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NO LIMIT HOLD'EM SECRETS

Winning Strategies And
Step-By-Step Tactics
For No Limit Texas
Holdem Poker



ROY ROUNDER

NO LIMIT HOLDEM SECRETS

BY ROY ROUNDER

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READ THIS FIRST

Hi, my name is Roy Rounder.

Of course, that's not my REAL name. "Rounder" is actually a nickname that all my friends used to call me... gradually, it became a part of my "poker persona" and pen name.

I've been playing Texas Holdem for as long as I can remember... BEFORE the game exploded with popularity. No limit Texas Holdem is my game of choice-- as it's been from day one-- and that's what this book is about.

Let's get a few things out of the way before you tackle this book...

First, be a responsible gambler. Don't get "addicted" to poker and don't play in stakes that are too high for you. While it's true you can make a full-time income playing Texas Holdem, don't go betting your house payments at the tables.

Gamblers Anonymous has given me permission to reproduce a simple questionnaire that will help you determine if you might have a gambling addiction. It can be found in the chapter titled, "Are You A Responsible Gambler?".

If you think you may have a gambling problem... or if you know someone who does... please, contact Gamblers Anonymous right away. Seriously.

Second, let me say this: I'm not a writer. Well, not a PROFESSIONAL writer anyway. I'm a poker player. I write like I talk. I may have a college education, but I don't pay attention to all the grammar rules or "common practices" when it comes to writing this book.

My goal here is to help you become the best damn poker player you can be. Period. If you're looking for something else, then this book isn't for you.

Third, I'm not sexist. In this book I use a lot of practical examples and use the word "his" all the time... instead of "his or her". Don't take this the wrong way. I think women are great... I love women... and I love playing poker with women. So if you see masculine names and pronouns scattered in these pages, just get over it. I do it to keep things consistent and to the point.

Fourth, when you read this book, I recommend doing it from front to back. I don't recommend skipping any parts. A lot of the chapters build on lessons from earlier in the book.

After you read the whole thing, use this book as a reference guide. Skim through the pages before your next big poker tournament. Re-read the chapters you have trouble with. And so on.

The reason this guide is so powerful is because it's PRO-LEVEL TACTICS simplified in an easy-to-understand language that anyone can use. A lot of the poker information out there is either too complicated and obscure... or so simple that you'd think it was written for a 3rd grader.

You'll be able to use these strategies no matter what your stakes or level. As you'll see, I still play in many low-stakes games because that's what my friends play in. I never turn a poker game down and I don't only play for money. I play poker because I love poker. Period.

Fifth, I'm an aggressive poker player. This may not be your style, but that's OK. Everyone has a different method and approach that works for them... and so please don't feel you must "copy" my style in order to get the most from these strategies.

Read this book with an open mind and integrate my techniques into the type of play that fits you best. Don't be afraid to try new things, of course, and make sure your game is constantly evolving.

Sixth, if you're a limit poker player, you'll still get a lot from this guide. The mechanics are the same. Limit poker involves less bluffing and "all-in" psychology... but more mathematics. But anyway, if you read this book and apply the relevant concepts to limit poker, you'll definitely see success... so feel free to give it a shot.

With that being said, I'll reiterate that my primary goal here is to teach you— the no limit Texas Holdem poker player— how to become the best damn poker player you can be. Whether you want to wipe out your local cash games, clean up the tables online, win a tournament on national TV, or make this amazing game your full-time job, this book is for you.

OK, let's begin.

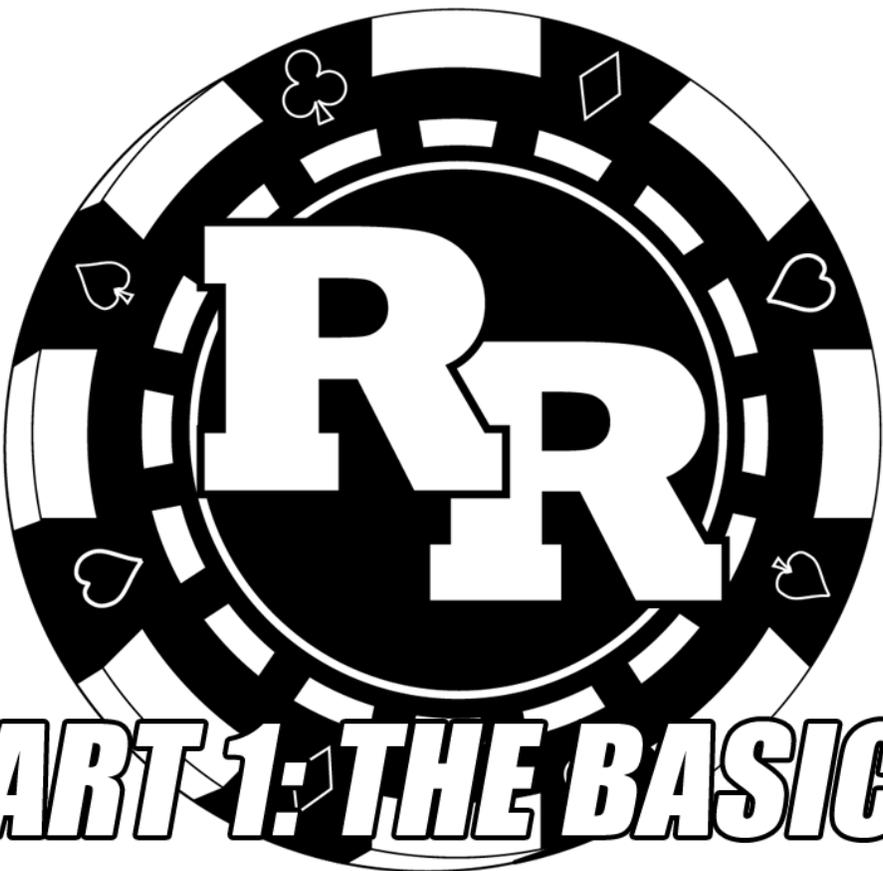


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PART 1: THE BASICS

CHAPTER 1: HOW TO PLAY TEXAS HOLDEM

CHAPTER 2: POKER DEFINITIONS AND SLANG

CHAPTER 3: HAND RANKINGS

CHAPTER 4: POKER ETIQUETTE

CHAPTER 5: ARE YOU A RESPONSIBLE GAMBLER?

CHAPTER 6: HOW TO HOST YOUR OWN HOME TOURNAMENT



HOW TO PLAY TEXAS HOLDEM

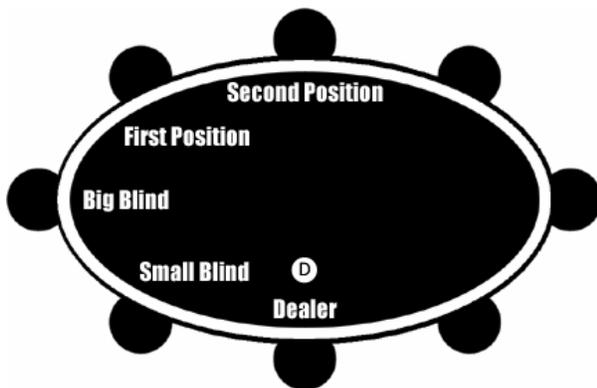
Here's how to play Texas Holdem...

A hand of Texas Holdem starts with the two players of the left of the dealer putting in **BLINDS**—or, forced bets. Some games will require that all players at the table put in **ANTES** too... but we won't get into that here.

Anyway, there's a **SMALL BLIND** and a **BIG BLIND**. The big blind is usually twice as much as the small blind, but not always. The blinds are determined before the hand starts.

The **REASON** for blinds is to encourage action. As you'll see, without blinds, players could just fold, fold, fold until they got pocket Aces (the best hand possible).

Here's what the table will look like:

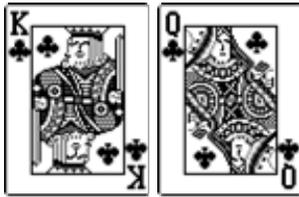


The dealer position usually has a small, round “button” in front of him, to signify positioning. That's why you'll often hear the words “on the button”... that's the dealer position.

When you play online poker, your blinds will usually be put in the pot automatically. You can turn this option off, but there's no real reason to do so (unless you plan on leaving the table).

OK, so after two players put in their blinds, each player is dealt TWO CARDS face-down. These are called your “hole cards”.

Example hole cards:



Now, each player has the opportunity to CALL THE BLINDS, MAKE A RAISE, OR FOLD. If someone makes a raise, the next player will have to call the raise to stay in the hand. The action always moves clockwise.

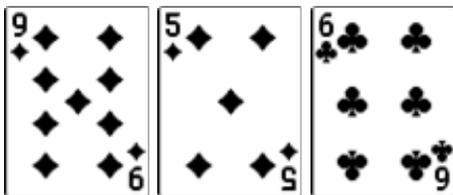
The person to the IMMEDIATE LEFT of the big blind is first to act. This player is known to be in FIRST POSITION... commonly referred to as “under the gun” (or “UTG”).

If no one raises the pot, the last person to act is the player who puts in the big blind. He can either CHECK (and let the flop come out) or he can bet (and start another round of action at the table). This position of big blind (when no one has raised the pot) is said to have the “option”.

Once everyone has called the bets and raises (or folded), it can be said that “the pot is good”. Now it’s time for the “flop”.

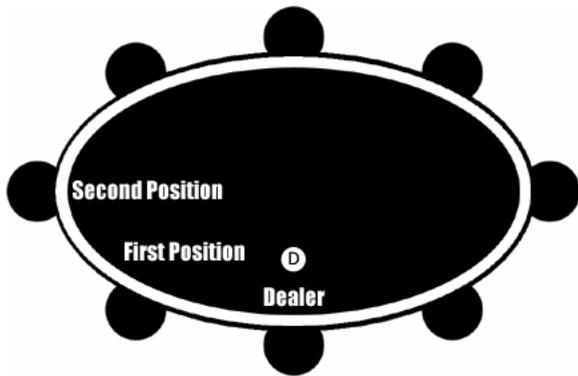
The dealer places three cards face-UP on the center of the table...

Example flop:



Now another round of betting begins. For the rest of the hand, the action will start with the person to the IMMEDIATE LEFT of the dealer and move clockwise... with the dealer acting LAST in any round of action.

Here’s what the table looks like:



Once the second round of betting is finished, the dealer places a FOURTH card on the table. This card is known as the “turn card” or “fourth street”. Once again, players are allowed to bet.

Example turn card:



Then finally, the dealer lays out the fifth and final card out on the “board”... this card is known as “fifth street” or the “river”.

Example river card:



A final round of betting begins. When this final round ends, the player who has the BEST FIVE CARDS (who hasn't folded) wins the pot.

Even though there are technically SEVEN cards in each person's hand, ONLY THE BEST FIVE are considered. This is important when no one can “beat the board”.

For example, if the five cards on the board were all spades, and both players left in the hand didn't have a spade, the outcome would be a SPLIT POT. Both players would get 50% of the pot and the next hand would begin.



POKER DEFINITIONS AND SLANG

Ace-High: A hand that only has an Ace as its highest card. This hand has no pairs, straights, or flushes.

Aces Up: Two pairs when the higher pair is Aces. If a player has a pair of 8's and a pair of Ace's, he would say he has *Aces up*.

Action: The act of putting chips into a pot. If a player makes a large bet and a lot of players call or raise, the player is getting a lot of *action*.

Active Player, Active Hand, Active: Players who are still in contention for winning the hand. If six players are at a table and four fold, there are two *active players*.

Add-On: When a tournament allows players to buy additional chips at a set point during the tournament. If a player pays for more chips to add to his current stack, he is buying an *add-on*.

Advertise: When a player makes a deliberate move early in the game to convey a specific image. If a player plays a bad hand to showdown in order to give the impression that he is very loose, he is said to be *advertising*.

Aggressive: A playing style that describes players who bet and raise large amounts during the hand. An aggressive player doesn't necessarily play a lot of hands, but he does bet a lot in the hands he does participate in. If a player raises the pot before every flop he sees, the player is *aggressive*.

Alabama Night Riders: Three Kings.

All-In: When a player bets all of his chips on one hand. If a player makes a great hand and bets the rest of his chips, he is *all-in*. The option to bet any amount and go all-in is the key distinction between limit and no limit Texas Holdem.

American Airlines: Another term to describe a pair of Aces, usually when they are the two down cards.

Angle or Angle Play: When a player seeks out a way to gain an edge over his competition. If a player is pretending he is acting like he will raise a player's bet to scare him away, he is using an *angle play*.

Ante: The forced amount that all players must put into the pot before the hand begins. Some games use blinds, some use antes, and others use a combination of both. (See: Blinds)

Baby: A small card like a 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6. If you have a pair of 4's, you have a *baby pair*.

Backdoor: A hand that requires the fourth and fifth cards on the table. If you need two consecutive spades after the flop in order to complete your flush, you have a *backdoor flush draw*. (See: Runner-Runner)

Backing Into: While playing a certain hand, unintentionally completing a better hand. If you flop a straight, and then while playing that hand you catch a flush, you *backed into* the flush.

Bad Beat: When you lose to a statistically worse hand. If only two cards will complete your opponent's hand and he catches one of them, you will suffer a *bad beat*.

Bankroll: The money that you have to play poker with. The size of your bankroll has a major impact on what stakes you can play. If you have a \$1,000 bankroll, you cannot play \$100-\$200 limit poker.

Belly Buster: When a player has four cards of a straight but needs a card in the middle of the straight to complete the straight. For example, if a player has 8d, 9h, Jc, Qs, he is on a *belly buster straight draw* (he needs the ten).

Bet Blind: When a player makes a bet without even seeing the next card. After the flop, the player to the right of the dealer can *bet blind* before the next card is even turned over. This is also known as *betting in the dark*. You can also check blind.

Bicycle: A popular slang term for using the Ace as a low card. For example, if the Ace was used with a 2, 3, 4, and 5 to form a straight.

Big Blind: The larger of two forced bets made to the left of the dealer to ensure betting on every hand. The big blind is the player to the left of the small blind.

Big Slick: Being dealt Ace-king at the beginning, one of the strongest starting hands you can get.

Big Bet: In limit poker, the larger of the two possible. If the game has a \$5-\$10 limit, \$5 is the small bet and \$10 is the large bet. Big bets are allowed after the fourth card is turned over on the table.

Blinded Out: Being forced out of a game by the forced blinds.

Bluff: When a player pretends to have a strong hand in order to win the pot even when he doesn't have good cards.

Board: The community cards, or the cards everyone can use, turned face up on the table.

Boat: A full-house. Also known as full-boat

Bottom Pair: A pair of the lowest cards shown on the table. For example, if a 5, 7, 8, and Q are on the board, and you have a pair of fives, you have the *bottom pair*.

Broadway: A straight with the Ace as the highest card: 10, J, Q, K, A.

Bullets: A pair of Aces.

Busted Hand: When a player was drawing to complete a hand but failed. If you hold four spades after the flop, but no more spades appear, you hold a *busted hand*.

Bust: To run out of chips or money.

Button: The small disc that travels around the table to indicate who is the dealer for the hand. This player is also the last one to act in every betting round after the flop, which means it's the best positioning to have at the table.

Buy-In: The amount of money that a player spends to play a certain poker game.

Buying The Pot: Placing a huge bet to scare everyone into folding.

Calling Station: A nickname given to a player who seems to call bets all the time, even when they don't have a great hand.

Calling Someone Down: When a player just calls every bet made by a player to avoid getting re-raised. This is done when a player wants to stay in the hand but has a marginal hand.

Cards Speak: At the end of the hand, the winner of the hand is the one with the best cards regardless what verbal announcement he makes.

Chasing: Waiting for a card to be dealt that will complete your hand.

Check raise: When a player checks to fake weakness only to raise the pot when it is his turn again. Players use the check raise to trap players when they hold good cards.

Check Blind: Same as betting blind. Checking before you even see the next card. Same as a *check in the dark*.

Coin-Flip: When two hands are statistically even (or close to it) and the winner will be based on luck.

Cold Deck: A deck that has been arranged by cheating players to con honest players out of their money.

Community Cards: The cards that are turned face up on the table and can be used by any of the players in the hand. (Same as the *board*.)

Cowboys: Kings.

Dead Money: Money put into the pot by players who have folded their hands.

Deuces: A pair of 2's.

Double Belly Buster: When two different cards can complete a hand. For example if you have 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, either a 3 or an 8 will give you a straight. This is also known as a *double gut shot*.

Down Cards: The two cards that are dealt face down to each player at the beginning of every hand.

Draw: When a player holds a hand that still needs cards to be complete. If a player is holding four spades, but needs a fifth spade for a flush, that player is on a *flush draw*.

Drawing Dead: When a player holds a hand that cannot possibly win against an opponent's hand, no matter what remaining cards are dealt.

Ducks: A pair of 2's.

Early Position: The first players who act in each round of betting. Players acting in *early position* must be pickier about what cards they play.

Easy Money: Money won from new, inexperienced, or untalented players.

Expected Action: A prediction about what moves a player will make later on in the hand. If you are thinking about making a bet, but you expect another player will raise you, you are taking an *expected action* into consideration.

Exempted Outs: Cards that can be dealt that will improve your hand, but will help other players more. If you hold AsKs, the Ad would improve your hand, but if there were already 3 diamonds on the table, it is likely that the Ad is an *exempted out* (because it helps someone make a flush).

Face Card: A Jack, Queen or King.

Family Pot: A hand where many people are involved in the action.

Feeler bet: A small bet made to get an idea of what the other players are holding.

Fifth Street: The fifth and final card turned over, also known as the *river*.

First Position: The first person to act in a round of betting. This is the worst positioning to have. Before the flop, the first position (to the left of the big blind) is also known as *under the gun*.

Fish: A bad player that is easily beaten. These players are either new to the game or are simply poor players. The opposite of a fish is a *shark*. You want to be the shark.

Flop: The first three community cards simultaneously turned over by the dealer.

Flush Draw: When a player holds four cards of a certain suit and is waiting for a fifth suited card to complete his flush.

Fourth Street: The fourth community card turned over, also known as the turn card.

Freeroll: A poker tournament where players are not forced to risk any money to play, but are able to win real money or prizes.

Full House: A poker hand consisting of three of a kind and a pair. Also known as a full boat.

Garbage Hand: A bad hand to be folded quickly.

Gorillas: A pair of Kings.

Grinder: A poker player who plays tight but wins consistently.

Gutshot: An inside straight draw. (See: Belly Buster)

Heads Up: When all but two of the players have been eliminated and the game is being played one-on-one.

High Card: When the winner of a hand is determined by whoever has the highest card. This only occurs when no players have a pair or better.

Hit: When a player who is on a draw catches a card that completes his hand, he *hits* his card.

Hit And Run: When a player plays for a short time, wins a big hand, and then quickly leaves the room. This is looked down upon by most poker players.

Hole Cards: The two face-down cards dealt to all players at the beginning of the hand, also known as the pocket cards.

Hooks: Pair of Jacks

Implied Odds: When calculating pot odds, making assumptions about future action and incorporating that information into your decision. For example, if you have a flush draw after the flop and a player makes a bet. It is reasonable to assume that if you complete your hand, you will be able to increase the size of the pot to maximize your winnings.

In The Dark: Making a move before you even see the next card. See also: Bet Blind and Check Blind.

Jackal: Slang term for a player who makes erratic, unexplainable bets and raises. Jackals are also known as manics.

Kicker: The card that is used to break ties when two players have the same hand or high card.

Lady: A Queen. A pair of Queens is usually referred to as ladies.

Late Position: The players who are not forced to act until the other players have already acted for that specific round of betting. Late position is preferable to early position.

Limit Poker: A type of poker that sets specific betting limits on the players.

Limp In: Only calling the blinds, and not raising the pot. This usually encourages other players to raise the pot.

Live Hand: A hand that can still win because it hasn't been folded and isn't *drawing dead*.

Lock: A hand that is a sure win, also known as the *nuts*.

Loose: A playing style where players play a lot of hands. Loose players don't wait for premium hands before the flop to play. These players are the opposite of *tight players*.

Loose Calls: When bad players make the wrong decision to call you when you have a better hand.

Main Pot: At the beginning of every hand, all chips are placed in the *main pot*. If a player goes all-in and there are other players still in the hand, a *side pot* is formed. The player who is all-in is only eligible to win the money in the *main pot*.

Manic: A wild, reckless player who will play as many pots as possible and bets big and unpredictably.

Monster: An extremely good hand.

Motown: When a player's hole cards are J-5, derived from Jackson Five.

Muck: To fold your hands by throwing them face-down into the pile of folded cards without showing the competition.

No limit: Variation of poker that has no limits on how much money can be spent. At any point in time, any player can bet all his chips on a single hand.

Nuts: The best possible hand at any given point in time.

Nut Flush: The flush including the Ace of the flushed suit.

Off-Suit: When two cards are not of the same suit.

Open, Opener: The first person to bet in a round of action.

Open Ended: A straight that can be completed with a card either higher or lower (i.e. you have 6, 7, 8, 9 either a 5 or a 10 will complete your straight.)

Outs: Possible cards that can be dealt that will give you a winning hand.

Outdraw: When you beat an opponent based on the cards that you draw, not your own ability.

Overcard: A card higher than any card on the board. If the board reads: 4, 7, 9 and you hold K, 5 you're holding one *overcard* (K).

Over pair: When you have a pocket pair that is larger than any of the cards on the table. If you hold pocket Queens, and the flop comes 10, 4, 8, you have an *over pair*.

Over The Top: Raising another person after they have raised you.

Over-Betting The Pot / Over-Bet: Making a bet that is too large considering the size of the pot. If you bet \$100 to win a \$2 pot, you are over-betting the pot.

Paint: Face cards.

Passive: A player who doesn't like to bet or raise much. These players will call, but are not aggressive with their play.

Pocket: The two face-down cards dealt to all players at the start of the hand, also known as the hole cards.

Pocket Pairs: When the two pocket cards form a pair.

Position: A player's spot at the table relative to the dealer button and when they have to act. Early position is one of the first to act. Late position is one of the last to act.

Position Bet: A bet made more on the power of the player's position than on the strength of their hand.

Pot-committed: Staying in a hand against logic because you have already bet too many chips to fold.

Pot-Limit: Variety of poker where the bet cannot exceed the size of the current pot.

Pot Odds: A risk/reward ratio for a poker hand. If you are on a nut flush draw, odds against you winning are about 5:1. If there is a \$20 bet to call and the pot is \$140, you are getting 7:1 on your money if you hit. These are profitable pot odds, so you should make the call.

Presto: Pocket fives.

Pre-Flop: Action that takes place before the flop comes out.

Prop Player: A player who earns money for playing at certain tables as decided by the poker room or casino.

Protecting The Blinds: When a player in the big blind calls a raise because he has already put money into the pot.

Pulling The Trigger: Going all-in with a hand when you are the short stack.

Put Them On A Hand: Guessing what a player is holding without seeing the cards based on their betting patterns.

Quads: Four of a kind.

Rabbit Hunt: Turning over the last card even after everyone has folded out the hand and someone already won the hand.

Rake: The money that a poker room or casino takes from every pot as profit.

Ran Down: When one loses a lot of chips in a hand to an inferior hand with a lucky draw.

Read: When you can tell what a player is holding based on his behavior and betting.

Reagan: When you are dealt 3-9 as your pocket cards.

Re-Buy: When a tournament allows you to buy more chips even after you have been eliminated from the game.

Represent The Flop: Betting as though the flop strengthened your hand.

River: The fifth and final card dealt out on the table.

Rock: A very tight player.

Rockets: A pair of Aces.

Run: When a player begins to win several hands in a row and has momentum working for him. Also known as a *rush*.

Runner-Runner: When a player has to catch two specific cards in a row in order to make their hand.

Scare Card: A card that could complete an opponents hand and make his cards stronger than yours. For instance, let's you have pocket Kings and the flop comes out: 8, A, 10. The Ace is a *scare card* because someone with an Ace will now have a better hand than you.

Set: Three of a kind.

Semi-Bluff: When a player makes a bet to win the pot with a mediocre hand or draw.

Semi-Connectors: Cards that are separated by one card. 7 and 9 are semi-connectors.

Short Man Table: When the table that table that you are playing at has had some players eliminated leaving less than the normal amount of players.

Short Stack: The player at the table with the fewest chips.

Shorthanded: When a table has less than 6 players remaining.

Showdown: At the end of the hand, after all the action is over, when the players turn over their cards to determine the winner of the hand.

Side Pot: The pot used to hold bets after a player has already gone all-in. The remaining players put their bets into a side pot that the all-in player is ineligible to win.

Slow Play: Playing a strong hand like it was weak in an effort to entice other players to make large bets.

Small Blind: The smaller of two forced bets to ensure betting on every hand.

Smooth Call: When a player calls a bet even though his hand is strong enough to raise with. This is to trick the opponents into thinking his hand is weak.

Split Pot: When two players have hands of equal value, the pot is split and each player gets an equal amount.

String Bet: An illegal move by players to place chips into a pot, then put more in a moment later. Instead players must put their entire bet in at one time or call out the amount of their bet before they put any chips into the pot.

Suited-Connectors: Two sequential cards that are of the same suit (examples: 8h, 9h or Js, Qs).

Table Talk: Chatting with opponents to intimidate or confuse them.

Tell: A signal, habit, or mannerism that tells other players at the table the strength or weakness of your hand.

The Nuts: The best possible cards for the hand. You have the nuts when no hand can possibly beat yours.

Tight: A player who doesn't play a lot of hands. These players are the opposite of *loose players*.

Tilt: An emotional state where players act irrationally because they are upset about the game or a previous hand.

Trap: When you play so another player bets when you have the stronger hand.

Trips: Three of a kind.

Turn/River: The last two cards dealt after the flop.

Under The Gun: The first person to act in the hand before the flop. This person is directly to the left of the big blind.

Value Bet: A bet made to increase the size of the pot, but not scare weak opponents away, when a player has a solid hand.

Verbalizing: Stating to yourself the reasoning for a certain move.

Wheel: A straight using the Ace as a low card: A, 2, 3, 4, 5.

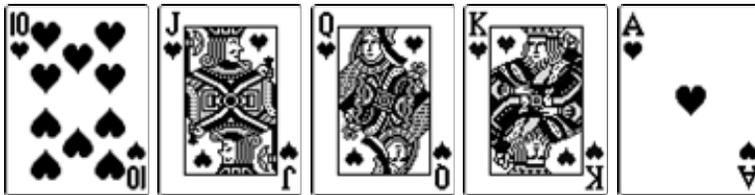


HAND RANKINGS

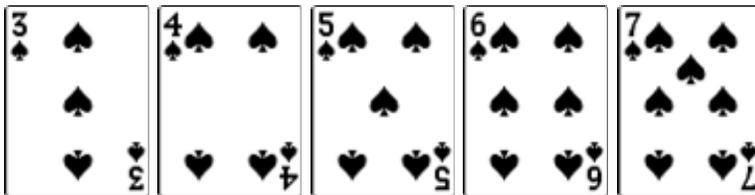
The following is a list of hand rankings, starting with the strongest:

Royal Flush: 10, J, Q, K, A of the same suit, this is the strongest hand in all of poker.

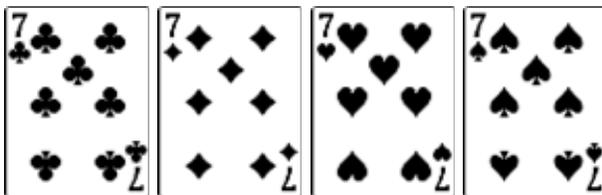
Example:



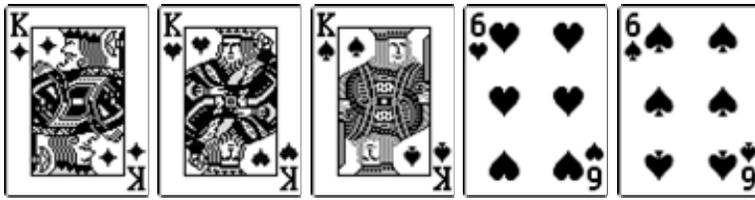
Straight Flush: Any series of five consecutive cards of the same suit. Example:



Four Of A Kind: Any hand with four cards of the same rank. (The fifth card does not matter.) Example:

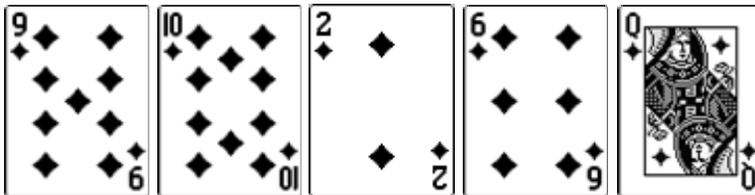


Full House: A hand that consists of three cards of the same rank and two other cards of the same rank. In other words, a full house is a three-of-a-kind with a pair. Example:

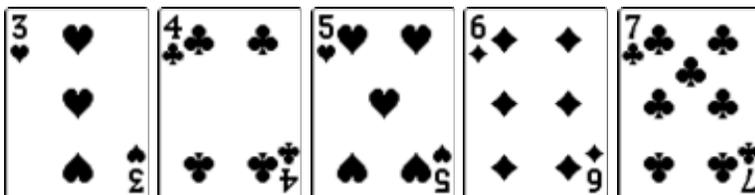


A full house is referenced as the three cards “full of” the pair. For example, the hand above would be referred as “kings full of sixes”.

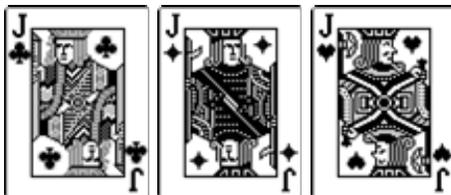
Flush: When the hand has five cards of the same suit. It doesn't matter the rank of the cards, so long as they are all the same suit – like Spades or Diamonds. If two players have a flush, then the player with the highest card of that suit wins the hand. If the highest cards are equal, move to the second, then to the third, etc. Example:



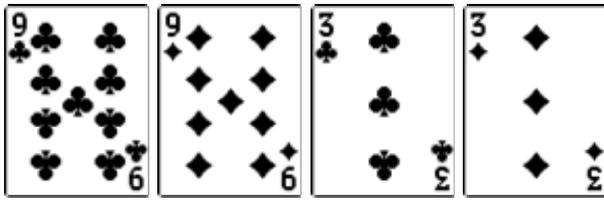
Straight: Five sequential cards of any suit. If two players have straights, the straight with the highest card wins. Example:



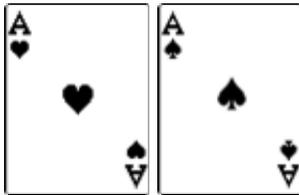
Three-Of-A-Kind: Three cards of equal rank. Also known as “trips”. Example:



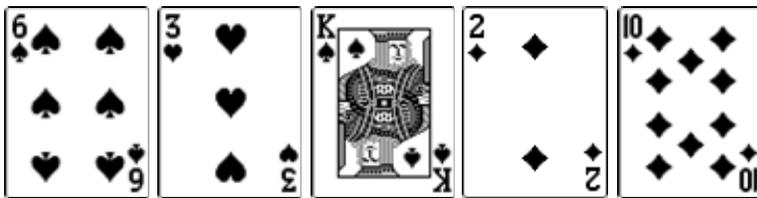
Two Pairs: Two pairs of cards of equal rank. Example:



Pair: Two cards of equal rank. Example:



High Card: A hand that doesn't form any of these combinations. If comparing two of these hands, whichever player has the highest card is the winner. Example:



In hands where the combinations are the same (like if two players have three Kings), then the tie is broken with the *kicker* or the highest card that the players have NOT in the combination (not a King). Whichever player has the higher kicker is the winner of the hand. If two players have the exact same five cards, the pot is *split* and the players equally divide the pot.



POKER ETIQUETTE

Before we get started into the strategies, let's talk about poker etiquette... There are three primary reasons to always use proper poker etiquette at the table:

1. It shows respect for the **GAME**.
2. It shows respect for the **PLAYERS**.
3. Your opponents won't "gun" for you.

The first two reasons **SHOULD** be enough to convince you to use proper etiquette... but the third reason is the icing on the cake.

When you don't follow the fundamental rules of poker etiquette, other players will become annoyed, angry, or whatever. The result is ugly.

The absolute **LAST** thing you want happening is all of your opponents **BADLY WANTING YOU GONE**. It alters the way the game is played... and **NOT** in your favor. Players will raise you when you're in the blinds... use trap plays... and "gang up" on you whenever possible.

For instance, let's say you're short stacked and you go all-in before the flop. Your opponent is holding Queens, so he calls. **ANOTHER** opponent knows that he probably **SHOULDN'T** call with his K-J, but that doesn't matter. He knows the odds that you lose the hand will **INCREASE** if he plays, so he calls too.

See what I mean?

I've seen this type of thing happen all the time to players who don't adhere to proper etiquette. Plus, players who earn a negative reputation at the poker table are less likely to find as many games.

OK, so we've established that not using proper etiquette is a **BAD IDEA**. Now let's discuss what poker etiquette **REALLY IS**... and how to follow it.

First off, refrain from excessive trash talk. A little table talk is okay... I actually recommend it... but not TRASH talk.

For instance, when an amateur player chases a gutshot straight draw and HITS, the guy at the table who got burnt usually gets bitter. I'll often hear things like, "You f'in idiot, don't you know you're not supposed to play stuff like that?!"

Don't be like this.

Just stick to your game and your strategies.

Other players think it's a GOOD idea to harass or try to INTIMIDATE the other players at the table... they think it will help them win.

For instance, just last night I heard a player bullying one of the younger guys at our table. He kept asking him, "Do you like to suck on gas pipes? C'mon, do you?"

It made everyone at the table feel uncomfortable. And it created an atmosphere where everyone started secretly "gunning" for this arrogant a**hole.

And I don't think it to be coincidence that he was one of the first guys eliminated from the table.

OK, so I've made my point. No trash talk.

The next rule for poker etiquette is to never play your hands out of turn. Sometimes, of course, this may happen by accident. If that's the case, start paying closer attention to the game.

But what I mean here is when guys play out of turn in order to achieve some type of STRATEGIC GOAL.

For example, let's say Richard is in the big blind and he's got A-5 suited. Everyone at the table either folds or limps-in and it's around to the guy in the small blind... who seems to be contemplating a raise.

Richard, who would like to see a cheap flop here, doesn't want the player in the small blind to raise the pot. So he reaches for a large stack of chips and puts them in the middle... or, he reaches for a big stack and ACTS like he's about to bet. Or, he could even say something like, "Raise."

The particulars are not important. The point is, Richard KNOWS that it's not his turn. What he's trying to do is get the player in the small blind to NOT raise the pot... by scaring him into thinking he's got a great hand. When the player in the small blind decides to just call the blinds because of Richard's behavior (I used the name Richard for a reason!), Richard then decides to just CHECK when it REALLY IS his turn.

This is bad poker etiquette. Do stuff like this and it WILL come back to haunt you, I can promise you that.

Okay, let's talk about third... and perhaps MOST IMPORTANT rule of poker etiquette. There are obviously tons of poker etiquette rules that I could spout out... but the others are mostly just common sense.

This third rule is this:

NEVER LOOK AT ANOTHER PLAYER'S DOWN CARDS.

The only time you are allowed to see another player's cards is when the hand is over and you have called his bet. If he places a bet and you fold, you are NOT allowed to see his cards. Period.

I know, I know... you're absolutely DYING to know whether or not he bluffed you. Just get over it!

Looking at another player's down cards is CHEATING. Because what it's doing is giving you information about a player's betting habits that can be used later in the game.

In my opinion, this is just as bad as leaning over and looking at another player's cards DURING THE HAND!

What's perhaps even WORSE than picking up a player's down cards after the hand and looking at them is doing it in a sneaky way that NO ONE KNOWS ABOUT. This happens in home games all the time.

For instance, let's say Darren bets 800 in chips on the river and Jack folds. Jack had top pair but is afraid Darren had him beat with the flush. Now, Jack REALLY wants to know if he just got bluffed out of that pot.

Darren puts his two down cards on the table and rakes in his chips. Meanwhile, it's Jack's turn to shuffle. So he collects all the cards that are scattered around the table.

Now here's what players will do all the time...

Jack will watch Darren's two down cards and intentionally position them at the BOTTOM of the deck. Then, he'll simply keep them on the bottom and gradually sneak a glance at each of the cards... or maybe he'll do it after positioning them at the top.

Either way, Jack has gained a valuable piece of information about the hand, but has also ruined the integrity of his own game.

This little maneuver happens way more often than you'd expect. Even with the most honest players.

So what should YOU do about it?

Well, for starters, you should NOT be one of these CHEATS. Secondly, when you make a bet and everyone folds, make sure you don't just throw your cards into the muck in an easy-to-spot location. Just nonchalantly mix your cards up with the others on the table.

And last but not least... if you suspect that someone is doing this or WILL do this and he gets into this position, simply grab the winning two down cards (even if they're not yours) and shuffle them into the mix yourself.

This will prevent the bad guy from cheating. And it will also give him a subtle message that you're on to him.

OK, so that wraps up our discussion of poker etiquette.

No trash talk, no acting out of turn, and no looking at another player's cards. The rest of poker etiquette is just the common sense stuff that you learned way back when you were in Kindergarten. Remember, it's in YOUR OWN SELF INTEREST to use proper poker etiquette at the table.



ARE YOU A RESPONSIBLE GAMBLER?

Responsible gambling is good gambling. Below is a 20-item questionnaire published by Gamblers Anonymous (reproduced with permission) regarding gambling addiction.

Answer these twenty questions honestly and carefully. If you answer “yes” to seven or more questions, you may have a gambling problem. Please contact Gamblers Anonymous by going to their website: www.GamblersAnonymous.org.

I strongly urge you to pass this on to fellow poker players as well who you may think is in danger of having a problem.

1. Did you ever lose time from work or school due to gambling?
2. Has gambling ever made your home life unhappy?
3. Did gambling affect your reputation?
4. Have you ever felt remorse after gambling?
5. Did you ever gamble to get money with which to pay debts or otherwise solve financial difficulties?
6. Did gambling cause a decrease in your ambition or efficiency?
7. After losing did you feel you must return as soon as possible and win back your losses?
8. After a win did you have a strong urge to return and win more?
9. Did you often gamble until your last dollar was gone?
10. Did you ever borrow to finance your gambling?
11. Have you ever sold anything to finance gambling?
12. Were you reluctant to use "gambling money" for normal expenditures?
13. Did gambling make you careless of the welfare of yourself or your family?
14. Did you ever gamble longer than you had planned?
15. Have you ever gambled to escape worry or trouble?
16. Have you ever committed, or considered committing, an illegal act to finance gambling?
17. Did gambling cause you to have difficulty in sleeping?
18. Do arguments, disappointments or frustrations create within you an urge to gamble?

19. Did you ever have an urge to celebrate any good fortune by a few hours of gambling?
20. Have you ever considered self destruction or suicide as a result of your gambling?



HOW TO HOST YOUR OWN HOME TOURNAMENT

I began hosting my own poker tournaments at a very young age. I would have a tournament every Monday night (with Monday night football on in the background) at my house. The buy-in was just \$5.

At first we'd get a turnout of just 10-15 "regulars". After a few months we started getting 20 players... then 30... and then MORE.

The buy-ins grew...

Soon we had to move the tournament to Sundays at 4 P.M., because each one was lasting so long and we needed more time.

And it just kept growing... and the stakes kept getting higher...

At that point, I was living in a two-story house. Before I knew it, I had three poker tables in the basement and one table in each room... including the kitchen. The place looked like a fraternity house combined with a casino. It was crazy.

But then... after many happy and successful years... it finally got out of hand. Strangers were showing up from other towns. Players were cheating. Fights broke out. Neighbors kept complaining. And the stakes were getting too high.

The last game I hosted had 70 players show up. People were **STANDING** at the tables while they played, because there weren't enough chairs, seats, and flat surfaces to sit on.

I decided enough was enough. The card game was moved to a nearby country club, where it still goes on today... hosted by some friends of mine.

Of course, I still remember those home poker tournaments like they were yesterday. Because that's where I got my poker education and built my original bankroll... starting all the way from measly \$5 buy-in games.

I got to meet and know a wide range of players of all ages... I made countless “poker friends” to travel to tournaments and casinos with... and I learned the game inside and out.

So that’s what this bonus report is about: how to successfully host your own home poker tournament. Hosting your own game can be an extremely valuable way to improve your skills quickly while meeting fellow poker enthusiasts. And it’s a great way to make money (or lose it). OK... let’s get started.

GETTING STARTED

The first step to hosting your own tournament is figuring out WHERE you’re going to have it. If you’re on a “shoestring budget”, the kitchen table (or counter) will probably be your location of choice. You can buy fold-out poker table tops for pretty cheap... and then upgrade to a real poker table as soon as you build your winnings.

You’ll want to buy poker CHIPS before investing in a table. Nice poker chips can dramatically improve the “feel” of the game. Even just the SOUND of chips clanking together makes for a better “poker atmosphere”.

Plus, real chips will allow you and your friends to learn chip tricks, which makes things more fun and entertaining.

As for the cards, pretty much any regular playing deck will do. If you don’t have a real dealer button, just use a random household item. I’ve used everything from half-dollar coins to blank CDs to duct tape.

You can also easily create your own “cut card” that goes on the bottom of the deck. This is used so that people can’t see the bottom card when someone shuffles. Basically, all you have to do is tape the two Jokers together. Make it so they face each other. The result is a “card” that’s double the thickness of the rest of the cards, which is perfect for using as the cut card.

BUY-INS

Choose a buy-in amount that makes sense. \$20 is a pretty common buy-in level for many poker games, since most people can fork out twenty bucks for multiple hours of entertainment.

If you’d like to “up the stakes”-- without making the buy-in too high-- just make it a tournament that allows re-buys. That will increase the final purse considerably. And no one will go home wondering how they’re going to pay for next month’s rent.

CHIP COUNTS

I like to start everyone off with \$1,000 in chips. This number is high enough to have multiple chip denominations... but low enough to not get confusing. But of course, it's up to you.

Count out the chips BEFORE everyone gets to your house... and consider putting each set into a Ziploc baggy. This is a common-sense way to prevent cheating.

Here's one way to break up the chips:

1 green \$500 chip
2 black \$100 chips
8 white \$25 chips
5 blue \$10 chips
10 red \$5 chips

Of course, the exact colors and combinations don't matter.

The one thing that DOES matter is that you keep your chip starting amounts and your colors the SAME from game to game. That way players who frequently attend your tournaments don't get confused.

ANTES AND BLINDS

It's CRUCIAL that you decide on your blind and ante schedule at the beginning of the game, before it starts. You want to adjust (raise) the blinds every 20 minutes. Raising the blinds keeps the action going... and prevents the game from lasting too long.

Find an alarm, stopwatch, or poker clock to use to remind you when it's time to adjust the blinds. When you've decided on a blind and ante schedule, write it down and make it accessible to all players... as this affects fundamental game strategy.

Here's a recommended blind structure if each player is starting with \$1,000 in chips:

Level 1: \$5 - \$10
Level 2: \$10 - \$20
Level 3: \$15 - \$30
Level 4: \$20 - \$40
Level 5: \$25 - \$50
Level 6: \$30 - \$60
Level 7: \$40 - \$80

Level 8: \$50 - \$100
Level 9: \$75 - \$150
Level 10: \$100 - \$200
Level 11: \$150 - \$300
Level 12: \$200 - \$400

Notice that your blind structure is largely dependent on how long you want the tournament to last. If you need to finish up within two hours, you'll obviously want to raise the blinds more substantially at each level. This recommended structure is for about a four-hour game.

COLLECTING MONEY

When you're collecting player buy-ins, do it **BEFORE** the tournament starts. Try to keep change on hand since not everyone will bring the exact bills needed.

Also, when you collect the money, line everyone up and do it one person at a time. This decreases the likelihood of conflict and makes it easier on you.

DRAWING FOR SEATS

After the money is collected, draw for seats. I've been to many home poker tournaments where the players don't draw for seats. This is a mistake. The reason is because **WHO** you're sitting next to has a definite impact on how the game goes.

For instance, let's say John and Jack were the two loosest players at the table... but were also best friends, so they always ended up sitting next to each other. Having the two loosest players right next to each other at every tournament will ultimately change the way that game plays out.

In order to help you become the best card player possible, you don't want "incongruent" situations like this arising. You want to keep it "random". The solution is simple: draw for seats.

Here's how to do it...

If you're at an 8-man table, take out the Ace-8 of any specific suit. In other words, pull out these cards:

Ace
Two
Three

Four
Five
Six
Seven
Eight

For our purposes here, the Ace can be thought of as the number “one”.

OK, so then shuffle the eight cards up effectively and make each player draw a card. Each card number has a corresponding SEAT number. So whoever draws the four gets seat four. Whoever gets the seven gets seat seven. And so on.

If you’ve got more than eight players... or fewer than eight players... just adjust the number of cards you draw from accordingly.

PAYOUTS

Determine the payouts BEFORE the game begins. The easiest way to do it is by using PERCENTAGES of the total purse (the “purse” is the amount of money from all the buy-ins added together).

Here are two common ways to structure the payout for a smaller tournament:

1st Place: 70%
2nd Place: 20%
3rd Place: 10%

1st Place: 60%
2nd Place: 25%
3rd Place: 15%

If you’ve got sixteen or more players (which means you’ll have at least two tables going), you’ll want to expand the payout to cover more of the top finishers.

But remember... the most important thing is to decide the payout BEFORE a single card gets dealt.

DRAWING FOR THE BUTTON

Draw for the dealer button at the beginning of the game. Do this by dealing one card to each player. Whoever gets the highest card first gets the button.

RE-BUY POLICY

Determine a re-buy policy before the game. The re-buy policy must include three main components:

1. Are re-buys allowed?
2. If so, for what length of time are re-buys allowed?
3. What's the maximum number of re-buys per person?

Be careful with this. Many amateurs allow unlimited re-buys for a given time period, but this can cause problems.

For instance, let's say your buy-in is \$20, and most players at your tournament are only willing to re-buy once... maybe twice.

But meanwhile, say there are a couple players who are willing to re-buy many, many times, because for them the money doesn't matter as much.

The problem with this type of situation is that the playing styles will be incongruent. One player will be more conservative... not planning to reload if he goes out... and another player will be willing to go all-in on hands like A-Q, K-J, etc.

What happens is the player who's willing to burn a couple hundred bucks will usually come out on top... because he can play more aggressively, make lots of all-in bets, and double up on his opponents.

The point is this: create a re-buy policy that makes things FAIR and FUN for everyone.

DISPUTES

Ultimately, if you're hosting a tournament you'll run into disputes. When a dispute occurs, you must wear the cap of "tournament director" and make the final decision about the matter. Fortunately, most disputes can be prevented in advance with just a little preparation.

At the beginning of the game, set forth the rules for specific situations. If you're going to host your tournament on a regular basis, you'll want to put these rules on paper.

Here are some of the main areas of the game where disputes arise from:

- Players who leave in the middle of the game

- What to do in the case of misdeals
- The minimum bet and raise amounts
- How pots and payouts will be split (i.e. if two players go out at once)
- Hand rankings
- Shuffling and cutting cards

If a player has to leave the game permanently, his chips are forfeited and split among the players at the table. If he has to leave temporarily, he's responsible for the antes and blinds that occur in his absence... but he can still stay in the game.

If there's a misdeal for hole cards, the cards should be shuffled and dealt again. If there's a misdeal with the community cards (i.e. someone forgets a burn card), it's best to make the policy that the cards remain in the same intended order.

For instance, if someone deals out a flop A-J-8... but forgot the burn card... then the Ace should become the burn card and another card must be dealt to complete the flop.

Minimum bets should equal the big blind... and minimum raises should equal the original bet or raise. For example... if Drew raises 200, Terry can't raise 100 more to 300. He must raise at least 200 more.

Split pots are simple. If two players tie in a hand, they split the pot 50/50.

If two players go out of the game at the same time, their "place" is determined by how many chips they had BEFORE the hand started.

For example... let's say Drew is chip leader, Jill is in second, and Terry is in third. If Jill and Terry both go out on the SAME HAND, Jill gets second place and Terry gets third. This is the case EVEN IF Terry had a better hand than Jill.

For hand rankings, all you have to do is follow the rules. The hand rankings (from best to worst) are:

Royal Flush
 Straight Flush
 Four Of A Kind
 Full House
 Flush
 Straight
 Three-Of-A-Kind
 Two Pairs

Pair
High Card

And as for “cutting” the cards, it’s really up to you. At my home tournaments, we had a policy that the dealer always offered the person to his right to cut the deck. That keeps it fair and prevents suspicion of cheating.

RACING OFF CHIPS

As your tournament progresses, it becomes necessary to “race off chips” to get rid of the smallest denominations.

For example, if sixteen players started with \$1,000 in chips each, the \$5 chip will no longer be useful when the field gets down to eight players. So the solution is to cash them in for higher denominations.

Here’s how it’s done:

First, one player at the table (usually the chip leader) serves as the “bank”. Everyone exchanges their small chips with the bank in as many ways as possible.

For instance, let’s say you’re getting rid of the \$10 chips at the table. If Drew has six \$10 chips, he’ll give five of them to the “bank” in exchange for two \$25 chips. If Shelia has ten \$10 chips, she’ll exchange them with the bank for one \$100 chip.

Next, everyone with “leftover” chips (that didn’t divide evenly) race them off. For each leftover chip, the player gets one card. The two players with the highest cards get the leftover chips. And then they exchange them with the banker.

Finally, the banker exchanges all of the low denomination chips with the chip case, and regular play resumes.

Exactly HOW you race off chips isn’t important. I’ve seen it done several different ways. Once again, what’s important is that you decide in advance and keep a consistent policy in your tournaments.

POST RESULTS

A good way to host a successful tournament is to get the email addresses of all the players who attend. Then, when the game is over, email everyone the results and a “recap” of how the night went. This is useful for players who went out early and went home... but were still interested in the results.

This is also an incredibly useful tool for getting players COME BACK and attend your tournaments. When you decide to have a game, just send out an invite to your email list.

You don't have to get on the phone and call everyone... and it's an efficient way to send updates to keep everyone connected.

Last but not least... if you're really serious about it, you can make your tournament a "poker league" and keep track of everyone's winnings over time. You can divide the tournaments into "seasons" and track who's made the most money, have a season-ending "major", and so on. You can even post the current stats to a website or blog.

OK, that's about it. Using this information, you'll be well on your way to hosting your own successful home poker tournaments.

Good luck!



PART 2: POSITIONING

CHAPTER 7: UNDER THE GUN

CHAPTER 8: FIRST POSITION AFTER THE FLOP

CHAPTER 9: LATE POSITIONING

CHAPTER 10: ON THE BUTTON

CHAPTER 11: WATCH THE GUN



UNDER THE GUN

First position before the flop is perhaps the HARDEST position to play at the entire table. This position is nicknamed “under the gun”.

Makes sense to me...

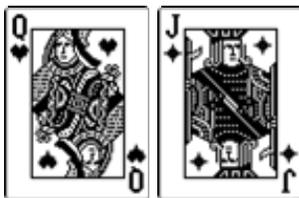
Under the gun is the first player to act as soon as the cards are dealt. It's the person to sitting immediately to the left of the big blind.

After the flop, under the gun is still an early position (assuming you're at an 8-man table or larger), which makes things worse.

The secret to playing first position pre-flop is to only play PREMIUM HANDS. Don't play the same hands as you'd normally play in other positions.

Let's demonstrate exactly WHY under the gun is so difficult with this example...

OK, so let's say you're in first position before the flop at your local \$1-2 no limit cash game and you look down at your cards:



This is a fairly strong hand that you'd normally play. Hell, you may even raise with this hand from time to time.

But you should NOT play this hand under the gun. It's only going to get you into trouble. And here's why...

Let's say you call the \$2 big blind with your Q-J off-suit in hopes of seeing a cheap flop. The action goes around the 8-man table and Darren comes out firing with a pre-flop raises.

"Make it \$10 to play", he says.

And now, you realize you've thrown away your \$2. Or, you're about to throw away an even bigger stack of chips.

Think about it: How often will the action go around the table WITHOUT a pre-flop raise? Not very often. The odds are someone is going to raise the pot, and playing your QJ is now trouble because there are a lot of hands that will just have you DOMINATED.

OK, so let's say you're not-too-bright (euphemism) and you decide to call Darren's raise and see a flop...

Everyone else has mucked their cards.

Now, here's where it gets really ugly. You KNOW that Darren has a strong hand. What are you looking for with this flop? The only thing that can really help you is if both a Queen and a Jack hit on the flop... or maybe a 9 and a 10 to give you the straight draw.

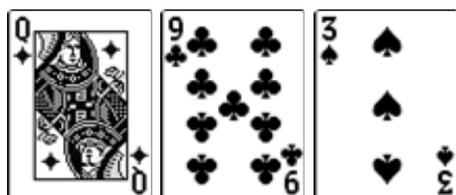
If Darren has A-Q, A-J, A-K, K-Q, or K-J you're in trouble. Those hands put you at about a 3:1 underdog. Not a good place to be.

If Darren has pocket Queens you're a 9:1 underdog. If he has Aces or Kings you're about a 6:1 underdog.

So what in the world are you doing limping in and calling a pre-flop raise?

You're just giving your money away.

OK, back to our example. The flop hits:



Now guess who has to act FIRST?

You've just hit top pair and you're first to act. Now what do you do? Your Queens aren't looking that spectacular because you have no clue about what Darren has. Being in an early position AFTER the flop is another reason why under the gun positioning is so difficult to play.

So let's say you decide to check because Darren looks like he's ready to fire again. He bets \$15, just like you expected.

Now what? You've got \$10 in the pot with top pair, so \$15 doesn't seem like THAT much. So you call... and the nightmare continues. In short, you end up becoming pot-committed and call Darren all the way down the river until he shows his A-Q and steals a ton of your chips.

And that is the perfect example of how players get in trouble from first position before the flop. They try to limp-in with a mediocre hand. And nine times out of ten you're just not going to get away with this. Someone is going to raise you, someone's going to have a better hand, and there's just no reason to get involved...

The key is to only play PREMIUM HANDS when under the gun. I usually play hands like A-A, K-K, Q-Q, J-J, X-X, 9-9, A-K, A-Q, K-Q and small wired pairs on occasion.

For some of these hands I will just limp-in. For others I will come out firing. The general rule is this:

If you're sitting at a TIGHT table and you get a premium hand under the gun, make a RAISE. If you're sitting at an AGGRESSIVE table and you get a premium hand under the gun, LIMP-IN.

At an aggressive table someone else is going to make the pre-flop raise for you, which means you'll get the opportunity to come back over the top of your opponent and create heads-up action for more chips.

At a tight table, you have to make the raise because you don't want everyone limping-in and seeing a cheap flop. If you let everyone see a cheap flop you're going to get run down by someone playing their scraps. There's just no reason to let this happen.

OK, so those are the general guidelines for playing in first position under the gun. If you're one of those players who's really in love with suited-connectors, you may want to play those the same way you'd play a small wired pair. But I wouldn't necessarily recommend it unless you're confident that you can limp-in or see the flop without risking too many chips.

Remember, preventing yourself from LOSING big hands is often times MORE IMPORTANT than learning how to WIN big hands. First position before the flop is a position that makes you very vulnerable to LOSING big hands. So be careful.



FIRST POSITION AFTER THE FLOP

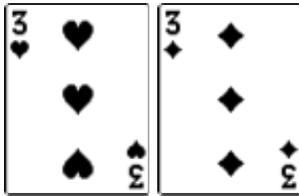
Being first to act after the flop means that you're in the small blind. After the flop hits, you must act **FIRST** before everyone else.

This position is tricky to play.

Why?

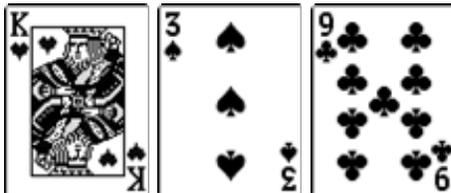
Because you're not sure of what anyone else at the table has... or if the flop helped them or hurt them. You don't know whether to bet or check... regardless of whether you flopped a monster or a mediocre second pair. Let's go over some examples...

You're in the small blind and look at your cards. You've got:



Almost everyone at the table limps-in and the action is to you with your small pocket pair. You're not exactly **THRILLED** with your positioning... or your hand... so you just limp-in and hope to spike a three on the flop.

The big blind checks the flop comes out:



Nice. You've just flopped a big hand... and there aren't any flush or straight draws on the board. But now what? Should you come out firing?

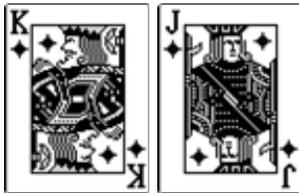
In this situation, probably not. Here you need to check. There are five players behind you that have a chance to act. Chances are at least ONE of those opponents will do the raising for you. There's no reason to make a bet being first to act.

After one of your opponents makes a bet, you can really do no wrong. You may decide to check again after the turn or maybe bet in hopes of getting re-raised. Either way you're going to make some money on the hand.

The KEY is checking after the flop with so many players in the hand. Let your OPPONENTS start the betting, and then take control of the action on the turn or river cards.

Let's look at another example.

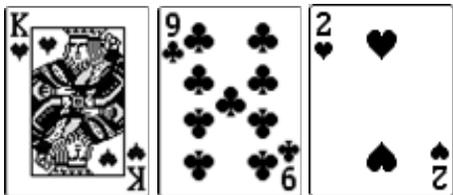
You're in the small blind and you're dealt:



The action goes around the table and Josh comes out with a pre-flop raise of \$5 and he's fourth to act. One other player calls and the action is to you with your suited KJ.

You've got \$1 in the pot and you like your hand, so you decide to call the bet from Josh by throwing \$6 more into the pot (calling the \$1 blind plus Josh's \$5 raise).

The flop hits:



What do you do? Do you check again, like in the previous example?

No. This time you didn't flop a monster. You flopped top pair, but you're not TOO confident due to Josh's pre-flop raise. He could easily have you beat right now.

So you have to find out where you're at in the hand... so you throw out a bet.

You don't want to CHECK and then have Josh fire another bet with a hand like pocket 10's or J's. And you know he WILL fire a bet if you just check to him... regardless of whether or not the flop helped him. And that's why you need to come out betting here...

So let's say Josh comes right back over the top of your bet with a raise.

Now you have to put him on a hand like A-K, which means you're in big trouble. So you should probably just muck the hand with a minimum loss.

Your bet after the flop is essentially a FEELER BET (we'll discuss feeler bets in further detail later in the book) to find out where you're at.

If Josh had simply CALLED your bet on the flop, you've probably got the best hand. You can continue betting on the turn and river, assuming the scary Ace doesn't hit.

Remember... the only way to find out where you're at in a hand is through betting. And that's why I would do it in a situation like this.

In general, that's how I like to play the small blind. If I catch a monster I'll check and let others lead the betting. If I hit top pair or some type of draw I'll throw out a feeler bet.

Play the small blind position this way. Not only will it keep you out of trouble but you'll also rake pots you'd normally miss out on.



LATE POSITIONING

Late positioning is your PREFERRED positioning at the table. Late positioning is NOT just the button... it also includes the seats to the right of the button.

If you were at an 8-man or 10-man table, the three seats to the right of the button would be considered “late positioning”. It is from these seats that you should win a majority of your pots.

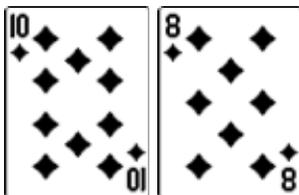
The obvious reason, of course, is that you get to see what your opponents do BEFORE you have to act. But obviously, there’s still the possibility that someone in a LATER position (like the button) will enter a pot.

That’s why I like to use a move called “stealing the button”.

Stealing the button is quite powerful. What it boils down to is that acting LAST in a round of betting is always preferred. So when you’re in a late position (but not on the button), you can force out the later positions pre-flop in an attempt to be last to act after the flop...

Here’s what I mean:

Let’s say you’re at a 10-man \$1-2 no limit table and you look down to see...



You’re sitting two seats to the right of the dealer.

A couple of guys limp-in by calling the big blind, but you definitely sense weakness. The action is to you.

This is a situation where I might play aggressively. It's not a good starting hand... and I certainly wouldn't play it from an early position. But here's a chance to "steal the button" and take down a pot by playing the positioning wisely.

So you make it \$8 to play. Not a huge bet, but just large enough to get one or two callers and build the pot up.

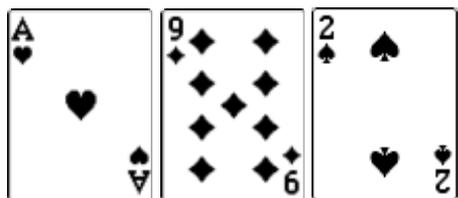
Brad and Josh, who are to your left, both muck their hands.

Perfect.

That's exactly what you wanted. Because now you're last to act post-flop... which is the equivalent to being on the button. You get to see what your opponents do first, and you've got control of the action since you made the pre-flop raise.

Greg, who's in the big blind, is the only player to call your pre-flop raise. It's just you and him, heads-up.

The flop hits:



Not exactly what you'd hoped for.

You've got nothing... no pair, no draw...

But like I said, you've played your positioning in a way that enables you to still take this pot down, even though you don't have good cards.

Here's why:

Because Greg has to act FIRST. You can get a full read on him by seeing what he does. If he comes out firing, you should lay the hand down.

But that's probably not what is going to happen. Greg likely didn't hit anything either. Here's how the hand plays out...

Greg looks down at his cards. He's holding pocket sevens. He liked his sevens before the flop, but now that there are two over-cards on the board, he's not exactly confident.

You made the pre-flop raise, so Greg has to give you some respect here. There's a good chance you have the Ace. So he basically gives up on the hand...

He checks.

You give it a small moment of hesitation and then come out firing. Nothing crazy, of course... just a reasonable bet in hopes of dragging the pot.

"Sixteen dollars", you say, doubling your pre-flop raise.

Greg immediately throws his cards in the muck without a second thought.

You toss yours in too... taking down a decent pot.

And it was all because you played your position aggressively and "stole the button" with your pre-flop raise.

Now of course, you can't ALWAYS make pre-flop raises in late positioning... but it needs to be a part of your game plan. I like to do it with hidden hands like suited-connectors and semi-connectors... along with any REAL hands (like pairs or face cards).

If the players who act first seem to have hit on the flop, I'll muck my hand. Don't be stubborn and try to bluff for no reason. If you sense weakness, make a move. If you sense strength, get out. It's as simple as that...

Here's a three-step recap:

1. Look for weakness... whether it's with a couple of your opponents just limping-in or everyone folding to you.
2. Raise pre-flop with hidden hands like suited-connectors, semi-connectors, and low pocket pairs. (Of course, you can raise with "real" hands too—like pocket Queens—but in those cases you've got a great hand and positioning isn't as important.)
3. If your opponents checks to you on the flop, fire away... even if you hit nothing. If you get called and sense strength, back off.

This simple three-step process will help you maximize your winnings based on your positioning... and will also help you get more action with your monster hands when you get them.



ON THE BUTTON

A majority of the hands you'll win over the course of a poker game should come when the button is sitting directly in front of you.

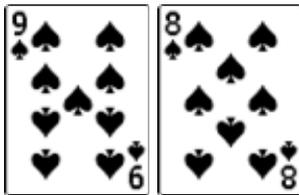
Having the button means that you're the DEALER... which is the best position at the table.

Any strong poker player will use this button to his advantage and LEVERAGE the power of being dealer with a variety of hands.

Why is the button so important?

Well, as the dealer, you get to see what your opponents do after the flop... before you must act. And that's why you should be AGGRESSIVE in this position, even with mediocre starting hands.

For example, let's say you're at an 8-man no limit game and you're dealt:



The blinds are 100-200 in this no limit game and three of your opponents limp-in by calling the blind. The action is to you and your suited-connector.

This is where you can take advantage of your positioning at the table... and take control of the betting.

You do this by making a pre-flop RAISE.

"Make it 1000 to play", you say in a demanding voice... as if you were sitting on a monster or something.

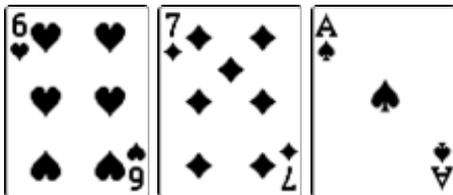
The REASON you make the raise is because you've got the button and you get to see what your opponents do after the flop before you act. This gives you a HUGE advantage that you don't have at any other position at the table.

Even if you MISS the flop by hitting nothing, you're still in a good position to take down the pot.

Josh calls your bet... and the other opponents fold.

So now you're in control of the hand and the betting.

The flop hits:



You've just flopped an open-ended straight draw. And you get to see what Josh does because he acts first.

He checks.

And THAT is exactly why the button is so powerful.

You made the raise before the flop so Josh has to put you on a strong hand like a large wired pair. If he doesn't hit on the flop, he is likely to check because he anticipates another bet from you.

So what do you do?

You fire AGAIN, right? Even if you DIDN'T hit the straight draw another bet is a good idea. Because more often than not it's going to result in you winning the pot... because the odds are Josh didn't hit anything on the board either, especially since he checked.

However, in our example you did get the draw (which means you have lots of outs)... so you can represent the Ace and force Josh to fold if he didn't get anything. You made the pre-flop raise... so if you come out firing here Josh will probably put you on the Ace.

So you make another bet.

“2000”, you say as you push in a large stack of red chips.

So you’re essentially on a semi-bluff right now because you’ve got nothing but a draw. You can hit a five or a ten on either the turn or river, which will complete your straight.

You’d LIKE to take the pot down now... but if Josh calls you’re still in good shape.

Sure enough, he calls.

OK, so now we’re fairly certain that Josh has the Ace. After all... he DID call your pre-flop raise, so you’ve got to put him on something decent. When he calls your bet on the flop, you can put him on Ace-something.

The turn card comes:



This is no help to you.

Josh is first to act again...

“I check”, he says as he pounds his fist on the table.

This is ANOTHER key advantage to playing the button aggressively. You KNOW that Josh is probably sitting on a hand like A10 or AJ and is checking to you because he feels as though you’re going to fire again.

So essentially, you get to see a free card after he checks... which only happens because you took control of the betting with your aggressive pre-flop raise.

Now what? Should you bet again, even though you didn’t hit on the turn?

NO WAY. Josh checked to you... so you’re going to use that opportunity to see a free card.

You don’t bet again because you know that Josh has the Ace... and maybe the Jack. And you know he’ll call no matter what you bet on the turn. You can’t afford to bet again

because the odds of hitting your straight aren't likely and you won't be able to buy the pot after the river if you miss.

You check, and the river comes:



Bingo. You've completed your straight.

Josh is first to act again and this time he comes out firing. Of course, after your little check on the turn he feels like he's got the best hand.

"Make it 1000", he says.

And you just come back over the top and go all-in. You know he'll call, considering he's pot-committed and only has about 2000 in chips left anyway.

Josh calls your all-in bet with no hesitation, and throws over his AJ... expecting to win the hand.

You throw over your nut straight and win the huge pot. All because you played the button aggressively...

Now, I know what you're thinking. You're thinking, "OK, you raked a huge pot, but you did it because you hit the straight on the river... not because of your aggressive play."

And sure, a little luck does help.

But think about it: If you hadn't played the hand aggressively from the very start, you would have never even SEEN the river card...

Josh would have come out firing on the flop when he hit his Aces. You wouldn't probably called the bet after the flop, simply because of your open-ended straight draw.

But when you missed on the turn, Josh would have come out firing AGAIN with an even LARGER bet... and you wouldn't have been able to see the free river card like you did in the example. His bet after the turn would have been too large for you to call with just an open-ended straight draw with one card to go.

Instead, the hand played out differently (to your advantage) because you played the button aggressively from the start.

Besides, even though you got lucky to hit your straight, Josh got lucky to hit his top pair. If the flop had come out with a King instead of an Ace and you still played it aggressively, you would have probably won the hand right there.

Or if Josh had KJ instead of AJ... you would have won by playing aggressively.

You see, playing the button this way gives you control of the betting, lets you see free cards, and gives you a read on the other players at the table. And that's why... even with mediocre hands... many of the great players will raise from this position.

Follow this strategy and you'll win more pots... and bigger pots... every Texas Holdem game you play.



WATCH THE GUN

If you're playing in a good poker game, your opponents are going to be smart and understand their table positioning. They're going to know when to make a raise on the button, when to limp-in with early positioning, etc. That's why YOU must be very aware of one position in particular: UNDER THE GUN.

When you're under the gun, it means you're first to act before the flop. You've got to make a decision whether to call, raise, or fold before ANYONE ELSE has had a chance to act. Heck, usually everyone hasn't even picked up their two down-cards yet and the action is to you.

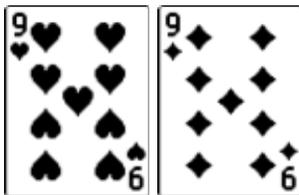
Under the gun is a tough position. And that's why you should only play premium hands from the position... a fact that smart players know.

Even though most players know to be careful when under the gun, many fail to pay attention to the position at any other time. You MUST be careful any time a smart opponent limps-in... or worse, raises... while under the gun.

Here's a situation that played out recently where my buddy John didn't pay attention to his opponent under the gun...

We were playing our regular \$1-2 no limit cash game and John had good table positioning, just to the right of the button. Brett and Aaron both limped in and the action was to John.

He slowly picked up his two down cards and saw:



Like many other players would do with this hand, John announced a raise... making it \$15 to play.

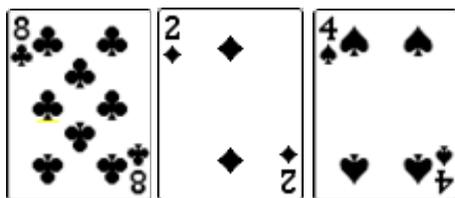
The action went back around to Aaron, who had limped-in while under the gun. Aaron didn't even flinch... and immediately made it \$30 to play, doubling John's pre-flop raise.

This is where John should have seen the red flag up and waving. Aaron is a smart and somewhat tight player who limped-in under the gun. He's only going to play big hands from this position... like most smart players would.

You don't limp-in with a mediocre hand under the gun... because you know someone behind you is going to make a raise and you're going to be stuck in early position after the flop.

If John had been "watching the gun", he would have wisely just called with his pocket nines, rather than making a raise.

So anyway... John calls, thinking he might still have the best hand. The flop hits:



This is good flop for John, because he has a pair that's higher than anything on the board. But without hesitation, Aaron throws out a \$50 bet.

John obviously should have anticipated this... I mean, Aaron isn't going to re-raise before the flop only to check after the flop. Of course, John calls the bet since nothing on the board is higher than his nines.

The hand plays out this way and John ends up losing a huge chunk of his stack to Aaron's pocket Kings... a hand John should have anticipated from the get-go.

The moral of the story is to always watch the player under the gun... every single hand. Take mental notes over the course of the game... and find out who plays only premium hands under the gun and who's too dumb to know anything about table positioning.

This type of information is extremely helpful in getting a read on your opponents... which will lead to more winnings every night.



**PART 3: BETTING
STRATEGIES**

CHAPTER 12: MIX IT UP

CHAPTER 13: FEELER BETS

CHAPTER 14: CHANGING GEARS

CHAPTER 15: STEALING THE BLINDS

CHAPTER 16: PLAY AGGRESSIVELY

CHAPTER 17: REPRESENT THE FLOP

CHAPTER 18: POT-COMMITTED

CHAPTER 19: SLOW PLAYING

CHAPTER 20: WHEN SLOW PLAYING BACKFIRES

CHAPTER 21: CHECK RAISE

CHAPTER 22: HEADS-UP PLAY



MIX IT UP

Great poker players understand the importance of MIXING UP THEIR BETS AND RAISES.

It's so simple... yet so many players fail on this critical point.

As you've heard me talk about, one of the keys to winning is to identify the betting patterns of your opponents.

Of course, your opponents (the smart ones) will often try to identify YOUR betting patterns...

So don't let them!

Be sure to CONSTANTLY mix up your bets, raises, and even BETTING BEHAVIOR for different starting hands.

Don't play the same starting hand the same way twice. Always change it up.

This actually will give you LEVERAGE to "trick" your opponents also. For example... let's say you raise \$65 pre-flop with 7-2 offsuit after sensing weakness at the table.

Everyone folds. You flip over your cards and jokingly say, "C'mon guys!".

Another hour passes and you pick up pocket Kings on the button. You make a raise of \$65 pre-flop. One of your opponents has K-J and REMEMBERS that you made the same pre-flop raise on a TOTAL BLUFF last time.

So he decides to come over the top of you for an all-in bet. And you promptly take all his money.

These types of situations won't happen too often, of course, but when they do they are VERY SWEET!

If you find yourself totally unable to get out of the habit of betting patterns, try this sneaky little trick:

Let's say everyone starts with 1000 in chips. The normal bets and raises are in multiples of five or ten, of course.

Well, as part of your "exercise" in learning how to mix your game up, you make bets and raises ONLY with odd numbers.

For instance, instead of raising 40 before the flop, you raise 43 or maybe 38. Instead of a 200 chip bet, you go for 199. And so on.

Now listen... THIS IS ANNOYING AS HELL. I'm serious... It's one of the most annoying things ever. BUT, it's a very useful way to get used to mixing up your betting strategy.

The goal is to keep your opponents guessing at what you have... and always betting weird amounts certainly achieves this objective.



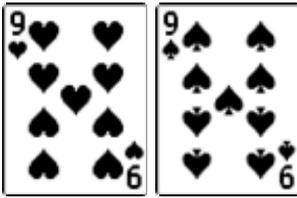
FEELER BETS

Betting is THE most important aspect of Texas Holdem poker. If you're one of those guys who likes to check, check, check or call, call, call then you're NEVER going to win consistently... Period.

Why is betting so important?

It's simple. Betting always lets you know WHERE YOU STAND in the hand. If you never bet, you never know what your opponents are holding.

Let's say you're on the button in a no limit cash game and you get dealt:



A few players limp-in and the action is to you with your medium wired pair. Instead of limping-in like your opponents, however, you throw out a pre-flop raise... which is actually a FEELER BET.

Feeler bets are crucial for your winning strategy, so listen up closely... A feeler bet is simply a bet made to find out where you stand in the hand. Something to "feel" it out.

"Make it 1500 to play", you say. (The blinds are 100 and 200.)

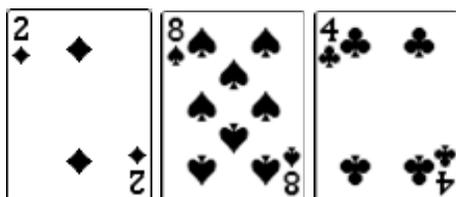
You make this bet because you have good positioning and you want to know WHERE exactly you stand in the hand. For all you know, Brad might have limped-in first to act with pocket Aces. Who knows?

You need to know. And the only way to know is to throw out a small feeler bet.

Then... if Brad or any of the other two opponents that limped-in are holding MONSTER HANDS, they're going to come back over the top of you with a re-raise, which is fine. If they come back over you with an amount you're not willing to pay, you can muck your nines and walk away with a minimized loss.

You found out where you stood, and that wouldn't have happened without your pre-flop raise.

Let's say instead you simply LIMPED-IN (what you DON'T want to do) just like your three opponents and the flop comes out:



A good flop for you, right?

Well, you're not quite sure... because Brad here comes out firing first to act with a 2000 bet... and you have NO CLUE what to put him on.

Did he limp-in first to act with a monster like Aces? Or is he holding a hand like A-8, which would give him top pair? Or perhaps he flopped a set?

You don't know.

Because you didn't throw out a feeler bet.

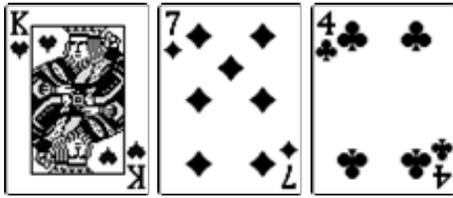
But let's just say you DID listen to me and threw out a feeler bet... And he called. Now what?

Well, you know he has some type of hand BEFORE the flop. And here's how the action plays out...

You make your feeler bet, and Brad and Josh both call. Rodney mucks his cards.

So you've gotten rid of one of the crap hands and you know you've PROBABLY got the best hand right now. And as I've said before... you WOULD NOT have known that right now had you just limped-in.

The flop hits (new example):



Both Brad and Josh check to you. This is yet another advantage to your pre-flop raise because it bought you a free card.

So what should you do here? Make another bet even though there's an over card on the board that Brad or Josh could easily be holding?

The answer is yes.

You have to bet. You need to throw out another bet as if the King didn't scare you in the least. And once again, this is a feeler bet. It lets you know where you're at AFTER the flop.

The bet does NOT have to be large... or anything that's going to get you into trouble or make you pot-committed. You simply throw out this bet to know where you stand... and hopefully Brad and Josh will just muck their cards here.

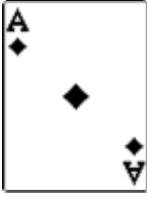
"2000" is what you say as you splash the pot with a stack of white chips.

Brad looks down a second time at his cards... thinks for a moment... then mucks them. Josh is next to act and he calls your bet with little hesitation.

Now you've got a feel as to where you're at. Josh is probably holding the King and has you beat right now. However, he hasn't made a move on you with a raise, so he probably has a weak kicker. If this is the case, he's likely to check to you again on the turn or river...

Once again, these feeler bets are CRUCIAL to winning poker matches. You can put Josh on a pair of Kings with a low kicker... all because of two small feeler bets.

The hand continues... the turn card comes:



YES.

This is a great card for you... because it's a card you can represent. You're fairly certain that Josh has a King with no kicker, and now you're confident you can probably bet him out and steal this pot.

Josh checks to you again on the turn... just like you expected. And you can tell he's not too happy about the Ace hitting the board.

Since you know where you stand at this point, a feeler bet is NOT necessary here. Remember... feeler bets are made in order to "feel" where you're at in the hand.

So then you check the Ace right behind Josh... maybe pretending as if you've hit and you're SLOW PLAYING.

The river comes:



You know that this is no help to Josh... and he checks to you for a third time.

Now there's no doubt you can steal this pot with your pair of nines. If Josh were holding a big hand there's no way he would've checked to you AGAIN on the river. He checks because you've been rather aggressive and he's afraid you may have the best hand.

So now you want to throw out a bet big enough for force Josh into folding his King with no kicker.

"7500", you say as you push in a large stack of chips...

Josh mucks his two down cards before your chips are even released from your hand.

And you take down (or STEAL) a good sized pot.

And how did you win? Well, your victory was because of your two FEELER BETS. They gave you a feel for the game, for the hand, and for the player you were up against.

There's just no way to put an opponent on a hand if you're checking all the time.

That's how WEAK players play. They check, check, and check again... never getting a good idea about what their opponents are holding.

So take control of the action and throw out feeler bets... and find out where you stand. If you had never bet and let Josh take control of the betting, you would have never known what he had and HE would have gotten the pot.

But instead, YOU dictated the action, YOU got a read on Josh, and YOU sensed enough weakness that you were able to make a move and win it...

So the moral of the story is this: Use feeler bets. And use them often. They don't need to be BIG, they just need to help you find out where you stand in a hand and help you calculate your next move. Trust me... this technique alone can REALLY help you win a lot more pots every night you play.



CHANGING GEARS

If you plan on becoming a great poker player, it's important that you CHANGE GEARS...

Changing gears prevents your style of play from becoming PREDICTABLE... and we all know that predictability is your enemy.

One minute you should be cruising along in first gear... folding and watching everyone else play. And then the next minute you should kick into fifth gear and bring your game to a different level.

Let me give you some examples.

It's 8 P.M. and you sit down at your local cash game... and the very first hand you look at is a 9-8 of spades while you're just to the right of the button.

A few players limp-in and the action is to you.

"Make it \$25 to play," is what you say... throwing out five red chips.

You decided that you're going to start this game in FIFTH gear... which is your aggressive gear. You do this because you want to SET THE TONE of the game and establish your table presence. This will also set you up for action later in the game when you get some real hands... like Cowboys or American Airlines.

Then... once the table gets used to your fifth gear, you shift all the way back down to first and only play premium hands. And you'll get ACTION.

So anyway... you continue your aggressive play for the first hour or so of the game. You make raises with a wide variety of hands like J-10, 10-9, 5-3, and so on. And your opponents have NO CLUE as to what you're making raises with.

They're confused as hell, which puts you in a DOMINATING position. They see you as an aggressive, manic-like player who continues to push the action. And you've also established yourself as table leader... even though you aren't necessarily CHIP leader.

So you began the night with \$200 in chips and now it's 9 P.M. You've played for an hour and now you've got \$180 in chips. Do you care? No!

That one hour was for the purpose of "paying your dues"... because you've set yourself up for the rest of the night. Now you're going to get paid off when you finally DO catch a real hand. Now it's just a matter of being patient.

So you decide to shift gears again... and drop into third gear. You'll still make the occasional raise with 9-8 suited, and you'll still bluff from time to time. But ONLY when you sense weakness and have good positioning.

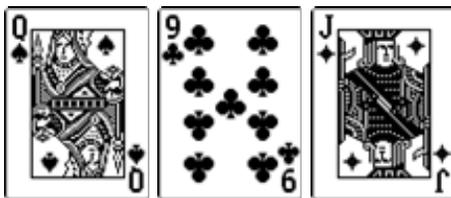
What you're really doing is waiting on that big hand like Queens, Kings, or Aces. When that happens, you get paid.

Finally, at 9:45 P.M. you get dealt Cowboys when you're third to act before the flop. You decide to make a large pre-flop raise that's likely to create heads-up action.

After all, you don't want four guys seeing a flop when you've got Kings... you're practically guaranteed to get run down.

You throw out a raise... say \$50. This is an aggressive raise at this table... but you've established yourself as an aggressive player. Hey, last time you made it \$50 to play you were holding 10-8 suited! (Of course, that was a different story... because you were on the button and you sensed weakness when everyone limped-in last time. You KNEW everyone was going to fold last time... and that's why you SHOWED your cards too. It was all about setting up for THIS hand.)

So anyway... Brad, the guy on the button, is the only one who calls. The flop hits:



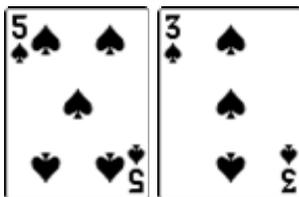
And to make a long story short, you end up doubling up on poor little Brad, who had A-Q.

So anyway... now it's 10 P.M. and you decide to shift down to first gear. This is your TIGHT PLAYER gear. You've got \$475 in chips and you just want to chill out and only play premium hands.

And once again, you'll get paid off if you're lucky enough to catch another big hand while playing in first gear. Because remember... your OPPONENTS don't know you're in first gear. For all they know you're still in fifth.

Personally, I usually use first gear as a time to regroup and think about my game plan. I spend this time attentively studying my opponents for tells and betting patterns.

So an hour goes by and you've basically been unheard from. Your opponents have practically forgotten you're even sitting at the table! You're on the button and you get dealt:



It's time to let your opponents that you're still in the game... still ready to play.

Josh and Rodney both limp-in and the action is to you.

“Make it \$30 to play”, you say... not really caring if your opponents call or fold. If they call, you've got positioning on them. If they fold you can rake in the blinds... which add up over the course of the night.

Josh folds, Rodney folds. They haven't heard from you in awhile and are therefore a little scared that you might be sitting on a big hand.

As you rake in the blinds, you throw over your 5-3 face up on the table and say, “Hey c'mon guys... give me some action here... I know you've got my five high beat!”

And they both smile and shake their heads. They know you're just messing with them... and they're used to it by now. They've seen this behavior before.

So you're back in fifth gear and you start playing aggressively again. You push the action for the next hour or so and hope to catch some favorable flops. If and when that happens, your chip lead increases.

The night rolls along and you continue to switch gears... from first to fifth, third to first, fifth to first, and so on.

This style of play keeps your opponents on their toes and continually guessing... never quite able to put you on a hand.

This is what strong poker playing is all about. You've got to harness your ability to completely change gears... back and forth and back and forth throughout the night. If you stay in one gear for too long you'll never win on a consistent basis.



STEALING THE BLINDS

If you're like most card players, when you sit down at a no limit cash game you plan on staying awhile. When I play, I usually figure being at the card table around eight hours... sometimes more. And man does that time fly.

At the end of the night (or early in the morning), a good chunk of my chips is usually from stealing the blinds and occasional pot. You'd be amazed at how quickly these pots will add up over the course of a night.

Let's say you're playing a \$1-2 no limit game and you ONLY steal the small and big blind three times per hour for an eight hour shift.

That comes out to \$72 in your pocket at the end of the night. And more often than not, you'll be stealing more than just the small and big blinds... and I'm guessing you may be playing in higher stakes games (if not, don't worry... you'll get there soon).

The point is, you can see how easily these small pots add up... and their presence can make your night successful.

These numbers are similar for tournament play too. In fact, it's MORE important in tournaments to steal blinds because they're constantly being raised. That's why blind stealing becomes a fundamental part of the game.

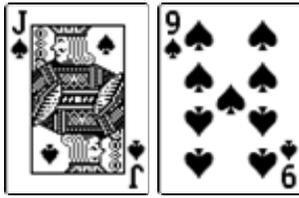
It's something you HAVE to do... just to stay in the game.

But here's the thing: You can't just steal the blinds whenever you feel like it. You have to pick and choose your spots to attack. And you do this based on two main criteria:

1. When you sense weakness in your opponents.
2. When you have good table positioning.

Here's an example of what I mean...

Let's say you're playing a \$1-2 no limit cash game and you get dealt:



You're on the button.

John, Aaron, and Shelly all limp-in by calling the \$2 big blind. And they ONLY limp-in, which catches your attention. You know that these players are normally fairly aggressive and will usually raise pre-flop with a variety of hands. So you're confident that this is an occasion where you can steal the blinds.

"\$20 to play," you say as you splash the pot with some chips.

You make this bet because you feel like all three of your opponents will fold... and you'll get the \$5 in blinds. It's not a lot of money... and your odds are terrible considering you're risking \$20, but trust me... once you get to know your opponents this is something that you REALLY need to do to make more money playing poker. Stealing \$5 an hour for 8 hours at this game would equal \$40... and for a \$1-2 no limit cash game, that's a sizeable amount.

You're pretty sure none of your opponents have a \$20 hand. If they DID, they would have made a pre-flop raise. The only person you're really worried about is John because he limped-in while under the gun. A smart player knows better than to limp-in under the gun at an 8-man table.

But then again... John isn't a very smart player.

Even if you DO get a caller or two, you're in OK shape. You've got good positioning... you've got control of the betting... and J-9 suited it the type of hand that can bust opponents because if you hit they DEFINITELY won't put you on it.

So a caller wouldn't be THAT bad... and if everyone folds (what you're hoping for) you get the ever-important \$5 in blinds.

Just as you expect... all three of your opponents fold and you rake in the \$5. You muck your two down cards and don't show them. I'll usually say something silly like, "C'mon guys... I had Big Slick."

So the night goes on like this... and from time to time you steal the blinds when you're in good position and sense weakness. You get a total of ten pots for \$50 in your pocket at the end of the game. That's \$50 you wouldn't have seen had you not been such a thief.

Remember... good positioning and sensing weakness are the keys. If you don't know if your opponents are weak, work on getting a better read on them and tracking their betting patterns more closely.



PLAY AGGRESSIVELY

I would have to say that the main reason I'm a strong player is because of my **AGGRESSIVE STYLE**. I like to push the action and raise pots with a wide variety of hands. And it's not only me... just look around. When's the last time you ran into a really great card player who always played **TIGHT**?

The truth is, aggressive poker players rule the game. And it's going to stay that way... tight players just don't win in the long run. Sure, on occasion they're going to have a good night. But that usually happens when their Aces run into someone's Kings or when they catch a player making some dumb mistake.

Other than that, tight players just don't get action at the table. Why would they? No one wants to put money into a pot after Tight Tim (who hasn't made a raise in three hours) raises before the flop. I sure don't.

If you're aggressive, and **SMART** about being aggressive, you can come out ahead in Texas Holdem.

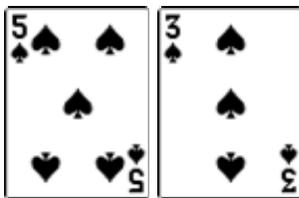
Here's an example of an average night of cards for me...

I'll cruise over to the St. Louis river boats and pick a spot where I've never played before... or maybe where I haven't played in a long time.

When I look around, I don't see anyone familiar. So this isn't going to be like the home games I play. These guys don't know I play aggressively and throw out lots of feeler bets. They're probably going to see me as a tight new player who's here to drop a good chunk of money.

I buy-in for \$400 and sit down... hoping to at least double my buy-in before the end of the night. I see absolutely **NOTHING** for the first hour. The best hand I see is an A-3 off-suit when first to act... and I have absolutely no intentions of playing that.

After about an hour and a half of playing nothing, I'm on the button and I get dealt:



This is actually one of my favorite hands. I'll often throw out a pre-flop raise with this hand... just to keep my opponents on their toes. Plus... for some reason I always seem to get lucky and hit with this hand. Yes, I know it's superstition, but hey... it works for me.

So anyway... it's time that I showed these guys what kind of player I am.

"Make it \$35 to play", I say with confidence.

I could really care less about how this hand plays out. I'm making this bet because I want to make a statement and set myself for the rest of the game.

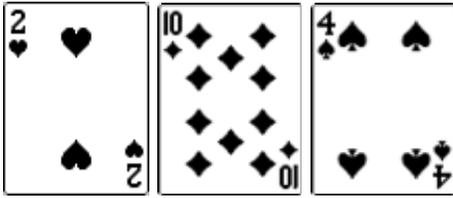
Let's look at the possible outcomes:

1. Everyone folds. This is what I expect to happen. After all, I haven't made a pre-flop raise yet. My opponents are probably putting me on Aces or Kings. If they FOLD, I'm going to throw over my monster 5-3 and establish myself as an aggressive (and slightly crazy) player... which will pay off later.
2. I get caught on a bluff. This will also set me up for action for the rest of the night. The only thing is, I want to make sure I don't lose TOO much money. I'm thinking of this situation as an investment for the future.
3. I get lucky and hit something on the flop. If I can take down a pot with my 5-3 and show it at the same time, then I'll really look like a stud... and once again, establish my table presence.

So as you can see, I'm making this bet to set myself up as the game progresses. I absolutely DON'T want my opponents thinking I'm a tight player. If they do, I'm not going to get any action when I finally do hit a big hand.

An older man sitting directly across from me at the table is the only one who calls my pre-flop raise. I immediately put him on A-K or A-Q. I know that he thinks I'm fairly tight based on the last hour or so... so he'd only call with a big hand like A-K.

But anyway... I've got good positioning and I get to see what he does after the flop before it's my turn. The flop hits:



My opponent checks.

Now the action is to me with my open-ended straight draw.

“\$50 to play”, I say. This is a semi-bluff. It’s not a BAD bet to make when on an open-ended straight draw like this. And like I said before, my intentions here are to establish a table image and advertise.

I’m fairly confident that my opponent will fold. If he calls I’m in decent shape because I’ve taken control of the betting and will get to see one more free card. And I have lots of outs.

My opponent looks down a second time and then says, “Aces are good”, as he mucks his cards.

“No, I was on an open-ended straight draw”, I say, as I shake my head and throw over my 5-3 of spades for the world to see.

And now I’m pretty well setup for the rest of the night. My opponents see me as an aggressive player that will raise with a variety of hands and push action when on a draw.

The game plays on and I get action when I finally DO get big hands. Even when I flop monsters like trips I can come out firing and get callers.

I’ve set myself up for a big night. Just by having the guts to risk some chips in order to establish my table image.

Throughout the night I’ll still throw out a pre-flop raise once in awhile with some mediocre hands like 9-8, 5-4, and so on. Some pots I end up raking, and some I do not. But that’s not the point. The point is, I’m keeping these guys guessing with my aggressive style of play. They’re never able to put me on a hand... and they end up calling when I get monsters like pocket Aces.

Adopting an aggressive style of play is a very powerful tool in the game of no limit Texas Holdem. Even if I had only made that one pre-flop raise with my 5-3 and then tightened up afterwards, I would have set myself up for more action later.

Aggressive players are the ones who win at Texas Holdem. But just be sure to be SMART at the same time. Use positioning to your advantage and know when to make your moves and when NOT to make your moves. And know when you've got to GET OUT of a hand.

Keep all these things in mind and your poker skills will jump to a new level... a level where you'll be able to quickly and consistently finish in the money when you play.



REPRESENT THE FLOP

The rule is this: If you make a pre-flop raise, bet after the flop. Period.

And that INCLUDES when you don't hit your cards.

This is a fundamental strategy to Texas Holdem. Don't be one of those players who raises with Big Slick before the flop... only to check after the flop when it comes out rags. Players who do that are weak.

The only time you shouldn't represent the flop after a pre-flop raise... and I mean the ONLY time... is when you hit something like a four-of-a-kind and your opponents are drawing dead. In this case, you WANT them to see another card... in hopes that they make a pair or a draw or SOMETHING so that you can milk more money out of them.

OK, so here are a few examples of WHY you should represent the flop after making a pre-flop raise...

Let's say you're fourth to act before the flop and you get pocket tens. The first few players muck their hands and the action is to you. You decide to make a bet that's likely to get just one or two callers...

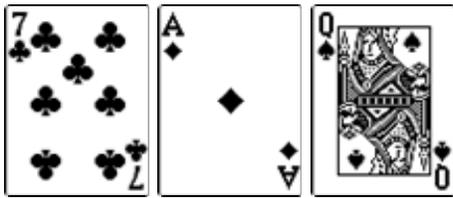
The blinds are 100-200 and you make it 2000 to play.

The next couple guys fold and the action is to Darren, who's on the button (which means he has positioning on you). He'll get to see what you do after the flop before he has to act.

You don't really care though... because your 2000 bet has worked to perfection. You didn't want two or more opponents seeing the flop with your tens... because if you let that happen you were likely going to get drawn out by a hand like Q-9 or K-8. But instead, Darren is the only caller and you're fairly certain you have the best hand right now.

If Darren had you beat, he would have probably re-raised you... since he's on the button. So you know you have a good shot at winning this hand...

The flop hits:



You're first to act. And of course, you're not exactly thrilled about the two over-cards on the board. Darren could easily have an Ace or a Queen in his hand right now... So what do you do?

"Make it 4000 to play", you say with no hesitation... as you fire your chips into the pot.

Only a weak player would check and show weakness in a situation like this.

Remember, Darren doesn't know what you're holding. For all he knows, you could have AQ or AK.

It's CRUCIAL that you represent the flop even though you hit nothing. Because the odds are Darren didn't hit anything either.

If you CHECK here, Darren's going to sense weakness and will be able to steal this pot right out from under you no problem. Even if he has pocket nines or something smaller... he can still steal the pot if you show him weakness.

That's why you have to beat him to the punch and throw out a strong bet as though the Ace and the Queen helped you.

Now of course, you're NOT going to win the hand every time you use this strategy. If Darren was holding AQ, he's going to come right back over the top of you with a raise... and you'll know to fold.

But in the long run, representing the flop will definitely pay off. You'll win about 70% of the pots by representing the flop when you hit absolutely nothing... and you'll probably get a caller the other 30% of the time and you'll want to back off and minimize your losses. Do NOT feel as though you must continue to bluff. It's OK to give up on the hand and lose the chips you've put in the middle.

Now... here's the REAL beauty of the bet. If you play at a table long enough... or if you play with the same guys consistently... your opponents will begin to pick up on the fact

that you follow your pre-flop raises with bets after the flop. This gives you two unique advantages:

1. Before the flop, your opponents will begin to fear you. They know that if you raise, they'll have to be ready for another strong bet after the flop.
2. You'll get more action when you really DO hit on the flop and complete a hand. Because your opponents don't want to feel like they're being bullied, so they'll play back at you from time to time.

And when THEY really have a great hand, they'll be even more aggressive... which will give you a clear read on them and will let you know when to fold.

Let's look at another example:

You're on the button and you get dealt:



Brad is third to act and he throws out a pre-flop raise... making it 1000 to play. Everyone folds to his bet and the action is now to you.

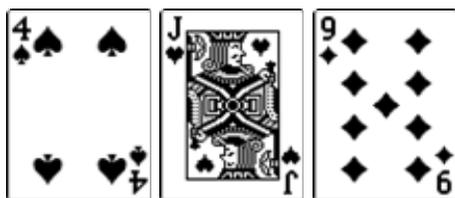
Because of your good positioning and monster hand, you decide to re-raise Brad.

“Make it 5000”, you say.

Brad looks down at his cards for a second time. After a long delay, he finally calls his bet.

After reading Brad's reaction, you feel like you've probably got the best hand at this point. You're putting him on a medium wired pair or a hand like A-Q or A-J.

The flop hits:



Brad is first to act. He checks.

You've missed you're A-K completely... but once again, Brad doesn't know that.

So you make a strong bet of 8000 with your Ace high. You make this bet because you want to represent a high pocket pair. You'd like to drag the pot down NOW... but even if Brad calls you've got a lot of outs with your two over cards. You could easily hit your King or Ace on the turn or river.

Instead, Brad looks down at his two cards again and then mucks his hand. He's forced to fold... considering your pre-flop raise and strong post-flop bet. He's got to put you on a high pocket pair.

Representing the flop is a core strategy of power poker. If you raise before the flop, follow it up with another bet after the flop. Always play like you're holding pocket Rockets. It will DEFINITELY pay off for you.



POT-COMMITTED

For every big hand you lose, the most common explanation will be that you became POT-COMMITTED.

“Pot-committed” is usually caused by these three things:

1. Your lack of anticipation.
2. Your emotional attachment to the hand.
3. Chasing or playing a bad starting hand.

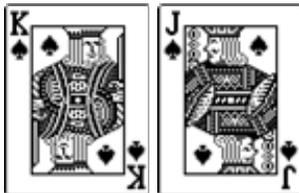
The first reason is the most important one of all... LACK OF ANTICIPATION. You’ve got to anticipate what’s going to happen AFTER you make your call, bet, raise, whatever... and go through the possible scenarios.

The second reason is the same cause of TILT. It has to do with a lack of patience or maybe just a player’s irrational emotions regarding his opponent.

The third reason is a sheer lack of discipline... when you call the blinds just because you “feel lucky” on this one... or because you chase a gutshot or something silly like that.

Let’s look at an example of these concepts in action...

Bob has good positioning at his local \$1-2 no limit game and looks down to see:



This is the strongest hand he’s seen in a few hours.

The action circles around the table.

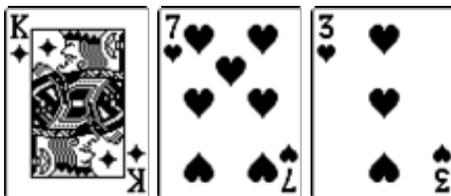
Mitch—a very tight player—comes in for a raise. Mitch is fourth to act.

Bob KNOWS that Mitch is a tight player, but he just can't seem to lay his K-J down. He's EMOTIONALLY ATTACHED to the hand, because he hasn't seen good cards for awhile and feels like he's ENTITLED to a winning hand.

So Bob calls Mitch's \$40 bet, a rather large pre-flop raise at this table.

Already, Bob is pot-committed. He's clearly not thinking about what's going to happen AFTER the flop... and how Mitch is going to open the action. EVEN IF Bob catches top pair or a flush draw, he's STILL not in good shape. Because there's a good chance Mitch has him out-kicked... and Bob is not going to want to pay for the turn and river hoping for the flush.

The flop hits:



Sure enough, Bob hit top pair.

But with absolutely no hesitation, Mitch comes out firing a \$75 bet.

What now?

Bob completely failed to ANTICIPATE this. This is a GREAT flop, but not great enough... because Bob has no clue what Mitch is holding, but he has to figure it's something great.

Bob hesitates... then calls.

Now he's REALLY pot-committed.

And you can see where this story is going...

The turn hits blank and Mitch comes out firing again. Bob ends up losing almost his entire stack to Mitch's Big Slick, because Bob became POT-COMMITTED.

Don't do this.

Ever!

The way to prevent being pot-committed is to NOT let emotions get involved. Stay logical. Think about what's going to happen on the NEXT card. And don't chase hands... calculate your pot odds and play the hand accordingly.



SLOW PLAYING

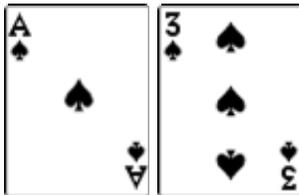
Honestly, I don't really feel like it's necessary for great card players to slow play their hands too often. It's just not a needed part of the game.

Sure, on occasion you're going to flop a full house or four-of-a-kind and you'll need to slow play the hand in order to let your opponents "catch up" to you and hit something on the turn or river... but even then, that's only if you sense complete weakness at the table.

For the most part, an aggressive and strong poker player can bet his monster flops and hands and get paid off almost all the time.

Here's what I'm talking about...

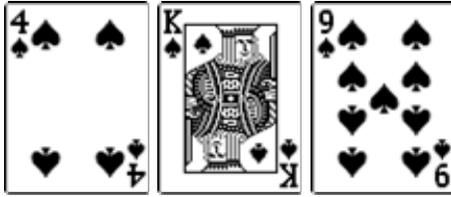
Let's say I've got good positioning at a no limit cash game and I get dealt:



A few of my opponents limp-in by calling the big blind and the action is to me. I decide to also limp-in... Darren is on the button, I expect him to throw out a pre-flop raise like he usually does from that position.

This time, however, he just limps-in... which is a surprise to me. The small blind limps-in and the big blind checks. So there are six players in to see the flop... all I'm hoping for here is to get very lucky and see some spades hit the board.

The flop hits:



Bingo.

I've just caught the lucky flop I was looking for and hit the nut flush. And now it's all about figuring out how to make the most money possible from the hand.

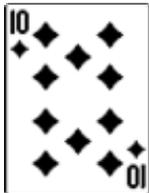
As I look at my opponents, no one seems to be very interested in this hand. They're mostly just chatting away... not engaged in the action.

So I pretend to be interested in the conversation and jump in there with a story of my own. I don't want my opponents to know that I've got a monster... by being the only guy at the table with his mouth closed.

While the conversation continues, all of my opponents check around to me.

And THIS is one of those very rare occasions where I'll slow play my hand. I sense complete weakness and I know that if I throw out a bet everyone will fold. No one's pot-committed... so I'm going to let everyone see the turn for free and hope that someone hits.

The next card comes:



This guarantees me that I've still got the best hand. I'm WISHING that someone was holding Q-J and just hit their straight... but it doesn't appear so. Still no signs of interest from anyone at the table.

Everyone checks the ten of diamonds... so I do the same. I'm going to win the hand either way, and even the minimum bet here is probably going to force everyone out. The river comes:



If someone has a Queen, they've just made their straight. And with only three spades on the board, they're probably thinking they've got the best hand with all the checking that's been going on.

Finally the conversation stops... this is a sure sign that SOMEONE at the table got something. Josh is first to act and he checks. Brad is next and throws out a reasonable sized bet. The next guy folds and the action is to me.

Now I have to make a raise. My raise needs to be STRONG, but not TOO STRONG. Because I don't want him to know I have the flush. So I come back over the top of him for 2.5 times his original bet.

Everyone else still in the pot mucks their hands... and the action is back to Brad. He looks at his down cards again... and I can tell he doesn't want to call this bet. But he has to. He's probably putting me on the Queen... which means we'd just split the pot.

Plus, he knows I bluff a lot, and he might be thinking that I'm just trying to steal this pot right out from under him.

So he calls... and sure enough he's got the straight.

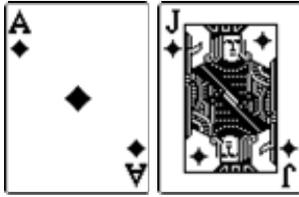
"Sorry Brad...", I say as I turn over my cards, "I had to slow-play the flush that time because I knew no one had a hand."

And I rake the pot... A pot I would NOT have gotten had I bet on the flop or turn.

This example is fairly extreme for a reason... because it demonstrates the ONLY type of situation where I'd slow play my hand. I'll only slow play when I know my opponents well and am EXTREMELY CONFIDENT that they don't have a hand.

OK... let's look at another scenario. This happened to be down in Tunica, Mississippi in a no limit cash game...

Here's what I got dealt as my two down cards:



This isn't exactly one of my favorite hands. In fact, I usually won't raise with A-J unless I'm on the button. I think the hand is trouble if I hit my Ace on the flop... there are just too many instances where I've run into A-K or A-Q.

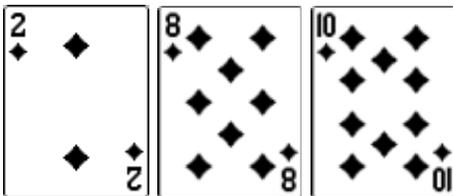
But anyway... I'd been playing aggressively the entire night at this casino and had just suffered a bad beat with pocket Jacks. I was third to act pre-flop and simply limped-in with my A-J of diamonds because I was sure that someone behind me was going to make a pre-flop raise at this very aggressive table.

I don't mind calling a medium bet with suited A-J. But I didn't want to make the raise... only to get re-raised... and be forced to act early after the flop. That's the situation I was trying to avoid here.

Sure enough, the guy sitting across from me makes it \$40 to play. A couple other guys jump into the action and it's my turn.

Now I'm happy to be sitting here with A-J suited with this nice-sized pot. I've got great pot odds and a good hand for busting my opponents.

My lucky flop arrives:



I've got the nut flush.

I'm first to act. And unlike in the first example of this chapter, I come out firing with a \$60 bet.

Why?

Well, because I'm sure that at least one of my opponents has an over-pair to the 2, 8, and 10 on the board. I've already established myself as an aggressive player that's going

to push the action... so I'm confident that one of my opponents is going to play back at me or call my bet with a hand like pocket Kings or Aces.

This bet also makes my opponents think that there's NO WAY I have the flush. Ironic, isn't it? You see, if I had the flush they'd expect me to slow play the hand by checking and trying to trap them.

After all, that's how most players would play the nut flush... and strong players know this. So I do the unexpected.

Like I said before... I really don't slow play many hands. Because I don't have to. My aggressive style of play gets me action with my monster hands.

And that's exactly what ended up happening in this situation...

The guy who made the original pre-flop raise decides to come back over the top of me. He pulls out a crisp \$100 Benji from under his stack and places it in the pot without saying a word.

The next two opponents fold and the action is back to me. I think for just a few moments... but not too long. I don't want to use too much drama. A good player can see right through that kind of acting job.

"I call", I say.

The turn card doesn't pair the board... so I've still got the nuts.

"Check", I say... as I tap my fist against the table.

And the reason I check here is because I know that my opponent is going to fire again. He may put me on the flush draw... and since the turn card wasn't a diamond, he'll bet again. He's NOT going to re-raise me on the flop and then just check the turn card.

I GUESS you can kind of call this a slow-play, but not really. I'm not trying to trap my opponent... I simply know he's going to place a bet.

Sure enough, he bets \$200...

To make a long story short, I end up raking in a huge pot and become the new chip leader.

And that's how I feel about slow playing... If you're an aggressive enough player, you just don't have to do it very much. You'll get called with your monsters. Heck, you might even get re-raised like I did in the second example.

But that doesn't mean you should take slow playing out of your game completely. It's a tool... a tool that you should use sparingly when you sense complete weakness in the table like I did in the first example. When someone gets a hand then you can bust them... and rake in a lot of chips.



WHEN SLOW PLAYING BACKFIRES

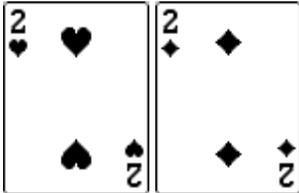
Another reason that I don't like to slow play my monster hands is because it can easily BACKFIRE and cause bad beats.

This happens when you check a monster flop... hoping someone will bet or make some type of hand. The problem comes when someone DOES end up making a hand... BETTER THAN YOURS.

Don't let this happen to you. Carefully analyze the cards on the board. Like I said in the last chapter, there are times you'll WANT to slow-play a big flop when your opponents are weak. That's when you must check to let them catch something. But BE CAREFUL! You must be sure that no one can make a hand that ends up being BETTER than yours.

Here is an example:

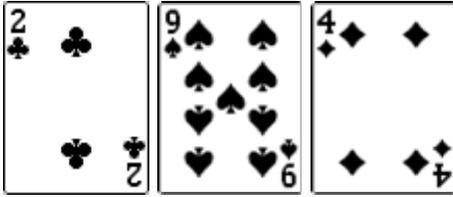
Let's say you're at a casino and you down at:



You've got good positioning. A few of your opponents limp-in by calling the big blind (1000 in chips)... and so the action is to you.

You're not feeling that good about pocket deuces so you decide to limp-in and hope to spike a two on the flop. Josh and Aaron... both to your left... also call the big blind. That means there are five players seeing the flop.

It hits:



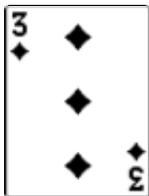
Perfect.

You've flopped your set... and you're looking to rake in a nice pot.

Unfortunately, everyone checks immediately. You look over to Josh and Aaron... who will both act after you... and they don't look like they're going to be making any bets.

You figure a check might be good here. You don't want to scare anyone away. So you check... and Josh and Aaron both do the same.

The turn comes:



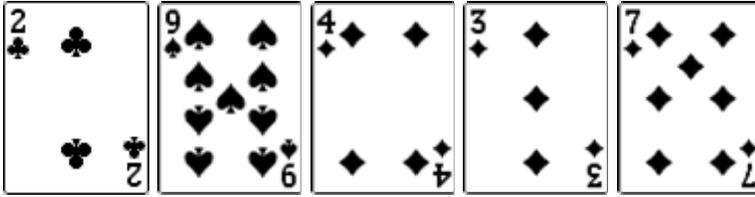
And once again, everyone checks to you. You sense weakness and continue to slow-play your trips. Josh checks... and Aaron actually MUCKS his hand, even though he can see a free river card.

GREAT, you're thinking. You finally hit a monster hand and people are folding even when they can see free cards. It doesn't look like you're going to get paid off in this one.

The river comes...



Now the board reads:



Cindy is first to act and throws out a 2000 bet... the next opponent mucks it and the action is to you.

You're excited now... because you may actually get some action after all. You make a re-raise...

"Make it 5,000", you say, as you push in a big stack of chips.

Josh comes right back over the top of you with no hesitation.

"10,000", he says.

And now you have NO idea about what the hell is going on. Everyone checks, checks, checks... and now all of the sudden Cindy comes out betting and Josh makes a re-raise. Did everyone just make a hand or something?

You look at the board again and suddenly it all starts to make sense. You realize that you TOTALLY misplayed the hand because you didn't analyze the cards carefully enough. You were too caught up in your trips to see what was going on.

The flop didn't scare you one bit... because there were three different suits (a "rainbow flop"). But the turn brought ANOTHER diamond and a possible straight draw. THAT'S where you should have made your opponents pay to see another card.

Instead, you were so caught up in your two's in hopes that you'd actually win some money with them. And in the process you gave everyone another free card. And now you realize that Cindy made her 6-5 straight... and Josh made his backdoor diamond flush draw.

And basically, you're screwed. Your trip two's are no good here anymore.

You're forced to lay the hand down. And it's all because you misplayed it by trying to SLOW-PLAY and letting your opponents catch up (and take the lead).

That's why it's important to analyze every card that hits the board. The minute you see any POSSIBLE signs of a draw, bet your big hand. Do NOT let others come in and see free cards with a draw and then bust you later.

This is how SLOW PLAYING backfires... and it's yet another reason to avoid SLOW PLAYING big hands. Instead, just come out betting them in the first place.



CHECK RAISE

Honestly, I don't really use the check raise maneuver in my style of play either. It doesn't make it a BAD play... it just doesn't fit with my particular style in live games.

(Online, I'll sometimes use the check raise to BLUFF an opponent... since most players online interpret check raises as major signs of strength.)

The reason is because I can usually get action with my big hands... I don't need to check raise them.

There are times, of course, where a check raise is the right play. I'll use it occasionally to mix up my play. I'll also use it if I get a tell on a player.

An example of when I might use a check raise is if I'm in the small blind and pick up A-2. Everyone folds and it's just me and the big blind left. I limp-in with my A-2, not a bad hand considering there are only two players left.

The big blind checks and the flop hits with an Ace. I know my opponent doesn't have an Ace, but I also know that if I bet here he'll fold. So I just check, and sure enough he throws out a bet trying to steal the pot. That's when I raise with my top pair. And then he folds.

The only time I'd do a play like this is when I know my opponent and have a great read on him... and it's only to pick up a few extra chips.

Another time I might check raise is when I pick up an unbeatable monster like quads (four-of-a-kind). If I've got pocket three's and the flop hits A-3-3 and I'm first to act... I'll probably just check. I don't want to scare everyone out right away... I'd rather let someone with the Ace bet first and become pot-committed, that way I can win more with my monster.

But like I said, I'm just not a big fan of using the check raise. If you use the strategies in this book and adopt my style of play you'll probably find it fairly useless as well.

Now... one thing to WATCH OUT for is when your OPPONENT check raises. If you throw out semi-bluffs and feeler bets frequently, you'll often run into check raises. And that's usually a sign to head for the hills.

Amateurs are especially fond of the check raise when they have a monster... which makes it pretty damn easy to get a read on them.

If you find ways to successfully incorporate the check raise into your game, go for it. A lot of it depends on the stakes you're playing at, your opponents, and your overall playing style. But I don't use it much, and I know that many pros feel the same way.



HEADS-UP PLAY

Heads-up skill is perhaps the most IMPORTANT— yet most UNDERDEVELOPED— skill for most no limit Holdem players. After all, in order to win FIRST in any given tournament or game, you ultimately must win the heads-up match.

But the problem is, most players don't find themselves in heads-up situations FREQUENTLY enough to practice and perfect their skill. Heads-up matches often only last a FEW HANDS... which isn't nearly enough time to learn the art of winning one-on-one.

I'm going to share with you step-by-step what you need to know to become a dominating heads-up player. Here we go...

1. Bet, bet, bet.

You cannot and will not win at heads-up poker if you only play premium cards. The reason is simple: For most hands, NEITHER you nor your opponent will catch good cards. It's simple mathematics.

That means you've got to win another way: By making your opponent fold! And the only way to do this is...

Yep, you guessed it. BET.

2. Show the occasional bluff.

This step is optional... but often very powerful. Heads-up poker is very much about PSYCHOLOGY and INTIMIDATION... so take any steps to confuse and scare your opponent.

What I like to do in heads-up is come out raging like a bull... betting at tons of hands. Then I slow down. Then I show a bluff. And all this time, my opponent is wondering, "What the hell is with this guy?"

Your opponent is going to be studying you... trying to get a read... and that's why mixing it up is so important. And that's why I personally like to show a bluff once in awhile... at a time when I think it will "tilt" my enemy.

3. Control the "stakes".

By taking control of the tempo of the heads-up match, you can also influence the "stakes" you play at.

Here's what I mean...

If the blinds in a heads-up match are low (in a heads-up Sit & Go, for example), the match can go for a really long time... or a really short time... or somewhere in between.

It all depends on the players. Some players—when they get heads-up—start pushing all-in with any Ace, pair, or decent looking hand.

Other players prefer to play the heads-up match more slowly...

So which way is better? The answer depends on if you're playing against a MORE SKILLED or LESS SKILLED player than yourself.

If you're up against someone better than you, you want to set the tempo to "high stakes". It's like turning up a volume knob...

When you pick up a good starting hand, bet very aggressively. No doubling the blinds here... risk a QUARTER... or maybe HALF of your chips on a hand.

The first few times you play this way your opponent will probably just fold... surprised at how aggressive you are. But soon he'll adapt, and he'll start pushing with HIS good hands.

And after that, it really comes down to more of a coin toss than anything else. You have the slight advantage, because you've set the tempo and still have an element of control.

If you're up against a more skilled player but can get your chances to 51%, then you should do it.

Now... on the other hand...

Let's say you're up against a LESS SKILLED player. That means you should keep the stakes LOW... and slowly grind their stack down.

Don't make all-in bets. Play it slow.

Your goal is to PREVENT the match from becoming a "coin toss"... because you're better than him.

4. Give a false sense of hope.

After stealing a lot of pots with your aggressive betting... and after "tilting" your opponent by showing a bluff... it's time to back down and give your rival the FEELING OF HOPE.

Start falling into a few betting "patterns" that any 4-year old would be able to recognize. (Of course, your opponent is going to feel like a GENIUS when he notices them.)

For instance, let's say you raised 300 pre-flop and then bet 1000 on the flop on that bluff you showed.

Well, bet 300 again pre-flop. And again. And again. Do it every time you have bad cards. Your opponent will catch on... or he'll catch some good cards... and soon he'll raise you.

When he does that, fold. When he does it again, fold. And so on.

Of course, this "pattern" isn't going to be like five hands in a row. You've got to space them out.

Your goal is to get your opponent thinking he's got you "figured out"... and that you bet 300 pre-flop when you don't have anything good. And that any time you get re-raised, you fold.

5. Let them make the wrong move.

Now that your opponent feels HOPE... it's time to let them step into your trap. When you pick up a REAL hand, play it EXACTLY like you did the bad hands.

Your opponent will raise you... but THIS time you make a re-raise. Or maybe you just call, and string them out. Get them pot-committed... and frustrated.

On the turn card, your opponent will think you've got nothing... and will come at you with an even LARGER bet...

See where this is going?

The key to winning heads-up is to make your opponent COME TO YOU when you've got the best hand. The reason this is so powerful is because it lowers your risk. You've got a REAL hand... so you're not worried about getting beat. All you're concerned about is how to TRAP your rival.

The exact betting "patterns" you set up for your opponent... and the exact way you go for the "kill" are irrelevant. The execution will differ for every opponent.

What's important is that you understand the GOAL of each stage.

The final thought I want to leave you with about heads-up poker is that PRACTICE is crucial to your success.

The best way to practice is to find a buddy and play him heads-up all night... over and over and over and over again. Put five bucks on each game, or whatever.

Heads-up poker requires a special "sense". It's not like regular multi-player poker... the starting hands are different, the betting patterns are different, and so on.

In heads-up no limit Holdem, pretty much anything goes. Any card over ten is worth playing... and even two cards UNDER ten are often worth playing.

Go practice with a friend and get a feel for it. Put the strategies from this chapter into action... and also practice some of your own.

After whomping your buddy, go find another poker friend and play with him. Just because you can beat one person consistently doesn't mean you're "good" at heads-up poker. Every opponent is different.

The other great way to practice, of course, is online at heads-up Sit & Go's. Be careful, though... there are a lot of "sharks" in these rooms who have played THOUSANDS upon THOUSANDS of heads-up matches. Only play the low stakes to start— otherwise you may be quickly discouraged.

OK, that's it for heads-up poker. Remember... this is a KEY skill for Texas Holdem mastery.



**PART 4: STARTING
HANDS**

CHAPTER 23: HOW TO PLAY BIG SLICK

CHAPTER 24: HOW TO PLAY ACE NINE AND UNDER

CHAPTER 25: HOW TO PLAY POCKET JACKS

CHAPTER 26: HOW TO PLAY LOW WIRED PAIRS

CHAPTER 27: HOW TO PLAY POCKET KINGS

CHAPTER 28: HOW TO PLAY POCKET ACES

CHAPTER 29: HOW TO PLAY SUITED-CONNECTORS

CHAPTER 30: HOW TO PLAY SEMI-CONNECTORS

CHAPTER 31: HOW TO PLAY HIDDEN HANDS



HOW TO PLAY BIG SLICK

Sure, Big Slick is a monster hand. And yes, it should be played in an aggressive manner.

But all too often I see players lose their entire stack with these two cards... simply because they pushed in their chips thinking the hand was invincible, only to see Darren call with pocket 5's and take the pot down.

And that's where it becomes a coin flip. Do you want your entire poker tournament or game to be decided by a coin flip or "luck"?

Of course not.

When I sit down at the table, I try to take as much LUCK out of the game of poker as possible. I let my STYLE decide the winner... Period.

So how do I play Big Slick?

AGGRESSIVELY, BUT NOT RECKLESSLY.

Here's how I played the hand (with good positioning) just a few days ago in a local money game... see what you think:

I was just right of the button in a \$1-2 no limit game when I was dealt the monster.

Josh was third to act before the flop and made a raise. "\$10 to play", he says.

Two of my opponents call the bet and the action is on me and my AK of diamonds.

This is where I decided to find out where I'm at in the hand... compared to the other players... so I make a move on Josh and CHALLENGE him to see how strong he really is.

I re-raise. "Make it \$40 to play", as I push in my red chips.

Now here's why I did the re-raise:

1. First off, it gives me a "feel" as to where I stand against my opponents. I can get a more accurate read on the other players and what they're holding.

If they simply CALL, I've probably got the best hand at the table. If one of them is sitting on Cowboys or Rockets, they'd most likely go back over the top of me with an even larger raise or an all-in.

It's CRUCIAL that you find out where you're at in a hand. Re-raising accomplishes this goal.

2. My re-raise over Josh's bet gives me CONTROL of the betting, which is also very important as you know. I want to be the guy at the table that dictates the action and STRIKES FEAR into my opponents with my aggressive play. The re-raise does this.

3. Because I'm the one that made the pre-flop raise, my opponents are fairly likely to check to me on the flop... regardless of what hits.

Why wouldn't they?

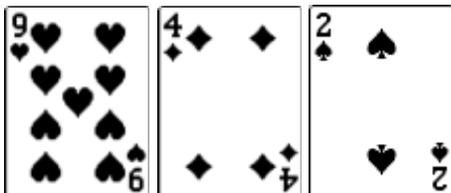
They anticipate another bet from me. Most strong players will follow up a pre-flop raise with a post-flop raise... regardless of the cards. This gives me a huge advantage, even if I don't hit an Ace or King on the flop.

For instance, let's say the flop hits 3-5-9 and my opponents check to me. I come out firing with another bet, even though I hit nothing. My opponents have to put me on a high wired pair (wouldn't you?) and muck their hands...

Anyway... back to the hand as it REALLY happened.

Josh was the only player to call my pre-flop re-raise of \$40. Now I've put myself in a good position to take this baby down after the flop... no matter what hits.

Flop comes out:



Not exactly what I was looking for.

But remember, Josh has NO CLUE that I'm holding A-K. He has to put me on a big hand... like Queens, Kings, or Aces, due to my re-raise before the flop.

Josh says exactly what I expected him to say, "I check."

That's where my aggressive play really pays off. I can now represent the wired pair with a big bet.

"Fifty dollars" I say as I throw two green \$25 chips into the middle.

The rest, of course, is history.

Josh mucks his hand and I rake in a nice pot with my Ace high.

That, my friend, is what I mean by playing big slick aggressively, but NOT recklessly. I made a pre-flop re-raise, but I didn't do anything crazy like go all-in and leave the game up to a coin toss.

The re-raise before the flop allows you the opportunity to get OUT of the hand if necessary. Had Josh come back over the top of me with a large bet or an all-in, I would have mucked the hand. I don't want my entire night decided over my A-K. I've laid down Big Slick many times before the flop... and I'm sure I'll do it many times in the future.

Remember: Aggressive, not reckless.

Your method for playing Big Slick should look something like this...

1. Raise pre-flop to narrow the field to one or two callers.
2. Get a read on your opponent. Will you be able to force him to fold after the flop? Or does he possibly have a monster?
3. Represent the flop. Don't back down.
4. If your opponent calls your bet on the flop, back off. Be careful not to bluff when there's a draw on the board or possible trips. Try to put your opponent on a hand.

Your pre-flop strategy should be mostly based on your POSITIONING and whether or not you sense weakness at the table.



HOW TO PLAY ACE NINE AND UNDER

Let's talk about how to play A-9 and under... Here are the starting hands I'm talking about: A-9, A-8, A-7, A-6, A-5, A-4, A-3, and A-2.

First, let's look at how to play them at a table with eight players or more. In this situation, A-9 and under are TROUBLE. A lot of amateurs will make the mistake of thinking that any hand with an Ace in it is good...

But they are wrong, wrong, wrong.

Let's look at the times when you SHOULD play A-9 and under:

1. When your two cards are SUITED and you can see a cheap flop. In this case, you will sometimes get lucky and hit the nut flush...
2. A-5 and under have a chance of hitting the straight. Once again, only if you can see a cheap flop...
3. If you're on the button or just to the right of the button and you sense weakness in your opponents...

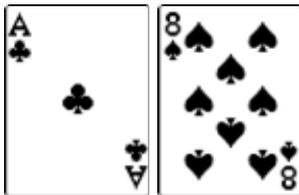
I'll never call a raise with A-9 and under... even when I'm on the button. It's just too easy for someone else to have the Ace with a better kicker. And your odds at hitting the flush (when your cards are suited) are slim so it's not worth calling a raise.

Those are really the only three instances where I'll play A-9 and under at a table with eight or more players. And in all three instances, it's only when I'm in good positioning, sense weakness, and can see a flop for a decent price.

If the table has FEWER than five players, I will play A-9 and under. I'll often actually make a RAISE with it... because with fewer than five players it could easily be the best hand at the table.

OK, let's look at how playing A-9 and under at an 8-man table can lead to trouble...

Let's say you're fourth to act before the flop and you look down at your cards:



This might be the best-looking hand you've seen in an hour... so you stubbornly decide to try to limp-in with it by calling the big blind (\$2).

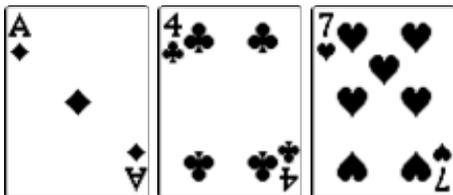
A couple of other opponents also limp-in and then the action goes to Josh, who's on the button.

"Make it \$10 to play", he says, as he tosses two red chips into the pot.

The action is back to you with your A-8 off-suit. You've got \$2 invested and think, "Why not... it's only \$8 more, and there's already a decent pot forming."

So you incorrectly call Josh's pre-flop raise.

The other opponents fold and so it's just you and Josh heads-up. The flop hits:



You're first to act.

OK, so you hit your Ace. That's what you wanted, right? I mean... why else would you call a pre-flop raise with A-8?

You know that Josh will probably throw out a bet here if you check it to him. After all, he's the one who made the pre-flop raise. You also know there's a good chance he has an Ace too... and in that case, his kicker has probably got you beat. It's unlikely that he raised the pot with something like A-6.

I'd say that at least half of the raised hands in poker usually involve an Ace. That's why it's so silly to play the hands A-9 and under because you're just going to get burnt.

So anyway... back to the hand. You decide to throw out a bet with top pair to see where you're at in the hand (which isn't a bad play here... the bad play came when you tried to limp-in).

"Fifteen dollars", you say... hoping Josh will muck his cards or just call.

Instead, he comes right back over the top of you... "Make it \$30", he says.

Now you're thinking that he's either making a move on you with something like pocket Kings... or he really does have the Ace with a kicker.

But you can't fold the hand. You just can't stand to muck top pair. And it's not your fault... most players can't. They just don't have the discipline.

So you call... The turn card comes:



Now the board is paired. The action is to you.

You don't know WHAT to do... after all, Josh could easily have you out-kicked and he's going to make you pay to see the river. If you bet, you're just going to get raised. If you check, you're showing weakness.

"I check", you say.

And you get what's coming to you. Josh fires out a fifty dollar bet with no hesitation.

At this point you're so pot-committed that you decide to call the bet.

See where this is going?

You'll check again on the river, and Josh will make a hundred dollar bet or go all-in. Then what? How do you muck top pair with a hundred bucks already in the pot? So you'll call his bet on the river... making the excuse that you were already pot-committed.

Josh will throw over A-Q, of course, and you'll be out of the game. And it's all because you played your measly A-9 and under in the first place.

Moral of the story? Don't play A-9 and under unless they're suited, you've got good positioning, and you sense weakness at the table.

Because it's just too likely that your opponent will out-kick you... and it's going to be too difficult to lay down top pair after becoming pot-committed. This strategy will save you tons of lost chips.

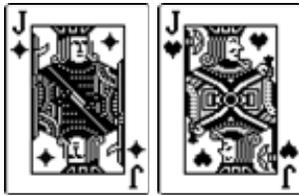


HOW TO PLAY POCKET JACKS

Pocket Jacks is the hand that everyone loves to hate. Experienced poker players have had their Jacks run down countless times... and struggle to find the right way to play it.

Fortunately, there IS a way to play pocket Jacks and consistently rake in nice pots. Here's how:

Let's say you're at an 8-man no limit table and the blinds are \$2-4. You're third to act before the flop. You look down at your cards:



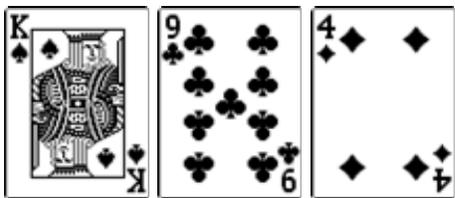
Luckily for you, you've just read my book, and you're now prepared to play these bad boys the RIGHT way.

You raise the pot and make it \$30 to play. This is a rather large pre-flop raise at this table. Most of your opponents are only raising to \$10 or maybe \$20 before the flop. But you're not going to make a wimpy raise with your "hooks".

No way. You're either going to rake in the blinds NOW, or narrow the field to one caller... two at the most. If there are more than two opponents in the hand you're going to lose.

If you had only made an \$8 pre-flop raise that five players called, you'd better spike a Jack on the flop... because that's the only way you'll win the pot. But you don't want to WASTE your pocket Jacks and give up on them like that... so you make the large raise.

And it works out perfectly. Darren is the only player to call your bet. The flop hits:



You're first to act. Now... if you had let more than two players see this flop, someone would've had the King. But since only Darren is in the hand, you know he probably doesn't have it. He's probably on the Ace.

So you go with the odds and fire out a \$50 bet as though the King helped you.

Darren looks down at his hand for a few moments... then mucks it. He was holding A-Q.

And THAT, my friend, is how you play J-J. Your goal should be to create heads-up action. If no one calls, that's fine. You rake the blinds. If you DO get a caller, bet again on the flop... regardless of what hits. Chances are you still have the best hand. You'll be amazed at how many pots you take down by following these simple two steps.



HOW TO PLAY LOW WIRED PAIRS

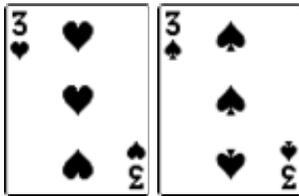
Low wired pairs, or small pocket pairs, are tough to play. I consider anything between two's and eight's (inclusive) to be a low pocket pair.

Most players can't figure out whether to RAISE with these hands... or limp-in in hopes of spiking trips.

The answer is BOTH. It all depends on table positioning.

Let's look at an example with early table positioning...

You're second to act before the flop at a \$1-2 no limit game and you get dealt:



Brad, who is sitting just to your right (under the gun) is first to act. He mucks his hand. So the action is to you and your small pocket pair. This is a situation where you should limp-in.

You don't want to come out firing, because there are too many opponents behind you that haven't had the chance to act yet. If one of them calls or re-raises your bet, you'll be first to act after the flop and you won't have a read on them at all. The only way to win in that type of situation would be to risk all your chips in a bluff or spike your trips.

So instead of raising, you should call the \$2 big blind... even though you know someone will likely raise the pot in this 8-man game.

The action goes around the table a few other players limp-in and then the action is to Darren, who's on the button. Darren makes it \$10 to play.

This is GOOD for you. Because chances are, only one or two other players will call Darren's raise. The pot size will be good for you... and if you spike a three you're going to take all of Darren's money. If you DON'T spike a three, you're going to be out just \$10.

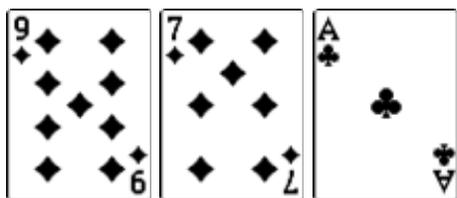
And THAT is how you play a small pocket pair from early positioning. Just limp-in... call any small or moderate pre-flop raises... and hope to spike your card on the flop. If you DON'T hit your card, you should probably muck it if the other guy bets strong.

The only situation where you'd want to stay in the hand aggressively is if your pocket pair is higher than any card on the board. In that case, you probably still have the best hand, and you can try to take it down.

Don't raise with small pocket pairs from an early position. Here's why:

Let's say in the example above you made a pre-flop raise of \$20 with your three's. The action went around the table and Darren was the only caller.

The flop hits:



Now what?

You don't want to show weakness by checking. After all, you're the one who made the pre-flop raise. But you don't want to BET again because there's a good chance Darren has the Ace. But since you threw out the pre-flop raise, you decide to bet again:

"Make it \$50", you say.

Darren calls with very little hesitation. Obviously a bad sign for you.

The turn card comes:



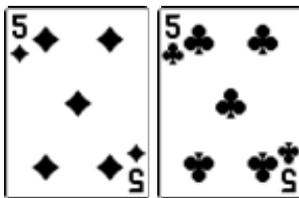
And you're first to act again. Now what? Should you continue to bluff with an even LARGER bet? Should you check and show Darren your weakness?

This is how raising with a small pocket pair from the early positions can get ugly... fast. That's why I'll limp-in from these positions and call any small raises. If someone behind you has a monster and makes an aggressive pre-flop raise, you can get out of the hand having lost only the big blind bet.

If you don't hit your trips, you can muck the hand with a minimum loss. And if you DO hit your trips, you will double up. Minimum risk of chips, maximum gain... that's how to play these hands.

OK, so we've talked about early positioning. Let's talk about LATE positioning with small wired pairs now... which is good positioning.

Let's say you're just to the right of the button and you look down at:



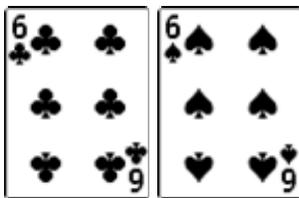
Josh is third to act before the flop and he makes it \$15 to play. Brad and Nathan both call. And the action is to you.

This is another situation where you should simply CALL the pre-flop raise. You don't want to go back over the top of three opponents, because someone could easily be holding a monster. If that's the case, they're going to re-raise you and then you're in trouble.

It's better to just smooth call the \$15 here and hope for a five on the flop. If the five hits, you're going to double up on one of your opponents... especially if one of them has a monster like Kings.

So once again... in this type of situation, the proper play is to minimize the risk of chips by just calling, but maximize the potential gains when you hit your trips.

Let's look at another example of playing a small wired pair in late positioning. You're to the right of the button again and you look down at your cards:



This time, Josh, Brad, and Nathan all LIMP-IN by calling the \$2 big blind. The action is to you.

And this is where you DON'T limp-in. Instead... raise it.

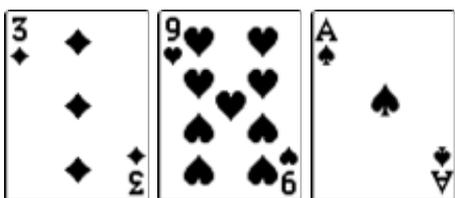
“Make it \$20 to play”, you say.

And the reason you do this is because you know you've probably got the best hand right now. After all, all three of your opponents only limped-in. By raising, you're likely to create heads-up action or steal all the blinds right now... both are great scenarios.

Anyway... so the hand plays out and Brad is the only caller. Perfect. You've created heads-up action with your small wired pair... AND MORE IMPORTANTLY, you've got the best positioning. Brad has to act first before you after the flop, turn, and river.

You also have a much better idea of what Brad is holding now. He just limped-in at first and now he just called. No raises. That means he probably has two over-cards like K-Q or K-J. He may have a small wired pair, just like you.

Either way, you're in control of this hand and have a good chance at winning this pot. The flop hits:



Brad checks to you.

Now although you missed your five, Brad doesn't know that. For all he knows, you've got a big hand like A-K or A-Q. So you MUST represent the flop. That's the beauty of having good table positioning with a small wired pair.

“\$40 to play”, you say.

Brad shakes his head... thinks for a moment... and then says, "I just can't call." He flips over his pocket seven's for you to see.

Even though Brad had the better hand, YOU won the pot. And the reason is because you had the best positioning and made the pre-flop raise to create heads-up action.

To summarize, here are the general "principles" to keep in mind when you get small wired pairs:

Early/Bad Positioning, Pre-Flop:

- LIMP-IN with your small wired pair.
- CALL small to moderate pre-flop raises.
- DON'T CALL huge pre-flop raises.

Late/Good Positioning, Pre-Flop:

- CALL if the pots been raised a small/moderate amount.
- RAISE if everyone else tries to limp-in, in order to create heads-up action with good positioning or steal the blinds.

Early/Bad Positioning, Post-Flop:

- If you don't hit your three-of-a-kind, you should probably muck the hand and live to see another day.
- If you hit your three-of-a-kind, get as much money from the hand as possible.

Late/Good Positioning, Post-Flop:

- If you don't hit your three-of-a-kind, you can still win the hand by leveraging your positioning.
- If you hit your three-of-a-kind, get as much money from the hand as possible.



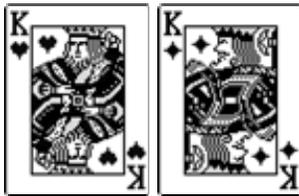
HOW TO PLAY POCKET KINGS

Pocket Kings... a.k.a. “Cowboys”... is one of the strongest starting hands in Texas Holdem. But just like pocket Aces, you’ve got to know how to play the hand PROPERLY in order to be a consistent winner.

The key to playing Kings is to make a strong pre-flop raise to narrow the field to one or two callers... and then from there, have the DISCIPLINE to back off if an Ace hits the board.

Here’s what I mean:

Let’s say you’re at the usual \$1-2 no limit game and you look down at your cards:



You’re fourth to act before the flop... so your positioning isn’t that great.

Josh is under the gun... and he catches your eye by limping-in. Josh is a smart player, which means he’s probably got a strong hand.

The next couple opponents muck their cards and the action is to you. This is where you’ve got to find out JUST HOW STRONG Josh’s hand really is.

So you announce a raise... making it \$15 to play.

The reason for such a large pre-flop raise is that it will only get one or two callers. You DON’T want three or more players seeing a flop when you’ve got Kings. Your chances of getting run down will be increased.

Just like with any monster hand, many players are SCARED to raise the pot in fear that they won't get any callers. But you MUST get over this feeling and raise the pot... if everyone mucks it, that's fine. If you get more than two callers, that's NOT fine.

Besides... if you advertise an aggressive playing style at the table, you WILL get action with your big hands.

The other important thing to remember here is that you must be careful with the SIZE of your pre-flop raise. This is where paying careful attention to every hand pays off. You must know the limits of how much players will pay to see a flop. And then you must bet accordingly... to aim at getting just one or maybe two callers.

Here, you know that a \$15 raise will only get one or two callers. It won't get more, because this particular table is somewhat tight.

OK, so back to the hand. Everyone folds and the action is back to Josh who's under the gun. He looks down at his cards a second time. He calls.

Now you're just PRAYING that an Ace doesn't hit the board on the flop. Josh must have a strong hand here because he limped in from first positioning. You're putting him on either A-Q or A-J... or maybe even A-K.

The only thing that will slow you down from here is if an Ace hits the board. If the Ace hits, you're in trouble.

THIS IS IMPORTANT: Do not fall-in love with your Kings so much that you cannot fold them! If there's an Ace on the board and you put your opponent on the Ace, then just get over it and live to see another day.

I call this the "Entitlement Effect"... when a player just can't seem to fold his hand with a high pocket pair, even though it's OBVIOUS his opponent has him beat.

This is simple human psychology at work here. We feel "entitled" to our monster hand... and don't have the DISCIPLINE and LOGIC to fold it away.

Regardless of how the hand plays out from here, you've played your Kings perfectly. When you get the Cowboys, just remember to make a strong pre-flop raise to get just one or two callers, and then go from there.

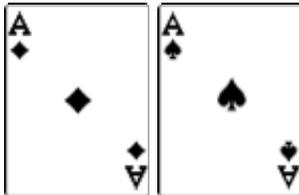
If an Ace or an obvious draw hits the board and your opponent comes out firing, be careful. Know when to muck your hand and live to see another.



HOW TO PLAY POCKET ACES

Pocket Aces is the BEST possible starting hand... but... it's also a hand a lot of poker amateurs go BUST on. And here's why:

Let's say you're on the button in a \$5-10 no limit cash game and you look down at your cards:

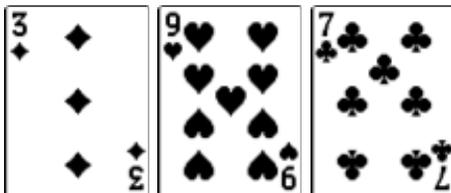


Bingo. You've got the Aces... the Rockets... the American Airlines... whatever you want to call it. AND you've got great positioning because you're on the button.

So five players limp-in and call the \$10 big blind and the action is to you. You're so excited about your Aces that you don't want ANYONE to fold to your raise... you want as many callers in there as possible because you have the best possible hand, right?

"Make it \$35", you say. (Which is a small raise for this table.) You want ACTION with your Rockets... hence the reason for the small raise. All five players call... all feeling they have to because of their pot odds.

Now you're REALLY excited. You're going to make a FORTUNE with your monster hand. The flop hits:



The first two players check. Nathan, third to act, bets \$50. The next two guys call. And suddenly, you're not quite feeling so confident about your Aces after all. "Why is everyone calling the \$50 bet?" you wonder. So you decide to call... and not raise it.

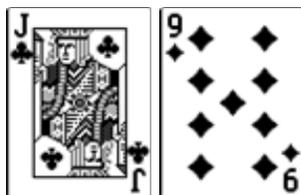
The next card comes:



Nathan checks. So does the next guy. But the guy on your right, Rodney, makes it \$300 to play.

And now you're even MORE confused. What could Rodney have caught? Did he flop a set? Is he just betting top pair? What's going on?

You stubbornly play your Aces and call the bet... because you just can't seem to lay them down. And after the river card you call his all-in bet, only to see him flip over:

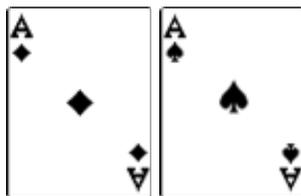


...Which means Rodney wins with two pair over your Rockets, and drags in all the chips.

And the only person you can blame is YOURSELF. You made the wimpy pre-flop raise and let five opponents see the flop... no wonder why your hand got run down.

OK, so let's say you've read my book and know the PROPER way to play pocket Aces. What do you do?

Well, let's use the same scenario. You look down at your cards and you've got:



Except instead of a \$35 raise you make it \$100 to play.

The goal is to either RAKE THE POT NOW before the flop... or... create heads-up action, which is exactly what you want (and need) with your Rockets.

With a \$100 bet, you're not going to get run down by J-9 offsuit.

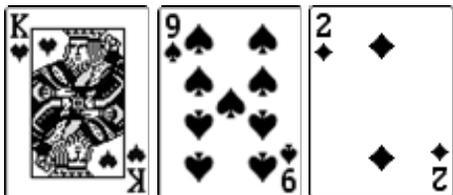
A lot of players who get run down with pocket Aces complain about the "bad beat" they suffered. In truth, it's NOT a bad beat. It's a BAD PLAY.

You just can't let lots of callers see a flop. The odds are no longer in your favor...

Sure, you're still STATISTICALLY FAVORED to win, but that doesn't mean your ODDS OF WINNING are even over 50%. With five opponents in the hand you'll be lucky if your odds of winning are over 40%.

Anyway... back to the hand.

Brad is the only caller of your \$100 bet. The flop comes:



Brad, who's first to act, checks.

You bet \$250.

Brad looks down at his pocket ten's for a second time. He thinks you may be trying to bully him... since after all, you always follow your pre-flop raise with another bet on the flop, no matter what cards you're holding.

So Brad plays back at you...

"Make it \$750" he says as he pounds a stack of chips down in the center of the table aggressively...

The rest, as they say, is history.

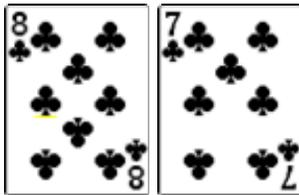
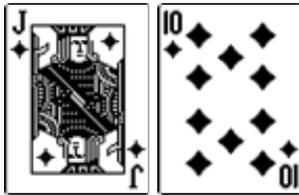
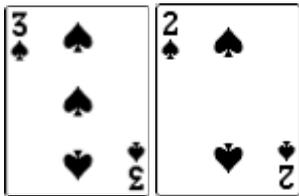
And THAT, my friend, is how you play pocket Aces. You want to make a pre-flop bet that will create heads-up action. You DON'T want more than two players seeing the flop with you... you're just going to get run down too easily.

MAXIMIZE your wins and MINIMIZE your risk with this monster hand... and you'll be on your way to the final table.



HOW TO PLAY SUITED-CONNECTORS

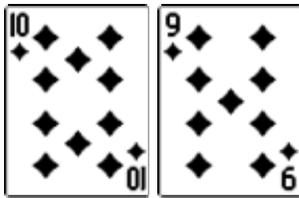
A suited-connector is a hand that is SUITED and CONNECTED. For example, these hands are “suited-connectors”:



Suited-connectors can possibly become some of your biggest money makers over the course of a game. These hands are GREAT to raise with or call a raise with because your opponents will never be able to put you on a hand if you hit.

Here’s an example...

Let’s say you’ve got good positioning in a \$1-2 no limit cash game and you pick up:



Michelle is third to act and she throws out a pre-flop raise... making it \$10 to play. The next two opponents fold. Nathan, who's just to your right, calls.

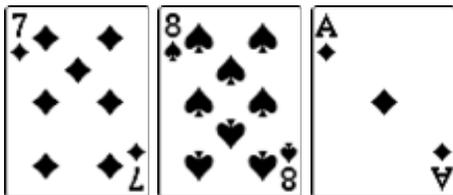
You decide to TAKE CONTROL of this hand and play your 10-9 aggressively in this situation.

So you make it \$25 to play.

Why?

The reason is simple. You want to represent a big hand like A-K or pocket Queens, Kings, or Aces. You've got good positioning and get to see what Michelle and Nathan do after the flop... so even if you don't hit on the flop, you can still take this pot down if you sense weakness.

The game goes around and only Michelle calls your raise. You put her on a hand like A-Q, A-J, or a small pocket pair. If she had anything better she'd probably have gone over the top of you. The flop hits:



You've basically flopped a monster hand. You've got an open-ended straight draw and a flush draw. And that's the beauty of suited-connectors: Your opponent can never put you on the hand if you're lucky enough to catch a good flop.

When you DO hit with suited-connectors, you're likely to rake a huge pot... or even double up.

Michelle comes out firing and makes it \$40 to play. She's probably got the A-Q or A-J and wants to slow you down and find out where you're at. You've got two moves now:

1. You can either go all-in on a semi-bluff. If Michelle calls you've still got lots of outs. If she folds you rake a huge pot.
2. You can just call the bet and see a turn.

You choose option number two. And you do that because you know what's going to happen if you DO make your hand... you'll be able to get all of Michelle's money anyway, since she won't put you on your 10-9 suited.

What you're actually HOPING for here is to hit the straight and NOT the flush, because the flush draw might scare Michelle. She's smart and will play it more conservatively with three diamonds on the board. But she's won't know you have 10-9 so if the straight comes out you're in good shape.

No matter how the hand ends up playing out, this is how you play suited-connectors. Play them aggressively... because when they hit, you get paid. Big time. And if you don't hit, just cut your losses.

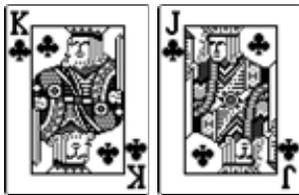
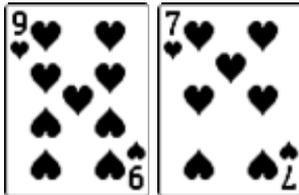
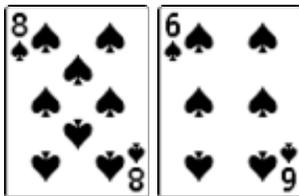
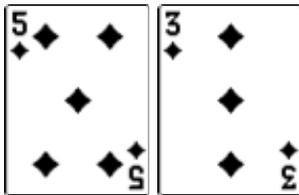
The key, as always, is to pay careful attention to your positioning. Play the hand more aggressively from a late position, because this affords you the opportunity to steal the pot even if you don't hit.



HOW TO PLAY SEMI-CONNECTORS

Semi-connectors are kind of like suited-connectors... except they don't exactly connect.

Semi-connectors are hands like:



Semi-connectors are SUITED and separated by ONE sequential card.

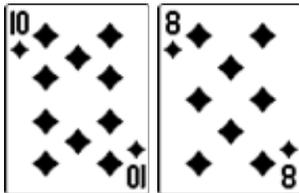
If you're an experienced Holdem player and you're wondering why you've never heard of "semi-connectors" before... it's because I made the term up. And the reason is because I think semi-connectors are an important hand... although no one ever talks about them.

When the timing, positioning, and chip stacks are right, I WILL play semi-connectors... aggressively. And the reason is because semi-connectors are HIDDEN HANDS. Your opponents can NEVER put you on them.

Don't discount semi-connectors as "crap hands"... they really aren't. They have a ton of straight and flush possibilities. And when you make two pair or hit a monster like a straight flush with these hands, you WILL bust your opponents for every single one of their chips.

Let me give you an real-life example that happened to me a few days ago when I got dealt semi-connectors...

I was sitting at an 8-man \$1-2 no limit table and sitting two seats to the right of the button, which is pretty good positioning. I picked up my two cards:



A couple of my opponents limped in by calling the big blind and the action came around to me. I was chip leader, and I sensed weakness at the table with my good positioning, so I decided to play the hand aggressively...

"Make it \$15 to play", I said, as I pushed in a few chips.

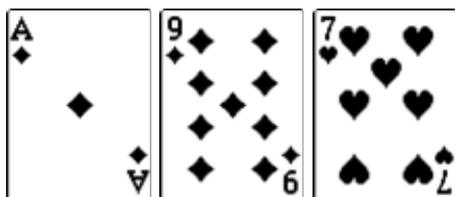
Now, here was my thinking behind the bet:

1. I don't really care if my opponents call my bet or fold. If they fold, I steal the blinds, which is cool with me. If they call, I have a hidden hand.
2. I have positioning... and if the two players to my left fold, I'll be last to act after the flop.
3. I'm in control of the hand. After the flop my opponents will likely check, regardless of what hits. That means I get to see a free turn card if I want... which is good with a hand like semi-connectors.

4. I can buy the pot by being in control with good positioning... as long as I sense weakness in my opponents.
5. If I catch a lucky flop here, my opponents will never see it coming... and I'll likely take someone's entire chip stack. Even if I only hit a lucky flop one out of five times... or TEN times... that I play semi-connectors, it's worth it. Because taking someone's ENTIRE chip stack pays off in the long run!

OK, anyway, back to the hand... after my pre-flop raise, both Brett and Rodney call. Both of them are relatively tight players, so I'm putting them on big cards or a small wired pair. If they had a hand like Aces, Kings, or Queens, they would have made a pre-flop raise.

So there's \$48 in the pot now and I'll be last to act after the flop. The flop hits:



Bingo. This is the favorable type of flop I was looking for. I've got an open-ended straight draw with a flush draw. But remember... I still technically have NOTHING at this point. I'm going to play the hand with caution... making sure I don't lose my entire stack by missing my draws.

Rodney and Brett both look back at their down-cards a second time... Rodney is first to act and he checks. Brett checks, too.

Just as I had thought. Like I said, when you've got positioning and you make a pre-flop raise, your opponents will likely check to you after the flop, regardless of whether they hit or not. Because they anticipate another bet.

So I decide to make a \$45 bet after this nice flop.

Once again, if no one calls, I rake in a nice pot. If anyone's going to steal this thing, it's going to be me. Period.

And if someone DOES call, I've got lots of outs. If I hit just one of my outs my opponents will never see it coming...

Rodney thinks awhile... and then announces a raise.

“Make it \$100”, he says, splashing the pot.

Brett folds and the action is to me. Of course, now I’m thinking, “Damn, Rodney must have a great hand.” I figured he would have made a pre-flop raise with a hand like A-K, but he was in an early position... just to the left of Nathan who was under the gun. It’s very possible that Rodney limped in with Big Slick.

Luckily, as chip leader, I can afford to get in a jam like this. \$55 more is still just a fraction of my stack. If I hit on the turn, I’m going to empty poor Rodney’s pockets... Hell, it might even be BETTER if he does have Big Slick since I’ll break him for sure if I make my hand. The implied odds are DEFINITELY in my favor... So I call.

Now, I could have gone back over the top of Rodney in that position with a semi-bluff... and maybe taken the pot. But like I said, Rodney’s a tight player... and his check raise after the flop means he probably has a big hand. I don’t want to lose my entire stack to a missed draw... even though this particular draw has very good odds. (31.91% chance I make my hand on the turn, 32.61% chance I make it on the river, and 54.12% chance overall.)

The turn card comes:



YES. This gives me the nut straight. Now my biggest challenge is keeping my excitement hidden... because I know that this is one of those situations where I’m going to win a HUGE pot.

Rodney is first to act. Since he raised me after my bet on the flop, I know he’ll come out firing. Sure enough, he bets \$200... thinking there’s NO WAY the six of spades could have helped me. Had a diamond hit the board he MIGHT have been suspicious... but not the six of spades. Like I said, semi-connectors is a hidden hand.

The rest is history. I take Rodney for every chip he has as I throw over my beautiful 10-8 of diamonds. He couldn’t BELIEVE it. He shakes his head and walks away from the table. I hear him murmur, “A f’in 10-8... you’ve got to be kidding... a f’in 10-8.”

And I'm thinking, "Yea... and I will play it the same exact way next time... Except next time it might be a 5-3 of hearts."



HOW TO PLAY HIDDEN HANDS

A lot of poker players fall-into the trap of only playing monster starting hands. This is a logical strategy, except that everyone will begin folding as soon as a tight player makes a raise... which is why this style of play doesn't hold up for winning long-term poker profits.

In order to get action with monsters, you've got to be willing to raise the pot more frequently and dictate some action. The best way to do this is through HIDDEN HANDS... hands that pay BIG when you hit on the flop.

These are hands like suited-connectors and semi-connectors... hands that your opponents will never put you on. The best way to play hidden hands is to make the occasional pre-flop raise with good positioning or call a small raise. When you hit a good flop, your opponents will be blindsided... which is why these hidden hands payoff over the long term.

The secondary benefit, of course, is that you're mixing it up and maintaining an unpredictable table image. When you make a raise with 7-5 of hearts and take down a pot, your opponents will think you're crazy... and will begin giving you more action on your big hands. They'll never know what you're holding, and that's EXACTLY what you want to happen.

Of course, if you play a hidden hand, play it with caution. If you make a pre-flop raise, you've got to be willing to lose those chips. If the flop hits all high cards and not any of your suit, muck your hand immediately. Don't continue to bluff at it without draws or outs.

When you DO hit a draw, you can throw out a semi-bluff and take a stab at the pot... just don't become too pot-committed or waste all your chips on a hand like this.

When I get a hidden hand I want to play, I'll usually make a small pre-flop raise in hopes of getting AS MANY CALLERS AS POSSIBLE. A great time to do this is when you're on the button or maybe in the blinds and lots of players limp-in, hoping to see a cheap flop...

Even just doubling the blinds is a good play. What you're doing is building up the chip count and setting up a nice pot. Your odds of winning the hand are not good, but if you DO catch a good flop, your odds of winning a TON of chips is very good. Low risk, high reward.

Making a pre-flop raise with a hidden hand isn't exactly your "textbook" poker play. But since you need to change gears and mix up your play anyway, you want to choose the best place to do it. A hidden hand like suited-connectors or semi-connectors is one of those places.



PART 5: PSYCHOLOGY

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THE SHORT STACK

Learning how to play as the short stack is a **CRUCIAL SKILL** when it comes to consistently winning at Texas Holdem. I can't tell you how many times I've seen experienced players come back and **WIN** a game or tournament after they were short-stacked.

Because think about it... **EVERYONE** is going to fall for some "bad beats" or tough luck, and there's no way to prevent it 100%. So when something like this happens and you get down on chips, you've got to know how to grind your way back into the game.

There are two mistakes that most poker players make when it comes to playing short-stacked.

The first mistake... and more common one... is that they wait **WAY TOO LONG** to make a move.

The second mistake is that they make their move either too early or miscalculate **WHEN** to make their move... often because they're suffering from "Short Stack Tilt".

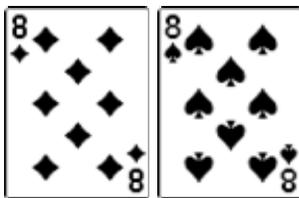
Let's look at the first mistake in further detail...

John buys into a tournament for \$100 and receives 1,000 in chips to play with. The blinds start at 5-10 and progressively raise every twenty minutes.

John grinds his way through three hours of solid poker and then finds himself at the final table with about 10,000 in chips. The blinds are now 150-300, which means John is doing quite fine.

But before he knows it, he takes a couple bad beats and finds himself sitting on 5,000... then 4,000.... then 2,500 in chips. This all happens as the blinds continue to increase.

More time goes by and now the blinds are at 300-600 and poor John is sitting on about 1,000 in chips. He's on the button... and looks down at his cards:



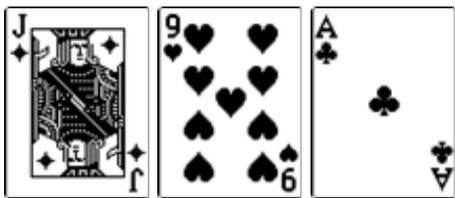
FINALLY, John decides to make a move.

“I’m all-in”, he says... pushing his 1,000 into the pot in hopes of doubling up.

But here’s the problem: John should have made his move a LONG TIME AGO... BEFORE he was so low on chips. He’s not going to scare anyone out of this hand with his measly 1,000. After all, that’s just 400 more than the big blind.

Plus, everyone at the table is kind of “gunning” to eliminate John from the table. Not because they don’t like him... but just because it means they’re one step closer to a money finish.

So five of his opponents pay the measly \$400 extra. The flop hits:



Game over for John. His pocket eights don’t stand a chance against five callers with this flop. And when an eight doesn’t hit on the turn or river, John packs up and leaves the table.

What John SHOULD HAVE DONE is made his move a long time ago. When you become short-stack, you’ve got to make your move while you’ve still got enough chips to intimidate other players.

DON’T make the mistake of only waiting for pocket Aces or Kings before you move your chips into the middle... because you’ll just get blinded to death. You want to make a move and get either one or two callers... or ZERO callers. This way, you have a much better chance of doubling up or raking in some much-needed blinds.

If your stack gets so low that everyone is going to call you when you move all-in, you’ve waited too long... and you’re done for the night. Even if you DO pick up a premium hand, having so many callers will likely lead to you getting run down.

The rule of thumb is this:

Make your move when your stack gets to about 10x the big blind.

If the blinds are 100-200 and you've got 2,000 in chips, it's time to move all-in when you've got a hand. That way you'll create heads-up action or rake in the blinds.

OK, now let's look at the SECOND MISTAKE players often make while playing short-stacked... and that's not knowing the RIGHT HAND to make a move with.

I'll move all-in with pocket pairs, an Ace, or two high cards. The KEY is POSITIONING.

You don't want to go all-in with A-2 from the first position. You want to go all-in with A-2 if three opponents limp-in and you're on the button... or a similar situation.

When you make a move, you want to look for WEAKNESS and you want to have good positioning. That way you don't run into a monster and you don't get multiple callers.

Also, be careful of "Short-Stack Tilt". If you've got more than 10x the big blind... or even if you don't... just don't panic. Like I said before, I've seen on MANY occasions where the short-stacked player makes a comeback and wins.

If you suffer a bad beat that sets you back considerably in chips, don't go on tilt and make a dumb move with the rest of your chips. Remember what we've talked about here and stick to your game plan.

Here's a recap of how to play when you're short-stacked:

1. Make your move when you're down to about 10x the big blind.
2. Make your move with good positioning and when you sense weakness.
3. Don't be too picky... move all-in with pairs or two high cards or an Ace high.
4. Don't go on "Short-Stack Tilt" and do anything stupid.

Follow these general principles and you'll be prepared to double up your chip stack and get back in the game.



MANIC

Remember this principle: **PLAY THE PLAYER, NOT THE CARDS.**

Usually you can get a good read on a player after the first hour or so of watching him play. Then it's not too hard to adjust your style of play to theirs.

But what about the guy that takes it to the **EXTREME**? I'm talking about the "loose cannon" at the table... who's willing to push his entire stack in the middle with nothing but rags.

This type of player is known as a **MANIC**.

Playing against a manic can be very frustrating... and can easily throw off your game. That's why manics remain a part of poker... because they **DO** manage to win. Some of them win quite often.

Once you learn **HOW** to play against a manic, though, you'll be **GLAD** when they sit at your table... licking your chops because you'll be prepared to put their chips in front of you.

OK, so why exactly do a lot of players struggle when they play against manics?

The answer is because often manics will get players "fired up" after they bluff. For example... let's say a manic goes all-in and everyone folds. And then the manic shows his 7-2 off-suit. And then the next hand the manic wildly bets pre-flop... only to fold at first site of the flop. This goes on... the manic will make strange moves... and the other players will think he's a **FISH**.

Of course, a manic will catch good cards just like anyone else... and this is when a regular player gets **BURNT**. The manic will go all-in... and someone will call, thinking that the manic is up to his old ways. And sure enough, the manic will throw over his pocket Rockets and double up.

So how do you beat a manic?

The key is knowing the WEAKNESS of a manic. And what their “triggers” are.

I’ve played with a LOT of manics in my time... and they have what I’d call a “warrior” personality. They like action... they like competition... they’re gutsy... and they ABSOLUTELY HATE the idea of someone outsmarting or intimidating them.

So the secret to playing a manic is to STAY AWAY FROM HIM until the time is right and you get a good hand. It doesn’t have to be a spectacular hand... just a hand that you know is better than his. And then you must PUSH HIM AROUND.

Challenge him. Challenge his ego. Check raise him. Check in the dark... only to raise his bet. In short, do everything you can to “set him off” into his manic mode. He’ll put you to a decision for all your chips... that’s his nature. And that’s when you take his chips.

The important thing for you is TIMING. If you pick up pocket Rockets, that doesn’t mean it’s the time to go after the manic. There are still other players in the game... and you want to take their money too. You must wait for the time when it’s just you and the manic heads up and you’ve got him right where you want him.

Hidden hands are what you want. Like when you have pocket pair and flop a set... or maybe when you complete a belly buster straight... and so on.

The key is to push him around and capitalize on his weakness. For the manic, his ego is more important than his chips... so go after THAT and you’ll get his chips instead.



KEEPING YOUR OPPONENTS OFF BALANCE

Listening to your “gut” while playing poker is often a valuable strategy.

On the flip side, your opponents will ALSO have “gut feelings” about what YOUR cards are... and the strength of your hand.

To combat this, it’s important to **KEEP YOUR OPPONENTS OFF BALANCE**.

Two of my favorite ways to do this are “in the dark” moves and table talk.

When you make a move “in the dark”, it means you make a check, bet, or raise **WITHOUT** knowing what the cards are... or what the person before you did.

For instance, let’s say you’re in the small blind and limp-in. The big blind checks. Right when the dealer gets ready to show the flop you say, “I bet \$5 in the dark”. Or, “I check in the dark”. And so on.

It’s a strategy to confuse and frustrate your opponents. They start thinking, “Is he doing that because he has a monster? Or because he has rags? Doesn’t he care about his chips?”

It also sets up a loose table image, if that’s what you’re going for.

In my DVD course, you can see some real-life examples of me playing and successfully making moves “in the dark”. Go check it out.

My other favorite way to frustrate and confuse my opponents is through table talk...

Now... I **DON’T** act like the asshole at the table and annoy everyone. Instead, I try to be fun and relaxed to play with (in cash games). I want everyone to approach me and want to play with me **LATER**— even though I took their money.

The way to use table talk without sounding arrogant is to simply say outrageous things about the pot and hand.

For example... let's say you're opponent has pocket nines, and you're holding 7-6 suited. The flop hits: A-K-Q. This is a situation where I might use some table talk... in order to get a read on my opponent AND keep him guessing.

I'll say something like, "Man, I REALLY hope that you go all-in right here so I can double up...".

As soon as my opponent hesitates, that's when I know I've got him. If he had the nuts—or even a great hand—he would have said, "Ok, all-in." But because he HESITATED, I know he doesn't have the straight or the Ace. If he checks to me, I'm going to bet him out of this pot.

Now I've got the psychological edge. He looks at me... thinking about my behavior and trying to put me on a hand. Instead of giving him one of those stone cold stares, I just smile and look him in the eye. I'm not emotionally attached to this hand... I know he's got my 7-6 beat. But if he checks, I've got him.

Sure enough, he gives it up and mucks it. And I win... all with the help of a little harmless table talk.



BAD BEATS

Bad beats are a part of poker. PERIOD.

Even that “one in a million” scenario that you NEVER thought could happen... WILL HAPPEN... as long as you play enough poker.

The thing about bad beats is that you can't let it get you down. I see so many beginning card players whine and complain about their bad beats... always blaming their losses on the “luck” of their opponents, rather than taking responsibility.

If you've ever thought, “Boy, I just seem to get more bad beats than anyone else,” then I challenge you to quit complaining and start changing your style of play.

The fact of the matter is, you CAN take steps to help prevent bad beats. The most effective strategy to adopt a tight-aggressive style of play. When you get a big hand, bet it. Don't let five limpers see a flop and outdraw your Aces with their 7-2 offsuit. Force out the bad hands and narrow down the field.

In addition to that, don't confuse “bad beats” with “bad plays”. If you've got pocket Queens with the board reading A-A-A-K-Q and your opponent beats your all-in with a King, that is NOT a bad beat. You were just too much of a sucker to play the hand right.

OK, so that's my rant about bad beats. Don't let them get you down... just move on and stick to your game.

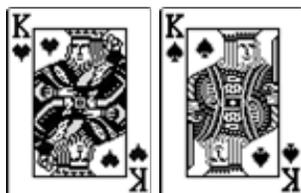
With that being said, I can't possibly publish a poker book without telling my OWN bad beat story... I've seen more than I can remember, but this one sticks out as the WORST.

My best friend and I went to a local tournament. We're friends away from the poker table, but the fiercest competitors as soon as the cards are dealt.

The tournament is good to both of us... and we make it heads-up at the final table.

Winning the money isn't nearly as important to me as getting bragging rights on my buddy for the next year to come. I've GOT to win this.

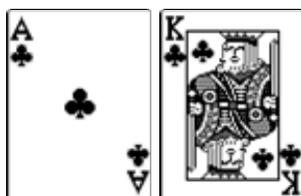
I look down at my cards:



Nice.

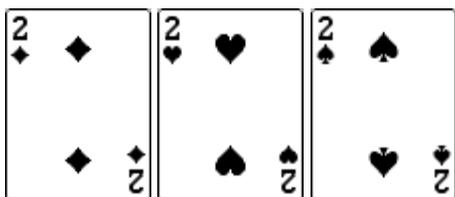
I make a pre-flop raise. My friend goes over the top of me. I quickly push my entire stack into the middle... and he calls my all-in with no hesitation.

He flips over his cards:



All right... so all I need to do is dodge an Ace. It's amazing that he had Big Slick suited against my Cowboys in a HEADS-UP match. But I'm feeling good about my chances.

The flop hits:



Wow. Now I've got the boat... I still just need to dodge an Ace.

The turn card comes:



What in the hell is going on!?! My twos over Kings just turned into Kings over twos. Meanwhile, my friend looks like he's just seen a ghost. Now an Ace won't help him... because then he'd have twos over Aces full, which isn't as good as my Kings over twos.

Right now my friend has a full house: twos over Kings. I also have a full house: Kings over twos.

Confused yet? Just wait. It gets better...

The river hits:



This final two gives my buddy QUADS with an Ace Kicker. It gives me quads with just a KING kicker. And that means he wins the hand!

I was in total disbelief.

And of course, my friend got bragging rights as he won the tournament.

OK, that's my bad beat story. Fun's over... let's get back to some poker strategy.



CONFIDENCE

When you play poker on a consistent basis, you'll begin to notice the difference between ARROGANCE and CONFIDENCE... as well as the distinction between MEEKNESS and PATIENCE.

To say these types of distinctions are important would be an understatement. Especially in tournament play.

The poker world has a lion's share of big egos, hotheads, and cocky players. I guess that's a result of it being a predominately testosterone-driven sport... along with the fact that poker is usually considered "gambling".

When you play poker, however, you should be EXTRA careful of the guy who possesses a CALM CONFIDENCE. This is the quickest way to spot a shark.

I can't really describe what "calm confidence" LOOKS like. You just kind of know it when you see it. The best real life example I can give you is Phil Ivey. He radiates calm confidence. I'm betting that before he became a household name, every card room where he went people said, "Hey, who's THAT guy?"

The reason this discussion is important is not only because you want to be careful of these sharks. The primary reason is because you want to learn to POSSESS that calm confidence. It's something you can train yourself to do.

Even if you're a terrible card player, if you radiate CALM CONFIDENCE you will gain the instant respect of your opponents in the room. They won't fold to you like you were Gus Hansen or anything... but they WILL respect you. I think a lot of it is actually at a subconscious level.

You might think I'm crazy. But I want you to think about it carefully. Think about the "sharks" that you know. Think about the players you see consistently win in your local hometown games...

What qualities and characteristics do they possess?

When I buy-in to a tournament or walk into a casino, I give myself a little “prep talk” before I go in. I take a deep breath, let go of any stresses or anxieties on my mind, and tell myself, “This is my house.”

“This is my house.”

“This is my house.”

I visualize myself taking every chip in that room... cleaning the pockets of my opponents... and playing the best Texas Holdem poker of my life.

This routine works for me. I recommend that you try it... or some type of variation. Do your best to achieve that “calm confidence”... like you somehow KNOW that you’re going to win, before the game even starts.



TILT

Everyone knows about TILT. Tilt is that undeniable emotion... or set of emotions... that floods your brain and causes you to lose chips. It sets you “out of whack”... blinding your logic... causing you to behave in ways you normally wouldn’t.

The reasons for tilt are numerous... but it’s usually the result of a big hand where you lost. And most particularly, a hand that seemed to “defy the odds”. That’s why you see so many players go on tilt after getting “rivered”. They think they have the pot won... in the bag... and then BOOM it gets reversed.

Getting your flush busted by a full house, getting Aces run down by A-7, or watching your opponent hit a miracle inside straight draw are examples of scenarios that might put you on TILT.

When tilt occurs, logic goes out the window... depending on the “degree” of tilt. If you really think about it, tilt is happening ALL THE TIME in some form or another. Poker is a game of odds, but cards will fall “against the odds” all the time... along with other types of bad beats, trash talk, and other aggravations.

I call these “tiny tilts”... when a player is mildly affected in a “tilt-like” way... but not necessarily on full blown TILT.

It all boils down to the core principle that most players play REACTIVE poker, rather than PROACTIVE poker. Plain and simple.

When you play proactive poker, you stick to YOUR game plan, YOUR strategies, and YOUR style of play. Obviously you play according to the players at the table, but you stick with proven, logical, step-by-step methods for consistent winnings.

Amateurs and poor poker players... and even “regular” poker players play the tides of emotions and “streaks” around them. That’s why sometimes they’ll have a GREAT night at the table... other times they’ll have a TERRIBLE night at the table... and so on.

This is also just a component of the “gambler’s personality”. The gambler is someone

who lives the upswings and downswings... back and forth... and those swings are actually what make it FUN for him.

I'm a rounder... a grinder... whatever you want to call it. That doesn't mean I don't enjoy poker. Hell, I love it more than just about anything else (notice I said JUST ABOUT). And that doesn't mean I don't have the occasional upswing and downswing... but I'll tell you, my swings don't "even out". I have a lot more upswings because of my approach to the game.

The point is, if you want to be a strong poker player who CONSISTENTLY makes profits at the table, you need to keep your emotions in check. If you take a bad beat, you've got to let it bounce off. You can't let it affect your game.

When I take a bad beat, I do one of these three things... or a combination of them... in order to avoid tilt and stick to my strategy:

1. I remind myself that it's just all part of the game. Because it really is. You must EXPECT the UNEXPECTED.
2. I don't play for a few hands... I'll just sit out, relax, take a few breathers, and watch. I'll use this time to take mental notes on players, strategize the rest of the game, and visualize myself regaining control and winning.
3. I'll leave the table. This is my favorite thing to do actually, but it's not always possible. But if I'm at a casino or card room where I can leave the table for an hour or so, I'll do that. I'll go grab some dinner and take a break.

If you stay at the table... and if you feel tilt upon you... remember what tilt REALLY IS. Tilt is simply your brain's reactions to the event that just happened.

When you lose, say, 75% of your chip stack, your brain has a hard time handling it. You've been going steady for hours... slowly building up that stack and earning it... and then all of the sudden it's down to 25%.

This type of bad beat "re-frames" your brain. It's simple psychology. You don't look at chip amounts the same. Where you'd normally make a small raise with A-J with middle positioning... now you're going all-in.

Why? Because you want your chips back! You want to get back to where you were before.

Of course, that's not how it works, and you're only going to lose the remainder of your stack if you play this way.

I like to use the stock market as an analogy. When a stock goes from \$100 to \$50, it's lost 50% of its value. An amateur investor who loses 50% of his money will suddenly go on "tilt" and try to get that money back.

So if the investor had \$2,000 in the stock and now has \$1,000, he'll try to get back to \$2,000 again by doing something "drastic". Obviously, this is a bad idea.

For a stock to go from \$50 to \$100, it must DOUBLE, or go up 200%. This figure is a lot different than 50%.

And poker is exactly the same way... it's EASY to lose a lot FAST... but it takes time, patience, and hard work to build it back up. Losing 50% is much easier than winning 200%... that's just how it is.

So don't let tilt affect you. The surest way to become "tilt-proof" is to become a more experienced poker player... where you've seen so many CRAZY things happen that you're not surprised by anything. Until then, just be sure to follow one of the three approaches I outlined above and you'll be in good shape.



ADJUST TO YOUR TABLE

While it's important to stick with your game plan and poker strategy, you can't become too restrictive about your style of play at any given table. Because every table is different... and the true Holdem rounder will adapt accordingly to the game he's in.

For instance, in some games a 3x big blind pre-flop raise is going to scare everyone out... time after time. But then in other games that kind of raise is going to get LAUGHED at.

It all depends on the players and style at the table. You must adjust YOUR play accordingly in order to consistently drag in poker profits.

I went to the riverboat recently and sat down at the \$1-2 no limit game at 7 P.M. The table was very tight. I was able to dictate the action and make pre-flop raises with a wide variety of hands. I stole the blinds consistently and walked all over my opponents.

I'd raise the pot with hands like suited-connectors... and when an opponent finally DID catch a hand I'd bust them with my hidden hand. I also bluffed at pots from time to time when I sensed weakness... only to show my cards at the end to get everyone riled up.

I was getting action with my big hands, bluffing at all the right times and stealing pots, and in general playing great poker.

At 1 A.M. I was moved to a table on the other side of the room. I sat down just to the right of the button and watched the action for awhile before jumping in to see a pot.

Immediately I knew that this table was going to be a LOT different than the last one. The man to my left, who looked like he had about a dozen too many beers made a pre-flop raise of \$50 into a \$6 pot.

But even more surprising than that was that three players called this pre-flop raise. At the previous table I didn't see a single pre-flop raise of more than \$30 get called. And I had been there for six hours.

I watched this hand particular hand play out... as the guy sitting across from me took down the pot with a K-9 off-suit. That's right. He had called a \$50 pre-flop raise with K-9 off-suit. And the guy who had made the ORIGINAL raise was holding Q-8.

I was absolutely amazed.

While this type of table is uncommon, it DOES exist. I'll find myself in these types of games every once in awhile... and when I do, I must COMPLETELY adjust my strategy. I can't bully this table around like I did at the last one. In fact, I won't even bluff once at a table like this. I won't go for stealing blinds. I won't raise with suited-connectors. Everything is different here.

My strategy at a loose, manic-like table like this one is to try to see a cheap flop with just about any type of hand. If I can limp-in with a 5-4 of hearts for \$2, I'll do it. I'll also try to see a cheap flop with any wired pair... because if I hit I know I'm getting paid.

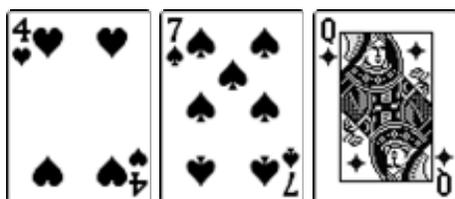
Just about any hand where I have a chance at a "lucky" flop is good at this type of table.

As for my big hands... I'll only make a pre-flop raise with monsters like Aces, Kings, Queens, an Big Slick. And when I raise, it's going to be a MASSIVE raise. I can afford to at this type of table because these loose cannons don't care if I've been playing tight or not. They'll still call my pre-flop raise when I have a hand because they just want the opportunity to bust me. But that's also why I must be very CAUTIOUS with my big hands.

After about an hour, I picked up pocket Aces. I was second to act before the flop and knew I needed to make a raise that would only get one or two callers. At the previous (tight) table I would have made it \$15 or \$20 to play... but not here.

"\$75 to play", I announce... my first pre-flop raise at this table. I was confident I'd get action, but I also knew that \$75 was large enough that I wouldn't get TOO much action.

The guy on the button was the only one to call. The flop hit:



I was first to act. I had sat down at this table with about \$300 and after my pre-flop raise I had about \$200 in front of me. So I pushed in the rest of my stack...

“I’m all-in.”

I make this bet because I can’t afford to let my opponent chase me down. These guys will chase a gut-shot draw if it’s for less than \$50. So I have to play big and force my opponent to fold if he’s on a draw.

I’m completely satisfied with the \$75 I got from him before the flop... no need to get greedy. Greed is what leads to bad beats.

So as you can see, I really had to adjust my game between these two tables. Of course, each of these situations was a little bit on the “extreme” side... in your average night of cards, the adjustments to your playing strategy won’t have to be as drastic.

If you develop a consistent system of winning poker, it will become much easier for you to adjust to your table. Think of your adjustments like volume knobs, not switches.

You must change up the DEGREE of your raises, your starting hands, your bluffs, and so on. Don’t just turn things “on or off”. Your overall strategy will always be the same, and that is to WIN. Period.



TABLE IMAGE

Table image is another crucial part of winning Texas Holdem strategy. Everyone has a table image, whether they know it or not. The key is knowing it and **TAKING CONTROL** of it by intentionally molding and shaping the image over the course of the game.

Your goal should be to have a table image that creates **UNPREDICTABILITY**. If your opponents know what you're holding, the cards don't matter one bit. Don't be predictable.

One way to build table image is to **ADVERTISE**. This is like when you play a "crazy" hand out of nowhere... something like 7-2 offsuit and then show it. Just to mix things up and keep your opponents guessing.

I usually don't need to play crazy hands too often, because I'd rather carefully surprise my opponents based on positioning, sensing weakness, and other factors like chip count.

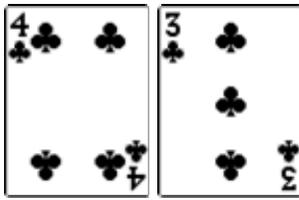
When you play with the same players night after night, mixing up your play becomes far more important, since your buddies will start to figure you out over time. And of course, you'll be able to figure **THEM** out and hopefully take their money consistently.

Let me show you an example of why table image is so important...

I was at the Horseshoe Casino in Vegas recently after a big tournament. I had to leave to the airport soon and had a few hours to kill... so of course, I decided to play some poker.

I bought in for \$100. I didn't know anyone at the table. The first hour passed and I hadn't seen a decent hand... I just kept folding over and over again. I **KNEW** that I was building a table image as a **TIGHT** player.

Finally, while on the button, I looked down to see:



A few players limped in and I sensed some major weakness. Not exactly a monster hand, but I decided to make a move.

“\$20 to play”, I said, throwing out my first pre-flop raise of the game.

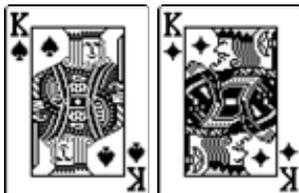
I figured my opponents would fold... putting me on something like Aces or Kings. Even I did get a caller and lost a bit on the hand, I didn't care much. I would show my bluff and it would set me up for action in future hands.

But no one called. Everyone immediately folded with no hesitation, just as I thought they would. Of course, I threw over my monster 4-3 for everyone to see... and in my usual fashion I said, “C'mon guys, you didn't have my four-high beat?”

The point of this wasn't to steal blinds. The point was to build table image... my opponents are going to be puzzled about me now. I hadn't bluffed in an hour, why now? Did I just suddenly decide to steal some blinds? Or am I crazy with my suited-connectors?

Unpredictability. That's the name of the game.

Just a few hands later I picked up a REAL hand. This was the most ideal situation possible because it came shortly after my suited-connectors bluff. I looked down to see:



Gotta love Cowboys.

I made a large pre-flop raise and got two callers. Whereas before I didn't get action with my 4-3 (and won the hand), now I was getting major action with Kings. I ended up doubling up against someone with pocket Jacks.

I think I ended up showing one more bluff in this particular game. I didn't bluff much, simply because of the way the table saw me. I was watching myself through THEIR eyes... reading their thoughts.

Finally I had to leave the game and grab my flight back to St. Louis. I cashed out for \$425... not shabby for a few hours of play. It paid for a first-class upgrade on my plane ticket.

Remember... your table image will dictate how others will bet against you. It will determine if they respect your bets, give you action on your big hands, come over the top of you, and so on. CONTROL your table image... don't just let it naturally form. And when you're involved in a big hand, be sure to think about how your OPPONENTS saw you in that hand... what they took note of... and how they'll react to you in the future. Change gears, send mixed signals, and keep them guessing.

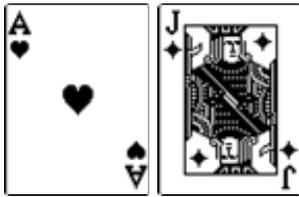


ANTICIPATION

One of the keys to becoming a strong poker player is ANTICIPATION.

The reason anticipation is so important is because it helps you MINIMIZE YOUR LOSSES and MAXIMIZE YOUR GAINS... the “mantra” for any serious rounder. Here’s what I mean:

Let’s say you’re on the button and you pick up your cards:



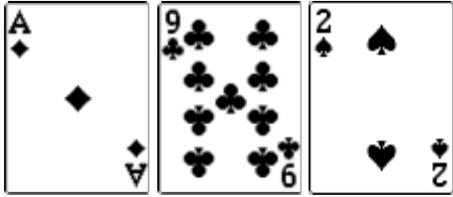
The blinds are \$5-10 and Aaron (a very tight player) makes it \$75 to play. Everyone at the table folds and the action is to you.

This is the best hand you’ve seen all night long... so you call the bet without much hesitation. I mean, it’s a strong starting hand, you’re on the button... this is a good call right?

Wrong. This is mistake number one. Aaron is a tight player who only raises pre-flop with monster hands. Even if he’s holding something like Queens and you can bust him if an Ace hits, what will you DO when the Ace hits? How will you know if you’ve got him beat?

You must ANTICIPATE what’s about to come from Aaron. When the flop hits, he’s GOING to come out firing...

OK, so anyway, the flop hits:



Aaron bets \$150, with very little hesitation.

Now what? You've got to put him on something like A-K, A-Q, A-A, K-K, or Q-Q. These are the only hands Aaron would be playing so aggressively with.

You think for awhile... and you KNOW deep down that you should fold. But I mean hell, you've hit top pair with a Jack kicker. How can you fold?

So you decide to see another card and call the \$150 bet.

Obviously, that's your second mistake. You were only thinking about the \$150 bet... and not what was about to happen on the TURN card. Because no matter what, you have to figure Aaron is going to fire again... especially now that he's sensed weakness in you.

The ONLY CARD in the deck that can change things for you is another Jack. Looking at the odds, there's three Jacks left in the deck and forty-seven unknown cards... giving you 6.38% chance of getting your Jack on the turn. Or roughly 14:1 against you. The only way you should be calling this bet is if there was \$2,100 already in the pot. But there's not. There's about \$315.

The turn card comes... and sure enough, Aaron comes out firing \$500 bet. And to make a long story short, you lose a huge pot... either by finally folding, or by watching Aaron turn over his Big Slick.

This type of situation happens to even the strongest players. The problem isn't that they're chasing anything... the problem is that they don't ANTICIPATE carefully enough what's going to happen after the next card. Think about what you'll do for each different scenario... and more importantly, anticipate what your OPPONENT will do for each different scenario.

In the example above, the right move would have been to muck the A-J before the flop. I know it's not easy, but that's the right move because you had to anticipate Aaron was going to make you pay every step of the way. Remember... MINIMIZE YOUR LOSSES, MAXIMIZE YOUR GAINS.



PLAYING THE WALLET

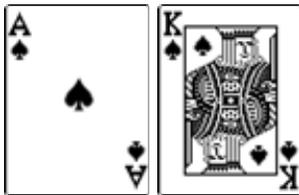
You know by now that you must **PLAY THE PLAYER, NOT THE CARDS**. But playing the player doesn't just mean adopting to his particular style... it also means knowing how much of a "player" the guy really is.

This chapter is about knowing how much money someone has that's **NOT** on the table.

It's usually pretty obvious... even just by outward appearances and demeanor. If you're like me, you'll often play with the same guys every week... and by then it becomes **VERY CLEAR** who has money to spend and who's trying to pay for rent with their poker winnings.

Most players don't even **THINK** about their opponents' bankrolls. But it's crucial... especially when you start to move up in stakes. Here's what I mean...

Let's say you've been playing for a solid eight hours in a \$2-4 no limit game and you're doing fairly well... up to about \$1000 from a \$200 investment. You look down to see:



You're in the small blind... and bells start going off in your head with this monster hand.

But then all of the sudden the action comes to a halt as the front door opens. And in walks Jack, who often stops by for a few hours every time there's a game going. He walks up slowly to the table... somewhat meekly.

"What's up guys, what's the buy-in tonight?" he says, digging into his wallet.

"\$100", Brad says, who's the host for the game.

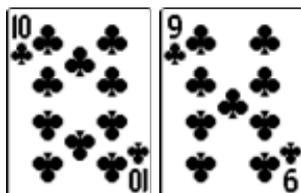
“Man, I’ve only got \$90... Oh well, I’ll just watch for awhile”

“Pull up a chair... I’ll loan you the other \$10. We’re not going to let you just sit and watch”, Brad replies.

So Jack pulls up a chair and buys-in. This looks like a kind gesture from Brad, but I’m thinking to myself that he probably loaned him the \$10 because he knows that we’re going to win Jack’s \$90.

Anyway, I raise the pot to \$40 with my Big Slick suited and end up raking in a lot of blinds. But my mind is on Jack... thinking about my game strategy for him. The \$90 he’s got in this game is the last \$90 in his wallet. That’s DEFINITELY going to affect his play in subtle ways... and some not-so-subtle ways.

A few hands pass and I’m just to right of the button and look down to see:



Jack and a couple guys limp-in and the action is to me.

“Make it \$20 to play”, I say as I raise the pot with my suited-connectors.

Jack is the only caller. After he calls my raise, he has just \$56 left. And if he loses THAT, he’s done for the night... he’ll go home and watch ESPN or whatever. But he won’t reach back into his pocket to buy-in or anything.

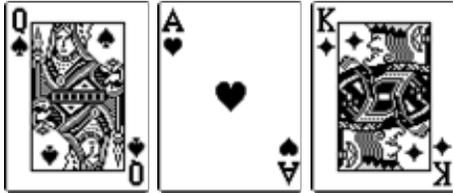
And that’s what causes Jack to play a different game. A game that he probably wouldn’t play if he \$500 in his pocket.

And it’s not only Jack. There are a few other players at the table who are also playing on their last dollars... or gambling with their paychecks from the week.

This is something you MUST pay attention to. Watch when a player re-buys... this is a perfect time to gauge if a player is loaded or broke. Someone with lots of money won’t hesitate one bit when re-buying... he’ll just reach into his pocket and break out the cash. Someone who DOESN’T have much money will say he’s got to go to the ATM... but he’s going to “wait awhile first to think about it”, or something like that.

You never want to be at the end of your bankroll at the table. It puts you at a severe disadvantage, just as Jack is here.

The flop hits:



No clubs, which means I don't have a flush draw or anything. All I have is an inside straight draw. I'm guessing Jack has a pair since he called my pre-flop raise.

The action is to Jack and he checks. I don't mess around.

"I'll put you all-in", I say as I push in a massive stack of chips that easily covers him ten times over.

I know I can make a bet like this against someone like Jack... who's playing on his last few dollars... because the only way he's going to call this bet is if he has a straight or trips. If he doesn't have a monster, he'll fold.

Sure, he might have been SLOW PLAYING a big hand, but that's a risk I'm willing to take. The odds of him having a monster are small, and I'm playing the odds.

Sure enough, he folds.

On the other hand, if I was playing against my friend Darren in this same situation, I DEFINITELY wouldn't have gotten away with this. Even if he was short-stacked, he's got another six Benjamin Franklin's in his wallet... and he will not be bullied around with this type of flop.

So factor in your opponent's WALLET SIZE into your game strategy. The size of their bankroll will dictate much of their playing style. Bully the weak, beware of the strong.



PLAYING LONG HOURS

As your poker career advances, you'll find yourself playing increasingly long hours at the poker table. Staying focused and remaining comfortable becomes just as challenging as the game itself.

Playing Texas Holdem for eight hours... or often times much MORE... can definitely be a physical and mental drain. So prepare your body for it, just as you would any other sport.

If you don't feel good, you won't play good. That's all there is to it.

Personally, I prefer lots of exercise as a way to prepare myself for long hours at the card table. Getting that endorphin kick from a good run or session of weight lifting will increase my mental acuity as well as keep my body comfortable at the table.

Exercise also serves as my "meditation" session. I go over my game plan and overall strategy as I workout. This is very energizing... and I'm usually pumped up and chomping at the bit when I finally get to sit down at the table.

In fact, I honestly believe exercising before I play poker is a big part of the competitive edge I have at the table. Because most poker players don't have the physical strength to sit at a table for long hours... they think, "Hey, it's just SITTING." But it's much more than that.

A career in poker itself makes it EXTREMELY difficult to maintain your health. Between the alcohol, cigars, and buffets, the entire lifestyle is certainly not conducive to proper nutrition and exercise...

Of course, it CAN be done. You've just got to discipline yourself... the same way you do at the table.

Don't get me wrong... I'm not trying to be your personal trainer here. I just honestly believe that health is a big part of being able to play long hours at the table... and playing long hours is crucial to long-term poker profits.

There are other things I'll also do in preparation for those long poker sessions... Here are a few of them:

1. Never start a game on an empty stomach.
2. Take breaks during the game. I usually try to at least STAND UP every thirty minutes or so to keep the blood flowing.
3. Breathe. I know it sounds silly, but a few deep breaths can keep your brain more alert.
4. Chew or munch on something. I prefer sunflower seeds.
5. Drink caffeine instead of alcohol. Alcohol is a downer, caffeine is an upper. Think about it.
6. Grab a bit to eat during the game. Eating several small meals during the day instead of a few big meals will keep your metabolism pumping and will make you much more comfortable while you sit on your ass grinding it out.

Find an approach that works for you and stick to it. Mastering this aspect of poker will automatically give you an edge over your opponents.



RR
PART 6: SPECIAL
TECHNIQUES

CHAPTER 43: STOP OPPONENTS FROM CHASING

CHAPTER 44: HOW TO SPOT THE SUCKER

CHAPTER 45: BLUFFING

CHAPTER 46: BUYING A FREE CARD

CHAPTER 47: RAISING WITH A DRAW

CHAPTER 48: SEMI-BLUFF

CHAPTER 49: LEAVE YOURSELF OUTS

CHAPTER 50: THE FIVE PLAYER TYPES AND HOW TO BEAT THEM



STOP OPPONENTS FROM CHASING

You've got to know when your opponents are chasing that ONE CARD that's going to complete their hand. This is why betting is so important. You've got to bet your opponents OUT when you feel you've got the best hand.

But how much should you bet in order to get your opponents to fold?

That, my friend, is the million dollar question. There's no easy answer. The answer really depends on quite a number of considerations... like:

- Size of the pot
- How many cards are left
- Your table image

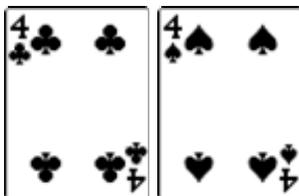
If they think you're just buying the pot, it's going to be tougher to bet them out when they're on the draw and you've got top pair.

The first thing you need to pay attention to are the suits on the board when you're judging the size of your bet. If there is two of the same suit on the flop, someone is likely going after the flush.

The second thing you want to watch out for is the possible straight. It's important that you analyze every flop, turn, and river card to see the straight... BEFORE it actually arrives. Keep in mind that just about everyone loves to play suited-connectors... and even call pre-flop raises with them.

Here's an example of a hand I played a few days ago where I had to bet out the chasers...

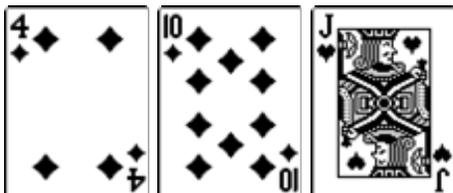
I was in a local \$200 buy-in tournament where I received 1,000 in chips to start. I was playing very good poker through the first few hours and looked down at my hand:



I was second to act. Blinds were 25-50 and I was sitting on about 3,000 chips. I decided to limp-in, knowing someone behind me was likely to raise the pot. My goal was to sneak in by calling a small raise and hopefully spike a four on the flop.

Just as I had expected, Brad (who was to my right) made it 200 to play. The button and the big blind both called and the action came to me.

This was the perfect situation for my fours. I got to see a cheap flop and no one would have a clue as to what I was holding. The flop hit:



The big blind is first to act. He checks.

Now, I would love to also check here. After all, I'm fairly sure Brad will throw out another bet... and I'm confident I have the best hand. But I can't take that chance. There's a straight and flush draw potential on the board. I simply CANNOT afford to let my opponents see a free turn card that could complete a draw.

So I throw out a bet of 1,000 with my trips. This is about half of my opponents' stacks. They are likely to fold if they're on the draw... the price is simply too high.

Each of them fold, as expected, and I rake in a nice pot.

The key to this win was that I DIDN'T mess around one bit. The size of the pot was already large enough and I didn't want to see another card. There were too many draws on the board... the flush draw along with two different open-ended straight draws, seeing as someone could easily have 9-8 or K-Q.

If I had let everyone see another card, someone was likely to hit. Remember... if you can take a hand down, do it. It's better to be SAFE with trips, rather than GREEDY. Being greedy is what leads to "bad beats".



HOW TO SPOT THE SUCKER

Don't be the sucker at the table.

Instead, SPOT the sucker... and do it FIRST.

A “sucker” is a poker player who will lose his chips... quickly... and has no right being in the game.

Of course, we LOVE suckers... because they're easy money. (A lot of people call them “fish”.)

Anyway, you can gain early chip leads and win a lot more money simply by GOING AFTER the sucker at the table. Capitalize on his weaknesses. And try to be the first player to go heads-up with him.

There are a lot of ways to spot the sucker in a card game... Primarily, you want to look for any signs that a bad player would exhibit. Here are five of the top characteristics I've noticed... besides the obvious stuff, like someone who doesn't know the rules.

Cockiness – A player who is very cocky is usually new to the game. Someone who has played for awhile has come across many fierce and legitimate competitors... and has been humbled by the process.

If someone is overly confident in his skills, consider it an attitude that is just trying to over-compensate for the TRUTH.

Too Talkative – I love table talk... and I love to use it... but only in MODERATION. And I only use it strategically to set up a specific table image for myself and to possibly intimidate some of my opponents.

For the most part, the “loud mouth” at the table is usually bound for defeat. Loud players usually make enemies at the table (because they're annoying)... and any good player knows that making enemies is not a good idea.

Playing Every Hand – If you notice a player who seems to be involved in virtually every hand, you can probably consider them a sucker.

Experienced Holdem players know to only play good starting hands. The top sign of an amateur is someone who plays too many hands.

When encountering this type of sucker, you can usually siphon some chips your way by bullying them and applying pressure. But be cautious— bad players are hard to bluff.

In this particular case, you want to throw out some pot-builders and then go heads-up with the sucker when you're confident you have the best hand.

Keep him pot-committed... then bet big on the river. If he calls, great. If not, you still just won a nice pot. When you're done with this process, repeat it as soon as you can again!

Overacting – I can swear that some players aren't interested in poker... and are only trying out for their soon-to-be-over acting career.

Anyone who brings a lot of emotion and drama to the behavior is a fish. Often they'll have a losing attitude to begin with.

It's easy to whip up on these opponents. Get them pot-committed when they're chasing a hand— that's usually the quickest way to take all their chips.

Showboating – This is similar to the cocky player. Someone who showboats hasn't been playing poker for very long. Or if he has, he's not very good.

Showboating is simply a behavior designed to cover up the player's insecurities about NOT having enough skill. These are the types of guys who bluff huge pots with 7-2 offsuit... because of the ego-boost it gives them when the hand is over.

Catch them with their hands in the cookie jar... and you'll get paid.

Those are five of the most common signs of a sucker. Trust your intuition when you sit down at the table. Match your strengths on the weaknesses of your opponents... And don't forget: When you can consistently beat a player, go after them and empty their pockets as soon as possible. Don't waste time in building your stack— otherwise a different player at the table will do so.



BLUFFING

To win at poker, you must bluff. There's just no way around it. Now obviously, you want to make **CALCULATED BLUFFS**... when you've got good positioning, sense weakness, and you're confident you can steal the pot.

The general purpose of a bluff is to steal a pot... everyone knows that. But there's a **SECONDARY** purpose to bluffing that most players don't realize... and that's investing in your **TABLE IMAGE**.

Every time you get "caught" bluffing, just think of it as an investment. Store it away in your mind, knowing that it will contribute to your aggressive table image.

I've been caught bluffing **MANY TIMES**. I lost track many, many years ago. But do I regret all those chips I lost? Of course not! Those "busted bluffs" led me to probably **TEN TIMES** as many pots **WON**.

Here's a real-life example of how a bluff pays off...

I sat down at a casino and bought in for \$200 at a \$1-2 no limit game. I didn't know anyone at the table, so it was time to let these guys know how I play.

I waited for a decent hand before jumping into the action... mainly trying to get a feel for the table and find out who the fish are. Finding the fish usually takes about ten minutes. You don't even have to play a hand with them, actually... you can usually just tell based on their demeanor.

Anyway... the fourth hand I see at this table is 5-4 suited and I'm just to the right of the button, which is good positioning. I sense weakness in the three players who limp-in in front of me, so I decide to make a raise.

"\$40 to play", I say... as I splash the pot.

Everyone looks up at me... some just noticing that I'm the new player at the table. The REASON I make this bet is to let these guys know that they're going to hear from me. I also make it because I expect my opponents to fold.

After all, I sensed weakness when they limped-in and they're going to be unsure of what I have since I just sat down a few hands ago. They probably think I've got Queens, Kings, or Aces. So I expect them to fold and me to get some blinds.

I do this type of play in just about every game... especially when it's a table full of strangers. This play is simply an investment for later.

Anyway... just as I thought... everyone folds with no hesitation. I throw over my 5-4 and say, "C'mon guys, loosen up. I know you had my five high beat."

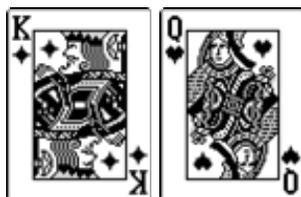
And this REALLY pisses them off. A very tight game can become a CRAZY, real poker game when someone makes a play like this. Frankly, I don't really care if I piss someone off here. In general I don't want enemies at the table, but a good poker player would recognize the strategy behind a move like this and respect me... not be angry about it.

And now my bluff has set me up for action for the rest of the night. I get two callers every time I catch a hand like Kings or Aces and make it \$30 to play.

Of course, I carefully pick my spots to attack. I'll still occasionally make a \$25 pre-flop raise with a small suited-connector... but only when I sense a lot of weakness and feel like I can take down the pot.

And I don't show these other bluffs. You only need to show a bluff once or twice at a table. And you only do it when you want to try to put your opponents on tilt and establish your table image.

The night is going very well and I'm up to about \$1200. I've been ready to leave for about an hour now... and so I finally make a mental decision that this will be the very last hand I play. I look down to see:

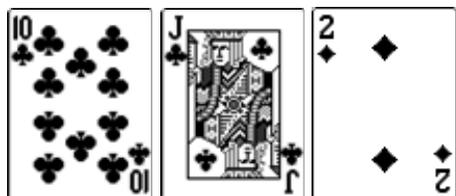


Nice. What a great hand to end a ten hour poker session with.

I'm fifth to act before the flop and decide to simply limp-in. I do this because I don't like my positioning and I'm sure that someone behind me will make a raise. Plus, I don't want to get silly... seeing as this is my last hand.

Sure enough, the guy on the button makes it \$10 to play. Two other players before me call. I'm next... and I'm more than happy to pay \$8 more with my K-Q.

The flop hits:



I've got an open-ended straight draw with two cards to come. The first to guys check to me.

I play the hand exactly as I'm supposed to by making a bet. Except here I make a semi-bluff by betting \$40... somewhat more than I'd usually bet with just an open-ended straight draw. I'm hoping to take the pot down now.

Tom, the guy on the button who made the original raise, immediately announces another raise.

"Let's make it \$80 to play", he says.

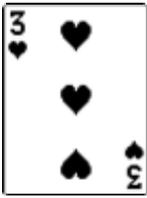
I chuckle to myself... as if \$40 more is going to scare me with my \$1200 chip stack.

The next two players fold and the action is back to me. I know Tom has a good hand. He's not a very aggressive player and definitely won't raise his opponent unless he's got a hand. I'm putting him on Kings or Aces.

But hey, I'm I can handle a \$40 raise with this nice pot. If I hit, I'm going to take the rest of his chips... so the implied odds are good.

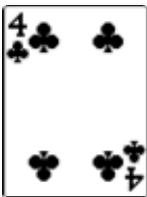
All I need is an Ace or nine. Technically the odds are just above 30%, except that I have a feeling he might have the Aces so that decreases my odds accordingly. Of course, if he DOES have Aces and an Ace hits, he'll make trips, so there will be no doubt I'll get the rest of his stack.

The turn card comes:

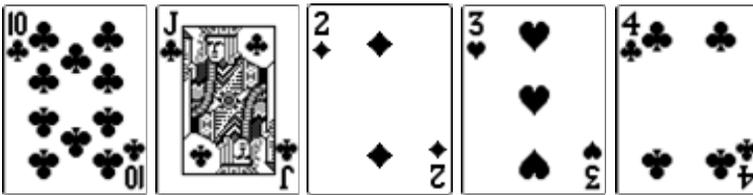


Not exactly what I was looking for.

I have to check here... no sense betting only to get raised. So I check, and Tom bets \$50. I call once again, hoping to hit on the river. The final card comes:



So now the board reads:



I'm first to act... and I've COMPLETELY missed my draw. But I see that the third club just hit the river. Representing the flush is my only chance at taking this pot down. With the way the hand has played out, it can definitely look like I've been on the flush draw the whole time... and Tom is probably scared now that the third club hit the board.

So I have two options here... I can either accept defeat or I can make a bold stab at this pot. I decide to go for it... especially since this is my last hand of the night.

"How much do you have left Tom?", I ask... looking as though I've just made my hand. He looks down and starts to count his stack chip by chip by chip...

"No Tom, you don't have to tell me the exact amount... just an approximation."

"Um... about \$300", he replies.

The only way I can win this pot is by representing the flush. And based on Tom's reaction, he doesn't seem too happy about the club hitting the board... nor does he seem happy about having to count his chips. I think I can steal it.

So I bet \$250, as I push in two large stacks of chips that I PRAY he'll fold to.

Tom thinks about... and thinks about it some more... and then thinks about it some more. I swear we sat there for ten minutes waiting for him to make up his damn mind.

Finally, looking as if he's going to muck his cards, he says, "Well, I know you hit your flush, but I'm going to pay you off" and he calls my bet.

"Good call man, I've got King high", is what I say as I rack up my other chips. I wish everyone good game and walk away from the table. I leave the game still up a good chunk of money and not disappointed about the final hand one bit.

I know that one out of two players... or even two out of three players would have laid that hand down in Tom's shoes. And so my bluff was just an investment. I know I'll be at a table with one of those other players at some point in the future (it was a local casino) and each of them... especially Bill... is going to remember my aggressive style of play and that last hand where I put it all on the line with nothing but King high.

This type of playing strategy is why I left that table with nearly four times as much money as I started with. And it's why I'll get action with big hands later.

So that's how it's done. You've got to look at bluffing as an investment in the future. Bluff at the right times, show your bluffs at the right times, and don't regret the times you get caught. Over the long run you'll increase your profits considerably.



BUYING A FREE CARD

Many players understand that it's important to play more aggressively from good positions. But most players only understand the logic to the extent that good positioning means you get to see what your opponent does first.

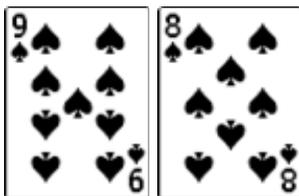
There's more...

If you play your position properly, you can often buy a "free card" on the turn. This strategy is very important for hands like suited-connectors, semi-connectors, or low pocket pairs. Because the flop may or may not help you... and you might want to see one more card before backing off or completing a hand.

When I refer to "good positioning" here... I mean when you're on the button or just to the right of the button or two seats to the right of the button. That's for an 8-man table. If the table is smaller, the button and player to the right of the button is good positioning.

OK, so here's an example of how I buy free cards...

I sit down at the riverboat at a \$1-2 no limit game. A few hands, while I'm on the button, I pick up:



A few players limp in and the action comes to me. I decide to leverage my table positioning... and hopefully buy a free turn card (if I want it). So I make it \$20 to play.

I make this bet because of my GOOD POSITIONING and because I don't think any of my opponents have strong hands. If someone had pocket tens or higher, he would have raised. So I'm putting them on hands like A-J, K-Q, Q-J, or small pocket pairs.

This is the perfect setup for the hand I'm holding. If I get a caller (I know I won't get more than one with this type of raise), my pre-flop raise will essentially let me see the turn card for free... this works nine times out of ten.

Even if my opponent MAKES his hand on the flop, he'll still likely check... because he anticipates another big bet from me after my large pre-flop raise.

This is great with a hand like suited-connectors because the hand has so many hidden possibilities of making a straight, flush, or maybe even two pair. Buying yourself a free card puts you in the "driver's seat" for winning the pot. Your odds of hitting something with a suited-connector by seeing the flop AND turn are pretty good.

Of course, this also sets you up in a position to just BUY the pot if you think your opponent is weak... and you'll want to do this sometimes too, of course.

If you only limped-in from the button with your 9-8, however, you wouldn't have ANY advantages going for you. You'd let a lot of people see the flop, which means someone's going to catch. By the time the action gets around to you you'll be forced to call a bet... possibly a large one. And what then? Even if the flop is favorable and puts you on a draw, should you call and risk your chips?

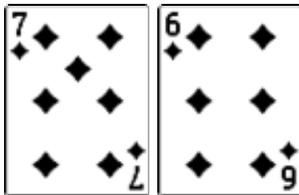
When you're on the button or in late positioning, you sense weakness, and you have a hand where you'd like to see the flop AND turn card, go ahead and raise the pot aggressively. This will buy you a free card, help you "make" more hands, and will allow you to buy several more pots over the course of the night.



RAISING WITH A DRAW

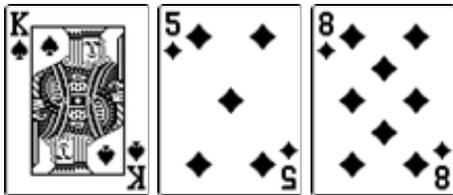
Let's talk about how to win more money when you're on a draw. Here's how most players play the draw:

You're just to the right of the button and you look down at your cards:



Josh, who's under the gun, comes out firing and makes it \$15 to play. Darren calls and the action is to you.

You love your suited-connectors, so you jump in to see a flop... hoping to catch something that you can use to bust your opponents. Plus, you've got good positioning on Josh and Darren. The flop hits:



Nice! You've just flopped an open-ended straight flush draw... You've got more outs than you can count.

Josh, who made the original raise, comes out firing with very little hesitation.

"Make it \$30 to play", he says. Darren mucks his cards and the action is to you.

You call.

I mean, why wouldn't you? You've got an open-ended straight flush draw... you've got to see that turn and river card and hopefully make the big hand you're looking for. The turn card comes:



This is no help to you. Josh comes out firing again, this time with a \$60 bet. And once again, you call. The river card comes:



Ouch. You've completely missed your draw. And now Josh bets \$100... and you have nothing left to do but muck your cards and watch Josh rake in a big pot.

That, my friend, is a TERRIBLE way to play a draw. But it's how most card players will INSTINCTIVELY play it.

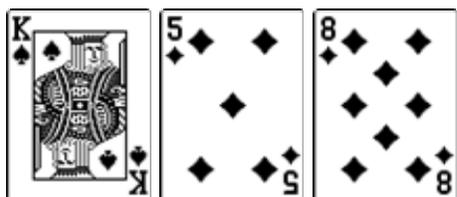
You see, one of the things you'll learn is that the NATURAL thing to do in a given situation is usually the WRONG thing to do. Because most people play REACTIVE Texas Holdem... rather than PROACTIVE Texas Holdem.

Don't let your opponents come out firing over and over again while you're on the draw... only to keep calling. When you behave like this, the ONLY WAY you can win is by making your hand.

Of course, the odds are almost always AGAINST you to make your hand. Even in this EXTREME situation where you had an open-ended straight flush draw, you still only had 54.12% odds of making your hand after the flop... and 32.61% odds on the river card. And that's the best your odds you will EVER get on a draw.

OK, let's look at the RIGHT way to play this hand. The key, of course, is RAISING the pot when you're on a draw. Let's take a look:

You've got 7-6 diamonds and the board reads:



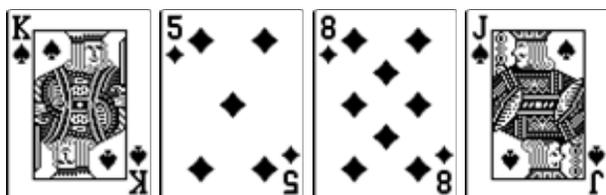
Josh bets \$30, Darren folds, and the action is to you. Instead of CALLING, you make a RAISE.

“Let's make it \$60”, you say.

Now... if Josh has something like A-Q right now, he might muck his cards right here. But let's assume he's on a hand like A-K or K-Q and just made his top pair.

Your raise completely turns the tables on him. Now he's lost control of the action... he's got to put you on a big hand. He hesitates, then calls.

The turn card comes, and now the board reads:



Instead of firing a bet this time (as he did in our earlier scenario), Josh checks to you. He expects you to come out betting, of course.

And that's where you bought yourself a free card AND took control of the hand. You can bet him out of the hand right here... and still feel safe because you've got good odds of making your hand. Or you can check to see the river card and hope to make your hand.

If you remember in the FIRST scenario Josh bet \$60 after the turn. And that was because HE WAS IN CONTROL OF THE BETTING. By raising Josh on the flop, YOU took control of the betting and Josh checked to you on the turn. So it cost you a total of \$60 after the flop to see both the turn and river... instead of costing you \$90 as in the previous scenario.

Not only that, but now you're in a position to BUY the pot. You can actually win it WITHOUT making your hand.

And there's ANOTHER benefit. If the turn card completed your straight or flush (or both), there would already be MORE money in the pot for you. Josh would still check to you, but you would have secured his \$60 after the flop.

Because if you let Josh stay in control of the hand and another diamond hit the board on the turn, Josh would probably back off... knowing that the diamond might have just made your hand.

So you see, raising with a draw accomplishes three things:

1. Gets you a free card.
2. Puts you in a position to win the hand WITHOUT actually completing your hand.
3. Gets more chips in the middle EARLY... that way if you DO make your hand you win more.

This is the perfect technique for MAXIMIZING YOUR WINNINGS on a big hand... while also minimizing your risk. The key is to be proactive, rather than reactive, and to raise with your draws in order to take control of the hand.



SEMI-BLUFF

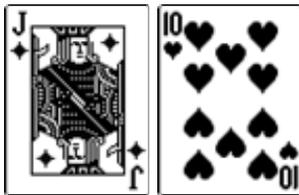
The semi-bluff is one of the single most powerful techniques in the entire game of Texas Holdem poker. A semi-bluff is when you make a BLUFF, but you have a lot of outs... so it's not REALLY a bluff.

The semi-bluff is usually made while on a good draw, but can be used in other situations as well. Let's look at a semi-bluff example while on a draw...

You're sixth to act in a \$200 buy-in tournament. There are 100 players in the tournament. So needless to say, you're playing to make the final table so that you can win some good money.

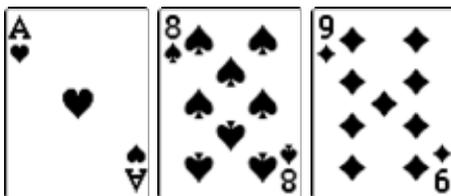
Darren is fourth to act before the flop and he makes it 1000 chips to play, which isn't a big bet with respect to the 200-400 blinds. You're chip leader at the table you're sitting at, with about 80,000 in chips.

You look down at your cards:



You decide to call Darren's bet here, as the rest of the table folds. J-10 is a good "hidden hand", and as chip leader you can play it with your positioning on Darren.

The flop comes out:



This gives you an open-ended straight draw, which equals a 31.45% chance of making your straight with two cards to go.

Darren is first to act and hesitates for a moment, then throws out a bet of 2000. You pick up a tell on him and think the Ace scares him... but you're not completely sure.

You, of course, don't like the Ace hitting the board. Darren could very easily have made that pre-flop raise with an Ace in his hand. Either way, you need to find out where you're at in the hand.

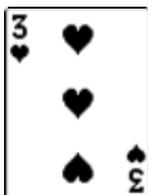
So you make it 4000 to play... doubling Darren's original bet

THIS is a semi-bluff. You have nothing yet, but you're working on making a hand. And as you're "working on it", your semi-bluff does three important things:

1. It gives you control of the action and lets Darren know that he can't push you around here.
2. It (usually) gives you a free card. If you miss the straight on the turn, Darren is probably going to check to you because you raised him last time and he anticipates another bet.
3. It gives you a chance at winning the pot even if you miss your draw.

Darren thinks awhile about your raise and then calls. You're putting him on an Ace with no kicker... or maybe a hand like pocket Kings. If he had anything stronger he would have probably gone back over the top of you. But he just called... which means you're in control of the hand now.

The turn comes:



Not exactly what you were hoping for. Of course, Darren checks here... since he's anticipating another bet from you. He's putting you on a big hand. You sense a LOT of weakness in him this time... so you don't even think he has the Ace.

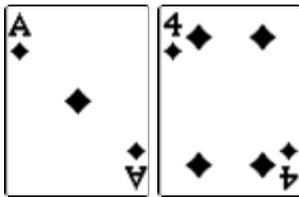
So you decide to buy the pot. You bet 6000, as you push in two large stacks of chips. Darren looks down at his cards a second time, and then tosses them into the muck.

And you rake in a nice pot, due to your semi-bluff.

Now of course, this is the proper way to play your draws (most notably open-ended straight draws). But the semi-bluff is a very versatile technique that can be used in many other situations as well...

It's important that you strategize with this technique **IN CONJUNCTION** with others. For example... using a semi-bluff on the short stack at the table is always a good idea.

Let's say you're holding:



And the board reads:



There are just two players in the hand and you're first to act. Now, you only have bottom pair here, but you know that your opponent will fold unless he's made a hand already. So you throw out a semi-bluff.

Now pay attention... the semi-bluff is **NOT** some small, weak bet. The semi-bluff is usually an **AGGRESSIVE** bet. You make it to represent a good hand. If your opponent does not have a King here, or a draw, he will fold.

In this example, you're hoping to bet your opponent out of this pot. If he comes back over the top of you, you'll fold... but that won't happen very often. If he calls, you're still OK, since you have outs. There are two fours in the deck that will help you, along with three Aces. That makes for five outs out of forty-seven cards... a 10.64% chance of

hitting on the turn, a 10.87% chance of hitting on the river, and a 20.35% chance of hitting if you see both the turn and river.

Be careful... you don't want to bet recklessly or waste chips. Choose your times to attack wisely... based on your opponent, their betting habits, your read on them, and positioning. If you shift gears frequently and use the semi-bluff in conjunction with other techniques we talk about, it will become a very powerful weapon in your arsenal of killer Holdem secrets...

Go ahead and start using the semi-bluff immediately in your next game of Texas Holdem. You won't be sorry.

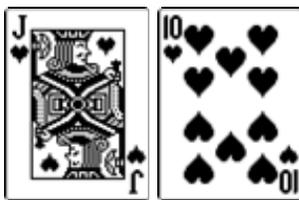


LEAVE YOURSELF OUTS

Bluffing is a part of the game. Using the “all-in factor” is important in order to steal pots and blinds in order to maintain a decent chip stack... especially if you don’t catch any good hands for awhile.

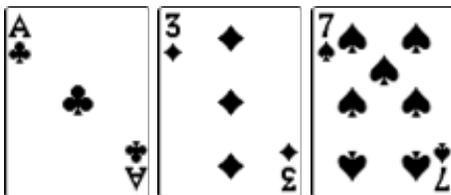
One of the important things about bluffing, however, is that you **MUST** leave yourself outs. Not having outs is a bad way to play the game. Here’s a bluff without outs that I witnessed the other night...

Bill was holding:



Bill was on the button and made a pre-flop raise. Not a bad play with this hand and positioning... I would probably do the same.

Josh, who was in the big blind, was the only player to call the \$15 pre-flop raise. The flop hits:



Josh was first to act and he checked to Bill... probably because he anticipated another bet from the raiser.

Sure enough, Bill bets \$40 on a stone cold bluff. There aren’t any hearts on the board and Bill doesn’t have a pair or anything. But it’s still not that bad of a play on his part...

he's simply following up his pre-flop raise with a post-flop bet. He's hoping Josh doesn't have the Ace and will fold.

Instead of folding, however, Josh looked down at his cards for a second time and then matched Bill's bet with a call.

And THIS is where Bill should have seen the red flag waving in the air and should have backed off. He made a pre-flop raise with a hidden hand and didn't hit anything on the flop. He took a stab after the flop and didn't get it. Now it's time to minimize his losses and live to see another hand.

The turn card comes:



This is obviously no help to Bill. Josh checks again.

This is where Bill screwed up. Instead of checking and seeing the river card for free, Bill bluffs at the pot hoping to buy it.

"I'm all-in", he says.

The problem is, Bill didn't have any outs. No draws or anything. If Josh calls his bet, Bill is dead... Period.

Sure enough, Josh calls and throws over A-Q... giving him top pair with a Queen kicker.

And Bill is embarrassed to even show his hand. He's drawing dead to a pair. He's got no outs... a ZERO percent chance of winning the hand. Even if he just had a GUTSHOT straight draw he'd be better off than he is now.

As soon as Josh called the post-flop bet of \$40, Bill should have backed off and gave up on the hand. But instead he ended up losing \$200 because he bluffed without outs.

The key is bluffing is to do it when you're CONFIDENT your opponent won't call. So one might argue that it DOESN'T MATTER if you have outs or not...

But it DOES matter. It matters because sometimes you WILL get caught on a bluff. And it's always better to have as many outs as possible.

If there are three cards left in the deck that can help you and the turn and river cards are remaining, you have a 12.49% chance of completing your hand. If there are five cards in the deck, you've got over a 20% chance.

Over the course of your poker career you will get caught bluffing... many times, no matter how well you time your bluffs. And if you can WIN one out of ten, or one of five times, then you're saving yourself a lot of chips over the long haul. It's yet another way to increase your "poker profitability".



THE FIVE PLAYER TYPES AND HOW TO BEAT THEM

First, let's start with the basics.

“Player styles” can be broken down like this:

You're either... **TIGHT** or **LOOSE**.

AND...

You're either... **PASSIVE** or **AGGRESSIVE**.

A lot of people confuse “passive” with “tight” and “loose” with “aggressive”. It can be a little confusing at first... but this report will clear things up for you.

TIGHT and **LOOSE** refer to **HAND SELECTION**. I'm talking about **WHICH HANDS YOU PLAY...** both at the beginning and during a hand.

If you only place A-A, K-K, and Q-Q, you'd be considered a very **TIGHT** player. “Tight” is someone who doesn't play a lot of hands.

If you'll jump in a pot with 7-2 offsuit just because they're “live” cards, you'd be considered a very **LOOSE** player. “Loose” describes someone who plays **LOTS** of starting hands.

OK, so that's “tight” versus “loose”.

Now... **PASSIVE** and **AGGRESSIVE** refer to **BETTING**. I'm talking specifically about **BETTING AMOUNTS**.

If you limp-in and check with your pocket Aces, you're demonstrating **PASSIVE** behavior. If you go all-in, you're being **AGGRESSIVE**.

Got it?

It's pretty simple. Just remember that tight and loose are opposites and relate to HAND SELECTION... passive and aggressive are also opposites and relate to BETTING.

Now, each player contains ONE of the first qualities and ONE of the second qualities. You can be either:

- Tight-Aggressive
- Loose-Aggressive
- Tight-Passive
- Loose-Passive

Tight-aggressive is the PREFERRED playing style... because it is the most effective. It's the player who plays premium hands and gets paid off with them.

It's important for me to interject something here...

These four basic styles are CLASSIFICATIONS. Don't take them TOO literally... just because a player demonstrates loose behavior in a hand doesn't make him loose. And as in all of poker, every player and every situation is different.

OK, now you're ready for the five player types and how to beat them. The five player types are really just THESE FOUR STYLES plus one more. We'll be looking at how to successfully PLAY AGAINST each style so that you come out ahead.

THE FIVE PLAYER TYPES

There's a lot of POWER in classifying and "stereotyping" players.

If you play a lot of poker, you'll see hundreds... and THOUSANDS... of different players. Often times you'll sit down at a table of strangers where EVERY HAND MATTERS. Having never played with these opponents... how do you know what to do?

The answer is to pick up little "signals" from a player and then USE THAT INFORMATION to stereotype and make educated guesses about how they'll play.

There's no "tell all" way to do it, of course. This is to simply give you that EXTRA edge and insight... something to simply add to your poker "bag of tricks".

OK, so here are the five player types. A lot of poker players have different ways to classify the styles out there. This list is based on my EXPERIENCE both online and

offline. I believe it's counter-productive to try to memorize TEN different "personalities" or whatever.

I like to keep things simple, which is why I endorse the concept of five main types. Here they are:

1. "Mike The Manic" - Loose/Aggressive
2. "Rick The Rock" - Tight/Passive
3. "Arrogant Andy" - The Ego Player
4. "Shawn The Shark" - Tight/Aggressive
5. "Frank The Fish" - Loose/Passive

OK, let's take a look at each one...

"MIKE THE MANIC" – LOOSE/AGGRESSIVE

Manics are the dreaded players in most poker rooms. They're crazy... erratic... and unpredictable.

I mean, who raises with 2-4 offsuit just because "24" is their favorite number? The MANIC does.

Characteristics of the Manic

A manic is LOOSE and AGGRESSIVE. That means they play a lot of hands... not necessarily GOOD hands... and they bet them aggressively. Manics usually BLUFF often too.

Over time, the hands that manics usually WIN are the ones where everyone else folds... not the "showdowns". The showdowns manics win are usually the result of a lucky "suck out".

At the surface, it'd appear that manics would be EASY to beat... and that they probably don't win much. As it turns out, the OPPOSITE is the case.

The reason is because many manics UNDERSTAND poker... they "get" positioning, sensing weakness, and scaring away opponents. The loose-aggressive style is MOST effective at a table of tightwads, which often happens in amateur tournaments or cash games.

Spotting a Manic

Manics are easy to spot. He's the guy pushing the action... the one who seems to be in practically EVERY hand...

A KEY characteristic of loose-aggressive players is their "all-in" or large bet frequency. A good player will bet aggressively. A MANIC will bet half his stack—or the entire thing—OFTEN.

Some loose-aggressive players demonstrate most of their crazy moves from good positioning. These are the "smarter" ones. Others will raise and re-raise from pretty much any position.

Beating a Manic

It's almost impossible to BEAT a manic.

In fact, I suggest that you NEVER try to beat a manic.

That's right, do NOT try to take his money...

Instead, the secret is to LET HIM BEAT HIMSELF.

Let HIM give YOU his money.

Because the biggest weakness of a manic is that he tries to buy TOO many pots... and gets TOO aggressive. He'll try to bully you, no matter what it takes.

And sooner or later, you're going to have a monster hand. The kind of hand that you KNOW he can't beat. And that's when you get paid off.

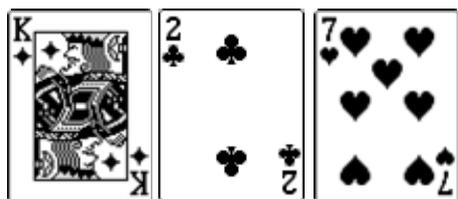
You must be patient. At a full table, wait like you normally would for PREMIUM hands... and play them aggressively. If the manic comes in doing the raising for you, just smooth call. Don't let him know you've got a monster. Make him think you've got something DECENT—so that he'll hang onto the hope that he can buy the pot from you.

At a short-handed table against a manic, you have to play his game. You can't just sit back and be as patient, because the blinds will eat you up. The best tactic is this... If you have a marginal hand, raise him. If you have a strong hand, call.

Don't get yourself into trouble with the bad hands... the key is to get him to COME TO YOU with your monsters. It only takes one pot to decide the game.

Also... don't try to make a move on a manic unless you've got a BIG hand. For instance, let's say Mike the Manic makes a pre-flop raise. You call with pocket 8's... and there's one other caller in the hand.

The flop hits:



IMMEDIATELY, Mike the Manic goes ALL-IN. The other player folds and the action is to you... What do you do?

You should probably fold. Even if you think he's just buying the pot, you really can't be too sure. The fact is Mike could EASILY be holding 7-2 right now... and in that case he just flopped a monster. On the other hand, he may have K-2 or K-7... or maybe just 9-4... or maybe pocket 2's. You just don't know.

What you DO know is that all you have is pocket eights... and that's not good enough to call in this situation.

So be careful. Sit back and be patient if you can... and let the Manic destroy himself. Don't go on tilt from his erratic behavior, because that's EXACTLY what he wants.

“RICK THE ROCK” – TIGHT/PASSIVE

Rick is the exact opposite of Mike. Instead of being a loose cannon... ready to buy the pot and bet aggressively any time... Rick just sits there. Like a rock. He only gets aggressive when he's got the nuts.

Characteristics of the Rock

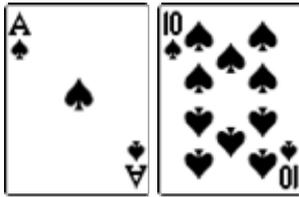
The key characteristic of the rock is that they don't get involved in many hands... and when they DO get involved, they don't play aggressively.

A rock will often limp-in with solid hands... or call a small raise... and maybe make a weak raise. They think only of how they can get BEAT... rather than jumping in and risking their chips.

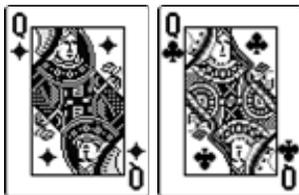
Here's what I mean...

Let's say you've got A-10 suited at a 4-man table. Rick the Rock calls your pre-flop raise, so it's just you and him heads-up.

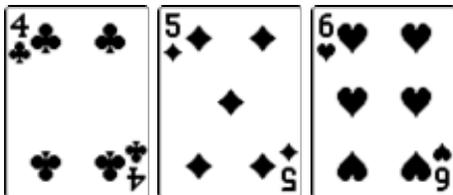
Your cards:



Rick's cards:



The flop comes out:



This flop sucks for you, but you need to represent it. You figure Rick doesn't have the straight. So you bet.

Rick calls. The turn comes out:



You bet again.

Now here's what Rick is thinking. "Damn, he could have a four... a higher pocket pair than mine... or any of those straight draws like 3-2, 7-8, 3-7. He's probably got me beat... but I have to call this bet."

Now the river hits:



You know Rick is a wuss. So you fire out another bet... this time a BIG bet... HOPING he folds.

And sure enough, terrified of losing, Rick folds at the river!

You take a deep breath... and gratefully rake the pot.

What was Rick thinking?!

Well, he was only thinking of LOSING... not thinking LOGICALLY enough. The fact is, if he had paid attention he would have known that seven probably didn't help you. You wouldn't have waited around with an eight on a gutshot straight draw. And you probably wouldn't have made a pre-flop raise holding a three or four.

See what I mean?

Rick the Rock is a WIMP. A tight-passive wimp.

Spotting a Rock

The easiest way to spot a Rock is to look for the guy who folds on the river... or folds to a small raise... or gets out of a hand even though pot odds are in his favor for a call. That's typical tight-passive behavior.

"Check-calling" is also classic Rick the Rock behavior.

Beating Rocks

As you probably already figured out, the key to beating Rocks is to bet... bet... and bet. When you're aggressive you'll scare out Rocks—even when they have better cards.

If you ever get RAISED by a Rock, run away... FAST!

The tricky thing about Rocks is that they can easily blend in with the rest of the table if you're not paying attention. Especially online. At a 10-man Sit and Go, for example, it's amazing how you can get away with ONLY playing premium hands like Queens, Kings, and Aces... and STILL get callers.

The reason is because online players don't pay attention to the other players enough.

Don't make this mistake. Spot the Rocks as soon as you can, and stay out of their way if they bet.

Also note that Rocks seem to be more common in MEDIUM stakes games online... rather than LOW stakes. At the low stakes, this style of play rarely works because there are usually more players to each flop. That prevents the Rock from getting to the end of a hand much.

“ARROGANT ANDY” – The Ego Player

I prefer to classify “ego players” separate from other types... because they just seem to be a breed of their own.

An ego player might be a Rock OR a Manic... but his vain approach to the game is the key weakness that you can use to your advantage.

Characteristics of the Ego Player

Arrogant Andy is the guy who likes to win pots.

Of course... EVERYONE likes to win pots.

But Andy is more extreme about it... he's willing to WASTE money in his effort. For example, he'll chase just about any draw... in hopes of winning that “monster” pot.

When Andy loses a hand, he blames bad beats, bad luck, or say something like, “Ha... I knew it all along.”

Spotting an Ego Player

It can be difficult to spot Arrogant Andy until he shows his face. In live games it's easier... online it's harder.

Andy's the guy that shows up when things get emotional.

For instance, if someone catches a bad beat then comes out firing on the next hand, there's a good chance it's Andy. He's not being logical...he's on tilt.

Another way to spot Andy online is in the chat feature. After he loses a big hand he'll say stuff like:

>>> Hmm... nice move playing that 5-7 with a pre-flop raise. This your first time playing poker?

Or

>>> WTF are you thinking playing those rags?! *!

Beating the Ego Player

You'll begin to love players like Andy... because once you know how to beat them it's EASY.

The key is to get them while they're playing on EMOTION... whether it's anger, boredom, shock... whatever. (These can all be classified as "tilt".)

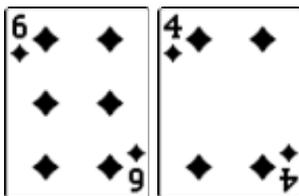
Your strategy is to basically let them have some room to HANG THEMSELVES... but not so much rope that they can STRANGLE YOU.

You'll achieve this by making a sequence of solid bets to pot-commit Andy to a pot. This is NOT slow-playing. It's DRAWING THEM IN... taking advantage of the fact that they're not thinking straight.

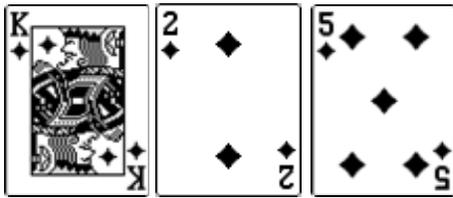
Let me show you what I mean...

You check the big blind in a No Limit game with semi-connectors. You see the flop free.

Your cards:



The flop:

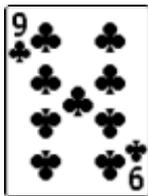


Nice. You've just flopped a flush... with a chance at hitting a STRAIGHT FLUSH if you get that three of diamonds.

Arrogant Andy leads with a bet. Instead of smooth calling (that's what you'd do against a Manic), you raise. Not a BIG raise... maybe even just the minimum.

He calls.

The turn hits:



Andy bets again. You make a small raise again... and he calls again.

Now the river:



Andy bets AGAIN. (He's got top pair.)

Now... instead of just making a small raise... you go ALL-IN. You figure he doesn't have the flush and you've got him completely pot-committed.

Andy thinks about it for awhile... he “knows” you have the flush... but then again you might just be buying the pot after a busted draw. He’s got top pair with a good kicker... there’s no way he’ll catch another “bad beat” again, right?

So pot-committed Arrogant Andy calls... and you double up.

This is how you beat Andy. Don’t force TOO much action against him, otherwise he’ll run. Try to reel him in slowly and get him pot-committed.

“SHAWN THE SHARK” – TIGHT/AGGRESSIVE

If you notice “sharks” at the table, it might be a good idea to LEAVE. Don’t play when you’re outmatched.

But chances are, YOU will be the best player at the table... if for no other reason than the fact you’re studying Texas Holdem and learning how to improve.

Characteristics of the Shark

As you know, the tight-aggressive player doesn’t waste his money playing bad hands. He’s patient... and plays premium hands aggressively. He gets his money in the pot with the best hand... and protects his money when he doesn’t have the best hand.

Shawn the Shark will only see maybe one in five flops... maybe one in ten. He folds a lot, but when he sees a flop he’s ready for SERIOUS ACTION.

I’ll keep the profile for Shawn the Shark short and to the point... because the entire point of my BOOK is to teach you how to become a shark.

Spotting the Shark

Sharks can be difficult to pinpoint at first glance... but a careful observation of the table will quickly clue you in.

Look for the player who doesn’t play a lot of hands... but when he DOES play, he seems to always win... and those pots always seem large... and as a result this player has a huge chip stack.

That’s Shawn the Shark.

Beating the Shark

Ultimately you must learn how to beat good poker players like yourself. Because that's the only way you'll win serious money in the game.

There are basically three ways to beat Shawn the Shark...

1. Get lucky...

One of the interesting things about poker is that you can use your SKILLS to create "coin toss" situations... where the winner is usually determined by luck.

In heads-up poker, go all-in with a starting pair. A pair versus two over-cards has a slight advantage. So if you pick up four's, go all-in. If your opponent has two cards higher than four but doesn't have a pair, you're at a slight advantage. But it's basically a coin toss.

2. Outplay him...

This is obviously the PREFERRED way to beat a Shark.

No matter who it is, your opponent will have weaknesses... or even just areas of his game where YOU are stronger. Lean on those areas... no matter what they may be. Does he chase too much? Does he call too much? Does he limp-in too much? And so on.

3. Bully him...

One of the COMMON weaknesses of a tight-aggressive player is the TIGHT part at a short-handed table.

Many really good players don't play well short-handed, because they're waiting for better cards... that never come.

If this is the case against your opponent short-handed, take advantage of the weakness by being aggressive. Bully Shawn out of pots and bluff with good positioning.

"FRANK THE FISH" – LOOSE/AGGRESSIVE

Of any player type, Frank the Fish is probably the WORST. Especially online.

When you come across Frank the Fish, you can literally turn him into your own personal ATM machine... as long as you know how.

Characteristics of the Fish

Frank is easy to spot. He gets involved in lots of pot... but is easily scared out of them.

On a draw, he'll stick around when he shouldn't... but then fold if the pressure gets turned up too high.

Frank is often a "calling station." This means he'll call many of your bets... but rarely raises. If he raises, you're probably better off folding.

When Frank has a good starting hand but doesn't hit on the flop, he checks. When he gets a piece of the flop, he check-calls.

Spotting the Fish

The fish is easy to spot... Just look for the player quickly losing chips!

Beating the Fish

Frank is the easiest player at the table to beat. And luckily, Frank is the most common player these days... especially in online poker with low stakes.

The secret to beating Frank is to be aggressive. If the Fish has a marginal hand, he'll call every bet down the line. If he's weak, he'll fold... and you'll still win the pot.

One of your most powerful weapons against Frank is REPRESENTING THE FLOP. Always pretend that the flop was TERRIFIC for you. Because if it didn't help Frank, he'll fold.

And of course, play your good hands the same way: aggressively. Bet on every card and watch Frank call all the way down.

Don't try anything tricky against Frank the Fish... just play straightforward poker and you'll come out ahead.



CHAPTER 51: ONLINE POKER VERSUS LIVE POKER

CHAPTER 52: WHY IT'S EASIER TO "TILT" ONLINE

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ONLINE POKER VERSUS LIVE POKER

Live poker is NOT the same as online poker.

Period.

You've got to understand this to be successful at both...

Most poker players start in LIVE games and then move to ONLINE games... and then get CREAMED for all their money. Again and again and again.

It's only those who understand the DIFFERENCES between the games and then EXPLOIT the advantages in each that turn consistent profits.

I've identified seven crucial differences between online and live poker here... start by learning these before learning the more advanced techniques to online poker.

Difference 1: Looser Players...

The biggest difference is that online poker players are FAR LOOSER than live players... especially at lower stakes.

At the casino I usually see 2-3 players still around at the end of a hand. Online I often see 4-5 players flipping over their cards at the end...

What's this mean for you? Well, if you're going to play online you need to be ready for CRAZY, IRRATIONAL players. It's common to be thinking, "What the hell was he thinking? He called my 400 chip raise bluff with nothing but King high!"

That's just how it goes.

Annie Duke, a terrific player and WSOP champ, knows a lot about online poker. This is what she says:

“Most online poker players look for any excuse to play. They don’t notice that you are a tight player. Just play your good starting hands and you will get plenty of action. Don’t worry about discussing your play.”

Couldn’t have said it better myself.

Difference 2: Don’t Bluff As Often...

I wish someone had told me this when I started playing online poker. I would have saved a TON of money.

Basically what it boils down to is that it’s MUCH harder to bluff online poker players... mostly because they’re looser, as we discussed.

Unless you’re playing higher stakes games where the games are tighter and the players are more talented, bluffing is usually unprofitable. The “exception” would be in ring games with fewer than six players... since often no one has a real hand.

The other reason you can’t bluff online is because there are a lot of players out there that I call “shark hunters”. These are players who look for EXCUSES to call large bets. I’m not kidding here.

These players will try to “read” into your big bets and WANT to believe you’re bluffing. They get an ego boost from the good calls they make... and don’t seem to remember all the monsters they’ve run into.

How do you defeat these opponents?

Simple... Just sit back, wait for strong hands, and play them aggressively. Don’t worry so much about check raises and slow plays... just bet your strong hands and fold your weak ones. You’ll be amazed at how far you can get on that simple logic alone.

So the moral is, don’t bluff much until you get to higher stakes games or if you’re at a short-handed table.

Difference 3: Play The Cards...

I often repeat my mantra: **PLAY THE PLAYER, NOT THE CARDS.**

Well, online it’s a little different. Often it’s more important to only focus on the cards... and the reason is once again because of the looser, unpredictable nature of online poker.

You can't predict what you're opponents will do online as well as you can offline. The fast pace of online poker contributes to this characteristic as well.

Difference 4: Different "Tells"...

In live poker, you'll look to study the TELLS of your opponents... such as body language, general composure, etc.

It's different online. Because you can't SEE your opponents!

Online poker tells mostly have to do with timing, screen names, and other "non-expression" aspects of the game. But even those aren't as reliable as the REAL TELLS that exist... which are classic betting patterns and sizes.

If you rely on getting a visual "read" on your opponent in live poker, then playing online might be tough for you.

Difference 5: Online Poker Is FAST...

If you're at a fast table at a casino... with a quick dealer... you may be able to finish thirty hands in an hour, max. In online poker, though, I've seen as many as NINETY hands in an hour.

This is a huge difference and has a major impact on the game.

It means you can go on HUGE RUNS very quickly... but it also means you can go BROKE within minutes.

Be sure to take your time online. It's easy to feel "rushed", especially with the damn timer beeping at you. But don't fret. Be patient, be careful, and be disciplined. It will payoff in multiples.

Difference 6: Virtual Environment...

At a home cash game, you'll need to physically take a \$100 bill out of your wallet to buy chips. Same with a casino.

But in online poker, you're just a CLICK away from betting your entire digital bankroll in a single hand.

This affects the psychology of how players value their money. Since it's not as "real", people get much more careless with it. TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS and take their money off their hands...

Difference Number 7: Different Games...

You won't find many 10-player single table tournaments in your local cash games. But online, these are some of the most popular games around.

Same way with turbo Sit & Go's, heads-up matches, 100-player tournaments, and so on. They're just not as common in live games as they are online.

Each game requires its own set of strategies and techniques... You can't bring the same patterns of play from one game to another.

A Sit & Go requires a "survival" mentality... whereas a 6-player ring game requires a "bully" mentality... and so on. Be sure to CONSCIOUSLY change gears as you move from game to game and adjust your style accordingly.



WHY IT'S EASIER TO "TILT" ONLINE

"Tilt" is the term used to describe playing based on EMOTION instead of STRATEGY. When you fall victim to tilt, it's usually the result of a bad beat...

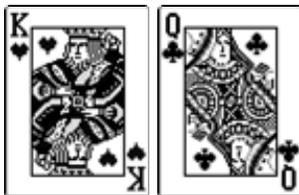
Going on tilt is a CANCER to your poker winnings. It can cause you recklessly lose your entire bankroll... as well as shake your own confidence in your playing ability.

The thing is, it's much easier to go on tilt ONLINE...

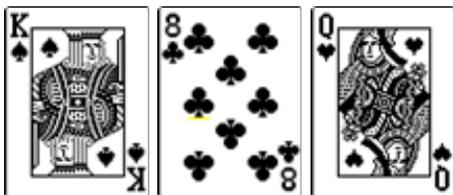
Why?

Because of the cause: the bad beat.

For instance, let's say Chad is holding a solid hand...



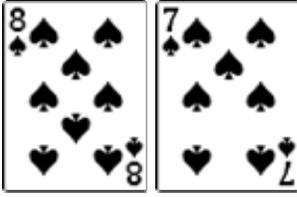
The flop comes out:



The opponent across the table moves ALL-IN.

Chad calls, of course. He's got top two pair. The only thing he's worried about is trips.

Chad's opponent flips over his cards. He's holding:



Obviously, Chad has a HUGE advantage.

The turn hits:



And then the river...



Chad loses to his opponent's lucky runner-runner flush.

Now at this point, Chad can do one of two things:

1. Start playing erratically...
2. CALM DOWN and dismiss this bad fortune...

The problem is, most players choose option one. But the reality is, situations like this WILL HAPPEN. And there's ABSOLUTELY NOTHING YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT.

You want all your money in the middle with those types of odds... but unfortunately sometimes the "suck out" will occur.

Now online, the "tilt" is worse. Not only is it more FREQUENT because of the bad players, but it's tough for Chad to find a way to "vent" it out. He's sitting there... starting to DWELL on the last hand... looking at the "hand history" function... cursing over and over...

He's not in a live game where he needs to be decent and polite. He's PISSED. And it's oh-so-easy to just go all-in with a couple clicks...

The point is, be careful of tilt online. It can quickly get the best of you...



BOREDOM: THE BANKROLL ROBBER

BOREDOM is almost as bad as tilt.

Because let's face it: Sitting in front of the computer and watching a bunch of animations play poker (after you've folded) is NOT exactly "fun"...

Interestingly, most players don't think, "Hey, this is a bad hand, but I'll play it anyway because I'm bored..."

It doesn't work like that.

Boredom CREEPS up on you... more of a subconscious thing... and robs your bankroll.

The way it does this is by causing you to make more LOOSE PLAYS.

Surprise, surprise.

This is YET ANOTHER reason that players are so loose online... because as you sit there and listen to the "clickety clicks" of chips in your poker room, YOU WANT TO PLAY. You want to bet, you want to raise, and you want to bluff...

At the casino you can strike up conversations with players, flirt with cocktail waitresses, or (gasp!) study your opponents' mannerisms and tells...

So what can you do online? These are four of my favorite ways to "cure" boredom:

1. Take notes...

I like to take notes on the competition. It keeps me engaged... plus, it helps later when I recognize betting patterns and learn about my opponents.

Often if I'm not in a hand I'll try to GUESS what one of the other players has... this helps me sharpen my skills and makes things more entertaining.

2. Play multiple games...

Winning online poker players often fold four out of five hands (depending on the game type, of course). This means things can get long and boring.

Many players therefore like to keep multiple tables going at the same time. This keeps them more DISCIPLINED since there's less downtime and twice (or more) the action.

Don't start playing multiple games at once until you can CONSISTENTLY beat the stakes you're at... otherwise you'll just lose money.

3. Read Poker Information...

I like to grab a poker magazine, new book, or any other poker article and read through it while I play online...

This adds to keeping my mind FRESH at the table.

I also like to play around with the odds calculator I have open... and continually learn odds and combinations that I can take to my LIVE/offline poker game. The odds calculator I recommend the most— hands-down— is “Holdem Genius” (www.HoldemGenius.com).

Here's what you can do...

Print out the last ten newsletters you've gotten from me and keep them handy the next time you play online poker. Just sift through them and look for topics and sections that are especially relevant to your game.

When you come across a new technique or strategy, you can test it out IMMEDIATELY!

4. Learn Chip Tricks...

Chip tricks are fun and time-consuming... and they don't require much “brain power”.

I practice new tricks and brush up on old ones during the “down times” of online poker games or tournaments...



WHY GOOD PLAYERS OFTEN PLAY BAD POKER ONLINE

Bad online poker play is NOT always the result of “poor skills”. In fact, I’ve known countless players who are GREAT in live games, but can’t stack up online.

What’s going on here?

The fact is, there are several reasons GOOD players can behave like AMATEURS online...

First, online poker takes away some key leverage points. One is reading tells... another is bluffing frequently... and another is a solid table image.

Instead, you have to leverage odds calculations, a disciplined hand selection, and increased post-flop “aggression levels”.

And making this “switch” isn’t an instant thing. It takes a lot of time and energy... and willingness to “rethink” one’s beliefs about how to play poker.

Another major reason good players “go bad” is because of the bad beats. The plain and simple truth is many people can’t handle the swings. They blame the card room, they call it “rigged”, and they give up.

Don’t let this happen to you.



SETTING UP YOUR PLAYING SPACE

A key difference between WINNERS and LOSERS is that winners pay attention to the “little things”.

One of these is WHERE YOU PLAY when you play online... and I’m not talking about the poker room itself. I’m talking about what your ENVIRONMENT looks like...

Here are the “do’s and don’ts” that I strongly recommend you adhere to...

- DO turn off the TV – Watching TV while playing online poker is a kiss of death for your bankroll. Not only will you be completely distracted from the game, you will get disconnected from the poker atmosphere. You won’t be thinking about poker between the hands... and this leads to loose and undisciplined play.
- DO sit in a comfortable chair – If you are uncomfortable, you’ll get frustrated more easily. When you’re comfortable, you’ll be able to focus better.
- DON’T lay down (with laptops) – You want to be in a comfortable chair, but you don’t want to be TOO comfortable. If you are lying down while playing, you are going to be tempted to SLEEP between hands. That’s a no-no.
- DO have a radio if you want – I have found that background music helps me play better poker. I don’t think of it as much of a distraction because I don’t focus on the music. It is also a crucial boredom fighter because the music works like a TV to provide a light distraction between hands, but you won’t get to out of the game. Music = Good; TV= Bad.
- DON’T bring up other programs on your computer – If you have your web browser up, a game of solitaire running, and your email inbox open, you will never be able to give serious attention to your game.
- DO have poker books (and my newsletters) handy – As we discussed, you can fight boredom and improve your skills by having a lot of poker literature around...

- DO have a notebook – If you want to manually take notes as opposed to using a software program, make sure that you have the notebook out at all times. You may need to refer to it for important information at any time during the game.



SIT & GO'S

Sit & Go's are HOT... and I want to cover some specific techniques you can use to win them...

I sincerely believe that Sit & Go's are revolutionizing the way poker is played. Literally, you can play dozens of TOURNAMENTS per day... every day... from the comfort of your own home. **WHENEVER YOU WANT!**

Mastering these games and developing a “system” for consistently winning is like writing your own paycheck. Seriously.

Patience and hand selection is everything.

The number one reason you'll lose a Sit & Go is because you played too many starting hands. The players in Sit & Go's are LOOSE... there are many reasons for this, but we won't cover them here. The thing to remember is this:

If you play a lot of hands against loose players, you will catch bad beats.

The answer then is to NOT play a lot of hands... and only play MONSTERS. The playing style to adopt is what I call “Tight-Aggressive SQUARED”.

Tight-aggressive squared means to play EXTREMELY tight with your hand selection... and EXTREMELY aggressively when you have a good hand. The great thing about Sit & Go's is that you will almost get action with your monster hands.

I've created this killer chart as a guide for you to follow. (PRINT THIS OUT.) There will be exceptions in each phase, of course, but for the most part this holds true. Follow this and you'll start placing in the money in more Sit & Go's starting IMMEDIATELY. (This is for 10-player Sit & Go's. It is basically the same for 8-player tables.)

# of Players Left	Your Game Strategy
10 – 8 Players	<p>When you have a monster hand (A-A, K-K, Q-Q) go all-in and play SUPER aggressively. Your goal should be to narrow the field to one caller and double up. If you have Big Slick, play it based on positioning... but still play it aggressively.</p> <p>The ONLY other hands you should play are pocket pairs and suited-connectors and Ace-X suited... and you should LIMP-IN ONLY with these hands. Your goal is to have a “hidden hand” that catches trips, a straight, or a flush that busts your opponents.</p> <p>Don’t play any other starting hands. Be disciplined and patient... the fish will kill each other off at this level.</p>
7 – 5 Players	<p>Maintain your previous game strategy. Only play premium hands. As the blinds go up, don’t bother playing suited-connectors or low pocket pairs unless you have a comfortable chip lead. Every action should either be RAISE or FOLD... never call.</p>
5 – 4 Players	<p>This is the phase right before payouts begin. Here, players at the table get tighter in hopes of finishing in the money. When you have good positioning and sense weakness, you can use your tight table image to steal the blinds (which will be reasonably high at this point).</p> <p>Lean on short-stacked players when they’re in the blinds by doubling their blinds. If you’re the chip leader, don’t let other players see a cheap flop. But don’t waste chips... be smart and play your POSITIONING.</p>
3 Players	<p>Now that you’ve placed in the money, be aggressive. Your goal is FIRST place... not second. Be very aggressive and steal the blinds from your opponents with good positioning. Don’t be afraid of risking all your chips. If you play it right, you’ll either place in third or in first... rarely in second.</p>
2 Players	<p>Hopefully you’re the chip leader at the table. If so, lean on your opponent by doubling the blinds EVERY HAND</p>

(or by putting him all-in if he's very short-stacked). If you're the short-stack, push all-in with pocket pairs, painted hands, and Ace-X suited. If the blinds are so high that you must make a move quickly, do it with connectors or any hand with an Ace.

Go for the money.

Your entire mentality in a Sit & Go should be to GO FOR THE MONEY. If you begin thinking of Sit & Go's like a BUSINESS... with profits and losses... it will make a lot of sense.

This will help you become more patient. In normal poker, being a 60/40 favorite or a 70/30 favorite with all your money in the middle is good. This is NOT the case with Sit & Go's... or at least not at the beginning of a Sit & Go. The reason is because you'll often get knocked out and the tournament will be useless.

The key is to be an OVERWHELMING favorite for your all-in hands... and you CAN do that by only playing monsters. Tight-aggressive squared is the name of the game.

This is also the reason why you should place THIRD or FIRST... but NOT second. At first glance this may seem strange... so let me explain.

When you make it in the money in the top three, you've accomplished your main goal. Now your goal should be FIRST PLACE. The reason is because it pays considerably more than second or third. The DIFFERENCE between second and third is relatively small.

That means when there are three players at the table, YOU should be pushing the action. Don't try to just sit back and wait for one of them to go out (unless there's a complete manic at the table). Instead, be aggressive and push your stack all-in with good hands.

Doing this will win you the blinds... which will build your chip stack VERY quickly. If you run into a great hand and lose, that's OK. By consistently following this approach you'll place in first much more often... and win more money in the long run.

Don't bluff.

When you're at low-stakes Sit & Go's online, bluffing isn't an option until you get down to just a few players (five or less in a 10-man game). The reason is because there is such

a huge percentage of DUMB online poker players who will call all the way down to the river with nothing but an Ace high or bottom pair.

Bluffing is a bad idea because it usually never works. This principle of not bluffing bad players is actually true for all types of no limit Holdem poker.

Calculate your profits per hour and aim for higher stakes.

One of the biggest mistakes I see with Sit & Go's is players who enter the WRONG STAKES games. The way to know the RIGHT stakes is to simply figure out what makes you the most money per hour. Period.

For instance, let's say you can play three Sit & Go's per hour. Let's say you place in the money for $\frac{1}{2}$ of the \$5 Sit & Go's you play and average \$16 in winnings for each time you place.

Now let's say you can win $\frac{1}{3}$ of the \$10 Sit & Go's you play in... and average \$35 in winnings for each time you place. Which level should you choose?

With the \$5 Sit & Go's, you're spending \$10 (let's ignore entry fees) to make \$16. So you make \$6 for every two games... which is \$3 for every game. That's \$9 per hour.

For the \$10 games you're spending \$30 to bring in \$35. So that's \$5 profit for every three games... which equals \$1.67 per hour.

This is a huge difference!

I've given you the LOWEST stakes games as examples here... and I hope you see my point. This type of discrepancy WIDENS when you start playing in higher stakes games.

My rule is this... start at the LOWEST level and work your way up. Build a bankroll at the \$5 games and then move to the \$10 ones. Build your bankroll there and move to \$20. And so on and so on. Follow this approach and you'll soon be making serious money per hour playing online poker.

The other thing to remember is that if you beat a lower stakes level... move up... then get your ass kicked and lose your money, don't despair! BUT DON'T DEPOSIT MORE MONEY! It just means you're not ready yet... and the answer is to go back down to the previous level and build your bankroll again.

The WORST thing you can do is get "stuck" at a level and keep depositing all your money in hopes of beating it. This is irresponsible gambling. Build a bankroll... risk it...

and then if you lose go back and build. Don't try to justify depositing large chunks of money into your online poker account because of the "bonuses".

Be smart and responsible... and as a result, your poker career will be much more profitable and rewarding. I can promise you that.

Use proper etiquette.

My last tip for you here with Sit & Go's is to not be a Jackass. Seriously. I see so many guys who act retarded with the chat features on Sit & Go's and basically shoot themselves in the foot.

The reason being a jerk is NOT smart is because EVERYONE sees it... and people will start "gunning" for you just to shut you up. Even if you pick on just one player with your trash talk, it annoys everyone.

What happens is that as soon as you enter a big hand, OTHER players will enter the hand too... just to get a chance at beating you. The reason it doesn't work to your advantage is because often there will be so many callers that your odds of winning the hand decrease dramatically.

Being rude and stupid with the chat features will lead you to fewer winnings and contributes to making poker LESS enjoyable. Don't do it.



ONLINE TELLS

A “tell” is a signal at the poker table that gives you some extra information about a player’s hand. In live poker, it’s often the way a player looks at you... or maybe the way he tosses his chips into the middle.

These signals are indeed important. Because you want to learn **AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE** about your opponents.

Online, though, you’re staring at a **COMPUTER SCREEN**... So it seems it takes “tells” out of the equation, right?

Wrong.

There are still “tells”... they’re just different. You can’t say a player **CLICKED** a certain way because he was bluffing. But you can make educated guesses about a player’s hand based on other factors... such as:

- Hand History
- Screen Names
- Table Chat
- Betting Patterns
- Positioning
- Chip Position
- Auto-Play Buttons

Some of these are useful in live poker, too.

OK, let’s take a look at each:

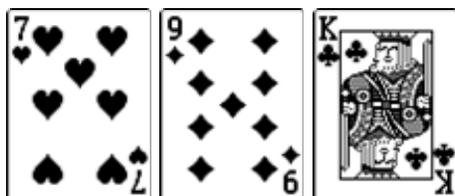
Hand History

The hand history of your opponent is the single greatest source of information in your poker game. It will tell you more about an opponent than anything else.

However, a lot of players don't seem to know that watching a player's hand selection is so important.

OK, let's say you fold pre-flop. Three players: Gary, Pete, and Jack all enter the pot. It's in the early rounds of a no limit Sit & Go tournament.

The flop comes out:



Gary checks, and Pete bets 100 into a pot of 90. This is a strong bet considering the pot size... so you'd put him on a King with a good kicker.

Jack calls, Gary folds.

You think Jack may have two high cards or a King with a mediocre kicker. If had a good kicker, he would have raised Pete.

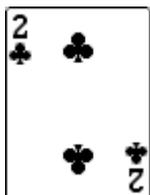
The turn hits:



Now Pete bets 300 into the 290 pot. Another strong bet... making you more certain he's got the King.

Jack thinks for a second... then calls.

The river hits:



Pete bets 200 into the 890 pot.

This is a signal that he's not so sure of his hand any more. Jack calls... showing that he's not totally confident either.

The two players flip over their cards...

Jack was holding K-8 suited. Not a bad hand... looser than at a live table... but "respectable" enough.

But what did Pete have?

Turns out he was on 9-6. Which means he was betting middle pair with a weak kicker. He also had the inside straight draw... but would have been dominated by the Jack.

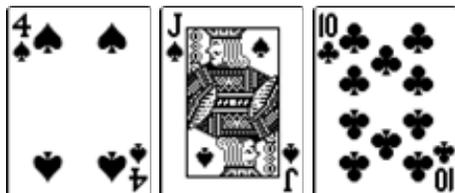
Now you KNOW that Pete is a loose player. It's unusual for a player to play loose just for one hand and then tighten up the rest of the day.

So you can assume that Pete is going to play many hands... and will get involved in high-action pots with poor-to-marginal hands. This "tell" gives you powerful information about Pete. The next time you have a good hand with him in the pot, you'll want to force serious action and consistently raise.

(I need to interject here that hand histories and betting patterns aren't really "tells" in the traditional sense of the word. But because they're so important online and give information about your opponents' hands, it's easier to talk about them in this section.)

OK, so the other thing that this hand tells you about Pete is the WAY that he plays. He was aggressive after the flop and turn, but backed down on the river when he realized how many hands could beat his.

You can take serious advantage of this by making moves on him when he shows WEAKNESS ON THE RIVER. For example, let's say you've got a pair of ladies (Q-Q) and the flop comes out:



You lead out with a strong bet... Pete is your only caller. You're confident you're ahead in the hand, because he would have raised had he had trips, two pair, or a higher pair.

The turn comes:



That's not a card you wanted to see. It gives you two pair, but now you're afraid Pete has trips.

Of course, you can't be scared away that easily... so you make another strong bet. Pete calls again. Now you're thinking he has something like K-T or A-T, since he didn't raise.

Finally, the river comes out:



Normally you'd make another big bet on the river and hope he calls. However, against this type of player you may not want to do that. You know Pete has a tendency to weaken up on the river without a hand.

So you figure he's going to fold. If he DOES fold, you want him to feel like he made the "right laydown". So you lead out with a HUGE bet... possibly putting Pete all-in... and representing one of the Jacks.

Pete folds his ten, of course. But what's important is that he tells himself that you got "lucky" to hit the Jack. He's not afraid of you in the future... he'll go heads-up with you again.

This is an example of "shearing" the sheep, but not skinning it. You'd never get away with this type of play in a live game. But here, if you make a "bully" bet, Pete will think you're a bully all the time and will be too scared to enter pots with you when he's weak.

But by convincing him you have the trip Jacks, Pete just thinks you were playing the cards, and that you're not a "shark" to be feared.

The goal is to INTIMIDATE opponents with your play, but not SCARE them from playing every pot you enter. It's a fine line, but an important one.

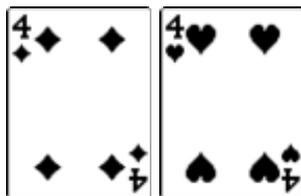
Plus, the great thing is, if Pete is so pot-committed that he decides to CALL-in this position, you'll win a giant pot.

Timing

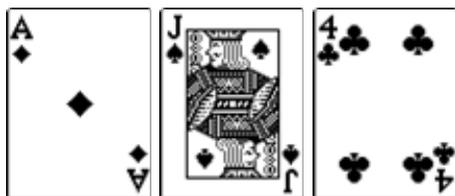
Timing at the online poker table is a "tell" that is hotly debated. Some believe it's the ONLY thing you can really rely on for information about an opponent's cards. Others say it's all phooey because it depends on the player's attention span and connection speed.

I believe that timing— while a SHAKY source of information— can still tell you some information about your opponents.

Let's say you get your cards:



The flop hits:



You lead out with a large bet. Your opponent thinks for his full time... and then calls.

If he had an Ace, he probably wouldn't have spent so much time thinking. You figure you're ahead in the hand either way.

The turn hits:



This is where I may move all-in in a Sit & Go... or make a huge bet in a ring game. But seeing as your opponent was tortured about calling the last bet, he'll probably fold. We want to milk him if he has that Jack.

So you continue the pot-commitment trap by leading out with a medium bet. You don't want to scare him away... you want to get more in the pot that you're about to win.

This time he calls after about ten seconds... and you're ready to push big in the next round of betting.

The river hits:



You take a few seconds (so as to not appear too eager)... and then put your opponent all-in. He KNOWS he's in major trouble, but with so many chips in the middle he's feeling pot-committed. He calls.

Who knows, he may have hit two pair.

But then he sees your trips...

He curses, leaves the table, slaps his computer desk, and stops playing for the day.

You check your hand history tool to see what he had. Sure enough: J-7. He would have definitely folded had you come out too strong on the turn... but by letting him hit the seven you got all his money.

And it all ORIGINATED when you picked up a "tell" about the timing. You could SENSE that he wasn't sure whether or not to call the best on the flop.

Good work.

Now... don't put too much faith into the timing. Don't go buying pots and bluffing just because you "sensed weakness" because there was a delay by your opponent.

But with a strong hand, you can afford to use the "timing tells" since it's really just a matter of HOW MUCH you win, not WHETHER you win.

OK, the following is a chart I've put together as the "meanings" of timed moves. BEWARE—this is not "gospel". Far from it. This is just a GENERAL analysis that's been confirmed by many hours at the poker tables. It can be very useful... just don't base any decisions on it. Especially since many smart players (like you) will DELIBERATELY delay your moves, make instant raises out of nowhere, and do anything to confuse the other players...

All right, you get the idea. You know that this isn't a SUREFIRE thing... just an additional piece of information that can help you. Right? Lol...

Here's the chart:

The Move And Timing	The Meaning Behind It
Instant Check	Very Weak
Long Pause, Then Check	Weak or Drawing
Instant Call	Very Strong
Long Pause, Then Call	Strong or if aggressive player, mediocre hand
Instant Raise	VERY Strong
Pause, Then Raise	Strong

Combine these TIMING TELLS with a mental "history" (or put it in your notebook). For instance, if the last three times your opponent made a quick check he folded to a bet, you can guess he'll continue that behavior again in the game.

Table Chat

"Table chat" can actually tell you a lot about your opponents...

A player who talks a lot about things completely unrelated to online poker is probably new to the game (or at least to the online poker world). You want opponents like these. Because you can take advantage of their inexperience.

Also, look for players who don't chat at all but then suddenly start chatting in the middle of a hand. I've seen players say something like this:

>>> Forget it, I have to go get dinner.

Or

>>> Today just wasn't my day...

And then they'll make a HUGE BET...

These players want you to call. So disappoint them and fold. They're trying to make it look like they're "desperate" to stop playing.

Yea, right.

Seems childish, but it happens. When you see it, get out.

On the other side, a player that constantly chats can be quite dangerous when he's quiet. If a manic player is always talking trash and attacking other players... but then all of the sudden SHUTS UP...

Fold your cards!

This is like the quiet before the storm... so run for cover.

The last table talk tell is when a cocky manic SAYS he has a monster. It means he probably does. This is the player who's always pushing action, bluffing, etc. This type of player gets an ego trip when he tells everyone he's got a monster but still gets a caller (because his opponent thinks it's a bluff).

Betting Patterns

As you know, players tend to fall-into DISTINCTIVE, IDENTIFIABLE betting patterns for each type of hand they play. And often they'll bet the SAME AMOUNT for each type.

The first key is to NOT be one of these players. Mix up your bets. Do NOT bet the same each time...

The good news is, at low-stakes online poker your opponents probably won't be smart enough to pay attention anyway. If you bet 100 chips every time you get Queens, Kings, or Aces... they probably won't notice.

But YOU WILL notice when your opponents fall-into patterns... right? The “secret” is to PAY ATTENTION. Period.

For instance... let’s say you identify an opponent who consistently check raises. The flop comes out painted and it’s you two heads-up. He checks to you... you’ve got a draw.

What do you do?

Normally I recommend taking control of the betting on a draw that way you can get a free river card. But not here. Because if you bet you’ll get raised... and then you’ll be over your head.

So you check and see a free card...

If you MAKE your draw, it’s pay day. Because your opponent will bet after the turn after sensing your weakness on the flop. And the rest is history.

With no limit Holdem, the WAY you bet isn’t as easy to identify as the AMOUNTS being bet. Really pay attention to VOLUME... not necessarily 50 chips versus 55... but rather BIG BETS versus SMALL BETS.

It’s counter-intuitive, but most players bet SMALLER with big hands and BIGGER with hands that aren’t so good. It’s almost a NATURAL thing to do, since you want your opponents to call.

The really great thing is when you run into an opponent in a ring game who always bets the same amount for his big hands. You can literally have a perfect read on him over and over and over... and he’ll be amazed that you always seem to know when to fold.

Another important pattern is finding when opponents OVER-BET the pot. Watch when two players go into a showdown. Let’s say player A bets 300 on the river into a 1000 chip pot. His opponent calls. Player A then turns over the nut flush (and there were no full-house possibilities on the board).

This shows you that Player A really wanted a call. He had such a good hand he didn’t want to scare out the opponent.

If you see this a few more times with him, that’s very useful. Because when he bets 500 on the river into a 300 chip pot, you can guess he’s buying it. And then you can bust his bluff with your kicker-less top pair.

Chip Position

There's a lot of differences between the chip leader, middle-stack player, and desperate short stack. The major "tells" you can get based on stack size are distinguished between the big stack and the short stack.

Chip Tell For Short Stacks

There's always a sense of DESPERATION with short-stacked players. This person will move all-in with mediocre hands... trying to increase his stack to a point where he's competitive again.

Short-stacked players also fall victim to the "drainage" effect... which makes them prone to playing bad hands and pissing away the rest of their chips.

If a short stack moves all-in, remember that it may be his last-ditch attempt to get back to "normal" stack levels. After all, it's no fun playing without the HOPE that you can win.

Of course, you still need a good hand. Don't call a short-stack's all-in with ten high... just because you don't put him on a big hand. The fact remains—he'll double up from you!

Challenge the short stack with good cards. You don't need monsters... just be smart about what will win in a showdown.

Chip Tell For Big Stacks

The POWER of the chip leader is undeniable. These are the players who can force expensive action and bully the rest of the table.

Chip leaders usually win a lot of pots by simply betting aggressively... because the other players don't want to go heads-up with them.

If you're going to go heads-up with the chip leader, you'd better have something good... because you need to be fully prepared to put every chip into the middle. You can't bluff the chip leader.

Auto-Play Buttons

The "auto-play" buttons are an appealing way to play Texas Holdem... especially limit Holdem where the action is more predictable.

In you're not familiar with what I'm talking about, auto-play buttons are the options offered in the poker room that allow you to decide your actions BEFORE it's your turn. Then when the action comes to you, the computer automatically DOES what you told it.

I don't recommend using the auto-play features...

Because they can reveal a lot of information about your hand.

When you use the auto-play buttons, you're basically telling everyone at the table, "Hey, this is my move... and I'm so confident in this move that I don't even need to see what everyone else does before I act!"

The WORST features are the auto-raise or auto-call buttons... those are just plain silly. Don't use them. Ever. Period.

Now... when watching your opponents, you want to look for INSTANTANEOUS decisions. That means they're probably using the auto buttons...

The most common and useful piece of information you can get is from people who auto "check". You can pretty much bet they don't have a hand and have no interest in winning it. You can bet them out.

The one auto feature that you can use is the auto FOLD buttons. It does little harm to show people you just won't play crappy hands. The exception is if you have some crazy strategy to look like a manic (which can be effective at times).

Now here's a really cool trick I figured out...

Sometimes I'll wait 15-20 seconds before making a move when the action is to me. This FRUSTRATES the hell out of my opponents...

...and the result is that they get so irritated they use the auto buttons!

It's beautiful (especially in limit poker). Because as soon as I make my move a large portion of the table instantly folds, checks, or bets. It tells me a lot about what these players are thinking... and their willingness to get involved in the pot.

OK, so the summary is to not use the auto-play buttons unless you're just folding bad hands. Watch for players who DO use the buttons... and try to get a sense of their hands from this behavior.



CONCLUSION

All right... So those are my strategies and techniques for no limit Texas Holdem poker. I sincerely hope you enjoyed this book. And more importantly, I hope that it helps you become a better, more profitable poker player.

If you have any comments or questions, email me at roy@royrounder.com. I try to answer emails, but it's difficult since I prefer to spend my time PLAYING poker. If I don't get back to you, I apologize in advance. I also try to answer emails within my NEWSLETTERS, so be sure to read those. (For general support inquiries, contact support@royrounder.com and you'll get an answer within 24 hours.)

I've got several new products coming out within the next few months, including a product for Sit & Go strategies, a book about online poker, and a DVD course...

These tools will give you a HUGE EDGE over your opponents. And they'll make your "hobby" more profitable than ever. So stay tuned. As a valued customer, you'll get "first dibs" on anything new. OK, now go play some poker! I'll talk to you soon.

Your Friend,

Roy Rounder