Chapter 9 — Bankroll Management

The unglamorous foundation that determines whether skill ever compounds into profit. Without this, everything else is irrelevant.

Why Bankroll Management Matters More Than Skill

A technically skilled player with poor bankroll management will go broke. A less skilled player with disciplined bankroll management will survive long enough to improve and profit. Variance is real, inevitable, and will test every rule you have. The only defense is having enough buy-ins to absorb the inevitable downswings without going bust or moving down in stakes.

The core truth: Even with a significant edge, you can lose 10, 15, or 20 buy-ins in a row. It's not a bad beat story — it's math. Your bankroll rules exist specifically for those stretches. Following them only when things are going well is not following them.

Minimum Buy-In Requirements by Stakes

These are minimums for a tight-aggressive, disciplined player. If you have significant leaks (and you do — everyone does while developing), add 20–30% more cushion.

Stakes	Min Buy-ins	Min Bankroll	Notes
NL2 ($0.01/$0.02)	30	$60	Learning stake — variance is low but leaks are expensive
NL5 ($0.02/$0.05)	30	$150	First real stake — treat it seriously
NL10 ($0.05/$0.10)	30	$300	Population quality increases — budget for adjustment
NL25 ($0.10/$0.25)	40	$1,000	Regs become more capable — need more cushion
NL50 ($0.25/$0.50)	40	$2,000	First mid-stakes — variance increases with skill increase
NL100 ($0.50/$1.00)	50	$5,000	Serious stake — serious bankroll required
NL200+	50+	$10,000+	Consult actual winrate data before moving up

Move-Up Rules

Only move up stakes when ALL of these are true:

→ You have the full minimum buy-in requirement for the next stake

→ You are a proven winner at your current stake over a meaningful sample

→ Your winrate is positive over at least 50,000 hands (or 100+ hours live)

→ Moving up does not drop you below 30 buy-ins at the current stake

→ You are not chasing losses or running hot from a short session

What "proven winner" means: Not just a positive result — a positive winrate measured in bb/100 (big blinds per 100 hands) over a statistically significant sample. At 6-max cash, 50,000 hands begins to smooth out variance. Short samples lie. A 5,000-hand heater is not proof of anything.

Move-Down Rules (Non-Negotiable)

Move down immediately when your bankroll drops below 20 buy-ins at your current stake.

This is not optional and not a suggestion. If you are playing NL25 and your bankroll drops below $500 (20 × $25), you move to NL10 immediately — same session if necessary.

Most players resist this rule because it feels like failure. It is not failure. It is the rule that keeps you in the game long enough to recover and move back up correctly.

Winrate Benchmarks

Understanding what a realistic winrate looks like prevents both overconfidence and unnecessary doubt.

Winrate (bb/100)	Assessment	Action
Below 0	Losing player	Study before volume. Plug leaks first.
0–2 bb/100	Marginal winner	Breakeven after rake. Study + play simultaneously.
2–5 bb/100	Solid winner	Focus on volume and moving up gradually.
5–10 bb/100	Strong winner	Consider aggressive stake climbing.
10+ bb/100	Exceptional	Likely a short-sample result — stay humble.

Note on rake: Online rake at micro/small stakes is significant — often 1–3 bb/100 in effective cost. A player running at 3 bb/100 before rake is roughly breakeven. Always account for rake when evaluating winrate.

Session Stop-Loss Rules

Stop-losses prevent a bad session from becoming a bankroll crisis. Set these before you sit down — not when you're already stuck and tilting.

Hard stop-loss: 2 buy-ins per session. If you lose 2 full buy-ins in a session, you close the tables and walk away. No exceptions. No "just one more buy-in." Done.

Soft warning: 1 buy-in. After losing 1 buy-in, take a 10-minute break. Assess whether you're playing well or tilting. If tilting — end the session now, not after another buy-in confirms it.

Tilt & Bankroll Protection

Tilt is a bankroll management problem, not just a mental game problem.

When you tilt, you play a larger range (breaking Law 1), make multiple mistakes per hand (breaking Law 2), choose aggression over safety when unsure (breaking Law 3), and stop protecting your stack (breaking Law 4).

Every law in this system is violated simultaneously when you're tilting. The 2 buy-in stop-loss is your structural defense against tilt destroying your bankroll.

The Compounding Equation

Bankroll × Winrate × Volume = Long-term profit

You control all three variables. A disciplined bankroll lets you play volume without fear. Volume at a positive winrate compounds. The players who get rich at poker aren't the most talented — they're the ones who stayed in the game long enough for the math to work. Protect the bankroll. The math does the rest.

Bankroll Growth Simulator

Enter your starting bankroll, winrate, and hands per week to project your growth curve over time. Variance bands show the realistic range of outcomes — not just the expected value line.

Starting Bankroll ($)

Winrate (bb/100)

Stake (NL?)

NL2 ($0.01/0.02)

NL5 ($0.02/0.05)

NL10 ($0.05/0.10)

NL25 ($0.10/0.25)

NL50 ($0.25/0.50)

Hands Per Week

▸ RUN SIMULATION

—

Weeks to 20 BI

—

Expected @ 1yr

—

Ruin Risk

Projected Bankroll — 52 Weeks (with variance bands)

Expected Value (EV line)

±1 Std Dev Band

30-BI Move-Up Threshold