

SPLINTER-BIDS and CUE-BIDS

Definitions

SPLINTER BID – a bid of a singleton or void

CUE BID – bid of first round control of a suit – i.e. an ace or a void. A second bid of the same suit shows second round control of the suit (i.e. king or singleton).

These types of bid should be considered together, but it is important to recognise the differences between them. Both are used primarily to investigate slam possibilities. There are many variations on when to use splinter bids and when to use cue bids. My preferred approach is (note this is a fairly simplistic treatment, it can get more complicated):

1. SPLINTER BIDS

1.1 After the initial opening bid, a **double jump** shows **agreement for the suit** opened and a **singleton or void**.

e.g. – 1♠ - 4♦ or 1♥ - 3♠

The point count should be about 10+ points. The bid would take preference over a Jacoby 2NT (hence a Jacoby 2NT bid would deny a singleton or void).

1.2 After partner's Jacoby 2NT over a major, a re-bid by opener of a different suit at the three level shows a singleton or void. This would take preference over the 'normal' re-bids of 4 maj, 3NT, 3 maj (except possibly on an 11 or 12 point opening hand).

e.g. – 1♥ - 2NT – 3♣ shows a singleton or void in clubs (hearts having been agreed).

(If you don't play 2NT Jacoby responses then 1.2 doesn't apply).

2. CUE BIDS

2.1 **Having agreed a suit**, a bid of a new suit in a game forcing situation shows **first round control** in that suit e.g. 1♠ - 3♠ - 4♦ (having agreed spades, the 4♦ is a cue-bid).

2.2 After partner's response a double jump re-bid agrees the responder's suit and cue bids the bid suit e.g. 1♦ - 1♠ - 4♣ (agrees spades and shows first round control of clubs) ; 1♣ - 1♥ - 3♠ (agrees hearts and shows first round control of spades).

(Note – some pairs play this as a splinter bid; I prefer it to be a cue-bid)

2.3 Following a splinter bid from partner a further new suit is a cue bid (first round control).

Examples

a)	North	South	b)	North	South
	1♥	3♥		1♠	2NT (Jacoby)
	4♣ (cue)	4♦ (cue)		3♦ (spl)	3♥ (cue)
	5♣ (cue)	5♥/6♥		4♣ (cue)	etc

In a) having agreed hearts the opener shows first round control in clubs; responder then shows first round control in diamonds; opener then shows also second round control in clubs (i.e. void, singleton ace, ace/king).

In b) (if you are playing Jacoby) - the 3♦ is a splinter bid (singleton or void in diamonds). The 3♥ and 4♣ bids are cue bids – first round control.

When one player initiates a cue bid sequence (i.e. in (a) - the 4♣ bid), responder should cue bid any other ace or void up to the level of 4NT. Moreover cue-bids **should be made in sequence**, so the absence of a bid would deny a cue bid of the suit. In the sequence (a) above, since opener has omitted 3♠ over 3♥, he would be denying first round control of spades, and also by omitting 4♠ over 4♦ he would be denying second round control of spades (i.e. hasn't got a singleton nor the ♠K) – this will be the major factor in South deciding whether to bid 5♥ or 6♥.

Similarly in (b) – the 4♣ must be the ♣A, otherwise North with a club void would have originally splintered with 3♣ rather than 3♦.

If any cue bid is to be made at the five level, the bidder needs to decide as to whether that bid is more useful or whether it is better to use whatever Blackwood 4NT (if playing RKCB you may decide it is more useful to determine whether partner has the king or possibly the queen of trumps).

In (a) above, opener may well decide that it is better to use 4NT instead of cue-bidding the second round control of clubs (the 5♣ bid).

c)	North	South	d)	North	South
	1♠	4♣ (spl)		1♥	1♠
	4♥ (cue)	5♣ (cue)		4♣	4♦
	5♥ (cue)	??		5♣	etc.

In c) the 4♣ is a splinter bid (singleton or void). 4♥ is a cue-bid (first round control in hearts. This bid also denies first round control in diamonds – otherwise the bid would be 4♦). 5♣ now says that the original singleton or void is in fact a void. 5♥ shows second round control in hearts (already shown first round control). The 5♥ bid would also deny second round control in diamonds, since with second round control in diamonds North would bid 5♦ in preference to 5♥.

In d) the 4♣ is a cue-bid (i.e. first round control) agreeing spades. The 4♦ is also a cue bid. The 5♣ shows second round control in clubs (first round already having been shown with the 4♣ bid).

In all the above, note the difference between splinter and cue-bids. A splinter is only made by responder on the initial round; and also if playing Jacoby by opener in the immediate response to 2NT).

Strictly speaking a sequence such as 1♦ - 3♦ - 4♣ is not game forcing, but this would still be considered as a cue bid.

A sequence such as 1♥ - 2♥ - 3♣ is certainly not game forcing, so the 3♣ is not a cue-bid (it is in fact a 'trial' bid – consider at a later date).

A full hand to show the importance of cue-bidding:

Love All, dealer West.

	♠ 8	
	♥ AKQ7	
	♦ 53	
	♣ AKQJ42	
♠ J532		♠ A107
♥ 52		♥ 963
♦ K1076		♦ QJ942
♣ 1097		♣ 83
	♠ KQ964	
	♥ J1084	
	♦ A8	
	♣ 65	

The best North/South auction is probably:

N	S
1♣	1♠
2♥	3♥
4♣	4♦
4NT	5♦
6♥	

There are a number of points to note in this auction:

1♣, 1♠ - automatic

2♥ - reverse bid 16+ points, clubs probably longer than hearts (if playing 5-card majors with an original prepared club, this bid confirms that the club bid was genuine)..

3♥ - suit agreement, stronger than 4♥ which would be a shut-out bid.

4♣ - cue bid. Even though clubs had been naturally bid originally, once a subsequent suit agreement has been reached (hearts), this now becomes a cue bid.

4♦ - cue bid

4NT – whatever Blackwood

5♦ (or whatever response) – one ace

6♥ - final contract. A reasonable assessment, hoping to draw trumps in three rounds and discard diamonds on the clubs, and then ruff a diamond.

Note the importance of the cue bid sequence. If North were merely to jump to 4NT over the 3♥ bid, when partner shows one ace, which one is it? If it were the ♠A (which is the more probable given South's original response), it would be highly probable that there would be two diamond losers. However the cue bid prior to Blackwood confirms the ♦A, so the slam can be bid with a high degree of confidence (hoping to discard any diamond losers on the clubs).