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# AMERICAN MAH JONGG

# Primer

VOL. 1

Everything you need to know  
to transition smoothly

Michele Frizzell



# AMERICAN MAH JONGG PRIMER

Companion Card Analysis 2025

Everything you need to know  
to play with confidence

MICHELE FRIZZELL



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

## AMERICAN MAH JONGG PRIMER COMPANION CARD ANALYSIS 2025

### PUBLISHING HISTORY

First Edition 20250422.1

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## Change Log

[illegible]

## Introduction

The National Mah Jongg League releases its annual card of valid hands for American Mah Jongg players each April. While the core rules of the game remain consistent (see Appendix A), the way hands are described—through colors, letters, numbers, and format—has stayed the same. The categories of hands have also remained largely unchanged over the years. The key difference each year lies in the shapes and patterns of the hands themselves.

This companion aims to summarize the differences between the old and new card, offering insights into the nuances to help you navigate the transition smoothly.

### What do the stats mean?

Numbers in parentheses throughout this guide give you valuable insights into yearly changes. A standalone number represents the total number of hands in a given category or attribute. A **+number** indicates an increase from last year, while a **-number** reflects a decrease. Percentages show the proportion of hands that share a specific category or attribute, with values over **9%** highlighting predominant patterns or key trends to watch.

Smaller shifts such as **+1/-1** indicate nominal changes, while **+3/-3** reflect more significant changes. Monitoring these shifts allows you to better evaluate hand potential, recognize favorable patterns, and refine your strategies to optimize your winning potential.

### What's New for 2025?

The 2025 card introduces a greater challenge than last year's version, with several key changes that increase the overall complexity. There are more unique and new hand shapes, which means players will need to reference the card more frequently, especially during the transition period. While there are slightly fewer easier hands, the number of moderately difficult hands has grown significantly, shifting the balance toward more challenging and strategic gameplay. These changes require players to make more thoughtful decisions in hand selection, demonstrate greater adaptability in hand development, and be more defensively aware, making this year's card more dynamic and demanding.

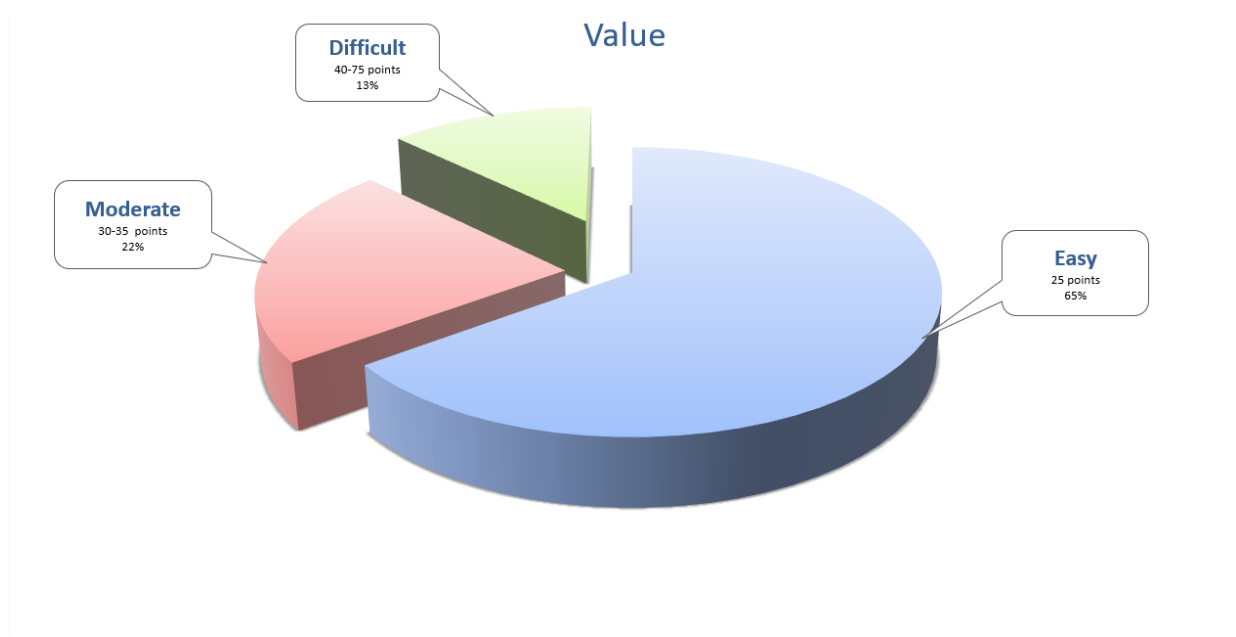
### Want to Learn More?

For a video presentation where you can follow along with the details, check out the link here: [VIDEO LINK TBD]. If you're new to the game, be sure to visit the American mah jongg wiki article (Appendix B) to learn how to play.



## 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	46	65%	49	67%
30	Open		2	8	11%	6	8%
30	Concealed		4	8	11%	4	5%
50	Singles & Pairs		-1	5	7%	6	8%
40	Quints		1	2	3%	1	1%
45	Quints		-2	1	1%	3	4%
75	Singles & Pairs		0	1	1%	1	1%
Total				71		73	

Sorted by this year's count in descending order.

The 2025 NMJL card is more challenging than the 2024 version. While easy hands have decreased to 46 (-3), moderate hands have increased to 16 (+6). Difficult hands with singles and pairs rise to 67 (+5). Notably, the card introduces 15 new hand shapes (+7) and 28 unique hand shapes (+12), adding complexity and requiring greater adaptability leading to a longer learning curve. Also, there were 35 point concealed hands (2) last year.

### Valuation Oversights

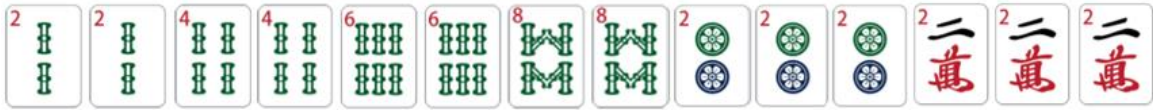
Four out of the 71 hands have been undervalued, which could impact decision-making and scoring outcomes. This oversight may lead to misjudging the difficulty or potential of certain hands, affecting overall gameplay and strategy. Players will need to adjust their approach to account for these discrepancies to remain competitive.

The two concealed hands below with four pairs and two pungs seem to be undervalued at 30 points, given their level of difficulty. As a result, they deserve a higher point value than they have been assigned. For context, hands with four pairs and two pungs on last year's card were valued at 35 points, reflecting their complexity.

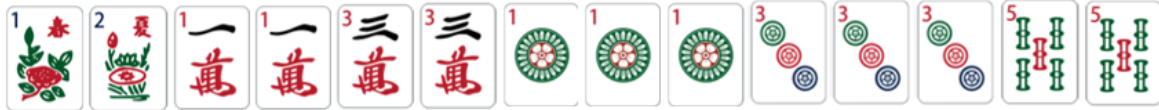




Evens #8



Odds #9



These are 30-point concealed hand with four pairs and two pungs.

Historically, these hands have a 35-point value.

Additionally, the two exposable hands below have three pairs and two kongs. The first has a 30-point value, while the other has a 25-point value and it has the same composition.

Odds #8



369 #5



This hand should be valued at 30 points

A final questionable valuation is the chow (e.g., sequence of three) dragon hand in Winds-Dragons. With two pairs, a chow, and three dragons—given the rise in dragon hands—it presents a unique challenge. Given its structure and difficulty, it deserves 30 points, being just two tiles away from a comparable 30-point hand.

Winds-Dragons #2



Given its structure, this hand warrants a 30-point valuation.

Winds-Dragons #7



The hand is an exposable hand valued at 30 points but it was on last year's card as Year #4 concealed!

Be cautious with undervalued hands as the game progresses. A promising hand can become nearly impossible if needed tiles are discarded or claimed by opponents. Stay alert to the flow of the game, assess tile availability, and be ready to switch hands if needed. Flexibility and awareness will help you avoid getting stuck with an unwinnable and undervalued hand.



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## 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. Out of all the shapes on the card this year, the vast majority use big multiples (i.e., pung, kong, quint; 92%, +3%).

Statistics (hand count includes variations [i.e., Evens #1 is counted as two hands]; >3%)		This Year	
Analysis by Recurring and Prevalent Shapes		Count	Card %
Pung kong pung kong		9	13%
Pair kong kong kong		5	7%
Pair pung kong pung pair		4	6%
Kong pung kong pung		3	4%
Pair pair pair pair pair pair pair		3	4%
Pung pung kong pair pair		3	4%

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		Analysis by Recurring and Prevalent Shapes (sans Singles-Pairs category)		HOLR/HOSR				
Pung kong pung kong		Pung kong pung kong	HOLR	9	9	13%	0	0%
Pair kong kong kong		Pair kong kong kong	HOSR	5	5	7%	0	0%
Pair pung kong pung pair		Pair pung kong pung pair (pyramid)		4	4	6%	0	0%
Kong pung kong pung		Kong pung kong pung	HOLR	3	3	4%	0	0%
Pair pair pair pair pair pair pair		Pair pair pair pair pair pair pair		3	3	4%	0	0%
Pung pung kong pair pair		Pung pung kong pair pair		3	3	4%	0	0%
Pung single single single kong kong		Pung single single single kong kong		3	3	4%	0	0%
7 shapes with two hands each		Kong kong pair kong	HOSR	2	2	3%	0	0%
		Kong kong pair kong		2	2	3%	0	0%
		Kong pung pung kong	HOLR	2	2	3%	0	0%
		Kong single pair pung kong (ascending)		2	2	3%	0	0%
		Pair pung NEWS pung pair		2	2	3%	0	0%
		Pair pung pung pung pung	HOSR	2	2	3%	0	0%
		Pung pair pair pung kong		2	2	3%	0	0%
Pair pung kong pung pair		Five-tile sequence matching kong kong		1	1	1%	0	0%
Kong four singles pung pung		Kong four singles pung pung		1	1	1%	0	0%
Kong kong kong singles		Kong kong kong singles		1	1	1%	0	0%
Kong pair pair pair kong (gate)		Kong pair pair pair kong (gate)		1	1	1%	0	0%
Kong pair pung pung pair		Kong pair pung pung pair		1	1	1%	0	0%
Kong pung NEWS pung		Kong pung NEWS pung		1	1	1%	0	0%
Kong YYYY pung pung		Kong YYYY pung pung		1	1	1%	0	0%
Pair chow pair pung kong		Pair chow pair pung kong		1	1	1%	0	0%
Pair kong single kong single pair		Pair kong single kong single pair		1	1	1%	0	0%
Pair pair pair kong kong		Pair pair pair kong kong		1	1	1%	0	0%
Pair pair pair pair pung pung		Pair pair pair pair pung pung		1	1	1%	0	0%
Pair Pair Pair pung pung pair		Pair Pair Pair pung pung pair		1	1	1%	0	0%
Pair pair pung kong pung		Pair pair pung kong pung		1	1	1%	0	0%
Pair pair pung pung kong		Pair pair pung pung kong		1	1	1%	0	0%
Pair pung kong quint (ascending)		Pair pung kong quint (ascending)		1	1	1%	0	0%
Pair pung pair pung kong		Pair pung pair pung kong		1	1	1%	0	0%
Pair pung single pung single pung single		Pair pung single pung single pung single		1	1	1%	0	0%
Pair pung pung pair YYYY		Pair pung pung pair YYYY		1	1	1%	0	0%
Pair quint pair quint		Pair quint pair quint		1	1	1%	0	0%
Pair single pair pung single pair pung		Pair single pair pung single pair pung		1	1	1%	0	0%
Pair single single pair pair pair pair pair		Pair single single pair pair pair pair pair		1	1	1%	0	0%
Pair single single single single pair single single single pair		Pair single single single single pair single single single pair		1	1	1%	0	0%
Pair YYYY YYYY YYYY		Pair YYYY YYYY YYYY		1	1	1%	0	0%
Pung chow pung pung		Pung chow pung pung		1	1	1%	0	0%
Pung kong pung pair pair		Pung kong pung pair pair		1	1	1%	0	0%
Pung kong single single single kong		Pung kong single single single kong		1	1	1%	0	0%
Quint kong quint		Quint kong quint		1	1	1%	0	0%
YYYY pung pung kong		YYYY pung pung kong		1	1	1%	0	0%

Sorted by this year's count in descending order

Sorted by this year's count in descending order.



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Statistics (hand count includes variations [i.e., Evens #1 is count])

### Analysis by Recurring and Prevalent Shapes

Pung kong pung kong	
Pair kong kong kong	
Pair pung kong pung pair	
Kong pung kong pung	
Pair pair pair pair pair pair pair	
Pung pung kong pair pair	
Pung single single single kong kong	

Sorted by this year's count in descending order.

Pung single single single kong kong		3	4%
-------------------------------------	--	---	----

Sorted by this year's count in descending order.

Analysis by Recurring and Prevalent Shapes (sans Singles-Pairs category)	HOLR/HOSR	This Year	Last Year
Pung kong pung kong	HOLR	9	13%
Pair kong kong kong	HOSR	5	7%
Pair pung kong pung pair (pyramid)		4	6%
Kong pung kong pung	HOLR	3	4%
Pair pair pair pair pair pair pair		3	4%
Pung pung kong pair pair		3	4%
Pung single single single kong kong		3	4%
Kong kong pair kong	HOSR	2	3%
Kong kong pair kong		2	3%
Kong pung pung kong	HOLR	2	3%
Kong single pair pung kong (ascending)		2	3%
Pair pung NEWS pung pair		2	3%
Pair pung pung pung pung	HOSR	2	3%
Pung pair pair pung kong		2	3%
Five-tile sequence matching kong kong		1	1%
Kong four singles pung pung		1	1%
Kong kong kong singles		1	1%
Kong pair pair pair kong (gate)		1	1%
Kong pair pung pung pair		1	1%
Kong pung NEWS pung		1	1%
Kong YYYY pung pung		1	1%
Pair chow pair pung kong		1	1%
Pair kong single kong single pair		1	1%
Pair pair pair kong kong		1	1%
Pair pair pair pair pair pung pung		1	1%
Pair Pair Pair pair pair pair pair		1	1%
Pair pair pung kong pung		1	1%
Pair pair pung pung kong		1	1%
Pair pung kong quint (ascending)		1	1%
Pair pung pair pung kong		1	1%
Pair pung single pung single pair		1	1%
Pair pung pung pair YYYY		1	1%
Pair quint pair quint		1	1%
Pair single pair pung single pair pair		1	1%
Pair single single pair pair pair pair pair		1	1%
Pair single single single pair single single single pair		1	1%
Pair YYYY YYYY YYYY		1	1%
Pung chow pung pung		1	1%
Pung kong pung pair pair		1	1%
Pung kong single single single kong		1	1%
Quint kong quint		1	1%
YYYY pung pung kong		1	1%

The increase in unique hand shapes (+12) requires mastering new patterns, adjusting strategies, and staying flexible. This adds complexity, heightening the challenge and making the game more dynamic and exciting.

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** ([Article 215](#); mark these with a yellow highlighter or red dot) because you can use any number of jokers in every block. They are easy, plentiful (14; -2), and relatively indestructible.



### Year #2



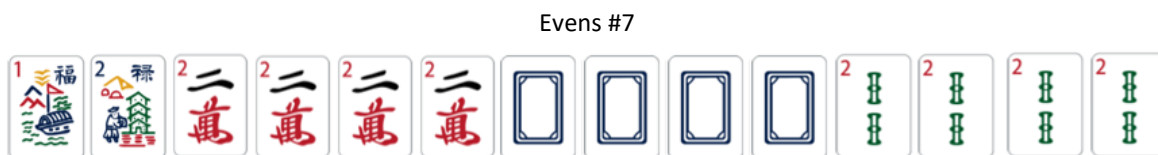
Hands of Least Resistance	Count
Pung kong pung kong	9
Kong pung kong pung	3
Kong pung pung kong	2
<b>Total (-2)</b>	<b>14</b>

### Hands:

Year #2  
 Evens #1 (2)  
 Consecutive Run #2 (2)  
 Odds #2 (2), #3 (2)  
 Winds-Dragons #1 (2)  
 369 #1 (2), #3



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. With the flexibility to use any number of jokers when the pair is secured, these hands are relatively indestructible (9; -4).



Hands of Slight Resistance	Count
Pair kong kong kong	5
Kong kong pair kong	2
Pair pung pung pung pung	2
<b>Total (-4)</b>	<b>9</b>

**Hands:**  
 Year #4  
 Evens #2 (2), #7  
 Any Like Numbers #3  
 Consecutive Run #3 (2)  
 369 #2 (2)

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

The *American Mah Jongg Skills and Strategies Matrix* ([Article 210](#)) 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.

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.

Hands with more than one block with singles and pairs are more difficult so they take longer to develop. There is an increase in the number of hands with pairs (64%, +4). There is also a slight decrease in the number of hands with singles (19%, -2). When playing a concealed hand with singles and pairs, keep an eye open for your tiles being discarded or exposed and if your hand is impacted, consider switching to an exposable hand. When playing an exposable hand with singles and pairs, secure them before committing that hand with more than one exposure.

Working with a wide variety of shapes will be a challenge for players of all skill levels. There are 15 hands with new shapes (+7) and 28 hands with unique shapes (+12), so always check the card before claiming your first discard and before declaring mah jongg.

## Patterns

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

369 #2-2

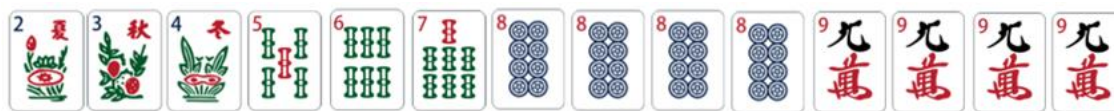


The **shape** of this hand is pair triple-kong and the **pattern** is flowers with mixed suits kongs.



There are two chow hands (e.g., three tiles in a sequence in one suit; Consecutive Run #4, Winds-Dragons #2). There is also a block with four consecutive tiles (Consecutive Run #7). Since these blocks must remain concealed until ready to win, be cautious when passing runs in one suit during the Charleston. Additionally, other hands include blocks with singles (e.g., Evens 4, Any Like Numbers #1, 369 #4), so mitigate risk in passes not passing all year tiles, all even tiles, or all 369 tiles together.

Consecutive Run #4

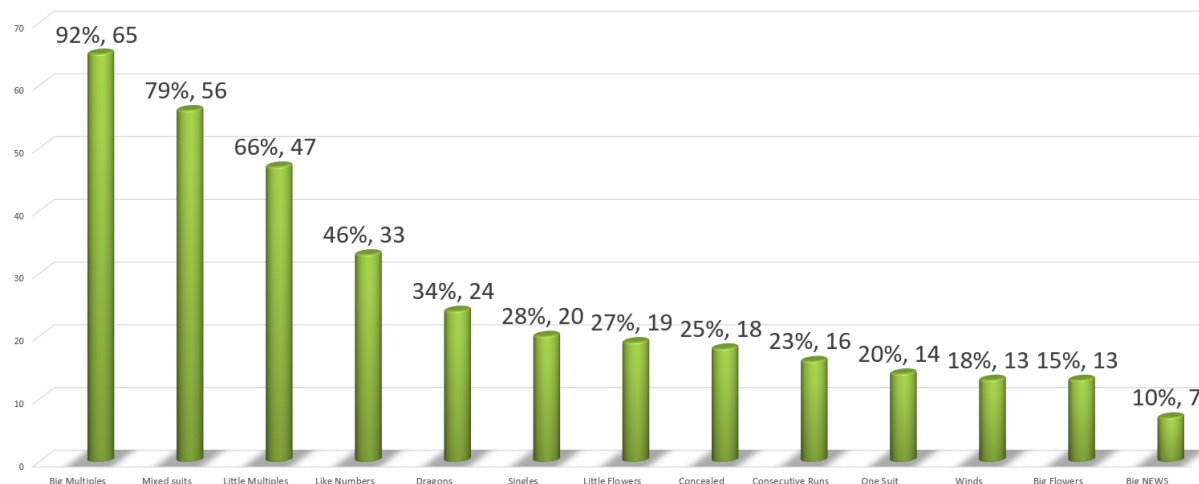


The shape of this hand is pung chow kong kong and the pattern is flowers with a sequence of five in mixed suits.

There is a slight increase in the number of hands in mixed suits (79%, +5). Don't be distracted by one suit (20%). Gather all tiles that can be used in the category regardless of suit.

Recognizing the shapes and patterns of hands extends to understanding key attributes which determine a hand's flexibility, difficulty, and scoring potential, allowing you to make more informed strategic decisions.

## Attributes



Statistics (hand count includes variations [i.e., Evens #1 is counted as two hands]; >9%)		This Year		Last Year	
Analysis by Attribute	Delta	Count	Card %	Count	Card %
Big Multiples (e.g., pung, kong, quint)	3	65	92%	62	85%
Mixed Suits (including Dragons)	5	56	79%	51	70%
Little Multiples (e.g., pairs)	0	47	66%	47	64%
Like Numbers	1	33	46%	32	44%
Dragons	5	24	34%	19	26%
Singles	6	20	28%	14	19%
Little Flowers (e.g., pairs)	-2	19	27%	21	29%
Concealed	5	18	25%	13	18%
Consecutive Runs	-6	16	23%	22	30%
One Suit	-5	14	20%	19	26%
Winds	0	13	18%	13	18%
Big Flowers (e.g., pungs, kongs)	1	13	18%	10	14%
Big NEWS (e.g., multiples)	0	7	10%	7	10%

Sorted by this year's count in descending order.



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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 (76%, -8), target them, and gather supporting tiles to optimize quick hand development.

There is a slight increase in the number of hands with pairs (66%, +2) and there is a significant increase in the number of hands with singles (28%, +6,). 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 (20%, -5), most use mixed suits with or without Dragons (79%, +5). 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 no change in the number of hands that use them (42%). However, 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.

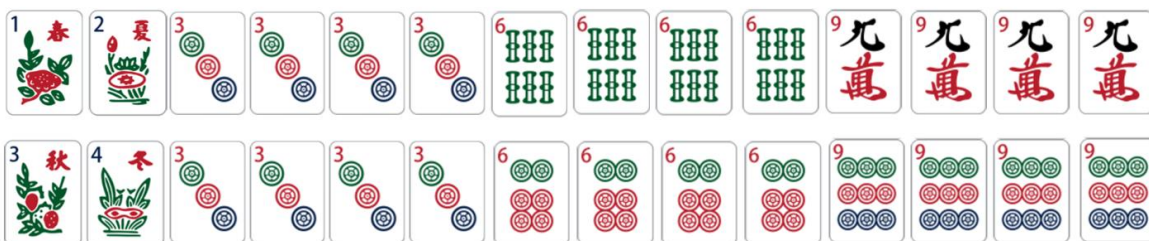
### Carry Over Hands

There are two hands with two options each that migrated to the new card.

Winds-Dragons #1



369 #2

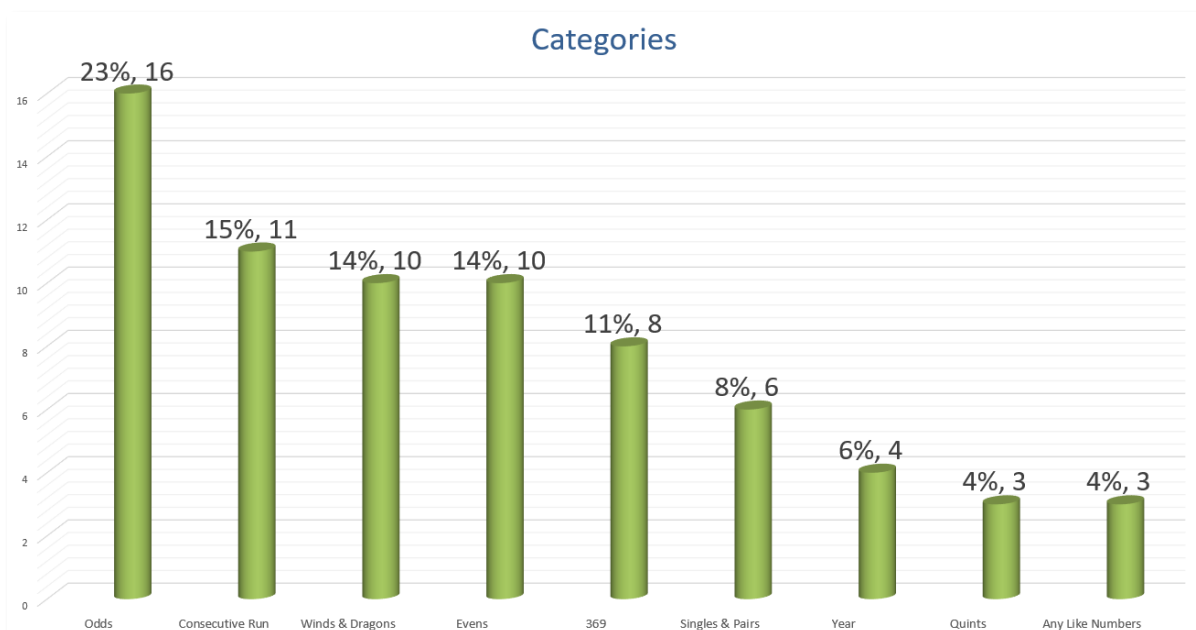


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## Categories



Statistics (hand count includes variations [i.e., Evens #1 is counted as two hands]; >3%)		This Year		Last Year	
Analysis by Category	Delta	Count	Card %	Count	Card %
Odds	3	16	23%	13	18%
Consecutive Run	0	11	15%	11	15%
Winds & Dragons	0	10	14%	10	14%
Evens	1	10	14%	9	12%
369	-1	8	11%	9	12%
Singles & Pairs	-1	6	8%	7	10%
Year	0	4	6%	4	5%
Quints	-1	3	4%	4	4%
Like Numbers	0	3	4%	3	4%
<b>Total</b>		<b>71</b>		<b>73</b>	

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 flowers, 2s, 5s, and dragons. This is the decade of deuces and, I predict, that this will be the Year of the Dragon. Avoid passing these tiles during the Charleston and count the cost of discarding them in the end game.
- Gather tiles to support the strength of the hand regardless of suit.
- Choose a category based on the strength of your hand. If you are between options, choose the option where there are no gaps (e.g., gathering tiles for 369 but have no 3s) and few weaknesses (e.g., a single that needs to be a pung, a pair that needs to be a kong).



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

Year	
<b>Powers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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).</li> </ul>	<b>Pitfalls</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hands use only two tiles.</li> <li>Anyone playing an Evens hand can impact the availability of 2s. Likewise</li> <li>Anyone playing an Odds hand can impact the availability of 5s.</li> </ul>
<b>Advice</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider this category if you have a strong representation of the year's tiles.</li> <li>Passing Year tiles is risky because of Singles-Pairs #6 so be mindful when passing 2s and 5s.</li> <li>Watch for white dragons in discards and exposures.</li> <li>There is ONE new shapes in this category (#3). Confirm the pattern on the card before committing exposures.</li> </ul>	
Evens	
<b>Powers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If you get odd tiles, you may have options in Consecutive Run.</li> <li>Uses two efficient tiles, 4s and 6s.</li> </ul>	<b>Pitfalls</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Since there are gaps between four even numbered tiles, switchability is limited.</li> <li>Fewer tiles might be available for this category if they are also needed for Year hands.</li> </ul>
<b>Advice</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider this category if you have gaps in your consecutive tiles or more multiples with even tiles than odd tiles.</li> <li>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.</li> <li>There are THREE new shapes in this category (#4, #5, #6). Confirm the pattern on the card before committing exposures.</li> </ul>	
Any Like Numbers	
<b>Powers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Depending on which hand you are focused on, you may be able to switch to another category containing hands with like numbers.</li> </ul>	<b>Pitfalls</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hands require one number in mixed suits.</li> <li>If you play Any Like Numbers #1, anyone playing a big dragon hand can limit the availability of single dragons.</li> </ul>
<b>Advice</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There are three hands to choose from but don't be deceived – there are like numbers in every category.</li> <li>Passing like numbers will be almost as risky as passing a pair.</li> <li>There are THREE new shapes in this category. Confirm the pattern on the card before committing exposures. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Any Like Numbers #1 has single dragons. Watch for dragons on the table!</li> <li>Any Like Numbers #2 has a concealed split-kong (e.g., two identical pairs). Jokers can be used in the pungs of like numbers or the kong of flowers.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	



<b>Quints</b>		
<b>Powers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of big multiples (e.g., pung, kong, quint) so jokers can be extremely helpful.</li> </ul>		<b>Pitfalls</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pairs of flowers are in two hands.</li> </ul>
<b>Advice</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider this category if you have big multiples and at least one joker but the more the better. Quints #1 requires only ONE joker!</li> <li>• If you play a quint with a pair of flowers, limit yourself to one exposed quint until you have the pair in your hand.</li> </ul>		
<b>Consecutive Run</b>		
<b>Powers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of number tiles 1-9 in three suits with flexibility of a 5-number range.</li> </ul>		<b>Pitfalls</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of 2s and 5s.</li> </ul>
<b>Advice</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• There are more consecutive run hands than any other type of hand if you include the SEVEN hands in other categories that contain runs of consecutive numbers so if you are in between categories with equal potential, choose Consecutive Run.</li> <li>• Consecutive Run #4 has a concealed chow (e.g., three in a sequence). Make sure you have the chow intact before you claim a discard for the pung of flowers because the only switchable hands are Evens #5, Odds #5, Winds-Dragons #3, and 369 #4.</li> <li>• Consider starting your range so that your hand won't be affected by anyone playing a Year hand.</li> <li>• There are THREE new shapes in this category (#4, #6, #7). Confirm the pattern on the card before committing exposures.</li> </ul>		
<b>Odds</b>		
<b>Powers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are three hands that use five numbers.</li> </ul>		<b>Pitfalls</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Since there are gaps between five odd numbered tiles, switchability is limited.</li> </ul>
<b>Advice</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider this category if you have weak runs (i.e., gaps, singles). There is a significant increase in the number of hands, but they are difficult because of the number of singles and pairs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Odds #9 is undervalued with four pairs.</li> <li>◦ Odds # 7 will be easy to read with exposed pungs of 3s or 7s, confirm by looking for other like numbers visible.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• There are TWO hands with new shapes in this category (#5, #9). Confirm the pattern on the card before committing exposures.</li> </ul>		



Winds-Dragons	
<b>Powers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There are two has of least resistance.</li> </ul>	<b>Pitfalls</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hands are not as switchable because there are only four hands outside the category using Winds.</li> </ul>
<b>Advice</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider this category if you have a strong representation of winds or dragons in your dealt hand.</li> <li>If you are not playing in this category, pass winds and dragons separately and one at a time. There are far more hands containing dragons (24) than winds (13), so consider passing winds before passing dragons.</li> <li>Monitor the number of winds being discarded in the begin-game. If too many being discarded and your hand has number tiles, consider switching to another category. The switch sweet spot is 70 tiles remaining in the wall so you have time to gather tiles to develop a different hand.</li> <li>Evens and Odds with winds are still there! In Winds-Dragons #4, you'll need kongs of North and South with odd like numbers, while Winds-Dragons #5 calls for kongs of East and West with even like numbers—these combinations are fixed and cannot be swapped. For example, you cannot use North and South with evens.</li> <li>Winds-Dragons #7 has a year block! Check the table for year tiles and if they are out of play, consider switching to Winds-Dragons #1-1.</li> <li>There are FIVE new shapes in this category (#2, #3, #4, #7). Confirm the pattern on the card before committing exposures.</li> </ul>	
369	
<b>Powers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hands use like numbers.</li> </ul>	<b>Pitfalls</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Since there are gaps between the only three numbered tiles, switchability is extremely limited.</li> </ul>
<b>Advice</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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.</li> <li>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.</li> <li>There are TWO new shapes in this category (#4, #6). Confirm the pattern on the card before committing exposures.</li> </ul>	
Singles and Pairs	
<b>Powers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The hands have the highest values on the card.</li> <li>The hands are all concealed so you can switch to a related category if your tiles become unavailable.</li> </ul>	<b>Pitfalls</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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.</li> </ul>
<b>Advice</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider this category if you have no jokers and few big multiples from the dealt hand.</li> <li>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).</li> <li>The big year hand will be very difficult this year so try to win this one early because everyone will be adjusting to this year's nuances and strategies.</li> <li>There is ONE new shape in this category (#2) so keep an eye on discards that affect your ability to gather singles and pairs.</li> </ul>	



## Problematic Parentheticals

Some hands on the card include text in parentheses that could lead to mistakes or disputes at the table. The shapes and patterns are represented by colors, letters, and numbers. The text in parentheses offers both flexibility and limitations. In cases of conflict, the text in parentheses takes priority. The following are visual examples for clarification to help prevent confusion.

### Misprints

#### Evens #4



This hand requires all three suits.

*In the early publication of the small card, this hand is incorrectly shown as one color/one suit.*

#### Consecutive Run #3-2



This hand can be made with one or three suits.

*In the early publication of the large card, this hand is incorrectly shown as one color/one suit.*

### Complex Patterns

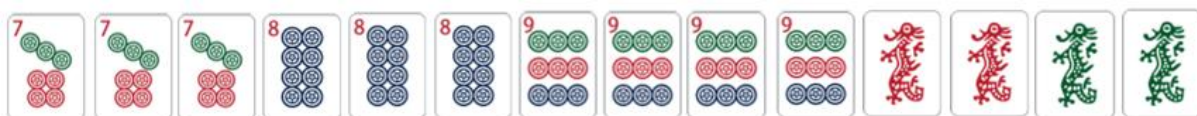
#### Any Like Numbers #2



This hand uses a concealed split-kong (e.g., two identical pairs).

Jokers can be used for the flowers and pungs, but not the pairs.

#### Consecutive Run #6



This hand requires three consecutive tiles in a pung pung kong shape in one suit with pairs of dragons representing the other two suits (see Opposite Dragons on page 19).

#### Consecutive Run #7



This hand has a 5-number sequence with a floating pair (e.g., pair any number).

The like kongs must be the same number as the pair in the 5-number sequence.



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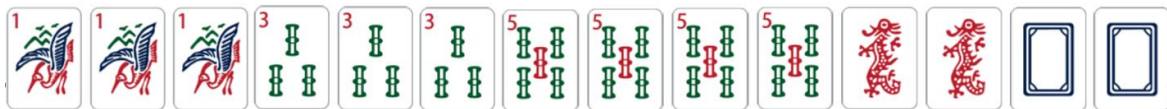
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### Consecutive Run #8



This hand requires a pair of flowers with single pair pung in two identical three-number sequences.

### Odds #6



This hand requires all three suits.

Number tiles in one suit with pairs of dragons representing the other two suits.

This is known as opposite dragons (see Opposite Dragons).

### Winds – Dragons #2

This hand must use a concealed chow with all three dragons.



The chow can be any suit and the dragons can be in any combination.

### Like Pairs/Pungs/Kongs

#### Year #1



The limitation of this hand is that the two off-suit pungs must be the same number.

The flexibility lies in the fact that both kongs must be either 2s or 5s, but they cannot be a mix of both.

This concept applies to any hand that includes “like pairs,” “like pungs,” or “like kongs” in the parentheses.

### Opposite Dragons

There is some confusion about the text in parentheses regarding hands with number tiles and opposite dragons (Consecutive Run #5 and Odds #6). Consider that the dragons serve as proxies for their corresponding suits. This ensures that all three suits—dots, cracks, and bams—are present and accounted for.

There would be less confusion if the league used consistent phraseology with mixed suit dragons hands. For example instead of saying “Any 3 suits w opp dragons,” they should say, “any 1 suit with opposite dragons.”



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## Select Standards

Mah jongg is a game of strategy, tradition, and evolving rules. Understanding key standards in preliminaries, game mechanics, and complex rules can help you navigate the game with confidence. While the back of the card offers guidance, space is limited, making deeper knowledge essential for accurate rule interpretation and effective play.

For a comprehensive collection of league-published guidelines and rulings, visit the Mahj Life Wiki, where you can read detailed articles with insightful commentary to help clarify complex rules and their practical applications.



The following are highlights of the changes on the back of the card that warrant your attention.

### Left Panel

#### *Game Begins*

Joker protocols have been relocated to a new section on the middle panel.

#### *Claiming a Discard*

**Rule #2** was modified by adding a sentence to elaborate on what happens when a player claims a discard, "A claim is made when a called tile is taken and made part of an exposure." This also applies to declaring mah jongg.

**Rules #5 and #6** were modified to clarify the priority when two players claim the same discard for exposure or mah jongg, and to establish that if one player racks the discard or exposes tiles, they get preference. However, the revision failed to mention that the original rule was designed to protect the player who is paying attention when the player next in turn is not.

These rules could be combined into a single statement: "When two players want the same discard for the same reason, the player next in turn gets the tile. However, if the player next in turn is not paying attention and another player claims the discard by racking it or exposing tiles, it's too late for the player next in turn."

**Rule #7** was added to explain the changes that can be made to an exposure during a player's turn. A player may adjust the number and type of tiles in an exposure up until they have discarded. However, the rule does not address the risk of disqualification if a player racks the wrong discard by mistake. Based on the rule on the back of the card, it appears that a player can correct this mistake, but that is a disqualifiable infraction.

### Middle Panel

#### Misnamed Tile

Two paragraphs were combined to make room for the rules regarding jokers. The new paragraph now includes TWO of the FIVE misnamed discard scenarios that can occur during a game.



It also covers TWO of the THIRTEEN circumstances that may lead to disqualification, along with the next steps.





## Rules for Jokers

This section outlines EIGHT of the EIGHTEEN joker protocols, covering when and how jokers can be used, their limitations, and specific scenarios where they cannot substitute certain tiles. These select rules ensure fair play and consistency in the game, but they are not comprehensive.



There's a misplaced rule in the list! #6 doesn't relate to jokers because it explains that a player cannot claim a discard to expose a block of singles (e.g., 123, NEWS, YYYY) unless it's their winning tile.

The rule should have stated that jokers cannot be used in a block of singles.



## 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's card. Always check the shape and pattern of the hand before you claim a discard to make any exposure.

## Tips for a Smooth Transition

1. Limit your category or hand options to ease into playing with the new card. I call these, "Jump starters" because they can help you understand the key concepts of the new card while minimizing overwhelming complexity. This makes the transition less intimidating and encourages confidence as you gradually explore the rest of the card.
2. Practice at home by doing hands-on skill builders:
  - Category Modeling: Helps you understand the flexibility and limitations of each hand on the card, sharpening your ability to assess potential hands and improve your strategy.
  - Charleston Modeling: Focuses on decision-making during the Charleston phase by practicing with random tiles. It builds the skill to make informed choices on incoming passes, ultimately helping you streamline your thought process.
  - Charleston Chain Reaction: Tests your instincts by comparing different hand development approaches with the same set of tiles. By analyzing the results, you can learn to trust your decisions and refine your hand development strategies.
  - Charleston Force: Forces you to think outside the box by selecting random categories during the Charleston exercise. This helps develop the flexibility to play various hands under pressure and broadens your hand development skills.
  - Charleston Sprints: Builds the ability to make quick decisions under time constraints. This is crucial for both online play and in-person games where fast thinking and decision-making can be pivotal.
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 with both of these providers so I will get a small commission if you decide to become a paid subscriber. Monies are used to support my YouTube channel.
  - Use the Mahj Life as your go-to source!
    - Wiki-Digital Repository with rules, etiquette, strategies, and teaching tips (Appendix A)
    - Recurring Skill Builder Videos (Mondays 9:00 AM Eastern)
    - Weekly American Mah Jongg Let's Play Livestreams
      - ◎ Nitty-Gritty (Mondays 1:00 PM Eastern)
      - ◎ Simply Social; gameplay with commentary (Fridays 5:00 PM Eastern)
      - ◎ Beat the Pro; play with me or watch and learn (Fridays 6:00 PM Eastern)



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## 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 guide 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 at the bottom of the wiki page.

### Appendix B: YouTube Videos

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



For 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* ([Article 192](#)).

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 video if you have any questions.

### 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, the Mahj Life Facebook group has 47k members and her YouTube channel has grown to over 42k subscribers with more than 2.7k videos published.

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

Michele Frizzell



# Notes ...



