



Presents...

**How to Beat
No-Limit Hold ‘Em
6-max Cash Games**

By Bill “Billyjex” Vosti

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Now that that's out of the way, let's learn to play some poker!

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Part I: Introduction

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Chapter 1: The Action Game

The days when the only game of poker you could find was in a casino are long gone. The internet revolution has spread through the poker world like wildfire, and the game of poker will never be the same.

The game of no-limit hold ‘em in particular has been greatly changed. The style of play has evolved rapidly over the past few years, with many young players learning the game at breakneck speed through as they play hundreds of thousands of hands a year on their computers.

The most popular online games for no-limit hold ‘em are 6-max cash games. These tables have a maximum limit of six players per table, which leads to more action and bigger pots. Hundreds of these games are running online at any moment. Hundreds of thousands of dollars are being won or lost every day at 6-max.

This relatively new game has mostly been ignored by the major poker books. Many of the authors of poker books are older, come from the casino background and haven’t paid their dues online like I have.

I’ve built my bankroll from playing these 6-max cash games and I’m here to tell you everything you need to know to beat not only the lower limits, but the higher ones as well.

If you spend the time reading and understanding every concept presented in this book, along with putting in the experience of actually playing hands online, you will excel at poker.

What can you expect from 6-max games?

- **The action.** The 6-max games have a lot more aggression than the game at your local casino or even a full-ring game online. The fact is you're dealing with only five other hands, so you need to make more plays with weaker hands than other hold 'em games. Learning how to play these marginal hands is tough, but that's what the rest of this book is for.
- **You get to play more hands with the fish.** Given the fact the table is six-handed, you'll be able to get into a lot more pots with the bad players than you would at a full-ring table. These are the players we make the most money off of and we want to play hands with them as much as possible.
- **You get to play more hands, period.** At a 6-max table online, you can get in 75 to 100 hands an hour, per table. I usually play six tables, so I'm playing 450 to 600 hands of poker an hour! I have a calculated edge where over the long run I win around 40 cents per hand I play. So, the more hands I play the more money I make. At a casino, you only get 30 hands an hour. You can see how playing online leads to a lot more money!
- **You'll be in the blinds a lot more.** Learning to play well in the [big and small blind](#) can be extremely tricky. You're going to be in these two spots often and if you play them poorly you'll be a long-term loser at 6-max. It's the whole dynamic of being out-of-position, which leads to...
- **The button and the cutoff (CO) are king in 6-max.** The real big winners at 6-max are masters of positional play and that means playing a lot more hands on the button and CO. I emphasize this often throughout this book and for good reasons.

A quick note on the formats used in this book

- There will be some terms used in the online poker world throughout this book that you might not recognize. These words are highlighted in **blue**, which is a link to the glossary that defines the word.
- There are links that are highlighted in **red**. These will redirect you to other parts of the book that relate to that word or concept.
- There are links that are highlighted in **orange**. These will open your web browser and direct you to a web site with more information on what you're reading.
- In this book, if a specific suit of the hole cards is needed to understand the hand, the symbols for the suit are displayed to the right of the card.. Sometimes, they are written in the format of text. For the text examples, when the hand is listed such as **98s**, the “s” means suited, in which both the **9** and the **8** are of the same suit. When the hand is listed like that, it does not matter what exact suit they are, just that they are suited. When the hand is listed such as **98o**, the “o” means they are offsuit and the 9 and 8 are not of the same suit. Again, in these instances it does not matter what the suit is.
- The following card abbreviations mean:
 - An “**A**” means an ace.
 - A “**K**” means a king.
 - A “**Q**” means a queen.
 - A “**J**” means a jack.
 - A “**T**” means a ten.

Chapter 2: Rakeback and Where You Can Play

At any given time of the day, there are 50,000 to 100,000 people playing online poker. Many of them are playing multiple tables, so there are literally hundreds of thousands of tables running online. Right now.

If you are new to online poker, first you need to find a site to play at. If you have already been playing online poker but struggling to maintain a bankroll, you need to find a new site with fishier players. If you've been making money but want to know how to win more, it's time for you to start mastering the concepts in this book.

A quick note on rakeback

For each hold 'em hand that sees the flop, the poker site or casino takes a small amount of money out of each pot, which is called the rake. This is how they make their money. The amount varies, although online it's usually from \$1 to \$3 per pot. This number can seem small in comparison to some of the pots but it adds up quickly.

For example, say I'm playing four tables of \$5/\$10 on Full Tilt. Each hour of play I am paying \$120 in rake! If I play 20 hours a week, that's \$2400 of money that I've won that has been taken out by the site. As you can see, over a year's time this number is huge for us professionals.

Thankfully, there's a way to get some of this money back. It's called "rakeback." By signing up on a poker site through a rakeback site, you can get anywhere from 20% to 50% (depending on the poker site) of your rake returned to you. This can really help anyone, regardless of how much they play or what stakes they play at.

Skilled Online Poker offers rakeback for many of today's popular sites. [Check out SOP's rakeback page.](#)

What site to play at and why

The most popular online sites can change frequently. Also, the fishiest online sites (the ones with the worst players) can change from month to month. I've decided to skip detailing each site in this book and keep an updated guide on what poker sites to play at [Skilled Online Poker's rakeback page](#).

Chapter 3: Bankroll Management

It's crucial to play within your bankroll. So many times players will take all the money they have online and put it at one table. These players are destined to lose all their money, become discouraged and either never play again or never have the will to improve their poker game, because they assume it's just bad luck.

A bankroll is the amount of money you have that is used just for poker. We all operate on a bankroll. Never put your entire bankroll at risk when playing online, as you're destined to become broke.

The general rule of thumb is to have 20 buy-ins for the stakes you are playing in your bankroll. A buy-in is the maximum you can buy-in for at the game, which is usually 100 times the big blind. For example, if you are a \$1/\$2 no limit player, you will sit with \$200 at a table. Thus, 20 buy-ins of \$200 is \$4,000, which should be your minimum bankroll for \$1/\$2.

It's always better to err on the side of caution and have more than 20 buy-ins for the stakes you are playing. While it's rare, it is possible to be a winning player and lose 20 buy-ins in a bad streak. The shorthanded online games are very aggressive and a little bit of bad luck can go a long way.

When you have 20 buy-ins for higher stakes and want to take a shot, go for it. If you lose 4 or 5 buy-ins, you should move back down to a lower stakes game to rebuild your confidence and your bankroll.

Chapter 4: Software for Online Poker

If you are playing poker online without the help of any software aids, you're already way behind¹. Many of today's online professionals use programs such as Poker Tracker and PokerAce Hud to get a leg up on the competition.

Poker Tracker is a program that records your hands as you play, importing them into their own software. Within this software, you can keep track of your winnings and losses and review hands. It goes into great detail, revealing how much you've won or lost from each position and how loose or tight you are from these positions.

It also shows you each hand preflop and how much the hand has won or lost for you. I can look up in my Poker Tracker and see that **AA** has won me hundreds of thousands of dollars, all by itself. I can also see that ace three offsuit (**A3o**) as my hole cards has been a long-term loser, and I can adjust my play based on that. Poker Tracker is an invaluable tool and anyone serious about online poker needs it. It's also very helpful for keeping track of numbers when tax season rolls around.

PokerAce Hud is another must-have program that works in conjunction with Poker Tracker. PokerAce displays the "stats" of your opponents on your poker client. If you've played with an opponent before or datamine his stats you can tell how loose, how tight, or how aggressive an opponent is right when you sit down. It's a great tool, especially for those who play 4 or more tables and can't notice how everyone at each table is playing.

¹ At the micro-stakes online (.25/.50 NL and lower,) it's not imperative to have Poker Tracker and PokerAce Hud. Playing a tight, solid and aggressive game will be enough since you will be up against plenty of bad players. However, once you reach the small stakes games, it's important to have these stat tools to keep up with the competition.

Many of your opponents, especially at \$1/\$2 and above, are using these tools in increasingly competitive world of making money online. You must use Poker Tracker and PokerAce Hud as you play. The stats from these programs will be referenced frequently in this book as they of great assistance to any serious player.

Chapter 5: Stats Defined

You're going to need to understand some key terms that the programs Poker Tracker and PokerAce Hud refer to. All of these stats should be used for self-analysis, and many of them will be used to analyze our opponents (as described in [Part III](#)). Some of these stats will be displayed on your PokerAce Hud layout. I have my own layouts for download on [Skilled Online Poker](#).

Key Terms

- **Voluntarily put \$ into pot (VPIP):** How often someone puts money into the pot. This is how we determine how loose or tight someone is and is a critical statistic to follow. This doesn't include when someone puts in the big blind or small blind.
- **Preflop raise % (PFR):** How often someone raises preflop. The higher the number, the more aggressive he is. PFR, combined with VPIP, will be the primary stats you use to spot fish.
- **Aggression Factor (AF):** How aggressive someone is on the flop, turn and river. It's a tougher stat to understand and use well, and is generally best to identify passive players.
- **Attempt to steal blinds (ASB):** A player is stealing the blinds when it is folded to them in the CO or button and they [open raise](#). According to the Poker Tracker, they are attempting to "steal" or win the blinds from this position. This helps to identify those who are [raising light](#) in [late position](#) (as they will have a higher ASB % than others) so we can [defend our blinds](#) lighter against these players.

- **Went to showdown % (WTSD):** A very important stat for self-analysis as well as to understand our opponents. This is how often you are going to the river and seeing a showdown against an opponent. If this number is lower than around 22%, that person is probably folding too much. If it's above 28%, that person is not folding enough.
- **Folded SB to steal (FSB%):** How often someone calls or raises in the small blind (SB) to a CO or button raise. If this number is real low, it's probably a fish.
- **Folded BB to steal (FBB%):** Same as above.
- **Continuation bet % (CB):** This is how often the preflop raiser bets the flop. If this number is very high, it means the preflop raiser is betting nearly every time he gets called preflop, which means he's often not going to have a hand when he bets (it's just too hard to always flop a hand in hold 'em). He's more susceptible to being bluffed.
- **Fold to continuation bet % (FCB):** This is how often someone folds to the preflop raiser when the preflop raiser bets the flop. If this number is low, you are dealing with someone who is calling any piece of the flop. If it's high, you should be continuation betting these people every time as they won't call you unless they hit a big hand.
- **Won \$ when saw flop (W\$WSF):** This stat is more useful for self-analysis. It's how often you're winning the pot when you play a hand postflop. If it's too low, you may be surrendering pots too easily.
- **Total hands:** This is an important statistic to use when using PokerAce Hud. If the sample size is too small you can't rely on the statistics as much. You only

need 50 or so hands to start getting an idea for VPIP and PFR, but every other stat needs at least a few hundred hands for that stat to become meaningful.

There are many other stats you can use, such as how often someone check-raises, but having so many stats displayed can be confusing.

Chapter 6: How Much Money Can You Expect to Make?

As I've said before, I know many, many people who are doing very well making money at 6-max online. But how much is realistic? How do we determine our win rates and compare?

Win rates in online poker are determined by Poker Tracker big blinds, or PTBB. This stat is achieved by taking how many big blinds you are winning at that limit per 100 hands and dividing it by two².

Think of it this way: a good player at \$2/\$4 will make around eight big blinds per 100 hands. That's \$32 per 100 hands, or 4 PTBB. It depends on your goals and your free time to determine how much you can play per month, but let's say you're playing for a second income and play 20,000 hands a month (which is about 15 hours a week, playing 4 tables). Per 1000 hands you're making \$320. Per 20,000 hands, you're making \$6400. Not bad for a second income!

Most professionals will play between 30,000 to 80,000 hands a month. You can see how poker can be a great income, even at the medium stakes.

Keep in mind the sample size needed for a good determination of your win rate. You can be running at 5 PTBBs over 20k hands and still be a losing player. You can be running at 2 PTBBs at over 50k hands and be a 5 PTBB winner over 200k hands. There's a lot of variance in poker related to luck; you may be on the good end or the bad end of it for awhile, but over hundreds of thousands of hands it will even out.

At the lower limits, the highest win rates are achievable but there's obviously less money to be won. A good win rate at a limit like \$.50/\$1 is 5 PTBB, but you can get a

² The reason for dividng by two is related to an old bug in Poker Tracker where it was originally miscalculated. It became so common place that it's still used.

few points higher if you're really good. But if you're winning that much you shouldn't stay there for long.

At \$2/\$4, a win rate from 3 PTBB to 6 PTBB is achievable and good. The games start to get tougher as you move up so the potential for a higher win rate goes down.

At limits like \$5/\$10 and higher, you can be happy just winning 2 to 3 PTBBs though the very best can win more. Having lower win rates still means big money at these limits.

Once you become a consistent winner, it's also important to consider your hourly rate when figuring out your win rate. A player can be winning 6 PTBBs at \$5/\$10 but if he's only playing one table, he's making much less per hour than someone playing eight tables of \$5/\$10 at a 2 PTBB win rate. The player playing one table plays around 75 hands per hour. For every 100 hands he plays, he is making \$120, so he's making \$90 per hour. The other player, who's playing eight tables, plays 600 hands per hour. He makes \$40 per 100 hands, so he's making \$240 per hour.

That said, playing as many tables as you can before your eyes bleed is up to your personal preference. It is much tougher to play eight tables and it will burn you out much faster. It is also harder to improve upon your game when playing so many tables. You won't be able to really analyze

You can't expect to jump into a 6-max no-limit hold 'em and start winning big if you're inexperienced. You can't expect to move up in limits and always be beating it for as much as you beat a lower limit for. It will take experience and dedication, but I believe anyone armed with the material in this book can excel at poker.

Chapter 7: Multi-tabling

One of the biggest advantages to online poker is that you can play more than one table at the same time. As you can see in the win rate thread, playing many tables at one time can help you earn a significant amount of money more than if you only played a couple; however, there are some disadvantages.

The pros of multi-tabling

- **More hands per hour.** Each 6-max table you add will give you another 70 to 100 hands of play. Since I average making a certain amount of money per every 100 hands, there's a great advantage to playing more hands per hour.
- **More action.** It can be boring just playing one or two tables. By playing four or more tables, you guarantee a constant stream of playable hands and situations to keep your interest.
- **More situations to learn.** More hands and more action spots means you will be in more situations in which you can learn from. There's a point where this can change though and you may be too overloaded with tables.

The cons of multi-tabling

- **Less focus.** The action can be so hectic when playing multiple tables that you will begin to lose concentration in some areas. You will miss hands that happen between your opponents. You may have two difficult decisions at once and will have to give less time than is needed to think about both.
- **Harder to learn.** Although more learnable situations will present themselves, if you are playing many tables you will sometimes not have time to learn from them. You'll be faced with another decision soon enough and won't be able to

analyze or think through a hand. If you're just playing a couple of tables, however, you can think through every decision and try to apply and understand all the concepts presented in the book.

Learning to multi-table

You should be working your way up to play multiple tables. Many professionals play four or more tables at all times. When starting, I'd recommend playing two tables. You'll have plenty of time to think things through and will still be getting in enough hands to learn.

Being comfortable with playing four or more tables mostly has to do with experience. I can play six to eight tables, facing over 500 hands an hour, because nearly every single decision I make is automatic. I've played so many hands that there's rarely a situation I've never seen before. I do face tough decisions that I have to think about, but while I'm struggling with a hand at one table, I'm able to play the other seven without having to take my mind off the tough decision.

The software tools help immensely with this as well. It's impossible to keep track of everything your opponent is doing when playing four or more tables and PokerAce Hud helps us understand how each player is playing.

Be forewarned, though. There are players who are playing a lot of tables, playing like robots and only using their stats to make decisions. They play so robotic we like to call them "Hud bots." While they may be making some money, they aren't playing the best poker they can and they aren't improving their game, either. Always try to find the right balance between playing a lot of tables and using your stats while still being able to observe other player tendencies and understand your decisions.

Part I Summary

- **Put the time into getting better.** To become good at poker, you must be dedicated to studying it and putting in the time to get experience. It takes time and perseverance but the payoffs can be big.
- **Play with rakeback.** Over a year's time, the amount of money you get back in rakeback is huge. You must be playing on a site with rakeback.
- **Don't risk too much of your money at one table.** Follow my bankroll guidelines. Otherwise, you're destined to go broke.
- **Get Poker Tracker and PokerAce Hud.** These programs are invaluable for a good player and a necessity once you get to small stakes.
- **Find the right amount of tables for you.** Don't play more tables than you can handle. You'll learn less and have less time to think for your tough decisions. At the same time, you should always aim for as many tables as you can handle well. Generally, the more hands you play per hour, the more money you will make per hour.

Part II: The Game Plan

Chapter 8: The TSA Game Plan

There's a phrase I often repeat to myself when I feel I'm not playing my best.

"Play tight, solid and aggressive."

I repeat this phrase all the time. It immediately clicks in my head to return to my original game plan, the game plan I have used for so long that has always made me money and will continue to make me money. It's a phrase I tell all of my students when they want a general idea of how to play. It's a phrase I tell beginners is the most important thing to winning at poker.

"Play tight, solid and aggressive."

So much of beating 6-max is this phrase. After learning all these concepts, after understanding all of your opponents, how well you do will always come back to the fundamentals of playing tight, solid and aggressive.

Playing tight

This one should be obvious. You're not going to be making money at online poker if you're calling raises with ace two offsuit (**A2o**) or king four suited (**K4s**) type of hands.

If you are up against very loose players, you'll be almost assured to win money by playing tighter, since you are playing better hands on average than them. With the better hand preflop you're going to be hitting better hands postflop.

There's such a thing as playing too tight, however. In the 6-max environment of online poker, you're only dealing with 5 other hands so you need to loosen up a little as compared to a full ring table.

Exactly how tight to play will be shown in the upcoming chapters. Follow my preflop chart for exactly what to play to maintain a tight style that still takes advantage of a shorthanded table. The style I advocate has been a proven winner over millions of hands.

Playing solid

There are times when you're having a bad session and you feel like you're on [tilt](#). You begin to play hands in spots you know you shouldn't but your emotions are taking over.

There are times when you're being outplayed by a good player at the table and you can't take it. You start playing back in bad spots and trying to hopelessly bluff him when he's representing that he has a big hand.

There are times when the big fish at the table is hitting every hand and you keep trying to bluff him out of frustration.

These are all examples of when you get out of your element and stop playing solid. Playing solid means to stick to your game plan and what you know are winning plays. It means making the correct plays despite the distractions or emotions at the table.

Learning to play solid when your emotions take control, when you are tired, when you are hungry, or when you're girlfriend just broke up with you is not easy. I still struggle with tilt sometimes. I've gotten much better at it and it's because I always remember my mantra: "Play tight, solid and aggressive."

When I hear this in my head I know to snap out of it and get back to the style of poker that has won me hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Playing aggressive

You've almost certainly heard about being aggressive in hold 'em, whether it be from the World Poker Tour TV shows, Doyle Brunson's Super System or the 22-year-old guy at the poker table at your local casino. It is the name of the game as playing passive in a game dealing with big pots and deep stacks is going to get you killed, especially at 6-max tables.

Aggression is a fickle thing, however, and you must use discretion when someone else is telling you they have a hand. The basic game plan of a tight, solid and aggressive player is to bet, bet and bet when he has a good hand³. When they have nothing, it's worth firing a bet or two at the pot but not bluffing off your whole stack.

Opponents who only know the word "aggression" and try to win every pot by bluffing are actually some of the biggest losers.

Just remember to play aggressive until someone lets you know they have a hand (either by calling a big bet or raising your bet).

A note on getting raised

There are times you have a good hand like [top pair top kicker \(TPTK\)](#) and you bet the turn and you get raised. Often you're going to have to let this hand go and fold. Sometimes you'll have middle pair and think the guy is bluffing you. Sometimes, you have two pair and the player who called you on the flop and turn goes all in when the [flush draw](#) gets there. For now, you need to let these hands go.

A fatal flaw of many players is assuming people are bluffing them more often than they really do. Simply surrendering your hand in these spots will save you money

³ There are times when checking is better. Refer to the [Chapter 26 on pot control](#).

and allow you to keep collecting profits from your good hands when you bet them strongly.

I know this concept is a little harder to understand, and there are thousands of tough situations where you will be faced with a tough decision after you bet and get raised. I will give you some guidelines in the later chapters on street by street play but to know when to let a good hand go may require thousands of hands of experience.

Chapter 9: Understanding Position, Part I

This is part one of two on position. It's important you get a fundamental understanding of position before we discuss the types of opponents you will face.

In a 6-max game, there are the following positions: the early position spots, UTG (under the gun) and UTG+1, the late position spots, the CO (the cutoff) and the button (the dealer button), and the blinds, the SB (small blind) and the BB (big blind).

Position means where you are on the table in relation to the dealer button. Any good NL player exploits his position at the table to win the most money he can. **Acting after the other players have acted is a HUGE advantage.** Poker Tracker, which breaks down how much you have won based on position, has demonstrated that I have won nearly three times as much on the button as compared to UTG. I'm getting dealt the exact same hands but on the button I get to act last postflop and that has made all the difference.

An example of the advantage of getting to act last is when you hold a hand like **ATs** on an ace high board.

You're playing \$1/\$2. You raise **A♦T♦** on the button and the BB calls.

The flop is **A♥6♣7♣**. A pretty good flop. The BB checks. You bet \$10 into a \$13 pot. The BB calls.

The turn is the **5♦**. That wasn't a great card, as it brought a straight if the BB held **98**, but it wasn't the worst as the flush draw has not got there.

The BB checks. Now here's where a big positional advantage comes in. We just gathered a lot of information about the BB's hand as he just called the flop and checked

the turn. We have the option of checking behind on the turn for pot control (a concept explained further in [Chapter 26](#)), or betting for value from flush draws or weaker aces.

Say we check behind. We get to see what the river card is, and how BB responds to it, before we have to do anything! We can adjust our decision on what to do based on much more information than is available for the BB to make his decisions. This positional advantage applies to nearly every hand of poker and creates a tough dynamic for anyone playing out of position.

You can also see from this example how tough of a time BB has making his decisions. On the flop, turn and river he has to act first. He is acting on much less information on each street than we have. It is from this dynamic that the player on the button will make much more money than the players in the blinds. For that matter, any player in position will make more money on average than the player out of position.

It's important to note that in the SB or BB, it's very important to play very tight, especially when inexperienced. I discuss preflop in the next chapter as to exact hands to play when and where, but ingrain it into your head to play tight out of position. A huge flaw of online poker losers is playing too many hands in the blinds. It is a sign to me of a bad player when I see someone calling raises in the SB and BB too much.

Chapter 10: Understanding Our Stats

Being a tight, solid and aggressive player, you're going to be aiming for a narrow range of preflop stats. Once you get to the \$2/\$4 limits and higher, the majority of players will be in this same range.

If your stats fall in between these lines, you're almost guaranteed to win money at the lower limits and with an understanding of the concepts in this book you're almost guaranteed to win money at the medium and higher stakes.

We're going to fall under the tight-aggressive (referred to as TAG in the online world) umbrella. We play tight, but we are looser when in position (the button and the CO) where we have a huge advantage. We are aggressive and bet our good hands and occasionally bet when we have nothing to always keep the pressure on.

- **Preflop raise (PFR):** This number should be around 15% to 19%. You can be a winning player with a 12-14% PFR, but you're giving up a lot of value by not raising more, especially in late position. If you follow my preflop chart you should land around the 15% to 17% range.
- **Voluntarily put \$ into pot (VPIP):** We'll be putting money into the pot around 18% to 23% of the time. As you can see, it's not much higher than our PFR. Nearly every time we come into the pot we should be raising. There are times such as calling a pocket pair to flop a set when we'll call raises, or when we'll complete the SB when there's multiple limpers before us. But for the most part, when you play a hand, you're raising.
- **Aggression factor (AF):** It's hard to tell you a good AF to have. Generally, the AF on the flop will be higher than the turn and river since you will be

continuation betting a lot and giving up on the turn. Your overall AF should be above 2 but not much higher than 3.

- **Attempt to steal blinds % (ASB):** This is an important number to have high. It should be at least 30% and getting up to 35% is a good goal. There's just so much value to be had on the button (refer to [Chapter 23](#) for more info) that you should be raising any decent hand when it's folded to you.
- **Went to showdown % (WTSD):** You should be going to showdown between 22% and 28%. This number will be affected strongly with how often you decide to pick off river bluffs. This stat can range widely since so many different factors will go into how this number is made, but if your WTSD is outside this range you may be doing something wrong.
- **Fold SB and BB to steal:** You should fold your SB in the high 80% while folding your BB in the low 80%. You shouldn't surrender your blinds too easily but you shouldn't be playing out of position too much, as the person in position has such a huge advantage.
- **Won \$ when saw flop (WSWSF):** It's important to have this number around 40 to 45%. If it's too low, you are either folding too much postflop or are playing too loose (thus playing too many losing hands). If it's too high, you're playing too tight preflop because you should be playing more hands that win less often, but show still show a profit in the long run.

Get these numbers in line and you will be halfway to a complete game. It's the most important step to start off in the right direction by playing a solid and tight game.

Chapter 11: Preflop Play

It's important to discuss in detail how to play preflop right after I discuss your stats because everything will come from preflop. It's like a big snowball from preflop to the flop, turn and river. First, consult my preflop chart to help you learn what to raise when it's folded to you and from where.

Notice how often I have you raising from the button. **The button is a HUGE money maker in poker.** Again, consult the chapters on position for more detailed analysis, but just know that the button (and the CO to a lesser extent) is what will make you rich.

The preflop chart can only help you know when to raise when folded to, however. When someone open raises and you have a good hand, should you 3-bet, call or fold? I'm going to give you some general guidelines on how to play in this spot against a TAG player who fits our own stats. From this starting point, you can adjust slightly based on the player types described in the next chapter. My advice references 100 BB stacks. Your best play may change if you are deeper stacked against an opponent.

- **You should have a very tight 3-bet range against early position (EP) raisers.**

Almost universally, an EP raiser has a good hand on average. It's best to not 3-bet hands like **TT** and **99** against EP raisers. In fact, I'd only 3-bet **AA**, **KK**, **QQ**, **AKo** and **AKs**. **JJ** should be 3-bet about half the time. Once you start establishing a reputation with players you see over and over, it's important to mix this up a little bit and start 3-betting some hands like **76s** to keep them off-balance, but that's more advanced play.

- **You should be calling small pocket pairs (22 to 77) to flop sets when facing a single raise.** Pocket pairs should almost always be called. Sets (when a pocket pair hits three of a kind on the flop) are HUGE cash cows and will make you A LOT of money.
- **You should be calling medium pocket pairs (88 to TT) to a single raise preflop and playing them carefully postflop.** Hands like **88, 99, TT** (and to a lesser extent **JJ**) can be very difficult to play postflop when you don't flop a set. It's best to keep the pot small in these situations and use your knowledge of hand ranges and your opponents to decide on the best course of action.
- **You should keep a tight 3-bet range against late position (LP) raisers but mix in more “bluff” 3-bets.** When someone raises in LP, it's less likely they have a big hand. This is certainly true for people who open raise the button. You should start 3-betting hands like **JJ, TT** and **AQ** but proceed with caution with hands like **KQ, AJ** and **KJ**. I would recommend calling with these hands but not 3-betting them, as 3-bet pots with strong but dominated hands are going to be very difficult to play. I'd much rather 3-bet a hand like **76s** against an LP raiser than **AJ**. Why? A hand like **76s** will be much easier to play postflop; if we flop top pair and get action, we know it's no good. If you 3-bet **AJ** and flop top pair, it's going to be difficult to know what to do. This is a complicated concept that won't make much sense to a beginner but it's a very important one to eventually understand:

- You should 3-bet your best hands and occasionally 3-bet your medium hands. You should usually just call your good hands.

Usually when someone calls our 3-bets preflop it is with their better hands. These kind of hands; **AK**, **AQ**, **AA**, **KK**, **QQ**, are destroying hands like **AJ** and **KJ**. With those hands you have almost no hope. With a hand like **76s**, however, we can sometimes flop a big hand that is deceptive and will win a lot of money off of our opponents big hands. Also, when we flop something like a pair of sevens it's easy to get away from if we get played back at. For example, let's say the button, a tight-aggressive regular, raises on the button to \$6 at a \$1/\$2 NL game. Occasionally you should 3-bet a suited connector here. In this example, we'll 3-bet **7♣8♣** in the big blind to \$20. Our opponent calls.

The flop is **8♦3♥4♣**. We bet \$30 into the \$41 pot and our opponent raises us all-in. We can fold here the majority of the time since a pair of eights in this spot just won't be the best hand enough. However, say in this spot we had **K♣T♣** and the flop was T high. If raised all-in, we'd have a much harder time folding top pair and would be faced with an extremely tough situation. Therefore, we should make 3-bets preflop with hands that will lead to easy decisions postflop.

- If you get **4-bet** by an EP raiser, play extremely tight. If someone raises in EP and plays back against your 3-bet by 4-betting you preflop, only go all-in with

AA or KK. At the medium stakes and higher, you'll usually have to go all-in in these spots with **AK** and **QQ** as well.

- **If you get 4-bet by an LP raiser, go all-in with AK and QQ too.** Since people get 3-bet more when they raise in LP, they know they need to 4-bet a little lighter, also. You just can't fold **AK** and **QQ** in these spots since our opponent can be getting out-of-line, so go all-in.
- **For more information on playing preflop, check out the dealing with getting 3-bet and using the 4-bet bluff section in Part VI.**

Chapter 12: The Continuation Bet

Being a tight and aggressive player, one of the most common bets you will make is the continuation bet. In every session you play, you will be making hundreds of continuation bets.

A continuation bet is a bet made on the flop after a player raises preflop. For example, you raise a hand in late position. Your opponent calls out of the blinds. He checks to you on the flop and you bet. That's a continuation bet.

You should almost always continuation bet into one opponent. When only one opponent calls you preflop, fire away on every flop. Even if you have nothing. Especially if you have nothing; you can't win the pot any other way. You will win the pot enough to make this bet profitable alone. It also helps to always continuation bet for the times when you do have a good hand. Your opponent can never know what you have just based on your flop bet alone.

I like to make my continuation bets large at almost full pot. I usually make it 80 to 90% of the pot. I find the larger bet lets you take the pot down easier, which is important since you usually won't flop anything⁴. It's important to bet this much even with a good hand so you keep your opponent guessing as to if you have a hand or not.

The only spots I wouldn't continuation bet into one opponent are when you have a hand that you should play pot control with (as explained in [Chapter 26](#)) or when you are up against a player that is so loose that he is never folding and your hand has no hope to win.

⁴ Mathematically, you'll flop a bad hand more often than you'll flop a good hand. The exact percentages can depend on the strength of your hand preflop and what we define as a good hand postflop, but about 40% of the time you'll have a hand good enough postflop that it is worth something.

You should usually continuation bet into two opponents. When two opponents call me preflop, I still bet into them a majority of the time. While it's less likely you'll take the pot down, there's more money out there to be won. Also, a bet into two players is interpreted as stronger than a bet into one player so your opponents will fold stronger hands.

When my hand completely misses the flop and the flop is coordinated (more on this in [Chapter 29 on board texture](#)), I give up. When both players are loose and my hand has no hope, I give up.

You need a hand to continuation bet into three or more opponents. There's just too good of a chance someone hit the flop big to bet into three or more opponents with nothing. I'd usually need at least top pair or a good draw⁵ to bet into three opponents.

You need to be continuation betting more than you think you should. There's some complicated math to it, but you win the pot enough on the flop and sometimes win the pot later in the hand by making a hand to make it worth it to continuation bet a lot.

Continuation bets at medium to high stakes. You should still be continuation betting most of the time at the higher limits, but be forewarned: other players at the table will know what you're up to and that you often don't have a hand. Expect to get called and raised a lot more by solid players at these limits when you continuation bet. It will be a tough adjustment to know when to continue and when to fold when you actually have a hand, but that will take experience.

⁵ Generally, a good draw means having a draw with eight or more outs to a very good hand. For example, holding **JT** on a **983** flop is a good draw with eight outs to a straight. If you don't know what "outs" are, refer to the [glossary](#) and [Chapter 28 on semibluffs](#).

What to do on the turn when your continuation bet is called? That's beyond the scope of this chapter. To know what to do here, you need to know your opponents, the table dynamics, their hand range and understand if it's a good spot to keep betting. In the later chapters you will begin to get an understanding of what to do beyond the continuation bet.

Chapter 13: Understanding the Value Bet, Part I

This is going to be part one of two on the value bet. I'm explaining it to you now before I discuss the types of opponents you play so you have a basic understanding of what it is. After you garner more information about the types of opponents you'll play, you'll visit the later chapter on value betting to know when you should value bet, who you should value bet and how much you should value bet.

The value bet is extremely important in 6-max. Mastering the art of the value bet will increase your win rate more than any other bet. I feel it's a bet that when mastered separates the big online winners from the marginal winners, especially at the medium to higher limits where getting value is a little tougher.

Most value bets refer to betting a hand on the river you believe will be called by a worse hand. You are getting value out of your hand. Many other bets on the flop and turn can be considered value bets but when referred to in the online poker world we're talking about the river bet.

I will tell you this right now: **you should be value betting more than you think you should.** A major flaw of the 6-max player is assuming he is being bluffed more often than he really is. You'll be shocked at some of the things a player will call your river bet with when he only beats a bluff.

Chapter 14: Pot Odds

An important and basic poker concept is pot odds. Pot odds are the odds the pot is offering you compared to the current bet you are facing. You use these odds to determine if you are getting the right price to draw to a hand like a flush or straight draw.

For example, say you have T♥9♥ on a 7♥4♥A♣ board. The pot is \$20 and you bet \$10, and your opponent moves all in for \$40. You have to call \$30 to win \$70. You think your opponent always has an ace, so we need to hit a flush to win (or running tens or running nines, but the odds of that are so small we'll ignore it).

To make a profitable call, we need to win this hand 30% of the time. I calculated this by adding what we have to call (\$30) to what we have to win (\$70) to get 100, and then I divided what we have to call (30) with this number (100), which is 30%.

Ok, a little complicated. Let's say you had to call \$50 to win \$50. You are getting 1 to 1 on your money. You must win 50% of the time. Let's say you have to call \$50 to win \$100. You are getting 2 to 1 on your money and have to win 33% of the time. As you can see in the T♥9♥ example, 70 is a little more than two times what you have to call, so it falls right on 30%.

Now we know we have to win 30% of the time. But how can we know how often we're winning? There's a very simple mathematical formula that I have always used to help me determine this.

On the flop, multiple the number of outs you have by four. This number will be very close to the actual percentage that you will hit one of your outs. **On the turn,**

simply multiply your number of outs by two. This number will be very close to the actual percentage that you will hit one of your outs.

Back to the **T♥9♥** hand. There are 52 cards in a poker deck, and 13 cards of each suit. There are two hearts in our hand and two hearts on the flop, so there are nine hearts left. So we have nine outs, and we multiply nine by four to get 36. We are roughly 36% to win the hand⁶, and we need to win the hand 30% of the time to make a profitable call, so we have an easy call.

Let's take this same situation to the turn. Your opponent goes all in and you have to call \$30 to win \$70. We take our nine outs and multiply it by two to get 18. We are about 18% to win⁷ and we need to win 30% of the time, so we fold.

Pot odds can be difficult to grasp at first. It's a little confusing but pretty simple with a little practice. I'd recommend keeping a calculator by your desk and figuring out the odds until you get a better grasp on the math. With enough experience, most of this will be second nature and you won't be doing much math at the table.

Note that you don't need to be figuring out these percents to the last decimal. Just a rough idea if you have the odds to call is enough. There are so many other factors going on in the hand if we are off by a couple percent it won't affect how much money we win in the long run by much. By getting within a percent or two you will be close enough to making the correct decision.

Also, pot odds are usually not this cut and dry. For example, say we are facing a \$50 bet to win \$70. $50 + 70 = 120$. $50/120$ is 41%. We need to win 41% of the time,

⁶ The actual odds of making a flush with your flush draw with two cards to come is 1.9 to 1, or 34.4%.

⁷ The actual odds of making a flush with your flush draw with one card to come is 4.1 to 1, or 19.6%.

and if we have a hand like **T♥9♥** in the above example, we are only 38% to win (or 36% with our quick calculations). If the other play is all in, it's a bad idea to call.

But let's say your opponent has \$200 behind after betting \$50. We can now call the \$50 because we expect to make more money in the future if we hit our flush. This is called implied odds and is a more advanced concept I explain in [Chapter 25](#).

There are also examples where we can't really count all of our outs in our calculations. Say we have **9♠8♣** on a **7♥6♥2♥** board. We are facing a bet of \$50 into a \$100 pot, so we have to call a bet of \$50 in a \$150 pot. We have to win this hand 25% of the time to call. We have eight outs to hit our straight, which is roughly 32% to happen. But we have to be wary of the flush out there and we could already be [drawing dead](#). Even if someone doesn't have the flush yet, if the **5♥** or the **T♥** comes on the turn or river, there's a good chance our straight won't even be the best hand.

Always exercise caution when your outs are not to the "[nuts](#)."

Chapter 15: Limped Pots

Limped pots (when there are no raises preflop but at least one call) are always difficult for a TAG. We're just not used to limping and dealing with hands like top pair no kicker in a small pot. I believe the solution is very simple: just don't worry about them very much.

There's not much value to be made from winning limped pots. You'll usually be in the SB or BB in these pots and you should only really get involved if you flop a very big hand.

Certainly don't bluff in these pots, especially if they're [multi-way](#). A [semibluff](#) is ok if you have an 8-out or more draw. Be wary of small flush draws though; a hand like **5♠2♠** on a **T♠9♠8♣** board is pretty worthless and should be check/folded. It's a classic example of [reverse implied odds](#).

A very good player once told me that if you're getting all-in on the flop in a limped pot without the nuts, you're probably doing something wrong. And he's right. While that's not a rule set in stone, getting all in with bottom two-pair for 100 BBs when you flopped two pair with **640** in the BB is going to be a losing play.

My general guidelines for limped pots are:

- When you flop top pair, no kicker, it's only worth one bet at most. **K3** on a **KQ8** flop is a very bad hand. If there are 2 or more players, I often won't even put a dime in the pot.

- When the SB [open completes](#) and you check the BB and he checks to you on the flop, it's OK to fire out a small bet to take the pot. Otherwise, never bet into a limped pot with nothing.
- If you bet an 8-out draw and get raised, never 3-bet as a semibluff. Just call and try to hit. Only with a huge [combo draw](#) like an open-ended straight flush draw would I 3-bet on the flop as a semibluff in a limped pot.
- Be very careful with two pair. If you have two pair and there are possible straights or flushes on board, getting all-in is usually very bad. If you have top two pair on a [dry board](#), then it's ok to bomb away with bets.
- Be careful with [trips, no kicker](#). A hand like **T3** on a **TT2** board isn't going to be very good when you are getting a lot of action. Proceed with caution.

Part II Summary

- **Play tight, solid and aggressive.** If you are always playing a style that fits this mantra, you will have the foundation of a good poker game. Understand each point and revisit this simple phrase often.
- **Position is huge.** Acting after the other players is a big advantage. You can react to what they have done on each street before you have to act, thus you'll always be outplaying your opponents if you're the one in position.
- **Understanding stats can help you find that tight, solid and aggressive game.**
The majority of winning poker players at 6-max all have similar stats.
Understand how to analyze the stats of your own play to find the right style.
- **Position is huge preflop.** Play tightly in the blinds preflop. Play loosely in late position.
- **It's better to continuation bet too much than too little.** You will often win the pot uncontested. When you don't, sometimes you'll have a good hand to win a big pot with, and sometimes you'll be able to hit a card on the turn or river to make the best hand. This all adds up to the continuation bet being a profitable play.
- **Value bet more than you think you should.** Your opponents will surprise you with what they're willing to call on the river. Value bet big and value bet often.
- **Limped pots aren't worth much for your win rate.** Don't fight for them very hard unless you have a good hand. In the long run, going after these very small pots just won't be worth it for our win rate.

Part III: Your Opponents

There are always multiple ways to play a hand. Some of them correct and some of them very bad. To choose the best play for a hand, we need to figure out what our opponents have for a hand. To figure out what our opponents have, we need to understand who our opponent is and how we expect him to play.

There are a few different player types online and they can be grouped together. The same types of players tend to play their hands similarly from preflop to postflop.

In this section of the book, I describe the three most common classifications of opponents: the fish, the TAG and the LAG. These opponents make up the vast majority of the players you face.

We will be using statistics to help us classify our opponents. You will see so many different players, especially at the lower limits, that an aid to help you keep track of them is essential. Stats will help you understand who an opponent is faster and easier than just general observation. It will also help you with opponents you've played with before but forgotten.

Using these stats with a good PokerAce Hud layout is important. Again, the layouts I use are available on [Skilled Online Poker](#).

It's important to note that you must also look beyond stats to understand your opponents as best as possible. Other things like how big your opponent bets, what kind

of cards your opponents likes to bluff, what kind of hands your opponent likes to call bluffs with, stats can't tell you. **You must always be observing.**

The easiest way to do this is to study their hole cards at showdown as described in the next chapter.

Chapter 16: Studying Hole Cards at Showdown

One of the **HUGE** advantages of online poker is the ability to see your opponents hole cards when they go to showdown against you or another opponent at the table. You can gain an incredible amount of information from analyzing their hands and how they played them street by street.

What to look for:

- **Their hand selection preflop.** By seeing their cards at showdown we can know what their preflop standards are. If you see someone limp under-the-gun and show **K4s** at showdown, they're going to be a fish. If you see someone 3-bet a player and showdown **T7o**, make a note because it's likely they'll be aggressive and loose. Knowing what a player chooses to play preflop can help you know what they are capable of and how advanced a player they are. It is the way to best tell who the fish are and who the aggressive raisers and reraisers are.
- **How they play their big hands.** Sometimes you'll notice a player flopped a set and proceeded to check behind the flop or just call players' bets. Sometimes you'll see a player who just limped preflop with **AA**. It's important to know if your opponent likes to slowplay his big hands or if he plays them fast with bets and raises like most players do.
- **How they play medium-strength hands.** Since most of the time a player will flop one pair with his hand it's important to know how far someone is willing to take this one pair and what he's willing to call or bet with it.

- **How they play their draws.** Do they **semibluff** big? Or do they check and call with their flush draws? Always be looking for this.
- **More reliable than stats.** I consider seeing someone's hole cards the most reliable way to tell how good and capable that player is. Stats can help you a lot but they don't tell you the intricacies of a player like his hole cards can. **Remember to always check an opponent's hole cards in the hand history window after he plays a big hand.** Piece together the whole hand from his perspective, and understand how his actions in that hand will relate to future hands.

Chapter 17: The Fish

Ah, the fish. God bless them. The fish are going to make you rich.

Most of your opponents won't be fish, especially at medium stakes and above.

But I've decided to write about the fish first and foremost because of how important it is to understand them. The fish tend to make such bad plays that it's almost like they're burning money.

Fish come in many different styles; more so than the TAGs and LAGs you're going to learn about in the next chapters. But at the heart the fish remain the same; they put way too much money in the pot with losing hands.

The stats of the fish

- If you need a reminder of the stat terms, [follow this link to Chapter 5](#).
- **VPIP:** The most recognizable characteristic of fish is how loose they are. A high VPIP is an automatic tip-off that you are up against someone who is making a very crucial 6-max mistake. **They are playing way too many hands preflop to be a winning player.** Typically, someone with a VPIP higher than 30 is when I start to consider someone as a bad player, though there are some OK players in the 30 to 40 VPIP range. Above 40 VPIP and your opponent will be hemorrhaging money with all the crap he is playing preflop. Above 50 VPIP and you've found a new best friend.
- **PFR:** Once you've identified someone with a high VPIP, you can correlate that to their PFR and it will give you a good indication of how aggressive he is. Most fish tend to be more passive in their PFR percentage than the majority of players, despite how many times they're playing a hand. I'd expect to see most fish in the

5 to 15 PFR range. Sometimes fish will have a PFR raise over 20 to go with a VPIP over 40 and these guys are going to be a little crazy to play against.

- **AF:** It can be interesting to see a fish's AF and how it relates to the way he plays. If a fish's total AF is high, such as over 4, chances are he is betting A LOT of hands and I will get tricky by checking many good hands to him. If a fish's total AF is low and under 1.5, he is very passive and won't be bluffing very much. Again, exercise caution with this statistic, as it can take a few hundred hands of data to be worthwhile.
 - **Correlation of VPIP and AF:** It's important to take note of how someone's VPIP is related to his AF. AF is calculated by how often a player bets or raises related to how often he calls postflop. If someone has a high VPIP, it's going to be harder for him to have a higher AF since he is playing so many bad hands and he isn't going to have something that should be worth betting as often. If you're against someone with a 50 VPIP and an AF of 2, he is still pretty aggressive. On the other hand, if you're against someone with a VPIP of 15 and an AF of 2 he is actually a little passive. Keep this in mind when playing against high VPIP fish and analyzing their AF numbers. For example, a 60 VPIP with an AF of 5 is going to be one of the most aggressive players you'll see.
- **WTSD:** This is a very important number to use when against a fish. If this number is high (over 30, up to about 60) and your opponent has a high VPIP you have literally found a goldmine. A high WTSD fish is the best kind. Value bet these guys to death and reap in the rewards. Sometimes you'll be up against

someone who plays half their hands but his WTSD is 20. These fish are still poor players because they are seeing every flop, but will only continue with a good hand and aren't calling you down with bottom pair. It should be noted these are still great fish to play against because you can steal almost every pot on the flop from them. If they are seeing over half the flops but are only continuing with top pair or better, they're going to be folding A LOT!

- **FSB, FBB:** How often your fish folds out of the blinds can help identify those who are the worst. Fish who call too much out of the blinds tend to have no positional awareness and are just playing the strength of their hands. If you see FSB and FBB numbers under 60%, chances are you'll be taking a lot of money from that player. You simply exploit this by the fact you'll often be against with a better hand while you're in position.
- **Fold to Cont Bet %:** This is an important stat to observe once you get a few hundred hands on a player. This correlates with WTSD a little, but the higher this number is the more often you should continuation bet that fish. If this percentage is very high (around 80%), and you're against someone who's playing 40% of his hands, that means he's folding a TON of flops and is only continuing with a good hand. If a fish has a fold to cont bet % of lower than 60%, I start to not continuation bet them as much because they are calling the flop with ANY piece: a pair, a gutshot, ace high, etc. It's important to take this stat and correlate that to their [hand range](#) as the lower this stat is, the wider number of hands they can have.

Other characteristics of a fish

Fish tend to do oddball plays that are hard to understand and comprehend.

Sometimes it's hard to read a fish's hand, but that's ok because usually it's a bad one.

Some specific things I always see from fish are:

- **Small raises and reraises preflop.** A fish likes to [minraise](#) preflop and sometimes even minreraise (which is always a terrible play). By minraising, they let others come in cheaply to the pot and [outflop](#) them. A min 3-bet is a terrible play and I am overjoyed when I am playing a fish that does this a lot. It allows you to call with whatever hand you opened with and hit a big flop and take all of the fish's money.
- **Small bets and raises postflop.** A fish will continue to not protect his hand and let you draw out by making small bets and raises in postflop situations. Often they will play their biggest hands by betting them small despite there being flush and straight draws present. Call these bets, outdraw them and profit.
- **Limping.** Fish love to see a flop and they'll [limp](#) into the pot from any position repeatedly.

How to play and exploit a fish

To really abuse fish, we're going to not let them keep limping preflop for cheap. You should be constantly raising their limps when you're in position whenever you have a good hand. If a fish is limping a lot you can raise his limps on the button with any hand you'd actually open the button with.

You might be asking, "If they never fold, why raise their limps with **98s**?"

Simply having position against them is so powerful you can usually have the weaker hand and raise it against them. Also, since they are calling such a wide range preflop

they are simply going to be missing a wide range of flops. Even against very loose fish you will take down enough pots on the flop with continuation bets to raise their limps loosely. And sometimes you'll have a big hand and take all their money.

I would be less apt to abuse their limps when you're in the blinds. It's going to be tougher to exploit them out of position so I would stick to raising your better hands when you're out of position.

When playing fish postflop it's all about getting value out of them. You have a hand, you bet it. You never slowplay a fish. If they are calling, you keep betting your good hands, even as weak as top pair no kicker. It's a very circumstantial thing but it's very easy to value bet hands like middle pair or **QQ** on a **K** high board on the river and get calls from fish with worse hands.

When you are betting a good hand and get raised, it can be tricky to know what to do. There are a wide variety of fish and some of them are passive, never raising without a great hand, while some are aggressive. Some are randomly aggressive and will make bizarre plays with bad hands. You'll have to learn from understanding their stats and gaining experience to know what to do in all of these spots.

It's also very important to avoid bluffing a fish. Besides a continuation bet, you should rarely be betting without a hand against a player that is not known to fold. There are certain circumstances where it's ok, but until you gain that experience, do not bluff a fish. You will be shocked at the kind of stuff they will call you down with, which will just remind you to value bet them with even more hands.

Chapter 18: Playing the TAG

The TAG (meaning “tight aggressive”) will be your most common opponent as you progress up in the limits. Nearly every winning player will fall under the TAG category. There are some TAGs that are losing players but for the most part a TAG will be a decent to excellent player.

Some TAGs will be easier to exploit and outplay than others. Some TAGs you will practice avoidance on, instead concentrating on exploiting the fish at the table.

One quick word of advice: always remember that TAGs are usually doing the same thing you are. They are playing tight, solid and aggressive. To understand them, just remember how you play.

The stats of the TAG

- If you need a reminder of the stat terms, [follow this link to Chapter 5](#).
- **PFR:** A TAG will raise between 12 to 22% of his hands preflop. On the lower end of this scale, you’re dealing with a “nit.” A nit is very tight and easy to play against as he only puts a lot of money in with very good hands. On the higher end is a very aggressive player. These types are usually very aggressive postflop as well and a pain in the ass to deal with. Most TAGs will fall in the 15% to 18% range.
- **VPIP:** A TAG’s VPIP will usually be a few points higher than their PFR. This is almost universally true and, at most, any decent player is calling only 6% more hands than they’re raising. If a TAG has a high VPIP compared to his PFR (say, their stats are 28/19) he is not going to be winning player.

- **AF:** A TAG's AF will fall between the 2 to 4 range. It will also lower from street to street. The flop AF will always be the highest due to the frequency of continuation bets. It's important to wait until you have a few hundred to a few thousand hands on a TAG before you take this stat for all it's worth. Once you do though, you can really start pinpointing the passive TAGs in the 2.0 range who don't bluff much at all, and the TAGs in the aggressive range (around 4.0) who are constantly looking for spots to bluff and take away pots.
- **ASB:** This is a very important stat to know about a TAG. If a TAG is stealing a high percentage of blinds, we need to be playing back at him by defending our blinds (described in more detail in [Part VI](#)) so it's much tougher for him to open the pot lightly in position. If a TAG has a low ASB, it's less important to 3-bet him lightly and defend out blinds. A TAG who steals less than 30% of blinds is playing tight when it comes to raising in late position. A TAG stealing 35% or more of blinds is opening up a lot of weak hands in position and won't be able to fight back if we start 3-betting him; he simply doesn't have good hands enough. Most TAGs will fall somewhere in the low 30%.
- **WTSD:** Once you get enough hands on a TAG, start taking a look at this stat. If it falls within 22-26%, they're playing fairly standard for a TAG. If it's lower, the TAG folds too much and is a candidate for bluffs like [double-barrels](#) and [semibluffs](#). If it's higher than 26%, the TAG is going to look up your bets with marginal hands so err on the side of caution when bluffing and start value betting him thinner. The reason for this is that since he sees showdowns more often than most, you can't profitably bluff him since he won't fold enough. However, you

can value bet him with some of your weaker hands since he will call those bets with worse hands.

- **FSB, FBB:** If a TAG has a high FSB/FBB (in the low 90's or high 80's) you can profitably raise their blinds with almost any two cards on the button. They are simply folding unless they have a big hand and you will start picking them off, a couple dollars a time. If a TAG has a low FSB/FBB (in the low 80's or 70's) they defend their blinds lightly and may be frequent 3-bettors against button raisers. You should tighten up your CO and button openings against these TAGs since they will play back at you more and if you keep raising hands like **K6s** and **96s** you will have to fold too much.
- **Continuation bet %:** If a TAG has a high continuation bet % (over 80%, generally) that means he is firing away almost anytime he raises preflop. Since he will often not be flopping a hand, these are the kind of opponents that you can steal more pots away from on the flop with check-raises and flop raises. I describe these type of moves in more detail in [Chapter 23, Part II of position](#) and in [Part VI](#) of this book.

Other characteristics of a TAG

- **3-bets.** You will start to deal with a lot of 3-bets when facing a TAG, especially when you open in late position. How often an opponent 3-bets doesn't really show up in their stats, so you must observe the table and the table dynamics. It's best to play tightly against 3-bets until you have a strong read that he 3-bets very light or are more experienced so you know when to play back in the right spots. If you raise in early position and are 3-bet, only continue with your best hands. If

you 3-bet in late position and get 3-bet, you can play a little looser but err on the side of caution. As you increase in limits, you'll be getting 3-bet enough to where you'll have to play back with bluffs, preflop and postflop. It's a complicated area that will take experience to deal with, but keep it in mind for when that one guy keeps 3-betting you when you open the button.

- **Robotic play.** Many TAGs are playing multiple tables. Some are even playing eight or more. It is impossible for them to keep track of everything going on with their opponents and they will mostly be playing on "auto-pilot." They will be playing based on the strength of their hand and the PokerAce Hud stats they are using. These kind of TAGs should be recognized and exploited by stealing away more pots from them with light semibluffs and bluffs.

How to play and exploit a TAG

TAGs are usually going to be good players. Often there's not much money to be won from playing them and they are simply an annoyance while you try to exploit the fish.

However, it's important for you to not be exploited yourself. If a good TAG knows how you play and you aren't mixing up your game and playing back at him, he'll start making money off you. Especially at the higher limits where there can be multiple good TAGs per table, it's important to not let yourself get run over.

To be able to recognize these spots, you'll need to have a solid grasp on hand reading, table dynamics and higher level thinking. However, if you are new to these concepts, there's nothing wrong with playing cautiously against a good player, even

though you know he's getting the better of you. If you are trying too hard to outplay a good TAG, you'll often be spewing hundreds of dollars in his direction.

Types of TAGs:

- **Solid TAG.** This type of player will play a TSA game. This player will mix in bluffs and semibluffs just enough to keep you guessing as to what his hand is. He'll have solid fundamentals. He'll avoid putting a lot of money in with dominated hands and can make big calls and big folds if he feels they are the right play. A lot of TAGs will fall under this category, especially at \$2/\$4 and above. Mostly you'll just have to live with them at the table while you attack weaker TAGs and fish.
- **The TAGfish.** This type of player is a little hard to define and the line that separates a TAGfish from a decent TAG is pretty thin. I find TAGs that tend to fall under the TAGfish umbrella are players that often overplay hands and are overaggressive in very bad spots. Often a TAGfish will be making a bluff or making a big calldown for the sake of doing a big bluff and not through any reasonable thought process like we are doing. They also usually have bad fundamentals and would not really understand some of the concepts in this book. The best way to play these guys is to stick to a tight, solid and aggressive game. They will eventually hang themselves by assuming you are pulling more moves than you really are.
- **The nitTAG.** I love playing the nitTAG. This type of opponent is not necessarily a bad player; he knows to play tight and aggressive and he'll be making money at the lower limits, but that's all he knows. He's very exploitable

in that he's folding everything but the very best of hands to aggression. A lot of the weaker multitablers fall under this category. In spotting a nitTAG, it's best to look for tight preflop stats. If they're playing 17/13 (VPIP/PFR) or lower, chances are they're going to be a nit. I have a few moves that I love to use against this guy.

- **Float or 3-bet against his CO opens.** Being in position gives you a huge advantage against a nitTAG. They open the CO with a wide enough range of hands that I will 3-bet a lot of weaker hands like **76s** and **22**. I will also call on the button with a hand like **J9s** – this is called floating, described in detail in [Part VI of this book](#) – and try to steal the pot away on the flop if I flop any piece, like a gutshot or middle pair. You'll be surprised how often these nits fold postflop.
- **Avoid big bluffs.** If a nitTAG puts in a lot of money, stop bluffing him. It's all about doing small flop bluffs that take 10 to 20 BB's to make. If you get called on a flop bluff, don't be putting in another huge bet against these guys. Chances are they are not folding.
- **Don't pay them off.** If you're in a spot with a marginal hand like [top pair good kicker](#) and the nitTAG just made a big river bet, chances are you should fold. They bluff much less frequently than solid TAGs when it comes to big bluffs. They'll still continuation bet and occasionally double barrel though.

Chapter 19: Playing the LAG

The LAG (loose aggressive) player is a tough one. Playing a lot of hands and playing them aggressively, these players will put you in a lot of tough situations. Some of the very best players and biggest winners fall under the LAG category; however, to play this style requires amazing hand reading skills and a great feel for the game. Most of the LAGs you face will be breakeven or losing players, trying too hard to win every pot by bluffing every hand or by calling with any pair. However, they will constantly challenge you with bets and raises that will leave you lost and confused.

The stats of the LAG

- If you need a reminder of the stat terms, [follow this link to Chapter 5](#).
- **PFR:** A glaring characteristic of the LAG is a high PFR. Any two decent cards are worth a raise for a LAG. The lower end of a LAG will be raising 22% but can be upwards of 35%. Any higher and your opponent is no longer a LAG, he's a maniac.
- **VPIP:** How close a LAG's VPIP is to his PFR will vary widely. The good LAGs will have a close VPIP to PFR correlation and will be on the lower end of about 30/25. The VPIP can be over 50, though this player will be on the borderline of an aggressive fish. Rely on PFR numbers to identify a LAG.
- **AF:** A LAG's AF will always be high.
- **ASB:** This number will probably be 35% or higher. They'll be raising bad hands such as **T4s** and **K3o**. You can start 3-betting these LAGs when they raise the CO or button more than you would a TAG. Be careful, however, since many LAGs will call your 3-bets and put you in tough spots postflop. If you 3-bet their

LP open, be prepared to go all-in with a wider range of hands than you would against a TAG or a fish.

- **WTSD:** This number won't be very reliable for LAGs. Since they are doing the betting, there's a good chance they'll be making a lot of people fold before the river and won't see many showdowns.
- **FSB, FBB:** If a LAG has a high FSB/FBB (let's say over 80 on FBB) chances are he's a decent player and is playing most of his hands aggressively in position. The lower the number, the more likely he is to defend his blinds. Against these kind of guys, you might want to tighten up your button opening range, especially if they are prone to 3-bet you or check-raise your continuation bets.
- **Fold to continuation bet:** If a LAG folds to a low number of continuation bets, chances are he is playing back at a lot of flops with raises or calling a lot of flops planning to take the pot away on the turn. If this number is below 60%, keep it in mind that your continuation bets will not be as effective. You have to adjust your game by betting the turn more when he just calls the flop, by calling more marginal hands against his flop raises, or by not continuation betting as much.

Other characteristics of a LAG

LAGs are aggressive, preflop and postflop. But how are they aggressive?

- **Preflop.** LAGs open a lot of pots. Most of them 3-bet a ton as well. Against LAGs, you can open up⁸ your calling range when a LAG 3-bets you. I'd recommend using position as the main factor in calling a 3-bet from a LAG.

⁸ To open up means to have a wider range of hands in a spot than you normally would.

- **Postflop.** LAGs will throw a bunch of raises and check-raises your way. You'll have to adjust by putting your stack on the line with more marginal hands than you're used to. It's important to note that many of these LAGs are simply bluffing too much. They just can't make a hand that much for how often they're betting and raising. Take this into account and pick off their bluffs.

How to play and exploit a LAG

Generalizing how to play against LAGs is tough because of the many varieties they come in. Their postflop play is going to be much different from LAG to LAG than postflop play will be from TAG to TAG.

Some LAGs are big bluffers postflop. They'll pick up on any weakness and bet to take the pot. They'll continue big bluffs even when you're calling down and your actions state you have a good hand. Some LAGs are actually tight postflop when it comes to making big bluffs. You'll have to analyze aggression factors for these kind of spots, but again, be forewarned: you need a few hundred hands for AF to mean anything. In the meantime, notice their postflop play by reviewing their hole cards at showdown.

Since LAGs are more aggressive, we will be calling their bets and raises more. The most important time to do this is when you show weakness or when your actions state you usually don't have a hand.

- **Inducing bluffs with strong hands.** Since LAGs love to pounce on weakness, you should start checking medium and top-strength hands to them in spots where you expect them to bluff. Do this in spots where your LAG opponent is likely to think you don't have a hand and thus he believes he move you off of your hand. Do this in a spot where your LAG

opponent is likely to think you have an OK hand that can't stand a big bet.

A common scenario is when you raise a hand like A♣A♦ on the CO.

The button, a LAG who likes to call your raises preflop, calls. You're

heads up to a flop of 7♥5♦2♣. You bet almost the pot and the LAG

calls. The turn is the 5♥. Now it's best to check and induce some bluffs.

The LAGs calling range was wide for the flop. He could have overcards,

any seven, any pocket pair or a straight draw. He could also have a

slowplayed set or trips, but we're willing to take that chance. Since he can put us on many hands such as AK that are folding the turn, he's going to bet. But if we bet, he will fold most of the hands we beat. Whether to check-raise or call if he bets is another story, but as long as you don't fold anywhere in the hand you're doing OK.

- **Inducing bluffs with weak hands.** In the last example, we put the LAG on a very wide range for calling the flop. While the CO/Button situation is one of the more extreme spots for a LAG to call the flop with nearly anything, there are going to be many spots where you can't give up a weak hand, such as middle or bottom pair, to a LAG when it's just too likely he's bluffing. An example is having 66 in the previous example. It would be worth a check-call on the turn. You simply have the best hand too much to fold. A river decision with this type of hand can be extremely

difficult if the LAG bets and your decision would depend on how aggressive the LAG is, how much he bet and what the river card is.

- **Semibluffing them more.** Since the LAGs usually won't have a hand good enough to be betting and raising, we should be semibluffing (described in [Chapter 28](#)) them more. When they make flop raises, be more apt to push with your good draws (any flush draw or 8-out straight draw⁹). When you bet a good draw on the flop and a LAG calls, be more apt to check-raise them all-in on the turn. What I mean by this is to check your hand on the turn and induce a bet from your LAG opponent, who can call the flop with many weak hands that he will now bet on the turn and thus you can go all-in as a semibluff and win the pot much of the time with your LAG opponent folding. For example, let's say we have **T♦9♦** on the CO and raise to \$12 at a \$2/\$4 game. A very aggressive opponent we have pegged as a LAG calls on the button. The blinds fold. The flop is **8♦2♠4♥**. We bet \$24 into the \$30 pot and the LAG calls. The turn is the **7♠**. We should check, let the LAG bet, and then go all-in. On that flop, the LAG can call many hands, such as ace-high, king high, **A4**, **A2**, or even some weaker hands. Thus, by checking to him on the turn we let him bet. Take advantage of the fact the LAG's hand range is wide enough that you can shove in a good draw and he will fold a decent amount of the

⁹ Having a straight draw that can be made by eight cards. For example, having **JT** on a **982** board. There are four **Qs** and four **7s** that can make your straight.

time: he simply won't have a hand good enough to call you and if he does, you have a decent chance to win the pot.

- **Giving them credit for a hand.** It's always important to remember that sometimes LAGs have hands. Sometimes they have big hands that they play in the exact same manner as when they bluff. In those spots, we must chalk it up to bad luck and continue on. However, sometimes they play a hand in a way that is typical of a big hand and we must give them credit for a big hand. Just because someone is a LAG, we can't start calling them down with any pair in any situation. You must use your skills of hand reading and table dynamics, combined with your experience, to understand when a LAG takes a line where it's much more likely he has a hand than when it's much more likely he has a bluff. The one guideline I will reinforce is to generally continue with the hand against a LAG when you've shown weakness¹⁰.

What is tough about playing a LAG is sometimes you're going to lose to a big hand of theirs. It can shake your confidence about calling down lightly against these guys but it must be done against your more aggressive opponents. Some LAGs do very well by making TAGs fold many of their hands.

It's a fine balance, however, and it can be easy to spew your chip by calling down LAGs in bad spots. There are a million spots and a million situations where you will be faced with a tough spot against a LAG. You must use all the concepts presented in this book in addition to understanding the LAG to know what to do.

¹⁰ When you've played your hand in a manner that indicates your hand is weak.

Chapter 20: Other Opponents

Not every opponent will fall under the fish, TAG and LAG umbrella. These types of players are less common but it is worth knowing who they are and what makes them what they are. Remember this, though -- they are all bad and losing players.

- **Tight-passive.** These opponents are usually pretty easy to play. They play tight so they are usually only playing good hands. Unlike aggressive TAGs however, they only bet when they have a hand. This makes them very easy to play against as whenever they are betting a large amount or raising we can fold pretty much everything. Their stats generally look something like 19/3/1.5 (VPIP/PFR/AF) or 12/5/2. Don't pay them off, but be sure to continuation bet if they call you preflop. They'll only continue if they hit the flop big.
- **Slightly loose, slightly passive.** This guy isn't tight enough to be a tight-passive but he's not exactly a fish. These players are usually OK postflop and just would need to read a book like this to become a TAG. Their stats are usually something like 30/10/2 or 25/9/2. There's no special way to play them; they are usually making enough small fundamental mistakes they will slowly bleed money to you.
- **Maniac.** The maniac is the fish on steroids. Raising, reraising, bluffing and going all-in with virtually anything he feels like is the trademark of the maniac. Their stats will often be out of this world, such as 60/40/4. A true maniac postflop will usually bluff virtually every single hand. To play against these guys is pretty simple: don't fold anything decent.

Remember with every player to observe their postflop tendencies. Preflop stats can help you a lot but won't tell you everything. Some players with tight stats are terrible postflop and have no hand reading skills. Some players with loose stats are tough players postflop who won't pay you off lightly. The best advice I can give you is to look at every hand history where the players went to showdown and look at their cards. You can piece together so much from observing how an opponent played one hand.

Part III Summary

- **Always be checking what your opponent has at showdowns, even if you're not in the pot.** By seeing what your opponent did preflop, on the flop, turn and river with a certain hand, you can learn many things about how he plays.
- **Use stats to help you classify opponents.** Similar players tend to have similar stats. Use stats to help you understand who you're up against.
- **The fish is your friend.** Identify these players quickly and do your best to maximize the value you get from them. Generally, a fish's fatal flaw is calling too many bets with weak hands. Value bet, value bet, value bet.
- **Get used to playing TAGs.** They are everywhere, especially at medium stakes and above. Not all TAGs are alike and some will be bad opponents who you can take money from. Learn to identify the good TAGs from the bad TAGs and play them accordingly.
- **LAGs are a mixed bag.** Some of them are really good and will challenge you and put you in tough spots more than anyone else. Some of them are way too aggressive and tend to bet for the sake of betting. Generally, you should be folding less to them.

Part IV: The Limits

Chapter 21: Strategy for Each Limit

In online poker there are a wide variety of limits, much more so than your local casino. Since the poker sites don't have to provide dealers, you can find online games with stakes as low as pennies and dimes. You can also find small increments in limits all the way up to \$5/\$10, such as \$1/\$2, then \$2/\$4, then \$3/\$6, with dozens of these games running at a time. You can't find that in Vegas.

Nearly every site has a maximum buy-in at a table for 100 times the big blind. For example, at \$2/\$4, your maximum buy-in will be \$400. You should always buy-in for this amount. It's best to have as much money as possible at the table since you are or soon will be the best player at the table.

Micro-limits

These stakes range from the absolute bare minimum, usually \$.01/.02 to \$.10/.25. If you're a beginner, it's a great place to start to gain some experience while not putting too much money at risk. In fact, if you're an absolute beginner to online poker, I recommend putting \$100 online, grabbing my preflop chart and sitting at a couple \$.01/.02 games. It helps to gain experience like this while reading this book.

What to expect:

- **Quality of play:** It's going to be very bad. You'll be up against gamblers, beginners and people who are so bad at poker they know to stick to the lowest limits. Since the play is so bad, a lot of hand reading will go out the window and it will be more about playing tight, solid and aggressive poker and betting your good hands.

- **Value betting:** Value bet everything at these limits. They aren't folding middle pair most of the time so you just need to get value by betting, betting, and betting some more.
- **Don't bluff.** Seriously, beyond a flop continuation bet, it's not worth it.

Small stakes

This includes \$.25/.50 and \$.50/\$1. These are great bankroll and skill building limits. You'll face some players who have an idea of what they're doing, but will still be surrounded by an entourage of idiots.

What to expect:

- **Quality of play:** There will be players with more experience at this limit. You'll begin to play against more TAGs. These players are tight and don't give up a lot of money, but at this limit they are usually pretty straightforward, uncreative and easy to play against. You'll still have your plethora of fish, donkeys and idiots.
- **Using stats:** You should be using Poker Tracker and PokerAce Hud if you've made it to these limits. They will start to help you a ton as you play against opponents of very different skill levels. There will be some players you should value bet to death and that you should never bluff, and then there will be the tight players who fold everything except for the nuts and are good candidates to bluff but not to value bet lightly. Having stats (and reading [Part III](#) of this book) will help you figure out who is who.

Medium stakes

The limits \$1/\$2, \$2/\$4 and \$3/\$6 encompass medium stakes. If you're make it to these limits and are beating them consistently, congratulations. You're making good enough money to make low-to-mid six figures a year from the comfort of your own home.

Of course, that attracts a lot of good players and these limits will be teeming with online professionals. Many of these players use software such as Poker Tracker and PokerAce Hud and the players have at least a decent grasp of the concepts presented in this book.

It should be noted that I still see plenty of people making a good living at these limits who I consider to be lackluster poker players. How do they do it? They play tight and aggressive, and bet their good hands when they have them. No matter what limit you're at, having that as the base of your play will make most of your money.

What to expect:

- **Professionals at every table.** You'll see them; they're playing eight tables and play for hours on end every day. They're doing the same thing you're doing by making really good money on their computer. Since they are everywhere, you'll have to work on outplaying these players and not being outplayed yourself.
- **Fewer fish, more aggressive fish.** The bad players will be a little harder to come by, especially as you increase in limit (unless you are playing on a site like [Cake Poker](#) or [Ladbrokes](#)). If you're at a table of five solid, tough players, there's no shame in leaving the table and trying to find at least one bad player. Also, the fish tend to be more aggressive as you

increase in limits. They still play way too many hands, but they will challenge you with bets and raises a lot more than their passive, lower limit brethren. You're going to have to start calling them down more lightly¹¹ and putting your stack in with some marginal hands.

High stakes

The limits from \$5/\$10 to \$25/\$50 encompass the realm of high stakes. These are where many of the tough professionals online go to play and where some seriously sick money can be made. Be warned, these games are very tough and you'll have to master the concepts in these books and gain hundreds of thousands of hands of experience if you ever want to be able to hang at \$10/\$20 and \$25/\$50. Oh, and you'll have to be able to stomach losing \$20,000 in a day.

The \$5/\$10 limit still has a lot of games running and has enough fish to make money playing tight, solid and aggressive, but it won't be easy.

What to expect:

- **Tough regulars.** These are the guys who crushed medium stakes and are now playing 4 to 16 tables of high stakes to make even more money. They will raise, reraise and check-raise you until your head spins. They will keep you off-balance so you never have a good grasp on what they have. You'll really have to be on the top of your game to play a table filled with these guys, but it's achievable.
- **Playing Tricky.** You'll have to start putting moves into your game to hang at these limits. You can't play a hand the same way every time or

¹¹ By lightly, I mean calling them down with a wider range.

you'll get abused by players who are excellent hand readers and know what you have. Deception is the name of the game.

- **Redefinition of a fish.** From the micro-stakes to medium stakes, often I look for fish by their preflop numbers. They won't raise nearly enough and they'll call way too many hands. At these limits, fish with bad preflop stats are rare. You'll have to look for those who are poor postflop players and numbers won't tell you that. A bad postflop player at these limits tends to bluff too much and tends to think other players are bluffing him a lot more than they really are. Sometimes a fish at these limits is actually a TAG who can be easily bullied.
- **Table and Site Selection.** When I play a limit like \$5/\$10 or \$10/\$20, I load up multiple sites to choose tables from. I'll often have tables spread across **Cake Poker, Full Tilt and Poker Stars** so I don't have to face five tough regulars at every point. It's fun to challenge yourself and outplay the best, but the majority of your money still comes from people who don't know what they're doing. The most consistent way I table select is to either sit down at any Cake Poker table (they'll usually be at least one fish) or to find a Full Tilt or Poker Stars table with people I don't recognize.

Ultra high stakes

You ready to win and lose the equivalent sums of BMWs and Benzs every hand? Then you're ready for \$50/\$100 to \$300/\$600 NLHE. These games run frequently online and are a blast to watch. They are filled with live pros you'd recognize from TV and the

cream of the crop from the online professionals who left medium and high stakes in the dust. There's the occasional big tournament winner sitting down with all their winnings, but they don't last long.

What to expect:

- **Big money.** Outrageous sums are being tossed around on hands like middle pair and flush draws. You can win over \$500,000 in one day playing these stakes... or you can lose \$500,000.
- **Heads up and 3-handed play.** It's tough to get 6 people to sit at table at the same time willing to lose \$40,000, so most of the action at these stakes is 3-handed or heads up. This leads to some outrageous aggression, with people putting in \$40,000 with bottom pair to pick off a complete bluff from their opponent.
- **Deep thinking.** The thought process going on in these hands is so deep and complex it's beyond the realm of this book. It involves the concepts taught here, but at such a high level that to be able to win at these limits is almost a God-given talent.
- **Railbirds.** People love to watch and follow this big action. It is fascinating to see someone lose in 30 minutes the amount of a nice 3-bedroom house in Las Vegas. Check out the web site [**High Stakes DB**](#) which tracks all the action.

Part IV Summary

- **Not surprisingly, the more money you are playing for the better the opponents on average.** Fish become hard to find at \$2/\$4 NL and above. You'll often be making money off the bad TAGs and the occasional fish you can find at these limits. Always be adjusting for who's around you.
- **Table select at the higher limits.** Many players are very fundamentally sound and it's just very difficult to make money off of them. Search out the fish and you'll be making big money.

Part V: The Concepts

Chapter 22: Hand Ranges & Equity

One of the most important aspects of hold ‘em is figuring out what your opponent has and acting accordingly. We refer to this as figuring out our opponent’s hand ranges. Every time you play poker, you are using your deductive skills to figure out your opponents hands, even if you don’t realize it.

For example, when you have a pretty good hand and you bet on the flop, turn and river, you’re putting your opponent on a hand: a worse one than yours. When you flop nothing and continuation bet and get raised, you’re putting your opponent on a hand: a better one than yours. This is a basic example but shows that in some way you are always considering what your opponent has.

To get really good at this game you need to be constantly putting your opponent on their hand range. What I’m about to say is one of the most important concepts in poker: **put your opponent on a hand range and choose the best play based on this information.** That’s it. That is a HUGE part of winning poker, especially as you increase in limits.

Start right away

You always need to put your opponent on a range starting with preflop, then adjusting it as you gain more information about his hand.

Some things to observe are what position your opponent is raising, limping, or calling from. If we are facing a tight player, with preflop stats of 16/14, and he raises UTG, he has a good hand. If we are facing a looser player with preflop stats of 22/18, and he raises the button, he has a very wide range (even looser than the preflop chart I have provided).

Thus we take this information and act accordingly. For instance, in the above example when the tight player raised UTG you wouldn't even play a hand as strong as **AJs**. You certainty wouldn't 3-bet him and put a lot of money in with a hand like **AQo**. Why? Well, he's tight, even tighter than us. We know the kind of hands we raise UTG and he's so tight that he's even folding hands like **ATs**, **KQo**, **77** and **66**. A hand like **AJs** performs very badly against the majority of hands that he is raising, so we stay away.

In the example of the loose button raiser, we know he's raising so many weak hands, we can start 3-betting weak hands ourself, such as **76s**, to steal the pot away and to keep him from stealing our blinds so frequently.

Again, this is preflop play, so it's going to be easier to decide what to do against his hand range. But the concept remains the same throughout every hand, against every opponent and in every situation from a flop check-raise to a river value bet: **put your opponent on a hand range and choose the best play based on this information.**

Knowing how to make the best play based on hand ranges

This is another one of those sections where I can only tell you so much. You're going to have to get some experience and play hands in all sorts of situations against all sorts of players to get a hold on this.

There are going to be spots where your hand is good but not great, like flopping an [overpair](#) and facing a flop raise from a tough, solid opponent. His hand range will be

hard to put together: he can be making a move, he can be raising a good draw, or he can have us drawing nearly dead against his set or bigger overpair. It may seem like there's not a great option and that's somewhat true. Strong arguments could be made for calling, raising or folding in this spot.

However, spots like this won't have a huge impact on how money you make. How's that? Since every option is so close, it is almost neutral in the long run if you always put your stack in here or always fold. Of the money we will make at poker, 90% will be from putting our opponents on hands and making the correct decision when it's clear what the correct decision is.

Stacking off with [top pair good kicker](#) against a tight player will usually be a very bad decision and will cost you a TON of money in the long run. Not value betting top pair good kicker on the river against a huge fish who doesn't fold anything is a huge mistake and will cost you a ton of money in the long run.

Let's go back to what I keep repeating: put your opponent on a hand range and choose the best play. If you keep thinking during every hand, you will start to notice the best play. When a tight player raises us on a flop of **J♣9♦6♥**, and we have **K♦J♠**, we're crushed. We put him on a hand range of at worst, **A♣J♦**, and most likely an overpair or a set. When a maniac raises us on a flop of **J♣9♦6♥**, and we have **K♦J♠**, we don't fold the hand. We put him on a hand range... well, he's a maniac, he can have almost anything. In these spots, a maniac's range is so wide that you just don't fold a good hand.

I'm about to get complicated: Using hand ranges with equity

What I'm about to talk about is a very advanced concept. I'm including it because just having a small understanding of it will help you get a leg up on the competition and help you understand why you are doing what you are doing.

When poker players refer to equity, they are talking about their chances of winning versus the assumed hand range of their opponent. It is sort of like figuring out pot odds: we are figuring out what our chance to win the pot is, except often times we are figuring out how often we are losing to him, how often we are winning against him and if there is enough money in the pot to justify putting our money in the pot.

Let's say I'm playing \$1/\$2. The CO, a TAG regular whose stats are 18/15 with a high postflop aggression factor, opens the pot to \$6. I'm on the button with **Q♦Q♥**, and I reraise him to \$20. The TAG calls.

Immediately I'm processing my opponent's hand range. For him to call my reraise, I think he has a big [broadway](#) like **AKs** and **AKo**. My opponent is a little on the tighter side, so I think he folds **AQs** and worse. He's calling any pocket pair from **22** to **99** to try to flop a set on me, and he's calling **TT** through **AA** to try to trap me.

The flop comes down **9♣ 5♣ 4♥**. My opponent checks and I bet \$30 into the \$43 pot. My opponent quickly shoves in the rest of his stack for \$150 over the top of my bet.

I'm processing his hand again. We can eliminate every **AK** except for **A♣K♣**, which he'd shove as a semibluff. He's folding **88, 77, 66, 33** and **22**. He's shoving **AA, KK, QQ, JJ, TT, 99, 55** and **44**.

My exact hand range for my opponent is: **A♣K♣, AA, KK, QQ** (which is very rare given that I have the other two,) **JJ, TT, 99, 55** and **44**.

I'm slightly behind **A♣K♣** with a 45% chance to win. I'm crushed by **AA** and **KK**, with only an 8% chance to win. I'm also crushed by his sets with only a 9% chance to win versus **99, 55** and **44**. However, I'm crushing **JJ** and **TT** with a 90% chance to win.

Since we have his hand range, we need add all those percents together to get a total of our % to win against his entire hand range and then look at the pot odds we are getting and seeing if we are winning enough of the time to call.

How the hell would you ever do that math at the table? Don't worry, you won't. What you do need to do is download a program like **Poker Stove** that lets you plug in hand ranges and start getting an idea of the percentages you need to win. You'll have to do this when you're not playing as it's too complicated to deal with in the 15 seconds you have to act online.

For the above example I plugged everything in. Our **Q♦Q♥** has a 38.2% chance of winning versus villain's hand range. We're losing most of the time, but we can't fold yet.

After I bet and villain shoves, I have to call \$150 to win \$253. I got the latter number by adding what was in the pot before the amount raised ($\$43 + \$30 + \$30 = \103), then adding that amount to what I have to call (\$150). Then to get our percentage to win, we add 150 to 253 and we get 403, which we now divide by the amount we have to call, 150. Thus, we need a 37.2% chance to win to make a profitable call.

Wow, it's pretty close! We just have enough equity of winning against villain's hand range given the pot odds to make a call.

Again, this is pretty complicated stuff and it's not feasible to apply all this math while at the table. But if you spend the time you're not playing with understanding the math behind hand ranges, equity, and your decisions, this kind of stuff will become second nature and you'll start making the best play.

A note on the frequency that a hand occurs in an opponent's hand range

This is another complicated topic, but is worth mentioning. Let's say we have **QQ** preflop, and are facing an all-in from a tight player. We know he only makes this move with **AA**, **KK**, or **AK**. We are getting odds where we need to win 35% of the time. We're losing 80% of the time to 2 out of 3 hands and winning 55% of the time versus one hand. We're only winning 31% of the time, so it's a fold, right?

Wrong! **AK** occurs more frequently than **AA** or **KK** due to the fact there are more combos of **AK**. There are only 6 combos of **AA** or **KK**: for example, **A♣A♥**, **A♣A♠**, **A♣A♦**, **A♥A♦**, **A♥A♠**, **A♠A♦**.

Whereas for AK, there are 16 combos: A♣K♣, A♣K♠, A♦K♦, A♥K♥,
A♣K♠, A♣K♦, A♣K♥, A♣K♦, A♣K♥, A♣K♣, A♦K♥, A♦K♣,
A♦K♣, A♥K♣, A♥K♦, A♥K♣.

Thus, for every 12 times he has AA or KK, he'll have AKs and AKo 16 times. This tilts the odds quite a bit as we will now be winning 39% of the time. We have the odds to call.

Chapter 23: Understanding Position, Part II

In the first part of position, I gave the basics of how important it is at 6-max poker. In part two, I'm going to tell you how to exploit position for bigger profits.

You're going to do that by abusing the button. The button is the king in shorthanded hold 'em. Love the button. Get to know the button. Raise the button.

In every session you need to evaluate how you use the button and find ways to play more hands on it. It is just that valuable in online poker. Once you've played ten thousand or more hands, you should open your database in Poker Tracker and click on "positional stats."

Your stats on the button are going to be higher than any other position. If you follow my preflop chart, you'll have a solid foundation for open raising on the button. If you are feeling adventurous, you certainly can raise a wider range than I recommend.

Your stats on the CO should also be higher than they are on UTG and UTG+1. Somewhere between your UTG and button stats is good.

Just open raising a wide range on the button and CO isn't all we're going to do to exploit the benefits of being in position. There are a number of fairly consistent techniques I use on the button:

- **Abusing limpers.** This is a fairly basic tactic that works best at the lower limits where limpers are fairly commonplace. If there are any number of limpers, you can raise a wide range of hands on the button, as wide as what your button open-raising range could be. It's just that profitable as every time you take down the pot is a 4 to 5 BB victory. When you get called, you'll have to refer to the continuation bet chapter as a guide to know when to bet.

It's important to be careful when you flop top pair with dominated hands like **A7** or **T7** when you isolate with them since if you get a lot of action you're likely to be behind with such a weak kicker. Play for pot control postflop.

Once you move up to higher limits, there are fewer limpers and other players have an idea that you are raising to isolate the limper and may play back lighter. That shouldn't stop you from abusing limpers, though, as limpers (who are usually pretty fishy) are harder to come by.

- **Abusing CO openers.** When the CO opens, whether it's a fish or a TAG, their hand range can be fairly wide. There's something about the CO and later that just opens people up. When we have the button against the CO we can abuse this wide range and call or 3-bet a wide range of hands ourselves on the button. It's important when you call in these spots that you open up your semibluffing range postflop. If you start calling with hands like **75s** and **KTo** on the button against the CO you can't rely on hitting a big hand postflop to make you money. You need to be stealing more pots.
 - For example, I'll raise any gutshot and any middle or bottom pair if I call with a suited connector on the button against a CO raiser. Let's say I'm playing \$1/\$2. The CO is a good TAG, but a little on the tighter side and straightforward. He opens to \$6. I call on the button with **T♦9♦** and the flop is **9♠4♣K♦**. This is an awesome flop to semibluff! It's rare for him to have gotten a piece of that flop. Just compare my preflop chart on

the CO to this board. He's folding such a large amount of the time. He leads out \$10 and I raise to \$32. He folds quickly.

- I wait until I have something in this spot to have back-up equity¹² just in case he does have a hand and calls. Imagine our opponent had **K♣A♦** in that spot. He'd most likely just call the raise. The turn is the **9♥**. Bingo! We'll be taking all his money.
- It's important when you get called on these semibluffs to not put any more money in on a bluff. Your opponent is showing a lot of strength by calling this raise and a continued bluff is pure spew unless you have a read on your opponent that he can call the flop and fold to a large turn bet.
- Playing hands like this helps for when you actually hit a big hand on a flop like this, like a straight, two pair or trips. Your opponent will never know if you have a big hand or just a gutshot and this makes you infinitely tougher to play against.
- It's important to note when I flop a good but not great hand, such as top pair, a flush draw, or an open-ended straight draw in this situation that I just call their continuation bet. If you raise their continuation bet and they 3-bet you all-in, you'll have to fold and these hands are too valuable to do that with. If you raise middle pair, a gutshot or the nut straight, you know what to do against a 3-bet¹³.

¹² By back-up equity, I mean that I want some chance to win the pot when I make a light semibluff. That chance can be hitting a gutshot, hitting trips or two pair or hitting an overcard.

¹³ If you don't know, you fold since your hand is weak.

- I will 3-bet any of the hands I call here as well. I 3-bet about 20% of the time and call 80% of the time.

Not being exploited in position

Part of understanding position is avoiding its pitfalls yourself. It's important to understand how big of an advantage a good player has over you when he's in position.

An example of this is how much I win UTG compared to the button. UTG, I'm playing only my good and great hands, yet my UTG win rate is much less than the button. Too often, I get calls from players in LP who either flopped a bigger hand against my bigger pair or I miss with overcards and have to fold to these players when they play back at me.

The most obvious way to avoid being exploited out of position is to not call too much in the blinds. There are some instances where you should call out of the blinds, as explained in Part VI under "[defending your blinds](#)," but being overly tight in the blinds will never be a big leak.

Another way to counteract being out of position is 3-betting out of the blinds. You will be taking the initiative back and putting the pressure on another player. Not having the initiative and being out of position is extremely difficult in no-limit hold 'em. Be careful of good players who will take advantage of you 3-betting a lot of hands out of position by calling your 3-bets and playing aggressively postflop.

People don't like it, but sometimes it's best to be overly tight and surrender what may be the best hand, when playing against a tough, aggressive player when you're out of position. An example of this is when you call a pocket pair like **5♣5♦** against a

tough TAG who has opened the button. The flop is **J♣T♣2♦**, you check, and he bets.

Let's face it. We'll have the best hand sometimes against hands like **7♥6♥, A♣4♣**

and others. But we just have to fold it. A tough TAG will know you have a marginal hand and will attempt to bluff you later too often. Also, with pretty much any hand, he

has good equity in this spot. Notice that **A♦K♥** has ten outs. Notice that **8♠7♠** has

ten outs! We must simply surrender to the good player.

Chapter 24: Understanding the Value Bet, Part II

You know what kind of opponents you play against and you know how to put them on hand ranges. Now it's time to take this information and put it to use as we try to understand when and how to value bet.

Most value bets will be easy. You'll have a set, two pair or an overpair and your opponent keeps checking to you or calling you down. It's pretty obvious we have our opponent beat so we bet for value.

How much should you bet? This is very circumstantial and you will have to rely on what hands you put him on and what he puts you on to know how much to bet correctly. Generally, it's better to make a large, 3/4ths pot-sized bet or larger. If someone feels like calling with his hand on the river he is usually willing to call a large bet. At the same time, if someone has a pretty marginal hand that is facing a tough board, he will only call if he is getting a cheaper price on the call.

A word of advice: be more apt to value bet larger when there's a [busted flush draw](#) or a [busted open-ended straight draw](#). People love to make big calls with weak hands when possible draws have missed. They will even interpret a bigger bet as a bluff since they assume you are trying to get them to fold.

What about when my hand isn't as strong? As I said earlier in the book, you should value bet more than you think you should. That's important to ingrain in your head as you find yourself on the river with top pair and are asking, "Should I bet here? He can't possibly call me with worse! What do I do if he raises!?"

Should I bet here? If you are asking that question, probably. Often we find ourselves on the river with a good but not great hand and an opponent that has checked to us. His checking is usually telling us something: he doesn't have much of a hand.

As I've said before, a fatal flaw of online poker players is thinking they are being bluffed more often than they really are. So bet your good hand. Even if your hand isn't that good but it beats most of the hand range of your opponent, you should bet.

If you value bet and if it gets called by a better hand 49%, but gets called by a worse hand 51% of the time, you've just made money on the bet. This is an important concept to know: a good value bet doesn't always have to get called by a worse hand.

For example, say we are playing in a \$1/\$2 game and we raise **K♥T♣** on the CO. The BB, a looser and more aggressive TAG with stats of 23/19/3, calls.

The flop is **9♣6♥5♦**. The BB checks and we fire \$12 into the \$13 pot. BB calls.

We begin our hand range analysis. Being as aggressive as he is, he would raise a straight or set on this flop. He most likely has a vulnerable one-pair hand on this board, like **T♥9♥**, **8♣8♦** or **7♣7♠**.

The turn is the **9♦**. The BB checks. There's no sense in betting since we have nothing and the turn card does not scare our opponent as we rarely have a nine. He might also be trapping with a nine. We check behind.

The river is the **K♣**. The BB checks again. A player this aggressive would almost certainly bet a nine. He probably still has a one pair hand.

He can't call with worse! Given the **K** on board, he can't possibly call a bet, can he?

Yes, he can. There's a good chance he's thinking that we don't have a **K** and if we bet we're just trying to bluff him off his hand since it's obvious he does not have that strong of a hand. You will be constantly surprised what opponents, even tighter ones, will call a river bet with if they feel you are bluffing.

What do I do if he raises? I see a lot of my students struggle with this concept. They are worried about betting weaker hands on the river like top pair and middle pair, or a hand like top two pair when the flush draw gets there because they are worried about getting either check-raised or raised after their bet.

I tell them not to worry at all. You simply don't get check-raised or raised on the river very much. And if you do? You fold most of your hands. **Opponents simply just don't bluff the river with check-raises and raises very much.** It does happen, but so infrequently you don't need to consider it.

If you have a very good hand and you get check-raised or raised on the river, you'll have to consider how often he is raising a hand that is good but still worse than yours and decide if you should call given the pot odds.

Chapter 25: Implied Odds and Reverse Implied Odds

The other day I was playing in a \$3/\$6 game with a bunch of bad players. There was a lot of money to be made at this table, although it was a little wild because some of the fish were maniacs.

One of the maniacs, whose stats were 60/20/2.5, raised in early position. I called on the button and took a flop with **9♠8♠**.

The flop was **7♣6♠2♥**. The maniac bet \$50 into the \$51 pot. Using my pot odd calculations, I'm about 16% to hit my draw on the next card ($8 \times 2 = 16\%$). Having to put \$50 into the now \$101 pot, it would seem I need a 33% chance to win to continue with my open-ended straight draw. **But this is incorrect due to my implied odds.**

Implied odds is taking pot odds but adding in how much I expect to win on future rounds of betting. While I'm not getting the correct odds to call with my open-ended straight draw if that is all the betting that is going to happen, I can expect to win more money since hitting a big hand like a straight is going to win me a big pot.

Let's say if we hit on the turn, we expect on average to make another \$250 off him. This amount we expect to win can vary greatly; sometimes he's check/folding, sometimes we're taking the rest of his \$530. But we can guess to help us in our example. Since we now expect to make another \$250 on the flop call, we can add that \$250 to the \$101 in the pot and assume we are now calling \$50 to win \$351.

We now need a 12.4% chance to win and can make a profitable call.

Of course, there are a million things to consider in no-limit hold 'em that can swing this decision in our favor. Let's say we expected to only win \$150 more off our

opponent. We would have needed a 20% chance to call profitably based on math. But I'd still call because:

- Sometimes we will hit an **8** or a **9** to win the pot.
- Sometimes the maniac will check the turn to us and we can see 2 cards for the \$50 we called on the flop (thus making that alone a profitable call, since 8 outs X 4 gives us roughly a 32% to win).
- In this example, we have a [backdoor flush draw](#). We'll make a spade flush about 4% of the time by the river, which gives us that added boost to our equity to make some close calls.

One key aspect that you can add when analyzing your implied odds is your ability to take the pot away on a later street. When playing tighter players, you can call a hand in this situation, planning to bet and take the pot away if they don't have anything. So, sometimes you win a big pot when they have a hand like a big pair and you hit the draw and you sometimes win a decent pot when they check/fold a hand like **AK** on the turn.

This isn't a golden rule. When an obvious draw like an open-ended straight draw or flush draw hits on the turn, players who can read hands may not put any more money in with a hand like **AA** when you make a big raise. When an obvious draw like an open-ended straight draw or flush draw misses, players who can read hands may pick off bluffs with marginal hands because they can put you on this busted draw.

In no limit, all these things are very circumstantial. It's impossible to ever really have a perfect number for your implied odds. However, we can try our best. Having an understanding of your opponents can help you greatly in these spots. Some general

guidelines that I use to help decide if I have implied odds to call when I don't have the direct pot odds are:

- **How bad my opponent is.** Against a fish, you will often be able to win more bets on later streets because they will call with a much wider range of hands.
- **If my draw is to the nuts or not.** If I have a low flush draw, I'll throw it away most of the time without good pot odds. The main reason for this is reverse implied odds (see below) and that flushes tend not to get paid off that much.
- **8-out straight draws are better than flush draws.** I like calling to hit my open-ended or double gutted straight draws a lot more than flush draws. When the flush comes, people are very hesitant to call big bets if they don't have a flush. A straight draw is more well hidden and will get paid off a lot more. It should be noted I don't mean one-card straights (such as **K9** on a **876** board). Those draws are pretty weak since if you hit your card you are rarely winning more money from your opponent.
- **Consider hidden outs.** Hidden outs are ways to win the hand that you might not notice or consider. This applies to hands like higher flush draws like an ace-high or king-high flush draw, where you can hit your **A** or **K** and win the pot. This also applies to the backdoor flush draw or backdoor straight draw. These possibilities add a few percent to your chance to win and that can make all the difference.

- **It's tempting to overestimate your implied odds.** It's fun chasing a draw, hitting it and winning a big pot. But often you are up against an opponent who just won't pay you off. Against tighter and good opponents, try to find ways to steal the pot by semibluffing rather than calling because you feel you have implied odds.

Reverse implied odds

Let's say I'm playing in a \$2/\$4 game. Two loose, passive players limp in position. I check the BB with **7♠4♠**. The flop is **9♠T♣2♠**. I bet \$10 on the flop with my seven-high flush draw and both players call.

The turn is the **5♦**. I check, the first limper bets \$20 and the second limper folds. I fold.

I fold here because there is a good chance of losing to a bigger flush. Hitting your hand and then losing a big pot with it is an example of reverse implied odds, i.e. that in future streets, **you can expect to lose money in future betting by hitting your hand**. This can greatly affect your implied odds and turn some of these hands into fold.

Let's further analyze the above hand. I have roughly an 18% chance to win. I have to call \$20 to win \$61. I think if I hit my flush he will pay off a \$75 river bet. That means I have to hit my hand at least 15.6% of the time, so I should call.

The problem is in these situations you have to assume a flush draw is in his range and if it is, it's almost always bigger than yours. And in these situations, he's going to raise the river and you're going to have to fold (although many would call a flush here).

Reverse implied odds can refer to preflop situations as well. You've almost certainly heard on TV or in beginner books not to play hands like **AT** and **KJ** to a raise, because of reverse domination. It means the exact same thing as reverse implied odds. By playing a hand like **KJ**, you sometimes expect to lose money even when you hit your hand as you will tend to get action from hands with better kickers. It has reverse implied odds in those situations and is not worth playing.

Again, always exercise caution when not drawing to the nuts, especially with flushes.

Chapter 26: Pot Control

A very important concept related to board texture is pot control. Pot control means keeping the pot small in situations where a big pot means bad things for your hand. Another way to think of it is a small or vulnerable hand means a small pot.

I exercise pot control often. Pot control situations will come up every session you play and it's important to gain a strong understanding of this concept.

Let's go back to the **QQ** hand I played from the hand ranges and equity chapter one more time, but with a different flop. A tight, aggressive regular makes it \$6 on the CO. I raise to \$20 with **Q♦Q♥** on the button. Our opponent calls. Remember, I'm putting him on **AKs, AKo, and any pocket pair**.

Let's not forget that our opponent is putting us on a hand range also. He probably thinks we're raising **99** or better, as well as big broadway cards, with the occasional light 3-bet with a suited connector or weak suited ace.

The flop is **A♣K♦3♥**. Our opponent checks. We're going to exercise pot control and check. Why?

Our main goal right now is to get to showdown. That flop was pretty bad for queens, but it was also pretty bad for our opponent's hand range. **If we bet, all we're doing is folding out every hand we beat, and we're getting called by better**. That's a very important concept, and if you feel that is the case when you're in a hand, under most circumstances you should not bet.

It's also possible that our opponent might make a move on this flop. If we bet, we could get bluffed off the best hand because villain might try to get us to fold our lower pocket pairs.

Once we check the flop, many opponents will bet the turn with whatever hand they have. We'll have to call one bet, even on a scary board like this, because giving up to one bet is too weak. Also, it is very rare that someone will have the balls to fire a big bet on the river on this kind of board as bluff so we can safely fold if he bets the river.

If our opponent checks to us on the turn, it's best to keep checking.

Sometimes I'll reraise a CO opener on the button with a hand like **A5s** or **KQ**, and I'd play them exactly the same way as **QQ** here (except maybe firing a value bet on the turn or river, since there are hands like **KJ** to call me if villain is playing loose).

You can play for pot control out of position, though it's going to be a little more difficult. Since you have to act first and give away more information, an opponent may try to bluff you more aggressively since you are showing weakness. For this reason, I tend to play for pot control out of position only against passive or weak opponents.

For example, I was coaching a student the other day while he was playing \$.50/\$1. The CO, a bad regular who is a little too loose and a little too passive with stats of 30/10, opened to \$3. My student was in the big blind and 3-bet him to \$10 with **TT**. His opponent called.

The flop was **Q♣9♥4♦**. I told my student to check and play for pot control.

Betting usually folds out worst hand (except for a hand like **A9**). Also, his opponent may make a semibluff (with hands such as **JT**, **A4** and **54**), if my student bets, moving

him off his hand. Since his opponent was passive and not known to bluff, we can safely check to him, showing weakness, and not be afraid of facing a big bluff.

In spots like this, if my opponent checks behind, I will usually bet the turn. When you check a flop like this after 3-betting, bad players tend to open up their calling range on the turn and will give you action with hands that would have folded to a flop bet.

Chapter 27: River Calls

Another important use for pot odds is when you are on the river and are facing a bet. Your decision against this bet is to either to call or fold. You can use pot odds to help you determine how often your hand needs to be good to make a call.

It's much the same way as when we are facing an all-in and are figuring out if we win enough to make the call given the money in the pot. It's a little more difficult on a river call since we are trying to figure out how many of his hands we beat and how often he has those hands compared to how many of his hands beat us and how often he has those hands.

Ok, that was a little confusing. So how exactly do we do this? Well, it all starts with hand ranges. Throughout the hand, we're putting our opponent on a hand range. Each decision he makes in the hand helps us narrow down his hands.

In any hand, when we get to the river and our opponent bets, it's a lot to consider and will most likely narrow his hand range down for us. We take this into account and now we have to figure out if we beat the hands he bets enough.

Often figuring out the math on this decision isn't possible. I use mostly intuition in these spots. If I beat some of his hands and lose to some of his hands, there's always enough money in the pot to justify a call. If I beat a few of his hands, and lose to most of his hands, I'll know I'll have to be getting a good price to call the river.

Let's try an example to smooth out this concept.

I'm playing \$1/\$2 on [Cake Poker](#). I raise **A♣T♣** on UTG+1 to \$7.

The flop is **T♦ J♦ 3♥**. I've flopped middle pair with the best kicker, an OK hand in this spot. However the board has many draws. The BB checks and I bet \$12. The BB quickly calls.

The turn is the **J♣**. The BB checks. I check behind for pot control reasons as I'm unlikely to get called by a worse hand if I bet and the second jack can mean I'm drawing dead to trips.

The river is the **5♣**. The BB bets \$35 into the pot of \$39. I have to call \$35 to win \$74. Thus, I need to be winning 32% of the time to call. I don't know too much about BB, but I'm assuming he's bad by how many hands he's played preflop since I sat down at the table. I find these kind of players play their flush and straight draws passively most of the time. It's also possible he has trip jacks since I would expect the same kind of player to play top pair good kicker passively.

I don't think he has a set or two pair because he would have put in a check-raise on the flop. I'm essentially putting him on either trip jacks or a busted draw to make this river bet. His hand range is most likely **AJ, KJ, QJ, J9, J8, Q9, KQ, 98** or one of the many flush draws possible.

Given that I feel at least half his hands are missed draws and I only need be good 32% of the time, we have a very easy call. This one is pretty clear-cut since there are so many busted draws and only a few hands that beat me.

Chapter 28: Semibluffs

The semibluff is an amazing move that will be a key element of your game in the aggressive games of 6-max no-limit hold ‘em. A semibluff is a bet or raise by a hand that figures to not be the best hand but can improve to be the best hand and that can also win the pot by folding a better hand.

Semibluffs are everywhere. Every time you bet a flush draw, you’re semibluffing. Every time you raise a gutshot, you’re semibluffing. Even when you continuation bet **AK** on a low board, you are semibluffing since if you are called you rarely have the best hand but can improve to the best hand.

Your opponents are using semibluffs all the time against you. That’s why when we’re facing an all-in with an overpair on the flop, we’re much more likely to call if there is a flush draw or open-ended straight draw possible since we are ahead of more hands in our opponent’s range.

Before I give you guidelines on how and when to use the semibluff, let me show you some math so you can see just how powerful a semibluff can be.

Let’s say we’re playing \$2/\$4 on Full Tilt. The game has a few good regulars at the table. It’s become a very aggressive game with a lot of 3-bets preflop.

I open **T♠9♠** on the button to \$14. The BB, whose stats are 22/18/3 and one of the more aggressive TAGs in the game, makes it \$48. Even though my hand is only a decent one and we’re only 100 BB’s deep, I make the call because his range is so wide that I plan on semibluffing a large amount of flops.

The flop is **J♦3♦5♥**. The BB bets \$75 into me. I shove in the rest of my stack (\$352). If I win the pot right now I will win \$173, a pretty good pot. To call me, I think my opponent will need to **QJ** or better to call. It's also possible I could get called by a hand like **A♠K♠** or **A♠5♠** and be in pretty bad shape.

My exact range for him calling is: **QJ, KJ, AJ, QQ, KK, AA, JJ, 55, 33, A♠K♠, A♠Q♠, A♠5♠**. This is a little bit of a wide range for him since it's possible he would not 3-bet **55, 33, A♠5♠** and **QJ**.

If I get called by this range, I have a 35% chance to win by hitting my flush. Sometimes I will win by making two pair or better by the river, also.

I believe my opponent is 3-betting 15% of his hands in this spot. He will have a hand to call 6.3% of the time.

Thus, 42%¹⁴ of the time I am putting in \$352 with a 35% chance to win. I am winning \$173 about 58% of the time. It should be noted that this 58% is what we call **fold equity**, or the amount of times we think our opponent will fold to our semibluff.

Our expectation when called is -\$71.30¹⁵.

Our expectation when not called is \$173.

Since we are only getting called 42% of the time, our total expectation and profit on this play in the long run is \$70.39¹⁶. That's huge!

¹⁴ $6.3/15 = .42$, or 42% we're getting called

¹⁵ $(.35(450) + (-352)(.65)) = +\$157.50 + (-\$228.8 = -\$71.30)$

¹⁶ $.58(173) + .42(-\$71.30) = 100.34 + (-29.94) = \70.39

This math is certainly confusing and I'm not going to lie; I needed help from a math-savvy poker buddy to get this all correct. In no way do you really need to understand all these numbers. Just understand that the semibluff is a very powerful move in poker that will win you a lot of money when used correctly.

Using the semibluff

You are going to use the semibluff often. As you saw in the previous example, when you are against aggressive players and you start calling a wider range of their 3-bets, it's important to raise or shove any good draw (which I consider to be one with 8 outs or more).

The semibluff helps you be more unpredictable to opponents. If you only ever raised with good, made hands, your opponent could fold all his hands except for his best ones. If you raise with all your good draws, however, he'll have to call you down lighter and you'll start getting those sets paid off.

- **Be more apt to semibluff “good” draws.** Semibluff more with bigger draws. These are draws like flush draws, open-ended straight draws, double gutshots¹⁷ and combo draws (flush + straight draws, pair + straight draws, etc). You can semibluff hands like gutshots and overcards but they will be more situational. Combo draws are EXCELLENT hands.

K♥Q♥ on a **J♥T♥4♣** flop is 42% to win even against top set. Try to get combo draws all-in whenever possible.

¹⁷ A double-inside straight draw. Essentially, it is two gutshots in one hand. It is a very deceptive hand. For example, holding 75 on a 6 9 3 board is a double gutshot; an 8 and a 4 give you a straight.

- **Be more apt to semibluff tighter players.** Since tight players can fold decent hands, I'm making more of my semibluffs against them. You simply have more fold equity on average against a tighter player. Against loose and passive fish, I'm more apt to just call when they bet and I have a good draw. You have much less fold equity against them. Also, an advantage to just calling against fish is to also keep them in the pot for when you actually hit the hand. You'll win a big pot. Just calling a draw against a tight player isn't as good because they will often fold when you hit your hand.
- **Be more apt to semibluff when you can get all-in.** Semibluffs work better when you can shove all-in and not have to worry about playing a turn or river with more money left behind. Our fold equity is usually greatest when we make an all-in move as well. By semibluffing and not being able to commit yourself by pot odds to your draw or by not being able to get all-in you can cause situations where your opponent will go all-in and you will have to fold your good draw. Be sure to brush up on the math, however. Folding a good draw when you have pot odds to suck out is very bad.

Examples

At \$1/\$2, you raise preflop to \$6 with **9♠7♠**. The BB, a LAG, calls. The flop is

T♠J♠3♣. The BB checks, you bet \$12 and the BB check-raises to \$40. You should shove here 100% of the time.

At \$5/\$10, the SB, a very aggressive TAG, opens to \$35. You call in the BB with **7♠6♠**. The flop is **5♠4♣2♠**. The TAG bets \$60. You semibluff to \$180. The TAG shoves in \$785 more. Even though it's a huge raise, you call because your draw is so big (15 outs¹⁸) that you have odds to call.

At \$.25/.50, UTG, UTG+1, the button and the SB limp. They are all fishy players. You check **5♣4♠** in the BB. The flop is **J♣3♥2♠**. SB checks. You should bet the pot as a semibluff. Even though you won't take this pot down that many times, you have an excellent 8-out draw to the nuts against very bad players and it's worth it to start building the pot for when you do hit your straight. It's important to not semibluff the turn if called, however, and to check-call. Once a fish calls a flop like this, he is seldom folding to a turn bet.

When not to semibluff

There are situations where you have a good draw but semibluffing will create a more awkward situation than calling.

I'd be less apt to semibluff when a very tight player has check-raised me or raised my continuation bet when I'm in a position where I generally have a strong hand. For example, if I raise UTG or UTG+1 with **J♥T♥** and a nitty TAG calls sitting directly on my left, I know he almost always has a pair. When I get raised on a **9♠8♣5♦** flop by him, my best play is to call and try to hit on the turn. I know I have no fold equity against

¹⁸ Notice how having an 8-out straight draw and a flush draw does not mean you have 17 outs. You only have 15 outs as 2 of the cards that make you a straight also make you a flush.

him because he always has a very good hand here. By semibluffing all I am doing is putting my money in with 8-outs against a strong hand.

This is all circumstantial and a semibluff with 8 or more outs can never be that bad of a play. I really hate semibluffing with an 8-out draw when I get reraised by my opponent and I have to fold. I also don't like semibluffing an 8-out draw when I'm out of position against a fish who has just bet and he is not known to fold. It's much better to call and try to hit against an opponent like that.

I generally avoid semibluffs with weaker hands like gutshots and overcards when I will have to push in my entire stack to do so (such as in the **9♠7♠** example against the LAG). If the flop was **T♠6♥3♦**, anything but folding is bad. There are circumstances when I will do this, however it usually requires me to be in a very aggressive game against opponents who are playing too aggressive against me. For example, in the **T♠9♠** hand, if the flop had been **8♠6♣3♥**, a semibluff there is OK because there's a good enough chance he can't call and we need to slow down his aggression. Part of the reason to push a gutshot like this is for [metagame](#) and [image](#), described in later chapters.

Chapter 29: Board Texture

I was recently playing \$2/\$4 on [Full Tilt](#). I raised $\text{A}\clubsuit\text{A}\heartsuit$ preflop and got called by a tough regular on the button. The flop was $\text{J}\spades\text{T}\spades\text{9}\spades$. I bet, my opponent raised, and I folded quickly.

At another table at the same time, I raised $\text{A}\spades\text{A}\heartsuit$ preflop and got called by a tough regular on the button again. The flop was $\text{5}\diamond\text{2}\diamond\text{2}\heartsuit$. I bet, my opponent raised, and I 3-bet, hoping to get my stack in.

These two examples show how I based my decision on “board texture.” In the first example, the board was very coordinated. There are many straight and flush draws out there as well as two pair combinations. The second example, the board is a dry board. That means that there aren’t as many flush and straight draws and two pair combinations possible, and that they are less likely given the rank of the cards.

Board texture refers to:

- **How coordinated the board is.** For example, a **JT9** board makes many straights possible. It also makes two pairs possible, as people are more apt to play cards closer in rank (such as **JT** and **T9**).
- **Any flush draws or flushes present.** A **J♠T♠9♠** board is bad for **AA** with no spade because many of our opponent’s hands now have our hand either drawing nearly dead against a flush, or our opponent’s hand has really good equity with a

spade. For example, **Q♠J♣** on this board is a 65% favorite over **AA** with no

spade.

- **What rank the cards are on the board and how they relate to your**

opponent's likely hand. When I get raised on the **5♦2♦2♥** flop, I am not

worried about my opponent having a deuce. Good players don't call raises

preflop with **2**'s in their hand, unless he has flopped **quads** or fives full of

deuces¹⁹ and that's too rare of an event to worry about. Chances are he has a

smaller overpair, a flush draw, or is making a bluff, figuring me for a hand like

AK.

You must ALWAYS be analyzing board texture. Understanding how the board relates to your opponent's hand, first before he acts, then after he acts, will help you put him on a hand range and choose the best play.

Let us go back to the **QQ** hand I played from the hand ranges and equity chapter. I knew the board, which was **9♣5♣4♥**, hit three of the pocket pairs he calls preflop with a set. I knew also that his weaker overpairs, **JJ** and **TT**, liked the flop and knew he would go all-in with them. I used board texture to help me figure out his hand range, which then helped me figure out that I was going to win just enough to make a call profitable.

In the later chapters when I discuss "tricky" play, I emphasize using board texture to know when to pull off moves like check-raise bluffs or double and triple barrels.

¹⁹ Holding **55** as your hole cards on the **522** flop.

Chapter 30: Stack Sizes

In an online poker game, at the majority of sites the maximum buy-in will be 100 times the big blind (100 BBs). The majority of players buy-in for this amount and most hands you play will be based around this size of stack. Every example in this book other than this chapter is based around a 100 BB stack for simplicity.

Sometimes, however, you will be facing situations where you're facing a stack that has significantly less than 100 BBs, or sometimes you will have been winning money and will have a stack significantly larger than 100 BBs and playing against opponents with similar stacks. The correct play can change drastically as stacks sizes change, more so for when stack sizes are larger.

Depending on how deep you are with your opponent, that is the "effective stack size." For example, if you have \$900 at a \$2/\$4 game and your opponent has \$120, effective stack sizes are 30 BBs²⁰. If you have \$900 and your opponent has \$1020, effective stack sizes are 225 BBs²¹.

When effective stacks are less than 100 BBs

Your play won't change that much below 100 BBs. All-ins will be more frequent and it will be easier to put your stack in with hands like top pair good kicker. Things like implied odds and calling raises preflop to flop sets go down in value, however.

From 75 BBs to 100 BBs, there is not much difference. In fact, there's not enough of a difference that it's worth writing about.

I find that players who buy-in for less than 75 BBs are almost always bad. This is true except for good players who buy-in for 20 BBs and when they double up they leave

²⁰ \$120/\$4=30 big blinds.

²¹ \$900/\$4=225 big blinds.

the tables. These players are called shortstackers and discussed below. They are usually playing with all the money they have on a site and are more into the gambling aspect of poker. I am less apt to give them credit for good hands when they go all-in and will be calling their pushes with more marginal hands.

When I'm in a pot with someone with less than 50 BBs and I flop a good draw, I am going to try as hard as I can to get all the money in on a semibluff. For example, let's say I'm playing \$.25/.50 and am facing an opponent with \$23. I don't know anything about him but assume he is bad.

Our shortstacked opponent raises to \$1.50 UTG. Another bad player with a 100 BB stack calls on the button. I call in the big blind with **7♠6♠**.

The flop is **5♣4♥2♠**. I check, UTG bets \$4 of his stack and the button folds. There's no other option but to just put UTG all-in. Even though he's raised UTG and bet into 2 opponents, we have a good draw and there's still a chance he might fold. Against a full-stacked opponent in this spot, I would always call since check-raising this kind of flop when you can't get all-in will lead to many tough turn decisions.

To summarize, when facing a shorter stacked opponent, be more apt to get all-in with any decent hand. These guys will throw their money in with some absolute garbage on occasion.

Shortstackers (Ratholers)

A newer phenomenon of online 6-max games are the shortstackers. These are knowledgeable opponents who buy-in for 20 BBs at multiple tables. As soon as they win a pot and get over 30 BBs, they automatically leave the table and return as soon as

possible, buying in for 20 BBs again. The practice of leaving the table and returning to buy-in for the minimum buy-in is called “ratholing.”

These players are trying to take advantage of the aggressive nature of the shorthanded games. Since everyone is raising so loose in position and 3-betting each other with marginal hands, these shortstackers then shove any decent hand when facing raises and are often called by these deeper stacked raisers, even when the deep stacks have bad hands.

A shortstacker will have very tight stats – around the 13 VPIP, 11 PFR range – and will be an annoyance at the table when you’re trying to open your game up against other, deeper stacked opponents.

The best way to play against these opponents is to play tightly when they shove over your open raise. It will depend on what position you raised from to determine what hands you should call with, but always keep in mind the shortstacker’s 3-bet range will widen dramatically when you raise on the CO or button. These guys usually make money from players who call their 3-bets with too many hands.

The other situation you will face against a shortstacker is when they open raise. Your only move against this when you have a hand is to 3-bet and put them all-in. Again, what hands to do this with will depend greatly on position. If a shortstacker’s stats are 13/11, he’s raising a very tight range UTG and I’d only put him all-in with a range of **99** or better, **AQ** or better. However, when this same player raises from the button, I’d put him all-in with nearly any decent hand, ranging from **KT** or better to any ace to any pair.

It should be noted that there aren't many good shortstackers below the \$1/\$2 level. Often times, someone buying in for 20 BBs will be a huge fish who is just gambling. It's best to notice when a 20 BB opponent doubles up and leaves before his next big blind – make a note on this opponent that he is a ratholer and play accordingly.

When playing with more than 100 BBs

Playing with deeper stacks can be very tricky and lead to some extremely tough situations. It's a fine balance towards getting the most value of your hand while protecting it at the same time.

Always be thinking about future turn and river decisions. This is very important and you must always consider it when playing deeper. Playing deeper you will often be in spots where there will be money left to play on the turn and river. Every preflop and flop decision is leading down this path so always keep in mind where your decisions are taking you.

For example, let's say I'm in a \$5/\$10 game. The button is pretty unknown to me, but has \$2,000 behind him, as do I. Over 30 hands, his stats are 21/10/2. He opens to \$40. I 3-bet **A♦Q♦** to \$150 in the BB. Already, I have to consider that I'm making a big pot out-of-position with a hand like **AQ**, which can be very tough to play in this spot. Given how wide the button can be raising, however, I 3-bet here more often than I call.

The flop is **Q♠J♠3♣**. Whether I decide to bet the flop or check and play for pot control, I have to consider my future turn and river decisions. If I bet and get raised, I have to decide between going all-in, calling and folding. You can see how playing OOP

is so tough – all three choices are viable decisions in a pot this big with a vulnerable but probably best hand like top pair top kicker.

If I bet and get called, I have to consider what I'll do on various turns – such as when the flush draw or straight draws get there or when the **J** pairs. If I bet, get raised and decide to call the raise, I have to consider the same turn cards and how they'll affect my decision. Same goes for when I bet the flop and turn and get called on both streets; I have to start thinking about how I'm going to react to the river before I make my previous decision. Every decision is going to involve hundreds of dollars and will have a big effect on how much money I win or lose.

100 to 140 BBs

Not much changes when you get a little above 100 BBs. You'll be making many of the same semibluffs and be getting all-in with the same strength hands.

Your implied odds go up a little bit. When you are facing a 3-bet after you've open raised a small pair, if you're around 125 BBs or more deep with an opponent, you can make the call whereas if you had 100 BBs you'd fold. You can also call on the turn to hit your draws more often.

Also be more worried about your opponent's implied odds. Start 3-betting larger preflop, especially when you're OOP. Be more inclined to make bets that are close to the size of the pot when there are multiple draws on board to reduce your opponent's implied odds.

140 to 180 BBs

This is when things can really get complicated. You're going to be in some really icky spots with top pairs and overpairs. Making a move like 3-betting all-in on the flop as a semibluff isn't going to be the best play.

We can start calling more hands preflop as well. Opening up our calling range against open raisers on the button is recommended. Hands like suited connectors, one-gapper suited connectors and suited aces go up in value since when they hit big hands they will win big pots.

We can start making more semibluff flop raises like raising gutshots and overcards when we're in position because our opponent is going to have to have a very good hand to want to put a lot of money in given how deep we are. **Abuse position strongly when you're deep against another opponent** – it's just so hard for them to continue with anything but the strongest of their hands.

At the same time, **we need to be careful making big semibluffs**. At 100 BBs deep, I recommended getting all in with any good flush draw or 8-out straight draw by 3-betting all in on the flop if you are raised. When you are 170 BBs deep, the situation changes and calling is better.

For example, let's say I raise UTG+1 with **K♦Q♠** at a \$1/\$2 game. The button, a decent player with stats of 20/13/2, calls my \$6 raise. We're heads up to a flop of **J♦T♣4♥**. I bet \$12 and the button raises to \$40.

When we are 100 BBs deep, I'd usually shove here. Button can be raising a few hands that have to fold a push. When we are called here on a push, we're always behind, but we have good equity with eight outs to the nuts.

But things change when you get deeper. In this hand, we both have \$340. Once he makes it \$40, shoving in \$315 is just going to be bad play. He'll fold a good amount, but we're only winning \$65 when he does. When we get called, he'll have **JJ, TT, 44 or JT**s every time. When we get all-in against these hands, we're only winning 26% of the time, so very often we're shoving in \$315 to win \$65 and when we get called we're only winning 1 out of 4 times. It's a losing play and it's a much better play to just call the flop raise and try to suck out on his big hand.

The same goes for calling a 3-bet in position against an aggressive 3-bettor. Let's say we open **T9s** on the button to \$3 at \$.50/\$1 and get 3-bet by the BB \$10. We're both 150 BBs deep. The flop is **J♣8♣2♥**. The BB bets \$18. Shoving in the rest of our stack would be bad here for the same reasons described above. It's much better to call once and reevaluate the turn.

Be careful with good one pair hands. Often getting in 180 BBs with top pair top kicker is a losing play. It's hard to ever really say when it's correct or not; again, you're going to need to gain some experience and use your hand reading skills for each exact situation.

Generally, against more aggressive opponents who can put in big raises and bets on a bluff, I'd be more apt to not bet my weaker top pairs in certain spots. If they are tough TAGs or LAGs who mix up their bluffs well with their strong hands, play more for pot control with a vulnerable one pair hand. If they are near maniac aggressive, don't be afraid to get a lot of your stack in with just top pair.

Against passive players and fish, keep betting away. There's a lot of value to be made against bad players when they get deep, so don't let up with TPTK and your overpairs. It's important to be very cautious when they put in a big raise against your bets however. Passive players are not known to bluff or pull stupid moves when they're deep.

Also be careful with hands like two-pair when there are straights and flushes present. Having **98** on a **T98** board is very dangerous and will be a losing play if you continue if your tight opponent has raised.

180BBs+

Many of the previous thoughts continue when you get deeper. When you start getting over 200BBs deep, you have a little more room to maneuver, especially against good players and can start opening up some big bluffs. Against another TAG, you're going to be representing a big hand anytime you put in 200 BBs so take that into account when you are finding spots to bluff. Always err on the side of caution, however. If your opponent is telling you he has a big hand, you should let off. If you're not careful, you can spew off a 200 BB stack, which is a big losing play.

You can get very creative preflop. Every hand can be 3-bet and 4-bet without great hands, as you will have so much money behind that you won't be committed if you are making a move preflop. You can call 3-bets with a wider range, as long as you are willing to semibluff and bluff on the right boards postflop.

Keep up the creativeness postflop. Semibluffing hands like gutshots and straight draws go up in value because when you are called and hit your draw you are destined to win a huge pot. Again, be careful semibluffing – in big pots don't semibluff to where

you are faced with a tough decision and won't know if you're pot committed. For example, let's say we're 250 BBs deep at \$2/\$4 and we open to \$14 on the button at \$2/\$4 with **T♦8♠**. The BB, who's a tough LAG, 3-bets to \$54. We call and see a flop of **J♣9♠2♥**. The LAG bets \$100. We can't shove here; it's just a ridiculously big overbet and we're risking too much money with eight outs. If we make a pot sized raise of around \$300, we're going to be faced with a terrible decision if the LAG pushes for \$646 over our bet. We'll have to fold a great draw because we aren't getting odds to draw to eight outs.

It's much better to use our positional advantage to just call here with our strong draw this deep.

As described above, be careful with vulnerable one-pair and weak two-pair type of hands. You also need to start being careful with sets on flush and straight boards. This is very circumstantial and I'm still almost never folding a set. Weaker flushes, especially those ten high and lower, are going to be in a lot of trouble in spots where you're getting over 200 BBs in the pot with them against your tighter opponents. When playing deep, analyze who your opponent is, try to figure out his hand range and act accordingly with your own hand, taking how deep you are and future streets of play into consideration.

Chapter 31: Levels of Thinking

Crucial to playing and winning in tougher games, the levels of thinking in poker are a product of using hand ranges, history, table dynamics and image. You use all these in combination to start really getting into your opponents head (and understanding how he's getting in your head).

The levels of thinking are progressive. The first level of thinking is what your cards are. The second level of thinking is what you think your opponents cards are. The third level of thinking is what your opponent thinks your cards are. The fourth level is what your opponent thinks YOU think his cards are. The fifth level is what your opponent thinks you think that he thinks your cards are... ok, that's enough for now.

Obviously, you use these every time you play, at least the first two levels. Most every player thinks on the first two levels. Sometimes, you'll find that 80/2/.5 fish who seems completely oblivious to anything except his two hole cards. But we can usually assume our opponent is thinking about what we hold.

In the 6-max world of online poker, the games can become so aggressive and full of bluffing and trickery that you must consider some high levels of thinking. It's not easy to have a grasp on this and will take experience, but with an idea of what to look for and with you constantly thinking about this subject while playing the game, you'll be on the right track to outthinking your opponents.

The levels: An example

I'm playing a \$3/\$6 game on Full Tilt. Three out of the 5 opponents at the table are good, solid and aggressive TAGs who I've played a few hundred hands with. We all

have a decent idea of how each other plays. One of them opens UTG+1 to \$21. I 3-bet **J♣J♦** on the button to \$72 (level one). The TAG calls.

I immediately start thinking on level two. To call my raise, I think he has a good hand. I put him on a hand range of any pocket pair, **AKs, AKo, AQs, AQo**. Sometimes he'll 4-bet **AA, KK** and **AK**, and sometimes he'll call with a hand like a suited connector, but for the most part that is going to be his range.

I'm also thinking on level three. For me to 3-bet him on the button, I usually have a good hand, but I know that he knows I can 3-bet him lightly given I have position. I think he puts me on a range of **TT+, AJs+, KQo+** and some random suited connectors and small pairs.

The flop comes down **5♥6♥7♣**. The TAG checks. I bet \$130. The TAG goes all in for \$400 more.

Level one says I have a good but not great hand; a medium overpair on a low board. Level two says my opponent has a hand that liked the board enough to go all-in. Knowing my opponent is aggressive, he can be shoving in **44, 55, 66, 77, 88, 99, TT, QQ, KK, AA, A♥K♥** and **A♥Q♥** here.

He can be shoving hands like **44** and **A♥Q♥** because when I think on the third level, I know he knows I can have random hands on the button or overcards that didn't hit this flop. On the fourth level of thinking, he knows that I know he can have a very strong hand here like a set. He also knows that I know he can make a move here, but the pot size and the cards dictate he moves all in with virtually any hand that is worth continuing.

I combine all of this to make my decision, which would be a call. There's simply too much money in the pot, so we make a pot odds influenced call.

Guidelines for level one and level two

If you have read the book up to this point, you should be on your way to understanding these levels. For level one, you consult the preflop chart and what stats to aim for. For level two, you need to understand the concepts covered in previous chapters on your opponents and their hand ranges.

Guidelines for level three

- **Consider how smart and aware your opponent is.** When playing the lower limits or against bad players, they just won't be thinking deeply enough for you to really consider what they think of your hand. You stick to value betting and playing the strength of your hand compared to the strength of theirs. At higher limits or against better players, you can assume they are thinking much on the same level as you and will have a good idea of what your hand is.

- **Always be thinking how to manipulate their thoughts.** When you think your opponent has your hand range narrowed down, be careful. They can either try to bluff you off the marginal holding, or sometimes they will be able to avoid putting money in against your strong hand. It's important to mix-up your play versus these players as described in

[Part VI](#) of this book and [Chapter 23 on position](#).

- **Always be thinking what you are representing.** Keep on your toes about what your hand looks like to your opponent. Every action you make is saying

something to your opponents. To make that big bluff, you must have your opponent thinking you have a bigger hand than his. To make a big call, you must think your opponent is betting a worse hand because he thinks your hand is weak by what you've represented.

Guidelines for level four

- **Consider how smart and aware your opponent is.** Even fewer players will be thinking this deeply. I wouldn't even worry about this below \$1/\$2.
- **Does the play for your opponent make sense?** Does he play a hand like this often? If he does he can have a pretty good idea of what he is representing to you and play accordingly. He can also make bluffs where he is representing a big hand because that's how he'd usually play a big hand.
- **Beware the good players who play a lot of tables.** They are probably on some sort of autopilot and are not going to be considering things very much at this level of thinking as they have too much going on.
- **Critical thinking.** Being able to process all this information will take some very tough and deep thinking and a great deal of experience. You must use your logical mind to process what he has, what you have and what you are both representing and how you react to what each other is representing.

Guidelines for level five

- **Experience.** Many of my thoughts on this level are from hundreds of thousands of hands. It has mostly become intuition and that's the best way to play in these situations. You must rely on instinct as you won't have time to consider all the options or even be able to comprehend the thoughts behind your logic.

One more example

I was playing \$5/\$10 the other day and a good TAG, whose stats were 18/15/2.5, raised UTG to \$30. I was on the button with **T♣T♥** and just decided to call the raise instead of 3-betting to mix it up. I expect the TAG to be raising most pairs UTG as well as the better broadway hands (level two).

The flop came down **8♣7♥2♦**. The TAG bet \$50 in the pot of \$75. Raising just folds out worse hands and gets action from better hands, so I called. Given my hand range, I now lose to **88** and **77** as well as **JJ-AA**, but I still beat hands like **99** and **AK** (level two).

The turn brought the **3♥**. The TAG bet \$125 into \$175. I called since I haven't shown any strength and he might be trying to get me to fold a hand like **66** or **55** (level three). Also, a flush draw came in on the turn and I know this villain likes to play his draws fast, so he can be betting any heart draw he has (level two). In fact, he can be **double barreling** with **AK** or **AQ** that doesn't have a flush draw if he thinks I'm tight enough (level three).

The river brought the **2♣**. The TAG bet \$300 into \$425. Now I have a very tough decision. Let's quickly review everything:

- He's betting like he has a good hand. He'd play **AA**, **KK**, **QQ**, **JJ**, **88** and **77** like this.

- I've shown that I have a good but not great hand. I'd almost always put in more money with **JJ** or better, a set or two pair. Most likely, he puts me on **TT** or **99**.
- He knows that I know he raised UTG. His usually has a good hand to do that (level four). He also knows that I know he'd play **AA**, **KK**, **QQ**, **JJ**, **88** and **77** the exact same way. He can think that I have a skeptical middle pair that still doesn't believe he has a big pair, so by firing the river he is showing he has a big hand (level four and five).
- Given all this, I know that he can try to exploit my weakness by continuing to bet hands like **AK** or **AQ**.

I make the call and lose to **AA**. Oops! Sometimes you make a big call and lose. You might feel your confidence shaken. It's best to go back and review the hand and make sure your thought process is reasonable and you made the right play.

Chapter 32: Image

Sometimes at a table, you'll raise three pots in a row and not win a single one.

Your image is not good and won't get much respect.

Sometimes at a table, you'll win two big pots in a row with good hands. Your image is good and you'll get respect when you bet.

Sometimes at a table you'll be card dead and won't have played a hand in 25 hands. Your image is tight and you'll get respect when you bet.

Your image is how others at the table perceive you. In the fast and furious world of 6-max poker your image can change very quickly based on the previous hands.

Your opponents all have images they are portraying to the table as well. Some are aware of it and some aren't.

Your image

Having a grasp of your own image will help you greatly when deciding how to react to what your opponents are doing (or predicting how they're going to react to what you do). Many players are short-sighted and only remember what has happened within the past half hour to hour when it comes to what they think your image is.

You will play some opponents so often they will know what your standard image is, so little bumps in the road won't affect how they view you too much. However, you can certainly do some things, like 3-betting a ton or going on tilt, that will change their minds for the short-term.

A good image. Having a good image means the other players feel you are playing a solid game. This usually occurs when you've not been out-of-line aggressive

and have been showing down good hands. It also means that your opponents still think you can make a move or two. A well-balanced image.

Think of it this way; if you've been betting and raising a normal amount but keep showing up with good hands when all the money goes in, people are going to be more reluctant to call you down lightly or bluff you.

With a good image you can get away with more bluffs in the right spots. You will be bluffed less. You might even be feared a little more and can bully a little bit until they pick up on your increased aggression.

A bad image. When you are playing a lot of pots and not winning them, your image is going to be bad. When you keep showing down losing hands, you'll start to get less respect when you bet and raise.

It's quite incredible how quickly players change when your image becomes bad. If you've lost a big pot or two or been caught bluffing a couple times, the amount of folds you can get on bluffs decreases dramatically.

It's much easier to play with a good image than a bad image. It's almost bizarre how much better things will work out for you with a good image. What you are trying to do with your bets, raises and calls will work out much better.

A nit image. Sometimes you are just so card dead you haven't won a pot in what feels like hours. You haven't put in a big bet postflop. You may have called preflop to hit some sets and folded to the flop bet. There's a good chance everyone else has noticed as well.

If people think you are a nit, they will respect your big bets but play back at smaller ones, figuring you will fold unless you have a huge hand.

Manipulating our image

How to use our image to our advantage should be fairly obvious: we do the move that has the most positive expectation against what we expect our opponent to do given what he thinks of us.

If he thinks we're tight, we put in a big bluff when we think he thinks our hand is a very good one. If he thinks we're out-of-control and on tilt, we tighten up and play solid, waiting for a good hand to get paid off.

It's all about staying one step ahead of the competition. When I notice I have a bad image and am not getting respect, I tighten up immediately. I raise less preflop and don't make as many bluffs. When I have a good image, I open up my game a little bit but not too much. I don't want to turn my good image into an overly aggressive image.

Take little steps in the other direction of your image, not big ones. If you've been playing tight, you don't need to 3-bet every hand preflop and double and triple barrel everything in sight. Just 3-bet a little more, double barrel a little more, check-raise a little more.

For example, let's say I'm playing \$3/\$6 on **Full Tilt**. The table is mostly comprised of solid TAGs. The past three orbits, I've raised the button when it's folded to me. The next orbit, it's folded to me again and I have **K♥6♥**. While I would raise this hand about 90% of the time that it's folded to me on the button, here I elect to fold it. I know that my recent image is that of a constant blind stealer. I feel I have less of a chance to steal the blinds and my hand is too marginal to hit many flops or play back with if I get 3-bet.

From this example you can see what I mean by little changes. I'm always aware of these things at the table and am making small adjustments. I never tighten up too much in these spots, as the button is still a big money maker. But I cut off the more marginal stuff as I anticipate they are going to play back at me lighter.

Using my good image to increase my double barrels is a postflop example. Let's say I'm playing \$2/\$4 on **Absolute Poker** and open **T♠9♠** UTG to \$12. First off, I like to raise suited connectors on occasion in early position, especially when my image is one of a solid player who is not to be messed with. The CO, a tighter TAG with stats of 17/13/2, calls. I put him mostly on small to medium pocket pairs here as he generally would 3-bet his big pocket pairs and he would not call other hands like suited connectors in this spot. The button and the blinds fold and we're heads up.

The flop is **7♥ 2♦ 2♠**. I bet \$20 and the CO calls. I keep my read on him that he has a pair from **33** to **TT**. It's also possible he's slowplaying **77** or **22**, but that's so rare I'm not that worried.

The turn is the **6♥**. Normally, I'd just give up here against most opponents. I just don't feel they are folding enough to a bet. However, I know that in the last few orbits, I've only shown down very good hands and not been caught bluffing. I've bet my good hands with big bets and given the fact I raised UTG, and thus am expected to generally raise good hands UTG, I can really represent a big pair by betting again.

I take all this into account and bet \$60 into \$67 pot. My opponent thinks for a little bit, and folds. In his mind, he doesn't have much other reason to think I am doing

anything but betting a good hand here since all he has seen me do is just that – playing good hands and betting them big. That is my image in his mind.

Again, some of your opponents are multi-tabling robots or are just too dumb to notice this stuff. Try to pay attention to the tables at all times.

Our opponent's image

For the most part when analyzing an opponent's image, we should be looking for the same things that we look for in ourselves. If you're up against a good, thinking opponent, you can assume he is making some of the same assumptions we are.

Generally, however, most players are either too bad to adjust their game based on their image or they are playing too many tables or not focusing, thus they are not really taking image into account. There are two things I look for that can really change an opponent's image, however.

- **The “tilt” factor.** Always look for an opponent who loses a big pot, especially when it's a bad beat. He could be going on tilt and spewing hundreds of dollars in every direction. Also look for a player who wins a big pot. He may start to loosen up and play more pots since he is now winning big for the session.
- **The last three orbits.** It's almost like an unseen force, but what your opponent has done the last orbits at that table can slightly alter his play. If he's been more aggressive, keep an eye out for more aggressive moves. If he seems to be folding a lot, he's playing tight for whatever reason, and you can react accordingly.

- **A note on when an opponent is playing more aggressive than normal.** Sometimes an opponent is either getting a hot run of cards or he is aware that he just made a few big bluffs. They may actually play tighter than usual after a few orbits at the table like this.

Part V Summary

- **Always be putting your opponent on a hand range and acting accordingly.**

To me, this is one of the most important concepts in hold ‘em. It takes experience to be able to read an opponent’s hand well, but once you get a good grasp on this, you will be unstoppable.

- **The button is your friend.** You can play a wide variety of hands on the button in a wide variety of ways. Raise limpers, play back against raisers who will be out-of-position against you, and steal the blinds often from the button. It’s your biggest moneymaker, position-wise.
- **Consider your implied odds.** A bad pot odds call might be a correct implied odds call. Be careful, however, about overestimating your implied odds.
- **Usually don’t bet an O.K. hand when it’ll never get called by worse.** It’s important to play for pot control in position when your hand is O.K. but there’s no point in betting. In these spots, we want to get to a showdown as cheaply as possible.
- **Semibluff often.** It’s a very profitable and powerful move in your arsenal.
- **Play carefully when deep stacked.** If you’re 200 BBs deep and getting all-in with one pair, you are probably doing something wrong. Play for pot control with more hands when deep stacked. Be more apt to call large bets with draws when you are deep since your implied odds have increased
- **Against good opponents, you’ll have to think deep.** The mind games really start when people know how you’re playing and you know how they’re playing,

and you're both good enough to start adjusting. It takes experience, but if you're one step ahead of your opponent, you'll be making the money in the long run.

- **Always be conscious of your image.** Slow down with a bad image. Open up your game with a good one.

Part VI: Advanced Play

You understand how to play a tight, solid and aggressive style. You know how to use your position to exploit the fish and outplay the TAGs. You know when it is a good time to value bet and when it's a good time to check behind.

You recognize board texture and understand how to act based upon it. You've even picked off some river bluffs with marginal hands because of the pot odds you were being offered.

You understand 90% of what it takes to be a winning poker player and most likely are by now. Still, there's always more money to be won and by understanding the unique and tough concepts of shorthanded online poker you will begin to CRUSH the games.

Chapter 33: Getting Tricky

Double and triple barreling

After a continuation bet you will often get called. Sometimes the same player is calling them so much you think he can't have a hand that often. You're right.

Sometimes a player will call a continuation bet and a turn card comes that doesn't make you a better hand but you think is a [scare card](#) to your opponent and that he can't call another bet. You're right.

Betting without a hand on the turn after continuation betting is called double-barreling. Knowing when to double barrel can be tough, but if you pick the right spots you'll be making money off it. You'll also be discouraging your opponents from calling your continuation bets with weaker hands and you'll build an image of an aggressive player so your big bets with big hands will get called later on.

You should usually double-barrel when a scare card comes off. When my opponent calls my continuation bet on a low flop and an overcard such as an **A, K, Q** or **J** comes on the turn, I almost always bet it. Usually your opponent will have called the low flop with a one pair type of hand that is small and a big card on the turn will be make it tough for him to continue with the hand if you bet. I would bet at least 2/3 of the pot or more. You want to make it tough for them to call.

You should usually double-barrel when you pick up a good draw, such as a flush draw or open-ended straight draw. When my continuation bet gets called on the flop and I pick up a flush draw, I'm almost always betting the turn. There's a chance he'll fold to the double-barrel and even if he doesn't, I have cards that can win me the pot

and that can win me a big river bet. This added equity makes the double-barrel a good bet: I have two ways to win.

If I didn't have the draw, he usually wouldn't fold the turn enough to make it a profitable double-barrel on its own. You need that extra 15-20% chance to win the pot to make it worth it.

If you never triple-barrel, you're not doing much wrong. I don't like triple-barreling (betting the river with nothing after you have bet the flop and turn and been called). I find once someone decides to call the turn, they are going to feel pot-committed and call the river. Only under rare circumstances where I have a hand like a busted 6-high flush draw and I think he has a bigger flush draw that he's going to have to fold would I triple-barrel. I might triple-barrel if a card like an ace hit the river, also.

It's always better to err on the side of caution when it comes to triple-barrels. It's very easy to spew in these spots and end up losing a lot of money.

Dealing with the donk bet

A donk bet is when an out-of-position opponent leads into you after you raise preflop. This term famously came from online poker forums when winning players kept facing this kind of bet from the weaker players in their fixed-limit games. It's by no means just a play done by fish today.

It's an interesting situation because the donk bet can mean many different things depending on the player. The donk bet from a fish is much different than a donk bet from a TAG or LAG. We'll examine dealing with the bet from all three typical opponents.

When a fish donk bets. I am constantly getting donk betted by fish. I am usually raising these fish donk bets. I find the fish donk bet to be nothing or a weak hand enough of the time to make bluff raising nearly any of these profitable.

For example, say we are playing \$.10/.25 on [Cake Poker](#). Our opponent, who I've tagged as a big fish, is generally playing like he has no clue. We raise **K♠T♣** on the button and our fish calls in the BB.

The flop is **J♣7♥3♦**. Our opponent bets the minimum (they love to do this) into a pot of \$2. You should raise this minimum bet every time, to about what the pot size is. They almost always fold.

If you have a good or great hand you should always raise a fish donk bet for value. If your hand is an OK but not good hand, you should usually call and see what happens on the turn.

Usually if a fish donks the full pot into me, I won't bluff it. Sometimes fish bet the minimum as a donk bet. This is an automatic raise every single time.

Once a fish calls a raise after his donk bet, give up. He actually has a hand this time and isn't planning on folding.

When a TAG donk bets. This is a tougher spot. You can bluff raise these but use discretion. A TAG's donk betting range can mean a lot of things depending on the player and it's hard to define all those things here.

Depending on the TAG, it can be a hand like middle pair trying to feel you out, or it can be a set trying to get maximum value from you. Some TAGs know you are going

to attempt to bluff their donk bet and will donk bet a strong draw into you so they can 3-bet all-in after you raise.

For the most part, only start playing back at a TAGs donk bets when you notice them doing it a few times. Then you can assume their hand range is wide enough to donk bet that they will have to fold to your raises.

If you have a good or decent hand like a medium overpair or top pair good kicker, I would usually just call a TAG donk bet and reevaluate based on how he bets the turn. Generally if a TAG leads strong again you can get away from these type of strength hands but there are many instances where I would continue with the hand.

When a LAG donk bets. This is a tougher and trickier spot that has the ability to drive you crazy if a LAG likes to donk bet and play back if you raise. I feel that I can't really say much here, since each and every LAG can play so many hands differently in this spot.

As usual with a LAG, you'll need to be prepared to put a lot of money in with marginal hands. I would recommend just calling most of your good hands when facing a LAG donk bet and occasionally raising with hands like gutshots, overcards and your great hands.

The trouble when facing a LAG is he might be capable of 3-betting all-in hands like gutshots as well. Also, when we just call the flop, he'll put us on a vulnerable hand and can bet the turn and river as well.

Experience will help you the most in these spots.

Should you donk bet?

As you can see, the donk bet can put people in some tough spots. As a whole, you won't be calling out of the blinds very much to be put into these situations, but there are some hands that aren't good enough to 3-bet out-of-position and you'll have to call these versus a CO or button raiser.

A donk bet can help you define a hand like middle pair, especially if you are up against a straightforward, tight player. You can also donk bet as a semibluff if you don't flop much but feel it's unlikely that your opponent has hit the flop. Donk betting into an aggressive TAG or a LAG is dangerous because they will often interpret this as weakness and raise.

Of course, if you feel that is the case, you can donk bet your strong draws and sets into them and get more value out of them.

Let's try an example of where I feel a donk bet will be the best play. At \$.50/\$1, a straightforward 18/15/2 TAG raises on the CO to \$3. We see this TAG playing every day and we know he plays a lot of tables. He's most likely playing like a robot and not paying great attention. We have **8♥8♦** in the SB and elect to just call. If we 3-bet it will just get the TAG to fold all his worse hands and call with his better hands.

The flop comes **T♣9♦2♦**. Given how many hands are in the CO's range, he most likely missed this flop. We have the best hand the majority of the time. Check-calling isn't a good play, because he most likely has a few outs with his overcard hands and we're going to have to play out-of-position with a marginal hand on the turn or river and can be easily bluffed off the best hand.

Check-raising to find out where we are in the hand is going to be expensive.

Given the fact he's straight-forward, I don't expect him to bluff our donk bet, so I lead into him for \$5. It will give us the same information as a check-raise and we are putting in much less money to find out.

Experiment with the donk bet and see if you like the play in your game. It is a cheaper way to find out where you are if you are against opponents who won't play back at it without a hand.

Keep your opponents guessing

As you've seen in the hand ranges chapter, if someone has a pretty good idea what your hand is, they're going to play pretty well against you. In the online poker world, you'll be playing against many tough opponents, often the same ones day in and day out. They're doing the same thing you're doing, making a good living playing online poker.

They're going to notice how we're playing. They're going to have PokerAce Hud telling them how tight or how loose we are. If we play a hand the same way every time, they'll start taking advantage of us and start taking our money.

That's why we have to start playing "tricky." By being tricky, you are always keeping your opponents off guard. They won't be able to put you on a hand, or they'll have to put you on such a wide range of hands it will be nearly impossible for them to play correctly against you.

A little warning before we proceed. Don't play tricky against fish or at the lower stakes (\$.50/\$1 and below). Your opponents will just not be thinking that deeply about what you have for a hand, and what hand they are representing themselves. Your

goal against these players is to play tight, solid and aggressive at all times, and to value bet them to death.

Dealing with getting 3-bet and using the 4-bet bluff

When you reach the medium and higher limits, preflop aggression picks up in all directions. Your opponents will begin to 3-bet you preflop much more. They know you are raising in late position with a wider range and will take advantage of that by putting the pressure on.

Sometimes you are getting 3-bet so much you need to play back. There are two ways to play back: start calling their 3-bets more and playing a flop or 4-betting.

Calling the 3-bet. When you notice your opponent is 3-betting you with a wider range than just his great hands, you can start calling the 3-bets with a wider range. This can be a tricky situation, since the pot will be large and you will be faced with a lot of decisions with one pair type hands.

I usually only try to call 3-bets when I'm in position. It is such a huge advantage because when playing out-of-position, you will have to define your hand so much more to your opponent and in such a large pot he'll usually outplay you.

I start calling with weaker hands such as **ATs** and **76s** when I'm raising the button and a player in the blinds is a constant 3-bettor. To play these hands postflop, I generally call a bet if I flop a pair, and raise (which is usually an all-in at this point) with good draws and two pair or better. This is very general, though, and you will need to gain some experience to understand all these circumstantial scenarios.

4-bet bluffing

4-bet bluffing starts to occur frequently at \$2/\$4 and above. It is 4-betting a marginal hand against an opponent who 3-bet you.

You should only 4-bet bluff if you have good reason to do so. Some opponents will 3-bet you virtually anytime you open in late position. You must make a stand against these opponents and sometimes I prefer to 4-bet all-in with a marginal hand like **T9s** or **66**. This happens rarely, however, and I only do it versus opponents who are getting out of line.

You may have noticed I said all-in. For example, let's say I and my opponent are 100 BB's deep. I raise **A6s** on the button to \$14 at a \$2/\$4 game. My opponent 3-bets to \$52. He does this to me constantly and I've been playing tightly against the 3-bets for the session.

Instead of making a reraise such as three times his 3-bet to \$156, it's better to push. By pushing, you force him to make a tougher decision and force him to call off a lot of money. It's just so rare he has a hand big enough to call, since he likes to 3-bet us so much.

Again, use extreme discretion when making this play. It can be very easy to spew in this situation.

Trapping with AA and KK

One thing I notice my students not doing enough is trapping with **AA** and **KK**. By trapping, I mean just calling an opponent's 3-bet when he reraises your opening

raise²². It's also possible to flat call an opening raise with these two hands, but that is very circumstantial and outside the scope of this book.

When you 4-bet an opponent, you are showing a lot of strength. Many of the tighter opponents you face can fold a hand like **QQ** or **JJ** to a 4-bet. Against these opponents, it's better to just call their 3-bet preflop and try to get it all in on any flop. Your opponent will have a much harder time folding a hand like **QQ**, **JJ** and **TT** when it flops an overpair in a big pot.

I usually only do this versus my tighter opponents. Against fish, I just go ahead and 4-bet since they are not good at folding. Against opponents who are tough aggressive players, I 4-bet sometimes since they expect me to 4-bet bluff with weaker hands.

Squeezing

Squeezing becomes a fairly common move at \$2/\$4 and above but can be effective at the lower limits when used correctly. Squeezing means to 3-bet when there is an open raise and at least one call.

For example, a TAG opponent raises to \$6 at a \$1/\$2 game on the CO. The button, a tight and passive regular calls. You're in the big blind with **T8s** and reraise to \$24, and everyone folds.

Squeezing can apply to 3-betting any of your hands in this spot, though generally when referred to in the online poker world it means 3-betting a marginal or decent hand.

²² Please never limp AA and KK. It will get you in very tough situations postflop and will rarely get you more action from a worse hand. Just raise it and hope someone makes a hand.

You should 3-bet big in this spot. I would make it at least four times the opener's raise and usually a little more if he has two or more callers.

This move is effective because your opponents fold a lot in this spot. You're showing a lot of strength and you're making it expensive for them to see a flop. Think of it this way: the original raiser, who is showing the most strength, is now trapped in between you and the original caller. If he decides to continue he's going to be in a tough spot. The caller(s) would usually 3-bet themselves if they had a big hand, so they are playing their marginal hands. They can't call such a large bet in this spot.

This move works best when you are facing tight players raising and calling in late position. Against fish, be wary of squeezing hands like suited connectors because they are less apt to fold and you'll be playing a large pot out of position with seven high. It's much better to call those hands and see a flop.

Start experimenting with squeezing. You'll get a feel for the best combination of table dynamics, image and who you are up against to make this move with. Used with the right amount of discretion, it will be a very profitable play.

Postflop floating

Floating is another play that your trickier and tougher opponents will start using when you get to \$1/\$2 and above. It refers to when your opponent calls your continuation bet on the flop with absolutely nothing or a very weak hand like a gutshot or bottom pair with the intention on stealing the pot away on the turn. Preflop floating was referenced in the understanding position chapter as part of the abusing CO openers section.

This is a technique that shows the power of position. An opponent can sometimes call with absolutely nothing and still be doing a profitable play.

I'm playing \$5/\$10 on Full Tilt. I have **A♣Q♦** on the button in a \$5/\$10 game. UTG+1, a standard 18/15 TAG who I've played a few hundred hands with, opens for \$40. I call.

The flop is **J♣5♥4♥**. UTG+1 bets \$60. I just call.

The reason I'm calling this flop is because there's a decent chance either UTG+1 has missed the flop with overcards or has an underpair to the board. Since UTG+1 is straightforward I expect him to usually give up if he has less than top pair. I usually raise this continuation bet but it's good to mix it up with floats. By calling, I can also represent a flush if a third heart hits.

The turn is the **7♥**. UTG+1 checks. I bet \$180 into the \$200 pot. UTG+1 calls.

Ok, my float didn't work there. But I'm not done yet. I put UTG+1 on an overpair or a good jack like **AJ** or **KJ**. In the hands we've played together, I think he views me as tight, so I can represent the flush by firing a big river bet.

I rarely do bluffs like this, but when facing the right mix of a tight opponent, who thinks you are tight and an ugly board for your opponent's hand, it's worth a shot.

The river is the **2♦**. UTG+1 checks, and I bet \$480 into the \$560 pot. UTG+1 runs down his [time bank](#) but eventually folds.

It's a ballsy bluff, given that I put UTG+1 on a pretty good hand, but in his mind I have the flush way too often for him to call.

It's possible to float on the flop without a hand that can make something if you really believe your opponent has nothing. This is a tougher play since you have nothing to back you up if your float doesn't work, so use it sparingly.

It's better to use the float against tighter opponents who can fold hands and tend to give up easier than others. This move has been known to frustrate players and put them on tilt, which is great for when you have a pocket pair in this spot and flop a set and get your opponent to put his whole stack in with middle pair or a bluff.

Slowplaying

Ah, slowplaying, the act of playing a very good hand in a deceptive manner by checking or calling. A favorite move by amateurs, old men and tournament donks, it's very overrated.

In 6-max no-limit hold 'em, slowplaying is usually a bad play. The games are aggressive enough that players call you down with any pair. They're aggressive enough that they will bluff and semibluff you on a variety of boards that you shouldn't slowplay.

Also, with 100 BB+ effective stacks, it will often take all three streets to get an opponent's stack in the middle. By slowplaying, you usually cut out a street of betting that is very costly if your opponent was willing to call you down or put in a raise.

Some might say that they get increased action from their opponents when they slowplay. I find that is rarely the case. It's much better just to bet your hand and hope they have something worth putting a lot of money in the pot with than slowplaying to squeeze out an extra bet or two.

However, there is one scenario where I would slowplay:

- When my hand **cripples the deck**. Let's say I have A♦A♠ and raise and get called. The flop is A♥7♦3♣. My opponent checks. There is absolutely nothing out there that can call me. Sometimes a pair of sevens will call and on rare occasion they'll bluff me here, but 95% of the time they're folding. This is a spot where there's more value to be made by checking and hoping to get a bluff or two from your opponent who might put you on a weak hand. If my opponent has a hand like 77 or 33, we're getting all the money in anyways.

Defending the blinds: The check-raise bluff

When you're playing the medium to higher limits, you'll face more TAGs who know what they're doing. They'll start abusing the button and raising very lightly.

These TAGs will be good players preflop and postflop and take advantage when you start 3-betting them with a wider range. In fact, you'll just end up putting a lot of money in out-of-position and the TAG will be getting the better of you.

When I notice this dynamic start to happen, I change my blind defense strategy: I start calling their late position raises sometimes and 3-bet sometimes. When I start calling, I call hands like KQ, KJ and AT. These hands can flop overcards and gutshots, which will help me with my next play: the flop check-raise bluff.

Anytime I flop overcards or a gutshot with these hands when calling in the blinds, I will check-raise a TAG late position raiser. Many TAGs at higher limits are good at playing back at 3-bets but not at check-raises on the flop. You'll take down the pot often

and when you don't, you have a chance to win the pot by hitting your gutshot or overcard.

It's important to not continue your bluff when you are called unless you have built up enough history of check-raise bluffing here that you think they are calling the check-raise with some marginal hands. Usually by calling, they are telling you they have a good hand. If you get the feeling they are calling with marginal hands, start firing the turn with a big bet.

In these spots, if I flop a hand like an open-ended straight draw or top pair, I will usually just check and call with it. These hands are worth more than just a flop check-raise bluff and are tough to play against a flop 3-bet.

An example of a check-raise bluff is from a session I just played. It was \$2/\$4 on [Poker Stars](#) and I was up against a regular, a TAG player with stats of 19/15/3. We've played together a little bit, and he knows I can make some moves but that I am generally tight. He raises the button (as he often does) to \$16. I'm in the BB with **K♣J♠** and elect to call, as by 3-betting I may get myself into a big pot out-of-position with a dominated hand, and I don't want to fold since he has attempts to steal the blinds at 33%. **KJ** is too strong of a hand to fold to 33% stealer.

The flop is **7♠6♣5♦**. I check and the button bets \$30. I make it \$80 and he calls.

The turn is the **T♠**. I check and the button bets \$160 and I fold.

Ok, it didn't work that time and that's poker. But think about it this way – he's raising so many hands that can't continue on that flop that he has to give up so much of

the time. Hands like any two broadway cards can't continue. Most suited aces have to give up, as well. He'd be hard pressed to continue with **A6**.

And I'm not doing a pure bluff; it's more of a semibluff. If he calls, I might hit a **K** or **J** and have the best hand. Hitting top pair on the turn might lead to some tough situations but more often than not we'll be winning the pot.

Also, next time he raises my blind he'll think twice about it. He knows I can play back at him lightly and that my blinds are not going to come without a fight.

Chapter 34: Timing Tells

You've read about tells in books. You've heard about it on TV. It's one of the most glamorous and talked about aspects of live poker: being able to pick something up from your opponent about the strength or weakness of their hand from an aspect other than the action of the hand.

We obviously lose this physical aspect when we play on the virtual felt of the online table. However, there are tells that exist and they involve the timing of how fast your opponent makes his decisions. These tells are not to be relied on very heavily and my understanding of them has only come with a lot of experience.

I'll describe some of the more reliable timing tells I've noticed in my career:

- **The timing of a check-minraise.** You'll get check-minraised a lot. Sometimes it's the pure nuts, sometimes it's absolutely nothing and sometimes it's top pair no kicker. While it's often hard to tell which one of these a check min-raise is, I have found a somewhat reliable timing tell depending on how quickly you are check-minraised.
 - 1) You raise from the button. The BB, a 40/10/2 fish calls. He checks the flop and you continuation bet. He instantly check-minraises you.
 - 2) You raise from the button. The BB, a 40/10/2 fish calls. He checks the flop and you continuation bet. He thinks for five seconds and check-minraises you.

I have found #1 to be a bluff a much higher percent of the time than #2. When someone instantly check-minraises you, it is much more likely they are trying to pick off your continuation bet than trying to sucker you in with a real hand.

Think of it this way: they had the move pre-planned before you bet. They think you have nothing and don't even need to think about what to do when you bet. They're taking a stand this time.

Whereas when someone thinks for five seconds and check-minraises, they're either trying to disguise their hand and are not trying to look too eager to raise, or they waited to see what you bet so they could act upon your bet with their big hand. When someone has flopped a set, they want to analyze their opponents bet before they act and decide upon the right decision. Also, most opponents feel if they instantly act, they are looking too eager to play the hand.

This timing tell isn't 100% accurate, but I have found it to be true enough to consider it every time I am check-minraised. When it comes to close decisions, this can be the tipping point to lead to one decision over the other.

- **"I have top pair and know I'm calling down."** There are often spots where someone has flopped top pair against a preflop raiser and he knows he is calling down. He at least knows he is calling the next street. He feels there's no option to either fold or raise, so the call is automatic. His big flaw is he tends to instantly call the next bet. Instantly. This can tip off me off, since I know if he had a big hand like a set or two pair he would have at least thought about raising.

For example, say you raise **K♠K♥** from the CO. The button, a 30/10/2 who is an OK but losing player calls. The flop comes down **Q♠7♦7♥**. You bet a 4/5 pot continuation bet and your opponent quickly calls. The turn is the **4♠**.

You bet 2/3 pot and your opponent instantly calls. In this spot, your opponent is

giving away his hand. If he had a 7, he would think about if he should raise or not. Thus, on the river you can play perfectly against him and make a large value bet since he has top pair and seems to like it.

This can hold true for draws as well. Many players know they are just going to call their flush draw so they instantly call after you bet. It's most important to know that almost all the time, when someone instantly calls your bets, it is NOT a big hand.

Not giving off timing tells yourself

It's very important you avoid giving off any timing tells yourself. It's tempting to quickly call in those top pair situations because you know what you're going to do. However, some players can pick up on these types of spots so it's best to act with the same amount of time in every decision (except in those hands that require some tough thinking).

Chapter 35: Metagame

Welcome to the holy grail of crushing high-stakes online poker. The master of the metagame will always be one step ahead of his opponents, leaving them wondering if he can see their hole cards.

The master of the metagame uses his vast knowledge about his opponent's hand ranges, their tendencies and their history with him to manipulate every situation in his favor. The master of the metagame understands his image and how he has been affecting the table dynamics and he knows how his opponents are planning to react to this.

So what exactly is metagame? It's the sum of all the parts of a poker session or multiple sessions against the same player. When a thinking opponent makes a decision, he considers all that you've learned: his and his opponent's hand ranges, his and his opponent's images, the table dynamics and the history of the table (what has happened in recent hands and what has happened in hands in prior sessions). The term "metagame" acts as an umbrella for considering all these things when playing the game of poker.

Good players understand metagame and do things to manipulate it when they're playing other thinking opponents. Most metagame comes from players who play each other constantly. How you played your set yesterday will be in your opponent's head and he will watch for the same pattern to avoid that set.

For example, I'm at a table with a tough \$3/\$6 regular on Poker Stars. We've played thousands of hands together and we have a good grasp on how the other plays. He knows that when I call out of the blinds with a medium pocket pair like 77, I check-raise when I flop a set and check-call the flop and turn when the board isn't very scary, such as

T554.

I know that as I hold **7♠7♥** in the BB and he open raises from the CO, I'm going to take metagame into account and make a move. If I don't flop a set, I'll check-raise it like I have a set. If I flop a set, I'll check-call the flop and turn, looking to induce bluffs since he will probably feel he can bluff me off a vulnerable hand like middle pair.

After I call with **7♠7♥**, the flop is **9♦7♥3♣**. Nice! I check. My opponent fires out \$36 and I call. The turn is the **J♥**. It's a good card because he can now represent that he has paired the **J** (and he might as well actually hit it, so he has a hand that can give me action sometimes). I check. My opponent bets out \$90 into \$112 pot and I think for a little bit, and call. I purposely think, even though I know what my action will be, because I want to him to think that I'm thinking if I should call again with a hand like middle pair. This is metagame again, dealing with timing tells.

The river is the **2♦**. I decide to think for a little while and check again. My villain thinks for nearly 20 seconds before finally checking his **A♦Q♣** behind on the river. Against his hand, I maximized value by using our previous history to manipulate metagame and have him bluff at me because he thought I was holding a much weaker holding.

This hand will greatly affect the metagame further. Now he knows I can slowplay a set and play it in creative ways. He will be less apt to bluff me in the future in these spots.

Sometimes it's worthwhile to make a play that has a slightly negative expectation or neutral expectation for the sake of metagame. When you're playing opponents who

you see every day, it can be worth it to “send a signal” with a play that you’re willing to go to the outer regions of correct strategy.

For example, let’s say we get 3-bet when we’re holding a hand like **T♠8♠**. By 4-bet shoving, we don’t expect to make a profit on the play, as when we’re called we’re going to get crushed a lot. But if we do get called and he sees our hand, he will know we are capable of going all-in preflop with a marginal hand when we feel he is being too aggressive. Again, be very careful with a play like this. It shouldn’t be done often and there needs to be a good chance that he will fold to your 4-bet to make this play worthwhile.

Another example is when you find yourself on the river with a very weak pair and are facing a bet from an aggressive regular. Sometimes your opponent is bluffing, but you don’t know if he’s bluffing to make a profitable call. You’re just not really sure. You should sometimes make this call and let your opponent know you can make very thin calls when you think he might be bluffing.

Metagame can also come in the form of a single session. It’s a combination of table dynamics and image and previous hands that can affect how the current hand is playing out.

For example, you’re playing a fish at \$1/\$2. In a previous hand, you had double-barrel bluffed the turn with a flush draw and the fish called with a set he was trapping with. You hit your flush on the river and the fish berated you in chat.

The metagame between you and the fish has been largely affected by this hand. From now on, every time you bet, the fish will think you’re an idiot and call you down

with anything. You exploit this metagame situation by only value betting the fish and not bluffing him.

Notes about metagame

- Don't worry about it that much at lower limits. Things like having a fish think you're an idiot will come naturally and it's pretty easy to know what to do when it happens. Don't worry about outplaying regulars at \$.25/.50 by mixing up your lines – they are probably bad at poker and not thinking on a high enough level to make you stray from your standard value lines.
- The plays listed in "mixing up your play" go great with metagame. It's about keeping our good, thinking opponents off their guard about what we actually have. It's also about confusing our weaker opponents into making bad, losing plays against us. You don't need to play a hand in a tricky manner every time (and you shouldn't), but if you just do it 1 out of 4 or 5 times, you will avoid being exploited and be able to gain value from more situations.
- Nothing can replace actual experience when it comes to understanding metagame. For players with hundreds of thousands of hands played, it becomes almost instinctive while they're playing to consider metagame in their decisions.

Part VI Summary

- **Always have a reason to double or triple-barrel.** Use your hand reading skills and your board texture reading ability to decide whether or not to fire another bluff after your continuation bet has been called.
- **You have to open up preflop if you're opponents are 3-betting your open-raises too much.** Start calling 3-bets with more marginal hands and throwing in 4-bets.
- **Don't slowplay too much.** It's better to go ahead and bet and hope they have something that can get all-in against your big hand.
- **If you're calling out of the blinds, check-raise bluff to steal some pots away.**
You can't call out-of-position and check-fold every flop that you don't flop top pair with. You need to be stealing pots to make up for calling preflop.
- **Use timing tells to your advantage.** Some players do make the mistake of acting within a certain amount of time with a certain hand. Don't take it too far – use your knowledge of how the opponent plays, his stats, and what you figure his hand range to be before you start bringing timing tells into the mix.
- **Consider metagame when playing against a familiar opponent.** Online, you'll play against many of the same people, day in and day out. How you played a hand yesterday or a month ago can affect your decisions in a hand you're playing today.

Outro

Before I found poker, I was destined for your average \$35k a year job right out of a college, working at a place I didn't enjoy and living a life I felt no way out of.

Since poker, I've averaged over six figures a year while being able to work when I want and where I want from the comfort of my own home. There are ups and downs to the world of poker, but overall, being freer is what it's all about.

I've spent a month in Costa Rica on a whim. In 2008, I will travel and live in Sydney, Buenos Aires and Prague. All of this is possible because I can make a good living from my laptop.

If you learn and understand what I've presented in this book, you can too. Hold 'em 6-max online is the only game (and the best game) you need to know to make a lot of money. But it won't happen unless you put some money online and build up the experience. By combining the experience with reading this book and online forums, you are destined to become a master of online poker.

Appendix

Glossary ([back to Chapter 1](#))

3-bet: The act of reraising a player preflop. For example, when an opponent raises the big blind and you reraise this bet, that is considered a 3-bet. The first raise is considered the “second bet.”

4-bet: The act of reraising a preflop 3-bettor.

Backdoor flush draw: When, on the flop, you have 3 cards to a flush draw. You can make a flush by cards of your suit coming on the turn and river, thus “backdooring” the flush.

Big blind: To the left of the small blind, the big blind is a preflop force bet that is usually 1/100th of the maximum buy-in for that limit, e.g. at a \$400 max buy-in online the big blind is \$4. The big blind acts last preflop.

Board: The five community cards.

Broadway: Any combination of cards ranked **T** or higher, either on the board or in your hole cards. **AKQJT** is a broadway straight. Holding **QJ** in your hole cards means you have broadway cards.

Busted draw: When a draw misses by the river. For example, if you had **J♦T♦** on a **9♦4♦3♣5♥7♥** board, you would have missed your flush draw by the river, thus you have a busted draw.

Button: The position on the table to the right of the blinds. The button gets to act last postflop giving it a huge advantage over other positions.

Card dead: When you consistently being dealt bad hands, preflop and postflop.

Check-raise: When a player checks and then raises after another player bets.

Combo draw: When you have a draw that has two or more ways of winning. For example, K♥Q♥ on a J♥T♥3♠ flop has two ways of winning: by making a flush or by making a straight.

Cripple the deck: When your hole cards contain all the good possible hands compared to the board. For example, you hold A♣A♦ on a A♥3♣7♠ flop.

Cutoff (CO): The position on the table to the right of the button.

Datamine: To grab hand histories from online tables while not actually playing at them. The purpose is to import these hands into Poker Tracker to gather data about your opponents before you play with them.

Deep stacks: When you and your opponent have more than 100 BBs at a table together.

Defending the blinds: When a player starts to play back against an opponent who he believes is stealing his blinds with a wide range of hands. For example, a hand like T8s is not a hand that I would play in the blinds if someone open raised in late position, but if I felt that player was raising such a wide range of hands in that spot I would start making plays with hands like T8s to defend my blinds.

Dry board: When the community cards don't contain any possible flush or straight draws. For example, a 8♠7♣3♥2♦K♦ board contains no flushes or straights and would be considered dry.

Dry flop: Same as above but just referring to the three flop cards.

Dominated hands: A hand that is likely to be dominated with one of its kickers. For example, KJ is often referred to as a dominated hand because it is dominated by KQ,

AJ and **AK**, and can often get players into trouble postflop when they flop top pair with it.

Drawing dead: Having a zero percent chance to win the hand.

Early position. Being under-the-gun (first to act preflop in a 6-handed game) or under-the-gun+1 (2^{nd} to act preflop in a 6-handed game).

Equity: A player's chances of winning a pot versus the assumed hand range of his opponent

Fish: A bad player.

Flop: When the first three community cards are dealt.

Flush draw: When your hand has four cards to a flush and there are more cards to come that can improve your hand to a flush. When the "flush draw gets there," it means that the third flush card has come on the turn or river and it's possible your opponent now has a flush.

Fold equity: The percentage that an opponent is likely to fold to a bet or a raise.

Gutshot: When you have four cards to a straight and only one card can fill the straight.

For example, having **JT** on a **972** flop is a gutshot

Hand range: The possible hands that we put an opponent on when he is playing a hand. For example, on the flop our opponent raises our continuation bet. We put him on a hand range of overpairs, two pair and sets.

High stakes: Typically defined as \$5/\$10 NL and higher.

Hit: When your hand gets a card that improves it. For example, I have **AK** and we see a flop with an ace on it. I hit my ace.

Hole cards: The two cards you are dealt preflop in hold 'em.

Late position (LP): Being in the CO or button seat.

Limp: To just call the big blind preflop.

Loose: A player who plays a lot of hands.

Long run: How someone or something performs at poker over a large sample size. For example, a player may make a call that wins him the pot, but in the long run it would be a losing play. The long run is after all the luck has evened out over hundreds of thousands of hands.

Lower limits: Typically defined as \$.50/\$1 NL and lower.

Making a move: When a player makes a play for the pot, such as bluffing, semibluffing or check-raising.

Medium Stakes: Typically defined as \$1/\$2 to \$3/\$6.

Micro Stakes: Typically defined as \$.10/.25 and lower.

Minbet: The action of making the smallest bet possible. For example, the smallest bet allowed would be the size of the big blind of the stakes you are playing at. At \$1/\$2, a minbet would be a \$2 bet. It is generally a very weak bet and done by bad players, unless it is a limped pot between the small blind and big blind.

Minraise: The action of making the smallest raise possible. For example, if some bets \$10 on the flop, a minraise would be to \$20 since you need to raise at least twice the amount that the last bet raised.

Multi-way: When there are three or more players to the flop.

No kicker: When your hand has a pair or trips and the other hole card is weak, usually referred to as a nine or lower.

Nuts: The best hand possible given the board.

Open complete: When it has been folded the SB and he completes the big blind.

Open limp: When it has been folded to a player preflop and he limps.

Open-ended straight draw: When you have four consecutive cards to a straight. For example, JT on a 983 flop.

Open raise: When it has been folded to a player preflop and he raises.

Orbit: When one cycle of the table has happened.

Outflop: When one hand improves more on the flop than another. Usually refers to a hand that is worse preflop that becomes better on the flop.

Out-of-line: When a player is getting overaggressive in bad spots.

Out-of-position (OOP): To have to act before someone else acts. It is a big disadvantage.

Outs: Cards that can come on later streets to improve your hand. For example, if I have JT on a 983 board, I have 8 outs to improve to a straight; four Qs and four 7s.

Overbet: When a player bets an amount larger than the pot-size.

Overpair: A pocket pair higher than any cards on the board.

Pocket pair: When your hole cards match in rank.

Postflop: The action that occurs from the flop onwards.

Preflop: The action that occurs before the flop.

Quads: Four of a kind.

Raising light: To raise a wide range of hands.

Rake: The money in the pot that the poker site takes out of the pot.

Rakeback: The money that you get back every month from the poker site, for the rake you've paid. To get rakeback from a site, you need to sign up under an affiliate, such as

Skilled Online Poker

Regular: A player who is constantly playing in the same games on the same site.

Reraise: To put in another raise after someone has already raised another bet.

River: When the last community card is dealt.

Scare card: A card that scares an opponent into thinking his hand is not the best, such as when you are holding **88** on a **652** flop and an A comes on the turn.

Semibluff: Making a bet or a raise with a hand that is figures to not be the best hand but can improve to be the best hand.

Set: Three of a kind when you hold a pocket pair and it matches a card on the board.

Shark: A good player.

Slowplay: To play a big hand deceptively by just calling bets or by checking.

Small blind: To the left of the button, the small blind is a preflop forced bet that is usually 1/200th of the maximum buy-in for that limit, e.g. at a \$400 max buy-in online game the small blind is \$2. The small blind acts first postflop.

Small stakes: Typically defined as \$.25/.50 to \$.50/\$1.

Spew: Performing a losing play, usually of a nature that is equivalent to lighting money on fire.

Stack off: To put your entire stack in the pot either by calling it off or by going all-in, expecting to get called.

Suck out: When a player doesn't have the best hand but gets a lucky card and improves to the best hand.

Suited ace: When your hole cards contain an ace and another card of the same suit.

Suited connector: When your hole cards are next to each other in rank and suited, such as **8♠7♠** or **5♥4♥**.

Suited one-gapper: When your hole cards are within one gap of each other in rank and suited, such as **9♠7♠** or **6♥4♥**.

Tight: A player who does not play a lot of hands.

Tilt: When emotions and anger take control of a person's ability to play poker correctly.

Time bank: On some poker sites, when a player is running out of time on a decision, he can activate his time bank, which will give him around a minute more to think about that decision. The time bank becomes depleted when used but slowly refills during a session.

Top pair good kicker (TPGK): When you have top pair with a good kicker. A good kicker is generally defined as being a **K**, **Q**, or **J** as a kicker. For example, having **KQ** on a **KT845** board.

Top pair top kicker (PTPK): When one of your hole cards is paired with the highest card on board, and your other hole card is the high card on the board. For example, **AK** on a **K8365** board.

Trips: Three of a kind when one of your hole cards matches with two of the cards on the board. For example, holding **AT** and having the board be **T78T3**.

Turn: When the fourth community card is dealt.

Under-the-gun (UTG): The position at the table that has to act first preflop.

Underpair: A pocket pair that is lower than highest card on the board.

Win rate: How much someone is winning at poker. This is usually judged by how many big blinds won over 100 hands. A good win rate at \$2/\$4 is 8 big blinds per one hundred hands, or \$32 per one hundred hands.

Hand Rankings (from weakest to strongest)

High Card:

When the five-card hand has no two cards in the same rank, nor has five cards in sequence or of the same suit. Generally a very bad hand unless there are more cards to come and you have a hand that can improve.

A♣K♦6♦7♠T♣ is an example of ace high.

One Pair:

When two cards in your five-card hand match in rank.

K♦K♣Q♥9♠5♣ is an example of a pair of kings.

Two Pair:

When two cards in your five-card hand match in rank, along with two other cards that match in rank.

Q♠Q♥7♣7♦3♥ is an example of two pair, queens and sevens.

Three-of-a-kind:

When three cards in your five-card hand match in rank.

J♥J♣J♦A♣6♠ is an example of three-of-a-kind, jacks.

Straight:

When your hand contains five cards of sequential rank.

T♦9♣8♦7♠6♣ is an example of a ten-high straight.

Flush:

When your hand contains five cards of the same suit.

A♣T♣7♣5♣2♣ is an example of an ace-high flush.

Full House:

When three cards in your five-card hand match in rank along with the other two cards in your hand matching in rank. Three-of-a-kind and a pair.

9♣9♦9♥4♣4♠ is an example of nines full of fours.

Quads:

When four cards in your five-card hand match in rank.

8♠8♣8♥8♦2♠ is an example of quad eights.

Straight Flush:

When five cards in your hand are of the same suit and in consequential order.

7♦6♦5♦4♦3♦ is an example of a seven-high diamond straight flush.

Royal Flush:

When five cards in your hand are the ace, king, queen, jack and ten of the same suit.

A♥K♥Q♥J♥T♥ is an example of a royal heart flush.

Rules of the Game

In Texas hold ‘em, each player is dealt two “hole” cards from a 52-card deck.

This is referred to as preflop and is where the first round of betting occurs, beginning with the player “under-the-gun,” or UTG for short.

The preflop betting ends with the “small blind” and “big blind,” players who have forced bets in the hand. Each player must either call the big blind, fold, or raise the big blind. If it’s not raised, the big blind can either check or raise.

On the flop, three cards are dealt. The small blind now acts first and another round of betting occurs.

On the turn, another card is dealt and another round of betting occurs.

On the river, the last card is dealt and the final round of betting occurs. At this point, a player makes his best five-card poker hand from the seven cards available to him. The best five-card hand that goes to showdown wins.

Odds

Preflop:

Being dealt a specific pocket pair (for example, AA): 220 to 1

Being dealt any pocket pair: 16 to 1

Being dealt AKo: 110 to 1

Being dealt AKs: 331 to 1

Being dealt two suited cards: 3.3 to 1

On the flop:

Holding a pocket pair and flopping a set or better: 7.5 to 1

Holding a pocket pair and flopping a set: 8.3 to 1

Holding a pocket pair and flopping a full house: 136 to 1

Holding a pocket pair and flopping quads: 407 to 1

Holding AKo and flopping a pair using the A or K: 2.5 to 1

Holding AKo and flopping two pair using the A and K: 49 to 1

Holding AKo and flopping trips using the A or K: 73 to 1

Holding AKo and flopping a full house using the A and K: 1087 to 1

Holding AKo and flopping quads: 9799 to 1.

From the flop to the river:

Holding a flush draw and making it by the river: 1.9 to 1

Holding an 8-out straight draw and making it by the river: 2.2 to 1

Holding a gutshot straight draw and making it by the river: 5.1 to 1

Holding a backdoor flush draw and making it by the river: 23 to 1

Holding overcards and making a pair by the river: 3.2 to 1

Thanks to...

- My mom, Trina Atherton, for consulting and editing help.
- James “Aubruche” Black, for his consulting and ideas.
- Max “Slider” Bloom, for his math help.
- Andrew “grindtashine” Liu, for being my personal punching bag.
- Chris “beachbum” Russo, for his consulting and ideas.
- All my other poker friends for discussing strategy with me and helping me develop my game to the level it’s at.

Preflop Hand Charts for a Tight, Solid, and Aggressive Game

Key: Green = Raise, Yellow = Fold

Under-the-gun (UTG)

AA	AKs	AQs	AJs	ATs	A9s	A8s	A7s	A6s	A5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AKo	KK	KQs	KJs	KTs	K9s	K8s	K7s	K6s	K5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AQo	KQo	QQ	QJs	QTs	Q9s	Q8s	Q7s	Q6s	Q5s	Q4s	Q3s	Q2s
AJo	KJo	QJo	JJ	JTs	J9s	J8s	J7s	J6s	J5s	J4s	J3s	J2s
ATo	KTo	QTo	JTo	TT	T9s	T8s	T7s	T6s	T5s	T4s	T3s	T2s
A9o	K9o	Q9o	J9o	T9o	99	98s	97s	96s	95s	94s	93s	92s
A8o	K8o	Q8o	J8o	T8o	98o	88	87s	86s	85s	84s	83s	82s
A7o	K7o	Q7o	J7o	T7o	97o	87o	77	76s	75s	74s	73s	72s
A6o	K6o	Q6o	J6o	T6o	96o	86o	76o	66	65s	64s	63s	62s
A5o	K5o	Q5o	J5o	T5o	95o	85o	75o	65o	55	54s	53s	52s
A4o	K4o	Q4o	J4o	T4o	94o	84o	74o	64o	54o	44	43s	42s
A3o	K3o	Q3o	J3o	T3o	93o	83o	73o	63o	53o	43o	33	32s
A2o	K2o	Q2o	J2o	T2o	92o	82o	72o	62o	52o	42o	32o	22

Under-the-gun + 1 (UTG+1)

AA	AKs	AQs	AJs	ATs	A9s	A8s	A7s	A6s	A5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AKo	KK	KQs	KJs	KTs	K9s	K8s	K7s	K6s	K5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AQo	KQo	QQ	QJs	QTs	Q9s	Q8s	Q7s	Q6s	Q5s	Q4s	Q3s	Q2s
AJo	KJo	QJo	JJ	JTs	J9s	J8s	J7s	J6s	J5s	J4s	J3s	J2s
ATo	KTo	QTo	JTo	TT	T9s	T8s	T7s	T6s	T5s	T4s	T3s	T2s
A9o	K9o	Q9o	J9o	T9o	99	98s	97s	96s	95s	94s	93s	92s
A8o	K8o	Q8o	J8o	T8o	98o	88	87s	86s	85s	84s	83s	82s
A7o	K7o	Q7o	J7o	T7o	97o	87o	77	76s	75s	74s	73s	72s
A6o	K6o	Q6o	J6o	T6o	96o	86o	76o	66	65s	64s	63s	62s
A5o	K5o	Q5o	J5o	T5o	95o	85o	75o	65o	55	54s	53s	52s
A4o	K4o	Q4o	J4o	T4o	94o	84o	74o	64o	54o	44	43s	42s
A3o	K3o	Q3o	J3o	T3o	93o	83o	73o	63o	53o	43o	33	32s
A2o	K2o	Q2o	J2o	T2o	92o	82o	72o	62o	52o	42o	32o	22

**Cut-off
(CO)**

AA	AKs	AQs	AJs	ATs	A9s	A8s	A7s	A6s	A5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AKo	KK	KQs	KJs	KTs	K9s	K8s	K7s	K6s	K5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AQo	KQo	QQ	QJs	QTs	Q9s	Q8s	Q7s	Q6s	Q5s	Q4s	Q3s	Q2s
AJo	KJo	QJo	JJ	JTs	J9s	J8s	J7s	J6s	J5s	J4s	J3s	J2s
ATo	KTo	QTo	JTo	TT	T9s	T8s	T7s	T6s	T5s	T4s	T3s	T2s
A9o	K9o	Q9o	J9o	T9o	99	98s	97s	96s	95s	94s	93s	92s
A8o	K8o	Q8o	J8o	T8o	98o	88	87s	86s	85s	84s	83s	82s
A7o	K7o	Q7o	J7o	T7o	97o	87o	77	76s	75s	74s	73s	72s
A6o	K6o	Q6o	J6o	T6o	96o	86o	76o	66	65s	64s	63s	62s
A5o	K5o	Q5o	J5o	T5o	95o	85o	75o	65o	55	54s	53s	52s
A4o	K4o	Q4o	J4o	T4o	94o	84o	74o	64o	54o	44	43s	42s
A3o	K3o	Q3o	J3o	T3o	93o	83o	73o	63o	53o	43o	33	32s
A2o	K2o	Q2o	J2o	T2o	92o	82o	72o	62o	52o	42o	32o	22

Button

AA	AKs	AQs	AJs	ATs	A9s	A8s	A7s	A6s	A5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AKo	KK	KQs	KJs	KTs	K9s	K8s	K7s	K6s	K5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AQo	KQo	QQ	QJs	QTs	Q9s	Q8s	Q7s	Q6s	Q5s	Q4s	Q3s	Q2s
AJo	KJo	QJo	JJ	JTs	J9s	J8s	J7s	J6s	J5s	J4s	J3s	J2s
ATo	KTo	QTo	JTo	TT	T9s	T8s	T7s	T6s	T5s	T4s	T3s	T2s
A9o	K9o	Q9o	J9o	T9o	99	98s	97s	96s	95s	94s	93s	92s
A8o	K8o	Q8o	J8o	T8o	98o	88	87s	86s	85s	84s	83s	82s
A7o	K7o	Q7o	J7o	T7o	97o	87o	77	76s	75s	74s	73s	72s
A6o	K6o	Q6o	J6o	T6o	96o	86o	76o	66	65s	64s	63s	62s
A5o	K5o	Q5o	J5o	T5o	95o	85o	75o	65o	55	54s	53s	52s
A4o	K4o	Q4o	J4o	T4o	94o	84o	74o	64o	54o	44	43s	42s
A3o	K3o	Q3o	J3o	T3o	93o	83o	73o	63o	53o	43o	33	32s
A2o	K2o	Q2o	J2o	T2o	92o	82o	72o	62o	52o	42o	32o	22

When folded to you when you're in the small blind (SB)¹

AA	AKs	AQs	AJs	ATs	A9s	A8s	A7s	A6s	A5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AKo	KK	KQs	KJs	KTs	K9s	K8s	K7s	K6s	K5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AQo	KQo	QQ	QJs	QTs	Q9s	Q8s	Q7s	Q6s	Q5s	Q4s	Q3s	Q2s
AJo	KJo	QJo	JJ	JTs	J9s	J8s	J7s	J6s	J5s	J4s	J3s	J2s
ATo	KTo	QTo	JTo	TT	T9s	T8s	T7s	T6s	T5s	T4s	T3s	T2s
A9o	K9o	Q9o	J9o	T9o	99	98s	97s	96s	95s	94s	93s	92s
A8o	K8o	Q8o	J8o	T8o	98o	88	87s	86s	85s	84s	83s	82s
A7o	K7o	Q7o	J7o	T7o	97o	87o	77	76s	75s	74s	73s	72s
A6o	K6o	Q6o	J6o	T6o	96o	86o	76o	66	65s	64s	63s	62s
A5o	K5o	Q5o	J5o	T5o	95o	85o	75o	65o	55	54s	53s	52s
A4o	K4o	Q4o	J4o	T4o	94o	84o	74o	64o	54o	44	43s	42s
A3o	K3o	Q3o	J3o	T3o	93o	83o	73o	63o	53o	43o	33	32s
A2o	K2o	Q2o	J2o	T2o	92o	82o	72o	62o	52o	42o	32o	22

When there are limpers in position and you're in the small blind (SB) or big blind

AA	AKs	AQs	AJs	ATs	A9s	A8s	A7s	A6s	A5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AKo	KK	KQs	KJs	KTs	K9s	K8s	K7s	K6s	K5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AQo	KQo	QQ	QJs	QTs	Q9s	Q8s	Q7s	Q6s	Q5s	Q4s	Q3s	Q2s
AJo	KJo	QJo	JJ	JTs	J9s	J8s	J7s	J6s	J5s	J4s	J3s	J2s
ATo	KTo	QTo	JTo	TT	T9s	T8s	T7s	T6s	T5s	T4s	T3s	T2s
A9o	K9o	Q9o	J9o	T9o	99	98s	97s	96s	95s	94s	93s	92s
A8o	K8o	Q8o	J8o	T8o	98o	88	87s	86s	85s	84s	83s	82s
A7o	K7o	Q7o	J7o	T7o	97o	87o	77	76s	75s	74s	73s	72s
A6o	K6o	Q6o	J6o	T6o	96o	86o	76o	66	65s	64s	63s	62s
A5o	K5o	Q5o	J5o	T5o	95o	85o	75o	65o	55	54s	53s	52s
A4o	K4o	Q4o	J4o	T4o	94o	84o	74o	64o	54o	44	43s	42s
A3o	K3o	Q3o	J3o	T3o	93o	83o	73o	63o	53o	43o	33	32s
A2o	K2o	Q2o	J2o	T2o	92o	82o	72o	62o	52o	42o	32o	22

¹ When a good, tough opponent is in the BB, I'd recommend raising the weaker hands less.

When you are in the BB, and it's folded to the SB who just calls the BB

AA	AKs	AQs	AJs	ATs	A9s	A8s	A7s	A6s	A5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AKo	KK	KQs	KJs	KTs	K9s	K8s	K7s	K6s	K5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AQo	KQo	QQ	QJs	QTs	Q9s	Q8s	Q7s	Q6s	Q5s	Q4s	Q3s	Q2s
AJo	KJo	QJo	JJ	JTs	J9s	J8s	J7s	J6s	J5s	J4s	J3s	J2s
ATo	KTo	QTo	JTo	TT	T9s	T8s	T7s	T6s	T5s	T4s	T3s	T2s
A9o	K9o	Q9o	J9o	T9o	99	98s	97s	96s	95s	94s	93s	92s
A8o	K8o	Q8o	J8o	T8o	98o	88	87s	86s	85s	84s	83s	82s
A7o	K7o	Q7o	J7o	T7o	97o	87o	77	76s	75s	74s	73s	72s
A6o	K6o	Q6o	J6o	T6o	96o	86o	76o	66	65s	64s	63s	62s
A5o	K5o	Q5o	J5o	T5o	95o	85o	75o	65o	55	54s	53s	52s
A4o	K4o	Q4o	J4o	T4o	94o	84o	74o	64o	54o	44	43s	42s
A3o	K3o	Q3o	J3o	T3o	93o	83o	73o	63o	53o	43o	33	32s
A2o	K2o	Q2o	J2o	T2o	92o	82o	72o	62o	52o	42o	32o	22