

American Mahjong Joker Strategy Cheat Sheet



Joker Fundamentals



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

- Each Joker represents any tile
- You can exchange one Joker for the natural tile it's replacing (if exposed)
- Using a Joker commits you to that group — it becomes visible
- Hidden Jokers (in your hand) offer flexibility that exposed Jokers don't



THE BIG QUESTION: Am I using this Joker to build my hand, or am I just using it because it's convenient?

Keep vs Use



HOLD THE JOKER

- ☐ The Joker makes a difficult group possible, but...
- ☐ You don't yet know which hand you'll pursue
- ☐ You need flexibility while waiting for more information
- ☐ Expanding the group would reveal your strategy
- ☐ The Joker is helping preserve multiple options
- ☐ The natural tile may still appear (rak is low)



USE THE JOKER

- ☐ It completes an important, high-value group
- ☐ It moves you significantly closer to Mah Jongg
- ☐ The hand is strong enough to commit to
- ☐ Waiting for the natural tile is becoming risky or unrealistic
- ☐ The Joker gives you a useful tempo advantage
- ☐ You're confident about your hand direction

Strategic Considerations



FLEXIBILITY VS COMMITMENT

Hidden Joker:

- Maximum flexibility
- No information given away
- Can be used elsewhere if you change direction
- Useful as insurance

Exposed Joker:

- Commits you to that group
- Reveals your hand strategy
- Can't be hidden again
- May trigger exchanges from opponents



THINK BEFORE USING:

1. What does this Joker accomplish right now?
2. What am I giving up by exposing it?
3. Does it reveal my hand prematurely?
4. What if I don't use it — what are my backup options?

Joker Dangers Signs



The more Jokers an opponent appears to have, the more carefully you should consider their potential hand.

Watch for:

- ☐ Large exposed groups (multiple melds = possibly Joker-heavy)
- ☐ Groups that could contain Jokers (incomplete-looking sequences)
- ☐ A player suddenly holding very few tiles (hidden groups/Jokers?)
- ☐ Discards that stop matching their earlier pattern (freed up by Joker use)
- ☐ An opponent aggressively exchanging for Jokers (pursuing specific groups)
- ☐ Players passing Jokers during Charleston (hint: watch what they're keeping)



Your response: If you suspect an opponent has Joker-heavy groups, consider:

- Playing more defensively
- Blocking suspected groups
- Being cautious about discards that could complete their hand



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