

5 Best Texas Holdem Strategy Tips are:

1. Choose an opening hands that can make you money in any given situation.
2. Follow what's happening at your table to correctly size your bet.
3. Limping is bad for you. Avoid limping!
4. Make the right folds and increase your profits.
5. "Have position" over your opponent.

1. Starting with Opening Hands

The hands that you choose to go into battle with in Texas Hold'em are vital. That said, starting hands are only one part of the game. Position is a major factor when it comes to deciding which hands you should play. In general, you can widen your starting hand range the closer you get to the Button.



You should also consider the amount of players in a hand. Hands can have less value (how much you can get paid off) against 1 player than when you're up against 6. On the flip side, these same hands can have greater bluffing value when heads-up because you only have one opponent to convince you have the nuts!

So, part of the selection process in choosing opening hands is not only hand strength, but how that hand can make you money in any given situation. A hand like a small suited connector, for example, plays better as a bluff in a heads-up pot but more for value multi-way. It's unlikely that you'll get paid off with a suited connector type hand, heads-up. And, it's even more unlikely that you'll be able to bluff in a [multi-way pot](#).

So, when you select an opening hand, you need to be aware of how it will make you money after the flop. If you don't know how a hand will make you money, then you are playing blind, and that is hardly good poker.

2. Bet Sizing with Confidence

In No Limit cash games, players have the ability to bet whatever they have in front of them. It's this very freedom that gets a lot of players into trouble. So, bet sizing is the second most important subject on our list of Texas Hold'em 5 Golden Rules.

Bet Sizing – [Pre-Flop](#)

One of the best tips for correctly sizing your bets is to follow what's happening at your table. If the standard pre-flop raise is 2.5xBB, as a beginner this is the line you should take. If you try to be clever and raise an odd amount, it could backfire. Your bet size has to be familiar and make sense to your opponents. By raising unusual amounts, all you're doing is making it harder for players to make a decision. Making it difficult for your opponents to think, post-flop, can be a good thing. However, pre-flop it normally results in that loose call you just don't want or need.

Bet Sizing - [Post-flop](#)

If you were the raiser pre-flop, a c-bet ([continuation bet](#), after a pre-flop raise) is almost mandatory. You should size your c-bet between 50% and 70% of the pot. The size of your bet will help define the strength of your hand. This is especially true when playing at the lower levels. Most inexperienced players will see a big c-bet as strength. You will be able to get the hand over – whether or not you've hit the flop.

You want your opponents to know (or think) that you have them beat. If you bet too small, you could end up facing a re-raise or a check-raise, depending on your position. Bet too big and you could find yourself pot-committed to a hand that is probably going to be the loser.

Here's a simple example of proper c-bet sizing:

You're UTG+1 in a 9-Max \$1/\$2 No Limit Hold'em cash game. You get dealt Pocket JJ and raise the table standard of 2.5xBB. It gets folded around to the Button who calls. Both Blinds fold. The flop comes down Ad-6h-2s. Now, the Ace is a scare card, but you feel that the BTN player would have 3-bet with a strong Ace, and would have tossed a weak one. Bet too small here and a savvy opponent could raise you, representing the Ace, and bluff you off the pot. You bet 2/3 pot with confidence and get the fold.

It's not always that easy, and your opponent could have called you with a suited Ace. And, if the board comes down 7d-8d-9d and you're holding As-Ks in a multi-way pot, a c-bet could be like throwing down a drain. However, the c-bet is a standard and necessary play. And a correctly sized c-bet will usually get the intended result – a fold and you winning the pot.

Bet Sizing - Bluffs

Let's say that you want to bluff in a \$20 pot. You feel that there is an excellent chance that your opponent would fold. If you bet \$20, you could be in for trouble if you're wrong and this guy decides to call – or worse come over the top. This would be a poor bet size if your opponent would fold to a \$10 bet. Because if the bluff fails, you would lose an extra \$10, needlessly.

Bet Sizing - Value

Now, let's spin the bottle 180 degrees. When you have the nuts, you should try to bet for value. For example, you've got to the river, heads-up, with Ad-Ks on a board that reads: Ac-Kh-7h-3d-2s. You're quite certain that your opponent has the Ace, at the very least. If the pot is \$50, and you bet \$20,

your opponent snap calls with two pair, you've probably left some money on the table. They might have called off another \$10-\$20! So, that's a classic bet sizing mistake.

The player that tends to be successful in games like Hold'em is the player that makes fewer bet sizing errors. Of course, you don't get to see your opponents' cards before sizing your bets. But, by using the information you have on an opponent and how the hand was played, you'll be able to figure out the right amount to bet.

For example, a loose caller might be more likely to call you down with middle pair. Therefore, when you have a strong hand, your bet-sizing can be a little bigger for value – versus a tighter opponent who would be more inclined to fold.

3. No Limping Allowed!

Most of the best online poker players tend to open raise whenever they're first to enter the pot. If someone else has open-raised, they would either call that raise, 3/bet or fold – depending on their take on the open-raiser

5 Reasons Why Limping is Bad for You!

1. When you limp in late position, you're giving the blinds an easy pass to see the flop for cheap with (more than likely) mediocre hands. Steal those blinds!
2. If you feel the urge to limp more than raise, you're probably playing too many weak hands. If you can't raise them, fold 'em!
3. When you limp into a pot, you'll probably find yourself post-flop facing multiple opponents with a mediocre holding. And you'll have no idea what anyone has.
4. Limping into pots when you're out of position can be particularly risky. If you hit the board hard, you could end up not getting any value for the hand. Even worse, if you hit top pair with a weak kicker, you'll be kicking yourself on the river when your hand is beat by a better kicker.
5. If you miss the board entirely, (which is more likely to be the case), you'll end you being the “dead money” in the pot. (Dead money is any money in the pot that has been contributed by players who have folded.)

One strategy that good players rarely use is the open limp. There is really only one instance where limping is correct. When the game is super-passive, and you're likely to see the flop for cheap with a speculative hand (like a suited connector, or any hand that is flop specific) that has good implied odds.

Whenever the action has been folded to you, the best play is to either raise or fold. The act of raising takes control of the hand and puts any caller on the defensive straight away. Good players tend to attack “limpers” because they see them as weak. And, in most cases, they're usually right.

So, unless you're in a multi-way pot for cheap, with suited connectors or set-mining a small pocket pair, avoid the open limp like the plague!

4. Knowing When to Fold

There is a little-known fact in the amateur poker world: Poker is as much about the bets you save as the bets you make. This mantra is rooted in knowing when to fold - a critical part of winning poker

strategy. Bad poker players are bad for many reasons but quite often their primary weakness is that they simply do not fold when they should.

It is the act of folding that will consistently put keep your bankroll intact. Folding is perhaps the least understood concept of making money in poker.

Let's look at a very basic example:

In a \$1/\$2 cash game, a player gets dealt A-6 off suit on the SB. UTG+1 limps and the CO raises 2.5xBB. Our player has an Ace, but weak Aces have been the Achilles Heel of many a poker player. Playing this hand to a raise, out of position in a possible multi-way pot is unwise. Our player agrees and folds their SB – saving an additional 2BB call.

If this player makes this fold 10 times in a session, they could save a possible \$40 (10 x \$4). On the other hand if the same player calls with this hand 10 times in a session and loses, they would be down a possible \$50 at least.

By folding and saving \$40, our player can be more aggressive in more profitable situations. However, by loosely calling out of position with a mediocre hand, our player would more than likely lose a big chunk of their stack. They could be beat by an Ace with a better kicker or up against an over-pair. Either way, not knowing when to fold could be their downfall.

It's simple maths. Make the right folds and increase your profits.

5. Using Position

“Position” is a word that's banded about constantly in poker. Having position over your opponent is one of the biggest advantages that you can have in a poker game. But many people fail to understand just why this is the case.

1. **Firstly**, when you “have position” on an opponent, you get to see them act before making your decision. It's that “you first” argument we've all had with a sibling or partner. If they don't break their neck scaling that 6-foot wall, then it's okay for you to have a go!
2. **Secondly**, you can widen your starting hand ranges in position. Attack the blinds with wider ranges, as well as play profitably in many more multi-way pots. Why? All because you have been able to see the action unfold in front of you.
3. **And thirdly**, you can use position to play more hands profitably post-flop. Having more information on an opponent is a huge advantage. You can use this extra info to bluff more accurately, value bet more effectively, make thin river calls and generally make better decisions all round.

If more poker players simply paid attention to their position, they could turn many losing sessions into winning ones!

Poker starting hand combinations basics.

Any two (e.g. AK or T5) = 16 combinations

Pairs (e.g. AA or TT) = 6 combinations

If you were take a hand like AK and write down all the possible ways you could be dealt this hand from a deck of cards (e.g. As Kh, As Kd, As Kc etc.), you would find that there are 16 possible combinations.

See all 16 AK hand combinations:

Similarly, if you wrote down all the possible combinations of a pocket pair like JJ (e.g. JsJh, JsJd, JsJc etc.), you would find that there are just 6 possible combinations.

See all 6 JJ pocket pair hand combinations:

So as you can see from these basic starting hand combinations in poker, you're almost 3 times as likely to be dealt a non-paired hand like AK than a paired hand. That's pretty interesting in itself, but you can do a lot more than this...

Note: two extra starting hand combinations.

Fact: There are 1,326 combinations of starting hands in Texas Hold'em in total.

Working out hand combinations using "known" cards.

Let's say we hold KQ on a flop of KT4 (suits do not matter). How many possible combinations of AK and TT are out there that our opponent could hold?

Unpaired hands (e.g. AK).

Hand Combinations Equation For Unpaired Hands

How to work out the total number of hand combinations for an unpaired hand like AK, JT, or Q3.

Method: Multiply the numbers of available cards for each of the two cards.

Word equation: (1st card available cards) x (2nd card available cards) = total combinations

Example.

If we hold KQ on a KT4 flop, how many possible combinations of AK are there?

There are 4 Aces and 2 Kings (4 minus the 1 on the flop and minus the 1 in our hand) available in the deck.

$$C = A1 * A2$$

$$C = 4 \times 2$$

$$C = 8$$

C = 8, so there are 8 possible combinations of AK if we hold KQ on a flop of KT4.

Paired hands (e.g. TT).

Hand Combinations Equation For Paired Hands

How to work out the total number of hand combinations for an paired hand like AA, JJ, or 44.

Method: Multiply the number of available cards by the number of available cards minus 1, then divide by two.

Word equation: [(available cards) x (available cards - 1)] / 2 = total combinations

Example.

How many combinations of TT are there on a KT4 flop?

Well, on a flop of KT4 here are 3 Tens left in the deck, so...

$$C = [(A) * (A-1)] / 2$$

$$C = [(3) * (3-1)] / 2$$

$$C = [3 * 2] / 2$$

$$C = 3$$

C = 3, which means there are 3 possible combinations of TT.

Thoughts on working out hand combinations.

Working out the number of possible combinations of unpaired hands is easy enough; just multiply the two numbers of available cards.

Working out the combinations for paired hands looks awkward at first, but it's not that tricky when you actually try it out. Just find the number of available cards, take 1 away from that number, multiply those two numbers together then half it.

Note: You'll also notice that this method works for working out the preflop starting hand combinations mentioned earlier on. For example, if you're working out the number of AK combinations as a starting hand, there are 4 Aces and 4 Kings available, so $4 \times 4 = 16$ AK combinations.

Why is combinatorics useful?

Because by working out hand combinations, you can find out more useful information about a player's range.

For example, let's say that an opponents 3betting range is roughly 2%. This means that they are only ever 3betting AA, KK and AK. That's a very tight range indeed.

Now, just looking at this range of hands you might think that whenever this player 3bets, they are more likely to have a big pocket pair. After all, both AA and KK are in his range, compared to the single unpaired hand of AK. So without considering combinatorics for this 2% range, you might think that the probability break-up of each hand looks like this:

AA = 33%

KK = 33%

AK = 33%

...with the two big pairs making up the majority of this 2% 3betting range (roughly 66% in total).

However, let's look at these hands by comparing the total combinations for each hand:

AA = 6 combinations (21.5%)

KK = 6 combinations (21.5%)

AK = 16 combinations (57%)

Hand Combinations Probability For AK, AA, KK

There are more AK hands in a range of [AA, KK, AK] than there are AA and KK hands combined.

So out of 28 possible combinations made up from AA, KK and AK, 16 of them come from AK. This means that when our opponent 3bets, the majority of the time he is holding AK and not a big pocket pair.

Now obviously if you're holding a hand like 75o this is hardly comforting. However, the point is that it's useful to realise that the probabilities of certain types of hands in a range will vary. Just because a player either has AA or AK, it doesn't mean that they're both equally probable holdings - they will actually be holding AK more often than not.

Analogy: If a fruit bowl contains 100 oranges, 1 apple, 1 pear and 1 grape, there is a decent range of fruit (the "hands"). However, the fruits are heavily weighted toward oranges, so there is a greater chance of randomly selecting an orange from the bowl than any of the 3 other possible fruits ("AK" in the example above).

This same method applies when you're trying to work out the probabilities of a range of possible made hands on the flop by looking at the number of hand combinations. For example, if your opponent could have either a straight draw or a set, which of the two is more likely?

Poker combinatorics example hand.

You have 66 on a board of As Jh 6d 8d 2c. The pot is \$12 and you bet \$10. Your opponent moves all in for \$60, which means you have to call \$50 to win a pot of \$82.

You are confident that your opponent either has a set or two pair with an Ace (i.e. AJ, A8, A6 or A2). Don't worry about how you know this or why you're in this situation, you just are.

According to pot odds, you need to have at least a 38% chance of having the best hand to call. You can now use combinatorics / hand combinations here to help you decide whether or not to call.

Poker combinatorics example hand solution.

First of all, let's split our opponent's hands in to hands you beat and hands you don't beat, working out the number of hand combinations for each.

Hands you beat.

$$AJ = 3 \times 3 = 9 \text{ combinations}$$

$$A8 = 3 \times 3 = 9 \text{ combinations}$$

$$A6 = 3 \times 1 = 3 \text{ combinations}$$

$$A2 = 3 \times 3 = 9 \text{ combinations}$$

$$22 = (3 \times 2) / 2 = 3 \text{ combinations}$$

Hands you don't beat.

$$AA = (3 \times 2) / 2 = 3 \text{ combinations}$$

$$JJ = (3 \times 2) / 2 = 3 \text{ combinations}$$

$$88 = (3 \times 2) / 2 = 3 \text{ combinations}$$

Adding them all up...

$$\text{Total combinations} = 42$$

$$\text{Combinations you beat} = 33 \text{ (79\%)}$$

$$\text{Combinations you don't beat} = 9 \text{ (21\%)}$$

Seeing as you have the best hand 79% of the time (or 79% "equity") and the pot odds indicate that you only need to have the best hand 38% of the time, it makes it +EV to call.

So whereas you might have initially thought that the number of hands we beat compared to the number of hands we didn't beat was close to 50/50 (making it likely -EV to call), after looking at the hand combinations we can see that it is actually much closer to 80/20, making calling a profitable play.

Being able to assign a range to your opponent is good, but understanding the different likelihoods of the hands within that range is better.

Poker combinatorics conclusion.

Working out hand combinations in poker is simple:

Unpaired hands: Multiply the number of available cards. (e.g. AK on an AT2 flop = $[3 \times 4] = 12$ AK combinations).

Paired hands: Find the number of available cards. Take 1 away from that number, multiply those two numbers together and divide by 2. (e.g. TT on a AT2 flop = $[3 \times 2] / 2 = 3$ TT combinations).

By working out hand combinations you can gain a much better understanding about opponent's hand ranges. If you only ever deal in ranges and ignore hand combinations, you are missing out on useful information.

It's unrealistic to think that you're going to work out all these hand combinations on the fly whilst you're sat at the table. However, a lot of value comes from simply familiarizing yourself with the varying probabilities of different types of hands for future reference.

For example, after a while you'll start to realise that straight draws are a lot more common than you think, and that flush draws are far less common than you think. Insights like these will help you when you're faced with similar decisions in the future.

Preflop Strategy

Preflop starting hand selection.

Choosing which hands to play and which hands to fold is fundamental to playing a winning poker game. The best hands to play in Texas Holdem are:

Big pocket pairs: AA-TT

Big suited connectors: AK, AQ, AJ, KQ

Big connectors: AK, AQ, AJ, KQ

These particular combinations of cards have the best chances of winning than other cards, so if you stick to these you will find yourself in more profitable situations after the flop. It is possible to play other combinations of cards successfully, but if you are a beginner player then it is advised to stick with the big cards until you find your feet at the poker table.

Preflop position strategy.

Your position in the hand is an incredibly important variable that you should be aware of in every hand, yet it is something that is all too often forgotten about.

The dynamics of play are slightly different in the preflop betting round, as the small and big blind will be last to act, whereas they will be the first to act on every other betting round. However, the general principles of position will remain the same, as you want to try and play more hands where you have position over your opponents than in positions where you do not.

This means that you should avoid playing too many hands in the blinds or in an early position, as being one of the first to act in each hand can make things very difficult unless you are holding a premium hand. Be very careful when playing in the blinds, and don't feel as though you have to enter more pots in these positions because you have already committed money to the pot. It is far safer to let marginal hands go rather than to call raises with half a holding and play out of position for the rest of the hand.

Your position can often play a more influential role than the strength of the cards that players are actually holding, so try and keeping the upper hand by combining good position with good cards.

The cards listed above in the starting hands selection section can be played from almost any position, but you should try and tighten up your starting hand selection in the earlier positions. So as a general rule, you can play with a wider range of the top starting hands in later positions than you should in the earlier positions in the hand.

So the top strategy tips on preflop position are:

- Always be aware of your position in a hand

- Try to avoid playing out of position unless you have a strong holding

- You can afford to loosen up your starting hand requirements in later positions

- Don't feel committed to playing hands when in the blinds

Preflop betting tips.

When the action reaches you before the flop, you will be faced with the decision to either fold, call or raise. If there has been no raise before you, then a call will simply mean matching the size of the

big blind, which is also known as 'limping in'. This is generally not a good play, as if you are entering any pot in Holdem you will want to be making a raise and show aggression.

If you are limping in with a hand, you are either entering the pot with a sub-standard hand or you are playing a premium hand too weakly. So the real question you should ask yourself if you are first to enter the pot before the flop is; "Am I folding or am I raising?"

The majority of the time you should either "pump it" or "dump it". Avoid limping in by simply calling the big blind.

Preflop bet sizing.

If you decide that you are going to enter the pot, you should be looking to make a raise of about 3 or 4 times the size of the big blind. By making a minimum raise you are letting opponents with marginal hands come in cheaply, and you are almost defeating the object of making a preflop raise.

The idea of a preflop raise is to reduce the amount of players who follow you to see a flop, as it is easier to make profitable decisions when there are fewer players in the pot. So make sure to come in with a strong 3 or 4 BB raise, and increase the size of the raise if you find that a lot of players are still calling these raises with marginal hands or if other players have limped in before you.

If there has been a raise before you, you must now consider whether you should fold, call or raise. If you have a poor or marginal starting hand you should look to fold. If you have a good starting hand like the ones mentioned above you should be happy to call and see a flop. If you have one of the top starting hands like AA or KK, should re-raise to help try and get as much money into the pot as possible.

Limping in.

There will be a few cases where limping-in will be an acceptable play. This will normally be when there have been a number of other players limping-in before you, and so you will have better odds to see a flop.

The best hands to limp in with are strong drawing hands such as suited cards with an ace or king, or any connecting cards that can make a straight. You are not looking to make top pair in these limped multi-way pots, as they can often land you in trouble. So aim to play hands that can land you a very strong holding or a strong draw, and then comfortably fold on the flop if neither of these materialize.

Top strategy tips for preflop betting:

Don't be afraid to bet or raise

Make solid 3 or 4 BB raises when entering an un-opened pot

Increase the size of your raise if other players have limped or are calling stations

Avoid limping with mediocre hands

Only limp if you have a potentially strong hand and others have limped before you

Other preflop strategy tips.

If you are playing in a shorthanded game such as a 6-max table, you can afford to reduce your starting hand requirements so that you can see more flops. If you stick to the starting hand requirements mentioned above, you would probably find that you are folding too often and missing out on opportunities to win money. So you can afford to play other hands such as AT, KJ, KT, QJ and so on.

When making your decision pre flop, you should also consider the type of players who you are playing against. If you notice that a tight player has made a raise, it is likely that they have a very strong hand, so you should re-evaluate the strength of your cards in this hand. Similarly, if a loose player makes a raise, it is more likely to be profitable to be call with a decent hand as you could well be holding a stronger hand than them.

It is important to not be afraid about making bets or raises before the flop. It is important to be aggressive in poker, as it is a winning style that all good players adopt. If you are afraid to make bets and raises when you should be, then you will be making unprofitable decisions and you will find it hard to ever win money from the game. To help accustom yourself to being aggressive, you could try dropping down in limits where there is less money at stake, so that you can become comfortable with playing aggressively and notice the advantages of an aggressive style over a weak playing style.

Starting Hand Selection

In Texas Holdem, it is important to have good starting hand selection. This is important as it prevents you from entering pots with sub-standard hands, which could eventually lead to you losing a lot of money in the process.

"Starting hand selection" is simply choosing the good hands over the bad, and thus folding the bad hands when you get them.

It is true that any hand can win in Texas Holdem (or poker in general for that matter), but the fact of the matter is that some hands will win more than others. So if we stick with the good hands, then we should see better results in the long run.

Basic starting hand selection.

Top tier starting hands - top 2% of starting hands.

Good Texas Holdem starting hands are typically hands like big pocket pairs and big connecting cards. So some of the top starting hands would be:

AA

KK

QQ

AKs

The little 's' indicates that the cards are suited, which will increase the value of the cards because it makes it more likely that they will be able to make a flush compared to if the cards were not suited.

This is obviously the top tier when it comes to starting hands, and if we were to only ever be dealt these starting hands we would be making a lot of money. In fact, if we folded every other hand that we were dealt and only played these hands, there is a fair chance that we would be winning money in the long run. But this would only work at the lower limits where other players probably wouldn't be aware that we only play premium hands.

Second tier starting hands.

If we only ever played with this elite group of cards, we would be folding numerous hands along the way and missing out on other opportunities to win money. Even though these are the cream of the crop when it comes to starting hands, there are still other great hands out there that can win us a lot of money in the long run if we play them.

Such hands are:

AK

AQs

AJs

KQs

JJ

TT

This gives us another 6 starting hands that we can play with, increasing the number of pots that we will be entering. Although these are not as good as the first set of premium hands mentioned, they are still great starting hands that should help us to win money.

Top 10 Texas Hold'em starting hands.

Now if we stick with this set of 10 starting hands we should definitely be on the right track to winning some money from poker. So for any player new to the game you should try your best to stick to the following top 10 hands (also throwing in some of top 20 hands if you have good position):

As Ac

Kh Kd

Qd Qs

Ah Kh (suited)

Ac Qc (suited)

Js Jd

Ks Qs (suited)

Ad Jd (suited)

Ad Kc

Tc Th

Top 20 starting hands.

As your game improves, you can look to open up your starting hand requirements and require more marginal hands like suited connectors. However, if you're new to the game you are better off sticking with the big cards that hit bigger flops and make post-flop play a hell of a lot easier for you.

Starting hand selection and table position.

Your table position should always play a big role in determining the range of hands that you choose to play with.

You should stick to playing much stronger hands from early position than you would from late position.

This means that if you are in one of the early position seats, you should stick to playing the top two tiers of hands and avoid lesser hands like; AQo, AJs, AT, KQs and so on. Conversely, if you are in late position and there has been little action before you, you can afford to play these sort of hands far more comfortably.

Why is table position important in starting hand selection?

If you are one of the first to act in a hand, you are going to be at a serious disadvantage to the rest of the players who are acting after you. Therefore, to avoid making things worse, you do not want to be entering a pot with anything less than a premium hand.

Acting first means that you are going to have little information on your opponents. If you are playing with a mediocre hand, it is likely that you are going to be in a spot where you have no idea whether you have the best hand or not. These situations are the ones that lose you the most money in poker, so avoid falling into them by playing stronger hands from early position that will make it easier to determine whether or not you have the best hand.

The importance of starting hand selection.

Starting hand selection is key because it helps to save us from sticky situations post flop, especially if we are new to the game.

Starting hand selection example.

Say for example we are not exercising very good starting hand selection and we decide to call a raise with Ks Th. The flop then comes Kh 8c 2d giving us top pair, which looks like a very strong hand. Our opponent bets into us and we decide to call, because after all we do have top pair.

The turn comes a 4d, and our opponent bets once again. We have top pair and we call seeing as we are still happy with the strength of our hand.

The river comes a 7c, and our opponent bets into us one final time. We make the call with our top pair thinking we might still have the best hand, but our opponent turns over Kd Qh.

He also has a pair of Kings but he has the higher kicker, so he takes down the pot.

Starting hand selection example evaluation.

This is an all too common problem for poker beginners, and it could have been so easily avoided by being a little stricter with our starting hand selection. Having top pair is great, but all too often an opponent can easily beat it with a better kicker. This is why it is important to have two big cards instead of one, because the size of our kicker can play a vital role in determining who the winner of the pot will be.

You are dealt two cards in Texas Hold'em; make sure that they are both good cards before you enter a pot. An ace with a low kicker is going to lose you more money than it wins.

Don't be tempted to call raises or enter pots with hands like A4 (rag aces) or K7, because they will just get you into more trouble than they are worth. Make sure that you are the one with the better kicker every time and take the money from the players who are entering the pots with weaker hands than you.

It is actually reasonable to bring down our starting hand requirements if we have good position. Position will give us an advantage over our opponents if we are last to act, so we do not necessarily have to have such a strong hand to play with because we will be obtaining information from the way our opponent plays because they will be acting first.

This information and knowledge of our opponent's hand from the way they play will compensate for the fact that our starting hand is a little weaker than normal. However, we still have to be prepared to fold as having position does not guarantee that we will win the hand, it simply gives an advantage. It is advised that you only enter pots with weaker hands in position once you have become a little more experienced.

Conclusion.

As you continue to play poker and gain experience from the game, it is a good idea to start expanding your starting hand requirements and experimenting here and there. However, if you are new to the game it is strongly advised that you stick to the big cards so that you give yourself the best opportunity to win money from poker.

If you are entering pots with a poor hand, you should be expecting to see poor results.

Flop Strategy

The flop is where the hand really starts to come together, and players start to evaluate the strength of their hands and make decisions based on their potential. You should always look to analyse the texture of the flop and consider what it could mean to both you and your opponents. Being able to fully understand the flop texture and what potential the cards on the flop contain is a key skill that every good poker player is looking to develop.

Being able to identify the nature of the flop and how it affects your own hand and your opponents' possible hands is key to being able to play this betting round as profitably as possible.

Flop strategy can involve all different types of mathematics both for players with made hands and for players with drawing hands. Therefore it is important to know how to size your bets and raises to make sure that you are making profitable moves at every opportunity.

Playing the flop can range from being fairly easy to difficult depending on the situation. The flop can often be relatively simple, and you are completely happy to either fold or raise with your hand when the action reaches you. However, the flop can be tricky to play when out of position or when in a multi-way pot, so more thought may be needed to work out the best plan of action in these situations.

The texture of the flop.

As mentioned above, it is a key skill to be able to understand and think about the implications that different flops in Texas Hold'em can bring. When I use the word 'texture' I basically mean the type of cards that appear on the flop and if there are any draw possibilities, as different flops can bring different possibilities for the players at the table. Here are two questions you should be thinking about after every flop:

Are there any straight possibilities?

Are there any flush possibilities?

These questions simply highlight the possibility that there may be potential for players to have drawing hands. It is important to take into account the fact that some players may have drawing hands because it will affect the way the hand will be played out. This is because where normally you might expect a player to call a bet with a made hand, players may now be calling bets because they have a draw to a stronger hand.

If there are numerous draw possibilities, the flop will often be referred to as being a 'wet board', whereas a flop that brings very little or no draw possibilities will be referred to as a 'dry board'. Here are two examples of typical wet and dry boards:

Wet board: Th 9s 7h

Dry board: Kd 8c 2s

The more draw possibilities there are on the board, the "wetter" it is. Think of "wet" as meaning slippery and dangerous.

How to approach the flop.

So now that you know about the different flop textures, what sort of strategies should you use when playing the flop? Well one of the first things to consider is if the flop actually improved your hand, and you will normally be faced with 3 different situations:

Your hand did not improve.

Your hand improved.

You are on a draw.

1] Your hand did not improve.

The first situation is pretty simple to address, because if your hand did not improve then you should simply look to let the hand go at the nearest opportunity, or hope to see another card for free and possibly improve. But at the end of the day, you are not really in much shape to win money from the hand on this occasion.

2] Your hand improved.

The second situation isn't too difficult, but there are different degrees of 'improvement' that we have to think about. To make things a little easier, I am going to split the improved hand section up into 4 smaller sections and give a little strategy for each:

- Decent Hand (any pair, middle pocket pair, top pair with weak kicker).

In these situations I like to bet out to see where I stand if there is no action before me. If I get a call I will consider my options on the turn depending on what card comes down. If I am raised I will usually tend to fold unless I have a strong reason to believe that my opponent is bluffing. If I am faced with a

standard raise then I will normally call with top pair but fold any lower pairs. I am not prepared to get involved in too much action with these hands.

- Good Hand (overpair, top pair top kicker, two pair)

With these hands I am more than likely to have the best hand at this point, therefore I will be and raise to make sure that I give the wrong pot odds to anyone looking to call with a drawing hand. You should never slowplay in these situations as your hand is nowhere near strong enough to give other players a free card to catch up, so make sure you are betting and raising to give your opponents bad odds and increase the amount of money you can win from the hand.

- Very Good Hand (set, straight, flush)

Again with these hands I will normally want to bet out to get as much money into the pot as possible. I am not necessarily looking to 'protect' my hand as much as before, but more to give myself the best opportunity to win a big pot. Some players will like to slowplay here, but in my opinion you will just be missing out on an opportunity to build the pot. It is also a good idea to bet with weak flushes and give bad odds to anyone who is looking to call with a high card of the same suit as the flop for a flush of their own.

- Exceptional Hand (full house, four of a kind, straight flush)

Make the most of this situation, because it's not going to happen very often. It is in these rare instances that I will look to slowplay to try and allow my opponents to catch up, but it is not likely that I am going to win too much money from these hands anyway. So just try and extract as much money as you possibly can, but do not be too disheartened if you end up winning a small pot.

3] You are on a draw.

Now if you have a drawing hand on the flop, you will want to try and see the turn card as cheaply as possible in an attempt to complete your draw. It is not often that you will be given 4 to 1 odds (roughly the pot odds you need to call for a straight or a flush) at this point, so you will have to consider the chance that you will win more money from the hand than is already in the pot.

This is known as your 'implied odds'. All this info may seem a little overwhelming at first, but in general just try not to pay too much for your draws, and try and see the turn as cheaply as possible. If you are feeling a little adventurous, you can always come out raising from time to time with a draw to disguise your hand and keep your opponents guessing.

Other flop strategy tips.

Good flop strategy involves always trying to consider what your opponent may be holding as well as thinking about the potential of your own hand. For example, if your opponent made a strong raise

before the flop, they may well have high cards like AK or AQ. So if the flop comes 8s 2c 4d you can be fairly sure that your opponent's hand did not improve. Whereas if the flop comes Ah Ks 5d, you can be confident that your opponent has caught a piece of the flop and is more likely to have improved.

Always try and give the wrong pot odds to any player looking to call with a draw. You can never be totally sure that your opponent has a draw, but it is better to bet assuming that they are on a draw rather than betting assuming that they aren't. By giving your opponents the wrong odds to chase, you will be making money every time they call. However, you will be losing money if you give your opponents good odds and they call.

Always assume that your opponent has a potential drawing hand. It's always better to give your opponent the wrong odds to call as opposed to good odds.

Be prepared to let good hands go. If you have a good hand but come up against a lot of action or are out of position to a raise, you should try and lean toward letting your hand go. It may be difficult to fold good hands, but it is far better to drop the hand early and save yourself from losing more money later in the hand. The best winning players wouldn't win money if they didn't fold the best hand occasionally.

Turn Strategy

However, turn strategy is actually a key part of any poker hand, as it is the point where the pot has usually grown to such a point from the preflop and flop betting rounds that you now will be making a decision about whether or not to commit yourself to the hand.

Most players have a decent strategy for the preflop and flop betting rounds, but have no real game plan for when the turn comes around.

The turn is almost like a continuation of the flop, but with the stakes raised a lot more. If you and your opponent have been betting correctly in previous betting rounds, you should find that any bets or plays you make on this street will commit a large portion of your stack into the middle. Therefore knowing whether to continue to fight for the hand or to let it go is a very important ability that no player should neglect.

Don't be afraid to let a hand go.

When playing the turn, it is important to stay focused and assess the strength of your hand. Many players have the problem of not being able to let the hand go because they feel that they have come

so far in the hand, that is worth their while to continue to see the river. This is a terrible way to play and will cost you a lot of money if you are not able to make clear and educated decisions on the turn.

On the turn, you should be contemplating whether you are going to commit to the rest of the hand or not. It is not a good idea to muddle your way through the hand and hope for the best, so have a clear idea in your head about what you are going to do and be happy with it. You should be happy to fold a mediocre hand at this point, as you do not want to be committing a much larger amount of money to the pot with a hand that may well be second best. So learn to let go.

Always keep a clear strategy in your head for each stage of a hand and your decisions will become a lot easier.

Typical turn strategy situations.

When you find yourself at the turn, you will normally be in one of the following situations.

You are continuing with a strong hand.

You are continuing with a bluff.

You called with a mediocre made hand.

You called for a draw on the flop and missed.

You called for a draw on the flop and hit.

1] You are continuing with a strong hand.

If you are at the turn with a strong hand, you should be looking to continue the action and bet if you feel that your opponent has not improved a possible draw. At this point you have probably not been given enough information to assume that your opponent has you beat, and so you should continue to make strong bets and lay down bad odds if they are on a draw.

If your opponent comes over the top of you and raises, you will have to reassess the strength of your hand and consider folding. Not many players will raise a bet on the turn unless they have a very strong hand themselves.

2] You are continuing with a bluff.

If you made a continuation bet on the flop and got called, you are in a very sticky situation indeed. You are now faced with a predicament of whether to fire a second barrel or to let the hand go. In

most cases it is better to check and let the hand go to any action, hoping that you get to see a free river card.

Firing a second barrel is a dangerous play, and it is advised that only the more experienced players attempt this sort of bluff.

However, if you can be fairly sure that you can force your opponent to fold with a strong bet, it may be a good play to bet again on the turn. But again, the majority of the time it will be safer to let the hand go and save your money for another hand.

3] You called with a mediocre made hand.

If you called on the flop with a half decent hand like middle pair, you were essentially calling to see how your opponent reacts on the turn. Therefore you should look to fold the hand if your opponent continues to show strength, and look to bet if your opponent checks to you and shows weakness.

Your opponent may have been making a continuation bet on the flop and is now shutting down because of your call on the flop, so now you are in a prime position to take down the pot. This is known as a 'float play', and it can be made with any two cards as a bluff to pick off continuation bettors.

4] You called for a draw on the flop and missed.

If you missed your draw on the turn, you should roughly use the same strategy on this street as you did on the flop. Your odds to complete your draw will almost be exactly the same, so try and get to see the river for as cheaply as possible. It is less likely that you will be given the correct odds at this point to call for your draw, so it is probable that you will need to fold your draw at this point unless you feel you have mammoth implied odds to play on in an attempt to complete your draw.

Never feel committed to call large bets on the turn to try and complete your draw. Stick with the mathematics and only call if you are getting good odds.

5] You called for a draw on the flop and hit.

If you were lucky enough to hit your draw on the turn, you are now in the mode to try and extract as much money as possible. If you are first to act, betting or checking as both acceptable plays, and you should choose the one that you think would make you the most money.

I would lean toward betting to make sure I was forcing the action and making sure that I gave my opponent to put money into the pot. If you are last to act then it is almost imperative to bet,

otherwise you will be missing out on an opportunity to build the pot. If your opponent isn't going to put any more money in at this point, then it is unlikely that will be putting any money in on the river either, so make sure you try and extract as much money as possible.

Other turn strategy tips.

You should try and think about your turn decision whilst you are making your play on the flop. It is a good idea whilst on the flop to think "Okay, so if I make this play now, what will I do on the turn?" By asking yourself this question you will find yourself making more educated moves on the flop, and not feeling so lost when you get to the turn.

River Strategy

When you make it to the river (which actually happens a lot less often than you might think), all the players have been given the final card on the board with which to make their best 5-card hand. River strategy is different to strategy on other betting rounds because with every other street there are always more cards to come to help players improve their hands, but on the river you are stuck with what you are given.

The river betting round is free from all the complications of pot odds, implied odds and all other types of mathematics that are involved with drawing hands.

However, this does not necessarily mean that the river is an easier round to play. River strategy can become very tricky as players will either 'have it' or they won't, and so the players who don't make the hands that they were hoping for will sometimes make one last effort to try and take down the pot with a big bluff.

Therefore to play the river well, you should always think about all of the information you have gathered from each street in the hand you played against your opponent up until this point to help influence your decisions.

How to play the river.

As I just mentioned, you have to think about the way your opponent has played the hand on each street to help inform your decision on how to play on the river. The more information you have, the more pieces to the puzzle you can fit together to build a bigger picture of what your opponent may be holding.

By the river it is often likely that your opponent will have given off enough information through the way they have played to indicate what kind of hand they are holding, so it is just a case of thinking through the hand and looking for it.

Always take your time to evaluate all of the plays that have taken place up to that point on the river. You can find a lot of useful information if you think about the hand carefully.

If your opponent has been playing as if they had a drawing hand on each street, and then comes out with a bet when the river comes with a card that could not have helped them, you can be fairly sure that they are bluffing be happy to call their bet if you have a decent hand. Similarly, if an opponent has been playing very aggressively on previous streets by betting and raising but plays very weakly on the river by checking, you can happily sense they are trying to trap you and trying to induce a bluff.

Position on the river.

Playing the river can be a lot easier if you have position over your opponent. Acting after your opponent will prove to be a huge advantage on the river because you can see how your opponent reacts before making your final decision. When you reach the river you will be in one of the following situations regarding the strength of your hand:

You are confident you have the best hand.

You are confident you have the worst hand.

You are unsure about whether you have the best hand.

The first two situations are easier to play in, both in and out of position, but things can become very tricky when you are not sure about whether or not you have the best hand. So here is a quick guide on how to play in or out of position when in each of the situations mentioned above.

Playing the river in position.

- You are confident you have the best hand.

If you are confident you have the best hand, you want to get as much money from your opponent as possible. This means that you should definitely bet and raise to get more and more money into the pot. It is better to make big pot-sized bets on the river rather than smaller bets to try and entice your opponent into calling. It will be more profitable to make big bets even if your opponent calls less often, as it is explained in the article on maximizing value.

- You are confident you have the worst hand.

When you feel that you have the worst hand, you should be happy to fold the majority of bets your opponent makes on the river. It is unlikely that opponents will bet into you out of position with a poor hand, so always lean toward folding rather than raising in an attempt to bluff.

If your opponent checks to you, you are now faced with the tough decision of whether or not to bluff. It is in these instances that you should use all the information from the way your opponent has played up until this point to decide whether a bluff is likely to work. Always try and be at least 80% sure that a bluff will be successful before making one, and fold if you have any doubts in your mind at all.

- You are unsure about whether you have the best hand.

If our opponent checks to us, then we should almost always check behind them and turn the cards over to see who has won. This is because if you ever bet in this position, it is unlikely that you will get a call from a player that we have beat, but it is likely that we are going to get a call from a player that has us beat. So just check it down and hope that your hand is the winning one after they have been turned over.

Don't bet marginal hands on the river. You are only going to get called by better hands the majority of the time.

If your opponent is betting into you on the river in this spot.

If our opponent is betting into us, once again we have to make the decision about whether or not we should call based upon the information we have gathered from previous betting rounds.

You may also need to factor in the odds that your opponent is giving you to call, because if your opponent makes a very small bet, you may well be given the correct odds to call because of the likelihood that your hand will sometimes win. But at the end of the day, there are no concrete rules for these situations and it is just a part of poker that will take time, patience and a thorough understanding of the game to master.

Playing the river out of position.

- You are confident you have the best hand.

It is nice to feel that you have the best hand, but unfortunately we do not have position to help maximize our winnings in these situations. If you feel that your opponent has a half decent hand, you should look to make a decent bet and hope that they will call, as it is not likely that they will bet if they are unsure about whether they have the best hand.

If you think that your opponent missed a draw and has a very weak hand, it may be more profitable to check in an attempt to induce a bluff. If you bet and it turns out they have no hand at all, then you are not going to win any more money because they are just going to fold. If you check however, you are giving them the opportunity to make a bluff and squeeze out that little extra money from them at the end.

- You are confident you have the worst hand.

It's pretty unfortunate to have the worst hand and be out of position, but it's not all that bad. At least in these situations you will have a clear idea about what to do... check and fold to any action. It is rarely a good idea to try and bluff when out of position in these spots, so save your money for another time. Only bet if you are incredibly sure that you can get your opponent off the hand, otherwise betting out here is not going to be profitable at all.

- You are unsure about whether you have the best hand.

Although this might seem like a bit of a dilemma, it's not as bad as you think. The last thing you want to do here is bet out... it's one of the biggest mistakes you can make in poker when you think about it logically. When you bet out not knowing if you have the best hand or not, you are only going to get calls from hands that beat you, and you are not going to get calls from hands that you are beating. It is a completely lose-lose situation, so never bet out if you are unsure about whether you hold the best hand or not.

Never bet when first to act on the river if you have a hand that could easily be either the best or worst hand.

The only hard part in these spots is when your opponent comes back at you with a bet. In these situations you have to once again consider the way the hand has been played out up to that point, as well as think about the way your opponent has been playing in other hands as well as this one.

If you think you have a decent chance of winning because your opponent is loose and bluffs frequently, then you have a good reason to call. However if you are not confident that you are ahead, you should be looking to fold unless you are being given good enough pot odds to make the call to see if you are ahead. It's all about practice and a good knowledge of your opponent's playing style.

Other river strategy tips.

Don't bet on the river if you are unsure about whether or not you have the best hand. I know I have mentioned it before, but it is something that you should always remember. You are only going to get a call from a better hand and a fold from a worse hand, so don't make that bet!

Always think about each play that led up to this point into the hand, and use it to influence the decisions that you make on the river. There is no better tell than the way an opponent has played their hand and the information they have given you by the way they have checked, bet or raised.

Always bet around the size of the pot when you want a call when you hold the best hand. Even though you may well get called less often than if you made small bets, you will be winning more in the long run. Its more profitable to win \$50 1 in 10 times than it is to win \$5 8 out of 10 times. It's all about maximizing value from your hands over the long run.