

Exclusion Blackwood

Basic Guidelines

Presented by Mike Savage

Traditionally when you have a void and are looking for slam, bidding Blackwood—asking for aces or controls—is considered not to be the best approach and cue bidding seems to be the only other option to find out about controls. However, wouldn't it be wonderful if you could ask for aces or controls and tell your partner not to count any in a certain suit (your void)?

Well there *is* a convention that does just that. It's an expensive one though, as the inquiry bid almost always starts at the 5-level! It's called *Exclusion* Blackwood—as you cue-bid the suit you want *excluded* from partner's answer to Blackwood. After trump agreement—usually shown, sometimes implied—a **jump shift to the 5-level (if hearts are trumps, to 4S) in a suit that can't be trumps is *Exclusion* Blackwood.** Some examples are: 1C-1S 3S-5D (*Exclusion* Blackwood with a diamond void; 1H-3H 4S (*Exclusion* Blackwood with a spade void); 2C-2D 3D-5C (*Exclusion* Blackwood with a club void), etc. It promises a good trump fit and a hand strong enough to play at the 5 or 6-level no matter what partner's response turns out to be.

Perhaps the most important thing about using *Exclusion* Blackwood is not to use it—unless you have discussed what bids are *Exclusion* Blackwood in your partnership. The simplest rules for deciding what is *Exclusion* Blackwood are those mentioned above—a jump shift to the five-level in a suit that can't be the trump suit on the auction or a jump shift to 4S if hearts are trumps. However some partnerships use *Exclusion* Blackwood over other sequences. Perhaps the most common is after a 1NT or 2NT opener, followed by a Texas Transfer to four of a major and then if responder bids a new suit (4S over hearts or any 5-level new suit), it's *Exclusion* Blackwood. Beyond these “common” instances of *Exclusion* Blackwood, much partnership discussion and agreement will be needed to decide on other instances. One instance that might bear discussion is: when is a second-round (or later) jump shift to the 4 or 5-level a splinter raise—and when is it *Exclusion* Blackwood? Only partnership discussion and agreement can answer this question. There are experts in dedicated partnerships that use *Exclusion* Blackwood in still other sequences—a few of which utilize altogether different responses.

What are the standard responses to *Exclusion* Blackwood? The easiest on memory would be to use whatever regular Blackwood structure your partnership plays—but it is highly recommended that you use either standard 0, 1, 2, 3, Blackwood responses or, my favorite, 0314 Roman Keycard Blackwood responses (1430 Roman Keycard responses are not recommended for *Exclusion*). Theoretically, it seems best that you use a version of Blackwood that has zero as its first step (either aces or controls—your choice). Since you are usually starting *Exclusion* Blackwood at a very high level, you need to be able to show 0 controls with the 1st step and 1 with the 2nd step.

Should you use queen-asking bids after partner's response to *Exclusion*? Sometimes you'll have a known 10+card fit; in others, you will have the queen. Playing queen-asking bids means you'll have to start king-asking one step higher. Some pairs never queen-ask after their partner's response to *Exclusion*, they only ask for specific kings. Others only ask for the queen if they can do so *below* trumps at the five-level and some insist on always using queen-asking bids, *regardless* of the level. It's a partnership choice. If not queen-asking, any non-trump suit bid after *Exclusion* is king-asking—asking for that specific king.

In dedicated partnerships, other instances of *Exclusion* are possible, especially with minor suit fits. However, if your partnership hasn't specifically agreed on an instance when *Exclusion* might apply, presume it's not *Exclusion* until discussed—as a misunderstanding could be catastrophic!