The Basics of Starting a Poker Stream

Creating a Twitch Account

Twitch is the website that we will be using to host your poker stream online. If you don't already have a Twitch account, you'll need to make one. Go to https://www.twitch.tv and click "Sign up" in the upper righthand corner of the screen. Fill in the information on the popup window and click "Sign up" to create your Twitch account.

Getting Streaming Software

In order to start streaming you need a program that will allow you to broadcast to Twitch. The most common program for this is called "OBS" which stands for "Open Broadcast Software". The current version of OBS that most people use is called "OBS Studio" - it's 100% free to download and use.

You can download OBS from this link:
https://obsproject.com/

Just click on the button for the operating system that you are running (Windows, Mac, or Linux) and it will download the program. Installation is straightforward.

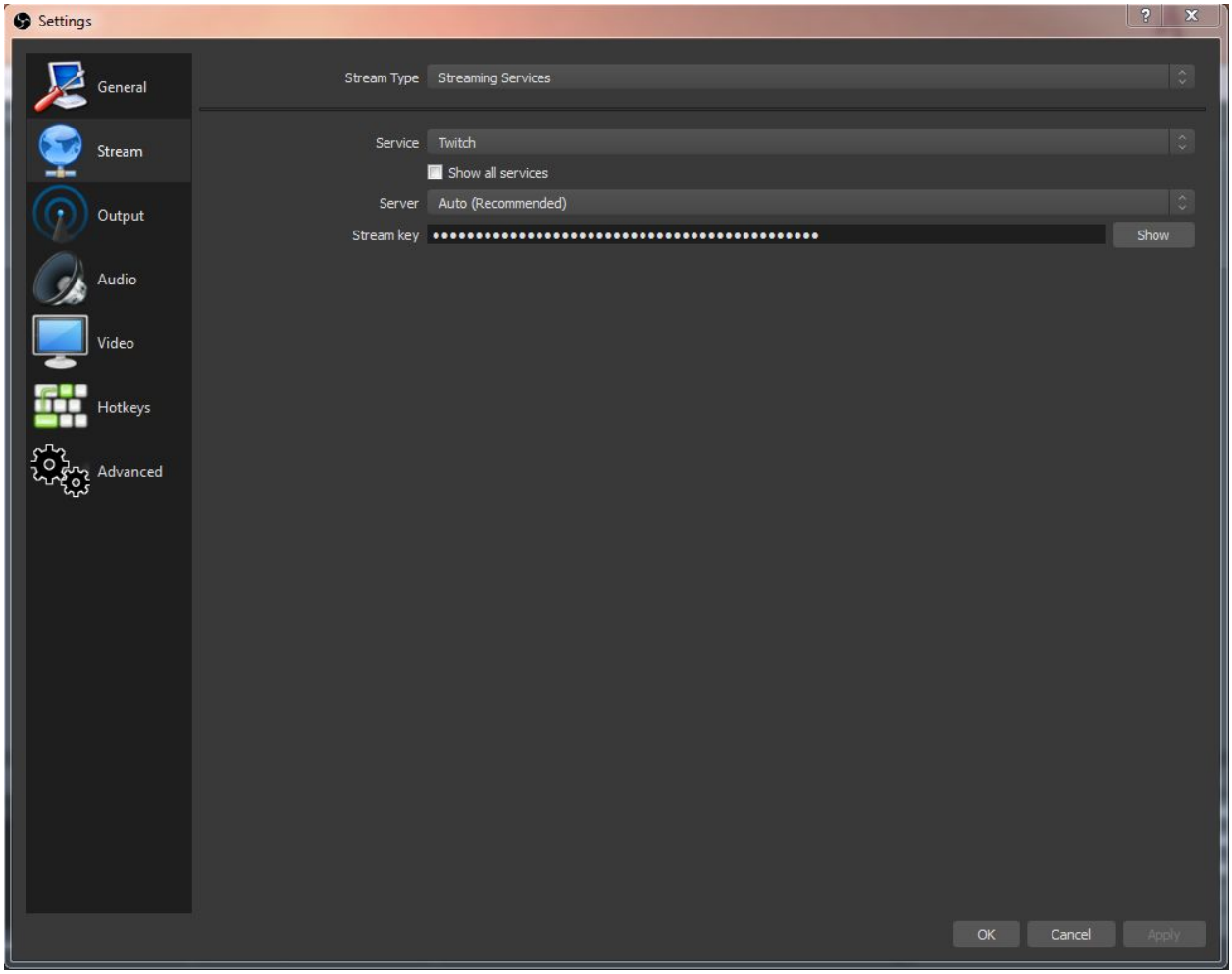
Connecting OBS To Your Twitch Account

Before you start streaming, you must first connect OBS to your Twitch account. This is done by giving OBS your personal "stream key". To find your stream key, navigate to https://www.twitch.tv/yourusername/dashboard/settings/streamkey
Where "yourusername" is your Twitch account name. Sign in to your Twitch account if needed. You can also find this page by going to your Twitch dashboard and clicking "Channel" under "Settings" in the left sidebar and then clicking "Stream Key" at the top of the page. From here, press "Show Key" to be shown your private stream key. It is **very important** that you don't share your stream key with anyone or else they will be able to stream to your Twitch account. Select and copy your key for use in the next step.

Now that you have your stream key from Twitch, we're going to input it to OBS. Open OBS and go to "Settings" in the bottom right corner and then select "Stream" in the left sidebar. Set "Service" to "Twitch" and then paste your stream key in the box next to

“Stream key”. You can select a server nearest to you if you’d like or keep it on Auto. Leave “Stream Type” on “Streaming Services”. Now you are ready to broadcast to your Twitch channel!

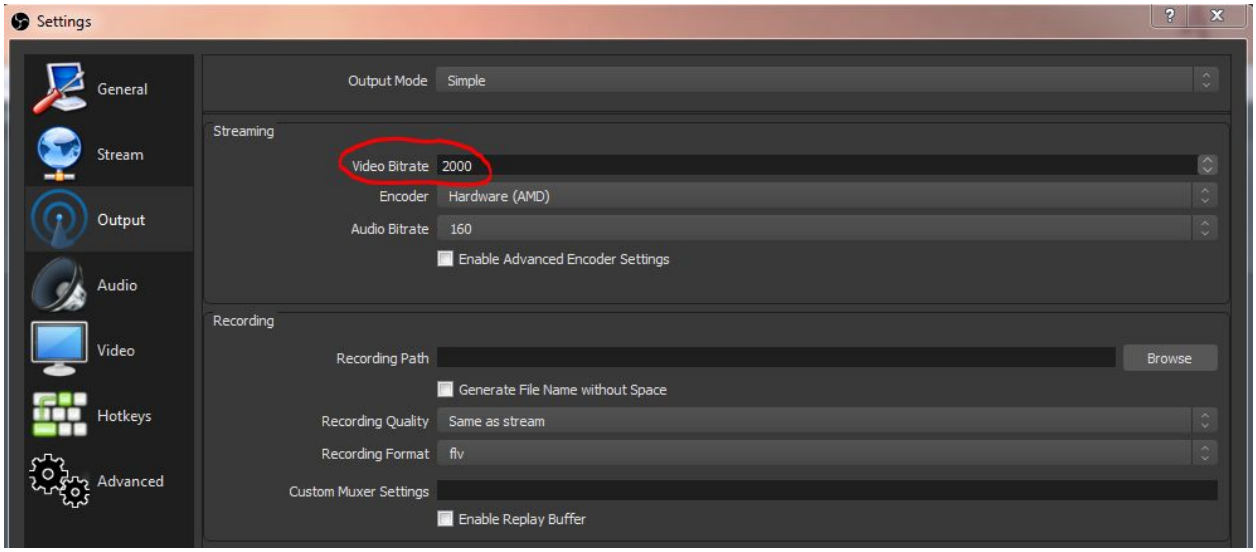
Here is a look at a completed “Stream” settings page:



Setting Up OBS

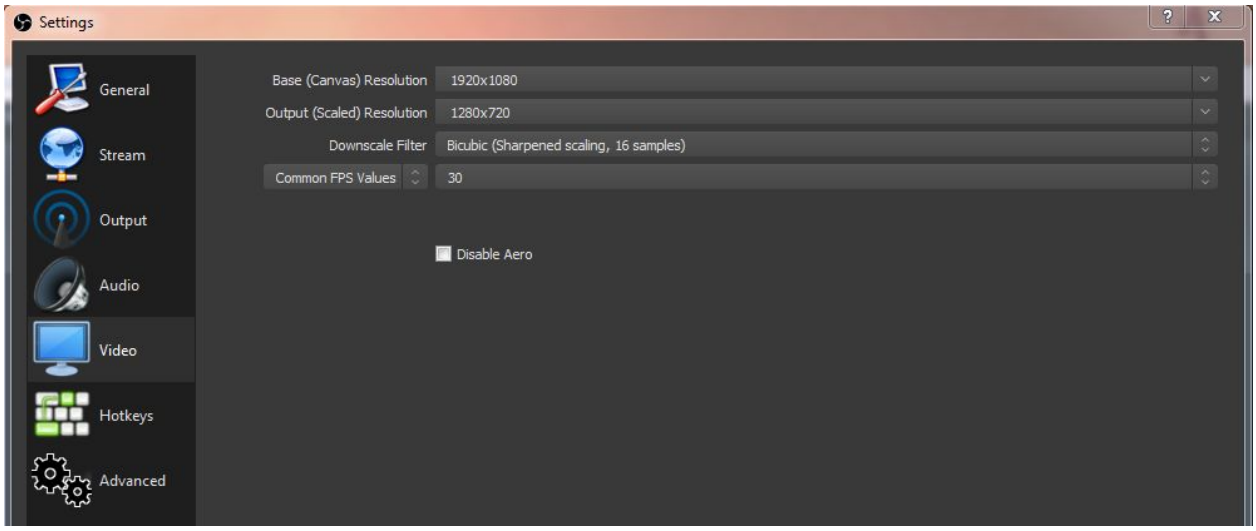
There are a few settings that should be adjusted in OBS to help your stream run smoothly and look good. Open OBS and navigate to the settings menu in the bottom right-hand corner. Click “Output” in the left sidebar and find the setting “Video Bitrate”. This setting determines how much data you are going to be sending to Twitch while you stream. The higher the number, the more data you send to Twitch. A higher bitrate will increase the quality of your stream, but if you set it too high your stream will begin to lag. **A good starting bitrate for streaming poker is 2000**.

Here is a look at the “Output” settings menu with “Video Bitrate” circled:



The next settings to be adjusted are under “Video” in the sidebar of the settings menu. Here you can adjust the resolution and the framerate of your stream. **For most people streaming poker, streaming at a 1280x720 resolution and 30 FPS (frames per second) will make for a good looking stream while also not taxing your computer too much**. There are two settings for resolution- “Base (Canvas) Resolution” and “Output (Scaled) Resolution”. “Base (Canvas) Resolution” should be set to your monitor’s current screen resolution (for most people with a desktop, this is going to be 1920x1080). “Output (Scaled) Resolution” determines what resolution your stream is going to be broadcasted at, and this is what you want to set to 1280x720. Set “Common FPS Values” to 30. If you have a more powerful computer, you can try setting the Output (Scaled) Resolution to 1920x1080 and the framerate to 60, but these high settings are not needed for streaming poker, and will tax your computer heavily. Note: if you decide to try streaming at a higher resolution and framerate, you will also need to increase your bitrate.

Here is a screenshot of the suggested “Video” settings with a 1080p monitor:

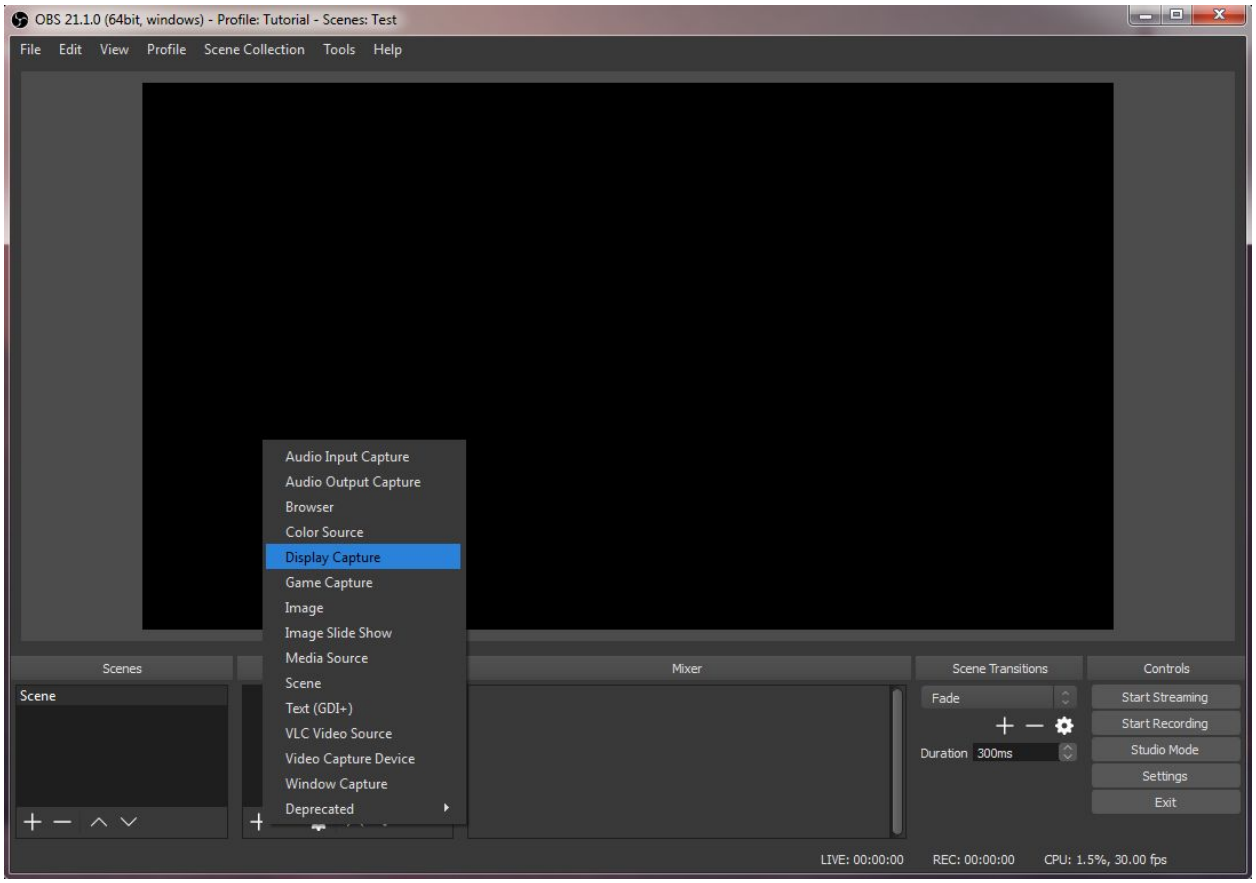


The final setting you’ll want to adjust is the delay of your stream. If you are streaming poker, you don’t want to be broadcasting your hand in real time to anyone watching. To avoid this, you can add a delay to your stream in OBS. This makes OBS to wait a specified amount of time before broadcasting to Twitch, which prevents people from finding out what hand you have in real time. To set a delay, click on “Advanced” in the settings menu in OBS and look for the section called “Stream Delay”. Click the “Enable” box and set the number of seconds you would like your delay. **For cash games, 2.5-4 minutes will generally be ok for a delay (150-240 seconds). For tournaments, especially those with longer time banks, a minimum of 5-6 minutes is recommended**. While having a longer delay does hurt your ability to interact with chat, it is important that you protect yourself from people looking to try and steal your money by watching your stream.

<u>Constructing the Layout of Your Stream</u>

OBS uses “Scenes” and “Sources” to set up the layout of your stream. Sources are where you give OBS an input (like your webcam, a picture, or a live view of your screen), and a scene is a collection of sources. When you first open OBS, there should already be a blank scene under “Scenes” (it has the name “Scene”), and you will be looking at a black screen. The black screen is a preview of what you stream is going to look like if you press “Start Streaming” (which will immediately begin broadcasting to Twitch). We are now going to begin adding sources to this scene.

The first source you are going to want to add is a display capture. **A display capture will record whatever is on your monitor** (for instance, a poker table). To set up a new source, click the “+” icon under “Sources” and then select “Display Capture”.

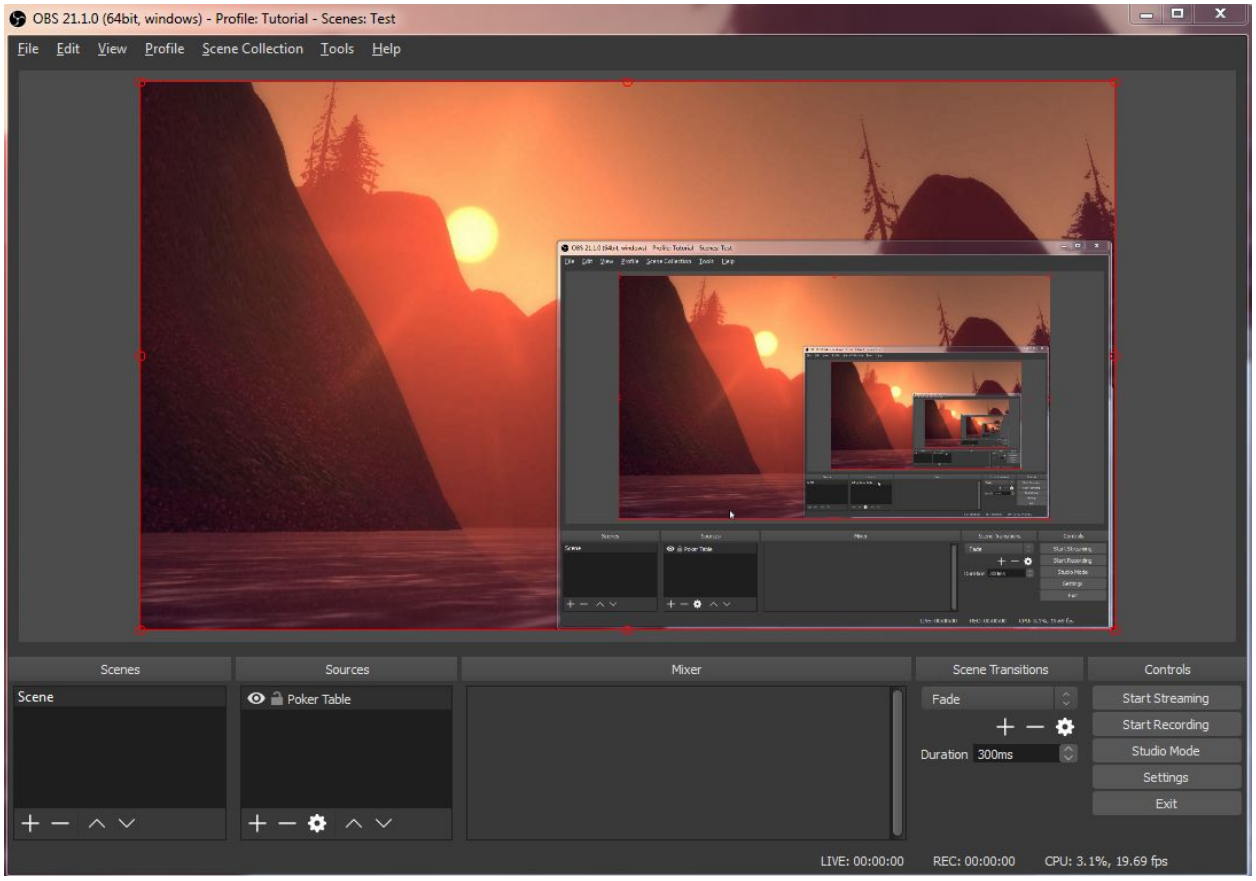


A menu will pop up where you can name this source (since this will be your poker table, you can name it “Poker Table”). Make sure “Make Source Visible” is checked and hit “OK”. The next menu will allow you to select which monitor you want to capture. If you’d like to select a different monitor to capture than the one currently being shown, click on the box next to “Display” and select which of your monitors you’d like to capture instead. If you only have one monitor, you won’t have any other option to pick. If you don’t want to show your mouse on screen you can uncheck “Capture Cursor”, but it’s recommended that you leave it checked. Click “OK” when you are happy with your settings.

With your display capture set up, you should now see your monitor in the preview window of OBS. Now we need to resize the capture space so that instead of showing your entire screen, it only shows the portion of your screen that your poker table is going to be on. There are a few ways to alter how sources look. If you have a source

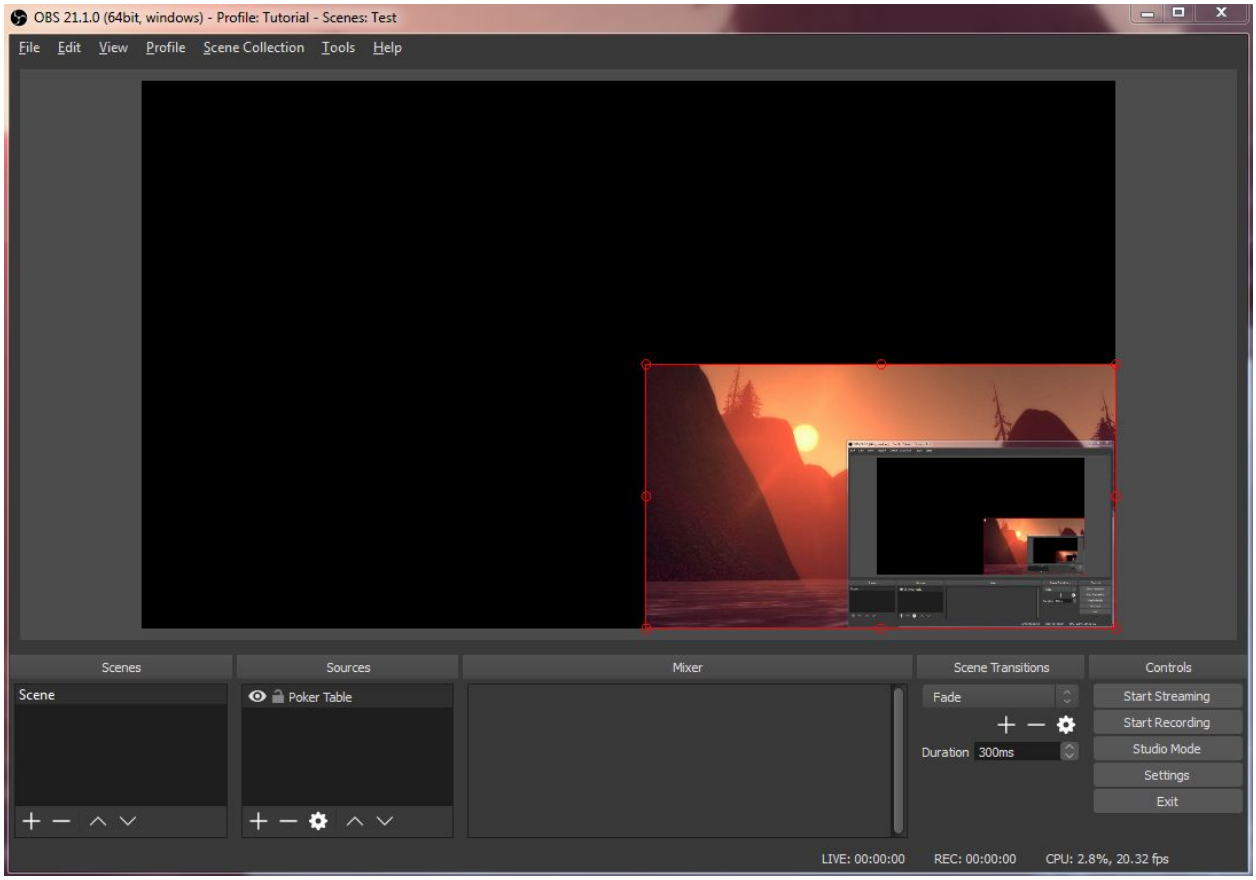
selected under “Sources” a red box will appear around the source. **If you click on the display capture you just made, you can now click and drag the source around the preview window, changing the position of it on your stream**.

After clicking on my “Poker Table” source (currently capturing my monitor), a red edit box appears around my preview window.



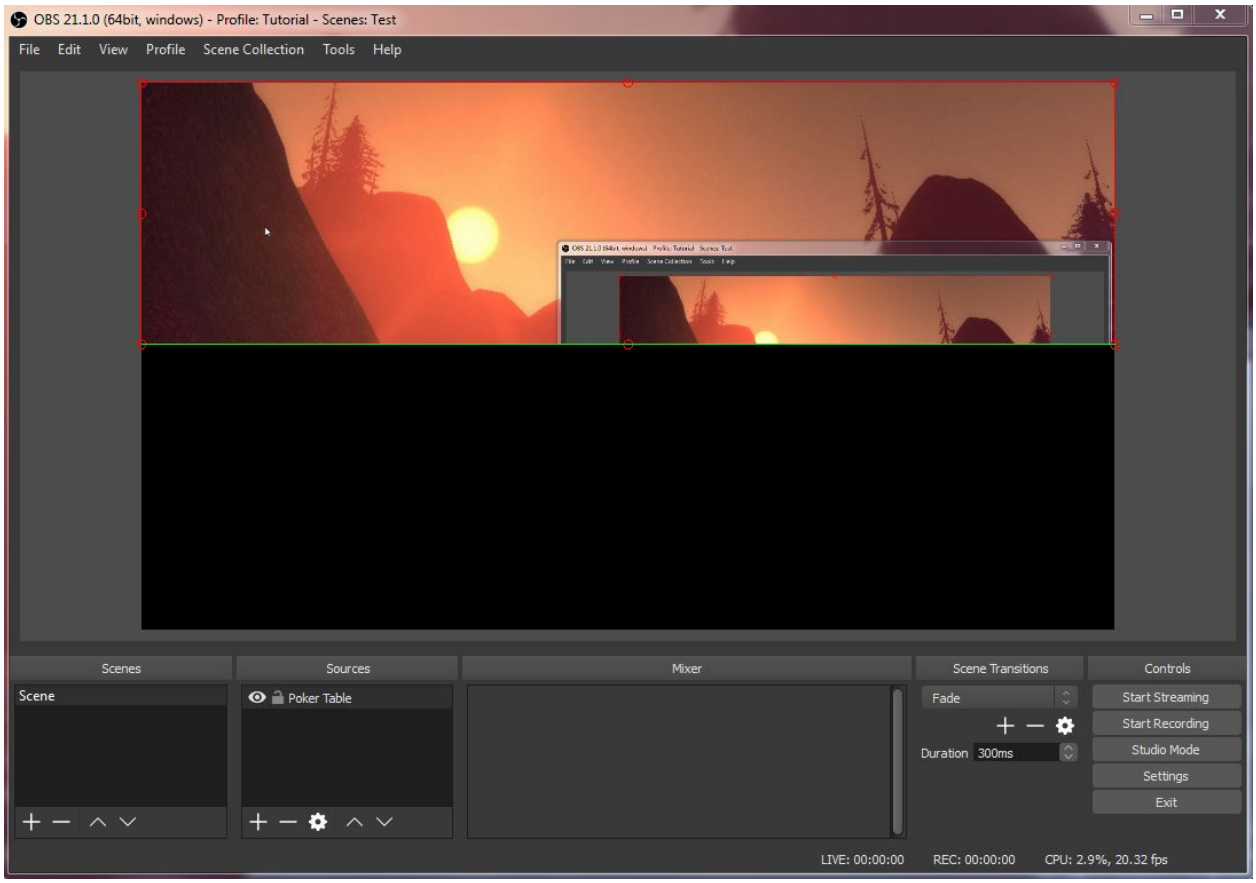
While dragging sources, they will “snap” to edges of other sources or the edges of the preview window. To turn off snapping, hold down control (CTRL) on your keyboard while you drag the window around. **If you click and drag one of the little circles on the red box you can alter the size of the window** (it will scale up and down as you drag it).

By clicking and dragging the red circle in the upper left corner of the red box, I was able to size-down my display capture:



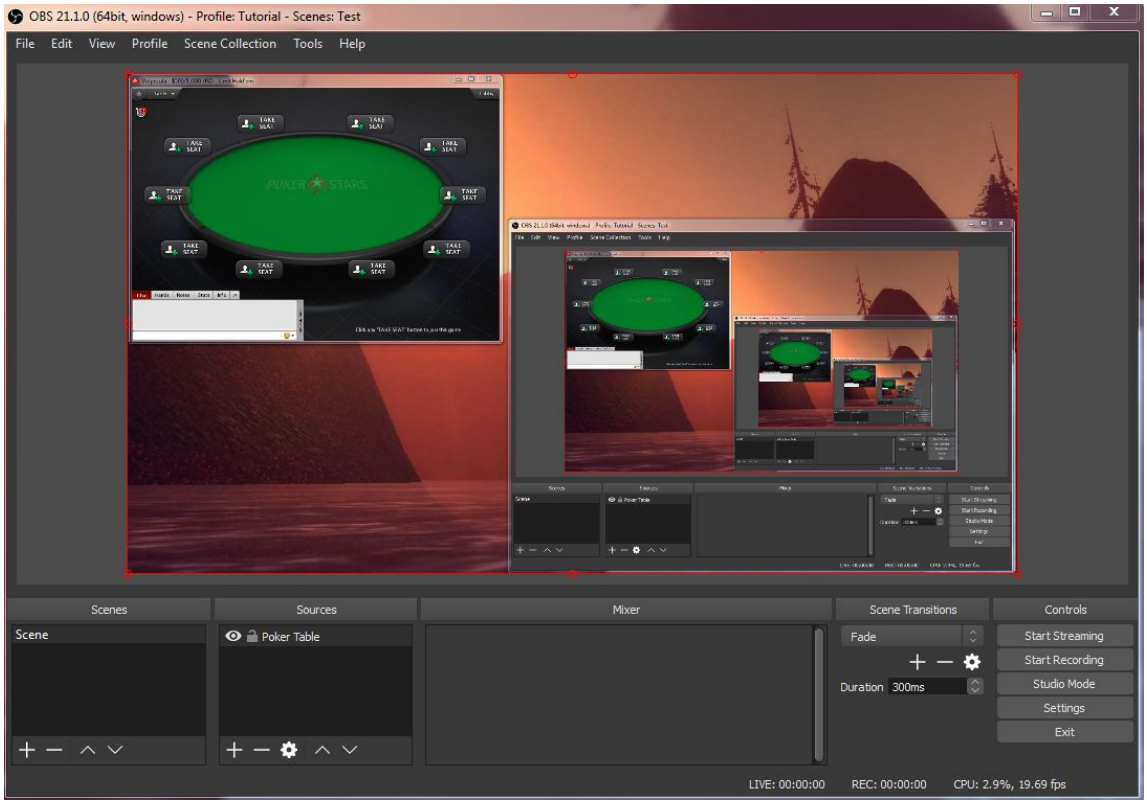
The final way to alter a source (specifically a display capture), is to crop it. Cropping hides or trims down what is being shown so you can have it focus on a specific part of your screen rather than the entire screen. **To crop your display capture, hold down "ALT" on your keyboard while you click and drag one of the red circles on the border around your display capture.** If you don't have a red border, just click on the display capture again under "Sources" to bring back the ability to edit. As you crop an edge of your display capture, it will turn green to indicate that you have cropped that side of the picture, and it will turn red again if you bring back the cropped side to the full extent of the screen.

By holding down ALT while dragging the bottom red circle, I was able to crop the bottom of my display capture. Notice the line on the bottom of the display capture is now green to indicate it has been cropped:

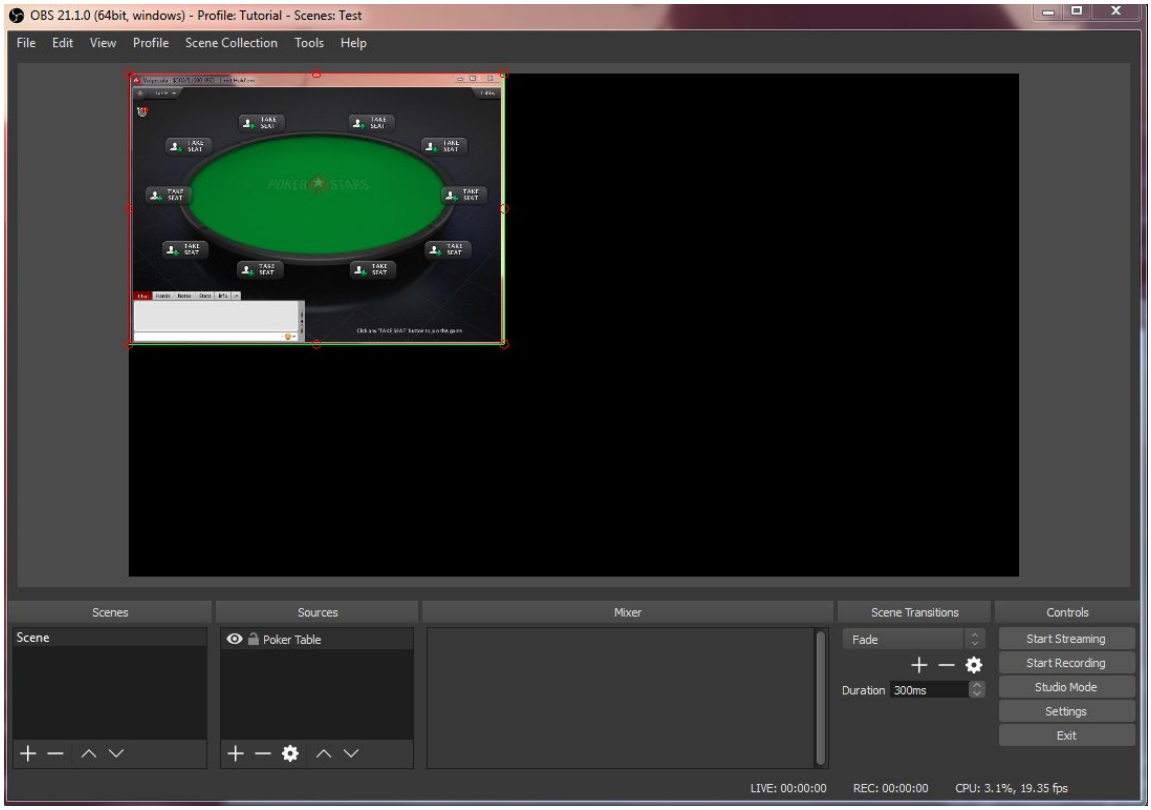


Use the crop feature to adjust all of the edges to where your poker table sits on your screen (you can bring up your poker table while you crop to give yourself a visual aid). After you have cropped the display capture around the spot on your monitor where your poker table sits, you can now resize the display capture by letting go of “ALT” and clicking and dragging the same red circles on the border.

Here is the process of cropping a poker table:



Holding ALT and dragging the bottom right red circle to match the table:

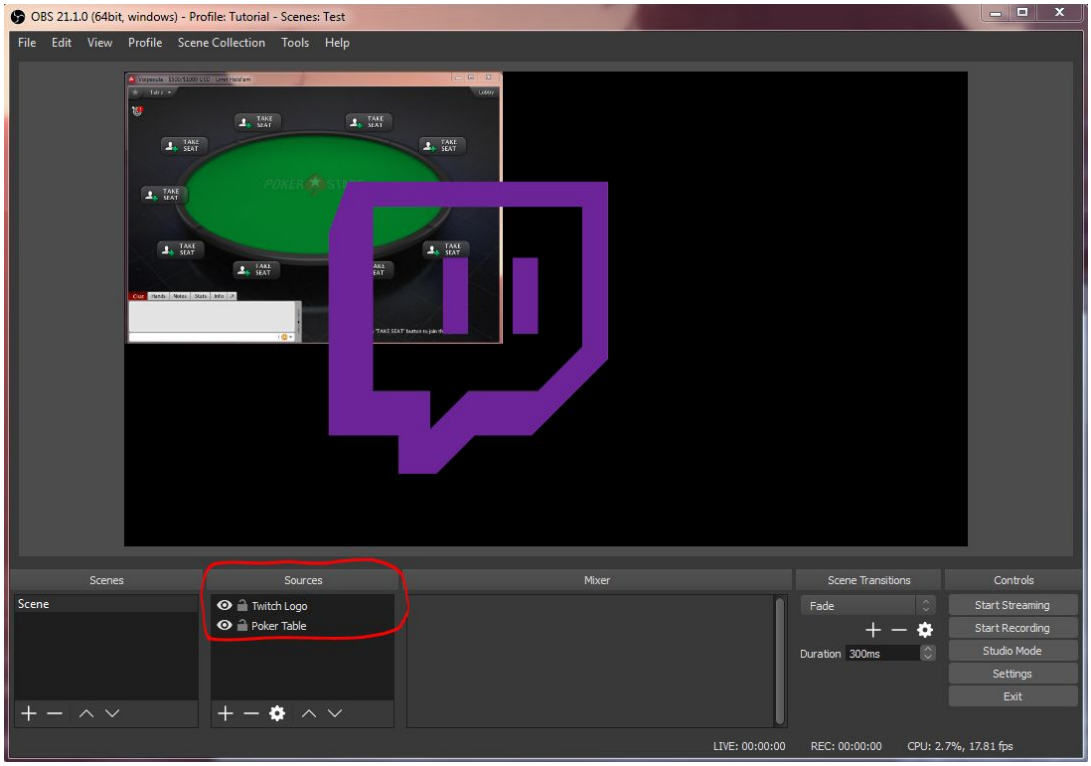


Now that you have your poker table being recorded, you can add other sources like a webcam and an overlay. These sources are added the same way we added a display capture: start by clicking on the “+” icon under “Sources” and selecting what you’d like to add to your stream. To add a webcam, select “Video Capture Device” and select which recording device you’d like to use next to “Device”. To add an overlay or any other kind of image, select “Image” and then click “Browse” and navigate to where your image is stored on your computer. All of these sources can be resized and repositioned similarly to the display capture above.

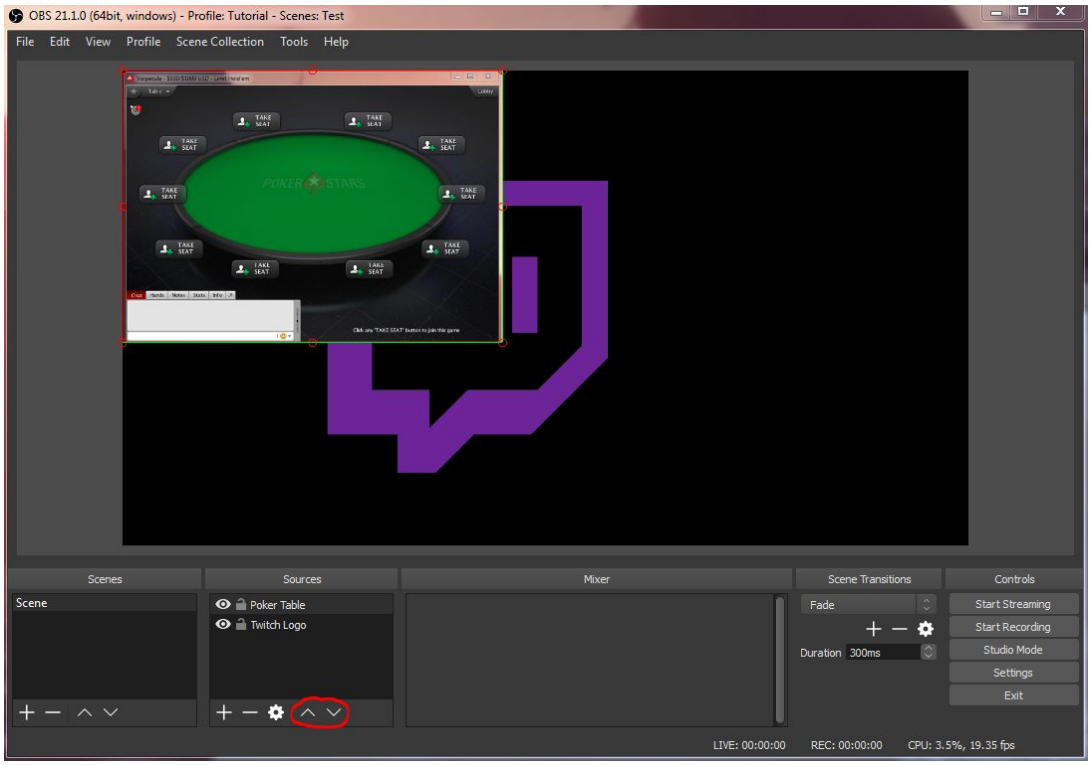
If you’d like to remove a source, you can simply select it under “Sources”, click the “-” icon below “Sources” and click “Yes” to confirm. The cog/circle next to the “-” symbol is to change the settings of the selected source. For instance, if you wanted to change which monitor was being captured for your display capture, you would click on your display capture source under “Sources” and then click on the cog/circle symbol. The arrows to the right of the cog symbol determine the order of the sources. **Order of sources is important because it determines which source gets shown first if you have multiple sources stacked on top of each other on your stream**. Sources at the top of the list will be at the forefront of your screen, and as you go further down the list of sources they will go further into the background (behind the other sources). For instance, if you wanted to put a background picture behind your webcam, you’d need to

make sure that the background picture was lower on the list of sources than your webcam so that it doesn’t cover up your webcam, but rather sits behind it.

An example of how the order of sources affects how they appear:



Above, the “Twitch Logo” source is listed above the “Poker Table” source in the “Sources” window of OBS (circled in red). Below, the order is reversed using the arrow buttons underneath the “Sources” window (circled in red):



Streamlabs

Streamlabs is a third-party broadcasting tool that can add many cool features to your stream. Streamlabs is not required to start streaming, but a large number of people use it to improve the look and feel of their stream. Features include setting up a place to donate to your channel, alerts for when someone follows, donates, or subscribes to your channel, and a customizable chat box that will show Twitch chat on stream.

If you wish to use Streamlabs, go to their website at https://streamlabs.com/dashboard. Click “Log in with Twitch” and then sign in with your Twitch account. You’ll now be at the Streamlabs dashboard, and from here you can access all of their features.

Most of the features of Streamlabs are in the form of widgets that you can add to OBS. To learn how to use these widgets, you can follow this guide from their website which gives a brief description of each widget and walks you through step-by-step how to set up each one:

https://support.streamlabs.com/hc/en-us/articles/217741147-Setting-up-your-Streamlabs-widgets-
Streamlabs also has their own version of OBS called “Streamlabs OBS”. It is a different software than OBS Studio that has better integration with the Streamlabs widgets. This guide won’t cover this software, and it’s not recommended over OBS Studio, but if you are interested in trying it out you can click the download link at the top of the Streamlabs dashboard to download the software.

Streamlabs has a help page with articles dedicated to every aspect of the service including troubleshooting. If you have questions or issues, you will most likely find an answer here: https://support.streamlabs.com/hc/en-us/categories/202602847-Help

Nightbot

Nightbot is a powerful tool to help you moderate your chat while you stream. It can also be set up with chat commands that can provide information about your stream. While Nightbot is not required to stream, utilizing it is heavily encouraged. To add Nightbot to your stream, begin by going to https://www.nightbot.tv/ and clicking “Login” in the top right corner. Select “Login with Twitch” and log in with your Twitch account. You’ll now be at the Nightbot dashboard. Have Nightbot join your channel by clicking “Join Channel” in the top right corner. There will be a popup telling you that you need to make Nightbot a moderator in your channel. Follow the simple instructions on the screen to do so. You can access your channel easily by typing twitch.tv/yourname into your browser’s address bar, where “yourname” is your Twitch account.

Once Nightbot has been added as a moderator in your channel, you can begin to utilize its two main features: chat moderation and chat commands. To configure Nightbot’s moderation tools, click on “Spam Protection” in the left sidebar of the Nightbot dashboard. From here you can tell Nightbot to remove messages with certain words (Blacklist Words/Phrases), excess capital letters, links, spammed messages (Repetitions), etc. Clicking on “Docs” next to each filter will bring you to an in-depth description of the filter.

To configure chat commands, click on “Commands” in the left sidebar from the Nightbot dashboard. Chat commands are an automated response from nightbot following a user in chat typing a certain command (for instance, if someone types !commands in chat, Nightbot will automatically reply with a link to the list of commands for your channel). Selecting “Default” will allow you to enable, disable, or edit Nightbot’s default commands, and “Custom” will allow you to make your own commands. To make your

own command from the “Custom” menu, select “+Add Command” in the top right and fill in the command name (most commands in Nightbot are started with “!” and then the name of the command), and the message Nightbot will reply with (for instance, you can have a !twitter command that has Nightbot reply with a link to your Twitter page). “Userlevel” sets who can use the command (ranking from highest to lowest top to bottom), and “Cooldown” sets how long Nightbot will wait before replying to the same command again. Hit “Submit” when you are happy with your command and it’ll be ready for use in your chat.

Recommended Streaming Equipment

A good webcam and microphone is essential to creating a high-quality stream and giving a good first impression for new viewers.

Recommendations for streaming equipment are the Rode Podcaster and Logitech C920 Webcam. Cheaper alternatives to these are the Samson Meteor USB Microphone and the Logitech C270 Webcam.