

Welcome to Module 1: Mastering the Card!

Today, we're diving into the Mah Jongg card and learning how to read it to build winning hands. Think of it like a cook book. Just like making your favorite foods, you need the right ingredients in the correct amounts to create a winning Mah Jongg hand. In this module, we'll break down the card so you can finally understand it the way it's meant to be understood. All those abbreviations, sections with numbers, colors, and symbols—don't worry, we'll make it clear, simple, and even fun!

Why does this matter? The Mah Jongg card is key to your success. Every hand you play comes from a section on the card. If you don't understand the card, you might miss winning hands or have trouble choosing tiles. But once you know how to read the card, you'll quickly know which tiles you need and how to build your hand.

I'll guide you through a simple, step-by-step approach—starting with identifying the “ingredients” of the Mah Jongg card and understanding how the sections fit together, like a menu of options. By the end of this module, you'll feel confident navigating the card and making smarter decisions during your game.

So grab your Mah Jongg card, and let's get started!

The Ingredients

Numbers:

The numbers on the card range from 1 to 9, just like the numbers on your Mah Jongg tiles. The White Dragon represents the number zero. Fun fact: You can't use the White Dragon in a Consecutive Run hand.

Letters:

The letters on the card are abbreviations:

D = Dragon

F = Flower

N, E, W, S = North, East, West, South winds

Next to the hands, you'll see an X or C:

X means “Exposed”—you can call for a tile from another player and place it on your rack.

C stands for “Concealed”—you must build these hands secretly and can't call for tiles (except the final winning one).

You'll find these letters under the Value column, which also shows how much each hand is worth in points or money.

Colors:

The number of colors in a hand tells you how many suits you need:

One color = one suit

Two colors = two suits

Three colors = three suits

Important Tip: When the letter D is the same color as the numbers, the Dragon must match the suit of those numbers. For example, if you use a suit of Craks, you'll need to use the matching dragon, which is the Red Dragon. Remember, the Green Dragon matches Bams, and the White Dragon matches Dots.

Likewise, if the colors differ, the Dragons and numbers must belong to different suits.

Parentheses:

Parentheses are additional helpers that give you extra details about how to build your hand. They're important because they even override the color-coding system. Basically, if something's in parentheses, it's important and gives you more clarity on things that the color-coding can't fully explain.

The Recipe Sections

Look at your Mah Jongg card. You'll see the hands grouped under bold section headings, like a restaurant menu. Each section has a specific theme, and the hands within it follow that theme.

Let's breakdown the sections:

The Year: Found at the top-left of the card, it features hands that include the current year plus some Flowers, Winds, and Dragons. When the White Dragon is used as a Zero, it can be used with any suit. Notice that the year itself is a grouping of singles which means you can't use a Joker.

2468: All hands use even-numbered tiles (2, 4, 6, 8).

Any Like Numbers: These hands have identical numbers. If the hand shows "11 111 1111," you can choose which matching numbers to use (e.g., all 8s or all 3s). This Section is not always on the card each year.

Addition or Multiplication Hands: These involve number tiles that add or multiply and are played as written. Which means you can't create new addition or multiplication hands, you can only use the specific hands listed on the card.

Quints: These require at least one set of five identical tiles. Since there are only four of each of the number tiles, Jokers are essential here.

Consecutive Run: This section uses ascending, connected numbers. Think 3, 4, 5, 6—not 3, 6, 8, 9. A Zero cannot be used in this section.

13579: Odd-numbered tiles (1, 3, 5, 7, 9).

Winds - Dragons: Combinations of Wind and Dragon tiles, sometimes with suit and number restrictions.

369: All about the numbers 3, 6, and 9.

Singles & Pairs: Are a little bit different because these hands only use pairs or single tiles—no Jokers are allowed!

Putting It All Together

Sections group together hands that share a theme and explain what types of tiles you need and how many are required for each hand. Most hands must be built exactly as shown, with no changes to the tile combinations. But some hands give you a bit of creative freedom, letting you pick which numbers to use.

When reading a hand, always:

Check how many suits are required (by counting the colors).

See which numbers and other tiles are needed.

Pay attention to parentheses for special instructions.

Conclusion:

By now, you should have a better idea of how the Mah Jongg card works. It's just like learning to cook—you need to get the right ingredients and know how they all come together to make something delicious. Once you've got that down, you'll be putting together winning hands in no time! But just knowing how to read the card isn't enough. You've got to get super familiar with the hands in each Section. No, you don't need to memorize every single hand, but you should know which Sections require what kinds of tiles and how the hands within those Sections fit together. This is the key to everything in the game, and that's exactly why we started with this in Module 1.

Because when you're playing, you'll be looking for a hand that matches the tiles you have. You need to know where each Section is on the card. If you don't know where to look, you'll spend way too much time hunting for a hand—and nobody wants that, trust me! Mah Jongg is a fast-paced game, and searching around for hands slows everything down.

Wondering how you can get familiar with the hands? I've got an exercise to help. Start by picking one Section of the card and putting together the tiles for each hand until you've done them all. Here's a tip: Before you dive in, separate your tiles into Suits—it'll make finding what you need way easier. As you put each hand together, pay attention to the types of tiles and combinations you're using. Try doing the same hands in different suits to mix it up. Then, move on to another Section and repeat the process. The more familiar you are with the hands, the easier the rest of the game will be!