



Adventures in Bridge

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This Week in Bridge

(402) Gerber and 1430 Gerber

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Level: 4, 7 of 10 (1, 3 of 6)

Robert S. Todd

robert@advinbridge.com

General

We are interested in exploring bidding slam when our side has a lot of High Card Points (HCP) or a lot of potential tricks. But we need to avoid slam if we have two “likely losers”. Ace-asking bids are designed to keep us out of slam when we are missing two Aces. Gerber is our Ace-asking convention in notrump contracts. Here we look at how (and when) to use Gerber to explore slam. We will also examine an upgrade to traditional Gerber, called 1430 Gerber, and see how this is an even more flexible tool for helping us investigate slam.

Traditional Gerber

Gerber is our Ace-asking convention after notrump has been bid. “Asker” uses 4♣ to ask the notrump bidder, the “shower”, how many Aces they hold. Here is how it works:

Example

1NT 4♣

___?

- 4♦ 0 or 4 Aces (Partner has to figure it out from context.)
- 4♥ 1 Ace
- 4♠ 2 Aces
- 4NT 3 Aces



When is 4♣ Gerber?

With any convention, we must agree with partner when it applies and when it does not. Determining when 4♣ is Gerber requires some good partnership agreements. Partnerships need to agree whether they play “lots of Gerber” or a “little bit of Gerber” – meaning is 4♣ Gerber in lots of NT auctions or only in a select few situations. This is a partnership agreement and philosophic approach to how to tackle auctions that you have not discussed with your partner. It is our default agreement in NT auctions to assume 4♣ is Gerber unless otherwise agreed or to assume it is not Gerber unless it is specifically agreed upon.

Example Sequences where 4♣ is Gerber!

- 1NT 4♣ Gerber

- 1X 1Y
1NT 4♣ Gerber

- 2NT 4♣ Gerber

- 1X 1Y
2NT 4♣ Gerber

- 1X 2Y
2NT 4♣ Gerber

Most partnerships also play the following auction as Gerber:

- 1NT 2♣
2♦ 4♣ Gerber

There are more complex auctions where it is less clear whether these 4♣ bids are Gerber or something else. Many of these complexities arise with a 4♣ bid after partner has bid 3NT. In this case, the question of whether 4♣ is Gerber is generally a matter of partnership agreement. This 4♣ bid could have many different meanings - Gerber, a natural ♣ suit, a splinter, or a control-showing bid?



Advice for Making Gerber Rules (Partnership Agreements)

Examples of possible Gerber agreements:

- 4♣ is Gerber over First or Last NT
- 4♣ is Gerber over First or Last NT and Always a Jump
- 4♣ is Gerber over First or Last NT when not another specific meaning (Natural, Splinter, Cuebid)

This third option is an example of “a lot of Gerber” and basically makes 4♣ Gerber unless after a NT opening, unless we explicitly agree otherwise.

Here is an example of a reasonable, but more complex Gerber sequence.

Example

1♠ 2♥
3NT 4♣ Gerber?

If we choose to play “lots of Gerber” then we will play this sequence as Gerber, asking partner for their number of Aces. Otherwise, we may treat this 4♣ bid as natural and an effort to play something other than 3NT – often a slam.

This is not about what is “right or wrong”, the key to these situations is to come to an agreement about when 4♣ is Gerber and when it is something else -- make sure that we and partner do not have a misunderstanding in the bidding.



An Upgrade to Gerber -- 1430 Gerber

Level 4

1430 Gerber is a change in the answers to 4♣ Gerber. One nice advantage of changing to 1430 Gerber is that if we choose to use 1430 Gerber, we can continue to use whatever rules our partnership chooses for when 4♣ is Gerber and for when it has other meanings. We will just look at adjusting the responses to 4♣ Gerber bid.

Slam Bidding Options

When partner opens notrump and we are interested in slam with a balanced hand that has no 4-card Major, then we must decide whether to invite slam with a quantitative 4NT bid (a cooperative auction) or drive to slam by asking for Aces (a unilateral auction – we will bid slam if we are not missing 2 Aces).

- 1NT 4NT
- 1NT 4♣

Combining Both Methods

Instead of choosing between these two options (invite slam or ask for Aces) we would like to be able to do both at the same time. 1430 Gerber allows us to combine both slam investigation methods.

Here are our new 1430 Gerber answers to 4♣:

1NT 4♣

___?

- Step 1: 4♦ 1 or 4 Aces
- Step 2: 4♥ 3 or 0 Aces
- Step 3: 4♠ 2 Aces with a Min (declining Quantitative Bid)
- Step 4: 4NT 2 Aces with a Max (accepting Quantitative Bid)

For those of us who play 1430 Keycard Blackwood, the steps in 1430 Gerber are similar to those of 1430 Keycard Blackwood, with the concept of Max-Min replacing “with the Queen” or “without the Queen.”

Note: A good way to remember this is to think about “Quantitative” replacing the “Queen”.

Asking for Max or Min in 4♦ 1/4 or 4♥ 3/0 Auctions

If partner bids 4♦ (1 or 4 Aces) or 4♥ (3 or 0 Aces) then we can ask if they are maximum or minimum in a similar way as we ask for the Queen – we make the cheapest bid.

- If partner is a maximum, they do something forward going, like bid their cheapest King.
- If partner is a minimum, then they return to our suit, bid 4NT.



Conclusion

Many tools have been developed to help us bid slam. In notrump auctions we use Gerber as our tool for asking our partner for their number of Aces. One of the biggest problems with this convention is knowing when it applies and when it does not. But knowing partner's number of Aces is not always what we want to know in order to investigate slam. Knowing if partner "likes their hand" is also extremely valuable. 1430 Gerber is an upgrade to Gerber (similar to a way that Keycard is an upgrade to Blackwood) that allows us to better bid slam. Make sure you and partner have some good agreements about your Gerber steps and when they apply.