

Mahjong Basics - Traditional Chinese Version

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OVERVIEW

Mahjong is a tile-based game that was developed in China during the Qing dynasty and has spread throughout the world since the early 20th century. It is commonly played by four players. This is a summary of the basic gameplay rules of the traditional Chinese version of the game.



MAHJONG TILES



A typical mahjong set comes with tiles, dice, a dealer indicator, and chips. Here are the different types of tiles:

Simple Tiles

		Numbers								
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Simples	Dots									
	Bamboo									
	Characters									

Honor Tiles

Winds			
East	South	West	North

Dragons		
Red	Green	White

Bonus Tiles

Flowers				
No	Image	Name	Character	Direction
1		Plum blossom	梅	East
2		Orchid	蘭	South
3		Chrysanthemum	菊	West
4		Bamboo	竹	North

4 Flower tiles - The Four Flowers are numbered 1 - 4 and are optional - if used, they give bonus points when drawn.

Seasons				
No	Image	Name	Character	Direction
1		Spring	春	East
2		Summer	夏	South
3		Autumn	秋	West
4		Winter	冬	North

4 Season tiles - The Four Seasons are numbered 1 - 4 and are optional - if used they give bonus points when drawn.

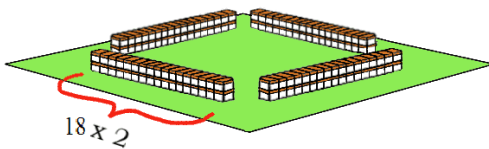
GAMEPLAY



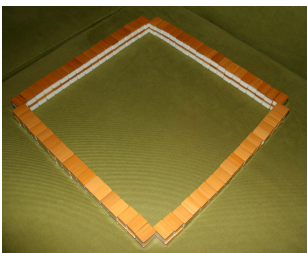
1. All tiles are placed face down onto the table, and all players begin shuffling/mixing (washing) up all the tiles.



2. Then each player grabs 18 2 tile high stacks, if not playing with the season (flowers) tiles grab 17 2 tile high stacks

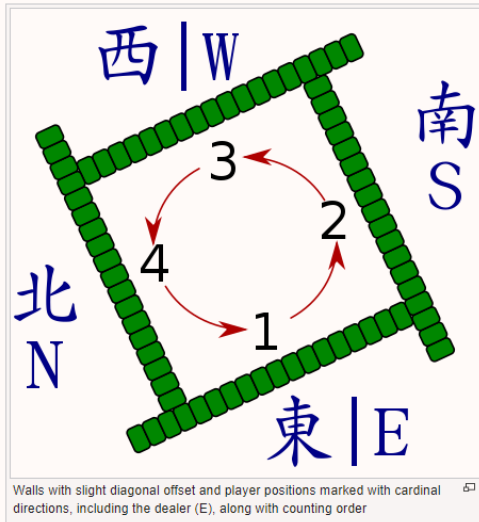


3. The 18 or 17 stacks are pushed together to form a square wall.

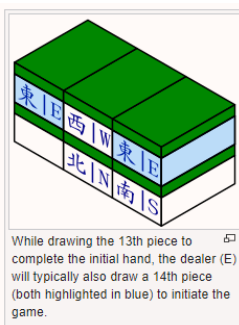


4. Next each player rolls the dice to see who will be the dealer (normally considered east).

- Once the dealer has been chosen, he/she rolls the dice again.
- Counting counterclockwise, starting with him/herself, the dealer counts to the number rolled.



- On the side of the wall landed on, the dealer counts tiles, starting from that player's right, till the rolled number. Places one of the dice on that tile, then takes the next 2 stacks and deals starting with him/herself. Till all players have 6 stacks.
- Then each player gets 1 extra tile for a total of 13 and the dealer gets 1 more extra tile for a total of 14.



- Place your tiles towards you so no one can see which ones you have (if you have any flower or season tiles show them and pick up an extra tile from the opposite side of the wall tiles were dealt from)



10. The dealer starts off the game by discarding a tile, then on each player's turn he/she picks up a tile and then discards one till there is a winner.

HOW TO WIN



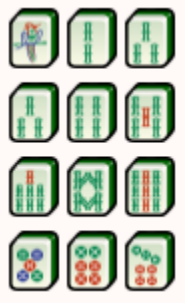
1. To make a winning hand you need to make melds (combinations)
2. There are 3 types of melds you can make:
 - a. Pong - a set of three identical tiles. For example:



- b. Kong - a complete set of four identical tiles. For example:



c. Chow - a meld of three suited tiles in sequence. For example:



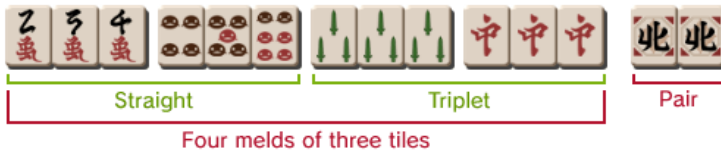
A pair (eyes) to complete the win



Dragons & wind tiles can only make pongs (3 of the same characters/symbols)

3. A winning hand consists of 4 Melds and a Pair (eyes)

A complete hand of 14 tiles



All PONG	
All CHI	
PONG and CHI	



OTHER IMPORTANT RULES



You can add another of the same tile to a pong, after that you get to grab another tile from the other end of the wall.

Using (melding) another player's discard

When a player discards a tile, other players may steal the tile to complete a meld. Stealing tiles has both advantages (quickly forming a winning hand and scoring extra points) and disadvantages (being forced to reveal part of one's hand to other players and not being able to change the meld once declared).

When a meld (Pong, Kong, or Chow) is declared through a discard, the player must state the type of meld to be declared and expose the meld by placing the three (or four) tiles face up. The player must then discard a tile, and play continues to the right.

Anyone can use a newly discarded tile to meld a pong, but only at the time it is discarded not afterwards.

To meld a chow using a discard, you can only pick up the tile from the person before you.

In a chow, place the discarded tile in-between the 2 tiles from your hand.

You can also use a discard to complete your pair (eyes) for a win.

If the player who pongs a discard is not directly after the discard (in order of play), one or two players will essentially miss their turn as play continues counter-clockwise from the player who declared the meld.

If multiple players call for a discarded tile, priority for the discard depends on the declared action of the player stealing the discard.

1st Priority-Whoever needs the discarded tile to win the hand. A player may take the tile to win the hand from any other player.

2nd Priority-Whoever declares a Pong (3 of a kind) or Kong (4 of a kind) using the discard. A player who calls for a Pong or Kong may take the discard from any other player. Only one player can be in this position because there are only four of any tile in a

Mahjong set. If you have a Pong (3 of a kind) already dropped onto the table, you cannot add to it to do a Kong (4 of a kind). You can only Kong with 3 that are in your hand.

3rd Priority-Whoever declares a Chow using the discard. Players may only call for a Chow from the discard of the player immediately prior to them, unless the tile is the final one required to complete the hand.

SCORING

Some examples



3pts for the suits

3pts for them all being 3 of a kind

1pt if it's the east round

1pt if you are sitting in the east seat

1pt if you picked up the winning tile yourself (from the wall)

1pt if this was all in your hand and you drop it down all at once

10 total points



3pts for the suits

3pts for them all being 3 of a kind

7pts for the dragon tiles

1pt if you picked up the winning tile yourself (from the wall)

1pt if this was all in your hand and you drop it down all at once

1pt if it's the (direction) round

1pt if you are sitting in the (direction) seat

SPECIAL HANDS

Special hands are alternative target sets of tiles that a player can go MahJong with. The original Chinese game allowed only a few special hands but some Western derivatives controversially include many more. Below is a list of special hands, including their name, description and award.

Heavenly hand - The dealer draws a winning hand at the beginning of the game.

Earthly hand - A player completes a winning hand with the dealer's first discard and in most variants, provided the dealer does not draw a kong.

Thirteen Orphans - Player has 1 and 9 of each simple suit, one of each wind, one of each dragon and in addition one extra piece of any of those thirteen elements



Orphans - Player has only 1s and 9s in the winning hand.



Nine Gates Hand - Player has 1112345678999 of any simple suit; any one extra piece of the same suit suffices to win. This hand always has 4 melds and the eyes. In the example below, there are two Pongs (111 and 999), two Chows (234 and 678) and the extra 5 forms the Eyes.



Self Triplets - 4 concealed Pongs



All Kongs - Player has 4 Kongs

Great Winds - 4 Pongs of all 4 winds



Other special high-scoring hands

All in Triplets - All melds are Pongs (or kongs). (3 Fans)



Mixed one Suit - Hand consists of only a single suit and Honors tiles. The Pearl, Jade, and Ruby Dragon limit hands are special instances of clean hands. (3 Fans)



All one Suit - All tiles are the same suit. (6 Fans)



Small Dragons - 2 Pongs of dragons and a pair of the 3rd dragon. (5 Fans)



Small Winds - 3 Pongs of winds and a pair of the 4th wind. (10 Fans)



All Honors Tiles - Player has all Honors in the hand (only winds and dragons, no Simples) (10 Fans)



Great Dragons - 3 Pongs of all 3 dragons. (8 Fans)



Win by Double Kong - Self-pick the winning tile by obtaining it in a replacement after a second consecutive kong. (9 Fans)

Buried Treasure - Concealed Pungs in one suit with Winds/Dragons and a pair = Limit

Heads and Tails - Pungs/Kongs of Ones and Nines = Limit

The Wriggling Snake - A pair of Ones and a run from Two to Nine in the same suit, with each of the winds = Limit

Three Great Scholars - Pungs/Kongs of all three Dragons, another Pung/Kong and a pair = Limit

Four Blessings Hovering Over The Door - Pungs/Kongs of each of the four Winds with any pair = Limit

The Thirteen Unique Wonders - One of each Dragon, one of each Wind, one of each One and one of each Nine. Any one of these tiles must be paired = Limit

Heaven's Blessing - MahJong immediately made by East with the original fourteen tiles dealt to that player = Limit

Earth's Blessing - MahJong immediately made by West, North or South using the first discard made by East = Limit

Gathering the Plum Blossom from the Roof - The Plum Blossom is the Five of Circles. This is made by a player who draws a loose tile (the roof) as a replacement for a Kong, a Flower or a Season and that tile is the Plum Blossom which allows the player to go Mah Jong = Limit

Plucking the Moon from the Bottom of the Sea - The Moon is the One of Circles. This is made by a player who upon drawing the last tile from the wall finds that it is the Moon which allows the player to go MahJong = Limit

TIPS & TRICKS



MAHJONG TIPS TO BECOME A BETTER PLAYER

With just a few adjustments and improvements you can improve your game out of sight in a short space of time, dramatically increasing your chances of ‘Going Mahjong’. Often beginners will dive head first into collecting as many sets of Chows, Pungs and Kongs as they can right from the start, but this is a strategy fraught with danger and can lead to problems as the game progresses. The next time you play, consider incorporating these helpful tips for Mahjong beginners into your game play strategy.

1. Resist the urge to separate your tiles – If you want to let your opponents know how close you are to compiling a complete hand, rearrange and group your tiles into Chows, Pungs and Kongs. Alternatively, this could be a great strategy to send your opponents the wrong signals!
2. Concentrate on the free tiles – Most of the 144 tiles in a Mahjong game are blocked anyway, so don’t worry about them. Focus on the free tiles available to match and remove, and make a play when the opportunity arises. You can only match a tile when there is a space on one side of the tile, so look to make matches with tiles at the top of the stack first. You’ll have a better chance of matching tiles while avoiding the problem of a tile you want being trapped.
3. Ignore tip number two...sort of – In most board games you must plan ahead, and Mahjong is no different. As such you need to consider the consequences of your actions, such as how removing certain tiles will affect the rest of the game. You need to continually ask yourself “will removing this tile be better or worse for me in the long run?” Often the easiest option is not the best option.
4. Don’t reveal too much of your Hand – You can only pick up discarded tiles when you can complete a Chow, Pung or Kong, so whenever you do this you’re giving away information about the tiles you’re holding. Experienced players will soon be

able to predict which tiles you'll pick up and discard, and tailor their decisions based on your moves.

5. Have a clear plan of attack – Think about the direction you want to take your hand and stick with it, while also remaining flexible. Picking up tiles for the sake of it won't work, and patience will always win out in the end. If your strategy isn't working, change tactics and look for other winning possibilities.

6. It gets interesting near the end – As the game nears its conclusion, keep an eye on the tiles other players are discarding, along with the tiles left in the wall. You also need to be careful which tiles you discard, and the best strategy is to discard tiles that have already been discarded by others if possible.

QUICK GUIDE SUMMARY



1. Make sure all flower/season tiles are removed.
2. Flip all tiles face-down and shuffle them up.
3. Each player makes 2 stacks (walls) of 17 tiles and then arranges each stack (wall) into a square.
4. Then each player rolls the dice, highest roll deals first.
5. Dealer rolls again, then starting with himself, the dealer counts counter-clockwise the # he/she rolled.
6. Starting from the right-hand side of that stack (wall), dealer counts tiles till the # he/she rolled, placing the dice on-top as a marker.
7. Next start grabbing tiles after that.
8. Each player gets 12 + 1 extra tile total of 13, the dealer then gets 1 extra tile total of 14.
9. Dealer starts the game by discarding a tile.
10. On each player's turn, he/she decides if they can make a combo with the last discarded tile. If not pick up from the new tiles, then discard one.
11. You can only pick up a discard if you can make a combo, a combo made with a discard must be shown to everyone.
12. When a tile is discarded, anyone can pick it up and make a pong with it, regardless of whose turn it is. (You cannot chow or kong unless it was discarded by the person before you).
13. This goes till someone makes mahjong (4 melds (combinations) + a pair).

RESOURCES

- **Mahjong Picture Guide** - Rules of Mahjong explained in pictures - tiles, pungs/chows, building/breaking the wall, turns, claiming discards, winning.
<http://www.mahjongpictureguide.com/>
- **Wikipedia Mahjong**
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahjong>
- **Asia Pacific Mahjong - How to Play Mahjong**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tRCb_LOkEmQ
- **South China Morning Post-Learn how to play mahjong in 2.5 minutes**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qpYF-xmNMew&t=22s>
- **mahjong 13 tiles** - smartphone game
Apple: <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/mahjong-13-tiles/id551252620>
Google: https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.poesysoul.mahjong13tiles_anzhuo
- **Tabletop Simulator** - an pc software that allows players to play and create tabletop games (**mahjong included**)
<https://www.tabletopsimulator.com/>