

Texas Hold em Poker Basic Rules & Strategy



Raise Your Game!

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Introduction

No previous poker experience or knowledge is necessary to attend and enjoy a QueenSix poker event. However, if you are new to the game, reading the following information will help you understand how the game works, and may give you a head start on your competition.

Texas Hold em Poker is a game that rewards skill, cunning and tactics, and requires players to make and respond to challenges. This allows players to learn about each other in an intimate and fun environment.

Playing in a poker tournament differs from playing at a poker table at a casino, as the chips do not hold monetary value in a tournament. Tournaments may carry entry fees and award prizes or cash for the winners, however a player cannot leave part way through and cash-in their chips for money. Players compete and are eliminated until there is a single winner (in reality prizes may be awarded to the top few place getters). As such the aim is not to win each and every hand played, but to survive to the end.

This quick guide aims to help you understand some of the basic rules of Texas Hold em poker, as well as provide a few tactics for beginners.

Tournament Structure

In a Texas Hold em Poker tournament, each player is allocated an amount of chips to start the game with. Once a player loses all of their chips they are eliminated from the game. A tournament is made up of a series of hands. In No-Limit Hold em (the most common form of poker) a player can potentially lose all of their chips in any one hand.

As players are eliminated from a tournament, those remaining are shifted between tables to even up the numbers. Tables are slowly broken down until there is just one remaining table of players. It is common at QueenSix events for people to crowd around and watch the final table action.

In addition to an individual winner, a QueenSix event may also have a winning team based on average player finishing positions.

At most QueenSix events, those who have been eliminated from the main tournament can play in single table side games, so no one is out of the action for long.

Poker Terminology

Flop: The first three face-up cards shared by all players in a hand

Turn: The fourth face-up card shared by all players in the hand

River: The final (fifth) face-up card shared by all players in the hand

The Pot: This refers to the value of chips in the middle of the table that someone is eligible to win in a hand.

Split pot: When two or more people have the same best five card combination at the end of a hand. The pot is split between the two players.

Hit (to hit): When a face up card on the turn or the river improves a player's hand (e.g. "he hit a king on the river to beat me")

Suited: Cards of the same suit


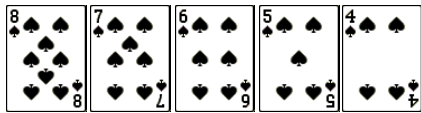
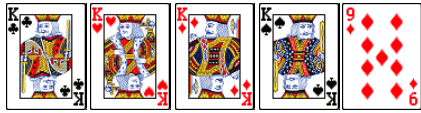
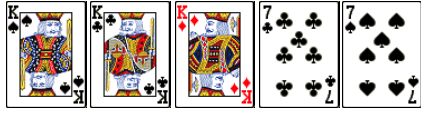
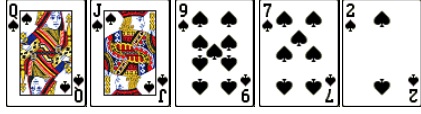
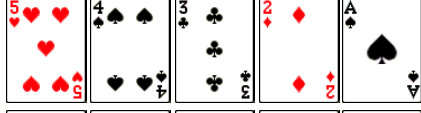




Suited Connectors: Cards of the same suit that are consecutive (e.g. 8♣ 9♣)

Pockets: Two cards of the same rank dealt to a player (e.g. 6♥ 6♠)

All-In: A player puts all of their chips into the pot.

Hand Rankings

Hand rankings in order from best to worst are as follows:

Royal Flush		A straight flush from a ten to an ace. A Royal Flush is simply the highest Straight Flush possible
Straight Flush		Five consecutive cards of the same suit.
Four of a Kind		Four cards of the same rank (quads).
Full House		Three of a Kind and a Pair.
Flush		Any five cards of the same suit.
Straight		Five consecutive cards.
Three of a Kind		Three cards of the same rank (trips).
Two Pair		Two sets of Pairs.
One Pair		Two cards of the same rank.
High Card		No combinations, the highest card counts.

Hand Structure

At the beginning of a hand, each player is dealt two cards which only they can see, and five community cards are shared between all players. A player can win a hand by either betting (more on that later) or by having the best five card combination out of the seven cards available.

The Blinds

At the start of every hand, before any cards are dealt, the player to the left of the dealer is obliged to place a small blind (half of the minimum bet) in front of themselves and the player two-to-the-left of the dealer is obliged to put in a big blind (the minimum bet). The blinds exist to encourage players to place bets. As the tournament progresses, the size of the blinds are increased.

The Deal

After the dealer shuffles the cards, cards are dealt to each player in a clockwise direction. Each player is dealt two cards, called hole cards, which only they can see.

1st Betting Round

Betting begins with the first person to the left of the big blind. Players have three options:

Call – placing a bet that matches the big blind.

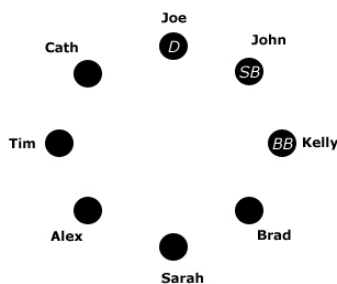
Bet – a bet of at least twice the big blind. Anyone who wants to play in the hand now has to at least match this value.

Fold – throw away the cards. The player has chosen to no longer take part in the hand.

If a player has made a bet, the other players then have the option to call, fold or raise. Any subsequent raise must be by at least the value of the initial bet, or previous raise, except for the case where the player is all-in. Raises may be made in any of the betting rounds.

If no player has made a bet, and the action gets to the big blind, that player has the option to check (put no additional chips in the middle and still take part in the hand), as they have already contributed the same amount to the pot as any players who have called.

The game proceeds when everyone who wishes to take part in the hand has matched the largest bet/raise.



For example, Joe is the dealer. John is the **Small Blind** and posts 50. Kelly is the **Big Blind** and posts 100. Brad folds his cards, Sarah **calls** for 100, then Alex **raises** to 300. Tim, Cath and Joe all fold. John would need to add 250 to call (he already has 50 in the pot), however he decides to **fold** and lose his 50. Kelly and Sarah put in an additional 200 each to **call** Alex's bet. With all the bets matched, the betting round is now over with Kelly, Sarah and Alex still in the hand, and 950 in the pot.

The Flop

After the first round of betting, the dealer places one card face down on the table followed by three face-up cards. This is known as the flop.

2nd Betting Round

Players have the option to check, or to bet a value of at least the big blind. If a player has made a bet, other players have the option to call, raise, or fold.

The Turn

The dealer then places one card face down followed by another face up. This is called the turn card.

3rd Betting Round

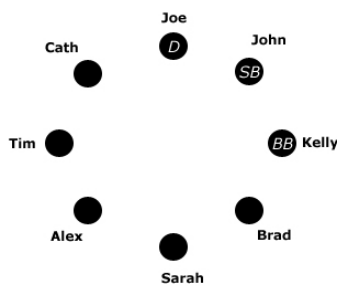
Players have the option to check or bet a value of at least the big blind. If a player has made a bet, other players have the option to call, raise, or fold.

The River

The dealer places another card face down followed by the final card face up. This is called the river card.

4th Betting Round

Players again have the option to check or bet a value of at least the big blind. If a player has made a bet, other players have the option to call, raise, or fold.



For example, there is now 2000 in the pot, and Kelly, Sarah and Alex are still in the hand. The cards in the middle are **A♥ J♠ 3♥ 9♣ 6♥**

Kelly (being the first player left of the dealer who is still in the hand) is first to act. She has **A♦ 5♦** and **checks**. Sarah has **J♣ 9♦** and **bets** 500. Alex has **K♥ Q♥** and **raises** to 1500. Kelly assumes her single pair is beaten and quickly **folds**. Sarah thinks for some time before deciding to **call** Alex's bet for the additional 1000.

The Showdown

All remaining players still in the hand now show their cards. The player with the best five card combination wins.

In our example Sarah has called Alex's bet and therefore Alex is the first to show his cards. Alex has a flush (**A♥ K♥ Q♥ 3♥ 6♥**) and knows he has won the hand. Sarah has

two pair (J♠ J♣ 9♣ 9♦ A♥) but knowing she has lost the hand, she folds her cards. Alex collects the 5000 chips in the pot.

If, during any of the betting rounds, a player bets/raises and no one calls, they win the pot and do not have to show their cards. The hand is then over at that point. Not all hands get as far as the Showdown.

Analysis of the Example: With three hearts in the middle, Sarah thought her two-pair was probably beaten when Alex raised on the river, but called his bet in the hope that Alex was bluffing. She had to bet 1000 to win 5000, so if there was a 1 in 5 (20%) chance Alex was bluffing or had a single pair, it was worth calling. Sarah knows Alex has a big ego, and that he likes to throw around chips to scare opponents off, so she thought there was easily a 20% chance that he had a single pair or less. Her decision to call was not bad, even though she lost the hand.

The Next Hand

The dealer position moves one position to the left and the two players left of the new dealer post the blinds.

Common Questions

Q: I have a pair of kings and a pair of queens. Bob has a pair of aces and a pair of 3's. Who wins?

A: Bob wins as his highest pair is higher than your highest pair.

Q: I have a straight from ace to 5. Kelly has a straight from 2 to 6. Shouldn't I win as an ace is higher than a 6?

A: No. In this case, your ace is representing a 1 and therefore has a low rank. Kelly would win as her straight to 6 is higher than your straight to 5.

Q: I have a flush (3, 9, 10, Q, A) of hearts. Lee also has a flush (3, 9, 10, J, A) of hearts. Should this be a split pot?

A: No. Any hand is based on a best-5-card-combination. Although these are both flushes to the ace, Your next highest card is higher than Lee's, so your flush is higher than Lee's and you win.

Q: Does J Q K A 2 make a straight?

A: No. The highest possible straight is from 10 to ace. The lowest possible straight is from ace to 5.

Q: John and I both have ace queen and hit trip aces, but my ace is a spade and his is a club. Does suit play any role?

A: No. No suit is higher than any other in Texas Hold em Poker. This would be a split pot.

Q: I have a full house, trip queens and a pair of jacks. Tim also has a full house, trip jacks and a pair of aces. Does Tim win because he has aces?

A: No. You win because in a full house the trips count first, and your queens are higher than Tim's jacks.

Beginner's tactics

When playing poker for the first time, beginners may get lucky but can also bust out early. The following is a conservative strategy and should help keep you out of trouble. All playing styles are valid, this is just to help get you started.

The most important decisions that can win or lose you a lot of chips are what you do pre-flop and what you do after the flop.

Pre-flop Strategy

The following is based on a full table (8 players or more). If you are playing with fewer than 8 players on your table, you will need to adjust and play some less-good hands also.

The following are possible raising hands on a full table. A raise of about 3-5 times the big blind is appropriate here. The aim of the raise is to keep your number of opponents low. These hands work well against one or two players but not as well against any more. The point of raising is to knock players out of the hand, thereby stopping players with not-so-good hands from getting lucky.

AA, KK, QQ, JJ, AK, AQ, AJ

The following are good calling cards:

KQ, KJ, K10, QJ, Q10, J10, Any Pair, Suited Connectors (consecutive cards of the same suit), an Ace with any other card

If cards are the same suit, it increases your chances of winning, but only by a small percentage.

As the number of players on your table decreases, it is less likely that someone will have a very good hand, so you can be more lenient with the cards you choose to play. For example with only two players, a single pair is often a winning hand, but at a full table you would hope for a better than that by the river.

If someone has raised, consider how many chips it will cost you to see the flop, and whether your cards are worth it. For example A3 off-suit is not a good candidate to call a raise with, as the person who raised may either already have a pair or be holding an Ace with a higher second card than your 3. This is common at a full table.

For example Mary-Jane calls a raise with A6, and after hitting her ace on the flop, ends up losing most of her chips to a player who raised with AJ pre-flop.

If you are small blind and no one has raised, you should at least call regardless of what your cards are, unless the person in the big blind is raising every hand.

After the Flop

If you have top pair you should bet. For example, if the flop is K Q 4, and you have KJ in your hand, you have top pair. An appropriate bet is around half the pot (half of the total already in the middle).

Betting may also be used as a way to obtain information about the other people's cards. If you have middle or bottom pair, a half-pot bet is appropriate, to find out if

anyone has a better hand than you do. If someone calls, and your hand does not get any better after the turn card, betting should stop there, unless, of course, you want to bluff, or stop another player chasing a flush or straight. If someone re-raises, consider whether you think your hand is better than theirs when determining whether or not to call.

If you have a relatively good hand on the flop, but are worried that someone else could get a better hand on the turn card, you should bet between half and the whole pot value. An example of this is when you have three of a kind, but there are two diamonds on the table. If a third diamond comes out on the turn or river and someone has two diamonds in their hand, they will have a flush, which will beat your three of a kind. Betting might encourage this person to fold, thereby enabling you to win the pot. It also allows you to win more money if they call your bet and their card doesn't hit.

If someone makes a reasonable sized bet and all you have is a high card in your hand, and no single card on the turn or river could give you a straight or a flush, you should fold. There is no point in risking your chips if a single pair can beat you. Always consider the size of the bet compared to the amount you could possibly win (the amount already in the pot).

Just like pre-flop, your decisions after the flop should take into account how many people are in the hand and any information you have about the strength of their cards.

A good strategy is to play very conservative early then become looser as the blinds go up. That allows you to bluff a little when it is worth while to do so, with people thinking you only play good cards (conservative means you bet when you have something and fold when you don't).

Playing a Short Stack

When your chip stack is less than around six times the value of the big blind, you are in a little trouble and need to get into the action before it is too late. One proven strategy is to go all in as one of the following occurs:

The action is on you (pre-flop) and no one before you has called (and at least one of your cards is higher than a 5)

The action is on you and you have a pocket pair

The action is on you and both your cards are 10 or above

Here you have two possible positive outcomes; everyone folds to your all-in bet and you win the blinds, or you get called and your cards win. It is possible that you might also get unlucky, but with so few chips it is much better to have given it a shot, than have your chip stack dwindled away by the blinds (winning a smaller pot later with fewer chips will not get you back into the game). It is often better to fold a hand like A5 when someone has called before you, then go all-in with a poor hand like J4 the next hand, than to take the risk when someone has already called or raised.

All the best in your QueenSix poker tournament. Hopefully this guide will help you raise your game!

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