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NL Hold'em Starting Hand Charts

One aspect of the game of No-Limit Hold'em that causes beginning players much grief is deciding which hands to play and which hands to dump. NL Hold'em is much more difficult than Limit Hold'em because the value of a hand depends on so many factors other than just the cards in your hand. Despite this difficulty, our coaches believe that following some general guidelines and adjusting from these is a better solution than having no guidelines at all. Given that well over half of your profitability in NL Hold'em is based on hand selection alone, we have developed these charts to help you better determine whether to play or fold.

There are no perfect No-Limit starting hand charts. That is because there are many factors that affect your decision, and charts cannot account for all of them. Some of these include:

1. The size of your opponent's stacks.
2. How loose or tight, passive or aggressive, your opponents are.
3. Where these opponents are located at the table – for example, does an aggressive player still have to act after you?
4. Your image at the table – for example, how tight or tricky you are perceived.

That being said, these charts will serve you well in most typical low-stakes No-Limit cash games, such as games with blinds of \$1/\$2, and home games. These games typically have several loose players at the table, and good opportunities for winning big pots with suited connectors (hands such as 87s) and pocket pairs. With practice, you will be able to be a consistently winning player with these charts as a starting point. As you improve, you'll find yourself making adjustments to these charts based on the factors listed above, and more.

Never use a Limit Hold'em hand chart in a No-Limit Hold'em game. Some hands, like the previously mentioned suited connectors and pocket pairs, go way up in value in No-Limit, and can be played from almost any position in loose, passive games. That is because in Limit Hold'em you might win a decent pot with these hands, but in No-Limit Hold'em you are aiming to win someone's entire stack. Other hands, such as AJ, which might be playable in a Limit game, are much less playable in No-Limit (see additional notes about AJ below the hand charts).

Note: It would be a serious mistake to apply these hand charts before reading the Frequent Asked Questions first.



CHART #1 - LOOSE, PASSIVE GAME

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

- Raise Always
- Call from Early Position, otherwise raise
- Call always
- Call from Middle or Late Position if the conditions are right (see Frequently Asked Questions)



CHART #2 - TIGHT OR AGGRESSIVE GAME NO ONE HAS RAISED YET

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

- Raise Always
- Call from Early Position, otherwise raise
- Call (or Raise) from Middle or Late Position if the conditions are right (see Frequently Asked Questions)



CHART #3 - THERE HAS BEEN A SINGLE RAISE (3-5 TIMES THE BIG BLIND) BEFORE YOU

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

- Re-Raise Always
- Call from Early Position, otherwise re-raise
- Call always
- Call from Middle or Late Position if the conditions are right (see Frequently Asked Questions)



Frequently Asked Questions

For the hands in yellow, what do you mean when you say to play these hands *if the conditions are right*? The hands in yellow are speculative hands. They should always be folded from Early Position. From other positions, they can be profitable given the right conditions. Some of the questions to ask yourself:

1. Are there other players who have called so far (the more, the better)?
2. Are the players who have called playing poorly after the flop? Will they pay me off if I hit something?
3. Is there an aggressive player still to act behind me (you might get raised and have to fold)?
4. If there has been a raise and no other callers, what chance do I have of using my position after the flop to win the hand even if I don't improve (Chart #3 only)?

Why does Chart #2 say to sometimes raise with the hands in yellow, but Chart #1 does not? We have different goals in mind. Using Chart #1, we want to call to encourage additional players to enter the pot. These hands will be immensely profitable when our loose, passive opponents enter the hand, and get trapped when we flop a set, or make a well-disguised straight. When using Chart #2, however, we want to size up the opponents still to act. If they are tight, we can raise. Sometimes, we'll pick up the blinds. Other times, our pre-flop aggression will allow us to take down the pot on the flop.

What's the difference between AKs and AKo? AKs means an Ace and King of the *same suit*. AKo means an Ace and King of *different suits*.

What are early, middle, and late position? Early Position is generally the first 2 (in a nine player game) or 3 (in a ten player game) positions after the blinds. Late Position is the "cutoff" position (to the right of the dealer), and dealer button positions. Middle Position is everything in between.

How much should I raise? As a general rule, raise 3 to 4 times the big blind, plus 1 extra big blind for every player who has called before you. So if there are 2 callers already, raise between 5 and 6 times the big blind.

What if someone raises after I call? Whether you call the raise depends on how much money the raiser has for you to win, how many other players are involved, and what type of hand you have. As a general rule, if you have a pocket pair, lean towards calling. If there are a lot of other players (and therefore a big pot), lean towards calling. In general, fold suited connectors from early position. Fold hands like KQ that don't play well against a raiser.

How do I play from the blinds? From the small blind, play the same hands you would play from late position, plus a few more. But don't call with junk hands like T5o, just because it is "cheap". From the big blind, if there is a raise to you, play like you would if you had already called from early position.

The chart says to fold KQo to a raise. Really? Yes, this hand performs very poorly against typical raising hands. Against AK, AQ, AA, KK, QQ, you are a big underdog. Other typical raising hands like JJ, TT, 99, AJs, are slightly ahead of you as well. The only time you might call or re-raise is from late position, if the opener was in middle or late position, indicating they might have a wider range of hands.

I was told to fold AJo from Early Position, why do you say to call with it? Folding AJo is not a bad idea in many games. We included it because, at low stakes tables (even tight or aggressive ones), the players are often playing badly enough after the flop that it can be profitable. We used data from millions of hands of low-limit poker to analyze this. The same could be said for KQo, ATs, and KJs – you can make a small profit in the long run at most low-stakes games, but folding would be perfectly acceptable from early position.

Can I use these charts in a NL Hold'em tournament? The charts would be best applicable to the early stages of a NL tournament, when everyone has a deep stack. In the middle and later stages, they should not be used.

