The Flop

Reading the flop is when you decide to go for the money or wait for the Poker Gods to give you a different opportunity. I see so many people chasing stuff after the flop and losing because they did not consider what their opponents had in their hand or the odds to hitting your own hand compared to pot odds.

You can't chase 2 outers with a pot-sized bet in front of you (unless you know the opponent is a loose player that bluffs too much). You are not getting the pot odds for this. The best hands have more than one way to complete and win on the river. If the flop did not help your hand or give you an excellent drawing hand that would win if it hit, then in most instances you should throw it away. Unless you hold AA, KK or QQ and rags fall.

Let's take a look at when it may be advisable to chase a hand. You have Ad 5d on the button with 5 players seeing the flop. The flop comes 2d 3d 8c. What should you be seeing with this flop?

Well, you have a nut flush draw and a gut shot str8 draw. Any diamond (9 left in the deck) and any 4 (there are 4 left in the deck and one of them makes a straight flush) will make your hand a strong probable winner. I would call *almost* any bet or if it was checked to me I would raise. Why? Well you look at this as having 13 outs. Almost even money against you hitting the card needed to make a competitive hand. You have a 27.7% chance that your card will hit on the turn and 28.5% chance it will hit on the river or a 48.1% dog on both streets. You are a 1.1/1 underdog for it not to happen. That is almost even money. You will probably be betting against someone who thinks betting over cards to the flop is a smart play, someone that may have a wired pair and made trips, or the blinds who may have gotten 1 or 2 pair. But, most of these possibilities are slim. As Bob Ciaffone says, it is hard to get a good hand; they just don't grow on trees.

That is one of the tricks of playing after the flop, if your hand has more than one way to finish the best then it was a good flop for you and you should become an aggressive poker player. If you have top pair, or 2nd pair and there is no heavy betting, and you are in position (last or 2nd to last in betting), then you have the choice of checking/calling (which means that you don't reveal your hand strength), betting out for information, or raising which over represents the strength of your hand.

Another example that will take into consideration your hand against what your opponents may hold that can beat you.

You hold the 9dTd and the flop comes Ad 8h Js.
You have 8 outs to get the win.
A little more risky than the previous example because you will need to catch one of 8 cards to make your str8 or with a runner, runner of diamonds for a weak flush.
So now pot odds really come into play. You really only have 1 way to win this hand (excluding the flush draw), by hitting your open ended straight draw and one of the hits could easily make your hand second best. Depending on how many people saw the flop (the more people the more likely) there is an ace on the board you might face considerable betting from people protecting their hand and trying to make any draws unprofitable. If there is a bet then you have the option to just call or raise, depending on how many people are in the pot and the pot odds. You need a 6 to 1 (rounded up) value to continue with this hand on the turn (not considering implied odds). You have a 3 to 1 shot that it will hit either on the turn or the river. (The flush draw is more risky because you do not hold the nut flush). So you don't want to put too much money into the pot with this hand but by all means don't give up. Position matters in this situation and will be addressed in another article. The trick from this point on is to not only know what you have and need to make your hand but what other possible hands are out there that can beat you.

Chances someone has an Ace before the flop:

Number of players	No one has an Ace Including you	You have an Ace And no one else	You have no Ace Chances someone does
2	71.87%	88.24%	84.49%
3	60.28%	77.45%	70.86%
4	50.14%	67.57%	58.95%
5	41.34%	58.57%	48.60%
6	33.76%	50.41%	39.68%
7	27.27%	43.04%	32.05%
8	21.76%	36.43%	25.58%
9	17.13%	30.53%	20.14%
10	13.28%	25.31%	15.61%

I am not going to analyze the data about Aces; I like charts so take just save the GIF image above and print it out for reference while playing online.

In regards to our previous example, you will most likely be playing against someone else that is holding an Ace. Or someone who has 2 pair or a different straight draw that may beat you or is playing the stupid end of the straight. This is why it is a more dangerous flop. There are many more hands that can beat you. Count how many hands that could be out there that can beat your straight draw if you hit or do not hit. Being able to read the board and put it in relation to what your opponent could be holding is the ability to play winning poker.

Think about it; in middle to late position, someone could easily be holding KT or KQ in any type of game (loose to tight) giving your opponent a gut-shot straight draw. He would

be an underdog to hit the hand, but one side of your straight draw does complete his hand. This is the type of hand people call an un-raised pot with all the time.

An Ace and a blank card (especially a J = ajax) is also a common starting hand (Ace small suited more likely) people enter an un-raised pot with all the time.

Someone could have a medium to small-wired pair that caught the flop (8's in this example).

Finally, someone could be holding a different diamond draw (happen less often that 2 people are holding suited cards of the same suite but it can be expensive if it happens and you are on the short end).

You have to get a feel for what your opponents may hold and then guesstimate this according to the betting that is happening on the flop. But you see that there are many different starting hands that can beat you now and at the showdown even if you hit your straight.

Deciding on the flop if your hand can become the best at the showdown or folding up camp for another run is where the money is won and lost. Of course, everyone is not holding each one of these hands:

KT suited or unsuited
KQ suited or unsuited
88 wired
AJ unsuited
Ax unsuited

But do you want to invest a lot of you money into this pot if it will get beat? Of course not, you want to save your money for when you hold the best cards and someone raises the pot with the second best cards. Since this article is about reading a flop I will not go into what action to take. <u>I am not suggesting that you fold every time there are many different holdings out there that can beat you.</u> Then you would only be playing the nuts and that would not be the most profitable way of playing. You just need to be aware over the next two rounds what cards help you and what cards may help your opponent more.

So in our example, a 7 on the turn or river would be the best card for you to complete your straight with. You would hold the nut straight at that point. A Queen is not the best card because it may complete somebody else's straight above yours. Once again, you can usually determine this by the betting of the other players. If the Queen slid onto the board, you would also be more careful with your betting yet when the 7 fell onto the board you want to get the most money into the pot at that time.

There are many books that go into reading the flop: the 2 I suggest are ***Gary Carson's The Complete Book of Hold'em Poker and Ken Warren Teaches Texas Hold'em***. Both of these books go into flop reading skills extensively and will pay for themselves in a matter of hours at the tables. If not in the money you win at least from the money you will not lose because of your new skill.

Lets look at a few starting hands and flops for practice, read what the possible best opponent hands might be and how your hand stacks up.

(A true example)

You see the flop for 1 bet with 5 people seeing the flop

You hold 55

Flop = 2, 6, 5

You have trips and want to either win the pot right there, because your trips are vulnerable being small. KK calls big raise.

Turn = 2 you have the 2nd best full house and the possibility that someone has a wired pair of 6's 2's or 2 pair are very slim. I bet out 2x the pot trying to dislodge my opponent's interest by making it too expensive to draw any more cards. He raises with the rest of his money and I call. Our cards are flipped and I see that he has KK with 2 outs and I am way ahead. 2 outs on the river has a 12/1 shot to hit the card. So 11 out of 12 times he is going to lose with his play. Obviously this was a bad play on my opponent's part considering the odds.

Turn = K

Well I lost the hand. I showed this example when the writer lost and someone hit a real miracle card because it does happen. But, I played that hand the way it should be played, aggressive and expensive for my opponent to draw out on me, and I would play it the same way every time in the future. I lost a $90 pot but the next 11 times someone has only 2 outs on the river I will win. I decided on the flop, with a big bet, that I was going to go down to the river with my hand and extract as much money from my opponents as possible.

My opponent lost all his money within the hour playing this type of loose play and busted out. If it was not going to be me to bust him it was going to be someone else. I won all my money back and doubled my starting money by the end of the night, because I realized that my play was correct and I won a similar showdown for more money next time.

You hold AsQs in late position with 5 callers ahead of you.

Board flops Ah, 7s, Td

AT is a common starting hand and could have given someone a strong 2 pair. Someone could have a gutshot straight draw if they were holding KQ or QJ and anyone holding an Ace will at least call on the river. Of course small to medium wired pairs always have to be considered if there was no pre-flop raising.

This example came down to the river in a showdown between AQ and AJ. AJ decided their kicker was good enough and became very aggressive, AQ decided he had the better kicker and called every raise. AQ won a nice pot at the showdown with the better kicker.

A way to practice reading the flop is to list the top three hands in any given flop. For instance;

A flop of Kh, Kc, Jc - The best possible hands are either 4 of a kind or a full house. The next possible best hand is trip King's.

I hope this helps you understand what good players already know. How to read a board not only for how many outs you have but more important, what other players might be holding that can draw out to beat you and what those possibilities are.

I would download this free software from poker stove to help you see the odds of different situations. See if you are actually playing the wrong hands or if your opponents have been calling the wrong hand.

#	Hole	Occurrences		Hands Won		Hands Split		Cume
1.	AA	1,809,627	0.45%	558,246	31.00%+	8,894	0.49%	0.5%
2.	KK	1,810,836	0.45%	468,381	26.02%+	10,980	0.61%	0.9%
3.	QQ	1,811,727	0.45%	395,997	22.03%+	13,844	0.76%	1.4%
4.	AKs	1,206,177	0.30%	238,934	20.19%+	22,641	1.88%	1.7%
5.	JJ	1,809,430	0.45%	342,172	19.09%+	16,687	0.92%	2.1%
6.	AQs	1,205,654	0.30%	220,049	18.66%+	26,126	2.17%	2.4%
7.	KQs	1,205,169	0.30%	213,327	18.08%+	25,194	2.09%	2.7%
8.	AJs	1,206,836	0.30%	205,651	17.47%+	29,730	2.46%	3.0%
9.	KJs	1,206,417	0.30%	200,865	17.05%+	28,465	2.36%	3.3%
10.	TT	1,810,247	0.45%	301,312	16.83%+	20,213	1.12%	3.8%
11.	AK	3,622,226	0.91%	592,106	16.67%+	71,186	1.97%	4.7%
12.	ATs	1,205,511	0.30%	195,008	16.63%+	33,055	2.74%	5.0%
13.	QJs	1,204,377	0.30%	194,900	16.58%+	28,816	2.39%	5.3%
14.	KTs	1,205,475	0.30%	189,465	16.14%+	31,618	2.62%	5.6%
15.	QTs	1,203,595	0.30%	185,659	15.84%+	31,786	2.64%	5.9%
16.	JTs	1,207,672	0.30%	185,301	15.78%+	33,151	2.75%	6.2%
17.	99	1,811,288	0.45%	274,597	15.29%+	15,319	0.85%	6.6%
18.	AQ	3,622,497	0.91%	526,561	14.87%+	81,492	2.25%	7.5%
19.	A9s	1,205,793	0.30%	171,359	14.60%+	32,307	2.68%	7.8%
20.	KQ	3,621,242	0.91%	511,328	14.43%+	78,799	2.18%	8.7%

Look at the best 20 opening hands in Hold'em. These are the best because they make the most money over the long term. Many beginners should stick with playing these hands. As an outline, hands 1-5 can be played under the gun and 2nd position, hands 1-10 in middle position (position 3-5), and hands 1-20 in late position and the blinds. Remember, if there has been a raise and especially a re-raise, you must tighten up with your starting hand requirements, especially if there was a re-raise. Sklansky calls this the gap concept when he discusses tournament strategy but you should also use it in ring game play if you have a weak hand and want to decide calling a re-raise.