

MAXIMALLY

EXPLOITING YOUR OPPONENTS

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How to Exploit Various Types of Poker Players

In order to win large amounts of money from poker, you must focus on your opponents' tendencies. You have to keep your eyes and ears open, actively observing their actions. If you only pay attention to your own two cards, your position and your chip stack, you are certain to fail in the long run. Fortunately for you, in the small stakes games, most of your opponents will be oblivious to what you are doing, giving you free rein to do whatever you want.

Make a point to diligently pay attention to the action during each and every hand that takes place at the table. Paying attention only when you are involved in a pot will not give you enough reliable information to get well out of line. You have to be mindful while playing poker. If you are mindlessly grinding, you are not playing optimally.

You should either take mental notes about everything you see your opponent's doing,

assuming your memory is good, or write notes on your phone or in a notepad if your memory is bad. Because I recognize and accept that my memory is not especially great, I write down every meaningful hand I play as well as a decent amount of the hands I witness at the poker table, as well as the tendencies of my opponents and how to exploit them. While I occasionally get teased for actually taking the game seriously, I exploit my opponents better than most. That seems like a fine tradeoff to me.

When taking notes on your opponents, it is especially important to record what each specific player does incorrectly. For example, if you see someone on separate occasions making very small and very large continuation bets on the flop, you should assume that those bet sizes indicate something about the strength of their hand. If you pay attention long enough, you will be able to see a few showdowns and figure out if a particular bet size correlates with a hand of a specific strength.

Once you figure out what your specific opponent is doing incorrectly, take steps to exploit their

weakness, allowing you to extract a large profit in the long run.

Common Tendencies

In all poker games, there are players who play too many hands, players who play too few hands and players who play roughly the correct amount of hands in a fundamentally sound manner. While many of these players will have similar traits, they all have distinguishing characteristics that allow you to siphon away their money, assuming you are paying attention and adjusting intelligently.

Players Who Play Too Many Hands Too Passively

The most common type of player you will encounter in small stakes games are players who play too many hands too passively. They often limp and then call raises with a wide range of marginal hands, hoping to connect well with the flop.

It is important to realize that these players usually have marginal hands when they act in a passive manner because they almost always raise and re-raise with their premium hands.

Just because someone plays a lot of hands does not necessarily mean they are aggressive. It is possible to be involved in many pots while still only investing significant money with premium hands, which is what these players do. They try to make a premium postflop hand cheaply before investing a lot of money.

Of course, the type of hand that each specific player perceives as “strong” varies quite a bit. Some will only want to put a lot of money in the pot with the nuts while others will blast their stack in with any junky top pair.

You beat this type of player by assuming they play straightforwardly. They may try to bluff you from time to time, but you will usually make the right decision if you assume they are playing in a straightforward, honest manner.

When this type of player calls your bets, you should assume they have a marginal made hand or draw. This should result in you value betting relentlessly, especially with hands that have their calling range crushed. Whenever you have a decent top pair or better, you should almost always value bet when you were the aggressor on the previous betting

round unless the board is especially bad for top pair. Be sure to size your bets such that your opponent can realistically call with worse made hands. If you bet too large, they may make tight folds with hands like bottom pair, resulting in you not extracting value.

When this type of player decides to apply pressure, you should tend to get out of their way unless you have a premium holding that is in good shape against their betting/raising range or a draw that is getting the correct pot odds to continue. If you know your opponent is betting and raising with mostly nut and near-nut hands, it is tough to be ahead of that range! Do not make the blunder of paying off their aggressive bets with strong, but crushed holdings, such as top pair.

Suppose you raise to 3 big blinds with $Q\heartsuit-J\spadesuit$ out of your 100 big blind stack and a loose, passive player calls on the button. The flop comes $Q\clubsuit-9\heartsuit-7\diamondsuit$. You should make a continuation bet of around 4 big blinds. If your opponent calls, you should bet again on most turns because no turn is highly likely to improve them to a hand that beats yours besides perhaps an Ace.

Suppose the turn is the (Q♣-9♥-7♦)-6♣. You should bet around 7 big blinds. If your opponent calls, you can assume he has a worse Queen, a 9 or a draw. If he raises, you can confidently fold, making the assumption that he has you beat with some sort of two pair or set that he decided to slow play on the flop. This turn bet allows you to get value when you are ahead while also getting relatively accurate information that will let you get away cheaply when you are crushed.

Assuming the river is a reasonably safe card (any card besides an Ace, 10, 8 or 5) you should make a fairly small value bet of around 15 big blinds, or 50% of the size of the pot. You are making this bet with the assumption that your opponent will fold all of his missed draws, call with most of his one pair hands and either call or raise with hands that are better than yours.

While a 9 may appear to be a scary river card because it improves second pair to trips, you should not automatically assume that your opponent has exactly the one hand that beats yours. Of course, if your opponent raises your river value bet, unless you have some sort of read that

lets you know with a high degree of certainty that he is bluffing or overvaluing a made hand worse than yours, you should fold.

It is important to realize that when you value bet on some of these rivers, such as a King, Jack, 9, 7, 6, 4, 3, or 2, that you could have the worst hand. However, your opponent will likely call your medium bet often enough with a losing hand to justify making the value bet.

As a bit of an oversimplification, when value betting, your bet needs to get called by a worse hand at least 50% of the time to make the bet profitable. In this scenario, it almost certainly will get called by a worse hand at least 50% of the time. That said, if you know your opponent only calls river bets with premium hands, you should instead check with the intention of calling if your opponent bets on most safe rivers. If you think your specific opponent will fold many marginal made hands worse than yours to a 50% pot bet, consider betting smaller, perhaps 33% pot.

Notice that if you bet significantly larger, perhaps around 75% of the size of the pot or more, your opponent will fold most of his one pair hands,

meaning he will usually only call when you are beat. By making a large bet, you force your opponent to play well, which is a disaster for you. Remember, you do not want to make it easy for your opponent to play well.

If the river is a bad card (an Ace, 10, 8, or 5) you should usually check and see what your opponent does. If he bets, you should vary your play between calling and folding depending on your opponent's specific tendencies, although folding is usually the best option against someone who is generally passive. Whenever the river is great for your opponent's range and bad for your hand, if your passive opponent bets, it is safe to assume he improved to a hand that beats yours.

You will often find that some of these players will call on the flop and the turn with a wide range, hoping to either "find out where they stand" or to improve their junky holdings, such as A-high or bottom pair, into a strong hand. Against these players, you should be very prone to make river bluffs, especially if you know that your opponent will raise on an earlier betting round with his premium holdings, meaning when he calls your

flop and turn bet, he usually has a marginal made hand that he will fold to a sizable river bet.

When attempting to bluff these players, you should usually make your river bets a bit larger than in the previous example because you are trying to make your opponent fold most of his marginal hands. The last thing you want to do is to bet small on the river with a bluff and have your opponent call with bottom pair.

Suppose you raise to 2.5 big blinds out of your 75 big blind stack with $Q\spadesuit-10\spadesuit$. A player who you know likes to stick around until the river with a wide range calls on the button. The flop comes $K\spadesuit-9\diamondsuit-4\clubsuit$, giving you a gutshot straight draw. You bet 3.5 big blinds and your opponent calls. The turn is the $(K\spadesuit-9\diamondsuit-4\clubsuit)-5\spadesuit$, giving you a flush draw as well. You bet 5 big blinds and your opponent calls. The river is the $(K\spadesuit-9\diamondsuit-4\clubsuit-5\spadesuit)-6\heartsuit$.

Seeing how you lose to almost all hands and your opponent could realistically fold to bet with A-high, a bottom pair, a middle pocket pair, or even a 9, you should make a sizable bet of around 15 big blinds, or 65% of the size of the pot. This will force your opponent to put in a significant amount of his

stack to make a hero call that will only win if you are bluffing. Of course, if you are known to be a habitual bluffer, you should be more prone to give up when you miss (and perhaps not bet on the turn). If you are known to be a tight or straightforward player, you should certainly bluff. Always be sure to factor in the way your opponent perceives you before making any play.

If you improve to a straight or flush on the river, you should of course bet for value. Since you expect your opponent to fold to a large bet, you should make a smaller bet of around 40% of the size of the pot. If you improve to second pair, you should also make a 40% pot bet for value because you expect most of your opponent range to be worse than your second pair.

This is an example of playing an extremely exploitative strategy, which means that if your opponent knows what you are doing, he can counter-adjust and crush you. If he knows that you are bluffing when you bet 65% pot, he can easily call with all of his made hands and raise with all of his junk. When you bet 40% pot, he can fold all of his marginal made hands. It should be obvious, but

if your opponent knows what you are doing, you have a major problem.

It is important to note that you will rarely encounter this exact situation too often. You will find that you rarely make it to the river against this specific opponent, and when you do, your opponents will not be paying too much attention to your exact bet sizes. Most small stakes players do not pay attention to what is going on at the table when they are not involved in the pot, which is one of the main reasons why most of them never progress beyond the small stakes games.

Many of these players will use a specific bet size with their strong hands and a different bet size with their weak hands. They may bet 33% pot with their middle and bottom pairs and 67% pot with their top pair or better hands. Others will raise or check/raise with top pair or better while calling with their worse made hands. Whatever they do, figure out what their bet sizes and actions indicate and adjust accordingly until you have a reason to believe that they have altered their default betting patterns (which will likely never happen). Once you figure out what your opponents are doing

incorrectly, you can adjust your strategy to maximally exploit them.

Players Who Play Too Many Hands Too Aggressively

This type of player is similar to the previous type of player in that they play a wide range of hands and see a lot of flops. However, they tend to do so in an aggressive manner, which makes them much more difficult to play against than their passive counterparts. Instead of being able to assume these players play in a face-up manner, you have to assume they are bluffing at least some portion of the time. This makes it much more difficult to accurately assess their ranges.

These players act in an aggressive manner because they have learned that most of their opponents play in a straightforward manner. They also know that most of their opponents will not want to call multiple bets without a premium holding. This leads them to bet whenever they sense weakness, which is any time their opponents check or fails to raise when facing a bet. Against the average player in small stakes games, this is an excellent strategy to implement. These players are usually winners in

the small stakes but they will get crushed once they move up and encounter players who know how to properly combat them.

You can beat this type of player in a few ways. The primary way to beat them is to induce them to try to bluff you. Of course, if you induce your opponent to try to bluff, you should not fold whatever bluff catcher you have unless the board runs out as poorly for you as possible, which will not happen too often if you choose your spots well.

The most obvious way to induce an opponent to bluff into you is to check as if you have a weak hand and are going to fold to a bet. Suppose you raise to 2.5 big blinds out of your 50 big blind stack with $K♥-10♠$ from middle position and an aggressive player who plays too many hands calls on the button.

The flop comes $K♠-7♣-5♥$. You make a continuation bet of 3.5 big blinds and your opponent calls. On most turns, you should strongly consider checking instead of betting for value. While some players check to “control the pot” because they are afraid of being beat, you are actually checking to induce a bluff against this type

of player. You should expect him to fold many of his weaker marginal hands if you bet, but he will usually bet with almost his entire range if you check. By checking, you get him to put much more money in the pot compared to when you bet, which is exactly what you want to happen when you usually have the best hand.

The turn is the (K♠-7♣-5♥)-9♠. You check and your opponent bets 8 big blinds into the 13 big blind pot. This is a scenario where many amateur players elect to check/raise, trying to force their opponent to fold all of their draws. While your opponent will fold his draws, he will also fold all of the hands that you crush, such as K-2, 8-7, 5-3 and A-8. Instead of check/raising, you should check/call with the intention of check/calling all rivers.

When you call your opponent's turn bet, do not look visibly happy or act in a fast manner as if calling is the only option that makes sense. That could tip your opponent off to the fact that you have a strong hand. Instead, subtly act as if you have a tough decision with hands such as J-J or 8-7. Remember, you really want your opponent to bet again on the river.

While you will get outdrawn roughly 15% of the time when you play your hand in this manner, many of your aggressive opponents cannot resist the opportunity to try to push you off your “obviously” weak hand. When you show top pair on the river, most of them will be shocked because they think that the only way to play top pair is to bet it for value and protection on all three streets. By checking and inducing bluffs, you will crush these opponents.

Notice that in this example, there are not too many bad turn and river cards for you. While an 8 or 6 would complete the most likely straight draw, the other cards are fairly safe. If instead of K-10 on K-7-5 you had K-10 on 10-9-6, you should be much more inclined to bet for value and protection on safe turns because there are numerous cards that could come that could give your opponent the best hand.

Always consider how the hand will play out if you take each possible betting line. If the board could easily run out terribly for you, you should be more inclined to bet for value and protection. If the board will usually run out decently well for your

hand and your opponent will play in an aggressive manner with a wide range if you check, you should check to induce a bluff.

While it may seem like checking is the only way to induce a bluff, you can also bet into some of your aggressive opponents and induce a bluff. Suppose a player who plays too many hands in an aggressive manner raises to 2.5 big blinds out of his 50 big blind stack from middle position and you call from the big blind with 3♠-3♦.

The flop comes 10♠-6♦-3♣. While going for a check/raise is a fine play, betting into your opponent is also a potential option against this type of player. If you check/raise, or even check/call, your opponent will know that you at least have something. However, if you bet into him for around 3 big blinds, he may think that you are trying to push him off his hand, which he probably knows should not connect too well with this board. He may decide to try to represent top pair or he may simply think you cannot withstand immense pressure, resulting in him either raising the flop or calling the flop and then taking an aggressive action on the turn.

So, you lead for 3 big blinds and your opponent raises to 9 big blinds. At this point, you should call to give him a chance to bluff on the turn and river. You do not want to make your opponent think that you have a premium hand by re-raising. You also don't want him to fold because most of his range is drawing nearly dead. Of course, he will outdraw you occasionally when he improves to a straight, but that is a risk you must be willing to take if you want to maximize your profit from your premium holding.

On the turn, you should again check/call with the intention of check/calling the river, giving your opponent the maximum number of opportunities to spew off his chips. If he checks behind on the turn, he either has nothing, which will not call a river bet, or a marginal made hand. If you check the river, if he has top pair, he will probably bet for value and if he has worse than top pair, he probably won't call if you bet. So, if the turn checks through, you should check the river.

If you check the river and your opponent bets when the board runs out somewhat poorly for you, you may want to only check/call because you could be

beat and most opponents will assume that you must have a premium hand to check/raise. This means that your opponent will probably only call a check/raise on coordinated boards with overly premium hands, most of which you lose to. For example, if the board runs out 10♠-6♦-3♣-8♠-9♠, you should check/call. However, if it runs out in an uncoordinated manner, such as 10♠-6♦-3♣-J♦-A♣, you should usually check/raise.

Another way you can induce an aggressive player to bluff is by making a tiny bet that looks like a classic blocking bet. A blocking bet is a small bet placed with a marginal made hand, usually on the river, to induce your opponent into calling with his strong hands while making it difficult for him to bluff.

If you know your opponent is an overly aggressive player who will attack any sign of weakness, reversing this concept is an excellent idea. Suppose one of these players raises to 2.5 big blinds out of his 100 big blind stack from middle position, the button calls and you call from the big blind with A♥-2♥.

The flop comes A♠-7♣-5♣. You check, the initial raiser bets 5 big blinds, the button folds and you call. The turn is the (A♠-7♣-5♣)-3♦. Both players check. The river is the (A♠-7♣-5♣-3♦)-J♠. This is an excellent spot to make a tiny bet of 2 big blinds into the 18 big blind pot because your aggressive opponent probably doesn't have an Ace because he checked behind on the turn. This bet will result in your opponent calling with any sort of weak made hand, which is an excellent result because it extracts 2 big blinds worth of value, and either folding or raising with his absolute junk. If he folds, he will become suspicious that you bluffed him, perhaps allowing you to get unwarranted action on future hands. If he raises, you can happily call because you know that in his eyes, you look as if you have a weak made hand and are trying to see a cheap showdown.

It is important to size your river bet to induce your opponent into doing what you want him to do. If you bet 7 big blinds on the river instead of 2, your opponent will almost never raise as a bluff, which would be terrible for you. Your opponent will then call with all of his reasonably strong made hands and fold everything else. A large bet yields much

worse results for you compared to a tiny bet. Always try to figure out what your opponent will do when facing bets of all sizes then choose the one that will work out best for you.

The other main way to take advantage of this type of player is by bluffing them when the board is good for your range and bad for their range. You have to realize that this type of player plays a wide range of hands, meaning they could have almost anything. Even though they could conceivably connect with many more flops than a tight player, around 67% of the time, they will miss the flop. This should lead you to attack their continuation bets fairly often, especially when you should have a strong range.

Suppose one of these players raises to 2.5 big blinds out of his 50 big blind stack from early position, the button calls and you call with A♠-10♦ from the big blind. It is worth noting that it is usually wise to call when you are out of position with hands that play reasonably well after the flop, although re-raising this hand is also a viable option.

The flop comes 8♠-7♠-4♣. You check, the initial raiser bets 4 big blinds and the button folds. This is

an excellent spot to check/raise to 11 big blinds with a wide range of premium made hands, draws and the occasional bluff. Anytime you have the backdoor nut flush draw, which you have with the A♠, you should usually continue by either calling or semi-bluffing. Even if you didn't have the A♠, you should bluff in this situation from time to time when you have a high spade because it is so easy for you to have a strong hand while at the same time, it is so difficult for your opponent to have a strong hand. Even if he has A-A, he cannot be thrilled to pile money into the pot because he could be against a straight, set or straight flush draw. Whenever you can put the top of your opponent's range in a terrible spot, you should do it, especially if your opponent thinks you are relatively tight and straightforward.

If your opponent happens to call your flop check/raise, you should usually continue betting if the turn is a spade(♠) Queen, Jack, 10, 9, 8, 6 or 5. By betting, you can realistically represent that you either had the nuts on the flop and are still happy with your hand or that you have improved to a premium hand on the turn. You do not need to bet too large on the turn because if you happened to

have the nuts instead of a bluff, you would be able to go all-in by the river by making a medium turn bet. Notice that if you had the nuts, you would not want to let your opponent off the hook on the turn by using a large bet size. So, bet around 12 big blinds out of your 36.5 big blind stack into the 32 big blind pot.

If your opponent calls your turn bet, you will be in a tough spot on the river. You should tend to bet again only if you think your opponent will fold most of his marginal made hands. If your opponent is a calling station (someone who rarely folds any sort of made hand) you should not have bluffed in this situation to begin with.

Players Who Play Too Few Hands Too Passively

This type of player rarely puts a chip in the pot without what they perceive to be clearly the best hand, especially after the flop. You will find that these players are deathly afraid of losing their entire stack. Some of them will even fold super-strong hands, such as A-K on K-8-6-2, if you apply enough pressure. That being said, some of these players will never fold hands they think are strong.

They assume that since they rarely enter the pot, they have to win almost every hand they play. Be sure to pay attention to your specific opponent and quantify exactly which mistakes they are making. Trying to bluff someone who is unbluffable because they start with only premium hands is a devastating mistake.

These players usually do not defend their blinds well, especially if you raise and then make a postflop continuation bet. They refuse to continue after the flop without at least a pair. If they check/call, they usually have top pair or worse. They make your decisions easy by check/raising with hands that have better than top pair, allowing you to easily fold when you are beat. If you are lucky enough to find one of these players who will check/call the flop with middle pair and worse but check/raise with top pair and better, you can bet the turn every time your opponent check/calls the flop, allowing you to steal the pot whenever they fail to improve to trips or two pair.

There are lots of ways to crush this type of opponent, mostly by taking advantage of the fact that they will fold too often. Many of these players

are quick to fold when facing a preflop raise when they are in the blinds. If they happen to call preflop, they will usually fold to a postflop continuation bet when they fail to connect with the board.

If one of these players is in the big blind and the players between you and the big blind are not too wild, when you are middle or late position, you should raise to roughly 2.5 big blinds with a wide range, looking to take advantage of their willingness to over-fold. For example, from middle position, hands such as A♠-4♦, K♦-9♠ and 8♠-5♠ should usually be folded if the players yet to act play reasonably well, but if they are tight and passive, you can raise, expecting to steal the blinds most of the time. If one of your opponents decides to re-raise, you should fold because your hand is certainly crushed by their range.

From late position, your raising range should be even wider. Taken to the extreme, if you are on the button and both players in the blinds are overly tight and passive, you can raise with any two cards. In general though, you should not play absolute trash like 9-4o, 7-3o and 5-2o. It is good for your image to show your opponents that you can open

fold from the button from time to time. These players will not mind if you steal a decent amount of the time, but if you steal every single time, they will start to defend more intelligently, which you do not want.

If you raise with a junky hand and one of the tight, passive players calls, you should almost always make a continuation bet of around 40% of the size of the pot, which will be 2.5 or 3 big blinds. This will give you an excellent price on your bluff while still getting your opponent to fold almost every time they fail to improve on the flop. If your opponent calls your flop bet, unless you have a strong hand, you should tend to give up. Against the rare player who plays too few hands too passively but is inclined to call flop bets, you should probably bet again on almost every turn, especially when a scary card arrives.

If you raise preflop and get multiple callers, you should usually play in a straightforward manner, betting when you have a strong made hand or decent draw and playing cautiously otherwise.

Another way to crush this type of player is by correctly folding against them. This may sound

counterintuitive, but every time you do not give these players action when they have a premium hand, you save a ton of money. Coupled with stealing their blinds relentlessly, they will slowly get ground down, losing roughly .4 big blinds per orbit at a 10-handed table.

That .4 big blinds per orbit number comes from the fact that these players will play around one in 12 hands that they are dealt. If you never give them action without an equally premium hand, they will win the blinds once every 12 hands on average while forfeiting their blinds once every nine hands. This is a bit of an oversimplification, but it is close.

For example, at 500/1,000 with a 1,000 big blind ante, it costs 2,500 to play each orbit, which works out to, on average, 250 chips per hand. If a tight player successfully steals 2,500 once every 12 hands, he will steal 208 chips per hand on average. This will result in him losing 42 chips per hand, or 420 chips per orbit. Using this strategy, if he has a reasonable stack of 25,000 chips, he will lose 20% of his stack in only 120 hands.

Of course, the math is not quite that simple because these players will occasionally get action

whenever their opponents play poorly by getting involved with vastly inferior hands. Notice they will effectively break even in situations when two players both have premium hands because all players will get the same amount of premium hands in the long run. If you know a guy is only entering the pot with premium hands, especially if the stacks are short, refuse to give him action unless you also have a premium hand. You don't have to enter the pot just because your hand is normally playable against the average opponent or because you are getting decent odds from the big blind.

Suppose a player who plays too few hands too passively raises to 2 big blinds out of his 28 big blind stack from second position. You have A-J in middle position. You should fold. While this may sound incredibly tight, you must realize that A-J is in marginal shape against this player's likely strong raising range. In fact, you should even consider folding decent pairs such as 8-8 in this situation.

Not only do you have to worry about the initial raiser, but you also have to take into account the players yet to act who will each pick up a premium

hand around 4% of the time. Even though hands like A-J and 8-8 are normally quite playable, they should easily be crushed by this player's early position raising range. So, you don't want to re-raise and calling will lead to situations where you are frequently dominated postflop. You should cautiously fold and wait for a better spot.

If you do not pay off the tight, passive players, you will slowly grind them down in the long run. Do not impatiently donate your stack to them.

Players Who Play Too Few Hands Too Aggressively

This is the second most common player type that you will encounter, after those who play too many hands too passively. These players have studied a few of the older poker books that say that "tight is right". These older poker books suggest waiting around for a strong hand before applying extreme pressure, hoping to either win the pot with no contest (which is not actually a good result because when you have best hand, you want to get value) or get all-in with what should be the best hand (but often isn't when a ton of money goes into the pot).

These players significantly overplay strong, but still marginal made hands such as top pair and overpairs. When they make a hand they think is strong, they pile their stack into the pot as fast as possible before the board gets too scary. It is not uncommon to see these players raise to 3 big blinds out of their 100 big blind stack with a hand such as A-J and get one caller from the blinds. They continuation bet 5 big blinds on J-9-4 and then shove all-in over a check/raise. They are shocked when their opponent shows them either a set or J-9. Instead of taking time to realize that they played their hand poorly, they curse the poker gods for their bad luck.

You crush this type of player by playing against them with overly premium hands, such as K-K and A-K, and hands that have huge implied odds, such as 3-3, A♠-3♠ and 8♦-7♦. You want to play the premium hands because they have even a tight range crushed and you want to play the implied odds hands because you frequently get paid off for a large amount of big blinds whenever you improve to a premium postflop hand. That said, as the stacks get shallower, the implied odds hands lose a lot of value because you will not be able to win too

many big blinds even when you make a premium hand.

You want to make a point to avoid hands that are easily dominated against this type of opponent. Hands like A♣-9♦ and K♦-10♣ are particularly bad because it is relatively easy to make a strong, but dominated hand, such as with A-9 on 9-7-3. The last thing you want to do is play hands that frequently either lose large pots or win small ones. When facing a raise from a tight, aggressive player, simply fold and wait for a better spot.

If you happen to find yourself in a situation postflop where you have a decently strong, but non-premium hand, make a point to not lose your entire stack when your tight, aggressive opponent wants to put a lot of chips in the pot. Suppose a player who plays too few hands too aggressively raises to 1,000 at 200/400 with a 400 big blind ante from middle position out of his 20,000 stack. You call on the button with K♣-J♣ and the blinds fold. It is worth noting that you should almost never 3-bet with this hand before the flop against this type of player.

The flop comes (J♦-7♣-2♠). Your opponent bets 1,500 and you call. Folding would be too tight as you could easily be against numerous worse hands such as 10-10 and A-Q.

The turn is the (J♦-7♣-2♠)-9♦. Your opponent bets 2,600. At this point, you should be concerned that you could have the worst hand. While you could make a case for folding against the weakest, tightest players who only continue betting on the turn with top pair, top kicker and better made hands, you should usually call one more time to see what develops on the river.

It is mandatory that you formulate a plan for the river before you call on the turn. If your opponent bets a third time, you should probably fold, giving him credit for Q-J or better. Even though you beat Q-J, you lose to everything else. Sometimes your opponent will accidentally turn a worse made hand into a bluff. Do not let that bother you. Most of the time when this type of players bets on the flop, turn, and river, top pair without the best kicker will be in bad shape.

If your opponent checks on the river, you should probably check behind unless you are confident

your opponent would bet with Q-J and better, meaning his checking range consists entirely of hands that you beat.

So, the river is the (J♦-7♣-2♠-9♦)-3♣. Your opponent bets 5,500. Sticking with the plan, you should fold. While you may have the best hand some small percentage of the time, you are almost certainly beat by someone who drastically under-bluffs. Remember, a penny saved is a penny earned!

You should essentially never make this fold against a loose player who is prone to bet with a much wider range, either for value or as a bluff. You should also not fold against players who overvalue decently strong preflop hands that failed to improve after the flop, such as 10-10 on the (J♦-7♣-2♠-9♦)-3♣ board. Always take your specific opponent's tendencies into consideration and adjust accordingly.

Since these players tend to be a bit too tight before the flop, you can slowly grind them down by stealing their blinds whenever you find an opportunity. Do not be afraid to attack their blinds even from early or middle position, especially if the

players between you and the blinds are relatively tight.

Suppose everyone folds to you in the cutoff and you look down at 9♠-7♣. The effective stack size is 60 big blinds. The button, small blind and big blind are all players who play too few hands. You should exploitatively raise to around 2.3 big blinds. If you get 3-bet, you should fold. If one player calls, you should almost always make a 2.5 big blind continuation bet on the flop. If multiple players call, you should usually play in a straightforward manner on the flop. Remember, your goal is to steal the blinds or a small postflop pot. When you face resistance, get out of the way. Of course, if the button, small blind and big blind don't like to fold before the flop, you should easily fold your awful 9-7o.

When a tight, aggressive player 3-bets you before the flop or applies significant pressure after the flop, unless you are getting substantial implied odds with a hand that has a decent chance to improve, you should fold. Remember, you win a huge amount of equity by staying out of trouble when your opponent's range has you crushed.

Suppose you raise from the hijack seat to 2.3 big blinds out of your 35 big blind stack with A♥-J♣. The button, a tight player who plays his strong hands too aggressively, 3-bets to 7 big blinds. This is a situation where you should make an easy fold. You are usually dominated, and when you aren't, you have to play a tricky hand out of position. While calling or going all-in would be options against a loose, aggressive player, against a tight player, they are not viable because your opponent will play well against you.

While the 3-bettor in this example could easily exploit you by 3-betting with a much wider range, you can rest assured that most of these players will rarely get out of line. They have been taught to 3-bet with their strong hands and fold or call everything else. Those are their rules and they are sticking to them! Of course, if you notice that your opponent is constantly 3-betting despite your assumption that he should be playing a tight range, you need to reassess your read and start fighting back.

Players Who Play Well

While these players tend to quickly move up from the small stakes games to larger buy-in games where they can win more money, all good players must start somewhere. These players tend to be on the tighter side while being capable of running well-timed postflop bluffs and getting away from hands that are reasonably strong, but obviously crushed. One sign of a strong player is that they usually win a lot of small pots without a showdown, while at the same time, rarely playing a large pot without a premium hand or a logical bluff.

One of the main ways to beat this type of player is by applying significant pressure when your range should be stronger than theirs. Suppose one of these players raises from early position and you call on the button. If the flop comes $8\clubsuit-7\spadesuit-6\diamond$ and your opponent bets, this is an excellent spot to raise with an overly wide range because the board is much better for your range than your opponent's. In fact, from a fundamentally sound point of view, your opponent should check this board the vast majority of the time, although most players in small stakes games will make a continuation bet far too often.

Many of these players are well versed in the idea of betting for value with a reasonably wide value range with the intention of folding most of it if they get raised. Use their dependence on this play against them. Suppose one of these players raises from middle position and you call in the big blind with 9♠-7♠. The flop comes A♦-9♥-6♥. You check, your opponent bets and you call. The turn is the (A♦-9♥-6♥)-10♣. You check and your opponent bets again. Seeing how you almost certainly have the worst hand at the moment, calling is not a good idea unless their bet was tiny. However, you could check/raise as a semi-bluff if the stacks are deep enough that you have some fold equity. If you know that your opponent would value bet any top pair on the turn with the intention of folding if he gets raised, you should check/raise with a wide range of hands that are not quite good enough to check/call.

While trying to exploit every player you encounter is a good idea, it is usually wise to not make big adjustments against strong players and focus your attention on crushing the weak players who are easily exploitable. Remember, you win money at poker when your opponents make mistakes. If your

opponents do not make many mistakes, you will not win much money from them, and that is fine.

Assuming you are one of these strong players, which you either currently are or are working to become, you must be keenly aware of how your opponents view you. Each specific opponent will have their own perception about you. Perhaps you won a big pot with no showdown against a player who may now think you are capable of bluffing. Even though you may have won the pot with a strong hand, they will be suspicious. Perhaps another player at the same table lost a sizable pot to you when you called his bluff with middle pair. He may think you are a calling station. Maybe you have folded your big blind to the same player's preflop raise a few orbits in a row because you had junky cards. She may think you are overly tight in the blinds. It is important to realize that the way your opponents perceive you is based on what they see, not what you see. You have to develop empathy and observe the world from your opponent's point of view. You may find that this is initially a difficult thing to do, but if you constantly practice, you will get better at it over time.

If your opponent expects you to be tight, you should bluff more often. If you have played very few hands recently, feel free to get well out of line and play a marginal hand as if it is the nuts. Suppose you have been somewhat tight recently and decide to raise from middle position with A-4 to 2 big blinds out of your 50 big blind stack. A loose, aggressive player who loves to 3-bet 3-bets you to 5 big blinds from the button. This is an excellent spot to 4-bet to around 13.5 big blinds. This will put the button in a difficult spot with most of his non-premium range because it looks as if you are willing to get your entire stack in. Of course, if the button decides to put his stack in despite your aggression, you should get out of the way. Sometimes your bluffs will fail even if you have been playing a tight strategy.

Another time you can get well out of line is when, in the past against a specific player, you have had premium holdings most of the time. If a specific player thinks that you only or mostly play strong hands, unless he is a calling station, he will make big folds to you on the turn and river when you take a line that he only thinks you would take with a strong hand. If your opponent thinks you love

running big bluffs, you should value bet with a much wider range than normal, especially if your opponent will refuse to fold Ace high or better regardless of the board. When you have a reasonable idea of how you think your opponent expects you to play, it is wise to play your premium hands as your opponent thinks you would play your bluffs and your bluffs as he thinks you would play your premium hands.

All of this implies you pay attention to your opponents and their actions at the poker table. If you fail to focus on the things that matter, you will have a difficult time adjusting properly, which will leave a lot of money on the table. If you find a game you can beat and play well in it, you play it a lot, and you keep a proper bankroll, you will thrive.