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Poker Plays You Can Use

Written by
Doug Hull

Edited by
Ed Miller

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




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Symbol	Meaning
	Difficulty 1 of 4
	Too loose
	Too tight
	Limped
	Played out of position
	Plays fit or fold (check folds flop)
	Bet sizing tell
	Maximizing value
	Making a thin value bet
	Player has predictable or straightforward play
	Bluffing with an empty or nearly empty range
	Tilty, or lashing out
	Slowplay
	Changing gears
	Floating, intention to bluff later
	Bluff, with potential to bluff more as needed
	Once and done bluff
	Bluff with the intention to follow up on next street
	Bluff with intention of bluffing all three barrels
	Semi-bluff: bluffing with a good chance of improving
	Fold

















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Thank you to Nathan Lloyd, Joe Wargo, Mark Freund and Jesse Chen for proofing this manuscript as it was being developed. Of course, thank you to my girl, Laura, for all her support.

-Doug

Foreword by Ed Miller

What's the number one skill a poker player can have?

Patience.

Have you heard that one before? Patience, they say.

Who's "they"? I'm not exactly sure, but whoever they are, chances are I'm not listening to any more of their advice.

I've been immersed in the poker world for twelve years now, and I've met a number of wildly successful poker players. You know what they tend to have in common?

They have hyperactive minds. They're competitive. They're Type-A. They're perfectionists. They're obsessive. Quite frankly, they tend to be just a little bit sick in the head.

The phlegmatic, let-the-world-come-to-me, *c'est la vie* souls among them are few and far between. If patience were the most important skill one could have, every one of these top players would be dead broke.

If you think about it, it's no different in any other game. The guys at the top tend to be a bit hyped up and obsessive. How laid back and patient do you think Tiger Woods is?

If it's not patience, what is the number one skill a poker player can have?

In my opinion, it's a willingness to work every single day to improve. It's accepting that everything you've learned to this point is subject to reexamination. "Standard" is never standard until all alternatives have been thoroughly considered. Everything can be improved. And every improvement is worth pursuing. It means that good is never enough. There's always better.

What is an expert poker player? It's a mediocre poker player who has made hundreds or thousands of small, incremental improvements.

That's why these Type-A, perfectionist types are well represented at the top. They're willing to put in the work. In fact, they're often driven to do it by a single-minded obsessiveness.

So how does this apply to you? Chances are, you're not single-mindedly obsessed with poker, nor are you the sort of sick in the head that some top players are. I'm not, either.

Doug Hull, author of this book, first came to me a couple of years ago in Las Vegas. He had a full-time job and a keen interest in poker. He wanted to turn that interest into a second career, and he asked me to coach him.

Just as I do with all new students, I asked him questions designed to get him to explain how he makes poker decisions. And as with nearly all new students, within the first half hour, I found some obvious things he could improve. At that point, for me he was a typical student. He had a base level of knowledge about the game with plenty of potential room for improvement.

We concluded that first session the same way I do with all my students. I gave him homework. He was to write down hands he played, then analyze them in a particular way. He was to do this as often as he could—every day if possible. Next time I saw him, we’d go over his homework, and I’d possibly assign something new to work on.

Doug left Vegas and returned home, and I didn’t hear from him for a while.

Next time I talked to Doug, he had changed drastically. He was a much improved player and thinker. It’s because he actually did the homework!

Over time, Doug and I went back and forth, and he continued to improve. He went from “just another” \$2-\$5 regular to a professional-level player in a year or less. I probably coached him a total of ten hours during that time. The improvement came from him and the work he was willing to do.

Doug isn’t a hyperactive, perfectionist, obsessive guy—though it’s fair to say he has those traits perhaps a bit more than the average person. There’s no magic about his results. They came because he possessed the number one skill a poker player can have: a willingness to work every day for a never-ending series of small improvements.

Now Doug has written a book (another testament to his willingness to work a little bit every day to accomplish a goal). It’s a good book. It’s a book about how to get better at no-limit hold’em and how to do it the right way—one small improvement at a time.

The book comes in two major sections. First you’ll read a series of hand examples. These examples are designed to show you the difference between how a typical no-limit hold’em player thinks and how a professional-level player thinks. Each of these hand examples represents a small improvement you can make in your play.

The second section turns the lessons from the first section into missions you can do on your own. These missions are the equivalent of recipes in a book on nutrition or exercises in a workout book. Doing the missions—doing them as often and using as much your brain on them as possible—are what will make you a better poker player. Do the missions, and you’ll see results. Ignore the missions, and you likely won’t.

You can’t put the workout DVD on, watch it from the couch, and expect to get fit. You can’t read this book, put it back on the shelf, and expect to win at poker.

You have to work every day. Work through every hand example. Figure out how to apply each one to your game. Change the details of the hands and figure out if the answers change.

Pledge to do every mission. Go as fast or slow as you like. You do not have to overhaul your game overnight. Quite the opposite. Focus on one

small change at a time. Just do a little bit every day. The most important thing—keep at it.

Doug did it, and he got results. And now in this book he shows you exactly the work you need to do to get the same results he did.

- Ed Miller

Author of *Playing the Player*, *How To Read Hands At No-Limit Hold'em*, *Small Stakes Hold'em*, and a big believer that you can achieve a whole darn lot if you're willing to commit thirty minutes every day.

Foreword by the Author

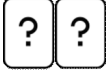


How is it that a winner can bet with the nut flush when a third flush card comes in and get called by worse and win? How can this same winner then bluff with a missed straight draw when a third flush card comes in and fold out top two pair and win again? The answer is from playing the player. Most poker players make systematic, predictable errors that can be exploited by those who are paying attention and are willing to pull the trigger when needed.

One of the concepts that changed how I think about poker is that not all bluffs need to tell a story. I am not always representing something specific when I bet. I am betting because the Villain's range is weak and I think he will fold often enough for it to be profitable. Many Villains are not thinking beyond their own cards. Other times you are representing a hand to a thinking opponent, and then that story needs to be coherent.

Another concept that changed how I think about poker is that just because you likely have the best hand on the flop, it does not follow that you should start to build a pot. Some hands are destined to be bluff catchers by the river and should be played as such. You need to protect your stack, not your hand.

A guide to reading these hands


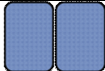

This book is laid out differently than other poker books. A tabular format is used so that all the relevant stack sizes, positions, holdings and table images are easily seen during every street.

\$2-\$5 Foxwoods	Image:	Action:	Hand:	Starting Stack:
UTG	LAG	Call/Call		\$450
...				
Cutoff	Bad regular	Call/Fold		...
...				
Button	Hero	\$30		Covers

In this format, the action of each player is in the action column. If a player makes multiple actions per street, they are separated by slashes. This hand would be written out as follows:

“A Loose Aggressive player limps Under the Gun. It is folded to a bad regular in the cutoff who also limps. Hero raises on the Button and only the LAG calls.”

This format is continued on each street in a different table. The starting stacks for each street are updated to make the action clearer.

	Pot: \$72	Range:	Stack:
LAG (UTG)	\$50/Fold		\$420
Hero (Button)	\$200		Covers

We can see that on the turn the LAG bet and then folded to our raise.

The other thing you will notice is that each chapter starts with a table showing the Villain's flaw, the difficulty rating of the play we made, and the exploit that we used. The icons are there to make it very fast to flip through the book for the situations you are looking for later.

A guide to reading this book.

This book is has two types of content. The first and lengthier type looks at different hands that illustrate a pattern in your opponents' strategy. These patterns are identified and then exploited. The second type of content is a set of missions for you to accomplish at the poker table over the next few months. Each of these missions is designed to give you concrete actions you can take to either eliminate a weakness in your own game or to exploit a weakness in your opponents'.

Most opponents at the poker table have a fairly static way that they think about poker. I like to classify players roughly as those that make calling errors (too loose), versus folding errors (too tight), versus betting errors (too aggressive), versus checking errors (too passive).

This makes them fall into predictable errors. When someone is predictable, they are exploitable. This book is all about identifying typical patterns and how to exploit them. For example, players are often announcing how they feel about their hands with bet sizing tells. This book shows you what to do when they fail at information hiding in this way.

When you have embraced the lessons of this book, you will find it much easier to fire in big bluffs. You will no longer be thinking about your own weak hand but instead will be thinking about the Villain's weak range. You can fearlessly fire when your focus is on the opponent's cards rather than your own.

The hand reviews allow you to hear my inner dialog as a hand unfolds. I am an aggressive player, but it is not wild flinging of chips. It is a cold, calculated brand of aggression that is designed to get better hands to fold and worse hands to call. This book will teach you to deviate from the typical strategies that most people use. You will then be able to adopt this much more exploitive and aggressive style. It will take a lot of work to get from here to there, but it will be worth it. The missions in the second half will give you the roadmap to get there. They are not there to be simply read. They are there as milestones for you to reach for on your path to better poker.

Bluffs and semi-bluffs

1) Loose Aggressive players are beaten by information deficits and backwards play.

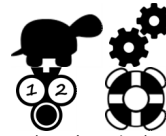


(Villain's flaw)



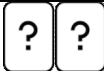

(Difficulty rating)

Related Missions: 5, 11, 14, 16



(Hero's exploit)

While he never said a word at the table, this player was generally ticking off the table by listening to loud music through his headphones, constantly three-betting pre-flop and giving off an arrogant vibe. I had seen him opening pretty light, even UTG with hands like KJo and A5s.


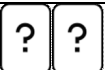

\$2-\$5 Foxwoods	Image:	Action:	Hand:	Starting Stack:
UTG	LAG Internet Kid	\$25		Covers
...				
Cutoff	Hero	Call		\$640
...				

This player was opening many pots for a raise, and betting so often that he must frequently have a weak hand. Because of this, we are ahead of his range, even his UTG opening range. We might even have him dominated with a better Ace. Lots of frustrated opponents would be tempted to raise here to stand up to the bully. We are ahead, so we should raise. Right? No. Resist this temptation.

Although we have position and the chance to isolate, we should just call instead. We do this because we know something about his hand, but all he will know about ours is that we choose to play. Good LAGs know they have a weak range, so when people stand up to them they are safe to fold. Good LAGs can thrive because their opponents do not hide information well. Betting into the LAG when you have a hand tells him he should fold. When people passively call them, they are more in the dark. When faced with this passivity they tend to predictably bet. Their victims fold often enough that the strategy works.




When we give minimal information by calling, we start creating an information deficit. His predictable error is that he tends to barrel into opponents, trying to get them to fold. If we hit top pair top kicker or an

Ace we can profitably call down three streets. We know the error he tends to make. We want to set up situations where he is likely to make that error.

	Pot: \$57	Range:	Stack:
LAG Internet Kid (UTG)	\$50		Covers
Hero (Cutoff)	???		\$615

Since we believe Villain bets nearly 100% of his range here, his bet does not carry any information. If we just fold, that plays into his game plan. He bets so often because most flops miss most hands. When ABC players miss, they fold to his bet. On the rare occasion that his opponents hit a flop, he can just fold to aggression. He wins enough small pots to make this strategy profitable.

We are not going to fold, yet all we have is a bluff catcher. We cannot call with the hopes of catching a pair or folding to a bet on the turn. If we want this pot, we might have to fight for it. That often means bluffing when the showdown value of our Ace high is not going to be enough.

	Pot: \$57	Range:	Stack:
LAG Internet Kid (UTG)	\$50/Fold		Covers
Hero (Cutoff)	\$200		\$615

Think to ourselves, “What would a typical bad recreational player do here with a great hand like a set?” They would do exactly the wrong thing and stand up to the bully, giving him the information he needs to make a good fold. So that is what we do: raise it up. We threaten a second barrel of the bluff with a turn shove. We can also think from the LAG’s perspective. When he gets raised big like this what does he think we have? People very rarely make cold bluffs like this, and there are no big draws to be betting out with. Sets and big over pairs are the most likely holdings.

This also uses a concept known as leverage. When a bet on one street implies an even bigger bet on the next street, you get to threaten the all-in amount while only risking the smaller amount.

He open folded AhTh.

As he folded, he said, “I do not want to stack off with just top pair to your set.” Notice that he specifically says he does not want to stack off. He thought we were going to shove the turn. We got \$565 worth of fold-equity while only risking \$200. That is leverage in action.

Notice also the bet sizing. We made a strong bet, about the size of the pot. I see many people bluff at the pot for too small of amounts because they are afraid to risk more than that. The problem is the smaller raise is not very effective, so it loses money because it will get called too often. The smaller amount is actually the riskier bluff.

I was honestly surprised to see he was so strong there. I would not have tried to take him off that kind of hand had I known. Playing backwards worked well, he put me on exactly the hand I was hoping he would. LAGs have come to learn that kind of resistance is a big hand, so I used that to my advantage.

Notice also that we switched gears. We started out pre-flop slowplaying. Normally slowplaying is a bad idea, but against a LAG, this backwards play works well. When we missed the flop we needed to switch gears and play backwards a different way. We started bluffing when we had nothing even though the original plan was to just call if we connected with the flop.

This might seem like a shocking move to make, firing in a \$200 bet with nothing. This is not reckless aggression though – it is calculated. Look at how we folded out a hand that really hit this board. As far as flopping a pair goes, this was a perfect board for his ATs. Even so, he found a fold because this move looked so strong. Every other time this has been done to him, he was against a better hand. We are mimicking the play of ABC players that hit a big hand to get a fold when we want one.

This play was specific for this kind of loose aggressive player. He is smart enough to read hands and thinks that players only play back at him when they hit. Doing this to a nit would be a very bad plan.

Alternate line: Call flop, Bluff-raise turn			
<div><div>10</div><div>6</div><div>2</div><div>7</div></div>	Pot: \$157	Range:	Stack:
LAG Internet Kid (UTG)	\$120/Fold	<div><div></div><div></div></div>	Covers
Hero (Cutoff)	Shove	<div><div>A</div><div>Q</div></div>	\$565

This alternate line of play would also be a reasonable plan since he would likely fold to this surprising aggression, just as he did in the actual line we took. This is a riskier play, but gets another \$120 into the pot before we bluff.

Alternate line: Call flop, Bluff turn						
<div>10♠</div> <div>6♥</div> <div>2♣</div> <div>7♠</div>	Pot: \$157	Range:	Stack:			
LAG Internet Kid (UTG)	Check/Fold	<div></div> <div></div>	Covers			
Hero (Cutoff)	\$125	<div>A♣</div> <div>Q♠</div>	\$565			

If he checks the turn, that gives us even more confidence that he has given up on his hand, making this bet a really high percentage play.



We started the above hand as a slowplay and turned it into a bluff. Here we play backwards again, only this time for value. We make it difficult for the LAG because even out of position we keep the information about our hand minimal.

\$1-\$2	Image:	Action:	Hand:	Starting Stack:
UTG	Limper	Call/Call	<div>?</div> <div>?</div>	...
UTG+1	Unknown	Call/Call	<div>?</div> <div>?</div>	...
...				
Cutoff	LAG	\$12	<div>?</div> <div>?</div>	\$412
...				
Big Blind	Hero	Call	<div>8♥</div> <div>8♦</div>	Covers

We are pretty happy to try and flop a set at this point. We look at the stack in front of the LAG, there is 40x the value of our call available to win. In addition, it is very likely two others will also call this bet. This immediately gives us 3.5x on our call in a situation where we flop a set once in eight flops. Having more people in the pot increases the chance someone will pay us off.

POKER PLAYS YOU CAN USE

	Pot: \$49	Range:	Stack:
Hero (Big Blind)	Check/Call		Covers
Limper (UTG)	Check/Fold		...
Unknown (UTG+1)	Check/Fold		...
LAG (Cutoff)	\$35		\$400

There are straight draws and a flush draw on board here, but we have a premium hand that we need to protect. We should bet, right? No, not when this player has the lead in position. His problem is that he bets too much when he sees weakness. We need to feign that weakness to get as much money in this pot as possible. Against other more passive players that call too much, we could bet this hand out for value, hoping to get called by the draws or weaker made hands. We are hoping to get stacks in against the LAG. Can we do it? With \$400 to win and \$50 in the pot, a pot sized bet on every street easily gets it in. With even a $\frac{3}{4}$ pot bet on every street, it is almost all in on the river. If one other player comes along just on the flop, then even a $\frac{3}{4}$ pot bet will easily be all in by the river.

What about protecting against the draws? Let us give him one of the worst possible draws: 7c9c. He is still a 40%-60% dog on the flop to our set because of redraws. Because we have observed this player is willing to bet too often, we need to give him that chance. Because his range is so wide, any particular draw should not be that scary to us. If he has a made hand with a Queen, he will do the betting also.

Imagine for a minute he has a weak Queen here and we lead out on the flop. He might call once but not twice. If we were to check to him though, he might bet two streets. Because of his wide range, he has air here often and a bet will just get him to fold. It is in his nature to bet into weakness. Let him.

	Pot: \$119	Range:	Stack:
Hero (Big Blind)	Check/???		Covers
LAG (Cutoff)	\$100		\$365

Most of the time, draws do not come in. What did come in was a nice barreling card. True to form, our LAG bets. With our call, he has \$265 left in a \$319 pot. Now it comes down to style and reads. What will get the money in? These are our options in order of preference:

- If he will call, shove the turn over his bet
- Minimum raise the turn over his bet and shove \$165 any river
- Call and evaluate river, but never fold the river

As the pot gets bigger, the need for deception goes down, and the need to take the pot goes up. The biggest fear is the flush card hitting on the river. Let us look at his odds with a few reasonable hands:

<div> <div> <div>6</div><div>8</div><div>Q</div><div>K</div> </div> <div>Board</div> <div> <div>8</div><div>8</div> </div> <div>Our hand</div> </div>					
The holding	Example	His odds	He will call turn check shove?	He will bet river on flush card?	He will bet river on non-flush card
Pair no draw	<div> <div>K</div><div>10</div> </div> <div> <div>Q</div><div>A</div> </div> <div>0%</div>	0%	Unlikely	?	?
Flush draw	<div> <div>A</div><div>9</div> </div> <div> <div>K</div><div>J</div> </div> <div>16% 18%</div>	16% 18%	Usually	Yes for strong, likely for middling	?
Air	<div> <div>A</div><div>9</div> </div>	0%	No	?	?
Two pair	<div> <div>K</div><div>Q</div> </div>	9%	Yes	?	?
Combination draw, high	<div> <div>A</div><div>J</div> </div>	22%	Yes	Usually	?
Straight draw	<div> <div>A</div><div>10</div> </div> <div> <div>7</div><div>9</div> </div> <div>9% 18%</div>	9% 18%	Maybe	?	?
Combination draw	<div> <div>7</div><div>9</div> </div>	30%	Yes	Usually	?

There is a lot of hand reading and combinatorics that goes into putting him on a hand. There are nine combinations of top two pair. He would likely play all those combinations this way every time. There are tons of combinations that give him air, but he would not play them all like this since he would give up on many of them on the turn. The rows of this chart are in order of my guesses as to relative likelihood of him holding these types of hands combinatorically while also taking into account the betting. These are rough guesses of a typical LAG without specific reads. Maybe the hyper-aggressive LAG has air more often than a weak made hand or a flush draw. However, to be considered a LAG, he needs to sometimes have air here. Most likely, I expect him to have a pair and no draw. Rarely he is going to show up with the specific open-ended combo draw of 7c9c.

Should we check-shove? Typically, we have a much better idea in this situation of how the LAG would react to our shove because it really comes down to math for him. How he will react to our flat call is up to much more debate. It depends on the player and how he feels about us. It cannot be quantified as easily as his reaction to our shove. The only thing we can say is he is likely to bet whenever he makes his flush.

The right play here is something you need to decide at the table. The guesses above are simply my beliefs as to which of these hands he would use to call the shove. It also shows that it is hard to guess how he would react when checked to on flush and non-flush rivers. We have two competing interests. The first is getting value from his river bluffs. The second is trying to get value from draws and weaker hands that will call the turn. If we do not bet now, he would play his draws perfectly on the river against us. If he has a bigger set, it is all going in and there is nothing to be done.

Traits that will make me want to flat call:

- He will three barrel with air but fold to a raise now
- He will three barrel with a busted draw
- He will bluff if a flush card hits

Traits that will make me want to shove:

- He will call with a variety of decent made hands and draws
- I am not getting more value from the air; he would only fire a third barrel when he hits his draw
- I am not getting more value from weak made hands; he will neither bet them nor call with them anyway





We are trying not to give ourselves a negative freeroll on the river. A negative freeroll is a situation where a weaker hand would call us now, but by checking we rarely induce a bluff yet we would call off our stack if he

has us beat. The less likely he is to bluff the river, the more we need to bet now. There was a lot of value in checking the turn to get his second barrel, but now there is more value in getting stacks in unless you have good reason to slowplay further.








2) Some players believe they are unlucky.
Act as if it is true.



There are certain players that are always complaining about people sucking out on them. They often verbalize their fears of it happening again. This Villain is notoriously tight, and he never does anything unpredictable. Other regulars at the table brag about correctly folding full houses to him without a second thought. That predictability makes him exploitable.

\$2-\$5 Mohegan Sun	Image:	Action:	Hand:	Starting Stack:
...				
EP2	Hero	\$15/ Call	 	\$600
MP1	Fatalistic Regular	\$45	 	Covers
...				

Villain thinks, “I never get there with Ace King”, and he never three-bets even that lite. Therefore, we put him solidly on QQ+. Him holding Ace King would be very surprising. We are getting about 20:1 implied odds on this call, and he is the kind of guy who will stack-off pretty significantly with an overpair to our set. We are happy to invest \$30 in set mining, even out of position.

  	Pot: \$97	Range:	Starting Stack:
Hero (EP2)	\$75	 	\$555
Fatalistic Villain (MP1)	Angry fold	  QQ+, AK	Covers

Because of his very nitty three-betting range, we can quickly go through the combinations of his holdings:






Holding	Count
QQ	6
KK	6
AA	3
AK	12 possible, likely many less

If we give him all the combinations of AK, it is almost 45% of the time that he does not hold an Ace. If we give him only the suited combinations then 65% of the time he does not hold an Ace. Just winning the \$97 pot 45% of the time with a bet of \$75 sounds great. However, we estimate it is closer to 65% of the time.

If this Villain is holding QQ or KK, this is a nightmare flop. The one card he did not want to see on the flop is there. He will not bet this flop, so we cannot check-call hoping to get more money in before we bluff. In fact, this guy is so tight that it is exceedingly unlikely that he puts any money in with KK, even if checked down to the river. This is a once and done kind of bluff. The emotional shock of the bet will play into his fear of flopping an Ace. This is a great time to fire.

He hates this flop. What is worse, a solid player just bet into him. It happened again – he got sucked out on. He folds, muttering, “Ace King got there again! I never win coin flips.” I believe this bluff folds him out of his entire range of hands that are beaten by a single Ace.

What if we want to take a more cautious path because we think he is capable of three-betting pre-flop with AKo and AKs. We expect him to be straightforward and timid, so look at this alternate line where he can have any cards in his range:

Alternate line 1: Wait for information, he bets flop				
	Pot: \$97	Range:	Starting Stack:	
Hero (EP2)	Check/Fold	 	\$555	
Fatalistic Villain (MP1)	Bet	  AK, AA	Covers	

POKER PLAYS YOU CAN USE

We expect this Villain to check down with KK or QQ. Since he bet, he has AK or AA. We can safely fold. We played this hand to flop a set. We missed.

Alternate line 2: Wait for information, he checks flop			
<div><div><div>A</div><div>7</div><div>4</div></div><div><div>♣</div><div>♠</div><div>♥</div></div></div>	Pot: \$97	Range:	Starting Stack:
Hero (EP2)	Check	<div><div>3</div><div>3</div></div> <div><div>♥</div><div>♠</div></div>	\$555
Fatalistic Villain (MP1)	Check	<div><div>?</div><div>?</div></div> <div>QQ, KK</div>	Covers

Since he could have any of the combos in his range in this alternate line, yet he checked behind, we figure him for QQ, KK.

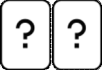
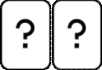

Alternate line 2: Wait for information, he checks flop			
<div><div><div>A</div><div>7</div><div>4</div><div>X</div></div><div><div>♣</div><div>♠</div><div>♥</div><div>?</div></div></div>	Pot: \$97	Range:	Starting Stack:
Hero (EP2)	\$75	<div><div>3</div><div>3</div></div> <div><div>♥</div><div>♠</div></div>	\$555
Fatalistic Villain (MP1)	Fold	<div><div></div><div></div></div> <div>QQ, KK</div>	Covers

When he has given up like this, he will easily believe we slow played an Ace on the flop and he will fold to this bet, just like he did in the actual line. Us waiting for information like this lowers the risk versus timid players.





If we were in position on the flop, we could make this same play only it would be easier. There would be no need to wait a street to fire the bluff. This is one of the many reasons to play in position against nitty players who will give up most flops.



This kind of play often takes the form of once and done bluffs when the pre-flop raiser has given up on a flop and you have position.


\$1-\$2	Image:	Action:	Hand:	Starting Stack:
UTG+1	Unknown	\$7		\$307
...				
Cutoff	ABC player	Call		\$407
...				
Button	Hero	Call		Covers


We could consider a squeeze play here, but taking a flop in position is fine also. We should be aware of domination here if we flop a pair, but in position against straightforward players we should be fine.


	Pot: \$24	Range:	Stack:
Unknown (UTG+1)	Check/Fold		\$300
ABC Player (Cutoff)	Check/Fold		\$400
Hero (Button)	\$20		Covers

No one seems to have any interest in this pot. We can take a stab at it once. We do not have much equity if called, but we get all kinds of folds here from fit or fold players that might be ahead of us with an Ace high type of hand. Some Villains would give up a middle pair: 77-JJ. They would think they lost a coin flip and be done. Since there are no likely draws, if we get called then it is likely by a weak Queen or a rather adventurous under pair. Some low stakes players do ridiculous slow plays here with a set of Queens. Knowing the players that are willing to do this helps. We would evaluate the turn action, but giving up after one barrel is fine. We should get folds often enough to make a little on this move. Little moves like this help make our pre-flop call right.

3) Raise boards where the flop continuation bet looks automatic.


(Villain's flaw)


(Difficulty rating)
Related Missions: 11, 14, 16


(Hero's exploit)

Some players will continuation-bet into boards when it superficially appears like it hits their range. However, this bet is actually a bet-fold on the flop or a fold on the turn when more pressure is applied back on them.

The Villain in this hand has proven himself able to continuation-bet with noticeable frequency, but he is not incredibly creative. He can fold a hand when he needs to.

\$2-\$5 Mohegan Sun	Image:	Action:	Hand:	Starting Stack:
...				
MP2	ABC Regular	\$25	<div>?</div> <div>?</div>	\$600
...				
Big Blind	Hero	Call	<div>Q</div> <div>J</div> <div>♠</div> <div>♠</div>	Covers

<div>A</div> <div>A</div> <div>7</div> <div>♣</div> <div>♥</div> <div>♠</div>	Pot: \$57	Range:	Starting Stack:
Hero (Big Blind)	Check/???	<div>Q</div> <div>J</div> <div>♠</div> <div>♠</div>	Covers
ABC Regular (MP2)	\$25	<div>?</div> <div>?</div>	\$575








At first, we can look at Villain's bet and say, "We missed. Time to fold." However, before we do we need to consider Villain's range. Here is a reasonable estimate:

Middle position opening range of ABC Regular												
AA	AKs	AQs	AJs	ATs	A9s	A8s	A7s	A6s	A5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AK	KK	KQs	KJs	KTs	K9s	K8s	K7s	K6s	K5s	K4s	K3s	K2s
AQ	KQ	QQ	QJs	QTs	Q9s	Q8s	Q7s	Q6s	Q5s	Q4s	Q3s	Q2s
AJ	KJ	QJ	JJ	JTs	J9s	J8s	J7s	J6s	J5s	J4s	J3s	J2s
AT	KT	QT	JT	TT	T9s	T8s	T7s	T6s	T5s	T4s	T3s	T2s
A9	K9	Q9	J9	T9	99	98s	97s	96s	95s	94s	93s	92s
A8	K8	Q8	J8	T8	98	88	87s	86s	85s	84s	83s	82s
A7	K7	Q7	J7	T7	97	87	77	76s	75s	74s	73s	72s
A6	K6	Q6	J6	T6	96	86	76	66	65s	64s	63s	62s
A5	K5	Q5	J5	T5	95	85	75	65	55	54s	53s	52s
4A	K4	Q4	J4	T4	94	84	74	64	54	44	43s	42s
A3	K3	Q3	J3	T3	93	83	73	63	53	43	33	32s
A2	K2	Q2	J2	T2	92	82	72	62	52	42	32	22

There are really only three likely hands right now:

Holding	Percentage
Trip aces	25%
Pocket pair under Aces	20%
Air	55%

The fear here is he has an Ace. Most players at this level will not bet out here with an Ace. If he had an Ace, he would likely check, hoping that we get something to call him with on the turn. If we discount the already unlikely Aces and look for other value hands, there are not that many. The small size of his bet also looks like he is just taking a stab. It looks a lot like a rote continuation-bet. How are we going to exploit this situation?


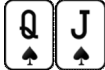
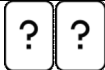
  	Pot: \$57	Range:	Starting Stack:
Hero (Big Blind)	Check/\$50	 	Covers
ABC Regular (MP2)	\$25/Fold	 	\$575

POKER PLAYS YOU CAN USE




This line folds him out of most of his air. We are playing a game of chicken, and we just won. Since a check by Villain would have been more consistent with holding an Ace, the combinatorics along with the bet told us a lot about his hand. What it told us is he does not often have an Ace.

We also told a story, but our story was more believable because it was mimicking the way many players would play an Ace. It does not need to be much of a story when he holds nothing though.

Let us consider the same hand where he could again hold any hand in his range:

Alternate line: Minimum raise, we get called			
	Pot: \$57	Range:	Starting Stack:
Hero (Big Blind)	Check/\$50		Covers
ABC Regular (MP2)	\$25/Call		\$575

This call is not a big surprise; we expect him to have under pairs sometimes. He still might have an Ace, or he could sometimes be calling with two big unpaired cards because he is priced in.

Alternate line: Minimum raise, we get called			
	Pot: \$157	Range:	Starting Stack:
Hero (Big Blind)	\$80		Covers
ABC Regular (MP2)	Fold		\$525

He probably called our minimum raise with some kind of pair like 88-JJ. When he did not improve, he just gave up. Our minimum raise showed strength and earned another \$25. We also picked up a solid backdoor flush. We were going to bet this turn regardless, but the flush draw shades the play a little more in our favor. The bet we make here does not need to be very big. We are mimicking a player with an Ace who wants to be called. One-third to one-half the pot should do just fine.



When we are making this kind of play, we are looking to take the pot down right now. Because of this, our equity when called does not matter as much as their likelihood of folding. We want players that are predictable in their high continuation betting frequency, players continuation betting where they would likely check with a made hand, and players that are not leading out on a draw such that they will call our raise.

\$1-\$2	Image:	Action:	Hand:	Starting Stack:
...				
Cutoff	TAG	\$12	<div>?</div> <div>?</div>	\$350
Button	Hero	Call	<div>8♥</div> <div>8♠</div>	Covers

The TAG is going to open pretty wide in the cutoff. We will have position and can flop a set or outplay post-flop.

<div>4♦</div> <div>7♣</div> <div>K♥</div>	Pot: \$27	Range:	Stack:
TAG (Cutoff)	\$15/Fold	<div></div> <div></div>	\$338
Hero (Button)	\$45	<div>8♥</div> <div>8♠</div>	...

This kind of disjointed rainbow flop with a single high card will get a bet from a TAG most of the time. It is mostly a bet-fold. A really good player would look at our raise and realize that we rarely have a hand we raise with. Thankfully, most TAGs will have air here a lot, and fold without thinking about it further. Any move can be overused, but turning our hand into a bluff is fine. We could also consider floating by just calling here. Floating means calling a bet with the intention to take the pot away by the river. Both are preferable to folding the flop when we miss our set.

4) Check-raise and barrel low paired flops from Big Blind.

<none>

(Villain's flaw)



(Difficulty rating)

Related Missions: 11, 17, 24



(Hero's exploit)

This move has a much higher difficulty rating because things go wrong on the turn and we need to make a decision to fire all three barrels as a bluff or to give up. This hand is similar to the above hand, where we are representing flopped trips. In this hand, the Villain is not a believer. This is one of those situations where a second barrel on the turn requires a third barrel to be profitable.

\$1-\$2 Hollywood Casino	Image:	Action:	Hand:	Starting Stack:
...				
MP2	ABC Recreational	\$10	<div>?</div> <div>?</div>	\$300
...				
Button	Unknown	Call	<div>?</div> <div>?</div>	\$300
...				
Big Blind	Hero	Call	<div>J</div> <div>10</div>	Covers
...				

This hand can flop big, and we can outplay these players post-flop.









<div>5</div> <div>5</div> <div>7</div>	Pot: \$31	Range:	Starting Stack:
Hero (Big Blind)	Check/\$30	<div>J</div> <div>10</div>	Covers
ABC Regular (MP2)	\$15/Call	<div>?</div> <div>?</div>	\$290
Unknown (Button)	Fold	<div></div> <div></div>	...

This is one of my favorite Big Blind special board textures. Here are the key components:

- Low pair with a low side card
- No flush draw or likely straight draw
- Raise from tight player pre-flop
- My call from the Big Blind or possibly Small Blind
- Potential to be heads up after the original raiser continuation bets

All of these work together to make it so Villain is unlikely to have anything but an over pair. We have a wider range that can represent flopped trips. This play works because this is how most people play flopped trips from the Big Blind: a small check-raise, then barrel.

His continuation bet is only half pot and could easily be an automatic one. There are not a lot of Fives in Villain's pre-flop raising range. We, on the other hand, closed the action in the Big Blind. We have a much wider range that can contain Fives. Our raise puts more money in the pot and looks stronger. With his call, we suspect an overpair like 88-JJ. On rare occasions, we expect a Seven or that he disbelieves us entirely while holding a couple of big cards. We expect to have a profitable turn bluff against this range.

   	Pot: \$91	Range:	Starting Stack:
Hero (Big Blind)	\$60	 	Covers
ABC Regular (MP2)	Call	 	\$260

This card is concerning as the Villain will now be very skeptical of the story we are trying to tell. There are bluffs where you bet the turn and then evaluate the river for the final bet because the final card will dictate our move. There are once and done bluffs, where you fire once and give up if called. This case is the all or nothing bluff; we cannot give up in the middle.

This is the big decision point of the hand. Giving up now is reasonable, but there is another way. If we bluff the turn, we need to commit to a river shove now. However crazy that may seem to put \$200 in with nothing, that river shove will look super strong and fold Villain out of almost his entire range.

Beware that chickening out on river is terrible. When making this play, giving up on the river will lose money, but barreling the river will make money. We need to commit to the river shove now. *Maybe* if the fourth Five comes out, we could consider giving up; but then again since Villain has

POKER PLAYS YOU CAN USE

called this far, he likely has a small pocket pair, and our Jack might be good for value.

We have gotten a read from this player that \$200 is a huge bet to him. He looks very uncomfortable calling the turn because he knows what is coming on the river. His fear helps us.

<div><div>5</div><div>5</div><div>7</div><div>5</div><div>3</div></div> <div><div>♠</div><div>♥</div><div>♠</div><div>♣</div><div>♥</div></div>	Pot: \$211	Range:	Starting Stack:
Hero (Big Blind)	Shove	<div><div>J</div><div>10</div></div> <div><div>♠</div><div>♠</div></div>	Covers
ABC Regular (MP2)	Fold	<div><div></div><div></div></div> <div><div></div><div></div></div>	\$200

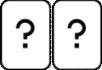
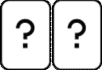

We are representing the absolute nuts here, even pocket Aces is just a bluff catcher. As expected, he folds. The reason this play works is that as unbelievable as it is that we have the last five, somehow it is *even more unbelievable* that we are bluffing. Most players do not bluff for the big money, whatever that means at the stakes you are playing. The typical player never bluffs in this specific situation. The common mistake of not bluffing often enough makes our bluff more believable.



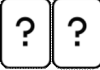
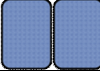
The Villain instantly forms a one-way animosity against me when I do not show. For the rest of the night, when I am beaten he makes snide comments about my likely weak holdings. I do not plan to bluff him again for a while.

Also note, you should always have a seat change Button, this gives you priority when a seat opens at the table. As you start taking more aggressive lines and pounding on players, they do form grudges. When a player wants to get even with you, try to make sure no seats to your left open up. If they do, take them. Even a semi-competent player with a grudge to your left is not as nice as him to your right.






Typically, this play gets a fold on the flop or turn. We rarely need to fire three barrels as seen in the example. Here is a more typical form of the play.

\$1-\$2	Image:	Action:	Hand:	Starting Stack:
UTG+1	ABC player	\$10		\$500
...				
MP2	Calling station	Call		\$400
...				
Big Blind	Hero	Call		Covers

	Pot: \$31	Range:	Stack:
Hero (Big Blind)	Check/\$50		Covers
ABC player (UTG+1)	\$20/???		\$490
Calling station (MP2)	Fold		...

This is how the play begins, we will be heads up, we expect the Villain rarely has a Seven after raising pre-flop and betting. We however could have anything since we just called from the blinds. The check-raise emulates how most people play this kind of Big Blind special. The Villain very well could have just been continuation betting and will give up immediately. If Villain has a premium over pair, they will likely call down and evaluate the turn.

	Pot: \$131	Range:	Stack:
Hero (Big Blind)	\$100		Covers
ABC player (UTG+1)	Fold		\$440

Some players might get really stubborn with Aces here. You will get folds from most ABC players even with KK. You need to choose your targets well, a calling station that cannot understand what you are representing will ship that same KK in this spot.

5) Fire the second barrel when overcards come on dry boards.



The second barrel is a natural extension of a continuation betting strategy. When a dry board with only medium and low cards comes, and your opponent calls, he will often be marked with a weak pair. Over cards that come on the turn will allow you to fold them out.

\$2-\$5 MGM- Vegas	Image:	Action:	Hand:	Starting Stack:
...				
EP2	ABC Player	Limp/Call	<div>?</div> <div>?</div>	\$600
Cutoff	Hero	\$30	<div>A♠</div> <div>Q♥</div>	Covers
...				

The flop comes out with very little for anyone:

<div>4♥</div> <div>6♣</div> <div>10♦</div>	Pot: \$67	Range:	Starting Stack:
ABC Player (EP2)	Check/Call	<div>?</div> <div>?</div>	\$570
Hero (Cutoff)	\$40	<div>A♠</div> <div>Q♥</div>	Covers

Villain calls. Because of our pre-flop raise, we can very believably have an over pair here. However, even a straightforward player will take a card off with a Ten, a small pocket pair, an occasional inside straight draw or just two over cards. We are hoping for a nice over card on the turn, preferably one that pairs us, but any of them will weaken the relative strength of his pair and not help his likely draw.

<div><div>4</div><div>6</div><div>10</div><div>K</div></div>	Pot: \$147	Range:	Starting Stack:
ABC Player (EP2)	Check/Fold	<div><div></div><div></div></div>	\$570
Hero (Cutoff)	\$100	<div><div>A</div><div>Q</div></div>	Covers

This is one of the best possible barreling cards. Villain can now tell himself two stories: We had an over pair, and are still going with it, or we had AK and just got lucky on him. We do pick up a little equity with our Broadway draw, and the nut no pair is worth something versus the straight draws that Villain might hold.



This is an important concept. Just as good players have learned to continuation bet when the board is right, we need to learn to fire again on good turns. Let us try again in a multi-way pot.

\$2-\$5 The Lodge	Image:	Action:	Hand:	Starting Stack:
...				
EP1	Loose passive	Limp/ Call	<div><div>?</div><div>?</div></div>	\$600
...				
MP1	Nit	Limp/Fold	<div><div></div><div></div></div>	\$900
MP2	ABC Regular	Limp/Call	<div><div>?</div><div>?</div></div>	\$750
Button	Hero	\$35	<div><div>A</div><div>K</div></div>	Covers
...				

Lots of limpers to the flop. I tend to start at 4-5 BB and add a big blind for every limper.

POKER PLAYS YOU CAN USE

<div> <div>9</div> <div>6</div> <div>4</div> </div>	Pot: \$117	Range:	Starting Stack:
Loose passive (EP1)	Check/Call	<div>?</div> <div>?</div>	\$565
ABC Regular (MP2)	Check/Fold	<div></div> <div></div>	\$715
Hero (Button)	\$80	<div>A</div> <div>K</div>	Covers

We should not be shocked by this call. There are lots of pocket pairs that will call: 55-JJ all seem reasonable. The suited connector, 78s makes a good straight draw. There are plenty of single gap connectors also. None of these hands that he probably has likes it when an over card comes.



The reason these are bad for the calling range on 964r is that these cards change the relative strength of their hands. Their top pair or their over pair often become a second pair, which is beaten by a single card. Their under pairs, like 77, now becomes third pair. The second bet by us makes us look stronger, so it is harder for Villains to call. Also, the bigger bets as the pots grow make people play more straightforward.

We would not want to fire again on the following cards:



The reason not to fire is that these cards help many of the kinds of hands that we expect called the flop. Lots of suited connectors picked up a straight, two pair, a pair with their draw or open trips. When these players improve, they are unlikely to lay down their hand. Since we are betting to get a fold, we should not bet unless we expect to get one.



These are cards are the bricks. On this loosely connected board they do not help any of the draws. They do not change the board, but they devalue the draws. This sets up a situation where we can bet the turn with the plan

to shove the river. There are so many weak fits on this kind of board that we can charge them on the turn and shove the river.

<div><div>9</div><div>6</div><div>4</div><div>Q</div></div>	Pot: \$277	Range:	Starting Stack:
Loose passive (EP1)	Check/Fold	<div><div></div><div></div></div>	\$485
Hero (Button)	\$175	<div><div>A</div><div>K</div></div>	Covers

Thankfully, we got a good barreling card, and the Villain released his hand. Note the bet sizing we used. We had lots of latitude in our bet size to get a fold. A bet of \$150 is on the small size while a bet of \$300 is on the large size. This sizing was chosen because we have fold equity now, and the \$310 that is left on the end will have fold equity if we decide to fire the final barrel. It leaves our options open. We should always look at the remaining stacks and decide our bet size based on our plan for the rest of the hand.


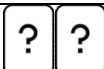

As you get better at deciding when to fire second barrels, you will find you *want* your continuation bets to be called. This is because often you will win the hand on the turn after being paid for a continuation bet. This puts more chips in your stack than just taking it down on the flop.


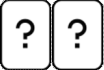

Most people will not notice what kinds of texture you are double barreling on. They will not know how to defend against your betting. Watch the hands you are not in. Notice which people are doing the same thing as you are. When you know what they are doing, you will be able to defend yourself and take advantage of their barreling. That comes in the next chapter.






Let us try this important move yet again.

POKER PLAYS YOU CAN USE

\$1-\$2	Image:	Action:	Hand:	Starting Stack:
UTG	Nit	Call/Fold		\$320
...				
Hijack	ABC player	Call/Call		\$400
...				
Button	Hero	\$15		Covers

	Pot: \$35	Range:	Stack:
ABC Player (Hijack)	Check/Call		\$385
Hero (Button)	\$25		Covers

Villain limp-called pre-flop, and on this flop we expect him to have a small pocket pair like 66-JJ. He might also have some suited connectors looking for an inside straight, or possibly a weak Nine from a suited connector. There are only a few good sets for him to have. His weak range will often fold on the turn, especially to a good overcard.









	Pot: \$85	Range:	Stack:
ABC Player (Hijack)	Check/Fold		\$360
Hero (Button)	\$60		Covers

This Queen is the kind of card that does not help his hand, and makes all his likely pair holdings look even weaker. It is the rare player who is going to call again with 77, 68s, or even 89s. This is why he folds.

6) Players that know when to two barrel bluff can be semi-bluffed on the turn.














As you are playing at the table, watch the other players. You will find certain players, the LAGs and TAGs, fire a second barrel when good barreling cards come. Whenever you can predict what a player will do before they do it, they are exploitable. Bluffing the bluffer is the next level of poker thinking. Raising this bluff is an excellent option, especially if you have a draw to back you up. The other reason this semi-bluff works is that it is rare at this level for a turn check-raise to be anything but a strong made hand. This induces a lot more folds because we look so strong. This is how to play against players that are playing like us.









\$2-\$5 The Bike	Image:	Action:	Hand:	Starting Stack:
...				
Hijack	Hero	\$25	 	\$600
Cutoff	LAG	Call	 	Covers
Button	Nit	Call	 	\$400
Small Blind	Weak player	Call	 	\$550
...				

We certainly do not like being out of position to the Loose Aggressive player; he tends to make our hands hard to play because he will bet or raise when he senses weakness. We expect the LAG to not have complete garbage, but he does not need to be too strong either. Most pairs, any two Broadway cards, suited Aces, suited Kings, and one or two gappers are all reasonable. He is capable of flat calling with premium hands if the mood suits him. We are on the border of folding or opening in this hostile situation. The weak players in the blinds and the predictable Nit on the Button give us reason to open here.

POKER PLAYS YOU CAN USE

  	Pot: \$105	Range:	Starting Stack:
Unknown (Small Blind)	Check/Fold	 	...
Hero (Hijack)	Check/Call	 	\$575
LAG (Cutoff)	\$35	 	Covers
Nit (Button)	Fold	 	...

We have very little hand strength on this flop, and terrible equity when called. Because of this, we do not like continuation betting into three opponents. However, after the LAG bets, we can close the action heads-up with an inside straight draw, backdoor Hearts, two over cards and a board that is unlikely to have hit him either. We are getting great odds from his small bet. Having this relative position on the LAG has advantages as his bet clears out the rest of the table.

   	Pot: \$175	Range:	Starting Stack:
Hero (Hijack)	Check/\$225	 	\$540
LAG (Cutoff)	\$75/Fold	 	Covers









This is a very sneaky card for us. We have a well-hidden double belly buster straight draw. It is a good barreling card for the LAG. It is an over card, we have shown weakness and we are the only opponent.

It is hard for us to simply call his bet, because we need to make a hand on the river to realize our showdown value. However, our hand also has stealing value. The stealing value combined with the showdown value makes this a profitable spot. His small bets and prior history of two-barreling gives us reason to try this move. The range analysis later in the alternative lines section applies here too. He does not likely have a strong hand, so we can push him out with a check-raise.

If he shoves over our check-raise, it comes down to pot odds and our perception of his range. We would be getting 2.4:1 on the shove. If he has even an overpair like AA, we need 4.5:1. If he only has an Eight, then we can barely squeak in a call since we would need at least 2.14 to call.

If he flat calls and we miss on the river, it is doubtful he called with anything that he would fold on the river for the small amount we have left.

We got really lucky with the draw we picked up on the turn. Let us look at an alternative line and see what happens if we are less fortunate.

Alternate Line: unhelpful over card on turn				Pot: \$127	Range:	Starting Stack:
						
Hero (Hijack)				Check/\$225	 	\$540
LAG (Cutoff)				\$75/Fold	 	Covers

Villain bets again on the turn. Let us look at his range; he called a late raise pre-flop and we had put him on a range like this:

Pre-flop cutoff calling range (25%)												
AA	AKs	AQs	AJs	ATs	A9s	A8s	A7s	A6s	A5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AK	KK	KQs	KJs	KTs	K9s	K8s	K7s	K6s	K5s	K4s	K3s	K2s
AQ	KQ	QQ	QJs	QTs	Q9s	Q8s	Q7s	Q6s	Q5s	Q4s	Q3s	Q2s
AJ	KJ	QJ	JJ	JTs	J9s	J8s	J7s	J6s	J5s	J4s	J3s	J2s
AT	KT	QT	JT	TT	T9s	T8s	T7s	T6s	T5s	T4s	T3s	T2s
A9	K9	Q9	J9	T9	99	98s	97s	96s	95s	94s	93s	92s
A8	K8	Q8	J8	T8	98	88	87s	86s	85s	84s	83s	82s
A7	K7	Q7	J7	T7	97	87	77	76s	75s	74s	73s	72s
A6	K6	Q6	J6	T6	96	86	76	66	65s	64s	63s	62s
A5	K5	Q5	J5	T5	95	85	75	65	55	54s	53s	52s
4A	K4	Q4	J4	T4	94	84	74	64	54	44	43s	42s
A3	K3	Q3	J3	T3	93	83	73	63	53	43	33	32s
A2	K2	Q2	J2	T2	92	82	72	62	52	42	32	22

This is about 25% of all starting hands. This range only hits this flop about 20% of the time. Half of those times with an overpair, a third of the time with just top pair. Sets and a straight draw make up the rest. Here are the hands that hit:

POKER PLAYS YOU CAN USE

[illegible]

How many of those hands like betting when a King of Clubs comes on the turn? Only about half of them:










3 6 8 K value range in white (10% of pre-flop)

The point of looking at this is that rarely does he have a hand here. Only 20% of his starting range hits; only 50% of that 20% hits the turn too. So, only 10% of the time does he have a hand strong enough to bet here. It seems far more likely that he is just betting because we showed weakness. This is not some nit that is out of character betting because he got lucky and hit a great hand. This is a guy that has shown a proclivity towards betting into weakness. That is why the check-raise will work, even if we did not have a draw to back us up.

What are we representing on this board? Nothing, absolutely nothing. He will probably give us credit for a set that we played sneaky. This is a bluff that is pressuring his weak range while not particularly representing anything.

This kind of analysis shows that almost no card really helps him. We would likely check-raise any card with similar prospects.










Let us look at a different alternative line. We checked the original turn and got in a check-raise. What happens if the Villain checks behind on the turn?

Alternate line: turn checks through, induce action					Pot: \$127	Range:	Starting Stack:
							
Hero (Hijack)					\$20	 	\$540
LAG (Cutoff)					???	 	Covers

If we hit one of our straight cards, we could just sell our hand for whatever we think we can get. A standard bet might be about \$100 when we make it.

We could also try something strange – bet \$20. What LAG is going to fold to this small bet? It would prove that he had nothing. Calling is just not his style. He might convince himself that this strange little bet is a blocking bet. If we are making a blocking bet then we would fold to a raise. In this book, we raise when we think someone will bet-fold. Often our small bet size telegraphs the intention to fold to a raise. Villain likes raising when people show weakness. Give it a try. This is how we beat people that play like us.









Also, the Seven might make him a tempting two pair if he had suited connectors 67 or 78. If he held this, his raise would very likely come, giving us a chance to shove.

Alternate line: turn checks through, big bluff					Pot: \$127	Range:	Starting Stack:
							
Hero (Hijack)					\$175	 	\$540
LAG (Cutoff)					Fold	 	Covers

If the turn checks through and we do not hit our miracle straight, we know that he bet the flop, but then checked back the turn. From earlier analysis, we suspect that he has a very weak hand. He wants to get to a cheap showdown. A healthy donk over-bet here really pressures his holdings. It appears as if we have one last chance for value and do not want to miss it. We are not representing anything in particular, but we do not need to. He will not need much of a story to fold his hand. He seems to only have a single pair, one beaten by a single Queen. He will fold pretty much everything here.



This semi-bluff requires courage and observation of patterns. While we will have some showdown equity with our draw, this play is mostly about noticing that a player is willing to double barrel with air. Just as we might bluff-raise a continuation bet, we are now bluff-shoving a frequent two barreler.

\$1-\$2	Image:	Action:	Hand:	Starting Stack:
UTG+1	Unknown	Limp/Fold	 	...
MP1	Loose passive	Limp/Call	 	\$262
MP2	TAG	\$12	 	\$312
...				
Button	Hero	Call	 	Covers

	Pot: \$41	Range:	Stack:
Loose passive (MP1)	Check/Fold		\$250
TAG (MP2)	\$30		\$300
Hero (Button)	Call		...

It all starts when he fires the first barrel on a flop that does not really hold much for anyone. Certainly he could do this legitimately with JJ+ and some good Tens. More likely, he has two missed overcards, some tenuous suited connectors or possibly some low pairs that are now essentially a bluff.

	Pot: \$101	Range:	Stack:
TAG (MP2)	\$60		\$270
Hero (Button)	Shove		...

The only value hands that like this King are AA, KK, TT, TK and flush draws. Maybe he was leading out with AK/KQ/KJ on the flop too. This is a very small amount of his range. Imagine you were this TAG and were following the barrel plan with AQ, AJ, QJ, JJ, 89s, 88. Would you make a hero call on the chance we were making a play? Exactly. We have just as empty of a range as him, but it is harder to call a bet than to make one.

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Getting Value

7) Players are amazingly truthful in discussing their hands during play.








People often ironically say poker players never lie, but that is a lie. During a hand, they almost always tell the truth. At worst, they tell you something misleading but true. I managed to get full value for this hand because the player told me what cards he held on the turn.

\$2-\$5 Playground Poker Club	Image:	Action:	Hand:	Starting Stack:
...				
Hijack	Bad, social regular	Limp/Call	<div>?</div> <div>?</div>	\$225
Cutoff	Hero	\$25	<div>J♥</div> <div>J♣</div>	Covers
...				

Everything is according to plan; I have position on a recreational player with a healthy pocket pair.

<div>10♠</div> <div>Q♠</div> <div>3♦</div>	Pot: \$57	Range:	Starting Stack:
Bad, social regular (Hijack)	Check	<div>?</div> <div>?</div>	\$200
Hero (Cutoff)	Check	<div>J♥</div> <div>J♣</div>	Covers






This is not a great board to continuation bet. I do not have very good equity when called, and this board hits a lot of his check-calling range. If I am called, I am likely to have to shut down on the turn. When that happens, I would open myself up to a river bluff from all the missed draws.

	Pot: \$57	Range:	Starting Stack:
Bad, social regular (Hijack)	Check/tank call	 	\$200
Hero (Cutoff)	\$50	 	Covers

I likely have the best hand here, but the board is super draw heavy. There are lots of pair plus draws, backdoor and front door flushes. I am really hoping for the proverbial Deuce of Stars to come out on the river.

These worries were entirely relieved when Villain tank calls saying, “I have two pair, I cannot fold.” It has been my experience that after the hand is over, I do not trust a lot of what people have to say about their hand. The pressure is off, and they have time to think about how they would like to manipulate you. However, as counter-intuitive as it might seem, people tell you the truth when they speak about their hand during the hand. The reason is that they think that no one will believe them if they tell the truth, they cannot think of a plausible lie that quickly, and they just do not like to lie. The more specific their statement, the more truthful it is. “I have a hand,” does not mean much. “I have a big draw,” is likely true. “I have a set,” is very likely true.

Villain here was very plausible with two pair. This made me feel much better when the worst card in the deck fell:

	Pot: \$157	Range:	Starting Stack:
Bad, social regular (Hijack)	Check/Call	  (assumed)	\$150
Hero (Cutoff)	\$150	 	Covers

Just about the worst card in the deck comes out here. Normally, I would consider just checking it back since there is no room for a bet-fold. However, when he had told me that he had two pair, I had already decided to ship if I managed to fade the two remaining queens. When Villain checked, I announced, “all-in”. He gently slid his remaining stack to me, put on his coat and walked away before I revealed my hand. The dealer just shrugged, mucked his hand and shipped me the pot.

He told the truth – he could not fold!

8) If you are bluff catching, improving your hand should not alter your plan.











If you know the other guy is full of it, then you can call down with a pretty weak hand. Sometimes you will back into a strong hand while doing this. However, you cannot bet into him for value because it will only scare him away before he has the chance to make the mistake. Once he has bluffed, then you can evaluate if you can raise for value.










\$2-\$5 Taj	Image:	Action:	Hand:	Starting Stack:
UTG+1	TAG	\$25		Covers
...				
MP1	Recreational Player	Call		\$550
MP2	Hero	Call		\$700
...				
Button	LAG	Call		\$600

	Pot: \$107	Range:	Starting Stack:
TAG (UTG+1)	Check/Fold		Covers
Recreational Player (MP1)	Check/Fold		\$525
Hero (MP2)	Check/Call		\$675
LAG (Button)	\$60		\$575

We were set mining and missed. However, we have relative position on the LAG. What this means is since we can count on him to bet often, by being to his right we get to see everyone's reaction to his expected bet. His bet has cleaned out all of the competition. This is a fine board for him to take the lead at an abandoned pot. We do not believe him for a minute and are happy to let him barrel off. He is willing to make the mistake of betting too often without a hand.

   	Pot: \$227	Range:	Starting Stack:
Hero (MP2)	Check/Call	 	Covers
LAG (Button)	\$150	 	\$515

We called so that the LAG could make the mistake of betting the turn. We execute that plan and call him. We only have a bluff-catcher, but it is doing its job. We ready ourselves for the third barrel since we do not believe he has the King. He certainly could have it, but it is a small fraction of his holdings.

    	Pot: \$527	Range:	Starting Stack:
Hero (MP2)	Check/Call	 	Covers
LAG (Button)	Shove	 	\$365

We got very lucky. Should we bet it out and hope he has a King to pay us off? No! We played this hand with the intention of calling the LAG down precisely because we did not believe he had a King. Betting would let him off the hook because he is never going to call us on the river with a worse hand. If he is never calling, we have to hope he is willing to bet with a missed flush or fire a third barrel to represent a King.

With Villain's wide range, if he managed to have a King it might have been very weak, for example, K5s. Betting might fold him out, whereas checking would allow him to bet for value.

9) Remember the Chicken-Hawk Declaration.



I offer up this observation

Chicken-Hawk Declaration

"If a passive player check-calls out of position on the flop and turn, then jams the river, he has whatever big hand you fear he has."

It is difficult live to get enough hands to determine if this is true so I leave it merely as a "declaration", not a law. My experience says I would have saved a lot of money had I believed it to be true.

Let us look at some of the kinds of situations where this would take place.



He is representing a straight with a pot sized bet. How could this tight, passive Villain call two streets with a Three? Maybe he got there with 3dAd when he picked up a straight draw on the turn. Maybe he had 7d8d, and now he is afraid you will check the river, so he jams.



You flop a straight with AQ; the tight passive guy check-calls you on the flop. Your straight is partially counterfeited on the turn, and he check calls you again. Finally, he jams on the river. You are against a boat of some sort.

Test this declaration for yourself. Pick out the passive players at your table; when you see this pattern, note what happens. My belief is they will always have a five card hand (straights, flushes, and boats) or better. Let me know what you observe by writing me at hull@ThreeBarrelBluff.com

Three-bet pots

10) Three-bet to isolate a bad player.



(Villain's flaw)



(Difficulty rating)

Related Missions: 5, 8



(Hero's exploit)

The first reason people three-bet is because they have a premium hand. This is also often the only reason they three-bet. However, there are other reasons. One of the favorite reasons, especially of TAGs, Internet Kids and LAGs is to isolate a bad player.

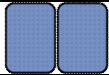
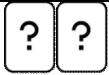

The way this works is there is a bad player that will raise into a lot of pots. We want to be in pots with this guy. If we just flat call after him, we will often find ourselves to be second of five people to the flop. This is not ideal. What we want is a situation where we are two or three to the flop, act last and were the last player to put in a raise pre-flop. This is a “Bread and Butter” scenario as Tommy Angelo called it in Elements of Poker. Flatting his raise will not get us that, but three-betting often will.

As you are adding this move to your arsenal, consider it a success if you get into this scenario. This is a profitable situation so you want to get into it often. The question is what kinds of stack sizes and holdings do you want to go to war with in this situation? QQ+, AQ+ are nice, but that is not what we are talking about for this kind of play (that is the more natural value raise.)

We want our Villain to have the money to pay us off. If he only has 30BB, you only are looking to raise for value. So, let us assume effective stacks are around 200BB or, hopefully, much more.

Next we are looking for fatal flaws in the Villain. Where is he going to stack off to us? Some common ones are the inability to fold top pair or playing any suited cards for flush possibilities. Suited Aces will allow for over flushing someone and can provide sneaky two pair hands versus better Aces.

The later our position when we isolate, the better. The reason for this is that smarter players to our left will take note of frequent three-bet isolation and can punish us. It is ideal to have passive, straightforward players after us to minimize this possibility.

\$1-\$2 Charity game	Image:	Action:	Hand:	Starting Stack:
EP1	Unknown	Limp/Fold		\$40
EP2	Frequent raiser, bad player	\$10/Call		\$380
...				
MP2	Hero	\$20		Covers
...				

Since we have three people after us, we want to raise to get heads-up against our Villain. We specifically took a seat change twenty minutes ago to get to this position because we wanted to act after this particular player. This is the kind of situation we were looking get into. The small raise should be enough to single him out. This was at a charity event, and they tend to have mostly passive, recreational players. Raises happen, but three-bets are pretty rare. At first people put you on big pocket pairs and Ace King/Queen when you make this play. Eventually they figure out you could have anything here. Villain's range is rather wide and hard to list. However, we expect lots of middle pairs, suited connectors and one gappers. We expect he reraises only with AA and KK so they are not in his calling range. He could have any Ace up to and including Ace King. Let us say this is what he is usually going to the flop with.




Bad player raise-call range.												
AA	AKs	AQs	AJs	ATs	A9s	A8s	A7s	A6s	A5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AK	KK	KQs	KJs	KTs	K9s	K8s	K7s	K6s	K5s	K4s	K3s	K2s
AQ	KQ	QQ	QJs	QTs	Q9s	Q8s	Q7s	Q6s	Q5s	Q4s	Q3s	Q2s
AJ	KJ	QJ	JJ	JTs	J9s	J8s	J7s	J6s	J5s	J4s	J3s	J2s
AT	KT	QT	JT	TT	T9s	T8s	T7s	T6s	T5s	T4s	T3s	T2s
A9	K9	Q9	J9	T9	99	98s	97s	96s	95s	94s	93s	92s
A8	K8	Q8	J8	T8	98	88	87s	86s	85s	84s	83s	82s
A7	K7	Q7	J7	T7	97	87	77	76s	75s	74s	73s	72s
A6	K6	Q6	J6	T6	96	86	76	66	65s	64s	63s	62s
A5	K5	Q5	J5	T5	95	85	75	65	55	54s	53s	52s
4A	K4	Q4	J4	T4	94	84	74	64	54	44	43s	42s
A3	K3	Q3	J3	T3	93	83	73	63	53	43	33	32s
A2	K2	Q2	J2	T2	92	82	72	62	52	42	32	22

Rather than play out an example hand, let us deal out 16 random flops from the remaining deck and determine which we would check and bet. We are almost always going to be checked to here. We will say he hits the flop when he flops

- Set
- Two pair
- Pocket pair below top pair
- Middle pair
- Flush draw
- Open-ended straight draw
- Inside straight draw

The following was done in Flopzilla, with the percentage rounded to nearest 5%. The highlighted cell shows the primary reasoning for our betting or checking.

“Miracle” flops			Our equity vs. his range	% of his range that “hits”	Our equity vs. his “hit range”
			Action: Bet		
	Bet for value		85%	45%	75%
	Bet as semi-bluff		75%	40%	60%
Can pick-up draws on turn			Action: Bet		
	We can pick up backdoor hearts or a straight draw. Lots of barreling and bluffing cards.		40%	40%	20%
Continuation betting boards					
	Typical continuation bet board		45%	35%	15%
	Hard for villain to hit		55%	25%	25%
	Can often fire a second barrel when an overcard hits		50%	25%	20%
	Can often fire a second barrel when an overcard hits		45%	35%	20%
	Can often fire a second barrel when an overcard hits, small chance of picking up straight draw		40%	40%	20%
Weak fits on coordinated boards			Action: Check, consider bluffing or bluff catching later		
	We have a bluff catcher.		60%	55%	45%
	We have a bluff catcher.		45%	70%	30%
	We have a bluff catcher.		60%	55%	50%
	A draw to Broadway, but might need to fade Spades		30%	70%	20%

Bad boards		Action: Check		
	Some backdoor equity with straights, but a straight with our Eight is a trap. Any Jack, any Ten, or any Diamond will often let Villain call with great equity when he does.	35%	60%	25%
		35%	45%	25%
		35%	45%	20%

Miracle flops:

We played this hand and hit a miracle flop, which are those where we have high equity when called, and will be called often because the flop also hits him. If our Villain gets over-flushed or pays off our sneaky two pair, it was all worth it. These are the places that pay off well. Bet these out; that is why you came.

Backdoor draws with barreling possibilities:

The next class of flops are those that are reasonably hard for Villain to hit. These are the ones that we can often barrel when an overcard hits or when we pick up a draw. Though we have low equity when called, we will know when we have a hand that worth putting big money in for. Villain's equity will be hard to achieve because we will often pressure him to fold.

Continuation betting boards:

The key to three points for these kinds of boards are

- Hard for the Villain to hit
- His hit is often weak
- He will fold to pressure later

That is why we are betting them and barreling them.

Weak fits on coordinated boards:

With position, we might be able to bluff these boards. These are going to be harder to play. We at best have bluff catchers on these boards. We will often give up to aggression on these boards.

Bad boards:

These boards fit our Villain's check calling range before the flop. We missed, and he more than likely hit. We cannot win them all. Just lose a little pot here, and buy your next lottery ticket versus this player soon.

You do not need Flopzilla at the table to do this kind of analysis. All the above classifications were done by hand as I dealt out the random flop; I then went back ran the numbers through Flopzilla. The numbers bore out my intuition. This is an easy exercise to try with just a deck of cards.

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Remember, I am saving every dime from this book to buy a modest retirement home in Vegas. Once I can move to Vegas and go pro as an author, coach and player, I will. There will be more books like this, but I need to be able to afford to write them. You can help.

Thanks,

Doug

Author of Poker Plays You Can Use

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Poker Missions

Poker missions for continuous improvement









Some of the kinds of plays that were outlined in these chapters are relatively easy, such as a one barrel bluff of raising a continuation bet. Some are much harder, such as floating out of position. How do you add these kinds of plays to your arsenal? You add them one at a time in a gradual progression. These missions give you a logical, gentle framework to improve your game slowly.

You have read the stories of these plays being used and now you need to get out there and do these things yourself. This is going to bring you out of your comfort zone. It is one thing to abstractly agree that a \$500 bluff makes sense when it is not your money. It is another thing to slide in five full stacks of red chips with Queen high. If even the thought of pushing in that kind of money has your heart pounding right now, you are going to benefit from following these missions.

If you are already playing a bigger game, you might want to drop to lower stakes. It should make the bigger bluffs, thin value bets and floats easier to stomach. Doing these missions is going to increase your variance. You are going to have some big winning sessions, but you are also going to bluff your entire stack into a big hand at some point. Sometimes it will happen four times in a session! This will rattle your confidence and make you want to go back to ABC poker. Do not do that. Take stock of what happened, learn from it, and carry on.

These missions are designed to help you avoid making the same flaws that the Villians in this book made, and, at the same time, teach you to exploit those flaws in other players. Each mission is presented as a small, focused exercise so you can work on one new skill at a time. Remember that there is some element of luck and chance in poker. If a mission does not work out successfully for you the first time you try it, do not assume that it is a poor strategy. These are strategies that are winning moves *over time*, they are not winning moves *every time*. Each time you try a new mission, use the strategy for at least one or two entire sessions so that some of the inevitable failures will be hidden by the equally inevitable wins.

These missions were designed to do one at a time and in order. Try one mission for a session or two before starting the next mission. Stick with certain mission for a while if you like. This is not a race. Some missions are stepping stones towards better play; once you have learned the lesson, then you no longer need to follow the overly strict rules of the mission. Other missions are designed to get you ready to accomplish the next mission so that the change is not too abrupt. Some missions are rules that will stay in your game indefinitely.

Flaws to eliminate	
	Stop ignoring opponent's tendencies
	Stop limping pre-flop and playing out of position
	Stop being predictable pre-flop, add some lite raises and lite three-bets
	Stop feeding the nits
Things to do more	
	Start exploiting fit or fold players. Start continuation betting, barreling and floating more
	Start exploiting bet size tells
	Start getting more value for made hands
	Start bluffing and semi-bluffing more, especially for bigger money

I want you to take these missions seriously. Do not just read them right now and consider doing them “later.” You can improve your game by committing to accomplishing these missions. I did. These are the kinds of challenges I gave myself when improving my game. Each session I was focused on looking for one kind of opportunity. Maybe I was looking to make a check-raise on the turn, or I was looking for a chance to over-bet for value on the river. You see the opportunities more when you are specifically looking for them.

Let me know how you are progressing with these missions by e-mail: hull@ThreeBarrelBluff.com. Anyone that finishes them all should let me know about your experiences. I will send you a free gift and buy you a beer at the next WSOP. I recommend you blog your experiences with these missions. If you do, please let me know, I will link to you from my web site: www.ThreeBarrelBluff.com.

1) Identify Tommy Angelo's "Bread & Butter" situations.



Stop ignoring opponent's tendencies

Element #116 of Tommy Angelo's Elements of Poker states that a Bread & Butter situation is one where you are last to act of two or three people and you put in the last raise pre-flop.

This mission is an exercise in observation. For this mission, draw two columns labeled Two and Three (see illustration below.) The Two column is for hands with two players to the flop; the Three column is for hands with three players to the flop.

You will then create a row for each orbit. Every time you see this B&B situation arise for *any* player in the game make a vertical line. If the B&B player wins, make the vertical line into a plus sign. If the hand gets to showdown, circle it. Every hand where there is a raise and no callers, write an "R" in the middle of the row for that orbit. Every time the Button hits you, draw a horizontal line across the chart under this series. Some people like to put a dot next to the hands they were the B&B for.

A typical chart might look like this after three orbits:

<u>2</u>		<u>3</u>	
+ ⊕			
①	R	⊕	1
+	R	+	

So, first orbit two B&B players won heads-up, the second one with showdown. Second orbit a B&B player lost at showdown while heads-up. Three-handed a B&B won at showdown and another one lost without showdown. There was a hand raised with no flop. Third orbit a B&B won

without showdown both two and three-handed. There was an uncalled pre-flop raise also.

This exercise will sharpen your focus on the game and give you a sense of how aggressive your specific game is. This example chart is more tight-aggressive than most \$1-\$2 games. People do not take advantage of position as much as they should.

When B&B do not win, watch to see why. Are they continuation betting and barreling enough? If the hand gets to showdown does it seem reasonable that more aggression would have won the hand because of the weak holdings of the out of position players? Under what situations did the out of position players win? Were those hands based on hand strength rather than aggression? Long term patterns like this are really hard to see unless you are taking notes.

After about a hundred of these situations, you can fill out the next chart. Remember the four numbers in each column should add to 100%.

R	Raised pre-flop, no flop ___% of ALL hands	
	Two players	Three players
+	B&B wins No showdown ___%	B&B wins No showdown ___%
⊕	B&B wins Showdown ___%	B&B wins Showdown ___%
 	Non B&B wins No showdown ___%	Non B&B wins No showdown ___%
①	Non B&B wins Showdown ___%	Non B&B wins Showdown ___%

If it were completely random, the B&B should win 50% of the time in the two player case and 33% in the three player case. If you watch for a decent sample size, it will not be random. The B&B player should win much more.

This should make it apparent that these are good situations to get into and that often your cards do not matter. This will really serve as inspiration for why you want to play in position with the initiative. It should also make it much clearer why calling a raise out of position aimlessly is a losing proposition.

Optional:

It is harder, but you could also do this exercise noting the dollar amount won or lost by the B&B player. The number of hands won should be easier to track and is a reasonable proxy to make the point though.

2) Stop limping pre-flop.

Stop limping pre-flop and playing out of position

In this mission you have one unbreakable rule:

I will never, under any circumstance, limp pre-flop.

This rule is simple, but iron clad. It does not matter if every player at the table has limped in before you and you are on the Button with JTs. Raise or fold.

Limping leads to limp-calling and being out of position. When you are out of position you are at a great disadvantage to your opponents. Limp-folding is like lighting your money on fire. Flip through the book and see how many hands were advantageous to us because the Villain had limp-called pre-flop.

If you want to see the flop, you need to raise by at least the standard raise for the table plus one big blind per limper in the pot already. My default standard raise is five big blinds plus one big blind per limper. If it has already been raised, you should consider a three-bet but may flat call the raise. If you get three-bet, you may flat call. While it is not forbidden, avoid calling any raise or three-bet out of position. If limped to in the Big Blind, you may check.

This mission will likely see you tightening up pre-flop since it costs you more to get into the flop. What else will it do? It is going to thin the field quite often. It is going to make it substantially more likely that you are in position post-flop. It will also give you the initiative going into many more flops than usual.

Optional:

Limping pre-flop is the first of many mistakes made by bad players in any hand. Many people often want to be in as many hands as possible. This can be tempting, but to see why you should not do this, you can make a chart where you record, over time, how much you would win/ lose by limping versus not limping.

For each hand that you neglected to limp where you normally would have, estimate how much you would have lost (or won) had you limped pre-flop. Mark saved money as +. Mark missed opportunities as -. Write

what you think would have happened. This is pretty rough estimate, but I expect it would be something like this:

Holding	Position	Savings	Imagined Action
AJo	UTG+1	+\$10	Limp call pre, miss flop
77	MP2	+\$2	Limp pre, no set on flop
A8s	CO	+\$10	Limp call pre, missed flop
KJs	MP1	+\$50	Out kicked on J high flop
89o	HI	-\$10	Flop two pair, everyone missed

These are real winnings in this column. Chips you do not lose are the same chips that you win when you get to the cashier's cage. Sometimes you would have gotten lucky and are kicking yourself for not seeing a cheap flop, but these are the exceptions. Over these sessions, you should have a sense of how much you are losing on these cheap flops.

After trying this for several sessions, do you miss limping pre-flop? You should not. Is there a place for limping pre-flop? Sometimes, but you are more right than wrong to always come in for a raise or fold.

This mission will get you playing less hands pre-flop but playing them more aggressively. This mission is a small step towards better pre-flop play. Keep at this until the later missions where your pre-flop options are widened.

3) Keep track of the pot size every hand.



Stop ignoring opponent's tendencies

People are often making too small of bets at a pot, giving good odds to call for. This will be more important as the hands get played through more streets and for larger amounts. You want to make sure your bets are the right size for your goals.

To do this, you only need to roughly keep track of the size of the pot. You do not need to be exact, for example, for a pot size of \$156, \$150 or \$160 is fine. When the pot gets to \$1285, \$1200 or \$1300 is sufficient. Going into the flop should be easy since the dealer should be announcing the number of players and you can multiply by the raise or big blind amount when limped. Do not forget to add in the amount from people who folded after putting in a limp or smaller raise.

It is important to try to make this automatic skill that is happening whenever you are in the pot. To make this a habit, you can make it a little

game with yourself. You can get a stack of coins to shuffle at the table. Set one aside for every pot you correctly tracked. See if you can get a full orbit in without losing concentration.

You can also use this mission to see if people are betting in accordance to pot size. I notice that often when the pots get big in absolute amount for the stakes, people underbet. That means at \$2-\$5 once pots hit \$400 or so, players will start betting \$150 because that feels like a big bet yet it is actually quite small relative to the pot. Try to observe under what conditions people are underbetting big pots. Are they scared to fire in more because of the large size or are they trying to increase the chances of being called when they have a lock hand in a big pot? The way people react in big pots like this can be very valuable information when you are in a similar situation later. This skill is something you should be doing as part of every hand you play.

About the author

Doug has been found at Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun poker rooms since 2001. When he is not perfecting this craft, he is blacksmithing, woodcarving or developing his permaculture homestead in Massachusetts.

He has authored an engineering textbook, co-authored a second and contributed to a third. He has taught countless people to use MATLAB through his blog at MathWorks.com.

Reach him at hull@ThreeBarrelBluff.com. Buy him a good Belgian beer at the WSOP and get a free copy of his next poker book. Visit his website at www.ThreeBarrelBluff.com



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