

BEGINNERS MAH JONG – HONG KONG VERSION

TERMINOLOGY

- **Chee or Chow** - a meld of 3 tiles in sequence of the same suit
- **Pung or Pong** - a meld of 3 identical tiles of the same suit
- **Kong** a meld of 4 identical tiles and must be exposed if formed from a discarded tile.
- **Um Kong** a meld of 4 identical tiles but self-drawn.
- **Ma** 2 tiles/ a pair
- **Seak** Game/Mah Jong (end of game)
- **Feng** similar to the term, “tricks” in cards
- **Honour tile** - Wind or Dragon tile
- **FAN** - points

PREVAILING WINDS

- **Toong** East
 - **Lam** South
 - **Sai** West
 - **Pak** North
- Fei or Jokers, Flowers and Season tiles are optional and are used to apply bonuses to the Game when scoring.

THE PLAYING SET

The set comprises of 136 tiles of which there are 36 pieces in each of the 3 suits, numbering from 1 to 9. There are 4 identical pieces of each number.

The suits are Bamboo/sticks, Characters and Circles/Dots/Balls (some people even refer to them as plates!)

There are 4 Prevailing Wind tiles, East, South West and North of which there are 4 of each

There are 3 Dragons – White, Green and Red of which there are 4 of each.

Lastly, there are 8 optional tiles comprising of Flowers numbered 1,2,3,4 and Seasons numbered 1,2,3,4.

The total number of tiles for the game is 136. 4 walls are constructed, each wall comprised of 17 tiles on 2 levels or 4 walls of 18 tiles on 2 levels if flowers and seasons are used in the game.

THE BASIC RULES

The objective of the game is to put together a complete set/hand which contains 4 sets of either Chee/Chow, Pung of Kong **and must contain a pair** to make a total of 14 pieces.

Each player starts with 13 tiles (East Wind starts with 14), picking 4 tiles at a time and one on the final pick (Two tiles for East Wind).

At each turn the player first picks one tile from the Wall or makes a meld with a discarded tile.

If the discarded tile is needed by another player the following apply.

- If it makes a CHOW only the player to the right of the person discarding the tile can claim it.
- If it makes a PUNG any player may claim the tile.
- If it makes a KONG, any player may claim the tile. However, by claiming a KONG the player is required to pick up a further tile from the DEAD WALL before discarding a tile. If this is not done it is impossible to WIN the hand.

If East Wind wins, he/she remains East Wind, otherwise the player to the right of the dealer (South) becomes the new East Wind and the last dealer becomes North wind

East Wind starts the game first and does not pick up a tile; simply discards one of the tiles in their hand.

Other players can either claim it to make a CHOW, PUNG or KONG or to DECLARE A WIN when 14 tiles are melded.

CLAIM PRIORITY

A WIN has priority over CHOW, PUNG or KONG

If 2 players want to claim the same tile to WIN, the player who sits to the right of the person who discards the tile wins.

PUNG has priority over CHOW.

TO START

The first step is to determine who will be East Wind. The correct method under the rules is as follows. **However, for simplicity I suggest we continue to use our current method of the person throwing the highest number from two dice is East Wind**

Each player throws two dice. The player with the highest number becomes "temporary East", and the other three seats, in counterclockwise order, temporary South, West and North.

Next, the player who is assigned as "temporary East" mixes four wind tiles, one of each wind, face down on the table and arranges them in a row. At one end of the row, an even-numbered suit tile is placed face up, and at the other end, an odd numbered suit tile.

See the example on the next page:



Temporary East then throws two dice and counts counterclockwise, starting with himself. The player indicated then picks up the wind tile at the odd end of the row, if the number thrown was an odd number, or even end of the row, if the number was an even number. The other three players, in counterclockwise order, pick up a tile from the same end. Each player then assumes the seat indicated by the tile, which was drawn.

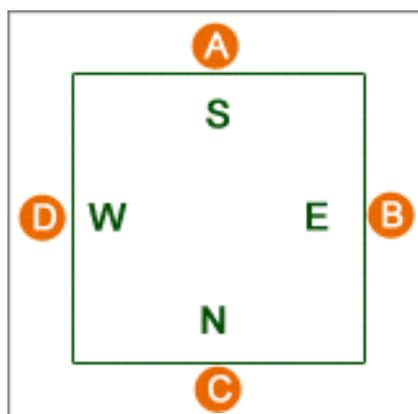
The player thus indicated (B) picks up the wind tile at the end of the row, since the number last thrown was an even number (four). In this case, B is East.



The other three players, in counterclockwise order, pick a tile from the same end the first wind tile was picked. In this case, C is North, D is West, and A is South.



This is then becoming the initial position. Note that the winds follow each other in counterclockwise direction in order East, South, West and North (the order in which winds are customarily listed in Chinese) so they do not follow compass directions.



144 tiles (136 without flowers and seasons) are mixed on the table. Each Player builds a row of 17 or 18 tiles x 2 tiles high to build one side of the wall. Each player then pushes their wall into the middle to form a rectangle.

To determine the side of the Wall to be the starting point, EAST throws the 2 or 3 dice, adds the totals together and, counting ANTICLOCKWISE and beginning with the wall in front of them until the total is reached and the wall is identified. The player of the identified wall then throws the dices again and the totals added together. This time the tiles are counted CLOCKWISE, starting from the right until the total is reached. At this point the tiles are parted slightly to the LEFT to identify the LIVE WALL which is the starting point for picking up the tiles. The right side of the Wall is called the DEAD WALL or KONG BOX.

EAST starts by taking the first 2 stacks (4 tiles) from the LIVE WALL, followed by South, West and North in that order. This is repeated twice more so that each player has 12 tiles. EAST then takes the 1st and the 3rd tiles from the top of the LIVE WALL, SOUTH takes the bottom tile, West takes the next top tile and North takes the one below.

If a hand contains FLOWERS or SEASONS, they are immediately melded, placed face up on the table and replaced from the DEAD WALL. EAST replaces first with other doing likewise in order.

EAST, as they have 14 tiles, commences by discarding a tile face up on the table. Play then continues by each player in order picking up the next tile from the LIVE WALL and then discarding one of their tiles

If any other player needs that tile to make a CHOW, PUNG or KONG, they may claim that tile. They MUST expose the CHOW, PUNG or KONG face up on the table in front of them. They must also discard a tile from their hand.

In addition, in the case of a PUNG or KONG being declared the next turn is played by the player to the right of the Declarer even if it was not their turn: in effective play jumping across the table.

The game concludes when a player goes out (WINS) with 4 CHOW or PUNGS (also KONGS) AND a PAIR, making 14 tiles in total.

GAME STRATEGY

A few pointers on game strategy picked up from a mahjong web site which you may or may not find useful!

Don't grab the first discard that completes one of your sets. Many beginners think they are doing good if they're making lots of melds (Chows, Pungs, Kongs) -- they don't realise that melding is an onerous duty, not a sign of success! If you watch experienced players, you will see that they do not necessarily grab the first Pung opportunity that comes along, for several reasons:

- a. It shows the other players three tiles that you have collected; opponents can learn more about your hand by the melds AND discards than they could from the discards alone.
- b. It narrows the opportunities for the hand you are building. (If you don't understand this now, you'll figure it out very quickly.)

In general, don't take somebody else's discard unless you have a clear plan for your hand, and that particular discard advances your hand closer to a win.

Keep a Pair. It's harder to make a pair if you have only one tile than it is to make a Pung if you have a pair. So if you have a pair, don't be too quick to claim a matching tile to form a Pung.

Have Patience. When first learning to play, it's typical to grab every opportunity to meld a Pung or Chow. In the early stages of a game, you should instead keep in mind that there are a lot of good

tiles available for drawing from the Wall - and by not melding your tiles, you don't clue everyone as to what you're doing, and you stand a chance to get a Concealed Hand.

Be Flexible. As you build your hand, be ready to abandon your earlier thinking about how to build it as you see what kind of tiles others are discarding.

Don't Let Someone Else Win. As much as you want to go out yourself, sometimes it's wiser to keep anybody else from winning. Especially, you don't want to "feed" a high-scoring hand. If a player has melded three sets of all one suit, that's especially dangerous (you might feed a Pure or Clean hand, and have to pay a high price); thus the player announces the danger when making a third meld in one suit.

Watch the discards and watch the number of tiles in the Wall. As it approaches the end, the tension increases - and it's more important to be careful what you discard when there are fewer tiles remaining to be drawn. If the number of tiles in the Wall is getting low, don't discard any tiles which you do not see in the discard area.

GAME SCORING

Well, with the introduction of scoring it will be essential for you to consider these points and more, which many will argue makes the game more interesting and challenging.

There are quite a few versions of MahJong, e.g Classical Chinese, Taiwan, Singapore, Japan, American British, and so on. They all have their own differences in rules and scoring, some of them quite different and in respect of scoring, more complex. The good news is that as we are playing the Hong Kong version and this is considered the simplest method both for rules and game scoring. So, with that excellent news, its onwards and upwards!

Before getting on to the scoring method here are a few important pointers.

- In the case where a player wins from another player's discard, the player who performed the discard PAYS DOUBLE.
- In the case where a player wins by drawing from the Wall, every losing player PAYS DOUBLE.
- In the case where a players wins from a HIGH RISK SCENARIO (called a LIMIT in the score table) the player who performed the discard pays for the other two losing players (in addition to the normal double share). Commonly known as OMGwhathavedone move!!!!
- The WIND allocation is now very important for the following reason:-
 1. The Winds are allocated a number. They are, EAST WIND = 1. SOUTH WIND = 2 WEST WIND = 3. NORTH WIND = 4 and you will need to remember this. As each round is commenced additional points are obtained if the your relevant Wind is collected or the Wind of the round.
 2. FLOWERS AND SEASONS will now take on an added scoring importance. You will notice that each one has a number. The number relates to your WIND as mentioned in item 1. You will score points for collecting your own FLOWER OR SEASON
 3. A single CHOW in a hand does not have any points value. In fact a hand with a mixture of CHOWS and PUNGS may end up with no points.

4. At the beginning of the game it is normal to set the minimum number of FAN (points) the winning hand has to achieve. This can range from 0 to 5 with 3 being the norm.
5. Each player will be given a set number of points at the beginning of the game, typically 2,000. Each player will be responsible for adding or subtracting points from there score as the games progress.. At the same time we can continue with the same game scoring of the WINNER takes a sweetie from each losing player.