

## HOW TO PLAY:

It may seem intimidating to the uninitiated, but learning the basics of poker need not be scary. Think of it this way; over 60 million people play poker in the United States and they all had to start at the beginning. That's the same place you're starting from today, so no worries!

With that many people playing, there must be something enjoyable about the game. Take my word for it – not everyone is in the game to make a fortune. The best estimate is that approximately 10,000 people play the game as a profession, and your chances of running into one of them are mighty slim. So, relax. Poker is a social activity and the vast majority of participants see it as no different from a game of chess, where the varying levels of skill creates an interesting challenge. You'll find playing at Silks Poker Room at Tampa Bay Downs to be a comfortable way to meet some new friends and make some new connections. So let's get you started.

The origins of poker are lost in the clouds of history. Some say it originated in France; others trace the origins back to the Persian Empire. The most accepted theory is that poker evolved from a German game that dates back to the 15th century, known as Pochspiel. None of this is important in the least to learning and enjoying the game, but you might want to throw that information in between hands.

There are many, many different poker games that are played, but we'll concern ourselves with the most popular form, Texas Hold'em. For beginners, this is almost always the game of choice and tables for all skill levels are readily available in Silks. Texas Hold'em has been called "a game that takes minutes to learn and a lifetime to master."

### **Here's how the game is played:**

Every player at the table gets two cards face down, known as "hole cards" and the two players to the left of the dealer begin the action by putting out mandatory bets known as "blinds". It's called a "blind" because these two players will have to bet without even seeing any of their cards. The player to the immediate left of the dealer places the "small blind", which is equal to half the table stakes. The player two places to the dealer's left places the "big blind", equal to the full table stakes. If you're sitting at a \$1.00 - \$2.00 table, which is ideal for beginners, the small blind will be \$1.00 and the big blind will be \$2.00.

The action continues with the player to the immediate left of the "big blind". This player has three options: call the bet (add \$2.00 to the pot and remain in the game), raise the bet (add additional money to the pot, which other players will have to match to remain in the hand), or "fold" and decline to continue to play the hand. This is a decision made based on the value of the two cards received.

The betting continues around the table, clockwise, until each player has had a turn to decide on their play. For those that remain in the hand, three cards are now dealt, face up, in the center of the table. These cards are known as the “flop” and are community cards, that is, they belong to every player’s hand. Another round of betting (call, raise, and fold) follows. A player may also decide to “check” or pass. For those players still remaining after the betting round, a fourth card is dealt face up. Another round of betting then takes place among the remaining players and finally the fifth card, known as “the river” is dealt. A final round of betting follows and, when this is complete, all players remaining in the game reveal their “hole cards”. The best five-card hand takes what is in the pot and the poker game moves on to the next hand.

Simple, right? It really is. After three hands, you’ll be in the swing, totally.

Now, whether you call, raise or fold depends on the cards you have in combination with the “community” cards at the center of the table. The first two cards, the “hole” cards, are the only cards exclusive to you. It’s important to make a sound judgment about the chances to win that these cards represent. Great “hole” cards would be two aces, two kings, two queens, an ace and a king, or some variation along these lines. A bad hand would be something like a two-seven (not in the same suit), or a two-eight. These cards make winning the hand a long shot. Fold your cards and live to fight another day.

The object, as mentioned earlier, is to have the best hand at the table. When you have that, you win the chips that have been bet. Pretty sweet. But you’ll need to know the ranks of all the hands, so you’ll know your chances.

### **The ranking of the hands is as follows:**

#### **Royal Flush**

The five highest cards, the 10 through the Ace, all five of the same suit. A royal flush is actually an ace-high straight flush. Which suit it is doesn't matter in poker. Two people with royal flushes would tie.

#### **Straight Flush**

Any five cards of the same suit in consecutive numerical order.

#### **Four of a Kind**

Four cards of the same denomination.

#### **Full House**

Any three cards of the same denomination, plus any pair of a different denomination. Ties are broken first by the three of a kind, then the pair.

#### **Flush**

Any five non-consecutive cards of the same suit.

**Straight**

Any five consecutive cards of mixed suits. Ace can be high or low

**Three of a Kind**

Three cards of the same denomination

**Two Pair**

Any two cards of the same denomination, plus any other two cards of the same denomination. If both hands have the same high pair, the second pair wins. If both pairs tie, the high card wins.

**Pair**

Any two cards of the same denomination

**High Card**

If no other hand is achieved, the highest card held wins.

You have the basics now. Just a few more hints to help you along. As you sit at the table, notice the other players. Often, their reactions will give you great insight into the quality of the cards they hold. These signs are called “Tells”. Here are a few “Tells” to watch for that indicate an opponent is holding a good hand:

**Acting Uninterested in a Hand While Still in It**

This is usually a sign of a strong hand. The player is pretending that he’s not excited about his cards – but he is.

**Hyperventilating Uncontrollably**

If observed in an otherwise seemingly healthy player, chances are good that he or she is holding a good hand. Fold your cards.

**Biting on Knuckles**

Another reliable sign that your opponent has a winning hand.

Conversely, “Tells” that indicate an opponent may not be playing from strength include:

**Sobbing**

This is a reliable sign that things aren’t going well for this player.

**Pressing Hands Forcibly Against the Forehead**

See above

There is more to the game, of course, and you will likely learn more about strategy each time you play. But for now, you have enough knowledge to walk into Silks Poker Room, sit at a beginner’s table, and have a blast. Don’t be afraid to share you novice status with the dealers – they are trained to help you as much as they can and answer questions.

Give it a try. The atmosphere in the Silks is terrific and I'm willing to bet that you'll be back more than once.