

SPLINTER-BIDS

When players are initially taught bridge, they basically only have one constructive method of raising partner's opening bid (major) to the game level – change the suit and then jump raise.

(Note 1♥ – 4♥ is not a constructive raise – the bidding should then stop).

So 1♥ – 2♦ – 2♥ – 4♥ allows opener to possibly investigate a slam with a suitable hand.

With more experience, players adopt different methods:

1. On balanced hands use Jacoby 2NT (some player still use the Baron 2NT).
2. **On unbalanced hands (i.e. containing a singleton or void) use a splinter bid.**

(The above two approaches have virtually replaced the more old-fashioned Swiss type bids, which primarily show a game raise and particular aces).

Consider this hand when partner's methods are limited to changing suit and then raising:

North a) ♠ AK7532
 ♥ KQ4
 ♦ 953
 ♣ 8

The bidding proceeds: 1♠ – 2♣ – 2♠ – 4♠ - ?

Your only sensible call is *'pass'*.

Now let's look at partner's possible hands (South)

b)	♠ Q986	c)	♠ Q986
	♥ AJ7		♥ AJ73
	♦ 84		♦ 8
	♣ AQ62		♣ AJ62

With hand (a) opposite (b) the limit of the contract is 4♠, but with hand (a) opposite (c) (which in hcp is actually weaker than x)) we want to be in 6♠.

The significant difference between the two hands is that c) contains a singleton (diamond).

Responder's Bid

A Splinter Bid enables responder (South) to tell opener (North) that he has a singleton (or void).

The bid has the following characteristics:

- Trump support (I suggest a minimum of xxxx (or possibly Qxx playing 5-card majors with suitable outside suit holdings).
- A singleton or void (see later what to do if the singleton is an honour).
- Game values (~ 11 hcp with a singleton and ~ 9 hcp with a void).

(all these requirements can be tuned with more experience).

So having identified that all the above are present, **a double jump in a suit** (obviously not the trump suit) **shows a singleton or void in that suit.**

It's usually bid in response to a major suit opening, but can also be used over a minor (for a slightly different reason).

(The bid is alertable).

So possible splinter sequences are, for example:

Over a major: 1♥ - 4♦; 1♠ - 4♣; 1♥ - 3♠; 1♠ - 4♥

- take care over this last sequence – it does not show a heart suit (some pairs do in fact use this to show a heart suit and have other methods to show the singleton heart – one I particularly like is 1♠ - 3NT to show a singleton heart, but only do this with experience and partnership agreement).
- you cannot use a 4♣ splinter if playing Gerber, so abandon Gerber.

Over a minor: 1♦ - 3♠; 1♣ - 3♥; 1♣ - 3♦; (1♦ - 4♣)

- playing a short club opening (e.g. 5-card majors), or possibly even better-minor (5-card majors) these bids should be avoided unless holding extra length in opener's suit – you need to guarantee the 8-card fit between the hands.
- take care with 1♦ - 4♣; this takes you past 3NT.

So in our example hand (c), responder would bid 4♦ showing his (spade) trump support and a singleton diamond (he would also bid 4♦ with a diamond void).

Opener's Rebid:

Whereas responder's bid is fairly prescriptive, opener's rebid requires some judgement. What opener has to consider is whether partner's singleton (or void) is of any use to him.

As a general rule, honour values (**except the ace**) in partner's splinter suit are often wasted. These should be discounted unless there are extra compensating values in the hand.

For example, KQ5, KJ7, Q92 are 'wasted' values opposite a singleton. In all three examples you only have at maximum one loser in the suit –and the honour cards are not 'pulling their notional weight'. The honour cards may as well be small cards.

.....whereas a holding of say 984 opposite a single has no wasted values (again, just one loser at most).

So, when holding wasted values opposite a singleton, sign-off in 4-major (unless there are compensating values in the other suits).

Conversely when holding non-wasted values, opener should consider slam investigation with better than a minimum opening. When first employing splinter bids I suggest that opener should just use some form of Blackwood enquiry (this also gives less information to opponents). With more experience opener himself can consider either further splinter or cue bids.

Returning to hand (c), after partner's 4♦ splinter bid, opener with about a 14 point hand (12 hcp + 2 for the singleton), and no wasted points in the diamond suit should bid 4NT to assess slam possibilities (opener is also thinking that partner has ~ 11+ points, so his values must predominantly lie in hearts and clubs). Blackwood confirms the necessary aces, so 6♠ can be bid with confidence.

Altering opener's hand slightly (with responder still having the original hand (c) - repeated for convenience):

d)	♠ AK7532	e)	♠ AK7532
	♥ KQ4		♥ Q94
	♦ 95		♦ K5
	♣ K8		♣ K8
	♠ Q986		♠ Q986
	♥ AJ73		♥ AJ73
	♦ 8		♦ 8
	♣ AJ62		♣ AJ62

After 1♠ - 4♦ - ?

- hand (d) is effectively the same as the original opening hand (a) opposite the original hand (c), and if partner has ♣A (which he has), again opener can confidently bid 4NT and then the slam.
- hand (e) is not the same as the original hand (a), now having **wasted values** in the diamond suit (and fewer compensating values in the other heart side-suit). So now opener settles for 4♠.

Further examples:

f)	♠ AK7532	g)	♠ A74	h)	♠ KQ105	i)	♠ A95	j)	♠ A95
	♥ 954		♥ KQ752		♥ KQ752		♥ KQ10		♥ K73
	♦ KQ4		♦ KQ105		♦ A74		♦ KJ64		♦ KJ64
	♣ 8		♣ 8		♣ 8		♣ K73		♣ KQ10
	♠ Q986		♠ 9		♠ 9		♠ K76		♠ K76
	♥ AJ73		♥ A983		♥ A983		♥ 9		♥ 9
	♦ 8		♦ 842		♦ 842		♦ A952		♦ A952
	♣ AJ62		♣ AKJ62		♣ AKJ62		♣ AJ862		♣ AJ862

- f) 1♠ - 4♦ - 4♠. North has a hand similar to the previous examples, but with the hearts and diamonds interchanged. Now the diamond suit (opposite the splinter), carries wasted values, effectively making the hand worth about 9 or 10 points - no chance of a slam.
- g) 1♥ - 3♠ - 4NT - 5♥ - 6♥ Over 1♥, 3♠ is the double jump splinter bid. North has a 16 point hand (14hcp + 2singleton), and the ♠A is not wasted - it is still a trick in itself, and the two small spades can be ruffed.
- h) 1♥ - 3♠ - 4♥ As (g) but with the spades and diamonds interchanged. Now the honour spade holding is wasted opposite the singleton, devaluing the hand to about 11 points.
- i) 1♦ - 3♥ - 3NT A splinter over a minor opening is normally used to help opener in deciding whether to bid no-trumps, when North's honour values in the splinter suit are not ruffable, but are not wasted for a no-trump contract.
- j) 1♦ - 3♥ - 4NT - 5♥ - 6♦whereas with the hearts and clubs interchanged, the heart holding opposite a singleton makes the hand unsuitable for no-trumps, and more suitable for a possible diamond suit slam (without the necessary aces in the South hand, 5♦ would be the limit).

k)	♠ KQ6 ♥ AKQJ73 ♦ - ♣ AQ94	l)	♠ KQ6 ♥ AKQJ73 ♦ 7 ♣ AQ98
	♠ A765 ♥ 9832 ♦ J862 ♣ 8		♠ 10765 ♥ 9832 ♦ A862 ♣ 8

k) 2♣ – 2♦ – 2♥ – 4♣ – 4♦ – 4♠ – 7♥ North opens a strong 2♣ (what else), and then shows his strong hearts. South can now splinter (agreeing hearts), and North's 4♦ invites partner to show anything more. He shows his ♠A (North knows it's the ace, since it can't be anything else), and that's sufficient for North to bid the grand slam.

l) 2♣ – 2♦ – 2♥ – 4♣ – 4♦ – 4♥ – 6♥ ...whereas without the ♠A, South settles for the game. North is content with the small slam.

What If A Singleton Honour?

The experts differ in this situation, but I would recommend treating any singleton honour other than the ace, as if it were a spot card, i.e. the hcp of the hand in total, is reduced by the value of the honour. With a singleton ace, I would treat as if a balanced hand (i.e. use Jacoby when more experienced). In the absence of Jacoby, change the suit and then raise.

m)	♠ AK7532 ♥ KQ4 ♦ 953 ♣ 8	n)	♠ AK7532 ♥ KQ4 ♦ 953 ♣ 8
	♠ Q986 ♥ AJ73 ♦ Q ♣ Q962		♠ Q986 ♥ AJ73 ♦ Q ♣ A962

m) 1♠ – 3♠ – 4♠ South doesn't have sufficient point for a splinter bid (11 – 2 = 9) – the bare ♦Q must be subtracted from the notional hcps.

n) 1♠ – 4♦ – 4NT – 5♥/♠ – 6♠ ...similar to (m), but with South having the ♣A instead of the ♣Q, this gives him two extra points – sufficient for a splinter (the singleton ♦Q does not add to the points total).

Splinters Bids By Opener

Opener can support partner's suit by double jumping in a new suit to show a singleton or void. He does this primarily to try to elicit more information from responder, with a view to reaching a slam. Don't use this un-necessarily, since all you do is give opponents more information. Responder should show any first or second round controls.

o)	♠ AJ52 ♥ AK954 ♦ AQ3 ♣ 7	p)	♠ AJ52 ♥ AK954 ♦ AQ3 ♣ 7
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♠ KQ742	♠ KQ742
♥ 7	♥ 7
♦ K65	♦ 965
♣ 9642	♣ K642

o) 1♥ - 1♠ - 4♣ - 4♦ - ...6♠ North wants to support responder's spade suit, and splinters in clubs. South shows his diamond control, and North knows that he will have at least 3 points in spades. Using RKCB, he can confirm that South has in fact both ♠K and ♠Q, sufficient for the slam.

p) 1♥ - 1♠ - 4♣ - 4♠ ...whereas without the diamond control, South settles for the game.

Splinters After Interference

If the interference bid does **not squeeze out** the possible splinter bid, then there is no change to the methods (interference bids bracketed).

e.g. 1♥ - (1♠) - 4♣ - splinter in clubs agreeing hearts
 1♦ - (1♥) - 3♠ - splinter in spades agreeing diamonds

If however the splinter is **squeezed out** ('displaced bid'), then in the particular suit, responder has one less bid available.

e.g. After 1♥ - (2♦) there are only two 'club' bids available (3♣ and 4♣), whereas without the interference there would be three available.

In these situations, there is no standard approach, but I suggest the following:

- If the opener has bid a major, then dispense with the 'strong jump-shift, weak, or Bergen raise.
i.e. **retain the splinter bid**
- If the opener has bid a minor, dispense with the splinter bid
i.e. **retain the strong jump-shift or weak bid**
(Bergen raises do not apply over a minor)

q) ♠ AQ7	r) ♠ AQ7	s) ♠ AK7
♥ AK954	♥ AK954	♥ AK954
♦ J5	♦ J5	♦ J5
♣ J83	♣ J83	♣ 874
(2♦)	(2♦)	(2♦)
♠ J65	♠ K1065	♠ J106
♥ J7	♥ QJ87	♥ 83
♦ K42	♦ KQ42	♦ 84
♣ AQ9652	♣ 6	♣ KJ9632

q) 1♥ - (2♦) - 3♣ ...3NT Despite the 2♦ interference squeezing out South, he makes his natural 3♣ response (he would have bid 2♣ without the interference)

r) 1♥ - (2♦) - 4♣ - 4♥ Again, despite the interference, South can still splinter in clubs

s) 1♥ - (2♦) - pass - dbl - 3♣ **Without** the interference South can bid 3♣ (if their system is that is a weak-jump-response), but **with the 2♦ interference**, South is squeezed out, and has to forego the 3♣ bid. After partner's double (extra values), he now bids 3♣.

Other Splinter Situations (with more experience)

1. Following a one no-trump opening bid and a transfer completion, responder can splinter (**single** jump bid) with a good 6-card suit to invite opener with a suitable hand (known as an auto- or self-splinter).
2. Following opener's 1NT rebid (15-17 points), a double jump from responder is a splinter together with a good original 6-card suit

t)	♠ KQ94 ♥ J102 ♦ 1095 ♣ AK64	u)	♠ K103 ♥ J64 ♦ KQ74 ♣ AK8	v)	♠ K103 ♥ KQ7 ♦ J974 ♣ AK8
	♥ AK9864 ♦ 8 ♣ Q73		♥ 9 ♦ A85 ♣ Q73		♥ 9 ♦ A85 ♣ Q73

- t) 1NT - 2♦ - 2♥ - 4♦ - 4NT 6♥ South's 4♦ is a splinter bid self-agreeing hearts (he knows partner has at least a doubleton having opened 1NT). North is happy to attempt the slam with reasonable heart support and no wasted values in diamonds.
- u) 1♦ - 1♠ - 1NT - 4♥ - 4NT 6♠ Opener with 16 points and no wasted values in hearts investigates the slam.
- v) 1♦ - 1♠ - 1NT - 4♥ - 4♠ (similar to (u) but interchanging hearts and diamonds in opener's hand)...whereas with wasted values in hearts, game is sufficient.

AFH