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How to Play

You can play by pressing keys on your keyboard, by selecting menu buttons with your mouse, or by clicking and dragging objects on the playing screen.

To place an initial bet: press , select Bet from the Main Menu, click the left mouse button on one of your chips, drag a chip from your pile toward the left side of the screen, or simply click on the green background.

To [Stand](#): press <S>, select Stand from the menu, or click on the dealers down card.

To [Hit](#): press <H>, select Hit from the menu, or click on one of your cards. If you have split a pair, you may hit either hand - the hand pointer shows which hand will be hit if you play from the menu selections.

To [Double Down](#): press <D>, select Double Down, or drag a chip from your pile. If you have split a pair, you must place the chip below the proper hand.

To [Split](#) a pair: press <T>, select Split, or drag the top card to the right.

To [Surrender](#): press <R>, select Surrender, or drag your bet to the right.

Playing Strategy

Playing strategy, sometimes called Basic Strategy, is the key to winning at blackjack. Edward Thorpe developed the first basic strategy, by using an IBM mainframe computer to analyze the results of any decision over millions of hands. This original work was accomplished in the early 1950s, and took many hours of computer time. Your home PC is more powerful than the early generation IBM computer used by Ed Thorpe, and it can perform the same analysis in the [Betting and Rules Analysis](#) mode, in much less time.

The best betting scheme will not help if you do not play the most competitive game. The first decision of any hand may include early Surrender, which allows you to sacrifice half your bet and not play out the hand; Splitting a pair; or Doubling Down. The remaining choice is to take another card (Hit), or stand pat (Stand).

An excellent playing strategy chart is provided on the last page of the Perfect Blackjack book.

See also [Surrender](#), [Pair Splitting](#), [Double Down](#), [Hit](#), and [Stand](#).

Surrender

Drag your bet to the right to surrender.

Most casinos do not allow Surrender because, if played properly, it can give the player an advantage. Lately, however, the competition in Las Vegas has caused some casinos to offer this variation. When available, you are allowed to give up half of your bet without playing out the hand (unless the dealer has a blackjack). The signal is to simply announce Surrender before you play your hand. In hand-held games, you place your cards face-up in front of your bet.

Properly used, surrender provides a significant advantage to the player. When combined with Perfect BlackJack [Betting Strategy](#), you can gain a full one-point advantage. Improperly used, however, surrender adds to the house advantage. My experience is that most players are confused about surrender and do not use it when they could save half their bet, or they abuse the rule and give up on hands that they could win.

If the surrender rule is in effect, you can sacrifice half your original bet (keeping half of it). The only situations which favor surrender are: a hand total of 15 against a dealer 10 or Ace, or 16 against a 9-Ace. If you play the hand, [Playing Strategy](#) requires you to hit, or take another card. The chances of busting the hand are high; and even if you do not bust, there is a good chance your hand total will still be less than the dealers. You could draw an Ace, 2, 3, or 4 (31% chance) on a 15 and still lose to a dealer 20 or 21.

Pair Splitting

Drag one card of a pair to the right to split.

When your first 2 cards are of the same rank (a pair), you may split them into separate hands. The signal to split a hand is to place another equal bet beside the first one. In a hand-held game, you must place your cards face-up on the table in front of your bet.

Do not touch the cards in a shoe-dealt game. The dealer will split the hand for you. If it looks like you could either [double](#) or split (i.e., a pair of 5s), the dealer will ask which you want to do. The reason for this is simple; if the dealer assumes you want to double down without asking, and deals you a 6, you could claim that you really wanted to split the pair (which would give you 11 on one hand rather than a total of 16).

The rules for pair splitting are fairly simple. Remember, *always* split Aces and 8s. *Never* split 4s, 5s, or 10s. Split 2s, 3s, 6s and 7s against a dealer 7 or less. Split Split 9s against a dealer 9 or less.

Double Down

Add a chip to your bet to double down.

One of the most important decisions in blackjack is when to double down. This play allows the player to double his bet when the odds of winning are better than 50%. In exchange for accepting the double down bet, the casino deals only a single card to the players hand.

The term Double Down comes from hand-help play, where the player doubles his bet, and is dealt one card face down. The dealer will turn over the down card at the end of play.

To Double down, place a second bet next to and equal to the first. In hand-held play, you must place your cards face-up in front of your bet. If you have a pair, the dealer may ask if you want a single card, or if you want to split the pair.

Double a hand total of 11 against a dealer 10 or less. Double a 10 against a dealer 9 or less. Double 9 against 6 or less, and double 8 against 4, 5, or 6.

Whenever the dealer shows a 4, 5, or 6, his odds of breaking are better than 50%. Double a [soft hand](#) of 13 through 17 against these dealer cards.

Hit

Click on your hand to draw another card.

The decision to take an additional card (hit) or stand pat (stand) is the simplest. The primary rule is not to bust your hand if the dealers up card is 6 or less. The only exception, explained below, occurs when the dealer shows a 2 or 3.

When you are satisfied with your hand, and want no more cards, you Stand. In hand-held play, slide your cards face down under your bet to signal your decision. When playing from a shoe, wave your hand from side to side over your cards.

To draw an additional card, you signal the dealer by lightly scraping the table with your cards, in a brushing motion towards you, in hand-held play. When playing from a shoe, simply tap the table near your cards with your index finger.

Since you cannot bust a soft hand, *always* hit to at least 18 with a soft hand - no matter what the dealer is showing.

With a hard total, hit to at least 17 against a dealer 7 or better.

The 2 is often called the Dealers Ace. You will find that the dealer very often makes his hand total of 17 or better from a face-up 2. This is because there is only a 10% chance, $(4/13) \times (4/13)$, of drawing two 10s in a row to the 2 and busting the hand.

Hit to a total of at least 13 against a dealer 2 or 3.

Soft Hand

In blackjack, an ace can count 1 or 11. A soft hand is one which includes an ace valued at 11. The hand is said to be soft because it cannot be busted. In the event the point count of the hand exceeds 21, the value of the ace merely changes to a value of 1, and the point value of the hand is reduced by 10. The hand total is then hard.

Never stand on a soft total less than 18.

Betting and Rules Analysis

[Betting Strategy](#) is the key to consistent winning at the game of casino blackjack (once [Playing Strategy](#) has been mastered). The high-speed computer analysis program available in Perfect BlackJack will analyze, in real time, four simultaneous betting schemes. The affect of rule variations is also analyzed.

The first betting strategy ignores [card count](#) and always bets the same amount.

The second approach uses standard card counting strategy, and bets the minimum when the card count is negative and the maximum when the card count is positive. As you can see from running the Betting and Rules Analysis program, you *can* beat the casino by card counting.

The third and fourth strategies are superior to the card counting scheme. These are Perfect BlackJack betting strategies, and can *double* the players advantage over the house. Refer to Chapter 5 of the Perfect BlackJack book for a complete explanation of these strategies, and how they were developed.

See also: [BJW Options](#)

Card Count

After [Playing Strategy](#), the most important concept in the game of blackjack is card counting. By using perfect playing strategy, you can reduce the house advantage to about 0.5% when the most advantageous house rules are in effect. By also counting cards, and varying your bet accordingly, you can achieve an advantage over the house of up to 2.5%.

The concept of card counting is very simple. When there are more high cards in the deck than low cards, the chances of being dealt a blackjack (which pays 3-to-2), and the chances of the dealer busting a hand, increase.

Low cards, 2 through 6, count +1. When more low cards have been played than high cards, the card count is positive and the deck is in the players favor. By increasing your bet with a positive, or advantageous, deck, you improve your odds over the house.

High cards are the 10s and aces. High cards count -1. When the card count is negative, the deck is in the dealers favor and you should minimize your bet.

Computer Simulation

Computer Simulation allows the computer to play Perfect Blackjack, in a Teach Mode. Every play decision is announced at the bottom of the screen. By watching and anticipating the correct decision for each and every card combination, you will quickly learn and perfect your [playing strategy](#).

The House

The House is the casino you play in. House rules can vary considerably from casino to casino. Smaller, privately owned casinos usually operate on tight profit margins, and therefore do not offer the best playing opportunity. The very best rules for a player can allow you to play nearly even with the house, even without card counting. The worst rules will provide the house with an awesome advantage.

It is important to always clarify the house rules before playing. This practice will save you money.

Insurance

Insurance is a side bet, offered when the dealer's first card is an ACE. If the dealer has a Blackjack, it pays 2 to 1. To be an even bet, there would need to be a ratio of 4 tens to every 12 cards (1 to 2). However, since there are 4 tens in every suit of 13 cards, the odds against the dealer having the blackjack, and the player winning an insurance bet, are 7.7%. The only exception is when the deck is rich in 10s (a true count of at least 4), and you have been tracking the card count.

Push

If the dealer and the player tie, the result is a Push. Your bet remains.

BJW Options

The following options are user selectable:

Number of Decks: *The available selections are 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10.*

Casino Rules:

Surrender Offered

Dealer Hits Soft 17

Double Any Hand (or only 10 & 11)

Resplit a Split Hand

Double After Split

Preferences:

Sound On (*includes shuffle sound if you have a sound board installed*)

Animation (*adds interest to the game, but slows down play*)

Never Take Insurance (*insurance is usually a bad bet*)

Always Bet Table Minimum (*this option eliminates the need to place a bet*)

Set Table Minimum (*smallest bet you can make at a particular table*)

\$5 \$25 \$100

Set Bet Increment (*set to the smallest chip you will play with: red, green, or black*)

\$5 (red) \$25 (green) \$100 (black)

Strategy Rules - Set the playing strategy rules for splitting pairs, doubling down, and surrender.

Simulation Options - Select Time Delay Between Hands (before cards are erased)

Analysis Options

Card Count to Increase Bet

Hours per Playing Session

Minimum Bet (- Card Count)

Maximum Bet (+ Card Count)

Blackjack

The term blackjack, also known as 21 or a natural, refers to an ace and a ten (or face card) dealt on the first 2 cards. Unless the dealer also has a blackjack, most casinos pay 3-to-2 for a blackjack. If both the player and the dealer have blackjacks, the hand is a [push](#).

Betting Strategy

The second most important concept to playing winning blackjack (after [playing strategy](#), of course) is knowing how and when to bet. The most powerful approach to betting ever developed is the Perfect Blackjack Betting Strategy. A complete description of this strategy is provided in the Perfect Blackjack book.

The [Betting and Rules Analysis](#) program shows the results, over time, of using four different betting approaches.

Bet Strategy #1 always bets the same amount, and ignores the [card count](#).

Strategy #2 counts cards, making a minimum bet with a negative deck and a maximum bet on a positive deck.

Strategies #3 and #4 are variations of Perfect Blackjack Betting Strategy.

As this computer analysis illustrates, virtually all losses over time occur against a negative deck (one rich in low cards, or poor in high cards). The basic concept of this powerful winning approach is to avoid playing against a negative deck. The *Perfect Blackjack* book provides an excellent strategy for accomplishing this goal, without being detected by the casino for card counting.

Table Limit

The table limit at most casinos is 100 times the [table minimum bet](#). This limit is imposed to prevent players from using the [double-up](#) strategy to win back losses.

Table Minimum

The minimum bet at most blackjack tables is \$5. Some \$2 and \$3 games are still available, but you must look for them - and they will be crowded.

The best time to play serious blackjack is late at night or early in the morning. You want to play one-on-one with the dealer as much as possible.

When a casino becomes crowded, especially during the evening and on weekends, the number of \$5 tables is reduced to encourage more players to sit at the \$25 tables. A such times, the only way to play an uncrowded game is to play at the \$100 tables. The *only* way to win under these conditions is use [Perfect Blackjack Betting Strategy](#).

Double Up

Perhaps the oldest gambling system ever devised is the double up concept. The theory is that every time you lose a bet, simply double your bet the next play. Eventually you will win back all of your losses plus one bet. In theory, this concept is sound; because in theory you could double your bets an infinite number of times.

In reality, however, you can only double your bets until you run out of money - or hit the [table limit](#). The table limit is intentionally set at 100 times your minimum bet. This practice limits the number of double up bets to less than 7. You will find that you win and lose in streaks. It is not uncommon to lose more than 7 hands in a row.

Minimum Bet

This selection, made under OPTIONS, ANALYSIS, determines the value of a bet made when the [card count](#) is negative.

Maximum Bet

This selection, made under OPTIONS, ANALYSIS, determines the value of a bet made when the [card count](#) is positive.

Stand

To stand, or stand pat, means to play the cards you have. To indicate this decision to the dealer, slide your cards under your bet in a hand-held game - or wave off another card by holding your hand over your cards, palm down, and waving your hand from side to side.

