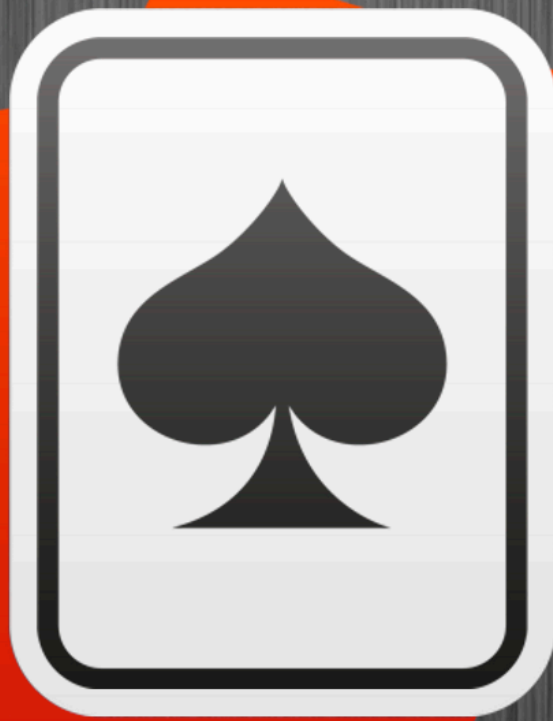


LearnProTM Blackjack



*Learn How to Play,
Master the Strategy,
& Maximize Your Odds*

by *Simplicent LLC*, authors of the popular app Learn Pro Blackjack

Learn Pro Blackjack™

Learn How to Play, Master Basic Strategy, and Maximize Your Odds

By, Simpligent, LLC

Also look for Learn Pro Blackjack™ Trainer, the popular companion app, for iPhone, iPad, and Android phones and tablets. Get it now at www.learnproblackjack.com.

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Preface

Unlike nearly every other blackjack book on the market, this manual isn't just about learning how to win. It's also about teaching you to have more fun, and build more confidence by learning the blackjack rules, basic strategy, odds, and secrets of the game that will help you improve the return on your gambling dollar. If you're like us, blackjack is entertainment and you enjoy the thrill of winning and losing, the chatter with your fellow players at the table, and the satisfaction of walking away from a successful evening with lots of comps and freebies. This book will help ensure that you know how to play blackjack strategically so that you aren't wasting your hard earned time and money getting up to speed before you can enjoy the game. Good luck!

Part One

Learn How to Play

Blackjack is one of the most popular card games in the world, and it is the only casino card game against the house that can be consistently beaten by professional players—legally. All blackjack strategy hinges on what statisticians and computers have determined to be the ideal moves for each hand. The use of those ideal moves is called basic strategy. Blackjack is a very fun game, and its possible to win a great deal of money playing it, but to maximize your experience, its best to learn how to play strategically before you sit down at a table and spend real money.

Rules and Gameplay

Ultimately blackjack is very simple to play. At the most basic level, blackjack is a contest between the dealer and player where the objective is to achieve a better hand than the dealer without exceeding a total of 21.

Scoring

Card values in blackjack are similar to most table games with the exception of the Ace. Suits (spades, diamonds, hearts, clubs) do not matter. When combined, individual cards are totaled to give the player a current score. Cards 2 through 9 are scored at face value, Jack, Queen, and King are valued at 10 points and Aces can be worth either 1 or 11 points.

Winning and Losing

Not surprisingly, the best possible hand to have in blackjack is called “blackjack” which is achieved when the first two cards in any hand total 21. To receive blackjack an Ace must be combined with a 10, Jack, Queen, or King on the first two cards dealt. Thus, a hand containing an Ace and a Jack would be blackjack, yet a hand of Jack, 9, 2 would simply be a score of 21. Blackjack is sometimes also referred to as a “natural.” In nearly all casinos, assuming that the dealer doesn’t also have blackjack, receiving a natural pays instantly and at 1½ times the wager.

After blackjack, the next most desirable outcome is to have the “best hand,” or highest total that doesn’t exceed 21. Winning with the best hand pays out at 1 times the initial wager, thus a player that bets \$10 would keep his bet and earn \$10 for the win.

The alternative to blackjack or best hand is “push” or “bust.” A push is a tie between dealer and player where money is neither lost nor won. Alternatively, busts are hands that go over 21 and are automatic losers that result in the player forfeiting all wagers. Players are terribly disappointed when they personally bust, but when the dealer busts all parties in the game win.

Hard and Soft Hands

Every blackjack card combination can be classified as either hard, or soft based on their potential point total. Identifying when a hand is hard or soft is necessary to learn basic strategy.

Hard combinations are when a player’s cards can only total to one value. For example,

if a player has a hand with a 4 and an 8, they would be considered to have a hard 12. Similarly, if a player has a hand consisting of a 7, 5 and Ace, their total can only be 13. Even though the Ace can technically be worth 1 or 11 points, in this scenario, the Ace can only be valued at 1 point since a value of 11 would cause the hand to bust (exceed 21), resulting in an automatic loss.

Soft hands are the opposite of hard hands because they can have multiple totals. For example, if a player has a hand that includes a 2, 3 and Ace, they are said to have a soft hand because the Ace can be worth 1 or 11 points, thus the hand could be worth either 6 or 16. Since the Ace is the only card in blackjack that can have multiple values, a hand must include an Ace to be considered soft. A primary benefit of soft hands is that it is impossible for them to bust.

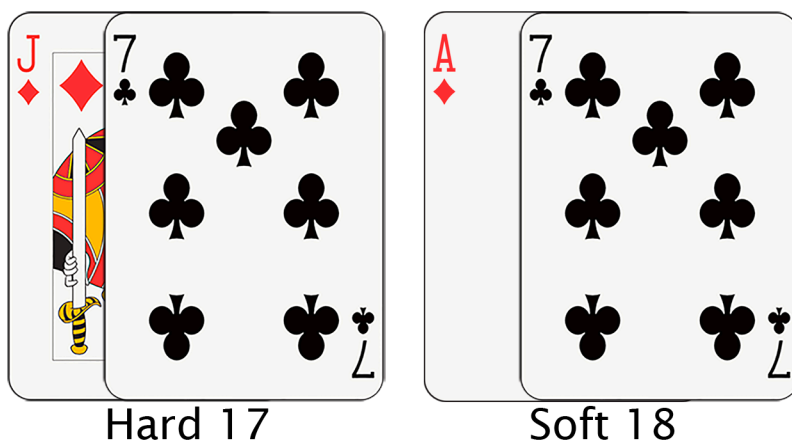


Table Setup and Gameplay

At a blackjack table, player(s) sit across from the dealer in a semicircle. The dealer deals the cards clockwise, so the player who is sitting farthest to the right of the table at “first base” gets the first card, and the player to the far left at “third base” gets the last card. After the player at third base gets his card, the dealer deals himself a card. The dealer deals one card for each of the two rounds resulting in everyone receiving two cards prior to the beginning of the game.

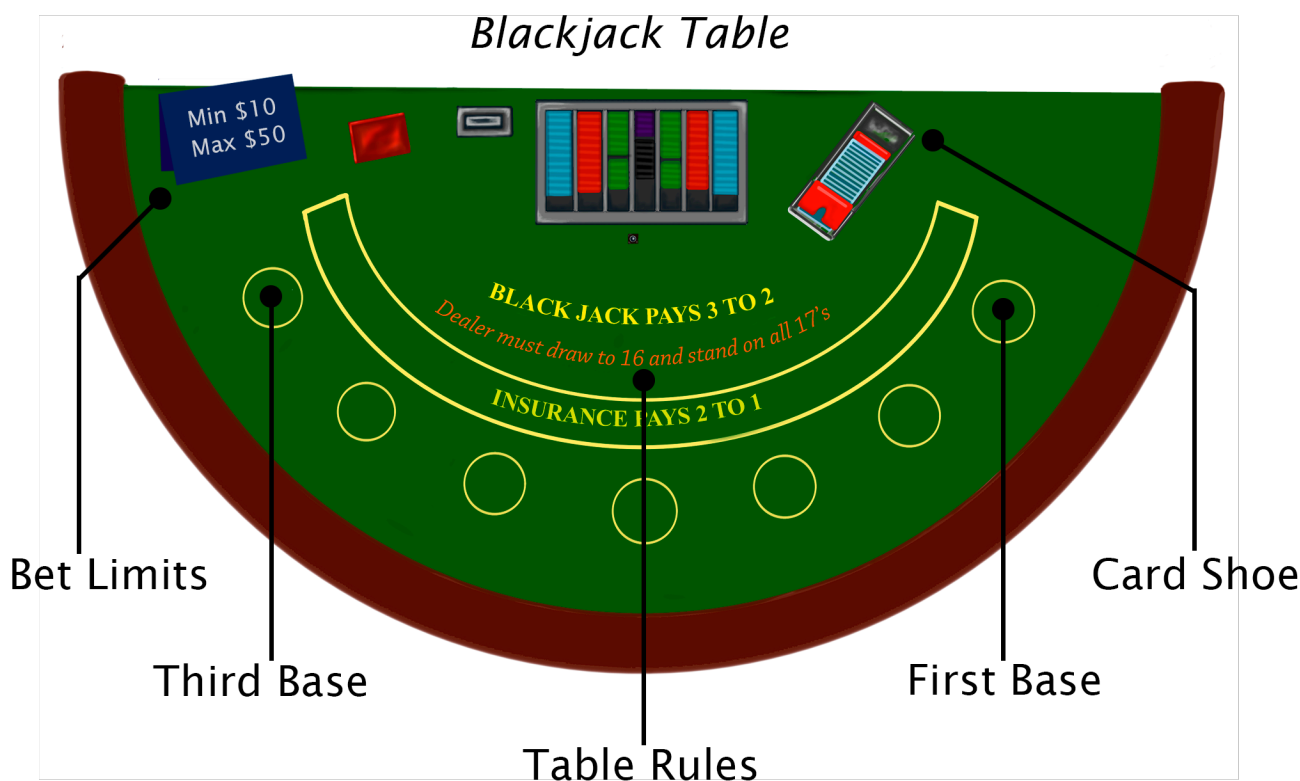
In games with three or more decks, the dealer deals from a shoe, which is a dispenser at the right side of the table next to the chip rack. In single- and double-deck games, the dealer holds the cards and deals by tossing the cards to the players. Cards in multi-deck games are usually dealt face up, and cards in single- and double-deck games are typically dealt face down. One of the dealer’s cards is always face down. This is known as the hole card, and the dealer does not show it to anyone until every player is done acting unless it is a blackjack.

Before a game begins, the dealer shuffles the deck(s) and “burns” a card by putting it in the discard tray without looking at it or showing it to anyone. After the card is burnt, players put their cash wagers or chip wagers in their betting circles. Wagers must be no less than the

table minimum, and no more than the table maximum as stipulated by the bet limits established by the casino for each table. Once the wagers are placed, the dealer starts distributing cards and players are not allowed to modify their bets unless it is to double or split.

After the initial two cards are dealt and the dealer has asked people if they want to insure their hands and/or checked for blackjack, he pays anyone who has gotten a two-card blackjack, then motions for the player at first base to indicate whether he will hit, double, surrender, split, or stand on his hand. The dealer continues across the table in a clockwise manner until the player at third base acts. After the player at third base acts, the dealer goes through the same process for himself—except he has to draw until he reaches 17 or busts. Some tables require the dealer to stay on a soft 17, and others require that the dealer hit on a soft 17. The latter is more advantageous to the house, so it is the rule you will see more frequently.

If the dealer busts, everyone who is still in the hand is paid an amount equal to whatever they have wagered. If the dealer does not bust, he pays anyone who has a higher card point total than his hand and collects the wagers of those people who had a lower card point total. After the hand has been concluded, the dealer collects all of the cards for the hand and puts them face down in the discard tray. The process is then repeated until the shoe or deck needs to be reshuffled.



In-Game Actions

In any game of blackjack, several actions are available to players. Likewise, dealers also take action to improve their own hands, but are required to draw cards until they reach a score of 17 or greater.

- To “hit” is to request an additional card
- To “stand” is to stop taking further actions and to play with the current hand
- “Doubling down” is the act of increasing the initial bet on a hand (up to as much as the initial wager) after the first two cards are drawn; upon doubling down, players automatically get one additional card added to their hand, but are not allowed to take any subsequent actions
- “Splitting” is to turn a hand of two identical cards (suits do not matter) into two hands by placing a second wager equal to your first wager
- To “surrender” is to forfeit the hand by giving up half of your bet (not offered in most places)
- Taking “insurance” is to make a side bet with the house that the dealer has blackjack when he/she is showing an Ace; a win on this side bet offsets a player’s potential loss on the main hand, thus the name “insurance”

Etiquette, Manners and Tipping

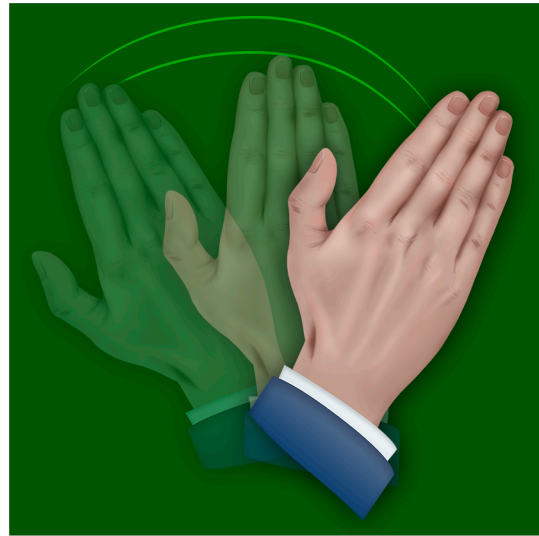
Blackjack etiquette is an important part of the playing experience and ranges from knowing the appropriate hand signals to understanding how you are expected to act, tip, etc. Some etiquette rules are standard, while others vary depending upon the location and the individual casino. It can take some time to get a feel for some of the nuances, but with a little preparation and old fashioned experience, you can feel like a pro relatively quickly.

Hand Signals

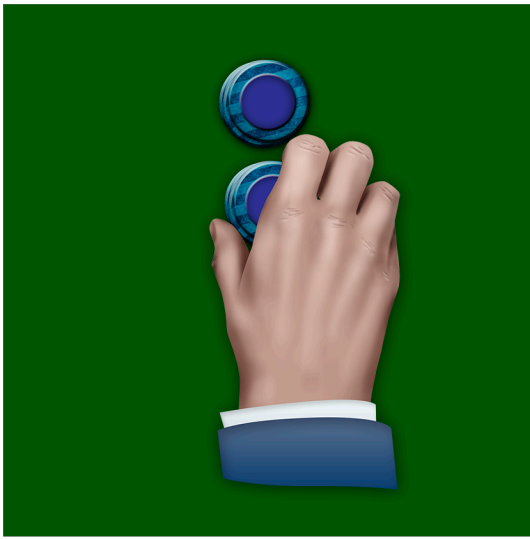
In multi-deck games with three or more decks, you are not allowed to touch the cards. You tap the table to have the dealer draw another card, and you wave your hand over your cards to stay. If you want to double down or double for less on a card combination, you put an equal or lesser amount of chips immediately next to, or behind your initial bet. To split two identical cards, you place an equal chip stack next to your first bet.



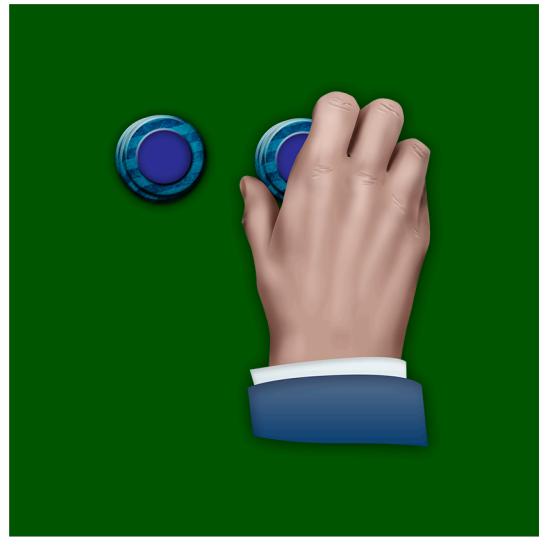
Tap to Hit



Waive to Stand



Bet to Double



Bet to Split

Hand signals in single- and double-deck games are slightly different. In these games, you are allowed to touch the cards, but you can only do so with one hand. If you are playing multiple spots at the same time, you can only act at one spot at a time, starting with the spot that is farthest to the right. Cards in single-deck games are usually dealt face down, and you pick them up with one hand. In order to hit, you scratch the cards against the table. When you want to stay, you tuck your cards underneath your chips. You split and double the same way that you would in a multi-deck game.

Camaraderie

The dynamics of the community at any given table may depend greatly on where you are playing, but there are some universal rules. For one, hitting a combination with a hard score over 11 when the dealer is showing a 4, 5 or 6 can be considered rude. Doing so may annoy fellow players because statistically, it is assumed that the dealer has a 10-value card face down. As such, most people in this situation would expect the dealer to bust. If you happen to draw a card that would have made the dealer bust, other players may become upset. Additionally, similar to this thinking, keep in mind that players at third base are the last to act, and as such can have more pressure on them to play appropriately. Other players may blame them for anything that goes wrong if the dealer wins a hand that might have been lost if they had acted differently. You should consider playing in seats other than third base unless you are okay with being under pressure by other players from time to time.

Tipping

There are two ways to tip the dealer. The first is by simply pushing chips forward and offering them to the dealer. The second way is by adding the dealer's tip to your wager. You can do this by putting it in front of your main bet. If you win the hand, the dealer gets double the amount of the tip wager—two and a half times if you hit a blackjack. Tipping the dealer can be advantageous because he or she may give you advice on hands and warn you when you are about to make a stupid mistake. That said, it is not necessary to tip the dealer if you are losing or if he or she is rude.

How much to tip can often be confusing for players, but it doesn't have to be. The best advice is to tip what feels comfortable to you. However, tips generally range from a high of leaving 10% of your buy-in for the dealer after the game to shouting the dealer a dollar or two every once in a while when you've had some good luck. Your best bet is to take note of how others at the table are acting and respond accordingly based on your fortune. It should be noted; however, that tipping during your round rather than afterwards has the added benefit of helping to build rapport with the dealer which can make for a better overall playing experience.

Part Two

Master Basic Strategy

In order to become a successful blackjack player, whether as a professional or a hobbyist, you need to have a basic understanding of how odds and strategy determine your risk.

Taking the time to learn basic strategy is definitely worth it in the long run. Blackjack is advertised as being the table game with the lowest house edge, but that is only the case when players use strategy and routinely make the correct moves. Players who only follow general guidelines or their gut instincts when playing generally lose much more money in the long run. Learning perfect basic strategy doesn't take long, and most people can usually memorize all of the correct moves in a few sittings.

House Edge and Game Fluctuation

Unless you are counting cards, the house has the advantage over the long term. You may have big swings of luck, but it is nearly impossible to win more hands over time than you lose. Taking that into account, it is important to determine how large your bankroll should be and what your maximum wager size should be if you want to keep from running out of money.

For a normal sitting, most infrequent players should expect to sit down with 20 times their average bet. So a player with a betting spread of between \$5 and \$10 using basic strategy can sit down with \$200 and expect to probably not lose all of his or her money in that sitting—he or she might even triple that amount. The reason you want such a large bankroll in proportion to your wagers is so that you can avoid losing all of your money before it can go back up due to variance. Also having an appropriately sized bankroll helps ensure the ability to perform multiple splits, double downs, etc. (all situations that are good for the player). Forfeiting these opportunities as a result of not having enough money can significantly reduce your odds. In layman's terms, an appropriate bankroll affords players elbowroom to take advantage of opportunities and withstand the inherent ups and downs of the game.

Basic Strategy

Although the house generally wins over the long-term, players can reduce the casino's odds dramatically by using simple strategy rules. Blackjack tables typically turn between 50 and 100 games every sixty minutes, which means that even a conservative player betting \$10 per hand is cycling through up to \$1,000 in wagers per hour. Decreasing the house edge from 3% to 1% for example can result in \$20 in savings during that limited amount of time. Since bet sizes and lengths of stay at the casino can vary substantially, savings can add up quickly. Playing according to strategy and reducing the house edge can mean the difference between having a great trip or a lousy vacation and the difference between dining in the cheap buffet and savoring a meal in the five star steakhouse at the end of the night.

Basic strategy is the only reason that blackjack has the lowest house edge of any casino game. Decades ago, some savvy mathematicians used computers to figure out which moves were statistically most effective for every card combination in blackjack. After simulating hundreds of thousands of hands, they finally came up with a list of the best possible in-game actions. There were slight variations in which moves were ideal for certain types of games and rules, but most of them were the same. Those charts of ideal moves became known as the basic strategy, BS or just basic.

Using perfect play, you can lower the house edge to anywhere from just less than 1 percent in eight-deck games to 0.13 percent in single-deck games. A house edge that low means that a good player has almost the same chance of winning during a sitting of blackjack as he or she does of winning a coin toss.

Unfortunately, many players fail to learn that the house only has such a small edge when the player is flat betting (betting the same amount each time) and playing basic strategy over many hands. Depending on which mistakes you make, you can lose more money more quickly in blackjack than in a game like a slot machine. In order to be a smart player, stick to the basic strategy moves and use flat or conservative bets that are appropriately sized for your bankroll.

How it Works

As noted above, basic strategy is simply the set of statistically correct blackjack moves for each possible combination of dealer and player hands that will minimize the casino's edge over the long-term. Each basic strategy action can be broken down into one of three categories: offensive, defensive, and neutral.

Offensive strategies are designed to ensure that players make the most of situations where the odds of winning are in the player's favor. For example, consider a player that has a soft 19 versus a dealer's 6. In this situation, the player already has a winning hand – the dealer has a high likelihood of busting and the player has a strong point total. If the player

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