



GOLDEN RIVIERA
ONLINE CASINO

ELEGANCE IN GAMING

**BEGINNERS GUIDE TO
BLACKJACK**



CONTENTS

- I TABLE OF CONTENTS
- II INTRODUCTION
- II ABOUT THE AUTHOR
- 1 BASIC RULES OF PLAY
 - 1 PRE-DEAL
 - 1 THE DEAL
- 4 A BRIEF HISTORY OF BLACKJACK
 - 4 A GAME BY ANY OTHER NAME
- 5 PROMINENT FIGURES IN BLACKJACK
 - 5 ROGER BALDWIN
 - 6 EDWARD O. THORP
 - 6 THE THORP METHOD VS THE CASINOS
 - 7 KEN USTON & KEITH TAFT: A CASINO'S WORST NIGHTMARE
 - 9 THE CASINO FIGHTS BACK
 - 9 STANFORD WONG: A NEW HOPE
 - 9 RETURN OF THE CARD COUNTERS: THE MIT BLACKJACK TEAM
 - 10 MODERN DAY MECHINATIONS
- 11 BLACKJACK STRATEGIES FOR THE REST OF US
 - 11 BASIC STRATEGY
 - 12 CARD COUNTING
- 13 TIME TO TRY YOUR HAND
 - 13 TO GET YOU STARTED
 - 14 THE BOTTOM LINE
 - 14 ONCE YOU KNOW THE BASICS: SOME RECOMMENDED MATERIALS



4
A BRIEF HISTORY OF BLACKJACK



5
PROMINENT FIGURES IN BLACKJACK



11
BLACKJACK STRATEGIES FOR THE REST OF US

INTRODUCTION

For the first-time casino patron, a simple glance at the craps table is usually sufficient to scare him or her off to games that seem “friendlier” and less daunting like roulette or the reels of a slot machine. Certainly, the layout of a craps table seems akin to a game of intellectual hopscotch: chalked lines, semi-circular tracks, columns and rows of alphanumeric figures in ostensibly haphazard sequences, arbitrary font size and text color combinations, a Pass line and Don’t Pass bar, a field, a come, a don’t come bar.

Like all casino games, craps is at its core about odds: you put up a wager and you bet that wager on various combinations of strategy and chance with a pre-established house advantage. You can reduce that advantage through a variety of techniques but only marginally. We’re talking fractional percentage points here, unlike blackjack where you could eke out maybe an extra 2% off the house edge if you’re good enough.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Max Stern is the Casino Manager at Golden Riviera Casino, who ensures everything within the online casino runs like clockwork. Max has a broad knowledge of the casino industry, with over a decade of experience under his belt. Here he shares some of his knowledge to help you improve your game.



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PRE-DEAL

A Blackjack table consists of five to seven circles of play on a semicircular board. The players sit opposite the dealer. Now, it doesn't strictly matter how many players are at any one particular table, because at its core Blackjack is a game between you and the dealer. If the dealer wins, you lose your bet, if you win, you get paid at 1:1. After the dealer shuffles the cards, the player cuts the deck. The dealer then picks up the cards and places them in a box called a shoe. In a motion called burning the card, the dealer will remove the top card and place it face up at the bottom of the pack or face down in the discard tray. The idea here is to reinforce the randomness of the cards.



THE DEAL

The dealer will start by typically giving each player one card (facedown). The dealer will then give himself a card (face up). After that, a second card is handed to each player (facedown), followed by a second card (facedown) to the dealer again.

There are a few variations to this: some casinos deal all the players' cards face up, others deal them all facedown. What's important, really, is that one (and only one) of the dealer's own cards is turned face up so all players can see it and make their moves accordingly.

The object of the game is for players to win money by creating card totals that are higher than the dealer's hand, but not exceeding a value of 21. Once a player's hand goes over 21, he is considered to have busted, and he forfeits his bet immediately, regardless of whether the dealer subsequently busts.

CARD VALUES

Kings, Queens, and Jacks (known as face cards or picture cards) are worth 10 points each. Aces can count either 1 point or 11 points, depending on which value advantages the player. All other numbered cards (2 through 10) retain their face value.

NUMBERED CARDS



FACE CARDS



WHAT'S A PLAYER TO DO

After seeing his first two cards, a player has a number of options. He can:

- Hit:** This is to request another card from the dealer. Remember, if your third card gives you a total value of more than 21 you are immediately busted and out of the round. To signal a hit, you can either scratch the table with your faced-up cards, tap the table, or wave your hand towards your body.
- Stand:** To stand is to be satisfied with your current hand – convinced that taking any more cards will be more of a risk than a potential reward. To stand is also to “stand pat”, to “stick”, or to “stay”. They all mean the same thing in this context. To signal your desire to stand, slide your cards under your bet if they've been dealt face down. If your cards are face up, you can indicate your desire to stand by waving your hands horizontally, as though you're shoos an imaginary insect away from the table.
- Double down:** Doubling down is allowed as a first decision of a hand only (i.e. straight after the first two cards are dealt). The player is allowed to place an additional bet equal to, or less than, the original betting amount. This additional amount is placed next to the original bet. The caveat in doubling down is that a player agrees to stand after receiving just one more card. He cannot ask for any more hits after this third card. To signal a double down, place your additional chips (no more than 50% of your original bet) next to the original bet and point with one finger.
- Split:** Like a double-down, a split is only permitted as a first decision of a hand. If your first two cards hold the same value (5/5, 10/10 etc), you can split them into two separate playing hands. You turn both cards face up and place an additional bet equal to the first next to the two turned-up cards. The dealer will then separate these cards into two separate bets and hit you with a further card on each of the splits. There are some limitations on splits, however: a split ace can only receive one additional card on each bet. Non-ace splits can be split again where applicable to three or four times depending on a particular casino's rules.
- Surrender:** Also available as the first-decision of a hand only, a surrender is offered in hole card games right after the dealer has checked his pair for a Blackjack. A player who has surrendered forfeits half his bet to the house.
- Insurance:** Where the dealer's up-card is an ace, a player can take insurance against the chance that the dealer has a Blackjack (also called a natural or a snapper). The insurance is generally limited to the half the original bet. If it turns out that the dealer has a Blackjack, then no money changes hands (think about it: the win on the insurance bet equals the loss on the original hand). If it turns out that the dealer didn't have a Blackjack, you forfeit your insurance. What if both you and the dealer have a Blackjack? It's a fairly unusual scenario, but in this case your insurance will win 2:1.

WHAT'S A DEALER TO DO

For all intents and purposes, the dealer is your opponent in a game of Blackjack: your hand is always pitted against his, and never against another player at the table. It's important to realise that the dealer is bound by very specific rules and regulations regarding what he must do with the hand he has dealt himself.

The dealer can't split pairs, he can't double-down, and he can't surrender. He can't take insurance for your potential Blackjack, and he can't choose whether to hit or to stand based on his intuition, his emotion, or his suspicion. If the dealer's total equals 16 or less, he must keep taking a hit until his hand totals 17 or more, after which he must stand. Once he reaches 17 or more, the dealer then turns all your cards face up. If your cards are closer to 21 than his, then you win the hand (and therefore the bet); if the dealer is closer to 21 than you, or if you've busted before he's even had a chance to check, then you lose.

Some casinos dictate that a dealer must keep drawing cards until "soft 17" (that is, a hand totally 17 points which includes at least one ace). This advantages the player somewhat .

Now, it obviously benefits the player that the dealer has little choice over what he can do with his cards, for this limits the number of action-based variables in the game. However, the player is also disadvantaged by the fact that if he (the player) busts, he immediately loses the hand, regardless of whether the dealer subsequently busts, too.

If both the dealer and the player came out with the same total, it's called a "push" and no money changes hands at all.



A BRIEF HISTORY OF BLACKJACK



A GAME BY ANY OTHER NAME

Blackjack as it's played today generally derives from the 17th- and 18th-century French game "vingt-et-un" (which, translated, means twenty-one). But even before that, there are references to similar types of games found in texts some 100 years previously. The great Spanish writer Cervantes (himself a gambler) writes about a group of cheaters in Seville in his tale *Rinconete y Cortadillo*. The fraudsters cheat at a game called *ventiuna* (which is Spanish for twenty-one). In Cervantes' tale, *ventiuna* is played by trying to reach 21 points without busting. Like modern-day Blackjack, aces can be valued at either 1 or 11.

In "vingt-et-un", which was rather popular amongst aristocrats (and not a few monarchs), the object is to get 21 points without busting. Unlike Blackjack, however, it's not necessary to hit a natural for the best win. The main object was to beat the dealer's score and stay in the game. Players take turns to be the dealer.

HIT OR STAND ON SOFT 17: DOES IT MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Yes. When a dealer's 17 total contains an ace, and that ace is counted as 11, then the hand is a soft 17 (eg: ace+6 or ace+2+4). Some casinos require that a dealer must hit their soft 17 rather than stand on it. If the dealer hits on soft 17, the casino's advantage is increased by about 0.2%. The reason? Even though it means the dealer will bust more often, it also means that when the dealer doesn't bust he'll probably end up with a better total than the player, meaning the player will lose the hand and therefore the bet.

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BY THE WAY

Each and every deal of “vingt-et-un” has its own name:

- The second deal is called Imaginary Tens: all scores are counted as 10 plus the value of the second dealt card.
- The third deal is called Blind Vingt et Un: a player will decide whether or not take a third card without even looking at his first two.
- The fourth deal is called Sympathy and Antipathy: if a player has two cards of the same colour, it is Sympathy. If they are unlike colours, it is Antipathy.
- The fifth deal is called Rouge et Noir: after receiving three cards, a player bets whether the majority of them will be red (“rouge”) or black (“noir”).
- The sixth deal is called Self and Company: a player bets on whether his first two cards will be a pair.
- The seventh deal is called Paying the Difference: each player receives two cards face up. The dealer pays or receives a stake depending on the difference in number between the suit and numbers on his own cards and those of each player.
- The eighth deal is called Clack: all stakes are pooled. The dealer dishes out cards, face up, and calls out a series of consecutive numbers. If any of the dealt cards correspond to what the dealer calls out, then the dealer takes the pool (jacks count as 11, queens as 12, and kings as 13). If they never match, the dealer forfeits the amount.

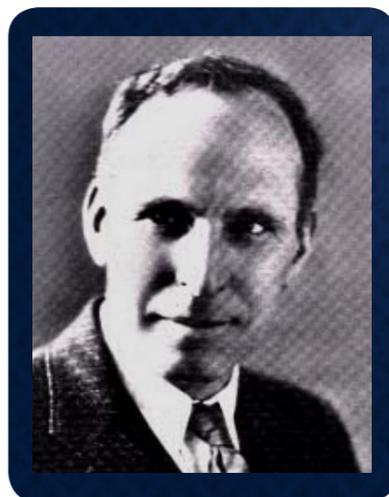


PROMINENT FIGURES IN BLACKJACK

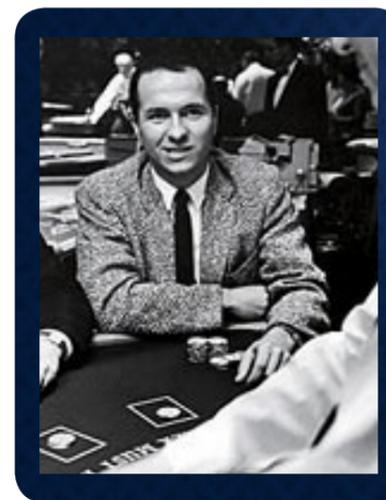
ROGER BALDWIN

Roger Baldwin was a pioneer in approaching Blackjack from the eye of a mathematician. Baldwin became interested in the game during his time in the army. His master's degree from Columbia University, his love of mathematics, and his fascination with Blackjack led him and some of his friends (Wilbert Cantey, Herbert Maisel and James McDermott) to devise optimal strategies for leveraging an advantage to the player in the game.

Their formulas were published in an article entitled “The Optimum Strategy in Blackjack” (1956). It was essentially the first exploration of Blackjack using proven formulas for having the best chance of beating the dealer. They soon expanded their findings into a book, *Playing Blackjack to Win* (1957). Though its research was groundbreaking, it tended to be largely inaccessible to the general public because of its complexity.



EDWARD O. THORP



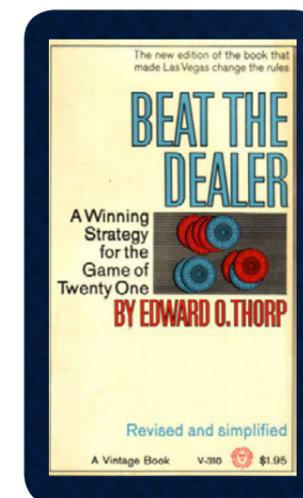
Edward Thorp's passion is first and foremost mathematics and physics. His immense contribution to Blackjack is really a result of his practical application of this passion. Thorp has a master's degree in physics and a doctorate in mathematics and has worked at some of the leading universities in the US.

Thorp is generally credited with the being father of card counting, premised on the idea that if one keeps a running count of the cards dealt to both the player and the dealer then it will be possible to determine which cards remain in the shoe and, therefore, predict a final result.

Being a true scientist, Thorp needed to verify his techniques before publishing his findings and coming to any sort of definitive conclusion. With his friend, Claude Shannon, he spent a weekend in Las Vegas.

Using \$10 000 from Manny Kimmel, an erstwhile illegal bookie with connections to the mob, as their starting capital, Thorp and Shannon hit the tables. Thorp's theory proved so successful that he won \$11 000 in just one weekend. Alas, his winning streak caught the attention of casino security, and Thorp was repeatedly expelled from various casinos for winning too much. Pit bosses became so wary of him that Thorp eventually had to enter casinos using false beards and large, wraparound glasses just to make it to the tables.

Thorp published *Beat the Dealer* in 1962 and it quickly became the modern-day Blackjack bible for everyone seeking an advantage over the house.



THE THORP METHOD VS. THE CASINOS

Predictably, casinos weren't enamored with Thorp's book about card counting, and some even tried, unsuccessfully, to change the game's rules to prevent card counting.

What could casinos do? Well, one method was to take a suspected card counter aside and beat them up with the stern warning never to return. But based on the popularity of Thorp's book, and the hundreds of thousands of Blackjack players looking for a better chance of winning, that's a lot of bruised bodies! So what casinos did was to continually reshuffle a table's cards at random points in an evening's play. This tended to work too well, however. It took so much time to continually reshuffle the decks that gamblers started getting impatient. They got bored and simply left tables to move onto something else. No bets on the table meant no money for the casino... never a good a business strategy.

Casinos then decided they would introduce multiple decks in a single game, all packed within a large shoe of up to eight or more packs of cards. Unfortunately, they had misunderstood Thorpe's card-counting theory. His methods could just as easily be applied to one deck as they could to multiple decks. It just took a bit longer for the player to find the right time to bet high and use his advantage over the casino.

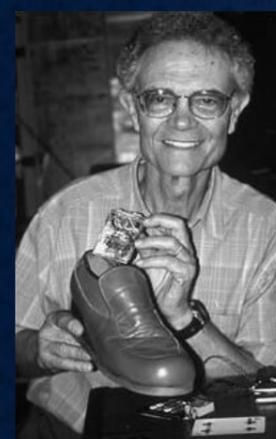
Committed Blackjack players were still raking in millions from casinos.

In response, casinos decided they would teach their own dealers to count cards using the Thorpe method. This was meant to enable dealers and pit bosses to quickly identify card counters by examining closely their betting habits. If a card counter saw that a table was moving to his advantage, he would naturally start betting big. But, because the house was also keeping a running tally of the count, and because card counters tended to have a quite stern expression on their faces (it requires a lot of concentration for most people), these individuals could be taken aside and asked to leave the premises immediately.



KEN USTON & KEITH TAFT: A CASINO'S WORST NIGHTMARE

Ken Uston was a Blackjack genius who became quite notorious for using team play to beat the house's odds. Uston was a mathematics genius: he had an enormous IQ and even attended Yale at the age of 16. He later received his MBA from Harvard University. During the 1970s, Uston began something of a clean sweep in and around the casino strips and quickly earned a reputation for being the house's worst nightmare. Like Thorpe before him, Uston eventually had to use disguise and subterfuge to even get to the tables.



KEITH TAFT



KEN USTON

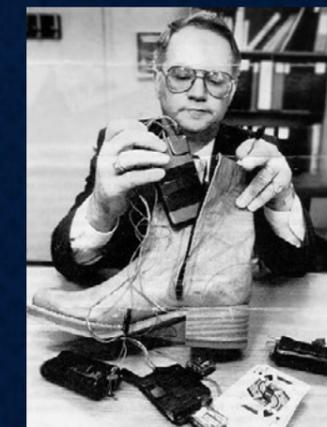
Dissatisfied by the casino's actions, Uston took many of them to court, saying they couldn't ban him just for counting cards when there was no cheating involved. The New Jersey court agreed with Uston. In response, many casinos changed their shuffling techniques and increased their deck size to mitigate Uston's successes as far as possible.

Uston also formed a partnership of sorts with Keith Taft, an electronics engineer who, together with his son, had built a computer that could beat the house at Blackjack. The computer, nicknamed George, was meant to be worn as a belt around the player. The player would then input a series of morse-code-like signals and George would advise him on the best kind of wager to make. George was fairly clunky, and Taft needed to operate the device with his big toes to input the data. When Taft and his son tested the device in 1972, they had limited success.

In 1976, Intel released the first 8-bit microcomputer, meaning that Taft would be able to design an improved and significantly smaller version of George – far more conducive to concealing the device in a busy casino context. Taft named his new version David (a reference to David and Goliath in the Old Testament). David (representing the player, who has scant resources but a steely determination) would take out Goliath (the giant casinos, ominous and threatening). The advantage of David was that it was built upon Thorp's original card counting strategy but with an important difference: computing power.



TAFT'S "BELLY PACK"



TAFT'S DEVICES

Thorp's method had a certain inherent inaccuracy, because it was designed to be accessible to the average player using mental arithmetic. Card values were placed in groups and a running count would be made according to the card group that had been dealt and not the card itself. So, card values of 2 to 6 would be assigned a +1 value. Cards with values 7 to 9 would be assigned a 0 value. And 10s, face cards and aces would be assigned a -1 value. By contrast, Taft's device could analyse each card independently and make the best possible predictions – far better than any human mind could mentally calculate on a Blackjack table.

Taft and Uston teamed up. The combination of Uston's gifted analytical mind, Taft's ingenious micro-mechanical David, and team of signalers and computer operators, meant a win of more than \$100 000 during a five-week Blackjack spree.

The casinos were mad, and laid charges against Uston and Taft's team for cheating. But after a thorough analysis, it was determined by the FBI that these devices could not be considered cheating mechanics, and so all charges against them were dropped.

THE CASINO FIGHTS BACK

Using their considerable connections and financial clout, the major casinos lobbied to change the law on the use of mechanical Blackjack aids. It worked. The Nevada Senate Bill 467, signed into law, stated that, "It is unlawful for any person at a licensed gaming establishment to use, or possess with the intent to use, any device to assist in projecting the outcome of the game." The penalties for contravention were stiff: first offenses carried a prison term of up to 10 years and/or a \$10 000 fine; the second offense was a mandatory incarceration. Was Taft an exceptional Blackjack player like Uston? Probably not. But Taft still made it to the Blackjack Hall of Fame 2004 for his contribution to the game's "development". Today, many of his devices are on display at the Blackjack Museum at the Barona Casino in California.

STANFORD WONG: A NEW HOPE

Considered by many to be the Godfather of Blackjack, Stanford Wong (the pseudonym of John Ferguson) is best known for publishing the book, *Professional Blackjack* in 1975. He found a way of beating the Continuous Shuffle Machines (or CSM's) that casinos had introduced as one of the many measure to counter-act card counting as a profitable strategy in Blackjack.

The idea of "wonging" is based on betting at a Blackjack table only when the table's hand becomes more advantageous to the player. Once it shifts back to the casino's advantage, the player then steps away and waits for his next most profitable moment.

Like some of his predecessors, Wong has a place in the Blackjack Hall of Fame. He is also the reason why many casinos have inscribed the words "No Mid-Shoe Entry" on some Blackjack tables. This ensures that new players must wait until the first hand after any shuffle before they can bet.



RETURN OF THE CARD COUNTERS: THE MIT BLACKJACK TEAM

MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) is widely known for attracting and molding some of the best analytical minds in the world – those who tend to see loopholes within ostensibly rigid systems and structures. Starting in the late 1970s, a group of profit-hungry MIT students decided to apply their minds to Blackjack, and devised a team-based strategy to beat the casino. The key was to work as discrete parts of a collective unit, using subtle signals and gestures to communicate.

Potential candidates for the team were recruited via university flyers handed around the campus. Students had to undergo rigorous testing for their suitability: only those with the best intellectual and emotional resources could make it in a real-stakes game in Vegas.

Some of the initial teams had limited success, but a remarkably successful partnership was formed when JP Massar (part of MIT's original Blackjack conglomerate that had subsequently disbanded) met up with Bill Kaplan, a Harvard graduate who ran a successful Blackjack team in Las Vegas

some years before. Kaplan had been so successful than he managed a 35-fold return on his initial "investment" capital over a nine-month period playing Blackjack. Massar and Kaplan would form a new Blackjack team, again recruiting MIT's best, but coupling it with tight management structures and careful operational strategies to form a well-oiled operation. In August of 1980, the team used an initial investment stake of \$89 000 (courtesy of both outside investors and players) to double their money in just ten weeks! Players and investors split the profits, with players paid in proportion to their playing hours and win rates.



The team played throughout the 1980s with around 35 players using capital amounts of up to \$350 000. By 1984, Kaplan had been so successful that he literally wouldn't dare show his face in a major casino without fear of being followed, searched, and asked to leave. He was just too much of a business risk to any gambling house.

By 1992, a new partnership called Strategic Investments was formed to bankroll a team that was set to hit the recently opened Foxwoods Casino in Connecticut. The team comprised nearly 80 players,

with up to 30 players gambling simultaneously at different casinos around the world. Like their predecessors, these teams were earning incredible fortunes. But they were also being quickly identified by casinos and subsequently barred from playing. To counter this, Strategic Investments would merely recruit new members and fresh faces. Many of the older players, who were by now personae non grata, would now have to stay in the shadows to coach and train new recruits on the methods they had learnt to beat the house. Eventually, casinos tagged on to the fact that the majority of these new faces were MIT students. Now, to pre-empt any unfavourable partnerships, major casinos will routinely upload to their facial recognition database all MIT students in any given year.



MODERN DAY MECHINATIONS

Technology has come a long way since the heyday of men like Baldwin, Thorp, Uston and Taft. In 2009, an iPhone application was made available as a card-counting device for ordinary consumers. As you'll remember, though, casinos successfully lobbied for a legal ban on any assistive devices during a game of Blackjack, so the safest advice would be to keep your mobile phone firmly in your pocket and your hands visible; unless of course you're looking to see the inside of a casino backroom.



FOR THE REST OF US

One of the characteristics of the basic strategy is that, by using it, you will be considerably 'luckier' than the average player.

Edward O. Thorp, Beat the Dealer

Smile if the person sitting next to you makes a bonehead play. Never give advice to other players at the table. A casino can offer Blackjack only if it makes money on the game, though it does not have to beat every single customer. A casino can afford to deal to winning Blackjack players only if it has a sufficient volume of losing Blackjack players.

Stanford Wong

BASIC STRATEGY

When it's played well, Blackjack can still be an often-profitable exercise, taking the house's edge down to roughly half a percent in a six-deck game. In fact, in a single-deck game where the dealer stands on all 17s and the player is permitted to double down after he has split, a player with a well-armed strategy arsenal can even gain a 0.1% edge over the house! Of course, single-deck games are practically non-existent in casinos today, because casinos will do anything and everything to make sure that Blackjack remains a profitable exercise for them.

So the point, really, is that good strategy can increase your chances of walking away with a smile on your face. It doesn't mean that the second you implement a strategy that you're going to win. But it does you give you better odds over time, and it's certainly more of a sure-fire bet than simply using guesswork or some mystical intuition alone.

HERE'S ONE BASIC STRATEGY GUIDE FOR THE BEGINNER:

YOUR HAND	THE DEALERS HAND	SUGGESTED PLAY
8 or less	Anything	Hit. Always
9	3,4,5,6	Double down
	2 or 7 and above	Hit
10	2 through 9	Double down
	10 or Ace	Hit
11	2 through 10	Double down
	Ace	Hit
12	2, 3 or 7 and above	Hit
	4 through 6	Stand
13 through 16	7 and above	Hit
	2 through 6	Stand
17 through 21	Always stand. No matter what the dealer's up-card	Stand

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It's important to keep in mind that a value of 10 is the most common single value in Blackjack: 10-value cards comprise four of the 13 denominations in any deck (kings, queens, jacks and, of course, tens). In other words, they are the most likely value of any unseen card (depending on how many players are at the table with 10-value cards already dealt to them). Let's imagine that you're sitting with a total 16. You see that the dealer's up-card is a 7. You might be tempted to stay, because 16 is a fairly high count, and you obviously don't want to bust. But based on statistical probability, you could reasonably guess that the dealer's likely next card will have a value of 10, giving him a total of 17. Now: that 17 will obviously beat your 16 so in reality your best chance in this scenario is to hit your 16 and hope that you won't bust. Blackjack is as much about your own hand as it is about the dealer's. It's a reciprocity you have to consider when deciding how to play at any given moment in the game.

CARD COUNTING

Probably the most famous method of increasing your statistical odds of beating the dealer in a game of Blackjack is card counting. This was referred to earlier, but as a recap let's recall that the basic idea behind card counting is that higher cards tend to advantage the player, while lower cards tend to advantage the dealer. Higher cards give the player an increased chance of a Blackjack (also called a natural, which pays at 3:2 unless the dealer can match your Blackjack, in which case it's a push). Remember also that a dealer is forced to hit on stiff hands (totals of 12 through 16). So on a stiff hand, all ten-value cards will bust the dealer and the player will win.

Card counting assigns values to cards based on their grouping. A "running count" is kept and this count is adjusted according to which cards have been dealt already. Players will tend to make larger bets when they have a greater advantage of scoring higher cards. So, for instance, if there are a large number of aces and tens still in the deck, then the player has a greater chance of hitting a Blackjack.

Although card counting is legal, casinos reserve the right to ban you from their tables if they think you're doing too well. It's also important to realise that many people think they can count cards well, where in reality they cannot. You'll recall that this was Keith Taft's mistake, which led him to build his first deck-analysis computer decades ago.

FOR EASE OF MENTAL ARITHMETIC, CARD COUNTING ASSIGNS THE FOLLOWING SCORES TO GROUPS OF CARDS:

CARD VALUE	RUNNING COUNT ADJUSTMENT
2-6	+1
7-9	0
10-Ace	-1



It's critical to remember that casinos have had to face the card-counting demon for decades now. As such, they've devised a fair number of techniques to thwart even the most committed card counter. For particularly adept card counters, this might include placing known offenders on a facial recognition database shared amongst all the major casinos around the world. Another method most modern casinos will use is to shuffle the deck or decks when a player suddenly increases his wager. This makes it possible for cards that were just in-play to make their way back to the top of shoe, making a running count an exercise in futility. Now, a player can't know when a dealer will suddenly reshuffle all the decks. As mentioned already, casinos won't reshuffle after every single hand, because this takes too long, making players frustrated and a frustrated player tends to leave the table before placing enough bets to net the casino a healthy profit on the game. In general, casinos will now tend to reshuffle their cards at random points of play in the game.



TIME TO TRY YOUR HAND

Ok... so you've made it this far in the guide and you're still here. Well done! You're clearly someone who's committed to learning some of the intricacies of Blackjack. Remember, there are loads of advanced strategies that you can employ that a beginner's guide like won't cover, but these tend to take time to digest and get your head around. By far and away the most important thing to do now is to take what you've gleaned from this guide and apply it to a real game.

TO GET YOU STARTED

You might be a bit circumspect when it comes to betting your hard-earned cash on a game of Blackjack when you're this new to the game. Land-based casinos will demand that you put at least some money down in order to have a chance at play. Luckily, you can get in some good practice with online casinos without spending a dime!

Let's try Golden Riviera Online Casino, for example. You don't have to spend any money – just choose to 'practice play' and implement some of the strategies employed in this guide to get started. Whether you ever decide to play with real cash is totally up to you. Golden Riviera allows you to select multiple varieties of Blackjack play.

Each of these varieties will specify their own conditions. Some will specify that dealers must stand on soft 17 (this advantages the player slightly), others say dealers must hit. Each of the tables will also vary the number of decks used, the kinds of payouts on different hands, and how the dealer deals the cards (whether face up or down). Of course, when you practice play you can't make any money either, but it's a great way to start.

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THE BOTTOM LINE

Playing good Blackjack is about strategically considering all the possible ways of playing a particular hand and choosing the move that statistically gives you, the player, the greatest expected return. There's no faking it at Blackjack, no room for bluffing, no fanciful levers or neon buttons. It's just you, the dealer and a shoe of decks. By applying your mind carefully, weighing up your odds, and acting within the limits of logic, reason and the realm of the rational, you can give yourself the very best chance of beating the dealer and walking away from the table richer than when you arrived.

Now go have fun!

ONCE YOU KNOW THE BASICS: SOME RECOMMENDED MATERIALS

There are a huge variety of Blackjack-related resources out there for the mind consumed with eking out every possible advantage from the casino. As a starting point, here are some recommended resources as you advance on the road to professional play:

1. **John Patrick, *Advanced Blackjack***, ISBN: 978-0818405822
2. **Edward Thorp, *Beat the Dealer: A Winning Strategy for the Game of Twenty One***, ISBN: 978-0394703107
3. **Don Schlesinger, *Blackjack Attack: Playing the Pro's Way***, ISBN: 978-0910575201
4. **Frank Scoblete, *Golden Touch Blackjack Revolution***, ISBN: 978-0912177168
5. **Arnold Snyder, *Blackbelt in Blackjack: Playing 21 as a Martial Art***, ISBN: 978-1580421430

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