

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. 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 a trump suit has been agreed and there is enough combined strength for a slam, the Blackwood convention can be used to check on the number of aces held by the partnership. We don't want to be in a slam contract missing two aces. When no trump suit has been agreed, a different approach is required.

Gerber

Suppose partner $\spadesuit 4$ opens 1NT (15-17) $\heartsuit K Q 7$ and we hold this $\diamondsuit K Q J 8 7 6 3$ hand. We have 18 $\clubsuit A 4$ points: 15 high-card points plus 3 length points for the seven-card suit. That puts us in the slam zone since the partnership has a combined total of at least 33 points (18 + 15). We know diamonds would be a suitable trump suit since partner must have at least two. The only thing stopping us from jumping right to $6\diamond$ is that we could be missing two aces.

We can't jump to 4NT to ask for aces because 4NT is not Blackwood after a natural notrump opening bid. It would be a quantitative—invitational—raise, which opener could pass. To get around this dilemma, we can use the Gerber convention. After a natural 1NT or 2NT bid, a jump to $4\clubsuit$ is artificial and asks how many aces partner holds. The responses are:

Slam Bidding — Part IV

REPLYING TO GERBER ($4\clubsuit$)

4NT 3 aces
 $4\spadesuit$ 2 aces
 $4\heartsuit$ 1 ace
 $4\diamond$ 0 or 4 aces

For example:

WEST		EAST	
\spadesuit K J 6		\spadesuit 4	
\heartsuit A J 10 5		\heartsuit K Q 7	
\diamondsuit 10 4		\diamondsuit K Q J 8 7 6 3	
\clubsuit K Q J 8		\clubsuit A 4	

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1NT	Pass	$4\clubsuit$	Pass
$4\heartsuit$	Pass	$5\diamond$	All Pass

East responds with $4\clubsuit$, Gerber, to the 1NT opening. West replies $4\heartsuit$ to show one ace. Knowing two aces are missing, East signs off safely in a game contract of $5\diamond$.

After the $4\heartsuit$ reply, East could have bid 4NT as a signoff bid. It would not be as safe a contract as $5\diamond$, since it might be defeated with a spade lead. The point is, however, that **4NT is a signoff after using Gerber.**

Suppose these are the two hands:

WEST		EAST	
\spadesuit A 10 6		\spadesuit 4	
\heartsuit A J 10 5		\heartsuit K Q 7	
\diamondsuit 10 4		\diamondsuit K Q J 8 7 6 3	
\clubsuit K Q J 8		\clubsuit A 4	

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1NT	Pass	$4\clubsuit$	Pass
$4\spadesuit$	Pass	$6\diamond$	All Pass

When West shows two aces with the $4\spadesuit$ reply, East can confidently bid $6\diamond$, knowing the defenders have only one ace to take.

If the reply to $4\clubsuit$ shows that the partnership holds all the aces and we are interested in a grand slam, a bid of $5\clubsuit$ now asks about kings:

REPLYING TO $5\clubsuit$

$6\clubsuit$ 3 kings
 $5NT$ 3 kings
 $5\spadesuit$ 2 kings
 $5\heartsuit$ 1 king
 $5\diamond$ 0 kings

Suppose these are the combined partnership hands:

WEST		EAST	
\spadesuit A K 6		\spadesuit 4	
\heartsuit A 10 5 2		\heartsuit K Q 7	
\diamondsuit A 4		\diamondsuit K Q J 8 7 6 3	
\clubsuit 10 8 7 3		\clubsuit A 4	

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1NT	Pass	$4\clubsuit$	Pass
4NT	Pass	$5\clubsuit$	Pass
$5\heartsuit$	Pass	7NT	All Pass

When West shows three aces and a king in response to Gerber, East can bid a grand slam. East might as well bid it in notrump since East can count thirteen tricks: one spade, three hearts, seven diamonds, a club, and whichever king opener holds—it doesn't matter whether opener has the $\spadesuit K$ or $\clubsuit K$.

Blackwood or Gerber?

On a given auction, *either Blackwood or Gerber will apply, but not both.* The partnership needs some general agreements on which convention applies in any situation. The usual agreements are the following:

BLACKWOOD OR GERBER?

- 4NT is Blackwood if the partnership has agreed (or implied agreement) on a trump suit.
- $4\clubsuit$ is Gerber if the last bid was a natural 1NT or 2NT.
- After Stayman or a Jacoby transfer bid, a jump to $4\clubsuit$ is Gerber and 4NT is quantitative.

Although this is straightforward in most situations, even experienced partnerships will sometimes have a misunderstanding. Let's look at some examples.

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

EAST
 ♠ A 5
 ♥ K Q J 6 5 2
 ♦ 4
 ♣ A K J 5

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	Pass	2♥	Pass
3♥	Pass	4NT	Pass
5♦	Pass	6♥	All Pass

Once the partnership has agreed on hearts as the trump suit, East's 4NT bid is clearly Blackwood. 4♣ by East would be a cuebid, not Gerber.

WEST
 ♠ J 8 7 3
 ♥ K Q 5 2
 ♦ A 9 7
 ♣ K Q

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

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1NT	Pass	4NT	Pass
Pass	Pass		

With no suit agreement, East's 4NT is quantitative—invitational—not Blackwood. West can pass.

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

EAST
 ♠ A K 9 2
 ♥ K Q J 9
 ♦ 4
 ♣ A Q J 4

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	Pass	4NT	Pass
5♣	Pass	5♠	All Pass

In this type of auction, the direct jump to 4NT implies that spades is the agreed trump suit. With interest in playing in another suit or notrump, East would start differently.

WEST
 ♠ A 7
 ♥ Q J 8
 ♦ K J 7 5
 ♣ A Q J 4

EAST
 ♠ K Q J 9 5 2
 ♥ 4
 ♦ A Q 4
 ♣ K 6 2

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♦	Pass	1♠	Pass
2NT	Pass	4♣	Pass
4♠	Pass	6♠	All Pass

East's jump to 4♣ over the natural 2NT rebid by West is Gerber since no suit has been agreed on—at least to West's knowledge. West's reply shows two aces and East knows that slam should have a play.

The situation after Stayman or a transfer bid in response to a 1NT opening bid is more confusing, so here are some examples.

WEST
 ♠ A 7
 ♥ K Q 10 5
 ♦ K 9 2
 ♣ A J 6 2

EAST
 ♠ K Q 8 5
 ♥ J 4
 ♦ A Q J 5
 ♣ K 9 3

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1NT	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♥	Pass	4NT	Pass
6NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

With 16 points, East wants to invite slam but starts with the Stayman convention to look for an eight-card spade fit. When West shows a four-card heart suit, East makes a natural invitation with a quantitative raise to 4NT. With a maximum, West accepts.

Many players would treat East's 4NT as Blackwood, agreeing hearts as trumps, although it is not actually the standard agreement. Nonetheless, it would be best to have discussed this with partner beforehand.

WEST
 ♠ 10 9 7 3
 ♥ K 7 3
 ♦ A Q 8
 ♣ A Q 6

EAST
 ♠ K Q J 5
 ♥ A J 8 3
 ♦ 2
 ♣ K J 7 4

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1NT	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♠	Pass	4♣	Pass
4♠	Pass	6♠	Pass

After East uncovers the spade fit using Stayman, East has enough—15 high-card points plus 3 dummy points—to consider slam. East's jump to 4♣ is Gerber. West's 4♠ shows two aces and East bids the small slam.

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

EAST
 ♠ A Q 5
 ♥ K J 8 7 4
 ♦ K J
 ♣ Q 6 2

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1NT	Pass	2♦	Pass
2♥	Pass	4NT	Pass
Pass	Pass		

With 16 high-card points and 1 point for the five-card heart suit, East has enough to invite opener to slam. First, however, East shows the five-card heart suit by making a 2♦ Jacoby transfer to hearts. After West bids 2♥, East makes the quantitative raise. West can pass or accept by bidding 6♥ or 6NT with a maximum.

Handling Interference

On distributional deals, the opponents may compete even when we are looking for slam. They may interfere over Blackwood or Gerber just to mess up our responses. So, we need to know what to do.

An opponent's bid takes away some of our bidding room but gives us the additional options of passing or doubling. This leads to a popular way of handling interference that can be remembered by the mnemonic DOP1:

DOP1 OVER INTERFERENCE	
Double	0 or 4 aces
Pass	1 ace
Cheapest bid	2 aces
Next cheapest bid	3 aces

WEST
 ♠ A K 8 6 5 3
 ♥ 4
 ♦ K 4
 ♣ A K J 6

EAST
 ♠ Q J 7 2
 ♥ J 8 3
 ♦ A Q 8 2
 ♣ 9 3

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	Pass	3♠	4♥
4NT	5♥	Pass	Pass
6♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

After West bids Blackwood, North interferes with 5♥, taking away East's standard reply of 5♦. Instead, East passes to show exactly one ace. West now knows to bid the slam.

If East doubled, showing no aces, West would know the partnership can't make a slam. West would have the option of signing off in 5♠ or passing and defending for penalty.

With two aces, East would make the cheapest bid over 5♥, 5♠. West could now decide whether to try for a grand slam.

The partnership can have additional agreements if the interference is at an even higher level or if the opponent doubles instead of bidding, but the important point is that it's not quite enough to say, "I play Blackwood and Gerber." We might want to discuss with partner how we handle voids, interference, signing off, and so on. That will leave us feeling much more comfortable using these "familiar" conventions. ♠