

A Beginner's Guide to **Texas Hold 'Em**



Introduction, Pre-Flop Play

Texas Hold'em is a poker game that uses a round disc called a "button" to indicate the theoretical dealer of each hand. After each hand is completed, as with standard poker rules, the button moves clockwise to the next active player. This player will be considered "the dealer" for that hand.

Before any cards are dealt, the player to the immediate left of the button is required to place the "small blind" and the player to the immediate left of the small blind is required to post the "big blind." The purpose of the blinds is to stimulate action (i.e. betting) by creating a pot (the more money in the pot, the more incentive there is for players to play the hand rather than fold). As a general rule, the small blind is usually half the amount of the big blind, but occasionally it is two-thirds. The blinds were considered "live" bets and the players who posted them will have the option of checking, calling, raising or folding when the betting returns to their position.

After the blinds have been posted, two "hole cards" (meaning they are face down) are dealt to each player. The player to the immediate left of the big blind starts the betting for this round. This player will have the option of calling (putting out an amount equal to the previous bet, which in this case is the amount of the big blind), raising (by increasing the bet by an amount at least equal to the previous bet or raise amount), or folding (not putting any money into the pot, and relinquishing the player's hole cards as well as any right to the pot). Betting continues in a clock-wise direction, with each player acting in turn until all of the remaining players (i.e. those that have not folded) have placed the same amount of money into the pot for that betting round.

The Flop

After the first round of betting is over, the "flop" (the first three of what will eventually be five community cards) is dealt. The community cards are common to all the players participating in the hand-everyone can use any combination of the community cards and their own two hole cards to make their best possible five-card hand (only five cards are used to determine a poker hand). After the flop and in each subsequent betting round, the first player to the left of the button is first to act. This player can check or bet. All subsequent players will have the option to check, bet, call or raise depending on the actions of player(s) acting before them. Once all remaining players have put the same amount of money into the pot for this betting round, the betting round is complete.

The Turn

After the flop betting round is complete, a fourth community card (called the “turn”) is dealt. This is followed by another betting round which proceeds in the same fashion as the betting round on the flop—betting begins with the first player to the left of the button and continues in a clockwise direction until all remaining players have placed the same amount of money into the pot for this betting round.

The River (also known as “Fifth Street”) and Showdown

After the turn betting round is complete, a fifth and final community card (called the “river”) is dealt. This is followed by a final betting round which proceeds in the same fashion as the betting rounds on the flop and the turn. At any time during the hand, if all players but one fold, the hand is over and the remaining player takes the pot. However, after the betting round on the river is complete, if more than one player remains, there is a showdown, in which the players turn over their cards (beginning with the player who made the last bet or raise, or, if no player bet or raised on the final round, beginning to the left of the button). Whichever player has the best 5-card hand, using any combination of the community cards and that player’s hole cards, wins the pot. If two or more players have hands of equal rank, then they split the pot (more common than one would think).

Hand Rankings

The following is the ranking of poker hands, from best to worst. Note that all poker hands include exactly five cards:

- **Straight Flush** – five cards of the same suit and in consecutive rank (i.e. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, all spades). The highest Straight flush is called a Royal Straight Flush or simply a Royal Flush, and includes the Ten, Jack, Queen, King and Ace, all of the same suit.
- **Four of a Kind** – four cards of identical rank (i.e. 9, 9, 9, 9, 2).
- **Full House** – three cards of one rank, and a pair of a different rank (i.e. 8, 8, 8, 3, 3).
- **Flush** – five cards of the same suit (i.e. King, Ten, 9, 7, 5, all hearts).
- **Straight** – five cards of consecutive rank (i.e. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6). Note that Aces can be used to make the highest straight or the lowest straight, but a straight can not “wrap around” from high to low (i.e. Q,K,A,2,3 is not a straight, but A,2,3,4,5 is a straight).
- **Three-of-a-Kind** – three cards of the same rank with any two cards (i.e. 7, 7, 7, 9, 3).
- **Two Pair** – a pair of one rank and a pair of another rank (i.e. 6, 6, 4, 4, 7).
- **Pair** – two cards of the same rank (i.e. 9,9, Ace, Jack, 2).
- **High Card** – none of the above (i.e. Ace, Ten, 9, 7, 2, of more than one suite).