



Carmel Companions Mahjong Rules Simplified Edition

The following is a set of rules for Mahjong, drawing from the version of Hong Kong Mahjong that our group played at Coopers Plains in May 2021. The rules are supported by subsequent research online, so that as a group, we can have a consistent set of rules to play by.

1. Mahjong Tiles

The **basic Mahjong set has 136 pieces**, which consist of 34 distinct kinds of pieces (4 of each kind). There are three **numbered suits**, which run from one to nine ($4 \times 27 = 108$ tiles).

1) Bamboos



2) Characters



3) Circles or Dots



In addition, there are four directional tiles (Winds), labeled as East, South, West, and North ($4 \times 4 = 16$ tiles).



There are also three Dragons tiles, labeled as Red Dragon, Green Dragon, and White Dragon (4 x 3 = 12 tiles). **Wind and Dragon tiles are known as *Honours* tiles.**



In a Mahjong set, there are also 8 optional tiles bringing the total number of tiles to 144. These are four tiles for Flowers and four tiles for Seasons. Each set is marked 1, 2, 3, and 4. ***In the version of Mahjong we play the Flowers and Seasons tiles are not used.***



2. Mahjong Game Objective

In simple terms, the **objective** of the Hong Kong Mahjong game is to put together a complete set (or "**standard hand**"), which contains **four instances of 3 or 4 tile sets** and a **pair**.

The sets can be one of the following types:

- **Pungs** - *three of a kind* of the same numbered suit tiles or honours tiles, or
- **Kongs** - *Four of a kind* of the same numbered suit tiles or honours tiles, or
- **Chows** – a *numerical sequence of 3 of the same numbered suit*. (Chows can not be formed from honours tiles as Wind or Dragon tiles have no numbers). *In Hong Kong Mahjong, multiple Chows in a hand are permitted.*

A **Pair** is *two of the same tile*, including honours tiles.

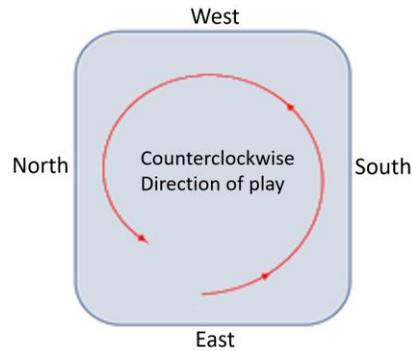
The other fundamental constraint in achieving a standard Mahjong hand is that if the hand contains at least one Chow, all numbered tiles in the hand must be from the same suit.

3. Preparing for the Game

3.1 Selecting EAST

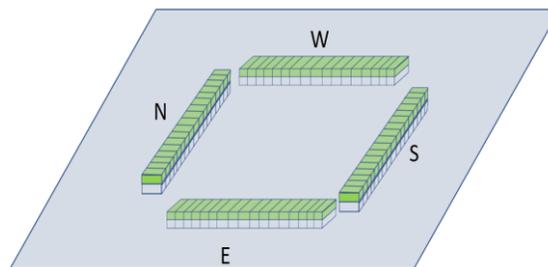
- a) **Four players** take up their seats.
- b) Each player throws one or two dice. **The player with the highest number becomes "EAST"**, and the other three seats, in counterclockwise order, South,

West and North. (Note the difference to the compass orientation).



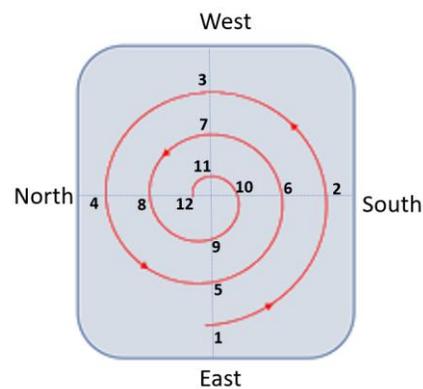
3.2 Building the Wall

- a) The 136 pieces, (without flowers & seasons) are mixed and then placed faced down on the table. **Each player then selects 34 tiles and arranges them face down in a row of 17 pieces 2 tiles high.**



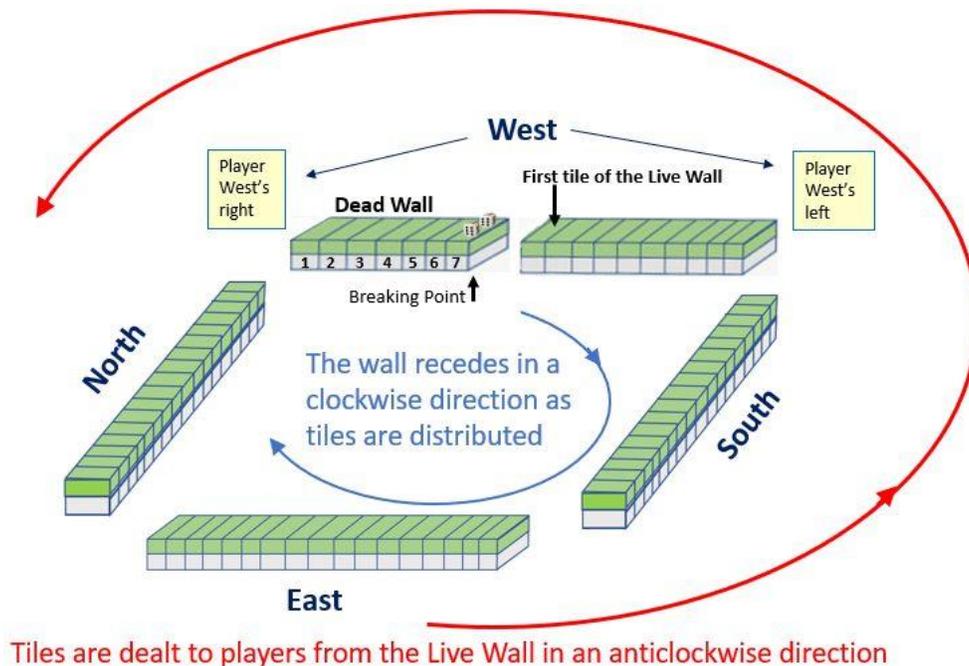
3.3 Breaking the Wall

- a) East throws two dice and counts **counterclockwise** round the walls to the total of the dice, beginning the count at East's position, till he comes to the total of the dice. That position becomes the starting position of the wall.



- b) The player at the starting position indicated, then counts off to the total dice value along the tiles of the wall, starting from the **right end of the wall** as seen from that player's position to break the wall.

The diagram below shows the case where East threw a total of 7 with the two dice. In that case, West counts off 7 tiles from West's right (i.e. left from East's perspective) then, breaks the wall by separating the tiles to West's left of the breaking point (tile 7 in the illustrated example). The tiles to the player's right of the breaking point are known as the **Dead Wall** (or Kong box); the remaining tiles, starting from the tiles to the player's left of the breaking point, constitute the **Live Wall**. The tiles of the Dead Wall are reserved as replacement tiles for Kongs.



3.4 Distributing tiles to each player for the initial hand

- a) **East starts the deal** by taking the first two stacks of the tiles (i.e. **four tiles**) from **the left of the break**, then each of the other three players picks two stacks of tiles in order South, West and North. This is repeated twice so that by this stage each player has 12 tiles.
- b) Finally East picks two more tiles. the first and third from the top of the wall, **making 14 tiles in total in East's hand**. Then **West, South, and North** pick one tile each as shown below so that they **each have 13 tiles**.



4. The Game begins

- a) **The game begins with the dealer (East)** selecting one of the 14 tiles in East's hand and **discarding it face up in the center of the table** on the discard pile **while announcing the tiles description (e.g. Circle 3)**
- b) South then draws a tile from the wall (temporarily bringing South's hand to 14 tiles) before selecting a tile to place face up on the discard pile while announcing to all, the tile description.
- c) This sequence is repeated by West and then North and continues back to East and the sequence continues. **Thus, the play goes counterclockwise around the table**, unless a tile is thrown which a player can claim. In that case, the next turn jumps to the player to the right of the respective claiming player's position.
- d) The play continues in this fashion until **a player claims Mahjong** or all until all available tiles are used in which case the outcome is **a dead hand**.

5. Claiming a discarded tile

When a player discards a tile, one of the other players may pick up the last discarded tile to complete a Pung or Kong. **Only the player on the discarder's left can claim a discard tile to complete a Chow *unless to declare a win* (i.e. expose the Mahjong hand).**

However, ***a drawback of claiming a discarded tile is that the player must then expose the completed set to all the others*** by putting the tiles face up on the table in front of the claiming player. This then provides other players with a view of what kind of hands he may be seeking to collect.

A player can pick up a discarded tile to complete one of the following sets:

A Chow is a set of **3 tiles of the same suit in sequence**. A player must say "Chow" to claim another player's discarded tile to form the Chow and then display or expose the Chow on the table and discard a tile to maintain 13 tiles in the hand (excluding any Kongs). ***A Chow can only be performed if the tile was discarded by the player from the claimer's left, unless to declare a win (i.e. expose the Mahjong hand).*** Below is an example of a Chow:



A Pung is a set of **3 identical tiles**. A player must say “Pung” to claim another player’s discarded tile to form the combination. The player then must show or expose the created Pung and then discard a tile. The **next player counterclockwise** from the Pung claimer will then have the next turn. Below are two examples of Pungs:



A Kong is like a Pung but with a set of **4 identical tiles**.



When a Kong is formed with a discarded tile, the player must declare a Kong and then expose the Kong. The player then draws an additional tile from the dead wall before selecting a tile to discard. This ensures the player has the additional tile needed to achieve Mahjong with a Kong.

If a player has a concealed Pung and draws the fourth tile from the wall ***the player may choose not to declare a Kong or to delay declaring the Kong to a later round.*** The advantage of delaying the declaration of the Kong is that the player may choose to use the Pung and the fourth tile for another purpose (e.g. to form a Chow). This is referred to as **splitting the Kong**.

If the declaration is delayed it must take place after the declaring player draws a tile from the wall. **A Kong once declared cannot be split.**

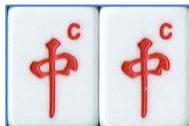
Regardless of how the Kong is derived or when the Kong is declared, once declared the player then draws a tile from the Dead Wall and discards as usual.

- a) Note that a player **cannot claim a discarded tile to convert an exposed Pung to a Kong.**
- b) However, if a player with an **exposed Pung, draws a 4th tile from the wall,** the player can use it with the Pung to **make an exposed Kong.**

- c) If a player **draws a tile from the wall and declares a Kong, formed from a concealed Pung**, the player displays the Kong on the table with the **two middle tiles face up and the two end tiles face down**. This shows that the Kong still counts as if held concealed in the hand. The fact that the Kong is still concealed seems relevant only if the game is scored.



A Pair is a set of **two identical tiles**. *It cannot be created with discarded tiles, unless declaring a win (i.e. expose the Mahjong hand)*. Only one Pair is allowed in a standard Mahjong hand. Following is an example of a Pair:



5.1 Priority Order for Claiming a Discard Tile.

If two or more **players claim a discarded tile at the same time**, then the priority order for the claim is as follows:

1. A win (**Mahjong**) has priority over Pung, Kong, and Chow.
2. **Pung and Kong** have priority over Chow.
3. If two players want to claim the same discarded tile, and **have the same priority, the player closest to the right of the discarder prevails**.

5.2 Robbing the Kong.

As stated above, a player with an exposed Pung, who draws a fourth tile from the wall can use it with the Pung to declare an exposed Kong. However, **if another player needs the fourth tile for Mahjong they can claim it**, hence robbing the Kong.

6. Exposed Sets and Hidden or Concealed Sets

A player must expose a set (Chow, Pung or Kong) to claim a tile from the discard pile. Sets that are completed from a tile picked up from the wall do not need to be exposed, and so can remain “hidden” or “concealed” in the hand. ***There is generally no good reason to expose a hidden set and several potential disadvantages.***

There are no constraints as to what tiles can be hidden in a hand. For example, a player

with an exposed Chow of character tiles may happily keep other numbered suit tiles or sets hidden in a hand. However, those tiles will eventually need to be swapped out if the player is to achieve a standard Mahjong hand, as all numbered tiles in the standard Mahjong hand must be from the same suit as the exposed Chow.

Because of the **fundamental constraint that to achieve a standard Mahjong hand all numbered tiles in the hand must be from the same suit as any exposed Chow**, the following are true:

- A player **cannot** expose a hidden set containing numbered tiles from a different suit from an exposed Chow
- A player **cannot** expose a Chow from a different numbered suit from an exposed Chow or exposed numbered Pung/Kong.
- A player **can** expose Pungs from different numbered suits if there are no exposed Chows.

7. Waiting to Win/Fishing

A player who is **one tile short of forming a Mahjong hand** is considered to have a “ready hand”. This is called “waiting” or “fishing” because that player is basically waiting or fishing for a particular tile or one of several possible tiles to complete his hand.

8. Winning

A player who creates and exposes a standard Mahjong hand, wins the game. As described, a **standard Mahjong hand** consists of **four sets of 3 or 4 tile sets** (either Chows or Pungs/Kongs) **and a pair**. Remember, ***if the hand contains any Chows, all numbered tiles in the hand must be from the same suit.*** (Honours Pungs/Kongs and Pairs are permitted)

Thus, a winning hand usually has 14 tiles, but more if a Kong is included.

- 14 tiles - four sets of 3 tile sets (Chow or Pung,) and a pair.
- 15 tiles – One Kong (4 tiles), three sets of 3 tiles (Chow or Pung) and a Pair.
- 16 Tiles – Two Kongs (4 tiles), two sets of 3 tiles (Chow or Pung) and a Pair etc

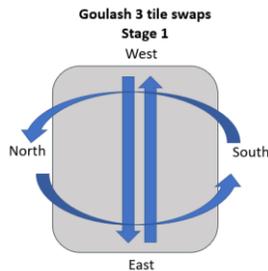
9. Start of Next Round

The **winning player from the previous round becomes East for the next round**. If East wins the game, East remains as East. In the case of a Dead Hand (all tiles from the wall are used up without a winner being found), the wind / seating positions remain unchanged.

Dead hands occur from time to time. **This is normal.** It is a game of chance as well as skill, after all. Some groups use a Goulash exchange after a dead hand. **The Goulash exchange is a defined sequence of tile trades between players at the start of the round to try to ensure a better chance of achieving a Mahjong hand.**

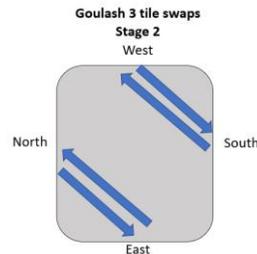
For the **Goulash exchange**, all players exchange 3 tiles with each other in three stages.

Stage 1: East exchanges 3 of their tiles with 3 selected by West whilst South exchanges 3 of their tiles with 3 selected by North.

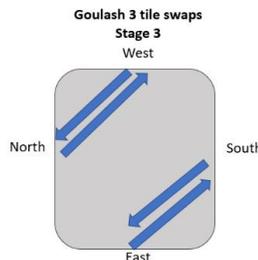


Stage 2: East then selects another 3 tiles, which can be the 3 received from West, a different 3 altogether or a combination of some of those received from West and some from the hand.

East then exchanges these 3 tiles with North whilst West exchanges 3 with South.



Stage 3: East then makes the final exchange of 3 tiles with South whilst North exchanges 3 with West.



Once the Goulash exchange is completed the game continues as per the normal rules.

Given the exchanges are designed to allow players to improve their hands, the expectation is that after the goulash exchanges, there is a greater chance of completing the round with a winner emerging.

10. Special Hands

In addition to the standard Mahjong hand detailed above, in Hong Kong Mahjong, it is possible to have a few special hands. These special hands, while sometimes difficult to compose, may add some interest and challenge to the game. The special hands and we propose for our games are:

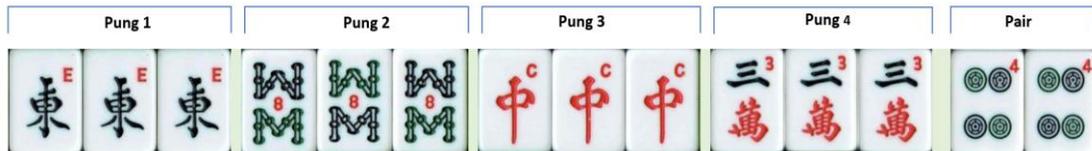
14.1 Seven Pairs -

A hand containing any seven pairs.



14.2 Hidden Treasure

Four Pungs, any pair, all concealed, and winning tile drawn from wall not from discards.



14.3 Three Great Scholars

Pung or Kong with all three dragons, any Chow, Pung or Kong, and any pair. Chow, Pung/Kong may be melded. (i.e., drawn from the discards) or drawn from the wall.



14.4 Little Four Winds

Pung or Kong of three Winds, a pair of fourth wind, any other set completing the hand. All except Pair may be melded (i.e., drawn from the discards).



14.5 Big Four Winds

A hand with Pung or Kong of each Wind, and any pair. The Pair may be melded.



14.6 All Honors

A hand with four Pungs or Kongs and a Pair of Dragons and Winds. All can be melded.



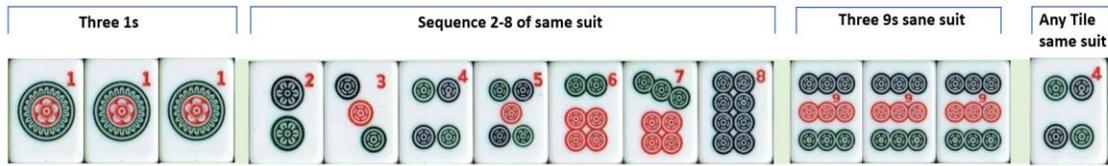
14.7 All Terminals

A hand with four Pungs or Kongs and a Pair of 1's or 9's. All can be melded.



14.8 Nine Gates

A hand of three 1's, a sequence of 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and three 9's, all of the same suit, and any other tile of the same suit completing the hand. The hand must be concealed (i.e hidden). Only the winning tile can be a discard. No Kongs are allowed.



14.9 Thirteen Orphans

A hand with one of each Dragon and Wind, 1 and 9 of each suit and 14th tile forming a Pair with any of these. The hand must be concealed, and the winning tile can be a discard.



14.10 All Kongs

A hand with any four Kongs + any Pair.



14.11 Jade Dragon

A hand with Pungs/Kongs and a Pair of Bamboos and a Pung/Kong of Green Dragon.



14.12 Ruby Dragon

A hand with Pungs/Kongs and a Pair of Characters and a Pung/Kong of Red Dragon.



14.13 Pearl Dragon

A hand with Pungs/Kongs and a Pair of Circles and a Pung/Kong of White Dragon.

