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Poker Rules

A complete, plain-English rulebook for cash games and tournaments. Tournament rules follow the Poker TDA's 2026 rules; everything else follows Robert's Rules of Poker, rewritten into one consistent book.

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CHAPTER 1

About these rules

What this rulebook covers, how it is organised, which rules win when they disagree, and how to read and use it.

Poker is played under a surprising number of slightly different rulebooks. Most of the differences are small, but they matter when a pot is at stake, and they are a common cause of arguments at the table.

This book brings the most widely respected rules together into one consistent set, written in plain English, so that players, dealers and organisers can settle questions quickly and fairly.

How the book is organised

1.1 What is covered

The first chapters describe how a cash game is run: how players behave, how seats and buy-ins work, how cards are dealt, how betting and the showdown work, and how blinds, antes and the button move. Then come the rules of each family of games: Hold'em and Omaha, stud, and draw and lowball.

Tournaments sets out the full rules for tournament play. *Online poker* explains how play differs on the internet, and *Optional house rules* describes popular variations such as straddles, bomb pots and running it twice. The book finishes with *Hand rankings* and a *Glossary*.

1.2 Cash games and tournaments

Most rules are the same whatever form of poker you play. Where a tournament is run differently, the cash-game chapters say so in a short note, and *Tournaments* gives the tournament rule in full. If the two ever seem to disagree during a tournament, the tournament rule applies.

1.3 Searching and numbering

Every chapter and rule is numbered, so a rule can be quoted precisely: rule 4.12 is the twelfth rule in chapter 4. On the web version you can search the whole book, and the PDF can be searched in any PDF reader.

Which rule applies

1.4 Sources and precedence

The tournament rules follow the Poker Tournament Directors Association (TDA) rules, including the changes the TDA adopted in 2026. The rules for everything else follow Robert's Rules of Poker by Robert Ciaffone, the most widely used rulebook for cardrooms. Where neither covers a situation, the book follows the practice of major cardrooms and online sites.

Everything here has been written afresh and arranged into one consistent set. It is not an official publication of the TDA or of Robert Ciaffone, and neither has reviewed it. *Acknowledgements* explains the debt this book owes to both.

1.5 House rules come first

A cardroom, club or tournament organiser (called *the house* in this book) may adopt its own rules. Posted house rules take priority over this book, and a house should announce any rule that differs from these before play begins. Where a house has no rule of its own on a point, it can use this book to fill the gap.

1.6 The floor has the final word

No rulebook can foresee everything. The person in charge of the game, called *the floor*, decides any situation that the rules do not cover, and may depart from the letter of a rule when applying it strictly would be clearly unfair. Decisions are based on fairness, the best interest of the game, and the spirit of the rules. *Conduct and etiquette* explains how decisions are made and challenged.

Reading the rules

1.7 Must, should and may

These three words have precise meanings throughout the book.

- **Must** means the rule is mandatory.
- **Should** means the action is strongly recommended, and failing to do it may count against a player in a dispute.
- **May** means the action is permitted but not required.

> **EXAMPLE**
> "You must protect your hand" is a requirement: if your unprotected cards are mucked by mistake, you have no claim to the pot. "You should announce a raise" is a recommendation: you can raise without saying so, but announcing avoids misunderstandings.

1.8 Examples and notes

Worked examples appear in shaded boxes. Unless an example says otherwise, it assumes a cash game with blinds of 100–200 in a fixed-limit or no-limit game as stated. Amounts are in chips. Notes highlight exceptions and point to related rules elsewhere in the book.

1.9 Card notation

Cards are written with their rank and suit symbol, for example A♠ (the ace of spades), K♥, 10♦ and 2♣. Hands are named in lower case: a full house, two pair, a straight. *Hand rankings* explains the order of hands, and the *Glossary* defines every poker term used.

CHAPTER 2

Conduct and etiquette

How players are expected to behave at the table, what counts as cheating, how penalties work in cash games, and how the floor makes and reviews decisions.

Poker only works when everyone trusts that the game is honest and that each player is playing for themselves alone. These rules protect that trust. They apply in cash games and tournaments alike; tournaments add some penalties of their own (see *Tournaments*).

Fairness and the floor

2.1 Fairness and the best interest of the game

Every rule in this book exists to keep the game fair. When a situation is not covered, or when applying a rule word for word would give a plainly unfair result, the floor decides what is fair and in the best interest of the game.

The floor is the floorperson or tournament director in charge. The dealer runs each hand, but any dispute the dealer cannot settle at once goes to the floor.

> **EXAMPLE**
> The dealer pushes a pot to the wrong player, who stacks the chips at once. The rightful winner objects before the shuffle for the next hand begins. The floor works back through the betting, finds the pot was 2,400, and moves that amount to the correct player, even though the chips are now mixed into another stack.

Playing your own hand

2.2 One player to a hand

Each hand is played by one person, acting alone. While a hand is in progress you must not show your cards to, or take advice from, another player, a spectator or anyone away from the table. You must not play another person’s chips, and nobody may play yours.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Your friend is watching from the rail. You hold A♠ Q♦, face an all-in bet, and turn round to ask what they think. That breaks the one-player-to-a-hand rule even if your friend says nothing. The floor will warn you, and a repeat will bring a penalty.

2.3 No discussion of a hand in progress

While a hand is being played, you must not say anything about it that could help or hurt someone still involved, whether or not you are in the pot. In particular, you must not reveal the cards you folded, guess aloud at what someone holds, give advice or criticise someone's play, or announce a hand at showdown before it has been placed face up. Such information changes the outcome, whatever the speaker intended. Once the hand is over, normal conversation is fine.

> **EXAMPLE**
> The flop is K♥ 9♥ 4♣ and two players are still in. You folded 9♠ 9♦ and say, "I'd have flopped a set." You have just told both players that only one nine is left, so neither of them can hold a pair of nines. Even as a joke, it is improper.

2.4 Showing cards during a hand

You must not show your cards to anyone while betting is still taking place, whether you are still in the hand or have folded, because the information can steer the decisions of players still to act. If you expose a card, your hand is not dead, but the card stays face up so that everyone has the same information, and you may be penalised. Who is entitled to see cards you have shown is covered under show one, show all in *The showdown*.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Three players see the turn. The first bets 1,500 and, while the others are thinking, flips over the A♣. The hand stays live, the ace stays face up for the whole table to see, and the player receives a warning.

> **NOTE**
> Tournaments penalise exposing cards with action pending more strictly. See *Tournaments*.

2.5 Protecting your hand

You are responsible for your own cards until the pot has been pushed to you. Keep them in front of you with a chip or card protector on top. If unprotected cards are gathered by mistake or fouled by another player's discards, you have no remedy.

> **EXAMPLE**
> You hold K♠ K♣ and have called a bet of 800 on the river. While your opponent turns over a pair of jacks, your cards sit loose near the muck, the pile of discarded cards. The dealer thinks you have folded and sweeps them away. Your hand can no longer be identified with certainty, so it is dead.

2.6 Keeping cards in view

Your cards must stay above the table and in full view, never in your lap or hidden under your hands, so that everyone can see who still holds cards. When you fold, slide your cards forward, low and face down, towards the dealer. Do not throw them high, at the dealer or into the pot.

Language and behaviour

2.7 Respect for players and staff

You must treat everyone with courtesy: other players, dealers, the floor and all other staff. The following are not allowed:

- threatening anyone, by word or action;
- abusive, insulting or obscene language aimed at anyone;
- berating a player for how they played a hand, or blaming a dealer for the cards;
- shouting, arguing loudly or otherwise disturbing the game;
- throwing, bending or marking cards, or damaging equipment;
- touching another player, or their cards or chips, without good reason.

2.8 Hate speech and abusive talk

There is zero tolerance of hate speech. Remarks that attack a person for their race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, disability or a similar characteristic lead to an immediate penalty without any warning, and a single incident can mean removal and a ban. This follows the tougher approach of the 2026 tournament rules. Other abusive talk aimed at a player or a member of staff, whether insults or persistent needling, is also penalised, and more heavily each time.

You should tell the floor if you hear or experience this kind of behaviour. You do not need to confront the offender yourself.

> **EXAMPLE**
> After losing a pot, a player makes an insulting remark about an opponent's nationality. The floor is called and gives no warning: the player is removed from the game and barred from the room.

2.9 The house language

During a hand, players must speak only the language or languages the house allows at the table, which should be posted or announced. This stops anyone passing information that others cannot understand. Between hands, many houses allow any language.

> **NOTE**
> Tournaments must post and announce the languages allowed at the table. See *Tournaments*.

Cheating and unfair play

2.10 Collusion

Two or more players working together against the rest of the table is collusion, and it is cheating. Examples include signalling hands to each other, sharing information about folded cards, raising back and forth to squeeze out a third player, and agreeing to check a hand down so as to knock out an opponent who is all-in. Collusion leads to removal from the game and, almost always, a ban.

EXAMPLE

Two friends sit in a 100–200 game. Whenever one bets, the other re-raises whatever they hold, so a third player caught between them must fold or put in far more chips. The floor reviews the session, sees the pattern, and removes and bars both players.

2.11 Soft play

Soft play means deliberately going easy on a particular opponent, typically a friend, partner or backer, for example by never betting a strong hand into them or always checking hands down when heads-up. It disadvantages everyone else at the table and is treated as collusion. If you hold the best possible hand and check it on the river as the final player to act, that alone does not prove soft play, but the floor may look at the circumstances.

2.12 Chip dumping

Chip dumping means deliberately losing chips to another player to pass value across. It is best known from tournaments but also happens in cash games. It is cheating and leads to removal and a ban.

2.13 Other forms of cheating

Any attempt to gain an unfair edge is cheating. This includes marking cards, using a device to see or record other players' cards, short-changing the pot, taking chips that are not yours, and looking through the muck or the stub (the undealt part of the deck). Cheating means immediate removal and a permanent ban, and the house may involve the authorities.

Pace of play

2.14 Acting in turn

Act only when it is your turn, and do not signal your intentions in advance, for example by holding your cards ready to fold. Acting early gives information to players who are still deciding. The consequences of acting out of turn are set out in *Betting and raising*; doing it deliberately is also an etiquette breach.

2.15 Reasonable time to act

Be ready when the action reaches you and act within a reasonable time. Big decisions deserve thought; routine ones should be quick. If you need longer, say "time" (see *Betting and raising*).

2.16 Calling the clock

If a player is taking too long, any player at the table may ask for a clock. In a cash game, the floor first decides whether a reasonable time has passed. If it has, the player is given a fixed time to act, set by the house; a common standard is one more minute, followed by a ten-second warning. When time expires, a player facing a bet has a dead hand, and a player not facing a bet is treated as having checked. The floor may allow extra time for an unusually difficult decision, and may act against anyone who stalls repeatedly.

EXAMPLE

Heads-up on the river, a player has been thinking about a bet of 6,000 for two minutes. The opponent asks for a clock, and the floor agrees reasonable time has passed. The minute and the warning run out with no action, so the hand is dead and the pot goes to the bettor.

NOTE

Tournaments use a shorter, fixed clock. See *Tournaments*. Some cash games use a shot clock on every decision instead (see *Optional house rules*).

Electronic devices

2.17 Phones and other devices

You must not take or make phone calls at the table, and phones and other devices must not rest on the table. While you hold a live hand, you must not use a phone, smartwatch or any other electronic device. Between hands, the house decides how much device use it allows, but it must never delay the game or disturb others. The house may extend these limits to new kinds of device at any time.

2.18 Headphones

Headphones and earbuds are usually allowed, provided you can still follow the game. You must be able to hear the dealer and other players, and you may be asked to remove them if you keep missing the action.

2.19 Smart glasses and cameras

Glasses that can record, take photographs or display information, including camera glasses, are banned at the table. Other photography and filming are subject to house policy, and you must never record another player's hole cards.

2.20 Real-time assistance

You must not use any strategy aid while you are playing, including solvers, charts, apps, artificial-intelligence tools, and advice passed to you by anyone else. Consulting help during play is cheating.

EXAMPLE

A player glances at a smartwatch before every big decision. The floor asks to see it and finds a chart of starting-hand ranges on the screen. That is real-time assistance, and the player is removed from the game.

Chips, cards and the pot

2.21 Splashing the pot

Deliberately throwing chips into the pot, instead of placing them in front of you, is an etiquette breach, and repeating it may be penalised. The full rule, with the other rules on how bets must be made, is in *Betting and raising*.

2.22 Rabbit hunting

Rabbit hunting means asking the dealer to reveal the cards that were still to be dealt when a hand ended early. Where the house allows it, it may be done only after the pot has been awarded, and it must not slow the game. Many rooms do not allow it. See *Optional house rules*.

Penalties

2.23 Penalties in cash games

The floor chooses a response that fits the offence and the player's record:

- a verbal warning;
- being asked to sit out for a number of hands or a period of time;
- removal from the game for the rest of the session;
- a ban from the room, for a fixed period or permanently.

Penalties usually increase with each offence, but cheating, threats, hate speech or violence may go straight to a serious penalty. The floor may also weigh a player's experience and record: the same action may be an honest slip by a newcomer but deliberate when an experienced regular does it.

> **EXAMPLE**
> A regular keeps acting out of turn. The first time, the dealer gives a reminder. The second time, the floor gives a formal warning. On the third occasion the player is asked to sit out for 30 minutes.

> **NOTE**
> Tournaments use different penalties, including missed hands and chip penalties. See *Tournaments*.

Decisions and disputes

2.24 Floor rulings and discretion

The floor bases every decision on fairness and the best interest of the game. Usually that means applying the rules as written, but in unusual situations the floor may make a common-sense ruling that differs from the letter of a rule if that is fairer. The floor may consider what a player most likely intended, and may review video before ruling, with the disputed chips set aside meanwhile.

2.25 Disputes and appeals

If you think something has gone wrong, say so at once, calmly, to the dealer, who will call the floor if needed. A dispute about a hand must be raised before the next hand begins, which is the moment the dealer first riffles the cards for it. After that, the result stands. Any delay can affect the ruling.

If you disagree with the floor's decision, you may politely ask the most senior manager on duty to review it. That manager's decision is final.

EXAMPLE

The dealer misreads the board and pushes a pot of 3,200 to your opponent's two pair, although you made a straight. You must say so before the dealer begins shuffling for the next hand. If you wait until the next hand is under way, the original result stands.

2.26 Protecting your own interests

You are responsible for your own interests. Follow the action, check your cards and the size of any bet you call, and point out any mistake you see, whether or not it helps you. Before you act, you may ask whether an opponent's hand is still live, how much the current bet is, or whether a bet is large enough to reopen the betting.

2.27 Refusing service and keeping players apart

The house may refuse to seat anyone, remove a player from a game, or keep two players, such as close relatives or business partners, out of the same game. It also decides when games start and close.

CHAPTER 3

Seating, buy-ins and table procedures

How players get a seat, move between seats and tables, buy in and add chips, what table stakes means, and how chips, absences, the rake and the flow of the game are managed in a cash game.

This chapter covers the practical business of a cash game: getting a seat, buying chips and keeping the game running smoothly. Many details, such as buy-in limits, how long a seat is held and how the rake is taken, are set by the house, which should post its policy clearly. Tournament seating and chips work differently (see *Tournaments*).

Getting a seat

3.1 Waiting lists

When a game is full, players wait their turn on a list kept by the house. You may add your name in person, or through any other method the house offers, such as an app. Players are called to seats in the order they joined the list.

You may be on the lists for several games at once, but you may hold a seat in only one game at a time.

3.2 Being called to a seat

When your name is called, you must answer promptly and take the seat, or ask the house to hold it for a short time. The house decides how long it will hold the seat; a few minutes is typical when others are waiting. If you do not respond, the next name is called and you may lose your place on the list.

It is your responsibility to stay where you can hear the list being called.

> EXAMPLE
> You are second on the list for a 100–200 No-Limit Texas Hold'em game and go for a coffee. A seat opens, and the first name on the list declines it. Your name is called twice with no answer, so the seat goes to the next player and you drop down the list.

3.3 Starting a new game

When a new game opens, players are seated from the list in order. The player who reaches the table first normally has first choice of the remaining seats; if two arrive together, the one higher on the list chooses first. The house may reserve a particular seat for a good reason, such as helping a player with impaired sight to read the board.

Before the first hand, the dealer deals one card face up to each player to decide who starts with the button. In high and high-low games the highest card wins the button; in lowball games the lowest card wins. Ties between cards of the same rank are broken by suit, ranked from highest to lowest spades, hearts, diamonds, clubs. Posting blinds in a newly started game is covered in *Blinds, antes and the button*.

EXAMPLE

In a new Omaha game the dealer deals a card to each of seven players. Two players receive kings, the K♠ and the K♥. Spades rank highest, so the player with the K♠ takes the button.

3.4 Must-move tables

When one game is popular enough to need a second table, the house may open a must-move table to feed the main game. Players in the must-move game are moved into the main game, one at a time and in their original list order, as seats there open up. This keeps the main game full.

When your turn comes, you must move. If you refuse, you must leave the must-move game and cannot rejoin it, or its list, for a period set by the house. In a game with blinds you may keep playing until you are due to post the big blind, and you move instead of posting it; in a stud game you may play one more hand. You enter the main game as a new player, so you either post an amount equal to the big blind or wait for the big blind there (see *Blinds, antes and the button*). You may take your whole stack with you, even if it is below the minimum buy-in.

EXAMPLE

You are first in line in a must-move 100–200 game when a seat opens in the main game. The big blind will reach you in two hands, so you play those two hands and then move with your stack of 9,000 instead of posting. Since the minimum buy-in is 10,000, you would not normally be allowed to sit down with that amount, but a must-move player keeps whatever chips they have.

Changing seats and tables

3.5 Seat changes

If you want a different seat in your game, tell the dealer. When a seat becomes free, players already in the game have priority over a new player, with the earliest request first. Once a new player has sat down, or their chips have been placed in the seat, no switch is made unless someone had already asked for that seat.

Changing seats can affect when you must post blinds. See *Blinds, antes and the button*.

EXAMPLE

You ask for seat 2 when you sit down in seat 7. An hour later, seat 2 opens. Another player in the game also wants it, but you asked first, so you move.

3.6 Table changes

You may ask to move to another game of the same stakes and type. The house may refuse if the move would leave your current game with fewer players than the one you want to join. If you move voluntarily to any other game, your stack must meet that game’s minimum buy-in.

Buying in

3.7 Minimum and maximum buy-ins

The house sets a minimum and maximum buy-in for each game and posts them. In limit games a full buy-in is commonly at least ten times the big bet. No-limit and pot-limit games usually have a maximum as well as a minimum. Some houses allow one short buy-in, below the minimum, per session.

A player who arrives from a broken game, or who is moved from a must-move game, may continue with the chips they have, even if this is less than the minimum.

3.8 Entering the game

Before you can be dealt in as a new player, you must have your chips on the table and follow the house's rules for posting a blind or waiting for the big blind. See *Blinds, antes and the button*.

3.9 Adding chips between hands

You may add chips to your stack between hands, in any amount up to the house's maximum if it applies to top-ups. Adding chips is not treated as a new buy-in. You must never add chips during a hand.

> **EXAMPLE**
> You started with 20,000 in a game with a maximum buy-in of 40,000 that also applies to top-ups. You now have 12,000. Between hands you may add up to 28,000, bringing your stack back to the 40,000 maximum.

3.10 Buying chips from other players

You must buy your chips from the house, not from another player. Players may make change for each other at equal value, for example swapping a 5,000 chip for five 1,000 chips. Selling or passing chips to another player is not allowed, because it gets round the buy-in rules and can hide collusion.

Table stakes

3.11 The table stakes rule

All cash games are played at table stakes. Only the chips in front of you when the hand begins can be used in that hand. You cannot bring more chips or money into play during a hand, and you cannot take any off the table. Equally, you cannot be forced out of a pot because you have run out of chips: you may call for whatever you have left and go all-in. Table stakes matter most in no-limit and pot-limit, where a single bet can be for your whole stack, which is why those games usually have a maximum buy-in.

> **EXAMPLE**
> In a no-limit game you have 4,000 in front of you and a wallet full of cash. An opponent bets 10,000. You cannot reach for more money. You may fold, or call 4,000 all-in. If you call and nobody else is in the hand, the 6,000 you could not match goes back to the bettor.

3.12 Chips in transit

If you have bought chips that have not yet arrived, you may play for that amount, provided you announce it to the table. If you do not announce it, only the minimum buy-in plays. Your opponents are entitled to know how much you have in play.

> **EXAMPLE**
> You buy in for 30,000 and the chips are on their way from the cashier. The dealer announces "30,000 behind" and deals you in. You win a pot in which you called a bet of 8,000. Your call stands because the amount was announced; the chips are given to you when they arrive.

3.13 Going all-in

When you put all your chips into the pot, you are all-in. You can win only as much from each opponent as you have put in yourself: that is the main pot. Any further betting between other players goes into a side pot that you cannot win, and any part of a bet that nobody can match is returned to the bettor. How side pots are formed and awarded is explained in *The showdown*.

All-in means every chip in front of you. You must not keep a chip back out of sight, or claim to be all-in while holding chips behind. You may choose to bet all but one chip, but that chip must stay in plain view.

Chips and money

3.14 House chips

Only the house's own chips play in its games. Chips from another cardroom must not be on the table and do not play.

3.15 Cash on the table

Whether cash may play is a house option. Where it is allowed, it is usually limited to high-value notes, which must be kept in plain view on top of or beside your chips and which play at face value. Where it is not allowed, you must change all cash into chips before you play.

3.16 Keeping chips visible

Your opponents are entitled to a clear view of your stack. Keep chips in neat, countable stacks, and place larger-denomination chips where everyone can see them, at the front or on top, rather than hidden behind smaller ones. Stacks of 20 chips of one denomination are good practice, as they make counting easy. Do not stack chips in a way that gets in the dealer's way or hides the cards.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Your stack is mostly chips worth 100, with a few 5,000 chips tucked behind them. An opponent asks how much you have. The dealer asks you to move the 5,000 chips to the front so the whole table can see them.

> **NOTE**
> In tournaments, stacks of 20 are now a rule rather than a recommendation. See *Tournaments*.

3.17 One player, one seat, one stack

Each seat belongs to one player and each stack to that player alone. Two people may not share a seat or a stack, and you must not play chips that belong to someone else.

Removing chips and leaving

3.18 Ratholing

While you remain in a game, you must not take chips off the table and put them in your pocket or bag. This is called ratholing, and it is not allowed because it reduces the amount your opponents can win from you while keeping your profit safe. You may take your chips with you for security during a short break, but you must bring all of them back. If you want to bank your winnings, you must leave the game.

> **EXAMPLE**
> You buy in for 20,000 and grow your stack to 55,000. You slip 30,000 into your jacket and keep playing with 25,000. That is ratholing. The dealer will ask you to put the chips back, and if you refuse you will be asked to leave the game.

3.19 Returning to the same game

If you cash out and return to the same game within a period set by the house, often an hour or more, you must buy back in for at least the amount you left with. This stops players leaving with a large stack and coming straight back for the minimum.

3.20 Leaving the table

You may step away for a break, but the house limits how long your seat is held; around 30 minutes is common, and less when others are waiting. Tell the dealer or the floor if you need longer. While you are away you miss hands, and you may owe blinds when you return; see *Blinds, antes and the button*.

If you are away too long, or away too often, the house may pick up your chips and give your seat to someone else. Your chips are then held for you securely, but you should take valuable chips with you, as the house is not responsible for chips left on an empty seat.

> **EXAMPLE**
> You leave a 100–200 game for dinner without telling anyone. After 30 minutes the floor counts your stack of 17,600 in front of the dealer, racks it and stores it. Your seat goes to the next player on the list. When you return, your chips are waiting, but you must go back on the list for a seat.

3.21 Playing over

With the floor's permission, a player waiting for a seat may play in an absent player's seat. This is called playing over. The absent player's chips are put to one side, and the playing-over player is treated as a new player: they either post a big blind to come in or wait until the big blind reaches them. When the absent player returns, the playing-over player finishes the current hand and then gives the seat back. The absent player's permission is not required.

Running the game

3.22 Collecting the pot

The dealer pushes the pot to the winner once the hand is over. Do not reach into the pot to take it yourself. Wait until the dealer has checked the hands and any side pots and awarded it.

3.23 The rake and time collection

The house charges for running the game, either by taking a small part of each pot (the rake), usually up to a fixed maximum, or by charging each player a fee for each period of play (time collection). The house decides which method it uses and at what rate, and must post it. Many houses take no rake from a pot that ends before the flop. Time collection is paid in advance, and the dealer collects it before dealing.

> **EXAMPLE**
> A house posts a rake of 5% of each pot, up to a maximum of 1,000. A pot of 8,000 is raked 400. A pot of 30,000 is raked 1,000, because the cap applies. A hand where everyone folds to the big blind before the flop is not raked at all.

3.24 Keeping the game moving

The dealer keeps the game moving by shuffling and dealing promptly, announcing bets, managing the pot and calling the floor when needed. You help by paying attention, acting promptly and not holding up the game with long conversations or absences.

3.25 Tipping the dealer

Whether and how dealers may accept tips is a matter for the house and local law. Where tipping is allowed, it is entirely at the player’s discretion.

CHAPTER 4

Dealing, misdeals and irregularities

How cards are shuffled and dealt, what happens when cards are exposed or dealt wrongly, when a misdeal is called, when a hand is dead, and how the dealer puts right errors with the deck and the board.

Mistakes happen: a card flips over, the flop comes too early, a seat is missed. The procedures in this chapter put things right while disturbing the hand as little as possible. Two ideas run through them all. Nobody should gain or lose from information they were not meant to have. And once players have committed chips, it is usually fairer to play on than to start again.

The examples use flop games such as Texas Hold'em and Omaha. Stud differences are mentioned briefly; the details are in *Stud games*.

The deal

4.1 Shuffling and cutting

Before each hand, the dealer mixes the cards face down on the table, shuffles them thoroughly and cuts the deck onto a cut card, a plain plastic card that stops the bottom card being seen. The cards are kept low throughout so that no face can be glimpsed.

A new hand starts the moment the dealer first riffles the cards. That moment is also the deadline for disputing the previous hand.

4.2 The order of the deal

In flop and draw games, the dealer gives the first card to the player immediately to the left of the button and continues clockwise, one card at a time, until every player has the right number of cards. The button receives the last card of each round. In stud games there is no button, so dealing starts with the seat immediately to the dealer's left.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Six players are in a hand of Texas Hold'em with the button in seat 4. The dealer gives the first card to seat 5, the small blind, then seat 6, the big blind, and so on round the table to seat 4. A second round in the same order completes everyone's two hole cards.

4.3 Burn cards

Before each new round of cards after the first, the dealer takes the top card off the deck, unseen, and puts it face down to one side. This is the burn card. In Texas Hold'em the dealer burns before the flop, the turn and the river; in stud, before each new street; in draw games, before the draw. Burning protects the game: if the top card was marked or glimpsed during the betting, it is now out of play.

Boxed and exposed cards

4.4 Boxed cards

A boxed card is a card found face up in the deck while the dealer is dealing. It is treated as a blank: the dealer sets it aside and uses the next card in its place, and the hand continues. If the next card has already gone face down to another player, the boxed card is replaced at the end of that round of dealing instead.

Two or more boxed cards found during the initial deal cause a misdeal.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Dealing hole cards in a 100–200 game, the dealer finds the 7♣ face up as the next card for seat 3. It is shown to the table, put aside, and seat 3 receives the following card instead. The deal continues as normal.

4.5 Hole cards exposed by the dealer

In flop games, if the dealer exposes either of the first two cards dealt off the deck, or two or more hole cards in total, it is a misdeal, because the hand has been changed too much to repair cleanly.

If the dealer exposes any other single hole card, the deal continues. The player cannot keep the exposed card. When the deal is complete, the dealer gives that player the next card from the top of the deck, and the exposed card becomes the burn card for the flop.

A card that falls off the table during the deal is treated as exposed, as is a card the dealer flashes so that it could be seen.

> **EXAMPLE**
> In a hand of Texas Hold'em, the dealer accidentally flips the Q♦ while dealing seat 7 its second card. It is not one of the first two cards dealt. The deal continues; once everyone has two cards, seat 7 receives the top card of the deck to replace the Q♦, which is then used as the burn card before the flop.

4.6 Cards exposed by a player

A card you expose yourself, for example by lifting it too high, plays. There is no misdeal and no replacement, because the error was yours. If you think the dealer flashed one of your cards, say so before you look at it.

4.7 Exposed cards in stud

Stud is different because some cards are dealt face up anyway. If one of your first two hole cards is turned face up by the dealer, your third card is dealt face down to compensate. If the exposed card is the lowest card showing, you do not have to bring in; the player on your left starts the action instead. If both are exposed, your hand is dead and your ante is returned. See *Stud games*.

> **NOTE**
> In tournaments, the player whose hole card was exposed may still have to bring in. See *Tournaments*.

Misdeals

4.8 Misdeals and the redeal

A misdeal cancels the hand: the cards are gathered, reshuffled and dealt again, and any chips are returned. The redeal is the same hand replayed, so the button does not move and only players dealt into the original hand receive cards.

4.9 Causes of a misdeal

Provided the error is noticed before substantial action (explained below), the following cause a misdeal:

- either of the first two cards off the deck, or two or more hole cards, exposed by the dealer;
- two or more boxed cards during the initial deal;
- the first card going to the wrong seat;
- any player dealt the wrong number of cards, except for the button case below;
- cards dealt to an empty seat, or to someone with no right to a hand;
- a player entitled to a hand, who is present or has posted, dealt out;
- the button in the wrong position;
- a card found that does not belong in the deck for that game, such as a joker or, in Short Deck Hold'em, any card from 2 to 5.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Blinds are 100–200 in Texas Hold'em. Seat 4 finds only one hole card, having been skipped on the second round. So far only the first player to act has folded. That is not substantial action, so it is a misdeal; the cards are reshuffled and the hand is dealt again.

4.10 Errors that are not misdeals

These errors are put right without a redeal:

- a single exposed hole card that is not one of the first two dealt; it is replaced as described above;
- one boxed card; it is treated as a blank;
- one extra card dealt at the end of the initial deal, for example to the first player on a third time round; it goes back on top of the deck to become the burn card;
- the button being dealt both its cards one after the other at the end of the deal; this is allowed;
- cards missing from the deck, provided no duplicates are found.

4.11 Substantial action

After substantial action, a misdeal can no longer be called and the hand is played out unless the deck is fouled. Substantial action means either:

- two actions in turn where chips go into the pot on at least one of them, such as a fold followed by a call, or a raise followed by a call; or
- any three actions in turn, such as three folds.

Posting blinds does not count. Once players have committed chips or made several decisions, starting again would take something real away from them.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Blinds are 100–200 in Texas Hold'em. Seat 3 folds and seat 4 calls 200. Then seat 6 notices only one card in front of them. Two actions have occurred, one of them a call, so substantial action has taken place. There is no misdeal. Seat 6's hand is dead and the hand continues without them.

> **NOTE**
> Some houses use a simpler test: a misdeal can be called until two players to the left of the blinds (or, in stud, after the bring-in) have acted. The house should state which test it uses.

Dead hands

4.12 Causes of a dead hand

A dead hand can no longer win any part of the pot. Your hand is dead if:

- you fold, or announce a fold, when facing a bet;
- you throw your cards forward in a way that makes another player act, even if you were not facing a bet;
- your cards touch the muck (the pile of discarded cards) and cannot be identified with certainty;
- your cards land in or mix with another player's hand;
- you have the wrong number of cards for the game once substantial action has taken place;
- you are on the clock, facing a bet, and your time runs out;
- in stud, you pick up your upcards, turn them face down or mix them with your hole cards while facing a bet;
- you fold out of turn, because a fold, once made, cannot be withdrawn;
- you act on a hand containing a card that does not belong in the game, such as a joker, without first pointing it out.

Chips you have already put into the pot stay there.

4.13 Hands retrieved from the muck

A hand that has reached the muck is normally dead, but the floor may rule it live if it can be identified with certainty and retrieving it is fair, especially when the player folded because of wrong information. The full rule, with an example, is in *The showdown*.

4.14 Button dealt too few cards

A button player with too few cards should say so before acting. Where the game allows, the missing card may be dealt even after substantial action. If the button acts on too few cards, the hand is dead.

Faults in the deck

4.15 Fouled decks

A deck is fouled if it turns out to contain a duplicate card, such as two copies of the 8♠, or a card with a different back appears in play. Play stops at once, however much action has taken place, and every chip goes back to the player who put it in, because a faulty deck cannot produce a fair result.

A card with a different back found only in the stub (the undealt part of the deck) does not cancel the hand. If you notice a faulty deck, you must say so straight away. A player who stays silent and keeps betting, hoping to win the pot or else claim a refund, may lose the right to that refund.

> **EXAMPLE**
> The river is dealt and the board shows the J♥. A player turns over hole cards that include the J♥ too. The deck is fouled. All bets in the hand, totalling 9,400, are returned to the players who made them, and the deck is replaced.

4.16 Missing cards and cards that do not belong

Cards missing from the deck do not cancel a hand, because the cards that were dealt were still random. A card that does not belong in the game, such as a joker, causes a misdeal if it is found before substantial action. After that, it is treated as a blank and replaced with the next card, in the same way as a boxed card. If such a card is in your hand, you must point it out before you act; if you act without doing so, your hand is dead. Look at all your cards before you act, because you take the risk of anything you have not seen.

> **EXAMPLE**
> In a Short Deck Hold'em game, seat 6 looks down at A♦ 4♣ after three players have folded. The 4♣ should not be in the deck. Substantial action has taken place, so there is no misdeal: seat 6 points out the card before acting and the dealer replaces it with the next card from the stub. The deck is checked before the next hand.

4.17 A dropped or disordered stub

If the dealer drops or disturbs the stub during a hand, the hand continues. The dealer restores the original order if possible. If not, the stub cards are shuffled face down and cut to make a new stub. If they have become mixed with the muck or burn cards, all of those are shuffled together.

4.18 Changing the deck

In cash games, a player may ask for a new deck. The house decides when to grant it, often at the next dealer change or once the current deck has been used for a full round. A damaged, marked or sticky deck is replaced at once.

> **NOTE**
> Tournament players may not request deck changes. See *Tournaments*.

Errors with the board

4.19 Premature board cards

If the dealer deals a board card before betting on the current round is finished, that card cannot be used, even if the players still to act then fold. Nobody may choose to accept or reject it. The same procedure applies to a premature flop, turn or river:

- the burn card for that street stays where it is;
- the prematurely dealt cards are returned to the stub, which is shuffled face down and cut;
- betting on the current round is completed;
- the dealer deals the replacement cards from the new stub without burning again.

Reshuffling means nobody benefits from having seen the premature cards, which could still appear.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Blinds are 100–200. Seat 2 raises to 600 before the flop and seat 5 is still thinking when the dealer burns and turns A♠ 8♦ 3♣. The flop is cancelled. The three cards go back into the stub, which is shuffled and cut, with the burn card left in place. Seat 5 folds, the big blind calls, and the dealer then deals a new three-card flop with no further burn.

> **NOTE**
> Some houses still use an older method for a premature turn: the card is set aside, the card that would have been the river is dealt as the turn, and the set-aside card is shuffled back into the stub only before the river. A house that uses it must say so.

4.20 Too many cards on the flop

If the flop contains four cards instead of three, it cannot be used, even if everyone can see which card was extra. The board cards are returned to the stub, which is reshuffled and cut, and a new flop is dealt without another burn.

> **NOTE**
> Tournaments use a quicker procedure for a four-card flop. See *Tournaments*.

4.21 Missed and extra burn cards

If the dealer forgets to burn, or burns two cards, the error is corrected if it is noticed before anyone acts on the new card. Once a player has acted, the card stands. Either way, later cards are dealt, as far as possible, so that the board ends up with the cards it would have had with no mistake.

If a flop was dealt face up without a burn and nobody has yet acted, the exposed flop is mixed back into the stub, which is shuffled and cut. The dealer then burns and deals a new flop.

EXAMPLE

The dealer burns two cards before the turn and deals the 6♥. Nobody has acted yet, so the second burned card, which should have been the turn, is turned up in its place, and the 6♥ goes back on top of the stub to be the burn before the river. If a player had already checked, the 6♥ would stand, and the second burned card would go back on top of the stub to serve as the river burn instead.

NOTE

Tournaments use a different procedure for a flop dealt without a burn. See *Tournaments*.

4.22 Burn card exposed

If the dealer accidentally shows the burn card, it is shown to the whole table and remains the burn. Nothing else changes, because it was never going to play.

If the dealer also exposes the card beneath it, the next board card, what happens depends on the betting. If the round is complete, that card simply plays where it would have. If not, it is a premature card and is handled as described above.

4.23 Extra card turned up on the board

If, while dealing the board, the dealer turns up an extra card from the stub, it is shown to the table and taken out of play. The board is completed, as far as possible, with the cards that would have come without the error. If the floor cannot be sure of the correct sequence, the stub is reshuffled before the next board card.

EXAMPLE

Dealing the turn, the dealer catches two cards and turns up both the K♣ and the 2♦ beneath it. The K♣ is the turn. The 2♦ would have been the burn card before the river, so it is shown to the table and used as that burn. The river is then the card that would have come anyway.

Seat and button errors

4.24 Cards dealt to a seat with no right to a hand

Cards dealt to an empty seat, or to someone with no right to a hand, cause a misdeal if noticed before substantial action. After that, the hand continues and the cards in that seat are dead. For a player dealt in while owing a blind, see *Blinds, antes and the button*.

4.25 Player dealt out by mistake

Missing out a player who was present, or had posted, and so was entitled to a hand is a misdeal if noticed before substantial action. After that, the hand continues and the player has no claim on it.

EXAMPLE

Blinds are 100–200. The dealer misses seat 8, who has just returned and is waiting to be dealt in. Seat 8 speaks up before anyone acts. It is a misdeal, and the hand is redealt including seat 8.

4.26 Button in the wrong place

If the button is placed wrongly and this is noticed before substantial action, it is a misdeal. After substantial action, the hand is played out, and on the next hand the button and blinds are adjusted so that, as far as possible, every player gets each position once in the round. How the button moves is explained in *Blinds, antes and the button*.

> **NOTE**
> In tournaments, once substantial action has taken place the button error stands and is not compensated for on later hands. See *Tournaments*.

4.27 Cards that leave the table

A card dealt off the table, or which the dealer drops to the floor during the deal, is treated as an exposed card. If you drop your own cards to the floor, they remain your hand and you must still play them. Deliberately throwing cards off the table may be penalised (see *Conduct and etiquette*).

CHAPTER 5

Betting and raising

How the betting moves around the table, how bets and raises are made and sized, and what happens when a player bets the wrong amount or acts out of turn.

Betting is where most poker disputes begin. These rules make sure every player knows exactly what an opponent has done, and that nobody gains an edge by acting unclearly.

They apply to every betting structure unless a rule says otherwise. Limit games use fixed bet sizes; big-bet games (no-limit and pot-limit) let players choose the size, and *No-limit and pot-limit* adds the rules for those games. This chapter describes the cash game; where a tournament differs, a note points to *Tournaments*.

Acting in turn

5.1 Order of betting

Each betting round moves clockwise, one player at a time. In games with a button, the first betting round starts with the player to the left of the big blind, and every later round starts with the first player still in the hand to the left of the button. In stud games, the first round starts with the bring-in and later rounds start with the best hand showing (see *Stud games*).

You must wait for your turn before you act, and you must act when your turn comes. A betting round ends when every player still in the hand has either put in the same amount or is all-in, and every player has had at least one chance to act.

5.2 The five actions

There are five things you can do when it is your turn.

- **Check**: you decline to bet but keep your cards. You may check only when nobody has bet before you on this round.
- **Bet**: you put chips into the pot when nobody has yet done so on this round.
- **Call**: you match the current bet.
- **Raise**: you match the current bet and increase it.
- **Fold**: you give up your hand and any claim to the pot.

Tapping the table is a check; pushing your cards forward face down is a fold. Use the plain words “check”, “bet”, “call”, “raise”, “fold” and “all-in”. Slang and gestures are used at your own risk, and the floor may read them differently from what you intended.

5.3 Folding with no bet to you

If nobody has bet, you may check for free. Folding instead is allowed in a cash game but discouraged, because it gives information to the others. It is binding.

NOTE

In tournaments, folding when you could check may also be penalised. See *Tournaments*.

5.4 Action out of turn

Acting out of turn means checking, calling, betting, raising or folding before the player whose turn it is. It slows the game and can unfairly influence the players who are skipped, so it must not be done deliberately.

When it happens, the action goes back to the correct player. What happens to the action out of turn then depends on whether the action changes before it comes back round:

- If the players in between only check, call or fold, the action has not changed. The action out of turn is binding and stands as it was made.
- If a player in between bets or raises, the action has changed. The action out of turn is no longer binding, and any chips are returned.
- A fold out of turn is always binding.

Whatever happens in between, a player who checked out of turn may not bet or raise when their turn comes, and a player who called out of turn may not raise. If the action has changed, they may still call or fold. A player who bet or raised out of turn, and whose action was cancelled by a change, has every option.

Skipped players must speak up. If a skipped player lets the action continue without objecting, the floor may let the action out of turn stand and decide how to treat the skipped hand.

EXAMPLE

No-limit Texas Hold'em, blinds 100–200. On the flop three players remain: A, then B, then C. Before A acts, C says "bet 600". The dealer stops the action and returns it to A. If A and B both check, the action has not changed and C must bet 600. If A bets 500 instead, C's statement is no longer binding, and C may fold, call 500 or raise. Had C said "check" rather than "bet 600", C could only call or fold after A's bet.

NOTE

Tournaments treat action out of turn differently, and may penalise it. See *Tournaments*.

5.5 Calling time

You are entitled to a reasonable amount of time to think. If you need longer, say "time" clearly. This stops the action and keeps your right to act. If you stay silent while the players after you act, you may lose that right; once three or more players have acted behind you, the floor may treat your hand as having folded.

You cannot lose your turn while waiting for a player before you to act. Your right to act only begins once it is legally your turn.

If a player takes too long, any player may ask the floor to put them on the clock. The procedure is in *Conduct and etiquette*.

How bets are made

5.6 Binding verbal declarations

A verbal declaration made in turn is binding. If you say “call”, you have called. If you say “raise”, you must at least make a legal minimum raise. If what you say and what you do with your chips differ, the verbal declaration takes precedence.

A verbal declaration can be general (“raise”), a specific amount (“eight hundred”), or both (“raise to eight hundred”). Saying an amount on its own counts exactly the same as pushing out that many chips without speaking. “Raise” followed by an amount means the total bet, not the amount added, unless you clearly say otherwise (“raise six hundred more”).

> **EXAMPLE**
> Blinds 100–200. A opens to 600. B says “call” but pushes out 1,400 in chips. B has called: the 800 extra is returned, because the verbal declaration came first and takes precedence over the chips.

> **NOTE**
> In no-limit and pot-limit, the floor may protect a player whose call plainly rested on a gross misunderstanding of the amount bet. See *No-limit and pot-limit*.

5.7 Chips released forward

Chips that you push forward and let go of in turn are a bet, a call or a raise. Once released, they cannot be taken back. In a limit game, a forward motion with chips that causes another player to act may also bind you to the action.

Do not make half-motions towards the pot with chips; keep them back until you have decided.

5.8 String bets and string raises

A string bet is a bet made in more than one movement: you put out some chips, then go back to your stack for more, without having first declared your action. A string raise is the same when raising, typically a call followed by a reach for more. Neither is allowed, because the first movement lets you watch your opponents react before deciding the size.

If you make a string bet or string raise, only the chips in your first movement count. In a raise, that usually means you have only called. The dealer should stop an obvious string raise without being asked.

To raise safely, either say “raise” (ideally with the amount) before your chips move, or put the whole amount out in one clear motion. How many movements you may use after saying “raise” in a big-bet game is covered in *No-limit and pot-limit*.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Blinds 100–200. A opens to 500. B silently pushes out 500, pauses, then reaches back and adds another 1,000. That is a string raise. B has called 500 and the extra 1,000 is returned.

5.9 Single oversized chip

If you are facing a bet and put a single chip that is larger than the call into the pot without saying anything, you have only called. To raise with one large chip, you must say “raise” before the chip lands. This applies to the big blind before the flop too: it counts as a bet.

If you are not facing a bet and silently put out one large chip, you have bet the full value of that chip, up to the most the game allows: in a limit game, the fixed bet for the round; in pot-limit, the size of the pot.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Blinds 100–200. A raises to 600. B silently drops a single 5,000 chip into the middle. B has called 600 and receives 4,400 in change.

5.10 Multiple chips put out silently

When you are facing a bet and silently push out several chips, the result depends on how much extra you have put out.

- If every chip is needed to make the call (removing any one of the smallest chips would leave less than the call), it is a call.
- If there is spare, measure the extra against the last full bet or raise. If the extra is half of that or more, you have raised and must make a full raise. If it is less than half, you have called and the extra is returned.

The same half-way test applies in limit and big-bet games. In limit, putting out a call plus at least half a bet commits you to a full raise.

Do not overbet to get change; any chips you put out silently can be counted as your bet.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Blinds 100–200, no-limit. A raises to 600, a raise of 400. B silently puts out 900. The 300 extra is at least half of 400, so B has raised and must make it 1,000, the minimum raise. Had B silently put out 750, the 150 extra would be less than half of 400, so B would have called 600 and the 150 would be returned.

5.11 Splashing the pot

Place your bet in front of you, where the dealer can see and count it, rather than throwing it into the pot. Chips thrown into the pot (“splashing”) mix with chips already there, and the dealer can no longer check the amount.

The dealer may stop the game to count out the pot, the floor decides any dispute about the amount, and deliberate or repeated splashing is an etiquette breach that may be penalised (see *Conduct and etiquette*).

> **EXAMPLE**
> Facing a bet of 600, a player tosses a handful of chips into the pot. The dealer has to stop, separate and count them to confirm the call, and asks the player to bet in front of them in future.

5.12 Conditional statements

A statement about what you will do later, such as “if you bet, I’ll raise”, is non-standard and should not be made. It gives unfair information and confuses the action. Whether such a statement is binding is a house decision; the default is that the floor may hold you to it, and may treat repeated use as a conduct problem.

Bet and raise sizes

5.13 Minimum bets and raises in limit games

In a limit game, every bet and raise is a fixed amount. Most games have two sizes: a small bet for the early rounds and a big bet (usually double) for the later rounds. You cannot bet or raise any other amount, except when going all-in for less.

> **EXAMPLE**
> In a 200–400 limit Texas Hold’em game with blinds of 100–200, bets and raises before the flop and on the flop are in steps of 200. On the turn and river they are in steps of 400. On the turn, A bets 400, B raises to 800 and C raises to 1,200.

5.14 Minimum bets and raises in big-bet games

In no-limit and pot-limit, the smallest bet is the big blind, on every betting round. A raise must be at least as large as the biggest full bet or raise already made on this round. There is no upper limit in no-limit beyond the chips in front of you; in pot-limit the most you can bet is the size of the pot. *No-limit and pot-limit* explains these limits in detail.

5.15 The betting cap in limit games

In limit games the number of raises on each round is capped while three or more players are in the hand and not all-in. The default cap is:

- a bet and three raises in games with three or more betting rounds (such as Texas Hold’em, Omaha and Seven-Card Stud);
- a bet and four raises in games with only two betting rounds (such as single-draw games).

The house may set a different cap and should display it.

When only two players are left in the hand (heads-up), raising is unlimited, provided the round became heads-up before the cap was reached. Once a round has been capped, it stays capped even if players then fold and leave two.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Limit Omaha, four players see the flop. A bets, B raises, C re-raises, D makes the third raise. The betting is now capped, and A, B and C may only call or fold. If instead A had bet and B and C had both folded, A and D would be heads-up before the cap and could keep raising each other without limit.

NOTE

In tournaments, the cap applies even heads-up until only two players remain in the event (see *Tournaments*).

5.16 Check-raising

Check-raising (checking and then raising after someone else bets) is allowed in every game unless the house says otherwise for a particular game. Some lowball games traditionally restrict it (see *Draw and lowball games*).

All-in bets and reopening the betting

5.17 Short all-ins in limit games

An all-in bet or raise that is smaller than a full bet or raise may or may not reopen the betting for players who have already acted. In limit games, the test is half a bet.

- If the all-in amount adds at least half a full bet or raise, it is treated as a full one. Everyone may now fold, call or make a full raise, including players who have already acted.
- If it adds less than half, it does not reopen the betting. Players who have already acted may only call the extra or fold. A player who has not yet acted may fold, call the all-in amount, or complete the bet to the full amount.

EXAMPLE

In a 200–400 limit game on the turn, A bets 400 and B goes all-in for 600, a raise of 200. That is half a bet, so it counts as a full raise. C may raise to 1,000, and A may raise when the action returns. If B had gone all-in for 550, a raise of only 150, A could only call 150 more or fold, while C could fold, call 550 or complete to 800.

5.18 Short all-ins in big-bet games

In no-limit and pot-limit, an all-in raise only reopens the betting if it is a full raise. An all-in that adds less than a full raise lets players who have not yet acted call it, raise or fold, but a player who has already acted and is now facing less than a full raise may only call or fold.

Several short all-ins in a row can add up to a full raise. If the total amount a player now faces, above their own last bet, is at least a full raise, the betting is reopened for that player.

EXAMPLE

Blinds 100–200, no-limit. On the flop A bets 1,000. B is all-in for 1,400, a raise of only 400. C calls 1,400. When the action returns to A, A may call 400 more or fold, but may not raise, because A has not faced a full raise. If C had instead gone all-in for 2,100, A would face 1,100 more than the original bet, which is more than a full raise of 1,000, so A could raise.

5.19 Completing the bet

Completing the bet means bringing a short all-in bet up to a full bet. It exists only in limit games; in big-bet games you either call the all-in amount or make a legal raise.

> **NOTE**
> Tournament all-in procedures, including all-in buttons and the rules on chips left behind, are in *Tournaments*.

Wrong amounts

5.20 Undercalls

An undercall is putting in less than the amount needed to call without first saying "call". In a cash game, chips released in turn bind you, and the default is that you must bring the amount up to a full call. This is always the case when you are heads-up or facing the first bet of a round.

When you face a raise in a multi-way pot, the floor may instead let you forfeit the chips you put out and fold. This allows for honest mistakes, but it is the floor's decision, not yours.

You may withdraw your chips and reconsider if you genuinely did not know the pot had been raised, provided nobody has acted after you.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Blinds 100–200, no-limit. Heads-up on the river, A bets 2,500. B silently puts out 1,000. That is an undercall against the only bet on the round, so B must add 1,500 and complete the call.

5.21 Underbets and underraises

A bet or raise smaller than the legal minimum (other than an all-in) must be corrected to the minimum, and no more. The correction is made if the mistake is noticed before the betting round ends, and everyone who called the short amount must make up the difference. A player who has already called may not change that call to a raise because the bet has grown.

> **EXAMPLE**
> No-limit, blinds 100–200. On the turn A bets 1,500 and B says "raise to 2,500", an increase of only 1,000. C calls 2,500. The dealer spots the error while A is still to act. B's raise is corrected to 3,000, the minimum, and C must add 500. C may not now re-raise, but A may still fold, call or raise.

5.22 Dealer announcements and wrong amounts

The dealer should announce each bet and raise as it is made ("raise to 1,800"), so every player knows the amount they face. In limit games, the dealer should also announce when the betting is capped.

Anyone who sees a wrong amount go into the pot should speak up. It is still your responsibility to know what you are calling: if you are told the wrong amount and then call, you are bound by the real amount, except in exceptional cases decided by the floor.

5.23 Pot counts and stack counts

The dealer does not count the pot in limit games. In no-limit, players are responsible for keeping track of the pot; the dealer may give a count on request if the house allows it, and may spread the chips so they are easier to see. In pot-limit, you are always entitled to a pot count when it is your turn, because the pot size decides the largest bet you can make.

A player facing an all-in bet may ask for that player's chips to be counted. The dealer counts them; the all-in player does not have to.

> **NOTE**
> In tournaments, the dealer does not give pot counts in no-limit games (see *Tournaments*).

CHAPTER 6

The showdown

How hands are shown and read at the end of a deal, who shows first, which hands may be seen on request, and how pots, side pots and odd chips are awarded.

The showdown is the moment, after the last betting round, when the players still in the hand reveal their cards and the dealer decides who has won. A good showdown is quick and clear: hands are turned face up, read aloud by the dealer and pushed to the right player.

This chapter covers cash games. Tournaments add stricter rules about all-in hands and showing cards, and a note points to *Tournaments* where they differ.

Showing and reading hands

6.1 Cards speak

The cards decide who wins, not what players say about them. If you turn your hand face up, the dealer reads it and awards the pot to the best hand, even if you have described it wrongly or not noticed what you hold.

You should still announce your hand or simply table it (turn all your cards face up on the table) so the dealer and other players can read it. Keep hold of your cards until the dealer has pushed you the pot.

> **EXAMPLE**
> On a board of K♠ 9♠ 6♠ 2♠ J♦, a player turns over 7♠ 4♥ and says “no pair, no good”. The dealer sees the flush in spades and awards the pot to that hand over an opponent’s two pair.

6.2 Deliberate miscalling

Describing your hand wrongly is not binding, but doing it on purpose to make an opponent throw away a better hand is cheating. The floor may award the pot to the player who was misled, if that player’s hand can still be identified, and may penalise the player who miscalled.

> **NOTE**
> Lowball has its own rules on miscalled hands (see *Draw and lowball games*).

6.3 Showing all your cards to win

To win any part of a pot at the showdown, you must turn all your cards face up: both hole cards in Texas Hold’em, all four in Omaha, all seven in Seven-Card Stud, and so on. This applies even to cards you are not using, and even if you are playing the board. Saying that you are playing the board is not enough; the cards must be shown.

If you show only part of a hand that looks like a winner, the dealer should ask you to show the rest. If you refuse, the floor will be called.

> **EXAMPLE**
> The board is A♣ A♦ K♠ K♥ Q♣ and two players reach the showdown. One says "I'm playing the board" and throws both cards into the muck face down. Because the cards were not shown, that player has no claim to the pot. The other player wins by showing any two cards.

6.4 Reading tabled hands

The dealer reads every tabled hand aloud and identifies the winner. Players are responsible for checking the reading. Anyone at the table, whether or not they are in the hand, should speak up if they think a hand has been misread or the pot is about to go to the wrong player.

6.5 Killing hands

Before pushing the pot, the dealer kills each losing hand by placing it in the muck. A properly tabled hand that is clearly the winner must not be killed. If the dealer kills a winning hand by mistake, the floor should rule it live as long as everyone saw it and it can be identified for certain.

Protect your cards until the pot is pushed to you, by keeping a hand or a chip on them. A player who lets go of a hand that has not been fully read takes the risk that it will be mucked.

The order of showing

6.6 Showing order at the showdown

If players do not show voluntarily, the dealer can require an order:

- If anyone bet or raised on the last round, whoever made the final bet or raise shows first.
- If everyone checked on the final round, the first player to act on that round shows first. In button games this is the first player still in the hand to the left of the button. In stud games it is the player whose upcards show the highest hand (the lowest in Razz).

Other players then show in clockwise order, or may fold their hands without showing.

You do not have to wait your turn to show a winning hand. Showing a probable winner straight away speeds up the game and is encouraged.

> **EXAMPLE**
> On the river A bets 800, B raises to 2,400, and A calls. B made the last bet or raise, so B shows first. If B had checked behind A's check on the river, A would show first as the first player to act.

6.7 Mucking without showing

When the betting is over, you may throw your hand into the muck face down rather than show it. You give up any claim to the pot by doing so, although other players may still ask to see the hand (see below). If every player but one mucks, the last player with cards wins without having to show.

NOTE

In tournaments, once a player is all-in and the betting is over, all hands must be shown face up (see *Tournaments*).

6.8 All-in players at the showdown

An all-in player is still in the hand for the pots they are eligible for, and must show all their cards to win any of them. In a cash game there is no requirement for hands to be turned face up before the remaining cards are dealt, although players in an all-in pot often agree to do so.

When there are side pots, players should show their cards as each pot is settled, rather than all at once, so the dealer can work through the pots in order.

Asking to see a hand

6.9 Asking to see a called hand

A player who calls the final bet has paid to see the bettor's hand, and is always entitled to have it shown, provided the caller has kept their own cards.

Any other player who was dealt in may ask to see a hand that took part in the showdown, even if it was mucked. This is a privilege, not a right, and is meant to help protect the game against collusion. The floor may refuse it, or withdraw it from a player who keeps asking to slow the game or needle opponents.

EXAMPLE

On the river A bets 1,500 and B calls. A shows two pair, and B says "good" and mucks. B already paid for that information. C, who folded on the turn, asks to see B's hand. The dealer may show it, but if C asks on every hand, the floor may stop granting the request.

6.10 Hands shown on request

Houses differ on whether a mucked hand that is turned up because someone asked can still win. The default in these rules is:

- If the player who appears to have won asks to see a losing hand, that hand stays live, and the pot goes to whichever hand is best.
- If anyone else asks, the hand that was mucked is dead and is shown for information only.

Some houses treat every mucked hand as dead, whoever asks. Each house should state its policy, and the dealer should follow it consistently.

EXAMPLE

A shows a straight and B mucks without showing. A asks to see B's hand, and the dealer turns up a flush. Under the default, B's hand stays live and B wins the pot. Had C asked instead, B's flush would be dead and A would still win.

6.11 Show one, show all

Every player has an equal right to information about another player's hand. If you show your cards to one player, every player at the table is entitled to see them.

If cards are shown during a deal to someone who still has a betting decision on the current round, they must be shown to everyone straight away. If they are shown to someone who has no further decision on this round, the other players see them at the end of the round. If you show only some of your cards, you do not have to show the others.

> **EXAMPLE**
> After winning a pot uncontested, A shows one hole card, the A♥, to the player on the left. Another player asks to see it. The dealer turns up the A♥ for the table. A does not have to show the second card, because it was not shown to anyone.

Mucked and discarded hands

6.12 Mucked hands

Cards that are thrown into the muck are normally dead. However, if a hand can be identified with complete certainty (for example, it is lying on top of the muck and obviously separate), the floor may rule it live if that is fair to everyone. The floor should try especially hard to recover a hand that was folded because the player was given wrong information.

If you throw your cards into another player's hand, face up or face down, your cards are dead.

> **EXAMPLE**
> On the river a player bets 2,000. The dealer wrongly tells you the bet is 200, so you fold, and your cards land just on the edge of the muck. They are still clearly separate and identifiable. The floor retrieves them and lets you decide again, now knowing the true bet.

6.13 Retrieving a hand from the muck

You may change your mind about discarding cards you have not yet shown, as long as they have not been killed. Cards become dead once the dealer has pushed them into the muck or they can no longer be identified with certainty.

> **EXAMPLE**
> A pushes the hand towards the dealer, then realises it holds the winning straight. The dealer has not touched the cards and they sit apart from the muck. A may pick them up and table them.

6.14 Discarding a live hand by mistake

If you discard your hand thinking you have won, but someone else has not yet folded or shown, the dealer should keep your cards out of the muck and call the floor. If your cards can be recovered and identified, they stay live. If they cannot, you are out of the hand. You do not get back chips you used to call, but any bet or raise of yours that nobody called is returned.

EXAMPLE

On the river A bets 1,000 and B folds. Forgetting that C is still to act, A throws the cards towards the dealer and they mix with the muck. A is out of the hand and C wins the pot. Because nobody called A's 1,000, it is returned to A.

Awarding the pot

6.15 Side pots and the main pot

When a player is all-in, the extra chips bet by others go into a side pot, which the all-in player cannot win. Each pot is settled separately, starting with the side pot formed last (the one involving the players with the most chips) and finishing with the main pot.

EXAMPLE

A is all-in for 2,000, B is all-in for 5,000, and C has called both. The main pot holds 6,000 (2,000 from each), and the side pot holds 6,000 (3,000 each from B and C). The dealer first decides the side pot between B and C, then the main pot between all three.

6.16 Split pots

When two or more hands tie, the pot is divided equally between them. Each side pot and the main pot is split separately; they are never combined first.

6.17 Split pots in high-low games

In high-low games such as Omaha Hi-Lo and Stud Hi-Lo, half the pot goes to the best high hand and half to the best qualifying low hand. If no hand qualifies for low, the high hand wins the whole pot.

Cards speak in high-low games. Players do not declare whether they are going high, low or both; the dealer reads each hand both ways, and one hand may win both halves.

EXAMPLE

In Omaha Hi-Lo, a pot of 4,800 is contested. One player has the best high hand and the best low hand. That player wins all 4,800. If another player had tied for the best low, the low half would be divided, so the first player would get 2,400 plus 1,200, and the second 1,200.

6.18 Odd chips

If a pot cannot be divided equally, the odd amount is first broken down into the smallest chip used in the game. No player receives more than one odd chip from a pot. The default rules are:

- **Button games (high only)**: the odd chip goes to the first tied player clockwise from the button.
- **Stud games (high only)**: the odd chip goes to the player holding the highest card by suit, counting all of their cards, not just the five that make the hand. Suits rank, from highest to lowest, spades, hearts, diamonds, clubs.
- **Low games**: the odd chip goes to the lowest card by suit in stud, again counting all the player's cards, or by position as above in button games.

- **High-low split games**: the odd chip from the split between high and low goes to the high hand. Where tied hands split one half, the odd chip from that half is awarded as in the matching high or low game.

The house may use a different method, but must state it and apply it consistently.

> **EXAMPLE**
> In Texas Hold'em, seats 3 and 7 split a pot of 1,525 and the smallest chip is 25. Each gets 750, leaving one odd chip of 25. The button is in seat 5, so seat 7 is the first tied player clockwise from the button and receives it.

> **NOTE**
> In tournament stud games, only the cards in the five-card hand are used to award the odd chip. See *Tournaments*.

6.19 Time limit for showdown disputes

Speak up straight away if you think a hand has been misread, or a pot awarded, counted or divided wrongly. A claim must be made before the next deal begins, which is the moment the dealer first riffles the cards. After that, the result stands. If the chips have already been mixed into a stack, the floor reconstructs the pot from the betting (see *Conduct and etiquette*).

> **EXAMPLE**
> The dealer pushes a split pot but gives one player 300 too many. Before the next hand starts the dealer notices; the extra chips are moved to the other player.

> **NOTE**
> In tournaments, a mistake in counting the pot can be corrected until there has been substantial action on the next hand. See *Tournaments*.

CHAPTER 7

Blinds, antes and the button

How the button and blinds rotate in cash games, how antes work, and what new players, absent players and players changing seats must post to be dealt in.

In button games (Texas Hold'em, Omaha and most draw games) a disc called the button marks the player in the dealer position. That player receives cards last and acts last on every betting round after the first. Forced bets called blinds, and sometimes antes, put money in the pot before the cards are dealt so that there is always something to play for.

The rules in this chapter make sure every player pays their fair share of the blinds and gets their fair turn on the button. They describe cash games; tournaments use a fixed version of these rules, covered in *Tournaments*.

How the blinds work

7.1 The small blind and the big blind

Most button games use two blinds. The player to the left of the button posts the small blind, and the next player to the left posts the big blind. Blinds are posted before any cards are dealt, which is why they are called "blind".

The big blind is usually the size of the smallest bet in the game, and the small blind is usually half of that or a little less. Before the flop, the first player to act is the one to the left of the big blind. On every later round, the first player still in the hand to the left of the button acts first.

After each deal, the button moves one seat to the left, and the blinds move with it.

> **EXAMPLE**
> In a game with blinds of 100–200, the button is in seat 4. Seat 5 posts 100 and seat 6 posts 200 before the deal. Seat 7 acts first before the flop. On the next hand the button moves to seat 5, and seats 6 and 7 post the blinds.

7.2 Live blinds

Blinds count as part of the player's bet. If you post the big blind and nobody raises, you only need to check to see the flop. If someone raises, you need to add only the difference to call.

Because the big blind is treated as a bet, other players must at least call it to stay in. The size of the minimum opening bet and raise is set by the game's blinds, even if a player posts less because they are short of chips.

EXAMPLE

Blinds 100–200. Three players call 200 and the small blind adds 100 to call. The big blind's 200 already matches the bet, so the big blind may check and see the flop.

7.3 The big blind's option

When the action comes back to the big blind before the flop and nobody has raised, the big blind still has the option to raise. This is called the live blind option. The dealer should give the big blind the chance to act rather than dealing the flop straight away.

The option is kept if a player has gone all-in for less than a full raise. The big blind may then call the extra or make a full raise.

EXAMPLE

No-limit, blinds 100–200. Two players call 200, the small blind calls, and the big blind says "raise to 1,000". This is allowed: the big blind's first turn to act is the option to raise. If one of the callers had instead gone all-in for 300, the big blind could still raise.

7.4 Antes in cash games

Some cash games add an ante, a small amount every player puts in before the deal. Antes are dead money: they belong to the pot and do not count towards the player's bet. Stud games use antes and a bring-in instead of blinds (see *Stud games*).

Some houses use a single ante paid by one player, such as a button ante. These variations are covered in *Optional house rules*.

EXAMPLE

A Texas Hold'em game has blinds of 100–200 and a 25 ante from every player. With nine players, the pot holds 525 before anyone acts (225 in antes plus the two blinds). A player calling the big blind puts in 200, because the 25 ante is not part of the bet.

7.5 Games with one, two or three blinds

Two blinds is the standard structure, but the house may use others:

- **One blind**: a single blind posted by the player to the left of the button, sometimes alongside an ante. This is common in some draw and lowball games.
- **Three blinds**: an additional blind, often a smaller one on the button or a larger third blind to the left of the big blind.

In a game with three or more blinds, the smallest is usually posted by the player to the button's left rather than on the button itself, unless the structure specifically uses a button blind. The house should display the blind structure for each game.

7.6 Straddles and kill pots

A straddle is an optional extra blind, usually twice the big blind, posted voluntarily before the deal by the player to the left of the big blind. A kill pot is a hand played at higher stakes after a player wins a set number of pots or a pot of a set size. Both are house options and are covered in *Optional house rules*.

Joining and returning

7.7 Posting as a new player

A new player has two choices:

- Wait until the big blind reaches them and start by posting the big blind in the normal way.
- Post an amount equal to the big blind straight away and be dealt in on the next hand, in any position except the small blind or the button.

A posted amount equal to the big blind is live: it counts as the new player's bet, and they have the option to raise when the action comes round, just like the big blind.

> **NOTE**
> Lowball games handle new players differently: you either wait for the big blind to reach you or kill the pot (see *Draw and lowball games*).

7.8 New players in the small blind or button seat

A new player cannot be dealt in while sitting in the small blind or button position. You must wait until the button has passed your seat. You may then post an amount equal to the big blind to be dealt in at once, or wait for the big blind.

A new player who lets the button pass once without posting is not treated as having missed a blind, and only needs to post the big blind amount to start.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Blinds 100–200. You sit down in seat 3 while the button is in seat 2. Seat 3 is the small blind position on this hand and the button on the next, so you sit out both. Once the button has moved on to seat 4, you may post 200 and be dealt in, or keep waiting until the big blind reaches you.

7.9 Missed blinds

If you are away from the table, or sitting out, when your blind is due, you miss it, and the dealer marks your seat with a missed-blind button so it is not forgotten. When you want to play again, you have two choices:

- Wait for the big blind to come round and start again from there.
- Make up all the blinds they missed on the next hand.

When making up both blinds, the big blind amount is live (part of the player's bet), and the small blind amount is dead (it goes straight into the middle of the pot and is not part of the bet). A player who missed only the small blind posts it as dead. A player making up missed blinds has the option to raise at their first turn.

Missed blinds cannot be made up while the player is in the small blind or button position; they must wait for the button to pass, just like a new player. If you are away for a long time, the house may pick up your chips (see *Seating, buy-ins and table procedures*).

EXAMPLE

Blinds 100–200. You step away from the table and miss both blinds. When you return, you post 300: 200 in front of you as a live bet and 100 into the middle of the pot as dead money. If everyone folds to you before the flop, you may check or raise.

7.10 Dealt in while owing a blind

Sometimes the dealer gives cards by mistake to a player who still owes a missed blind. If that player looks at the cards before putting up the blind, and has not yet acted, the cards are dead. If the player has already acted and put chips into the pot by the time the error comes to light, the hand plays on and the player owes the blind on the next deal.

EXAMPLE

Blinds 100–200. You return from a break owing both blinds and the dealer deals you in without noticing. You look at your cards, then the dealer realises. Your hand is dead. Had you already called 200 before anyone noticed, you would play the hand and post your missed blinds on the next deal.

7.11 Missed blinds after a rebuy

A player who goes all-in, loses and then buys in again is not a new player. If they missed any blinds while out, they must make them up before being dealt in, or wait for the big blind.

7.12 Blinds when a new game starts

When a new game starts, the button goes to the player who draws the highest card (the lowest in lowball games), as described in *Seating, buy-ins and table procedures*. Players who drew for the button are active in the game and must make up any blinds they later miss. A player who joins a new game does not have to post until the button has gone round once, provided no blind has yet passed their seat, and may change seats freely on the same condition.

The button

7.13 The dead button

The default in cash games is the dead button. The big blind always moves to the next player due to post it, and the small blind and button are then placed to fit. If a player in the small blind or button position has left, the small blind or button may sit in front of an empty seat, and the same player may act last on two hands in a row.

This keeps the blind obligations exact: every player posts each blind once per round.

EXAMPLE

Blinds 100–200. The button is in seat 1, small blind seat 2, big blind seat 3. After the hand, seat 2 leaves. With a dead button, seat 4 is due the big blind and posts 200. Seat 3 posts the small blind. The button moves to seat 2, which is now empty, so seat 1 acts last on this hand too.

7.14 The moving button

Some houses use a moving button instead. The button always moves to the next active player, and the blinds adjust around it. This stops any player having last action twice in a row, which can matter in big-bet games. It can mean a player posts a blind while on the button, or that two big blinds are posted on one hand, so the house should explain how it handles those cases.

A house using the moving button should state so clearly. Otherwise, the dead button applies.

7.15 Heads-up blinds and button

When only two players are in a game, the button posts the small blind and the other player posts the big blind. The button is dealt the last card, acts first before the flop and acts last on every later round.

When a game becomes heads-up, the button may need to be moved so that neither player posts the big blind twice in a row.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Heads-up with blinds 100–200. A is on the button and posts 100; B posts 200. Before the flop, A acts first and may fold, call 100 more or raise. On the flop, turn and river, B acts first and A acts last.

> **NOTE**
> Tournaments always use a dead button, and many use a big blind ante; see *Tournaments*.

Changing seats and leaving the table

7.16 Changing seats and the blinds

If you move to a seat that the big blind will reach sooner, you may be dealt in straight away. If you move to a seat further from the big blind, you must either wait until the big blind reaches your new seat or post an amount equal to the big blind to be dealt in at once.

In games with more than two blinds, a player who changes seats is dealt in when they reach the same position relative to the blinds that they left, or may post a big blind amount to play sooner.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Blinds 100–200. You are in seat 5, two seats after the big blind, and you move to seat 9, which the big blind will not reach for another six hands. You may post 200 in seat 9 and play straight away, or sit out until seat 9 is due the big blind.

7.17 Dealing off

A player who plays the button and then moves to a new seat may let the blinds pass the new seat once and then come in behind the button without posting. This is called dealing off. It means you do not pay for having moved, provided you take the button before moving.

7.18 Dodging the blinds

Deliberately leaving the table to avoid the blinds and then returning in a cheaper position is not allowed. The floor may require the player to post the missed blinds or wait for the big blind.

CHAPTER 8

No-limit and pot-limit

The extra rules for big-bet games, including minimum and maximum bets, how to declare a raise, how to work out a pot-sized bet, and how all-ins and side pots work.

No-limit and pot-limit are known together as big-bet games, because a single bet can be many times the size of the blinds. All the rules in *Betting and raising* apply to them too. This chapter adds the rules that differ, or matter more, when bets can be large. It describes cash games; where tournaments differ, a note points to *Tournaments*.

Bet sizes in no-limit

8.1 Big-bet betting structures

In a limit game, every bet and raise is a fixed amount. In a big-bet game, you choose the amount between a minimum, set by the blinds and earlier bets on the round, and a maximum: your whole stack in no-limit, or the size of the pot in pot-limit. There is no cap on the number of raises.

Any game can be played as no-limit or pot-limit. The most common are no-limit Texas Hold'em and pot-limit Omaha.

8.2 Minimum bet in big-bet games

The smallest bet is the size of the big blind, on every betting round, unless you are going all-in for less. The house may set a different minimum for a game, such as double the big blind, but it must make this clear.

If the big blind is short because that player does not have enough chips, the minimum stays the same. Anyone entering the pot before the flop must still put in at least a full big blind, and a raise before the flop must be at least to double the full big blind.

> **EXAMPLE**
> No-limit Texas Hold'em, blinds 100–200. On the flop, the smallest bet is 200. On the river, it is still 200, however big the pot has become.

8.3 Minimum raise in big-bet games

A raise must increase the bet by at least the size of the biggest full bet or raise already made on this round. Before the flop, the big blind counts as the first bet, so the smallest raise is to double the big blind.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Blinds 100–200. Before the flop A raises to 600, an increase of 400. B wants to re-raise and must make it at least 1,000. B makes it 2,200, an increase of 1,600. C now needs to raise to at least 3,800.

8.4 All-in for less than the minimum bet

If a player goes all-in for less than the minimum bet, the next player may fold, call that amount, or raise. A raise must add at least the full minimum bet on top of the all-in amount.

An all-in raise that is less than a full raise does not reopen the betting for players who have already acted (see *Betting and raising*).

> **EXAMPLE**
> Blinds 100–200. On the turn A goes all-in for 150. B may fold, call 150, or raise to at least 350 (the 150 plus a full 200).

8.5 The maximum bet in no-limit

In no-limit, you may bet or raise any amount up to all the chips you have in front of you. You cannot bet more than you have, and you cannot win more from each opponent than you put in yourself.

Making a bet or raise

8.6 Declaring a bet or raise

Because a bet can be any size, the amount must be clear. You may:

- say the amount ("bet 1,500", "raise to 4,000"), and then put out the chips; or
- put the whole amount out in a single motion without speaking.

A clear verbal declaration binds you to the amount stated, and if it differs from the chips you put out, the bet is corrected to what you said. The general rules on verbal declarations, including how "raise" followed by a number is read, are in *Betting and raising*.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Blinds 100–200. A bets 800 on the flop. B says "raise to 3,000" and starts counting chips. B's bet is 3,000 as soon as B has said it, however long the counting takes.

8.7 Raising in one motion or after saying "raise"

If you say nothing, your raise must go into the pot in one continuous motion. Putting out some chips and going back to your stack for more is a string raise, and only the first movement counts (see *Betting and raising*).

If you say "raise" without an amount, you must make at least the minimum raise. In a cash game, because a big raise can need a lot of chips, you may then bring the chips forward in more than one movement; the raise is complete when your hand comes back from the pot. The amount is whatever you have put in by then.

> **NOTE**
> In tournaments, a raise must be either declared in full or made in one motion (see *Tournaments*).

8.8 Saying “pot” in no-limit

In no-limit, saying “pot” or “I bet the pot” does not name a valid amount, because nobody is obliged to work out the pot for you. It binds you to at least a minimum bet, and you should state an actual figure instead. In pot-limit, “pot” is a valid declaration and means the largest bet allowed.

8.9 Single large chip in pot-limit

The rules for betting or calling with one large chip are in *Betting and raising*. In pot-limit, a single chip worth more than the pot, put out silently when you are not facing a bet, is a bet of the size of the pot.

8.10 Gross misunderstanding of a bet

Because a big-bet wager can be almost any size, the floor may protect a player who acted on an obvious and gross misunderstanding of the amount bet, provided nobody else has been harmed by it. A “call” clearly aimed at a much smaller amount may be withdrawn. The floor is unlikely to accept this claim if the caller has already put in most of the amount.

A player who bets should not show their hand until the caller has put in a call that looks about right.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Blinds 100–200. On the turn A bets 900 and B moves all-in for 22,000. C, who was watching A, slides 900 forward and says “call” before the dealer has announced B’s all-in. It is plain that C was calling A’s bet. The floor may let C take back the 900 and decide again, as long as nobody has acted after C.

> **NOTE**
> In tournaments, a player who says “call” is bound to call the full amount. See *Tournaments*.

Pot-limit

8.11 The pot-limit maximum

In pot-limit, the largest bet you can make is the size of the pot. When you raise, you first count your call as part of the pot, and then you may raise by the size of that total. The dealer works out the figure; you do not have to.

To work out the largest raise:

- Count the pot, including every bet in front of players on this round.
- Add the amount you need to call.
- The total is the most you can raise by.
- Your largest total bet is your call plus that raise.

A quick check for a player who has not yet put chips in on this round: the largest total bet is three times the last bet, plus everything else that was in the pot before that bet.

EXAMPLE

The pot is 1,000 and A bets 400. B wants to bet the most allowed. The pot is now 1,400; B's call of 400 makes it 1,800, so B may raise by 1,800. B's largest total bet is 400 + 1,800 = 2,200. The quick check agrees: three times 400 is 1,200, plus the 1,000 already there.

8.12 Pot-sized raise examples

These examples use blinds of 100–200. In each, the player acting has no chips in front on that round unless stated.

Situation	Pot before you act	Your call	Pot after your call	Largest total bet
Before the flop, first to act	300	200	500	700
Before the flop, facing a raise to 700	1,000	700	1,700	2,400
On the flop, pot 1,500, no bet yet	1,500	0	1,500	1,500
On the flop, pot 1,500, facing a bet of 500	2,000	500	2,500	3,000
On the flop, pot 1,500, a bet of 500 and a raise to 2,000	4,000	2,000	6,000	8,000
The same, but you made the 500 bet and now face the raise	4,000	1,500	5,500	7,500
On the turn, pot 4,000, a bet of 1,000 and one call	6,000	1,000	7,000	8,000

In the last but one row, your largest total bet is the 2,000 you need to match plus a raise of 5,500. Because 500 of your chips were already in front of you, you add 7,000 more.

NOTE

Some houses treat the small blind as if it were a full big blind when working out the pot before the flop, so the largest opening raise is four times the big blind instead of three and a half. Houses may also round the pot up to a convenient chip unit to keep play moving. Either option must be stated in advance.

8.13 Pot counts and oversized bets in pot-limit

In pot-limit, a player may ask for the size of the pot when it is their turn, and the dealer must count it and announce it. The dealer should also stop any bet larger than the pot without waiting to be asked.

If a bet is too large, the excess is returned and the bet is reduced to the pot-sized maximum. Any player or the dealer may point out an oversized bet, and it may be corrected until all players have acted on it. If a player has been considering an oversized bet for some time and only then objects, the floor may decide that the bet stands.

EXAMPLE

Pot-limit Omaha, blinds 100–200. On the turn the pot is 2,600 and A, first to act, puts out 3,000. The dealer says "the pot is 2,600" and returns 400. A's bet is 2,600.

NOTE

The rules on counting the pot in no-limit games are in *Betting and raising*.

8.14 Pot-limit Omaha

Pot-limit Omaha is the most widely played pot-limit game. Each player receives four hole cards and must use exactly two of them with three from the board. Because hands run close in value, the pot-limit structure keeps the betting in proportion to the pot. Omaha Hi-Lo is also often played pot-limit.

The full rules of Omaha are in *Hold'em and Omaha games*.

All-ins and side pots

8.15 Table stakes in big-bet games

Big-bet cash games are played for table stakes: only the chips in front of you when the hand starts can play, and if a bet is larger than your stack you may call all-in for what you have. The full rule, and the maximum buy-in that houses use to limit the size of a big-bet game, are in *Seating, buy-ins and table procedures*.

8.16 Side pots in big-bet games

When a player is all-in and others keep betting, the extra chips go into a side pot that the all-in player cannot win, and any part of a bet that nobody can call goes back to the bettor. How side pots are settled is explained in *The showdown*.

EXAMPLE

No-limit, blinds 100–200. On the flop A bets 5,000. B, with 1,800, calls all-in. C, with 9,000, calls 5,000. The main pot holds 1,800 from each of the three players, plus whatever was in the pot before the flop. The side pot holds the remaining 3,200 each from A and C, 6,400 in total, and only A or C can win it.

8.17 All-in showdowns in cash games

When a player is all-in and the betting is over, the remaining cards are dealt and the hands are shown in the usual order. In a cash game, players do not have to turn their cards face up before the board is complete, although they often agree to (see *The showdown*). Show one, show all still applies: if an all-in player shows their cards to one opponent, every player may see them.

Where the house allows it, the players involved may agree to run the remaining cards twice or more (see *Optional house rules*). Players must not make insurance deals or other side bets with each other over an all-in pot. The house will not rule on any such private arrangement, and the pot always goes to the best hand.

NOTE

In tournaments, all hands are turned face up as soon as a player is all-in and the betting is complete (see *Tournaments*).

CHAPTER 9

Hold’em and Omaha games

How Texas Hold’em, Short Deck Hold’em, Omaha, Omaha Hi-Lo, 5-Card Omaha and Big O are dealt and played, how hands are made in each, and the irregularities that belong to these games.

Hold’em and Omaha are flop games. Each player receives private hole cards and shares five face-up community cards, the board. The games differ in how many hole cards you get and how many of them you may use.

This chapter covers what is special to each game. General dealing procedures are in *Dealing, misdeals and irregularities*, and betting structures in *Blinds, antes and the button* and *No-limit and pot-limit*.

Texas Hold’em

9.1 Texas Hold’em overview

Texas Hold’em is played with a standard 52-card deck, a button and two blinds. Each player receives two hole cards. Five board cards are then dealt face up in three stages: three together (the flop), then one (the turn), then one more (the river). There is a betting round before the flop and after each stage, so a hand that goes the distance has four betting rounds. The best five-card hand at the showdown wins the pot.

The game may be played limit, pot-limit or no-limit. A house may also use an ante or a big blind ante alongside the blinds.

9.2 The deal in Texas Hold’em

Before the deal, the player to the left of the button posts the small blind and the next player posts the big blind. The dealer then deals one card face down to each player, starting with the small blind and going clockwise, and then a second card the same way. The button receives the last card.

Before each stage of the board, the dealer burns one card face down. The flop is turned face up all at once; the turn and river follow one card at a time.

9.3 Betting rounds and limits in Texas Hold’em

Before the flop, the first player to act is the one to the left of the big blind. Action moves clockwise and ends with the big blind, who may check if nobody has raised, or raise. On the flop, turn and river, the player nearest the button’s left who still holds cards acts first, and the button acts last.

In limit Texas Hold’em, bets and raises before the flop and on the flop are the size of the small bet. On the turn and river they double to the big bet.

> **EXAMPLE**
> In a limit game with blinds of 100–200, the limits are 200–400. Before the flop and on the flop, every bet and raise is 200. On the turn and river, every bet and raise is 400.

NOTE

When only two players are dealt in, the button posts the small blind, acts first before the flop and acts last on every later round. See *Blinds, antes and the button*.

9.4 Making a hand in Texas Hold'em

You make the best five-card hand you can from any combination of your two hole cards and the five board cards. You may use both hole cards, one of them, or neither. When your best hand is the five board cards alone, you are "playing the board".

EXAMPLE

The board is A♣ K♦ 7♥ 7♠ 2♣. You hold 9♣ 9♦. Your best hand is two pair, nines and sevens, with an ace: 9♣ 9♦ 7♥ 7♠ A♣. An opponent holding A♥ 3♠ has aces and sevens with a king, which beats your hand.

EXAMPLE

The board is 10♠ J♥ Q♦ K♣ A♠. No flush is possible, and nobody can beat a straight to the ace. Every player still in the hand is playing the board, so they split the pot equally.

9.5 Playing the board in Texas Hold'em

Playing the board does not excuse you from showing your cards. To win a share of the pot, you must table both hole cards, as with any other hand (see *The showdown*). Announcing "I'm playing the board" is not enough: if your cards reach the muck before they have been shown, you have no claim to the pot.

EXAMPLE

The board is 8♣ 8♦ 8♥ Q♠ Q♣ and two players reach the showdown. One turns over 4♦ 3♣ and the other says "board" and slides their cards, face down, towards the dealer. The dealer stops them before they reach the muck, and the player turns them up as 7♥ 2♠. Both players have now shown, so they split the pot.

9.6 Hole cards exposed or misdealt in Texas Hold'em

If the dealer exposes either of the first two cards off the deck, or two or more hole cards, it is a misdeal. Any other single hole card exposed by the dealer is replaced with the top card of the deck once the deal is complete, and the exposed card becomes the first burn card. One extra card dealt at the end of the deal also goes back on top of the deck as the burn card; two or more extra cards cause a misdeal. A card you expose yourself is not a dealer error, and you must keep it. The full procedures are in *Dealing, misdeals and irregularities*.

EXAMPLE

Six players are in the game. While dealing the second round of hole cards, the dealer flips the 8♥ intended for the player in seat 4. The dealer finishes dealing, then gives seat 4 the top card of the deck in place of the 8♥. The 8♥ goes face down as the burn card before the flop.

9.7 Board cards dealt too soon or in error in Texas Hold’em

A flop, turn or river dealt before the betting round is complete is never used, even if everyone still to act then folds, and nobody may choose to accept it. The burn card stays where it is, the early cards are shuffled back into the stub (the undealt part of the deck), and once the betting is finished the replacement card or cards are dealt without another burn. A flop with too many cards is cancelled and redealt in the same way. These procedures, and what to do about a missed or extra burn, are set out in full in *Dealing, misdeals and irregularities*.

> **EXAMPLE**
> One player has still to act before the flop when the dealer turns J♠ 6♦ 6♣. The burn card stays put and the three cards are shuffled back into the stub. Once the betting is complete, the dealer turns a fresh flop without burning again.

> **NOTE**
> Tournaments handle a four-card flop, or a flop dealt without a burn, differently. See *Tournaments*.

Short Deck Hold’em

9.8 Short Deck Hold’em overview

Short Deck Hold’em (also called 6+ Hold’em) is Texas Hold’em played with a 36-card deck: every two, three, four and five is removed. The deal, the board and the way you make a hand are as in Texas Hold’em, but hands run stronger and some rankings change.

9.9 Antes and the button blind in Short Deck Hold’em

Short Deck Hold’em is usually played with an ante from every player instead of the normal two blinds. The most common format adds a single button blind, posted by the player on the button; some games use antes only. The house sets both amounts.

With a button blind, the player to the left of the button acts first before the flop and the button acts last. Calling means matching the button blind. After the flop, betting order is as in Texas Hold’em.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Six players each ante 100 and the button posts a button blind of 200. Before the flop, the player to the button’s left may fold, call 200 or raise. The pot already holds 800 before anyone acts.

9.10 The ace in a Short Deck straight

The ace may play high or low. Played low, it takes the place of the missing five, so A-6-7-8-9 is the lowest straight. The highest straight is still 10-J-Q-K-A.

> **EXAMPLE**
> You hold A♠ 9♦ and the board is 6♣ 7♥ 8♠ K♦ Q♣. Your ace plays low to make the straight A-6-7-8-9.

9.11 Flush versus full house in Short Deck Hold'em

With only nine cards in each suit, a flush is harder to make than a full house. In Short Deck Hold'em, a flush therefore ranks above a full house. The full Short Deck order is in *Hand rankings*.

> **EXAMPLE**
> The board is Q♥ Q♠ 7♥ 9♥ 6♣. One player holds A♥ K♥ for an ace-high flush. Another holds 7♠ 7♦ for sevens full of queens. In Short Deck Hold'em, the flush wins.

9.12 Three of a kind versus a straight in Short Deck Hold'em

Houses do not agree on whether three of a kind or a straight ranks higher in Short Deck Hold'em. In the most common version, three of a kind beats a straight. Some live games keep the standard order, with the straight on top. The house must announce which version it uses, and display it at the table where it can, before play begins.

> **EXAMPLE**
> The board is 6♠ 6♦ 8♣ 9♥ K♠. Player A holds 6♥ A♣ for three sixes. Player B holds 7♦ 10♣ for a straight from 6 to 10. Where three of a kind beats a straight, player A wins. Where the standard order is kept, player B wins.

9.13 A two, three, four or five in a Short Deck hand

A two, three, four or five does not belong in a Short Deck Hold'em deck. If one turns up before substantial action, it is a misdeal. After substantial action, the hand continues and the card is treated as a blank and replaced (see *Dealing, misdeals and irregularities*). Either way, the deck should be checked and replaced before the next hand. Otherwise, the irregularity rules for Texas Hold'em apply in full.

Omaha

9.14 Omaha overview

Omaha is dealt and bet exactly like Texas Hold'em, with the same blinds, board and four betting rounds, except that each player receives four hole cards instead of two. It is most often played pot-limit, and pot-limit Omaha is widely known as PLO.

9.15 Using exactly two hole cards in Omaha

In Omaha you must make your hand from exactly two of your hole cards and exactly three of the board cards. Not one hole card, not three, not four: always two. This rule catches out many players who come from Texas Hold'em.

- You cannot play the board. Five board cards alone are never a hand in Omaha.
- Four cards of one suit on the board give you a flush only if you hold two cards of that suit.
- Four cards to a straight on the board give you a straight only if two of your hole cards fit.
- Three hole cards of the same rank play only as a pair, because you can use just two of them.

EXAMPLE

The board is A♠ K♠ 8♠ 6♠ 2♥. You hold Q♠ J♥ 7♣ 3♦. You do not have a flush, because only one of your hole cards is a spade. Your best hand is Q♠ J♥ with A♠ K♠ 8♠, which is only ace high.

EXAMPLE

The board is 9♣ 10♦ J♥ Q♠ 3♣. You hold K♥ 4♣ 4♦ 4♠. You do not have a straight: the king would need a second hole card that also fits, and none of your fours does. Your best hand is 4♣ 4♦ with Q♠ J♥ 10♦, a pair of fours.

EXAMPLE

The board is 8♥ 8♣ J♦ 4♠ 2♥. You hold 8♦ 3♣ A♥ K♥. Your best hand uses 8♦ and A♥ with 8♥ 8♣ J♦: three eights with an ace and a jack.

9.16 Showing an Omaha hand

To win the pot at the showdown you must turn up all four hole cards. Cards speak: the dealer reads the best legal combination of two hole cards and three board cards, whatever the player announces. See *The showdown*.

9.17 Irregularities in Omaha

Omaha uses the same irregularity procedures as Texas Hold'em. The one Texas Hold'em rule with no Omaha equivalent is playing the board, since you can never use five board cards. A hand holding more than four cards at the showdown is a dead hand.

Omaha Hi-Lo

9.18 Omaha Hi-Lo overview

Omaha Hi-Lo (also called Omaha 8-or-better) is dealt and bet exactly like Omaha, but the pot is split between the best high hand and the best qualifying low hand. It is commonly played limit or pot-limit.

9.19 The 8-or-better low qualifier in Omaha Hi-Lo

To win the low half, a hand must be five cards of different ranks, all eight or lower. The ace counts as the lowest card for low and as the highest card for high. Straights and flushes do not spoil a low hand. Lows are compared from the highest card down; see *Hand rankings*.

If no hand qualifies for low, the high hand takes the whole pot.

EXAMPLE

The board is K♣ 9♦ 6♠ 4♥ 2♣. Lows need two different hole cards of eight or lower that do not pair 6, 4 or 2. A player holding A♦ 3♠ makes 6-4-3-2-A. A player holding 8♥ 7♣ makes 8-7-6-4-2. Both qualify, and 6-4-3-2-A wins the low half.

9.20 Different hole cards for high and low in Omaha Hi-Lo

Your high hand and your low hand are judged separately. Each must use exactly two hole cards and three board cards, but they may be different pairs of hole cards and different board cards.

> **EXAMPLE**
> The board is Q♠ J♠ 5♦ 3♣ 2♠. You hold A♠ 4♦ K♠ 9♥. For high, you use A♠ K♠ with Q♠ J♠ 2♠ for an ace-high flush. For low, you use A♠ 4♦ with 5♦ 3♣ 2♠ for 5-4-3-2-A. You may well win both halves.

9.21 Counterfeited low hands

A low hand is counterfeited when a board card matches one of the low hole cards it relies on. The duplicate adds nothing to that hand, but it may complete a better low for an opponent, or leave your own hand without a qualifying low.

> **EXAMPLE**
> After the turn, the board is K♦ 8♣ 4♠ 3♥. You hold A♣ 2♦ 9♠ 9♥, giving you 8-4-3-2-A, which is ahead of an opponent holding A♥ 5♠ J♣ J♦ with 8-5-4-3-A. The river is the 2♠. It duplicates your deuce, so your best low is still 8-4-3-2-A. Your opponent, though, now uses A♥ 5♠ with 4♠ 3♥ 2♠ to make 5-4-3-2-A and takes the low half.

9.22 Scooping and quartering in Omaha Hi-Lo

Winning both the high and the low half is called scooping the pot. If two players tie for one half, they split that half, so each receives a quarter of the pot. This is called being quartered.

> **EXAMPLE**
> The board is K♠ 9♠ 5♦ 3♣ 2♠ and the pot is 1,200. Player A holds A♥ 4♥ K♦ K♣. Player B holds A♣ 4♦ Q♥ J♥. Player C holds 10♠ 7♠ J♦ J♣. Player C has a king-high flush with 10♠ 7♠ and wins the high half, 600. Players A and B both have 5-4-3-2-A for low, so they share the low half: 300 each.

9.23 Odd chips in Omaha Hi-Lo split pots

Split pots are decided by the cards alone, never by agreement between players. When a pot cannot be divided evenly between the high and low halves, the odd chip goes to the high hand. When tied hands share a half, any odd chip in that half is awarded by the usual odd-chip rule for button games: the first tied player clockwise from the button receives it. See *The showdown*.

5-Card Omaha and Big O

9.24 5-Card Omaha overview

5-Card Omaha is Omaha with a fifth hole card. Everything else is unchanged, including the rule that you must use exactly two hole cards and exactly three board cards. It is usually played pot-limit and high only. The extra card means many more two-card combinations, so the winning hands tend to be stronger than in four-card Omaha.

EXAMPLE

The board is 9♥ 7♥ 5♣ K♦ 2♥. You hold A♥ Q♣ 8♠ 6♦ 6♠. You have a heart in your hand, but only one, so there is no flush. The 8♠ 6♦ fit with 9♥ 7♥ 5♣ for a nine-high straight, which is your best hand.

9.25 Big O overview

Big O is 5-Card Omaha played high-low split with an 8-or-better qualifier for low, usually at pot-limit. All the Omaha Hi-Lo rules apply: exactly two hole cards and three board cards for each half, different hole cards may be used for high and low, and the high hand takes the whole pot if nobody qualifies for low.

EXAMPLE

The board is A♦ 8♣ 6♥ 4♠ K♣. You hold 3♦ 2♣ K♥ K♠ 9♦. For high, K♥ K♠ with A♦ K♣ 8♣ gives you three kings. For low, 3♦ 2♣ with 6♥ 4♠ A♦ gives you 6-4-3-2-A, the best possible low on this board.

9.26 Table size in five-card games

With five cards to each player, a full table could exhaust the deck, so the house should limit five-card games to eight seats or fewer.

CHAPTER 10

Stud games

How Seven-Card Stud, Razz and Stud Hi-Lo are dealt and bet, who brings in and who acts first, and how stud-specific irregularities are handled.

In stud games there is no shared board and no button. Each player receives their own mix of face-down hole cards and face-up upcards, and everyone can see part of everyone else's hand. Antes and a forced bet called the bring-in start the action. The order of betting is decided by the cards on show, not by seat.

This chapter covers Seven-Card Stud and its two most common relatives, Razz and Stud Hi-Lo. General dealing procedures are in *Dealing, misdeals and irregularities*, and betting rules are in *Betting and raising*.

Seven-Card Stud

10.1 Seven-Card Stud overview

Each player starts with two hole cards and one upcard. The first upcard is called the door card. Three more upcards follow, one at a time, and the last card is dealt face down. There is a betting round after each stage, so a hand played to the end has five betting rounds. Each stage is called a street, named after the number of cards a player holds: third street, fourth street, fifth street, sixth street and seventh street (also called the river).

At the showdown, you make your best five-card hand from your seven cards. The game is normally played limit, with up to eight players.

> **EXAMPLE**
> By seventh street, you hold 4♦ 9♣ in the hole, K♠ 9♥ 2♣ 9♠ face up, and 4♠ as your last hole card. Your best five cards are 9♣ 9♥ 9♠ 4♦ 4♠: a full house, nines full of fours.

10.2 Antes and the bring-in in Seven-Card Stud

Before the deal, every player puts in an ante. After third street is dealt, the player with the lowest upcard must make a forced bet called the bring-in. The house sets both amounts. The bring-in is smaller than the small bet in the game's limits.

In Seven-Card Stud, the ace counts high when deciding the bring-in, so a deuce is the lowest card. If two or more players show the same lowest rank, suit decides. From lowest to highest, the suits rank clubs, diamonds, hearts, spades. Suits settle procedural questions like this one, and some odd-chip awards, but they never decide who wins a pot.

> **EXAMPLE**
> The upcards are K♦, 4♥, 4♣, J♠ and 9♦. Two fours tie for lowest. Clubs is the lowest suit, so the player with the 4♣ must bring in.

10.3 Completing the bring-in in stud

The player with the bring-in may put in just the bring-in amount, or may choose to bet the full small bet instead. If they bring in for the minimum, the players after them may fold, call the bring-in, or complete the bet to the full small bet. Completing is not a raise. It counts as the opening bet for the purpose of any cap on the number of raises.

> **EXAMPLE**
> In a game with limits of 200–400, antes of 25 and a bring-in of 50, the player with the 4♣ puts in 50. The next player completes to 200. The player after that may fold, call 200 or raise to 400. With a cap of a bet and three raises, there may still be three raises after the completion.

10.4 An all-in bring-in player

If the player due to bring in has only enough chips for part of the bring-in, they put in what they have and everyone else must come in for at least the normal bring-in. If they are all-in for the ante alone, the action starts with the next active player to their left, who may bring in, complete or fold.

10.5 First to act on later streets in Seven-Card Stud

From fourth street onwards, the player whose upcards make the highest poker hand acts first. Only the upcards count: pairs, two pair, three of a kind and so on, then the highest unpaired cards. Partial straights and flushes count for nothing. If two players show hands of equal value, the one who received cards first, nearest the dealer's left, acts first. Suits are not used here in a cash game.

The player who acts first may check or bet. There is no bring-in after third street.

> **EXAMPLE**
> On fourth street, one player shows K♦ 7♣, another shows J♠ J♥ and a third shows A♠ 9♦. The pair of jacks is the highest showing hand, so that player acts first. On fifth street, if the ace-nine player catches the A♣ to show A♠ 9♦ A♣ and nobody else improves, the pair of aces is now highest and acts first.

> **NOTE**
> In tournaments, a tie between equal showing hands is broken by suit. See *Tournaments*.

10.6 Betting limits and the open pair on fourth street

In limit Seven-Card Stud, betting on third and fourth streets is at the small bet, and betting on fifth, sixth and seventh streets is at the big bet. There is one exception. If any player shows an open pair on fourth street, every player on that round may choose to bet or raise either the small bet or the big bet. Once anyone bets or raises the big amount, every later raise on that street must also be the big amount.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Limits are 200–400. On fourth street a player shows 9♠ 9♦ and acts first. They may bet 200 or 400. If they bet 200, the next player may call 200, raise 200, or raise 400. After a raise of 400, all further raises on that street are 400.

NOTE

In tournaments, an open pair on fourth street does not allow the larger bet. See *Tournaments*.

10.7 Dealer announcements in stud

The dealer announces who has the bring-in, which hand is high and acts first on each street, every bet and raise, and any open pair. The dealer does not point out possible straights or flushes.

10.8 Keeping upcards in order and in view

You must keep your upcards face up, in the order they were dealt, and where every player can see them. Deliberately rearranging your upcards misleads your opponents and is not allowed. When facing a bet, turning over or picking up your upcards is a fold.

10.9 A hole card dealt face up on third street

If the dealer exposes your first or second hole card, your third card is dealt face down, so you still have two cards down and one up. The exposed card becomes your upcard. If both of your first two cards are dealt face up, you have a dead hand and your ante is returned.

If the card exposed in error would have been the lowest upcard, that player does not have to bring in. Instead, the player to their left acts first and may bring in, complete or fold.

EXAMPLE

Your first card is dealt face up as the 3♥. The dealer gives you your second card face down as normal and then your third card face down too. The 3♥ is your door card. If it is the lowest card showing, you do not have to bring in: because it was exposed in error, the player to your left starts the action.

NOTE

In tournaments, the player whose hole card was exposed may still have to bring in. See *Tournaments*.

10.10 A seventh-street card dealt face up

If the dealer deals a player's last card face up by mistake, the betting on seventh street is started by the player now showing the highest hand, counting all upcards.

- With three or more players in the hand, everyone else still receives their last card face down. The player whose card was exposed may declare themselves all-in before the betting starts: they put no more chips in, and any further betting goes into a side pot.
- With two players in the hand, if the first player's last card is dealt face up, the second player's last card is also dealt face up and betting continues as normal. If only the second player's card is exposed, that player may declare all-in before the betting starts.

A player who is already all-in should receive the last card face down, but if it is dealt face up, they keep it and the other players receive their cards normally.

NOTE

In tournaments, an exposed seventh-street card is replaced while betting is still possible. See *Tournaments*.

10.11 Running out of cards on seventh street

With seven or eight players still in the hand, the deck may not hold enough cards for everyone to receive a seventh card. The dealer deals as far as possible but never deals the last card of the deck. That last card is shuffled with the burn cards (and any cards taken out of play earlier), cut, and a card is burned before the remaining players receive their cards. If there are only just enough cards for the players still waiting, the dealer skips the burn.

If even that will not give every remaining player a card, the dealer tells the table that a shared card is coming, burns a card and turns one card face up in the centre of the table. This common card counts as the seventh card of every player still in the hand, and the player with the highest hand showing, including the common card, acts first.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Seven players reach seventh street. After the burn, six cards remain. The dealer gives cards to the first five players and keeps back the last card. That card is shuffled with the four burn cards, the dealer cuts, burns one and deals the final two players their seventh cards.

10.12 Stud cards dealt before the betting is complete

If the dealer deals the next street before the current betting round is finished, those cards are taken out of play. When the betting is complete, the dealer takes one further card out of play for each player still in the hand, then burns and deals the street as normal. All the removed cards are kept to one side in case the deck runs short.

If the early card is a player's final hole card and they have looked at it or mixed it with their other cards, they must keep it. They may not bet or raise on sixth street, because they already hold all seven cards.

> **NOTE**
> Tournaments reshuffle the early cards into the stub instead. See *Tournaments*.

10.13 Too many or too few cards in stud

Holding more than seven cards kills your hand. Holding fewer than seven at the showdown normally kills it too, with one exception: if the only card you are missing is your seventh-street card, the floor may rule the hand live.

10.14 An absent player in stud

If you have left the table and your turn comes round, you lose your ante and any bring-in, and your hand is killed when the betting reaches your seat.

> **NOTE**
> In tournaments, an absent player's hand is killed as soon as the initial deal is complete. See *Tournaments*.

10.15 Calling a hand already beaten on the board

If you call a bet when your opponent's upcards already beat your whole hand, you are not entitled to get the chips back. The call is a normal call.

Razz

10.16 Razz overview

Razz is Seven-Card Stud played for low. The lowest five-card hand wins the whole pot. Lows are ranked the ace-to-five way: the ace is always low, straights and flushes do not count, and pairs are bad. The strongest Razz hand is 5-4-3-2-A, called a wheel. There is no qualifier: someone always wins with the lowest hand. See *Hand rankings*.

All Seven-Card Stud rules apply to Razz unless this section says otherwise.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Your seven cards are 2♣ 3♦ 4♥ 5♠ 6♣ 6♦ 7♠. In Razz the straight does not count against you, so your best hand is 6-5-4-3-2.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Your seven cards are A♣ A♦ 3♥ 5♠ 6♣ 9♦ 9♠. You use one ace and one nine, so your hand is 9-6-5-3-A.

10.17 The bring-in in Razz

In Razz, the player with the highest upcard brings in. A king is the highest card and an ace the lowest. If two players show the same highest rank, the higher suit brings in, using the order clubs, diamonds, hearts, spades from lowest to highest.

> **EXAMPLE**
> The upcards are K♠, K♦, 3♥ and 8♣. The two kings tie for highest. Spades outranks diamonds, so the player with the K♠ brings in.

10.18 First to act in Razz

From fourth street onwards, the player showing the lowest hand acts first. Showing hands are compared as low hands, so an open pair is worse than any unpaired cards. If two players show equal lows, the one nearest the dealer's left acts first.

> **EXAMPLE**
> On fourth street, the upcards are 3♥ 5♦, 8♣ 2♠ and 6♦ 6♠. The 5-3 is the lowest showing hand and acts first. The 6-6 is the worst, because it is paired.

10.19 Limits in Razz

Betting is at the small bet on third and fourth streets and at the big bet on fifth, sixth and seventh. An open pair on fourth street does not change the limit.

Stud Hi-Lo

10.20 Stud Hi-Lo overview

Stud Hi-Lo (also called Seven-Card Stud 8-or-better) is dealt and bet like Seven-Card Stud, but the pot is split between the best high hand and the best qualifying low hand. All Seven-Card Stud rules apply unless this section says otherwise.

A qualifying low is five cards of different ranks, all eight or lower. The ace counts as both high and low. Straights and flushes do not spoil a low. If no hand qualifies for low, the high hand takes the whole pot.

You may use any five of your seven cards for high and any five, the same or different, for low.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Player A holds A♠ 2♦ 5♣ 6♥ 7♠ K♣ K♦. Player B holds 9♥ 9♣ 9♠ 4♦ 3♣ Q♥ 10♠. Player B wins high with three nines. Player A's kings lose for high, but A♠ 2♦ 5♣ 6♥ 7♠ makes a 7-6-5-2-A low, and player B has no qualifying low. The pot is split between them.

10.21 The bring-in and order of action in Stud Hi-Lo

The lowest upcard brings in, as in Seven-Card Stud, and the ace counts as a high card for this purpose. Ties are broken by suit, with clubs lowest. On later streets, the highest hand showing acts first. If two showing hands are equal, the player nearest the dealer's left acts first. When the player showing the highest hand is already all-in, the action moves on to the next player, just as if the all-in player had checked.

> **EXAMPLE**
> The upcards are A♦, 2♥, 7♣ and Q♠. The ace counts high for the bring-in, so the 2♥ brings in, even though an ace is a strong low card.

10.22 Limits in Stud Hi-Lo

Betting is at the small bet on third and fourth streets and at the big bet on fifth, sixth and seventh. An open pair on fourth street does not change the limit.

10.23 Splitting the pot and odd chips in Stud Hi-Lo

The pot is divided by the cards alone, never by agreement between players. When the pot cannot be divided evenly:

- between the high and the low hand, the odd chip goes to the high hand;
- between tied high hands, it goes to the player holding the highest card by suit;
- between tied low hands, it goes to the player holding the lowest card by suit.

When using suits to award an odd chip, all seven of a player's cards count, not just the five that make the hand.

EXAMPLE

The pot is 1,502, so the high and low halves are 751 each. Two players tie for low with 8-6-4-2-A, so each takes 375 and one chip is left over. It goes to whichever of the two holds the lowest card by suit among all seven of their cards: a player with the A♣ beats a player whose lowest card is the A♦.

NOTE

Tournaments award odd chips in stud games differently. See *Tournaments*.

CHAPTER 11

Draw and lowball games

How Five-Card Draw, A-5 Lowball, 2-7 Single Draw, 2-7 Triple Draw and Badugi are played, how the draw works, how low hands are read, and how the joker is used.

In draw games, every card is dealt face down and there is no board. After a betting round, each player may throw away cards and receive replacements from the deck. This is the draw. Some games have one draw and some have three.

Several draw games are played for low, where the lowest hand wins. They differ in how a low hand is read: whether the ace is low, and whether straights and flushes count against you. Full rankings for every game are in *Hand rankings*. General dealing procedures are in *Dealing, misdeals and irregularities*.

Five-Card Draw

11.1 Five-Card Draw overview

Five-Card Draw is played for high, with a button and two blinds. Each player receives five cards face down. After a betting round, each player still in the hand may discard and draw replacements. There is a second betting round, then the showdown. The best five-card hand wins.

Before the draw, the player to the left of the big blind acts first. After the draw, the player nearest the button's left who is still in the hand acts first. In limit games, the bet doubles after the draw.

> EXAMPLE
> In a limit game with blinds of 50–100, bets and raises before the draw are 100 and after the draw are 200. You hold K♠ K♦ 8♣ 5♥ 2♠. You call before the draw, throw away the 8♣ 5♥ 2♠ and draw three cards.

11.2 Ante games and jacks or better to open

Some Five-Card Draw games use an ante from every player instead of blinds. In these games the house may require that a player hold a pair of jacks or better to make the first bet. If nobody can open, the cards are reshuffled and dealt again, usually with a further ante. After the draw, the player who opened acts first, or the next active player to the left if the opener has folded. The house must announce any opening requirement before play.

11.3 The order of the draw

The first player still in the hand to the button's left draws first, and the draw moves clockwise from there, so the button draws last. When it is your turn, you discard face down and say clearly how many cards you want. The dealer burns one card before the first replacement card of each draw, then deals each player their replacements in turn.

You must discard before you receive your new cards. A player who takes no cards is said to stand pat.

EXAMPLE

Three players remain. The first player to the button's left discards two and says "two". The dealer burns one card, then deals two. The next player stands pat. The button discards one and receives one.

11.4 Drawing five new cards

You may draw up to four cards in one go. If you want to replace all five, the dealer gives you four, and your fifth after every other player has drawn. If you are the last player to draw, the dealer gives you four, burns a card, and then gives you the fifth. This makes it harder for anyone to control the cards a player receives.

11.5 Changing the number of cards you draw

You may alter your request for cards, but only if no card has yet been dealt in response to your request (including the burn card), and no other player has acted on the number you gave.

11.6 Asking how many cards a player drew

Until there has been any action after the draw, a player still in the hand may ask an opponent how many cards they drew. The opponent must answer, and so must the dealer. Once anyone has acted after the draw, the opponent no longer has to answer, and the dealer must not.

11.7 Knocking to check or stand pat

Rapping the table when it is your turn means either that you check or, at the draw, that you stand pat. If you knock to stand pat without realising there has been a raise, your hand is still live and you may play it.

EXAMPLE

You hold 9♣ 10♥ J♦ Q♠ K♣, a straight. At the draw you knock on the table. The dealer gives you no cards and moves on to the next player.

11.8 An exposed card before the draw in Five-Card Draw

In Five-Card Draw played for high, a player must keep any card the dealer exposes before the draw. Exposed cards in lowball games follow different rules, given in the sections for those games.

11.9 An exposed card on the draw

A replacement card that the dealer exposes during the draw may not be taken by the player, in any draw game. The dealer finishes giving replacement cards to every other player in order, then replaces the exposed card from the deck.

EXAMPLE

You draw two. The first card is dealt face down, but the second flips over as the 6♦. You keep the face-down card. The dealer completes the draw for the other players, then gives you a new card in place of the 6♦, which is put out of play.

11.10 Too many or too few cards in draw games

Five cards make a playing hand.

- In lowball games, a player found with fewer than five cards before the draw may be given the missing cards, as long as the first player to act has not yet acted.
- In Five-Card Draw played for high, a short hand found before anyone has acted is a misdeal, unless the short hand is the button's.
- In any draw game, the button may receive a missing fifth card even after action has started.
- If action has started, a short hand is still live, and the player draws enough cards to make five.
- After the draw, a hand with more or fewer than five cards is a fouled hand and is dead.

11.11 Reshuffling the discards when the deck runs out

In games with more than one draw, the deck can run out before a draw is complete. The dealer does not deal the last card of the deck as a replacement. Instead, the dealer shuffles that last card together with the discards from earlier rounds, cuts, burns a card and finishes the draw. Discards from the draw in progress stay out of the reshuffle, so that no player can be given back cards they have just thrown away.

> **EXAMPLE**
> On the third draw of a 2-7 Triple Draw hand, four cards remain after the burn. The first player draws two and receives them. The next player asks for three. The dealer deals one more card, which leaves only the last card. That card is shuffled with the earlier discards, the dealer cuts and burns, and the player receives the other two cards from the new stack.

A-5 Lowball

11.12 A-5 Lowball overview

A-5 Lowball (ace-to-five lowball, also called California lowball) is draw poker for low. The ace is always low. Straights and flushes do not count against you. The best hand is 5-4-3-2-A, called a wheel. The game is played with a button and blinds and one draw. In limit games the bet doubles after the draw.

> **EXAMPLE**
> The hand 6♥ 4♥ 3♥ 2♥ A♥ is not a flush in A-5 Lowball. It is a 6-4 low, the second-best possible hand.

11.13 Comparing A-5 lows

Two A-5 lows are compared from the highest card down, and any hand without a pair beats any hand with one; the full method is in *Hand rankings*.

> **EXAMPLE**
> One player holds 7♣ 5♦ 4♥ 3♠ A♦, a 7-5. Another holds 7♥ 6♣ 3♦ 2♠ A♣, a 7-6. Both have a seven on top. The second cards are 5 and 6, so the 7-5 wins.

11.14 An exposed card before the draw in A-5 Lowball

What happens to a card exposed by the dealer before the draw depends on the betting structure. The player never has a choice.

- In limit A-5 Lowball, a seven or lower must be kept. An eight or higher is replaced once the deal is complete, and the exposed card is used as the burn card.
- In no-limit and pot-limit A-5 Lowball, only an ace, two, three, four or five is kept. Any other card, including a six or seven, is replaced. The aim is that an exposed card should never tell the table that you cannot hold the nuts.

11.15 Calling your hand in lowball

Cards speak: the hand you show is read for what it is. You must not claim a better hand than you hold. If you announce “eight” you must be able to show an eight-low or better. Getting the second card wrong, such as calling 8-6 while holding 8-7, carries no penalty. If you miscall your hand and another player throws away their cards as a result, your hand is dead. If both hands are still intact, the best hand wins. In a showdown with three or more players, a miscalled hand is dead and the best of the other hands wins. A player spreading a hand that contains a pair must say “pair”.

> **EXAMPLE**
> You say “eight” and spread 9♠ 7♦ 5♣ 3♥ 2♠, which is really a nine-low. Your opponent still holds 9♥ 6♣ 4♦ 3♠ 2♣. Both hands are intact, so the cards speak: the 9-6 beats your 9-7. Had your opponent thrown their cards away because of your call, your hand would have been dead. Always keep your cards until you have seen your opponent’s hand.

11.16 A new player entering a lowball game

In lowball games played with blinds, a new player may not simply post an amount equal to the big blind. You must either wait for the big blind to reach you or kill the pot by posting double the big blind. The same choice applies if the big blind passes your seat while you are away. The house may set a different policy, but it must post it.

> **EXAMPLE**
> In a limit A-5 Lowball game with blinds of 100–200, you take a seat three places before the big blind. You may wait for the big blind to reach you, or post 400 to kill the pot and be dealt in straight away. See *Optional house rules* for how a kill pot changes the limits.

11.17 The sevens rule in limit A-5 Lowball

Many limit A-5 Lowball games use the sevens rule, and the house should announce whether it is in force. After the draw, a player holding a seven-low or better must bet. If you check such a hand and it turns out to be the best, you win only what was in the pot before the draw and lose any right to the bets made after it. If you check it and lose, you lose as normal. Check-raising is not allowed in limit A-5 Lowball unless the house says otherwise. No-limit and pot-limit games do not use the sevens rule, and check-raising is allowed.

2-7 Lowball

11.18 2-7 Lowball overview

In 2-7 Lowball (deuce-to-seven lowball, also called Kansas City lowball), the ace is always high, and straights and flushes count against you. In effect, the worst hand by normal high rankings wins. The top hand is 7-5-4-3-2 in at least two suits. A-2-3-4-5 is not a straight here: it is an ace-high hand, which loses to any king-high or lower hand without a pair.

> **EXAMPLE**
> 7♠ 5♦ 4♣ 3♥ 2♠ is the best possible hand. 8♥ 6♥ 5♥ 4♥ 2♥ looks like a strong low but is a flush, which is a very poor 2-7 hand. 6♦ 5♣ 4♠ 3♦ 2♣ is a straight and loses to any pair.

11.19 2-7 Single Draw overview

2-7 Single Draw has one draw and two betting rounds. It is usually played no-limit, with blinds and often an ante. The rules for no-limit betting are in *No-limit and pot-limit*. Check-raising is allowed, and a seven-low or better does not have to bet.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Blinds are 100–200 with an ante of 25. You hold 8♥ 6♣ 4♦ 3♠ 2♥ and raise before the draw. You stand pat. Your opponent draws one and checks after the draw. You may bet any amount up to your stack, or check.

11.20 2-7 Triple Draw overview

2-7 Triple Draw is played limit, with a button and blinds. There are three draws and four betting rounds: one before the first draw and one after each draw. Betting is at the small bet for the first two rounds and at the big bet for the last two. Because players may draw up to 15 replacement cards each, the game is usually played six-handed, and the dealer will often need to reshuffle the discards.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Limits are 200–400. Before the first draw and after the first draw, bets and raises are 200. After the second and third draws, they are 400.

11.21 An exposed card before the draw in 2-7 Lowball

Before the draw, the player must keep a dealer-exposed 2, 3, 4, 5 or 7. An exposed 6, 8 or anything higher is replaced. The player has no choice. On the draw itself, an exposed card is always replaced, as in every draw game.

Badugi

11.22 Badugi overview

Badugi is a four-card lowball game with three draws. Each player receives four cards face down. It is played with a button and blinds, usually at limit. There are four betting rounds: one before the first draw and one after each draw. Betting is at the small bet for the first two rounds and at the big bet for the last two. The draw procedures are the same as for other draw games.

11.23 Making a badugi hand

The aim is to hold four cards of four different suits and four different ranks. Such a hand is called a badugi. Aces are always low, and straights do not count.

If your four cards include a pair or two of the same suit, they do not all play. You keep the largest group of cards with no repeated rank and no repeated suit, choosing the lowest such group. The other cards are ignored.

> **EXAMPLE**
> A♥ 4♥ 6♣ 7♦ has two hearts, so only three cards play. Keeping the A♥ gives 7-6-A, which is better than keeping the 4♥. Your hand is a three-card 7-6-A.

> **EXAMPLE**
> 3♠ 3♦ 5♥ 9♣ contains a pair. One three is ignored, so your hand is the three-card 9-5-3.

11.24 Ranking Badugi hands

More cards always beat fewer: any badugi beats any three-card hand, and so on down. Hands of the same size are compared from the highest card down, and the best hand is 4-3-2-A in four suits (see *Hand rankings*). Identical hands split the pot, because suits never break a tie.

> **EXAMPLE**
> One player has 8♠ 7♥ 3♦ 2♣. Another has 9♥ 4♣ 3♠ 2♦. Both are badugis. The highest cards are 8 and 9, so the 8-7-3-2 wins. A third player holding A♠ 2♥ 3♣ 5♣ has only a three-card 3-2-A and loses to both.

The joker

11.25 When the joker is used

Some draw games add a joker, sometimes called the bug, to the deck. The house must tell players whether the joker is in use. The joker is not fully wild; what it can represent depends on the game.

11.26 The joker in high draw games

In Five-Card Draw played for high, the joker can stand for an ace, or for any card that completes a straight, a flush or a straight flush, and nothing else. In a flush it counts as the highest card of that suit not already in the hand. The best possible hand is five aces: four aces and the joker.

> **EXAMPLE**
> The joker with A♣ A♦ 7♠ 3♥ makes three aces. The joker with K♠ Q♠ 9♠ 4♠ makes an ace-high flush, the joker counting as the A♠. The joker with K♣ K♥ 7♦ 7♠ is only an ace, so the hand is two pair, kings and sevens with an ace.

11.27 The joker in A-5 Lowball

In A-5 Lowball, the joker counts as the lowest card not already in your hand. It can therefore never pair one of your cards.

> **EXAMPLE**
> The joker with 6♣ 4♦ 3♥ 2♠ counts as an ace, making 6-4-3-2-A. The joker with A♦ 2♣ 3♠ 4♥ counts as a five, making a wheel.

CHAPTER 12

Tournaments

The complete rules for tournament play, from registration and seating to betting, showdowns, penalties, prizes and deals.

In a tournament everyone starts with the same chips, the blinds and antes rise on a schedule, and players are eliminated until one holds every chip. Tournament chips have no cash value, so several procedures differ from a cash game.

The chapters on cash games apply to tournaments unless this chapter says otherwise. Where they disagree, this chapter wins.

How tournament rules apply

12.1 Floor decisions are final

The floor (the tournament director or a floorperson acting for them) rules on every dispute. Fairness and the best interest of the game come first, and in an unusual situation the floor may make a common-sense ruling that departs from the strict wording of a rule. The floor's decision is final.

12.2 The TDA model and house rules

These tournament rules are modelled on those of the Poker Tournament Directors Association (TDA), the industry body that works for uniform tournament rules worldwide, as updated in 2026. They work alongside the house's own rules, which the house should make available to players. Where a gaming regulator's rules conflict with these, the regulator's rules apply.

12.3 Official betting terms and gestures

Use plain, unmistakable words: check, bet, call, raise, fold, all-in, complete, and (in pot-limit only) pot. Tapping the table is a check. Slang and unusual gestures are at your own risk: the floor may rule that they mean something other than what you intended.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Facing a bet of 8,000, a player says "I'm good" and nudges some chips forward. The words could mean a call or a fold. The floor decides from the chips and the circumstances, and the player cannot complain if the ruling is not what they meant.

12.4 Player responsibilities in tournaments

You should check your seat, protect your hand, follow the action, act in turn, make your intentions clear, keep your chips properly stacked, stay at the table while your hand is live, and table all your cards at showdown. Speak up if you see a mistake, play at a reasonable pace, know the rules, and tell the house about any discriminatory or offensive behaviour.

You must be identifiable at all times; the floor may ask you to remove sunglasses, a hood or anything that hides your face.

12.5 The official table language

The house must post and announce which language or languages may be used at the table. Using any other language during a hand may be penalised, because other players cannot follow what is said.

Registration, seating and table balancing

12.6 Random seat draws

Every tournament and satellite seat is assigned at random, and you may not swap. If you start in the wrong seat, you move to your correct seat with your whole current stack.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Your seat card says Table 12, seat 3, but you sit in seat 8 and win a pot. When the error is found, you move to seat 3 with all your chips, including that pot.

12.7 Late registration, alternates and re-entries

Late registrants, alternates and re-entries each receive a full starting stack and draw a table and seat at random from the same pool used for other new players at that time. They are dealt in straight away unless they are between the small blind and the button, in which case they wait for the button to pass. If a re-entry event lets you give up your chips for a fresh stack, the chips you give up are taken out of play.

If you announce a rebuy before a hand, those chips play in that hand and you must complete the rebuy.

12.8 Moving tables with your chips

Whenever you are moved, as an alternate, to balance tables or because your table is breaking, you must go directly to your new table with all your chips, in your hands or in a rack. The game at your new table does not wait for you: if you are not in your seat by the end of the initial deal, your hand is killed, and any blind or ante due from that seat is still taken from your stack. If you are away when your table breaks, staff should carry your chips to your new seat.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Your table breaks and you draw Table 7, seat 2. You rack your chips and walk straight there, without stopping to chat on the way. Seat 2 is due the big blind, and you arrive just after the cards are dealt: your hand is killed, but the big blind still comes out of your stack.

12.9 Breaking tables

The house decides the order in which tables break. Breaking tables in a random order, rather than a published one, is one way to discourage players from stalling. Players from a broken table get new seats by a two-step random process, so that nobody can influence who goes where. They may land in any seat, including the blinds or the button, and are dealt in at once unless they are between the small blind and the button.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Seven players remain at a breaking table. The dealer shows them seven seat cards, turns them face down and mixes them, then deals each player a playing card face up. The highest card by suit takes the first seat card from the pile, the next highest the second, and so on.

12.10 Balancing tables

The floor keeps tables roughly equal, using a procedure fixed in advance to decide which table loses a player. In flop games and mixed games, the player who would post the next big blind is the one who moves, and they take the worst seat at the short table: the seat that will pay the big blind soonest. This applies even where that seat must post the big blind on two consecutive hands, but a player is never moved into the small blind. In events that play only stud games, the last open seat at the short table is filled.

A table with three or more players fewer than the fullest table stops once the blinds would reach an empty seat, and waits for players to be moved in. The floor may waive this, and doing so is not a misdeal.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Table 3 has nine players and Table 5 has seven. The player at Table 3 who would post the next big blind there is moved to Table 5 and placed in the empty seat that posts the big blind next. They pay it on their first hand at Table 5, so the move does not let them skip a big blind.

12.11 Hand-for-hand play

Near the money, the floor may order hand-for-hand play: every table plays one hand and then waits until all tables have finished.

- Prize eligibility starts when the floor announces that the hands in progress are the last before hand-for-hand.
- Time comes off the clock for each hand, normally two minutes and never more than three, and blinds rise when a new level is reached.
- If there is an all-in and a call, all cards in the hand stay face down and the dealer waits for the floor before dealing further.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Twenty-seven places are paid and 30 players remain when hand-for-hand is announced. On the hands already in progress, four players are eliminated, leaving 26. Only 27th place is paid among the places they fill, so all four share the 27th-place prize equally.

12.12 Final table size

In nine-handed and eight-handed events, two tables of five combine into a nine-handed final table. In seven-handed and six-handed events, two tables of four combine into a seven-handed final table.

Chips

12.13 Stacks of 20 and visible chips

You must keep your chips in stacks of 20 of the same denomination wherever you have enough to do so. Your larger chips must always be in plain sight, where others can tell what they are worth, and your live cards must stay in plain view.

> **EXAMPLE**
> You have 37 chips of 1,000 and six of 25,000. You make one stack of 20 and one of 17 from the 1,000 chips, and keep the 25,000 chips at the front where everyone can see them.

12.14 Tournament chips kept in view

You must not pocket tournament chips or carry them in any way that hides them, including when you move tables. Chips handled like this are forfeited and taken out of play, and the player may be disqualified. Lost chips whose owner cannot be found are also taken out of play.

12.15 Colour-ups and the chip race

When a denomination is no longer needed, the house removes it at a scheduled colour-up. Full units are exchanged directly, and odd chips are settled in a chip race starting from seat 1. Each player receives one card per odd chip, and the highest cards by suit win the new chips in turn. No player may win more than one chip. You cannot be raced out: if you lose your last chips in the race, you receive one chip of the smallest denomination still in play. Leftover chips of a removed denomination are exchanged at equal value only, and any remainder worth less than the smallest chip in play is removed without compensation. Keep your chips fully visible during the race; you are encouraged to watch it.

The floor may also colour up any player at any time, but must announce it.

> **EXAMPLE**
> The 100 chips are being removed. Amir has three, Bea four and Carl three: 1,000 in all, enough for two 500 chips. Bea's A♠ wins the first. Her K♦ is next highest, but nobody may win twice, so the second goes to Carl's Q♣. Amir, who has other chips, receives nothing.

12.16 Betting with bounty chips and tokens

Bounty chips and other tokens with no chip value should look different from betting chips. If you bet with one, the floor may treat it as a call or an all-in.

Blinds, antes and the button

12.17 The dead button in tournaments

Every player must pay the big blind once per round. To make that happen, the button may sit in front of an empty seat, or a player may act last on two hands in a row.

EXAMPLE

Seat 3 posts the small blind and seat 4 the big blind, and seat 3 is eliminated. On the next hand, seat 4 posts the small blind, seat 5 the big blind, and the button sits in front of the empty seat 3.

12.18 Placing the button to deal in the most players

The button is not tied to a particular seat. It may be moved to the position that lets the most players be dealt into the hand.

EXAMPLE

Four players from a broken table fill seats 2, 3, 5 and 6. With the button on its usual course, two of them would sit out between the small blind and the button. Instead, the button may be placed so that more of them are dealt in.

12.19 Errors in moving the button

If the button is moved wrongly and the error is noticed before substantial action, it is corrected. After substantial action, the hand stands and the button is not moved back later to compensate. Substantial action means any three actions in turn, or two actions in turn if either of them put chips in the pot. Posting a blind does not count as an action.

12.20 The button and blinds heads-up

Heads-up, the small blind is on the button, is dealt the last card, acts first before the flop and acts last on every later round. When heads-up play begins, the button may need adjusting so that no one pays the big blind twice in a row.

EXAMPLE

Ana is on the button, Ben in the small blind and Cleo in the big blind, and Ana is eliminated. Cleo has just paid the big blind, so on the first heads-up hand Cleo takes the button and the small blind, and Ben posts the big blind.

12.21 The big blind ante

With a big blind ante, the player in the big blind pays one ante for the whole table as well as the big blind. The ante is dead money and is not part of the big blind's bet. If that player cannot cover both, the big blind is paid first and the rest goes towards the ante. Antes should not be reduced as the event goes on, even at the final table.

EXAMPLE

Blinds are 1,000–2,000 with a big blind ante of 2,000, and the big blind has only 3,000. They post the full 2,000 big blind first; the remaining 1,000 is a partial ante. They are all-in for 2,000 in live chips.

12.22 New blind levels

A new level begins when the floor announces it or the tournament clock signals it, and applies from the next hand. The dealer or the floor may raise the blinds at the table, but the change must always be announced. A hand begins with the first riffle, the press of the shuffling machine's button, or the dealer

change. If a hand starts at the old level by mistake, it continues at that level once substantial action has occurred. If the level changes during a dealer change, the incoming dealer deals one hand at the old level.

> **EXAMPLE**
> The level changes while cards are being dealt, so that hand stays at 1,000–2,000. Before the next shuffle, the dealer announces “Blinds are now 1,500–3,000,” and raises the blinds.

12.23 Being at your seat for a live hand

To have a live hand, you must be within reach of your chair when the last card of the initial deal is dealt. Otherwise your hand is killed at once; your blinds and antes stay in the pot, and in stud the bring-in is posted for you if due. Once your hand is live, including when you are all-in, you must stay at the table until it ends.

There are no missed blinds in a tournament. Absent players are dealt in, their blinds and antes are posted, and their hands are killed, so a long absence can blind a player out. Deliberately dodging a blind is penalised.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Blinds are 2,000–4,000 with a big blind ante of 4,000, and you are away for a full orbit. Your small blind (2,000) and your big blind plus ante (8,000) are posted, costing you 10,000, and every hand you are dealt is killed.

Action and betting

12.24 Verbal declarations and chips

You act by verbal declaration, by pushing out chips, or both; whichever comes first counts. If they are simultaneous, a clear verbal declaration wins. Saying only an amount is the same as silently pushing out that amount, and “raise” followed by an amount states your total bet.

Any action in turn is binding, and a general declaration such as “call” or “raise” commits you to the full current amount. Wait until a bet is clear before you act; if you act first, the floor may hold you to calling whatever the bet turns out to be.

> **EXAMPLE**
> After the flop one player bets 3,000 and the next raises to 11,000. You say “call”, having noticed only the 3,000. You must put in 11,000.

12.25 Calls and undercalls

Silently putting out a chip that is tiny compared with the bet is improper and may be ruled a full call. If you put out less than the call without saying “call”, you must make a full call if you are heads-up and facing any bet, or if you are facing the opening bet of a round in a multi-way pot. Before the flop, the big blind is the opening bet. Otherwise the floor decides whether you must call in full or may forfeit what you put out and fold.

EXAMPLE

Four players see the flop. The first bets 9,000, and the next silently puts out 2,000. That undercalls the opening bet in a multi-way pot, so the player must call 9,000.

12.26 String bets and raise sizes

In no-limit and pot-limit, a raise must be made in one movement or by stating the full amount first. Going back to your stack for more chips is a string bet, and only the first amount counts.

A raise must add at least as much as the biggest full bet or raise made so far in the betting round. If you silently add at least half a minimum raise to the call, you must make a full minimum raise; less than half is a call, unless you said “raise” first or are all-in. A bet below the legal minimum is corrected at any time during that betting round.

EXAMPLE

Blinds are 1,000–2,000. One player raises to 6,000, a raise of 4,000, and the next re-raises to 15,000, a raise of 9,000. Your minimum re-raise is to 24,000.

12.27 Oversized chips and multiple chips

If you face a bet and silently put out a single chip larger than the call, it is a call. To raise with it, say “raise” before it touches the table; with no amount stated, the raise is the most the chip allows. If you face no bet, a single chip put out silently is a bet of its full value (in pot-limit, up to the size of the pot).

If you silently put out several chips and removing one of the smallest would leave less than the call, it is a call. If removing it would still leave the call, the half-a-raise rule decides, and if those are your last chips you are all-in.

EXAMPLE

Blinds are 1,000–2,000 with a big blind ante of 2,000. A player raises to 5,000, a raise of 3,000. You silently put out a 5,000 chip and two 1,000 chips. Removing a 1,000 still leaves 6,000, enough to call 5,000, so the half-a-raise rule applies: the threshold is 6,500 (the 5,000 call plus half the 3,000 raise), and your 7,000 passes it, so you must raise to 8,000. Had you put out only the 5,000 chip, you would simply have called.

12.28 Short all-ins and reopening the betting

In big-bet games (no-limit and pot-limit), an all-in for less than a full raise does not reopen the betting for players who have already acted, unless they face at least a full raise in total when the action returns. Several short all-ins can add up to a full raise; the minimum raise is still the last full bet or raise. In limit, an all-in of at least half a bet or raise reopens the betting, and the cap on raises applies even heads-up until only two players remain in the event.

EXAMPLE

Blinds are 1,000–2,000. Alice raises to 5,000, a raise of 3,000. Bilal goes all-in for 7,000 (2,000 more), and Chloe all-in for 8,500 (1,500 more). Alice now faces 3,500 extra, at least a full raise, so she may re-raise, to a minimum of 11,500. Without Chloe’s all-in, Alice could only call or fold.

12.29 Pot counts and unclear bet amounts

The dealer counts the pot only in pot-limit, and only on request. Before the flop, pot-sized bets assume full blinds even if a blind is dead or short. A pot-limit bet that is too large is reduced at any time in that round. One that is too small because the player was given a low pot count is corrected only until substantial action follows it. In no-limit, “I bet the pot” commits you to at least a minimum bet.

If a stated amount could mean more than one bet, it is ruled the highest reasonable amount that does not exceed the pot, including bets not yet pulled in.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Blinds are 300–600. A player says “seven”. If the pot is 6,500, the bet is 700, because 7,000 would exceed the pot. If the pot is 7,200, the bet is 7,000.

12.30 Invalid declarations and non-standard actions

Saying “call” with no bet to you is a check; “raise” with no bet commits you to at least a minimum bet; “check” when facing a bet lets you call or fold, not raise. Folding when you face no bet, or out of turn, is binding and may be penalised. Conditional statements such as “if you bet, I’ll raise” are discouraged and may be binding.

12.31 Acting out of turn

Action out of turn is backed up to the correct player and may be penalised. If the action reaching the player who acted out of turn has not changed (players before them only checked, called or folded), their action is binding. If it has changed, their chips are returned and they have every option. A fold out of turn is always binding. Heads-up, if you check or call out of turn, you may not bet or raise when the action reaches you.

A player skipped by action out of turn must speak up. If they stay silent until substantial action has taken place after them, the action out of turn stands and the floor decides what happens to their hand.

> **EXAMPLE**
> After the flop the action is on seat 2 when seat 5 bets 6,000. Action goes back to seat 2. If seats 2, 3 and 4 all check, seat 5’s bet stands. If seat 3 bets 4,000, the action has changed: seat 5 takes back the 6,000 and may fold, call or raise.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Heads-up on the turn, Nadia is first to act, but Ollie says “check”. Nadia then bets 10,000. Ollie checked out of turn, so he may call or fold but may not raise.

12.32 All-in means all your chips

To go all-in you must put in all of your chips, never part of them. There are no partial all-ins, and you may not hide a chip behind. When the dealer places the all-in button in front of you, any chips you have pushed partly forward are moved back to your stack, so that the button clearly marks the whole stack as in. If the dealer places the button and you are not all-in, you must say so.

You do not have to bet your last chip. Keeping one chip behind is a legitimate choice and the house should not force it into the pot, but it must stay in plain view.

If hidden chips are found after an all-in is called, the floor decides whether they were part of the action. If not, the all-in player cannot win them but is not saved by them, and the floor may award them to the winner.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Blinds are 2,000–4,000. Petra has 41,000 and bets 40,000, leaving one 1,000 chip in clear view. That is a bet of 40,000, not an all-in, and the dealer does not push the last chip in for her. If the dealer had placed the all-in button in front of her, Petra would have to point out that she still had a chip.

12.33 Dealer announcements of bets

The dealer should announce the size of each bet and raise as the action goes round. An all-in is counted only when the player facing it asks. Only the player facing the action may ask the dealer to bring bets into the pot.

12.34 Stack counts and accepted action

Everyone is entitled to a reasonable estimate of an opponent's stack. You may ask for an exact count only when it is your turn and you face an all-in; the dealer or floor counts it. It is your job to know the bet before you call. If you are given a wrong figure and then call, you have accepted the true amount.

> **EXAMPLE**
> You ask how much a player has moved all-in for. The dealer says 18,000 and you call, but the true amount is 23,500. You have called 23,500.

12.35 Calling the clock in tournaments

If a player has had a reasonable time to act, the floor may put them on the clock, on its own initiative or when a seated player asks. The player then has 25 seconds plus a five-second countdown. If time runs out, a player facing a bet has a dead hand; otherwise the hand is checked. If the player acts just as time runs out, the action stands.

> **EXAMPLE**
> A player facing an all-in has been thinking for several minutes and an opponent asks for the clock. The player has not acted when the countdown ends, so the hand is dead.

Showdown

12.36 Cards speak and tabling your hand

The cards decide the winner, not what players say, though deliberately miscalling your hand may be penalised. Anyone at the table should speak up about a misread hand or a wrongly awarded pot.

To table your hand, turn all your cards face up so the dealer and players can read them: both hole cards in Texas Hold'em, all four in Omaha, all seven in Seven-Card Stud. To play the board you must still table all your hole cards. If you show only part of your hand and then muck, you lose any claim if the cards cannot be identified with certainty. A properly tabled hand that is plainly the winner cannot be killed by the dealer. If you table one card that would win, the dealer should ask you to show the rest and call the floor if you refuse.

12.37 Hands face up when a player is all-in

As soon as one player is all-in and nobody else in the hand can bet any further, every player in the hand turns their cards face up before any more cards are dealt. Nobody may muck without tabling, and all hands are live. The exception is hand-for-hand play, when cards stay face down until the floor says otherwise.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Jo is all-in for 15,000 before the flop and Kai and Lena both call. They still have chips, so the cards stay down. On the flop Kai bets 20,000, Lena moves all-in and Kai calls. No more betting is possible, so all three hands are turned up before the turn and river are dealt.

12.38 The order of showing in tournaments

If no one is all-in and nobody shows voluntarily, the floor may set the order. The last player to bet or raise on the final round shows first. If there was no bet on the final round, the first player who would have acted shows first: the first to the left of the button in flop games, the highest hand showing in stud, the lowest in Razz. If everyone but one player mucks without tabling, the last player wins without having to show.

12.39 Asking to see a hand in tournaments

If there was a river bet, any caller who has tabled or kept their cards may ask to see the hand of the last player to bet or raise. All other requests are at the floor's discretion. Once you have mucked face down or no longer hold cards, you lose the right to ask. If you show your cards to one player after a hand, anyone at the table may ask to see them.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Rosa bets 20,000 on the river and Sam and Tara call. Tara mucks without showing; Sam keeps his cards. Rosa says she was bluffing and won't show. Sam may insist on seeing her hand; Tara may not.

12.40 Mucked and killed hands

Discarding face down does not by itself kill a hand. While the cards remain completely identifiable and retrievable, you may change your mind and table them. They are dead once pushed into the muck or no longer identifiable. If you bet and then discard believing you have won while another player is still in, the dealer should hold your cards and call the floor.

You must protect your hand. If the dealer kills it by mistake, or it is fouled and cannot be identified for certain, you get back only any bet or raise that has not been called. A fouled hand that can still be identified stays in play.

12.41 Side pots and odd chips

Each side pot is settled separately, the main pot last.

Odd chips are first broken down into the smallest denomination in play. In board games, an odd chip between tied hands goes to the first of them to the left of the button. In stud games, including Razz and tied hands in Stud Hi-Lo, it goes to the player with the highest card by suit in their five-card hand. In high-low games, the odd chip in an uneven split goes to the high hand.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Blinds are 1,000–2,000 with a big blind ante of 2,000. Before the flop Ali is all-in for 10,000, Bo is all-in for 30,000, and Cy calls 30,000. The blinds fold, leaving 5,000 in dead money. The main pot is 35,000 (10,000 each plus the 5,000) and the side pot 40,000 (20,000 each from Bo and Cy).

> **EXAMPLE**
> The smallest chip in play is 500 and two players split a pot of 15,500. Each receives 7,500, and the extra 500 goes to the one closest to the left of the button.

12.42 Disputes and rabbit hunting

You may challenge the reading of a hand until the next hand starts, and a miscounted pot until substantial action on the next hand (or one minute after the pot is awarded if a break follows). Rabbit hunting, showing the cards that would have come, is not allowed.

Irregularities

The procedures in *Dealing, misdeals and irregularities* apply to tournaments except where this section gives a tournament procedure.

12.43 Misdeals in tournaments

A misdeal is declared if, before substantial action:

- two or more cards are boxed (face up in the deck) on the initial deal;
- the first card goes to the wrong seat, or a seat is wrongly dealt in or out;
- anyone is dealt the wrong number of cards (the button being short is handled separately);
- a card that does not belong in the game turns up, such as a joker, or a 2 in Short Deck Hold’em;
- in a flop game, the dealer exposes either of the first two cards off the deck, or any two hole cards.

After substantial action, no misdeal is possible unless the deck is fouled, and a card that does not belong in the game is treated as a blank. The house sets its own misdeal rules for draw games.

The redeal is an exact replay: the button does not move, no new players are seated and the limits stay the same. A player dealt in originally but away from their seat receives cards in the redeal and may play them if now seated. A player on penalty is dealt in and their hand killed, and the two deals count as one hand of the penalty.

EXAMPLE

The dealer flips the second card off the deck face up in a Texas Hold'em event: a misdeal. A player who was dealt into the first deal while away, and has now returned to their seat, plays the redeal, but a player newly arrived from a broken table waits for the next hand.

12.44 Fouled decks and the short button

If two or more identical cards are found, or another fouled-deck condition set by the regulator or house arises, play stops and all bets are returned, whatever action has taken place.

If you are on the button and are dealt too few cards, say so at once. The missing card may be dealt even after substantial action if the game allows it, but if you check or bet with too few cards, your hand is dead.

12.45 No deck changes on request

Decks are changed when the dealers rotate, when the level changes, or as the house decides. In a tournament you may not ask for a new deck.

12.46 Burn cards and irregular flops

If a hand is killed after substantial action for having the wrong number of cards, all its cards go to the muck, and exactly one card is burned before each later round.

If the flop has four cards, the floor is called: the four are mixed face down, the floor picks one as the burn, and the other three are the flop. If the flop was dealt without a burn and no one has acted on it, the three cards are mixed face down, one becomes the burn, and the flop is the other two plus the next card. If anyone has acted, even with a check, the flop stands and only one card is burned for the turn.

12.47 Premature cards and reshuffling

If a board or stud card is dealt before the previous betting round is finished, the burn card stays as the burn, the premature card goes back into the stub, the stub is shuffled, and the correct card is dealt without another burn. Any reshuffle during a hand must be done face down.

EXAMPLE

On the turn, the dealer burns and turns the K♦ before the last player has acted. The burn stays. The K♦ goes back into the stub, which is shuffled face down, and when the betting ends a new turn card is dealt without a burn.

12.48 Boxed and exposed cards

A single boxed card on the initial deal is not a misdeal and is handled as in a cash game, as are other dealer-exposed cards outside the misdeal rules above. If you expose your own cards while action is pending, including when last to act, your hand stays live, but you may be penalised, with any penalty starting after the hand.

12.49 Stud procedures in tournaments

- A hole card exposed on the initial deal becomes that player's upcard, and third street is dealt face down. That player may be the bring-in.

- A card exposed by the dealer on seventh street is replaced if betting is still possible. Seventh street is dealt face down even when betting is over.
- If the bring-in is all-in for the ante, the action starts on their left, and that player must fold or put in at least the bring-in.
- If two showing hands tie for the right to act first on a later street (high hands in stud and Stud Hi-Lo, low hands in Razz), the player with the highest card by suit acts first.
- A pair showing on fourth street does not allow a double bet.
- Picking up your upcards while facing action kills your hand.
- No card is dealt on fourth street to a hand that has been killed.

> **EXAMPLE**
> In a Seven-Card Stud event, the dealer accidentally turns your first hole card, the 8♣. It becomes your door card, your third-street card is dealt face down, and if the 8♣ is the lowest card showing you post the bring-in.

12.50 Running short of cards on seventh street in stud events

Before dealing seventh street, the dealer checks whether the stub holds enough cards: one for each player still in the hand, one to burn, and the bottom card, which is never dealt. If it does not:

- if the three earlier burn cards would make up the shortfall, they are mixed with the stub, the new stack is cut, one card is burned and every player receives a card;
- if the stub still holds three or more cards but the earlier burns would not be enough, the dealer burns one card and turns the next face up in the centre as a common card for every player;
- if the stub holds fewer than three cards, it is mixed with the three earlier burns and cut, one card is burned and the next is turned up as a common card.

When a common card is used, the player who acted first on sixth street also acts first on seventh street.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Eight players start a hand in a Seven-Card Stud event, and seven of them reach seventh street. Only four cards remain in the stub, but the dealer needs nine: seven for the players, one burn and the bottom card. The three earlier burns would bring the stub to only seven, so the dealer burns one card and turns the next face up as a common card for all seven players.

Etiquette and penalties

12.51 One player to a hand and no disclosure

Every player has a duty to protect the whole field. Whether or not you are in the hand, you must not discuss live or folded cards, advise or criticise anyone's play, or read out a hand that has not been tabled. Only one player plays each hand: you may not show your cards to, or discuss strategy with, anyone else during a hand.

12.52 Table talk, abuse and hate speech

Abusive talk towards players, dealers or staff is subject to tough penalties. There is zero tolerance for hate speech: it is penalised on the first occurrence, and the floor may disqualify the player.

> **EXAMPLE**
> After losing a pot, a player aims a slur at an opponent. The dealer calls the floor at once, and no warning is given first: the floor penalises the player and may remove them from the event.

12.53 Soft play, chip dumping and collusion

Poker is an individual game. Soft play, deliberately going easy on a friend, is penalised and may cost chips or lead to disqualification. Chip dumping and any other collusion lead to disqualification. If you hold the best possible hand and check it on the river as the final player to act, that is not automatically soft play; the floor judges each case.

12.54 Electronic devices and smart glasses

You may not take calls at the table, leave devices on it, or use one while you have a live hand. Betting apps, strategy charts and outside advice are not allowed. Smart glasses, including camera glasses, are banned. Staff must keep a close watch on electronics, and the floor decides how new devices are treated.

> **EXAMPLE**
> A player sits down wearing glasses with a built-in camera. The floor tells them to remove and put away the glasses before playing.

12.55 Other etiquette breaches

Penalties may also be given for persistent stalling, touching other players' cards or chips, acting out of turn again and again, hidden chips, betting out of the dealer's reach, throwing cards and excessive chatter. Fold by pushing your cards forward low to the table.

12.56 Tournament penalties

The floor may give a verbal warning, a missed-hand or missed-round penalty, a chip penalty, or disqualification, and may escalate for repeat offences. A missed round is one hand for each player at the table when the penalty is given, including you. A chip penalty removes chips from your stack and may be used instead of making you miss hands.

On a missed-hand penalty you must stay away from the table. You are still dealt in, your blinds and antes are posted (and the bring-in, if you are due it in stud), and your cards are killed. Forfeited chips, and the chips of a disqualified player, are taken out of play.

> **EXAMPLE**
> You receive a one-round penalty with eight players at the table, including you, so you miss eight hands. For a similar offence another player is given a chip penalty instead: the floor removes 10,000 from their stack and takes it out of play, and the player stays at the table.

Prizes, ties and deals

12.57 Players eliminated on the same hand

If two or more players are eliminated on the same hand, the one who started it with more chips finishes higher. With a big blind ante, stacks are compared after the ante is posted. Players who started with exactly equal stacks share the combined prize money for their places equally.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Blinds are 1,000–2,000 with a big blind ante of 2,000. Dana, in the big blind, has 9,000 and Eli has 8,000, and both lose all-in on the same hand. After posting the ante Dana had 7,000 against Eli's 8,000, so Eli finishes higher.

12.58 Deals

The house decides whether players may agree a different split of the remaining prize money. If it allows a deal, every remaining player must agree to it, the floor must approve it and announce it, and something should be left to play for. The house is not bound to settle disputes over private agreements it has not approved.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Three players remain, with prizes of 50,000, 30,000 and 20,000. They agree to take 36,000, 31,000 and 27,000 and play on for the last 6,000 and the trophy. The floor confirms all three agree, approves the deal and announces it before the next hand.

12.59 Results and prize reporting

The house records official finishing positions and the prize paid to each player, including amounts under any approved deal, and meets any legal or regulatory duty to report prizes. You may need to provide identification before you are paid.

Live-streamed and featured tables

12.60 Streaming procedures at featured tables

Streamed and featured tables may use cameras that show hole cards, broadcast delays and release forms. If you play at one, you must follow the procedures the house sets, which may include showing your hole cards to a camera every hand; any release form should reflect them. No one may pass information from the broadcast to a player.

> **EXAMPLE**
> You are moved to the featured table and told to lift your cards so the table camera can read them before you act. You must do so on every hand, even when you plan to fold.

Mixed-game and rotation tournaments

12.61 Rules in mixed-game events

In mixed-game events such as H.O.R.S.E., the games change in a fixed rotation, and each game's own rules apply while it is played. The house should post any mixed-game procedures of its own. Stud and Stud Hi-Lo need not follow one another in the rotation. In single-draw games, players may enter the pot by just calling the big blind.

12.62 The button in rotation tournaments

When the rotation moves from a flop game to stud, the button moves after the last flop-game hand to where it would go for another flop-game hand, and stays frozen there through the stud games. When flop games return, play starts from the frozen button. During the stud games, the player moved to balance tables is the one who would be the big blind next in a flop game.

> **EXAMPLE**
> In a H.O.R.S.E. rotation, the last Omaha Hi-Lo hand is dealt with the button on seat 4. The button moves to seat 5 and stays there through Razz, Seven-Card Stud and Stud Hi-Lo. When Texas Hold'em returns, its first hand is dealt with the button on seat 5.

CHAPTER 13

Online poker

How online play differs from a live cardroom, and the rules on timing, disconnections, fair play, software and conduct that online sites expect you to follow.

The games played online are the same games described in the rest of this book. The hand rankings, the betting structures and the order of play do not change. What changes is who runs the table. Online, the software deals the cards, counts the pot, enforces the betting and decides the showdown, so many of the live problems in earlier chapters simply cannot happen.

Each site publishes its own terms and game rules, which always take priority over this chapter. What follows is the common ground across most sites.

How online play differs

13.1 Software dealing and rule enforcement

Online, the software deals every card, places the button, takes the blinds and antes, and only lets you act when it is your turn. It offers you only the actions that are legal at that moment, with the correct minimum and maximum amounts.

As a result, several live rules have no online equivalent. There are no string bets, because each bet is a single click. There is no action out of turn, because your buttons are inactive until the action reaches you. There are no misdeals, exposed cards or miscounted pots. Pre-selected actions such as “check/fold” are not actions out of turn; they are instructions to the software that take effect only when your turn comes, and only if the situation has not changed.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Blinds are 100–200. You tick “call 200” while two players act before you. One of them raises to 600. Because the amount to call has changed, the software clears your pre-selection and waits for a fresh decision from you.

13.2 Random number generator and shuffle

Online sites shuffle with a random number generator (RNG), a program that produces an unpredictable sequence used to order the deck. A fresh, complete shuffle is made for every hand. Reputable sites have their RNG and games tested by independent laboratories and are overseen by a gambling regulator.

Runs of bad luck are part of the game. A tested RNG favours no player, account or stake.

13.3 Automatic showdown

When the final betting round ends with two or more players in the hand, the software turns the cards over in the correct order and awards the pot. Cards speak: the software always reads your best hand, and you cannot misdeclare it or lose the pot by mucking a winner by mistake. Split pots, side pots and the

main pot are calculated automatically, including odd chips.

> **EXAMPLE**
> You hold 9♥ 8♥ on a board of 10♥ 7♣ 6♦ 2♥ K♠ and do not realise you have a straight. The software shows your hand and awards you the pot against your opponent's two pair, just as a careful dealer would.

Time, disconnections and sitting out

13.4 Action timer

Every decision has a time limit, shown as a countdown beside your seat. The limit varies by site and format. If the timer runs out, the software acts for you: it checks if checking is possible and folds if you face a bet. Repeatedly timing out usually sits you out of the game.

13.5 Time banks

Most sites also give you a time bank, an extra reserve of seconds that starts automatically, or at your request, once your normal time expires. Many sites top it up at set intervals, for example after a number of hands or at each new tournament level.

> **EXAMPLE**
> You have 15 seconds to act and a 30-second time bank. Facing an all-in on the river, you think for 25 seconds. The software takes 10 seconds from your time bank, leaving you with 20 for the rest of the session until it is topped up.

13.6 Disconnections

If your connection drops during a hand, you remain in the hand. Your seat is held and your timer keeps running, along with your time bank if you have one. If you reconnect in time, you act as normal. If you do not, the software acts for you in the usual way: it checks when it can and folds when you face a bet.

The game does not wait for you. In a tournament, you continue to be dealt in, and your blinds and antes are posted, until you return or are eliminated. You are responsible for your own connection, device and power supply.

> **EXAMPLE**
> In a tournament with blinds of 100–200, your router fails after you post the big blind. The player on the button raises to 500. Your time and time bank run out, so your hand is folded. Your next big blind will be posted automatically if you have not returned by then.

13.7 All-in protection

Some sites once offered all-in protection: if you disconnected while facing a bet, you were treated as all-in for the chips already in the pot, and you could still win that part of it. Some players abused this by disconnecting on purpose to see a free showdown, so most sites have withdrawn it and rely on time banks instead. Treat a disconnection as a fold unless your site clearly says otherwise.

13.8 Sitting out and missed blinds

You may sit out at any time using the sit-out option. You keep your seat, but you are not dealt in, and the blinds you would have paid are recorded as missed. Most sites remove a player who has been sitting out for a set time from a cash game, and return any chips to the player's account.

When you come back, you must make up the missed blinds, or wait for the big blind, before you are dealt in. In tournaments, sitting out does not stop your blinds and antes from being taken.

13.9 Posting to enter an online cash game

When you join a cash game, the software usually gives you two choices: wait until the big blind reaches you, or post an amount equal to the big blind and be dealt in straight away. Some sites deal you in without posting if you take a seat in the right position. A posted big blind is a live blind: it counts towards your call, and you have the option to raise if no one else has.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Blinds are 100–200. You sit down three seats before the big blind and choose "post now". You put 200 in the pot and are dealt in. Two players call and no one raises before the action reaches you, so you may check rather than put in more.

Showing, mucking and table features

13.10 Auto-muck and showing your cards

Most sites give you an auto-muck setting. When it is on, the software folds losing hands at the showdown without showing them, and does not show a winning hand that no one called. You can usually switch it off to show losing hands, and choose to show your cards after everyone else has folded.

Whatever your settings, the last player who bet or raised on the final round shows first, and a called hand that wins the pot is always shown. Folded hands are never shown to other players. On most sites, any hand shown at the showdown is recorded in the hand histories of everyone at the table.

13.11 Running it twice online

Some sites offer to run the remaining cards more than once when players are all-in before the river. Each player usually turns the option on in their settings, and it only happens if every player who is all-in agrees. The pot is divided equally between the runs, and each run is dealt with fresh cards from the same deck. Where the option is offered, sites generally take the rake only once. Some sites allow up to three runs.

> **EXAMPLE**
> You and one opponent are all-in for a pot of 10,000 after the flop. You both have "run it twice" switched on. The software deals two separate turns and rivers. You win the first run and your opponent wins the second, so each of you receives 5,000.

13.12 Fast-fold formats

Fast-fold games pool players from many tables. As soon as you fold, you are moved to a new table with new opponents and a new hand. Many sites let you fold before your turn with a fast-fold button. You do not wait for the big blind or post to enter, and sitting out simply removes you from the pool.

13.13 Anonymous tables

Some sites offer anonymous tables, where players appear under temporary labels instead of screen names. You cannot follow a player, take notes on them or match them to past hand histories, which protects less experienced players. The site still knows who everyone is, and its fair-play checks apply in full.

Fair play and integrity

13.14 One account per person

You may hold only one account on a site, in your own name, with your own verified details. You must not let anyone else use your account, play on another person's account, or buy, sell or share an account. Using a second account to re-enter a tournament or to sit at the same table as yourself is cheating. Accounts found in breach are usually closed, and their funds may be withheld.

13.15 Collusion

Collusion is any agreement between two or more players to work together against others at the table. Examples include sharing hole cards by phone or messaging, raising together to trap a third player, or soft play towards a friend (deliberately not betting against them). Collusion is cheating and is always prohibited. Players found colluding are banned, and their winnings are usually removed and returned to the players they cheated.

13.16 Chip dumping

Chip dumping means deliberately losing chips to another player, for example to move money between accounts or to build up a friend's stack in a tournament. It is a form of collusion and is treated the same way.

> **EXAMPLE**
> In a tournament, one player repeatedly calls large all-ins from a friend with very weak hands and then folds strong hands to the same friend's bets. The site's security team reviews the pattern, closes both accounts and removes their prize money.

13.17 Ghosting

Ghosting is when someone else plays your account or advises you in real time, often a stronger player taking over in the late stages of a tournament. It breaks the one-account rule even if no money changes hands, and sites treat it as cheating. You must make every decision on your account yourself.

13.18 Bots and real-time assistance

You must not use a bot, meaning any program that makes playing decisions or takes actions for you. You must also not use real-time assistance (RTA): any software, chart, person or service that tells you what to do in a hand while you are playing it. Solvers and similar tools are fine for studying away from the table, but not during play. Accounts found using bots or RTA are closed and their balances are often confiscated.

13.19 Permitted tools

What is permitted varies from site to site. Most sites publish a list of permitted and prohibited tools, and some divide tools into those allowed at all times, those allowed only when the poker software is closed, and those never allowed. Before you use any third-party program while playing, you must check your site's current list. If a tool is not on the permitted list, assume it is prohibited.

13.20 HUDs and tracking software

A heads-up display (HUD) shows statistics about your opponents on the table screen, built from hand histories collected by tracking software. Some sites allow approved HUDs, some restrict which statistics they may show, and others ban HUDs entirely and offer their own built-in statistics instead. Buying or sharing hand histories you did not play is prohibited almost everywhere. Check the site's rules before installing any tracking software.

Chat, records and player protection

13.21 Chat rules and penalties

Table chat is for friendly conversation. You must not abuse, threaten or harass other players, use hate speech, or discuss a hand in progress in a way that could help or hinder someone. The conduct standards in *Conduct and etiquette* apply online as they do live.

Sites enforce chat rules with warnings, chat bans and, for serious breaches, account suspension. You can usually mute a player or turn chat off.

13.22 Hand histories and disputes

The site keeps a complete record of every hand: the cards, every action and the timings. You can usually request or download your own hand histories. If you dispute a result, contact the site's support team, quoting the hand number. The site's records decide the matter. Your recollection, a screenshot or another player's account cannot override them.

> **EXAMPLE**
> You believe you clicked "call" but the software folded your hand. Support checks the hand record, which shows your time ran out before any action was received. The fold stands.

13.23 Responsible gambling tools

Licensed sites provide tools to help you keep your play under control. They usually include:

- deposit, loss and buy-in limits, set for a day, a week or a month;

- session reminders and time limits;
- time-outs, which lock your account for a short period such as a day or a few weeks;
- self-exclusion, which closes your account for a long period, often six months or more, and cannot be undone early.

Lowering a limit takes effect at once; raising one usually involves a waiting period. If poker stops being fun, use these tools early.

CHAPTER 14

Optional house rules

Popular variations a house may add to its games, from straddles and kill pots to bomb pots, shot clocks and jackpots, and how each one works.

Many houses offer optional extras that change the stakes, the pace or the payouts of standard play. None applies by default. The house must announce or post which options are in force, with any limits, before play begins, and must not change them in the middle of a hand. If an option has not been announced, assume it is not in use.

Straddles

14.1 The live straddle

A straddle is an optional blind bet, usually twice the big blind, placed before the cards are dealt. Other players must call the straddle to play, and a raise must increase the bet by at least the size of the straddle.

The player who straddles acts last in the first betting round. If no one raises, the straddler may check or raise. A straddle is a live blind, so it counts towards any call or raise the straddler makes later in that round. Straddles are mostly used in no-limit and pot-limit cash games and are rarely allowed in tournaments.

14.2 Under-the-gun straddle

The most common straddle is posted by the player immediately to the left of the big blind (the player “under the gun”). The player to the straddler’s left acts first before the flop, and action continues round the table to the straddler, who acts last.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Blinds are 100–200. The player under the gun puts out a straddle of 400. The player to their left acts first and may fold, call 400 or raise to at least 800. Everyone folds round to the big blind, who calls by adding 200. The straddler may now check or raise.

14.3 Button straddle and Mississippi straddle

Some houses allow a straddle from the button, and some allow it from any seat (often called the Mississippi straddle). In most houses that allow a button straddle, the small blind acts first, then the big blind, then the rest of the table, ending with the button. Some houses instead start with the player under the gun and skip over the button, coming back to it after the blinds have acted. The house must state which order it uses.

EXAMPLE

Blinds are 100–200 and the button straddles for 400. In a house where the small blind acts first, the small blind folds, the big blind calls 400 by adding 200, and the action then moves round the rest of the table. When it reaches the button, the button may check or raise.

14.4 Sleeper straddle

A sleeper straddle is posted by a player who is not first to act, for example a player two seats to the left of the big blind. It is only live if every player before it folds or simply calls the big blind. If someone raises first, the house's rules decide how the sleeper straddle is treated. Many houses do not allow sleeper straddles because they cause confusion.

14.5 Re-straddles and straddle limits

The house decides how many straddles are allowed in one hand. Some allow only one, while others allow re-straddles, each one double the last, up to a set maximum. Every straddle must be posted before the cards are dealt, clearly in front of the player.

EXAMPLE

A house allows up to two straddles. Blinds are 100–200. The player under the gun straddles to 400, and the next player re-straddles to 800. No further straddle is permitted, and the player after the re-straddler acts first.

Kill pots

14.6 Full kill and half kill

A kill pot is a hand played at higher stakes because one player has posted an extra blind, the kill blind. In a full kill, the kill blind is twice the big blind and the betting limits double for that hand. In a half kill, the kill blind is one-and-a-half times the big blind and the limits rise by half. Kill pots are almost always used in limit games, especially lowball and high-low games.

The player who posts the kill blind normally acts in turn, though some houses let a voluntary killer act last in the first round. Only one kill is allowed per hand.

EXAMPLE

In a limit game of 200–400 with blinds of 100–200, a full kill blind is 400 and the hand is played at 400–800. A half kill blind is 300 and the hand is played at 300–600.

14.7 Required kills and the kill button

In a required-kill game, the winner of each pot takes a marker called the kill button. A player who wins a pot while holding the kill button must kill the next hand. To count, the second pot usually has to reach a minimum size set by the house, so that a pot made only of the blinds does not trigger a kill.

A required kill must be posted on the next hand, even if the player wants to leave or sit out. A player who keeps winning while killing must kill again.

EXAMPLE

In a 200–400 game, you win a pot and take the kill button. You win the next pot too, and it is well above the house minimum. On the following hand you must post a kill blind of 400 and the game is played at 400–800.

14.8 Kills in high-low games

In split-pot games such as Omaha Hi-Lo and Stud Hi-Lo, many houses trigger a kill only when one player wins the whole pot (scoops) and the pot is larger than a set size, often a multiple of the upper limit. A player who wins only half the pot does not have to kill.

Running out the board

14.9 Running it twice or more

When players are all-in and no further betting is possible, the house may let them deal the remaining cards more than once. Everyone involved must agree before any further cards are dealt. The dealer deals each run in turn from the same deck without reshuffling, burning a card before each street. The pot is split into equal parts, and each part goes to the winner of its run. An odd chip goes to the winner of the first run unless the house says otherwise. The house takes its rake only once. Running it twice is not used in tournaments.

EXAMPLE

Blinds are 100–200. You and one opponent are all-in before the flop for a pot of 20,000. You agree to run it twice. You win the first board and your opponent wins the second, so you each receive 10,000.

14.10 Rabbit hunting

Rabbit hunting means turning over the cards that would have come if a hand had not ended early. It slows the game, so many houses forbid it, and it is not allowed in tournaments. Where the house permits it, the dealer may show the cards only after the pot has been awarded.

14.11 Insurance

Insurance is a side bet in which a player who is all-in and ahead pays a premium to protect against losing the hand. It is rare, and offered only by the house, on posted terms, where the law allows. Players must not arrange insurance or other side bets with each other at the table.

Special games and formats

14.12 Bomb pots

In a bomb pot, every player at the table puts an agreed amount into the pot, often one or two big blinds, and the flop is dealt with no betting before it. After the flop, the player nearest the button’s left who is still in the hand acts first. Many houses deal two boards in a bomb pot and split the pot between the best hand on each board.

The house sets how often bomb pots happen (for example, once an orbit or by table vote), the amount each player posts, and whether a player may sit out of one.

> **EXAMPLE**
> In a game with blinds of 100–200, the table plays a bomb pot of 400 each. Eight players post 400, making a pot of 3,200. The dealer deals the flop straight away, and the first player to the left of the button acts first.

14.13 The 7-2 game

In the 7-2 game, a player who wins a pot holding 7 and 2 (the weakest starting hand in Texas Hold'em) collects a bonus from each other player dealt in. The house sets the bonus amount and whether the hand must be shown to collect it. The whole table and the house must agree to play it.

14.14 Bounties in cash games

Some houses add cash-game bounties, such as a set payment to anyone who wins a pot against a named player. The house posts the amount and who pays it.

14.15 Dealer's choice

In dealer's choice, the player on the button chooses the game to be played for one hand or one full orbit. The house must post the list of games allowed and the betting structure for each. If a stud game is chosen, the button is handled as in a mixed-game rotation.

14.16 Mixed-game rotations

A mixed game rotates through several games in a fixed order. The best known is H.O.R.S.E.: Texas Hold'em, Omaha Hi-Lo, Razz, Seven-Card Stud and Stud Hi-Lo. An 8-Game mix usually adds 2-7 Triple Draw, no-limit Texas Hold'em and pot-limit Omaha to those five. The game changes after a set number of hands, a full orbit or a set time, as the house decides.

When the rotation moves from a button game to a stud game, the button is moved to where it would have been for the next hand, and stays there throughout the stud games. When button games resume, the button starts from that position. The house must post the stakes for every game: limit games use a small bet and a big bet, while no-limit and pot-limit games use blinds of a stated size.

> **EXAMPLE**
> A mixed game is played at 400–800 limit. The house posts that the no-limit and pot-limit rounds use blinds of 200–400, and that stud rounds use antes of 75 and a bring-in of 100. The last Texas Hold'em hand ends with the button on seat 4, so the button is placed on seat 5 and stays there through the stud rounds.

14.17 Cap games

A cap game is a no-limit or pot-limit cash game with a maximum amount that a player can put into the pot in one hand, for example 30 big blinds. A player who reaches the cap is treated as all-in but keeps the rest of their chips.

EXAMPLE

In a cap game with blinds of 100–200 and a cap of 6,000, you hold 15,000. After you have put 6,000 into the pot, you are all-in for the rest of the hand. Your other 9,000 stays in front of you.

Clocks and showdown policies

14.18 Shot clocks in live cash games

A shot clock limits each decision to a set time, typically 30 seconds, run by the dealer or a table device. If your time runs out, your hand is dead if you face a bet, and you are treated as having checked if you do not.

14.19 Time banks in live cash games

Houses with a shot clock usually give each player a small number of time-extension cards or buttons. Each one adds a fixed amount of time, often 30 or 60 seconds. You must use one before your time runs out. The house decides how many you get and when they are replaced.

EXAMPLE

The shot clock is 30 seconds. Facing a big river bet, you use one extension card before the clock runs out, giving you another 60 seconds. You call with 20 seconds left.

14.20 Must-show-to-win policies

At every showdown, a hand must have all its cards turned face up to win any part of the pot (see *The showdown*). Some houses extend this. They may require a hand to be shown before any promotion is paid, such as a bonus, a bounty or a 7-2 payment, even when everyone else has folded and there was no showdown. The house must post any such requirement, and a player who refuses to show cannot collect.

Jackpots and promotions

14.21 High-hand jackpots

A high-hand jackpot pays a prize for the best hand in a set period, or for any hand above a set strength such as four of a kind. The house must post the qualifying rules. These commonly include:

- in Texas Hold’em, both of the player’s hole cards must play;
- in Omaha, the normal rule of two cards from the hand and three from the board applies;
- a minimum number of players must be dealt in, and the pot may have to reach a minimum size;
- the hand must be shown and confirmed by the dealer or the floor before any cards are mucked.

14.22 Bad-beat jackpots

A bad-beat jackpot pays out when a very strong hand loses at the showdown, for example four of a kind or a high full house beaten by a better hand. The posted rules commonly require both hole cards to play in both hands, both hands to be shown at the showdown, and a minimum number of players dealt in.

The jackpot is usually shared between the player with the losing hand, the winner of the hand, and the other players dealt in.

An irregularity such as a misdeal or a fouled deck may disqualify the hand. The house's posted rules decide every claim.

EXAMPLE

The house posts a bad-beat qualifier of four of a kind. You hold 9♠ 9♦ on a board of 9♥ 9♣ 8♥ 7♥ K♠. Your opponent holds 6♥ 5♥ for a straight flush. Both hole cards play in both hands, eight players were dealt in, and the hands are shown, so the jackpot is paid according to the house's posted split.

CHAPTER 15

Hand rankings

The ranking of high hands, how ties are broken, how low hands are read in A-5, 8-or-better, 2-7 and Badugi, and how Short Deck Hold'em changes the order.

Every poker hand is made of five cards, except in Badugi, where hands have up to four. This chapter sets out how hands rank in high games, in the different kinds of low game, and in Short Deck Hold'em. It ends with worked examples of close comparisons.

High hands

15.1 The ranking of high hands

In high games, the best hand wins. From best to worst, the hands rank as follows.

Hand	Example	Description
Royal flush	A♥ K♥ Q♥ J♥ 10♥	The ace-high straight flush
Straight flush	9♣ 8♣ 7♣ 6♣ 5♣	Five cards in sequence, all of one suit
Four of a kind	Q♠ Q♥ Q♦ Q♣ 7♠	Four cards of one rank, plus any fifth card
Full house	8♠ 8♦ 8♣ 3♥ 3♠	Three cards of one rank and a pair of another
Flush	A♦ J♦ 9♦ 6♦ 2♦	Five cards of one suit, not in sequence
Straight	10♠ 9♥ 8♦ 7♣ 6♠	Five cards in sequence, of mixed suits
Three of a kind	5♥ 5♣ 5♦ K♠ 9♣	Three cards of one rank and two unmatched cards
Two pair	J♣ J♦ 4♠ 4♥ A♣	Two pairs and one unmatched card
One pair	10♥ 10♣ K♦ 6♠ 3♣	One pair and three unmatched cards
High card	A♠ Q♦ 8♣ 6♥ 2♠	None of the above

EXAMPLE

A♦ J♦ 9♦ 6♦ 2♦ beats 10♠ 9♥ 8♦ 7♣ 6♠, because any flush beats any straight. Within a category, the rules in the next section decide.

15.2 Breaking ties between high hands

When two hands are in the same category, they are compared in this order:

- **Straights and straight flushes:** the highest card of the sequence.
- **Four of a kind:** the rank of the four, then the fifth card.
- **Full houses:** the rank of the three, then the rank of the pair.
- **Flushes and high-card hands:** the highest card, then the next highest, and so on through all five.

- **Three of a kind:** the rank of the three, then the two other cards, highest first.
- **Two pair:** the higher pair, then the lower pair, then the fifth card.
- **One pair:** the rank of the pair, then the three other cards, highest first.

The unmatched cards used to break a tie are called kickers. Only five cards ever count. If two hands are still equal after all five cards have been compared, they tie and split the pot.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Q♠ Q♣ 9♦ 7♥ 4♠ beats Q♥ Q♦ 9♣ 7♠ 3♦. The pairs match, and so do the first two kickers. The last kicker is a four against a three.

15.3 Suits and tied hands

In standard poker all suits are equal, and a suit never decides who wins a pot. Two identical hands in different suits split the pot.

Suits are used only to settle questions other than who wins, such as drawing for the button, the bring-in in stud games and some odd-chip awards (see *Stud games*). For those purposes they rank, from lowest to highest: clubs, diamonds, hearts, spades.

> **EXAMPLE**
> One player holds K♠ J♠ 8♠ 5♠ 3♠ and another holds K♥ J♥ 8♥ 5♥ 3♥. The flushes are identical apart from suit, so they split the pot.

15.4 The ace in a straight

The ace may play high, in A-K-Q-J-10, or low, in 5-4-3-2-A. The low straight is called a wheel and counts as five-high, so it is the lowest straight. The ace cannot sit in the middle of a straight: Q-K-A-2-3 is not a straight.

Low hands

15.5 A-5 low hands

In A-5 low (used in A-5 Lowball, Razz and the low half of hi-lo games), the ace is always the lowest card, and straights and flushes are ignored. The best hand is 5-4-3-2-A.

Compare two lows by their highest card first. The lower card wins. If those are equal, compare the next card down, and so on. Any hand without a pair beats any hand with a pair.

> **EXAMPLE**
> These lows are listed best first: 5-4-3-2-A, 6-4-3-2-A, 6-5-4-2-A, 7-4-3-2-A, 7-6-5-4-3, 8-4-3-2-A, 8-7-6-5-4. The 7-6-5-4-3 is a straight in high poker, but in A-5 low it is simply a 7-6 low.

15.6 The 8-or-better low qualifier

In Omaha Hi-Lo, Big O and Stud Hi-Lo, a hand can win the low half only if it qualifies: five cards of different ranks, each an eight or lower. The worst qualifying low is 8-7-6-5-4. A hand with a nine or a pair in its best five low cards does not qualify. If nobody qualifies, the high hand takes the whole pot.

> **EXAMPLE**
> 8♣ 6♦ 4♠ 3♥ 2♣ beats 8♥ 6♠ 5♣ 3♦ 2♦. Both start 8-6, but the next cards are 4 and 5. Both beat 9♠ 4♦ 3♣ 2♥ A♦, which does not qualify at all.

15.7 2-7 low hands

In 2-7 low, used in 2-7 Single Draw and 2-7 Triple Draw, the hands rank as in high poker, turned upside down. The ace is always high, and straights and flushes count against you. The top hand is 7-5-4-3-2 in at least two suits. The ace-low wheel does not exist: A-5-4-3-2 is just an ace-high hand.

Any hand with no pair, straight or flush beats any hand that has one. Between paired hands, the lower pair is better, and a pair of aces is the worst pair.

> **EXAMPLE**
> These are the six best 2-7 hands, best first: 7-5-4-3-2, 7-6-4-3-2, 7-6-5-3-2, 7-6-5-4-2, 8-5-4-3-2, 8-6-4-3-2. The hand 7♣ 6♦ 5♥ 4♠ 3♣ is not on the list: it is a straight, and loses to any pair.

15.8 Badugi hand rankings

A Badugi hand has up to four cards and is played for low, with the ace low and straights ignored. Only cards of different ranks and different suits play. A four-card hand, called a badugi, beats any three-card hand, and so on down. Hands of the same size are compared from the highest card down. The best hand is 4-3-2-A in four suits.

> **EXAMPLE**
> J♠ 10♥ 9♦ 8♣ is a badugi and beats A♠ 2♥ 3♦ K♦, which is only a three-card 3-2-A because two cards are diamonds. Between two three-card hands, 6♣ 4♦ 2♠ beats 7♥ 3♣ A♦, because six is lower than seven.

Short Deck Hold'em

15.9 Short Deck Hold'em hand rankings

Short Deck Hold'em uses a 36-card deck with no twos, threes, fours or fives. Three changes follow.

- **A flush beats a full house.** Flushes are harder to make with only nine cards in each suit.
- **Three of a kind usually beats a straight.** That is the most common version, but some games keep the standard order, with the straight on top. The house must announce which it uses.
- **The low straight is A-6-7-8-9.** The ace plays low in place of the missing five.

Everything else, including how ties are broken, is unchanged.

EXAMPLE

In the most common version, Short Deck Hold'em hands rank: royal flush, straight flush, four of a kind, flush, full house, three of a kind, straight, two pair, one pair, high card. A♣ 6♦ 7♠ 8♥ 9♣ is the lowest straight.

Comparing close hands

15.10 The five-card limit and unused cards

In games where you choose from more than five cards, your hand is the best five. A sixth or seventh card never breaks a tie, even if it is higher than your kicker.

EXAMPLE

In Texas Hold'em, the board is A♣ A♦ Q♥ Q♠ J♣. Player A holds K♦ 2♣ and player B holds J♥ 10♠. Player B has a third pair, jacks, but only two pairs count. Player A's hand is A A Q Q K and player B's is A A Q Q J, so player A wins with the king.

EXAMPLE

The board is 9♠ 9♦ 6♣ 6♥ K♠. Player A holds A♥ 2♦ and player B holds A♠ Q♣. Both make nines and sixes with an ace. Player B's queen would be the sixth card, so it does not count, and the pot is split.

15.11 Comparing two pair and full houses

With two pair, the higher pair counts first, however strong the lower pair. With full houses, the three of a kind counts first.

EXAMPLE

K♠ K♦ 9♣ 9♥ 3♠ beats K♥ K♣ 4♦ 4♠ Q♥. The kings tie, and nines beat fours. 8♠ 8♦ 8♥ 2♣ 2♦ beats 7♣ 7♦ 7♠ A♥ A♦, because eights beat sevens.

15.12 Comparing flushes

Flushes are compared card by card from the top, not by the suit or by the lowest card.

EXAMPLE

A♥ J♥ 9♥ 6♥ 3♥ beats A♣ J♣ 8♣ 7♣ 6♣. The first two cards match, and the third is a nine against an eight.

15.13 Comparing straights

Straights are compared by their highest card only. A wheel is five-high and loses to every other straight.

EXAMPLE

6♦ 5♠ 4♣ 3♥ 2♦ beats 5♣ 4♥ 3♦ 2♠ A♥, because six-high beats five-high, even though the second hand contains an ace.

CHAPTER 16

Glossary

Plain-English definitions of the poker terms used throughout these rules, from action to wheel.

This glossary explains the terms used in these rules and the everyday vocabulary you will hear at the table. Where a term has a fuller rule elsewhere, the relevant chapter is named.

A

Action

Your turn to act, or any check, bet, call, raise or fold made in a hand. “The action is on you” means it is your turn.

Add-on

An optional purchase of extra chips offered in some tournaments, usually once, at the end of the rebuy period.

All-in

Having put all your remaining chips into the pot. An all-in player stays in the hand to the showdown but can win only as much from each opponent as they put in themselves.

Angle shooting

Using deceptive behaviour that may not break a written rule, such as a misleading gesture or remark, to gain an unfair edge. The floor may penalise it.

Ante

A small forced bet put into the pot before the deal, either by every player or, under a big blind ante, by one player for the whole table.

B

Bad beat

Losing a hand in which you were a strong favourite, usually because an opponent’s weaker hand improved on a later card.

Bad-beat jackpot

A prize the house pays when a hand of at least a posted strength loses at the showdown (see *Optional house rules*).

Badugi

A four-card draw game played for low, and the name of its best type of hand: four cards of different ranks and four different suits (see *Draw and lowball games*).

Bet

To put chips into the pot when no one else has done so in that betting round, or the chips put in.

Betting round

One full cycle of action in which each active player may check, bet, call, raise or fold. It ends when every remaining player has either put in the same amount or is all-in, or when only one player is left.

Big bet

In limit games, the larger of the two fixed bet sizes, used in the later betting rounds. “Big-bet games” is also a common name for no-limit and pot-limit games.

Big blind

The larger of the two blinds, posted by the player two seats to the left of the button in most games. It usually sets the minimum bet.

Big blind ante

A single ante for the whole table, paid by the player in the big blind, in place of an ante from every player. It is mostly used in tournaments.

Blind

A forced bet posted before the cards are dealt by one or more players to the left of the button. A blind counts towards the poster’s bet unless the rules make it dead.

Bluff

A bet or raise made with a weak hand in the hope that better hands will fold.

Board

The community cards dealt face up in the centre of the table. In stud games, a player’s board is their upcards.

Bomb pot

A hand in which every player posts an agreed amount and the flop is dealt with no betting before it (see *Optional house rules*).

Bounty

A prize for knocking a particular player out of a tournament, or a set payment offered as a promotion in a cash game.

Boxed card

A card found face up in the deck while dealing. It is normally treated as though it were not there and replaced.

Bring-in

In stud games, the forced bet on the first betting round, made by the player with the lowest upcard (the highest in Razz).

Burn card

The card dealt face down out of play before each round of cards, so that no one can benefit from having glimpsed the top of the deck.

Button

The marker showing the dealer position. The button player receives the last card in each round of the deal and acts last in every betting round after the first in flop and draw games.

Buy-in

The amount needed to enter a tournament or join a cash game, including the minimum amount you must bring to a table.

C

Call

To match the current bet or raise.

Cap

The maximum number of raises allowed in one betting round in a limit game. Once it is reached, the round is "capped" and players may only call or fold.

Cards speak

The rule that a hand is valued by the cards it contains, not by what the player says it is.

Cash game

A game played for chips that represent money, where players may join and leave at any time and buy more chips between hands. Compare tournament.

Check

To decline to bet while keeping your cards, possible only when no one has bet in the current round.

Check-raise

To check and then raise after an opponent bets in the same betting round. It is allowed unless the house, or the rules of a particular game such as limit A-5 Lowball, say otherwise.

Chip dumping

Deliberately losing chips to another player to help them. It is a form of collusion.

Chip race

The tournament procedure for removing small chips when they are no longer needed. Odd chips are exchanged for larger ones by dealing cards to the players who hold them.

Chips in play

The chips a player has on the table, which must remain visible and are the only chips that player may bet in a hand.

Chop

To split a pot between players. In cash games, it also means the blinds agreeing to take back their blinds when everyone else folds.

Clock

A time limit placed on a player who is taking too long to act. Any player may ask the floor to put a player "on the clock".

Collusion

Two or more players secretly working together against the others at the table. It is cheating.

Colour-up

Exchanging chips of a lower value for chips of a higher value, either at a player's request or, in a tournament, when the house removes a small denomination from play.

Community cards

Cards dealt face up in the centre of the table that every player may use, as in Texas Hold'em and Omaha.

Completion

In limit games, bringing an incomplete bet up to the full amount, such as raising the bring-in to a full small bet in stud. A completion does not count as a raise.

Counterfeit

In hi-lo games, a board card that pairs one of the low cards your hand relies on, weakening or ruining your low (see *Hold'em and Omaha games*).

Cut

Dividing the shuffled deck in two and placing the bottom part on top before dealing.

Cut card

A plain plastic card placed under the deck to stop anyone seeing the bottom card.

D

Dead button

A button placed in front of an empty seat when the rotation requires it, so that every player pays each blind once per round, even if the same player ends up acting last on two hands in a row (see *Blinds, antes and the button*).

Dead hand

A hand that can no longer win any part of the pot, for example because it has the wrong number of cards or has touched the muck.

Dead money

Chips in the pot that belong to no player still in the hand, or a blind that does not count towards the poster's bet.

Dealer's choice

A format in which the player on the button chooses which game is played for a hand or an orbit.

Deck

The pack of cards in use, normally 52 cards without jokers. Short Deck Hold'em uses 36.

Door card

In stud games, a player's first upcard.

Downcard

Another name for a hole card: a card dealt face down to a player.

Draw

In draw games, exchanging some of your cards for new ones. A hand that needs further cards to become strong is also called a draw.

Drop

Money the house takes from a game to pay for running it, either from each pot or from players at set times.

E

Exposed card

A card that has been seen by other players when it should have stayed hidden, because of a dealing or player error.

F

Fast-fold

An online format for cash games in which a player who folds moves straight to a new table and a new hand.

Fifth street

In stud games, the fifth card dealt to each player and the betting round that follows. In flop games, another name for the river.

Floor

The floorperson or tournament director who supervises the games and makes rulings.

Flop

The first three community cards, dealt face up together, and the betting round that follows.

Fold

To give up your hand and any claim to the pot.

Forced bet

Any bet the rules require before or at the start of a hand, such as a blind, an ante or a bring-in.

Fouled deck

A deck that cannot produce a fair hand, for example because it contains two identical cards or a card with a different back. Play stops and all bets are returned (see *Dealing, misdeals and irregularities*).

Fourth street

In stud games, the fourth card dealt to each player and the betting round that follows. In flop games, another name for the turn.

Freeroll

A tournament with no entry fee. Also a situation where you are sure of at least a share of the pot and may win all of it.

Full house

A hand made of three cards of one rank and two of another, such as K♠ K♥ K♦ 4♣ 4♥.

G

Ghosting

Letting someone else make decisions for you, or advise you in real time, during an online game. It is cheating.

Gutshot

A straight draw that needs one specific rank in the middle, such as holding 9 8 6 5 and needing a 7.

H

Half kill

A kill pot played with a kill blind of one and a half big blinds, which raises the limits by half.

Hand

The cards a player holds, or a single deal from the shuffle to the award of the pot.

Hand-for-hand

A tournament procedure, used near a prize position, in which every table plays one hand and then waits until all tables have finished before the next deal.

Heads-up

A pot or a game with only two players.

High-hand jackpot

A house prize for a hand above a set strength or for the best hand made in a set period (see *Optional house rules*).

High-low

A split-pot game in which the pot is shared between the best high hand and the best qualifying low hand, as in Omaha Hi-Lo and Stud Hi-Lo.

Hole cards

The cards dealt face down to a player, seen only by that player.

H.O.R.S.E.

A mixed game that rotates through Texas Hold'em, Omaha Hi-Lo, Razz, Seven-Card Stud and Stud Hi-Lo.

House

The cardroom, casino, club or organiser that runs the game and sets its rules.

HUD

Short for heads-up display: software that shows statistics about opponents on an online table. Whether it is allowed depends on the site.

I

Insurance

A side bet that protects an all-in player who is ahead against losing the hand. It is rare and only offered by the house where permitted.

K

Kicker

An unmatched card used to break a tie between hands of the same type, such as two players each holding a pair of jacks.

Kill blind

The oversized blind posted in a kill pot, usually twice the big blind.

Kill button

A marker given to the winner of a pot in a kill game, showing that a second win will require that player to kill the next pot.

Kill pot

A hand played at raised limits because one player has posted a kill blind (see *Optional house rules*).

L

Leg up

Holding the kill button after winning a pot, so that winning the next qualifying pot means you must kill the hand after it.

Limit

A betting structure in which every bet and raise is a fixed amount, with a small bet in the early rounds and a big bet in the later ones.

Limp

To enter the pot before the flop by calling the big blind rather than raising.

Live blind

A blind that counts towards the poster's bet and gives them the option to raise if no one else has.

Live hand

A hand that is still in play and eligible to win the pot.

Lowball

A form of poker in which the lowest hand wins, as in 2-7 Triple Draw and A-5 Lowball.

M

Main pot

The pot that every player still in the hand is eligible to win, including any player who is all-in. Further bets go into a side pot.

Misdeal

A deal that is cancelled because of an error, after which the cards are reshuffled and dealt again.

Missed blind

A blind a player did not post because they were away from the table when it was due. Before being dealt in again, the player must make it up or wait for the big blind.

Mississippi straddle

A straddle that may be posted from any seat, often the button, rather than only by the player under the gun.

Muck

The pile of discards and burn cards. To muck a hand is to throw it away without showing it.

Must-move table

A table that feeds players into a main game of the same type. Players there must move to the main game in order as seats become free.

N

No-limit

A betting structure in which a player may bet any amount up to all the chips they have on the table.

Nuts

The best possible hand at that moment, given the cards on the board.

O

Open

To make the first bet in a betting round, or the first voluntary bet or raise before the flop.

Open-ended

A straight draw of four cards in a row that can be completed at either end, such as 8 7 6 5 needing a 9 or a 4.

Option

The right of the big blind (or a straddler) to raise when the other players have only called.

Orbit

One full circuit of the button round the table, so that each player has been dealt one hand in each position.

Out of turn

Acting before the action reaches you. An action out of turn may be binding, depending on what happens before your turn (see *Betting and raising*).

Outs

The cards still to come that would improve your hand to a likely winner.

Overcall

A call made after another player has already called the same bet.

P

Pat

In draw games, a hand that keeps all its cards and draws none.

Play the board

To use all five community cards as your hand, so that your hole cards do not play.

Position

Where a player sits relative to the button, which decides the order of action. Acting later is an advantage.

Post

To put a blind or other required amount into the pot before the deal.

Pot

The chips wagered in a hand, which go to the winner or winners.

Pot-limit

A betting structure in which the largest bet allowed is the size of the pot; when raising, the call is counted as part of the pot first (see *No-limit and pot-limit*).

Protect your hand

To keep your cards safe from being mixed with the muck or another hand, for example by placing a chip on them.

Q

Qualifier

The minimum hand needed to win the low half of a split pot, usually five different cards of eight or lower.

R

Rabbit hunting

Revealing the cards that would have come if a hand had not ended early. Many houses forbid it, and it is not allowed in tournaments.

Raise

To increase the amount of the current bet in the same betting round.

Rake

The commission the house takes from each pot, usually a percentage up to a set maximum.

Random number generator

The program that shuffles the cards in online poker, often shortened to RNG.

Rathole

To remove chips from the table during a cash game while still playing. It breaks the table stakes rule and is not allowed.

Real-time assistance

Any software, chart or person telling you how to play a hand while you are playing it. It is prohibited online and live.

Rebuy

To buy more chips in a tournament after losing some or all of your stack, where the tournament permits it. In cash games, simply buying more chips.

Re-raise

To raise after another player has already raised in the same betting round.

River

The fifth and final community card in flop games, and the last betting round.

Run it twice

Dealing the remaining cards twice, or more often, when players are all-in, and splitting the pot between the runs (see *Optional house rules*).

S

Satellite

A tournament whose prizes are entries into a bigger tournament.

Scoop

To win both halves of a split pot.

Sevens rule

In limit A-5 Lowball, the rule that a player holding a seven-low or better after the draw must bet; checking it forfeits any bets made after the draw (see *Draw and lowball games*).

Shot clock

A time limit for every decision, enforced by the dealer or a device.

Showdown

The point at the end of the final betting round where the remaining players reveal their hands to decide who wins.

Side pot

A separate pot made up of bets that an all-in player cannot match. Only the players who contributed to it may win it.

Small bet

In limit games, the smaller of the two fixed bet sizes, used in the early betting rounds.

Small blind

The smaller of the two blinds, posted by the player immediately to the left of the button in most games.

Soft play

Deliberately going easy on a particular player, such as a friend, for example by never betting into them. It is treated as collusion.

Splash the pot

To throw chips into the pot so that they mix with it and the amount cannot be checked. Chips should be placed in front of you instead.

Split pot

A pot shared between two or more players, because of tied hands or a high-low game.

Stack

The chips a player has on the table, or a single pile of chips.

Straddle

An optional blind, usually twice the big blind, posted before the deal. The straddler acts last in the first betting round (see *Optional house rules*).

Street

A round of dealing and the betting that follows it, such as third street in stud or the turn in flop games.

String bet

A bet or raise made in more than one movement without a verbal declaration first, such as putting in a call and then reaching back for more. Only the first movement counts.

Stub

The undealt part of the deck during a hand.

Stud

The family of games in which each player receives a mix of hole cards and upcards and there are no community cards, such as Seven-Card Stud and Razz.

Substantial action

Any three actions in turn, or two actions in turn if either of them put chips in the pot; posting blinds does not count. Once it has occurred, most errors in the deal can no longer cause a misdeal (see *Dealing, misdeals and irregularities*).

Suited

Of the same suit, such as A♥ J♥.

T

Table

To table your hand is to turn all your cards face up on the table so the dealer and other players can read them.

Table stakes

The rule that you may bet only the chips in front of you at the start of a hand, and may not add or remove chips during it.

Tank

To take a long time over a decision.

Tell

A habit or mannerism that may give away information about a player's hand.

Third street

In stud games, the first three cards dealt to each player and the betting round that follows.

Tilt

Playing poorly because of frustration or anger, often after a bad beat.

Time

A request to stop the action while you consider your decision. Saying "time" protects your right to act.

Time bank

An extra reserve of thinking time a player may use once their normal time runs out, online or live.

Tournament

A competition in which players pay a fixed entry for a stack of chips, blinds rise at set intervals, and prizes depend on finishing position. Compare cash game.

Turn

The fourth community card in flop games, and the betting round that follows.

U

Under the gun

The first player to act before the flop, seated immediately to the left of the big blind.

Upcard

A card dealt face up to a player in stud games.

V

Verbal declaration

Stating your action aloud, such as "call" or "raise to 600". A clear verbal declaration made in turn is binding.

W

Wheel

The hand 5-4-3-2-A, the lowest possible straight and the best hand in A-5 Lowball and Razz.

CHAPTER 17

Acknowledgements

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This book stands on the shoulders of people who spent decades turning the customs of the card table into fair, workable rules. It was written independently and in its own words, but it could not exist without them.

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The Poker Tournament Directors Association

The Poker Tournament Directors Association (TDA) was founded in 2001 by Matt Savage, Linda Johnson, Jan Fisher and David Lamb to bring consistency to tournament rules around the world. Its members, who include tournament directors from cardrooms, casinos, tours and online sites in dozens of countries, meet at regular summits to debate and vote on the rules.

The *Tournaments* chapter follows the Poker TDA Rules, including the Recommended Procedures and Illustration Addendum, and the changes adopted at TDA Summit XII in 2026. Any mistakes in how those rules are expressed here are this book's own. The official TDA rules, in many languages, are published free of charge at pokertda.com, and tournament staff should treat them as the authoritative text.

Robert Ciaffone and Robert's Rules of Poker

Robert Ciaffone, known to players as Bob Ciaffone, is a poker author, player and leading authority on cardroom rules. He wrote Robert's Rules of Poker with the aim of making the best possible set of rules freely available for the good of the game, and he has generously allowed anyone to use it. It has shaped house rules in cardrooms around the world.

The cash-game chapters and the game-by-game chapters of this book follow the principles of Robert's Rules of Poker. Readers who want the original should seek out Robert Ciaffone's own work.

Cardrooms and online sites

The chapters on online poker, optional house rules and some newer games (such as Short Deck Hold'em and Badugi) draw on the rules and help pages published by major online sites, including PokerStars, and by leading live cardrooms. Their published rules helped confirm how these games and features are run today.

About this book

Independence

This rulebook is not an official publication of the Poker TDA, Robert Ciaffone or any cardroom or online site, and none of them has reviewed or endorsed it. Their names appear here only to give credit.

Corrections and feedback

Rules change and mistakes happen. If you spot an error, or a situation these rules do not handle well, please get in touch so the next edition can be better.