

# MAHJ — Game Night Cheat Sheet

SIDE 1 · HOW TO PLAY · WELCOME2MAHJ.COM · NOT AFFILIATED WITH NMJL®

## Game Setup

1. **Pick East:** everyone rolls two dice, highest total is East (tied highs roll again)
2. **Mix:** all 152 tiles face-down, everyone mixes them around
3. **Build walls:** each player makes a wall 19 stacks long, 2 tiles high
4. **Roll & break:** East rolls two dice, counts that many stacks from the right along East's wall, keeps counted stacks and pushes the rest out.  
Dealing starts at the break, taking tiles to its left
5. **Deal:** each player takes 4 tiles (2 top + 2 bottom) starting with East, going right.  
3 times, then East takes the 1st and 3rd top tiles, others take 1 each

**TIP:** East starts with 14 tiles, everyone else has 13. East rotates to the right (counter-clockwise) every hand.

## The Charleston

### 1ST CHARLESTON (mandatory):

1. **Right** → pass 3 face-down
2. **Across** ↑ pass 3 face-down
3. **Left** ← pass 3 face-down (blind pass OK)

### 2ND CHARLESTON (optional — any one player can stop it before its first incoming tiles are seen):

4. **Left** ← pass 3 (many tables stack them in a small pyramid — a custom, not a rule)
5. **Across** ↑ pass 3
6. **Last Right** → pass 3 (blind pass OK)

### Courtesy pass — with the player across:

each player names a number from 0–3; both players pass the lower number  
(always available, even if Charleston was stopped)

**NOT ALLOWED:** Never pass a Joker.

## Your Turn (every turn)

1. **Draw** one tile from the wall
2. **Decide** — does this help your hand?
3. **Discard** one tile face-up, **name it out loud**
4. **Pause** 2–3 seconds so others can call

## Calling

- Say **"Call!"** to claim a discard for a group of 3+. Say **"Wait!"** only to pause play while you decide.
- Say **"Mahjong!"** if it completes your hand (this is the only way to call for the final pair or single)
- For an ordinary call, expose the group face-up, then discard one tile. If the call completes Mahjong, do not discard.
- Mahjong beats an ordinary call until that caller makes their new discard

**CONCEALED (C) HANDS:** ONLY call for Mahjong.

## Joker Rules

-  Jokers may substitute only in groups of **3 or more identical tiles**. **Never** use a Joker in a single, pair, NEWS or year group, or a Singles & Pairs hand.
- Cannot be passed in the Charleston
- A discarded Joker is dead — it cannot be called
- **Exchange:** After you draw or call, and before you discard, you may exchange a matching natural tile for an exposed Joker.

## Reading the Card

 **F** = Flower (any of 8)       **0** = Soap (zero)

**D** = Dragon (Red, Green, Soap) · **NEWS** = Wind tiles

Each dragon has a suit:

 **Red** = Crak     **Green** = Bam     **Soap** = Dot

**C** = Concealed — call only for Mahjong

**X** = Exposed — calling allowed

**Card colors** = how many suits (any suit): same color = same suit; different colors = different suits

Pair = 2 | Pung = 3 | Kong = 4 | Quint = 5 | Sextet = 6

**TIP:**  The 1 Bam (bird tile) looks like a Flower — if it has a bird, it's a 1 Bam.

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## Hand Strategy

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- **Turns 1–5:** keep 2–3 candidate hands open
- **Turns 6–12:** narrow your choices
- **From turn 13:** commit as your rack develops
- When in doubt, **don't call** — stay flexible

**TIP:** Look for tiles you already have pairs/triples of, then find hands on the card that use them.

## What to Discard

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*MAHJ guidance — not a fixed order*

- Tiles in **none** of your candidate hands
- Tiles from your weaker backup hand
- Last resort: tiles that might help opponents

Avoid discarding a Joker — unless you're folding and have no other lower-risk tile (nobody can call a Joker).

Hold Flowers by default — many hands use them.

## Defense — Read the Table

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- **Other 3 copies visible** of a tile you hold → lowest risk, not guaranteed (Jokers can still call it)
- **Watch exposures:** *MAHJ strategy guidance — not an official rule*
  - 0 → hard to read                      1 → note their suit
  - 2 → lean defensive                    3+ → **FULL DEFENSE**

**Hot suit** = the suit nobody is discarding. Be very careful discarding it.

## Scoring & Payouts

| Win type       | Discarder pays                               | Others pay |
|----------------|----------------------------------------------|------------|
| Discard win    | 2x hand value                                | 1x         |
| Self-pick win  | All pay 2x                                   |            |
| Jokerless hand | Discarder 4x • others 2x • self-pick: all 4x |            |

**Singles & Pairs hands** cannot use Jokers, so there is no separate jokerless double. They can still double for a discard win or self-pick.

## What to Say & Table Etiquette

- **Discard:** name it — "Four Crak." Dragons, winds & flowers use shorthand: "Red," "Soap," "East," "Flower."
- **Call a discard:** If you need a moment, say "Wait!" to pause play. Say "Call!" to claim the discard — before the next player racks, discards, starts a Joker exchange, or declares Mahjong
- **Win:** "Mahjong!"
- **Joker exchange:** "I'd like to exchange." — give the matching tile, take the Joker
- **Buy a moment:** "Give me a second to check my card"
- Don't touch other players' racks
- Joker exchange: give them a matching tile, let *them* swap (don't reach for their rack)
- No comments about others' hands during play

**TIP:** New to the table? "I'm still learning — can you remind me?" is perfectly normal to say. Everyone was new once.

## Common Beginner Mistakes

### Committing to a call you can't complete

Once the tile is on your rack or you've exposed, you must make a legal exposure with it or your hand **can be declared dead** (don't announce it yourself — let another player notice).

Not committed yet? Take the call back, no penalty.

### Misnaming a discard

If it leads to a Mahjong call, **you pay a flat 4x the hand value**; the other players pay nothing

### Committing to one hand too early

#### DEAD HAND

**Drew out of turn?** Drawing a tile from the wall out of turn makes the hand dead.

**Realized your hand is dead?** Don't announce it. Before your hand is declared dead, keep playing defensively.

Once it is declared dead, stop drawing, discarding and calling. You still pay.



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