

The Game of Mah Jongg

These instructions are based on the American version of Mah Jongg. The set includes 8 Jokers and players refer to a card that shows the sequences that are needed to complete a Mah Jongg hand.

The American version consists of the following:

4 racks (and pushers)

2 die

152 tiles consisting of the following:

8 Flowers

8 Jokers

4 of each wind – North, East, West, South = 16 tiles

Numbers 1-9 in Craks (4 of each number) = 36 tiles

Numbers 1-9 in Bams (4 of each number) = 36 tiles

Numbers 1-9 in Dots (4 of each number) = 36 tiles

4 Red Dragons

4 Green Dragons

4 White Dragons called "Soaps"



Note: I have used "she" and "her" in this document. This is less cumbersome than continually referring to players as he/she, him/her, etc.

3 Suits

<p>Bamboos (Bams) #1 to #9 (4 tiles of each) match with Green Dragons</p>	<p>36 tiles</p> <p>4 tiles</p>	<p>#1 Bam looks like a bird, also called "Bird Bam"</p> 
<p>Characters (Craks) #1 to #9 (4 tiles of each) match with Red Dragons</p>	<p>36 tiles</p> <p>4 tiles</p>	
<p>Dots #1 to #9 (4 tiles of each) match with White Dragons [Soaps]</p>	<p>36 tiles</p> <p>4 tiles</p>	
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<p>Winds – NEWS North East West South (4 tiles of each)</p>	<p>16 tiles</p>	
<p>Flowers – FFFF All the same – numbers are not important or significant</p>	<p>8 tiles</p>	
<p>Jokers can be used for Pungs (3 of a kind), Kongs (4 of a kind), and Quints (5 of a kind).</p> <p>Jokers can never be used for a single tile or a pair.</p>	<p>8 tiles</p>	<div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: flex-start;"> <div style="display: flex; gap: 10px; margin-bottom: 10px;">  <div style="text-align: right; padding-right: 10px;"> <p>Example of a Pung with a Joker (3 of a kind)</p> </div> </div> <div style="display: flex; gap: 10px;">  <div style="text-align: right; padding-right: 10px;"> <p>Example of a Kong with Jokers (4 of a kind)</p> </div> </div> </div>

Playing the Game

Part 1: Starting the Game:

1. Each player places a rack in front of her. The pushers are placed on the long side of the rack toward the centre of the table.
2. Along the back of the rack against the pusher, each player builds a row of tiles called a wall, two tiles high, face down (19 stacks of two -- 38 in total). Note: If the set does not include pushers, the tiles are placed on the side of the rack toward the middle of the table and players can carefully push out their walls so that no other player is able to see any tiles that are racked (later in the game).
3. One player is designated East (the "dealer") and rolls the die to start the game.
4. East takes the number she rolled and counts that number of tiles (both tiers) from her right-hand side of the wall. (The counted tiles will remain on her wall.) She moves the pusher just to the left of the last tile counted and pushes the rest of the tiles out towards the middle of the table. The tiles that were counted are now moved down to the left side of her rack against the pusher and will stay there until the end of the game. They will be the last tiles played.

Note: As play continues, when all the tiles from the stack in the middle are taken, the player to the left* of East pushes out her complete wall of tiles. Tiles are taken from the right-hand side of the stack (from the perspective of the player who pushed out the wall). When that stack is used up, the next person to her left* pushes out her wall, and so on. (*Many groups have been pushing out the untouched wall to the right of the last wall that was pushed out, keeping it going in the same direction as the play goes. Whatever you do, you should be consistent.)

5. Picking from the right-hand side of the wall of tiles that were pushed out, East takes the first 4 tiles (2 stacks of 2 each). Hint: Make a "caboose" with 2 tiles at the end of the row of tiles. Place the last two tiles diagonally against the others. That way, everyone knows to pick from the other end of the tiles, the end without the caboose.
6. The next player to her right takes the next 4 tiles.
7. This continues in turn (3 times) until each player has 12 tiles face down in front of her.
8. Then East picks the top tile from the end, the player to her right picks the next tile which was underneath it; the 3rd player picks the next top tile and then the 4th player picks the bottom one. East takes one more tile so she now has 14 tiles and the other three players each have 13.

Hint: If there are only a few tiles left (e.g. 3), it is a good idea to push out the next wall of tiles and place those few tiles at the end. Otherwise, they can easily get mistaken for the 3 tiles being passed for the Charlestons.

9. Players "rack" their tiles and look at them. The goal of each player is to complete a sequence with her tiles that matches one of the sequences shown on the card.

Part 2: The Charleston:

1. The Charleston is the next step and is compulsory. This is an exchange of tiles to the right, across, and left as follows: Each player discards 3 tiles by passing them face down to the player on her right. A player must discard her tiles before picking up the tiles that have been passed to her. Each player looks at those tiles and can re-arrange her hand. The second exchange (3 tiles) is with the player across. The third exchange (3 tiles) is to the left.

Note: It is not allowed to pass a Joker to another player during these exchanges.

2. If all players agree, a second Charleston can be performed. If even one player refuses, the second Charleston is not done. No player should feel any pressure or obligation to agree to a 2nd Charleston, and no reason needs to be given when refusing. The sequence for the second Charleston is to the left, across, and right. Once the second Charleston has been started, all three exchanges must be done.
3. A player may use the "blind pass" on the third pass of each of the Charlestons. A blind pass means that 1 - 3 tiles would be passed directly through to the next player without the player looking at them and the remainder made up from tiles in the player's hand.
4. When the first Charleston is completed (or the second one if agreed on), players across from each other can then agree to do a final courtesy exchange from 1 to 3 tiles if both are willing. There is no obligation to do this step. That is the end of the exchange of tiles.

Hint: To assist in remembering the order of passing tiles for the Charlestons, think of dancing with RALPH (right, across, left) for the first Charleston and with LARRY (left, across, right) for the second Charleston.

Part 3: Beginning the Play:

1. East (the dealer) starts by discarding one tile. Now all players should have 13 tiles.
2. If no one claims this tile, the player to the right of East picks up a tile from the stack and discards one.

3. Play continues to the right, in turn, until one player declares a "Mah Jongg" or until all the tiles have been taken, whichever happens first.
4. If all the tiles have been taken/discarded and no player has won Mah Jongg, it is called "reaching a wall." There is no winner. All tiles are shuffled, walls are built again, and a new game begins. Suggestion: To make it more fun when playing with money, each player puts a designated amount into the "pot" (e.g. 25¢ each) and the winner of the next Mah Jongg wins the pot as well.

Part 4: Rules for Discarding and Picking Up Tiles:

1. As each tile is discarded, the player must announce the name of the tile she is discarding so that all players are aware of the discard (e.g. 3 Bam, 8 Crak, 2 Dot, North, Red Dragon, Soap, etc).
2. If any player can use the tile to complete a Pung (3 of a kind), a Kong (4 of a kind), a Quint (5 of a kind), or the last tile required to win a Mah Jongg, she can ask for the tile. She must request the tile before a player picks up and "racks" the next tile. She can stop the play and ask for a moment to think about whether she wants the discarded tile or not. If she decides not to take the tile, the game proceeds as it would normally.
3. If a player decides to pick up a discarded tile, it must complete a Pung, Kong or Quint (or any tile to win Mah Jongg). She must expose the Pung, Kong or Quint on the top of her rack and discard a different tile. If a tile is picked up to win Mah Jongg, there is no discard.
4. If more than one player asks for the same tile, the player who can win Mah Jongg has priority. If no one wanting the tile can win, then the player whose turn would normally come first has priority. After picking up a discarded tile, exposing the completion, and discarding a different tile, play continues to the right. This may cause a player or players to lose a turn.
5. There is a "Window of Opportunity" for a player to claim a discarded tile. This window remains open until a player racks the next tile or discards it.
6. When discarding, once a player calls out a tile's name or touches the table with it, it is considered discarded and the player cannot reclaim it. If a player has picked up a tile from the stack and looked at a tile, but hasn't racked it or discarded it and, meanwhile, another player requests the previous tile, the player must put the tile back on the stack (even though she has seen it) and allow the player to claim the discarded tile. It is a good idea to make a point to rack your tile when you pick it up. However, one should be courteous and not rack a tile so quickly that the other players do not have a reasonable chance to consider the discarded tile.
7. When a Joker is displayed as part of a Pung, Kong or Quint, another player can take the Joker if she has the tile represented by the Joker, but must wait for her turn to do so. When it is the player's turn, the procedure is to first

pick up a tile, rack it, request the Joker or Jokers, exchange the tile for the Joker, then discard. The player cannot take the Joker first and then play her turn. When a Joker is taken from another player's rack, the taker is not required to display anything. The player who displayed the Joker can also take her own Joker if it is still available and if she picks up the appropriate tile in a subsequent turn.

Hint: When displaying a Quint, Kong, or Pung with a Joker, place the Joker(s) inside the other tiles so that it is obvious which tile the Joker represents. When more than one completion is displayed on the rack, sometimes it can cause confusion as to which Quint, Kong or Pung the Joker belongs to.

8. If a player mistakenly discards a tile that could have replaced a Joker, she cannot reclaim it nor can another player pick it up to claim a Joker. Everyone should follow those rules and be consistent. It is not about "being nice." It's about following the rules consistently to be fair to everyone all the time. If a player does it often enough, she will learn not to do it and be more careful next time!
9. If a Joker is discarded, it cannot be picked up.
10. Players should take care when naming the discarded tile. If the discarded tile has been announced incorrectly and is picked up for Mah Jongg, the winner can demand double the amount owed from the player who has incorrectly identified the discarded tile.

Part 5: Descriptions of Hands from the Card

1. All hands are made up of 14 tiles. When a player announces Mah Jongg (completes one of the sequences shown on the card), she will not discard.
2. Some hands are shown with a C in front of the value. Those are concealed hands. If a player tries to make a sequence with a concealed hand, she cannot pick up any discarded tiles except the last one she may need to complete the sequence and declare Mah Jongg. She may exchange a tile from a displayed Joker if she has the appropriate tile because that does not require any part of the hand to be exposed. If a player mistakenly picks up a discarded tile and exposes more than one completion of a concealed hand, her hand is considered "dead." She is disqualified and play continues with the remaining players. If she has exposed only one completion from a concealed hand (e.g. one Kong or Pung), it is possible to change that hand into a non-concealed hand by choosing a different sequence using that same Kong or Pung.
3. If a hand is shown in black, it can be made up of any suit but all tiles must be of that one suit. It is important to remember that Green Dragons go with Bams, Red Dragons go with Craks and the White Dragons [Soaps] go with Dots (see Help Sheet). Flowers and Winds have no particular suit and can be used wherever indicated (FFFF or NNN, NEWS, etc).

- If a hand is shown in three different colors, that means the suits must be three different ones. All the tiles in red must be in one suit (not any particular suit, but any suit), the tiles in green in another suit and tiles in black in the third suit. If only two colors are shown, then two different suits are required. The player can choose which suit to designate for each color, unless the suit is further described in brackets.
- The White Dragon [Soap] is used for "0" (zero) in some places (e.g. 2016 or 000). In 2016, for example, the three numbers (2, 1 and 6) must be in the same suit (Bams, Craks or Dots). 2016 must be pure (no Jokers can be used). This applies to any future cards for future years (e.g. 2017, 2018, 2019, and so on).
- Jokers can be used in Pungs (3 of a kind), Kongs (4 of a kind), and Quints (5 of a kind). A Pung, Kong or Quint can be made up completely of Jokers. Jokers can never be used in singles and pairs.



The X's mean not allowed!
NEWS is made up of four single tiles.
FF is a pair.
2016 is considered to be all singles.



Hint for beginners: Try to avoid sequences on the card where you are missing more than one single or pair after the Charleston(s) and courtesy pass. It is more difficult (though not impossible) to win a Mah Jongg game requiring a single or a pair unless the player has those tiles before the play begins (when East discards the first tile). Why is that? **A player cannot pick up a discarded tile for a single or a pair unless it is the last tile to win a "Mah Jongg" and Jokers cannot be used for a single or a pair.**

Another hint: The easiest sequences to win are those without singles and pairs, unless you have the necessary singles and pairs very early in the game. If you start the game with more than one Joker, consider trying to win by choosing a sequence without singles and pairs. Sometimes players will have 5 Jokers and still lose because they were waiting for a single or a pair.

Part 6: Winning the Game:

- The game is won when one of the players completes a sequence of 14 tiles shown on the card. She will announce "Mah Jongg" and then expose her completed hand on the top of the rack. It is important that players wait until a winning hand has been verified before throwing in their tiles.
- The winner is paid the amount shown on the card by all players except as follows: The player who discarded a tile which the winner picked up to

declare Mah Jongg pays double the amount shown. If the winner picked up the tile herself from the stack which completed the win or which she was able to exchange for a Joker which allowed her to win, all players pay her double the amount shown. If the winner has no Jokers in her winning hand, she receives double what is owed. (E.g. if a hand is valued at 25¢ and the winner picks her own tile to make Mah Jongg, plus she has no Jokers displayed, each player pays her \$1.00.)

3. If the player has made a mistake (for example, used a Joker for a single or a pair or has mismatched the suits), she has a "dead hand" and is disqualified. Play will continue with the remaining players until all tiles have been taken/discarded. The player who is disqualified must still pay the winner at the end of the game.
4. Any Jokers that were displayed prior to the hand being declared "dead" can be taken by the remaining players if they pick up the appropriate tile to replace the Joker. Any Jokers displayed after the player mistakenly announces "Mah Jongg" are considered "dead" and cannot be taken by the other players. Suggestion: Turn over "dead" Jokers to show the blank back side of the Joker tile so it is evident to the other players which Jokers are not available anymore. This causes less confusion.
5. A player should always have 13 tiles during the play of the game, except the "dealer" at the beginning before she discards her first tile, and during each player's turn (after a player picks up a tile and before discarding). If, at any other time during the game, a player has too many or not enough tiles, her hand can be declared "dead." Any Jokers that were displayed prior to her hand being declared "dead" can still be claimed by other players, and any of her tiles not yet exposed are kept concealed until the game is finished.
6. A player's hand can be declared "dead" by another player if it is noticed that she cannot win because of the discarded tiles (for example, if it is obvious that a player needs a pair of Souths to complete her hand and three Souths have been discarded).

Part 7: Starting the Next Game:

1. All tiles are thrown into the middle and mixed up, face down. It is a good idea for players to pick randomly from the tiles so that the tiles are well shuffled. The four walls are built again lined up against each player's rack.
2. The next "dealer" is the player to the right of the previous dealer.

Part 8: Playing With Only 3 Players:

Follow the instructions in [Part 1: Starting the Game](#), #1 through #7, except that only three players draw tiles. Missing player's space is not given any tiles. East draws one extra tile so she has 14 tiles. Charleston is omitted, courtesy pass is optional, and East starts the game by discarding one tile.