



# Poker Dealer Guidelines

These guidelines are intended to be for new dealers, as well as to inform players who would like to know them. Many of these rules can be found in Robert's Rules of Poker, the Tournament Directors Association Rules, as well as in the rules section of World Free Poker's own website. Most of these rules are standard for casino No Limit Hold-Em games. Areas where the league rule differs is clearly indicated.

Areas where there is the most confusion and inconsistencies are indicated by the brace in the left margin.

## **Tournament Directors Association Rule 1, paraphrased – It's often referred to as "Rule 1" by poker professionals**

The tournament director / lead dealer is free to make a decision that will sometimes contradict other rules, provided they believe the decision is made in the best interest of the game.

### **Be at Your Seat / Absent Player**

**In a casino tournament**, if a player is not at their seat when it is their turn to act, the hand is dead - even if the player is the big blind. Since we do not want to discourage patronizing the venue, if the absent player is returning from the bar, it is acceptable to wait a moment, at the dealer's discretion.

If a player is away from the game for an extended period, at the request of the other players, the absent player will be eliminated after 2 full rotations. If the play is at final table or it's a Sit & Go, they will be signed out at that position. A player may ask for an unscheduled break if needed, but will be granted only if all other players agree.

Players who sign in, but do not claim their seat before the start of a Sit & Go, will have until the end of the first blind level to do so. No chip stack will be put out for the missing player. If the player does not arrive by the end of the first level, the seat will be given to the first name on the list for the next Sit & Go. If there are no players waiting for a new Sit & Go, the absent player (or late arriving substitute) will continue to have the opportunity to join the game until the color up. The late or replacement player will start with a full stack. However, if a player is knocked out, neither a replacement player nor the original player may join in. If a late player sits during a hand, but is not dealt in, they cannot join in if a player is eliminated during that hand. When a replacement player is taken, the dealer will adjust the Sign In list that the player was taken from.

Players who sign in, AND claim a seat by leaving a card protector, tip, or other marker at a Sit & Go, will get a chip stack and be blinded out, and will have until the color up to arrive – even if a player gets knocked out – before being disqualified. If disqualified, any knocked out players will be advanced on the sign out sheet.

### **Single Chip Bet**

Silently putting in a single chip, of any value, when facing a bet, will be a call. When not facing a bet, a large chip silently bet is a bet for the full value of the chip.

### **Multiple Chips Bet**

When facing a bet, if a player puts in one chip of any size, it is a call. However, depending on what the prior bet was, putting in multiple chips for more than the call amount can have different meanings.

For example, if a player silently puts in one 500 chip and one 25 chip when facing a bet of 225, the action will be considered a call with change coming. However, this is contrary to standard casino rules, and the player should be advised as such. The official casino rule is, the single 500 chip is sufficient for the call due to the single chip rule, so the second chip brings the total to a valid raise amount and negates the single chip rule. If the player had put in 550, that would be a raise.

If a player bets 400, and the next player goes all in for 550, as explained below, a minimum raise would still be 800. But if the next player puts in two 500 chips without saying anything, it is still a call of the 550 all in, since neither chip by itself is sufficient to make the call of 550. Of course, encourage players to say "Raise" or "Call" first to avoid confusion.

## Raises & Bets

The phrase “Make it X” (or other similar phrase other than “Raise”) is not acceptable and will be treated as if the player had simply said “X”. If ‘X’ is **at least** half more than the amount of a call, it will be a raise and need to be increased to the minimum raise value if not already a valid raise amount. Exception: If ‘X’ means the player is all in, the bet will stand. A minimum raise is double the original bet amount, even for a re-raise. I.E. A bet of 400 followed by an all in of 775, a minimum raise is 800.

Conversely, specifically saying “Raise to X” will always be a raise. If ‘X’ is not a valid raise, it will need to be increased to the minimum raise value, unless ‘X’ is all in. If the player doesn’t realize that there was already a raise, and says “Raise to X,” ‘X’ will need to be at least double the prior bet. Saying “Raise, X” is equivalent to “Raise to X”.

Saying “X more” or “X on top” is equivalent to saying “Raise of X”. The total bet will be the amount of the call plus X, even if the player is the small blind.

The phrase “Same Bet” is not acceptable and the bet is the full value of the first chips put in, unless clarified first.

If a player puts in chip(s) and states the amount of the bet/raise afterwards, that statement will be ignored, and the bet/raise will play as if it was a silent motion. Verbal declarations are binding, but only before the chips hit the felt.

## Act in Turn, Know the Blinds

Players should be encouraged to act in turn, even when folding pre-flop. Nonetheless, an out of turn (OOT) folded hand will be mucked immediately. If a player makes a bet or raise out of turn, play will be backed up to the skipped player. *If the skipped player makes a raise, the OOT action will stand. I.E. The OOT player can call the raise, or re-raise, but if he chooses to fold, the chips put in will remain in the pot.*

If either blind attempts to fold before other players have acted, their cards will be returned and told to post the blind, provided that their cards are not mixed with other folded cards. If they fold in turn, even if there was no raise, the hand will be dead. If they failed to post the blind, and fold in turn, they will be required to post, even though their hand is dead.

While dealers will attempt to remind players to post blinds, it is the player’s responsibility to be aware of the blinds.

## Blind Bets

If the action limps around to the blinds, and either blind puts in chips that would otherwise be considered a call, it is a call and those chips are returned. For example, if the blinds are 100/200 and the action returns to the big blind who then puts in 200, or a single 500, it is treated as if the player forgot that they already had a blind bet posted. If the player first picks up the blind bet chips and tosses them in with additional chips, then it is a single motion of all the chips, for a raise.

## Two Cards to Win

At a showdown, a winning hand must show both cards, even if their 5 card poker hand uses only one hole card. When players are playing the board, they still must show both cards to be entitled to a share of the pot.

If a player finds their hand has only one card, or three or more cards, their hand is dead and the player will not be entitled to a refund of any chips bet, even if they are a blind.

## Showdown Order / Cards Speak

The last player to bet or raise on the River round is first to show their hand. If there was no action on the river, the first person to the left of the button shows first. Players can elect to fold rather than show, but cannot change their mind. In the interest of saving time, any player can show first. A player with a strong hand is particularly encouraged to do so.

At the showdown, if any player is all-in, all live hands must be turned face up. Player have the option to fold even when not facing a bet. But all live hands at the showdown must be turned up.

When players are all in with no additional side pot action possible, all players must expose their hand before any additional cards are dealt.

Once a player has tabled his hand face up, his hand is live and able to win the pot regardless of what the player or dealer declared the hand to be. Any player or spectator who notices a mistake is obligated to point it out.

At the Showdown, any player can request to see a folded hand that has not been pushed into the muck. If the player who was to be awarded the pot makes the request, the hand is live and the pot can be awarded to the player who folded, if he folded the winning hand. The option to request a folded hand is a privilege which must not be abused.

## **Mucked Cards / Unintentional Folds**

If a player folds in error, and the cards are easily retrievable and identifiable, they can be returned to the player, provided there wasn't any additional significant action. This often happens when the player folds when mistaken about the amount of a bet he is facing.

If the big blind folds before there is any other action, unaware that they are a blind, their cards are returned.

If the big blind folds when it is their option to check, these cards are also returned, but the player will be warned that in the future, such a fold will be binding.

## **Exposed Cards**

Any card dealt which flips, or significantly tilts before landing face down, is an exposed card and will be replaced at the end of the deal. The exposed card then becomes the burn card, and is placed on top of the deck stub, face up.

Any card which flies off the table when dealt, even if it lands face down, is treated as an exposed card. It is shown to all of the players, and replaced by the burn card.

Once a card is dealt, if it is then exposed or partially exposed by a player, the card is not replaced.

If a face up card is found while dealing, it will be replaced like any other exposed card.

If either of the first two cards dealt are exposed, or any two cards dealt are exposed, it is a misdeal.

If a card is found face up while drawing the Flop, Turn or River, it will be shown to all players, then play as if it was found face down, even if it's a burn card.

## **Misdeals / Button Errors**

Some errors can be easily fixed, such as the button only getting one card, or the small blind getting a third card.

If a player gets three cards, or someone other than the Button gets only one card, or if a player is skipped entirely, it's a misdeal - provided the error is discovered before there is significant action. Only the dealer can declare a misdeal.

If any error is discovered after there is significant action, the misdealt player's hand is dead, even if the player is a blind. The other hands play out normally.

If the button is in the wrong position, it is a misdeal if discovered before there is significant action. Otherwise the hand plays out, and the button and blinds move after the hand as if the button and blinds were correct.

"Significant Action" is when any player calls or raises. Players that fold are not significant.

## **At Least Half More is a Raise**

When a player puts in or states exactly half more than the call amount, the bet will need to be increased to a full raise.

For example, when facing a bet of 400, putting in 600 will be increased to 800.

Obviously, the exception is an all in.

## **Count / Announce Bets**

Dealers are encouraged to count and announce bets whenever possible and practical.

## **Minimum bets and raises**

The minimum bet is one big blind. The minimum raise is double the call, except as shown below, after an All-In Partial Raise.

If the big blind player is all in for less than the big blind, players who call must call for a full big blind while the minimum raise is still two big blinds.

If after the flop, turn, or river, a player opens betting by going all in for less than the minimum of one big blind, the minimum raise would be one big blind. I.E. If the blinds are 50/100 and a player goes all in for any amount less than 100, a minimum raise would make it 100. Of course, players could simply call the all in amount.

### Re-raise after an All-in Partial Raise

If a player partially raises when going all in, players who have already acted may not be able to re-raise.

For example, Player A bets 400. Player B goes all in for 700 (or any amount less than 800). Player C and D call for 700. When the action gets back to Player A, his only option is to call or fold. If Player A appears to be contemplating a raise, he should be allowed to do so, with the raise returned afterwards. Although it wastes time, the other players have a right to know if Player A would have raised if he were able to do so.

In the first example, because they didn't act yet, Players C and D could raise, with the minimum raise being 800.

Also in the first example, if Player C or D went all in for any amount over 600, even if it was less than 800, it still would not be considered a raise.

### Vague Bets

When the blinds are low enough to allow a bet of either size, chip size will dictate whether a bet is "hundreds" or "thousands" when not specified.

For example, in a tournament with 10K starting stack, and the blinds are 100/200, a player opens betting by saying "Six" while throwing in:

A) A 5K chip. That will be ruled a bet of 6,000 and the player needs to put in another 1K.

B) A 1K chip. It will be ruled a bet of 600.

C) A 1K chip and a 500 chip. It's a bet of 600.

D) A 5K chip and a 100 chip, it's a bet of 6,000 and will need to be increased.

In both example C and D, either chip could have been the mistake, but the total of 1,500 in example C is closer to 600 than 6,000. Similarly, example D's total of 5,100 is closer to 6,000 than 600.

### String Bet

Bets and raises must be made in one motion, or one announcement.

If a player silently puts an oversized chip forward, it is a call when facing a bet. If not facing a bet, it is a bet for the full value of the chip. Making a value declaration after the chip has landed will be ignored.

{ If a player moves a stack of chips forward beyond their cards, but does not bet everything in his hand, it is acceptable, as long as his hand made no back & forth motion, and there was no pause while making stacks.

If a player moves a stack forward, then brings it all back, the entire stack in hand is the bet.

### Mulligans

{ If a player makes a bet, then quickly removes part of it, it is at the dealer's discretion to allow the correction, provided the next player hasn't acted yet.

The key is that it has to be quickly identified as a mistake and fixed immediately, and before the next player acts. Once again, confusion and mistakes can be avoided if the player states his intention before putting in chips. Note that most casinos do not allow such mulligans in tournaments. Some don't allow them in cash games either.

### All In / Bubble

{ When a player goes all in, he should push all his chips forward, so his action is obvious to all. If he is the dominating chip leader, pushing in a stack of large chips that covers everyone else's stack is sufficient.

When two players are simultaneously knocked out, the player's chip stacks determine their sign out positions. If both players had the same size stacks, then the better hand gets the better position.

When the tournament is on the bubble (one player left before final table), and an all in has been called, the dealer should announce "All in called" and the other dealer should acknowledge it, and not deal any new hands until the first dealer confirms that the all in player survived.

When the tournament is near the bubble, the dealers should try to listen and be aware of all in action at the other table, so that if both tables have an all in player at the same time, the "All in called" procedure can be correctly made.

## Side Pots

A player who is all in for less than what other players bet, is entitled to a share of the pot equal to what he wagered, from each player in the hand. The excess goes into a side pot.

For example, the blinds are 50/100 and the big blind is all in for 75, two people call for 100 each, and the small blind folds, the main pot will be 75 from each of the callers, plus the big blind's own 75, and the 50 small blind, for a total of 275. The side pot is 25 from each of the callers, for a total of 50 on the side.

Calculating and cutting side pots are one of the more difficult tasks a dealer faces. In the above example, it's probably easier to calculate that the two players who called for 100 mean the side pot is 25 for each of them, or 50. Simply take the 50 from the small blind and put it to the side while gathering everything else into the main pot. Of course, it can get more complicated, such as if the small blind had no 25 chips and folds, needing change. If there was an additional all in, it gets trickier. Breaking down big chips before taking part of a bet to make a pot or side pot can make things easier.

If several people go all in so that there will be no more betting on subsequent rounds, it is acceptable to allow the bets to stand, and figure it out after the river. (Note that casinos will generally cut side pots first.) After the river, find the best hand, count that player's chips, and bring that amount from all players in the hand, into the main pot. Award the main pot to that player. Muck his cards (plus anyone who got felted), then find the next best hand and do it again, etc.

## Protect / Conceal Your Hand

Players should protect their hand by placing a chip or other item on top of the cards to prevent the dealer from accidentally mucking the hand. Players will have no recourse should the dealer accidentally muck a live unprotected hand. The hand should NOT be protected in such a manner that the dealer and other players cannot see that the player has a live hand.

When players peek at their cards, they should do their best to prevent neighbors from seeing the values of the cards. Players who do not keep their cards concealed can be given a warning or penalty.

## Exposing Cards

If a player shows cards to a player who is already out of the hand, the cards will be shown to other players after the hand is over, if any player who was dealt in requests it.

If a player shows cards to a player who is still in the hand, the dealer will make a judgement call whether it was deliberate or accidental. If deliberate, the hand will be dead. In either case, the exposed card(s) will be shown to all players.

A player who exposes cards or folds a hand face up when there are still others in the hand, can receive a warning or penalty.

## Penalties

Penalties are at the discretion of the lead dealer, and include sitting out one hand or one rotation, or disqualification. When sitting out, the player's position will be dealt to the muck, and required to post blinds when appropriate.

## Clock

Any player who was dealt into a hand, even those that already folded, can call "Clock" when another player is delaying the action. When "Clock" is called, the player who is facing a decision will have 30 seconds to decide and complete their action.

*{ The dealer can also call clock when a player appears to be needlessly delaying action.*

If the player does nothing, his hand will be dead when time runs out. Saying "Raise" does not stop the clock. If a player says "Raise" but does not specify an amount by the end of the 30 seconds, it will be a minimum raise.

Dealers should have a clock running or ready so they can start the countdown without delay. The dealer should announce 30 seconds, then give warnings at 20 seconds, 10 seconds, and a countdown of the last 5 seconds as: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, Dead. Do not say 'zero'. The hand is dead when the dealer says 'dead' even if the player makes an action at that point.

## Premature Flop, Turn or River

If the Flop is exposed before the pre-flop action has been completed, the action will finish, the burn for the Turn will be burned, then the next three cards (turn card, river burn card and river card) will become the flop. Then the pre-mature flop cards will be shuffled into the stub. Because there are already two burn cards, there will be no burn for the Turn.

If the Turn is prematurely exposed, the action will finish, the burn card for the River will be burned, then the River card will be used as the Turn. The original turn will then be shuffled into the stub. Again, no burn for the River.

If the River is prematurely exposed, the action will finish, then the premature River will be shuffled into the stub.

In all cases, the burn card and discards do not get shuffled in. The new shuffle starts with a scramble/wash followed by at least two riffles. There is no burn when this new shuffle is finished.

### **Extra Cards Drawn for the Flop, Turn or River**

When drawing cards for the flop, the dealer should deal 3 cards face down, then give them a little spread to verify that there are only 3 cards. Sometimes when drawing the cards, the dealer can feel a double card being drawn, and will be able to figure out which card would be the next burn. As such, he will put that card back onto the stub and turn over the Flop cards. In situations where it is unclear which is the extra card, the dealer will give all four cards a brief scramble, then randomly select one card to be put back onto the stub to be used as the burn for the Turn and flip the other three.

If a dealer turns over the Flop and then sees that there are four cards, the dealer will turn them face down, give them a scramble, then randomly pick one to be put back onto the stub to be used as the burn for the Turn. The remaining three cards are the Flop.

A double card draw on the Turn or River is a lot easier to figure out, while face down. But if two cards are turned up, turn them back over, scramble them, and pick one to be turned and one to go back onto the stub for the River burn.

### **Blinds**

Each player must be a big blind and small blind once per rotation. It gets tricky as people are eliminated, but the next big blind will always be the next remaining player to the left, while the previous big blind becomes the small blind and the previous small blind becomes the button. If the big blind is eliminated, the next hand will have no small blind. If the small blind is eliminated, the button will remain in place. When playing three handed, if the big blind is eliminated, the button becomes the big blind which means the small blind will be the small blind again on the next hand.

Confusion is most prevalent when two or more people are eliminated. Stop and think about the above rules and there should be no problem.

When playing heads up, the button is also the small blind and acts first pre-flop, but post flop, the big blind acts first.

### **Bounties**

Players who arrive late, after a player has signed out but before the first color-up, will be given the opportunity to play as a bounty. The bounty player is worth 100 points to whomever knocks him out. As an incentive to the bounty player, he will be given 100 points if he survives to heads-up, and still worth 100 to the winner. I.E. A total of 200 if the bounty wins.

Visiting out-of-towners and new players who are unsure if they want to join the league, can play as bounties with the same offer of bounty points for themselves, if they chose to join later in the night. In either case, a new player app is needed.

### **Dealer Procedures**

Dealers are not to award a pot until the action is complete, when every player has either turned their hand face up, or folded. Then dealers determine the winner, push the pot to the winner, muck all cards, then move the button, and start to shuffle. If the dealer is about to make a mistake and award the pot to the wrong player, it is the duty of any player who notices the error to speak up. Once the cards are mucked and shuffling begins, it is too late to correct such an error.

In the interest of saving time, a shuffle that contains two good riffles of the deck is sufficient. As dealers get more experienced and become faster, a shuffle should include a riffle, a stripe and two more riffles before cutting the deck.

Cutting side pots tends to be the most difficult task for a dealer to perform, and it's not any easier when players are shouting numbers in an effort to help. As soon as a player is all in, or seems to be contemplating it, start doing the mental math. If the all in is a small amount, calculate the amount to go into the main pot, otherwise calculate the excess to go to the side. Multiple all ins are even trickier. Practice by taking random amount of chips and act as if everyone is all in.

Keeping track of the button can also be a challenge. Sometimes it can shift a little during a hand, so it appears between two players. Fix it as necessary. Also, when taking any sort of break, even just a color-up, make sure the button is correct first, perhaps even announcing, "Button is good."

## **Seating, Blind Timing**

When there are 11 or more players at a one table venue, the table must sit 11 players. I.E. All players must have the chance of being knocked out before the final 10. If there are extra players waiting to sit, it is acceptable to add a 75/150 level until everyone has been seated. It is undesirable, but acceptable, to lock out players who did not sign up online or show up late.

Timing of each level is somewhat flexible, and is adjusted as people get knocked out. Sit & Go games should last about 45-55 minutes. Regular games should last about 75-85 minutes for the first game, then 65-70 minutes for games two and three.

For Sit & Go, start with two 8 minute levels, or 9 minutes for the first Sit & Go, where many players have bonus chips. Then drop one minute almost every level, or every level if a lot of people get knocked out quickly. When heads up, use at least two 5 minute levels before going to 4 minutes. Never have levels less than 4 minutes.

For regular games, we guarantee seating until half an hour after the scheduled start time, and players are locked out at color-up, so the first two levels should be 15 minutes, or adjusted as necessary if the game starts late, so the color up occurs at half an hour after the scheduled start time. Remaining levels and games use slightly longer than Sit & Go timing. At multi-table venues, if blinds got significantly reduced, they should be restored after the final table merge.

## **Blind Structures, Breaks, Tournament Timing**

For normal nightly games and Sit & Go, (i.e. starting stacks of 1,500 plus bonus chips), the blinds are 25/50, 50/100, color up, 100/200, 200/400, 300/600, color up, 500/1K, color up, 1K/2K, 2K/4K. 3K/6K, color up, 5K/10K. Break at final table merge.

For monthly or major tournaments, (starting stacks of 5,000 or more) the blinds are 25/50, 50/100, color up, 100/200, 200/400, break, 300/600, 400/800, 600/1200, 800/1600, color up & optional break, 1K/2K, 2K/4K, 3K/6K, color up, 5K/10K, 10K/20K, 15K/30K, color up, 20K/40K, etc. The second break is often skipped if there are few players left before the final table merge, or if the merge happened shortly before the color up. Initial levels are 15 minutes, then 12 minutes once down to two tables, then staying there until final table gets to 8 players where number of players plus 4 is a good rule of thumb.

For the yearly semi-finals and finals, additional levels are added, and the blinds last longer.

## **Dealer Responsibilities**

Set up / assist in setting up the tables, chairs, poker table tops and chip racks. Talk to non-players at the venue, to see if they are interested in joining WFP. If needed and time allows, give brief introductory poker lessons.

At multiple table weekly events, when one dealer is dealing the final table, the other dealer should check to see if the working dealer needs assistance or chips, make chip stacks, etc. If there are any new players, talk to them to make sure they know the details about WFP including our website and FaceBook page, sign in on line, and to turn in receipts.

At Sit & Go events, after each game the dealer should put the sign out sheet in a pile, and put a new sign in sheet in the clip board, making sure the area is neatly organized so players can sign in without confusion. If the next table is full, the dealer should start immediately, or after as short a break as possible. If a dealer chooses to take a break, and another dealer finishes and is ready to go before the first dealer is ready, that second dealer is free to take the table immediately.

At the end of the night, the dealer should make starting stacks then return the chips to the chip case, store the poker table top, reset the tables and chairs, tip out when required, then check with the lead dealer for anything else before leaving.

If a dealer makes \$61 to \$70 in tips, the excess over \$60 is tipped out to the Lead dealer. If the dealer makes \$70 or more in tips, \$10 is tipped out. This is completely on the honor system. No tip out at events where tips are pooled.

## **Lead Dealer Responsibilities**

In addition to the above Dealer Responsibilities, the Lead Dealer should check the sign up web page in a timely manner, to see if an extra dealer is needed, or to call off a second dealer if not needed. LD will bring chips, blank forms, pens, and poker table tops to the venue, arriving in time to have the room set up at least 30 minutes before the scheduled start time. After the last game, the LD will fill out the billing form and collect payment from venues when applicable.

Submit paperwork to WFP at the end of the night. The preferred method is to use TurboScan, available for both iPhone and Android. Send the scans to [wfp@worldfreepoker.com](mailto:wfp@worldfreepoker.com) The alternate method is to fax to the number on the billing form. Paperwork, plus any cash or checks, can be turned in on a semi-regular basis as needed.