

Mahjong Terms Glossary

A guide to the most common Mahjong terms and what they mean.
Perfect for beginners, or anyone who wants a quick refresher.



Basic Game Terms

Chow	A sequence of three consecutive tiles in the same suit.	
Pung	A set of three identical tiles.	
Kong	A set of four identical tiles.	
Pair (Eyes)	Two identical tiles, required in every winning hand.	
Suit	One of the three numbered suits: Circles, Bamboo or Characters (Cracks).	
Tile	The basic Mahjong piece (similar to a playing card).	
Wall	The square formation of face-down tiles that players draw from.	
Draw	Taking a tile from the wall on your turn.	
Discard	Throwing away a tile you don't want.	
Dealer	The starting player who begins the game and may score differently.	

Tile Types

Winds	Four Wind tiles: East, South, West, North.	
Dragons	Three Dragon tiles: Red, Green, White.	
Flowers (Hong Kong)	Eight flower tiles, usually numbered 1–8. Used as bonus tiles in Hong Kong Mahjong.	
Animals (Singapore)	Four animal tiles: Cat, Mouse, Rooster and Centipede. Used in Singapore Mahjong.	

Important Hand Terms

Hand	The 14 tiles you hold and build into a winning pattern.
Winning Hand	A complete hand that matches an allowed pattern for the game you're playing.
Mahjong	Calling out when you have a winning hand.
All Honors	A hand made entirely of Winds and Dragons.
Dead Hand	A hand that is 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 (High Hand)	A rare hand that scores the maximum possible payout.

Regional Names

Mahjong (HK)	→ Same as a winning hand.
Hu (Chinese)	→ Same as a winning hand.
Ron (Japanese)	→ Winning by claiming another player's discard.
Tsumo (Japanese)	→ Winning by drawing your own tile.

Common Phrases

In the Wall	A tile that is still in the face-down wall.
Dead Tile	A tile you no longer need.
Safe Tile	A tile unlikely to help an opponent.
Tile Efficiency	Choosing which tiles to keep or discard to give yourself the most options.
Open Hand	A hand with visible sets (called from discarded tiles).

