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Bridge Bidding Made Simple · Standard American edition



CHAPTER 11

Slam Bidding

When to look for slam, the quantitative 4NT, and Blackwood

Mike Smith

bridgescorer.com

1. When to think about slam

A small slam (twelve tricks) or a grand slam (all thirteen) brings a big bonus, but going down throws away the game you could have made. So before bidding a slam, check two things: **enough strength**, and **not too many aces missing**.

Small slam (6): about **33 points** between you, or a little less with a good fit, and **no more than one ace** missing.
Grand slam (7): about **37 points** and **no aces** (or kings) missing.

The points add up well when you have a good trump fit or both hands are balanced. With a fit, a long suit and short suits make up for missing points; with no fit, slam needs the full count.

2. Balanced hands: the quantitative 4NT

When partner opens **1NT (15–17)** and you are balanced, simply add up. A raise to **4NT** is not a question about aces: it says "partner, bid six if you are at the top of your range".

Your points (balanced)	Bid	Why
10–15	3NT	game, but slam is unlikely (32 at most)
16–17	4NT	slam if partner has a maximum
18–21	6NT	33 or more even if partner is minimum
22 or more	7NT	37 or more

♠ A Q 5 ♥ K J 4 ♦ K J 8 3 ♣ Q 6 2	Partner opens 1NT. **16 points**: 31 to 33 between you. Bid **4NT**. Partner passes with 15, and bids **6NT** with 17 (or a good 16).

3. Blackwood: asking for aces

Once you have agreed a trump suit and know you have enough strength, a bid of **4NT** asks partner how many aces they hold. (This is a different 4NT from the one above: it is Blackwood when a suit has been agreed.)

Partner replies	Showing
5♣	no aces (or all four)
5♦	one ace
5♥	two aces
5♠	three aces

Add partner's aces to your own. If two are missing, sign off in **five** of your suit. If one is missing, bid the **small slam**. If none are missing and you are thinking of a grand slam, bid **5NT** to ask for kings in the same way (6♣ none, 6♦ one, and so on).

♠ K Q J 10 8 4 ♥ A 5 ♦ K Q 6 ♣ A 3	You open 1♠ and partner raises to **3♠** (10–12 points, four spades). With **19 points** and a fine suit, slam is likely: bid **4NT**. If partner replies 5♦ (one ace), you have three of the four: bid **6♠**. If partner replies 5♣ (no aces), two are missing: bid **5♠** and stop.

When not to use Blackwood. Aces are not everything. If you have two quick losers in a suit nobody has bid (say two small cards), finding out about aces will not tell you whether the opponents can cash two tricks there. With a void, the answer can mislead you too. Beginners do best to keep Blackwood for hands where the only worry is missing aces.

4. Summary

Situation	Bid
Balanced, 1NT opposite, 16–17	4NT (quantitative)
Balanced, 1NT opposite, 18–21	6NT
Suit agreed, enough strength	4NT (Blackwood) to count aces
Two aces missing	sign off in five
One ace missing	small slam
All aces held, grand possible	5NT for kings

5. Test yourself

1. ♠ K J 4
♥ A Q 6
♦ K Q 5
♣ J 8 7 3

2. ♠ A K 5
♥ K Q 4
♦ A J 6
♣ Q 7 3 2

3. ♠ A K Q 8 4
♥ K Q 6
♦ A 7 2
♣ K 5

4. ♠ K Q J 10 8 4
♥ A 5
♦ K Q 6
♣ A 3

5. ♠ Q 7 3
♥ K 8 4
♦ K J 5
♣ J 9 6 2

6. ♠ K Q J 7 4
♥ K Q 5
♦ K Q J
♣ Q 3

1, 2 and 5: Partner opens 1NT (15–17). What do you bid? 3: You open 1♠ and partner raises to 3♠. What now? 4 and 6: You open 1♠, partner raises to 3♠, you bid 4NT and partner replies **5**♦. What now?

Answers

1. 4NT. 16 points: 31 to 33 between you. Ask partner to bid six with a maximum.

2. 6NT. 19 points: at least 34 between you, and at most 36: not enough for a grand.

3. 4NT. 21 points opposite 10–12, with a spade fit: check for aces.

4. 6♠. You have two aces and partner one: only one is missing.

5. 3NT. 10 points: 25 to 27 between you. Game, but no slam.

6. 5♠. You have no aces and partner only one: two are missing, so stop in five.

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