

Five Instructive Themes (FIT)

2. Responding to One-of-a-Suit

(d) Fourth Suit Forcing

Say the first three partnership bids are in different suits. Because the only way to force the opener to bid again is to bid the fourth suit, it was soon realised that the bid could be made regardless of your holding in the suit. It has two related purposes.

(A) To extract more information from the opener. As in, "Partner, you've shown me (say) five hearts and four clubs. Tell me more."

(B) To set up a game-force — it is best to play that Fourth Suit Forcing can never be dropped below game (so it shows 12 or more points).

Addressing (A), information-gathering, opener should reply using the following priority order.

(1) Bid responder's suit with three cards (in a 5-4-3-1 shape).

(2) Bid their second suit with a fifth card (in a 5-5 — or 6-5 shape).

(3) Bid their first suit with a sixth card (in a 6-4 shape).

(4) Bid notrumps with a stopper in the fourth suit. Note, this is only the fourth priority — they should show extra shape if they can.

(5) Go back to responder's suit with a decent doubleton (in a 5-4-2-2 shape).

(6) Repeat their first suit with five cards — the last resort.

Exercise: The uncontested auction goes 1♦-1♥-1♠-2♣-? How should opener reply to 2♣ Fourth Suit Forcing with these?

♠ K9842 ♠ AJ75 ♠ AQ82 ♠ AK42
♥ - ♥ 2 ♥ Q2 ♥ 3
♦ AK8432 ♦ A9764 ♦ KJ872 ♦ KQ983
♣ 32 ♣ KJ3 ♣ 72 ♣ 732

With the first, they should bid

2♠. By showing their fifth spade, they must have six diamonds (with five-five, they'd have opened 1♠).

With the second, they should bid 2NT. This shows no extra shape but a stopper in the fourth suit.

With the third, they should go back to 2♥. While this may be priority one (4♠ 3♥ 5♦ 1♣), it is often priority five (4♠ 2♥ 5♦ 2♣).

With the fourth, all they can do is go back to 2♦, the last priority.

Dealer: South	♠ 74		
	♥ Q42		
	♦ AK632		
	♣ A72		
♠ 103		N	
♥ KJ109		W	E
♦ J8		S	
♣ QJ963			
	♠ AQ652		♠ KJ98
	♥ A8653		♥ 7
	♦ 5		♦ Q10974
	♣ 85		♣ K104

S	W	N	E
1♠ (1)	Pass	2♦	Pass
2♥	Pass	3♣ (2)	Pass
3♥ (3)	Pass	4♥	End

(1) Rule of 20 opener — opening the "high five".

(2) Fourth Suit Forcing, "We're going to game, more information please."

(3) "Partner, you thought I was 5♠ -4♥, actually I am 5♠ -5♥." (Priority two).

West led ♣Q v 4♥, declarer winning dummy's ♣A. Declarer hurriedly cashed ♦AK, dumping ♣8, then led ♠4 to ♠Q, the finesse successful. Declarer cashed ♠A, ruffed ♠2 (West throwing ♣3 — ruff no better), ruffed ♣2, ruffed ♠5 (West throwing ♣10), ruffed ♣7, and ruffed ♠6 with ♥Q. Declarer had garnered the first ten tricks and, with ♥A to come, that was game made plus one. andrew.robson@thetimes.co.uk