

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. 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.

When partner opens 1♥ or 1♠ and we have four-card or longer support and about 13 or more points, we know the partnership is headed for at least game in the major suit. The only consideration is whether the partnership belongs in slam. To help decide, it is often useful to discover how well the hands fit together.

One way we can do this is to use the Jacoby 2NT response (see *previous issue*). This essentially puts responder in charge. The 2NT response asks for a further description of opener's hand. Based on opener's rebid, responder decides whether to investigate slam or stop in game. Only with considerable extra values does opener overrule responder's decision.

A second approach is for responder to make a *splinter raise*. Using this convention, responder makes a descriptive bid and leaves opener in charge of deciding whether to pursue a slam contract.

The Splinter Raise

If the partnership agrees to use splinter raises after an opening bid of 1♥ or 1♠, then:

SPLINTER RESPONSE TO 1♥/1♠

A double jump in a new suit shows:

- four-card or longer support
- 13-16 dummy points
- A singleton or void in the suit

Splinter Raises

For example, suppose we are East and partner opens the bidding 1♥:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♥	Pass	?	

With this hand, we have four-card support for hearts and a hand worth 14 dummy points —11 high-card points plus 3 for the singleton spade. That's enough to want to be in game opposite partner's 1♥ opening. If we are playing splinter bids, we respond 3♠ to show the singleton spade. It will now be up to opener to decide whether to stop in 4♥ or look for slam.

We can use 3♠ as a splinter bid because we have other ways to show spades. With four or more spades, we can simply respond 1♠ since a new suit response is forcing. If the partnership uses strong jump shifts, we could jump to 2♠ to show a strong hand with spades. So, 3♠ is isn't needed to show spades. At one time, a double jump response was used as a preemptive bid, but most partnerships find it more valuable as a splinter bid.

With this hand, we could jump to 4♣ in response to partner's 1♥ opening. There are only 10 high-card points but the club void is worth 5 dummy points. Some partnerships prefer to avoid making a splinter bid with a void or a singleton ace, but that's a matter of style.

Hands that Don't Qualify

A splinter bid is useful but is quite specific and should only be used when it is the best description of the hand. It puts partner in charge of the auction, so we don't want to use it if that's not what we want. We'll always have some other option.

Consider the following hands for East after the auction begins:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	Pass	?	

With this hand, we have a singleton but we don't have the strength to commit the partnership to game. Instead, we can make a limit raise to 3♠, inviting opener to bid game. A splinter bid of 4♥ would invite opener to consider slam, not game.

This hand is worth about 18 points: 15 high-card points plus 3 dummy points for the singleton. If we were to make a splinter bid to 4♦, we would be uncomfortable if opener signed off in 4♠. We'd want to bid again, but now we might get too high. It would be better to take a different approach, perhaps starting with Jacoby 2NT to take charge and ask opener to describe the hand. Or we could simply start with a new suit response, 2♣.

This hand has about the right strength, but with all our values concentrated in the diamond suit, it's probably best to start by responding 2♦, showing our excellent source of tricks and planning to show the spade support next.

If the Opponents Interfere

Responder can make a splinter raise even if right-hand opponent makes an overcall. For example, suppose the auction begins like this:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	2♣	?	

North's 2♣ overcall doesn't prevent us from making a splinter jump to 4♥, showing a game-going hand in spades with a singleton heart. With a heart suit, we would simply respond 2♥.

With this hand, we would jump to 4♣ to show the spade fit and club shortage. This is only a single jump, but the message is clear. We could make a cuebid of 3♣ with a strong hand but no singleton in clubs.

Opener's Rebid After a Splinter Bid

When responder shows support for opener's major and a singleton or void, opener has the following options:

OPENER'S REBID AFTER A SPLINTER

With no interest in slam:

- sign off by bidding 4♥ or 4♠.

With interest in slam:

- Bid 4NT to check for key cards (aces and kings).
- Make a cuebid.

In deciding the likelihood of a slam, opener considers whether the partnership has *wasted values*. This is easier to see by looking at how the auction might go on various hands.

WEST	EAST
♠ K Q 9 7 5	♠ A 10 8 2
♥ 10 8 4	♥ A 6 5 3
♦ K Q 7	♦ 6
♣ A 4	♣ K 9 7 3

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	Pass	4♦	Pass
4♣	Pass	Pass	Pass

After West opens 1♠, East makes a splinter raise to 4♦, showing the spade support and diamond shortness. That's not good news for West. The ♦K and ♦Q are not likely to be of much use. East-West will have to lose a diamond trick despite West's 5 high-card points in the suit and East's singleton.

So, West simply signs off by bidding 4♠, returning to the agreed trump suit. East accepts opener's decision and passes. The partnership doesn't want to be any higher since West will likely lose two heart tricks and a diamond trick.

Now let's leave the West hand untouched and exchange East's hearts and diamonds.

WEST	EAST
♠ K Q 9 7 5	♠ A 10 8 2
♥ 10 8 4	♥ 6
♦ K Q 7	♦ A 6 5 3
♣ A 4	♣ K 9 7 3

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	Pass	4♥	Pass
4NT	Pass	5♥	Pass
6♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

The situation is quite different. None of West's high cards are wasted. Although the partnership has no high cards in hearts, there will only be one loser because West's remaining hearts can be trumped in dummy. West uses Blackwood to check for aces and bids the excellent slam.

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

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	Pass	4♣	Pass
4♦	Pass	4♥	Pass
4NT	Pass	5♥	Pass
5NT	Pass	6♦	Pass
7♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

When East shows a singleton club, West can consider a slam since the partnership should have no club losers. West shows interest in slam by making a cuebid of 4♦. East cooperates by making a cuebid in hearts. West now uses Blackwood to reach the excellent grand slam on only 25 high-card points.

Extended Splinters

Once the concept of splinter raises is understood, they can be extended into many other situations. For example, opener can make a splinter raise in support responder:

WEST	EAST
♠ A 9 7 5	♠ K Q 10 8 3
♥ A Q 4	♥ K 9 5
♦ A Q J 8 4	♦ K 7
♣ 7	♣ 9 6 5

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♦	Pass	1♠	Pass
4♣	Pass	4NT	Pass
5♠	Pass	6♠	Pass
Pass	Pass		

West opens 1♦ and East responds 1♠. With four-card support for spades, West can value the hand as

20 points—17 high-card points plus 3 dummy points for the singleton club. That's enough to put the partnership in game in spades.

West could simply jump to 4♠, but a more descriptive raise is available. A splinter raise of 4♣, shows the spade support, the strength to take the partnership to game, and a singleton or void in clubs. East can interpret 4♣ as a splinter raise because West would simply rebid 2♣ or jump shift to 3♣ to show a club suit after the 1♠ response.

East, knowing the partnership has no wasted values in clubs, checks for aces and bids 6♠. Only one club trick is lost since East's other two clubs can be trumped in the West hand.

A splinter raise can occur later in the auction:

WEST	EAST
♠ K J 9 6 3	♠ 10 4
♥ A J 8 5	♥ K Q 9 3
♦ Q J 5	♦ 6
♣ 4	♣ A K 8 5 4 2

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♥	Pass	4♦	Pass
4♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

West opens 1♠ and East responds 2♣. When West rebids 2♥, East knows the partnership has a heart fit and enough strength for game. East could simply raise to 4♥ but a more descriptive bid is a splinter raise to 4♦ showing heart support, shortness in diamonds, and interest in slam if West has the right cards. With wasted values in diamonds, West has no interest in going beyond game, so the partnership rests safely in game.

In this example, the splinter raise is a single jump, not a double jump. The partnership needs to be clear on the situations in which splinters apply.

Convention Card

If we do decide to use splinter raises (as recommended in Grant Standard), we check the appropriate box on the Convention Card.

Conv. Raise: 2NT <input type="checkbox"/> 3NT <input type="checkbox"/> Splinter <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Splinter raises can be a useful tool for slam bidding if used appropriately. ♦