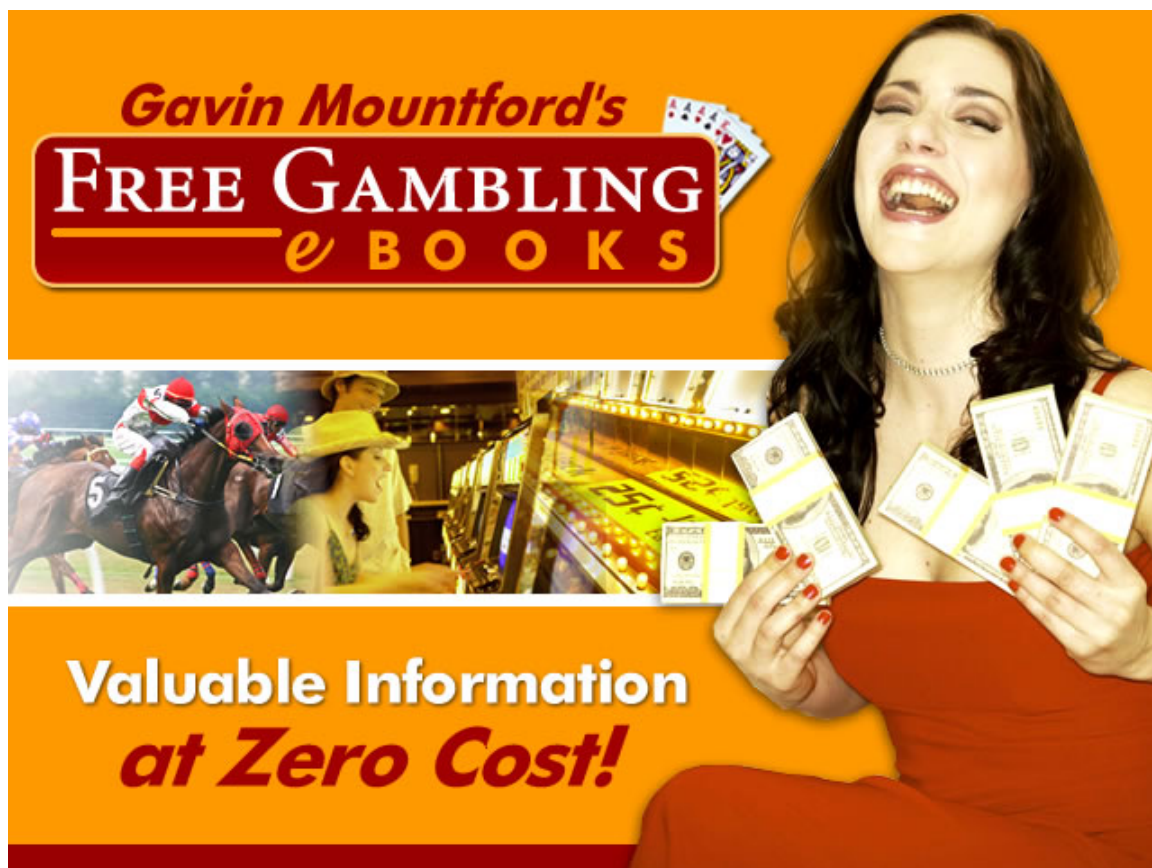


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Introduction

Thanks to the internet, the game of Texas Holdem has become one of the most popular poker games to date. Players from around the world can compete online in the comfort of their own homes and enjoy playing poker 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. But with the increasing number of players comes an increasing amount of competition thus making it more difficult to win on a consistent basis...until now. With the information provided here you can become a better online Texas Holdem poker player regardless of your experience. Beginners and veterans alike will benefit from the table tested techniques presented in this document.

Each section of this strategy guide eBook deals with a specific situation that can be encountered during any typical online Texas Holdem game.

Starting Hands

A good starting hand is the first and foremost key to winning at online Texas Holdem poker, period. The majority of the online poker community tends to overlook this crucial element essential for winning *consistently*. Sure, anyone will get lucky every now and then with a 7-2 off suit, but to win consistently you must condition yourself to play only hole cards with the best possible winning percentages.

So what is a good starting hand? Ace/Ace - Ace/King Suited - King/King? There are numerous books and resources on the internet that will give you an ANTICIPATED good starting hand along with the win percentages for each, but here is what they don't tell you:

The strength of a good starting hand depends greatly on the number of players left in the game AND the number of callers. If there are 10 people seated at the table, then a good starting hand will be quite different from a good starting hand with only 3 players sitting at the table.

David "Einstein" Sklansky was the first author to have both ranked every 2-card starting hand and group them along with recommendations on how to play them. The top 16 ranked starting hole cards are fundamental to solid play. They constitute about 7% of all hands you will be dealt.

Table 1 - Sklansky's Group 1 hands

AA KK QQ JJ A_s

Ace/Ace and King/King are substantially more powerful than the Queen/Queen.

Table 2 - Sklansky's Group 2 hands

TT A_{Qs} A_Js K_Qs A_K

The overall power of Ace/King is actually slightly greater than that of King/Queens, so I would reverse the order of these two hands within this Group.

Out of the 10 hands in these two groups your decision to raise should not be treated equally based upon the following:

- Raising Ace/Ace, King/King, Queen/Queen, and Ace/King should be aggressive before the flop because these cards can lose their value in large multi-way pots.
- Raising Ace/King, Ace/Queen, Ace/Jack, and King/Queen should be moderate because they do play well in multi-way pots.
- Raising Jack/Jack should only be done on a tight tables in order to run out hands such as Ace/Nine. This type of hand can also

lose value in multi-way pots.

- Raising Ten/Ten is generally not recommended.

Always consider the fact that your starting hand strength also depends on your table position, or how many people bet before and after you do. As a general rule, you should stick to the conventional best starting hand percentages when there are 8 to 10 players with 2 to 3 callers.

When the field is narrowed down to 5 players or less, you should play your starting hands more aggressively. For example, the Ace/King suited is often considered to be the second best starting hand with a full table. If there are less than 5 players left, any Ace hole card with a decent kicker can give you the same winning percentages as the Ace/King suited would have. The concept is very simple, you are playing the mathematical odds implied via the 52 cards in the deck along with the probability that fewer players will equal less chances that someone will draw an Ace. In short, the fewer number of players holding cards at a table, the greater your chances of winning are.

If you are in a late position at a full table and have seen one player wager a large bet, and there are one or two callers, most often you can bet at the very least ONE of them is holding a strong starting hand with high win percentages (such as an Ace with a high kicker, suited sequence cards, or heavy pocket pairs, etc).

If, at any given point of the game, you have five or more players seeing the flop, then a good starting hand can often times change to small sequence cards such as a five/six or a small suited pairs. Reason?

When over half of the players at a table call a hand, the high cards such as Aces, Kings, and Queens are usually tied up as hole cards thus not showing up on the flop, turn or river. This is an excellent opportunity for small pairs, lower straights, or any flush draw to win a big pot.

As a general rule, you should never bet the minimum when you have an excellent starting hand unless you intend to "limp in" and get more callers for the hand. There are times when limping in can win you some big pots, but you shouldn't let slow playing become a dominant strategy. It is good to bet at least 3 to 4 times the minimum in order to run out any possible draw hands or players who rely on luck and chance to win a big pot early in the tournament.

Once you have mastered the basic concept of good starting hands for every scenario, you will become a better Texas Holdem player regardless of when, where, or who you play. Ready for some more?

Pairs

Pairs are always good hole cards, but you should play them wisely. Everyone loves to see a pair in the hole. One of the most anticipated pocket pairs are the pocket Aces which tend to cause amateurs to bet the whole farm thinking they cannot lose. If you do not comprehend anything else in this guide, comprehend this...pocket Aces are not ALWAYS a winner. Yes, they are indeed the best starting hand you can theoretically be dealt, but I have seen way too many players lose all of their chips with the "all-in" pocket Aces.

Having said that, let's start with the idea of "slow playing" your pocket Aces. There are a few things that you should consider before doing so. If you choose to slow play the Aces you should be at a table that has players who are unlikely to call a pre-flop raise from an early position, very loose players, or one or more players who are frequently stealing the blinds. Keep in mind that slow playing with any hand should not become a dominating strategy but rather a technique used sparingly.

Now suppose that you come out strong with your betting and you get multiple callers or even a raise. If it comes to the turn or river card and you do not improve your hand you should typically lay down. More often than not, you will lose a substantial amount of chips - especially if there is a possible straight or flush hand showing on the board. Remember, it is better to save your stack and live to play another hand than to foolishly take chances.

Other pocket pairs such as the Deuce/Deuce is not as strong as many would think at ANY point during the game. I would recommend never holding this small pair (unless you are a blind and can check through to the next card). All it takes is someone holding a single Three card and then seeing another Three show up on the flop or turn to win the hand.

In general, the Five to Nine pair are usually not good pocket pairs to bet on - but can be a good hand to see the flop on if the betting is not beyond your comfort level or if you are a blind and have the option to check. If you don't hit at least three of a kind on the flop, it is best not to hold these low pairs unless you can continue to check the hand. The best advice I can give for playing pocket pairs on the Internet is to watch which pairs have recently won, and which ones have recently lost. Keep a mental record of the "wins" versus "losses". I say this for the simple fact that if King/King in the hole has won three times during the tournament, odds become favorable that they will not win the fourth time BEFORE at least one bad beat. This one observation alone can save you a lot of money - especially in large multiplayer tournaments. Many online casinos state that they use random number generators when dealing or determining cards (I'm not saying they don't) but after countless hours of real game time, one will begin to wonder just how "random" anything can be.

ALWAYS, ALWAYS be aware that when any pair is showing on the board, a full house is possible. A full house Threes full of Twos will beat Ace/Ace or trip Aces every time. Whenever you see someone betting hard on board pairs, you should at the very least be holding an Ace or King with the pair, and it is recommended not to play against a high wager unless you already have trips with the possibility of hitting the full boat yourself.

Sequence cards

Sequence cards can sometimes be better than pocket pairs as long as they are Eight/Nine or better. I would recommend that you not play any lower straight unless you are a blind and have no choice - or unless you have established yourself early in the game. Which brings me to mention, blinds usually end up winning big pots by playing low straights. Beware of a big or small blind betting on a possible straight flop. More often than not, they actually have it. A Jack/Ten is one of the best possible straight hands to hold due to the odds of making the straight on a draw, as well as having a no loose straight hand if it hits. I usually play open ended straights with a high probability to win more often than I do pairs. Straights win more times than you would think when playing online Texas Holdem!

Position

Many poker professionals state that the dealer position is the best betting position you will experience. This is true in most cases, but is not always the case (you will understand why I say this later). The dealer position is valuable due to the fact that you have the opportunity to see how many players are still in on the hand and how strongly they feel about their hand. Since Texas Holdem is played in a clockwise manner, those to the right of the dealer have less information to base their decisions on thus having a perceived disadvantage. Early betting positions are always subject to being raised by other players after you. Any time you are in the dealer position with multiple callers AND you have a good starting hand, then you can usually increase the minimum bet with a slight guarantee that everyone will call. This is a wonderful way to increase the winning pot size.

While I will not argue or try to belittle the dealer position, I will say that many [online poker tournaments](#) have been won by those who truly understand how to make the most out of the "blind" positions. Consider that you play a blind position 2-1 over the dealer position during a [tournament](#). The "blinds" are what you would call an "early" position. You have no feedback from the other players as to what type of hand they think they have, and how much they are willing to wager on their hands. Unless you start out with strong hole cards, you need to be very conservative and check your hand. If you do not have good starting cards, simply do not raise, do not call, do not fish, and do not take the chance, end of story. Often I see those in the big or small blind position take a gamble based upon the idea that they already have half of the ante in the pot, so why not gamble and call the other half. Why not? Because it is still truly a gamble and foolish. Especially when the blind stakes are high. Those who can resist this temptation are those who end up saving a good bit of chips for when they actually have a hand and need to use them. Remember, good players win with a solid game plan; they do not rely on luck or chance.

While speaking of position, it is always a good time to introduce the art of bluffing. Believe me when I say this, bluffing is truly an art. Compare it to the abilities of a skilled artist whose brush dances around the canvas as if it had a mind of its own - a competent holdem player can bluff his way around the table just as easily. While you can always bluff one player easier than you can 9 players, position is a critical factor. If you know many of the players at the table are tight players and you feel the timing is right, then a blind position is the absolute best time to bluff a bad hand like no other. I say this for two reasons. One, there are no cards on the table, so even if an opponent has Ace/Ace in the hole, they have absolutely no idea if you have Ace/Ace also. When bluffing from a blind position before a flop the mindset should be "my cards are just as good or better than yours and I'll prove it with my wager". But keep this in mind; if you raise a substantial amount on the bluff, and you get more than one caller, one of them will usually have a very strong hand they are proud of. If this is the case, back off of your bet and fold. There is no harm done here, do not be a victim of playing your ego. When bluffing from the blind position you are really only concerned with "stealing the other blind" and nothing more.

Now consider the post-flop bluff from a blind position assuming you have one or more callers. If an ace (or any strong possible combination such as 3 sequence

cards etc.) shows on the board, you have the option of slightly raising the bet again to see if your opponents are actually holding anything of value. If not, they will most likely fold their hand fearing that their king or queen will not hold up to your "supposed" ace and so on. With callers on the table this is effectively the opposite of "blind stealing" and a tactic used by many of the best online poker players. Nothing is more powerful than bluffing the blind stealer. I would advise that you use this tactic with caution, and do not over play it. It is much more effective if you do not overplay it. The more experienced players will catch on to you if you abuse it.

Easy Online Tells

Obviously there are not as many tells when playing on the internet as there are when playing in person. You cannot see the other player in order to read his/her expressions and emotions. But believe it or not, there are times when you can pick up on the playing habits of another player online. For instance: Players that frequently push the check/fold button before their turn. This is very common among NOVICE or uneducated players. This is an easy tell, they have no hand worth playing and only hope to see free cards - or fold if a raise is made. A GOOD player will take some time off of the clock even when they have nothing. This keeps the other players guessing at all times. Sometimes it will even frustrate an experienced or frequent player causing them to make a hasty decision. If you see someone checking quickly hand after hand, play them aggressively, unless of course you know the player and they are using this as a method to fool their opponents.

Some veteran players will try to use the clock as a "timing" tool to their advantage. For example, a player may take the full "time out" before they make their decision to check/fold/raise. If they use a large amount of time to simply check, odds are they have nothing. Slightly raise the stakes to keep them in check. If they come back with a large raise or an all-in raise – watch out! Unless you know this player very well it is wise to be cautious and back down. Regardless of the outcome use it to your advantage by taking mental note of the player's style and use this knowledge for the next showdown. A novice player will consistently play their hand the same way every time.

I'll give you a good example. I once knew a player that went all-in every time he would stay in a hand. It didn't matter if it was on the flop, the turn, or the river, if he bet – it would be all-in. Believe it or not, he won a lot of tournaments – until I (and eventually a few others) caught up to him by carefully observing his playing style. He would only play Ace/King, Ace/Ace, or any suited cards. Once this tell was out, it was easy to know when to stay in a pot or when to fold. My point is this: If you will carefully watch a player and take note of what cards they hold when they win AND loose, you can get a good feel of how they play and thus recognize their "tells".

Winning on the flop

In the beginning of a [tournament](#), watch the first 10 to 15 hands. If there have been 2 of a kind, 3 of a kind, and full house wins, you can bet that a straight is sure to follow soon. If you get an open end straight at this point, you should bet stronger than usual. This also works in reverse, for example, if a straight has won, 2 of a kind, and 3 of a kind has won numerous times, bet on a full house showing very soon. You must carefully watch every hand that has been played and take note to the number of hands won that are shown to the table as well as "mucked" hands. Calculate these possibilities when predicting what will show next.

Early in a [tournament](#), you should use pre-flop betting to get a feel for the playing styles of the other players. Raising the bet by at least 3 times the minimum wager on the flop will usually make tight players fold. Also, many novice players will not call any type of raise to their hand before seeing the flop - even if they have a good starting hand. This type of betting can also slow down the blind stealer as well as aggressive players who play multiple hands while the blinds are low.

To Chat or not to Chat

Some players like to use chat very often. This is no different than the lounge player who likes to “trash” talk during the game and keep you distracted. Sometimes they will remark only to anger you, trying to get you to play to their hand. Other times they will befriend you, hoping that you become less aggressive in your betting towards them.

If you are serious about winning online Texas Holdem, turn off the chat, don't even open yourself up to the distraction. If you really want to talk and have a good time getting to know people, visit a designated CHAT room and save your money. Remember, if you are focusing your attention on the talk, your not focusing your attention on the players and the cards they play.

If you must chat (my wife can't help it - she loves to talk) then never disclose the truth about your previous hand. If someone asks you...LIE. Whatever winning hand they had, you had one better. If you had the nuts and couldn't be beat, then tell them you bluffed their socks off! The point is this, if they are analyzing your style (and they will) you have an opportunity to throw them off. Always keep them guessing. You do not want to be a predictable player.

Playing Back to Back Hands

If someone has just won on 3 of a kind, it is almost guaranteed that the next hand will not win on 3 of a kind – this goes for any winning combination. While a full house can be likely, most often something completely different will win such as a low pair, a straight, a flush, or even a single high card. You must be constantly aware of the poker odds against you. Be very selective when betting back to back hands. There are times when you may feel a sense of “domination” and become more aggressive in your betting - eventually losing a big pot. Never let your emotions dictate your strategy.

The only exception to this rule would be if you were a substantial chip leader or established player and the other players were reluctant to call your larger bets. Then you can use your chip stack along with momentum to bully the table - although this is usually short lived.

Folding

Believe it or not, many poker players will tell you that folding is an art just like bluffing is. This section will definitely raise a lot of eyebrows, but all I can say is don't knock it until you try it. It is possible that if you folded every hand and never played a flop (except for the forced blinds), you could finish in the top 1/2 of most internet tournaments. Yes, you read that right. Try it for yourself, play a money game with 9 other people with the intention to fold every hand, and often times you will end up in the top 1/2. How is that for an instant improvement in your game?

I simply call it conservative play and if you haven't figured it out by now, it is one of the biggest secrets to winning consistently online. Remember when I said that you do not have as many physical tells when playing online? It is because of this that you must condition yourself to play your cards more often than you play the other people at your table. Believe me, I know how hard it is to lay down an Ace/King with a big pot show - but when a tight player is betting heavy on the board low straight - I save my chips and fold. It is human nature to want to think a bluff is going down and nothing will beat MY good cards. But I can't see him. I can't see the shift in his eyes, the nervous finger tapping, the smirk on his face. I can't hear the tone of his voice. The only thing I can do is bet on the value of my cards in relationship to the cards on the table.

Most online casinos have a stat tracker showing you how many times you fold (and when), how many times you see the flop, how many times you win, etc. When your fold percentage is high, you will more often than not get the cards you need to win that hand you have been waiting patiently for. Remember the motto? Minimize loses. Fold when in doubt and never chase cards - especially when the stakes are high. Players who continually chase cards end up broke. Call this odds, call this percentages, call it anything you want. I call it "knowing from experience that after I have folded 12-15 hands I usually get a good starting hand that almost never loses".

Could Haves

There are times when you fold, only to see a flop that would have given you a good betting hand. Watch this closely. First of all, this tells you that you missed your opportunity to win a hand. Most importantly, your odds of getting a good hand AFTER that are seemingly lowered due to perceived expectations. Always wait a few more hands before you bet strong again. Give yourself some time to get over the emotion of "missing out" so that you can get back to your game plan.

The basic psychology behind this is simple: You feel that you have missed an opportunity; you then try to create another opportunity to compensate. More times than not, you lose your money trying to make something happen out of nothing. Be patient, your time will come around again and let the odds roll back in your favor. Never play out of frustration or with a sense of hopelessness. Keep your mind focused and constantly remind yourself that you are a winner. Positive thinking does wonders for your game (wonders for your life) and will reveal opportunities you would have otherwise never noticed.

Flush showing on flop

I included this section apart from the others for a good reason. Unless you have at least one suited HIGH card to go with the flush, simply do not wager high on this type of hand. Get out while you can if there is any heavy betting action.

Keep in mind, loose players will often chase the flush if they are holding only one suited high card and they see 3 more on a flop. If you are going to chase cards, then this is the only time I would recommend it. Typically you should hold nothing less than a suited Ace, King, or Queen if there are 8 players or more, Queen to Ten when there are 5 or less. I have talked to a number of great players about the “bad beats” they have taken, and a flush draw is one of the favorites. As stated earlier, this is usually how the pocket Aces end up getting “shoved”.

High card flush hands win some of the largest pots of every game. Period.

When the Blinds Have Been Raised

This is the best time to bet a slow hand early in any tournament. Most players will fold due to the initial shock of the minimum bet being raised. Many who are "fishing" will not fish until a few hands have been played with the new minimum bets and their comfort level has resumed. Also take note that many players will tighten up every time the blinds are raised, and aggressive players will start to bluff even less.

Players Who Raise Often

This is one of two things, a very strong player who is confident and experienced, or a very stupid player who plays only by the luck of the draw. Watch this player carefully during the first 5 or so raises. If they lose more often than not, you probably have a sucker. Be as a tiger, patiently waiting in the bush to attack. Take his money when you have a strong hand or the nuts.

Confident players will often change up their game strategy during play. A supposed loose player will become tight for a few rounds, and then loose again. If you see a player that is playing too loose, occasionally bet big hands and slow them down. If you lose a big pot, you then have the opportunity to set them up for an all-in. Make them believe that you are even looser! One good hand will take their entire chip stack. By purposely giving away a few small hands you can set them up for the big pot winner and often times bring other players into the stack as well.

Bluff Less

It is harder to bluff on the internet than it is in person. Because of the limited tells, more often than not, players will play their hand rather than the person they are playing. This is not to say that it is impossible to bluff an internet holdem game, but be very selective when you do. Many players will only bluff bad hands, but I want to introduce to you the art of bluffing a good hand (commonly know as slow playing). Let's say that you make a significant raise and you get a caller. Assuming that you have the nuts (a hand that cannot be beat) check or bet the minimum on the next card. Very often, this will provoke an even bigger raise than you would have gotten had you bet heavy again. In this way you are bluffing your opponent with a winning hand and – maximizing your winnings.

If you are attempting to bluff with a losing hand, it is wise to do so preflop and post flop only. Continuing a bluff on the turn or river card is very dangerous unless you see a weakness in the caller. If you haven't bluffed them out by the turn card, chances are you're not going to.

I will say it again, conservative players win consistently when playing online. Believe this and bluff less.

Tournament Play

As a general rule you should play very aggressive in the beginning of a [tournament](#). This is for two reasons. First, many beginners will hold and bet on nothing until they are eventually put out. Secondly, the blinds and minimum bets are very low allowing you to see more cards on the flop without losing much of your stack. If you are going to chase cards (which you very seldom should), do it at the beginning of a tourney, but never, NEVER at the end of a tourney.

Be aware that other players will use this same tactic also. If you find yourself at a table where everyone seems to be using this same strategy, play the opposite and take advantage of a loose table. The ability to constantly change up your playing style during a game is what separates the champions from the wanna-be's.

Establish Yourself

After winning multiple hands, or one big hand, you become more powerful and intimidating to many of the players early in the game. The chip leader position will naturally demand respect from the rest of the table. Your bluffing power is greater and you can run out the weaker players easier.

If you have been playing on a poker internet site for a while and a few people at the table recognize you as being a solid player, they will ultimately respect every hand you play. Your name alone will give you an edge. It is amazing how poorly some will play when they feel intimidated by another good player. I have seen some of the best internet players thrown completely off their game when they found out they were playing a pro from the WSOP.

I recommend that beginners play a number of holdem websites and move around using different aliases until you can win on a consistent basis. Given, no person can win every tournament they play in, but you should get to where you can place in the top payout positions 3 out of 5 tournaments with 10 players or less before you should expect to establish yourself. As with any sport practice makes perfect.

Players Who Have Little To Lose

Call or bet against players with small chip stacks frequently. All-ins are common due to frustration coupled with the fact that they have very little to loose and very little to play for. Many times even a semi decent hand will beat someone in this situation. Watch the player carefully to determine if they are in fact acting out of desperation. If you have noticed that they have either checked or folded a number of hands while holding a low stack, this would lead you to believe that when they do finally bet the last of their chips, they have something pretty good to go with. If they go all-in right after a big loss, chances are they are ready to leave the table and just want to get it over with.

All-in on No-Limit

If you go all-in on any hand and you do not have the nuts (a hand that cannot be beat) you might as well be playing a slot machine. Sure, the pocket Aces are the best possible hole cards, but when betting your entire chip stack before seeing a flop be advised that ANYTHING can happen. It is wise not to go all-in pre-flop regardless of what you have unless you are sitting at a very tight table.

Some internet players will use the all-in as an attempt to bluff others out of smaller pots. Let them have it, because a small pot is really not worth the risk (commonly calculated as pot odds). If the size of the pot is substantial, and you have most of your chip stack in it already, AND you have a decent chance of winning the hand, then you should go all the way. But consider, trying to bluff a large pot with a weak hand will usually result in a loss. As I stated earlier, beware of a player who has checked a bet, and then comes back with an all-in on the next turned card. Many times this is a sucker bet, don't be the sucker.

Finding The Right Table

You want to find a table with loose players. Look for tables where the players see the flop at least 60% of the time or better. The worst table to be at is one that has nothing but tight players seeing the flop 40% or less. Very tight tables lend to very small pots. When there are big pots involved you better have the cards and plenty of chips because it is almost impossible to bluff a tight table. Since you are learning to becoming a conservative player your mission is to find all of the loose gamblers!

When you have found a good table to play, watch a number of hands go around before you sit down. This gives you an opportunity to observe the playing styles of your opponents and will lend to some of the online tells I discussed earlier. Targeted the tight players, play more sequence straights and aggressively steal more blinds. When you see loose players in on a hand then YOU should tighten up - slow play, bait and trap, etc. Let them have the smaller pots and then hit them heavy with an all-in winner. Again, know your opponent, study his habits, and you will stand a better chance of taking all of his chips.



Do you use a poker odds calculator? I sure hope so. Odds calculators are a CRUCIAL part of winning money at online poker. Here are a just a few ways an odds calculator can QUICKLY and EASILY improve your game: The biggest mistake made by most card players is playing TOO MANY HANDS. For example, tell me if this thought has ever crossed your mind...

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Conclusion

The best advice I can give to anyone who wants to play Texas Holdem online or offline is to stay within your comfort zone. You should never play for more chips than you are comfortable losing because the pressure will simply be too great for you to play effectively. Poker is a mind game. If you stay within your mental limits, the risk becomes less of an issue and you will play Holdem poker as it was meant to be played – as a FUN game where you are in control of your emotions and your emotions are not in control of you.

Often times I see players who enter big money tournaments that they had no business being in to begin with. Quite simply the larger tournaments with the bigger payouts attract the better players. If you are not at that same level of play as your opponents, you are simply donating your time and money for a lesson learned. If you cannot consistently win at a \$20 buy-in table, then why should you loose more money at the \$50 tables? Always know your limits and always play responsibly.

There you have it. Countless hours of internet Texas Holdem have been played in order to bring you these game winning observations. Many of the principles I have covered in this eBook may simply be regarded by some as common poker sense, but I feel the need to stress these principles once again due to the fact that so many Texas Holdem players on the internet tend to abandon them. You can effectively eliminate the majority of your competition online simply by following these guidelines. Create your own unique style of play and mix it up frequently, and I WILL see you at the final table!

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