Slam Bidding

What is Needed to Make Slam?

♦ Hand evaluation: Not covered in this lecture
  ▪ Suggest you use a combination of high card points and loser count to determine whether you should look for slam
♦ Fewer than 2 quick losers (i.e. losers you can’t get rid of)
♦ A way to win 12 (or 13) tricks (without losing 2 (or 1) tricks in the process)
  ▪ High cards
  ▪ Ruffing
  ▪ Long suit

♦ When should I bid NT with a known suit fit?
  ▪ When you don’t think you need ruffs to make the contract AND you either don’t have to lose a trick to set up your tricks or you are double stopped in all suits

♦ When should I bid a grand slam?
  ▪ When you can confidently count 13 tricks

Tools for Exploring for Slam:

Ace or Keycard asking bids

♦ See Leonard’s lecture notes in June, 2014 for list
  ▪ (RKC, Gerber, Exclusion, Minorwood, Kickback, Mini-RKC)

♦ Agreements necessary
  ▪ Initial responses
    ▪ E.g. for Roman Keycard: 3014 vs. 1430
    ▪ Void-showing (must be potentially useful void – usually not in partner’s bid side suit)
    ▪ Are responses the same for NT auctions (e.g. 1N-4C if you play Gerber)?
  ▪ Does K ask guarantee all key cards? (recommend yes)
    ▪ Do you respond number of kings or specific kings? (recommend specific – Hand A)
    ▪ Can you bid a grand slam over K ask if extra source of tricks? (recommend yes)
  ▪ For Roman-type responses, does Q ask guarantee all keycards? (recommend no)
    ▪ What do you skip for “next step” Q ask (agreed suit and maybe NT)
    ▪ Can you show the Q when you have extra length (but no Q)? (recommend yes)
  ▪ How do you handle interference (& does it differ based on level of interference)?
  ▪ For keycard responses: What is key suit if not obvious (recommend last bid suit)
When is “asking bid”, not really asking? For example, if you play Gerber:

- Usually only Gerber after a jump over NT or on pre-discussed specific auctions, such as:
  - Directly after a weak 2 bid
  - In Stayman auctions (1N-2C; 2x-4C) so 4N can be quantitative. If response is a major, suggest 4C be “keycard” Gerber (if you normally play keycard asks)
  - When it can’t be anything else (natural, splinter, etc.)

When should you use these bids?

- When the answer to the ace/keycard-asking question(s) tells you all you need to know to bid slam (Hand B)

When should you not use these bids?

- Generically, when you don’t know what to do after any possible response
  - When you have a side suit with 2 quick losers or worse (e.g. xx or Qxx) (Hand C)
    - Note: you can use RKC after your unprotected suit has been control bid
  - When the response can get you too high (e.g. you’re in hearts & 2 keycards + queen (5S response in standard RKC) is not enough for slam) (Hand D)
  - When you have a void (unless you are bidding Exclusion) (Hand E)

Control bids

Control card bidding (is often called cue bidding)

- Usually a control bid occurs when:
  - You are on a game force or accepting a game invitation
  - It is above 3 of your agreed major (new suits below that are usually game tries)
  - It is above 3N if your agreed suit is a minor (new suits below that are usually NT probes)
  - It is not a jump (jumps are usually splinters)
  - It is a bid in a suit showing a control in that suit
    - 1st round control is A or void
    - 2nd round control is K or singleton
    - You cannot control bid in trumps
    - A control bid in a suit in which you have previously splintered promises a void or a singleton A (i.e. a 1st round control)
  - Use when:
    - Ace or keycard asking bids are inappropriate (see above) (Hands C & E)
    - To keep the bidding low or find key control prior to possible keycard asking (Hand F)
      - Especially when you’re afraid to go past game if partner has no controls

Note: if partner starts control bidding, it is useful to think about why (s)he might be control bidding instead of asking for keycards (Hand G)
Agreements needed:
- Are you required to show a control (if you have one) in response to partner’s control bid or can you retreat to your suit with a minimum?
- Do you bid controls up the line (i.e. cheapest 1st so that skipping a suit denies a control in that suit (in the context of which controls you choose to show – see next bullet)
- What controls do you show?
  o 1st round controls only?
  o 1st round controls first & 2nd round controls only when first round control has been promised or denied? (recommend)
  o 1st or 2nd round controls up the line (regardless of whether 1st or 2nd)?
  o Does this answer change if the control is being bid by partner of a 2♣ opener?

“Courtesy” control bids (Hand H)
- If you are accepting a game try by partner, control bid on the way (at 4-level – 3-level is usually a “waffle”). This will help partner if the control is just what partner needs for exploring slam or the game-try is really trying to find out if it is worth exploring for slam.

Frivolous 3N or Serious 3N (one or the other) – advanced treatments
- Distinguishes between “courtesy” control bids and real slam tries
  - If it is “courtesy” you control bid in return only if you are interested in slam
  - If it is a real slam try, you must control bid in return if you have a control
- Downside: you cannot play 3N once you have a confirmed major suit fit
- Occur when you have an agreed upon major, 3N is available to bid & at least one hand is unlimited.
- How they work:
  - Assume auction goes: 1♠-2♥; 3♥- [3N or<”New” suit: suit other than hearts> or4♥]
  - If you play frivolous 3N:
    o 3N: I have no interest in slam, but I have a control to bid if you’re interested
    o “New” suit: I am interested in slam & have a control in this suit; bid your cheapest control if you have one
    o 4♥: I have no controls
  - If you play serious 3N:
    o 3N: I am interested in slam; bid your cheapest control if you have one
    o “New” suit: have no interest in slam, but I have a control in this suit
    o 4♥: I have no controls
♦ Last train – an advanced treatment
  - Invented by Jeff Meckstroth, named after Monkee’s song “Last Train to Clarksville”
  - Bridge World definition: “Any time there is only one call that indicates slam interest or further slam interest without raising the partnership’s level of commitment, it is a Last Train slam-try, unrelated to the strain named (unless followed by an uninvited further action).”
  - Translation: The bid directly below game in your agreed suit is a non-specific control bid or a mild slam try. It’s either a control in the suit bid or a control that you can’t show without bidding beyond game or just a mild slam try.
    • Example: 1♠ -4♦ (splinter); 4♥ (4♥ is a mild slam try with a control somewhere, not necessarily hearts)

**5-Level bid of an agreed major**

*When bid voluntarily (i.e. not just forced by competitive bidding):*

♦ If only 1 unbid suit in which a control has not already been shown, asks for 1st or 2nd round control in that suit
  - Example: 1♠ -4♦ (splinter); 4♥ (control)-4♠ (not interested); 5♠ (bid slam with 1st or 2nd round club control)

♦ If opponents have bid a suit in which a control has not already been shown, asks for 1st or 2nd round control in that suit
  - Example: 1♥ – (3♦) - 5♥ holding ♦x, ♥AK10x, ♠Jx, ♣AKJxxxx
    o Pass without 1st or 2nd round control of diamonds
    o Bid 6♥ with singleton diamond or protected K with no interest in NT
    o Bid 5N with a protected K to suggest 6N rather than 6♥
    o Bid 6♦ with 1st round control (A or void) to let partner know 7♥ is possible (obviously, if the suit is above 6 of your suit, you can’t do this)

♦ If none of the above applies, asks for good trump
  - Example: 1♥-2N (Jacoby); 3♣ (0 or 1♣); 4♥ (not interested)- 5♥ great hand, but my hearts are bad (say ♠--, ♥J9xxx, ♦AKQx, ♣AQxx). Go to slam with good hearts. *Note: RKC won’t help (void) nor will Exclusion (5♠ is too high) nor will control bidding as partner has no possible 1st round control other than spades (5♠) which doesn’t help and will commit us to slam.*
  - Example: 3♥- 5♥ (I have a monster outside of hearts, bid slam with 1-loser suit), say ♦A10xx, ♥x, ♠AKQx, ♣AKxx

♦ Beware: if your side has preempted & opponents have acted, this is a just a preempt – not an asking bid (e.g. (1♦)–3♥- (P)– 5♥ (you think they might have a spade fit, for example)
When neither a king-ask nor a signoff after a Gerber-type auction:

♦ **Quantitative:** When directly after a NT bid by partner: asks partner to go to 7N if at the top of the range, otherwise bid 6N (this is forcing to slam)
  - Pavlichek: *If you get these hands a lot, I recommend you play money bridge for big bucks*

♦ **Grand Slam Force (GSF) – extremely rare if you’re playing RKC**
  - Asks partner to bid a grand slam with 2 of the top 3 honors in the agreed or last bid suit
    - You can bid 7 of agreed or last bid suit or always bid 7♣ just in case partner needed to know about honors in that suit to bid a grand slam in another suit
  - Without 2 of the top 3 honors, the simplest option is to bid 6 of the agreed suit
  - A more complicated option without 2 of the top 3, depending on the room available below 6 of your suit:
    - 1st step: Q or at least 10 card fit
    - 2nd step: A or K
    - 3rd step: A or K and at least 10 card fit
  - Agreements needed:
    - Which steps get lost as you lose room
    - You can reverse the 1st and 2nd steps
  - Playing RKC, this is most useful when you only need to know about honors in the agreed suit and:
    - You have a void, but either don’t play Exclusion Blackwood or don’t want to bid Exclusion for some reason (usually because it’s too high)
    - You have cue bid above 4N (so RKC isn’t available)

♦ **Pick a slam – a modern treatment**

  *Note:* If you play both GSF and pick-a-slam, you need a clear agreement about when 5N is GSF and when it is pick-a-slam (recommend either a simple, unambiguous rule or drop GSF completely)

  - Most often used when you know you want to be in a **small** slam, but don’t know where
  - Can also be used when you have a known fit, but think there might be a better choice (either NT or a second suit fit)

  - Asks partner to bid a slam, in the best strain based on the choices available from the implications of the auction. You should usually respond with:
    - A suit of your own that is longer/stronger than already shown
    - Stronger support for a suit partner has bid than you have already shown
    - An unbid side suit of your own
    - NT if you are exceptionally NT oriented or NT is one of the clear choices
Your response to 5N may not be the “final” word. If you bid a new suit of your own, partner can correct without support for that suit (i.e. this is a negotiation, not a fiat)

Some examples (all assume the 5N bidder has enough strength to force slam):
- 2N-3♣ (stayman); 3♥-5N: I have 4 spades – bid 6♠ or 6N
- 1N-2♦ (transfer); 2♥-5N: I have 5 hearts – bid 6♥ or 6N
- 1N-2♣ (stayman); 2♦ (no major)-5N: I have at least one minor – bid 6 of your cheapest minor and I’ll pass or correct to 6N
- 1♣ - (5♣)-5N: I have a monster with both red suits
- 1♣ -1♠; 3♠ -3♦; 3N-4N: 5N: Bid 6♠ or 6N
- 1♦-2♣; 2N-5N: We might belong in 6♠ or 6♦ or 6N

4N

*When neither an ace/keycard-ask nor a signoff after a Gerber-type auction:*

- **Quantitative**: It is a quantitative slam invitation when directly after a NT bid by partner: asks partner to go to slam if at the top of the range (suggest you respond keycard if accepting – just in case you’re off 2 of them):
  - 1N-4N
  - 1♦-1♣; 1N-4N
  - 2N-3♣; 3♥-4N: I have 4 spades & a slam invitation
  - 1♥-2♦; 3♠ -3N; 4N

- **To Play**: It is to play when:
  - Original NT bidder retreats to 4N after suit bids by partner
    - 2N-3♣; 3♣ -4♦; 4N: I have no fit for you and am not interested in slam
  - No fit and you’re at the 4 level (usually happens when there is competition)
    - 1♣ - (3♥)-4♣ -(P); 4N
  - After a Gerber auction (e.g. 1N-4♣; 4x–4N)
    - Responder to Gerber should bid slam if using Roman responses & have the upper end (i.e. if you showed 1 or 4 and you actually have 4)

- **Takeout**: It is takeout when it cannot be natural based on the opponents’ bidding:
  - Asks partner to pick a minor (similar to an Unusual NT) or shows 2 places to play and asks partner to bid the lowest suit (s)he can tolerate *(need partnership agreements)*
    - (1♣)-P-(3♣ – game invitational)-4N
  - This is usually looking for a good sacrifice
Hand A: The argument for specific kings

♣ AQxxxx Partner opens 1♥: 1♥-1♠; 3♠ -4N (RKC); 5x (0-3 keycards)... At this point you know:
♥ Kx - Partner has: At least ♠Kxxx; at least ♥Axxx and the A♣
♦ AQJx - So your only possible loser is a diamond (10 spades with ♠AKQ, ♥AK, ♠A)
♦ x You want to bid 7N if partner has the ♠K so you ask for kings (5N)

If you play number of kings and partner shows 0 or 2, you know what to do (6S & 7N respectively), but if partner shows 1, you don’t know what to do...the ♠K is worthless to you, but the ♥K is golden.

If you play specific kings, you know exactly what to do (if response is ♠6, you can bid ♠6 to ask for ♥K).

Hand B: A perfect hand for Ace/Keycard asking

♣ x You open 1♥ and partner makes a 4-card limit raise in hearts (however you do that).
♥ AQJxx - All you need to know to place the contract at the proper level (5, 6 or 7) is how many
♦ KQJx keycards partner has; just bid 4N (note that 0 keycards is impossible – there are only 7
♠ KQx non-key HCP available)

Hand C: Unprotected suit

♠ AKxxxx You open 1♠: 1♠ -3N (3 spades, flat, GF)
♥ x - You are clearly in slam range
♦ AK109 - If you ask for keycards, you won’t know what to do if partner shows 1 keycard:
♣ xx If it’s the ♠A, slam is a good bet, but the ♥A you might have 2 club losers

Control bidding: after 3N, bid 4♥ then if partner bids:
- 4♥: Sign off in 4♠. Partner will get the message that you’re worried about clubs and
  continue with a club stopper.
- 4♠: Pass
- 5♠: You have good chances for slam – bid 6♠

Hand D: Response can get you too high

♠ AQ Partner opens 2♣: 2♣ -2♣ (GF); 2♥
♥ J10xx - You are clearly in slam range
♦ x - If you ask for keycards, and partner shows 2 with the Q (5♠), you are in trouble if
♣ KQxxxx partner has the ♥AKQ and neither minor ace.
Suggest that on this hand you bid 3♥ showing extras and let partner take control
Hand E: Void

- ♠ AKxxxx: You open 1♠: 3♠ – “3 card limit raise” (call it 3♠)
- ♥ KQJx: You are clearly in slam range
- ♦ Kxx: If you ask for keycards, and partner shows 1 or 2, you don’t know what to do. The ♦ A is mostly useless (it can provide a discard), but the red aces are valuable.

Control bidding: after 3♠, bid 4♣ (1st round control of clubs) then if partner bids:
- 4♠: Bid RKC (see note below): Bid 6♣ if 2 aces or 1 ace + ♣ Q, else sign off in 5♠
- 4♥: Bid RKC (see note below): Will show 1 ace; ask for ♠ Q: yes bid 6♠, no bid 5♠
- 4♦: Pass
- 5♣: This should be 2nd round control of clubs since you showed 1st round control.
  Bid 5♠. The ♦ K is useless.

**NOTE:** When you show 1st round control in clubs, if partner is looking at the ♦ A, he will know that you are void and NOT count the ♦ A in response to RKC. If he’s not looking at it, he certainly won’t count it, so the response to 4N will never include the worthless ♦ A. As responder, be aware of this and exclude the ace in partner’s void.

Hand F: Control bidding followed by RKC

- ♠ AKxxxx: You open 1♠: 3♣ (Limit)
- ♥ x: You are clearly in slam range
- ♦ xx: If you ask for keycards, and partner shows 1, you don’t know what to do. You want to be in 6 if partner has the ♦ A, but the ♥ A leaves you with 2 possible diamond losers.

Control bidding: after 3♠, bid 4♣ (1st round control of clubs) then if partner bids:
- 4♠: Bid 4N: if partner has both aces and the Q♠, bid 7♠
- 4♥: Bid 4♣ – partner will get the message and bid slam with a sure diamond stopper (♦ KQ) and maybe with just ♦ Kx if feeling brave (should be 50%)
- 4♦: Pass

Hand G: Hand 21 from Regional on Tuesday afternoon – control bidding

- ♠ AKxxxx: Paul opened 1♠: 3♣ (3 card limit):
- ♥ xx: Paul (the optimist) thinks: I’m worth a mild slam try. We have slam if partner has the perfect hand. With an unprotected suit, I have to bid controls.
- ♦ KJ9xx: Auction continued: 4♣- 4♥; 4♠-6♠ (he’s worried about hearts – I’m not!)
- ♣ A: I held: ♠ 109x, ♥ AK, ♦ Axx, ♣ 1098xx. The ♣ Q was onside…life is good.

Hand H: Courtesy control bid

- ♠ AQxx: Partner opens 1♣: 3♣-4♣ (I’m not interested in slam, but maybe partner is if my A fills a hole)
- ♥ Ax
- ♦ xxxx: Partner could have something like: ♠ Kxxx, ♥ x, ♦ KQJxxx, ♣ Axx

Hand I: Frivolous 3N

- ♠ Jx: Partner opens 1♠: 3♥ (GF): 3♥ (extras – unlimited) – 3N (no interest but a control)
- ♥ KQxxx: - Opener should control bid (or RKC) only if interested in exploring opposite a minimum.
- ♦ Axx: By contrast, if I instead of 3N would have shown a hand with slam interest and
- ♣ QJx: demanded a control bid from opener (if possible).