



COMPANION
2023 EDITION

AMERICAN MAH JONGG

Primer

Everything you need to know
to play with confidence

Michele Frizzell



AMERICAN MAH JONGG PRIMER

Companion Edition 2023

Everything you need to know
to play with confidence

MICHELE FRIZZELL

Email correspondence should be addressed to:

michele@mahjlife.com



<https://www.facebook.com/groups/michelefrizzell>



<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCyhydCuxDvVSX-yco5SHMDA>

AMERICAN MAH JONGG PRIMER COMPANION EDITION 2023

PUBLISHING HISTORY

First Edition 20230412.1

All rights reserved.



Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivatives 4.0 International

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

Mahj Life

This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

Contents

- Change Log5
- Introduction6
- Analytics6
 - Value6
 - Categories7
 - Attributes10
 - Shapes11
- Findings12
 - Notes12
 - Problematic Parentheticals12
 - Carry Over Hands13
 - Fatal Errors14
 - Hot Commodities14
 - During the Charleston14
 - After the Charleston14
 - Promising Tandem Categories14
- Top 3 Mistakes19
- Tips for a Smooth Transition20
- About the Author21
- APPENDIX22
 - Appendix A On-Demand Resource22
 - Appendix B YouTube Videos22

Change Log

Date	Chapter	Change
04/12/2023	Analytics/Value	Corrected pie chart point value for easy hands
04/12/2023	Findings/Promising Tandem Categories	Added captions withing category labels for clarity

Introduction

The National Mah Jongg League publishes its annual card of valid hands for American mah jongg players in April.

The rules of the game rarely change (see Appendix A). The methods used to describe the hands (i.e., colors, letters, numbers, format) stay the same. The categories of hands have been the same for many years. The changes are in the shapes and patterns of the hands.

The purpose of this companion is to summarize the differences between the old and new cards to give you an insight into the nuances and help you with a smooth transition.

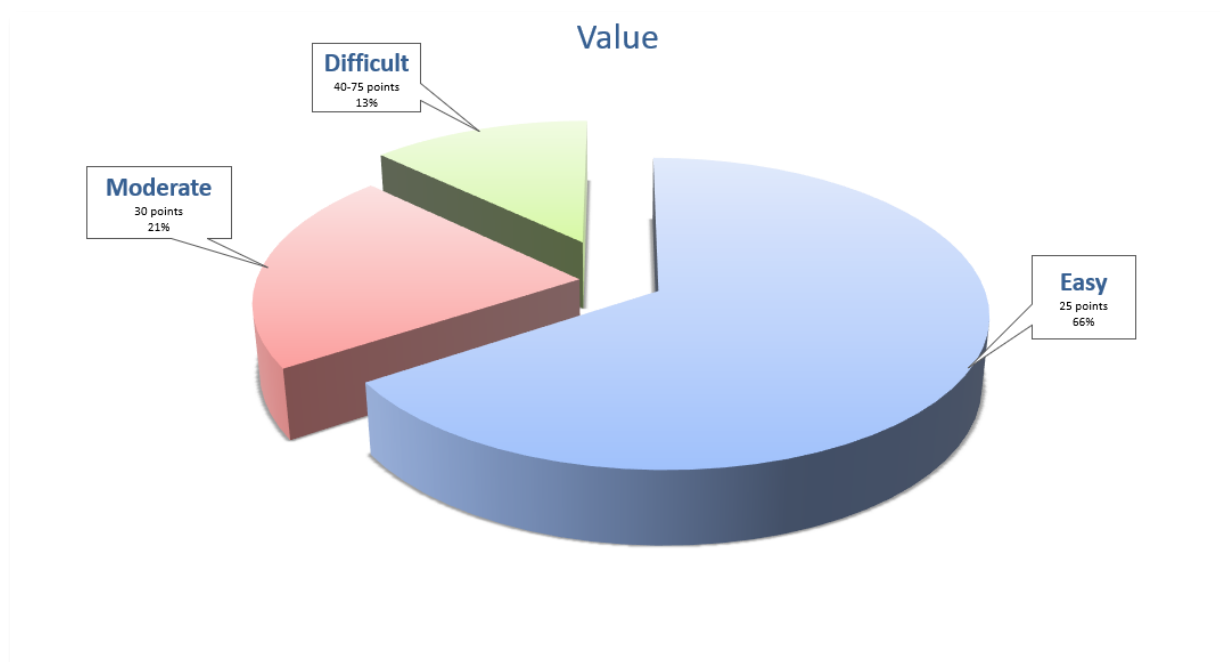
If you are brand new to the game, visit my American Mah Jongg wiki article (Appendix B).

If you want to watch a video presentation and follow along with the following nitty-gritty details, here is the link:

<https://youtu.be/fZ021kfm1Ow>

Analytics

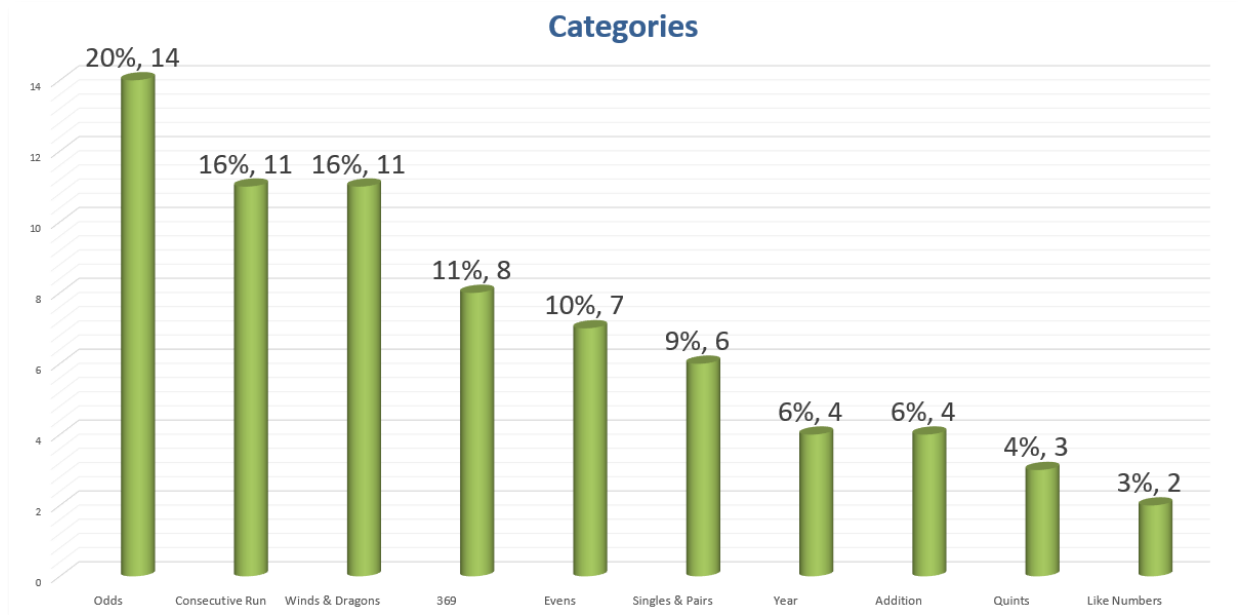
Value



Statistics (hand count includes variations [i.e., Evens #3 is counted as two hands])		This Year		Last Year	
Analysis by Value	Delta	Count	Card %	Count	Card %
25 Easiest	3	46	66%	43	65%
30 Open	2	8	11%	6	9%
30 Concealed	1	7	10%	6	9%
50 Singles & Pairs	-1	5	7%	6	9%
40 Quints	-1	1	1%	2	3%
45 Quints	0	2	3%	2	3%
85 Singles & Pairs	-1	0	0%	1	2%
35 Concealed	0	0	0%	0	0%
75 Singles & Pairs	1	1	1%	0	0%
Total		70		66	

This appears to be a balanced card. For beginners, there is a plethora of hands to choose from because most of the hands are relatively easy (66%, 25 points). There are more moderate hands (21%, 30 points) and fewer difficult hands (13%, 40-75 points) than last year but intermediate and advanced players should still find the card challenging because of the varying shapes.

Categories



Statistics (hand count includes variations [i.e., Evens #3 is counted as two hands])		This Year		Last Year	
Analysis by Category	Delta	Count	Card %	Count	Card %
Odds	2	14	20%	12	18%
Consecutive Run	0	11	16%	11	17%
Winds & Dragons	4	11	16%	7	11%
369	0	8	11%	8	12%
Evens	-3	7	10%	10	15%
Singles & Pairs	0	6	9%	6	9%
Year	-1	4	6%	5	8%
Addition	4	4	6%	0	0%
Quints	-1	3	4%	4	6%
Like Numbers	-1	2	3%	3	5%
Total	4	70		66	

Year tiles are always risky to pass; this applies throughout this decade. There is an omission in the description of the third hand. The league confirmed that this hand must include two Dragons.

Evens are going to be affected by Year hands and Addition Hands hands. With the significant decrease in the number of hands, it should be easier to play Year hands.

Any Like Numbers has two hands to choose from but don't be deceived – there are like numbers in every category on the card except Winds – Dragons. As always, passing like numbers will be almost as risky as passing a pair.

Addition Hands have returned! The league surprised us with only mixed suit options so it should be easy to memorize. The hands use a formula with a specific like number that equals even numbers. For example, 3+3=6 could be two Flowers, four 3 Bams, four 3 Craks, with four 6 Dots.

Quints has only three hands this year. Quint #2 is unusual in that there is no flexibility with the run.

Consecutive Run has more hands (+2) than Odds if the count includes consecutive run hands in Quints, Winds – Dragons, and Singles and Pairs categories. Therefore, Consecutive Run has the most options and it's the most flexible by nature. The reason for this is that there are three suits numbered 1-9 with patterns that span up to five numbers. Three hands use a five-number range and all the other hands span from 2-4 numbers. If you chose to play a hand in this category, and you have mixed suits, keep tiles in a four number range around your multiples or predominant pattern for the greatest flexibility. Also, because of the flexibility, if you are in between hands or categories with equitable potential, choose Consecutive Run.

Odds has the highest hand count within the category but it will never be as flexible as Consecutive Run.

Winds – Dragons has more options including five hands with number tiles. There is a significant increase in the number of Wind hand overall (19%, +4). If you pass Winds, pass one at a time and try not to pass East and West together because there are three hands with singles.

There is a gotcha-hand! The first one has two big multiple NEWS options that are slightly different.

Winds – Dragons #1-1



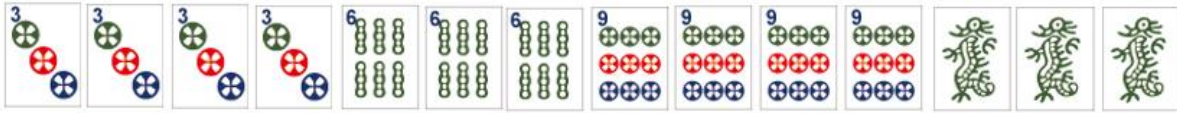
Winds – Dragons #1-2



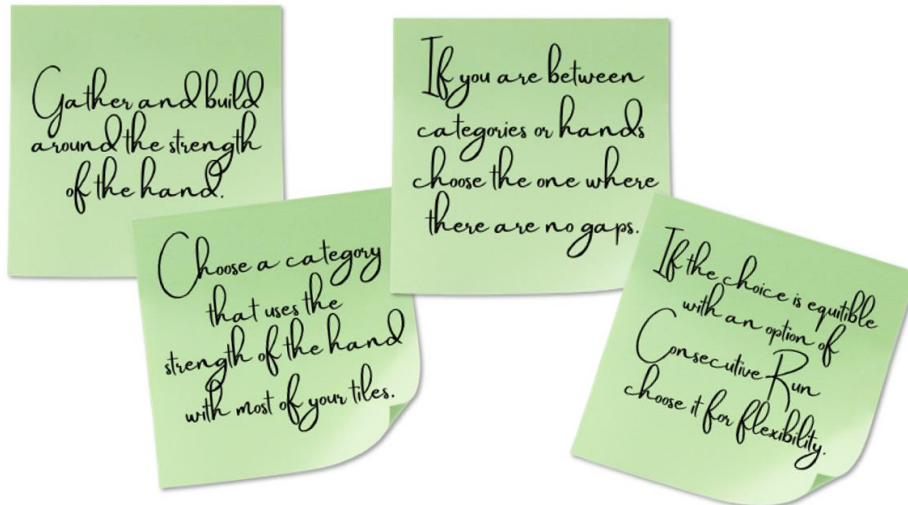
Dragons have a nominal change with the number of hands overall (29%, +1). Keep in mind that there are seven more hands with Dragons than Winds so consider passing Winds before passing Dragons. Also noteworthy is that there are Dragons in every category on the card this year except for Quints. When passing these tiles, try to pass one at a time of each. Be mindful of discarding Dragons in the endgame because there are ten hands that use these tiles as pairs and singles.

Although the **369** category has a fair number of hands, it is not very flexible because there are only three number tiles to work with and there is a wide spread between each number. Make sure you have a good representation of these tiles if you play this category.

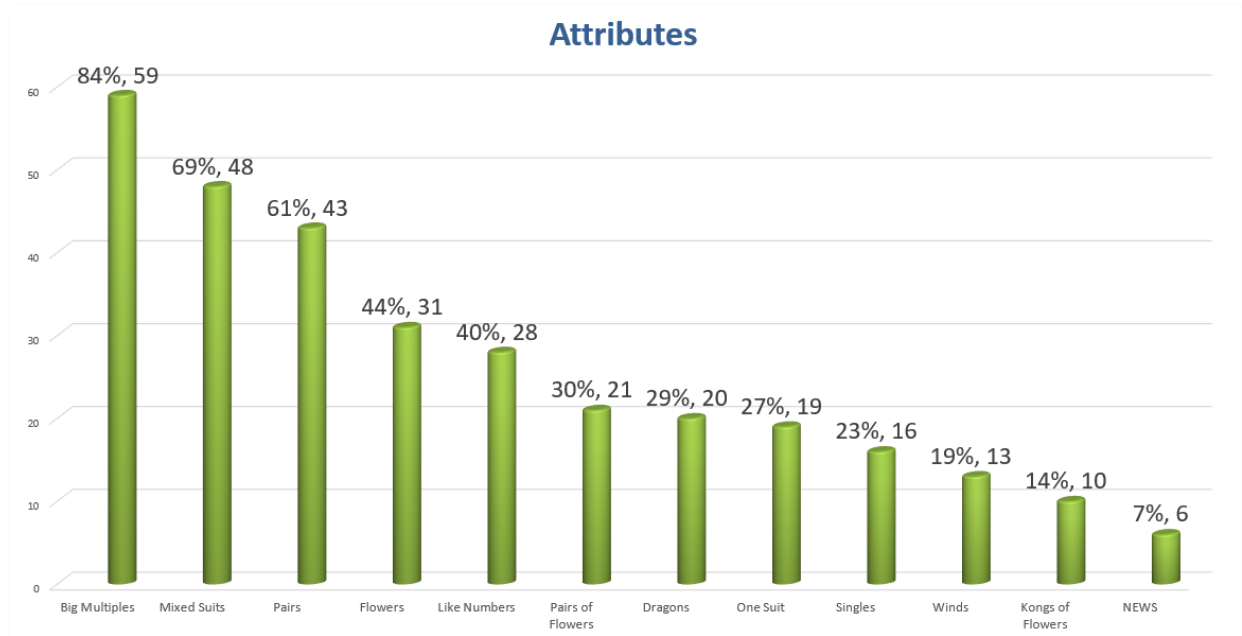
If you hear the term "knitted," it refers to hand adopted from Western Mah Jongg which is played in Great Britain. It means that a hand has an alternating connection with numbered tiles and the corresponding Dragon.



Singles and Pairs hands represent each category as normal except there are no Winds. The big year hand will not be as difficult as last year's but it will still be difficult so try to win this one early because everyone will be adjusting to this year's nuances and strategies.



Attributes



Statistics (hand count includes variations [i.e., Evens #3 is counted as two hands])		This Year		Last Year	
Analysis by Attribute	Delta	Count	Card %	Count	Card %
Big Multiples (i.e., pung, kong, quint; with or without pairs and singles)	1	59	84%	58	88%
Mixed Suits (including Dragons)	3	48	69%	45	68%
Pairs	2	43	61%	41	62%
Flowers	6	31	44%	25	38%
Like Numbers	-3	28	40%	31	47%
Pairs of Flowers	-5	21	30%	26	39%
Dragons	1	20	29%	19	29%
One Suit	0	19	27%	19	29%
Singles	3	16	23%	13	20%
Winds	4	13	19%	9	9%
Kongs of Flowers	7	10	14%	3	5%
NEWS	0	6	7%	6	9%

There are many attributes that impact decision making this year. The list is lengthy, and the attributes vary widely.

American mah jongg will always be a game of multiples (i.e., pair, pung, kong, quint; 84%). Since most of the hands use big multiples (i.e., pungs, kongs, quints; 91%), target them and gather supporting tiles to optimize quick hand development.

There is a slight increase in the number of hands with pairs (61%, +2). There is also a slight increase in the number of hands with singles (23%, +3). When playing an open hand with multiple pairs, secure half before committing with more than one exposure.

Although there are many hands in one suit (27%), most use mixed suits with or without Dragons (69%). Gather tiles that support the strength of your hand regardless of suit to maximize your flexibility as the hand develops.

Use of Flowers in American mah jongg sets it apart from all the other versions. This year, there is a significant increase in the number of hands that use them (44%, +6). All but the Quints category include two to six hands with Flowers. Also, instead of double pungs of Flowers, there are more kongs of Flowers. There is a significant decrease in the number of hands with pairs of Flowers hands (30%, -5). These tiles will always be a hot commodity regardless of the year and passing them should be a rarity. Also, survey exposures and discards to count the cost of discarding them in the endgame.

Shapes

The shapes of the hands on the card change from year to year so it's important to study these shapes so you minimize mistakes. As always, the list is lengthy and the shapes vary widely.

The top six prevalent shapes make up nearly half of the hands (49%, images below). Out of all the shapes on the card this year, the vast majority use big multiples (i.e., pung, kong, quint; 91%) including pairs and singles with some using big multiples only (33%). Working with a wide variety of shapes will be a challenge for players of all skill levels so always check the card before claiming your first discard and before declaring mah jongg.

Statistics (hand count includes variations [i.e., Evens #3 is counted as two hands])		This Year		Last Year	
Analysis by Recurring and Prevalent Shapes	Delta	Count	Card %	Count	Card %
Pung kong pung kong	4	10	14%	6	9%
Pair kong kong kong	4	9	13%	5	8%
Pair pung kong pung pair (pyramid)	3	6	9%	3	5%
Kong kong pair kong	3	3	4%	0	0%
Pair kong pair kong pair	3	3	4%	0	0%
Kong pair pair pung pung	2	3	4%	1	2%

There is a slight increase in the number of hands with pairs (61%). There is also a slight increase in the number of hands with singles (23%). When playing an open hand with singles and pairs, secure them before committing a hand with an exposure.



Findings

Notes

There are no changes to the back of the card and just one modified note on the inside left panel:

White Dragon is used as a zero “0”.
It may be used with any suit.

In other words, when you use a White Dragon in a year block it represents a number (0) and it is neutral. As always, jokers cannot be used in a block that consists of singles or pairs.

Problematic Parentheticals

There are some hand descriptions that may cause mistakes and disputes at the table:



The league confirmed that the text should read, “2023 Any Suit, Pungs Any 2 Dragons.”



The text should read, “Any two suits.”



There is no flexibility with this run.

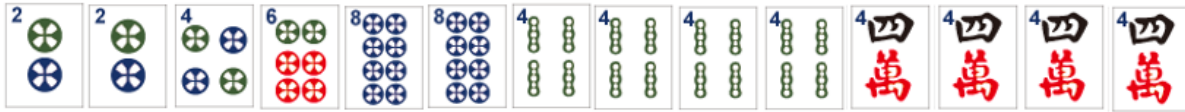


The text should read, “Like Numbers 3, 6, or 9.”

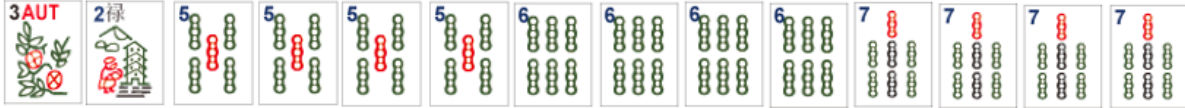
Carry Over Hands

There are nine carry over hands this year, so it will take time to learn the hands. Have patience with yourself and others.

Evens #2

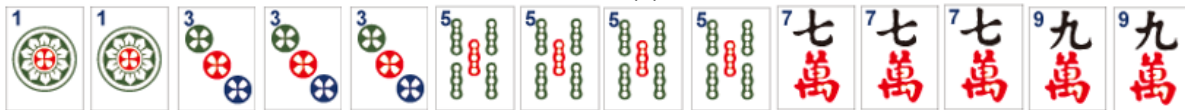


Consecutive Run #5 (2)



One suit or three suits

Odds #1 (2)



One suit or three suits

Odds #3 (2)

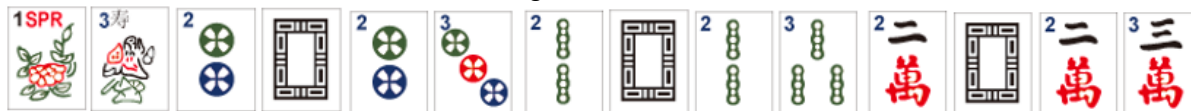


Little (135) or Big Odds (579)

Singles and Pairs #5



Singles and Pairs #6



Fatal Errors

This year, there is only one fatal pung – FLOWERS. Hands with Flowers will be as pairs or kongs only.

Hot Commodities

During the Charleston

Since most of the hands on the card use multiples (91%), passing a pair may help develop your opponents' hand. Passing like numbers poses the same risk, albeit to a lesser extent if you're lucky. Other tiles that should be passed rarely are Flowers and White Dragons. For this decade, passing 2s will also be risky. If you pass any of these tiles, pass one at a time to different players and be mindful when discarding these tiles in the end game.

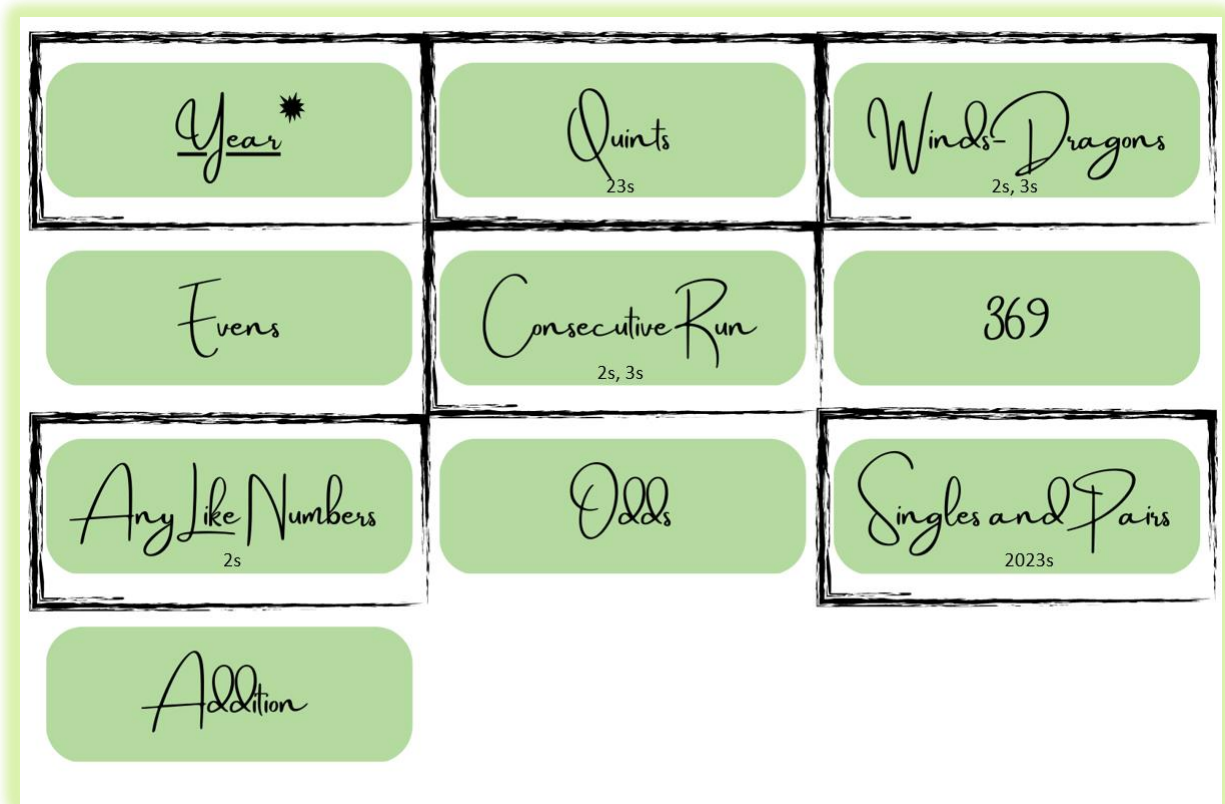
After the Charleston

There are no safe tiles this year because there are singles or pairs of every tile in the set. Survey discards and exposures, then count the cost of discarding hot tiles, especially in the endgame.

Promising Tandem Categories

Promising tandem categories is the switchability to another category or hand based on shapes and tiles being used. Dependency is based on being able to use similar shapes plus the use of two or more tiles. Feasibility is based on the number of visible exposures and discards at each decision point.

Use of "same" means the usage of all tiles that can be used within the category.



Year

Quints

Winds- Dragons

Evens *

Consecutive Run
Fillers

369

Any Like Numbers
2s, 4s

Odds

Singles and Pairs
Evens

Addition
Evens

Year
2s

Quints

Winds- Dragons

Evens
Same

Consecutive Run
Hand #6 & #7

369
3s, 6s, 9s

Any Like Numbers *

Odds
3s, 5s, 7s, 9s

Singles and Pairs
All but hand #5

Addition
Evens

Year

Quints

Winds- Dragons

Evens
Same

Consecutive Run

369
3s

Any Like Numbers
1s, 2s, 3s, 4s

Odd's

Singles and Pairs

Addition*

Year

Quints*

Winds- Dragons
Runs

Evens

Consecutive Run
Same

369

Any Like Numbers
Same

Odd's
Same

Singles and Pairs

Addition

Year 2s, 3s	Quints Runs	Winds- Dragons Runs
Evens Omissions	Consecutive Run [*]	369
Any Like Numbers Same	Odds Omissions	Singles and Pairs Runs
Addition		

Year	Quints	Winds- Dragons Winds, Fillers
Evens	Consecutive Run Fillers	369 3s, 9s
Any Like Numbers Same	Odds [*]	Singles and Pairs Odds
Addition		

Year <small>2s, 3s</small>	Quints	Winds- Dragons *
Evens	Consecutive Run <small>Same</small>	369
Any Like Numbers	Odds	Singles and Pairs
Addition		

Year	Quints	Winds- Dragons
Evens	Consecutive Run	<u>369</u> *
Any Like Numbers <small>Same</small>	Odds <small>3s, 9s</small>	Singles and Pairs <small>3s, 6s, 9s</small>
Addition <small>3s, 6s</small>		



Top 3 Mistakes

1. Passing risky tiles in the Charleston. Hold Flowers, Dragons, and Year tiles or pass them individually to different players.
2. Claiming a discard for an exposure on a concealed hand. Check the X or C first.
3. Playing a hand from the previous year. Always check the shape before you claim your first discard.

Tips for a Smooth Transition

1. Target strength! Optimize your potential to develop a hand quickly by gathering around multiples and building with an adaptive style of play. When you get your dealt hand, identify the multiples. Then pick one or two categories that can use the multiples with as many of the remaining tiles. If you don't have multiples, identify the predominant pattern, and hold tiles for that category. When a multiple forms, reassess. Gather all the tiles that can be used in the categories you are playing. When you run out of discards, pick a category, or pick a hand to free up more discards.
2. Practice makes progress. If you have a set of tiles at home, do hands-on exercises!
 - Category Modeling – Create every hand on the card including flexibility and limitations in the parentheses. <https://youtu.be/TtP5mOQJWak>
 - Charleston Modeling – Take thirteen random tiles. Then create a mock Charleston by lining up six rows of three tiles each. Practice making decisions on those incoming passes. If you're left with four discards or fewer, I would call it a success! <https://tinyurl.com/8ey692x6>
 - Charleston Chain Reaction – Compare two iterations using the same tiles to test your instincts. The setup is the same as “Charleston Modeling.” When looking at your dealt hand, choose the category that you think has the greatest potential. Make notes of other options. As you do the Charleston in the first iteration, take a photo of each incoming pass. After the Charleston, note the category you played, the hands you considered and the number of discards. Then recreate the dealt hand and Charleston passes using the photos. Then repeat the exercise for the best option noted at the beginning of the exercise. Compare the results to see if your instincts were correct. <https://tinyurl.com/94jy9yps>
 - Charleston Force – Setup is the same as “Charleston Modeling” but, this time create a strip of paper for each category on the card. Mix up the strips then pick three random categories. Do the Charleston Modeling exercise and force hands in the preselected categories. <https://tinyurl.com/94jy9yps>
 - Charleston Sprints – Setup is the same as “Charleston Modeling” but, this time use a stopwatch to time your decision making through the Charleston. Do three sprints and take an average of your time. For novice players, your average should be under four minutes. For intermediate players, your average should be under three minutes. For advanced players, your average should be under two minutes. Push yourself to make decisions in two minutes or less because quick decision making is appreciated by experienced players and, in many cases, can be required if you play online! <https://tinyurl.com/kdnkby3n>
 - Solitaire – Bring it all together in a game of solitaire where you play four hands at one time. You have to be able to compartmentalize your decision making because you will see all the “player's hands” as the game progresses. If you can do that, there is much that can be learned! <https://tinyurl.com/98rse73h>
3. Play live often and practice situation awareness!
 - Play with peers to relax and have fun.
 - Play with advanced players to learn by observation.
 - Play online. I like Mahjong Time because the interface is realistic. They also host marathons and tournaments. Send me an email for a free 30-day VIP trial. I am an affiliate partner so I will get a small commission if you decide to become a subscriber. Monies are used to support my YouTube channel.
 - Watch my videos!
 - American Mah Jongg Lessons (Appendix B)
 - Recurring Skill Builders (Mondays 9:00 AM Eastern)
 - Let's Play Livestreams
 - ☉ Nitty-Gritty BASICS; intended for beginners (Mondays 10:00 AM Eastern)
 - ☉ Nitty-Gritty PRIMETIME; intended for experienced players (Mondays 6:00 PM Eastern)
 - ☉ Simply Social; gameplay with commentary and casual conversation (Fridays 5:00 PM Eastern)

About the Author



Michele Frizzell is an avid player, group leader, and instructor. In 1973, she and her mom learned how to play Wright-Patterson Mah Jongg, a version popular in the military community. Michele has since learned other ways to play, including the League version. She began teaching and leading mah jongg groups in 1990. In the fall of 2017, Michele moved to rural Georgia and discovered that there were there no mah jongg players in the area, so she decided to become a YouTube creator to share her lessons and skill builders online. She has published a primer to help new players shorten their learning curve and has published over 2,400 videos on her channel with a community of over 26,000 subscribers.

Michele lives in Canton, Georgia with her husband David, and their poodle Riley.

May all your picks be keepers,

Michele Frizzell

Mah Jongg Instructor, Author, Speaker



678-521-7695

michele@mahjlife.com | mahjlife.com

6175 Hickory Flat Hwy, Ste 110-335

Canton, GA 30115



#MAHJLIFE

APPENDIX

Appendix A On-Demand Resource

Mahj Life maintains a mah jongg wiki, a free and searchable on-demand collection of mah jongg-centric articles including rules, strategy, and sportsmanship. Each article has been categorized by subject matter using tags. Look in the article footer then click a tag of interest to see an index of related articles.

<https://mahjlife.com/wiki>

Here are the most important articles to check often:

- *Rules not in Mah Jongg Made Easy* ([Article 00](#))
- *Top 10 Confusing and Complex Rules* ([Article 189](#))

Appendix B YouTube Videos

If you are new to the game, please visit my YouTube channel where you can watch video lessons for American Mah Jongg. Look for links under the download section in the Mahj Life Wiki article titled, *American Mah Jongg* ([Article 162](#)). Please leave comments below videos if you have any questions. You can also post questions on my Facebook group and send me private messages at michele@mahjlife.com

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/michelefrizzell>

“

**LEARN FAST
PLAY HARD
MOST IMPORTANTLY
HAVE FUN!**

”

Michele Frizzell

