

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, "Fourth Suit Forcing - FSF" promises partner that you will bid again unless he bids game, in which case you may pass.

The sequence 1♣ - 1♦ - 1♥ - 1♠ is natural. To bid FSF responder should bid 2♠.

Partner's priorities when replying

1. Bid responder's suit with 3 card support, or, if not...
2. Bid his own second suit with 5 cards, or, if not...
3. Bid his first suit with 6 cards, or, if not....
4. Bid No Trumps with a stopper in the bid suit, or, if not...

If none of the above you have to find a bid so.....

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

How 'forcing' is Fourth suit Forcing?

Although some partnerships play it as game-forcing, this description will explain the more flexible "one-round force" approach. This means that opener will again, but the 4SF bidder has not promised a rebid. If either partner bids at the 3-level then the auction becomes game forcing.

Examples of reasons for bidding Fourth Suit Forcing:

East	West	East
♠ K J 10 5	1♥	1♠
♥ A 7	2♦	3♣
♦ A J 8 2		
♣ 10 7 3		

East has values for game. The most likely contract is 3NT. He bids 3♣, asking West to further describe his hand, hoping West will bid 3NT to show a club stopper. If West does not do so then East will note West's bid and seek an alternative resting place.

East	West	East
♠ A 7 5	1♦	1♥
♥ K Q 10 5 4	2♣	2♠
♦ Q 8		
♣ K 9 4		

East has values for game and a stopper, but before bidding 3NT he can check to see if partner has 3 card heart support by bidding 2♠. If partner has three hearts she should bid 3♥ (delayed support). If not partner might bid 3NT herself if she has a spade stop.

East	West	East
♠ A K 7 4	1♥	1♠
♥ A 7	2♦	3♣
♦ A J 8 2		
♣ 10 7 3		

East has a powerful hand (16 HCP) and a heart doubleton, and can envisage a possible diamond slam if West is 5-5 in hearts and diamonds. A direct bid of 4♦ takes up a lot of room so East bids 3♣ (FSF) asking for more information. If West has five diamonds he should bid 4♦. If West bids 3♥ he is showing six hearts, in which case a heart slam may be on.

Responding to Fourth Suit Forcing

Opener's rebids are natural. However, the priorities are:

1. Showing 3-card support for partner's major
2. Rebidding a suit to show extra length
3. Bidding no-trumps with a stopper in the fourth suit
4. Raising the fourth suit with 4 cards in that suit (rare)

Examples of Responses to Fourth Suit Forcing

West	West	East
♠ 7	1♦	1♠
♥ K 7 6	2♣	2♥
♦ A Q J 6 2	?	
♣ K Q 8 7		

3NT. West has 15 HCP opposite 11+ HCP and has a reasonable heart stopper because the opening lead will come round to declarer's ♥K.

West	West	East
♠ J 7 5	1♦	1♠
♥ 6	2♣	2♥
♦ A Q J 6 2	?	
♣ K Q 8 7		

2♠. No heart stopper. West's 2♠ bid shows delayed 3 card support, which may be useful if responder has five spades.

West	West	East
♠ J 7	1♦	1♠
♥ 6	2♣	2♥
♦ A K J 6 2	3♣	
♣ K Q 8 7 2		

3♣. West has no heart stopper so cannot 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 five diamonds as well. 3♣, a suit at the 3-level, is game forcing.

West	West	East
♠ J 7	1♦	1♠
♥ 6	2♣	2♥
♦ A Q J 8 6 2	3♦	
♣ K Q 8 7		

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 suit.

West	West	East
♠ 8 4	1♥	1♠
♥ K Q 10 9 3	2♣	2♦
♦ 10 4	2♥	
♣ A K 6 3		

2♥. Every now and again there is not an obvious response to Fourth Suit Forcing. 2NT cannot be bid without a stop in diamonds. 3♣ would suggest 5-5 in hearts and clubs and would be game forcing. Repeating hearts promises six hearts. Nevertheless 2♥ is the best option.

Fourth Suit Forcing in other positions

We have so far focused on Fourth Suit Forcing used by the responder after opener has shown two suits, rebidding below the barrier. Fourth Suit Forcing can be used in any auction where *our side* has bid three suits and the Fourth Suit Forcing bidder has enough to force to game.

West	East	West	East
♠ Q 6 4	♠ A K 9 7	1♣	1♥
♥ A J	♥ Q 10 9 7 5 4	2♣	2♠
♦ Q 8	♦ 6 2	3♦ ⁽¹⁾	3♥ ⁽²⁾
♣ K Q 10 9 7 4	♣ A	4♥	

(1) Fourth Suit Forcing

(2) I have 5+ hearts. I may or may not have a diamond stop.

East's reverse shows 11+ HCP so West has enough strength for game and is able to bid 4SF at the 3 level.

With 12-13 HCP East would have had to bid 2NT.