

What is the San Francisco Convention?

“San Francisco” is a “Bad Slam Prevention” convention known also as “Warren”. It is discussed briefly in both the “Encyclopedia of Bridge” and in Root-Pavlicek’s “Modern Bridge Conventions”. It has the distinguishing feature of asking for aces and kings both at the same time.

Why Play San Francisco?

The advantage of “Total controls” is that Aces are counted differently from Kings and that all Kings are counted equally.

Often, after just a single inquiry and answer, it is possible to determine that a slam is a bad idea because you determine that you are missing at least both an ace and a king (possibly in the same suit) or that a Grand is still possible because you have all of the aces and kings.

This system also has a huge advantage when the person who is asking (known as the “Interrogator”) has all of the aces or three aces and a king. There is no asking for aces when you know full well that the person answering the inquiry (the “Answerer”) will have none or exactly one just so that you can follow up by asking for kings.

When Do You Play San Francisco?

You play San Francisco in most of the same situations where you would play Blackwood, Kickback, Roman Key Card Blackwood, Exclusion Blackwood, Minorwood, Redwood, or Gerber in any form. Basically, you have narrowed your strain down at least down to “either this suit or no trump” and a reasonably sure that you have the proper strength for slam, but want to make sure that you aren’t somehow in danger of losing the first two tricks because you are missing an ace and a king or two aces or three kings.

How Do You Play San Francisco?

Basically, it’s a simple “ask and answer” convention. The Interrogator asks “How many Controls do you have?” and Answer tells how many she has.

How do I count my “Total Controls” or “Two-One Points”?

Basically, you count 2 controls (“CP”) for each ace and 1CP for each King. It’s that simple. There are a total of 12CP in the deck.

What Initiates a San Francisco Total Control Inquiry?

Of course, this ought to be discussed with your partner. The benefit to San Francisco over Roman Keycard Blackwood is that suit agreement does not affect the values attached to each control card. The following would be the most common “trigger” bids:

- 1) **4NT** when all else fails
- 2) **4♣** after a natural **1NT** or **2NT** opener or other limited opener
- 3) **4♣** after any genuine offer to play **3NT**
- 4) **3NT** in a slam forcing auction
- 5) The fourth suit at the 4-level
- 6) 4 of the suit just above the agreed trump suit (often **4♠**). You’ll have to discuss what it means to have “agreed” to hearts.
- 7) A jump to 4 of the agreed minor.

But, in general, whatever would have initiated Blackwood, Gerber, or Kickback before you adopted San Francisco should still initiate a Total Control Inquiry. It’s just what the answers mean that changes.

What are the “Normal” Total Control Answers?

- the first step (usually 5♣ or 4♦) shows 0-2CP
- the second step (usually 5♦ or 4♥) shows 3CP
- the third step (usually 5♥ or 4♠) shows 4CP, and so on up the line.
- The apparent "raise" (usually 5^{NT} or 5♣) shows 6CP.

When Do I Give the “Strong Side” Answers?

If you have opened with a monster or strong and forcing bid (Precision 1♣, R-W 2♦, or 2♣ in most other systems) or a natural, strong 2^{NT} (19-21, 20-21, 22-24, whatever "half the deck and balanced" means to you) and you are being asked about controls in all four suits, you can sort of “discount” 2CP. Go ahead. Try to construct a Monster hand or strong 2^{NT} opener with neither one ace nor two kings. Now, would your partner who didn't have the cards to place a slam without asking still be interested?

I suppose if you have agreed to play Mexican 2♦, Maxi-Roman 2♦, Karosel 2♦ or New York 2♣, it would be reasonable to agree for the Opener to give the strong side answers after such an opener.

What Are the “Strong Side” Answers?

- the first step (usually 5♣ or 4♦) shows 0-4CP
- the second step (usually 5♦ or 4♥) shows 5CP
- the third step (usually 5♥ or 4♠) shows 6CP, and so on up the line.
- The apparent "raise" (usually 5^{NT} or 5♣) shows 8CP.

Can We Agree to Use the Strong Side Answers in situations when the Responder is the Answerer?

Of course you can. However, my partners and I have found that, after an opening bid, it is rare that that we ever know that Answerer holds at least two kings or one ace. You may play systems where the opening bid may establish a hand that must hold at least 2CP (most bids that show 18+HCP do this), but it is extremely rare that a response does so with any degree of certainty. And, when it does, it usually established the number of CP with a fair degree certainty, so you wouldn't have to ask whether Responder has more.

When Do I give the “Weak Side Answers”

When you are a passed hand or you have made a preemptive opening bid, it is going to be extremely rare that you will have 5CP and the difference between your holding one king and two kings may determine the playability of the slam.

With some partners I have agreed to play that the Responder to a Monster opener always gives the “Weak Side” answers.

What Are the Weak Side Answers?

- the first step (usually 5♣ or 4♦) shows 0-1CP
- the second step (usually 5♦ or 4♥) shows 2CP
- the third step (usually 5♥ or 4♠) shows 3CP, and so on up the line.
- The apparent "raise" (usually 5^{NT} or 5♣) shows 5CP.

Aren't there a lot of possibilities for each number of CP?

No, the odd numbers of Controls have at most two possibilities and the even numbers have at most three (and most of those have only one or two). In addition, whenever there are three possibilities, at least one of the possibilities always requires Answerer to have either all four aces or all four kings. This is a possibility that you can quickly discount when you have even one of each them.

Can you show me all of the possibilities for each number of CP?

Why certainly

Number of CP			
0	No Aces or Kings		
1	One King		
2	One Ace	Two Kings	
3	1A+1K	3 Kings	
4	2 Aces	1A+2K	4 Kings
5	2A+1K	1A+3K	
6	3 Aces	2A+2K	1A+4K
7	3A+1K	2A+3K	
8	2A+4K	3A+2K	4 Aces
9	4A+1K	3A+3K	
10	3A+4K	4A+2K	
11	4A+3K		
12	All the Aces and Kings		

What if I can't tell which Control cards Answerer has?

With the exception of when your combined hands total exactly 10CP (and a clarification may be available in that case), when you had to ask about controls in all four suits and you can't tell which ones she has, you don't belong in Slam.

Can you summarize what to do with the results for each number of Controls when all four suits are in play?

Of course

Total CP	What to do	
8 or less	STOP! You maybe too high already	
9	Bail out at the 5-level unless you've got a lot of Queens, some shortness, unlimited entries, and can place (and benefit from your knowledge of the placement of) <u>all</u> of the missing high cards. A slam is no better than 47% otherwise.	
10 (missing an Ace)	Slam should be 80%+	Grand is foolish
10 (missing two Kings)	Slam should be 70%+	Grand is never better than 40%
11	Slam should be 90%+	Grand only works with a running suit or shortness or if you <u>know</u> who has the missing king. In other words, don't do it against slam jammers!
12	Slam should be 95%+	A Grand becomes 70%+ if you have two or more queens together or shortness or if you can place or drop the missing queens.

Don't I have to alert San Francisco?

In the ACBL, EBU, and WBF, you have to alert the San Francisco Total Control Inquiry only when the Responder asks immediately on the first round. The reasons for the alerts on the first round differ, but they are required in all three jurisdictions.

Since the answers are always above **3NT** and never begin before the Opener's second turn to call, you are required to give a delayed alert for the answers, however. If you have never made a delayed alert before, they are pretty easy. If you end up declaring (as you often will), after the third pass, just say "Delayed Alert" and wave the **Alert** card. If opponents somehow manage to sacrifice against you, you wait until partner commits to an opening lead and do the same.

When using screens, of course, you have to alert the Answer as soon as it is made (or as soon as the tray comes from behind the curtain).

How do I put San Francisco on my Convention Card?

In the ACBL or EBU, in the "Slam Conventions" section, you can put the following on the explanation lines, if you play a strong, forcing **2♣** Opener: If you play strong, forcing **1♣**, **1♦**, **1NT**, or **2♦** opener or play some kind of weak or conventional **2NT** opener (or, despite my suggestions to the contrary, you decide to play strong side answers opposite strong jump shifts), you can fix this up to reflect what you really play.

--Quote--

"San Francisco" A=2CP, K=1CP 1st step by **2♣** or **2NT** Opener 0-4CP, by PREer 0-1. o/w 0-2CP, then single steps

--End quote--

A very similar explanation also would go in the "Slam Zone Tools" section of the WBF convention card.

Won't We Get Too High Sometimes?

As with most slam prevention conventions, if you initiate them in a situation where you may not like the answer, of course you might get too high, but if you reserve your inquiries for situations where you are genuinely interested in slam and want only to be certain that you're not missing an ace and a king or two aces, you will be fine.

The answers, however, are structured such that it is usually possible to play 5NT, even if you are unpleasantly surprised by the answer.

If you tell your aces and kings in one answer, for what purpose do you use a follow up bid?

There are three possible situations depending upon whether the Answerer says that she has less than, more than, or exactly 3CP. In all cases, Answerer is requested to clarify her answer. Most of the time the bid that requests the clarification will just be **5NT** or the next level of whatever was used for the first inquiry.

Well, suppose she shows 0-2CP, and I'm still interested in a Grand. What do the clarifications mean?

The answers show CP up the line, very similar to the answers to 5NT in Blackwood.

The first step (often **6♣**) shows 0CP.

The second step (often **6♦**) shows 1CP.

The third step (often **6♥**) shows 2CP

Suppose she shows 4 or more CP. What do the clarifications mean then?

The answers show extra tricks: Normally queens, but sometimes aces in previously excluded suits (see the questions about Exclusion later in this publication).

The first step (often **6♣**) shows no queens or uncounted aces.

The second step (often **6♦**) shows one queen (or one previously uncounted ace).

The third step (often **6♥**) shows two queens (or one queen and an uncounted ace)

The fourth step (often **6♠**) shows three queens (or two queens and an uncounted ace)

The fifth step (often **6NT**) shows all four queens (or all three queens and an uncounted ace), but Answerer is within her rights just to empty the box in this case. If he were interested in a grand, how can he not want to play **7NT** with 4 tricks about which he didn't know?

Are You Serious about Asking for Queens?

Yes, holding all of the aces and kings only makes you certain of 8 tricks. In order to make a grand slam, you probably need to be able to run one or more suits.

Historical Note: My partners and I added this refinement about 30 seconds after we were in **7NT** with all of the aces and kings, but none of the queens and went down 4 when systematic attempts to drop the queen in all four suits failed. If we had determined that we were missing all 4 queens, we could easily have made 6NT, if we had stopped there.

What about the case when the Answer shows exactly 3CP?

There is one case where Interrogator, holding exactly three aces and one king, can't tell if Answerer has three kings or one ace and two kings. The answer to this may determine whether he wants to play in **6NT** or 6 of a suit. In this case:

The first step (which is often **6♣**, Clubs=Common) shows that she has 3 kings

The second step (which is often **6♦**, Diamonds=Different) shows that she has one of each.

How do I find out about the Queen of Trump?

Generally, if the queen of trump is likely to be a particular problem, you will want to find out about it earlier, either by a trump quality inquiry or, if you are looking for a Grand Slam, you may want to ask about it later by bidding a nonsensical 6-level contract.

However, two other methods are available:

- 1) Bid the cheapest unplayable suit to ask specifically about the queen of the agreed trump suit. The first step says "no" the second step says "yes".
- 2) Add a 13th control for the queen of trump and adjust all of your actions after responses accordingly.

However, since an "Extra Trick" inquiry is possible (and any answer to that inquiry will include the queen of trump) when Answerer shows 4 or more CP, you probably only need to ask specifically for the trump queen when a strong hand is interrogating a hand that has shown 0-3CP. When ♠ is the agreed suit, there is always room to make an inquiry and get out at the 5-level when missing both 2CP and the ♠Q. When ♥ is the agreed suit, there is room over the **5♣** answer, but not over **5♦**. (Yet another reason to use **4♠** to start the inquiry whenever possible with agreed ♥.)

How do I stop in 5^{NT}, if we're missing 3 or more CP and her answer was above 5 of our trump suit?

This is done the same way that you would have done so playing Blackwood, or Key Card Blackwood. This most often happens when you get a 5♦ answer intending to play some number of ♣ or 5♥ when you intend to play some number of ♦. The usual method is to bid 5 of an unplayable suit (such as 5♠). This basically tells the Answerer that she should bid 5^{NT}. Whenever you get an answer that pushes beyond 5 of your intended suit and you don't have 10CP between you, it usually means that you should have used another bid to ask in the first place or that you should have asked about a specific suit first (See "San Francisquito" below).

How does Interrogator initiate an "extra tricks" follow up after a 5^{NT} (or 6♣) answer?

You may want to discuss this with your partner, but the usual solution is simply to make the next bid up the line. This, of course, won't work if ♣ (or ♦) was the suit that you intended to play. For this reason, it is usually best to agree to use a jump to 4 of the minor suit as a means of initiating the total control inquiry. This applies even if you play Classic Blackwood. Gerber, Minorwood, or Redwood works much better than classic Blackwood when you are thinking about a minor suit slam.

What Initiates a San Francisco Exclusion Control Inquiry?

Once again, you should probably discuss this with your partner, but these would be the most common instances:

- 1) 4 of a suit shown, agreed, or preempted by opponents.
- 2) 4 of a suit that you and your partner have excluded earlier (by splinter or exclusion response)
- 3) 4 of a suit in which specific controls have already been shown (See "San Francisquito", below).
- 4) A jump to the 5-level in a suit obviously not to play (which is not the same thing as "not obviously to play").

How do the answers change when you have an excluded suit?

Basically, except that you always use the "Normal" answers (except when the "Weak" answers apply) even by the strong opening hand and that you don't count the Controls in the excluded suit (so that there are only 9CP of interest), the answers are in steps as without an excluded suit.

Can you summarize what to do with the results for each number of Controls with an excluded suit?

There are three cases. One is when you hold a void of the excluded suit. A second is when you hold a singleton and the third is when your partner is the one with the short suit of unknown character.

When you have a void, a good fit, and some queens outside the excluded suit:

CP outside excluded suit	What to do
6CP or less	Slam is never better than 40%. Get out as low as you can
7CP (missing two kings)	Slam is 70% or so (better if you know who has them)
7CP (missing an ace)	Slam is 80%+
8CP	6 looks good, 7 requires a second short suit and extras
9CP	6 should be 95%+, 7 is possible with some extras

When you have a singleton, a good fit, and some queens outside the excluded suit:

CP outside excluded suit	What to do
7 CP or less	Slam is never better than 40%
8CP	Slam depends upon a hook unless you can place the king or can run another suit.
9CP	Slam is 60% or better. 7 is only likely if partner has the ace opposite your singleton

When your partner is the one with the short suit, place the contract where it would play opposite a singleton and let partner go up one level with a void.

What Is San Francisquito (SCITO)?

San Francisquito is a method of asking for controls in a particular suit. The mnemonic "SCITO" comes from "Specific Controls In This Only". "San Francisquito" means "little San Francisco" and also sounds like "SCITO", if you say it quickly

When will San Francisquito help you?

San Francisquito is most useful when partner has shown some strength and you realize that you can't possibly play slam unless partner has specific cards in one specific suit. Interrogator will usually have a doubleton (which might have an unguarded king or queen) or an honorless 3- or 4-card suit. The other situation is when a King will give value to your lower honors such as when you hold QJ75 or the like. The right answer might turn a game into a Grand Slam. The idea is to ask cheaply and get out in game, if you have a suit with two quick losers.

What Initiates San Francisquito?

You **definitely** have to discuss this with your partner, but these are really good candidates:

- 1) A jump in a new suit below game when you are already forced to game
- 2) A jump in a new suit by a hand that was already known to be strong before the jump.
- 3) A bid in a slam curious auction of one of the odd suits when Responder has shown two suits.

The important consideration here is that either that you were already forced to game (or already declared slam curiosity) or that the Interrogator was already known to be strong before he jumped and that the inquiry is in a suit that hasn't previously been offered as a place to play and that the inquiry takes place below 4♥.

What are the SCITO answers

The first step shows 0CP: neither the ace nor the king of the suit of interest

The second step shows 1CP: the king of the suit

The third step shows 2CP: the ace of the suit

The fourth step shows 3CP: both the ace and the king of the suit

Can I do Exclusion San Francisco after I do a SCITO?

Yes, you can. The net effect is that you are asking about controls only the two remaining suits. We might call this “double exclusion”. In this case, only the 6CP that are in the two remaining suits are involved in the answer. We always use the “Normal” answers (except when “Weak” answers would otherwise apply) and might consider using the “Weak” answers for all but the known strong hands. Double exclusion doesn’t come up that often, but it is common to ask first in a specific suit and then in the rest of the suits (since the initial suit of the specific inquiry is **automatically excluded** from a subsequent total control inquiry).