

# What's Standard?

by David Lindop

This series is based on *Grant Standard*, a set of conventions and agreements that are in popular use today, such as 15-17 INT openings, five-card majors, and weak two-bids. A summary chart of *Grant Standard* and the corresponding convention card can be found at [www.AudreyGrant.com](http://www.AudreyGrant.com). The site also has *Grant Basic*, a simpler set of agreements.

Earlier articles in this series appeared in the *Bridge Bulletin* and can also be found under 'Articles' at [www.AudreyGrant.com](http://www.AudreyGrant.com).

To consider bidding slam, there are three requirements. We need enough combined strength to have a reasonable chance of making slam—about 33 or more points for small slam and 37 or more for a grand slam. We should have agreed WHERE we're going to play—in a suit or notrump. We should have enough controls—aces and kings, or singletons and voids.

It's this last requirement that gives rise to conventions like Blackwood and Gerber, so let's look at when we use them...and when we don't!

## Blackwood

After a suit has been agreed, a bid of 4NT asks how many aces partner holds. The responses are:

### RESPONDING TO BLACKWOOD (4NT)

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

Blackwood isn't intended to get us to good slams but to keep us out of bad ones. For example:

<b>WEST</b>	<b>EAST</b>
♠ Q 7	♠ K J 3
♥ A 9 8 2	♥ K Q J 7 5 4
♦ K Q 10 7 5	♦ 4
♣ Q 3	♣ A K J

## Slam Bidding — Part II

<b>WEST</b>	<b>NORTH</b>	<b>EAST</b>	<b>SOUTH</b>
1♦	Pass	1♥	Pass
2♥	Pass	4NT	Pass
5♦	Pass	5♥	All Pass

East's hand is worth about 20 points—18 high-card points plus 2 length points. When West opens the bidding, East already knows the partnership has enough combined strength to be in the slam zone. Once the heart fit is found, East also knows WHERE. Now it's time to make sure the defenders can't take the first two tricks. 4NT asks about aces and West's 5♦ response shows one. Knowing the partnership is missing two aces, East bids 5♥. A return to the agreed trump suit is a sign off and West is expected to Pass. East has assumed the captaincy and West accepts East's decision.

A bad slam is avoided and the partnership stops safely at the five level. If West's ♦K-Q had been the ♦A, the partnership would reach an excellent slam.

## Going for Grand Slam

If the response to 4NT shows that the partnership holds all the aces and we are interested in reaching a grand slam, a bid of 5NT asks for the number of kings partner holds.

### RESPONDING TO 5NT

6♠	3 kings
6♥	2 kings
6♦	1 king
6♣	0 or 4 kings

<b>WEST</b>	<b>EAST</b>
♠ A 10 7 3	♠ K Q 9 8 5
♥ K 4	♥ A 3
♦ K J 7 6 2	♦ A 4
♣ A 8	♣ K Q 7 3

<b>WEST</b>	<b>NORTH</b>	<b>EAST</b>	<b>SOUTH</b>
1♦	Pass	1♠	Pass
3♠	Pass	4NT	Pass
5♥	Pass	5NT	Pass
6♥	Pass	7♠	All Pass

West's 5♥ response shows two aces, so East knows the partnership has all of them. With enough strength to be interested in a grand slam, East continues with 5NT to ask about kings. West's 6♥ bid shows two, so East goes for the grand slam.

If West had shown only one king, East would have signed off in 6♥. If West held the ♦Q instead of the ♦K, a grand slam would be a risky spot.

There are a couple of important points to note about 5NT. **To ask about kings, we must always go through 4NT first.** If we hold all the aces, we know partner will respond 5♣, showing none, but that's okay. We can then bid 5NT. A jump to 5NT after the suit has been agreed would mean something else...more on that later.

**A bid of 5NT after 4NT implies that the partnership holds all the aces and we are interested in grand slam.** So, we shouldn't bid 5NT if we know the partnership is missing an ace. Partner is allowed to jump to a grand slam with extra values...and we don't want to be there missing an ace!

## Stopping in 5NT

Before using Blackwood, we should be prepared for any response partner might make. We don't want to get beyond a safe signoff in our trump suit at the five level if we find we are missing too many aces.

This is especially a danger when our trump suit is a minor. We can't sign off in 5NT since that would ask for kings! Consider these hands:

<b>WEST</b>	<b>EAST</b>
♠ K Q	♠ 7 4 2
♥ 4	♥ K Q 5
♦ A K Q	♦ 10 4
♣ K J 10 9 7 6 3	♣ A Q 8 4 2

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♣	Pass	3♣	Pass
4NT	Pass	5♦	Pass
?			

After East's invitational jump raise to 3♣, West can envision an easy slam if East has two aces. East's 5♦ response shows only one ace, however, and now West has a dilemma. West can't bid 6♣ since the opponents have two aces to take. West also can't bid 5NT since that would ask about kings and get the partnership even deeper into trouble.

Perhaps West should have anticipated this problem and settled for a safe 5♣. However, there is a way out. After the response to 4NT, **the bid of the cheapest suit at the five level that could not possibly be trumps asks partner to bid 5NT.**

Using this, the auction would go:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♣	Pass	3♣	Pass
4NT	Pass	5♦	Pass
5♥	Pass	5NT	All Pass

West's 5♥ bid is not a suggestion to play with that suit as trump since it has never been mentioned before. So, East dutifully bids 5NT and West can pass. The partnership stops in a makeable—if somewhat unexpected—contract.

## Responding With a Void

When the partnership has agreed on a trump suit, a void has a similar effect to an ace. It stops the opponents from taking the first trick in the suit. It may even be more valuable! So, if partner bids 4NT, should we count our void as an ace?

The answer is a resounding NO! To see why, let's see what happens if West counts an ace as a void in the following auction:

WEST	EAST
♠ J 8 7 3	♠ A K Q 6 4
♥ —	♥ A K Q 5 3
♦ A Q 7 6 5	♦ K 4
♣ K Q 7 3	♣ 5

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♦	Pass	1♠	Pass
3♠	Pass	4NT	Pass
5♥?	Pass	7♠	All Pass

Oops! The defenders can take the ♣A.

West has 13 high-card points but revalues the hand to count 5 dummy points when East responds 1♠. That puts the hand in the medium-strength category, enough for a jump raise. East wastes no time using Blackwood and, when West shows two aces, East assumes the partnership can make a grand slam.

The problem with showing a void as an ace is that it might duplicate an ace in partner's hand—as in this example. There are ways that a void can be shown in response to 4NT and this is a popular agreement:

### RESPONDING TO 4NT WITH A VOID

- With no aces and a void, bid 5♣. In other words, ignore the void.
- With one ace and a void lower-ranking than the trump suit, jump to the six level in the void.
- With one ace and a void higher-ranking than the trump suit, jump to the six level in the trump suit.
- With two aces and a void, respond 5NT.

With this agreement, West can jump to 6♥ in the above auction since hearts are lower-ranking than spades. This shows one ace and a void in hearts. East would know the partnership is missing an ace and settle for 6♠.

Here's another example:

WEST	EAST
♠ —	♠ K 8 5
♥ A 9 7 2	♥ K Q J 8 5 4 3
♦ Q J 3 2	♦ A K
♣ K Q 9 6 2	♣ A

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♣	Pass	1♥	Pass
3♥	Pass	4NT	Pass
6♥	Pass	7♥	All Pass

With one ace and a higher-ranking void than the trump suit, West jumps to 6♥ in response to Blackwood. West can't afford to jump to 6♠ since that might take the partnership beyond a safe contract if East isn't interested in the spade void. On the actual deal, East is pleased to hear that West has a spade void—the only suit higher-ranking than hearts—along with one ace, which must be the ♥A. East bids the grand slam.

If all of this sounds too complicated, ignore it. Simply forget about the void when responding to 4NT.

## When Not to Use Blackwood

**Blackwood tells us how many aces partner holds but not which aces. If it is important to know which ace(s) partner holds, don't use Blackwood.**

This typically occurs when we have a void or two or more low cards in a side suit. Consider these hands:

WEST	EAST
♠ K Q 8 7 5 3	♠ J 10 9 2
♥ —	♥ A K Q 3
♦ K Q 7	♦ J 8 3
♣ A K Q 3	♣ 4 2

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	Pass	3♠	Pass
4NT?	Pass	5♦	Pass
?			

When East shows one ace in response to Blackwood, West has a dilemma. If East has the ♦A or ♠A, slam is a good bet. If East has the ♥A—as in the actual case—slam can't be made if the defenders take their two aces.

West wouldn't be much better off if East showed two aces. If they are the ♠A and ♦A, the partnership can likely make a grand slam. If one of the aces is the ♥A, a grand slam would be out of the question.

If Blackwood is not the answer, what is? One approach is to simply guess. West could jump to 6♠ and hope that East has the right hand for small slam and the wrong hand for grand slam. This has the advantage that it doesn't give away too much information. If the defenders lead a heart against 6♠, West can discard three diamonds and make the slam.

**A more scientific approach is cuebidding.** Instead of asking for controls, we show—cuebid—one of our controls and partner cuebids in return. This is not easy for inexperienced partnerships but it does allow us to pinpoint specific aces and kings—and voids and singletons.

In the above situation, West could cuebid 4♣, showing the ♣A, and East would then cuebid 4♥, showing the ♥A but denying the ♦A. More about this in the next issue. ♠