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Ranking of Poker Hands

This page describes the ranking of poker hands. This applies to the game of [poker](#) of course, but is also used in other card games such as [Chinese Poker](#), [Chicago](#), [Poker Menteur](#) and [Pai Gow Poker](#).

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Standard Poker Hand Ranking

There are 52 cards in the pack, and the ranking of the individual cards, from high to low, is **ace, king, queen, jack, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2**. There is **no** ranking between the suits - so for example the king of hearts and the king of spades are **equal**.

A poker hand consists of five cards. The categories of hand, from highest to lowest, are listed below. Any hand in a higher category beats any hand in a lower category (so for example any three of a kind beats any two pairs). Between hands in the same category the rank of the individual cards decides which is better, as described in more detail below.

In games where a player has more than five cards and selects five to form a poker hand, the remaining cards do not play any part in the ranking. Poker ranks are always based on five cards only.

Some readers may wonder why I deal with how to compare (say) two threes of a kind of equal rank. This obviously cannot arise in basic draw poker, but such comparisons are needed in poker games using shared (community) cards, such as Texas Hold'em, in poker games with wild cards, and in other card games using poker combinations, such as [poker menteur](#).

1. Royal Flush

This is the highest poker hand. It consists of ace, king, queen, jack, ten, all in the same suit. As all suits are equal, all royal flushes are equal.

2. Straight Flush

Five cards of the same suit in sequence - such as ♣J-♣10-♣9-♣8-♣7. Between two straight flushes, the one containing the higher top card is higher. An ace can be counted as low, so ♥5-♥4-♥3-♥2-♥A is a straight flush, but its top card is the five, not the ace, so it is the lowest type of straight flush. The cards cannot "turn the corner": ♦4-♦3-♦2-♦A-♦K is not valid.

3. Four of a kind

Four cards of the same rank - such as four queens. The fifth card can be anything. This combination is sometimes known as "quads", and in some parts of Europe it is called a "poker", though this term for it is unknown in English. Between two fours of a kind, the one with the higher set of four cards is higher - so 3-3-3-3-A is beaten by 4-4-4-4-2. It can't happen in standard poker, but if in some other game you need to compare two fours of a kind where the sets of four cards are of the same rank, then the one with the higher fifth card is better.

4. Full House

This consists of three cards of one rank and two cards of another rank - for example three sevens and two tens (colloquially known as "sevens full" or more specifically "sevens on tens"). When comparing full houses, the rank of the three cards determines which is higher. For example 9-9-9-4-4 beats 8-8-8-A-A. If the threes of a kind were equal, the rank of the pairs would decide.

5. Flush

Five cards of the same suit. When comparing two flushes, the highest card determines which is higher. If the highest cards are equal then the second highest card is compared; if those are equal too, then the third highest card, and so on. For example ♠K-♠J-♠9-♠3-♠2 beats ♦K-♦J-♦7-♦6-♦5 because the nine beats the seven.

6. Straight

Five cards of mixed suits in sequence - for example ♠Q-♦J-♥10-♠9-♣8. When comparing two sequences, the one with the higher ranking top card is better. Ace can count high or low in a straight, but not both at once, so A-K-Q-J-10 and 5-4-3-2-A are valid straights, but 2-A-K-Q-J is not. 5-4-3-2-A is the lowest kind of straight, the top card being the five.

7. Three of a Kind

Three cards of the same rank plus two other cards. This combination is also known as Triplets or Trips. When comparing two threes of a kind the hand in which the three equal cards are of higher rank is better. So for example 5-5-5-3-2 beats 4-4-4-K-Q. If you have to compare two threes of a kind where the sets of three are of equal rank, then the higher of the two remaining cards in each hand are compared, and if those are equal, the lower odd card is compared.

8. Two Pairs

A pair is two cards of equal rank. In a hand with two pairs, the two pairs are of different ranks (otherwise you would have four of a kind), and there is an odd card to make the hand up to five cards. When comparing hands with two pairs, the hand with the highest pair wins, irrespective of the rank of the other cards - so **J-J-2-2-4** beats **10-10-9-9-8** because the jacks beat the tens. If the higher pairs are equal, the lower pairs are compared, so that for example **8-8-6-6-3** beats **8-8-5-5-K**. Finally, if both pairs are the same, the odd cards are compared, so **Q-Q-5-5-8** beats **Q-Q-5-5-4**.

9. Pair

A hand with two cards of equal rank and three other cards which do not match these or each other. When comparing two such hands, the hand with the higher pair is better - so for example **6-6-4-3-2** beats **5-5-A-K-Q**. If the pairs are equal, compare the highest ranking odd cards from each hand; if these are equal compare the second highest odd card, and if these are equal too compare the lowest odd cards. So **J-J-A-9-3** beats **J-J-A-8-7** because the 9 beats the 8.

10. High Card

Five cards which do not form any of the combinations listed above. When comparing two such hands, the one with the better highest card wins. If the highest cards are equal the second cards are compared; if they are equal too the third cards are compared, and so on. So **A-J-9-5-3** beats **A-10-9-6-4** because the jack beats the ten.

Notes on Low Poker

When playing games in which the lowest hand wins, there are some modifications to the ranking. These may not be universal, so should be discussed in advance when starting a game with new players. As far as I can tell, the most usual rules are:

- straights and flushes do not count as combinations
- aces count as low, below the twos
- a hand is always considered to belong to the highest category into which it fits - for example **7-7-7-5-5** counts as a full house - not (for example) as a pair with three odd cards that happen to be equal.

With these rules the best low hand is **5-4-3-2-A**, which does not count as a straight in this case.

Notice that because aces are low, a pair of aces is the **lowest**, and in this context therefore the **best** pair, beating a pair of deuces.

Variations that I know of include:

- recognising straights and flushes: in this version the best hand is **6-4-3-2-A** of mixed

suits;

- playing with aces always high: in this version (with straights and flushes also counting) the best low hand is **7-5-4-3-2** of mixed suits.

Ranking of suits

In standard poker there is no ranking of suits. If two hands are identical apart from the suits of the cards then they count as equal. In standard poker, if there are two highest equal hands in a showdown, the pot is split between them.

However, Franco Pratesi has informed me that in Italy there is a generally accepted ranking of suits in poker. The ranking is: **hearts (high), diamonds, clubs, spades (low)**. These ranks are used to break ties between otherwise equal hands. Other players in different places use other suit rankings - for example Ken Pikus (kpikus@chemonics.com) and John (jqv77@hotmail.com) report that their circles play with the ranking **spades (high), hearts, clubs, diamonds (low)**; Rudolf Lercher (WLNLER@rlb-noe.raiffeisen.at) and his friends play with the ranking **hearts (high), diamonds, spades, clubs (low)**.

Note that if you do play with a suit ranking, it is not at all obvious how it should apply when comparing hands with mixed suits, and careful discussion in advance is needed to avoid unpleasant arguments later. For example, using the Italian ranking, which of the following would you expect to be higher:

Hand A: ♥8-♠8-♣J-♣9-♥3 or **Hand B:** ♦8-♣8-♦J-♠9-♦3 ?

There are at least two views. Some would say that hand A is higher because A has the highest card within the pair (♥8). Others say that hand B is higher because the ♦J beats the ♣J - when two hands are equal in rank, the comparison is between the highest card which is **not** part of the combination. A surprising consequence of this second rule is that ♠K-♣Q-♦7-♣6-♠2 beats ♥K-♠Q-♥7-♦6-♦2. The combination is "high card", so the kings are ignored. You compare the highest card that is **not** in the combination, and the higher queen wins. On the other hand, if playing that the higher card **within** the combination wins, then the hand with the ♥K wins.

Poker Hand Ranking with Wild Cards

A wild card is a particular card, often a joker, which can be used to substitute for any card the holder wishes, even a duplicate of a card the holder already has. Several cards may be designated as wild - for example all the twos. This must be agreed in advance.

The hand ranking is the same as described above, except that it is now possible to have five of a kind - five cards of the same rank - in which of course at least one will be represented by a wild card. Five of a kind is the highest combination, beating a Royal Flush.

Short Deck

In some places, especially in continental Europe, poker is sometimes played with a deck of less than 52 cards, the low cards being omitted. Italian Poker is an example. As the pack is reduced, a Flush becomes more difficult to make, and for this reason a Flush may be ranked above a Full House in such games. See the [Italian Poker](#) page for an example of this type of game.

Hand probabilities and multiple decks

The ranking order of poker hands corresponds to their probability of occurring in straight poker, where five cards are dealt from a 52-card deck, with no wild cards and no opportunity to use extra cards to improve a hand. The rarer a hand the higher it ranks.

Mark Brader has provided [probability tables](#) showing the frequency of each poker hand type when five cards are dealt from a 52-card deck, and also showing how these probabilities would change if multiple decks were used.

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