

MAH-JONG

British Rules



Peter Gregory

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PDF edition Version 3.01 (87 pages)

*This contains the same information that can be found on the website, but in a form which is easier to reference.
It has the same content as the 3rd edition of the printed version of the book (no longer available) but with updates to the following chapters: Scoring, “Mah-Jong (Know the Game)” Corrections & Clarifications and Questions Answered.*

Cover illustration

*The tiles of a Mah-Jong set arranged in the Symbolic Square.
Dragons derived from “Vector illustration of two Chinese dragons” by serazetdinov and “Vector of Ancient Traditional Chinese Dragon Pattern” by John Lock / Shutterstock.com.*

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The contents of this book are† taken verbatim from my website:

MahjongBritishRules.wordpress.com

which is a relaunched version Mahjong-BritishRules.com, itself a relaunch (in 2018) of my original website, www.MahJongBritishRules.com (first published in October 2008). This new website was published in August 2022.

The website is based on the 3rd (2008) edition of the book “Mah-Jong (Know the Game)” by Gwyn Headley and Yvonne Seeley, which explains the British Mah-Jong Association (BMJA) rules.

The original website was endorsed by the authors, who have since advised me on the various clarifications to the rules which are included in this text.

Whilst I have endeavoured to make the explanation of the BMJA rules as clear as possible (and have consulted extensively with the authors), any misunderstandings that arise are entirely my responsibility.

Peter Gregory

† The website itself will, of course, be changed if further clarifications are required



Approved by the British Mah-Jong Association (BMJA)

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Gwyn Headley and Yvonne Seeley for explaining the finer points of the game and for their many helpful responses to my questions.

Thanks to Mr Joe Lees who lent me his fine bone and bamboo Mah-Jong set used to illustrate the rules. He purchased it in a second-hand shop in London for £1 in 1948.

Thanks to the visitors to my website who have contacted me with questions about the rules and for pointing out the occasional error.

Thanks to Ann and Malcolm for the alternative way of paying when settling the score.

Introduction

Mah-Jong (pronounced with a soft “J” and variously known as Mah-Jongg or Mahjong) is a charming Chinese game played with engraved tiles. Traditionally, the tiles have been made from ivory or bone dove-tailed into bamboo. But a variety of other materials has also been used including wood, Bakelite, resin and modern plastic.

The exotic tiles, the oriental associations and the rituals which surround the game lend it a certain mystique and perhaps make it somewhat forbidding. However, although the rules are quite intricate, the rudiments of play are surprisingly easy to master and it is not unusual for a beginner to do quite well.

Origins of the Game

Although there have been claims for its antiquity, it seems most likely that the game originated in the Nongpo area of China in the latter half of the nineteenth century. It quickly spread to other countries in the early part of the twentieth century, becoming popular in the West in the 1920’s.

Forms of the Game

Along the way the rules mutated into a variety of national forms; Hong Kong, Japanese, Taiwanese, Vietnamese, Western Classical, American, etc. Even within one country there are home grown variations. This lack of standardisation is reflected in the many books which have been written on the subject. And it’s shared by the, often obscure, rule books that accompany Mah-Jong sets. It’s a confusion that can be quite frustrating for the newcomer trying to learn the game.

The Rules Explained Here

The rules explained here follow those set out in **“Mah-Jong (Know the Game)”** by Gwyn Headley and Yvonne Seeley. It was written in collaboration with the **British Mah-Jong Association (BMJA)** in an attempt to curtail the confusion over how to play and to allow the beginner an easier passage into the game. Unlike certain other versions, the British game is quite close to the original Chinese gambling game, but it is played differently and with only notional money.



More Information

The Headley and Seeley book also contains a short history of the game, something on tactics and etiquette and - for the more serious player - tournament play rules and penalties.

“The Complete Book of Mah-Jongg” by A. D. Millington is considered to be an authoritative (but perhaps over wordy) guide to classical Chinese Mah-Jongg. Besides delving into the minutia of these rules it covers the history, philosophy and symbolism of the game and assesses its various rival forms.



Equipment

The Tiles

A Mah-Jong set has **144 tiles** (traditionally made from ivory or bone, dove-tailed into bamboo). These can be divided into sets of **Characters, Circles, Bamboos, Dragons, Winds, Flowers** and **Seasons**. Characters, Circles and Bamboos are known as “**suits**”. Often there also **4 spare tiles, 4 blank tiles** and sometimes another **4 joker tiles**.

Tiles can be classified into “**major**” and “**minor**” tiles. Major tiles are worth more than minor tiles. Suit tiles have both types. Dragons and Winds are major tiles, but are also known as “**honour**” tiles as they are able to increase your score further by doubling. **Flowers** and **Seasons** are **bonus tiles**.

Characters

There are **4 sets of 9 tiles numbered 1 to 9** and show the Chinese symbol for the numbers 10,000 to 90,000. The 1 and 9 Characters are major tiles. The 2 to 8 Characters are minor tiles.



The appropriate Arabic numeral is also marked on the tile.
It's typical of sets made for export to the West.

Circles

There are **4 sets of 9 tiles numbered 1 to 9**. The tiles show the appropriate number of Circles. The 1 and 9 Circles are major tiles. The 2 to 8 Circles are minor tiles.



Bamboos

There are **4 sets of 9 tiles numbered 1 to 9**. The tiles show the appropriate number of bamboos, except for the 1 Bamboos which often shows a picture of a bird (usually a sparrow or rice-bird). The 1 and 9 Bamboos are major tiles. The 2 to 8 Bamboos are minor tiles.



Learning the Game by Stages

For the newcomer to Mah-Jong, who maybe finds all the rules rather daunting, here is a way of gently easing yourself into the game. A very basic, pared-down version of the game is suggested first, followed by a number of steps which will lead you towards the full game.

Stage 1 - Some Basic Rules

Mah-Jong is meant to be played by four people. This version works OK with three, but is less satisfactory with two. No scoring is involved.

The aim of the game

The winner is the first player to declare a **Mah-Jong** hand consisting of 4 sets and a pair.



A set can be a **pung** (three identical tiles) or a **chow** (a run of three tiles in the same suit), though only one of these is allowed.

Overview of the game

To get to this winning position you first build a four-sided City wall from the tiles and deal out a portion of these to each player. Players then try to form sets of tiles. Each turn entails:

- Picking a tile from the wall or claiming one discarded by another player
 - Discarding an unwanted tile
- ...until you finally get a completed hand and cry "**Mah-Jong!**"

Preparing to play

- **Remove** the 4 Season tiles and the 4 Flower tiles (also the 4 spare and 4 joker tiles, if present)
- **Shuffle the tiles**, face down, and **build 4 walls**, each 17 tiles long and 2 tiles high
- **Move the walls to the centre of the table** until their ends meet
- Each player then throws the **dice** to find who will deal out the tiles and start the game
- The **player with the highest score** breaks the wall in front of him (it does not matter where) and **deals out 14 tiles to himself and 13 to each of the other players**. The tiles are taken from the break point in a clockwise direction.

Each player then arranges his tiles (in a rack, if there are any) so that only he can see them.

Note that the tile next to the last dealt tile will be the one to be used next in the game. It marks the **start of the live wall**.

Playing the game

Play is started by the dealer discarding one of his tiles. Discarding a tile involves laying it face upwards in the centre of the table and describing it to the others. For example, “**5 Circles**”.

Normally, the turn then passes to the player on the **right** (moving in an **anti-clockwise** direction). This player can do one of two things:

- Pick up a tile from the start of the live wall and discard it, or another, from his hand
- Claim the discarded “**5 Circles**” by calling “**Chow!**”, “**Pung!**” or “**Mah-Jong!**”

A **chow** is a run of three tiles from the same suit (for example: *3, 4 and 5 Circles*). Only one chow is allowed (and none are allowed if there are fewer than 4 players).

A **pung** is three identical tiles (for example: *three “5 Circles” tiles*).

The chow or pung is then laid face upwards on the table in front of the player (exposing it to the other players) and a tile from the hand is normally discarded.

If this player is able to form a winning hand (4 sets and a pair) from this new tile, then he does not make a discard. Instead he calls “**Mah-Jong!**” to announce that he has won the game.

This may involve claiming the “**5 Circles**” to form a **pair** (rather than a chow or a pung).

However, this next turn could be interrupted by one of the other players claiming the discarded “**5 Circles**”. This can be done in two ways:

- By calling “**Pung!**”

The player uses the claimed tile to form a set of three tiles and exposes it to the others. He then discards an unwanted tile from his hand. The turn then passes to the player on his right. Players between the claimer and the discarder lose a turn.

- By calling “**Mah-Jong!**”

To do this, the player must be able to form a winning hand from the tiles. The claimed tile thus goes towards making a **pung** or a **pair** of identical tiles.

It's possible that more than one player may want to claim the same tile. The rules of precedence are as follows:

- A **pung** takes precedence over a **chow**
- **Mah-Jong** takes precedence over a **chow** or **pung**
- If more than one player can make **Mah-Jong** with the discarded tile, then the nearest player to the right of the discarder (i.e. going in an anti-clockwise direction) takes precedence

Any discarded tiles which have not been claimed are dead and play no further part in the game. Play continues in this fashion until someone goes Mah-Jong or all the tiles are used up, in which case it's a drawn game.

The Game

The Aim of the Game

The aim of the game is **to win the most points**, often represented by the special tokens (called tallies). You can play any number of sessions until you decide to finish. A session consists of:

- **Building** a four-sided City **wall** from the tiles
- **Dealing** out a portion of the tiles to each player
- **Assembling the tiles into sets or a special hand** by:
 - Picking a tile from the wall or claiming one discarded by another player
 - Discarding a tile you no longer want
 - . . . until a completed hand is obtained
 - The first player to do this wins the session and cries “**Mah-Jong !**”
- **Scoring then exchanging tallies** based on who wins and the sets collected

Example hand

The player who was South Wind went Mah-Jong with the following (exposed) hand.

It scored 544 points and South Wind collected 2.176 points in tallies from the other three players.



Number of people

Four people are needed to play the game, though it can be made to work quite well with three. There are also versions for 2 and 5 people.

General strategy

Winning is **helped by skill and knowledge** of the game, but there is a **large element of luck**.

Opinions vary on this, but I think **the game is made more interesting and exciting if people aim to achieve a high score** in each game, rather than complete a Mah-Jong as quickly as possible. To this end it is better to collect sets of the high scoring tiles (called major tiles) and to look for combinations which will double your basic score.

For a detailed discussion of Mah-Jong strategy see page 45.

Preparing to Play

Distribute the tallies

Before the first session **each player is given 2,000 points in tallies.**

If tallies are not available then each player can use a score sheet, marked with two columns showing payments and receipts.



2,000 points in tallies



Determine who is North, South, East and West Wind

First session

One of each of the four Wind tiles (or Wind counters) are placed face-down and shuffled.

Each player takes one of the tiles and then takes the seat appropriate to the Wind selected.

The clockwise order is **North, West, South, East**. This is a little confusing as West and East are opposite to the compass we are used to.

In Mah-Jong, one gets used to starting with East then moving **anti-clockwise**, rather than clockwise, to South, West and North. **Being East Wind is important** because that player always pays or receives double the score when **Mah-Jong** is declared (as explained later).

Subsequent sessions

If the player who was East Wind declared **Mah-Jong** or the game was drawn, then there is no change.

If another player declared **Mah-Jong**, the Winds rotate in an **anti-clockwise** fashion so that the player who was **South Wind now becomes East Wind**, and East Wind now becomes North Wind, etc.

(When only 3 are playing, East Wind always exists.)

Determine the prevailing Wind

The **prevailing Wind** (also called the **Wind of the round**) always starts as **East Wind**.

It can change, but only in a long game of at least 5 sessions. If you collect a set of the prevailing Wind your score is doubled (as explained later).

Changing the prevailing Wind

The prevailing Wind only changes after everyone has been East Wind (determined as explained above). It then becomes South Wind. When everyone has been South Wind (again determined as explained above) the prevailing Wind becomes West Wind. And eventually, North Wind).

The game officially ends when everyone has played as the prevailing North Wind !

Shuffle the tiles

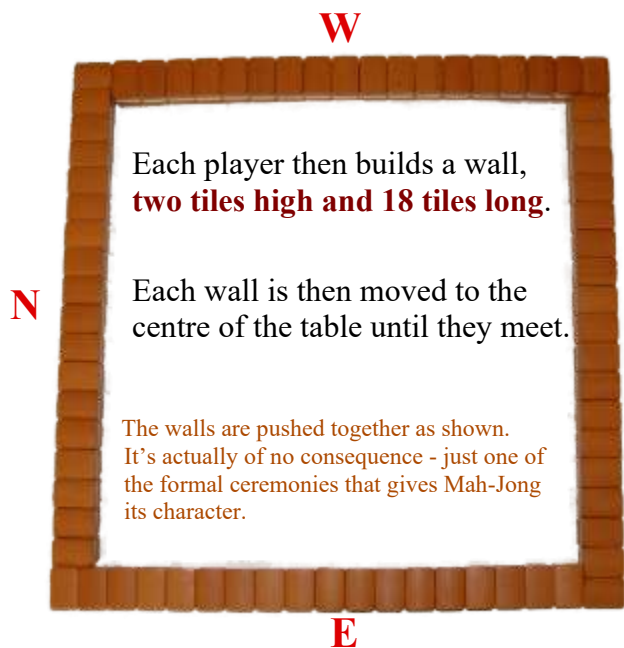
Put all the tiles (minus any blank and joker tiles) on the table, **face down**. The players who are **North and South Winds then shuffle**, or “wash”, them.

The shuffling is called “Twittering of the sparrows”, from the distinctive noise it makes.

Mah-Jong literally means “The game of the sparrows”.

When East Winds thinks that the tiles have been shuffled enough he says “**Pow!**” (meaning “Start”).

Build the walls



The wall symbolises the **Great Wall of China**.

The four walls must touch to prevent Dragons or evil spirits entering !

Break into one wall

S Determine which wall to break

East Wind throws **2 dice** to determine which wall to break. Starting with the wall in front of East Wind, count **anti-clockwise**.



In this example, East Wind throws **6** then counts **anti-clockwise** to locate the wall in front of South Wind.

South Wind then throws **8**. The sum of the two throws is **14**. So he counts **clockwise** along the wall starting from his right.

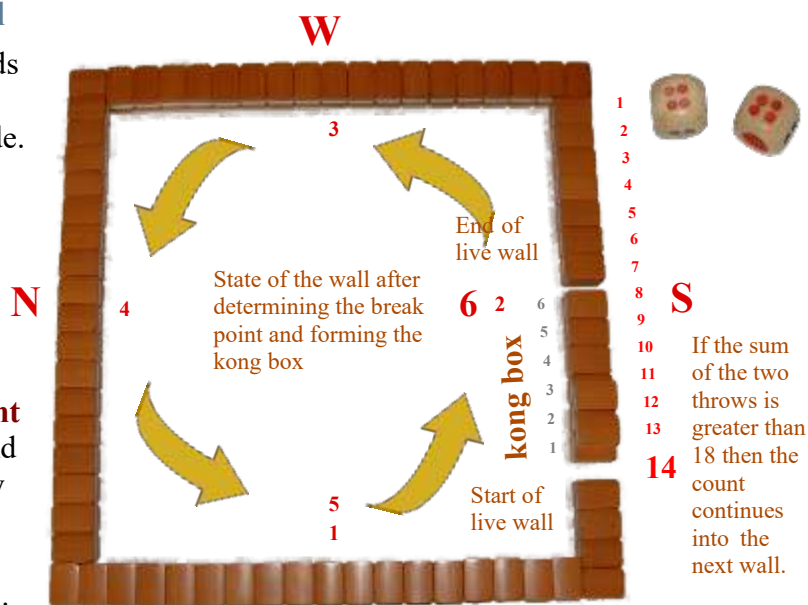
Determine where to break the wall

The player who sits where the count ends then **throws 2 dice again** to determine where in the wall the break is to be made.

Add the numbers from the two throws together.

Starting from the **right** end of the wall, count towards the **left**. If the end of the wall is reached continue counting into the next wall.

Pick up the two tiles at the break point – the two tiles are called **loose tiles** – and put them on top of the tiles immediately to the **right** of the break so that the top-most tile lies furthest away from the break point. This is the end of the wall.



The tiles on the other side of the break point are the start of the wall.

So when tiles come to be dealt from the wall it will be in a clockwise direction.

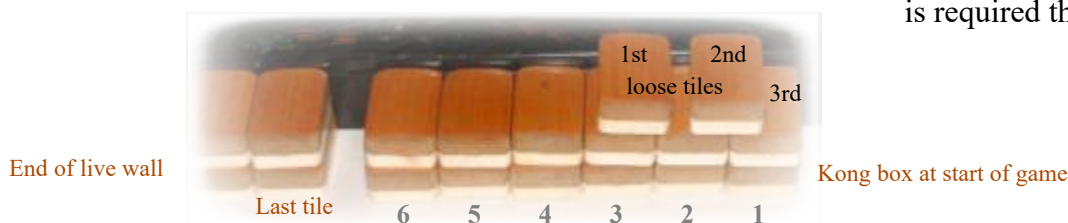
E Dealing begins from the start of the live wall. **E, S, W, N, E, S, etc.**

The kong box

At the end of the wall the last seven pairs of tiles (including the loose tiles) are moved away from the rest of the wall. These detached tiles are called the **kong box** or **dead wall**.

Its function is to provide replacement tiles for kongs, Flowers and Seasons. The loose tiles are taken in turn (the furthest from the end first) and replaced from the end of the kong box as required.

The session ends in a drawn game when the last tile in the live wall (the one before the kong box) has been taken and played without Mah-Jong being called. This is called a “Wash-out”. Note that the kong box is never replenished from the live wall. If the kong box is exhausted and another replacement is required then the game is drawn.



Scoring

Tile Classification

The tiles can be classified into four types; **minor** tiles, **major** tiles, **honour** tiles and **bonus** tiles. These types bestow differing scoring capabilities.

Minor tiles

These are the **suit tiles numbered 2 to 8**. They are the least valuable of the tiles.



Major tiles

These are the **suit tiles numbered 1 and 9**. A set of major tiles scores twice the points of an equivalent set of minor tiles.



Honour tiles

Honour tiles are the **Dragons** and **Winds**. They are also major tiles, but are more valuable again as sets of these are able to double your score. A set of Dragons always doubles your score. A set of Wind tiles - if your own - will double your score. A set of East Winds (as the prevailing Wind) will double your score unconditionally and is especially valuable to the player who is East Wind as it gives him two doubles.

The Winds - **East, South, West** and **North** - are associated with the numbers **1, 2, 3** and **4** shown on the Flower and Season tiles.



Bonus tiles

These are the **Flowers** and **Seasons**. They give bonus points as well being capable of doubling your score when you have one which is associated with your Wind. A complete set of Flowers or Seasons (known as a **bouquet**) also doubles your score.

The acquisition of bonus tiles is down to pure luck.



Working out the Scores

In the following explanation, “**winner**” will be used to refer to the player who has called “**Mah-Jong!**” and won the session. However, points are also awarded to the other participants and it is possible one of these may end up better off than the so-called winner.

Overview of the calculations

If the winner has gone out with a special hand then his score is the score of that special hand, with possibly extra points from any bonus tiles. Otherwise calculating his score is a **two stage process**, as it is for the other players.

Calculating the basic score

The basic score is determined from:

- The various sets of pungs and kongs
- Certain pairs of honour tiles
- Flower and Season tiles
- Points given for going Mah-Jong (and if the last tile comes from the wall)

Doubling

The basic score is then doubled for each doubling condition that can be found to apply to the hand. Some of these doubling conditions only apply to the winner.

The limit

The final score can never be more than the **limit**, which is normally set to **1,000 points**. Most of the special hands score the limit and some half the limit.

Calculating the basic score



Chows

No points are scored for chows (exposed or concealed)

Pungs

	Exposed	Concealed
Minor tiles	2 points	4 points
Major tiles	4 points	8 points



Exposed minor pung 2



Concealed minor pung 4



Exposed major pung 4



Concealed major pung 8

Kongs

	Exposed	Concealed
Minor tiles	8 points	16 points
Major tiles	16 points	32 points



Exposed minor kong 8



Concealed minor kong 16



Exposed major kong 16



Concealed major kong 32

“Mah-Jong (Know the Game)”

Corrections & Clarifications



Mah-Jong (Know the Game)
by Gwyn Headley and Yvonne Seeley
3rd edition 2008
(KTG)

There are some mistakes/ambiguities – acknowledged by the authors – in the official explanation of the BMJA rules (2nd edition 2002, 3rd edition 2008) of “Mah-Jong (Know the Game)” by Gwyn Headley and Yvonne Seeley.

These corrections and qualifications are highlighted here to avoid any confusion.

They have come to light as a result of the many and various questions sent by visitors to my website since it was launched in 2008 (often just seeking an explanation of a particular rule).

My thanks to them and to Gwyn and Yvonne for responding to my emails with the relayed questions.

The website (blessed with no space constraints, an ease of correction and the help of the authors) is able to give these corrections and qualifications. And their current state is reflected here.

Corrections

Paying double when East Wind

The following statement (KTG 3rd edition, p28) is incorrect:

“The prevailing Wind player always scores double and pays double to all the other players”

See statement (2nd edition p24, 3rd edition p34):

“There are two points to remember: every player, no matter what his score, pays the player who goes Mah-Jong, and East Wind always pays and receives double.”

- Description used in this book:

“Settling Up”

“If East Wind wins then everyone pays him double his score. If another player wins then East Wind pays or receives double the difference between his score and that of the other players.

This rule holds for East Wind even when the prevailing Wind changes from East to South.”

Scoring a double for a concealed hand when you go Mah-Jong

Described as (KTG 2nd edition p23, 3rd edition p33):

“All concealed hand of different suits with Winds and/or Dragons”

- Description used in this book:

“Doubling – For the player who goes Mah-Jong”

“All tiles are concealed and are from one or more suits with Dragons and/or Winds”

(Questions Answered. [p79](#)): *“You might expect a concealed hand of the same suit with Winds and/or Dragons to give you the special hand of “Buried treasure”. But if your hand contains a kong or a chow, this special hand is nullified. So in these cases having just one suit (with Winds and/or Dragons) would give you a double. If the hand doesn’t contain a pung, kong or pair of Dragons/Winds (and no chow) then it is the special hand of Purity.”*

Doubling for all 1s & 9s when you go Mah-Jong

Described as (KTG 2nd edition p23, 3rd edition p33):

“All 1s and 9s with Winds and/or Dragons”

- Description used in this book:

“Doubling – For the player who goes Mah-Jong”

“All tiles are 1s and/or 9s with some Dragons and/or Winds (All tiles are majors)”

This makes the rule consistent with the clarifications given for other doubles involving suits.

Special hand – Buried treasure

Described as *“Concealed pungs in one suit with Winds/Dragons and a pair”* (KTG 2nd edition p30, 3rd edition p40) but with an illustration (in the 3rd edition) showing a Mah-Jong hand of just Characters.

- Description used in this book:

“Buried treasure

Concealed pungs and a pair using one suit and (optionally) Winds and/or Dragons.”

Special hands: Going Mah-Jong with the final discard

The authors of the BMJA rules have allowed **another doubling** (of the bonus tile score) **if a player goes Mah-Jong with the final discard tile** for a special hand that scores less than 1,000.

For example:

A player calls Mah-Jong – with the final discard tile – for the special hand of Triple knitting.

He also has 2 bonus tiles, one for his own Wind (which gives 1 double).

His score would be $4 + 4 = 8 \times 2 \times 2 = 32 + 500 = 532$

Clarifications

Constructing the wall – How the corners should touch

When I was constructing my website I looked at the 2nd edition of "Mah-Jong (Know the Game)" and found that some photographs showed the overlap of the walls so the right end is inside and some the other way around. The explanation for building the walls just said, *"The walls must touch in the corners..."*.

So I referred to **A. D. Millington's** book, **"The Complete Book of Mah-Jongg"** – generally cited as an authoritative text on classical Chinese Mah-Jong (from which the BMJA rules derive) – and found the following:

"By tradition, the walls are pushed together so that each stands in at the right end, and out at the left. This arrangement is of no consequence as far as the play of the game is concerned: but it is one of the formal ceremonies which give Mah-Jongg its character. The walls represent the walls of a Chinese city, and their formation into a neat and tight-fitting square is said 'to keep the devils out' "

The 3rd edition of "Mah-Jong (Know the Game)" – published after my website had been constructed – had new photographs, but again with the variation of overlaps and no specific instructions on this matter.

So I have used the rule given by Millington: **“the right side of the wall should be on the inside”**.

Mah-Jong Strategy

Strategy and Rules

The Mah-Jong rules that you play by will clearly influence the kind of strategy that you need to employ. The strategy discussed here relates to the BMJA rules. Although I expect there will be some commonality with other forms of the game, if you play by different rules you will – no doubt – have a different opinion about some of the judgements made here.

Also, I cannot pretend to any superior wisdom about BMJA Mah-Jong strategy – it's just my opinion. You may have a better insight. So, if you have something of relevance to add, please visit my website.

Some General Observations

Luck and skill

Unlike games such as chess, success in a Mah-Jong game (played by the BMJA rules described here) is a hostage to fortune. That is not to say that skill plays no part. The more experienced player will make better choices than the novice and so stand a better chance of winning. Sometimes just one decision can make the difference between going Mah-Jong or not. But generally it's a matter of playing the percentages game.

Although it's not unusual for less good players to come out on top or even for newcomers to win at their first attempts, over time better strategy tends to win out.

This luck element adds to the fun of the game. Everyone can have good days which lift the spirits and bad days which don't!

In consequence, however, I think it makes the BMJA rules inappropriate for the kind of knock-out competitions promoted in some forms of the game.

Scoring

Some people prefer to play without scoring the hands, so that the winner is the person who simply goes Mah-Jong. Whilst a number of the tactical considerations here will still apply, the nature of the game is quite changed.

Aiming to get the highest score over several games involves a more complex set of strategies. And it is this form of the game which is really being discussed here.

Going for a quick Mah-Jong or a high score

Another divergence comes from the attitude that the players have to the game. Some simply go for the easiest Mah-Jong hand while others aim for a high-scoring one.

By adopting the first method, it's clear that you are more likely to go Mah-Jong than a player who is looking to get a high score. But whether you thereby achieve the highest number of points in a session of several games is perhaps a moot point.

The latter strategy can point to the power of doubling. Witness the story of the king who (thinking it was a modest request) agreed to give a wise man one grain of rice for the first square of a chess board then to double the quantity for each subsequent square. An unimaginable amount of rice was forfeited. The last square alone would “contain” 2 multiplied 63 times (over 9 million, million, million) grains! It's an amount few would intuitively guess.

The number of doubles possible in Mah-Jong is considerably less, but the effect is still noticeable.

Even so, if people are attempting to get high scores (particularly if they are going for difficult special hands) it can be very frustrating if another player continually wins with easy, but low-scoring hands.

The power of doubling

It's worth exploring the effect of doubling a bit further.

Some doubles are down to pure luck (for example, having your Own Season), but others can be played for (though will also depend on varying degrees of luck). There are seven of them:

- No chows
- All the same suit (and some honour tiles)
- Set of Dragons
- All 1s/9s (and some honour tiles)
- All concealed
- Own Wind
- Prevailing Wind

Assume a fairly modest basic score of 40.

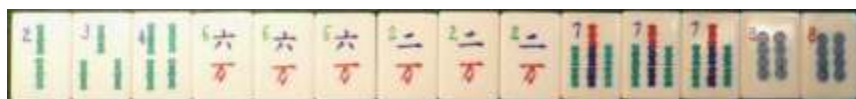
One double would give 80, two doubles 160, three doubles 320, four doubles 640 and five doubles 1,280 (enough to take you over the maximum score of 1,000). Just one good score might well be enough to win over several low-scoring Mah-Jongs during one session.

Scoring some example Mah-Jong hands

Let's try to illustrate this with some example Mah-Jong hands...

† indicates number of hands of this score required to exceed 1,000

1 chow, 3 exposed minor pung

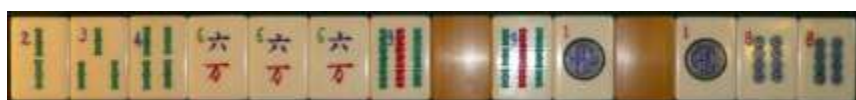


0 Chow 2 Exposed minor pung 2 Exposed minor pung 2 Exposed minor pung 0 Pair

Basic score: **26** No doubles

Final score: **26** 39†

1 chow, 1 exposed minor pung, 2 concealed major pungs

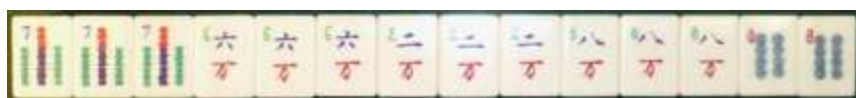


0 Chow 2 Exposed minor pung 8 Concealed major pung 8 Concealed major pung 0 Pair

Basic score: **38** No doubles

Final score: **38** 27†

4 exposed minor pungs of different suits



2 Exposed minor pung 2 Exposed minor pung 2 Exposed minor pung 2 Exposed minor pung 0 Pair

Basic score: **28** **1 double**
No chows

Final score: **56** 18†

3 concealed major pungs, 1 exposed minor pung, different suits



8 Concealed major pung 8 Concealed major pung 8 Concealed major pung 2 Exposed minor pung 0 Pair

Basic score: **46** **1 double**
No chows

Final score: **92** 11†

Questions Answered

Here is a fairly extensive list of answers to questions about Mah-Jong. Some are asked frequently, others are more esoteric. I've tried to cater for both beginners and those with a good knowledge of the game.

In answering some of the questions I have given website references. These were correct at the time of publication.

Where the questions are about the rules of the game, the answers only relate to the British Mah-Jong Association (BMJA) rules. When I have been uncertain about an answer, I have sought the advice of Gwyn Headley and Yvonne Seeley – the authors of the rules. They have always been very helpful.

I am also obliged to the many people, from the UK and around the world, who have asked me questions and so made this chapter possible.

If you have a question which is not answered here, visit my website at MahjongBritishRules.wordpress.com → [Questions Answered](#) where you can see all the latest questions and send me yours.

Equipment

Mah-Jong Sets

Q. How many tiles are there in a Mah-Jong set (one used for the BMJA rules)?

A. The minimum number is 144, but it can vary and you need to be wary of unsuitable sets

The set required for BMJA rules must have at least 144 tiles. These are made up as follows:

4 of each of the 1 to 9 of the Bamboo suit	= 36
4 of each of the 1 to 9 of the Circles suit	= 36
4 of each of the 1 to 9 of the Character suit	= 36
4 of each of the red, white and Green Dragons	= 12
4 of each of the East, South, West and North Winds	= 16
4 Flower and 4 Season tiles	= 8
Total	= 144

You may have 4 spare (blank) tiles. Sometimes these look like the White Dragons. Total = 148.

You may also have 4 joker tiles. Total = 152

Modern American sets can be used, but they have 8 joker tiles - and the Red and Green Dragon tiles look different.

Beware of modern Japanese sets which have 4 “Red Fives” tiles and no Season tiles.

In Malaysia some sets only have 88 tiles – intended for just 3 players.

See www.sloperama.com - [FAQ 7a. Different types of Mah-Jong sets](#) & [FAQ 7b. Is My Set Complete?](#)

Q. How much do Mah-Jong sets cost?

A. I am no expert on this, but this is my impression. In the UK you can expect to pay at least £30. Prices for new sets can get to around £150. Antique sets are much more expensive; from several hundred to thousands of pounds.

Q. How much is my set worth?

A. See www.sloperama.com - [FAQ 7h. How much is my set worth?](#)

Q. Where can I buy a Mah-Jong set?

A. For advice see MahjongBritishRules.wordpress.com → [Sets](#)

Q. Where can I buy an antique/vintage Mah-Jong set?

A. See www.donaygames.com and www.mahjongmahjong.com

Q. How old is my set?

A. See www.sloperama.com - [FAQ 7g. How old is my Mah-Jongg set?](#)

Tiles

Q. What are my tiles made from?

A. Tiles can be made from a variety of materials; plastic (Bakelite, Catalin, celluloid, vinyl), bone, bamboo, ivory, wood, jade and even stone.

More information: www.sloperama.com - [FAQ 7c. How to identify what your tiles are made of](#)

Examples of sets made from various materials: www.charli.org → [Museum](#)

Chinese characters

Q. What numbers do the Chinese characters stand for?

A. 10,000 to 90,000

The top characters shown on the suit of Chinese characters are 1 to 9. The bottom character, normally in red, stands for 10,000.

Q. My set has character tiles without western style (Arabic) numbers – only Chinese ones. How do I tell what their numbers are?

A. Here is a set with the associated Arabic numbers.



One to four have the corresponding number of marks, so are easy to distinguish. For the other tiles you need to use your imagination a bit.

- The 7 could be construed to look like the French 7 (with the stroke through)
- The 9 looks a bit like an “n” (for nine)
- With a vivid imagination you could think of the 6 as depicting a person being sick over the side of a ship - “sea sick” (six)!
- 5 and 8 defeat me

The reason such tiles do not have Arabic numbers is that the set was not made for export to the west. They are (I believe) more rare, and therefore more valuable.

Dragon Tiles

Q. What do the letters, “C”, “F” and “P” stand for on the red, green and White Dragon tiles?

A. “C” on the Red Dragon tile stands for “*Chung*”, “F” on the Green Dragon tile stands for something like “*Fa*” and “P” on the White Dragon tile stands for “*Po*”.

The translation of Chinese characters to English can be done in various ways and there are different derivations dependent on dialect, so there is sometimes some ambiguity in the etymology.

“*Chung*” means “*centre*”. “*Hung chung*” means “*red centre*”.

“F” has various possible derivations: “*Fa*”, “*Fa choi*”, “*Fart choy*”, “*Chingfa*”, “*Fat*”. “*Fa*” means “*get*” but is associated with “*Fa choi*” which means “*get rich*”.

“*Po*” means “*white*” or “*blank*”. Some White Dragon tiles are marked with the letter “B” which stands for “*bai*” or “*bai-ban*” and means “*white*” or “*white board*”.

See Tom Sloper www.sloperama.com → [FAQ 7e. Those mysterious special tiles that come in some Mah-Jongg sets](#)

Wikipedia en.wikipedia.org → [Mahjong tiles](#)

Glossary

- Bamboos** A suit of tiles showing 1 to 9 bamboos, although the number one tile is often depicted by a picture of a rice-bird or sparrow.
- Base/Basic score** The score for one hand which is obtained by adding together the points allocated to each set, pair, bonus tiles and (if applicable) for going Mah-Jong.
- BMJA** British Mah-Jong Association. Founded to halt the proliferation of “home rules” and establish an authoritative yet familiar code of play. This is described in “**Mah-Jong (Know the Game)**” by Gwyn Headley and Yvonne Seeley.
- Bonus tiles** A collective term for the Flower and Season tiles. Bonus tiles are not used in play, but merely enhance the score.
- Bouquet** A full set of Flower or Season tiles. A player who holds such a set in his hand doubles his score twice.
- Calling** When a player only requires one more tile to finish he must declare “one for Mah-Jong” and is said to be “fishing” or “calling”.
- Calling hand** A hand where the player only needs one tile to go Mah-Jong.
- Characters** A suit of tiles showing the Chinese symbol for the number of the tile (1 to 9) and another symbol for 10,000.
- Chow** A run of three tiles in the same suit. Chows are not scored.
- Chuang-tzu** Box used to contain Wind discs and to indicate prevailing Wind. Also called Tong box.
- Circles** A suit of tiles showing 1 to 9 Circles.
- Clean hand** A Mah-Jong hand that is made up of just one suit, with some honour tiles.
- Concealed set** A concealed set is one that has not been placed face-up on the table as a result of someone calling "Chow", "Pung" or "Kong". During play it may be held in the hand or placed face-down on the table. A concealed set is worth double its exposed version.
- Dead tiles** Tiles which have been discarded and not claimed. They are laid face up and play no further part in the game.
- Dead wall** Another name for the kong box.
- Dirty hand** A completed hand which has sets from more than one suit. This is often frowned upon, but “going out dirty” is sometimes the only option.
- Dragons** There are 3 sets of Dragon tiles: Red Dragon, Green Dragon and White.
- Doubling** An important part of the scoring process. A basic score may be doubled for various reasons (e.g. having a set of Dragons).