

#1 POKER BESTSELLER

STRATEGIES FOR BEATING  
SMALL STAKES POKER  
CASH GAMES



JONATHAN LITTLE

# Strategies for Beating Small Stakes Poker Cash Games

By Jonathan Little

[PokerCoaching.com](http://PokerCoaching.com)

## What's Your Cash Game IQ?

I created a short quiz as a companion to this book. Use this quiz to quickly test your knowledge about small stakes no-limit hold'em cash games.

Take the quiz now at:

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It's only 10 questions long. After you answer each question, I will give you a short analysis of the concept being covered.

To get the most out of this quiz, I suggest you take it before you read this book to help you identify the cash game concepts you need to work on. Take it again after you have finished reading this book to make sure you have mastered every concept. Finally, keep taking this quiz until you get a perfect score.

Take the quiz now and get your Cash Game IQ by visiting:

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On [JonathanLittlePoker.com](http://JonathanLittlePoker.com), they submitted numerous excellent questions that helped make this book as thorough as it is. I also asked some of my students to proofread this book. Thanks entirely to them, this is the cleanest book I have ever written. The proofreaders for this book are:

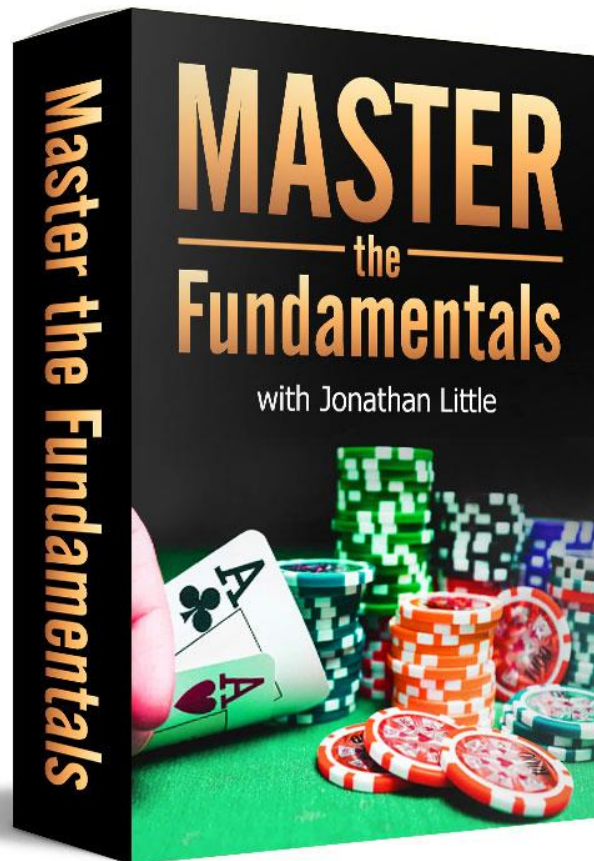
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## Free Poker Course

I created a poker course called ***Master the Fundamentals*** to teach you the skills required to beat small stakes no-limit hold'em games and prepare you for the high level strategy content on [PokerCoaching.com](http://PokerCoaching.com).

To access Master the Fundamentals for free, visit:

[PokerCoaching.com/fundamentals](http://PokerCoaching.com/fundamentals)



## Introduction

You may be wondering what a two time World Poker Tour champion can teach you about small stakes cash games. Some people assume I don't even play cash games. In fact, about half of my poker play is in the cash game format, although it is primarily at \$10/\$20 no-limit and higher. I even have two best-selling books, [\*Jonathan Little on Live No-Limit Cash Games, Volumes 1 and 2\*](#), which extensively discuss my strategies for beating tough cash games.

That being said, I realize that high stakes games are drastically different from small stakes games. So, in preparation for this book, I spent a decent amount of time playing \$1/\$2 no-limit in local casinos, primarily at Borgata in Atlantic City, New Jersey. While I was perplexed by some of my opponents' plays at first, I developed a solid strategy that was effective against my opponents. In this book, I will share with you the strategies that enabled me to win at the rate of \$35 per hour at \$1/\$2 no-limit. Throughout this book I will use as examples many of the actual hands I played in order to demonstrate key concepts you must master if you want to succeed.

Small stakes cash games are an extremely profitable form of poker because the average player is quite weak. As long as you maintain a bankroll of at least 2,500 big blinds, you will rarely go broke, assuming you are a good player. This means that if you learn to play well, you can quickly progress up through the ranks to the middle stakes games where you can win more money.

Please note this book is not for total beginners who have no poker experience at all, nor is it meant to be an exhaustive guide on how to beat cash games. Instead, the purpose of this book is to teach you to play at a skill level that will get you to the middle stakes as fast as possible, allowing you to realize your dream of making significant money from poker. Once you get to that level, I strongly suggest you check out my other books, [\*Jonathan Little on Live No-Limit Cash Games, Volumes 1 and 2\*](#), which present my complete strategy for beating middle and high stakes games.

In order to bring your skills up to the level of being proficient enough to crush the small stakes games, you may have to forget a lot of what you have previously been taught about poker. Bookstores (particularly online) are filled with books by people touting a system they claim will teach you to win at poker. These books often suggest playing an overly tight strategy where you only put money in the pot when you are confident you have the best hand. I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but if you want to get good at poker, you must learn to play a technically sound strategy while being able to get out of line in order to take advantage of your opponents' errors. If you are only capable of thinking inside the box, expect to stay boxed in at the small stakes forever.

As a quick example, suppose someone raises from middle position and you have A-J on the button. (Throughout this book, if suits are not listed, assume the hand is offsuit. Suited hands



will either have an “s” after them or the corresponding suit symbols.) Against overly tight players, you should fold because they are only raising with hands that dominate yours. Against reasonably active players, calling is probably best because if you reraise and get much action, you will usually be in bad shape. Against wild players, you can reraise for value because they will call your reraise with numerous worse hands that you crush. As you can see, following a simple preflop chart that says “always reraise with A-J” will get you in a ton of trouble. In order to succeed at cash games, you must adjust your strategy based on how your opponents play, which means you must pay attention to your opponents. The first section of this book will teach you to do exactly that.

The second section deals with how to play a fundamentally sound preflop strategy. The most common spot where amateur players make huge mistakes is when the action folds to them. Since these mistakes occur almost every hand, they become quite costly in the long run, even if each individual error is not too significant. Most small stakes players routinely limp when they should raise or fold, costing themselves huge amounts of equity. After discussing what you should do when the action folds to you, we will discuss what to do when someone raises before the action gets to you. After that, we will discuss what to do when your opponents limp before the action gets to you. Finally, we will review how to apply aggression and how to deal with aggression from your opponents. Sometimes you should fight fire with fire and other times you should quickly get out of the way, even with strong hands.

The third section covers how to play after the flop. Most small stakes poker books suggest you play a simple postflop strategy, such as “raise with draws and top pair and better hands, call with middle pair and bottom pair, and fold everything else”. I will be the first to tell you that if you follow a simple, formulaic strategy, you will fail. Fortunately for you, almost all small stakes players commit this egregious error. I will show you how to get well out of line in order to take full advantage of your opponents’ mistakes, allowing you to fold strong hands when you are crushed and steal the pot when it is clear your opponents have nothing.

The final section of this book discusses “other topics” which must be mastered if you want to succeed at small stakes cash games. If you cannot pinpoint your opponents’ tells, you will not win nearly the maximum amount. If you can’t manage your bankroll, you will almost certainly go broke. If you approach poker, which can be infuriating at times, with a poor mental attitude, you will be miserable, which will lead to failure. All of these topics and more will be discussed in the final section.

One of the best things you can do to improve your poker skills is to study CONSISTENTLY away from the poker tables. My training site, [PokerCoaching.com](https://PokerCoaching.com), offers top-level coaching from some of the best players in the world.

To get a FREE 5-day trial to [PokerCoaching.com](https://PokerCoaching.com), visit:

<https://PokerCoaching.com/5free>

## Combating Your Opponents

I want to make it perfectly clear that you make money primarily by taking advantage of your opponents' mistakes. Your own great plays certainly matter, but taking advantage of your opponents is where most of your profit comes from. That is why you can achieve such a huge win rate in small stakes cash games compared to other forms of poker. If your opponents all played well, you could not expect to make much money. If you ever hear someone say "I would win if my opponents would stop making bad plays," they are clearly unaware of this most basic concept.

Most poker books start by laying out a default strategy. A much better way to approach poker, assuming you already know the basics, is to figure out what your opponents are doing incorrectly so you can develop a strategy that takes advantage of their errors. In high stakes games you should strive to play in a fundamentally sound manner that is unexploitable, electing to slowly grind out a small edge. An unexploitable strategy aims to play in a game theory optimal manner such that no matter what your opponent does, he cannot profit versus you. This strategy will lead to you breaking even against other excellent players and winning a small amount from amateur players.

In small stakes games, where your opponents constantly make blunders, you should look to get well out of line in order to exploit them. An exploitable strategy is one that is tailored to take advantage of your opponents' mistakes. Since the players in the small stakes games will make plenty of mistakes, you should play in an exploitable manner.

No two players are exactly the same, but you will find that you will be better able to formulate your plan of attack if you classify your opponents in some way. While you can classify them based on a wide range of metrics, it is usually best to figure out where your opponents fall on the loose/passive and the tight/aggressive spectrums. From there, you can quantify specific tendencies each opponent exhibits that you can exploit. To help you get started classifying your opponents, I will outline the six basic types of opponents you will encounter and also list adjustments you can make to your default strategy in order to take advantage of them. Rest assured, I will cover my default bet sizing and general strategies in the Preflop and Postflop sections.

### Straightforward Loose Passive Players

You are likely to find that most of your opponents in small stakes cash games play in a straightforward, loose, passive manner. These players have usually been playing poker for a long time but have not grasped the concept that they do not need the best hand to win the pot. They also do not understand that if a lot of money goes into the pot when they have top pair, they will usually be crushed by a premium made hand.

Their general strategy is to limp, or call a raise, hoping to see a flop with a wide range of hands they think have potential, including 4-4, A-J, A-4, K-9, 9-8, K-5s, Q-7s, and 5-3s. After the flop, when they make top pair or better, they tend to apply immense pressure because they are afraid of getting outdrawn. With a made hand worse than top pair, they will usually check with the intention of calling down to the river, where they will typically fold to one last bet if they fail to improve to a hand that beats top pair. They tend to also play their drawing hands in a passive manner, calling down to see if they improve to a premium hand. If they are fortunate enough to complete their draw, they usually bet or raise big, hoping you will pay them off. When they miss their draw, they usually fold. You will find that most of these players rarely bluff because they think the only winning poker strategy is to make strong hands and then pile in their money.

For simplicity, all hand examples in this book will be from \$1/\$2 with \$200 effective stacks unless otherwise stated. The effective stack is the shortest stack involved in the pot. Suppose three of these loose, passive players limp for \$2, one from the lojack (the seat three to the right of the button), one from the hijack (the seat two to the right of the button), and one from the cutoff (the seat directly to the right of the button). You decide to call \$2 on the button with 8-7. Both blinds see the flop as well. It comes 8-6-3. If someone bets and someone else calls, you should usually fold, assuming that you are against some combination of (a) made hands that beat yours, (b) worse made hands that will win 25% of the time against yours, and (c) draws that will win about 35% of the time against yours. While you could have the best hand, unless you think your opponents will play in an overly weak manner if you raise, you should get out of the way. Some players elect to call a bet to try to improve to trips or two pair, but you will often find that when you improve, you will not get paid off or that you still have the second-best hand. If only one player bets on the flop and everyone in between folds, you should tend to call, opting to see what develops on the turn. If everyone checks to you, you should certainly bet both for value (because worse made hands and draws will call) and protection (because you do not want to give a free card to various overcards, such as A-T and Q-J). It is important to realize that you should have a logical reason for every bet you make. If you routinely make bets without having a logical reason, you are certainly making errors.

Straightforward, loose, passive players are easy to beat because they usually play in a blatantly straightforward manner. They raise when they love their hand, call when they are unsure, and fold when they know they are crushed.

You will find that a decent chunk of your profit comes from folding when it is clear these opponents have premium hands. If you know your opponent really likes his hand and you have a marginal made hand, such as top pair with a weak kicker or middle pair, you should get out of the way, assuming you are not getting the proper price to draw to a better hand. Do not be stubborn and stick around until the river, hoping to luckily improve.

You will also crush these players by value betting in such a way that they can realistically call when you have the best hand. For example, assume you raise to \$6 with A-Q and three players

call. If the flop comes A-7-5, you should bet about half the size of the pot on all three streets. You will find that most opponents will happily call you down with any Ace, which you crush, whereas if you check, they may or may not value bet, fearing they could be beat. By betting on all three streets, you extract a huge amount of value from your opponents' good, but second-best, made hands. However, if you instead bet the size of the pot or more on all three streets, unless your opponents are incapable of folding marginal made hands, they will usually make snug folds. You rarely want to make a bet that forces your opponents to play perfectly, as a large bet does in this situation.

You may be wondering why I used the preflop raise size of \$6, as it is much smaller than most people's raises are in a typical \$1/\$2 game. The logic for this bet sizing will be addressed in the Preflop section. I will also discuss how to deal with players who choose much larger bet sizes. In general though, before the flop you typically want to raise to a touch less than the size of the pot. You can figure out the size of the pot by multiplying the last bet by three then adding in any additional money that is in the pot. In this situation, when you are the first to put money in the pot, three times the last bet (the big blind) is \$6 plus any dead money (the small blind), equals \$7. So, a bit less than \$7 is \$6. This same formula applies when the pot gets large. Suppose there are two limpers for \$2 each, someone raises to \$10, and someone else reraises to \$26. If you want to reraise to a bit less than the size of the pot, you should make it a bit less than  $3 \times 26 + 10 + 2 + 2 + 2 + 1 = \$95$ , so perhaps \$88. Once you memorize this simple formula, you will never again be confused about how much to raise before the flop. Of course, there are times when you should drastically adjust your bet sizes based on your opponent. These situations will be discussed in the Preflop section.

Always think about the range of hands you are trying to get value from and adjust your bet size accordingly. There are times to make big value bets and other times to value bet tiny. If you have the nuts and think your opponent has either the second nuts or nothing, you should bet huge, perhaps way more than the size of the pot, because very few people are capable of folding the second nuts and they will fold to any bet when they have nothing. If you have middle pair and think your opponent has bottom pair or Ace high, you should bet tiny, perhaps 25% of the size of the pot or less, because few people will call large bets with trashy made hands.

While betting for value will allow you to crush your opponent when you have a better made hand, you must be disciplined enough to make a big fold when it becomes clear that your opponent has improved to a superior hand. For example, if you bet the flop, turn and river with A-K on A-7-5-J-2 and your opponent called on the flop and turn, and then raised on the river, it would be a total disaster to call your opponent's raise. Betting for value with the intention of folding if your opponent raises is a skill that simply must be mastered if you want to succeed against loose, passive, straightforward players. Remember, these players call when they have marginal hands (that your A-K beats) and raise when they have premium hands (which probably beat your A-K). This means you can profitably bet for value while still being able to fold if you

get raised. Most small stakes cash game players are not capable of making a “big” fold in this spot, which is one of the main reasons they never move up in stakes. It is nearly impossible to build a bankroll if you always pay off your opponents when they outdraw you.

Another way you beat these opponents is by allowing them to overvalue their good, but not premium, made hands. Suppose three of these players limp from middle positions and you raise to \$14 with A-A from the big blind. All the limpers call. The flop comes J-T-5. You bet \$26 and one of your opponents raises to \$60. At this point, both calling and going all-in are fine options, depending on what you think about your opponent’s raising range. It is up to you to figure out which play your opponent will view as the weakest, resulting in him paying you off with the vast majority of his range. Of course, he could have you beat, but you will find that most of the time you are against a marginal top pair such as K-J or Q-J.

Before we progress further, it is important to realize that you are always playing against a range of hands, not one specific hand. If you ever hear someone at the table say “I put him on A-J so I went all-in”, that player probably makes the mistake of putting his opponent on one specific hand. That is simply not how poker works in the real world. In the previous example, when your opponent raises the flop, his range could be quite tight, perhaps only A-J, K-J and Q-J, or it could be much wider, including all sets, two pairs, overpairs, top pairs, strong middle pairs, and draws. Of course, your opponent will only have one specific hand this exact time, but if you ran this situation a million times, you would find that your opponent does not have that one specific hand every single time. For this reason, you have to play your hand against your opponent’s range. If you happen to be against the wide range of all sets, decent made hands, and draws, your A-A will win roughly 67% of the time. While you will occasionally be against a set or two pair that has you crushed, on average you will be in great shape. In turn, if you find that your specific opponent has exactly a set or two pair almost every single time he raises, you should fold your A-A because it only has 19% equity.

This illustrates why it is so important to understand how each of your opponents thinks. If you get your stack in with 67% equity every time, you will crush the games, but if you instead get it in with 19% equity every time, you will quickly go broke. It is up to you to figure out how much equity you have in each situation and respond accordingly. In every hand you play for the rest of your life, you should focus diligently on putting each player on a range and narrowing it as play progresses.

One other way you can crush straightforward, loose, passive opponents is by picking up the pot when it is clear they are not interested. Suppose one of these players limps from the lojack and you raise to \$10 from the button with K♦-5♦ (a risky, but probably correct play, depending on what you think about the limper’s limping range). Only the limper calls. The flop comes A♥-6♥-2♠. Your opponent checks. This is an excellent spot to bet \$10 into the \$23 pot. If your opponent doesn’t have top pair or better, he will usually fold, giving you the pot. Seeing how your opponent will only connect with the flop roughly 33% of the time (meaning he will have

nothing 67% of the time), and you only need to win the pot 30% of the time based on your bet size, you will steal the pot way more than is required to show a profit. To figure out how often a total bluff needs to work, you divide your bet (\$10) by the pot you are trying to steal plus your bet (\$23 +\$10) giving you  $10/33 = 30\%$ . If you know roughly how often your opponent will call a bet based on his range, you can tailor your bluff size to ensure your bluffs are profitable. Keep in mind that as your bet size decreases, your opponent is likely to call with a wider range.

You can also attack multiway pots if it is clear no one is interested. If two people limp, you limp from late position, and the blinds come along, if the flop comes K-8-3 and everyone checks to you, feel free to take a stab with a bet of about 50% of the size of the pot with any two cards. When everyone checks to you, especially on the flop and turn when you are last to act, do not be afraid to bet. While most players in these games tend to bet large, usually near the size of the pot, you will find smaller bet sizes usually result in the same outcome. There is no point in betting the size of the pot when you are bluffing if betting half of the size of the pot will induce your opponents to fold roughly the same range of hands. By betting the minimum required to get the job done when you are bluffing, you save money every time your bluffs fail. You must realize that if your bluff needs to work 30% of the time but it will actually work 35% of the time, you will show a profit, even though your bluff will fail 65% of the time. If your bluffs succeed almost every time, you are not bluffing often enough.

### Weak Tight Passive Players

Weak, tight, passive players tend to act in an overly weak manner until it becomes clear to them that they have a premium hand. They abhor the idea of putting their hard-earned money at risk unless they are completely confident they will win the pot. In general, these players are usually older, opting to play poker to pass the time, although that is not always the case.

These players tend to limp with most of the hands they deem to be playable. It is not uncommon for them to limp with strong hands such as J-J and A-K from early position, call a raise, and then check-call down with top pair, top kicker or an overpair, fearing they could be beat by A-A. They see monsters in the closet because, to them, losing money is a traumatizing experience that must be avoided at all cost.

Against these players, you should be overly cautious when they call your preflop raises, flop bets, and turn bets. It is important to recognize that when they put money in the pot, even in a passive manner, they can easily have a strong hand. For example, four players, some loose passive and others tight passive, limp and you decide to raise to \$18 from the small blind with Q-2s (another risky, but probably correct play, which will be discussed later). Only the second limper, with a \$100 starting stack, calls. The flop comes A-J-4. You bet \$18 and your opponent calls. The turn is the (A-J-4)-6. You both check. The river is the (A-J-4-6)-9. You check, your opponent goes all-in for \$64 and you fold. He proudly shows his J-J as he scoops the pot. Once

your opponent called your preflop raise and flop bet, you can be confident he has a strong hand he will never fold, allowing you to swiftly abandon your bluff.

An alternative version of this player type will only enter the pot by raising, usually to a huge amount, perhaps to 7.5 big blinds (\$15) because they want to be sure they win the pot immediately or force their opponents to pay dearly to see the flop. They despise getting outdrawn because they feel like they deserve to win with their strong hands. Feeling like you deserve anything in poker (or life) will cause you to make mistakes. This significant error, which they commit every single time they are dealt a premium hand, makes them the easiest player type to play against. You should simply fold and wait for an overly premium hand that has their strong range in bad shape. When someone raises huge before the flop, especially if they are incapable of getting away from their entire range, which is perhaps 9-9+ and A-Q+, just wait around for A-A, K-K, Q-Q, and A-K to crush them.

Since most of these players are not capable of folding a premium hand, if you happen to make a hand that beats their premium range after the flop, it is usually best to bet it strong. If one of these players raises to \$10 from early position and three players call, you should call with all of your pairs and suited connectors, regardless of your position. Suppose you call with 3-3 from the big blind and the flop comes J-6-3. You check and the initial raiser bets \$40. Everyone folds around to you. While slow playing against most players would be ideal, since you know this type of player only puts in significant money when he thinks he has a premium hand, you should raise, perhaps to \$90 or all-in. Your opponent will either call or go all-in with his entire range, which will usually be exactly J-J+. Of course, you lose to J-J, but you beat everything else. There is no point in slow playing if your opponent will happily jam his stack into the pot immediately.

While the main way you crush these opponents is by staying out of their way unless you have the effective nuts (a hand so strong that it might as well be the nuts, such as 3-3 on J-7-3 or J-7 on T-9-8), you will find that you can also slowly steal their stack by raising when they are in the blinds. These players don't like to invest money in a pot without a premium hand. Because of this, they are quick to fold to preflop raises, even when getting decent pot odds in the blinds. If everyone folds to you in middle or late position, do not be afraid to raise with a wide range of reasonable hands, including 2-2, A-2, K-9, T-9, 6-5, and 9-5s. If only the weak, tight, passive big blind defends, you should make a half pot continuation bet. If you have nothing and your opponent calls your flop bet, it is usually wise to concede the pot. If you have a marginal made hand, check the turn and try to get closer to the showdown. If you have the effective nuts, continue betting in order to extract maximum value.

### [Straightforward Tight Aggressive Players](#)

Straightforward, tight, aggressive players tend to play in a similar manner as the weak, tight, passive players, except they understand there is value in aggression. These players are

generally capable of raising with a slightly wider range preflop, including all pairs, Broadway hands (hands containing two cards ten and higher), suited Aces, and suited connectors. They frequently enter the pot with a raise, opting to rarely limp. They typically have a somewhat solid tight, aggressive preflop strategy.

Despite their reasonably sound preflop play, most of these players play poorly after the flop. They tend to overvalue any decently strong made hand. They realize they play very few hands, so they feel they must win most of the pots they enter. This leads them to pay off their opponents too often. For example, they raise with A-Q and four players call. The flop comes Q-J-8. They continuation bet, get raised, then respond by going all-in. They are usually disappointed to see that they are crushed by two pair or better. They do not accurately assess their hand's actual value in light of their opponent's range. In order to take advantage of this flaw, look for situations where your opponent is likely to have a strong hand, usually when he is making a large bet into multiple opponents, and then try to invest as much money as possible in a manner that ensures he stays in when you can beat his somewhat obvious top pair or overpair.

These players usually know they should continuation bet with most of their range, especially in heads-up pots. Once their continuation bet fails, they are lost as to what to do on the turn when they do not have a premium holding. Especially heads-up, it is often a good idea to call these players' continuation bets on boards that should be good for your range and bad for their range. As an overgeneralization, flops good for the preflop raiser contain either an Ace or high cards and flops good for the preflop caller contain middle and low cards. You can then apply pressure on the turn either when the board gets overly scary or when your opponent checks to you.

For example, a straightforward, tight, aggressive player raises to \$7 from the lojack and you call on the button with 4-4, A♣-T♣, K♦-Q♣, or 7♦-6♦ (you should usually call with all of these hands). Everyone else folds. The flop comes 9♠-8♣-6♥. Your opponent bets \$12. This is an excellent spot to call to see what develops on the turn. If your opponent checks, on any turn card that fails to improve your hand, you should bet \$27 into the \$41 pot, hoping to force your opponent off almost his entire range. If you improve to a premium hand, you should probably bet smaller, around \$14, to induce him to stay in the pot. If your opponent continues betting on the turn, it is a good idea to get out of the way, making the assumption that he usually has a premium hand he will not fold to additional pressure. Unless you know this specific player likes to fire multiple barrels with hands like A-K and K-Q, it is best to fold.

It is important to realize that by betting two different sizes based on your hand's strength when your opponent checks to you on the turn, you open yourself up to being exploited. In this situation, if your opponent figures out you bet on the larger side when you are bluffing and on the smaller side when you have a premium hand, he will be able to check-raise when you are bluffing and check-fold when you have a premium hand. If your opponent plays perfectly



against you, expect to quickly lose all of your money. But in the time I spent at the \$1/\$2 tables, I did not encounter anyone who played anywhere close to perfectly.

Fortunately, as long as your opponents are not keenly aware of your strategies and you don't play with them on a regular basis, playing in an exploitable manner is okay because they will not adjust to take advantage of you. If they happen to become aware of what you are doing, it is usually best to adjust to a more unexploitable (game theory optimal) strategy. In the previous example, a less exploitable play would be to bet the same amount on the turn with your entire range when your opponent checks to you. While you will likely get less value from your premium hands (because you will usually be bluffing), you want to make the bet that maximizes fold equity, which would be the \$27 bet. Fold equity is simply the equity you gain when your opponent folds a hand that has some potential. You typically rely on fold equity to make a situation profitable when your hand is weak. If you don't have fold equity (perhaps because your opponent is a calling station, you have a wild image, or your opponent only plays strong hands), playing a weak hand in an aggressive manner is a bad idea.

In general, as your opponent's skill level goes up, you should play in a less exploitable manner. You will find that almost everyone who plays the small stakes cash games is either oblivious to what you are doing or will not have the courage to do anything about it. This allows you to play in a blatantly exploitable manner almost all of the time with little fear of retaliation.

You should relentlessly attack straightforward, tight, aggressive players' blinds, especially from middle and late position. This will usually result in them either folding preflop or calling preflop and then check-folding to a flop continuation bet when they miss, both of which are excellent results for you.

If your raise plus continuation bet is met by a raise or check-raise from one of these players, it is almost always a good idea to fold unless you have a strong overpair or better. Most of these players will only raise the flop with top pair or better, meaning you simply must have a strong range to continue. Of course, some of these players will also check-raise draws, but realize when you have J♥-J♦ on T♣-9♣-3♦, if you bet and face a raise, if you think your opponent's range is sets, top two pair, overpairs, good top pair, and strong flush draws, your J-J only has 40% equity. So, you should fold. If you accurately comprehend how your hand fares against your opponent's raising range, you will be able to get off the hook with a minimal loss in spots where other players lose their entire stacks.

### Good Tight Aggressive Players

Good, tight, aggressive players are similar to straightforward, tight, aggressive players except they tend to understand relative hand values, both preflop and postflop. They will not make the huge error of losing their entire stack every time they get A-A on 9-8-5 or A-K on K-J-7. Instead they play intelligently, sometimes calling raises and other times folding, depending on their

perception of their opponent. These players will almost never mindlessly put their stack in the pot simply because their hand is normally strong.

This player type also knows how to continue applying pressure in an intelligent manner. Whereas straightforward, tight players will continuation bet with K-Q on 9-6-3 and then check-fold on the turn unless they improve to top pair, good, tight, aggressive players will continue betting when any overcard comes and perhaps even check when they improve to top pair, hoping to induce you to bluff. When your opponent is capable of taking various actions with their entire range, they become much more difficult to play against because you cannot know with a high degree of certainty what any of their actions indicate.

Fortunately, you will rarely run into this type of player because they quickly move up to the middle and high stakes games. If you play well and do not make the mistake of playing like everyone else at your table, you will win money in the long run. If you play well enough to beat \$1/\$2, you almost certainly play well enough to beat \$2/\$5.

These players, and all other forms of good players, are quite difficult to exploit. These are not the players you are winning a huge amount of money from. Since you make money primarily because of your opponents' errors, you should tend to avoid playing with good players who make few errors unless you have a reasonably strong hand.

One of the easiest ways to exploit this type of player is to continually apply pressure. You mainly accomplish this by reraising their preflop raises, raising their flop continuation bets, raising their turn bets, or bluffing them on the river.

For example, if one of these players raises to \$6 preflop from the hijack, feel free to reraise from the cutoff or button with a reasonably wide range of hands, depending on how you expect your opponent to react. If you think he is on the tighter side, only raising with premium hands before the flop, do not reraise him as a bluff too often. If you know your opponent has a premium hand, bluffing is a terrible idea. If you think he is a bit looser, raising with hands like A-3 and Q-9 from the hijack, you should aggressively reraise him. You should typically reraise to about \$17. This will either result in him folding or calling preflop and then playing overly straightforward on the flop, both of which are great results for you.

Your reraising range should consist of premium hands and hands that are not quite good enough to call your opponent's initial raise. This is referred to as a polarized range. As an example, you could reraise with hands like J-J+ and A-Q+ for value plus some occasional bluffs like A-5 – A-2, K-8s – K-5s, Q-8s, J-7s, a few other marginal suited hands, and perhaps unsuited connectors like T-9, 9-8, and 8-7. You should notice that if you always reraise with all of these hands, you would be bluffing way more than you are value betting, which is usually an error versus a strong player. For this reason, you should not bluff every single time you have the opportunity. Instead, either do it sporadically or when you have a physical read that the initial raiser is opening with a weak hand.

You can attack these players on the flop by raising their flop continuation bets on boards that should be good for you and bad for them. Great boards to liberally attack include T-9-7, 8-7-5, J-7-7, and 8-8-6. If there is a flush draw on the flop, that provides an additional reason to apply pressure. For example, if your opponent continuation bets \$10 into the \$13 pot, feel free to raise to \$26 with any marginal draw, such as a gutshot, or perhaps even complete air. Similarly to your preflop bluffing range, you should notice that it is more common to have a bluff than a premium hand on any board. For that reason, you should not bluff every time you have the opportunity, unless your opponent assumes you only raise with premium hands.

It is important to understand that most good players will be somewhat aware of your general playing style. If you are aggressively raising and reraising in every pot, do not expect good players to assume your raises must indicate strength. If you have been overly tight for the last hour, either because you have been card dead or you generally play a tight strategy, you should expect your good opponents to fold when you apply pressure. Use this knowledge to your advantage and do the opposite of what they expect you to do. If you find that your opponents always fold to your aggression when you have a premium hand, you are most probably playing too tight.

Against good, tight, aggressive players, you can call the flop with a wide range and then bet the turn when it is checked to you. This is referred to as “floating” the flop. Additionally, you can also raise if they bet the turn with a decently wide range. Most good players in small stakes cash games assume their opponents will only raise the turn when they are willing to get their stack in. This means that in order for them to continue against a turn raise, they think they must have a premium hand. Since it is difficult to have a premium hand, they will usually concede the pot.

Suppose a good, tight, aggressive player raises to \$6 from middle position out of his \$300 stack, the Button (a tight, passive player calls) and you call with A♠-3♠ in the big blind. The flop comes 8♣-5♠-2♦. You check and the initial raiser bets \$10. The Button folds. Both check-calling and check-raising are fine options, depending on how you expect your opponent to react. In general, most players fear turn check-raises more than flop check-raises, so you will find that check-raising the turn gives you a bit more fold equity. However, your opponent may not bet the turn, meaning you may not have the opportunity to check-raise. This time, you decide to check-call. The turn is the (8♣-5♠-2♦)-6♥. You check and your opponent bets \$23. This is an excellent spot to check-raise to \$57 or so. This will apply immense pressure and make your opponent think you may be willing to put your entire stack in on the river.

It is important to realize that you can easily have a set or a straight whereas your opponent almost certainly has either an overpair or unpaired overcards. This means your range should be significantly stronger than your opponent's, assuming you are not check-raising the turn too often. Of course, he could have a set, but that is quite unlikely, and if he does, he may reraise immediately on the turn, allowing you to abandon your bluff.

If you check-raise the turn and your opponent calls, you should occasionally consider bluffing on any river besides an Ace or 4. If you are convinced your opponent has an overpair, he will almost certainly not fold to a typical less than pot sized bet. Instead, you should make a giant bet, electing to go all-in for \$227 into the \$153 pot. Of course, if your opponent is not capable of folding an overpair, bluffing would be like lighting money on fire.

Remember the earlier discussion about how often a bluff needs to succeed in order for it to be profitable. In this case, your bluff needs to work  $227/(227+153) = 60\%$  of the time to make you money. While 60% may sound like a huge amount of the time, most good, tight, aggressive players will not want to put their entire remaining 113 big blind stack in with only an overpair when they could easily be facing the nuts. Notice by taking this aggressive line, you take almost all of your opponent's premium preflop hands and turn them into marginal bluff catchers. You will find that most players will give you the pot because the vast majority of the \$1/\$2 player pool only makes this play when they are a lock to win the pot. Of course, if you make this play too often, your opponents will get suspicious and start looking you up. If that happens, you should revert to a balanced game plan. Notice that if you can play your premium hands in this manner and expect to get paid off because you have developed an overly aggressive image, you will realize gigantic implied odds; meaning when you are fortunate enough to complete your draws, you stand to win a huge amount of money.

In general, you will find that the first time you make a huge overbet as a bluff, it will succeed a high percentage of the time. If you do it a second time, it becomes more likely that it will be called. If you do it frequently, you will start getting looked up by any decently strong made hand. You can use this to your advantage by bluffing with the overbet the first time, either value betting or bluffing the second time, then primarily value betting for the remainder of the session.

Another added benefit of applying immense pressure to your good, tight, aggressive opponents is the fact that they will be inclined to stay out of your way, effectively turning them into straightforward, tight, aggressive players who are easy to exploit. If you can play in a manner that strikes fear in the hearts of your opponents, you will be able to have your way with the table.

### [Maniacal Loose Aggressive Players](#)

Maniacs come in many different varieties. The main type of maniac blindly applies pressure whenever you show any form of weakness. If you show significant strength, they will get out of the way. Even maniacs realize that if you are willing to put your stack in against someone who appears to be crazy, you must have a premium hand. For this reason, against maniacs, you should tend to call with your decently strong hands in order to induce bluffs and occasionally bluff in situations where you think the maniac will assume you must have a premium hand.

It is important to realize that hand values shift dramatically when playing against maniacs. This is because the range of hands they start with is significantly wider than tighter players. For example, if a maniac raises to \$8 and you call on the button with Q♥-T♥, you should happily look to call down on a J♠-T♠-5♣-4♦-7♣ board, assuming you know your opponent will three-barrel with all of his bluffs when given the opportunity. While it is quite scary to put in a large portion of your stack with only middle pair, if you do so in a passive manner, you will have your opponent's range crushed. If your opponent raises with 40% of hands preflop, which is 2-2+, A-2+, K-2s+, K-8+, Q-8s+, Q-9+, T-9, 9-8, 8-7, and all decent suited connectors, you have 71% equity if he three-barrels with that entire range. That is an extreme example, but clearly, if your opponent is wild, calling down with middle pair is rarely an error, especially given you will usually be getting 2:1 pot odds or better on each street.

Do not make the mistake of raising this type of maniac after the flop with your premium hands, even on draw-heavy boards. If a maniac raises before the flop and you call with 9-9 (as you frequently should unless you are confident you can get your entire stack in profitably before the flop), if the flop comes J♠-9♠-7♦, it would be a huge error to raise your maniacal opponent's continuation bet. If you raise and he has nothing, he will easily fold. By calling, you force him to stay in the pot with his entire range. While you will occasionally get outdrawn, it is well worth the risk in order to induce him to continue bluffing. In fact, it is probably best to call down until the river, only raising at that point if you improve to a full house or two small cards come on the turn and river.

Be aware that you can successfully bluff these players from time to time. Suppose you call a maniac's raise, this time with Q♣-J♦, and get a K♠-9♠-7♦ flop. When facing your opponent's continuation bet, you should often raise. Notice that if you get called, you have four fairly clean outs to improve to a straight. You can also continue bluffing when a spade comes. A Queen or Jack could give you the best hand. If you expect your opponent to give your flop raises too much credit, do not be afraid to get well out of line.

There is another type of maniac who reraises before the flop with an overly wide range, hoping to push you off almost your entire range. It is quite common in small stakes cash games for someone to raise to \$7 only to have a maniac reraise to \$35. It is important to differentiate between maniacs who reraise huge and tight, passive (or tight, aggressive) players who reraise huge. Maniacs make this reraise frequently whereas tight players only do it with premium hands. Against a maniacal player, you should accept that if you have a strong hand, you are going to play a huge pot, usually for all your money. Both reraising the \$35 reraise and calling are great options with hands that typically have the maniac's range crushed, such as 9-9 and A-Q. While these hands would never be worthy of playing an all-in pot versus a tight player, they are quite strong versus a maniac. If you think the maniac will fold to a \$70 reraise or an all-in push for \$200, you should tend to call, forcing him to stay in the pot with his entire range.

If you think he will be willing to invest his entire stack with whatever junk he reraised with, feel free to get your stack in with what is probably the best hand.

One other form of maniac you are likely to encounter is the type who blindly applies pressure at all times, assuming he thinks you are reasonably active, whether or not you have shown weakness. Against these players, it is important that you remain at least somewhat active preflop and on the flop so they don't mind giving you action. You will find that most maniacs despise paying off overly tight players. Once they determine you are "active enough", they will gladly give you action. Feel free to raise and reraise with your premium hands when you are happy to get your stack in. Against these players, A-9 on A-K-8, 8-7 on 8-5-2, and 7-7 on 6-3-2 are almost certainly strong enough to play for 100 big blind stacks.

You must bear in mind that maniacs will wake up with premium hands from time to time. Do not let this discourage you from playing significant pots against them. If someone at your table told you they would put their entire stack in the pot with 40% equity, you should happily hop in every time, even though you will lose your stack 40% of the time. While you will certainly encounter larger swings to your bankroll when playing against maniacs, as compared to tight players, if you can remain emotionally stable, they will eventually deposit their stacks into your bankroll.

You may notice that much of the advice in this section flies in the face of conventional small stakes cash game wisdom that states you should bet and raise to protect your strong hands. You must accept and understand that you make money by giving your opponents the opportunity to make errors. If you force your opponents to fold when you have them drawing thin, you will almost never win big pots unless you have A-A against K-K. Of course, you will lose when the situation is reversed and you have K-K versus A-A. You must learn to effectively ignore "cold deck" situations and focus on ways to win your opponents' stacks in situations where they will not get yours when the situation is reversed. Putting your opponents in situations where they can realistically make errors is the key to making money from weak opponents.

### Calling Stations

Some of your opponents will not be capable of folding any hand they deem to have any amount of potential on the flop, turn and perhaps even the river. These calling stations simply never fold! While these players are easy to demolish, they give most amateurs fits because they seem to "always" get lucky on the turn or river. Many amateurs fail to realize that they are actually committing huge errors by paying the calling stations off whenever they improve to a premium hand. Even 8-2 is going to beat A-A on a J-8-3 board 19% of the time. If you pay attention, most calling stations will make it clear when they have the best hand.

You will find that most calling stations act in a generally passive manner unless they have a strong hand, effectively putting them in the straightforward, loose, passive category. However, they are willing to call much larger bets with a much wider range than they should. This means you should be more inclined to reraise them for value before the flop. Compared to the polarized reraising range discussed when playing against good, tight, aggressive players, you should reraise with an unpolarized range against calling stations. This range is roughly 7-7+, A-T+, K-J+, and Q-Js. Notice that there are effectively no pure bluffs in this range. Remember, if your opponent is not capable of folding, there is no point in bluffing. Since your opponent will call your reraises with junky hands, such as A-3, K-8, and 7-5, you can reraise with a much wider range purely for value because you expect to be called by numerous hands you dominate.

After the flop you should value bet relentlessly. Against the most extreme calling stations who will call bets on all three streets with any pair, if you flop a hand such as J-T on Q-J-6-7-2, you can realistically value bet all three streets.

Previously it was discussed that when choosing your bet size you should generally bet smaller when your opponent's range is weak. That advice goes out the window against extreme calling stations who do not care how much you bet. As long as your bet is not exorbitantly large, they will find an excuse to call. With J-T on Q-J-6-7-2, feel free to bet fairly large, perhaps 80% of the size of the pot, on all three streets.

When value betting on the river, which is where most amateur small stakes cash game players fail to apply pressure, your bet needs to get called by a worse hand at least 50% of the time in order for you to profit. If you expect your calling station opponent to call your river bet on the Q-J-6-7-2 board with any one pair hand or better that would realistically call a preflop raise, J-T will win roughly 65% of the time, making it an easy value bet. If you fail to make thin value bets against calling stations, you are leaving significant money on the table.

It is mandatory to keep in mind that if a calling station, known for his passive play, decides to raise or check-raise, you must have the discipline to make a big fold, at least until you have proof he is capable of running an aggressive bluff when you are applying pressure. Just because a player is involved in lots of pots does not mean he is aggressive. Against typical calling stations, you should value bet overly wide but fold when they show the first sign of strength. This will allow you to extract maximum value while getting off the hook whenever they get lucky to outdraw you. The inability to get off the hook when outdrawn is another spot where most amateurs spew significant money.

### Which Strategy is Ideal?

The strategy you should employ depends almost entirely on how your opponents are playing. If they are primarily tight and passive, you should play like a maniac, at least until it becomes clear that your opponent is not going to fold a decently strong hand. If your opponents are all

blatant maniacs who cannot resist the temptation to bet when you check to them, you should play in a tight, passive manner, giving them every possible opportunity to bluff.

While getting well out of line to exploit your opponents feels amazing, you will find that, as a default, you should play a tight, aggressive strategy in most small stakes cash games. This is because the general player pool usually plays in a loose, passive manner. These players are incapable of folding marginal made hands even when it is clear they are beat. If your opponents tend to rarely fold, there is little reason to attempt to bluff with a high frequency.

For example, it is quite common for five players to limp, you raise on the button to \$12 with A-Q, and three of the five limpers call. The flop comes Q-T-7. Everyone checks to you, you bet \$30, and one player calls. The turn is a (Q-T-7)-3. Your opponent checks, you bet \$44, and he calls. The river is the (Q-T-7-3)-5. He checks, you go all-in for \$114, and he proudly calls with Q-J, doubling you up with almost no risk.

Other times, the player with Q-J will check-raise on the flop because he assumes that if you only call the check-raise, you cannot have top pair or better. Instead of check-calling your \$30 flop bet, he may instead check-raise the minimum, to \$60. At that point, you should usually call \$30 more and not fold to additional pressure. Of course, you could be beat, but if you know your opponent overvalues top pair, you will have the best hand most of the time. It should be clear that going all-in on the flop is usually not a good idea because that will tip your opponent off to the fact that you actually think your hand is strong, possibly allowing him to make a snug fold.

In order to exploit players who hang around way too long with marginal one pair hands (which will be most of the player pool) you generally need to start with either superior preflop hands or hands that can easily flop well, such as 2-2, K-Q, and 7-6s. In order to start with better hands than your opponents, you must play a reasonably tight strategy.

As your postflop skills increase, you should start playing a bit looser before the flop, opting to call raises and limp along a bit more often with the intention of attacking the pot with multiple postflop bets when it is clear your opponents have weak holdings. This will allow you to slowly grind up your stack with minimal risk. However, if you do not navigate tricky postflop situations well, you can easily spew off a ton of money. On the other hand, if you never get involved in tricky spots, you will never gain the experience required to excel.

For example, if three players limp, there is nothing wrong with calling from the cutoff or button with a wide range of marginally playable hands, such as A-4, 2-2, K-9, and 8-6. If everyone checks to you on the flop in a manner you perceive to be weak, you should take a stab at the pot, betting 65% of the size of the pot, whether or not you have a strong hand.

As you better develop your hand reading abilities, you will be able to steal an increasing number of pots that do not belong to you, while also getting off the hook with an otherwise strong hand when you happen to be crushed. I frequently find myself in spots where someone raises, someone calls, and I call with a decent hand like A-J, then flop J-T-7 or A-Q-6. The initial



raiser bets and the other player calls. While my hand could easily be best, if I get the vibe that one of my opponents thinks he has a premium hand, I will fold. There are other times where I will call or even raise, depending on my read. As you gain more experience at the poker table, you will be able to navigate these tricky situations much better.

So, which strategy is best? It is one that maximally exploits your specific opponents' errors. If you make a point of constantly identifying what your opponents do incorrectly, figure out the adjustments you should make to take advantage of them, and then have the courage to get out of line in order to exploit them, you will probably be the best player at the table.

## Preflop Strategy

While the most beneficial thing you can do to maximize your win rate is to get out of line in order to exploit your opponents, it is important to have a fundamental understanding of how to play technically sound poker. Although my overall strategy is quite robust (as outlined in [\*Jonathan Little on Live No-Limit Cash Games, Volume 1\*](#)), I will outline some general principles here. Unlike most high stakes poker games, you will find that a large portion of the pots in small stakes games are limped. While I will discuss my strategy for raising and dealing with raises first, be sure to pay attention to how I combat limpers later in this section.

### Preflop Raise Sizing

Before discussing which hands to play before the flop, I must address preflop bet sizing. If you observe the average \$1/\$2 game, when someone raises after the action folds around to them, they typically raise to between \$8 and \$15. When asked why they picked this sizing, they reply “because that is how much we raise in this game!” It should be clear that this is not a thoughtful answer. When you choose any bet size, you need to know why you are making that decision.

In general, as your stack size increases, your preflop raise size should also increase. This is because pots grow exponentially in no-limit games. You will find that if you make 2/3 pot bets on the flop, turn and river, you will play much larger pots when you see a flop with 15 big blinds in the pot compared to when there are only 7.5 big blinds in the pot. However, this does not mean you should blindly choose large sizes.

As your postflop skill level increases compared to your opponents', you want to see flops with as little money in the pot as possible. The reason for this is that while you often don't have a large advantage preflop, you can have a very large advantage postflop. The more money you put in the pot before the flop, the less you can capitalize on your postflop skills. The best players, especially in the high stakes games (i.e. the players you should model your strategy after), play a wide range of hands for small amounts of money before the flop. Their typical raise size before the flop is 2 big blinds, which would be \$4 at \$1/\$2. While I do not advocate min-raising, I suggest you raise to 2.5 or 3 big blinds when everyone folds around to you, assuming 100 big blind effective stacks. This sizing will allow you to easily play sizable pots when you happen to flop a strong hand while giving you plenty of room to apply multiple streets of aggression.

Perhaps most importantly, small preflop bet sizes allow your opponents to call with a wide range of junk that will be relatively unplayable on most flops. The biggest problem with raises larger than 3 big blinds is that they force reasonable opponents to play correctly. For example, most decent players know to fold hands like A-9 and K-T to a 5 big blind preflop raise, but if you

raise to 3 big blinds, they will be tempted to call, or even reraise. By keeping your opponents in with a wide range, you will be better able to extract huge amounts of value when you flop well, while also pushing them off their hands when they flop poorly.

If you happen to find yourself in an overly soft game with players who never fold before the flop to any raise size, you should simply play tight and make large raises. Still, in my experience, even in soft games, when I raised to \$15, I got far fewer callers compared to when I raised to \$6. This means that my opponents were making intelligent folds. The last thing you want to do is force your opponents to play intelligently.

While you may feel uneasy using a bet size that is drastically different than the one everyone else uses at your table, you must realize that you are learning to play in a manner that will force your postflop skills to improve. Improving your postflop skills will help you become a better poker player. The real reason most small stakes players use huge bet sizes is because they don't want their strong hands to get outdrawn. Their simple strategy is to limp with their marginal hands, hoping to see a cheap flop, and raise huge with their premium hands. What they are actually doing is playing in a blatantly straightforward manner that makes them easy to play against. This strategy may work against their worst opponents, but when they face competent competition, they get demolished.

You must accept that when you choose a smaller sizing, you will get outdrawn more often. Getting outdrawn is not the end of the world, although you would not know that if you listened to small stakes players converse. As your postflop skills increase, you will be able to navigate tricky situations and make tight folds when your normally premium hand is in bad shape. For example, suppose you raise with K-Q to \$6 out of your \$200 stack from early position and five players call. The flop comes K-J-6. You bet \$18 and an overly tight, straightforward player raises to \$70. This is a fairly easy spot to fold because your tight opponent would probably only make this raise with a set or two pair. Most amateurs are simply unable to fold K-Q and get stacked, whereas good players lose only a small amount.

While most amateurs view this as a reason to raise larger preflop, you must understand that not every hand plays out in this manner. More often, instead of someone raising to \$70, someone calls the \$18 bet with a hand like K-9 or Q-J. This player will then be unable to fold to additional bets on the turn and river, allowing you to extract huge amounts of value. When this happens, many amateurs don't think much of it, but when they get outdrawn or have to make a big fold, they are miserable. You must learn not to worry about whether or not you are winning or losing in the short run because the short run is not what matters.

If you model your game after your \$1/\$2 opponents, you should expect to stay in the \$1/\$2 games for quite a while. If you instead model your strategies after high stakes players, you will have a much better chance of reaching their skill level. Do not fall into the habit of choosing a specific strategy simply because that is what everyone else does at your table.

### When the action is folded to you

When everyone folds to you, you should almost always enter the pot with a raise to roughly 3 big blinds. This will disguise your range of hands, which will make you difficult to read, especially compared to most of your opponents who raise with their strong hands and limp with their marginal hands. I strongly suggest you play your entire playable preflop range in the same manner. This means acting exactly the same and raising to the same amount with each hand. Your goal should be to give away as little information as possible. There is no need to get fancy by limp-reraising with A-A, hoping to trap someone, or raising huge with 7-2 in an attempt to steal the blinds and stroke your ego.

It is worth pointing out that the range of hands I suggest you raise with is a bit looser than I would suggest to the typical amateur. Remember, my goal is to make you a skilled postflop player who is capable of combating both strong and weak opponents. This means being comfortable playing both tight and loose ranges. If you are doubtful about your postflop skills, feel free to tighten up the ranges, but realize that you will only improve by getting experience outside your comfort zone.

From early position, you should play a strong range of hands because you have to worry about everyone else at the table waking up with a stronger hand. While some players opt to have a raising range and a limping range from early position, I do not think that is necessary if you use the 2.5 to 3 big blind raise size I suggest. With \$200 stacks, you do not want to raise to \$12 with 6-6 from first position because if you get reraised to \$35, you have to fold. However, you can raise to \$5 and call a reraise to \$15. With your small pairs, you need to be getting 10:1 implied odds to justify a call, meaning the effective stack needs to contain at least 10 times the amount you have to put in now. Since you have to put in \$10 more, you are getting 20:1, assuming \$200 stacks. With suited connectors and suited Aces, you need to get 20:1, which will often make calling reraises with these hands unprofitable.

The range of hands I open raise from early position does not change too much based on my opponents because the overriding factor is that someone yet to act will pick up a strong hand a decent amount of the time. As your position improves, you can play a wider range that widens even more based on your opponents' tendencies. Remember, the ranges below assume everyone folds to you. If someone raises before the action gets to you or someone limps, everything changes.

From early position, this is my typical raising range:

AA	AKs	AQs	AJs	ATs	A9s	A8s	A7s	A6s	A5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AKo	KK	KQs	KJs	KTs	K9s	K8s	K7s	K6s	K5s	K4s	K3s	K2s
AQo	KQo	QQ	QJs	QTs	Q9s	Q8s	Q7s	Q6s	Q5s	Q4s	Q3s	Q2s
AJo	KJo	QJo	JJ	JTs	J9s	J8s	J7s	J6s	J5s	J4s	J3s	J2s
ATo	KTs	QTs	JTs	TT	T9s	T8s	T7s	T6s	T5s	T4s	T3s	T2s
A9o	K9o	Q9o	J9o	T9o	99	98s	97s	96s	95s	94s	93s	92s
A8o	K8o	Q8o	J8o	T8o	98o	88	87s	86s	85s	84s	83s	82s
A7o	K7o	Q7o	J7o	T7o	97o	87o	77	76s	75s	74s	73s	72s
A6o	K6o	Q6o	J6o	T6o	96o	86o	76o	66	65s	64s	63s	62s
A5o	K5o	Q5o	J5o	T5o	95o	85o	75o	65o	55	54s	53s	52s
A4o	K4o	Q4o	J4o	T4o	94o	84o	74o	64o	54o	44	43s	42s
A3o	K3o	Q3o	J3o	T3o	93o	83o	73o	63o	53o	43o	33	32s
A2o	K2o	Q2o	J2o	T2o	92o	82o	72o	62o	52o	42o	32o	22

You may find this range to be overly tight, but when you are out of position against the entire table, the normally outdated adage of “tight is right” applies. The purpose of raising 9-8s and 2-2 is that you want to be able to realistically represent the nuts on all flops. If you only raise with premium pairs and premium big cards, you will be exploitable on middle and low flops because the best hand you can ever have is an overpair. You always want at least some potential to have the nuts after the flop. Conversely, if your opponents are overly aggressive before the flop, you should expect to get reraised a decent amount of the time and generally should fold small pairs and suited connectors.

From middle position, this is my typical raising range:

AA	AKs	AQs	AJs	ATs	A9s	A8s	A7s	A6s	A5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AKo	KK	KQs	KJs	KTs	K9s	K8s	K7s	K6s	K5s	K4s	K3s	K2s
AQo	KQo	QQ	QJs	QTs	Q9s	Q8s	Q7s	Q6s	Q5s	Q4s	Q3s	Q2s
AJo	KJo	QJo	JJ	JTs	J9s	J8s	J7s	J6s	J5s	J4s	J3s	J2s
ATo	KTo	QTo	JTo	TT	T9s	T8s	T7s	T6s	T5s	T4s	T3s	T2s
A9o	K9o	Q9o	J9o	T9o	99	98s	97s	96s	95s	94s	93s	92s
A8o	K8o	Q8o	J8o	T8o	98o	88	87s	86s	85s	84s	83s	82s
A7o	K7o	Q7o	J7o	T7o	97o	87o	77	76s	75s	74s	73s	72s
A6o	K6o	Q6o	J6o	T6o	96o	86o	76o	66	65s	64s	63s	62s
A5o	K5o	Q5o	J5o	T5o	95o	85o	75o	65o	55	54s	53s	52s
A4o	K4o	Q4o	J4o	T4o	94o	84o	74o	64o	54o	44	43s	42s
A3o	K3o	Q3o	J3o	T3o	93o	83o	73o	63o	53o	43o	33	32s
A2o	K2o	Q2o	J2o	T2o	92o	82o	72o	62o	52o	42o	32o	22

Notice this range is significantly wider than the early position range, but still not too crazy. If I have reason to believe my opponents will frequently reraise before the flop, I will tighten up a bit. If I expect my opponents to rarely reraise, I add in a few more hands with potential, such as all suited Aces and a few more suited connectors. It is important to realize that from early and middle position, hands like Q-Jo and A-8o should almost always be folded because it is likely you are dominated by someone yet to act who will not fold to a preflop raise. You will find that most small stakes players vastly overplay these hands because they perceive them to be strong whereas in reality, they are quite weak.

From the cutoff, this is my typical raising range.

AA	AKs	AQs	AJs	ATs	A9s	A8s	A7s	A6s	A5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AKo	KK	KQs	KJs	KTs	K9s	K8s	K7s	K6s	K5s	K4s	K3s	K2s
AQo	KQo	QQ	QJs	QTs	Q9s	Q8s	Q7s	Q6s	Q5s	Q4s	Q3s	Q2s
AJo	KJo	QJo	JJ	JTs	J9s	J8s	J7s	J6s	J5s	J4s	J3s	J2s
ATo	KTo	QTo	JTo	TT	T9s	T8s	T7s	T6s	T5s	T4s	T3s	T2s
A9o	K9o	Q9o	J9o	T9o	99	98s	97s	96s	95s	94s	93s	92s
A8o	K8o	Q8o	J8o	T8o	98o	88	87s	86s	85s	84s	83s	82s
A7o	K7o	Q7o	J7o	T7o	97o	87o	77	76s	75s	74s	73s	72s
A6o	K6o	Q6o	J6o	T6o	96o	86o	76o	66	65s	64s	63s	62s
A5o	K5o	Q5o	J5o	T5o	95o	85o	75o	65o	55	54s	53s	52s
A4o	K4o	Q4o	J4o	T4o	94o	84o	74o	64o	54o	44	43s	42s
A3o	K3o	Q3o	J3o	T3o	93o	83o	73o	63o	53o	43o	33	32s
A2o	K2o	Q2o	J2o	T2o	92o	82o	72o	62o	52o	42o	32o	22

From late position, my range is based much more on the players yet to act. Again, if I expect them to frequently reraise, I will tighten up. If I expect them to play in a tight, straightforward manner, I will raise an even wider range. If you expect the players yet to act to be overly tight, feel free to raise a significantly wider range.

From the button, this is my typical raising range.

AA	AKs	AQs	AJs	ATs	A9s	A8s	A7s	A6s	A5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AKo	KK	KQs	KJs	KTs	K9s	K8s	K7s	K6s	K5s	K4s	K3s	K2s
AQo	KQo	QQ	QJs	QTs	Q9s	Q8s	Q7s	Q6s	Q5s	Q4s	Q3s	Q2s
AJo	KJo	QJo	JJ	JTs	J9s	J8s	J7s	J6s	J5s	J4s	J3s	J2s
ATo	KTo	QTo	JTo	TT	T9s	T8s	T7s	T6s	T5s	T4s	T3s	T2s
A9o	K9o	Q9o	J9o	T9o	99	98s	97s	96s	95s	94s	93s	92s
A8o	K8o	Q8o	J8o	T8o	98o	88	87s	86s	85s	84s	83s	82s
A7o	K7o	Q7o	J7o	T7o	97o	87o	77	76s	75s	74s	73s	72s
A6o	K6o	Q6o	J6o	T6o	96o	86o	76o	66	65s	64s	63s	62s
A5o	K5o	Q5o	J5o	T5o	95o	85o	75o	65o	55	54s	53s	52s
A4o	K4o	Q4o	J4o	T4o	94o	84o	74o	64o	54o	44	43s	42s
A3o	K3o	Q3o	J3o	T3o	93o	83o	73o	63o	53o	43o	33	32s
A2o	K2o	Q2o	J2o	T2o	92o	82o	72o	62o	52o	42o	32o	22

Similar to the cutoff, my button raising range depends entirely on the players in the blinds. There are times when I have a fairly snug button raising range and other times when I raise any

two cards. Always quantify how you expect your opponents to react and then adjust your range accordingly.

From the small blind, your strategy should depend entirely on your opponent in the big blind. Limping becomes a reasonable option, especially if you think the Big Blind will play in a very straightforward manner. If you decide to limp with a wide range of junky hands, such as J-6o and 7-4o, you should also include some premium hands in your limping range so you are not easily exploited. If your opponent is somewhat tight, it is generally best to raise a wide range, perhaps as wide as any two cards, but that strategy is becoming much less effective as players have improved their big blind defending strategy over time. If your opponent is overly loose and aggressive, there is nothing wrong with simply folding your junk, opting instead to play most of your pots in position. I would approach a generic small blind situation by raising most of the time, but my strategy would be quite fluid, depending on my opponent.

In most small stakes games, the players in the blinds can agree to “chop”. This is where both blinds take back their money and move on to the next hand. Assuming the rake is low, perhaps \$4 at the most, I do not chop. If the rake is large, chopping becomes a good idea because, even with masterful play, you cannot overcome the house’s edge. While I have numerous reasons for why you should typically not chop, the main reason is because you should get experience playing out of position and short-handed. If you never get experience in these situations, you will be ill-prepared for when you move up to the higher stakes games, where the blinds rarely chop. You will also find that the vast majority of the \$1/\$2 player pool is completely unaware of how to play blind versus blind. Some players will be too loose while others will be too tight. If you work hard on this aspect of your game, you will be able to hold your own from the small blind and win a large amount when you are in the big blind.

### When your opponents will call large preflop raises

Occasionally, you will find yourself in a game where your opponents are willing to call your preflop raises with an extraordinarily wide range. Some of these players will be completely oblivious to your preflop raise size. They will stop at nothing to see a flop with the entire range of hands they deem playable. These are the easiest players in the game to beat. All you have to do is wait around for a value hand and then apply significant pressure.

Imagine you are in a game where your opponents will call up to \$30 before the flop with the top 30% of hands. You should raise huge with your premium hands, perhaps 9-9+ and A-J+, and raise smaller, perhaps to the “standard” \$6 with your Broadway and drawing hands. This will result in you getting as much money in the pot as possible when you have a huge edge while having the possibility of playing a huge pot postflop when you improve to a premium hand. Be aware most players will quickly figure out this simple strategy and will adjust by only playing strong hands against you. I also do not think there are many players who will call a 15 big blind preflop raise with hands like K-8o whereas many would likely call a 3 big blind raise. However, I



recognize that some games are extremely soft, especially in locations where poker is relatively new. I will discuss how to attack limpers and how to play postflop versus these players in a later section, but for now, realize that almost all of your value from these players will come from piling your chips in when you have what is usually the best hand.

### When you get reraised

When you raise and get reraised, you must figure out the probable range of the reraiser. If the reraiser is tight, meaning he will only reraise with A-A, K-K, Q-Q, J-J, A-K, and A-Q, you should fold all but your best hands. If a tight reraiser uses a huge bet size, for example, reraising to \$45 over your initial \$6 raise, simply fold and wait until you pick up A-A or K-K. This section will assume your opponent makes a “standard” reraise to between \$16 and \$24. With A-A and K-K, you should almost always be happy getting your stack in. With Q-Q, J-J, and A-K, your play should vary drastically depending on your opponent’s willingness to get all-in with good, but not amazing, hands, such as T-T and A-Q. If your opponent will stack off with T-T and A-Q, getting in with J-J and A-K is great, but if he will only reraise and get all-in with A-A and K-K, you are best off calling with those hands, opting to see what develops after the flop.

### When the reraiser is tight

If the reraiser is tight and you have a marginal hand, such as A-J or K-Q, it is usually prudent to fold before the flop to anything larger than a tiny raise (perhaps \$13 over your \$6 raise). For example, if you raise to \$6 with K-Q and face a reraise from a tight player to \$24, you should certainly fold. Moreover, you will find that almost no one in small stakes games folds in this situation. This is a major leak of the entire player pool. When you are usually dominated or in a situation where you will have large reverse implied odds, meaning you will either lose a large pot or win a small one, you should fold.

Notice what happens when you call a tight player’s reraise with K-Q and you flop top pair. If the flop comes K-6-4, your opponent will be willing to get all-in with A-A, K-K, and A-K. He will probably only put in a small amount of money with J-J, T-T, and A-Q before giving up. If it comes Q-7-3, he will put his stack in with A-A, K-K, Q-Q, and A-Q, all of which crush you, while putting in very little with J-J, T-T, and A-K. Notice your opponent will always know where he stands whereas you will be in the dark. Of course, when you completely miss the flop, you will have to fold. You want to avoid high reverse implied odds situations at all costs. A-J, K-J, and Q-J all fall into the category of having high reverse implied odds. Avoid playing large pots against strong ranges with these hands whenever possible. Even though these hands are normally “strong”, when your opponent’s range is overly tight, these are some of the worst hands you can play.

When facing a tight player’s reraise, it is important to recognize which hands have been demoted to “drawing hands”: 9-9, 2-2, A-Js, A-2s, K-Qs, and 8-7s are all reasonable hands to call a reraise with, assuming you are getting the proper implied odds. Remember, with pairs you want to get at least 10:1 and with suited connectors and suited Aces, you want to get at least

20:1. Assuming \$200 effective stacks, if you raise to \$7 and your tight opponent reraises to \$30, you should fold all drawing hands because you are only getting 8.7:1 implied odds ( $(200/(30-7)) = 8.7:1$  implied odds). You must have the discipline to recognize when you are not getting the proper implied odds, even with hands that are normally quite strong. Of course, when you have a junky hand, you should always fold.

#### When the reraiser is loose

Your strategy should be quite different when the reraiser is loose, compared to when he is tight. If he is willing to reraise with a wide range, perhaps any pair, any Broadway hand, any A-x, and various suited hands, the biggest error you can make is to fold too often.

With your premium hands, it is usually best to 4-bet, assuming your opponent will not fold too often. You should go out of your way to ensure he feels roped into the pot. For example, if you raise to \$6 with A-A and your loose opponent reraises to \$20, you should usually 4-bet to \$40 then make a \$32 postflop continuation bet on most boards. Of course, if he figures out this bet sizing tendency, you should either use a similar sizing with your entire range or switch to reraising tiny almost exclusively as a bluff, at least until he figures out your adjustment. You will know your opponent has figured out your bet sizing tendency when he stops paying you off when you have strong hands.

As an aside, the term “3-bet” comes from the now defunct game of Limit Hold’em. The first bet is the big blind, the second bet, or the “2-bet”, is the initial raise, and the third bet, the “3-bet”, is the reraise. A “4-bet” is a reraise of the reraise.

With your premium hands, you have the option of just calling your opponent’s reraise. Do not be afraid to call with your premium hands. While you will occasionally get outdrawn, you ensure your opponent stays in the pot. This guarantees that he has the opportunity to commit a major postflop blunder. Suppose you raise to \$6 with Q-Q and a loose player reraises to \$22 in position. You know he will fold all of his junky hands, which you think make up a large part of his range, to any 4-bet. This is an excellent spot to call, especially if he will make multiple postflop bluffs because he assumes you will not have a premium hand, given you didn’t 4-bet preflop. If you 4-bet this type of player, you allow him to get off the hook with a minimal loss.

When you have a good, but not amazing hand, such as A-J or K-Q, it is usually best to just call a loose player’s reraise. When you call in this situation, your goal should not be to fold every time you miss. When you flop any sort of equity, which will often be the case when you have a gutshot straight draw or better, you should at least check-call and occasionally check-push all-in. Suppose you raise with K♥-Q♥ to \$6 and one of these players raises to \$22 out of his \$200 stack. You call. The flop comes J♥-9♠-6♦, giving you a gutshot straight draw, backdoor flush draw, and overcards. You should check, giving your opponent the chance to bluff. If your opponent makes any bet larger than perhaps \$20, you should strongly consider going all-in. You

will win the pot every time your opponent has nothing, which will often be the case due to him having a wide range. Even if you get called, you will usually have a decent amount of equity. Notice that even against A-J (top pair, top kicker) you will win 40% of the time.

When you have a drawing hand and face an aggressive reraiser, your play depends primarily on the implied odds you are getting and how wide your opponent's range is. It is important to realize that A-Js and 8-8 are value hands that should rarely be folded when facing a loose reraiser, whereas they are marginal drawing hands when facing a tight reraiser. Assuming you are not getting the proper implied odds to call with traditional drawing hands, such as small pairs, suited Aces, and suited connectors, you should strongly consider reraising as a bluff or folding. You can also make this play as a bluff with your hands containing a blocker, primarily A-x and K-x.

Reraising as a bluff with a big card in your hand is referred to as reraising with a "blocker". The presence of a big card in your hand makes it less likely that your opponent has a premium hand. For example, when you have an Ace in your hand, your opponent will have A-A half as often, as compared to when you don't. The reason for this is that there are six combinations of A-A and you have removed three of them. Similarly, he will only have A-K 75% as often since there are 16 combinations of A-K and you've removed four of them.

Suppose you raise 2-2, A-7s, or K-5s to \$6 out of your \$200 stack from middle position and a loose player reraises from the button to \$20. This is an excellent spot to reraise to \$48 with the intention of folding if your opponent goes all-in, assuming you think he will only be willing to 5-bet all-in with premium hands. If he calls your 4-bet, you can make a relatively small continuation bet of \$32 on the flop and usually steal the pot every time he misses.

Be aware that if your opponent is a calling station, these bluffs are not ideal. Simply wait for premium hands before putting money in the pot. Having a balanced range containing a mixture of value hands and bluffs is a skill you must master if you want to succeed at the high stakes games. The main way you will profit from small stakes games is by having the patience and discipline to build large pots with your strong hands while getting out of the way with your weak hands. Fancy plays are not necessary; they will simply get you in trouble.

### When there is a raise before you

Frequently, there will be a raise before the action gets to you. This section outlines my default strategy for when everyone folds to someone, who makes a preflop raise, then everyone between you and the raiser folds, with no one calling in between.

It is important to figure out the preflop raiser's range and tailor your strategy accordingly. For example, if you know the raiser loves to limp with all his marginal and junky hands while only raising with his premium hands, you should assign him a tight range when he raises, even

though he limps almost every hand. Do not fall into the habit of thinking “this guy sees lots of flops, so he must be weak every time he puts money in the pot.”

Some players (but certainly not all) adjust their ranges based on their position. Most competent players play a tight range from early position and a loose range from late position. Most super-tight players play only premium hands from every position. Some maniacs are willing to raise with any two cards from any position. It is not uncommon to find two different players who have drastically different ranges when they raise, even though they raise with the exact same percentage of hands. One player may raise with the top 15% of hands from all positions whereas the other player may raise with 5% of hands from early position, 10% of hands from middle position, 25% of hands from the cutoff, and 40% of hands from the button. Do not fool yourself into thinking all “reasonably active” players have the same range in all situations.

As a mild over-simplification, hands can be broken down into strong hands (premium pairs and premium big cards), marginal hands (junk big cards and A-x), drawing hands (small pairs, suited connectors, and suited Aces), and weak hands (anything else). It is important to develop a strategy for playing each type of hand against the various players you will encounter on a regular basis. The following sections will discuss how to play each type of hand against generic tight raisers and loose raisers.

It is worth noting that some players will make gigantic preflop raises with their entire range, perhaps as large as \$30. Against most of these players, unless you have a strong hand, perhaps 7-7+, A-J+, and K-Q, you should simply fold and wait for a better spot. If you find yourself in a game where everyone makes huge raises, sit back and wait for premium hands. At that point, the blinds effectively do not matter. You are in a game where all you have to do is wait for a premium hand, then pile in your money. Do not fall into the habit of calling \$15 raises with the same range of hands with which you call \$6 raises. Failing to account for preflop bet sizing is a huge leak of most small stakes players.

#### When a tight player raises

When you have a premium hand versus a tight raiser, you must realize that some normally premium hands, such as A-Q and J-J, become less than premium. This should lead you to call with most of your strong hands, besides A-A and K-K, unless you can confidently reraise with the intention of folding if 4-bet. For example, if you have J-J and face a raise from a tight player who you expect to have a tight range, you can 3-bet with the intention of folding if he 4-bets, because you know with a high degree of certainty that he will call with hands you beat, such as 9-9 and A-J, and reraise with hands that beat you, such as A-A and Q-Q. While reraising for information is rarely the correct play, when you are against an overly tight opponent, the information you receive will usually be accurate. With A-A and K-K, it is almost always an error to not reraise and get all-in. If your K-K happens to run into A-A, that is simply bad luck.

As for bet sizing, when deciding to 3-bet a tight raiser for value, you can get away with making a larger than normal 3-bet because your opponent will be incapable of folding his reasonably strong hands, which should be his entire preflop raising range. For example, if a tight player raises to \$8 out of his \$200 stack, feel free to reraise to \$28 with A-A because your opponent is unlikely to fold any part of his range. Of course, if you think he will be disciplined and fold, you should revert to a standard sizing of \$22.

When you have a marginal hand, such as A-J, K-Q, and J-T, versus a tight raiser, you have to figure out how you fare versus the range. If your opponent is raising with a legitimately tight range of only big pairs and premium big cards, you should fold your marginal hands because they will be dominated most of the time. It may feel incredibly nitty to fold K-Q to a preflop raise, but it is often the correct play when your opponent is abnormally tight. If your opponent is a bit looser, willing to raise with most pairs, most big cards, and lots of suited connectors, you should tend to call with these hands. You should consider turning some of them, mainly the ones that are a bit too weak to call, such as A-9 and K-T, into bluffs by reraising exactly as you would with your premium hands. This will add a few bluffs to your range and make you more difficult to play against. Of course, if your opponent will never fold to your 3-bet and be quite willing to call multiple postflop bets, having lots of bluffs in your range is a bad idea. Do not attempt to bluff someone who is not capable of folding.

With your drawing hands that have large implied odds, such as 2-2 and 8-7s, you should almost always call the preflop raise of a tight player. If your opponent is incapable of folding an overpair after the flop, you desperately want to see as many flops as possible with hands that have huge implied odds. If you flop two pair or better, you are almost certain to stack your opponent.

With your junky hands (which is any hand not covered already) you should simply fold. Hands like A-5, K-9, and 9-8 are simply not playable versus tight raisers, especially when they make large preflop raises. The last thing you want to do is call a raise with A-5, flop top pair, and then have to call multiple bets with a marginal bluff catcher.

When I first started playing poker in 2003, everyone in my local game thought you had to play any hand containing an Ace because it is the best card in the deck. Once I figured out the concept of reverse implied odds, I started to fold my weak Aces, particularly when facing a raise from a tight player. My win rate went through the roof. Especially against tight players, do not feel obligated to play any hand simply because it is normally considered to be strong. If your opponent's range is A-A, K-K, Q-Q, J-J, and A-K, hands like A-Q and T-T are in horrible shape.

#### [When a loose player raises](#)

When you have a premium hand versus a loose raiser, you should play aggressively, assuming your opponent will believe you are reraising with more than just the most premium hands. If you have been overly tight, you should strongly consider calling with your premium hands

because most competent players will prudently fold to your aggression. All in all, in a generic small stakes game, unless you make a gigantic raise, most players will call your reraise with almost their entire range in order to see a flop.

For example, if an active player raises to \$8 at \$1/\$2 and you have J-J, you should usually reraise to about \$22. This will put your opponent in a miserable situation. While he should almost certainly fold and concede his initial raise, many players will call with their entire preflop raising range. If your opponent 4-bets to \$60, you should usually fold unless both you and your opponent have reasonably active images. You will find that very few players 4-bet in small stakes cash games without the intention of getting all-in. Against a "standard" range, worthy of getting all-in, A-A, K-K, Q-Q, and A-K, your J-J only has 36% equity. A-K only has 38% equity. This means that you should typically fold these hands when 4-bet unless you have a good reason to believe your opponent will 4-bet with more than only premium hands. If you are unsure whether your opponent will 4-bet in a face-up manner, you should call the initial preflop raise with hands you are not willing to get all-in. You do not have to reraise every time you are dealt a typically strong hand. Think ahead in order to avoid situations where you will be unsure of how to proceed.

While your marginal hands should be played in a cautious manner against tight raisers, they should be played much more aggressively against loose raisers. This is because loose raisers will be involved with numerous hands that are dominated by marginal big cards. Typically, this should lead you to reraise hands like A-J, K-Q, and Q-T when facing a raise from a loose opener. You should reraise these hands exactly as you would your premium hands. While it may feel risky to reraise with Q-T, you will find that most of the time, the initial raiser will call and then check-fold the flop to your half pot continuation bet when he misses. This will result in you scooping these pots about 60% of the time due to your fold equity. When combined with the fact that you will make the best hand sometimes, this play is hugely profitable.

As a simple example of this concept, imagine what happens when a loose player raises, you call with K-J, and the flop comes T-8-4. Your opponent is going to make a standard continuation bet and you are going to fold. Instead, if he raises to \$7 and you 3-bet to \$20, he is going to call preflop and then check-fold to your continuation bet on T-8-4 when he fails to improve.

Just as against tight raisers, you should look to flop a strong made hand or draw with your drawing hands. The only time you should consider reraising preflop with your drawing hands is when the initial raise comes from late position and you expect your opponent to frequently call your reraise and then check-fold the flop. This is because your opponent probably doesn't have a hand that can pay you off if you improve to a premium hand after the flop, meaning you don't actually have huge implied odds. Turning these drawing hands into preflop semi-bluffs (an aggressive action with a hand that is probably not best at the moment but could easily improve to be the best on a future street) is probably a better play. Notice that this situation is similar to when you have a marginal hand and reraise a loose raiser, except drawing hands have a realistic chance of flopping the nuts.

With your junky hands, you should generally fold. The only time you should consider playing junk is when you expect the initial raiser to fold if you reraise. Suppose a loose raiser makes it \$8 from the cutoff and you are in the small blind with A-6, K-5, or 9-8. None of these hands are strong enough to call. Therefore, if you expect to have a large amount of fold equity, meaning you think the initial raiser will fold most of the time to your reraise either because you have a tight image or you expect your opponent's range to be full of trash, you should reraise. From out of position, you should reraise a bit larger than normal to discourage action because you want to avoid playing large pots from out of position. So, make it \$28 or \$32. This will frequently result in your opponent folding. When he elects to call, you can make a continuation bet of \$30 on most flops and frequently steal the pot. If your opponent doesn't fold, you should generally only continue bluffing when a scary card comes on the turn or when you have improved to a strong hand. Remember that it is perfectly acceptable to concede the pot when it is clear your opponent has a strong hand which he isn't going to fold.

#### When there is a raise and a caller

When there is a raise and one caller before the action gets to you, your main focus should be on the initial raiser's range. Again, you have to assess if he is raising with a tight or loose range. You usually don't have to worry too much about the caller because unless he is overly tight and passive, he probably would have reraised if he had a strong hand.

When the raiser has a tight range, you should still reraise with your premium hands, A-A, K-K, Q-Q, and A-K and you should tend to make a reraise that is a bit smaller than the size of the pot. With your strong hands, such as J-J, T-T, 9-9, and A-Q, as well as your more marginal hands, it is usually best to call and see what develops. While there is a bit of value in protecting your strong, but not amazing, hands, you will find that most of your value comes from flopping top pair or better before investing too much money. Remember that most of your value from small stakes cash games will come from extracting maximum value from your strong made hands, not bloating the pot preflop when you are slightly ahead. You should also call with all of your drawing hands. With your hands that are usually dominated, such as A-9, K-10, 8-6, and 7-3, you should fold. There is no point in getting involved with hands that are drawing thin.

When the raiser has a loose range, you can consider getting a bit out of line, especially if the initial raiser is prone to fold when reraised. If he calls a reraise with his entire opening range, you should tend to reraise primarily for value, although you must recognize that your value range will be much wider compared to when you face a tight raiser.

If the initial raiser folds most of his hands to a pot sized reraise, feel free to get out of line as often as possible, at least until you think your opponent has adjusted. Hands like A-x and K-x are excellent candidates to reraise because they are too weak to call and see a flop, even against a loose opener. You should strongly consider reraising a bit larger with your bluffs, perhaps to 1.2 times the size of the pot, compared to your value hands. You will find that most

players are unaware of changes you make to your bet sizing. They see a large bet and think “too rich for my blood!” They see a reasonable bet and think “I can afford that.” Of course, if your opponents are paying attention, you should probably size all your bets the same. However, given that most of your opponents will not recognize your bet sizing adjustments, you should experiment with getting out of line.

Once it becomes clear that the initial raiser will rarely fold to any reasonably sized reraise, you should reraise to that size exclusively for value. Hands as weak as A-T and K-J can be reraised against this type of opponent because they will call with many inferior hands. Of course, once the initial raiser calls your reraise, the caller will be somewhat prone to see a flop as well. However, if you frequently have your opponents dominated, you should not mind three-way action. As long as you play intelligently after the flop, you should welcome investing a reasonable amount of money before the flop when you tend to have at least one of your opponents dominated.

Marginal high card hands are difficult to play versus players who will frequently call reasonably sized reraises. If your opponent generally folds to a large reraise, turning hands like A-8 and K-9 into bluffs by reraising large is probably the best play. If your opponent calls almost any reraise, you can profitably call with these hands, assuming you play well after the flop. You must be aware that when you flop top pair, you do not have the nuts. When you flop top pair, you should call one or two postflop bets but then concede the pot to additional aggression. As in most situations, you should call with your drawing hands and fold your junk.

It is important to recognize that some preflop callers only call raises with strong hands. Against these callers, you should be less inclined to reraise with your bluffs and instead only reraise for value. If you expect the caller to be abnormally strong, you should only reraise with only premium hands. Always be sure to account for each player in the pot because the presence of one specific player could drastically change the way you approach a situation.

As I said before, when there is a raise and multiple callers, you should focus primarily on the initial raiser. Again, this is because if any of the callers had a premium hand, they would typically reraise. Given that there will be more dead, or almost dead, money in the pot, you should be even more inclined to make a squeeze play with your hands that do not flop well, such as A-x and K-x. You should also reraise your premium hands for value. I urge you to experiment with various bet sizes to determine if there is an amount you can regularly reraise to that steals the pot preflop. If you can routinely steal the pot with a bluff by reraising to \$47 when a loose player raises to \$7 and three people call, you will scoop up lots of dead money in the long run. While this play may feel quite risky (because you are investing 1/4<sup>th</sup> of your 100 big blind stack), it only needs to succeed 60% of the time to show an immediate profit; and that profit will be greater when you flop a hand you can continue with. You will find that \$47 is “too expensive” for most players.



### When there are limpers

In small stakes cash games, it is quite common to see numerous players limp with a wide range. This is because most players want to see if the flop connects with their hole cards before folding. It is important to realize that players limp with varying ranges. In order to take advantage of their weak play, you must figure out the limpers' tendencies and adjust accordingly.

Most players who limp preflop will raise their premium hands, limp their marginal and junky hands, and fold complete trash. These players are comfortable raising hands like A-J and K-Q but are uneasy about raising with "marginal" hands such as K-J and 9-7s. When these players limp, you can effectively remove the top 10% of hands from their range. This means that they will often fold to a sizable preflop raise and when they don't, at best they will flop a marginal hand such as top pair with a mediocre kicker.

Other limpers limp with their entire playable hand range, either because they realize removing the top part of their range is not a good idea or because they are blatantly passive. These players could easily have premium hands in their range, even when they limp and then call your preflop raise. You must proceed with a bit more caution against these players.

It is also important to realize that some limpers limp with a small range of both monsters and some reasonably playable hands, such as A-A, 3-3, A-4s, and 7-6s, from early position but a wide range from late position, such as K-7, 8-6 and 6-3. You must adjust your strategy according to the range you expect them to have in each position.

### When there is one limper

Your strategy when facing one limper depends primarily on the limper's probable range, the limper's position, your position, your image, and your hand. Your position is important because if you are in early position, you have to worry about everyone else at the table waking up with a strong hand whereas if you are in late position, you only have to worry about the few remaining players. Your image is important because if your opponents expect you to raise their limps frequently with a wide range, they will adjust and fight back. If they expect you to play in a blatantly straightforward manner, raising when you have premium hands and calling with everything else, you should actively look for spots where you can steal their limps.

For example, if you have a tight, straightforward image, when a weak player limps at \$1/\$2 from middle position and the action folds to you, regardless of your position, you should strongly consider raising to an amount you expect your opponent will frequently fold to with hands that flop poorly, such as A-4, K-6, and Q-4. If you think your opponent will always call a raise to \$8 but will usually fold to a raise to \$12, make it \$12. If you happen to have a premium hand and want action, then you should simply raise to \$8. Obviously if your opponents figure out this strategy, you should adjust to a more balanced strategy of raising to the same amount

with all of the hands you plan to play (probably to \$12 because you will have more stealing opportunities than premium hands). If instead of a tight image, you have a maniacal image or your opponents will not allow you to easily push them around, you should never bluff and instead raise almost entirely for value.

It is vitally important that you be aware of your image at the table and then make plays designed to take advantage of your image. If your opponents expect you to raise with a wide range, tighten up. If they expect you to be overly tight, steal whenever you have the opportunity. Realize that your opponents only know what they see. If you have raised or reraised four times in the last orbit but have yet to show down a hand, your opponents will think you are crazy even if you have had premium hands every time. If you think that your opponents think you are tight, whereas in reality, they think you are crazy, you will make significant errors. That being said, in small stakes games, some players aren't aware of image concerns at all. Don't overthink yourself. While your image is a huge concern, the rest of this section will assume you have a relatively generic image of being reasonably in line most of the time.

#### *When facing a limper from early position*

When facing one limper from early position who has a wide range and you are also in early position, you should tend to raise with your reasonably strong hands, such as 9-9, A-J, and K-Q, and call with your drawing hands, such as 4-4 and 7-6s. You should almost always fold your junky hands, such as A-x and 9-7. With your marginal hands, such as K-J and J-T, your play depends on what you expect the players yet to act to do. If you expect them to frequently raise, assuming both you and the initial limper must be weak, you should either raise or fold these hands. While folding is a bit tight, it will keep you from playing out of position with hands that are easily dominated. If you expect the players yet to act to also limp with a wide range, you should limp with your marginal hands because the limping ranges of the players behind you will contain many hands you dominate.

It is important to notice that limping with marginal hands will often result in you flopping a marginal top pair in a multiway pot. For example, suppose a weak limper limps from early position and you call from early position with K-Js. Four other players limp, including the blinds. The flop comes K-T-5. Your hand's value will vary wildly based on your opponents' actions. For example, if it is checked to the initial limper and he bets, you have an easy call. If everyone checks to you, you have an easy bet. If the Small Blind bets, the Big Blind calls, and the initial limper raises, you have an easy fold. Do not fall into the trap of blindly playing a large pot every time you make top pair.

When facing one limper from early position who has a wide range and you are in middle or late position, you should be more inclined to raise with a wide range because there are fewer players yet to act. You should tend to raise your entire range of playable hands, including junky

hands like A-x and 9-7. This will result in your raising range being primarily hands that have the limper dominated, plus a few bluffs. As discussed earlier, you should strongly consider tailoring your bet size to induce the action you want. Limping behind with a drawing hands is acceptable, although raising in order to play a heads-up pot in position is usually the best play.

When facing one limper from early position who has a wide range and you are in the small blind, you should limp with a wide range of hands that are not strong enough to raise for value. Your raising range should depend almost entirely on how wide the limper's range is and how you expect him to play postflop. If he is difficult to play against after the flop, usually because he will not play blatantly straightforwardly, you should raise with only premium and other strong hands, such as 9-9, A-J, and K-Q. If he frequently folds to your preflop raise or calls and then plays straightforwardly after the flop, you can raise a bit wider, such as with hands like A-9, K-T, and Q-J. You should tend to limp with your marginal hands and drawing hands. You can also limp with some of your junky hands, such as A-2, K-7, 8-6, and 5-4, purely due to your pot odds. However, be careful with hands containing one big card and one small card as those have huge reverse implied odds, meaning when you flop a decent hand like top pair, you will usually lose a large pot or win a tiny one.

Suppose a bad limper who will fold to a large raise limps from early position. Everyone folds around to you in the small blind. You should tend to raise with a wide range because unless the Big Blind wakes up with a hand, you will steal the pot. With your value hands, such as 9-9, A-J, and K-Q, you should consider raising a bit smaller to induce the limper to call. Remember, you don't want to force your opponents to fold when you have them crushed. If you happen to know the limper will call a reasonably sized raise with his entire range and then play straightforwardly after the flop, you should consider raising to \$10 with a wide range with the intention of continuation betting \$12 on most flops. While you will have very little preflop fold equity, you will have a lot of postflop fold equity. It may feel risky to let your opponent see a flop with a wide range, but if you manage to steal the \$22 pot 65% of the time on the flop, this play will be hugely profitable. If your opponent plays reasonably well after the flop, you should be content to steal the pot before the flop by making a larger raise.

When facing one limper from early position who has a wide range and you are in the big blind, it is usually best to check unless you think the limper will concede the pot to a preflop raise or to a preflop raise plus a flop continuation bet. If your opponents routinely let you see a free flop from the big blind, you don't want to do anything to discourage that. For this reason, I tend not to get too out of line versus limpers from the big blind.

If you happen to face a weak limper and you check from the big blind, your postflop play depends on your opponent's strategy. You will find that most weak limpers will simply bet when they have something and check when they have nothing. When you miss the flop against this type of player, check and see what develops. If your opponent also checks, you should usually bet the turn and the river, hopefully making your opponent think you have top pair. If

your opponent will blindly bet the flop with his entire range because he assumes that when you check you must be weak, consider check-raising when you have any sort of equity.

For example, suppose one of these players limps and you check in the big blind with K♥-5♥ or T-9. The flop comes J♠-7♥-4♦. Notice that both of these hands have a decent amount of equity but not quite enough to justify check-calling. You check and your opponent bets \$3 into the \$5 pot. This is an excellent spot to check-raise to \$9. This applies significant pressure and will usually force your opponent to fold unless he has top pair, which he should rarely have if he continuation bets with almost his entire range when checked to. If he calls your check-raise and you do not improve to a hand that beats top pair or you do not drastically improve the quality of your draw on the turn, you should usually give up. Be aware that some players are willing to call a flop check-raise with an overly wide range, such as any pair, any draw, Ace high or overcards. Against these players, check-raising the flop is not the ideal strategy unless you plan to continue firing on the turn and river. Lots of amateurs have an arbitrary rule in their head not to lose a lot of money in a limped pot. If you can find players who will fold most of their range on the turn or river to a reasonable amount of aggression, you will scoop up way more than your fair share of these pots.

When facing one limper from early position who has a tight range and you are also in early position, you should only raise with your premium hands. This is because the initial limper's hand is usually strong and when it isn't, you have to worry about everyone else at the table waking up with a premium holding. You should call with your drawing hands, as you stand to win a decent pot when you connect well with the flop. With your marginal hands, such as A-9 and K-T, you should fold because you are too likely to be dominated.

With your good, but non-nut hands, such as A-J and K-Q, you should vary your play based on how tight you think the limper is. If you expect him to limp with only premium hands, you should limp along. If you expect him to limp with a reasonably wide range including premium hands, pairs, big cards, and suited connectors, you should raise for value. Your play should typically vary the most when you have borderline situations. This is where adjusting your strategy based on your reads becomes vital.

It is worth mentioning that some players will limp with a snug range and when they get raised, they reraise with their nut hands and call with their non-nut hands. These are the prime players to raise with hands like A-T and K-J because they will reraise when you are crushed and call when they are crushed. By making a reasonable raise, perhaps to \$8 preflop over their \$2 limp, you will get accurate information and also have a good chance to play a bloated pot in position when you have your opponent dominated. Of course, when you are limp-reraised by this type of opponent when holding hands like A-T and K-J, you should fold.

When facing one limper from early position who has a tight range and you are in middle or late position, you should continue to play as if you were in early position. The limper's strategy is

the main factor that determines your play. If your opponent frequently has a strong hand, there is no point in getting out of line.

When facing one limper from early position who has a tight range and you are in the small or big blind, you should be happy to see a cheap flop with all decent hands. Especially when you are out of position against a strong range, you only want to raise when you have your opponent in bad shape. Do not be afraid to play a cheap flop out of position, even with a hand that is normally strong, such as A-J. Having a “strong” hand is not a good enough reason to raise. I recognize I am suggesting you play overly tight when facing a tight limper. You must also constantly quantify your opponents, so you can adjust your strategy if it becomes clear that they have a limping range that is reasonably wide. If you play as if one of your opponents is a tight limper whereas in reality he is a loose limper, you will leave significant money on the table.

#### *When facing a limper from middle or late position*

When facing one limper from middle or late position who has a wide range and you are also in middle or late position, you should tend to raise with all your playable hands and some of your junky hands in order to either get the pot heads-up or to steal the pot preflop. Hands such as A-A, 2-2, A-Q, A-3, K-T, K-5, Q-J, Q-9, and suited connectors should all be raised. Notice this range is quite wide. You must actively be aware of your image so you don't induce your opponents to make intelligent adjustments. If you have been abusing your opponent a lot recently and he is getting fed up, pass on a spot to raise as a steal with a marginal hand. If you have not raised as a steal in a while, or at all, strongly consider doing it.

When facing one limper from middle or late position who has a wide range and you are in the small or big blind, it is usually best to see a cheap flop with all of your non-premium hands. With your best hands, you should still raise for value. Of course, if you think you can make a sizable raise or a raise plus a continuation bet as a bluff and steal the pot a huge portion of the time, feel free to attempt that bluff.

When facing one limper from middle or late position who has a tight range and you are also in middle or late position, you should be a bit more willing to raise with your high card hands, such as A-T and K-J, because your opponent's range is probably wider compared to when he limps from early position. Raising to play a bloated heads-up pot in position will tend to work in your favor. Granted, unless your opponent will frequently fold to your preflop raise or your preflop raise plus continuation bet, it is probably not a good idea to raise with blocker hands, A-x and K-x.

As when the limper is in early position, when facing one limper from middle or late position who has a tight range, you should be content to see a cheap flop from the small or big blind. You want to play big pots in position and small pots out of position.

Even against only one limper, there is a lot to consider. You should be constantly assessing your opponent's limping range, his strategy when faced with aggression, your position, and your image. If you are keenly aware of these factors, you will be able to approach each situation intelligently.

#### When there are multiple limpers

When multiple players limp, your main concern should be the strategy of the initial limper, just like when you are facing a raise and multiple callers. This is because most players tend to raise with their premium and reasonably strong hands when someone limps in front of them. This should lead you to assume the additional limpers have weak ranges. Although, some players limp with their entire range whenever possible. They happily limp behind with hands like J-J or A-K, hoping to flop well before investing significant money. This section will assume the initial limper, as well as the other limpers, have weak ranges. If they have premium ranges, you should play in a cautious manner, namely raising with your premium hands, limping your decent high card hands and drawing hands, and folding everything else. Remember, if someone's range is abnormally strong, there is no need to get out of line.

With your premium hands, you should raise for value. Even if you know the initial limper has a strong range, you should raise with your best hands. As the limpers become more prone to have wide ranges, your value range should widen. If a strong limper limps from first position and three people call, you should not raise T-T and A-Q if you expect to frequently get reraised. If you expect most of your opponents to limp and then call your raise with a wide range of junky hands, you can raise hands as weak as 7-7, A-T, and K-J for value.

As discussed earlier, you should experiment with adjusting your bet size to get the result you desire. If you want everyone to fold, raise large, and if you want them to call, raise to a bit less than the size of the pot. Remember, to figure out the amount of a pot sized raise, multiply the last bet by three then add any additional money that is in the pot. So, if four players limp and you want to raise the size of the pot from the button, make it  $\$2(3) + \$3 + \$2 + \$2 + \$2 = \$15$ . In general, if you want your opponents to fold, raise a touch larger, and if you want them to call, raise a bit smaller.

With your marginal high card hands, such as Q-J and J-T, feel free to limp along. As long as you play well after the flop and do not overplay top pair with a marginal kicker, these hands are quite profitable to limp. As your hand gets weaker, such as when you have Q-9, J-8, or T-9, you must proceed with a bit more caution because the hands you are likely to flop will be weaker. If your opponents are overly weak, you can limp along with these hands, but in order to do so, you have to expect to have a sizable postflop edge.

Be more willing to see flops with all drawing hands, even those as weak as K-2s and 8-5s, but realize that all draws are not created equal after the flop. For example, if four people limp and

you limp along with 8♥-5♥, if the flop comes K♥-9♥-4♦, the initial limper bets, and all the other limpers call, unless they are known to call with all sorts of junk, you should strongly consider folding. This is because it is too likely that someone has a better flush draw than you. While folding a flush draw on the flop may seem a bit premature, it will allow you to sidestep a huge reverse implied odds situation. Notice if you make your flush on the turn and your opponents all have top pair and worse, which will frequently be the case, they will check-fold. If someone else has a larger flush, they will bet and you will be handcuffed into calling down. This is not a situation you want to be in.

Some players love to raise small over multiple limpers when they have drawing hands, thinking that if they connect well with the flop, they will be able to easily get their stacks in. I do not like this play because you will occasionally get limp-reraised, forcing you to fold a strong drawing hand. Also, there is no need to build the size of the pot preflop because it is usually not too difficult to play a significant pot when you flop a premium hand due to most players' unwillingness to fold top pair. You should be content to see a cheap flop when you have a drawing hand.

As more players limp, you should become more willing to raise with blocker hands, A-x and K-x, assuming the initial limper is weak and the other players are not known to limp behind with premium hands. Raising with a blocker against multiple opponents is a strong play because you can justify making a large raise relative to the size of the pot, and unless your opponents have strong hands, they will probably fold. However, if your opponents rarely fold to large preflop raises, you should take this play out of your arsenal because it will frequently fail. If you raise with blockers and one person calls, you should make a roughly 35% pot continuation bet on most flops. This will usually result in your opponent playing in a straightforward manner because most players will think you are "obviously" trying to get action, based on your small bet size. If multiple limpers call your preflop raise and you miss the flop, you should check-fold unless the board is very dry, such as A-7-2 or K-8-4. In that situation, if it is checked to you, you can make a relatively small bet.

If you hit top pair when you raise the limpers with blockers, you should usually go into pot control mode (checking with the intention of getting to showdown cheaply). This is because it is reasonably likely that if a lot of money goes in the pot after the flop, your opponent will have your top pair, bad kicker beat. Suppose you raise with A-2 over multiple limpers and your opponents have some combination of 8-8, 7-7, A-J, K-Q, Q-9, and 9-8. The flop comes A-7-4. When your opponents have nothing, they will be drawing thin, meaning you don't mind if they see a free turn. When they have you crushed, they will never fold. This is an ideal time to try to see a cheap showdown. There is no need to bet for value or protection when your opponents are either drawing thin or have hands that crush you, which they will never fold.

## Limp-reraising

It is quite common to see players limp and then reraise in small stakes cash games. These players usually have either very tight or very wide ranges. Some players limp with a wide range and then reraise with their best hands and call with their marginal hands. More maniacal players limp-reraise with their premium hands and sporadic bluffs. If you expect your opponent to only limp-reraise with his best hands, you should continue with a very snug range when he limp-reraises. For example, if you think your opponent only limp-reraises with A-A, K-K, Q-Q, and A-K, when you get limp-reraised, assuming the raise size is large enough that it makes calling with drawing hands unprofitable, you should only continue with A-A and K-K. Do not fall into the trap of paying off these blatantly straightforward opponents with Q-Q, J-J, A-K or worse.

When the limper is known to limp-reraise with all of his premium hands and some bluffs, you are in a significantly more difficult situation. The main problem you will run into is that if you reraise the limp-reraiser, he will only continue with his best value hands. This should lead you to call the limp-reraise with your entire range that is profitable to play. Your calling range depends on how wide you think your opponent is limp-reraising and how you expect him to proceed after the flop. As the limp-reraiser's range gets wider, meaning he has more bluffs or overvalued marginal hands in his range, your calling range should also widen. After the flop, assuming your opponent will continuation bet his entire range, you should tend to call with all of your top pair or better hands and proceed to the turn. From there, you will often face a decision for your stack, but if you have a rough idea of your opponent's strategy, you can make sound decisions.

Suppose one of these players limps from early position, four other players limp, and you raise to \$15 with T-T from the button. The initial limper reraises to \$40. At this point, if you were to go all-in, your opponent would call with A-A, K-K, Q-Q, and A-K. Against this range before the flop you only have 36% equity, so getting all-in is a horrible result. However, if your opponent is limp-reraising with various trash hands, such as A-4 and 8-7, folding would be criminal. It should be clear that if your opponent is reraising with every A-x combination, he will have way too many bluffs in his range. If he only limp-reraises with his premium hands and exactly A-6, you should be fine with letting his bluffs succeed because he will be bluffing infrequently. In my experience, most players either limp-reraise with only the nuts or with a range much too heavily weighted towards bluffs. It is also important to figure out which hands your opponent will turn into limp-reraise bluffs. The boards you can continue on change drastically based on the hands in your opponent's bluffing range. To complicate things further, some players limp-reraise with all hands they perceive as "strong". This is often a range of 9-9+ and all Broadway hands.

In general, if your opponent has too many bluffs in his range, you should call his \$40 limp-reraise with your T-T. If the flop contains an Ace, you should usually fold to any additional pressure because it is too likely that your opponent either has a premium hand or an A-x hand



that improved to top pair. If there are two cards higher than your T-T, such as K-J-x or Q-J-x, you should also fold to a bet. If there is only one non-Ace overcard to your pair, you should often resign yourself to calling down. If your opponent's limp-reraising range contains too many bluffs, you simply can't fold. One of the benefits of being a loose, aggressive player is that your opponents must pay you off when you have a premium hand. Luckily, most players will be nowhere near balanced, allowing you to adjust well to their tendencies.

I want to make it perfectly clear that I think limp-reraising is usually a horrible play. Take the most standard limp-reraising spot as an example. You pick up A-A in first position and limp. Four other players limp and the Button makes it \$16. You reraise to \$60. Everyone folds and you profit \$27. While winning \$27 without the risk of being outdrawn may seem like a great result, you left a huge amount of equity on the table. Imagine instead you raised to \$6 from first position, four players called, then the Button reraised to \$24. You could then reraise, profiting \$48 when everyone folds. Or you raise to \$6 and four players call. Someone flops top pair and refuses to fold, giving you his entire stack. That is actually the most common outcome when you see a multiway flop with A-A. Of course, you will occasionally lose your stack when someone makes a concealed two pair or hits a set.

Suppose you raise with A♣-A♠ to \$6 from first position and four players call. The flop comes 8♥-6♥-4♦. You bet \$20 into the \$33 pot. One player calls and another player, known to generally play in a straightforward manner, raises to \$90. You now have a relatively easy fold. If your opponent has a premium made hand, either a set or two pair, you are drawing thin. If he has a premium draw, you are flipping. This is a situation you want to avoid. Of course, if your opponent overvalues any overpair, you should be content to stack off. One of the main skills you must develop in order to crush small stakes cash games is the ability to get off the hook when you are clearly beat. You must learn to be disciplined enough to not go broke every time you get outdrawn. So, learn to play postflop and don't be content to win a small pot with A-A by limp-reraising.

In my opinion, there are two spots where limp-reraising makes sense. The first is when you are in early position and have a playable hand, such as 3-3, A-4s, or T-9s and want to limp. If everyone limps and you see a cheap flop, that is an acceptable result. If someone yet to act raises and you think he has a weak range because he loves to blindly attack the limpers, you should strongly consider turning these hands into bluffs. If your opponent calls, he will frequently put you squarely on a premium hand. This will allow you to represent premium preflop hands and to occasionally improve to a premium postflop hand. This will result in your opponent making many postflop errors because he will fold too often when you are bluffing and call too often when you are fortunate enough to flop the nuts.

For example, suppose you limp for \$2 with A-4s from early position, three players limp, then an aggressive player who likes to attack the limpers raises to \$16 from late position. You are not getting the proper implied odds to call, but you should strongly consider reraising. To call his

raise profitably, you want at least 20:1 implied odds with suited Aces and suited connectors, but you are only getting 14:1, assuming \$200 stacks. If you make it \$40, your opponent will be in a miserable situation with all his non-premium hands. If he goes all-in, you can easily fold. If he calls and you see a heads-up flop, you can continuation bet \$32 (into the \$88 pot) on most boards, resulting in you frequently stealing the pot. Always be sure you pick your spots well. If you attempt this play against someone who actually only raises limpers with a premium range, you will light your stack on fire.

Another time to limp-reraise is when a few people limp and you realize someone yet to act plans to raise, based on your knowledge of the players or a physical tell. When that is the case, if you have a premium hand, you should limp where you would normally raise. This will result in a raise by the player yet to act. Quite often, all of the limpers will call, allowing you to then reraise, locking up a huge amount of dead money while also appearing as if you are trying to take advantage of the situation with a marginal hand.

Suppose three players limp and you have K-K. This would normally be an easy raising situation, but you realize the player behind you is getting ready to raise. So, you limp. The player yet to act raises to \$14. The initial three limpers all call. You can now reraise to \$55 or so, putting everyone in a horrible spot. If everyone folds, you pick up \$59 in profit, and if anyone calls, you certainly have the best hand and can happily proceed to the flop.

#### When the limpers don't fold to preflop aggression

Some players limp with a wide range and are willing to call huge raises, perhaps as large as \$30, with their entire range. These players will stop at nothing to see a flop with the entire range of hands they deem playable because they can't stand the idea of folding a hand that could have been the winner. Your strategy against these players is simple: wait for the nuts and then put your stack in. That being said, most people have some arbitrary amount they feel is too expensive to see a flop with the vast majority of their non-premium range. For some players, this is \$12, and for others, it is \$40. Once you figure out how much someone will reliably call with their junk, you can tailor your strategy to take advantage of their weakness. When your limping opponents will call huge raises, you should simply wait for the nuts and then extract maximum value.

If you can engineer situations where you can make the pot huge when you are in position with a hand that is likely to be superior, you will crush your opponents. While you normally don't want to invest significant money with hands like A-9 and K-T, if you know that the limpers have weak ranges (perhaps because they always raise with their strong hands) but will nevertheless call most raises, you can make a sizable raise in position, then frequently win the pot after the flop with a continuation bet. While small continuation bets work well against most standard players, if your opponents are calling stations, you may find that a larger continuation bet is mandatory to ensure you have fold equity.

With your drawing hands, you should rarely raise because you do not want to bloat the pot with a hand that thrives in high implied odds situations. When multiple players limp before the action gets to you, there is almost never a great reason to raise with 2-2, A-3s, or 8-7s. Be glad that your opponents constantly let you see cheap flops with hands that flop well.

### Abnormal Stack Sizes

As stack sizes change, your strategy should change. This entire preflop section has assumed you are playing with 100 big blind stacks. When stacks get deeper, which will often happen as the session progresses, you must realize that hands which can easily improve to the effective nuts, such as 2-2 and 8-7s, go up in value and hands that are usually one pair, such as J-J and A-K, go down in value. This is because you usually have large implied odds with your drawing hands and large reverse implied odds with your high card hands. This does not mean that high card hands are unplayable. It simply means you must be aware that one pair after the flop is nowhere near the nuts, as stacks get deep.

As stacks get shorter, big pairs and high cards gain value, and drawing hands lose value. This is because if you hit your draw, you will not be able to win much money. If you have \$60 at \$1/\$2 and someone raises to \$7, you should either fold or go all-in with your small pairs, suited connectors, and suited Aces. You will simply not flop a strong hand often enough to justify investing such a high percentage of your stack before the flop. I am sure you see players misplay this situation on a regular basis. While you should usually fold these hands, you should go all-in when you expect to have a decent amount of fold equity.

If you are short stacked and a tight player raises from first position, you should fold your drawing hands, but if a loose, aggressive player raises from late position, you should probably go all-in. Pushing all-in takes advantage of your hand's raw equity and your fold equity. The formula for figuring out if raising all-in is profitable is:  $(\text{percent you steal the pot})(\text{size of the pot}) + (\text{percent you get called})(\text{your equity in the pot})(\text{total size of the pot}) - \text{amount you put in the pot}$ .

Suppose a tight player who only raises with premium hands and a few sporadic bluffs raises to \$6 from first position. Everyone folds to you on the button with 8-7s and a \$60 stack. Let's assume your opponent will call your all-in 90% of the time. Your equation would be:  $(.1)(\$9) + (.9)((.31)(\$123) - \$60) = \$.90 - \$21.87 = \text{a } \$20.97 \text{ loss}$ . Clearly pushing in this situation is a horrible idea. Notice we didn't even account for the times the blinds wake up with a premium hand, which will be about 4% of the time each. Just so you know, the .31 in the equation is your equity in the pot (31%) versus your opponent's calling range, and was determined using an online poker equity calculator, such as the free program, Equilab.

Alternatively, you should push if a loose, aggressive player, who you know raises a wide range when everyone folds to him, raises to \$7 from the cutoff and you have 8-7s on the button.

Suppose your opponent raises 70% of hands and will call your all-in with the top 7% of hands. This means he will call your all-in 10% of the time. Against this range, your 8-7s has 32% equity. So, you have  $(.9)(\$10) + (.1)((.32)(\$123) - \$60) = \$9 - \$2.06 = a \$6.94$  profit. Again, I did not account for the players in the blinds, but their impact is negligible. As you can see, pushing in this situation is incredibly profitable, so much so that you can profitably push with any two cards. When your opponent does not call your all-in often enough, your fold equity will make almost any short stacked all-in profitable. While pushing in this situation is extremely profitable, be aware that if you go all-in too often, your opponents will figure out your strategy and adjust. You must also understand that if you have no fold equity because your opponents will happily call your all-in with their entire raising range because "it is only \$60", you should wait for a hand that crushes their range and then get all-in.

For a thorough discussion on how to play with varying stack sizes, I suggest you check out [Secrets of Professional Tournament Poker, Volume 1](#). Although [Secrets](#) is about tournaments, the strategies discussing play with various stack sizes directly apply to cash games.

### Playing with a straddle

A straddle is a voluntary blind bet, usually two times the size of the big blind, placed by the player in first position. This effectively acts as a third blind that is twice the size of the big blind. The player to the left of the Straddle goes first before the flop and the Straddle then has the option to raise once the action gets back to him. I strongly suggest you never make a traditional straddle unless it is required in your game, which effectively turns the game into a game with three blinds. In general, players who voluntarily straddle are trying to increase the amount of action in a game, or they are simply looking to gamble. It should be clear that making pots large when you are out of position is not a good idea.

The most important thing to realize is that the straddle cuts the effective stack size in half. \$200 is 100 big blinds at \$1/\$2 but only 50 big blinds at \$1/\$2/\$4. This means you should use a strategy suited for 50 big blind stacks, assuming you have \$200. In general, with that stack size, big pairs and big cards gain value and drawing hands, such as suited connectors, suited Aces, and small pairs, lose value. Your bet sizes should be adjusted to account for the larger pot size. A typical preflop opening raise should be to \$12.

One play most aggressive Straddlers have in their arsenal is raising from the straddle when lots of players limp, and reraising when there is a raise and a lot of callers. For example, at \$1/\$2/\$4 with \$200 stacks, someone raises to \$14 from early position and four players call. The Straddle can then either raise large or go all-in, forcing everyone to need a decently strong hand to call. When facing this type of player in the straddle, strongly consider calling initial raises with your premium hands (rather than reraising). Against Straddlers who only make this raise over limpers (notice the raise will not be as large due to there being no preflop raise), you can limp

with your premium hands and then either limp-call or limp-reraise, depending on the size of the Straddler's raise and any additional action before you.

Some casinos allow players to straddle from any position. The person to the left of the straddle goes first before the flop and then the action proceeds as it typically does after the flop. For example, if the person in the cutoff straddled, the Button would go first before the flop, then the Small Blind, the Big Blind, First Position, and so forth. If you are on the button when the Cutoff straddles, you should either limp or raise with a wide range because you will be in position against the Straddle, who will probably be aggressive with many hands that are worse than yours. At the very least, you see a cheap flop in position.

Some casinos offer a Mississippi straddle, which is where the person on the button straddles and then the Small Blind goes first. Posting a Mississippi straddle with a deep stack is often a good play because it forces the blinds to be in a horrible spot, since they have to go first preflop and postflop. Notice the Mississippi straddle will usually result in you seeing a bloated flop in position, which isn't a bad thing. From the blinds when a Mississippi Straddle is posted, you should usually develop a relatively tight limping strategy because you have a bit of money already invested and you have to worry about the rest of the table picking up a hand. You also have to worry about the Button making a sizable raise, forcing you to fold. You should limp with your playable hands and fold your trashy hands. If you think the Button is frequently going to raise, as many will, you should just fold hands that don't flop well. It is amazing how often people limp from the blinds only to be blown off their hands by a Straddler's raise. Do not set yourself up to be in a bad situation unless you plan to capitalize on it by limping with a premium hand in the future.

## Postflop Strategy

While executing a balanced strategy is important in middle and high stakes games, in small stakes cash games you should try to maximize your value from each and every hand you play. The concept of balance goes out the window unless you play with the same opponents on a regular basis. Even then, especially if they are not good at poker, they will not be able to correlate your exploitative plays to specific types of hands.

Before delving too deep into postflop play, you must realize that hand values are not fixed. They constantly change based on the number of players in the pot, your opponents' prelop ranges, your opponents' tendencies, your image, the board texture, the effective stack size, and your hand. You will find that overpairs and top pairs can range from being nearly the nuts to an obviously beat junk hand.

Two examples will better illustrate this concept. Suppose you raise with A♥-Q♦ to \$6 and a loose, passive player calls from the button. The flop comes Q♣-8♠-7♣. You bet \$10 and your opponent calls. The turn is the (Q♣-8♠-7♣)-7♠. You bet \$22 and your opponent calls. The river is the (Q♣-8♠-7♣-7♠)-4♠. You bet \$50 and your opponent calls with A-8, giving you a nice pot. In this situation, even though the board got a bit rough by the river, your top pair, top kicker is a premium hand, assuming your opponent shows no aggression.

Instead, suppose you raise with A♥-Q♦ to \$6 and four players yet to act call. The flop again comes Q♣-8♠-7♣. You bet \$20 and three players call. The turn is the (Q♣-8♠-7♣)-7♠. You check, one player bets \$60, another calls, and another folds. Even though you could still have the best hand, it is highly probable someone improved to trips. The intelligent play, assuming your opponents are not blatantly crazy, is to fold.

Notice that the number of players in the pot drastically changed your hand's strength even though nothing else changed. Keep this in mind as we proceed through the postflop section. Players who crush the games extract maximum value from their marginal made hands while getting away from normally strong hands once it becomes clear they are beat. Compared to prelop skills, postflop skills are much more difficult to master, primarily because there are many more situations that can arise. This section will teach you how to tackle the situations you find yourself in most often. Realize that learning how to play in common situations will only take you so far. You must actively put your opponents on ranges in each and every pot you play. Failure to do so will certainly leave money on the table.

In this section I will first discuss how to play the most common situations heads-up and then how to play them multiway. Please recognize I am not going too in-depth on any individual situation. For a thorough treatment of how I approach postflop play, please refer to [Jonathan Little on Live No-Limit Cash Games, Volume 1](#).

## Heads-Up

On the flop, you will have a premium hand, a decent top pair, a junky middle or bottom pair, a draw, or trash. While the value of each hand in each category will vary, they can be lumped together for simplicity.

### When you have a premium hand

With your premium hands, you have to figure out whether or not you fear being outdrawn. With hands where you do not fear being outdrawn, you have to figure out how likely your opponent is to have a strong hand. For example, if an overly tight player raises to \$6 and you call on the button with 2-2, if the flop comes 5-2-2, you do not need to fear being outdrawn. If your opponent bets, it is usually best to slow play even though he probably has a strong hand. However, if you get the vibe that he has exactly an overpair and will never fold to your aggression, you should raise to get the money in immediately before a card comes that could scare him off. If instead, you raise with Q-J, one player in late position calls, and the flop comes Q-Q-J, it is quite difficult for your opponent to have anything. This should lead you to check, giving your opponent the opportunity to either bluff or improve to a decent, but still second-best hand.

When you have the nuts but can easily be outdrawn, you should bet. Slow playing these hands can lead to disaster. For example, if you raise with 4♥-4♦ and you see a 9♠-8♠-4♣ flop heads-up, you should almost certainly bet. Middle card boards are excellent for the preflop caller, meaning your opponent should have a much stronger range than you. Obviously in this exact situation, you have a much stronger hand than normal. You should start by betting with the intention of checking if the turn is a spade and continuing to bet on most other cards, even ones that complete the obvious straight draws. Notice that 4-4 is not exactly the nuts, but it is close enough. You usually do not need to play the nuts and the second nuts differently because both hands are so strong that you will rarely fold. On 9♠-8♠-4♣, top two pair and better hands can all be played as the effective nuts.

### When you have a strong one pair hand

With your strong one pair hands, you should usually bet as long as it is likely that your opponent has a worse hand. Just like when you have the nuts but fear a redraw, it is usually best to check once your top pair loses a large portion of its value. For example, if you raise and get one caller with A♥-J♥ and the flop comes J♠-T♠-5♦ you should certainly bet. If the turn is a spade, King, or Queen, you should usually check with the intention of calling at least one bet. If the turn is any other card, you should continue betting an amount that marginal made hands can realistically call. With top pair, it is mandatory that you choose bet sizes that allow worse

hands to call. In this example, you should usually bet about half of the size of the pot on safe turn cards because marginal made hands will usually fold to a larger bet.

Another concept you must master if you want to have any chance of winning at small stakes cash games is that you can bet for value with the intention of folding if you get raised. Say you raise to \$6 with A♥-J♥ and see the same J♠-T♠-5♦ flop. You bet \$10 and your opponent calls. The turn is the (J♠-T♠-5♦)-7♣. Even though an obvious straight draw completed, there are many other draws and marginal made hands your opponent could have. Against typical timid opposition, you should bet \$17 for value. If your opponent calls, you should assume he has either a worse made hand or a draw. If your opponent raises, you should almost certainly fold, assuming he improved on the turn to a hand that has you crushed. This strategy works amazingly well, especially against players who play in a relatively straightforward manner on the turn and river, which will be almost everyone in the player pool besides the maniacs. If you bet \$17 on the turn and your opponent calls, you should continue betting for value, perhaps \$28, on all safe rivers, again with the intention of folding if you get raised.

It is quite common to see small stakes players, when facing a flop continuation bet, raise when they make top pair because they want to win the pot immediately. Against all but the worst calling stations, this is a huge mistake. Almost all of the value from top pair comes from extracting value from worse made hands, not by raising and picking up a small pot when your opponent is drawing thin. What often happens is that these players raise with top pair and then face significant aggression. They are usually unable to fold, resulting in them getting all-in with top pair versus a hand that has them crushed.

For example, you raise with A-A, 8-8, 7-7, A-K, A-Q, J-T, or 5-4. Someone calls on the button. The flop comes K-7-4. You make a continuation bet and the Button raises with his K-Q. Notice that with A-A, 7-7, and A-K, you are never folding. With A-Q, J-T, 8-8, and 5-4, you will fold. Your opponent's raise forces you to play perfectly. This means that when your opponent wins, he wins a small pot and when he loses, he loses a large pot. Routinely raising the flop with top pair is one of the main reasons amateur small stakes players consistently lose.

Against opponents who you think might raise the turn with a range wider than only premium hands that beat top pair, you should often check with the intention of check-calling down on most boards. Most aggressive players realize that their opponents will continuation bet on most flops. They also realize that most players will give up on the turn when they have a marginal or weak hand. Against these aggressive players, a powerful strategy is to check to them on the turn, inducing them to bluff, while also making it very difficult to get pushed off your hand by a sizable turn or river raise.

For example, suppose you raise to \$6 with K-Js from middle position and a loose, aggressive player calls from the button. The flop comes K-Q-6. You bet \$10 and your opponent calls. The turn is the (K-Q-6)-9. Notice you could easily be crushed by a straight or two pair. If you bet and get raised, you will have a tough time withstanding the pressure. This is an excellent spot to



check to induce your opponent to bluff. So, you check and he bets \$22. Calling is the only play that has any merit. Notice if you raise, your opponent will know with a high degree of certainty that you have a strong hand, which will result in him playing perfectly. Notice that there are very few bad river cards for you. If you check the river and your opponent bets, you should call. Even though an Ace bumps you down to middle pair, most aggressive players view an overcard as a card they simply must bluff. If a Jack comes, you have two pair and your opponent may also view that as a mandatory bluffing opportunity. Perhaps the worst card for you is a Queen, but even then, it is likely your opponent is trying to blindly attack your “obvious” weakness. So, once you check the turn, your plan should be to call down almost every time.

#### When you have middle or bottom pair

Middle pair and bottom pair are difficult hands to play because, while they often have a decent amount of value, if significant money goes in the pot, you are almost always beat. Although top pair is usually strong enough to value bet against most players, middle and bottom pair are not. As with top pair, it is important to realize that middle pair can be a reasonably strong value hand or absolute junk. For example A♥-Q♥ on K♥-Q♣-2♦ is fairly strong, but on K♠-Q♠-J♠, it is quite weak.

You will find that the best strategy with middle pair against most players is to value bet the flop with the intention of pot controlling on the turn, as you should do against loose, aggressive players with top pair. This will allow you to see a showdown cheaply with little risk of getting blown off your hand.

Alternatively, with your weak top pairs and strong middle pairs, checking the flop is a reasonable strategy, especially if you think your opponent will only call your flop bet with a strong range consisting of middle pair and better. The purpose of checking is to control the size of the pot and allow you to see a cheap showdown with what is usually the best hand if relatively little money goes in the pot. You will find that this situation frequently occurs when you raise with a big pair and an overcard flops.

Suppose you raise with J-J from middle position to \$6 and a somewhat straightforward player calls from the small blind. You assume his range is mostly non-premium pairs, big cards, and a few suited connectors. The flop comes Q-6-3. While you probably have the best hand, if you bet and your opponent calls, he should have a Queen a large percentage of the time. However, if you check and he checks to you on the turn, you can be much more confident that he doesn't have top pair. Also notice there are very few bad turn cards for you besides an Ace or King. If your opponent bets the turn after the flop checks through, you should tend to call at least once versus almost everyone because most players will either attack “obvious” weakness or value bet too thinly with a hand like 8-8 or 6-5. The combination of these two factors should lead you to call the turn and often the river, assuming you don't have a strong read on your opponent.

Checking the flop minimizes the amount you lose when you are crushed while maximizing the amount you win when your opponent is drawing thin.

### When you have a drawing hand

Draws tend to come in three types, premium draws, marginal draws, and trashy draws. Premium draws are flush draws with additional equity, such as a straight draw or overcards. Marginal draws are naked flush draws, open ended straight draws, and gutshot straight draws with overcards. Trashy draws are gutshot straight draws with one overcard, naked gutshot straight draws, and naked overcards. It is important to realize that some draws should be played as if they are premium hands, while others should routinely be check-folded when you aren't the aggressor. Failure to accurately assess a draw's strength is the downfall of many small stakes poker players.

You should play your premium draws aggressively, assuming your opponent's range does not entirely consist of premium hands. This is because they tend to have roughly 45% equity against even the strongest ranges. For example, suppose someone raises to \$7 and you call with T♣-9♣ from the button. The flop comes 8♣-7♣-3♦. Your opponent bets \$12. Your optimal play depends almost entirely on your opponent's tendencies. If you think your opponent's range is generally weak, you have excellent options at your disposal. You can raise the flop, or you can call the flop, either with the intention of betting the turn if your opponent checks or raising the turn if he continues betting and you miss.

If you think your opponent will only continuation bet with his premium hands, there is little point in raising because he will rarely fold. While investing significant money in a roughly neutral spot isn't too bad, a much better strategy is to improve to the effective nuts before piling in your stack, especially if your opponent will pay you off when you hit.

When you are fortunate enough to complete your draw to the effective nuts, you should raise versus some players and call versus others. In the high stakes games where players are capable of getting away from strong hands when faced with aggression, raising when you make the effective nuts is almost always an error. A better play is to continue calling, hopefully inducing your opponent to think you have a marginal made hand. This is often the best play against the better players in the small stakes games. Remember back to how I suggested you play top pair, betting for value until you get raised. If your opponents implement that same strategy, raising when you improve to the effective nuts is a horrible play because they will fold. However, against players who are incapable of folding top pair, it is usually best to put in a small turn raise. Against blatant calling stations who are always ready and willing to get all-in with top pair, put in a large raise, perhaps even an all-in raise.

Suppose someone raises to \$8 and you call with 9♣-8♣. The flop comes T♣-7♣-3♦. Your calling station opponent bets \$14 and you call. The turn is the (T♣-7♣-3♦)-K♣. Your opponent

bets \$30. This could be an excellent spot to go all-in if your opponent seems to have a hand he likes and is unable to fold. If instead, your opponent is capable of making a big fold, assuming you decided to call the flop instead of raising, you should call the turn, looking to raise or call on the river, depending on the situation.

Marginal draws are a bit tougher to play because you often have to rely on fold equity in addition to your actual equity to show a profit, especially if your opponents are good enough not to pay you off every time you hit. This should lead you to play marginal draws a bit more aggressively than premium draws, assuming your opponents will often fold to your aggression.

Suppose a tight player who only raises premium pairs and premium big cards raises to \$7 from early position and you call with J♠-T♠ on the button. The flop comes Q♣-9♥-4♠. If your opponent bets \$10, you should almost certainly call because the only hand in your opponents' preflop raising range he will fold to a raise is A-K. When he has any other hand, you are in bad shape. Also notice that your opponent may check the turn when he doesn't have top pair or an overpair, giving you the opportunity to steal the pot.

Now suppose a loose, aggressive player raises from middle position to \$7, you call on the button with J♠-T♠, and see the same Q♣-9♥-4♠ flop. If your opponent bets \$10, you should strongly consider raising to \$27 because your opponent's range is much weaker, meaning he will frequently fold to your aggression.

When you complete your marginal draw on the turn and your opponent continues betting, it is usually best to call unless he is a calling station. Remember, you don't want to do anything that will allow your opponent to drastically narrow your range to entirely premium hands. That being said, if you have J♠-T♠ on a Q♥-9♥-4♠ board and call a continuation bet, if the turn is a heart and your loose, aggressive opponent continues betting, you should strongly consider raising as a bluff to represent the flush. You must understand which cards would be great for you and horrible for your opponent. As long as you are known to be capable of calling, instead of raising with your drawing hands on the flop, you can easily represent any draw that comes in on the turn with a raise. Of course, once your opponents figure out you are capable of bluffing in this spot, you should also raise with your nut hands to keep them guessing.

The concept of maximizing fold equity also applies to your junky draws. Whereas with your marginal draws you have a reasonable amount of equity, with your weak draws, you have to rely almost entirely on fold equity. This is because if your opponent has any sort of made hand, you may have as little as 10% equity. However, this does not mean you must always raise or fold on the flop with your junky draws.

Suppose someone raises and you call with A♠-3♠ on the button. The flop comes J♦-5♠-2♣. Your opponent bets. At this point, you should either raise or call depending on how you expect your opponent to react. If you expect him to fold immediately when he has nothing, you should raise. If you expect him to call your flop raise with a wide range, you should call. When you call

your opponent's flop bet, you should have a clear idea of how to proceed on various turns. If he continues betting on the turn and you think he will bet with an overly wide range, you should raise every time you fail to improve, usually with the intention of checking behind on the river if you don't make a straight. If your opponent will only bet the turn with strong made hands, you should fold. If that opponent checks, you should bet the turn every time, whether or not you improve. With draws that are worse, such as 5-4 on 8-7-2, you should usually raise or fold on the flop because there are so few cards that can come on the turn that you actually want to see.

#### When you have junk

When you have a junky hand, meaning you probably have very little equity, such as with 7-6 on K-J-3 or A-4 on 9-8-7, if you are the preflop caller and your opponent bets into you, you should fold almost every time. Unless the board is particularly great for your range and you expect it to be bad for your opponent's range, there is no shame in conceding a tiny pot. However, it is important to realize that not all junky hands are created equal. K-Q is much better than 4-3 on J-8-5 and should occasionally be turned into a semi-bluff.

When you have junk as the preflop aggressor in a heads-up pot, you should usually continuation bet when the board should be good for your range, when the board should be bad for your opponent's range, or when you get the vibe that your opponent missed the flop.

For example, suppose you raise from early position and a player who you know only calls preflop raises with small pairs, marginal Broadway hands, and suited Aces calls from the button. You can continuation bet almost all boards because small pairs will fold when big cards flop, big cards will fold when middle and small cards flop, and the suited Aces will fold when an Ace or flush draw doesn't flop. If instead, your opponent is known to call with suited connectors because he reraises with all his other playable hands, you should continuation bet all boards except those containing multiple middle cards because these should connect well with your opponent's range.

Against most opponents, you should check on boards containing three middle cards and also when you have a marginal made hand, such as top pair with a bad kicker or middle pair. If you flop a strong hand on a board containing three middle cards, your play should depend entirely on how you expect your opponent to react. If you think he will attack your "obviously" blind continuation bet, you can confidently bet, knowing you will get action. If you expect him to simply fold when he misses, you should consider checking. While checking will occasionally give away a free card that lets your opponent outdraw you, it will also make you much more difficult to play against.

Your continuation bet sizing should also depend on how you expect your opponent to react. In general, as the board contains more draws, you should bet larger. This is mainly because you want to cut down on the implied odds of the draws. In single raised pots, your continuation

bets should be roughly half of the size of the pot on dry boards, such as K♠-7♥-2♦, and 3/4 of the size of the pot on coordinated boards, such as J♠-T♠-5♦. In reraised pots, you should size your bets a bit smaller since you will easily be able to get all-in by the river when using smaller bets, because the preflop pot is much larger. One of the main benefits of betting large on the early streets is to let you build a large pot by the river. If the pot is already large because of a preflop 3-bet, you no longer need to be concerned with building it. Your goal shifts to keeping your opponent in with all made hands that you crush.

I want to make it perfectly clear that there is nothing wrong with raising A♥-5♥ and then check-folding on J♠-8♠-6♦, especially if you get the vibe that your opponent likes his hand. While continuation betting is a profitable play against most opponents in most situations, sometimes you are throwing good money after bad.

When you raise preflop, flop nothing, make a continuation bet, and then get called, you have to figure out if you should fire an additional bluff on the turn. In general, when the board changes in a way you don't think helps your opponent, you should fire again. For example, if you bet 9-8-3 and your opponent calls, if the turn is an Ace or King, you should bet every time. Notice on the turn you should have way more top pairs in your range than your opponent. If an obvious flush or straight card arrives on the turn, you should also consider betting, especially if you think your opponent will raise on the flop with his draws, meaning most of his flop calling range is marginal made hands. But if you think your opponent is the type of player who will raise on draw-heavy flops with his made hands for protection, when he calls your flop bet on draw-heavy boards, he probably has a draw, meaning turns that complete the draws are horrible for you. This same logic applies to when you should bluff the river. If the board changes in a manner that should be good for you and you think your opponent will fold most of the time, consider betting again. Bluffing the turn and river is a broad topic that is covered in-depth in [Jonathan Little on Live No-Limit Cash Games](#). In [Volume 2](#) of that best-selling series, I review numerous hands where I attempt postflop bluffs, some ending well and some ending in disaster. As you become a more skilled cash game player, I highly suggest you check it out.

#### Additional Tactics

Another common play you see amateur small stakes players make is to lead into the preflop raiser. You will find that most of these players make this play with marginal made hands in order to "find out where they are at". While a few players will mix up their range such that they are difficult to play against, meaning they lead with marginal made hands, draws, and premium hands, once you figure out the leading range of a specific player, you can crush him. For example, if you know a player always leads with top pair, bad kicker, and middle pair, good kicker, but folds when raised, you can simply raise him every time he leads. Also notice that leading with these hands takes them out of his checking range, making his checks much weaker. If your opponent leads with that same range but never folds to aggression, you can raise for

value whenever you have top pair crushed and call when you are getting the proper odds to draw.

I strongly suggest you do not have a leading range without having specific reads on your opponents. For example, some players will always raise when led into. Against these players, lead with your premium hands then call your opponent's raise, inducing him to continue bluffing on later streets. If your opponent will fold when led into unless he has a premium hand, you can lead with a wide range of junk. In reality, most players are at least somewhat unpredictable, meaning you will have a difficult time predicting what they will do in abnormal situations. Also, leading takes specific hands out of your checking range. I prefer my checking range to be as strong as possible, especially when I am out of position. The last thing you want to do is let your opponents know that when you check, you are usually planning to check-fold.

Another situation that frequently occurs in small stakes games is facing a player who will call any bet, regardless of its size, when he has a hand he thinks is worth playing, but will fold to any bet when he has nothing. Against these players, at least until they figure out your strategy, you can bet large when value betting and small when bluffing. This will allow you to extract maximum value from your strong hands and cheaply bluff with your trash.

One key situation worth addressing is when you find yourself on the river in a sizable pot with a hand you think has a lot of value. Just because your hand has a lot of value does not mean you should raise with it every time. In order for a value bet to be profitable, assuming your opponent will never attempt to bluff you, you must have the best hand at least 50% of the time when you raise and your opponent calls. Against players who will only call river raises with the nuts, raising for value with less than the nuts is often a bad idea. Against players who will call river raises with any made hand, raising the river with a wide range of value hands is ideal.

Suppose someone raises to \$7 from middle position and you call with A-Q in the small blind. The flop comes A-8-6. You check, your opponent bets \$10, and you call. The turn is the (A-8-6)-4. You check, your opponent bets \$22, and you call. The river is the (A-8-6-4)-A. You check and your opponent bets \$42. This is a situation where you have either a clear call or a clear raise. If your opponent only calls a check-raise with a full house, check-raising is a horrible idea because when you check-raise and get called, you lose. If your opponent calls a check-raise with any made hand, such as K-8 and better, you should raise because your opponent will call with a wide range of made hands that you crush.

When choosing a river check-raise size, your opponent's tendencies and probable calling range are your main concerns. If your opponent is prone to calling with a wide range, such as with 9-9 in the previous example, unless your opponent is a blatant calling station who is oblivious to bet sizing, you should raise somewhat small, perhaps to \$89. If your opponent doesn't care about bet sizing and simply thinks he has a hand too good to fold, you should go all-in. If instead you find yourself in a situation where you have the nuts and you think your opponent has the second nuts, you should make a large river raise because he will call any raise size.

A common leak of some small stakes players is to always raise huge or always min-raise on the river. If you blindly choose a specific bet size in every generic spot, you are leaving money on the table. Always think about your opponent's tendencies and the range of hands you are trying to get value from, then size your bets accordingly. For example, suppose you have K♣-9♠ on an 8♠-7♠-6♠-2♠-5♠ board, giving you the straight flush. If your opponent bet the flop, turn, and river, you should certainly raise large because he either has the Ace high flush, the lower straight flush or nothing. Min-raising in this situation would be a disaster because most people are incapable of making a big fold with the second or third nuts.

### Multiway

The main difference between multiway and heads-up pots is that someone is more likely to have connected with the flop. While you can usually get away with continuation betting somewhat blindly in heads-up pots, as more and more people see the flop, you should revert to playing straightforwardly. For example, if you raise with Q-J and one or two players call, you can justify continuation betting on K-7-2, but if four to eight players call (as will usually be the case in the softest games), you should check with the intention of folding to a bet. When you have nothing in a three-way pot and the flop is coordinated, such as J♠-T♠-6♣ or 7♦-6♦-4♦, you should usually be content to check-fold. While you should attack heads-up pots aggressively, you must be more selective in multiway pots.

Advisedly, you should not play blatantly straightforwardly in multiway pots. One prime situation you should look to attack on a regular basis is when you are in position and everyone checks to you, especially when you are not the preflop aggressor. Suppose a straightforward player raises to \$6 from second position, a passive player calls in middle position, you call on the button with K-J, and the Big Blind calls. The flop comes Q-7-4. Everyone checks to you. Most Big Blinds will check their entire range, meaning you cannot narrow his range very much, other than removing premium preflop hands because he would have probably reraised preflop with them. The initial raiser probably missed the flop because he would continuation bet with top pair or better. The first caller probably missed as well because he would also bet with top pair or better. Both the preflop raiser and the first caller are "capped" at having middle pair and worse. This means you are essentially betting into one player, the Big Blind, who could have anything other than premium preflop hands. Even though this pot is multiway, you should take a stab, betting about \$15 into the \$25 pot. If the Big Blind calls, you should proceed with caution. If one of the other players calls, you should assume they have, at best, top pair with a marginal kicker, and be prepared to bluff again on the turn and river. Unless your opponents are blatant calling stations, you will usually be able to make them fold top pair, bad kicker and worse made hands by the river. In general, if you have reason to believe most of your opponents in a multiway pot are not interested, do not be afraid to attack, especially if you could realistically have a strong

hand. While you will occasionally be able to steal multiway pots, most of the time you will have to rely on your cards.

#### When you have a premium hand

When you have a premium hand, it is usually best to simply bet for value, whether or not you can easily be outdrawn. This is because it is likely one of your opponents has a decently strong hand you beat. The only time you should consider slow playing is when it is clear that if you bet, you will only get action from a hand that will pay you off regardless of how you play your hand. You do not want to slow play when slow playing may let a good, but second best, hand off the hook.

For example, suppose someone raises from early position, you call with A-J, and six other people call, including the blinds. The flop comes A-A-J. The blinds and the initial raiser check to you. Notice if any of the players yet to act have an Ace, they will bet, allowing you to play a large pot. In this situation, slow playing has some merit. If instead, the same number of players saw the flop but you were on the button and they checked to you, you should bet because if you check, someone with an Ace will be able to see the turn with a much smaller pot, making it difficult for you to play for stacks. All of this being said, slow playing in multiway pots, especially when you are susceptible to draws, is a costly mistake. Slow playing hands like trips or two pair is almost always wrong.

When you have a premium hand on the flop, make a bet, and get some callers, if the board drastically changes on the turn in a way that makes your hand much worse, it is usually ideal to check and see what develops. If the turn checks through, you should usually continue checking on the river unless your opponents are calling stations. If the board gets even worse for you, continue to check.

For example, you raise to \$6 with 8♥-8♦ from early position and five players call. The flop comes 8♣-7♦-5♣. You bet \$20 and three players call. If the turn completes an obvious straight or flush draw, you should check, looking to check-call when you are getting the proper implied odds to draw to your full house and fold when you aren't. This may seem overly tight, but when numerous players see the turn, some of them will have draws, especially when you have a premium hand (taking premium cards out of your opponents' ranges). If the turn is a safe card, you should continue betting for value, usually about 70% pot.

#### When you have a strong one pair hand

Top pair and overpairs are tricky hands to play postflop, but if you listen carefully to what your opponents tell you, you will be able to fold when you are crushed. As when playing heads-up, if you bet and get called, you can generally assume you have the best hand, and if you get raised, especially by reasonably straightforward players, you can assume you are beat. As with your



premium hands, if you see a horrible turn in a multiway pot, check-folding is perfectly acceptable.

#### When you have middle or bottom pair

Middle pair and bottom pair are hands that should be played incredibly cautiously in multiway pots. It is important to realize that these hands are acceptably playable in three-way pots but are trash in seven-way pots. Suppose someone raises, three people call, and you call with 9♣-8♥ on the button. The flop comes K♦-8♦-7♥. The initial raiser bets and someone calls. Even though you have middle pair and a backdoor straight draw, assuming the bet is not abnormally small, you should fold because one of the two players probably has a superior made hand and the other probably has a draw. This means that some of your outs may not be good. For example, the 9♦ is almost certainly a bad card. Occasionally, you will be against K-K or 7-7 and lose a large amount of money when you improve. While most players recognize middle pair is a drawing hand in this situation, they fail to realize it has huge reverse implied odds. You want to draw to hands you can confidently continue with versus numerous opponents. Middle two pair when facing aggression on the turn is not a situation you want to be in.

#### When you have a drawing hand

Playing draws is tricky on multiway flops because when someone bets and numerous players call, some players have made hands and others have draws. If you have a clean draw to the nuts, such as A♠-3♠ or K♥-Q♥ on J♠-T♠-5♥, you should be happy to call and see what develops. If instead you have 4♠-3♠, you should consider folding to one flop bet if it is clear that many players will see the turn.

As your draw gets worse in multiway pots, you should consider ditching it early. However, there are times when you can profitably call with a junky draw, especially when it is to the effective nuts. Suppose someone raises to \$6 from early position, four players call, and you call with A♥-4♥ on the button. The flop comes K♣-5♣-3♠. The initial raiser bets \$8 and all four players call. This is a situation where you can justify calling \$8 to win \$73 with your gutshot. You must be aware that the 2♣ is not the ideal card for you. If you improve to top pair when the flush draw misses and face a turn bet, you should probably call then fold to additional river aggression. As long as you approach these situations cautiously, they can be profitable.

There are times when you should apply pressure with your draws, especially when it is clear that most of your opponents have weak ranges. For example, if you flop a draw and everyone, including the initial raiser, checks to you, you should usually bet the flop with the intention of betting most turns, assuming you see the turn heads-up. Suppose someone raises, four people call, and you call with T-7 from the big blind. The flop is 9-8-3. Everyone checks to the Button, who bets. You should strongly consider check-raising to roughly 2.7 times the Button's bet if

you think he is aware he can steal this pot a decent amount of the time. However, if you think the Button will only bet with a strong hand, perhaps because he is known to be a straightforward player, you should call and see what develops.

#### When you have junk

When you miss the flop in a multiway pot, it is usually best to simply check-fold. While this may seem quite weak, it is likely that someone else has a decent hand. There is no point in trying to bluff people off decent hands. A common mistake amateur players make is to raise a hand like A-K from early position, get multiple callers, and then continuation bet when they fail to improve to at least top pair on the flop. These players often compound the error by continuing to bet when they still have nothing on the turn. Do not fall into the trap of vastly overvaluing strong preflop hands that become weak after the flop.

#### When the pot is large

You will find that hand values drastically change as the pot size increases. For example, you raise A♣-A♦ to \$6 from early position and five players call, including the blinds. The flop comes 9♥-8♥-4♣. The Small Blind leads for \$24 and the Big Blind raises all-in. Even though you could have the best hand, you should typically fold unless your opponents are bonkers. Instead, suppose someone raises to \$6, three people call, you raise to \$34 from the button with A♣-A♦, and they all call. The flop comes 9♥-8♥-4♣. In any reasonable scenario, even though you are against the four players, you simply cannot fold because the pot is too large. The only time you should consider folding is when all three players before you push all-in. When you have a reasonably strong hand in a huge pot, your goal should not be to fold without an excellent reason.

Be aware not to take this concept too far, especially when you are against someone who has a strong range. Suppose you raise from early position with A-Js to \$6, three players call, and then a somewhat tight, straightforward player reraises from the button to \$30. It should be clear that folding preflop is a perfectly acceptable play. Instead, you decide to call. The flop comes A-T-5. Everyone checks to the Button, who bets \$80. Even though you have top pair, you should fold. The only hands in your opponent's range you beat are K-K, Q-Q, and J-J, which he may check behind on the flop. If instead, the preflop reraiser is a blatant maniac, you should either call or go all-in on the flop because you crush numerous hands in his range, such as A-3, K-Q, and 8-7. Always be sure to assess your opponent's range and adjust accordingly.

## Overbetting

When you see most small stakes players make a huge overbet before the river, they are usually trying to protect their decently strong made hand. They want to do everything in their power to ensure they don't get outdrawn. When they overbet the river, they know they have the best hand and want to get full value. As discussed earlier, this strategy is horrible because it forces their opponents to play well. If you find yourself against one of these players, refuse to pay them off.

There are some players, especially in 3-bet pots, who will overbet with their unpaired hands, such as A-K on J-8-4, and bet smaller with their made hands, such as K-K and A-J, on that board. Against these players, you should be somewhat inclined to call their overbets (which will usually be all-in due to the preflop 3-bet) with a wide range of paired hands. But clearly this play can easily backfire if you have the wrong read.

While I generally do not recommend overbetting, there are two main spots where it makes sense. The first is when you are against someone who refuses to fold, either because he is a calling station or because you think his range contains almost entirely strong, but second best, hands. This is a typical spot to make a large overbet: You raise with A♣-2♣ from late position and the Big Blind calls. The flop comes Q♣-7♣-4♠. The Big Blind checks, you bet \$10, and he calls. The turn is the (Q♣-7♣-4♠)-3♦. He checks, you bet \$24, and he calls. The river is the (Q♣-7♣-4♠-3♦)-K♣. Your opponent checks. At this point, if your opponent has a Queen or worse made hand, he will almost certainly fold to any bet. If he has two pair or better, he will call a reasonably large bet, but he probably won't have many two pair hands besides exactly K-Q in his range. If he has a flush, he will call any bet. This means you should either bet a tiny amount when you think he has a Queen or worse, or bet a huge amount when you think he has a flush. Suppose your opponent has a Queen or worse 75% of the time and a flush 25% of the time. You think he will call a \$25 bet with a Queen or worse and a \$160 all-in bet with a flush. To figure out which bet is better, multiply each bet times the percentage of the time that bet gets called. Notice your opponent may raise the \$25 bet with a flush, which we will ignore. He may not call a \$25 bet with his total trash, but we will ignore that too. So, your opponent will call a \$25 bet 100% of the time, meaning this bet size profits \$25. When you bet \$160, your opponent will call 25% of the time, meaning this bet profits  $.25(\$160) = \$40$ . Even though the large bet gets called only 25% as often as a small bet, it shows much more profit. Failure to recognize situations like this will leave a lot of money on the table.

Another time to overbet is when you think your opponent's range contains mostly marginal and weak made hands, which he will fold to a large bet. Suppose you find yourself in the same situation as the previous example except this time, you think your opponent doesn't have a flush, perhaps because you know he always check-raises the flop with flush draws, you know he leads the river when he makes a flush, or he makes it clear through his mannerisms that the river severely diminished his hand's value. This is an excellent spot to overbet as a bluff

because, unless your opponent is a calling station, he will fold his entire range. Even if you have a hand as strong as Q-T, you should consider turning your hand into a bluff because if you bet small, he is likely to call with all non-flush hands that beat you and only a few hands you beat. By going all-in, you win the pot every time. Clearly, winning the pot every time is much better than only winning when you have the best hand. As long as you use this play sparingly, it will show a huge profit in the long run.

## Other Topics

While you certainly must master the technical side of poker if you want to succeed, there are many other aspects you can work on that will help take your game to the next level. In fact, once you progress to the higher levels, where everyone knows how to play their cards reasonably well, mastery of the non-technical skills is what separates the big winners from the break-even players.

### Tells

The average player in small stakes cash games has little to no control over their physical mannerisms. This is probably because they are oblivious to how powerful tells are. If you pay attention to your opponents, you will frequently see behavior that is obviously weak or obviously strong. You can use that information to narrow your opponents' range significantly, allowing you to make well-informed decisions. Nevertheless, most tells should only slightly sway your decision one way or the other. If you are bad at the technical aspects of playing poker but are great at reading people, you will lack the full spectrum of skills required to succeed.

The first thing you must do to start gathering reads on your opponents is to stop being concerned with only your two cards. You are not playing solitaire. Pay attention to your opponents. This simple concept cannot be stressed enough. You must develop a baseline read of how your opponent acts on a regular basis. From there, you should look for behaviors that are out of the ordinary. Look for things that drastically change. For example, if someone normally has calm, steady hands, but all of a sudden, they start shaking, that almost certainly means something. If you pay attention, you can figure out if your opponent's hands shake when he has a premium hand, when he is bluffing, or every time he plays a big pot. While almost any movement or gesture can be a tell, I will list some of the tells that I find most useful against amateur players.

The first tell is the "I am obviously interested" look. When an amateur player gets a hand he plans to play, he often sits up in his chair and visibly becomes interested in what is happening at the table. You will see this behavior both preflop, when someone is dealt a premium starting hand, and postflop, when he improves to a strong postflop hand. Suppose you raise with J-Ts and four players call. The flop comes T-9-4. While this would be a standard spot to continuation bet, if two of the players to your left become obviously interested, it is probably best to either check-call or check-fold, depending on the action. Being aware of your opponents' level of interest in spots like this will allow you to save numerous continuation bets.

The opposite of the "I am obviously interested" look is the "I am obviously not interested" look. This tell manifests itself most often in multiway pots after the flop. Most players will stop

paying intense attention to the game and go back to focusing on whatever they were focusing on before the hand. Suppose you raise with Q-J and four people call. The flop comes K-8-7. If all of your opponents become clearly uninterested in the pot, you should continuation bet, even though you should normally check-fold in this situation.

The rate at which your opponent blinks is often an indicator of hand strength, assuming he blinks at different rates at different times. In general, players blink a lot when they are bluffing and blink normally when they have a strong hand. Most players' heart rates vary wildly depending on their hand's strength. Some players' hearts beat faster when they attempt a large bluff. Again, you have to study your opponents to figure out their specific tendencies.

Some players will give you "the speech" or "Hollywood" during a hand. This is almost always an attempt to get you to call. In general, when someone is bluffing, he will be quiet and still. Some players can't even put together a coherent sentence when bluffing. If someone is trying to goad you into calling, do not pay him off. While trying to talk your opponents into calling may work against the absolute worst players, it will utterly fail against the rest. You will find that other players talk when you are about to make the opposite of the play they want you to make. If you are about to call, they will say something in attempt to get you to fold. If you know a player always talks when his opponents are about to make the correct decision, when he doesn't talk, it means he wants his opponent to make the incorrect play.

The speed at which your opponent acts can also be a huge indicator of the strength of his hand. Some players will take forever when they have a premium hand whereas others will act quickly. If you can pinpoint how your opponent acts with each type of hand, you can use that information to help you make better decisions. When someone makes a quick bet or raise, it is usually with either a very strong hand (because he knows he is going to bet) or a very weak hand (because he wants to look as if he has a strong hand). Most players will have one of the two ranges, either really weak or really strong. Most players do not mix it up. When someone calls a bet quickly, it is usually with a mediocre made hand or a draw. This is because with mediocre made hands, most players know they are not going to fold or raise. Most players feel the same way about drawing hands, resulting in the same fast call. Other players take their time with their marginal hands, such as weak made hands and draws. They need some more time to analyze the situation through when they are unsure of what to do. Knowing that someone thinks before calling a bet on the flop with middle pair and worse can allow you to value bet top pair, bad kicker on all three streets.

Keeping track of these tells, and many more, may seem overwhelming so instead of initially focusing on everyone at your table, focus on the players seated directly next to you, as you will play most of your pots with them. Once you have some rough reads on them, branch out to the other players at the table, again focusing on the players you will play with the most. Over time, the act of observing your opponents will become a routine aspect of playing live poker.

It should be clear that you should strive to have no tells. While some middle and high stakes players are capable of reading tells, most small stakes players are simply playing their cards and acting naturally. There is no point in trying to give off a false tell to trick your opponents because they probably won't even see it. Instead, do your best to remain stoic when you are involved in a pot. Remain stoic until you no longer have your cards. Do not fall into the habit of becoming uninterested when you know you are folding because it will let your opponents know that when you actually are interested, you are not folding. As long as you have cards, wear your poker face.

### Bankroll management

In small stakes games, there are primarily two types of players: those who are purely recreational, meaning they can reload their bankroll by working their day job, and those trying to play as a professional, meaning they cannot, or refuse to, reload their bankrolls from a job. These players require drastically different bankrolls because they have a different tolerance of risk of ruin. For example, if you make \$2,000 per month at your job, losing your weekly \$100 poker allowance is not a big deal. However, if you only have \$2,000 to your name, losing \$400 in one month is huge. I want to make it perfectly clear that no amount of bankroll management will save a losing player. Using proper bankroll management, winners can ensure that they will have the ability to play in the future, even when they are running poorly.

If you have a soft \$1/\$2 cash game in your area that doesn't charge a huge amount of rake, it is quite possible to win \$20 per hour or more with a bankroll as small as \$3,000. While a \$3,000 bankroll may sound like a lot, assuming you want to treat your bankroll as a true professional does, it is quite small. As you move up, your bankroll requirement will increase in terms of big blinds. This is because the games will tend to get tougher as you move up, meaning you will win fewer big blinds per hour. If you need \$3,000 at \$1/\$2, you will probably need \$12,000 at \$2/\$5. If you play well within your bankroll, you will not mind the losses too much and can comfortably grind out a nice profit with minimal swings. Notice that this is the opposite of what most small stakes players do. They show up to the casino with their entire net worth and try to run it up. If they win, they are ecstatic. If they lose, they are devastated. Going through large amounts of emotional turmoil will drive you crazy. If you want to stay sane, I suggest you keep a large bankroll.

Although I am personally not a fan of having a "stop loss", which is an arbitrary rule you set saying you will quit each day, week, or month after losing some amount of money, I realize it is a good idea for most amateur players who lack emotional control. I have watched numerous players obliterate bankrolls by going on tilt and losing a large amount of money in a single session. If you know that in each session you typically win one or two buy-ins, you should probably not have regular sessions where you lose 10 buy-ins. While it would be ideal for you to have no emotional connection to money, I realize that most players go on tilt when things go

poorly. As an arbitrary default, in 100 big blind games, you should at least consider stopping for the day if you lose 300 big blinds, assuming the game is not great.

When you are at the table and lose some amount of money, assuming you are profitable in the game, it is usually a good idea to reload, which is when you add more money to the table. Personally, if I am playing in a game where I can buy in for 100 big blinds, if I dip below 90 big blinds, I will add 10 big blinds to the table. I simply keep additional chips in my pocket and add them as necessary. I do not suggest you buy in for 100 big blinds and then play until you either have no chips on the table or until you are finished for the day. This strategy will occasionally result in you having a 30 big blind stack. If you are a winner in your games, you typically want to have a large stack. By having a short stack, you will miss out on many profitable situations.

It is important to recognize how much rake the casino is taking. In the past, at \$1/\$2 no-limit, the casino would take \$3 per hand. While this amount of rake is reasonably beatable, some casinos now take as much as \$10 per hand. If your casino rakes more than \$5 at \$1/\$2, it will be difficult for you to win, even if you are a great player. You must be disciplined and realize that you do not have to play a game simply because the casino spreads it. There are extremely soft home games where I live, which rake 5% of the pot, uncapped. A somewhat standard large pot may be \$10,000, meaning the house rakes \$500 in each of those hands. Especially if you cannot get in as a huge favorite on a regular basis, this rake is simply unbeatable in the long run. If you decide to play in a game with high rake, you should adjust by playing very tight before the flop. If you only play three hands per hour, but they are all significant and you win most of them, you will pay a minimal amount of rake. If instead, you are involved in numerous small pots, despite winning more than your fair share of them, you will lose money on average due to the rake. Each time you pay the rake, you cut into your profits. If the rake is huge, you don't have to play.

As you beat the small stakes games, you will eventually grow your bankroll. I suggest you move from \$1/\$2 to \$2/\$5 when your bankroll increases to roughly \$8,000. If you dip back to \$6,000, it is probably wise to move back down to \$1/\$2. Of course, these recommendations should change based on your risk tolerance. If things go poorly at the higher stakes, or you move to the higher stakes for a while and then you start losing, especially if your bankroll is in jeopardy, do not be ashamed to move down. I have seen numerous players forfeit their chances of success because they had too much pride to move down. Instead, they continued playing the high limits until they were broke. Don't be like them.

## Mindset

While your mindset, attitude, and outlook on life will not make you a winning poker player, having control of your emotions will certainly make life more enjoyable. If you enjoy life, you will be much less prone to go on tilt, which is a serious leak for most small stakes players. I, along with Dr. Tricia Cardner, discuss numerous psychological aspects of poker in our book, [Positive Poker](#), but I will address a few of them here.



As I see it, you are on tilt any time you play differently than you would if you were playing your absolute best. Players go on tilt for many reasons, such as making a poor play, getting unlucky, having an argument with their partner, or from being too excited. You must constantly be aware of how you are feeling and if there is something that is altering your thought process. If there is, acknowledge your feelings, realize it shouldn't affect your strategy, and then continue playing fundamentally sound.

Most players in small stakes games go on tilt when they get unlucky. They feel they should win every time they have the best hand. As you should know by now, you will not win every time you have the best hand. If you get all-in with A-A versus 2-2, you will lose 18% of the time. If you get your stack in and lose in this situation, you must realize you did nothing wrong. If you did nothing wrong, you have no reason to be upset. If a result is expected some portion of the time, when it happens, it should not surprise or anger you. It is simply part of the game.

Previously I used to go on tilt was when I realized I made a mistake. I worked hard to cure my tilt and eventually I figured out that if I recorded my hands in a notebook, I could forget about them and mull them over in the future, away from the table. Whatever causes you to tilt, work hard to eradicate it. Whenever you play less than your best, you will leave a lot of money on the table.

While each player reacts to tilt in various ways, if someone is obviously upset and playing poorly, quantify what he is doing incorrectly and then adjust your strategy to take advantage of him. It is common to see a normally tight, aggressive player become a maniac or a loose, passive player become a calling station. If you pay attention, you will be able to tell when someone is off their "A" game.

There are a few other attitude leaks I think are worth mentioning. First, do not complain about things. At every table, there seems to be someone who is unhappy with every aspect of life. This person is rarely focused on poker and almost always plays poorly.

I suggest that you do not discuss strategy at the poker table. While most small stakes players want to get better at the game, they should discuss the game away from the table, not at it. By discussing strategy at the table, you reveal your thought processes to your opponents, which clearly isn't a great idea. You may also educate the players who are inferior to you. If you want to talk poker with someone at your table, wait until you are finished playing for the day.

Some players drastically change their strategy when they know their session will end soon. The vast majority of small stakes players have a leak where they want to end each session either up or even. They can't stand going to sleep a loser. It should be clear that this is an asinine thought process because each session is actually part of one never-ending session. The last hand of your previous session might as well be the first hand of your next session. If you recognize that someone at your table is playing passively, trying to lock up a winning session, you can probably push him around a bit more than normal. If someone is down a buy-in, he may gamble a bit

more than normal in an attempt to get even. Being aware of these factors can help you make better decisions.

Assuming you strive to become a professional, or even a winning poker player, you must develop the mindset of a pro. Most professional poker players do not care about the routine swings of the game. They realize that sometimes they will win and other times they will lose. Pros monitor their emotions and recognize when they are not thinking clearly. They keep a large bankroll to ensure they don't go broke. They do not let annoying people or circumstances take them off their game. They do not let things bother them at the table. Professionals live a healthy life, both at and away from the table. They work hard studying the game and are constantly developing their skills. They do not get discouraged when things go poorly, even for a long period of time. Pros are impossible to keep down. If you want to succeed at this difficult game, you must develop the mindset of a true professional.

## Quiz Time!

Now it's time to put the knowledge you gained by reading this book to the test. I created a short companion quiz for this book, which you can find at:

[CashGameIQ.com](http://CashGameIQ.com)



**CASHGAMEIQ.COM**

It's only 10 questions long, and each question relates to a specific concept I discuss in this book. If you get a question wrong, the quiz will direct you to the appropriate section in this book to learn more about that topic.

I suggest you keep taking this quiz until you get a perfect score.

Take the quiz now by visiting:

[CashGameIQ.com](http://CashGameIQ.com)

## Conclusion

Congratulations on reaching the end of this book! You now have a solid foundation to be a successful small stakes cash game player.

One of the best things you can do to improve your poker skills is to study CONSISTENTLY away from the poker tables.

My training site, [PokerCoaching.com](https://PokerCoaching.com), offers top-level coaching from myself, former WPT Player of the Year Faraz Jaka, former #1 online player in the world Bert “GirafGanger7” Stevens, GTO expert Michael Acevedo, Jonathan Jaffe, Matt Affleck, Lexy Gavin, Tristan Wade, Evan Jarvis and Alex Fitzgerald!



To get a FREE 5-day trial to [PokerCoaching.com](https://PokerCoaching.com), visit:

<https://PokerCoaching.com/5free>

## Resources

I strongly suggest you check out my other resources:

[PokerCoaching.com](http://PokerCoaching.com) – This is my poker training site where you can get access to hundreds of interactive poker hand quizzes, video classes and live poker training webinars from some of the best poker players in the world.

[JonathanLittlePoker.com](http://JonathanLittlePoker.com) – This is my personal website where I post a free weekly educational blog and a free weekly podcast, WeeklyPokerHand. Also be sure to sign up to my email list to get lots of free educational content.

[Subscribe on YouTube](#) – Subscribe to my YouTube channel for In-Depth Poker Strategy Videos, a Weekly Poker Hand Analysis, A Little Coffee, and much more!

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## Other books by Jonathan

[Mastering Small Stakes No-Limit Hold'em](#)

[Strategies for Beating Small Stakes Poker Tournaments](#)

[Excelling at No-Limit Hold'em](#)

[Jonathan Little on Live No-Limit Cash Games, Volumes 1-2](#)

[Secrets of Professional Tournaments Poker, Volumes 1-3](#)

[Positive Poker](#)

[The Main Event with Jonathan Little](#)

You can get the audiobook version of many of these books at [JonathanLittlePoker.com/free](http://JonathanLittlePoker.com/free)