



FLAWLESS POKER GUIDE SERIES

8-Handed SNG Early-Stage Guide: Cutting Early Busts

Deep-stack play in the first levels ($\approx 50\text{--}100\text{bb}+$ down to $\sim 25\text{bb}$) of 8-player sit-and-gos
· survival value, tight-aggressive ranges, implied odds, and avoiding one-pair disasters,
with the numbers computed

EDITION · OCTOBER 2026 ·

A BRIGHTER GAME AHEAD · PLAY · TRACK · IMPROVE · WIN



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Flawless Poker · 8-Handed SNG Early-Stage Guide: Cutting Early Busts · October 2026 edition. Study material for use away from the table; charts and ranges are approximate guidelines, not solver output.



Study material, not a live aid. This guide is for study **away from the table**. It is not meant for real-time use while you play, and most sites restrict outside help during hands. Learn it before and after sessions, then play from what you remember.

Tags. [Computed] = calculated by our Python scripts (Monte Carlo/exact equity, ICM via Malmuth-Harville, binomial probabilities). **[Approx.]** = simplified guideline. **[Consensus]** = general poker-community estimates. Ranges and charts are approximate guidelines, not solver output. Only play with money you can afford to lose.

1. A typical pattern: many wins but many early busts

Example: a player with **40** eight-handed \$3.50-\$5 SNGs who finished **7th or 8th 15 times (37.5%)** and **won 9 (22.5%)**.

Finish	Example rate	Expected for an average player	How unusual (binomial) [Computed]
7th-8th	15/40 = 37.5%	2/8 = 25%	P(15+ by chance) = 5.4%
1st	9/40 = 22.5%	1/8 = 12.5%	P(9+ by chance) = 5.5%

Reading: both numbers are unlikely to be pure luck. This player wins nearly **twice** as often as average (a strong late game and heads-up), but also busts in the first two places much more often than average. That's the classic profile of a player who **gambles in the early levels**: big pots with one pair, flips with AK/JJ, or chasing draws. Early busts are the cheapest leak to fix because the early levels are where you have the least to gain and the most to lose.

The fix in one line: play **tight-aggressive** in levels 1-3, **avoid all-ins without a strong made hand or the nuts-type draw**, and arrive at the middle stage (~25bb) with your stack intact; late-game skill does the rest.

2. Why early chips are worth more than late ones [Computed, ICM 50/30/20]

8 players × 1,500 chips. Your prize equity at the start = **12.5%** of the pool.

- If you **double up** to 3,000 (others 1,500 each), your equity rises to **22.5%**, not 25%. Doubling only multiplies your equity by **1.80×**.
- So a 50/50 flip for your stack is worth **11.25%** vs 12.5% for folding: a loss of **1.25 points**, or **10% of your equity**.
- Break-even: you need to win the all-in **55.6%** of the time just to break even in prize terms.

Your win % in the all-in	Equity after taking it	Change vs folding
50%	11.25%	-1.25 pts
55%	12.37%	-0.12 pts
60%	13.5%	+1.00 pts
65%	14.62%	+2.13 pts

Chip value curve [Computed]

Your stack (others equal)	Chip share	Prize equity	Equity per chip vs start
500	4.17%	4.52%	1.08×
1000	8.33%	8.68%	1.04×
1500	12.5%	12.5%	1.00×
2250	18.75%	17.67%	0.94×
3000	25.0%	22.24%	0.89×



Your stack (others equal)	Chip share	Prize equity	Equity per chip vs start
4500	37.5%	29.83%	0.80×
6000	50.0%	35.77%	0.72×

Your **first** chips are worth the most: losing 1,000 of your 1,500 cuts equity to ~4.5%, while gaining 1,500 adds only ~10 points. **Survival > accumulation early**, especially in 50/30/20 and 65/35 formats.

3. Early opening ranges by position (deep, 50–100bb) [Approx.; % computed]

Open **2.5–3bb** (bigger vs limp-happy fields), **+1bb per limper**. Early levels at micros are full of callers, so **tighten early seats and favour high-card and pair hands**.

UTG (12.8%)

	A	K	Q	J	T	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2
A	X	X	X	X	X	X	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
K	X	X	X	X	X	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Q	X	X	X	X	X	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
J	X	.	.	X	X	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
T	.	.	.	.	X	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
9	.	.	.	.	.	X	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
8	.	.	.	.	.	.	X	.	.	.	.	.	.
7	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	X	.	.	.	.	.
6	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	X	.	.	.	.
5	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	X	.	.	.
4	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	X	.	.
3	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	X	.
2	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	X

UTG+1 (17.0%)

	A	K	Q	J	T	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2
A	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	.	X	.	.	.
K	X	X	X	X	X	X	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Q	X	X	X	X	X	X	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
J	X	X	.	X	X	X	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
T	X	.	.	.	X	X	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
9	.	.	.	.	.	X	X	.	.	.	.	.	.
8	.	.	.	.	.	.	X	.	.	.	.	.	.
7	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	X	.	.	.	.	.
6	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	X	.	.	.	.
5	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	X	.	.	.
4	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	X	.	.
3	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	X	.
2	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	X

MP (20.4%)

	A	K	Q	J	T	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2
A	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
K	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	.	.	.	.	.	.
Q	X	X	X	X	X	X	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
J	X	X	X	X	X	X	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
T	X	.	.	.	X	X	X	.	.	.	.	.	.
9	.	.	.	.	.	X	X	.	.	.	.	.	.
8	.	.	.	.	.	.	X	X	.	.	.	.	.
7	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	X	X	.	.	.	.
6	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	X	.	.	.	.
5	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	X	.	.	.
4	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	X	.	.
3	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	X	.
2	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	X

HJ (25.8%)

	A	K	Q	J	T	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2
A	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
K	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	.	.	.	.	.
Q	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	.	.	.	.	.	.
J	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	.	.	.	.	.	.
T	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	.	.	.	.	.	.
9	X	.	.	.	.	X	X	X	.	.	.	.	.
8	.	.	.	.	.	.	X	X	X	.	.	.	.
7	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	X	X	.	.	.	.
6	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	X	X	.	.	.
5	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	X	.	.	.
4	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	X	.	.
3	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	X	.
2	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	X

CO (34.8%)

	A	K	Q	J	T	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2
A	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
K	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	.	.	.
Q	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	.	.	.	.
J	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	.	.	.	.	.
T	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	.	.	.	.	.
9	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	.	.	.	.	.
8	X	.	.	.	.	.	X	X	X	.	.	.	.
7	X	.	.	.	.	.	.	X	X	X	.	.	.
6	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	X	.	.	.	.
5	X	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	X	X	.	.
4	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	X	.	.
3	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	X	.
2	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	X

BTN (40.9%)

	A	K	Q	J	T	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2
A	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
K	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Q	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	.	.	.
J	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	.	.	.	.	.
T	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	.	.	.	.	.
9	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	.	.	.	.
8	X	.	.	.	.	X	X	X	X	.	.	.	.
7	X	.	.	.	.	.	X	X	X	X	.	.	.
6	X	.	.	.	.	.	.	X	X	X	X	.	.
5	X	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	X	X	X	.	.
4	X	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	X	.	.	.
3	X	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	X	.	.
2	X	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	X	.



SB: raise or fold vs BB (~35–45% early; tighter than the late-game SB). **BB:** defend vs min-raises with pairs, suited hands, and Broadway; fold offsuit trash.

Facing a raise early: call with pairs (set-mining, Section 5), suited broadways, AQ/AJs/KQs in position; **3-bet only QQ+, AK** (and JJ vs loose openers). No light 3-bets early vs callers.

4. Limpers and isolation [Approx.]

- Micro early levels often have 2–3 limpers. **Iso-raise to 4bb + 1bb per limper** with: 22+ (small pairs can also over-limp), A9s+, ATo+, KTs+, KQo, QJs, JT_s. Fold weak offsuit hands.
- **Over-limp** small pairs and suited connectors behind several limpers to see cheap flops; you'll have big implied odds multiway.
- Example [Computed]: isolating a limper with AJo and flopping top pair on J-6-3 gives **83.5%** vs the limper's whole range. Value-bet 3 streets vs recreational players.

5. Set-mining and suited-connector implied odds [Computed]

Pocket pair → set or better on the flop: **11.8%** (7.5 : 1 against). With realistic payoff (sets don't always get paid or win), you need the **effective stack ≥ 15–20× the call**.

Effective stack	Call a 3bb raise (×)	Call a 3-bet to 9bb (×)	Set-mine?
100bb	33×	11.1×	Yes vs raises; no vs 3-bets
75bb	25×	8.3×	Yes vs raises; no vs 3-bets
50bb	17×	5.6×	Yes vs raises; no vs 3-bets
35bb	12×	3.9×	Marginal vs raises; no vs 3-bets
25bb	8×	2.8×	Marginal vs raises; no vs 3-bets

Suited connectors (87s) on the flop: two pair or better **5.6%**, open-ender **9.7%**, flush draw **10.9%**; a strong hand or strong draw about **22.9%** of the time. They need **~20×+** stacks and opponents who pay off. At 25bb they're mostly folds vs raises.

6. Don't stack off with one pair [Computed]

Micro-stakes players rarely put 100bb in with worse than a strong hand early. Equity of one-pair hands vs typical early stack-off ranges:

Spot	Board	Villain's stack-off range	Hero equity
AKo top pair top kicker on K-7-2r vs micro stack-off range (Ah Kd)	Ks 7d 2c	Sets, two pair, AK split	21.3%
AKo TPTK vs stack-off range incl. KQ/KJ (Ah Kd)	Ks 7d 2c	Adds worse kings	50.4%
QQ overpair on 9-6-3 vs check-raise-all-in range (Qh Qd)	9s 6d 3c	Sets, two pair, bigger pairs, 87s	19.7%
KQ top pair on K-8-4 vs passive player's raise-raise (Kh Qd)	Ks 8d 4c	Value only	9.3%
JJ overpair on T-7-2 vs a fish who calls anything (Jh Jd)	Ts 7d 2c	Wide	74.2%

Against **value-only** ranges (sets, two pair), top pair and overpairs are **10–21%**. Only vs a range that includes many worse one-pair hands (a fish who stacks off with any king, or a calling station)



does one pair become a stack-off. **Default early: with one pair, win a medium pot; don't play for stacks.**

7. Bet sizing vs weak recreational fields [Approx.]

- Value-bet **bigger** (66–100% pot) with strong hands: callers call too much.
- C-bet less as a bluff multiway; bluff almost never vs stations.
- Thin value works: KQ on K-8-4 vs a station's calling range has **78.6%** [Computed]. Bet 3 streets for value when they keep calling, check-fold to big raises.

8. Pot control [Approx.]

- With medium-strength hands (top pair weak kicker, middle pair, overpair on a wet board), **check one street** in position to keep the pot small.
- Plan: **two streets of value** with one pair, **three streets / stacks** only with two pair+.
- Out of position, check-call rather than bet-and-face-a-raise.

9. Multiway pots [Computed]

Equity vs **1-4 opponents** each holding a loose limping range:

Hand	vs 1	vs 2	vs 3	vs 4
AA	84.6%	72.2%	62.8%	54.3%
KK	77.3%	63.3%	52.6%	44.7%
JJ	69.4%	52.5%	41.1%	33.7%
AKo	63.8%	44.9%	33.4%	25.4%
AJo	59.6%	39.7%	28.4%	21.1%
KQo	51.6%	35.1%	26.7%	22.5%
77	56.8%	38.2%	28.3%	23.0%
T9s	42.2%	31.0%	24.8%	20.0%
A5s	51.4%	33.2%	24.1%	19.6%
K9o	45.6%	28.9%	21.5%	16.5%

KK is only ~53% vs 3 loose players and below 50% (44.7%) vs 4, and AKo is ~25% vs 4. **Multiway pots need stronger hands to stack off.** Raise bigger preflop with premiums to thin the field.

10. Common early-bust spots, with math [Computed]

AK all-in preflop

AKo vs range	Equity
vs QQ+,AK	38.9%
vs JJ+,AK	39.8%
vs TT+,AQ+	49.0%
vs 77+,AJ+,KQ	55.0%

Early, a micro player's 4-bet/5-bet jam is usually QQ+/AK: AK has **38.9%**, and remember you need ~**55.6%** to break even in ICM terms (Section 2). **Fold AK to early 5-bet jams from unknowns.** Get it in with AK only when you shove first (fold equity) or late when stacks are short.



Overpair vs set

Set vs overpair on the flop: **89.8%** for the set. When a tight player raises big on a dry low board, overpairs are in trouble (Section 6).

Chasing draws without odds

Draw	Turn→river hit	Needs vs half-pot bet	vs pot bet
Gutshot (4 outs)	8.7%	25%	33.3%
OESD (8 outs)	17.4%	25%	33.3%
Flush draw (9 outs)	19.6%	25%	33.3%

A gutshot never has the direct odds; a flush draw needs implied odds vs bets bigger than $\sim 1/3$ pot on the turn.

11. Blind levels and changing gears [Approx.]

Effective stack	Stage	Gear
50–100bb+	Early (levels 1–3)	Tight-aggressive , set-mine, value-bet; no big bluffs or flips
30–50bb	Late-early	Open slightly wider in CO/BTN; still avoid marginal all-ins
20–30bb	Gear change	Start stealing, 3-bet jam over late opens with strong hands
< 20bb	Middle/bubble	Push/fold (see the 8-handed in-depth guide)

Typical turbo levels double every 1–2 levels; when the **BB reaches $\sim 1/25$ of your stack**, switch gears.

12. Exploiting weak early players [Consensus + Approx.]

Player	Sign	Exploit
Loose-passive limper	Limps and calls	Iso-raise bigger, value-bet 3 streets, don't bluff
Maniac / spewer	Raises/jams constantly	Wait for strong hands, let them bluff, call with top pair+ in position
Calling station	Calls down light	Value-bet thin & big; never bluff
Scared money (tight)	Folds to aggression	Steal blinds, c-bet small

13. Pre-game checklist

1. **Read the lobby:** payouts, starting stack, blind schedule.
2. Set a rule: **no stack-off with one pair in levels 1–3** unless villain is a known station.
3. **AK/JJ/TT:** don't call off 100bb early vs unknown 4-bet/5-bet jams.
4. Set-mine only with 15–20× effective stacks.
5. Plan the gear change at ~ 25 bb.
6. Take a 1-minute break after a bad beat before the next tournament.

14. Walkthroughs [Computed equities vs stated ranges]

1. AKo all-in preflop at 100bb vs a tight early 4-bet jam range

Hero **Ah Kd** vs Typical early 'I have it' range: **38.9%**.

38.9% vs QQ+/AK; ICM break-even early $\approx 55.6\%$ → **fold** to an early 5-bet jam.



2. JJ facing a 3-bet jam early (100bb) from an unknown

Hero **Jh Jd** vs *Tight micro jam range*: **36.4%**.

JJ 36.4% vs a tight jam range → **fold** early (100bb); call later at ≤20bb.

3. TPTK AK on K-7-2 facing a check-raise jam

Hero **Ah Kd** on Ks 7d 2c vs *Stack-off range*: **21.3%**.

TPTK is only 21.3% vs a value check-raise range → **fold** unless villain stacks off with worse kings.

4. QQ on 9-6-3 vs a check-raise all-in

Hero **Qh Qd** on 9s 6d 3c vs *Stack-off range*: **19.7%**.

QQ is 19.7% vs a check-raise all-in on 9-6-3 → **fold**.

5. Set-mining 55 vs UTG raise, flop K-5-2

Hero **5h 5d** on Kc 5s 2d vs *UTG continuing range*: **88.9%**.

55 flops a set on K-5-2: 88.9% vs UTG's continuing range → build the pot.

6. 87s in a limped 4-way pot flops a flush draw

Hero **8h 7h** on Kh 9h 2c vs *Each limper*: **35.1%**.

87s with a flush draw in a 4-way pot: 35.1% vs three limpers; call cheap bets, don't jam.

7. Isolate a limper with AJo, flop J-high

Hero **Ah Jd** on Js 6d 3c vs *Limper*: **83.5%**.

AJo isolates and flops top pair: 83.5% vs the limper → bet for value 2-3 streets.

8. KQo bets K-high vs a station

Hero **Kh Qd** on Kc 8s 4d vs *Station calls*: **78.6%**.

KQo vs a station on K-8-4: 78.6% → thin value bets every street.

9. Chasing a gutshot vs a pot bet

Hero **Jh 9d** on Ts 8c 3h 2d vs *Villain range*: **22.9%**.

Gutshot on the turn: 22.9% (includes some pair outs), still below 33.3% vs a pot bet → **fold**.

10. Overpair KK vs fish raise-raise on A-high

Hero **Kh Kd** on As 9c 5d vs *Fish range*: **8.1%**.

KK vs a fish's raise-raise on A-9-5: 8.1% → **fold**.

11. A5s flops nut flush draw multiway (3 opponents)

Hero **Ah 5h** on Kh 9h 4c vs *Each opponent*: **40.2%**.

A5s flops the nut flush draw vs three opponents: 40.2% → play aggressively for value/fold equity.

12. 77 calls a raise and flops an overpair-type board 6-4-2 vs raiser

Hero **7h 7d** on 6s 4d 2c vs *Raiser*: **43.5%**.

77 on 6-4-2 vs a preflop raiser: 43.5% → check-call one bet; don't stack off.



15. Drills: 30 spots

1. Starting equity at $8 \times 1,500$ chips, 50/30/20?
2. Equity after doubling to 3,000 early?
3. Break-even win % for an early stack flip?
4. Equity after a 50/50 flip (expected)?
5. % of your equity lost by a 50/50 flip?
6. With a 60% edge in the flip, change vs folding?
7. Example player (Section 1): 7th-8th rate vs expected?
8. Chance an average player busts 7th-8th 15+ times in 40?
9. Chance an average player wins 9+ of 40?
10. Set or better on the flop with a pocket pair?
11. Stack:call needed to set-mine?
12. Set-mine vs a 3bb raise at 50bb?
13. Set-mine vs a 9bb 3-bet at 100bb?
14. 87s flops two pair or better?
15. AKo TPTK on K-7-2 vs a value stack-off range?
16. Same vs a range that includes KQ/KJ?
17. QQ on 9-6-3 vs a check-raise jam?
18. JJ on T-7-2 vs a fish who calls anything?
19. AKo vs QQ+,AK?
20. AKo vs 77+,AJ+,KQ?
21. KK vs 3 loose limpers?
22. AKo vs 4 loose opponents?
23. Set vs overpair on the flop?
24. Flush draw turn→river?
25. Gutshot vs pot bet on the turn: call?
26. Iso-raise size over 2 limpers?
27. Early 3-bet range vs a typical opener?
28. When to change gears?
29. KK vs a fish's raise-raise on A-9-5?
30. One-pair plan early?

Answers

1. **12.5%.**
2. **22.5%.**
3. **55.6%.**
4. **11.25%.**
5. **10%.**
6. **+1.00 pts.**
7. **37.5% vs 25%.**
8. **5.4%.**
9. **5.5%.**
0. **11.8%.**
1. **15-20x.**
2. **Yes ($\approx 17x$).**



3. **No** ($\approx 11\times$).
4. **5.6%**.
5. **21.3%**.
6. **50.4%**.
7. **19.7%**: fold.
8. **74.2%**: value.
9. **38.9%**.
0. **55.0%**.
1. **52.6%**.
2. **25.4%**.
3. **89.8%**.
4. **19.6%**.
5. **No** (8.7% clean vs 33.3%).
6. **$\sim 6bb$** (4bb + 1 per limper).
7. **QQ+, AK** (JJ vs loose).
8. At **$\sim 25bb$** effective.
9. **8.1%**: fold.
0. **Two streets of value**, no stack-off.

Ranges and charts are approximate guidelines, not solver output. [Computed] values come from our scripts, [Approx.] values are guidelines, and [Consensus] values are community estimates. This guide is for study away from the table, not for real-time use during play.



A brighter game ahead
PLAY • TRACK • IMPROVE • WIN

ABOUT FLAWLESS POKER

Flawless Poker publishes study guides for online No-Limit Hold'em players: cash games, sit-and-gos and multi-table tournaments. Every guide pairs practical ranges and plans with numbers computed from equity, ICM and simulation models, so you can understand why a play works, not just what to do.

Play responsibly. Real-money poker is for adults only: 18+ (21+ where required by local law). Check that online poker is legal where you live. Play within your means, only with money you can afford to lose, and never chase losses. Set time and deposit limits before you play.

If gambling stops being fun, help is available. In the US, call or text 1-800-GAMBLER (1-800-426-2537). Elsewhere, contact your local problem-gambling helpline.

Study material, not a live aid. These guides are for study away from the table, not for real-time use during play. Charts and ranges are approximate guidelines, not solver output.