

A kicker is a card that helps break a tie when players have the same made hand. With one pair, it can decide who wins the pot—but only if the pair itself is tied and the players’ best five-card hands are not identical. That last detail catches plenty of beginners: poker does not award the pot to whoever has the highest-looking hole card. It compares each player’s best five-card hand.



This guide explains the **kicker in poker**, the one-pair tie breaker, and the relevant **poker showdown rules** in Texas Hold’em. It also covers hand rankings, odds, draw probabilities, and ways printable cheat sheets and equity charts can make the rules easier to remember.

What Is a Kicker in Poker?

A kicker is a side card that does not form the main hand but can decide a tie between hands of the same rank. For one pair, the pair is compared first. If both players have the same pair, their remaining cards are compared from highest to lowest.

For example, if two players both have a pair of kings, the player with the highest unmatched card wins. If that card ties, compare the next-highest unmatched card, then the third. A Hold’em hand is always evaluated using the best five cards available from the player’s two hole cards and the five community cards.

Important: suits have no ranking in standard poker. A spade does not beat a heart, and a suit cannot break a tie between otherwise identical hands.



Texas Hold'em Hand Rankings: Where One Pair Fits

In standard Texas Hold'em, hand rankings run from strongest to weakest. A kicker does not change this order; it helps compare hands at the same level.

- 1. Royal flush
- 2. Straight flush
- 3. Four of a kind
- 4. Full house
- 5. Flush
- 6. Straight
- 7. Three of a kind
- 8. Two pair
- 9. One pair
- 10. High card

One pair is a hand containing two cards of the same rank, with three other cards. Those three cards are its kickers. For instance, a hand of K-K-A-9-4 is “a pair of kings, ace-nine-four.” Against another pair of kings, the ace kicker is checked first.

How the One-Pair Tie Breaker Works

At showdown, each player’s best five-card hand is identified. If both players have one pair, compare the pair rank. The higher pair wins. If the pair ranks match, compare the kickers in descending order.

Comparison Player A Player B Result Pair rank J-J-A-8-4 10-10-A-K-9 Player A wins: jacks beat tens First kicker Q-Q-A-9-5 Q-Q-K-J-8 Player A wins: ace beats king Second kicker 8-8-A-J-5 8-8-A-10-9 Player A wins: jack beats ten Third kicker 6-6-A-K-9 6-6-A-K-8 Player A wins: nine beats eight

Compare the cards in order and stop as soon as one player has the higher card. You do not keep comparing after the first difference. If the pair and all three kickers match, the hands tie and the pot is split, unless another rule or

side-pot situation affects how the pot is awarded.

A quick kicker sanity check

If villain has A-Q and you have A-J on a board of A-8-5-3-2, both of you have a pair of aces. Your best hands are A-A-Q-8-5 and A-A-J-8-5, so villain's queen kicker wins. The board's 8 and 5 are also used, but they do not overcome the queen-versus-jack difference.

When Your Hole-Card Kicker Matters—and When It Doesn't

A hole card matters only if it makes it into your best five-card hand. Hold'em players may use both hole cards, one hole card, or neither. The board can supply some or all of the five cards used at showdown.

When the hole-card kicker matters

Suppose the board is A-9-6-3-2. You hold A-K, and your opponent holds A-Q. Each player has a pair of aces, but the king kicker beats the queen. The best five-card hands are A-A-K-9-6 and A-A-Q-9-6.

When the kicker is on the board

Suppose the board is A-K-8-5-2, and both players hold an ace. If neither has a hole card that improves on the board's five-card combination, both may use the same five cards: A-A-K-8-5. That is a tie, not a win for the player with a higher unused hole card.

When the board plays

If the five community cards are the best hand available to every player, everyone still in the hand has the same five-card hand. The pot is split. A hole card that is not part of a player's best five cards cannot act as an extra kicker.

This is one of the most common showdown errors: players notice a high card in their hand and assume it must count. It does not count unless it belongs in the best five-card combination.

One Pair, Kicker, and Showdown Rules

At showdown, players reveal their hands and the best hand wins. The comparison always uses five cards—not seven. Do not compare hole cards separately, and do not count a sixth card as a bonus tiebreaker.

- Compare the made hand first: for one pair, compare the pair rank.
- If the pair is tied, compare the highest kicker.
- If that kicker ties, compare the second kicker, then the third.
- If all five cards match in rank, the hand ties. Suits do not break the tie.
- Use only the best five cards available to each player.

A player can win with a lower hole card if the board or the rest of the hand produces a stronger five-card combination. Conversely, a high hole card may be irrelevant if it cannot improve the player's best five.

Hand Odds and Probabilities: Useful Context

Hand probabilities can help put poker outcomes in perspective, but always check what situation the number describes. The chance of being dealt a hand before the flop is different from the chance of completing a draw after the flop.

As a reference point, in a standard five-card deal from a 52-card deck, the odds of four of a kind are **0.0240% (1 in 4,164)**—often stated as about **1 in 4,165**, depending on rounding. That figure describes a five-card hand, not the probability of making quads by the river in a particular Hold'em situation.

In Hold'em, a player starts with two hole cards and may use five community cards, so probabilities depend on the stage of the hand, known cards, and the specific draw. A general hand-ranking chart is helpful, but it cannot replace looking at the actual board and action.

Draw Odds by Flop, Turn, and River

Draw odds tell you the chance of hitting one of your outs on a future street. An *out* is a remaining card that appears to improve your hand. The math assumes the listed outs are clean; in real hands, an opponent may redraw or already have a stronger hand.

Situation	Approximate chance	What it means
9 outs, flop to turn	19.1%	Chance to hit on the turn
9 outs, turn to river	19.6%	Chance to hit on the river
9 outs, flop to river	About 35.0%	Chance to hit on either remaining street
2 outs, flop to turn	About 4.3%	Chance to hit one of two cards on the turn
2 outs, flop to river	About 8.4%	Chance to hit one of two cards by the river

A classic nine-out example is a four-card flush draw after the flop. If you have four cards of one suit among your hole cards [pokerhānds](#) and the board, nine cards of that suit remain unseen in a 47-card unknown-card pool. The chance to hit on the turn is 9/47, about 19.1%; from turn to river it is 9/46, about 19.6%. The chance to hit at least once by the river is about 35.0%.

That is a **flush draw**, not a straight draw. A straight draw is about completing five consecutive ranks. Keep the two separate when counting outs: a card that completes a straight is not automatically a flush card, and a flush draw does not mean you are one card away from a straight.

If you hold a pocket pair and want to hit one of the two remaining cards of that rank, the chance is about 4.3% on the turn and 8.4% by the river. Those are card-hit probabilities, not a guarantee of winning. A set can still lose to a completed draw, and a card that improves your hand may improve an opponent's hand more.

Printable Cheat Sheets and Equity Charts

Printable cheat sheets are useful for keeping hand rankings and the kicker comparison order close at hand during study or a home game. Look for a sheet that clearly shows the full ranking list, a five-card hand example, and a reminder that suits do not rank. A compact chart of common flop draw odds can also help you review the turn and river percentages without memorizing every calculation.

Equity charts answer a different question: how often a hand is expected to win or tie against another hand or range, given the known cards. They account for more than just the chance of hitting a draw. For example, a nine-out draw's roughly 35% chance to complete by the river is not automatically 35% equity; some outs may not be clean, and you may already be ahead or behind.

Use charts as learning aids, not as a substitute for reading the board. Check the assumptions: number of players, known hole cards or ranges, and whether the chart shows preflop, flop, or turn equity.

A Simple Showdown Checklist

1. Build the best five-card hand for each player.
2. Compare hand categories, then the ranks within that category.
3. For one pair, compare the pair first.
4. If the pair ties, compare kickers from highest to lowest.
5. Ignore unused hole cards and ignore suits as tiebreakers.
6. If the best five cards are identical, split the pot.

The short version: a kicker matters when players tie on the main hand and the side card is part of the best five-card hand. With one pair, compare the pair, then the three kickers in order. If villain has the same pair but a higher first kicker, villain wins; if the board supplies the same best five cards for both players, neither hole-card kicker counts. That is the core of the one pair tie breaker—and the cleanest way to apply poker showdown rules.