

## INSTRUCTIONS

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### SEVEN-CARD STUD

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# SEVEN CARD STUD

The Wild West's signature game still has plenty to offer



JAMIE MCGOVERN

**W**ith so much of the poker world focused these days on no-limit Texas Hold'em, you might be wondering why you should be interested in learning and playing an 'old school' game like limit Seven-card Stud. The answer is simple: because you can win. With so many people devoting time and energy to Texas Hold'em, Seven-card Stud

has enjoyed a real rebirth as a game where the well-informed player (you) can profit at the expense of the less adept.

In a wider sense, it's a good idea anyhow to add new games to your poker repertoire, because who knows, you might find yourself in a situation where a given game is the only one in town. Plus, such study will teach you to think more

**ABOVE**  
There's  
nowhere to  
hide with  
exposed  
cards

broadly and analytically about poker in general, and that's always a good thing.

With all of that in mind, let's broaden our horizons with a quick overview of what has famously been called 'the waiting game', a style of poker that rewards patience, memory, and the powers of deduction - the game of Seven-card Stud



JAMIE MCGOVERN

Back in the Wild West, Stud games were all the rage. And while they've been overlooked in recent years, they're making a comeback - and with good reason

**I**n Seven-card Stud, there's an ante from each player on top of the blinds to get the pot started, and then every player is dealt two cards face down and one card face up that everyone can see. Whoever has the lowest 'up' card, or door card, makes a mandatory minimum bet. Each player in turn after that has the standard poker options to call, raise or fold. After the betting round is completed, each remaining player gets another up card. Now there's another round of betting, but this

time (and for the rest of the hand) the highest hand leads out, with everyone following clockwise in turn. This continues for two betting rounds of face-up cards until completion of the betting round. You are then dealt a sixth card, face up, by which time you should have a very good idea of your

Seven-card Stud's fixed limit is determined by the house or the players

hand strength. Then comes a seventh card - this one dealt face down - followed by a final round of betting and then a showdown. The winner of the pot is determined according to standard poker values: flush beats a straight, pair beats a bluff, etc.

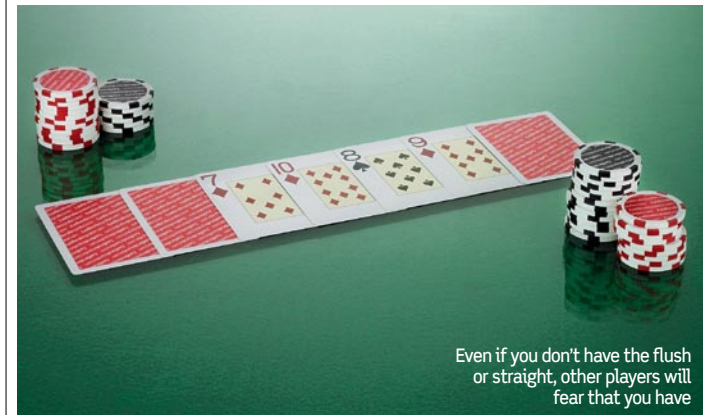
**Betting**

Seven-card Stud is usually played fixed limit, which means that the amount a player can bet or raise is determined by the limits established by the house or the players. For

instance, in a \$5 and \$10 fixed-limit game on Ladbrokespoker.com you can bet or raise only in increments of \$5 during the first three betting rounds, and then in steps of \$10 on the final two streets.

If the structure of this game seems familiar, yet the number of cards seems large, the chances are you're probably getting nostalgic over that old Western-movie standby, Five-card Stud, where players get only one down card and four up cards. Seven-card Stud has generally surpassed Five-card Stud in popularity because of those all-important extra rounds of betting and the juicier pots they create. ■

Seven-card Stud has surpassed Five-card in popularity because of its far juicier pots



Even if you don't have the flush or straight, other players will fear that you have

Stud potential

Let's take a quick look at the different starting hands in Seven-card Stud

**THREE OF A KIND** The best starting hand has three of a kind, or trips, rolled up, as they say. You'll get this hand fewer than once every four hundred deals.

**PAIR** Far more commonly - about one time in six - you'll start with a pair plus an unpaired third card. If your hole cards match, you're said to have a buried pair, and if you have an up card that matches a down card, you're said to have a split pair or open pair.

**THREE TO A STRAIGHT** As with pairs, you'll start with three to a straight about one time in six. High straight cards are better than low ones, because then your hand can improve either to a straight or to high pairs.

**THREE TO A FLUSH** You'll start with three suited cards fairly rarely, only about once every 19 hands. This hand is usually playable, especially if you have high cards in your flush draw suit.

**THREE HIGH CARDS** If you have a hand containing three cards of Ten or higher, you can sometimes take a flier on a hand, but only if there's a lack of first-round betting and raising.

**EVERYTHING ELSE** Most of the time, your starting hand will consist of three cards that aren't paired, connected, or suited. These are the hands you should routinely fold, for they rarely improve into winners.

FIRST CHOICE IS KEY

Seven-card Stud's a race - and slow starters rarely win

Your opening decision in Seven-card Stud is the most important one you make. Get in the habit of playing only the quality starting hands described above. Many Seven-card Stud players are too loose - they play too many hands of low quality and low potential. In a sense, every hand of Seven-card Stud is like a race, so if you play only when you have good cards it's like having a big head-start each time you set off from the blocks.





JAMIE MCGOVERN

Bluffing's for experienced players - stick to the seven golden rules of Stud and you can let your opponents' betting build up huge winning pots for you

**H**ere's your basic strategy for Seven-card Stud. Follow these seven simple rules and you'll mark yourself out as a solid player, and from there the Stud world is your oyster.

**PLAY SUPER-TIGHT TO START WITH**

This is the hardest part, because, after all, it's more fun to play hands than it is to fold. Stick to the good starting hands (see p45), and fold everything else. You may find such tightness tough, but it will

**Learn which opponents only play quality cards and those that'll chase**

definitely pay off, by keeping you out of expensive pots with losing cards.

**WHEN YOU GET THE GOODS, BET THE GOODS**

If you have a particularly strong starting hand, like trips or a high pair such as Aces or Kings, you may be tempted to slow-play it and let the other

players catch up. However, in most Seven-card Stud games you'll get plenty of action from players with worse hands, so you don't really need to worry about drawing them in. Concentrate on building a pot and then winning it with the best hand. Bet your best hands, fold your worst ones... that's the one-two punch of Seven-card Stud!

**ARE YOUR CARDS LIVE?**

Before you make any betting decisions, be sure to look around the table and see what

cards are exposed. Obviously, if you have two Aces and the other two Aces are already out against you, you're not going to improve to trips. Likewise, if you have a hand like (J-T) 9 (where the cards in parentheses are your hole cards) and you see a lot of Queens and Eights out there, it's unlikely that you're going to build a straight.

**KNOW YOUR FOES**

Study your opponents closely. Learn which ones have starting requirements - that is, they play only quality starting cards like you do. Learn which ones will chase (try to complete hands even when the odds are against them). Knowing your foes makes all the difference. Someone who plays only good cards is much more likely to have the hand he's representing than someone who chases a lot.

STARTING HAND	IMPROVES TO	ODDS AGAINST IMPROVEMENT
Pair	Two pair	1.5-1
Pair	Three of a kind or better	4-1
Three of a kind	Full house or better	1.5-1
Three suited cards	Flush	4.5-1
Three to a straight	Straight	4.5-1

**FOURTH STREET: FIT OR FOLD**

When you get your fourth card, it should work well with the other three, improving your straight or flush draws, for example. If that fourth card doesn't help, this is an excellent time to get away from your hand - fold it, and wait patiently for the next deal. Remember that you're running a race, and if you catch a bad card, or brick, on fourth street, then someone else has probably taken the lead. Don't chase; fold!

**REMEMBER WHAT CARDS HAVE BEEN PLAYED**

The real challenge of Seven-card Stud is remembering what cards have already fallen. As players fold their hands, their up cards disappear into the muck, meaning that valuable information is no longer there to be seen. Get in the habit of memorizing everybody's starting cards (it's easier than you think) so that you can gauge whether your cards - or your foes' - are still live.

**READ THE CARDS BUT BEWARE THE BLUFF**

Pay close attention to everyone else's up cards as the hand develops, and build (and then update) a picture of the hands you think they have. If your opponents show four to a straight or four to a flush, of course there's an excellent chance that they have made their hand. Can you beat a straight or a flush? If not, you should probably credit them with a made hand, and fold.

Of course, players bluff. They bet when they don't have a hand, and sometimes their bet pays off. Mostly, though, bluffing will not be an important part of your Seven-card Stud strategy. Just stick to your basic 'when you get the goods, bet the goods' plan of attack, and save your bluffs for later in your stud career, when you're no longer a beginner - but then again, your opponents aren't either. That's when the bluff can be used to deadly effect. For now, though, wait for good cards - and make them pay off. ■

**SHORT-HANDED PLAY**

■ In a full (nine- or ten-handed) game of Seven-card Stud the winning hand is usually two pair or better. Keep this in mind when calling final-round bets, for if you have only a lowly pair you probably can't beat anything but a bluff. Often, though, you'll find yourself playing in short-handed games with just four or five players. In this case, a pair is probably going to be enough to win, so if you have a strong hand, or even one that just looks strong - and therefore scary - go ahead and bet aggressively. Remember, it doesn't matter what cards you have if everyone folds!

“The challenge of Seven-card Stud is remembering what cards have fallen. Memorize everybody's starting cards so that you can gauge what cards are still live”