

Slam Bidding – From A to Z

By Neil Kimelman

Slam bidding is an area that all players have problems with doing well. It isn't easy. It is more an art than a science, yet there are tons of guidelines, conventions and rules that will help you improve your game in this area.

So I am going to try and offer what I know, and have learned, from over 50 years of playing tournament bridge (wow, I am old!). This will be a series of articles, I predict at least six, which will start with most of the basics, and continue to higher level concepts, that may even be of benefit to expert level players.

I will tell you the traditional rules for slam bidding, and expand to some other excellent tools I use that are not generally not well covered in bridge literature, if at all.

I guarantee that all levels of players will be better off after reading this series. So off we go!!

Article 1 – Basic Slam Stuff

In Article 1 I will give an overview of the following basic slam information:

- a) Slam Bidding tools.
- b) When a bid is a slam try.
- c) Serious and non-serious slam tries.
- d) Traffic lights.
- e) If you know where you want to play, bid it.

a) Slam Bidding Tools.

There are a variety of tools to help you navigate the slam investigation waters. I will list them here, with a shorty description:

- I. Asking for Keycards (there are five, the 4 aces and the king of trumps).
- II. Asking for kings.

- III. Cue bidding.
- IV. Grand Slam Force.
- V. Forcing Pass.
- VI. Other specific bids, with specific meanings.

I. Asking for Keycards.

When we first start off we learn about the Blackwood Convention. This is a bid of 4NT by either partner. In response, the other partner will show how many aces.

Over the years this Convention has evolved and there are many, many variations. I will be devoting most, if not all of Article 2 (May 1st) on this subject.

II. Asking for Kings (and Queens).

The same principles applies to kings, as asking for Keycards, just one level higher. Not only can we ask for kings, but on some slam auctions you can actually ask for Queens!

III. Cue bidding.

Once a trump fit is established bidding a different suit is not¹ a natural bid showing length, but a call indicating either a 1st round (ace or void) or 2nd round (king or singleton) control in the suit bid.

1. This is standard, however, some partnerships may have chosen to use other treatments for news suits in this context.

IV. Grand Slam Force.

This is a bid, usually a jump to 5NT, asking which of the three trump honours, if any, partner holds.

V. Forcing Pass.

This is a system to combat opponent interference while conducting a slam investigation auction.

VI. Other specific bids, with specific meanings.

There are bids that are slam tries that have commonly accepted meanings, which are very specific. Here is an example: Let's say partner opens the bidding with five of a major. What does this bid mean?

Partner is showing a hand missing the ace and king in the (long) suit bid, but has no losers outside of that suit. If they had opened 5♠ a possible hand might be: ♠QJ109xxx ♥AK ♦- ♣AKQJ. Holding one of these honours you would bid 6♠ and with both (lucky partner!) bid seven. But 7♠, not 7NT!

b) When a bid a slam try.

A good definition is when you are in a game forcing auction, and have agreed on a denomination, any other bid, is at least, a mild slam try.

c) Serious and non-serious slam tries.

A bid below the game level tells partner I am not ashamed of my hand, and at least a bit interested in investigating slam. A bid above game, forces to the next level or is showing strong slam interest.

There is also a Convention with this name. If you have agreed a major below game, then 3NT shows a serious slam try, whereas any other call says I am not ashamed of my minimum type opening bid.

d) Traffic lights.

This is an important concept that I discussed in my previous books that can be a very helpful slam-decision making tool.



Red light when driving means stop! Do not go on! The same thing applies to some bridge auctions. The most common occurrence of a red light bid is 5♠ in this auction:

North	South
1♠	2♣ Game forcing.
2♠	3♠
4NT	5♣
5♠	

5♠ Says, partner we are off two key cards. No matter how good your hand, pass.

Yellow light



Yellow light can be described by all of the following statements:

- I have some interest in slam, but am ok if we stop in game.
- Or I think this all we can make, based on my hand and the previous bidding.
- I have a minimum for my bidding.
- I have wasted values.

Some Yellow light bids are:

- Bidding game after cue bidding.
- Jumping to game.
- Partner jumps to a small slam without using one of the above slam investigation tools.

Green light



I have a great hand I definitely am interested in investigating further. Green light bids include:

- Asking for Keycards.
- Asking for kings. We have all the other Keycards and I am inviting you to show your kings, or bid a grand slam with extra values, a long solid suit, or the like.
- Bidding a new suit at the six level.

I will be using these terms throughout this series of articles.

e) If you know where you want to play, bid it.

Tied to the previous paragraph, Jumping to a specific game contract is usually telling partner one or more of the following:

- I have a strong preference for this contract.
- I am giving you a choice of which game to play.
- Based on what I know at this time, I do not think my hand is worth a slam try.

In **Article 2** I will get into the details of the slam bidding tools that are available, how to use them, rate the value of each one, and provide some overall recommendations.