

MAHJ — Game Night Cheat Sheet

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

GAME SETUP

1. **Pick East:** everyone rolls dice, highest roll is East
2. **Mix:** all 152 tiles face-down, everyone mixes them around
3. **Build walls:** each player makes a wall 19 tiles long, 2 tiles high
4. **Roll & break:** East rolls dice, counts that many from the right along East's wall, keeps counted tiles and pushes the rest out
5. **Deal:** each player takes 4 tiles (2 top + 2 bottom) starting with East, going right. 3 rounds, 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 player can stop):

4. **Left** ← pass 3 (stack the tiles in a small pyramid to mark the 2nd Charleston)
5. **Across** ↑ pass 3
6. **Last Right** → pass 3 (blind pass OK)

Courtesy pass — trade 0–3 tiles across (always available, even if Charleston was stopped)

! Never pass a Joker. Avoid passing Flowers.

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!**" (or "**Wait!**") to grab a discard for a group of 3+
- Say "**Mahjong!**" if it completes your hand (this is the only way to call for the final pair)
- Expose the group face-up, then discard one tile
- Mahjong beats all other calls

! Concealed (C) hands: ONLY call for Mahjong.

WHAT TO SAY AT THE TABLE

- **Discard:** name it — "Four Crak." Dragons, winds & flowers use shorthand: "Red," "Soap," "East," "Flower."
- **Call a discard:** say "Wait!" first to freeze it, then "Call!" — before the next player draws
- **Win:** "Mahjong!"
- **Joker exchange:** "Exchange, please" — give the matching tile, take the Joker
- **Fix a slip:** "Hold on, I made a mistake" — say it before the next player goes
- **Buy a moment:** "Give me a second to check my card"

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

READING THE CARD

 **F** = Flower (any of 8)  **O** = 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

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

JOKER RULES

-  Substitute in groups of 3+ only — **NEVER** in pairs
- Cannot be passed in the Charleston
- A discarded Joker is dead — it cannot be called
- **Exchange:** on your turn, give a player a tile that matches what one of their exposed Jokers stands for — they swap you the Joker

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SIDE 2 • STRATEGY, SCORING & ETIQUETTE • WELCOME2MAHJ.COM

HAND STRATEGY

- After the deal: pick **2–3 candidate hands** from the card
- After the Charleston: narrow to **2**
- After 5–6 draws: commit to **1**
- Save Jokers for the **hardest-to-find** tiles
- 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 (SAFEST FIRST)

1. Tiles in **none** of your candidate hands
2. Tiles whose duplicate is already in the discard pile (**can't be called — only the most recent discard can be claimed**)
3. Isolated winds and dragons you don't need
4. Tiles from your weaker backup hand
5. Last resort: tiles that might help opponents

! Avoid discarding a Joker — unless you're folding and have no safe tiles (nobody can call a Joker). Hold Flowers by default — many hands use them. Once your hand clearly doesn't, discard them early before opponents need them.

DEFENSE — READ THE TABLE

- **3 copies visible** of a tile → 4th is usually safe (unless an opponent has a Joker)
- **Watch exposures:**
0 → normal play 1 → note their suit 2 → play carefully
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	

S&P hands: higher base value already built in — no separate jokerless bonus.

TABLE ETIQUETTE

- **Name every discard** ("Four Bam", "Red", "Soap")
- **Pause before racking** — give others time to call
- 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: Say "I'm learning" at the start. Everyone will help you.

TOP 5 BEGINNER MISTAKES

1. Passing a Joker in the Charleston
2. Calling a tile you can't actually complete the group with → **dead hand** (don't announce it yourself — let another player notice)
3. Using a Joker in a pair (illegal)
4. Misnaming a discard → **you may pay for everyone**
5. Committing to one hand too early

Made a procedural mistake? (Drew a tile out of turn, misnamed a discard, etc.) Speak up immediately and describe what happened — self-reported mistakes are almost always forgiven. **Realized your hand is dead?** Don't announce it. Keep playing defensively until another player calls it.



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