

FOURTH SUIT FORCING (FSF) by Maritha Pottenger

The **Fourth Suit Forcing** bid is usually made by Responder. It generally occurs on the second turn. Most partners play Fourth Suit Forcing to game. (Some play it forcing only one round.) It occurs when Responder bids the 4th suit—which was unbid previously—because Responder is not sure about the level or the strain (no trump or a suit) in which to play the hand.

Opener responds to the *fourth suit forcing* by (in prioritised order):

1. Raise Responder's first bid suit with 3-card support,
2. Bid notrump with stopper(s) in the fourth suit,
3. Raise the fourth suit with four cards in that suit (or 3 small if no other good options),
4. Make the most natural rebid possible, when none of the above apply..

Since the 4th suit is forcing, a jump rebid by Responder is ONLY invitational—NOT game forcing. So: after--1D-P-1H-P-1S-P-

A jump by Responder to 2NT, 3D, 3H, or 3S is **non-forcing**. Shows a good 10 to bad 12 HCP and 4 card diamond or spade support or six hearts when rebidding own suit. Conversely, if the auction goes: 1D-P-1H-P-1S-P-2C (Fourth Suit Forcing), then Responder has created a game-forcing auction. Rebidding diamonds, hearts, or spades (or 2NT) is further description and Opener canNOT pass until game is reached. A likely hand for Responder is: Kx AKJxx Q10x xxx

If the auction starts with 1C-P-1D-P-1H-P- most pairs play that **one spade is natural and 2S is artificial and Fourth Suit Forcing**. So, with xx AKx AKxxx Qxx, after partner opens 1C; you bid 1D and partner rebid 1H, your bid is TWO spades—fourth suit forcing to discover whether partner has a spade stopper for no trump. Or, you might end up in 5C or 5D or even a 4-3 heart fit.

Suppose you hold Kxx AKxxx J10x Ax. Partner opens 1D and you bid 1H. Partner bids 2C. Your next bid is 2S—Fourth Suit Forcing. If partner admits to 3-card heart support, you will play in hearts. If partner denies 3-card heart support and rebids a minor, you will bid 3NT with your spade stopper.

If you hold AQxxx xxx AJ Qxx and partner opens 1D; you bid 1S; partner bids 2C. What next? You rebid 2H—Fourth Suit Forcing. You cannot rebid spades—would promise 6; you cannot support either of partner's minors and you lack a heart stopper for no trump. Get partner's input!

Along with the modern principles of **fast arrival**, the Fourth Suit Forcing convention can be used to create a game force at a low-level and leave extra room to explore for slam. So, on the auction of:

1C-P-1H-P-1S-P-2D-P-2H-P-2S, **Responder is making a slam try with 4-card spade support.**

Responder's hand should look something like: Kxxx AKxx Ax Qxx with extra values and possible interest in slam. With a bare minimum game force hand (such as Kxxx AKxx xx Kxx), Responder would jump to 4S—fast arrival—denying any slam interest.

Additional Agreements with Fourth Suit Forcing:

1. Fourth Suit Forcing is generally NOT used when the opponents are in the auction. Cue bids can be used to force the bidding in those circumstances.
2. Fourth Suit Forcing is not necessary when someone has opened 2C (strong) or when Opener has made a reverse. You are already in a forcing auction.
3. A jump in the 4th suit shows a 5-5 hand and is strongly invitational. So, if partner opens 1D and you bid 1H and partner bids 1S, you could jump to 3C with: x KQJxx xx AJ10xx

Most people say that FSF is not needed in a 2 over 1 game force auction. However, Responder might occasionally bid FSF on a 3-card suit in order to get more information about Opener's distribution.