (2)	Pass
3N (3)	Pass	6N(4)	All pass

1 *23+balanced; or any game force* **2** *Relay* **3** *25-26, bal.*
4 *See commentary*

A "quantitative" slam, bid on the basis of having sufficient high card points. East knows the partnership has 32-33hcps. Some may blast 6N, as above, others may bid 4N as a more tentative move to slam. That would work all right as West is maximum for his rebid and will raise 4N to 6N.

Let's say North is awkward and leads a very neutral major suit card. We win in dummy and run ♦8 (this is the correct card as it would allow declarer to pick up ♦K x x x in the South hand – on the second round, ♦J is led, underplaying ♦10, etc). The diamond finesse loses and we must rely on the club finesse. We can get to dummy with a major suit card or a diamond. A low club allows a finesse of ♣J. It holds and we have twelve tricks – four spades, three hearts, three diamonds and two clubs.

The slam is good, needing one of two finesses (roughly a 75% chance). Had North led a club our task would have been less troubling.

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

Board 2 : Dealer East : NS vulnerable

West	***North***	***East***	***South***
		Pass	2♣ (1)
Pass	2♦ (2)	Pass	2♥
Pass	4♦ (3)	Pass	5♣ (3)
Pass	5♥	All pass	

1 *Eight playing tricks, unbalanced; or 21-22, balanced*
2 *Relay* **3** *Ace-showing cue bid*

Once North bids 4♦ South knows that partner is interested in slam. South would like to use Roman Key Card Blackwood ("RKCB") but his hand is flawed. He has no control of the spade suit. If partner similarly has no control of the suit, the slam will fail as the defence can cash two rounds of spades.

South can focus on the spade weakness by continuing to cue bid. When he bids 5♣ North can appreciate that the spade suit is key to the slam. North bids a quiet 5♥ and South will appreciate that both players are thinking along the same lines.

Of course, the defence will have been listening to North South's dialogue so a spade will probably be led. Without a spade lead declarer will make all thirteen tricks as the two losing spades can be thrown on the fourth diamond and the third club winner. This is sometimes known as a "five or seven" hand – stay at the five level or risk an exceedingly dubious grand slam as declarer shouldn't take precisely twelve tricks.

♠ J 4 3 ♥ J 6 5 4 ♦ Q 10 8 7 6 ♣ 10 ♠ K 8 6 5 ♠ A Q 9 7 ♥ A Q 9 8 2 ♥ K ♦ 3 ♦ K 9 5 ♣ A 4 3 ♣ K Q 8 7 6 ♠ 10 2 ♥ 10 7 3 ♦ A J 4 2 ♣ J 9 5 2	Board 3 : Dealer South : EW vulnerable ***West*** ***North*** ***East*** ***South*** Pass 1♥ Pass 2♣ Pass 2♥ (1) Pass 2♠ (2) Pass 4♦ (3) Pass 4N(4) Pass 5♦ (4) Pass 6♠ All pass **1** *Not strong enough to bid 2♠, a reverse (or "going above the barrier" showing a good 16+hcps)* **2** *A responder's reverse, always game forcing* **3** *A splinter, showing a shortage in diamonds and 4card spade support (see commentary)* **4** *RKCB* **5** *0 or 3 of the 5 "aces"* West's use of 4♦ as a splinter bid is quite sophisticated. Were West to bid 3/4♠ instead that would work as East is still likely to follow up with RKCB. In fact East's ♦K is no asset facing the shortage. Often, especially playing matchpoints, the defence cashes a side suit ace ("before the rats get at it") and were South to do that it would simplify declarer's task. The contract should make anyway. Declarer can ruff the hearts good and should come to twelve tricks through four spades, four hearts, a heart ruff and three clubs. Alternatively declarer could set up the fifth club as a winner. It will, however, be problematic to make all thirteen tricks, on a non-diamond lead, even though West's diamond loser could be thrown on the fourth club winner.

♠ A Q 7 5 3 2 ♥ K Q 10 5 ♦ - VOID - ♣ A J 10 ♠ 9 6 ♠ 8 ♥ A 9 4 3 ♥ J 8 ♦ A 9 8 6 3 ♦ Q J 10 4 2 ♣ 9 5 ♣ Q 8 6 4 3 ♠ K J 10 4 ♥ 7 6 2 ♦ K 7 5 ♣ K 7 2	Board 4 : Dealer West : All vulnerable ***West*** ***North*** ***East*** ***South*** Pass 1♠ Pass 3♠ (1) Pass 6♠ All pass **1** *10-12 hcps, 4+trump support ("limit raise")* Sometimes a scientific approach (using cue bids, RKCB and other "gadgets") is not necessary and a blast to slam works well. Here North has great trumps, first round controls in both minors and a decent heart suit that has a second round control too. We could use a "round the houses" approach if we think we might reach a grand slam but on this sort of hand it's not clear that we'll get enough useful information to make that a worthwhile proposition. East will lead a top-of-a-sequence ♦Q. Declarer sees that an ace is missing and the slam will, at least in part, depend on making some heart tricks. Declarer ruffs the opening lead, crosses to a trump and plays a heart to ♥K. It holds and dummy is reached with a second trump so another heart can be played. West does best to duck and ♥Q wins. Declarer notes the fall of ♥J and crosses to ♣K to lead a third heart. West now wins ♥A and plays a club. We don't risk the club finesse but win with the ace. Dummy's club can be thrown on ♥10 and we can ruff North's losing club. Twelve tricks – six spades, three hearts, two clubs and a heart ruff. Now let's say East had been dealt ♥A x x. Now his duck of the first heart would be a masterstroke. He would win the second heart and could return a heart to partner's ♥J for the setting trick. Congratulations would be in order.

	♠J1043 ♥QJ864 ♦3 ♣J106	
♠82 ♥AK ♦AQJ1094 ♣A52		♠AK975 ♥32 ♦K865 ♣K3
	♠Q6 ♥10975 ♦72 ♣Q9874	

Board 5 : Dealer North : NS vulnerable

West	***North***	***East***	***South***
	Pass	1♠	Pass
3♦ (1)	Pass	4♦ (2)	Pass
4♥ (3)	Pass	4N(4)	Pass
5♦ (5)	Pass	5♥ (6)	Pass
6♥ (7)	Pass	7♦	All pass

1 *Strong jump shift, usually (as here) 16+hcps with an excellent 6card suit* **2** *Slam try* **3** *Ace-showing cue bid* **4** *RKCB* **5** *0 or 3 of the 5 "aces"* **6** *Do you have the queen of trumps?* **7** *Yes, and ♥K*

We don't often come across strong jump shift responses. They are rare but are very useful on the right hands, as here. East would like to use 4N directly over 3♦ but the small doubleton heart makes that less attractive. When partner is able to show the ace of hearts East is better placed to invoke RKCB. He follows up by asking for the queen of trumps. He feels pretty sure partner will hold this card for his bidding but it acts as a useful way of finding a side suit king, here in hearts. That should be enough for East to bid the grand slam, a reasonable spot.

Declarer has twelve top tricks (two spades, two hearts, six diamonds and two clubs) and can ruff the club loser for the thirteenth. [… now, if West had a doubleton club and three small spades, the grand slam would fail … but, with a slightly better spade fit, West might have taken the bidding more slowly, bidding 2♦ over 1♠]

	♠K104 ♥92 ♦10976 ♣K973	
♠AQ975 ♥AJ3 ♦K52 ♣82		♠6 ♥KQ10865 ♦AQ3 ♣AQJ
	♠J832 ♥74 ♦J84 ♣10654	

Board 6 : Dealer East : EW vulnerable

West	***North***	***East***	***South***
		1♥	Pass
1♠	Pass	3♥	Pass
4♦ (1)	Pass	4N (2)	Pass
5♥ (3)	Pass	6♥	All pass

1 *"Ace"-showing cue bid* **2** *RKCB* **3** *2 of the 5 "aces" without the queen of trumps*

[Some Easts might open their hand with 2♣. Thereafter the auction will continue 2♣ – 2♦; 2♥ – 3♠, the last bid being an ace-showing cue bid agreeing hearts.]

It's useful to have an agreement that when responder introduces a new suit at the four level, as here (4♦), it is an advance cue bid agreeing the last bid suit. The heart suit is agreed implicitly and not through a direct raise. Here West would like to bid 4N but is worried about the club suit in which he has neither first nor second round control. He becomes inventive by bidding 4♦, ostensibly showing first round control, because the alternative of bidding 4♠ sounds very much like someone wishing to play in spades. 4♦ may surprise East, who's holding ♦A, but it allows East to bring RKCB into the auction. East knows that all five key cards and the queen of trumps are held. He could ask for kings but, on this hand, the one key reply wouldn't get the partnership past the six level.

Declarer should make all thirteen tricks. The club finesse can be taken and repeated (or the third club can be ruffed in dummy). One spade, six hearts, three diamonds and three tricks from playing the club suit.

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

Board 7 : Dealer South : All vulnerable

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
			1♠
Pass	2♦	Pass	3♥ (1)
Pass	4♣ (2)	Pass	4♦ (2)
Pass	4♥	Pass	4♠ (2)
Pass	5♦ (3)	Pass	5♠ (3)
Pass	6♦ (4)	Pass	6/7♥
All pass			

1 Game forcing **2** Ace-showing cue bid **3** King-showing cue bid **4** Emphasising the quality of the diamonds

It's a brave person who opens the South hand at the one level but it works very well here. When we open a Benji 2♣ we usually have a 6card suit, perhaps with a side suit or 5/5 in two suits. Opening 2♣ with 5422 shape, as here, is less usual but could work – e.g. 2♣ – 2♦; 2♠ – 3♦; 3♥ – 4♣ (cue bid, as above).

We're so used to trying to use RKCB that it's easy to forget that good slams can be reached purely through the intelligent use of cue bids (on board 2 we shunned the RKCB route as it wasn't appropriate). Here North's 6♦ is the key bid as it really tells partner that the diamond suit is very good. South can play North to hold ♦QJ in addition to the king that has already been shown (with the 5♦ bid). That information will allow brave souls to reach the grand slam. With the trump suit breaking 3-2 and the diamonds being benign, there are thirteen tricks. Declarer can throw a losing club on a long diamond winner so North's club loser can be ruffed – two spades, four hearts, five diamonds, a club and a club ruff.

[*in game forcing auctions as above, if North wanted to set spades as trumps he would bid 3♠ over 3♥. That means that when he bids 4♣ instead, it unambiguously agrees the heart suit by inference.*]

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

Board 8 : Dealer West : Love all

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
Pass	1♥	Pass	2N (1)
Pass	4♣ (2)	Pass	4♥
Pass	4N(3)	Pass	5♣ (4)
Pass	5♥	All pass	

1 Game forcing heart raise, promising 4+trumps ("Jacoby") **2** Splinter bid showing a void or singleton club **3** RKCB **4** 1 or 4 of the 5 "aces"

South has a minimum for his game force and rightly signs off in 4♥ when partner shows a shortage in a suit in which he holds the suspect king. North has extra values and makes one more try for slam. The 5♣ reply means that the partnership is missing 2 "aces", where one of those aces might be the king of trumps (it is). With two key cards missing it's right to stay out of slam though, as here, if one of those "aces" is the king of trumps slam could make on a successful trump finesse.

Here North South have wisely eschewed the slam. The trump finesse loses and declarer is held to eleven tricks – four spades, four trumps and three diamonds.