

Card Game for 5 or More

POKER

Historical Notes

Although the roots of Poker can be found in many ancient games, it is the legitimate child of the American frontier. Today it remains immensely popular in casinos, clubs, and private homes around the world.

Objective

To win all that has been bet (*the pot*) by convincing all other players that you have the best hand, either by showing them that you actually do, or by convincingly pretending (*bluffing*) that you do, thereby causing them to drop out of the competition (*fold*). Poker is a gambling game that is almost always played for money or something of value. Otherwise there is no way to bluff and thus no reason to fold, and the game hinges purely on the luck of the deal.

That being sad, it is possible to play “family friendly” poker by starting each player off with an equal number of chips and then declaring whoever has the most chips at the end of a specified time to be the winner.

Special Terms

In addition to its standard meaning, a “hand” in Poker indicates the entire process beginning with the ante and ending with one or more players winning the pot. A game of Poker will include numerous hands, yet each hand is also considered a separate game. Also, in Poker a “round” usually refers to a round of betting, which generally includes the dealing out of a card or two to each player. Unlike in most games, to “deal” means to parcel out cards a few at a time.

Concept

Poker is best played by five to eight players, although as few as two can play and some games, such as Texas Hold ‘Em can handle as many as are likely to fit around your table.

There are numerous (probably hundreds) of distinct games within the Poker family. These generally share the following characteristics:

- ◆ Each person plays for him/herself. No partnerships or teams.
- ◆ Score is kept with chips whose colors designate value, or with currency.
- ◆ Each hand consists of a series of deals and several opportunities to bet by adding chips to a central pile known as “the pot.”
- ◆ The winner of each hand collects the chips in the pot. In games with multiple winners, the chips are divided amongst them.
- ◆ The winning hand is the best combination using five cards. Only one combination of five cards may be used in any one hand. Any other cards are never counted to break ties or for any other reason.
- ◆ If all but one player fold, the remaining player is the winner and collects the pot without any obligation to show any cards.

The Deck

The standard 52-card deck is used. Cards rank from 2 (low), 3, 4, ... 10, jack, queen, king, ace (high). Aces also can rank low in sequences (A-2-3-4-5). Some Poker games use a joker as a wild card.

Cards are dealt from left to right, one at a time, at least one of them face down. In some games, cards are also placed face-up in the center of the playing area and are considered to be part of each player’s hand.

Rank of Hands

In almost every form of Poker, various set combinations of cards are valued in the following order from highest to lowest:

Five of a kind (if wild cards are used). Five aces being the best of the best, then five kings, five queens, and so on. The lowest possible five of a kind (five deuces) will beat all the following combinations.

Straight flush. Five cards of the same suit in rank sequence. The best is A-K-Q-J-10 (known as a royal flush), then comes K-Q-J-10-9 (a king-high straight flush) followed by a queen-high straight flush, etc. No suit is higher or

lower than another suit, thus two royal flushes must be treated as a tie. The lowest possible straight flush (A-2-3-4-5) will beat all the following combinations.

Four of a kind. Four aces being the best of the best, then four kings, four queens, and so on. The lowest possible four of a kind (four deuces) will beat all the following combinations.

Full house. Three cards of one rank and two cards of another rank, such as 9-9-9-4-4. A full house with three aces is higher than a full house containing three kings, etc. If wild cards are used and there are two hands with the same three of a kind, then the value of the pair determines the winner. The lowest possible full house (2-2-2-3-3) will beat all the following combinations.

Flush. All cards of the same suit, but not in rank sequence. If more than one player holds a flush, the hand with the highest ranking cards wins. Thus $K\spadesuit-Q\spadesuit-8\spadesuit-4\spadesuit-3\spadesuit$ would beat $K\heartsuit-Q\heartsuit-6\heartsuit-5\heartsuit-2\heartsuit$ because the 8 is higher than the 6. The lowest possible flush (A-2-3-4-6), will beat all the following combinations.

Straight. Five cards in rank sequence but not of the same suit. Two or more straights are ranked the same way as straight flushes. The lowest possible straight (such as $A\heartsuit-2\spadesuit-3\diamondsuit-4\clubsuit-5\heartsuit$), will beat all the following combinations.

Three of a kind. Same principle as four of a kind.

Two pair. Two cards of any one rank and two cards of another rank with one unmatched card. If more than one player holds two pair, the hand with the higher-ranking pair(s) wins. For example Q-Q-4-4-7 beats J-J-6-6-8, but J-J-6-6-8 beats both J-J-5-5-9 and J-J-6-6-7. The lowest possible two pair (3-3-2-2-4), will beat both of the following combinations.

Pair. Two cards of any one rank with three unmatched cards. If more than one player has a pair, the hand with the higher-ranking pair wins. The lowest possible pair (2-2-3-4-5), will beat any high card.

High card. If no hand has a pair or better, the hand with the highest-ranking card wins.

Thus K-5-4-3-2 beats Q-J-10-9-7 but is beaten by K-6-4-3-2.

Wild Cards

In amateur games, the house rules may designate, or allow the dealer to designate, certain cards as wild. Those most commonly named as wild are deuces and/or treys, but various games may make any rank wild (10s, 2s, and 4s in *Dr. Pepper*; 3s, 9s, and sometimes 6s in *Baseball*, etc.) or certain configurations may be wild (one-eyed jacks and the suicide king, for example). Some consider such games to be "trash Poker," but the use of wild cards can add interest to friendly games whose stakes are not really high enough to demand a serious attitude.

Most people play that wild cards rank precisely the same as the card they are replacing, with two exceptions. The first is that a wild card alone has no more value than its nominal rank. Thus, if deuces are wild in stud Poker and only one face-up card has been dealt, a two will be out-ranked by any other card for purposes of determining the initial bettor. The second exception occurs when a player holds an ace-high flush. A wild card cannot be assigned the same rank as an existing card in such a hand. Thus, one cannot have a "double-ace-high flush."

Other players restrict wild cards further by insisting that no straight can be higher than its highest natural card, and/or that natural hands beat otherwise equal hands that contain wild cards.

The Betting

Different games have different sequences (or intervals) for placing bets. Almost all Poker games require an "ante," which gains the contributor entrance to the hand. Then one or more cards are dealt to each player and there is an opportunity to make an "opening" bet. Who makes this bet depends upon the particular game being played.

Beginning with the player on the opener's left, and progressing clockwise around the group, each player may "call," "raise," or "fold." To call is to match the previous bet. To raise is to match and then add to the previous bet. To fold

is to drop out of the hand. It is very important not to do any of these out of turn.

In most games, a player may choose to make no bet (this is called a "check") if no one has yet placed a bet in the round.

A call or raise should be accompanied by a statement of the act, such as: "I'm in." or "I'll see (*i.e.* match) your 10 and raise you 20."

A player signifies he is folding by turning all of his cards face down and pushing them slightly toward the center of the playing area.

If a player's bet has been raised, he must either call (by adding to the pot the amount of the last bet), fold, or raise again.

Generally, there are three types of betting rules: "No Limit," "House Limit," and "Pot Limit." Most no-limit and pot-limit games are "table stakes" games in which a player may bet "all in," thereby betting the entire amount he possesses. The rules covering all-in bets are too complex to be covered here. Several hours study on the Internet and a lot of practice is advised before playing in any game lacking a clear and affordable house limit.

There are two basic types of Poker: Draw and Stud. In Draw Poker, all of the cards in each player's hand are hidden from the other players. In Stud Poker, several cards in each hand are visible to, and sometimes shared by, other players. Most of the variant games are forms of Stud Poker.

Draw Poker

The basic hand of Draw Poker follows these steps:

1. Everyone antes (usually one chip, but amount may be set by house rules, or declared by the dealer).
2. The dealer gives each player five cards (one at a time).
3. The first person to the dealer's left who holds a pair of jacks or better may open by placing a bet. (Again, this "jacks-or-better" rule may be altered by house rules or the dealer.)
4. If no one can open, the cards are returned to the dealer, who shuffles and deals again. In most games, all players ante again.

5. Once a player opens with a bet, and all players have responded by calling, raising or folding (that is, once "the pot is right") the person who opened is given the opportunity to discard up to three of his cards and receive replacements from the unused deck held by the dealer. Then each active player receives the same chance in clockwise rotation.
6. Once everyone has received their requested number of cards, the opener may bet, check (that is pass without betting), or fold. If he bets, the other players call, raise, or fold in the normal way. If he checks, the next player may likewise check, bet, or fold, and so on around the table.
7. Once the pot is right again, the last person whose bet was called must show his cards and announce the value of his hand. Then anyone who has a hand of higher value does the same. This is called the "showdown."

Some play that all those still in the hand must show their cards even if they know they cannot win. But this rule seriously undermines a player's ability to bluff in the future.

The player who announces the best hand wins the pot (providing that he actually has a hand whose value is equal to or greater than what he announces).

Some used to play that "the cards speak for themselves," but most now agree that if a player is incapable of figuring out his hand, he doesn't deserve to win.

The deal then passes to the next player and a new hand begins.

Stud Poker

The basic hand of Stud Poker follows these steps:

Everyone antes (as in Draw Poker)).

The dealer deals each player one card face down (for Five-Card Stud) or two cards face down (for seven-card stud) followed by one card dealt face up. Cards dealt face down are referred to as "hole" cards.

The dealer should announce who has the highest card (or best hand) showing and that player has the first opportunity to bet or check. If two or more players are showing the highest

ranked cards, the player nearest the dealer's left has the first option to open. If any player bets, each player, in turn, must call, raise, or fold.

Once the pot is right, or if all players check, another card is dealt to each player and the process of betting is repeated, beginning with the person whose two cards now make up the best hand showing.

Players may look at all of their cards, but all cards should remain on the table, not be picked up and held in the player's hands.

The deal in Five-Card Stud ends after four cards have been dealt face up to each player (on top of the one initially dealt face down). In seven-card stud, the deal is two down, four up and the final card face down. A round of betting follows each deal, initiated by the player with the best hand showing at the time.

If two or more players remain in the game after the final round of betting, there is a show-down in which the hidden cards are revealed, and the values of the hands announced, beginning with the player having the highest hand showing. The rules for this are the same as for Draw Poker (above).

Texas Hold 'Em Poker

This is a variation of Seven-Card Stud (see the rules above) in which each player gets two cards of their own and shares another five cards with the other players. This means that the entire bunkhouse can play without fear of running short of cards.

Hold 'Em is very popular with tournament gamblers and online gamers. Some of its betting conventions, however, are not well suited to private games at home with friends, especially if other poker games are being played as part of the same session. Therefore, some adjustments in the betting rules have been made herein, but they do not alter the essence of the game itself.

To start, all players ante the standard amount. Then, each player is dealt two cards, face down. Each player looks at their cards and a round of betting takes place, beginning with the first player to the left of the dealer.

Next, the dealer burns (that is, discards unseen) the top card of the deck, and then flips the

next three cards face up on the table. These cards are called "the flop." Then, another round of betting takes place, beginning with the first player to the left of the dealer who hasn't folded.

The dealer next burns another card and deals one card face up beside the first three. This is called the "turn" (or "Fourth Street"). Again, the player to the left of the dealer begins the third round of betting.

The dealer burns another card before placing the final face-up card next to the others. This card is called the "river" (or "Fifth Street").

After a final round of betting, the player who made the last bet shows her hand first. The player with the best 5 cards wins. Both hole cards must be shown to win a pot.

It can happen that the best hand is sitting faceup on the table. In that case, the pot is split among those remaining in the game at the end of the hand.

If you wish to play Texas Hold 'Em exclusively throughout the game time, then you might want to play by the same rules used in tournaments. The play is the same as given above, but the betting is different.

At the beginning of each deal, the person to the left of the dealer bets (posts) a predetermined amount (equal to one-half of the minimum bet) known as the little (or small) blind. Then the person to that player's left follows by posting twice that amount, known as the large blind. This assures that there is a worthwhile pot right from the start.

After the blinds have been posted, the deal begins with the first two hole cards. Once the players have seen their cards, beginning with the player to the left of the one who posted the big blind, each player must either match that bet, raise, or fold. If no player raises the big blind, then the player in that position may check, or raise.

The betting and dealing continues as described above until a winner is determined.

Variations in Poker

Other than making different cards wild, the Poker games may be varied:

- ◆ by changing the cards needed to open (in Draw Poker).
- ◆ by allowing a player to draw four cards if he shows an ace as his fifth card (in Draw Poker).
- ◆ by making the player with the worst hand the winner. This is called *Lowball*, and aces are always low.
- ◆ by splitting the pot between the player with the best hand and the player with the worst hand. Called *High-Low*. Or splitting the pot between the player with the best hand and the player holding a particular card in the hole, such as the highest spade (called *Chicago*). Such splits tend to keep more players in the hand and make the pots larger.
- ◆ by dealing each card face down in Stud Poker and allowing the players to decide which card of theirs to turn face up before each round of betting (except the final round). This is known as *Roll Your Own* or *Mexican Stud*.
- ◆ by dealing all cards face down in Stud Poker and having the player to the left of the dealer turn up one card. This is followed by a betting round and then the next player turns up cards until his hand beats the previous one, then another round of betting, and so on. Such games are called “no-peek” or prefaced with the term “night.”
- ◆ by dealing some cards in the center to be shared by all players in Stud Poker. Popular forms are *Spit in the Ocean*, *Criss-Cross*, and *Texas Hold 'Em*.
- ◆ by requiring that a player win two hands before taking the pot.

The Odds

There are over 2.5 million possible combinations of five cards in a standard deck of 52 cards. One could study for decades and not read all of the books and websites devoted to the odds in Poker. To get you started, here is the simplest formulation. This table shows how many hands of five cards you should expect to be dealt to be reasonably certain of getting a particular combination.

Combinations	Expect once in this number of hands
A Pair	2
Two Pair	20
Three of a Kind	46
Straight	254
Flush	508
Full House	693
Four of a Kind	4164
Straight Flush	72,192
Royal Flush	649,739



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