

American Mahjong Hand-Building Cheat Sheet



Start With Your Back

STEP 1: SORT YOUR TILES Organize by:

- Suit (dots, bams, craks)
- Honors (winds, dragons)
- Pairs
- Connected tiles
- Singles

STEP 2: LOOK FOR STRENGTHS Ask yourself:

- Do I have pairs? (How many? Which ones?)
- Do I have multiple tiles in one suit?
- Do I have consecutive tiles?
- Do I have useful honors?
- Do I have combinations that fit several hands?

STEP 3: DON'T FORCE IT

✗ Wrong approach: **HAND** → Force the rack into it

✓ Right approach: **RACK** → Find possibilities → Choose the hand

The Hand-Building Rule

Choose the hand your tiles are naturally building — not the hand you wish they were building.

Think of it this way:

- Your tiles are talking to you
- They're showing you what's possible
- Listen to them, don't argue with them
- The best hand is the one your rack wants to become



What Makes a Promising Hand?

✓ STRONG

- Multiple required tiles already in your rack
- Pairs you need are present
- Several tiles that work in more than one hand
- Few difficult tiles remaining
- Clear path to Mah Jongg

✗ WEAK

- Many specific tiles still needed
- Key tiles already visible in discard racks
- Too many singles with no connections
- Little flexibility or backup options

Flexibility vs Rigidity

👍 MORE FLEXIBLE

- Multiple possible hands still viable
- Connected tiles in your rack
- Useful pairs you can build from
- Several interchangeable tiles
- Backup plans available

👎 LESS FLEXIBLE

- Exact singles with no alternatives
- Rare combinations required
- Many specific tiles required
- One narrow, rigid path to Mah Jongg

When Should I Commit?

COMMIT TO A HAND WHEN

- ☐ Your rack strongly supports a hand
- ☐ You already have several required tiles
- ☐ The hand still has good drawing potential
- ☐ Backup options exist if draws disappoint
- ☐ You have pairs or connected combinations

WIN & STAY FLEXIBLE WHEN

- ☐ Several hands are equally possible
- ☐ You don't have enough information yet
- ☐ The hand requires too many specific tiles
- ☐ You have few pairs or connections
- ☐ Key tiles are already visible/discarded

