

A Guide to Texas Hold'em Poker

Please note that this is not a full guide to playing Texas Hold'em but covers just enough that you won't be baffled.

Here's how it's played:

1. The two players to the left of the dealer put out **blind bets** (see below).
The player directly to the dealer's left puts out the small blind while the player two to the dealer's left puts out the big blind.
2. Every player is dealt two cards, face down. These are called hole or pocket cards.
3. The action (the first move) falls on the player to the left of the big blind.
He can either: call the bet, raise it, or fold (see below for more detail on betting).
Betting continues around the table, clockwise.
4. After the betting is completed, three cards are dealt face up in the centre of the table.
The first three cards in Texas Hold'em are called the Flop. These cards are "community cards" meaning everyone will use them in combination with their own hole cards to make the best hand.
5. From the flop on, betting begins with the player to the dealer's left, who can check or bet.
6. A fourth card is dealt face up onto the board. This is called the Turn card.
7. Another round of betting.
8. The final card is dealt face up. This card is called the River.
9. A final round of betting occurs. The remaining players show their cards and the person who can make the best five card hand (by combining their pocket cards with the cards on the board) wins.

Note: It is very possible for there to be a tie; in this case the winners split the pot.

Note: In some rare cases the five cards making up the board will actually be the best hand, in which case everyone left in the hand divides up the pot.

About Blinds

In Texas Hold'em the action is started by making the two players to the left of the dealer put in a forced bet, called a "blind" before the deal. It's called a blind because you haven't seen a card when you put in this bet -- you're going in without seeing, or blind.

The player immediately to the dealer's left places a small bet called the "small blind," while the player two places to the left puts in the "big blind."

Usually the "big blind" is equal to the smallest bet possible, while the small blind is ½ that amount.

So, if the minimum bet was 2 chips, the big blind would place a forced bet of 2 chips and the little blind would put out 1 chip.

About Betting

Let's look at how a round of betting goes.

When you're the first to act there are two things you can do: **check** (pass the bet) or you can **bet**. Let's say you bet.

The next player (the one sitting on your left) can do three things: he can **call** or see your bet, which means he matches it exactly; he can **raise** the bet; or he can give up on his hand and **fold**.

This continues from player to player going around to the left. If someone raises a bet you made, when it comes back to you, you have the same options as everyone else: call, raise, or fold.

The round of betting is over when everyone simply calls the last bet and all the players (who haven't folded) have put in the **same amount** of money.

A round of betting can also be "checked around" – meaning everyone checks and there's no money put in the pot that round. There is no checking in the first round because the blind bets force everyone to either bet or fold.

Poker Odds by Hand

It's useful to have a very rough idea of what the relative frequencies of the various poker hands are.

Poker Hand	Number of Ways the Hand can be Made	Odds of Getting the Hand in 5 Cards
Royal Flush	4	1 in 649,740
Straight Flush	36	1 in 72,193
Four of a Kind	624	1 in 4,165
Full House	3,744	1 in 694
Flush	5,108	1 in 508
Straight	10,200	1 in 254
Three of a Kind	54,912	1 in 47
Two Pairs	123,552	1 in 21
One Pair	1,098,240	1 in 2.4
No Pair Hand	1,302,540	1 in 2.0

Ranking of Poker Hands

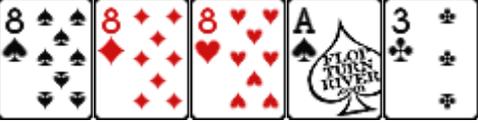
Poker is played with a standard deck of 52 playing cards.

The cards are ranked from high to low in the following order: Ace, King, Queen, Jack, 10, 9, ..., 2. Aces (which are always high) are worth more than Kings which are worth more than Queens etc.

The cards are also separated into the four normal suits and no suit is more valuable than another.

If you fancy some practice reading the board and which hand beats which take the quiz at:

http://poker.about.com/library/hands_quiz/bl_hands_quiz.htm

	<p>Royal Flush The five highest cards, the 10 through the Ace, all five of the same suit. A royal flush is actually an ace-high straight flush. Which suit it is doesn't matter. Two people with royal flushes would tie.</p>
	<p>Straight Flush A Straight Flush is comprised of five cards in numerical order, all of the same suit. It's not allowed to "wrap around," such as Q-K-A-2-3.</p>
	<p>Four of a Kind Four cards of the same denomination, the fifth card is irrelevant.</p>
	<p>Full House Any three cards of the same denomination, plus any pair of a different denomination. Ties are broken by the three of a kind.</p>
	<p>Flush Any five non-consecutive cards of the same suit. In a tie, whoever has the highest ranking card wins.</p>
	<p>Straight Any five consecutive cards of mixed suits. Ace can be high or low but a Straight cannot "wrap around." In a tie, whoever's Straight goes to a higher ranking card wins.</p>
	<p>Three of a Kind Three cards of the same denomination. Our example displays three of a kind, eights.</p>
	<p>Two Pair Any two cards of the same denomination, plus any other two cards of the same denomination. If both hands have the same high pair, the second pair wins. If both pairs tie, the high card wins.</p>
	<p>Pair Any two cards of the same denomination. Our example displays a pair of queens. In a tie, the high card wins.</p>
	<p>High Card If no other hand is achieved, the highest card held wins. In our example, the ace of hearts is the high card. In the case of a tie, you move to the next highest card, and continue.</p>

Poker Etiquette

Whether you're playing at a home game or in a casino, there is basic poker etiquette that any player should know and follow. These basic poker rules of good behaviour make sure the game is fair and runs smoothly, no matter what kind of game you're playing.

1. Don't Play Out of Turn

While you may be so excited about how good your hand is you can hardly wait to raise the pot, you have to wait until it's your turn to do so. Same goes for folding hands you can't wait to get away from. If you jump the gun, it gives other players information they shouldn't have before they make their own decision and can confuse the action.

2. Don't Talk About Your Cards While the Hand is Still Going On

Once you've folded, it's tempting to chat about what would have happened if you had stayed in, but if anyone who's still in the hand hears, it'll give them information that they might use to their advantage. For instance, if you had a 7-2 as your pocket cards in Hold'em and the flop comes 7-7-2, if you blurt out that you would have had a full house, everyone will know that it's unlikely that any player still in the hand has the full house, making it hard to bluff and represent that hand.

3. Don't Show Your Cards (Until the Showdown)

When you fold, make sure you don't flash or flip over your cards as you toss them into the muck. Again, if players know what you fold, it'll give them information that may change how the rest of the hand plays out. Unless you are all-in and heads up, there is no reason to show or expose your cards until the showdown.

4. Don't Splash the Pot

There are two bad betting habits that you see a lot in the movies which are no-nos in real life. The first is when a player tosses his bet in a big mess in the centre of the pot. That's called **Splashing the Pot**, and it makes it hard to tell how much you've bet. A better way is just to stack your chips neatly in front of you to bet.

5. Don't Make String Bets

The second bad habit from movies is the **string bet**, which is when a player goes "I'll call your 500.... and raise another 1000!"

You have to declare whether you're simply calling or raising right away -- once you say "call," that's all you can do. If you're going to raise, say raise and the amount right away. This is especially important in casinos.

6. If You Show One, Show All

If you win a hand before the showdown but want to show your cards anyway, you can't just show them to the one player to your left or right, you have to turn them up for the whole table to see. After all, why should only the lucky players next to you get to know what you were holding?

7. You can't borrow or add chips during a hand

If you run out of money during a hand you are not allowed to borrow from other players or add to your stack during that hand, only between hands.