

10 STEPS TO
WINNING

TEXAS HOLD'EM

FOR NOVICES AND INTERMEDIATE PLAYERS
TO DEVELOP A WINNING PERSONAL STRATEGY



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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this book to my wife, Sharon. She has had to put up with countless hours of talk about the game. I would like to thank her for the word processing and many helpful comments with respect to the grammar and composition of this book. It is much more readable because of her. She also has worked long and hard processing the many changes to the original draft.

Next I would like to thank my son, Liam, who has also worked long and hard on the formatting of the book and gave me many comments concerning the understandability of what I wanted to convey. He has done a wonderful job of the technical work required by a book such as this.

Both have come to know a lot about Texas Hold'em but having one player in the family is enough!

W. Forbes Cavanagh

FOREWARD

This book and strategy card are a MUST for anyone who has little or no knowledge of the game of Texas Hold'em Poker and wishes to become a winner in as short a time as possible. The strategy card which is included is much more complex and sophisticated than it appears. Intermediate players can appreciate and may use the strategy card without any preparation. Intermediate players may wish to read only portions of the last five steps of this ten step book. For beginners, this book prepares you to understand and make use of the comprehensive strategy suggested by this card in order to begin to be a winning holdem player. The strategy takes you all the way from learning a pair of aces beats a pair of kings to assessment of when to fold a good hand during the final round of betting. The strategy on the card is useful at all levels of no-limit holdem from \$1/\$2 to \$200/\$400 games. However, the discussion is particularly aimed at low limit games from \$5/\$10 to \$10/\$20. It explains the various betting strategies and why seating location is important and many other issues of importance.

There are unique features in this book that are different from the usual strategy recommendations. For instance, in Step 10 you are introduced to my Card in the Hole Theory of Texas Hold'em, in Appendix 2 there is the explanation of how to improve upon the misleading preflop no foldem card odds that others seem to value, the argument is made of the qualitative value of high pairs. These are some of the new ideas presented in this book.

The book is complete with respect to the knowledge needed by the beginner and intermediate hold'em players. Yet, it is easy to read and understand.

This book includes the holdem strategy card.

Good Luck

W.F.C.

STEP 1 – Learning the Game

Introduction

Texas Hold'em (holdem) is a poker game where the best five card hand is selected from seven cards. The best hand wins based on the usual hand categories with a Royal Flush being the top hand. It is assumed that readers are at least aware of the winning order of poker hands.

The delivery of the cards by the casino dealer starts with two down cards given to each player. The casino dealer does not play. Each player looks at their down ("hole" or "pocket") cards. Then a betting round begins.

Seating

Most commonly, there are ten players at a table. Although I have seen more, especially in tournaments and often with player drop-outs, it can be smaller. We will assume ten players and later relax this assumption. The casino dealer is not among the ten players, as he does not play.

For each game, one player is considered to be the designated dealer, despite the deal actually being done by the casino dealer. For instance, suppose I am four seats to the left of the casino dealer (cards are dealt clockwise) and I am the designated "dealer." In front of me will be a little white "button" or "puck" with a "D" or "B" on it. This button rotates one seat to the left after each game so that you are the button once every 10 hands.

Blinds

The player immediately to my left (if I am the button) is called the "small blind" (SB). The player on his left is called the "big blind" (BB). In a \$1/\$2 game the BB puts \$1 out as an initial bet before the cards are dealt. The SB usually puts up half of this amount prior to the deal. Therefore, every pot has at least the blind money in the pot.

The Deal

Every player receives two down cards – called pocket cards. The SB receives the first card and the BB gets the next card and this continues around the table, twice, ending with the button receiving his second card. Then the first round of betting begins.

Betting

Holdem consists of two cards face down for each player plus five face up cards which are common to all players. Each player uses their personal down cards plus the five common cards to make the best five card poker hand. There are four rounds of betting in holdem. After all the players have received their two face down cards there is a round of betting called pre-flop betting. After the pre-flop betting is completed three cards are placed face up in the middle of the table. Then the second round of betting begins and is referred to as betting on the flop. After the flop betting has been completed a fourth card is placed face up in the middle of the table beside the three flop cards. This card is called the turn card or fourth street. Then the third round of betting begins which is called the turn betting. After this round of

betting is completed a fifth card is placed face up on the board and the final round of betting begins. The fifth card is called the river card or fifth street and this betting round is called “betting on the river”. This completes the betting.

Table Stakes

You're betting and raising in any given game is limited to the amount of money you have exposed on the table. If you end up with all your money in the pot, it is called “all in”. You continue to play but the size of the pot you can win is limited to the size of the pot after your “all in” has been called. Subsequent betting money is placed in a “side pot” and the others compete for it. If you have the best hand you win your designated pot but not the side pot. (You are not allowed to increase your table stake until the game is over which is the reason you are limited to your table money). The side pot is won by the highest hand owned by the others. If you do not have the best hand, all of the money goes to the player with the best hand.

Etiquette

While the players are trying to make money many also want to enjoy the game. Casinos have rules, such as, all players must speak English, and you are not allowed to criticize others and other helpful requirements are mandated. Casino dealers will answer polite questions with respect to rules etc., (but simple questions to the dealer will broadcast to players that you are a novice and this could affect how others play against you). It is a good idea to be polite and also not to unfairly delay the game by taking a long time to decide on your bets. Do not show individual players your pocket cards, even after the hand is over, if you do there are rules that apply and you could be required to show the cards to all the players. Do not intentionally show your pocket cards when you are mucking them. There are other polite and ethical considerations that you will learn as you play but if you are trying to be fair, you will be forgiven the occasional faux pas. Do not worry too much about etiquette, as players will recognize that you are learning and will make helpful suggestions.

It is customary to tip the dealer when you win a pot. By watching the other players you can figure out the tipping etiquette. In limit games of \$1/\$2 or lower a usual tip would be 50 cents and for larger limit games one dollar is reasonable. In very large pots or very large limit games the expectation might be a couple of dollars.

Step 2 - Learning the Terminology

At the back of this text is a glossary of poker terms and definitions. Here are some of the more useful terms.

Holdem Terms

Pocket pair – When the hole cards are paired

Draw – When you have, counting the board, four suited cards and are hoping to ‘draw’ a fifth for a flush on the turn or river. Another example would be having four consecutive cards and hoping to draw a fifth for a straight on the turn or river.

Drawing hands – Players who are on a draw.

Made hands – This is a hand that is already completed and may win as is, such as a full house, three of a kind, two pair, etc. Many consider holdem to be a struggle between made hands and drawing hands.

Slow playing – This means that a player with a very good hand bets very small or simply checks in the hope others will bet for him and he can therefore deceive the others into thinking he has a mediocre hand. This play is very useful when there are aggressive bettors around the table.

Check /Raise – This is when a player checks his hand during betting and reraises after someone else bets. This usually is indicative of a very strong hand. Some experienced players claim that they have never seen a bluffer check/raise on the river. So be careful when you are check/raised on the river.

Back door or runner runner – This is when two cards are needed after the flop to complete your draw hand and they happen. An example would be having three hearts after the flop and the turn and river are hearts which complete your flush.

Early, middle and late position – This refers to seating with respect to betting. The first three to bet are early position bettors, the next three are considered middle and the last three are considered to be the late position. Unlike the others, prior to the flop, my card considers early to include the first 4 seats (or 5 in an eleven seat game), middle to be the next two seats and late to be the button and the player before the button.

Free card – This refers to the situation where someone has raised during a betting round in the hope that it will scare players into checking on the next round of betting resulting in the next card being dealt with no added money put into the pot – thus, a free look at the next card.

Heads up – When there are only two players remaining in the game.

Card odds, Pot odds and Implied odds – The holdem strategy card considers card odds to be the probability of completing your hand with the remaining cards to come and making it a hand with a chance to win. Pot odds are the ratio of the total in the pot to the amount of the bet. Implied pot odds refer to pot odds that include any bets likely to be made and therefore, should be added to the total in the pot at the time you are to bet. For instance, a good rule of thumb is that if you have a 10% chance of completing your hand, you should have pot odds plus implied bets of at least 1-9 (one chance in ten (1+9) of winning the pot) in order to stay in the game. This is an extremely important concept and more will be discussed about this later in this book.

Outs – This is the quantity of cards in the deck that will give you your needed made hand. For instance, a hand with an AA, wishing to improve to three of a kind has 2 outs (2 A's). A hand with, say, 5, 6, 7, 8 of hearts has 9 more of the suit to make a flush and 8 more cards that make a straight. The total outs

are $9 + 8 - 2 = 15$ outs. Two must be deducted because two of the hearts counted in the 9 were double counted (i.e. the 4 and 9 of hearts were counted both as flush outs and straight outs, a point often missed by novices).

Outside, inside straight draws – When a player has four consecutive cards, (such as 3, 4, 5, 6,) and needs a fifth to complete the straight and the fifth can be at the top or bottom of the four consecutive cards, this is an outside or “open ended” straight. If the four cards span a window of five positions, (such as where you have 3, 4, 6, 7, and a 5 is needed) then you need a card in the middle to complete the straight, this is an inside or “gut shot” straight draw. The difference is that an outside straight can be completed with 8 possible cards (called outs) whereas, a gut shot has only 4 outs.

Kicker – When you have an A (or other high card in your pocket), the other card is called the kicker. For instance, if you had K9 and someone else had a KJ, then his kicker to the K is the J, and is called a higher kicker and would win in a showdown. More money has been lost having a poor kicker since many players do not realize the importance of good kickers. This is why, on the holdem strategy card, an AX (where the X kicker = a nine or lower) is rated so low which seems to surprise many novices.

Limp – Players, who call the big blind without raising are called limpers.

Nuts – The best possible hand at that stage of the betting.

Overcard – A card that is higher in rank. For instance, if I had a pair of pocket K's and the flop had A, 9, 3, then, the A is an Overcard to my K's. Another example would be if my pocket cards were K9 and the flop is J, 9, 4, then the J is an overcard to my pair of 9's.

Tell – This is when you observe some idiosyncrasy of another player which gives a suggestion as to the strength of his hand. It may be visual, verbal or some other action.

Tilt – This is when a player has just won a good pot or was beaten by a lucky draw by an opponent causing him to change his normal betting strategy on the next hand or hands.

Under the gun – This is the player who is first to bet.

No foldem holdem – This is a table where no one seems to ever fold their pocket cards.

These are many of the very common terms you will run into but there are many less common ones which are identified in the glossary.

Step 3 – Learning the Betting

First let's consider a "structured" betting game. A standard structured limit game is when there is a small and big blind. The big blind bets a specified amount say \$1 in a \$1/\$2 limit game. The small blind puts up half of the big blind amount. The amount of the big blind is the betting amount pre-flop and after the flop. Betting after the turn card and river cards are in amounts equal to twice the big blind. Usually raises are stopped (capped) when the betting has reached four times the betting amount.

Pre-flop

After everyone has received their two down cards in the pocket, the pre-flop betting begins. The small blind and the big blind are to the left of the button (designated dealer) and since they both already have bets in (called the blinds), the player immediately to their left begins the betting. He may muck his cards, or call the blind by putting in an amount matching the big blind, or he may raise the blind by a matching amount. For instance, in a \$1/\$2 game, the big blind is \$1. He may call the \$1 by putting in \$1 or he may raise by putting in \$2. The next player must fold, call this \$2 by putting in \$2 or raise it to \$3. The next player and so on, has the same decisions to make. When the betting gets around to the small blind, he can muck his cards and lose the amount of the small blind or he can call all the bets or even raise. The betting would be capped at \$4, so no raises above this can be made by anyone. Then, the big blind must fold, call or raise. This continues until all players have either mucked or called the last raise.

Flop

Three cards are then placed face up after the pre-flop betting is concluded, the casino dealer places these three cards – face up – in the middle of the table. This is called the "flop." This initiates another round of betting. The betting begins this time with the player to the left of the "B". It may be the SB* if he is still in the game and he must make his choice of "checking" (i.e. no bet) or betting \$1 (the size of the original BB).

The next player to the left must then choose his options. If the first bettor has checked, then he may check. If there was a bet of \$1, he must match it ("call") or he can raise it two bets to \$2 or he can fold his cards. This continues until all participating players stop raising and have all called the bets. The 4 bet cap continues to apply throughout the hand.

*If the SB folded, pre-flop, the betting begins with the first player to the left of the button who is still active in the game.

Turn

A fourth card is placed beside the flop cards and betting begins again with the small blind first, if he has not mucked to this point. If he has, then the bet passes to the first live player to his left. This time, the bet amount is twice the big blind and would be \$2. This is followed by the usual betting around the table with a cap of \$8 (4 bets x \$2) until all have folded or called the last raise.

River

The river betting is the same routine as the others, with \$2 bets. Players may check, call, fold or raise. Upon betting completion, the cards are shown. The highest hand wins and all ten players plus the casino

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dealer may help identify the best hand even if it wasn't called by the player. In other words, the cards "speak for themselves."

The last raiser shows his pocket cards first. The next player to his left then shows his cards or mucks them so that he loses but doesn't have to show anyone what he was holding. If there is only one better on the river and all others drop out, this person wins and does not have to expose his pocket cards.

Step 4 – Learning Player Types

Significance of Player Types

There are many types and variations of players with varying strategies. It is very important to, at least, group them into categories. Each category requires you to adjust your betting strategy accordingly. For instance, you may not want to be aggressive against an aggressive player or perhaps you do, for certain types of aggressive players. The point is to know what type of player you are facing in order to assess his likely response and what this response is likely to indicate about his hand holding.

Loose vs. Tight

This book considers a player to be loose when he seldom folds before the flop and a tight player to be one who seldom participates pre-flop unless he has a premium holding.

Passive vs. Aggressive

This book considers a player to be passive when they seem to muck fairly frequently when faced with aggressive betting or do not seem to raise when raising would seem to be warranted. An aggressive player would be one who raises a lot whenever he decides to participate in a hand, almost regardless of his hand quality.

Player Typing

For our purposes, we are going to group players into one of five categories.

Loose/passive (L/P) – This category would be where a player regularly pays to see the flop in the hopes of improving, even with mediocre pocket cards. Thus, given this term because they are “loose” with their pre-flop betting. However, when faced with a raise or raises on any subsequent betting round, they seem to fold too often, given the quality of their hand. The suggested strategy here would be to aggressively bet against him both on the pre-flop and on the flop when bets are small in an attempt to have him fold. If he does not fold, you may be wise to be worried.

Loose/aggressive (L/A) – These, also, are players who regularly pay to see the flop in the hopes of improving even with the lower success pocket cards. Upon even the mildest of improvement they will bet aggressively hoping to reduce the player field so that they can steal the pot. They often may bet/bluff on the turn and river continuing to hope for others to fold. The strategic plan against these players is to play premium hands against them and to not be intimidated. Later, we define a “calling station” and if you become one of these, it will slow down L/A players from taking you on.

Tight/passive (T/P) – These players prefer to enter pre-flop betting only when they have top pocket cards. Thus given the name of being “tight” with their entry betting. When they do enter, they seem to back off in the face of aggressive betting during any subsequent betting rounds. A tight player is to be treated with respect for his pocket cards. You may wish to bet aggressively against a T/P on the flop to see if they muck (when they have not improved their hand by very much) or stay in (they don’t raise a lot) meaning they have good confidence in their holding – a sign that you may want to consider mucking. A T/P player betting aggressively is a fearsome thing and should be treated with a lot of respect.

Tight-aggressive – These players also only enter pre-flop play, to see the flop, whenever they have a very good pocket holding. When they do decide to enter, they bet aggressively. First, to clear the field of those who have weak cards and may have liked to stay in and get a lucky draw and secondly, to maximize the pot size, since they have a good chance of winning. T/A players are probably the most successful of all types. Think about it! – They wait for good hands before entering and create large pots to win. You would do well to be a T/A player. In any case, all other things being equal give the T/A player a lot of respect and make sure you also have a premium holding to take them on.

Maniac – This is a player who seems to be in every hand (loose) and bets extremely aggressively. He is very intimidating and seems to have the cards whenever you do call him later in the betting. If you raise, he raises back at you. A maniac is a formidable and unpredictable foe. Take him on when you have a premium hand and don't be intimidated. Raise right back at him. If he feels you are serious, he will usually back off. A check/raise (see glossary) will often cool his heels against you in future hands. (You should want to be on the left of the maniac. If you are on the left you can pick and choose when you want to take him on. If you are on the right, he gets to decide when to harass you with his betting.)

Table and Seating Choices

Tables also come in flavors. Some tables are very loose with five or more players always in to see the flop. Tighter tables would have three or less regularly in to see the flop. The significance of this is if it is a loose table you may wish to play tighter than usual because with so many players participating it is more likely someone will really "hit" the flop. Good hands are therefore often "run down" by lucky flops and turn cards improving someone's mediocre holding to a good hand. On the other hand, tighter tables may be best played by playing looser and increasing your choice of pocket cards that you use to enter the preflop betting. If you find you have better luck against tighter tables, then you should check tables out by watching their play and joining when it seems to be to your liking. If you are at a table that is not to your liking or through players leaving and entering, becomes a different type of table, then you can ask for a table change. Casinos and players have no problem with this request. It is often done and casino people are quite willing to accommodate you.

After you have selected your table, whether loose or tight, then you should consider your seating choice. My suggestion is to first look at the sizes of the table stakes in front of each player. Since money tends to flow to the left, (this concept will be discussed later) sitting on the left of a big stake is often helpful. I believe you should sit to the close left of maniacs and T/A players. This allows you to make decisions after they have bet. I do not like to make bets in front of them, since I may be trapped with an average holding when they raise.

You can improve your sitting by simply informing the casino dealer that you wish a particular seat, when it becomes available. They have no problem with this request and you will then have preference over new players entering the game. The casino dealer will, also, offer any open seat when a player leaves first to the existing players. But, if you have not asked for it in advance, you might not speak up in time before another existing player grabs it.

If you notice that there are two or three excellent players at the table, this does not mean you are necessarily at a disadvantage. What you need to offset this are two or three bad players. Simply confront the bad players more often than the good players.

Incorporating player ID types into your betting strategy

The strategy card which you are going to learn to use has a strategy that is based on you being a T/A player at a normal table. However, table variation may warrant slight changes to this strategy. BEWARE!! Adjusting strategy away from this card can come at quite a risk. Do not adjust your strategy lightly.

After having said this, there are some situations where you may want to make slight adjustments.

PLAYERS	STRATEGY ADJUSTMENT
Loose	Tighten up and play slightly better pocket cards than usual.
Tight	Loosen up and play some marginally decent pocket cards
Passive	Raise more on the pre-flop and on the flop when the bet size is smaller in order to have more potential opponents fold.
Aggressive	Play only premium cards and play them aggressively. Be a calling station unless you are 90% certain you are beat and your opponent is not likely to fold.

These suggestions are consistent with what you should do when the table is also loose, tight, passive or aggressive.

Hiding Your Own Player ID Type

In order not to be predictable, you should vary your play occasionally. For instance, bluff occasionally if you are considered a tight player. Make sure, where possible, that the other players see your down cards to know that you bluffed. The point is to have them know what you did. If you bet aggressively, then try a “slow play” a time or two. “Slow playing” is checking or calling instead of raising with a premium hand. Again, you want others to be aware of what you did. Another example would be to play hard with an ace and small or an inside straight, neither of which have good winning chances, although, you could get extremely lucky. This very loose play also must be shown to the other players. If you do any of these, you will be considered unpredictable which is a good situation. However, do not do this very often – it hurts your bankroll and besides, the majority of low limit players have no idea whether you are playing loose or passive or anything else. So why change their perception of you when they simply don’t have one.

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Please go to <http://www.HoldemStrategyCharts.com> to purchase the book or eBook “10 Steps To Winning Texas Hold'em”.

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Hold'em Strategy Charts specializes in Texas Hold'em Poker Strategy guides. Our guides are based on a multi-year research project by Dr. W. Forbes Cavanagh, a University Professor and an avid poker player, specializing in Statistics and Quantitative Methods. We employ various complex statistics to determine the optimum strategy for each hand while playing Texas Hold'Em Poker. Whether you are experienced or a novice looking for tips on learning to play, these guides will be an asset to you.

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