


First Step Poker
By: William T. Love

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Section I: A Brief History of Poker

Many historians and experts have various ideas as to the origin of poker. The only thing we can be sure of is that poker's present day form was derived from many different games. Since its beginning, poker has gone through many changes. Many speculate, though, that the game has been around for many centuries. The most popular belief is that poker was invented around 900 A.D. by the Chinese. Another very popular theory is that poker originated in France, modeled after the French card game "Poque". The French brought poque to New Orleans when they settled there in 1480. We can be sure that, because of its unique and complicated basic principles, poker's birth was an odd one.

The history of poker in the United States has a bit more consistency. Poker was spread by steamboat up the Mississippi and Ohio rivers at first, and later traveled by wagon and train around the rest of the country. One of the earliest written references to poker was made by Jonathan H. Green in 1834. Green described the rules of a game in his writing that was played on Mississippi riverboats that he referred to as "the cheating game". He soon realized that this game was not included in the most recent American Hoyle and took it upon himself to name the game poker.

In 1910 it was made illegal in Nevada to facilitate any type of betting game. Soon after, the Attorney General of California declared that stud poker was illegal, but also decided that draw poker was legal because it relied heavily upon skill, and therefore was not based upon luck. Because of these decisions, draw poker games began to develop quickly and grow in popularity.

Although there is a plethora of theories dealing with poker's origin, there is one definite fact about the game. Poker has stood the test of time, and remains one of the few pastimes that is shared by people from all walks of life and is still growing in popularity. In the US, poker has evolved from a game played by drifters and riverboat passengers into a full fledged sporting event. This progression has taken place in many locations, from backrooms to glittering casinos around the world. Its history has been rich with famous places and characters. Today, poker is carefully regulated by strict gambling laws, and saloons have given way to cardrooms and casinos, but poker is being played more than any other card game in the world.

Poker will be around for a long time to come, and will evolve and flourish like so many other pastimes. No matter where you live, if you take the time to look, you will find games to play, friends to be made, and money to win.

Section II: Rules of the Game

Poker Hands: Highest to Lowest

- Royal Flush (Ace, King, Queen, Jack, and 10. All of the same suit)
- Straight Flush (five consecutive cards of the same suit)
- Four of a Kind
- Full House (three of a kind and one pair)
- Flush (five cards of the same suit)
- Straight (five consecutive cards)
- Three of a Kind
- Two Pairs
- One Pair
- High Card

In the case of equal hands (such as two players with pairs of threes), the winner is decided by the “kicker”. The kicker is the highest ranking card that is not part of the hand. A player with this hand: ♠8 ♦8 ♦5 ♣K ♥3 is considered to have

a pair of eights with a king kicker.

Examples and Explanations of Hands

Royal Flush

This is the most valuable hand in all of poker. A Royal Flush is composed of 10, Jack, Queen, King and Ace, all of the same suit. It's the toughest hand to get.

Examples:

HAND 1: ♠10 ♠J ♠Q ♠K ♠A

HAND 2: ♥10 ♥J ♥Q ♥K ♥A

Straight Flush

A Straight Flush is comprised of five cards in numerical order, all of the same suit. It's not allowed to "wrap around," such as Q-K-A-2-3. This is also very rare. If you get two of these in a row, you are cheating. If there are two Straight Flushes at the table, then whichever hand's Straight Flush reaches the highest card value wins. So in the examples below, Hand 2 (which has a King) would beat Hand 1 (which only goes up to 8).

Examples:

HAND 1: ♦4 ♦5 ♦6 ♦7 ♦8

HAND 2: ♣9 ♣10 ♣J ♣Q ♣K

Four of a Kind

Four cards of the same numerical rank and another random card. If there are two or more hands that qualify, the hand with the highest-ranking Four of a Kind wins. In the examples below, Hand 2 would beat Hand 1.

Examples:

HAND 1: ♠6 ♥6 ♣6 ♦6 ♠J

HAND 2: ♠Q ♥Q ♣Q ♦Q ♥3

Full House

Of the five cards in your hand, three have the same numerical rank, and the two remaining card also have the same numerical rank. Ties are broken first by the Three of a Kind, then the Pair. So K-K-K-3-3 beats Q-Q-Q-A-A, which beats Q-Q-Q-7-7.

Examples:

HAND 1: ♠J ♦J ♥J ♦4 ♠4

HAND 2: ♥5 ♠5 ♣5 ♦A ♣A

Flush

A Flush is comprised of five cards of the same suit, regardless of their numerical rank. In a tie, whoever has the highest ranking card wins. In the example below, Hand 1 (with a King) beats Hand 2 (with a Queen).

Examples:

HAND 1: ♠2 ♠4 ♠7 ♠J ♠K

HAND 2: ♦5 ♦6 ♦7 ♦8 ♦Q

Straight

Five cards in numerical order, regardless of their suits. Just like with the Straight Flush, a Straight cannot "wrap around." In a tie, whoever's Straight goes to a higher ranking card wins (so in the examples below, Hand 1 beats Hand 2).

Examples:

HAND 1: ♥7 ♥8 ♠9 ♣10 ♦J

HAND 2: ♣3 ♦4 ♦5 ♥6 ♠7

Three of a Kind

Three cards of the same numerical rank, and two random cards that are not a pair.

Examples:

HAND 1: ♠10 ♦10 ♥10 ♥3 ♦Q

HAND 2: ♣2 ♦2 ♥2 ♠8 ♠9

Two Pair

Two sets of pairs, and another random card.

Examples:

HAND 1: ♣7 ♥7 ♠J ♦J ♠5

HAND 2: ♣Q ♠Q ♦K ♣K ♥A

One Pair

One pair and three random cards. If more than one person has a One Pair, then the person with the highest ranking pair wins.

Examples:

HAND 1: ♠8 ♦8 ♦5 ♣K ♥3

HAND 2: ♥2 ♣2 ♦3 ♠4 ♣5

Texas Hold'em

Texas Hold'em is the most played poker game in the US and around the world today. Most poker tournaments as well as the World Championship of Poker are Hold'em tournaments. Texas Hold'em is by far the best game for beginners to learn because of its simplicity and because of the fact that calculating odds for each player is much easier than in other games such as Seven-Card Stud. One can learn to play Hold'em very quickly and can be playing fairly well with just a few hours of practice.

Unlike most poker games, there is no Ante in Texas Hold'em. Instead, at the beginning of each round, two players "line the pot" with what is called a blind bet. The blind bets are placed by the two people to the left of the dealer, who is designated by the "dealer button" or simply "the button". After each hand is completed, the button will move clockwise to the next active player who will then be considered to be the dealer. The dealer is the last to act in each round of betting. The player one seat to the left of the dealer posts the "small" blind, and the player two seats to the left of the dealer posts the "large" blind (which is generally double the value of the small blind).

There are four betting rounds in each round of Texas Hold'em. The first round happens after the players are dealt their "pocket cards" (these are two cards that each player is dealt face down). Once all bets are placed for the first round, three cards are dealt in the middle of the table face up. This is called the "flop" and the cards in the center of the table dealt face up are called "community cards". Another round of betting begins after the flop is dealt. Most players who fold do so after the flop simply because 5/7 of each player's cards have been revealed to them at this point, and one usually has a good idea of whether they will have a solid hand or not. Once this round of betting is completed, a third community card is dealt face up in the center of the board, called the "turn". After the turn, there is a third betting round. Once the third round is completed, a final community card is dealt in the center of the table. This card is called the "river". After the river is dealt, the fourth and final betting round ensues before the "showdown". At the showdown, all remaining players must compare their hands. Each player uses five of the seven cards available to him/her (two pocket cards and five community cards) to make the best possible hand.

Each bet during the first two rounds is set at the lower limit of the betting structure. In a \$5/\$10 game, all bets and raises are \$5 for the first two rounds after pocket cards are dealt. For the last two rounds the stakes double, and all bets and raises are \$10 until the round is completed. Before any bets are placed, players have the option of checking. Although it is relatively rare, every player at the table can check as long as no one bets or raises. Some players check in order to wait and see if other players are confident enough to bet. Another popular (but sometimes frowned upon) strategy that some players use when they have a strong hand is called “check raising”. This is when a player checks in order to make his opponents think he has a weak hand, waits for them to bet, then raises again. This leaves the other players with the decision of whether to continue betting and protect their previous bet or to cut their losses. This is a great way to “line the pot” if you have a very strong hand.

An initial bet, plus three raises are the maximum amount of bets allowed during any betting round. During a betting round, there can be 1) a bet 2) a raise 3) a re-raise and 4) a cap. The word cap refers to the final raise in a betting round. Once the betting has reached the cap, the players are only allowed the option of calling or folding.

By the end of a round, two things can happen. More often than not, at least half of the players will fold (especially in a game with experienced, selective players) before the final round of betting is complete. If all but one player has folded, the last player left wins the pot without having to show his/her pocket cards. If two or more players have not yet folded when the final round of betting is complete, they must have a “showdown” where the hands are compared to reveal the winner. If two players tie (which is fairly rare) then they split the pot.

Omaha Hold'em

Omaha Hold'em is a variation of Texas Hold'em, but nine cards are available to each player instead of seven. Players' hands consist of four cards dealt face down to each player and five cards dealt face up to the board, which are shared by all players in the game. Players must construct their final hands using exactly two cards from their own hands and three cards from the board. A player wins by having the highest-ranking hand of five cards.

The basic differences between Omaha and Texas hold'em are these: first, each player is dealt four cards to his private hand instead of two. The betting rounds and layout of community cards are identical. At showdown, each player's hand is the best five-card hand he can make from exactly three of the five cards on the board, plus exactly two of his own cards. Unlike Texas hold'em, a player cannot play only one of his cards with four of the board, nor can he play the board, nor play three from his hand and two from the board, or any other combination. In high-low split, each player, using these rules, thus makes a separate five-card high hand and five-card ace-to-five low hand (eight-high or lower to qualify), and the pot is split between the high and low (which may be the same player). To qualify for low, a player must be able to play an 8-7-6-5-4 or lower (this is why it is called 8 or better, or simply Omaha 8). A few casinos play with a

9-low qualifier instead, but this is rare. Each player can play any two of his four hole cards to make his high hand, and any two of his four hole cards to make his low hand.

The betting rounds for Omaha Hold'em are identical to the Texas Hold'em rounds. Although the betting rounds follow the same structure, there are generally more bets placed and there is usually more money in a pot during an Omaha game because there are more possible hands since more cards are involved in the game.

Seven-Card Stud

Seven Card Stud was by far the most popular US poker game until the late 20th Century. Seven Card Stud is still very popular in the US and around the world, especially along the East Coast. Seven Card Stud remains the most popular home game because it is easy to create personal variations of the game to suit a group's needs. Around 1990, Texas Hold'em took Seven Card Stud's place as the most popular poker game in the two largest poker cities in the US; Las Vegas and Reno, Nevada.

The game begins with each player automatically anteing a small sum. The exact size of the ante depends on the stakes you have chosen to play. Three cards are then dealt to each player; two face down and one face up. After the first three cards have been dealt, the player showing the lowest upcard must make what is called a "bring-in" bet. As with the ante, the size of the bring-in varies depending on the size of the stakes, but unlike the ante, you have a choice with the bring-in. You may (as most players do) make a minimum bet that is only slightly larger than the ante, or you may choose to make a full-sized bet. For example, in a \$3-\$6 game, you could choose to make a bring-in bet of either \$1.00 or \$3.00 (I will continue to use the \$3-\$6 game for my other examples in this section). Most players opt for the minimum even if they have a strong hand, because it creates deception, but there are strategic reasons why making an occasional full-sized bring-in makes sense.

The bring-in bet, by the way, is the only significant time and place in poker where card suits come into play. The highest suit is spades, followed by hearts, diamonds, and clubs. If the lowest upcard showing is a three, and two players are showing threes, the player with the lower suited would be forced to make the bring-in bet. If one player held the three of hearts, and the other the three of diamonds, the player with the three of diamonds would make the bring-in bet.

Assuming the player who brings the hand in does so for the minimum, the next player to act may choose to fold, call the minimum bet, or raise by "completing" the bet. For example, in the \$3-\$6 game, the first raiser would increase the bet from \$1 to \$3, a raise of only \$2. Any further raises during this round would be in normal \$3 increments.

Fourth Street

After the action has been completed in the opening round, the dealer gives a face-up card to each player remaining in the game. Unlike the first round, where the lowest

hand was forced to start the action, in this second betting round, the highest hand on the board has the option to start the betting; that is, the player showing the highest hand is called upon first to either bet or check.

Checking is not an option on the first betting round, because the forced bring-in bet creates a bet that must be called or raised. The betting action starts with the highest visible hand throughout all further betting rounds. In the unlikely event of a tie, suits once again come into play. For example, if two players are each showing the highest hand with an ace-four (or four-ace; the order the cards are received in doesn't matter), the player with the higher suit would start the action.

Normally, all bets and raises are at the lower dollar figure during the first two betting rounds, and at the higher dollar figure for the final three betting rounds. If, however, someone immediately makes an open pair on his first two up cards, he is allowed the option to immediately make the larger bet; that is, he can choose to bet either \$3 or \$6.

He could also choose to check, although he probably wouldn't do that unless he either had such a strong hand that he wanted to entice other players to stay in, or someone else had shown such strength on the first betting round that he suspected he was playing against someone whose hand was still stronger despite the open pair (for example, if he thought his opponent was "rolled up"-a player who had started with three of a kind).

If the player bets \$3, his opponents may call or raise in \$3 increments. Because the open pair creates the possibility of the \$6 wager, just because the player who owns the pair bets \$3, the other players don't have to stick with that number. For example, Player A, who is showing an open pair of fives, might bet \$3, and find himself immediately raised \$6 by Player B (who puts \$9 into the pot to do so). As soon as the \$6 raise is made, the action stays at the \$6 level; that is, Player C cannot re-raise \$3 (putting \$9 into the pot). If Player C wants to re-raise after Player B has raised \$6, Player C must also raise \$6. Similarly, if Player A bets \$6, all further calls or raises are in \$6 increments.

Fifth and Sixth Streets

On Fifth Street, you receive your third upcard, and then there is a round of betting, again started by the highest hand on board. There are no more \$3 bets: all bets and raises are at the higher (\$6) increments. Sixth Street is virtually identical: an upcard is dealt, the highest hand acts first, and all bets and raises are at the higher \$6 increments.

Seventh Street, AKA "the River"

The betting on Seventh Street is identical to sixth street, but the card dealt is the last card you will receive, and it is dealt face down, meaning that like your initial two hole cards, only you know what you've received. After you examine this final card, you assemble your best possible five card poker hand out of the seven in front of you. Don't

forget that a poker hand is always five cards. If your hand is (4-4) 5-6-5-7 (7), you don't have "three pair." Your best hand here is two pair, sevens and fives, with a six kicker.

Section III: Types of Poker Games

Casino Games

There is absolutely no substitute for the rush a player feels while sitting under bright casino lights, staring across a chip-covered table trying to read the only opponent left to showdown (usually an absolute stranger) before placing your final large bet to showdown. Although online and home games can be both fun and exciting, few will argue with the idea that casino games are the most exciting way to play poker. The only drawbacks to casino games are that you must actually go to a potentially crowded, smoky, and loud casino (unlike home or internet games) and it can be difficult to find a good game in some casinos.

This is probably the most important advice you will receive when it comes to casino poker: The first time you sit down at a casino game it is very important, for your sake and for the sake of not slowing down the game and potentially annoying other players, to let all of the players at the table and the dealer know that it is your first time playing casino poker. All dealers and most players at public casinos will be very flexible and help you become comfortable with the routine and rules of the game. If you do not make everyone involved in the game aware of your lack of experience, the more experienced players at the table will likely become irritated and impatient very quickly.

For almost every new poker player, casino games are fairly intimidating. They move more quickly, are more structured, and can be much more confusing than the average home game. It can also be intimidating to sit at a table with seven or eight strangers who all have a better idea of what is going on than you. Once again, the most important thing to remember is let everyone know that you need help getting through the game.

One of the more confusing aspects of casino poker games is the buy-in. Although it is a fairly simple concept, new players often have trouble remembering standard buy-in procedures and policies, which are usually very strict at casinos. Players buying in short (i.e. for less than the minimum) are the cause of many card room disputes. The player can sit down with any amount of money, no matter how much, as long as it is at least the minimum buy-in amount. A player with chips may add additional chips to his stack as he desires when he is not involved in a pot, but he may not take chips off the table until quitting the game. Chips and/or money should be in clear view of every player and a player has the right to ask an opponent how much he is playing and to be told. Hidden cash, such as under a cigarette packet or ashtray, cannot be bet. Money and/or chips from the table are not allowed to be transferred from one player to another (this makes collusion more difficult).

There is one more important thing to keep in mind while playing casino poker, which will be mentioned later in the etiquette section, but is worth mentioning twice. As in most service industry jobs, most front-line casino employees get paid minimum wage. The majority of a casino employee's pay comes through the gratuities of casino patrons.

You should never expect a dealer to bend the rules if you decide to tip. However, if you are winning, and the dealer is being courteous and helpful, it is customary to show your appreciation. Naturally you are under no obligation to tip, but an occasional gratuity is always in good form and helps keep up the morale at the table. Look at tipping as a donation to "Lady Luck."

Internet Poker

Online poker is a relatively new phenomenon popping up all over the internet. One can rarely surf the web without encountering at least a few online poker pop-ups or advertisements. Although most players still prefer live poker games, there are many advantages to playing online. Despite the obvious advantages of playing online, there are still a few risks of playing in some online casinos. Online casinos can be both fun and practically risk-free if you take the time to check up on the site you play through before giving them any money.

In the past two or three years, computer poker has been transformed from a fun game that a few serious poker players used as practice into a multi-million dollar business. Today, with the emergence of quick, lifelike, micro-stakes games; one can match up with players of all skill levels. New players can quickly develop a strong knowledge of poker as well learn how to play selectively and aggressively without having to risk the embarrassment of slowing down fast-paced casino games. More importantly, players can learn the basics without risking lots of money. With low and micro-stakes games, a new player can play hundreds of hands with just a few dollars.

The only real problem with online play is the fact that there are a few essential aspects of a live poker game that are not present during an online game. The most important disadvantage of playing online is the fact that you cannot look an opponent in the eyes. Almost all poker tells (signs that one is bluffing) are physical hints that you must be watching the player to identify. The fact that you are not able to watch your opponents as you make decisions can be a disadvantage, especially for more skilled players.

Although online poker is becoming a very popular venue for poker players, its original use is still very important to even the most serious players who aspire to maintain a winning record. Computer poker programs were originally designed as a means of entertainment and practice for professional players. Despite the fact that computer poker is now very popular among both skilled and unskilled players, it can still help one improve his or her skills dramatically in little time for little or no money.

When playing for free simply for fun or for practice, it is very easy to find a good poker program that costs nothing to download and play. The best place to find a free downloadable game is at a pay site that offers a "free sample" of their program. They do this so that players can get used to the program before giving any money to the site. Before going out and buying relatively expensive programs like Hoyle Casino, be sure to

check out pay sites like www.partypoker.com and [www.Full Tilt.com](http://www.FullTilt.com) that offer free downloadable versions of their poker programs.

There are a few things to keep in mind when choosing an online casino if you want to play with real money. Although it is much harder to find a poorly run casino with late payouts and poor customer service than it was even just a few years ago due to some new regulations, it is still very important to be sure that you are handing your money to a reputable company that will pay out on time and be fun and easy to play with. In order to obtain a license, online casinos are required to show the software that they are using. However, casinos are not overly watched in this regard. The best way to tell that a casino is worth its grain of salt is to check if they are using systems that are most desirable in the industry. Finally, look for a casino that has been around for at least two or more years and that is favored by many.

As you may have seen, many sites have a little icon where you can vote for the site if you like it. Service sites like Gambling.com collect these votes, assemble monthly rankings, and hand out "Top Site" awards to the winners. Typically, awards will be given for the #1, Top 5, Top 10, and Top 20 sites. Given the hundreds of online casinos, these awards can be a convenient way to find an established site that is popular with the gaming public.

Maybe the most important thing to look for once you have narrowed your search for the perfect site down is how quickly you will receive your winnings. Believe it or not, there are sites that only make their payouts on the last Friday of the month, for example. Or they may require that you send them email expressly requesting your winnings. At a few sites your withdrawal transactions have to be pre-approved and the site advises that that can take up to two weeks. Be sure that you will receive a quick payout through a secure server before you begin gambling at a site.

Section IV: How to Not Look Like an Idiot

Poker Etiquette

One of the largest problems with poker as a whole is the fact that there is no standardized set of rules or etiquette because there is such a wide range of games. Every casino has a slightly different set of rules that its patrons must follow at the tables, and home games have even more discrepancies. Because of this, you should be sure to glance at the rules at every casino in which you play in order to avoid any unnecessary problems. Since there is no universal set of rules that poker players must follow at every table, here are a few generic tips to follow that apply to nearly every type of game:

- Do not pass your cards out of turn, even if you are no longer interested in staying in contest for the pot. It can affect the fortunes of one player over another when the field is shortened and a player has a difficult decision to make. It usually gives an advantage to the players seated beside you who have yet to make their plays. You may see other players fold, or call out of turn, but please don't do it yourself. If you do, be assured that this is a good way to quickly annoy other players.
- When discarding your hand, do so at a low level of flight so that no other player can see what you have discarded.
- Leave your cards in plain view at all time, preferably on the table in front of you. Holding them against your shirt or showing them to friends behind you is not appropriate behavior. Even when you look at your cards, there is no need to lift the entire card off of the table. Simply lift the edge of the cards off of the table with your thumb while holding the center of the card flat with your remaining fingers.
- Also keep your chips in plain view at all times.
- Refrain from giving other players advice or criticizing the way they play.
- Do not abuse the dealer, verbally or in any other way. Bad behavior, such as throwing cards at the dealer, while mercifully rare, is totally unforgivable. Always keep in mind that it is not the dealer's fault when you are losing.
- Forget post-mortems. It is irritating for other players to have to listen to discussion on what happened in the last hand, or even several hands before.
- If you are plagued by the need to show someone what a good hand you had, when not required to do so at a showdown, make sure all the players enjoy the same experience. The correct guideline often quoted is "show one show all". Keep in mind that your strategy will quickly become public knowledge if you show your opponents your hand whenever it is not necessary.
- Do not splash the pot. This is where a player throws his chips into the pot when making a bet. It takes extra time for the dealer to re-stack and count the bet when you splash the pot. When you bet, place your chips directly in front of you. The dealer will then be sure you have bet the right amount and when betting is complete will place them into the pot.
- Soft-play agreements have a negative effect on the game. This is where a player bets less than he normally would or checks good hands when against friends,

- husbands or wives. Don't enter into these types of agreements. Every player should play in his/her own self interest - it's the essence of poker.
- Do not touch other player's chips or cards for any reason during a hand.
 - Do not try to educate players at the table by pointing out what you think are mistakes. It's odd and most players will resent it. Why not let people pay for their education - its how I had to learn.
 - Players should speak up and assist the dealer by calling attention to an error in the amount of the bet or the improper reading of the hand etc. Likewise, any player who sees as error about to be made, such as awarding the pot to the wrong person, has a duty to speak up. Do not be afraid to ask even if you're not totally sure if a mistake has been made.

Glossary of Common Poker Terms:

Action

(1) Opportunity to act. If a player appears not to realize it's his turn, the dealer will say "Your action, sir."

(2) Bets and raises. "If a third heart hits the board and there's a lot of action, you have to assume that somebody has made the flush."

Ante

A small portion of a bet contributed by each player to seed the pot at the beginning of a poker hand. Most hold'em games do not have an ante; they use "blinds" to get initial money into the pot.

All-In

To run out of chips while betting or calling. In table stakes games, a player may not go into his pocket for more money during a hand. If he runs out, a side pot is created in which he has no interest. However, he can still win the pot for which he had the chips.

Backdoor

Catching both the turn and river card to make a drawing hand. For instance, suppose you have As- 7s. The flop comes Ad-6c-4s. You bet and are called. The turn is the Ts, which everybody checks, and then the river is the Js. You've made a "backdoor" nut flush. See also "runner."

Bad Beat

To have a hand that is a large underdog beat a heavily favored hand. It is generally used to imply that the winner of the pot had no business being in the pot at all, and it was the wildest of luck that he managed to catch the one card in the deck that would win the pot.

Blank

A board card that doesn't seem to affect the standings in the hand.

Blind

- A forced bet put in by one or more players before any cards are dealt. Typically, blinds are put in by players immediately to the left of the button. See also "Live blind."
- Board**
All the community cards in a hold'em games - the flop, turn, and river cards together.
- Bottom Pair**
A pair made of the lowest card on the board.
- Burn**
To discard the top card from the deck, face down. This is done between each betting round before putting out the next community card(s). It is security against any player recognizing or glimpsing the next card to be used on the board.
- Button**
A white acrylic disk to indicate who is the dealer. Sometimes the player who is the dealer that turn will be referred to as "the button".
- Buy**
(1) As in "buy the pot." To bluff, hoping to "buy" the pot without being called.

(2) As in "buy the button." To bet or raise, hoping to make players between you and the button fold, thus allowing you to act last on subsequent betting rounds.
- Calling Station**
A weak-passive player who calls a lot, but doesn't raise or fold much. This is the kind of player you like to have in your game.
- Cap**
To put in the last raise permitted on a betting round. This is typically the third or fourth raise. Dealers in California are fond of saying "Capitola" or "Cappuccino".
- Case**
The last card of a certain rank in the deck. If there are already three 8's in play, then the next 8 is considered the "case".
- Center Pot**
The first pot created during a poker hand. This is as opposed to one or more "side" pots that are created if one or more players go all-in. Also "main pot."
- Check**
(1) To not bet, with the option to call or raise later in the betting round. Equivalent to betting zero dollars.

(2) Another word for "chip", as in poker chip.
- Check Raise**
To check and then raise when a player behind you bets. Occasionally you will hear people say this is not fair or ethical poker. Almost all casinos permit check-raising, and it is an important poker tactic. It is particularly useful in low-limit hold'em where you need extra strength to narrow the field when you have the best hand.
- Cold Call**

To call more than one bet in a single action. For instance, suppose the first player to act after the big blind raises. Now any player acting after him must call two bets "cold." This is different from calling a single bet and then calling a subsequent raise.

Come Hand

A drawing hand (probably from the craps term).

Complete Hand

A hand that is defined by all five cards - a straight, flush, full house, four of a kind, or straight flush.

Connector

A hold'em starting hand in which the two cards are one apart in rank. Examples: KQs, 76.

Crack

To beat a hand - typically a big hand. You hear this most often used to apply to pocket aces: "Third time tonight I've had pocket aces cracked."

Cripple

As in to cripple the deck. Meaning that you have most or all of the cards that somebody would want to have with the current board. If you have pocket kings, and the other two kings flop, you have crippled the deck.

Dog

Shortened form of "Underdog".

Dominated Hand

A hand that will almost always lose to a better hand that people usually play. For instance, K3 is "dominated" by KQ.

Draw Dead

Try to make a hand that, even if made, will not win the pot. If you're drawing to make a flush, and your opponent already has a full house, you are "drawing dead". Of course, this is a bad condition to be in.

Equity

Your "rightful" share of a pot. If the pot contains \$80, and you have a 50% chance of winning it, you have \$40 equity in the pot. This term is somewhat fanciful since you will either win \$80 or \$0, but it gives you an idea of how much you can "expect" to win.

Expectation

(1) A term referring to the amount of you expect to gain on average if you make a certain play. For instance, suppose you put \$10 into a \$50 pot to draw at a hand that you will make 25% of the time, and it will win every time you make it. Three out of four times, you do not make your draw, and lose \$10 each time for a total of \$30. The fourth time, you will make your draw, winning \$50. Your total gain over those four average hands is $\$50 - \$30 = \$20$, an average of \$5 per hand. Thus calling the \$10 has a positive expectation of \$5.

(2) The amount you expect to make at the poker table in a specific time period. Perhaps in 100 hours play, you have won \$527. Then your expectation is \$5.27/hr. Of course, you won't make that exact amount each hour (and some hours you will lose), but it's one measure of your anticipated earnings.

Family Pot

A pot in which all (or almost all) of the players call before the flop.

Fast

As in "play fast." To play a hand aggressively, betting and raising as much as possible. Example: "When you flop a set but there's a flush draw possible, you have to play it fast."

Flop

The first three community cards, put out face up, all together.

Foul

A hand which may not be played for one reason or another. A player with a foul hand may not make any claim on any portion of the pot. Example: "He ended up with three cards after the flop, so the dealer declared his hand foul."

Free Card

A turn or river card on which you don't have to call a bet because of play earlier in the hand (or a reputation which you have with your opponents). For instance, if you are on the button and raise when you flop a flush draw, your opponents may check to you on the turn. If you make your flush on the turn, you can bet. However, if you don't get it on the turn, you can check as well - seeing the river card for "free."

Gutshot Straight

A straight filled "inside". If you have 9s-8s, the flop comes 7c-5h-2d, and the turn is the 6c, you've made your gutshot straight.

Heads Up

A pot that is being contested by only two players - "It was heads up by the turn."

Hit

As in "the flop hit me." It means the flop contained cards that help your hand. If you have AK, and the flop comes K-7-2, it hit you.

House

The establishment running the game. Example: "The \$2 you put on the button goes to the house."

Implied Odds

Pot odds that do not exist at the moment, but may be included in your calculations because of bets you expect to win if you hit your hand. For instance, you might call with a flush draw on the turn even though the pot isn't offering you quite 4:1 odds (your chance of making the flush) because you're sure you can win a bet from your opponent on the river if you make your flush.

Jackpot

A special bonus paid to the loser of a hand if he gets a very good hand beaten. In hold'em, the "loser" must typically get aces full or better beaten. In some of the large southern California card clubs, the jackpots have gotten over \$50,000. Of course, the jackpot is funded with money removed from the game as part of the rake.

Kicker

An unpaired card used to determine the better of two near-equivalent hands. For instance, suppose you have AK and your opponent has AQ. If the flop has an ace

in it, you both have a pair of aces, but you have a king kicker. Kickers can be vitally important in hold'em.

Live Blind

A forced bet put in by one or more players before any cards are dealt. The "live" means those players still have the option of raising when the action gets back around to them.

Maniac

A player who does a lot of hyper-aggressive raising, betting, and bluffing. A true maniac is not a good player, but is simply doing a lot of gambling. However, a player who occasionally acts like a maniac and confuses his opponents is quite dangerous.

Muck

The pile of folded and burned cards in front of the dealer.

No-Limit

A version of poker in which a player may bet any amount of chips (up to the number in front of him) whenever it is his turn to act. It is a very different game than limit poker. The best treatise on no-limit poker is in Doyle Brunson's Super/System.

Nuts

The best possible hand given the board. If the board is Ks-Jd-Ts-4s-2h, then As-Xs is the nuts. You will occasionally hear the term applied to the best possible hand of a certain category, even though it isn't the overall nuts. For the above example, somebody with Ah-Qc in the above hand might say they had the "nut straight".

Offsuit

A hold'em starting hand in which the two cards are of different suits.

One-Gap

A hold'em starting hand in which the two cards are two apart in rank. Examples: J9s, 64.

Out

A card that will make your hand win. Normally heard in the plural. Example: "Any spade will make my flush, so I have nine outs."

Outrun

To beat. Example: "Susie outran my set when her flush card hit on the river."

Overcall

To call a bet after one or more other players have already called.

Overcard

A card higher than any card on the board. For instance, if you have AQ and the flop comes J-7-3, you don't have a pair, but you have two overcards.

Overpair

A pocket pair higher than any card on the flop. If you have QQ and the flop comes J-8-3, you have an overpair.

Pay Off

To call a bet where the bettor is representing a hand that you can't beat, but the pot is sufficiently large to justify a call anyway. Example: "He played it exactly like he made the flush, but I had top set so I paid him off."

Play the Board

To show down a hand in hold'em when your cards don't make a hand any better than is shown on the board. For instance, if you have 22, and the board is 4-4-9-9-A (no flush possible), then you must "play the board" - the best possible hand you can make doesn't use any of your cards. Note that if you play the board, the best you can do is to split the pot with all remaining players.

Pocket

Your unique cards that only you can see.

Post

To put in a blind bet, generally required when you first sit down in a cardroom game. You may also be required to post a blind if you change seats at the table in a way that moves you away from the blinds.

Pot Limit

A version of poker in which a player may bet up to the amount of money in the pot whenever it is his turn to act. Like no-limit, this is a very different game from limit poker.

Pot Odds

The amount of money in the pot compared to the amount you must put in the pot to continue playing.

Protect

(1) To keep your hand or a chip on your cards. This prevents them from being fouled by a discarded hand, or accidentally mucked by the dealer.

(2) To invest more money in a pot so blind money that you've already put in isn't "wasted."

Quads

Four of a kind.

Ragged

A flop (or board) that doesn't appear to help anybody very much.

Rainbow

A flop that contains three different suits, thus no flush can be made on the turn. Can also mean a complete five card board that has no more than two of any suit, thus no flush is possible.

Rake

An amount of money taken out of every pot by the dealer - this is the cardroom's income.

Rank

The numerical value of a card (as opposed to its suit).

Represent

To play as if you hold a certain hand. To bet as if you held a better hand than you really did because a solid hand is possible according to the board. If there are three cards of a like suit on the board, a player who doesn't have a flush might bet as if he did to scare his opponents.

Ring Game

- A regular poker game as opposed to a tournament. Also referred to as a "live" game since actual money is in play instead of tournament chips.
- River**
The fifth and final community card put out face up, by itself. Also known as "fifth street". Metaphors involving the river are some of poker's most treasured cliches - e.g. "He drowned in the river."
- Rock**
A player who plays very tight, not very creatively. He raises only with the best hands. A real rock is fairly predictable - if he raises, you can throw away just about anything but the best hands.
- Runner**
Typically said "runner-runner" to describe a hand which was made only by catching the correct cards on both the turn and the river.
- Scare Card**
A card which will likely turn the best hand into trash. If you have 10c-8c and the flop comes Qd- Jd-9s, you almost assuredly have the best hand. However, a turn card of 10d would be very scary because it would almost guarantee that you are now beaten.
- Second Pair**
A pair with the second highest card on the flop. If you have As-10s, and the flop comes Kd-10h-6c, you have flopped second pair.
- Sell**
As in "sell a hand". In a spread limit game, this means to bet less than the maximum when you have a very strong hand, hoping players will call whereas they would not have called a maximum bet.
- Semi-bluff**
A powerful concept first discussed by David Sklansky. It is a bet or raise that you hope will not be called, but you have some outs if it is. A semi-bluff may be correct when betting for value is not correct, a pure bluff is not correct, but the combination of the two may be a positive expectation play.
- Set**
Three of a kind when you have two of the rank in your hand, and there is one on the board.
- Short Stack**
A number of chips that is not very many compared to the other players at the table. If you have \$10 in front of you, and everybody else at the table has over \$100, you are playing on a short stack.
- Showdown**
The point at which all players remaining in the hand turn their cards over and determine who has the best hand - i.e. after the fourth round of betting is completed. Of course, if a final bet or raise is not called, there is no showdown.
- Side Pot**
A pot created in which a player has no interest because he has run out of chips. The player with no interest in the side pot, however, still has interest in the pot that includes his chips.
- Slow Play**

- To play a strong hand weakly so more players will stay in the pot. This is a way to make the pot larger by not scaring away your opponents.
- Split Pot**
A pot which is shared by two or more players because they have equivalent hands.
- Spread Limit**
A betting structure in which a player may bet any amount in a range on every betting round. A typical spread limit structure is \$2-\$6, where a player may bet as little as \$2 or as much as \$6 on every betting round.
- Straddle**
An optional extra blind bet, typically made by the player one to the left of the big blind, equal to twice the big blind. This is effectively a raise, and forces any player who wants to play to pay two bets. Furthermore, the straddler acts last before the flop, and may "re-raise."
- String Bet**
A bet (more typically a raise) in which a player doesn't get all the chips required for the raise into the pot in one motion. Unless he verbally declared the raise, he can be forced to withdraw it and just call. This prevents the unethical play of putting out enough chips to call, seeing what effect that had on the other players, and then possibly raising.
- Structured**
Used to apply to a certain betting structure in "flop" games such as hold'em. The typical definition of a structured game is a fixed amount for bets and raises before the flop and on the flop, and then twice that amount on the turn and river.
- Suited**
A hold'em starting hand in which the two cards are the same suit. Example: "I had to play J-3 - it was suited."
- Table Stakes**
A rule in a poker game meaning that a player may not go into his pocket for money during a hand. He may only invest the amount of money in front of him into the current pot. If he runs out of chips during the hand, a side pot is created in which he has no interest. All casino poker is played table stakes. The definition sometimes also includes the rule that a player may not remove chips from the table during a game. While this rule might not be referred to as "table stakes", it is enforced almost universally in public poker games.
- Tell**
A clue or hint that a player unknowingly gives about the strength of his hand, his next action, etc. May originally be from "telegraph" or the obvious use that he "tells" you what he's going to do before he does it.
- Tilt**
To play wildly or recklessly. A player is said to be "on tilt" if he is not playing his best, playing too many hands, trying wild bluffs, raising with bad hands, etc.
- Time**
(1) A request by a player to suspend play while he decides what he's going to do. Simply, "Time please!" If a player doesn't request time and there is a substantial amount of action behind him, the dealer may rule that the player has folded.

(2) An amount of money collected either on the button or every half hour by the cardroom. This is another way for the house to make its money.

Token

A small amount of money (typically \$.50 or \$1.00) given to the dealer by the winner of a pot. Quite often, tokens represent the great majority of a dealer's income.

Top Pair

A pair with the highest card on the flop. If you have As-Qs, and the flop comes Qd-Th-6c, you have flopped top pair.

Trips

Three of a kind.

Turn

The fourth community card. Put out face up, by itself. Also known as "fourth street."

Under the gun

The position of the player who acts first on a betting round. For instance, if you are one to the left of the big blind, you are under the gun before the flop.

Underdog

A person or hand who is not mathematically favored to win a pot. For instance, if you flop four cards to your flush, you are not quite a 2:1 underdog to make your flush by the river (that is, you will make your flush about one in three times).

Value

As in "bet for value." This means that you would actually like your opponents to call your bet (as opposed to a bluff). Generally it's because you have the best hand. However, it can also be a draw which, given enough callers, has a positive expectation.

Variance

A measure of the up and down swings your bankroll goes through. Variance is not necessarily a measure of how well you play. However, the higher your variance, the wider swings you'll see in your bankroll.