

GERBER by Maritha Pottenger

When you or your partner opens 1NT or 2NT (or rebids 1NT or 2NT), or when you open 2C and rebid 2NT, most people use the Gerber convention (named after a gentleman who had that moniker) to ask for Aces.

Four Clubs is Gerber. It asks: “How many Aces do you have, partner?” The responses are:

4D: I have zero or four Aces

4H: I have one Ace

4S: I have two Aces

4NT: I have three Aces

Please note that Gerber is NOT used with strong, balanced hands. With balanced hands, make quantitative bids (based on HCP). To use Gerber, you should have a long suit or a strong, two-suited hand where you only care about partner’s Aces. (Example would be x KQJ1098x Kx AQx.)

Your partnership must decide: if one of you opens 3NT or opens 2C and rebids 3NT, do you want 4C to be Gerber or to be Stayman? Also, if partner opens one of a suit and you bid a suit (one over one) and partner jump shifts to 2NT, would 4C be Gerber? What if partner’s opening bid was 1C? Is 4C still Gerber? Discuss this with your partner!

Most people write “ONTO” on the section of the convention card that applies to Gerber. That stands for: “Over No Trump Only.” I’ve seen many people get into trouble over the years because one partner bid 4C and thought it was Gerber and the other partner thought it was something else entirely. Most people interpret ONTO as meaning if you (or your partner) opens 1NT, 2NT, or opens 2C and rebids 2NT. Some people agree if you open a suit; your partner makes a 1-over-1 response, and you jump to 2NT, Gerber still applies. (Discuss this with your partner.) Kantar (and others) suggest that you use 4C as Stayman over (strong, NOT gambling) 3NT openings or 2C followed by 3NT rebids. Thus, you must jump to 5C as Gerber (Ace-Asking) in those sequences. Similarly, if partner opens 2NT, and you bid 3C (Stayman), Kantar (and others) would say that 4C is natural (a second suit); 4NT is quantitative; and 5C is Gerber (Ace-asking).

I have an agreement with a number of my partners that if either of us opens some number of no trumps and partner makes a Stayman inquiry, we will still use (4C) Gerber for our Ace-asking. In fact, we use Key Card Gerber (step responses just the same as for Roman Key Card Blackwood, but over 4C). Thus, 4D shows 1 or 4 key cards; 4H shows 0 or 3 Key cards; 4S shows 2 or 5 key cards without the trump queen; and 4NT shows 2 or 5 key cards with the trump queen. The agreed-upon suit is assumed to be the major partner answered in response to Stayman. (For example, 1NT-P-2C-P-2H-P-4C is Roman Key Card Gerber and agrees to hearts.)

If you make this agreement about Roman Key Card Gerber, you can use the 4NT bid to show a quantitative invitation after you have done a Stayman inquiry. For example, 1NT-P-2C-P-2H-P-4C is Roman Key Card Gerber and agrees to hearts. 1NT-P-2C-P-2S-P-4NT shows a quantitative invitational hand (16 HCP) with a 4-card heart suit. Partner can pass 4NT or bid 6NT—depending on his/her hand. If you play Texas Transfers, then a Jacoby transfer followed by 4NT is a quantitative raise. If you do not play Texas, you can make the agreement to use 4C as Key Card Gerber over Jacoby Transfers as well as Stayman. **Discuss with partners!**

NOTE: Some people use 4C as Gerber over a diamond opening as well—to look for a diamond slam. That way, they can sign off in 4NT or 5D if they do not have enough (or the right stuff) for 6D. Using Blackwood might get them too high. Some people extend this to use a jump to the 4-level in the other minor as Ace-asking (to preserve enough room to stop at 4NT or 5C or 5D). Thus, 1C-P-4D would be Ace-asking and agreeing to clubs. Again, if you and your partner decide to play this, discuss it. Decide also whether you will simply show the four Aces or show Key Cards since you have suit agreement. (I recommend showing Key Cards if you decide to go this route.)