

Fourth Suit Forcing



When three suits have been bid by the partnership, and you think a game contract is likely but are still not sure of the denomination, bidding the fourth suit means:

"I can't put the contract into No Trumps because I do not have a good stop in the fourth suit. Have you got a stop?" or

"I'm uncertain as to where we are. Please describe your hand further."

As the above shows, a bid of the fourth suit says **nothing** about that suit. It doesn't necessarily mean that you don't have a stop on the suit.

The fourth suit at the two level shows at least the values for 2NT (11 HCP, or 7HCP if opener has reversed), and if bid at the 3-level it requires the values for 3NT (13 HCP, or 9 HCP if opener has reversed).

A bid of the fourth suit (4SF) at the 3-level is game forcing. A 4SF bid at the 2-level is forcing for one round, which means that partner must make a bid unless there is intervention. If partner responds at the 2 level, showing a weak opening hand (11-14 HCP), the 4SF bidder does not have to bid again. However if partner responds at the 3 level then the auction becomes game forcing.

In summary, after 4SF, any bid at the 3 level is game forcing.

The sequence 1♣ - 1♦ - 1♥ - 1♠ is natural., but forcing. To bid 4SF responder must bid 2♠.

Examples of reasons for bidding Fourth Suit Forcing:

East
♠ K J 10 5
♥ A 7
♦ A J 8 2
♣ 10 7 3

West	East
1♥	1♠
2♦	?

East has values for game. The most likely contract is 3NT but East is worried about clubs.

East
♠ A 7 5
♥ K Q 10 5 4
♦ Q 8
♣ K 9 4

West	East
1♦	1♥
2♣	?

East has values for game but the best contract might be 3NT or 4♥

East	West	East	East has a powerful hand (16 HCP) and a heart doubleton, and can envisage a possible diamond slam if West has a 5 th diamond. Bids of 3♦ or 4♦ are limit bids so not forcing – partner might pass!!
♠ A K 7 4	1♥	1♠	
♥ A 7	2♦	?	
♦ A J 8 2			
♣ 10 7 3			

Opener's options when replying to 4SF

- Bid No Trumps with a stopper in the bid suit
- Rebid his own second suit with 5 cards
- Rebid his first suit with 6 cards
- Bid partner's suit with 3 card support (partner may have five cards in his suit).

If none of the above opener has to find a bid so.....

- Bid responder's suit with a good doubleton, or..
- Bid own first suit with a good 5 card suit.

If the 4SF bid is at the 2-level, a weak opener (10-14 HCP) must rebid at the 2-Level. With 15 or more HCP opener has enough strength for game (4SF bidder has at least 10 HCP) so opener must show this by bidding at the 3 level, jumping if necessary.

Examples of Responses to Fourth Suit Forcing

West	West	East	3NT. West has 15 HCP opposite 10+ HCP and has a reasonable heart stopper because the opening lead will come round to declarer's ♥K.
♠ 7	1♦	1♠	
♥ K 7 6	2♣	2♥	
♦ A Q J 6 2	?		
♣ K Q 8 7			

West	West	East	2♠. Denies a heart stopper and shows delayed 3 card support, which may be useful if responder has five spades. It also shows a weak hand (11-14 HCP). It is forcing for one round. (With one more point West would have jumped to 3♠ which is game forcing.)
♠ J 7 5	1♦	1♠	
♥ 6	2♣	2♥	
♦ A Q J 6 2	?		
♣ K Q 8 7			

West	
♠	J 7
♥	6
♦	A K J 6 2
♣	K Q 8 7 2

West	East
1♦	1♠
2♣	2♥
?	

3♣. West has no heart stopper so cannot safely bid No Trumps. West does not have three card support for East's spades either. By repeating clubs West promises five clubs so is showing at least five diamonds as well. West is strong enough to bid at the 3 level (game forcing) to show his clubs. With a slightly weaker hand West would have had to bid 2NT.

West	
♠	Q 7
♥	6
♦	A Q J 8 6 2
♣	K Q 8 7

West	East
1♦	1♠
2♣	2♥
?	

3♦. West has no heart stopper, and no 3-card card support for East's spades, so rebids 3♦ (game forcing) to show her 6 card diamond suit and her 15+ HCP hand.

West	
♠	8 4
♥	K Q 10 9 3
♦	10 4
♣	A K 6 3

West	East
1♥	1♠
2♣	2♦
?	

2♥. Every now and again there is not an obvious response to 4SF. Here 2NT cannot safely be bid without a stop in diamonds. 3♣ would suggest 5-5 in hearts and clubs and 15+ HCP, and would be game forcing. Repeating hearts suggests six hearts which is not the case. Nevertheless 2♥ is the best option.