

THE 30-SECOND TIMEOUT

Nick's Course Must-Knows.

A condensed field guide to six core concepts from **THE ABSOLUTELY FREE*** Course.

Six concepts. One sequence: **frame the session, mark the levels, read volume profile, read the orderflow, read the DOM, then decide acceptance or rejection.** Each section covers the read, the rule, and a worked example — the same framework taught in the full course, distilled to a single reference you can keep on your desk.

KEY TERMS — QUICK GLOSSARY

POC — Point of Control. The highest-volume price in a session. A magnet — price comes back to it.

Opening Range — The 5-minute window after the open (8:30–9:30 CT). The real reference, not the 30-second spike.

Stacking — Size building on the DOM as price approaches a level. Active defense.

VAH / VAL — Top and bottom of the 70% volume band around POC. Acceptance and rejection happen here.

Delta — Ask volume minus bid volume. Positive = aggressive buyers; negative = aggressive sellers.

Pulling — Large size disappearing before price arrives. Spoof or changed mind, not a level.

HVN / LVN — High Volume Node = magnet. Low Volume Node = runway. Price moves fast through LVNs.

Absorption — Passive participants taking the other side repeatedly. High delta, no price movement.

Reoffer / Rebid — Zones where sellers (reoffer) or buyers (rebid) have repeatedly defended a price.

WHAT'S INSIDE

- 01 Frame the Session
- 02 The Four Key Levels
- 03 Volume Profile
- 04 Orderflow & Delta
- 05 The DOM
- 06 Acceptance vs. Rejection

HOW TO USE THIS

- **Read it end-to-end** before the session. The sequence is the framework.
- **Use it as a checklist** when reviewing trades after the close.
- **Print it** and pin it next to your monitor for quick reference.
- **Treat the examples as templates.** Your symbols, timeframes, and stops will look different.
- **The full course** at [COURSE.NICK4ATICK.COM](https://course.nick4atick.com) expands every concept with charts, video, and quizzes.

AUTHOR

Nick · Futures trader, co-host of *SundayTicks*

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SECTION 01

Frame the Session.

Before you put on a single contract, you need the **context stack**. Layers — monthly open, weekly VP, 4-hour trend, 1-hour structure, prior session — set the read before the cash open. Layers disagree often. The tension *is* the read.

THE CONTEXT STACK

- **Prior session levels are the strongest magnets.** pdVAH, pdVAL, and pdPOC act as the initial floor and ceiling. Globex high and low typically test these in the first 30–60 minutes of RTH. Auction mechanics, not prediction.
- **Weekly VP frames the week.** Inside weekly value, above VAH, or below VAL — that single read sets the macro bias.
- **Layer disagreement is information.** If weekly VAH says resistance but 1-hour says up, don't lean on the level alone — watch how price treats it given the conflict.
- **Globex tone.** The overnight session sets the emotional tone: defending prior value, or probing new territory? Overnight single prints and gaps matter only if RTH price approaches them.

THE OPENING RANGE

- **The OR is the high and low of the first 30 seconds and the first 5 minutes of RTH.** Both — not 15, not 30 minutes. Just those two.
- **Calibration:** ES tends to rotate roughly **15 points out of the 30-second range**; NQ around **65 points**. Averages, not targets — but useful for risk context. A NQ breakout that's already covered 55 of those 65 points is in a different risk profile than one just breaking out.
- **By 8:35 you usually have enough to start looking for setups.**
- The OR shows where buyers and sellers first found their footing after overnight, news, and pre-market. The boundaries become reference points for the rest of the day.
- **Two gaps matter** (the rest is noise): (1) Overnight session gap — 5pm CT globex open vs prior RTH settle. (2) Weekly opening gap — Sunday 5pm open vs Friday close. Treat the gap as *context, not a trade plan*.

WHAT I WATCH IN THE FIRST FIVE MINUTES

The opening five minutes tell you several things *if you read them, not trade them*. None are trading signals by themselves — you're building context, not a position.

- **Previous session context.** Open above pdVAH or below pdVAL = starting outside value, in price discovery. Open inside prior value = rotation day more likely.
- **Opening drive direction.** Strong directional move that holds (no reversal back through the open) = the market is telling you something.
- **Globex high/low respect.** Testing and respecting globex extremes = real references. Blowing right through = the market has more to say on that side.
- **30-second OR break.** Did we break out of the 30-second range yet? Direction matters more than the break itself.

THE 60-SECOND MENTAL CHECK

Before the session: slept? Stressed? Already calculating size on the fly? If yes to any, increase selectivity or sit. *This is harder than any setup read.*

SECTION 02

The Levels That Have Care.

The chart has thousands of lines. Five matter. **Obvious ones are the good ones** — if a level isn't immediately visible, it's probably not. Cap your map at five. More than that is noise trading, not reading.

- **Reoffer Zone.** Sellers defended a level multiple times (3+ sessions). On test, they reoffer — price pokes, gets rejected, long wick. *Bias: rejection.* Short into it, target the level below or POC.
- **Rebid Zone.** Buyers controlled a level. On re-approach, they rebid — pull the ask, price stalls, buyers start the hunt down to find offer. *Setup: scale into bids as price approaches.*
- **Volume Void (LVN Extreme).** A price range with almost zero volume in VP history. Price probes through with no friction. *Void is a runway, not a magnet.* Use it to read direction, not as a stop.
- **Swing Points / Line Clusters.** Multiple 4-hour wicks cluster at one price (e.g. three 4hr wicks within a few points). HTF tested repeatedly. *Bias: rejection or grind* — buyers and sellers still deciding.
- **Large Player Intervention.** A level that appears across multiple sessions — pdVAH today same as last week's pdVAH. The repetition is signal, not magic. *Behavior changes when institutions know where the magnet is.*

THE 5-MINUTE PREP

Morning prep takes maybe five minutes. Mark prior day VAH, VAL, POC, globex high, globex low. That's it. You're not predicting — you're reminding yourself where the market has done business recently and where overnight players drew their lines.

THE TRAP

Zones are reference, not instructions. **Five levels max.** If you're drawing 12, you're overcomplicating — and overcomplication trades like noise. The cleaner the map, the cleaner the read.

SECTION 03

Volume Profile.

VP is an **auction record, not a prediction**. Widest bars = where most volume traded. Thin bars = where price moved without agreement. You're reading results of past negotiations, not predicting the next one.

THE THREE READS

- **POC**. The single price with highest volume. A magnet — price comes back to it repeatedly, especially in rotational sessions.
- **VAH / VAL — the 70% rule**. Top and bottom of the 70%-volume range around POC. These are the rotation targets.
- **HVN vs. LVN**. HVN = magnet (price comes back and sits). LVN = runway (price blows through, or rejects with no interest).

THE FADE-TO-POC SETUP

Price pokes VAH, gets rejected fast — short wick, sellers step in, close back inside value. **Short the VAH retest. Target POC. Stop above VAH.** Classic high-probability rotation when the higher timeframe agrees with the fade.

SESSION VS. COMPOSITE

Session profile resets daily — use it to define VAH, VAL, POC for that session's rotations. **Composite profile** (multiple days stacked) shows whether you're inside a multi-week value area or breaking into discovery. Both needed, for different reasons.

SECTION 04

Orderflow & Delta.

Delta = ask volume minus bid volume per price. Positive delta = aggressive buyers initiating. Negative delta = aggressive sellers initiating. **Delta does not guarantee price direction**. The question: is the aggressive side showing up at the level *and* price responding? Or absorbing with no move?

ABSORPTION — PASSIVE WINS

Tight cluster of high-delta candles, price going nowhere. Bid/ask refresh on the DOM. Aggressive side is trying; passive side is eating it. **Wait for the second refresh minimum** — the first could be a resting order. Reversals happen when the aggressive side exhausts but the absorber is still loaded.

THE ABSORPTION READ

High-delta candles cluster at a level. Price doesn't go anywhere. Buyers aggressive, sellers passive (absorbing). **Watch for the flip**. When delta switches direction (sellers losing fuel) or price finally breaks above (acceptance), that's the reversal signal. Entry on the second refresh; add on the third.

SCALE-IN OFF ABSORPTION

- **Starter** on the first response to the level.
- **Add** on the second refresh — that's the conviction confirmation.
- **Higher-conviction add** on the third refresh.

Exhaustion is only valuable at extremes (VAH, structural high). Declining delta in the middle of value is noise. Watch for the final push candle with the smallest delta in the sequence — that's the tell.

VAH — ACCEPTANCE VS. REJECTION

Speed is the first tell. Tagged VAH and turned fast = rejection. Slow grind above = acceptance building.

Acceptance = time + volume above + delta positive + POC migrating up + closes above range expanding.

Rejection = quick reversal + aggressive selling + long wick + bars back inside value.

THE TRAP

Labeling every bump as a level. Use **session VAH, VAL, POC + 1-2 obvious LVNs** between value and a structural level. If you're drawing more than five things on a profile, you're overcomplicating it. Looks impressive, trades like noise.

STACKED IMBALANCES

Single imbalance is noise. 4-5 consecutive rows the same direction is meaningful — that's commitment (10:1+ ratio on tape). Watch for exhaustion at the same time: delta declining as price makes a new extreme, heavy volume + minimal price progress, delta switching sides quickly.

THE EXHAUSTION SEQUENCE

1. **Large aggressive candles** with strong delta in one direction.
2. **Delta starts declining** even as price makes new highs/lows.
3. **Price slows, volume stays heavy** — the two sides are fighting.
4. **Reversal candle** appears, often with delta switching sides.

SECTION 05

The DOM.

The DOM shows **resting limit orders**, not execution — bid below market, ask above. Different from Time & Sales (T&S = already executed). Both needed: **DOM = potential, T&S = reality. Passive activity tells you intention; initiative activity tells you what's happening.**

REAL SIZE — 3 SIGNATURES

- **Stacks.** Size builds as price approaches (200 → 400 → 800 → 1,200 bids stepping up).
- **Absorbs T&S fills.** Rapid small fills accumulating against the resting order.
- **Price stalls or reverses** when the level is hit.

THE ICEBERG TELL — REFILL BEHAVIOR

DOM shows a modest stack (say 50 contracts) at a price. T&S shows prints repeatedly filling at that level — 50, 50, 50. Stack refills to ~50 almost immediately after each fill. Total prints far exceed what was ever visible. **Count the fills.** Ten fills of 50 = 500 contracts at one price when you only ever saw 50. That's an iceberg. Genuine committed size.

THE STACKING READ

At a key level, bids start small and build as price ticks toward it — size growing with each step. T&S shows fills accumulating. Tape pace slowing. Sell volume shrinking. That's an absorption setup forming. **Entry isn't on the stack.** Entry is when initiative flips: a buyer hits the offer, an ask gets pulled, buyers start stepping up. Passive tells you location; initiative tells you when. *Resting size is intent, not commitment.*

SECTION 06

Acceptance vs. Rejection.

At a level, two outcomes. **Speed is the first tell.** Tagged the level and turned fast = rejection. Slow grind above = acceptance building. Delta confirms. Bar structure backs it up.

ACCEPTANCE

Time + volume above + delta positive + closes above range expanding. Bars widening consecutively, no pause. POC migrating up.

REJECTION

Quick reversal + aggressive selling + long wick + close below. The speed is the tell — if it turned fast, it's rejected. Bars back inside value.

BAR READING AT THE LEVEL — WHERE THE READS CONVERGE

A bar by itself is mostly noise. A bar at a profile level is information. The same bar that looks bullish in the middle of value looks very different at VAH. At VAH or VAL, bar structure *is* the rejection/acceptance signal.

- **Rejection candle at VAH:** long upper wick + close below the level, ideally on solid volume. The tail shows buyers tried and failed. If delta was positive through the probe and price still reversed, that's sellers sitting there eating everything buyers throw at them.
- **Acceptance candle at VAH:** solid body closing at or above VAH, ideally two or three consecutive bars doing it with no major wicks and volume building. Don't fade that — the market is telling you the old VAH is now value.
- **Mirror logic at VAL:** rejection has a long lower wick + close above; acceptance is solid closes below + volume building.
- **Outside value:** first bar is a probe. **Verdict comes in bars 2–3.** Stalling/rotating = trying to find acceptance (may reverse). Fast and clean = it keeps going.

MOMENTUM

Widening bars + expanding delta + small wicks + price accelerating. Both signals align (visual force + aggression). Trade with it, not against it. A single wide bar with flat delta is an isolated spike, not momentum.

GRIND

Small choppy bars, random alternating delta, long wicks both ends. Grind *inside* value = chop (acceptable). Grind at *an extreme* (VAH) = rejection setup. Grind in *discovery* (above VAH) = stalling, reversal likely.

SECTION 07

Session Development: Trend vs. Rotation.

The first hour defines the day. After 30–60 minutes, you can usually tell whether you're in a trend day or a rotation day. The trade approach for each is opposite — read the day right and trade with it; read it wrong and you're fighting the tape.

TREND DAY — WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

- **Opening drive that doesn't reverse** back through the open. Price makes a move and holds.
- **OR break that extends cleanly.** No immediate retest. The break holds and price keeps going.
- **Value area migrating in one direction.** Developing VAH, VAL, and POC all shifting together — higher on a trend up, lower on a trend down.
- **Delta expanding** in the direction of the move and staying there. Not flip-flopping. Consistent one-sided pressure.
- **No significant rotation** back through the prior hour's low (on an up day). Higher lows holding.

TREND DAY — TRADE APPROACH

Look for pullbacks to rising VAH or session POC on a trend up. **Don't fight it.** The pullbacks are shallow and the market rips before your fade gets confirmed. Trend day is the easiest day to trade and the easiest day to screw up — easy because it goes one way, screwed up because everyone keeps looking for the reversal.

COMMIT TO THE READ

Commit to your morning read and give it until noon before seriously considering changing it. Update only when price clearly contradicts the read — like a lower low below the session low on a trend up day. **Not just because the trade you're in is uncomfortable.**

ROTATION DAY — WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

- **OR tested from both sides** within the first 30–60 minutes. Breaks high, comes back. Breaks low, comes back. The OR acts as a magnet.
- **Value area building in the same place.** Developing VAH/VAL aren't migrating far — the range is establishing itself.
- **Delta flip-flopping.** Positive on the up moves, negative on the down. Two-sided. Neither dominating.
- **Multiple wicks at the extremes.** The market keeps probing the boundaries and getting rejected back in.

ROTATION DAY — TRADE APPROACH

Fade the extremes at known levels (VAH fade, VAL fade, prior day levels). Tight stops. Target the other side. VAH to POC, POC to VAL, VAL back to POC. **Small bites, consistent.** The trap: thinking every rotation day is about to turn into a trend day. Sometimes it just chops until the close.

THE MENTAL GAME — SURVIVE AND ADVANCE

- **Survive and Advance.** The only goal of any session is to protect your ability to trade the next one. Small 1-point wins on tough days = success. Traders still trading in year five aren't the ones with the biggest single days — they're the ones who didn't blow up the account.
- **Daily max loss = a non-negotiable hard stop.** Hit it, close the platform. No exceptions, no looking for one more trade. Past-you (calm, rule-making) was smarter than present-you (desperate, account bleeding). Follow past-you.
- **Three losses in a session = step back.** Either the market isn't cooperating with your read, or your read is off today. Either way, you're not going to outsmart a session beating you.
- **Locked-in is harder than any setup.** Bad sleep, stress, oversizing, firing trades hip, calculating size on the fly — if any apply, increase selectivity or sit. Sitting is discipline, not weakness.
- **Noise sessions exist.** Setups failing immediately, delta contradicting price, OR chaotic, 45 minutes in and barely off the open = close the platform. Better trader when you take days off screens.

THE FULL COURSE

Every key level type, every orderflow pattern, every profile shape, every DOM read, every mental-game module — with charts, video walkthroughs, and quizzes.

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