



Third Party Tools and Services Policy: Reference Guide

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Introduction

This is intended to be a supplementary reference guide beyond the information that is already available on the PokerStars website. It is created for any third party developers or players that require knowledge in some of the finer details regarding our policy towards the use of third party tools and services.

This guide will:

- clarify our official policy;
- detail what the common types of tools are permitted, and not permitted, to do.

Overview

Third Party Tools and Services fall into one of three categories:

- 1) **Permitted at all times**
- 2) **Prohibited only whilst the client is open***
- 3) **Prohibited at all times**

Category 2) tools are generally tools or services that can be used for studying or for helping players improve their game away from the poker tables. However, they have been deemed to give players an unfair advantage if they were to be utilized during play.

Category 3) tools generally have malicious intentions and try to assist players in violating our Terms of Service.

** For various reasons our detection methods do not distinguish whether an account is actively playing or not, so our rule is based on client usage.*

Category 1 – Permitted at all times

The following are generally acceptable:

- 1) Tools or services that simply report basic game state information, such as pot odds or absolute hand strength.
- 2) Charts that are static and basic in nature, such as simple table-based starting hand charts advising on what hands to play or not in unopened pots.
- 3) Tools or services that monitor and display numerical-based statistics in-game, but make use of only information that you have accumulated through your own play. Furthermore, there are qualitative limitations on any statistics displayed in-game, such as not being able to be split based on card values. There are also feature limitations of tools and services displaying statistics in-game, such as not being able to automatically change displayed statistics based on game state or opponent tendencies.
- 4) Macros and Hotkey programs for gameplay efficiency that do not reduce the requirement of a player having to make a decision. The player must decide what action to take and the exact relative size of any bet or raise, with the macro or hotkey merely executing this decision. For example, a hotkey that bets half the pot is permitted. A hotkey that bets a randomized amount between half and three quarters of the pot is prohibited.

Category 2 – Prohibited only whilst the client is open

The following are prohibited only whilst the client is open:

- 1) Reference material or charts that provide advice that goes beyond a basic level, such as a large collection of tables offering recommendations beyond whether to play certain hands or not in unopened pots.
- 2) Tools or services designed specifically to ease referral to reference material.
- 3) Tools or services that compute advanced equity calculations, such as GTO strategies, range vs range simulators (node locking), ICM or Nash Equilibrium-based programs.
- 4) The use of any AI models to get advice on what action to take on a table.
- 5) Any Game Theory Optimal (GTO) solution available from any source, whether a website, subscription service, server, database, etc.

Category 3 – Prohibited at all times

The following are prohibited at all times:

- 1) Any tool or service that plays without human intervention (a 'bot') or reduces the requirement of a human to make decisions. A human must decide what action to take and the exact relative size of any bet or raise. For example, 'auto-folders' and tools that randomize the size of bets are prohibited.
- 2) Any tool or service that offers real-time advice on what action to take through reading of the current game state (a 'bot').
- 3) Any tool or service that delays a player's decision by either a specific or randomized amount of time.
- 4) Any tool or service that shares hole card data with other players or services.
 - a. Hosting live streams on Twitch and other similar services is not considered as sharing hole card data.
- 5) The practice of datamining hands or private results (observing games without playing in order to build up a database of hand histories for future reference); the use of hands or private results acquired through datamining; the mass sharing of hands, private results or playing statistics for the purpose of analysis of opponents.
- 6) Any tool or service that is targeted towards the manipulation of opponents in games in which you are unable to choose a specific table to play on, such as Spin & Go's.
- 7) Any tool or service for table selection efficiency that filter or sort available games, or automates/semi-automates the process of joining available games, based on opponent gameplay statistics or notes. For example, seating scripts that join you on a set number of tables that have an average statistic for opponents above/below a certain figure, or work off pre-assigned player note labels, are prohibited. Seating scripts that merely join you on a set number of available tables without consideration of the opponents are permitted.
- 8) The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) models or tools to develop any type of software or tool that is against our rules. For example, using an AI model with a command to develop or modify a poker bot is prohibited at all times.
- 9) Any dedicated tool or service that scrapes data from our tables that could be used to input into an advanced poker calculator or GTO database.

Common Third Party Tool Classifications

The functionality of most third party tools and services can be grouped into one of the following categories, which we will look at in turn:

- [Game Theory Optimal Solution Databases](#)
- [Third Party Result Tracking Services](#)
- [Gameplay Utility and Hotkey Scripts](#)
- [Reference Material – Starting Hand Charts, Trees, etc.](#)
- [Game State Reporters](#)
- [Player Tracking Databases and HUDs](#)
- [Table Selection and Seating Scripts](#)
- [Hand or Situation Analyzers](#)
- [The Use of Artificial Intelligence](#)
- [Remote Control Software, Virtual Machines and Virtual Private Networks](#)
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Game Theory Optimal Solution Databases

There are a number of commercially available service providers who offer subscriptions to pre-solved Game Theory Optimal (GTO) solutions in the form of a database that can be accessed through a user interface (normally a website).

Some players may also have pre-solved their own GTO solutions and have the solution stored locally or on a server.

Accessing or referencing these databases while the PokerStars client is open is strictly prohibited.

It is irrelevant whether the solution being displayed corresponds to the game state of any poker table currently open in the PokerStars client. The display of any solution while the client is open will be treated as a violation of our rules.

Some service providers also offer functionality that allows users to re-solve a situation when it does not exactly match a pre-solved solution. Using any such re-solving functionality while the PokerStars client is open is also strictly prohibited.

Of course, all of these databases can be used for studying and training purposes, but the PokerStars software must not be running when this occurs.

Third Party Result Tracking Services

There exists a range of services which collate and publish publicly available information, such as Sit & Go or multi-table tournament results. These services are permitted, providing they abide by the following policy:

- 1) No player profitability data (i.e. ROI, net profit, etc.) may be displayed on any player unless they have explicitly opted into such display.
- 2) No information may be displayed on any player if they explicitly choose to opt-out of such services.
- 3) Players may signify their options by contacting Customer Support stating their desire. These player options will be collated internally and periodically emailed (approximately weekly) to each service operator, who must action the player requests in a timely and accurate manner.*
- 4) Instructions on how players can opt-in and out of their service must be prominently displayed and accessible.
- 5) Any service operator found to be in violation of these rules risks having their access to the game clients restricted and/or their service impeded including, but not limited to, the warnings of players who access their service.

Any tool or service which collates information considered not to be publicly accessible, such as hand histories, cash game results or Spin & Go tournament results, is prohibited.

** Additional independent procedures may be created by each service operator if desired, but all services must adhere to this procedure at minimum.*

Gameplay Utility and Hotkey Scripts

Providing the script is not accessing any variables that are considered off limits and it is the end user that is still making the ultimate decision as to how to play their hand, efficiency-based utility and hotkey scripts are permitted.

Scripts may take into consideration any information that is extractable before the cards are dealt. This includes variables such as big blind size, effective stack size and absolute position.

In addition, scripts may also identify:

- The current street
- The current pot size
- The current bet size
- Whether the time bank button is visible

However, scripts may not take the following poker-related variables into consideration:

- Value of any visible cards, regardless of whether they are personal hole cards or community cards
- Relative position (in position / out of position vs the aggressor)
- Any player or opponent action throughout the hand

This means the following scripts would be **permitted**:

- Bets 65% of the pot if on the flop, 55% if on the turn, upon a single key press
- Enters 50% of the pot as the default bet amount
- Tiles tables based on big blind amount
- Raises 3xBB UTG and 2xBB on the button, upon a single key press

Similarly, the following scripts would be **prohibited**:

- Folds a player's cards if dealt a starting hand in the bottom 10% of starting hands
- Repositions a table if dealt a premium pair
- Makes the requested action after a specified time or within a specified time period
- Bets or raises a randomized amount
- Raises 9xBB if in position on the pre-flop raiser, 11xBB if out of position, upon a single key press
- Bets 70% of the pot if it is a two-toned flop, 50% if it is a rainbow flop, upon a single key press
- Raises 3xBB + 1xBB for every limper, upon a single key press

Reference Material – Starting Hand Charts, Trees, etc.

“Reference material” is defined for the purpose of this policy as any material designed to provide advice on what action to take in various poker scenarios.

Our intention is to permit simple starting hand charts that would help introduce a beginning player to basic strategy. We do not wish for players to be supplied with in-depth reference material, follow it blindly, and significantly improve their performance.

Firstly, regarding tools designed to ease referral to reference material:

- Any tool or feature designed specifically to ease referral to reference material is prohibited while the client is open, due to their likely use to ease access to prohibited reference material.
- The presentation of reference material to the user cannot be automated or semi-automated by the reading of any of the current game state. This includes information both before and after any cards are dealt. A tool that provides such a feature is considered to be a poker bot.

Reference material can:

- Only advise on what hand combinations to play or not play (or a mixture of both) in an "unopened pot"*.
- Distinguish advice based on position or stack size.
- Distinguish advice based on what card(s) of the user are in the hole and what cards are face-up.

**"Unopened pot" – a poker hand before any chips have been voluntarily added to the pot. That is, a call or raise not including forced blinds, ante or bring-ins.*

Reference material cannot:

- Distinguish between calling and raising.
- Advise on whether to play or not in opened pots.
- Recommend in what proportion to "play or not play" for any specific hand combination.
- Distinguish advice based on known opponent cards or community cards.

Furthermore, the entire content of any reference material must be able to be converted to a maximum of nine "13x13 chart matrices"* and each intersection only provide one of three possible advices in unopened pots: play, don't play, or a mixture of both (in an undefined proportion).

PokerStars at our sole discretion may advise that any specific, or similar, collection of reference material is prohibited for use while playing, even if the qualities of the material do not clearly breach the previously defined parameters. This will be in instances whereby we deem the material is not within the spirit of this policy.

**"13x13 chart matrix" – a table with 13 constant columns and 13 constant rows that, for this policy, can only represent card ranks, suits, or visibility.*

Game State Reporters

Game state reporters are tools that extract the current game state and present related information to the player.

Only the following are allowed to be extracted:

- Any information available before any cards are dealt.
- Running pot and bet sizes, but only to calculate:
 - The explicit pot odds
 - Stack/pot sizes for conversion to different units, such as big blinds
- Hole and community cards, but only to calculate:

- Absolute strength of a player's hand (e.g. "two pair, Jacks and Fives")
 - Percentage chance of making an absolute hand (e.g. "36.5% to make a flush before showdown")
- Percentage chance of winning against all possible hole cards (e.g. equity vs a random hand).
- Percentage chance of winning against a specific starting hand (e.g. all-in equity).

Game state reporters are also allowed to report prior actions throughout the current hand. For example, reporting on the following would all be permissible:

- Dead cards
- Action on prior streets
- Time to act values

However, there must be no analysis or interpretation of this data from the tool itself. The tool's functionality is to merely display data in an alternate form. No interpretation, commentary or advice can be given by the tool. For example, the following tools would be prohibited:

- Any that provide any type of advice, whether it be direct ("you should fold") or indirect ("this is a bad situation", "you are in the red zone").
- Any that display text in a different color dependent on whether a player's pot odds are greater or less than their equity against a random hand.
- Any that take a player's starting hand, refer to an internally defined starting hand chart and report back that it is in "zone 3" of a user-defined hand order; or even that it is in "group 2" of a publicly available hand grouping, such as the Sklansky and Malmuth hand groupings.

Player Tracking Databases and HUDs

We determine that there are two main components to these software packages:

- 1) The tracking application itself, that parses hand histories, stores information in a database and returns ad-hoc user-requested reports.
- 2) Heads-Up Displays (HUDs), that are the in-game retrieval of statistics of players currently at a table. This typically involves panels of information that are overlaid on top of the poker table itself, but does extend to include any information, whether it be an external window or otherwise, that includes information on players participating in the current playing session.

There are virtually no restrictions to what the tracking applications can do with the data in terms of what, how and when data is displayed, providing:

- the tracking application is not used to merely mimic the features of an otherwise prohibited HUD;
- the underlying data only contains information from hands in which the end-user personally participated in.*

This includes the editing of client player note files, per a user defined criteria, being acceptable providing this is not done in a real-time, HUD-replicating-like fashion.

**We do allow tracking applications to import a limited number of observed hand histories (up to 30 per playing session), in order to initialize HUD data prior to commencing play. This feature must be tightly controlled and not exploitable by end-users under any circumstances. Failure to ensure this will result in the prohibition of the tool.*

HUDs **may**:

- Display an unlimited number of numerical based statistics on the frequencies of specific actions having occurred by the respective player*, providing it is calculated from hands in which the end-user personally participated.
- Include “pop-up” based HUD functionality to further display additional statistics.
- Alter the color or font of an individual statistic based on two different thresholds. For example, a HUD may show a VPIP statistic in red if it is less than 20%, white if it is between 20%-30% and green if it is greater than 30%. However, the thresholds must be raw values and cannot be dynamically calculated or population-percentile based.

**Meaning statistics have to be raw counts of events occurring / count of event opportunities, and not adjusted by other information such as population-based tendencies.*

HUDs **may not**:

- Have statistics that are split based on card values. For example, AGGRESSION FREQUENCY is fine, AGGRESSION FREQUENCY ON FLUSH DRAW BOARDS is not. Similarly, COUNT OF AKO WHEN 3-BET would also be prohibited.
- Dynamically change based on any details of the current game state, aside from game format and opponent usernames. For example, altering statistics shown based on stack sizes or table position is prohibited.
- Dynamically change based on player/opponent tendencies. For example, displaying FOLD TO CBET but only for players that have high folds to continuation bets is prohibited.
- Rate, label, categorize or stereotype players based on their tendencies.
- Display graphical representations of more than one numerical data point. For example, bet size / hand strength scatter plots are prohibited but a 0-100 “temperature gauge” representation of a player’s VPIP is permitted.

- Display statistics or information that is not based upon the corresponding opponent's details. For example, displaying any hand chart is prohibited.

Table Selection and Seating Scripts

Table selection and seating scripts that merely navigate the poker lobby, specifically choosing individual tables or tournaments to play at, are permitted provided the filtration, sorting or joining are not based on any opponent details. Opponent details include, but are not limited to, gameplay statistics, winnings, categorizations and notes.

Any tool or service that adapts the user interface to merely display statistics on the players in the games, is permitted, providing these statistics are not obtained from a prohibited data source.

For example, the following table selection tools or seating scripts would be **permitted**:

- Any that automatically registers a user in the next available Spin & Go tournament, whenever the user's active Spin & Go tournaments is below a certain number.
- Any that automatically registers a user into ring games, that already have at least a certain number of players seated.
- Any that overlays on the PokerStars client average statistics of players in the games from hands played by the user.

For example, the following table selection tools or seating scripts would be **prohibited**:

- Any that time a user's registration into a global waiting list, such as those that exist for Spin & Go's, in order to avoid other classes of players.
- Any that automatically registers a user into ring games, that already have at least a certain number of players seated and at least half of whom are classified as "weak" by whatever means.
- Any that sort the available games in order of favorability, as determined by the details of registered or seated opponents.
- Any that will join a heads-up Sit & Go provided the opponent is not on a list of players to avoid.
- Any that automates an alert to the user when specific opponent(s), or a given number of opponents on a list, are playing.

Hand or Situation Analyzers

Tools that either analyze specific hand histories or allow the creation of a user-defined situation, in order to run simulations or comparisons against player models are prohibited whilst the client is open. That is, the following calculations are prohibited from being accessed whilst the client is open:

- a specific hand's equity vs a non-random range of hands
- a range of hand's equity vs another range of hands
- the distributed strength of a hand on all possible flop combinations
- a Nash equilibrium solution of a specific scenario
- the EV comparison of different player decisions
- the ICM equity of specific tournament situations*
- how a player model or AI engine would have played a particular hand or situation

**A one-off ICM calculation of current chip stack to tournament equity in order to facilitate a tournament deal is permitted*

The Use of Artificial Intelligence

The use of any Artificial Intelligence (AI) model or AI-powered tool while playing poker on PokerStars is prohibited where the user provides information about an active game and requests advice, recommendations, or guidance on what action to take.

The use of AI to create, develop, modify, or assist with any tool that violates our rules is also strictly prohibited. For example, using an AI tool to develop a poker bot, including as a personal or experimental project, is not permitted.

Remote Control Software, Virtual Machines and Virtual Private Networks

The use of any type of remote-control software, virtual machines or virtual private networks are not strictly prohibited in themselves. However, if we believe any of these tools are being used for the purposes of masking a violation of our rules, or of circumventing our detection methods, we will consider them to be prohibited tools in themselves.

This means we would take strong action on any account using any of these tools if there is no obvious legitimate reason why they are being used. This would include permanent bans and potentially confiscation of any funds.

Screensharing, Screen Recording and Screenshotting Software

We do not prohibit the use of screen sharing, screen recording, or screen capture software in itself. We recognize that legitimate players may have valid reasons for using these types of software while playing online poker.

However, these tools may also be used to facilitate breaches of our rules, including by enabling another person to view the game, provide assistance, or otherwise contribute to prohibited activity.

Where we determine that any of these tools are being used as a means to cheat, assist cheating, or circumvent our rules, we will treat their use as a prohibited activity and may take action against the account.

Frequently Asked Questions

You no longer have a list of permitted and prohibited programs on your website. Why is this?

The list of tools on our website was never exhaustive, our intention was never to have a complete list, and there were also some tools that were used very infrequently. With the changing landscape of how software is provided and consumed, we took the decision to remove the lists from our website.

Do you provide an API to developers to pass game state data to third party tools?

No. Extracting relevant information is a programming challenge developers need to overcome independently.

Can I restrict prohibited in real-time functionality in order to be permitted at all times?

Some developers do not wish to be labelled as prohibited whilst the client is open or have their players warned upon misuse of their software. They have enabled functionality to disable certain features that may be in violation of our rules when the PokerStars software is running. We have decided to warn any players who use a tool that has prohibited functionality irrespective of whether that functionality is disabled. This is a change in policy and we do not foresee any major impact on players.

Disclaimer

In order to maintain a fair playing environment, our policies are subject to review and change at any time. Whilst we look to notify the public of any significant changes, it is each player's own responsibility to keep track of our most up-to-date policies, which are available on our website, located at: <http://www.pokerstars.com/poker/room/prohibited/>

In case of disputes, management decision will be final.