Six-Figure Poker: A Study Guide

I. Core Concepts & Building Blocks

This section reviews the fundamental principles and four key building blocks for achieving a six-figure income in poker, focusing on cash games.

A. Overall Strategy & Mindset

* **Success in Poker:** Like any other endeavor, success requires both acquiring the necessary skills and having a clear plan to achieve your goals.
* **Focus on Cash Games:** The guide explicitly focuses on cash games as the quicker path to a six-figure bankroll, contrasting them sharply with tournaments, which are deemed less efficient for earning money.
* **Experience of the Author:** The author's personal journey from low stakes to over seven figures provides context and credibility for the advice offered.

B. The Four Building Blocks

1. **Ranging Opponents (Villains):**

* **Definition:** The process of narrowing down the possible hands an opponent might hold based on their actions throughout a hand.
* **Methodology:** Start by eliminating hands an opponent *doesn't* have with each action, rather than focusing on what they *do* have.
* **Pre-flop Ranging:** Eliminate premium hands (e.g., Aces, Kings, some Queens) if an opponent just calls, as these would typically 3-bet. Also eliminate extreme "trash" hands.
* **Post-flop Ranging (Street by Street):**After a bet and call on the flop, eliminate hands that didn't connect, hands that would have raised, and complete "air."
* After further action (e.g., turn overbet and call), continue to narrow the range by eliminating hands that would have folded or raised.
* **In-Game Application:**Think in "big buckets" (e.g., "some straight draws," "some flush draws," "some top pair") rather than specific hand combos, especially early in a hand.
* **Crucial Point:** Carry the thread from street to street; the assigned range from a previous action must logically extend to the next. Do not assign hands on later streets that were eliminated earlier.
* **Example Scenarios:** Demonstrated with both a detailed visual range chart and a mental in-game process (e.g., Ace-5 spades hand).

1. **Defaults/Shortcuts:**

* **Definition:** Pre-set strategies or decisions used to save processing power and make faster choices during a hand.
* **Purpose:** Guide players in the right direction without requiring complex, real-time calculations for every scenario.
* **Examples of Author's Defaults:In-Position Flop Defaults:**Ask: "What size will they raise strong stuff and call with weak stuff?"
* **If yes:** Usually half pot in single-raised pots, third pot in 3-bet pots.
* **If no (e.g., dry/static board where opponents trap or fold weak hands):** Employ a "big bet or check" strategy.
* **In-Position Turn Defaults:**Ask: "Are they capped?" (meaning their range is limited to weaker hands, as strong hands would have raised earlier).
* **If yes:** Go big (opponents won't put in more money for small sizes, but won't fold for big sizes either).
* **If no:** Ask: "Can we choose a size where they raise their strong stuff and call with their weak stuff?"
* **If yes:** Go small.
* **If no:** Employ a "big bet or check" strategy.
* **Out-of-Position Flop Defaults (against recreational players):**Ask: "Will they overstab or telegraph their hand strength with bet sizing?"
* **If yes:** Check entire range (recreational players play poorly against a range check, opening opportunities for check-raises).
* **If no (e.g., against pros):** Simplify; range bet on boards favorable to you, range check on boards unfavorable to you.
* **Key Takeaway:** The specific defaults aren't as important as *having* a set of defaults to streamline decision-making.

1. **Repeatable Thought Process:**

* **Definition:** A consistent list of questions asked in every hand to arrive at the highest Expected Value (EV) decision.
* **Customization:** Should be personalized to what works for the individual player.
* **Author's Thought Process:**"What is their range?"
* "What is my default?"
* "What happens if [I deviate]?"
* (On Rivers): "What would I do with the inverse?" (e.g., if bluffing, what size would I use, which informs value betting).
* **Application:** Demonstrated through detailed hand examples from pre-flop to river, showing how each question guides the decision-making process, incorporating ranging and defaults.

1. **Building a Study Plan:**

* **Importance:** Crucial for self-accountability and achieving long-term goals by breaking them down into consistent, smaller tasks.
* **Weekly Accountability:** Create a list of tasks to complete *no matter what* each week. Adjust intensity based on performance (e.g., ease back if too tough, add more if too easy).
* **Realism:** Goals must be realistic and align with personal priorities. Aiming to be the "best player in the world" requires significantly more dedication than aiming for six figures.
* **Sample Plans:Full-Time Player (e.g., 32 hrs playing, 8 hrs studying):** Example includes ranging drills (timed), repeatable thought process drills (timed).
* **Part-Time Player (e.g., 16 hrs playing, 4 hrs studying):** Similar drills, adjusted hours.
* **Key Message:** The specific plan is less important than *having* a plan and consistently executing it.

C. What's NOT Important (for first $100k)

* **Bankroll:Misconception:** Many players are "obsessed" with bankroll size before developing skills.
* **Reality:** Skills are paramount. Start with micro stakes (online) or low stakes live with a small bankroll, focus on honing skills. The bankroll will grow as skills improve.
* **Author's Experience:** Started with small savings, lost bankroll multiple times, but persisted in building skills, which eventually led to a six-figure bankroll.
* **Theory (Solvers/GTO):Misconception:** Jumping into advanced Game Theory Optimal (GTO) analysis too early.
* **Reality:** At low stakes and live play, opponents deviate significantly from GTO. There's abundant "low-hanging fruit" to exploit.
* **Author's Perspective:** Solvers are valuable at a higher level (to "deviate harder"), but foundational skills (ranging, thought process, defaults) are far more critical for the first six figures.
* **Prioritization:** Master the basics before delving into complex theory.

II. Quiz

Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. According to the author, what is the primary reason to focus on cash games over tournaments when trying to build a six-figure bankroll?
2. What is the core principle behind "ranging" opponents in poker, and how does it generally begin?
3. Explain the concept of "carrying the thread" in ranging and why it is considered the most important point for in-game application.
4. What are "defaults" in poker, and what main benefit do they provide players during a hand?
5. When should a player employ a "big bet or check" strategy on the flop, according to the in-position flop defaults?
6. How does the repeatable thought process help a poker player, and what is the first question the author asks himself in this process?
7. What additional question does the author add to his repeatable thought process specifically when playing on the river?
8. Why does the author emphasize weekly accountability in building a study plan, even in the face of personal challenges?
9. Why does the author state that bankroll size is not important for a beginner aiming for their first $100,000 in poker?
10. At what point does the author suggest that poker players should start incorporating advanced theory (like GTO solvers) into their study, and why not earlier?

III. Quiz Answer Key

1. The author states that cash games allow players to build a six-figure bankroll "relatively quickly," whereas tournaments are described as being for people who care about things other than earning money and can be "miserable." This indicates that cash games are seen as a more efficient and direct path to financial goals.
2. The core principle of ranging opponents is to eliminate hands an opponent *doesn't* have with each action they take, rather than guessing what they *do* have. It generally begins pre-flop by removing strong hands that would have 3-bet, as well as unplayable "trash" hands.
3. "Carrying the thread" means logically extending the range assigned to an opponent from one street to the next, without making up new hands. It's crucial because it ensures that range assignments are consistent and based on previous actions, preventing illogical assumptions about an opponent's holdings.
4. Defaults are pre-set shortcuts or strategies that guide players' decisions in common scenarios. They help players come to faster decisions and save significant processing power during live gameplay, allowing for more efficient and less mentally taxing play.
5. A player should employ a "big bet or check" strategy on the flop when, according to their assessment, opponents will *not* raise their strong hands and simultaneously call with their weak hands for a standard bet size. This often occurs on very dry and static boards where strong hands might trap, and weak hands have little incentive to call.
6. The repeatable thought process helps a poker player by providing a consistent framework for decision-making, ensuring they always aim for the highest Expected Value (EV) decision. The first question the author asks himself in this process is: "What is their range?"
7. Specifically on the river, the author adds the question: "What would I do with the inverse?" This involves considering how one would play a bluff in the same situation, which then helps inform the optimal size for value bets.
8. The author emphasizes weekly accountability to ensure consistent progress towards larger, long-term goals. By committing to a specific list of tasks each week "no matter what," players develop discipline and ensure they stay on track with their overall development plan.
9. The author believes bankroll size is not important for a beginner's first $100,000 because developing the necessary skills is the foundational step. He argues that even with a small starting bankroll, players can hone their skills at micro stakes, and the bankroll will naturally grow as their proficiency increases.
10. The author suggests incorporating advanced theory (like GTO solvers) only after achieving the first six figures in poker. He explains that at lower stakes and in live games, opponents deviate so much from optimal play that focusing on basic exploits, ranging, and a solid thought process offers more "low-hanging fruit" for profit.

IV. Essay Format Questions

1. Discuss the relationship between the four building blocks (Ranging, Defaults, Repeatable Thought Process, and Study Plan). How do they interact and support each other in helping a player achieve their poker goals? Provide specific examples from the text to illustrate these connections.
2. Analyze the author's strong emphasis on "what opponents don't have" versus "what they do have" in the ranging process. Why is this approach particularly effective in live poker, and how does it simplify complex decision-making for players without access to detailed range charts?
3. Compare and contrast the author's recommended approach to poker for a beginner aiming for $100,000 with common misconceptions regarding bankroll and GTO theory. Argue why prioritizing skills and exploitative play over bankroll size and theoretical perfection is a more pragmatic path for initial success.
4. The author stresses the importance of having a "repeatable thought process" and "defaults." Explain how these two concepts contribute to reduced "processing power" during a hand, leading to faster and more efficient decision-making. Provide examples of how these tools might be applied in a typical poker scenario.
5. Reflect on the author's advice regarding setting realistic goals and building a personalized study plan. How does this philosophy extend beyond poker and apply to achieving success in other demanding fields? Discuss the trade-offs involved in pursuing ambitious goals versus maintaining a balanced life.

V. Glossary of Key Terms

* **3-Bet:** A re-raise before the flop, typically the third bet in the sequence of betting.
* **Bankroll:** The total amount of money a poker player has specifically set aside for playing poker.
* **Big Bet or Check Strategy:** A strategy where a player chooses to either bet a large size or check, avoiding medium-sized bets. This is often used on boards where opponents are unlikely to call medium bets or raise strong hands.
* **Blank (Card):** A card dealt on a later street (turn or river) that is unlikely to significantly change the hand strengths or board texture.
* **Board (Poker Table):** The community cards dealt face-up in the center of the table that all players can use in combination with their hole cards to make the best five-card hand.
* **Button (BTN):** A position at the poker table, typically the last to act post-flop. The player on the button is usually considered to have a strategic advantage due to position.
* **Capped Range:** An opponent's range of hands that is limited to weaker holdings, usually because they would have played their stronger hands more aggressively on a previous street.
* **Cash Games:** A poker format where chips represent real money and players can join or leave at any time, cashing out their chips for their monetary value.
* **Combo Draws:** Hands that have multiple ways to improve to a strong hand, such as a straight draw and a flush draw simultaneously.
* **Defaults/Shortcuts:** Pre-established strategic decisions or rules of thumb that a player uses in common poker situations to save processing power and make faster, more consistent choices.
* **Deviate (from Theory):** To play in a way that is different from what Game Theory Optimal (GTO) play would suggest, often to exploit an opponent's specific tendencies.
* **Donk the River:** To make a bet out of position on the river after checking on a previous street.
* **Dry/Static Board:** A poker board with cards that offer few drawing possibilities (e.g., no straight or flush draws) and where the nuts are unlikely to change on subsequent streets.
* **Expected Value (EV):** The average amount of money a player can expect to win or lose over the long run from a particular decision or action.
* **Fold Equity:** The amount of money a player expects to win by making an opponent fold their hand, even if the player's own hand is not strong.
* **Flush Draws:** Hands that need one more card of the same suit to complete a flush.
* **Game Theory Optimal (GTO):** A theoretical strategy in poker that is unexploitable by opponents, representing a perfectly balanced approach that cannot be beaten in the long run.
* **In-Position:** Having the advantage of acting last on a betting street.
* **Inverse (on Rivers):** In the context of the repeatable thought process, considering what one would do with a bluff (the "inverse" of a value hand) on the river to inform the optimal betting size for a value hand.
* **Jack-X (Jack-X, 9-X, etc.):** Refers to any hand containing a Jack (or 9, etc.) as one of its two hole cards, often used when describing an opponent's range on a board with that card.
* **Low-Hanging Fruit:** Easily exploitable tendencies or clear strategic advantages that can be capitalized on with minimal effort or advanced theory.
* **Micro Stakes:** Very low-stakes poker games, typically played online, with very small blinds (e.g., $0.01/$0.02).
* **Node Locking (in Solvers):** A feature in poker solvers that allows a user to force a specific action or strategy for a player at a particular decision point, to see how the solver adjusts.
* **Open (Pre-flop):** To be the first player to voluntarily put money into the pot (i.e., make the first raise).
* **Open-Ended Straight Draw (OESD):** A straight draw where a player has four consecutive cards and can complete a straight with cards on either end (e.g., 6-7-8-9, needs 5 or T).
* **Out-of-Position (OOP):** Having to act first on a betting street, which is generally a strategic disadvantage.
* **Overbet:** A bet size that is larger than the current pot size.
* **Overstab:** To make an overly aggressive or unnecessarily large bet, often telegraphing hand strength.
* **Paired Board:** A community board where at least one rank of card appears twice (e.g., A-A-7).
* **Pile Solver:** A specific type of poker solver software used for Game Theory Optimal (GTO) analysis.
* **Processing Power:** Refers to the mental effort and time required to make decisions during a poker hand.
* **Range (of Hands):** The full spectrum of possible hands an opponent might hold, given their previous actions and the game context.
* **Range Bet:** To bet with virtually every hand in one's range in a specific situation, regardless of its strength.
* **Range Check:** To check with virtually every hand in one's range in a specific situation.
* **Ranging (Villains):** The skill of determining an opponent's possible hand combinations based on their actions throughout a hand.
* **Recreational Player (Rec):** A poker player who plays for enjoyment rather than professional profit, often exhibiting predictable and exploitable tendencies.
* **Repeatable Thought Process:** A consistent, step-by-step series of questions a player asks themselves during every hand to arrive at the optimal decision.
* **River:** The fifth and final community card dealt in a hand of Texas Hold'em.
* **Se-Bet (Continuation Bet):** A bet made on the flop by the player who made the last raise before the flop.
* **Set:** Three of a kind made with a pocket pair and one community card.
* **Single Raised Pots:** Pots where there was only one raise before the flop.
* **Solver Boy:** A term for a poker player who extensively uses and studies poker solver software.
* **SPR (Stack-to-Pot Ratio):** The ratio of a player's effective stack size to the current size of the pot. It helps determine the strategic implications of future betting.
* **Straight Draws:** Hands that need one more card to complete a straight.
* **Street:** Refers to a round of betting in poker (e.g., pre-flop, flop, turn, river are each a "street").
* **Telegraph (Hand Strength):** To unintentionally reveal the strength of one's hand through actions or bet sizing.
* **Theory (Poker Theory):** The academic and mathematical study of poker, often centered around concepts like GTO and optimal strategy.
* **Three-Bet (3-bet) Pots:** Pots where there has been a re-raise before the flop, resulting in a larger pot size from the outset.
* **Tournaments:** A poker format where players buy in for a set amount, receive chips, and play until one player has all the chips. Payouts are based on finishing position.
* **Trap (in Poker):** To play a strong hand passively (e.g., by checking or calling) in order to induce a larger bet or raise from an opponent.
* **Turn:** The fourth community card dealt in a hand of Texas Hold'em.
* **Two Pair:** A hand containing two different pairs of cards.
* **Under Bluff:** To bluff less frequently than optimal, often a tendency of recreational players.
* **Under Pair:** A pocket pair that is lower in rank than the lowest community card on the board.
* **Unvulnerable (Hand):** A hand that is very strong and unlikely to be beaten by future community cards.
* **Villain:** A term used in poker to refer to an opponent.
* **Wet/Dynamic Board:** A poker board with cards that offer many drawing possibilities (e.g., straight draws, flush draws) and where the nuts are likely to change on subsequent streets.