

How To Play Poker

Poker is a game that combines strategic assessment and skill and is played with a standard, 52-card pack and a poker chip set. There are many variants to poker, the most popular of them being Texas Hold 'em and Omaha. While poker is ideally played between minimum 2 players till a maximum of 10 people, the player number can vary according to the game variant. Learning how to play poker starts with grasping the basic rules of play, understanding how the hands are ranked and making a poker hand.

Understanding Poker Basics

Stages:

In each stage, one player posts the small blind and the player to his left posts the big blind. These are compulsory bets for these two players while the remaining players may decide not to bet. The small blind and big blind positions change clockwise after each hand.

Pre-Flop

This is the first stage where each player is dealt two cards face down, followed by a round of betting where you can check, bet or fold. Since Small Blind and Big Blind players have to make compulsory bets, the player acting next to the big blind i.e. the UTG position is the first to act. The UTG can act in three different ways i.e. call, raise or fold. The next player will also have similar options and once all players have acted, the chips are moved to the middle of the table and the second round begins.

Flop

After the first betting round is over comes the Flop round where three community cards are dealt face up on the table. Every player can use his two hole cards and the three community cards to make a five-card poker hand. The first player to act is the Small Blind. He can check. i.e. not bet anything, bet or fold. The Big Blind acts next and can either fold or call i.e. matching the small blind's chips or he can raise. Once every player has contributed the same amount of money, the third stage begins.

The Turn

After the Flop round, the fourth community card called The Turn or fourth street is dealt face up. Now there are six cards available to the player, two in his hand, and four on the table and he/she can use any of these five to make a five-card poker hand. The action plays out exactly as the previous round.

The River

The fifth and final community card i.e. The River also known as the fifth street is now dealt on the table. With seven cards available, every player has to make their best, five-card poker hand.

The Showdown

Betting stops and all remaining players have to show their cards. The player with the best hand wins the pot.

Seating Positions:

Dealer: The dealer is one of the most important position in a poker game as the button moves clockwise to the left each round. The positions are named relative to the position of the dealer button.

Blinds: Two players on the poker table have to pay the forced bets also called the blinds. The first player left to the dealer button is called the Small Blind and the player left to him is called the Big Blind. These positions must act first after the flop has been dealt.

Early Position (EP): The first three positions after the Blinds are called 'Early Position' (EP). The position is called Under The Gun (UTG) and is the player to the left of Big Blind followed by UTG+1 and UTG+2.

UTG is the first playing position preflop which means that the player seated here is the first to act in a newly dealt hand before the flop.

Middle Position (MP): The three players who have approximately an equal number of players acting before and after them are seated in the 'Middle Position' (MP). Based on the total number of players on the table, they are: MP, MP+1 and MP+2.

Late Position (LP): The late positions comprise of Hijack and Cutoff. After the MP+2 comes the Hijack, followed by the Cutoff. These two players only act after all the previous players have decided on their actions. The Dealer position is the last player to play.

Texas Hold 'em

The Texas Hold 'em begins with every player being randomly dealt two 'hole' cards face down. In three stages thereafter, five community cards are dealt face up. The first stage is the 'flop' where three community cards are dealt face-up. Later, additional single cards called 'the turn' or 'fourth street' and a final card i.e. 'the river' or 'fifth street' are dealt one after the other. Rounds of betting are made before the flop is dealt, and then at every stage. Players bet a certain amount of chips or money using betting ([hyperlink to Betting Rules](#)) actions that include Call, Fold, Raise or Check.

Every player on the table tries to make the best five-card poker hand from any combination of his two 'hole' cards and the five board or community cards.

Omaha

Omaha or Omaha Hold 'em is the second most popular poker variant played both in live and on virtual felts and is similar to Texas Hold 'em. In Omaha each player is dealt four hole cards instead of two and he can choose two of these to combine with three of the five community cards to make his best hand.

Texas Hold 'em Vs. Omaha: How They Differ

Texas Hold 'em and Omaha are similar in their format, seating position, hand rankings, betting rounds and gameplay.

Number of Hole Cards Dealt: Apart from the fact that in Texas Hold 'em, the players are dealt only two hole cards instead of four as in Omaha, the two games differ in certain ways.

Number of Hold Cards Used: In Omaha, a player has to use exactly two hole cards to make his best poker hand where in Texas Hold 'em a player may choose to either use both, or one or none of his hole cards to make a hand. This also means that making big hands is easier in Omaha than in Texas Hold 'em.

Popular Betting Structures: While both games can be played with any betting structure, the preferred betting structure for Texas Hold 'em is no-limit, and the preferred betting structure for Omaha is usually pot-limit.

Poker Hand Rankings

A player's decision to bet, fold, call, raise or check depends on how strong his five-card poker hand is. For this it's important to understand the Poker Hand Rankings.



POKER

HAND RANKINGS



Poker Hand Rankings

Royal Flush: Is the best hand any poker player can make and very rarely made. It has the five highest cards of a card deck i.e. Ace-King-Queen-Jack-Ten, all in the same suit.

Straight Flush: Any five cards in a numerical order, all in the same suit are called Straight Flush. For instance, Queen-Jack-Ten-Nine-Eight or Eight-Seven-Six-Five-Four are Straight flush combinations.

Four Of A Kind: Aka Quads are four cards of equal value or rank, along with one side card or 'kicker'. If case of a tie during a hand, the player with the highest four of a kind wins.

Full House: When a player makes a hand that has three cards of same value (three-of-a-kind) and one pair of any other value, he's said to have made a full house. For instance, a hand with three 10's and two eights, irrespective of the suit, is a full house.

Flush: Any five cards, all of the same suit. Here, the numerical sequence is not important but the suit is. In case two or more players make a flush, the player holding the highest ranked card (higher flush) wins. If all five cards are the same rank, the pot is split.

Straight: Five cards of sequential value. Every possible straight will either contain a 5 or a 10. If more than one player makes a straight, the one with the highest ranking card at the top of the sequence will win. Ace can be used as the highest or as the lowest card in numerical value. It can be used to make an Ace high straight i.e. Ace-King-Queen-Jack-Ten or Five-Four-Three-Two-Ace i.e. Five high straight.

Three of a Kind: Three cards of the same value are made. Since aces are the highest card in a deck, a player making a three of a kind with aces will have a better hand than one making a three of a kind of any card with lower value.

Two Pairs: The player makes two pairs in his hand, each pair being of the same numerical value. So, a hand having two deuces and two queens will be two pair and the fifth card is the side card (kicker). If two players make two pair, the one with the higher two pair wins. If both players have exactly the same two pairs, the player with the higher kicker will win.

One Pair: There are two cards of matching rank or numerical value, making one pair. The suits are irrelevant here and the remaining three side cards may be of any numerical value. In a game of poker, a player with the higher one pair will defeat the player with the lower one pair. In case both have made the same pair, the player having the highest side card/kicker wins.

High Card: Is the weakest category where the cards don't form a pair. A high card combo with Highest card will be superior to one with a lower-value high card.

Poker Tournament Rules

The standard scheme of a Holdem tournament is really simple: the player enters the tournament with a set buy-in fee and receives tournament chips in return which have no cash value. This means that a player can lose only his buy-in but will continue playing until he loses all of his chips or takes everybody else's chips to win the tournament. This format makes tournaments a lot of fun to participate in and also creates a very competitive spirit of play.

At the start, all participants receive an equal number of tournament chips, called starting chip stack. For example a starting stack can be 2000, 5000, 10000 or any amount which the tournament director determines.

Each tournament has its blind structure which is a timetable for increasing the size of the blinds according to the predetermined periods. Typically, each blind level can last between 10 min and 1 hour and with the advancement of the blinds levels, the blinds increase, for example from 50-100 to 100 200, etc