THE POKER BLUEPRINT

Advanced Strategies for crushing Micro & Small Stakes NL

anticipate

- do not bluff

range

Villain

- move clockwise

Hero

- Skills
- Mindset
- Silver Bullet?

- aggro
- 3bets light

Fold   Call   Raise   → $
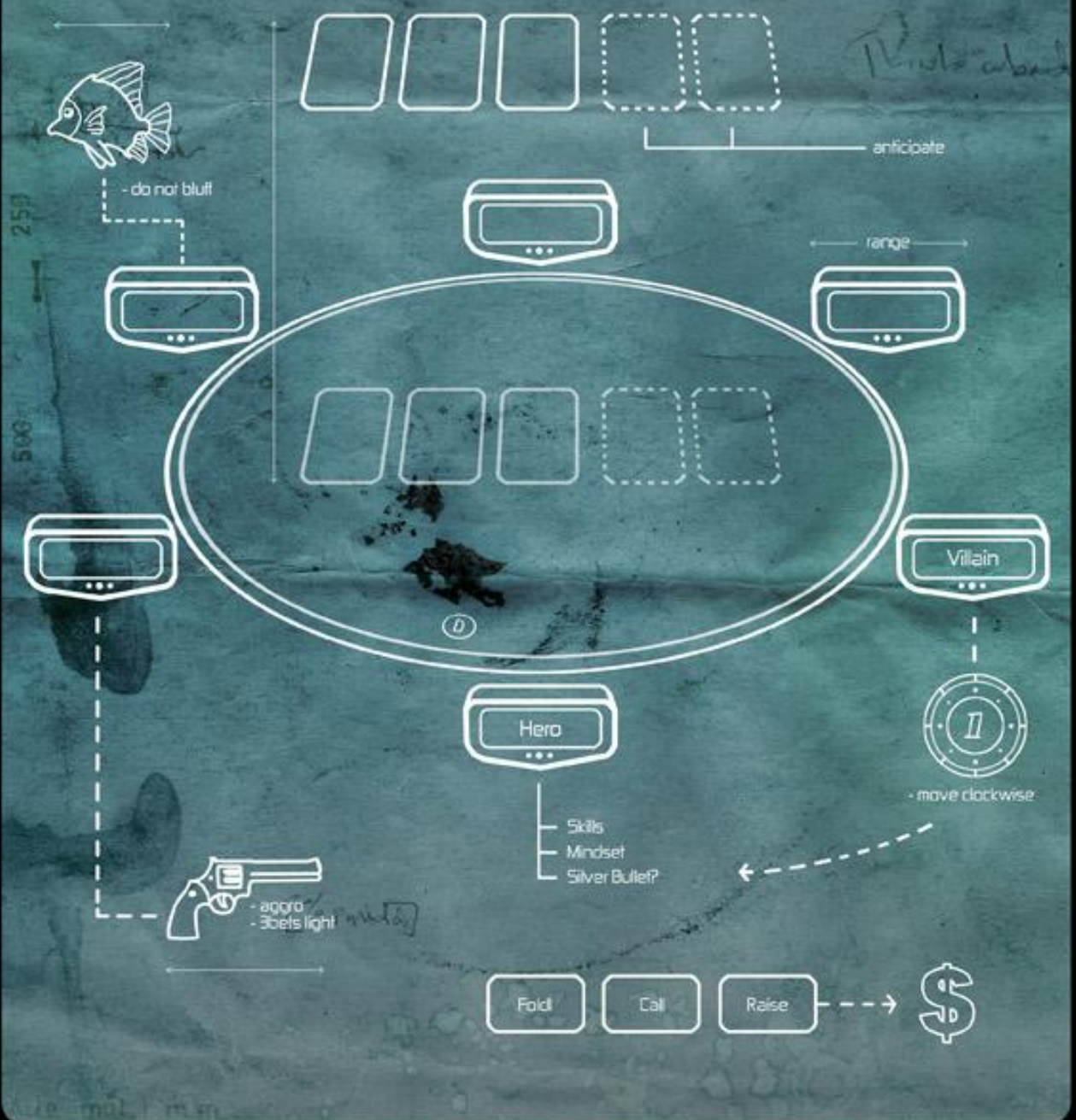
BY AARON DAVIS & TRI NGUYEN

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Play to Learn

The Learner and the Grinder

The difference between these two mentalities is also the gap between a microstakes grinder and a high-stakes player. You should tackle poker as a competitive game and strive to become better every day. It is not a mere vehicle that provides you with a modest income. Simply changing your perception of the game will improve your skills much more and much faster.

The "learner" will try to understand difficult poker concepts and try to outplay his opponents. He questions what hands are in Villain's ranges, what his raise on the river means, what spots are best for check-raising, and a multitude of other situations that arise in every session. He desires knowledge. He knows he can get better. He wants all the edges he can get. He enjoys playing poker. Every bad beat is simply a result of variance.

The "grinder" only wishes to win money and does not care to improve his game. He is content with his marginal winnings and taking money from the occasional fish. He plays at the same stakes for months and even years. He may play 8+ tables and simply wait for the nuts. He misses out on the small edges because he does not care to fight back. He may want to fight back at times, but fails because he lacks the experience and knowledge. Every bad beat results in anxiety or anger. He loses control of himself and his game deteriorates. He is doomed to mediocrity. Poker becomes a grind.

I hope that after reading this book, you will fall into the "learner" category. If you find yourself in the "grinder" category, don't sweat. You've just taken a big step in improving your game by seeking more knowledge. Keep up your momentum.

I found myself in the "grinder" category for a while without realizing it, and had to grind it out at the same stakes for months. Poker really became a grind. There was no more fun playing the game that I used to stay up all night reading books and forum posts. Once I became aware of it, I worked harder and improved tremendously within a few short months. It was a lot more enjoyable and refreshing as well.

You will get from this book what you put into it. If you read it without applying any of the strategies, then it is merely information. I cannot promise you a magic bullet, but I can assure you that if you study the materials in this book and apply them, you *will* become a better player—enough to beat your current game.

Remember, knowledge is not power; it is applied knowledge.

Table Selection

A Brief History

A few years ago, when online poker was full of really bad players, it was easier to win. I miss the days when bad players would open-limp all the time and had no problem stacking off 200BBs with top pair, no kicker. Unfortunately, those days are gone. However, fish are still swimming around, just in smaller groups than before. You should go out of your way to search for them. This is because table selection is the most important factor separating winning and losing players.

Player Stats

If a player plays over 35 percent of his hands, unless he is regular, he is almost always bad. If he plays over 35 percent of his hands and raises less than 10 percent of his hands, then he is almost always bad. The most profitable fish are loose and passive (aggression factor less than 1.5) who will often fail to extract value from their strong hands post-flop.

> *Important Note: If you don't know what these numbers mean, I strongly recommend buying a hand history tracking program like Holdem Manager. You can set it to automatically store all the hands you play and give you useful stats about your opponents' games (how loose they're playing, how aggressive they are, how much they're up or down in a session, etc.).*

Stack Sizes

Anyone sitting with less than 100BB should get you salivating, especially if they are playing on just one table. This almost always means they are recreational players, and that means there is a lot of passiveness in their game.

If you find players who regularly play less than 25BB, they are likely professional short-stackers and they aren't very good. Although they can be annoying, the best way to deal with them is to not call their shoves too light. My range for calling their shoves is 55+/ATs. This range changes with respect to our positions. If I open UTG and a short-stacker shoves, my calling range is tighter. If I open in the CO or BTN and a short-stacker shoves from the blinds, my calling range will be wider. Your calling range also depends on how loose they are. It's your job as a player to figure out his estimated shoving range.

Player Tendencies

Although practicing this advice is hard, before sitting down, watch the game for a few minutes to see who is playing normally. Sometimes a solid regular has a losing session and can be playing his C game, which you can exploit. Some people start to play looser than

their normal game if they are on tilt. Some don't bluff as often because they don't want to lose more. Figure out which players fall into which categories. Once you are able to recognize tilt among regular players, playing poker will be an easy task. No money tastes sweeter than tilt money.

Seat Selections

If I have the option of having position on a really good player or having position on a really bad player, then I would instantly choose having position on the bad player. A good player can give you a lot of trouble by using his positional advantage, but you can easily counter this by folding a lot of your marginal hands and playing only with the nuts. Since he is so aggressive, you can basically win by closing your eyes and check-calling three streets with your strong hands.

If I were starting a table, then I would sit at the top left corner (10 o'clock position in a 6-max table). For some reason, the majority of fish like to sit in the lower two seats. By sitting to a fish's immediate left, even if the table fills up with the best players at your stakes, the game is still worth playing.

Number of Fish Required

As long as there's a fish at a table, that game is worth playing. If you are unsure on how to play against the rest of the table, you aren't losing much value by folding all your non-premium hands. No matter how good your opponent is, it's going to be tough for him to exploit you if you play against him with a range of TT+/AQ+. Of course, he will be stealing your blinds left and right, but the presence of the fish makes it a very high-EV situation.

Bum-hunting

Bum-hunting is when a regular sits at a heads-up table and waits for a really bad player to join and play. This practice has been frowned upon by many online poker players. But in the words of Don Corleone, "It don't [sic] make any difference to me what a man does for a living." I feel the same way regarding table selection. If bum-hunting is your table selection standard, go for it and don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

Screen Names and Avatars

If a player has a screen name of an alcoholic drink or a car, then he is usually a recreational player over the age of 30. Such examples are whiskey72 or Ferrari_lover.

If a player has a screen name of a famous player follow by a number, then he is usually bad. Such examples are Phil_Ivey_123 or Helmuth33.

9   Table Selection

If a player has a screen name of a sports team with the team's logo, then he is usually bad. Such examples are Lakers2000 or Colts13424.

If a player's screen name has the word "crazy", "bluff" or "gamble", then he is usually a nit.

If a player's screen name has the word "monies" or "lol," then he is likely a young player who posts in online forums. This generally means he's an aggressive player.

If a player has a picture of his baby as his avatar, then he is usually over 30 and is almost always bad.

Bankroll Management

Knowing When to Move Up

(This is an excerpt taken from Tri's upcoming poker psychology book)

Bankroll management is different for everyone. The number of buy-ins required for a stake before moving up depends on your ability to rebuild and your age. If you are young (18 years old) and have no problem moving down when you lose a few buy-ins at your shot taking, I would try to move up as quickly as possible.

In fact, if I were to start over again, I would implement the 30 buy-in (50 for PLO) rule for whatever stake I am playing and move down if I lose 5 buy-ins at that stake. I would only play 4 tables so I could focus more on both my and my opponent's play. I would take notes religiously and would try to move up as fast as possible. This is because how much you can win is highly disproportional to your poker skill. For example, a 1/2NL regular can make $100K/year and a 2/4NL regular can make $200k/year even though the 2/4NL regular isn't that much better. In some instances, their skill level is the same.

Another reason why you should try to move up as soon as possible is that as you grow older, your willingness to gamble and take risk decreases tremendously. You have worked hard to get to where you are; the risk of losing it all is disheartening and at times, scary. You don't want to deal with an enormous amount of stress anymore.

When you're young, you don't know any better, and that's a good thing. You have a lot of hope and aspiration to be the best. You have that gamble in your blood. You want to play because you truly love the game. It's exciting. The high when you win is comparable to the low when you lose. During this phase in your poker career, you should be as aggressive as you can with your bankroll. You have time and age by your side. If things go wrong, you can always rebuild. After all, it's easier to rebuild a $1,000 bankroll than a $100,000 bankroll.

My friends and I have talked about the older generation and how nitty they are. What we don't often realize is that, compared to the 18-year-olds of today, we are the nits. Just when we think it's tougher to be more aggressive than we already are, a new generation of poker players comes in and proves us wrong. Thus, it's not surprising that every year, a new young superstar appears who challenges the pecking order of the current poker establishment. Those who have been around kind of accept their place in the poker hierarchy. They know who they can beat and who has an edge on them. They no longer want to deal with the swings and are content where they are. Do they still want to improve? Sure. But not enough to go through enormous swings against better players. Age has caught up to them.

It's not uncommon for nosebleeders to admit their reluctance to play super under-rolled as they grow older. These are the same nosebleeders who definitely wouldn't hesitate to gamble if they were younger. In fact, they probably wouldn't think twice. But now that they are older and are content with what they have, the idea of playing stakes that can ruin them isn't appealing anymore.

So, whoever said you're only young once was right. Considering that your earnings improve exponentially relatively to your skill level, you should try to be as aggressive as possible with your bankroll.

You're Young Only Once

Imagine for a minute that you are working at a corporate job and there are ten rankings on the company ladder. The CEO is at the top and the cashier is at the bottom. You were a cashier last quarter and got promoted to a higher position this quarter. You love your field. You are willing to work hard and hope that one day you will be at the top. It doesn't matter why you want to be at the top (pay, status, power, etc.); the key is you want to be at the top and you will try your best to get there.

How come some people don't have the same when it comes to poker?

Why is it that in every job when we are at the bottom, we want to get to the top? But in poker, some players are satisfied with grinding out a decent living. There's nothing wrong with being satisfied with where you are. That's not the problem. The problem is being satisfied with where you are without taking a shot at the top. In poker, it is extremely profitable when you are the best player at your given stake. Other regulars will stay out of your way. When you create tables, you get to play fish heads-up for a while before other regulars join. You also improve a lot because you're playing heads-up. Most important of all, your earning potential increases dramatically.

The best strategy when becoming a poker player is to be as aggressive as you can regarding your bankroll when you are first starting out. You want to move up as soon as possible.

If you ask high-stakes players what they would do differently if they were to start again, most will likely say, "I wish I had been more aggressive with my bankroll." This is coming from players who were playing on 15 buy-ins. Looking back, they understand that the opportunity to improve at a fast rate is very important. Few, if any, regretted putting their bankroll at risk, as they were moving up. In fact, some kind of wish they had been more aggressive. Because they understand that if their shots fail, they can always rebuild. They are still young. Of course, if you ask the same players if they would use the same bankroll management at their current age, they wouldn't. Time is no longer on their side. They wise up a little. They don't want to lose it all when they have so much to lose.

I remember when I first started playing poker. All I wanted to do was play. It was a rush to improve every time I sat down at the table. There was so much to learn. Of course, I was

young and didn't know better.

I remember playing 100NL on Paradise Poker and getting sucked out on over and over again. I had enough money and went to a local casino to play live. I played a $300 buy-in game, ran incredibly hot and won about 10 buy-ins. It felt awesome. I came back the next day with $600. At this time, I was using my two buy-ins rule. After my big win, I felt pretty dangerous inside. My confidence was sky-high. I wandered around the casino and noticed a $5-10NL game ($500 buy-in) was taking place. I sweated for a few minutes and realized I could beat this game. I did what any young kid would do. I sat down.

Over the course of the night, I won and won and finally got into a big hand for all my chips, and my hand held. I do not know what would've happened if I'd lost that pot. It was over $3,000, which was about 25 percent of my bankroll. If I have to guess, I would go on tilt and go home and sleep and come back the next day to grind the $300 games. Luckily, I won the pot and ended up playing $5-10NL from that point on. To my amazement, the $5-10NL ($500 buy-in) games were as easy as the $2-5 games ($300 buy-ins).

For my online bankroll story, I was playing 400NL on Party Poker for a month during my senior year in college. I remember limp-re-raising all my strong hands in 6-max games. That's the ultimate move in live poker, so I did it online. I don't know how I won, but I did. Then one day, I got bored at 400NL and played 600NL. At this point, I'm positive I had less than $15,000 to my name because I would remember if I had more than that. It's fifteen-thousand for a broke college kid. I played 600NL for less than 10 hands and for some random reason decided that I could play $5-10NL, the highest stake at this point. I ended up winning a little bit with "unorthodox" plays such as open-limping under-the-gun, limp-re-raising in the cutoff because the button kept raising pre-flop, and check-raising flops with bluff-catchers. I didn't know any better. Then I found out about rakeback and asked Party Poker to close my account because it's bad luck. They closed my account and I created the account SlowHabit. My friend transferred me $1,000 and I split that into two tables at $5-10NL. I ended up busting one table and ran the other table up to about $8,000. I was afraid I would lose it all so I left and played 4-tables. I wasn't good enough to 6-table yet. I am very bad at video games. Next thing I know, I ran that account to about 250K and closed that account when I ran bad.

Looking back, I don't think I stopped to think for a second that I might bust my account. The thought of me losing buy-ins didn't even register in my head. I had two! Of course, knowing what I know now, it was a very stupid thing to do because the probability of me losing it all was extremely high. But do I regret it? No, because even if I busted my account, I could deposit and rebuild at lower-stakes. Luckily, I ran hot and continued playing the biggest games on Party Poker until legislation passed and I can no longer play on the site. I know I wouldn't have the chance to make as much money as I could if I were to follow strict bankroll-management guidelines.

Let's pretend I can go back in time and knowing what I do know, would I still take the same risk? If I'm 20 like I was, yes. If I'm 25, no. I would definitely think it over because

time is no longer on my side. If I'm 25, I have more responsibilities. I'm likely a college graduate. I have to repay my parents for taking care of me and making me who I am, except for the gambling part.

There is always an opportunity to be better. You have to embrace the risk. After all, what's the worst thing that can happen? You lose a buy-in and move down to rebuild. Not exactly a risky situation, is it?

100 Buy-in Rule

I have never been a fan of X buy-ins rules. My philosophy is that if you are running good and playing well, you can afford a few buy-ins to take a shot at the next level. After all, with living expenses and variance in poker, your bankroll might never reach 100 buy-ins until half a year later. By that time, your game might be stagnant because you are playing against the same types of regulars over and over again without learning anything new. You might risk playing down to your opponents. Or worse, everyone is improving so you keep staying at one stake and it's tougher to move up.

Of course, when using an aggressive approach to bankroll management, you have to be honest with yourself and ask if you can grind lower games if taking shots doesn't work. If you get tilted easily by taking a shot and losing, then approach the situation cautiously. Take all the time you want. Though, like what my man Mike McDermont once said, "If you're too careful, your life can be a fucking grind."

One thing I want to be clear about is that I'm not advocating for you to go take shots in tough games full of regulars. I'm talking about the situations where you feel the timing is right and you're feeling good about your game and luck. If that is the case, go for it. You eventually have to defeat them, why not start now when everything is going your way?

Shoot, Reload, Try Again

If Phil Ivey suddenly got in contact with you and offered to play you HU at one stake higher than your regular game, would you take it? I know I would because I would learn a lot. What if a lineup of the top five nosebleed players invites you to play a game of 6-max game at your regular stakes. Would you take it? I know I would, because I would learn a lot. Or am I just being delusional, not learning that much and just wanting to play against great players for a small price?

In terms of learning a lot and also future potential earnings, you learn more by playing a tough regular HU or taking a shot at stakes higher than yours. You have the most to gain when you are playing against these players because you learn more. What Ivey or other nosebleeders do, you cannot apply to your game. They play differently. Their opponents are also different. So if you aren't afraid of losing a few buy-ins to Ivey, why are you afraid to lose a few buy-ins at one stake higher for the chance to greatly improve your game?

Taking shots is one of the most important things you can do to improve as a player. First, it

gives you a reality check—you might not be as good as you think. Second, you might realize that the players playing one stake higher than you aren't that good and that you can beat them. Third, you can run good and never look back again.

So, when you feel good about your game and there's a softer game at a higher level, take a shot. Give yourself three buy-ins and move down if you lose it. I don't care why you lost. Move down. Once you start to lose an amount of money that seems big to you, you will play badly. And you will play scared. You will feel that you're not. But trust me, you are and you will.

Move down. Reload. Try again.

You should also take shots to improve your game. If I ever teach a poker course at university, my final exam will be take a shot at higher stakes. Some people are afraid of losing, of getting embarrassed. But think of it as college tuition if you lose. You paid for your lessons. Go home and analyze why you lost. If you lost with AA pre-flop, then go back down and grind as fast as you can so you can take the next shot to show yourself that the last failed attempt was a fluke. You are better than that.

Just remember to move down once you lose three buy-ins, because if you continue playing, you might end up losing more than you can handle. This will make it hard for you to grind the lower games because now, you have to win a lot to just break-even over a long stretch of hands. If you can withstand long break-even stretches, more power to you. Some people cannot fathom the idea. The thought of breaking even over 100K hands can tilt people and create an enormous amount of stress that can be very tough for you to overcome. Thus, the best solution is to avoid the situation altogether. Of course, you will probably go past your loss limit the first few times around. I know I did. However, we learn. Just like the first time we touched that burning stove.

Stop-Loss

People often ask me how many buy-ins do I lose before I quit? The answer depends heavily on how good your game is compared to your opponents. If you are playing against a bunch of morons, then keep playing until you don't feel comfortable losing X amount. The cutoff for the majority of people is six buy-ins. After that, their games go downhill.

As a professional, it's always best to play your A game and quit when you no longer operate at a high level. Of course, it's difficult to be rational when you are tilting. No one can. Thus, I developed a system to help me put things in perspective.

A simple strategy I use for stop-loss is to think of my biggest winning days and average them out. If I'm having a losing session and it passes the average, I try to quit. That doesn't mean I'm constantly checking my cashier to see whether I'm up or down (I don't

do that). I usually keep track of how many all-ins I lost and once I feel I've had enough, I quit. Of course, it's easier said than done because we always want to get back to even. But knowing that there's no way in hell you are coming back helps you to step away from the tables. It's going to be very tough to do it upon command. I still have trouble with it to this day. However, I'm much better at quitting now. The main reason I got better at quitting is to look over my game log.

Game Log Analysis

If you look over your game log for the past year, you will notice that your total earnings for the year are almost equivalent to the sum of your 15 biggest sessions. That is the number of buy-ins for me at 10/20NL. If you play higher, then that is a little less than your total earnings. If you play lower, then the earnings are a little more than your top 15 winning sessions.

Now, look over the worst 15 losing sessions. If you somehow cut half of those sessions down, you are a much richer man. I know it's tough to quit when you are stuck but hopefully, by looking at this data, you will realize how important stop-loss is to a player's earnings. This was how I realized that minimizing losing sessions can increase your income tremendously.

Cash-Out Versus Moving Up

It's important to try to move up as quickly as possible to the stake where you can comfortably play for a decent living. This stake should be 200NL.

I think it is important to be the best poker player that you can be before you settle down and grind the games. The enthusiasm for learning the game has a relatively short span. For some people, a few downswings and they get discouraged and will be content with grinding 12 tables at small-stakes. There is nothing wrong with this. It is just not how I want to live my life.

Now, imagine yourself as a business. Any business in the real world isn't going to be very profitable in the first three years. They have to develop a system in their company. They have to improve their infrastructure. They have to incur a lot of expense to improve. A business doesn't generate a lot of profit if it isn't good at what it does. It doesn't make as much if it doesn't have a market share in its niche. Thus, as a business owner, your goal is to become the best business in your niche.

For this reason, you shouldn't be cashing out that often. I should be clearer. You shouldn't cash out to spend a lot. You can cash out and put it in the bank in case one of the poker sites collapses. But besides that, you should try to cut down your expenses and work hard to improve your craft. Spend as much money as you can to improve your game. Use it for coaching and taking shots. That's your expense.

There will be a day when your learning curve will slow down dramatically. In other words, there will be a day when your business has little growth potential. This is when you want to settle down and grind the tables to reap the profits. You have worked hard and now you can see your reward. Hopefully, the stakes that you are grinding at are bigger than 50NL.

If you keep cashing out and spending it, you are keeping yourself from moving up. What if there's a great game and you can't play in it because you are not rolled for it?

Many people think the Dang Brothers, Phil Galfond and Durrr are lucky because they have the rolls to play Guy Libierte in the ultra-nosebleeds game. Not many stop to ask how these players manage to have the roll to play Guy. They probably don't. They were willing to take a risk when it presented itself, and they prospered from that decision.

You can too. Just on a lower scale.

Math is Easy

Math is Easy

Hand Combinations

A hand combination is any two cards that you are dealt, such as JT spades. This is one of my favorite math topics in poker because learning hand combinations, or simply "combinations", will automatically make us better hand readers. It allows us to narrow Villain's hand range based on his actions, our cards and the community cards. With that said, let's get some facts out of the way.

1. There are 1,326 combinations in No-Limit Holdem.
2. A set has 3 combos.
3. Two pairs have 9 combos.
4. Pocket pairs have 6 combos.
5. A pair + kicker has 12 combos.
6. Unpaired cards have 16 combos.
7. Any two specific suited cards have 4 combos.
8. Any two specific cards have 1 combo.

This may seem intimidating, but it's really not as hard as it looks. Let's go over a quick example to illustrate this.
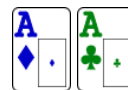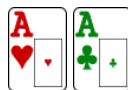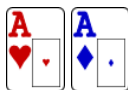
> **100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.**
> A tight player raises from UTG and you 3-bet from the Button with
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> He 4-bets you all in. How many combinations of AA does he have?

There are 4 aces left in the deck. Based on the list from above, there are exactly 6 combinations of AA. If we manually count them out, we have

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That's simple enough. Now let's go over a slightly more complicated problem and see how things change when <u>we hold one of the cards on the board.</u>

> **100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.**
> You raise from UTG with
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> and a TAG player calls from the SB. The flop is
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> He checks to you. You bet 2/3-pot and he check-raises to 3x your bet size. How many combinations of sets, two pairs, AA, AK and straight draws are in his range?

We'll need to make some adjustments because we hold one of the cards on the board.

1. Sets – 7 combos: 3 combos for a set of eight, 3 combos for a set of 9 and 1 combo for a set of kings (you have one king and there's one king on the flop).
2. 2 pairs – 2 combos: Since we don't think he's going to be calling our UTG raise with 98 offsuit, we can subtract those combos from his range. There are 4 combos of 98 suited preflop. On the flop, he can only have 2 combos for 98s (98 clubs and 98 spades). We also remove K9s and K8s from his range because TAGs don't call UTG raises from the blinds with those hands.
3. AA – 3 combos: Again, there can be 6 combos of AA, but since we have one of the aces in our hand, he can only have the following 3 combos.
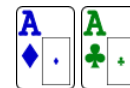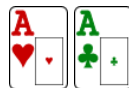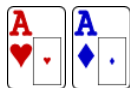
4. AK – 6 combos (3 aces left x 2 kings left = 6 combos): A pair + kicker usually has 12 combos. However, we hold a king and an ace so that takes away several combinations.
5. Straight draws – 4 combos of JT suited (JT clubs, JT spades, JT diamonds, JT hearts): We can safely assume that Villain will not call an UTG raise with JT offsuit from the blinds. I left out T7s and 76s because he is less likely to call an

UTG raise with those hands from the blinds in a heads-up pot. Even if he does, he will more likely check-call.

If we know he never check-raises with a straight draw here, then that decreases the chances that he has JT and increases the chances that he holds two pair or better. Thus, the correct play is to fold. Another option is to call and see what he does on the turn. If he bets again, then we're likely behind and can fold. If he checks, then we can check behind for a cheap showdown. If you've seen villain overvalue his KQ and check-raise here, you can call the flop more liberally.

As you can see, hand combinations allow us to focus on villain's hand range to figure out how likely he is to have a certain hand. This does not replace hand reading in any way. It should be a great supplement, however, to dissect your opponent's range.

Hand Ranges

A hand range is a group of holdings that one player is likely to have based on previous history and the actions in a hand. Let's look at some examples.

> **100NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.**
> Villian is a TAG and raises to $4 from UTG. You 3-bet to $14 from the BTN with
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> He 4-bets you all-in, and you call.

His hand range here is very strong, which means that a lot of his holdings include TT+ and AK. Versus that range, our AK is a 40 percent underdog. Since we know he's a TAG, he is unlikely to be doing this with AQ/AJ or 99. So, we stand to lose money in the long run if he shows up with this range every time in this situation.

> Now, let's say a very bad, maniacal player raises $4 from UTG and you 3-bet again to $14 with
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>
> He 4-bets you all-in and you call.

His range is much *weaker* compared to that of our previous opponent because of his maniacal, aggressive nature. He might be the type to 5-bet all-in with AJs and 55. There are tons of mediocre hands that we either dominate or are 50/50 against. He could do this with TT+ and AK, but a larger portion of his range consists of AT+, 55+ and KQ-type hands. We have 48 percent equity against this range. With the dead money out there, we have more than enough odds to call profitably.

We did not try to put Villain on a specific hand, but rather on a range of hands he might have had. This is how you should be thinking in poker. It's often very difficult to put a player on an exact holding, but it's much each easier to estimate his hand range.

Hand ranges also allow us to analyze a situation in a broader perspective. For example, if our maniacal Villain from the previous example 4-bets us and shows up with AA, it doesn't mean that we made a bad read. We know that AA is only a *small part of his range.* Sometimes he will show up with a good hand, but most of his range consists of much weaker holdings. As you can see, you estimate a player's hand range based on his image, tendencies and history.

Hand ranges are dynamic and can change after any given action. Consider the following example.

100NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.
Let say our TAG player raises to $4 from UTG and we call from the button with

The flop is

He c-bets full pot. His hand range has not changed because he will c-bet this dry flop nearly 100-percent of the time. We call. The turn is a

and he checks. At this point, his hand range changes.

Unless he is going for an unlikely check-raise, we can safely assume that he rarely has KK, 99, 22, and K9+ in his range. He would have bet those hands to try to extract value from a weaker Kx, TT-QQ, or 9x. Checking allows us to control the pot size and check behind with our weak hands. So his hand range has *weakened*, while ours has gone up relative to his holdings.

A good generalization to keep in mind is that if you think your opponent's range is stronger than your hand, you want to fold more often. And if you think his range is weaker than your hand, you want to call or raise more.

The Fundamentals

If you're not good with numbers, don't worry. You only need to understand a few basic fundamentals of poker to become a great player. Once you learn these concepts, you will no longer have to worry about the mathematical aspects of poker.

Probability and Odds

Probability is the proportion of the time that something is likely to occur or has already occurred. It is usually expressed as a **percentage** (e.g., 40 percent) or a **ratio indicating odds** (e.g., 7:1). They are one and the same. For example, an open-ended straight draw has 31.5 percent equity on the flop, which is equivalent to saying it's a 2.2:1 dog.

Percentages are very straightforward. The higher the percentage, the more often an event is likely to occur. Now let's go over ratios.

There are two ways to describe a ratio. You can say it in terms of being a **favorite** or a **dog**, and there's a significant difference between the two. The simplest thing to keep in mind is that when you're a favorite, you're ahead, and when you're a dog, you're behind.

Let's look at a few examples.

- To be a 2:1 **favorite** means that for every two times that you win, you lose once.
- To be a 3:1 **dog** implies that you lose three times for every one time that you win.

Now, let's say we want to convert a 4:1 dog to a percentage. To do that, we use the equation below:

> **Percentage = wins/(left number + right number)**

Convert 4:1 dog to a percentage.
percentage = wins/(left number + right number)

$$= 1/(4 + 1)$$
$$= 1/5$$
$$= \mathbf{20\%}$$

Let's have some more practice.

Convert 3:1 **dog** to percentage
= wins/(left number + right number)
= 1/(3 + 1)
= 1/4
= **25%**

Convert 2:1 **dog** to percentage
= wins/(left number + right number)
= 1/(2 + 1)
= 1/3
= **33%**

Convert 2:1 **favorite** to percentage
= wins/(left number + right number)
= 2/(2 + 1)
= 2/3
= **67%**

Convert 3:1 **favorite** to percentage
= wins/(left number + right number)
= 3/(3 + 1)
= 3/4
= **75%**

Convert 25% to ratio
= 25% = 25/100
= 25 wins, 75 losses
= 25/75 = 1/3
= 1:3 or **3:1 dog**

Convert 37% to ratio
= 37% = 37/100
= 37 wins, 63 losses
= roughly 40/60 = 4/6 = 2/3
= 2:3 or **3:2 dog**

Pot Odds

One of the essentials of poker, pot odds are something that every poker player should learn about. Whether you're grinding it at a 10NL table or playing high-stakes, you have to know what pot odds are. We will cover two types of odds: **immediate odds and implied odds.** Knowing about odds allows us to determine if a call, bet, fold or raise is the most optimal play.

Immediate odds

Normally referred to as simply "odds", immediate odds are how much you stand to win immediately in relation to what you have to risk, and is usually expressed as a ratio. Here are five simple steps we need to take to determine our pot odds.

1. Determine the original pot size.
2. Determine the amount we have to call.
3. Add up original size of pot and amount we have to call to get the Total Pot Size.
4. Express it as a ratio (Total Pot Size:Amount we have to call).
5. Convert it to a percentage.

Let's apply this in a few examples.

> Say we get to the river with top pair and there's $50 in a pot. Villain bets $25. Do we have enough odds to call?

In order to know if you can profitably call here, you need to know your odds. To determine this, let's follow the steps above.

1. Original size of pot = $50
2. Amount we have to call = $25
3. Original size of pot + amount we have to call = Total Pot Size
   $50 + $25 = $75
4. Total Pot Size:Amount we have to call
   75:25, or **3:1 odds**.
5. 3:1 odds converts to 25 percent equity, which means if you are good here 25 percent of the time, you break even. If more than 25 percent, you stand to win money in the long run. With our top pair, we think we're good here more than 25 percent of the time, so we call.

http://www.DailyVariance.com

Sometimes the numbers don't round up perfectly, so we'll have to do some adjusting. Here's an example:

> We get to the river with top pair and the pot is $70. Villain goes all-in for $65. We think we're good here about 50 percent of the time. Do we have enough odds to call?

We need to call $65 to win $135 ($70 + $65). That's 135:65. This can be a hard number to work with, so let's round it up. $135 is about twice as big as $65, so we reduce that to about 2:1. We can convert 2:1 odds to about 33 percent equity. Since we think we're good here at least 50 percent of the time, we can profitably call.

Hopefully, that wasn't too hard. It does take a little getting used to in the beginning, but after a bit of practice, you can easily do this in seconds. If you have trouble understanding this, I suggest you read this section again to feel more comfortable. It took me a while getting used to it myself.

Let's go over another example for some more practice.

> **100NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.**
> We hold
>
> and the flop is
>
> Villain bets $15 into a $20 pot. Do we have the odds to call with our flush draw?

Let's apply the steps from above:

1. Original size of pot = $20
2. Amount we have to call = $15
3. Original size of pot + amount we have to call = Total Pot Size
   $20 + $15 = $35
4. Total Pot Size:Amount we have to call

35:15, or **2.33:1 odds**. To get this number, just compute 35/15 on a calculator.

5. 2.33:1 odds converts to 30 percent equity, which means if we are good here 30 percent of the time, we break even. If more than 30 percent, we stand to win money in the long run. Against a hand like AQ, we have about 37 percent chance of winning, but ONLY if we get to see BOTH the turn and river. If we plan to fold to a turn bet when we miss, then we only get to see one card. This reduces our 37 percent equity to about 20 percent. Based on this alone, we can't call. Good thing we have **implied odds**.

Implied Odds

Implied odds reflect how much we expect to win in later streets if we hit our hand. In the above example, if we know that Villain is the type of player who will stack off with Ax even when the flush card comes, we can call here all day. We have a lot of money left behind to make up for it. Although our immediate odds aren't great, our implied odds are enough to at least warrant a call.

Figuring out implied odds is very similar to determining immediate odds. You simply add what he has left (excluding his bet) to the Total Pot Size.

So after he bets the flop, he still has $75 left. So $75 + $35 (Total Pot Size) = $110. Our new odds are 110:15, which is about 7.33-to-1. Since we only need *4:1 odds to call, we can continue.

* A flush draw has 19 percent equity if you get to see only 1 card; this is the same as a 4:1 odds. Check out The Odds Chart on page 33.

Reverse Implied Odds

Reverse implied odds reflect how much you stand to lose even if you do hit your hand. The most basic example is raising with ATo from UTG. We don't want to do this in an aggressive game because this hand has a lot of reverse implied odds. Even if we do hit an Ace on the flop, we will stand to lose a lot of money against AJ, AQ and AK when the money goes in. Furthermore, we will not be able to extract much from weaker aces that will only call one or two small bets.

Here is a simple reverse implied odds situation that isn't so obvious at first.

You have

K♦ 5♥

in the BB. For some reason, the pot is limped around and you see the flop 5-way. The flop comes out

K♥ 7♠ 4♣

What is your play in this situation?

You should check-fold. Because there are so many players in the pot, your hand is rarely ahead. If you are behind, you are almost drawing dead. Thus, in this situation, you should check it down unless your hand improves on the turn or the river.

Fold Equity

Fold Equity is based on how often we expect our opponents to fold to a bet or raise. Since poker is all about being aggressive at the right time, it's a good idea to know a little something about fold equity. Often times, you will find yourself in spots where a call is perfectly okay, but with fold equity, it may be best to raise it. Allow me to demonstrate.

> **100NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.**
> The BTN raises to $3 and we call with
>
> from the BB. The flop is
>
> We check. He bets full-pot and we check-raise to 3.5x his bet.

With the nut flush draw + overcards + BDST (backdoor straight draw), we are actually ahead of a top pair hand like T9. Although we can call here, the most optimal play is to raise. This is because of fold equity. Raising will fold out medium-pair hands like 99 or 8x. With the dead money already in there and being OOP, we don't mind that kind of result, especially since most of his range will be mediocre holdings. A ten will probably call us and that's fine because we will be able to fire on a lot of turn cards (any spade, and J, Q, K and A). Since most of his range includes marginal hands like T9, he can't be too thrilled about calling another big bet.

Here's another example you may be familiar with:

> The MP raises and we 3-bet from the button with

We only have ace-high, and even a pair as weak as 22 is ahead of us. So why do we want to put money in when we're behind?

Fold equity.

We will be able to fold out hands that are a favorite against us but too weak to call OOP (22-88). We can put a lot of pressure on our opponents with AK and we don't mind getting it all in pre-flop when we get 4-bet. Three-betting with the intention of getting it in against a 4-bet is rarely our goal with AK. If he folds to our 3-bet, then we win. If he calls, then we can still flop a big hand and win. If he 4-bets us, then we have enough odds to call.

Odds Chart

# of Outs	Hand	% on flop (1 Card to Come)	% on Flop (2 cards to come)	2 Card Odds (X : 1)	% on Turn (1 card to come)	1 Card Odds (X : 1)
1		2.1%	4.3%	22.5	2.1%	45
2	Pocket pair	4.3%	8.4%	10.9	4.3%	22
3		6.4%	12.5%	7	6.4%	14.3
4	Gutshot	8.5%	16.5%	5.1	8.5%	10.5
5		10.6%	20.3%	3.9	10.6%	8.2
6	Overcards	12.8%	24%	3.1	12.8%	6.7
7		14.9%	27.8%	2.6	14.9%	5.6
8	OESD	17%	31.5%	2.2	17.0%	4.8
9	Flush Draw	19.1%	35%	1.9	19.1%	4.1
10		21.3%	38.4%	1.6	21.3%	3.6
11		23.4%	41.7%	1.4	23.4%	3.2
12	FD + 1 OC	25.5%	45%	1.2	25.5%	2.3
13		27.7%	48.1%	1.1	27.7%	2.5
14	FD + OESD	29.8%	51.2%	.95	29.8%	2.3
15	FD + 2 OC	31.9%	54.1%	.85	31.9%	2.1
16		34%	57%	.75	34.0%	1.9
17		36.2%	59.8%	.67	36.2%	1.7
18		38.3%	62.4%	.60	38.3%	1.6
19		40.4%	65%	.54	40.4%	1.4
20		46.8%	67.5%	.48	42.6%	1.3

Table 1: OESD = Open-Ended Straight draw; FD = Flush Draw; OC = Overcard

Estimating Your Equity on the Flop and Turn

Below are two simple and easy methods to estimate your equity on the flop and/or turn. They work best when you deal with small numbers of outs. Also note that Multiples of 2 are generally more accurate than Multiples of 4; however, both give very good estimates.

- **Multiples of 4** – To approximate the equity you have <u>on the flop</u>, multiply your number of outs by 4.
  - You have an open-ended draw straight on the flop. That's 8 outs, so 8 x 4 = 32 percent to win by the river. The actual number is 31.5 percent (This is if you get to see *both* the turn and river cards.)

- **Multiples of 2** – To approximate your equity <u>on the turn</u>, multiply your number of outs by 2.
  - You have an open-ended draw straight on the turn. That's 8 outs, so 8 x 2 = 16 percent to win by the river. The actual number is 17 percent.

Expected Value

Expected Value (EV) is the average amount that we stand to win or lose if we see a certain situation many times.

Let's go over a quick hand to clarify what this means.

100NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.
You have

on

You bet $20 into a pot of $25. Villain raises you all-in $65 more and you think he has 98 for an open-ended straight draw. What's the EV of your call?

First, you must determine your equity against his hand. I plugged this into Poker Stove to find out that you have 65 percent equity. This means that on average, you will win 65 percent of the time and lose 35 percent of the time. So, you need to call $65 more to win a total pot of $110 ($25 + $20 + $65). Now use the equation below to figure out your EV.

EV = (% you win)(amount you win) – (% you lose)(amount you lose)

Your EV = (.65)($110) – (.35)($65)

= $71.5 – $22.75

= **$48.75 (roughly half of a buy-in)**

This means that on average, you will earn $48.75 for every time you call his raise in this exact scenario. Thus, it is a very +EV (positive expected value) call that you should make all day because you will win a lot in the long term.

You will also lose 35 percent of the time. When you lose, you lose the $65 you invested in the pot, but you still gain an expected value of $48.75, or Sklansky Bucks. Just know that as long as you keep winning Sklansky Bucks, you'll be making money when variance evens out.

So, what happens when you don't know Villain's exact hand? You estimate his *hand range* (the possible hands that he can hold).

---

100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.

A TAG player raises to $4 from UTG and you 3-bet to $12 from the button with

He calls. The flop is

He checks. You bet $20 into a pot of $25.50 ($1.50 from the blinds), and he check-raises all-in for $68 more. What's the EV of your call?

You need to call $68 to win $133.50 ($25.50 + $20 + $20 + $68). To figure out the EV of your call, let's first determine his hand range. We can safely rule out all bluffs just because it's such a bad flop to do it on and Villain is good enough to know that.

> Made hands: He can do this with AA, AK, AQ, 77, 66, A7s, A6s and 76s. We will remove some sets and two-pair hands from his range because he will often fold 77, 66, 76s, A7s, and A6s to pre-flop 3-bets. We can also take away AK some of the time because he would want to 4-bet you and get it in pre-flop.

> Draws: he could have KsQs, QsJs, JsTs, Ts9s, 9s8s, 8s6s, 6s5s. Again, we will take away some of the small suited connectors because he will usually fold them pre-flop to a 3-bet. Since it's a two-tone board, he probably wouldn't check-raise all-in with just an open-ended straight draw.

Against this range of hands, you have 54 percent equity to win. Now let's determine the EV of your call.

Using the equation from above:

EV = (% you win)(amount you win) – (% you lose)(amount you lose)
= (.54)($133.50) – (.46)($68)
= $72.09 – $31.28
= $40.81

As you can see, the EV of your call is $30.01 (that's 30BB at 100NL) given your read on the player's hand ranges. You will not be able to make these kinds of calculations at the table, and that's fine. You should do it whenever you have time. Maybe you were stuck on a hand and didn't know if your call was correct or not. Now you can plug in the numbers to find out. Since folding is zero or neutral EV, then calling is generally correct if your EV is greater than zero.

Determining How Often a *Bluff* Has to Work to be Profitable

We get to the river with a busted draw and we bet full-pot to bluff him off his hand. To determine if this is a profitable bet, we need to figure out how often he needs to fold. To accomplish this, we use the equation 0 = 100F – (size of bet)(1-F).

How often a pot-size bluff has to work to be profitable
0 = 100F – (size of bet)(1-F)
0 = 100F – 100(1-F)
0 = 100F – 100 + 100F
100 = 200F
100/200 = F
.5 = F
50% of the time or more

How often a half-pot bluff has to work to be profitable
0 = 100F – (size of bet)(1-F)
0 = 100F – 50(1-F)
0 = 100F – 50 + 50F
50 = 150F
50/150 = F
.33 = F
33% of the time or more

Determining How Often a *Call* Has to Work to be Profitable

We get to the river with top pair and villain bets full-pot into us. The pot is $50 and he bets $50. We think he's bluffing some of the time, and so we call. In order to know if this is a profitable call, let's do some quick math.

How often we must be ahead for our call to be profitable against a pot-size bet?
Pot size : Amount we have to call
($50 + $50):$50
$100:$50
2:1
= 33% of the time or more

How often we must be ahead for our call to be profitable against a half-pot bet?
Pot size : Amount we have to call
($50 + $25):$25
$75:$25
3:1
= 25% of the time or more

Memorizing Numbers

You get to the river with

on

The pot is $100 and the preflop raiser shoves his entire stack of $75. How often do you have to be good here for this call to be profitable?

If you don't know the answer to this right away, you're going to be losing valuable time and energy doing it in the middle of a game (the answer is at least 30%).

<u>These situations happen all the time in poker</u>. Villain may bet half-pot or full-pot, or he might even over-bet the pot and you sit there trying to figure out the odds. Learn the math now, so that when these situations come up again, you can focus your attention on his hand range instead of the odds you need to make a profitable call.

I've already done all the hard work for you. I plugged all the numbers into the equations and organized the answers for you (on page 40). All you have to do now is memorize it.

Learning these charts is one of the easiest and fastest things you can do to immediately improve your poker game and win rate.

If I were to learn poker from the beginning again, this will certainly be one of my top priorities. Poker is all about having an edge over your opponents. Whether you know something they don't or are capable of doing something and they're not, you gain. Knowing these charts is certainly one of those edges.

Quick Poker Facts

(Memorizing these charts now will make your life much easier)

Bluffing Frequency on River	
How often your bluffs have to work to be profitable	Your Bet Size
67% or more	2x the pot size
60% or more	1.5x the pot size
50% or more	Pot size
43% or more	$\frac{3}{4}$ of pot size
33% or more	$\frac{1}{2}$ of pot size
25% or more	$\frac{1}{3}$ of pot size
20% or more	$\frac{1}{4}$ of pot size
17% or more	$\frac{1}{5}$ of pot size

Calling Frequency on River	
How often we must be ahead for our call to be profitable	Villain's Bet Size
40% or more	2x the pot size
37.5% or more	1.5x the pot size
33% or more	Pot size
30% or more	$\frac{3}{4}$ of pot size
25% or more	$\frac{1}{2}$ of pot size
20% or more	$\frac{1}{3}$ of pot size
17% or more	$\frac{1}{4}$ of pot size
14% or more	$\frac{1}{5}$ of pot size

Preflop: The Fundamentals

The Blinds

Look at positional stats in PokerTracker or Holdem Manager and you will find that you're actually losing money in the blinds. The amount is probably a little more than you would like. This is the fate that most, if not all, poker player share because it's very difficult to win money playing pots out of position. It's difficult to extract value from your strong hands, and your range is more faced-up. You also give your opponent more information regarding the strength of your hand than vice versa.

When the decision to fold or call pre-flop is close, folding is better because a small mistake can lead to a bigger one post-flop. In the occasion that you do play and find yourself being out of position, try to keep the pots small so you won't find yourself in many sticky situations.

Raising from the blinds

Be very conservative with your raises from the blinds. With a few limpers in the pot, don't raise unless you've got a good hand like 99+, ATs+, AQo+, or KQs. Another thing to remember is that when you raise from the blinds after a few limpers, most people will put you on premium hands (AQ+, TT+). So, on a flop like AT3 rainbow, you're not going to extract much value from weaker hands. Players will know what your range is and they have the opportunity to continue or not after you act. If you get raised here, then be very cautious against standard TAGs and especially NITs. Unless there is any history, if your c-bet gets raised, you should fold one pair in this spot. No one is going out of their way to make you fold AQ /AK on an AT3 flop.

3-betting From The Blinds

Against a UTG raise, the majority of your 3-bets should be for value. Unless I know UTG is a fish, I rarely 3-bet in this type of situation because my perceived range is so strong. An argument can be made that if my opponent thinks my range is strong, I should 3-bet with marginal holdings to make him fold his good hands. Although this reasoning is valid, I'm going to get called pre-flop a lot since Villain has position on me. If he is aggressive and good, he's going to make my life pretty tough post-flop. My philosophy regarding poker is to put myself in situations to make simple decisions and avoid making costly one. This is one of those situations that I wish to avoid and I hope you do too.

Since we are rarely 3-betting a UTG open from the blinds, we should call with the majority, if not all our holdings. If you only 3-bet with the nuts, an observant opponent

will notice and will put a lot of pressure when you only call from the blinds. Besides, it's not like we are giving up a lot of value by calling from the blinds. It is just one of those situations where no matter what you do, you aren't going to get a lot of value out of it. The sooner you accept this fact, the better your game will be and subsequently, your bankroll.

It is important to note that there are a lot of players who won't notice that you are 3-betting from the blinds with only the nuts. In such situations, I would definitely 3-bet KK+ and try to get as much money in as possible. If you find a particular player who fold to 3-bets a lot, you can start 3-betting with marginal hands such as 98s and KQo. However, I would be cautious of such an approach. There are much better situations in an orbit of hands where your edge is bigger.

Against an MP open, the same principle applies, although you can widen your 3-betting range since your opponent's opening range is wider and your perceived range is wider as well. It is important to note that you should try to have your range as wide as possible.

In this situational dynamic, you should 3-bet more often with JJ+/AK against looser opponents. If my opponent folds to 3-bets a lot, I wouldn't 3-bet with JJ and AK and would call pre-flop to keep them in. I rarely flat call in this spot with QQ+ because it would be disastrous if I fail to stack my opponent's premium holding. I would call with QQ+/AK only if I know the players who have yet to act is squeeze happy and will 3-bet if I call. If those players don't exist at the current table, you lose too much value for not 3-betting pre-flop.

You shouldn't be 3-betting with non-broadway suited connectors. They don't play well in 3-bet pots and you won't flop enough hands to continue after c-betting. Don't 3-bet with weak suited Ax either. It doesn't flop well and it is very tough to play post-flop. When you flop an ace, you rarely dominate your opponent and you only get action when you are behind.

Against opponents who rarely fold to 3-bets, tighten up your range by removing suited connectors. If they call 3-bets a lot and fold to c-bets when they miss, then go ahead and widen your 3-betting range to include suited broadway hands that are easy to play post-flop.

Against a CO/BTN open, you should 3-bet with a wider range because his stealing range is wider. The question is which range should you be 3-betting with?

In this type of situation, I would like to 3-bet with a polarized range. What this means is I would 3-bet with premium hands such as JJ+/AQ and speculative holdings such as 65s and 87s that can't play profitably post-flop without the initiative. I would call with marginal hands such as AJ, KJ, QJ, and pocket pairs. The reason is by calling with AJ, KJ and QJ, I can keep some of the hands I dominate in the pot since worse hands are rarely calling my 3-bet. Sometimes I call from the blinds with AK/AQ as well to have some nut hands in my flatting range and for deception value. Some players like to 3-bet small pairs from the blind against the CO/BTN because it works well with their game. Since I don't like to play out of position, I like to call with those holdings and make my decision post-flop.

Squeezing

Squeezing is when you re-raise a pre-flop raiser with another player in the pot. Unless you have a history of 3-betting a ton, this will look extremely strong and will give you a lot of respect and folds. Most of the time, the person squeezing will be from late position or from the blinds. At 50NL, a squeeze is usually a strong hand. At 600NL, ranges are wider and Villain can show up with speculative hands such as A4s, 75s, and KJo.

Here is a simple squeezing spot.

> **100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.**
> A weak-tight UTG player limps and CO raises to $5. You have
>
>
>
> on the Button. You 3-bet to $17.

The example above illustrates that you can 3-bet to punish a habitual isolator, whose range in this spot is likely wide. Squeezing also discourages the CO from playing more hands because he has to worry about you.

Another squeeze spot is when a loose player opens in MP or in the CO and the BTN calls. If you are in the blinds, then this is a good squeezing spot. The main reason is when a loose player opens, the BTN has a wider value range to 3-bet with. So when the BTN only calls, the majority of his calling range is marginal holdings such as small pocket pairs, QTs, and ATs. Let's stop for a second. If you have JJ+/AQ+ on the BTN and a loose player opens in the CO, what would you do? You would 3-bet the majority of the time because your hand is so ahead of your opponent's range and your hand dominate some of the hands he

calls a 3-bet with. This is the main reason why good players always advocate folding marginal holdings on the BTN or CO against an early position open if there is a squeeze happy player on the blinds.

While squeezing is a powerful play, it can easily be misused. Learn the guidelines below to prevent yourself from making mistakes that cost you money.

- **Squeeze until they give you a reason to stop**: If they don't adjust by either 4-betting you light or start shoving flops lightly against your c-bet, then there's no reason to stop. Keep running them over. You will be surprised to see so many players willing to let you have your way. If a player, especially a regular, has been folding to your 3-bets, suddenly 4-bets you, then fold anything worse than AK and QQ. He isn't leveling nor adjusting against you. He has the nuts.

- **Villain's Hand Range:** A good, tight-aggressive player's hand range for calling your 3-bets consist of 88+, AQ, KQs, QJs, JTs, T9s, 98s, and 87s. On a flop like A73 rainbow, you should consider betting your entire range since you have a lot of fold equity. And because it's a flop where you can have a lot of combinations of strong hands in your range (AT+), your betting range is easily balanced with air. For this reason, just bet one-half to three-fifth pot. There's no reason to bet bigger since hands that are behind your made hands aren't going to outdraw you often. Betting small also allows you to bluff cheaply on future hands.

- **Ace high flops:** If you 3-bet with TT-KK OOP and the flop comes Axx, you should bet-fold more often than check-call. Although you won't often get called by worse, it makes the hand easier to play, especially if your opponent is aggressive. Of course, if your opponent is passive and let you get to showdown easily, then checking is fine.

- **Against NITS:** Don't squeeze a NIT when he raises from early position because his range will be too tight and strong.

- **Against loose-bad players:** Don't squeeze loose, bad players with low suited connectors. They will call your 3-bets and c-bets too often that it's just not profitable. It's much better to just call their raise preflop and stack them when you hit something big.

- **Against shortstacks:** Don't squeeze when there's a short stack in the hand and you don't want to call his all-in raise. He's not going to fold often, and will just jam with

any A or any pair. AT+ or 77 are decent hands to squeeze with but stay away from medium or low suited connectors.

- **Against light 4-better:** Don't squeeze against an opponent who 4-bets you back frequently. This won't happen much at lower stakes, although it's something to keep in mind as you move up.

After Villain calls your squeeze, *never* bet unless you think he will fold a lot or you are willing to get it in on the turn. It's very exploitable to always check-fold the turn after you bet the flop. Good players will pick up on this and you will lose a lot of money. Fewer players are capable of detecting this at micro-stakes or small stakes, but be aware of it.

His hand range for calling the flop mostly consists of weak-type hands or even overcards if he's tricky. You should be betting the turn a ton of the time against players like him. Unless he's stubborn and calls you down lightly, it's tough for him to do anything about it.

Here's another example.

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100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.
MP opens $4. CO calls $4. You squeeze to $16 with

MP folds and CO calls. The flop is

You bet one-half pot and Villain calls. The turn is a

What is your play?

You should consider betting three-fourth pot or near pot to commit yourself. Don't bet so small that he would take it as weakness and shove over your bet with a pair or a draw.

Most of Villain's range will be Tx, 77-99, 98s, 87s (occasionally 6x and A4s), and cannot continue on the turn. You have tons of equity (overcards and OE) to make the best hand against a hand like ATs. If he shows up with a set, you can always suck out. On the same note, if he can show up with a set on this board, he'll have a lot of other pocket pairs in his range that will fold to the turn bet.

> *Caution*: *Squeezing a lot will build up adrenaline and you may find yourself playing too aggressively to the point of spazzing out like a monkey. You will also find yourself more incline to fight for pots because the pots are bigger. I suggest taking a conservative approach at first by squeezing with only QQ+/ AK+ so you are comfortable playing in 3-bet pots. Once you're more comfortable and recognize some spots where your opponents fold all the time, you can add speculative hands such as 87s, ATs, and KJs to your range. I would also practice playing in 3-bet pots against weaker players at the table first.*

Under the Gun (UTG)
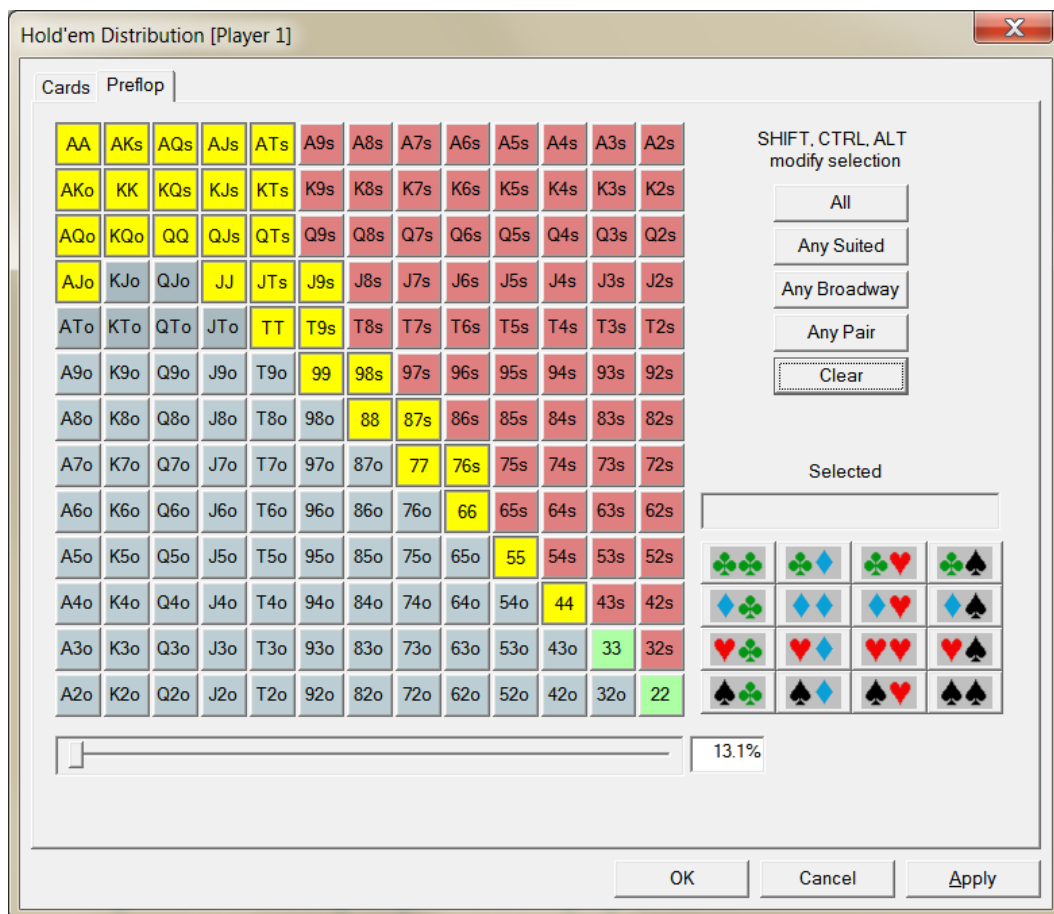
Figure 1: UTG's Raising Range in Yellow Highlights - 13.1%

UTG is the first player to act pre-flop, with three players having position on you—middle position (MP), cut off (CO) and the button (BTN). Since you will be out of position for most hands, it's best to play with a tighter range than all other positions.

Hand Ranges

Here's a conservative range of hands to play from UTG if you want to play at 23/18 or so. I recommend raising about 12-14% of hands.

1. All pairs 44 and higher
2. All suited broadways such as ATs, KTs, JTs

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3. AJo+ and KQo. If players behind me are aggressive, I would fold AJo and KQo as well.
4. Medium suited cards such as 87s, 98s, T9s (stay away from single-gap suited cards like T8s).

> ***Important Note***: *Avoid playing ATo from UTG because of <u>reverse implied odds</u> (how much you expect to lose once you made your hand). For example, ATo will be dominated by AK, AQ and AJ too often when the money goes in, and thus it has poor reverse implied odds.*

While you can certainly expand your range with more speculative hands, this is a good starting point. How tight or loose you want to raise depends on how good and aggressive players are behind you and how good the blinds are.

Players Sitting Behind You

With several good players behind you, tighten up your pre-flop range. You will be out of position against them in all the pots. They can 3-bet you more often or float your flop c-bets. It'll also be tough to extract value from your strong hands and even more difficult to see a cheap showdown. With weaker and looser players behind, you can open with more hands. Medium suited connectors like 98s or 87s go up in value for their drawing potentials and they are easier to play post-flop when your opponents don't put a lot of pressure on you and let you draw cheaply.

Flow of Game

In a passive game where players don't 3-bet often, you can add more small suited connectors (76s, 65s, 54s) and Axs into your UTG range. In an aggressive game, you should tighten up your range to include more high suited cards and 55+ and avoid opening with small suited connectors.

Fish in the blinds: Proceed With Caution!

When there's a huge fish in the blinds who calls pre-flop raises very liberally, you should widen your pre-flop raising range to include hands such as A5s, K7s, Q8s, and J9s. Unless the players behind you are very aggressive and 3-bet a lot, it's worth risking playing against them OOP and having the chance to play against the fish in position.

The majority of your earnings will come from really bad players so you should go out of your way to play pots against them. Some players like to comment how so and so is lucky because he always seem to cooler the fish. What they don't get is in order to cooler a fish, you must play with them. Since the majority of fish are passive and rarely put pressure on you, it's tough to make mistakes against them.

I strongly recommend slowly expanding your UTG opening at first. Don't raise A5o when you're starting out. Do it with hands such as A7s, K8s, Q7s, and T6s. Having suited cards will at least give you more equity and allow you to semi-bluff more often post-flop.

Important Note: This strategy also applies from MP, CO or on the BTN.

Middle Position (MP)
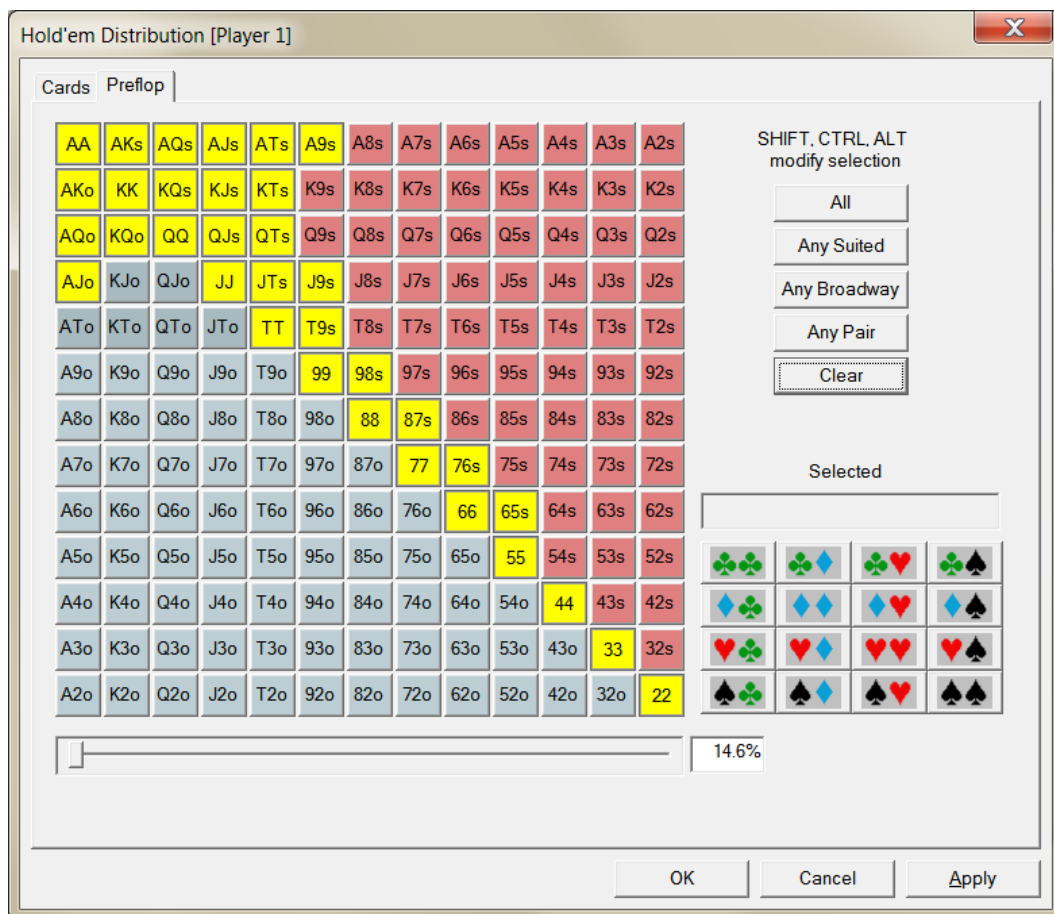
Figure 2: MP's Raising Range in Yellow Highlights – 14.6%

MP is the player to the immediate left of UTG. Being in MP allows you to open up your pre-flop range a bit more since there's one less player to act behind you.

Hand Ranges

Generally, I would treat my UTG and MP ranges almost the same. I recommend opening 13 to 16 percent of hands in this position: all pairs, A9s+, AJo+, KQo+, KTs+, QTs+, J9s+, T9s, J9s, T9s, 98s, 87s, 76s, 65s. If players behind me are not aggressive, I would include all Ax suited in my opening range.

This is only a standard guideline and your range should change with respect to table conditions. In an aggressive game, I would fold all Axs suited and small suited connectors below T9s.

Limping behind

You shouldn't always raise after UTG limps. Consider limping behind with hands that play well multi-way (22-55, Axs, and low SCs such as 65s). This benefits you in a couple of ways. Low pairs and low SCs don't do so well heads-up because they generally don't flop anything big. By calling, you encourage weaker players to come along, and thus you increase your implied odds. Limping behind also shows that you are not loosely isolating (or raising) the limper every time, which earns you more respect when you do isolate. One downside to this is that a loose-aggressive player from late position may raise your limps a lot. To counter this, tighten up your limping range by folding a lot of marginal hands and isolate the UTG limper with a strong range.

Isolating UTG player

Isolating, or raising, a limper is another alternative and should generally be your default play as oppose to limping behind. You want to have the betting initiative because it allows you to take down most pots pre-flop or post-flop. Whether it's best to limp behind, raise or even fold will depend on a couple factors.

1. Is Villain likely to fold to your pre-flop raise? If not, is he likely to fold to a continuation bet on the flop or turn? If you answer yes to either question, then go ahead and raise.

2. Will the players behind you 3-bet lighter because they know you're isolating UTG with a wide range? If yes, then limp behind or just fold small suited connectors like 76s.

3-betting the UTG raiser

Unless UTG is playing at 40/28, his UTG raising range is usually tight. For this reason, when you 3-bet from MP, make sure it's more for value than semi-bluffs. Never 3-bet bluff here with a random hand like 64o. That is just FPS (Fancy Play Syndrome). Even if you feel like you have a great handle on how he plays, just muck it.

The hands I would 3-bet with in this spot depends heavily on how tight UTG is and how aggressive players behind me are. Unless the players behind me are squeeze happy, I would 3-bet with QQ+/AK. If UTG is really loose, then I would add TT/JJ/AQ/KQs to that range. Sometimes I'll 3-bet with low suited connectors such as 87s and 76s but I wouldn't go crazy with the idea and 3-bet more than 25% of the time.

There are times when I'm not 3-betting with premium hands such as QQ+/AK:

1. If UTG rarely calls 3-bet and folds all the time. In such a case, I would add more speculative holdings such as suited connectors to my 3-betting range.

2. If a fish is in the blinds and I want him to tag along. I always try my best to play against the fish.

3. If the players behind me are squeeze happy and like to 3-bet all the time.

Against good aggressive players, I like to call with TT/JJ/AQ/KQs because I don't want to get 4-bet and have to fold. Additionally, if there are aggressive players behind me, I would call with these hands and shove if UTG folds or calls against a 3-bet. With so much dead money in the pot already and my range is so strong when I take this line, it is a profitable play. It should be noted that if a tight player 3-bets, I would fold those hands.

3-betting with small pairs is the exception rather than the rule. Unless UTG is really bad, I would call instead of 3-betting to isolate. Small pairs play much better in a single-raised pot. Calling also encourages bad players to come along as well.

3-betting with small suited aces is fine some of the times. I would 3-bet more often with A2s-A5s rather than A6s because you can make a straight and you'll have more situations where you can semi-bluff. It should be noted that the difference between A6s and A2-A5s in terms of absolute strength isn't much as UTG will rarely call your 3-bet with anything lower than ATs. Having an ace in your hand also decreases his likelihood of having AA and AK/AQ. Again, 3-betting with Axs should be minimal. It should be fold > 3-bet > call.

Low suited connectors such as 76s and 65s are great to 3-bet with because there is some deception value to what you have. In the chance you get 4-bet and have to fold, you don't lose much value. Low suited connectors also can't profitably call an UTG raise so it's best to either 3-bet or fold.

Cutoff (CO)
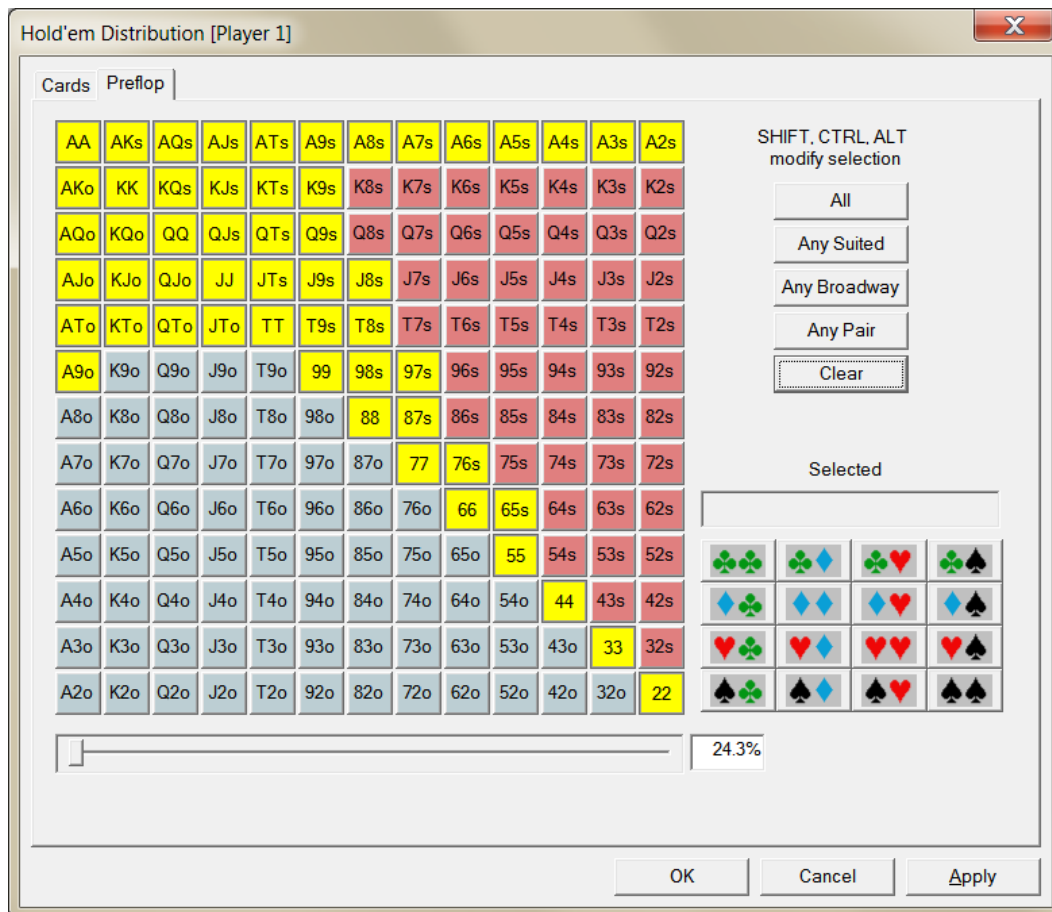
Figure 3: CO's Raising Range in Yellow Highlights – 24.3%

The CO is to the left of the Middle Position (MP). It is the second most profitable seat in a 6-max game, second only to the button. Playing from the CO allows you to play in position in most pots; therefore, you will want to isolate and 3-bet more often.

Hand Ranges

Here is a range of hands that you should be playing from the CO: 22+ (all pairs), broadway cards, suited and offsuit (AT, KJ, QT, JT, etc.), A9o+, A2s+, K9s+, Q9s+, medium suited connectors (J8s+, 97s+, 87s, 76s, 65s).

This makes up about 24 percent of hands. As you improve, you can add more suited two- and three-gappers such as T7s and Q8s to your range. The same principles about limping

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behind and 3-betting apply here, although you now only have to worry about the button behind you.

Limping behind

You can limp behind with even more hands from the CO (Axs and T7s). One thing worth noting is that with one limper in front of you, you should be more inclined to raise and isolate him. The problem with isolating against two limpers is that if the first limper calls, the second will likely come along as well. Unless they both play very straightforward on the flop, just limp behind.

Isolating limpers

Isolate with the same hands from MP and more. Any broadway cards are fine. So is the majority of suited hands (85s, 96s) higher than a 6. Weaker players will usually just limp-call or limp-fold and check-call or check-fold the flop. By isolating, you will have the lead on the flop, and the decision to bloat the pot or not usually rests on you. Isolating from the CO is also more profitable than from MP because you only have one player sitting behind you instead of two. This decreases the chance of you getting 3-bet lightly.

Good hands to raise with are hands that do well in heads-up pots. For example, you should isolate with KTo way more often than with a hand like 65s against a limper. Broadway hands such as KTo plays well post-flop because when you flop a pair, it is usually the best hand and has less chance of getting outdraw. The same can't be said for low cards such as 65s or 54s.

3-betting

Your range for 3-betting in this spot should be polarized to the nuts or speculative holdings such as 65s or 97s that can't profitably call a pre-flop raise from a tight player.

If UTG or MP is a fish, then I would expand my 3-betting range since it will discourage the button from over-calling and making this a multi-way pot. This allows you to steal the initiative from the fish and play him heads-up against you while you have position. If the button or blinds are capable of 4-betting light in this spot, then I would tighten up my 3-betting range and would be more incline to get it in with TT+/AQ+. However, in the micro- and small-stakes games, 4-betting light doesn't happen often. You usually see KK+/AK if someone 4-bets you.

Stealing the Blinds

Keep stealing from the CO with your normal pre-flop range and gradually widen the range as you improve. Although you will put yourself in marginal spots and may not feel comfortable at first, you will eventually. Once that happens, you will have a bigger edge over players in the blinds.

A simple example:

> **100 NL – 6 max. Everyone has over 100BBs.**
> It is folded to you and you are in the CO with
>
> 10♠ 7♠
>
> What is your action?

You should definitely RAISE here because you have position and this hand plays well post-flop. The only time you should consider folding this hand pre-flop is if the BTN is 3-betting you way too often.

One more example:

> **100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks**.
> A loose-passive player from UTG open limps and you hold the same hand
>
> 10♠ 7♠
>
> You've seen him limp-call from UTG with hands as strong as
>
> K♥ Q♠ and Q♦ J♦
>
> He likes to peel the flop with all sorts of holdings. What's your play?
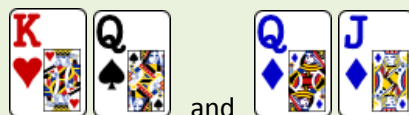
You should CALL here almost always. Raising is not optimal because we know that UTG likes to limp-call with a strong range. Some of my students would auto-raise to isolate in

this spot without giving any thought to the UTG's limping range. He has a strong hand so call and try to make two-pairs or better to stack him.

If you isolate the limper, there is also the possibility that the BTN and the blinds 3-betting you and forcing you to fold. If you only call and players behind you isolate, you can call and hope to flop a big hand after the fish calls.

Button (BTN)
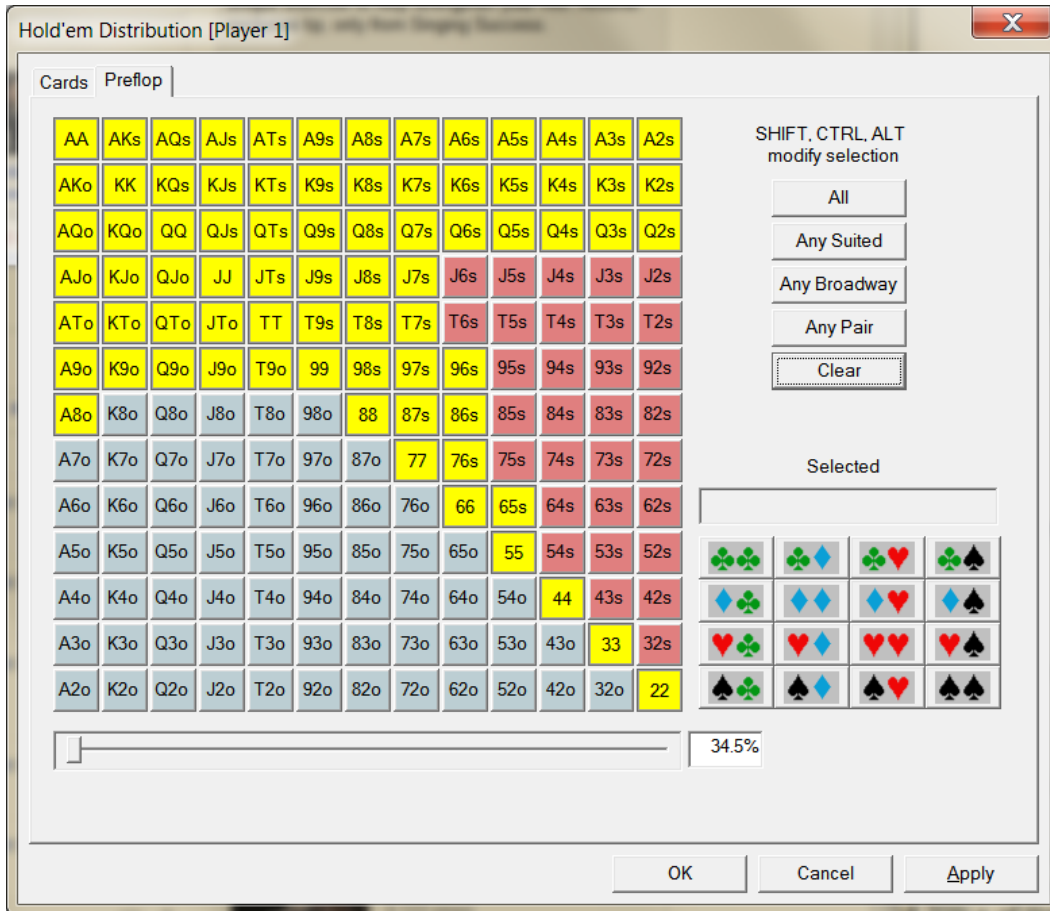
Figure 4: BTN's Raising Range in Yellow Highlights – 34.5%

The button is the most profitable position in NLHE and you should find any excuse to play in this position. Playing on the BTN is so profitable because you get to act last on every hand and you will have more information about your opponent's range than vice versa. Your opponents won't also be able to put as much pressure on you. It is also much easier to extract value from your made hands and you have a choice of getting a free card the majority of the time.

Hand Ranges

A good hand player can profitably play 50% of his hands from the button. Those who prefer playing a tighter style play from 30% to 35%. A range of 35% includes: all pocket pairs, Axs, K2s+, Q2s+, J7s+, T7s+, 96s+,86s+,76s,65s, A8o+, K9o+, Q9o+, J9o+, T9o.

Deciding which hands to play will depend on whether it is folded to you and how good the players are in the blinds. If the blinds are fishy, then I would widen my range. If the players in the blinds are aggressive and like to 3-bet, then I would fold hands such as 33, J9o or 75o that can't profitably call re-raises. If the players in the blinds are good at playing post-flop and give me trouble, then I would fold the majority of my low suited connectors and non-broadway two-gappers as well. Keep in mind that you want to be raising with the majority of the speculative hands on the button, not calling. It is not profitable to call raises with KTo, A4o, or 75s. Those hands are tough to play without the initiative.

Limping Behind

You should generally raise pre-flop if there's only one limper. When there are two or more limpers, I would limp behind with weaker hands such as Axs and suited connectors that play well in multi-way pots. With Axs, you will be able to cooler more players when you both flop a flush draw. T7s and 65s are also great because your hands can make some kind of a straight. Avoid calling with J5s type hands. With 99+, AK, KQ, or KJs, you should raise pre-flop regardless of how many limpers there are.

Another play I often like to use is open limp on the button or to min-raise the button if it is folded to me. I do this when a player in the blinds is bad but is overly aggressive pre-flop. I don't want to bloat the pot pre-flop because that will decrease the stack-to-pot ratio and make it easier for him to play against me. When playing against a very aggressive opponent, I want to put in the minimal amount of money before we see a flop. Since he is so aggressive, I can take advantage of it by committing more chips when I make a strong hand post-flop.

Loose/Tight Limpers

Against players who never limp-fold or check-fold on the flop, tighten up your raising range. Your main purpose for isolating is to take down the pot right away. In loose games where there are always three or four people in a pot, it's best to really cut down on your isolation, especially with middle offsuit connectors like T9o. I would fold these speculative hands.

Against players who limp-fold or check-fold the flop a lot, you should raise with hands that you decide to play with. It's also preferable to isolate with Q8s more than 65s in this case, because you will make stronger one-pair hands, straights, and flushes.

> ***Important Note****: Many small-stakes players often make the mistake of raising with 65s against an opponent who never limp-folds. Or they open with speculative hands when a player on the blinds likes to 3-bet light. I know I used to burn money not realizing this because it is such a small mistake. However, if you do keep committing the same small mistake over and over again, it will get costly in the future.*

Stack Sizes

With several short-stackers at your table, high card hands such as KTo or A9o go up in value because you can flop a strong pair. Against full stacks, their values diminish and suited connectors like 76s are better due to better implied odds and drawing potentials. Let me demonstrate.

> **100 NL – 6 max. Shortstacks in the blinds.**
> Everyone folds to you and both blinds have $35. You'll want to raise with hands like
>
>
>
> Your goal is to flop a pair and get it in on a safe board. But if they have +$100, suited connectors like
>
>
>
> are better to raise with because these types of hand play well when stacks are full or deep. Your hand is deceptive and can extract a lot of value post-flop.

The deeper you are, the more hands you want to play from the button. It is very tough for your opponent to play against you because he has to play 4 streets of poker and on each street, he has to worry about the next one where the bet size could potentially get bigger. With 100BBs, your opponent decreases his positional disadvantage by bloating the pot pre-flop and can get his stack in by the turn. With 200BBs, bloating the pot pre-flop is not

as attractive anymore because I can call with more hands pre-flop and try to put pressure on him post-flop.

3-betting

Your 3-betting range from the button should be the widest out of all the positions. The main reason is you have position. My approach for 3-betting on the button depends more on who my opponent is rather than the strength of my hand. If my opponent keeps folding to 3-bets, then I would 3-bet him all day. If my opponent does call 3-bets but check-fold whenever he misses the flop, then I would 3-bet him all day as well. Of course, I wouldn't go out of my way to 3-bet with bad hands such as 74o or J7o.

When 3-betting from the button, be conscious of players in the blinds. If they don't get out of line often by 4-betting you light, then you should 3-bet as often as you can. However, once you recognize that players on the blinds is 4-betting you light, you should decrease your 3-betting frequency. I don't think you should worry too much about this concept since it rarely happen in games below 200nl. However, it is good for you to know you to know of such an idea so you can take advantage of the situation when it arises.

> *Important Note: Keep in mind is there are times when you should deliberately force yourself to fold pre-flop sometimes. The main reason is you don't want an opponent who's been folding too much to recognize that he's folding too much. You want to give him the illusion that he's not constantly getting exploited even though he is.*

Stealing the Blinds

If everyone folds to you on the button, then you should keep stealing the blinds until the players fight back. Most regulars play very tight from the blinds and some will fold to your steals almost 90 percent of the time. That's 9 out of 10 times.

Some players will call from the blinds but they will check-fold often that raising pre-flop and c-betting a lot is profitable. Sometimes, I would raise pre-flop and intentionally give up when I have no equity in the pot. The main reason is I want to show whoever that is defending the blinds that I'm not trying to steal _every_ single pot. This makes my life easier because they are going to give me credit for a hand when I bet and more importantly, they are less inclined to fight back.

Postflop: Time to Play Poker

Why We Bet

It's never a good idea to bet without a reason. You always want to know why you're making a certain play in every situation, and betting is no exception. You should make betting decisions based on your perception of being ahead or behind your opponent's range.

1. When you have the best hand, you usually want to bet for value and extract money. You also do it to protect your hand and prevent your opponents from drawing out on you. It is important to note that there are times when you know you have the best hand but should check instead of betting. This is because no worse hand is calling and no better hand is folding. For example, you have QQ on J39KA. You will often have the best hand on the river. However, unless there is some history, you should check frequently in this spot.

2. When you rarely have the best hand, you want to bluff Villain off his hand. If called, you have no outs. For example, you have 9To on AK3r. Another type of bluff is the semi-bluff—where you bluff to fold out better hands and still have outs when called. For example, JT on AK3r.

3. Dead money is the money in the pot. This category applies to both of the above situations. You can value-shove the flop with an overpair to take down all the dead money in a 4-bet pot. You can also shove a strong draw in a 4-bet pot. The dead money does not belong to anyone at the table, even if you've already put money in. Your goal is to take down as much dead money as you can without getting to showdown, unless, of course, you have the nuts. Below is a simple pre-flop example.

---

100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.
You open raise to $4 from UTG with

The BTN 3-bets to $14 and you 4-bet all in.

Villain is now forced to fold hands like AQs, KQs, 87s and 76s, and they have about 33-percent equity against AK. You take down the dead money in the middle

without having to see the flop. The main objective of playing AK aggressively pre-flop is to take down the dead money.

Continuation Bet

A continuation bet, or c-bet, is when the pre-flop raiser makes a bet on the flop. A well-balanced c-betting range is a crucial element in the overall development of your game.

Do not make the mistake of blindly c-betting just because Villain checks to you. Make sure you know why you are c-betting. As a general rule, c-betting too much is a mistake, as it will encourage your opponent to check-raise you or call you down more often because he thinks you're bluffing. That's not the type of opponent you want to play heads-up against. You want him to be as passive as possible. However, that doesn't mean c-betting too much is "bad". Against the right opponents (those who check-fold when they don't have a hand and show aggression when they do), c-betting can be highly profitable. Below are guidelines on whether you should bet on certain boards.

1. **Fold-to-Continuation-Bet Frequency:** If you have Hold'Em Manager, there is an option to show how often a player folds to continuation bets. If it's greater than 70 percent, you can bet your entire range and still profit.

2. **Equity:** You want to have some sort of equity in the hand. Even with A6 on T54 rainbow, you can still make a pair or a backdoor straight to win the hand some percentage of the time. On 765 rainbow with A3s, you may want to check-fold or check behind.

3. **Dry Flop with One High Card:** Prime examples are A65r, K83r, QT2r, J73r, T22r. Betting on A- and K-high boards works much better than on other boards because it hits your perceived pre-flop raising range. If your opponents are behind, they usually have five outs or less. You will get lots of folds, so you should bet with almost your entire range here. Furthermore, most of your opponent's range consists of lower pairs and suited connecters rather than Ax or Kx.

4. **Wet Boards:** If the flop is T98s and you have AQo, don't bet. The flop hits a lot of Villain's medium-hand range and he will call or raise often. Additionally, he usually has a pair to go with a straight draw and you will need three bullets to get him to fold. You also have some equity in the pot that you want to realize.

5. **Paired Flops:** Avoid betting 552 rainbow with weak hands like 86s or 76s because you have very little equity if he calls. You can check behind and make a delayed c-bet on the turn if he checks again. Your line is congruent to a pocket pair that is

playing for pot control or a hand that improves with the turn card. If I bet the turn and get called, I'm done with the hand unless I improve.

With AJ+ on this board, you can check-call as the pre-flop raiser against passive opponents. If he bets again on the turn, you can fold, but most will just check behind. I wouldn't check-call the flop against aggressive opponents. They will recognize that you have a weak range the majority of the time and will put a lot of pressure on you. Against them, c-betting is better. If they call a lot, consider betting again on the turn, or check-fold the flop if you don't feel comfortable firing the turn and river as a bluff.

6. **Way Behind/Way Ahead:** An example of this is KK on A82 rainbow. You're way behind a pair of Aces, sets and two pair, and you're way ahead of bottom- and middle-pair and random gutshots. You can check behind here sometimes if it is checked to you. You'll rarely be outdrawn, and since your hand looks like a weak Ax, Villain isn't going to try to bluff you off it on the turn or river.

7. **Multi-Way Pots:** You generally want to bet more in a three-way pot on a dry flop because people are less likely to mess around in these spots. But check behind if there's a short stack.

8. **In Position/Out of Position:** You should c-bet a lot more often OOP. In position, you can check behind and get a free card. It's a lot harder to get a free card when you're OOP, and you generally want to be aggressive to take down the dead money. If you're playing against a weaker player who will call c-bets a lot but won't bet it himself when checked to, then you can also check more often to try to get to showdown with a marginal holding.

9. **Against Loose Players:** You generally want to check behind or check-fold some of the time on low-medium boards (876s, 764s, 542 rainbow, etc.). Loose players like to call flop bets will all sorts of hands, making c-betting on the flop with random hands less profitable to you. You still want to bet every dry ace or king flop against them.

10. **Against TAGs**: You want to c-bet all the dry boards versus TAGs, and check behind wet boards if you miss. Be prepared to adjust if you suspect they're attacking you light. Here's a quick example.

> **100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.**
> Say you open-raise to $4 from the CO with
>
> 7♥ 5♥
>
> BB calls and the flop is
>
> J♠ 5♣ 2♦
>
> Villain checks and you c-bet 2/3 of the pot. He check-raises to three times your bet size.

You can't really fold here because he's representing a narrow value range and you have a good enough hand to continue, especially with the overlay in the pot and the chance that your hand is likely best once improved.

For his range, his raise makes little sense unless he slow-played an overpair. JJ, 55, and 22 would check-call the majority of the time. There's only one combination of 55, and 22 is unlikely because most TAGs fold small pocket pairs against late-position openers. That leaves us with AJ and QQ+, hands that would re-raise pre-flop. Knowing that, you can call here or even throw in a small 3-bet to end the hand now (fold to a 4-bet). If you call the flop and he bets again on the turn, you can fold. Although this line seems exploitable, your opponent isn't exploiting you as often as you think since your calling range on this flop is pretty strong. However, you should be conscious of how often you can flop bets and fold to turn bets all the time. If you do this a lot, you are burning money and you should question if you are getting bluffed on the turn a lot.

11. **Inducing Bluffs:** Some players will <u>almost always</u> bet the flop or the turn once you check the flop. They will consider that as weakness, and rightfully so. You can check-call with AT+ on A83 rainbow because you have the majority of hands beat and you will rarely be outdrawn. If there's a flush draw possible on the board, you should bet to charge his draw and to make the hand a little easier to play.

12. **Polarizing your range:** You'll want to polarize your range when you check behind. This means you bet the flop with strong hands and air, but check behind with marginal hands.

> **100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.**
> Say you open-raise to $3 from the button with
>
>
>
> and the SB calls. The flop is
>
>
>
> SB checks. Just check behind.

If SB has an ace, his kicker is likely higher than yours. The best-case scenario sees you chop at the river. So you check back here to keep the pot small because he's rarely going to call the flop with a hand you beat. If he leads the turn, you can call. If he checks again, you can check behind again and maybe go for a small value bet on the river. If he's not capable of calling you with a hand like JJ on the river, then you should just check behind. Although this may seem exploitable, many players at micro-stakes and even small stakes will not realize that you're using this strategy.

An interesting scenario is when the board is A22r instead. You should bet with A5 in this spot because pocket pairs are more likely to call. On ATTr if you have a small pocket pair like 55, you will face hands such as KQ, QJ, and KJ that are behind but have great equity against you. For this reason, you should lean toward betting.

Paired Flops

When a player check-calls your c-bet on paired flops, *he almost always has a pocket pair*. He will sometimes check-call with A-high as well. Knowing this, if a player calls your flop bet, be ready to fire a lot of turns. If he raises the turn bet, it's almost never a bluff, so just fold unless you beat trips.

Unless your opponent is aggressive, calling a turn raise with a high pocket pair is usually burning money. You aren't likely going to get exploited in this situation because players start to realize that bluffing overpairs in no-limit holdem is a very good way to lose money. If you feel your opponent is raising you a lot in this spot, do not 3-bet him. Call the turn and call the river.

Raising With a Gutshot

On a paired flop where there is a straight draw possible, a raise from an aggressive Villain will likely be a bluff. His range includes numerous gutshots and open-ended straight draws. While they have some equity in the pot, they can't profitably check-call. So they check-raise.

> **100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.**
> You open raise to $3 from the button with
>
>
>
> and a good LAG player calls from the small blind. The flop is
>
>
>
> and he checks. You bet $5 into a $7 pot. He raises to $15. What's his range?

Villain's range now includes more gutshots like 76s, 75s and 65s. He will more likely raise with these hands as opposed to a random hand like 97 diamonds because if you call, he still has outs. He could also have slow-played QQ-AA, although they make up a small percentage of his range since he would re-raise with them pre-flop. If he slow-played them pre-flop, he's not likely to go crazy on a flop where he might be drawing dead.

Pocket pairs like 55-77 are also rare because Villain would check-call with them. So, what do you do?

Without an aggressive history, calling here is fine. However, for some opponents, a small 3-bet is better. There are many reasons for this. It can induce a bluff, though that's a little too optimistic. A more important reason is that it's a type of flop where opponents like to check-raise, so 3-betting here balances out the times when you don't have trips, which is often. Showing that you 3-bet here sometimes with trips allows you to 3-bet bluff in future hands.

If he's the type of player who will shut down once you call his check-raise, you can elect to call his flop check-raise instead of 3-betting and try to take it down on the turn or river.

Getting Check-Raised on a Paired Flop

As shown in the previous example, a check-raise on a paired flop is usually a bluff. Most players have a polarized range toward really strong hands and complete bluffs—with the latter being much more prominent.

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100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.
Suppose you open raise to $3 from the button with

A good TAG calls from the small blind. The flop is

You bet $5 into a $7 pot. He raises to $15. What's his range?

Villain is not going to have a strong hand here often. However, since you opened from the BTN, your range will be wide and weak. Any decent TAG knows that. With that in mind, most players tend to slow-play a 7 here—hoping that you improve on the turn or river. With 88-TT, he'll most likely just check-call the flop to keep the pot small. So, the only legitimate hands he can check-raise with here are JJ-AA. However, there are many more straight draws and random bluffs in his range. Thus, we should call his flop check-raise.

Since your hand has decent showdown value, you don't want to turn it into a bluff by 3-betting. If Villain bets again on the turn, you can safely fold.

One interesting thing regarding these two examples is the construction of your range after you bet. You balance your flop range by 3-betting with trips+ and air, and call with your marginal hands and super nuts hands such as quads or boats. At the same time, if you don't balance these holdings well, your opponents might catch up and think you only call with marginal holdings and continue to put pressure on you. It is unlikely that they do, so you don't have to worry about it that much. However, as you move up in stakes (5/10NL+), you should consider calling the flop check-raise more often with any holding that you want to continue with, since calling with the majority of your range is a little easier to balance than 3-betting some hands and calling others.

One important note regarding the board texture on a paired flop is that a check-raise is more believable if the flop is TT6 rather than 223, since a ten is more often in your opponent's pre-flop range than a two.

3-Bet Pots

In 3-bet pots, Villain's flop calling range is similar to that of single-raised pots. Villain's calling range on the flop consists of mostly middle pocket pairs and occasionally AK/AQ that he didn't 4-bet with. Knowing this, we should double-barrel bluff the turn if we pick up some type of draw. Most of his hands will not withstand a second strong barrel.

Let's turn our attention to the following hand.

100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.

A TAG player open-raises to $3 from the button and you 3-bet to $10 with

from the big blind. He calls and the flop is

You c-bet $17 into a pot of $20.50 and he calls. The turn is a

You've picked up an open-ended straight draw. The pot is $54.50 and you have $73 left. Now what?

With 100BB stacks, you should bet strong and call off the rest if he jams. A large part of his flop calling range consists of 66-TT, 5x and sometimes Ace-high. A turn bet will fold out most of those hands (except TT, of course), making this a very profitable play. If he calls with Jx, you can still draw to your straight. There's also too much dead money out there to check-fold. Unless the turn bet is really small, you can't check-call a turn bet due to incorrect odds.

If stacks were deeper (125BB+), I would bet-fold turn. An amount around 1/2- or 3/5-pot is good. You are rarely getting bluff-shoved in this spot, so you can safely fold to a raise.

One more example.

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100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.

A LAG player open raises to $3 from the button, and you 3-bet to $10 from the BB with

He calls. The flop is

You bet $17 into $20.50 and he calls. The turn is a

and you now have a flush draw with overcards. The pot is $54.50 and you have $73 left. Do you bet or check?

You should bet. Most of his flop calling range consists of 66-JJ. QQ+ makes up a very small part of his range because he would have 4-bet them pre-flop. Had he slow-played them, he would have definitely check-raised the flop, since you don't have a 5 in your range as often because it's a 3-bet pot. So bet big to commit yourself, and call if he shoves. You can also over-bet all-in if over-betting is a part of your game. If over-betting is not part of your game, bet what you normally bet here with with Qx+ and call it off. Of course, don't bet so small that you are getting incorrect odds to call against a shove.

A 1/2- to 3/4-pot bet has *huge fold equity* against his likely range, and if called, you can still make your flush. If he's the type to float on these boards, a check-raise all-in is another option. However, you do run the risk of him checking behind all his medium pairs. Once Villain checks behind, he will be more likely to call a river bluff.

Important Note: Don't bet so small on the turn that he can just raise all-in with a hand like 99. Increase your fold equity as much as possible by betting more than half-pot and showing him that you're committed to the hand.

Monotone Boards

Monotone boards have an interesting effect on people—they slow down the action a lot. Players don't often shove their stacks in with AcAd on T87 monotone spades, compared to AcAd on T87 with two spades. On monotone boards, there are fewer draws that your opponent can have when he shoves his stack in. Either he has the nut-flush draw or a strong made hand.

> **100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.**
> Say we open-raise to $3.50 with
>
> J♦ J♣
>
> from the CO and a good TAG calls from the SB. The flop is
>
> 10♠ 8♠ 3♠
>
> He checks and you bet $6 into $8. He raises to $20. What's your play?

It is almost never correct to get it in here. Your best options are to either call the raise and fold to a turn bet if he continues aggression, or just fold now because you're really only beating a bluff.

Keep in mind that he will rarely have a hand like T8o or ATo because most people don't call pre-flop raises OOP with off-suit hands. This takes away the likelihood of him having a lone A, K, Q or J of spades in his range and decreases his semi-bluffing range. Assuming he does have one of those cards, Villain will likely check-call the flop (except with the nut-flush draw). So his value range includes a slow-played JJ+ with a spade, plus TT, 88 and sometimes 33. You're way behind his value range, and barely ahead of his semi-bluffing range—not a great spot to shove your entire stack in.

Villain's Perception of Your Range

Your betting frequency depends on a few things (equity, board texture and image). You generally should bluff more and value-bet less if Villain's perception of your range is strong, and bluff less and value-bet more if it's weak. Knowing what he thinks of your range allows you to determine the best course of action at any time.

---

100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.
You open-raise from the CO with

and Villain calls from the BB. The flop is

The default play is to bet here almost 100 percent of the time.

Villain's perception of your range includes a lot of hands with an ace in them, and he's right. You will also show up with sets, two pair, TT-KK and 9x. Although unlikely, betting might fold out TT-QQ. Betting also charges his draws, protects your hand and makes the hand easier to play.

Let's look at another example.

---

100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.
What if you have

on

Your perceived range doesn't hit this flop as hard. Villain will likely put you on high cards more often than medium suited connectors, and may decide to call you down lighter, float or even bluff-raise you. In this scenario, it's best to check behind against an aggressive player who can check-raise this flop with a wide range.

Leading

Leading, aka donk-betting, is betting into the pre-flop raiser. Few players donk-bet, and even fewer do it effectively. Donk-betting has many purposes—to steal the pot, to induce a bluff, to build a pot, to slow down the pre-flop raiser, etc.

The first time you lead should be with a weak made hand or draw. Most players in the lower limits don't react well to leads and either fold or call. Decent players understand that you would have shown aggression pre-flop or gone for a check-raise on the flop with a strong hand. So they'll either call lighter on the flop or bluff-raise with weak pairs, overcards, and gutshots, and you'll need to fire a second barrel to win.

Polarize Your Leading Range

You generally want to lead with *strong made hands* that can easily call a raise, or with *draws* (pair + flush draw, flush draw, open-ended, overcards + open-ended, gutshot + opened-ended, gutshot). This cannot be emphasized enough. There is nothing worse than leading with JQ on KJ3 rainbow, getting raised by the pre-flop raiser, and not knowing what to do. Don't put yourself into these difficult situations without a plan.

---

100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.

Say you call a button raise from the blinds with

It's heads-up and the flop is

What do you do?

This is a good spot to lead. Check-calling makes the hand tough to play because there are a lot of turn cards that will leave you not knowing what to do. Leading will often take the pot down. If you get raised, you should fold. Pocket eights are actually at the bottom of your range on the flop, since you can have two pair, sets, and a straight in your range. You can also have a strong combo draw that wants to take the bet-3-bet line.

If he calls your leads, you should consider betting on any turn, because he's probably calling the flop with a naked flush draw or a smaller pair. Checking allows him to bluff, and it's tough for you to call because he can have other strong holdings as well. It's a difficult situation, but betting is generally superior to check-calling or check-folding here.

Single-Raised Multi-Way Pots

Consider leading with middle and bottom pairs in a single-raised multi-way pot. It'll be too hard to profitably check-call with medium pairs. Leading also puts the player behind you in a difficult situation. He has to worry about you showing up with a strong hand, as well as the other player in the pot. This is evident in our next example.

---

100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.

Button open raises to $4, SB calls and you call from the BB with

6♥ 5♥

The flop is

Q♣ 6♦ 4♥

SB checks to you and you lead for 3/4-pot. Button tanks and folds. SB folds as well.

Check-calling is sub-optimal. The button will c-bet nearly 100-percent of his range because he has the betting initiative on a very dry board. Although we may sometimes have the best hand, there are plenty of turn scare cards that Villain can barrel off on (9 or higher). Leading here forces the Button into an awkward spot. Even if he thinks you're leading light here, he'll have to worry about the SB waking up with a strong hand. If you bet the flop and either opponent raises, then you can safely fold, knowing you're beat.

Who to Lead Against

Generally, you want to lead into straightforward players who are passive. Your prime targets are:

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1. Players who fold too often to leads. A good example is a regular who is playing more than nine tables. You can also check a pre-flop raiser's stat on your HUD to see if he's folding a lot (75 percent) to donk bets.
2. Players with a high stealing frequency from the CO or BTN. Their ranges will often be wide and weak.
3. Weak-tight players. They play a straightforward game and will just fold to your flop leads without a strong hand.
4. Players who like to check behind for pot control. When you have a strong hand, consider leading into them to extract value since they are going to check behind a lot.

Who to NOT lead Against

Do not lead into aggressive players. They don't usually like being donk-bet into and will raise your flop bet. Consider leading into them with a strong hand.

Do not lead into good players who are capable of bluff-raising you some percentage of the time. However, if you are capable of leading with two pair of better, then you can balance it out with a draw here and there.

Do not lead into calling stations. You want to take down the pot on the flop without having to fire numerous barrels.

Playing the Turn

After Villain calls your donk bet, bluff the turn again on a scare card. On a two-tone board, lead if the turn completes the flush because a flush draw is well within your donking range. Overcards are also great scare cards to barrel on. If you lead on T83 and the turn is a 6, you can lead again because the 6 is well within your range and Villain could be floating the flop with Ax. He will most likely have a hand like Tx, 99 or 8x.

Leading the flop makes the turn a lot easier to play. This is because if Villain has a strong hand on the flop, he's likely to raise your donk bet. By calling, he somewhat reveals the strength of his hand, and won't have strong holdings very often. After all, how often do you call a donk bet with the top of your range?

A good time to lead is when you have two overcards with some backdoor straight and flush draws. This allows you to barrel the turn often against Villain's weak turn range.

100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.

A good LAG player from the CO open-raises to $4 and you call from the BB with

Q♠ J♠

The flop is

9♠ 5♦ 2♣

You lead 3/4-pot and he calls. The turn is a

K♦

and you pick up a gutshot straight draw. What's your play?

Fire again. Villain will call the flop donk bet with any gutshots, complete floats and of course, made hands like sets, two pairs, TT+, 66-88, 5x, and 2x. However, most hands in his range are small pairs and some straight draws, and he'll fold to a second barrel. If Villain floats the flop with Kx or won't fold A9+, you have some outs. In the above example, unless Villain has shown me he is capable of calling light, I'll barrel the river again. If he calls with a marginal holding, I'll adjust by only donk-betting him with strong hands over the next few thousand hands. People have selective memory; he will remember this hand where you donk-bet three streets as a bluff. Of course, he doesn't know that you have good reasoning behind your play and are not randomly bluffing into him.

Raising

There are two reasons why we want to raise—for value or for bluffs. Never raise to "see where you're at"—it's too expensive. If you're unsure whether you're ahead or behind, just call his bet and see how he reacts on the next street. Had you raised, you might have left yourself open to a 3-bet bluff and folded to a worse hand.

Raising for Value

The title speaks for itself—raise to extract value with your strong hand. Let's go over a very standard situation.

100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.
You have

on

The preflop raiser c-bets 3/4-pot. You should …

Raise him. While you have the best hand now, a flush card on the turn can give Villain a winning hand. A turn T, 8, or 5 will also kill the action if he has a set, two pair or a strong draw. He may put you on a ton of draws and shove with TT+ to maximize his fold equity. Avoid doing that in his spot. You're either somewhat ahead against a pair + straight draw or way behind versus straights, sets or two pair. For example, AA has only 55-percent equity against 86 clubs, and is drawing nearly dead against T8.

Against bad players who can't fold, take liberty in raising with decent top pairs on drawy boards.

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100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.
You open-raise to $4 from the CO with

SB is a passive donk and calls. His stats are 35/10. The flop is

He leads out for half-pot. He has a tendency to donk-bet with a wide variety of hands and likes to call down a lot. What do you do?

Raise. You want to extract as much as you can from his Tx, 99, 8x, 77, 66, 5x, flush draws and straight draws. Don't call against this type of player. Not only do you risk giving him a free card, but a call gives you no information about his hand. Suppose you raise, he calls, and a flush card comes on the turn. If he check-raises, he probably has the flush and you can safely fold. Most players at 100NL and below are not capable of turning their made hands into bluffs by check-raising the turn flush card.

Raising as a Bluff

When a donk leads into you, he usually has a marginal hand. Against a habitual donk-better, bluff-raise and punish him. He is out of position and has a tough decision to make. He will know that if he does call, there is the threat of future barrels. As always, you'll want to have some outs when you bluff someone.
Let's look at one example.

> **100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks**.
> You open-raise UTG with
>
> ♣10 ♣9
>
> and SB playing at 45/10 calls. The flop is
>
> ♦K ♣8 ♠6
>
> He leads 2/3-pot into you. You've seen him lead with a mid-pair earlier, and he's the type to slowplay his strong hands on the flop. Your play?

Raise him. Given our read, it is very unlikely that he has a strong hand. His leading range is wide and consists of Kx, 99-QQ, 8x, 6x, T9, T7, 97, and 75. Slow down if he calls. Trying to multi-barrel bluff here against a donk is just asking for trouble. But if you hit your gutshot or pick up a club draw, fire again.

What about when TAGs lead? A TAG usually leads to slow you down and "protect" his hand. He has some kind of weak hand that he hates to check-call with and doesn't want to check-raise. So he leads.

> **100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks**.
> Suppose you open-raise to $4 from the button with
>
> ♦Q ♥J
>
> and BB calls. The flop is
>
> ♠A ♣5 ♦2
>
> and he leads 2/3-pot. Call, fold or raise?

Raise. Villain is usually weak here. His range includes a lot of hands like 66-99, and sometimes TT and JJ (but he will check-call with these hands more often). He doesn't want to check-call with 66-99 because there are a bunch of scare cards on the turn and he won't know what to do against a turn bet. Most of his leading range can't stand a raise, and he won't know if you have a big hand or not. So he'll just fold because he doesn't want to play a big pot OOP with a mediocre hand. You can call here with hands like Ax, 66-KK and 5x. Throw in an occasional raise with Ax to balance your range and discourage him from calling your bluff raise in the future with weaker pairs.

> **Important Note**: Players RARELY lead with strong hands because they're afraid that leading would look too scary or suspicious and fold out a lot of hands. They tend to slow-play by check-calling and waking up on the turn, especially on dry boards.

Types of Boards to Bluff-Raise On

The best boards to bluff-raise are ones where opponents c-bet a lot. Players like to c-bet their entire pre-flop range on boards such as AK3, AQ5 and KQ8. You should bluff-raise sometimes on these flops because you will get a lot of folds. An argument can be made that you rarely have a hand on AK3 or AQ5, but your opponents will do nothing about it. Three-bet bluffing just doesn't occur in micro- and small-stakes game. Of course, you will run into one or two players who do; stop bluffing them—there are many other choices available.

Monotone and low connected boards (e.g., 6c5s4s) are also fertile ground for bluff-raising. Imagine if you have TT or JJ on this flop; how comfortable are you facing a raise? On 654s, Villain can have straights, sets, two pair, pair + flush draw, pair + straight draw, flush draws and straight draws. Even if we have AA here and get it in, we will be way behind (sometimes drawing dead) or slightly ahead. That's one way I figure out when to bluff-raise. If I have a good hand in such a spot, how much will I hate my life if I get raised there?

Monotone boards are great because they will slow him down unless he has a set or flush. On K82 with all spades, a pre-flop raiser will c-bet almost his entire range. With a medium spade, he may bet or check behind (in position) or bet-fold the flop (OOP). His betting range is polarized between hands that have no spades or a pair, two pair, sets and flushes. He may call, but rarely will he 3-bet without a strong hand.

Stay away from paired boards. You want to throw in a bluff here and there, but it's generally not a good idea to attack those flops. Decent players will know that your check-raising value range is very narrow and will enter call-down mode. Of course, against some

players who aren't paying attention or don't like to make hero calls, I would float on a paired board and take it away on a later street. No one can help you determine which players will fold on a paired board to your aggression. You have to try it and figure it out for yourself.

Floating

Floating is when you call a bet with a hand that is rarely ahead with the intention of taking down the pot on a later street. It's a profitable weapon because it's a great way to counter players who c-bet too much (75 percent or more on the flop) and players who play straightforwardly on the turn.

Being able to float well also puts a ton of pressure on your opponents because it forces them to check-fold the flop more than they would like, or it makes the turn tougher for them to play. You will also take down more pots.
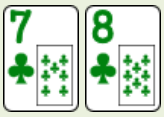
What factors should you consider before you float?

1. If your opponent 2-barrels too often, you shouldn't float the flop because you will have to fold the turn too often.

2. If your opponent plays straightforwardly on the turn and telegraphs the strength of his range either by checking or betting. Some players check whenever they don't have a hand on the turn and bet whenever they do. These are your primary targets.

3. It is credible for you to represent a hand on the turn or river. A quick example.

> The flop is
>
>
>
> and you float the flop with
>
>
>
> If the turn is a spade and your opponent checks, you can easily represent a flush by betting.

4. Make sure that when you float, you have some equity in the pot and have some backdoor draws so you can continue on the turn. Take the hand from our previous example. Although you only have a gutshot on the flop wit 78 clubs, you

can call the turn on a club and a nine. Depending on how good your opponent is at hand reading and how aggressive he is at the river, you can sometimes call a seven or an eight on the turn. Some players are so aggressive that they will bet on the river and take away your option bluff (or see a free showdown).

Axx and Kxx are also great flops to float on. Your opponents are c-betting with almost, if not all of their range and will give up on the turn if a card below a ten comes and they don't improve their hand. That's a lot of turn cards for you to win the pot. Let's get to an example.

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100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.
A decent TAG open-raises to $4 from the CO and you call from the BTN with

J♦ 10♦

The flop is

A♦ 9♣ 2♣

He bets 2/3-pot, and you decide to float this time.

A turn Q, 8, or diamond gives you at least eight more outs, allowing you to call another bet. If the turn comes a J or T, you may call again if you think he's double-barreling light. If the turn is a club and Villain checks, you will take down the pot more often than not with a bet. If Villain check-calls a turn club and isn't overly tricky, I would bet the river again because his range is likely a pair with a club that will fold to a river bet.

If he's capable of check-calling the turn with 9x or TT-KK, fire the river again. You will take down the pot the majority of the time. If you are the type of player who will give up on the river on a good spot, don't float the flop or you are just burning money.

Let's go over another example.
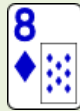
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100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.

MP is a TAG and open-raises to $4. You call from the button with

The flop is

and he c-bets 3/4-pot. You call, and the turn is the

He checks. What's your play?

Don't wait for the river—bet now. Villain usually check-folds here with his air and weak pairs. Two pair or stronger would have bet the turn. If he calls, he probably has Jx, Tx, the occasional 9x, 8x and diamonds. Give up on the river unless you have reason to believe his range is weaker or he will fold to a river bet.

Say you hit your gutshot on the turn and he bets into you. Unless stacks are super deep (200BB+), calling is usually the better play. A ten on the turn completes so many hands that Villain will fold a lot. I wouldn't be surprised if Villain folded a hand like KK to a turn raise. By calling, you under-represent your hand and can extract more value on the river (either with him bluffing or value-betting with worse hands). The hands that will stack off to a turn raise will put money in on the majority of rivers anyway.

If you hit a K or Q on the turn, call his bet and bet if he checks. On the river, if he continues betting, you will have to fold if you only have a pair of queens or kings. Those two cards improve a lot of your flop calling range, and he has a really strong hand if he fires three barrels. We call the turn because a queen or a king is a good bluff card and Villain's bluffing frequency will go up. However, Villain's high bluffing frequency on the turn doesn't mean his bluffing frequency on the river is high.

Last example:

100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.

A TAG open-raises to $4 in MP and you call from the BTN with

The flop is

He bets 2/3-pot and you call. Turn is an

He bets 2/3-pot.The most optimal play is to…

Fold. This is probably the most important factor regarding floating. You don't have to take down all the pots. Sometimes, there's nothing you can do and you have to fold. That's fine, and it doesn't make you a bad player. Being a good player is all about making the play with the greatest EV. In this case, you maximize your EV by folding.

Double-Barreling

The turn is the one street that most players at the lower limits have trouble with. The problem stems from players making plays on the flop without a plan for future streets. For example, they bet with KT on Ac6s5s and don't know what to do on various turn cards. Whether you check, bet, call or raise, plan your actions before the next card falls. You generally want to fire again on the turn if either of these conditions exists:

1. Your equity improves
2. A scare card hits

Let's say you c-bet the flop as the pre-flop raiser and pick up a draw on the turn (flush draw, open-end, gutshot + overcard). Bet again to try to take down the dead money in the pot. A second barrel will look strong and increase your chances of winning without a showdown. On boards where a turn puts more draws out there, I will bet the river as well.

For example:

---

100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.
You bet with

on a flop of

The turn is a

You bet again and get called. You should seriously consider bluffing the river.

The turn creates a lot of draws. Villain is likely to have a made weak hand or a draw. If he had a strong hand, he would've raised the turn to protect it. Therefore, a river bluff is profitable.

A great turn card that allows you to fire the river is an 8d (or any card that puts a straight out there) because it often gives Villain a pair with a draw that he will continue with on the turn and fold on the river, giving you more dead money.

Another example:

> **100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks**.
> Suppose you open-raise to $3 with
>
>
>
> from the button and a good player calls from the SB. The flop is
>
>
>
> and he check-calls your c-bet. The turn is any spade besides a J or 8. He checks to you. What do you do?

Bet again. Villain will occasionally show up with sets and two pair here, but his range consists primarily of medium pairs and straight draws. You can safely exclude most overpairs from his range because he would 3-bet preflop or check-raise the flop. A turn bet would fold out 3x, 8x, and pocket pairs below a jack that don't make a set. More importantly, you now have 14 outs (3 Aces, 2 threes, 9 spades) to make the best hand.

> *Important Note: A turn J or 8 isn't a good barrel card because it narrows your value-betting range to trips and sometimes overpairs. That's a very small part of your range. A good player will realize this and call again with a stubborn pair. Sometimes, he'll have a boat or trips here as well. Since you have showdown value against open-end draws and gutshots, checking behind is an option.*

Scare Card

A scare card improves one player's perceived range and decreases another's perceived range. In other words, it makes the board look more dangerous for one of the players in the pot. Overcards and flush cards are some of the most common scare cards that players like to barrel on (straight draws are more subtle, and thus harder to rep). Scare cards also provide great opportunities to multi-barrel and apply tremendous pressure on your opponents. The classic example is the ace.

---

100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.
You open raise to $3 with

K♠ 10♠

on the button and SB calls. The flop is

J♠ 8♦ 3♥

He check-calls your half-pot bet. The turn is the

A♦
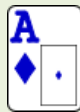
The best play is to …

Bet again. The Ace hits your perceived range more than Villain's because 1) you raised pre-flop and 2) he would have 3-bet a strong Ace before the flop. You also picked up a gutshot draw to the nuts. A river K or T may give you the best hand as well.

There is another way to play a turn ace when you are in position. You can check behind to represent a small Ace going for pot control, and then bet the river if it gets checked to you again. Betting the turn is usually better than checking behind, since your opponent will check-fold the turn often.

The king is another great scare card.

---

100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.
You open-raise to $3 from the BTN with

and BB calls. You c-bet 2/3-pot on

The turn is a

You should fire again.

The king is one of the best cards in the deck to barrel on because it hits your range more than his. In this scenario, it's actually better than an ace because players sometimes check-call the flop with ace-high hands like AQ/AJ. Had the turn been an ace, you would have continued bluffing (and rightfully so). There is also less Kx in your opponent's check-calling range. Another important factor regarding a high turn card is that Villain will check-fold a lot of small pocket pairs that he check-called with on the flop. For these reasons, this is a good time to bet the turn.

The worst cards to double-barrel on are ones that pair the board, because you are less likely to have trips or a boat.

Consider the following example:

100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.
You open raise to $3.50 from MP with
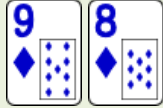
A good TAG player calls from the BTN and the flop is

You bet 3/4-pot and he calls. The turn is a

and you bet again.

If you never double barrel with 88-99 and JJ+ in this spot, your hand range is very polarized toward complete bluffs and trips. It becomes more unlikely that you have a T in your hand with two on the board. So 99, 88 or 7x will likely call another barrel.

Let's say the turn is a 7 that pairs the middle card. His range now improves. All top-pair hands will call, 88-99 might call also, all trips call or raise and Villain has the option of bluff-raising to rep trips. Not a great spot to be bluffing.

What if the turn pairs the bottom card? It's a relatively safe card for him because the board hasn't changed much. If he has top or middle pair, then he still has the same hand. It also makes it less likely for you to have bottom set due to hand combinations.

The Problem of Scare Cards
In today's games, many people know what the obvious scare cards. For this reason, your bet is less credible on that particular scare card and you usually need to fire another bullet to take down the pot. Fortunately, people call on the scare card and fold to a river bet all the time.

You can balance your range in this spot by betting your medium-strength hands. For example, you c-bet on a T52r flop with Tx and JJ-KK. If the turn is an ace, you should

consider betting as well. This widens your value-range on the turn and you can safely fold against a check-raise. Curious opponents might check-call on the turn with hands such as 44, 54, and sometimes pocket pairs lower than TT.

Betting on the turn also lets your opponent know that he can't simply put you on air when you bet on a turn ace. He'll second-guess himself the next time he decides to call with 66-99 and 7x, and even a weak T in this situation.

This same concept can be applied for cards other than a turn ace. You can still value-bet with Tx on a turn J, Q, and K. Against opponents who check-raise the turn with a wide range, I would frequently check behind on the turn. Checking behind makes the hand easier to play and prevents you from being bluffed. Although an argument can be made for making the most EV play, it's sometimes better to sacrifice a little EV to make your life easier and, more importantly, to prevent you from making a costly mistake.

An alternative to betting on the turn is to check behind the turn ace and value-bet the river (or bluff if you don't have a hand with showdown value). You can credibly represent a medium pair or a small ace going for pot control on the turn and betting for thin value on the river.

Implied Threat of the River Bet

Another reason to double-barrel the turn is the implied threat of the river bet. The threat of losing a stack causes players to err on the side of caution, causing them to fold their marginal holdings on the turn. This puts their turn range face-up and makes it easier for you to play against them on future hands. I can't recall how many times I've check-called the turn with a marginal hand because I knew my opponent would give me a free showdown at the river. Most players below 100NL don't have the skills (or guts) to fire that last bet on the river. This is especially true if it is a big river bet. For this reason, you should incorporate bluffing the river into your game.

Having a reputation for not giving free showdowns allows you to take tons of uncontested pots because they know you have a few more bullets waiting for them in later streets. It's not fun when you call with a mediocre hand on the turn and you don't know what to do against a river bet that can possibly be an all-in.

The implied threat of the river bet is what makes position so important. You control whether you take a free showdown or not.

Strong hands (two pair or better)

As players keep improving, it gets tougher to "trap" players into stacking off with marginal holdings. The best way to get value out of your strong hands is to bet, especially when players like to call. A common mistake I see is to slow-play monster holdings. That's not to say slow-playing is bad. There is certainly a time and place for it. However, unless a player has been very aggressive, you should bet and play your strong hands fast on all streets. There are many reasons for this.

It is easier to balance a betting range than a check-calling range. Betting balances the times when you have a hand and when you have nothing. You can't really check-call with nothing. Well, you can, but it isn't going to be profitable.

Some players like to check-raise the turn as well. An observant opponent will realize how unbalanced your check-raising range is on the turn. I construct my opponent's check-raising range by observing the hands he shows down when he check-raises the turn. If I see a strong hand, I note that he check-raises the turn with a strong hand. This means that when he's 2-barrelling, he's more likely to have a draw. Of course, that is a simple read, and I adjust my estimated range for him as I see more hands. On the other side, if an opponent check-raises the turn and I see a draw at showdown, it tells me that he's the type of player who likes to take a free card rather than bet his draw. As you can see, it's easier for me to construct his turn range when he check-raises the turn. If my opponent were to bet the turn with the majority of his turn range, I wouldn't know what to do. Sometimes he has a draw with outs against my marginal holding; sometimes he has a strong hand that crushes my marginal holding. Against that range, I have to fold if he bets the turn.

A simple example:

> **100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks**.
> You open-raise pre-flop to $4 with
>
> 6♥ 6♦
>
> from MP and BTN calls. The flop is
>
> 10♦ 6♠ 5♦
>
> You bet 3/4-pot and he calls. The turn is a
>
> 3♥
>
> You should almost always bet here.

Some players like to check-raise in this spot because they want to trick their opponents into betting Tx or better. But Tx or better is going to call your turn bet anyway. In some cases, those hands might shove the turn to protect their hands. But by checking, you give a free card. Many of his hands are medium pairs that will check behind. These medium pairs may have also picked up a straight draw (76, 75, 64, and 54). He would have called a bet with weak pairs, pair + draws and maybe flush draws. If the turn is checked through, the river can come a diamond or straight card, which might cause you to make an incorrect decision. Betting out also balances all those times you double-barrel with your flush draws or a hand like 87.

Top pair

Playing top pair, good kicker against the pre-flop raiser can be tricky. Against the majority of players, the flop is a check-call. And with enough history, you can call off your stack with top pair, good kicker. There are a few factors that you should consider.

1. There's a huge difference between having a top pair such as KQ on QT5 rainbow and AT on T84 rainbow. There are not many overpairs on QT5. Thus, KQ is an easier stack-off than AT.

2. How wide is your check-raising range? If you rarely check-raise with draws or bluffs, then you should consider check-calling with both those hands because, when you check-raise for value, those holdings are actually the bottom of your value range. Worse hands are rarely paying you off. Additionally, players are less likely to play back at you because you have a narrow check-raising range.

A quick example:

---

100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.
A tricky player open-raises to $3 on the BTN and you call with

from the big blind. The flop is

You check and Villain bets 3/4-pot. What is your action?

Check-call is by far the most common and best play. Check-raising over-represents your hand, and it's hard to imagine a hand such as JT calling your check-raise. However, that doesn't mean you should check-call this flop all the time. If you have been active post-flop after defending from the blind, you can profitably check-raise this flop and continue betting the turn and river for value. However, it is important that you recognize the history between you and your opponent if you want to take an aggressive line for value with a good but not great hand. Some players tend to think their image is crazier than it really is. Or they over-think how their opponents are going to react. Misreading the situation will cause you to overplay your hand and you will end up spewing.

Going off on a tangent, you should consider check-raising a lot at micro- and small-stakes games. For example, if I had 65 clubs instead of Q8 clubs in the above example, I would check-raise and fold to a 3-bet instead of check-calling. There are many reasons for this.

1. Regulars at these stakes play tight and straightforward, so you can actually fold out better hands. Some players also c-bet too much. Some are playing 12+ tables and won't even notice that you are check-raising all the time.

2. Check-raising folds out hands such as AK, AT, and K9 that will fire the turn often, forcing you to fold if you don't improve.

3. Having a 5 reduces the number of sets he can continue with.

4. Players rarely 3-bet bluff or float your check-raise, so you don't have to worry about folding the best hand. If you get called and don't improve on the turn, just check-fold.

5. You will get away with this play a lot.

Draws

If the turn gives you extra outs (straight or flush draw), you should highly consider betting again. You may decide to go for a check-raise against a Villain who bet-folds the turn too often. However, unless you have this specific read, you should bet, because players are checking behind the turn far too often nowadays. Betting the turn prevents Villain from checking behind for pot control with medium and weak pairs that would otherwise fold to a bet. Once he checks behind, he will be much more likely to call off a river bluff. For these reasons, you should consider playing your draws aggressively when you have the betting lead.

Let's look at another hand.

> **100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks**.
> You open-raise to $4 from UTG with
>
> J♠ 10♠
>
> and a weak-tight BTN calls. The flop is
>
> K♠ 9♥ 7♥
>
> You c-bet full-pot and he calls. The turn is a
>
> 4♠
>
> Bet or check?

Bet. Villain's range consists of tons of flush and straight draws that will fold to a second barrel. You also picked up an extra 9 outs with your flush draw. A river jack or ten may sometimes give you the best hand against a stubborn A9 or 9sXs/7sXs. A queen or an eight gives you the best hand. Having raised UTG, Villain likely perceives your range to be stronger here than if you were to raise from the button. This increases your fold equity. Be aware that if Villain calls the turn and the river is 2r, you usually have to check-fold even though he rarely has better than Kx, because so many draws missed that he's going to find a call often. If you have a read that your opponent folds to river bets a lot, then go ahead and bet. With so much money out there by this point, with the chance that he has a draw himself, and with the small chance he's folding a made hand he called two streets with, a river bet is decent.

Multi-Way Pots

With three or more players in a pot, it's best to play your draws conservatively, especially when they are non-nut draws. Players typically have a stronger range if they call your flop bet, and it'll be harder getting them off their hands. Unless you have a monster draw (nut flush draw + OE), just check-fold or check behind. A good rule of thumb is that the less equity you have in the pot, the less you should be betting.

100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.
You open-raise to $3 with

from the BTN and both the blinds call. The flop is

You bet full pot and they both call. The turn is a

They check. Should you bet or check?

Check. Although the turn is a scare card, it hits their range quite a bit and improves a lot of their hands. If either of them has J9 or AJ, he now has a straight. Someone may have picked up two pair with KQ or KT. With that in mind, you have very little fold equity against their range, and there is also the chance that your small flush draw might not make the best hand even if you do hit. For these reasons, you should check.

Little Fold Equity

On some boards, you really can't do anything but check. The turn card probably helps Villain's range so much that he'll call again, and then you'll have to bluff the river too if you want to win the pot.

For example:

> **100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks**.
> You open-raise to $3.50 with
>
> 8♥ 7♥
>
> from the CO and BB calls. The flop is
>
> K♥ Q♥ 5♠
>
> and he check-calls your 3/4-bet. The turn is a
>
> 10♣
>
> and he checks. Bet or check?

Check. The turn likely improves his range. If Villain has Kx here, he's not folding because he will often have KQ, KJs, KTs, and K9s in his range since he defends from the blinds. If he has AQ or QJ, he'll have a straight draw to go with his pair and he won't be folding that either.

Another reason to check is that there is a good chance you'll get check-raised on the turn and have to fold. Players are getting better, so they are defending from the blinds with a stronger range (suited broadway cards). Checking gives you a chance to improve your hand and extract value. If the river is a blank and it is checked to you again, you should consider bluffing the river. He would've bet two pair or better on the river, hoping you had a made hand and went for pot control on the turn. He may also have missed draws such as JT or ace-high flush draws that can't call a river bet.

Bet-Fold

Bet-folding is something I wished I had learned much sooner in my poker career. The idea is simple: you bet with the intention of folding to a raise. This is a great line that can be used to protect a vulnerable hand against draws. Do this with bluffs, semi-bluffs and even good pairs. The significance of this line lies in charging draws, extracting value from worse hands and letting you know when you're behind.

100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.

Suppose you open-raise to $3.50 with

A♦ 9♦

from MP and CO calls. The flop is

9♠ 4♠ 8♦

You bet 3/4-pot and he calls. The turn is a

Q♥

and you bet 2/3-pot. He raises and you …?

Fold. The turn is a tough spot because your hand is too good to check-fold. On a flop with this many draws, A9 is likely good against most of his range. So you either check-call or bet-fold. Check-calling is a viable option, but you risk giving a free card on a draw-heavy board with a vulnerable hand, and it allows your opponent to put you a hand. This will encourage him to bluff the river more, which is something you don't want him to do with a marginal holding in a spot where he can easily have stronger hands than yours. Betting allows you to avoid most of these complications.

Betting allows you to charge draws and extract value from 9x or 8x. If Villain has two pair or better, he'll raise most of the time to try to stack you. There are too many draws for him to be slow-playing. Against a raise, you can be sure your hand is no longer good and you can comfortably fold. There will be situations when you'd rather check behind with your good pair.

> **100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.**
> Let's say you're in position with
>
> J♠ J♥
>
> Villain is an aggressive player who is willing to get it in light. The board is
>
> 9♠ 8♥ 4♦ 7♦
>
> He checks to you. Should you check or fire the second barrel?

Bet. Although it sucks to get check-raised on this turn, you are likely behind if that happens. The best scenario you wish for is that Villain has TT, T9, or a pair with diamonds. Combine those holdings with made hands such as two pair or better, and you're crushed. Nevertheless, it's a spot where you should bet because Villain has a lot of hands that will check-call a turn bet. Hands such as TT, T9, or a pair with a draw will check-call much more often than check-raise because they don't need to protect their hands.

Against a tricky, good opponent, I would check behind often here because I wouldn't know his check-raising range. Once I can determine whether he's check-shoving this spot with draws, I will have no problem bet-calling. However, the majority of players won't check-raise this turn often and thus, you should bet-fold with JJ. An interesting question is whether you bet-fold with AA in this spot. The answer is yes, you should. Unless you have a read that your opponent slow-plays pre-flop with big pocket pairs and goes crazy with them post-flop, bet-folding AA is best.

If you are worried about being exploited because you are bet-folding AA here, don't. AA isn't the top of your turn betting range. You can easily have two pair, sets and straights in your range. Of course, if you feel your opponent is check-raising the turn a lot against you, then it's an easy bet-call on future hands. However, with the way players construct their turn check-raising range, I wouldn't lose sleep if I bet-folded AA on the turn.

Bet Sizing—Setting Up For a Shove

One of the most common problems of small- and micro-stakes players is bet-sizing. They have a strong hand they want to go all-in with. So they bet or raise and somehow end up with 80BB at the river in a 50BB pot.

Other times they end up with such a small stack that bluffing the river becomes ineffective. Suppose the pot is 90BB and they have 40BB left. If they bluff all-in, Villain will call much more often because of such great pot odds. The ideal stack size you should have by the time you commit yourself should be two-third to a full pot size. If you are a few big blinds over or under, that's fine.

Let's see how we can employ bet-sizing in our favor in a few situations.

Hand #1: 100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.

Everyone folds to the button and he raises to $6. You 3-bet to $24 with

from the small blind, and he calls. The pot is now $49. You c-bet $20.

He calls. The turn is a

The pot is now $89. You have $56 left for roughly a 3/5-pot shove on the turn.

Hand #2: 100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.

The button open-raises $4. You reraise to $14 from the small blind with

and he calls. The pot is $29 ($14 + $14 + $1). You c-bet 3/4-pot ($21.75) on

and he calls. The pot is now $72.50 ($21.75 + $21.75 + $29). You have $64.25 left for nearly a pot-sized shove. Perfect sizing.

Hand #3: 100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.

You're on the button with

MP raises to $4 and you call from the BTN. The pot is $9.50 ($4 + $4 + $1.5). The flop is

and he bets $8. You raise to $20 and he calls. The pot is now $49.50 ($9.50 + $20 + $20). You have $76 left on the turn and the pot is roughly $50. It's a pretty awkward spot because you have 1.5 times the pot size. Shoving isn't bad, but it's not as good as having a full pot-sized bet left. Had you raised to $24-28 on the flop, you would have had just the right size to shove on the turn.

An important note regarding bet sizing is to remember to cater to the fish. In other words, if you are playing against a bad player who is also a calling station, don't use standard bet

sizes. I have seen many students leave money on the table because they fail to extract maximum value from their hands.

---

100 NL – 6 max. 120BB effective stacks.
Let's say you open-raise to $3.50 from the CO with

and the fish from the blind calls. The flop is

The fish donk bet $6. What should you raise to?

You should raise really big in this spot. Fish don't like to fold, so if he has an ace, he's going to call no matter what. In this hand, you should make it at least $25 to go. You want to build the pot so that it's tougher for Villain to fold in later streets. A mistake I see all the time is to raise to $15 to keep the fish in. If he has anything he likes, he will call and you have a chance to stack him. If he has air, he's not going to call a small raise. Of course, against a regular player, I would never make it $25 to go because it is so tough for me to balance this in future hands. I want to be able to bluff-raise this flop sometimes, so I will make a small raise with my strong hands.

Another common mistake my students make involves incorrect bet sizes against fish who call too much on the flop and turn. My students would bet a standard 2/3-pot on the flop and turn. This bet sizing bloats the pot so that a bad player will have a hard time folding a pair on the river. A more efficient betting pattern against bad players who like to call a lot on earlier streets is to bet 1/3-pot on the flop and turn and 2/3-pot on the river. There are two reasons for this. First, it keeps the pot small at the river so that players are less inclined to call your river bet because there's less money out there. Second, they will get to the river with wide ranges and will often fold to a big bet.

> **Important Note**: *Knowing how to play well against a fish is probably the most important skill because at the end of the day, that's where the majority of your winnings will come from. Being able to play well against regulars is good, but being able to play well against fish is even better.*

Check-Raising

Slow-play on dry boards; play fast on wet boards.

Check-raising is a profitable move that should be in every good player's arsenal. However, we don't want to blindly check-raise the flop and hope it works. There are a few factors we should consider before check-raising.

1. The strength of your hand
2. Board texture
3. Villain's perception of your range and check-raising tendencies
4. Villain's c-betting frequency
5. The range of hands that Villain will go broke with

> **100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.**
> A good LAG player open raises to $3 on the button. You call from SB with
>
>
>
> The flop is
>
>
>
> You check and he bets $5 into $7. You raise to $21.

Using the guidelines from before:
1. Your hand is very strong.
2. The board is so dry that you don't have to worry about getting outdrawn.
3. You are capable of check-raising this flop with KQ and 67. However, he likely doesn't know that. So when you check-raise, he will think you have sets or AJ.
4. On this flop texture, Villain is probably c-betting with a high frequency.
5. Villain will probably go broke with AJ+.

Based on the above analysis, calling is the most optimal play here. The main reason is because he doesn't know you are capable of check-raising light on this flop. Thus, it is unlikely that he's calling your check-raise with a weak holding or playing back with air. If

you have been caught check-raising this flop with hands such as KQ, 67, or A2s, then check-raising with a strong hand such as 55 is a better line because he is less likely to believe you.

Check-calling Villain's c-bet is also profitable because Villain will continue bluffing on a broadway turn and will continue value-betting with Jx or better. In both situations you are getting one more street of value.

Let's look at some less obvious examples.

> **100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks**.
> A good LAG player open-raises to $4 from the BTN and you call with
>
>
>
> from the BB for deception. The flop is
>
>
>
> You check and he bets 2/3-pot. You should …

Raise. He's going put you on a bluff a large percentage of the time because your value range is very narrow. AA, 33, and A3s wouldn't check-raise the flop. 3x suited (besides A3s) is unlikely as well because you would have folded those hands to a pre-flop praise. He *could* put you exactly on AK or AQ, but that's being optimistic since people rarely call pre-flop raises with AK from the blinds. More often than not, Villain will put you on a bluff and call you down light or bluff-raise you. You also want to build the pot in case he has Ax or a stubborn TT-KK hand.

On to the next hand:

100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.

A decent TAG player open-raises to $3 from BTN. You have some history with him and he doesn't respect your plays. You pick up

and decide to just call. The flop is

and you check-raise his c-bet.

With your history, he will have a hard time folding and may even go broke with mid-pocket pairs. The check-raise looks very bluffy (although you know better than to check-raise bluff on these types of boards against stubborn opponents). There are not many hands that you can check-raise for value with.

If he calls, then bet the turn. If he 3-bets the flop, then raise and get it in. You don't want a scare card to come on the turn and have him fold a hand like TT. An argument can be made that by 4-betting the flop, we are giving Villain a chance to fold and thus, play correctly. However, the times that he will stack off light on this flop with a pair far outweigh instances when he has air and folds to our 4-bet.

One last hand:

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100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.

The CO open-raises to $4 and you call from the BB with

The flop is

and you check-raise him.

While you currently have only Q-high and a gutshot, you also have a backdoor flush draw, backdoor straight draw and overcards. Many turn cards will improve your equity or give you the winning hand. You can continue your aggression with any diamond. I will likely follow through on a turn ace as well since Villain is likely to have a straight draw or a small pair that will fold on the turn. If the turn is a ten, jack, queen, or king I will continue betting.

An argument can be made for check-calling when the turn is a ten, jack, queen, or king and that is if our opponent floats the flop a lot. In such a situation we want to give our opponent a chance to bluff on the turn so that we can extract more value from our hand. We aren't afraid of getting outdrawn that often because if Villain has a straight draw, his outs will likely improve our hand as well.

In this example you will often need to fire the second barrel to win. That's fine. You will fold out a lot of 8x hands and some 9x hands on the turn, taking down the dead money along the way. Being able to check-raise on the flop with a wide range helps you to gain more value on your strong hands and makes you tougher to play against.

Important Note: Don't go crazy and start check-raising all dry boards when you have some equity. Target the right opponents. Players who c-bet more than 75 percent of the

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time are good targets to start with. Players who call too loosely are not. Similar to 3-betting pre-flop, you'll want to keep putting the pressure on a player until he gives you a reason not to. If he keeps folding to your check-raises, then don't stop. When he does fight back (by 3-betting your check-raise or calling you down lighter), simply decrease your check-raising frequency and have more strong hands in your range. Poker is about making adjustments, and it's easier to adjust when you are the original aggressor.

Check-Raising for Value

To extract the most value when you check-raise with a strong hand, you should do it in situations where your perceived range is wide. For this reason, check-raising on a wet flop will get you more calls than on a dry flop.

For example:

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100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.
The CO open-raises to $3.50 and you call with

8♠ 8♦

from the SB. The flop is

9♦ 8♣ 5♦

You check. He bets 3/4-pot and you check-raise.

This is a great spot to check-raise for value because you can have a lot of draws in your check-raising range. Whether you check-raise with draws or not in this spot is irrelevant because your opponent doesn't know. When he faces a check-raise on this board, he is trying to construct a range for you and he will put straight and flush draws in your range. Of course, he will also take into account two pair, sets and straights. But because there are draws in your range, his stack-off range is lighter than if the board was rainbow.

Another reason for check-raising this flop is that there are a lot of turn cards that can slow down the action and prevent you from stacking him. For example, Villain will get it in on the flop with 98, 55, big diamonds, and QQ+. If the turn comes a diamond, a six, a seven, a ten, or a jack, both of you will slow down considerably.

It's also good to check-raise for balance. This is a great spot to check-raise an opponent who c-bets too much. So, having some nut hands in your range makes Villain more willing to give you credit when you check-raise with a hand such as 77, QJ, and 87.

If you don't know how to construct a check-raising range, start off with only the nuts in your range and see how your opponent reacts to your check-raise. If you are getting a lot of folds, start adding draws with eight or more outs. If you still get a lot of folds, add some gutshots to your range. If you find that your opponent is calling you light or playing back more often, you can drop draws from your check-raising range and add more value hands such as top pair, good kicker or overpairs that you flatted with pre-flop. The key is to be conscious of what your check-raise means to your opponent and adjust your range accordingly.

A quick example:

100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.
An unknown player open-raises to $3 on the BTN and you call from the BB with

The flop is

He c-bets $4 into $6.50, and you check-raise.

Check-raise here with your open-ended, straight-flush draw with overcards 100 percent of the time to maximize your fold equity against a hand like 99. If he calls or shoves, you still have tons of outs. Against aces, you have 54-percent equity. Let's say you have the same hand but the flop is

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Then a check-call is much better because your equity goes way down against top pair. Now, if villain is a NIT and folds to check-raises all the time, then go ahead and check-raise. Although it sucks if he ends up 3-betting the flop, you will get him to fold hands such as QQ-99 and sometimes a hand as strong as K9. However, as a default, I would check-call on this flop.

> **Important Note:** *No matter how much information I give you, you have to go out and try it for yourself. By actively thinking about your range in any situation, you will be more aware of your opponent's range and his tendency. Ultimately, it is up to you as poker player to determine how to fit those pieces together. That comes with practice and observation.*

Check-Raising the Turn

Several years ago, a play called "stack-a-donk" was very popular. This is where you raise pre-flop, bets the flop, *check the turn to induce a bet,* and then raise all in (usually with an overpair). It was extremely effective back then because players kept betting with their top- and mid-pair when checked to on the turn. They also couldn't fold them to a check-raise. Once pot control became the new mantra, it became less effective because players started checking behind more often with marginal holdings.

In micro- and small-stakes games where your opponents aren't as observant, you can have an unbalanced turn check-raise range with only the nuts and monster draws and get away with it. However, as you move up in stakes, you will realize that constructing a balanced turn check-raising range is very difficult. It makes it very difficult to two-barrel effectively if your opponents know that you have a tendency to check-raise the turn with the nuts. Even if you don't check-raise the nuts often, your opponent may misread your frequency and call your two barrel lighter. Of course, the way you adjust is to stop betting the turn with air. However, I want to make my life easier by having a simpler overall game plan. I would bet the majority of my nut hands to balance the times I'm betting with air. For borderline situations where my hands are marginal, I can bet, check-call or check-fold, depending on my opponents.

If my opponent floats a lot, I will check-call the turn more often than folding. I will also check-call the turn with the nuts instead of check-raising, and will check-call or check-raise the river, depending on whether I still have a strong hand by the river.

If my opponent has a tendency to pot-control, I will check-call the turn as well because that means his betting turn range is polarized to floats, draws, and nut hands. If I check-

call and don't improve on the river, unless I have a specific read, I will check-fold to a river bet.

Having said that, there are spots where a turn check-raise is applicable as you move up. They usually involve deep stacks.

For example:

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100 NL – 6 max. 200BB effective stacks.
You c-bet with

9♠ 8♠

on

7♥ 6♣ 5♦

The turn is a

J♠

You should highly consider check-raising here to get more money in so you have about a pot-sized river bet.

Opponents rarely float on such a flop. If they will call your turn bet, they will bet if checked to with the majority of made hands such as two pair, sets, straights, and sometimes overpairs. Of course, there are times when opponents will check back with hands such as 88-TT and 87, and you can get value from those hands with a river bet.

Usually, if you check the turn with a strong hand and it gets checked through, you should check the river as well. Betting the river after checking the turn seems like an obvious value-bet. However, this flop hits a decent part of Villain's range, so he almost always have a hand that will call a river bet but would check behind a lot.

Check-Raising the River After a Missed Turn Check-Raise (For Value)

So you missed the turn check-raise because he checked behind. What should your line be on a "scary" river? Go for the check-raise again.

Let's go over the following example.

100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.
The CO open-raises to $4 and you call with

9♠ 8♠

from the SB. The flop is

J♥ 8♣ 3♣

and you check-call a pot-sized bet. The turn is a

9♥

You check, and he checks behind. The river is a

K♠

What is your action? Check or bet?

Check. Look at your line from his perspective. After your check-call the flop, your range is mostly Jx, 8x, straight draws and flush draws. You are probably check-raising the flop with AJ+ and strong combo draws to get more money in. The river is the perfect card for him to try to take down the pot against your range. Betting the river prevents him from bluffing with his air and missed draws. You are going to get value from AK/KQ by betting or checking. For these reasons, checking is infinitely better than betting. One argument for betting is that it protects the time you show up on the river with a missed draw and want to bluff at the pot. While this is true, considering that Villain didn't bet on the turn, he likely has ace-high and will fold to a river bet. As exploitable as that sounds, that's how players play.

Important note: We intentionally left out river check-raise bluffs because it's an advanced play that will likely get you in trouble. Once you improve and play 200nl+, then you can add that play to your game.

3-Betting

"3-bet pots are normal pots on crack."

The 3-bet is one of the most powerful plays you can have in your arsenal. It is extremely profitable to 3-bet in position, especially from the button. Even if players know you are 3-betting light, it's tough for most of them to counter it. They usually over-adjust their pre-flop stacking-off range. This means more money for you since you are risking 10BB to see where you are at and they risk their stack with 99/AJ type hands.

The Fundamentals

In 3-bet pots, due to a smaller stack-to-pot ratio, your post-flop and positional edges decrease in value. This is because if you 3-bet a 30BB short stack, if he calls, he's going to have a pot-sized stack left on the flop. If he flops anything, then he's stacking off. Thus, you have little fold equity against opponents with short stacks. If the same player is OOP with 200BB+, then there's more room for you to maneuver post-flop, meaning more opportunities for you to exploit your positional and skill advantages.

You also have a ton more fold equity with deep stacks because players are much more willing to stack off with 50BB than with 200BB. As a result, you will see more all-in pots when the stacks are 50BB. With 200BB, there is more cautious play because players want to protect their stacks. You probably can't count more than a handful of times when you've seen a good, aggressive player 3-barrel bluff with ace-high and lose 200BB.

Below is a chart that illustrates how different stack sizes affect the game.

3-bet Pots: Based on Pre-flop Stack Sizes		
Characteristics	**Short Stack (50BB or less)**	**Full Stack (100BB)**	**Deep Stack (150BB or more)**
Skill Advantage	Low	Medium	High
Positional Advantage	Low	Medium	High
Stack-to-pot ratio	Low	Medium	High
Showdowns	Very High	Medium	Low
Fold Equity	Very Low	Medium	Very High

Creating an aggressive Image

3-betting lightly is an excellent way to create an aggressive image. Players will put you on a wide range of hands and pay you off lighter. Unless they fight back, you will control the

flow of the game. This allows you to isolate the fish more often, exploiting the regulars' weakness and playing pots in position. So when is a good time to 3-bet?

You generally want your first 3-bet to be a semi-bluff (hands like J8s, 86s, 75s). This is because people tend to give you more credit for it, and people fear the unknown. If you've just sat down at the table and you 3-bet in the first orbit, they don't know who you are or how you play yet. If you're a regular, they may have an idea based on previous history, but they won't know exactly how you're playing on that day. So they will shy away from doing anything reckless until several orbits later.

After that, keep 3-betting until people give you a reason to stop—by 4-betting you, calling you down lighter, and/or check-raising the flop more. I'd also focus on targeting a weaker player at the table and 3-bet him. If you keep this up, you will end up tilting him and he will be ecstatic to get all-in pre-flop with AQ or 88.
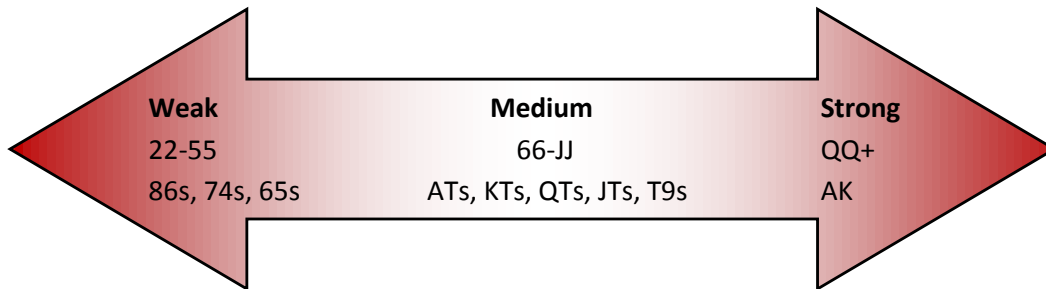
3-bet Stats

Although 3-bet stats are helpful, don't put too much emphasis on them. They are more reliable if you're playing heads-up because his stats directly reflect his actions against you. In a 6-max game, if you open from the CO and he 3-bets from the SB, his stats aren't going to give you an accurate reflection of his 3-betting tendencies. It gives you an overall representation of the game, which can be misleading. He might have recently lost a pot and is now tilting. Or he might have noticed that you folded to a 3-bet an orbit ago, so now he's doing it lighter. Or he only likes to 3-bet the player to his right and no one else. You just don't know. It's more practical and reliable to base your reads on his previous actions. You'll get better reads on him and really get into his head as a player. Of course, it is important to note that a player with 3-bet stats of 10 percent is looser and more aggressive than a player with 3-bet stats of four percent.

Polarized Range

When you 3-bet, you want to polarize your range. This means you should do it with your strong and weak hands (QQ+, AK, 96s, 76s and 65s). With medium pairs (66-JJ) and medium suited connectors (QTs, T9s), it's much better to just call because we don't want to fold to a 4-bet with these hands. They have too much value post-flop to risk folding them. The only exception is if villain is very loose-passive, never 4-bets and tends to check-fold the flop. Then you can 3-bet with 88-JJ for value.

If villain never 4-bets you, then there is less incentive to polarize your range because you will be able to see all flops with your medium-strength hands.

Weak	Medium	Strong
22-55	66-JJ	QQ+
86s, 74s, 65s	ATs, KTs, QTs, JTs, T9s	AK

Calling Station

Against weaker opponents who call 3-bets too often, you should 3-bet more Broadway cards and fewer suited connectors. Your high cards, such as KTo, increase in value because you will be more likely to flop a strong middle or top pair than with a hand like 65s. Furthermore, if villain is calling a lot of 3-bets pre-flop, we don't have to worry as much about reverse implied odds (he will have tons of hands like K2-K9s). Low suited connectors go down in value because you will rarely flop top pair. They also make smaller flushes than K8s and Q7s. We don't have to worry about folding to his 4-bets with hands like TT, JJ and AQ, so we can 3-bet more liberally with them.

Another great thing about a calling station is that he plays very straightforwardly after the flop. His goal is to flop big hands and stack off. If he misses, then he folds. He doesn't realize that you determine the aggression and how much money goes into the pot. With position, you can easily bet or check behind for pot control. Furthermore, he's making a big mistake against you because your 3-betting range is so wide that he won't be able to extract value when he flops two pair or better. And those hands don't come along very often. Even if he does call your flop c-bet, you can still bluff when a scare card comes on the turn or river.

3-betting as the Aggressor

We will first discuss playing 3-bet pots as the aggressor. You want to do most of your 3-betting in position (from the CO or BTN) because you will have position for the rest of the hand. This allows you to play your hands profitably, as well as widen the range of hands you can 3-bet with.

3-betting against UTG/MP

A player raising from UTG will have a perceived tight range. If you 3-bet him from the button, then you will get a lot of respect. 3-betting the MP is almost the same, as his range will be almost as strong.

Increase your 3-betting range versus UTG. If he starts playing back at you by calling your 3-bets lighter or 4-betting, then slow down. For the most part, however, he will be folding a ton of his holdings and playing back only with JJ+ and AK. This is fine, because it doesn't happen often. If he calls a lot of your 3-bets and check-folds most flops, then keep doing it. If he starts to call down your multi-barrels, then it's a good time to narrow your 3-betting range to include more Broadway cards and fewer suited connectors.

3-betting against the Cutoff

Most regulars widen their opening range from the cutoff, so you want to 3-bet the cutoff relentlessly from the button. You'll have tons of fold equity because: 1) his range is weak, and 2) he doesn't want to play against you from out of position.

If your opponent has an aggressive 3-betting history, then widen your 3-betting value range because he's more likely to 4-bet as a bluff. Without history, you can safely fold to a 4-bet even with a hand as strong as AQ. The general strategy is to keep 3-betting him until he starts to fight back. He can fight back by 4-betting pre-flop, check-raising flops, or calling down with marginal holdings.

It is important to realize that there will be times when he shows up with a real hand. If he has folded to your 3-bet five times in a row, and then he 4-bets you, then he has a hand. There's nothing embarrassing about getting caught. Phil Ivey gets caught too and he's the best poker player in the world. If Villain 4-bets, then fold and 3-bet him later.

3-betting from the blinds

You don't want to 3-bet too often from the blinds. It's simply not profitable against good, aggressive players in late positions because playing out of position is tough.

If you do 3-bet from the blinds, then it's always a good idea to do so with a polarized range. Always 3-bet with QQ-AA and AK. With 99-JJ and AQ, you want to be doing it about half the time. These are good hands, but without an aggressive dynamic, you're still going to have to fold them to a 4-bet.

3-betting with Deep Stacks
When stacks are 150BB or more, you can 3-bet with many more hands in position, including hands like 96s, J7s, Q7s and K5s. Players play much more straightforward when stacks are deep. Some players will call a lot pre-flop, hoping to flop a strong hand, and will check-fold once they miss. Some players will fold to re-raises pre-flop all the time.

If you're in the blinds, then you should tighten up your 3-betting range because playing against an aggressive player out of position with lots of money behind is neither profitable nor fun. I know sometimes it looks weak to fold out of position so much. but position is that important and there's nothing much you can do about it. Fortunately, there are many players out there who love playing out of position and want to show you they can outplay you at a positional disadvantage. Just nod your head in agreement while taking down pots.

3-betting with AQ
Say you and another good player at the table have been clashing. Both of you have 3-bet the other several times already, and have not shown down a hand yet. Finally, you pick up AQ and open-raise from the cutoff. Not surprisingly, he 3-bets you again from the big blind. You could 4-bet him here because his range is somewhat wide, but it's not the best play because if he shoves all-in, you can't really call. AQ doesn't do well against an all-in raise. We're 38-percent against 88+ and AQ+, and that's being optimistic, because people will rarely 5-bet shove pre-flop with 88 or AQ.

So, we just call. The plan is to simply shove over his bet on a ton of flops (742 rainbow, T73 rainbow, J55 rainbow, JT5 rainbow, etc.). The drier the board, the stronger your range will appear. If there's a flush draw possible, he may call you down lighter. The purpose of doing this is to fold out AK on the flop, as well as complete air.

There are some flops you don't want to raise all-in with. On Axx, just call. On Kxx, just fold. AK, KQ, KJs, or KTs could very well be in his range.

If you raise all-in on the flop and are called, then you still have about six outs to make the best hand. Against JJ on T66 rainbow, AQ still has 25-percent equity. So if he bet-folds to your shove, then you will win an enormous amount of dead money. Just make sure you don't raise small and give him a chance to re-bluff. You want to maximize your fold equity by raising him all-in.

You can do this with other Broadway hands such as AJs, ATs, KQ, KJs, KTs, QJs, QTs and JTs.

> *Important Note: This play can cause you to become spewy if you are mindlessly doing it without logical reasoning and reads. <u>The idea is to wait until the situation presents itself and then apply it.</u> Don't force the play; let the game come to you. If Villain is weak-passive and he suddenly 3-bets you, chances are, he's not making a play and is doing it with a premium hand, so fold. This also works best when stacks are around 100BB.*

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Playing the Flop

Say you 3-bet an opponent pre-flop and he calls. Now what? How we play postflop depends on various factors, such as his frequency for calling 3-bets out of position, his perception of our range, and of course, board texture.

Your Perceived Range

People will usually put you on AK, high cards, small suited connectors that can't profitably call a pre-flop raise, or high pocket pairs when you 3-bet before the flop. On the flop, Villain can put us on a different range of hands depending on what we do.

Let's say the flop is

and we bet this flop. He will fold a large percentage of the time because the board texture hits our perceived range. Had the flop come

it probably wouldn't hit our range much. So it's best to check-fold with a hand like AK.

Paired boards

We can also use the flop texture to narrow down our opponent's hand range. When Villain calls a c-bet on a paired board, he will have a pocket pair most of the time, and even more often than in single-raised pots. He may sometimes float with ace-high, but that's not going to happen often in a 3-bet pot. Knowing this, you want to apply serious pressure.

For example:

A player calls your c-bet on

7♠ 7♦ 2♣

If an A, K, or Q hits, bet hard again (and fold to a shove). If you have

9♥ 8♥

and the turn is the

10♠

you can still bet strong and commit yourself.

Only do this against opponents who are tight or can make a big fold. There will be players who will call the turn again with 88. If he never folds with 88, then you may want to check behind with your 98s or and value bet a river J or 6; bluff the A, K and Q. This allows you to see all five cards with enough money to make a scary river bluff.

Monotone boards

Players generally play two pairs, sets or small flushes very fast on these boards. If you c-bet in a 3-bet pot and he calls, you can safely rule out those hands. There will be so much money out there by then (about 60BB in the pot if he calls) that he would want to get it in right away with his strong hands. Knowing that, you want to be shoving your stack on the turn if you have the nut-flush draw.

Let's go over a quick hand to demonstrate this concept.

> Say you 3-bet a MP raiser from the BTN with
>
> A♥ Q♣
>
> from the BB and the flop is
>
> J♥ 10♥ 3♥
>
> You bet and he calls. If the turn is any card other than a J, T or 3, you should bet and call it off.

If you started with 100BB, then you probably have about 70BB left, so it's the perfect size. You could fold out Tx with a heart, 99-77 with a heart or a random Kx or Qx with a heart. A strong hand would have raised you all-in on the flop already.

A93-type boards

You want to c-bet almost 100 percent of your 3-betting range here. Even if you have TT-KK, it's best to c-bet this OOP more often than not. This can be for thin value if you've been 3-betting pre-flop a lot, because he may call you with lower pocket pairs or 9x. More importantly, if you check-call here, you turn your hand face up. We've all done this before and we end up in a very difficult spot when villain barrels the turn and the river. We end up leveling ourselves with thoughts like, "He knows I have a weak hand. And he knows I know that, but he's going to bet anyway because he thinks I'm going to fold. So I call." Then you find yourself calling 3 barrels against his AT. The reason why he can 3-barrel with AT is because you would have bet the flop with AJ+. His AT is the same as AK.

Counter

Ace-high flops are great spots to float in position in 3-bet pots. The reason is explained above—villain will c-bet almost 100 percent of his 3-betting range on this flop. We exploit that by floating here. You don't need a legitimate hand but you should float with a hand that has some equity in the pot in case Villain has a real hand.

If he checks the flop, then just check behind because he probably has some weak made hand like TT-KK that intends to call you down. If he bets the flop, then call.

If he bets the turn, then he probably has an ace, so just fold. There's nothing wrong with folding the turn after floating the flop. If Villain checks the turn, then check behind to represent something like A5s going for pot control. When he checks again on the river, he rarely has an ace. You can now bet about 2/3-3/4 of the pot.

Countering 3-bets

Let's try looking at this from a defensive point of view. You raise from MP and the BTN 3-bets you for the 3rd time. It can get frustrating over time to play someone who constantly applies pressure to you.

How do we deal with that?

Tight strategy

You generally want to be calling 3-bets in position. If at all possible, avoid doing it OOP. If you're OOP against a good, aggressive player, the best strategy is to simply fold against his 3-bets and tighten up your opening range. Folding is a neutral EV play; it is not a losing play. Unless you want to get into a variance war with the good player, you can tighten up your opening range and wait for a good hand. If you keep folding to his 3-bets, then he's going to expect you to fight back and stack off lightly. However, you will fight back, when you have JJ+. Villain is going to level himself into calling off with AQs/99-type hands. Just remember that when out of position, it's a smaller mistake to call 3-bets too tight than too loose.

Playing Fit-Or-Fold

If you want to call with marginal hands, then you have to "play poker" on the flop. You can't just fold to a c-bet if you miss. Say you have 77. It's a decent hand pre-flop, but it would be a mistake to call a 3-bet and fold when you don't hit your set every time. You will not flop it nearly often enough to make it a profitable call pre-flop. Even when you do, you'll still have to try to stack him off (which is easier said than done since his range is wide and he won't have a strong enough hand post-flop to stack off). *You must be willing to float and make plays if you want to play those pairs and suited connectors profitably*.

Let me demonstrate.

You raise from the CO with

The BB 3-bets and you call. The flop is

He c-bets and you call. The turn is an

He checks and you check. The river is a

He checks. What's your play?

You should highly consider betting the river since he doesn't have a strong hand very often. The board on the turn is drawy enough that he would bet any hand that is better than QJ. As for your range, you can reasonably have a flush. If he had a flush, then he would've bet the river. You can also have a pair of queens that went for pot control on the turn and is now betting for thin value. You could also rep a rivered two pair. He might end up calling with AQ+ but that's rarely going to happen. Once he checks the river on this board, he's going to check-fold most of the time. And since we can beat ace-high, we should bet.

Calling 3-bets with Pocket Pairs

Even with position, you should fold pocket pairs worse than 99 when stacks are less than 150BB. However, if you know your opponent well and know that he's straightforward enough to c-bet on a J52r and give up on the turn and river, you can call 3-bets with 55+. If you are out of position, unless the opponent is really passive, you should fold these pocket pairs out of position to 3-bets.

CO vs. BTN

You can actually call with a wider range of hands here versus a button 3-bet because he will have hands like ATs, KTs, and QTs. For this reason, you can call with AQ, AJ, KQ, KJs, and QJs hands and play post-flop. Generally, against an aggressive opponent who has been active, I'm not going to fold if I flop a pair. Barring a disastrous turn and river that put 4 to a straight or 4 to a flush on the board, I'm going to check-call it off. You will lose sometimes when Villain shows up with a real hand, but you will pick off some bluffs as well. Of course, if you see the nuts every time you go into check-call mode against a player who has been 3-betting you a lot, then maybe he doesn't 3-bet you that often or maybe he does 3-bet you that often but he doesn't fire multiple barrels as bluffs that often.

Late position vs. 3-bet from blinds

If Villain has a very narrow 3-betting range, then I want to 4-bet to give him a chance to stack off with a range of JJ+/AK, which AA/KK dominates. By calling his 3-bet, he may slow down if the flop is bad for his hand and we fail to stack him.

If an opponent is 3-betting with a wide range, then I will call with my premium hands because I want to balance the times when I have marginal holdings. Against someone who is really aggressive, I will slow-play and then call down all three streets, even if the board gets scarier and scarier, because aggressive players' bluffing frequencies increase as the board gets scarier. I almost never fold KK+ against them.

I would shove over Villain's bet on wet flops like T83s because that's what I would do with my semi-bluffs on this board. If Villain 3-bets a lot and c-bets at a high percentage, then semi-bluffing the flop is insanely profitable since he will bet-fold very often.

On dry boards like Q73 rainbow, I would raise small or flat Villain's c-bet if he's the type to pounce on weakness and capable of firing multiple barrels with AK or random hands. This causes him to overplay his marginal hands. A small raise works well against opponents who aren't very aggressive on the turn or the river. Additionally, there will be times where I will raise small on a flop as a bluff, so I want to do it with a weak hand as well. An argument can be made that if no one is paying attention, then balancing is overrated since your opponents are only playing their cards. Nevertheless, it's important to develop a sense of how important balance is to your game so you can be aware of it as you move up.

Don't jam the flop

Don't always just get it in on the flop against a 3-better's c-bet. Almost always call more with sets and two pairs. You probably already do that with medium pairs, so why not do it with the nuts? You don't want to have an unbalanced range for calling and shoving. Calling the flop with strong hands some of the time will also prevent aggressive villains from putting you on a weak hand and double-barrel bluffing you in the future.

Bluffing the Flop

Players who 3-bet too often also tend to c-bet the flop frequently. Good boards for you to bluff-raise on are connected boards, and sometimes even Kxx or Qxx. Bluff-raising ace-high boards works on some opponents, but it's better to call the flop c-bet to represent more Ax-type hands. You probably wouldn't raise a c-bet with AT on A73 rainbow versus someone who 3-bets you pre-flop. You would call instead, and you'd do the same with your other strong holdings since he will bet his pair of aces on the turn anyway. When he checks the turn, check behind. Again, you do that with all your weak aces or smaller pairs. On the river, if he bets, you can fold since he isn't bluffing often. If he checks, then you can bet 1/2- to 3/5-pot to take it down.

Inducing a Bluff

Some players never believe you when you raise a fairly dry flop. By raising, you represent such a narrow range of hands for value that a thinking Villain will not give you credit for it. This is probably true because we would slow-play QQ on Q72 suited almost always. We will just call the flop with a weak top pair or medium pair. If Villain is smart enough to recognize when your value range is really narrow, and if he is capable of 3-bet bluffing or floating out of position and betting the river if the turn goes check-check, then a dry board is a great spot to min-raise a c-bet to induce a bluff.

The following example is a hand I played several years back against a tough aggressive player at 5/10.

He was sitting on several of my tables and I noticed that he would shove all-in on the flop with overcards if you min-raised his c-bet in a 3-bet pot. I picked up

on the button and raised preflop. He 3-bet from the SB and I called. The flop was

and he c-bet. Normally I'd just raise big or shove it in, but after seeing his bluffy tendencies, I decided to min-raise. He immediately shoved with KJo.

Most players at the micro-limits and small stakes are not capable of Villain's move. The purpose of this example is to show you how you can manipulate your opponent if you pick up on some of his tendencies. If you face a player who is capable of doing it, then you now know how to exploit him.

As you move up in stakes, you will realize that there's more value to fast-playing your hands than slow-playing. As players get better, it's more difficult to trap them. However, a lot of players want to make hero calls so if you're playing your strong hands aggressively, you will get called more often than you think. Here's another example.

You raise pre-flop with

in the CO and the BB calls. He's a good aggressive player. The flop is

Villain checks. You c-bet and he check-raises. What do you do?

Almost everyone calls in this spot. You want to let him continue bluffing his hand. However, if he is smart, he will shut down on the turn, since you will have a hand stronger than Tx way more often than a float. So, if he is aggressive enough, you should 3-bet Villain's check-raise more often than call. He has been in this spot many times and every time someone calls a check-raise, they have a strong hand. By 3-betting, you are taking a different line and he may go crazy and try to bluff you or float out of position to take it down on a future street.

4-betting

You generally want to 4-bet a hand that either cannot profitably call a 3-bet (A3o, KJo) or that you want to go all-in with pre-flop (QQ+/AK). Having an ace or king in your hand is great because of hand elimination. There is less chance that Villain holds AA, KK, or AK.

Don't 4-bet with T7o because you want to least have decent equity in the pot if he does call; choose T7s instead. T7s gives you more semi-bluffing opportunities where you can bet the flop with a flush draw and follow through on the turn. You can also bet the flop with a backdoor flush draw and continue the aggression when you pick up a flush draw on the turn.

> For example, you c-bet with
>
> 10♠ 7♠
>
> on a flop of
>
> J♠ 5♣ 3♦
>
> and the turn is an
>
> 8♠

It's also important that you don't 4-bet with hands such as 55-88 or T9s. Assuming stacks are deep (150BB), it's better to just call his 3-bet with these hands because the implied

odds are high and there are little to no reverse implied odds (your hand is rarely dominated).

Once stacks get deep (150BB+), I would 4-bet with a wide range of hands against habitual 3-betters. There are a few reasons for this. It's tough to counter my play because stacks are so deep. If I 4-bet big, which is a little more than double his 3-bet size, then he won't have odds to call pre-flop to play post-flop. I may have aces or kings. Most importantly, players rarely 5-bet bluff shove for 150BB+, and like to play tight when stacks are deep, so I take down the pot pre-flop a lot of times.

4-Betting

4-betting is usually a reaction to your opponent's 3-betting tendencies. A player who has been 3-betting a lot and/or folding to 4-bets frequently is a prime target to 4-bet light against. The standard of today's game is to 4-bet 2.1-2.5 times the 3-bet size. So if UTG raises to 4BB, and Button 3-bets to 12BB, you should 4-bet to 25BB. This is good for a couple of reasons:

1) If you're bluffing, then you risk less than a third of your 100BB stack and force your opponent to risk his entire stack.
2) If you're 4-betting for value, then you also encourage Villain to come along with hands that might fold to a shove. You may also induce him to 5-bet shove with a worse hand.

You never want to put in more than 30BB of your stack pre-flop because you do not want to commit to the pot with a weak hand. If you 4-bet to 40BB and he shoves, you would need to call 60BB to win 140BB—roughly 2.3-to-1 odds. This means you will have to call a shove with a hand as weak as A2s or 65s against his shoving range of QQ+/AK.

Playing TT and JJ

If you have been 4-betting small with these hands, then you're losing a lot of value. You may decide that you want him to shove with random hands such as T8s or Q4s. While that may sometimes work, players will usually just fold those hands. People 3-bet bluff less than we think, 4-bet bluff even less and 5-bet bluff very rarely. So you gain very little by 4-betting him there.

You might even induce AQ, AJ or KQ to shove over your small 4-bet. That's a big mistake because you want him to fold and allow you to rake in the dead money. Had he folded, he would have lost his equity share of the pot without seeing the flop. But by 4-betting small, you encourage him to shove with hands that still have 43-percent equity against you. So I would just shove it in here with TT and JJ, 4-bet bigger so he knows you're committing yourself, or call his 3-bet.

If he 3-bets light against you and you're OOP, then you should 4-bet big or shove. Against passive opponents who don't barrel enough, calling is optimal because you have more chances of seeing showdowns with TT and JJ. If he's a nit who rarely 3-bets you, then you should fold to his re-raises when you open from UTG or UTG+1. Players will save a lot of money if they treat TT and JJ like 99.

Playing AK

It's a mistake to push this hand too hard. AK falls into the same category as TT and JJ because it's a marginal hand to 4-bet and get all-in with. One unique distinction is that 4-betting with AK folds out a lot of Aces preflop that would have gotten stacks in if they had flopped a pair of Aces. Let's say you raise from the CO and the BB 3-bets you. You 4-bet him and he folds all AQ, AJ, and ATs. JJ+ and AK will get it in versus AK with 60-percent equity. For this reason, calling a 3-bet and playing post-flop is fine.

The idea behind calling the pre-flop 3-bet instead of 4-betting is to call all of his flop c-bets and bet the turn when he checks to you. A half-pot bet will be sufficient to take it down. If you think he will check-call or check-raise more often than not, then check behind the turn. AK has some showdown value in 3-bet pots, so you don't need to bluff the river often if it gets checked to you again. Calling 3-bets with AK also allows you to stack most Ax hands on Ace-high flops. After all, it is very tough to fold top pair in 3-bet pots. Lastly, Villain will be barreling with a high frequency on any turn A or K to represent AK.

The following is a hand example I played from several years back at 400NL.

> There was a loose-passive player that was the obvious mark at the table. He raised from the CO and I 3-bet with
>
> 10♦ 9♦
>
> from the BTN (it's much better to just call his raise because this hand plays so well postflop that I'd hate to fold to a 4-bet. I didn't know any better at the time). He called and the flop was something like
>
> J♣ 5♥ 2♦
>
> I c-bet and he called. The turn was an
>
> A♥
>
> It was the perfect bluff card, and I shoved. He snap-called with
>
> A♠ K♥
>
> I never expected him to show up with that hand.

I took two things away from that hand:

    1) You should not automatically shove your entire stack in preflop with AK.

    2) Calling a low flop with AK will induce a lot of bluffs on a turn A or K.

Playing AQ and 99

We rarely want to 4-bet with these hands and get it in preflop without history. The only hands we can really get value from are AJs, ATs, and 88, but those situations are extremely rare. An exception is when you have a very aggressive history with a villain who never believes you and is willing to stack off very light. The majority of the time, however, the best play is to call a 3-bet with them when stacks are deeper than 125BB.

An advanced tactic where you can 4-bet and fold AQ pre-flop from the blinds is when the CO opens and a habitual 3-better 3-bets from the BTN. Due to card removals, your opponents don't have QQ+/AK as often and will have to fold the majority of their hands since your cold 4-bet is so strong. Against really tight opponents from the blinds, I would highly consider folding QQ/AK in the CO. One reason is because the blinds have a strong range. Secondly, the BTN could show up with a strong hand as well. If I had QQ+/AK from the BTN, I would shove when the CO folded.

Adjusting Against Different Players

There is always more than one way to play a hand. If you take into account stack sizes, position, image, game flow and types of opponents, a hand may be good enough to raise in one situation, and a clear fold in another. For the sake of simplicity, we will focus on playing against different types of opponents and how that affects your decision-making.

> **100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.**
> Let say everyone folds to you on the button and you have
>
> A♦ 10♠
>
> You make a standard raise to $3 and the SB calls. The flop is
>
> 8♦ 6♠ 2♣
>
> What do you do?

In a vacuum, you should bet to try taking it down. You have the initiative and should continue your aggression. If he calls, then you still have about six outs (three aces and three tens) to make the best hand. That's fine reasoning; however, betting is not always the optimal play. It depends on your opponent.

Against a Loose-Passive Player
Check behind. He's going to call your bet with any pair or any draw that connects with the pot. You have ace-high, so there is still showdown value if you both check it down. Since he's a passive player, he won't be leading the turn or river much. You also have the best hand a decent amount of the time.

Against a Nit
Assuming he's playing 17/12, you should bet the flop. Nits often play a fit-or-fold game (fold if they miss; call/raise if they hit). Against a nit, your ace-high might not be good anymore since he will have more pocket pairs in his range and fewer hands like A9, K9s, QJo, and JTo. More often than not, you'll also have to barrel the turn. If the turn is a J, Q, K or A, you should bet again.

Let say the turn is a low card, I would give up and fire a river card that is bigger than a 9 if it is checked to me.

Against a Decent TAG

You want to the bet the flop as well, with the intention of following through on the turn and sometimes the river. A TAG's range on the flop will also have lots of pocket pairs, so your showdown value with ATo decreases. Decent TAGs also generally play somewhat of a fit-or-fold game, especially out of position. Sometimes they'll 3-bet from the blinds with 86s. Sometimes they'll check-raise with KQ on a dry flop like 862 rainbow, but for the most part, they'll just continue with their good hands and stay out of your way if they miss. So if villain does have a strong hand like a set, two pair, slow-played overpairs, he'll check-raise you right away. You can then fold without too much thought.

Now, if he calls your c-bet, be ready to fire the second barrel on all overcards. Keep in mind that your decent TAG at 50NL and 100NL knows that you will be likely to bluff the turn if a scare card comes. Just fire anyway because there's nothing he can do but fold or go into check-call mode. If he calls, you can still bluff the river.

If the card is higher than an 8, go ahead and fire. If it's a 7, 5, 4, or 3, it's not as good anymore because it's not a scare card. Unless you have a good understanding of your opponent's game, you should give up.

Against a Good, Aggressive Player

There will be a little more leveling going on against this type of player because he likely knows the things you do already. He's also good at balancing his range and mixing up plays. Against this type of player, it's okay to check behind the flop because he might check-raise with hands like A8, 99+, overcards, open-end draws, gutshots and, of course, sets and two pairs. He can also call with those same hands. So, checking behind is the most optimal play, but let's say you decide to bet this time. He calls and the turn is a K—a great scare card for you.

You bet and he quickly calls again. The river is a 2 and pairs the bottom card. Now it's not such a great spot to barrel again because the river doesn't really change anything. On one hand, if he thinks his pair of eights is good on the turn, he may still think that. He also knows you will be more likely to fire your missed draws on the river and can make a hero call against you.

On the other hand, you could have a decent to strong hand yourself (A2, 86, 8X, 99-AA and Kx). Since he hasn't shown any aggression so far, he likely doesn't have a hand stronger than 8X here, so a river bet is still profitable. Again, you can bet 2/3- to 3/4-pot to rep a variety of hands going for thin value, and not just specifically Kx.

Balancing Your Range

Balancing your range is an important aspect of poker that we often overlook. You know you're supposed to balance your range, but how do you do it? Against bad players who can't hand-read well, there's little incentive to balance your range. They either don't know what you are representing or don't care. But against good hand readers, having a well balanced range will earn you more money and make you difficult to play against.

Let's go over a situation where it's rare that you are bluffing.

> **100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.**
> A good, aggressive player raises to $3 from the Button and you call from the SB with
>
> A♠ 10♠
>
> The flop is
>
> A♦ 6♥ 2♣
>
> You check-call his pot bet. The turn is a
>
> 7♥
>
> and you check. He checks behind. The river is a
>
> Q♣
>
> You bet 2/3-pot for value, and he folds.

After you check-call on the flop, you will have a made hand (Ax, 6x, pocket pairs) the majority of the time. For this reason, you rarely, if ever, get to the river with air. So when you bet, you rarely have a bluff in your range. For this reason, you should check the river the majority of the time.

This has three purposes:

1) It induces him to bluff with air so that you can call him down.

2) It induces him to make a thin value bet with worse hands (Qx, KK).

3) It balances your range so that he will be less likely to value-bet light or bluff you in the future, thus allowing you to see a cheap showdown with your medium/small pairs.
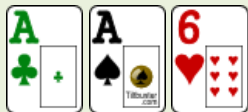
Here's another example:

100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.
A good, aggressive player raises to $3 from the Button. You slowplay from the big blind with

The flop is

You check-call his 3/4-pot bet. The turn is a

and both of you check. The river is a

You bet 2/3-pot and he folds.

This is a pretty thin spot to value bet because you're only expecting to get a hero call from QQ or a rivered Jx. Your range is very polarized when you bet here (Ax, air and maybe a

lower pair that you decide to turn into a bluff), with Ax making up the majority of your range. Betting out here will cause him to fold air and weaker pairs. If he somehow ends up calling, it'll be with A2 that checked the turn for pot control much more often than a hand like Jx. The best play here is to check and induce a bluff from random junk hands (QTo, T8s, 98s, 75s, etc.). He may be tempted to value-bet you light if has QQ or Jx because he'll put you on 6x or 77-TT.

It's easy to multi-table, play your standard game and still make a profit. However, you will miss many unique opportunities like these to exploit your opponents. The standard play is not always the best play.

Monotone board – villain has a weak range

Here's an example of how we can exploit a player if we can accurately estimate his range.

---

100 NL – Heads-up. 100BB effective stacks.

Villain is a good, aggressive opponent who's playing a pretty straightforward game so far. Villain raises to $4 from the Button and you call from the big blind with

The flop is

You check, and he checks behind. The turn is the

You check and he bets almost full-pot. You check-raise 3 times his bet and he quickly folds.

Let's look at Villain's range. Unless he's capable of checking behind the flop with a flush, QQ or QT, his range is very narrow here. And if he is capable of that, he won't do it often. He will be much more likely to value-bet the flop with a flush or bet to protect QQ or QT.

Villain will usually have one of a variety of hands including a heart, such as Kx, Jx, 98 or 87. The idea is that he can't have a strong hand at all. You, on the other hand, can very well be check-raising with a flush.

There is one downside to your play: it's hard to balance since it's a spot where you either have the nuts or air. However, considering that your opponent's range is likely weak in this spot, you rarely have to play the river. If Villain calls the check-raise, barring any specific read that he folds rivers way too often, I would give up and check-fold. I would value-bet my nut hands at the river.

The Exception

There will be situations where you can't really do much to balance your range. No matter what you do, your hand will appear too strong.

> **100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.**
> A weak-tight player raises to $4 from UTG and a good, aggressive player calls from the CO. You overcall from the BTN with
>
>
>
> The flop is
>
>
>
> The UTG player bets 3/4-pot. The CO raises 3x his bet and you shove all-in with your set of sevens.

Most of you know that when you shove here, you can never have a bluff. The flop is very dry. There is a bet and a raise in a multi-way pot, and you raise all-in. Your hand will appear to be very strong. You would never do this with even AQ here unless the game has been unusually aggressive (where everyone is getting it in with top pair, weak kicker). In this example, your range is *very* skewed toward strong made hands and no bluffs. If the CO is at least decent, he will fold a hand as strong as AQ here. If you cold-call the flop raise, both players are likely check-folding on the turn since your hand looks so strong.

Balancing Your Range

Follow the guidelines below to help you balance your game.

- Any time you find yourself in a situation where your perceived range is strong (good top pair or better), then **value-bet less** and **bluff more**.

- Any time you find yourself in a situation where your perceived range is weak (mid-pair or worse), then **value-bet more** and **bluff less.**

Air <-------------Your Perceived Range--------> Strong Hands
Value-bet more, bluff less   Value-bet less, Bluff more
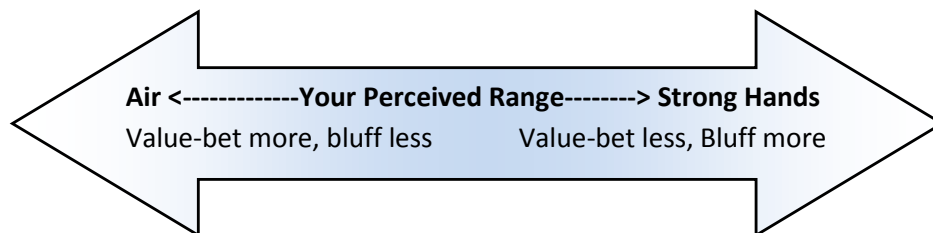
Strong Perceived Range

You should value-bet less because your perceived range is too strong. When your betting range on the river is almost exclusively for value and never a bluff, Villain will fold worse hands and call or raise with better hands. If you check instead, it may induce a good, thinking player to value-bet light with top pair, weak kicker or mid-pair. He could also try to bluff you. With a strong perceived range, you also want to bluff more if you have a hand that can't win at showdown.
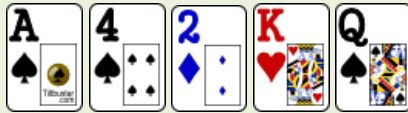
Let's look at a quick example.

100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.
Suppose you have

7♥ 4♥

and the board is

A♠ 4♠ 2♦ K♥ Q♠

You c-bet the flop and Villain check-calls. Turn is check-check. If Villain checks to you on the river, you should turn your hand into a bluff.

You can easily have a flush, and you can also have QQ, KQ, JT. Villain usually has Ax in this spot and will fold much of the time. Most importantly, your hand is almost never good on the river if it goes check-check.

Weak Perceived Range

If your perceived range is weak, then you need to value-bet more often because Villain is less likely to believe you. You also want to bluff less because you can't credibly represent a strong hand most of the time. Villain will call you down lighter and possibly bluff-raise you.

Observe the following the hand.

100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.
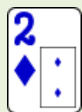Let say you raise to $3 from the BTN with

SB calls. The flop is

He check-calls your 2/-pot bet. The turn is a

and he checks to you. You decide to check behind. The river is a

and he checks to you. You throw in a small value bet.

His check on the river implies that he has a lot of weak made hands because a busted draw would have just bet out. So a small bet here can induce some of those hands to call us. Our decent Villain would have value-bet most of his Qx hands on the river. He knows that your turn check indicates a lot of weakness because you would bet with Qx or better. Since your range is so weak by the river, you can't really rep anything strong. He knows that and will be tempted to call you down with a hand like JT or T9.

Against a tricky, aggressive opponent, I would check back the river because I'm going to get check-raised a decent amount of the time and it'd be hard to call him down. However, against weaker players, I would value-bet the river all day.

Another line I would take is to bet-fold the turn. It makes the hand easier to play, and you can charge draws such as J9 or KJ. There's a chance Villain is calling with weak tens such as JT or J9. He can have backdoor clubs as well.

Multi-Way Pots

Multi-way Pots – Proceed With Caution!

Bluff-Raising Multi-Way Pots

I wasn't too sure if I should include this section because some readers might go ballistic and donk off all their money after reading it. Since you are a responsible poker player who wants to increase his winnings, here it is.

Bluff-raising in multi-way pots is an advanced, aggressive play. If you pick your spots well, then you'll win a lot of money. It also makes you tougher to play against because you could conceivably have anything in any spot. Allow me to demonstrate.

---

100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.
MP raises $4 and CO calls. You overcall from the BTN with

9♦ 8♦

The flop is

Q♠ 7♦ 5♣

MP c-bets 2/3-pot, CO calls and you … raise!

You have a gutshot and a backdoor flush draw. Not a great hand by any means, but you do have some equity. By raising, you typically represent a set or two pairs. If MP and CO are at least decent players, then they will be forced to fold hands as strong as KQ. If you have AQ, KQ, or a straight draw, then you almost always call here. Most decent players know that. So, what hands can you raise for value here that they beat? Not many. Unless you have a history of raising dry boards like this in a 3-way pot with at best top pair, medium kicker, they will respect you.

Put yourself in MP's position. You c-bet with KQ on Q75 rainbow, a very dry flop. A player behind you calls and a good, aggressive player raises. You're not going to be too thrilled about it and you will make a disciplined, good fold. Assuming you do call, you do it with the intention of folding to another big bet on the turn.

In this hand, if MP calls and CO folds, then don't bet the turn unless you hit your gutshot or pick up a flush draw + pair or flush draw + OESD. Then you can just pot the turn to commit yourself and maximize your fold equity.

If MP is a thinking player, he'll also have to worry about CO waking up with a strong hand. So he will insta-fold his QJ and probably KQ as well.

If CO calls, he either has a stubborn top pair, two pair or a set. Just check the turn no matter what card falls and hope to hit your straight/backdoor flush draw on the river. **Do not** try this move on a flush-draw board. You are much more likely to have a strong draw than a set or two pairs and they will be more likely to get it in lighter against you. Multi-way pots are great for bluff-raising as well.

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100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.
Let say MP raises $4 and BTN calls. You overcall from the BB with

The flop is

You check. MP c-bets 2/3-pot and BTN folds. You check-raise.

You have a ton of fold equity here because your line looks insanely strong. A decent player will fold a hand as strong as QJ on this board. He'll have to be worried about you because he will realize that you probably never check-raise here with QJ for value. Nobody does. If he calls and the turn is a diamond, then just bet the pot to commit yourself and maximize your fold equity in case he does call the flop with a hand like KJ or QJ.

Check-raise size: you want to vary between 3-4x the betting amount (3 if it's HU, 4 if there's one caller). So if the PF raiser c-bets $4 into a $6 pot, then check-raise to $12-$16. Be sure to vary the amount so that you don't give off any sizing tells.

Notice how in each hand, you have a gutshot, backdoor straight draw, and/or a backdoor flush draw. Always give yourself some rope to hang onto in case they end up calling your flop raise.

> **WARNING**: *When you're pulling stunts like these, please have an idea of how villains play. Don't blow off your entire stack against a donk who can't fold top pair, no kicker. Don't do this against players who don't know how to read hands. In all honesty, there are many players who are not capable of making this fold with QJ or even KJ in this spot at 100NL and lower. They either can't understand at that level or they just can't fold even though they know that calling is bad. What works at higher stakes may never work in the lower stakes. At the very least, I hope this example will motivate you to think beyond the norm. Instead of just folding because you have very little equity in a hand, think about your range and your opponent's range. Think about all your options and determine which is the best. How else are you going to improve?* ☺

Scare Cards

A scare card weakens your perceived range while it strengthens your opponent's perceived range. An overcard such as an Ace or a king is usually used in pots as a scare card. Here is a simple example.

100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.
MP raises to $4. You call on the BTN with

Q♠ 10♠

The blinds fold. The flop is

9♠ 8♣ 3♦

Villain checks and you check. The turn is an

A♥

Villain bets $7. What is your play?

Usually in this situation, if I don't have a hand with showdown value, I will raise the turn. This is because Villain would bet at the turn Ace almost always. However, the strongest hand in his range is AK, and even that is a little optimistic since he usually bets the flop with that hand. He can't have two pair because he would've bet the flop with A3, A8, and A9. He might show up with a set, but that rarely happens because players almost always c-bet to build the pot when they flop a set. So, his turn range is usually an Ace with a weak kicker or some random hand. How do we counter his bet? As always, the answer depends on the type of opponent you are dealing with.

If I'm facing a fishy player, then I will make a 3x raise on the turn and give up if he calls. Fishy players don't like to fold Ax. When I'm raising the turn, it's to fold all his random hands. One can make an argument for calling the turn and betting the river if it is checked to you. However, what if the fishy player doesn't check to you on the river and bets again? He may be value-betting with an ace or bluffing. We don't know. For this reason, I like to make a turn raise and give up.

If I'm playing against a regular player, then I will raise this turn almost always and follow through with a river bet. A decent player will realize that my range contains a lot of strong hands. It's normal for anyone to check back the flop with a set, A9s, A8s, and A3s. If you bluff the river and get called, then take a note that he likes to call with a marginal hand when he realizes it's the top of his range. Either that or he doesn't like folding top pair. What usually happens is that the table regular folds to the turn raise or calls and folds to a big river bet. You must remember to follow through with your river bet. If you don't intend to bet the river, then it's best to fold to his turn bet and save yourself some money.

Regarding the above situation, I will give up on the hand if the board pairs. All your value hands are less likely now and players will have trouble folding a pair of aces on a paired board.

Let's look at a more complex example.

100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.

MP opens for $4. You call in the CO with

9♠ 9♦

The flop is

5♠ 8♠ J♦

Villain bets $8 into $9.50. You call. The turn is a

K♣

He bets $21 into $25.50 and you call. The river is a

J♥

He shoves $67 into $67.50. What is your play?

Before getting to our decision, let's analyze the hand, street by street. Pre-flop is normal. On the flop, there are a lot of high-card hands and semi-bluffs that Villain can have in his range so we call. The turn is an interesting card because he can easily have a pair of kings (AK, KQ, KTs). He can also have sets, two pairs (KJ), one pair such as QJs, AJ or AA. However, he will also have a lot of flush draws and straight draws (T9s, QTs, ATs, AQ). Combination-wise, that's 12 combos of AK, 12 combos of KQ, 3 combos of KTs, 12 combos of sets, 9 combos of KJ, 3 combos of QJs, 12 combos of AJ and 6 combos of AA. That's 66 combos of value hands that he's betting on the turn.

For semi-bluffing hands, he has 2 combos of T9s, 4 combos of QTs, 4 combos of ATs, 16 combos of AQ, 4 combos of 76s, 2 combos of 79s and about 10 combos of Ax of spades. That's roughly 42 combos of semi-bluffing hands, plus a few random hands that he may bluff the turn with since it's such a great card for his range and such a bad card for our range. Let's give him ten of these random hands. We beat about 52 of Villain's hands on

the turn, so we should fold the turn. But since we made a bad turn call, we get to the river.

The river is an interesting card because it polarizes his betting range. You have a few Jx in your range that he has to be afraid of. This means that he's going to shove the river for value with hands such as QJs (2 combos), AJ (8 combos), 55 (3 combos), 88 (3 combos), KK (3 combos), JJ (one combo). That's a total of 20 hands on the river. Sometimes he will value-shove with hands such as AK and AA, but he is more likely to check-call with those holdings, so the times they bet will negate the times they check, so we don't have to account for them in our calculation. What about his drawing hands?

Now let's assume that he gets to the river with the 52 hands that we assigned him on the turn. If he bluffs with half of them, it is an easy call because we will win half of the time while getting 2-to-1 odds. But since micro- and small-stakes players don't bluff that often in this spot, we have to adjust Villain's bluffing frequency. In reality, bluffing frequency in this spot is about 20 to 25 percent in low-stakes games. Nevertheless, if Villain is an aggressive opponent who follows through with his bluff sometimes, you should call. If Villain is a nit, fold. A nit will show up with the rare nut hands in this spot all the time.

What is the main reason for showing you this hand? It is to show you the hand analysis that I go through away from the table to improve my game. It is also to show you that when a turn scare card comes, it increases Villain's bluffing frequency dramatically. More importantly, it is to show you that if an opponent represents a strong hand on the turn but the river improves your perceived range and narrows his value-betting range a lot, you should call a big river bet. Unless, of course, you are dealing with a 9+ tabling nit who will check the river if he doesn't have trips or better because he is afraid you have Jx.

Timing Tells

There are some great players who think timing tells are overrated; others players swear by it. I believe they exist, and sometimes I use them to make a big bluff or to check back the river with a strong hand. The main reason for its existence is that everyone's playing style has a pattern. Sometimes we auto-pilot and we don't know we're auto-piloting. Other times, we unwillingly let our emotions take over. I know I've called too quickly a few times in my playing career because I was acting on adrenaline. Let's go through a few scenarios.

Quick Call

From my experience after hundreds of thousands of hands, a quick call is usually an attempt to appear strong and to slow down the aggressor on the next street. With a strong hand, a player would take more time thinking about his option (whether to donk bet, check-raise, or check-call). In some situations, we have no option besides check-calling, so we often act way too fast.

For example:

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100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.
The BTN raises to $6 and we call from the SB with

The flop is

We check to Villain and he makes a standard $10 c-bet. We insta-call.

We have been through this situation many times. Unless there is some crazy history, we know the best play. Thus, we don't take too long to check-call. However, let's say we have J9 of clubs in the same situation. Now our flop action is a little delayed. We need more time to think about whether to check-call, check-raise or check-fold.

Of course, there are players out there who check-call quickly with the nuts to feign weakness, but this number is exceedingly small. In fact, you wouldn't lose much if you paid no heed to a fast check-call. Consider that the percentage of players who check-call

fast with a weak hand is way higher than those who do so with a monster hand, and that the benefits of winning a lot of dead money outweighs the times you get clipped off by a monster.

A reliable tell that I have used many times is when a fish check-calls really fast on boards where flush draws are possible. He doesn't care about correct pot odds; he likes to draw no matter what. Against players like him, I usually bet half-pot on the river to get them to fold their missed draws. There's no need to bluff with a bigger bet size because they aren't going to fold a made hand. Your goal is to make them fold a draw that has a high card that might beat you.

Slow Call

By "slow call", I'm not talking about a few seconds of delay. I'm talking about tanking, tanking, then calling. Unless your opponent has a history of taking his time during hands, he almost always has a strong hand and wants you to bluff off your chips. Regular grinders aren't morons. They know when they are taking time with their hands. The majority of the time, it's calculated.

Of course, some players genuinely take their time to call because they are facing a difficult decision and don't know the best course of action to take. Regarding these players, your guess is as good as mine since I need to play against them to know. As a default, I would start off by bluffing the river and see how they react to it. Some players fold all the time. Some call a lot. This is one of those concepts you have to try out for yourself to know which players belong to which categories.

Let's look at an example to illustrate this concept.

100 NL – 6 max. 100BB effective stacks.
You raise $6 from the BTN with

The SB calls and the flop is

He checks, you bet $11 and he calls. The turn is a

He checks. You bet $22. He *tanks* for a while and finally calls. The river is a

What should you do?

On such a draw-heavy board, once he check-calls the turn, the strongest hand that he can show up with is QJ. Any better hand probably check-shoves the turn to avoid playing the river. So, when he tanks on his turn decision, he is usually figuring out whether he is getting the odds to call a turn bet. On this board texture, if he is tanking, he is usually holding a pair with a flush draw or flush plus straight draw. On the river, I would shove the majority of the time if I couldn't beat Qx. I would expect to take down the pot often.

Important Note: If you are the type of player who will bet this turn but won't follow through on the river, you should check the turn the majority of the time. Because the board is so drawy by the turn that once Villain check-calls, the river is almost a mandatory shove.

Glossary

1. Unless specified, all examples are from
    a. 100NL (for the sake of consistency and simplicity).
    b. 6-max games with 100BB.
        i. With 2 players in a pot
2. Unless specified, all c-bets are 3/4-pot.
3. Positions
    a. SB = small blind
    b. BB = Big Blind
    c. UTG = Under the Gun
    d. MP = Middle Position
    e. CO = Cutoff
    f. BTN = Button
4. Check-call means you check and **then** call a bet
5. Bet-Fold means you bet and **then** fold to a raise
6. Call/Fold/Raise means you should call, fold, **or** raise
7. Isolate – raising or re-raising someone (usually a weaker player) to play head up against
8. SCs – suited connectors
9. Ax, Kx, Qx etc… - "x" is any random card that does not pair the first card
10. JTs, 86s etc… – JT suited, 86 suited
11. C-bet - continuation bet
12. TPTK – top pair top kicker
13. TPGK – top pair good kicker
14. TPWK – top pair weak kicker

The 4 color deck used in this book can be found at TiltBuster.com. They have many more designs at their site. These cards are great because they are easy on the eyes and can be a great help when logging long sessions. Most can be purchased for about $10 and are easy to install.

Final Words

Congratulations for making it this far!

We hope by now, you've gained some new insights and confidence. Much of what has been written in this book will be more than enough to beat games up to 100NL. You owe it to yourself to apply your new learned knowledge.

Some strategies will be easy to implement, while others may take some time getting used to. Don't let it discourage you when things don't work out. Remember that everything is hard before it becomes easy. Keep working at it and there's no stopping you.

This book is only as successful as you are.

Good luck!

Aaron Davis
Tri Nguyen

Recommended Readings

No-Limit Workbook: Exploiting Regulars

Nosebleed player "*kingsofcards*" and High Stakes Player "*Slowhabit*" will show you **WHY** you are struggling in your regular game. It's because you unknowingly GIVE UP a lot of pots and are getting OUTPLAYED. This book will teach you how to **AVOID MAKING COMMON MISTAKES** over and over again.

"The opportunity cost of not getting this book is too great, it will pay for itself even if you only read half. As a 200nl player with aspirations to play higher, this will be a great addition." - **Respected DeucesCracked Member WhiteheatSyd**

Let There Be Range

"*If you are a low-midstakes grinder and proven winner, and can afford it, get the book! I don't think realistically anyone can create/recreate a book as powerful as Let There Be Range for at least another 10 years.*" – CardRunners Coach/Instructor SixPeppers

"If there's one thing that this book gave me apart from the obvious, it was confidence. A confidence about Holdem which I had never experienced before." – Respected TwoPlusTwo Member Barracuda

The Pot Limit Omaha Book: Transitioning From NLHE to PLO

Slowhabit's PLO eBook has *proven methods and strategies* that can help you earn $300/hour playing PLO. It is currently the BEST PLO educational tool in the market for crushing small- and mid-stakes PLO games and nothing else comes close -- Google it or search on TwoPlusTwo.

"I think for $375 it's a no brainer purchase for people playing small or mid stakes 6-max PLO online." – DeucesCracked Executive Producer WiltOnTilt

"Experienced NLHE players looking to get better at 'the other big bet game' would be hard-pressed to find a better resource." - **PokerSavvyPlus Coach/Instructor Foucault**