

The 10 Commandments of Good Slam Bidding

1. Never forget “the magic of voids.”
2. HCP are NOT the key.
3. He who knows, goes (or stays).
4. He who doesn’t know – invites.
5. KISSing is fun. Being tortured is NOT.
6. Don’t fall in love with your hand.
7. Greed is a terrible thing.
8. The length/strength of your trumps is often crucial.
9. You can’t bid ‘em all.
10. Know when to say no.

Are these the only commandments that apply to slam bidding? Of course not. The subject is so vast that many others are possible. However, keeping these ten in mind will go a long way towards helping you improve your understanding of this complex topic. In the next three chapters, I will explain, explore, and provide examples for all of the commandments. Can I guarantee that, by the time you finish the tenth commandment and “Know when to say no,” you’ll be a slam bidding expert? If only it were true.

I am willing to make the following guarantee. If you carefully read the chapters that follow, you will have learned a lot and taken a big step towards achieving every player’s Slam Holy Grail: **bidding more good slams and avoiding more bad ones.**

The Magic of Voids

I was recently asked by a reader what I would bid with the following exquisite hand. He told me, “Matchpoint scoring, neither side vulnerable.”

♠ A K 8 5 4 ♥ — ♦ A Q 5 ♣ A K 10 7 6

I said I would open 2♣, but other players would prefer 1♠ or even 1♣. However, the question was not, “What would you open?” This hand was not the dealer, your RHO was. The question was: “What would you do after your RHO opens 4♥?”

I suggest making your decision before reading on. Here are my thoughts on the possible choices:

Double. If I were sure that my partner would bid something, I would seriously consider this call. Although double shows a good hand without hearts, because the auction is at such a high level, there’s a good chance that partner will pass. Defending 4♥ doubled might be our best spot, but when I picked up these cards, hearts was NOT the trump suit I had in mind.

4♠. This bid has two serious flaws. The first is that spades might be the “wrong” suit. If partner is short in spades, we could find ourselves going down in 4♠ while cold for slam in a minor. In addition, a nonvul overcall of 4♠ hardly does justice to this monster. It might be the best hand you pick up all month!

What else is there? Although 5♣ might be your best contract, it makes no sense to attempt to score up a game by taking 11 tricks at the five level when you had the chance to bid game at the four level.

How did I answer? Whenever I am faced with a difficult decision and don't know what is right, I fall back on my "principles of a lifetime." What principle applies here? *The magic of voids.*

What do I mean? **Hands with a useful void take a lot of tricks.** Why is that? It's like playing with a 30-point deck. When you have a void, the 10 HCP in that suit (in effect) don't matter, so you can bid and make game or slam with far fewer HCP than are normally needed. When the void is in the opponent's long, strong suit – that's even better.

With that in mind, what did I do? I overcalled 5♥, a seat-of-the-pants example of a Michaels Cue-Bid. Although partner might hate both my suits and have nothing, my experience reassured me to be aggressive based on the void.

How did it work out? The partner's hand was:

♠ 10 ♥ J 7 5 ♦ K J 9 7 2 ♣ J 8 4 3

Partner would have bid 5NT to ask for my minor, and 6♣ turned out to be the correct contract. I don't know about you, but I do believe in "magic."

The setting: A prestigious international tournament in 1997. IMP scoring. Both sides are vulnerable.

Your hand is:

♠ K 10 9 5 ♡ — ♦ 10 9 6 4 3 ♣ K J 8 2

At most tables, the auction proceeded:

<i>West</i>	<i>Partner</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>You</i>
—	—	Pass	Pass
1♡	2♣	3♡*	???

*3♡ = A weak jump raise (WJR).

What's your call? Please answer before reading on.

You have terrific shape and excellent support for a partner who made a vulnerable overcall at the two level. You are perfectly willing to get to 5♣, not to mention that you have no interest in defending if they get to 4♡ (a void in trumps is NOT magical).

Remember: For every 20 hands you play, you rate to get only one void – and sometimes it will be in partner's suit. Therefore, when you pick up a void AND it is in an opponent's suit, you should regard it as heaven-sent, say "Thank you," and seize the moment with an aggressive bid.

If you appreciate *the magic of voids*, you'll bid 4♡.

Partner has: ♠ A 2 ♡ Q 10 6 5 ♦ A ♣ A 10 7 6 5 4

and will jump to 6♣ and make it. Eight expert pairs held this hand, and only three of them bid 4♡.

If you did, well done!