

Fourth Suit Forcing

We have encountered a few conventional bids so far in our bridge education (the most iconic of these is stayman: opposite a One No Trump opening, a Two Club response says nothing about Clubs but means “I have a four card major....do you?”). The downside of making a bid conventional is that you lose its natural meaning – once we agree to play stayman we are giving up our ability to bid Two Clubs naturally over a One No Trump opening bid.

A very common (and very useful!) convention that most bridge players eventually adopt is the rather straightforwardly named “Fourth Suit Forcing”, The agreement say that, if the opponents are silent and we are the only side bidding. Introducing the fourth suit is not natural, it says nothing about the suit bid and just says:

“We are going to bid game. We have to keep going until we are in a game contract. I don’t yet know what the right contract is, so please bid something sensible!”

Some Example auctions

Really the best way to learn Fourth Suit Forcing is just to see a few examples in action:

1C:1H	1S:2C	1S:2H	1C:1S	1H:1S
1S:2D*	2H:3D*	3C:3D*	2C:2H	2D:2S
			3C:3D*	3C*

Remember that usually responder knows what to do on their second bit. The most common time for fourth suit forcing to happen is on responder’s second bid but where they are *not* sure. (Although see the fourth and fifth examples)

When Might We Use Fourth Suit Forcing?

Imagine we hold the following. Our partner opens One Heart. We respond One Spade and our partner bids Two Clubs. (What do they have?.....12-15 HCP. 5+Hearts, 4+Clubs, 3-Spades. What should we bid next?)

♠ AKT4

♥ 92

♦ 872

♣ AJ84

Is game likely? (Yes) Which game? (.....?)

How do we respond to Fourth Suit Forcing?

Same auction. Imagine we have opened One Heart. Our partner responded One Spade and we rebid Two Clubs. Partner has now bid Two Diamonds which we know is fourth suit forcing. What would be bid next holding the following?

♠ 2

♥ AQT93

♦ KT9

♣ QJT2

♠ 54

♥ AJT93

♦ 32

♣ AKQ2

♠ Q2

♥ KJT92

♦ T3

♣ AQ32

Fourth Suit forcing is a very useful convention. We are giving up the ability to bid the fourth suit naturally. But the situation where you want it to be natural is very, very rare. It is a small price to pay for the ability to find the right game.