BRIAR HOUSE SOCIAL

THE MAHJONG STARTER GUIDE

Your seat *at the* table.

A clear, visual introduction to American mahjong.

Meet the tiles. Learn the rhythm. Find your next table.

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FRISCO, TEXAS

briarhousesocial.com

mahjongntx.com

START HERE

You can learn this.

You do not need to memorize the card before you sit down.

Mahjong began in China and has many forms. This guide teaches the American version: recognize tiles, choose a hand from the annual NMJL card and make one decision at a time.

Use this guide at your own pace. When you are ready to try it at the table, a lesson gives you time to ask questions, practice the Charleston and play with guidance.

Elise Victor

Explore lessons · page 23

Find what you need

The game in one page **3**

Tiles, the card and jokers **4-7**

Setup, dealing and the Charleston **8-10**

Taking turns, calling and winning **11-14**

Social-game payments **15**

Strategy, manners and vocabulary **16-19**

Printable table card, log and checklist **20-22**

Play with us and further reading **23-24**

New to the game? Read pages 3-14 first. Already playing? Start with pages 16-20. Print pages 4-5 and 20 for a useful table reference.

THE BIG PICTURE

One goal. Fourteen tiles.

Match one complete hand on the current card, including its notes.

14

Your tiles must match the card’s numbers, suits and group sizes. Looking at your card during play is part of the game.

01 **Set up and deal**

Build four walls. East starts with 14 tiles; everyone else has 13.

02 **Trade in the Charleston**

Pass unwanted tiles in a set order. Keep your jokers.

03 **Take turns**

East discards first. Then play moves to the right: draw, decide, discard.

04 **Call when allowed**

You may claim the latest discard for a legal exposure or to complete mahjong.

05 **Show and check a win**

Declare mahjong, show all 14 tiles and verify the hand before clearing the table.

KEEP THIS COUNT

13 tiles while waiting. **14** before you discard or when you win. Count your concealed tiles and any exposed tiles together.

RECOGNIZE · PRINTABLE REFERENCE

Meet the three suits.

Each suit runs from 1 to 9, with four copies of every number.

Bams

Bamboo shapes. The bird is 1 Bam.



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Craks

The character suit. Read the numeral in the corner.



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Dots

Circles. Check the number when a design is unfamiliar.



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

READ THE SYMBOL, THEN THE NUMBER

Tile designs and colors vary by maker. Your 1 Bam may look different from this bird; use the set's key when needed. The card's ink colors do not dictate the paint colors on your tiles.

RECOGNIZE · PRINTABLE REFERENCE

The rest of the set.

Winds, dragons, flowers and jokers complete your 152 tiles.

Winds

North, East, West and South.
Four of each: **16 total.**



North East West South

Dragons

Four of each: **12 total.**
Soap is the white dragon.
Only soap can represent 0.



Red
Craks

Green
Bams

Soap
Dots

For “matching dragons,” use the pairing above. For “opposite dragons,” follow the card’s note and use a dragon outside that numbered suit.



Flowers

8 total. Different flowers and seasons count as the same tile. The card uses **F**.



Jokers

8 total. Wild only inside a required group of at least three identical tiles.

THE SET, COUNTED

108 suit tiles + **16** winds + **12** dragons + **8** flowers + **8** jokers = **152**.
Set aside blanks and extra jokers for standard NMJL play. Some social tables use blanks under house rules; ask the host how they work.

UNDERSTAND

Read one hand at a time.

Everyone uses the same annual National Mah Jongg League card.

Numbers and letters

1-9 name suit tiles. F means flower; D means dragon; N, E, W and S name winds. A 0 is always soap.

Colors and notes

Colors show relationships among suits. Same color means the same numbered suit; different colors mean different suits. Flowers, winds and zeroes are suitless. Read the notes for dragon requirements.

X, C and the value

Look next to the point value on your card for X or C. X allows legal exposures. C means concealed: call only to complete mahjong. The point value is the hand's base value.

A MADE-UP EXAMPLE TO PRACTICE READING

FF 1111 22 3333 DD

X 25

Two flowers + four 1s + two 2s + four 3s + two matching dragons = 14. In this example, use one numbered suit.



Teaching illustration only; it is not a hand to play from the annual card. Use your official card for complete hands, values and instructions.

TRY IT

Point to each group and count it aloud: **2 + 4 + 2 + 4 + 2 = 14.** Then find a real line on your card and check its groups the same way.

UNDERSTAND

Jokers follow the group.

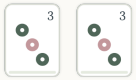
Look for matching tiles, not simply a row of adjacent symbols.

Single · 1



No jokers

Pair · 2



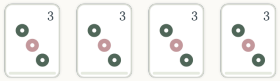
No jokers

Pung · 3



Jokers allowed

Kong · 4



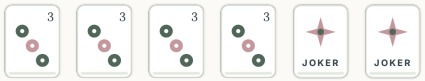
Jokers allowed

Quint · 5



Jokers allowed

Sextet · 6



Jokers allowed

NEWS is four different singles.

A year grouping also follows the card’s single-and-pair requirements. A joker cannot replace a single or a pair, even when the symbols are printed close together.

Never pass a joker during either Charleston or the courtesy pass. A discarded joker cannot be claimed, even for mahjong.

PREPARE

Set the table.

Four players, one shared tile set and one current card per person.

Have these ready

- ☐ 152 tiles, counted
- ☐ Four racks and pushers
- ☐ Two dice
- ☐ One current NMJL card per player
- ☐ A stable table and a mat, if available

Know your rack



TOP: public exposures

SLOPE: tiles facing only you

Build four equal walls

Mix the tiles face down. Each player builds **19 stacks, two tiles high**. Put the walls in a square, ready to bring them into play one at a time.

19 stacks × 2 tiles = 38 tiles per wall

BEFORE THE FIRST DEAL

Agree whether this is a teaching game, whether you are using coins, chips or points, and which house rules apply. For your first games, standard rules keep the learning simpler.

PREPARE

Deal without guessing.

Follow the wall from its live end. Each player takes their own tiles.

01 Choose East

Roll two dice; the highest total is the first East. Reroll ties. East rolls again to break East's own wall.

02 Count from East's right

Count the dice total in two-tile stacks, right to left. Keep that right-hand section back. Begin taking tiles just left of the gap.

Example: roll 8

8 stacks stay back

Start here; take toward the left

03 Four tiles each, three times

East takes two stacks, then each player to the right takes two. Repeat for three trips around: everyone has 12. Continue into the next wall when needed.

04 Finish: East 14, others 13

EAST	**2**	**EAST**
NEXT	**3**	**1**

Live end is at the right. East takes the 1st and 3rd top tiles. In turn to East's right, the others take the tiles marked 1, 2 and 3.

After the deal, continue at NEXT: top before bottom within each stack. Keep East's 14 and everyone else's 13 through the Charleston.

TRADE

The Charleston, at a glance.

Pass three tiles face down each time. Never pass a joker.

FIRST CHARLESTON



1 Right

2 Across

3 Left

Pause here. Any player may stop the second Charleston without giving a reason. Decide before anyone picks up the second-left pass. Once it begins, complete all three passes.

SECOND CHARLESTON · ONLY IF EVERYONE CONTINUES



4 Left

5 Across

6 Right

Courtesy pass: trade 0-3 tiles with the player across; use the lower number requested. Available even when you skip the second Charleston.

Blind passing: on pass 3 or 6 only, pass along up to three incoming tiles without looking; add your own tiles to make three total. Keep each person's tile count unchanged.

PLAY

Draw. Decide. Discard.

East starts by discarding without drawing. After that, play moves to the right.

01

Draw

Take the next tile from the live end of the wall. Wait until the previous discard is named, and allow a moment for calls.

02

Decide

Compare your tiles with your chosen hand. Keep the new tile or choose another tile to release.

03

Discard

Put one tile face up in the center and say its name clearly. Your turn ends when you discard.

13 while waiting

14 before you discard or when you win

Include the tiles exposed on top of your rack in that count.

A call replaces the draw.

If you legally claim a discard, expose its completed group and then discard. Do not also take a wall tile. The player on your right goes next, even if the call skipped someone’s turn.

Try it: take one practice turn with your tiles face up. Count before and after you discard. Name the tile out loud.

PLAY

Can I take that discard?

Only the latest discard may be claimed, while its call window is open.

YES

It completes mahjong.

You may call the winning tile for any legal hand, including a single, a pair or a concealed hand. A discarded joker is never available.

YES

It completes a legal exposure.

In an X hand, call to finish a required group of 3, 4, 5 or 6 identical tiles. Show the whole group, including any jokers.

NO

It only helps a single or a pair.

Wait for those tiles through the deal, passing or drawing, unless this discard completes your entire winning hand. You cannot call merely to redeem a joker.

Say “Call,” then make it visible.

Place the called tile and the completed group on top of your rack, then discard. Do not put the called tile among your concealed tiles. Check the group before you finish the turn; after you discard, its size is fixed.

Timing: call promptly. The window closes when the next player racks, discards, declares mahjong or announces a joker exchange, or another claim proceeds to exposure. For overlapping claims, use the current card’s priority rules.

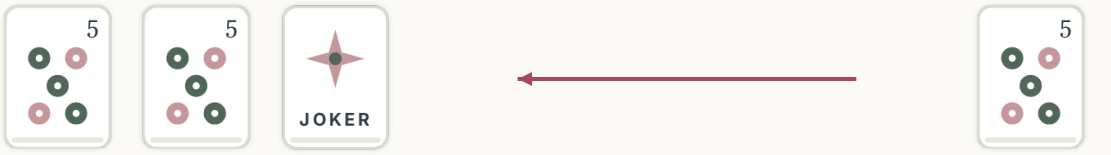
PLAY

Trade a natural tile for a joker.

A natural tile is the actual tile a joker represents.

On your own turn, first draw, or call and complete a legal exposure. Before discarding, you may exchange a matching natural tile from your hand for an available exposed joker. You can do this while playing a concealed hand.

BEFORE · ANOTHER PLAYER'S EXPOSED GROUP



Your 5 Dot

AFTER · THE GROUP STAYS COMPLETE



Your joker

Announce the exchange, offer the matching tile and let the other player hand you the joker. You may also redeem a joker from your own valid exposure. Do not put the offered tile onto the discard area.

Remember: you cannot take a joker directly from another player's concealed tiles or call a discard solely to exchange it. If a hand has been declared dead, check which exposed jokers remain available.

FINISH

Check the hand. Then celebrate.

A win is complete when all 14 tiles match one legal hand on the card.

01 Say “Mahjong.”

Expose the complete hand in card order. Keep the winning tile clear so the table can see how you won.

02 Check the whole line

Confirm the numbers, suits, group sizes, jokers and the card’s notes. You do not discard after winning.

03 Record or settle together

Use the scoring method agreed before play. Keep your tiles in place until the hand is verified.

If the wall runs out

If the final tile is discarded and nobody wins on it, the game is a wall game. Under standard social payment rules, nobody pays. Scored events can award points differently.

If something goes wrong

Pause and identify the exact issue before moving tiles. An invalid exposed hand or a wrong tile count may lead to a dead hand. Once confirmed dead, that player stops drawing and discarding, but still owes any standard payment to the eventual winner.

Wrong-mahjong and disputed-hand penalties depend on the circumstances. Use the current rulebook or ask the event director; avoid guessing.

REFERENCE

Social-game payments.

Choose your stakes before play. You can also practice without money.

The card's value is the starting amount. The chart shows what **each other player pays the winner**, using V for the card value. At a table that treats points as cents, a 25-value hand starts at 25¢.

HOW THE HAND WINS	THROWER	OTHERS · EACH
Discard, base payment	**2 × V**	**V**
Self-pick, base payment	**-**	**2 × V**
Discard, eligible jokerless	**4 × V**	**2 × V**
Self-pick, eligible jokerless	**-**	**4 × V**

THE JOKERLESS EXCEPTION

Singles and Pairs hands use the **base payment** rows; they do not earn the extra jokerless double. Winning through a joker exchange is treated as self-pick under standard payment rules.

Example: a 25-value hand

Win on a discard with jokers: the thrower pays **50**, and the other two pay **25 each**. Win the same eligible hand jokerless on a self-pick: all three pay **100 each**.

At a Mahjong NTX Rally table, use the current Player Guide and scorecard to calculate points.
Use this payment chart for social games with stakes.

BUILD CONFIDENCE

Choose a direction. Stay flexible.

You can keep two possible hands in mind while the Charleston unfolds.

01 Sort what you have

Group suits together. Notice pairs, flowers, dragons and jokers. A repeated number or several nearby numbers can suggest a section of the card.

02 Find two realistic options

Compare the tiles you actually hold with two printed hands. Read the notes now, especially suit and dragon requirements.

03 Protect the hard-to-get tiles

Singles and pairs must be natural. Keep the ones your strongest option needs; a joker cannot fill those gaps.

04 Pass what serves neither option

Choose three tiles you can release. Reassess after each incoming pass instead of committing to the first attractive line.

A USEFUL QUESTION

“Which hand uses more of what I already have?” Start there. A bigger printed value does not automatically make a hand the better choice.

BUILD CONFIDENCE

Look up before you discard.

Use visible information. Treat every guess about another hand as a guess.

Read the exposures

Compare each exposed group with possible lines on the card. Several groups may narrow someone's options. No exposures does not prove that a player is playing a concealed hand.

Count what is already visible

There are four of each numbered tile, wind and dragon. Count discards, exposures and your own tiles. A required natural pair becomes impossible if too few copies remain available; a joker cannot repair it.

Balance progress with risk

Calling can move you closer to a win, but it also limits which hands you can switch to. Keep a backup option that fits any groups already exposed.

Near the end of the wall, compare the chance of finishing your hand with the risk of helping someone else. A recently discarded tile may be less risky, but it is not guaranteed safe: hands can change between turns.

AVOID AUTOMATIC DECISIONS

Redeeming a joker can help you, and it can leave the other player jokerless. Consider the whole table before exchanging. Good decisions depend on the hand in front of you.

AT THE TABLE

Make room for a good game.

A calm, clear table is easier to learn at and more enjoyable to return to.

Name every discard

Say the tile clearly as you place it face up. Keep exposed groups visible and give others a reasonable moment to call.

Keep hand information private

Avoid discussing what you need, what you passed or what another player should discard. Coach openly only when everyone has agreed to a teaching game.

Ask about the format

House rules, scoring and tournament procedures can differ. Read the event’s rules before play; ask its director for a ruling.

Handle mistakes plainly

Explain what happened without criticizing the player. Check the rule before changing the table. Keep your hand intact until any win is verified.

GIVE YOURSELF ONE GOAL PER SESSION

First: name the tiles. Next: follow the Charleston and keep the right count. Then: read a hand confidently and spot legal calls. You do not have to master all of it in one afternoon.

QUICK REFERENCE

The words you will hear.

Use this page when a term is new. The action matters more than the vocabulary.

Bam / Crak / Dot

The three numbered suits: bamboo, characters and circles.

East

The dealer. Starts with 14 tiles and makes the first discard.

Wall

Face-down stacks that supply tiles for the deal and draws.

Charleston

The passing sequence before the first discard.

Courtesy pass

An optional 0-3 tile exchange with the player across.

Natural tile

The actual tile, rather than a joker standing in for it.

Pair / pung / kong

Two / three / four identical tiles.

Quint / sextet

Five / six identical tiles. Jokers can help build these groups.

Exposure

A completed group displayed on top of your rack.

Racked

Placed on the sloping part of your rack with your concealed tiles.

X / C

Printed next to the point value on your card. X = exposed; C = concealed. C hands call only to complete mahjong.

Call

A spoken claim for the latest available discard.

Joker exchange

Trading a natural tile for a matching exposed joker on your turn.

Soap

The white dragon, also used for 0 on the card.

Self-pick

Winning on your draw; joker-exchange wins use self-pick payment.

Jokerless

A winning hand with no jokers. Bonus eligibility depends on the rules.

Wall game

The wall runs out and nobody wins.

Dead hand

A hand disqualified from further play in that game.

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Keep this by your rack.

YOUR GOAL

14 tiles matching one complete card hand, including its notes.

YOUR TURN

East discards first. Then draw, decide, discard. Play moves right. Count 13 while waiting; 14 before discarding or winning.

CHARLESTON

Right · Across · Left. Stop here if anyone wishes. Otherwise Left · Across · Right. Pass 3 each time; never a joker.

CALLING

Latest discard only. Call for a required group of 3+ identical tiles in an X hand, or to complete mahjong. Never call a discarded joker.

JOKERS

Only in groups of 3+ identical tiles. Never a single or pair. Exchange on your turn after drawing or completing a called exposure.

COURTESY + BLIND PASS

Courtesy: 0-3 across, lower request wins. Blind pass: up to 3 unseen incoming tiles on the last pass of either Charleston; pass 3 total.

Full explanations: pages 10-13 · Rally scoring: Player Guide

FOLD

BRIAR HOUSE SOCIAL · AMERICAN MAHJONG

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PRINT AND KEEP

Your game log.

Four games, one page. Record the scoring method your table has agreed to use.

Date _____ **Where** _____

Scoring method / stakes _____

	PLAYER 1	PLAYER 2	PLAYER 3	PLAYER 4
Name				
Game 1				
Game 2				
Game 3				
Game 4				
Total				

For Mahjong NTX, use the current official scorecard and scoring instructions. This general log is a personal record. Use the Rally scorecard for official bonuses and penalties.

One thing to practice next time

PRINT AND KEEP

Host a comfortable first game.

Set up the table so the players can focus on learning.

The table

- ☐ 152 tiles, counted
- ☐ Four racks and pushers
- ☐ Two dice
- ☐ Four current NMJL cards
- ☐ A stable table and four chairs
- ☐ A mat, if available
- ☐ Good light and space for discards
- ☐ Drinks on a separate surface

Before you begin

- ☐ Agree it is a teaching game
- ☐ Choose points, chips or no stakes
- ☐ Explain any house rules
- ☐ Name East and check tile counts
- ☐ Keep this guide within reach
- ☐ Allow time for questions

A simple teaching plan

First: identify a few tiles and build one real hand from the card face up.
Next: practice the Charleston and one draw-and-discard turn each.
Then: play slowly, checking counts and talking through decisions only because this is an agreed teaching game.

Allow extra time for a first game. Pause between games for snacks and conversation; keep hands clean before handling the tiles.

PLAY WITH US

Find your next table.

Briar House Social brings together the learning, the game and the company.

START WITH A LESSON

Let’s put the tiles on the table.

The card makes more sense when you can work through a hand together. In a lesson, we practice the Charleston, talk through what to keep and play with time to pause and ask questions.

Come on your own or learn with friends. You do not need to know the rules before your first lesson.

Explore lessons at mahjongntx.com/learn

Current dates and signup details

MAHJONG NTX

Your North Texas mahjong community.

Fall Rally registration is $70 and covers seasonal play from October 19 through December 6, 2026. A Rally table plays for the seasonal standings. Players choose when and where to meet.

A qualifying round is two to four games in one sitting with the same four registered Rally players.
Four games is standard. Use the Player Guide for scoring and submission details.
New to mahjong? Start with a lesson and join a table once you can follow play with the current card.

Fall Rally details and registration at mahjongntx.com

Shop Briar House

info@briarhousesocial.com

KEEP LEARNING

A guide to return to.

Learn the basics here. Use the current official card at every game.

Your next three steps

01 Keep your own card

Use the same annual NMJL card as the rest of the table. The printed hand and its notes control what you can play.

02 Choose one practice goal

Name tiles, count your hand or spot a legal call. Repeat that skill until it feels familiar.

03 Play with people who teach clearly

A lesson or a patient practice table gives you a place to apply what you have read.

RULES AND FURTHER READING

National Mah Jongg League: the current annual card, *Mah Jongg Made Easy* and official bulletins are the governing references for NMJL play.

nationalmahjonggleague.org

Additional clarification: Tom Sloper's American Mah-Jongg FAQ explains special situations and points readers to official rulings.

sloperama.com/mjfaq/mjfaq19.html

Briar House Social is independent of the NMJL. This beginner guide is a learning companion, not a replacement for the card or rulebook. Event-specific rules govern organized play.

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