

American Mahjong Cheat Sheet

Tiles, the Charleston, jokers, and the NMJL card — at a glance.

THE SET

152 playable tiles

108 suits: Bams, Dots, Craks (1–9, four each).

16 winds: N · E · S · W (four each).

12 dragons: Red (Craks) · Green (Bams) · White / Soap (Dots).

8 flowers · 8 jokers. Most retail sets ship 166 with spares.

THE GROUPINGS

Vocabulary

Pair — two of a tile. **Pung** — three. **Kong** — four. **Quint** — five.

Single — one specific tile. **Chow** (run) is *not* used in American play.

THE WILD

Joker rules

Jokers may stand in for **pungs, kongs, and quints**.

Never in pairs, singles, NEWS, or year hands (e.g. 2026).

Exchange: on your turn you may swap the natural tile for a joker on any exposed set — yours or an opponent's.

Charleston: jokers may never be passed.

THE OPENING

The Charleston

1st Charleston: right · across · left (3 tiles each, simultaneous).

2nd Charleston (optional, by table consent): left · across · right.

Courtesy pass: 0–3 tiles with the player across.

Blind pass allowed only on the across leg of either Charleston.

THE TURN

Play, in order

1. Draw from the wall (or call a discard).
2. If calling a discard, expose the completed pung / kong / quint face-up on your rack.
3. Discard one tile and name it.
4. Calls override turn order: any player may call the next discard.

THE WIN

Declaring mahjong

Your hand must **exactly** match a hand on the current NMJL card. You may call mahjong off any discard that completes your hand — including a final pair or single.

Stop play, expose, and verify against the card.

THE CARD

Reading the NMJL card

2026 sections: 2026 · 2468 · Quints · Consecutive Run · 13579 · Winds & Dragons · 369 · Singles & Pairs.

X = same tile within a hand. **D** = dragon paired to its suit. **C** = concealed (no calling discards except the winning tile). Concealed hands score more.

THE ETIQUETTE

Table manners

Wait for the discarder to fully name the tile before calling.

Once your hand is past you, it's past you — no take-backs after the next draw.

Five jokers in a hand is technically possible. Politely impressive.