

Splinter Scenarios

I'm not sure where the name "Splinter" came from, but hands that they describe have an outside importance in finding out if your trump fit will lead to extra tricks or not. The basic idea is "fitting hands." You might have a 10 card trump fit, but if you have "mirror distribution", the trump won't provide any extra tricks.

Consider

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



In A) West has 16 HCP and East has 15. 31 HCP and a 10 card fit and making anything more than 4♠ will take a lucky lie of the cards. This is because without length differential in the side suits, the extra trump will rarely enable you to take extra tricks. Hand A will make 4N as easily as it will 4♠ despite the massive fit.

In B) there's only 21 HCP, but the massive trump fit can now be used to score extra tricks by ruffing. If trumps split 2-1 you can ruff 3 hearts in East and make 6♠. The best that NT can hope for is 10 tricks if diamonds break 3-3 and only then if they don't lead hearts.

The key to taking extra tricks with your trump suit is to be able to win your trump tricks using only one trump at a time. You can accomplish this only by ruffing, or by voiding one hand of all trump and then leading high ones from the other hand. That second point is why ruffing in the long hand rarely leads to extra tricks. Also, cross-ruffing is an extreme variety in which you win all of your trump one at a time by ruffing in alternate hands.

Since we cannot devise our line of play until after we've seen partner's hand, the auction is where we need to describe our hand to our partner in order to help them tell the difference between fits like A and B.

The commonest method for showing shortness is the splinter bid. This bid is an unusual jump in an auction and shows both a 4 card raise for the trump suit (the last bid suit if none has been established) and shortness (0 or 1) in the bid suit.

Since splinters are so useful, it's good to have a general principle to apply to the situation. The one I tend to use is "if I can bid as suit as natural and forcing, then jumping shows shortness."

Here are some common auctions where splinters may apply

1. Double jump in response to a major suit opening

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
1♥	P	4♣	

This is the classic splinter. This bid shows enough values to make game (13+ support points and a fit). Some people learned this as 13+ HCP and a fit.

Make sure you are on the same page as your partner.

The auctions are 1♠-4♣\4♦\4♥ and 1♥-4♣\4♦\3♠

2. Double jump in response to a major suit response

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
1♣	P	1♥	P
4♦			

This is a splinter by opener. This bid shows enough values to get to game, namely 19+ support points.

The auctions are 1♣-1♥-3♠\4♦, 1♦-1♥-3♠\4♣, 1♣-1♠-4♦\4♥ and 1♦-1♠-4♣\4♥

3. Double jump in response to a minor suit opening

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
1♣	P	3♥	

Not everyone who plays splinters plays them for the minors too. This bid shows 5 card support for opener's minor and 13+HCP since the game you are trying to reach is still 3N. Please note that 4♣ in the above auction would typically be non forcing since 5♣ takes more HCP to make than 3N.

Auctions are 1♣-3♦\3♥\3♠ and 1♦-3♥\3♠\4♣

4. Jump Reverse after a major suit response

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
1♣	P	1♥	P
3♦			

This is often used to show a 2 way splinter. Either just shy of game (17-18) or slammish (21+). There are only a few of these auctions:

1♣-1♥-3♦, 1♣-1♠-3♦\3♥ and 1♦-1♠-3♥

5. Jump shift response by opener in a 2/1 auction

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
1♠	P	2♣	P
3♦			

This is used to show a fit for responder's suit and shortness in the bid suit. If you aren't playing 2/1, this bid should also show some extra values.

There are many auctions for which this applies.

6. Jump shift response by responder in a 2/1 auction

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
1 ♠	P	2 ♣	P
2 ♥	P	4 ♦	

This is used to show a fit for opener's second suit and shortness in the bid suit.

There are many auctions for which this applies.

7. Double jump shift by opener after 1N response

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
1 ♠	P	1N	P
4 ♦			

This bid shows a hand just shy of a 2♣ opening bid. It implies a self-sufficient suit (7+, often 8) and usually shows a void in the bid suit.

Note: The auction 1♥-1N-3♠ deserves some discussion. Since responder has typically denied holding four or more spades, if responder shows 0 spades you are telling the opponents that they have a 10 card spade fit and therefore inviting them to sacrifice. A common alternative usage for this bid is a weak 5-6 hand, like ♠KQxxx ♥ KQxxxx.

8. Jump Cuebids in competitive auctions

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
1 ♥	2 ♣	4 ♣	

This is identical to the classic splinter in #1. However, please note that there are many alternative uses for jumps in new suits like a 3♠ bid by East. Many people play fit showing jumps in competitive auctions.

9. Jumps past game in control bidding auctions

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
1 ♥	P	2 ♣	P
3 ♣	P	4 ♠	

While this jump is not past the 5♣ game, it is past the more common 3N game, and is therefore showing a serious effort to make a minor suit trump. Some people play this as Exclusion Blackwood, but I tend to believe that the # of hands in which I want to reveal a void and then not let my partner exercise judgment is sufficiently small that a blanket agreement of showing a void and slam interest is more frequently useful.