

Advanced Blackjack Strategies & Card Counting

5.2. COUNTER BASIC STRATEGY: INCREASE YOUR EDGE

By Hal Marcus



Hal Markus developed the *Blackjack 6-7-8 training software* and the new *Blackjack 6-7-8 Basic Strategy Cards*. For more details on the strategy cards, including a 10% discount for *Blackjack Insider* subscribers, [click here](#).

What first steps did you learn when you started to play blackjack? Presumably, you learned the rules of the game, including options like splitting and doubling down, and when you could exercise the options. You also discovered (but perhaps not right away) that some playing strategies were better than others, and that there existed this concept of Basic Strategy which provided the correct playing strategy for any combination of player's hand and dealer's upcard. For example, many players always stand on A,7 when the best decision is to sometimes double, sometimes stand, and sometimes hit, depending on the dealer's upcard. At this point, using Basic Strategy, you're playing almost even with the house. This is much better than the average blackjack player who loses 2% of all money bet to the house.

The next step you took (or perhaps plan on taking in the future) was to learn how to count cards in order to get the edge over the house. Card counting provides a mechanism that alerts you as to whether you should raise or lower your bet, depending on the count. As the count rises into positive territory, you increase your bet to reflect your increasing advantage. This is how you get the edge over the house — you bet more when the distribution of remaining cards favors the player, and you bet less when the distribution of remaining cards favors the casino. You can increase your edge further by varying your playing strategy based on the count. For example, with some sets of point count values, such as the Hi-Lo, when using a Count Index Playing Strategy, the index number for 16 v. 10 is 0. This means that if the count ≥ 0 , stand instead of hit (assuming you can't surrender). Basic Strategy says to always hit 16 v. 10 when you can't surrender. Memorizing a lot of index numbers and recalling them under casino conditions can be quite tedious although using the Illustrious 18 (see **Blackjack Attack** by Don Schlesinger) substantially reduces the number of indexes to commit to memory.

The development of Basic Strategy does not reflect one's bet spread. And the development of a Count Index Playing Strategy, while it considers the set of point count values to determine at which count index you should deviate from Basic Strategy, also does not consider the bet spread. I wondered whether taking the bet spread into account could be used to fine tune Basic Strategy to increase one's expected win rate. For example, let's say you vary the bet from 1 to 16 based on the count in a 6-deck game. With 16 v. 10 (assume surrender is not allowed), the question is which produces the greater expected value: always hitting or always standing. I examined every combination of player's hand and dealer's upcard to answer questions such as these. My research lead to a modified Basic Strategy known as **Counter Basic Strategy** ("CBS"), and in