



AMERICAN
MAH JONGG
Primer

Everything you need to know
to play with confidence

Michele Frizzell



AMERICAN MAH JONGG PRIMER

Companion Card Analysis 2024

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to play with confidence

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AMERICAN MAH JONGG PRIMER COMPANION CARD ANALYSIS 2024

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Change Log

Date	Chapter	Change
04/01/2024	ALL	Initial release
04/02/2024	Analysis, Shapes	Odds #7 number and illustration corrected
04/03/2024	Analysis, Categories	Data table and chart corrected to show four hands in the Quint category

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 the Mahj Life American Mah Jongg wiki article (Appendix B).

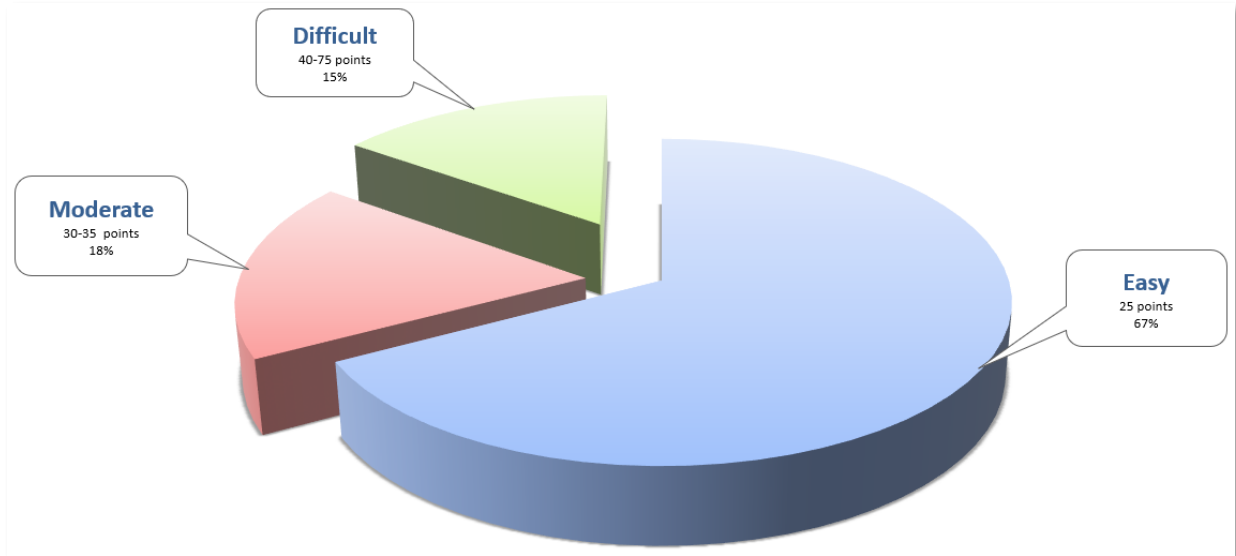
If you want to watch a video presentation and follow along with the following nitty-gritty details, here is the link:

<https://youtu.be/ouxfOPJLujY>



Analytics

Value



Statistics (hand count includes variations [i.e., Evens #1 is counted as two hands])		This Year		Last Year	
Analysis by Value	Delta	Count	Card %	Count	Card %
25 Easiest	3	49	67%	46	66%
50 Singles & Pairs	1	6	8%	5	7%
30 Open	-2	6	7%	8	11%
30 Concealed	-3	4	7%	7	10%
35 Concealed	2	3	4%	1	1%
40 Quints	3	3	4%	0	0%
45 Quints	-1	1	1%	2	3%
75 Singles & Pairs	0	1	1%	1	1%
Total		73		70	

Sorted by this year's count in descending order.

There is a slight increase of easier hands (+3, 67%) but there are fewer 30 point hands and an easier big year hand.

Valuation Oversights

There is an even hand with three pairs that has a value anomaly:

Evens #5 (25 points)



Evens #4 (30 points; 2023)



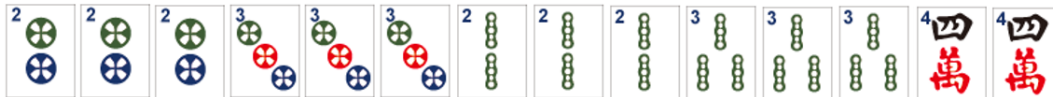
This also makes me question the value of Any Like Numbers #3 because it's as difficult as a hand with three pairs.

Any Like Numbers #3 (25 points)



There are three concealed hands with one pair and four pungs that have value anomalies:

Consecutive Run #8 and 369 #7 (30 points)



Odds #7 (35 points)



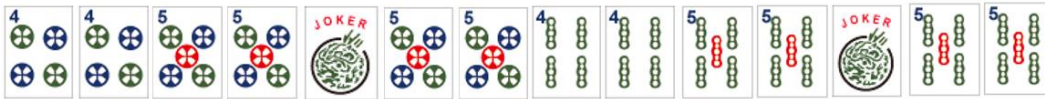
There are two quints with two pairs and two quints that have value anomalies:

Quint #1 (40 points)



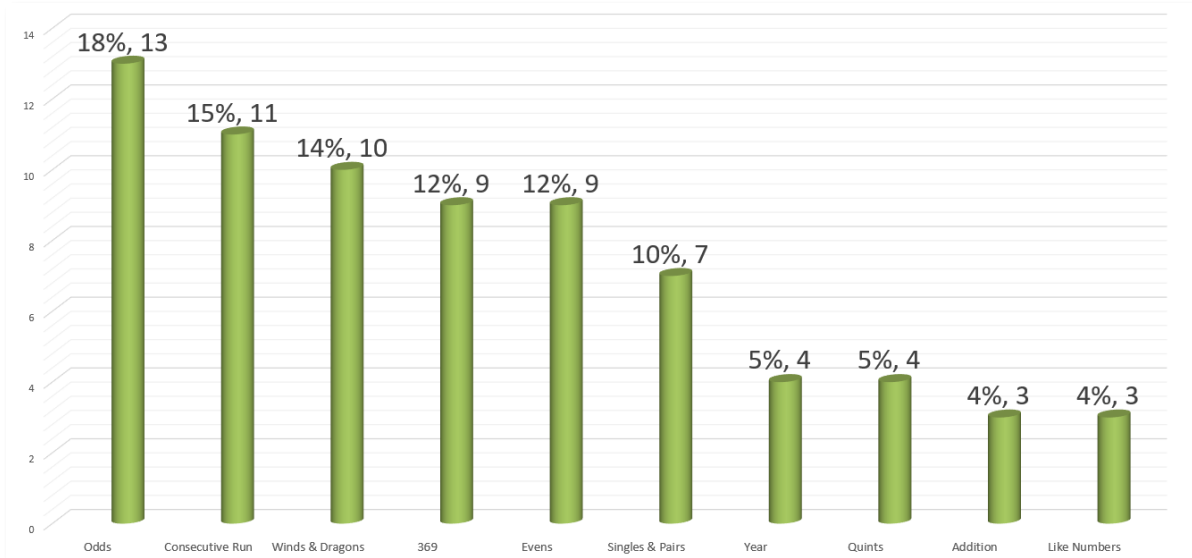
The reason for anomaly could be that there are eight Flowers in the set.

Quint #3 (45 points)



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 (25 points, 67%). There are more moderate hands (30-35 points, 18%) and some difficult hands (40-75 points, 15%). No matter your experience in the game, you should be challenged by playing with this year's card.

Categories



Statistics (hand count includes variations [i.e., Evens #1 is counted as two hands]; >3%)

Analysis by Category	Delta	This Year		Last Year	
		Count	Card %	Count	Card %
Odds	-1	13	18%	14	20%
Consecutive Run	0	11	15%	11	16%
Winds & Dragons	-1	10	14%	11	16%
369	1	9	12%	8	11%
Evens	2	9	12%	7	10%
Singles & Pairs	1	7	10%	6	9%
Year	0	4	5%	4	6%
Quints	1	4	5%	3	4%
Addition	1	3	4%	3	4%
Like Numbers	1	3	4%	2	3%
Total		73		70	

Sorted by this year's count in descending order.

There are powers (i.e., pros) and pitfalls (i.e., cons) that apply to each category on the card. Consider powers and pitfalls when faced with a decision to choose which category or hand to focus on, especially when the choices are equitable. For example, both choices use most of your tiles or both choices use most of your multiples.

This advice applies to all categories:

- Hot commodities will be 2s and 4s.
- Gather tiles to support the strength of the hand regardless of suit.
- During the Charleston, choose a category or hand where you have no gaps and few weaknesses.
- After the Charleston, choose a category or hand where you have no gaps and few weaknesses before committing with more than one exposure.

Let's take a brief look at the powers and pitfalls in each category on the card.

Year	
Powers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When you play in this category, you can thwart others from completing the big year hand, the highest value hand on the card (last hand in Singles-Pairs). 	Pitfalls <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hands use only two number tiles. • Anyone playing an Evens hand can impact the availability of 2s and 4s.
Advice	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider this category if you have a strong representation of the year's tiles. • Year tiles are always risky to pass because of Singles-Pairs #6 so be mindful when passing 2s. • Watch for White Dragons in discards and exposures. • Watch for 6s and 8s and consider a switch to Evens if Dragons are visible. You could also watch for 3s and 5s and consider a switch to Consecutive Run. 	

Evens	
Powers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you get odd tiles, you may have options in Consecutive Run. • Uses two efficient tiles, 4s and 6s. 	Pitfalls <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since there are gaps between four even numbered tiles, switchability is limited. • Fewer tiles might be available for this category if they are also needed for Year hands.
Advice	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider this category if you have gaps in your consecutive tiles or more multiples with even tiles than odd tiles. • If you get odd tiles, consider switching to the Consecutive Run category especially if you get 5s since it is the most efficient tile in the set. • Be mindful of singles and pairs in hands because there are two using math play and #6 is a new shape. 	

Any Like Numbers	
Powers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depending on which hand you are focused on, you may be able to switch to another category containing hands with like numbers. 	Pitfalls <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hands require one number in mixed suits. • If you play Any Like Numbers #3, anyone playing a NEWS-multiples hand can limit the availability of single Winds.
Advice	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are three hands to choose from but don't be deceived – there are like numbers in every category on the card except Addition Hands (44%). • Passing like numbers will be almost as risky as passing a pair. • If my memory serves me correctly, all three hands are new shapes. 	

Addition Hands	
Powers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These are all Hands of Slight Resistance which means if you have your flower pair in-hand, you are able to complete the rest of the hand with the help of jokers if necessary. • Switchable with Consecutive Run and Odds to a lesser extent depending on which hand you choose. 	Pitfalls <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flowers are in every hand and they may not be available. • Hands typically include singles or pairs. • Use of three specific numbers 1-7 number tiles
Advice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Math play hands come and go on the card and usually show up as addition or multiplication. This year, multiplication hands are in the Evens and Odds categories. • Have Flowers in-hand before committing with more than one exposure. 	

Quints	
Powers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of big multiples (e.g., kongs, quints) so jokers can be extremely helpful. 	Pitfalls <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pairs are in a couple hands.
Advice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider this category if you have big multiples and at least one joker but the more the better. • Have at least one pair in-hand before committing with two exposures. • If you get lots of Flowers, remember that there is a quint in Consecutive Run #6. 	

Consecutive Run	
Powers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of number tiles 1-9 in three suits with flexibility of a 5-number range. 	Pitfalls <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of 2s and 4s (lesser extent)
Advice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consecutive Run is the most powerful category on the card because hands use tiles numbered 1-9 in three suits. Also, they are efficient because you can move your starting number up or down if tiles you need become unavailable. If you choose to play a hand in this category and you have mixed suits, keep tiles in a four or five number range around your multiples or predominant pattern for the greatest flexibility. • There are more consecutive run hands than any other type of hand if you include hands in other categories that contain runs of consecutive numbers so if you are in between categories with equal potential, choose Consecutive Run. • There are two surprises in one hand, there is a quint of Flowers and a Consecutive Run hand a concealed chow (e.g., three in a sequence)! • Consider starting your range so that your hand won't be affected by anyone playing a Year hand. • There are five new shapes in this category (#1, #2, #4, #6, #8) so check your hand before you commit to exposures. 	

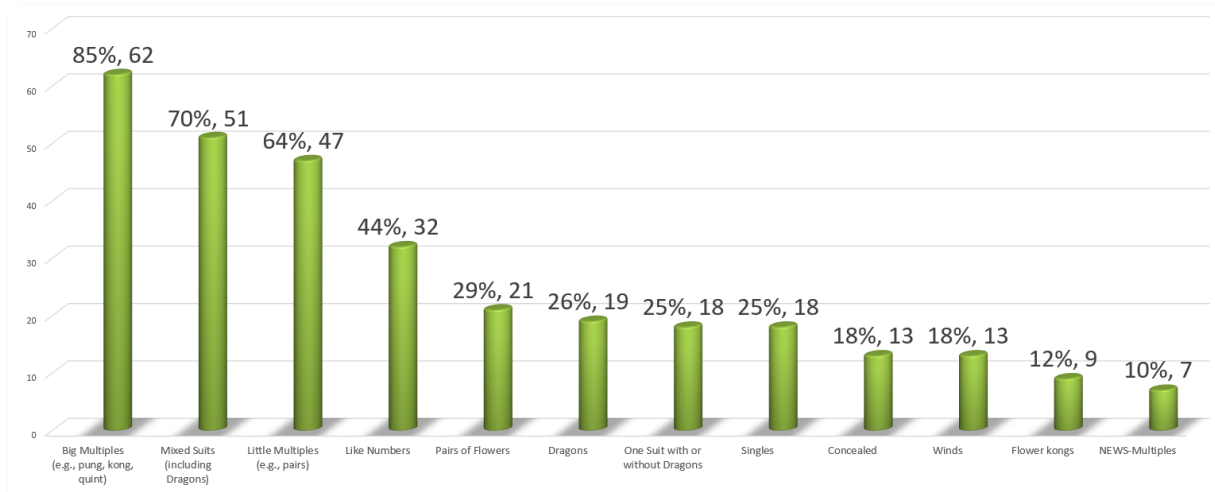
Odds	
Powers	Pitfalls
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are two hands that use five numbers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since there are gaps between five odd numbered tiles, switchability is limited.
Advice	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider this category if you have weak runs (i.e., gaps, singles). • If you get even tiles, consider switching to the Consecutive Run category especially if you get 4s and 6s since these – with the 5s – are the most efficient tiles in the set. • Be mindful of singles and pairs in hands because there are two hands with new shapes (#1, #4) and two hands using math play. 	

Winds-Dragons	
Powers	Pitfalls
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are five hands use consecutive runs. • There are four hands of least resistance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hands are not as switchable because there are only two hands outside the category using Winds.
Advice	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider this category if you have a strong representation of Winds or Dragons in your dealt hand. • If you are not playing in this category, pass Winds and Dragons separately and one at a time. Try not to pass North and South or East and West together. There are more hands containing Dragons than Winds, and so consider passing Winds before passing Dragons. • Monitor the number of Winds being discarded in the begin-game. If too many tiles are being discarded and if you are playing one of the consecutive run hands, consider switching to that category but do it before the middle of the game so you have time to gather tiles and build a different hand. • There are three new shapes (#3, #5, #7) so check your hand before you commit with exposures. 	

369	
Powers	Pitfalls
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hands use like numbers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since there are gaps between the only three numbered tiles, switchability is extremely limited.
Advice	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although the 369 category has a fair number of hands, it is not very flexible because it only uses three number tiles that have two-number spans between them, limiting your ability to switch categories. Consider this category if you have a strong representation of 369 with no gaps in your dealt hand. • If your hand does not develop by the middle game, consider switching to Any Like Numbers if you don't have exposures or you have exposures that can be used. • There is a new shape (#2) and a new pattern (#4) so check your hand before you commit with exposures. 	

Singles and Pairs	
Powers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The hands have the highest values on the card. The hands are all concealed so you can switch to a related category if your tiles become unavailable. 	Pitfalls <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hands are shallow since they are comprised of singles and pairs so if you switch to a hand outside the category, it will require time to build multiples.
Advice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider this category if you have no jokers and few big multiples from the dealt hand. Hands typically align with another category on the card, such as Consecutive Run, Evens, or Odds. If you draw jokers, consider switching to another category before the middle of the game (e.g., 70 tiles remaining). 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. There are four new shapes (#2, #4, #5, #6) so keep an eye on discards that affect your ability to gather singles and pairs. 	

Attributes



Analysis by Attribute	Delta	This Year		Last Year	
		Count	Card %	Count	Card %
Big Multiples (i.e., pung, kong, quint)	4	62	85%	58	83%
Mixed Suits (including Dragons)	3	51	70%	48	69%
Pairs	4	47	64%	43	61%
Like Numbers	4	32	44%	28	40%
Flowers	0	31	42%	31	44%
Pairs of Flowers	0	21	29%	21	30%
Dragons	-1	19	26%	20	29%
One Suit with or without Dragons	-1	18	25%	19	27%
Singles	2	18	25%	16	23%
Concealed	0	13	18%	13	19%
Winds	0	13	18%	13	19%
Flower kongs	-1	9	12%	10	14%
NEWS-Multiples	2	7	10%	5	7%

Sorted by this year's count in descending order.

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). Since most of the hands use big multiples (i.e., pungs, kongs, quints; 85%), target them and gather supporting tiles to optimize quick hand development.

There is a slight increase in the number of hands with pairs (+4, 64%) and there is an increase in the number of hands with singles (+2, 25%). When playing an open hand with singles and pairs, secure them before committing a hand with an exposure.

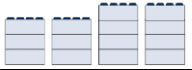
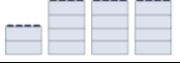




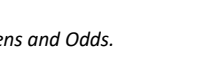
Although there are many hands in one suit (25%), most use mixed suits with or without Dragons (70%). Gather tiles that support the strength of your hand regardless of suit to maximize your flexibility as the hand develops.

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 (42%). All but the Quints category include two to six hands with Flowers. 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 half of the hands. Out of all the shapes on the card this year, the vast majority use big multiples (i.e., pung, kong, quint; 85%). 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.

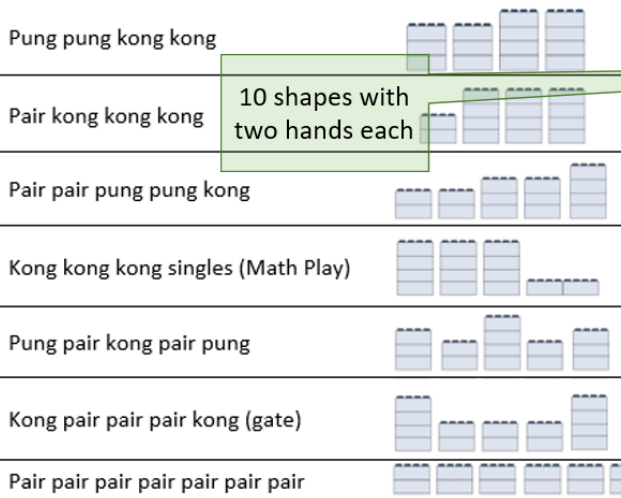
Statistics (hand count includes variations [i.e., Evens #1 is counted as two hands]; >3%)		This Year		Last Year	
Analysis by Recurring and Prevalent Shapes	Delta	Count	Card %	Count	Card %
Pung pung kong kong 	10	11	15%	1	1%
Pair kong kong kong 	-2	7	10%	9	13%
Pair pair pung pung kong 	4	5	7%	1	1%
Kong kong kong singles (Math Play*) 	4	4	5%	0	0%
Pung pair kong pair pung 	4	4	5%	0	0%
Kong pair pair pair kong (gate) 	2	3	4%	1	1%
Pair pair pair pair pair pair pair 	1	3	4%	2	3%

Sorted by this year's count in descending order.

*Math Play refers to multiplication hands in Evens and Odds.

Statistics (hand count includes variations [i.e., Evens #1 is counted as t

Analysis by Recurring and Prevalent Shapes

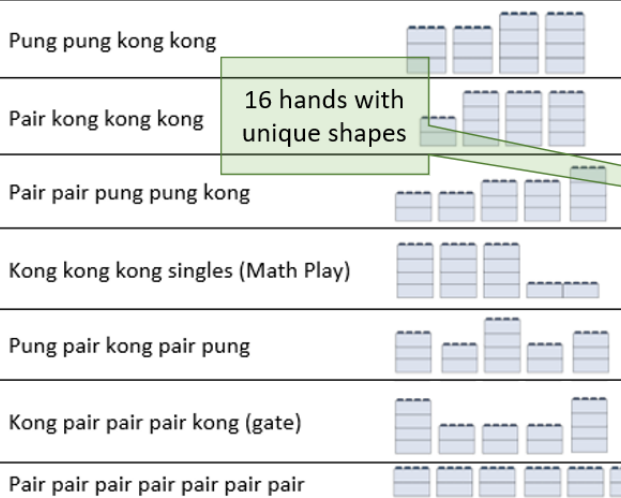


Sorted by this year's count in descending order.

	This Year	Last Year
Analysis by Recurring and Prevalent Shapes (sans Singles-Pairs category)		
Pung pung kong kong	10	11 15% 1 1%
Pair kong kong kong	-2	7 10% 9 13%
Pair pair pung pung kong	4	5 7% 1 1%
Kong kong kong singles (Math Play)	4	4 5% 0 0%
Pung pair kong pair pung	4	4 5% 0 0%
Kong pair pair pair kong (gate)	2	3 4% 1 1%
Pair pair pair pair pair pair pair	1	3 4% 2 3%
Kong pung kong pung	2	2 3% 0 0%
Pair kong NEWS kong	2	2 3% 0 0%
Pair kong pair pair kong	2	2 3% 0 0%
Pair pair pung kong pung	2	2 3% 0 0%
Pair pung pair pung kong	2	2 3% 0 0%
Pair quint pair quint	2	2 3% 0 0%
Pair single pair pair single pair pair pair	2	2 3% 0 0%
Pung pair pung pung pung	2	2 3% 0 0%
Pung pung pung pung pair	2	2 3% 0 0%
Quint kong quint	1	2 3% 1 1%
Kong kong kong singles	1	1 1% 0 0%
Kong pair pair pung pung	-2	1 1% 3 4%
Kong pung pung kong	0	1 1% 1 1%
Pair pair pair kong kong	1	1 1% 0 0%
Pair pair pair pair single single single single single	1	1 1% 0 0%
Pair pung kong pung pair (pyramid)	-5	1 1% 6 9%
Pair pung pair pung pair pair	1	1 1% 0 0%
Pair pung YYYY pung pair	0	1 1% 1 1%
Pair single pair pung pung pung	1	1 1% 0 0%
Pair YYYY kong kong	0	1 1% 1 1%
Pung kong kong pung	0	1 1% 1 1%
Pung kong pung kong	-8	1 1% 9 13%
Pung single single pung pung pung	0	1 1% 1 1%
Quint chow pung pung	1	1 1% 0 0%
Single pair kong single pair kong	1	1 1% 0 0%
YYYY pair single single YYYY	1	1 1% 0 0%

Statistics (hand count includes variations [i.e., Evens #1 is counted as t

Analysis by Recurring and Prevalent Shapes



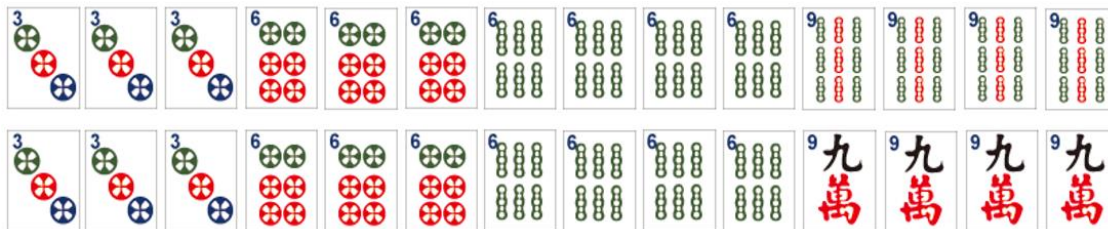
Sorted by this year's count in descending order.

	This Year	Last Year
Analysis by Recurring and Prevalent Shapes (sans Singles-Pairs category)		
Pung pung kong kong	10	11 15% 1 1%
Pair kong kong kong	-2	7 10% 9 13%
Pair pair pung pung kong	4	5 7% 1 1%
Kong kong kong singles (Math Play)	4	4 5% 0 0%
Pung pair kong pair pung	4	4 5% 0 0%
Kong pair pair pair kong (gate)	2	3 4% 1 1%
Pair pair pair pair pair pair pair	1	3 4% 2 3%
Kong pung kong pung	2	2 3% 0 0%
Pair kong NEWS kong	2	2 3% 0 0%
Pair kong pair pair kong	2	2 3% 0 0%
Pair pair pung kong pung	2	2 3% 0 0%
Pair pung pair pung kong	2	2 3% 0 0%
Pair quint pair quint	2	2 3% 0 0%
Pair single pair pair single pair pair pair	2	2 3% 0 0%
Pung pair pung pung pung	2	2 3% 0 0%
Pung pung pung pung pair	2	2 3% 0 0%
Quint kong quint	1	2 3% 1 1%
Kong kong kong singles	1	1 1% 0 0%
Kong pair pair pung pung	-2	1 1% 3 4%
Kong pung pung kong	0	1 1% 1 1%
Pair pair pair kong kong	1	1 1% 0 0%
Pair pair pair pair single single single single single	1	1 1% 0 0%
Pair pung kong pung pair (pyramid)	-5	1 1% 6 9%
Pair pung pair pung pair pair	1	1 1% 0 0%
Pair pung YYYY pung pair	0	1 1% 1 1%
Pair single pair pung pung pung	1	1 1% 0 0%
Pair YYYY kong kong	0	1 1% 1 1%
Pung kong kong pung	0	1 1% 1 1%
Pung kong pung kong	-8	1 1% 9 13%
Pung single single pung pung pung	0	1 1% 1 1%
Quint chow pung pung	1	1 1% 0 0%
Single pair kong single pair kong	1	1 1% 0 0%
YYYY pair single single YYYY	1	1 1% 0 0%

American mah jongg is a game of multiples. To optimize your winning potential, start every hand by targeting multiples. Keep tiles to support the multiple and focus on a category that uses most of your tiles to simplify and expedite hand development.

Keep an eye open for opportunities to play hands with varying shapes using two pungs and two kongs. These are called **Hands of Least Resistance** (mark these with a yellow highlighter or red dot) because you can use any number of jokers in every block. They are easy, plentiful, and relatively indestructible.

369 #1



There are also **Hands of Slight Resistance** (mark these with a grey highlighter or red dot). These hands consist of one pair with big multiples. If you have the pair in your hand, it upgrades to a Hand of Least Resistance.

Odds #8



Hands of Least Resistance	Count
Pung pung kong kong	11
Kong pung kong pung	2
Kong pung pung kong	1
Pung kong kong pung	1
Pung kong pung kong	1
Total	16

Hands of Slight Resistance	Count
Pair kong kong kong	7
Pung pair pung pung pung	2
Pung pung pung pung pair	2
Total	11

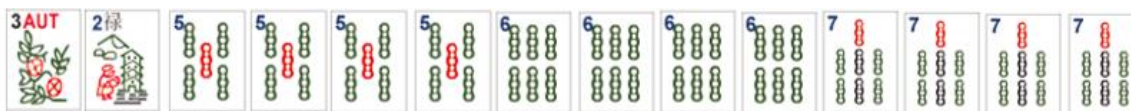
If you ever feel overwhelmed, frustrated, or discouraged with the game, consider playing these hands for a short time to relieve stress, build your confidence, and improve your resilience.

The *American Mah Jongg Skills and Strategies Matrix* contains links to the latest video demonstrations of how to play with these shapes in mind (Appendix B). Consider using [removable highlighters](#) (Highlighter Tabs-A) for quick reference when playing the game.

Patterns

The pattern of a hand can be described by its components. For example:

Consecutive Run #3



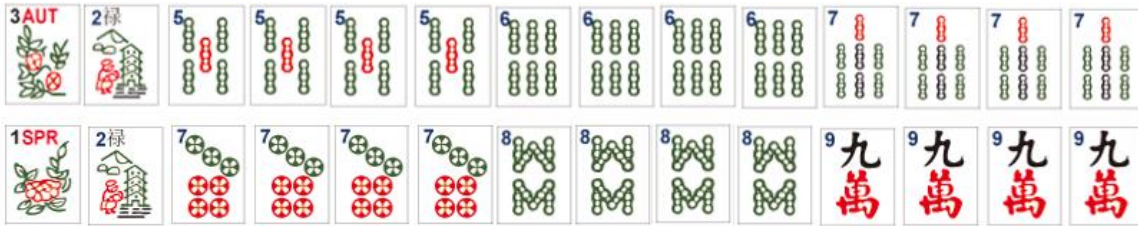
The shape of this hand is pair triple-kong and the pattern is pair of Flowers with a sequence of three

This year, there are 23 unusual patterns so check your hand before committing to your first exposure!

Carry Over Hands

Three more hands to choose from and only four were carried over.

Consecutive Run #3



Winds-Dragons #1



Pairs

There is an increase in the number of hands with pairs (+4; 64%). There is also a slight decrease in the number of hands with singles (-2; 19%). When playing an exposable hand with singles and pairs, secure them before committing that hand with more than one exposure.

Suits

There is a slight increase in the number of hands in mixed suits (+3; 70%). Don't be distracted by one suit (26%). Gather all tiles that can be used in the category regardless of suit.

Flowers

There is a significant number of hands with Flowers (42%). Passing Flowers will always be risky so make it a rarity. Survey exposures and discards to count the cost of discarding them in the end game.

Back of the Card

There are many changes on the back of the card that may cause confusion.

Left Panel

The Tiles

- They removed "Wh White (soap, R Red, and G Green."

Preliminaries

- They added. "When East's wall has been depleted, wall to the left is pushed out."

The Charleston

- They rephrased tiles that can be passed to “Any three tiles may be passed, with the exception of jokers.”
- First Charleston – added that the Charleston may be stopped only after the first left and that the courtesy pass still applies.
- They rephrased tiles that can be passed to “Blind pass of 1,2, or 3 tile permitted on first left and/or last right” and they removed “without looking at them” but this still applies.

Pick-and-Discard

- The game begins with East discarding their 14th tile. Players to the right of East pick and discard in turn. Jokers may be discarded and named, “joker,” “same,” or name of the previous discard.
- When it is the player’s turn, jokers may be replaced in any [valid] exposure whether picked from the wall or in the player’s hand.
- A player’s turn begins when they either pick or claim a tile [and complete an exposure].

Claiming a Discard (reordered)

- They removed, “no picking or looking ahead” but this rule still applies.
- They moved this from the middle panel, “A player must verbalize their call, alerting the other player that a claim is being made. The caller may say “call,” “take.” “I want that,” etc.
- If there is a simultaneous call for exposure, the player next in turn gets preference (#4).

Middle Panel

Misnamed Tile (reordered)

Mah Jongg In Error

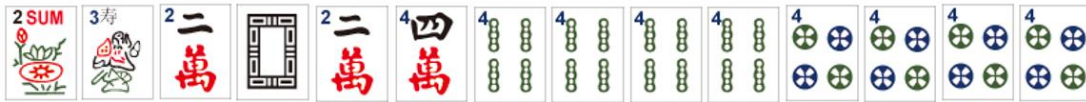
- They removed, “If a player declares mah jongg in error and exposes part or all of the hand and all other hands are intact, game continues, but declarer’s hand is “dead.” The same penalty applies for calling a discard and making an incorrect exposure. Dead hand discontinues playing and does not pick or discard, but must pay any subsequent winner the full value of the hand.”
- This was moved to the first line, “If all or part of the hand is exposed in error, declarer’s hand is “dead.”
- If there are three “dead” hands which did not result from mah jongg in error, then the surviving player throws in their hand and nobody gets paid (#3).

Front of the Card

Problematic Parentheticals

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

Year #3



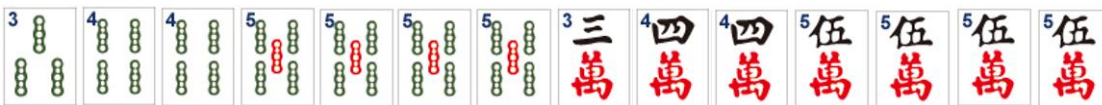
The limitation in this hand is that the two off-suit kongs must be the same number.
The flexibility in this hand is that both kongs must be either 2s or 4s.

Quints #3



The hand must use the same two consecutive numbers in two suits.

Consecutive Run #4



The hand must use the same three consecutive numbers in two suits.

369 #2



The limitation in this hand is that the two off-suit pungs must be the same number.
The flexibility in this hand is that both pungs must be either 3s, 6s, or 9s.

369 #4



The limitation in this hand is that the two pungs must be the same number.
The flexibility in this hand is that both pungs must be either 3s, 6s, or 9s.

369 #5



The 3s and 9s are kongs, the pairs are 6s in each suit.

369 #6



Two suits with numbered tiles and any opposite Dragons.
These are also known as “off-suit” Dragons.

Singles - Pairs #5

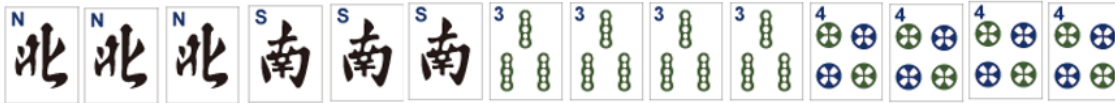


Three suits with numbered tiles and opposite Dragons.

Other Visual Issues

Blocks of Winds are shown with no spaces accommodate two options on one line.

Winds-Dragons #3



Winds-Dragons #5



Fatal Errors

This year, there are two fatal errors on this year’s card:

A pung of Flowers
because hands use pairs, kongs, or quints.



A quint of Dragons
because hands do not use Dragons.



Top 3 Mistakes

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

Tips for a Smooth Transition

1. 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 using 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, then gather tiles that can be used in your categories. 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 (Appendix B)
 - Category Modeling – Create every hand on the card including flexibility and limitations in the parentheses.
 - 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!
 - 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.
 - 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.
 - 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!
 - 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!
3. Connect with others and play often!
 - Join Facebook groups to get the latest news (Appendix C)
 - Consider working with a reputable instructor (Appendix A)
 - Play with peers to relax and have fun and play with advanced players to learn by observation.
 - Play online. I recommend I Love Mahj because they have a fantastic exercise room and intelligent robots (use MAHJLIFE for an extra week in your trial. I like Mahjong Time because the interface is realistic; 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.
 - Use the Mahj Life as your go-to source!
 - Mahj Life Wiki-Digital Repository with rules, etiquette, strategies, and more (Appendix A)
 - Recurring Skill Builder Videos (Mondays 9:00 AM Eastern) and weekly Let's Play Livestreams
 - ☉ Nitty-Gritty BASICS; designed for beginners (Mondays 1:00 PM Eastern)
 - ☉ Nitty-Gritty PRIMETIME; designed for experienced players (Mondays 4:00 PM Eastern)
 - ☉ Simply Social; gameplay with commentary and casual conversation (Fridays 6:00 PM Eastern)



APPENDICES

Appendix A: Mahj Life Wiki, a FREE and Searchable On-Demand Resource

On the Mahj Life website you will find a mah jongg wiki which is a free and searchable on-demand collection of mah jongg-related articles. Each article is categorized by subject matter using keyword tags. To find an article, enter either keywords or a specific article number in the search box. After reading the article, you can find tags in that page's footer that you can click to take you to an index of related articles.



Mah jongg terms used in this book and in my YouTube videos can be found in the wiki glossary.

If you have a situation that is not covered by a wiki article, submit ideas or content using the form found on the "Get Involved" page.

Appendix B: YouTube Videos

If you are new to American mah jongg, please visit the Mahj Life YouTube channel where you can watch American mah jongg video lessons and livestreams . If you have not already done so, subscribe and click the little grey bell to get channel notifications!



For more fundamentals and skill building exercises, look for links under the download section in the Mahj Life Wiki articles "American Mah Jongg" (article 162) and "Direct Links to NMJL YouTube Videos."

To learn even more essential skills and strategies, review the Mahj Life YouTube channel's video posting and livestream schedule. There you can find links to videos and wiki articles on various topics, to access this schedule, go to the Mahj Life wiki article "American Mah Jongg Skills and Strategies Matrix" (Article 210).



You can leave comments in the comment section below each Mahj Life YouTube video if you have any questions. You can also post questions on the Michele Frizzell #MAHJLIFE Facebook group or send me an email to michele@mahjlife.com.

Appendix C: Connect and Engage

Please subscribe to the Mahj Life Email list for important announcements and to receive content updates.



Join the following Facebook Groups to join online conversations at Michele Frizzell #MAHJLIFE, Mahjong Community, and Mah Jongg, That's It!

Find a mentor through the Mahj Life Instructor Guild directory on the Mahj Life Website.

About the Author



Michele Frizzell is an avid mah jongg 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 National Mah Jongg 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. As a result, she decided to become a YouTube creator to share her lessons and skill builder drills online. As of this publication date, her YouTube channel has grown to over 32,800 subscribers, and she has published more than 2,600 videos.

Michele has two grown sons and she lives in north Georgia with her husband, David, and their poodle, Riley.

May all your picks be keepers,

Michele Frizzell

Mah Jongg Instructor, Author, Speaker



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#MAHJLIFE

“

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

”

Michele Frizzell

