
Keycard

Roman Keycard Blackwood (RKCB)

There are six keycards in a suit contract - the three offsuit Aces (I will refer to them as OAces when convenient), the Joker and the two Bowers (as opposed to five keycards in bridge). After the partnership agrees on a trump suit, 8NT is a keycard ask. This is an artificial bid (alertable) and forcing. The responses are (1430 style):

- 9♠: 1 or 4 keycards
- 9♣: 0 or 3 keycards
- 9♦: 2 or 5 keycards, no Joker
- 9♥: 2 or 5 keycards, including Joker.

This convention lets you figure out how many keycards your side holds when you are trying to bid a grand (a 10 bid). You must be ready to play at at least the 9 level, and if partner shows you all the missing keycards you should be bidding 10 (otherwise why are you asking). Here I include the left bower as a keycard (slightly different to bridge where the Q of trump is not considered a keycard) because it is necessary to know about when trying to bid a grand. There is no response to show all 6 keycards: this is because I can't imagine a situation where someone is asking for keycards without any of them. If this does happen to come up, responding 9NT should suffice.

In the same way you can ask for the Queen in bridge, you can ask for the Joker. If Responder bids 9♠ or 9♣, Asker can bid one step up (9♣ or 9♦ respectively) to ask Responder if they hold the Joker. Responder signs off in 9 trump if they lack the joker, or can bid one step up if they have it (skipping 9 trumps of course, since that would be a sign off). See the Specific Ace Ask subsection for what to do when you are missing exactly one keycard.

Kickback Variation

When using standard RKCB, if the agreed trump suit is not hearts, then some of the 8NT responses are above 9 trump. This risks being pushed to 10 trump when some important keycards are missing. Kickback solves this problem by starting the keycard conversation at a lower level when the agreed trump suit is lower - saving space.

After a trump suit has been agreed, bidding one step above 8 trump is kickback. For example, if Diamonds is agreed trumps, then 8♥ is kickback. If Clubs is trumps, then 8♦ is kickback and if Spades is trumps then 8♣ is kickback. When someone bids kickback, they are making a RCKB enquiry (as if they bid 8NT, which is the kickback suit when Hearts is trump). The responses are the same as RKCB, except they are encoded as steps above the kickback bid.

- 1 Step up: 1 or 4 keycards
- 2 Step up: 0 or 3 keycards
- 3 Step up: 2 or 5 keycards, no Joker
- 4 Step up: 2 or 5 keycards, including Joker.

Asker can also enquiry about the Joker in the same way as normal RKCB.

Situations where there is no agreed upon trump suit.

Sometimes, there is no agreed up trump suit yet, but a bid can still obviously be kickback. The assumed suit is the most recent suit that responder has bid. However, if there is no agreed upon suit yet, then bidding a suit partner has already bid is natural and never kickback.

Maybe???
might want
kickback
there though
idk

Need to fill everything with examples

Specific Aces

Suppose you bid keycard and find out that you're missing one keycard, but your side has the joker and maybe the Right bower. Since you start with the lead, there is still a good chance you can make 10 tricks with a good hand if you keep the right suits after the kitty and choose the right suits to play. For example, you might be missing an Ace in one suit, but have another running offsuit so that the missing Ace doesn't matter. Hence, I think it can still be quite valuable to find out which keycards partner has. The beauty of 500 is that the Open Misere bid gives us a little bit of extra room to find out this information efficiently.

For simplicity we assume that hearts has been flagged as the trump suit (i.e 9NT is the kickback suit), although this same structure can of course be used with Kickback by shifting every bid accordingly. We assume that Asker has found out that their side holds a total of 5 keycards including the Joker.

Response to 9NT	Asker Rebid	Responder Rebid
10♠: ♠A no ♣A ♦A (OR: ♠A ♣A ♦A)	(10♣): Inquiry (10♦): ♥A? Soft trumps (10♥): Sign off, ♦A	10♦: ♠A no ♣A ♦A 10♥: ♠A ♣A ♦A 10♥: ♠A no ♥A or not worried 10NT: ♠A ♥A, worried
10♣: ♣A no ♠A ♦A	(10♦): ♥A? Soft trumps (10♥): Sign off	10♥: ♣A no ♥A or not worried 10NT: ♣A ♥A, worried
10♦: ♦A no ♠A ♣A 10♥: no ♠A ♣A ♦A	(10♥): Sign off	
OM: Exactly 2 OAcres	(10♠): Relay, no OAcres (10♣): ♥A, Soft trumps (10♦): ♥A? Confirms all OAcres (worry about trumps) (10♥): Sign off, one OAce	10♣: ♣A ♦A no ♠A 10♦: ♠A ♦A no ♣A 10♥: ♠A ♣A no ♦A 10♦: not worried (transfer) 10♥: worried (transfer) 10NT: worried 10♥: no ♥A or not worried 10NT: ♥A, worried

Table 1: *The Specific Ace Ask structure.* Bids in brackets are made by the asker, all other bids are by responder. In theory, the partnership should hold exactly 5 out of 6 keycards, hence after a 10♠ response Asker should know which case it is. However, this might not be the case in practise, so I have included an inquiry 10♣ bid. Enquiring about the ♥A should confirm all the off suit aces and show worry about the trump suit (most likely missing the Right Bower). Responder can figure out which bowers are missing from the suit, knowing that Asker cannot have the ♥J. They should then do something intelligent if they have the ♥A, deciding whether to stick it out in 10♥ (maybe with the ♥J and/or some extra trump length) or try 10NT (maybe with some suits that are running after hearing about partner's Aces). After bidding OM, you show the OAce you don't have with 1 step being low, 2 steps being middle and 3 steps being high. The way to remember this system is that the 10♠, 10♣, 10♦ shows exactly that Ace (or sometimes all three in the case of 10♠) and if you have 2 Aces you go through OM. Also 10♦ is a ♥A inquiry.

In order for this structure to work when a suit other than hearts is trump, you need to be playing kickback. In that case, the bids are all shifted down by however many steps the kickback suit is below 9NT. For example, if Diamonds are trump, shift every bid down by 1. If clubs are trump shift down by 2 and if spades are trump shift down by 3 (OM is included as a normal bid in this shifting math).

Knowing how many keycards partner holds and what aces they hold should tell Asker about the trump suit by implication. Knowing what high trumps partner holds and how to get to their hand can tell Asker exactly how to play the trump suit (maybe they have to guess which bower they have). This means declarer at trick one can decide the best way to pick up the trump suit and knows how to get to partners hand for a first round finesse, say, if needed.

For example, suppose you have a 5 card trump suit headed by the joker and an outside Ace. Partner has shown support and shows you 3 keycards including two outside Aces using the Ace ask structure (this time I don't care what suit they are in). Thus your side is missing exactly one of the bowers. At trick one, you put partner on lead with one of their aces (leading a high card to indicate you want a switch). Partner will now know how to play the trump suit. They know you have the Joker since you forced grand but did not ask about the joker (they have to play you for the Joker anyway). If they have the Right Bower, they will lead it and lead towards you (hopefully giving you count so you can decide whether to play for the finesse or the drop). If they don't have the Right Bower, they should lead the Left Bower (hopefully one of you has the Ace of trumps) so you can finesse. So even if you bid a grand without a solid trump suit, having all this

information helps immensely in getting the play of the hand correct.

The other case where this will be useful is when your side is missing one offsuit Ace. Declarer finds out what Ace this is and keeps their high cards in the other suits. You now never worry about going off by randomly playing the wrong suit, and have a lot more possibilities to play for in the other suits (say, taking a finesse or trying to cross ruff on the weak suit). This will at least remove the thought of playing for layouts where your partner is missing the necessary Ace, and points you in the direction of finding other layouts to play for.

An Open Misere ask (instead of a 9NT ask) could be used as some sort of asking for Kings or some sort of ♥A inquiry.

If showing the Joker takes you above 9NT, respond as if you are responding to a 9NT Specific Ace inquiry.