POKER 101

A Beginner's Guide to Texas Hold'em

THE POKER PEOPLE

Texas Hold'em is the most widely recognized version of poker and the one commonly featured on TV. This guide is designed to help you feel comfortable at the table by outlining the basic flow of the game and the terms you'll hear during play.

How to Play a Hand of Texas Hold'em

Blinds and the Dealer Button

Each hand starts with two players placing forced bets called the **small blind** and the **big blind**. These bets ensure there is always something in the **pot** to play for.

To keep track of the order of play, a marker called the **dealer button** moves clockwise around the table after each hand. The player with the button is considered the dealer, with the small blind paid by the player to their left and the big blind by the next player to the left.

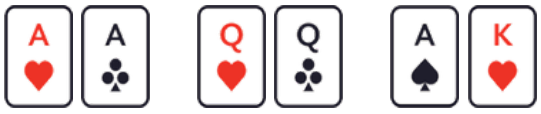
Hole Cards

Every player is dealt two private cards face down. These are called your **hole cards**. Only you should see your hole cards. They are the foundation of your strategy for that hand.

Your first decision is whether those two cards are strong enough to play. Some starting hands give you a clear advantage, while others are much more difficult to win with. Learning which hands to continue with – and which to fold – is one of the most important skills in poker.

Premium Hands

High Pairs (Jacks or higher) or Ace-King



These are the strongest starting hands and the ones you should almost always play.

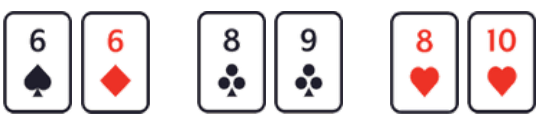
Strong Hands

Medium pairs (8-10) or two high cards (Jacks or higher)

These hands are solid and worth playing in most situations.

Playable Hands

Small pairs (7 or lower) or suited connectors (same suit, close rank)



These hands can be played but require more help from the community cards to win.

Fold These Hands

Low cards or cards that are different suits and far apart in rank

Let these go. Folding early with weak cards helps you conserve chips.

The Board (Community Cards)

In addition to your hole cards, five shared cards are placed face up in the center of the table. These are referred to as the board. The first three cards are called the flop, the fourth is the turn, and the fifth is the river. As each card appears, you'll consider how it works with your two hole cards to build your strongest possible five-card hand.

Betting Rounds

There are four betting rounds in each hand – one after players receive their hole cards, and one after each stage of the board (the flop, turn, and river). During each betting round, players take turns making decisions. When the **action** is on you, it simply means it is your turn to decide.

Depending on the situation, your options will include:

- **Check** – pass the action to the next player without betting (only available if no one has bet yet in that round).
- **Bet** – place the first wager in a betting round.
- **Call** – match the current bet.
- **Raise** – increase the current bet. Other players will have to match you to stay in the hand.
- **Fold** – give up your hand and sit out the rest of that round.

The round continues until all players still in the hand have acted and the bets are settled.

Winning the Hand

By the end of the hand, you will have seven total cards available – your two hole cards plus the five cards on the board. Your goal is to make the best possible five-card hand using any combination of those seven cards.

After the final betting round, all players still in the hand reveal their cards. This is called the **showdown**. The player with the strongest five-card hand wins the **pot**, which is all of the chips bet during that hand. Sometimes a hand ends earlier if all other players fold.

Poker Etiquette

- Keep your hole cards private until the hand is fully complete.
- Do not discuss your hand while the action is still in progress.
- Be mindful of the action and wait your turn before making a decision.
- If you're ever unsure what your options are, simply ask the dealer. The dealer is there to guide the game and is happy to help.
- Most importantly – have fun! Poker is competitive, but it's meant to be enjoyable and social.