

Mahjong Rules

The Purpose of the Game

The purpose of the game is to be the first to complete a hand. A completed hand consists of four sets of three (or four) tiles in a suit plus an identical pair of any suit. The individual sets can be triplets or quadruplets (identical) or sequenced (1,2,3; 5, 6, 7; etc.).

Starting a Hand:

At the beginning of play, each of the four players sits at each side of a square table. The square table allows the players to be equidistant from each other. Each side of the table represents the four winds, north, south, east and west. All the tiles are placed face down on the table and are shuffled around. Each player collects 36 tiles and arranges them in 2 rows of 18, one row stacked on top of the other. The stacks are then pushed to the middle of the table to form a square.

The player designated as the east has the duty of rolling the two dice. Counting himself as "1" and the player to his right as "2," the east player continues counting in a counterclockwise direction until he hits the number rolled on the two dice. Seven stacks are counted from right to left on the selected player's wall. This is set aside for the exchange of flowers later in the game. From that point, the place where the players may begin to take tiles is decided. In some versions, the player who is selected, as a result of the number rolled on the dice the first time, has to roll again to determine where along his wall the other players may start taking tiles. In other versions, the number originally rolled is used again to determine where along the wall of the selected player should the other players begin to take tiles. Whichever method is used, the point at which the tiles are taken from the wall are decided by counting from the rightmost part of the wall (after the flowers stack is counted) and proceeding to the left until the required number is reached. At that point, the east player takes 2 stacks of 2 tiles (4 tiles total) and is followed by the player to his right taking the same amount. This process continues in a counterclockwise direction until all players have taken 3 double stacks (total 12 tiles). Each player then takes 1 more tile for a total of 13 tiles in each player's hand. The east player takes 1 more tile after all players have 13 tiles for a total of 14 tiles. This is so the east player can begin the round by discarding one of his tiles. After receiving all of their tiles, each player usually arrange their tiles in order. Any flowers that a player receives in his hand is "retired" to the right hand corner of the table, face up. A tile is drawn from the flower pile to make up for the retired tile. The flowers will earn extra points.

Playing a Hand:

After the east player discards a tile, the player to his right picks up a tile from where the wall was left off. The player decides if he wants to keep the tile or not. If he does keep the tile from the wall, he must discard another tile from his hand, keeping his hand at the original number of 13 tiles. If he decides the tile is useless, he simply discards it in the middle of the wall formation. This process continues with each player in a counterclockwise direction

Players may not always need to draw from the wall. If a player sees that he can fill one of his sequences in his hand with a discarded tile, he may do so instead of drawing from the wall. A player who intends to pick up a discarded tile must announce his intentions by saying "chow," "pung," or "kong." A "chow" is a sequence of three tiles in the same suit (i.e. 4, 5, 6 of the bamboo suit). A "pung" is 3 identical tiles of the same suit and a "kong" is 4 identical tiles of the same suit. For example, if a player has 2, number 4 tiles of the bamboo suit and a number 4 tile of the bamboo suit is discarded, he may say "pung" to complete his sequence. After a sequence is completed from a discarded tile, the sequence must be "retired" at the right corner of the table for two reasons: to eliminate it from the player's hand and to prove that there really is a sequence. Then the player must discard one of his tiles from his hand. The player sitting to his right goes next. Therefore, the game has a tendency to skip a player's turn. There are some limitations to completing a sequence from discarded tiles. For example, a player may only "chow" from the player to his left. Also, if two players simultaneously shout "pung" and "chow," "pung" always takes precedence.

(note: if a player decides to "kong," he must draw a tile from the flower stack and discard a tile from his hand)

Winning a Hand:

A player has won when he has completed a combination of 4 triplets, quadruplets or sequences. The "retired" tiles also count toward his combination. For example, a player may have 2 sequences in his hand and 2 triplets that are "retired." The 2 triplets count toward his combination. In addition, he must also have a pair of identical tiles, sometimes referred to as the "eyes." Therefore, his winning combination would be 2 sequences on hand, 2 "retired" triplets and a pair of "eyes."

Scoring:

After a player has won, he automatically gets 20 points. The other players reveal their tiles and points are tallied up in the following manner:

Combination	Retired	On Hand
sequence	0	0
triplet	2	4
three "ones" or "nines"	4	8
three of any wind suit	4	8
three of any dragon/prime suit	4	8
quadruplet	8	16
four "ones" or "nines"	16	32
four of any wind suit	16	32
four of any dragon/prime suit	16	32
pair of primes or player's own wind	2	2
a flower	2	-----

In addition, points can be doubled in the following manner:

All Hands:

1. three or four tiles of the players own wind
2. three or four tiles of any dragon/prime suit

The Winning Hand:

1. a hand of only one suit plus a pair of dragons/primes or winds
2. a hand of only one suit (8x the score)

A player's "own wind" refers to the direction he represents in relation to the east player. For example, if a player is sitting directly across from the east player, he would be the west player. If he had three or four tiles of the east at the end of the game, he would be able to double his score.

If money is involved, the players who did not win must pay the winning player the difference between their individual scores and the winner's score.

If the east player wins, he remains the dealer. Otherwise, the dealer position passes onto the player to his right. A full game is completed after each player has been dealer 4 times or when the previously decided number of rounds has been reached.

Aside from the formal rules of play, Mahjong also has some informal rules. For example, the number of rounds that are going to be played are usually agreed upon by all the players before the start of the game. Mahjong etiquette forbids a player from dropping out of a game before the agreed upon rounds have been completed. Extending a game, however, is deemed as very acceptable. Other informal rules are that mahjong players are expected to arrive on time for a game, never throw tiles and not to withdraw a tile that he/she has discarded. Finally, players are not allowed to leave the table unless there is an emergency (bathroom breaks are acceptable if agreed upon).
