Fourth suit forcing (game-forcing) - Summary Sheet

Does not promise a holding in the suit

Whenever three suits have been bid naturally by a partnership then a bid in the fourth suit will be forcing and will not promise a holding in that suit (except possibly at the one-level).

How forcing?

4th suit at the three-level is always game-forcing.
On this sheet I am also describing 4th suit at the 2-level as game-forcing. This is the choice of many experts, although not the choice of EBED (the ebu teaching course).

When to use a bid in the fourth suit

Use this bid whenever you have sufficient strength to force to game, and either the best strain or the correct level is not clear.

Is there a better suit fit?

In a sequence such as 1♦, 1♠, 2♣, and with sufficient strength for game might partner hold 3 spades to go with your five-card suit? Bid 2♥ and give him the opportunity to bid 2♠ (3 card support) or 2NT (heart stop).

No trump stop

A common use arises when you have the strength for game and little prospect of a better fit elsewhere, but no adequate stop in the fourth suit for a no trump contract.

Note that if you had a suitable stop you would just bid the appropriate number of no trumps yourself.

Expressing a slam interest

When you know of a fit but you are just too good to jump to game create a game-force with a bid in the fourth suit and then rebid the agreed suit. This will set the suit with at least a mild slam interest and may give the opportunity to exchange further information at a low level.

Responding to a bid in the fourth suit

Opener should show any one of the following – 3 cards in partner's suit, 5 cards in opener's second suit, 6 cards in opener's first suit, a no trump stop in the fourth suit.
Lacking any of these he will have to rebid his first 5-card suit.

Fourth suit at the one-level

The sequence 1♣, 1♦, 1♥, 1♠ is usually played as natural (at least four spades) and forcing for 1 round.
The sequence 1♣, 1♦, 1♥, 2♠ can then be played as 'fourth suit forcing', denying a 4-card holding in spades and forcing to game (or 2NT as agreed).