

Alphabetical Glossary for American Mahjong

A

American Mahjong – A version of Mahjong commonly played in the United States using the National Mah Jongg League (NMJL) rules and annual card. It includes Jokers, the Charleston, and a standardized set of winning hands.

Annual Card – The yearly Rules and Hands Card published by the National Mah Jongg League (NMJL). It outlines all valid hands that may be played during that year.

B

Bam / Bamboo – One of the three numbered suits in Mahjong. Bams are represented by bamboo symbols and are numbered 1–9.

Blind Pass – A Charleston move where a player passes fewer than three of their own tiles, choosing replacement tile (s) they've received to complete the exchange.

Break the Wall – The act of determining where tile drawing begins after the dice are rolled. The wall is “broken” by East after dealing.

C

Call – To claim a discarded tile from another player because it helps complete a valid hand. A call interrupts the normal sequence of play.

Charleston – A mandatory tile exchange process before play begins in American Mahjong. Players pass tiles to improve their hands.

Chow – A sequence of three consecutive tiles in the same suit.

Concealed Hand – A Mahjong hand in which tiles remain hidden and are not exposed during play unless Mahjong is declared.

Crak / Character – One of the three numbered suits in Mahjong. Craks are represented by Chinese character symbols and numbered 1–9.

Courtesy Pass – An optional pass between opposite players after Charleston rounds. Players may exchange up to three tiles.

D

Dead Hand – A hand that can no longer realistically make Mahjong based on available tiles, discards, and exposures. A hand may also be called dead if the player has too few or too many tiles in their rack.

Dealer / East – The player designated as East. East begins the game with fourteen tiles and initiates play.

Discard – A tile placed into the center of the table after drawing. Other players may call certain discards.

Dot / Circle – One of the three numbered suits in Mahjong. Dots are represented by circular symbols and numbered 1–9.

Dragon Tiles – Honor tiles that include Red Dragon (goes with Craks); Green Dragon (goes with Bams) and White Dragon / Soap (goes with Dots)

Draw – The act of taking a tile from the wall during a turn.

E

Earthly Hand – When East's fourteen tiles match a line after the Charleston but before gameplay begins. Odds are roughly 1:100,000. Consider purchasing a lottery ticket when this occurs.

East – The player who starts the game and controls the deal. East rotates after each completed game.

Exposure / Exposed Set – A group of tiles revealed after calling a discard. Exposed tiles remain visible.

F

Fauxjong – When a player mistakenly calls Mahjong.

Flowers – Special tiles used in many American Mahjong hands. Flowers are interchangeable and not suit-specific.

H

Hand – The collection of tiles a player is building toward Mahjong.

Heavenly Hand – When East's fourteen tiles match a line before the Charleston begins. Odds are roughly 1:1,000,000. Definitely purchase a lottery ticket if this occurs.

Honor Tiles – Tiles that include Winds, Dragons, and Flowers.

J

Joker – A wild tile used only in exposed or concealed pungs, kongs, quints, and sextets. Jokers cannot be used in singles, pairs, or sequences.

Joker Exchange / Joker Swap – The act of claiming an exposed Joker by replacing it with the exact tile the Joker represents in another player's hand.

K

Kong – A set of four identical tiles.

L

Live Hand – A hand that still has a possible path to Mahjong.

M

Mahjong – The name of the game and the winning declaration made when a player completes a valid fourteen-tile hand matching the card.

Mah Jongg – Alternative spelling often used by the National Mah Jongg League.

N

National Mah Jongg League (NMJL) – The most recognized governing organization responsible for publishing the annual Rules and Hands Card used in American Mahjong.

NEWS – A grouping using North, East, West, and South Wind tiles.

North – One of the four Wind tiles.

P

Pair – A set of two identical tiles.

Pass – The act of giving tiles to another player during the Charleston.

Pung – A set of three identical tiles.

Q

Quint – A set of five matching tiles, using at least one Joker.

R

Rack – The tray used to hold tiles during play.

S

Section – A category on the NMJL card grouping similar hand patterns.

Sequence – A run of consecutive numbers in the same suit.

Sextet – A set of six matching tiles, using at least two Jokers.

Soap/Zero – Nickname for the White Dragon tile that also represents zero in year-based hands.

Suit – One of the three numbered tile categories: Dots – Bams – Craks

T

Tile – A playing piece used in Mahjong.

Tile Wall – Rows of stacked tiles built before play begins: nineteen tiles across x two high.

W

Wall – The stack of tiles from which players draw during the game.

Wall Game – A game where no player reaches Mahjong before all tiles are exhausted.

West – One of the four Wind tiles.

Wind Tiles – Honor tiles including North, East, South, and West.

Y

Year Hand – A Mahjong hand built around the current calendar year shown on the NMJL card.

Z

Zero / Soap – The White Dragon tile often used to represent zero in year-based hands.

