

American Mahjong Basic Rules Summary

GAME SETUP • CHARLESTON • HOW TO PLAY • MELDS • KEY RULES

A quick reference guide to the main rules and gameplay for American Mahjong.

STARTING THE GAME

- 1 Choose the **dealer (East)** (draw tiles or roll dice).
- 2 Shuffle tiles face down ("wash").
- 3 Build walls: each player makes a wall **19 tiles long** and **2 tiles high**.
- 4 Roll the dice to break the wall (dealer rolls and counts to choose the break).
- 5 Deal tiles counter-clockwise in sets of 4 until each player has 12 tiles.
- 6 Dealer takes 2 more tiles (14 total). Other players take 1 more tile (13 total).
- 7 Charleston happens before play begins (see right).

THE CHARLESTON (PASSING)

Pass 3 tiles each time, face down.

- 1 **First Charleston (mandatory):**
Right → Across → Left.
- 2 **Second Charleston (optional):**
Left → Across → Right.
- 3 **Courtesy pass (optional):**
Exchange 0–3 tiles with the player across.

Important Rules:

- Never pass a Joker.
- "Blind pass" is only allowed on the First Left and Last Right.

TILE REFERENCE

Each suit has tiles numbered 1–9 (four copies of each tile).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
CIRCLES									
BAMBOO									
CHARACTERS (CRACKS)									
FLOWERS									

WINDS

East

South

West

North

東

南

西

北

DRAGONS

Red

Green

White

中

發

JOKER

JOKER

MELDS (SETS)

Jokers can be used in sets, but not in pairs.

CHOW

一萬 二萬 三萬

Three sequence tiles in the same suit. (No Jokers allowed)

PAIR

東 東

Two identical tiles. (No Jokers allowed)

PUNG

Three identical tiles. (Jokers allowed)

KONG

中 中 中 中

Four identical tiles. (Jokers allowed)

QUINT

Five identical tiles. (Jokers allowed)

SEXTET

九萬 九萬 九萬 九萬 九萬 九萬

Six identical tiles. (Jokers allowed)

HOW TO PLAY

- 1 After the Charleston, dealer discards 1 tile to start play. Players take turns counter-clockwise.
- 3 Draw one tile, then discard one tile.
- 4 You may call a discard to complete a matching set:
 - Chow (3)
 - Pung (3)
 - Kong (4)
 - Quint (5)
 - Sextet (6)
- 5 Any player may call Mahjong if the discard completes their hand.
- 6 Called sets are placed exposed in front of you.
- 7 If you call for a tile, you must expose the completed set and discard ends that player's turn.
- 8 Jokers may be used in exposed sets, but cannot be used in pairs.
- 9 The hand ends when someone declares Mahjong (matches a hand on the card) or the wall runs out.

QUICK NOTES



- Dealer (East) starts.
- Play goes counter-clockwise.
- Keep 13 tiles in hand (14 when it's your turn).
- Mahjong hands must match the National Mah Jongg League (NMJL) card.
- Jokers can be used in sets, but not in pairs.
- If you have an exposed set with a Joker, another player may exchange the Joker with the real tile.
- Goal: Complete a valid hand from the current NMJL card (usually 14 tiles).

Priority: Mahjong has first claim on a discard.

