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Bridge Bidding: The Next Step · Acol edition



CHAPTER 1

Fourth Suit Forcing

How to keep the bidding going when you have the points but no clear bid

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1. The problem

Sometimes you know your side has enough for game, but you do not know **which** game. Partner has bid two suits, you have bid one, and the fourth suit is wide open. If you bid 3NT and nobody can stop that suit, the opponents may take five tricks before you start. If you raise one of partner's suits, you may miss an easier game in your own major.

Opener	Responder
1♦	1♠
2♣	?

♠ A Q 10 6 4
♥ 7 4 3
♦ K 2
♣ A J 5

14 points: game is certain, but which one? You have no heart stopper for 3NT, only five spades, and just two diamonds and three clubs. None of 3NT, 3♠, 3♣ or 3♦ describes this hand.

2. The answer: bid the fourth suit

When partner has bid two suits and you have bid one, a bid in the **fourth suit** is **artificial**. It says nothing about that suit. It says: "I have enough for game (about **12 or more** points), but I need to know more. Please describe your hand."

So on the hand above you bid **2♥**. Partner must not pass, and in this book the bidding must not stop below game: fourth suit forcing is **forcing to game**.

> Some partnerships play fourth suit forcing as forcing for one round only, so that responder can stop in a partscore on the next bid. Both ways are common. Agree with your partner which you play.

3. How opener answers

Partner's fourth-suit bid asks a question, and opener answers it by going down this list and stopping at the first one that fits:

Priority	With…	Bid
1	Three cards in responder's major	Raise it (2♠ in our example)
2	A stopper in the fourth suit	2NT with a minimum, 3NT with extra values (about 15+)
3	Extra length in one of your suits	Rebid it at the cheapest level: a six-card first suit, or a five-card second suit
4	Four cards in the fourth suit	Raise it

Support for partner's major comes first because a 5-3 fit in a major usually plays better than 3NT. Stoppers come next, because 3NT is the most likely game when there is no major fit.

Here is the same responder hand with three different openers. The bidding starts 1♦ – 1♠ – 2♣ – 2♥ each time.

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

Opener has no three-card spade support, but ♥K-J-6 stops hearts. With a minimum, opener bids **2NT**, and responder raises to **3NT**.

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

Opener has three spades, so the first answer on the list applies: **2♠**. Responder bids **4♠**, a much safer game than 3NT with only a singleton heart opposite three small ones.

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

No spade support and no heart stopper. Opener is 5-5 in the minors, so shows the extra club: **3♣**. Now neither hand can stop hearts, so responder bids **5♣**, avoiding a 3NT that would lose the first five heart tricks.

4. When not to use it

Fourth suit forcing is for hands with no good natural bid. If a natural bid tells the story, make it:

- With a **stopper** in the fourth suit and no interest in anything else, bid no-trumps yourself: 2NT with about 11, 3NT with 12 or more.
- With a **fit** for one of opener's suits and invitational values, raise it.
- With a **six-card suit** of your own, you can often just rebid it (a jump shows a good hand).
- With a **weak** hand, give preference or pass: the fourth suit promises game values.

The one-level exception. After 1♣ – 1♦ – 1♥, a bid of **1♠** is natural, showing four spades. The fourth suit is only artificial at the two level or higher.

5. Summary

Situation	What it means
Responder bids the fourth suit at the two level or higher	Artificial, 12+ points, forcing to game
Opener has three cards in responder's major	Raise it first
Opener has a stopper in the fourth suit	2NT (minimum) or 3NT (extras)
Opener has extra length	Rebid that suit cheaply
1♣ – 1♦ – 1♥ – 1♠	Natural: four spades

6. Test yourself

1. ♠ 7 6
♥ A Q 9 6
♦ K 8 4
♣ A J 7 3

1♦ – 1♥ – 1♠ – ? What do you bid?

2. ♠ K 6
♥ A Q J 8 4
♦ A 5
♣ 7 4 3 2

1♦ – 1♥ – 1♠ – ? What do you bid?

3. ♠ Q 7 3
♥ 5
♦ A K 8 6 4
♣ K J 9 2

You opened 1♦. 1♦ – 1♠ – 2♣ – 2♥. What do you bid?

4. ♠ 5
♥ A 6 2
♦ K Q 10 7 4
♣ A J 8 3

You opened 1♦. 1♦ – 1♠ – 2♣ – 2♥. What do you bid?

5. ♠ 6
♥ 7 3
♦ A K Q 10 8 3
♣ K J 7 4

You opened 1♦. 1♦ – 1♠ – 2♣ – 2♥. What do you bid?

6. ♠ K J 8 4
♥ 6 3
♦ A Q 7 5
♣ 9 5 2

1♣ – 1♦ – 1♥ – ? What do you bid?

Answers

1. 3NT. 14 points and ♣A-J-7-3 stops clubs. A natural bid says it all, so no need for the fourth suit.

2. 2♣. 14 points, five hearts and nothing in clubs. Bid the fourth suit and let partner show three hearts or a club stopper.

3. 2♠. Three-card support for partner's major comes first.

4. 2NT. No spade support, but ♥A-6-2 stops hearts. With a minimum, 2NT.

5. 2♦. No spade support and no heart stopper, but six good diamonds: rebid them at the cheapest level. There is no need to jump: fourth suit forcing has already committed you both to game, and bidding cheaply leaves room to find the best one.

6. 1♠. At the one level the fourth suit is natural: you are showing your four spades.

Next: Chapter 2, Checkback. Free lessons and challenge hands to play: **bridgescorer.com/learn**

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