

Splinter bids.

Slam hands that depend on *fit* (as distinct from those where twelve tricks are available by sheer weight of high cards) are identified by good bidding. The problem of the old fashioned methods of cue bidding is that cue-bids don't define *shape*. To help identify well-fitting hands it is more efficient to play, say, 1♠ – 4♣ as a Spade fit with a Club shortage rather than just as a cue-bid.

In modern methods a splinter bid (a double jump in any suit) shows four-card trump support and a shortage in the bid suit. Note that (see Hand 5 in the previous examples) 1♠ – 4♥ *is* a splinter sequence, (as, incidentally, is 1♥ – 3♠). It would be very embarrassing to forget this arrangement – I propose that any Clarendon pair who find themselves in 4♥ with a farcical 2–1 fit or similar should be fined a round of drinks. There are definite upper limits on a splinter bid – you should not be too strong, the range being about 10 – 14 points. Bear in mind that a splinter on a singleton is made only on hands that will Pass a sign-off. Thus:

West	East
1♠	4♦
4♣	

will always end the auction where 4♦ was bid on a singleton. It follows that a player who employs a splinter and then bids again over a sign-off will have a **void** in the short suit. In the examples below, Hands 10 and 11 would bid 4♦ over partner's 1♠; Hand 12 is too strong and would have to use other methods:

10.	<table style="margin: 0 auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="padding: 2px 5px;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px 5px;">W</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px 5px;">E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px 5px;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W	E	S	♠ J 8 6 5 2 ♥ Q J 9 7 ♦ 10 ♣ A Q 4	South West 1♠	North Pass	East ?
N									
W									
E									
S									

11.	<table style="margin: 0 auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="padding: 2px 5px;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px 5px;">W</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px 5px;">E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px 5px;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W	E	S	♠ K Q 9 5 ♥ Q 10 6 3 ♦ 7 ♣ A K 8 2	South West 1♠	North Pass	East ?
N									
W									
E									
S									

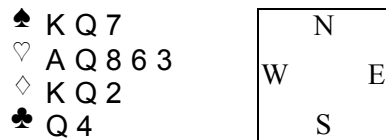
12.	<table style="margin: 0 auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="padding: 2px 5px;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px 5px;">W</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px 5px;">E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px 5px;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W	E	S	♠ A K 8 3 ♥ A 10 8 2 ♦ 5 ♣ K J 10 6	South West 1♠	North Pass	East ?
N									
W									
E									
S									

It is important to understand the rationale for using splinter bids. If you, as opener, hold length and rubbish in a suit where partner has announced a shortage the value of your hand has improved dramatically. You are said to be "playing with a thirty point pack" since the ten points in the splinter suit are irrelevant to your trick taking potential. As a simple example consider this hand:

Hand 13.	♠ A 4 ♥ A K Q 8 5 2 ♦ 10 7 5 3 ♣ 6	<table style="margin: 0 auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="padding: 2px 5px;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px 5px;">W</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px 5px;">E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px 5px;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W	E	S	
N							
W							
E							
S							
	West 1♥ ?		East 4♦				

Where are your losers? You can have only one Diamond loser since partner has promised both a shortage in Diamonds and four trumps. The only other possible losers are one in Spades and one in Clubs; it is difficult to construct a hand opposite (with no points in Diamonds and at most one in Hearts) that can't fill in the gaps and offers no play for slam. Blackwood is probably as good a continuation as any. By contrast, consider:

Hand 14.



West

1♥

?

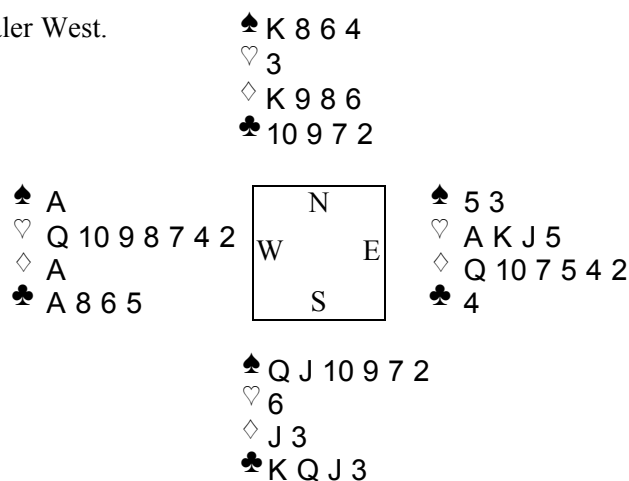
East

4♦

For all the 18 points there are a lot of losers and the Diamond honours are wasted facing a shortage. You *might* make a slam but it is looking very doubtful – East needs all of the ♠A, the ♥K and the ♣A K. That would be an absolute maximum for a splinter. Optimists might bid wheel out Blackwood, realists would sign off in 4♥.

Finally, a cold grand slam from a 1997 Hinckley – Clarendon league match (a hand which somehow turned up again in the Leicestershire simultaneous pairs). Originally, one North-South pair played in 6♠ Doubled, one East-West pair reached the dizzy heights of 5♥ and two pairs triumphantly reached 6♥. A splendid exhibition!

Hand 15. East-West Game, Dealer West.



Is the following sequence really so very difficult?

South	West	North	East
4♠?	1♥	Pass	4♣
3♠	5NT	6♠?	7♥

True, North-South may sacrifice in 7♠ but after Ace and another Club from West (obvious on the bidding!) the cost will be 1700 points. (Tolerable compensation to East-West for a vulnerable grand slam). I believe that in the actual event two East players responded 2♦ to 1♥. They should give up the game and take up knitting. 2♦ indeed! Simply clueless. This is never going to persuade West that the Heart support is so good and the rest of the hand is so poor. The pair who subsided in 5♥ showed the folly of this keep-partner-guessing approach:

South	West	North	East
3♠	1♥	Pass	2♦
Pass	4♥	4♠	5♥
Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass

Notice how East was hoist by his own petard (What *is* a petard? Does anybody know?) on the second round. With West worried about trump losers and East worried about losers everywhere else the bidding ground to an undistinguished halt. When the hand was played around the county I believe that only one pair recorded 2210 on the East-West cards – this probably tells you all you need to know about the pitiful standard of local bridge.