# A guide to reading hands

If all our opponents played with their cards face up, we could make optimal decisions on each of our turns and would be a big winner. That is also the reason why most poker scandals involve the scammer being able to see the hidden cards by means of an illegal device (a software glitch, card manipulation or access to a livestream with the cards revealed).

In Stud H/L, however, there is a *legal* way to get surprisingly close to that scenario: paying attention to the board texture and to our opponents' playing style. Consequently, we will be able to restrict their holdings to a very narrow range. This holds true for all forms of poker, but particularly for Stud H/L, where so many hands end in a showdown.

Additionally, the fixed-limit betting structure forces players to play their hands more straightforward, more in line with their actual value. Once a hand goes to showdown – and in the Statistics chapter we've seen that this happens in almost every second pot – the open cards, the hidden cards and the betting actions are all tightly connected. In other words: the hand tells a story. We just have to remember what our opponent held, what he could see, how he reacted to each new card – and suddenly everything falls into place.

So, how do we become good at reading hands? It involves two skills: the first one is easy, the second one is essential – but don't worry, it is not hard to learn.

First, imagine we are up against an opponent who is always betting, no matter what. He follows the logic "aggression and continuation bets are always good" – well, it is rather a concept than a logic. Can we restrict this opponent's range by looking at the board texture? No, he can simply have everything at any time.
Next, imagine we are up against an opponent who applies hand selection on 3rd street but from 4th street onwards is always betting, no matter what (there are no opponents of the first type, but there are players who come very, very close to the second type). Can we restrict this opponent's hands? Yes, to a certain degree: by observing which hand types he selects to play on 3rd street and under which circumstances (his position, open cards, player actions, bet sizes). From 4th street on we would again have no further means of restriction. What have we applied so far, and what do we need to further restrict the range of a player who is not always betting after 3rd street?

**Observation!**

And Stud H/L is the prime game for giving us tons of information: due to the nature of the split pot, many hands will be revealed in the end. In no-limit games a huge part of the decision tree is never revealed. In Stud H/L a surprisingly large portion of the decision tree gets shown down, if you just pay attention and remember.

The second skill is putting yourself into the position of the player whose hand you want to read. What has he seen and how has he (re)acted? Then go through all possible hand combinations he could have. Which combinations make sense from his point of view, and which don't? Almost no player acts totally illogically, but there is still a challenge: what seems logical for one player need not be logical for another. Put yourself in his shoes – it's only a change of perspective. How does this player tick? You can do that offline first, with a hand history or a hand you remembered. Do this often; eventually it will become natural and you can apply it easily during a hand.

Admittedly, there are a few more skills necessary: observation is followed by analysis, memorization and, obviously, applying our knowledge in future games.

Let us look at the first example:
Player A is in BRI with an open deuce. A King, 7, 7, 8 are folded and it's up to player B in BRI+1, who completes with an Ace. Player A defends and now catches a six (suits play no role in the hand), while player B catches a Queen and bets again. Player A calls. It is a standard situation in Stud H/L on 4th street where player A most likely holds some kind of low draw or three different low cards with a pair, and player B holds some sort of pair, most likely Aces.

Now, on 5th street, player A catches a Jack, while player B catches another Queen, thus the board reads: (x-x)-2-6-J vs. (x-x)-A-Q-Q. Player B automatically bets and – without much hesitation – player A calls.
What do we think about the range of player A now?
Trips with either (2-2), (6-6) or (J-J) in the hole are unlikely, both from a mathematical perspective and based on the action. The biggest chunk of player A's range is made up of low draws (he should not call any longer with a hand like (2-3)-2-6-J, as he is presumably up against two high pairs already).
Do we know anything about player A? If we have him pegged as a bad player, he could have any low draw, not knowing that he does not get the right odds to chase. His chances of winning the high are next to nothing without additional outs.

What if we know that player A is a good player? Then we can deduce that he must see a real chance to win high, even against two pairs. The only way to do so is if he has a gutshot straight draw to go with his low draw. His hole cards must therefore be either (3-4), (3-5) or (4-5). Most players would also not fold if they have an Ace in their hole, e.g. (A-3)-2-6-J[1]. However, the chances of pairing the Ace (at least one Ace is already gone) are slim, and a pair of Aces would likely not be good enough to win high.
The example shows that we must factor in more than just our opponents' cards when we try

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[1] In fact, (A-3)-2-6-J is a borderline hand here. For illustration purposes we assumed at the beginning of the hand that 7,7,8 are dead which makes it a clear fold as most of the equity is coming from finishing a low. If all low outs were live it would be a marginal +EV call. If one low out is dead, a bare low draw (no straight/flush potential) is marginal -EV but here the small possibility of making a runner-runner straight with 4-5 elevates a call marginally into the +EV range. We look at this hand in detail in the *Sample Hands* chapter.

to get an idea about their range. In expensive, late-street spots like this, a good player's range will typically be much narrower than that of a bad player who keeps chasing everything – but because of the latter, our EV against the bad player is still better.

Let us go back to the factors that decide how an opponent plays his hand. For a thorough hand analysis we eventually must take these factors into account:

1. All open cards
2. Prior action
3. Pot odds
4. In tournament poker: ICM and stack sizes
5. Known opponent playing styles (adjustment, adjustment to adjustment, …)

However, if we just get started, we should not overstrain ourselves with too much at once. We first start out with focusing on things we can manage, by doing that we will already achieve good results.  Once we become more proficient, we can add further factors along the way.

I recommend beginning with these three basic tasks:

- Judging whether your opponent has Aces when he enters the pot with an open Ace on 3rd.
- Restricting your opponent's range when he plays with an open 9-K
- From 4th street on: is your opponent playing/chasing a high or a low hand?

Player observation also comes first here as well, especially for the first two tasks.

Let's look at the first task: villain's treatment of an open Ace. We get the most information when there has been a raise before villain has to act. Most players have a tendency to reraise when they have a pair of Aces, while they just call with an Ace and two low cards. If they *never* reraised with the latter holding, they would be very easy to read:

- reraise = Aces,
- call = three low cards or some other hand that they elect to play with.

If villain opens the action, we can usually draw fewer conclusions on 3rd street. There are, however, some passive players who open-limp in that situation with an Ace and two low cards or even weaker combos.

Note that if a player cold-calls two bets with an open Ace, his range is heavily skewed towards three different wheel cards or three suited low cards. However, almost all players have preferences, and it is up to us to observe and remember those preferences. That helps us to restrict their range later in the hand and make better decisions.

 On 4th street, if the Ace player catches badly – for example (x-x)-A-9 - and still bets into two open low cards, it is safe to assume that he has Aces or some other sort of high hand that he believes is good. Very few (aggressive) players will continue betting in this situation when

they have a hand like (2-7)-A-9 without obvious flush chances. Obviously, from time to time *you* should bet a hand like that to protect your range, but this is more common in a heads-up situation than against two opponents showing strong low boards.

Another interesting situation is when the Ace bricks and is up against a low card that also bricked. If the Ace was the aggressor, most players understand that with a continuation bet they can credibly represent Aces. Again, in a "bricked" multiway pot a bet from the Ace player is stronger. However, if both opponents caught badly, the Ace player could also prepare to thin out the field on 4th and try to take down the pot on 5th with another continuation bet, but not all players will do that.

In other words, we are constantly assessing the situation and observing our opponents' tendencies. Over time we build a better understanding of their playing style.

Before we go back to hand reading, a short detour: what does this mean for *our* play with an Ace up?

Our opponents are observing us as well, so the same logic applies: if there was a raise in front of us and we always reraise when we have Aces and always just call when we have three low cards, we become very easy to read. That is a massive advantage for our adversary.

The first way to prevent this is to *almost always* reraise with an Ace up when we elect to play. This keeps our range wide, with Aces obviously in there and enables us to steal the pot later in the hand with "nothing" if our opponents' board develop badly.

On the other hand, from time to time when we have Aces we just call. This protects our calling range for those situations when we *don't* have Aces. However, if we play like this, we must be aware of two things. First, this play only works against observant players. If our opponents do not even notice (or remember) that we merely called with Aces on 3rd, there is no point in this maneuver.

Secondly, we usually want to thin out the field with Aces and simply calling is not the recommended way of playing. That means if we flat-call we deliberately make a suboptimal play in order to balance our future ranges. That said, even in the actual hand this gains us an element of surprise, as our opponents will often not put us on Aces.

A good situation to just call with Aces is when we are facing a raise and a reraise and we know that the initial raiser is the type of player that will call two (or even three) more bets without hesitation. The same applies if we completed, someone 2-bet and then there was already a call. In those situations we lost the opportunity for a successful iso-raise and can instead disguise our hand by only calling. In fact, if we come over the top now, we are more or less giving away the fact that we have Aces and are offering our opponents very attractive pot odds.

End of detour – if we flip the perspective back to villain, this also helps us understand his play. Pay attention to the situations where a player had Aces and did *not* reraise 3rd. Did he just not care, or was it a special situation like one of the above? If it was, make a (mental) node – and the next time you get into a similar situation against the same opponent, you cannot simply discard Aces from his range.

Once you feel comfortable judging your opponents' hand strength when they have an open Ace, add the situations when they play high doorcards (9-K). Let's first start with the cases where they play for even two bets. These situations are cleaner because their ranges are more capped.

### Reading high doorcard for two bets on 3rd street

Say a Q has raised and now the player we observe is reraising with an open 9. Unless he is shallow, desperate or on tilt, he will usually either have (9-9)-9, (Q-Q)-9, (K-K)-9 or (A-A)-9. Looking at the combinations, villain has three combos each for (9-9)-9 and (Q-Q)-9, and six combos each for (K-K)-9 and (A-A)-9. That means combinatorically villain is having Kings or Aces twice as often as Nines or Queens[2].

Make additional use of the other open cards and your past observations on this player:

- If another K or A is visible that, reduces the likelihood of Kings or Aces respectively
- If the player tends to slowplay when he's rolled up, you can heavily discount trip 9s.

Now, after the initial assumption, observe the rest of the hand - even if you are not actively in it. Does anything happen that contradicts your first read? If so, replay all actions from the start of the hand and put yourself into the player's shoes: Which cards and actions has he seen? Given *his* perspective, which specific hands still make sense?

If you are in the hand and your opponent catches an Ace or a King, proceed very cautiously: there is a good chance he just made trips (or had trip 9s all along).

Reverse the roles on 3rd street: the 9 raises first and is then 2-bet by the Q. Now, it is almost certain that the Q holds a hand that beats a pair of nines. In Stud H/L it is much less common to reraise in this spot with a hand like (A-K)-Q than in Stud High, because we can never be sure that one or more low hands will join the fun – and they absolutely should: even three rag lows are juicy against two high hands.

In this second situation the reraiser's range is wider than in the first example. The possible hands that beat a pair of 9s are: (T-T)-Q, (J-J)-Q, (Q-Q)-Q, (K-K)-Q, (A-A)-Q. What happens next in the hand? If the 9 catches an Ace and shows strength, the Q bricks but is not bothered and still "pops it up", then the Queen probably started with (Q-Q)-Q or (A-A)-Q.

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[2] Here, we're solely looking at combinatorics. In reality the initial raiser will often have Queens, and only one Queen combo is left. This means the practical chances that the raiser has Kings or Aces is even higher than 2/3.

Keep this in mind:

> **The method for narrowing ranges never changes:**
> **Take the visible cards and the actions on all streets, then trace Villain's line back from the beginning of the hand. Identify all hands that still fit his actions so far!**

In online poker you can even practice this after the session by going through your hand histories.

### Reading high doorcard for one bet on 3rd street

Another typical spot where players reveal their hand strength on 4th is this:
In a multiway pot heavy action ensues, a player who started with a Q and then caught on offsuit 6 suddenly reraises instead of folding. What does he have?
Most of the time he has **trips**. He was either rolled up from the start, or began with (6-6)-Q. We cannot entirely rule out (6-Q)-Q-6 and (A-A)-Q-6, but two tools help us narrow it down:

1. **Board texture**
   Say another player is showing (x-x)-**5-5** and has already shown strength on 4th, and no other 5s are visible. The Q6-player must assume he's up against trip 5s – so if he now slams in a reraise, he's very likely sitting on better trips**.**
2. **Player type**
   Is he the kind of player who would really go to war with nothing more than **(A-A)-Q-6** in that spot (multiway, board distribution)? If not, you can discard that hand.
   What about (6-Q)-Q-6? Some players treat any two pair on 4th as the utmost nuts, regardless of the board or action. If he belongs to that species, you can't rule it out yet. Most players, however, would proceed cautiously if the open board allows strong hands and wait until they hit a full house before they drive the action.

Action point to remember:

> **If, on 4th street, a straightforward player with a *non-suited, non-coordinated high-and-low card* suddenly goes hard in a multiway pot, he very often has trips**.

More sophisticated players will often delay their raises with trips until the big bets have arrived or until their board can be misread as something else. They are *more* likely to reraise 4th street with two pair for isolation and protection.

If the player we're observing plays a 9–K doorcard *for one bet as the aggressor*, the steal-rate tables from the *Defending your bring-in* chapter give us a good first approximation of Villain's range.

Naturally, we need prior observations to have at least a rough idea of his steal rate. If his steal rate from the position he raised with is around **20%**, he'll usually have a pair – and, quite often, the pair his doorcard is advertising. If his steal rate is higher than 20%, he's

adding other combos to his raising/stealing range. Our task is then to observe which categories/structures he includes:

- Broadway-heavy hands
- Suited high combos
- Even hands with two low cards and his high doorcard?

The higher his steal rate is, the wider is his range. And the wider his range, the harder he is to play against. On later streets, we may be able to narrow his range further based on the betting actions and the board texture. Most players (not all) back off quickly when they catch bad and didn't actually start with the advertised pair.

If the target player *only calls* a bet on 3$^{rd}$ street with a 9-K, our first look is whether his doorcard is higher or lower than the initial raiser's doorcard:

- **If his doorcard is higher** than the initial raiser's, we can usually rule out a wired pair. Most players understand that the correct play in that spot is to reraise and isolate, preventing obscure draws (low or high) from entering the pot cheaply.
  However, if the player is passive, he *might* still just call with a pair higher than the initial raiser's doorcard and we should not automatically rule it out.

- **If his doorcard is lower** than the initial raiser's (e.g. he called with a 9 against a K-complete), we go back to our player knowledge: is he the type to call with *any* pair here, even an underpair? If so, restricting his range becomes harder.
  If he is a better player, it becomes *easier* to restrict his range. His possible holdings, in descending order of likelihood will be:

  - (A-9)-9 – a pair plus an overcard to Villain's likely pair
  - (7♠8♠)9♠, (8♠T♠)9♠, (T♠J♠)9♠ – suited rundowns
  - (9-9)-9 – slow-played trips
  - (A-A)-9 – a slow-played overpair
  - Any buried pair he plays for set-mining - usually only if he's confident he'll see 4th street for one bet

Note that rolled-up 9s are just as likely as the three suited rundowns *combined*: there are three combos for trip 9s (draw two out of the three remaining 9s), and for each suited rundown there is only one combo.

Exactly as in NLHE, we can use card removal to refine these likelihoods based on known cards:

- If a 9 is dead, trips 9s reduce from three combos to one.
- If we see an Ace, (A-A)-9 shrinks from six to three combos.
- If we see the 7♠, 8♠, T♠ or J♠ somewhere, one or more suited rundowns might not even be possible, and so on.

That's another reason why tracking dead cards is so important. Card removal in Stud H/L works a bit differently than in No-Limit Hold'em: in NLHE, our hole cards mostly shape how attractive a bluff or bluff-catch is, while the board helps refine Villain's combos; in Stud H/L, we lean on card removal primarily to narrow Villain's range and tweak the odds of making our own hand.

For example, the other day my opponent was showing 3-4-5-7 on 6th street. A very scary looking board – I wasn't too concerned though since I was holding three sixes. In that spot it was easy, since you always see your own cards. But only by tracking all the *dead cards* can we narrow ranges as much as possible. And if we want to be a winner, we shouldn't miss a single clue.

Admittedly, the examples so far were chosen to be relatively clean and didactic. In practice we'll frequently face more obfuscated situations. Most of the time it is hard to pin our opponent down to a *very* narrow range. What helps a big deal then is having at least a solid idea whether he is:

- playing or drawing to a high hand,
- playing or drawing to a low hand,
- or trying to go both ways,

so we can judge whether he's contesting the same half of the pot as we are.

This question is most prominent on 4th and 5th street:

### Is our opponent going low or going high?

Obviously, the answer is only getting tricky when the player is showing several low cards. We should learn to identify situations where our opponent is likely having a high hand though his board tells otherwise.

Here are two examples:

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Villain1  2.3 BB  (x x)  4♦ 2♠
Villain2 13.8 BB  (x x)  A♠ 2♥
Villain3  9.5 BB  (x x)  7♥
Villain4  2.6 BB  (x x)  9♥
Villain5  5.5 BB  (x x)  5♣ 3♥
Villain6  2.7 BB  (x x)  K♥
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3rd

Villain1 brings-in
Villain2 calls
Villain3 folds
Villain4 folds
Villain5 calls
Villain6 folds

4th

Villain2 checks
Villain5 bets


Villain5 is a player who usually doesn't start betting before he is convinced of his hand. So what is he betting here – can this really be just a low draw?

Two things speak against that:

1. **He cannot be sure that his low draw is best.**
   Both Villain1 (4–2) and Villain2 (A–2) show strong low boards. If Villain5 is only drawing to some low, there is a decent chance he gets *half* at best – or nothing. Note: The last card that you draw to finish the low decides the quality of the low and here there are two other potential low draws out.
2. **Many of the cards he would like to catch are already visible.**
   Two deuces, one four and one Ace are out on the table. Unless he already holds one or both of those ranks in the hole, a lot of his "dream cards" are simply not available anymore.

Could he be betting an open-ended straight draw? In theory, yes, 2-3-4-5 and 3-4-5-6 are possible. But:

- For the (2-4)5♣3♥ two 2s and one 4 are already showing, which cuts down the combinations. For this hand, one Ace is already dead to finish the straight.
- For 3-4-5-6 one 4 is already showing. However, for his hand three cards that would finish the straight are dead: 2, 2, 7.

So yes, he *can* have a straight draw, but it is unlikely and if so, it is not a particularly attractive one.

If we further take Villain5's tendencies into account, it becomes even more likely that he has a strong high hand and his hole cards are either (3-3), (3-5) or (5-5).
Since we don't yet know whether it is two pair or trips, we should, in Villain1's seat, simply fold any speculative hand – even something like (8-4)-4-2.

In the actual hand, Villain5 held (3♣3♦)5♣3♥ and enjoyed the neat side benefit of very effectively blocking his opponent's wheel draws.


In the next hand I was involved myself and made a mistake on 5$^{th}$ street as I misread the looks-like-a-low-hand-but-is-high indications.

Villain1  4.5 BB  (x x )  9♦
Villain2  8.2 BB  (x x )  J♣ 9♥ 9♣

Villain3  15.4 BB  (x x )  A♣ 6♥ J♦
Villain4  2.6 BB  (x x )  K♥
Villain5  5.5 BB  (x x )  4♠
Villain6  12.1 BB  (x x )  6♣
  Hero   7.8 BB  (7♦4♣)  8♠ 5♥ K♣

3rd
Villain5 brings-in
Villain6 folds
Hero    calls
Villain1 folds
Villain2 completes
Villain3 calls
Villain4 folds
Villain5 folds
Hero    calls

4th
Villain3 bets
Hero    calls
Villain2 calls

5th
Villain2 bets
Villain3 2-bets
Hero    folds

On 3rd street I have a playable hand. I do not like that one 6 is gone, as because it's the pivot card for my straight. I also don't want to play for two bets, which is why I'm just limping in from early position.

Villain2 – showing a Jack - raises against my limp and into an Ace, indicating some sort of high hand. The Ace just calls. For now, this call points more towards a low-oriented holding than a high one, because a pair of Aces would often reraise to isolate.

On 4th street the Ace catches a 6 while I catch a 5 improving my hand to a rough low draw and a gutshot with only two live outs. Villain3 bets out. His hand looks like a good low draw (certainly better than mine). Nonetheless, my low draw isn't completely worthless and I still have two direct winners for high. A raise from Villain2 is unlikely, so I decide to peel one, Villain2 comes along.

On 5th street, Villain2 adds open 9s to his hand, leads out, and now Villain3 reraises with (x x )A♣6♥J♦. It's my turn. I've bricked my low, Villain2 most likely has two pairs+, I might have to call more than two bets here, and if Villain3 has a better low draw this could get ugly.

Assuming that Villain2 has something like (Q-Q)-J-9-9 and Villain3 a hand like (2-3)-A-6-J, my 4-5-7-8 has only about 20% equity.

But would Villain3 really raise here only with a good low draw?

Thinking about it after the hand, I couldn't find a good argument for that. He must also know that Villain2 is likely better than just a pair of 9s. So reraising with a low naked low draw here would be committing equity suicide – he is far behind for high and has not made a low yet. The raise might make some sense if he has a flush draw to go with it and wanted to blow me off my low draw, but his board is rainbow. And if he really has a strong low draw, he doesn't need to shut me out – he's already a healthy favorite for low.

However, if he has a high hand, the reraise to knock out my low draw suddenly makes a lot of sense. Given the structure of his board, he could either have (A-J) or (A-6) for Aces up or (A-A) for slowplayed rolled-up Aces. As argued in the beginning, Aces would likely raise 3$^{rd}$, making the rolled-up Aces even more probable.

And (A♥A♠)A♣6♥J♦ is exactly what he had. I wasn't sharp enough at the table to realize he is driving a high hand. I remembered that two 6s were dead and thought it might be a good time to fold.

Villain2 indeed had Queens in the pocket, and thus my *only* low draw had about ~31% equity. Knowing that, and considering how much is already in the pot, it's a clear call.

Note: The equity is comparably low because many of my favorable cards are gone (A,A,A,6,6).

Another note on Villain3's play: obviously he was sandbagging on 3$^{rd}$. On 4$^{th}$ he opted to bet his two good low card as to not raise any suspicion. And on 5$^{th}$ his reraise to knock me out is absolutely correct – both from a value point of view and because he does not want to share the pot with me, if he can help it.

The more common knock-out situation in Stud H/L is a low hand iso-raising in a 3-way pot to push out a mediocre high hand and improve its chances of scooping. In the *Missing iso-raises* chapter we will later see that there many situations where we should try to knock a player out of a multiway pot to gain equity.

If Villain3 had actually held (2-3)-A-6-J instead, even with a flush draw, an iso-raise would not be +EV. He's favorite for the low and can complete a flush - both are reasons to keep me in the hand and maximize his profit (unless he thinks I am going to call a 2-bet anyway).

His overall equity with (2-3)-A-6-J including a 4-flush would increase from about 46% in the 3-way pot to about 54% in the heads-up pot. Mathematically it's close - but it's not enough to justify the iso-raise.


## Conclusion

We looked at two hands where players held a strong high hand, even though at first glance their open cards suggested a low draw. Those are already the more complex situations to

spot. If an opponent shows no low card, or not enough low cards, he is clearly playing for high.

If players *do* show low cards and actually hold a low (draw), most of the time they play quite straightforwardly. If they're still on a draw or unsure whether they have the best low, they tend to just call. Once they're confident they have the best low, they bet or raise.

There are mainly two exception types you should watch for when a low draw drives the action - as not to confuse them for a high hand:

**Exception 1 – monster draw:**
Their draw is really strong – for example a good low draw with an added flush or open-ended straight draw (more rare: gutshot straight draw). Observe how aggressively they treat those hands so you don't mistake that line for a made high hand. Or put differently: when a "low-looking" board suddenly starts playing for stacks, pause, run through your *high-versus-low* checklist, and ask:
*"If he were really just going low here, would this line actually make sense?"*
A passive player in that spot (like in the first example) is far more likely to have a strong high hand.

**Exception 2 – value-raising the low in a high-heavy pot:**
On 4th street a player has two open low cards – not even very coordinated, say 2-7 rainbow – and is up against two obvious high hands. The first high hand bets, the second high hand calls. If our "low board" player really has a low draw and his low cards are live, he can raise for value here. Against two callers he will often exceed the 33.33% break-off equity, which makes the raise +EV (provided he's confident both opponents will continue; otherwise he risks isolating himself against a stronger high with nothing made yet). So even this raise on 4th does not automatically indicate a strong high hand – which is exactly why it is a dream scenario if he actually *does* have a big high hand.

**Note: if a player raises on 4th holding one low and one *high* card open, that raise is always driven by a high hand.**

To conclude: reading hands is no rocket science. If you ever feel overwhelmed, start small. Watch how your opponents play even when you're not in the pot. Focus first on a few specific situations like outlined (for example: "Player's doorcard is an Ace") and then expand from there.

Put yourself in your opponent's position:
What cards is he seeing? What actions did he face? Given that information, which hands would *you* play this way?

During the hand, try to form a rough range. At showdown, check how close you were. If he turns over a hand that completely surprises you, go back through the streets:

What did he see?

What did he do?

Does his line make sense now that you know his cards?

If yes, adjust your analysis process. If it still seems crazy, make a player note.

Either way, you've improved your hand-reading – and that edge carries straight into the next session.

## QUIZ: The case of the vanishing hand

Let's put our detective hats on. Here's a real WCOOP hand where every street gives away a piece of the puzzle. It is a great exercise to practice working backwards through a hand and narrowing a player's range.

The hand was played in the WCOOP 2025 61-H event, a $1.050 buy-in 8-game. It's from the early phase of the tournament - everyone is deep. Our goal: figure out what wizowizo's hole cards were!

```
Villain1  (x x )  5♥ 5♠ T♥ K♦ (?)
Villain2  (x x )  8♥
Villain3  (x x )  A♣ Q♦ 3♦
Villain4  (x x )  9♣
wizowizo(x x )  T♣ 5♦ 4♥ J♣ (?)
```

3rd street:
Villain1   brings-in
Villain2   folds
Villain3   bets
Villain4   folds
wizowizo calls
Villain1   calls

4th street:
Villain1   bets
Villain3   2-bets
wizowizo calls
Villain1   calls

5th street:
Villain1   checks
Villain3   checks
wizowizo bets
Villain1   2-bets
Villain3   folds
wizowizo calls

6th street:

Villain1    bets
wizowizo calls

7th street:
Villain1    bets
wizowizo folds

On every single street, the new open cards and the betting tell us more. Your task:
Find some reasonable hole-card combinations that *wizowizo* could have played this way!

Bonus:
Can you name one of the cards that Villain3 had in his hole (rank is enough) and one of Villain1's
hole cards (rank+suit)?

This is just one hand – and it didn't even go to showdown. But remember from the *Statistics*
chapter: almost half of all hands do reach showdown! That means there is huge amount of
information you can analyze without having to guess the cards. And when you do force yourself
to guess before the cards are revealed, you train exactly the skill you want to sharpen.

The high showdown rate in Stud H/L pushes players toward more straightforward,
mathematically sound play. That's a blessing for hand reading but on the other hand, it leaves
little room for bluffing. That unfortunately makes Stud H/L rather uninteresting for TV broadcasts
and trigger-happy players who like to bet high – maybe the cure would be a small reform: keep
the structure as it is until 4th, and then switch to pot-limit from 5th street onwards...