

136 Ready-to-Use Mahjong Strategies & Tactics



Written by: Senba Kurono
Mahjong Soul - Celestial
Tenhou - 9th Dan

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Introduction

Nice to meet you, or maybe I should say hello again! I'm Senba Kurono, your friendly neighborhood Virtual YouTuber.

I'm thrilled to share some great news: I've just released my third book on mahjong!

What sparked this latest volume was a suggestion from Chief Editor Kanemoto over at Kindai Mahjong. He asked, "How about trying a slightly different approach this time?" and that got the wheels turning.

My previous two books, *Mahjong Year One Textbook* (Takeshobo, 2022) and *Senba Kurono's Guide to Getting Stronger at Mahjong* (KADOKAWA, 2023), were written as structured strategy manuals. They're meant to be read cover to cover to help you build a solid foundation and deepen your understanding of the game. But there's a trade-off: they kind of demand your full attention and stamina. Sit down, start from page one, and power through. Not always easy, right? So this time, I changed things up.

See, I always keep a few mahjong books, strategy guides, and what-to-discard quizzes right in my bathroom at home. It's a little habit of mine: I flip through a few pages every day during those spare moments. That's the vibe I went with for this book. Something you can casually skim, anytime, anywhere. Open to any page, and you'll find something fun and useful.

Each section wraps up in just one or two pages. No need to commit to a long session. It's designed to be light and digestible but still packed with insight. The topics are split across three difficulty levels, ranging from "This is core strategy" to "Wait, that's a thing?" plus they're grouped into

attack and defense sections for easier reference. Whether you're a beginner or a seasoned player, there's bound to be a nugget or two that sticks with you.

If this book can become your travel companion on your daily commute or something to wind down with before bed, I'd be delighted. And if it helps you fall a little more in love with mahjong, or better yet, helps you start winning more, that would be the greatest reward I could ask for as an author.

Senba Kurono

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Celestial Rank on Mahjong Soul







Preface and mahjong annotation

If you've cracked open Kurono Senba's *136 Ready-to-Use Mahjong Strategy & Tactics*, I'll bet you already know the joy of slamming down a winning tile and the sting of an unlucky tsumo from your neighbor. This book is here to turn those "sometimes I win" moments into "wow, I meant to do that" in almost plain English.

A quick heads-up before we dive in: all the examples use standardized English-friendly names for hands and patterns to make this book as inclusive as possible. However, the original Japanese terms are shown in parentheses on every page so you can learn and follow mahjong manga, streams, or articles you happen to find in the wild. If you're comfortable with the core Riichi gameplay and lingo, you're good to go. Everything else is fully localized and explained in the glossary in the back for easy reference.

Before you get started, here is the essential list of terms and symbols:

Essential Terms

- **Pon:** To call a tile to make a set for a triplet (three identical tiles),
e.g.  or 
- **Chi:** To call a tile from the player on your right for a sequence,
e.g.  or 
- **Kan:** To call a tile to add to an existing triplet or to make a set for a quad (four identical tiles) e.g.  for a concealed kan or 
- **Ron:** To call a win on an opponent's discarded tile
- **Tsumo:** To call a win from a tile you draw yourself

- **Riichi:** The key element of riichi mahjong. A declaration made with a 1,000-point deposit by a player when their hand is one tile away, fully concealed, and will discard all draws that would change their hand until winning for 1 yaku and is worth 1 han.
- **Tenpai:** To be in a “ready” state where one more tile completes a hand
- **Noten:** To not be in a “ready” state where one more tile completes your hand. At the end of a hand that ends in a draw, noten players pay a 3,000-point penalty split between all players in tenpai.
- **Dora:** Special bonus tiles that grant 1 han if they are present in your winning hand. Dora do not count towards the yaku requirement. At the start of each hand, the dora indicator is flipped face-up from the wall, and the next tile in sequence from the indicator tile is the dora.
- **Ura dora:** Special bonus tiles used whenever a hand wins with riichi. In the event of a riichi winning hand, the tiles underneath the dora indicator(s) are revealed. The newly revealed tiles serve as additional dora indicators.
- **Yaku:** A qualifying tile pattern or condition that allows a player to win a hand and awards han.
- **Pinfu:** A yaku that requires a closed hand consisting of all sequences, with a non-round wind, seat wind, or dragon pair and a two-sided wait.
- **Han:** The primary measure of a hand’s value from various special hand patterns (yaku) and bonus tiles (dora).
- **Fu:** Mini-points that represent the value of specific hand elements: win method, triplets, quads, and wait types.

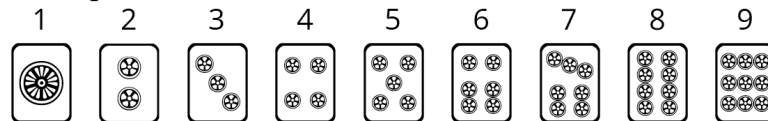
This book uses generally accepted mahjong notation, in which hands are written using mahjong tile suits as seen below:

Essential Symbols

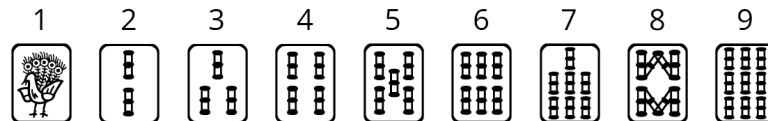
Characters (manzu):



Dots (pinzu):



Bamboos (souzu):



Honors - Winds (fanpai) & Dragons (sangenpai):



By generally accepted convention, mahjong hand diagrams will indicate the following, if necessary: Round, Seat, Turn, and any other additional info followed by the whole hand or discard pile. There will also be standard notations above the tiles that indicate various states of those tiles such as, but not limited to the following: RED for red doras, DRAW for the tile you draw, PON, CHII, or KAN for the tiles you call, DORA for the actual dora (not the dora indicator), and the occasional RIICHI to indicate that the tile was used to declare riichi.

An example can be found below:

East Round 1, West seat, Turn 8



The hand on the other page shows that it is East Round 1, you are seated in the West seat, and it is Turn 8. It consists of two dora tiles in hand, one red five, a five of characters you just drew, and a triplet of West tiles that you called earlier.

On a final note, at Mahjong Pros, we believe that learning and getting better at mahjong should be as simple and accessible as possible. You shouldn't have to take another language course in order to learn concepts.

We are working on growing mahjong and the mahjong community so any input or recommendations you have, please send them our way! Thank you for reading!

Harrison Doan
Mahjong Pros
<https://mahjongpros.com>

Contents

Introduction by Kurono Senba	2
Preface and mahjong annotation	4
Chapter 1 Offense	14
Level 1	
❶ Early Game: Play your own hand	15
❷ Lock in one pair early	16
❸ Keep two pairs	17
❹ Break up three pairs	18
❺ Don't miss 4x scoring chances	19
❻ Prioritize the points, not the dream	20
❼ Lock in the Perfect One Away	21
❽ Spot Sticky One Away shapes	22
❾ Triplets do not pair up easily	23
❿ Sequence linked blocks are strong	24
⓫ Love the dora but don't be bound by it	25
⓬ Continuous sequences ease resets	26
⓭ Pair-attached sequences are weak	27
⓮ It's not locked if you draw it later	28
⓯ Anticipate drawing the dora	29
⓰ Tiles near the dora are precious	30
Level 2	
❶ A Half Flush is 80% foresight	31
❷ Sandwich = Set + Pair	33
❸ 2x points for half the win rate? Skip it	34
❹ A pair of Fives is worth 0.5 han	35
❺ When in doubt, aim for All Simplets	36
❻ Drop edge waits for All Simplets	37
❼ Extended sequences are potential pairs	38

Level 2

24	It's okay to keep six blocks	39
25	A Full Flush is at least 5 han	40
26	Isolate triplets in a closed Full Flush	41
27	Pinfu is better than Value Tiles	43
28	Full-hand patterns are better	44
29	Leave the option for straights open	45
30	Keep information to a minimum	47
31	All else equal, aim for the ura dora	48
32	Don't shy away from dora waits	49
33	Skip Seven Pairs without insta-riichi	51
34	Skip Seven Pairs if you need tenpai	52
35	Keep safe tiles with Seven Pairs	53
36	Don't wait on the dora indicator	54
37	Waits near the edge are stronger	55
38	The strongest tiles are 3s and 7s	56
39	Bad shapes? Plan ahead	57
40	Not all bad shapes are equal	58
41	Start slow, push in the endgame	59
42	Keep floating tiles with bad shapes	61

Level 3

43	Avoid getting trapped by unlucky draws	62
44	Avoid single waits for sequences	63
45	Build blocks by reading discards	64
46	Discard the left player's wind first	65
47	Discard dragons freely	67
48	Keep pairs for Thirteen Orphans	68
49	Big start? Mind the winds	69
Column 1: Defense is a mindset		70

Chapter 2	Push Fold Strategy & Riichi Decision-Making	72
Level 1		
❶	Push harder, fold harder	73
❷	Riichi is worth 1.5 han	74
❸	Don't chase phantom hands	75
❹	Don't be fooled by one turn of safety	76
❺	Always folding leads to bleeding out	77
❻	The best defense is offense	78
❼	Double riichi is an insta-riichi	79
❽	Push early, fold late	80
Level 2		
❾	Break tenpai if it's mediocre	81
❿	Pushing unsafe tiles is a roulette	83
⓫	Trust in luck over your own draws	84
⓬	Call rate is a vanity metric	85
⓭	Don't focus on win rate	86
⓮	Even dealing in could be good	87
⓯	Don't be the third to riichi	88
⓰	Consider a locked discard riichi	90
⓱	Dress up a cheap hand with a riichi	91
⓲	Stop justifying silent tenpai	92
Level 3		
⓳	Don't discard bait for fun	93
⓴	Do discard bait during fights	94
⓵	A chasing riichi lowers guard	95
⓶	Defensive pushes invite disasters	96
⓷	Take risk early if you have a good hand	97
Column 2: Why YouTube and mahjong pair well together		98

Chapter 3 Calling Tiles	100
Level 1	
① Don't call if you'll lose your pair	101
② Call if you can get 4 han easily	102
③ Call freely when you have 3 dora	103
④ Open kans are costly	104
⑤ Value tiles are a triple threat	105
⑥ Open All Simples lowers defenses	106
⑦ Avoid All Triplets only hands	107
⑧ Always go for Riichi + All Simples + Pinfu	108
⑨ Riichi time = Go time	109
⑩ Remaining tiles are a countdown	110
Column 3: What is your mahjong playstyle	111
Level 2	
⑪ No open Two Identical Sequences	113
⑫ Yaku-less hands have less waits	114
⑬ Show off your red doras	115
⑭ Continuous sequences forms pairs	116
⑮ Three open calls means no folding	117
⑯ Look for chances to call even in tenpai	118
⑰ Don't miss a valid call opportunity	119
⑱ Pon over chii except for dora pairs	120
Level 3	
⑲ Avoid drawing tiles when it's dangerous	121
⑳ 3,000 pts. tenpai > 1,000 pts. win	122
㉑ Go wide if everyone is folding	123
㉒ Rebuild waits using sequences.....	124
Column 4: Enjoy mahjong more with 3 key mindsets	125

Chapter 4 Defense & Reading 129

Level 1

❶ Consider the danger levels of extra tiles 130
❷ Drop terminal triplets when stuck 131
❸ Assess the value of your own hand first 132
❹ Don't chase Pinpoint Folds 133
❺ Assess hand values from calls 134
❻ A discarded red five rules out waits 135
❼ One-shot cancel = one less safe tile 136
❽ Reads without basis are guesses 137
❾ Don't aim for a 0% deal-in rate 138
❿ Hands with two calls are cheap and fast 139

Level 2

⓫ No visible doras? Time to fold 140
⓬ Down two sets? Time to fold 141
⓭ Pick the potentially lesser evil 142
⓮ "Last Chance" depends on timing 143
⓯ Tiles near early dora cuts are safe 144
⓰ The 2nd riichi is more dangerous 145
⓱ The pace of a Flush is your signal 146
⓲ Stalling out is a valid defense 148
⓳ More wait patterns = more risk 150
⓴ Sabotage a little everyday 151

Level 3

⓶ Open hands have two discard piles 152
⓷ Only believe in your own tiles 153
⓸ A pair of honors is an open declaration 154
⓹ If the 8 is safe, discard the 5 before 2 155

Level 3

25	If a red 5 is cut, discard the 6 before 9	156
26	Pair discards rule out certain waits	158
27	2 or 8 pair drops could be edge waits	160
28	Concealed kans signal an incoming riichi	161
	Column 5: About mahjong puns	162

Chapter 5 Placement Control, Mindset, & Other Techniques

Level 1

1	Comebacks are always possible	166
2	Scoring is your north star	167
3	Luck is attracted by skill	168
4	Be satisfied with being 2nd or 3rd	169
5	Don't dwell on bad luck	170
6	Demotions are a chance for growth	172

Level 2

7	Withhold info to scare others	173
8	Who can you let win?	174
9	Skip Pinfu if you need a full 5 han	176
10	Will this improve my placement?	177
11	Only push if it makes a difference	178
12	Call if you can overtake someone	180

Level 3

13	Drag the fight out if you're in last place	181
14	Picture your ideal future	182
	Afterword	183
	Glossary	185

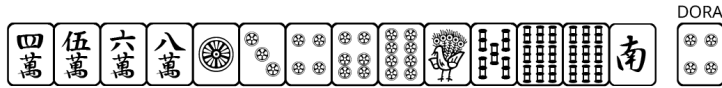
CHAPTER 1

Offense






Let it be known, 'tis
offense that decideth all in
the game of mahjong!











East Round 1, East Seat, Turn 1

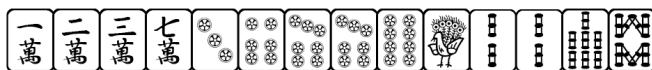


1 Early game: Play your own hand

This is your opening hand from your dealer turn, and it's looking pretty promising. For your first discard, candidates like , , or  might come to mind, but which one's best? Some players might argue for holding onto the , saying, "I want to keep at least one safe tile". But in this case, it's actually better to cut the  right away.

Here's why: right now, you've got one set in characters (manzu), two blocks in dots (pinzu), and one block in bamboos (souzu). That leaves you short of the five blocks you'll need to win. So you definitely don't want to miss out on potential connections from  or . If you keep your dots (pinzu) structure intact, a draw of  gives you a two closed waits (ryankan) shape with , and even a draw of  could lead to a scattered two closed wait shape (ryankan) across . That makes  a critical tile. As for bamboo (souzu), drawing a  there also opens up a two closed wait shape (ryankan).

Besides, it's extremely rare to face a riichi this early. And even if someone does declare riichi, the danger posed by any one tile at that point is negligible. So when you're holding a hand that looks riichi-ready, it's better to expand your options and push for the initiative than to shrink your hand out of fear of a riichi that might not even come. Maximize your acceptance range, and nudge your odds of getting there just a little higher.



2 Lock in one pair early

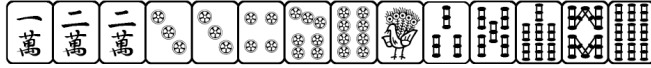
So, what's the best discard from this hand? If your first instinct is "Well, I'll leave the clustered tiles alone and probably cut the isolated or , then heads up: that might be a trap. The tile you actually want to cut here is .

You'll need four sets and one pair to win. Right now, your likely set candidates are and so that's three. You still need to complete one more set.

That's why tiles like (which could form a two-sided wait (ryanmen) with a or draw), or and (which also lead to two-sided wait shapes (ryanmen)) are worth keeping. They're important seeds for tile efficiency.


Now let's look at the part. It might seem like things move forward if you draw a there, but if you do make a set () you'll lose your only potential pair, which actually means your hand hasn't progressed at all. That's why is the most expendable tile in this hand.

When you've only got one pair (toitsu) to work with, like in this hand, it's usually better to lock in that pair as your winning pair (jantou) and leave the rest of the hand as flexible as possible. That way, your tenpai efficiency goes up, not down.








3 Keep two pairs

This time, you've got two pairs (toitsu) that could serve as your winning pair (jantou).

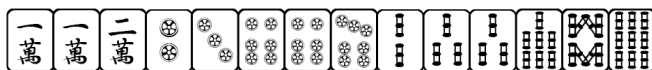
You might be thinking, "I only need one pair to go with my four sets, right? So I'll just cut the .

But take a breath and look a little closer at your hand shape.

If you cut  now and later draw something like  or  to complete a set in characters (manzu), you'll suddenly be left without a pair, which means you won't be able to make use of that great draw.

That's why the better discard here is . By doing that, you keep both pairs in your hand. Then, even if one of them becomes a triplet (koutsu), the other one can still serve as your winning pair (jantou). See how this gives you more effective tiles to move your hand forward, compared to cutting .

Sure, you only need one pair to win. But if you want to get there efficiently, keeping two pairs for as long as you can is often the better path. This is one of the foundational principles of tile efficiency and it comes up in all sorts of situations.



4 Break up three pairs

Earlier, we said “two pairs (toitsu) are better than one,” but what about when you have three?

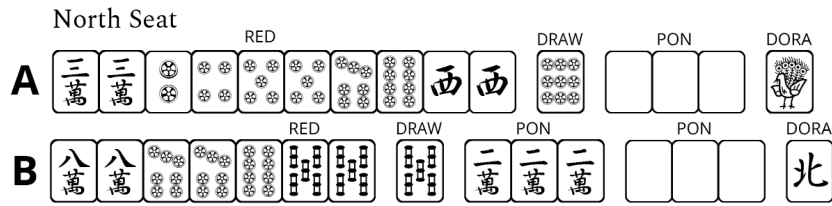
In the hand shown, if you want to keep all three pairs, you’d cut . If you’re looking to break one pair and go down to two, you’d cut or .

To compare the options, let’s count the potentially unlucky tiles you’d regret discarding if you drew them next. If you cut , the worst draws would be the four remaining tiles. On the other hand, if you cut , only the two remaining tiles would be unlucky draws.

When you’re sitting on three pairs (toitsu), there’s overlap in your double pair waits (shanpon), so each pair is doing less work than it would in a two-pair setup.

That’s why the more efficient play here is to break one of the pairs. Go ahead and cut or to bring it back to a solid two pair (toitsu) shape.

Just remember these efficiency guidelines: “Fix one pair, keep two pairs, break three pairs.” Do this and your tenpai speed is going to level up fast.



5 Don't miss 4x scoring chances

Hand A starts off in the early game with a pon of and after drawing , you're now one tile away from tenpai (iishanten).

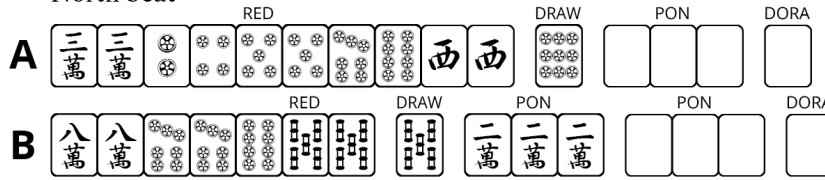
At this point, you've got two clear options: 1.) cut and aim for a quick, easy 2,000-point hand or 2.) push further by discarding going all-in on a potential Half Flush (honitsu) for 8,000 points.

In this case, the boldest move is best. Go ahead and discard and commit to the Half Flush (honitsu). Sure, your win rate will drop a bit, but the reward is well worth it.


Think of it like this: Would you rather win 2,000 points 1 out of every 2 times or win 8,000 points (mangan) 1 out of every 4 times? If you're playing the expected value (EV) game, the 8,000 point (mangan) draw clearly comes out ahead. The same logic applies to Hand B, from this shape, cutting and shifting toward All Triplets (toitoi) hand worth 8,000 points (mangan) is the more efficient path.


Whenever you're sitting on a 2,000-point hand but can see the outlines of Half Flush (honitsu) or an All Triplets (toitoi) hand, that potential +2 han boost is incredibly valuable. In those moments, make the call to push for it because the payoff is worth the risk.

North Seat







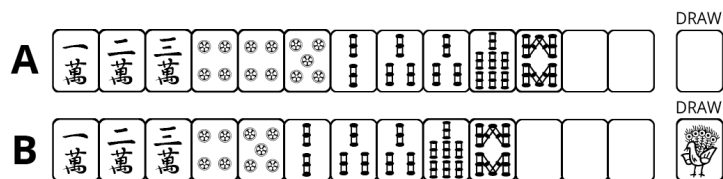
6 Prioritize the points, not the dream

Hand A looks similar to the previous one, but this time the dora has changed. So should you still be pushing for Half Flush (honitsu) here? True, if the hand fully commits to a Half Flush, it could reach 12,000 points (haneman). But in this case, the better move is to cut  and go all-in on a closer 8,000 point hand (mangan).

Let's run a lottery analogy. Dropping characters (manzu) for a Half Flush (honitsu) is like a lottery ticket that wins 12,000 points (haneman) 1 out of every 4 times. Cutting  instead is a ticket that wins 8,000 points (mangan) 1 out of every 2 times.





Even though Half Flush (honitsu) increases your hand value, it only bumps it by about 1.5x from 8,000 points (mangan) to 12,000 points (haneman). This happens because your hand already qualifies for 8,000 points (mangan). Once you're at that tier, the +2 han from the Half Flush (honitsu) doesn't add as much value as it would to a lower-point hand.





The same idea applies to Hand B. In the previous example where the dora was , you'd cut  and aim for All Triplets (toitoi). But now that  is the dora, the better play is to cut  and take the solid two-sided wait (ryanmen) tenpai.








7 Lock in the Perfect One Away

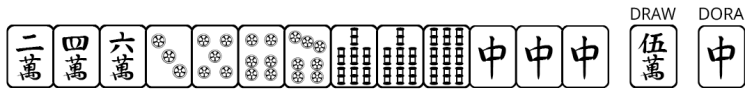
A shape where two two-sided waits (ryanmen) and a double pair (shanpon) wait are all possible within a hand and is one away from tenpai (iishanten) is called a “Perfect One Away” (kanzen iishanten) because of its optionality.

In Hand **A**, your hand becomes a Perfect One Away (kanzen iishanten) by cutting either  or . You’ll reach tenpai through either of the two-sided wait (ryanmen) tiles, or if  or  becomes a triplet. This hand is considered a Perfect One Away (kanzen iishanten) because this gives you the largest number of winning draws.

Whether to cut  or  depends on how many  vs.  tiles are already visible in the discard pool. Keep the two-sided wait (ryanmen) shape with less visible tiles in the discard pool.

On the other hand, what happens if you think, “Let’s just fix the two-sided wait (ryanmen)” and cut  or ? If you cut  and then draw , you’ll end up with Hand **B**, missing the chance to reach tenpai.

Shapes like  which can serve as both a two-sided wait (ryanmen) and a pair, might feel wasteful to break. However, you actually move toward tenpai in the shortest possible path by aiming for a Perfect One Away (kanzen iishanten) shape.



8 Spot Sticky One Away shapes

The two closed waits (ryankan) in characters (manzu) just got filled, one step towards tenpai.

You might be thinking, “guess I don’t need anymore,” and be tempted to discard it right away. But take a close look at your hand. You’ve already got three sets plus a pair and you’re now in a “Sticky One Away” (kutsuki or kutsuki tenpai) structure, a waiting shape that improves by attaching tiles to isolated blocks.

Compare the isolated tiles , , and . Of the three, the weakest draw is since it’s near the edge. It only helps if you draw a third by yourself so it’s not a great payoff.

On the other hand, drawing opens up a three-sided wait (sanmenchan) and you can even get a tenpai off a chii. That’s why the best move here is to cut the .

Sticky One Away (kutsuki) is a very strong shape, but until you get used to it, it can be easy to overlook. Once your third set is done, start asking yourself: “Is this a Sticky One Away (kutsuki) shape?”

That habit alone will reduce missed opportunities and give your tenpai speed a big boost.



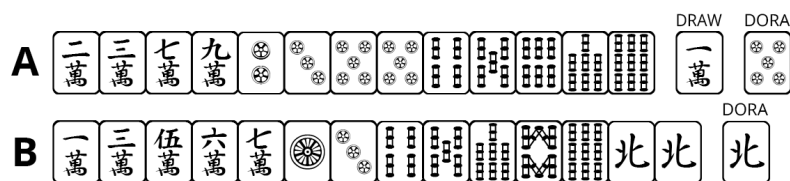
9 Triplets do not pair up easily

You have a lucky hand with a triplet of dora, and it's in a Sticky One Away (kutsuki) shape. Your floating tiles are , , and . Since is part of a sequence shape like , we'll keep that. So now, which do you cut: or ?

You might feel tempted to keep , thinking "let's hold on to the connected tiles," but let's look at what that gives us. If you keep , your good draws become , , and , but only has two left in the wall and only has one left. That means , despite seeming connected, isn't pulling much weight. So the better discard here is , the tile near the dora triplet.

By keeping you open up a two-sided wait (ryanmen) with a draw of or , that alone gives you eight useful tiles. Even if you draw the , creating a middle wait, it's still a three dora hand and strong enough to justify pushing with riichi. Not a bad wait at all.

In situations like this where you're still short on completing an incomplete set that needs one more tile, a block (taatsu), keeping isolated tiles instead of ones near a triplet (koutsu) can often give you larger tile acceptance (ukeire) and more ways to advance your hand.



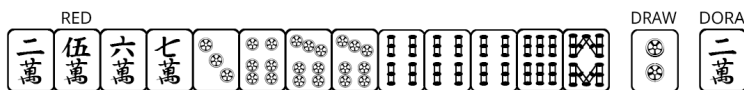
10 Sequence linked blocks are strong

Hand **A** is one away from tenpai (iishanten) with two dora. Your choice is between keeping or . You might feel like this is just a toss-up. “It’s just two middle waits (kanchan)! Might as well go with my gut!” But actually, the better option is to keep the , which is connected to the sequence (shuntsu).






That segment doesn’t just wait on a direct draw of to complete a middle wait (kanchan), it also holds hidden potential. Draws like or can reshape it into a three-sided wait (sanmenchan) on or a two-sided wait (ryanmen) on . A lot of high-quality improvements are buried in there.



What about Hand **B**? Here, both characters (manzu) and dots (pinzu) have middle wait (kanchan) shapes, but is the stronger choice to keep. Why? Drawing upgrades it into a three-sided wait (sanmenchan). Draws like or turn into a two closed wait (ryankan) that also links up with the sequence. So has more working synergy than and should be prioritized.





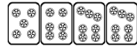
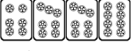


When you’re unsure which block (taatsu) to keep, don’t just compare the immediate tile acceptance (ukeire). Think about whether either shape is connected to a sequence (shuntsu), and whether it holds potential for favorable transformations.



11 Love the dora but don't be bound by it

After drawing , you're now one away from tenpai (iishanten) with remaining waits on  and a middle wait on . Your floating tiles are  and , but discarding either doesn't advance your hand meaningfully.

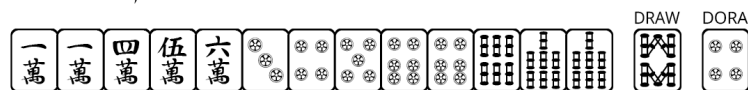
You might feel tempted to hold onto , thinking “maybe I'll pair it up,” but the better move here is to cut the dora .

Right now, the middle wait on  is a bit unstable depending on future draws. But by keeping , your hand has good potential to evolve by either: 1.) drawing  or  will give you strong shapes like  and  or 2.) drawing  or  will you shift into a Perfect One Away (kanzen iishanten) with two two-sided waits (ryanmen).

If your goal is a fast riichi with a red dora and a good shape, then this is the moment to cut the dora. Doras are powerful, no doubt, but you don't have to use them every time. In fact, holding onto them too long can often backfire. Once someone else declares riichi, you may no longer be able to discard them safely.

Knowing when to cut a dora is the first step toward high-level play. Ask yourself, “Do I really need to keep this dora?”

South Seat, Turn 5



12 Continuous sequences ease resets

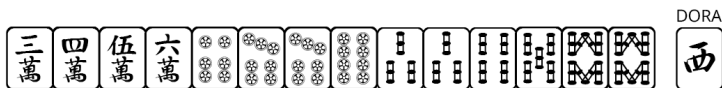
You've reached tenpai, but the wait is on the double pair (shanpon) on and .

Since it's still early in the round, you may want to break tenpai and aim for either a better shape or higher value. Between cutting or , which is better?

At first glance, looks more promising since it seems more likely to lead into All Simples (tanyao). In reality, the only upgrades that improve the hand after cutting are , , , and . Just four tile types. Even then, All Simples (tanyao) isn't guaranteed.

On the other hand, if you cut , you preserve the sequence shape. On top of the same four tiles, you also gain , , , and as improvement draws for a total of eight useful tile types. Plus, this shape can develop into a two-sided wait (ryanmen) with Pinfu for 1 han and possibly even a three-sided wait (sanmenchan). Even if you don't end up with All Simples (tanyao), you still have a highly satisfying tenpai.

This is a great example of how identifying continuous sequences (renzoku kei) to break or reset your tenpai lets you aim more efficiently for better waits.



13 Pair-attached sequences are weak


A sequence of four tiles is formally called a four-tile shape (yonrenkei). These fall into three categories:

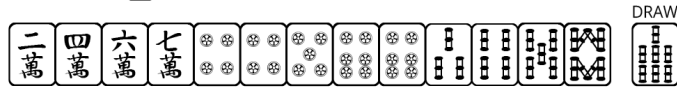
- **Extended Sequence** (nobetan):
- **Bulging Sequence** (nakabukure):
- **Pair-Attached Sequence** (aryanmen):

These three are not equally strong. There's little difference in value between an extended sequence (nobetan) and a bulging sequence (nakabukure), but the pair-attached sequence (aryanmen) is clearly weaker than the other two.




In the example hand, the extended sequence (nobetan) shape gives you a good wait for that all lead to two-side waits (ryanmen) or better. The bulging sequence (nakabukure) shape also gives two-sided waits (ryanmen) with . But the pair-attached sequence (aryanmen) shape only has two tiles that make a two-sided wait (ryanmen). (While yes, if you draw , it turns into a weird three-way wait for a pair (, , or , but you're already using five tiles to form that, so the wait isn't actually that strong.)







When you're unsure which four-tile shape to keep, get rid of the pair-attached sequence (aryanmen). It's the least efficient and least rewarding of the three.

There is a  in your discards

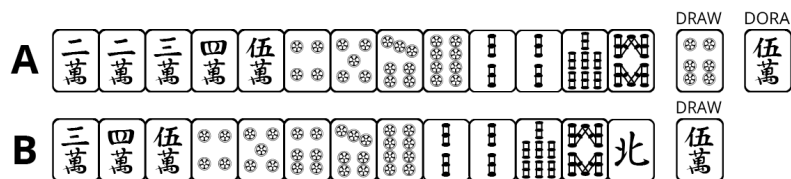


14 It's not locked if you draw it later


You had just discarded  and planned to get rid of the edge wait (penchan) on . And what do you draw next turn? The worst-case . Are you going to discard immediately while sighing?





Don't give up in this situation. Keep the locked discard (furiten) , and instead, drop the weaker  block (taatsu). Even though it's a locked discard (furiten) on the , a two-sided wait (ryanmen) is still a two-sided wait. The chance of completing it is roughly twice that of finishing the  shape. On top of that, you're currently two tiles away from tenpai with one wait left in each suit: characters (manzu), dots (pinzu), and bamboo (souzu). So the odds that the locked discard (furiten)  ends up being your final wait becomes roughly 1 in 3. Not as bad as it feels, right? Even if the  shape stays all the way until tenpai, a locked discard (furiten) riichi still gives you Riichi + Pinfu + Self-Draw (menzen tsumo) = 3 han guaranteed which is a decent point payout.


Don't treat it as a setback whenever you draw a bad tile like this. Treat it as half a step forward. Stay positive and look around. Maybe there is a different block (taatsu) you can drop instead. Keep your options wide open.









15 Anticipate drawing the dora

Take a look at Hand A. You've just drawn the perfect , and now you're one away from tenpai (iishanten) with two two-sided waits (ryanmen) and a potential Pinfu hand.

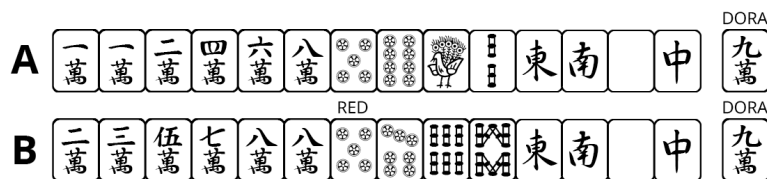
You'll need to drop one of the pairs either   or  , but which should it be?

The key detail here is that  is the dora.

Let's say you choose to drop  and later swap it for a safer tile like . If you then draw the dora , you'll end up with Hand B. You won't be able to use that valuable dora for anything but discarding the tile you drew that turn (tsumogiri).

If you had chosen to cut  during the pair discard decision, you'd still have , and now cutting that would let you use  as your winning pair (jantou).

So when there's a chance you might draw the dora later, try to keep a shape that lets you actually use it and not just watch it slip through your fingers.



17 A Half Flush is 80% foresight

Half Flush (honitsu) is a unique kind of yaku. With hands like Pinfu or All Simples (tanyao), you often end up with the yaku naturally just by aiming for Riichi. But that's not how it works with Half Flushes (honitsu) because it requires you to use only one suit plus honors. Your tile selection has to differ from standard riichi strategy right from the starting hand.

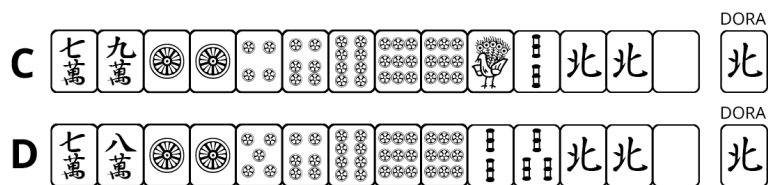
What's more, in the early game you're mostly just discarding tiles from the suits you won't be using, so the first few turns tend to look the same no matter who's playing. So then, what separates players who consistently win with Half Flushes (honitsu) from those who don't?

Simple. It's whether or not they can spot a honitsu hand from the very start. The basic rule of thumb is: 1.) you have 10 or more tiles of one suit plus honors, and 2.) your hand that doesn't look very promising for a normal riichi route.




For example, take starting Hand **A**: Even if you discard honors and aim for riichi, you're probably ending up with something like an edge wait (penchan) only riichi. Not very appealing at all. Better to toss dots (pinzu) and bamboo (souzu) and go for a Half Flush (honitsu) from the start.


Now look at starting Hand **B**: it also has 10 tiles made up of honors and one suit (characters (manzu)), but if you discard honors and go for a closed hand, you can probably reach tenpai with something like Riichi + Red Dora + Dora. That's already a solid hand without needing to go for a Half Flush (honitsu). So in this case, it's better to play naturally and discard honors.

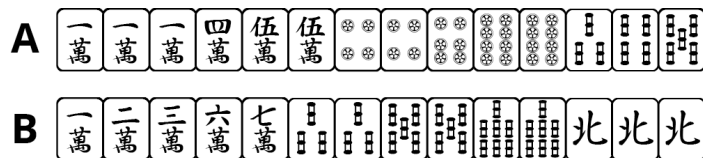
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



The key is asking yourself: “If I reach closed tenpai, what kind of hand will I have?” That judgment is what helps you decide whether to pursue a Half Flush (honitsu) or not.

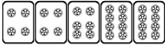
Let’s look at a few more cases: Starting Hand **C** has two dora, but it’s full of awkward shapes and poor waits. A chance of a closed tenpai looks tough. However, if you aim for a Half Flush (honitsu), you can call tiles more freely. Tiles like , , , or honors are usually easy to call so you can speed up the hand. So in this case, it’s better to discard characters (manzu) and bamboo (souzu) and push for a Half Flush (honitsu).




Starting Hand **D**, on the other hand, has several good blocks (taatsu). The chance of reaching a closed tenpai is much higher than in **C**. Even though you have 10 tiles in dots (pinzu) + honors, you should aim for Riichi + 2 Dora and start discarding from .




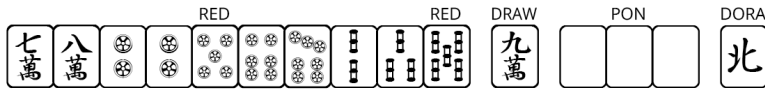
18 Sandwich = Set + Pair

A shape like is sometimes referred to as a “sandwich shape”. It’s an excellent structure, and with draws of , , , or , you can form one set and one pair. That’s four kinds of useful tiles packed into one block.

Once you understand that, it becomes easy to see what to cut from Hand **A**. If you treat the  portion as providing one set and one pair, then you should definitely keep the dots (pinzu) as-is.





That means the  portion should be used as a set, not as your pair, so the best move is to cut  and lock in a two-sided wait (ryanmen). If one of the four useful dot tile (pinzu) draws comes first, you’ll be able to reach a two-sided wait (ryanmen) riichi on .



Now, what about Hand **B**? Here, you already have three set candidates in characters (manzu) and honors, so the best move is to cut  and reshape your hand into a “sandwich shape.”







19 2x points for half the win rate? Skip it

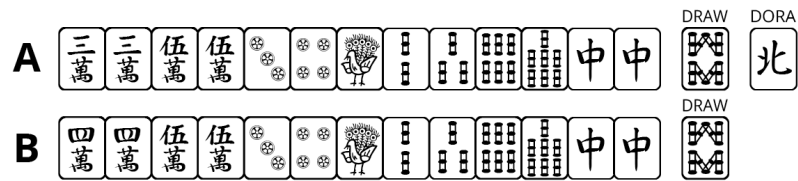
In mathematics, there's the concept of expected value (EV). For example: "a lottery ticket with a 50% chance of winning \$1,000" and one with "a 25% chance of winning \$2,000" both have the same expected value. So what about mahjong?

In the hand above, if you cut the red , you're left with a  wait worth 2,000 points. If you cut  instead, you're left with a  middle wait worth 3,900 points.





At first glance, those expected values might seem roughly equal. But unlike a lottery, in mahjong, failing to win mean you might end up dealing in or letting someone else draw their winning tile. That added risk means the actual expected value of cutting  is lower than cutting red .








In this case, where the point difference is only double, it's better to prioritize your own winning chance and go with the red  discard.



Now, if the dora were , that would change things. Cutting  and aiming for an 8,000 point hand (mangan) with a  middle wait would be worthwhile, because the value jumps from 2,000 to 8,000 which is a 4x increase.








20 A pair of Fives is worth 0.5 han

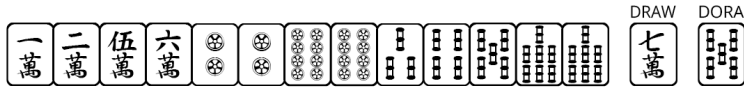
In Hand A, you've drawn  and reached one away from tenpai (iishanten). You now have a choice between cutting  or . When playing using Red Tile rules (aka ari), the clear choice is to cut .

This hand is very likely to develop with  forming first, leading to a double pair wait (shanpon) on  or . If your final wait ends up being  and , you'll have two  and one red  remaining which means three out of four waits have high-value potential.

In practical terms, this gives you a Riichi +  hand, or a Riichi with a 50% chance of Red Dora, so you can treat the pair of  as being worth roughly 0.5 han on average.

Now take Hand B, if you cut  just because "I want to keep   as a two-sided wait (ryanmen)", you lose access to red  when you call a pon on , and that's a missed value opportunity.

So when playing under Red Tile rules (aka ari), it's good practice to hold on to any pair of fives, especially when there's a chance to fully use the red tiles.



21 When in doubt, aim for All Simples

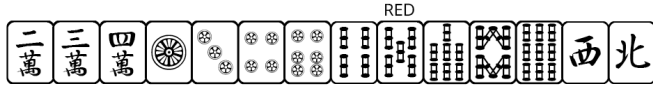
You've drawn and are one away from tenpai (iishanten). Now you have six blocks, so you'll either need to drop one of your pairs (toitsu) or discard the edge wait (penchan) on .

According to the principle #4 "Break up three pairs" earlier, the widest tile acceptance (ukeire) would come from discarding one of the pairs.

For example, if you discard , your bad draws would be the remaining four . But if you drop the pair of , your bad draws are just the remaining two . If you're aiming purely for the fastest path to riichi, seems like a necessary block to keep.

Even so, in this case, the better play is to discard the edge wait shape (penchan). Here's why: By dropping the edge wait (penchan), you guarantee All Simples (tanyao), which raises your hand value and enables you to call tiles. Plus, if you connect to one of the pairs and form a two-sided wait (ryanmen), you're left with a strong shape. The two tile difference in tile acceptance (ukeire) is something you can reasonably afford to give up.

When in doubt, one effective tactic is to prioritize locking in All Simples (tanyao) first; the efficiency and flexibility it brings often outweigh the slight drop in immediate tile acceptance.

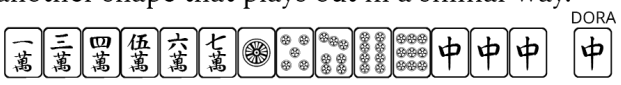


23 Extended sequences are potential pairs

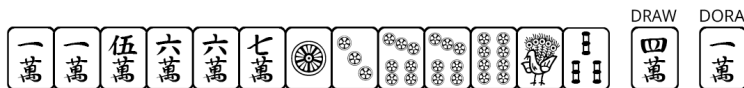
You've got four set candidates, but no winning pair (jantou) yet. In a spot like this, it might be tempting to think, "I can make a pair anytime," or "I'll just riichi on an honor tile single wait (tanki) later," and reach for 東 or 西. But doing that would actually be a huge waste! The 東 西 南 block turns into an extended sequence (nobetan) with a 南 draw, or a middle wait on 西 with an 南 draw. Likewise, 一萬 二萬 三萬 becomes an extended sequence (nobetan) with a 二萬 draw, or a middle wait on the 三萬 with a 二萬 draw.

These are potential pairs which are strong, flexible shapes that might become your winning pair (jantou) while keeping good wait potential.

Here's another shape that plays out in a similar way.



If you discard 東 and keep 一萬, you can reach tenpai by drawing 二萬 for a 一萬 四萬 七萬 shape, or by drawing 四萬 七萬 and ending up with a middle wait on the 二萬. When you have something like 一萬 三萬 四萬, it's easy to instinctively cut the 一萬 without thinking, but in hands without a pair, the value of that 一萬 tile goes up because it becomes a "stepping stone" tile (tobii-ishi) that works harder than it looks.



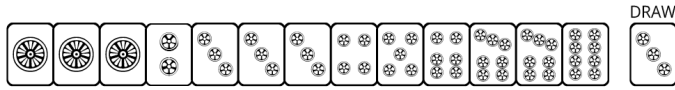
24 It's okay to keep six blocks

You've reached two tiles away from tenpai (iishanten) with the dora as your pair. If you discard or , you'll have five blocks. If you cut , you'll stay at six blocks.

When you first start learning tile efficiency, you're taught the importance of the "Five-Block Method." So you might instinctively think, "I need to get down to five blocks no matter what!" and choose to throw out one of the middle wait blocks (kanchan). It's true that shifting to five blocks now lets you form a strong shape later when you advance your hand, like a double pair wait (shanpon) on and .

But what if you discard , and then draw an ? Or what if someone pons the and suddenly your remaining wait gets much weaker? What if the middle wait (kanchan) you kept dries up? Getting hit by one of those bad outcomes really stings since your chances of winning drop sharply. That's why, when you're holding two equally weak middle wait blocks (kanchan taatsu), the better move can actually be to cut and stay in a six-block shape.

It might look indecisive to delay your block selection, but in reality, it's a flexible play that keeps you open to whichever draw comes first. Learning when to use the Five-Block Method and when to delay it is a sign of growth. Let the situation decide.



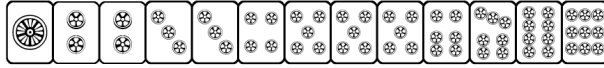
25 A Full Flush is at least 5 han

You might be thinking, “Isn’t Full Flush (chinitsu) a 6 han yaku?” Fair question. If you can instantly tell which discard gives you the widest waits in the hand above feel free to skip this section. (Note: You’re already in a closed tenpai on when you drew a .)

The correct answer is: Discard the since it gives you a seven-sided wait on .

Chances are many readers would hesitate here, and that’s perfectly normal. A Full Flush (chinitsu) is a hard yaku to navigate if you’re not used to it. Even if you’re in tenpai, it’s easy to miss your wait, overlook a win, or accidentally miscall your win. And in fast-paced formats like online mahjong, you might even run out of time before you figure it out. So how do you avoid that? Simple: call tiles.

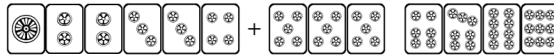
Whether it’s a tile that puts you in tenpai, a chii to extend your shape, or even a pon on an honor tile, calls can make your wait much easier to spot and manage. If you’ve got even one dora, you can still hit with a 12,000 point hand (haneman) even after calling, so the usual concern about losing hand value doesn’t really apply. When you go for a Full Flush (chinitsu), it’s often worth treating it as a call-first hand. Don’t be shy, open up your hand and keep the pressure on.




26 Isolate triplets in a closed Full Flush

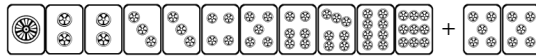
A perfect closed Full Flush (chinit-su) tenpai! ...or so you thought until you realized you have no idea what your actual wait is. Sound familiar? It's something just about every player has experienced.


When you're dealing with a complex multi-sided wait (tamenchan) like this, start by isolating the triplet.




Looking at it this way, you can see an extended sequence wait (nobetan) on .






Next, return one tile from the triplet and treat it as the pair (jantou) instead:



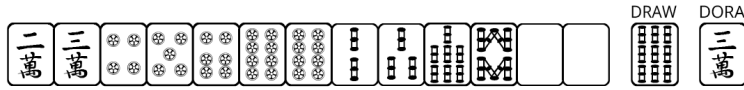
The  part is still a bit messy, so let's isolate that:



Now it becomes clear that you've got a 3-sided wait (sanmenchan) on , in a Pinfu shape.

So your full wait is on , , , , and  for a 5-sided wait. What makes these complex multi-sided waits (tamenchan) hard to read is that the triplet could be functioning as either a set or a pair.






That's why pulling out the triplet and looking at both configurations (as a triplet and as a pair) makes it much easier to recognize the wait patterns.



27 Pinfu is better than Value Tiles

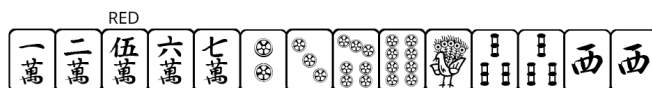
When you come across a hand where multiple yaku are possible, which one should you prioritize?

In this hand shape, for example, you can see both Value Tiles (yakuhai) and Pinfu forming. In this case, it's better to prioritize Pinfu.





If you go for Value Tiles (yakuhai), you'll need to drop  and . But if your two-sided wait (ryanmen) completes first, you'll be left with a double pair wait (shanpon) wait on  and the white dragon . That wait maxes out at 4 tiles, and if you win on the cheaper , the hand ends up as just Riichi + Dora, for only 2 han.

On the other hand, if you target Pinfu and drop the pair of white dragons, your wait will always be a two-sided wait with up to eight tiles, with no loss in hand value between the two options. Plus, the hand becomes Riichi + Pinfu + Dora, giving you 3 han with better wait shape and more stability.

You might feel hesitant about breaking up a Value Tile (yakuhai) pair, but when Pinfu is clearly within reach, go ahead and drop it. Aim for the higher-value, more efficient path.











28 Full-hand patterns are better

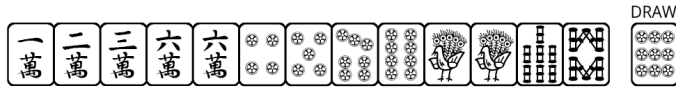
You've completed one set in the character tiles (manzu), and now your hand has more potential block shapes than you need. At this point, you're faced with two main options: 1.) discard  and  to prioritize Pinfu or 2.) discard  and  to chase a Three Color Straight (sanshoku doujun).

In mahjong, yaku can be divided into two categories:

- **Full-Hand Patterns** (zentai yaku): like All Simples (tanyao) or Pinfu, which involve the shape of all 14 tiles
- **Partial-Hand Patterns** (bubun yaku): like Value Tiles (yakuhai), a Full Straight (ittsuu), or a Three Color Straight (sanshoku doujun), which only depend on a specific part of the hand.

When both types are possible at the same time, you should generally aim for the full-hand patterns. If you chase a Three Color Straight (sanshoku) by dropping  and , and then end up drawing , your hand may degrade into something like an edge wait (penchan) on , with only Riichi + 1 Dora. But if you go for Pinfu by discarding  and , your wait will always be a two-sided wait (ryanmen). Plus, drawing tiles like  or  will strengthen your dots (pinzu), increasing your tile acceptance and flexibility.

Full-hand patterns are stable and are not affected by high vs. low tile outcomes, consistently lead to good shapes, and are solid point hands. So when in doubt, aim for the full-hand patterns.



30 Keep information to a minimum

You're now one tile away from tenpai (iishanten) for Pinfu. Since you've got six blocks, you'll need to drop one of the two pairs: or . But which one?

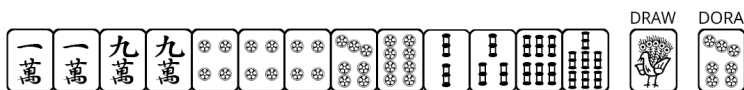
The correct choice here is to discard . The reason? Discarding gives less information to your opponents than discarding .

Let's say you cut , then draw on the next turn and declare riichi with your second as the declaration tile. What does that tell your opponents?




Quite a lot, actually. They can now rule out four different two-sided wait patterns (ryanmen): wait, wait, (the tile just after) and (the tile just before) . That's four major possibilities removed from their defensive considerations, making it much easier for them to fold or maneuver.




On the other hand, if you discard , the only wait your opponents can rule out is , just one two-sided wait pattern (ryanmen). That's far less information given away.

If you're mindful about building a discard pile that's hard to read, you'll naturally increase your ron potential and improve your overall win rate.








31 All else equal, aim for the ura dora

You've drawn  and are one away from tenpai (iishanten). Now it's time to drop either the  or  pair, leaving yourself with two two-sided waits (ryanmen).

If the danger level and the number of visible tiles on the table are roughly the same, you might think there's no difference in winning chance between discarding  or . From a surface-level efficiency standpoint, that's correct. But in this hand, the better move is to cut .

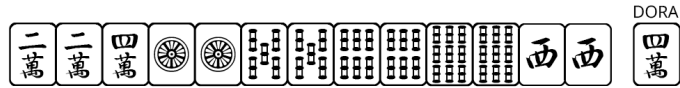
Here's why: Right now, your hand doesn't have any yaku, and once you reach tenpai, you're almost certainly going to rely on Riichi + 1 Dora for your score. And when you win after declaring riichi, you flip the ura dora, right?

This is where it gets interesting: If  is your pair, then any of the four remaining  tiles can flip to give you an ura dora.


But if  is your pair, then you're only hoping for one of the two remaining  tiles to flip. In other words, having  as your pair makes it twice as likely to hit an ura dora.

So in situations where your win rate is unchanged either way, look for those subtle value differences and let potential ura dora efficiency tilt your decision just a bit in your favor.

East Round 1, Turn 3



32 Don't shy away from dora waits

You've reached tenpai for a Seven Pairs (chiitoitsu) hand, waiting on a single dora tile (tanki). But the wait is , which isn't exactly ideal.

At this point, you have three main options:

- 1.) Stay in silent tenpai (damaten) on a single tile wait (tanki) for the dora.
- 2.) Wait for a better single wait (tanki) and then declare riichi.
- 3.) Go for an immediate riichi on the dora single wait (tanki).

Let's break them down.

Option 1: Silent tenpai (damaten)

Since the dora is one of the middle tiles (chunchanpai) and easy to use, you can't expect much chance of a ron from opponents. And if you don't riichi, other players are free to keep building their hands unpressured.

If someone else reaches tenpai and declares riichi before you do, now you're forced into a head-on single wait (tanki) battle, which is far from favorable.

Option 2: Wait for a better single wait (tanki)

This isn't a bad option either. Your current dora single wait (tanki) Riichi hand is worth 8,000 points (mangan). However, if you switch to a better wait, the hand drops to around 3,200 points. Since this is East 1 round, you may want to be a bit more ambitious.

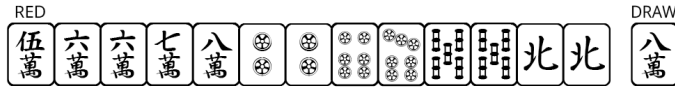
[Recommended] Option 3: Immediate riichi on the dora single wait (tanki)

Sure, you won't get many ron wins, but what if everyone else folds? Now you're the only one drawing for the rest of the hand.


Your tsumo rate per turn is about 1 in 34, roughly 3%. Across the fifteen or so remaining turns, that adds up to a 35% chance of tsumo, and if you self-draw your winning tile (tsumo), you get 3,000/6,000, which gives a huge boost to your top rate.





Also, there's a bonus defensive upside. If you're waiting on the dora, you've already neutralized the worst-case scenario of getting chased with a riichi and then dealing in with the dora. That simply can't happen anymore.

So in the end, a dora single wait (tanki) may actually be a surprisingly well-balanced attack and defense play.





33 Skip Seven Pairs without insta-riichi

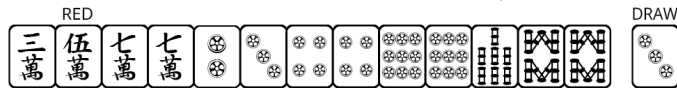
You've drawn , and now the hand has five pairs with All Simples (tanyao) + Red Five clearly in sight. You might be thinking, "If I go for a standard hand, I'm still two away from tenpai. But with Seven Pairs (chiitoitsu), I'm one away from tenpai (iishanten)! Let's go Seven Pairs (chiitoi)!"

But take a moment and think it through calmly. Let's say you cut  and aim for Seven Pairs (chiitoitsu). Later, you pair up  and reach tenpai. At that point, your possible waits are  or  single wait (tanki). Can you really call that a satisfying tenpai? Unless the table situation is extremely favorable, you're likely to sit in silent tenpai (damaten), hoping for a better single wait (tanki) to appear.

In that sense, this hand ends up needing two stages even as a Seven Pairs (chiitoitsu). Stage one, you reach tenpai, then stage two, you wait for a better wait. It's effectively two tiles away from tenpai even for Seven Pairs (chiitoi). So in this case, it's probably better to skip the single wait (tanki) only Seven Pairs (chiitoi) path and aim for a standard hand, which can lead to two-sided waits (ryanmen), and allow for calls if needed.

The best move here is to start by dropping the pair of  , structure the hand into five blocks, and aim for Riichi + All Simples (tanyao) + Red Five.

South Round 4, East Seat, Turn 3, Currently in 4th



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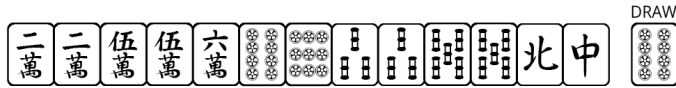
Lv.2

34 Skip Seven Pairs if you need tenpai

There's one more important guideline when choosing between Seven Pairs (chiitai) and a standard hand: "If it's a hand where you absolutely must reach tenpai, don't go for Seven Pairs (chiitoitsu)." Seven Pairs (chiitai) is notoriously bad for forming tenpai.












With a standard hand, you can at least call pon or chii to force a tenpai even if it doesn't have a yaku. But with Seven Pairs (chiitai), you can't do that at all. That means in high-pressure rounds like South 4 where tenpai or noten will swing point differences, or when you're the dealer in the South round and need to continue (renchan), going for Seven Pairs (chiitai) can actually backfire. You end up failing to reach tenpai, pay a noten penalty, or lose your dealership outright.

For example, in the hand shown above, you're two away from tenpai as a standard hand, but one away from tenpai (iishanten) for Seven Pairs (chiitai). However, the chance of completing a Seven Pairs (chiitai) tenpai is only about 3 out of 34 per draw, and on average, it takes eleven turns to complete. That's too slow when you're on a clock. Here you should aim straight for a standard hand start by dropping the pair of , and consider calling for All Simples (tanyao) if needed. Save Seven Pairs (chiitai) for cases where 1.) tenpai isn't urgent or 2.) your shape clearly won't form a viable standard hand.

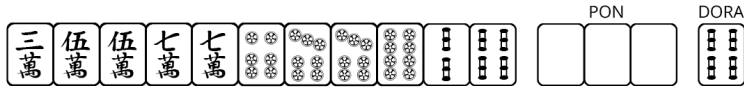


35 Keep safe tiles with Seven Pairs

So far, we've talked about how to choose between standard hands and Seven Pairs (chiitoi). But once you do decide to go for Seven Pairs (chiitoi), how should you play it? The answer is: Prioritize keeping tiles with high defensive value.

In the hand above, you've just paired , giving you five pairs and zero sets. Your remaining lone tiles are , , , and . Let's say  is unplayed and the other tiles (, , ) each have one copy already discarded. In this case, the best move is to discard , which is likely to become the most dangerous tile later. If you think: "It's unplayed, so all three might still be in the wall!" and hold onto , you're setting yourself up for trouble. Once someone declares riichi, that unplayed tile becomes dangerous against everyone, and now you're stuck holding it.

On the other hand, tiles that have been discarded once, like honors or terminals, are often safe against at least one player. It's much easier to fold using them while staying one away from tenpai (iishanten), and they also make for strong single waits (tanki) in the endgame if left as your final pair. When you're one away from tenpai for Seven Pairs (chiitoi), don't get tunnel vision over how many of a tile are left. Instead, factor in how the tile might behave if someone pushes on you. Build your hand not just for offense but for resilience under pressure.










36 Don't wait on the dora indicator

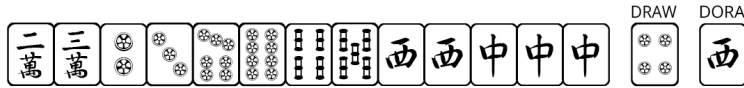
Let me ask you something: “What do you think is the hardest middle wait to win with in all of mahjong?”

“Waiting on a middle wait for the dora tile?” That’s certainly rough. But what’s even harder is the middle wait on a dora indicator tile. Because one copy is already visible for the indicator, the maximum number of available tiles is only three.

Since it’s next to the dora, other players are reluctant to discard it, giving it high utility and low visibility. It’s the worst of the worst among bad waits, truly a “dead-weight middle wait.”

In the hand above, you’ve already pon’d the , and cutting  would leave you one away from tenpai (iishanten), but the middle wait on the  is the dora indicator tile. If that ends up as your final wait, your odds of winning are very slim. If it’s an early-round situation, you might justify keeping it. Maybe you pair the dora or draw a red  to boost the hand. But if this is a 1st place-deciding hand, the better play is to cut  and , and aim to form two sets from the stronger  structure instead.

It might feel wrong to discard a block that includes a dora, but when the value of winning is high, it’s often smarter to let go of the dora and build a more winnable wait elsewhere.



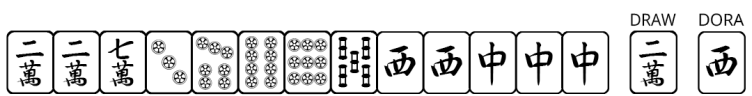
37 Waits near the edge are stronger

You've got a triple of 中 and two dora; this is a hand worth fighting for. You've just drawn 中, putting you one tile away from tenpai (iishanten).

Currently, your block candidates are 二萬三萬, 四東五東, and 六東七東, but since you have six blocks, you'll need to drop one of them. Assuming there's no major difference in visible tiles or table conditions, the recommended choice here is to discard 六東七東, keeping the two two-sided waits (ryanmen) on the edge.

That's because both 二萬三萬 and 四東五東 leave you with 一萬 and 六東 edge waits. Even if you declare riichi, or call and get into tenpai, there's a slightly higher chance that opponents would discard those edge tiles with a "please let the edge tiles pass!" kind of mentality. In contrast, 六東七東 leaves you with 三東 and 八東 as wait tiles closer to the center. These are more useful to other players and more dangerous to cut. Opponents tend to hold onto those tiles longer, making ron wins harder to get.

Two-sided waits (ryanmen) are generally considered a good wait shape, but even among various two-sided waits (ryanmen), there's a clear difference in how easy it is to win depending on which tiles you're waiting on. Keep that nuance in mind when shaping your waits; even small differences can tip a match.



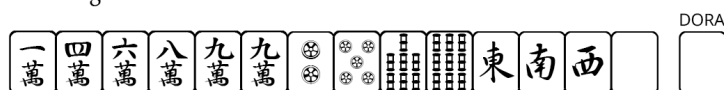
38 The strongest tiles are 3s and 7s

You've got a triplet of and two dora; a hand worth pushing. After drawing , you've reached one away from tenpai (iishanten), and like the previous example, this one's a Sticky One Away (kutsuki tenpai). You've got three floating tiles: , , and . Which one should you cut?


If you've already absorbed the lesson on two-sided wait (ryanmen) quality, this should feel straightforward. The best move here is to cut . Although all three cuts offer the same number of acceptance tiles, the two-sided wait (ryanmen) you get from attaching to , like or is more central, making them harder to win off of by discard. By contrast, attaching to offers better options. Draw and you get or draw and you get . Both are more edge-oriented, higher-quality two-sided waits (ryanmen).

Even a middle wait on from drawing results in a relatively decent wait as far as middle wait shapes go. Edge waits like that are among the better ones for ron potential. So while the number of possible attachments is the same for tiles numbered 3 through 7, prioritizing those that build toward edge-facing two-sided waits (ryanmen) makes tiles like 3 and 7 more valuable. That's the kind of small but crucial edge you want when shaping Sticky One Away (kutsuki) hands.

Starting hand



39 Bad shapes? Plan ahead

If you flip over your starting hand (haipai), and your first instinct is to go “let’s just aim for a riichi” and start cutting  or the honor tiles, take a deep breath and look at your hand again. Getting to riichi from this shape feels pretty rough, doesn’t it?

You’re short on blocks, don’t have a single good shape, and even if you just cut honors and terminals naturally, you’ll probably be sitting at two away from tenpai by the time someone else throws down a riichi stick. It’s a recipe for getting run over.

That’s why this is a great moment to shift gears. Cut straight into dots (pinzu) and bamboo (souzu), and push toward a Half Flush (honitsu) in characters (manzu), or even Seven Pairs (chiitoi) if things line up. If you get some overlap in the honor tiles, your speed could ramp up quickly.

But most importantly, this kind of hand lets you build a shape with strong defensive potential if someone else riichis first.

When your starting hand is clearly behind, one of the smartest things you can do is start stocking up on potential safe tiles. That way, you’re less likely to deal in when the pressure hits.

Play like someone preparing for the midgame storm, not just someone chasing a hand that may never form.

40 Not all bad shapes are equal


The idea that “it’s okay to riichi even with a bad shape if you have a dora” has become pretty widespread over the past ten years. But have you ever found yourself wondering, “is it really okay to riichi on this wait?” That’s where the concept of ranking your bad shapes comes in handy.

Not all bad waits are created equal. For instance, even with double pair waits (shanpon), a wait on terminals or honor tiles can actually have winning chances similar to a two-sided wait (ryanmen). On the other hand, a middle-tile double pair wait (shanpon) is much less likely to result in a win. That’s because edge and honor waits are more likely to be discarded due to Line Theory (suji) or tile block formations (taatsu), whereas middle tiles tend to be held onto longer.


The same holds true for middle wait (kanchan) and edge wait (penchan) shapes. The 4-6 middle wait shape (waiting on 5) is the hardest to win on, while edge waits like 2-4 (waiting on 3) or 6-8 (waiting on 7) are considered the strongest among bad waits.

So when you’re unsure about riichi-ing on a bad shape or choosing between waits, try asking yourself: “Where does this wait rank among the world of bad shapes?”

In the midgame (second row of discards):

Other players are starting to move forward, so there's value in pushing for a fast riichi. Here, the best move is likely to cut  to keep three two-sided wait (ryanmen) shapes and stay two away from tenpai because you'll keep the door open to form a 3-4-5 Three Color Straight (sanshoku dojun) if you draw the right tiles. This path strikes a good balance between speed and flexibility.

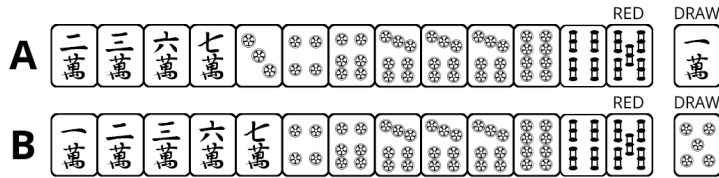
In the endgame (third row of discards):

Now you need to think more practically. Even more than just winning, you must get to tenpai to avoid paying the noten penalty. At this stage, cutting  is your best play. Forget the Three Color Straight (sanshoku dojun) or dora acceptance. What matters now is maximizing the ways to reach tenpai.

So make a note:

- In the **early game**, don't worry about tenpai, go for ideal shapes and values.
- In the **midgame**, aim for a realistic riichi with a flexible hand.
- In the **endgame**, play hard toward tenpai, even if it means giving up high-value options.

The key is to stay adaptable and adjust your decisions by turn count.



43 Avoid getting trapped by unlucky draws

Take a look at Hand A. You've reached one away from tenpai (iishanten) for Pinfu, and now it's time to decide: do you drop or ?

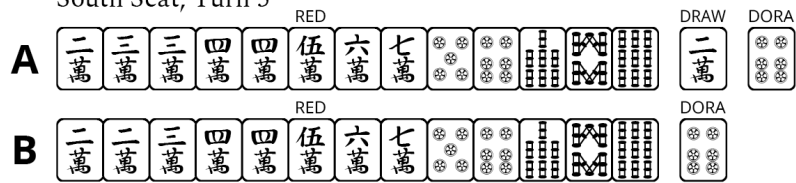
There are a few ways to approach this. Look at the table state, discards, and visible tiles. If all those factors are neutral, the right call is to discard . Why? Because cutting from the block risks locking you out. If you later draw or , they become completely dead tiles and fit nowhere in your hand.

But if you go with a cut, a later draw isn't wasted. From the resulting shape of drawing (Hand B), you can then cut and shift into a pairless wider one away from tenpai (iishanten) shape, which keeps more possibilities alive.


This is a core idea when choosing which block to break. Sometimes the blocks nearby can cover some of the downsides of your bad draw. If you spot those safety nets, you can avoid getting trapped by what would've been an unlucky draw (urame).







So from here on out, make it a habit to calmly project the worst-case draw and let that guide your discard choice.

South Seat, Turn 5

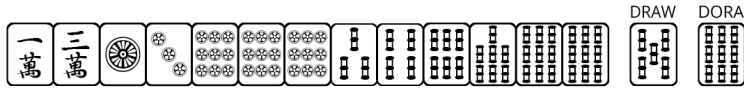


44 Avoid single waits for sequences

Take a look at Hand A. You've completed a Two Identical Sequences (iipeikou), but it's led to a single tile wait (tanki). Not the ideal outcome. Sure, if you discard , you'll have a valid 8,000 point (mangan) tenpai: Two Identical Sequences (iipeikou) + Red Dora + Dora at least. But it's a dora single wait (tanki) on a middle tile, and that kind of wait is notoriously hard to win on especially if no one wants to push early.

Since the turn count is still early, here's an idea: cut  instead and shift into the setup in Hand B. If you draw into  or  in the character (manzu) block, you can reach tenpai on a  wait, giving you Riichi + Pinfu + Red Dora + Dora, which gives you a serious shot at 12,000 points (haneman). Vice versa, if the dots (pinzu) side completes first, you're not out of luck. You'll still get a three-sided wait (sanmenchan) in characters (manzu)  or  and a clean riichi opportunity.

It's natural to feel hesitant about breaking up a completed Two Identical Sequences (iipeikou). After all, that's already a yaku. When it lands you in a weak single tile wait (tanki) tenpai, stepping back and intentionally breaking tenpai can be the stronger long-term play.



45 Build blocks by reading discards

You've reached one away from tenpai (iishanten) with two doras in hand. You're aiming for riichi and need to choose between discarding or , but in a case like this, take a moment to look at the other players' discards.

If multiple opponents have already discarded or early in the hand, then it's better to keep . Likewise, if or have been discarded early, then keeping the dot (pinzu) tiles is the better call.

The reasoning here is that tiles discarded early are often not surrounded by nearby tiles in the opponents' hands. For example, "if someone has discarded early, they likely don't have or either, meaning those tiles are more likely to still be in the wall." These kinds of techniques are broadly known as Wall Reading (yama yomi) or Table Reading (bakyou yomi).

There's another benefit to this approach. If someone declares riichi, you'll already have a safe tile from earlier discards in your hand, making it easier to fold or defend.

So for both offense (pursuing your win) and defense (keeping safe tiles), this strategy of "building your blocks (taatsu) based on what's in the opponents' discard rows" is doubly effective. Give it a try in your next game.

East Seat, Turn 1



46 Discard the left player's wind first

You're the dealer, and your starting hand is looking solid. There's a clear path to All Simples (tanyao) + Dora. This is the kind of hand where you'll likely just play, aiming for the fastest possible hand according to tile efficiency (tenari), starting with honor tiles and letting the shape build naturally.

Here's the question: Have you decided on the discard order for those three "wind tiles" that aren't your seat wind or round wind? It turns out, there's a slightly optimal order. Cut in the order of the left-hand opponent's (kamicha) wind → the across-seat opponent's (toimen) wind → the right-hand opponent's (shimocha) wind. In this case, that means 4 → 3 → 2 (based on seat order from yourself) or Left (L) → Over (O) → Right (R).

Why? Well, the longer you keep an honor tile, the higher the chance someone will pair it and be ready to call pon. A tile discarded on turn 1 is less likely to get pon'd than one discarded a few turns later.

Now here's where it gets interesting. If your 北 gets pon'd by the North (the player to your left), that's actually slightly beneficial for you, because when North calls pon, both South and West lose their next draw turns.

That's two players losing a turn to draw and that can swing the tempo in your favor, since you'll relatively get more draws. Ideally, you want North to call pon. And to make that more likely, you should delay discarding 北, giving North time to pair it up.

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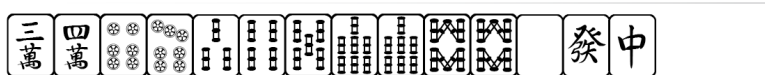
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Lv.3

On the flip side, if your 南 gets pon'd by South (the player to your right), no one loses out on a draw. No turns get skipped, and you gain nothing. So it's better to get that tile out early, before South pairs it up.

The optimal discard order for unrelated wind tiles is 4 → 3 → 2 or L → O → R, maximizing your chance to get that subtle gain from a pon by the North seat.

It's not a flashy hand-winning technique, but this kind of micro-efficiency is exactly what strong players apply consistently, and over the long run, those small edges add up and shape real win rates.



47 Discard dragons freely

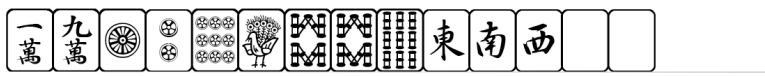
So, what about the discard order for the three dragon tiles (sangenpai)? As it turns out, there's a commonly accepted best practice: "If you don't need them for your hand, start by cutting the Green Dragon

The reasoning often given is that doing so reduces the chance of someone making All Greens (ryuuisou) by eliminating one of its key components early. Sure, that logic holds, but the actual probability of All Greens (ryuuisou) appearing is just 0.002%. We're talking about an ultra rare kind of hand.

Other theories you'll hear include: " have lower win-rates when it becomes your wait because red is a warning color"; "the is harder to visually confirm than the other two, so in online games with time pressure, players struggle to quickly read how many are out, reducing its value as a safe tile"; or "on fully automatic tables, the internal magnets in the tiles can only spin half a turn, so if you realize a is in your own wall and might be useful it's better to keep it" and so on.

In any case, none of these theories are solid, so you don't need to be overly sensitive about the exact discard order of dragon tiles.

Turn 4



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48 Keep pairs for Thirteen Orphans

You're holding a Thirteen Orphans (kokushi musou) hand, two tiles away from tenpai, missing the 北, 發, and 中 tiles. It's still early in the hand, and in this case, you haven't dealt with the middle tiles yet, so 5筒 and 6筒 remain. You'll eventually need to discard both, but in this kind of spot, it's better to discard 5筒 first and keep the pair of 6筒.

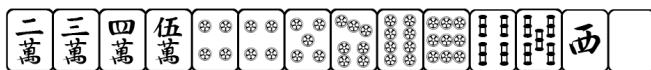
Now imagine that right after this, someone calls riichi. If you had kept both 5筒 and 6筒, you'd need to push through two risky tiles just to have a chance at winning. If you'd kept the pair of 6筒 and already discarded 5筒, you'd only need to risk one dangerous tile to still have a path to victory.

In general, when you're still one tile away from tenpai (iishanten) or worse for Thirteen Orphans (kokushi musou) and someone declares riichi, the right play is usually to fold. Though there are those rare moments when you have to win with Thirteen Orphans (kokushi musou) no matter what.

In those cases, you want to push back after your opponent's attack, and the key is to keep pairs and triplets that reduce the number of dangerous tiles you'll need to push through.




So when you're forced to fight, you've already narrowed the risk, and that might make all the difference.

East Seat



49 Big start? Mind the winds

When you're the dealer and receive a strong starting hand, there's one thing you'll want to be mindful of a "Four Winds Abortive Draw (suufon renda)". This is a local rule where the hand ends in an abortive draw if all four players discard the same wind tile on their first turn. It's not used in pro-level games like M-League or televised matches, but it is enforced on many online mahjong platforms. In free-play parlors, it used to be fairly common, though nowadays it's seen less often.

That's why when you're dealer and holding a strong opening like the one described, it's better to cut something like  in online mahjong, rather than opening with a wind tile like . Even though the chance of a Four Winds Abortive Draw happening is less than 1%, if you have other discard options, you should start by throwing . Having your hand voided would be a huge waste of momentum. On the flip side, if you're South seat or West seat and your starting hand is lackluster, you might consider intentionally matching wind tile discards, betting on the small chance of triggering a Four Winds Abortive Draw (suufon renda).

There's even data showing that when East and South both open with the same honor tile, and West follows with it too, the chance of a four-wind draw actually rises to around 10%.

Defense is a mindset

When you play mahjong, there are times when you suffer unavoidable deal-ins (honjuu) or spells of bad luck. For example, you might declare an early riichi with a wide wait, only to deal into a chasing riichi or cut an honor tile because you lack safe tiles and get hit.

What would you do at such times? Some people sulk and lose motivation, launch reckless attacks to recoup lost points, or adopt a superstitious mindset like, "Since normal play isn't working today, I'll try doing the opposite of what I usually do."

However, it is precisely how you behave when luck deserts you that truly tests your skill as a player. What you should do when luck turns against you is simply "play as you normally do."

For example, someone has declared riichi and your own hand is in pieces. The reason you completely fold in such a spot is that you know folding is the profitable choice (while pushing is a loss). If you say, "I'm running cold, so I'll try a play I normally wouldn't," and push anyway, you're knowingly taking a loss and only deepening the wound. Precisely when you're out of luck, make every effort to stick to your usual play, the decisions you normally believe are most profitable.

That said, because mahjong is played by living human beings, we cannot eliminate psychological influence. Whoever you are, when something unfortunate happens, you inevitably suffer at least some shock.

What matters is how quickly you can recover from that shocked state. The stronger the player, the more outstanding their speed at bouncing back after their morale sinks. Although innate temperament and grit play a part, this “speed of returning to normal” can definitely be developed through training.

The key lies in “breaking the fall with your mind.” Say it’s East 1, you declare riichi, but then deal in 8,000 points to a chasing riichi. That’s undeniably bad luck, yet by telling yourself, “At least it happened in East 1! I’ve got seven more hands to claw it back,” you find a positive element, clarify your next move, and bounce back immediately. Or if you start with a great hand but your draws go dead and another player wins, you might think, “It’s a pity I couldn’t win, but the dead draws let me fold. Damage kept to a minimum!”

I call this ability to “break the fall and snap back from a dented state” the “konjac mentality.” (Note: Konjac is a firm but rubbery, low-calorie jelly made from the fiber-rich corm of the konjac yam, used in Japanese cuisine for its springy texture and almost zero carbohydrates.) Nerves of steel that are never shaken no matter what might be something you’re born with, but a konjac-like mentality that dents and instantly springs back can be learned by anyone. Honestly, this mindset doesn’t just help in mahjong but in everyday life as well. So go ahead and give it a try. You’ll be surprised how far it takes you.

CHAPTER 2

Push Fold Strategy & Riichi Decision-Making

The moment of thy
strike 'tis thine to
discern!



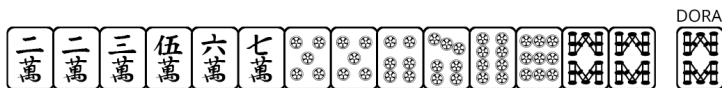
1 Push harder, fold harder

If you want to get better at mahjong, you can't avoid learning about the push fold (oshi hiki) strategy. **Pushing** (oshi) means discarding tiles that might deal in, all for the sake of maximizing your win. **Folding** (hiki) is giving up on winning and switching to discarding the safest tiles possible.

Strong players are excellent at switching between the two. If they decide a hand isn't worth pushing, they'll break apart sets without hesitation and fully commit to folding. On the other hand, players who struggle with push fold (oshi hiki) strategy often keep pushing with weak hands, tossing out honors, neighboring discard tiles, or Line Theory (suji) based safe tiles even when safer options are available and end up dealing in.



To those players, here's the message I want to share: "Push harder, fold harder!"


What that really means is to stay conscious of whether you're currently pushing or folding. Don't just play on autopilot. This was advice given to me by a senior crow tengu when I was still new to the game and it has stuck with me ever since.



2 Riichi is worth 1.5 han

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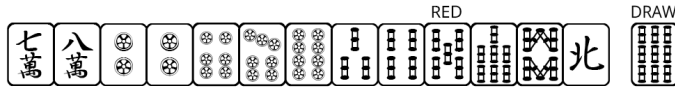
This hand has a good-shape while being one away from tenpai (iishanten) with two dora. If you call and aim for All Simples (tanyao), you'd cut , but the final wait will always be a harder-to-win double pair wait (shanpon). Plus, if you can't call , you'll be stuck at 3,900 points.

So, it's better to cut  and aim for riichi. This gives the widest acceptance and guarantees a two-sided wait (ryanmen).


Another upside of going for riichi is the chance to combine with other bonuses like One-shot (ippatsu), Ura Dora, or Self-Draw (menzen tsumo), potentially making a 12,000 point hand (haneman).







While both Riichi and All Simples (tanyao) are 1 han, Riichi tends to be worth more in practice, roughly 1.5 han on average, thanks to incidental bonuses.

So when you're unsure about deciding between Riichi and another 1 han yaku, remember: Riichi is effectively worth 1.5 han.



3 Don't chase phantom hands

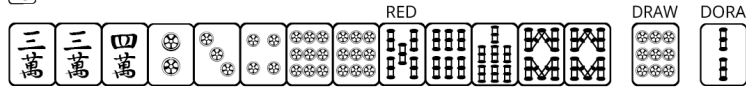
You were one away from tenpai (iishanten) for Riichi + All Simples (tanyao) + Pinfu + Three Color Straight (sanshoku dojun), but drew , which breaks the Three Color Straight (sanshoku) but gives you tenpai.

If you love hand pattern yakus, you might think, “Three Color Straights (sanshoku dojun) are the crown jewel of mahjong!” and be tempted to wait for a better hand. But the only upgrade tiles are  and , just two kinds, making the chance of drawing one is roughly 2 out of 34 per turn. Realistically, someone will discard   before that happens. Even if you do improve, your final wait still ends up on  , which introduces high-low (takame-yasume) hand value outcomes.

So don't get fixated on an unconfirmed Three Color Straight (sanshoku dojun). Go straight for the riichi and leverage the power of a fast tenpai. Pushing others into defense gives you more chances to self-draw (tsumo), and even this shape can hit One-shot (ippatsu) or Ura Dora for a possible 8,000 point hand (mangan).

Chasing yakus are fine; just don't let a phantom hand cost you a valuable first riichi opportunity.

四萬 is a safe tile



4 Don't be fooled by one turn of safety

You've reached tenpai with two dora, but you have no yaku, so you need to cut either 三萬 or 四萬 to declare riichi.

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Normally, you'd cut 三萬 for a two-sided wait (ryanmen). But let's say an opponent has already declared riichi, and their riichi discard was 四萬. Now 三萬 looks dangerous, while 四萬 is completely safe. What's the right call?

Even in that case, the best play is to cut 三萬 and go for the two-sided wait (ryanmen) with a chasing riichi. Yes, in this turn only, 三萬 might have a higher chance of dealing in.

But the fight won't end in one draw. Across several turns, there's a big difference between a double pair wait (shanpon) with, at most, four winning tiles left versus a two-sided wait (ryanmen) with potentially eight.

If you can double your wait by taking one calculated risk, it's worth it.

5 Always folding leads to bleeding out

Pushing back against a riichi takes courage. Especially when you've just learned folding (betaori), it's easy to fall into the habit of breaking your hand and folding even if you were in tenpai first.

I've been there too. In my early days, I folded (betaori) too often and ended up bleeding points little by little. So this is a lesson I'd share with my past self.

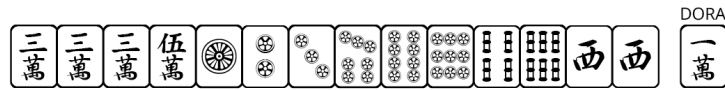
If you folded every hand from East 1 to South 4, what would your score look like by the end? You wouldn't still have your full 25,000 points.

Even perfect folding can't stop self-draw (tsumo) losses, noten penalties, or the occasional failed fold.


Some say full-game folding (betaori) leads to an average loss of about 1,500 points per hand, so that's around 12,000 points gone in an East-South match (hanchan). You would be left with just 13,000 points at the end.

So if you're already in tenpai or have a solid hand, even against riichi, maybe that's reason enough to find the courage to push back.

East Round 1, South seat, Turn 1



7 Double riichi is an insta-riichi


You were dealt a Double Riichi hand right at the start, but it's a middle wait (kanchan) on  with no dora. What's the best move here?

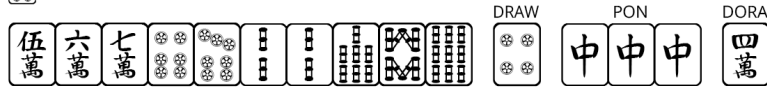
If it wasn't a Double Riichi, it'd be a tougher call, but on the first turn, you should instantly riichi.

This is the only moment when the hand is worth 2 han. There are no upgrades that keep it at 2 han, and only two ways to improve the wait.

Even if it becomes a two-sided wait (ryanmen), losing the double riichi drops the value to just 1,300 points. The best way to make the most of this rare double riichi setup is to riichi immediately.

Forcing others into defense and forcing draws while no one else advances, that's a strong mahjong playstyle.

 is a safe tile










8 Push early, fold late

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You've called  and are in tenpai on a  wait for 1,000 points. Then an opponent declares riichi, and you draw .  is a safe tile;  is not. The basic rule is: "Push with a good shape." So cutting  is standard, but sometimes it's better to play it safe and cut , even if it narrows your wait. The key factor is turn count.


In the early game:

- More safe tiles are available, so the chance of dealing in with one particular risky tile is lower
- There are many turns left, so you have time to win if you fight back
- Folding early increases the chance you'll get stuck later

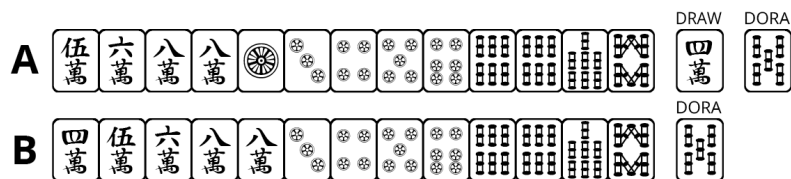
That makes the aggressive  discard more worthwhile.

In the late game:


- The risk of dealing in with a single risky tile is much higher
- Your chances of winning are low
- You're likely to run out of safe tiles


So in that case, cutting the safe  is the better call.
















When you're unsure whether to push or fold, go with this rule: push early, fold late.






9 Break tenpai if it's mediocre

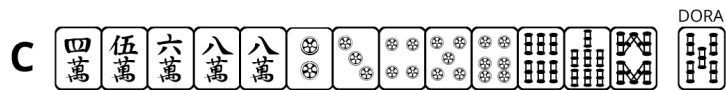
Hand **A** was one away from tenpai (iishanten) with a middle wait (kanchan) and a two-sided wait (ryanmen). You then drew one of the character (manzu) two-sided wait (ryanmen) tiles to enter tenpai on a middle wait for .

You might be tempted to think, “If the dots (pinzu) side had filled first, I’d insta-riichi, but now... maybe I just stay in silent tenpai (damaten) and wait for a better shape?” and quietly discard  vertically into the discard pile.

The better move here is to break tenpai by cutting  instead, leading to Hand **B**. The benefit of cutting  is that you can win right away if you draw  for 300/500 points. But cutting  opens up far more upgrade paths, not just through dots (pinzu) but with draws like , , , ,  leading to better shapes or higher-value hands. Compare that to cutting , there are only four types of the useful tiles: , , , . The  cut nearly doubles your improvement options.

Plus, with this hand, you still have possible upgrades to have the dora, a 4-5-6 Three Color Straight (sanshoku doujun), or even Two Identical Sequences (iipeikou). So it’s absolutely worth giving up the immediate self-draw (tsumo) chance on  to aim even higher.

The main drawback of cutting  is missing a direct win if you draw , but if that gives you a chance at a perfect three-sided wait (sanmenchan) and a riichi, that’s not a loss at all as you see in Hand **C**.




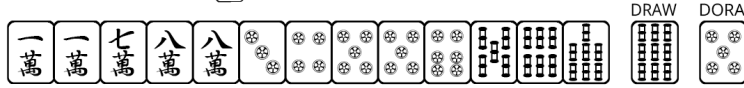
When your tenpai feels mediocre, remember there's a third option besides immediate riichi or silent tenpai (damaten): Break your tenpai to aim for the biggest possible improvements.

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East Seat, Turn 5,  is a safe tile





10 Pushing unsafe tiles is a roulette

You have a great hand that's one away from tenpai (iishanten) for Pinfu + 2 Dora. Then someone declares riichi, and you draw an unsafe tile  that typical Mahjong Line Theory (suji) doesn't apply to (musuji), but you also have a completely safe tile . Which is better: Push with  or fold with ?

The right move depends on the turn count and how many tiles, according to Mahjong Line Theory (suji), are already safe.

According to Mahjong Line Theory (suji), there are three suits with six lines each (1-4, 4-7, 2-5, 5-8, 3-6, and 6-9) for a total of eighteen lines. If we assume the riichi is a two-sided wait (ryanmen) and only 1 of those 18 is a winning tile, meaning the first unsafe tile you push has a 1/18 chance of dealing in. The next one would be 1/17, and so on. So early in the hand when only a few lines are accounted for, pushing an unsafe tile is rarely fatal.

In this case, push with . By contrast, in the mid-to-late game, many lines are already used up and accounted for. Pushing a remaining unsafe, non-line tile (musuji) carries a much higher risk. Near the end, with only two to three lines (suji) left, it's like playing "Pop-Up Pirate" with nearly every slot filled. One wrong move and you deal in.

In that case, folding with the safe  is correct.

Don't be overly afraid of unsafe, non-line tiles (musuji) if it's early on and your hand has potential. Push with confidence.




11 Trust in luck over your own draws

One-shot (ippatsu) and Ura Dora are called “incidental yaku”; unlike others, you can’t aim for them directly.




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Say you’re down 9,000 points in All Last, and on turn 10, you reach tenpai with the hand above. Some might choose a silent tenpai (damaten) and wait for some improvements. But the only improvement that increases hand value is drawing  for an All Simples (tanyao) swap.

So your decision comes down to comparing:

- 1.) Riichi now, then draw a , hoping for One-shot (ippatsu) or Ura Dora to hit.
- 2.) Draw  first, change to All Simples (tanyao), riichi, then tsumo . But in this case, you need two exact draws in sequence

Look at the odds of both options and pick the one with the higher probability. Drawing a specific tile is about 3% per turn, whereas the One-shot or Ura Dora occur about 40% of the time. Compared to the latter, which requires two specific tiles, the first option of needing only one has a dramatically higher chance of happening.

*While a  draw adds Pinfu, the score would still just be 1300-2600, so unless you have an ura dora, you can’t overtake in points. The Self-Draw + Ura Dora condition doesn’t actually change

12 Call rate is a vanity metric

Since the rise of online mahjong, more and more players have started paying attention to in-game stats. One of the benefits of online platforms is how they visualize your playstyle data, such as placement rate, win rate, deal-in rate, and call rate.

Sometimes players become overly focused on those stats and ask things like: “My call rate is xx%. Should I try to increase it?” The short answer is: You don’t need to worry about your call rate.

A player who calls three times with no impact on the outcome is far less threatening than someone who calls once with perfect timing. If you start calling just to raise your stat, you’re missing the point entirely.

Even in top-level M-League play, some players exceed a 30% call rate, while others stay in single digits (granted, single digits is a bit of an outlier).

Don’t bother calling tiles to increase or decrease your call rate.

Instead, ask yourself: “Is this call necessary for this hand?” That’s the only question that matters.

13 Don't focus on win rate

There's a saying: "The stronger the player, the higher their win rate minus their deal-in rate."

If you only latch onto that idea, you might end up focusing solely on increasing your win rate.

What kind of mahjong does that lead to? Things like leaving a Pinfu + 1 Dora hand as a silent tenpai (damaten), or calling early on a hand that's one away from tenpai (iishanten) for Riichi + All Simples (tanyao) + Pinfu just to force a fast All Simples (tanyao) 1,000 point hand all for the sake of boosting win percentage.

Sure, your win rate might go up, but that doesn't mean your overall results will improve. In fact, you'll often miss out on winning hands worth 8,000 points (mangan) or more, or get overtaken late in the game because you settled for cheap hands.

Online mahjong has made all kinds of player stats visible, and that's a great development. But some players become so obsessed with numbers that they throw off the core balance of their mahjong playstyle.

So it's worth focusing on the true goal of placing well consistently and earning positive results over the long term. Focus on improving correctly, not just chasing the numbers.

14 Even dealing in could be good

The basic principle for push fold decisions against a riichi is the value of your own hand.

But in some situations, it could be beneficial to push even with a weak hand, specifically in All Last when you're the clear point leader. Say you're in first place with 50,000 points, and second place (the dealer) has 30,000. Now imagine a riichi comes in from the last-place player. The only way your top spot is at risk is if the dealer continues their dealership (renchan) and overtakes you. So even if you deal into a 16,000 point hand (baiman) from the riichi player, you still finish first.

Depending on how many dora are visible and what the riichi discards look like, you can often judge that as long as "Even if I deal into a 12,000 point hand (haneman), I stay in first." In those cases, it's usually correct to push. In real games, you can estimate the riichi hand's potential value by considering the player's current place, point total, and visible dora, which expands the number of hands where dealing in is actually acceptable.

When you're heading into All Last with a big lead, it's worth playing with the mindset that: Even dealing in can be a winning outcome.

15 Don't be the third to riichi

When deciding whether to push or fold against a riichi, the main factor is the value of your own hand.

Sometimes your hand is borderline though, not strong enough to clearly push, but not weak enough to fold outright.

In those cases, focus on one key question: "Is anyone else pushing?"

This one factor drastically changes the value of your decision to push.

If someone else is pushing:

- The chance of someone else dealing in increases.
- The riichi will likely resolve earlier.
- Your own win rate drops.
- Your risk of losing points through tsumo or no-ten penalties decreases.

So the return rate from pushing goes down.

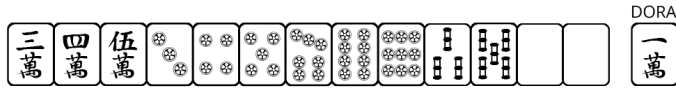
But if both other players are clearly folding:

- Dealing into someone else's hand becomes nearly impossible
- The hand will drag on longer
- Your win rate increases
- Your rate of tsumo loss or noten penalties decreases

In this case, pushing becomes more attractive.

Jumping into a fight where one player has riichi and another is already pushing means becoming the third fighter. Being the third fighter means high risk, low return.

When unsure, ask yourself: "Am I about to become the third player in the battle?" If so, you may want to reconsider.



17 Dress up a cheap hand with a riichi

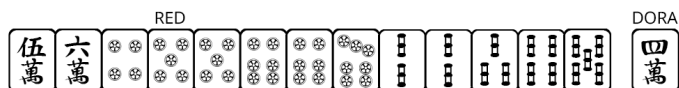
You've reached tenpai on a middle wait with a confirmed Three Color Straight (sanshoku dojun) in hand. Some players might think, "This kind of wait won't get dropped even if I riichi, so I'll just keep it hidden (damaten)."

Even if you win with it hidden (damaten), it's only 2,600 points. Not very satisfying. Honestly, is a center middle wait like this really an "easy" wait, even if you keep it hidden?


More likely, your silence just gives other players room to build their hands, and you'll end up facing a riichi yourself without getting to win.

So what should you do? Even with this kind of wait, go ahead and riichi. If you self-draw (tsumo), you score Riichi + Self-Draw (tsumo) + Three Color Straight (sanshoku) = a full 8,000 point (mangan). That's a solid hand worth fighting for.

What really boosts your top rate is how many 8,000 point-class hands (mangan) you can win in an East-South match (hanchan). The key to that is simple. Don't let hands like this slip by. Always riichi them! Start building the instinct that: "If there's a chance at least a 8,000 points hand (mangan), not riichiing is a waste."






18 Stop justifying silent tenpai

You've reached tenpai with Pinfu, All Simples (tanyao), and a red dora on a  shape.


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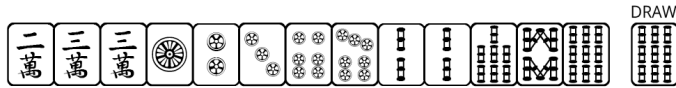
Lv.2

When people first learn mahjong, they often play by the rule of thumb: "If you're in tenpai, just riichi!" As players reach the intermediate level, they start holding back with reasons like: "This wait probably won't get dropped anyway"; "Even if I stay silent, I've got 8,000 points (mangan) if I win on "; or "If I draw  or , I can add Two Identical Sequences (iipeikou)."


The idea that "it won't show up anyway" just isn't true. Even defensive players will push when they have big hands like Four Concealed Triplets (suuankou) or a Concealed Full Flush (menchin). There is also a possibility of drawing it after discarding a safe tile and declaring a chase riichi.




Remember, this is a two-sided wait (ryanmen) with up to eight winning tiles. If you self-draw (tsumo)  while still remaining silent (dama or damaten), you'll kick yourself and think "I could've had 8,000 points (mangan) if I riichi'd!"

It's easy to fall into the habit of finding reasons to stay in silent tenpai (damaten) as you gain more knowledge, but go back to the basics. If it's a fast, good-shape tenpai, you should riichi aggressively.












19 Don't discard bait for fun

You're one away from tenpai (iishanten) with two two-sided wait shapes (ryanmen), and you draw a .

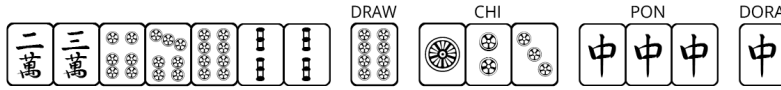
If you discard that  immediately, it's called a draw-discard (tsumo giri). If you instead add the drawn  to your hand and discard the  you were already holding, that's called a swap-discard (kara giri).

These two actions may look almost identical, but the standard is to draw-discard (tsumo giri).

Why? Because when you draw-discard (tsumo giri), the only information others get is: "That tile wasn't useful." With a swap-discard (kara giri), they learn: "This tile was useful before, but no longer is," which gives them much more to work with.

If you've already discarded tiles like  or  earlier, and then later do a swap-discard (kara giri) on , sharp players might think: "Why was he still holding onto  despite already cutting upper bamboo (souzu) tiles? Did he complete    and draw  as an extra? Or did he slide after drawing ?"

In short, even subtle tile behavior can leak hand info. So when possible, avoid unnecessary swap-discards (kara giri) to keep your hand concealed.



20 Do discard bait during fights

CH
2
Lv.3

In the previous section, we looked at the advantages of draw-discards (tsumo giri), but does that mean swap-discard (kara giri) has no use? Actually, it does in the form of a “safe tile reset.”

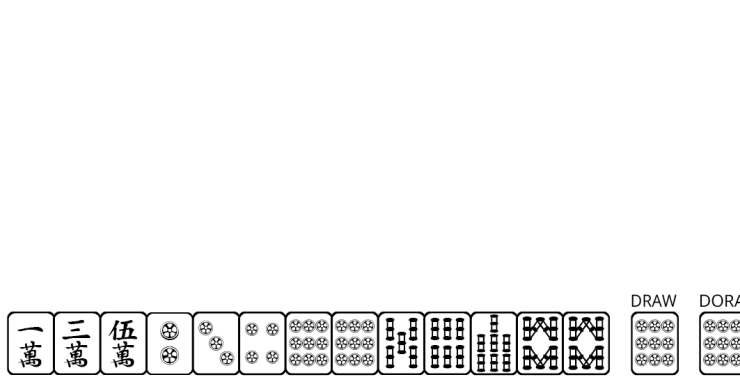
Imagine you’re in tenpai with the hand above, holding a two-sided wait (ryanmen) with three dora. Then an opponent declares riichi. Of course, you’ll push; your hand is strong.

Let’s say their riichi discard was and you draw , which you don’t need.





If you draw-discard (tsumo giri) the , what happens? Other players can confidently discard , knowing it just passed. What if you swap-discard (kara giri) the instead? From their perspective, it may look like you just entered tenpai or changed your wait.



Now that same suddenly looks risky and that hesitation can lead other players to think they are running out of safe tiles or even deal in.

So beyond just riichi battles, you can also use an intentional swap-discard (karagiri) to reset others’ perceptions of what tiles are safe, especially when it’s clear you’re in tenpai.






21 A chasing riichi lowers guard

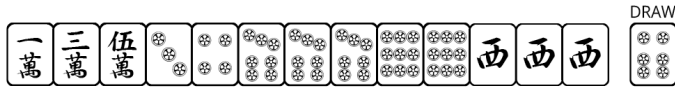
You've reached tenpai with a dora triplet but no yaku, so you need to cut either  or  and declare riichi. However, another player has already declared riichi, and let's say neither  nor  are safe. In this situation, what's the better move?

You might be tempted to cut , thinking "It's closer to the edge, so it looks safer..." but the better choice is to cut  and go for a chasing riichi.

Why? Because with two riichis on the table, the chances of winning by ron from the two remaining players go up significantly.

Sure, in this single turn,  might have a lower deal-in risk. Either way, you're stuck with a low-hit-rate middle wait. So the best way to boost your win chances is to cut the riskier , turning the  into a line trap (suji) wait on the 2-5 line. When a second riichi is declared, the non-riichi players are pressured and struggle to defend. Compared to facing one riichi, their guard is often looser against line traps.

Use the pressure of the two riichis to your advantage. Sometimes it's worth taking a risk to push aggressively for the win.



CH
2
Lv.3

22 Defensive pushes invite disaster

There is one defensive technique against riichi called a “defensive push” (mawashi uchi) where you attempt to develop a hand while discarding safe tiles.

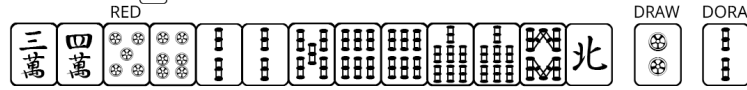
For example, in the hand above, instead of breaking up the triplet of 西, you might discard 西, which seems safer based on 西 being a one-chance tile, while aiming to stay in tenpai. It can feel great when it works, but this book doesn’t particularly recommend it.

The core principle when facing riichi should be binary: push or fold. If you push, commit fully. If you fold, don’t risk a single unsafe tile, that’s a strong playstyle.

Everyone has experienced dealing in by throwing a terminal based on a three-tile wall (sanmai kabe), where three of the four copies of a tile are already visible, or cutting 西 into a riichi just because 西 was discarded early.

Always keep in mind that defensive pushes (mawashi uchi) carry the risk of dealing in. Only use it when you can’t fully fold, and your hand still has decent point value or tile acceptance (ukeire).

3 copies of 北 has already been discarded



23 Take risk early if you have a good hand

You've got a huge hand, All Simples (tanyao), Pinfu, Red Dora, and Dora 2 that is one away from tenpai (iishanten), then you draw 北. Normally, this would be an easy draw-discard (tsumo giri), but an opponent has already called twice, and their last discard was 北 making the 北 feel risky.

So what's better here: a draw-discard (tsumo giri) of 北 right now or play it safe by cutting 北, then cut 北 later only if you reach tenpai? While it depends on the turn count and the discards of the open player, in general, draw-discard (tsumo giri) of the 北 now is recommended. Why? Because you're holding a super winning hand, folding isn't an option, and the 北 will have to be cut eventually if you reach tenpai anyway.

Right now, there's still a chance the opponent isn't in tenpai, but the deeper into the hand, the more likely they are in tenpai and the more likely 北 becomes a deal-in tile. At worst another riichi could come in from the side, making 北 even harder to discard later.

So when you're holding a high-value hand and can't afford to fold, it's better to take on the risk early. "Cut dangerous tiles now while the damage risk is lower" is the mindset you should have.

Why Youtube and mahjong pair well together

Mahjong streams have become a hugely popular genre on YouTube in Japan. Some of you reading this book may already be streamers, or maybe you're thinking about giving streaming a try.

There are many reasons why mahjong content has blown up in Japan, but one key factor is that the game itself is incredibly well-suited to streaming.

In recent years, many competitive multiplayer games have been designed around tight, high-skill gameplay. The better you get, the more you win, and that's great game design.

But it also means:

- When there's a skill gap, the stronger player tends to dominate
- Without closely matched opponents, exciting, dramatic matches are harder to produce

Mahjong, on the other hand, is unpredictable until the hands are revealed. Even players with vastly different skill levels can still play a real match. That makes it perfect for collabs or viewer participation since there is no need to hold back or adjust for others. Anyone can jump in, play seriously, and have a tense and exciting time. This unique balance makes mahjong extremely stream-friendly.

Another reason is technical. Online mahjong games are light on system resources, and unlike modern AAA titles that demand high-end gaming PCs and graphical power, mahjong runs smoothly on modest machines even with a 3D avatar. A basic browser capture setup is all you need to go live.

That's why mahjong has become a go-to choice for individual creators and virtual YouTubers in Japan, especially those with limited budgets or equipment.

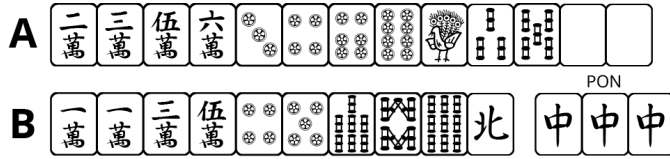
CHAPTER 3

Calling Tiles

Which hands stirs thy
cry? Which hands
keeps thee mute?



has just been discarded



1 Don't call if you'll lose your pair

Calling tiles, pon or chi, to complete sets brings you a step closer to winning. However, not all calls actually move your hand forward.


One common pitfall is the “pair-breaking call,” a call that eliminates your pair (jantou).

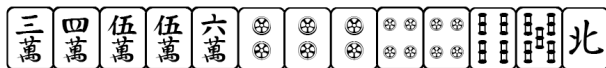
For example, in Hand **A**, if you pon the , you secure a yaku, but you lose your pair in the process. So while it looks like progress, your hand hasn't really improved.

In Hand **B**, which already started from a Value Tile (yakuhai) call, ponning or chii-ing also eliminates your pair, making it highly likely you'll end up on a single-tile wait.


When a value tile (yakuhai) like a Wind or Dragon comes out, it's easy to get impatient, but sometimes passing on the call lets you draw something like and move ahead naturally.


Especially when you're one tile away from tenpai (iishanten), even a single extra draw matters. Make your turns count.

Player to your left discards 





2 Call if you can get 4 han easily

You're one tile away from tenpai (iishanten) for All Simples (tanyao) when the player to your left (kamicha) discards , a tile you can call chii for tenpai.


Around what turn count is it worth calling this ? The key factor here is how many han you have, in other words, "what is the value of the hand if you win?"

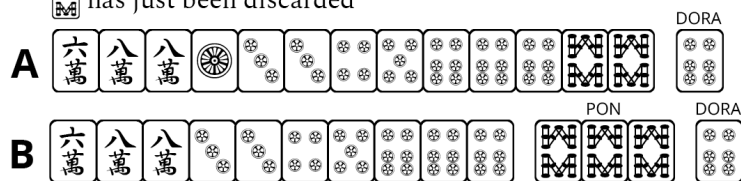
CH
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If the dora is , then even in the first 6 turns, say as early as turn 2, it's worth calling chii to take tenpai. A 8,000 point (mangan) tenpai has enough value on its own. Plus, even if you keep the hand closed and go for riichi, the hand lacks Pinfu, so moving from 4 han to 5 han won't increase your score. That means there's little reason to cling to a closed hand.






Now, what if the dora is ? Calling chii only gives you a 2,000 point hand. If you wait and get to riichi, it jumps to 5,200, which is a huge boost from staying closed. So in that case, it's better to delay calling chii until the midgame around turn 10.


When you're unsure whether to call chii or pon for tenpai, ask yourself: "If I finish this hand closed, how much will the value go up?"












 has just been discarded







3 Call freely when you have 3 dora

In Hand **A**, you're already one tile away from tenpai (iishanten) with a triplet of the dora  and your waits are , , , and  for four types in total.

When another player discards , should you call pon even though you won't be closer to tenpai? Yes, yes you should. This is a three dora power hand that you definitely want to win.

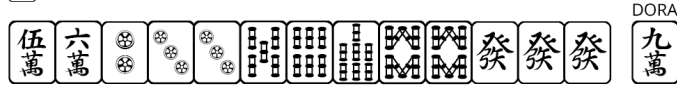
If you pon  and discard , your hand transforms into Hand **B**, turning into a Sticky One Away (kutsuki tenpai) on  or . Now the number of useful tiles increases sharply to  and . You can also expand by calling  to complete  and discarding  or ponning  or  to move into a wider one tile away from tenpai (iishanten).

If you keep your hand closed, most tiles will lead to a tenpai with bad waits. By opening your hand, you increase your chances of forming better waits and even leave room to call chii on the .

Moreover, the level of caution from other players and ultimately your win-by-discard rate, how often you ron on others, will differ greatly between a riichi with a middle wait on  and a one-call hand that is in tenpai for  or .

Whenever you're holding three or more dora and already have a confirmed yaku like All Simples (tanyao) or Value Tiles (yakuhai), you should actively call even if you don't get closer to tenpai.

發 has just been discarded



4 Open kans are costly

You're one away from tenpai (iishanten) with two two-sided waits (ryanmen) when the fourth 發 gets discarded by another player.

You might feel tempted to kan it and maybe think "I'll get more fu (mini-points) or maybe a kan dora hits!" but be careful.

CH

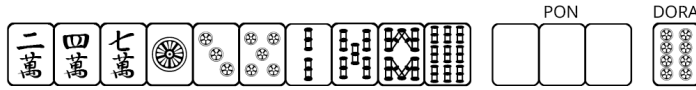
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Calling an open kan (daiminkan) from a closed hand comes with three key downsides:

- **You lose the ability to riichi.** If you riichi and win, you get to flip the ura dora. Whether you kan or not, the number of flipped dora tiles is the same, so you should rather keep the potential han from riichi instead of losing it.
- **You risk powering up your opponents.** When you kan, kan dora and kan ura dora may help other players, possibly turning their wins into high-value hands.
- **You give up a future safe tile.** If you need to fold later, that 發 might've been a useful safe tile, but revealing it in an open kan leaves you with fewer options to defend.

So when it comes to open kans from a closed hand, it's often better to hold back and stay patient.



5 Value tiles are a triple threat

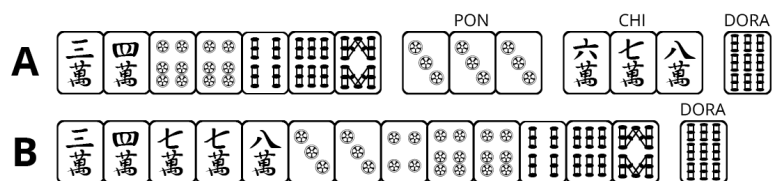
Value Tiles (yakuhai) like dragons and winds are handy tiles because calling pon gives you an instant 1 han. Calling them isn't without drawbacks. You lose the ability to use a pair of honor tiles as safe tiles or lose closed hand upsides like Riichi or Concealed Self-Draw (tsumo).

Take the example hand above: you called on , but you're still far from tenpai, the hand value is low, and you have no safe tiles left. If someone riichis now, you're stuck. You can't push confidently and folding isn't easy either.

Remember the three conditions for calling Value Tiles (yakuhai): **Speed**, **Value**, and **Safety**.

If calling puts your hand in tenpai or close to it, that's **speed**. If you have multiple dora or clear potential for a high-value hand, that's **value**. If you still have another set of pairs or an honor pair that bolsters defense, that's **safety**.

If your situation meets two out of three, go ahead and call. If it meets zero, you should pass. If it's just one, let your hand structure and point situation guide the decision.



6 Open All Simples lowers defenses


Open All Simples (kuitan) is a very useful yaku, but it comes with a major weakness. Your hand ends up consisting only of tiles between 2 and 8, which means very low defense capabilities.


If you've made a call like in Hand **A** and then get hit with a riichi, you're suddenly stuck and it's hard to push or fold safely.

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Lv.1

For example, in Hand **B**, if you chii  thinking "this confirms All Simples (tanyao)", you'll end up with a painful two tiles away from tenpai with the current shape.

Calling  here should be limited to situations where winning the hand has extra non-tangible value, like securing 1st place or when you already have multiple dora and can expect decent points.

In most other cases, it's better to pass and preserve both hand shape and flexibility.


7 Avoid All Triplets only hands

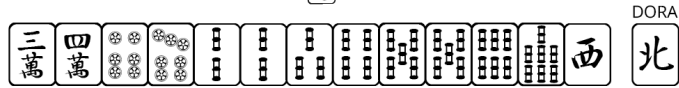
All Triplets (toitōi) is one of the easier yaku to remember. The conditions for completing it are straightforward, and you can still win after calling. Some people may recall forcing an All Triplets (toitōi) even with just two pairs back when they were beginners.

All Triplets (toitōi) has two major drawbacks. One, since you need to call to advance the hand, your hand becomes shorter and your defense weakens. With a hand full of pairs and triplets, it's hard to fold or maneuver once someone attacks. Two, the final wait is always either a single tile (tanki) or a double pair wait (shanpon), which makes it weak in head-to-head showdowns.



Because of these risks, you should only aim for All Triplets (toitōi) when the hand promises a decent return. Specifically, when you have things like Value Tile (yakuhai) pairs, dora pairs, Half Flush (honitsu) potential, or red tiles.

In other words, only go for All Triplets (toitōi) when you can expect All Triplets (toitōi) + at least 1 han of additional value.

Player to the left discards 



8 Always go for Riichi + All Simples + Pinfu

You're one tile away from tenpai for a clean All Simples (tanyao) + Pinfu hand when the player to your left (kamicha) discards . Should you call chii on  and take tenpai?

The key factor is turn count. About 20 years ago, the dominant strategy was “take tenpai as early as possible,” so some players would chii even in the early game within the first 6 turns.

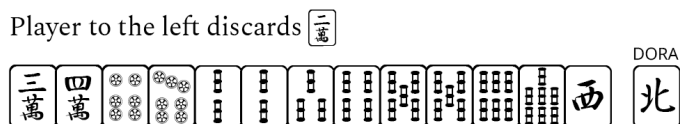
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A hand this clean, one that can become a Riichi + All Simples (tanyao) + Pinfu (mentanpin), might only come up once per East-South match (hanchan). Twice if you're lucky.

Turning it into just a 1,000 point All Simples (tanyao) hand is a waste! You have a golden hand that can easily reach 8,000 points (mangan) if you declare riichi with potential for Riichi + Pinfu + All Simples (tanyao) + Self-Draw (tsumo) + Ura Dora.


That's why in today's playstyle, early-round 1,000-point quick hands are usually passed up. Instead, players aim to reach tenpai while staying closed and go for riichi to preserve high-value potential.

Practically speaking, you should avoid calling to get into tenpai until the third row of discards and focus on calling riichi instead.



9 Riichi time = Go time

We just talked about how turn count is the main factor in deciding whether to call for tenpai, but that guideline can change depending on other elements. The biggest of those is pressure from other players, especially a riichi.

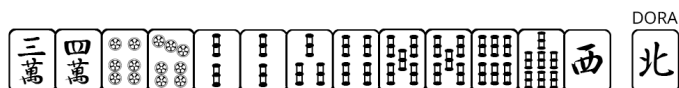
In the hand above, an opponent has already declared riichi and the player to your left (kamicha) discards . In this situation, you should call chii and go into tenpai without hesitation.

Sure, if you stayed closed, you would have a chance at mangan with a Riichi + All Simples (tanyao) + Pinfu (mentanpin) with upside. However, once a riichi is on the table, you no longer have time to leisurely build a perfect hand.

Being noten while your opponent is tenpai is like walking into a fight unarmed against someone with a weapon.




When facing a riichi, shift your mindset to: “A 1,000-point good-shape tenpai is better than a Riichi + All Simples (tanyao) + Pinfu (mentanpin) one away from tenpai (iishanten) hand”

Prioritize getting to tenpai quickly when under pressure.



10 Remaining tiles are a countdown

Continuing from the last two sections, here's another look at the same hand, this time focusing on a different factor that affects calling decisions: remaining tiles left in the wall.

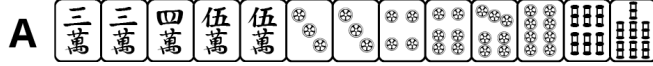
In this hand, you'd ideally stay closed and aim for a high-value riichi, but what if  and  are being discarded one after another early on. Now there are already seven of your eight potential winning tiles in the discard pile. Even if it's still early in the game, if the last  gets discarded, you'd definitely chii, right?

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So what about the seventh? The sixth? If you follow that logic, you'll find that once four of your wait tiles are gone, that's usually the point where it's best to call.

Two-sided waits (ryanmen) are strong because they have more outs, but once four copies of a wait tile are visible, you're down to just four left in the whole wall. At that point, it's roughly on par with a middle wait in terms of strength.

So when the fourth copy of your wait tile is discarded, even in the early game, don't cling too tightly to the idea of riichi. Make the call.



What is your mahjong playstyle?

Evaluating your own mahjong playstyle can actually be quite tricky.

Take so-called “aggressive players” for example. It’s not like they’re sitting there thinking, “I’m a hyper-offensive type, so I’ll push every time!” More likely, they’re just cutting the tile that they logically believe is most profitable in that moment.

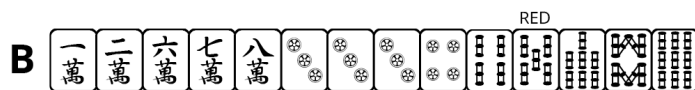
So you’ll often hear things like, “I’m just playing normally, but people keep saying I’m aggressive...”

In that sense, there isn’t much value in fixating on your own mahjong playstyle. However, if you’re someone who wants to get stronger, there’s still a benefit to exploring it.

That’s because back when I was still new to the game, I gradually refined my own mahjong by trying out a variety of styles, testing what worked and adopting the best parts.

About 900 East-South matches (hanchan) ago, I tried being a full-on Quick Attack Type (sokkou gata). I’d call early and aim for tenpai as quickly as possible, prioritizing win count above all else.

During that phase, I played around 100 East-South matches (hanchan) of ultra-fast mahjong, even calling from a middle wait + two-sided one



away from tenpai (kanchan-ryanmen iishanten) shape from Hand **A** and discarding to reshape into two two-sided waits (ryanmen).

Next, I switched to the Quick Riichi Style (bouten sokuri gata), always going for max tile acceptance and immediate riichi the moment I reached tenpai. For instance, from the shape in Hand **B**, I'd cut and if I drew , I'd slam down riichi on a single wait on .

Naturally, I didn't win much during this period. Not even in casual games with friends. That phase helped me understand when I was calling too much or when I was getting too obsessed with acceptance numbers.

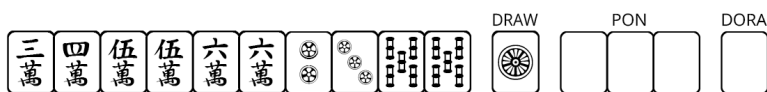
From there, I kept cycling through styles, like the Super-Defensive Style (chou bougyo gata) who folds the moment two opponents have called, or the Hand Value Style (te yaku gata) who refuses to win with anything below 3 han.

By trying those extremes, I gradually solidified my own baselines for things like "folding too often" or "not calling enough."

In fact, swinging hard into an extreme mahjong playstyle can help you pinpoint what "too much" actually feels like.



For example, if you're unsure about your push fold decisions, try something extreme: Push on every tenpai, or fold on every unknown tile, just once.


Going that far can help you internalize a sense of where the real boundary lies, like, "Okay, this much is still safe to push."














11 No open Two Identical Sequences


You might hear, “You can’t get Two Identical Sequences (iipeikou) in an open hand,” and think, “Well, of course!” and you’d be right.

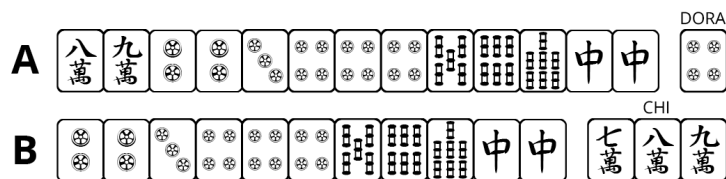
In the hand above, you’ve called pon on the dora then you draw  and reach tenpai on a  wait. This is a serious hand worth pushing.

If this were a closed hand, you’d cut  to preserve the Two Identical Sequences (iipeikou) chance. However, the decision shifts because the hand is already open.

Instead of cutting  , cutting  here has three key advantages:

- If you later draw  , you can cut  and shift into a three-sided wait (sanmenchan) with this shape .
- Cutting  avoids giving away information. If you cut  now, opponents might start folding tiles like  or  more readily, since they appear completely safe after matching your discard.
- By keeping  , you also gain defensive flexibility after your opponent has declared riichi. If you draw  , you’ll still have the choice between cutting  or  , depending on safety.

If you want to win this hand, cut the  and stay ready for the potential three-sided wait (sanmenchan) upgrade.



12 Yaku-less hands have less waits

The basic principle in mahjong is to aim for wide waits, but there are times when you should intentionally create a narrower wait. One of those times is when you're calling with a yaku-less hand (atozuke) for a Value Tile (yakuhai) yaku.

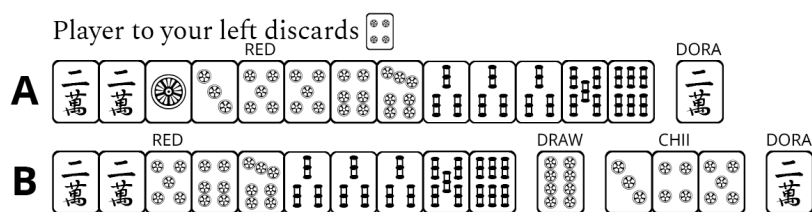
CH
3
Lv.2

In Hand A, if you were building a closed hand and drew 七萬, you should cut 東 to reach a three-sided wait (sanmenchan) on 東, 西, 中, and aim to riichi. Pretty straightforward.

Consider this scenario, what if the player to your left (kamicha) discards 七萬. You decide to call chii to enter tenpai waiting on 中, relying on Value Tiles (yakuhai) 中 to come out later? In this case, should you discard 東 or 西 here?

The correct answer is to cut 西, even though it gives you a narrower wait. Why? If you cut 東 and form the tenpai in Hand B, you end up with a wide wait. But five of those tiles are 東, which don't complete the yaku and leaves you with a likely locked discard (furiten). With yaku-less hands (atozuke), a wide wait often means more tiles will be worthless.

The best discards when calling yaku-less hands (atozuke) differ from closed one because not all waits will give you a yaku and could put you in a locked discard (furiten) state.



13 Show off your red doras

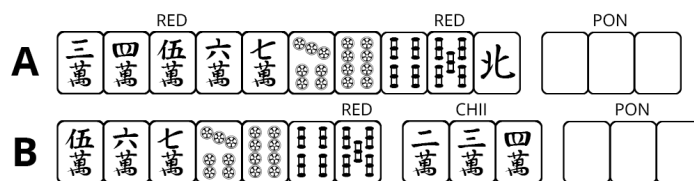
Take a look at hand **A** above. You're one tile away from tenpai (iishanten) and the player to your left (kamicha) discards a . If you chii, you'll be in a two-sided wait (ryanmen) tenpai for All Simples (tanyao), 3 Dora. Of course you want to call that and take that tenpai, but here's the question: should you chii with or and the red ?

In this case, you'll want to chii with the using the and the red in your open set. Showing a red dora might feel like it'll make the table more wary, but the benefit outweighs the risk. Namely, you eliminate the chance of having to discard red later.


You might be thinking, "Why would I ever cut red on purpose?" But let's say you chii using keeping the red in hand. Now imagine someone declares riichi with , the very tile you're holding, as their discard.

Now look at hand **B**. is a safe tile, but even though it's a line tile (suji) of 5-8, it hasn't been proven safe. If you want to hold tenpai safely, your only option might be discarding red and dropping your hand's value in the process. If you had already used red in the set instead, you'd now be able to safely discard maintaining your All Simples (tanyao), 3 dora tenpai without compromise.


It's natural to hesitate before revealing a dora, but by locking it into an open set, you can sometimes protect your hand's value when it matters most.

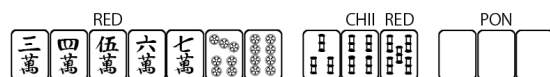








14 Continuous sequences forms pairs

This is a two red dora hand opened with a call of  Value Tiles (yakuhai). The hand has shapes in characters (manzu), dots (pinzu), and bamboo (souzu) that are all technically openable, but in this case, you'll want to avoid calling the characters (manzu) suit.

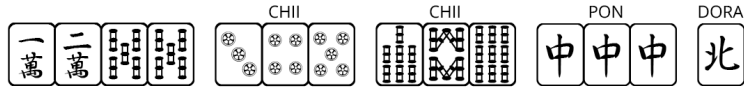
CH
3
Lv.2

Why? Because the character (manzu) shape is part of a continuous sequence (renzoku kei) and breaking it up tends to lead to a poor result. For example, if you call  from Hand A, you'll be left with Hand B: A one tile away from tenpai (iishanten) hand where the final tenpai shape will likely be a single tile wait (tanki) and a weak one at that. On the other hand, if you build the hand by calling in dots (pinzu) or bamboo (souzu) instead, you'll avoid that narrow shape and preserve the potential for a better, more flexible wait.



A     draw would complete the hand with a  wait tenpai. Even if  completes first instead, the characters (manzu) shape transforms into an extended sequence (nobetan) wait.

When you don't yet have a pair (jantou) in your hand, it's smart to preserve continuous sequences for the potential to form one complete set plus the pair.



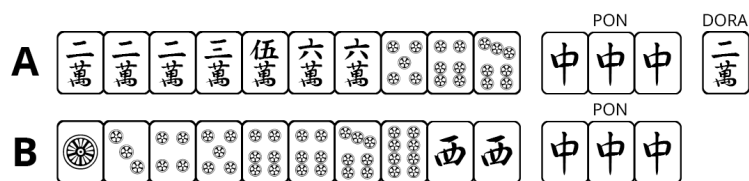
15 Three open calls mean no folding

You went “Pon! Chii!! Chii!!!” and got to tenpai, but the hand’s worth just 1,000 points and it’s an edge wait on . Then someone throws out a riichi, and what you draw next is a dangerous tile. With only four tiles left in your hand, folding seems impossible, but pushing back feels like a terrible trade for such a cheap hand. So what should you do?

...Actually, let’s rewind a step. Unless you’re in a must-win-to-take-top situation, hands like this with three open sets, bad wait shape, and low value shouldn’t be fully opened in the first place.

The issue is that three open sets leave you nearly defenseless. With just four tiles left in hand, you have no safety net and no flexibility to respond. That’s why whenever you go for a third call, ask yourself “Can this hand fight a riichi?” That means either the hand must offer good waits or be worth at least 3,900 points. Ideally, both.

Also remember, when someone else calls three times early on, they’re usually meeting at least one of those criteria too. So if your own hand is still far from tenpai and someone else calls three times, you’ll want to fold with as much caution as a riichi.



16 Look for chances to call even in tenpai

Are you feeling too comfortable just because you called and reached tenpai?

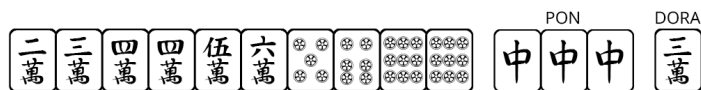
Take Hand A, you've pon'd the 中 and locked in a middle tile wait on 四萬. Even this hand still has multiple call opportunities that lie hidden, ready to upgrade your hand.

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Lv.2





First try chii-ing the 一萬 and discarding 六萬; that alone turns your wait into a solid two-sided wait (ryanmen) on 四萬, 七萬. Or pon the 二萬 and cut 伍萬, and suddenly you're waiting on 一萬, 四萬. A pon on 六萬 or a chii on 七萬 leaves you with 二萬, 二萬, 二萬, 二萬, shifting into a strong three-sided wait (sanmenchan) on 一萬, 三萬, 四萬.

Hand B is in tenpai on a 三 middle wait, but if you chii 三 with 三 and discard 一, the shape transforms into a three-sided 三 wait (sanmenchan), built from 三, 三, 三. Likewise, ponning 西 and dropping 一 leads you to a three-sided 三 wait (sanmenchan). Chii-ing 三 with 三 gives you a two-sided 三 wait (ryanmen).







Of course, in real games, you'll want to weigh things like opponent aggression and remaining tile counts. By getting comfortable with calling to reshape your hand and waits, it'll be easier to pivot and create stronger waits when the opportunity arises.




17 Don't miss a valid call opportunity

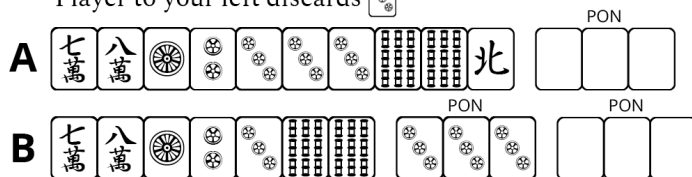
Let's say you're holding , and a tile  is discarded by the player to your left (kamicha). Situations where the exposed set and discard appear to form a single group, is known as a swap-call (kuikae). For example, you call that  and discard , or if you pon a tile you already have as a concealed triplet and then discard a matching tile from your hand. Under standard mahjong rules, swap-calls (kuikae) are prohibited.

That said, there are situations where a call might look like a swap-call (kuikae) at first glance but is actually legal.


For example, take the hand shown above. If you're already in tenpai and someone discards a dora , you can chii it with  and discard . This doesn't count as a swap-call (kuikae) and lets you incorporate the dora. Similarly, if a red  is discarded, chii-ing with  and discarding  is also valid and lets you snag a bonus tile.

Once you're in tenpai, don't just look to improve your wait. Keep an eye out for calls that boost your score too.

Player to your left discards 

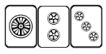






18 Pon over chii except for dora pairs


Take a look at Hand **A**. Your hand is one tile away from tenpai (iishanten) and the player to your left (kamicha) just discarded a . Of course you'll call it and take tenpai, but here, you have a choice: pon or chii?

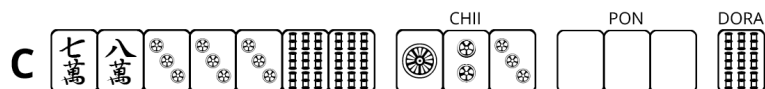
In most cases, the better move is to pon.




CH
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Lv.2

If you shape your hand like Hand **B**, you'll preserve the  sequence in your hand. Keeping this configuration means  is backed by a wall of four s, so its safety level is high.

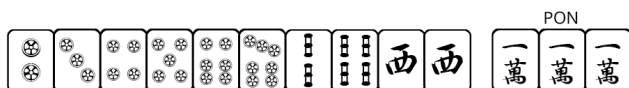
It will give you peace of mind if you later decide to fold. You'll have the option to discard  for a  draw and hold tenpai safely.

So in general, ponning to get into tenpai is preferred. However, there is one major exception when your pair is the dora. If the dora is , then you'll want to chii and form the shape shown in Hand **C** below.













If you later draw a third  you can discard a  from your triplet to upgrade your score, or even pon the third  directly.

Both pon and chii have their merits and tradeoffs; the key is learning to switch based on what the hand calls for.

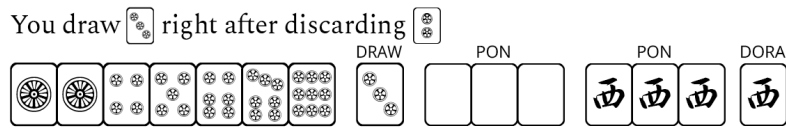


19 Avoid drawing tiles when it's dangerous





Let's say you've reached a yaku-less tenpai like the one shown above near the end of the hand. Right now, your hand has no yaku, so you can't win, but if the round ends and you're still in tenpai, you'll earn the noten penalty from others. Great result, right? But there's still one last draw to go, and you'd rather not risk picking up a dangerous tile...


In this kind of situation, there's a trick called skipping your draw turn (tsumoban skip), which you can use to hold your tenpai and avoid danger. For example, if the player to your left (kamicha) discards  or , you can chii and discard . If  or  is discarded, you can chii and discard . These sequences don't count as a swap-discard (kuikae), so they're fully legal and they let you skip your draw while keeping your tenpai shape intact. Other cases include ponning a , then discarding  or  to keep a single-tile wait (tanki). If a  is discarded and since you don't have a yaku to win with, you can still chii it and discard any tile to safely maintain tenpai.

In a real game, you'll need to judge how safe your discard options are, but this technique isn't just for tenpai preservation. It also works for Last Tile Shifts (haitei zurashi) or One-shot Cancels (ippatsu keshi) which we will cover later on. Remember it to broaden your options when the round is on the line.



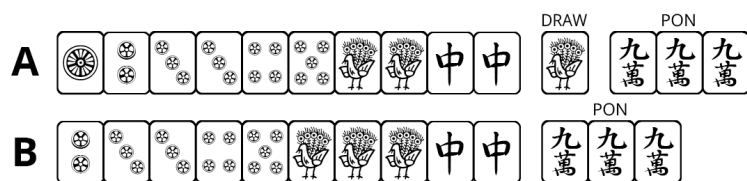
21 Go wide if everyone is folding

You started with a one tile away from tenpai (iishanten) hand, then pon'd on the  and discarded , entering a  middle wait tenpai. With a set of  Value Tiles (yakuhai) + Half Flush (honitsu) + 3 Dora, this is a 12,000 point hand (haneman).



But now you've drawn a , the worst possible tile in this case. If you've played long enough, you'll know that these things happen. It's tempting to just brush it off and discard it, but this is exactly where it pays to stop and think.

From your opponents' perspective, your open hand clearly shows 8,000 points (mangan) or higher. That makes it very difficult for anyone to push back against you. So now, take a look at their discards. If it looks like everyone's folding (betaori) and only throwing safe tiles, then this is a perfect time to intentionally switch into a locked discard (furiten) three-way wait (sanmenchan).


After all, if everyone's clearly folding (betaori), it's unlikely you would win by ron anyways. So why not broaden your wait for a self-draw (tsumo)? That will give you the best odds of winning the hand. You might feel some resistance about putting yourself in a locked discard state (furiten) after calling, but sometimes, especially with big hands, it's worth embracing that risk just like declaring a locked discard (furiten) riichi.



















22 Rebuild waits using sequences

Take a look at Hand A. You've reached tenpai with a  pair but unfortunately you drew a , the side of your double pair wait (shanpon) that can't win. It's easy to think, "Well, if I can't win with it, it's better to just discard it," right?

CH
3
Lv.3

Instead of draw-discarding (tsumo giri), there's another path: try cutting  here.

By shifting into the shape of Hand B, you can reconstruct your tenpai on the  pair wait with any of the four dot (pinzu) tiles: , , , or .

What if someone discards a  next? You can pon it, discard , and you'll break the locked discard (furiten) on the  while transitioning into a two-sided wait (ryanmen) on  and . Otherwise, you could discard  to enter a  tenpai. Alternatively, if  or  shows up, chii it and discard , and once again you've rebuilt your  wait, this time completely without the locked discard (furiten).

If you're someone who finds Value Tile (yakuhai) hands a little uncomfortable, learning recovery techniques like this can take the edge off calling tiles to rework your hand.

Enjoy mahjong more with 3 key mindsets!

Mahjong is both fascinating and unreasonable, and sometimes even if you do your absolute best, you can still lose. As you study standard theory and deepen your understanding of the game, there may come a time when you start to feel a sort of frustration toward its unfair aspects.

So today, let me share with you three mindsets that will help make mahjong more enjoyable whether you win or lose!

Mindset 1 - Set goals that you can definitively accomplish through your own decisions

Mahjong is deeply intertwined with luck. Even if you say "I'm going to win today!" and go into the game fired up, you'll only succeed about half the time. You're bound to feel stress when it doesn't happen if your only goal is to win.

The key to enjoying mahjong long-term is to set goals that can be definitively accomplished through your own decisions.

For beginners, things like "Let's try to make as many two-sided wait (ryanmen) tenpai as possible!" or "If someone declares riichi, I'll make sure to fold properly!" work well.

For more experienced players, you could try things like “Let’s incorporate Line Theory (suji) counting into my push fold decisions,” or “Let’s pay more attention to whether opponents’ discards were draw-discard (tsumo giri) or hand-discard (tedashi).”

If you’re someone who often reads strategy books or watches videos, you could go with “I’m going to try out that strategy I learned yesterday!” or “Today, I’ll try playing like so-and-so pro!”

As a result, sometimes you’ll win and sometimes you’ll lose. As long as you achieve your goal, you’ll surely enjoy the game.

Mindset 2 - Praise your own mistakes

It’s a strange thing, but as you study mahjong and accumulate knowledge, the number of “mistakes” you can recognize yourself will definitely increase.

Once you learn that even the order you organize your honor tiles at the start has pros and cons, you’ll start feeling like even the sequence you cut wind tiles in was a mistake. Those feelings will shake you up and throw off your later plays. The more serious the player, the more they tend to get hung up on these little errors and end up not having fun.

Noticing mistakes is proof of growth. It means you’ve gained more knowledge and your internal library of correct plays has expanded.

So when you do notice a mistake, tell yourself: “No way anyone else noticed that was a misplay but I did! Heh heh heh. That’s proof I’ve grown since yesterday!”

Give yourself a smug little laugh in your head and confidently reach out for the next draw.

Mindset 3 - Respect your opponents

When you first started playing, losing probably didn't bother you at all. As you improve, you will be feeling all sorts of emotions.

Why? You begin gaining confidence in your own skills, and with that, losing will start to feel frustrating.

Building up your ability through hard work and gaining confidence is something that applies not only to mahjong but to any discipline. Mahjong is a game where sometimes miracles happen that overturn skill differences. When you suffer a loss like that, the confidence you built up can end up hurting you instead.

Try flipping your perspective in those moments.

For example, what if the three other players at the table were all top pros? Even if you ended up with a hopelessly unlucky last-place finish, wouldn't you be less upset? That's because the opponents are clearly stronger than you and you'd go into the match with respect, accepting that losing is only natural.

In other words, what really matters is respect. I believe that the reason some players get irritated when they lose is because, as they gain skill and confidence, they unconsciously start seeing their opponents as beneath them. Then when something unfair happens and they lose, they can't accept it and feel frustrated.

So try recalling your beginner mindset when losing was normal and make a conscious effort to respect your opponents.

When someone else wins a hand, say: "Wow! That was a great win!" If you do that, you'll likely be able to approach your next match with a clear and refreshed heart, win or lose.

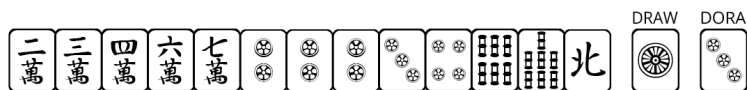
I'd be delighted if adopting these three mindsets helps make your mahjong life richer and more enjoyable.

CHAPTER 4



Defense & Reading

A technique to guard
thy precious points












1 Consider the danger levels of extra tiles



You have two two-sided wait (ryanmen) shapes that are one away from tenpai (iishanten). It's tempting to think: "All I need is to draw either  or  and I'll be ready to riichi!" and just draw-discard (tsumo giri) everything else.

Even in a spot like this, there's still one thing to consider: the danger level of your extra tiles.

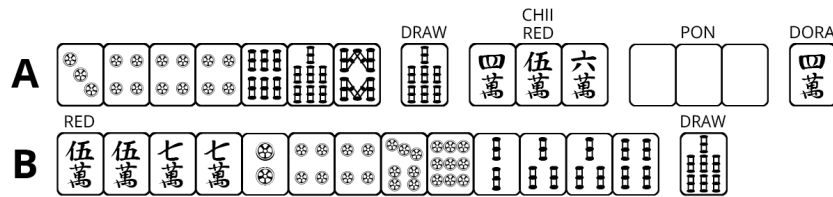
This hand has already been shaped to keep a relatively safe . Let's say you draw the . At this point, you should carefully compare the safety of  and .

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You might be tempted to just draw-discard (tsumo giri)  out of habit thinking, "honor tiles are usually safe, right?" In this case, the fourth  is already visible as the dora indicator. This makes  a long shot tile just like an honor tile since it can only deal into a single tile wait (tanki) or double pair wait (shanpon).

If you end up dealing into a painful double pair wait (shanpon) on  from such a great one away from tenpai (iishanten) hand, you'll be kicking yourself, cursing "If only I'd kept  instead...!"


So don't let habit dictate your discard; take the time to consider the danger levels and keep the safer tile.



3 Assess the value of your own hand first

Your opponent declares riichi. What’s the first thing that goes through your mind?

If your instinct is to think, “I wonder what their wait is,” then take caution; that’s not what you should be focusing on first. The very first question to ask yourself when facing a riichi is not what they’re waiting on but rather: “Do I push, or do I fold?”

For example, with Hand **A**, where you’re in tenpai for a three-sided wait (sanmenchan) worth 3,900 points, the only thing to think is: “I’m in a strong tenpai, so I push.” Then you discard the drawn  without hesitation.

On the other hand, with Hand **B**, where you are still two away from tenpai with bad shapes, you should tell yourself: “This is a weak hand, so I’ll fold,” then go on to discard the safest tile available. What the opponent is waiting on doesn’t matter in this kind of decision.

In mahjong, what matters most is the value of your own hand: whether you’re in tenpai and how many points it would score. When someone declares riichi, don’t rush to read their wait. Pause and assess the value of your own hand first.

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4 Don't chase Pinpoint Folds

One of the most popular themes in pro and streamer mahjong videos is the “Pinpoint Fold” (bita dome) moment. It’s a flashy scene where a player, facing down a riichi, folds while skillfully avoiding only the winning tiles by throwing all sorts of dangerous looking tiles out. It looks great and always gets a reaction.

There’s a downside to admiring those plays and wanting to copy them yourself. Accurately pinpointing just the winning tiles requires an enormous amount of tile reading skill and data. For beginners and intermediate players, trying to “Pinpoint Fold” (bita dome) often means “pinpointing” the wrong tile entirely and missing your chance to push and win. It happens far more often than making a correct call.

At its core, defense in mahjong doesn’t mean reading your opponent’s exact wait; it means evaluating the relative safety of the tiles in your hand and choosing the safest one each turn. Instead of thinking “I want to pinpoint fold (bita dome) too!”, steadily practice proper defense. If you keep at it, you’ll naturally get better at narrowing down likely waits over time.

5 Assess hand values from open calls

When you're up against someone who calls tiles frequently, it's easy to start wondering "Are they in tenpai yet?", "What's their wait?", and get distracted by all sorts of thoughts. The very first thing you should do is assess their hand value.

For example, suppose the dora is a terminal tile and the opponent has an All Simple (tanyao) call in that round. Unless they have a red dora, the hand is worth 1,000 points. If you've got two red dora in your own hand, their maximum is 2,000. Even if you deal in, it's not that painful. If your hand is worth around 8,000 points (mangan) or more, push back with confidence. On the other hand, if someone is clearly going for a hand in the dora suit with a likely Half Flush (honitsu), that's almost always Half Flush (honitsu) + Dora and possibly more easily totaling 8,000+ points. You'll need a hand with at least that much value yourself to fight back properly.

In most real games, common open hands are either Value Tiles (yakuhai) or All Simple (tanyao). The value of both these hands scales directly with how many dora they're holding. So when you see a call, try asking yourself: "How many dora does that hand likely have?" If you can tell whether it's a cheap hand you can afford to deal into or a high-value hand that could cost you the game, you'll avoid the all-too-common mistake of pushing into a big hand without realizing it.

6 A discarded red five rules out waits

There's something you can deduce when an opponent discards a red five tile: It means they no longer have the 5 of that suit in their hand.

For example, if someone discards a ^{RED}伍 and later declares riichi, they cannot be waiting on shapes like 四伍 or 伍六. In other words, it's as if all four 伍s were visible and you can eliminate certain wait possibilities from consideration.

To start with, this raises the safety value of tiles like 三 and 七, since they can't be part of a two-sided wait (ryanmen) that includes 伍. Also, if 一 has already been proven safe along with the ^{RED}伍, then not only is 四七 impossible, but so is 一四, meaning 四 is now safer as well. If 九 is safe too, then we can infer 六 becomes safe for the same reason.

Even if the ^{RED}伍 has been discarded, edge waits (penchan) and double pair waits (shanpon) aren't completely ruled out. For example, from a hand like 三三^{RED}伍 + dora, or a hand with a pair of honor tiles, the player could discard the ^{RED}伍 and declare riichi.

So if you're in a situation where you've already committed to full defense (betaori) and do have safer tiles available, it's better to discard those instead.

7 One-shot cancel = one less safe tile

When you call a tile in the same turn that another player declares riichi, thus canceling their chance at a One-shot (ippatsu), it is called a “One-shot Cancel (ippatsu keshi)”. Let’s weigh the pros and cons:

Pros:

- Cancels the riichi player’s One-shot (ippatsu) bonus.

Cons:

- You reveal three tiles from your hand as an open set, which increases your risk of getting cornered and discarding a dangerous tile later.
- You give up closed-hand yakus like Riichi or Two Identical Sequences (iipeikou).

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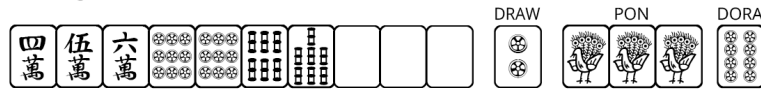
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Considering that the chance of an One-shot + Self-Draw (ippatsu tsumo) happening is only around 5–6%, your disadvantages are guaranteed and the expected value leans heavily negative. Since mahjong is a zero-sum game, if both you and the riichi player lose, the remaining two players are the ones who gain.


So if you’re the type to One-shot Cancel (ippatsu keshi) whenever possible, remember unnecessary One-shot Cancels (ippatsu keshi) lead you to locking up your tiles and possibly dealing in later.


Facing riichi



8 Reads without basis are guesses

What exactly is “reading” in mahjong? It refers to the act of using visible information such as hands and discards to infer hidden factors, like an opponent’s wait or hand value.

Let’s say you draw a tile that hasn’t been confirmed safe, like , right after someone declares riichi. You’re already in tenpai.

If you’re thinking “Eight lines (suji) have already been cleared, so this  has about a 10% chance of dealing in so I’ll push” or “I’m sitting on a big lead with zero dora. If the dora are evenly split, their riichi could have 2–3 dora. I’ll fold”, these are examples of good reading since you’re basing your decision of deduced risk and point value from things you can see.

On the other hand, saying things like “It’s the kind of flow where the first tile after riichi always deals in, so I’ll fold” or “Today’s been going my way, and I’m winning most showdowns so I’ll push this one too” rely on vague feelings of luck or momentum, which aren’t grounded in visible data. That’s not what we call reading.

Playing by “flow” might occasionally get results, but over the long run, the players who consistently win are always the ones who base their decisions on solid reads, not superstition.

9 Don't aim for a 0% deal-in rate

Online mahjong has made key stats like win rate and deal-in rate visible. As a result, a common question people ask is: "What's a good target for my deal-in rate?" Rather than just looking at your deal-in rate in isolation, it's better to look at the difference between your win rate and deal-in rate.

As a rule of thumb:

- If your win rate minus deal-in rate is 10%, you're doing just fine.
- If it's over 12%, you're likely winning by a strong margin.
- If it's 8%, there may still be room for growth.

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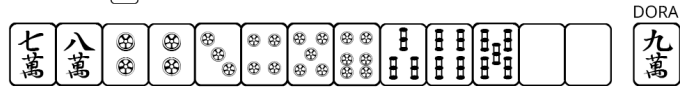
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(Of course, this is just one benchmark. It varies depending on your opponents' play styles and skill level.)

For example, a player with a 0% deal-in rate but only a 5% win rate won't perform as well as someone with a 10% deal-in rate and a 20% win rate.

It's important to pay attention to data, but what really counts in mahjong is your final placement at the end of the game. Don't let yourself fall into thinking, "My deal-in rate's been high lately, so I'll play it safe here." Focus on making the best push fold decisions in the moment based on hand value, not in-game stats.

The 2nd is discarded



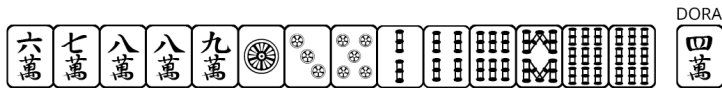
10 Hands with two calls are cheap and fast

In the early game, the first was discarded and no one called it. Right after when the second was discarded, another player called pon. So how should you interpret this kind of call? To put it bluntly, it's a cheap and fast hand, likely with zero or one dora!

If the hand had two or more doras, or was shaping into a Half Flush (honitsu) or All Triplets (toitai), most players would normally call the first Value Tile (yakuhai) even if their shape was a little off, right? On the other hand, if the hand was both cheap and in bad shape, many players would pass on the second one as well and hold it as a safe tile. So when someone does call the second tile, you can guess their hand is somewhat put together.

Specifically, something like the hand shown above is plausible for a player who wanted to stay closed and go for Riichi + Value Tiles (yakuhai) + 1 Dora. Since the hand has wide acceptance, they may have passed on the first copy. With the second one coming out soon after, they begrudgingly take the open tenpai.

So when you see a player pass the first Value Tile (yakuhai) and call the second Value Tile (yakuhai), you can read it as: "That hand is cheap, but they're probably in tenpai or at least a solid one away from tenpai (iishanten) with good waits."



11 No visible doras? Time to fold

In Riichi mahjong with red tiles, each hand contains a total of seven possible dora, four revealed dora indicators and three red dora. If your hand has neither red tiles nor dora, the remaining seven dora are distributed among the other three players.

On average if you have no doras in hand, that's 2.33 dora per opponent. (Of course, it's possible they're clustered in the dead wall, but counting on that every time is overly optimistic, isn't it?)

CH
4
Lv.2

In other words, dealing into an open hand often means giving up at least 3,900 points, and the likelihood of someone quietly holding a 8,000 point hand (mangan) with three or more doras is much higher than usual.

If you have a good shape with a strong tenpai, it's still worth pushing, but if your hand is far from tenpai in the late game or you're risking dangerous tiles just to get to a tenpai at the end of the hand, your chance of suffering a major loss goes up significantly.

So when you're unsure whether to push or fold in the endgame, try thinking in terms of: "How many dora can I see from my point of view?" which turns into "How many dora might be in my opponents' hands on average?"

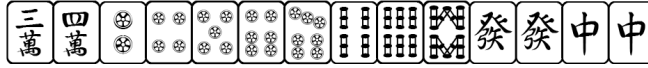
12 Down two sets? Time to fold

“I’ve gotten better at folding against riichi, but I don’t really know how to defend against open hands,” is a question I hear often. One useful rule of thumb for those situations is the idea of a “two-set gap.”

For example, when someone has called three times, it’s clear they’ve already completed three sets. Now, what if you’ve only completed one set at that point? If we compare that two-set gap to a 50-meter dash, it’d be like you’re 20 meters behind, a massive lead. Even if you try to push forward from there, your chance of winning is maybe 1 in 10. On the flip side, you’ll probably deal in around 3 out of those 10 times. Just like when facing a riichi, it’s safest to fold.

The same logic applies when another player has two open sets and you haven’t even completed one yet. Even though their tenpai isn’t confirmed, the two-set speed difference is already pretty significant. In that case too, it’s usually better to start playing defensively.

Facing riichi



13 Pick the potentially lesser evil

You've already been dealt a riichi from another player, and now your hand looks like the one above. Let's say you have no guaranteed safe tiles (genbutsu) and no visible lines (suji) to rely on, so what should you discard?

The and are both live tiles (shonpai), meaning they haven't been seen yet. In this case, your best option is to discard one of those pairs. Honor tiles generally offer better safety than number tiles, and if one gets through, you'll survive another turn.

So is there a difference between discarding and ? If both are live tiles (shonpai), their deal-in risk is the same at first glance. Here's where the idea of "ura dora efficiency" comes into play.





If you discard the and it unfortunately deals in, then any of the four remaining could show up as the ura dora indicator. This causes the ura dora to flip and increase the opponent's hand value. On the other hand, if you discard the and it deals in, then only the two remaining could become the ura dora indicator since you're already holding the other two. This makes the ura dora being less likely.




So in this case, cutting the is the more optimal choice.

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Lv.2

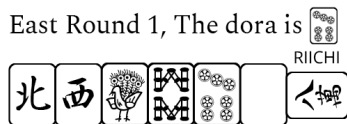
14 “Last Chance” depends on timing

One way to identify a safe tile is through the concept of “last chance.”




For example, if you’re facing a riichi and you can see three copies of  from your perspective, then  can only complete a two-sided wait (ryanmen) if the opponent is holding the fourth . Compared to other line-less (musuji) tiles, this makes  relatively safer. The safety level of a last chance tile scales with the turn number. Early on, when many tiles still remain in the wall, there’s a decent chance that the fourth tile is still in the wall, which in turn lowers the odds that the opponent is holding it.





What about the endgame? By then, very few tiles remain in the wall, which increases the chance that the opponent has it in hand. The probability that  completes a two-sided wait (ryanmen) goes up. This is especially true when  has already been discarded by the riichi player, yet nobody else has discarded it even in the late turns. That’s a big red flag! The chance that the riichi player is holding the fourth  jumps significantly.

When you’re about to discard a last chance tile, take a moment to ask, “is that fourth copy more likely to be in the wall or in the riichi player’s hand?”











15 Tiles near early dora cuts are safe



A player has declared riichi with the discards shown above. At this point, there are two tiles that are extremely safe to discard:  and . The reason? The dora tile  was discarded early.

Let's consider why. If  were part of the wait, it would imply a shape like , but if they had  as of turn 5, it would be natural to keep both  tiles, hoping to draw a third for a dora triplet. Discarding it so early suggests they had no use for them, meaning they likely didn't have that shape.

CH
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Lv.2

How about a double pair wait (shanpon) on  or ? This would imply something like  or , but again, that means they fixed the  or  pair before calling riichi and discarded the dora beforehand. That sequence is also unlikely.

In this way, when a middle-numbered dora gets discarded before the riichi declaration, you can reasonably infer: "They almost certainly don't have  in hand, so a wait that wraps around it like a two-sided wait (ryanmen) using  is very unlikely."

That makes tiles adjacent to the early dora discard, like  and , remarkably safe.

16 The 2nd riichi is more dangerous

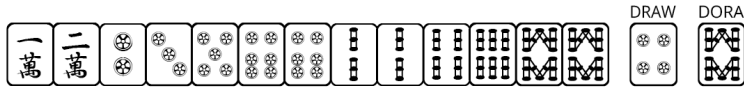
In the early game, an opponent (Player **A**) declares an early riichi while your hand is still far from tenpai. Since you don't have the hand to push back, you begin folding, but then another player starts pushing dangerous tiles. Already, that's a warning sign. A few turns later, that second player (Player **B**) declares a chasing riichi. Now here's the question: Between Player **A** (the early riichi) and Player **B** (the chaser who pushed through danger), whose hand is likely higher in value?

Answer: Overwhelmingly, Player **B**'s.

Early riichi can often come from hands that are cheap and even have bad shape, like a middle wait, with just Riichi as a yaku. But a chasing riichi? That's a different story.

For someone to push non-line connected (musuji) tiles into a live riichi means they likely have something to push with: a good wait, high value, or both.

At the very least, it's rare for a chasing riichi to be from a hand that's just "bad wait, riichi only." So when you're facing two riichis on the table and you can't find a tile that's safe for both, aim for the chasing riichi's guaranteed safe tiles (genbutsu). Their hand is more likely to be expensive so dealing into them would hurt more.



17 The pace of a Flush is your signal

Your hand is two tiles away from tenpai with two dora, a hand worth chasing. Then your opponent across the table (toimen) opens with a pon of the terminal tile and starts tossing out 2 through 8 tiles for Bamboo (souzu) and Dots (pinzu). It's giving off strong vibes of a Half Flush (honitsu) in the characters (manzu) suit. So how should you play this?

Let's break it down based on how far along their Half Flush (honitsu) seems to be:

CH
4
Lv.2

•**Green Light:** Their discards are just random non-character (manzu) number tiles. Probably not tenpai yet.

This is your best window. You can and should aggressively discard your weak shapes like the edge wait (penchan) to push toward your win.

If your hand ends up waiting on the same suit they're collecting (e.g., characters (manzu) in this case), your winning chances plummet. So clean out those weak character (manzu) tiles early while you still can.

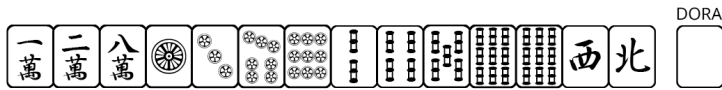
•**Yellow Light:** They start discarding honors including live ones (shonpai). The danger is rising and they're close to tenpai.

If your hand still looks like an 8,000 point hand (mangan) or more, you can consider continuing the plan and toss . However if your hand is only worth 1-2 han, then stop cutting their suit. Don't risk feeding them a big win in exchange for your small one.

• **Red Light:** Their discards are full of characters (manzu). They're likely in tenpai.

Even though you have two dora, cutting more character (manzu) tiles in a non-tenpai state is a high-risk, low-reward move. Start pivoting your hand using safe-looking non-character (manzu) tiles. Avoid feeding into their likely Half Flush (honitsu) setup.

When facing a potential Half Flush (honitsu), it's tempting to "wait and see" or react later, but the proactive move is to discard the risky suit early while it's still safe.



18 Stalling out is a valid defense

This hand is a scattered mess. No red dora, no regular dora, nothing going for it. Then suddenly, the player to your left (kamicha) who's also the Dealer pons the dora out of nowhere. It's the type of situation that would make you despair. If you casually toss number tiles trying to build up your hand only for the Dealer to call your tiles and win with 4,000-all, that wouldn't it be truly depressing?

That's where the Squeezing (shibori) technique comes in. Squeezing (shibori) is the technique of choosing tiles that are hard for the opponent to your left (kamicha) to call, with the goal of slowing them down and lowering their win rate. It's especially effective against fast, aggressive dealer hands.



CH
4
Lv.2

Here's what to aim for:

1.) Honor tiles or guaranteed safe tiles they've already discarded (genbutsu)

They can't chii honor tiles and they're most likely not calling tiles they already discarded.

2.) Line (suji) tiles that are the "outside" line of early discards

Shapes like  or  tend to be kept to support pon and chii setups, so discards that lie outside these (like 1s, 9s, and

lines (suji) that skip over those shapes) are less likely to be called.

3.) Multiple edge tiles (1s, 2s, 8s, 9s)

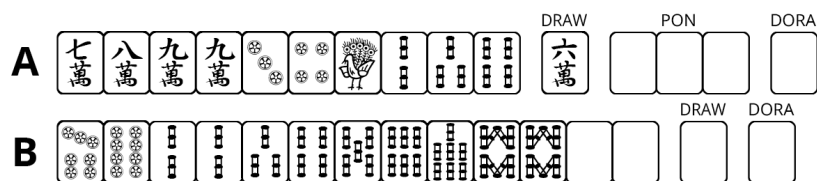
They are hard to pon and even harder to chii. If you have two or more of these tiles, one safe discard buys more time and up to several turns of defense.

4.) If it's a Half Flush (honitsu) or Full Flush (chinitsu) setup, cut outside their target suit




Don't feed into a potential Half Flush (honitsu) with matching tiles. Stick to suits they're not collecting.



If you can stall the Dealer long enough this way, there's a good chance another player with a cheap hand might win and end the hand. That's a win in itself which is much better than paying 4,000 points.

So when a scary open hand appears and your own hand looks hopeless, switch gears to squeezing (shibori) your opponent. You won't win, but you'll dodge the worst-case scenario and that's worth plenty.












19 More wait patterns = more risk

When you're facing a riichi while holding something like Hand A and you're deciding whether to cut  or . As a rule of thumb,  is safer.

Why?  can only deal in against three types of waits: two-sided (ryanmen), double pair (shanpon), and single tile (tanki) waits. On the other hand,  hits all of those waits plus middle waits and another two-sided wait (ryanmen) shape (4-7). So you're looking at five potential wait types. Comparing and counting the types of shapes that a tile could deal into is a core method for evaluating tile safety.

CH
4
Lv.2

Take Hand B, for example. You're facing riichi again. Let's say  is a safe discard and now you're trying to choose between  and . Once again, look at the table and count all the dangerous patterns. If all  are visible, that eliminates middle wait  as a possibility, making  safer.

If the riichi player tossed a  early on, it's less likely they're sitting on a  middle wait or a double pair wait (shanpon), so  gets safer too.

If you find yourself frequently dealing into weak hands, try making a habit of counting how many possible bad shapes your tile can hit. Fewer patterns means lower risk. Simple as that.

20 Sabotage a little every day

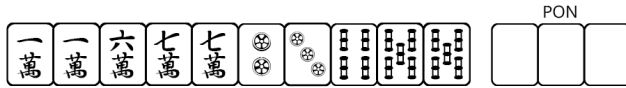
There's a subtle technique in mahjong called "Last Tile Shift" (haitei zurashi), which shifts the last draw. Most commonly, it's used to deny a riichi player their final draw from the wall, especially since they're threatening Last Tile Win (haitei raoyue). You call a tile near the end to steal their last draw.

That's not its only use. You can also use Last Tile Shift (haitei zurashi) to

- 1.) Force another player to take the last draw (haitei) when they're clearly out of safe tiles and struggling to fold. That way they bear the risk of one more draw. Or
- 2.) Push the last draw (haitei) to someone who's likely in tenpai forcing them to risk maintaining tenpai and possibly dealing in just before end of the hand.

In both cases, you're not aiming to win. You're trying to make someone else's life harder and reduce your own chance of losing points, like avoiding a noten penalty or a late-game deal-in.

It's not flashy and it won't win you any hands. It might even only work 1 out of every 10 tries. If you make it a habit, you'll nudge your average upward. Like eating your vegetables or doing morning stretches, it's the kind of discipline that quietly pays off over time.



21 Open hands have two discard piles

Folding against an open hand can be tricky. Unlike with riichi, you can't tell whether or not someone is in tenpai, and with a Value Tile (yakuhai) call, the possible waits are all over the place. So how do you defend?


One clue is to look at the discards of the opponent to the left (kamicha) of the one with the open hand.

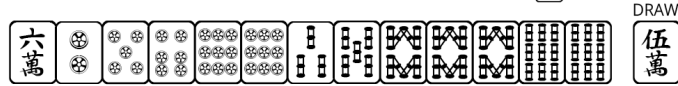
Let's say Player **A** has called a set of Value Tiles (yakuhai) and is pushing forward. Player **B**, who sits to Player **A**'s right, discards tile and Player **A** doesn't call it. That's meaningful.

CH
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Lv.3








Why? If Player **A**'s hand looked like the example above, they have a shape where would complete a set, so they would have called it immediately to progress their hand. The fact that they didn't implies Player **A** likely doesn't have a shape that needs . So even in later turns, is relatively safe to discard against Player **A**.



This is the core logic of reading open hands. Don't just look at the discard pool of the player who called. Analyze what they didn't call from the player to their left (kamicha) as well. It can paint a more accurate picture of their possible waits.




Facing Dealer riichi, Riichi declaration tile is 



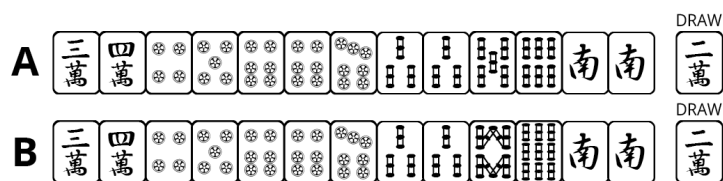
22 Only believe in your own tiles

You are facing an early dealer riichi. Looking for any clue, you glance at the discards. The riichi declaration tile is , and now two other players, both clearly folding, have also discarded . Meanwhile,  is now a last chance tile. Glancing at your own hand, you're holding three of the  and  is also a last chance tile. So, between  and , which is safer?

The key detail here is, even though the two other players have folded, the 4th  is still possibly live. This suggests that there's a good chance the Dealer with the riichi has it. If the dealer does, that nudges 's danger level up a notch.

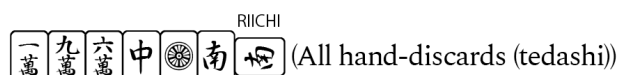
On the flip side,  hasn't been proven safe against the riichi, so even if the other players had it, they'd be unlikely to discard it. That means the fourth  has an equal chance to be in anyone's hand, not just the dealer's. So relatively speaking,  comes out a bit safer.

Even among last chance tiles, not all are equally safe. If you pause and think, "Where is that last copy most likely to be?" you'll start making more reliable folding decisions.



23 A pair of honors is an open declaration

The South Player has called riichi with these discards.



What can we tell from these discards? The key point is that the player in the south seat dropped a pair of their own seat wind **南**. That tells us most likely it's a Pinfu or All Simples (tanyao) hand, or maybe even both.

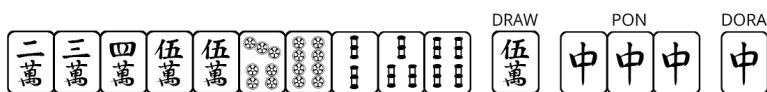
If their starting hand was like Hand **A**, already one tile away from tenpai (iishanten), then tossing the **南** pair makes perfect sense since they would be aiming for a clean Riichi + All Simples (tanyao) + Pinfu (mentanpin).

If their hand was like Hand **B**, they'd probably cut the **南** edge wait (penchan) instead and leave open the chance to pon the **南** and win quickly.









In other words, discarding a pair of Value Tiles (yakuhai) signals: "I'm going for a high-scoring riichi, and the shapes I kept at one away from tenpai (iishanten) were all strong." That also means we can read that line adjacent (suji) tiles and honors are relatively safe to discard.






Use this as a clue when you're searching for safe tiles.










CH
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Lv.3



24 If the 8 is safe, discard the 5 before 2

You've pon'd the dora  and confirmed a two-sided wait (ryanmen) tenpai worth 8,000 point (mangan). This is a hand you really want to win. Then you draw , which could become a new pair. What's the difference between discarding  or discarding  here? In general, the better play is to discard . That way, you don't give the table any extra information or leak safe tiles. If you discard , you're effectively denying a  two-sided wait (ryanmen), which may tip other players off that  is now safe to push.

What if someone else has already declared riichi? Still cut .  is connected to two lines (suji) via  and , which makes it more likely to deal in. , being closer to the edge, carries less risk overall.

Now, here's the twist. What if  is a guaranteed safe tile (genbutsu) against the riichi? In that case, cutting  is actually stronger. While both  and  can hit two-sided waits (ryanmen),  is already used three times in your hand, meaning it can't deal into a double pair wait (shanpon). Between middle wait  and middle wait , the  is statistically more likely, so  becomes the safer discard. Don't just assume that you should discard tiles on the edge. Sometimes the inner tiles are safer options to cut.



25 If a red 5 is cut, discard the 6 before 9

A discard comes out as a riichi declaration from another player. Let's call that Riichi Hand **A**. Meanwhile, you've got Hand **B**.

You're looking at either cutting or to reach an 8,000 point (mangan) tenpai. It's a tempting spot to push, but is there a real difference in risk between those two tiles?

Generally, yes. The danger levels of a tile tend to increase the closer you go towards the center numbers.

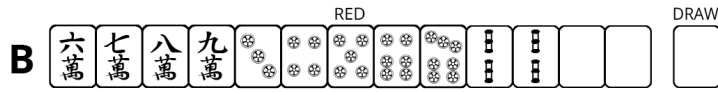
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Let's break it down:

- could deal in with five types of waits: and two-sided waits (ryanmen); middle wait; pair in a double pair wait (shanpon); or single wait (tanki).
- could deal in on just three: two-sided wait; pair in a double pair wait (shanpon); or single wait (tanki).

So at face value seems safer since it has fewer wait types and less exposure. Here's where it gets interesting. Riichi Hand **A** came off a discard. That one tile changes everything. Watch what it eliminates:

- two-sided wait (ryanmen)? Gone. If they had (with Red 5), they wouldn't cut the .
- middle wait? Unlikely. They wouldn't discard the from the (with Red 5).
- double pair wait (shanpon)? Same idea. Turning (with Red 5) into a double pair wait (shanpon) instead of a two-sided wait (ryanmen) doesn't make sense.



- $\boxed{\text{六萬}}$ single wait (tanki)? Discarding a $\boxed{\text{伍萬}}$ just to wait on $\boxed{\text{六萬}}$?

Practically never.

That knocks out four of the five danger cases for $\boxed{\text{六萬}}$. So in this case, $\boxed{\text{六萬}}$ now only deals-in on a $\boxed{\text{六萬}}\boxed{\text{九萬}}$ two-sided wait (ryanmen). While $\boxed{\text{九萬}}$, on the other hand, still deals in on $\boxed{\text{六萬}}\boxed{\text{九萬}}$ two-sided wait (ryanmen), $\boxed{\text{九萬}}$ pair on a double pair wait (shanpon), and $\boxed{\text{九萬}}$ single tile wait (tanki), which means this time, $\boxed{\text{六萬}}$ is actually safer than $\boxed{\text{九萬}}$.



That's the read you get when someone discards a $\boxed{\text{伍萬}}$. Not only does it signal "I don't have that suit's five," but it also tells you they aren't on a 4-6 double pair wait (shanpon) or single tile wait (tanki). That flips the usual logic and sometimes makes a center tile safer than an edge one.




So next time you see a $\boxed{\text{伍萬}}$ come out in riichi, run through the waits to shut down the possibilities and you'll spot opportunities to push that others miss.




All discarded from the hand (tedashi)









26 Pair discards rule out certain waits










A riichi has just been declared with the above discard row. At this moment, there's one tile that stands out as especially safe: , the tile just outside of .




Why? It's extremely awkward and almost implausible to end up with an  wait while doing a  pair drop. Let's walk through each pattern where  could theoretically deal in.



- Two-sided wait (ryanmen) on  (like  


That would mean the hand had     and instead of tossing , they chose to cut  twice? Pretty unnatural.



- Double pair wait (shanpon):



Sure,  could deal in if the shape was    , and the player chose to drop both  tiles... but if they had that, taking the   two-sided wait (ryanmen) instead by cutting  is clearly better. So again, unlikely.

- Middle wait on  from  

This would require them to not cut , and instead drop both ? That's a pretty unnatural sequence.

- Single wait (tanki) on 

Nope. If they were dropping  as a pair, they clearly aren't aiming for a single wait on  afterward.


So even though  is technically not a line tile (suji) to , it's practically safe. You can treat it as a near-guaranteed safe tile.






That's why when you see a pair being discarded from their hand, take a moment to picture what waits and sequences that discarded tile rules out.

All discarded from the hand (tedashi)








27 2 or 8 pair drops could be edge waits

Using the same idea from the previous section that “a middle tile one outside of a discarded pair is unlikely to be the wait”, you might think  looks pretty safe based on the discard row above. However, this time the situation’s a bit different.

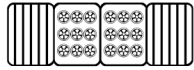
Sure, it’s not going to be a part of a  two-sided wait (ryanmen). However, there is a chance it hits a double pair wait (shanpon), specifically from a shape like . In that case, they could have first cut one  to keep their hand flexible, then after completing the two-sided wait (ryanmen) block, discarded the second  and declared riichi. Even if  looks safe on first glance, that kind of timing keeps a double pair wait (shanpon) very much in play.

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Even with a riichi like this,  is 100% safe but the  line tile is still slightly more dangerous than it looks. Why? Because despite  being discarded earlier,  was held all the way until the riichi declaration. That timing raises the odds of a double pair wait (shanpon) coming from something like  plus a pair. Whenever the riichi declaration tile is a 2 or an 8, take a moment to carefully determine whether there is a possibility of a double pair wait (shanpon) on a terminal still in play.

Another player has declared a concealed kan



28 Concealed kans signal an incoming riichi

When another player calls a concealed kan on a 1, 9, or an unrelated wind tile, it's easy to get spooked. After all, the extra dora flips and the added 32-fu bonus (effectively +1 han) mean the hand can spike in value quickly if you deal in.

In reality, when someone declares a concealed kan on one of those tiles, rarely are they ever in a valid tenpai, so you usually don't have to worry about a silent tenpai either.

Among the four most common yaku in mahjong, Riichi, Pinfu, All Simples (tanyao), and Value Tiles (yakuhai), a concealed kan of a 1, 9, or an irrelevant wind tile can only make a valid tenpai hand if the player already has a triplet of Value Tiles (yakuhai) in their hand.

That said, the fact that they have made a concealed kan on a very safe terminal or honor tile is proof that their hand is near tenpai and they are in a battle-ready state. Assume they will declare riichi in the next few turns.

If your own hand is still far from tenpai, now's a good time to quietly fold moving forward. Ditch your risky tiles early and stock up some safe tiles so that you will not be caught off guard when the riichi does come.

About mahjong puns

One of my “hobbies,” if you can call it that, is making mahjong puns. If you’ve ever played in a Japanese mahjong parlor, you’ve probably heard regulars shout things like “Kakan ni kakan! (果敢に加槓)” which is a homophone that means “You dare to make a kan!” or “Issou ga isou! (一索がいそう!)” which is another homophone that mean “The one bamboo might be out there!” For some reason there’s always a certain percentage of mahjong players who love wordplay and, yes, I’m one of them.

So, while I have the chance, let me show off a few of my personal favorites (in Japanese of course) for the next time you’re in a Japanese speaking mahjong parlor:

1. Nan nyuu celebrate! (南入・セレブレイト) which sounds like “Can you celebrate!” (キャンユースレブレイト) from Namie Amuro’s 1997 hit single “Can You Celebrate?”

Sing the chorus as you say it. I use it when I reach the South Round while sitting on a big lead. In a live parlor, it can come off as pure taunting, so I mostly save it for my solo-stream sessions.

2. Nayande-ataru-jin (ナヤンデアタール人), which sounds like Neanderthal-jin (ネアンデルタール人) meaning “Neanderthal”.

Break it out when you're stuck finding a safe discard or after you've just dealt in. "Nayande-ataru-jin ni natchatta yo! (ナヤンデアタール人になっちゃったよ〜!)" can lighten (or fail to lighten) the mood since it sounds like "I've turned into a Neanderthal!".

Gauge the table first: If no one knows what a Neanderthal is, the joke bombs hard.

3. Nandome-da ginga! (ナンドメダ銀河) which sounds like Andromeda ginga (アンδροメダ銀河) meaning "Andromeda Galaxy".

When your discards keep pairing up, use it to ask the galaxy "How many times is this?!" There's also a variant, "Nando-urame-da ginga! (ナンドウラメダ銀河)" that is used to ask the galaxy just "how many bad draws is this?" for the moment you discard a middle wait and instantly draw the worst tile possible.

4. Nama-sute (生捨て) which sounds like Namaste (ナマステ)

Nama-sute means to "throw away a fresh, unplayed tile". So when Value tiles (yakuhai) are running hot, toss a fresh honor and chant "Na-ma-steeeee" with your palms pressed together like a customary Hindu greeting. Easy to slip in, but beware: If the tile gets ron'd, it's usually for big points.

5. Bakyoo-oon! (場況ォーン) which sounds like famous Japanese

Comedian Kei Tani's signature one-word gag "Gachon!"

Bust out an over-the-top Kei Tani impression when you want to pause and inspect the table state (bakyoo, 場況). Volume and gusto are everything so forget shame and go all-in! Depending on the vibe, switch it up with a quieter, humorous alternative "Matsuo Bakyoo (松尾場況)" based on the most famous poet of 17th-century Japanese, Matsuo Bashou (松尾 芭蕉).

I've got more than 365 of these in my repertoire. Yes, that many! I use them all the time on my mahjong streams, so if you're curious about the rest, come check out the channel on Youtube (https://youtube.com/@senba_crow)!

CHAPTER 5

Placement Control, Mindset, & Other Techniques

'Tis the heart that
fortifies all thy skill



1 Comebacks are always possible

You'll often hear players say, "I'm low on points, so I have to push." It's a common mindset when you're sitting in last place. The urge to chase lost points can creep in fast. Most of us have probably had that moment where we push harder than usual, only to make things worse and end up busting out.

Take a step back. If you're "pushing because of points" in a spot where you normally wouldn't, then that usually means the shape of your hand is poor. Maybe it's a bad wait; maybe you're still two tiles away from tenpai. In other words, you're taking a riskier bet than normal for a smaller-than-usual reward. (If it were a hand worth pushing, you'd be pushing even without being behind, right?)

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The truth is, mahjong is a game where comebacks are always possible as long as you have a dealer turn remaining. No matter the point gap, your next dealership can swing it all. If you crash out before that turn comes because you took an unnecessary gamble, you won't get a chance at a comeback.

When you're in last place, it's important to stay calm and think about whether your hand is really worth pushing.

2 Scoring is your north star

One of the most common questions from players who learned mahjong through online platforms is “When should I learn how to calculate points?” It’s true that in online mahjong, the app handles point calculation when you win. There’s no need to learn it just to declare your score. But once you do learn point calculation, it opens up a much wider range of tactical decisions.

For example, let’s say someone calls and you realize: “That the Dealer’s hand is probably at least 5,800 points, Double East  + 1 Dora, but my hand’s only worth 1,300 points. I’ll fold here.” Or you might face a riichi and think: “Their hand looks dangerous, but I’ve got Half Flush (honitsu) + Value Tiles (yakuhai) + a Red Dora for 8,000 points (mangan). I’ll push.”

You’ll also be able to build hands around exact goals: “I’m 3,800 points behind my opponent, so I’ll go for Riichi + Pinfu + 1 Dora.”

Point calculation acts like a compass for deciding your push fold judgment and hand-building direction. The right time to learn it is when you feel ready to sharpen those skills.

3 Luck is attracted by skill

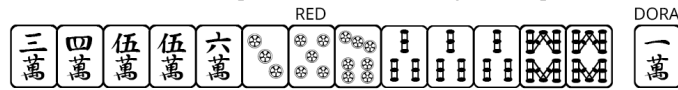
When someone wins a head-to-head battle with a middle wait, or hits a bunch of ura dora on a cheap riichi and turns it into a 8,000 point hand (mangan), people sometimes throw around the phrase “They just got lucky.”

Let’s pause and think it through. These so-called “lucky” outcomes only happen because the player chose to participate in the gamble: pushing with a middle wait or declaring riichi on a hand with no yaku other than Riichi itself. These are risky choices, but they give you access to the lottery. Whether someone takes that shot or not comes down to skill and knowing when to take that risk.


Mahjong is always a game with luck in the mix. Even with a two-sided wait (ryanmen), whether you win or not comes down to fortune. With bad luck, you might not even reach tenpai in the first place. So anyone who finishes first has, in some form, benefited from luck. However, to cash in on that luck, they made a 100% skill-based decision to position themselves for it.

In that case, the phrase “just got lucky” shouldn’t be a dismissal of someone else’s win. If anything, it’s coolest when you say it lightly about your own win: “I just got lucky this time.” That’s the kind of humility that speaks for itself.


South Round 4, 3rd place, Behind 1st by 9,000 points



4 Be satisfied with being 2nd or 3rd

It's the final hand, and you're currently in 3rd place. You're 1,800 points behind 2nd, and 9,000 points away from 1st. If you win a 2,000 point hand, you move up to 2nd. If you self-draw (tsumo) an 8,000 point hand (mangan), you take 1st. Right then, your opponent to your left (kamicha) discards a , a tile that would let you call and enter tenpai.

Depending on the ruleset, but assuming standard net mahjong or most free-play parlor rules, the optimal move here is to call immediately and secure 2nd place. Each placement jump is typically worth around 20,000 points in raw score value, so winning this hand is equivalent to pulling off something close to a dealer 24,000 point hand (baiman) in terms of expected gain.

The final hand, also known as "All Last," is a unique phase of the game. Everyone not in 1st is aiming to climb in placement. If someone else wins, your standing is likely to drop. In that context, letting a tile like  go by, even though it gives you a fast tenpai, is a huge risk. Skipping the call to aim for a better wait raises your chance of falling to 4th significantly.

If you often find yourself wondering, "Why do I always get overtaken at the end?", it might be worth shifting your mindset and learning to be satisfied with moving up a single placement when the hand calls for it.

5 Don't dwell on bad luck

There are times in mahjong when you can't help but think, "Why am I so unlucky?" Maybe you've had several hands in a row with nothing but dead draws. Maybe you've lost three consecutive head-on riichi clashes. Maybe it's been a long stretch with no top finishes at all. You'll often hear players voice these frustrations aloud.

Is there any actual benefit to focusing on these kinds of things?

The human brain can only hold about four pieces of short-term information at once. Meanwhile, a single hand of mahjong throws an overwhelming amount of data at you: your own tile acceptance, other players' tile choices, discarded patterns, point spread, call reads, and more. Just tracking those is enough to max out your mental bandwidth. What happens when you start cluttering that space with noise like "How many turns of dead draws have I had?"

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That's right. You lose the capacity to process the information that actually matters. That, in turn, causes you to play worse and that spiral is one of the real causes of a cold streak. The most important skill here is to not dwell on misfortune.

It's easy to feel like you're the only one getting unlucky, but it's a trick of the game's structure. Mahjong is designed in a way where you can't really see other people's bad luck. Maybe you win a 1,000-point hand, but maybe someone else was sitting on a four-dora monster that never came together.

Maybe the opponent across from you (toimen) who folded might have been stuck in a perfect one tile away from tenpai (kanzen iishanten) with ten straight useless draws.

Maybe you have a middle wait and it turns out that all the tiles were part of someone else's hand.

Bad luck happens to everyone in equal measure.

The best way to deal with bad luck is by reminding yourself: "I'm not the only one who's unlucky" then mentally delete the experience. This frees up your attention and memory to play mahjong better and helps you play with a fresher overall mindset.

6 Demotions are chances for growth

Most online mahjong platforms have a ranking system.

The details vary slightly depending on the platform, but when you create an account, you start at the lowest rank and as you win, your rank goes up. Once you reach a certain level, you're allowed into higher-ranked tables, where the average player skill also rises.

Naturally, though, there's a penalty when you lose. If you rack up too many losses in a given stretch, you'll drop in rank.

Many players feel a strong psychological resistance to rank demotions. Some start to believe their skill has dropped or that they dislike how a lower rank looks on their profile. It's not uncommon for players to avoid ranked matches entirely when they're close to demotion. It's something often called "rank freezing."

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Slumps happen to everyone. Even top players can go dozens of games without a win or fall into a streak of last-place finishes that push them into rank demotion territory. In that sense, demotion is something that can and will happen to anyone. You could even say that facing it head-on, continuing to play seriously despite a slump, is a kind of badge of honor. When you do make it through the downswing, chances are good you'll come out of it stronger. Not just as a mahjong player but also as a person.



7 Withhold info to scare others

When you're folding and not quite sure you have enough safe tiles, spotting all four of a single number tile can be a huge relief.

If four copies of  are visible, then  and  become no-chance tiles and are much safer to discard. If  has already been proven safe,  becomes safer too. If  is safe, then  is also a solid candidate.

Now imagine this: Someone has declared riichi.  is a guaranteed safe tile (genbutsu) and three copies of it are already in the open. You draw the fourth .

It's tempting to feel reassured by the no-chance situation and toss it out right away since it's a known safe tile. If you do that, both of the other players now see four  and suddenly their pool of safe information expands. That gives them an easier time folding, making the table more passive overall.

Instead, the sharper play is to keep that fourth  concealed and discard another tile that's already known to be safe. By hiding that last , you create more chances to potentially force someone else to deal in and avoid a direct hit yourself.

8 Who can you let win?

No matter how hard you try in mahjong, you'll only win about 1 in every 4 hands. That's why how you play the other three hands becomes critically important. Start thinking in terms of: "If someone else is going to win, who would I least mind it being?"

Scenario #1:

South 1st Round

East: 40,000

South: 5,000

West: 10,000

North (you): 45,000

With a point spread like this, what's the move? If East (the Dealer) wins a big hand, they'll overtake you for the top spot, but if South or West wins, it won't impact the standings too much.

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Lv.2

You'll likely remain in the lead as the game progresses. In that case, when East starts calling and building a hand, it's in your interest to defend and prevent them from advancing further.

Scenario #2:

South 1st Round

East: 40,000

South: 5,000

West (you): 10,000

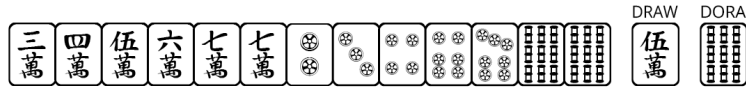
North: 45,000

Now imagine you're in West's seat. If South wins, you get pushed down to last place. Complete disaster. If North wins, you remain in 3rd. Even if East wins, South gets pushed closer to busting, which helps you hold 3rd. So compared to South winning, a win by East or North is still preferable. If North is pushing their hand, it's okay to let them go ahead. You might even play slightly assistive to help North end the game.

The player you want to prevent winning or the one whose win actually benefits you changes depending on the point situation.

If you can develop the mindset of "By preventing my rival (someone who is in the lead or has a similar score to you) from winning, I can accept wins from the rest," then even in rounds where you're unlikely to win yourself, you can still steer things toward a favorable overall outcome.

South Round 4



11 Only push if it makes a difference

Your point situation in All Last doesn't just affect hand-building; it heavily shapes push fold decisions too.

Let's say you've reached tenpai for Pinfu + 2 Dora. In a normal situation, this would be a hand you'd gladly pursue with a chasing riichi.

But what if the All Last looks like this?

East: 15,000

South (you): 20,000

West: 19,000

North (Dealer and declared riichi): 45,000

CH

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Lv.2

In this case, even with a strong Pinfu + 2 Dora, folding is actually the safer choice. Let's compare how your final placement changes depending on whether you push or fold:

If you push:

- You win → 2nd place
- Dealer self-draws (tsumo) or wins off of someone else → still in 2nd place
- You deal in → very likely 4th, occasionally 3rd place
- East or West wins → you drop to 3rd place

If you fold:


- Dealer self-draws or wins off of someone else → you stay in 2nd place
- East or West wins → you drop to 3rd, but not worse

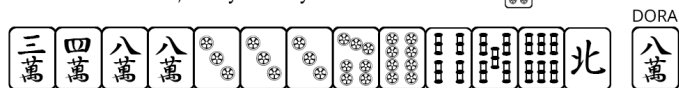
Even if you push, your reward (moving to 2nd) doesn't change even if you win big. The penalty for dealing in is steep and you risk falling to 4th.

That makes it a high-risk, low-reward move.

On the other hand, folding keeps you in 2nd most of the time, and even in the worst case, you end up 3rd, a low-risk, medium-reward outcome.


That's why even a good hand like this may call for folding if the math says so.







South Round 4, Player to your left discards 



12 Call if you can overtake someone

Even when you call and take tenpai, you don't always have to bridge the point gap right away. Let's say it's All Last, and you're behind 1st place by 4,000 points. You draw into the hand shown above.




If you call on , it turns into a 3,900-point hand, which at first glance doesn't seem enough to reverse the standings. Still, calling here is the better move.

Why? Because if you call, your win conditions become: 1.) drawing the  pair yourself or 2.) ron-ing it from your rival. If you don't call, your only condition becomes: draw  or  yourself, then declare riichi, and then win. In both cases, around half of your outs hinge on whether you can draw  or . However by calling , you also gain the ability to ron from your rival making your odds better.

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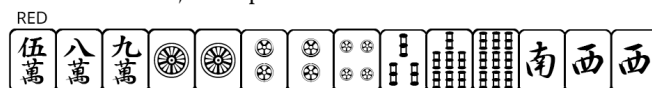
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Plus, if you call now and then pon  then discard , you might end up with three dora, or maybe  upgrades to a red five. Maybe a riichi stick appears and suddenly any win is good enough. All of these extra possibilities tilt the scale further in favor of calling.

In general if self-drawing (tsumo) or a direct-hit lets you overtake someone in points, call to get into tenpai.




South Round 3, Last place





13 Drag the fight out if you're in last place

When you're in the lead, it's standard practice to speed things up and move the hand along. Each hand you clear while keeping the top spot increases your chances of ending the game in first. So then, what kind of mindset should you have when you're in last place?

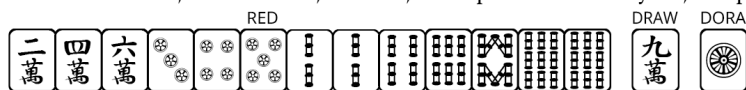
Of course, if you're close to tenpai with a strong hand, just push for the win. When that's not the case, you'll want to play with the goal of dragging the hand out.

Picture this: You're deep in 4th place in South 3 with no dealer turns left. The Dealer, the player to your left (kamicha), has opened with a Value Tile (yakuhai) call, and the player in 3rd has declared riichi. Let's say , , and  are safe tiles, which should you discard?

The best move is to cut  and , hoping they'll get called by the Dealer. In this situation, the worst outcome is a self-drawn win (tsumo) from the non-dealer. What you can do is help the dealer fight back. If the Dealer wins off that 3rd place player, your odds of climbing out of last get that much better.

Even when you're folding, think about the following three things: who you want to win, how to avoid letting the hand end quickly, and how you can support them.



South Round 2, North Seat, Turn 5, Last place with only 12,000 points



14 Picture your ideal future

You're sitting in 4th place with no dealer turn left in South 2, Turn 5. The Dealer, the player to your left (kamicha), quickly calls a set of Value Tiles (yakuhai) and the player in 3rd comes flying in with a riichi. That kind of crushing setup happens to everyone at some point. You might think, "I'm in last. What else can I do but push all-in?" but is that really your best move?

Even if you're behind, charging headlong into a riichi with a hand full of weak shapes is reckless at best. Instead, ask yourself, "What kind of development actually helps me here?"

For example, if the riichi player deals into the Dealer, that shortens the gap between your opponents without you taking any risk. Even if the Dealer self-draws (tsumo), that would negate the riichi threat and earn you some ground thanks to the lost riichi stick. Best of all, the round doesn't advance, meaning more chances for you to come back. What you really want is for the Dealer to rush in and clash with the riichi player. Say the riichi tile was ; cutting  yourself might be just the nudge the Dealer needs to call and speed up. If they land a direct hit on the riichi player, even better.

The takeaway? Even when you can't win the hand yourself, favorable outcomes are still out there. Before going all-in, ask yourself: "Who am I okay with winning this hand?"

CH

5

Lv.3

Afterword

I usually work as a mahjong streamer on YouTube. Over the course of writing books, I've come to realize a big difference between streaming and putting together a printed work: a book has a page limit.

In a livestream, I can go off on tangents and talk about "this and that," sharing all kinds of thoughts as they come to mind. But in a book, that freedom doesn't quite exist.

For my previous two books published in Japan, I focused tightly on "This absolutely needs to be said!" kinds of topics, trimming away the side branches to keep things concise. While I think that made the content easier to digest, there were also plenty of points I wished I could include, like things I would've happily shared in a stream, but had to cut due to space.

That's why, in this book, each topic is kept to a compact one to two pages. This lets me shine a light on those "side branches," techniques and bits of knowledge that don't usually get much coverage in conventional strategy books.

In fact, there are hardly any books out there that cover this kind of material. Until now, the only way to learn it has been by reviewing games with strong players or catching an offhand remark during stream banter. Compared to big-picture fundamentals like riichi judgment or hand-shaping basics, the influence of these details on your results are admittedly small, maybe once every 100 games if that.

Simply knowing about them can give direction to those instinctive plays that used to feel vague, making the game that much more enjoyable.

I believe this kind of obsession with the finer details, the branches and twigs, is the heart of what makes any hobby, not only mahjong, so fascinating.

If this book helps you find more joy in the game, even just a little, then nothing would make me happier.

Senba Kurono

千羽 黒乃

9th Dan on Tenhou.net

Celestial Rank on Mahjong Soul

Glossary

- **8,000 point hand** (mangan, 満貫) - Scoring - A point cap which limits the impact of han and fu. Typically associated with hands that have reached 4 han and 40+ fu or 5 han and worth 8,000 points, the Dealer receive 1.5x.
- **12,000 point hand** (haneman, 跳満) - Scoring - A hand worth 6 to 7 han, the Dealer will receive 1.5x.
- **18,000 point hand** (baiman, 倍満) - Scoring - A hand worth 8 to 10 han, the Dealer will receive 1.5x.
- **24,000 point hand** (sanbaiman, 三倍満) - Scoring - A hand worth 11 to 12 han, the Dealer will receive 1.5x.
- **32,000 point hand** (yakuman, 役満) - Scoring - The highest standard scoring hand worth 13 han or more, the Dealer will receive 1.5x.
- **After a Kan** (rinshan kaihou, 嶺上開花) - Yaku - A hand where a player wins with the tile drawn from the dead wall after immediately calling a kan. Worth 1 han.
- **All Greens** (ryuuiisou, 緑一色) - Yaku - A yakuman consisting of a legal hand using only green tiles from the 2, 3, 4, 6, and 8 from the Bamboo suit (souzu) and the Green Dragon.
- **All Honors** (tsuuiisou, 字一色) - Yaku - A yakuman consisting of a legal hand where a player wins with only honor tiles.
- **All Last** (oorasu, オーラス) - Game Mechanics - The term used for the last hand of the game barring a dealer continuation. Once the Dealer fails to continue and the top player has reached the goal score, the game ends.
- **All Simple** (tanyao, 断么九) - Yaku - A hand where a player wins without any terminal or honor tiles. Worth 1 han.
- **All Terminals** (chinroutou, 清老頭) - Yaku - A yakuman consisting of a legal hand using only terminal tiles: 1s and 9s.
- **All Terminals and Honors** (honroutou, 混老頭) - Yaku - A hand where a player wins with only terminal and honor tiles.

- **All Triplets** (toitōi, 対々和) - Yaku - A hand where a player wins with four triplets and/or quads.
- **Blessing of Earth** (chihou, 地和) - Yaku - A yakuman where a non-dealer player is dealt a winning hand by their first draw. In addition, no players can make tile calls before the first draw.
- **Blessing of Heaven** (tenhou, 天和) - Yaku - A yakuman where the dealer is dealt a winning hand by their first draw.
- **bulging sequence** (nakabukure, 中膨れ形) - Hand Shape - A shape where there is a sequence with two or more duplicate tiles in the middle of the sequence. e.g. 2334, 45556, or 7889
- **calling tiles** (naki, 鳴き) - Game Mechanics - Legal claims on an immediately discarded tile. When multiple players can call on a discard, the following takes priority, Ron over Pon, and Pon over Chii.
- **Celestial** (konten, 魂天) - Online Client - Part of a ranking system used in Mahjong Soul.
- **closed hand** (menzen, 門前) - Hand State - The state of a hand for when a player has not called on another player's discarded tiles. The opposite of an open hand.
- **completely folding** (betaori, ベタ降り) - Defensive Tactics - Refers to a purely defensive play where a player aims to minimize the chance of dealing into other players' hands by discarding completely safe tiles, often giving up the chance to win in the process.
- **complex multi-sided waits** (tamenchan, 多面張) - Hand Shape - A shape where you are waiting on three or more different tiles.
- **concealed kan** (ankan, 暗槓) - Game Mechanics - Kan that is declared when a player draws all four of a tile type. A closed kan does not open the hand.
- **concealed triplet** (ankou, 暗刻) - Game Mechanics - A concealed tile group consisting of three of the same type of tiles.

- **continuous sequences** (renzoku kei, 連続形) - Hand Shape - Any shape where the sequence is continuous. The shape could contain multiples of one tile and doesn't contain duplicate tiles. e.g. 4567 or 4556.
- **count of tiles a hand is away from tenpai** (Shanten, 向聴) - Hand State - Referring to the number of tiles needed to get to tenpai.
- **Counted Yakuman** (kazoe yakuman, 数え役満) - Yaku - A hand where a player wins with 13 han or more from the various yakus counted.
- **dan** (dan, 段) - Online Client - Part of a ranking system used in Tenhou.net. These ranks are "degree" levels, starting with 1-dan. Dan ranks continue upwards to 10-dan with Tenhou being the highest rank possible after 10-dan
- **deal-in rate** (houjuu ritsu, 放銃率) - Player Stats - The percentage of hands a player deals into an opponent's winning hand typically used as an indicator of a player's defensive capability. Typically calculated as Number of Deal-ins divided by Total Hands played multiplied by 100%.
- **dealer continuation** (renchan, 連荘) - Game Mechanics - Occurs when the dealer wins, a new hand will start but the seat wind does not rotate
- **dealing into a hand** (houjuu, 放銃) - Game Mechanics - Occurs when someone discards another player's winning tile.
- **defensive push** (mawashi uchi, 回し打ち) - Defensive Tactics - Refers to a defensive technique where you avoid discarding dangerous tile and aim for a win by flexibly altering your hand shape.
- **double pair wait** (shanpon, シャンポン) - Waits - A shape involving two pairs where either could complete a triplet. e.g. 4455, 5577, 1199
- **Double Riichi** (daburu riichi, 両立直 or ダブルリーチ) - Yaku - A hand where a player declares Riichi with their starting hand before any tiles are called. Worth 2 han.
- **Double Two Identical Sequences** (ryanpeikou, 二盃口) - Yaku - A closed hand where a player wins with two sets of two identical sequences of the same suit and numbers. Worth 3 points. Does not stack with Seven Pairs or Two Identical Sequences.

- dragon tiles** (sangenpai, 三元牌) - Tile Type - Three different tiles most commonly referred to as Dragons. Traditionally order as G, R, then W.
- draw-discard** (tsumogiri, ツモ切り) - Discard Behavior - Discarding a tile that was just drawn.
- edge wait** (penchan, 辺張) - Hand Shape - A edge wait of waiting on 3 when you have a 12 or 7 when you have 89.
- exhaustive draw** (ryuukyoku, 流局) - Game Mechanics - Whenever the round ends in a draw.
- extended sequence** (nobetan, ノベタン形) - Hand Shape - A shape where the sequence allows for two different tiles to complete the pair. e.g. 2345, 4567, 6789
- folding** (hiki, 引き) - Defensive Tactics - The strategic concept of folding in push fold strategy when your hand is weak or other players are showing strong signs of attacking. Playing defensively to avoid dealing in such as discarding safe tiles or avoiding riichi.
- Four Big Winds** (daisuushii, 大四喜) - Yaku - A double yakuman where a player wins with a hand with four triplets or quads of the wind tiles.
- Four Concealed Triplets** (suuankou, 四暗刻) - Yaku - A yakuman where a player wins with four concealed triplets. If the player is waiting on a pair and declares a win off another player, it does not count as Four Concealed Triplets.
- Four Kans** (suukantsu, 四槓子) - Yaku - A yakuman where a player wins with four quads of any type.
- Four Small Winds** (shousuushii, 小四喜) - Yaku - A yakuman where a player wins with a hand with three triplets or quads of the wind tiles plus a pair of the fourth wind.
- Four Winds Abortive Draw** (suufon renda, 四風子連打) - Game Mechanics - Occurs when all four players' initial discards are the same wind type causing the hand to be aborted. A call for a concealed kan invalidates the abortive draw.

- **Full Flush** (chinit-su, 清一色) - Yaku - A hand where a player wins with tiles from only one suit, no honors. Worth 6 han closed and 5 han if open.
- **Full Straight** (ittsuu, 一通) - Yaku - A hand where a player wins with a complete sequence of 1 through 9 of one suit. Worth 2 han if closed and 1 if open.
- **full-hand patterns** (zentai yaku, 全体役) - Yaku - A classification of winning hand patterns that uses all 14 tiles.
- **Fully Outside** (junchan, 純全帶么九) - Yaku - A hand where a player wins with every sequence, triplet, and pair containing at least one 1 or 9 with no honor tiles. Worth 3 han closed and 2 open.
- **guaranteed safe tile** (genbutsu, 現物) - Defensive Tactics - A 100% safe tile, such as the same tile that was previously discarded by the player being defended against or one mathematically unable to be in a winning hand.
- **Half Flush** (honitsu, 混一色) - Yaku - A hand where a player wins with a hand with tiles from only one suit and honor tiles. Worth 3 han closed and 2 open.
- **Half Outside** (chanta, 全帶) - Yaku - A hand where a player wins where every sequence, triplet, or pair contains at least one terminal or honor tile. Worth 2 han if closed and 1 if open.
- **Hand Value Style** (te yaku gata, 手役型) - Play Style - A mahjong play style where a player refuses to win a hand with less than 3 han.
- **hand-discard** (tedashi, 手出し) - Discard Behavior - Discarding a tile that was already in the hand before the draw.
- **high-low** (takame-yasume, 高安) - Points - Refers to the scoring difference between multiple possible winning tiles when in tenpai in which some tiles complete additional hand patterns and scoring elements while some do not.

- **kyu** (kyu, 級) - Online Client - Part of a ranking system used in Tenhou.net. This rank is used to indicate a progression from beginner to advance with the number system going from higher numbers (e.g. 9th kyu) to lower (e.g. 1st kyu) with 1st kyu being the highest kyu rank before dan ranks.
- **Last Chance tiles** (one chansu, ワンチャンス) - Defensive Tactics - A tile where three tiles of the same type are already visible or accounted for.
- **Last Discard** (hourei raoyui, 河底撈魚) - Yaku - A hand where a player wins by declaring a win on the last discarded tile. Worth 1 han.
- **Last Draw** (haitei raoyue, 海底撈月) - Yaku - A hand where a player wins by drawing the winning tile with the last tile drawn from the wall. Worth 1 han.
- **last tile draw** (haitei, 海底 or ハイテイ牌) - Game Mechanics - Refers to the last legal tile that is drawn from the wall. Could trigger the Last Tile Draw yaku.
- **Last Tile Shift** (haitei zurashi, 海底ずらし) - Defensive Tactics - Refers to a technique in mahjong where the last tile draw is shifted from the intended player using calls
- **Line Theory** (suji, 筋) - Defensive Tactics - A defensive theory based on the locked discard (furiten) rule to determine which tiles are safe. Refers to a conceptual pairing of two tiles that are two apart and have two tiles in between.
- **live tile** (shonpai, 生牌) - Defensive Tactics - Refers to a tile that has not yet been discarded by any player.
- **Locked Discard** (furiten, 振り聴) - Hand State - A hand state where a player cannot declare a win on another player's discarded tile with the current configuration. They are still allowed to with their own draws assuming the hand is valid. A locked discard state is caused by a previous discard or skipping a winning tile.
- **mahjong playstyle** (janfuu, 雀風) - Play Style - A style of playing mahjong often referring to the tendency and traits of a player.

- **Mahjong Soul** - Online Client - Popular online riichi mahjong client with English support
- **middle wait** (kanchan, 嵌張) - Hand Shape - A shape that completes a sequence with a middle number. e.g. 13, 46, 78
- **Nine Gates** (chuuren poutou, 九連宝燈) - Yaku - A yakuman where a player wins with only suit with numbers in the order of 1112345678999 plus any tile matching one of them.
- **non-Line Theory tile** (musuji, 無筋) - Defensive Tactics - Refers to a tile that does not fall within known Line Theory (suji) patterns and is therefore considered unrelated or unconnected by Line Theory logic.
- **One away from tenpai** (iishanten, 一向聴) - Hand State - Referring to a hand that is one tile away from a “ready” state to complete a hand.
- **One-shot** (ippatsu, 一発) - Yaku - A hand where a player wins within 1 turn after declaring Riichi. In addition, draws/discards must not be interrupted by tile calls during that turn. Worth 1 han.
- **One-shot Cancel** (ippatsu keshi, 一発消し) - Defensive Tactics - Refers to a technique in mahjong where the One-shot yaku is negated by calling on a tile
- **Open All Simple** (Kuitan, 喰いタン) - Yaku - An open hand where a player wins without any terminal or honor tiles. Worth 1 han.
- **open kan** (daiminkan, 大明槓) - Game Mechanics - Occurs when a player claims a fourth tile discard when they possesses three tiles of the same type in their hand. This opens your hand.
- **pair** (toitsu, 対子) - Hand Shape - Set of two identical tiles.
- **pair-attached sequence** (aryanmen, 垂リヤンメン or 垂両面) - Hand Shape - A two-sided wait shape that is adjacent to a pair. e.g. 6678, 2234, 4566
- **partial-hand patterns** (bubun yaku, 部分役) - Yaku - A classification of winning hand patterns that only depend on a specific part of the hand.

- Perfect One Away** (kanzen iishanten, 完全一向聴) - Hand State - Refers to a hand that is one tile away from tenpai (iishanten) whose waits are both a double-sided wait (ryanmen) and a double pair wait (shanpon) to reach tenpai.
- Pinfu** (pinfu, 平和) - Yaku - A hand where a player wins with four sequences and one non-Value Tile pair. The potential winning tiles must be tiles from a two-sided wait that are sides of a sequence.
- Pinpoint Fold** (bita dome, ビタ止め) - Defensive Tactics - A defensive folding technique referring to deducing and avoiding the exact tile your opponent is waiting to win on.
- player across** (toimen, 対面) - Game Mechanics - The player seated across from you who takes a turn after the player on your left. You cannot call chii from this player
- player to your left** (kamicha, 上家) - Game Mechanics - The player seated to your left who takes a turn after you. You can call chii from this player.
- player to your right** (shimocha, 下家) - Game Mechanics - The player seated to your right who takes a turn before you. You cannot call chii from this player.
- pon tenpai** (pon ten, ポンテン) - Hand State - Ponning to get into tenpai.
- pushing** (oshi, 押し) - Defensive Tactics - The strategic concept of pushing in push fold strategy when your hand is strong with good potential to win. You play aggressively by declaring riichi or discarding risky tiles in order to pursue the win.
- Quick Attack Style** (sokkou gata, 速攻型) - Play Style - A mahjong play style where a player aims to win as quickly as possible, prioritizing win count above everything else.
- Quick Riichi Style** (bouten sokuri gata, 棒テン即り一型) - Play Style - A mahjong play style where a player aims to create hands with the maximum amount of tile acceptance and immediately riichi the moment they reach tenpai.

- **reading** (yomi, 読み) - Defensive Tactics - The act of using visible information such as hands and discards to infer hidden factors like an opponent's wait or hand value.
- **Red Tile rules** (aka ari, 赤あり) - Rules - A mahjong rule variation in which special red-colored 5 tiles are added to the standard mahjong tile set. These red tiles function as dora but do not count as yaku.
- **Robbing a Kan** (chankan, 搶槓) - Yaku - A hand where a player wins by declaring a win on another player's kan. For Thirteen Orphans, you can call on a closed kan. Worth 1 han.
- **sandwich shape** (sandoitchi katachi, サンドイッチ形) - Hand Shape - An extended shape similar to two middle waits (ryankan) that waits on four different tiles that could complete a set and a pair. e.g. 44688, 33577
- **seat wind** (jikaze, 自風) - Game Mechanics - The wind that is assigned to each player at the start of the game. After the Dealer fails to repeat the hand, each player's seat wind will rotate counterclockwise.
- **Self-Draw** (menzenchin tsumohou / menzen tsumo, 門前清自摸 or メンゼンツモ) - Yaku - A closed hand where a player wins by drawing the winning tile. Worth 1 han.
- **Seven Pairs** (chiitoitsu, 七対子) - Yaku - An irregular, closed hand where a player wins with seven different pairs. Worth 2 han.
- **silent tenpai** (damaten / dama, 黙聴 / 黙) - Hand State - A hand state where a player with a fully closed hand is in tenpai but has not declared riichi.
- **simples** (chunchanpai, 中張牌) - Tile Type - Tiles numbered from 2 through 8.
- **single wait** (tanki, 単騎) - Waits - A term for a wait on a single tile for a pair.
- **skipping your draw** (tsumoban skip, ツモ番スキップ) - Defensive Tactics - Refers to a mahjong technique where you call to avoid drawing additional tiles effectively skipping your draw.

- **someone else dealing in instead of you** (yokoidou, 横移動) - Scoring - Refers to the movement of points between players other than yourself
- **Squeezing** (shibori , 絞り) - Defensive Tactics - The technique of choosing tiles that are hard for the player to your left to call.
- **starting hand** (haipai, 配牌) - Hand State - The first thirteen tiles dealt to each player.
- **Sticky One Away** (kutsuki tenpai, くつつき聴牌) - Hand State - A hand shape where there are three sets and one pair already complete and the remaining two tiles are not part of a sequence or pair. The hand will reach tenpai when one of those tiles forms a block by drawing an adjacent tile.
- **Super Defensive Style** (chou bougyo gata, 超防御型) - Play Style - A mahjong play style where a player immediately folds whenever they sense two or more players have leads.
- **swap-call** (kuikae, 喰い替え) - Discard Behavior - A rule that prevents you from calling a tile, then immediately discard a tile that could have been used in that set. For example, ponning an 8 dots and then discard an 8 dots or chiing a 1 characters for a 23 characters and discard a 4 characters.
- **swap-discard** (karagiri, 空切り) - Discard Behavior - Discarding a copy of a tile that was drawn with one already in the hand, effectively swapping like tiles.
- **table reading** (bakyou yomi, 場況読み) - Defensive Tactics - A defensive tile reading strategy in mahjong where you infer an opponent's hand based on factors such as their discards and safe tiles and using that information to inform your own discards.
- **Tenhou.net** - Online Client - Popular online riichi mahjong client in Japan with limited English support.
- **Terminal-only Discard Draw** (nagashi mangan, 流し満貫) - Yaku - A special scoring condition for exhaustive draws where all discards for a player are terminal and/or honors. In additional, none were called by other players.

- **terminals** (routouhai, 老頭牌) - Tile Type - Tiles numbered 1 or 9 because they are always at the beginning or end of a sequence
- **Thirteen Orphans** (kokushi musou, 国士無双) - Yaku - An irregular, closed, Yakuman hand where a player wins with one of each of the 13 terminal tiles plus one additional tile that matches one of them
- **Three Big Dragons** (daisangen, 大三元) - Yaku - A yakuman where a player wins with three triplets or quads of all three Dragon tiles.
- **Three Color Straight** (sanshoku doujun, 三色同順) - Yaku - A hand where a player wins with three sequences with the same number in three different suits. Worth 2 han if closed and 1 if open.
- **Three Color Triplets** (sanshoku doukou, 三色同刻) - Yaku - A hand where a player wins with three triplets with the same number. Worth 2 han.
- **Three Concealed Triplets** (sanankou, 三暗刻) - Yaku - A hand where a player wins with three concealed triplets or quads.
- **Three Kans** (san kantsu, 三槓子) - Yaku - A hand where a player wins with three quads. Worth 2 han.
- **Three Small Dragons** (shousangen, 小三元) - Yaku - A hand where a player wins with two triplets of Dragon tiles plus a pair of the third Dragon tile. Worth 2 han.
- **three-sided wait** (sanmenchan, 三面張) - Waits - A term for any shape that produces a three-sided wait. e.g. 45678, 4555, or 2345678
- **three-tile wall** (sanmai kabe, 三枚壁) - Defensive Tactics - Three of the four copies of one number tile are already visible in your hand or in the discard piles.
- **tile acceptance** (ukeire, 受け入れ) - Strategy - Refers to the number of tiles that you could draw to reduce the number of tiles a hand is away from tenpai

- **tile efficiency** (tenari, 手なり) - Strategy - Refers to the speed and quality of hand development which can be broken down to speed (making the hand more likely to complete) and points (maximizing the points gained per hand).
- **triplet** (koutsu, 刻子) - Game Mechanics - A tile group consisting of three of the same type of tiles.
- **Two Identical Sequences** (iipeikou, 一盃口) - Yaku - A hand with two identical sequences of the same suit and numbers. Must be a closed hand. Worth 1 han.
- **two middle waits** (ryankan, リャンカン) - Waits - An extended shape that completes a sequence with two middle number tiles. e.g. 135, 468, 579
- **two tiles away from tenpai** (ryanshanten, 二向聴) - Hand State - Referring to a hand that is two tiles away from a “ready” state to complete a hand.
- **two-sided wait** (ryanmen, 両面) - Waits - A shape consisting of two consecutive numbers waiting on two possible tiles to complete a sequence on either side.
- **unlucky draws** (urame, 裏目) - Game Mechanics - Refers to a situation where after discarding a tile, the tiles you draw in subsequent turns out to a poor match for your hand or ruins your potential waits.
- **ura dora efficiency** (ura dora koritsu, 裏ドラ効率) - Strategy - Refers to the probability of gaining an ura dora after declaring riichi. For example, the probability of hitting an ura dora with a Pinfu hand is approximately 38% (13 out 34 tiles).
- **Value Tiles** (yakuhai, 役牌) - Yaku - A hand with a triplet of the Player’s wind, Round wind, or Dragon tiles. Worth 1 han.
- **value tiles** (yakuhai, 役牌) - Tile Type - Tiles that are the round wind, seat wind, or Dragon tiles.
- **waits** (machi, 待ち) - Waits - The collective term for patterns that can be used to form tile groups or pairs.

- wall reading** (yama yomi, 山読み) - Defensive Tactics - A defensive tile reading strategy that refers to predicting which tiles remain in the draw wall by analyzing factors such as discards, calls, and riichi declarations.
- win rate** (agari ritsu, アガリ率 or 和了率) - Player Stats - The percentage of hands a player wins typically used as an indicator of a player's offensive capability. Typically calculated as Win Count divided by Total Hands played multiplied by 100%.
- wind tiles** (kazehai, 風牌) - Tile Type - Four different tiles representing winds in the four cardinal directions
- winning pair** (jantou, 雀頭) - Hand Shape - A pair in a standard winning hand of mahjong. Also referred to as the head in other sources.
- yaku-less hand** (atozuke, 後付け) - Yaku - Refers to hand in tenpai with no guaranteed yaku but can gain a yaku upon obtaining a specific winning tile.
- yaku-less tenpai** (keishiki tenpai, 形式聴牌) - Hand State - A tenpai by formality and rules only.

136 Ready-to-Use Mahjong Strategy & Tactics
Translation: Harrison Doan

IMA SUGU TSUKAERU MAHJONG TECHNIQUE 136

by Senba KURONO

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Original Japanese edition published in 2024 by TAKESHOBO CO., LTD.

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First Mahjong Pros Edition: September 2025

This was originally published as an ebook by Mahjong Pros.

Original illustrations: AKAGASHI

Original Design: AIDAC Design Co.

Edited by Mahjong Pros Editorial: Dr. Hematheja "Theja" Lanka

Designed by Mahjong Pros Design: Lynn Vuong

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ISBNs: 978-1-969071-00-3 (paperback)

978-1-969071-01-0 (ebook)

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in China

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