

Poker Tells

Poker is as much a game of cunning and psychology as it is a game of cards. Playing the right hand is not enough to give you that killer edge you need if you want to make the really big wins.

Reading other players is just as important in Online Poker as it is at a real poker table. Follow the guidance below and you will overnight improve your playing and your win rate. For more great poker advice, tips and strategy see the FirstPokerTips [Poker Blog](#)

1 Online Poker Tells

Poker tells have been called the body language of poker, but tells have never been just about body language. Online players have no bodies to betray their thoughts, but actions do. Tells are simply the act of inadvertently betraying information. You don't need to be seen, or even have a body for that.



A tell can be any activity that that reveals useful information to your opponents. I first wrote about online poker tells around the turn of the century, the caveman days of online poker. One of the tells I mentioned then was The Stall. Back then, when players played at two tables at a time at most, The Stall was one of the most comically obvious, predictable and exploitable actions online. Inexperienced players would stall before betting the river when they had a powerful hand, as if they were unsure of what to do. Many years later now, The Stall is used just as often now by more experienced players as a reverse tell, to try and pretend to have strength. This makes The Stall now fairly unreliable, but it still is a tell nonetheless. It is just harder to decipher what it means.

Also, now that some players play as many as eight games at a time, slow play is more of a

regular occurrence. The value in observing a Stall now occurs when a player breaks from their usual betting patterns. For instance, if a player has been playing crisply -- apparently with a good connection and only playing one game -- but then suddenly goes into a Stall, this will almost always mean something. On the other hand, if a player who has been playing slowly suddenly is making bets promptly as soon as it is his turn, this means something also. It will not have the same meaning in all cases, but simply being aware that an opponent has altered their normal behaviour will almost always be helpful in that it should wave a caution flag in front of your eyes.

Analyzing betting patterns is an enormous part of playing winning online poker: speed of bet, call or raise, sizing of bets in pot limit or no limit. A large percentage of online players now are regulars. They play a lot, which means they get into rhythms or habits. Their standard rhythms are exploitable, but any deviations from the norm represent the key moments to focus on. You don't want to call someone's all-in bet when they deviate because they have the nuts, but you do want to call when they deviate because they have a busted draw in a key pot... and you don't want to be clueless about the very fact that they have deviated!



The Rant. Many online poker tells are the result of bad players telling you that they are about to play even worse than normal. How nice of them. The most obvious of these announcements is The Rant. Flawed players go on tilt in all sorts of poker games, and online is no exception. The thing about online is loudmouths and bullies can't glare at, roll their eyes or do some other belittling physical action. But via the chatbox they CAN insult their opponents. They can't say "change the deck" but they can rant about software being rigged against their genius-level play.

Boiling it down to the basics, a player who goes on a rant about stupid opponents or rigged software might just as well paint themselves purple with ten inch letters: "I am on tilt". Besides obviously horrible opponents, ranters are THE players to target in any game, even more so than obvious multi-tablers. You want to play against people on tilt, but you also want to be sure you don't take them off tilt by playing a weak hand at them that helps them to calm down. Go ahead and goad abusive players in the chatbox. These are almost always players who think they are far better than they are, and play considerably worse when

losing than when winning. They will often make the game. Treasure the ranters. To a large degree, winning poker is about defeating people who act stupidly. Ranters are at the top of the list.

Chat revoked. While not a subset of the rant, a small number of online players list "chat revoked" or something similar as their location due to the cardroom blocking their chat privileges for some prior immature or rude chat outburst. When you see one of these players who needs to tell you that their chat is revoked, you know you are dealing with an immature person. They are also more likely to tilt (though not necessarily, they could have had chat revoked for racist or misogynist talk). If most chat revoked players lose a pot in an ugly way, you KNOW they wish they could call their opponent an idiot or worse. They WANT to rant. They WANT to insult. They want to exacerbate the tilt impulses they are feeling. You can even push them further by saying something like "nice hand" to the winner. You should be able to see the steam coming out of the chat revoked player's icon.

The Gloat. While not universally true, players who like to gloat after winning a pot are normally significant, longterm, weak-tight losers. Someone who regularly wins doesn't need to draw attention to that fact. Someone who is seldom a significant winner and needs to draw attention to that fact will be insecure as well as weak-playing. Gloaters are much easier to bluff after they begin to gloat, because they hate to now seem like a loser. They don't mind folding on the flop, or on the turn when an overcard hits, because they can pretend they got sucked out on. What they hate to do is be beaten on the river by an opponent with a superior hand. Gloaters can go on mega-tilt if they start losing after gloating, but more often they tighten up and enjoy their moment. They don't get them very often.

The Whiner. Chatbox-whining players are different than the above. People who whine in public, to a group of strangers who couldn't care less, are very likely used to whining. In other words, a whiner is not likely to be on tilt when losing. A variation of The Whiner is The Challenger who whines "let's play head-up" any time someone beats him two hands in a row, or three of so ugly hands in an hour. Both these types are serious, long-term losers.



The Rocket Scientist. Any player who sees fit to lecture about how to play, and then is blatantly wrong, is a short term target. These players almost never last very long, are often first-timers and are seldom exploitable over time.

Online tells almost always give you information, but don't confuse "it means something" with "it means the same thing in every situation." Using the "in turn" betting buttons is a good example. Using the auto-check almost always means weakness, but the auto-bet and auto-raise buttons can have very different meanings depending on the street where the betting occurs. Auto-raise before the flop is surely always a sign of real strength (unless a player is a maniac or obviously tilting). Auto-raise on the flop will more often be a sign of false strength, where someone is trying to protect a marginal hand.



Some tells carry over from casino poker, like a player impatiently taking the blind out of position, or right before having to take the big blind the next hand. Other tells are pure creations of online poker, though perhaps not tells per se, like using a statistics program to see an opponent's flop percentage.

When playing online you can't see your opponents, but you can see what they DO. Just like in the rest of life, what people actually do is what matters. How they act reveals their confidence, skills, backbone, maturity and level-headedness. The betting actions and chat behaviour of opponents offers a goldmine of information that you can use against them. It may not be easy to decipher online tells but that is the very fact that makes them all the more important.

2 Real life Poker Tells

What are poker tells? A tell is any clue, habit, behaviour or physical reaction, that gives other players more information about your hand. The following are tips supplied to PokerTop10 by the pros, and can apply against novice or advanced players. Remember, in poker there are many contradictions and exceptions to the rule. Also, experienced pros will give out false tells to fool players.

1. Watch the Eyes

This is why many pros wear sunglasses or visors/caps when playing, they know that the eyes rarely lie. For example, many players can't help but stare at big hole cards, so their length of time peeking is longer. Conversely, if a player is looking to steal the pot, he may look to his left to see if the remaining players, who haven't yet acted, have quickly glanced at their cards and are likely to fold. Another example, a player may try to ask you questions about your hand, knowing that people rarely can "look someone straight in the eyes" while being dishonest.



2. Facial Expression

Again, many pros try to disguise their entire face by wearing a cap and looking downward. This is to avoid the classic stare-down that poker pros are famous for. They may try to study your face for nervousness (detecting a weak hand), or even look for repetitive characteristics like a body "tic". You may have obvious unhappiness in your face when your hand is weak, and conversely, you may show a contrasting show of confidence when your hand is strong.



3. Weak is Strong/Strong is Weak

In its most simplistic form, this usually applies to novice players but frequently applies to pros as well. Basically, players like to be actors, and when they have a monster hand they tend to look disinterested. For example: "Oh, is it my turn to act" or "Oh I guess I will play these cards". Alternatively, a player increasing the level of his voice while raising the pot, and trying to look intimidating.. may be running a bluff.

4. Anxiety

Anxiety typically occurs in people when they are confronted, or anticipating confrontation.

Psychologists call this the "Fight or Flight" stimulus response, which links back to the days when we were cavemen/cavewomen. Physical changes happen including flexing of muscles, eye pupil dilation, palpitating heart rate, dry throat. In poker, when someone has a big hand they are typically ready for confrontation and can exhibit some of these characteristics. You may see the chest expanding abnormally, or you may notice the player's voice become slightly higher as he makes a comment. Some of the top players in the game will stare at the vein on the top-side of your face for blood pressure changes. During a bluff, the player may demonstrate anxiety, but if he knows he will fold the hand if re-raised (non-confrontational end) may look quite comfortable.

5. Trembling Hands

Also, a byproduct of anxiety, beware of a player whose hands are shaking, this nervousness can represent a big hand.

6. Glance at Chips

Again, relating to the eyes. It is common for players to quickly glance at their chips if they connect with the board after a Flop. This may be a subconscious reaction, but the tell is the player is already planning his attack!

7. Peeking Hole Cards on Flop

Some players will take another look at their hole cards when, for example, the board is showing a potential 3 card flush draw. Typically, the player is looking to see if one of his cards is connecting, because he remembers only that the two cards are different suits.

8. Repetitive Betting Patterns

Usually the most revealing poker tells are based on the way a player habitually bets during particular situations. For example, maybe the player always checks when he has made the nuts, or a player may regularly fold after being re-raised.

9. Body Posture/Attitude

Some players show obvious changes in their posture based on their attitude/hand strength. For instance, you may notice their shoulders drop/slump when they are not confident (weak hand). Conversely, you may notice the player is very attentive and sitting in an erect position when he has strength. You may also notice that a player who bluffs a lot, leans forward in a confrontational way... remember Strong is Weak!

10. Chip Stacking

When you first sit down at a table, study the way the players stack their chips. Although it is a generalization, loose aggressive players typically maintain unorganized/sloppy stacks, while tight conservative players keep well organized/neat stacks.

3 Hiding Poker Tells and Concealing them from your opponent

Have you ever looked around the poker table at the silent stony faces, sheathed in hoods and sunglasses, and felt intimidated? Do you struggle to get a read on your opponents, while at the same time feel as if you are giving away the store? You probably are. You need to learn to conceal your tells. The first step toward doing this is to develop a better understanding of tells, where they come from and how they work.

Tells are visual and audible clues, unwittingly emitted by players, which their opponents may use to determine the relative strength of their hands. Generally, these tells can fall into one of three categories. If they are based upon your opponents physical movements, they are "visual" tells. If they are based upon your opponents speech, they are "audible" tells. If they are based upon your opponents betting patterns, they are "betting" tells. In brick and mortar games all three categories of tells are widely available to the observant player. In online games, the visual and audible tells are mostly absent, and players must rely primarily on betting tells.



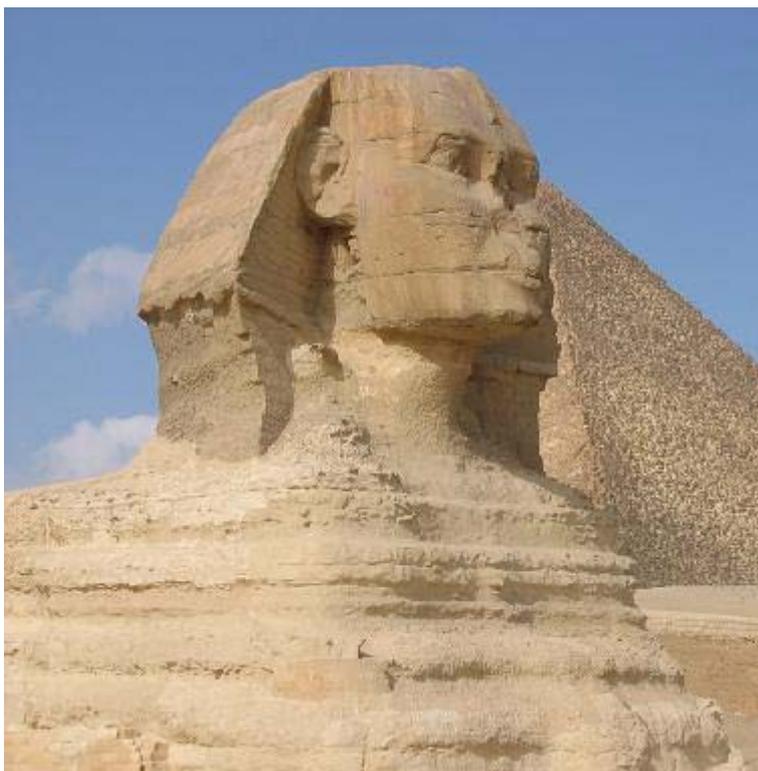
There are often observable differences between the ways your opponents act when they are strong and the ways they act when they are weak. This is the source of tells. If you are familiar with the movie Rounders, you may recall that John Malkovich (Tony KGB) has a brutal tell. When he has a strong hand, he cracks open an Oreo cookie and eats it, and when he is bluffing, he cracks the cookie and plays with it, but does not eat. In real life, most poker tells are not that dramatic. They often happen in an instant and can be very difficult to prevent. They often come from slight differences in hand movements, breathing, eye contact, etc.

Other tells may be more obvious. Your opponent may begin talking incessantly, or make a long dramatic pause (feigning thought) before making a large raise (both signs of a very strong hand). These tells often come from amateurs, who may be unaware of how brutishly obvious they are being. Of course, it is easier to conceal this type of tell, but there are some strategies you can adopt which will help you conceal the subtler tells as well.



The obvious tells can be concealed by simply avoiding certain behaviours. In the Rounders example, John Malkovich could have prevented the Oreo cookie tell very effectively by not messing with the Oreos. Similarly, you can avoid transmitting obvious tells by recognizing the obvious behaviour which is their source, and avoiding it altogether. Some obvious behaviours to avoid include over-acting, excessive talking, rechecking your cards when a flush draw appears, and warning an opponent about the strength of your hand when you are weak (or vice versa). Of course there are many other obvious tells besides these, and your goal should be to avoid all of them. Watching your opponents can be instructive. If you see your opponent acting obviously and giving away the store, you will know how not to act in the future.

Most intermediate and advanced players do a pretty good job at avoiding obvious tells. It is the subtler tells which create problems for these players. This is natural, because it is often easier to decipher a tell than it is to obscure one. However, there are some simple steps that you can take to help conceal even the most pesky tells.



The most basic thing that you can do to help conceal your tells is to standardize both your betting and your body movements. For instance, when betting it is a good idea to be consistent about how you put your chips into the pot. This requires you to develop a standard method for putting chips into the pot, which you should use every time you bet. Whether you choose to push your chips out in a stack, splash them, or use some other method is not important. What is important is that you stay consistent in your method so that

your opponent can not get a read on you based upon how you put your chips into the pot.

Be conscious of your breathing and speech patterns. It is common for a player who is bluffing to unconsciously hold their breath when they are bluffing. It is also common for a player with a strong hand to become overly talkative while the hand is in play. Unusual voice

inflections can also be interpreted as weakness. It is better to not talk at all when you are involved in a hand. Of course, your opponent may try to engage you in conversation in an attempt to generate a tell. A common ploy is for them to ask you about the content of your hand. You should be prepared for this, and there are two ways that you can handle it. Your first option is to completely ignore the questioner, pretending that he and his question do not even exist. The second thing that you can do is engineer a reverse information probe.

Consider the following situation. You have raised before the flop in a Texas Hold'em game. Your opponent defends his blind and an ace flops. He checks and you bet. He then asks you, "Do you have an ace?" Let's stop right there for a moment. When your opponent asks this question, what he really is asking is: "Can you please give me some sort of verbal or visual tell to base my decision on?" But there is a simple way to turn the information probe back onto him. You answer the question with a question of your own. When he asks if you have an ace, you respond, "What do you think?" Now, your opponent is the one being questioned. With four simple words, you have effectively reversed the information probe, whether your opponent realizes it or not. At this point, he will either realize that his probe has backfired, and drop it, or he will actually give you free information by telling you what he thinks you have.

You should also be especially conscious of your eye movements. When players make their hand they often unconsciously glance down at their chips. Even more telling is whether or not you choose to make eye contact with your opponent. Quite often a player with a made hand will initiate eye contact with their opponent while a player who is bluffing will avoid it at all costs. Since your opponent is trying to decipher your eye contact, the best way to stay out of trouble is to never make eye contact with your opponent while the hand is in play.

Another way to conceal tells is to standardize your betting. You should standardize both the time that you take to bet and the sizing of your bets and raises. You can standardize the time it takes you to bet by slowing the game down, just a little. Breathe before you bet. This keeps you from acting too quickly when you are very strong or very weak. If you are playing No-Limit or Pot-Limit, standardize the amount that you raise preflop to conceal any tells associated with bet sizing.

Of course, there are many other tells, and many ways of concealing them. Your basic strategy should be to completely avoid suspect behaviour whenever possible, and to standardize everything that you do as much as possible. Be as consistent and robot-like as you can, and your opponents will have a much more difficult time getting a read on you. This will take some practice. Be conscious about your body movements, and watch your opponents watching you. Quite often, if you emit a tell that your opponent catches, you will notice it also. You can then avoid that behaviour in the future.

Top Rated Poker Rooms

Room	Rating	Free Bonus	Our comments	More
	★★★★★	150% up to \$600	Great function to alert you to free tournaments	
	★★★★★	100% up to \$500	Largest poker room in the world	
	★★★★★	150% up to \$600	Accepts US Players	
	★★★★★	75% up to \$250	Beautiful live 3D interface	
	★★★★☆	300% up to \$600	Free token for New player freeroll tournament	
	★★★★☆	111% up to \$444	The best for regular cashback promotions	
	★★★★☆	100% up to \$400	Has very easy players to win from	

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