



## **INTRODUCTION**

It's becoming almost as big as baseball, football, hockey, and other sporting events. Television has increased its popularity. With the Internet, it's coming into our homes at a lightning fast rate. The rage that's sweeping the nation – poker!

Although the game has been around for years played in family recreation rooms, smoky bars, casinos, and even retirement homes, these days, poker has become the game of choice for hundreds of thousands of people.

Family game night used to mean getting out the Monopoly board and battling over Park Place and Broadway. Now, family game night is more likely to be characterized by breaking out the poker chips and battling each other for the best hands.

More and more people are talking about their bad beats, their great hands, and their prowess for play. Popular on college campuses, fraternal clubs, and even retirement homes, poker has become our new game of chance, and our new game of choice.

What has led to the rise of this game? Most likely, it has been television and the media. On any given evening, the average person can flip on the TV set and find a poker game being aired.

The World Series of Poker, Celebrity Poker Showdown, and Ultimate Poker Showdown are rising in the ratings as we tune in to see professionals battle it out and compare our play to theirs.

Nearly every home these days has at least one computer. The Internet has become our lifeline, in ways, for information, contact with the outside world, and – yes – our portal to the world of poker beyond our kitchen table. Now ordinary people can log on and play poker with people other than our parents, kids, and friends. Many professional players

sponsor online website where they are required to play allowing Average Joe to match his poker skills with the likes of Howard Lederer and Chris Ferguson.

Perhaps the biggest rise in poker popularity – specifically online poker – stems from one man’s \$40 online buy-in leading to the Cinderella story of the industry. Chris Moneymaker qualified for The World Series of Poker main event through a small buy-in satellite event at Poker Stars.

At the Series, he outlasted a field of 839 entrants – the largest in World Series of Poker history at the time. He pitted heads against some of the most well-known poker professionals in the world – and won! Moneymaker’s first-place finish netted him \$2.5 million dollars, which wasn’t bad considering it was his first live tournament.

Many people looked at Moneymaker’s win as monumental. After all, he was just an average guy. He could be anyone’s next door neighbor or co-worker, and he went up against the pros and won. Chris Moneymaker opened the door for everyday people to dream about being the next professional poker player.

In fact, the 2004 World Series featured triple the number of players over the 2003 turnout. At least four players in the WSOP final table won their entry through an online card room. Like Moneymaker, 2004 winner Greg “Fossil man” Raymer also won his entry at the Poker Stars online card room.

There are a myriad of tips and tricks for playing the game of poker. Everyone seems to have an opinion on the best way to play the game.

True, poker is a game of chance, and many would argue that there really is no secret to winning the game. However, there is a best way to play. As Kenny Rogers sang in “The Gambler”, you’ve got to know when to hold ‘em and know when to fold ‘em. Know when to walk away, and know when to run.

There are many variations on the game of poker, but the one most popular today has got to be Texas Hold ‘Em. It’s a relatively simple game, but like all poker, it can change with the deal of every card. In this book, we’ll explore different ways to play the game online to maximize on your buy-in. We’ll touch on tournaments as well.

Online poker can be fun and even profitable when you play smart and follow the advice of those in the know. Whether you’re playing for fun or for money, the game can easily become an obsession, so we’ve also given you information about getting help with a gambling problem.

We won’t make you a professional – that’s up to you! But we will try to give you some food for thought when the cards are dealt and it’s time to bet.

So, let’s talk poker!

## HISTORY OF POKER

The history of poker is a matter of some debate. The name of the game likely descended from the French word *poque*, which descended from the German word *pochen* ('to knock'), but it is not clear whether the origins of poker itself lie with the games bearing those names. It closely resembles the Persian game of *as nas*, and may have been taught to French settlers in New Orleans by Persian sailors.

Poker is commonly regarded as sharing ancestry with the Renaissance game of *primero* and the French *brelan*. The English game *brag* (earlier *bragg*) clearly descended from *brelan* and incorporated bluffing (though the concept was known in other games by that time). It is quite possible that all of these earlier games influenced the development of poker as it exists now.

English actor Joseph Crowell reported that the game was played in New Orleans in 1829, with a deck of 20 cards, four players betting on which player's hand was the most valuable. Jonathan H. Green's book, *An Exposure of the Arts and Miseries of Gambling* published in 1843 described the spread of the game from there to the rest of the country by Mississippi riverboats, on which gambling was a common pastime. As it spread up the Mississippi and West during the gold rush it is thought to have become a part of the frontier, pioneering ethos.

Poker initially was played with one round of betting. Players were dealt five cards face down and there was no draw of cards. Professional gamblers later modified the rules to increase the profitability of the game to them. After 1850, wild cards and bluffing became common practices and drawing cards was introduced as well.

The addition of the draw was especially helpful to professionals because it included another round of betting and thus another chance to cheat their opponents. It also introduced the necessity for more skill in playing the game.

Soon after this spread the full 52-card English deck was used, and the flush was introduced. During the American Civil War, many additions were made, including draw poker, stud poker (the five-card variant), and the straight. Further American developments followed, such as the wild card (around 1875), lowball and split-pot poker (around 1900), and community card poker games (around 1925). Spread of the game to other countries, particularly in Asia, is often attributed to the U.S. military.

As we've already pointed out, the game and jargon of poker have become important parts of American culture and English culture. Such phrases as *ace in the hole*, *ace up one's sleeve*, *beats me*, *blue chip*, *call one's bluff*, *cash in*, *high roller*, *pass the buck*, *poker face*, *stack up*, *up the ante*, *when the chips are down*, *wild card*, and others are used in everyday conversation even by those unaware of their origins at the poker table.

Modern tournament play became popular in American casinos after the World Series of Poker began in 1970. It was also during that decade that the first serious strategy books appeared, notably *The Theory of Poker* by David Sklansky, *Super System* by Doyle Brunson, and *The Book of Tells* by Mike Caro.

Poker's popularity has experienced an unprecedented spike in recent years, largely due to the introduction of online poker and the invention of the hole-card camera which finally turned the game into a spectator sport. Viewers can now follow the action and drama of the game, and broadcasts of poker tournaments such as the World Series of Poker and the World Poker Tour have brought in huge audiences for cable and satellite TV distributors.

Of course, we're exploring the phenomenon of online poker, so let's look at the history of that.

Other types of online gambling sites were launched before the first online poker room. Online sports books were introduced in the mid 1990's which was also the time of online casinos sprouting up around the web.

It wasn't until 1998 that the first online poker forum was launched. Planet Poker, which has since become a relatively small poker room, enjoyed the status as the sole online

poker forum for a short period of time. Other online sites entered the fray soon after. Paradise Poker was launched in 1999 and would soon become the industry leader.

Today, there are many, many sites to choose from. A search for the most popular sites for online poker show over 1,000 matches, and a Google search gives over 50 million matches for references to online poker sites.

The major sites include Poker Stars, Party Poker, Full Tilt Poker, Pacific Poker, and Bodog Poker. Many offer the chance to play with “fake money” or real money. You can accumulate points at some sites that can be redeemed for merchandise bearing the site’s name.

Another feature with most sites includes the offer of bonus cash with a real money deposit. Often, you can receive a code that matches the amount of your deposit up to a certain amount. For example, make a \$50 real money deposit into your Party Poker account and you will receive \$50 free making your total bankroll \$100.

It’s a matter of personal preference as to which site is best. We will remain objective in this book and will not be able to tell you which site to go to. Each one has its distinct features that appeal to the everyday player.

Online venues may be more vulnerable to certain types of fraud, especially collusion between players. However, they also have collusion detection abilities that do not exist in brick and mortar casinos.

For example, online poker room security employees can look at the “hand history” of the cards previously played by any player on the site, making patterns of behavior easier to detect than in a casino where colluding players can simply fold their hands without anyone ever knowing the strength of their holding.

Online poker rooms also sometimes check player's IP addresses in order to prevent players at the same household or at known open proxy servers from playing on the same tables

The biggest challenge with online poker is you don't have the advantage of trying to "read" your fellow players. A basic knowledge of the game, of course, is the first step to good play.

While we would like to assume you already know the basics, you might not, so our next section looks at general terms used in poker as well as hand rankings. It's always good to have this information at hand!

## **POKER 101**

Following is the ranking of general poker hands from highest to lowest.

1. **Royal Straight Flush** - 10-J-Q-K-A, all of the same suit.
2. **Straight Flush** - five cards, of the same suit, in order, such as 2-3-4-5-6 all of diamonds.
3. **Four of a Kind** - four of the same card, such as K-A-A-A-A.
4. **Full House** - a set of three of a kind plus a pair, such as 8-8-Q-Q-Q.
5. **Flush** - five cards of the same suit
6. **Straight** - five running cards not necessarily of the same suit, such as 6-7-8-9-10
7. **Three of a Kind** - three cards of the same value, such as 10-10-10
8. **Two Pair** – four cards with two of the same value and the other two of the same value, such as 8-8 and A-A
9. **One Pair** – two cards of the same value, such as 2-2
10. **High Card** – any one card with the highest value

Slang for specific hands:



A-A – American Airlines, bullets, pocket rockets

A-K – Big Slick, “Walking back to Houston”

A-J -- Ajax

K-K – Cowboys

K-Q – Marriage

K-J – Kojak

K-9 -- Canine

Q-Q – Dames, divas, ladies, the Hilton sisters

Q-J – Maverick, Oedipus Rex

Q-7 -- Computer Hand

J-J – Jokers, hooks

J-5 – Jackson Five, Motown

10-5 – Five and dime

10-2 –Doyle Brunson

8-8 – Snowmen, Octopuses

7-7 – Hockey Sticks, walking Sticks

7-2 – The Hammer

5-5 – Nickels, presto

5-4 – Jesse James (for his Colt .45)

4-4 - Sailboats

2-2 – Ducks

## **Poker Vocabulary**

### **Ace-High**

A five-card hand that has no hand combinations (flush, straight, pair etc), but contains one Ace.

### **All-in**

When you bet all your money on a hand, either voluntarily in the belief that you have the strongest hand, or because do not have enough money to cover the full amount bet by

someone else. You then contend for the pot in an amount proportional to what you contributed.

### **Ante**

The minimum bet that players must place into the pot by each player before betting begins. The ante is placed before any cards are dealt.

### **Bad Beat**

When a good hand that would have been expected to win the pot is beaten by a lucky draw.

Backdoor making a hand you weren't playing for, eg. You play for a full house but make a flush

### **Big Blind**

The first bet posted by the player to the left of the player who posts the small blind. It is a forced bet. The big blind bet amount is equal to the lower bet. For example, in a \$10 - \$20 game, the big blind is \$10

### **Big Slick**

An A-K combination as pocket (hole) cards.

### **Blind Bet**

A forced bet that is placed before any cards are dealt. It is considered a live bet for the first round of betting. You have big blind and small blind bets in the first round of betting

### **Bluff**

To pretend that you have a better hand than you actually do, by betting aggressively, in the hope that the other players will fold.

### **Boat**

Slang for a full house.

### **Board**

The cards seen by all the players, the community cards in the center of the table or in a players hand in a game like stud poker

### **Bullets**

A pair of Aces. If these are your pocket cards, they are also known as “Pocket Rockets”.

### **Burning a Card**

Discarding the top card from the deck.

### **Buy-in Amount**

the amount you must bring into a game.

### **Call**

When you place a bet equal to the previous bet.

### **Cash Out**

To finish playing and exchange your chips for cash.

### **Catch**

When a player makes the hand s/he was drawing to.

### **Check**

When you want to stay in the game but not place a bet. You can only check if no other bets have been placed in the betting round.

### **Check-Raise**

To check at the beginning of a betting round and then raise when a player to your left bets.

### **Community Cards**

Cards that are dealt to the table. All players can use these cards to complete a five-card hand.

### **Dead Man's Hand**

Two pair hand consisting of Aces & Eights. This is reputed to be the hand that Wild Bill Hickock was holding when he was shot dead.

**Dealer-button**

A flat disk that is used to signify the Dealer's position on the table in online poker. The disk is usually marked with a D.

**Deuces**

A pair of Twos.

**Drawing**

Remaining in the round and accepting more cards.

**Drawing to a hand**

Remaining in the round with the hope of making one's potential hand as more cards are dealt.

**Drawing Dead**

When a player is drawing to a hand that is not the best hand offered by the flop and will therefore be beaten even if the hand is made.

**Early Position**

In an early betting position for a hand weakest position

**Family Pot**

When everyone at the table is still involved in the pot

**Fast Play**

Betting and raising aggressively

**Flop**

The first three community cards dealt to the table

**Fold**

When players throw in their cards. They give up any claim on the pot in exchange for not having to contribute more money to the pot.

**Forced Bet**

A bet that a player has no choice but to make, a blind bet

**Flush Draw**

When a player holds four cards of the same suit and is hoping to draw a fifth card of that suit to complete a flush.

**Go on tilt**

When a player loses emotional balance during a game and plays irrationally.

**Gut Shot**

To draw to an inside straight.

**Heads Up**

A game with only two players in it.

**Hole Cards**

These are the Down Cards in front of the players. (Also known as “Pocket Cards”)

**House**

The host of the game (e.g. the casino).

**Inside straight draw**

Drawing to a straight where the cards needed to complete the straight are those in the middle of the straight. For example, you have 6-7-9-10 and need the middle card (8) to make the straight.

**Kicker**

The highest unpaired card of a player's pocket cards.

**Limping In**

Calling the big blind rather than raising.

**Monster**

A very strong hand.

**Muck**

When you do not want to show your hand to the table. The hand is discarded without being displayed to the table. You can muck a losing hand in a show down, or the winning hand if everyone else has folded before you.

**Nuts**

The best possible hand that cannot be beaten, at a particular point of the game.

**Nut Flush**

A flush containing the Ace.

**Off suit**

Cards of different suits.

**Outs**

Cards that will make the hand that the player is drawing to.

**Over card**

A card on the board higher than your pair

**Paint Cards**

The picture cards (King, Queen, Jack).

**Pocket Cards**

The cards dealt face down to each player. (Also known as “Hole Cards”)

**Pocket Rockets**

A pair of Aces as your pocket cards (hole cards).

**Pot**

The pot is the pile of chips that accumulates as each player ante, bet and raise. All winnings are paid from the pot. The value of the pot varies. It is dependant on the stakes involved and the amount the Players bet. The pot goes to the winner of each round.

**Note:**

The House takes a small percentage of the pot. This is known as the “rake”.

If two or more Players have the same winning hand, they split the pot equally.

**Pot –Limit**

A game where a player's maximum bet is the size of the pot

**Pot Odds**

The calculated odds the money in the pot represents in relation to how much it will cost to play and hand and the players chances of winning the hand

**Quads**

Four of a kind (four cards of the same denomination).

**Rake**

Percentage of the pot taken by the house.

**Rags**

Useless cards – cards that don't improve a hand.

**Rainbow**

When the board contains 3 or 4 cards of different suits.

**Raise**

When you increase the bet made by a preceding player. This increases the stakes for remaining Players, who now have to match the total amount including the raise.

**Ring Game**

A normal real money table game, as opposed to a tournament game.

**River Card**

The final community card dealt.

**Scare Cards**

High board cards (e.g. an Ace that appears on the flop).

**See**

To see someone is to call their bet.

**Semi-bluff**

To bluff with a hand that still has drawing potential and could improve to be the winning hand.

**Seven Deuce**

The acknowledged weakest starting card combination in Texas Hold-em (7-2)

**Show down**

After the last betting round when the remaining players compare hands to determine the winner. The player with the highest value hand wins the pot.

**Sitting Out**

When you choose to leave a table for a few hands.

**Note:**

If a player sits out for more than fifteen minutes, or has missed two rounds of blinds, they are usually removed from the table.

**Slow Playing**

Playing non-aggressively with a powerful hand; calling and betting instead of raising. This is done in the hope of not driving players out of the hand and thus sucking more money into the pot. This is also called “sandbagging”.

**Small Blind**

The first bet posted by the player to the Dealer's left. It is a forced bet. The small blind bet amount is equal to half of the lower bet. For example, in a \$10 - \$20 game, the small blind is \$5.

**Stack**

A player's chips.



**Steal**

To try and win the pot by betting when everyone else has checked, or by making a large raise when everyone else has called.

**Tells**

Gestures or words by a player that give away the value of his/her hand

**Tight**

A tight player is a player who never bets unless they hold a good hand

**Turn**

The fourth community card dealt

**Under the Gun**

The player who must act first in the betting round.

**Visible Cards**

Cards dealt face up to each Player. Players use these cards to complete a five-card combination.

**WSOP**

World Series of Poker

Now that you have the terminology at hand, let's look at playing the game of Texas Hold 'Em.

## **PLAYING TEXAS HOLD 'EM**

Hold 'em is probably the best known and most popular form of poker today.

Each player starts with two hole cards. There are three rounds of community cards. These are dealt face up, for every player to use, with betting after each round. Players make the best 5-card hand using any combination of the five community cards and two hole cards.

Each new hand begins with a small blind, a big blind, and a round of betting. The betting rules vary depending upon whether the game is Limit, Pot Limit or No Limit.

Once the first round of betting is complete, the dealer then puts out the first three community cards, or "the flop". There is a round of betting. The dealer then puts out the fourth community card or "the turn". There is a round of betting. The dealer then puts out the fifth community card or "the river". There is a final round of betting. After the last round of betting, the pot is awarded to the best hand.

All Hold 'em games include a small blind and big blind. These are forced bets, and are determined by the position of the button. These bets are considered live, and every player in the hand must either call the big blind, raise, or fold. The button moves clockwise around the table, giving each player a turn being the button, small blind, and big blind.

In Limit Hold 'em, each betting round has a fixed bet. In \$5/\$10, the small blind is \$2.50, the big blind is \$5, and the first two rounds of betting are in increments of \$5. The last two rounds of betting are in increments of \$10. There is a maximum of three re-raises per betting round.

In Pot Limit, a player can bet any amount from the minimum bet to the size of the pot. In a \$5/\$10 pot-limit game, the small blind is \$5 and the big blind is \$10. The first player can call the big blind (in this case, \$10), or raise to any amount up to the size of the pot.

A raise must either equal or exceed the previous bet or raise. In this case, a pot-sized raise would be \$25 (\$5 small blind + \$10 big blind + \$10 call), meaning that, in total, player three can bet up \$35. Supposing player three makes a pot-sized raise, the total pot is now \$50.

If the next player wants into the hand, they must call \$35, which is the size of player three's bet. If they want to raise the maximum, they would bet \$120, which equals the size of the pot (\$50) plus a \$70 raise (\$35 call + \$35 raise).

In No Limit, a player can bet any amount from the minimum bet to the maximum number of chips they have in front of them. As in pot limit, a \$5/\$10 No Limit game means blinds of \$5 and \$10.

Here are some general guidelines for pocket cards. They are not steadfast, but can give you something to go by. Of course, the (S) means suited.

### **The Strongest Starting Hands:**

**PAIR of HIGH CARDS** - AA, KK, QQ, JJ, 1010

**ACE and HIGH CARD SUITED** - AK(S), AQ(S), AJ(S), A10(S)

**FACES SUITED** - KQ(S), KJ(S), QJ(S)

**ACE KING** – AK

### **Medium Strength Starting Hands:**

**FACE TEN SUITED** - K10(S), Q10(S), J10(S)

**MEDIUM PAIRS** - 99, 88, 77

**TWO HIGH CARDS** - AQ, AJ, A10 (ace king ranks higher, above), KQ down to J10

**ACE and MEDIUM SUITED** - A9(S), A8(S), A7(S)

**MEDIUM SUITED CONNECTORS (No Gap/One Gap)** - J9(S), 109(S), 108(S), 98(S), 97(S) down to 75(S)

**Other Conditional Starting Hands:**

**LOW PAIRS** - 66, 55, 44, 33, 22

**ACE and LOW SUITED** - A6(S), A5(S), A4(S), A3(S), A2(S)

**LOW SUITED CONNECTORS (No Gap/One Gap)** - 65(S), 64(S), 54(S,) 53(S)  
(lowest)

One of the biggest factors in knowing how to play hold 'em poker effectively is being aware of your position.

## **POSITION**

Position is simply where you are sitting in relation to the dealer's button. In hold em and many other poker games, your position at the table is a big factor. The strength of your position comes from the fact that the betting goes in a clockwise fashion.

In a favorable position you get to see how many other players react to their hands and whether they fold, bet, or call before you do. The poker phrase, "Position is power" comes from this simple idea.

There are many names associated with position to identify where players are sitting in relation to the dealer's button. Each particular position has its own strengths or weaknesses.

- The player to the left of the dealer is not only the small blind, but must act first after the flop.
- The player to the left of the small blind is the big blind. He or she is already obligated to the game and is in another early position after the flop.
- The player to the left of the big blind is "under the gun". This player is the first to act pre-flop and is considered to be in the worst position, even though

they do not act first in any other betting round (the blinds would) because they would have to invest an entire bet to get into the action.

- The player with the dealer's button is the last to act after the flop and has the most advantageous position. They are called "the dealer", "on the button", or just "the button".
- The player to the right of the button is called "the cutoff", which comes from the fact that this position is one of the best for blind-stealing at a full nine-handed or ten-handed table. This player often cuts off the dealer by betting before they have a chance to bet.
- Players in all positions are referred to as being in early, middle, or late position. Players in an early position are the first ones to act in a betting round (like the player under the gun) and late position players (like the cutoff and the button) are some of the last to act.

The importance of your position varies on many factors. For example, in no limit hold 'em position is much more important than in limit hold 'em. It is always better to be in a late position though, so it is important to identify what hands are generally playable in all positions.

Let's say you're under the gun. You have Queen-Ten, unsuited and decide to limp into the pot. The player who bets after you raises, and everyone but you folds. Now you're in a jam. Chances are good that this player has a better hand than you. If they have any ace, king, or pocket pair, they are statistically better than you.

You'd suspect that someone who raised has at least a hand like that. Now you can either call again or go into the flop as an underdog or you can fold and just give up the bet. What's worse is that if you call, you will be acting before this player for the rest of the hand.

On the other hand, let's say you're on the button. You have Queen-Ten, unsuited and everybody folds to you. One option would be to fold and let the blinds fight it out. Another would be to just call and see what happens on the flop. Many players here

would raise because you could steal the blinds and even if you didn't, you'd act after them for the remainder of the hand. Raising is only a viable option because of your favorable position.

Another notable factor is that position goes hand in hand with knowing the players directly around you. For example, an aggressive, blind-stealing player to the immediate right of a tight player usually results in the tight player's blinds getting stolen.

Being in late position with a good hand has major strengths over being early with a good hand. Early position raisers are assumed to have a good hand and it tends to scare players away.

Early pre-flop raises force opponents to call two bets at once - at least in the case of no limit - with nothing in the pot yet. In late position, there may be players who have already called one bet. Those players only have to call one bet (in limit) with a little something already in the pot. So players in late position with a good hand have the ability to manipulate the pot.

While position is important, you will also need to calculate the best chances you have to pull out the card you need to win. We call these pot odds and outs.

## **POT ODDS AND “OUTS”**

Probability and odds are huge factors in Texas hold 'em. Players use odds to determine their actions. The chances of finishing a flush or a straight, the probability of getting an over card, the percentage of times you're going to flop a set to match your pocket pair are all important factors in poker. Knowledge of these statistics is a key to winning. In online games especially with very few (if any) tells, statistical knowledge becomes the main factor when choosing whether to bet, call, or fold.

Pot odds decisions are one of poker's most elementary, yet it is one of the most common mistakes made by amateur players at all levels. You will most likely always find a player who is making bad pot odd decisions or ignoring them entirely, meanwhile paying off the rest of the table!

In Texas Hold 'Em, you commonly use outs and pot odds the most. This is also the starting point for those who want to learn about poker odds. To those out there who "ain't good at countin' much", you better get good because that is how it's done. Outs are defined as a card in the deck that helps you make your hand. At this point it's only simple division.

The numerator (top number) will be the number of outs you have. The denominator (bottom number) is the number of cards left that we haven't seen. The result will be the percentage chance of making one of those outs. Therefore, the most math you'll be doing will be dividing small numbers by 50 (pre-flop), 47 (after the flop), or 46 (after the turn)

Pot odds are as easy as computing outs. You compare your outs or your chance of winning to the size of the pot. If your chance of winning is significantly better than the

ratio of the pot size to a bet, then you have good pot odds. If it's lower, then you have bad pot odds.

For example, say you are in a \$5/\$10 hold em game with Jack-Ten facing one opponent on the turn. You have an outside straight draw with a board of 2-5-9-Q, and only the river card left to make it. Any 8 or any King will finish this straight for you, so you have 8 outs (four 8's and 4 K's left in the deck) and 46 unseen cards left.  $8/46$  is almost the same as a 1 in 6 chance of making it.

Your sole opponent bets \$10. If you take a \$10 bet you could win \$200.  $\$200/\$10$  is 20, so you stand to make 20x more if you call.  $1/6$  higher than  $1/20$ , so pot odds say that calling wouldn't be a bad idea.

The next step is to use bet odds and implied odds. That's tougher, because it involves predicting reactions of other players. With bet odds, you try to factor in how many people are going to call a raise. With implied odds, you're thinking about reactions for the rest of the game. One last example on implied odds...

Say it's another \$5/\$10 hold em game and you have a four flush on the flop. Your neighbor bets, and everyone else folds. The pot is \$50 at this point. First you figure out your chance of hitting your flush on the turn, and it comes out to about 19.1% (about 1 in 5).

You have to call this \$5 bet versus a \$50 pot, so that's a 10x payout.  $1/5$  is higher than  $1/10$ , so bet odds are okay, but you must consider that this guy's going to bet into you on the turn and river also. That's the \$5 plus two more \$10 bets. So now you're facing \$25 more till the end of the hand.

You have to consider your chances of hitting that flush on the turn or river, which makes it about 35% (better than 1 in 3 now), but you have to invest \$25 for a finishing pot of \$100:  $\$100/\$25$  with 1 in 4. That's pretty close.



But there's more!

If you don't make it on the turn, it'll change your outs and odds! You'll have a 19.6% chance of hitting the flush (little worse than 1 in 5), but a \$20 investment for a finishing pot of \$100! \$100/\$20 is 1 in 5. So the chances would take a nasty turn if you didn't hit it! What's makes it more complicated is that if you did hit it on the turn, you could raise him back, and get an extra \$20 or maybe even \$40 in the pot.

Is there an easier way to calculate pot odds? Thankfully, there are several short cuts that have been devised to make a quick judgment for pot odds.

One of the easiest methods is to take your total outs, multiply times 2, and then add 2. This is roughly a percentage chance of making your hand.

For example, say you have an inside straight draw with 4 outs.  $4 \times 2 = 8$ . Add 2, for a total of 10. You have roughly a 10% chance to make your hand. Your call should be no more than 10% of what is already in the pot.

This method is quick and decently effective, though certain calculations will be a bit off. This method does not take into consideration the fact that you may have more than one card remaining to come; it simply estimates your chance of hitting your “out” on your next card.

There are a number of tools online that help you calculate your odds. Just do a Google search, and you'll find several. Keep in mind, though, that using them may significantly slow your play and cause your fellow players to interpret this as a “tell”.

Playing your pocket cards is key, but you'll also need to know some strategies when it comes to the flop and the river.

## **PLAYING THE FLOP**

Besides the dealing of the pocket cards, and your decision to fold or hold them, the Flop is probably the most important moment in Texas Hold em.

Three cards hit the board, often making “nut” hands out of weak pocket cards, and at times, making strong pocket cards useless. Your ability to read the flop will be a huge factor in your success in Texas Hold em.

### **Flopping 3 of a Kind**

There is a difference between *flopping a set* and *flopping trips*. First, *flopping a set* would be a situation where you hold a strong pair, such as KK, and the river comes K-A-6. Your monster 3 Kings are hidden, and anyone with an Ace is probably going to be putting in a raise, seeing top pair on the flop. The potential for this hand is amazing, and slow play would be a good option.

A similar situation we will call *flopping trips*. This would be a situation where you hold only one of the 3 cards as your pocket card. Say you hold AK suited, and the flop comes out K-K-Q.

Here again, you have 3 of a kind, but even so, you have to understand that this is a bit of a weaker hand. Anytime a pair is showing on board, there is danger of a full house already formed.

QQ would definitely be a hand that someone would hold onto, and if given this flop, your 3 Kings are losers. It's also harder to maximize a pot with the two Kings on the flop. Those are huge scare cards, and if you bet out right away, you may get nothing more than what is already in the pot. Again, slow play, and be especially careful of an already formed full house.

There are, however, certain times you want to jam the pot with 3 of a kind. If the flop gives chances for a straight draw, like K-K-10, where anyone holding Q-J has a good chance at a straight, or if 2 of the cards are the same suit, giving someone a chance at a flush if they held onto a pair of same suited cards. In these instances, they are going to play to the river, so make them pay to see extra cards!

Another time you want to jam the pot is if you have flopped a small set. For example you checked with the big blind with a pair of 3's, and the flop comes out Q-8-3. You have your set, and will most likely win with it, but you don't want to risk someone holding a

higher pair getting their set on the turn or river for free. Bet, raise, check raise if you know someone else will bet, whatever you have to do to narrow down your competition and hopefully force out the medium pairs. What you like to see is someone with AQ in this situation with top pair, top kicker who will give you action but has very little chance of winning it. Jam the pot with small sets.

### **Top Pair after the Flop**

If you held a high pair before the flop and were jamming the pot, then you should continue to jam the pot if you still hold the top pair. If you held Q-Q, and the flop comes out 10-2-7, you're most likely still the leader, unless someone was slow playing Aces or Kings before the flop, or someone with 10's just flopped a set.

The fact is, if you play aggressively with a high pair before the flop, you will generally know whether or not you still have the lead.

If you held A-K, and the flop comes out 4-K-9, here again, you're jamming the pot. You hold top pair with the best kicker, and the last thing you want is for someone to draw out and complete a flush or straight to beat you.

Top pair is strong after the flop, but definitely not strong enough to sit on and slow play.

### **Flopping a small Pair**

Suppose you were holding A-8 of clubs, and the flop comes out Q-8-3. You have missed your flush draw, because only the 3 is clubs, but you have flopped a pair of “babies.”

You have to respect the fact that someone may have a queen, and have you beat. Even so, if the action is checked to you, you should seriously consider putting in a bet here. By putting in the bet, you accomplish the purpose of finding out the true strength of your pair. If anyone holds a queen, you can expect a raise. If you have high hand, expect calls. If you are raised, then you must consider the personality of who raised you. If a weak or tough player raises you then it might be time to call or fold. If it's the mediocre player, then by all means stay in, and even re-raise.

This particular hand might be hard to fold, though, simply because you still have a lot of outs. An ace would give you a huge hand; another 8 would be even better, and there's always the possibility of 2 more clubs hitting the board.

So, go ahead and bet with the small pairs, and then judge by your opponent's personalities and actions as to where you stand.

### **Flopping a Monster Hand**

By monster hand, we mean flopping a royal flush, 4 of a kind, full house, flush, straight, and straight flush. Statistically the hand is yours or practically yours. In most circumstances, the best choice is to slow play. You want the other players to stay in and build a decent hand that they will bet with or at least call to the river with.

We offer a word of caution though. In the case of flushes and straights, make sure you don't get caught with the low end of a straight or a low card flush, where someone makes the same straight with a higher card, or someone makes the same flush with a higher card.

If you are playing good quality pocket cards though, this should rarely happen. But if your flush is only a 10 high, bet aggressively and try to force out anyone holding a jack, queen, king or ace of your suit. Granted, most people won't fold with four to a flush, but at least you're making them pay for a chance to get their card.

As a general rule then, slow play the monsters and wait till the more expensive turn and river to begin extracting chips from your opponents.

### **Flopping a Flush or Straight Draw**

You have to first of all understand that odds are still against you making your hand (2-1 with four to a flush or open ended straight). But the rule of thumb to follow here is that Texas Hold em rewards aggressive play. Bet this hand if it is checked to you and hope for one of two results. Either everyone else folds and you pick up a small pot, or you end up making your flush or straight and winning a huge one.

If there are bets and raises to you, then you will need to resort to calculating pot odds to determine if it is profitable to call or in some cases raise.

### **Flopping 2 Pair**

Say you hold J-10 suited, and the flop comes out 10-4-J. You have managed to flop the top two pair. I would tend to jam the pot with two pair. While two pair is strong, there are still a lot of hands that can beat it. There is no harm in jamming the pot and elbowing everyone else off the table. If you end up making a full house on the later streets, you can adjust your strategy, but for moment, you want to bet and force the limpers out.

There are exceptions to this of course. If you hold AQ and the flop comes out AQ2 rainbow, you are pretty strong and can afford to let someone catch up a little. Read the texture of the flop. If the flop is suited or connected you definitely do not want to mess around with slow playing, but rather get your chips in while you are ahead and charge the draw hands to play. Flops that show little help to the other players might be worth slow playing a bit so that they improve enough to call your bets on the turn and river or give an aggressive player a chance to bluff.

### **Ugly Flops**

If you are holding onto a marginal type hand, and it is not helped at all by the flop, then plan on checking and folding. Taking bad hands to the river will take a major toll on your bankroll.

The turn or 4th Street in Hold em is the first instance where the bets are doubled. You can hear the “cha-ching” in your ears, as you bet those good hands. However, for the beginner, this street can be exceptionally dangerous, as this is where many players complete their straights and flushes, along with all of the other hand possibilities of poker.

If you have played good poker up to this point, at both the pocket card selection and flop, then you should have some idea of whether or not you are ahead or behind in the hand.

As a general rule, if you are ahead after seeing this 4th card hit the board then bet and start building the pot. On the other hand, if you are pretty sure you are behind, this is the

prime time to fold your hand, before you start throwing your money away by calling the expensive bets.

Say you were dealt J-J, and you bet aggressively before and after the flop. The flop and turn board looks like this: Q-3-7-A, three of which are diamonds, and unfortunately, you hold the black jacks (spades and clubs). You should fold this hand to any raises. Why? Count how many ways you are beat: an ace, queen, 2 diamonds, or 1 diamond if another shows on the river, plus a remote straight opportunity if the river card is a 10, K or another Jack. That's a lot of ways to beat you.

Now count how many "outs" you have and what the best possible hand is that you could form. Right now, your best hope is another Jack, giving you three of a kind. Are you willing to call bets and raises when there are only two cards left in the deck that can help you, and even then, still have a shot at getting beat by someone blessed with a diamond flush or straight??

Good poker plays before and after the flop gives you the information you need to make the decision on the Turn. Stick with your gut instinct. If you're ahead, bet, and if you're behind, fold unless you are getting good pot odds with a draw hand. Don't pray for miracle cards. Play the cards you hold.

Now that you have the flop, the turn will come, but perhaps the most significant card you want to see is the river.

## **PLAYING THE RIVER**

The River Card. Showdown. It's time to see who is taking down the chips, and who is drowning in the river. River play is fairly simple. If you have the best hand either by strength of good cards early, or luck of the draw on the river, now is your final chance to get a few more chips from your opponents.

Some "classy" players will check here, even though they know they have the top hand, and thus save their opponents a few dollars to put back in their wallet. Unless it's a long time friend, I would advise taking his wallet, emptying it of its contents and then stuffing the wallet down his throat. There are winners and there are losers in poker. If you are

looking for “courtesy play”, then play with family. The world of poker is like Jack London's icy wastelands where only the strong survive.

The only real advice we can give on river play is to almost never fold. If you have been playing good cards up to this point in the hand, then you at least have a shot at holding the winning cards. By now the pot is large enough that it also makes good money sense to stay in.

Unless you did not complete a pure draw hand, call any bets. Don't get the reputation as someone who can be bluffed off the river. If this happens, you'll just face more and more bluff bets on the river. On the other hand, if you get the reputation as someone who can't be bluffed, then no one in their right mind will attempt it.

The only other times you should consider folding is when an extremely conservative player who never bluffs has been calling towards a draw hand the entire hand and now it looks like he has hit his card.

Or when there are two or more players who start betting and raising on the river, you can be sure that at least one of them holds the goods. You can make a case for folding here.

Pot odds dictate that you bet or call on the river, unless you are practically positive you are beat.

## **BETTING**

*Nobody is always a winner, and anybody who says he is, is either a liar or doesn't play poker.*

— Amarillo Slim

A bet is a declaration that either:

- a)"I have the best hand and I'll wager money on it" or
- b)"You have a poor hand, and you will fold if you are forced to wager on it"

Typically, players are *supposed* to bet when they have a good hand. Players who don't have good hands are *supposed* to fold. Of course, if it was this simple, there would be no need for this book.

You might as well wager on Tic-Tac-Toe. Most players play contrary to this idea, attempting to be a cunning or deceptive player. Don't fall into this trap when you are just learning to play.

Your betting strategy should be built upon this simple idea, but you must know when to stray and bet in situations when you otherwise wouldn't. Here are some situations you should start looking at to improve your game:

### **Blind-stealing**

When you are in the dealer's position, and only you and the blinds are remaining in the game, a raise is often called "blind-stealing". This is because the blinds may fold, whereas if you didn't raise but simply called, the blinds would simply check. It's a good way to make a buck or two, but will never make you rich. It's more of a way to end the game fast and have a new hand dealt with more players (and more money).

### **The steal-raise**

If you are last to act and all players have checked to you, betting to simply limit the number of players or take the pot is called a steal-raise. Don't use this exclusively, as better players will be onto you quickly and begin check-raising against your (most likely) poor hand.

It is good to use a steal raise when you have an excellent drawing hand such as a nut flush draw. Players will tend to "check to the raiser". If you draw to your hand, you now



have a larger pot to win. If you don't, you can always check, and hope the fifth card makes your hand.

### **The check-raise**

Check raising is checking to your opponent, with the intention of luring them to bet, so that you can raise them back. Your intention is to lure them into a false sense of security so that you can raise them and increase the pot (remember, after one bet is committed, its more likely they'll commit to two).

### **The opener**

This reckless move is often done by people who bluff. It is when the person first to act raises, making all other players call two bets at once. Its intention is to limit the number of players. Basically, this move amounts to a backwards steal-raise. The effect will almost certainly cause many players to fold, but the ones remaining will either be equally aggressive or truly have a great hand. This is also known as betting for information. This tactic is best used with few players in on the hand.

### **Squeezing**

Squeezing is a tactic only used in a short-handed game. It's betting when you have a good hand currently, and you suspect another player or players may be on a draw. For example, you have top pair with the best kicker. Chances are they won't make their draw (be it a straight or a flush draw, etc). Your goal is to limit their pot odds.

The above examples are really just examples of bets. If you are playing no limit or pot limit hold em, the whole thinking behind betting becomes radically different.

When you're dealt Aces, Kings, or AK suited, you can and should raise and even re-raise before the flop, no matter your position. A pair of queens or jacks you have to be a bit

more careful with, but the chances are still huge that you are top hand before the flop. Raise and drive out the draw hands, if there are no raises in front of you.

With strong cards (pocket suited), look to raise in middle or late position, only if no one has raised before you. If you raise in middle position and someone in late position re-raises, be careful. If they're a strong player they probably have you beat in card strength unless they're bluffing to try and take the blinds and antes.

While bluffing might be a good tactic for some players, it's not always the way to go. Hard and fast strategies will help you to win in the long run.

## **STRATEGIES**

"Know how to win before you sit down. Experience may be the best teacher, but it's also the most expensive."

*-Doyle Brunson, Poker Wisdom of a Champion, 2003*

Hold'em is basically HIGH card game. The players holding two good high cards have the best chance at the best hand or a draw to the best hand after the flop. Only play strong hands that will stand a raise or multiple raises, from early betting positions. Play medium strength and other playable hands from the later positions if you have a good chance of seeing the flop at a reasonable price.

Play strong high hands MOST of the time, and play them very aggressively. Take all the raises you can get. If you don't thin out the competition, you reduce your chances of winning.

Plus, your aggressive play before the flop can add credibility to any strong play you might want to use on the next round if a garbage flop falls and you want to try a steal. Be ready to fold your high pair if you get a lot of action with a threatening flop

However, before you start betting like a madman when you get two eights in the pocket, you need to carefully consider all factors involved in solid pre-flop strategy.

The factors to consider are the number of players, how aggressive/passive the players at the table are, your bankroll, your position, and how much risk you are willing to entail.

**Number of players:** With 10 people in the game, it's much more likely that someone else has a strong hand in the pocket than in a short-handed game. Also, you'll need to be more cautious in larger games, as the chances of someone's pre-flop hand fitting the flop will be much better. More competition means stiffer competition.

**How aggressive the players are:** Assuming you've been playing with a few people for several hands, and you noticed some jerk is raising every hand pre-flop, you'll want to play tighter. Let the guy win the blinds (big deal) and nail him to the wall when you have a solid hand in the pocket pre-flop.

**Your bankroll:** If you have \$2 left, you'll want to play extremely carefully and select one hand to bet on, hoping to get as many players involved as possible for a larger pot. You'll want to be all-in before the flop is dealt. On the flip-side, if you have \$1000 at a \$1/\$2 table, you can take the high-risk, high-payout bets.

**Your position:** People in late position (big blind, small blind, on the button) have the ability to influence the size of the pot much more than those in early position. This is especially true pre-flop. See our separate section on position.

**Your tolerance for risk:** Depending on your playing style, you may want to play more or less aggressively pre-flop. Players who shoot for larger pots, but don't mind a greater chance for losing a few hands will want to raise pre-flop, especially if they are in late position. Some players prefer to be as selective as possible pre-flop, grinding out a winning hand here or there. It really depends on your own style of play, and how you perceive the players around you.

You of course will want to consider what cards you have in your hand. Naturally, AA is the best to start with. It helps if your hand is suited or if the cards are sequential in rank

like a Seven and an Eight ("connected"). It's important to understand how your two cards hold up against other combinations of cards though.

Here are some general strategies to keep in mind:

**Fast play high pairs and very strong hands before the flop.** This puts more money in the early pot and encourages weak and garbage hands to fold that could get a lucky flop and beat you.

**Don't draw to the low end or both ends of a straight.** If a 9 8 7 flops, you want to be playing the J 10 and not the 6 5 or the 10 6. (The low part is commonly called the "ignorant" end of the straight.)

**Unconnected Medium and Low Cards are Usually Unplayable.** This includes suited cards that can't flop a straight. Both ends of a straight such as 9 5 fall into this very weak category.

**Play starting low pairs cautiously.** This means from 66 down to 22. You should not usually play them from an early seat and play from the late positions, only when the price is right. If you don't flop a set or quads you should usually fold.

**Play aggressively when you have a two way draw after the flop.** If you can make a straight AND a flush or trips etc., usually bet/raise your hand.

**Bet an Ace or two high over cards after a garbage flop** (a three suit "rainbow" with unconnected medium and low cards). Usually fold if someone raises.

**Watch out for uniform flops,** like 8 7 6, they can easily turn into straights that can overtake your high pair or other good hand.

**Check the raisers chips.** Players that are close to all-in often rush the betting just to get all their chips in a sink-or-swim last hand.

**Beware of Suited Flops** that can make a completed flush. In this case, you should usually hold the nut in that suit, or have trips or two pair that can fill up.

You can have all the strategy under your belt that your brain can hold, but be careful! There are tell-tale signs that can be exhibited by even the most seasoned poker player. While it's true that playing online doesn't give you the advantage of seeing a player face to face, there are still some tells that many online players have to give them away.

## TELLS

*If you can't spot the sucker within the first half hour at the table, then you are the sucker.*

-- Common poker saying, as spoken by Matt Damon in Rounders and originally attributed to Amarillo Slim

In live games, reading your opponents is much easier than it is online. Professionals wear sunglasses to hide any trace of emotion in their eyes. They bring I-pods and portable CD players to listen to and minimize distractions. They spend countless hours looking for tell-tale signs of a player's strengths and weaknesses.

When you play online, you don't have the advantage of looking into the other players' eyes to get a read on their cards. This makes moves like bluffing significantly more precarious. It can be done, and we'll cover that in a separate section, but you can also get some tells from your fellow players in the online poker room.

Several of the tells listed here are useful in both online and offline poker. However, since we lack the ability to read opponents' physical expressions, these are the tells that **are** available to us making them that much more important.

First, let us define a “tell.” A “tell” is a habitual action by another player that gives you a clue as to what he is holding. In offline poker, a widening of the eyes is often a “tell” of a very strong hand. That is one reason you see so many poker players wearing sunglasses at the table. It’s not because of the bright Las Vegas lights.

Let’s take a look at some of the tells that are exhibited by online players and what they mean.

### **Speed of Play**

Every online poker room has a set number of seconds that each player has to respond before he is declared either all-in or folded. Sometimes, due to internet issues, a player's actions will almost always be slow and laggy.

However, often, the speed of play can be a good “tell.”

Typically, a quick bet is a sign of weakness, and a delayed action is a sign of strength, as the player is calculating his strategy with what he perceives to be a huge hand. Watch how much time it takes the other players to make their action, and mentally make a note of it.

If you get a chance to see their cards at showdown, see if you can determine what they “slow bet” with and what they “fast bet” with.

Now would be a good time to think about our own play and whether or not we exhibit these tells by our speed of play.

A good strategy is to try and take the same amount of time for every action, so that observant players cannot draw any conclusions from your own speed of play.

### **Use of Check Boxes/Auto Plays**

If you have been to any of the online casinos, you will notice that they make use of check boxes such as “fold” “raise any”, or “call any”. You can tell when a player has used a check box, because his action comes within the blink of an eye of the player before him.

You can use this to your advantage. When a player has checked “raise any” it should be obvious that he has a strong hand. If a player uses the check box to “check” then you can probably surmise that his hand is weak.

If a player uses the check box to “call any”, then maybe we can assume that he has a draw hand that he has not completed, but is definitely not ready to fold.

While these are not 100% accurate, the observant player can over time, begin to draw conclusions and make assumptions based on an opponent’s use of the check boxes.

The fact that a player feels strongly enough about a hand to make a decision before even seeing the actions of the players before him, should be a “tell” as to what that player is holding.

### **Opponents Fold/Flop Percentage**

While you cannot mark this percentage down exactly, you should over the course of several games get a sense of whether or not the player folds a lot of trash hands or if he is staying in almost every pot.

This “tell” can be used both online and offline, to help you determine the strength of a player’s overall game. If he folds a lot of cards, beware. If he stays in almost every pot, you can probably run over him if you play good cards.

### **Chat Box**

Just as in brick and mortar casinos, the “chattiness” of a player can be an obvious tell. Generally, if a player who is chatting all of a sudden gets quiet, you can bet he is playing a set of good cards. He is spending every ounce of focus on playing his cards and squeezing out the biggest pot possible.

On the other hand, if a player is betting and becomes antagonistic in the chat box, he may be bluffing and hoping his show of “confidence” will aid him in bluffing you off the table. Watch the chat box also for players who are “steaming” or “on tilt.” A whining player or one who is using lots of abusive language is probably emotionally unable to play good poker until he or she calms down.

## Waiting for the Big Blind

When you sit down at a Hold 'em table, many times you'll have the option of “waiting on the big blind” to get to you or you can post a matching big blind and start playing immediately. This a good tell on how patient and online player will be.

If he is not patient enough to wait on the big blind to get around to him, he might not be very patient about waiting on good starting hands. Expect him to be a loose player. The opposite holds true for players who do wait on the big blind. Either they are patient or cheap.

Both are pretty good qualities to have if you are playing online poker. Cheap players, even when they are not especially skilled will tend to wait on better hands since they are loathe to throw away their bets!

## Beginner's Tells

Some of the tells that we should note here, are almost hilarious in nature, but players see it all the time in low limit poker.

The first one that comes to mind is the common “bet with a weak hand, feign weakness with a strong hand.” If you are playing Hold 'em with pocket aces, don't slow play them. This author has seen so many players with pocket aces feign weakness only to see an opponent's straight or trips made on the flop, turn, or river to beat them. This may seem elementary. It definitely is, but it's seen all the time from beginners in online poker.

Another comical beginner tell is when a player **always** waits one card after he has paired before making a bet. A player will be dealt a King on the flop and checks it. The turn is a deuce and now he's betting like a madman. Would he be betting on a pair of 2's? Of course not, but you can be pretty sure he paired the Kings on the flop. Bet it if you've got it.

You will see many of these types of situations in your online poker career. Make an effort to observe them in other players, while avoiding them yourself.



It's easy to exhibit tells when you have a good hand. So what happens when you have a not so good hand? To bluff or not to bluff – that is the question!

## **BLUFFING**

*Sometimes nothing can be a pretty cool hand.*

— Paul Newman as Cool Hand Luke, showing his stone-cold bluff after winning a 7-card stud pot

The do's and don't of bluffing could fill a small book on their own, but here are a few of the most important things to keep in mind:

- Avoid bluffing heavy winners: they can afford to Call and usually do.
- Beginners are often desperate to know what you've got and will call just for the sake of knowing.
- Experienced players play a cagey game, are studying your actions more closely, and are often easier to bluff.
- Ask yourself how good your cards might look to the other players. Don't bluff without at least a little something in your hand to make it look threatening.
- As a general rule, bluffs have a better chance to work well at tight tables, and are pretty much doomed to failure at loose tables, unless all the "loose players" have already folded.
- In low limit games, there's really no point in bluffing. For a buck or 2, you can bet that most of the time someone will call your bluff. With high limits, and especially no limit games, bluffing is at its most effective.
- Don't bluff at big chip stacks. They have the chips to absorb a loss, and are more likely to call. On the flip side, bluff at the short stackers. They're protecting their

chips like a hen on her eggs and faced with any real challenge they may “chicken” out.

- Common sense tells you that the more people you are trying to bluff, the less chance you have of it working. Remember, your goal is for **everyone** to fold.
- Bluff from late position whenever possible. If everyone is checking, calling or folding in front of you, it’s a perfect time to try and buy the pot. It’s not wise to bluff from early position, because you have no clue as to who has hit their hand or been dealt killer cards.
- Many would argue that to bluff with "outs" isn't a true bluff. But logic dictates that you're better served bluffing when there is at least an outside chance of you forming a decent hand. This is also referred to as a “semi-bluff,” and is made when there are still cards to come.

For example, you are dealt AK in a Texas Hold 'em game and the flop completely misses you with a board showing J, T, 3. This might represent a good time to go ahead and bluff at the pot.

You are representing a big pair or that you caught a piece of the flop, and your show of strength might prompt the rest of the table to fold, giving you the pot right there.

However, even if someone does call your bluff, you have outs. An ace or king on the turn or river gives you top pair, and if a queen hits, you have the nut straight.

Bluffing with "outs" simply means that even if the bluff does not work, you're not completely dead in the water

- So many people think that if they bluff a lot and play loose and crazy poker, it makes their bluffs stronger because no one can ever be sure what they have. It actually works the exact opposite. As anyone who’s played long knows, great cards don't come often, so the chance that the wild player is holding trash is generally higher than the chance that he’s got good cards. Therefore, strong players almost always call crazy bluffers. On the other hand, it’s very hard to call

a person's bluff when they always play good cards. When you have the image of a strong player who throws away the trash cards, the other people at the table know that odds are you **have good cards**, and to call the bluff is taking a big risk. Play a good number of hands at any one table and build your table image before trying to bluff.

You'll have the opportunity to practice all your new found skills online in many venues. Now we'll look at the "special" games that are found in almost every online poker site.

## **PLAYING MULTI-TABLE TOURNAMENTS**

Online multi-table tournament play is not only fun and educational, but they're a great way to maximize on your bankroll if you play them right. Many sites offer low entry fee tournaments that pay out the top places at a mostly decent increase on your investment.

For example, Full Tilt Poker has \$1.25 tournaments with 45 people going on all the time. They pay the top 6 places: 1<sup>st</sup> = \$17.10, 2<sup>nd</sup> = \$11.25, 3<sup>rd</sup> = \$7.20, 4<sup>th</sup> = \$4.50, 5<sup>th</sup> = \$2.70, 6<sup>th</sup> = \$2.25. So if you win, you get a pretty good pay-off. Even if you place 6<sup>th</sup>, you'll get your money back with a buck to spare.

The key here is to make it to the final table and, hopefully, the top spot. You need to play very straight forward, solid poker - especially early on.

Many novice players in multi-table tournaments will bet crazily in the first few rounds hoping to get someone out or get a caller on their pocket 2's.

Be selective in what you call, and, in general, don't play into the "all-in" mentality that can lose you in the long run. You may find yourself very inactive for the first few rounds, and that's OK. Survival is the key here. Try to make it to the first break with enough chips to make you a player.

However, if you have a premium hand, don't be afraid to push in your chips. If you want to be a contender for first place, you're going to need a lot of chips. If you play your premium hands aggressively and double up, you have a better chance of this happening.

Extract as much value from your premium hands as possible - Too many people overplay their premium hands because they're afraid their opponent will hit a bigger monster on them. They'll bet too much post-flop and push their opponent out of the pot - even with a monster.

Use probabilities to your advantage to determine the odds of your opponent beating your hand. You need to trap with those big hands. Too often, people will raise too much with huge pockets causing everyone to fold. If you do this, you won't get the full value out of your great cards. Bet sparingly and keep as many people in the pot as you can.

Well-timed aggressiveness goes a LONG way. "Well-timed" means ALWAYS consider your position when you make a move. "Aggressiveness" means don't be afraid to push your good hands.

If your hand is good enough to see a flop at this stage, it is then good enough to raise with. Hence, only play (raise) with premium hands from early position. The selection of hands to play (raise) does increase in late position. There's nothing worse later in the tourney than raising pre-flop in early position when the blinds are big with a hand like AT only to have someone slam over the top of you in late position.

Be sure to protect your chips in tournament play. This means don't raise marginal hands out of position. Putting your chips out there in early position with a hand like ATs is not protecting your chips. You're gambling that no one else has a better hand, or at least is afraid to attack back, with the entire table to act behind you.

What do you do if they slam over the top of you? Fold and give up a large amount of chips? Or call and risk your tournament life on a hand that is more than likely dominated? Not a decision I'd like to make, so avoid putting yourself in this position.

You should never "just call" a large pre-flop raise. If your hand is good enough to call, then it is good enough to re-raise and put the pressure on the original raiser. If you don't feel comfortable re-raising with the hand, you should probably fold it. The only exception to this is if you want to slow play a big hand like AA or KK.

It may be correct to fold what seem to be good hands with a pre-flop raiser in front of you for the purpose of protecting your chips. For example, if player 1 in early position pre-flop raises a fairly large sum and player 2 in mid-position calls, do you really think your pocket tens or even pocket jacks will be good after the flop?

Since you have an early position raiser and a mid-position caller, the best case scenario for you is that your opponents only hold over cards to your tens. And even then, you'd have to hope for a board without any face cards to survive. So in this scenario, it may be best to fold your pocket tens for the sake of chip conservation.

Poker professional Chris Ferguson suggests the best way to play tournaments is to play consistent and tough. He says, "Stop trying to force things to happen. Just concentrate on playing solid poker, and let the chips fall where they may.

Before you worry about adjusting for tournaments, concentrate on adjusting for the other players. The most important skill in poker is the ability to react to a wide range of opponents playing a wide range of styles.

Players who can do this will thrive in both ring games and tournaments alike. Many of the most costly tournament mistakes are the result of players over-adjusting for tournament play.

Your play shouldn't change much as the tournament progresses. Gear your play to take maximum advantage of your opponents, irrespective of how far along the tournament is.

Most players are too loose in the early stages of a tournament. Rather than become one of these players, adjust for their play instead: Attempt to steal the blinds less often, call more raises, and re-raise more frequently.

Likewise, when opponents typically tighten up later on, you should steal more often and be less inclined to get involved in opened pots. Again, this should be a reaction to the way your opponents are playing, not an action based on any particular stage of the tournament.”

Ferguson, however, does outline two times when adjustments may be warranted.

### **1. When you are just out of the money.**

If you are short stacked, you need to be very careful when committing your chips, especially with a call.

If you have a large stack, look for opportunities to push the short and medium stacks around - especially the medium stacks. These players will be a lot less likely to want a confrontation with you, and it should be open season on their blinds and antes.

If you have a medium or small stack, you need to be a bit more careful.

Remember, though, that the other players - even the larger stacks - don't want to tangle with you. They just want to steal from you without a fight. Be prepared to push them around a little, and even to push back occasionally when they try to bully you. This often turns into a game of Chicken between the bigger stacks to determine which large stack will let the other steal most of the blinds.

### **2. At the final table**

Very little adjustment is necessary until you are one player away from the final table. Here, again, you should tighten up slightly because this is the next point where the payout structure handsomely rewards outlasting other players.

Look for opportunities to push around the other players, and the smaller stacks in particular. This is good advice throughout the final table.

Many people might ask, what about heads up?

There are no more tournament adjustments necessary. You are essentially playing a winner take all freeze-out for the difference between first and second place.

He says, “Tournament adjustments should be subtle. It is rare that your play would be dramatically different in a tournament. When in doubt, just play your best game. And if you never adjust from that, you've got a great shot of winning, no matter what game you're playing. “

Another excellent way to hone your skills and make a little cash is at the sit and go's.

## **PLAYING SIT AND GO'S**

Sit and go tables are a wonderful place to hone your game and make a little money. You can learn many, many things at the sit and go. These tournaments are usually low-cost, fun, and convenient. There are always sit and go's going on in the major online poker rooms. You can play them quickly (usually less than an hour), and there's no scheduling involved as in multi-table tournaments.

The major difference in a sit and go versus a multi-table tournament is that there is no one waiting to take a busted player's place. When a player goes broke in a sit and go, they're out. This is advantageous because as the table gets smaller as players are eliminated, your stack is still good.

In a multi-table, you may have a good stack on your own table, but when moved to another one or as players are added to your table, your stack may not compare to the others.

That's the reason your stack size should always play a major role in your hand selection. You should probably start out with pretty conservative starting hand requirements. The blinds dictate that you should play fairly tight early.

The blinds are small and you are nine-handed, so they don't come around as often. This also helps you establish a tight image, which you hope will pay off later when the blinds are high and you might really need a timely ante steal.

As the players dwindle, you will want to loosen up your play more and do some gambling. The payout structure dictates this move. The payouts reward tight play early and loose play later on. Most sit and go's pay the top 3 places. You should play for third place and then loosen up to try for the win.

Pro Howard Lederer recommends this strategy and says, "I see many players employ a nearly opposite strategy. They figure they have nothing to lose, so they go for the quick



double-up early. They take chances too soon when, in their view, there's "nothing on the line". Then, once they're in the money, they tighten up, thinking about that extra payout for moving up a spot.

“If you start to rethink your SNG approach and adopt a "slow early, fast late" strategy, you will see an almost immediate improvement in your results.”

As far as strategy for play, we like Chris Moneymaker’s suggestions.

1: Early in the tournament, don't gamble. You'll see other people around you gambling, but you shouldn't get involved unless you have a big hand. Big hands are AA, KK, QQ, AK. For the first 3-4 blind levels, you shouldn't be playing any other hands except these (with one exception, listed next).

If you have AA, KK, or QQ, try to get all-in before the flop. Your preferred plan with AK is to re-raise a raiser all-in and have him fold. If you see a flop with AK and you didn't hit a pair, you probably need to get out.

2: You can call with a pocket pair (e.g., 88) if what it costs you to call is less than about 1/15th of your chips. For instance, if you have 1000 chips, if you can call for less than 60-70 chips, do so.

Your plan is to flop a set or an over pair. If you don't flop a set or an over pair, you get out. If you flop a set, try to get all your chips in the middle. If you flop an over pair, you may be willing to get all-in - you may not. Tread carefully.

3: If you're the second person to put in a raise, it's usually not correct to raise the minimum amount. A good rule of thumb is to raise about the size of the pot. For instance, suppose everybody has 1000 chips, and it's 20 to go. One person calls, the next makes it 40. If you have KK, you should not raise to 60. There are a few options here:

Raise the pot. That would be a raise of about 130 chips (including the 10 and 20 chips blinds that are already in).

Raise a large amount that will really commit your opponent to the pot after the flop: for instance a raise to 400-500. When the flop comes down, if there's no dreaded ace, then move the rest of your chips in.

Raise all-in right there. If somebody wants to call you with AJ or QQ, fine.

4: When betting after the flop, your bet must be some reasonable fraction (perhaps not less than  $1/3$  or  $1/2$ ) of the pot. Otherwise, you are giving drawing hands the correct pot odds to call.

If they hit their draw, they can now put you all-in unless you have an unbeatable monster (for instance, you flopped a full house). In this case, it's rarely correct to "suck people in." You want them out.

5: When you make a bet with what you believe to be the best hand, bet enough so that an opponent with the most obvious draw would be making a mistake to call. For instance, suppose you have QQ, and the flop is J-7-3 with two spades.

You are concerned about the possibility of a spade flush draw being out against you. The probability of that person hitting a flush is about 20% (one in five times) on the turn card. Make sure you bet more than  $1/5$ th of what somebody could win from you if he hits his flush on the turn.

6: Conversely, don't call with a draw unless you can get the right pot odds. Suppose there are 100 chips in the pot on the flop. You and your opponent each have 800 chips. If he bets 400 chips on the flop and all you have is a flush draw, you can't call - you're not getting the right price.

7: It is almost always better to be the bettor or raiser than the caller. Particularly in all-in situations, you would much prefer to have "fold equity" - that is, your opponent folds and you don't have to have a showdown. So in general, you need a much stronger hand to call all-in than you do to bet (or raise) all-in.

8: If you're going to make a bet or raise, and you will be "committed" to the pot after that bet or raise, then go ahead and put all of your chips in. That is, suppose you and your opponent have 1000 chips each.

If you bet 900 before the flop and he calls, there will be (at least) 1800 chips in the pot after he calls. There is virtually no flop that would make it correct to fold for your last 100 chips. So go ahead and bet all 1000 right now. The only time this might be correct is if your opponent will make the analogous mistake. That is, he won't call all 1000 chips right now. But he will call 800 chips now, and then feel obliged to call his last 200 after the flop. If he's that kind of player, it might be a correct play with a huge hand like AA.

9: As you get near the cash, and particularly on the bubble (one more player to bust out before everybody is in the money), many players will become extremely tight and play very conservatively, unwilling to be the last one to bust out before the money.

Take advantage of this - you should be able to steal blinds frequently. This will set you up with a good stack once you've gotten into the money.

Most of the advice given in this book applies to no-limit hold 'em games. Many might say there's no difference in betting when it comes to limit and no-limit. We beg to differ.

## **LIMIT GAMES**

There are many differences between limit and no-limit poker. Many no-limit players have difficulty gearing down for limit play, and limit players lack the courage and feel needed for no-limit games.

Many of the high-powered strategies that are available to the aggressive no-limit player can't be used to great advantage in limit. Specifically bluffing and getting small pots are much more difficult when the game limits you to a maximum bet.

However, one thing remains constant between the two games. That is the need for an aggressive style. The nature of limit hold 'em makes it necessary to keep a tighter rein on your aggressive play, but when you play a pot, play it strongly.

In limit poker, you should play big cards most of the time. The straight forward nature of limit play means that most of the time you have to show down a hand. You'll make the best hands more often with big cards rather than with smaller ones like 2-4 suited.

This is mainly because there isn't much money at stake in limit hands. If a player doesn't have to jeopardize many chips, he is most likely going to call anything you put out there. If you don't have a big hand, you risk losing even on suited connectors.

Poker great Doyle Brunson suggests that patience and self-discipline are essential to playing limit hold 'em. You need to know which hands to get into and which hands not to bother with. He suggests you need to pay attention to what the other players are doing – even if you're not in a hand.

Don't get overly stressed about deciding what cards to play and what cards not to play. You're not going to lose your shirt in limit games by calling a raise with pocket 2's and getting an A-K-K flop. Just fold out gracefully and wait for the next hand.

Professional Chris Ferguson offers up the following advice:

In Limit Hold 'em, it is not uncommon to see pots that are contested by four, five, or even six players. This happens with some frequency at lower limits, especially when playing with those who haven't learned the virtues of a tight-aggressive style of play.

In multi-way pots, draws become especially powerful, and playing big draws aggressively against multiple opponents can create very profitable situations. For example, say that you're dealt As-8s on the button. Three players limp before the action gets to you, and you decide to limp as well. Both blinds call, so a total of six players see

the flop of 4s-7s-Jc. You have no hand at the moment, but you do have the nut flush draw.

On the flop, the small blind bets and three players call. What's your best action? Clearly, folding would be wrong. With two cards to come and nine outs, you'll make the nut flush roughly 35 percent of the time, making you only a 2:1 dog. With six small bets going in the pot pre-flop and four going in on the flop, you're getting pot odds of 10:1.

You might be tempted to just call and see what the turn brings but, in fact, raising in this situation gives you better value. The pot is getting large and it's likely that all your opponents are going to call. Even those who have nothing more than second pair or a gut shot straight draw may feel that their pot odds are favorable enough to justify calling the second bet. If your raise gets called by four people, you'll be getting great value. You'd be getting 4:1 on your money when you're only a 2:1 underdog – a clear win for you.

The raise might also work well for you on the turn and river. By acting after the flop, there's a chance that the other players will check to you on the turn. This gives you the option of checking and taking a free card if you don't make your flush.

The level of aggression that you show with a draw will largely depend on your position. To show how your play might change with position, imagine you're in a hand with the same hole cards (As-8s), the same number of players (six), and the same flop (4s-7s-Jc).

This time, however, you're not on the button but are in the big blind instead when the small blind bets out. Here, you want to encourage the other players in the hand to put as much money in the pot as possible.

If you raise, you're probably going to force players with second pair or a gut shot to fold, so your best option is to call. Give your opponents every opportunity to throw money in the pot.

Finally, let's look at how you might play the same cards when you're the first to act. If you have a nut flush draw in the small blind and there are six players in the pot, go ahead and bet. It's a favorable situation for you, so you want to make sure that some money goes in the pot.

When out of position, I'll usually follow-up my flop bet with another bet on the turn no matter what card hits. Then, if I miss again on the river, I can decide whether or not I want to bluff at the pot. If I'm against only one or two players on the river, I'll usually bluff. If there are five players left in the hand, I won't bother. It's too likely that someone will call.

You can make a lot of money playing draws in low-limit Hold 'em. Just remember that you want as many people contributing to the pot as is possible, which means that in different positions, you'll need to do different things to get the most out of your draws.

When playing limit tables, abide by the general rules of no-limit hold 'em. Just remember to play tighter and possibly more aggressive than you would in a no-limit game. The stakes aren't as huge as they are in no-limit, so relax, play your cards, and rake in your chips!

## **SOME THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND**

*Poker is a godless game, full of random pain.*

— Andy Bloch

Texas Hold 'em is such a complex game that there are literally hundreds of different methods and strategies that can be successful. Good advice to any reader would be to invest a few dollars into at least one good Texas Hold 'em book, written by such masters as Doyle Brunson or Phil Helmuth.

But keep in mind that this game is full of chances and changes. There is no one consistent way to play cards. There's a reason they call it gambling. When you should win on pocket Aces, often you don't. You have to be able to determine when it's time to fold out and cut your losses when it looks like you won't win.

It's not a matter of being brilliant. It's just a matter of character. That's all it is. You have the discipline to draw back when you see that your strategy is incorrect. That's the kernel of the idea in gambling: it's the discipline to keep your losses down and not to let your losses affect you.

It's the same in business. It's a percentage game. You don't win 100% of the time. You do something adequate, you stay in the game, and you keep playing. You win a little bit more than you lose, and when you lose, you lose less. You're going to win eventually.

You may not win the whole world; you may not even be an extremely high producer. But you're going to be a winner.

It sounds simple. It is just so hard to execute. Execute extremely well and you'll win. That's why Vince Lombardi, the famous football coach, used to spend eight hours on one sweep, just one play.

Do the simple blocking and tackling and the other stuff will take care of itself. It's the same in gambling and in business. You get the basics and you'll win. You don't have to be some super-visionary.

Keep in mind that online play is different than live play. While it may seem obvious, it still needs to be stressed. Many players play two tables, read e-mail, watch television, or talk on the telephone while playing. Since there are so many distractions, some of your opponents may not be aware of all the action that is taking place.

This is yet another reason to use less deception in your game, since some of your opponents will not even see some of your plays so that you can gain some future value out of them.

Here is one final point about play on the Internet. Since players move in and out of games a lot, can't see your face, and are distracted by many other things, they tend to notice less that you are playing a tight game.

In a live game, if you sit there a couple of hours without playing a hand, don't expect a lot of action when you decide to bet or raise. On the Internet, you can play a

straightforward tight game for a long time and still get good action when you bet since opponents either do not notice or have not had enough time to realize that you are such a tight player.

On the other hand, if you don't play many hands in a live game, your chances for pulling off a successful bluff are high, while on the Internet I doubt this gives you much of an advantage. A bluff on the Internet is usually only profitable by the merits of the play of the particular hand, not by table image.

So remember, table image is not as important online as in a live game. Play a more straightforward game with fewer bluffs and protect your hands against those opponents who try to win every pot by bluffing too much.

Poker is a game of infinite complexity. Players like Chris Ferguson can calculate the odds of almost any situation, but there are no hard, fast rules for how to play a specific hand. The math matters, but if you want to take your game to the next level, you need to start working on three things: Creativity, imagination, and flexibility.

There are many successful styles that work in poker. From the seemingly reckless manner of Gus Hanson (there is a method to his apparent madness), to the tightly disciplined systems of David Sklansky, your goal should be to experiment with different ways of playing.

Once you've started doing that, you need to figure out which style will work best for you and the situation at hand.

If the game is too loose, it's often right to play fewer cards. If the table is a rock garden, you can sometimes get away with bluffing more. The key is not to be stuck to some plan that is "always right," but to redefine yourself in each given situation.

Learning how to adjust your play takes practice. Shorthanded play is a great opportunity to test your creativity because you have more decisions to make.

You can also invest time playing single table sit & gos, where the increasing blinds force you to play more hands against your opponents.



Imagination is at the heart of the game. Just as there is no right way to write a song or paint a picture, there is no right way to play poker. The best players are experimenting and adjusting all the time. The beauty of the game lies in this ever-shifting landscape, and it keeps us interested each time we sit down.

## CONCLUSION

This book isn't guaranteed to make you a successful poker player. It's meant to offer you some tricks and strategies to get you to a new level of play. Poker games change with the dealing of every card. There is no tried and true formula to guarantee a win each and every time.

This author plays online poker on a daily basis. I don't win all the time, but I don't lose all the time. I take my share of bad beats and have made more than my share of mistakes. On the other hand, I have found myself to be pretty much consistently staying well ahead of my initial buy-in, which is what I wanted in the first place. It's a learning process, and I have found that as I continue to play, my knowledge base increases, I play smarter more often, and am able to bet aggressively when I need to.

I, personally, prefer the online site Full Tilt Poker – [www.fulltiltpoker.com](http://www.fulltiltpoker.com). They have great avatars, inexpensive sit and go's, inexpensive tournaments, and excellent cash games. If you're at Full Tilt, check out the game tables. If you see any game highlighted in red, it means there's a bonafide pro in that room. Watch for a little while and learn a tremendous amount!

I have also played at Party Poker – [www.partypoker.com](http://www.partypoker.com). While it's not quite as user-friendly as Full Tilt, it does offer up the chance for some quick play and some quicker payouts. Their tournaments are more expensive with larger rakes, but they have excellent competition for you to test your skills on.

Poker Stars – [www.pokerstars.com](http://www.pokerstars.com) – is relatively user-friendly, but their biggest advantage is low cost tables and tournaments. You can play for as little as \$.01/\$.02 stakes in real money games. Their sit and go's are similar to Full Tilt as little as \$1.20 with 7 places paid – 1<sup>st</sup> place paying off \$14. I've had a colleague who tells me that

when she loses on Full Tilt, she goes to Poker Stars and wins. This site is definitely a contender for online play.

Poker is a fun pastime that can have huge rewards. It all depends on YOU as the player. Study, pay attention, play aggressive, adjust when you need to. But above all, just play. The more you play, the better you'll get. They say "Rome wasn't built in a day". Poker professionals weren't born overnight either.

See you on the tables!