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## Introduction

Here is an extensive list of answers to questions about Mah-Jong. Some are general questions, like the equipment required to play the game, but the majority are questions about the British Mah-Jong Association (BMJA) rules.

They were mostly put to me by visitors to my website, 'Mah-Jong, British Rules'. A lot of the questions are ones that most players are likely to ask themselves at some point in their play. Some are from people still learning the game. Others are more esoteric, relating to unlikely scenarios or obscure consequences of the rules that the authors could hardly have been expected to anticipate.

In answering them I've tried to cater for both beginners and those with a good knowledge of the game. Sometimes a one sentence, or a yes/no, answer will suffice, but often I expand on this to give a more detailed reply.

The BMJA rules were first set out in 1994 in a book by Gwyn Headley and Yvonne Seeley called 'Mah-Jong, Know the Game'. The aim was to "*establish an authoritative yet familiar code of play*" amid the "*uncontrolled proliferation of 'home rules'*" that had bedevilled the British game.

The website, published in November 2008 (and endorsed by the authors of MJ-KTG), was based on the 3<sup>rd</sup> (2008, still the latest) edition of the book. Blessed with no space constraints, my aim was to give a detailed, richly illustrated, description of the BMJA rules as well as to provide other information which might be helpful to players of Mah-Jong.

As questions from visitors to my website came in over the subsequent years, and some mistakes or ambiguities inevitably emerged, I was able (with the help of the authors) to clarify or update the rules.

It seems incredible that our interchange of emails has continued to the present day!

The questions are grouped into five categories:

- 1. Mah-Jong equipment
- 2. Preparing to play
- 3. Playing the game
- 4. Scoring
- 5. Miscellaneous

The sixth chapter details the corrections and clarifications to the rules that have come about as a result of all this. It should be particularly helpful to those who rely on MJ-KTG to understand the rules.

In addition there is a glossary of Mah-Jong terms, a list of website references and an index, which may provide an easier way to look for answers to any questions you may have.

Most of this *can* be found on my website. But it is thought that this book would provide a handier reference, particularly when people are playing the game, as well as being something to be read at leisure.

### *Abbreviations*

A couple of references are mentioned many times, so I have used abbreviations for them.

MJBR            My website, 'Mah-Jong, British Rules'  
                      at [MahjongBritishRules.wordpress.com](http://MahjongBritishRules.wordpress.com)

MJ-KTG        'Mah-Jong, Know the Game'  
                      by Gwyn Headley and Yvonne Seeley

## Discarded tiles

### Q. Should a discarded tile be placed face-up?

A. Yes

*If a discarded tile is accidentally placed on its side or face-down then this should be corrected.*

### Q. What is a dead tile?

A. A dead tile is one that has been discarded and not immediately chowed, punged or konged. It takes no further part in the game, aside from helping players decide what tiles to collect and discard.

### Q. At what point is a discarded tile considered to be ‘dead’ and so not claimable?

A. This needs to be agreed between the players.

*The speed of play (and sometimes unclear calls) can often leave little time for a player to decide to claim the discarded tile. So one needs to agree on the rules to be applied when (say) a “Pung!” clashes with the next player picking up a tile from the wall.*

*I would suggest that once this next tile has been seen, the previously discarded tile is considered ‘dead’ and the pung is disallowed. So a tile that has been taken from the wall but not turned over when the pung is called would need to be returned and the pung allowed to stand.*

*A less lenient rule might be to consider the discarded tile to be ‘dead’ once the next tile in the wall has been touched.*

*If the player made a mistake when describing the discarded tile (e.g. calling it a 6 Bamboos, when it was a 9) then I would suggest that some discretion is required.*

## Concealed and exposed sets

### Q. What is the meaning of ‘concealed’ and ‘exposed’?

A. See the two questions below for the quick answer.

*If you have to call “Chow!”, “Pung!” or “Kong!” to claim a tile that someone else has discarded then the set that you thereby make is an ‘exposed’ one. You have to lay it down in front of your rack so that others can see it.*

*However, if you are able to make a chow, pung or kong from the tiles that you obtain from the deal or from picking up from the wall then that set is 'concealed'. You keep that in your hand (so that others cannot see it) unless it is a kong, whereupon you (usually) lay the four tiles in front of you and claim a tile from the kong box to make up for the extra tile in the set.*

*You do not have to lay the kong down immediately as you may decide to use the four tiles differently, for example to help make the special hand of 'All pair honours' (e.g. with two pairs of green dragons). You can still claim points for a concealed kong in your hand if someone else goes Mah-Jong.*

**Q. What is a concealed set?**

**A.** A chow, pung or kong that has been collected without claiming any tiles from a discard.

*A concealed chow has no significance as there is no scoring involved.*

**Q. What is an exposed set?**

**A.** The opposite of a concealed one i.e. one of the tiles has been claimed from a discard.

**Q. Can I change my mind about an exposed set once I have laid it down?**

**A.** No

*There is a general rule, which is that once a set has been exposed it cannot be incorporated back into the hand, for example to make a special hand.  
e.g.*

*An exposed kong of a major tile cannot be used to make 'All pair honours'.*

*A chow cannot be used to make 'The wriggling snake'.*

**Q. If you go Mah-Jong by claiming a tile to make a pung, is that pung exposed or concealed?**

**A.** It is exposed and will destroy an otherwise concealed hand.

*Note that this does NOT apply to the special hands of 'Buried treasure' and 'The gates of heaven'.*

## Winds

**Q. Why is being East Wind important?**

**A.** Because East Wind always pays and receives double his score.

**Q. When does East Wind move to another player?**

**A.** When the player who is East Wind does not go Mah-Jong.

*Note: If the game is drawn, East Wind doesn't change.*

**Q. If I am West Wind or North Wind and go Mah-Jong, do I then become East Wind?**

**A.** No. The person who was South Wind becomes East Wind.

**Q. When does the 'prevailing Wind' change?**

**A.** When the first player who was East Wind, becomes East Wind again.

*So this takes at least 4 games, and more if East Wind goes Mah-Jong.*

**Q. What effect does a change in the 'prevailing Wind' have?**

**A.** It only affects the scoring in 2 ways. So when the 'prevailing Wind' becomes South:

*A pung/ kong of South Wind gives a double for any player*

*A pair of South Wind tiles scores 2 points for any player*

*NB: The following statement in MJ-KTG (3<sup>rd</sup> edition, p28) is incorrect:*

*"The prevailing Wind player always scores double and pays double to all the other players"*

*See statement in MJ-KTG p24 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) and p34 (3<sup>rd</sup> edition):*

*"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."*

*Note:*

- *If the player who is South Wind has a pung/ kong of South Wind then he gets 2 doubles (one for his own Wind and one for the 'prevailing Wind').*
- *If the player who is South Wind has a pair of South Wind tiles*

*then he gets 4 points (2 points for his own Wind and 2 points for the 'prevailing Wind').*

- *A change in the 'prevailing Wind' doesn't stop East Wind paying and receiving double.*

**Q. Do the Flower/Season designations (i.e. East Wind – 1, South Wind – 2, West Wind – 3, North Wind – 4) change when the 'prevailing Wind' changes?**

**A.** No

**Q. What effect does playing the game with 3 players have on the Winds?**

**A.** East Wind always exists. The other players take the Winds associated with their positions relative to East Wind.

*i.e. Opposite – West Wind, to left – North Wind, to right – South Wind.*

**Q. What is the difference between 'Wind of the round' and the 'prevailing Wind'?**

**A.** Nothing. They are just different names for the same thing.

**Q. Does the 'prevailing Wind' always go first?**

**A.** No. East Wind always goes first, even if it is not the 'prevailing Wind'.

*East Wind always receives 14 tiles (one more than the other players) and so starts the game by discarding the extra tile.*

## **Kong box**

**Q. Is the kong box ever replenished from the live wall?**

**A.** No

**Q. What happens when the kong box is empty?**

**A.** It's a drawn game.

*More precisely, when the kong box is empty and a player requires another tile because of a kong or a bonus tile then the game is drawn and the goulash is played next.*

## Special hands

### And pairs

**Q. What does a pair refer to exactly in the various special hands?**

**A.** The pair must (where applicable) be from the tiles that would qualify for a pung or a kong in that particular special hand.

*In 'Triple knitting' it's a pair with different suits, but the same numbers.*

### And exposed sets

**Q. Can you make a special hand when you have exposed sets?**

**A.** Only for special hands which are made of up pungs or kongs.

*Special hands which are made up of pungs or kongs can use exposed kongs. These are: 'Purity', 'Imperial jade', 'Heads and tails', 'Three great scholars', 'All Winds and Dragons', 'Four blessings hovering over the door' and 'Fourfold plenty'.*

*The other special hands must be kept concealed until you go Mah-Jong.*

*If you have exposed a chow, pung or kong, it cannot be used in one of these other special hands.*

*e.g.*

*An exposed chow cannot be used to make 'The wriggling snake'.*

*An exposed kong cannot be used to make two major pairs for 'All pair honours'.*

*However, you can pung the last set to go Mah-Jong for 'Buried treasure' and 'The gates of heaven' – hands which, until that point, need to be concealed.*

### And discards

**Q. Can you claim a discard when you are saving for a special hand?**

**A.** You can pung and kong tiles when the special hand is composed of pungs and/or kongs, but for other types of special hands you can only claim the final tile to go Mah-Jong. You can never claim a previously discarded tile.

## All pair honours

**Q. In ‘All pair honours’ can you have two pairs of the same tile – i.e. two pairs of Red Dragons?**

**A.** Yes

*Note, however, that you need to have kept them in your hand and not declared them as a kong.*

**Q. Does ‘All pair honours’ have to include a pair of 1s, a pair of 9s, a pair of Winds and a pair of Dragons?**

**A.** No. It just has to consist of pairs of any of the major tiles.

*Honour tiles are also classified as major tiles.*

**Q. ‘All pair honours’ can include 1s and 9s, but these tiles are not honour tiles. So why is this special hand given this name?**

**A.** I assume that the name used for the ‘All pair honours’ special hand is there by convention, rather than being strictly logical.

*Answer from authors of MJ-KTG:*

*“The hand called ‘All pair honours’ does indeed include 1s and 9s. We agree they are major tiles rather than honour tiles, but the traditional name for this hand has been used for a good long time and, by spelling out the use of Winds, Dragons, 1s and 9s, we don’t believe there is any confusion.”*

## All Winds and Dragons

**Q. Could ‘All Winds and Dragons’ consist of all Winds and no Dragons?**

**A.** You cannot form a Mah-Jong with just Winds as you need a pair to complete the hand.

*Pungs/Kongs of all the Winds and no Dragons would be ‘Four blessings hovering over the door’.*

*Pungs/Kongs of all the Winds and a pair of Dragons could be ‘All Winds and Dragons’ or even ‘Four blessings hovering over the door’. It would make no difference to the score.*

**Q. How much do I score for a pair of East Winds?**

**A.** If East is the ‘prevailing Wind’ (which is normally the case):

- When you are East Wind you will score 4 points (2 points for the ‘prevailing Wind’ and 2 points for your own Wind)
- When you are *not* East Wind you will only score 2 points (for having the ‘prevailing Wind’)

*If East is NOT the ‘prevailing Wind’ you will only score 2 points when you are East Wind.*

**Q. How does a change to the ‘prevailing Wind’ (to South Wind) affect the basic score?**

**A.** A pair of South Wind tiles scores 2 points for any player.

*If the player who is South Wind has a pair of South Wind tiles then he gets 4 points (2 points for his own Wind and 2 points for the ‘prevailing Wind’).*

*The same rules apply when the ‘prevailing Wind’ changes to West and North.*

**Q. If someone goes Mah-Jong with a loose tile from the kong box (giving a double) does that qualify him for an extra 2 points (to the basic score) because the winning tile was drawn from the wall?**

**A.** No

*The winning tile must be drawn from the live wall to get the extra 2 points. The kong box is not part of the live wall.*

## **Doubling**

**Q. Do you get a double for a pair of Dragons?**

**A.** No. It must be a pung or a kong of Dragons.

*The same rule applies to your own Wind or the ‘prevailing Wind’. However, they do give you 2 points.*

**Q. How many doubles do you get for a pung/kong of East Winds?**

**A.** If you are East Wind (and the ‘prevailing Wind’ is still East) then you get 2 doubles.

**Q. Can you give an example of a concealed hand which is not 'Buried treasure' and explain how many doubles it gets?**

**A.** Consider the following hand: Concealed kong of Dragons. Concealed pungs of 9 Circles, 2 Circles, 5 Circles. Concealed pair of 1 Circles.

*It is not 'Buried treasure' as it contains a kong. It qualifies for the following doubles: 'no chows', kong of Dragons, All concealed (with one or more suits and some honour).*

**Q. Can you claim a double when you rob the kong?**

**A.** Yes, if you are making a chow.

*You get a double if you are claiming a chow, but lose it immediately as you can no longer claim a double for 'no chows'.*

*Note: The double doesn't apply to special hands.*

**Q. When a double is given for "all the same suit"/ "all 1s and/or 9s" / "all concealed" – "with Dragons and/or Winds" can the Dragon or Wind be just a pair?**

**A.** Yes

**Q. Does the doubling condition "All tiles are 1s and/or 9s with some Dragons and/or Winds" apply if you only have one set of 1s or 9s?**

**A.** Yes, though you may then have a special hand.

## Special hands

### And bonus tiles

**Q. Do bonus tiles count for anything if you have a special hand?**

**A.** Only if the special hand scores less than the limit of 1,000 points.

*You can add the scores from any bonus tiles if: (1) You go Mah-Jong with a special hand of 'Purity', 'All pair honours', 'Knitting' or 'Triple knitting'. (2) You are fishing with a special hand when somebody else goes Mah-Jong.*

## And doubling

### Q. Can you double a special hand score?

**A.** You can't double the value of the special hand, but you can double the value of the bonus tiles when the special hand score is less than 1,000.

*When you have a special hand that scores the limit of 1,000 points then it doesn't apply, because the score cannot go over this limit.*

*When you have a special hand which doesn't score the limit (i.e. 'Purity', 'All pair honours', 'Knitting', 'Triple knitting' and limit hands for which you are fishing) then the doubling is only applied to the score you obtain from any bonus tiles.*

*Although in the case of 'Purity' (when you have sufficient bonus tiles), you could conceivably get a higher score by not treating your hand as a special one.*

*So, if you have 2 bonus tiles, one of which is your own (going by the numbers East - 1, South - 2, West - 3, North - 4), then you score  $[(4 + 4) \times 2 = ]$  16 in addition to the value of the special hand.*

*e.g.*

*A special hand of 'Knitting' with 2 bonus tiles, one your own, will score  $[500 + (8 \times 2) = ]$  516 point*

*A special hand of 'Purity' with 3 bonus tiles, two your own, will score an additional  $[12 \times 2 \times 2 = ]$  48 points*

### Q. Can you double a special hand score if you are fishing when someone else goes Mah-Jong?

**A.** Yes, but it only applies to bonus tiles if you are claiming you are one off a special hand.

*If you are fishing with 'The wriggling snake' with 2 bonus tiles, one your own, when somebody else goes Mah-Jong then you score  $400 + (8 \times 2) = 416$  points*

*Note: It's conceivable that you may score more by not treating the hand as a special one.*

*e.g.*

*If you had concealed pungs of Red and Green Dragons and concealed kongs of South and West Winds (i.e. fishing for 'All Winds and Dragons') plus your own Flower you could score  $[(8 + 8 + 32 + 32 + 4) \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 = ]$  672 points as opposed to  $[400 + (4 \times 2) = ]$  408 points. If one of the Winds was your own you would have another double, giving a final score of 1,000.*

## 6

## Corrections and clarifications to the rules

There are some mistakes and ambiguities (acknowledged by the authors) in the official explanation of the BMJA rules found in MJ-KTG. They have come to light as a result of my answering the many questions listed in the previous chapters.

Besides incorporating the resulting updates to the rules, my website (MJBR) was able to provide further details to help clarify the rules.

This chapter makes clear where this updated version of the rules differs from that given in MJ-KTG. It should be particularly useful to those who rely on the book to explain the rules.

Two editions of MJ-KTG are referred to: the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition published in 2002 and the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition published in 2008.

### Corrections

#### Paying double when East Wind

The following statement (MJ-KTG 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, p28) is incorrect:

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

See statement (2<sup>nd</sup> edition p24, 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.”*

#### *Correct rule*

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.

## 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.

*e.g.*

*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 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of MJ-KTG 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 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of MJ-KTG – 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.”*

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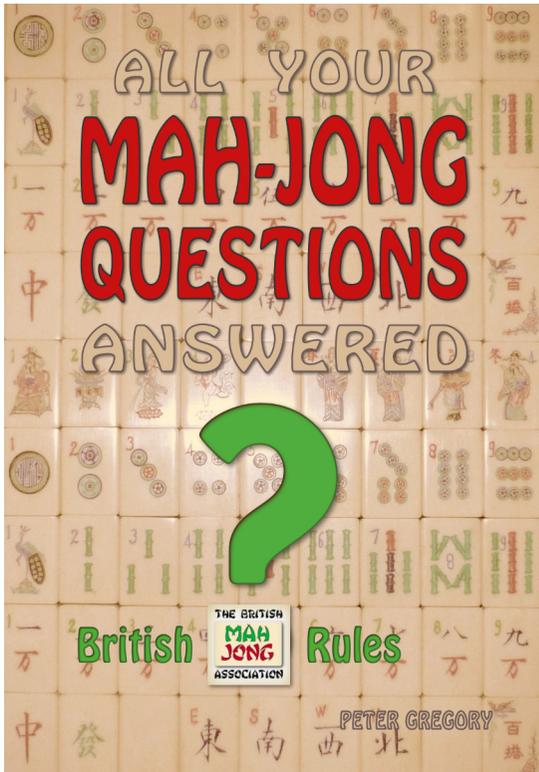
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