

Splinter Bids

I. Controls plus Tricks can produce slam on less than 33 points

Point count is not very accurate with unbalanced hands that have a good fit. Tricks and controls, or controls with distribution and lots of trump are the hand types that make slam easily with less than 33 points. Here are the two hands from the chapter on slam bidding repeated to illustrate this point.

West	East	West	East
♠ AJ3	♠ KQ10987	♠ AJ987	♠ KQ1065
♥ KQJ1085	♥ A97	♥ 4	♥ A9854
♦ A3	♦ 965	♦ A7652	♦ 5
♣ 85	♣ 6	♣ A7	♣ 63

In the first example, slam is making on only 28 points. There are 17 points opposite 11. There are 13 tricks available, 6 spades, 6 hearts, and 1 diamond, while the opponents have only 1 trick, the ♠ A. There are plenty of tricks in hearts and spades and both minor suits are controlled. Diamonds are controlled on the first round by the ace and clubs on the second round by a singleton.

In the second example, slam is making on 28 points, 17 opposite 11. There are no quick losers and only 8 tricks on top, but a cross ruff will produce 12 tricks. Draw no trumps at all, take all 2 aces then ruff hearts in one hand and diamonds in the other. This produces 3 aces, 4 ruffs in each hand for 8 tricks and one round of trump for a total of 12 tricks.

II. With a Fit, Knowing About Shortness Can Help Diagnose a Good Slam on Less Points

When responder has four or more trumps and a singleton, then only three suits matter for slam plus the A of the singleton suit. Therefore you are working with a 34 point deck; 3 suits times 10 points in each, plus 4 for the Ace. If on a 40 point deck, 33 points are needed for a small slam; then on a 34 point deck, the math indicates that **28 points can be enough for slam.**

Look at the following two hands. In both cases, West has the same hand and East has a singleton. In fact East has the same hand in each but some of the suits are different. What do you notice? Would you like to be in slam on either of these hands?

West	East	West	East
♠ AJ1073	♠ KQ94	♠ AJ1073	♠ KQ94
♥ KQ3	♥ A97	♥ KQ3	♥ 4
♦ K2	♦ A7652	♦ K2	♦ A7652
♣ 873	♣ 6	♣ 873	♣ A52

Opener has 14 points, while both responders have 16 points. In fact the two responders have the same hand, except that the clubs and hearts are exchanged. In the first example, slam is cold. Opener just has to ruff 2 diamonds in dummy and then draw trump. In the second case, slam needs the opening lead of the A♥ or no club lead and the A♥ onside. A poor slam that you wouldn't want to be in. What is the difference between these hands?

The difference is that Opener has no wasted high cards opposite the singleton on the hand that makes a slam. The hand where slam is poor has a KQx opposite the singleton.

Wouldn't it be nice to know where partner's singleton is when they have a good raise to game in our suit with distribution? Read on.

III. The SPLINTER: A Double Jump Shift Shows a Raise to Game with this Singleton

The double jump shift is a bid we don't need to use for anything else. Strong hands of 17+ points can give a single jump shift. So we use the double jump shift in response to the opening bid of one of a suit to say "*Partner I have a singleton in this suit, with a good game going raise of your suit.*"

For example, responding 4♣ to your partner's 1♠ bid, would show a singleton club with 12 or more high card points outside of clubs. Two Aces and a King which is only 11 high card points, is an acceptable minimum.

Watch out for the auction 1♠ pass 4♥ . It sounds like a desire to play 4♥ , but it's actually a splinter bid in support of spades.

Exercise 1. Partner opens 1♥, make a bid with each of the following hands:

A.	B.	C.	D.	E.
♠ AK43	♠ K76	♠ A742	♠ 9	♠ 2
♥ J10987	♥ KQ54	♥ AK7	♥ QJ10765	♥ KJ9873
♦ 3	♥ K6532	♦ J9743	♦ K73	♦ 96
♣ K54	♣ 7	♣ J	♣ A87	♣ Q652
Pts _____				
Bid _____				

IV. FOR SLAM: OPENER NEEDS CONTROLS, GOOD TRUMPS, AND NO WASTAGE

To consider slam after your partner makes a splinter bid, you need a hand with at least 13 high cards in our new 34 point deck. In other words **count your points excluding the K, Q, and J of the suit that partner is short in.**

Another important consideration is **having controls** (Aces, Kings, and shortness). You don't want the opponents to take the first 2 tricks or to be able to make a lead which would set up a trick for their side once they got in with their Ace. It is also important to have good trumps. You may have to use dummy's high trumps for ruffing, so we need **good trumps** of our own to draw trump with later. Besides, you won't make slam if they have both an Ace and a trump trick.

Exercise 2. You open 1♥ and partner bids 3♠, your bid:

A.	B.	C.	D.	E.
♠ 543	♠ KQ6	♠ 987	♠ K84	♠ 876
♥ KQ10987	♥ KQ543	♥ AQ674	♥ Q10765	♥ AK987
♦ A2	♥ K65	♦ AK3	♦ AK	♦ AK98
♣ K5	♣ 75	♣ J9	♣ AK2	♣ 7
Pts outside_____				
Bid _____				

VI. What Other Auctions Include Splinters ?

This is a matter of partnership agreement. Clearly Opener can splinter over Responder's response and Responder can splinter on the second round. The rule of thumb is that as long as the double jump is available below game, it is a splinter. Here are some examples:

Opener	Responder	Opener	Responder
1♦	1♥	1♣	1♥
4♣		1♠	4♦

Also many people play that the double jump after a Jacoby transfer or Stayman is a splinter:

Opener	Responder	Opener	Responder
1NT	2♥	1NT	2♣
2♠	4♦	2♥	4♣

Watch out for this last auction, 4♣ is no longer Gerber when you play splinters!

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