

Pre-Flop Hand Categories

Introduction

In this Article

- Pre-Flop overview of the different [hand](#) categories and how to play them
-

Pocket Pairs

Big Pairs (AA-TT)

High Pocket Pairs are the hands with the highest [value](#) in Texas Hold'em. This counts for all types of the game, be it [shorthanded](#) or in multiway pots at [full-ring](#) tables, be it in [passive](#) or [aggressive](#) games. If there are only one or two players in the hand, you will be able to win even [unimproved](#) with big pairs. The more players see the flop, the less the chance of winning the hand unimproved. If the [pair](#) improves to a [set](#) or a full house, you will be able to win big pots. A high pocket pair does not give your opponents the opportunity to beat you with typical overcards. If you have pocket aces, no overcards are possible at all. Thus, the strength of a pocket pair equals the value of its cards. The best hands, AA and KK, are also known as monsters. With this kind of hand you should [cap](#) pre-flop if possible. QQ should also be capped, referring to the starting hands chart. You should be more cautious if you hold JJ or TT. If someone already 3-bet preflop, you should be aware that you might be [dominated](#) by a higher pocket pair. But these kinds of hands should be raised, too, because of their [equity edge](#) against random starting hands as long as no one raised before.

Medium Pairs (99-77)

Medium pocket pairs have a higher-than-average profit in long term. You will win against one or two players quite often even unimproved. This especially counts if you know that your opponents play with [weak](#) hands smaller than your pocket pair.

In multiway pots with lots of players, medium pairs are also profitable. In this case, you customarily need a set to stay in the hand post-flop. If there are many players who see the [flop](#) and you improve your hand to a set, loose-aggressive opponents are the type of players you want to play against. Their looseness guarantees that they play with bad hands and their aggression ensures frequent betting and raising with one pair hands and overcards. With a set or a full house, you are able to win huge pots in loose-aggressive games.

Medium pairs should be played as written in the open raising chart. Open limping is possible from early position, but it is best if several [loose](#) opponents [limp](#) in so you get good implied [odds](#). From middle position, you should [raise](#) these hands if you are first in. If only one player limped in, you should try to make an isolation raise. You try to force the blinds to [fold](#) which will bring dead money in the [pot](#). If you play heads-up, you will be ahead with such hands in most cases. If several players have already limped in, you should do so as well because you have fewer chances to win

unimproved.

Small Pairs (66-22)

The smaller the pocket pair, the smaller the chance of winning unimproved, even against a small number of opponents. With small pocket pairs, you usually hope to make a set or full house on the flop to win a large pot. Small pocket pairs work best in loose games, because many opponents on the flop guarantee good implied odds. You make your set 12% of the time. If you did not improve your hand on the flop, you should fold it to a [bet](#) in multiway pots.

Usually you should keep the investment as small as possible (an exception can be [blind](#) stealing according to the open raise chart). You should limp in with small pairs if 2 players already limped in. If 3 or more people are in the hand, you are able to play small pairs even if you have to invest 2 small bets.

[Suited](#) Cards

Big suited Broadways (AKs-ATs, KQs, KJs)

Big suited Broadways are the strongest non-pair hands, hierarchically coming second to the big pairs (AKs has a higher [EV](#) than TT). In many cases you will hit top [pair](#) with a very good [kicker](#). These hands also have very good [flush draw value](#) and decent [straight](#) draw value.

Big suited Broadways are excellent starting hands under all circumstances. In unraised pots you should [raise](#) these hands pre-flop because of their [equity edge](#). If there has been a raise and you face only one opponent, you have to decide between raise or [fold](#). You should use the extended pre-flop strategy for advanced players to help with this decision. If there are many people in the hand, cold calls with big suited [connectors](#) might be profitable.

Little suited Broadways (KTs, QJs, QTs, JTs)

These hole cards are very powerful in [loose](#) games in particular. If there are players who [limp](#) in with [weak](#) hands, you also have an equity edge. However, there is a chance of getting [dominated](#) when you hit top pair on the [flop](#).

Note: These hands have their best value in multiway pots because they have less top pair power, but a higher chance to [complete](#) to a straight with pretty much the same flush chances.

Medium & Small Suited Aces (A9s-A2s)

Suited aces are – especially in low [limit](#) games at PartyPoker (loose games) – very good starting hands. They have some high card strength and very good nut flush draw power. In loose games you might be able to get your nut flush paid off on the [turn](#) or [river](#). But you should be cautious if you make top pair with aces. There is a high chance of being dominated by an ace with some better kicker.

The kicker is very important for suited aces. So A9s has much more power than A2s. A nine will be the best kicker in most cases, while a two never is. Furthermore, you have a good chance to win

with a pair of nines (they might be top pair). A pair of twos also has very little value. Especially inexperienced players prefer A5s-A2s because of there [wheel](#) opportunity. A wheel is the lowest possible straight from A-5. Researches on this matter have shown that A5s is a little bit better than A6s. In all other cases the [hand](#) with the better kicker is more profitable.

Suited aces display their power in multiway pots with loose opponents who limp in with very weak hands in general. Medium aces (A9s-A7s) can be raised from late position according to the starting hands chart. With smaller aces you should just limp in if there are already several opponents in the hand. Suited aces are also perfect to steal the blinds (take a look on the open raising chart). An ace gives you the best hand pre-flop in most likeliness. If you have only one or two opponents left on the flop, it is possible to “buy” the [pot](#) with a continuation [bet](#) if your opponents didn’t hit anything. If the pot has been raised, medium and small suited aces are unplayable outside of the blinds (domination).

Suited Kings & Suited Queens (K9s-K2s, Q9s-Q2s)

These are relatively [weak](#) and speculative hands. Outside of the blinds, these hands are only playable from late position with several limpers. Their [value](#) is the chance of a [flush](#). If you make top pair, there is a huge chance of being [dominated](#). These hands are weaker compared to suited aces, because you will not win with a [pair](#) of kings or queens that often.

There is the possibility of losing a flush to a nut flush, but this is very uncommon. Because of their flush potential, these hands are perfect for [blind](#) defense.

Suited Connectors & Suited One-Gappers (T9s-54s, J9s-64s)

These hands are mere speculative hands without any [high-card](#) strength. They do have good [straight](#) and flush value, though. These hands are very profitable in loose-passive games, because you will hit relatively weak draws on the [flop](#) quite often. In [aggressive](#) games, you will not be able to get the [odds](#) to proceed with these hands. But, in [passive](#) games, the opponents frequently provide you with free cards.

These hands are only playable from late position (or the blinds) with several limpers. You should pay at most 1 SB to see the flop.

Suited Trash (all other suited starting hands)

All other hands are called suited trash. You should never play these hands unless you are in the big blind. They are not strong enough to be played profitably in the long [run](#). Nevertheless, your [loose](#) opponents at PartyPoker will do so.

Offsuit Cards

Big Ofsuit Broadway (AKo; AQo, AJo, KQo)

Big aces and KQ are the best offsuit starting hands. They will often improve to top pair and will win a lot of small and medium pots. Thus, offsuited hands have a little less value than their suited relatives.

Because of their high card strength, they are strong and profitable in the long run. They should

generally be raised in unraised pots. If the [pot](#) is raised already, you have to evaluate your chances to win the [hand](#) (opponent evaluation). This means [fold](#) or [reraise](#).

Little Offsuit Broadway (ATo, KJo, KTo, QJo, QTo, JTo)

These are only slightly profitable. They should be folded from EP and early-MP. In late position against loose opponents they certainly have some value. You should be very cautious and analyze which players have limped in. If for example a [rock](#) limps in from EP, you should be aware that you might be dominated. They have [top-pair](#) qualities, but don't have a very strong [kicker](#). QJo for example gives your opponents overcard draws in many cases.

Offsuit Trash (all other offsuit starting hands)

All other offsuit hands are too weak to invest any money.

Exception: You might steal the blinds with offsuited aces from LP. Take a look at the open [raise](#) chart for this matter.

Sources:

Small [Stakes](#) Hold'em

Ed Miller, David Sklansky, Mason Malmuth; USA 2004

Weighing the Odds in Hold'em [Poker](#)

King Yao; USA 2005

Post-flop: How to Play Made Hands on the Flop

Introduction

In this article

- *How to choose the right [line](#) on the [flop](#)*
- *How to determine the strength of your [hand](#)*
- *Individual hand categories in detail*

The flop is, without question, a decisive moment in a [poker](#) hand. You need to estimate your hand's strength as accurately as possible in order to make the correct decisions afterwards.

You can either have a made hand, a draw, or absolutely nothing once the flop has been revealed. We won't bother discussing trash hands, since there isn't much to say other than, "fold."

You don't want to just [fold](#) when you have a made hand or a [draw](#). But you can't know how to play

such a hand if you don't know exactly how strong it is and where you stand with it.

We will start by discussing how to play made hands after the flop. Drawing hands will be [covered](#) in their own article, which can be found here: [➡ How do You Play Draws on the Flop?](#)

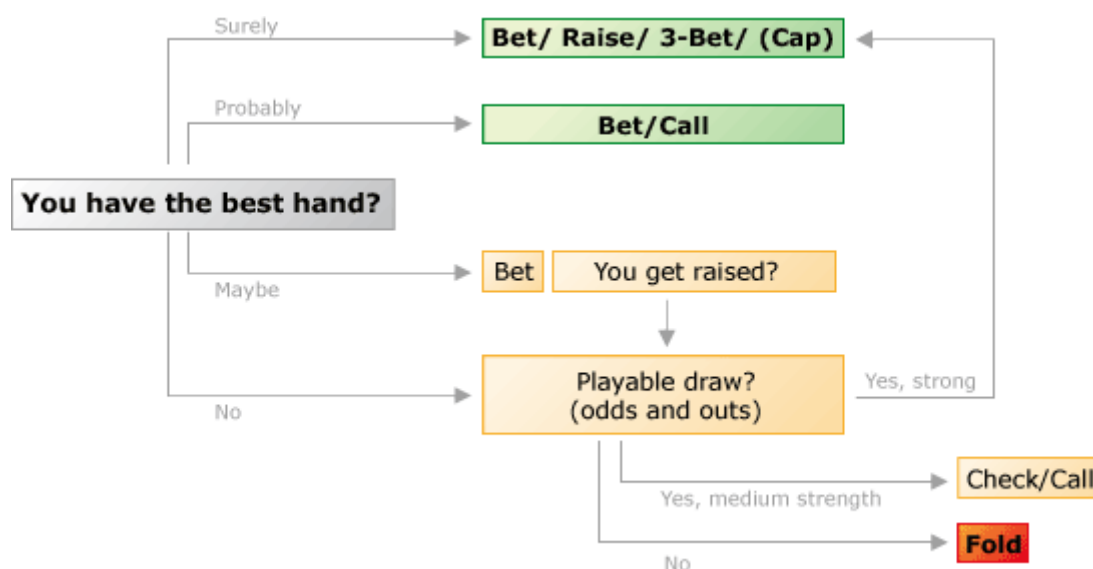
A made hand is a hand that has real [showdown](#) value, meaning it is strong enough to win a showdown. K high can even be a made hand in theory, since it beats Q high and all weaker hands, but overcards are generally treated as drawing hands.

A lot of [weak](#) made hands like bottom/middle [pair](#) are also often seen as drawing hands on the flop. They can, however, have showdown [value](#) when you are facing weak opponents.

The strength of a hand depends on a number of factors. In other words, you can't play every hand the same way in every situation. There are a number of factors to be analyzed before you make your decision.

Which line should you play?

Before you make your decision on the flop, ask likely you are to have the best hand in the present situation. The following chart shows you how to then decide on the best line:



Your decision on the flop is based on how likely you think you are to have the best hand.

- **Certain:** You have a very strong hand. You [bet](#) and [raise](#) all the way to the [cap](#) to get as much money in to the [pot](#) as possible.
- **Fairly certain:** You have a strong hand. You bet and raise to protect your hand. You will usually just [call](#) when someone raises behind you in order to induce bluffs. If, however, the flop is draw heavy and you can protect your hand with a raise, you raise.
- **Possible:** You have a weak/medium strength hand that could be ahead but is probably already beaten. You bet to find out where you stand with your hand and to protect in case you are ahead. If a player raises behind you, you continue playing according to [odds](#) and [outs](#).
- **Very unlikely:** You don't have a made hand. You evaluate your draw and play according to odds and outs. You can read more in this article: [How to Play Drawing Hands on the Flop?](#)

When choosing your line, keep in mind that there are exactly two reasons to invest money:

- **You are favored to win:** You are certain that you have the best hand and bet (for value and/or [protection](#)).
- **Your opponents are likely to fold:** You don't think you are likely to have the best hand, but you do think your opponents are likely to fold to a raise.

How do you determine the strength of your hand?

The strength of a made [hand](#) depends mainly on the following factors:

- Your hand (hand ranking)
- The number of opponents in the hand
- The pre-flop action
- The [flop](#) texture
 - The probability that you have the best hand
 - Your [outs](#) (when you think you are behind)
 - Your opponents' outs (when you think you are ahead)

WHAT DO YOU HAVE?

The first way you judge the strength of a [poker](#) hand is by looking at the hand ranking. A [flush](#) is better than a [straight](#) or two [pair](#) by definition.

If you have a made flush on the flop, you are probably ahead. The higher your flush, the less likely that an opponent will have a better flush. The nut flush can only be beaten by a full house or better (which you shouldn't exactly expect to see in most cases).

HOW MANY OPPONENTS ARE YOU FACING?

The relative strength of your hand increases when fewer opponents are involved in the hand and decreases when several opponents are involved in the hand.

Top pair is a strong hand against a single opponent, but it's pretty [weak](#) against 7. It's simply much more likely that someone has hit a better hand or will catch up by the [river](#) when more players are in the hand.

WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE THE FLOP?

The pre-flop action is a strong indicator of the type of hand you may be up against. An early position [raise](#) before the flop is almost always a sign of a big ace or a big pocket pair. The [odds](#) of running into such a good hand are obviously much lower in a [blind](#) steal situation or after a flop [bet](#) in a big multiway [pot](#) (7 handed), because the hand ranges are much broader in such situations.

HOW IS THE FLOP TEXTURE?

The strength of your hand depends just as much on the cards in the flop. Top pair is much less vulnerable on a rainbow flop than a (single) [suited](#) flop.

Here are a few criteria to use when analyzing the strength of your hand on the flop:

How likely are you to have the best hand?

The probability of a certain hand (for example, top pair) being the best hand varies from flop to flop. Sometimes it will be the best hand and sometimes it will be behind.

How many outs do you have?

If you are behind, the strength of your hand depends on the number of outs that you have.

For example, top pair with a 2 card flush [draw](#) gives you an advantage when you are behind; there are a lot of outs you could hit on the [turn](#) or river for the best hand.

A [gutshot](#) or a backdoor flush draw make a made hand better. Bottom pair even has outs for two pair or trips, or could end up beating a straight or a flush by turning into a full house.

How many outs do your opponents have?

You obviously don't want your opponents to have many outs against you. You might have the best hand on the flop, but there are quite a few hands that could catch up by the river.

In order to estimate how many outs your opponents have against you, you need to analyze the flop. Your hand is obviously vulnerable on a draw heavy [board](#).

| | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| Draw heavy: |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Dry: |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

You should play top pair aggressively on a draw heavy board to protect against any draws. You want to make the next card too expensive for your opponent to see.

When you bet ...

- ... you can get your opponents to [fold](#). This is good, since this prevents them from completing a draw.
- ... you make your opponents pay. This is good, since you are ahead at the moment, which means any money entering the pot gives you more [value](#) for your hand. Your goal is to give your opponents bad odds, so that any money they invest is a loss and money in your pocket.
- ... you don't let anyone see a free card. Your aggression on the flop is usually followed by more aggression on the turn - you're not giving anything away for free.

Depending on the number of outs your opponents have against you, your hand is said to either be robust (there are few outs against you) or vulnerable (there are a lot of outs against you).

How do you play your hand?

This section will look at the different types of hands you can have on the [flop](#) and the best way to play a given [hand](#) on the flop.

We'll start with a short summary of the different hand categories. You can then see how likely you are to have the best hand and what [line](#) you should choose on the flop.



How to play your hand on the flop

| Hand | Do you have the best hand? | Line |
|---|---|--|
| Monster, set, three-of-a-kind, two pair | (Almost) always | Bet / Cap |
| Top pair (with or without draws) | Usually | Bet / 3-Bet |
| Middle pair (with or without Draws) | Against 2 opponents: usually. Against 3+: rarely. | Bet / Call (Fold) |
| Low pair (with or without draws) | Rarely | Against 1 opponent: bet, otherwise check / fold (call) |

These are, of course, only guidelines. A look at the chart only shows you how strong your hand is on average. You always have to take factors like the flop texture, pre-flop action, and the type and number of opponents in the hand into account when making your decision.

We will now take a look at how to play specific hands on the flop.

How do you play straights or better?

These hands are usually *the monster* hand on the flop. There is absolutely no reason why you should not continue playing. You want to see as much money enter the [pot](#) as possible, so you [raise](#) to the cap. The only time you don't play such a hand extremely aggressively is when the flop is single [suited](#).

With a [straight](#) or better, you aren't really concerned about the number of opponents in the hand - the more, the merrier. Your opponents will rarely have (any) [outs](#) against you and could already be drawing dead.

How do you play two pair and three-of-a-kind?

You will almost always have the best hand on the flop; your goal should be building up a large pot. Bet/raise to the cap. If the pot has already reached a substantial size on the flop, you will need to protect your hand. Make your opponents pay for their [weak](#) hands and draws so you can take down a big pot.

You can think about slowplaying your hand when the pot is small, the flop dry, and you have (an) [aggressive](#) opponent(s) behind you. Your opponents will rarely have outs against you on a dry flop, but a [flush](#) or straight [draw](#) could be out there when the flop is draw heavy.

With trips or a set, you have 7 undiscounted outs from the flop to the turn, and 10 from the [turn](#) to the [river](#). Two pair gives you 4 outs against a straight or a flush.

Although you will almost always have the best hand on the flop, there are few things to keep in mind:

- A [set](#) is stronger than trips. It's not as easy for your opponents to spot a set as it is to spot trips, and a set always beats trips (since you will have a full house if you hit a set and someone else hits trips).
- One two pair isn't just as good as another two pair. Top two pair is more robust than bottom two pair in a multiway pot. You can also [run](#) into trouble when the [board](#) pairs the card you are not using.

How do you play top pairs and overpairs?

A top [pair](#) or [overpair](#) on the [flop](#) usually gives you the best [hand](#). You should definitely bet/raise, first and foremost to protect your hand. You'll have to reevaluate your hand based on the action and start playing passively if you think you might be behind.

This hand is a lot easier for your opponents to beat. The strength of a top pair or overpair can [range](#) from marginal to very strong, depending on the overall constellation of the hand.

Your pair loses strength when ...

- ... there are more opponents in the hand
- ... the flop is [draw](#) heavy
- ... your pair is low
- ... your [kicker](#) for top pair is [weak](#)

If you are facing several opponents on a draw heavy board, there are probably a lot of [outs](#) against you. You might even already be behind. You will be drawing dead if your opponent completes a [flush](#) or a [straight](#) on the [turn](#). Protecting your hand is very important.

If you have a low top pair or overpair, there are a lot of cards that could kill your hand on the turn. You need to [bet](#) to protect against overcard outs.

You'll have to see yourself behind when you have a weak kicker and other top pairs or overpairs are likely to be out there (for example, you bet and an opponent raises behind).

How do you play middle pairs?

You can see yourself ahead fairly often when facing less than 3 opponents, but you're probably behind when several opponents are in the [hand](#). Your goal should be protecting your hand when there are few opponents in the [pot](#) and finding out where you stand when several opponents are in the hand.

If your opponent(s) check(s) to you, you [bet](#) as long as no one else has the [initiative](#). You'll have to see yourself behind if you get raised with more than two opponents in the pot and will only be able to continue to play according to [odds](#) and [outs](#). A [raise](#) is more likely to be a [bluff](#) when there are only 1-2 opponents in the hand, which is why you would then [call](#).

You'll have to see yourself behind if a player bets into you with more than 2 opponents in the hand. With 1-2 opponents in the hand, you would raise to protect your hand. Once again, it is also more likely that your opponent is bluffing, since he will not be likely to have hit the [flop](#) and will only be facing 2 opponents himself.

If you are ahead, your opponents could have a number of outs against you. Since you yourself only have middle pair, you are very likely up against overcards. A [draw](#) heavy flop could give your opponents quite a few chances to beat you.

If you see yourself behind, you do have outs for two pair/trips (of course, this won't help much when facing straight/flush draws). This gives you 5 outs, assuming they are clean. You can make an easy call on the flop and see if you improve on the [turn](#).

How do you play bottom pairs?

You can rarely see yourself ahead with bottom [pair](#) when facing more than one opponent. Your goal, when facing 1 opponent, is to protect your hand and buy the pot. If he checks, you bet. If he bets, you can call, since he might be bluffing. If he bets again on the turn you will probably have to [fold](#).

There's little to be won with bottom pair in a multiway pot. You can only [check](#) and play according to odds and outs. You can count your outs on a bottom pair as you would a middle pair (the same goes for estimating the number of outs against you). Just keep in mind you are almost guaranteed to up against overcards (at the least). There is no real need to protect, however, since you don't see yourself ahead most of the time.

Conclusion

This article should have given you a better understanding of how to play made hands on the flop. You now know how to determine the strength of your hand based on various factors, such as the pre-flop action, flop texture and number of opponents in the hand. You also learned how to choose the best [line](#) on the flop.

You also learned why you should play a certain line and when you should make an exception. Your general goals are protecting your hand and increasing the size of the pot - the trick is always finding the right balance. When you have a monster, your main concern is building up a large pot. A hand like top pair needs protection, and a hand like bottom pair can usually only be played according to odds and outs.

Post-flop: How do You Play Draws on the Flop?

Introduction

In this article

- *How to determine the strength of a [draw](#)*
- *When to play aggressively and when to play passively*
- *Why a semi-bluff must generate [fold equity](#)*
- *How to adjust your game based on the number of opponents in the [hand](#)*

The [flop](#) is, without question, a decisive moment in a [poker](#) hand. You need to estimate your hand's strength as accurately as possible in order to make the correct decisions on the later streets.

You can either have a made hand, a draw, or absolutely nothing once the flop has been revealed. We won't bother discussing trash hands, since there isn't much to say other than, "fold."

You don't want to just fold when you have a made hand or a draw. But you can't know how to play such a hand if you don't know exactly how strong it is and where you stand with it.

This article will [deal](#) with post-flop play when you have a drawing hand. Be sure to also [read](#) the article: [How do You Play Made Hands on the Flop?](#)

The strength of a drawing hand depends on the number of *discounted/modified* [outs](#) you have. You must discount your outs appropriately in order to be able to choose the right [line](#) on (and after) the flop.

If you aren't sure what is meant by '[odds](#) and outs', or if you need to freshen up before continuing with this article, you can take a look at the article on the [Mathematics of Poker](#)

The following factors play a key role in determining the strength of your hand:

- The [board](#) texture
- The number of opponents you are facing and their playing style
- Your position
- Your opponents' actions

What exactly do these factors mean?

WHAT IS THE BOARD TEXTURE?

The cards on the board [tell](#) you a lot about the strength of a draw. What other draws/made hands have outs against you (for example, a better [straight](#) draw, or a [set](#) that could [turn](#) into a full house)? Would any of your outs give your opponent an even better hand?

REVERSE IMPLIED ODDS

Reverse implied odds are the opposite of implied odds that take possible future losses into account.

Assume you have an OESD, but an opponent could also have a [flush](#) draw. You may not be able to count on two of your outs for the straight, since they would [complete](#) your opponent's flush as well.

You have to discount your [OESD](#) outs heavily when the board is single [suited](#). Too much action from your opponents may even be a sign that you are already *drawing dead* against a completed flush.

This is a situation in which reverse implied odds come into play. Reverse implied odds are reduced [pot](#) odds that include future losses that could occur if an opponent has or gets the upper hand. Your reverse implied odds are higher when your opponent has a strong draw or good chances of improving his hand by the river, since you are then less likely to have the best hand at the showdown, even if you complete your draw.

HOW MANY OPPONENTS ARE IN THE HAND AND HOW ARE THEY PLAYING?

The number of opponents you are facing, as well as their playing style (tight, loose, aggressive, [passive](#)) also determine how you can continue playing your hand. You can play more aggressively against a [tight](#) opponent, since he will be more likely to fold his hand than a calling station. You will also have a hard time making your opponents fold when there are three or more of them in the hand.

WHAT IS YOUR POSITION?

Your post-flop actions (and options) depend on your position relative to your opponents. For example, you can [raise](#) for a free card ([bet](#) flop, [check](#) behind turn) when you are in position, but will have a hard time doing so when out of position, since your opponent will always get to have

the last say.

WHAT HAVE YOUR OPPONENTS DONE SO FAR?

Your opponents' actions give you information on the strength of their hands. They also tell you how many of your outs are clean and whether or not you can give yourself implied odds. You have higher implied odds against a set than against top [pair](#) when you have a flush draw, for example, even though the danger of your opponent redrawing for a full house is higher.

SUMMARY

The main questions you should ask yourself - even when you aren't on a draw - are:

- What do I have?
- Which cards are on the board?
- Who are my opponents?
- What position am I in?
- What have my opponents done so far?

When should you play aggressively/passively?

You can play a [draw](#) either one of two ways:

- Aggressively - You want to make your opponents [fold](#) and get as much into the [pot](#) as you can (you have decent pot [equity](#)) when you have a strong draw.
- Passively - You wait for your draw to [complete](#) before showing any aggression.

Choosing the correct way to play your draw depends on a number of factors, including those we just discussed in the previous section. You will usually end up playing a mix of [passive](#) and [aggressive](#) play.

PLAYING AGGRESSIVELY

You should play your draw aggressively when you can generate fold equity against a better [hand](#) and when you have high pot equity (a strong draw).

Always pay attention to the [bet](#) size : pot size ratio. A semi-bluff (a bet made with a draw) needs to work more often, meaning your opponents fold to your bet, when the pot is smaller in order to be profitable.

You can learn more about the mathematical formulas behind fold equity and semi-bluffs in the article on [Semi-bluffs](#).

PLAYING PASSIVELY

You should play your draw passively when ...

- you can't [bluff](#) your opponent
- you can't generate much fold equity with aggression
- you can expect higher implied [odds](#) by playing passively
- your pot equity is low and you want to stay in the hand as cheaply as possible.

WHAT IS FOLD EQUITY?

Before we dive into post-flop play, we will take a quick look at the factors that influence the amount of fold equity you can generate.

Your fold equity decreases when ...

- more players are in the hand
- a [maniac](#) with a high WTS is in the hand
- a calling station with a high WTS is in the hand
- a [rock](#) is playing aggressively
- one or more players have indicated strong hands (pocket pair, AK) by capping before the [flop](#)
- one or more players plays the flop aggressively (for example, bet/3-bet), which indicates either a strong draw or a set/two [pair](#)

Your fold equity increases when ...

- you are only facing one or two opponents
- both opponents only limped/completed
- you raised before the flop and have [initiative](#)
- the [board](#) is scary (high cards, possible draws)
- you are facing an opponent with a low WTS
- an opponent in late position, who has a number of weaker hands in his [raise range](#) ([blind](#) battle), shows aggression

How do you play heads up?

Always ask yourself the following two questions when you are heads up:

- Do I have [showdown](#) value?
- Can I make my opponent [fold](#) a better hand?

WHEN SHOULD YOU PLAY AGGRESSIVELY?

You can play a [draw](#) aggressively when ...

- ... you have so many [outs](#) that you don't need to generate any fold [equity](#).
- ... the [board](#) is scary and your opponent is not likely to have hit.

These are both usually the case, which means you can often semi-bluff even when you don't have very many outs and when the board isn't particularly scary.

WHEN SHOULD YOU PLAY PASSIVELY?

It's much more difficult playing a draw passively when you are heads up, since you will almost never get correct [pot odds](#) to [call](#). An exception can be made when you have some showdown value, for example with a made [hand](#) + draw.

You will also rarely be able to generate sufficient fold equity in such a situation, since your opponent will often have a strong hand or very high WTS.

How should you play against several opponents?

WHEN SHOULD YOU PLAY AGGRESSIVELY?

Here are examples of when and why you can play a draw **aggressively**:

- You can force one player out of the hand and [isolate](#) the pre-flop [aggressor](#). This, however, will only be profitable when the aggressor is likely to only have overcards and can be brought to fold after the [flop](#).
- You have high equity and can [raise for value](#). This requires a lot of outs and can usually only be made on the flop.
- You have more than just a draw (for example middle [pair](#) + [flush](#) draw). You could already be ahead and can raise *for protection*.

WHEN SHOULD YOU PLAY PASSIVELY?

Here are examples of when and why you can play a draw **passively**:

- You can get more value when you [complete](#) your draw (usually because there will either be more opponents in the hand to pay you off, or because you think your opponent(s) will be less likely to put you on a draw if you play passively, which increases your implied odds).
- Raising would only result in isolating yourself against a stronger hand (like a high pocket pair).

How should you play against 3+ opponents?

You can often play *for value* on the flop in multiway hands. A player with the nut flush draw has 35% pot equity and should try to keep as many players in the hand as possible.

In order to find the right line, you need to take a look at the pre-flop action. You can, for example, trap players between you and the pre-flop aggressor to get more money into the pot.

You have little or no showdown value in a multiway pot. You can't generate much fold equity, either. If you don't improve on the turn, you should either *check/call* or, depending on your position, *bet/3-bet or check/raise for value*.

[Weak](#) draws, like gutshots, should normally be played passively. You can rarely raise for value and can't expect to generate fold equity with a bet/raise. On the other hand, you will usually have the right pot odds to call.

Conclusion

A number of factors such as the number and type of opponent(s) in the hand, the board texture and your position determine how you can play a draw. You should be able to estimate both your fold equity and pot equity fairly accurately in order to find the right [line](#) for the situation at hand.

Post-flop; When can you raise for value on the flop with a draw?

Introduction

In this article you will learn:

- The mathematical background of [value](#) raises with a [draw](#)
- Against how many opponents you can value [raise](#)

On the flop, we differentiate made hands from drawing hands (and trash hand, which only have a small part in this article). For several reasons, both of these hands can be raised on the [flop](#).

With made hands you raise on the flop because you want to extract value from your opponent. You therefore raise, in the assumption of having the best [hand](#) with which you want to be paid off. For made, but fragile hands, this is also done for protection, as your opponent will often [fold](#) a hand which could otherwise beat you when it gets improvement.

With drawing hands, or draws, there also are many situations in which you can raise, even if you're fairly certain of not having the best hand at the moment.

In general, you have to ask yourself the following question when holding a good draw: Is there a possibility that I can win the hand without a showdown, because I can make all my opponents fold their hand?

This way of playing a hand is called a semi-bluff and is described in the bronze-section: [Semi bluff and pure bluff](#)

In the gold-section this subject is analysed even further: [Semi-Bluffs](#)

Whenever you see the opportunity to win a hand without a showdown, you should play a good draw as aggressively as possible. Yet there are also situations in which you don't see this opportunity to make all opponents fold, and should still play your draw aggressively and raise or even [cap](#).

In the next part we'll show you what the requirements are for playing a draw aggressively on the flop, even when you're certain you can't bring all your opponents to fold.

When can you [value raise](#) with a draw?

When playing a [draw](#) on the flop, many factors influence your game. Was there a pre-flop aggressor? What has happened on the [flop](#) so far? What position do you have?

In addition to these influential factors, there is another, mathematical subject which influences how you should play your draw on the flop: The [equity](#).

Your equity shows the likelihood of your holding the best [hand](#) on the [river](#). With a draw, which you

can assume isn't the best hand at the moment, it is fairly easy to determine the equity. This results from the [outs](#) for making your hand the best one on the [turn](#) or the river. The more outs you have, the higher the equity.

When playing a strong draw, your equity will be so high, that you shouldn't only ask yourself if you can [call](#) based upon the [pot](#) odds, but also whether you should increase the pot size by raising. This happens when the possibility of hitting one of your outs is so big, that you want to increase your profit by making the pot bigger.

Therefore, such a raise with a draw is called a raise for value, or value raise. Now we have to look what the requirements are for you to make a value raise.

Imagine being in following hand:

Preflop: Hero is BU with **8♦, 9♦**

2 fold, UTG+2 calls, **4 fold**, CO calls, Hero calls, **SB folds**, BB calls

Flop: (4.50 SB) **4♦, J♠, 2♦** (4 players)

BB bets, UTG+2 calls, CO calls, Hero?

[Preflop](#) is a standard call, following the Starting Hand Chart. On the flop you obviously can't fold with your [flush](#) draw. The question you should therefore ask yourself is: Call or raise?

As a general rule: You can raise your draw on the flop, if your equity is high enough for you to make an average profit when making the pot big.

Viewed mathematically, we're talking about a positive expected value (=EV) after your raise. The calculation for this on the flop is:

*EV(Raise) = total increased pot size * equity of your hand – additional costs for a raise*

This results in: EV(Raise) > 0, if:

Total increased pot size * equity of your hand > additional costs for a raise

How can we define this part in a more formal way?

Total increased pot size: This is the total of all raises which are added to the pot. This includes your and the opponent's bets. If you're playing against 3 opponents on the flop, who all call your raise, you'll have 4 small bets (SB) on the flop; one from each opponent and your own SB.

Keep in mind that only the amount paid here, the one caused by the raise, has already been invested by your opponents and the point is to decide whether or not you should put in a second [bet](#) or not.

Additional costs for a flop raise: The additional cost for a raise is always one SB and not two, as you might suspect. This is because you'll call anyway. We should only consider the extra added SB for the raise.

Equity of your hand: Your equity is the probability of your hitting one of your outs on or before the river. The more outs you have, the higher the equity of your hand.

Just like with [odds](#) & outs, it is easiest to look at the most important draws and their accompanying equity, so you can easily decide whether a value raise is possible or not.

The strongest draws we can play on the flop in Hold'em, are:

- An open-ended [straight](#) draw
- A flush draw
- A combination of these draws ("Monster draw")

| Draw | Outs | Equity |
|---------------------------------------|------|--------|
| Open-ended straight draw | 8 | 31% |
| Flush draw | 9 | 35% |
| Flush draw & gutshot | 12 | 45% |
| Flush draw & open-ended straight draw | 15 | 54% |

Notice: The equity reflects the chance of hitting one of your outs on or before the river. The equity calculated is based on your staying in the hand until the river, because of draws with 8 or more outs being so strong.

How many opponents do you need for a [value raise](#)?

With aid of equity, you're now able to calculate the amount of opponents needed for making a [value raise](#).

We assume all players who have already [bet](#) or called on the [flop](#) will stay in the [hand](#) and won't [fold](#) for another SB against your raise. This means the total increase in [pot](#) size is the same as the amount of players on the flop.

Once you have all the required values, you can put them in the formula mentioned above. When you get a positive EV, you can raise for value. If the [EV](#) is negative, you can't. However, in such a case you shouldn't simply fold your hand, but continue playing based on [odds](#) and [outs](#). With strong draws you'll just [call](#) if a raise for value isn't possible.

Back to our previous situation:

Preflop: Hero is BU with **8♦, 9♦**

2 fold, UTG+2 calls, **4 fold**, CO calls, Hero calls, **SB folds**, BB checks

Flop: (4.50 SB) **4♦, J♠, 2♦** (4 players)

BB bets, UTG+2 calls, CO calls, Hero raise or call?

We'll use our formula again:

$EV(\text{Raise}) = \text{total increased pot size} * \text{equity of your hand} - \text{additional costs for a raise}$

This results in: $EV(\text{Raise}) > 0$, if:

$\text{Total increased pot size} * \text{equity of your hand} > \text{additional costs for a raise}$

Now we calculate the variables in order to see whether a flop raise has a positive EV.

Total increased pot size on the flop: You're playing against three players on the flop. After the bet from the BB both UTG+2 and CO have called. Normally, all opponents would call after another bet, in case we raised. The total increased pot size on the flop therefore is 4 SB; 3 from our opponents, who called our raise and 1 SB we've invested ourselves.

Additional costs: 1 SB

Equity of your hand: You have 9 outs with the [flush draw](#) on the flop, making your equity 35%. In decimals this is 0.35, meaning:

$EV(\text{Raise}) = \text{total increased pot size} * \text{equity of your hand} - \text{additional costs for a raise}$

$EV(\text{Raise}) = 4 \text{ SB} * 0,35 - 1 \text{ SB} = 1,40 \text{ SB} - 1 \text{ SB} = + 0,40 \text{ SB}$

As you can see, you have a positive Expected Value here, when you raise your flush draw on the flop against 3 players. In position, you can and should raise on this flop.

Flop: (4.50 SB) 4♦, J♠, 2♦ (4 players)

BB bets, UTG+2 calls, CO calls, Hero raises, BB calls UTG+2 calls, CO calls.

Because we've looked at our example a little bit closer, we can now calculate how many opponents we need when holding a typical draw, to be able to raise on the flop based on our equity.

THE OPEN-ENDED STRAIGHT DRAW (OESD)

$EV(\text{Raise}) = \text{total increased pot size} * \text{equity of your hand} - \text{additional costs for a raise}$

Heads-up:

$Equity = 31\% = 0,31$

$Total\ increased\ pot\ size = 2\ SB$

$EV(\text{Raise}) = 2\ SB * 0,31 - 1\ SB = -0,38\ SB$

The Expected Value for a raise on the flop, sitting heads-up, is below 0. Therefore you can't raise for value against one opponent, holding an OESD

3-handed:

$Equity = 31\% = 0,31$

$Total\ increased\ pot\ size = 3\ SB$

$EV(\text{Raise}) = 3\ SB * 0,31 - 1\ SB = -0,07\ SB$

The Expected Value for a raise with an OESD stays below 0, even against 2 opponents. A raise for value isn't an option here.

4-Handed:

$Equity = 31\% = 0,31$

$Total\ increased\ pot\ size = 4\ SB$

$EV(\text{Raise}) = 4\ SB * 0,31 - 1\ SB = 1,24\ SB - 1\ SB = +0,24\ SB$

Versus 3 opponents the EV is a little bit above 0. This shows you can raise for value with an OESD, when you are at least up against 3 opponents who would call your raise.

THE FLUSH DRAW

Heads-up:

$Equity = 35\% = 0,35$

$Total\ increased\ pot\ size = 2\ SB$

$EV(\text{Raise}) = 2\ SB * 0,35 - 1\ SB = 0,7\ SB - 1\ SB = -0,30\ SB$

Just like with an OESD, the Expected Value for a raise, holding a flush draw on the flop in a heads-up situation is below 0. A value raise isn't an option here.

3-handed:

$Equity = 35\% = 0,35$

$Total\ increased\ pot\ size = 3\ SB$

$EV(\text{Raise}) = 3\ SB * 0,35 - 1\ SB = 1,05\ SB - 1\ SB = +0,05\ SB$

4-handed:

$EV(\text{Raise}) = 4\ SB * 0,35 - 1\ SB = 1,40\ SB - 1\ SB = +0,40\ SB$

As you can see, it is possible to raise flush draw for value when you're up against 2 opponents who would both call your raise.

One out (=4% equity to the [river](#)) between an OESD and a flush draw makes the difference against 2 opponents. Where you can raise a flush draw for value, you can't with an OESD.

FLUSH DRAW + [GUTSHOT](#)

When holding a flush draw and a gutshot, the same rule applies as with a flush draw: You can raise for value against 2 opponents, but you can't when sitting heads-up.

THE [MONSTER](#) DRAW

The monster draw is a combination of an open-ended straight draw and a flush draw, making a total of 15 outs and an equity of 54%.

Heads-up:

$$\text{Equity} = 54\% = 0,54$$

$$\text{Total increased pot size} = 3 \text{ SB}$$

$$\text{EV(Raise)} = 2 \text{ SB} * 0,54 - 1 \text{ SB} = 1,08 \text{ SB} - 1 \text{ SB} = +0,08 \text{ SB}$$

The monster draw, with its equity of more than 50%, has superior strength; You can play these hands aggressively against any opponent and still have a positive expectation.

Basically all the rules apply to any re raises you can make. In addition to a value raise, there is of course also the possibility of a value [cap](#). This would be an option if you have already raised for value and another player 3-bets you which is called by a third player.

Back to the first example:

Preflop: Hero is BU with **8♦, 9♦**

2 fold, UTG+2 calls, *4 fold*, CO calls, Hero calls, *SB folds*, BB calls

Flop: (4.50 SB) **4♦, J♠, 2♦** (4 players)

BB bets, UTG+2 calls, CO calls, **Hero raises**, **BB 3bets**, UTG+2 calls, CO calls, **Hero caps!**

Obviously, the rule concerning the use of your equity to your advantage applies here too, as raising/capping would give you a theoretical long-term win of 0.4 SB.

As we have now looked at the different strong draws, it is possible to formulate a simple rule, which will help you to decide whether or not you can raise for value.

When your part in the increased pot size is smaller than the equity, you can make a profitable raise.

If you're playing in a 4-handed pot on the flop (against 3 other players), your part in the additional pot would be 25% if everyone calls. With 8 outs and a 31% equity, you can raise for value here. 3-handed you would invest 33% of the additional pot and can therefore only raise if you have 33% or more equity. This means you would need at least 9 outs, the amount you would have with a flush draw.

When sitting heads-up you'll always pay half of the additional bets, meaning you would always need at least 50% equity to raise profitably. This is the case with 14 outs (~51%) or more.

This is what it looks like in an overview:

| Amount of players on the flop | Amount you have invested in the bet | Outs/equity on the flop for a value raise |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| 2 | 50% | 14 Outs / 51% Equity |
| 3 | 33% | 9 Outs / 35% Equity |
| 4 | 25% | 8 Outs / 31 % Equity |

How do you play on the turn?

A [raise](#) for [value](#) is only possible on the [flop](#) (with very few exceptions). If you want, you can also calculate which circumstances you would need on the [turn](#) to make a value raise. But what happens if, after your value raise or value cap, you don't hit your [draw](#) on the turn? How should you continue to play? In general, you should ask yourself the same question here: Can I bring my opponent to fold?

Since you're assuming none of your opponents folds to a value raise, because you want all of them to [call](#) your raise for it to be for value, you'll mostly see the turn with 2 or more opponents. This means you have to play your draw passively after value raising the flop if you haven't hit one of your [outs](#).

When in position, you're able to get a free card, but also without position you should play your [hand](#) passively. The disadvantage here is that an attentive player is able to see that you're on a draw. This shouldn't bother you though, because you've gotten your value on the flop. Additionally, if your draw completes on the river, your opponent will generally not [fold](#) due to the large [pot](#).

Apart from that, you can't assume all opponents can [read](#) your hand perfectly. Some are even extra careful, because they suspect a trap after this much action on the flop.

Let's have another look at our example-hand:

Preflop: Hero is BU with 8♦, 9♦

2 fold, UTG+2 calls, 4 fold, CO calls, Hero calls, SB folds, BB calls

Flop: (4.50 SB) 4♦, J , 2♦ (4 players)

BB bets, UTG+2 calls, CO calls, Hero raises, BB 3 bets, UTG+2 calls, CO calls, Hero caps, BB calls, UTG+2 calls, CO calls

Turn: (10.25 BB) Q♣ (4 players)

BB checks, UTG+2 checks, CO checks, Hero checks

In case you were not on the [button](#) and had opponents behind you, you should also check/called in this spot. The goal of this article was to explain the principle of a raise for value on the flop. Playing draws on the flop and on the turn as well provides many possibilities, but requires a separate article, which will soon be added to the silver section.

Conclusion

You have learned that, given certain circumstances on the flop, strong draws can be played aggressively even when you're sure you haven't got the best hand or you don't see any chance in bringing your opponent to fold. You'll hit one of your outs on the turn or the [river](#) often enough for it to be profitable, in the long run, to make the pot larger on the flop.

A raise for value with a draw is also possible on the turn, but because there's only one card to come, draws have a lot less value than they had on the flop. This means a raise for value on the turn is only an option with a [monster](#) draw. You now possess an additional mathematical tool, the ability to make the right decision in any situation.

Additionally, this way of playing makes it harder for your opponent to make a read on you. This belongs under the important topic of "balancing" and it is further explained in the Gold and Platinum sections.

Post-flop: How to Play Made Hands on the Turn

Introduction

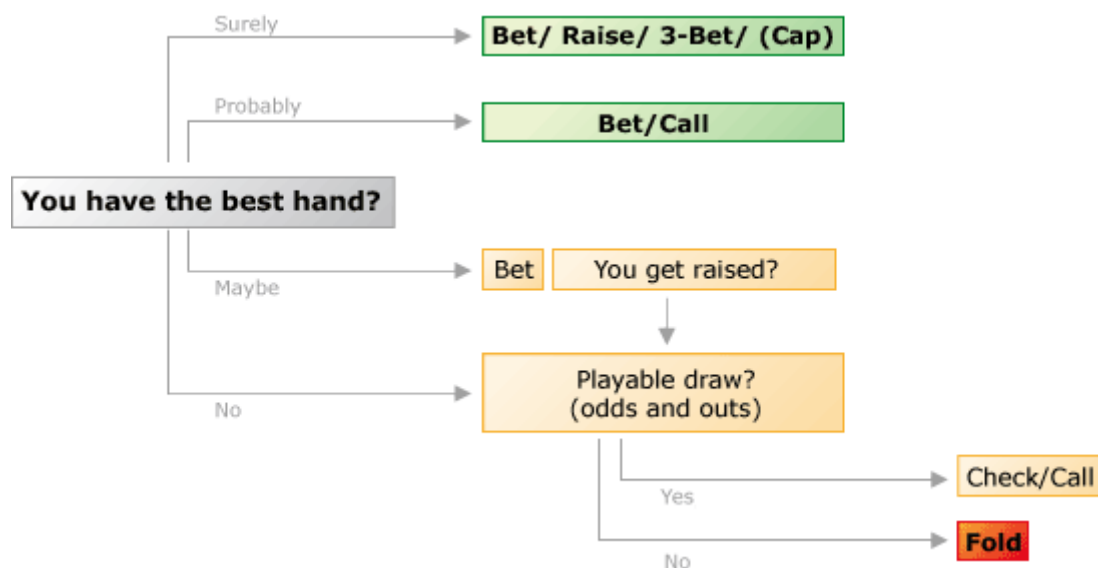
In this article

- finding the right [line](#) for the [turn](#)
- how to react to donk bets and raises

After having learned the basic concepts of playing with made hands in the [Evaluating Made Hands on the Flop](#) article, you will now learn how to continue playing on the turn.

You will learn when to make a further [bet](#) on the turn, and how to react to donk bets and raises. We will look at examples of different concepts put to practice to give you a better feel for playing on the turn in general.

Which line should you play?



You've seen this graphic before in [Evaluating Made Hands on the Flop](#)

It is also used for playing on the turn. Raise/cap with a [draw](#) for [value](#) is no longer an option, however, since you will hardly ever have enough [outs](#) to hit on the [river](#). You can, of course, [raise](#) with a draw as a semi-bluff, but we will not discuss this move in this article.

Your decision depends just as heavily on the strength of your [hand](#) on the turn as on the [flop](#). However, you have to be more critical when asking yourself if you really do have the best hand.

Some players may have paid to see the flop out of curiosity, but you will almost always find hands with some kind of strength, be it a draw or a made hand, once you make it to the turn. Keep this in mind when making your decision.

You are certain you have the best hand

The decision is easy in this case. Keep betting/raising ([cap](#))! Just remember that you need at least two [pair](#) (and sometimes more!) before you can cap on the turn.

You probably have the best hand

You think you are ahead in most cases and bet for value and to protect your hand. Deciding to raise isn't as easy as on the flop, however, and depends heavily on how [aggressive](#) your opponent is.

You can usually bet/3-bet with top pair or an [overpair](#) on the flop, but should only continue to play such hands passively on the turn. You will learn how to evaluate your hand after a raise later in this article.

You could have the best hand

You see yourself ahead often enough to justify a bet, mainly to protect what you have. There are a lot of danger cards you don't want to see; you're going to make your opponent pay if he wants to see them. You are probably behind if you get raised, however, and only continue to play based on [odds](#) and outs.

You do not have the best hand

Your hand isn't good enough to win many showdowns. [Protection](#) doesn't matter any more. You'd like to see if the river helps as cheaply as possible. Your play is based purely on odds and outs.

Note: This article (and the graphic) addresses play with initiative!

When to bet the turn with [initiative](#)

The main difference between the flop and the turn: the bets are now twice as large.

You are now playing for Big Bets. Don't throw your money away!

You have to play tighter on the turn; the bets are now twice as large and the [pot](#) odds are much worse than they were on the flop. It's easier to invest a SB on the flop than a BB on the turn with a [weak](#) draw and the chance for a free card. You have to be more careful on the turn and ask yourself if your hand is really worth a Big Bet.

Take what is yours!

This no reason not to make value bets. If you were ahead on the flop, you are usually still ahead on the turn, but we will say more to that in the next section. You also want to get money out of draws.

Your opponents can't [fold](#) to a check!

On the other hand, the poor pot odds make your opponents play tighter, as well, which you can take advantage of in the right situations. If there is a decent chance that all opponents will fold, even those who could have a better hand, you should bet.

If you can answer the questions in the following checklist positively, you should bet.

- Could weaker made hands call?
- Could better made hands fold?
- Do you want to make your opponent pay if he is on a draw (which you have beat on the turn)?

EXAMPLE 1

Pre-flop: 6 folds, CO Hero is SB completes, BB Hero raises, CO A♥ SB T♥ calls

Flop: (6 SB) T♦, 9♥, 4♣ (3 players)
 SB checks, Hero bets, CO raises, SB folds, Hero 3-bets, CO calls

Turn: (6BB) K♠ (2 players)
 Hero ???

Could weaker made hands call?

The king is, of course, a scare card, but you could still very well be ahead. The CO raises with a lot of hands (starting with bottom pair) on the flop.

You are ahead against a lot of these hands. You want to get value from weaker hands and protect your hand (against a 5 outer middle pair, for example). He could also [check](#) behind with a lot of made hands to get to a cheap [showdown](#).

Don't forget what happened on the flop: You 3-bet and still have initiative. Checking on the turn indicates that you have a hand and don't want to fold - you would have used the king as a scare card to bluff, otherwise. You would lose value by checking and, therefore, choose to bet.

Could better hands fold?

Very unlikely. JJ+ and top pair are the hands that could beat you. The pre-flop action makes pocket pairs unlikely (he played limp/complete) and he will hardly ever fold a king that just hit top pair.

Do you want to make your opponent pay for a draw?

This is a pretty dry [board](#). 2 OESDs are possible, as well as gutshots and overcards. There is no immediate need to protect against a draw, so protection should not be your main argument for a bet.

Keep the initiative on the turn if possible!

You generally bet on the turn when you believed to have the best hand on the flop. There are exceptions to the rule, but they are rare.

EXAMPLE 2

We will now look at a situation in which you could make an exception to the rules.

Pre-flop: Hero is SB with J♣ J♠
 MP2 raises, 2 folds, BU 3-bets, Hero caps, BB folds, MP2 calls, BU calls.

Flop: (13 SB) T♣, 9♦, 4♣ (3 players)
 Hero bets, MP2 calls, BU calls

Turn: (8 BB) A♣ (3 players)
 Hero ???

You will usually be ahead with your overpair on the flop; you can even be pretty sure that you have the best hand, since no one raised on the flop; slowplaying a [monster](#) in such a large pot would be unusual. Your opponents will usually have smaller pairs or overcards, usually an ace. The turn card could be bad news.

Could weaker made hands call?

Weaker made hands will rarely [call](#). Smaller pairs that picked up a [flush](#) draw on the turn might stay in the hand, or perhaps a T that was played passively on the flop and still has 5 outs for two pair.

Could better hands fold?

Very unlikely. QQ and KK might not feel too comfortable with the A on the board, but there aren't many players that would fold in such a pot.

Do you want to make your opponent pay for a draw?

Draws are quite possible; even a single ♣ could be enough for an opponent to call. Gutshots with KQ, KJ or QJ will want to see the river, as well.

Question 3 was the only one you could answer positively; too little to justify a bet. You can't really see yourself as being ahead, so there is no point in making draws pay. The last thing you want to face is a raise: you won't be able to fold your flush draw and will only end up investing more than necessary.

You check/call. This is the best way to get to the river as cheaply as possible.

The lesson learned? You may have to change your tactic on the turn depending on the card that is dealt. However, these are exceptional cases - you should, in general, make a contibet on the turn when you saw yourself ahead on the flop.

How to react to a donk bet

Pre-flop: Hero is Button with A♣ A♠
1 fold, UTG+1 calls, 2 folds, MP2 calls, 1 fold, CO raises, Hero 3-bets, 3 folds, MP2 calls, CO calls

Flop: (11,5 SB) 6♦, 8♦, K♣ (3 players)
MP2 checks, CO bets, Hero raises, MP2 calls, CO 3-bets, Hero caps, MP2 calls, CO calls

TURN 1

Turn: (11,75 BB) Q♦ (3 players)
MP2 checks, CO bets, Hero ???

You get a lot of action with aces before and on the flop. Then the CO donks on the turn after you capped on the flop. The turn card could have completed a flush draw or otherwise hit within his [range](#).

He could have a flush, top two pair, or even a [set](#). You can't assume you will be ahead on average. MP2 is still in the hand, as well, and you can't be sure you have him beat, either. Calling is your best option.

TURN 2

Turn: (11,75 BB) 2♣ (3 players)
MP2 checks, CO bets, Hero ???

This time a [blank](#) shows up on the turn, but you still can't see yourself ahead of the CO. You can pretty much rule out a flush draw. He could donk with top pair, but he will usually have a stronger hand in such a situation. You continue to play passively in this example, as well.

You can't raise for value with top pair/overpair when an opponent donks after the flop was capped in a multiway pot.

How to react to a [raise](#) behind you

This decision isn't as easy on the [turn](#) as it is on the [flop](#). You often [call](#) a raise on the flop, since you are getting good [odds](#) and your opponents can be on a wide [range](#) of hands. Calling a raise on the turn requires more. Why? The bets are now twice as large and there is only one card left to help that

can help a semi-bluff.

A raise on the turn is rarely a [bluff](#).

A raise could be a bluff when there are few opponents in the [hand](#) (heads up play is, in part, much more [aggressive](#)), and there are no callers between you and the bluffer.

We will now take a look at the different kinds of raises you can face on the turn and look at the right course of action for each hand category.

SITUATION A

[Villain](#) 1 checks, Villain 2 checks, **Hero bets**, **Villain 3 raises**

Villain 3 may well be bluffing. There are no callers between you and he is in position. The two checks indicate marginal hands for Villain 1 and 2, which will probably [fold](#) to a bluff raise. Still, you should give Villain 3 a strong made hand, top [pair](#) or better.

SITUATION B

Hero bets, **Villain raises** (2 players behind)

This raise is less likely to be a bluff. He is out of position and two others are still to act. He is also raising an oop [bet](#).

SITUATION C

Hero bets, Villain 1 calls, Villain 2 calls, **Villain 3 raises**

You can pretty much rule out a bluff. Your bet with three opponents indicates strength, and so do their calls. Even a dumb player knows a bluff is not the best idea in this situation. You can be sure that he has a very strong hand.

SITUATION D

Villain 1 checks, **Hero bets**, Villain 2 calls, Villain 3 calls, **Villain 1 check/raises**

This time we will go one step further. We just saw Villain 3 raise in position against 3 opponents; now we see Villain 1 check/raising out of position against 3 opponents. He will almost always have a very strong hand, or even a [monster](#).

Let's take a look at the different hand categories.

Straights and better

You will usually have the best hand on the turn and will almost always 3-bet.

EXAMPLE

Pre-flop: Hero is BB with **Q♦**, **K♥**
2 folds, **CO raises**, BU calls, *SB folds*, Hero calls.

Flop: (6.50 SB) **T♥**, **A♥**, **J♠** (3 players)
Hero checks, **CO bets**, BU calls, **Hero raises**, CO calls, BU calls.

Turn: (5.75 BB) **A♣** (2 players)
Hero bets, **CO raises**, BU calls, Hero ?


You hit the nut [straight](#) on the flop. Then the CO raises you and the BU cold calls on the turn. You are in Situation B from above. You clearly have the BU beat, the only question is what the CO might have. Still, you can see yourself ahead most of the time.

You can rule out a full house, since he didn't start any action on a [draw](#) heavy [board](#) on the flop. He probably has trips; you should 3-bet for [value](#) and [protection](#).

Two pair & [Three-of-a-kind](#)

You will usually be ahead with such a hand and shouldn't let a raise scare you.

EXAMPLE 1

Pre-flop: Hero is MP2 with Q , A 
Hero raises, MP3 calls, *3 folds*, BB calls.

Flop: (6.50 SB) J , A , A  (3 players)
BB checks, **Hero bets**, MP3 calls, BB calls.




Turn: (4.75 BB) 2  (3 players)
BB checks, **Hero bets**, **MP3 raises**, BB calls, Hero ?

MP3 raises your 2nd barrel on the turn and the BB cold calls. This time you are in Situation A. MP3 probably has a strong hand after only calling on the flop. He probably would have raised on the flop with a draw - the [blank](#) on the turn doesn't present the best opportunity for a (semi-)bluff.

However, you have a very strong hand yourself. Better hands like AK, AJ, A2, JJ and 22 aren't likely given the pre-flop action, which leaves A2 and 22 (and he probably would have folded 22 on the flop). He probably has a baby ace, which is why you 3-bet.

EXAMPLE 2

Pre-flop: Hero is MP3 with K , Q 
UTG+1 calls, *2 folds*, MP2 calls, **Hero raises**, *5 folds*, BB calls, UTG+1 calls, MP2 calls

Flop: (8.5 SB) Q , K , 7  (4 players)
BB bets, UTG+1 calls, MP2 calls, **Hero raises**, BB calls, UTG+1 calls, MP2 calls

Turn: (6,23 BB) 7  (4 players)
BB checks, UTG+1 checks, MP2 checks, **Hero bets**, BB calls, UTG+1 calls, **MP2 raises**, Hero ?

You hit top two pair on the flop, then the board pairs on the turn. You are in Situation D.


MP2 check/raises in a 4 handed pot, a sign of a very strong hand. You pretty much have to give him the 7. You can't 3-bet, all you can do is call down to the [showdown](#).

Even if you are, in fact, behind, you still have 4 [outs](#) for a full house, which makes this turn call easy. There is also a (slight) chance that MP2 is raising with a weaker hand (like Kx). You may, in fact, have the best hand and should invest one more bet on the [river](#).

Overpairs & Top pairs

Overpairs and top pairs aren't as good as they may seem at first glance. 3-betting is rarely profitable.

EXAMPLE 1

Pre-flop: Hero is SB with A , A 
1 fold, UTG+1 calls, *2 folds*, **MP2 raises**, *1 fold*, CO calls, *1 fold*, **Hero 3-bets**, *3 folds*, MP2 calls, CO calls

Flop: (11 SB) 7 , 9 , K  (3 players)

Hero bets, MP2 raises, CO calls, Hero 3-bets, MP2 calls, CO calls

Turn: (10 BB) J♠ (3 players)

Hero bets, MP2 raises, CO folds, Hero ?

MP2 raises after heavy action on the flop and your second barrel on the turn. You are in Situation A. The CO folds and you are playing heads up. MP2 could raise with a lot of hands on the flop, he most likely has a hand between bottom and top pair. The board is draw heavy and he could be semi-bluffing with a [flush](#) or straight draw. The straight draw is relatively unlikely, though, since he tried to [isolate](#) a limper before the flop; his range is probably made up of high cards.

His raise on the turn indicates a hand that probably has you beat. You showed a lot of strength before and after the flop, so he won't be expecting a fold. He is sure to have a strong top pair at the very least, but it's probably something even better. He's likely to have a hand like KJ or a [set](#) with 99, 77 or JJ that he slowplayed on the draw heavy board. You can't expect to have the best hand and should call down to the showdown.

Be aware that folding is not an option. Even if you are behind, you still have 8 outs against a hand like KJ.

You can't assume to have the best hand with top pair/overpair in Situations A and B (where a bluff would still be likely) and should usually just call.

EXAMPLE 2

Pre-flop: Hero is CO with A♥ 2♥

6 folds, Hero raises, Button calls, 1 fold, BB calls

Flop: (6,5 SB) A♠, T♠, 7♣ (3 players)

BB checks, Hero bets, Button calls, BB calls

Turn: (4,75 BB) 3♥ (3 players)

BB checks, Hero bets, Button raises, BB calls, Hero ?

This time the BU raises after only calling before and on the flop. You are in Situation B. Whereas you had any top pair beat in the last example, you now have the weakest [kicker](#) with your top pair. The BU would have to be bluffing with a very marginal hand for you to have him beat (he could be semi-bluffing given the very draw heavy board). However, you have no real reason to assume he is bluffing and will usually be behind. You would even have to fold top pair with 10:1 [pot](#) odds, since you can only give yourself 2 or 3 outs.

The main reason for folding in this example is your [weak](#) kicker. Turn raises are rarely bluffs; you have to give your opponent at least top pair or better, which makes your aces no better than middle pair.

EXAMPLE 3

Pre-flop: Hero is SB with K♣ J♣

6 folds, CO calls, Button calls, Hero raises, BB calls, CO calls, Button calls

Flop: (8 SB) J♦, 8♦, 6♣ (4 players)

Hero bets, BB calls, CO calls, Button calls

Turn: (6 BB) 5♥ (2 players)

Hero bets, BB calls, CO calls, Button raises, Hero?

You are in Situation C after the BU raises the field as a possible [OESD](#) completes on the turn. He will usually have a set or even a straight, possibly only two pair. You are far behind and play according to odds and outs. Calling down is only an option when you believe your opponent might be bluffing with a draw, which you never assume against an [unknown](#).

How many discounted outs do you have?

You have to discount 5 of your outs. The board is very draw heavy and you might even be drawing dead. You can't count on more than 2 or 3 clean outs.

How large is the pot?

11 BBs.

How high are the costs?

You will usually only have to pay 1 BB. The other two players have been [passive](#) so far and are likely to remain so after the BU's raise. They are both most likely on draws or marginal hands.

Compare the pot odds to the odds to decide whether to call or fold

Even with 11:1 pot odds, 2-3 outs don't give you the odds to call and you have to fold your top pair.

You are almost always so far behind in Situations C and D (where you can completely rule out a bluff) that you have no other choice than playing according to odds and outs.

Middle pairs

Hands in this category rarely put you ahead. Middle pairs are marginal hands that can, however, get better. We will now look at a few examples of possible actions to take.

EXAMPLE 1

Pre-flop: Hero is MP1 with **T♥T♦**

3 folds, Hero raises, 3 folds, Button calls, 1 fold, BB calls

Flop: (6,5 SB) **J♠, 6♠, 4♣** (3 players)

BB checks, **Hero bets**, Button calls, BB calls

Turn: (4,75 BB) **9♦** (3 players)

BB checks, **Hero bets**, **Button raises**, *BB folds*, Hero ?

The BU raises and the BB folds. Situation A once again. Call flop/raise turn can indicate a strong made hand in [slowplay](#) mode (not necessarily the best move for him to make given the draw heavy board).

He could have hit two pair or a set on the turn (a set of nines would, however, be unlikely after he cold called on the flop). He could also be (semi-)bluffing.

He is in position and the BB checked. Flush and straight draws are both possible on this board. He could have had a straight draw on the flop, or picked one up with the 9.

You will usually be behind, but can call down (instead of playing odds and outs) since he could be bluffing.

EXAMPLE 2

Pre-flop: Hero is MP1 with **T♥T♦**

3 folds, Hero raises, 3 folds, Button calls, 1 fold, BB calls

Flop: (6,5 SB) **J♠, 6♠, 4♣** (3 players)

BB checks, **Hero bets**, Button calls, BB calls

Turn: (4,75 BB) **9♦** (3 players)

BB checks, **Hero bets**, **Button raises**, BB calls, Hero ?

This time the BB calls, which puts you in a poor situation. If he is on a draw, it's a strong one (assuming he is a good player). He is getting app. 4:1 pot odds, which means he needs app. 9 outs - a flush draw at the least.

He could, however, have a made hand (like a weak jack) and think the BU is bluffing. A lot of weaker players in lower limits can't fold a weak pair and make a poor call in such a situation.

Still, you are behind on average and should continue to play according to odds and outs.

This time you have fold. The pot is too small to call with only 1-1.5 outs.

You should play middle pairs according to odds and outs to most turn raises, as you will usually be behind.

Bottom pairs

This is obviously the category that least likely has you ahead of your opponent. (Semi-)bluffs are usually the only hands you can beat.

EXAMPLE

Pre-flop: Hero is MP1 with T♥ T♦

3 folds, Hero raises, 3 folds, Button calls, 1 fold, BB calls

Flop: (6,5 SB) J♠, 6♠, 4♣ (3 players)

BB checks, Hero bets, Button calls, BB calls

Turn: (4,75 BB) K♦ (3 players)

BB checks, Hero bets, Button raises, BB folds, Hero ?

You are in a similar situation, but have even less than middle pair this time. A king shows up on the turn and the BU raises. This time there are even fewer hands weaker than yours. The BU could have hit top pair or two pair, which would also explain his passive flop play. There are also a number of draws possible he could semi-bluff with. The king is a good scare card to bluff on.

You should play passively (and fold in this situation), since there is hardly a hand you can beat that he can raise with, and because you don't expect a raise in this situation to be a bluff.

You have to assume you are behind with a bottom pair on the turn and can only continue to play according to odds and outs.

Examples

We will now continue with examples from the [How to Play Made Hands on the Flop](#) article, in which you have initiative going into the turn.

With a straight or better

Pre-flop: Hero is MP2 with T♥ 9♥

UTG+1 calls, UTG+2 folds, MP1 calls, Hero calls, 2 folds, BU calls, SB completes, BB checks.

Flop: (6 SB) J♣, Q♣, K♦ (6 players)

SB checks, BB checks, UTG+1 checks, MP1 bets, Hero raises, 2 folds, BB calls, MP1 calls.

Turn: (6 BB) T♦ (3 players)

BB checks, MP1 checks, Hero bets, BB calls, MP1 raises, Hero ?

Two opponents call your raise on the flop, then an ugly card shows up on the turn leaving you on the idiot's end of the straight: Any ace has you beat. Still, you bet on the turn to protect what you do

have.

MP1 check/raises against two other opponents - a very strong indication that he has a monster. You pretty much have to give him the straight and can only continue to play based on odds and outs. This time you fold, since you will usually be drawing dead in such a situation.

Two pair and three-of-a-kind

Pre-flop: Hero is CO with **K♠ T♠**

6 folds, **Hero raises**, BU calls, SB calls, **BB 3-bets**, Hero calls, BU calls, SB calls.

Flop: (12 SB) **2♥, T♥, K♣** (4 players)

SB checks, **BB bets**, **Hero raises**, BU calls, *SB folds*, **BB 3-bets**, **Hero caps**, BU calls, BB calls.

Turn: (12 BB) **4♦** (3 players)

BB bets, Hero ?

There was a lot of action leading up to the turn. The BB has shown a lot of strength and is now donking on the turn. Time to reevaluate the situation. You gave the BB a few premium hands like AK, AA, KK, TT, or perhaps a flush draw, on the flop.

You should reraise, since he could be playing AK or AA, and since you capped for value on the flop. You want to protect your hand against the BU (who seems to have a draw or other marginal hand) and to get value for your two pair. You raise and call a 3-bet.

Overpairs

Pre-flop: Hero is BU with **A♥ A♣**

2 folds, UTG+2 calls, MP1 calls, *2 folds*, **CO raises**, **Hero 3-bets**, *2 folds*, UTG+2 calls, *MP1 folds*, CO calls.

Flop: (11.5 SB) **8♦, 6♦, K♣** (3 players)

UTG+2 checks, **CO bets**, **Hero raises**, UTG+2 calls, **CO 3-bets**, **Hero caps**, UTG+2 calls, CO calls.

Turn: (12 BB) **T♠** (3 players)

UTG+2 checks, **CO bets**, Hero calls, **UTG+2 raises**, **CO 3-bets**, Hero ?

Once again we see a lot of action before the flop (and even a [Cap](#) on the flop!) The CO donks on the turn. As with top pairs and overpairs, you can't see yourself ahead on average and can only call.

Then an otherwise passive player check/raises the field, which leads the CO to 3-bet. You will almost always be far behind and should get out of the way. Don't fall hopelessly in love with pocket aces!

Conclusion

You have learned the most important concepts for making the right decision on the turn. You are now capable of making decisions based on the type of hand you have and the information you have on your opponents and the board. You have gained a better understanding of an important aspect of Hold'em [poker](#) theory and can use this knowledge to stay one step ahead of your opponent.

Find out how much you really understood in this article with a quiz!

Post-flop: How to Play on the River

Introduction

In this article

- When to [value bet](#)
- 7 rules for [river](#) play
- When to [bluff](#)

The river is the final street in Hold'em. There are no further cards. This is where the last value raises are made and busted draws get their last chance to bluff.

To make the right decisions on this street, you often have to consider the action on previous streets and decide which hands your opponent can have after the [flop](#) and [turn](#).

You have more information than on previous streets, which is very important. [Hand](#) reading skills are now required for you to decide whether you should value bet or try to make your opponent bluff. Let's start by asking what the purpose of a bet on the river is.

What is the purpose of a river bet?

Of course, a river bet can have purposes other than getting value. Take a look at the following example.

You are in the small blind, facing one opponent. You are on the river. The [board](#) is A♠ J♠ T♠ 9♣ 4♥

Suppose you could see your opponent's cards, but your opponent couldn't see yours. Should you bet or [check](#) in the following situations?

| Situation | Your cards | Opponent's cards |
|-----------|------------|------------------|
| A | K♠, Q♠ | 3♦, 2♦ |
| B | 3♣, 2♠ | 5♥, 2♦ |
| C | 5♣, 2♦ | 3♥, 2♠ |
| D | K♠, Q♠ | 9♠, 8♠ |

- **Situation A:** You should check. You may hold the nuts, but you can't expect your opponent to [call](#). Thus, a bet has no value. If, on the other hand, you check, then your opponent may decide to bluff, allowing you to win an extra bet.
- **Situation B:** You should bet. Your opponent may have a very bad hand, but it still beats yours. Your opponent will have to [fold](#) if you bet, since he can't see any value in calling with 5 high (which, of course, is true).
- **Situation C:** You should check for the same reasons as in Situation A. You may not be holding the nuts, but you have a better hand than your opponent.
- **Situation D:** You should bet. Your opponent obviously won't fold here. Therefore, you get value by betting. You may even get raised, in which case you can 3-bet. You could also consider slow playing with check/raise, as your opponent is very likely to bet. You will find

reasons for not check/raising in such a situation later on in this article.

Looking at the example, we see that there are exactly two reasons for betting on the river:

- You can make a worse hand call (Situation D).
- You can make a better hand fold (Situation B).

You should only bet on the river when one of these possibilities is likely.

Therefore, you have to ask yourself the following question when considering a river bet:

- Which worse hands will call?
- Which better hands will fold?

7 Rules for River play

Now that you have a rough idea of when you should bet the river, we can start talking about real river play. Below is a list of seven rules that you can use as guidelines to give yourself a feel for play on the river.

- **Don't fold what could be the best hand in a big [pot](#)**
You feel that you are behind most of the time and consider folding. However, in big pots you often get such good odds, that the few cases in which you are ahead are enough to justify a call.
- **Do fold when you're certain you're beat**
If analyzing the situation makes it clear that you have the worst hand, fold.
- **Bet strong hands for value**
If a weaker hand will call often enough, then you should bet to get value from your strong hand on the final street.
- **Only bet with made hands if you want to get called**
If you think your opponent will call with too many better hands and too few weaker hands, just check.
- **Induce bluffs**
If you think you will only get called by better hands, but that worse hands will bluff if you check, then you shouldn't bet. This way you induce bluffs.
- **Make the occasional bluff when you're certain you have the worst hand**
You feel that you usually have the worst hand and automatically opt for a fold. However, there are situations in which better hands will fold to a bet. In this case, you should attempt a bluff to try to take the pot down.
- **Avoid check/raises on the river**
You have a strong hand, but fear that your opponent will either fold or [flat-call](#) if you bet, and will not [raise](#). Despite this, you should still bet directly instead of trying a tricky check/raise.

Don't [fold](#) what could be the best [hand](#) in a big [pot](#)

Fixed [Limit](#) Hold'em isn't a game in which you should often fold to a single [bet](#) in a big pot. In the

basic section, you learned not to play too loosely. You should be able to realize that you are behind as quickly as possible and then continue according to the [odds](#) and [outs](#). Pot odds, and therefore pot sizes, are especially important on the final street of the game. If you hold a strong hand and have already invested a lot on the [flop](#) and turn, then you shouldn't just fold to one Big Bet, even if you think you are often behind. The pot is simply too large and your odds too good.




Therefore, it is important to evaluate precisely how often you are ahead. Due to the pot size, you have to consider all possibilities, even the ones that would usually seem very unlikely. For example, if you are getting pot odds of 19:1 and your opponent bluffs 5% of the time, this is still enough to justify a [call](#). You just have to win the hand more often than every twentieth time. Psychologically, the odds against winning will make you feel bad about calling. This is because the cases in which the call will have a negative result hugely outnumber the cases in which the result will be positive. However, you must remember that calls on the [river](#) can often be profitable even if you lose the hand much more often than you win.

You also have to take your opponents and their number into account. You are obviously less likely to win the [showdown](#) against several opponents than against a single opponent.


EXAMPLE

Pre-flop: Hero is CO with  
5 folds , **MP3 raises** , **Hero 3-bets** , *1 fold* , SB calls, BB calls, **MP3 caps** , Hero calls, SB calls, BB calls

You hold pocket queens in the CO and 3-bet MP3. The blinds cold call and MP3 signals a premium hand by capping. Four players see the flop.

Flop: (16 SB)    (4 players)
SB checks, BB checks, **MP3 bets** , **Hero raises** , SB calls, BB calls, **MP3 3-bets** , **Hero caps** , SB calls, BB calls

You flop the [nuts](#) on a [draw](#) heavy [board](#). Your primary aim is to protect your hand, so you bet and [raise](#).

Turn: (16 BB)  (4 players)
SB checks, BB checks, **MP3 bets** , **Hero raises** , SB calls, BB calls, MP3 calls.

You were not able to reduce the number of opponents in the hand, but you did make the [passive](#) players pay the maximum. MP3 bets again. There is now a [straight](#) possibility with T9, but MP3 is unlikely to have T9 after the action before and on the flop. You raise again for the same reason as on the flop. You want to reduce the number of opponents in the hand. You may not get any folds, but due to the fact that nobody 3-bets, you can be fairly sure that you have the best hand.

River: (24 BB)  (4 players)
SB checks, **BB bets** , MP3 calls, Hero ?

Unfortunately, the worst possible card is dealt. The [flush](#) has arrived and any ten makes a straight. Not only that, but the passive Big [Blind](#) decides to donk bet all of a sudden and MP3 calls. Raising is out of the question. With three players involved, you would have to be ahead in more than one third of cases. Considering the board and the action, this can't be the case. So the question is whether you are ahead often enough to call.

You are getting 26:1 pot odds, so you only have to be ahead in 4% of the time ($100/(26+1)$) for a call to be profitable. You will often be ahead against the Small Blind. This player was passive the

whole time and will therefore often have a marginal made hand or a busted draw. MP3 was very active up to the [turn](#) and then became passive. Most of the time MP3 will have a strong made hand but will understandably feel that you are ahead.




The interesting point is the Big Blind's bet. You are obviously beat when the Big Blind bets into three players. However, you don't know this player, and opponents sometimes make completely crazy moves. On average, you will win the hand more than 4% of the time, and in addition to this, you could sustain psychological damage ([tilt](#)) if you folded the best hand in this [monster](#) pot. Therefore, you must call.


Fold when you are beat

The first rule implies that it is often profitable to call even when you feel you are behind. However, this doesn't imply that you should never fold a hand that was strong on the turn. In some situations, the pot can't be large enough to make a call profitable.

EXAMPLE 1

Pre-flop: Hero is CO with   *5 folds* , **MP3 raises** , **Hero 3-bets** , *1 fold* , SB calls, BB calls, **MP3 caps** , Hero calls, SB calls, BB calls

Flop: (16 SB)    (4 players)
SB checks, BB checks, **MP3 bets** , **Hero raises** , SB calls, BB calls, **MP3 3-bets** , **Hero caps** , SB calls, BB calls.


Turn: (16 BB)  (4 players)
SB checks, BB checks, **MP3 bets** , **Hero raises** , SB calls, BB calls MP3 calls

River: (24 BB)  (4 players)
SB bets , **BB raises** , *MP3 folds*, Hero ?

You flop top [set](#). The hand takes a similar course to the hand in the example in the previous section until it reaches the river. Things then suddenly change. The passive Small Blind wakes up and bets. The passive Big Blind tops it off with a raise. Your pot odds have now nearly been halved, changing from 26:1 to 13.5:1.

While you are only behind against the Big Blind in the previous example, the Small Blind is now also a factor. You are in a [tight](#) spot, as you may even face a 3-bet and [cap](#) if you call. In this worst case scenario (SB 3-bets, BB caps) you would only be getting 32:4, or 8:1 pot odds.

In this case the board is also significantly more dangerous than in the previous example, as you now

lose to any  . What's more, you get completely different pot odds for a call and have to win at least twice as often to make calling profitable. This time you have to fold despite the large size of the pot.

EXAMPLE 2

Pre-flop: Hero is CO with A  T 
5 folds, MP3 calls, **Hero raises**, 1 fold, SB calls, BB calls, MP3 calls

Flop: (10 SB) T , 3 , 2  (4 players)
SB checks, BB checks, MP3 checks, **Hero bets**, SB calls, BB calls, MP3 calls.

You hit top pair top kicker and, of course, bet out. All your opponents call.

Turn: (7 BB) J  (4 players)
SB checks, BB checks, MP3 checks, **Hero bets**, SB calls, BB calls, MP3 calls.

On the turn an overcard appears and all players check. A jack could be out there, but you decide to bet again and protect on the draw heavy board.

River: (11 BB) Q  (4 players)
SB bets, BB calls, MP3 calls, Hero ?

Unfortunately, all opponents call your turn bet. The river card is an overcard that completes the most likely flush draw and some straight draws. The Small Blind donks and the others call.

You can't really think you're ahead very often here. Not only does the small Blind's bet represent huge strength considering the action on previous streets, but two players call this bet. The Small Blind can easily have a flush or a backdoor straight draw that completed on the river. He could also be betting with a queen. You are almost always behind against the SB.

The BB has been passive throughout the hand. You don't have much information on him. If he is a somewhat reasonable player, then you can put him on a worse ten, jack or queen. Better and worse hands than that are unlikely. The same applies to MP3.

You basically have to see yourself behind against each opponent. 14:1 pot odds don't change anything; you have to fold.

Bet for value with good hands

You've already learned the point of a bet on the river at the beginning of this article. We will now take a closer look at these reasons. Let's take a look at the first purpose: getting paid off by worse hands. In other words, a value bet.

The deciding questions you need to ask when considering a value bet are:

- Do I have the best hand?
- Will a worse hand pay me off in **more than** 50% of cases?

Do I have the best hand?

The strength of your hand is affected by ...

- ... **the number of opponents in the hand:** Your hand has to be even stronger for each additional opponent in the hand.
- ... **the board texture:** Which possible draws could have hit on the river?
- ... **the board development:** Could anyone have had a draw on the flop, or are backdoor draws the only kind possible?

The more opponents you are faced with on the river, the more likely it is that someone has a better hand than you. As a rule of thumb, you should remember: You can often bet for value with top pair and a good kicker, even against as many as three opponents. With a top pair and weak kicker, or

middle pair and good kicker, you can usually value bet against up to two opponents.

To make a good decision in these situations, you must take the board texture into consideration. If a lot of draws have completed, then raises by better hands become more likely. Furthermore, it becomes more likely that players will check behind with better hands, as they will themselves be scared of getting raised by a completed draw. You must also consider on which streets the draws that completed were possible.

EXAMPLE 1

You hold A♥ Q♣ in MP3. The board is (7,5 BB) 8♦, 5♠, 7♦, 9♦, Q♥ (3 players).

MP2 checks, Hero...? There is one player left to act behind you. Take a look at these three possible constellations.

| Situation | Flop | Turn | River |
|-----------|------------|------|-------|
| A | 8♦, 5♠, 7♦ | Q♥ | 9♦ |
| B | Q♥, 9♦, 7♦ | 8♦ | 5♠ |
| C | Q♥, 9♦, 5♠ | 7♦ | 8♦ |

- **Situation A:** You should check. The river brings a nightmare card. Straight and flush draws that were possible on the flop have now completed. You don't want to see a raise.
- **Situation B:** You should bet. The river is a [blank](#). Straights and flushes are unlikely, since no one raised on the turn. You will often have the best hand when you get called.
- **Situation C:** You bet. Hardly any draws were possible on the flop. Opponents will rarely call with straight draws, but will often call with made hands weaker than yours. It is unlikely that the 8♦ has completed a draw. This would also have been a backdoor flush, meaning it is not likely that an opponent was chasing it.

A river card that completes a flop draw is much more likely to have helped an opponent than a card that completes a backdoor draw.

EXAMPLE 2

You hold T♦ T♣ in MP3. You have an opponent in the big blind who has behaved passively on every street. Take a look at these three different board configurations.

| Situation | Flop | Turn | River |
|-----------|------------|------|-------|
| A | 8♣, 3♦, 7♥ | J♣ | K♦ |
| B | 8♠, J♣, 7♥ | 3♦ | K♦ |
| C | K♦, J♣, 7♥ | 3♦ | 8♠ |

The Big Blind checks to you. Do you bet or check?

- **Situation A:** You bet.
- **Situation B:** You bet.
- **Situation C:** You check.

Your opponent needs a reason to stay in the hand on the flop, unless of course he is a [complete fish](#).

In situation A, the reasons are usually straight draws or weak pairs that hit on the flop. This makes Kx unlikely. The jack could help straight draws, but if it had helped, then your opponent probably would have bet earlier instead of waiting to check/raise the river.

Situation B is similar, but the decision isn't quite so easy. Your opponent could have hit the J on the flop and be playing way ahead / way behind. However, you are usually facing a weaker hand, probably the 7 or the 8.

Things are completely different in Situation C. The opponent will usually have a higher pair or a straight draw after calling the flop. You can't expect to beat any hand that calls a bet on the river.

Overcards on later streets are usually not as bad as on the flop, as it is unlikely that an opponent has exactly that overcard!

Will worse hands call more often than better hands?

Just to clarify the meaning of the question, since it is often misunderstood: You can answer this question with 'yes' if and only if: Your opponent will have a weaker hand more than 50% of the time when he calls.

Example: You bet the river ten times. Your opponent calls you 6 times and has a weaker hand 4 times. Looking at the cases in which he did call, we see that he had a weaker hand in 4 of 6 cases, which is clearly more than 50%.

If the opponent were to call you 8 times and only have a worse hand 3 times, then he would be calling you with a worse hand in less than 50% of cases (3 of 8). What matters here is not a single case or ten cases, but the average that would be attained if the situation were repeated infinitely.

Comment: If you are out of position, there are exceptions in which you should bet despite getting called by a worse hand in less than 50% of cases. The theory behind this is more complex and is dealt with in the gold section.

EXAMPLE 1

Pre-flop: Hero is BB with A♥ K♥

6 folds, CO calls, SB completes, **Hero raises**, CO calls, SB calls

Flop: (6 SB) A♦, 9♥, 5♣ (3 players)

SB checks, **Hero bets**, **CO raises**, *SB folds*, **Hero 3-bets**, CO calls

You flop top pair top kicker and have the initiative. The Small Blind has already checked. You decide to bet. The player behind you raises and the Small Blind folds. The flop is very dry, with the only possible draws being gutshots. And there is only one face card. This means that the CO will rarely be semi-bluffing with a draw here. He will usually have a made hand or be bluffing. If he has a made hand, it's probably weaker than yours. The only hands that beat you are sets and two pairs, which are very unlikely (especially a set of aces). You will almost always have the best hand and decide to show aggression and raise.

Turn: (6 BB) Q♣ (2 players)

Hero bets, CO calls

River: (8 BB) 3♣ (2 players)

Hero ?



Your opponent called your raise on the flop and bet on the turn. Since he has shown a lot of strength and there aren't draws possible, it is very unlikely that he is bluffing. It is also unlikely that he has a better made hand, since he didn't cap on the flop or raise on the turn. You can therefore assume that he has a weaker made hand and wants to see a cheap showdown.

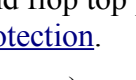
If you check, he will check behind. If you bet, he will call. When you do get called, you will have the best hand (unless CO is playing a strong hand far too passively). You can expect to have the best hand far more than 50% of the time and bet for value

If your opponent raises your bet, you will be getting 11:1 pot odds. To call profitably, your opponent must be raising with a weaker hand in more than 1 of 12 cases. You should call if he does raise, since you have no reason to believe he would be bluffing.


Missing out on opportunities to value bet on the river is one of the biggest mistakes that players make. Players tend to go to the showdown with very weak hands, especially in lower limits. You want to get as much value as you can from them.

EXAMPLE 2


Pre-flop: Hero is SB with **K**  **J** 
7 folds, BU calls, **Hero raises**, *1 fold*, BU calls

Flop: (5 SB) **J** , **8** , **6**  (2 players)
Hero bets, BU calls

You isolate the button and flop top pair with second best kicker. The board is very draw heavy and you bet for value and protection.



Turn: (3,5 BB) **5**  (2 players)
Hero bets, BU calls

The button calls your flop bet. At this point you don't know much about your opponent's hand. The BU could call on the flop with a lot of different draws and made hands with the intention of making a decision on the turn. The five completes a couple of straight draws, but you still bet for value and protection against other draws. You would definitely call a raise and go to the showdown.

River: (5,5 BB) **2**  (2 players)
Hero ?

The BU calls your turn bet too. He is either playing a draw passively or medium/marginal made hand (and sees himself behind). The river brings a blank. He could be on a busted draw, but there are a number of weaker made hands that he could have and call with. You therefore decide to value bet.

If the BU raises, you should call. No draws completed on the river. He either has a strange way of playing a strong hand, or he is trying to bluff. You don't know much about this opponent, so you call.

What happens if **T**  appears on the river instead of **2**  ?

River: (5,5 BB) **T**  (2 players)
Hero ?

This river card is decidedly worse. Some straight draws have completed, as has the flush draw. Nevertheless, your opponent will still call with weaker hands more often than better hands, so you should still value bet.

Checking is bad in this spot for several reasons. There's no real point in trying to induce bluffs, as nearly all draws have completed. Opponents will call with a lot of worse hands, but will not bet these hands if checked to. A check on this type of river often means that the checker wants to get to the showdown without getting raised by a better hand. This also means that your opponent will rarely bluff with hands that he would otherwise have folded.

If the BU raises, you should call. The river is dangerous, and you will often be faced by a better hand when raised, but your opponent may be aware of these facts too and try to bluff you off your hand. You have top pair, after all. There are a lot of weaker hands that could try to bluff you.

Let's take a look at another possible river card, the queen of spades.

River: (5,5 BB) **Q♠** (2 players)

Hero ?

This river brings an overcard to your top pair. The [OESD](#) with T9 has completed, but all others have missed. Your opponent could have called with a straight draw and a queen overcard and now hold top pair.

Nevertheless, it is again the case that most hands that have improved will raise if you bet. Busted draws will usually be folded and sometimes raised. If your opponent calls, then you will nearly always have the best hand, except, possibly, for a queen. You should make a value bet in this situation.

A raise on this river would be ugly. Nevertheless, you would be getting 8.5:1 pot odds, so you should still call if you have no specific reads. You can consider folding if you think your opponent is a straightforward [TAG](#). That kind of opponent hardly ever bluffs the river. If you get raised, you will of course be behind much more often than ahead. You only need to win 11% of the time, though, so you should only fold if you think your opponent isn't capable of bluffing in this spot.

Remember: Even if you really don't want to get raised, this shouldn't prevent you from making value bets. Getting raised may be bad in this spot, but it won't happen often, so having to call when raised won't hurt as much in the long [run](#) as missing value bets out of fear. If you only have one opponent, you shouldn't be too worried about draws, as these are far less likely with one opponent than with two or more.

This example shows you that you can still bet with a middle pair with a good kicker against one opponent, even when draws complete on the river.

EXAMPLE 3

Pre-flop: Hero is SB with **K♣ J♣**

6 folds , CO calls, BU calls, **Hero raises** , BB calls, CO calls, Button calls.

Flop: (8 SB) **J♦ , T♦ , 5♣** (4 players)

Hero bets , BB calls, *CO folds* , BU calls

You raise KJs from SB against two limpers and four players see the flop. You hit top pair with a good kicker and bet for value.

Turn: (5,5 BB) **2♥** (3 players)

Hero bets , BB calls, BU calls.

A blank appears on the turn, so you have an easy value bet.

River: (8,5 BB) **6♦** (3 players)

Both opponents call your bet. There is a possible flush on the river. Nevertheless, you value bet again, as there are still many worse hands that will call.

The same applies as in the previous hand if you get raised. Without specific information on your opponent you should call; you should only fold if you don't think your opponent is capable of bluffing. Your [line](#) should again be bet/call.

Only bet with made hands when you want a call

In the section on the "Bet strong hands for value" rule, you learned that a value bet is profitable if worse hands will call more often than better hands. In this section you will learn about borderline cases in which you can't be sure whether worse hands will call 50% of the time.

These cases often occur when the board is very dangerous. Draws could have completed, you aren't sure what to do if raised, and there are quite a few better hands that could flat call your bet. We'll get straight examples, since these are borderline decisions.

EXAMPLE 1


Pre-flop: Hero is MP3 with J  , J 
Hero raises, CO folds, BU 3-bets, SB folds, BB caps, Hero calls, BU calls.

Flop: (12.50 SB) 9  , 2  , 5  (3 players)
BB bets, Hero raises, BU folds, BB 3-bets, Hero calls

You raise from middle position with pocket jacks. The pot gets capped and three players see the flop. The Big Blind bets and you choose to raise for value and protection. Then he 3-bets. If you estimate that BB's range is 99+ after capping pre-flop and bet/3-betting the flop, you should quickly realize that you are not ahead against his range. You want to see the showdown due to the large pot, but you should stay passive for the rest of the hand.

Turn: (9.75 BB) 4  (3 players)
BB bets, Hero calls

The turn doesn't change the situation, so you should just call.

River: (11.75 BB) A  (3 players)
BB checks, Hero ?

The river brings an ace and the Big Blind checks. The check means that you can pretty much exclude pocket aces and nines from his range. You also should assume that your opponent will not fold to a bet. TT is the only high pocket pair you have beat. If you bet, you will get called by a worse hand in less than 50% of cases, which makes betting unprofitable.

In addition to this, you are not ahead often enough to call if you get check/raised, so you would have to make an unpleasant fold, not knowing what your opponent had. You should check and take the free showdown.

EXAMPLE 2

Pre-flop: Hero is SB with K  A 
6 folds, CO calls, BU calls, Hero raises, BB calls, CO calls, BU calls

Flop: (8 SB) K  , 8  , 5  (4 players)
Hero bets, BB calls, CO calls, BU calls

You raise with AK from the SB after two players limp; four players see the flop. You flop top pair top [kicker](#) and all opponents call your value bet.

Turn: (6 BB) J  (4 players)
Hero bets, BB calls, CO calls, BU calls

On the turn you still have the best hand more often than not and bet for value. Once again, all three opponents call.

River: (10 BB) Q  (4 players)
Hero ?

The river now completes [flush](#) and straight draws after three opponents called the flop and turn. You can't be sure how often your opponents will call with weaker made hands. Stronger hands could easily flat call for fear of even stronger hands, or to profit from over-calls. You will rarely make better hands fold with a bet, as you would be giving 11:1 pot [odds](#).

Therefore, betting again on the river would be bad. You should check and call any bet. As you can see: Check/call with top pair top kicker is not a mistake when the river card completes a number of draws in a multiway pot.

When should you try to induce a bluff?

Inducing bluffs has already been mentioned in several examples. In this section you will learn more about what this means.



'inducing a bluff' means checking to feign weakness and induce your opponent to bluff with a weaker hand that he would not have called a bet with.

Clearly, you can only induce bluffs when you are out of position. This move can be successful when:

- You can hardly think of any worse hands that would call if you bet.
- You don't think you can make better hands fold.
- You think you will win the showdown often enough to justify investing a bet.

The first point means that you can't value bet. The second point means that bluffing isn't profitable. The third point means that your hand is strong enough to take to the showdown.

EXAMPLE 1

Pre-flop: Hero is SB with A  5 
8 folds, Hero raises, BB calls

Flop: (4 SB) J , 8 , 5  (2 players)
Hero bets, BB calls

You attack the Big Blind with a [weak](#) ace and get called. You hit bottom pair top kicker on a [draw](#) heavy board. You bet for protection and to find out where you stand.

Turn: (3 BB) K  (2 players)
Hero bets, BB calls

Another overcard. You decide to bet again in the battle for the blinds, since the BB hasn't shown any real strength.

River: (5 BB) 3  (2 players)
Hero ?



The BB calls again and now you are on the river. The 3 is a blank, not completing any draws and, of course, not a dangerous overcard. However, hardly any worse hands will call if you now bet. The only worse hands that may call are 5 with a weaker kicker, 44, and 22. Busted draws will fold, and experience suggests that all other pairs will call. Betting is not profitable, since it is very unlikely that a hand like A high will call.

You are left with the choice between check/fold and check/call. As there were a lot of possible draws on this board, it is very likely that your opponent now holds a busted draw. This is where inducing bluffs comes into play. Many opponents interpret a check as a declaration of defeat and try to get their fingers on the pot. You can exploit this with a call.

To make the right choice, you have to pay attention to the pot size. You get 6:1 pot odds if your opponent bets. This means that you only need to win the pot about 15% of the time when you call. This is quite possible, given the board. If you manage to induce a bluff in this spot you have gotten maximum value from busted draws and can be pleased with yourself.

Tip: Don't let anyone convince you that generally passive players aren't capable of making river bluffs. In fact, a lot of calling stations love to bluff in these situations. You should be careful when considering trying to induce bluffs against good players, as these often interpret your check as a trap or bluff induce attempt.

EXAMPLE 2

Pre-flop: Hero is SB with A  K 
7 folds , BU raises , Hero 3-bets , BB calls, BU calls

Flop: (9 SB) 7  , 8  , 5  (3 players)
Hero bets , BB folds, BU calls

You 3-bet a [button](#) raise with the premium hand AK. On the flop you only have A high, but you make a continuation bet, as you could easily still have the best hand.

Turn: (5,5 BB) 5  (2 players)
Hero bets , BU calls

You bet again on the turn, since only one opponent is still in the hand.

River: (7,5 BB) Q  (2 players)
Hero ?

You find yourself on the river with [unimproved](#) overcards against an opponent who has passively called on the flop and turn. No better hand will fold against a bet. Furthermore, the Q could have helped the opponent. It is also doubtful that your opponent can call with any weaker hands.

You should again try to induce a bluff here and play check/call. He may even just check behind with the better hand. We said before, one of the most common mistakes players make on the river is not making a value bet.

When can you bluff with trash hands?

The important question is whether better hands will fold to your bet often enough. We will talk about bluffing with trash hands, as these are the best hands to bluff with. Your opponents will very often hold better hands. This means that when you make a hand fold, it will rarely be a weaker hand. Moreover, your opponents will often think that you're insane if your bluff fails and is revealed, which you can use to your advantage by making thinner value bets later on.



You can make made hands and busted draws fold with a bluff bet. When considering a bluff, always ask yourself these two questions:




- How likely is it that: a) your opponent is playing a draw, and b) a draw completed?
- Did a scare card show up?

If your opponent is likely to be on a draw that did not complete, you should bluff (assuming you can't beat his busted draw, in which case you could consider inducing a bluff). Your opponent will correctly fold his busted draw, and you will have successfully bluffed the better hand into folding.

Opponents are more likely to fold marginal made hands like bottom pair to scare cards. However, you need to be aware of what happened on the previous streets, which the first example will illustrate.

EXAMPLE 1

Pre-flop: Hero is SB with 7  6 
4 folds, Hero raises, BB calls

Flop: (2,5 SB) 5 , 5 , 8  (2 players)
Hero bets, BB calls

You raise from SB and BB defends, and you hit an [OESD](#) on the flop. You bet, because you think you can make a number of better hands fold.

Turn: (3 BB) A  (2 players)
Hero bets, BB calls

The ace is a perfect scare card for another bet.

River: (5 BB) K  (2 players)
Hero ?

The BB called your turn bet, which isn't what you wanted. The board offers hardly any possibilities for draws. Your opponent is even less likely to hold a draw, since you have 76. You are probably facing a made hand that wants to see the showdown - there is hardly a better card to fold to than the ace on the turn.

You have hardly any chance of making better hands fold, so you shouldn't bluff on the river. You also have no showdown value, so inducing a bluff is out of the question. Save your last bullet and play check/fold.

EXAMPLE 2

Pre-flop: Hero is BB with 6  3 

UTG calls, 6 folds, BU calls, 1 fold, Hero checks

Flop: (3,5 SB) 8 , 4 , 5  (3 players)
Hero bets, UTG folds, BU calls



You are given a freeplay, hit a monster draw on the flop, and bet. Not only can you make better hands fold and take the pot down directly, your bet would even be a value bet if both opponents called, as your draw will complete by the river more than every third time. The theoretical principles that govern this are covered in the article on value raises with draws: [When can you Raise for Value on the Flop with a Draw?](#)

Turn: (2,75 BB) J  (2 players)
Hero bets, BU calls

One player calls and you opt for a second bet in the hopes of getting a better hand to fold.

River: (4,75 BB) K  (2 players)
Hero ?

Your draws have missed on this draw heavy board and you are left with 6 high. However, there are a lot of other possible busted draws that have more showdown value than your own hand. The opponent could have called the flop with overcards and/or gutshots and potentially picked up

another draw on the turn (T , 7 , for example). Your opponent definitely won't call a river bet with that kind of hand, so you should bluff to get rid of busted draws with more showdown value.

This bluff needs to work app. 18% of the time ($1 / (4,75 + 1)$), which is likely in this situation. Therefore, you bet.








Avoid check/raises on the river

A check/raise is very rarely profitable on the river. While your opponent checking behind on other streets shouldn't really bother you due to the fact that there are other streets to come, this does not apply to the river.

Not only that, but you will only rarely manage to cap. Your check/raise will usually be interpreted correctly: you have a strong hand. This leads your opponent to either call or fold. If, however, you simply bet, then you are not showing as much strength. Players are likely to raise your bet, which lets you 3-bet. This is why people say call check/raises 'action killers'.

The question is: What you can expect from a bet vs what you can expect from a check/raise?

EXAMPLE

You are sitting in the Small Blind with A  2 . The board on the river: K  J  9 , 3 , 4 . Three opponents remain in the hand.

Here are some examples for possible betting sequences:

- Hero bets , call, call, call.
You get 3 BBs from the other players.
- Hero checks, check, check, bet , Hero raises , *fold, fold*, call
You only get 2 BBs from the other players.

In the second case you get one BB less, which definitely wasn't your intention when check/raising.

You need a good reason to assume that the next player will bet after your check and that you can [sandwich](#) potential callers. This, however, is rarely the case, which means check/raising is not profitable in the long [run](#). Many players try too many tricks on the river, causing them to miss out on a lot of value in the long run.

Summary

River play is more complicated than one would think at first glance. This article provides you with seven rules that can help you make good decisions in every river situation. The first two rules, "Don't fold what could be the best hand in a big pot" and "Do fold when you're certain you're beat" can be used to decide whether to make a call. You've learned that pot size is an important factor in making these decisions.

Value betting was covered in conjunction with the two rules "Bet strong hands for value" and "Only bet with made hands if you want to get called". Knowing the correct boundary for value bets is one of the most important basic skills for river play.

If you can't value bet despite having showdown value, your repertoire is not yet exhausted. The "Make use of the option of inducing bluffs" rule results from the fact that you can check to make opponents bluff with hands that would otherwise have been folded.

Even if you don't have any showdown value, you can follow the "Make the occasional bluff when you're certain you have the worst hand" rule according to the corresponding section.

The final rule, "Avoid check/raises on the river", is a reminder that check/raises on the river are usually not profitable in the long run. Your opponent will check behind too often, and you will not get the opportunity to 3-bet.

If you apply these rules and carefully select your checks, calls and bets, then there is nothing to stop you from finding success on the river, assuming, of course, that you played correctly on the streets leading up to the river.

Post-flop: Basic Hand Reading

[Poker](#) is a game of incomplete information and mixed strategy

Incomplete Information

In contrast to chess, where all information is known, we lack some knowledge in poker and are therefore unable to make perfect decisions. We do not know our opponent's [hand](#) and we do not know the future community cards.

Mixed Strategy

Although, like in black jack, we do not know the future cards, we can still determine probabilities for them. It is on the basis of these probabilities that we will make correct decisions. However, poker has a somewhat larger “human factor“ than black jack. Players interpret the same cards differently according to their own experience and whims, and even the same player will sometimes handle the same cards differently from before because the circumstances have changed. This may be for psychological reasons (the player is on [tilt](#)) or for tactical reasons. The latter indicates a strong player who can maintain the flexibility to adapt to changing situations.

Hand Reading

To compensate for the lack of information, a strong player will try to guess an opponent's hand or at least a [range](#) of possible hands. This is called "hand reading." There are many indices for estimating the opposing hand. Some are derived from the profile of the individual opponent, others from the betting sequence and number of players.

The Categories

There are several basic traits one can use to profile an opponent. Here, we will use gaming strength, looseness, aggression, and deceptiveness. Any community member who follows our advice will have a tight-aggressive playing style. Such a player will [fold](#) all trash hands in the pre-flop and will spend more time out of the hand than in it. This time should be used to observe and categorize the opposing players. One should be in the position to characterize every opponent as one of four basic types: tight-aggressive, tight-passive, loose-aggressive, or loose-passive. Advanced players use analysis software like PokerTracker and PokerAce to project data on their opponents directly onto the table. This is very helpful as it reduces the effort needed for observation, enabling one player to maintain games at three or four tables simultaneously. Information about analysis software can be found in the technology forum.

Gaming strength

Gaming strength is the most important criterion to consider when selecting a table. It is well known that the money comes from the [weak](#) players. We would most prefer a weak and [passive](#) player, but a weak [aggressive](#) player (aka a [maniac](#)) is also interesting, since he will put his chips against ours in a [bluff](#). If we get called by a weak player on the flop, we can [bet](#) the [turn](#) without too much worry as long as we're [heads-up](#) with him and have an [unimproved](#) AK. His [call](#) on the [flop](#) could just mean "I have two cards."

Looseness

A player is called [loose](#) if he plays too many starting hands and calls post-flop with low-valued cards. A slightly loose player has a flop-seen rate of over 20%, and over 25% is loose. A rate above 30% will impair the results considerably. A [tight](#) player will go to the [showdown](#) in about 35% of all cases. A showdown rate of over 40% is an indication of a very loose player. It is difficult to place this type of player's hand exactly. He might play a 65 offsuit from the pre-flop and get a [straight](#) on the flop without it being immediately noticeable. This is actually a small advantage of looseness. It's much easier to guess the hand of a tight player, since he wouldn't be playing unless he had a legitimate hand.

Aggression

PokerTracker measures aggression with an aggression factor. The [AF](#) is calculated with the formula $AF = \text{Bets} + \text{Raises/Calls}$. A [value](#) over 1.5 is aggressive, under 1.0 is passive, although strong players with a value under 1.5 may be considered passive; however, this is rare. Much caution should be taken if a passive player plays his hand strongly (raises), however if an aggressive player does the same it might mean a free card [raise](#) or a semi-bluff on the basis of a high value [draw](#).

Raising standards

Raising standards are synonymous with pre-flop aggression. A good player raises 8-12% of his hands. Fewer than 8% is too passive, more than 12% too aggressive. Many players are aggressive the whole way through, but there are some who raise a lot before the flop and then continue in a more passive fashion. One must make fine distinctions here. Caution should be taken on an raise from an early position by a reserved player, that is, one who raises 5% of his pre-flop hands. AQ is a clear fold in this case or in the case of an [unknown](#) opponent. However, an opponent who raises 20% of his hands is clearly overreaching. In this case, we should re-raise with AQ and usually also with KQ.

Deceptiveness

There is basic split amongst players; those who play straightforward and those who get tricky. Aggressive players are often quite deceptive and less straightforward. They play their strong hands weak and their weak hands strong. Regardless, there are also passive or moderately aggressive players who would normally never raise on a bluff, but who might risk a bluff bet against multiple opponents after a scary flop or a scare card. Thus, aggression and deceptiveness are two distinct traits. Usually, one should play straightforward in a low [limit](#) area with a lot of callers (one must produce the best hand on the [river](#)) whereas a little deceit is more effective with higher limits. In this games there are fewer opponents on the flop and these are in more of a position to part with a weak hand. After all, one can only bluff a person who has developed a sense for danger.

The four basic player types

tight-aggressive

The style of winning players! They play few hands, but when they do and hit a flop, they know how to be [aggressive](#) and defend their [hand](#). They use the semi-bluff, and in special cases a pure bluff, with fewer opponents left and when the time seems right.

tight-passive

The so-called "Rock" is actually too timid for [poker](#). They play a straightforward and uncreative style and are the easiest of all types to [read](#). Since they only play quality cards and [fold](#) so often, one cannot win much from them. They're winning players in loose-passive games, since they capitalize on the obvious blunders of their opponents. They don't stand a chance against stronger players, though. When they do raise, they only win small pots since they're easy to dodge. They often find themselves in the lead, but lack the gusto to [bet](#) their hands. Hence, they lose [value](#) and sometimes even a [pot](#) since they leave [weak](#) draws in their hands. They are easy to [bluff](#) and don't defend their blinds with enough vigor.

loose-passive

The "calling station," as loose-passive players are known, is the favored opponent of all winning players. They play far too many hands and go too far in the post-flop with weak cards. Like the rock, they fail to extract much value from their good hands. Sometimes they land a bad beat and cause some short term consternation. These feelings of frustration are unjustified. Handle your calling stations well; you want to play with them. Don't try to bluff them, and just make bets. One should bet with a top [pair](#) and medium kicker, since calling stations will often take a middle or bottom pair all the way to the [river](#).

loose-aggressive

This is the type with the largest need to prove themselves. They play too many hands and [raise](#) far too much. They want to win every pot possible and view folding as a type of defeat. For this reason, it is not easy to bluff them out of a hand. One should give serious consideration to a call-down even with a mediocre hand, even if one would have folded against a [rock](#) with the same hand. They often get caught in a pure bluff this way. Particularly extreme specimens are called maniacs. They raise often with [complete](#) trash. If one has position on a maniac, it is possible to play passable hands with a 3-bet to [isolate](#) the maniac (isolation play). One often ends up with a stronger hand and position.

The Betting Sequence

Preflop-Action

Unraised Pot

One can typically exclude premium hands in an unraised pot, since these will usually be raised pre-flop. Strong opponents will usually have middle and small pairs, [suited](#) connectors, suited aces, suited high cards (KTs) or high cards (KJ). Very weak players could have almost anything.

Raised Pot

In a raised pot one can surmise that the raiser and the cold caller (except for the big [blind](#)) have good hands. In these cases one must not be afraid to go against them, if they consist of T 8.

The Limp-Raise

The [limp-raise](#) occurs when a limper re-raises a raiser. This usually indicates a slowly played [monster](#) (AA or KK). Suppose a player limps, we raise, everybody else folds, and the limper re-raises us. If we don't hit the [flop](#) with AK or AQ, we should leave the hand. Surely one who limp-raises has AK or AKs and therefore has the upper hand on us. It would be unfortunate to give up an AK hand against another AK hand, but it can't be helped. In the majority of cases one is faced with a pocket pair. What will happen if one hits the king with AK? Against AA and KK one is already down. Fold? I cannot recommend that in all cases. It's inhumane to part with a top pair/top [kicker](#) hand. I would usually [turn](#) to a call-down policy in this case. There are many people who would limp-raise with AK, AKs, QQ or JJ. A [maniac](#) might even try it with medium pairs, since placing the raiser at AK is within the bounds of his optimism. If the limp-raise is from a very [passive](#) player, however, there is every reason to feel discomforted. In our top pair/top kicker example, we could raise on the flop and [check](#) our weapons after a re-raise. After a call, go with "check turn, [call](#) river", and if he checks the river then "check turn, bet River." The danger of "bet Turn, check River" is that he could also [check-raise](#) the turn with AK. All of this is valid for [heads-up](#) matches. A limp-raise against many opponents almost always means AA or KK. Exceptions are maniacs and tilters, who simply want to feed the pot.

At this point, it's also worth discussing the limp-raise in an active context. I recommend not limp-raising with a KK. The danger from all the ace hands is too great. A further danger comes from the blinds. I've seen KK get busted by a freak 2 pair out of the blinds all too often. The only situation in which I would [limp](#) out of early position with KK is when a bunch of loose-aggressive players who raise every pot are sitting behind me. A limp-raise attempt with AA is a little more plausible, since it's not threatened by overcards. A good opportunity might look thusly: the table is very tight, pre-flop raises from the early position are much respected, and one hasn't had a good hand in a while. In this case, the danger is that one will only get 1.5 small bets.

Flop-Action

Since only small bets are at [stake](#) on the flop, the action here should not be taken so seriously as on the more expensive streets. One often hits some tactical maneuvers here: probe bets, [bluff](#) or semi-bluff bets, free card raises, and [value](#) bets/raises with strong draws (there may be exceptions where no such skirmishing occurs, but then there are also no made hands).

Raises

If a solid player raises on the Flop, it commands respect.

Checkraises

A [check-raise](#) is a stronger play than a [raise](#) in position. It gets even more respect.

Lead Bets

If a player bets (out of position) against more than one person, it indicates a strong [hand](#).

[Button Bet](#)

An aggressive player always bets on the button when the bid is checked through to him. Vulnerable hands like top pair-no [kicker](#) can benefit from this. Suppose I have Q3s in a small [blind](#) and a [flop](#) of QT7. A lead bet would be problematic, since one would lose against a bigger Q and cannot shake [gutshot](#) draws. It's best then, to [check](#) once and see what happens. Against an early better, [fold](#) immediately. But if our [aggressive](#) button better is checked through it's a good opportunity for a check-raise, since it's then possible that one has the best hand and that every [weak draw](#) will be confronted with a 2-bet.

Cold [Call](#)

If a player calls a raise on the flop cold (2 bets at once), there are a few possibilities:

- i) He has a strong draw ([flush](#) draw, [OESD](#)).
- ii) He is a weak player and calls with a weak draw, e.g. with a gutshot.
- iii) He calls a top [pair](#) with a weak kicker (happens more often with weak players)
- iv) He's slowly playing a [monster](#) to raise on the [turn](#).

And now for the hand reading process: if there is no way to make a flush or straight, one can eliminate the possibilities i) and partly ii). If it is a strong player, eliminate ii) and iii).

Turn-Action

In contrast to the flop, "strong" truly means "strong" on the turn. Early position bets or check-raises should be particularly respected. Under special circumstances, however, there is also some [deception](#) on the turn. This occurs against aggressive players in [heads-up](#) (and probably also three-handed) situations with high limits check-raise bluffs and free [showdown](#) raises are part of a professional's arsenal.

Number of opponents

The number of opponents is an important strategic element. If one only faces a single or pair of opponents, it is possible to take a properly aggressive tack and build bluffs or semi-bluffs into one's strategy. The opponents will often not hit the flop, since an unpaired starting hand will only make a pair on the flop a third of the time. Against four or more players, these kinds of bluffs are senseless since at least one will probably make good with the flop. Against many opponents, one should only play the good hands and fold the bad ones. The [line](#) between aggressive and conservative strategies is drawn at 3 players; though one must make this decision on a case-by-case basis.

For hand reading, a multi-way [pot](#) is protected from bluffs if one opponent plays his hand strongly. He can usually be trusted in this case. However, if the pot is two- or three-handed then the possibility of a bluff cannot be discounted.

Over the course of time we will list some examples here. Examples of good reads posted in this thread will be incorporated into the article if I believe them to be valid in general.

How to Play Overcards

Introduction

In this article

- *When to contibet*
- *How to react to donk bets*
- *How and when to play according to [odds](#) and [outs](#)*

You've probably heard the old cliché "AK is like Anna Kournikova - looks great, but rarely wins." AKo is one of the most often played hands in [poker](#). But as you know, this [hand](#) often looks better before than after the [flop](#). You will usually end up missing the flop and won't quite know where you stand. You are certain to have overcards if you don't [pair](#) the flop. Hitting on the [turn](#) or [river](#) would give you top pair top [kicker](#).

Learning the strengths and weaknesses of overcards and how to play them profitably will improve your overall game immensely. These hands account for a large portion of a pro's profit: A pro knows when to [fold](#) and when to get [value](#) for his hand.

This article will teach you how to play after the flop when you have overcards and were the pre-flop [aggressor](#). A good understanding of the concept of odds and outs will be required, if you aren't familiar with this subject, or need to brush up before you continue reading, you can take a look at the article on [Odds and Outs for Advanced Players](#).

What makes playing overcards so difficult?

- **You will usually only have overcards after the flop**
The odds of hitting a pair on the flop are only around 29%. The odds of hitting two pair are

only around 1.5%. The odds of hitting a [flush draw](#) when you have [suited](#) hole cards are app. 15%. In other words, you will have neither a pair, nor a strong draw, on 2 out of 3 flops when you play AK. This may sound a bit sobering, but it's not that bad, since ...

- **You will usually be ahead on the flop even when you don't hit a pair**
Probability is just; your opponent will only hit the flop 1/3 of the time, as well. A high can very well be the best hand on the flop. The odds of being ahead with A high depend, of course, on the [board](#) and the opponent you are facing.


When should you contibet?

The Bronze and Beginner's sections gave you a number of charts to get a feel for pre-flop play, but you've only learned the standard post-flop moves so far.

There are a number of other factors that then come in to play after the flop, for example the number of opponents in the hand. This article will discuss one option you haven't seen yet: the contibet with overcards.

Many inexperienced players make the mistake of resigning the hand when they don't hit after having raised before the flop. They don't understand that they are often ahead when they have overcards and should not simply give up their [equity](#).

Pre-flop: 6 folds, CO calls, SB completes, BB Hero raises, CO calls, SB calls

Flop: (6 SB) K , 7 , 5  (3 players)
SB checks, Hero ???

You've completely missed the flop. You only have one overcard and a backdoor draw. Still, you can see yourself ahead fairly often. The board is pretty dry - a few [straight](#) draws could be out there, but not much else.

A lot of players [limp](#) with small pocket pairs, suited [connectors](#) and baby aces. Your AQ is ahead against a lot of these hands (such as 98, JT, J9, QT, QJ, A high and many more) on this board. Your [bet](#) allows you to protect.

If you are, in fact, ahead, your opponents will usually have 6 outs on their hole cards (as long as they don't have A high, as well). They could make a correct [call](#) with 7:1 odds, assuming they know their outs are clean. Your bet can also make a few better hands, like 22-44, fold, since they will see themselves behind after you bet and know they don't have many outs to improve their hand.

You go ahead and bet.

Hero bets, CO folds, SB folds.

Of course, this hand won't always play out like it did this time. Both opponents will rarely fold on the flop. Your bet is, however, still profitable, since ...

- ... you can take down a 6 SB [pot](#) with a 1 SB bet. You only need to see both opponents fold every 7th time for your bet to be +EV.
- ... you could be ahead, even if an opponent stays in the hand, since a lot of players make [loose](#) calls with [weak](#) hands on the flop.
- ... you could still improve your hand. You have 6 good outs, as long as your opponent doesn't have a K or a [monster](#). A queen or ace on the turn will usually give you the best hand.

Making this decision live at the table is rarely as easy as it was in this example. Whether or not you can contibet with overcards depends on the board texture and the number of players in the hand: The more opponents in the hand and the draw heavier the board, the less likely it will be that no one will have a reason to stay in the hand after the flop.

The pot will also be larger when several opponents are involved in the hand, which means players will be less likely to fold marginal hands. Being in position is always an advantage - you can often take a free card on the turn.

We've [set](#) up the following guidelines to help you make the right decision when considering a contibet with overcards.

When you are facing less than 3 opponents

You (almost) always bet. You will usually be ahead against two opponents, since they will usually have missed, as well. You want to protect your hand against live cards and make better hands (like weak pocket pairs) fold. The pot will usually be small, so your opponents won't want to invest too much.


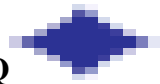
You are facing 3 opponents

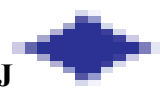


You only contibet under the right conditions. With three opponents in the hand, it's likely that someone has hit. The pot size will be at least 8 SBs, which means your opponents will be getting 9:1 odds if you bet. There are quite a few hands they could profitably call with.

Do not bet when...

- ... you are out of position against all opponents.
- ... the flop is draw heavy and you don't have any back doors.
- ... the flop is dry without a face card.



EXAMPLE 1




Pre-flop: Hero is MP2 with **K**  **Q** 
Hero raises, 2 folds, **Button** calls, **SB** calls, **BB** calls

Flop: (8 SB) **J** , **8** , **5**  (4 players)
SB checks, **BB** checks, Hero ???

You've completely missed the flop and only have K high, but both blinds have checked to you and you only have one player behind you. The board is moderately coordinated; most opponents will fold when they haven't hit anything. You could even make a better hand like A high fold. There is also a face card showing, which you can represent. This is an example of a situation in which you can bet.

EXAMPLE 2

Pre-flop: Hero is **UTG** with **A**  **K** 
Hero raises, 5 folds, **CO** calls, **Button** calls, **SB** folds, **BB** calls

Flop: (8,5 SB) **J** , **9** , **8**  (4 players)
BB checks, Hero???

This is the worst kind of flop you can see with AK - 2 suited and 3 connected cards. You don't have a backdoor for the flush and could easily be up against a pair or even two pair, since your opponents

will have a number of suited connectors in their ranges after having cold called before the flop. You will rarely be ahead and can hardly expect to [bluff](#) a better hand out of the pot. If you get called, you won't know if your opponent is on a draw or made hand. You have no other choice but to [check](#) and give up the [initiative](#).

You are facing 4 opponents



With four opponents in the hand, you can expect someone to have hit the flop. There will also be enough money in the pot for almost everyone to call a contibet profitably.

You should only bet when ...

- ... the flop is very dry and at least 2 players have already checked. [Paired](#) boards are then usually pretty good for a contibet.

EXAMPLE

Pre-flop: Hero is UTG with A♦ K♦
 Hero raises, 2 folds, MP1 calls, 2 folds, CO calls, Button calls, 1 fold, BB calls

Flop: (10,5 SB) T , 8♥, 5  (5 players)
 BB checks, Hero???



The flop is dry and the BB checks. You can't see yourself ahead against 4 opponents. The probability of someone having hit is around 100%, you are oop against most of your opponents and the pot is so large, that you won't be able to make anyone fold (unless they have absolutely nothing). Opponents could even call profitably with a [gutshot](#) (not even needing implied odds!). The best thing you can do is check.




You are facing more than 4 opponents

With more than 4 opponents in the hand, your contibet can't be profitable. At least one opponent will have hit the flop (in all likelihood) and the pot will be very large. No one is going to be folding to a bet on the flop. You can only continue playing according to odds and outs.

How should you react to a donk bet on the flop?

Been here before? You try to [isolate](#) a limper, which doesn't work, and then the limper donks into you on the flop.

Pre-flop: Hero is CO with A  J 
 UTG calls, 5 folds, Hero raises, BU calls, UTG calls.

Flop: (7,5 SB) 6 , 6 , 2  (3 players)
 UTG bets, Hero ???

UTG has donked. You would have contibet if had checked, for sure, since you will usually be ahead. The question now: Are you still likely to be ahead with your overcards?

In this example, the answer is yes! The flop only connects with 5 cards directly, so UTG is not very likely to have hit. He probably wouldn't bet with a 6 either, since he would be afraid of scaring off his customers.

Even a [fish](#) knows you will often miss the flop after you [raise](#) before the flop. A lot of opponents will bluff on this board. Since this is quite possible, you should raise in order to [push](#) the BU, who probably has 6 live outs, out of the hand.

As you may have noticed, you are usually in the following scenario when an opponent donks: You see yourself ahead against the [passive](#) player often enough and want to force the players behind you out of the hand. The question now: Are you ahead against the donkey? The answer to this question when facing an [unknown](#) depends largely on the board texture and number of opponents in the hand.

The flop is showing few or no draws

Your opponent's donk is either a bluff or a made hand. He will be semi-bluffing in the rarest of cases. The few opponents in the hand, the more likely the donk is a bluff, the more opponents in the hand, the likelier it's a made hand.

Raise the donk bet when you have exactly 2 opponents.

Let's change the example around a bit.

Pre-flop: Hero is CO with A♠ J♠
 UTG calls, 5 folds, Hero raises, BU calls, SB calls, BB calls, UTG calls.

Flop: (10 SB) 6♠, 6♥, 2♣ (5 players)
 UTG bets, Hero ???

The flop hasn't chanced, but it's much less likely that this donk bet is a bluff, since so many players are in the hand. UTG is betting into the entire field (4 opponents he knows little about). The pot is also pretty big. You will probably have to call once with overcards. As we said, only a very [aggressive](#) or stupid player would bluff in this spot, so you will have to choose a passive approach. [Take the quiz](#) on this article to find out how to play the hand correctly.

The flop is draw heavy

This presents a whole new scenario. This donk bet could be a made hand, a bluff, or a semi-bluff. Your two hole cards become very important. Your hand is particularly vulnerable with so many draws showing; backdoors will come into play.

Raise when ...

- ... facing less than 4 opponents and ...
- ... you have at least a BDFD or a 0-gap BDSD.

Note that you don't have a 0-gapper with AK on a Q73 board, but rather a 2-gapper, since you need a J and a T for a straight.

Pre-flop: Hero is MP1 with A♥ Q♣
 3 folds, Hero raises, 4 folds, SB calls, BB calls.

Flop: (6 SB) 3♠, 9♥, 8♥ (3 players)
 SB checks, BB bets, Hero ?

The BB donks into you on a draw heavy board. He will usually have a pretty wide [range](#) when doing so. He could have anything from a made hand like bottom, middle or even top pair, as well as a number of possible flush and/or straight draws. You can see yourself ahead against his range on average. You also have a nut BDFD, which makes your hand stronger against other draws.

You could get the SB to fold a better hand, like bottom/mid pair or a small pocket pair, with a raise. You are also in position and can probably take a free card on the turn if you want. These factors make your hand strong enough for a raise.

You won't be able to see yourself ahead anymore if you get 3-bet and will only be able to continue playing according to odds and outs. You'll be getting 11:1 odds if the SB folds, so you will only need 4 outs to stay in the hand. You might not even be in bad shape with your overcards, since he could have top pair or an [overpair](#). You also have a nut BDFD.

How do you play overcards according to odds and outs?

We will now take a look at a few situations in which you choose (or have no other choice but) to play passively using the same examples from the previous section.

EXAMPLE 1

Pre-flop: Hero is MP2 with **K♦** **Q♦**
Hero raises, 2 *folds*, Button calls, SB calls, BB calls

Flop: (8 SB) **J♦**, **8♥**, **5♣** (4 players)
SB checks, BB checks, **Hero bets**, *BU folds*, **SB raises**, *BB folds*, Hero ???

You decided to contibet the flop, the then the SB check/raises. There is no sense in 3-betting on this dry board; the SB will usually have a made hand that he won't give up easily.

He will usually see the turn at the very least. The pot will then be too large for him to fold, since he would be getting 13:1 odds. A free card won't help you much; you only have backdoors and overcards and can't know how many outs you have. You are left with other choice than playing passively and take out your checklist for playing according to odds and outs.

1) How many discounted outs do you have?

You have 6 undiscounted outs on your overcards, but they won't always give you the best hand. You can't be sure that you have the best hand if you hit top pair. The queen could [complete](#) an OESD, or you could be [dominated](#) by KJ or even K8 (although he would probably not check/raise with K8). You might even be facing a set.

On the other hand, you can't discount all of your outs. You have overcards and could be playing heads with top pair and a good kicker if you hit (you won't be able to fold if you do hit). You can give yourself 4 outs on your overcards after discounting. You can give yourself another 2 outs for your 2 card BDFD (as you learned in the article on odds and outs). You also have 2 2-gap BDSs (T9 and AT). You can give yourself 0.25 outs for each. All in all, you have 6.5 outs after discounting.

2) How large is the pot?

11.5 SBs.

3) How much will it cost to stay in the hand?

You are last to act, so you know it will cost exactly 1 SB.

4) Compare the odds to the pot odds: call or fold

You need 6.5:1 odds to call with 6.5 outs. You have an easy call with the 11.5:1 pot odds that you are being offered.



As you can see, overcards need to be discounted (sometimes heavily). This is the case in our

example, since your opponent's range is so polarized. He will either have a made hand or nothing at all after check/raising, and usually it will be a made hand. Your overcard outs won't all be clean, especially if the flop is showing any possible draws. You might even be dominated or drawing dead. As a general rule of thumb we can therefore say:

On a rainbow flop against ...

- 1 opponent: You can give yourself 5 outs on your overcards.
- 2 opponents: You can give yourself 4 outs on your overcards.
- more than 2 opponents: You can give yourself 3 outs on your overcards.

EXAMPLE 2

Pre-flop: Hero is UTG with A  K 
 Hero raises, 5 folds, CO calls, BU calls, SB folds, BB calls

Flop: (8,5 SB) J♦, 9 , 8♣ (4 players)
 BB checks, Hero checks, CO checks, BU bets, BB folds, Hero ?

You decided not to contibet and the BU starts the action. You have to decide to call or fold after the BB gets out of the way.

1) How many discounted outs do you have?

You have 6 undiscounted outs on your overcards. The last example taught you how to discount. The BU bet into 3 players, so you discount your outs by 50%, leaving you 3. Keep in mind you could already be drawing dead (or very thin).

Your opponent could have a completed straight; a couple of two pairs are also in the other players' ranges. The board is also suited, something you have to take into account. You can't discount all of your ♦ outs, though, since you will have top pair top kicker if you hit and won't be able to simply fold your hand. You would then also have a few redraws for two pair or trips. You even have a 2-gap BDDSD, but you can't give yourself any outs for that on a suited board.

Discount your tainted outs by 50%. This leaves you with 2-3 discounted outs in our example.

2) How large is the pot?

9.5 SBs.

3) How much will it cost to stay in the hand?

Calling will cost you 1 SB. You do have one opponent behind you, but a check/raise would be very unlikely in this situation. You checked as the PFA; he would probably have bet if he had a hand, since there is only one player behind him.

4) Compare the odds to the pot odds: call or fold

You need 15:1 pot odds to call with 2-3 outs. You fold, since you are only getting 9.5:1.

We can therefore say:

Discount your tainted outs by 50% on a suited board.

Discount your tainted outs by 100% on a single suited board.

Here is a chart so summarize things:

| | Outs on Overcards |
|--|-------------------|
|--|-------------------|

| Board | 1 Opponent | 2 Opponents | 3+ Opponents |
|----------|------------|-------------|--------------|
| 1-suited | 5 | 4 | 3 |
| 2-suited | 4 | 3 | 2 |
| 3-suited | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Keep in mind this chart only provides a guideline to follow. The actual values depend on a number of situational factors, such as the board texture and opponent(s). Use it as a reference and combine it with the information you have - you will probably make the right decision.

How should you play on the turn?

Your play on the turn won't differ too strongly from your play on the flop. Expect your opponents to be tighter on the turn in general. Many players like making a cheap bluff or raise for a free card on the flop, but bluffs can rarely be found on the turn. Opponents will also be less likely to call with a draw, since they will be usually be getting worse pot odds than on the flop.

It's important to differentiate between two possible situations on the turn when you have overcards: Either you will have initiative, or you won't. We will only look at examples in which you have initiative, because any time you have overcards without initiative your hand is just a weak draw and can only be played according to odds and outs.

Your opponents have been passive so far. This is usually due to one of two possible reasons: either they are on a draw and want to see the next card as cheaply as possible, or they have a made hand that they want to take to the [showdown](#) cheaply (occasionally they could even be slowplaying a monster).

EXAMPLE 1

Pre-flop: Hero is MP2 with **K♦** and **Q♦**. Hero raises, 3 folds, SB calls, BB calls.

Flop: (6 SB) **J♦**, **8♥**, **5♣**. (3 players) SB checks, BB checks, Hero bets, SB folds, BB calls.

Turn: (4 BB) BB checks, Hero ?



You have a realistic chance at getting the BB, your opponent, to fold after he only called on the flop. A lot of opponents in the lower limits won't believe you until you bet on the turn.

It's also quite possible that he called your bet on the flop with a marginal draw (gutshot) and will have to give it up to a bet on the turn. He also could have made a loose call with A high and be willing to fold it on the turn. You could even be ahead with your hand. Your opponent has been passive, so he probably doesn't have a strong hand like top pair. All of these factors combine to make a turn bet profitable in this situation.

You should usually bet when you are only facing one opponent on the turn.

EXAMPLE 2

Pre-flop: Hero is MP2 with **K♦** **Q♦**
Hero raises, 3 folds, SB calls, BB calls

Flop: (6 SB) **J♦**, **8♥**, **5♣** (3 players)
SB checks, BB checks, Hero bets, SB calls, BB calls.

Turn 1: (4,5 BB) **6♣**
SB checks, BB checks, Hero ?

We see the same board, but this time both opponents call your flop bet. The flop is moderately coordinated; 2 OESDs and a couple of gutshots are possible. You will almost always be behind on the turn with two other players in the hand. Your chances of winning the pot are slim. This is a good spot to take a free card. You check behind and hope to see a good card on the river or to get a free showdown. If your opponent bets, you will have to fold.

Turn 2: (4,5 BB) **A♣**
SB checks, BB checks, Hero ?

This turn card creates an entirely different situation. Even if your opponents called with marginal hands, you now have a very realistic chance at getting them to fold with a bet. You raised before and on the flop, and are now raising again on the A on the turn. Your opponents will assume that you either have a big pocket pair or overcards, which is exactly the range they are now behind against. A single pair needs 8:1 odds to call on the turn. Your opponents will only be getting 6:1 - they will have to fold if they don't see themselves ahead. Therefore, you bet.

When you are facing two opponents on the turn, you must take the flop texture and turn card into account before you decide to raise again.

EXAMPLE 3

Pre-flop: Hero is SB with **A♣**, **K♥**
MP3 calls, CO calls, BU folds, Hero raises, BB calls, MP3 calls, CO calls.

Flop: (8 SB) **Q♦**, **Q♠**, **6♥** (4 players)
Hero bets, BB calls, MP3 calls, CO calls.

Turn: (6 BB) **7♠** (4 players)
Hero ?

Unfortunately, everyone called your contibet on the flop. You can't see yourself ahead on the turn against this many opponents, regardless of how dry the flop is. You are also out of position against every opponent.

The turn won't scare anyone into folding a better hand that they didn't fold on the flop. It's a pretty grim situation for you, so all you can do is check.

When you are facing more than 2 opponents, you will usually have to check with overcards.

Examples

Now that you've been introduced to the theory, it's time to take a look at a few concrete examples.

EXAMPLE 1

Pre-flop: Hero is BB with $A♥$, $Q♣$
2 folds, UTG+2 calls, 3 folds, BU calls, SB folds, Hero raises, UTG+2 calls, BU calls.

Flop: (6.5 SB) $3♥$, $4♦$, $T♦$ (3 players)
Hero bets, UTG+2 calls, BU calls.

Turn: (4.75 BB) $K♣$ (3 players)
Hero ?

Both players call your contibet on the flop. Once the turn comes you need to decide again if you want to check or bet. The flop was pretty draw heavy - flush and straight draws are possible. The K on the turn is a scare card. You bet again, since you only have two opponents in the hand - you could be ahead and want to protect against any draws. You could also make a better hand fold with a bet (you can easily represent the K).

EXAMPLE 2

Pre-flop: Hero is MP2 with $K♦$, $A♥$
Hero raises, MP3 folds, CO 3-bets, BU calls, 2 folds, Hero caps, CO calls, BU calls.

Flop: (13.50 SB) $7♣$, $Q♣$, $8♣$ (3 players)
Hero bets, CO raises, BU calls, Hero calls.

Turn: (9.75 BB) $2♦$ (3 players)
Hero checks, CO bets, BU calls, Hero ?

You see a lot of action before and on the flop in this example. The CO even raised your flop bet after you capped before the flop. You only call because there is so much money in the pot. You then have to reevaluate your hand on the turn.

1) How many discounted outs do you have?

You have 2 overcards on a suited board and are facing two opponents. The BU could have a flush draw, which would taint the $A♣$ and $K♣$. You give yourself max. 3 outs.

2) How large is the pot?

~12 BBs.

3) How much will it cost to stay in the hand?

Since you are last to act, you know that you will have to pay exactly 1 BB.

4) Compare the odds to the pot odds: call or fold

With 3 outs you have 14.5:1 odds. You are only getting 12:1 pot odds, so you fold. Granted, this is a tough fold with so much money in the pot, but you can't be sure that an A or a K on the river would give you the best hand.

EXAMPLE 3

Pre-flop: Hero is MP1 with $A♣$, $Q♣$
2 folds, Hero raises, 4 folds, SB calls, BB calls.

Flop: (6.00 SB) 7♣, J♣, 3♣ (3 players)
 SB checks, BB bets, Hero ?

Both of the blinds call your pre-flop raise and the three of you see a single suited flop. You can forget raising, since you don't even have a BDFD or 0-gap BDS. You can only continue playing according to odds and outs.

1) How many discounted outs do you have?

You have 2 overcards on a single suited board and are facing two opponents. You can only give yourself 2 outs for your overcards. You do have a 2-gap BDS, but you can't give yourself any outs for that.

2) How large is the pot?

7 SBs.

3) How much will it cost to stay in the hand?

Staying in the hand will usually cost you 1 SB. It's hard to say how often the SB will check/raise in this situation. He only cold called your pre-flop raise, so he doesn't to be a strong pre-flop player. Judging by that, he shouldn't be too likely to check/raise 2 opponents on such an ugly board.

4) Compare the odds to the pot odds: call or fold

You need 22.5:1 pot odds to call with only 2 outs. You make an easy fold, since you are only getting 7:1.

EXAMPLE 4

Pre-flop: Hero is UTG+2 with A♦, Q♣
 UTG+1 calls, Hero raises, MP1 folds, MP2 calls, MP3 folds, CO calls, 3 folds, UTG+1 calls.

Flop: (9.50 SB) 3♣, 3♠, 6♦ (4 players)
 UTG+1 checks, Hero bets, MP2 calls, CO calls, UTG+1 folds.

Turn: (6.25 BB) T♥ (3 players)
 Hero ?

The flop is pretty dry. You make your contibet and get called by two players. And this is exactly why you should bet again: Your opponents will have often called with overcards on the flop and will be willing to give them up on the turn. But they can only do that if you let them. The T isn't much of a scare card, but they will still have to fold, since the pot odds just dropped by 50%.

EXAMPLE 5

Pre-flop: Hero is MP3 with A♥, Q♣
 1 folds, Hero raises, 2 folds, SB calls, BB calls.

Flop: (6 SB) 3♣, 9♥, 8♥ (3 players)
 SB checks, BB bets, Hero raises, SB folds, BB calls.

Turn: (5 BB) 4♦
 BB checks, Hero ?

The turn is a blank. The BB's donk on the flop can mean any number of things: flush and straight draws, bottom/middle pair, possibly top pair. He probably doesn't have anything better, since most players would check/raise with 2 opponents in the hand with anything better than top pair.

You're obviously behind against any made hands, but you still want to protect against any draws. Your opponent will be getting 6:1 pot odds, meaning he will need ~6.5 outs to call. This means he will probably call with a flush draw or an OESD, but would be making a mistake in doing so with a gutshot. The odds won't be high enough to call with bottom/middle pair if he sees himself behind, either.

Your bet on the turn could also let you take a free showdown on the river. You can take your overcards to the showdown against any drawing hands. If an ugly card shows up on the river, you can also just check behind (as long as nobody donks). You bet on the turn to protect your hand and for a free showdown.

BB checks, Hero bets, BB raises, Hero ?

Then the BB raises. You can't see yourself ahead any more and can only continue to play according to odds and outs.

1) How many discounted outs do you have?

A check/raise on the turn shows a lot of strength and is rarely a bluff. It's hard to say how many outs you have when you don't have a very good [read](#) on your opponent. You need to discount heavily and can give yourself 3-4 outs on your overcards.

2) How large is the pot?

8 BBs.

3) How much will it cost to stay in the hand?

Since you are last to act, you know that it will cost exactly 1 BB.

4) Compare the odds to the pot odds: call or fold

You need at least 11:1 pot odds with 3-4 outs and fold, since you are only getting 8:1.

Conclusion

After reading this article, you should know how to evaluate your overcards on the flop and know exactly what to do in your post-flop play. Remember what those other guys said about Anna, "Looks great but never wins." Now you can be happy every time Anna Kournikova comes your way. She's looking better than ever and you now know how to score.

Your [bankroll](#) only stands to profit if you can learn to follow these guidelines. Understanding how to play your overcards correctly will become increasingly important as you make your way up the levels. These are situations you will encounter very often. Making small mistakes doesn't cost much in a single hand, but it can have a severe effect on your win rate over time. Taking the time to improve your game with overcards is definitely worth the effort.

How to Play Short-handed (With Charts)

Introduction

In this article

- *The difference between short-handed and [full-ring poker](#)*
 - *The Open Raising Chart (ORC) and other charts*
-

A poker game is considered short-handed when 3-6 players are dealt cards. The strategy and general approach to playing in such games is quite different from that in a heads up or full-ring game.

Short-handed games are much more [aggressive](#) than full-ring games. Swings tend to be larger, since you play more hands. On the other hand, your chances of winning increase as well, since a lot of poor players are attracted to the heavy action found in short-handed games.

This article will give you a detailed overview of how your strategy should change when you switch from full-ring to short-handed play. You will also get new charts to help you find the right [line](#) before the [flop](#).

DOWNLOADS

→ [The ORC and additional preflop charts](#)

How is short-handed play different?

Having fewer players at the table brings a number of changes to the game.

YOU WILL HAVE A MARGINAL [HAND](#) MORE OFTEN ON THE FLOP

Having fewer players at the table means you have to post blinds more often, which means you can't sit and wait for a strong starting hand. You have to make more marginal decisions than in a full-ring game.

Bluffs and semi-bluffs are made more often, both by you and your opponent, to extract more [value](#) with marginal hands. This means some hands which would be too marginal to play in a full-ring game have more value, which changes how you evaluate your hand on the flop. You have to learn to react in situations in which you miss the flop, but are still ahead with your hand.

DEFENDING BLINDS BECOMES MORE IMPORTANT

This is an easy conclusion to reach: Since you have to post blinds more often, defending your [blind](#) becomes more important. If you aren't up to par in blind defense situations, you should work on your game a bit more before you switch to short-handed play, or you will miss out (or even lose) a fair amount of value when you are in the Big Blind.

SWINGS ARE LARGER

Since you have to play in more marginal situations and defend your blind more often, you can expect to encounter larger swings. Losing 100 BBs is normal, losing 200 isn't that big of a deal, either. You should give yourself a financial cushion before moving up a [limit](#). Whereas you would wait until you have 300 BBs in your [bankroll](#) to move up a limit in full-ring play, you should have 500+ BBs before you move up a limit in short-handed play. You should also be mentally prepared for the downswings that will inevitably come your way.

Be sure to [read](#) the article on advanced bankroll management:

→ [Go to the article: Bankroll Management for Advanced Players](#)

MORE HANDS, WEAKER OPPONENTS

SH play does have its upsides. There are a lot of [loose](#) players that don't know how to show aggression at the right time. You also play more hands per hour, since playing a single hand doesn't take as long with only 6 players at the table. This means you earn more per hour, assuming you

have the same win rate. And sometimes there's a practical side to it - as you make your way up the limits, you will find fewer full-ring tables to play at.

You will often find yourself in a heads up situation on the flop. Two articles, one from the Bronze section and one from the Gold section, can help you:

→ [Standard Lines Against A Single Opponent](#)

→ [Standard Lines: Advanced](#)

The ORC and other charts

This section will introduce you to the Open Raising Chart (ORC). This chart is the basic chart used for short-handed play and replaces the Starting Hands Chart and other pre-flop charts from the Bronze section.

→ [Download all charts including the ORC as PDF file](#)

This chart differentiates between the following situations:

- You are [first-in](#)
- Players have limped in in front of you
- One [raise](#) was made in front of you
- You are defending your Big Blind
- More than one raise was made in front of you

You are first-in

This is the most simple situation - you are first-in when everyone folds in front of you. Look at the "ORC - First-in" to find the right action.

This chart includes all hands that are, from a statistical point of view, profitable against the random hands behind you. You raise to increase the [edge](#) that you already have. Notice that you never open [limp](#). If you are first-in, you either raise, or [fold](#).

The chart shows you all hands you can play (raise!) from your position. Any time all opponents fold in front of you, you raise when your hand is found in the chart. Note: The chart gives the *weakest* playable hand. When, for example, you want to look for the weakest playable A high hand and see AJ, you raise with AJ, AQ and AK.

Pre-flop: Hero is CO with Q♥ 9♥
2 folds, Hero ?

You look at the chart under the CO column. Find the row under "Suited Cards" and you see: Q8. This means you raise with any queen with an 8 or better [kicker](#). This includes Q9, so you raise.

The ORC takes the possibility of running into a strong hand behind you into account. This is why you can play more hands in late position than in early position.

As you've learned for some time, you do not limp when you are first-in. The risk of being raised and isolated by a better hand is much higher at a 6max table. You can imagine what this means for your implied [odds](#).

Players have limped in in front of you

If someone has already limped in by the time the action comes to you, you need to use the chart, "Against 1 limper." Once again, you see the weakest hands you can play in a given position. You also differentiate between 1, 2 and 3 limpers.

It doesn't matter if you are in the Small Blind or not. You only have to pay half as much when you

are, but the fact that you will be out of position (potentially against several opponents) offsets any advantage this gives you.

1 LIMPER

If you are not in the Big Blind and 1 player limps in before you, you either raise or fold. The hands found under the column in the chart are the hands that give you an edge against the random hands behind you and the hands found in your opponent's open limping [range](#).

Pre-flop: Hero is BU with
MP2 folds, MP3 calls, CO folds, Hero ?



You look at the column for 1 limper and at the section for [suited](#) cards. You see that you raise suited jack high hands with a 9 or better kicker. JT is good enough for a raise in this situation.

2 OR 3 LIMPERS

Once 2 or more players have limped in, you no longer follow the principle of raising or folding. You should still raise with strong hands, but should only [call](#) and see a cheap flop with marginal, but playable hands (small [pair](#) for [set](#) value, suited [connectors](#)).

The chart differentiates between 2 and 3 limpers, as well. You also see two columns, one for hands you raise with, and one for hands you call (overlimp) with.

Pre-flop: Hero is SB with
MP2 folds, MP3 calls, CO folds, BU calls, Hero ?



You start by looking at the raise column. The row "pairs" shows you 88, which is higher than your pocket sixes. You can't raise. Time to look to the right to see if you can call. There you see 44. Your pocket sixes are better, so you [complete](#).

One raise was made in front of you

If exactly one raise was made in front of you, there are a few charts you could look to. In general, the key question is whether or not you are in the Big Blind.

Important: The positions listed in these charts refer to the [aggressor's](#) position, not yours!

YOU ARE NOT IN THE BIG BLIND

Two charts can help you in this situation. It doesn't matter the call was made before or after the raise (limp or cold call).

1 raise and 1 call

This chart shows you all the hands you can 3-bet with. Note: Your actions only depend on a call when you have a pocket pair.

1 raise and at least 1 call

This chart shows you when you can call a raise.

EXAMPLE 1

Pre-flop: Hero is BU with
2 folds, CO raises, Hero ?



Look at the chart 1 raise (and 1 call) under the CO (no blind). Under off-suited cards you see A8. You fold your A5.

EXAMPLE 2

Pre-flop: Hero is SB with T  T 
 MP2 folds, MP3 raises, CO folds, BU calls, Hero ?

Look at the chart 1 raise (and 1 call) under MP\$ (SB). The BU called, so you look at the "With call" column and see 99. You can 3-bet with TT.

EXAMPLE 3

Pre-flop: Hero is CO with Q[♣] J[♣]
 MP2 raises, MP3 calls, Hero ?

Look at the chart 1 raise (and 1 call) under MP2. There is only a "-" for the row with Q high suited hands. This means you need to look at the chart 1 raise and at least 1 call. Here you see QTs. You

can call with Q  J .

Big Blind / Blind defense

You will find yourself facing a single raise (without any calls) and sitting on the Small or Big Blind more often in short-handed games. You can use the charts we just discussed when you are in the SB.

When you are in the BB, you have an advantage: you only have to pay 1 SB to call, which means you will usually be getting 3.5:1 [pot](#) odds (unless the SB raised). The disadvantage: you will be out of position after the flop.

Considering the fact that a raise in a SH game is usually made with a hand too [weak](#) to be found in the SHC, you can easily conclude that the range listed in the SHC for defending your blind is too [tight](#). You would be giving up too much money without a fight.

If your opponent sees you folding your BB too often, he will raise with weak hands to steal your blinds, since he knows doing so will be profitable for him. Defending your blinds goes beyond the situation at hand. It's a way of telling your opponent: This twice before you try to steal my blind. It's not free for the taking.

The Blind Defense Chart is designed to help you in exactly this situation. Be sure to look at the right column for the aggressor's position, as this plays a key role. You then differentiate between calling hands and raising (3-bet) hands. Take a look at a few examples:

EXAMPLE 1

Note: Hands listed as x/x (for example, 22/TT), give you the weakest hand for calling (22) and the weakest hand for 3-betting (TT).

Pre-flop: Hero is BB with 9[♣] 9[♥]
 MP2 raises, 4 folds, Hero ?

Look under MP2. You see 22/TT in the row for pairs. This means you can call with 22+ and raise with TT+. You call with your pocket nines.

EXAMPLE 2

Note: When hands are listed as .../A2, for example, you should either fold or 3-bet.

Pre-flop: Hero is BB with A[♦] 5[♦]
 4 folds, SB raises, Hero ?

Look at the rows for suited cards under the SB and you see .../A2. This means you don't call with a small suited ace - you 3-bet. You raise with A[♦] 5[♦].

EXAMPLE 3

Note: When a hand is simply given as x, you do not 3-bet. This is the weakest hand you can call

with.

Pre-flop: Hero is BB with J♣ 5♠
3 folds, BU raises, SB folds, Hero ?

Look at the rows for off-suited cards under the BU. Under jack high hands you see J8. This means you can call with a jack and an 8 or better kicker. Your J5 is too weak, so you fold.

You may wonder why you should defend your blind with such weak hands. Two thoughts to keep in mind: You are getting 3.5:1 pot odds. You don't have to win too often for your call to be profitable in a blind defense situation. Secondly, You should be well versed in playing heads up oop against a single opponent. You can learn more about playing in such a situation in the following article:

→ [Go to the article: Standard Lines Against A Single Opponent](#)

You will have to get used to check/folding on the flop when you don't hit. This will happen often enough. You will hit a pair or a [draw](#) and have a playable hand about 1 in 3 times.

There was more than one raise in front of you

Any time more than one raise is made in front of you, you will either raise again and cap, or fold. You can find a list of hands to [cap](#) with in the chart 1 raise and 1 re-raise.

EXAMPLE 1

Pre-flop: Hero is SB with 7♣ 7♠
MP2 raises, 2 folds, BU 3-bets, Hero ?

This chart is pretty easy to read. You look in the row for pairs and see TT. 77 is too weak, so you fold.

EXAMPLE 2

Pre-flop: Hero is SB with J♣ J♠
MP2 raises, MP3 folds, CO 3-bets, BU caps, Hero ?

And this time? This isn't a simple raise, re-raise situation...

When the action is already capped and you are

- ... not in the Big Blind: You call with AKo, AKs, QQ+.
- ... in the Big Blind: You call with hands found in the raise, re-raise chart.

Tough as it is, you lay down your jacks.

Conclusion

You have to play more hands and see more flops when you are short-handed. You will tend to have weaker made hands after the flop, which means you will encounter higher [variance](#) and face more complicated situations. The good news is that you can make a higher profit, since your opponents will not be able to overcome these same problems as well as you can.

The charts in this article give you a good pre-flop foundation for playing short-handed. You should print them out and have them handy while playing. Your goal is to one day know them so well that you don't need to consult them to make the right decision.

In order to continue progressing, you need to get as much practice in as you can and study up all the learning material PokerStrategy has to offer. This will help you as you learn to estimate what has so far been referred to as, "possible hands your opponent could have."

Mathematics: How does Knowing the Expected Value (EV) Help You?

Introduction

In this article

- $EV = (\text{possible winnings}) * (\text{probability of winning}) - (\text{possible losses}) * (\text{probability of losing})$
- How to figure out the best action
- How to apply the EV formula to improve your game

The expected [value](#) of an action tells you how big your profit or your losses will be on average for that action. In poker, you can always find out which is the "right" action by determining the EV of all possible actions and choosing the one with the highest expected value.

If you are confronted with the choice between calling or folding, for instance, you can compute the EV to know exactly which decision is the better one. Of course, you have already learned how to make a decision regarding call/fold using the [odds](#) and outs; learning to calculate the EV is the next step.

In this article you will learn how to calculate the EV of an action and choose the best possible action in a given situation. Furthermore, we will show you how you can use the expected value to analyze past game situations, allowing you to answer questions such as 'What would have had to be the case in order to ...' or 'What would have happened if I had done this?'.

In order to be able to comprehend the content of this article, it is absolutely necessary to understand the concept of [outs](#) and odds. You may also want to freshen up on some your basic math regarding probability and linear equations.

How to compute the expected value of an action

Let's suppose someone offers you one of two envelopes. One contains €5, the other €20. You can look and touch, but can't [tell](#) which envelope contains which bill.

You can buy one of these two envelopes for €10. The question is, should you? The answer can be found in the expected value of each action. The EV tells you how much money you will make/lose on average if you were to allowed to make this decision repeatedly.

You need four values to compute it:

- How much can you lose?
- How much can you win?
- How high is the probability of winning?
- How high is the probability of losing?

EV is the abbreviation for expected value, and there is a basic formula to find it.

$$EV = (\text{possible winnings}) * (\text{probability of winning}) - (\text{possible losses}) * (\text{probability of losing})$$

You basically measure up possible winnings against possible losses. This gives you the expected value for your decision: What will this decision ultimately leave me with? We see this formula differentiate between winnings and losses, however, we can generally [call](#) both of them 'payout'. If the payout is positive, you make a profit, if it is negative, you suffer losses.

Our general formula is therefore:

$$EV = \text{Probability}_1 * \text{Payout}_1 + \text{Probability}_2 * \text{Payout}_2 + \dots + \text{Probability}_n * \text{Payout}_n$$

Here is what this formula takes into account:

- What can happen?
- **Payout_x**: How much do you earn or lose if event x happens?
- **Probability_x**: How probable is it that x happens?

Instead of differentiating between winnings and losses, you simply determine the result (payout) of a given decision. If the value is positive, you will make a profit on average by making that decision. If it is negative, you will lose money on average by making that decision.

You can calculate an exact EV by taking all possible outcomes in a given situation into account. First, you ask yourself what can happen and how much you would win or lose in each case. After that, you determine the likelihood of each possible result actually taking place. Then you multiply your possible winnings and losses by the probability of that result taking place, and, finally, add up the results.

In our example, the probability of choosing either envelope is 50%. You will take envelope A with €5 50% of the time, and you will choose envelope B with €20 the other 50% of the time.

This also means you will win €5 half the time, and win €20 the other half of the time. However, you will also lose €10 100% of the time you play.

Let's put this into our formula:

- You lose 10 Euro 100% of the time, since you have to pay to play.
- You win €5 50% of the time.
- You win €20 50% of the time.

This translates into the following:

$$EV = \text{win}(\text{envelope A}) * 50\% + \text{win}(\text{envelope B}) * 50\% - \text{loss}(\text{stake}) * 100\%$$
$$EV = 5 \text{ Euro} * 50\% + 20 \text{ Euro} * 50\% - 10 \text{ Euro} * 100\%$$

In the next step we see 50% of 5 (€2.50) + 50% of 20 (€10) - 100% of 10 (€10). The result tells how much we would make/lose on average by accepting the stranger's offer and purchasing an envelope.

$$EV = 2.50 \text{ Euro} + 10 \text{ Euro} - 10 \text{ Euro}$$
$$EV = 2.50 \text{ Euro}$$

This means you will make a profit of €2.50 on average every time you accept the offer. The result is a positive value, meaning that the decision is +EV. You will hear a lot about 'plus EV' and 'minus EV' in [poker](#) and the PokerStrategy community. Now you know what it means.

How to use the EV to make the best decision

What's looked easy so far can quickly become complicated when you start analyzing real situations. If you happen to find yourself with the choice of folding or calling on the turn, for example, simply do this: Calculate the EV of calling, and then the EV of folding. Compare the results - the option with the highest value is the decision you want to make.

Let's take a look at an abstract example first. You have two events: A and B. The probability that A happens is 80%, the probability of B happening is 20%.

| | Event A happens | Event B happens |
|-------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Probability | 80% | 20% |

In this example, you can bet on whether Event A or B will take place. If you bet correctly on Event A, you win €2, but will lose €4 if Event B takes place.

Or, you can win €4 by correctly betting on Event B, but will lose €2 if Event A takes place.

| | Event A happens | Event B happens |
|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| You bet on A | You win 2€ | You lose 4€ |
| You bet on B | You lose 2€ | You win 4€ |

To find out whether it's better to bet on A or B, you compute the expected value for a bet on Event A and the expected value for a bet on Event B. Then you compare them.

$EV = (\text{possible winnings}) * (\text{probability of winning}) - (\text{possible losses}) * (\text{probability of losing})$

$$EV(A) = 2€ * 80\% - 4€ * 20\%$$

$$EV(B) = 4€ * 20\% - 2€ * 80\%$$

The EV of Event A results from the fact that you will win €2 80% of the time and lose €4 20% of the time. Let's find out exactly what that means.

$$EV(A) = 2€ * 80\% - 4€ * 20\%$$

$$EV(A) = 1.6€ - 0.8€$$

$$\underline{EV(A) = 0.8€}$$

The resulting value is positive, meaning it is profitable to bet on Event A. You will win €0.80 on average every time you do. Now let's take a look at the EV of Event B.

$$EV(B) = 4€ * 20\% - 2€ * 80\%$$

$$EV(B) = 0.8€ - 1.6€$$

$$\underline{EV(B) = -0.8€}$$

The resulting value is negative. You will lose €0.80 on average every time you bet on Event B!

You compare the EV of both possible decisions and see that the EV of A is significantly higher than the EV of B.

$$\underline{EV(A) > EV(B)}$$

A win of 80 cent on the one side, and a 80 cent loss on the other side. Your best choice will obviously be to bet on A. And just like that, you have learned an essential principle in poker.

When you are confronted with a decision, choose the action that has the highest expected value.

This is a fundamental principle of poker. Take a closer look at the wording. You aren't looking for the action that will result in the highest profit, but rather for the action with the highest expected value. Sometimes the best action will be -EV, meaning you will lose money on average. This is still

the best decision when all other options have an even lower EV.

Expected value in Texas Hold'em

Suppose you are facing one opponent on the [turn](#).

You have: T♣ 9♣

The [board](#) shows: 6♥ 7♣ 2♥ 4♦

You have a [gutshot straight draw](#) and need an eight to make your straight. You are certain that your opponent has an overpair, like two queens or maybe kings.

Your [outs](#) are clean and you need one of the four eights in the [deck](#) to win the [hand](#). 4 of the 46 cards remaining in the deck are useful. The probability of hitting an 8 on the [river](#) is, therefore, 4/46, or about 0.087 or 8.7%.

You lose when any other card is dealt. There are $46 - 4 = 42$ cards in the deck that are not useful to you. The probability of losing the hand is, therefore, 42/46, or 0.913 (91.3%).

All we need now is the possible winnings and losses. The [pot](#) is \$5. Your opponent bets \$1. This means the pot you can win is \$6 now.

Your losses are the \$1 you have to pay to [call](#).

The EV of calling is therefore:

$EV(\text{call}) = (\text{possible winnings}) * (\text{probability of winning}) - (\text{possible losses}) * (\text{probability of losing})$

$EV(\text{call}) = \$6 * 8.7\% - \$1 * 91.3\%$

$EV(\text{call}) = -\$0.39$

A negative value, meaning you will lose money on average. You can expect to lose \$0.39 of every \$1 you invest, and win \$0.61 of every \$1 you invest. A poor investment and a clear case of -EV.

But don't stop there. You know how much you can expect to lose on average by calling, but you need to determine the EV of all possible actions before you know which decision is best.

The EV of folding is always zero.

$EV(\text{fold}) = \$0$

You don't invest any more money, meaning your possible losses are zero. The same goes for your winnings though, as you can't win the hand when you fold. This is where a lot of people ask, "What about the money you've already invested in the hand?" The answer: Forget that money, it's not yours anymore.

Compare the EV of all possible actions to determine the correct decision:

$EV(\text{fold}) = \$0$

$EV(\text{call}) = -\$0.39$

$EV(\text{fold}) > EV(\text{call})$

You can clearly see that you are better off folding than calling.

Other uses

Playing good [poker](#) means making the decision with the highest [EV](#) in a given situation. Any time the expected [value](#) of an action is higher than 0, you make profit by taking that action.

Once you start playing around with the formula (which you should do when analyzing past hands where you weren't sure about your choice, for example) you can start asking yourself questions like: How big would the [pot](#) have had to be in order to justify calling a \$1 [bet](#) with my [gutshot](#) draw? Let's take a look.

The pot size is therefore our "possible winnings":

$$EV(\text{call}) = (\text{possible winnings}) * (\text{probability of winning}) - (\text{possible losses}) * (\text{probability of losing})$$

You want to know when the expected value will positive:

$$EV(\text{call}) > 0$$

We can change the formula to find out how large the pot must be for the EV to be positive:

The EV of calling is > 0, when:

$$(\text{possible winnings}) * (\text{probability of winning}) - (\text{possible losses}) * (\text{probability of losing}) > 0$$

Now we just have juggle a few things around. You might want to brush up on your algebra if you have trouble following this.

The EV(call) is > 0, when:

$$(\text{possible winnings}) * (\text{probability of winning}) - (\text{possible losses}) * (\text{probability of losing}) > 0,$$

which can be rewritten as:

$$(\text{possible winnings}) * (\text{probability of winning}) > (\text{possible losses}) * (\text{probability of losing}), \text{ which can be rewritten as:}$$

$$(\text{possible winnings}) > (\text{possible losses}) * (\text{probability of losing}) / (\text{probability of winning})$$

Now we have isolated our [unknown](#) variable on the left side of the formula and can plug in the values that we have to arrive at the answer!

$$(\text{possible losses}) = \$1$$

$$(\text{probability of losing}) = 42/46$$

$$(\text{probability of winning}) = 4/46$$

This leads us to the following result:

$$(\text{possible winnings}) > (\text{possible losses}) * (\text{probability of losing}) / (\text{probability of winning})$$

$$(\text{possible winnings}) > \$1 * (42/46) / (4/46)$$

$$(\text{possible winnings}) > \$1 * 1932/184$$

$$(\text{possible winnings}) > \underline{\underline{\$10.5}}$$

This means the pot has to be bigger than \$10.50 for a \$1 investment to be profitable. You should already know the [odds](#) for a gutshot [straight draw](#) on the [turn](#) are 1:11. You can therefore afford to call when you can win at least 11x that amount.

The method of expected value has brought you to the same result as you would have arrived at by calculating the odds. There is, in fact, a very simple connection between the two. As we said, the odds of hitting one of your four [outs](#) for a straight are 4/46, which equates to 0.087, or 8.7%.

In other words: You will [complete](#) your straight app. 1 in 12 times (100% / 8.7%). You therefore have 11:1 odds against you, meaning you will miss 11 times and hit once every 12 times in this scenario. As you can see, the EV is directly translateable into the odds format, in which pot odds are also generally given.

It's the same idea, just a different way of getting there.

Conclusion

Let's review. To compute the expected value, you weigh your possible winnings against your possible losses.

$$EV = (\text{possible winnings}) * (\text{probability of winning}) - (\text{possible losses}) * (\text{probability of losing})$$

This tells you how much you will win or lose in average.

You can simply define winnings and losses as payout and use this simpler formula:

$$EV = Probability_1 * Payout_1 + Probability_2 * Payout_2 + ... + Probability_n * Payout_n$$

A positive result means you will make a profit, a negative result means you will suffer losses.

When you analyze a situation, you have take all possible results, as well as the probability of that result taking place, and how much you will win/lose into consideration. Then you put these values into the formula to determine the EV of a given action.

If you are confronted with several possible choices and want to know which is the most profitable, you compute the expected value for every possible action. Then compare the values and choose the course of action with the highest EV.

You've now learned how to take your game to a new mathematical level by determining the EV of a decision in a given situation. All this calculating might seem complicated at first, but it's not really all that complicated once you get the hang of it. Don't hesitate to ask for help in the forum if you're having trouble.

A lot of articles and concepts you will come across in the future require you to calculate the EV of all possible decisions. Take the time to master the concept of EV. Understanding the concept of expected value is the next step after mastering the concepts of odds and outs.

Mathematics: Odds & Outs for Advanced Players

Introduction

In this article

- *The checklist for evaluating draws*
- *How to correctly discount [outs](#)*
- *The [value](#) of backdoor draws*

One of the most important tools of an aspiring [poker](#) professional is the concept of [odds](#) and outs, as you have already learned in Bronze section. This article is designed to deepen your understanding of the nuances behind various types of draws and will teach you how to precisely apply this concept to your game.

You will learn the role that backdoor draws play and the number of outs you can give yourself. You will learn to discount outs and properly evaluate and play various draws, such as [gutshot](#) draws, two [pair](#) draws, top pair draws, and combinations of these draws.

This article will give you a more comprehensive understanding of odds and outs and teach you to accurately determine the number of outs you can depend on. This will ultimately help you in virtually any game situation and lead to more profitable decisions at the table.

DOWNLOADS

→ [Overview to odds and outs for advanced players](#)

Playing according to odds and outs

Let's look at the chart from the Bronze section before we get started. There are a few changes that need to be made.

You can see the odds and outs of various undiscounted draws. An exception worth noting is the gutshot [draw](#). You can [call](#) with 7:1 instead of 11:1 odds in some situations, which we will discuss later in this article.

| Undiscounted Outs of Different Draws | | |
|--|--------------|--------------|
| Undiscounted Outs | Outs On Flop | Odds on Turn |
| Backdoor straight draw | 1.5 | 35.5:1 |
| Backdoor flush draw | 2 | 22.5:1 |
| Gutshot | 4 | 7:1 |
| Draw for two pair/trips | 5 | 8:1 |
| Overcards | 6 | 7:1 |
| OESD | 8 | 5:1 |
| Flush draw | 9 | 4:1 |

We will start by clarifying what this article is all about: How do you best play according to odds and outs? Look at the following example:

Pre-flop: Hero is CO with **T♣**, **8♣**
 UTG+2 calls, MP2 calls, *ifold*, Hero calls, **2** *folds*, BB checks

Flop: (4,5 SB) **A♣**, **J♥**, **7♠** (4 players)
 BB checks, UTG+2 checks, **MP2 bets**, Hero ???

You decided to enter the [hand](#) with a [suited](#) one gapper after two limpers and flopped a gutshot draw. First, you need to ask how many outs you have. A gutshot, as you learned in the Bronze articles, has 4 immediate outs (You also have a backdoor straight and backdoor flush draw, but this will not be [covered](#) in-depth until the next section).

Now you need to decide whether or not calling is profitable. To do this you must calculate the [pot](#) size, which is currently 5.5 SBs after MP2 [bet](#) the flop.

Then you ask yourself how much it is going to cost to see the next street. You probably won't [run](#) into a check/raise, since no one raised before the flop. You can therefore expect to see the turn card for 1 Small Bet.

Finally, you compare the pot odds with the odds and decide whether calling or folding is the better choice. The odds and outs chart shows you need 7:1 odds to call; you are only getting 5.5:1 and [fold](#).

The Checklist

The example shows you how helpful it can be to have a kind of checklist handy when playing according to odds and outs. The following points are decisive:

- How many discounted outs do you have?
- How big is the pot?
- How much will it cost to stay in the hand?
- Compare the odds and pot odds -> call or fold

You determine your chances of winning the hand and compare them to the amount you can expect to win vs. the amount you must pay to stay in the hand. You can then determine whether or not calling is profitable.

Counting your outs isn't always as easy as in this example, however. You will now learn what discount outs means and how to do so.

Your relative position

The last example showed you that determining the actual cost of staying in the hand requires some strategic thinking. The relative position of the players at the table plays an essential role. Let's make a small change to our example:

Pre-flop: Hero is 3 BB with T♣, 8♣
 UTG+2 calls, MP2 calls, SB folds, SB calls, Hero checks

Flop: (4 SB) A♣, J♥, 7♠ (4 players)
 SB bets, Hero ???

You hit the same gutshot draw and the player in front of you bets. The major difference: You are now in a different position. There are also two opponents behind you. It's very possible that the costs of staying in the hand will go up. You can expect to pay app. 1.5 SBs for the turn card on average.

How do you play backdoor draws?

The next two sections will teach you what to pay attention to with different drawing hands, when and why to discount, and how to calculate the [pot odds](#) needed to [call](#). We will start with backdoor draws.

Having a backdoor [draw](#) means you need to hit [outs](#) on the [turn](#) and on the [river](#) to [complete](#). You can either have a backdoor [flush](#) draw, BDFD, or a backdoor [straight](#) draw, BDSD.

1 card backdoor flush draw

This means you are only using one of your hole cards to as part of your draw. For example, if you have A♣ K♠ on a 4♣ J♣ T♦ flop, you need a ♣ on both the turn and the river to make a flush.

The following chart shows you how many outs you can give yourself with a 1 card backdoor flush draw.

| | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
|  | Outs for a 1 card backdoor flush draw |
|---|---------------------------------------|

| 1 Card BDFD | 3 or more opponents | Less than 3 opponents |
|----------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| A | 2 | 2 |
| K | 1.5 | 1.5 |
| Q | 0.25 | 1 |
| 9+ | 0 | 0.75 |
| <9 | 0 | 0.5 |

The column on the left corresponds to the strength of your hole card, the two on the right to the number of outs you can give yourself based on the number of opponents active in the [hand](#).

EXAMPLE

Pre-flop: Hero is BU with **K♥, 7♦**

Hero raises, SB calls, BB calls.

Flop: (6 SB) **4♥, Q♥, 8♠** (3 players)

SB checks, BB checks, **Hero bets**, SB raises, *BB folds*, Hero ?

You raised from the [button](#) with K7o and both blinds called. The blinds [check](#) to you and you make a continuation [bet](#) in position. Then the Small [Blind](#) check/raises. Call or fold?

- **How many discounted outs do you have?**

You hold an overcard and a K high BDFD. Since you only have one opponent, you use the column titled "Less than 3 opponents" and look at the corresponding "K" row in the left column; you have 1.5 outs. The K also gives you three good outs, which we will discover in the section on one [pair](#) draws. You also have a 1 card BDSD with your 7, which gives you an additional 0.25 outs (which will be outlined in the next section). You have a total of 4.75 outs.

- **How big is the pot?**

9 SB.

- **How much will it cost to call?**

Since the BB has already folded, you are heads up. You must pay exactly 1 SB to play.

- **Compare the odds and pot odds -> call or fold?**

You have 4.75 outs, meaning you need 9:1 pot odds to call. There are 9 SBs in the pot, so you call.

Not counting your backdoor draw outs, you have 3 outs for your overcard, meaning you need 15:1 odds to call. The 9 SBs in the pot wouldn't be enough and you would have to [fold](#).

We can take things even further. You can expect the Small Blind to bet on the turn; he has shown a lot of strength so far. Since this is very likely, you can add this bet into your calculations. These "new" pot odds are referred to as implied pot odds.


You can see that backdoor draws are not worth much alone, but they do add [value](#) to a hand and can make the difference in close call-or-fold decisions.

2-Card-Back-door Flush draws

The main difference between 1 and 2 card backdoor flush draws? The value of a 2 card BDFD does

not depend so heavily on the strength of your high card, meaning you can give yourself 2 full outs for a 2 card BDFD.

EXAMPLE

Pre-flop: Hero is MP3 with J , 9♣
Hero raises, 3 folds, BB 3-bets, Hero calls.

Flop: (6,5 SB) 4♥, A♥, 6♣ (2 players)
BB bets, Hero ???

You raise from MP3 with J9s and the Big Blind 3-bets. You call, only to miss the flop completely. You can only continue to play according to odds and outs. Time to look at the checklist.

- **How many discounted outs do you have?**
Since the opponent is an unknown, you assume his 3-Bet comes right from the BB "Defense Chart". You can't give yourself outs for your jack or nine, since your opponent is likely to have hit the ace or have a higher pocket pair. The J high BDFD is all you have - a total of 2 outs.
- **How big is the pot?**
7.5 SBs.
- **How much will it cost?**
You are heads up and must pay exactly 1 SB to stay in the hand.
- **Compare the odds and pot odds ->call or fold?**
You need 22:1 pot odds to call with 2 outs. You are only getting 7.5:1 and fold.

WHY IS A 2 CARD BDFD WORTH MORE?

The chart shows you the difference. A 2 card BDFD always gives you 2 outs, whereas you can rarely give yourself 2 full outs with a 1 card BDFD. But there are a few other advantages, as well.

First, a 2 card flush is naturally better hidden (4-suited vs. 3-suited board), which means you can expect to get paid off more often, meaning you have higher implied odds.

If there are 4 cards of the same suit on the board, your opponent only needs to hold one card of that suit to have a flush. This is half as many cards as he would need on a board with 3 flush cards. You are therefore, as shown in the table, beat much more often when holding a 1 card flush.

Backdoor straight draws

Backdoor straight draws require a closer look. Aside from 1 and 2 card BDSs, there are three other kinds of BDSs. Let's look at an example.

You hold J♣ 9♦.

- Flop: T♦ 3♥ 2♠ - You have a 0-gap BDS. The three cards that represent the draw are connected without gaps.
- Flop: 8♦ 3♥ 2♠ - You have a 1-gap BDS. The 3 cards have a gap.
- Flop: 7♦ 3♥ 2♠ - You have a 2-gap BDS. The 3 cards have two gaps.

The difference between these types is mainly the fact that 0-gap BDSs have better chances of turning into an OESD on the turn, whereas the 1-gap and 2-gap BDSs require specific outs to complete.

The following chart gives you the number of outs you have with various BDSs. It is important to differentiate between rainbow and suited flops, since a flush would have you beat.

| Outs for BDSDs | | |
|----------------|---------------|----------------|
| BDSB | Rainbow Board | 2-suited Board |
| 0-gap BDSB | 1.5 | 1 |
| 1-gap BDSB | 0.75 | 0.5 |
| 2-gap BDSB | 0.25 | 0 |

You can clearly see that BDSBs (and BDFDs) are only valuable as "back-up." You would need 22.5:1 pot odds to call with 2 outs on the flop, meaning you will almost never be able to call with a BDSB alone. These draws can, however, make the difference in close call-or-fold decisions with other draws.

How do you play strong draws according to odds and outs?

Flush draws

Flush draws, like backdoor draws, can be placed in one of two categories: 1 and 2 card flush draws. You don't really need to discount your outs with a 2 card flush draw. Discounting may be theoretically necessary, but you will almost always have the right pot odds to call (at least to the river) with a 2 card flush draw.

1 card flush draws are another story, as it is more likely that another player also has a card of that suit.

EXAMPLE

Pre-flop: Hero is BB with 4♥, 4♠, BU raises, SB calls, Hero calls.

Flop: (6 SB) J♥, A♥, 6♥ (3 players)
SB bets, Hero ???

Your flush draw with 9 undiscounted outs isn't worth much in this example. You have the third lowest heart and two other players have shown strength. After heavy discounting you can count on 3.5 outs.

As you can see, 1 card flush draws depend very heavily on the strength of your hole card. The following chart will show you how to discount your outs with 1 card flush draws.

| Outs for a 1 card flush draw | | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| 1 card flush draw | Less than 3 opponents | 3 opponents | More than 3 opponents |
| A | 9 | | |

| | | | |
|----|-----|---|-----|
| K | 8 | 7 | 4.5 |
| Q | 7 | 6 | 4 |
| J | 4.5 | | 0 |
| 8+ | 4 | | 0 |
| <8 | 3.5 | | 0 |

You see your hole card on the left and the corresponding number of outs you can count on to the right, based on the number of opponents involved in the hand. Keep in mind, if you have the K and the A is on the board, your K is as good as an A (in the chart), since you are drawing for the nut flush.


OESDs

2 card OESDs don't need to be discounted, either. The only thing you are worried about is possible flush.

EXAMPLE

Pre-flop: Hero is MP3 with J , 9 
MP2 calls, **Hero raises**, 3 folds, BB calls, MP2 calls.

Flop: (6.5 SB) T  Q , 2  (4 players)
BB bets, MP2 calls, **Hero raises**, BU folds, BB calls, MP2 calls.



Turn: (6.25 BB) 4 
BB bets, MP2 calls, Hero ???

You hit an OESD on the flop and raise the BB's donk bet in order to possibly get a free card. The BB seems to know what you're up to and donks again on the turn. Raising again won't help much. You have to continue playing according to odds and outs.

- **How many discounted outs do you have?**

Neither of your hole cards can be considered outs as the Queen represents an overcard. The BB very likely has you beat. You do, however, have 8 undiscounted outs with your OESD. A quick look at the board shows a possible flush draw. With 2 opponents in the hand it is rather likely that one of them has it.

Looking back at the hand so far, you see that MP2 has been passive the whole time, first limping, then calling a raise, and smooth-calling the rest of the way. Aside from bad made hands and other draws, a flush draw is a definite possibility. The BB is less likely to have a flush draw, but his donk bets could also be explained by a hand like middle pair + flush

draw. In other words, even though the 8  or K  would complete your draw, you cannot be certain that hitting these outs will give you the best hand. These are so-called tainted outs and need to be discounted. You discount 0.5 outs per opponent, leaving you with 7 discounted outs in this example.

- **How big is the pot?**

9.25 BBs.

- **How much will it cost?**

Since you are last to act, so there won't be any raises behind you. Staying in the hand costs 1 BB.

- **Compare the odds and pot odds -> call or fold?**

You need 6:1 odds to call with 7 outs, which means you can easily call with the 9:1 odds you are getting.

When the board is 2 suited and you have ...

- two opponents: you discount your tainted outs by 50%.
- more than two opponents: you discount your tainted outs by 100%.



How do you play weak/medium draws?

Gutshot draws

Gutshots are interesting in certain respects. For one, they rarely hit - you only have 4 outs. On the other hand, your hand is very well disguised, which means you have good implied odds.

This section will take a different approach to draws. You will learn how to give yourself implied odds depending on the situation at hand. If you aren't familiar with implied odds, you can learn more by clicking [here](#).

EXAMPLE 1 - ON THE FLOP

Pre-flop: Hero is BU with 7 , 6 
Hero raises, SB folds, BB calls.

Flop: (4.5 SB) 8 , Q , 4 , (2 players)
BB checks, Hero bets, BB raises, Hero ?

You can only continue playing according to odds and outs after the BB's check/raise.

- **How many discounted outs do you have?**

You can be sure that your 4 gutshot outs are clean. You also have a 0-gap BDSD with the 8



. This gives you an additional 1.5 outs. You can give yourself 1 full out for the BDSD, since a 5 would complete your gutshot. You can't give yourself outs on your hole cards, since the BB is sure to have a strong hand when he isn't bluffing; he has a polarized [range](#). All in all, you have 5 outs.

- **How big is the pot?**

7.5 SBs.

- **How much will it cost?**

You are last to act and have to pay exactly 1 SB.

- **Compare the odds and pot odds -> call or fold?**

You have 5 outs, which means you need 8.5:1 pot odds to call. You theoretically have to fold, since you are only getting 7.5:1. This is where the implied odds come into play. The Big Blind's check/raise suggests that he will be leading out on the turn regardless of what comes. You can therefore add 2 more SBs to the total pot size when calculating the pot odds. Your opponent is very likely to have a made hand, but he will rarely be able to beat a straight. You can expect to win an additional 2 BBs (4 SBs) on average when you do complete your gutshot. Your implied odds to call on the flop are therefore 11.5:1, which are

more than enough to stay in the hand with 5 outs.

EXAMPLE 1 - ON THE TURN

Flop: Hero calls.

Turn: (4.25 BB) J

BB bets, Hero ???

Your draw does not hit on the turn. Again, you must make a decision.

- **How many discounted outs do you have?**
You still have 4 outs, but now you have different odds on the turn. The ratio of helpful cards to non-helpful cards has changed. There are now 46 unknown cards and 42 non-helpful cards, which gives you 10.5:1 odds.
- **How big is the pot?**
5.25 BBs.
- **How much will it cost?**
Again, you are last to act and would have to pay 1 BB.
- **Compare the odds and pot odds -> call or fold?**
The odds have improved slightly to 10.5:1. The pot odds, however, have deteriorated. You are only getting 5.25:1. You can't assume that he will bet again on the river. If he has been bluffing, he will probably give it up. He could also check/call with a weak made hand, in which case you would only win 1 additional BB. All in all, you can expect to win 1 additional BB and can give yourself app. 6:1 implied odds, which still aren't enough. You fold.

The following chart shows the implied odds you get with various gutshot draws. You will see different columns for Rainbow or 2-Suited boards and the respective required pot odds to make a call.

| Pot Odds needed for a Gut-Shot | | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------|------------------|------------------|
| Gutshot | Board | Pot Odds on Flop | Pot Odds on Turn |
| 2-Card Gutshot | Rainbow Board | 7:1 | 10:1 |
| | 2-suited Board | 9:1 | 10.5:1 |
| 1-Card Gutshot | Rainbow Board | 10:1 | 10.5:1 |
| | 2-suited Board | 14:1 | 14:1 |

EXAMPLE 2

Pre-flop: Hero is BU with J , T
MP2 calls, MP3 raises, Hero calls, 2 folds, MP2 calls.

Flop: (7.5 SB) 5 , Q , A (3 players)

MP2 bets, MP3 calls, Hero ?

You could call after a limp and a raise before the flop and hit a gutshot draw. MP2 donks after limping pre-flop and the PFA calls. You will rarely be ahead in such a situation; MP2's donk bet into the PFA will rarely be a bluff. He will often have a strong draw (flush) or a strong made hand (Q or A). And even if he only has a 5, he still has you beat.

Once again, we consult our checklist to determine the value of moving forward with the hand.



- **How many discounted outs do you have?**
Your hole cards are not worth much with two overcards on board. The clubs indicate potential flush draws and the action supports this possibility. Your 2-card gutshot gives you 4 outs, but you need to discount (due to the possible flush draw). All in all, you can give yourself 3.5 outs.
- **How big is the pot?**
9.5 SBs.
- **How much will it cost?**
You are on the button and are last to act, so you must pay 1 SB.
- **Compare the odds to the pot odds -> call or fold?**
You have a 2-Card gutshot on a 2-suited board. You determined that you have 3.5 outs, so you are looking for 12.5:1 pot odds. Once again, you can give yourself implied odds. The table shows you can give yourself 9:1 implied odds, meaning you can call with 9.5:1 pot odds.

Always keep your implied odds in mind with gutshot draws. They are what give these otherwise weak draws potential.

Two pair draws


Discounting outs and calculating implied odds with two pair draws depends entirely on the situation at hand. The key is determining which of your outs complete better hands.

EXAMPLE 1



Pre-flop: Hero is BB with 7 , 5 
MP3 raises, CO folds, BU calls, SB calls, Hero calls.

Flop: (8 SB) Q , T , 5  (4 players)
SB checks, Hero checks, MP3 bets, BU calls, SB folds, Hero ?

In this hand, you hit bottom pair on the flop. You certainly are not ahead with so many opponents in the hand and can only continue playing according to odds and outs. You have 5 discounted outs, which correspond to 8:1 odds.

The 7  in your hand really doesn't have any straight draw potential, nor do your diamonds have any chance at a backdoor flush. Calling is easy with 10:1 odds in this case. Let's look at the next example.


EXAMPLE 2

Pre-flop: Hero is BB with J , 5 
MP3 raises, CO folds, BU calls, SB calls, Hero calls.

Flop: (8 SB) Q , T , 5  (4 players)
 SB checks, Hero checks, **MP3 bets**, BU calls, *SB folds*, Hero ?

You hit bottom pair with J5s. This time, however, you will have to discount your outs differently:

- **How many discounted outs do you have?**

Your outs on the 5 are pretty clean, since the 5 of clubs is on the board. Your J, on the other hand, isn't so clean. You have to discount the J . Against two opponents you should discount him by half. A J on the turn would also allow redraws for a straight and complete 2 gutshots (AK and 89). You should therefore also discount your remaining J outs by 50%. Your J does give you a 0-gap BDS. A look at the chart shows you that this is worth 1 more out. All in all, a total of 4.5 outs.

- **How big is the Pot?**

10 SBs.

- **How much does it cost?**

You're last to act, so it costs 1 SB.

- **Compare the odds to the pot odds -> call or fold?**

You have 4.5 outs, which corresponds to 10:1. You are getting 10:1 pot odds so you call.



Discount your outs by 50% when you are facing more than two opponents and your outs could complete other draws or allow redraws.

The last two hands show why. The 7 was actually a better [kicker](#) than the J, because it didn't allow any redraws or complete any draws. You have reverse implied odds with the J, since you can't count on all your outs (the extent of which depends on the number of opponents in the hand).

Overcards

We will not go into great detail here, since there is a complete article devoted to this topic in the Silver section. We will look at examples to get used to using the checklist instead:

EXAMPLE

Pre-flop: Hero is Button with J , T 
 UTG+1 calls, *3 folds*, MP2 calls, MP3 calls, *1 fold*, Hero calls, *SB folds*, BB checks

Flop: (5.5 SB) 3 , 5 , 9  (5 players)
 BB checks, **UTG+1 bets**, *MP2 folds*, MP3 calls, Hero???

You obviously can't see yourself ahead. UTG+1 bets into the field and will usually have hit the board or at least have a strong draw. Time to go through the checklist.

- **How many discounted outs do you have?**

You discount your overcard outs by 50%, since you aren't sure how many of them are clean. Aside from your overcards, you have a BDS. The chart shows you can give yourself 1 out with a 0-gapper on a 2-suited board, giving you a total of 4 outs.

- **How big is the pot?**

7 SBs.

- **How much will it cost?**

In most cases you will have to pay 1 SB. The only player left to act behind you is the BB who has not been very active so far. Given the previous [preflop](#) action he will most likely have directly bet any playable hand.

- **Compare the odds to the pot odds -> call or fold?**

You have 4 outs, which correspond to 11:1 odds. You are only getting 7:1, so you fold.

Important: Do not confuse this with the gutshot draw, in which case you had 7:1 implied odds. This applies specifically to gutshots, which almost always give you the [nuts](#). A top pair draw isn't so strong. Opponents can easily catch up by the river.

So, although you have 1-2 BB implied odds on the one hand, you have 1-2 reverse implied odds on the other (negative IOs). This means you will pay your opponent off every time you hit and he catches up. You would have top pair and he could be bluffing, so you will be [showdown](#) bound. The IOs and RIOs negate each other.

Examples

You've now seen how to evaluate different draws on various boards and how to discount your [outs](#) as precisely as possible. We will now look at a few examples to help you get a feel for putting this theory into practice. We will also take a look at various combodraws.

EXAMPLE 1

In this example, we take another look at the situation from the section on 1-Card [flush](#) draws.

Pre-flop: Hero is BB with 4♥, 4♠

BU raises, SB calls, Hero calls.

Flop: (6 SB) K♥, A♥, 5♥ (3 players)

You called with pocket fours in the BB after the BU tried to steal and the SB cold called. You have a flush [draw](#) and an [underpair](#) on the [flop](#).

- **How many discounted outs do you have?**

A flush draw usually gives you 9 outs, but it isn't worth much with 4 high. You have 3.5 outs after discounting.

You also have two outs for a [set](#). You need to discount these outs since a player could already be holding a flush. Discount them by half to 1 out. You also have a 2-gap BDS. Look at the column "Rainbow Board", since the suit helps you. You see you have an additional 0.25 outs.

Altogether, you have $3.5 + 1 + 0.25 = 4.75$, nearly 5 Outs.

SITUATION 1

Flop: (6 SB) K♥, A♥, 5♥ (3 players)

SB checks, Hero checks, BU bets, SB calls, Hero ?

- **How big is the [Pot](#)?**

8 SBs.

- **How much does it cost?**

You are last to act and have to pay 1 SB to see the [turn](#).

- **Compare the [odds](#) to the pot odds -> [call](#) or fold?**

You have 5 outs, which correspond to 8:1 odds. You are getting 8:1 and call.

SITUATION 2

Flop: (6 SB) K♥, A♥, 5♥ (3 players)

SB bets, Hero ???

- **How big is the pot?**

7 SBs.

- **How much will it cost?**


This is an interesting question. The PFA is still behind you and could make it more expensive. The SB has also shown interest in the [hand](#). What would happen if he 3-bets a [raise](#) from the BU? You are sandwiched. You can expect further action from either/both opponent(s). Staying in the hand will cost more than calling the SB's donk [bet](#). You will have to pay 1.3-1.5 SBs on average.

This changes the pot size accordingly. You get $(6+1.5*2)=9:2$, or 4.5:1 pot odds when staying in the hand costs 2 SBs.

- **Compare the odds to the pot odds -> call or fold?**

You have 6 outs, which correspond to 7:1 odds. You fold, since you are expecting to get 4.5:1 pot odds.

Example 2

Pre-flop: Hero is BB with J , 9♠

CO raises, BU calls, SB calls, Hero calls

Flop: (8 SB) 2 , T , Q  (4 players)


SB checks, Hero checks, CO bets, BU folds, SB raises, Hero ?

You call in the Big [Blind](#) with J9o, as do the BU and SB, after a steal raise from the CO. On the flop, you hit an [OESD](#) and 1-card flush draw.

You might consider raising for [value](#) with such a draw, but this is not the best move, since you can't be sure that any of your outs will give you the best hand. You might get the CO to fold, but the SB has shown a lot of strength with his check/raise. You should continue playing passively according to odds and outs.

- **How many discounted outs do you have?**

You can't give yourself any outs on your hole cards with this much action. Your 1-card flush draw is Q high flush draw, since your J is as good as a Q with a Q on the [board](#). The chart shows this gives you 7 outs when facing 2 opponents (the BU folded). You can't give

yourself the full 6 outs on your OESD (the two  were already counted towards the flush draw). The flop is 1-suited, but another card of that suit would give you a flush. You have a total of 10 outs.

- **How big is the pot?**

11 SBs.

- **How much will it cost?**

You can expect to see the turn card for 2 SB despite the heavy action on the flop. The CO is just making a contibet. He has position on most players and the board is pretty scary. Still, he will often have a [weak](#) hand. The SB is also showing a lot of strength by check/raising out of position. The CO knows this, as well, and will need a very strong hand to 3-bet, especially after he sees you call. Since, however, the CO will certainly not just call 100% of

the time, you will have to pay a little over 2 BBs on average. You should estimate your costs at app. 2.2 SBs.

- **Compare the odds to the pot odds -> call or fold?**

You have 10 outs, which correspond to 5:1 odds. You are getting $11:2.2 = 5:1$ pot odds and can call.

Example 3

Pre-flop: Hero is MP2 with $7\clubsuit, 7\heartsuit$

Hero raises, MP3 calls, *3 folds*, BB calls.

Flop: (6,50 SB) $3\heartsuit, 5\spadesuit, J\clubsuit$ (3 players)

BB checks, **Hero bets**, **MP3 raises**, BB calls, Hero ?

You bet your pocket pair after seeing one overcard on the flop. The player in MP3 raises in position and the BB cold calls. You have to see yourself behind against at least one of your opponents, especially after a cold call. You can only continue playing according to odds and outs.

- **How many discounted outs do you have?**

You have 2 outs for a set. The board is drawless aside from an OESD with 64. Discounting is not necessary here. You also have a 2-gap BDS. A 6 and a 4 would give you a straight. According to our chart, this gives you 0.25 outs, giving you a total of 2.25 outs.

- **How big is the pot?**

11.5 SBs.

- **How much will it cost?**

You are last to act and would have to pay exactly 1 small bet.

- **Compare the odds to the pot odds -> call or fold?**

You learned how to calculate odds in the Bronze section. You have 2.25 outs, so you have odds of $(47:2.25) \sim 20:1$. The pot size is 11.5 SBs. You can give yourself implied odds on the set, since the board is basically drawless. You can expect to win an additional 2 BBs when you hit a set on average; a showdown will be likely given the action so far. You have 15.5:1 SB implied odds, which is not enough for a call. You fold.

The main reason you switch to odds and outs mode here: The BB's cold call. You simply have to see yourself behind.

Example 4

Pre-flop: Hero is MP2 with $K\clubsuit, J\clubsuit$

Hero raises, *4 folds*, BB calls.

Flop: (4.5 SB) $3\clubsuit, Q\heartsuit, 7\spadesuit$ (2 players)

BB checks, **Hero bets**, **BB raises**, Hero ?

You made a standard continuation bet on the flop and the BB raised. There is little sense in 3-betting with K high; time to look at the checklist:

- **How many discounted outs do you have?**

You can give yourself 3 clean outs on your K. You probably aren't dominated, since the BB only called before the flop. A hand like K3, Q3 or K7 is unlikely, so you can expect to win the hand if you hit your king. The board is very dry, so your opponent won't be on a draw. He either has a made hand or is bluffing. A Q is pretty likely, but you could even win if your J pairs, which is why you discount your outs on the J by 50%, leaving you 1.5 outs.

You also have 2 backdoor draws: a king high BDFD, which gives you 2 outs, and a 0-gap BDS, which gives you 1.5 outs on a rainbow board. All in all you have a total of 8 outs.

- **How big is the pot?**
7.5 SBs.
- **How much will it cost?**
You are heads up and have to pay exactly 1 SB.
- **Compare the odds to the pot odds -> call or fold?**
You have 8 outs, which correspond to ~ 5:1 odds. You are getting 7.5:1 and can comfortably call.

Example 5

Pre-flop: Hero is SB with A♥, 9♥

MP3 raises, 2 folds, Hero 3-bets, BB folds, MP3 caps, Hero calls.

Flop: (9 SB) 3♥, 5♣, 7♠ (2 players)

MP3 bets, Hero ???

- **How many discounted outs do you have?**
At first glance, this board looks pretty good; you have 2 overcards, two 2-Gap BDSs and a backdoor nut flush draw. However, you need to discount your overcards heavily. Your A is dominated by AT-AK, your 9 could be dominated by TT+. You have to discount your 6 overcard outs by 50%. You can give yourself 0.25 outs on the BDS with the 9, even though the board is two suited, since you are only facing one opponent. You will also end up splitting with another A rather often. You can give yourself 2 full outs on your BDFD. All in all, you have 5.5 outs.
- **How big is the pot?**
9.5 SBs.
- **How much will it cost?**
You are heads up and have to pay exactly 1 SB.
- **Compare the odds to the pot odds -> call or fold?**
You have 5.5 outs, which correspond to 7.5:1 odds. You are getting 9.5:1 and can call.

Example 6

Pre-flop: Hero is MP3 with T♣, 9♣

Hero raises, 2 folds, SB calls, BB calls.

Flop: (6 SB) 3♥, Q♦, K♠ (3 players)

SB checks, BB checks, Hero bets, SB raises, BB 3-bets, Hero ?

You raise with suited connectors from MP3 and both blinds call. You hit a gutshot on the flop and make a contibet. Unfortunately, both blinds decide to start some action. Capping for a free card won't work often, you can only continue to play according to odds and outs.

- **How many discounted outs do you have?**
Your gutshot on a rainbow flop gives you 4 outs. You have to discount your hole cards completely.
- **How big is the pot?**
12 SBs.
- **How much will it cost?**
You must pay 2 SB to call.
- **Compare the odds to the pot odds -> call or fold?**
The pot odds are at 13:2, or 6.5:1, in the case of the SB calling (which is quite likely given

the pot size and the previous action). If it gets capped on the flop you would be getting 15:3 pot odds, so 5:1. Your pot odds will therefore deteriorate with further action. You have a clean gutshot, which gives you 7:1 implied odds. You are only getting 6.5:1 pot odds at best however, which is why you have to fold your hand.

Conclusion

This article should have given you a deeper understanding of odds and outs. You learned to discount outs and evaluate backdoor draws. You also have a checklist you can use on the flop or turn in situations, in which you can only continue playing according to odds and outs.

You now have an important tool that will give you an [edge](#) against the other players at the table.

Mathematics: Implied odds and Reverse Implied Odds

Introduction

In this article

- Implied [odds](#) take future winnings into account
- Reverse implied odds take future losses into account
- When can you give yourself which odds

The bronze section introduced you to the concepts of odds and outs, and [pot](#) odds. Pot odds, as you should already know, are the ratio between the amount you can win and the amount you have to invest to stay in the [hand](#). A standard situation, which you would calculate pot odds:

- You have a [draw](#).
- Your opponent bets.
- You have to decide whether to [call](#) or [fold](#)

You can determine whether it is profitable to call or fold by calculating the pot odds. This, however, is only half of the story; the pot odds alone fail to take the possibility that more money will enter the pot into account.

A draw hand can often play out as follows:

- You hit your draw and your opponent keeps betting or calls bets from your side. Or:
- You hit your draw, and your opponent hits an even better hand and you pay him off.

Both of these possible scenarios have one thing in common: more money enters the pot on the later streets. The pot odds fail to reflect this, as they are defined by money that is currently in the pot. This is where the concepts of implied pot odds and reverse implied pot odds come into play.

What are implied pot odds?

You've probably already heard of the notion of implied pot odds (or implied odds) in a forum discussion or coaching. Implied odds are modified pot odds that reflect the possibility of more money entering the pot on later streets. You know your opponents won't fold every time a possible draw completes, which means that you can expect them to invest more money on later streets when you do [complete](#) your draw. Even if they don't continue to bet, you can probably get a call.

EXAMPLE


0.50/1.00

[Fixed-Limit](#)

Hold'em

(10

handed)

Pre-flop: Hero is BU with J , 9 
2 *fold*s, UTG+2 calls, 2 *fold*s, MP3 calls, CO calls, Hero calls, SB calls, BB checks.

Flop: (6.00 SB) A , 8 , 7  (5 *players*)
SB *bet*s, BB *fold*s, UTG+2 calls, MP3 *fold*s, CO calls, Hero???

Final Pot: 9.00 SB

There are 9 Small Bets in the pot, which means you have 9:1 pot odds. You need 11:1, however, to justify calling with a [gutshot](#) draw. You theoretically have to fold. Let's suppose you call in spite of the odds, and the [turn](#) shows...

Turn: (5.00 BB) T  (1 *player*)
SB *bet*s,

Final Pot: 11 SB

There were 9 Small Bets in the pot on the [flop](#). There would theoretically have to be 2 more in the pot to justify your call. And that is exactly what happens on the turn. You hit your [straight](#) and the SB bets. Now that there is an additional Big [Bet](#) (2 Small Bets) in the pot, your call on the flop was correct.

You can assume that your opponent will invest another Big Bet given his action on the flop. Your possible winnings are therefore higher than the amount currently in the pot, since your opponent is certain to invest again on the turn (if he doesn't bet, he will certainly call). And there you have it, your implied odds.

DEFINITION OF IMPLIED POT ODDS

Implied pot odds are modified pot odds that take possible winnings from future bets on the later streets into account.

Implied pot odds

= (current pot size + amount still likely to enter the pot : amount to call

WHEN CAN YOU GIVE YOURSELF IMPLIED ODDS?

To make one thing clear: your assumptions about possible bets by your opponents in the future streets are always speculative. You can be pretty sure sometimes that your opponent will call you down or fire at least one more barrel on the turn or the river, but nothing is ever certain.

The size of your implied odds depends on a multitude of factors, such as ...

- ... the strength of your opponent's hand.
- ... the number of opponents and their respective playing styles.
- ... how obvious your hand is to your opponents.
- ... your [image](#).

An opponent with two [pair](#) will rarely lay down his hand when a gutshot draw completes. A [maniac](#) might even start a [bluff](#) on the card that completes your draw. And calling stations don't like folding, even when an obvious hand like a [flush](#) hits. And, in general, the more players involved in the hand, the more likely that one of them will have a reason to call.

You have to pay attention to all these things if you make correct assumptions about your implied odds. Before we can go into further detail, however, we have to take a look at the flip side of the coin: reverse implied odds.

What are reverse implied pot odds?

Whereas the implied pot odds take possible future winnings into account, the reverse implied pot odds factor in possible future losses.

EXAMPLE

0.50 / **1.00** **Fixed-Limit** **Hold'em** **(10** - **handed)**

Pre-flop: Hero is SB with **T♠**, **9♣**
4 folds, MP2 calls, *2 folds*, BU calls, Hero calls, **BB raises**, MP2 calls, BU calls, Hero calls

Flop: (8.00 SB) **Q♥**, **J♥**, **9♣** (4 players)
 Hero checks, **BB bets**, *MP2 folds*, **BU raises**, **Hero ?**

You call with [suited connectors](#) after two others [limp](#). The BB raises and everyone calls. You hit bottom pair with a [weak kicker](#) and an [OESD](#) on the flop. BB bets, MP2 folds and BU raises. What now?

Even though you have to clearly see yourself behind, you have a strong draw. But can you stay in the hand here? Let's take a look at your outs:

- Two nines give you trips.
- Three tens improve your hand to two pair.
- Four kings and four eights give you a straight.

All in all, this adds up to 13 undiscounted [outs](#). With pot odds of 5.5:1, this should be an easy call. But what will the situation look like if you do, indeed, hit one of your outs?

Given the board, it's very probable that you are already up against two pair, a [set](#) or a completed straight.

If you hit trips, you will still be behind against Q9 and J9. Any sets will turn into full houses and the straight will still have you beat.

If you hit your two pair, every king and every eight have a straight. Your out also gave hands like QT and JT the better two pair.

You could hit a king for a straight, but would only split with any other T and even be behind against the AT nut straight.

Or you could hit the 8 for a straight, but would only split with any other T and be behind against KT. Anyone with two pair or a set will still have a lot of outs for a full house. You won't necessarily have the best hand at the [showdown](#).

And, last but not least, you could be facing a flush draw, meaning any heart has you beat, no matter how you hit.

So, what can you expect to win if you hit one of your outs? The answer: You probably won't win anything and will probably end up paying even more!

None of your outs are certain to give you the best hand. You will only end up committing yourself to at least seeing the [river](#) card if you hit trips or two pair, and you will have a hard time laying down your hand if you do complete a straight.

You can't really expect any one to invest much on a hand weaker than yours. The [board](#) is too scary.

You're dealing with reverse implied odds. As the name indicates, they are indeed 'reverse' implied odds and give you a good reason to fold a draw despite seemingly good pot odds.

DEFINITION OF REVERSE IMPLIED POT ODDS

Reverse implied pot odds are pot odds that have been adjusted to take potential future losses into account. They are always applicable in cases where you would presumably win the minimum if you have the best hand, but would lose the maximum if your hand happens to be behind.

As shown in the previous example, implied odds and discounted draws go hand in hand: you can't give yourself implied odds on discounted outs. The reverse implied odds kick in when you hit a dirty out. Your hand improves, but your investments result in future losses. You would have higher implied odds if you had the winning hand, since all bets would result in future profit.

EXAMPLE

0.50 / 1.00 Fixed-Limit Hold'em (10 - handed)

Pre-flop: Hero is BB with A, 9, 4 folds, MP2 calls, MP3 calls, CO calls, BU calls, SB calls, Hero checks

Flop: (6.00 SB) 7, 4, 2 (6 players)
SB bets, Hero ?

You get can play your A9o for free after five players limp. Low cards on the flop - hard to imagine that no one has hit anything. The SB bets into five players indicating that he has a made hand, as there are no draws except for an OESD with 65 or a couple of gutshots that would make sense.

You have two overcards, which gives you 6 outs. Still, you can't call despite 7:1 pot odds. You have to strongly discount your outs. The SB can easily bet a hand like A7, A4 or A2; 92, 74s or 72s are also possible. This would leave you with only three clean outs.

You might be able to give yourself implied odds if you hit a clean out, but you will have reverse implied odds if you hit a dirty out that gives your opponent an even stronger hand.

You can usually assume that you have relatively equal implied odds and reverse implied odds with two overcards on the flop, simply because you have a relatively equal number of clean and dirty outs.

You can only give yourself implied odds on your clean outs. You have to fold, since you can only count on 3 clean outs and would need another 8 SBs in implied odds to give you the 15:1 odds you need to call with a 3-outer. You could even face a [raise](#) behind from other opponents, which would give you even worse pot odds.

Reverse implied pot odds are the reason you discount outs. There are two ways of doing so: Either you subtract possible losses from the pot odds (reverse implied odds) and do not discount your outs,

or you discount your outs and only give yourself implied odds on your clean outs.

When do you apply which type of odds?

Let's try to get an overview of when to apply IO and when to make use of RIO.

Signs you have implied pot odds:

- You're drawing for the [nuts](#).
- You know which outs are clean.
- You have more clean than dirty outs.
- You are using both hole cards for your draw.

In general:

- The more outs you have to discount, the smaller your implied odds, and vice-versa.
- Don't play against too many opponents when you are not drawing for the nuts.

The opposite is true for reverse implied odds. The more you have to discount, the bigger they will be.

Being out of position can also contribute to reverse implied odds, as you cannot know how expensive your draw will actually be, which, of course, reduces your implied odds considerably.

FLUSH DRAW

A flush draw will usually give you the best hand if completed. You have to discount outs on a [paired](#) board, and/or when facing several opponents with a very low flush draw. However, you will rarely have dirty outs.

Chances are higher that an opponent will pay you off when you use both of your hole cards to complete your flush. In that case, your good implied odds are only slightly limited by the fact that a 3-suited board instills distrust in some opponents who will then slow down, even with two pair or a set.

Your implied odds aren't so good, however, when you are only using one of your hole cards. Three cards of the same suit will scare any opponent who doesn't have a flush as well, so you can't expect much more to enter the pot.

OESD

An OESD (8 outs) is almost as strong as a flush draw.

Again, your implied odds are higher when you are using both of your hole cards, as a strongly connected board has the same scary effect as a suited board. A split pot, which would reduce your implied odds significantly, is also less likely.

An OESD has to be more strongly discounted in some cases, though. For instance, if the flop is 2-suited and a possible flush draw could be out there, you definitely have to discount these outs when playing against several opponents. Still, you have more clean than dirty outs (app. 6:2). This means you can give yourself implied odds, since you are three times as likely to hit a clean out than a dirty out.

Furthermore, the actions of your opponents and the development on the board often indicate whether or not you will be ahead with your hand (for instance, your straight is less likely to be the best hand in the case of a 3-suited or a paired board). All in all, an OESD gives you good implied odds.

GUTSHOT

A gutshot (4 outs) is a weak draw, but under optimal conditions (rainbow board, you're drawing to the nut straight, you use both hole cards and the risk of a raise behind you is low) and with the right pot odds (7:1), you can afford to look at the turn. Once again, you can give yourself more implied odds if you use both hole cards instead of just one.

As with the OESD, you have more clean than dirty outs. However, you have lower implied odds on a 2 suited board: You could lose to a flush, and opponents will be less likely to pay you off.

Hitting a gutshot on a rainbow board is much more promising; opponents are likely to pay out off with weaker made hands.

All in all, a gutshot usually has good implied odds; though do, however, they decrease on suited boards and when several opponents are involved in the hand.

A PAIR WITH A DRAW TO TWO PAIR OR TRIPS

A two pair/trips draw may have 1 more out than a gutshot draw, but it is, in fact, a weaker draw. Your implied odds are lower, since you are not drawing for the nuts.

Similarly to the other draws, implied odds decrease with connectedness and/or [suitedness](#) of the board, and the amount of opponents. Two pair / trips draws usually have very low implied pot odds.

OVERCARDS DRAWING TO TOP PAIR

With two overcards, you have a weak draw that almost always has to be strongly discounted. It doesn't even matter how the board is coordinated. You are drawing for top pair at best, which is far from the being the nuts.

As explained in the example above, you have relatively equal number of clean and dirty odds, meaning you can only give yourself very low implied odds, if any.

You should be more concerned about reverse implied odds than implied odds with any weaker draw.

CONCLUSION

This graphic should help illustrate the role of (reverse) implied odds more clearly.



gutshot/OESD on rainbow board

nut flush draw

weaker flush draw or nut flush draw/OESD/gutshot on paired board

gutshot/OESD on 2-suited board

two pair/trips draw

top pair draw

weaker draws

Summary

This article showed you that you need more than just the pot odds to make the right decision when playing a draw. Thanks to the concepts of implied pot odds and reverse implied pot odds, you will now be capable of making better assumptions about the profit/loss you can expect from your draw, allowing you to make better decisions.

Taking these concepts into account leads to more complexity, however. Aside from your cards, factors such as board texture and opponent type play a role in making your decision. For example, you can expect to win more from a maniac than from a [rock](#).

Two pair/trips draws and top pair draws require you to ask yourself how many of your outs could also help your opponent, which depends on your opponent, the position he raised from, and the board texture.

As you can see, estimating your implied odds and reverse implied odds is no simple matter. There are a number of factors involved, which only serve to make things even more complicated. If, however, you can take the content of this article to heart, you will find yourself making better decisions with drawing hands in the future.

Anyone can memorize these concepts and take them to the table, but it will take considerable time and experience before you can master the art. This article only provided you with a limited amount of the information available on implied odds and reverse implied odds, so be sure to [read](#) more!

Bankroll Management for Advanced Players

Introduction

In this article

- *How to know you are ready for short-handed [poker](#).*
- *How to know when you are ready to move up a [limit](#).*
- *The advantages and disadvantages of cashing out.*

Now that you've reached Silver status, you're sure to have had experienced a few upswings and downswings along the way. The most important tool you have when making your way up the limits is a solid [bankroll](#) management.

This article will address the following questions in detail:

- When are you ready for short-handed play?
- When are you ready for the next limit?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of cashing out?

It should go without saying, but if you haven't [read](#) the Beginner's article on bankroll management yet, do so before you continue reading this article.

→| [Go to the article on: Bankroll Management](#)

When are you ready for short-handed play?

Short-handed play has been growing in popularity for some time. These games tend to have more action and more [fish](#) at the table, and tend to be more profitable for good players. You will also find a dwindling number of [full-ring](#) tables as you make your way up the limits.

You can take a beating if you switch to short-handed play before you are ready. You will have to [deal](#) with bigger swings and be required to take your game up a notch. Before you start playing short-handed, you should be sure to ...

- ... have read and understood all the articles in the Bronze and Silver sections.
- ... have a sufficient financial cushion (at least 500 BBs).
- ... be mentally prepared. If you are on scared money or find yourself guessing more often than knowing what to do, you should stay away from the short-handed tables and work on your game some more.

You can find a good introduction to short-handed play here:

→ [Go to the article: How do You Play Short-handed?](#)

Don't switch to short-handed play until you've reached the \$0.50/\$1.00 limit. That means you need at least \$500 in your bankroll, but waiting until you have more can't hurt

The increase in action and marginal spots you will find yourself in can be nerve-wracking. It's much easier to go on [tilt](#) at a 6max table - if you are prone to tilt, be sure to take a look at the psychology articles and videos before you give short-handed poker a try.

→ [Go to the psychology articles](#)

When are you ready to move up a limit?

Poker should be fun, but taking the time to build up your bankroll in the lower limits is a necessary step, even if it's not all that exciting. The real money is waiting, be patient and you will make it. Until then, stay disciplined. Anyone itching to play \$0.25/\$0.50 won't make it far playing \$5/\$10.

Moving up a limit is a [bet](#) step for a poker player. You are playing for more money - when you win, you win more; when you lose, you lose more. The types of opponents you play against changes as well. Don't rush the decision. Before you move up a limit, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I have enough money in my bankroll for this limit?
- Am I mentally ready for this limit?
- Am I good enough for this limit?
- At what point will I move back down a limit if I suffer losses?

DO I HAVE ENOUGH MONEY IN MY BANKROLL FOR THIS LIMIT?

You know the general rules:

- You need 300 Big Bets in full-ring games.
- You need 500 Big Bets in short-handed games.

But these are just general rules that you can tailor to yourself. Everyone has to decide for himself how large of a cushion he needs to survive a [downswing](#) without having to move back down immediately.

The simple truth is that you can play more relaxed and freely when you aren't on the verge of having to move down a limit. If you want to dive into a new limit and are willing to take risks from the get go, you should give yourself a larger cushion than 500 BBs.

Moving up a limit always requires you to adjust your game, which is usually difficult at first and results in losses. Don't let this get to you, you know what to expect and can prepare yourself ahead of time.

Be honest when asking yourself if you are ready. Do you have enough discipline to move back down if you lose too much? Have you had trouble moving down a limit in the past? If so, you may want to give yourself a larger financial cushion, as well.

You can take a direct approach if you are the type of player who can deal with [set](#) backs and has the discipline to move down a limit as soon as financially necessary. If not, let your bankroll grow a bit more before you move up to the next limit.

AM I MENTALLY READY FOR THIS LIMIT?

There are players who have made a steady profit at their limit for some time, but are afraid of progressing to the next step. They may not feel comfortable playing with so much money or lack the confidence to play at the next level - there are a number of reasons.

These are extreme cases, but the point to an important aspect of poker: the comfort zone. The number of BBs you need in your bankroll to change limits are just numbers on paper that guide you; psychological bankroll management is just as important.

Play the limit you are most comfortable at, where you can deliver your A game. Find your comfort zone.

If you find yourself constantly checking your account balance, regretfully pushing money into the pot, or have inhibitions when it comes to making the right move, you are probably outside of your comfort zone.

Player in your comfort zone means playing the best poker you can and not worrying about whether you win or lose. It may sound cliché, but there is truth in the saying: Winning money is a side effect in poker.

AM I GOOD ENOUGH FOR THIS LIMIT?

Remember when grandma used to say, "Anything you don't have to work for isn't worth having."? The basic strategy you need for the micro/low limits is easy enough to learn, but there come a point where it won't take you any further.

This can be a hidden danger, though you won't have trouble every time you move up a limit. As you work your way up, you will find more and more players who are just as good as you, if not better. The flow of the game changes, too - you will encounter new table constellations and face more difficult decisions.

Losing money isn't the only sign that you aren't ready for the next limit. If you keep finding yourself in tough spots where you just don't know what to do, you may need to take some more time before you try the next limit. If you can't spot the fish, you might be it.

PokerStrategy offers the most diverse learning material on this subject in Fixed Limit. The problem: You have to use it! Reading an article now and then and watching a video or coaching is better than nothing, but not much. Invest time and take advantage of all the offers. Set goals for your bankroll and learning progress.

Before you move up a limit, take the time to observe a few tables at that limit to get a feel for the game. If you can honestly [tell](#) what the players are doing and know what the right reaction would be, you're ready to take a seat.

WHEN SHOULD I MOVE DOWN A LIMIT?

Before you move up a limit, you should know exactly at what point you will move back down if you are not successful. This is prescribed in part by your bankroll management, but is also a matter

of the financial cushion you give yourself.

Setting a stop and sticking to it is of utmost importance. If you wait too long to move back down, you may find your bankroll too [weak](#) for the next lowest limit when you do move down. There is no sense in moving up with 500 BBs and waiting until you have 300 BBs for the next lowest limit before you move back down. You don't want to end up having to move down too limits because you played beyond your bankroll too long.

Pros and Cons of cashing out

Cashing out is also an important subject when it comes to bankroll management. There are a lot of players that want to cash out as much as possible early in their career. Doing so, however, is often a poor decision from a financial point of view. You may be able to buy yourself something nice with the money you've earned and finally have something tangible for your efforts, but cashing out is a step back in your poker career.

WHAT ARE THE DISADVANTAGES OF CASHING OUT?

Assume you have read and understood all the strategy articles. You've worked your way up to \$0.50/\$1.00 and built up a \$500 bankroll. Then you switch to short-handed play. You have no trouble adjusting and your bankroll continues to grow.

You go to as many coachings as you can and actively participate in the forums; you post and evaluate sample hands...basically everything you should do if you want to get as good as you can as quickly as possible.

Your bankroll has grown to \$800 and you could move up to \$1/\$2, where you would expect to continue winning. But then you start thinking how nice it would be to buy a new monitor.

You cash out for \$400 leaving you \$400 in your account. You can comfortably play \$0.50/\$1.00. That would be fine if you are planning to spend half your life at this limit. If, on the other hand, you want to make it to the profitable limits (\$2/\$4, \$5/\$10), you're going to lose a lot of time by cashing out.

Assume your win rate is 2 BBs / 100 hands and you play 300 hands per hour. You would make an average of \$6 an hour at \$0.50/\$1.00. At \$1/\$2 you'd be making an average of \$12 an hour, and at \$3/\$6 a good \$36 an hour.

You're giving up the chance of doubling your hourly profit by giving in to temptation. It's also going to take a lot longer for you to reach the next limit at \$6 an hour.

In order to earn \$400 at your win rate, you would need to put in an average of...

- ... 67 hours at \$0.50/\$1.00
- ... 33 hours at \$1/\$2
- ... 17 hours at \$2/\$4
- ... 11 hours at \$3/\$6
- ... 7 hours at \$5/\$10

The further away your cash out takes you from the amount needed to move up a limit, the more harm done in cashing out. The lower your limit, the longer it will take you to get to the higher [stakes](#). There are a number of reasons for waiting until you've reached the profitable limits before you cash out.

Just like in real life: Time is money. If your goal is, for example, reaching the \$5/\$10 limit, you shouldn't look at the limits along the way as a place to earn money, but rather as a place to build up your bankroll until you can start making money at \$5/\$10.

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF CASHING OUT?

There are, of course, a number of reasons why you should cash out, even if it is a financial setback in your poker career. Cashing out can bring a number of psychological benefits, such as rewarding yourself for work well done or motivating yourself during a downswing.

The advantages of cashing out are:

- You have reached a goal and want to reward yourself. You know this will slow you down, but this is O.K. for you. You'd rather treat yourself to a small reward and put off moving up to the next limit a bit longer.
- You are in a serious downswing and haven't cashed out for some time. Cashing out can be a great motivator in such a situation. After all, it's the fruit of your labor, and sometimes you have to remind yourself why you play.
- You play for a substantial amount of money. Cashing out is a big help to your financial situation outside of poker.
- You're having an unbelievable [upswing](#) or just hit a [jackpot](#). You could move up, but don't feel ready. The money isn't doing anything in your account, since you're not going to use it to justify moving up a limit.

Conclusion

Finding the right bankroll management isn't just a matter of setting boundaries in BBs. Always ask yourself if you are ready for the next level from a financial and mental point of view. Don't move up if you aren't ready - there's nothing worse than being the fish at the table.

You should already know how important it is to stick to your bankroll management and move down a limit when necessary. Moving down isn't admitting defeat - it's part of the game for every sensible player. Set stops and stick to them. Don't press your account to the max - you want to be able to play comfortably if you do have to move down and not be on the verge of having to move down again.

Way ahead - Way behind

Definition of "Way ahead - Way behind"

A WA/WB situation arises when your own [hand](#) is either far ahead or far behind, but you don't know which and only have a few [outs](#).
-I will first address only [heads-up](#) situations, in which only 2 players are left on the [flop](#) and your opponent has the [initiative](#).

The
Co:

standard
26/22/2,5

example:
WTS:36

Preflop: Hero is BB with A♠ 5♦ calls
CO raises,

Flop: A♣ 4♥ 9♦ rainbow

Is this really a way-ahead way-behind situation?!

Yes, either the hero is way in front with a pair of aces or the opponent hit the ace himself with a better kicker, and we have only 3 kicker outs against him. Now, like in every hand, we want to make the most of this and get the most value from it.

Against strong opponents, a calldown is the best variant, since we will lose the least this way. A fold while heads-up on the flop is out of the question.

But what about the worse hands, the ones that barely have any outs against us? CO could have raised with any number of pocket pairs, or with hands like QJ, KJ, KQ, QT. With these hands, he'll either have to hit 2 outs against our top pair or make a runner-runner 2 pair. Both of these are rare events. So how do we get the most money from these hands? Our usual sequence would be: check/raise flop, bet turn. Against hands like QJ, KQ we allow our opponent to cheaply fold his hand. Even pocket pairs might be a simple fold here. We would minimize our value with the usual sequence.

The in WA/WB situations, our standard line causes us to earn minimum value if we are WA since CO will fold these hands, but if we are WB we allow him to get the maximum value from us because of our turn raise.

Hence, it can no longer be our standard line.

A much more passive line is needed here. Check/call on all 3 streets is a much stronger sequence. It will lose the least if we are behind and does not allow our opponent to cheaply part with his hand. Rather, it induces bluff bets if we are ahead.

Even if your opponent has something like KQ, and doesn't hit anything until the river, he'll usually fire off one last bet in the hope of getting us to fold.

Also:

Suppose our opponent took a free card on the turn after we played c/c on the flop. In that case, we bet the river!

A brief calculation:

Let us re-examine our standard example from before:

Co: 26/22/2,5 WTS:36

Preflop: Hero is BB with A♠ 5♦
CO raises, Hero calls

Flop: A♣ 4♥ 9♦ rainbow

This calculation is much simplified, but will still show the validity of the concepts.

Standard Line:

We're WA after the flop:

Our opponent has a [hand](#) like KQ or 55.

We check, he bets, we [raise](#) him=>he'll [fold](#) small pockets and [unimproved](#) undercards up to A directly against the [check-raise](#).

+ 0.5 BB Net gain

We're WB after the flop:

Our opponent holds something like AK/AQ or a 2 [pair](#).

We check, he bets, we raise, he'll [call](#) with the intention of raising us again on the [turn](#). We [bet](#) the turn, he raises, we cannot fold our top pair in [heads-up](#) so we call the turn and [river](#) bets both.

- 4 BB Net loss

WA/WB Line:

We're WA after the Flop:

Our opponent has a hand like KQ or 55.

We check, he bets, we call. On the turn we [check](#) to him again. Now it's difficult to say how much you'll make off an opponent here, on the average. Many opponents would bet some beatable hands right on into the turn and river. From these, we would get 2.5 BB. Some opponents would bet the turn but [check-behind](#) on the river, from these we would get 1.5 BB. Others would neither bet on the turn nor the river, and from these we would get .5 BB.

In my opinion, 1-1.5 BB is a realistic middle [value](#).

+ 1-1,5 BB Net gain

We're WB after the Flop:

Our opponent holds something like AK/AQ or a 2 [pair](#).

We check and call on every street, even though this isn't true every time we will assume that your opponent value bets with his stronger hand.

- 2,5BB Net loss

As you can see, the WA/WB [line](#) is better than the standard line in both cases!

Further Examples:

1) BB: 30/24/2,4 WTS:38 Preflop: Hero CO with A♥ Q♣

Hero raises, BB 3-bets, Hero caps, BB calls

Flop: K♠ Q♥ 3♦

BB bets, Hero...

The cap we put on his direct bet should make us considerate. We don't want to fold our hand here. We find ourselves in a WA/WB situation. No overcard is dangerous for us since we have an ace ourselves.

But if our opponent has AA or hit the king with AK/KQ then we're WB. If he only has one pocket or Ax, we're WA.

The hero's plan here should be a calldown, in case the another Q or A shows up!

2) *SB: 30/24/2,4 WTS:38*

Preflop: Hero is CO with K♦ Q♠

Hero raises, SB 3-bets, Hero calls

Flop: K♠ 4♦ 9♣

SB bets, Hero calls

Turn: A♣

SB bets, Hero...

We hit our pair of kings with queen kicker on the flop. The hero is ahead after the flop. He calls the flop so he can raise a bet from SB but then A♣ appears on the turn. Not the card the hero wanted to see. He is now WA/WB at the turn:

Against an ace, the hero is WB. Unfortunately, that the SB 3-betted pre-flop seems to indicate that it might be so.

However, we are not necessarily behind!

Against pocket tens or pocket jacks we're ahead, and also against weaker kings. He would be WA against these hands, so a fold is out of the question.

The hero will not raise the turn but play a calldown because of the WA/WB situation.

3) *SB: 40/26/2.0 WTS:39*

Preflop: Hero is CO with K♥ J♥

Hero raises, SB 3-bets, Hero calls

Flop: K♠ 8♦ A♣

SB bets, Hero...

It's no dream flop after a 3-bet pre-flop. But against this type of opponent it's also no reason to throw your hand away.

If the SB has hit an ace, we're WB and we'll have to hit our kicker or another king. A raise would be dangerous on all streets since the SB won't have any trouble 3-betting us with an ace. And we don't have an easy fold if that happens. We want a showdown!

Once again, our plan is a calldown!

When do I deviate from a c/c on all streets when I'm OOP?

We're OOP: our opponent plays a [check-behind](#) on the turn or

IP: our opponent checks to us on the turn.

We want to be sure that at least one bet gets into the [pot](#) on every street. As soon as our opponent checks behind on the turn, I bet the [river](#). We've still got a pair and don't want to see a [check](#) on 2 streets.

When should I consider a donkbet?

Informally, it can said this way:

The more [passive](#) and higher the [WTSD](#) of the opponent, the more sensible the bet/fold [line](#) on the river.

[Bluff](#) induce has little [value](#) against this kind of opponent. He often plays check behind with pockets or a hopeless hand. But he won't [call](#) our bets. If he has a strong ace, he often won't raise on the river; he has a small [AF](#).

The line „bet/call“ is almost never sensible for the following reason:

For bet/call we would need an opponent who was willing to call us with worse hands, yet against which we would have no easy fold. That is, he would have to have a high WTSD and a high AF. But a bluff induce has a lot of value against this kind of opponent, and for that reason I pull the c/c line on the river.

I've hit 2 pair on the turn OOP and c/c is too [weak](#). What should I do?

OOP, [check-raise](#) is often the variant that will get most value from a hopeless hand. It will also get the most value from hands that were WB before but are now surely WA.

What's missing in the article

To what extent is WA/WB applicable to 3-4 handed situations?

How much does a free card cost us, on average?

How much value do our [outs](#) have when we are WB, such that we don't need to fold on an earlier street?

How do you play when you're WB but you get the feeling your opponent is playing WA/WB?

These points will be addressed either in another article, „Advanced WA/WB“, or else added to this one.

Table selection - how to find profitable tables

Introduction

In this article

- *Profit counts*
- *Finding profitable tables with and without software*
- *When to change your seat or leave the table*

Strangely enough, table selection is ignored or at least strongly underestimated by a lot of people, including even very strong players. This can easily be seen by taking a look at the mid [stakes](#) tables on PartyPoker. It often happens that table is exclusively filled by TAGs. Not only is this an unprofitable situation for everyone, but the concerned players should also know better.

Why is table selection so important? Good table selection has a direct influence on the earning rate. All big winners follow one important rule of thumb: only play if you have an [edge](#). [Poker](#) isn't about honour or competing against strong opponents. Quite the opposite! You should avoid these strong players. The main concern is your profit and you make it by playing against bad opponents.

Table selection gets more important the higher the [limit](#) is. On the lowest limits, there are [fish](#) wherever you look. The higher you climb, the less frequent they become. This means you have to make a more careful selection in order to put your poker skills into play in the most profitable conditions.

Good table selection contributes to your profitability almost as much as your raw poker skills. Everyone knows this quote: 'You can be the 10th best poker player in the world and you will still lose if you are on the same table with the 9 best ones.'

For those that have ignored this aspect so far, the following know-how, if applied properly, should have a huge impact. A lot of players build up their solid basic playing strength and know the most important principles in poker strategy by now. Their further development through fine tuning their skills will naturally progress slower from this point on. Table selection however is independent of your poker abilities and can give an incredible [push](#) to anyone that has ignored it so far.

What are you looking for?

Tables with good values

From the point of view of the seeker, 'good values' of course equates to bad players. The best indication of the presence of fish is the [VPIP](#) (voluntarily put money into [pot](#)). Tables with a VPIP of 40 or higher are definitely very profitable. This [value](#) is the main criterion when it comes to table selection. There are exceptional cases however where you can accept values significantly lower

than 40. One such case is when you can have position on one or two extremely [weak](#) players.

Another important value is the PFR (pre-flop [raise](#) percentage). An average [TAG](#) has a PFR value of about 17-21. When choosing your tables, you are looking for a value that's significantly lower, as it hints to the presence of [passive](#) players. But not only is it an indication of weak players, it also offers an array of other concrete advantages. First, you get the opportunity of a free play from the big [blind](#) more often. You can thus hope to even [turn](#) a trash [hand](#) into something big by flopping two [pair](#) or better; the chances for this are 1 in 20 after all. Passive pre-flop behaviour also lets you play more drawing hands from late position as you will be able to see a cheap [flop](#) with good pot [odds](#).

Please note that the given values are adequate for SH tables (6 max.); for FR tables, they will naturally be a bit tighter. In that case, a table with a VPIP of 30 or above can generally be considered profitable. The bigger the VPIP and the smaller the PFR, the more playable a table is. Of course, the same goes for tables with a PFR value that's far above average. However, beginners might find difficulties playing there, as you will be confronted with harder decisions a lot more often.

Tables with good textures

The average VPIP and PFR values don't [tell](#) us anything about the distribution of these attributes amongst the different players. The fundamental question is: do you prefer an even field of players who are slightly inferior to you or is it easier to play on tables with two (or more) really bad fish while the remaining players are strong (maybe even slightly better than you)?

A lot of people prefer the second variant for a couple of reasons:

- Players with a VPIP of 30 aren't necessarily bad post-flop. If they are of the [aggressive](#) type, they can make life rough for you.
- On the other hand, real fish with a VPIP of 50 or higher are really bad players. If you get lucky, they are not just [loose](#) but also passive (calling stations). This means they are also predictable to a certain degree, allowing you to minimize losses against them.
- A fish with a VPIP of 70 will play his hand in two thirds of all cases. That's exactly what you want.
- If you have position on the mega fishes, you can frequently [isolate](#) them. In that case, it's even an advantage to have tight-aggressive players behind you, as they will usually respect a raise. This will improve your chances to be [heads-up](#) in a hand against a worse player with better cards and the better position.

Depending on the limit/time/room, you won't have the choice to look for the 'perfect' table though, but have to be satisfied with the existing offer. You should however avoid sitting down at a table that doesn't seem to be profitable just because there is nothing else! It's pointless to play without an edge or with just a marginal edge. In that case, you can invest your time better by reading strategy articles or visiting the hand samples forum.

Good relative position on bad players

This aspect will be treated more in detail under 'seat selection'.

Methods of table selection

Software-supported table selection (table-scanning)

Table scanning is a very simple and efficient method. Whoever is capable of using it is well off! You open several tables, scan them and see whether they are profitable and where the soft spots are

located right away. As you can imagine, a couple of things need to be in place in order to accomplish this miraculous work:

- PokerTracker
- PokerAce
- A very big database

PokerTracker/PokerAce can be easily acquired, but how do you get a hold of the database?

Method 1: You collect the data while playing. This method is not very efficient as the speed is extremely slow.

Method 2: You actively data mine. For instance, you keep the computer running during the nights and collect data on 12 opened tables concurrently.

Method 3: You share or trade collected data with other miners. The [poker](#) strategy forum has a [section](#) for this.

With these two tools (PockerTracker/PockerAce), it's already possible to do excellent table selection (given the right database). You simply start PokerAce, open a few tables of the desired [limit](#) and wait for the values to show up. When you spot a good table, you take a seat or join the waiting list. This might not work on all poker rooms supported by PokerStrategy, but it's probably the easiest way of doing table selection (i.e. on PartyPoker, PokerStars, etc.).

There are also programs that focus on table selection and make this even easier, as you don't have to manually open the tables but can instead scan all available tables and will be presented with a neat list of tables with the biggest [fish](#). Two examples for such software are GamblersLittleHelper by PokerStrategy and SpadeEye (available in the [shop](#)).

Again, a lot depends on a database that is sufficiently big and up-to-date. Some of these tools even have data mining functions integrated. We recommend that you first make sure whether data mining is allowed by the poker room and which tools can be used for that purpose, though. You can do this by asking on the forum or by using the search feature.

Table selection without software

Programs like Fishfinder etc. make it quite easy to find good tables/positions. But what should you do if you don't own any such software, if you don't have a sufficiently big database of opponents because you're new on a limit or if there is no compatible software for the poker room of your choice?

Good table selection is also possible in such cases. With a little bit of attention, you can quickly find good tables and bad players; how to do so will be examined in this part of the article.

[Pot](#) size / average [VPIP](#)

Even before opening a table, you can make significant pre-selection. Most poker rooms show average values in the lobby for the different tables, which you can use for additional orientation. The most important ones are the average pot size and the average VPIP/PFR of the table.

Big pots are an indication that too many players see the [flop](#) and/or that they go too far into the hands. As looseness is an indication of bad players, these tables potentially hide the most fish. This means that tables get more profitable as these values increase. This approach also has disadvantages though:

- Having more loose-aggressive players in a [hand](#) doesn't necessarily create bigger pots. Sometimes they are the work of very [aggressive](#) players that just love to [raise](#). This might not be to everyone's taste.
- In a few cases, big pots are the product of coincidence. It's possible that the last couple of hands produced action flops (lots of high cards) that were hitting the hole cards of several

players.

- Another disadvantage is that big average pots can attract sharks, as they scent good prey.
- Big pots are in big demand. This will also lead to longer waiting lists. Once you finally get your seat, it's possible the texture of the table and the average pot size have changed for the worse.
- A high VPIP table can also be created by a temporary ultra-short-handed game (2-4 players), as the play will usually be looser here and even TAGs will show a high VPIP in that situation.
- The statistics can be out-of-date and the dynamics of the game may have already shifted to the negative once you claim a seat.

We can conclude from this that the values offered by the poker rooms can only be used as rough indicators and don't constitute essential criterion for table selection.

Observation of the table

Another way of doing table selection is to simply observe the play on a table for a short amount of time. You will often know after just a few hands whether you can play profitably on a table or not.

The first clear sign of a good table is the amount of players that see the flop. You should pay attention to how many players [limp](#) pre-flop or how often raises and 3-bets are cold-called.

Especially on short-handed tables, a pre-flop limp is mostly a strong sign of a fish. You should try to get the seat behind this player. If there aren't many raises but a lot of limps, the table is definitely playable profitably.

Further signs of a good table:

- **Players post their blinds in the middle of an orbit and don't wait for the blinds to get to their seat.**

One of the most obvious signs of a bad player. Posting the [blind](#) in the CO on FR tables might be usual, but on SH tables, it's definitely a no-go. Players that post their blinds in MP2 are always warmly welcomed guests.

- **There is dead money in the pot before the flop (from sit [outs](#)).**

When you click on 'sit out' and miss the blinds while away, you have the possibility of posting the blind with an additional dead blind when coming back, in order to rejoin the game right away instead of waiting for the blinds to come around. A good player will always wait before he posts his blinds.

- **Players open-limp/many limpers.**

Another good indication of a sea full of fish. Open-limps, especially in late positions, always point to weaker players. A lot of limpers on a table are an indicator of a rather loose-aggressive game with lots of calling stations, who are your favorite opponents. Over-limps after some others are however not automatically a sign of a bad player. On this kind of tables, good players can limp in, too.

- **There often are cold-callers after someone raised.**

According to what we teach in the beginner's section of the SH strategy section, you should always play raise or [fold](#) after a raiser. Of course, there are situations where a [cold-call](#) makes sense, for instance when there are very [loose](#) and bad players behind you and you are holding a good multi-way hand. In the majority of cases however, a cold-caller behind a raiser is likely to be a bad player.

- **A player in the SB just calls a steal raise from the CO or the BU and thus gives the BB good [odds](#) for a [call](#).**

The same logic applies here. Cold-calling in the SB after a (steal-)raiser is almost always wrong and indicates that a player is rather [weak](#).

- **Chat insults/excited discussions: one or more players could be on [tilt](#).**

You can often see how players insult their opponents or [tell](#) them very excitedly how they played a hand wrong. This can indicate that one or more players don't have their emotions under control and could [turn](#) out to be easy prey. Beginners should pay attention though: the playing atmosphere on such tables can be very heated and aggressive, which can be profitably played by an experienced player while it can turn out bad for an inexperienced player. If you have a hard time dealing with aggressive opponents and aren't quite used to the SH playing style yet, you should be careful and change the table if the need arises.

- **There is a player with a [stack](#) that's too small on the table (<12 BB)**

Players that play several hands on a table with a stack of under 12 BB can usually also be classified as fish, as they won't be able to get enough [value](#) out of their monsters when the opponent happens to be holding a favorable hand. Of course, it can also happen to good players that they forget to reload in the heat of the battle. The probability that these players continuously play as short stack is relatively small, though.

Buddy list

You should add players that play particularly bad to your buddy list so you're able to find them back later. On PartyPoker, it works like this for instance: My account > Buddylist > Add. If you have a player on the buddy list, you can search for him like this: Search Tables (bottom bar) > Player Search > Buddys > [check](#) box > Search.

On the lower limits, the creation of a buddy list is not necessary, as there are usually enough bad players. It starts making more sense on the mid stakes, when you find a huge fish and want to play against him as often as possible, and maybe even follow him to higher limits. You shouldn't go overboard, though, and you should only add really big fish, as there are still enough bad players on the higher [stakes](#) and the list could quickly grow too big and confusing. A rough reference value is a VPIP of over 50%; you should only add these to your list and check where they are playing at the beginning of each session.

The buddy list can also cause some problems, though. You will never find some of the players again as the might stop playing due to their big losses. They might show up again at a later point, but usually only on an irregular basis. Others change their limit, or you move up the limits and leave the fish behind. But even when the concerned players are online and playing on the right limit, there is a potential for problems. A lot of them disable the search feature on their account (I wonder why?) by activating 'Hide me from search' in the options menu. You will only find a zero behind their name in that case. All in all, you need a large pool of buddies in order to successfully be able to use this tool.

Be flexible!

Someone that is prepared for compromises has more success when it comes to table selection. A lot of players, especially beginners and rookies, feel most comfortable on FR tables. On these, you have the time to wait for solid hands. To be able to play on the desired 10-player table, you need a table with exactly 9 players and one free seat, though. This constellation is of course rather rare. Alternatively, you could join the waiting list on a full table, which will put your patience to test. The biggest problem originating from this rigid approach however is the restricted freedom of choice when it comes to seat selection. You have to be satisfied with the seat that is currently free.

A player that is prepared to sit down at a table with two, three, four or even five free seats will have an easier time. He will find a free table right away and he can choose the best position on the [fish](#). Tables with 7 or 8 players (including yourself) are very similar to the full ring game. They also have the tendency to fill up fast. Tables with 6 players are a borderline case and tables with 5 or less players are definitely short-handed.

This means that a player that can play both full ring and short-handed has a clear advantage in table selection. In contrast to 6 max. tables, half empty full ring tables have a distinct advantage for an experienced short-handed player. The opponents are usually not distinguished short-handed specialists, as they sat on a full table previously (except for those sitting down at the half empty table at a later time). A lot of the players that are stuck at the table stayed because they are behind and don't want to leave as loser. These break-even hunters are often on [tilt](#) and thus potential prey.

Seat selection

The flow of the money

It is of great importance where you sit in relation to the different player types. The position element in Hold'em is way too significant for this to not matter. It's even so significant that there is a prominent rule to it: money in Hold'em always travels from the right to the left.

This means that the thought process of who you want on your right culminates in the question of who is the biggest money provider. The answer is easy: the really bad players. This means you want the worst players on the table to be sitting to your right. You can't always spot them right away, but there is a pretty good indicator: the looseness.

You want:

- Loose-passive opponents on your right
- Loose-aggressive opponents on your right
- Tight-passive players on your left
- Tight-aggressive players on your left (you would usually also prefer these on your right side, but as there has to be someone on your left, you prefer TAGs to LAGs here)

This means that, per se, you want all [loose](#) players on your right and all [tight](#) players on your left. It's usually also comfortable to have position on players that are in the [hand](#) more often than others. This will allow you to be in more situations with a positional advantage.

loose-passive

The biggest chunk of money in Hold'em comes from calling stations, because they are the worst players. Admittedly, a calling station is also an agreeable opponent on your left side, as he will [call](#) raises with bad hands once in a while and won't put up a lot of pressure with good cards, thus hardly using his positional advantage. But still, if you [raise](#) with AK or a strong pocket pair, you want the loose-passive opponent to already be in the hand with J9o. Even a calling station won't call with just any trash. But once he's in, he will probably stay until the river, as long as he catches any part of the [board](#) (they will often even start a call down with a baby-pair). This means your good hands will be paid off to the maximum. At the same time, your chances of winning increase dramatically if you succeed in isolating the calling station with a raise.

A LPA usually has a low PFR. This has two implications:

- Whenever he raises, stay on your guard. He will usually be holding a premium hand.
- As he will often just [limp](#) with cards like AQ-AT, you will get the opportunity to raise AQ aggressively instead of having to [fold](#).

A big advantage of having position on this player type is that he gives you the opportunity to play

your hand optimally because of his [passive](#) playing style. You can [bet](#) the [turn](#) for value, take a free card on the turn or you can even get to a free show down with an [unimproved](#) hand on the [river](#).

loose-aggressive

The [LAG](#) is [aggressive](#) and hard to predict. Having position on him is thus more important than against the LPA. When you get into hard struggles, you can get more bets out of your winners and minimize the costs of your losers. The loose-aggressive player can't [bluff](#) as effectively out of position, as he doesn't have semi-bluff raises at his disposal. A very loose LAG with a high PFR ([maniac](#)) can also be isolated with decent hands.

The LAG will often try to steal your blinds. That's why you should find out his stealing standards early on in order to fire back. If you do this early in the session, you might instill some respect in him and get rid of his 'stealing on light hands'.

tight-passive

Okay, you would, of course, prefer to have all players on your right side, but unfortunately, this is not possible. So the [rock](#) should rather be on your left side. Even though you can only win little money from him like this, getting money from a rock isn't an easy task in the first place. At least he can't cause much damage on your left side, as he won't protect good hands and often just calls. He will therefore not extract enough [value](#) from his winners. When he raises, however, you usually have an easy fold, as he will probably have better than top [pair](#).

If you raise him first in late position with marginal hands (small aces), he will hardly 3-bet you with AT or AJ. You will often be able to buy the [button](#) off him, pre-flop as well as post-flop. He will only protect his blinds insufficiently against your frequent steal attempts, and only with the strongest hands.

tight-aggressive

When it comes to TAGs, a lot of arguments speak for each side. Due to a lack of room, they have to go on the left though (there are simply not enough rocks!).

Let's first talk about the disadvantages of the situation where he sits on your right: because of his 'raise or fold' policy, he will raise first in from middle position with many hands that are not the top of the crop (KQ, KJ, AT), against which you will still have to fold AJ or even AQ simply because you can't exclude premium hands. This means you will not get to play often, which can be frustrating. The [TAG](#) is looking to pick out the fish, just as you are. If he sits on your right, he will often preempt you with his raise and will take the fish away from you. In multi-way pots, the TAG will often get you off a better hand with his [protection](#) and semi-bluff raises.

Let's look at the actual topic now: the TAG sits on your left side. As he usually recognizes you as a solid player, he will mostly respect your raises and won't get in the way of your fight against the fish. With a strong hand in heads-up, you will always get the opportunity to check/raise on the [flop](#) against him. In case he is very aggressive and follows through on his principle, you might even be able to check/raise him on the turn, given the right board. You will also be able to pick up his blinds from time to time.

Of course, you won't be able to always find the perfect seating position. If there are 3-4 bad players on a table, this isn't much of a problem either. You should try to sit down as close to the bad players as possible, even if you will take a place to their right. This might make it almost impossible to [isolate](#) them pre-flop and you will also have to continue against them out of position post-flop, but you will be in a hand with them more often due to [blind-steal](#) situations, which will give them plenty of opportunities to make mistakes in order to increase your profit. On good tables, you can also put up with a TAG on your right side if there are lots of fish in the game. In any case, you should never underestimate the seat position and you should try to get the best seat as far as possible, but you can't be too picky either. You can still change the seat later in the game, if need be.

Seat change

If the opportunity is favorable for a seat change, you shouldn't let it pass by. The following conditions should be fulfilled:

- There is a free seat.
- There are no players in the waiting list, as they would have prior claim to the seat.
- The new seat improves your position on the [weak](#) players.

Here is how you do it:

- You remember the table number or select the table with your cursor in the table list.
- You wait till the end of the current hand. At the moment where the [pot](#) gets pushed to the winner, you leave the table.
- You wait until the cards for the next hand have been dealt (estimate).
- You then double click on the bar that represents the table in the table list.
- You sit down at the (hopefully still) free seat.

This whole mess is necessary as you would be put on the same seat if you left the table in the middle of a hand and returned right away. By waiting until the last instant when leaving your seat, you try to keep the seat occupied as long as possible, to avoid finding both the old and the new one taken away when you return to the table. This only counts for PartyPoker, though. On some sites (PokerStars) you can change seats at will at any time during a hand, as long as you're not involved in the hand yourself.

If the improvement of your position is going to benefit your expected value significantly, you can even make the change in late position, at the cost of some free plays!

When should you leave a table?

If one of the tables you're playing on is just acceptable, but not sensational, you should be looking for other tables while playing. As you [fold](#) a lot as a [tight](#) player, you should use your free time to improve your playing conditions by finding even softer tables. This is possible without much effort, especially if you can fall back to the scanning method or the buddy list.

Which tables should you give up on first? In principle, you should avoid strong opponents. Having a positive balance on a table is no reason to stay. Your [streak](#) of luck is a phenomenon describing the past; it has absolutely no influence on future happenings. Analogically, a table isn't bad just because you lost a lot playing on it. If there is a rich presence of fish, you have a strongly positive expected [value](#) and should stay.

Surprisingly, a lot of players think exactly the opposite. They stay on tables with strong opponents because they are behind on these. They just don't want to leave the table a loser and try to achieve break-even by force. The mistake they are making is to consider matters personally. It's not a shame to be behind. It can happen to anyone when the cards decide against you. You shouldn't take it as a personal defeat. Also, it's not the table result that counts but rather your overall bankroll, especially in the long [run](#). If you leave a table a loser, it doesn't change your [bankroll](#). You should be able to [deal](#) with this well, especially as a winning player.

There are also reasons to leave a table even when there isn't another good one available. The [fish](#) at your current tables, who are your reason for sitting down there, have an annoying disadvantage: their presence is very unstable as they tend to go [broke](#) sooner or later. As soon as the reasons for your own presence on a table disappear, you should get out, too. You can take your time with finding new profitable opponents. Most experienced players go over to multi-tabling anyway. Playing on four tables, you can easily close two stagnating tables without being bored to death and

use your freed resources to look for better seats.

Of course, there are also numerous reasons to avoid changing tables too often. First, it adds a certain agitation to your game. Some people overextend themselves while searching for better tables and are then too distracted. It's also always a matter of whether it pays off to give up all the findings and reads on a current table just to find a new table with a [VPIP](#) higher by just two or three %. You have to think about your table image, after all. When people consider you a winning player as you are considerably in the plus, you can abuse this with very aggressive play with lots of pre-flop raises and semi-bluffs. This respect can't just be transferred to the new table.

Conclusion

The reality is: a lot of average players make a decent profit through poker, even though their talent isn't impressive. They just pick their games carefully. In stark contrast, a lot of talented and very creative players keep going broke because they ignore the basic principles of table selection. They play beyond their means and compete against the most tenacious opponents. Doing this, they miss out on getting into really profitable situations, the way every big winner does it. A winner is all about winning. His mind and every action he takes is [set](#) on it. Winners only play when they see an advantage for themselves.

Never play without an edge!