

Intro

This article is about the differences between a poker room and a home game, and how to avoid being labeled a poker novice. It assumes that the reader already knows the basics of Texas Hold-Em, but has been too intimidated to go into a casino's poker room.

Asking questions, while seated with friends at a home game, is a relatively safe thing to do. Asking questions at a table in a poker room can be deadly. Or at least financially costly. Hopefully, this article will answer your questions so you can go to a poker room with confidence.

This article is a lot longer than it needs to be. A true student of the game might immerse himself in these details before going to a poker room. The intended audience of this article is a more casual player who may want to become familiar with some of these details, and return here to review some of the questions that may have popped up during their first experience.

The first few sections after the House Rules section, applies primarily to cash games. If your interest is strictly tournaments, after reading about House Rules, you can probably go to Bets and Raises then the Novice Mistakes and Bad Habits section.

The Basics

House Rules

As you read this you'll see a lot of "Some poker rooms do this, some do that," etc. Asking questions about those kinds of differences will NOT get you exposed as a novice, just someone who has not played at that poker room. In many cases, asking those kinds of questions will build your credibility as an experienced poker player because you're concerned with the details of the house rules. The best time to ask is between hands when the dealer is shuffling and dealing. In areas with multiple poker rooms, some dealers may work at more than one. If the dealer's response is at all unclear, don't be afraid to call a floor person and ask again. Asking a question during a hand is bad etiquette because it breaks the concentration of those in the hand. Of course, if it's a question that will affect your play of the hand, that's a different story, but it may help a player figure out what you have.

Poker Rooms are different

Poker rooms have etiquette all their own, with rules that are different than those of the main casino floor.

Because players are betting against each other and not the house, spectators might not be tolerated. After all, a 'spectator' could actually be a cheater's accomplice. Also, seating is assigned by the staff, so 'lurking' while waiting for a seat is unnecessary. When there aren't seats available, a wait list is created. When there are multiple seats available, a new player is assigned to the table with the most empty seats.

Of course, it is the player's choice for the type of game and betting limits. But it's the management's job to seat you at one of those tables.

The poker room makes money by taking a small percentage of each pot, called a Rake. With more players at a table, the chances of larger pots and larger rakes increase. Therefore it's in the poker room's interest to have full / balanced tables. For the same reason, players want full tables, too. As a result, many poker rooms allow players to eat while playing, and even provide food waitresses and snack tables. They'll ask you to keep the actual food off the table, etc. Some will ask you to not eat while you're in a hand, or at least do so in a manner that doesn't slow down the game. And please try to keep the cards and chips clean.

Also, because players cannot easily change tables, smoking is not allowed in most poker rooms.

In fact, if you wish to change tables for any reason, you need to get the floor person's assistance. He will give you a choice of new tables, if possible, as well as advise you if you can take all the chips you have to the new table or if you must cash some in, and whether or not you'll be required to post blinds.

If you wish to change seats but stay at the same table, you can do this by asking the dealer. He will tell you when to move and if you'll need to post the blinds. All of your chips will remain in play.

If you want to leave, you can do so at any time. If you wish to take a short break and return to your seat, all of your chips must remain on the table.

Wait List - Games and Limits

When you arrive at the poker room, in most cases there are overhead computer displays showing all the games, betting limits, and a list of people waiting.

This is a typical wait list:



The top of each list shows the type of game. The next line has the table numbers. Below that are the first 15 or so names on the list with a count count below. On the very bottom is a scroll of info about any promotions as well as the dealer rotation.

The games will be labeled with the type of game and blinds, or abbreviations like HE \$2/\$4, LHE \$2/\$4 or Limit \$2/\$4, and NL \$1/\$2, NLHE \$1/\$2 or No Limit \$1/\$2. Those represent the two typical games a novice will play: Limit Texas Hold-Em, with \$2 and \$4 fixed bet sizes, and No Limit Texas Hold-Em, with \$1 and \$2 blinds. Larger poker rooms may have what looks like alphabet soup with additional games and higher limits.

\$2/\$4 Limit and \$1/\$2 No Limit are becoming less popular as poker rooms switch to \$3/\$6 Limit and \$1/\$3 No Limit as their low limit games.

Another game that is not always offered, is called Pot Limit. It operates just like No Limit, except raises are limited to the amount of chips already bet.

The low limit No Limit game is the game that is most often found. In smaller poker rooms, it may be the only game offered. In larger rooms, it's the one with the most tables running, and may be the only game early in the morning. It's the most popular game because No Limit is the game almost exclusively shown on poker TV shows - albeit at bigger limits.

There is a desk at the entrance, where you can ask about the games available. The one piece of information that is not shown on the display, is the buy-in. All games have a minimum buy-in. You do NOT need to maintain that minimum. If you fall below the minimum, it's OK to continue to play, although your strategy may change. It's only when you go all-in and lose, that you'll be required to reload to the minimum if you intend to stay. If you have at least one big blind, and you choose to reload, you do not have to get to the minimum - in most cases.

Most No Limit games also have a maximum. The maximum is just the maximum you can buy in for. When you sit down at a table that is not a newly started game, there may be players with more than the maximum. This

just means that they have won enough to take them over the maximum. All of their chips are in play.

Some games do NOT have a maximum.

This information is also on the little placard next to the dealer, but often obscured, so just to ask at the desk.

Sometimes, if you arrive early in the day when they are opening new tables, you can request a new table rather than an open seat. If you request the new table, you can also request a specific seat if desired.

Some casinos allow players to call in to get on the wait list. Although it's hard to see in the photo, the fourth name on the second list has a blue telephone icon next to his name. Call ins are given a specific time limit to arrive and check in. In the mean time, as seats or tables open, call in players who haven't checked in get skipped.

There are also some poker apps that include this function. They are discussed near the end of this article.

Rake / Seat Rental

The poker room makes money from the rake - they remove 10% from the pot, up to a maximum, often \$5, in dollar increments. This is done by taking \$1 out of the pot when it exceeds \$10, another \$1 when it exceeds \$20, etc. I.E. 10% rounded down. If the poker room offers a Bad Beat or other type of bonus payout, they will typically remove an additional dollar or two. The rake and bonus dollar(s) are kept aside until the hand is over, allowing the dealer and players to verify the amount.

In areas where there is only one casino, the poker room rake can be higher. In areas where there are several poker rooms, it may be wise to find a room with lower rakes. Poker experts say that, low-limit games are losing propositions because "You can't beat the rake." Playing at higher limits, and/or lower rakes, makes it easier to beat. Of course, your bankroll may dictate the low limit regardless of these other concerns.

The highest rake this author has ever seen was on a cruise ship where the maximum was \$15! Not only that, they had 50¢ chips, used only to enable a partial rake and reduce the loss due to rounding. Many players thought this was excessive and grumbled about it, but what could we do? Fortunately, there were enough inexperienced players that the good players were able to beat that excessive rake.

This author has not seen, but has been advised that some poker rooms will take a rake pre-flop even if there is no call of the bet.

At higher stakes tables, some poker rooms charge a "Seat Rental" rather than a rake. This is typically \$5 for

some specific duration, usually 30 minutes. This fee is charged whether you're playing or absent.

Bottom line: If you can, it's best to shop around for the best rake.

Poker Clubs

In most areas, private games, where the house gets a piece of action, are illegal. In some areas, casinos are also illegal. Often in some of these areas, poker clubs are becoming popular, although their legality is still in question.

They operate by charging a membership fee, and/or an admission fee, but do not have a rake or seat rental. They also typically have at least one billiards table which is NOT coin operated. This helps them get around the law by claiming they are a membership only club, offering multiple games under the same roof. Never mind that there's 20 poker tables and one dusty billiards table. They may also offer other amenities, but poker is the real reason people go.

Sign Up / Buy In

After getting your questions answered, tell the attendant what game and betting limit you want.

If seats are available, she will direct you towards a table. Otherwise, she will ask for your name for the list. If the list is long, some poker rooms will take your cell phone number, allowing you to go to the casino while waiting for a seat, and they'll text you when you're at the top of the list. Otherwise, stay nearby, because when your name is called, you'll only have a minute or two (even less in a busy room) to identify yourself, before you lose your spot on the list.

In many poker rooms, in the interest of having as many hands per hour as possible, players are required to bring chips to the table rather than forcing a dealer to delay while you buy-in. If there's a list, go to the cashier before your name gets to the top. If there is open seating, then in the interest of getting more active players, they may allow you to sit immediately and buy-in from the dealer.

In contrast, in the interest of keeping the tables full, you can always re-load by buying from the dealer.

However, very few poker rooms allow you to color-up when you're ready to leave although you can always ask.

Alternatively, if other players have high value chips, they may buy your low value chips in an effort to make their own stack look bigger.

Bets and Raises

In \$2/\$4 Limit, the blinds are \$1 and \$2, while bets and raises pre-flop and post-flop are \$2, and bets and raises after the turn and river are \$4. (In \$3/\$6, the blinds are \$1 and \$3 while bets are \$3 and \$6.)

In \$1/\$2 No Limit, the blinds are \$1 and \$2 (or \$1 and \$3), but bets are always at least \$2 (or \$3). Initial raises must be at least double the previous bet, but re-raises are a different matter, as it must be double the previous raise. I.E. If the bet is \$2, and there's a raise to \$5, most rooms require it to be at least \$8 (the amount of the prior raise of \$3 plus the \$5 to call), while sometimes a re-raise must be at least \$10 (double the amount to call). While these types of minimum raises are rare enough that it probably won't matter, it can get confusing what a re-raise would be when the prior raise is a partial all-in.

Minimum bet size in no-limit are always the big blind. Prior bets and raises do not affect the minimum for the next round in a hand (although they very much affect strategy).

When someone wants to call or raise, but doesn't have enough chips to do so, he is "All-In". Players cannot reach into their wallet to reload during a hand. When a player is all-in, all he can win from each player in the hand is what he himself risked. Any additional money bet is in a side-pot for the remaining players.

Multiple side-pots will be created when several players are all-in. It is advisable to watch the dealer to make sure the side-pots are divided correctly. This tends to be an area where mistakes happen.

Most poker rooms will "Cap" the betting to a certain number of raises per betting round, usually 4 (1 bet plus 3 raises). I.E. After 3 players have raised, the remaining players can only call or fold. There is never a cap when only two players remain in a hand. The cap is there to prevent two players, working as a team, to continue raising until the remaining players fold.

If a player raises, but is all-in for less than a full raise, different poker rooms handle it differently. Say there are only 3 players. Player 1 bets \$10. Player 2 calls. Player 3 goes all in for \$17. In some poker rooms, since that raise was for more than half of the required amount, it is considered a valid raise, allowing player 1 to re-raise. The minimum amount of that re-raise can vary by house rule too. However, in other poker rooms, that \$17 all in does NOT qualify as a raise, so player 1 and 2 can only call or fold.

There is a third type of game sometimes offered, called Pot Limit. It operates just like No Limit with the single exception that there is a maximum raise. When betting the maximum in Pot Limit, the total of the pot,

all called bets, as well as your own call, is the maximum you can raise. It can get quite confusing, but it is acceptable to ask the dealer how much a pot sized raise would be. At that point, you can still raise any amount up to that point, or even just call, or even fold.

Chip Stack

Some poker rooms allow cash to play. I.E. You can have cash in your stack of chips. If they allow it, they will usually only allow \$100 bills.

Once you put chips (or cash) on the table, they must remain on the table until you are ready to leave. The novice tendency is to pocket part of the winnings from a big pot, since this is a typical way to protect winnings on the regular casino floor. The reason you can't do that at the poker room is, you're not playing against the house. Once you win money from a player, that player has the right to try to win it back, for as long as you're still seated there.

If a friend / spouse comes along and asks for money, you can't give them part of your stack - even if they are planning on sitting at that table. To give them money, you'll have to reach into your wallet.

The exception to this rule is to pay a waitress or massage person, since this is usually a small / insignificant portion of your stack. Also, since tipping the waitress is encouraged and delaying the game is discouraged, it's OK to tip out of your stack. Similarly, it's OK to pocket a few souvenir chips.

You should stack your chips in a manner that makes it relatively easy for another player to estimate the total. Do this by keeping stacks a uniform height of 10 or 20 chips, all the same color, with the high denomination stacks in front.

If you need to take a smoke / bathroom / food / whatever break, and intend on returning to that table, you must leave all your chips where they are. Usually, there is no reason to be nervous. While Poker is a game of taking money from the other people at the table, outright theft is very rare.

Absence

If you are absent long enough that you have missed the blinds, a small plastic disc with "Missed Blind" on it, will be at your stack. (Note: These discs are called buttons or Lammers which is short for laminated plastic. They're much smaller than the Dealer Button, which is often referred to as "THE Button".) When you return, you'll need to "post" both blinds. The big blind will stay in front of you, and can act as your chips to call the bet, while the small blind you pay goes right into the pot.

Alternatively, you have the option to sit out hands and wait to be the big blind rather than post.

If you are absent for a long time and there is a wait list, a floor person may bag your chips and open the seat. You can claim your chips at the desk when you return, but you've lost the seat.

If the poker room has a Bad Beat Jackpot, you may remain eligible as long as there is no "Missed Blind" button at your seat. Some poker rooms require you to have been dealt in the hand to be eligible.

Bad Beat / High Hand

Many poker rooms feature a Bad Beat Jackpot. As already mentioned, an additional dollar or two is removed, and is dropped into a separate bucket when the hand is over. At the end of the day, these are collected and added to the jackpot.

The Bad Beat will win when a very rare hand is beaten. In most cases the rules dictate that the players hold a pocket pair, or use both cards to make a straight flush. The minimum hand to qualify as the loser can vary from as low as Aces full of Jacks, to Quad Queens.

Often the Bad Beat will go for weeks or even months before being hit. When it hits, usually the loser of the hand gets 50% of the jackpot. The winner gets 25% and 25% is shared among the other players at the table. Some share that last part among all active players at every table. Some also share it with active players in the poker rooms at the casino's sister properties in town.

Instead of a Bad Beat, or sometimes in addition to, some casinos have a High Hand where they keep track of the high hand, for a specified time period. In most cases, there does not need to be a losing hand, or even a showdown. Just show the hand to the dealer and floorperson to be eligible to win some previously advertised amount. Some casinos do other things such as bonus prizes for quads and straight flushes which pay an immediate bonus, or spin a prize wheel. High hand promos are generally posted in the room, on their website, and listed in poker apps to be discussed later in this article.

Chop The Blinds

If all other players fold, when the action gets to the small blind, either he or the big blind can suggest they chop. This means that they take back their blinds, the hand is over and the dealer button advances. This is encouraged by poker rooms since it is unlikely that the pot will grow, so this prevents wasting time on a hand that will produce little or no rake.

Novice Mistakes and Bad Habits

Pay Attention to the Action

Because the software does things for you, many online poker players learn bad habits. Specifically, online you can call or fold ahead of time, as well as check a box to automatically post blinds. You may not realize it, but the software waits until it's your turn to actually take the action. When you're at a live table, failure to wait your turn, failure to put up your blinds, and failure to know there was a raise, are the biggest indicators that you're a novice. Basically, any sort of acting out of turn is bad. On the other hand, occasional minor mistakes are easily forgiven and forgotten.

An exception to this is if you are dealt garbage and you want to run to the restroom. Go ahead and put your cards forward just a little to indicate the fold, then get up and leave. Don't toss them to the dealer as you would if it were your turn, as that may cause the person on your left to think it's his turn to act. If you prefer, tell the person next to you to fold for you, this way it's understood that it's not his turn yet.

Any other type of acting out of turn can influence the players that are thinking about their action.

For example, if a player is thinking about making a bet when the player after him bets out of turn, it will affect the decision of the player who was skipped. If a later player calls a prior bet, but the skipped player makes a raise, different poker rooms will handle the second player's call differently. Some will require the chips to stand even if the player folds, and some will allow him take back his call, fold, or to call the new raise, but may not allow a re-raise.

Unlike BlackJack where hand signals rule, in the poker room, verbal declarations are binding. If you say "Call" without realizing there was a raise, you have to call that raise. If you say "Raise" without realizing there was already a raise, you will be required to make the minimum re-raise. If you say "Raise to \$12" without realizing there was a raise to \$10, you may be required to make the minimum re-raise. You will NOT be allowed to raise higher than that, because that would be considered a "String bet".

String Bet

Bets and raises must be made in one motion or one declaration. If you specify "Raise", it is then acceptable to put out the chips for the call, then stop and think about the raise, and then put the raise out. But that raise must go out in one motion. You can't put chips out

and bring your hand back to put more out. If you want to raise so much that you can't handle the number of chips, just announce the amount and then take as many steps as necessary.

A statement such as "I call your bet and raise you \$x" is illegal. Yes, this is typical of home games, and is seen in movies and non-poker TV shows all the time, but once you say "call", you're done. Ditto for "I see your bet, and..." Sorry. There's no 'and...'

Forward Motion

While verbal declarations are binding, words are unnecessary. Chips moved in front of your cards (or past the line if there is one), are all that is necessary to indicate your action. However, make sure that action is correct. If you intend to call \$2 by throwing in two \$1 chips, and mistakenly throw in two \$5 chips, that's a raise to \$10. On the other hand, if you instantly realize your mistake, you may be allowed to fix it. But the window of opportunity is very short, and you will be limited on the number of Mulligans you get.

Some poker rooms state that ANY forward motion, or chips brought over the line, is a bet. While many poker rooms allow you to grab a stack of chips, and then drop only a few or even just one of them, some rooms will state that whatever is in your hand, is the bet.

If you grab a stack of chips, with the intention of dropping several of them as a raise, but you accidentally drop only one and start to pull your hand back, that's a call. If it's not enough to be a call, you'll be required to complete it, but not allowed to raise. If you drop more than what you intended, it could be a raise. For example, if the bet is \$15, and you drop 4 red \$5 chips, you can take one back. But if you drop 5 of them, many proker rooms will consider that a raise, and you'll be required to put out another \$5 to make the raise correct.

Single / Multiple Chips

If you put out a single large chip, regardless of how large, or how many smaller chips you have, it's a call.

For example, if the bet is \$2, and you have a ton of \$1 chips, and you put out ANY larger chip, it's still a \$2 call. On the other hand, if the bet is \$16, and you put out \$26 (one \$25 plus one \$1), and you're in a poker room that recognizes more than half a raise as valid, you'll be required to bump it up to a full raise. Sure you intended to get change because you may not have any \$5 chips. Just say "Call" before putting out the \$26, and you'll get the change intended.

On the other hand, if you're in a poker room that doesn't recognize a partial raise, and the bet is \$16,

even if you put out \$31, in ANY combination, it's still a call, and your bet will be reduced to \$16. The exception is if \$31 is all you have. You're All-In without declaring it.

Do not make change out of another player's bet. The dealer will make the change necessary, sometimes while action is going on, sometimes when that betting round is completed.

Clarify Your Intentions

If you do verbalize your intentions, be sure to do so clearly. Not only do you need to speak clearly, the words you choose is important too. For example, if it's \$5 to call and you say "Raise \$15" while putting in a single \$25 chip, most casinos will rule it a raise to \$15 total while some will rule it as \$20 total. It's best to say "Raise to \$15" or "Raise, \$15 total" or just "\$15." Additionally, if the amount you state is different than the amount of the chips, be sure to make your announcement before the chips hit the felt.

If you're the first to bet post flop, phrases such as "Same Bet" when putting in a bet are irrelevant. The bet will be the total amount of the chips.

Action

Once the player before you has clearly declared his actions, it is acceptable for you to take your own action. You do not have to wait.

Two Cards To Win

When it comes to the showdown, the player who last bet or raised on the River is required to show his hand first. If there was no River bet, some poker rooms require the last player who bet or raised on the prior rounds to show first, others require the person to the button's left to show. Once that player shows, it's up to the remaining players to show a better hand, or to fold.

If the player that is required to show decides to fold, then the other player does not need to show his hand, unless there are still more players in the hand.

Players must show both cards to win. In the event the winning player only shows one card, and throws the other into the muck pile, the losing player, after exposing both cards, can claim the pot.

Cards Speak

At a showdown, when a player turns up his cards, he plays the best hand possible, regardless of what he may have announced his hand to be.

Show One, Show All

If you show your cards to any player still in the hand, the cards must be exposed to all players. Unless it is absolutely clear that you only showed one card, both cards are exposed.

If you show your card or cards to a player that is out of the hand, or to a player that is all in, and you then fold, the dealer may hold the cards aside to show to the entire table when the hand is over.

Note that it is usually NOT the dealer's job to police this. He may tell a player not to show the cards, but he often won't expose them after the hand unless another player notices this and mentions the rule. Note also that this "Show One, Show All" rule refers to people, not cards. I.E. If you only expose one card, only that one card needs to be shown to the other players, although the dealer may show both because he was uncertain if only one card was shown.

Protect Your Cards

When you peek at your cards, cover them with your hands and lift the corner in a manner that prevents your neighbors from seeing them. Removing the cards from the table, or deliberately exposing them to another player or spectator, can cause your hand to be declared dead.

Place a "Card Protector" (a chip or small lucky charm) on top of your cards to indicate that you have not folded. This is most important for the seat on each side of the dealer. If the dealer accidentally takes your unprotected cards, the floor person may allow you to retrieve them if they are easily identified. Otherwise, you're out of luck.

If a player folds, but throws them into another player's cards, that other player's hand might be killed if not covered by a card protector.

If a player protects his cards with his hands in such a manner that he can be mistaken for not having any cards at all, the betting action could pass him as a result. If so, his hand may be declared dead when it is revealed that he has cards.

At the showdown, if you think you have the winning hand, do not allow the dealer to take your cards until he has pushed the pot to you, or you are shown a

better hand. A distracted dealer may not read your hand correctly. If such a dealer takes your cards and places them in the discard pile, your hand might be called dead.

Muck Diving / Rabbit Hunting

Looking for your cards in the muck pile, to verify what would have happened if you hadn't folded, is not allowed.

Similarly, the dealer is not allowed to show the turn and/or river in a hand that ends before those cards are dealt. A dealer may be written up if he obliges such a request, so don't ask.

Rules Violations

Violating rules, abusive behavior and cursing will result in a warning. Excessive or repeated offenses can result in a time-out, particularly costly in a tournament when your blinds are posed even during the penalty.

More offenses and you will be asked or forced to leave the poker room.

Tournaments

Pick a format

Tournaments are a great way to play on a fixed budget. You buy in for a specific amount, and, with luck, you could be playing for hours, and end up winning a large sum. Of course, you could be knocked out on the first hand.

Some tournaments will allow a knocked out player to rebuy until a specified time. This is usually the same as the time limit for late players to get into the game. Some also have an optional Add-On of a specific number of chips for a reduced cost. The time limit for this is often the same as late registrations. Usually until the first scheduled break.

Blinds are raised on a pre-set schedule. Typical low buy-in tourneys have 12 or 15 minute blinds. Better tourneys have 20 minute or longer blinds. Breaks are scheduled, typically about 10 minutes every hour. High priced tourneys can run multiple days and have blinds as long as 2 hours, followed by 15 minute breaks. In long tourneys, they will also schedule a meal break.

When looking at the list of tournaments offered, you usually just see multiple prices. Usually the total then broken down. The first number is the amount that goes

into the prize pool, the second is the poker room's fee. Sometimes a third price is listed in parenthesis. This is the amount taken out as a tip for the dealers.

Sometimes the listing will also specify the starting stack. This is generally useless without more info. For example, a 20K starting stack sounds better than a 10K stack, unless the first has blinds that start at 100/200 while the second has blinds starting at 25/50.

Some poker rooms disclose this info on their web site, some don't. To find it on a casino resort's website, look for a "poker" link on the casino or gaming page.

Prizes

The prize pool will be divided based upon the number of players, with the payouts posted shortly after the buy-in period is over. Often, 10% of the players will get paid, with most of the money going to the winner.

When it gets close to the money, deals are often formed for the bubble - the last person before the money. Usually someone suggests that all remaining players donate some token amount, so that the person on the bubble gets their buy-in back. Often, once the bubble is burst, the remaining players will suggest chopping the pot. I.E. They will work out some kind of deal where they split the prize pool rather than play on. If an agreement can't be reached, play resumes.

When there is a break, you must leave your chips on the table. The dealer and/or floor people will watch them. The only time you take chips off the table is when the tournament director moves you to a different table. Chip racks will be provided as necessary.

Tournament rule differences

All chip stacks are dealt in, however, you must be seated before the deal is completed, or your hand will be folded, even if you are a blind. If it's your turn to post a blind, it will be posted from your stack even if you are not seated. Consider this if you need to take a bathroom break and can't wait for the next scheduled break. Note that since many players will rush to the bathrooms on a break, there will often be a considerable wait.

If all players fold to the small blind, you cannot "chop" and take back the blinds as you can in a cash game.

If any player is all-in with a call, and there are no other players in the hand, the players must show their cards before any additional cards are dealt or the pot awarded.

Some additional House Rules may be different for tournaments than cash games.

Other Concepts

Be Kind To The Dealer

Some dealers have a hard time reaching the ends of the table. Give them an assist by pushing bets forward when the betting round is complete - but do not make change for yourself from other people's bets. Similarly, after the hand is over, it's acceptable to move the button, but make sure the dealer is aware when you move it, otherwise it may accidentally get moved twice, which will cause confusion.

While the occasional curse after losing a hand is understandable, excessive cursing or berating the dealer for 'making you lose' is not tolerated.

Dealers live off tips. It is traditional to tip the dealer after winning a pot. Some players will not tip if the pot was small. On the other hand, some players will tip even if their small raise has chased everyone out of the pot, netting them a mere \$3 win. A \$1 or \$2 tip is typical unless the pot is large.

Dealers are human and do sometimes make mistakes. Try to be observant to help correct mistakes, but do not berate a dealer when a mistake is discovered.

Post / "Buy" The Button

While all poker rooms will require you to post or wait if you have a Missed Blind button, some also require new players to post or wait when joining a table.

If you take the seat between the small blind and the dealer button (or return from a break in that position), some poker rooms will allow you to "buy" it by posting both blinds. Conversely, because blinds have already been paid, you can sit out one hand to wait for the button to pass, so as to not disturb the sequence of who pays which blind. When you "buy" it, you post both blinds in that hand, rather than the two players who were scheduled to post. In the next hand, you get the button, and the players that should have posted in that last hand will now post.

Straddle

The person Under The Gun chooses to place a blind raise before the cards are dealt. If no player raises, he gets the option to re-raise when the action comes around. Straddles are usually a pre-set amount, and often just double the blind. Note: Straddles are not allowed in tournaments.

Some poker rooms do not allow a Straddle. In that case, a player making such a bet is actually making a

blind raise. The difference is, if there are no additional raises, this player does NOT get the option to re-raise.

In some poker rooms, players other than the Under The Gun player can make the straddle, and a variety of rules affect that type of straddle.

Several poker strategy books suggest that the straddle is more helpful to the other players than to the person making the straddle bet.

While the Straddle is an advanced strategy, and is covered in many poker books, it would be advantageous for a novice to at least have a cursory understanding of it, which is why it is briefly covered here.

Run It Twice / Bomb Pots

When you watch poker TV shows or vlogs, the players often agree to deals, most commonly, to "Run It Twice." Most of the types of deals seen on those shows are not allowed at low stakes games, primarily because they are confusing to rookies, and result in slowing the game, but they are gaining popularity.

Run it twice is often only allowed when there are only two players left in the hand, and one is all in. If they agree, then the remaining cards are run out, then they are run out again, complete with additional burn cards. I.E. If there is already a flop when the deal is made, there will be a turn and river followed by another turn and river. The hands will be evaluated twice: the flop and each turn and river. Note that the turn and river remain joined in that you can't use the flop with the first turn and second river.

Bomb Pot is a new concept that is starting to be offered, but on a limited basis. Often the first hand for every new dealer. Note dealers usually switch every 30 minutes. All players bet the same amount, often 5 times the big blind, before the cards are dealt. After the deal, the dealer goes right ahead and puts out a flop before any additional betting happens. Action goes normally at that point.

Another new concept is a Double Board. It works the same way, except the dealer puts out two flops, then a betting round, then two turns, betting, and two rivers. The normal five cards in the middle is called the board. With the double board option, the two sets of five cards, two boards, are independent. You can't mix them. Another new twist is a combination: A double board bomb pot.

Additional Resources

Bravo

Many poker rooms use the Bravo Player Tracking system to track open seats, playing time for comps, and other functions. The Bravo app allows players to see some of the same type of info as is displayed on the wait lists. It also has descriptions of whatever the poker room wants to add, usually info about tournaments, promotions, etc. as well as links to the website, and phone so you can call in to be put on the wait list. Some poker rooms even allow that function right thru the Bravo app.



Poker Atlas

The Poker Atlas app has some of the same functions regarding describing the poker rooms and tournaments. It also has live info, and adding to the wait list in the app, but only for limited numbers of poker rooms, primarily those that do not use the Bravo system. As a resource for room and tournament descriptions and comparisons, it does a much better job than the Bravo app because they gather their own info, and display it in a common format for every casino. On the otherhand, their info can sometimes be out of date.



Robert's Rules

Many poker rooms use Robert's Rules of Poker. Even if your local poker room uses something else, their rules are probably similar, so this is a good source of information.

'Robert' was Bob Ciaffone, a leading authority on cardroom rules, and a columnist for Card Player magazine. He had compiled a list of rules and freely distributed it. He had his own website but it has changed a lot since his death in 2022. Do a Google search to find copies of his rules.

Tournament Director's Association

More and more poker rooms are abandoning Robert's Rules in favor of the TDA's rules:

<https://www.pokertda.com/poker-tda-rules/>

Note that most of the rules are similar to Robert's, but written differently.

Poker Leagues

There are poker leagues across the country. Do a Google search in your area.

Most play at a pub or restaurant, with no fees other than a request to patronize the venue.

Unlike a bowling league, in poker leagues there is no requirement to play any specific day or number of times. They often have some method of tracking performance, with prizes including trips to Las Vegas or a local casino. While frequent participation makes it is easier to win the prizes that they offer, most leagues have methods where a player can win prizes even when playing infrequently.

Also, to keep it legal and non-gambling, in most cases there is no fee. The league makes money from the venue the same way the venue would pay DJs and other entertainers. If it brings in business, the venue is happy, so be sure to patronize the venue while you play.

Unlike in a poker room, where it may be good advice to believe the exact opposite of what people tell you, the players in poker leagues tend to be friendly, open, and will offer honest answers to poker questions. After all, if they are kind and friendly, they know you may become a regular player. Many poker league players use the league games as a way to tune up their game in between their trips to the casino's poker room.

In many leagues, the players do the actual dealing, passing the deck every hand. In some leagues, there is a dedicated dealer at each table. This author has played in both types, but now has graduated to being a dealer in a league with dedicated dealers:

<https://www.worldfreepoker.com> is based in Northern New Jersey.

For the price of a burger and a beer, poker leagues are a great way to learn the game.



About The Author

Dave Miller got started playing poker around the time Chris MoneyMaker won the World Series. As mentioned above, he is a dealer (as well as tournament director, and dealer trainer) for a pub poker league. He has created two casino games for which he is actively trying to get casino placement. He also has a dream of one day becoming a dealer in a casino poker room.

For more into, go to his website:
<http://www.DaveMillerGaming.com/>