THE SLOT PLAYER'S FIELD MANUAL

NO. 01

SLOT SMART



CLOSE IS NOT A WIN. CHAPTER 4 EXPLAINS WHY.

The field manual for longer sessions, better comps, and fewer regrets

TONY CASINO

14 RULES · HOST SCRIPTS
PRE-SIT CHECKLIST

READ THIS FIRST

This manual will not teach you how to beat a slot machine, because nobody can. Every modern slot is built to keep a fixed share of the money played through it over time, and no system, timing trick, or betting pattern changes that.

What this manual will do is make you the most informed person at the bank of machines. You will know how the game actually decides outcomes, which machines quietly cost more to play, how to make the same bankroll last two or three times longer, and how to get the casino to give back more of what you spend in free play, rooms, and meals.

That is the real edge available to a slot player. It is not about winning more often. It is about losing less per hour, enjoying more hours, and walking away with more of what you came with.

DISCLAIMER

This book is for entertainment and educational purposes only. Gambling involves risk of financial loss. Nothing in these pages guarantees a profit or improves the mathematical odds of any game. Payback percentages, rules, and comp policies vary by casino, state, and country, and can change at any time. Always check the rules where you play. The author and publisher are not responsible for any losses incurred.

PLAY WITH A PLAN, NOT A PROBLEM

Set your limit before you leave home and never chase losses. If gambling stops being fun, starts costing money you need, or becomes something you hide, reach out for confidential help. In the US, call or text **1-800-GAMBLER**. Outside the US, search for your country's national gambling helpline.

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HOW TO USE THIS MANUAL

The book is built in three parts and a bonus kit.

Part 1, The Invisible Machine, explains what is happening inside the cabinet. Read it once and the myths stop working on you.

Part 2, The Machine Audit, teaches you to size up any machine before you put money in it.

Part 3, The Longevity and Comps System, turns that knowledge into a session plan: how much to bring, how fast to play, and when to leave.

The Bonus Kit gives you word-for-word scripts for talking to casino hosts, a guide to status matching, a free play strategy, and the 30-Second Pre-Sit Checklist you can print or save to your phone.

> **If you only have ten minutes before your next trip, read Chapter 13 and the checklist. Then come back for the rest.**

INTRODUCTION

THE PLAYER WHO ALWAYS SEEMS TO GET MORE

Every casino has them. They play the same machines as everyone else, yet their sessions last longer, their offers arrive in the mail every month, and they seem oddly calm whether the screen is flashing or not.

They are not luckier. They simply understand three things most players never learn.

NO MEMORY, NO MOOD

The machine is not hot, cold, due, or tight tonight. Once you truly believe this, you stop making the expensive decisions that come from superstition.

NOT ALL MACHINES COST THE SAME

Two games that look nearly identical can differ in their long-run cost by a factor of two or more. Choosing well is the single biggest lever you control.

THE CASINO KEEPS SCORE

Your player card records how much you play, and the casino uses that number to decide what to give back. Players who understand the scoring get more back for the same play.

The rest of this manual is those three ideas, unpacked into rules you can actually use on the floor.

PART ONE

THE INVISIBLE MACHINE

The spinning reels are a show. The real game happens on a computer chip inside the cabinet, and it finishes before the first reel moves.

Ch. 01 The Chip Behind the Reels

Ch. 02 The Machine Is Never Due

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Ch. 04 Virtual Reels and the Near-Miss Illusion

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CHAPTER 01

THE CHIP BEHIND THE REELS

THE CORE IDEA

Every outcome is decided by a random number generator (RNG) the instant you press spin. Nothing you do after that moment, and nothing that happened before it, changes the result.

WHAT AN RNG ACTUALLY IS

A modern slot runs a program called a pseudo-random number generator. It is a mathematical formula that produces a long, unpredictable stream of numbers. "Pseudo" means the numbers come from a formula rather than from something physical like dice, but the sequence is so long and so scrambled that it behaves as random for every practical purpose. Gaming regulators and independent test labs check these programs before a machine is allowed on the floor.

IT NEVER STOPS RUNNING

The RNG does not wait for you. It keeps generating numbers constantly, many times per second, whether anyone is sitting at the machine or not. When you press spin, the machine grabs the number (or set of numbers) produced at that exact instant and translates it into reel positions.

That has two big consequences.

1. **Timing is meaningless.** A press a fraction of a second earlier or later would have pulled a completely different number. No human can time a button press to land on a winner.
2. **The person who "took your jackpot" did not.** If you leave a machine and someone else hits a jackpot on it minutes later, you would not have hit it. They pressed at a moment you never would have matched.

WHAT THE SPIN ANIMATION IS FOR

The outcome is locked in at the press. The reels spinning, slowing, and stopping one by one is theater. It is designed to build anticipation. Stopping the reels early with a second tap does not change anything either. It only speeds up the show.

MYTHS THIS CHAPTER KILLS

MYTH	REALITY
Hitting spin at the right rhythm helps	The RNG cycles far faster than any human reaction
Stopping the reels early changes the result	The result was fixed before the reels moved
Machines pay more at certain times of day	The math is the same at 3 a.m. and 9 p.m.
Using a player card makes the machine pay less	The card records your play; it is not connected to the RNG
Cash plays better than tickets, or vice versa	The machine does not know or care how credits were loaded

RULE 01

Never spend money or time on a ritual meant to influence the outcome. Spend that energy on choices that actually matter: which machine, how much, how fast, and when to leave.

CHAPTER 02

THE MACHINE IS NEVER DUE

THE CORE IDEA

Every spin is independent. A machine that has not paid in an hour is exactly as likely to pay on the next spin as one that just hit.

THE GAMBLER'S FALLACY

The gambler's fallacy is the belief that past results change future odds. Flip a fair coin and get five heads in a row, and most people feel tails is now "due." It is not. The coin has no memory. The odds on the sixth flip are still 50/50.

A slot machine is the same, only more extreme. The RNG has no record of what it produced last time and no target it is trying to hit tonight.

WHERE THE "DUE" FEELING COMES FROM

Part of it comes from a real fact that gets misunderstood. Every machine is set to pay back a certain percentage over its lifetime, often hundreds of thousands or millions of spins. Players hear "it pays back 90%" and assume it must catch up soon if it has been stingy. But that percentage is a long-run average, not a schedule. A machine can run well below its average for thousands of spins, or well above it, and still be working exactly as designed.

HOT AND COLD MACHINES

You will hear players swear a machine is hot. What they are seeing is ordinary randomness. Random results come in streaks and clumps, and human brains are built to find patterns in them. A run of wins is not evidence that more wins are coming.

THE COSTLY BEHAVIORS IT CREATES

- Staying on a losing machine "because it has to hit soon"
- Raising your bet after a dry stretch to catch the payoff
- Hovering near someone else's machine waiting for them to leave
- Feeling robbed when a machine you left later pays someone else

RULE 02 **Judge a machine only by what it is (its denomination, paytable, and volatility), never by what it has recently done.**

CHAPTER 03

LOSSES DISGUISED AS WINS

THE CORE IDEA

Many modern machines celebrate results that actually lose you money. Learning to spot them is one of the fastest ways to see your real session clearly.

WHAT A LOSS DISGUISED AS A WIN LOOKS LIKE

You bet $2.00 on a 40-line video slot. Three lines pay, for a total of $0.60. The machine flashes, plays a winning jingle, and the credit meter ticks up. It feels like a win. It is actually a $1.40 loss.

THE SPIN	AMOUNT
Total bet	$2.00
"Win" celebrated on screen	$0.60
Actual result	**−$1.40**

Researchers in Canada studying multi-line slots found that players' bodies react to these fake wins much like they react to real ones, and that players tend to overestimate how often they are winning. That matters, because your gut is your main sense of how a session is going.

WHY MACHINES ARE BUILT THIS WAY

Frequent small payouts keep the session feeling active and rewarding. The lights and sound effects create a steady stream of small hits of excitement. None of this is illegal or hidden. It is design. Your job is simply to read the meter, not the music.

THE 10-SPIN REALITY CHECK

THE 10-SPIN REALITY CHECK

Here is a simple habit that cuts through the noise. Every 10 spins, glance at your credit meter and compare it to where it was 10 spins ago. Ignore the celebrations in between.

WHAT YOU SEE AFTER 10 SPINS	WHAT IT TELLS YOU
Meter is up	A genuine short-term win. Consider banking some of it (Chapter 14)
Meter is roughly flat	Normal play. Continue within your plan
Meter is down sharply	Normal for higher-volatility games. Check you are still within your session budget

An important note: this check is not a way to tell if a machine is about to pay. Ten bad spins do not mean a machine is cold, and ten good spins do not mean it is hot (see Chapter 2). The check exists to keep you honest about your actual spending, so you make decisions based on money, not excitement.

RULE 03

A win is only a win if the payout is bigger than your total bet. Everything else is a smaller loss with a soundtrack.

CHAPTER 04

VIRTUAL REELS AND THE NEAR-MISS ILLUSION

THE CORE IDEA

The reels you see do not show the true odds. The symbols that seem to land "just above" or "just below" the payline are often far more common than the ones you need.

PHYSICAL STOPS VS. VIRTUAL STOPS

An old mechanical reel might have 22 physical positions: 11 symbols and 11 blank spaces. If every stop were equally likely, the odds of three jackpot symbols would be about 1 in 10,648 (22 x 22 x 22). Jackpots that large could never be offered at those odds.

So modern machines use a virtual reel. Inside the computer, each reel might have 64, 128, or even more virtual stops. Each virtual stop is mapped to one of the physical positions you see. The jackpot symbol might be mapped to just one virtual stop, while the blanks next to it are mapped to many.

ILLUSTRATION: ONE REEL WITH 128 VIRTUAL STOPS

PHYSICAL POSITION	VIRTUAL STOPS	CHANCE PER SPIN
Jackpot symbol	1 of 128	0.8%
Blank just above jackpot	8 of 128	6.3%
Blank just below jackpot	8 of 128	6.3%
Cherry	5 of 128	3.9%
All other positions	106 of 128	82.8%

This is an illustration, not a real machine's settings, but the principle is how virtual reels work. With one jackpot stop out of 128 on each of three reels, the odds of lining up three are about 1 in 2.1 million.

WHY NEAR MISSES FEEL SO CLOSE

Because the blanks surrounding the top symbol are weighted heavily, you will often see the jackpot symbol sitting just off the payline. It looks like you almost won. In reality, you were never close. That position is simply common.

Rules on near-miss design vary by jurisdiction, and regulators restrict how far machines can go in creating them. But the effect of reel weighting itself is legal and widespread.

ON VIDEO SLOTS

Video slots do not need physical reels at all, so the same idea shows up differently. Bonus symbols may appear on the first two reels far more often than on the third. Two scatter symbols and a dramatic slow-down on reel three is the video version of the near miss.

RULE 04 **A near miss is not a sign you are close. Treat it like any other losing spin.**

CHAPTER 05

THE VOLATILITY SPECTRUM

THE CORE IDEA

Two machines with the same payback percentage can feel completely different to play. Volatility is how the machine spreads its payouts, and choosing the right level for your bankroll is one of the smartest moves you can make.

WHAT VOLATILITY MEANS

Volatility (also called variance) describes the shape of the payouts.

- **Low volatility** machines pay small amounts often. Your bankroll moves slowly up and down.
- **High volatility** machines pay rarely, but when they do, the amounts can be large. Your bankroll can drain fast, then jump.

Neither is better in the long run. They are different experiences with different risks.

THE FOUR TIERS

TIER	TYPICAL GAMES	HOW SESSIONS FEEL	BEST FOR
Low	Simple video slots with many small line hits; many classic penny themes	Steady, long, few big swings	Small bankrolls, long sessions, comp building
Medium	Most mainstream video slots with free-spin bonuses	Mix of dry spells and moderate wins	Most recreational players
High	Big-bonus video slots, many classic 3-reel jackpot games	Long dry spells, occasional big hits	Larger bankrolls, short sessions, jackpot chasers
Extreme	Hold-and-spin and "link" style games with stacked jackpots	Very long dry spells, rare dramatic bonuses	Only bankrolls that can absorb fast losses

HOW TO READ VOLATILITY ON THE FLOOR

Casinos rarely post volatility, so you read it from clues.

1. **Top award size.** The bigger the top prize relative to your bet, the higher the volatility.
2. **Paytable spread.** Lots of small pays near the bottom of the table point to lower volatility. A thin table with a few huge pays points higher.
3. **Bonus dependence.** If most of the excitement and the payouts live in a bonus round, expect higher volatility.
4. **The 20-spin feel.** Over a short trial, frequent small hits suggest low volatility. Many blank spins in a row suggest high.

HOLD-AND-SPIN GAMES DESERVE SPECIAL CAUTION

Hold-and-spin (lock-it, link-style) games are among the most popular machines on any floor. They are also among the most volatile. A large share of their return is packed into a bonus feature that you may not trigger for hundreds of spins. Sessions on these games can drain quickly, so size your bankroll accordingly (Chapter 13).

MATCHING VOLATILITY TO YOUR GOALS

YOUR GOAL	CHOOSE
Play as long as possible on a set budget	Low
Earn comps steadily	Low to medium
A balance of time and excitement	Medium
A shot at a big hit, accepting a short session	High

RULE 05

Decide what kind of session you want before you sit down, then choose the volatility that matches. Never let the theme or the sounds choose for you.

PART TWO

THE MACHINE AUDIT

Choosing the machine is the biggest decision you make all night, and most players make it in two seconds based on a theme they like.

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Ch. 07 How to Read a Paytable in 30 Seconds

Ch. 08 Max Bet Traps

Ch. 09 Classic 3-Reels vs. Modern Video Cabinets

Ch. 10 Progressive Jackpots and the Contribution Tax

CHAPTER 06

DENOMINATION ECONOMICS

THE CORE IDEA

As a rule, the higher the denomination, the smaller the share of each bet the casino keeps. Penny slots are the most expensive slots on the floor per dollar wagered.

WHAT "HOLD" MEANS

Hold (or win percentage) is the share of every dollar wagered that the casino keeps over time. Payback, or return to player (RTP), is the flip side. A machine that holds 10% pays back 90%.

That 10% does not sound like much until you remember that you re-bet the same money over and over. Run $100 through a 10% machine and you expect to lose $10. Run your credits through it 10 times in a session (very easy on a fast video slot) and you have wagered $1,000, with an expected loss of $100.

WHAT THE REAL NUMBERS SHOW

Nevada is one of the few places that publishes slot results by denomination. These are statewide figures for 2023 as reported from Nevada Gaming Control Board data.

DENOMINATION	CASINO HOLD (2023)	PAYBACK TO PLAYERS	EXPECTED LOSS PER $1,000 WAGERED
Penny	9.67%	90.33%	$96.70
Quarter	7.99%	92.01%	$79.90
Dollar	6.39%	93.61%	$63.90
$5	5.11%	94.89%	$51.10

The pattern holds year after year. In 2024, pennies again held the most (9.36%), and $5

machines the least (4.46%). Two cautions: higher-denomination figures include video poker, which tends to pay back more, and every casino and state is different. Use the pattern, not the exact decimals.

Sources: Las Vegas Then and Now, denomination data · Las Vegas Review-Journal, 2023 results · Las Vegas Review-Journal, 2024 results

THE "PENNY" MACHINE IS RARELY A PENNY

A penny machine with 50 lines and a 5-credit-per-line minimum is a $2.50 bet. Many players bet $1 to $3 per spin on pennies while believing they are playing cheaply. They are paying penny-machine hold on quarter-machine money.

THE DENOMINATE-UP RULE

If you routinely bet 75 cents or more per spin on a penny machine, consider moving that same bet to a higher-denomination machine. You give up some of the bonus-round entertainment, but the long-run cost of your play usually drops.

YOUR PENNY HABIT	SAME BET ON	WHY
$0.75 per spin	3 credits on a quarter machine	Lower typical hold
$1.00 per spin	1 credit on a dollar machine	Lower typical hold
$3.00 per spin	3 credits on a dollar machine	Lower typical hold
$5.00 per spin	1 credit on a $5 machine	Among the lowest holds on the floor

RULE 06

Look at the dollars per spin, not the denomination on the glass. If your bet is big enough to move up, move up.

QUARTER 07

CHAPTER 07

HOW TO READ A PAYTABLE IN 30 SECONDS

THE CORE IDEA

The paytable is the machine's instruction manual. A quick scan tells you what your bet really is, which symbols matter, and what you must do to qualify for the top prizes.

Most players never open it. That is exactly why it gives you an edge in decision-making.

THE 30-SECOND SCAN

Open the help or paytable screen (usually an "i," "?," or "Pays" button) and look for five things.

1. **Minimum and maximum bet.** What does one spin actually cost at the lowest setting that still gives you full access to the game's features?
2. **Lines or ways.** Is it fixed lines (you must play them all), selectable lines, or "ways to win" (often 243 or 1,024)? Fixed lines and ways games set your real minimum bet.
3. **Bonus triggers.** What triggers the bonus, and does it require a certain bet level? Some games only award certain features or jackpots at higher bets.
4. **Top award requirements.** Is the top prize available at every bet, or only at max bet? (Chapter 8 covers this in detail.)
5. **Posted RTP, if shown.** Some jurisdictions and newer games display a theoretical return in the help screens. If you see it, use it.

DEAD SYMBOLS AND DEAD BET LEVELS

On some games, part of the paytable is effectively off-limits at lower bets. A jackpot symbol that only pays when a certain bet level is active is a dead symbol at lower bets. Many progressive and "link" games work this way. If you play below the qualifying

level, you are paying for a game in which the most valuable prizes cannot reach you.

PAYTABLE RED FLAGS

WHAT YOU SEE	WHAT IT MEANS
Jackpots shown only at highest bet	Lower bets play a weaker game
Large minimum bet on fixed lines	Your true cost per spin is high
Most value is in a bonus, few line pays	Higher volatility, faster bankroll swings
Several feature levels tied to bet size	Small bets get a stripped-down experience

RULE 07 **Never play a machine whose rules you could not explain in one sentence. If you cannot, open the paytable first.**

CHAPTER 08

MAX BET TRAPS

THE CORE IDEA

"Always bet max" is old advice that is sometimes right and often expensive. The answer depends on how the machine rewards extra coins.

WHEN MAX BET MATTERS

Some machines give a disproportionate reward for betting the maximum. Common examples:

- **Classic multiplier 3-reels with a jackpot bonus.** One coin pays 1,000 for the top symbol, two coins pay 2,000, but three coins pay 10,000. That jump makes the max-coin version a better game.
- **Progressive jackpots that require max bet.** If you are not betting max, you are contributing to a jackpot you cannot win.

contributing to a jackpot you cannot win.

- **"Buy-a-pay" machines.** Each extra coin unlocks a new set of winning symbols. Playing fewer coins means some wins pay nothing.

COINS PLAYED	TOP AWARD	PER COIN
1 coin	1,000	1,000
2 coins	2,000	1,000
3 coins (max)	**10,000**	**3,333**

WHEN MAX BET WASTES MONEY

On many modern video slots, betting more simply multiplies every payout evenly. A $5 spin pays exactly five times what a $1 spin pays on the same outcome. The game's return is essentially the same at every bet level. Betting max there does not improve your odds or your return. It just speeds up your losses (and your comp earnings) at the same rate.

THE DECISION TABLE

MACHINE TYPE	BET MAX?
Top award jumps disproportionately at max coin	Yes, or choose a lower-denomination machine where max is affordable
Progressive requires max to qualify	Yes, or skip the machine
Buy-a-pay with locked symbols	Yes, or skip the machine
Video slot with proportional payouts	No. Bet the level that fits your bankroll

THE SMART ALTERNATIVE

If a machine rewards max bet but max bet is too rich for you, do not play it at a lower bet. Find the same style of game at a lower denomination where you can afford max. A three-coin quarter machine ($0.75) usually beats a one-coin dollar machine on a game that rewards max coin.

RULE 08

Bet max only when the paytable rewards it. Otherwise, choose the bet that fits your plan.

CHAPTER 09

CLASSIC 3-REELS VS. MODERN VIDEO CABINETS

THE CORE IDEA

The two big families of slots offer very different experiences, costs, and volatility. Neither is better. Pick the one that fits your goal for the session.

SIDE BY SIDE

FEATURE	CLASSIC 3-REEL	MODERN VIDEO SLOT
Typical lines	1 to 9	20 to 100+, or 243+ ways
Common bet size	1 to 3 credits	Often 40 to 500+ credits
Hit frequency	Lower	Higher (many are losses disguised as wins)
Volatility	Often high	Ranges from low to extreme
Bonus rounds	Rare or simple	Central to the game
Speed	Fewer spins per hour	Fast, especially with quick-stop
Max bet relevance	Often important	Often irrelevant
Paytable clarity	Simple, easy to evaluate	Complex, many hidden rules

WHO EACH ONE SUITS

CLASSIC 3-REELS

Choose them if you want simple rules, clear

VIDEO SLOTS

Choose them if you want entertainment.

paytables, the possibility of better returns at higher denominations, and you are comfortable with long dry spells.

frequent action, and bonus features, and you are willing to accept a typically higher hold, especially at the penny level.

A HYBRID APPROACH

Many smart players split their session. They spend most of their bankroll on a lower-hold machine they understand well, and set aside a smaller "fun envelope" for the flashy video games they enjoy. That way they get the entertainment without letting the most expensive machines eat the whole budget.

RULE 09 **Pay for entertainment on purpose. Spend most of your budget where it lasts longest, and a defined slice on pure fun.**

CHAPTER 10

PROGRESSIVE JACKPOTS AND THE CONTRIBUTION TAX

THE CORE IDEA

A slice of every bet on a progressive goes into the jackpot meter. That slice comes out of the base game, so unless you can win the jackpot, you are paying for a prize you cannot reach.

HOW PROGRESSIVES WORK

A progressive jackpot grows with every bet placed. Some are local (one machine or one bank). Others are wide-area progressives that link machines across many casinos and can reach millions of dollars.

To fund the growing meter, the machine diverts a small percentage of each wager. The

base game pays back less to make up for it. Only the jackpot winner gets that money back, and wide-area jackpots are extremely rare.

THE CONTRIBUTION TAX IN PLAIN TERMS

Think of it this way. If a portion of every bet is going to the meter, you are effectively paying a jackpot tax on every spin. If you are betting below the qualifying level, you pay the tax and get nothing for it.

THREE TYPES OF PROGRESSIVES

TYPE	JACKPOT SIZE	ODDS OF HITTING	BASE GAME
Standalone (one machine)	Smaller	Better	Moderate cost
Local bank	Medium	Moderate	Moderate cost
Wide-area	Very large	Extremely long	Usually the highest cost to play

WHEN A PROGRESSIVE MAKES SENSE

You can afford the full qualifying bet for your entire session. You understand the base game will likely pay back less than a comparable non-progressive. You are playing for the dream of a life-changing hit and accept the price of that dream.

WHEN TO SKIP

You cannot afford the qualifying bet. Your goal is time on device or comps. You are on a tight bankroll.

RULE 10

Only play a progressive at the bet that qualifies for the jackpot. If you cannot afford that, play something else.

PART THREE

3

THE LONGEVITY & COMPS SYSTEM

How the casino scores you, how fast your money really burns, how to split your bankroll, and exactly when to stand up.

Ch. 11 The Theoretical Loss (Theo) Formula

Ch. 12 Spin Speed and Burn Rate

Ch. 13 Session Bankroll Architecture

Ch. 14 The Walk-Away Protocol

CHAPTER 11

THE THEORETICAL LOSS (THEO) FORMULA

THE CORE IDEA

The casino does not reward you for what you actually lose. It rewards you for what you are expected to lose, a number called your theoretical loss, or theo.

WHY THE CASINO USES THEO

If comps were based on actual losses, a lucky winner would get nothing and an unlucky loser would get a fortune, and both would be equally valuable customers. Theo smooths out luck. It measures how much play you gave the casino.

THE FORMULA

$$\text{Theo} = \text{Average Bet} \times \text{Spins per Hour} \times \text{Hours Played} \times \text{House Hold}$$

The player tracking system records your bets and time automatically every time your card is inserted.

A WORKED EXAMPLE

You play a penny video slot at $1.50 per spin, about 600 spins per hour, for 3 hours. The machine holds 9%.

STEP	MATH	RESULT
Total wagered	$1.50 × 600 × 3	$2,700
Theo	$2,700 × 0.09	**$243**

Whether you actually walk out up $200 or down $400, the casino rates that session at

roughly $243 of value.

WHAT THEO TURNS INTO

Casinos return a portion of your theo as comps, free play, room offers, and food credits. That portion varies widely by property and by player tier. A common rough expectation is that a modest fraction comes back, not the majority. If your theo was $243, do not expect $243 in comps. Expect a slice of it.

HOW TO USE THEO TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

1. **Always use your player card.** Unrated play earns nothing. Insert the card before your first spin and leave it in.
2. **Understand that slow play lowers theo, and that is fine.** Your goal is entertainment per dollar, not the highest possible theo.
3. **Concentrate play.** Comps and tier status build faster at one or two casino brands than scattered across many.
4. **Track your own numbers.** Write down your coin-in (total wagered) and time for each session. When you talk to a host (Bonus section), you will know your value.

RULE 11 **Comps are a rebate on expected loss, not a reward for winning. Never play more to earn a comp you would not otherwise have earned.**

CHAPTER 12

SPIN SPEED AND BURN RATE

THE CORE IDEA

The single biggest factor in how fast you lose money is not the machine, the bet, or your luck. It is how many spins you take per hour.

THE BURN RATE FORMULA

Expected Hourly Loss = Bet per Spin × Spins per Hour × House Hold

WHAT YOUR HOUR ACTUALLY COSTS

The table below uses 500 spins per hour, a steady video-slot pace, and the 2023 Nevada penny hold of 9.67% (Chapter 6).

BET PER SPIN	WAGERED PER HOUR	EXPECTED LOSS PER HOUR
$0.40	$200	$19.34
$0.88	$440	$42.55
$1.50	$750	$72.53
$2.50	$1,250	$120.88
$5.00	$2,500	$241.75

Now compare a $3.00 bet both ways. On a penny machine at 9.67%, 500 spins cost about $145 per hour. On a dollar machine at the 2023 dollar hold of 6.39%, the same bet and pace cost about $96 per hour. Same money, same speed, roughly a third less expected cost.

THE SPEED LEVER

Modern video slots can run 600 to 800 or more spins per hour if you play fast and use quick-stop. Slow down and the expected cost drops in direct proportion.

PACE	SPINS PER HOUR	LOSS PER HOUR AT $1.50, 9.67% HOLD
Rushed (quick-stop, no pauses)	800	$116.04
Typical	500	$72.53
Relaxed	350	**$50.77**

Relaxed	350	$50.77

The same bankroll lasts more than twice as long at a relaxed pace as at a rushed one.

WAYS TO SLOW DOWN WITHOUT FEELING BORED

- Let the reels spin out. Skip the quick-stop tap.
- Take a short break every 30 minutes. Stretch, get water, check your envelope.
- Watch the bonus animations instead of skipping them.
- Talk to the people you came with.
- Never use auto-play features.

RULE 12 **Speed is a bet multiplier. If you want more time for the same money, slow down before you bet down.**

CHAPTER 13

SESSION BANKROLL ARCHITECTURE

THE CORE IDEA

Decide how much you will spend before you see a machine. Divide it into envelopes, set a win goal and a stop-loss, and let the plan make decisions for you when emotions run high.

STEP 1: SET THE TRIP BANKROLL

This is money you can lose completely without affecting rent, bills, savings, or your peace of mind. If you would be upset to lose it, it is not gambling money.

STEP 2: SPLIT INTO SESSIONS

STEP 2: SPLIT INTO SESSIONS

Divide the trip bankroll by the number of sessions you plan. A 3-day trip with 2 sessions per day has 6 sessions. A $600 trip bankroll becomes $100 per session.

STEP 3: THE 3-ENVELOPE RULE

Use three physical envelopes (or three clearly separate pockets or wallet sections).

1. PLAY

This session's bankroll only.

EMPTY = SESSION OVER

2. RESERVE

Future sessions' money.

NEVER TOUCHED MID-SESSION

3. BANKED

Winnings you have locked in.

NEVER GOES BACK IN A MACHINE THIS TRIP

The banked envelope is the one most players skip, and it is the one that changes results. Money that never goes back in a machine cannot be lost to one.

STEP 4: SIZE YOUR BET TO YOUR VOLATILITY

The right bet is the one that gives your session bankroll enough spins to ride out normal swings. A useful rule of thumb:

VOLATILITY	SESSION BANKROLL SHOULD COVER	$100 SESSION MEANS A BET OF ABOUT
Low	100 bets	$1.00
Medium	200 bets	$0.50
High	300 bets	$0.33
Extreme (hold-and-spin)	400+ bets	$0.25 or less

If the minimum bet on a game is too large for this guide, the game is too volatile for your bankroll. Pick another one.

STEP 5: SET YOUR STOP-LOSS

STEP 5: SET YOUR STOP-LOSS

Your stop-loss is the empty Play envelope. There is no "one more twenty from the reserve." Pulling from the reserve is how a $100 session becomes a $400 session.

STEP 6: SET YOUR WIN GOAL

Pick a realistic target before you start. A common choice is 50% of the session bankroll. On a $100 session, that is $50 in profit. When you hit it, you trigger the Walk-Away Protocol in Chapter 14.

A SAMPLE SESSION PLAN

ITEM	EXAMPLE
Trip bankroll	$600
Sessions	6
Session bankroll (Play envelope)	$100
Machine type	Medium volatility video slot
Bet	$0.50
Pace	Relaxed, about 350 spins per hour
Expected cost per hour at 9.67% hold	About $17
Stop-loss	Play envelope empty
Win goal	+$50

RULE 13 **Your plan is made at home, when you are calm. On the floor, your only job is to follow it.**

THE WALK-AWAY PROTOCOL

THE CORE IDEA

Every slot has a built-in edge, so the longer you keep playing, the more your results tend to drift toward the expected loss. A win only becomes real money when you stop putting it back in.

WHY LEAVING MATTERS MORE THAN WINNING

This is not about a machine "turning cold." As Chapter 2 showed, machines do not have moods. It is about simple math. Each spin carries a small expected loss. A lucky streak puts you ahead of that expectation, but every additional spin adds more expected loss on top. Keep playing long enough and the edge tends to wear the lead down. The only reliable way to keep a short-term win is to stop exposing it.

THE PROTOCOL

1. **Hit your win goal, cash out a ticket.** The moment your credits reach your session bankroll plus your win goal, press cash out. Take the ticket in hand. This creates a physical pause.
2. **Bank the original stake and half the profit.** Put your original session bankroll and half of the winnings in the Banked envelope.
3. **Play only the other half, if you want to.** Keep playing with half your profit as free-roll money, at the same bet size or lower.
4. **Set a floor.** If the free-roll money is gone, the session is over. You still leave with your full stake plus half your profit.
5. **Ratchet up on further wins.** If the free-roll money doubles, bank half of it again and repeat.

THE RATCHET IN ACTION

THE RATCHET IN ACTION

MOMENT	CREDITS ON MACHINE	BANKED ENVELOPE	STATUS
Start	$100	$0	Session bankroll in play
Win goal hit	$150	$0	Cash out ticket
After banking	$25	$125	Playing $25 free-roll
Free-roll doubles	$50	$125	Bank half again
After banking	$25	$150	Playing $25 free-roll
Free-roll lost	$0	**$150**	**Session ends, up $50**

THE BIG-HIT RULE

If you hit something significantly larger than your win goal (a bonus that pays several times your session bankroll), end the session. Cash out, bank everything, and take a real break. A large win is the moment players most often give money back, because the credits on the meter stop feeling like real money.

WALKING AWAY WHEN YOU ARE LOSING

The protocol also covers bad nights. When your Play envelope is empty, you stand up. You do not move to a "luckier" machine with reserve money. You did nothing wrong. You had a normal losing session and you kept it contained.

RULE 14

Cash out early, bank often, and let the ticket in your pocket decide when you are done, not the lights on the screen.

THE BONUS KIT

THE CASINO COMP BLUEPRINT

Most players accept whatever the casino mails them.
Informed players ask, compare, and convert.

Part A How the Comp System Works

Part B Meeting a Host (Scripts 1 to 5)

Part C Tier Status Matching (Script 6)

Part D Free Play Conversion Guide

Part E Read Your Mail Offers

BONUS KIT

GET MORE BACK FOR THE SAME PLAY

This blueprint shows you how to get more back for the same play, with exact words to use.

> **One principle runs through all of it: comps are a rebate on play you would have done anyway. Never increase your gambling to chase a comp. A $50 dinner is a terrible deal if it costs you an extra $150 in expected loss.**

PART A

HOW THE COMP SYSTEM WORKS

There are three main layers of rewards at most casinos.

LAYER	WHAT IT IS	HOW YOU GET IT
Points	Earned automatically as you play with your card	Redeem at the players club for free play, food, or merchandise
Tier status	Your level in the loyalty program (names vary by brand)	Based on total points earned in a period
Discretionary comps	Rooms, meals, show tickets, travel	Awarded by hosts or club staff based on your theo

Points and tiers are mostly automatic. Discretionary comps are where conversations with people matter, and where most players leave value on the table.

PART B

MEETING A HOST

A casino host's job is to keep valuable players happy and coming back. Hosts have discretion over comps, and building a relationship with one is the single best way to improve what you receive.

WHEN YOU QUALIFY

There is no universal threshold. As a rough guide, if you play regularly and your sessions involve a few hundred dollars or more of total wagering, it is worth asking whether you can be assigned a host. Higher-tier members usually get one automatically.

SCRIPT 1: ASKING FOR A HOST

AT THE PLAYERS CLUB DESK

"Hi, I'm here for a few days and play slots pretty regularly. Is there a host I could be introduced to, or is my play at a level where I'd have one assigned?"

IF THEY SAY NO

"No problem. Could you tell me roughly what level of play usually gets someone a host here? I'd like to know what to aim for."

SCRIPT 2: INTRODUCING YOURSELF TO A HOST

FIRST MEETING

"Thanks for meeting me. I enjoy playing here and I'm planning to visit `[number]` *times this year. I usually play* `[type of machine]` *at around* `[bet size]` *for a few hours a session. I'd love to know what you can do to make my visits a little better."*

The key elements: you are friendly, you share your real play level, and you signal future visits.

Hosts care about repeat business.

SCRIPT 3: ASKING FOR A SPECIFIC COMP

AFTER A SESSION

"I played about `[hours]` today on `[machine type]`. Would my play cover dinner for two at `[restaurant]` tonight?"

Be specific and ask for one thing at a time. A yes is easy when the request is clear and reasonable.

SCRIPT 4: ASKING ABOUT A ROOM

BEFORE BOOKING

"I'm planning to come back `[dates]`. Based on my play, is there a room rate or comp you can offer for that stay?"

Ask before you book online. Once you have paid a public rate, it is much harder to get a comp applied.

SCRIPT 5: WHEN THE OFFER FEELS LIGHT

COMPARING OFFERS

"I appreciate it. I noticed my offers here have been lower than what I get from `[other casino brand]` for similar play. Is there anything you can do to bring them closer?"

This is polite, factual, and gives the host a reason to act. Only say it if it is true.

HOST ETIQUETTE

- Be honest about your play. Hosts can see your records.
- Thank them, and remember their name.
- Do not ask for a comp before you have played.

- Give them your business. If a host takes care of you, book through them.
- Never inflate your play to earn a better offer.

PART C

TIER STATUS MATCHING

Many casino brands will match the tier status you hold at a competitor. If you have mid-level status at one chain, you may be able to get a similar level at another without starting from zero.

HOW IT TYPICALLY WORKS

1. Earn a tier at one casino brand.
2. Ask the players club at a competing brand whether they offer a status match.
3. Bring proof: your physical card, an app screenshot, or a recent mailer showing your tier.
4. If approved, you receive the matched status, sometimes for a limited trial period, during which you may need to play a certain amount to keep it.

SCRIPT 6: REQUESTING A STATUS MATCH

AT A COMPETING BRAND

"Hi, I hold `[tier name]` *status with* `[competitor brand]`*. Do you offer a status match? I'm planning to split more of my play here."*

THE STATUS CHAIN

Some players use one match to qualify for another, carrying status from brand to brand. This can work, but expect limits: many programs only allow one match per person per year or lifetime, some require a minimum tier, and policies change often. Always ask about the current rules, and never misrepresent your status.

WHAT STATUS GETS YOU

Depending on the brand and level: priority lines, resort-fee waivers, room discounts or upgrades, dining credits, event invitations, and better mail offers. Even a modest tier can make a trip noticeably better.

PART D

FREE PLAY CONVERSION GUIDE

Free play (also called promotional play or bonus credits) is credit loaded onto your card that you must play through at least once. Anything you win from it is yours as cash. It is real value, but only if you use it well.

WHAT FREE PLAY IS REALLY WORTH

Free play is worth roughly its face value times the payback of the machine you play it on. $100 of free play on a machine paying back 90% is worth about $90 on average. On a machine paying back 95%, it is worth about $95.

FREE PLAY AMOUNT	PLAYED AT 90% PAYBACK	PLAYED AT 95% PAYBACK
$25	About $22.50	About $23.75
$50	About $45	About $47.50
$100	About $90	About $95
$250	About $225	About $237.50

THE CONVERSION STEPS

1. **Check the rules first.** Ask whether the free play must be used on certain machines, expires on a certain date, or requires you to play your own money first.
2. **Pick a lower-hold machine.** Use what you learned in Chapter 6. Higher-denomination machines usually pay back more, so free play often converts better

there.

3. **Play it through once.** Run the free play credits through the machine until they are gone.
4. **Cash out everything that is cash.** Whatever is left as cashable credits, print a ticket immediately.
5. **Do not add your own money unless you planned to.** Free play is a gift. Using it as a warm-up to an unplanned session turns a gift into a cost.

COMMON FREE PLAY MISTAKES

- Letting it expire
- Playing it on the highest-hold penny games
- Treating winnings from free play as house money and re-betting them carelessly
- Driving to the casino just to use a small free play offer and then gambling much more than planned

PART E

READ YOUR MAIL OFFERS

The offers casinos send by mail and email are calculated from your recent play. Use them as a scoreboard.

- If offers increase, your rated play went up. Make sure that was intentional.
- If offers from one brand are consistently better, consider concentrating play there.
- Keep offers organized by expiration date, and decide in advance which ones you will actually use.

THE COMP PRINCIPLE

Get everything your play has earned. Never play more to earn something extra.

SLOT SMART · PRINT OR SCREENSHOT

THE 30-SECOND PRE-SIT CHECKLIST

Run through it before you put a single dollar in any machine.

BEFORE YOU LEAVE HOME

- ☐ Trip bankroll (money I can lose without stress): $ _____
- ☐ Sessions: _____ Per session: $ _____
- ☐ Three envelopes ready: Play, Reserve, Banked
- ☐ Win goal per session: $ _____
- ☐ Player card packed

BEFORE YOU SIT DOWN

- ☐ **Denomination:** My real bet in dollars per spin? Should I denominate up? Ch. 6
- ☐ **Paytable:** Can I explain the game in one sentence? Ch. 7
- ☐ **Max bet:** Does it reward max bet? Can I afford it? Ch. 8
- ☐ **Progressive:** Betting enough to qualify? If not, skip. Ch. 10
- ☐ **Volatility:** Matches my bankroll and goal? Ch. 5, 13
- ☐ **Card in:** Inserted and recognized? Ch. 11

WHILE PLAYING

- ☐ Relaxed pace, no quick-stop, no auto-play Ch. 12
- ☐ Read the meter every 10 spins, not the celebrations Ch. 3
- ☐ Near misses and dry spells mean nothing Ch. 2, 4

WHEN TO STAND UP

- ☐ **Win goal hit:** cash out, bank stake plus half the profit Ch. 14
- ☐ **Big hit:** end the session Ch. 14
- ☐ **Play envelope empty:** session over, no reserve money Ch. 13
- ☐ **Not having fun anymore:** session over

THE ONE RULE TO REMEMBER

Make the plan at home. Follow it on the floor.

Gambling problem? Call or text 1-800-GAMBLER (US). Confidential help, any time.

TEAR-OUT SUMMARY

THE 14 RULES AT A GLANCE

01	Rituals do not change outcomes. Spend your energy on real choices.
02	Judge a machine by what it is, never by what it has recently done.
03	A win is only a win if it pays more than you bet.
04	A near miss is just a losing spin.
05	Choose volatility on purpose, before you sit down.
06	Look at dollars per spin, not the denomination on the glass.
07	Never play a game you cannot explain in one sentence.
08	Bet max only when the paytable rewards it.
09	Pay for entertainment on purpose, with a defined slice of your budget.
10	Only play a progressive at the qualifying bet.
11	Comps are a rebate, not a reason to play more.
12	Slow down before you bet down.
13	Make the plan at home. Follow it on the floor.
14	Cash out early, bank often, and let the ticket decide when you are done.

REFERENCE

GLOSSARY

TERM	MEANING
Coin-in	Total amount wagered, including re-bet winnings
Comp	A complimentary reward (food, room, free play) based on your play
Denomination	The value of one credit on a machine
Free play	Promotional credits that must be played through once; winnings are cash
Hit frequency	How often a spin returns any payout, including losses disguised as wins
Hold	The share of money wagered the casino keeps over time
Host	A casino employee who manages relationships and comps for valued players
Loss disguised as win	A payout smaller than the total bet, presented with winning effects
Near miss	A losing result that appears close to a winning one
Payback (RTP)	The share of money wagered that a machine returns to players over time
Progressive	A jackpot that grows as players bet, funded by a slice of each wager
RNG	Random number generator, the program that decides every outcome
Status match	A casino granting you a loyalty tier based on your tier at a competitor
Theo	Theoretical loss: average bet × spins × time × hold
Virtual reel	The weighted internal map that decides where physical reels stop
Volatility	How a machine spreads its payouts between frequent small wins and rare big ones

CLOSING

A FINAL WORD

The casino will always have the edge. That has never been the question. The question is whether you play on their terms or yours.

Players who play on their terms choose machines that cost less, take their time, protect their wins, and collect every comp they have earned. They leave knowing what they spent and why. Most nights they still lose a little, and that is fine, because they bought a good night out at a fair price.

THAT IS THE KIND OF PLAYER YOU ARE NOW. ENJOY THE GAME.

TONY CASINO

If gambling is causing problems for you or someone you love, help is free and confidential. In the US, call or text 1-800-GAMBLER.