

Fourth-Suit Forcing

There are several articles here that are all saying basically the same thing. Each article will enhance your understanding of the bid.

Article 1 from www.bridgeguys.com

Mr. Norman Squire of England introduced this convention for the responder and his rebid. The bid by the responder of the only unbid suit at his second turn is a waiting move and promises nothing about the suit itself.

This bid has been popularly known as **Fourth-Suit Forcing**, but there is no bridge player who plays it as non-forcing, and therefore this term has become non-descriptive.

The question, which must be addressed by both partners in their partnership agreement, is whether or not the bid shows length and/or strength in the fourth suit. If the bid is used artificially, the responder usually has 2 or 3 losers in this fourth suit. In this case, the opener should not opt for No Trump unless he indeed has a stopper in this fourth suit.

An example can illustrate the principle:

South	West	North	East
1 ♣	Pass	1 ♦	Pass
1 ♥	Pass	1 ♠	

♠ 743
♥ A75
♦ AQJ3
♣ 954

Although North does not possess a 4-card Spade suit, playing the **Fourth Suit Bid** is forcing for one round only, and promises a minimum of 10-11 points. If, on the other hand, the **Fourth Suit Bid** is made on the Third Level, it is considered to be forcing to game. Both partners must agree on this method if they wish to use it.

Article 2

Convention Name: Fourth Suit Forcing

Convention Difficulty: Improvers

After you have made three natural suit bids, you very rarely wish to play in the fourth, so bidding the fourth suit is given a conventional meaning. It asks partner to describe his hand further, helping the bidder to pick the correct contract. It also avoids some hands that seem to be 'impossible' to bid.

Bids and Responses

Suppose you had:

♣A106

♦K7

♥532

♠A9543

After the bidding:

1D Pass 1S Pass

2C Pass ?

What do you bid? You want to make an encouraging bid, as you have 11HCP and could be in game. However, you do not have enough clubs to bid 3C, enough diamonds for 3D, enough spades for 3S or a heart stopper for 2NT. You seem to have no natural bid.

The problem is solved by bidding 2H, the fourth suit. It shows 10HCP at the 2-level and 13 at the 3-level, and denies an available natural bid, and asks opener to describe his hand better.

If he has a heart stop he bids 2NT or 3NT

With 3 spades, or a good doubleton, he bid 2S

With 5 clubs he bids 3C

With 6 diamonds, or a good 5 with no alternative, he bids 3D

With 15HCP and none of the above, he raises the Fourth Suit, a game-forcing bid

Notes

A modern idea is to play that in the auction 1C : 1D : 1H : 1S, 1S is a natural bid showing spades. To bid the 'fourth suit' in that auction, you bid 2S instead of 1S.

Article 3

Fourth Suit Forcing

SAYC is an "approach forcing" system. This means that it relies on Responder (to 1-level opening bids) finding largely natural, meaningful bids to sustain the auction for the first two rounds of the bidding. 2/1 GF is a "level forcing" system when Responder's 1st bid is a 2-over-1 (e.g. 1D-P-2C), but is an approach forcing system if Responder answers with ONE of a suit (e.g. 1D-P-1S). At the other end of the spectrum lies relay systems, where Responder uses artificial, meaningless bids (called "relays") to sustain the auction.

All approach forcing systems, including SAYC, rely on two fundamental rules of bidding:

1. A new suit bid by an unpassed Responder is usually forcing.
2. Bidding a suit previously bid by the pair is usually NOT.

Fourth Suit Forcing is an extension of Rule #1 above. However, Responder's bid of the 4th suit is usually artificial and does NOT promise length in the bid suit.

1D	P	1H	P	
1S	P	2C		- This DOESN'T promise Clubs.

The 4th Suit Force (2C in the above example) forces Opener to bid again, as any new suit would. Here, though, opinion divides: is it forcing for only 1 round or forcing to game? The STANDARD treatment is that the 4th suit bid is forcing for only ONE round. MANY people, however, play it as forcing TO GAME. Discuss this with any new partner.

"But what if Responder has a lot of cards in the 4th suit and a poorish hand?" you might ask.

S- xx	H- QJxx	D- x	C- QJ10xxx
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1NT does not look like an attractive rebid here after 1D-P-1H-P-1S-P. So what does Responder rebid if 2C is artificial and forcing? The answer depends upon whether you play a bid of the 4th suit as forcing TO GAME. If you do, you much JUMP to 3C, NON-FORCING, since 2C followed by 3C would, by definition, be a game force. If, however, you play that a bid of the 4th Suit is only a ONE ROUND force, you may rebid 2C (forcing) and then 3C (NOT forcing).

FAILURE to use the 4th suit as a force always LIMITS the Responding hand. If, over 1D:1H:1S Responder were to, say, jump in either major, this would be highly invitational but NOT forcing (as according to Rule #2 above). To FORCE, Responder would use the 4th Suit and THEN rebid the major.

1D 1H
1S 3S - NOT forcing.

1D 1H
1S 2C
2NT 3S - FORCING.

The same limitation holds true even if Responder subsequently leaps to game. The direct leap tends to DENY slam interest, while the SLOW approach (via the 4th suit force) SHOWS slam interest.

1D 1H
1S 3NT - 13-15 HCPs.

1D 1H
1S 2C
2D 3NT - 16-18 HCPs (else 3NT LAST time).

Remember: Direct Denies, Slow Shows. This, of course, is consistent with the Principle of Fast Arrival, which states that with a mediocre hand we tend to bid game quickly, while a slower, more patient route tends to show a better hand.

Fourth Suit Forcing

An article by Ed Sheldon for the Ace of Clubs (CUBC magazine)

Consider the following everyday sort of hand:

AQ973

J4

J62

K104

Partner opens 1H, you bid 1S, he rebids 2C, and it's your go.

No natural bid is attractive on this hand; bidding hearts or clubs commits you to what may well be the wrong denomination on inadequate support; bidding diamonds or spades overstates the suit quality; finally, no-trumps is unlikely to work well with such a flimsy diamond holding.

Acol textbooks of fifty years ago will tell you that the solution is to play a convention called Fourth Suit Forcing. In an uncontested auction, a bid of the fourth suit (diamonds in this case) shows this kind of hand - the values for 2NT (or better) but with only a half guard in the fourth suit (Q-x, J-x-x or similar). Opener was expected to bid what he thought he could make; typically 2NT or 3NT (according to strength) if he had help in diamonds, something else if he did not.

This works admirably on hands like the one above (or perhaps a bit stronger), but there were still problem hands in this are. How about:

AQ973

J4

762

KJ4

We have exactly the same problem as we had before, except that now we don't have a half-guard in diamonds. The practical solution is to bid 2D on this hand also. Getting to 3NT with delicate stops like J-x-x facing Q-x is less important than having a sensible way to bid hands like this one.

There are other hands when responder is going to be in difficulty at his second turn. Still on the auction 1H-1S-2C:

KQ1042

A7

A72
964

Here you have a guard in the fourth suit, but to bid 3NT now would be wrong. Either 4H or 4S could be a better contract, and if 3NT is right, it could well be better played from partner's side of the table (for example if partner has Q-x-x in diamonds). None of 2S, 3H or 3S are forcing in Acol, but in any case to commit to one major now would be too unilateral. What you want to do is consult partner, and a bid of 2D (fourth suit) does just that.

Once you accept the premise that the fourth suit doesn't promise anything other than some values, it becomes attractive to bid other hands this way. For example, on the auction 1H-1S-2C:

KQ1097

AJ

73

KJ82

It must be right to investigate clubs now, but 3C would not be forcing, and 4C eats up a lot of room, as well as taking the bidding past 3NT which may be the correct spot.

In fact, nearly all hands which are either too strong to make a non-forcing bid (other than those which can simply bid game) or unsure of the best denomination should bid the fourth suit.

Continuations after the fourth suit

Before we can define the requirements for a bid of the fourth suit, it is probably best to look at the continuations. First, I'll take 1H-1S-2C-2D, on the assumption that responder has a balanced 10+ or some kind of strong hand.

2H - This is what opener bids when he's stuck; although he may well have a sixth heart, this is not guaranteed; there is no alternative with:

97

KJ1097

Q3

AQ72

Since opener can have a hand like this, and responder could have a balanced eleven count, this sequence should be non-forcing. Since the non game forcing types for responder will have heart tolerance, anything other than 3H by responder now should be forcing. 3D is repeat fourth suit forcing, asking for more information.

2S - In principle, this shows spade support and a minimum, and is non-forcing. However, if you would raise spades with a minimum hand containing three spades (as most players would), then all you can have for this bid is a doubleton honour, something like:

K7

KJ432

J7

AJ72

Again, responder is assumed to be relatively well-prepared for this, and all bids other than 3S are game forcing.

2NT - This shows a diamond stop and a relatively minimum hand. Responder will usually bid 3NT now, but may bid a suit, game forcing.

3C - This shows the extra club, and is game forcing. It may or may not contain a diamond guard; although that's what partner is usually most interested in, other features of your hand may be more important, or your hand may be unsuitable for no-trump play:

72

KQJ108

A

AQJ107

This has a diamond guard, but 3NT doesn't express the character of the hand very well. You can always bid no-trumps later. Note that weaker 5/5 shapes (without enough to force to game) will have to bid 2H.

3D - There are two possibilities for this bid; either natural, catering for something like:

none

AQJ107

AJ72

KJ106

Or artificial, 'fifth suit forcing', catering for hands like:

K7

AQJ107

Q8

KQ62

(note that while 2H/S is an acceptable solution for weaker hands of this type, jumps to 3H/S should convey more specific messages).

One possible compromise is to play the raise as natural when it is a major and you could have a four-four fit in the suit, otherwise as artificial (so 1H-2C-2D-2S-3S is natural, but 1D-1H-2C-2S-3S is not). I prefer to keep things simple and play 'fifth suit forcing' in all sequences (besides, you may be able to get back to your fit in the fourth suit later, see below).

3H - As implied above, this should show a good heart suit and extra values, e.g.

72

AQJ1097

6

AKJ2

Clubs or spades may still become trumps.

3S - Since 2S would be non-forcing, and show only two spades, bid 3S on:

KQ2

AJ1076

2

KJ42

Spades are now agreed.

3NT - This shows a sound stop, and enough values to make the contract. It should be restricted to about the 15-17 range; stronger hands should describe their distribution with an eye to slam. It should be possible to play 3NT (or 4NT) if this is the right thing to do.

How far is fourth suit forcing?

When the fourth suit is 2D, the above structure works very well. If the fourth suit is at the three-level, though, in an auction like 1H-1S-2D-3C, opener will have to bid 3NT on a minimum with a club guard. Therefore, 3C should guarantee game-forcing values. The continuations follow similar lines to the above, with opener bidding out his shape.

Similarly, it is not practical for a fourth suit bid of 2S to show merely invitational values. When opener does not hold a stop, he will have to bid naturally at the three level with a minimum. This means that if opener has extras he must either make a non-forcing bid and hope, or bid the fifth suit, and convey no distributional information to his partner.

While it is probably playable for a fourth suit bid of 2H to be only invitational, with opener rebidding 2S on all minimum hands without a stop, I think it is clearly preferable to play this bid as game forcing. This offers the spin-off benefit mentioned above of being able to get into a four-four fit in the fourth suit: in an auction like 1D-1S-2C-2H-2NT, where opener has shown a heart stop (though not necessarily a minimum hand - the auction is game forcing), 3H by responder is natural and forcing, showing a four card holding.

Fourth suit at the one-level

This only occurs in the auction 1C-1D-1H-1S, and it is something of a special case. Many pairs play this sequence as natural, and use 2S as the artificial force. This is fine, but again, it is possible to get back to spades later if you start with an artificial 1S. I recommend 1S be played as artificial, with the following continuations:

1NT - Minimum balancedish with a spade stop. Now, 2S is invitational, forcing for a round with a four card suit. 2NT is invitational, all other bids are natural, game forcing.

2C/D/H - Natural, fairly minimum, non-forcing. All continuations are natural and game forcing (apart from 2S which is artificial, repeat fourth suit forcing).

2S - Natural, forcing for a round; a four card suit with extras. All continuations game forcing, except 2NT which is invitational.

2NT - Game forcing with a spade stop.

3C/D/H - Natural, game forcing. Now 3S is repeat fourth suit forcing.