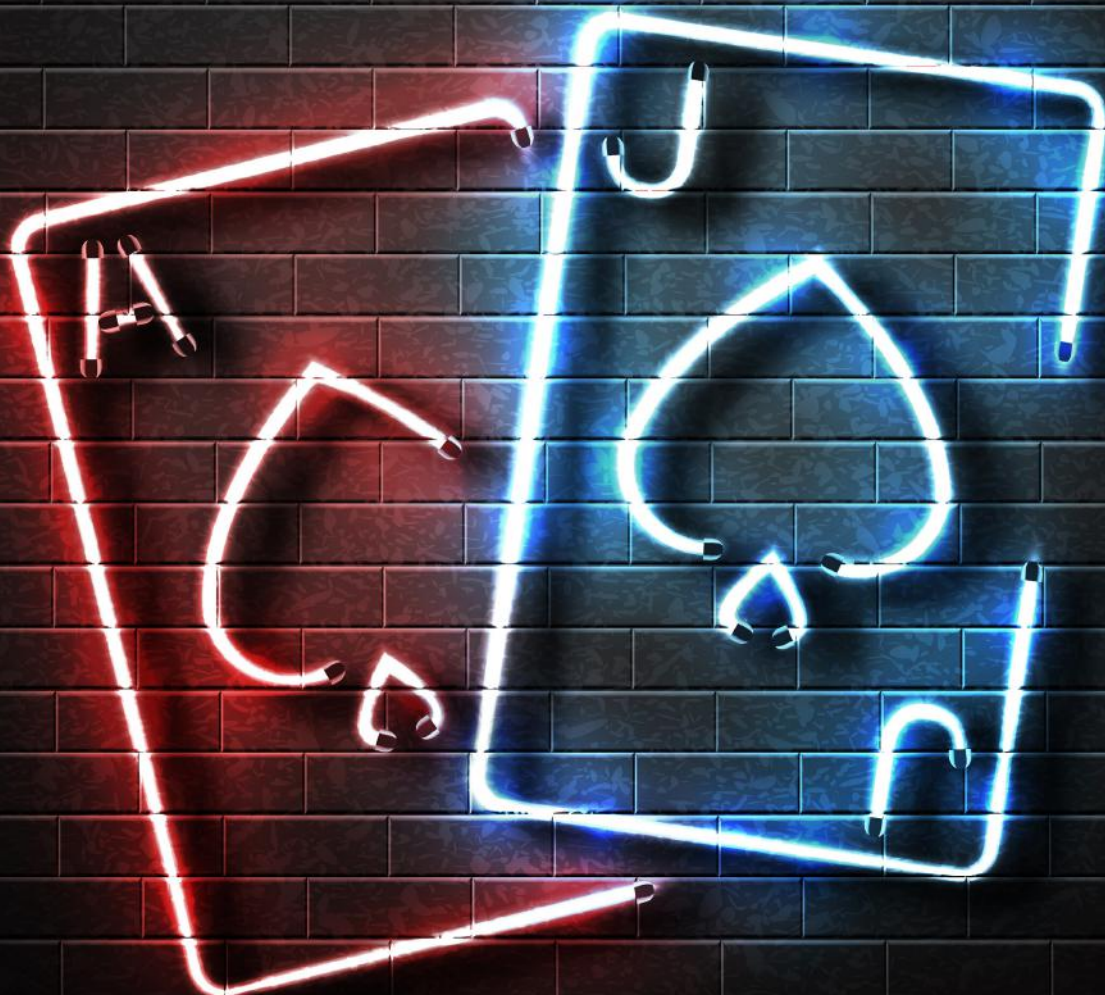


PREPARED BY
MARKET PROSPECTORS

THE BET CHAT BLACKJACK MASTERCLASS

CARD COUNTING, PERFECT STRATEGY, AND EVERYTHING ELSE
YOU NEED TO KNOW TO BEAT THE CASINOS



There are generally only two types of gamblers who frequent casinos - those who are intimidated by them and those who are not.

The former group may enjoy the thrill of a flutter but because they have no basic understanding of blackjack, they'll content themselves with the less demanding skills of roulette and probably throw a few coins into the fruit machines for good measure.

But that's not the way we do it here at **Bet Chat!**

The simple truth is that it doesn't have to be that way.

Blackjack is by far the most skillful of all casino games and, more importantly, it also has the lowest house percentage. You might well argue that if there is any house edge at all, then why even bother playing?

Well, it's quite true that if the house lost on a regular basis then every blackjack table in the world would be shut down. The fact that this will never happen owes everything to the fact that just a handful of players in every hundred play the game correctly. That doesn't mean that this minority always win, but it does mean they maximise their chances of doing so.

There are times, when even playing perfect strategy, you will be beaten by the cards. That is the lot of a gambler, but by following what is essentially a very simple process, you can gain an edge over the house and never feel intimidated at a blackjack table again.

In a nutshell, that's what this guide is all about...

Realistically, you're probably not going to pack a bag, leave your current life behind, and become a professional card shark in Vegas. But, next time you do end up in a casino with friends, or indeed if you just like the occasional flutter on blackjack online, it makes perfect sense that you give yourself the best possible mathematical chance of winning. After all, gambling is never any fun if you lose!

This guide will teach you perfect strategy, how to card count and everything else you need to turn the tables on the casino. I hope you enjoy it.

Mr X

Professional card counter (name redacted for this reason)

THE BASICS



You may have played pontoon and believe that blackjack is the same thing. It isn't. The only common thread between the two games is that they are both based on the magic figure '21', but that is where the similarity ends. To make this abundantly clear, you'll need to know the exact way that casino blackjack is played. The rules differ slightly in certain countries, and I'll deal with these subtle variations later in the guide. Here then, is how British blackjack works:

Blackjack is played on a table that seats seven players. A dealer, provided by the casino, is the only person who ever touches the cards to be dealt. The reason for this is that the deal does not rotate, and if you do ever touch an undealt card at ANY time the dealer will probably think you are trying to cheat - trust me on this one. The dealer can deal any number of hands from a minimum of two to a maximum of seven.

Therefore, should you find yourself the only player at the table, you must play two hands, or boxes, to start the game. A box is simply the name given to the rectangular space in front of each seat where the player places his bet before any cards are dealt.

Of course, to start playing you need chips. To obtain these, simply place your money on the table in front of the dealer, but NOT in a box. If you do this, the dealer will assume you are making a bet. Most British casinos start at around £5 per hand as a minimum bet, but make sure you check as the staking levels are always clearly displayed on the table.

You should also remember that the dealer cannot give you any cash change. Whatever amount you put down will be converted into chips, but do also note that you can cash in these chips at any time at the casino's cash desk.

Let's assume that you are ready to begin play during a dealer's shuffle. In British casinos a four-deck pack is commonplace, and the dealer uses a plastic card called the stop card to ask a player to cut. If he offers this to you, simply place the stop card somewhere in the middle region of the pack.

The dealer will then divide the cards at that point and reassemble them so that point becomes the top of the pack.

The dealer will then reinsert the stop card so that there are maybe 20 or so cards behind it. These cards will NOT be dealt as the stop card is the cue for him to reshuffle the pack.

Then, all the cards are placed in a 'shoe' - don't worry, the shoe is just a plastic box! There is nothing sinister about this - it's simply a method to allow the dealer to deal the cards easily and quickly, since it's clearly impractical for him to hold a four-deck pack in his hands.

Before he starts dealing, the dealer will check how many boxes contain a stake. You MUST place your stake in a marked box if you want to be included in the hand. Simply sitting at the table with a pile of chips in front of you and an expectant look on your face isn't enough.

You're a student of mine now, so we're going to do this my way - the proper way.

The dealer deals one card face up to each player and one card face up to himself. Then he adds a second face-up card to each player and one card face-down to himself. Clearly the player has no control whatsoever over which two cards he is dealt, but equally neither does the dealer. It's at this stage of the proceedings that the fun really starts.

The object of the game, from the player's point of view, is to get closer to 21 - without exceeding the total - than the dealer. If you do this then you win, if you don't you lose. If both the player and dealer have the same total then the hand is declared a stand-off and the player retains his initial stake.

The crux of blackjack is knowing when to take a card (draw) and when to stay on your existing total (stand) and I'll teach you this - with a bit of flair - gradually over the coming pages.

Since it's clearly impossible to bust with your two original cards, the beauty of blackjack is clear - it is the ONLY casino game in which the player is completely in control of his own destiny. When you can appreciate that, you're halfway there.

That, in a nutshell, is the essence of the rules of Blackjack. Obviously, there is more to making a profit from any casino game than simply knowing how to play, and that is why I'll be teaching you how to progress from a beginner to a master blackjack player.

The great thing about blackjack is that apart from giving you the best chance of any casino game to beat the house, it can also be a hell of a lot of fun. Clearly though, it is vital to understand everything that is going on at the table. It doesn't matter how many people are playing, blackjack is always a game between two people. The players are not trying to beat each other - each of them individually is attempting to beat the dealer.

So remember, it's irrelevant whether you have a better or worse hand than the player sitting next to you. In fact, even if a single player is playing four separate hands, that still represents four separate games.

Last month I told you that the idea of the game is to get as close to 21 as possible without exceeding that total. That's technically true, but as it does you no good to have 20 if the dealer has 21, you can see that the overriding objective is to beat the dealer - and beat him good.

To calculate your hand, simply add up the value of your cards. Therefore an 8 of hearts and a 5 of spades will give you a total of 13. All picture cards count as 10, while an ace can count as 1 or 11 at the player's discretion. Therefore an ace and a six could count as either 7 or 17. I should also make it clear that 'suits' in blackjack are completely meaningless (card suits anyway - you can still look sharp in a blazer while you clean out the croupier!)

At the end of a hand if you have 19 and the dealer 18, you will win your initial stake. So, if you had placed a £5 chip in your box the dealer will place another one alongside it. If he has 19 and you have a lesser total he will take your chip, and if you both have 18 the hand is a stand-off. The dealer indicates this by tapping his knuckles in front of your box and leaving your chip untouched.

By the way, never be so intimidated to think that after a stand-off you must leave your stake in the box. You could do this, but you could increase or decrease the stake or remove it completely and sit out the next hand or try your luck at another table.

Now, let's take a look at the play of an average hand...

Hitting and Standing

Those of you who have played pontoon will understand the terms 'twist' and 'stick'.

However, I'd like to make an impassioned plea at this point – forget them when you enter the blackjack domain. They have no place whatsoever in blackjack terminology. If you use them you'll blow your Cincinnati Kid image straight away! The correct terms are 'hit' and 'stand'.

Say your first two cards are a 3 and a 2. Clearly you would not want to stand on a total of 5, so you would need to hit the hand.

To do this, simply tap the table in front of your cards when the dealer gets round to you (the dealer deals clockwise) or say "hit" or "card". You continue this process until you are happy with your total. Consequently, if you have received another 2 to give you a total of 7 you would want to hit again.

If your first two cards were a 10 and a 9 you would obviously want to stand on your total of 19. To indicate this to the dealer, either pass your flat palm across your chest or say "no card" or "stand".

A Natural or a Blackjack?

There is one way that a player can win automatically. This is when you are dealt an ace and a picture card or an ace and a 10. This is referred to as a blackjack or a natural. When you are lucky enough to get one you will not only be paid out immediately but also at odds of one and a half to one. Therefore, if you staked £10 and got a blackjack, the dealer would pay you £15, and there would be a total of £25 in your box.

The only time that you will not win with a blackjack is if the dealer has one as well. In this case, the hand is a stand-off. However, I should point out that a blackjack beats a standard total of 21. So, if you had a natural and the dealer had a 10, a 6 and a 5 you would still win.

Busting

This is when the player loses automatically. If your hand totals more than 21 the dealer will collect all your cards and your stake. Please note that it doesn't matter if the dealer busts as well - you still lose. If the dealer busts he only pays out those players who have not bust and whose cards are still on the table.

In addition to hitting, standing and getting a natural, there are two other options open to the player. These are known as 'doubling down' and 'splitting'. I'll explain exactly what they entail later in the guide.

The Dealer's Hand

The crux of blackjack is that the player makes all the decisions and the dealer makes none. They aren't allowed to double, split or even decide when to hit or stand - these decisions are all made for him under the rules of the game. The management of casinos have found this to be by far the best way since it is not inconceivable that a dealer, allowed free reign, might bust on purpose to help a friend win.

So, they must work to clearly set guidelines: they have to hit their own total up to and including 16 and stand on 17 or better.

Even if all the players have a total of 20 and he has 17, the dealer must stand, and all the players will win.

Similarly, if all players have totals below 16, the dealer has to hit their own total of 16, even though it is very likely that they will bust.

The player, of course, can do exactly as they like, and that's the beauty of blackjack. Next I'll explain how to exploit this crucial difference, and the vital business of when to stand and when to draw.

PERFECT STRATEGY

A casino is the perfect place to observe human emotions. If you stand by the exit door you don't need to ask departing punters if they have won or lost - it's generally written all over their faces. You can normally spot the losers at the tables too - they're the ones keeping track of which roulette numbers have come up so they can convince themselves there is some kind of pattern to the random spinning of the ball. They also have a tendency to blame bad luck when they lose. It brings to mind the story of the famous South African golfer Gary Player. After yet another sub-par round a jealous opponent accused him of being lucky. "It's funny that," said Player, "the more I practice the luckier I get".

According to those who are ignorant of the game, both winning and losing blackjack players are simply victims of luck. The losers are said to be cursed with bad luck and the winners blessed with some divine kind of Midas Touch. As you begin to win using the strategies which I'm teaching you in this school, some people will attribute your success to good luck. If this occurs then quote Gary Player. Or let them stew in their jealousy.

In the last chapter you will remember I told you that the dealer's strategy never changes. He must draw to 16 and stand on 17 or more. The player's fate, though, is entirely in his or her own hands. I explained that there are three options to each hand. Either the player wins, the dealer wins or the hand is a stand-off.

But here's a little poser for you: when does the dealer win a stand-off?

The answer is when both the player and dealer exceed 21 and 'bust'. Okay, it was something of a trick question, but it also points out something vital. It's no use to you if the dealer busts if you have already gone over yourself and lost your bet. So obviously, if the odds suggest that the dealer is likely to bust you should try to ensure that you don't - then an automatic win in your favour is likely.

As the dealer has to draw to 16 the ideal face card for him to have, from the player's point of view, is a six. Chances are that his second card will give him a total over 11 but less than 17 and force him to draw again in a vulnerable position. Similarly, a dealer's face card of four or five is also likely to leave him in no-man's land.

With that in mind, my first rule of blackjack dominance is that the player never busts against a dealer's four, five or six. That is easily operated since the player refuses to take a card if his total exceeds 11. For example, a player dealt a picture card and a three should stand against a dealer's six. Many amateur blackjack players ignore this basic strategy and lose. Don't make the same mistake.

Okay, so what if the dealer's face card is a two or three? Computer studies have shown that he still has a reasonable chance of busting, but because he has a better chance of making a hand you must be prepared to take a risk.

One theory suggests that the player should hit a total of 12 against a two or three but should not risk busting on any other total. The theory works for any number of cards in your hand. Say you were dealt a five and a two against a three. You must hit your total of seven since there is no risk, and if you received a five you would hit again because your total would be 12. An ace after that, giving you a total of 13, would be the place to stand.

Finally then, what should you do if the dealer's card is seven, eight, nine, ten, picture card or ace? These are the worst cards for the dealer to have from the player's point of view. Chances are he will make a hand and so you have to be prepared to take more risks.

One general rule here is to draw to 16 and stand on 17 or more. The only time this does not necessarily apply is when you have an ace in your hand, but I'll explain that later in the series.

It seems only common sense that you would hit a total of 12 against a dealer's ten. But if you had 16 and the dealer has a seven showing, you **MUST** also hit that hand too.

Many punters find this very hard to justify. “Why should I take the risk of busting,” they’ll argue, “when any card the dealer takes other than a ten or ace will mean he must draw again and is likely to bust?”

There is no straightforward answer to that question except to say that statistically taking a card is the right decision. Research has shown that if the situation were played out a million times, the player would win more hands drawing a card than he would standing on 16.

But enough chit chat! Let me give you a tried and tested winning method!

The most effective way of learning and remembering when to draw and when to stand is to use ‘strategy cards’. These are simple tables which tell you what to do in any given situation. The four strategy cards given below will enable you to play blackjack using a stand and draw technique which is widely regarded as being the best by many professionals.

To use the cards, simply find the dealers’ card along the top row, and then travel down the grid until you reach your hand indicated on the left hand side. The grid where the dealers’ column intersects with your row contains a letter which tells you what to do. The key is:

S = Stand (Stick)

H = Hit (Twist)

SP = Split

D = Double Down (Buy A Card)

The terms in brackets relate to the terms used in UK Pontoon or 21.

Don't worry if you don't understand the terms split and double down just yet - they will be covered later. What's important right now is that you begin to learn what to do in any given situation.

So have a look at the strategy cards below:

Strategy Card 1

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	A
17+	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
16	S	S	S	S	S	H	H	H	H	H
15	S	S	S	S	S	H	H	H	H	H
14	S	S	S	S	S	H	H	H	H	H
13	S	S	S	S	S	H	H	H	H	H
12	H	H	S	S	S	H	H	H	H	H

Example: if the dealer's card is a 7 or more you stand on 17 or more but you hit on 16 or less.

Strategy Card 2

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	A
11	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	H
10	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	H	H
9	H	D	D	D	D	H	H	H	H	H
5-8	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H

Example: If you hold 11 you Double Down every time unless you know the dealer is holding an Ace.

Strategy Card 3

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	A
A, 8-10	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
A, 7	S	D	D	D	D	S	S	H	H	H
A, 6	H	D	D	D	D	H	H	H	H	H
A, 5	H	H	D	D	D	H	H	H	H	H
A, 4	H	H	D	D	D	H	H	H	H	H
A, 3	H	H	H	D	D	H	H	H	H	H
A, 2	H	H	H	D	D	H	H	H	H	H

Example: If you hold an Ace and an 8 or higher with the other card you always stand.

Strategy Card 4

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	A
A, A or 8,8	SP	SP	SP	SP	SP	SP	SP	SP	SP	SP
10,10	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
9,9	SP	SP	SP	SP	SP	S	SP	SP	S	S
7,7	SP	SP	SP	SP	SP	SP	H	H	H	H
6,6	H	SP	SP	SP	SP	H	H	H	H	H
5,5	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	H	H
4,4	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H
3,3	H	H	SP	SP	SP	SP	H	H	H	H
2,2	H	H	SP	SP	SP	SP	H	H	H	H

Example: If you hold two Aces or two eights you always split them and play two hands.

These strategy cards have been produced by analysing millions of individual Blackjack hands and are the exact strategies used by the majority of practicing professional players.

With practice you will be able to memorise all these play strategies and they will help you to majorly reduce the house odds. Soon I'll show you card counting, where you can turn the odds round into your favour and bank healthy profits on a very regular basis.

DOUBLING AND SPLITTING



Blackjack rules differ slightly across the world but one basic truth applies universally - casinos are not in the habit of giving money away. As I've already mentioned in a previous lesson, casinos have to have a slight edge over the player or every table would be shut down. They do still offer decent percentage opportunities to players, but the vast majority of casual players are too ignorant of the game to take advantage of them.

Doubling and splitting are two of the best ways in which a player can increase the size of his bet. Knowing how to utilise these strategies is vital, so here are the basic playing guidelines you need to learn...

Doubling Down

In British casinos the rules regarding doubling couldn't be simpler. You make your bet in the usual way before any cards are dealt and if your first two cards total 9, 10 or 11 you have the option of doubling down. This means that if your initial bet was £5 and you were dealt (for the sake of example) a 7 and a 3, you could place another £5 chip alongside your first one and receive another card from the dealer. You therefore have £10 on the hand and will be paid out at even money if you win.

It's important to note that if you do double down you will only ever get one more card. If you doubled on a total of nine and got a two you would have to stand on 11. You should also understand that you can only ever double down on your initial two cards - a three-card total of nine, ten or eleven doesn't count for doubling purposes.

Having stated that doubling down presents an excellent way to shift the odds in your favour, I should warn you that doubling when the odds say you shouldn't is one of the surest ways of losing your pot. For this reason there is a basic play strategy that tells you exactly when to double down. This strategy is illustrated on the 'strategy cards' which I gave you in the previous chapter.

The strategy cards make it very clear when to double down and when not to double down. For example, if you are holding two cards which make a total of 11, you should always double down unless the dealer's up-card is an ace.

Using the strategy cards will ensure that you increase your stakes on hands which are statistically proven to be in your favour. Of course, you won't win every hand which you double down, but over the period of a few games you are much more likely to make a profit.

Splitting

Splitting is available when you are dealt a pair with your first two cards, for example two 7's or two 3's. When you split, you place a second bet of the same amount next to your initial wager. A second card is then dealt to each card of the pair making two completely new hands. You play the hand on your right first in the usual way to its conclusion and then play the hand on your left.

In Las Vegas, tens, jacks, queens and kings are considered the same for splitting purposes but to choose to split them is a mug's bet. Think about it - why would you ever want to split a hand that already gives you a total of 20? It is not only small-time amateurs who make this mistake - some thoughtless high-rollers split picture cards as a habit. With tactics like that it's no wonder the casinos provide these players with free food and accommodation.

Here in Britain you can't split picture cards, nor can you split 4's and 5's. In fact, you'd never ever want to, but the Government forces casinos to make it a rule purely to protect the layers. Every other numbered card is fair game and there are occasions when you will split on the majority of them.

The major advantage of splitting is that it allows you to turn a poor hand into two potential winning ones.

For example, if you were dealt a pair of 8's you would have a total of 16. This is not the best of hands by any means, but by splitting them you are likely to radically improve your position.

There are slightly different rules when you are dealt a pair of aces. First of all, you are only allowed one further card on each ace. Secondly, a 10 or picture card dealt to you will not count as a blackjack but just as 21.

Some of you may be wondering whether you can double down after you have split. The answer is yes and done correctly it can be very profitable...

Here's an example: say you staked £10 and were dealt two sevens against a dealer's five. You split the sevens (costing you another £10) and were then dealt a three and a four. Following the doubling down strategy you would double both hands because the totals would be 10 and 11. That would mean an extra £10 on both hands and suddenly you have £40 riding on the outcome. That's when the game gets exciting and more often than not you will win in those situations because you are letting the odds dictate your bet.

Once again, I'll end this chapter by suggesting you keep looking over the strategy cards.

Now that you understand how doubling down and splitting works, it is up to you to learn when to use these clever strategies. If you practice properly what we have taught you so far in this Blackjack Masterclass will make you a better player than 90 percent of the people you'll find in a casino.

CARD COUNTING

In the previous four parts I have discussed the basic play strategies which can help you to succeed as a serious blackjack player. The tactics on the strategy cards can actually help you to gain an edge over the casino of 1%. This basically means that for every £100 you bet while using basic strategy, you can expect to make a £1 profit.

Now, learning to count cards increases this edge considerably. It allows you to know at any given point in a game whether the cards remaining are more likely to help you win or lose, making it possible to adjust your stake accordingly.

Card counting works because of the way blackjack is played in casinos. Since the dealer has to hit on hands of 16 or less, the more smaller cards such as 2's, 3's, 4's and 5's that are in the pack, the better chance he has of hitting without going bust. At the same time, if the remaining deck contains few low cards because they have already been dealt, the chances are that the dealer will bust a lot of the hands he hits. By counting cards you will know whether the cards favour you or the casino, so, you can eliminate the edge of ignorance that most casual players have against them.

A simple card-counting technique was created by the professional blackjack player and mathematician Edward Thorpe, and dramatically improves your chances of making good profits at the table.

This is the technique:

- Start with an imaginary total of 0
- Whenever you see an Ace, 10 or picture card dealt, deduct 1 point from the total
- Whenever you see a 2, 3, 4, 5 or 6 dealt, add 1 point to the total

Don't start counting cards until they have been played out. This means that you should wait until a player has finished playing his hand before including them in your count. Such a habit will make it easier for you to count the cards without getting confused about what you have and have not already counted. The only exception to this is with your own cards. Since you are less likely to get confused with your own cards, you can include them in the count immediately.

Because card-counting plays a central role in your success as a blackjack player, it is essential that you master card-counting by practicing in a no-risk situation.

You can practice card-counting with friends, or online. Most online casinos will also let you practise playing blackjack with virtual money but note that they shuffle the virtual pack after each deal. While this can be useful for mastering the mechanics of the game, it won't help you particularly with your card counting.

THINKING OF GOING PRO?

In the previous few chapters I've revealed the precise strategies which make it possible to play blackjack and win, not just occasionally, but regularly. To recap briefly, the steps to playing profitable blackjack can be summed up as the Blackjack Masterclass Action Plan...

- Know the game
- Memorise perfect strategy
- Learn to count cards
- Learn to manage your money and self with discipline
- Practice, Practice and Practice

By following this simple action plan, you will find that taking money from the casinos on a regular basis is far easier than you ever thought possible. Indeed, after several months of successful playing in a real casino environment, you may even begin to consider quitting your nine-to-five job and becoming a professional player.

Deciding to make blackjack your main occupation is not a decision that you should make lightly. It's a decision that will affect the rest of your life. If you set yourself up as a professional player before you are truly ready, the casinos will take great pleasure in chewing you up and spitting you out. If, on the other hand, you wait until you have totally mastered the game of blackjack, your success and new standard of living as a professional player will be the envy of everyone around you.

Since deciding whether or not you are ready to play blackjack on a professional basis has such far-reaching consequences, I strongly recommend that you analyse your abilities as honestly as you can by answering the following questions...

- Have you memorised perfect strategy completely so that you instantly know what you should do in any given situation?
- Can you count cards accurately and quickly?
- Have you practised your skills and succeeded in taking money from the casinos on a regular basis by playing basic strategy and card-counting techniques (not by recklessly staking half your betting bank on a lucky hand)?
- Are you equally at home playing a four, six or eight-deck game as you are a single deck game?
- Do you always bet in a disciplined, logical, and businesslike manner?

If you can't answer each of these questions with a definite "YES!" then do not give up your day job. There is at least one vital element of the game that you need to study and practice further and deciding to become a professional player in such a weak state could ruin you financially.

On a more positive note, when you can answer yes to each of the above questions, you can start thinking about becoming a professional player.

Becoming a professional blackjack player is not simply a case of quitting your day job and spending a leisurely few hours in casinos every evening. That "bed of roses" lifestyle works only in the movies and would be far from profitable in the real world. True professionals organise their days so that they can devote time to...

Continue Learning

It's important to realise that a professional blackjack player never stops learning. Although the strategies I've revealed over the past few chapters will enable you to profit regularly at the table once you have mastered them, there are a number of other strategies that are useful in different situations, and the professional needs to be aware of as many of these as possible.

The truly professional blackjack player almost always has at least one new book on blackjack techniques on their coffee table. They study with passion and are always looking at new methods of card counting and various play strategies. They study the strengths and weakness of each method under a variety of hypothetical situations. They know what will work in a six-deck game and what will fall apart in an eight-deck game.

If you can't stand the thought of continuing your study of blackjack, then think again about becoming a professional.

Remember - the more you know the more profit you'll be able to pocket.

Practice More

Studying new techniques and strategies alone would be useless if it wasn't coupled with practice sessions. Far from being smugly confident about his or her ability to beat the dealers, the professional blackjack player constantly strives to improve their gaming skills. To this end they schedule periods of time to practice them in a safe environment.

Before the advent of computers, practicing used to involve hosting friendly games in your own home to play with chips or small cash stakes (although this wasn't "technically" above board!). These days, the professional is far more likely to spend a few hours sat in front of a computer screen playing in a simulated casino environment.

Not only does this enable you to practice whenever you like, but the computer can also analyse your performance and highlight areas which need improvement.

Actual Casino Play

Having spent a few hours in further study and practice, the professional then enters the casino itself to put more money in their already very healthy bank account. They visit the casino alone on the majority of occasions, and always think of them as business excursions. One rule which is common to all professional players is that they never give in to the temptation to mix business with pleasure, and playing blackjack while with friends is almost never done (unless they're being used in your strategy, say with card counting).

The player who takes his friends along to the casino will not be single-minded enough to succeed in beating the dealer. Instead, they will be trying to entertain their companions and, perhaps, impress them with their amazing talents. In doing this, they usually end the night with a loss.

The professional plays alone, discreetly and without giving any thought to having 'fun'. They may enjoy their evening, or they may not, but as long as they exit with a profit, they've done their job, and that alone gives them pleasure.

Keep that in mind when you head out to ply your trade in the casinos.

CASINO GUIDELINES

If a person masters the art of painting, they become famous and revered by critics all over the world. If another teaches themselves to play a musical instrument to classical standard, record companies fall over themselves trying to get them to sign a recording contract.

In the world of blackjack, the professional player never gets any recognition for their immense skills.

Instead, they have to remain as inconspicuous as possible in order to avoid getting banned from the casinos which provide them with their livelihood.

This is an important point which you need to understand at all costs. If you are to be successful, the last thing you should do is draw attention to your skill. Getting banned from a casino is not always the “compliment” which many amateurs believe it to be, but is often a sign of inexperience. Even worse, getting banned from a casino makes a potential source of income unavailable to you - and that is not good.

According to the majority of professional blackjack players, there are three main ways of avoiding casino bans. These are:

1 - Create a route

Do not visit the same casino night after night and expect to take money from them consistently without getting noticed. Casino personnel are among the most scrupulous in the betting industry, and players who win even modest amounts on a regular basis are watched closely.

Instead, join a number of casinos within (say) a fifty mile radius of your home and visit each one in turn. The more casinos you can visit, the better. Being a member of ten casinos would allow you to visit each one once every ten days. Being a member of twenty would obviously halve this visit rate and reduce the chances of you being banned even further.

Of course, eventually you may still get banned - particularly if you begin playing (and winning) with high stakes. But it will take longer for each casino to spot you as a professional, and more time in the casino equals more money in the bank.

2 - Use disguises

This may sound ridiculous, but a lot of professionals use disguises of one sort or another - and with good reason. Disguises will reduce the chances of the casino camera operators recognising you as the same player who won several hundred pounds twenty days ago. So, once again, you are able to extend your time at the blackjack tables and increase your profits even further.

Using disguises doesn't mean that you have to make yourself look silly mind - after all, that would defeat the objective, which is to be as inconspicuous as possible. Here are some ideas you can use to change your appearance without attracting undue attention to yourself:

Grow a moustache and/or beard, then shave it off after a few weeks and start again (more difficult for females, granted!)

If you don't wear glasses, obtain a pair of plain glass spectacles and wear them

If you normally wear glasses, wear contact lenses occasionally

Change any jewellery you wear on a regular basis - a unique wedding ring once resulted in one professional getting banned from a casino, despite his otherwise flawless efforts to disguise his appearance

Don't drive to the casino in the same car week after week. Your car is likely to be on camera as you drive into the casino premises and has as much chance of being recognised as you do. Instead, take the occasional taxi or change your vehicle every few months

It's all very James Bond, isn't it? But it works.

Also if you have a membership card, then this does not necessarily mean that you should not use disguises. People tend to remember faces more easily than names, and so a subtle change in appearance (note the word subtle - do not have blonde hair on one visit and black hair the next!) might help you to extend your welcome. Eventually, of course, your name WILL become known as that of a consistent winner and, regardless of your disguise efforts, you may be banned. But at least the above guidelines will have helped you to rake at least a few more thousand from the house before this occurs.

3 - Throw a Loss

Like it or not, the professional blackjack player can be likened to a hustler. Their aim is to sting the casinos by appearing to be a regular player, when in fact they are nothing of the sort.

Regular players lose. In order to fit in, the professional must also throw the occasional loss every once in a while. They will play against perfect strategy or the count of the cards so that the suspicions of the dealer will not be aroused. They will also spend a little time at the roulette wheel or craps table and have a small flutter.

If they lose occasionally, the casino are more likely to think that the professional is a regular player who has both good and bad “lucky streaks” and so will often overlook the fact that their good streaks far outweigh the bad ones.

CONCLUSION



And so we reach the end of our Blackjack Masterclass. The lessons that I've presented to you contain all the information you need to make regular profits playing the only casino game in the world where the odds can be tilted in your favour. Work hard, master the principles, and a life of wealth and satisfaction are yours for the taking.

BONUS: INTERVIEW WITH A PROFESSIONAL



Mr X is a professional blackjack player and the brains behind The Blackjack Masterclass. What follows is based on the actual transcription of an exclusive interview with Mr X who reveals (among other things) exactly how a player can continue to take the casino's money even after they have aroused the suspicions of the dealer....

Mr X (we'll call him Mark for the purposes of this interview) is a fairly average man as far as looks are concerned. About 5' 11' tall, with a dark head of hair and a full, neatly trimmed beard, he's the sort of person you wouldn't give a second glance if you passed in the high street. He certainly doesn't give the impression of being a man who, over a period of 38 months, made an average profit of £477 for every day he worked. But that's exactly what he is.

We chatted over tea (I can't stand coffee!) for a while in the designer kitchen of his large five bedroom house, which is situated in the smart neighbourhood of Kensington. Mark was just about as down to earth as you can get, and it was only when we walked downstairs into the basement area that it dawned on me just how special this man really was. The basement had been converted into a very swish little office. A large blown-up photograph of Mark holding a briefcase full of bank notes took pride of place on the main wall.

"That picture was taken on the night that I first seriously considered playing blackjack for a living," he explained. "I was on holiday in Las Vegas at the time and - modesty aside - I played like a dream. Everything went like clockwork, and I won the equivalent of over £5,000 on that one night."

"So how long had you been playing before that point?" I asked, taking a seat in one of the two comfortable armchairs.

“So why didn’t you go full time at that point?”

Mark took a sip of his coffee. “Because I’m not a gambler at heart, I suppose, and I didn’t want to risk the regular salary I had coming in on what could have been - at that time - a lucky run. Although I was making money, I was still a bit green and was only using a fairly basic card-counting strategy. Besides, I wanted to have a fairly big pot of money to play with before going full time. Even then I knew that I had to be able to survive losses if I ever wanted to make big money in the long run.”

“And what was your working pattern when you did decide to become a professional?”

“I worked five nights a week, travelling to casinos all over the country. About four or five times a year I would fly over to Las Vegas for a few weeks to rake in the big bucks. I found that it was easier to make a lot of money in the States in a shorter period, simply because there are so many casinos in one locale.”

“Sounds like a lot of fun,” I enthused, beginning to wonder what it would be like to experience ‘raking in casino cash’ on a regular basis.

“It was,” he agreed. “I used to lose occasionally, of course, but eight days out of ten I would come home with a healthy profit. And then the bans started to make an impact, and that wasn’t so good.”

I nodded. “Tell me about them.”

“Well, I guess you could say that I was too flash. I played too long and too loud - I hadn’t mastered the art of blending in. I was too extravagant when I won - buying drinks all round, that kind of thing. These days, whenever I get the opportunity to play blackjack - which isn’t too often since I don’t like to travel abroad so much - I’ll throw away a perfectly good hand if I think it will help me to retain an ‘amateur’ image.”

“Casinos like amateurs,” he continued. “They also like ambitious amateurs who want to become professionals, because most of these people simply don’t do enough homework, and they end up losing both their money and their faith in perfect strategy.”

What casinos don't like are the amateurs who study hard and make it work. Those are the people who become true professionals, and they have to keep a low profile if they don't want to get banned pretty quickly. My problem was that I didn't know this at the time."

"So the key is for the player to make the Pit Bosses think he's an amateur?"

"That's part of the key, but the dealers are just as likely - if not more so - to figure you out as being a counter. Of course, if you know how, you can carry on playing even after a dealer has figured out what you're doing."

Now this was beginning to sound exciting. "You can?"

Mark laughed. "Sure you can. It's called tipping."

I sat in eager silence, waiting for him to continue.

"You see, dealers are just normal guys like you and me. They're at the casino to make a living. If you can keep a dealer happy by tipping him in proportion to how well you're doing, he is likely to overlook any suspicions he has and will let you keep on winning - just so that he can line his own pockets in the process. Of course, there are a few dealers who give more loyalty to the casino than to their own pockets, but fortunately these are in the minority."

"So basically, by tipping the dealer in proportion to your profits (five or ten percent is an effective place to start) and making friendly eye contact with him, you can often play long after he has noticed what you're doing. Eventually, of course, the Pit Bosses might figure out what you are doing and call you away from the table regardless of your relationship with the dealer, but until that point comes you have plenty of opportunity to really make the risk worth your while."

I leaned forward in my chair. "Now you've said it, the idea of tipping the dealer sounds obvious. Have you any other advice for would-be professionals?"

"Well, as The Blackjack Masterclass points out, when all is said and done, it's very difficult to win at blackjack without counting cards. In fact, I don't think that I've ever met anyone who has done this and survived for more than a week or two.

The whole thing about blackjack is that it can be beaten mathematically, but not in any other way. That's why casinos still allow people to play the game - because they know that there is only a tiny fraction of players who are willing to invest the discipline and effort it takes to count cards properly.

Then, you have to keep accounts. I used to keep proper books as far as possible, recording my gross income (that's my blackjack winnings) and the expenses I had to pay, such as petrol, drinks and losses. I also recorded how long I played at the table. This helped me to find out how much profit I had made over a given period, and how many hours I worked to achieve that profit."

"So you treated it like a business?" I asked.

"Absolutely! Blackjack is a business. You may enjoy it as much as you would if it was a hobby, but at the end of the day it has to turn a buck if you're going to survive. You see, when you gamble for a living you can't afford to get complacent about your performance. You have to look at the bottom line and if you aren't getting the results you set out to achieve, change your strategy. If that doesn't improve the situation, you'd have to seriously reconsider whether you have what it takes to be a successful gambler."

"Which is?" I asked.

"The ability to discipline yourself, to study and memorise strategies. To practice. These things sound trite, but they really are the keys to success as a gambler - regardless of whether you play blackjack, poker or spend your days at the race track."

We were getting down to the nitty-gritty. There was one more question I had to ask. "Do you think that anyone who does this - exercises discipline, studies and practices - could make money on a regular basis?"

"I have no doubt about it. Anyone who masters the principles contained in The Blackjack Masterclass will make money - it's a foregone conclusion based purely on the laws of mathematics. I personally may have been banned from many casinos, but hopefully your students will learn from my main mistake of being too flash. One or two of them will - in all probability - really go for it and take a few casinos to the cleaners in memory of my teachings."

“Revenge is sweet,” I smiled.

Mark leaned back in his chair and grinned at me. “It certainly is!”

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