Slam bidding with Blackwood and Gerber

To make a slam or grand slam your side needs to have **strength** or **shape**.

To make a small slam (12 tricks) you need 33 HCP while to make a grand slam (13 tricks) you need a minimum of 37HCP.

An example of a hand with **strength**:

AKJ4	Q8	= 33HCP for 12 tricks in 6NT
KQ8	AJT4	
943	AKQ5	
A73	94	

An example of a hand with **shape**:

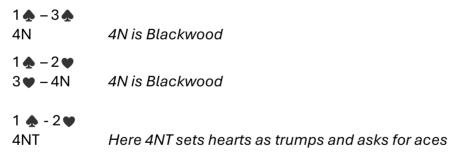| AKJT865 | Q72 | =23HCP for 12 tricks in 6S |
8	234	
3	A654	
AT73	KQ2	

In both these hands it is vital to know how many aces your partner has in order to bid slam. To do this we use the Blackwood convention.

The Blackwood convention

The Blackwood convention uses a bid of 4NT to ask partner how many aces they have.

It is used to avoid bidding a slam when you are missing two aces.

For example:

1♠ – 3♠
4N   *4N is Blackwood*

1♠ – 2♥
3♥ – 4N   *4N is Blackwood*

1 ♠ - 2♥
4NT   *Here 4NT sets hearts as trumps and asks for aces*

4NT is nearly always Blackwood. The exception is where partner has opened or rebid NTs

1N – 4N   Here 4N is not Blackwood. It asks partner to bid 6N with a maximum 1NT opening (called a 'quantative' bid)

When should you use Blackwood?

To make a small slam you:

- Must be able to make 12 tricks
- Must have a strong trump suit (a 9 card fit is ideal)
- If playing in NT all suits must be stopped
- Your opponents must not be able to take two quick tricks.

To use Blackwood you should have known trump fit or enough HCP if playing in NT.

Blackwood is used to avoid bidding 'bad slams'. *Only use it when you think you might have enough to make 12 tricks and you just want to be sure you are not missing two aces.*

Here is a good example:

KQxxx	AJxx	*Here you have a good trump suit and lots of tricks*
AK	xxx	*but have two quick losers – A♣ and A♦*
X	KQxx	
KQJxxx	xx	

Blackwood is not useful if you have a void.

AKxxx
KQxxx
-
KQJ

If you use Blackwood and partner shows one ace, it is not helpful because you don't know which ace it is. If it is the ace of diamonds you still have two quick losers (A♥ and the A♣) (there are other methods to use in this situation but learn Blackwood first).

How do you respond to partner's 4NT ask?

After partner bids 4NT the responses are simple:

5 ♣ = 0 or 4 aces
5 ♦ = 1 ace
5 ♥ = 2 aces
5 ♠ = 3 aces

You **MUST** answer partner's question using one of these responses. *Remember: the Blackwood bidder is 'driving' the auction.*

How do you tell if partner has 0 or 4 aces after a 5♣ response? If partner bids 5♣ and you have two aces you know they can't have four. If you have no aces and partner responds 5♣ you know they have all four (if you both have none then something strange is happening with your bidding!). Easy.

What happens next?

After partner responds to your 4NT, you will:

- Decide the contract by bidding slam in the agreed trump suit
- Sign off by rebidding the trump suit at the cheapest level
- Bid 5NT asking for kings (when you have all the aces and are looking for a grand slam but that is a lesson for another day!).

For advancing players: Roman Key Card Blackwood 1430

A modern variation of the Blackwood convention is Roman Key Card Blackwood.

Instead of asking how many aces partner has, RKCB asks about five 'key cards' – the four aces and the king of trumps.

It begins the same way as ordinary blackwood:

1H – 3H
4NT but here 4NT asks about the key cards.

The responses are a little different:

5 ♣ = 1 or 4 key cards
5 ♦ = 3 or 0 key cards
5 ♥ = 2 key cards, without the queen of trumps
5 ♠ = 2 key cards with the queen of trumps

This is called RKC '1430' . Some people paly a variation where the meaning of the 5 ♣ and 5 ♦ bids are reversed – this is called 'RKC 3014'.

Similar to ordinary B, a bid of 5NT asks about the three remaining kings. Only use this if you and your partner have all the key cards.

Asking about the queen of trumps: The complete version of RKCB allows the asker to inquire about the queen of trumps (where partner has bid 5 ♣ or 5 ♦) by using the next available bids outside the trump suit

For example:

1H – 3H
4NT – 5C
5D here asks if partner has the queen of hearts. Partner rebids the trump suit if they do not have the queen. Any other bid promises the queen of trumps.

How do I ask for aces after my partner bids NT?

The Gerber convention

If partner opens or rebids NT, a 4NT bid is no longer an ace ask – it is an invitation to 6NT.

In this situation you can use the Gerber convention.

1NT – 4♣   *Gerber - asks how many aces opener has.*

2NT- 4♣   *Gerber - asks how many aces opener has.*

The responses follow the same pattern as the responses to Blackwood:

5♦ = 0 or 4 aces
5♥ = 1ace
5♠ = 2 aces
4NT = 3 aces