

MAH-JONG

Some Basic Rules

For the newcomer to Mah-Jong, who maybe finds all the rules rather daunting, here is a way of gently easing yourself into the game. It's a very basic, pared-down version of the British Mah-Jong Association (BMJA) rules. Once you are happy with this, you can advance towards the full game.

Mah-Jong is meant to be played by four people. This version works OK with three, but is less satisfactory with two. No scoring is involved.

The aim of the game

The winner is the first player to declare a **Mah-Jong** hand consisting of 4 sets and a pair. Here's an example:



A set can be a **pung** (3 identical tiles) or a **chow** (a run of 3 tiles in the same suit), though only one of these is allowed.

Overview of the game

To get to this winning position you first build a four-sided City wall from the tiles and deal out a portion of these to each player. Players then try to form sets of tiles. Each turn entails:

- Picking a tile from the wall or claiming one discarded by another player
- Discarding an unwanted tile .
...until you finally get a completed hand and cry **Mah-Jong !**

Preparing to play

- Remove the 4 Season tiles and the 4 Flower tiles (also the 4 spare and 4 joker tiles, if present).
- Shuffle the tiles, face down, and build 4 walls, each 17 tiles long and 2 tiles high.
- Move the walls to the centre of the table until their ends meet.
- Each player then throws the dice to find who will deal out the tiles and start the game.
- The player with the highest score breaks the wall in front of him (it does not matter where) and deals out 14 tiles to himself and 13 to each of the other players. The tiles are taken from the break point in a clockwise direction.

Each player then arranges his tiles (in a rack, if there are any) so that only he can see them.

Note that the tile next to the last dealt tile will be the one to be used next in the game. It marks the **start of the live wall**.

Playing the game

Play is started by the dealer discarding one of his tiles. Discarding a tile involves laying it face upwards in the centre of the table and describing it to the others. For example, “*Five of Circles*”.

Normally, the turn then passes to the player on the **right** (moving in an **anti-clockwise** direction). This player can do one of two things:

- Pick up a tile from the start of the live wall and discard it, or another, from his hand.
- Claim the discarded “*Five of Circles*” by calling **chow**, **pung** or **Mah-Jong**.
A **chow** is a run of 3 tiles from the same suit (for example: *Three, Four and Five of Circles*). Only one chow is allowed (and none are allowed if there are fewer than 4 players).
A **pung** is 3 identical tiles (for example: 3 “*Five of Circles*” tiles).
The chow or pung is then laid face upwards on the table in front of the player (exposing it to the other players) and a tile from the hand is normally discarded.

If this player is able to form a winning hand (4 sets and a pair) from this new tile, then he does not make a discard. Instead he calls **Mah-Jong** to announce that he has won the game.

This may involve claiming the “*Five of Circles*” to form a **pair** (rather than a chow or a pung).

However, this next turn could be interrupted by one of the other players claiming the discarded “*Five of Circles*”. This can be done in two ways:

- By calling **pung**.
The player uses the claimed tile to form a set of 3 tiles and exposes it to the others. He then discards an unwanted tile from his hand. The turn then passes to the player on his right. Players between the claimer and the discarder lose a turn.
- By calling **Mah-Jong**.
To do this, the player must be able to form a winning hand from the tiles. The claimed tile thus goes towards making a **pung** or a **pair** of identical tiles.

It’s possible that more than one player may want to claim the same tile. The rules of precedence are as follows:

- A **pung** takes precedence over a **chow**.
- **Mah-Jong** takes precedence over a **chow** or **pung**.
- If more than one player can make **Mah-Jong** with the discarded tile, then the nearest player to the right of the discarder (i.e. going in an anti-clockwise direction) takes precedence.

Any discarded tiles which have not been claimed are dead and play no further part in the game. Play continues in this fashion until someone goes Mah-Jong or all the tiles are used up, in which case it’s a drawn game.

Further stages

For further stages that will lead you towards the full BMJA game, go to the Beginners’ section of the “Mah-Jong, British Rules” web site at: www.MahJongBritishRules.com/Beginners