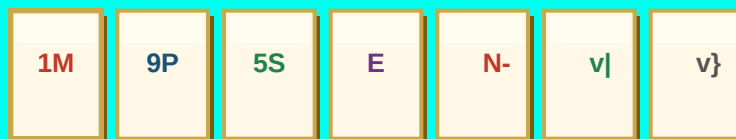


LEVEL BEGINNER · BEGINNER

Mahjong for Absolute Beginners

Everything you need to play your first game



FREE DOWNLOAD

Mahjong is one of the world's oldest and most beloved tile games, originating in China over 150 years ago. Four players (or two in MoneyBall Mahjong's quick mode) race to build a complete hand of 14 tiles before anyone else.

This guide covers everything a first-time player needs to know: the tiles, the setup, how turns work, and your first winning strategies. By the end you'll be ready to play your first full game!

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN IN THIS GUIDE

- All 136 tiles and what they mean
- How to set up and start a game
- The complete turn cycle
- What a winning hand looks like
- The 3 ways to claim a discard (Pong, Chow, Ron)
- Your first 5 strategy principles
- Common beginner mistakes to avoid

TIP Mahjong is easy to learn in an hour, but takes a lifetime to master. The goal of this guide is to get you to "playable" quickly!

THREE SUITED SUITS

These are the "number" tiles. Each suit has tiles numbered 1-9, with 4 identical copies of each tile ($4 \times 9 \times 3 = 108$ tiles total).

EXAMPLE: Man 𠄎 — Characters (shown in RED)

1M 2M 3M 4M 5M 6M 7M 8M 9M
One Two Three Four Five Six Seven Eight Nine

These can form sequences: 3M-4M-5M, 7M-8M-9M, etc.
They can also form triplets: 5M-5M-5M

EXAMPLE: Pin 𠄎 — Circles (shown in BLUE)

1P 2P 3P 4P 5P 6P 7P 8P 9P

Example sequence: 2P-3P-4P | Triplet: 8P-8P-8P

EXAMPLE: Sou 𠄎 — Bamboo (shown in GREEN)

1S 2S 3S 4S 5S 6S 7S 8S 9S

Example sequence: 1S-2S-3S | Triplet: 6S-6S-6S

HONOR TILES

These tiles cannot form sequences — only triplets (3 identical tiles).

EXAMPLE: Wind Tiles (16 tiles total: 4×4)

E = East Wind S = South Wind
W = West Wind N = North Wind

Only valid meld: E-E-E or S-S-S or W-W-W or N-N-N
Cannot form sequences like E-S-W (they are not consecutive)

EXAMPLE: Dragon Tiles (12 tiles total: 3×4)

N- (Chun) = Red Dragon
v| (Hatsu) = Green Dragon
v} (Haku) = White Dragon

Only valid meld: N--N--N- or v|-v|-v| or v}-v}-v}

TIP Remember: Winds and Dragons can ONLY form triplets — never sequences. This makes them harder to use in your hand.

THE FORMULA: 4 MELDS + 1 PAIR

Every winning hand in Mahjong follows the same structure: you need exactly 4 "melds" (groups of 3 tiles) plus one pair (2 identical tiles). That's $4 \times 3 + 2 = 14$ tiles total.

TYPE 1: PONG (Triplet)

Three identical tiles. Works for any tile type.

EXAMPLE: Pong examples

- ' 5M-5M-5M (three 5-Man)
- ' East-East-East (three East winds)
- ' N--N--N- (three Red Dragons)
- ' 5M-5P-5S (same number, different suits – NOT a Pong)

TYPE 2: CHOW (Sequence)

Three consecutive tiles of the SAME suit. Only works for Man, Pin, and Sou — NOT for Winds or Dragons.

EXAMPLE: Chow examples

- ' 3M-4M-5M (consecutive Man tiles)
- ' 7P-8P-9P (consecutive Pin tiles, ending at 9)
- ' 1S-2S-3S (consecutive Sou tiles, starting at 1)
- ' East-South-West (Winds cannot form sequences)
- ' 8M-9M-1M (sequences don't wrap around)

COMPLETE WINNING HAND EXAMPLE

EXAMPLE: A simple winning hand (14 tiles)

Meld 1 (Pong): 3M-3M-3M
Meld 2 (Chow): 5P-6P-7P
Meld 3 (Chow): 2S-3S-4S
Meld 4 (Pong): East-East-East
Pair: 9M-9M
%
Total: 3+3+3+3+2 = 14 tiles ' WIN!

Visualised (tap any tile in-game to select it for discard):



TIP When you first start, just count your tile groups. Do you have 4 groups of 3? Do you have a pair? If yes — you have a winning hand!

THE TURN CYCLE

Players take turns clockwise (East !' South !' West !' North in 4-player mode). Each turn has 3 phases:

EXAMPLE: One complete turn

STEP 1 – DRAW

Take the top tile from the wall.

You now hold 14 tiles temporarily.

STEP 2 – CHECK FOR WIN (Tsumo)

Do your 14 tiles form 4 melds + 1 pair?

If YES !' declare "Tsumo!" and win!

If NO !' continue to step 3.

STEP 3 – DISCARD

Select one tile to throw away (discard).

You now hold 13 tiles again.

Other players may claim your discard.

CLAIMING A DISCARD

After you discard a tile, the other players have a chance to "claim" it before the next player draws. There are 3 types of claims:

EXAMPLE: Claim type 1 — RON (Win!)

ANYONE can claim a discard to complete their winning hand.

This is called "Ron" (winning from another player's discard).

Example: You need 3M to complete your hand.

The player to your right discards 3M.

You declare RON !' you win!

EXAMPLE: Claim type 2 — PONG (Triplet)

ANYONE can claim a discard if they already hold 2 matching tiles (to make a triplet).

Example: You hold 7P-7P in your hand.

Another player discards 7P.

You declare PONG !' you claim 7P, reveal the meld 7P-7P-7P, then discard a different tile.

EXAMPLE: Claim type 3 — CHOW (Sequence)

ONLY the player directly to the left of the discarder can Chow.

You need 2 tiles in hand to complete a sequence with the discard.

Example: You hold 4M-5M. The player to your RIGHT discards 3M.

You declare CHOW !' you claim 3M, reveal 3M-4M-5M, then discard a different tile.

Note: Chow is ONLY available from the player on your right.

Pong and Ron work from anyone.

TIP Priority order: RON beats PONG beats CHOW. If multiple players want the same tile, the highest priority wins.

Ø=Ü; Your First 5 Strategies

Simple rules to improve immediately

Page 6

STRATEGY 1: KEEP MIDDLE TILES

Tiles numbered 4, 5, and 6 are the most flexible for building sequences. A 5 can connect to 3-4-5, 4-5-6, or 5-6-7 — giving you 3 different sequence options. Edge tiles (1, 2, 8, 9) only connect one way.

EXAMPLE: Value comparison

5M can complete: 3M-4M-5M, 4M-5M-6M, 5M-6M-7M (3 options)

1M can only complete: 1M-2M-3M (1 option)

! ' Discard 1M before 5M when choosing what to throw

STRATEGY 2: DISCARD ISOLATED HONORS FIRST

If you only have ONE Wind or ONE Dragon tile (and no matching pair), discard it early. You can't use it in a sequence, and you need 2+ of the same honor to make a Pong. It's "dead weight" in your hand.

EXAMPLE: Early discard priority

Hand: 3M-4M-5M-7P-8P-9P-2S-3S-6S-6S-East-North-N-

East, North, and N- are isolated honors — discard them first.

6S-6S is a pair that could become your winning pair or a Pong.

Keep 2S-3S (need one tile to complete a Chow).

STRATEGY 3: BUILD PAIRS DELIBERATELY

Pairs are incredibly valuable. They can become: (a) your winning pair, (b) the start of a Pong if you draw a third, or (c) a quick Pong target from discards. When you have a pair, think carefully before discarding half of it.

STRATEGY 4: FOCUS ON 1-2 SUITS

Beginners often hold tiles from all three suited suits, making it hard to complete sequences. Try to commit to 1-2 suits early and discard from the third. This focuses your draws and makes your hand more efficient.

STRATEGY 5: COUNT YOUR MELDS

At any time, count: "How many complete melds do I have? How many partial (2-tile) groups?" A simple target:

EXAMPLE: The 3-2-1 hand structure

Strong hand target (7 building blocks for 4 melds + 1 pair):

3 complete melds (done)

2 partial melds (need 1 tile each = need 2 more tiles)

1 pair (done or partial)

If you're at this stage, you're 1-2 draws away from winning!

& p Common Beginner Mistakes

What *NOT* to do

MISTAKE 1: KEEPING TOO MANY ISOLATED TILES

New players often keep tiles "just in case" — holding one of everything. This wastes your hand. If a tile doesn't connect to at least one other tile you hold, it's probably ready to discard.

MISTAKE 2: NEVER PONGING

Some beginners hesitate to Pong because they don't know when it's good. Simple rule: if you can Pong AND your remaining 10 tiles still have a path to a win, do it. A locked Pong means one less group to worry about.

MISTAKE 3: IGNORING DEFENSE

When another player has 2-3 locked melds (Pongs showing), they are likely close to winning. Start being careful about what you discard — try to throw tiles that have already been discarded by others (called "safe" tiles).

MISTAKE 4: CHOWING TOO EARLY

Chow (sequence claim) is weaker than Pong because it only works from the player on your right. Early in the game, it's often better to wait and draw the tile yourself — you might draw something even better.

MISTAKE 5: NOT WATCHING THE WALL COUNT

The wall starts with 84 tiles after the deal. As it depletes, change your strategy. With 20 tiles left, favor safer discards over aggressive building. With 10 tiles left, focus on not dealing into opponents.

TIP The single best habit for a beginner: after each turn, count your melds. "I have 2 complete melds, 3 partial groups, and a pair — I need 2 more draws to win." This mental model accelerates improvement enormously.

Ø=ÜË Quick Reference Card

Keep this handy during your first games

TILES AT A GLANCE

EXAMPLE: Complete tile reference

SUITED (can sequence or triplet):

Man 1M-9M x4 each (36 tiles)
Pin 1P-9P x4 each (36 tiles)
Sou 1S-9S x4 each (36 tiles)

HONORS (triplet only – no sequences):

Winds: East, South, West, North x4 each (16 tiles)
Dragons: N- v| v} x4 each (12 tiles)

TOTAL: 136 tiles

CLAIM PRIORITY

EXAMPLE: Who gets the discarded tile

1. RON – anyone who can complete their winning hand
2. PONG – anyone who holds 2 matching tiles
3. CHOW – only the player to the discarder's left

If no one claims !' next player draws from the wall

WIN CONDITIONS

EXAMPLE: How to win

TSUMO: You draw the winning tile yourself from the wall.

RON: You claim another player's discard to complete your hand.

DRAW GAME: Wall runs out before anyone wins !' no winner, restart.

Winning hand = 4 melds (Pong or Chow) + 1 pair = 14 tiles

TURN SUMMARY

EXAMPLE: Every turn in 3 steps

1. DRAW !' take top tile from wall (now hold 14)
2. CHECK !' 4 melds + pair? !' TSUMO WIN!
3. DISCARD !' remove weakest tile (back to 13)



Watch: How to Play Mahjong — Beginner Video Tutorial

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=how+to+play+mahjong+beginners+tutorial

Ø=Þ€ Ready to level up? Get the Intermediate Guide (\$2.99)

moneyballmahjong.online/guides !' Tile Efficiency, Tenpai & Smarter Claiming