

## Chapter Three

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# Practice Counting Outs

Poker is a strange and wonderful game. No one ever said it would be easy to master. Counting outs properly will never be an exact science, and never will two experts be in exact agreement. There is simply too much to consider, and each hand is different. Furthermore, your ability to read players will hopefully assist you in counting outs.

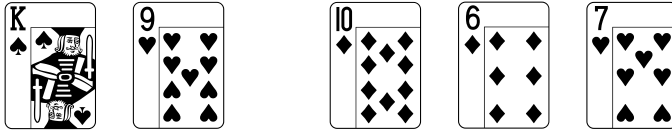
Nevertheless, it is worthwhile running through some sample drawing hands, and discuss how we could arrive at a reasonable modified out-count. Here are ten practice hands. I've purposefully chosen a few examples that entail complex decisions, to make you think. You may not agree with me on all examples, and that's OK. I suggest you work through the examples like this:

- 1) Formulate a quick opinion, taking no more than five seconds or so, by trying to memorise the rules presented in the outs-counting chart I gave you.
- 2) Then take time to think through the complexities, perhaps to arrive at a different answer than your first opinion.
- 3) Then read through the solution I provide, to see if we agree.

### Hold'em on the Come

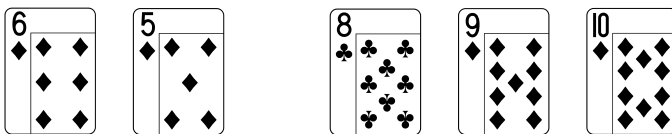
In any case, I want you to formulate your own opinions about each hand. The games that you play in are different to the games I play in, and my answer to each problem may not be appropriate for your game.

#### Hand 1: K♠-9♥, flop 10♦-6♦-7♥, four other players



Two strikes against your gutshot straight: There are two diamonds on the board, and you're only using one of your cards. The straight draw is worth only three outs. The king overcard is worth only one out with this many players. Total: Four outs.

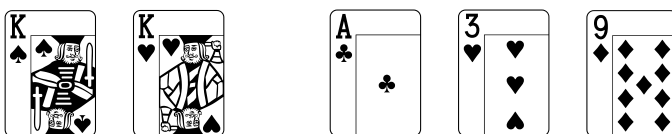
#### Hand 2: 6♦-5♦, flop 8♣-9♦-10♦, four other players



The gutshot to the idiot end of a straight is worthless, and the flush draw is worth only seven of a possible nine outs, because your cards are so low.

Hand value: seven outs.

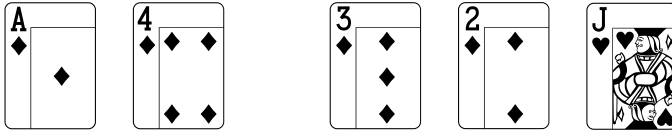
#### Hand 3: K♠-K♥, flop A♣-3♥-9♦, two other players



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Two outs, pure and simple. A pair of kings is like an ace magnet, and it has happened again. If there's a bet and a call ahead of you, you're beat by a pair of aces; there are simply no draws on the board. Throw your hand away.

**Hand 4: A♦-4♦, flop 3♦-2♦-J♥, three other players**

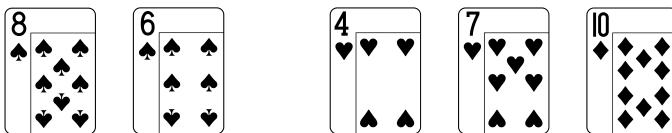


**You have all sorts of goodies here**

- ♠ The flush draw is ace-high with no paired board: Good for all nine outs.
- ♠ Your one-way straight draw buys you three more outs. Why not four? An inside straight is worth four outs, isn't it? Not this time: You'd be counting the 5♦ twice (it makes a straight flush!)
- ♠ Your ace overcard is worth one out. That's all. If you had fewer opponents, or a better kicker, it might be worth more.

Total out-count: 13 outs.

**Hand 5: 8♠-6♠, flop 4♥-7♥-10♦, four other players**



Did you see that you flopped a double belly-buster? You have two ways to make a straight.

### Hold'em on the Come

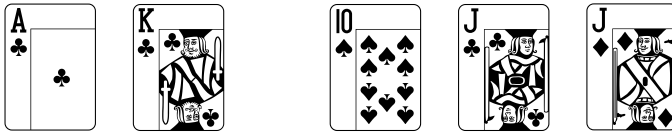
A nine, however, does not give you the nut straight. So your straight draw is slightly compromised: seven outs instead of eight.

The presence of two hearts on the board further compromises your straight, because there are three or more players.

Final hand value: Six outs.

OK, let's do some that are a little more difficult.

**Hand 6: A♣-K♣, flop 10♠-J♣-J♦, three other players, pot is raised on the flop**



How many outs? I would give you four outs for any queen, one out for the ace-high backdoor flush possibility, and two more outs for your two overcards...unless you can reasonably read other players as *not* having a jack. If nobody has a jack, then your overcards would be worth more.

Hand reading is a learned skill. If the betting before you goes bet, raise, do you put the raiser on a jack? Perhaps not... many players would slowplay their jack. But the board is coordinated, and player holding a hand like A♥-J♥ could indeed be nervous about straight possibilities. His raise could be for the purpose of chasing out any inside straight draws.

Therefore, you'd have a tough time reading the raise to determine if the raiser has a jack, a ten, or a straight draw trying to buy a free card. Likewise, you also would be unable to read a cold call. You just don't know *what* your opponents may be holding.

Playing overcards against a pair on the table, like this, is a two-edged sword. If someone holds a jack, your overcards are nearly worthless. But if no one has another jack, then the pair

## Practice Counting Outs

definitely helps you, since you can now beat someone's two pair! In other words, if anybody holds K-10 or A-10, the presence of the two jacks counterfeits their ten. You still win when an ace or king comes.

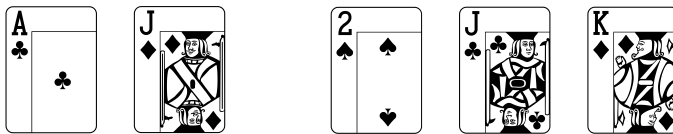
Finally, note how easy it would be for the same card that gives you top pair (an ace or a king) to give someone else a straight. Conservatively, I'd count your two overcards as just one out apiece. But it's close.

Why all four outs for the inside straight? After all, the board is paired and coordinated; shouldn't that concern you?

Yes, it should. Lots of people play hands like J-10, which would make a full house...and if a queen comes to fill your straight, then somebody holding Q-J (another common starting hand) also holds a full house. However, we've already compromised your out-count for the pair on the board by counting only two outs for the overcards, instead of three or four outs.

That gives you a drawing hand worth seven outs. Still not a bad draw.

**Hand 7: A♣-J♦, flop 2♠-J♣-K♦, four other players, no pre-flop raise**



These are the hardest hands of all to analyse, because you usually must decide whether you are drawing, or whether you hold the best hand.

We can assume that at least one person has bet into you, or you'd have no reason to believe you aren't already winning.

So...how many outs? Five, for the remaining jacks and aces in the deck? The fact that there was no pre-flop raise indicates that probably no one is holding A-K. That means that any ace and any jack is likely to give you a winner. Five outs, then?

### Hold'em on the Come

No, that's too optimistic. As a rule of thumb, *never* consider all of your outs with a low pair to be good. Say it with me, now:  
*Too many things can go wrong.*

Can you tell by the betting, for sure, that your pair of jacks with top kicker isn't actually the best hand? Do you *know* that somebody has a king? Of course not. They could be testing the waters with a jack, or betting with a draw. It's very possible that you have the best hand.

Suppose, now, that there's both a bet and a call ahead of you. Is it safe to assume that one or the other is holding a king? One of those two may be holding only a jack, but it's unlikely that both do. Could either be on a draw? Yes, that's possible...a hand such as A♣-Q♠ or A♦-10♦ may want to stick around for the inside draw on the strength of their overcard ace or runner-runner flush draw. Q♣-10♣ is also a likely hand, though not especially one that you want to be up against, since it negates the value of your ace. In fact, if an ace comes on the turn, you could lose a lot of money to Q♣-10♣!

The bottom line is that it's logical to add *at least* one out to your modified count on the possibility that your jack is the best hand, but not to get too carried away with the idea that you may be best. I'd value this hand at five outs.

Let's talk about one more thing. What happens if you *do* hit your ace on the turn? Is it enough to win? Remember, there are always two difficulties when calculating modified outs:

- 1) The possibility of hitting your outs and still losing.
- 2) The possibility of missing your outs and still winning.

Right now, the *only* way you win without hitting your calculated outs is if you are already winning. Well, I suppose a runner-runner ten-queen to give you a straight is possible, but it's unlikely, and it would probably be a shared pot anyway.

So the only way you should modify your out-count, by factoring in the unexpected, is to go downward, not upward.