

Lesson 10 – Gerber Convention (4♣)

The Blackwood Convention is used to initiate and investigate slam possibilities when a suit contract has been agreed on. The Gerber Convention is used to bid to slam in a NT contract. Before investigating Slam possibilities, it should be determined that you and Partner hold at least 30 points or more. See Bidding Chart listed under the lessons in Step 1. Also review Blackwood, Lesson 9, if necessary. A good foundation in Blackwood will help when learning Gerber.

Small Slam = bidding to 6 level and taking 12 tricks

Grand Slam = bidding to 7 level and taking 13 tricks

Blackwood Convention is initiated by the bid of **4NT**.

Gerber Convention is initiated by the bid of **4♣**, with some qualifiers.

Important:

Many partners have an understanding that **4NT** is **always** Blackwood.

This was recommended in Lesson 9.

Some partners may have an agreement that **4♣** is always Gerber. However, this agreement should also stipulate that **4♣** is always Gerber **except** when clubs has been bid as a suit. (Here are some examples when a club bid does not mean the club suit: **2♣** opening bid; **2♣** response after 1NT opening or **3♣** response after 2NT opening, both meaning Stayman.)

Recommendation: Do not consider an opening bid of **1♣** to be a bid of a suit. It could be that the opener has just 3 clubs. If clubs are rebid at any time, then consider it a suit and do not use **4♣** to mean Gerber.

You and your partner should discuss and agree on this if you decide to use **4♣** as always Gerber, unless it has been bid as a suit.

Sometimes you may need to bid to **4♣** when you are looking for a NT contract, but are short in a suit so have decided against NT, but you have a long, strong club suit perhaps. A **4♣** bid in that case is inviting to game in **5♣**. If in doubt, use 4NT for Blackwood instead.

As you become more proficient at playing bridge, you will find there are many decisions to be made about bidding. If you have a regular partner, many of these bids are based on "partnership agreement." If you play with many different partners, you will likely encounter most of the common bridge conventions and it's helpful to know what they are. Also, it's helpful to know what the opponents are bidding.

Often, Gerber is initiated after a 1NT or 2NT opening bid. Then the jump to **4♣** is clear. It always means Gerber, in this case. There should be no difficulty in identifying Gerber when it happens this way. Some partners will agree that this is

the only way that 4♣ means Gerber. If you do not know how your partner will interpret your bid, you may misunderstand each other.

Usually, you can take 13 tricks if you have all the Aces and Kings, 12 tricks if you have all the Aces and Kings except one, and if you are missing two of them (i.e., two Aces, two Kings or one of each), you may be able to make only 11 tricks. This is also dependent on distribution (e.g. voids, singletons, long suits, etc.). With a void in one hand and the "magic" 9 trump together, sometimes Slam can be made with fewer than 30 HCP.

A bid of 4♣ initiates Gerber and is asking Partner for Aces. Once the process is started, precise answers are essential.

Partner responds according to how many Aces are in his/her hand. Just like Blackwood, the bids go up the line.

4♦ = 0 or all 4 Aces (1 bid higher up the rank from 4♣)

4♥ = 1 Ace

4♠ = 2 Aces

4NT = 3 Aces

If it is determined that an Ace is missing, usually the initiator will get out of Gerber and bid NT at the next lowest level possible. Remember, NT was the contract agreed upon before Gerber was started so Partner should know that a NT bid will end the bidding.

If it is determined that the partnership possesses all 4 Aces, then the initiator will continue by asking for Kings. That is, by bidding 5♣.

Partner will answer according to how many Kings he/she has:

5♦ = 0 or all 4 Kings

5♥ = 1 King

5♠ = 2 Kings

5NT = 3 Kings

From this answer, the initiator will bid NT again at the appropriate level. That is the signal to indicate a final bid.

Usually, with all Aces and all Kings, the contract will be **7NT**.

Usually, with the partnership missing one Ace or one King, the contract will end at the **6NT**.

Usually, with the partnership missing two Aces or two Kings or one of each, the contract should go no higher than the **5NT**.

Distribution (e.g., long suits, voids and singletons) is also an important factor. For example, one King could be missing, but if one partner has touching honors in other suits and can run one or two long suits, avoiding the suit where the King is missing, a Slam could still be possible.

Here is a sample bidding auction to show how Gerber is used:

Player	Bid	Explanation
North	2♣	North has 22+ pts
South	2♦	South has 11 pts, so initially answers 2♦ ("waiting" – indicating 3+ pts) South holds 2 Aces and 1 King.
North	2NT	North is showing 22-24 pts and a balanced hand
South	4♣	Gerber – asking for Aces (2♣ opening bid was a conventional bid, does not mean the club suit; therefore, 4♣ means Gerber – if both players in a partnership are not in this agreement, then problems will ensue)
North	4♠	North indicates 2 Aces (all 4 Aces are in the partnership)
South	5♣	Gerber – asking for Kings
North	5♠	North has 2 Kings (one King is missing)
South	6NT	With all 4 Aces and missing 1 King, 6NT should be makeable

And another one:

Player	Bid	Explanation
East	1NT	East has 15-17 pts.
West	4♣	West has 18 pts, no 4-card major and a balanced hand, with 2 Aces and 3 Kings
East	4♥	East has 1 Ace (one Ace is missing)
West	5♣	Even though 1 Ace is missing, West will ask for Kings since the contract can still end at 5NT if one King is also missing.
East	5♦	No Kings. (One Ace and one King are missing.)
West	5NT	This is a cut-off bid in NT.

Similar, but slightly different:

Player	Bid	Explanation
East	1NT	East has 15 pts.
West	4♣	West has 18 pts, no 4-card major and a balanced hand, with 2 Aces and 2 Kings
East	4♠	East indicates 2 Aces, so all Aces are in the partnership
West	5♣	Gerber, asking for Kings
East	5♥	East indicates 1 King, so they are missing 1 King
West	6NT	This is a good judgment, should make 12 tricks – nothing is guaranteed, as it also depends on distribution

Gerber is meant to be used to determine the level of a NT contract. Sometimes, however, it can be used to investigate Slam even when you and your partner have agreed to a suit contract. You can do this only if you have a partnership agreement where you both know that 4♣ means Gerber unless clubs was bid as a suit (ignoring a 1♣ opening bid if clubs was never bid a second time). If your partner may, for any reason, think that you actually meant to bid 4♣ as a club suit, then you cannot use it for Gerber.

(Also, be aware that the use of some other conventions may make it impossible to use 4♣ to initiate Gerber after a bid of a suit, but beginners are not likely to be using these more advanced conventions.)

Question: Why would you use Gerber instead of Blackwood for a suit contract?

Answer: Because it keeps the bidding at a lower level. You can investigate slam, but if it looks risky, you can revert back to the suit at a lower level.

Compare these two scenarios (no harm was done by exploring for slam):

Player	Bid	Explanation
North	1♠	19 HCPs – 3 Aces, no Kings, 3 Queens and a Jack
South	3♠	indicating 10-12 points and minimum 3-card spade support, probably 4 cards, could be using Dummy points to raise the bid, but maybe not
North	4♣	Gerber – asking for Aces
South	4♦	no Aces
North	4♠	missing 1 Ace, it's best not to ask for Kings; can now stop at game level (4♠) without bidding any higher

Compare it to the same game but using Blackwood (as you can see, this is risky):

Player	Bid	Explanation
North	1♠	19 HCPs – 3 Aces, no Kings, 3 Queens and a Jack
South	3♠	indicating 10-12 points and minimum 3-card spade support, probably 4 cards, could be using Dummy points to raise the bid, but maybe not
North	4NT	Blackwood – asking for Aces
South	5♣	no Aces
North	5♠	Missing 1 Ace; it's better not to ask for Kings; 5♠ is now the lowest bid in suit agreed on, which may be too high. With 29 points, they may make 11 tricks, but 4♠ is a safer contract, and there is no benefit to bidding 5♠ compared to 4♠, taking only 11 tricks, but if you can take only 10 tricks, 4♠ is much better!