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# POKER FUNDAMENTALS GUIDE

# THE RULES OF POKER

*Text courtesy of Pokerstars.com*

## THE RULES OF TEXAS HOLD'EM

Driven by the popularity of televised poker, Texas Hold'em (more commonly, "Hold'Em") has become the world's most popular poker game, both in live casinos and online. We'll go into more detail below, but here are the key points you need to know:

- Every player is dealt two cards, for their eyes only
- The dealer spreads five cards—three at once, then another, then another—which can be used by all players to make their best possible five-card hand
- Before and after each card(s) is revealed, players take turns to bet. To stay in the hand and see the next card, all players must have put the same amount of chips in the pot as each other
- The best poker hand wins the pot (See "Hand Rankings")

It's a simple game to learn, yet has the potential to be played with a seemingly infinite variety of strategies, tactics, and nuance.

## THE RULES OF TEXAS HOLD'EM

Before you begin playing Hold'em, you'll want to learn the rules. In Hold'em, each player is dealt two private cards (known as "hole cards") that belong to them alone. Five community cards are dealt face-up, to form the "board." All players in the game use these shared community cards in conjunction with their own hole cards to each make their best possible five-card poker hand. In Hold'em, a player may use any combination of the seven cards available to make the best possible five-card poker hand, using zero, one or two of their private hole cards.

The four major variations of Hold'em are distinguished from each other by their betting limits:

- Limit Texas Hold'em: There is a predetermined betting limit on each round of betting.
- No Limit Texas Hold'em: A player can bet any amount, up to all of their chips.
- Pot Limit Texas Hold'em: A player can bet any amount, up to the size of the pot.
- Mixed Texas Hold'em: The game switches between rounds of Limit Texas Hold'em and No Limit Texas Hold'em.

## THE BLINDS

In Hold'em, a marker called "the button" or "the dealer button" indicates which player is the nominal dealer for the current game. Before the game begins, the player immediately clockwise from the button posts the "small blind," the first forced bet. The player immediately clockwise from the small blind posts the "big blind," which is typically twice the size of the small blind, but the blinds can vary depending on the stakes and betting structure being played.

In Limit games, the big blind is the same as the small bet, and the small blind is typically half the size of the big blind but may be larger depending on the stakes. For example, in a \$2/\$4 Limit game the small blind is \$1 and the big blind is \$2. In a \$15/\$30 Limit game, the small blind is \$10 and the big blind is \$15.

In Pot Limit and No Limit games, the games are referred to by the size of their blinds (for example, a \$1/\$2 Hold'em game has a small blind of \$1 and a big blind of \$2). Depending on the exact structure of the game, each player may also be required to post an "ante" (another type of forced bet, usually smaller than either blind, posted by all players at the table) into the pot.

Now, each player receives his or her two hole cards. Betting action proceeds clockwise around the table, starting with the player “under the gun” (immediately clockwise from the big blind).

## PLAYER BETTING OPTIONS

In Hold'em, as with other forms of poker, the available actions are “fold,” “check,” “bet,” “call,” or “raise.” Exactly which options are available depends on the action taken by the previous players. If nobody has yet made a bet, then a player may either check (decline to bet, but keep their cards) or bet. If a player has bet, then subsequent players can fold, call, or raise. To call is to match the amount the previous player has bet. To raise is to not only match the previous bet, but to also increase it.

## PRE-FLOP

After seeing his or her hole cards, each player now has the option to play his or her hand by calling or raising the big blind. The action begins to the left of the big blind, which is considered a “live” bet on this round. That player has the option to fold, call or raise. For example, if the big blind was \$2, it would cost \$2 to call, or at least \$4 to raise. Action then proceeds clockwise around the table.

**Note:** The betting structure varies with different variations of the game. Explanations of the betting action in Limit Hold'em, No Limit Hold'em, and Pot Limit Hold'em can be found below.

Betting continues on each betting round until all active players (who have not folded) have placed equal bets in the pot.

## THE FLOP

Now, three cards are dealt face-up on the board. This is known as “the flop.” In Hold'em, the three cards on the flop are community cards, available to all players still in the hand. Betting on the flop begins with the active player immediately clockwise from the button. The betting options are similar to pre-flop, however if nobody has previously bet, players may opt to check, passing the action to the next active player clockwise.

## THE TURN

When the betting action is completed for the flop round, the “turn” is dealt face-up on the board. The turn is the fourth community card in Hold'em (and is sometimes also called “Fourth Street”). Another round of betting ensues, beginning with the active player immediately clockwise from the button.

## THE RIVER

When betting action is completed for the turn round, the “river” or “Fifth Street” is dealt face-up on the board. The river is the fifth and final community card in a Hold'em game. Betting again begins with the active player immediately clockwise from the button, and the same betting rules apply as they do for the flop and turn, as explained above.

## THE SHOWDOWN

If there is more than one remaining player when the final betting round is complete, the last person to bet or raise shows their cards, unless there was no bet on the final round in which case the player immediately clockwise from the button shows their cards first. The player with the best five-card poker hand wins the pot. In the event of identical hands, the pot will be equally divided between the players with the best hands. Hold'em rules state that all suits are equal.

After the pot is awarded, a new hand of Hold'em is ready to be played. The button now moves clockwise to the next player, blinds and antes are once again posted, and new hands are dealt to each player.

## LIMIT, NO LIMIT, POT LIMIT AND MIXED TEXAS HOLD'EM

Hold'em rules remain the same for Limit, No Limit and Pot Limit poker games, with a few exceptions:

### LIMIT TEXAS HOLD'EM

- Betting in Limit Hold'em is in pre-determined, structured amounts. Pre-flop and on the flop, all bets and raises are of the same amount as the big blind. On the turn and the river, the size of all bets and raises doubles. In Limit Hold'em, up to four bets are allowed per player during each betting round. This includes a (1) bet, (2) raise, (3) re-raise, and (4) cap (final raise).

### NOTES ON THE SPECIFIC RULES OF NO LIMIT TEXAS HOLD'EM BETTING

The minimum bet in No Limit Hold'em is the same as the size of the big blind, but players can always bet as much more as they want, up to all of their chips.

**Minimum raise:** In No Limit Hold'em, the raise amount must be at least as much as the previous bet or raise in the same round. As an example, if the first player to act bets \$5 then the second player must raise a minimum of \$5 (total bet of \$10).

**Maximum raise:** The size of your stack (your chips on the table).

In No Limit Hold'em, there is no "cap" on the number of raises allowed.

### POT LIMIT TEXAS HOLD'EM

The minimum bet in Pot Limit Hold'em is the same as the size of the big blind, but players can always bet up to the size of the pot.

**Minimum raise:** The raise amount must be at least as much as the previous bet or raise in the same round. As an example, if the first player to act bets \$5 then the second player must raise a minimum of \$5 (total bet of \$10).

**Maximum raise:** The size of the pot, which is defined as the total of the active pot plus all bets on the table plus the amount the active player must first call before raising.

**Example:** If the size of the pot is \$100, and there is no previous action on a particular betting round, a player may bet a maximum of \$100. After that bet, the action moves to the next player clockwise. That player can either fold, call \$100, or raise any amount between the minimum (\$100 more) and the maximum. The maximum bet in this case is \$400—the raiser would first call \$100, bringing the pot size to \$300, and then raise \$300 more, making a total bet of \$400.

In Pot Limit Hold'em, there is no "cap" on the number of raises allowed.

### MIXED TEXAS HOLD'EM

In Mixed Hold'em, the game switches between rounds of Limit Hold'em and No Limit Hold'em. The blinds are typically increased when the game switches from No Limit to Limit, to ensure some consistency in the average pot size in each game. The betting rules on each round follow the rules for that game, as described above.

# TRADITIONAL HIGH POKER HAND RANKS

Text courtesy of [Pokerstars.com](https://www.pokerstars.com)

**STRAIGHT FLUSH:** Five cards in numerical order, all of identical suits.

5♣ 6♣ 7♣ 8♣ 9♣

In the event of a tie: Highest rank at the top of the sequence wins.

The best possible straight flush is known as a royal flush, which consists of the ace, king, queen, jack and ten of a suit. A royal flush is an unbeatable hand.

**FOUR OF A KIND:** Four cards of the same rank, and one side card or “kicker.”

8♣ A♦ A♣ A♠ A♥

In the event of a tie: Highest four of a kind wins. In community card games where players have the same four of a kind, the highest fifth side card (“kicker”) wins.

**FULL HOUSE:** Three cards of the same rank, and two cards of a different, matching rank.

K♣ K♥ K♠ 10♣ 10♠

In the event of a tie: Highest three matching cards wins the pot. In community card games where players have the same three matching cards, the highest value of the two matching cards wins.

**FLUSH:** Five cards of the same suit.

Q♣ 8♣ 6♣ 4♣ 3♣

In the event of a tie: The player holding the highest ranked card wins. If necessary, the second-highest, third-highest, fourth-highest, and fifth-highest cards can be used to break the tie. If all five cards are the same ranks, the pot is split. The suit itself is never used to break a tie in poker.

**STRAIGHT:** Five cards in sequence.

2♦ 3♣ 4♠ 5♥ 6♣

In the event of a tie: Highest ranking card at the top of the sequence wins.

*Note: The Ace may be used at the top or bottom of the sequence, and is the only card which can act in this manner. A,K,Q,J,T is the highest (Ace high) straight; 5,4,3,2,A is the lowest (Five high) straight.*

**THREE OF A KIND:** Three cards of the same rank, and two unrelated side cards.

J♦ J♣ J♥ 5♣ 8♦

In the event of a tie: Highest ranking three of a kind wins. In community card games where players have the same three of a kind, the highest side card, and if necessary, the second-highest side card wins.

**TWO PAIR:** Two cards of a matching rank, another two cards of a different matching rank, and one side card.

6♠ 6♣ 10♣ 10♦ K♦

In the event of a tie: Highest pair wins. If players have the same highest pair, highest second pair wins. If both players have two identical pairs, highest side card wins.

**ONE PAIR:** Two cards of a matching rank, and three unrelated side cards.

2♦ 6♥ 8♠ A♣ A♥

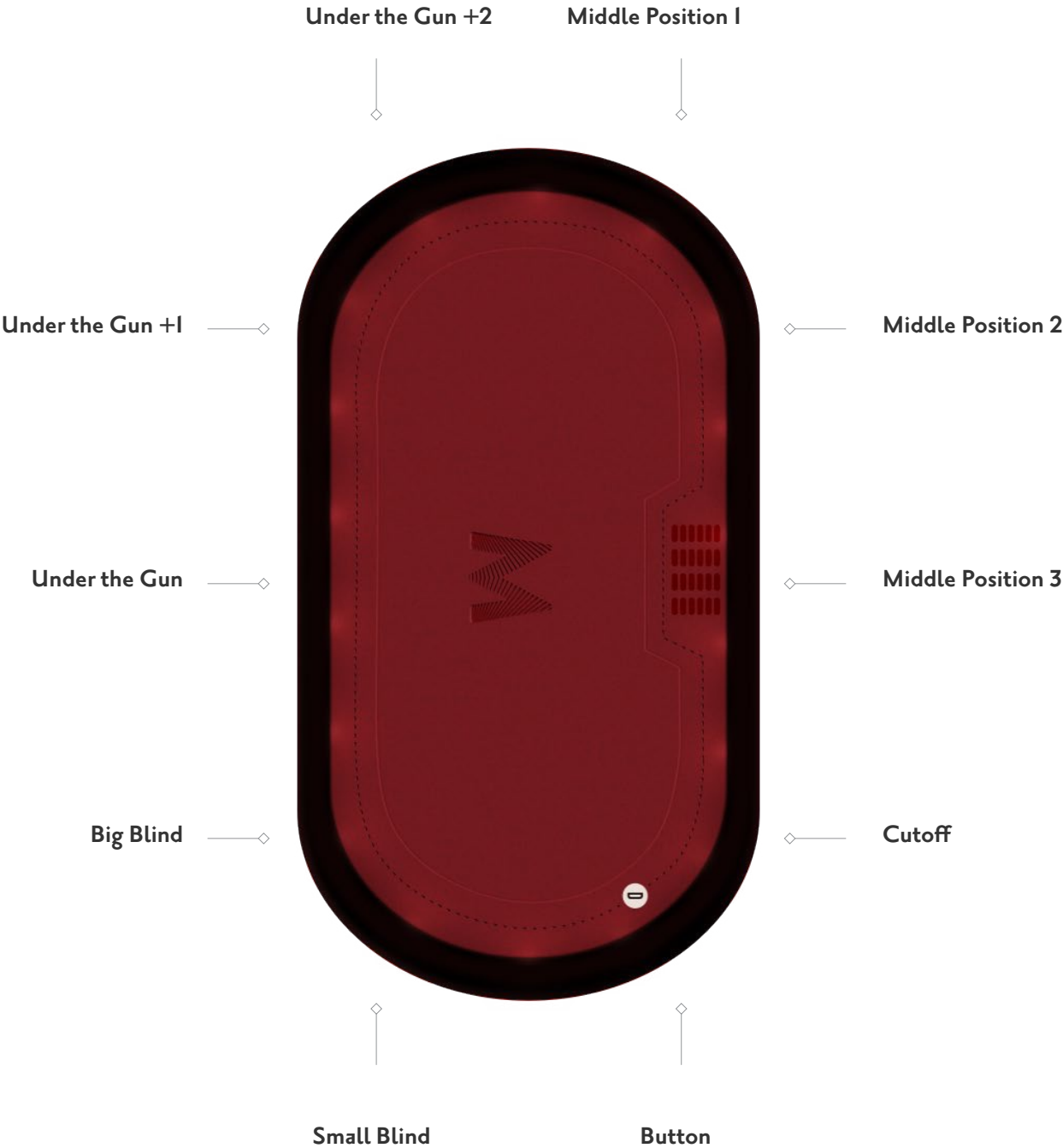
In the event of a tie: Highest pair wins. If players have the same pair, the highest side card wins, and if necessary, the second-highest and third-highest side card can be used to break the tie.

**HIGH CARD:** Any hand that does not qualify under a category listed above.

K♥ J♠ 10♣ 6♥ 3♦

In the event of a tie: Highest card wins, and if necessary, the second-highest, third-highest, fourth-highest and smallest card can be used to break the tie.

# TABLE POSITION



# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**BALANCED RANGE (N.):** An unexploitable range that includes both strong hands and weak hands with potential. Even if your opponents know what your range is, they won't be able to exploit it if it's perfectly balanced.

**BARREL (N.):** A bet on a postflop street.

**BARRELING FREQUENCY (N.):** The frequency at which you bet the turn and follow up on the river.

**BLOCKING BET (N.):** A small bet designed to stop your opponent from making a large bet that is difficult to call.

**BOARD TEXTURE (N.):** The characteristics of the flop—whether wet, with many draws and nutted hands possible, or dry, without draws and no hand better than a set possible.

**BRICK (N.):** A turn or river card that is expected to have no impact on the outcome of the hand.

**CALL (V.):** To match an opponent's bet.

**CAPPED RANGE (N.):** A range that doesn't include many of the strongest hands possible.

**CHECK (V.):** To defer your right to bet for the moment.

**CHECKED AROUND (ADJ.):** When all players check on a postflop street.

**CHECKING RANGE (N.):** The range of hands with which a player checks.

**CHECK-RAISE (V.):** To check postflop and then raise a bet from another player.

**COIN FLIP (N.):** When two hands are all in together preflop with similar equity. For example, a pocket pair against two overcards.

**COLD CALL (V.):** To call a single preflop raise.

**COLD-CALLING RANGE (N.):** The range of hands with which you call a single preflop raise.

**COMBINATION (N.):** A specific set of hole cards. Note that suit is important here. **A** **K** is not a combination. **A♦** **6♣** is.

**CONNECT WITH THE BOARD (V.):** How well your hand hit a particular board. This is measurable in terms of equity.

**CONTINUATION BET (N.):** A bet made by the player who made the last bet or raise. This term is often abbreviated "c-bet."

**CONTINUING RANGE (N.):** The range of hands with which you call or raise a bet from another player.

**DEUCES (N.):** A pair of twos.

**DOUBLE UP (V.):** When you go all in and win enough chips to double your stack.

**DRAW (N. AND V.):** The hand you're trying to make. For example, if you are dealt a two and a three, and the flop includes a four and a five—you're drawing a straight.

**DRY BOARD (N.):** When the table's shared cards do not present many opportunities for drawing hands. For example, a "rainbow" flop with three different suits, which does not open up the possibility of a flush draw.

**EDGE (N.):** When you have more equity than your opponent.

**FIRE A BARREL (V.):** To bet.

**FIRE MULTIPLE BARRELS (V.):** To bet on multiple streets.

**FIRE THREE BARRELS (V.):** Making a bet on the flop, turn, and river.

**FLOP (N.):** The first three shared cards that are dealt.

**FOLD EQUITY (N.):** The equity you gain when your opponent folds. The more frequently your opponent will fold, the more fold equity you have in proportion to the pot size.

**GAME THEORY OPTIMAL (GTO) POKER (N.):**

A defensive playing strategy that aims to make you unexploitable to your opponents.

**GET RUN OVER (V.):** To be aggressively pushed out of many pots.



**GUTSHOT DRAW (N.):** When you have four out of the five cards needed for a particular draw, but are missing one.

**HAND RANGE (N.):** All the hands a player has in a specific situation. This changes as the hand progresses.

**HEADS-UP POT (N.):** A pot with two players.

**HERO CALL (N.):** When a player has a relatively weak hand but suspects that their opponent is bluffing so they decide to call that opponent's bet on the final round of betting.

**HIGH-EQUITY DRAW (N.):** A draw which has many outs.

**HOLE CARDS (N.):** The two cards you're dealt. These are also described with the term "pocket." For example, if your hole cards are  , you have "pocket aces."

**INITIATIVE (N.):** The player who made the last bet or raise is said to have the initiative.

**IN POSITION (ADJ.):** When you act after your opponent.

**LAG (N.):** Loose aggressive player. They play a wide range of hands in an effective manner.

**LEAD INTO (V.):** In a heads-up pot, to make the first bet on a postflop street. Implies that your bet is directed at an opponent.

**LEAD OUT (V.):** To make the first bet on a postflop street.

**LEAK (N.):** A habit that loses you money.

**LIMP IN (V.):** To enter the pot before the flop by simply matching the big blind's bet, rather than raising.

**LOOSE PLAYER (N.):** A player who plays a wide range preflop.

**LOOSE RANGE (N.):** A range of hands containing many combinations. Used interchangeably with "wide range."

**LOW-CARD WET BOARD (N.):** Boards with many possible draws, but ones that don't involve high cards, such as   ,   , and   .

**MANIAC (N.):** A player who plays too many hands in an overly aggressive fashion, mostly without a plan.

**METAGAME (N.):** The integration of your playing history with your opponents into your decision making process.

**MIN-RAISE (N.):** A raise that is double the previous bet. Preflop this is twice the big blind.



**MULTI-WAY POT (N.):** A pot with three or more players.

**NITTY (ADJ.):** A conservative, tight style of play.

**THE NUTS (N.):** The absolute best hand possible.

**NUTTED HAND (N.):** A hand that almost always rates to be the best. You can also describe a player holding such a hand as “nuttled.”

**OPEN LIMP (N.):** When the first player enters the pot by choice. This doesn't include the blinds, as those are forced bets. Used interchangeably with “open raise.”

**OUT OF POSITION (ADJ.):** When you act before your opponent.

**OUTS (N.):** Cards you need to complete your draw.

**OVERBET (N.):** A bet exceeding the size of the pot.

**OVERCARDS (N.):** Cards that rank higher than any card on the board.

**OVERPAIR (N.):** A pair that ranks higher than any possible pair on the board.

**PAY OFF (V.):** To call a big bet.

**PEEL (V.):** To call a bet or raise so you can see one more card on the board.

**POLARIZED (ADJ.):** When a range consists of only strong hands and very weak hands. The more polarized a range, the stronger the value hands and the weaker the bluffs.

**RANGE ADVANTAGE (N.):** An advantage in which your range of hands compares favorably to another range.

**THE RIVER (N.):** The fifth shared card.

**SET (N.):** Three of a kind when the player is holding a pocket pair.

**SHOW DOWN (V.):** To physically reveal your cards to your opponents.

**SHOWDOWN (N.):** The moment after the final round of betting when the last players left in a hand reveal their cards to determine the winner(s).

**SHOVE (V.):** To bet all of your remaining chips.

**SLOW PLAY (V.):** To refrain from betting or raising in hopes that your opponent will do the betting for you. Also, to give your opponent a chance to make a better hand in order to extract more value.

**SMALL BALL (ADJ.):** A style of poker that minimizes risk by consciously keeping the pot small unless the player has a strong hand.

**SPECULATIVE HAND (N.):** Hands such as suited connectors and small pocket pairs. They don't make a good hand very often, but when they do it's likely to be the best hand.

**STICKY PLAYER (N.):** An opponent who usually doesn't fold marginal hands in hopes of completing their draw.

**STRADDLE (N.):** A voluntary bet made after the blinds have been posted but before the hole cards are dealt.

**STREET (N.):** A segment of play. Any card that is dealt or any betting round.

**TAG (N.):** Tight aggressive player. They play around 20 percent of hands and open raise around 17 percent. This type of player is likely a professional.

**THREE-BET (V.):** To reraise another player's open raise preflop, or to reraise over the first raise on a postflop street.

**TIGHT RANGE (N.):** A range of hands containing few combinations.

**TILT (N. AND V.):** A poor mindset that leads a player to make costly mistakes.

**TRAP (V.):** To refrain from betting or raising in hopes that your opponent will do the betting for you. Also, to give your opponent a chance to make a better hand in order to extract more value. Can be used interchangeably with “slow play.”

**TREYS (N.):** A pair of threes.

**TRIPS (N.):** Three of a kind when the board is paired and the player holds one card of the same value.

**THE TURN (N.):** The fourth shared card.

**TURN YOUR HAND FACE UP (V.):** When you let other players know almost for certain what you have. You don't literally flip your cards over, but you may as well have done so.

**VALUE BET (N.):** A bet where you expect to have more equity than your opponent.

**VALUE HAND (N.):** A hand that you can bet with and expect to be called by worse hands frequently enough to show a profit.

**WET BOARD (N.):** A coordinated board with multiple draws possible. This term can apply to the board at any stage, regardless of how many cards are down.

**WET FLOP (N.):** A flop with many possible draws available.

**WIDE RANGE (N.):** A range of hands containing many combinations. Used interchangeably with “loose range.”

**WINNING PLAYER (N.):** Any profitable player.

**WHALE (N.):** A big fish who plays too many hands in a passive manner without any skill. They are always likely to call big bets with weak hands.

