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How To Play Poker

Poker is a game that combines strategic assessment and skill and is played with a standard, 52-card pack and a poker chip set. There are many variants to poker, the most popular of them being Texas Hold 'em and Omaha. While poker is ideally played between minimum 2 players till a maximum of 10 people, the player number can vary according to the game variant. Learning how to play poker starts with grasping the basic rules of play, understanding how the hands are ranked and making a poker hand.

Understanding Poker Basics

Poker basics involve understanding the seating positions on a poker table, and the four stages of betting.

Seating Positions:

Dealer: The dealer is one of the most important position in a poker game as the button moves clockwise to the left each round. The positions are named relative to the position of the dealer button.

Blinds: Two players on the poker table have to pay the forced bets also called the blinds. The first player left to the dealer button is called the Small Blind and the player left to him is called the Big Blind. These positions must act first after the flop has been dealt.

Early Position (EP): The first three positions after the Blinds are called 'Early Position'(EP). The position is called Under The Gun (UTG) and is the player to the left of Big Blind followed by UTG+1 and UTG+2.

UTG is the first playing position preflop which means that the player seated here is the first to act in a newly dealt hand before the flop.

Middle Position (MP): The three players who have approximately an equal number of players acting before and after them are seated in the 'Middle Position' (MP). Based on the total number of players on the table, they are: MP, MP+1 and MP+2.

Late Position (LP): The late positions comprise of Hijack and Cutoff. After the MP+2 comes the Hijack, followed by the Cutoff. These two players only act after all the previous players have decided on their actions. The Dealer position is the last player to play.

Stages:

In each stage, one player posts the small blind and the player to his left posts the big blind. These are compulsory bets for these two players while the remaining players may decide not to bet. The small blind and big blind positions change clockwise after each hand.

Pre-Flop

This is the first stage where each player is dealt two cards face down, followed by a round of betting where you can check, bet or fold. Since Small Blind and Big Blind players have to make compulsory bets, the player acting next to the big blind i.e. the UTG position is the first to act. The UTG can act in three different ways i.e. call, raise or fold. The next player will also have similar options and once all players have acted, the chips are moved to the middle of the table and the second round begins.

Flop

After the first betting round is over comes the Flop round where three community cards are dealt face up on the table. Every player can use his two hole cards and the three community cards to make a five-card poker hand. The first player to act is the Small Blind. He can check. i.e. not bet anything, bet or fold. The Big Blind acts next and can either fold or call i.e. matching the small blind's chips or he can raise. Once every player has contributed the same amount of money, the third stage begins.

The Turn

After the Flop round, the fourth community card called The Turn or fourth street is dealt face up. Now there are six cards available to the player, two in his hand, and four on the table and he/she can use any of these five to make a five-card poker hand. The action plays out exactly as the previous round.

The River

The fifth and final community card i.e. The River also known as the fifth street is now dealt on the table. With seven cards available, every player has to make their best, five-card poker hand.

The Showdown

Betting stops and all remaining players have to show their cards. The player with the best hand wins the pot.

Texas Hold 'em

The Texas Hold 'em begins with every player being randomly dealt two 'hole' cards face down. In three stages thereafter, five community cards are dealt face up. The first stage is the 'flop' where three community cards are dealt face-up. Later, additional single cards called 'the turn' or 'fourth street' and a final card i.e. 'the river' or 'fifth street' are dealt one after the other. Rounds of betting are made before the flop is dealt, and then at every stage. Players bet a certain amount of chips or money using betting ([hyperlink to Betting Rules](#)) actions that include Call, Fold, Raise or Check.

Every player on the table tries to make the best five-card poker hand from any combination of his two 'hole' cards and the five board or community cards.

Omaha

Omaha or Omaha Hold 'em is the second most popular poker variant played both in live and on virtual felts and is similar to Texas Hold 'em. In Omaha each player is dealt four hole cards instead of two and he can choose two of these to combine with three of the five community cards to make his best hand.

Texas Hold 'em Vs. Omaha: How They Differ

Texas Hold 'em and Omaha are similar in their format, seating position, hand rankings, betting rounds and gameplay.

Number of Hole Cards Dealt: Apart from the fact that in Texas Hold 'em, the players are dealt only two hole cards instead of four as in Omaha, the two games differ in certain ways.

Number of Hold Cards Used: In Omaha, a player has to use exactly two hole cards to make his best poker hand where in Texas Hold 'em a player may choose to either use both, or one or none of his hole cards to make a hand. This also means that making big hands is easier in Omaha than in Texas Hold 'em.

Popular Betting Structures: While both games can be played with any betting structure, the preferred betting structure for Texas Hold 'em is no-limit, and the preferred betting structure for Omaha is usually pot-limit.

Poker Hand Rankings

A player's decision to bet, fold, call, raise or check depends on how strong his five-card poker hand is. For this it's important to understand the Poker Hand Rankings.

Royal Flush: Is the best hand any poker player can make and very rarely made. It has the five highest cards of a card deck i.e. Ace-King-Queen-Jack-Ten, all in the same suit.

Straight Flush: Any five cards in a numerical order, all in the same suit are called Straight Flush. For instance, Queen-Jack-Ten-Nine-Eight or Eight-Seven-Six-Five-Four are Straight flush combinations.

Four Of A Kind: Aka Quads are four cards of equal value or rank, along with one side card or 'kicker'. In case of a tie during a hand, the player with the highest four of a kind wins.

Full House: When a player makes a hand that has three cards of same value (three-of-a-kind) and one pair of any other value, he's said to have made a full house. For instance, a hand with three 10's and two eights, irrespective of the suit, is a full house.

Flush: Any five cards, all of the same suit. Here, the numerical sequence is not important but the suit is. In case two or more players make a flush, the player holding the highest ranked card (higher flush) wins. If all five cards are the same rank, the pot is split.

Straight: Five cards of sequential value. Every possible straight will either contain a 5 or a 10. If more than one player makes a straight, the one with the highest ranking card at the top of the sequence will win. Ace can be used as the highest or as the lowest card in numerical value. It can be used to make an Ace high straight i.e. Ace-King-Queen-Jack-Ten or Five-Four-Three-Two-Ace i.e. Five high straight.

Three of a Kind: Three cards of the same value are made. Since aces are the highest card in a deck, a player making a three of a kind with aces will have a better hand than one making a three of a kind of any card with lower value.

Two Pairs: The player makes two pairs in his hand, each pair being of the same numerical value. So, a hand having two deuces and two queens will be two pair and the fifth card is the side card (kicker). If two players make two pair, the one with the higher two pair wins. If both players have exactly the same two pairs, the player with the higher kicker will win.

One Pair: There are two cards of matching rank or numerical value, making one pair. The suits are irrelevant here and the remaining three side cards may be of any numerical value. In a game of poker, a player with the higher one pair will defeat the player with the lower one pair. In case both have made the same pair, the player having the highest side card/kicker wins.

High Card: Is the weakest category where the cards don't form a pair. A high card combo with Highest card will be superior to one with a lower-value high card.

Betting Rules:

Play in poker centers the act on 'betting'. Different poker variants usually have different betting patterns.

Poker Strategy

For amateurs and novices it's advisable to start playing free games online so that they can get a real time feel of the game. (HYPER LINK TO ONLINE POKER GUIDE)

Once you get the hang of it, you can start playing low stakes cash games on various poker sites (HYPERLINK TO INDIAN POKER SITES). As your confidence builds as a player, you can gradually transition to the live felts or higher stakes.

Bankroll Management

To succeed, a player needs to be disciplined and develop his money management skills. Managing your poker bankroll or the money set side in your account so that you have a steady flow of funds is perhaps the most important part of playing poker, one that requires careful planning.

Bankroll management is required to deal with the average variance one would expect in a game over time and begins with deciding how much money you are prepared to allocate to poker.

For successful Bankroll Management:

- Consider the bankroll as an investment.
- Select your games carefully
- Play within the limit of your bankroll.

Unplanned and impractical bankroll management can prevent even the best players from moving up in stakes.

Poker Rules

Learning how to play poker is a straightforward process. First, you learn the basic poker rules, followed by the poker hand rankings and the sequences that make them. Lastly you'll learn how the betting rules work, finishing up with the different game types like No-Limit, Pot-Limit and (fixed) Limit.

This seems quite a lot at first, but don't worry, the rules of poker are fairly easy to pick up. After a few practice sessions online or with your friends, you'll be ready to get started in the exciting world of poker!

Texas Hold'em Poker Rules

Texas Hold'em poker is played with up to 10 people per table, a deck of 52 cards and poker chip set. At the start of the game two forced bets are placed by the two players to the left of the player in *dealer* position – these bets are called the small blind (SB) and big blind (BB). The SB and BB indicate the stakes of the game. Usually the BB is twice the amount of the SB. When these blinds are placed the deal can begin: all players who are in the hand will receive two cards, the first card is dealt clockwise starting from the small blind, followed by another round of dealing with the last card going to the dealer.

First Betting Round (Pre-Flop)



Now that all players have received their *starting hand* and bets are placed, the betting opens, with the player directly to the left of the big blind (Under The Gun position) as first to act. This stage of the game is called *Pre-Flop*. Once all players who are in the hand have matched the bet, the first three community cards are dealt.

In live games the top card is dealt face down as the 'burn' card – to prevent marking of cards or any other forms of cheating.

Second Betting Round (The Flop)



Once all bets are matched pre-flop the game moves on to the next stage: The Flop. Three community cards are dealt face up in the middle of the table:

A new round of betting opens, beginning directly left of the dealer (small blind).

Third Betting Round (The Turn)



Once all bets are matched, the fourth community card, the turn, is dealt: , making the board

The same rules apply on the turn as on the flop, with the exception of Limit Games, where the minimum bet on the turn is double the minimum bet on the flop.

Final Betting Round (The River)



After all bets are matched, the last community card is dealt:
,making a full house possible on the four-straight board:

Showdown

The final round of betting commences – all players who match the bets in this round will go to the Showdown, with the last aggressor being the first one to show his cards.

After the winner(s) in the hand are determined the pot is shipped to them , the dealer button moves one spot to the left and a new hand begins in the *pre-flop* stage.

How To Make A Poker Hand

Now that you know how to play a round of poker, the next step is to learn how different poker hands stack up against each other and how to determine the winner of each round that goes to showdown.

The most important part of understanding the rules of poker is to know **how to make a poker hand**, using your hole cards and the five community cards in the middle of the table. See the panel on the right for the relative strength of poker hands – note that as the strength of the poker hand increases the probability of making this hand becomes less. For example, the probability of making Four of a Kind is 4,164 : 1, versus Two Pair at 20:1. You don't have to learn all the probabilities of making a hand, as long as you understand the relative strength of hands and how to make them.



Poker Hand Rankings

Rules for making a poker hand

When you play Texas Holdem poker, you have to make the best five card hand of the seven total cards available to you at showdown. You can use any five card combination, so it is even possible to 'Play the Board', meaning that you use the five community cards in the middle of the table. This results in a split pot, at best.

Example in Hold'em

Our Hand The Board

The best five card poker hand out of the these seven available cards is :

Two pair, Jacks and Nines with a King kicker.

The *kicker* comes in to play as the extra card in a situation where both players make the same combination. For example, both players have the above Two Pair as their best combination. The fifth card in the hand (the kicker) decides who wins the pot, in this case the King. This situation arises very often when there is a pair, two pair, trips or quads on the board. The key is to arrange the hand from highest card to lowest so you can easily see which player has the better kicker.

Betting Rules & Limits

A game of poker is generally played with one of these three different betting limits: No Limit, Fixed Limit and Pot Limit. The first one, being the most popular form of poker, allows the player to bet any amount he wants, even his whole stack of chips. In Fixed limit the betting proceeds by a predetermined raise amount and in Pot Limit the betting is capped by the size of the pot. At a certain point in a tournament an ante may be introduced. An ante is a blind bet that all players make prior to the cards being dealt for each hand.

No-Limit Texas Holdem is the format played in the World Series of Poker Main Event, the biggest annual poker tournament, where six to eight thousand players put up \$10,000 to get a shot at the title. No-Limit is also the format preferred for online cash games and tournaments. Fixed limit Holdem is hardly played anymore, the two dominant games at this moment are No-Limit Texas Hold'em and Pot Limit Omaha.

Poker Tournament Rules

The standard scheme of a Holdem tournament is really simple: the player enters the tournament with a set buy-in fee and receives tournament chips in return which have no cash value. This means that a player can lose only his buy-in but will continue playing until he loses all of his chips or takes everybody else's chips to win the tournament. This format makes tournaments a lot of fun to participate in and also creates a very competitive spirit of play.

At the start, all participants receive an equal number of tournament chips, called starting chip stack. For example a starting stack can be 2000, 5000, 10000 or any amount which the tournament director determines.

Each tournament has its blind structure which is a timetable for increasing the size of the blinds according to the predetermined periods. Typically, each blind level can last between 10 min and 1 hour and with the advancement of the blinds levels, the blinds increase, for example from 50-100 to 100 200, etc.

Texas Holdem

In Texas Hold 'em, the small blind and big blind have to make 'forced' or compulsory bets. Since the small blind position is to the left of the dealer and big blind is on the left of the small blind, to make it fair, the dealer button is rotated clockwise after each hand so that the position of small and big blinds keep changing every hand.

The small blind bets a certain amount first, and the big blind then has to bet an equal amount or he can choose to raise it.

Players have to make a choice of three betting actions:

- Check or call: To call is to match the previous bet made. Check is the same, only when no bet has been made, so a check is a call for free.
- Bet or raise: In no-limit, a minimum bet equals the size of the big blind, and the maximum is the total amount of chips you hold. Once a bet is made, the minimum raise is the size of the bet made by the player preceding you, and maximum remains the size of your stack.
- Fold: means throwing away your hand and waiting for the next deal to play again. Again, folding is for free.

Betting rounds correspond to the four stages in poker: Preflop, Flop, Turn and the River round.

In Preflop, the UTG can call, raise or fold and all other players have the same options. In Flop round, Small blind can check i.e. not bet anything, bet i.e. put some money in the middle which other players have to match, or fold. The Big Blind can either fold, call or raise. The remaining players follow the same options. In the Turn and River rounds players opt from the same choice of betting actions as in the Flop round. With four betting rounds over, showdown has players tabling their hand and the best hand wins.

A No-Limit Hold 'em cash game is played according to the blind size and the buy-in varies from one poker room to another. Usually the minimum buy-in will be 20 big blinds and the maximum 100 big blinds, though in certain games no maximum buy-in limit is set.

In Limit Hold 'em, betting limits are fixed and size of the game is based on the pot size. Plays remains like in any Hold 'em game but you bet and raise in increments. There are a set number of raises you can make before betting is capped, after which players can not raise, and can only call or fold until the next street is dealt.

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Online Poker Guide

Online Poker In India: The First Steps

While the world's first e-mail poker tournament aka Worldwide Rec. Gambling Poker Tournament (WRGPT) was held in 1991, online poker set foot in India with the launch of Adda52 in January 2012.

The growing interest for poker in India led to launch of many new indigenous online poker setups and it wasn't long before big international names like the The Stars Group owned PokerStars came knocking on the doors of the Indian virtual players with its PokerStars India client.

Today, there's a healthy choice of poker sites for a domestic player to choose from, offering a user-friendly gaming experience to the recreational and the professional player alike.

Selecting A Poker Room

Playing online poker starts with selecting a poker room. Navigate through the various Indian websites available and once you're familiar with the structure, games offered, bonuses and offers on different active poker websites, you can go in to register not just in one but as many as you want to play in.

- Before playing poker online, decide on what kind of game you want to play: Cash games or Tournaments.
- Most online poker sites host regular free-rolls and opting to play in these is an excellent way for a beginner to build his bankroll with, without having to deposit any real money. The deposit mechanisms for different sites vary and you have to choose what works for you the best.
- If you're new to online poker, you may want to exercise caution before putting real money online, so look for value in tournaments. Many websites offer games and tournaments with low buy-ins and competing in these can help you start and get the hang of it.
- There is continuous, 24x7 action through the week on the online poker sites. Hunt for the best promotional offers and bonuses that could range from Instant bonus, locked bonus or special offers.
- Many established sites vie to meet the guaranteed prize pools even by making an overlay in case the targeted entry field is not reached, so that the players don't lose out in terms of prize money. Keep an eye open for such tournaments and identify which sites follow these norms.

Reliability

The most important step for a newcomer to online poker is to cross check the reliability of the poker site he is accessing and planning to play on. Make sure that the online poker room you're playing on conforms to the laws of the land and is legally safe to register in.

PokerGuru provides a detailed list of the reliable online poker rooms operational in India. We take utmost caution in listing only the most trusted sites in our Top Online Poker Rooms section and any online poker site found involved in dubious activities is immediately removed from our list.