

Mahjong Terms Glossary

Beginner Terminology

- **Chow:** A sequence of three consecutive tiles in the same suit.
- **Dealer / East Wind:** The starting player who begins the game. In many rule sets the dealer scores differently or continues if they win.
- **Discard:** Throwing away a tile you don't want.
- **Discard Line:** The visible row of tiles placed face-up as players discard — useful for tracking what others may be building.
- **Draw:** Taking a tile from the wall on your turn.
- **Flower / Season Tiles:** Bonus tiles worth points in many versions.
- **Hand:** The set of tiles you hold and build toward a complete winning pattern.
- **Honor Tiles:** Winds and Dragons — no numeric value, always special.
- **Kong:** A set of four identical tiles.
- **Mahjong / Hu / Ron:** Different regional names meaning "I win" — used when declaring a winning hand.
- **Pair / Eyes:** Two identical tiles — required in every winning hand.
- **Pung:** A set of three identical tiles.
- **Suit:** One of the three tile families: Bamboos, Circles, Characters.
- **Tile:** The basic Mahjong piece — similar to a playing card.
- **Wall:** The square formation of face-down tiles that players draw from.

Intermediate Concepts

- **All Honors Hand:** A hand made entirely of Winds and Dragons.
- **Dead Hand:** A hand no longer allowed to win due to an incorrect call, misclaim, or rule violation.
- **Furiten (Japanese):** A rule where you cannot win on a discard because you ignored a potential winning tile earlier.
- **Limit Hand:** A rare hand that scores the maximum possible payout in a scoring system.
- **Robbing the Kong:** Winning by claiming a tile another player uses to upgrade a pung into a kong.
- **Self-Draw (Zimo):** Winning with a tile you drew from the wall rather than another player's discard.
- **Tile Pool Awareness:** Paying attention to which tiles are already visible (discarded, claimed, or used in kongs) so you know what is still possible to draw.

Advanced Terminology

- **Call / Claim:** Taking another player's discard to complete a pung, kong, or chow (allowed depending on rules).
- **Closed Hand:** A hand built only from tiles you drew yourself — usually scores higher.
- **Danger Tile:** A tile that may complete another player's hand — risky to discard.
- **Dead Wall:** A reserved part of the wall used for replacement tiles (rules vary by region).
- **Hand Shape:** How your tiles fit together as potential paths to a winning pattern — strong hand shape gives multiple ways to complete a hand.
- **Open Hand:** A hand where you have claimed discards — visible sets placed on the table.
- **Safe Tile:** A tile unlikely to help another player win — used in defensive play.
- **Tile Efficiency:** Choosing which tiles to keep or discard to give yourself the most possible future winning shapes.
- **Waiting / Tenpai:** Being one tile away from a winning hand.

Region-Specific Terms

- **Charleston (American):** A tile-passing phase before the game begins — helps shape your starting hand.
- **Joker (American):** A wild tile in American Mahjong that can replace other tiles in sets (but not the pair).
- **Riichi (Japanese):** A formal declaration that your hand is ready to win — locks your hand but increases your scoring potential.
- **Ron (Japanese):** Winning by claiming another player's discarded tile.
- **Variation Rules:** Names and rules may differ depending on where you play — don't worry, you'll pick them up naturally as you go along.

★ Tip: Don't worry about memorising everything — you'll learn the language naturally as you play.