How to Read a Pokies Paytable Before You Play

Why the paytable matters

Every online pokies game has a paytable. It is the grid or list that shows what each symbol combination pays. Many players jump straight into a game and only discover the payout structure after they have spun a few times. Taking a minute to read the paytable first can save confusion and help you match a game to your own preferences. This article walks through the main parts of a paytable and what to look for at each step.

Step 1: Understand the basic layout

A paytable is usually a table with rows for each symbol and columns for how many matching symbols appear on a payline. The most common format lists the highest-paying symbol at the top and the lowest at the bottom. For example, a row might read "Wild - 5 of a kind - 500x bet" and then a row below it "Wild - 4 of a kind - 100x bet." The numbers tell you the multiplier of your total bet that you receive if those symbols land in the right places.

Some games list payouts for three, four, and five matching symbols. Others only list four and five. Check how many paylines the game uses. A payline is a line across the reels where symbols must land to count. Classic slots have a single horizontal payline. Modern online pokies may have dozens of paylines, including diagonal and zigzag patterns. The paytable usually notes which paylines are active.

Step 2: Identify the highest-value symbols and the wild

The top of the paytable shows the symbol that pays the most. It is often a themed icon like a diamond, a crown, or a character from the game. Below that, the lower-paying symbols appear in descending order. The wild symbol, if the game has one, also sits near the top. A wild substitutes for other symbols to complete a winning combination. Some wilds carry their own payout when you land enough of them on a payline. Others only act as substitutes and do not have a standalone prize.

Check whether the wild symbol has restrictions. Some paytables note that the wild does not substitute for the scatter symbol or that it only appears on certain reels. Knowing this early stops you from expecting a win that the game does not award.

Step 3: Spot the scatter symbol and bonus rounds

Most online pokies include a scatter symbol. Unlike regular symbols that need to land on a payline, a scatter symbol pays when it appears anywhere on the screen. The paytable often

lists scatter payouts separately, sometimes in a small box off to the side. The amount typically multiplies your total bet, and landing three or more scatters can trigger a bonus round.

Bonus rounds add free spins or a separate mini-game. The paytable may not show the full bonus round paytable within the main grid. Look for a note like "See bonus round rules for details" or a small table that lists the bonus prizes. If the bonus round uses its own set of symbols, make sure you know what they are before you start playing.

Step 4: Check the return to player percentage and volatility

Many paytables include a theoretical return to player percentage, often abbreviated as RTP. This figure tells you what portion of all money wagered the game pays back to players over a very long period. It is not a guarantee for a single session but a statistical average. A higher RTP means the game keeps less of the money wagered in the long run. The paytable may show the RTP at the bottom or in a separate section of the game info.

Volatility is not always printed on the paytable, but you can infer it from the payout spread. If the top prize is very large compared to the smaller prizes, the game has high volatility. You will experience longer dry spells but the possibility of a big hit. If the paytable shows many small prizes and a moderate top prize, the game has lower volatility and gives more frequent small wins. Choose the style that suits your comfort level.

Step 5: Verify the paylines and symbol positions

A paytable only makes sense when you know which positions on the reels count. Some games use a fixed number of paylines, such as 243 ways to win. Others let you choose how many paylines to activate. The paytable should state the number of active paylines. If the information is not on the paytable itself, look in the game rules or the help section. Playing a game with more paylines increases your chances of landing a win but also changes the overall math. The paytable still applies the same multipliers, but the frequency of wins shifts.

Watch for symbols that must appear on consecutive reels. Some paytables specify that winning combinations must start from the leftmost reel. Others allow any position. The rules are usually written just above or below the paytable grid. Missing this detail can make you think you have won when the game says no.

Step 6: Look for minimum and maximum bet limits

Although the paytable shows multipliers, the actual payout depends on the bet size. Check the minimum bet per spin and the maximum payout cap. Some games cap the top prize even if the multiplier times your bet would exceed that cap. The paytable may note a maximum payout in

the fine print. If you are playing with a larger bankroll, confirm that the game honours the full multiplier up to a reasonable limit.

A few online pokies include progressive multipliers for consecutive wins or for betting the maximum amount. These are not always in the main paytable. Scan the rules for any special payout conditions that override the standard table.

Step 7: Use demo play to test your reading

Most reputable sites offer a demo play or practice mode that uses virtual credits. This is the best way to confirm you read the paytable correctly. Run a few dozen spins in demo mode while keeping the paytable open. Look for matches and check that the payout matches the number in the table. If the game awards something different, you may have misread the paylines or missed a restriction. Demo play costs nothing and builds confidence before you wager real money.

For a broad comparison of Australian-facing online pokies, including game rules, RTP, and withdrawal conditions, you can browse the resources at collections.humanitix.com. That site gathers information on many titles and notes legal restrictions that apply in Australia.

Step 8: Cross-check with the game's help files

If anything in the paytable seems unclear, open the game's help or information panel. Some games provide a detailed breakdown of each symbol, including animations that show winning combinations. A paytable is a summary. The help file fills in the gaps, such as whether the wild symbol appears on all reels or only on reels two, three, and four. It may also explain how the bonus round is triggered and what the bonus paytable looks like. Reading both the paytable and the help file takes less than five minutes and removes guesswork.

What to watch for across all steps

A few red flags deserve attention. If a paytable lists only the top two or three symbol payouts and hides the rest, that is a sign the lower prizes are very small or the game relies on rare jackpots. If the paytable is missing entirely and the game only shows a "win" animation after the fact, you cannot verify what you are playing for. Legitimate online pokies always display a clear paytable before you spin. If you cannot find it, move to a different game.

Also watch for games that change the paytable between demo mode and real-money mode. This practice is rare among licensed operators, but it has happened. A quick way to check is to compare the paytable shown before you deposit money with the one visible during real play. If they differ, report it to the site. Sites such as collections.humanitix.com compile reviews that note whether a game's advertised paytable matches the real experience.

Final practical tips

Reading a paytable is a skill that improves with practice. Start with games that use a simple 3-reel layout and a single payline. Move to multi-payline games once you can quickly locate the highest and lowest payouts, the wild symbol, and the scatter symbol. Keep the paytable open on a second screen or a printed page if that helps. Over time, you will learn which game structures suit your playing style and bankroll. The paytable is not a guarantee of any outcome, but it is the best map you have before the reels start spinning.