Fourth suit forcing (to next level) - Summary Sheet

A bid in the 4th suit 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 describing 4th suit at the 2-level as forcing to 2NT. This is the choice of EBED (the ebu teaching course) but not the choice of all experts.

When to use a bid in the fourth suit

Use this bid whenever you have sufficient strength to force to the agreed level, 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 at least invitational strength (10+ points) might partner hold 3 spades to go with your five-card suit?
Bid 2♥ (4th suit) and give him the opportunity to choose between 2♠ (3-card support) and 2NT (stop in Hearts).

No trump stop

A common use arises when you have the strength for a bid in no trumps with little prospect of a better fit elsewhere, but no adequate stop in the fourth suit.

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 make a rebid the agreed suit which you could have made directly. 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 2NT).