



## Lecture 5: Position

### **How important is position in poker?**

Position in poker is incredibly important. What position you are acting in relative to other players will have a huge effect on your expected value for the hand, so considerations about position are something that should be constantly present in your decision making process. You should be adapting your range to your position at all times.

### **Why is position so important?**

There are two main reasons that position is so important in poker. These are information, and expected value.

#### Information

When we act in a later position than other players, we have already seen how they have acted. This means we can have as much information about their range as possible. Since our profitability in the game will be determined by acting on an accurate assessment of our opponent's range, we can see that having this extra information about our opponent's range should make a big difference to how much profit we can make. Since our range assessment is built on our opponent's actions, when we act out of position, our range assessment for our opponents effectively must remain the same as it was on the last round of betting, despite the fact that a new street has been dealt. This is obviously a huge disadvantage – the information we can use is then limited to purely mathematical information, for example about board texture. If we were to always act in a later position than our opponents, we would always be acting with more information than they have, and with a more accurate assessment of their range than they have of ours. So in theory, as long as we make good decisions based on our range assessment, we should always be able to win money from our opponent's just by playing in position against them.

#### Expected Value

Our expected value from a hand goes up when we play in position. One reason for this is obviously the above; the better and more accurate our range assessment of our opponents is, the better decisions we can make, and therefore the higher expected value we have. But another reason position has an impact

on expected value is because when we play in position we can have much better control over the size of the pot. When we bet out of position, we cannot control whether our opponent will raise us, and when we check we can't control whether our opponent will bet. But when we are in position, we can react to what our opponent has done, allowing us to make the right play a lot more of the time. Sometimes our opponent will check raise us if we bet, which negates our positional advantage to some extent. But even when this happens, it's much easier for us to control the pot on later streets. If we think our opponent's range for check raising the flop is weighted towards draws and bluffs when he checks the turn, we can make the correct play and bet the turn instead. Or we can check behind for pot control. Another effect of not being able to control the size of the pot very well out of position is that it is often difficult to build a big pot when we have hit a big hand. This is again because when your opponent has position he can control the size of the pot. Lines such as bet flop, check raise turn often go wrong if your opponent uses pot control lines, meaning that we lose value.

Basically, when we are in position we can maximise our expectation on our big hands by being able to bet and raise with them. We can maximise our expectation on our medium and low strength hands by being able to reach showdown with them by being able to control the size of the pot. And we can minimise our losses by having enough information to fold more often, or again reach showdown more cheaply.

### **How should considerations about position affect our play?**

#### Range Selection

Being out of position should affect our range preflop for entering hands. Because our expectation on hands out of position is lower than it is in position, and because building a big pot when we hit a big hand on the flop is much more difficult, we should have a narrower range for entering a pot in early position than we would have in a later position. We should be playing more often with the top end of our hand distribution, hands that play well by their own strength. Another reason for this is simply how mathematically likely it is that someone will have a strong hand behind us and reraise us. When we raise in a late position, not only will we have positional advantage after the flop and the increased expectation associated with that, but also it is mathematically less likely to find someone with a strong hand behind us. This means we can raise with a much wider range.

We also need to remember the effect being out of position has on our implied odds. Since our expectation out of position is reduced, so are our implied odds. Against a lot of opponents it will therefore become unprofitable to try to play suited connectors or to set mine out of position. We should therefore tighten our preflop range to include less of these types of hands from early position.

Postflop, position should affect our range even more. When playing out of position, it's often a good idea to simply play as straightforwardly as possible. We should let go of our marginal and weak hands easily when we are playing out of position, and we should be very careful even with good top pair hands. It's not weakness to fold a hand if you are unsure where you are, and it will probably save you a lot of money in the long run if you do. When we do have a good hand, we should mostly just straightforwardly bet out instead of trying to slowplay, unless our opponent is extremely aggressive and

bets close to 100% of his range. Often just betting out will be the best way to get as much money in as possible, and has the benefit of not looking as strong as a check raise does, which means it will get a call a higher percentage of the time. We should be careful of just betting out in multiway pots though, since often if we get one caller, it gives opponents behind good odds to then call for a draw. In these situations, check raising can stop you allowing your opponents to not make mistakes, and so will be more profitable.

Because of having reduced implied odds out of position, it's better not to draw out of position if you can help it. But if you do end up with a draw out of position, it's essential that you play it aggressively. It will be very difficult for you to pick up the pot when you miss your draw if you play passively and use a check/call line on the flop. You might run into problems later when your opponent calls your bet or check raise. But by playing aggressively you will at least have the chance to pick up the pot. Our opponent is also less likely to bet at us on the turn if we have played aggressively so far in the hand, meaning we can take a free card more often.

When we play in position our range can widen out a lot more. We have many more options for different types of lines we can use, and we can even play draws passively against some opponents profitably. We can play more speculative hands in position, and stay in pots with marginal hands more often.

### Bet Sizing

We can use bet sizing to try to negate our out of position-ness a bit. When we reraise preflop we should make our reraise larger when we are out of position than when we are in position. When we raise out of position, we should raise more than the size of the pot. This will help to cut down our opponent's implied odds in the hand. Although it might seem counter-intuitive to be putting more money in a pot when we are out of position, by raising larger amounts we are actually lessening the positional advantage our opponent has. Not only are we making his implied odds for hitting draws and sets smaller, we are also making it more difficult for him to peel cards and make our life difficult on later streets. We should also raise larger proportional to the stack sizes we are playing; the deeper stacks we have, the larger we should raise. This is because positional advantages are amplified the deeper stacks we have. As stacks become deeper it is much easier to use position to win pots through aggression, to float flops, and to have a good bluffing frequency.

Against players who are aware of position and who adapt well to it, we can reraise less than the size of the pot preflop. We do this in order to try to keep them in the pot when we have the positional edge. Against bad opponents who are not aware of position, although you should still raise large amounts out of position, you should raise as large as possible in position too. The more money we can get in the pot when we are in position, the better! So just raise as much as you think your opponent will call.

After the flop, the same kind of reasoning applies. When we have position, we should bet as much as we think we can get a call with when we have a strong hand, and as little as we think our opponent will fold for when we want a fold (this will only work against bad opponents – against good opponents, it's better to standardise our bets so it isn't so obvious). But out of position, we should bet a larger amount in general (this doesn't mean to overbet the pot) to try to deny our opponent his positional advantage.

## Positional Lines

When we play in position, poker becomes a much more interesting game. There are many interesting moves and lines we can use. Some of these we can use without even looking at our cards. One example is when weak players limp into pots. Well, if they are passive players who need to hit the flop to continue, it will be profitable to simply raise their limp then just continuation bet any flop. They will fold a large enough percentage of the time to make this very profitable. Similarly, if there are passive players in the blinds who like to call out of position, we should be raising in late position, then c-betting any flop again. If there are tight players in the blinds, we can simply raise often and steal their blinds.

Another line we can use is when we call in position against a preflop raiser, to float (call) their c-bet on the flop, then see what they do on the turn. If they check, we can take the pot away. Or, we can wait until the river and take the pot down if they check again. This is a difficult line for our opponent to adapt to, and to combat when he has nothing. This line is one of the exceptions we mentioned when discussing calling, since mostly you should always be calling for value. But your fold equity on later streets makes this play profitable. We can also use these types of lines for weak drawing hands, gutshots, etc. Using these lines mean we can win the pot another way if we don't hit and thereby increase our expectation on these hands.

We can also use pot control lines effectively in position. One common pot control line is the bet / check / bet line that is often used with top pair hands. We use pot control lines when our hand has value, but can't stand a check raise on the turn.

With position against a habitual flop check-raiser, there is a very effective line we can use. If we feel his check-raising range is too wide, and includes a high percentage of bluffs and marginal hands that can't stand too much heat, we can call with position, and call again on the turn. If they bet the river, they probably have a very strong hand, but when they check the river, it is almost impossible for them to have a hand with which they can call a large river bet / river shove. So we can simply bet the river and take the pot down. This works for two reasons. The first is that we represent huge strength with this line. The second is that when our opponent checks the river after check-raising the flop and betting the turn, unless the board has brought an obvious scare card for him, his range is almost definitely made up of marginal and air type hands. So it puts huge pressure on him and forces him to fold.

When we are out of position in a multi-way pot we can use checking lines to negate our positional disadvantage and to give ourselves the best odds possible. By the time the action comes back around to us we have already seen how the rest of the players have acted, meaning we have the most information possible. It's also less likely in a multiway pot that our opponents will be aggressively stabbing at pots – usually they will be betting for value with some kind of hand. So we can use this information to play our marginal hands in the best way possible.

In a multiway pot, we can also use being out of position to cause problems for the preflop raiser. If the preflop raiser was called by another player who had position on him, and we call behind out of position, by betting the flop we effectively sandwich the original raiser between us and the other caller. This makes it very difficult for the original raiser to raise our bet, or even call it without a strong hand

because of the player left behind him to act. This is because if the player behind him raises, it will be too difficult for him to continue with the hand. This line is a good line to use as a semi-bluff line with weaker draws, as it will get folds often enough to make it profitable.

Betting out of position with draws not strong enough to check raise is a good line to use even against one player. But for this to work, your opponent must have missed the board with a significant percentage of his range, plus be the type of player that is tight enough to fold when they miss with overcards.

### Seat selection

Although we will focus more on adapting to player types in the next lecture, when we sit at a table we must consider what our position will be relative to different types of players. Since position gives us such a huge advantage, we really want to have position on the players that we want to have the most information about. These are generally the loose players and aggressive players in the game. We don't want to end up in a lot of pots out of position against these types of players as they will make all our decisions far too difficult, and our hands impossible to play. If we have tight and straightforward opponents behind us, then when they reraise us they will generally have a strong hand, and we can act accordingly. But the looser players will have wider ranges, and will be making more moves, so if they have position on us they will be able to take advantage of that to a huge extent. Money at poker tables generally moves from right to left, because of the higher expectation associated with playing hands in position. So we want to have the loosest players, the aggressive players, and the maniacs to our right so we can make the most profit from them, whilst being able to fold correctly against the tight players to our left when we are out of position. Never underestimate the value of having a good position relative to different players at the table! If you find yourself in a bad seat positionally, you should leave the table or try to move seats, even if the game seems quite good.