

# Fully Qualified, Forcing or Not Forcing

## Fourth Suit Forcing, Episode 6

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### PREREQUISITES

Please refer to my first article in this series, episode 1, for a consideration of bids that fully qualify the opener's hand. Refer to episode 2 for an in-depth discussion of the essential elements that indicate a Reverse bid by opener. Refer to Episode 3 for a simple and efficient method for responding to the Reverse. Refer to Episode 4 to consider the ramifications of the opener's Jump Shift. Episode 5 presents a treatment of Responder's Reverse. Since this is a series, each episode builds on the concepts and theory presented in previous articles. I may even use terms presented in those episodes.

Fourth Suit Forcing is an important component of any bidding system.

The only bids that force opener to speak again are bids in new suits (mostly). It follows that when the first three bids between the partners are in different suits, the only forcing bid left is a bid of the fourth suit. Such a bid does not necessarily show the suit—merely a game-going hand needing to know more about opener's hand.

It is essential that you remember that jumps by responder in a previously bid suit are NOT forcing. In modern bidding, each bid below game (on the second round by responder) is INVITATIONAL and NON-FORCING.

Opener    Responder

1♦        1♥

1♠        3♥

Opener    Responder

1♣        1♥

1♠        3♠

Opener    Responder

1♣        1♥

1♠        3♣

In each case, Responder is making an invitation. What if partner wants to force? Then, Responder bids the Fourth Suit at their 2nd turn to bid.

An example of 4th suit forcing. South is the dealer and opened 1 Heart:

<p>♠AK862 ♥73 ♦J85 ♣KQ5</p> <p>♠J7 ♥QJ86 ♦KQ632 ♣64</p>	<p>♠Q1094 ♥105 ♦A1074 ♣1032</p>
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<p>♠53 ♥AK942 ♦9 ♣AJ987</p>	
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The Bidding:

West	North	East	South
			1♥
Pass	1♠	Pass	2♣
Pass	2♦	Pass	3♣
Pass	5♣	Pass	Pass
Pass			

North's 2♦ bid was artificial and forcing, "fourth suit forcing," and South's 3♣ bid showed a fifth club, enabling North to bid 5♣. Since neither North nor South bid any level of No Trump, it is unlikely that either has a Diamond stopper. Since we are going to game, 5♣ is a reasonable place to be.

Fourth Suit Forcing is usually used by the responder to establish a game force. Some people play that this bid is forcing only for 1 round. I find this approach to be difficult and confusing. I prefer Fourth Suit Forcing to GAME. Therefore in the following auction:

Opener    Responder

1♦	1♥
2♣	2♠

2 Spades is the 4th suit. Responder is promising a game going hand and suggesting a 5-card Heart suit. If Responder has only a 4-card Heart suit, the bid tends to DENY a stopper in the fourth (Spade) suit. If responder has a game going hand with a Spade stopper AND five Hearts,

Responder can bid 3NT later. In this case responder bid 2 Spades (artificially) to set up a game force.

Opener	Responder
1♦	1♥
2♣	2♠

In the same auction, opener had denied 4 Spades. By rebidding 2 Clubs rather than 1NT, opener implies some exposure in one or both Major Suits.

Again, I recommend that the Fourth Suit is 100% forcing to Game. Therefore after:

Opener	Responder
1♥	1♠
2♣	2♦

Responder holds:

♠AQ432 ♥4 ♦Q32 ♣AKQ2

He bids 2♦ to set up a game force. This bid says nothing about Diamonds. It could be 432; it could be AKQ. It could be a singleton; it could be a five-card suit. If opener has the 4th suit stopped, she will usually bid notrump. Both players assume the 4th suit is unstopped until either player bids notrump.

After 4th suit forcing is used the opener bids naturally for his third bid. Opener should have a stopper in the 4th suit in order to bid notrump.

AN IMPORTANT EXCEPTION:

Opener	Responder
1♦	1♠
2♣	2♥

Most modern bridge players prefer this pattern to show a weak hand with 5 Spades and 4 Hearts. This pattern suggests a poor hand that will not play well in NT. Responder is suggesting that Opener pick one of Responder's major suits. I like this pattern because of its frequency. If Responder had a better hand, they might choose to bid an invitational 2NT, a jump in Hearts (forcing), or a game going 3NT.

In contrast, the following bidding by Responder is forcing to game.

Opener	Responder
1♦	1♥
2♣	2♠

Why? Because Opener has denied 4 Spades. Responder is not suggesting that the hand be played in Spades. Responder is forcing game and will wait with bait on their breath to see what Opener

does next. The 2♠ bid may be artificial. There has to be a reason the Responder did not bid 3NT. Perhaps responder is looking for a Minor suit slam and needs more knowledge of Opener's shape. The only strident point here is that 2♠ is 4th Suit Forcing to game.

Example hands for Opener following responder's 4th suit forcing bid, with responder holding:

♠K73 ♥AKJ96 ♦Q109 ♣93

Opener    Responder

1♦            1♥                            2♣    2♠

Opener's rebid holding:

♠A3 ♥9 ♦KQJ87 ♣A10763

Bid 2NT (Spade stopper)

♠Q75 ♥54 ♦KQJ8 ♣AJ74

Bid 2NT (Spade stopper)

♠53 ♥Q ♦AK765 ♣KQ1065

Bid 3♣ (Shows 5-5)

The responder usually makes the 4th suit forcing bid. It has to be the 4th bid of the auction.

Fourth suit forcing is typically not used after a 2/1 GF response. You are already on a game force. The 4th suit would be natural in that case. Opponents are passing.

Opener    Responder

1♠            2♦  
2♥            3♣ shows Clubs

Fourth-Suit is NATURAL and non-forcing by a passed hand. Opponents are passing.

Opener    Responder

P            1♥  
1♠            2♣

2♦ Shows length in Spades and Diamonds.

Fourth Suit forcing is alertable.

Stay tuned for the next episode which will focus on Top and Bottom cuebids. ♣