**Skill #3 Assess Your Hand Value (92 – 120)**

**CRITICAL CONCEPT** The more accurately your opponents can read your hand, the more you have to bet in proportion to your stack to prevent them from calling profitably.

The more accurately you can read your opponents’ possible holdings, the larger the bet you can call to try to bust (or bluff) them.

**CRITICAL CONCEPT** Before you bet with good hands, you should mentally decide whether you are willing to pay off a big bet with your hand or not. (this will often be the case when you believe your opponent is optimistically calling your bet on the come and a card on a future street drops that you believe completes their draw; in this situation how does EWC factor into your decision-making)

The simple question here is → “Am I willing to lose a lot?”

If you are willing to risk losing a lot, then you should usually avoid offering too high implied odds to players with the most likely draws. Bet enough so that if they call, they will lose money over the long term even if they do get you to pay off a big bet when they get there.

**Introduction**

Skill #1 and Skill #2 are **folding skills** → be **disciplined with preflop** hand selection and **don’t pay people off**.

These folding skills are critical to becoming a winning player because they mitigate the potential for bleeding away your chips – chronic violation of Skill #1 and Skill # 2 is a **huge leak amongst 1-2 players**.

Folding, however, doesn’t make you money. In order to make money, **you need to take positive actions**. Skill #3 is the first step in that direction, and it centers around assessing your hand value. Let’s start with these questions:

* If you bet, how many opponents will call (what factors drive opponents’ calling tendencies)?
* How often will you get drawn out on by a caller (what are typical drawing scenarios and the associated math)?
* How often will a caller with a failed draw call again or bluff (categorize this by player type)?
* Is your hand even the best hand at this time (what information are you relying on to support your confidence)?
* How does your bet sizing impact your hand value and **others’ perceptions of your and their own hand value** (how will a set of actions and the associated size of those actions influence a hand’s dynamics)?

Use all the available information to assess your hand value and then to estimate answers to these sorts of questions.

If your assessment is that the value of your hand is strong, then the goal is to try to get as much value out of the hand as possible **without pushing it too far** (what does “pushing it too far” mean in a concrete sense).

**CRITICAL CONCEPT** When you flop a “good” hand, you don’t want to push everyone out so you can take down the pot at that instant. You want to get the hand to showdown and make money along the way.

1-2 players violate this concept all the time. They incur significant opportunity costs by shutting down the action too early by overbetting the value of their hand.

What is the value of a good hand in poker?

When you get to showdown, you turn over the winning hand. That is the **sole value of a good hand** – **it is realized only at showdown**. ***If there were no showdowns, all hand would be equally valuable***.

Why would you want to take a hand that has good showdown value and play it in a way designed to avoid a showdown at all costs?

You want to avoid showdowns with hands that will lose at showdown. Bad hands, not good hands, hate showdowns. (See Appendix for heads-up scenarios that analyze the insights surrounding this section’s critical concept)

The anxiety in these “have a good value hand” situation is all about what the turn and river may bring (what tells are common is this situation). However, understand this:

In order to play good value hands optimally, you must embrace the turn and the river, not fear it, so that you can get to a showdown where your hand’s value is realized (showdown value) and pays you off.

What if you get drawn out on? Don’t sweat it. It happens. That’s part of the game.

With 1-2 you don’t have to worry so much about getting outdrawn. If someone draws out, they’ll likely make a big bet, and you can just fold. The player with the winning hand will give you that information. Also, because players don’t bluff enough in 1-2 games, you get to save one or more bets and so when you get drawn out on its not as big a hit to your stack.

Getting drawn out on in bigger games against tougher players is much worse because tougher players:

* Are willing to bluff.
* Are more aware of the composition of their hand ranges at any given time.
* Make big bets you’re forced to pay off.
* Will bluff the flop and turn with a draw and then shove the river when they get there.

Your hands without showdown value are the ones you want to bet so much your opponents all fold.

**What Weaker Hands Will Call?**

In hold’em generally, with any bet you make, you’re trying to get a worse hand to call, or a better hand to fold. When you flop a good value hand, ask yourself → if I bet, what weak hands will call given my bet sizing?

**EXAMPLE** You have A♥K♥ and get two callers. Flop → A♦9♠4♣

If you bet, what worse hands will call you? (how will stack depth and SPR affect this assessment)

* A all player types will call; what player type might raise (160)
* 9 weak player calls; tougher player may raise (160)
* 4 weak player calls; tougher player acts based on {preflop action, tells, reads} (160)
* KK – TT may get a raise with raising probability increasing from TT to KK; if 9 and sometimes 4 calls, it would be illogical for this range not to call (24)
* 88 – 55 possibly a less squeamish call than 33 – 22 (24)
* 33 – 22 possibly a squeamish call (12)

The green numbers represent the total combos. In this case there are (540) total combos. From this total, many factors such as player type, stack depth, SPR, bet sizing, and position will pare down this total to the functional combos in-play. For instance, the player on the button may play all A9+ combos whereas that same player UTG may only play AQs+ combos. If a player is short stacked or RFI, he might play A6+ and A2s+. Thus, different circumstances will affect the functional combos in-play.

If instead of AK you had AT, then your value is crushed by AA and AJ+ but intact everywhere else. Out of the original 540 combos with AK, you remove 54 combos to arrive at 486 total combos.

If instead of AK you had JJ, then your value is crushed by any A2+ and QQ+ but intact everywhere else. Out of the original 540 combos with AK, you remove 178 combos to arrive at 362 total combos.

In summary, with three hands starting hands {AK, AT, JJ}, the total combos you crush on an A-9-4 flop are {540, 486, 362} (is there a correlation between value maximization, bet sizing, and total combos; if so, how does game dynamics affect this maximization function).

**Streets of Value**

After internalizing the critical concept of this section (although exactly how to execute may not still be clear), the next step is to assess how many streets of value (SoV) a hand is worth.

If on a given street, there is a high likelihood that inferior hands will call your high value hand, then that street is a SoV. In the example from the previous section, we would count the flop as a SoV.

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