

A woman with blonde hair styled in a bun, wearing a light blue and green floral qipao, is seated at a green Mahjong table. She is smiling and looking to her left. The background is a lush garden with trees, rocks, and a small pond. The title 'Reach MAHJONG' is overlaid at the top, with 'Reach' in a white script font and 'MAHJONG' in large, bold, blue block letters with a white outline. Below the title, the subtitle 'The Only Way to Play' is written in a white script font. The author's name 'Jenn Barr' is at the bottom right in a white script font.

Reach **MAHJONG**

The Only Way to Play

Jenn Barr

REACH MAHJONG

The Only Way to Play

JENN BARR

HUNTINGTON PRESS
LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

Contents

New Dogs Learning Old Tricks	1
PART I—HOW TO PLAY	3
I. Tools of the Trade	4
Board Map	10
II. Deal 'Em Up	11
Seating.....	11
Points	15
Building the Wall.....	16
Dealer	18
Breaking the Wall.....	20
Lucky Tile/Dora Indicator.....	24
Taking Turns or, Playing the Game	26
Combos.....	28
III. Winner!.....	39
Ready Hand.....	39
Outs/Waits.....	40
Types of Wins	44
Hand Points	46
IV. Special Situations	75
V. Count 'em Up.....	85
Base Points	85
PART II—VARIATIONS	105
VI. Inflated Mahjong	106

VII.	Mahjong for Money	110
VIII.	Two-Player Mahjong	112
IX.	Three Player Mahjong	114
	Simple Three Player Game	114
	Original Three Player Game	115
	Wild White Dragon	120
	5 or More Players	127
	Variation Summary	127
PART III—STRATEGY		129
X.	Playing Your Hand	130
XI.	Reading the Board	142
XII.	Your Opponent	144
PART IV—APPENDICES		154
A.	Glossary	155
B.	Answers to Quizzes	192
C.	Etiquette	199
	About the Author	204
	About Huntington Press	206

New Dogs Learning Old Tricks

Most descriptions you will read about Mahjong start out by telling you what an old and traditional game it is. That's fine, but hearing vague comments about its long history in China will not help you learn the game and, quite frankly, may bore you out of a learning mindset.

This book is simple and straightforward. It's designed to teach you how to play the game in a day or two (with practice) and get you comfortable with the rules currently used in Japan, where 10% of the country's population plays this game regularly.

Throughout Japan, there is a huge competitive network of both amateurs and professionals, including networked computer and arcade games, each with tens of thousands of members. The reason for its popularity is not because Mahjong is an ancient spiritual game connected with the blood of the people's ancestors (although this very well might be true). The reason everyone is playing this game is because it's challenging, competitive, and fun. It's as simple as that.

People throughout the world are realizing the benefits of this rule set. Mahjong clubs can be found in places like Canada, Russia, Croatia, and throughout Europe.

Like poker in the Western world, Mahjong is perfect for companionship, mind skills, and gambling. Pick up this book

and you'll find a challenging hobby that will stay with you throughout your life, as well as a new way to take money and pride from your friends and, more importantly, your enemies.

Mahjong tiles are like a deck of cards. There are a million different games that you can play using the tiles. They're all Mahjong. This book only explains the Japanese style of Mahjong, known as "Reach Mahjong." Its simplicity and strict rules provide a firm platform for a test of skill and a strong competitive atmosphere. A player who becomes proficient in Reach Mahjong will have no problem transferring to Chinese rules and will only need a short lesson and a bit of practice to get used to the American rules, since the main differences among all types of Mahjong are the scoring systems.

Read the book, get online and play, get a deck of tiles, call some friends, and make some money!

PART I

HOW TO PLAY

I. Tools of the Trade

Who

To play a full game, you need four players. Short on friends? Don't worry, tons of online options bring the friends to you. Just need one more player? The variations chapter explains how you can play Heads Up (2-player) or 3-Way Mahjong.

What

There are a few things that you must have to start your game.



TILES

These are obviously the most important physical elements of the game. The *only* alternative is a deck of Mahjong cards. A deck of tiles should have 136 normal tiles and may contain eight special tiles. There are three suits numbered 1 through 9: Bamboo, Dots, and Craks, and one suit of Honors (winds and dragons). There are 4 tiles of each number/Honor in each suit. There is only 1 each of the special tiles.

Bamboos

The 1-Bams is usually a bird. Don't mix it up with the 1-Dots!

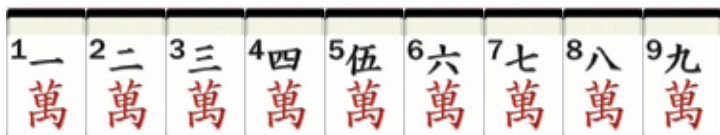


Dots



Craks/Grands

The red character under the black numbers stands for "10,000," so each of the Craks (derived from the word Character) means "ten-grand," giving us a fun slang name: Grands.



Honors*Winds:*

East



South



West



North

Dragons:

White



Green



Red

Extra Tiles

Red Fives: There is a small circle on each red-five in case the color wears off or a player can't distinguish the color.



Bamboo



Dots



Craks

Flowers/Seasons: These will differ for each set. A Mah-jong-tile artist puts his heart into the Flowers/Seasons tiles.



Spring



Summer



Autumn



Winter

Round Indicator (Button): This plate is necessary to help keep track of which Round the game is in. Reach Mahjong plays two rounds, East and South, so anything that shows this will work.



East Round



South Round

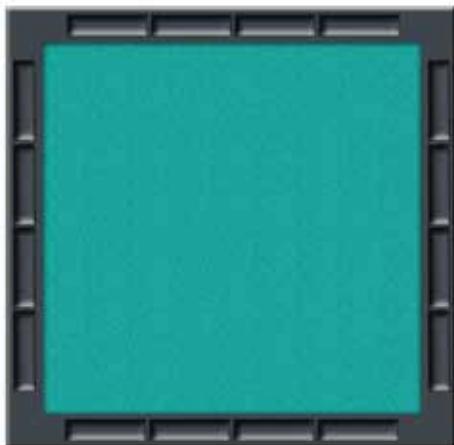
Dice

A pair of dice comes with any Mahjong set you purchase. In Reach Mahjong, only two dice are needed to decide the dealer and where to break the wall.



Table

It's possible to play on the floor, but to keep everyone comfortable, a table is best. Whether it's a square card table, a coffee table, or a small kitchen table, use whatever you have. Just make sure that all players can reach the middle of the table comfortably. Best-case scenario: an automatic shuffling table made by Alban with a point display.



Still good: A mat with places for your point bones, so everyone knows how many points the other players have.

At least you can play: Contact paper on a rectangular table, so your tiles don't get scratched up while you're shuffling. Two people have to reach far, but just place the dudes with long arms there.

Bones/Chips

Reach Mahjong uses scoring sticks or "bones" to keep track of who is winning. A normal game will call for a total of at least 100,000 points: 25,000 for each player. The denominations are not important, but normally you'll find:

100-point bones (40)



1,000-point bones (36)



5,000-point bones (8)



10,000-point bones (4)



Altogether these total 120,000 points. I like to break one of my 1,000-point bones in half to make 500-point bones, so that the scoring is easier in the end.

Can't find the right bones? No worries. Poker chips work just as well! Just assign an amount to each color.

When

A full game of Reach Mahjong consists of two rounds named the East Round and the South Round (kept track of on the Button). Each player gets to be the dealer one time each round. This means that a full game has at least eight hands. When four professionals play a full game of Mahjong, with automatic shuffling tables, it usually takes about 45 minutes to an hour. Quarter-games (East Round only) are also common.

Where

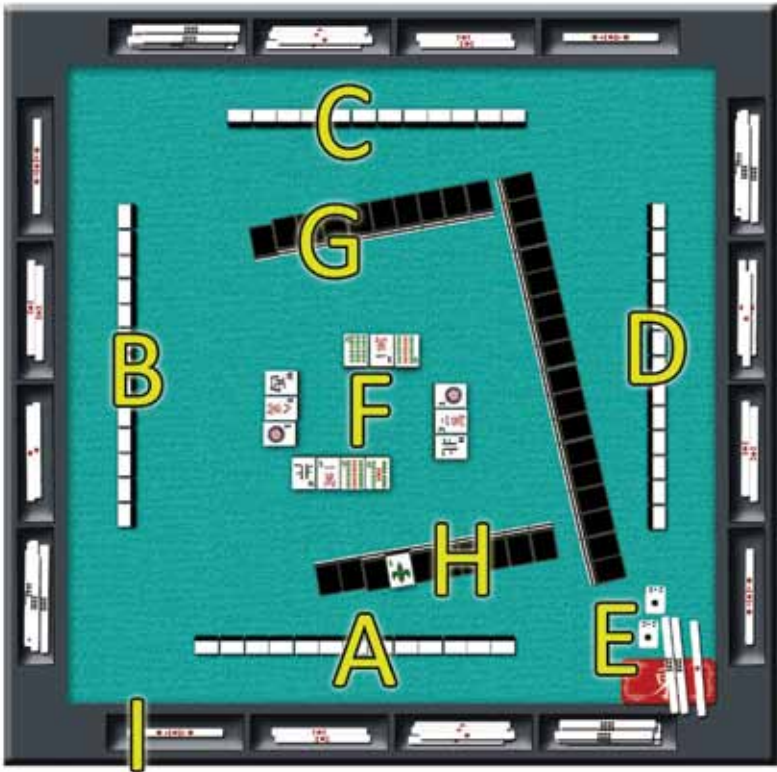
In Japan, you can find casino-style Mahjong parlors in just about every city you go to. In other parts of the world, you may have to settle for getting your friends together at home or at a café. In addition, many online options allow you to play real time with opponents anywhere in the world.

How

Now that you have everything you need, it's time to learn how to play.

Board Map

- A. East Player's Hand (dealer)
- B. North Player's Hand
- C. West Player's Hand
- D. South Player's Hand
- E. Continuance and Reach Bank
- F. River
- G. Wall
- H. King's Tiles (part of the wall)
- I. East Player's Bones (Chips)

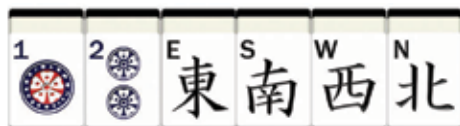


II. Deal 'Em Up

Seating

Many Mahjong players consider seating to be a big deal. I'm not one of them, but I'm a sheep and I tend to follow the herd, so I do feel an obligation to explain how seats are normally chosen. If you find it too much of a pain, go ahead and just pick the seat facing the TV in your home game, skip this section, and learn how to play the game. But if you decide to play in a tournament someday, it's likely this information will come in very handy.

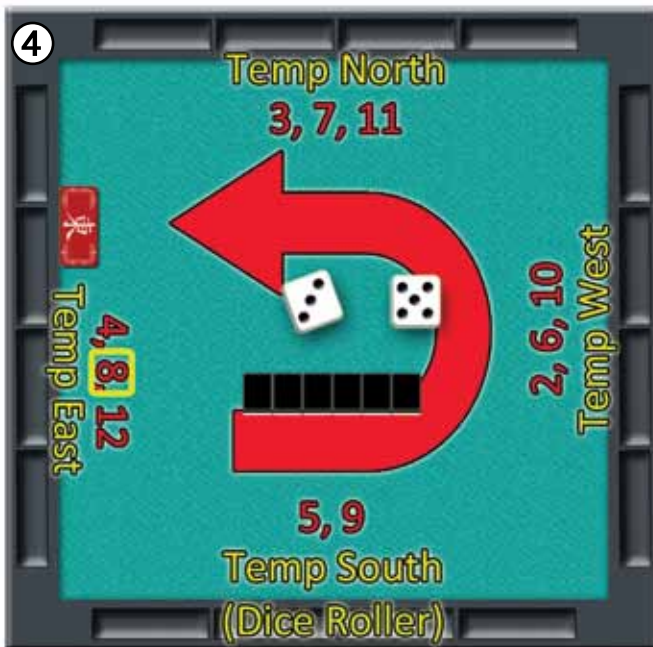
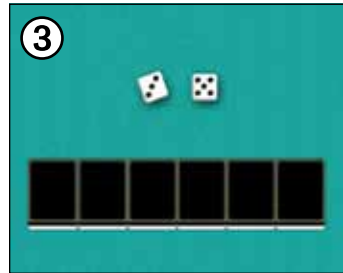
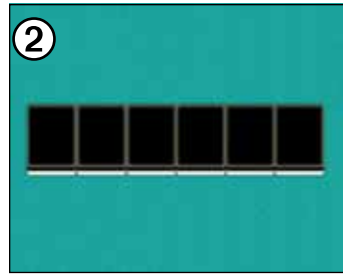
1. Everyone first sits in his favorite seat (no hair-pulling or eye-gouging!). One player shuffles 6 tiles together facedown: one of each Wind, one odd number, and one even number.



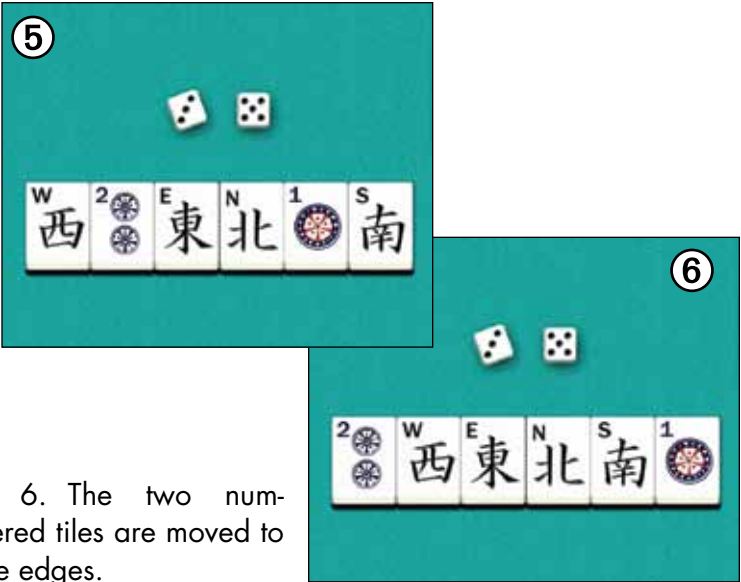
2. After shuffling, line them up facedown.

3. The person across from the shuffler rolls the dice.

4. The dice roller starts with himself and counts off the number on the dice counter-clockwise. Whichever seat he finishes counting on gets the Button.



5. The shuffler turns over the tiles without changing the order.

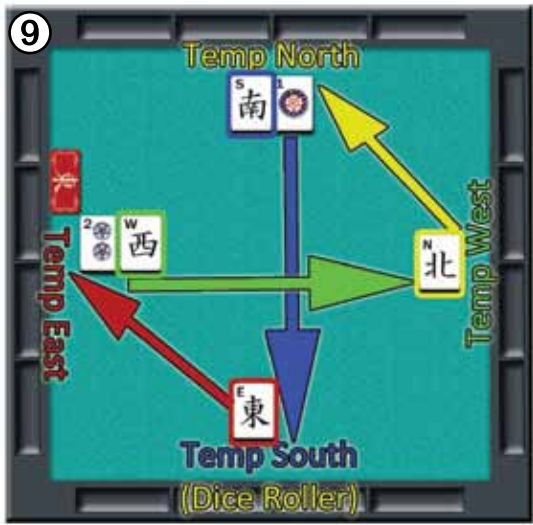


6. The two numbered tiles are moved to the edges.

7. If the dice showed an odd number, then start from the odd side; if they showed an even number, start from the even side. In our example, an even number (8) was rolled, so we'll start from the even side and the player with the Button will get the first tile. The remaining tiles will be distributed in order counter-clockwise.



8. The seat with the Button is Temporary East and that's where the player who drew the East tile will sit. The player that drew the South tile will sit to the right of Temporary East, the player with the West tile will sit across, and the player with the North tile will sit to the left of Temporary East.



9. North and South are the opposite of normal maps, so be careful! The seat to the right of East is South, across is West, and the seat to the left of East is North. This is because Mahjong has been considered to be a game of the gods. We are supposed to be playing as though we are looking up at Heaven and these are the directions when looking up. If you don't get it, try standing on your head and looking up. Still don't get it? Clap your hands, sing the alphabet song ...

For a quick way to choose seats, just mix up one of each wind and have each player choose one. The player who chooses the East tile gets to choose his seat and that seat becomes temporary East. The other players sit in their seats according to the wind they have chosen.

Points

Each player starts with 30,000 points. The bones should be distributed like this: one 10,000-point, two 5,000-point, nine 1,000-point and ten 100-point sticks. If you want to have a bonus for the winner of the game (like an ante), start with 25,000 points. In that case, the bones should be distributed like this: one 10,000-point, two 5,000-point, four 1,000-point and ten 100-point sticks.

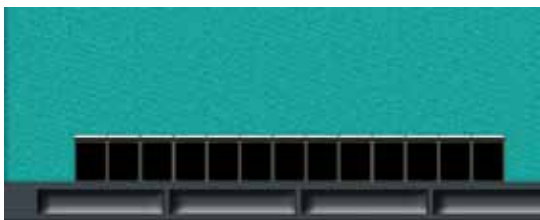


Building the Wall

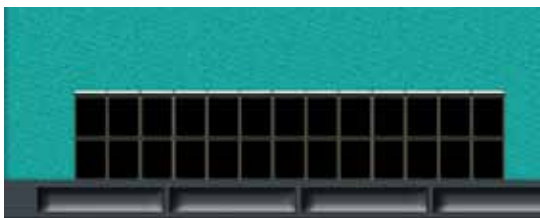
The wall is the collection of tiles that the deal and all draws will happen from. There is an order to this madness. If you are fortunate enough to get to wash the tiles (shuffle by hand) and build the wall all by yourself, you'll learn a cool trick to show off to your friends.

Everyone needs to help in washing the tiles, since there are so many (136) of them. Unless you're playing in a tournament, don't worry about if they are all upside down or not; that will slow down your efforts. The important thing is to play as many hands as possible. If your set has more than 136 tiles, make sure to take out the seasons and/or separate out the red 5's. If you want to use the red 5s, replace 3 or 4 normal 5's with them.

After the tiles are good and mixed, line up 17 in front of you facedown.



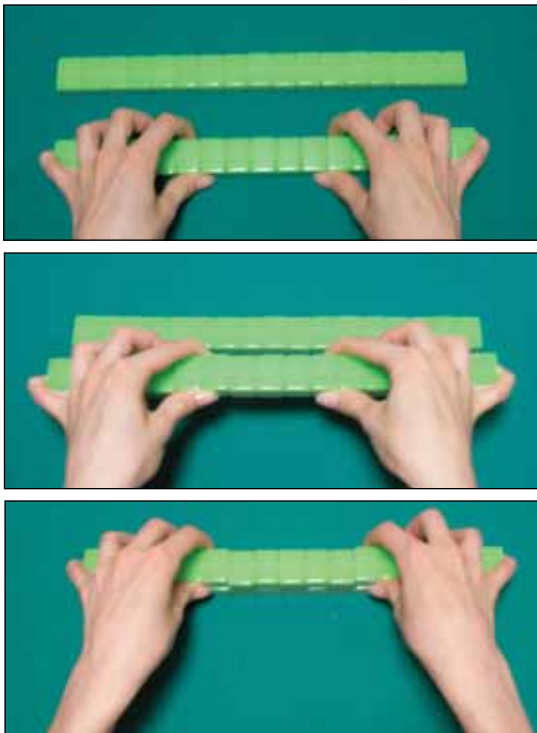
Now line up 17 more in front of that.



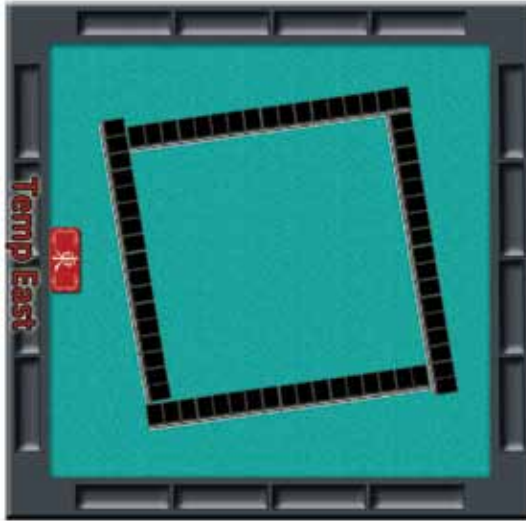
Push the front row out a little bit, push the second row out a little less ...



... put your pinkies on either side of the back row, steady the inside tiles with the rest of your fingers, and in one swift motion put the back row on top of the front row.



There's your wall! If your friends are doing their jobs, there should be four of these to form a mountain.



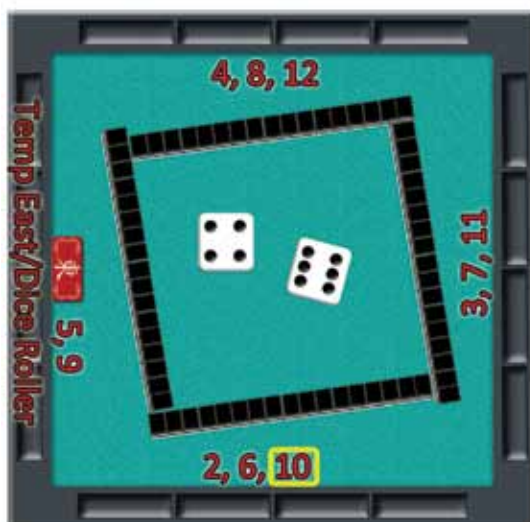
Dealer

The dealer in Mahjong has an important role. Each player gets two chances to be dealer, so everyone should pay attention to this section!

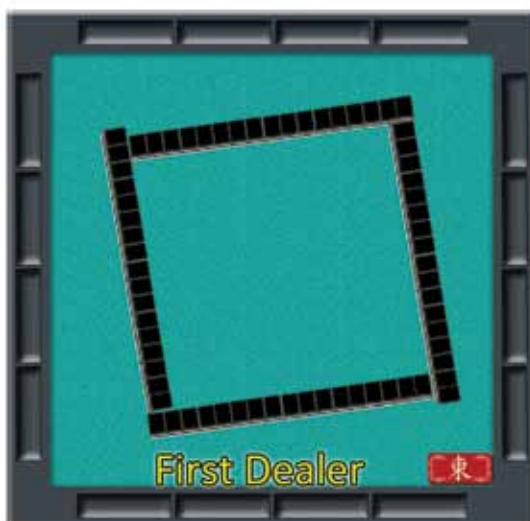
After everyone has arrived at their seats, whoever is in the seat with the Button (Temporary East) rolls the dice once to decide the first dealer.



The dice roller starts with himself and counts off the total of the dice counterclockwise.



The player chosen wins the Round Indicator and is the first dealer of the game.



Breaking the Wall

The dealer is responsible for breaking the wall and for this she gets a bonus of 50% for any hands she wins! The catch is that she has to pay double for hands won on a draw by other players ... The idea is to win! The dealer is also always the East Wind.

The dealer picks up the dice for the last time.



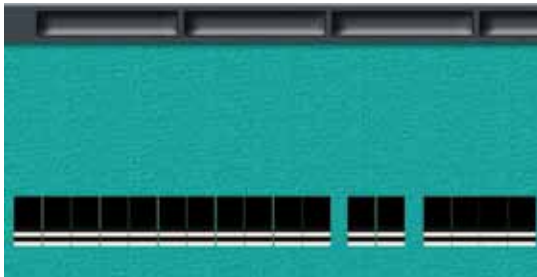
The dealer starts with herself and counts off the total on the dice counterclockwise.



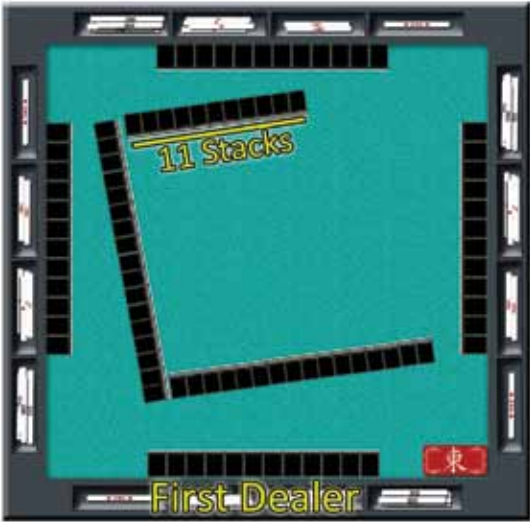
She starts on the right-hand side of the wall in front of the lucky person the dice pointed to and counts off the number of tiers shown on the dice.



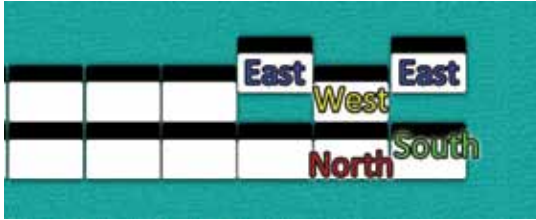
Leave all the tiles that you counted off. Those tiles will be the end of the wall. Starting with the next tier, the dealer takes four tiles (i.e., breaks the wall). These 4 tiles will not be the tiles that you counted off. The tiles counted off will not be touched during the entire deal.



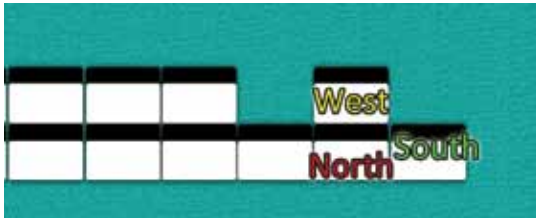
Next, the player to her right takes four tiles (two tiers), and each player after takes turns taking four tiles each three times so each player has 12 tiles. Make sure you're taking your tiles in order!



Next, the dealer takes one tile, plus her first draw.



The player to her left takes one tile from the bottom and the other two players take one tile each as well.



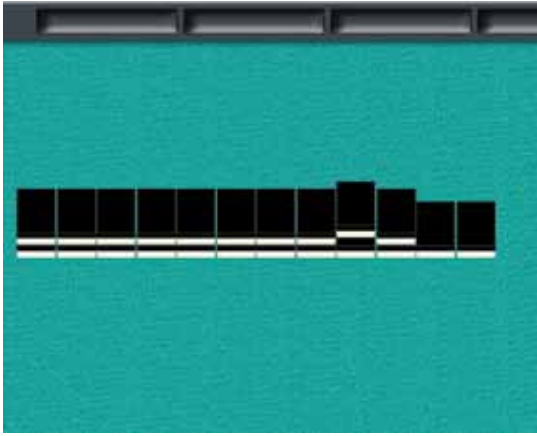
Tiles are always taken by tier: first the top tile of the tier, then the bottom tile of the tier. No other drawing order is allowed for normal turns.

The dealer now has 14 tiles and each of the other players have 13. Congratulations! Your hands are ready to play!

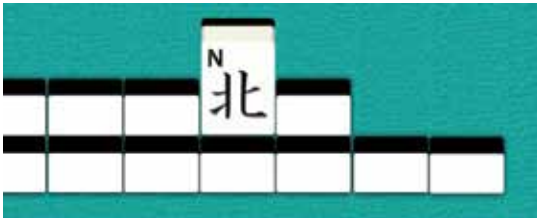


Lucky Tile/Dora Indicator

There is always a bonus tile in Reach Mahjong called the dora. It will be explained in the points section, but we have to decide which tile will be lucky each hand. First, drop the top tile from the last tier of the wall. This part is really a matter of etiquette and not entirely necessary.



Next, flip over the top tile of the third tier from the end. When you are counting tiers to the third, count them before you drop the tile. If you're not sure, check the image above and make sure the end of your wall matches the one in the image. The next number in sequence of this tile (the dora indicator) will be the Lucky Dora. More about that later.

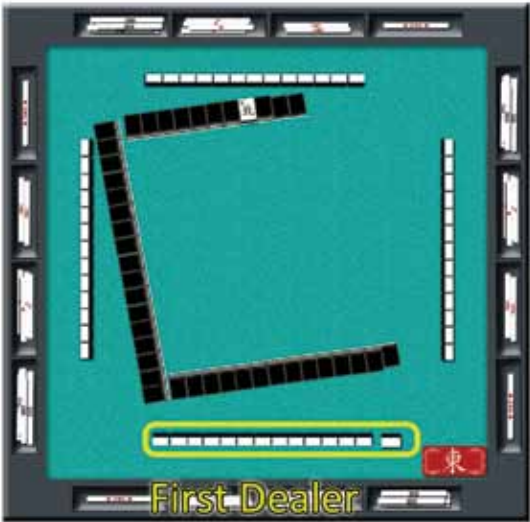


The 14 tiles at the end are called the King's Tiles or the Dead Wall. These tiles will not be touched for the whole game (unless you declare a quad, but more about that later).



Taking Turns or, Playing the Game

DRAW



Each turn a player takes includes receiving a tile and discarding a tile. Normally, players draw a tile from the wall. It's *not* OK to take just any tile you want! You *must* draw the next available tile when you draw from the wall.



If you like the tile you get, keep it and discard a tile from your hand. If you don't like it, discard the one you picked directly to the River.



All discards must be lined up in front of the player who threw them away from left to right in rows of six (the rows of six is just a custom, but everyone does this now, so let's be sheep and follow the herd!).



It sounds a little tedious, but the order of the discard is important for rules later, so just do as you are told.

Combos

I suppose you might want to know how to decide if you want a tile that you just drew or not. That's fair. The goal is to make a hand ... You want to know *how* to make a hand too? Tough crowd. OK, here goes.

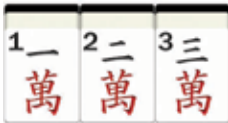
With two exceptions, every hand must have four sets or runs and one pair. Sets of 3- or 4-of-a-kind and sequential runs of three are acceptable.



Set of 3-of-a-kind



Set of 4-of-a-kind



Sequential run of three

Before you get too excited, there are some rules. Sets of three and four and runs of three must be in the same suit. No mixing and matching! Also, runs can't wrap around from nine to one. The lowest straight starts with one and the highest straight ends with nine. For example, the following sets and runs are unacceptable, or as we would say in Japan, *dame*!



Bad sets of three



Bad set of four



Bad run

Get the idea? Now that you realize you actually wanted to keep that tile you just discarded, get your friends to let you take it back and let's start over again.

Complete hands consists of four runs or sets and one pair:



CHOW

You may take a tile from the player to your left when he throws it away if it completes a run in your hand. Make sure you don't touch the wall before you decide to take it! Once you touch the tile you're supposed to draw, you're no longer allowed to take other players' discarded tiles. To complete a run with another player's discard, chow is used. chow means to eat. In effect, if you declare chow, you may "eat" another player's discard. The final discard of the game is *never* allowed to be chowed.



To declare chow, first show which tiles you will use with your newfound treasure.



(seven and nine of craks)



(see the eight-craks on left-player's discard)

Next choose a tile from the rest of your hand to discard, throw it in your river, and then meld the set. Melding is putting the set together on the table. Melded sets can never be changed once melded.

You need to show everyone which tile you took from your opponent, so turn the new tile perpendicular to the two from your hand and place them on the right side of the table. The new tile stays on the left of the two from your hand, since you took it from the player on your left.



Now your turn is over and the play continues to your right as usual. Remember, chow is used only to complete runs of three.

PON/BUMP

Pon is almost like chow. Many people in the world use the word “Pung” from the Mandarin word “Peng4,” which means “bump.” In Japan, the word is “pon.” You are free to use whichever word you would like when you play.

Pon is used when you have a pair and you want to use another player’s discard to complete a set of 3-of-a-kind. You may bump off of any player to complete a set, but you must declare the pon when the tile is thrown away. If the player to your right discards a tile you want to pon, but you don’t declare it until it comes around to your turn, everyone will think you’re dumb and you’ll have to pay 1,000 points to the pot for not paying attention! The final discard of the game is *never* allowed to be poned.

To declare a pon, first say, “PON!” or “BUMP!” in a really loud voice (since you are acting out of turn, you should make extra sure to pon loud and clear, even more than when you say chow). Show the pair that matches with the discard, then discard a tile. Now you’re ready to meld! Place the tile corresponding to the player you took the tile from perpendicular, so everyone knows who you bumped off of. If you poned off of the player to your left, place the left tile sideways; if you bumped off of the player across from you, place the middle tile sideways; if you bumped off of the player to your right, place the right tile sideways.



Ponned from player on the left



Ponned from player directly across



Ponned from player on the right

The melded set should be placed to your right, on the edge of the table along with your chows. Remember, pon may be declared from any player's discard.

QUAD

Quad is a very special type of declaration. Since each normal group of tiles in Reach Mahjong can only contain three tiles, a quad requires special attention. A quad must be a set of four of the exact same kind of tile. Once again, no mixing of suits is allowed and the number or characters has to match too. Since the rest of your hand will be missing a tile for a group, you will need to take an extra supplementary tile from the end of the deck after declaring your quad.



After drawing your extra tile, you discard and play continues to your right as normal.

There are three ways to declare a quad.

Open Quad

An open quad is essentially bumped from another player the same way you would bump a set of trips. If you have 3-of-a-kind in your hand and someone discards the final tile of the set, you are allowed to say, "quad," and take the tile.



Show the other three tiles you will use with it, take your extra tile from the King's Wall, and make your discard.



Meld your set, once again turning one tile sideways to show who you took it from.

Concealed Quad

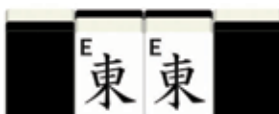
Sometimes you'll be lucky enough to draw quads yourself during the game. If this happens, you'll have the option to declare a concealed quad at almost anytime.



When you're ready to show the world your set, wait for your turn, draw a tile from the wall first, then say, "quad." Show all four tiles in your set, draw your supplementary tile from the King's Wall, then make your discard. Concealed quads can only be declared directly after drawing a tile, not directly after bumping or chowing a tile. The drawn tile doesn't need to be part of the set of four in the quad.



Since you made this quad all on your own, you get extra points, so you need to show that this quad is concealed by turning two of the tiles upside down and leaving the other two face-up. Make sure you show all four tiles beforehand, so people don't think you're hiding a different tile in the set!



All concealed quads hang out with the open sets and runs to your right on the edge of the table. A hand is still eligible for Reach after declaring a concealed quad as long as there are no groups exposed from the hand (i.e. pon, chow, open quad).

Add-a-Quad

If you've ponned a set of 3-of-a-kind and you draw the fourth tile to your set, you're allowed to add the tile to your set to upgrade from trips to quads. Simply add the fourth tile to your set, draw your extra tile from the King's Wall, and discard. Remember, add-a-quad can't be declared if you're acting out of turn by ponning or chowing a group. You must wait until your next turn at drawing from the wall.



Placing Declared Tiles

The first exposed set should go on the corner of the table and the next ones should be placed either next to or on top of the first set. The third set should follow the second set, so that it's obvious in which order the tiles were taken.



Priority of Declarations

The first to the tile (the first to declare) gets the tile, but if two or more players declare a tile at the same time, an order is followed to decide who gets the tile:

- Winning the hand with Mahjong (Ron) always holds top priority.
- Pon or quad holds priority over chow.
- If no one else claims the tile, it may go to the chow.