

## Casino Poker for Beginners: Playing Your First Round

Written by Administrator

Monday, 09 October 2017 17:02 -

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*Ed. note: For those who might have missed it before, we're reprising **Robert Woolley's** series of articles for poker players who are new to live poker. The series is great for newcomers, and likely useful as well to those with experience playing in casinos and poker rooms.*

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In the first two installments of this series, I have tried to guide those who are new to live poker through the process of getting seated in your first cash poker game at a casino. So now we picture you sitting in the game, stacks of chips in front of you, ready to get started. Now what?

### Introductions

First, be sociable. This not only makes the game more enjoyable for everybody, but it's a strategic advantage. You may not believe this at first, but it's true — you will win more money from people who like you than from people who don't, all else being equal.

Take a few seconds to introduce yourself at least to the players on your immediate right and left. (But don't do it while they're playing. Many players don't like being distracted during a hand.)

Be especially nice to the player to your left — chat him up, buy him a drink, make him your buddy — because he's in the best position to make your life difficult with raises and reraises, and he may be less inclined to do so if he perceives you as a friend rather than a foe.

Of course, every player at the table *is* your foe, your prey, and your target. But it's best if you help them forget that about you by your disarming, friendly demeanor.

### The Blinds: Post Right Away or Wait?

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I'm assuming that you know generally about paying blinds such as in a flop game like Texas hold'em from your experience at home games and/or online play. But there are some nuances to how they work in a casino that might be new to you. These often begin with your very first hand after taking your seat.

In most casinos, you will be allowed to play for free for the few hands until the big blind reaches you, but in some you will immediately have to make a decision: "post" the blinds or sit out. This requires a bit of explanation.

All mysteries regarding the blinds are easier to understand if you think of the two blinds as payment in advance for one round of play. Once you see them that way, most of what can be baffling about the mechanics of the blinds makes a lot more sense.



Post blinds right away or wait?

If, by chance, the first hand of poker after you take your seat happens to have you in the big blind, you just put it in, followed by the small blind the next hand, and it's done, all making perfect sense. You have made your "payment" for one round or "orbit" of play. (One round of poker is sometimes called an "orbit" from the fact that the dealer button circling the table resembles a planet in orbit around the sun.)

But if you are in any of the other eight or nine positions, some accommodation must be made.

Poker rooms that let you start playing right away without posting the blinds are making an exception to the general rule about paying in advance for one round of the game. In other words, they're giving you a few hands of free play.

In the other casinos, the dealer will ask whether you want to pay the blinds from where you are (though the two players to the left of the dealer button will still have to pay theirs, too) or wait

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until the big blind comes around to you naturally.

It's usually better to wait to post, for a couple of reasons. First, paying the blinds out of turn is a bad deal financially. You're making full payment for one round of poker, but getting only some fraction of the hands that constitute a full round. Worse, you'll be playing most of those hands from bad (that is, early) position.

Second, it's to your advantage to let the game pass you by for the first few minutes. Use the time to relax, catch your breath, and clear your head. You can watch the mechanics of the action and get a sense of the rhythm of the game without having to focus on making poker decisions. There will be plenty of time to play for as long as you want after the blinds reach you in the natural order of things.

After you have more experience, the same advice holds true to wait for the big blind to come around rather than to post right away. However once you have played some more, you can then use that initial non-playing time to start scoping out more particularly how your opponents play, rather than think about the technical aspects of the game.

### What to Do After Taking a Break

Last time [we discussed taking a break from the game](#) — something you are allowed to do if you wish. You are likely to face a similar decision regarding posting the blinds after you return from a break.

If the blinds pass your seat while you're away, then upon your return the dealer will ask if you want to post the blinds or wait for the big blind to come around again. The first reason for waiting (getting less than a full round of play for your blinds) is still valid in this case, though the second (taking time to observe the game without playing) is much less of an issue by that point.

I tend to post and come back in right away if I have only missed one or two hands, but I'll wait if I have been away for more than that. Other people always wait, which is perfectly sensible. Still others always post, which I think is foolish if it will only buy you one or two hands — from the worst strategic positions — before you will have to pay the blinds again.

### Other Potential "Blind" Spots

That covers the basics, but, unfortunately, there are some other tricky, complicated situations involving the blinds that can come up. They can arise, for example, when two or more players leave the game simultaneously, or when somebody pays the big blind but not the small blind before taking a break, and so on.

Don't worry about figuring out what should happen, or even trying to understand what the dealer directs the players to do in these oddball cases. It takes a long time to grasp how they sort this out. For now, just do whatever the dealer and/or floor person direct you to do, trusting that they know what they're doing.

That said, I'll address one common, slightly complicated situation: If you happen to rejoin the game when it's your turn to pay the small blind, but you missed the previous hand in which you would have been the big blind, some poker rooms offer you the option to "buy the button." This means paying both blinds at once, then having the privilege of the dealer button in front of you the next hand. (All casinos *should* offer this, because it's to everybody's benefit, but, sadly, some do not.)

If you are given this option, take it, unless for some reason you're not ready to play right away; it's a significant strategic advantage.

For my next subject, I'll start telling you everything you need to know about poker chips — handling, stacking, and betting with them. In fact, this is such a big subject that I'll be spending a few articles covering it.

*Robert Woolley lives in Asheville, NC. He spent several years in Las Vegas and chronicled his life in poker on the "[Poker Grump](#)" blog.*

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