

# Control showing Cue Bids



Conventions such as 'Blackwood' or 'Roman Key-Card Blackwood' often unfortunately lead a partnership to bid too high before they have learnt that a slam is not a viable proposition, especially if the agreed suit is a minor. Or you may have a void suit and need to know which specific aces partner has - you don't need one in your void suit. Or you may have a small doubleton holding - you need at least a King or an Ace in any suit of two or more cards or you may lose two tricks off the top.

West	East
♠AKJ84	♠Q973
♥AKJ	♥Q10832
♦Q7	♦J8
♣KQ9	♣A6

**Hand 1**

West	East
♠AKJ84	♠Q973
♥AKJ	♥Q10832
♦Q7	♦A6
♣KQ9	♣J8

**Hand 2**

With hand 1 a small slam in a major goes off on a diamond lead.

With hand 2 a small slam is solid. The important question for West is which Ace East holds. If he holds the ♦A West can bid the slam.

West	East
♠AKJ84	♠Q973
♥AQJ	♥K10832
♦Q7	♦
♣KQ9	♣10876

**Hand 3**

West	East
♠AKJ84	♠Q973
♥AQJ	♥K10832
♦Q7	♦K876
♣KQ9	♣-

**Hand 4**

With hand 3 a small slam can be made. With hand 4 the slam fails on a diamond lead. It all depends on the location of East's void.

Cue-bidding for controls (Ace, King, void or singleton) is one answer to these problems.

You can also use cue bidding rather than Blackwood if the trump suit is a minor and a Blackwood response might go too high: For instance, if clubs are agreed as trumps, and you need 2 key cards from partner for slam, then a 5♦ reply showing only 1 key card is a disaster. In this example West uses RKCB (3014) and ends up in a slam with two aces missing:

<b>West</b>	<b>East</b>	<b>West</b>	<b>East</b>
♠ 3	♠ K Q J	1♣	3♣
♥ K Q 3	♥ 9 7	4NT	5♦
♦ A K Q	♦ 9 8 7 4	6♣	P
♣ K Q J 9 5 4	♣ A 9 7 2		

Cue bids aim to reveal control of suits outside trumps. To say that you have “control of a suit” means that the opponents are unable to cash two quick tricks in the suit.

- **First Round Control** = Ace or void
- **Second Round Control** = King or singleton

The first cue bid normally occurs at the 4-level. However, with hearts as trumps (e.g. 1♣ :2♥, 3♥...), 3♠ will be the first cue bid. Where a minor suit has been raised (e.g. 1♥, 2♣ :3♣...), bids at the 3-level are played as stoppers for 3NT, not as cue bids.

### Conditions for Cue bidding for slams

1. An 8 card trump suit has been explicitly agreed, by both players bidding it, or when it is implicitly agreed (e.g. via Jacoby 2NT, a splinter bid, or a jump bid in a major in response to partner’s opening 1NT.)
2. The initiator of the first cue bid has good reason to believe that a slam may be possible. If you don’t have a genuine interest in a slam you will mislead partner and he may bid on after you sign off below slam.
3. Once started, cue bidding cannot stop below game – the issue is game or slam.
4. A primary cue bid shows first round control of the suit bid. The first cue bid made is a primary cue. A new suit cue bid is a primary cue unless the ace or void of that suit has already been shown or denied.
5. Do not differentiate between an ace and a void.
6. With more than one primary cue available, bid the cheapest possible.
7. Bypassing a suit (except trumps) denies first round control of that suit.
8. A secondary cue shows second round control of the suit bid, i.e. either the king or a singleton. A cue bid is a secondary cue if it is:
  - a bid in a suit in which a primary cue has already been made, OR
  - a bid in a suit which the bidder previously bypassed to deny first round control.
9. Do not make a secondary cue if you can make a primary cue.

10. Do not differentiate between a king and a singleton when making a secondary cue bid.

11. With more than one secondary cue available, bid the cheapest possible.  
Bypassing an outside suit to make a secondary cue denies second round control in the suit bypassed.

12. Bidding the trump suit is a signoff invitation, showing concern about a possible missing control. Partner may continue cue bidding.

Revisiting an earlier example where RKCB was used to investigate a slam in clubs and the bidding got too high, we can now see how cue bidding would have avoided the disaster:

<b>West</b>	<b>East</b>	<b>West</b>	<b>East</b>	<b>West</b>	<b>East</b>
♠ 3	♠ K Q J	1♣	3♣	1♣	3♣
♥ K Q 3	♥ 9 7	4NT	5♦	3♦	4♣
♦ A K Q	♦ 9 8 7 4	6♣	P	4♦	5♣
♣ K Q J 9 5 4	♣ A 9 7 2			P	

The first bidding sequence uses RKCB. The second sequence uses cue bids. 3♦ is not a cue bid as the trump suit is a minor and the contract has not passed 3NT. It is showing a stop, which might be ♦KQ. 4♣ and 4♦ are primary controls in clubs and diamonds. East's 5♣ denies a first round control in hearts or spades, so West knows a slam is not there and passes.

<b>West</b>	<b>East</b>	<b>West</b>	<b>East</b>
♠ A K Q 8 6 5	♠ 9 4 3 2	2♣	2♦
♥ -	♥ 6 5 4 3 2	2♠	3♠
♦ K Q J 2	♦ A 7 4	4♣	4♦
♣ A Q 3	♣ 6	4♥	5♣
		7♠	P

4♣, 4♦ and 4♥ are primary cues, 5♣ is a secondary cue, as 4♣ was a primary cue. 7♠ with only 25 HCP!

<b>West</b>	<b>East</b>	<b>West</b>	<b>East</b>
♠ A K Q 8 6 5	♠ 9 4 3 2	2♣	2♦
♥ -	♥ 6 5 2	2♠	3♠
♦ K Q J 2	♦ A 7	4♣	4♦
♣ A Q 3	♣ 6 5 4 2	4♥	4♣
		6♣	P

4♣, 4♦ and 4♥ are primary cues, 4♣ (trump suit) denies the ability to make another cue, so, no ♣K, no club singleton. Therefore, 7♠ is too risky.

<b>West</b>	<b>East</b>	<b>West</b>	<b>East</b>
♠ J 6	♠ 2	1♥	2♦
♥ AK 9 7 2	♥ Q J 3	3♣	3♥
♦ K 2	♦ AQ 7 6 5 4	4♣	4♦
♣ AQ 6 5	♣ K J 9	5♦	6♥
		P	P

4♣ and 4♦ are primary cues, 4♣ denying 1st round spade controls. 5♦, a secondary cue, shows 2nd round control in diamonds and denies 2nd round control of spades and clubs (bypassing 4♣ and 5♣). East has control in spades and can thus bid 6♥.

<b>West</b>	<b>East</b>	<b>West</b>	<b>East</b>
♠ AK 8 6 5	♠ 9	1♠	2♣
♥ J 5	♥ Q 4 3	4♣	4♦
♦ 2	♦ AK 7 4	4♠	5♣
♣ AK 9 7 3	♣ Q J T 8 5	P	

4♦ and 4♠ are primary cues. East's 5♣ signoff in the trump suit says "I have no control in hearts." With a heart control he would have bid 5♥.

West's pass says "I have no control in hearts either."

<b>West</b>	<b>East</b>	<b>West</b>	<b>East</b>
♠ J 6	♠ AK 3 2	1♥	2♣
♥ AK 9 7 2	♥ 6	4♣	4♠
♦ 2	♦ Q 7 4	6♣	P
♣ AK 6 5 3	♣ Q J 9 8 2		

4♠ is a primary cue, showing slam interest and 1st round spade control and denying 1st round diamond control. 6♣ is a sign off, ruling out a grand slam as the ♦A is missing.