

HOW TO PLAY Texas Hold'em No-Limit Tournaments

Here is a **simple, beginner-friendly explanation of Texas Hold'em tournaments.**

The Basic Idea

In a Texas Hold'em tournament, everyone starts with a certain number of poker chips. **Your goal is to win everyone else's chips** and eventually be the last player standing.

How Each Hand Works

Each player receives **2 private cards** that only they can see.

Then up to **5 community cards** are placed face-up in the middle of the table.

You make your best **5-card poker hand** using any combination of your 2 cards and the community cards.

The cards come out in this order:

1. Pre-flop

- You receive 2 cards.
- Players bet.

2. Flop

- 3 community cards are dealt.
- Players bet again.

3. Turn

- A 4th community card is dealt.
- Players bet again.

4. River

- A 5th community card is dealt.
- Final betting.

5. Showdown

- If two or more players remain, they show their cards.
- Best 5-card hand wins the pot.

What Makes a Tournament Different?

The blinds increase as the tournament progresses.

For example:

Level	Small Blind	Big Blind
1	100	200
2	150	300
3	200	400
4	300	600
5	500	1,000

So if you start with **20,000 chips**, you can't just sit there waiting for great cards forever. Eventually, the blinds become expensive.

Your most important number

Think about your stack in terms of **big blinds**.

If you have 20,000 chips and the big blind is 1,000:

$$20,000 \div 1,000 = 20 \text{ big blinds}$$

You have a **20-big-blind stack**.

The Poker Hands

From strongest to weakest:

1. **Royal Flush** — A K Q J 10, same suit
 2. **Straight Flush** — five consecutive cards, same suit
 3. **Four of a Kind** — four cards of the same rank
 4. **Full House** — three of one rank + two of another
 5. **Flush** — five cards of the same suit
 6. **Straight** — five consecutive cards
 7. **Three of a Kind**
 8. **Two Pair**
 9. **One Pair**
 10. **High Card**
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The Most Important Beginner Strategy

You don't need to play every hand.

Good poker often means folding.

For example, if you have:

- A♠ K♠ → **Very good**
- A♥ A♣ → **Excellent**
- K♦ Q♦ → **Good**
- 7♣ 2♦ → **Usually fold**
- J♠ 4♠ → **Usually fold**

A common beginner mistake is thinking:

"I've already put chips in, so I should keep playing."

Don't.

If your hand is bad, **fold and wait for a better opportunity.**

★ **A Simple Tournament Strategy**

Early tournament

Play relatively conservatively.

- Don't gamble your entire stack unnecessarily.
- Play strong starting hands.
- Learn how the other players play.
- Build your stack when good opportunities appear.

Middle tournament

The blinds are becoming more important.

- Steal blinds when appropriate.
- Be more aggressive with strong hands.
- Pay attention to everyone's stack size.

Late tournament

This is where tournament poker becomes very different.

You need to pay attention not only to **your cards**, but also to:

- Your chip stack
- Opponents' chip stacks
- Blind size

- How close you are to the money
 - How many players remain
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Example

Suppose you have:

25,000 chips

Blinds are:

500 / 1,000

You have **25 big blinds**.

You are dealt:

A♠ K♠

A player raises to 2,500.

You have a very strong hand, so you might call or raise, depending on the situation.

The flop comes:

A♦ 7♣ 3♥

You now have **a pair of aces with a very strong kicker**.

You would generally be willing to put significant chips into the pot.

One Tournament Rule to Remember

You don't have to win every hand.

Your objective isn't to collect every pot.

Your objective is to **keep enough chips to survive while taking advantage of good opportunities**.

For a beginner, I'd remember these **5 rules**:

1. **Play fewer hands.**
2. **Play strong hands aggressively.**
3. **Don't chase bad hands.**
4. **Think in big blinds, not just chips.**
5. **Protect your tournament life when you don't have a good reason to risk it.**

Here is a **very simple Texas Hold'em tournament starting-hand cheat sheet**.

PLAY THESE — Almost Always

Premium hands

- AA — Aces
- KK — Kings
- QQ — Queens
- JJ — Jacks
- AK — Ace-King
- AQ — Ace-Queen

With these, you generally want to **raise**, rather than just call.

PLAY THESE — Usually

Good hands

- 10-10
- 9-9
- 8-8
- A-J
- A-10
- K-Q
- K-J
- Q-J

Also consider:

- A-9 suited
- K-10 suited
- Q-10 suited
- J-10 suited
- 10-9 suited
- 9-8 suited

"Suited" means both cards are the same suit, such as ♥A and ♥9.

USUALLY FOLD THESE

Especially when someone has already raised:

- 2-7

- 3-8
- 4-9
- 5-10
- J-3
- Q-4
- K-5
- A-2 through A-8 **when not suited**

Don't be tempted just because you have an Ace.

★ The Easiest Rule to Remember

If you're just starting out:

Top 10 hands to play:

AA, KK, QQ, JJ, 10-10, AK, AQ, AJ, KQ, KJ

If you have one of these, you're usually interested in playing the hand.

If you have something like **7-2, 8-3, 9-4**, just **fold** and wait.

💡 One Important Tournament Adjustment

Your **position at the table matters**.

If you're one of the first players to act, play **tighter**.

If you're one of the last players to act and everyone has folded to you, you can play **more hands**, because you have more information.

A simple beginner rule:

Early position: Play the strongest hands.

Middle position: Add a few good hands.

Late position: Play more hands, particularly if everyone has folded.

And remember: **the number of big blinds you have changes the strategy**. A hand you might raise with at 40 big blinds can be played very differently when you have only 10 big blinds.

🔴 WHAT IS DIFFERENT ABOUT A TURBO TOURNAMENT

The blinds increase **much faster**.

You don't have as much time to wait for premium cards.

Example:

Level	Blinds
1	100 / 200
2	200 / 400
3	300 / 600
4	500 / 1,000
5	1,000 / 2,000

Your 20,000 starting stack can become only **10 big blinds** relatively quickly.

That forces you to make decisions sooner.

The Biggest Difference

Think of it this way:

Regular tournament:

"I can wait for a good hand."

Turbo tournament:

"I can't wait forever. The blinds are coming for me."

How Your Playing Style Changes

	Regular	Turbo
Blinds	Slow increase	Fast increase
Time to play	More	Less
Patience	Very important	Still important, but limited
Waiting for premium hands	Easier	More dangerous
Stealing blinds	Important	Very important
All-ins	Less frequent early	More frequent
Luck factor	Lower	Higher
Tournament length	Longer	Shorter

A very important Turbo rule

Don't wait until you're almost out of chips before becoming aggressive.

For example, suppose you have **12,000 chips** and the big blind is 1,000.

You have only **12 big blinds**.

You need to start looking for opportunities to raise or go all-in with good hands **before** you get down to 5 or 6 big blinds.

If you're a beginner

I'd recommend starting with a **regular tournament** rather than a Turbo.

You'll have more time to:

- Think about your decisions
- Learn the players
- Practice position
- Wait for good cards
- Understand how tournament strategy works

Once you're comfortable with that, **Turbo tournaments are a lot of fun**, but they require faster and more aggressive decision-making. The **biggest difference** between a **Limit Texas Hold'em tournament** and a **No-Limit Texas Hold'em tournament** is **how much you can bet at each point in the hand**.

Texas Hold'em Limit Tournaments vs Texas Hold'em No Limit Tournaments

	Limit Hold'em	No-Limit Hold'em
Bet size	Fixed amounts	Any amount, up to your entire stack
Can you go all-in?	Only for the fixed bet amount (unless your remaining chips are less)	Yes, anytime
Bluffing	More difficult	Much more powerful
Risk of losing entire stack	Lower	Much higher
Big hands	Usually win smaller pots	Can win your opponent's entire stack
Strategy	More mathematical	More aggressive and psychological
Tournament swings	Generally smaller	Can be very large

Example

Suppose the blinds are **100/200**.

Limit Hold'em

The betting amounts are predetermined.

For example, you might have:

- Pre-flop: **200**
- Flop: **200**
- Turn: **400**
- River: **400**

You **cannot decide to bet 2,000** just because you have a great hand.

If you have 5,000 chips, you can't simply announce "all-in" for 5,000.

No-Limit Hold'em

With blinds of 100/200, you can bet:

- 200
- 500
- 1,000
- 2,000
- **All 5,000 chips**

That's what makes No-Limit much more dramatic.

The difference in tournament strategy

Limit Hold'em

Because you can't make huge bets, **you generally play more hands** and rely heavily on:

- Starting-hand strength
- Pot odds
- Position
- Drawing hands
- Mathematical decisions

It's harder to scare someone out of a hand because the bets are relatively small.

No-Limit Hold'em

You have much more control over the size of the pot.

For example, you have **A♠ K♠** and the flop is:

K♥ 7♣ 2♦

You have top pair with a strong kicker.

In Limit, you can only make the prescribed bet.

In No-Limit, you might bet 50% of the pot, 100% of the pot, or even move all-in.

That makes **bet sizing and bluffing** extremely important.

Which is easier for a beginner?

I'd say **No-Limit Hold'em** is easier to understand, even though becoming good at it is much harder.

The basic idea is simple:

You can bet any amount you want, including all your chips.

For tournaments, I'd recommend learning **No-Limit Hold'em first**, because it is by far the more common tournament format.

One very important tournament difference

In **both formats**, the blinds increase as the tournament progresses.

So if you start with **10,000 chips**, you don't have 10,000 blinds forever. The increasing blinds force players to become more aggressive and eventually eliminate players.

In **No-Limit**, this becomes particularly important because your **stack size relative to the blinds** determines how aggressively you should play.