

## “Fourth Suit Forcing,” or Fourth Suit Artificial and Game-Forcing Dan Kroll

**The problem.** Let’s say you hold ♠A7 ♥KJ753 ♦KQ104 ♣95, and your partner opens 1♦. You respond 1♥ and partner rebids 1♠. You know partner has at least 4 diamonds and 4 spades and does not have 4 hearts, but you don’t know much else about her hand. How do you get more information, while making a forcing bid?

Without making an artificial bid (stay tuned!), there is no satisfactory natural bid with that hand. 2♥ would show 6+ hearts and 6-9 hcp (weak); 3♥ would show 6+ hearts and 10-12 points (invitational); 3♦ would show ♦ support and 10-12 points (invitational); and 3NT would show 13-15 hcp with the fourth suit (♣) stopped. None of these bids aptly describes your hand.

**The solution.** This is where the “fourth suit forcing” convention comes in. This is a convention where the bid of the fourth suit in an auction starting suit1-suit2-suit3 (e.g. 1♦-1♥-1♠-2♣\*) is artificial and game-forcing, showing strength for game and asking opener to describe her hand further. **When you have enough points to force game, and are not sure what the final contract should be, you can bid the fourth suit**, which is alerted. (If asked, explain it as “artificial and game-forcing.”) It is completely artificial; you might have xxx or even a void in the fourth suit. Its purpose is to establish a game-force and get more information from partner.

**What are the requirements for bidding the fourth suit?** Responder must have game-forcing values, i.e. 13+ hcp or equivalent playing strength. Responder should also have a hand that either can’t make a natural bid (like 3NT or 4 of opener’s or responder’s major) or needs more information to arrive at the right contract. For example, you might have: (1) 5 cards in your major and want to find out if partner has 3; or (2) no stopper in the fourth suit to play in NT; or (3) a slam interest.

**Examples.** (1) You hold: ♠AQ865 ♥7 ♦Q98 ♣AKQ4. Partner opens 1♥, you bid 1♠, and partner rebids 2♣. Start with an artificial 2♦\* to set a game-force. If opener shows 3 spades by bidding 2♠, you can bid 3♠ to set the suit and probe for slam. If opener bids something else, such as 2NT, you can bid 3♣ to show a club slam interest, knowing opener will not pass because we are in a game-force. (Or, if she does, you’ll have an amusing story to tell your new partner when you find one.)

(2) You hold: ♠AQ86 ♥K7 ♦987 ♣AJ74. Partner opens 1♥, you respond 1♠, and partner rebids 2♣. Bid 2♦\* to force game and get more information. You will find out if partner has a ♦ stopper for 3NT, because you cannot bid 3NT without one.

(3) You hold: ♠AQ1093 ♥AQJ97 ♦84 ♣8. After 1♦-1♠-2♣, bid 2♥\*, fourth suit forcing. You have enough points for game but don’t know if we should be in 4♠, 4♥ or 3NT. 2♥\* will get you more information and then you can bid the right game.

**What does opener rebid after the fourth suit?** Opener should make the most natural descriptive bid by showing something else about her hand as follows:

- (1) Bid responder's major to show 3-card support (having already denied 4);
- (2) Bid NT with the fourth suit stopped;
- (3) Rebid one of opener's own suits with extra length; or
- (4) Raise the fourth suit to show 4 cards in that suit but no stopper.

**Examples of opener's rebids:** In all the following examples the auction has gone:  
(2♥\* is an artificial game-force)

You	Pard
1♦	1♠
2♣	2♥*

1. You hold ♠8 ♥KJ5 ♦KQJ86 ♣A972. Bid 2NT. You do not have 3 spades and you have hearts (the fourth suit) stopped.
2. You hold ♠A87 ♥5 ♦KQJ86 ♣K972. Bid 2♠, showing 3-card ♠ support.
3. You hold ♠85 ♥3 ♦AK765 ♣KQ1053. Bid 3♣ to show 5-5. Always rebid your second (lower) suit when 5-5.
4. You hold ♠105 ♥J2 ♦KQJ75 ♣AQ82. Bid 3♦. You don't have 3 spades or a stopper in hearts (the fourth suit) or a fifth club, but you have an extra diamond.
5. You hold ♠6 ♥AJ65 ♦KQ87 ♣QJ105. Bid 2NT to show your ♥ stopper. Some people would bid 3♥ to show 4 of them but I think it's more important to show your stopper before the auction gets too high.
6. ♠6 ♥9765 ♦KQ87 ♣AQJ10. Bid 3♥. This shows 4 hearts but (usually) no stopper in hearts. I would not want to rebid 2NT without a real stopper, because partner might show up with something like ♠AKQ54 ♥8 ♦A72 ♣9843. It will be a bit embarrassing when the opponents take the first 5 or 6 heart tricks against 3NT when you could have made 5♣ or even 6♣ (if the ♣ finesse is working).

**What if responder has only invitational strength?** With only invitational strength (10-12 points), responder should not bid the fourth suit. Instead, responder can choose between 2NT or bidding a suit at the 3-level. Examples:

- ▶ ♠A87 ♥QJ42 ♦109 ♣KJ53. After 1♣-1♥-1♠, jump to 3♣, invitational.
- ▶ ♠A876 ♥QJ42 ♦109 ♣KJ5. After 1♦-1♥-1♠, jump to 3♠, invitational.
- ▶ ♠AQ10876 ♥972 ♦Q2 ♣K3. After 1♦-1♠-2♣, jump to 3♠, invitational.
- ▶ ♠Q93 ♥AQ1087 ♦QJ84 ♣8. After 1♣-1♥-1♠, jump to 2NT, invitational.
- ▶ ♠AQ1093 ♥AJ1097 ♦84 ♣8. After 1♦-1♠-2♣, jump to 3♥, 5-5 invitational.

### Quiz on Fourth Suit Forcing

1. ♠A87 ♥AJ42 ♦109 ♣KJ53. Pard opens 1♣, you bid 1♥, pard bids 1♠. You bid?
2. ♠A87 ♥AJ42 ♦109 ♣KJ53. Pard opens 1♦, you bid 1♥, pard bids 1♠. You bid?
3. ♠A876 ♥AJ42 ♦109 ♣KJ5. Pard opens 1♦, you bid 1♥, pard bids 1♠. You bid?
4. ♠A87 ♥AQJ42 ♦109 ♣QJ5. Pard opens 1♦, you bid 1♥, pard bids 1♠. You bid?
5. ♠AKJ1096 ♥972 ♦K2 ♣K3. Pard opens 1♦, you bid 1♠, pard bids 2♣. You bid?
6. ♠AKJ1096 ♥A72 ♦K2 ♣K3. Pard opens 1♦, you bid 1♠, pard bids 2♣. You bid?
7. ♠10876 ♥A72 ♦AKJ2 ♣AQ3. Pard opens 1♦, you bid 1♠, pard bids 2♣. You bid?

### Answers:

1. 2♦. Fourth suit forcing. Did you think I would give you a trick question on the first one? You have the values for game but no stopper in the fourth suit. You're hoping partner will bid 2NT, showing a ♦ stopper, which you will raise to 3NT. If partner rebids 2♥, showing 3 hearts, you will revert to 3♣ to show your ♣ support.
2. 3NT. Of course I am giving you a trick question on the second one. There is no need to bid fourth suit forcing when you have a good, natural bid available. Here, you have the fourth suit (♣) stopped and the values for game, so just bid 3NT.
3. 4♠. Another trick question. As with #2 above, you have the values for game and a good, natural bid available, so use it! A jump to 4♠ shows 13-15 support points with 4+ card support. Don't complicate matters by bidding the fourth suit.
4. 2♣. Fourth suit forcing. You could jump to 3NT because you have 13-15 hcp and the fourth suit stopped, but if partner has 3 hearts you want to play in your 5-3 major fit. Bid 2♣\* to find out. If partner does not bid 2♥, you intend to bid 3NT.
5. 4♠. No need to bid fourth suit when you have a natural bid available.
6. 2♥, fourth suit forcing. This time, you are too strong for 4♠, so start with the fourth suit. You intend to rebid your ♠ on your next bid, showing a slam interest.
7. 2♥, fourth suit forcing. You have a slam interest in ♦ and are too strong to bid 3NT or 3♦. Start with the fourth suit and then bid ♦ to show a slam interest.