Poker Bet Sizing: Ditching Medium Bets to Maximize Win Rate

This briefing document summarizes key strategies for bet sizing in poker, primarily advocating against the frequent use of "medium" bet sizes (typically 1/3 to full pot) in favor of either very small or very large bets. The core argument is that defaulting to medium bets significantly reduces a player's win rate, as these sizes often fail to extract maximum value or exert sufficient pressure for bluffs.

I. Core Thesis: Medium Bets "Kill Your Win Rate"

The central premise is that **"the most common bet size in poker is also the worst."** The source highlights a student, Alex, who doubled his win rate and achieved a six-figure year after being "banned... from using any normal bet size between 1/3 to full pot on any turn in river." This suggests a fundamental shift in approach is needed, moving away from "defaulting to half pot" because it means "leaving piles of money on the table."

II. Nine Spots Where Medium Bet Sizes Kill Your Win Rate

The document identifies nine common scenarios where medium bet sizes are suboptimal:

1. **As the Pre-flop Raiser Facing a Large Stab on the Flop (Out of Position):**

* **Problem with Medium Check-Raise (e.g., 3x-4x):** When an opponent "stabs big" (e.g., $50-$60) on a wet, dynamic board, their range is often very strong. A medium check-raise size (e.g., $150-$200) is a "huge mistake" because live players are "unbalanced" and "their range is just too strong." Solvers indicate that strong hands (top pair, two pair, flush draws) often fold to large check-raises, but in live play, opponents are less likely to fold sufficiently.
* **Recommended Action:** Use a **large check-raise size (e.g., 6x to $300)**. The rationale is that if you "have a strong hand that can cooler their strong hands, don't use a medium size, put in the big boy check-raise and win a lot more money." This size punishes their strong, inelastic range and leverages their reluctance to fold.

1. **As the Pre-flop Raiser Facing a Small Stab on the Flop (Out of Position) with a Strong Hand:**

* **Problem with Medium Check-Raise:** While a small stab often indicates a weaker range, a medium check-raise still misses value. Weak hands will fold regardless of a small or medium raise.
* **Recommended Action:** Use a **large check-raise size (e.g., $250-$275)**. Live players are generally "too inelastic" or "price insensitive" with good hands, meaning "they're going to call too much." This allows for extraction of "many more large pots" even if some weaker hands fold. The goal is to "go big and target the hands that are going to continue or punt to this huge size."

1. **Four Bets on an Ace-High Board (with Nuts/Strong Value):**

* **Problem with Medium Bet (e.g., 1/3 pot):** Against hands like Kings, Queens, Jacks, or Tens, a medium bet might cause them to fold, missing value. If the opponent has the last ace, you're stacking them anyway.
* **Recommended Action:** Use a **very small size (around 10% pot)** on the flop. This forces hands like Kings, Queens, Jacks, and Tens to "continue for a very small bet." On the turn, if they bet, you can stack them. If they check back (indicating hands like Queens or Jacks), go "very very small" on the river to ensure they call, extracting "two streets against the very very weak portion of their range."
* **For Bluffs in this Spot:** Bet "very small size on the flop keeping their range wide and weak." If they stab on the turn, fold. If they check back on the turn, bet "a little bit bigger than that maybe 225 maybe 250" on the river to get hands like Jacks, Tens, Kings, Queens to fold.

1. **Three-Bet Pot In-Position as the Pre-flop Raiser (with the Nuts):**

* **Problem with Medium Bet:** In three-bet pots, medium bets (relative to the pot) can cause opponents to fold strong hands or not raise them.
* **Recommended Action:** Use a **small size (e.g., $50)** on the flop. This encourages opponents to "check raise when they have a hand like 98 suited pocket 9ines pocket eights queen nine." It also keeps weaker hands (e.g., pocket sevens) in the pot, which would fold to a large bet. This "works to perfection" against out-of-position players on wet, dynamic boards, as they are likely to "fast play a ton."
* **For Showdown/Thin Value:** Bet small on the flop, then check back a lot of turns. This "funnels our opponents into the best line in poker" where they "float the flop too wide," "raised off too much of their strong stuff," and "get to the river with a wide and weak range," leading them to bet into your middling showdown value hands.

1. **Blank Turns Where Opponent is Inelastic (Out of Position, Capped Range):**

* **Problem with Medium Bet (e.g., $60-$75):** When an opponent check-calls the flop on a wet, dynamic board, their range is "relatively capped" (no two pair or sets, which would have raised). While their range isn't necessarily weak, a medium bet fails to extract maximum value from hands like King-Queen, Ace-Queen, flush draws, or straight draws, which are unlikely to fold even to a massive size.
* **Recommended Action:** Use a **big size (e.g., $125-$150)**. These hands "are not folding even for a massive size." A medium size "does not get the job done" and "you're lighting money on fire."
* **For Bluffs:** Use the **big size** on the turn to "pile in more money now so we win a bigger pot later when we get our opponent to fold."

1. **Nut-Changing Turn Card (with a Super Nutted Hand):**

* **Problem with Medium Bet (e.g., $60-$70):** When the board pairs, a medium bet causes the top of the opponent's range (e.g., trips) to slow play and prevents draws from sticking around.
* **Recommended Action:** Use a **small size**. This encourages opponents with trips to "raise," putting more money in. It also keeps "straight draws, their gut shots, their flush draws" in the pot, as recreational players "don't like to chase draws when the board pairs." This maximizes value by allowing draws to hit.

1. **Big Boy Bluff on the River (Opponent Super Capped):**

* **Problem with Medium Bet (with a bluff):** When the opponent's range is "super capped" on the river (e.g., best hand is top pair), a medium bluff might not be enough to get folds, or it risks losing too much if called.
* **Recommended Action:** Use a **very large bluff (1.5-2x pot or more)**. If value betting for a call from King-Queen, you'd go medium. But with "six high," this is "the point to run the big boy bluff" and "get our opponent to fold 90 95% of their range."
* **Lead-in Strategy:** Use a small size on the flop (keeping range wide and weak) and turn (encouraging flushes to raise, keeping weak hands/draws in). This ensures the river opponent's range is wide and weak.

1. **Big Boy Value Bet on the River (Opponent with Strong but Not Nutted Hands):**

* **Problem with Medium Bet:** When an opponent has many strong hands (e.g., two pair, strong aces) that are unlikely to fold regardless of size, a medium bet leaves money on the table.
* **Recommended Action:** Use a **very large bet ("put in all the money")**. If you used small bets on prior streets to keep hands like Ace-Ten, Ace-Five, Ace-Four in their range, these hands are now strong enough to call a large bet but not the nuts. This is the spot to "get called and we are going to win."

1. **Facing a Check-Raise and Then a Check on a Nut-Changing Turn:**

* **Problem with Medium Bet:** Opponent's range after check-raising flop and checking turn is often "mostly... two pair and sets" (flushes would usually bet). A medium bet fails to maximize value against these inelastic hands.
* **Recommended Action:** Use a **very egregiously large size (e.g., $400)**. Opponents are unlikely to fold two pair and sets just because a flush came in. Going small makes no sense as they won't raise, and going medium misses value. Choose "the biggest size here that two pair and sets are going to call."

III. Four Rare Exceptions Where Medium Bets Are Okay

While the general rule is to avoid medium bets, there are specific, rare scenarios where they can be appropriate:

1. **C-betting as the Pre-flop Raiser in a Single-Raised Pot:**

* **Context:** In a single-raised pot, the "absolute size of the pot is smaller" compared to 3-bet pots.
* **Reasoning:** A "medium size" (around half pot) can be "the magical elixir point where opponents will do exactly what we want: raise the strong stuff, call out the weak stuff."

1. **Medium Bet in Four-Bet Pots on Low Boards (with Strong Value):**

* **Context:** After a 4-bet, on low, static boards (e.g., 2-2-3).
* **Reasoning:** Hands like Nines, Tens, Jacks, Queens, Kings "are not folding no matter what on this board." A medium size (e.g., 2/3 pot, $200-$250 in a $2/$5 game) maximizes value against these inelastic hands and allows for a "two-street game" before scary cards hit.

1. **Bluffing on the River When Value Bets Go Very Big or Very Small:**

* **Context:** On a river where your value range is polarized to either "very very big" (thick value targeting strong hands) or "very very small" (thin value targeting weak calls).
* **Reasoning:** The medium size "we don't lose our entire stack when our opponent does end up with a strong hand... and the medium size we can get hands like queen king queen jack queen 10 queen n suited... to fold." It's a "rare exception" but can be "pretty good."

1. **Value Betting on the River When Bluffs Go Very Big or Very Small:**

* **Context:** On a river where your bluff range is polarized to either "very very big" (getting all folds) or "very very small" (folding draws).
* **Reasoning:** In this unique scenario, "with value... not too big not too small just right." The medium size (still often over-pot, e.g., slightly bigger than pot) allows extraction of value from hands like Ten-X that would call.

Conclusion

The overarching message is to be intentional and strategic with bet sizing, moving away from a default "medium" approach. By understanding opponent tendencies (inelasticity, capped ranges, fast play) and pot dynamics, players can apply very large or very small bet sizes to either extract maximum value from strong hands, induce folds from weak ranges, or keep weaker hands in the pot for future streets. This "eliminat[ing] the medium size from your game helps you level up and become the biggest boy possible."