

ACE AND KEY CARD ASKING CONVENTIONS

Regular Blackwood

The Blackwood convention, named after Easley Blackwood, is a convention used to ask partner how many aces he holds for the purpose of determining whether a small slam or a grand slam should be bid. Further, if the Blackwood Convention discloses that the partnership holds all the four aces, a bid of 5 no trump, asks partner to show how many kings he has.

Typically, the Blackwood Convention is used only after partnership has agreed upon a suit.

The responses to Blackwood are as follows:

5 clubs 0 or 4 aces

5 diamonds 1 ace

5 hearts 2 aces

5 spades 3 aces

The responses to 5 no trump king ask are the same, but at the 6 level:

6 clubs 0 or 4 kings

6 diamonds 1 king

6 hearts 2 kings

6 spades 3 kings

Blackwood Responses Over Interference

If opponents interfere with Blackwood by bidding a suit, there are several methods available to respond to the ace asking bid:

DOPI is an acronym which says that over an intervening bid, Double with 0 aces and pass with 1 ace.

ROPI is an acronym which says that over an intervening double, Redouble with 0 aces and Pass with 1 Ace.

Another method is DEPO, which says Double with an even number of aces and Pass with an odd number of aces. In the case of an intervening double, REPO says Redouble with an even number of aces and pass with an odd number of aces.

Whether you use DOPI and ROPI or DEPO and REPO is a matter of preference.

Blackwood Responses With a Void

Responding to Blackwood with a void

Bid 6 of your void suit if below the agreed Trump Suit.

Bid 6 of the Trump Suit with a void in a suit higher than the agreed Trump Suit.

Bid 5 no trump with a void and 2 aces.

When not to use Blackwood

If you are void in a side suit, do not use Blackwood since an ace in your void suit is useless in a trump contract and you will now know whether partner's ace showing bid includes the ace in your void suit. Instead, you should cue bid your void suit after agreeing on a trump suit, which will prompt partner to cue bid his controls in response. Alternatively, you can use EXCLUSION BLACKWOOD, which will be discussed later.

When 4 no trump isn't Blackwood

There are different situations when 4 no trump is not used as Blackwood.

Quantitative Raise

A quantitative 4 no trump is a raise after your partner has bid no trump, asking him to bid 6 no trump with a maximum, which when combined with your hand equals 33 or more points. For example,

1 no trump followed by 4 no trump asks partner to bid 6 no trump 17 or a good 16 points. You should have 17 -18 points to bid 4 no trump. With 19 or more, you can bid 6 no trump on your own.

2 no trump followed by 4 no trump asks partner to bid 6 no trump with a 21 points or a good 20 points. You should have at least 12 or 13 points to bid 4 no trump.

1 club -1 spade – 2 no trump– 4 no trump asks partner to bid 6 no trump with 19 or a good 18 points. You should have 15 or a good 14 points to bid 4 no trump here.

4 No Trump For Takeout

4 no trump for takeout is used to describe a distributional hand when opponents have bid. For example:

1 heart – 4 no trump shows at least 5-5 in the minors. If vulnerable, both minors should be strong. If not vulnerable, they can be weak.

4 hearts/spades – 4 no trump is takeout and shows 2 places to play. If partner bids the suit you don't have, bid your cheapest suit next and partner will know you have the other 2 suits.

KEYCARD BLACKWOOD

Key card Blackwood is used to ask partner how many key cards he has. There are five key cards, including 4 aces and the k of trump. This is far superior to regular blackwood because it enables you to determine whether partner has the King of trump as well as the number of aces he holds.

The responses to keycard blackwood vary. Some people use 3014, meaning that a 5 clubs response shows 3 or 0 keycards while a 5 diamond response shows 1 or 4 keycards. Others use 1430, where the 5 club and 5 diamond responses are reversed. There is no [articular advantage or disadvantage. Your choice. I use 1430. In both cases, a 5-heart response shows 2 key cards without the queen of trump, while a 5-spade response shows 2 key cards with the queen of trump.

In addition, once it is determined that your side has all 5 key cards, you can ask partner for the number of kings or specific kings he has outside the trump suit by bidding 5 no trump.

NUMBER OF KINGS

After partner's response to 4 no trump identifies all 5 key cards, 5 no trump asks for the number of kings outside the trump suit.

6 clubs shows 0 kings

6 diamonds shows 2 kings

6 hearts shows 3 kings

SPECIFIC KINGS

After partner's response to 4 no trump identifies all 5 key cards, 5 no trump asks for specific kings below the trump suit, starting with the lowest king. In modern bridge bidding, most players prefer to ask for specific kings rather than number of kings, since it can often solidify a side suit and is more important than number of kings in reaching a grand slam in a suit.

So that if spades is the agreed suit and keycard blackwood has shown all 5 key cards, 5 no trump would ask partner to bid the lowest side suit in which he has the king. If he has no outside king below the trump suit, he responds by bidding 5 spades.

My recommendation is that you use 5 no trump to ask for specific kings below the trump suit, up the line.

QUEEN ASK

The Queen Ask bid is used to ask partner whether he has the Queen of trump – often essential in deciding whether to bid a grand slam. The Queen Ask is done by bidding the suit above partner's key card response. If partner has the queen of trump, he bids his cheapest side suit king, which signifies that he has the king of the bid suit as well as the Queen of Trump. If he has the queen of trump but no outside king, he bids 6 no trump. If he does not have the queen of trump, he responds by bidding the trump suit to the queen ask.

Obviously, you don't use the Queen ask bid if you have the queen. Similarly, if you and your partner have a known 10-card fit, you don't need to find the queen, since trumps are likely to break 2-1, even if the queen is outstanding. So with a 10-card fit, simply ask for kings. (see below)

CAVEAT: If you have more trumps than you are expected to have, count the extra number of trumps as though you had the queen. For example, if you have A x of spades and partner bids 4 no trump, asking for key cards and then asks for the queen of trump, you can bid a side suit in which you have a king to show that you have that king and the queen of trump, since partner must have K x of spades and has identified all the key cards. When you have A x of a suit and your partner has K x of the suit, missing the queen, the odds are that opponents' spades will split 2-1, so you don't need the queen. Failing that, if one hand has the three missing trump, there is a 50-50 chance if picking up the queen via a finesse.

GERBER

Gerber directly over a no trump bid.

Gerber is another ace-asking bid as an alternative to key card blackwood. It is always used in connection with a no-trump auction. For example:

1 no trump – 4 clubs asks for the number of aces. If all aces are present. 5 clubs asks for the number of kings.

2 no trump – 4 clubs asks for the number of aces.

1 club – 1 heart – 2 no trump – 4 clubs asks the number of aces.

2 clubs – 2 diamonds – 2 no trump- 4 clubs asks number of aces.

Conversely, if you are playing Gerber where 4 clubs asks for aces, if instead of 4 clubs you bid 4 no trump, that is always a quantitative raise in no trump, asking the original no trump bidder to pass with a minimum or bid 6 no trump with a maximum. This would be used by the responder who has enough points to be in 6 no trump, if opener has a maximum for his bid.

Mini -Max Gerber

A variation of regular Gerber is mini-max Gerber, used when opening bidder has 2 aces. With 2 aces and a minimum for his bid, he bids 2 hearts. With 2 aces and a maximum for his bid, he bids 2 spades. Partner will then know not only the number of aces in opener's hand, but whether he has a minimum or maximum for his bid as well. This will enable responder to assess whether or not to bid slam.

Key Card Gerber

Keycard Gerber is used after a Stayman, Jacoby Transfer, Jacoby 2 no trump, Delayed Texas Transfer or Texas Transfer bid following a notrump opening or rebid.

Examples:

1 no trump – 2 hearts – 2 spades – 4 clubs

1 no trump – 2 clubs – 2 spades – 4 clubs

1 club – 1 diamond- 2 no trump – 3 clubs- 4 clubs

2 clubs – 2 diamonds – 2 no trump – 3 clubs – 3 spades- 4 clubs

2 clubs – 2 diamonds- 2 no trump – 3 hearts - 3 spades – 4 clubs

In each case, 4 clubs is Key Card Gerber, either 1430 or 3014, asking for the number of keycards in opener's last bid suit.

Also, in each case, if responder bids 4 no trump instead of 4 clubs, it is a quantitative raise asking opener to bid 6 no trump or six of the last suit with a max or sign off in the suit or pass 4 no trump with a minimum.

MINORWOOD

Minor wood is a convention used to ask for keycards in a minor suit at a lower level than 4 no trump, which is the asking bid for regular keycard Blackwood. The reason for this is that the responses to keycard blackwood may get you to high, past game, if you find out you don't have enough for slam.

To use Minor wood, simply jump from 1 club or 2 clubs to 4 clubs. The responses are 1430, after which you can use the queen ask bid, by bidding one over the minor wood response. The same applies for bidding 4 diamonds over 1 diamond or 2 diamonds.

These sequences allow responder to stop in game, 5 clubs or 5 diamonds if the minor wood responses indicate that slam is not in the cards.

EXCLUSION BLACKWOOD

This is a seldom-used convention, but when applicable, it is indispensable. Simply put it is a convention where the asking bid asks partner to show the number of keycards excluding the suit in which responder asks. It is used when responder has a void in a suit, but is interested in slam. He needs to know the number of working keycards in partner's hand, but has no interest in hearing about keycards in his void suit. This is especially so because he only needs to know about the keycards in suits in which he is not void.

Exclusion blackwood is used after there is an agreement as to the suit and inquired jumps to the 5 level of his void suit. Responder then uses 3014 to respond, but does not count aces in the asking suit.

Exclusion Minorwood Example:

1 heart – 3 hearts - 5 clubs

Opener has KQ x
 A Q J 10 x
 K Q x x
 Void

Opener has 17 points plus a void in clubs. He needs two key cards to make 6 hearts and 3 keycards to make 7 hearts. Partner has made a limit raise. If he holds the spade ace, the heart k and the diamond ace, the hand makes 7, even though he only has 11 points. But if instead he holds the spade ace, the heart k and the club ace, he only makes 6 hearts because he is missing the diamond ace and the club ace is useless. He finds out how many of the keycards he needs by bidding 5 clubs over 3 hearts, which tells partner to show the number of his key cards not counting the ace of clubs. Partner response 5 diamonds with 3 or zero key cards not counting the club ace, 5 hearts with 1 or 4 keycards, not counting the club ace, 5 spades with 2 keycards not counting the club ace without the queen of hearts, 5 no trump with 2 keycards with the queen of hearts.

KICKBACK BLACKWOOD

Kickback Blackwood is used as a key card asking alternative to regular Blackwood or Key Card Blackwood at a lower level. It is used after a low level agreement on a suit and slam interest. Following are the kickback asking bids:

- 4 diamonds – clubs is agreed suit
- 4 hearts – diamonds is agreed suit
- 4 spades – hearts is agreed suit
- 4 no trump – spades is agreed suit

Responses to kickback are 3014.

Partnerships who use kickback should discuss when the 4 level bid is kickback and when it is a cue bid.