



BEGINNERS GUIDE TO POKER

FOREWORD



LEARN

You and I are the same - every successful Poker player starts out as a beginner. When I started playing Poker, I would learn the game and improve my skills by playing freerolls and low buy-in tournaments every day, and I would continue to improve these skills by watching videos and reading articles.

PLAY

By playing tournaments daily, I could test out strategies, improve my game and learn from my mistakes. Playing regularly is a great way to improve your game and to build up confidence.

PRACTICE

The more you practice and improve your game, the greater opportunity you have to win. This led me on an incredible path, where I was fortunate enough to freeroll into the PSPC (\$25,000 PokerStars Players Championship). My goal for the tournament was only to play well and make it into the money but, once I had achieved this, I knew that it was time to dream...

Anyone can learn the game of Poker, but if you dedicate time to improving your game and have a competitive nature, you too could one day be sitting at a PokerStars final table.

Hopefully this book is the start of that journey.

RAMÓN COLILLAS
PokerStars Team Pro

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK:

If you're new to poker or just wanting to improve your game then download this book, store it on your phone or tablet, then study and restudy the content whenever you can.

Let's get started!

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GETTING TO KNOW

**“ONE OF THE GREATEST
GAMES ON EARTH.”**

Before we get on with the Poker Basics, which will guide you through everything you need to know as a new player, there are a few fundamentals about the game that will aid your general understanding.

In particular you should have an idea of the numerous variants of the game, including the differences between No-limit and Fixed limit, and between “cash” and “tournament” poker.

What you learn in these early stages will be explained in greater depth throughout the many courses. You can progress at your own pace and should get in the habit of going back to re-read articles to refresh your memory.

THE GAME



POKER VARIANTS

There are many different variants of the game of poker, some of which seem similar but have specific quirks and different strategies. In old-school gangster movies, for example, they might be playing games known as five-card draw or seven-card stud, while some of today's more advanced players, could be playing Omaha hi-lo, with any number of their own personal rules tagged on.

But let's forget about all of those for a moment. By far the most common poker variant is no limit Texas Hold'em - sometimes abbreviated to NLHE. Specifically, this is the game where each player receives two personal "hole" cards and can bet all of their chips at any time.

All of the rules and mechanics of the game will be explained as this course progresses, but bear in mind that when we are talking about "poker", we are almost always talking about no limit Texas Hold'em, unless otherwise stated. It is the easiest variant to learn and is justifiably the most popular.

Most televised tournaments are NLHE competitions, including main events on the European Poker Tour (EPT), and all other regional PokerStars Live tours.

NO LIMIT OR FIXED LIMIT

As stated above, the beginner's courses at PokerStars School focus almost exclusively on no limit Texas Hold'em. It is therefore important to understand what "no limit" means in a poker context.

In some games - known as "fixed limit" or "pot limit" - players are permitted to bet only a very specific amount, determined by the pre-arranged level of the game. But "no limit" means that there are no betting restrictions: no matter how many chips you have in front of you during a no limit game, you are allowed to bet them all whenever it is your turn.

Crucially, you are not allowed to bet any more than you have in front of you. You cannot reach into your pocket, or visit the PokerStars Cashier, when you are in the middle of a hand. But if you have the chips on the table, you can wager them all at any time in a no limit game.

As a result of this betting freedom, no limit games can be quite volatile. Players can lose all their chips - or double their stack - in only one hand. Later in the course, we deal with the crucial concepts of bankroll management, which will ensure you do not go broke. But for the time being remember that a no limit game means that all your chips are in play all the time. Be careful and learn at the play money, or low-limit, tables before tackling no limit games.

TOURNAMENT V CASH PLAY

Even at this very early stage in your poker career, it is worth understanding the difference between “cash” and “tournament” poker. PokerStars School covers both in depth in later courses, but it is important to know what separates the two.

In short: a cash game is played with chips that have a real cash value and players join and leave the game as they please. Essentially a cash game is endless, with the participants changing continually as play progresses.

Cash games take place around only one table. You play a cash game against the players beside whom you are seated, and if you don't like those opponents, you can get up and find another game. (Note: there is not any actual cash on the table. All poker is played using chips, or online where your balance is indicated on the screen.)

By contrast a tournament is played in accordance with a very strict and pre-defined structure, costing a specific entrance fee. Any number of players can enter, and players in a tournament are spread across as many tables as it takes to fit them in.

A tournament is completed when a player has either lost all his chips or has won everyone else's.

At the beginning of a tournament, all the players exchange an entry fee for a number of tournament chips. Everyone is charged the same amount to enter, and everyone gets the same number of chips. From then on, these chips are the only currency that matters. Tournament chips have no cash value from the moment the tournament begins.

The champion - i.e., the player who is never knocked out and accumulates all the others' chips - takes the biggest slice of a prize pool, with money also going to an agreed percentage of the top-placed finishers. Second place will win an agreed amount; third place slightly less, and so on.

When you see poker champions waving a huge check at the end of a tournament, their prize comprises the lion's share of the total money wagered by all the players who were knocked out along the way.

Tournaments follow an agreed format, and the key factor is the advertised entry fee. A \$3 tournament might follow the same structure as a \$300 tournament: entrants might get, say, 3,000 tournament chips for their original investment and play would proceed in precisely the same manner.

Things are markedly different in a cash game, where there is no fixed moment at which it must end, nor a pre-defined fee. Players can typically buy back in to a cash game if they lose their chips, a practice that only applies in some rebuy tournaments.



TEXAS HOLD'EM

**“YOU’VE GOT TO KNOW WHEN TO
HOLD’EM, KNOW WHEN TO FOLD’EM”**

Texas Hold’em is played using a standard 52 card deck, and between two and ten players on a given table. Big tournaments may include many hundreds of players but during any one hand, the player is only competing against others on his or her table.

RULES



CHAPTER 2

Before every hand, one player is designated the nominal “dealer”, identified by a marker known as the dealer button or “button”. This person does not actually deal the cards - especially not online, where it is done automatically - but the position of the dealer determines which two players have to post the “blind” bets that get the action started.

The two players to the left of the red dealer button must post these compulsory “blinds” - so called because they are placed before anyone even sees their cards. The player on the dealer’s immediate left posts the “small blind” and the player one further seat around the table posts the “big blind”, which is usually twice the size of the small blind.

In the illustration, the dealer is in seat five with the button in front of him. The two seats to his left are “in the blinds”.



CHAPTER 2

After every hand is complete, the dealer button moves clockwise one position around the table, which means that players take turns to be the dealer, the small blind and the big blind.

After the blinds have been posted, all players are dealt two cards face down. These are known as “hole” cards, and can only be seen and used by one player. By the end of the hand, five more “community” cards may have been dealt, face up in the middle of the table, which are available for all players to use.

The first three community cards are exposed together (known as the “flop”), then a fourth card (known as the “turn”) is dealt individually, and then a fifth (known as the “river”) is exposed. A betting round separates each deal.

The aim of poker is to make the best five-card hand out of the seven available - two in an individual’s hand and the five community cards.

THE FOUR BETTING ROUNDS

If a hand of poker is played all the way to its conclusion, there will be four betting rounds - or four periods during which players can commit their chips to the pot. A player can also “fold” their cards and leave the action at any time.

A betting round must be concluded satisfactorily before the remaining players see more cards and another betting round begins.

PRE-FLOP THE FIRST ROUND OF BETTING

The first betting round takes place before the first three community cards (the “flop”) are dealt. This action is described as “pre-flop” and at this stage players are wagering based solely on the strength of their two concealed “hole” cards.

The player sitting to the left of the big blind acts first - a position known as “under the gun”. Players then act in turn, moving clockwise around the table.

You have the following options when it is your turn to act:

- **Fold:** This means that you no longer want to play the hand, and are throwing your cards away. You no longer have any claim to the money in the pot, even if you paid one of the blinds
- **Call:** This means that you want to lay the hand by matching the size of the current bet. Pre-flop, this will be at least the size of the big blind, and may be greater if any other player has raised

- **Raise:** This means that you want to raise the size of the current bet. If nobody before you has made a raise, you can make a raise yourself
- If you are sitting in the big blind and no else has raised before you, you have the option to check. This means that you do not wish to commit any more chips to the pot. You can only check pre-flop if you are in the big blind and no one else has raised

The betting round is complete when all players have either folded, indicating they no longer wish to continue in the hand, or committed the same amount of chips to the pot.



THE FLOP THE SECOND ROUND OF BETTING

After the first round of betting is complete, the first three community cards are dealt face up in the middle of the table. This is known as the “flop”.

Another round of betting begins with the first player still with cards to the left of the dealer.

If no one has bet, you have the option to check (i.e., to move the action to the next player without committing any chips to the pot.) Otherwise you have the same options as you did pre-flop: fold, call or raise.

Again, the betting round is complete when all players have either folded, indicating they no longer wish to continue in the hand, or committed the same amount of chips to the pot.

THE TURN THE THIRD ROUND OF BETTING

When all bets have been made in the second betting round, and at least two players still have cards, the fourth community card is dealt. This is known as the “turn”. Another round of betting begins, starting with the first player still in the hand to the left of the dealer. Play progresses exactly as it did after the flop.

THE RIVER THE FOURTH ROUND OF BETTING

When all bets have been made in the third round of betting, the fifth and final community card is dealt. This is known as the “river”. A final round of betting begins, again starting with the first player to the left of the button.

Any players still with cards go to a “showdown”.



SHOWDOWN

After the last round of betting is complete, each player must form the best possible five-card poker hand, made from a combination of their two hole cards and the five community cards.

At this point, all players remaining must show their hands, so that the best hand can be determined. The player who has the highest ranked poker hand at showdown wins the pot.

In the example pictured, Player 7 has two pair: kings and queens, with a seven. The five best cards available to him are the two kings on the flop, the two queens (his own hole cards), and the seven. (Remember: all poker hands have five cards.)

Player 5 has three of a kind. He has one king "in the hole" which he matches with the two kings on the flop. His other cards are the seven and the six, which were the turn and river.

Three of a kind is better than two pair and so player BB (Big Blind) wins.

If more than one player has the same winning hand, the pot is split evenly among all the players with the winning hand.

When the current hand is complete, the dealer button is passed one position to the left and the next hand begins.



POKER HAND

**“AT SHOWDOWN ONLY THE
BEST HAND ALWAYS WINS”**

RANKINGS

You can win a hand of poker two ways: either by forcing all your opponents to fold their cards or by having the best hand at showdown. You therefore need to know the ranking of poker hands, i.e., what beats what.

In Texas Hold'em, players make the best hand using their two hole cards and the five community cards. A poker hand must consist of five cards, and it does not matter how many of your hole cards you use. Sometimes you will use both, sometimes only one and on some occasions, none of your hole cards will be used.

If the community cards, for example, were



then all remaining players will have a royal flush. It is impossible to beat this hand with any hole cards. All the suits in poker are of equal value. It makes no difference whether someone has the ace of clubs or the ace of diamonds. If remaining players have the same hand at showdown, only in different suits, the pot is split.



HAND RANKINGS

The value of poker hands is determined by how rare or common it is to be dealt them, with the most common hands valued lower than the rarer hands. The complete list of poker hands is as follows, in increasing order of scarcity:



HIGH CARD

Any hand that does not qualify under a category listed here.



ONE PAIR

Two cards of a matching rank and three unrelated side cards.



TWO PAIR

Two cards of a matching rank, another two cards of a different matching rank, and one side card.



THREE OF A KIND

Three cards of the same rank.



STRAIGHT

Five cards in sequence.



FLUSH

Five cards of the same suit.



FULL HOUSE

Three cards of the same rank, and two cards of a different, matching rank.



FOUR OF A KIND

Four cards of the same rank, and one side card or 'kicker'.



STRAIGHT FLUSH

Five cards in numerical order, all of identical suits.



ROYAL FLUSH

Five cards in numerical order, all of identical suits.



HIGH CARD



If you have no pair, three of a kind, straight, flush, full house, etc., then the highest card in your hand is considered to be decisive. The hand above, in which the best card is an ace and there is no other combination of poker hand, is known as “ace high”.

Ace high beats king high. King high beats queen high, and so on. If the high cards in two players’ hands is the same, the second-highest card becomes decisive. If these cards are also the same, the third-highest card plays and so on. These cards are known as the kicker.

HIGH CARD ACE, KING KICKER:

Player 1 has



Player 2 has



The board is



Both players have an ace, but Player 1 wins, because he has a king as his second highest card (kicker). His opponent only has a queen.

ONE PAIR



If you can form a hand containing two cards of the same value, you have a pair. The hand above contains a pair of aces, with a king kicker. A pair of aces beats any other hand containing only a pair in NLHE (aces are high in poker). The king would be decisive if an opponent also had a pair of aces.

TWO PAIR



If you have two different pairs in your hand, then you have “two pair”. In the hand above, you have two pair, kings and queens.

The ranking of the cards is important. Two pair, kings and queens, beats queens and jacks, for example. And the biggest pair is always decisive. Two pair, aces and threes, beats two pair, kings and queens.



is better than



If two players have the same two pairs, then the fifth card in the hand is decisive.



beats



Because the fifth card, the Ace is a higher ranking than a Ten.

THREE OF A KIND



Three cards of the same rank is known as “three of a kind” - sometimes known as “trips” or “a set”, depending on the precise formation of the hand.

You have a set when your hole cards contain a pair and one of the community cards is of the same rank.

If you have



and the board is



then you have a set with



Trips is when there is already a pair on the board and one of your hole cards is of the same rank.

A set is preferable to trips, because with trips you have the problem that one of your opponents may have the same three of a kind, but with a better kicker or even as a full house.

STRAIGHT



A straight consists of five consecutive cards of different suits. The hand above is a “king high straight” as the highest card is a king. If two players have a straight, then the highest card wins.

FLUSH



A flush consists of five non-consecutive cards of the same suit. It doesn't matter which suit you are holding, and the rank of the cards is only important if you are up against another flush.

The “nut flush” is the name given to the highest possible flush, typically ace high. If your hole cards are



and the flop comes



you have flopped the nut flush.

If two players have a Flush, the player with the highest card wins. If both players have the same high card, the second-highest card wins, etc.

If Player 1 has



and Player 2 has



on a board of



then Player 2 wins with a flush containing the



which is ahead of Player 1's



FULL HOUSE



A full house consists of three of a kind plus a pair. The hand above is called “aces full of sevens” because the player has three aces and two sevens.

The rank of the card in the three-of-a-kind is decisive, so



beats



In poker jargon, a full house is also known as a “boat”.

FOUR OF A KIND



Four of a kind, also known as quads, consists of four cards of the same rank and one card of another rank. If two players have four of a kind, which is very rare, then the four of a kind with the highest card rank wins. If two players have the same four of a kind, then the kicker card is decisive.

STRAIGHT FLUSH



A straight flush is five consecutive cards of the same suit. If two players have a straight flush then the highest card wins.

The highest possible straight flush, and the best hand in poker, is an ace high straight flush, also known as a...

ROYAL FLUSH



A royal flush consists of a straight from ten to the ace with all five cards of the same suit. A royal flush is exceptionally rare and is therefore the most coveted hand in poker.



SPLIT POT

If two or more players reach showdown with a hand that is of equal value, then the pot is split and each remaining player gets the same amount.

For example, if Player 1 has



and Player 2 is holding



on a board of



then both players have two pair (aces and eights) with a queen kicker.

The



is higher than the



but it doesn't play, because only the best five-card poker hand counts. It is a split pot.

The pot would also be split in the following example:

Player 1 is holding



and Player 2 has



on a board of



Both players have the identical straight. The pair of aces doesn't play, since it doesn't contribute to building the best possible five-card poker hand.

Split pots often occur in Hold'em, because five of the available seven cards are identical for all players. If the last two cards are of same rank as well, or aren't required to form the best possible hand, then the pot is split automatically. When both players start with similar hands, e.g.



against



the result is almost always a split pot.

THE KICKER

As already mentioned in some previous examples, a kicker determines who wins a showdown if two players have the same hand. It is not a key component in building the hand, but it can decide who wins if two players have similar hands.

A hand consists of five cards, but only a straight, flush, full house and straight flush use all five cards. However, with hands where not all of the cards are required to make the hand, such as three of a kind or two pair, the remaining cards can be the decision maker.

For example, If Player 1 has a hand such as



and Player 2



the



in Player 2's hand wins the hand for Player 2.

Another example if Player 1 has



and Player 2 has



with the board showing



then Player 1 wins. Although both players have three queens, Player 1's



outkicks their opponents.



TABLE POSITION

“SEAT OPEN”

Good poker players are obsessed with “position” - specifically, their position relative to the dealer button during any hand of play. The dealer button not only determines which players post the two blinds (in the two seats immediately left of the button), but also the order of the action on all subsequent betting rounds.

Action in poker moves clockwise, away from the dealer. The player to the dealer’s immediate left acts first and betting progresses all the way round the table until it reaches the dealer again.

It follows that it is always best to be the dealer. On most of the betting rounds (and all of those post-flop) the dealer is the last person to act, which means he or she has been able to accrue the most information on the strength of the other players’ hands.

If the opponents have all shown weakness, by checking for example, the dealer can bet and potentially pick up small pots. If any of the opponents have shown strength, with big bets or raises, the dealer can fold and lose the minimum from weaker hands.

Playing strategy alters depending on table position, with a nine-handed table being divided into early, middle and late position.



EARLY POSITION

Players in the two blind seats - the small blind (SB) and the big blind (BB) - are considered to be in "early position". Likewise the players in the two seats immediately to the left of the big blind.

The first of these, immediately to the left of the big blind, is said to be "under the gun" (UTG) because this player is the first to act in the pre-flop betting round and has no information at all on what his opponents intend to do. The player to his left, also in early position, is UTG+1.

Players in early position need to have extremely strong hands to enter a pot. They will be forced to act earliest and will have minimal information from their opponents.

MIDDLE POSITION

"Middle position" (MP) is defined as those seats between the player UTG+1 and the seat to the dealer's immediate right. Players in middle position can have marginally looser starting hand requirements than those in early position because there are fewer players to their left to act behind them.

However, it is still risky to enter a pot from this position as the players in later position will have an advantage.

LATE POSITION

"Late position" is by far the strongest position to be in. The seat to the immediate right of the dealer is known as the "cut off" (CO). The dealer is said to be "on the button" (BTN).

These are the best seats to have because you can see all the action ahead and can gather the most information. It follows that you can have significantly weaker holdings in these positions because you have the best opportunity to judge the strength of the hands you are facing.

SUMMARY

Position is important because being able to act after other players gives you critical information. If several players have already entered the hand, you know that you need a much stronger holding to play. Conversely, if everyone has folded around to you, any two cards might be enough to raise the blinds.

Generally, you should play more hands from late position than from middle position, and more from middle position than from early position.



ENTERING

“RAISING CHIPS”

We saw in the hand raking lesson how you go about assessing the value of hands, and once you have figured out their strength, you need to decide how you want to play them.

Very little is ever cut and dried in poker. General rules can be bent many times, depending on the circumstances. But your options pre-flop are always the same: to play (call or raise) or not to play (fold).

Your decision here determines much about how the rest of the hand plays out, and will likely depend upon three crucial factors:

- Your hand strength
- Your position at the table
- Your opponents' action in front of you

THE POT



GROUPING STARTING HANDS

As we have seen, various factors combine to make one starting hand stronger than another - namely whether it is paired, suited or close in rank. As a result, poker hands can subsequently be sorted into loose groups and you can begin thinking about the strategy for playing each.

We'll call the strongest hands "monsters" and the weakest "trash", with a couple of categories in between.

GROUP 1: MONSTERS



and sometimes



Huge pairs are the best starting hands in Texas Hold'em poker, with aces the best of them all. These are "monster" hands and should always be played, even from early and middle position or against an opponent's raise. It is advantageous to play these hands very aggressively, so you should definitely raise when you have a monster. See a monster, raise it up.

Many experts also consider a suited ace-king to be a monster hand. It is connected, both in suit and rank, and these are the highest two cards you can have without a pair. Under most circumstances it can be regarded as a monster and played accordingly. But be aware that it is actually only ace high if it does not connect with a flop. For some experts, it belongs only with the other very strong hands described below.

GROUP 2: VERY STRONG HANDS



These are all very strong hands, but considerably less valuable than the hands in Group 1. This group contains paired cards slightly lower than the out-and-out monsters described above, or high-ranked connecting cards that are not quite the very best. An unsuited ace-king, for instance, is marginally less valuable than a suited version. A suited ace-queen is not quite as closely connected.

Nevertheless, you should play and raise with these very strong hands in most cases. However, if there is a raise and a re-raise in front of you, you should be very wary that an opponent may have a better hand. You may consider folding. The raiser or re-raiser could easily have a hand from Group 1, which will be beating yours.

GROUP 3: SPECULATIVE HANDS

Any pair from



to



any ace with a kicker lower between a jack and nine, any suited ace, two suited cards ranked 10 or higher

(e.g. ).



two cards of the same suit with a maximum gap of two ranks

( and ).

The most important factors in assessing your starting hand are whether your hole cards are paired, connected, or high in rank. "Speculative" hands are typically missing one or two of these things: they're a pair, but not a particularly high pair; they're suited, but not especially close in rank, etc.

Crucially all of these hands have the potential to make something much stronger, but are not particularly strong on their own. In early position you should probably fold them, because someone is likely to raise in later position and put you under pressure.

By contrast, in late position you could consider a raise, especially when all opponents in front of you have folded. If someone calls, you know that you have the potential to make something significantly stronger.

The most important lesson to learn about speculative hands is that they should be folded if someone else shows much greater strength, or if the hands' potential is not realized.



GROUP 4: WEAK/TRASH STARTING HANDS

All other hands are considered weak starting hands. They are trash. They are neither highly ranked, nor connected in any meaningful way. Even something like



is weak. It may look like it has potential to make a flush or a straight, but it is so low that it could often still be losing.

You should not play this kind of hand without a very good reason. You'll see more experienced play them, when they know their opponents well and have the correct odds to call.

CONSIDERING POSITION

As ever in poker, your position at the table is a crucial factor to consider. This applies especially in your pre-flop decision making. If a large number of players can act behind you, you need to be very selective with your starting hands.

TRACKING THE ACTION

Another important factor to consider pre-flop is the action in front of you. If an opponent has already entered the pot, you know that they like their hand to some degree. It's your job to figure out what type of hand this player has.

You need to adapt your starting hand selection to this new information. You may need to tighten up and only play hands that are strong enough to compete against their hand. You never know exactly what hand your opponent holds but often you can narrow down the range of possible holdings and get a better understanding of what you are facing.

CONCLUSION

The first decision you should make when receiving your hole cards is whether they are strong enough to justify entering the pot. Good starting hands often make good showdown hands, so the decision you make immediately can affect everything that follows.

As a beginner, you should probably play only the hands considered to be strong and fold all others. There is no shame in folding consistently - another hand will be along very soon.

But once you have decided to play, you should play aggressively and consistently. You must also factor table position into your assessment of how strong your hand is, and you must make sure you pay attention to others at the table. They are giving you information about the strength of their hands when they bet or raise. Make sure you are watching.

BET SIZING

“MIX UP YOUR BET SIZING”

If you decide to bet, it is very important to wager the right amount. The most important thing to know is that the size of a bet is measured relative to the pot. All players should be aware of how big the pot is so they know how much they could potentially win by continuing with their hand.

If you bet \$10 into a pot that only stands at \$5, you are risking a lot to gain a little. It is a huge bet. On the other hand, if you bet \$100 into a pot that is already at \$1,000, the bet is tiny compared with the pot.

Although fashions in bet sizing are always changing, and advanced players have different reasons for betting different sizes, the following are widely accepted definitions:

Small bet: about half the pot.

Medium-sized bet: between half and three quarters of the pot.

Large bet: more than three quarters of the pot.

This applies in cash games or tournaments. In the former, the pot will be real money, while in the latter it will comprise tournament chips. But the general guidelines apply in both instances.



SMALL BETS

The size you want to bet will always depend on the specific situation, but typically players might want to make small bets on a dry board (i.e., where there are few connecting cards), on the river (when all community cards have been exposed) or as a continuation bet (i.e., following up a pre-flop raise).

On a dry board - If there are few to no draws possible - for example a flop of



- then it is not possible to have a flush draw or an open-ended straight draw. Therefore, it is not as important to protect a big hand because the chances of it being outdrawn are slim. It is OK to bet relatively small, in the hope of attracting a call to increase the size of the pot. (Remember: if you typically bet small with a good hand then you should typically bluff small as well. Good opponents can spot changes in patterns and can figure out when you are bluffing and when you are not.)

On the river - If all the community cards are out already, no one can outdraw your hand. It follows that it is no longer necessary to protect a big hand. Therefore, the situation is similar to an extremely dry board and bets on the river tend to be smaller than bets on other streets.

A continuation bet means to bet on the flop after raising pre-flop. You are continuing your aggression, hence the name. This is a good way to pick up the pot if your opponent missed the flop. It's not necessary to make a big bet to do so as your opponent should already be convinced of the strength of your hand from your pre-flop aggression.

BIG BETS

In certain situations, big bets can be a very strong weapon. They will put a lot of pressure on your opponents and force them into decisions that can cost them a lot of their chips. Big bets can be useful to bluff people off decent hands, gain huge value with strong hands or to protect against strong draws.

Here are typical situations when to make a big bet:

On a draw heavy board - In contrast to a "dry board" described above, you should bet big when there are many ways in which your strong hand can be outdrawn. Suppose you are holding



in the big blind. Several players call and nobody raises, so you see a flop for free. It comes



giving you two pair.

Your hand is strong at this stage, but a lot of cards are dangerous. Your opponents could easily make a flush, a straight or a better two pair on the turn or river. You should make a big bet here, possibly even bigger than the size of the pot.

Two pair is a hand that often calls for big bets because although it is strong enough to be ahead most of the time, it is weak enough that it can be outdrawn on turn and river. (This only holds true if there is no pair on the board. Otherwise a lot of players might have two pair and your hand is usually not strong enough to make a huge bet.)

Pre-flop - Before any community cards have been dealt, even a very strong hand can be vulnerable against a significantly weaker one. Even if you hold



and your opponent holds



you are less than a two-to-one favorite. If you raise pre-flop it should almost certainly be a large raise to force out holdings that might beat you.

With the nuts - If you are lucky enough to have the best possible hand, you might want to bet big in order to build a gigantic pot. (Sometimes you might also want to pretend to have the nuts and make a huge bluff.)

MEDIUM BETS

If you have decided that a bet is necessary, but the situation isn't listed above, then a medium-sized bet is probably in order.

BET SIZING EXAMPLES

A decent pocket pair pre-flop

You are holding



in the cut off seat. Two players in front of you call. It is important to make a big raise, up to five or six big blinds here. You are pretty confident you are holding the best hand and you want an opponent to pay dearly if they want to out-flop you.

Protecting your hand on the flop

In the same scenario as above, both limpers call after you raise to five big blinds. The flop is



The board is pretty dry but your hand is vulnerable to over-cards, and you could be outdrawn if an ace, king or queen comes on the turn or river. You should definitely protect your hand by betting. A medium sized bet will do the job.

A monster on the river

You are holding



and the board is



You have a Straight, which is the nuts. You have one opponent, who checked to you. It is OK to bet big here. Maybe he caught an ace on the river and wants to see the showdown.

A decent hand on the river

On the same board as above and with the same opponent, but this time you have



You were trying to hit a flush after the flop but made two pair on turn and river instead. When he checks to you, you should make a small bet. If he has a queen or a jack, for example, or even a hand like



he might call you to see if you have a busted flush draw.

A marginal hand on the river

Consider the same board again



This time you are holding



for third pair. This is a hand you should just check behind. Remember that you always need a purpose to bet. You shouldn't go for a value bet here because your hand is not strong enough for that. It's obviously not necessary to protect your hand from draws because all cards are out already. Bluffing is not necessary either because if you opponent has a weak hand, you will win the showdown anyway. And there is no need to bet for information either. If you check, the cards will get turned over, which will give you all the information you need.

A terrible hand on the river

Yet again the same board with your lone opponent. Unfortunately, you are holding



You had a nice draw but it missed (a "busted" draw) and now you have nothing more than nine high. This is a good spot for a bluff. Usually you should bet small and represent an ace. Occasionally it's OK to make a big bluff, representing a straight.

CALCULATING OUTS

**“ALWAYS LEAVE
YOURSELF OUTS”**

WHAT ARE OUTS

We have already seen how the relative strength of a poker hand can increase or decrease as flop, turn and river is dealt. For example



is a big favourite against



pre-flop, but becomes a huge underdog if the flop comes.



If you have a hand that is probably losing, but has the potential to improve to a winner, (i.e., a drawing hand) you need to decide whether it is worth continuing with it through the various stages of the pot.

In short, you need to identify the cards that will improve your hand - known as “outs”.

The best definition is simple: “outs” are the cards left in the deck that improve your hand, ideally to make it strong enough to win the pot at showdown.



EXAMPLE WITH A FLUSH DRAW

You are holding



and the flop is:



Although in some circumstances your ace high might be winning already, you do not actually have a very strong hand. Not yet, at least.

However if another heart appears on the turn or river, you make a flush, and unless another player has a full house or better, you will win the hand. (The board isn't paired, so none of our opponents can have a full house yet.)

There are 13 cards of each suit in the deck. You hold two of them, and another two are on the board. Four of the 13 hearts have therefore already been dealt, meaning that there are still nine hearts left in the deck.

This means there are nine cards that can improve your hand to a (probable) winner. You have nine outs.

EXAMPLE WITH A STRAIGHT DRAW

You have



and the flop is



Now any ace or nine will complete your straight. There are four aces and four nines in the deck, so you have eight outs.

If one card is missing to complete a straight, you have four outs. For example, if your hole cards were



and the flop was



your outs would be



EXAMPLE WITH A STRAIGHT DRAW AND OVERCARDS

You have



and the board is



One of the four queens in the deck will make you a straight. If your opponent has a middle pocket pair, e.g.



then you have additional outs, as any king or any jack would give you a higher pair.

In this case, the number of your outs would increase to ten (four queens, three kings, and three jacks).

EXAMPLE WITH A SET AGAINST A FLUSH DRAW

If you hold



and hit a set on a board showing



you have a pretty strong hand. But it is not definitely a winner and could already be behind to any opponent with two spades in his hand.

However, you still have the chance here of improving your hand even further. There are seven cards that could make you a full house or better (a seven, three remaining twos and three remaining jacks), or the turn and river could be the same rank, which would also give you a full house.

EXAMPLE WITH A STRAIGHT DRAW AND A FLUSH DRAW

You hold



and the board is



You have both an open-ended straight draw and a flush draw. This means you have nine outs to make the flush and eight outs to make the straight. At the same time, you have to consider that two cards are counted twice

(in this case the 3 of hearts and the 8 of hearts),

which have to be subtracted. Therefore you have a total of 15 outs.

SUMMARY

Learning to calculate your outs gives you a much firmer grasp on how poker hands can play out, and swing from one way to another as the cards are revealed.



POKER BANKROLL

Managing a bankroll carefully is a vital skill for a successful player to learn, no matter at what level you play the game. Here are some pointers on bankroll management, which will help ensure poker is an enjoyable as well as profitable pastime.

MANAGEMENT

WHAT IS A BANKROLL?

The term “bankroll” refers to the amount of money you set aside exclusively to play poker - for example the money you have online at PokerStars. It is separate from all the other finances in your life.

No matter how big your bankroll may be, there is always a risk that you could lose it all and this should not risk at all on any of your other day-to-day financial obligations. To keep this risk as low as possible, good bankroll management is required.

**“DON'T LET
YOUR BANKROLL
MANAGE YOU”**



BASIC RULES OF BANKROLL MANAGEMENT

1. Never play for more money than you can afford to lose

This is the most important rule. It is always possible to lose money playing poker, even if you play every hand perfectly. Therefore you should NEVER risk an amount of money that could get you into financial trouble away from the poker table, especially if you are experiencing a downswing.

Similarly you should never put yourself in a position where your entire bankroll is on the table in a single tournament or hand. Only ever sit down with a small fraction of your bankroll at any one time.

2. Be aware of your goals

Broadly speaking, poker players fall into three groups, each with different expectations and goals in the game. It is very important that you decide what you want from poker and that you select the right level to achieve your aims.

- **Recreational players** are playing mainly for fun and have other sources of income besides poker. If they lose their bankroll they can fund it with fresh money from their regular source of income
- **Serious players** are good and profitable players but do not depend only on poker for their income. It is not the end of the world if they lose their poker bankroll, but it will hurt
- **Professional players** depend on poker as their only source of income. They cannot afford to lose all their bankroll as this means they would lose their job. Therefore they must employ the strictest bankroll management techniques

3. Do not play higher than your bankroll permits

The following information is intended to offer a good rule of thumb for bankroll requirements if you are playing sit and go tournaments and multi-table tournaments, or fixed limit Texas Hold'em. (The chart at the bottom of this page offers a general guide to bankroll requirements to play no limit Texas Hold'em cash games.)

If you are a recreational player don't risk more than 10 per cent of your bankroll at once. If you have a bankroll of \$100, you should not be entering a tournament with a buy in of more than \$10 or sitting at a cash table with more than that amount. For serious and professional players the bankroll restrictions are even tougher.

Sit & Go tournaments (STTs): If you are a serious player, you should aim to have at least 30 times the tournament buy-in in your bankroll before entering any STT. A professional player will need 100 buy-ins.

For example, a serious player could play \$20 STTs with a bankroll of \$600 but a professional would need \$2,000 in his bankroll in order to play \$20 STTs.

Multi-table tournaments (MTTs):

Tournaments offer huge prizes but also huge swings. You should have at least 50 buy-ins in your bankroll in order to play them as a serious player. A professional will need 200 buy-ins. It is probably best not to play tournaments exclusively. It is safer also to play SNGs or cash games.

4. Stay inside your comfort zone

If you start playing at a limit that you feel is too high, you should stop - even if you can afford to keep playing. It is easy to get nervous in these situations, which can lead to you no longer enjoying the game and making poor decisions. A competent poker player only plays within the limits in which he or she feels comfortable.



FOR NO LIMIT HOLD'EM CASH GAMES

The chart shows you the bankroll requirements for different stakes at no limit Texas Hold'em cash tables. No limit Hold'em can be an extremely volatile game to play, so you must make sure you have a big enough bankroll for the stakes you want to play.

LIMIT	BUY-IN X	RECREATIONAL PLAYER 10 TIMES X	SERIOUS PLAYER 20 TIMES X	PROFESSIONAL PLAYER 50 TIMES X
\$0.02/\$0.05	\$5	\$50	\$100	\$250
\$0.05/\$0.10	\$10	\$100	\$200	\$500
\$0.10/\$0.25	\$25	\$250	\$500	\$1,250
\$0.25/\$0.50	\$50	\$500	\$1,000	\$2,500
\$0.50/\$1	\$100	\$1,000	\$2,000	\$5,000

To play a game comfortably, you should have at least the amount listed above. For example, if you are a recreational player and have less than \$50, it is best only to play the \$0.01/\$0.02 games. With a bankroll between \$50 and \$100 it is OK to play \$0.02-\$0.05 games, etc.

When you first sit down at a cash table, you are usually told the buy-in restrictions, i.e., the maximum and minimum amount a new player is permitted to bring to the table. But you will need the same total bankroll whatever starting stack you choose to bring to the table.

For example, if you buy into a 1c-2c game for \$1 instead of \$2, you will risk less money in every hand. But the risk of losing all your money in one hand increases as well. Therefore you can use the chart even if you prefer playing with a shorter stack.

CONCLUSION

There isn't ultimate bankroll management. You must decide which would be the best for you. It is important to set your own rules how to manage poker money and how to move up or down through the stakes. Remember that poker is connected with variation and suitable bankroll management will help you to survive during a downswing.



WHAT IS THE BEST POKER GAME

Firstly, it's best to find a poker game that you enjoy playing/studying. Secondly, it's important to find a game that fits in with your free time.

“WHAT SHOULD I PLAY?”

HOW DO I KNOW WHAT POKER GAME I WILL ENJOY THE MOST?

This is the simple part, try playing them all. You can either play them for Play Money (for FREE) to test the games out or try them at their lowest stakes. You'll soon know which game you enjoy most and which game fits into your free time.

FOR ME?



HOW MUCH FREE TIME DO YOU HAVE?

FREE TIME	RECOMMENDED GAME TO PLAY/TEST
30 MINUTES A DAY	5 x Spin & Go's.
1 HOUR PER DAY	10 x Spin & Go's, or 100 hands of 6-max cash, or 200 ZOOM hands.
4 HOURS PER DAY	40 Spin & Go's, 400 hands of 6-Max cash, 800 Zoom hands, or one Turbo MTT.
8 HOURS PER DAY	80 Spin & Go's, 800 hands of 6-Max cash, 1,600 Zoom hands, or one Standard MTT.
UNLIMITED	Pick a game that suits your bankroll and enjoyment best.
WEEKENDS ONLY	Weekends have the biggest and most exciting tournament schedules.

All games are based on playing one table.

HOW MUCH TIME SHOULD I SPEND PLAYING POKER VS STUDYING POKER?

Again, this is different for everyone. Some players prefer to learn through play at the tables, the more hands they play the more situations arise and the more experienced they become. Others prefer to learn through reading, books, articles, taking courses. Then of course, you have forums, talking about hands with friends and other poker players, or even watching Twitch and reviewing videos.

For a beginner, it's important to split your poker play vs poker study at least 60/40. The study aspect should be split too, allowing you to review your hands, learn new strategies and discuss these with friends/other players.

HERE'S A ROUGH GUIDE TO YOUR PLAY VS STUDY RATIO:

60%	10%	15%	15%
Playing poker	Reviewing the hands you've played.	Taking courses, reading books, reading articles.	Watching Twitch, watching videos, posting hands in forums, talking poker with friends.



HOW CAN I IMPROVE MY GAME?

PokerStars School offers several resources and free courses. Here's what's available:

COURSES		
We have a wide range of free courses available, including:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Basic Course- Spin & Go Course- Cash Game Course- Pot Limit Omaha Course- MTT Course- And much more...		
TWITCH	DISCORD	STRATEGY ARTICLES
PokerStars run regular Live Twitch sessions. Watch pros & trainers play live poker, see their hole cards and understand their thought processes, ask questions.	There is a PokerStars Discord channel where you can chat live with other poker players & pros. PokerStars School has its own section/chat room.	New Strategy articles are added to PokerStars School every week.

HAVE FUN AND KEEP POKER EXCITING

Set yourself fun challenges. This will not only keep the game exciting whilst you're improving your play, but also keep you on track to reach your goals.

TOURNAMENT CHALLENGE

Decided you want to play poker tournaments? If you have up to six hours per day to play with (and a \$200 bankroll) a fun challenge could be to play a mixture of \$1.10 satellites into the Sunday Million, as well as standard \$1.10 Turbo Tournaments.

This way you could spend your study time improving your tournament poker, and you'll have the excitement of trying to win a seat into the Sunday Million.

SPIN & GO CHALLENGE

Set yourself a target, such as 'play 50 x \$0.25 Spin & Go's in one week'. Perhaps even ask a friend if they want to take the challenge with you - loser buys the lunch! When that lunch arrives, you can both sit down and discuss strategy, learn and improve each other's games.



**“YOU’VE MADE
THE FINAL”**

FINAL TIPS

Once you’ve mastered the basics make sure you get plenty of practice in. PokerStars offers many ways to test out your new skills without risking a cent.

PLAY MONEY GAMES

Play for free using play money chips to master the basics.

POKERSTARS FREEROLLS

Search for ‘Freeroll’ tournaments in your PokerStars lobby.

POKERSTARS VR

Join free-to-play virtual reality games for a truly remarkable experience.



CHAT AND LEARN WITH OTHER PLAYERS

There are plenty of places to meet other poker players, learn tips, talk strategy and find out what's happening in the poker world. Here are some to check out PokerStars on:

[Facebook](#)

[Twitter](#)

[Instagram](#)

[PokerStars YouTube](#)

[PokerStars Blog](#)

[PokerStars Twitch](#)

[PokerStars Discord](#)

[PokerStars Live](#)

[PokerStars Podcast](#)

[PokerStars School](#)

CONGRATULATIONS! GO YOU, THAT'S THE BASICS OF POKER COMPLETED!

We hope you found this book useful.

If you have any questions please feel free to drop us a message in our Discord or head over to Twitch and ask one of our Trainers live. Best of luck at the tables.

