

A Practical Guide

# THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO PLAYING VIDEO POKER



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# VIDEO POKER

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Although traditional poker gets all the big time attention and money thrown its way, video poker has held a steady and loyal fan base since its creation.

Video poker's simplicity, low house edges, and low betting minimums have made it one of the most consistently popular casino games over the past few decades. Plus, you only need a party of one to play.

Part of video poker's consistent popularity comes from how easy it is to play online. If you're new to the game and the word 'poker' generally scares you off, be not afraid as our downloadable video poker guide will teach you everything you need to know about going from video poker amateur to pro.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF VIDEO POKER

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### 1890

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While playing poker with machines dates back to the 1890s, these early devices were more reminiscent of old-time slot machines more than anything we know as video poker today. However, some did eventually allow players to hold specific cards on the machine's five reels in hopes of improving their hand, much like games do today.



## 1970

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It then took the better part of the 20th century for modern video poker machines to be developed. In 1970, the 'Poker-Matic' gaming machine was developed by Dale Electronics. This machine, which still used mechanical reels as opposed to a video screen, experienced a good deal of popularity and eventually was found on gaming floors all across Vegas.



## 1979

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As computer CPUs got cheaper, a monitor-based video poker game finally emerged in 1979. Called 'Draw Poker', the game's earliest releases required the player to have at least two pairs for a winning hand. Interestingly, manufacturer SIRCOMA (which would later become the now-famous IGT) didn't know the house edge of their own game at first.

To calculate this, casinos literally had to put employees on the casino floor to play video poker while tracking their results. After several weeks of this, an approximate house edge was figured, which could then be presented to potential buyers.



**Once these small bumps were smoothed out, video poker's popularity exploded. Countless spin-offs were born and their presence in casinos and anywhere else gaming machines were legal became widespread.**

# THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN POKER AND VIDEO POKER

Despite its name, video poker bears more similarities to slot machines than to actual poker.

The most obvious difference is that in video poker you aren't competing with anyone. Strategy is limited to calculating the likelihood of getting a card or cards that will help you make a playable hand instead of trying to figure out what other players might have, if they're bluffing, or if you should raise your bet in the middle of a hand.

Also when you hit a good hand in video poker, there's no worrying about someone else having a better one. For these reasons, video poker is a much simpler and less stressful game.

**Playing video poker (especially online) is much less time consuming, too. Even though efforts have been made to speed online poker up, in video poker you can still play through many, many more hands in an hour.**

And even though video poker might resemble some slot machines (especially poker-themed slots), the differences between the two are large. With slots, there's no real element of skill unlike in video poker. Getting a say in which cards you fold and which you hold makes for a much more immersive gameplay experience as opposed to the spin-and-wait nature of slots. Video poker games also generally have much higher maximum payout percentages compared to slots.



## DIFFERENT TYPES OF VIDEO POKER

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The many different types of video poker are often classified into either 'full pay' or 'low pay' machines.

As you might expect, **full pay games** pay more in the long run. Similar to slots and table games, video poker machines come with a return-to-player percentage. This number is often around 99% or higher, meaning in the long term you can expect to lose just 1p of every £1 when you play perfectly.

Note that these return percentages are most accurate when the maximum number of credits are being wagered.

**Low pay games** use pay tables that decrease the maximum possible payouts and increase the casino's house edge. As you might expect, players generally don't play as long on these types of machines and if you see land online casinos promoting a particular video poker game especially hard, it's probably a low pay game.

Within those categories, there are countless variations of video poker. Before playing one online, always try and see if you can find a pay table for it first.

Descriptions of some of the more popular types are listed below.

### JACKS OR BETTER

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This is the most common version of video poker and it's also commonly called 'Draw Poker.' As the name suggests, payoffs begin with a pair of jacks and increase in size through eight other poker hands.

The full pay version of the game is also sometimes known as 9/6 Jacks or Better, whereas anything from 9/5 to 6/5 Jacks or Better are low pay versions.

The first number indicates the payoff amount for a full house (9x your bet) and the second shows the payoff for a flush (6x your bet). As the first number decreases, so too does the return-to-player/maximum payout percentage.



### JOKERS WILD

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This version, which includes a joker as a wild card, is one of the highest paying video poker games.

Although the game is very similar to Jacks or Better, the added joker allows for much stronger hands but makes the game much more difficult to master.

Full pay joker poker has a payout percentage of 100.64% if perfect strategy is followed. Despite its similarities to Jacks or Better, be aware that payouts begin at a pair of Kings instead of Jacks.



## DEUCES WILD

As you might guess, all 2s are wild in this version. This makes four of a kind extremely common, occurring once every 15 hands on average.

Full pay versions of Deuces Wild can offer payout percentages as high as 100.8% when played perfectly.

## BONUS POKER AND DOUBLE BONUS

Similar to Jacks or Better, Bonus Poker offers better payouts for four-of-a-kind and has a payout percentage of around 99.20%. The bonus payouts vary based on the rank of your hand.

Double Bonus games offer similar special payouts, particularly for landing four aces. There are many versions of these games, but the only one with a theoretical payout percentage over 100 is the 10/7 version (100.20% when played optimally).

There is also a version called Double Double Bonus that offers a greater variety of bonuses for four-of-a-kind combinations (e.g. Four Aces + 2, 3, or 4). With perfect strategy, Double Double Bonus can give you a 100.1% return on your investment when playing the maximum bets.

## PICKEM POKER

This variant is different than most others. Instead of choosing which hands to hold and fold, you're instead dealt two cards face up. To complete your hand, you pick a card from two stacks of three cards that each have the top card turned up.

Even though it sounds like a lot is out of your hand (no pun intended) in Pickem, there's actually a great deal of strategy involved which can be read about online. Playing with an optimal strategy can give you an expected pay rate of 99.9%.



# HOW TO PLAY VIDEO POKER

Once you log on or sit down to a video poker machine, most are played like this:

<b>ROYAL FLUSH NO DEUCES.....</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>750</b>	<b>1000</b>	<b>1000</b>
<b>FOUR DEUCES.....</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>800</b>	<b>1000</b>
<b>ROYAL FLUSH WITH DEUCES...</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>125</b>
<b>FIVE OF A KIND.....</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>STRAIGHT FLUSH.....</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>FOUR OF A KIND.....</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>FULL HOUSE.....</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>FLUSH.....</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>STRAIGHT.....</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>THREE OF A KIND.....</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>

2 of Diamonds, 2 of Clubs, Ace of Spades, 4 of Hearts, Queen of Spades

SOUND   MORE GAMES   OPTIONS   **BET ONE**   BET MAX   DEAL

- 1 Choose how many coins you want to wager, between 1-5 (for the best payout potential, 5 is always recommended).
- 2 Press the 'deal' button to be dealt five cards at random.
- 3 Select which cards you would like to hold onto, or use the Auto Hold feature to let the game choose for you. The unselected cards will be discarded.
- 4 The number of cards you did not hold on to will be replaced with new cards from the remaining deck.
- 5 Any successful hands, as seen on the game's paytable, will be paid out.



A game's hand ranking chart will usually be in plain view on your screen, with successful hands 'lighting up' when hit. Also on display or within easy access will be the game's payable. This is usually displayed as a table that shows how much you expect to win for completing a hand with each of the five bet sizes.

**Before playing any video poker machine, always be sure to compare paytables with your other options. Small differences in payouts may not seem like much, but an overall return rate of 99.43% versus 97.18% will cause you to lose your money six times as fast over the long run.**

## HOUSE EDGES AND ODDS

Video poker odds and edges vary dramatically based on the type of game you are playing. Although, one nice thing about video poker compared to slots and many other casino games is that what you stand to win for each successful combination and bet size is displayed right out in the open.

Not all games are created equal though, and some have a much higher theoretical return rate (sometimes even over 100%) than others. Here are tables for three of the most common games:

### Jacks or Better 9/6

Hand	Payout (5 coins)	Probability	Return
Royal Flush	4000	0.00%	1.98%
Straight Flush	250	0.01%	0.55%
4 Of a Kind	125	0.24%	5.91%
Full House	45	1.15%	10.36%
Flush	30	1.10%	6.61%
Straight	20	1.12%	4.49%
3 Of a Kind	15	7.45%	22.33%
Two Pair	10	12.93%	25.86%
Jacks or Better	5	21.46%	21.46%
Nothing	0	54.54%	0.00%
<b>Total Return</b>			<b>99.54%</b>

## Deuces Wild

Hand	Payout (5 coins)	Probability	Return
Royal Flush	4000	0.002%	1.77%
4 Deuces	1000	0.02%	4.07%
Royal Flush/Deuce	125	0.18%	4.49%
5 of a Kind	75	0.32%	4.80%
Straight Flush	45	0.42%	3.71%
4 of a Kind	25	6.19%	32.47%
Full House	15	2.12%	6.37%
Flush	10	1.65%	3.32%
Straight	10	5.65%	11.31%
3 of a Kind	5	28.45%	28.45%
Nothing	0	54.68%	0.00%
<b>Total Return</b>			<b>100.762%</b>

## Jokers Wild/Joker Poker

Hand	Payout (5 coins)	Probability	Return
Royal Flush	4000	0.00%	1.94%
5 of a Kind	1000	0.01%	1.87%
Royal With Joker	500	0.01%	1.04%
Straight Flush	250	0.06%	2.87%
4 Of a Kind	100	0.86%	11.17%
Full House	35	1.57%	10.98%
Flush	25	1.56%	7.79%
Straight	15	1.66%	4.98%
3 Of a Kind	10	13.39%	26.79%
Two Pair	5	11.09%	11.09%
Kings or Better	5	14.20%	14.20%
Nothing	0	55.60%	0.00%
<b>Total Return</b>			<b>100.65%</b>

Note that these percentages assume you are wagering the maximum 5 coins on each bet and also playing with perfect strategy.

As you see, the total expected return varies with just the smallest tweaks and features. If you aren't sure about the long term viability of a certain game, use this table for quick reference:

Game	Maximum Payout Percentage	House Edge
Deuces Wild 25/15/9/5/3/2	100.76%	-0.76%
Joker Poker (Full Pay)	100.64%	-0.64%
Double Bonus	100.2%	-0.02%
Double Double Bonus	100.1%	-0.01%
Deuces Wild 25/15/11/4/4/3	99.96%	0.04%
Deuces Wild 25/16/10/4/4/3	99.74%	0.26%
Bonus Poker 9/6	99.64%	0.36%
9/6 or 'normal' Jacks or Better	99.54%	0.46%
Deuces Wild 25/15/9/4/4/3	98.91%	1.09%
Bonus Poker 8/6	98.49%	1.51%
Jacks or Better 9/5	98.45%	1.55%
Jacks or Better 8/6	98.39%	1.61%
Joker Poker (Low Pay)	98.09%-98.59%	1.91% - 1.41%
Deuces Wild 20/12/10/4/4/3	97.58%	2.42%
Bonus Poker 8/5	97.40%	2.6%
Jacks or Better 8/5	97.30%	2.7%
Deuces Wild 20/12/9/4/4/3	97.06%	2.94%
Deuces Wild 25/16/13/4/3/2	96.77%	3.23%
Bonus Poker 7/5	96.25%	3.75%
Jacks or Better 7/5	96.15%	3.85%
Deuces Wild 20/10/8/4/4/3	95.96%	4.04%
Bonus Poker 6/5	95.36%	4.64%
Jacks or Better 6/5	95.00%	5%
Deuces Wild 25/15/10/4/3/2	94.82%	5.18%

Note that the numbers after Deuces Wild games indicate the payoff (e.g. 25 to 1) for royal flush (natural)/4 deuces/royal flush (wild)/5 of a kind/straight flush. The numbers after Bonus Poker and Jacks or Better games show the payouts for a full house and flush.

# BASIC STRATEGIES

On every video poker turn, there are 32 possible ways to play each hand. Thankfully, math lovers have figured out the best way to play in every possible video poker scenario and written about them online for all to learn. Following optimal strategy for a given game will typically get you within 0.1% of a video poker game's max payout percentage.

However, that's always easier said than done. While one of the great things about playing video poker online is that you can reference strategy charts (see below) all you want while playing, it takes an extremely patient and disciplined player to do so for every hand.

Realise that if following these strategies led to quick and consistently big wins, casinos wouldn't have much incentive to keep offering the game. Know too that even if you find a machine with a 100% or higher RTP and you play perfectly every hand, it can take a long time to get rich on video poker due to the low betting limit.

However, even if you don't feel like referencing an optimal play chart every hand (or downloading software that can do it for you), even being somewhat knowledgeable of what they look like, or just using them when you hit a tough decision, can make you a much better video poker player.

## USING A STRATEGY CHART



*An expert video poker strategy chart will include every possible hand, its expected return, and what move is best to make next. As you can imagine, these can run rather large and can look quite complicated at first glance.*

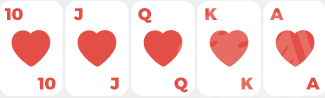
While they are readily available on the internet for you to reference all you want, the better news is that you don't have to in order to enjoy the high payout percentages that many games offer.

For instance, following the below basic strategy chart will give you an expected RTP rate of 99.46% compared to 99.54% playing the optimal strategy:


# THE SIMPLEST VIDEO POKER STRATEGY EVER

To use this strategy, simply look at your initial hand and go down the list until you find the highest applicable item. Hold those cards and discard the rest for the best odds of winning. Again, a more advanced chart will rank every possible hand combination, even those that aren't outright paying combinations.


**1**



Royal Flush




Four-of-a-Kind




Straight Flush

**2**

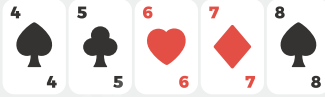


Four to a Royal Flush


**3**



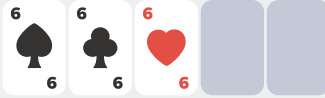
Flush



Straight




Full House



Three-of-a-Kind

**4**



Four to a Straight Flush

**5**



Two Pair

6



High Pair (Jacks or better)

7



Three to a Royal Flush

8



Four to a Flush

9



Low pair

10



Four to an outside Straight

11



Three to a Straight Flush

12



High Pair (Jacks or better)

14



Suited J-10

13



Two unsuited high cards



Suited Q-10

15



One high card



Suited K-10

16

Discard everything

# CHEATERS AND CONTROVERSIES

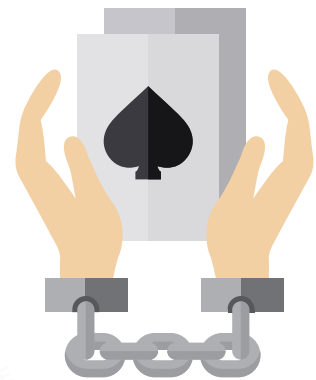
*Just because video poker is automated doesn't mean the game hasn't had its fair share of controversies, scandals and players (or casinos) that think they can pull a fast one.*



## THE KINGS OF GAME KING

Since its release in 1996, one of the most popular video poker machines has been IGT's Game King. Version 5.0 was released in 2002 and amid its new graphic enhancements, added game types, and other improvements was also a subtle bug in the machine's code. For seven years, this glitch remained hidden.

One day, pianist and gambler John Kane was playing Game King video poker at Vegas' Fremont Casino. After choosing to cash out and play on another machine, the game mysteriously rewarded him with an \$1,000 jackpot for no reason. Recreating this bug would become an obsession that he and a partner would eventually uncover and exploit for over half a million dollars over the next few months.



The pair eventually got greedy and casinos unsurprisingly began to notice that some of their machines were losing \$75,000 or more in a single month. Over one multi-day period, Kane took the Wynn for \$225,000.

Eventually, the duo and their winnings were detained by the Gaming Control Board and local police. Both men were arrested and charged by the United States Department of Justice on a number of charges that including hacking and conspiracy to commit wire fraud. With the defense arguing that all the men did was "push a sequence of buttons they were legally entitled to push", all the charges were eventually dropped, however their winnings were never returned.

## SKETCHY OREGON

In 1992, Oregon approved the operating of state-run video poker machines. A not-so-small caveat of these machines is that their return to player rates ranged from 90%-94%. As video poker typically has the highest RTP rates of any casino game, anything below even a mediocre 97% should be avoided. At a 90% return, players will lose their money 20x as fast as those on a full-pay version of the same game.

So even though the lottery board was already making their dough, they apparently felt the need to skim even more from taxpayers and guests to their state.



In 2014, software developer Justin Curzi noticed something strange in the video poker game he was playing. Holding an off-suited 2, 4, 5, 6, and 7, the obvious move seemed to be to discard the 2 and hope for 3 or an 8 to complete the straight and pay 5:1. But the machine's auto-hold feature, which normally suggests the best move probability-wise, recommended he instead discard the 7, reducing his win probability by 50%. Moreover, this reduced the game's real payout rate from 90% to an even more abysmal 87%.

A \$134-million dollar lawsuit against the Oregon lottery ensued, but was eventually thrown out on technical grounds.

## BIG WINNERS OF VIDEO POKER



*Video poker doesn't tend to make big winners overnight the way slots or casino games with higher betting limits do. However, just because the wins come a little slower doesn't mean it's not possible to win jackpot-sized amounts with good play and good patience.*



## VIDEO POKER'S MOST FAMOUS MILLIONAIRE

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Bob Dancer literally wrote the book on being successful at video poker. Author of Million Dollar Video Poker, Dancer was an aspiring blackjack professional who began dabbling with video poker on the side when he moved to Vegas in 1993. During a six-month period, he and his wife took their \$6,000 bankroll and grew it into over a million dollars, including hitting a \$400,000 hand at one point.

This was far from blind luck for math-wiz Dancer, however. Long before his big run, Dancer taught classes at Vegas casinos on gambling and video poker and had written extensively on the topic.

## WILD HEART LEADS TO WILD WINS

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Wild Heart is a video poker game that's a spin-off of classic Double Joker games. Instead of just trying to get the best five card hand, players are playing three lines of five cards each at the same time. Players can hold cards on each line as they try and get the best possible hand on just one line or on all three.

In 2010, a Canadian player took advantage of these greater possibilities by playing the maximum bets on every line. In return, they won \$107,064 for getting a royal flush on all three lines.



## 100 TIMES THE SPOILS

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Another player that did win big quickly was an unknown Las Vegas resident in March 2017.

Playing on a Triple Double Bonus video poker game that allowed for bets of \$500, the lucky player won \$400,000 on a single hand at The Cosmopolitan. One important footnote is that this version of video poker allows for 100 hands to be played at once, hence the higher betting limit.

# THE DOS AND DON'TS OF VIDEO POKER



If you take away nothing else from our guide, remembering the following video poker tips will ensure that you keep the house's edge down to a minimum, further your chances of winning, and keep playing and having fun for a long time.



**DO**

## PLAY THE MAXIMUM AMOUNT OF COINS

If you have a good understanding of video poker strategy and how hands rank, there's really no reason not to play the usual maximum of 5 credits per bet unless you're on a strict budget. Even then, 5 coins a hand becomes worth it when you do hit those rarer combinations (like royal flushes).



**DON'T**

## FORGET TO CHECK THE PAYTABLE

Not all video poker games are created equal. Before choosing one, look at its payouts and win probability. Remember that in Jacks or Better games, the two numbers after the title (as in JOB 9/6) represent the bet multipliers for successful full houses and flushes. Also, any game with a payout percentage lower than 98% should be avoided if possible.



**DO**

## PRACTICE FIRST

Before playing video poker for free, play a free version online first. This will allow you to get used to the game's rules, flow, and basic strategy without risking your bankroll for the sake of learning.



**DON'T**

## FORGET TO RESEARCH YOUR STRATEGY

Every video poker game comes with its own optimal strategy. If you're serious about giving yourself the best chance of winning real money, research a strategy chart for it before playing. When you play online you can even reference this chart as much as you want.



**DO**

## SET A LIMIT

Before beginning to play video poker (or any game) at an online or land casino, figure out exactly how much you're ok with losing. Make this number your limit and if you get to zero, call it quits. If it helps, only deposit the exact amount of money you want to gamble with to your online casino account. Many sites even let you set a monthly limit for yourself that makes it impossible to make further deposits.





**DO**

## KNOW WHEN TO WALK AWAY

Even if a game has an expected return larger than 100%, that doesn't mean it's impossible to lose money in the long-term. Especially for games with lower rates, understand that the longer you play, the more likely it is you will start losing money. If you find yourself up big (or down) quickly, it's often a good idea to walk away for the day and go do something else.



**DON'T**

## PLAY CRAZY VARIATIONS

Game manufacturers are constantly trying to out-do one another and create the next video poker machine that every casino will want to buy. In doing this, they inevitably create machines that look flashy but aren't as advantageous to the player. The simpler games are classics for a reason: they provide both the player and the casino with a near equal chance of winning money.



**DO**

## HAVE FUN

Even though video poker has some of the best odds you'll find at an online casino, it's important to remember that most big wins from the game come solely from disciplined and patient play. That's why it's important in the short-term to have fun with video poker and enjoy the process of learning how to best play the game.



**NOW YOU'RE READY  
TO PLAY VIDEO POKER**



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