

I. ACE-ASKING SEQUENCES

We use *Roman Key Card Blackwood*, *Gerber*, *Exclusion Roman Key Card Blackwood*, *Redwood*, and *Two-Suited Roman Key Card Blackwood* as well as *Control Asking Bids*, *Second Trump Asking Bids*, and *Second Support Asking Bids* to locate Aces.

If we have established a suit fit, then we can use 4NT as **Roman Keycard Blackwood**. A bid of 4♣ directly over a natural no trump bid, 1♣, or 2♦ is **Gerber**.¹ An opening bid of 4NT is traditional **Blackwood**.

A. When is 4NT not Blackwood?²

1. If partner's last bid was 1NT, 2NT, or 3NT, or if your last bid was 3NT, then 4NT is not Blackwood unless a major fit has been found.
2. If the sequence has been basically a no trump sequence—Stayman, Jacoby, or minor-suit Stayman without finding a fit—then 4NT is not Blackwood.
3. If partner has never bid or doubled, then 4NT is not Blackwood unless it is the opening bid or an overcall over 4♣ or 4♦ but not 4♥ or 4♠.

B. Contraindications for Blackwood:³

“A bridge player's skill is inversely proportional to the frequency in which he uses Blackwood.”⁴

1. Uncertainty about total strength as well as quick losers.
2. Uncertainty whether to play in a suit or in no trump.
3. Possession of a void or blank doubleton or worse.
4. The wrong answer will get us too high.

C. *Roman Keycard Responses*. We use 1430 responses only in hearts and only in response to 4NT. Otherwise, we play 3014.

1. 5♣ One or four keycards in hearts but three or zero in clubs, diamonds, or spades.

1. 4♦ Shows one ace.
 4♥ Shows two aces.
 4♠ Shows three aces.
 4NT Shows either four aces or none.

2. *Root & Pavlicek*, pp. 187–188.

3. *Root & Pavlicek*, pp. 188–189.

4. *Root & Pavlicek*, pp. 188–189.

2. 5♦ Zero or three keycards in hearts, but one or four in clubs, diamonds, or spades.
3. 5♥ Two keycards without the Queen of trumps.
4. 5♠ Two keycards with the Queen of trumps.
5. Many players use 5♥ and 5♠ to show five keycards. The ambiguity can be expensive. Moreover, is it reasonable to ask for aces without even one keycard?

If Partner signs off after 5♣ or 5♦, and we possess four or three keycards rather than one or none, then a further bid shows the King of that suit and the higher number of Aces.

D. Queen Ask.

If the answer to **RKB** does not locate the trump Queen, the cheapest bid other than trump asks for possession of the Queen. The answers are shown by steps.⁵

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| 1. | Step 1 | No trump Queen. 5NT will still ask for Kings. |
| 2. | Step 2 | Trump Queen but no side Kings. |
| 3. | Step 3 | Trump Queen with a side King. |
| 4. | Step 4 | Trump Queen with two side Kings. |
| 5. | Step 5 | Trump Queen with three side Kings. |

Possession of unexpected trump length can count as the Queen.

E. Showing a void.⁶

Six of a suit below the trump suit shows one keycard and a void in the suit bid. Six of the agreed trump suit shows one keycard and a void in a higher suit.

Five no trump shows two aces and a void. If the agreed trump suit is a major, then 6♣ asks for the void. Bidding the agreed trump suit in response to 6♣ puts the void in a higher suit.

With zero keycards, don't bother showing a void. With three keycards, the void may duplicate partner's ace. Bid 5♦ so that partner can continue his inquiries. In both instances, if partner signs off at five, the void may justify going further.

F. Signing Off in 5NT.

To sign off in 5NT, the asker should bid five of an unplayable suit that is not a queen ask.

5. *Kearse*, p. 891.

6. *Root & Pavlicek*, pp. 190–191.

G. Exclusion Blackwood.

If we have identified a major suit fit below game, a jump to the five level in a minor suit is exclusion Blackwood. It asks for the keycards outside the suit.

H. Redwood.

Redwood allows us to check for key cards without going past game in a minor suit, but we do not use it in auctions that begin with 1♣.

If we have a fit in clubs, an immediate jump to 4♦ is RKC for clubs. Here are some sample auctions.

If Opener starts with 2♣ and responder immediately jumps to 4♦, Responder sets clubs as trump and asks for keycards by steps 3014. Responder should have at least four clubs in case Opener has only five. Responder should also have a hand no worse than 5 LTC.

I. Minor Suits After Opening One Club.

We can also find a club or diamond fit following a strong club opening. Each of the following illustrates an ace-asking auction:

1♣-1♠	Opener has a strong club; Responder has an unlimited, balanced hand.
2♣-2NT	Opener asks for support in clubs; Responder has at least three clubs and at least 12 DP.
4♣	Opener asks for Key Cards in Clubs.
1♣-2♣	Opener has a strong club; Responder has something in the minors.
2♦-2♠	Opener asks for more information; Responder has at least six diamonds.
4♦	Opener asks for Key Cards in Diamonds.
1♣-2♣	Opener has a strong club; Responder has something in the minors.
2♦-3♦	Opener asks for more information; Responder has five diamonds and four clubs.
4♦	Opener asks for Key Cards in Diamonds.

Opener can also take a detour to check on controls in a side suit before getting too high.

1♣-2♣	Opener has a strong club; Responder has something in the minors.
2♦-2♥	Opener asks for more information; Responder has at least six clubs.
2♠-3♦	Opener makes a CAB in spades and Responder shows second round control.
4♣	Opener asks for Key Cards in Clubs.

J. Two-Suited Key Card Inquiries.

If Responder has shown a two-suited hand with a trick bid such as 1♣, 1♥; 1NT, 4♦ showing at least seven hearts and at least five diamonds, Opener's immediate 4NT is *Roman Keycard Blackwood*, but there are six key cards: the four aces and both kings in the two suits shown. Opener should have at least two of the six key cards and ideally three in order to avoid ambiguity. As elsewhere, if Responder has to

make an ambiguous bid—either 5♣ or 5♦—and Opener signs off in 5♥, then Responder should continue when holding the greater number of Key Cards. Opener can also use *Exclusion Blackwood* in the other minor or the other major.

Similarly, if Responder has shown both majors, e.g. 1♣, 1♥; 1NT, 2NT, showing five-five in the majors, Opener's 5♣ and 5♦ are *Exclusion Blackwood* and 4NT is *Roman Six Key Card Blackwood*. If Opener next asks for Kings, Responder's answers are 0, 1, 2.

K. Key Card Inquiries after an Unusual Positive.

We have a few situations in which a jump shift shows 4441. For example:

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| 1♣–3♦ | Opener has a strong club; Responder has 4414 with 14+ HCP. |
| 3♠–4♦ | Opener asks for Key Cards in Spades; Responder shows two Key Cards without the Queen of Spades. |