

Blackjack Strategy – Moving On From The Basics

If you are relatively new to Blackjack, it is advisable to find a basic strategy and either memorise it, or write it down and take it along to the casino with you. But as you become more familiar with the game and move into more intermediate Blackjack territory, you may find yourself asking a few questions about how to improve on the basic Blackjack strategy.

There are several examples with regard to hitting certain hands against certain dealer upcards. One such example is that of hitting with a hard 16 against the casino's 10 or face card. Basic blackjack strategy maintains that the correct play is to hit, as this is a losing position and by hitting, you will lose less in the long run than by standing.



However, the problem with basic Blackjack strategy is that it is, well, too basic. In this example, we haven't considered what the 16 is made up of. There are many ways to make this particular Blackjack hand and there is a difference between, for example, a K-6 and a 9-7. This also excludes the fact that your original two card holding may have been lower and after hitting, you now find yourself with a 16, such as 8-4-4. Although all three hands total 16, the manner in which they are composed means they could all be played slightly differently.

As a hand of 16 requires an A, 2, 3, 4 or 5 to improve, hitting requires you to catch a low value card. When your hand already includes two of your "outs", as in the 8-4-4 example, you obviously have less chance to hit the cards you need and therefore a greater chance of busting. This means that sticking is a marginally better option than hitting.

Similarly, basic Blackjack strategy dictates standing with a 12 against a dealer's 4 and newcomers to the game should definitely follow that advice. But once they are more familiar with Blackjack and its finer points, they could consider that there are four ways of making up a starting hand of 12 that doesn't involve two lower value cards: T-2, J-2, Q-2 and K-2. These are arguably worth hitting, as one of the cards that will bust your hand is no longer in the deck. In

the case of a 9-3 holding, two of the cards you are relying on are in your hand, so sticking is still the best option.

This may seem a very specific and possibly even trivial point. The sort of thing discussed above may only crop up once or twice in an hour long blackjack session, after all. But it is these very fine percentages that can be exploited to chip away at the casino's edge on the Blackjack tables. Any reduction in house edge, no matter how fine, improves the player's chances of beating the game, or at least reducing the negative long-term impact on your bankroll.