

Chapter 11: Turn Theory

Both preflop and on the flop, the thought process that leads to a decision has a clear forward-looking trajectory. Plans for future streets, perception of opponent's plans, and their perception of ours together form the backbone of the profitability of preflop and flop actions. Although many pots will end on the flop, even those small battles are won or lost in large part because of the expectations each person in the hand has of how well he and his opponents will execute the follow-through turn and river strategies when necessary. Conversely, the thought process that leads to a river decision has a clear backward-looking trajectory. The entire board and three streets worth of actions are known and there are no future streets, so goal is to process the accumulated information and act accordingly. The turn is the bridge that links the two trajectories, funneling the multiple possible paths, uncertain board texture development, and wide ranges in play on the flop into the determined path, fixed equities, and narrow ranges in play on the river.¹

To play the flop-turn transition correctly requires interpreting flop ranges within the context of a specific turn card which narrows considerably the possible paths the board texture can take. An expert at this backward-looking half of playing the turn has the ability to handle each of the possible flop-turn texture shifts. Chapter 10 covered the first key skill involved, which is to view flop texture as the sum of possible turn-river contingencies. For any given texture, the equilibrium flop strategies are fundamentally based on that fact that flop texture branches into turn and river texture. Any specific turn card is another example of a **structural asymmetry**, a factor outside either player's control that constrains and revises their previous plans. Just as the arrival of a particular flop disrupts preflop strategies that are based on an averaging of possible flop scenarios, the arrival of a particular turn disrupts flop strategies that are based on an averaging of possible turn scenarios.

The first step in exploiting opponents' flop-turn strategies is to understand how equilibrium flop strategies are built by the interrelation of a given flop's turn asymmetries. Every flop action is a commitment to a weighted set of future scenarios – a continuation bet heads-up on Jc7s3s against someone who will call 40% of the time is not simply a decision to bet, it is a decision to accept a set of contingencies that includes the different likelihoods of a flush turn, straight turn, board-pairing turn, backdoor flush draw turn, and so on. There is a legitimate sort of circular logic at work in defining what it means to balance a flop range – given a flop texture and two players, the equilibrium set of action frequencies for each player's range is that which generates a balanced set of turn ranges. Recall the discussion on the “two-tiered balancing game” in the “Medium-Wet Boards” section of Chapter 8. It is not possible to take a flop action that generates a perfectly balanced turn range for each turn card, so a balanced flop-turn game plan is the one that does the best possible job of weighing the contingencies, minimizing the total cost of exploitable gaps.

Turn Texture

Later in Chapter 11 we will look at a series of analyses of the flop-turn transition through the lens of the texture shifts that take us from a flop texture to a turn texture. In other words, we want to look at how the turn card defines a new context for the hand, addressing all of the different variations, and to talk about the situations that arise in each context. This process must begin with a basic analysis of turn texture in itself. In general, we will want to think about turn texture as an extension of flop texture, as the sum of a flop texture and a turn card that shifts the context. In order to do this properly, we need to establish some concepts regarding the equity relationships in play on two major types of turns: **static turns** and **dynamic turns**.

¹ Assuming there will still be money left for the river. Of course, this chapter will also cover the SPR ~ 1 spots that occur when a single-raised pot has a bet and raise on the flop or a three-bet pot has a bet and call. But in those cases as well there is the possibility of the action going check-check (creating an SPR ~1 river spot), which means that the players in the hand still need to track the logical consistency of their actions in a flop-turn-river sense. A turn that goes check-check with SPR ~ 1 creates a river scenario where both players will be reading into the turn checks to help with constructing logically consistent river ranges and to determine the consistency of their opponent's actions. And because the choice to bet is also a rejection of the option to check, when anticipation of river contingencies is used to balance a turn checking range it also impacts the composition of the turn betting range. That said, in aggressive PLO games, the common situations where the turn SPR = 1 do not go check-check very often (although they will sometimes). Either deeper initial stacks or lower bet sizing can make the SPR for these situations slide upward to 1.5-2.5. With SPR ~2 the balancing act between stack-off ranges and checking ranges becomes very interesting, and multi-street consistency plays a key role.