



## No Limit Holdem Strategy Guide

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### **Chapter 1 Getting Started**

#### Choose a Poker Site

So, you're ready

Good paragraph for links

to join the world of online poker and make your millions. That's exciting but the first thing you need to do is find a safe online poker site. I recommend you start with a bigger poker site such as PokerStars or Full Tilt Poker but feel free to pick any poker site you want. Just make sure it's a well-known, reputable site. You can find a list of safe poker sites here.

Big poker sites are the best sites to play at because they are the most stable and they have the most players for you to play against. If you ever get stuck at a bad table at a big poker site, you can easily find another table among the hundreds that are available around the clock.

On top of that, big poker sites are the most financially stable places to play poker. They have been around for a long time and some are even publicly traded. Small poker sites are just like small businesses; they don't always survive in the long term. When you play at a big poker site, it's like shopping online at Amazon. It's safe, secure and you know you're going to get what you paid for.

### Deposits and Bonuses

After you pick a poker site, you'll have to decide how much you want to deposit. This decision isn't always an easy one because poker sites offer one time bonuses on your first deposit. The dilemma you'll face as a new poker player is whether to try things out with a small deposit or to make a big deposit and take full advantage of your bonus offer.

At the two sites I mentioned above, you can get a 100% bonus on your first deposit for up to \$600 extra. So if you deposit \$20, you'll get an extra \$20 added to it. If you deposit \$600, the poker site will match it with an extra \$600. Yes, you will have to play a certain number of hands to clear your bonus but it's not hard.

The catch is that you only get your bonus one time. If you start out with a tiny deposit, you will miss out on a lot of money that you could have gotten from that site. There's nothing wrong with that, but it's something to keep in mind. It's something I wish I would have known when I got started with online poker.

### Making a Deposit

Depending on where you live, making a deposit can either be *really* easy or *sort of* easy. In the UK, for example, making a poker deposit is super easy and there are a ton of deposit methods. In the United States, making a deposit is usually easy, but there aren't as many deposit options.

The easiest way to make a deposit is to open up your poker software and visit the cashier. From there, you can click on the "deposit" button and then you'll be greeted with a list of deposit methods. You'll see options such as credit card, money transfer, etc. The easiest method is credit card but there are also several others. Whichever method you pick, your poker site will walk you through with step-by-step directions to get started. It's all pretty simple.

Every once in a while, players from the United States will have their credit card deposits blocked. This is due to a piece of legislation that was passed in 2006 that attempted to make banks prevent transactions to poker sites. Don't worry, it's not a law against you and it won't get you in trouble. It's just the leftovers of a lame attempt certain government bureaucrats made to make it look like they were doing something to appease hard-line anti-gambling and anti-poker special interest groups.

If your credit card transaction is blocked, you can simply try a different credit card or choose one of the other deposit methods. I'd go ahead and go with a different deposit method just to have it there in the future.

## **Chapter 2**

### **What It Means to be Tight-Aggressive**

If you haven't heard the term "tight-aggressive," you soon will as you do more and more research on poker strategy. Being tight-aggressive (or TAG) is the most basic, important premise behind being a winning poker player. Poker players who learn how to become TAGs almost always become winning poker players.

In its simplest form, tight-aggressive means that you are tight in choosing which hands you play, but you are aggressive when you do play those hands. Being tight-aggressive means you wait for strong hands and then play those hands like you mean it. TAGs don't play weak hands and then check and call a lot. They either fold and get out of the way or they come in with a raise, confident with the knowledge that their hand is likely stronger than the opposition.

We'll get into preflop strategy soon but when you play tight-aggressive, it means you are selective in choosing your starting hands. The biggest mistake new poker players make is to play too many hands before the flop. The small cost of seeing a flop is enticing to new players, but that small cost adds up surprisingly quickly.

After that, new players tend to play their hands too passively, which is the opposite of playing hands with aggression. Players who play their hands passively do a lot of checking and calling but very little betting or raising. When you play with aggression, you don't do very much calling but you do a lot of folding, betting and raising. The basic idea is that if a hand is strong enough to play, it's strong enough to raise. This isn't a hard and fast rule (nothing in poker is) but it's generally correct.

The problem with playing passively is that it gets you into the habit of chasing draws when you shouldn't be and it doesn't extract value from your good hands. If you check-and-call on draws all day long, you'll lose money faster than you can make it. The odds of draws hitting are poor and when you chase against the odds, you are donating free money to the table.

Just as bad is *not* betting when you have strong hands. The object of poker is to make money, and to make money you have to be willing to make bets and raises. Even new players know to raise when they have monster hands, but I'm talking about making bets and raises with hands like TPTK (top pair, top kicker) and small two-pairs. Don't sit there and try to slowplay these hands or wait until the river to bet – start betting with them early.

In addition to getting value for your hands, you also want to bet to charge your opponents to draw out against you. That's right; you're not the only person with draws. If you have a strong hand, you can bet that someone out there has a draw to a better hand. You need to charge your opponents money to draw. The more you charge them, the more you make. Sure they'll suck out

on you every once in a while but if you keep on betting and they keep on calling with draws, you'll make a ton of money in the long run.

Finally, please remember that being aggressive does not mean to be a maniac. Your aggression should be controlled and it should make sense. If you have a reason to bet, then bet. If not, fold.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Preflop Strategy**

Your play before the flop will affect the rest of the hand so it's important that you take the correct actions after your cards have been dealt. Luckily, preflop play isn't super complicated. If you play a solid, tight game, you won't have too many problems during the preflop stage.

The preflop stage can be broken up into two decisions. First, you must decide whether or not to play the hand you are dealt. If you decide to play the hand, you must then decide on *how* to play the hand.

Your decisions should be based on a combination of these three factors:

1. Your cards
2. Your position at the table
3. Bets and raises made by other people at the table

Let's examine each one of these factors and then put it all together.

#### Your Cards

Some people like to say that "any two can win" in Holdem but if you want to be a winning player, that's not the right mentality. In Texas Holdem, you want to play cards that work well together and have high card strength. As a very general rule, you should only play about 20-25% the hands you are dealt.

*But there's a catch.* There always is. You can't just choose to play a hand or not based on the cards alone. You need to look at the other factors too. Certain hands fare well in late position but are horrible to play in early position. Other cards do well in multi-way pots but perform poorly in heads-up situations. But don't worry; we'll cover everything you need to know. It's actually not as bad as it sounds.

Anyways, let's get back to the cards. Cards can be grouped into several different groups, including:

1. Premium Hands
2. Small-Medium Pairs

3. Small-Medium Suited Connectors
4. Suited Aces
5. Big, Non-Premium Hands

1. Premium Hands

These are the hands that make you stop and think “oh cool.” Premium hands are hands like the big pairs TT-AA, AK and AQs. The bigger they are, the better. If they are suited, that’s even better. You can play these hands from any position, and should almost always raise with them.

With AA, KK and QQ you should usually 3-bet with them as well. With AA and KK, you should try to get as much money in the pot as possible. If you can get either hand all in preflop, go for it.

2. Small-Medium Pairs

This hand grouping includes the hands 22-99. In general, your goal with these hands is to hit three of a kind and break someone. These hands play the best in multi-way pots but they also don’t fair too poorly in heads up situations.

The only problem with small pairs is they are notoriously difficult to play against people in heads up pots. When you first get started with poker, the best advice I can give you is to play small pocket pairs for sets only. If you don’t flop a set, fold the hand.

The best position to play these hands is from late position when people have already entered the pot. In early position, your play with the hand will depend on the rest of the table. Against tight tables, you can come in with a raise with these hands if you’re the first person in.

3. Small-Medium Suited Connectors

Small to medium suited connectors are hands like 4-5 where both cards are of the same suit. This hand grouping includes the hands 45s up to TJs. With suited connectors, your goal is to get in the pot cheaply, with lots of other players and to hit a big hand.

These hands should be pretty easy to play because you’ll either hit something promising on the flop or fold. These hands should only be played when three factors are present: you can get in the pot for cheap, you are in late position and two or more people are already in the pot.

4. Suited Aces

Suited aces are hands that include an Ace and any other card of the same suit. These hands get new players in trouble all the time because they see the suited ace and want to play to get

a flush. The problem with suited aces is that they don't hit flushes very often and they aren't strong without flushes. On top of that, other players can spot potential flushes so you won't get paid off all the time.

For those reasons, suited aces should only be played when in late position and when several other people are already in the pot. Once you join a pot, you should only continue if you have a flush draw AND you get the right pot odds to chase your draw. We'll discuss pot odds in Chapter 8 but for now, just remember you can't chase without the right pot odds.

## 5. Big, Non-Premium Hands

These are hands that contain two face cards but aren't quite strong enough to be considered premium hands. This grouping includes hands like KQ, KJ, QT, QJ, etc. These hands are decent, but they can get you into trouble very easily.

These hands cause trouble because they look stronger than they actually are. Against premium hands like AK and AQ, these smaller hands are dominated. They share one card but the non-premium hand is out-kicked. For example, if you have KQ and an opponent has AQ, you're going to get in a lot of trouble on a QQ2 flop.

These hands can be played in medium to late position if nobody else has raised. If you're the first person in, come in with a raise and try to take the pot down. If you're not the first person in, only play these when you're in late position and a couple of people are already in the pot.

## Your Position at the Table

Position is an important concept because your position at the poker table determines whether you have to act before the other players or after them. When playing in early position, for example, you have to make every decision without the knowledge of what your opponents will do in response. When playing in late position, you get to watch your opponents act before you have to make a decision.

The advantage of position is a powerful one, and as a result, you should play fewer hands in early position and more hands in late position. In early position, you need all the help you can get so you only play premium hands that are easy to play. In late position, you can open up your hand range a bit because you have the advantage of information.

In early position, it's fine to play super tight. If you stick with premium hands only, you'll do just fine. One way to tell if you're playing correctly in early position is to check how often you raise when coming in. *In early position, you should only enter the pot with a raise. Why?* Because you should only be playing hands that are worthy of raising. In addition to that, the raise makes your hand easier to play. It establishes dominance in the hand and it lets fewer people in the pot. Fewer people in the pot means fewer people acting against you with the advantage of information.

In middle position, you can start to open up your hand range a bit but you still need to be careful. At aggressive tables, you should play middle position as if it was early position. At tables with more docile players, you can play a wider assortment of hands. This doesn't mean you can start playing trash; it just means you can play a few more hands than in early position.

In late position, you can open up your hand range even more. All the premiums, big non-premium hands, pocket pairs, suited aces and suited connectors can be played from late position. If a few people have limped in, you can limp in behind them with your weaker hands. If you're the first one in, come in with a raise. You'll often steal the blinds in this manner but if not, you'll usually take the pot down on the flop with a bet.

### Bets and Raises Made By Other People

Other people's actions will have a large impact on the hands you play. The number of other players in the pot and the bets those players make should both affect what types of hands you play.

When several people have entered the pot without raising, you can play a wider range of hands. In unraised, multi-way pots, you can play hands like suited connectors and suited aces. In pots that are raised, you should only play strong hands and pocket pairs. It's not just your cards you have to watch – it's also the cards of your opponents.

Watch the actions your opponents take and then put yourself in place of your opponents. Ask yourself what kind of cards would make you take the same action as your opponents. When they raise, it usually means strength. In that case, you need strong cards to continue on. Otherwise you're just wasting money trying to play catch up with inferior cards. When your opponents limp in, it typically represents weakness or mediocrity.

### Putting it All Together

When deciding on whether or not to play a hand, you should consider each of the above factors as they relate to one another. For example, a raise by an opponent in early position represents more strength than a raise by an opponent in late position. Not only is that opponent raising, but he's raising from early position. That player probably has a fairly strong hand.

It all sounds complicated at first but once you get a little experience at the tables, you'll be putting it all together without even thinking. You'll automatically notice when people make big raises in early position, when they make small raises in late position and so on. It just takes experience. By watching your opponents, knowing your position and understanding the strength of your cards, you'll know which hands to play and which hands to fold.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Flop Strategy**

Simply making it to the flop sometimes seems like an exercise in patience. After folding 75% of your hands, the few that make it to the flop seem like a breath of fresh air. Don't let that fresh air tempt you into holding onto your hands for too long, though.

I see new players all the time playing their hands on the flop as if those are the last hands they'll ever play. These players end up spending too much money on hands that don't pan out, whether by chasing draws or just paying off better hands.

Don't let the same thing happen to you. Once you make it to the flop, you will need a very strong reason to continue on in the hand. The flop is where the true test of your persistence will pay off. After the flop, you need to have a very strong hand or a draw to a very strong hand to continue on.

The types of hands with which you should continue on the flop will depend greatly upon the current table conditions. The number of players in the hand, the board texture, their actions, their histories and your position will all determine what kinds of hands you should play and how. Against some players, top pair is all you need; against others, you'll need to have much stronger hands.

Generally, you'll be looking for top pair, top kicker (TPTK) or better to continue on in the hand. There will always be adjustments depending on the table conditions but this is a good rule to start out with. With a hand like TPTK, you should start betting as soon as possible. By betting, you accomplish three objectives:

1. Getting money in the pot
2. Charging for draws
3. Force your opponents to play more straight-forward against you

The first objective is to simply get money in the pot. You most likely have the best hand and you win money in poker by betting when you have the best hand. With extra strong hands, some players like to wait for the turn or river to start betting. That's fine, but make sure you only slowplay the best of your hands.

Secondly, betting early charges your opponents for draws. You don't want them to draw out on you for free, do you? If your opponents are going to try to suck out on you, you should at least make them pay for it. On top of that, you can't get any money out of them if you start betting *after* they miss all their draws.

The last objective on that list is debatable but I still find it to be true in today's small and medium stake poker games. When you play an aggressive game and come out betting, your opponents tend to play their hands as if they were face-up. It becomes costlier for them to bluff you because you're already betting – it means they have to raise instead of just bet. That extra expense makes them less likely to bluff. When your opponents *do* raise, it's more likely they are doing so with a legit hand.



The number of opponents in the hand will also affect how you should play your hand after the flop. If there are several opponents in the hand with you, you'll have to proceed carefully unless you have a strong hand. You should still bet with TPTK and better, but be ready to get out if things turn sour.

Speaking of which, if you get action from one of the other players, you're going to have to try your best to figure out if your hand is stronger than his. Look at the board texture and your opponent's recent history to try to get a gauge for how strong his hand may be. It's more of an art than a science but you'll get better at it over time.

As a general rule, your bets with made hands should be equal in size to about 3/4 to the full size of the pot. If you bet too small, you won't get much value for your hands and you will allow your opponents to draw cheaply. By betting something close to the size of the pot, you'll be cutting the odds of any draws. If people still chase their draws against your pot sized bets, it's just more profit for you.

### The Board Texture

The board texture is the general makeup of the community cards. It could also be described as the "feel" of the cards. Certain board textures tend to match more often with commonly played hands than others. For example, a board that consists of three high cards is likely to have hit the types of hands people like to play. A board texture that consists of three low cards is less likely to have hit as many hands.

Knowing how to read the board texture will save you a lot of trouble when trying to read your opponents' hands. If you know how to read the board, you'll know what the best possible hand is and what types of hands your opponents are likely to be betting / calling with.

Another example would be playing against a player who keeps calling your bets while there are two spades on the board. When a third spade hits and that opponent suddenly bets, the board texture plus your opponent's betting pattern tells you that a flush is quite likely.

Certain board textures can be considered safe while others should be considered dangerous. Think about the types of hands people like to play and then look at the board and see how it fits. For example:

A board that contains the cards 2s-Kh-7d is pretty safe. There aren't any straight or flush draws and the only card that is likely to have connected with someone's hand is a king. It's not a guarantee of course, but it's definitely one of the safer flops you can hope for. If you have a set on a flop like this, you're in great shape – especially if someone has a king.

On the other hand, a board like TsJsQh is very dangerous. People love to play the types of hands that connect with a board like this. In fact, anyone holding an 89, any two big cards or two spades has a very nice piece of this board. Unless you have the nuts or close to it on a board like this, you will need to be extremely careful.

## Continuation Bets

Continuation bets are the bets you place after making a preflop raise. Any time you place a bet after raising before the flop (whether you hit anything or not), it's considered a continuation bet.

Almost every time you place preflop raise, you should follow it up with a continuation bet. You took control of the hand before the flop so you might as well continue that momentum by placing a continuation bet. The continuation bet accomplishes two things:

1. It makes you harder to read
2. It wins pots

The continuation bet makes you harder to read simply because it keeps your opponents guessing. Sometimes you are betting with strong hands, other times you're betting with air. They'll never know what you have, which means they'll make more mistakes.

It also wins pots because it simply continues the momentum that you gained by raising before the flop. This is nice because unless you have a pocket pair, you won't have anything most of the time.

The times when you shouldn't follow up with a continuation bet are when there are multiple people in the pot or you're up against a calling station. In both cases, the odds of your opponents calling are too high. The only times you should bet in these situations are when you have legitimate hands.

## **Chapter 5 Turn and River Strategy**

The turn is a critical turning point in the hand because people don't make it to the turn by accident. They stuck around on the flop for one reason or another so it means your opponents are doing one of three things:

1. Playing a legit hand
2. Playing a draw
3. Planning a bluff

The first and second options are the most likely, but occasionally you'll find people calling bets on the flop in order to make bluffs on the turn or river. Usually, though, it's because they have a legit hand or are playing a draw. Your job is to figure out which and play accordingly.

On the turn and especially on the river, the value of your hand will be more firmly established. Most of the community cards have been dealt so you should be able to tell what the strongest possible hand is and what kind of hands are likely to be out there.

If you have a monster hand, the turn and river are easy streets to play. All you need to do is bet as much as you think your opponent is willing to call. If your opponent also has a strong hand, you'll both get it all-in eventually.

The difficult situations are when you have hands like TPTK, an overpair, two pair and other non-nut hands. In any case, if you have been betting up to now, you should continue betting for value. Your opponent will let you know soon enough if he has you horribly beaten.

If an opponent suddenly becomes active with bets or raises, you need to be extremely careful. First, look at the board and see if any obvious draws have been completed. After that, consider the playing style of your opponent. If he's a pretty solid player or is a player who is usually passive, there is a good chance he has a strong hand. In that case, you should only continue with the best of your hands.

It's impossible to tell you which hands you should continue with and which ones you should fold under pressure because there are so many variables to consider. Some opponents will play top pair as if it's the nuts while others won't get involved with anything less than a full house. It's up to you to try to gauge the strength of your opponent's hand by looking at the board texture, his betting patterns and his playing style. If you take all three factors into consideration, you will be surprised at how close you come to guessing your opponents' hands.

The river is a unique street because now every player knows his final hand. There is no more chasing draws or semi-bluffing. You either have a hand or you don't. To determine the correct play on the river, you will first want to evaluate the strength of your hand vs. the likely hands of your opponent.

Look at your opponent's play from the very beginning of the hand all the way down. Ask yourself how he played the hand before the flop, and what that means, and then how he played his hand on the turn. What kind of hands would make *you* play in the same manner?

### Playing the River in Late Position

If your opponent checks to you on the river, you should bet with most made hands for value. Your opponents will call with all kinds of random junk. If you somehow make it to the river with complete air, I would advise you against bluffing the river. Your opponent has made it to river for some reason and will probably call again.

Many people will tell you to check behind on the river with marginal hands but I disagree. Unless you're playing against a very smart, tricky player, a bet with top pair or better is almost always a good idea. Your opponents will call with all kinds of junk. It's actually pretty funny to see some of the things they call with. Don't be afraid to bet the river.

### Playing the River in Early Position

Playing the river from out of position is one of the most difficult spots in poker. Whether you have a monster hand or a marginal hand, it's going to be hard to determine the best course of action. You simply don't know what your opponent is going to do. That's why position is such a powerful concept.

If you have a strong hand on the river, I would advise making a smallish value bet. Hopefully you will have some sort of idea of how that opponent plays and can size your bet accordingly. If not, just go for a half pot sized value bet.

Occasionally you can try checking on the river with a strong hand but it's a risky move. If you have some reason to believe your opponent was on a draw, a check on the river will occasionally induce a bluff. It's better than betting because in that case, your opponent will simply fold. By checking, you at least give him an opportunity to hand you some money.

With a questionable hand on the river, like top pair or some other vulnerable hand, your best bet is to check-call or check-fold the river. If you bet with these types of hands, you will only get called or raised by better hands. By check-calling, you give your opponent the opportunity to make a mistake by bluffing or betting with a worse hand. Occasionally, you'll simply have to bite the bullet and fold your hand. There's no shame in that. The best plays in poker are folds.

## **Chapter 6** **Playing Big Pairs**

Big pocket pairs are powerful but they can sure cause a lot of trouble for the people that have them. Have you ever gotten a pocket pair and been excited and nervous at the same time? I bet so. Pocket pairs sometimes have that affect on us. This chapter will be broken up into two sections. One section will be for AA and KK, and the other will be for TT-QQ.

### Playing AA and KK

If you ever have trouble playing your big pocket pairs, I have one quote of wisdom that will rock your world:

*At the end of the day, Ace-Ace is just one pair. It's not two pair, it's not three of a kind and it's definitely not a straight.*

Ok so maybe that wasn't quite as earth-shattering as I thought it would be but it's still something we should all keep in mind. It's easy to get into the mindset that your Aces or Kings deserve to win the pot. They don't. Your big pair is nothing more than a poker hand with a slightly higher chance of winning the pot. It's a statistic.

The easiest way to sum up the correct strategy for AA and KK is this:

- Get as much money in as possible preflop
- Play them for value after the flop

- If you get action after the flop, remember that you only have a single pair. It's an awesome pair, but still just a pair.

With the big pairs AA and KK, you should be happy to get them all-in preflop. Even though it's "just a pair," it's still the best starting hand you can get. Against anyone else willing to get it in, you're a pretty big favorite. Even then you're not guaranteed anything but you'll still make money in the long run by getting your AA and KK all in preflop.

When you can't get your AA or KK all in preflop, you have to play it after the flop as if it was a TPTK type of hand. This means you should place bets on the flop, turn and possibly the river to get value for your hand. In other words, keep on betting until someone gives you a reason to pause.

The board texture will also have a lot to do with how you play your hand. As I'm sure you're aware, the board always seems to get nasty right when you have a big hand. If it helps any, pretend like you're playing with TPTK. Go for value, but don't randomly get all-in unless you have a good reason to believe you have a stronger hand than your opponent.

Doyle Brunson once described big pairs as being hands that are great at winning small pots and losing big pots. That old quote still has quite a bit of truth to it. If you have a pocket pair and it doesn't improve, the only pots you're going to win are when the opponent either 1) folds or 2) calls with a weaker hand.

Now on the other hand, when you lose pots with AA, it's easy to lose a lot of money. It's a simple case of "I've waited for so long to finally see that AA or KK and I'll be damned if I'm going to fold it!" Well, when you finally get action from an opponent, it's usually not because they have a hand weaker than a single pair.

I don't say this to discourage you from playing your hands aggressively. In fact, you should be betting and raising with your big pocket pairs all the time. They are good hands, after all, and they need to be bet for value. It's just that you need to really slow down and analyze the situation when someone comes right back in your face with a big raise.

### Playing TT-QQ

TT, JJ and QQ are inherently difficult hands to play. For a long time, I saw these hands, especially JJ, as the devil. I always felt so pressured to play these hands as if they were the nuts when I knew they could easily lose to other hands. It made me misplay these hands left and right. It took me forever, but I eventually figured out how to play these hands. Hopefully this will help you avoid the same mistakes I made.

Before the flop, you should make big raises and re-raises to get money in the middle. Your hand is almost always the best one at the table. However, if someone 4-bets you, these are not good hands with which to go all in. If you go all in with a hand like TT or JJ, you'll only get called by bigger pairs or AK, which is a coin flip.

After the flop, you should continue betting these hands as if they were TPTK. Just keep on betting until someone gives you a reason to believe they have you beaten. The only thing you have to worry about is being slowplayed. If that happens, there's really not much you can do. Your opponent will probably make a big raise on the river if you fall into the trap. All you can do then is fold and move on to the next hand.

Sometimes the flop will bring an overcard, but that's not the end of the world. Just play the hand as if you had second pair, top kicker. Throw a bet out there and see what happens. If it gets called or raised, just check the hand down from there and fold to any additional bets.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Playing Small Pairs**

Small pocket pairs are awesome hands. They're so small and sneaky and they love winning big pots for you. Unfortunately, many people don't know how to treat their pocket pairs with the love and respect they deserve.

The biggest mistake people make with pocket pairs is playing them too often and in a passive manner. As much fun as they are to play, they shouldn't be played every time they are dealt.

When playing at a 6 person table, pocket pairs can be played from all positions but not in all situations. Any time you are the first person in the pot, you can play a pocket pair. In fact, you should come in with a raise. It sounds weird raising with 22 from under the gun but it's the way I play them. There are three reasons why you should come in with a raise with pocket pairs.

1. You probably have the best hand
2. It gives you a good chance to win the pot if you miss your set
3. It disguises your hand

In 9 and 10 person games, you should fold your pocket pairs from early position. There are just too many people left to act and the odds are too great that you'll run into a stronger hand.

At all types of tables, you can limp in with pocket pairs if other people have already entered the pot. If someone in front of you raises, you should fold your pocket pair unless at least one other person has called that raise. Otherwise, you could easily get stuck between a raiser and a re-raiser.

The common wisdom is that if you're trying to hit a set, the maximum raise you can call is 10% the size of you or your opponent's stack (whichever is smaller). Back in the day that might have been the case, but today's poker players are too good for you to go around calling off 10% of your stack all the time. They won't pay off your set often enough to make it worth spending all that money all the time. Instead, you should be willing to call a maximum of 5% of you or your opponent's stack.

One last thing about pocket pairs: don't call late position raises from the blinds with pocket pairs. People who raise from late position are rarely attached to their hands. If you call those raises and then fold every time you miss your set, you'll be donating a lot of money to those raisers. The reason it doesn't work is because late position raisers are the least likely people to pay you off if you hit a set. They rarely have a legitimately strong hand.

Even when late position raisers do have a strong hand, you'll be hard pressed to make any money with your small pocket pair. First of all, it needs to hit a set, which it will only do about 1 time out of 8. Every time a set does hit, you need to win a huge pot just to make up for the all the times you missed. In the end, it's just not worth calling late position raises with small pairs.

If you want to fight back with a small pair, make a re-raise before the flop and then make a big bet on the flop. By doing it that way, you'll give yourself two different ways to win the pot: by scaring off the opponent or by having the best hand at the showdown.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Pot Odds**

The subject of "Pot Odds" is rarely on anyone's top 10 list of most exciting things to read about but it's actually not too bad. The math behind pot odds can be quite complicated but unless you're just curious, it's not necessary to know all the equations behind it. All you need to know is a few basic concepts and you'll be good to go.

The point of learning about pot odds is so you know how much money you can call when you have a draw. If you routinely make calls without getting proper pot odds, you'll lose money in the long run. However, if you only make calls when the price is right, you can chase your draws and make a profit.

First of all, the term "pot odds" simply describes a ratio between the size of the pot and the size of a bet. So if you're playing in a \$100 pot and someone bets \$50, the pot is now \$150 and you have to call \$50. If you put that in ratio form, it would be 150:50, which reduces down to 3:1. In that case, you would say that you're getting 3 to 1 pot odds.

Once you know your pot odds, all you have to do is compare them to the odds of you completing your draw. Instead of trying to memorize some complex equation to figure out the odds of getting the cards you need, there's an easy way to figure out the odds of completing your draw. All you do is memorize the odds of a few of the more common draws out there.

For example:

<u>Draw</u>	<u>Odds of Completing on the Next Card</u>
Open Ended Straight Draw	5:1
Flush Draw	4:1
Set to Full House	6:1

Now all you have to do is compare the odds of your draw completing to your pot odds. If your pot odds are greater than the drawing odds, you can call the bet and make a profit over the long run. If your pot odds are worse than the drawing odds, you should fold.

Example:

You have a flush draw on the flop and the pot is \$100. An opponent bets \$25. The pot is now \$125 and you have to call \$25. The pot odds are then 125:25, which reduces down to 5:1.

Now that you know your pot odds, take a look at the odds of completing a flush. The odds are 4:1. Since the pot odds are greater than the drawing odds, you can call this bet and make a profit in the long run. That's all there is to it. Just compare the pot odds to the drawing odds and see which one is greater.

### How it Works

When you call bets while chasing draws, you need to have the proper pot odds because otherwise you'll show a loss over the long run. In any given situation, you'll either hit the draw or miss it but over the long run, the odds always catch up to you.

The easiest way to explain this is to use an example. Let's say that you have a flush draw in a \$100 pot. Your opponent bets \$50, which gives you pot odds of 3:1. The drawing odds of hitting a flush on the next card are 4:1. Your pot odds aren't great enough to make this draw worth chasing.

Let's say you find yourself in this same situation 100 times over the course of a year. If you call that \$50 bet every time, here's what the final numbers will look like:

You will complete the draw about 20 times and you will miss the flush draw about 80 times. That means 20 times you'll win the \$150 pot for a total profit of \$3,000 (\$150 times 20). The other 80 times, you'll miss the flush draw and lose a total of \$4,000 (\$50 times 80). Your net profit after being in this same situation 100 times is negative one thousand dollars.

## **Chapter 9**

### **Bankroll**

Bankroll management is a critical skill for poker players because it prevents them from going broke during the normal ups and downs caused by variance. No matter how great a poker player you may be, you will experience the occasional downswing. You can do your best to only get all-in when the odds are in your favor but even then you're not guaranteed to win every time.

The purpose of bankroll management is to keep yourself from going broke when you hit those rough patches in the road. The concept is simple: only play in stakes for which you have a proper



bankroll. The size of your bankroll depends on several factors but generally you should only play in no-limit games for which you have at least 20 buyins.

For example, if you have a \$2,000 bankroll, the highest stakes you should play in are \$0.50/\$1.00 (\$100 buyin). If your bankroll ever dips below 20 buyins, you simply move down in stakes to a point where you once again have at least 20 buyins. By doing so, you will rarely ever have to deposit again.

Moving down in stakes is not fun but it's important that you have the self-discipline to do so when necessary. The biggest destroyer of poker careers has been an unwillingness to move down in stakes. Some of the greatest poker players in the world have gone broke because they refused to move down in stakes according to their bankrolls. Don't let the same thing happen to you.

Yes, it's a bummer to have to move down in stakes but it definitely beats blowing your bankroll and then saving up your paychecks for a year to start a new bankroll. The lower stakes might feel insignificant but that will pass after a while at the tables. Just stick it out until you can build your bankroll back up to a sufficient level for your normal stakes. You'll be glad you did.

The purpose of moving down during a bad run is two-fold. First of all, it prevents you from risking too high a percentage of your bankroll in any one game. Second, it allows you to play against easier opponents while you get your confidence back. Those bad runs can be a real drain on the soul, and moving down to play against easier people is a great way to regain that confidence.

Serious poker players should stick with a bankroll of around 30 buyins per level. It takes longer to move up in levels with a bigger bankroll but it makes it twice as safe. On top of that, it gives you additional peace of mind so you can concentrate on making the best play every time. Any time you play with scared money, you play poorly.

This chart depicts the minimum bankroll you should have to play at each level:

<u>Stakes</u>	<u>20 Buyins</u>	<u>30 Buyins</u>
\$0.02/\$0.05	\$100	\$150
\$0.05/\$0.10	\$200	\$300
\$0.10/\$0.25	\$500	\$750
\$0.25/\$0.50	\$1,000	\$1,500
\$0.50/\$1.00	\$2,000	\$3,000
\$1.00/\$2.00	\$4,000	\$6,000
\$2.00/\$4.00	\$8,000	\$12,000
\$3.00/\$6.00	\$12,000	\$18,000
\$5.00/\$10.00	\$20,000	\$30,000

**Chapter 10**  
**Table Selection**

Table selection is probably the most underrated method of improving your winrate. All it requires is a minimal amount of work and you can easily increase your hourly rate. Instead of joining tables at random, you can use table selection to find the tables with the easiest opponents.

The entire point of poker is to win money and you don't win money by constantly challenging yourself against the hardest opposition in the world. Sure, I understand that you want to improve your skills once in a while but the purpose of the daily grind is to win money. It doesn't matter how you win that money, as long as you win it. Your goal, then, should be to play at the easiest tables you can find.

Live poker players don't have a whole lot of options when it comes to finding tables but online players have hundreds of tables to choose from. When you play online, you have access to the stats of each table right in the poker software's game lobby. You'll see a list of things like hands per hour, average pot size and the percentage of players seeing the flop. All you need to do is look for the tables that have the most favorable stats and then join those tables.

### Percentage of Players Seeing the Flop

This is the best indicator of the softness of a table. Fishy players love to play lots of hands so look for the tables that have the highest percentage of players seeing the flop. The greater the number, the easier the table. At tables with a high “% to the flop” statistic, you just need to sit back, play a tight game and wait for strong hands.

### Average Pot Size

Poker sites also list the average pot size over the past several hands. If you want to find good action, look for the tables with the highest average pot size. This is an indicator that the players at the table aren't holding on to their money too tightly. Just be aware that this statistic can be skewed by recent all-in pots between players who both happened to have strong hands.

### Hands Per Hour

The hands per hour stat doesn't necessarily reflect the fishiness of a table but it can give you a good idea as to the general speed of the table. If you're a winning player, a higher hands per hour stat means you will achieve a higher hourly winrate. If you have a tie between two tables using the other two statistics, use this one as the tie breaker.

### Your Seat at the Table

Your position at the table can also be a big factor in determining your success at that table. The ideal seat at any poker table is to be to the left of the most active players and to the right of the most passive players.

By sitting to the left of the most active players, you use the power of position to submit yourself to the fewest surprises possible. You will have position against that player on every single hand except for when he has the dealer's button. The rest of the time, however, you will get to see what his move is before you have to make yours. This is a great advantage to have over an aggressive player.

The reasoning for sitting to the right of the most passive players is basically the same – to prevent surprises. Out of all the players at the table, you would rather give the power of position to those who are the least likely to use it against you. Passive players are rather predictable and tend to make few preflop raises. With these players sitting to your left, you don't have to worry about them surprising you with random bets and raises.

### Other Factors

Once you actually make it to a table, there are other things you can look for to determine if you are truly at a weak table. Signs that indicate you are at a good table include:

- Multiple players limping into the pot preflop
- Players calling preflop raises with weak hands
- Players making weak raises and small bets
- Players chasing draws with no regard for pot odds
- Players on tilt (raising every hand, making angry comments in the chat box)

## **Chapter 11**

### **Bluffing**

Bluffing in poker is the act of making a bet or raise with inferior cards for the purpose of winning the pot without a showdown. The art of bluffing plays an important role in poker strategy but newer players often overuse bluffs. The biggest problem is that they throw out bluffs without any real rhyme or reason, other than the fact that their cards can't win the pot.

For your bluffs to be successful, they have to be convincing and they have to be used at the right times. Bluffs made out of desperation are often unsuccessful because they aren't planned and the stories the bluffs tell don't add up. Bluffing should be done sparingly, with purpose and at the right times.

The purpose of bluffing is two-fold:

- To win more pots
- To remain unpredictable

The first reason is pretty obvious. The occasional bluff will result in a lot more pots taken down over the long run. Of course this is only true if your bluffs are successful. If you bluff too often, you will just end up losing money in the long run.

With regards to the second purpose of bluffing, it's important to remember the types of games you play in. If you're a small stakes player online, it's unlikely that many of your opponents will remember you or even pay attention to your playing style.

### Bluffing Before the Flop

The most common type of bluff is the preflop raise with weak cards. If you are sitting in late position and have tight players to your left, you can often win the blinds with a late position raise. Just wait until there's a hand in which you have late position and the table folds around to you. You can then make a late position raise and steal the blinds.

### Bluffing on the Flop

The flop is the second most common place to find bluffs. The average bluff on the flop comes in the form of a continuation bet. If you raise before the flop and the flop misses you, a continuation bet will often take the pot down anyways.

To give yourself the highest chance of success, you should only bluff on the flop if there is 1-2 other people in the pot with you. When you have multiple people in the pot, it becomes too likely that one of them will call your bluff.

In addition to that, you should note the board texture before attempting a bluff. A board that has three low, unsuited cards is less likely to have hit someone's hand. A board that contains three big cards is a dangerous board to bluff because people like to play hands with big cards.

Boards that contain a single Ace or King are also good to bluff if you made a raise before the flop. People will be hard pressed to call because they will figure that your preflop raise means you have something like AK or AQ. Of course, you'll have to be careful on these boards because your opponents will also be playing hands that contain Aces and Kings.

### Bluffing on the River

Bluffs on the river are the riskiest types of bluffs because there are more cards out that possibly connect with other players' hands. They are also dangerous because your opponents have refused to fold up this point for a reason – they must have *something*. Thirdly, these bluffs are dangerous because they require you to risk more money with bigger bets.

You should only make bluffs on the river when you have a strong idea of what your opponent has and you know your opponent is capable of folding that hand. If the river brings a scare card and your opponent knows how to fold, go for the bluff. Even then, this is a risky bluff. Think back to the last time someone made a bet on the river when you had a real hand. You were probably pretty tempted to call.

Semi-bluffing is the act of making a bet or raise with a drawing hand. The goal of the semi-bluff is to get the opponent to fold but if it fails to achieve that goal, there is still a chance that the draw completes. In that sense, semi-bluffs can win the pot in one of two ways: by getting the opponent to fold or by hitting the draw.

The occasional semi-bluff is an important part of your game because it keeps you unpredictable. If you never semi-bluff, your opponents will know to fold whenever you make a bet. When your opponents know you're capable of semi-bluffing, they'll be more likely to call when you have legitimate hands.

As powerful as semi-bluffs are, it's important not to get carried away with them. If you go around making semi-bluffs that have no chance of succeeding, you're just wasting your money. True semi-bluffs have a strong chance of making the opponent fold right then and there.

The nice thing about the semi-bluff is that if it fails, it disguises your hand quite nicely because your opponents will rarely peg you for betting with a draw. If you get called and still catch your draw, there's a good chance your opponent won't give you credit for having that draw. On top of that, the pot will be bigger, allowing you to make a large value bet on the river with your draw.

Despite their advantages, you still need to use semi-bluffs sparingly. Every time you knowingly make a semi-bluff that has no chance of succeeding, you're wasting your money exactly as if you were chasing a draw. You're spending your money while hoping to get lucky and complete your draw – not a winning strategy.

Semi-bluffs can also be used to buy a free card when you have position. For example, if you have a straight draw and an opponent makes a bet on the flop, you can make a raise and hope for a fold. If he doesn't fold, not all hope is lost. On the turn, that opponent will often check to you and you can then check behind for a free look at the river.

The best opponents to use the semi-bluff against are tight, predictable players. You don't want to semi-bluff fish because they'll just call and you don't want to semi-bluff smart, aggressive players because they'll play back at you too often to make it worth it. Tight players are the best because they are the most likely to fold.

Finally, don't forget to look at your own table image before attempting a semi-bluff. If you appear to be a tight, solid player, your semi-bluff will work way more often than if you just got caught trying to steal the pot two hands ago. This is true even if you haven't done any bluffing but appear to have. If you have won the last three pots in a row without showing your cards, your semi-bluff is much less likely to succeed.