

Fourth Suit Forcing

The Problem:

After 3 suits have been bid, it is sometimes difficult to create a game forcing auction. Suppose you are responder and the auction starts 1♦-1♥; 1♠:

- **Sometimes you don't know where you want to play.**
 - a. ♠x ♥AKJxx ♦KQxx ♣xxx - you know you belong in game, but where? ♦? ♥? NT?
What can you bid?
 - 3D can be passed and doesn't find out if you belong in hearts
 - 3H can be passed and implies a 6 card suit
 - 4D can be passed, bypasses 3N, & doesn't find out if you belong in hearts
 - b. ♠x ♥AJxxxx ♦AKJx ♣xx - you know you belong in game, but where? ♦? ♥? NT?
What can you bid?
 - 3D can be passed and doesn't find out if you belong in hearts
 - 3H can be passed
 - 4D can be passed, bypasses 3N, & doesn't find out if you belong in hearts
 - 4H might be the wrong spot
- **Sometimes you don't know at what level you want to play.**
♠A10xx ♥AQxx ♦AKx ♣xx - you know you belong in spades, but game or slam?
What can you bid?
 - 4S will probably be passed
 - You haven't agreed on a suit, so control bids aren't available

The Solution:

If the first 3 bids are all different suits, the 4th suit is artificial and game forcing (alert)

- Invented by Norman Squire, British bridge theorist prominent in 1940s-1970s (died 1991)
- Neither promises nor denies the fourth suit
 - Note that the 4th suit is rarely a viable contract (except when it's spades)
- FORCES GAME
 - Some people play this as only a 1 round force. I strongly suggest game force and this talk assumes that it is game forcing

It does NOT apply in any of the following situations:

- Responder is a passed hand
- Opener has reversed or jump shifted
- Opponent has interfered with the auction
 - If the interference is a low-level double, you can agree to play it on – discuss with partner
- You play 2/1 game force and responder made a 2/1 bid
 - It's no longer necessary in this case as you are already on a game force
- The specific auction 1♣-1♦; 1♥-1♠ is not 4th suit forcing (though it is a 1 round force)
 - Some people play 1♣-1♦; 1♥-1♠ as 4th suit forcing, but I strongly recommend against it
 - Want ability to bid 1♠ with ♠10xxx ♥xx ♦AKJxx ♣xx as opener can be 4-4-2-3, 4-4-1-4 or 4-4-0-5
 - ▶ Play 1♣-1♦; 1♥-2♠ as 4th suit forcing

When do you use it?

- When you have a game force, but are not sure about the right place to play the hand
- When you have a slam invitation and no other way to show that
- If you know where the contract belongs, just bid it – don't use a convention just because you play it!
 - ♠K10xx ♥AQxx ♦J10x ♣Ax
 - After 1♣-1♥; 1♠ just bid 4♠; After 1♦-1♥; 2♣ just bid 3N (partner doesn't have 4 spades)

I'm game forcing with 4 spades after 1♣-1♦; 1♥: When do I bid 1♠ and when do I bid 2♠?

- Bid 1♠ when you have no rebid problem (you know what to do after partner's next bid)
 - ♠ KQxx ♥Kx ♦AJxx ♣xxx : If partner doesn't support spades, you'll bid 3N (else 4♠)
- Bid 2♠ when you have a rebid problem (you're going to have trouble after partner's next bid)
 - ♠ KQxx ♥- ♦KJxxxx ♣Kx : If you bid 1♠ and partner bids 1N, how can you show concern about NT?
 - ♠ KQJx ♥- ♦AKxx ♣KJxxx : If you bid 1♠ and partner bids 1N, how can you show slam interest in ♣s?

When is it slam-invitational?

- When responder clearly knew all along which strain was right, but bid 4th suit forcing anyway
 - 1♦-1♥; 1♠-2♣; 2N-3♠ – clearly wanted to play spades (Why didn't s/he bid 4♠ instead of 2♣?)
 - Responder might be: ♠ A10xx ♥AQxx ♦AKx ♣xx
 - If opener is interested, (s)he should control bid (♠ KQxx ♥xx ♦Q10xxx ♣AK should bid 4♣)
 - If opener is not interested, (s)he should bid 4♠ (♠ Q9xx ♥x ♦QJxx ♣AQxx)
 - 1♦-1♥; 1♠-2♣; 2N-3♦ – Why didn't partner just settle for 3N after opener's 2N?
 - Responder might be: ♠ Kx ♥AQJx ♦KJxxx ♣Ax
 - 1♦-1♥; 1♠-2♣; (2♦/♥)-2N – clearly wanted to play NT (Why didn't (s)he just bid 3N instead of 2♣?)
 - Responder might be: ♠ Ax ♥KQxx ♦AQx ♣Kxxx
 - No problem if partner bid 2N instead...just bid 4N to show the slam invitation

Priority of opener's rebids after 4th suit forcing:

1. Show 3 card support for partner's suit if it is a major
 - 1♦-1♥; 1♠-2♣: Bid 2♥ with ♠AQxx ♥Qxx ♦KQxx ♣xx
 - Should almost never have 3 card support after rebidding a minor (see "avoiding a problem" below)
2. If 4th suit is a major, raise it if you have 4 of them. If it's a minor, choose between raise and 2N.
 - 1♣-1♦; 1♥-2♠: Bid 3♠ with ♠AQxx ♥KQxx ♦Kx ♣xxx
 - 1♦-1♥; 1♠-2♣: Bid 3♣ with ♠AQxx ♥x ♦Kxxx ♣Axxx
3. Bid 2N with a stopper in the 4th suit (3N after 1♥-1♠; 2♦-3♣) (no need to jump – you're on a game force)
 - ▶ Never bid NT without a stopper in the 4th suit
 - 1♦-1♥; 1♠-2♣: Bid 2N with ♠AQxx ♥xx ♦KQxx ♣Kxx
4. Make your most descriptive bid:
 - Show extra length in your first or second suit:
 - 1♦-1♥; 1♠-2♣: Bid 2♦ with: ♠ AKxx, ♥xx ♦KQxxxx ♣x
 - 1♥-1♠; 2♣-2♦: Bid 3♣ with: ♠x, ♥AKJxx ♦xx ♣KJxxx
 - Show support for responder's suit (if a major) with honor doubleton (*Responder Beware!*)
 - 1♦-1♥; 2♣-2♠: Bid 3♥ with ♠xx ♥Kx ♦KQxxx ♣KJxx

What if I really have the 4th suit, but not a game force?

- If you are invitational:
 - If you only have 4 of them, bid 2NT: After 1♦-1♥; 1♠: Bid 2N with ♠xx ♥QJxxx ♦Ax ♣Axxx
 - ▶ **Important note for opener:** If accepting game try, with 3 card support for responder's major, show this by bidding 3 of the major "on the way" to 3N.
 - Bid 3♥ with ♠AQxx ♥Kxx ♦KQxx ♣xx (this is game forcing & offers an alternative)
 - If you have 5-5, jump in your 2nd suit: After 1♦-1♥; 1♠: Bid 3♣ with ♠x ♥AJxxx ♦Qx ♣KJxxx
- If you are less than invitational – this problem is the same whether you play 4SF or not:
 - Bid 1N if available and reasonable: 1♦-1♥; 1♠: Bid 1N with ♠Jx ♥AJxxx ♦Qx ♣Jxxx
 - Rebid a 6+ card suit at the cheapest level: 1♦-1♥; 1♠: Bid 2♥ with ♠xx ♥AQxxxx ♦x ♣Jxxx
 - Correct to opener's 1st suit:
 - 1♦-1♥; 1♠: Bid 2♦ with ♠Qx, ♥KQxxx ♦xxx ♣xxx
 - 1♦-1♥; 2♣: Bid 2♦ with ♠Kxxx ♥Kxxx ♦xx ♣xx – Really ugly, but no choice
 - Pass with some support for opener's 2nd suit: 1♦-1♥; 1♠: Pass with ♠Kxx ♥Kxxx ♦xxx ♣xxx

Avoiding a problem:

- With any reasonable alternative, opener should generally not bid 2 of a new minor at his/her 2nd bid:
 - 1♦-1♥: Bid 1N (not 2♣) with ♠Kx ♥Kx ♦Axxxx ♣Kxxx
 - 1♦-1♥: Bid 2♥ (not 2♣) with ♠xx, ♥Kxx ♦Axxx ♣AKxx
 - 1♥-1♠: Bid 2♠ (not 2♦) with ♠Kxx ♥AQxxx ♦AJxx ♣x