

BLACKWOOD

This is a convention named after the American Easley Blackwood. It is one of the most often played conventions in Bridge and is also often one of the most wrongly used conventions in Bridge.

Blackwood is a method for checking that the opposition cannot cash two quick Aces against you when you bid a slam contract in a suit.

It should be used:

both

1. WHEN A SUIT HAS BEEN AGREED

and also

2. WHEN YOU KNOW THAT YOUR COMBINED VALUES ARE ENOUGH FOR SLAM

From the original Blackwood convention there have been many types of Blackwood developed and, of course, it is vital that you and your partner are playing the same one!

The method shown here is the one that we think is fairly simple, but a good improvement on simple Blackwood. It is RKCB (1430)

RKCB (1430)

This stands for Roman Key Card Blackwood

This method checks on Aces and also the King of the agreed trump suit.

WHAT ARE THE KEY CARDS?

The five Key Cards are the four aces and the King of the agreed trump suit.

THE TWO TYPES OF RKCB

The traditional method (0314) or the 1430 method

We recommend you play the 1430 method. The reason for this is that more frequently responder has just one key card rather than no key cards and so can respond 5♣ rather than 5♦. This makes very little difference, but it does keep the bidding just a fraction lower, a very slight advantage at a high level.

RESPONSES TO 4NT

	Traditional Blackwood	Traditional RKCB (0314)	RKCB (1430)
5♣	0 or 4 Aces	0 or 3 Key Cards	1 or 4 Key Cards
5♦	1 Ace	1 or 4 Key Cards	3 or 0 Key Cards
5♥	2 Aces	2 Key Cards No trump Q	2 Key Cards No trump Q
5♠	3 Aces	2 Key Cards and trump Q	2 Key Cards and trump Q

If partner responds in clubs or diamonds how do we know which of the two options it is? The answer is that it is *usually* clear from the bidding up to that point

eg if partner responds 5♣ to your RKCB enquiry, if they opened 2♦ (strong) then they are sure to have 4 Key Cards; whereas if they opened 2♠ (weak) they will clearly only have 1 Key Card.

ASKING FOR KINGS

5NT asks for Kings. **Only use it if you know the partnership holds ALL the Aces/Key Cards**

If playing RKCB don't forget that you have already shown the trump King if you hold it, so don't include it in your calculations.

RESPONSES TO 5NT

	Traditional Blackwood	Traditional RKCB (0314)	OR	RKCB (1430)
6♠	0 or 4 Kings	0 Kings (Ignoring the King of Trumps)		
6♦	1 Kings	1 King (Ignoring the King of Trumps)		
6♥	2 Kings	2 Kings (Ignoring the King of Trumps)		
6♣	3 Kings	3 Kings (Ignoring the King of Trumps)		

ASKING FOR THE QUEEN OF TRUMPS

If the responder to RKCB has two Key Cards then we will also know whether they also possess the Queen of trumps.

But what if they reply something else?

After a RKCB response the next suit up which is not the trump suit asks for the trump Q.

Without it, just bid the trump suit at the lowest level.

With it, bid **anything** else (usually to show your lowest King)

Eg

You	Partner	You	Partner
1♥	3♥	1♠	3♠
4NT	5♣	4NT	5♣
5♦	5♥	5♦	6♦
Here Hearts are the agreed suit and 5♣ shows 1 Key Card. 5♦ asks "Have you got the ♥Q?" The reply says "No".		Here Spades are the agreed suit and 5♣ shows 1 Key Card. 5♦ asks "Have you got the ♠Q?" and the reply says "Yes", and also the ♦K.	

AGREEING A SUIT

If you have both bid a suit naturally then the suit has been agreed. If there is a jump to 4NT after a suit has been bid then it automatically agrees that last suit bid.

WHEN DO WE OR DON'T WE BLACKWOOD OR RKCB?

USE BLACKWOOD WHEN WE HAVE ENOUGH STRENGTH FOR A SLAM

E.g . Partner opens 1♥ we have:

♠ A K 6
♥ K J 8 5 4
♦ K 10
♣ A Q 9

We have the strength for slam, but it is just possible that we are missing two Aces. Bid 4NT (which agrees Hearts by implication). If partner shows no key cards you can rest in 5♥. If he shows one or two (missing the trump Queen) then you should try 6♥ and if he shows two with the trump Queen then try asking for Kings with a possible Grand Slam in mind.

DON'T USE BLACKWOOD TO FIND OUT IF YOU HAVE ENOUGH STRENGTH FOR SLAM

Partner	You
♠ A J 6	♠ K Q T
♥ Q 7 5 4	♥ A 10 3 2
♦ 10	♦ K Q J 7
♣ A J 9 8 3	♣ Q 6
1♣	1♦
1♥	?

Here it looks from your point of view that a Heart Slam may be on, but you are not sure yet whether partner has the general strength for it. If you bid 4NT then partner will bid 5♠ showing 2 Key Cards and the trump Queen and you will have to go on to bid the slam (which won't make). Perhaps a bid of 1♠ (4th suit forcing) is more appropriate here.

USE BLACKWOOD WHEN A SUIT HAS BEEN AGREED

Auctions such as:

You	Partner	You	Partner
1♠	3♠	2♠	2♦
4NT		2♥	3♥
		4NT	

You	Partner	You	Partner
1♥	4NT	1♠	2♠
		2♥	4NT

In each of the above auctions the suit bid before the 4NT bid is the agreed suit.

DON'T USE BLACKWOOD IF YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT SUIT YOU ARE GOING TO PLAY IN

Eg Partner opens 1♠ and you hold:

	You
	♠ 6
	♥ A K 7 2
	♦ K Q 2
	♣ A Q J 9 5
1♠	3♠
3♦	?

It looks like a slam is on (you have 19pts and partner has opened), but you don't know in what suit. Perhaps 3♥ is the way forward.

USE BLACKWOOD WHEN WE NEED TO KNOW IF PARTNER HAS THE RIGHT CARDS TO MAKE A SLAM

We have:

♠ A
♥ K Q 10 7 5 4
♦ A
♣ K Q J 9 2

We open 1♥ and partner says 3♥. Here we know what we can make is just likely to depend on the number of Aces partner holds. If he has none we can stop in 5♥, if one we can bid 6♥, and if he has two then surely 7♥ is a good proposition.

DON'T USE BLACKWOOD IF THE RESPONSE DOESN'T TELL YOU WHAT YOU WANT TO KNOW

Eg
You open 1♠ and partner says 3♠.
You hold:

♠ A K 10 5 4 3
♥ 8
♦ 7 2
♣ A K Q J

If partner shows one Ace here then if it is the ♥A there may still be two diamond losers, so we don't know what to do. It is better to cue bid and see what happens (we will go through this in the future).

USE BLACKWOOD WHEN WE NEED TO KNOW IF PARTNER HAS THE CARDS SO THAT OPPONENTS CANNOT CASH TWO TOP TRICKS

Partner opens 1♥ and we have:

♠ 6
♥ K Q 9 5
♦ A K J 10
♣ A Q 9 8

Surely a heart slam is "on", but can they cash two aces? There could be two Aces missing so here Blackwood will tell us.

DON'T USE BLACKWOOD IF THE REPOSE COULD TAKE YOU HIGHER THAN YOU WANT TO GO

Eg Partner opens 1♦ and we hold:

♠ Q
♥ K Q J
♦ A Q 10 7 5
♣ K Q J 9

Here we have 20 pts opposite an opening bid. It looks like a slam is on, but we could be missing two Key Cards when we would want to stop in 5♦.

What if the auction goes:

Partner	You
1♦	4NT
5♥ (showing 2 Key Cards)	Help!

You have a difficult bid on the first round but perhaps 2 or 3 clubs is the way forward.

USE BLACKWOOD WHEN PARTNER'S RESPONSE WILL TELL US WHAT WE WANT TO KNOW

We hold:

♠ A K Q J 5 3 2
♥ 4
♦ 10
♣ A K Q J

After:	You	Partner
	2♦	2♥
	2♣	3♠

Partner probably has quite a weak hand, but may have an Ace. Here if you bid Blackwood then partner can show you none (when you stop in 5♠), one (when you bid 6♠) or two (when you bid the spade grand slam).

DON'T USE BLACKWOOD WITH A VOID

Eg Your hand is:

♠ (void)
♥ A K Q 9 8 3 2
♦ 10 7
♣ A K Q J

After:	You	Partner
	2♦	2♥
	3♥	4♥
	4NT	5♣
	?	

Here partner has a weakish hand, but one Ace. But which one? If it is spades it is useless as you are likely to lose two diamond tricks. If it is diamonds you can bid the spade small slam happily. Here, again, it is better to cue bid.

DON'T USE BLACKWOOD IF YOU ARE GOING TO PLAY IN NT.

Suppose the auction starts:

Partner	You	Partner	You
1♠	2♣	2♣	2♦
2NT	?	2NT	?

Partner	You	Partner	You
1NT	?	2NT	?

In each of the above auctions 4NT would be a quantitative bid (and **NOT** Blackwood) - Bob has already covered these.

Over a 1NT opening bid some people like to play Gerber. In this case the asking bid is 4♣, and the responses are like simple Blackwood

ie

4♦	0 or 4 Aces
4♥	1 Ace
4♠	2 Aces
4NT	3 Aces

Similarly some people like to play this over 2NT as well

Eg in auctions like

Partner	You
2♣	2♦
2NT	?

Partner	You
2NT	?

But you do need to have clear partnership understanding here. In the above cases some players would treat a bid or 4♣ by you now as a slam try in clubs. So take care!

So a summary:

THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF BLACKWOOD

DO USE BLACKWOOD	DON'T USE BLACKWOOD
When the two hands have enough strength for a slam between them	To find out <i>if</i> the two hands have enough strength for a slam between them
When a suit has been agreed	When you don't know what suit you are going to play in; or if you are going to play in NT
When partner's response will tell us what we want to know	If the responses doesn't tell you what you want to know
When we want to know if partner has the right cards to make slam	When you hold a void