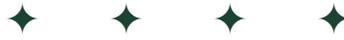




— M A H J O N G M A S T E R Y —



# The Winning Cheat Sheet

*Your Table-Side Companion*



*🌸 Quick-reference frameworks, decision guides, and  
everything you need — right when you need it. 🌸*







## Keep This at Your Elbow

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*There is a moment in every game — usually somewhere in the middle, when the pressure begins to build — when you know the right question but can't quite remember the answer. Should you expose? Is this the pivot moment? What does the FAST framework say here? What's the three-question test for this decision?*

*This guide exists for that moment.*

*Everything in here comes from the full Mahjong Mastery series, distilled into the formats most useful when you're actually at the table: decision trees, quick checklists, frameworks compressed to their essential logic, and key numbers you should have at your fingertips. You don't need to read it cover to cover. Keep it nearby, open to whatever section you need, and let it quietly shore up your game.*

*Think of it as a trusted friend sitting just off your shoulder — not playing for you, but ready to whisper the right question at the right moment.*

*May your tiles be plentiful, your Charlestons productive, and your Mahjong calls decisive.*

With warmth and good tiles,  
*The Mahjong Mastery Team*





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# The Charleston Decision Guide

*The Charleston is your opportunity to shape your hand before play begins — and to gather intelligence about the table. Three passes: Right, Across, Left. Here's what to do at each stage.*

## PASS RIGHT — INFORMATION GATHERING

<b>Always pass:</b>	Isolated off-suit tiles, honors you don't have pairs of, tiles from suits you're not using
<b>Always keep:</b>	Jokers (never pass a joker), pairs, any meld you've already formed
<b>Watch for:</b>	What comes back — returned tiles signal what's available on the table

## PASS ACROSS — DIRECTIONAL COMMITMENT

<b>Pass:</b>	Tiles from your weaker hand option; tiles you're 80% sure you won't need
<b>Keep:</b>	Tiles for your top two hand candidates, all bridge tiles, all jokers
<b>Watch for:</b>	Are you getting your preferred suit back? Bad sign. Getting honors back? Others aren't using them.

## PASS LEFT — FINAL CLEANUP

<b>Pass:</b>	Last cleanup — tiles that don't fit your refined direction
<b>Keep:</b>	Jokers (always), tiles for your top two hands, all pairs
<b>Golden rule:</b>	Never pass a joker. Not once. Not for any reason.

**The Charleston intelligence principle:** You're not just cleaning your hand — you're gathering data. What your neighbors receive and keep tells you something about their direction. What comes back to you confirms availability. Use all of it.

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### **Optional Pass — When to Use It**

After the three required passes, you may offer an "optional" pass (usually across). Use it when: you received tiles you definitely don't want, you see an opportunity to trade toward tiles you need, or you want to test an opponent's reaction by offering a specific tile. Don't feel obligated to offer if your hand is solid.



# Hand Selection — The 5-Factor Quick Check

*Before you fall in love with a hand, run it through these five factors. The best hand on the card is the one your tiles actually support, not the prettiest one you can imagine.*

Factor	What to Check	Good Sign	Bad Sign
<b>Tile Density</b>	Which suit/range do you have the most of?	4+ tiles in one suit range	Scattered across all suits
<b>Joker Count</b>	How many jokers do you have?	2+ jokers = real flexibility	0 jokers = choose easy hands
<b>Early Draws</b>	What are your first 3-4 draws telling you?	Draws reinforce your direction	Draws point a different way
<b>Charleston Return</b>	What came back that you wanted?	Suit you're building came back	You got your suit back unwanted
<b>Trap Hand Check</b>	Does the hand require 5+ exact singles?	Joker flexibility, common tiles	Needs rare tiles, no joker flex

## TRAP HAND WARNING SIGNS

*Trap hands look attractive. They're usually statistical nightmares. Check for these before committing:*

- Requires 5 or more exact singles
- Needs tiles that rarely appear in discards (flowers, specific honors in large numbers)
- Has no joker flexibility — every meld must be natural
- Depends on perfect draws across 8+ consecutive turns

- You chose it because it looks impressive, not because your tiles support it

**The pragmatist's rule:** Easy hand completed = win. Beautiful hand attempted = usually a loss. Always choose the achievable over the impressive.



# The Exposure Decision — 3-Question Framework

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*Every time a tile you can use appears in the discard, you face the exposure decision. Run these three questions before you call it — or let it go.*

## QUESTION 1 — DOES EXPOSING THIS MEANINGFULLY ACCELERATE MY PATH TO MAHJONG?

**Yes (expose):** You're 3-4 tiles from winning. This completes a critical meld. You have joker backup.

**No (wait):** You're still far out. The meld is helpful but not urgent. You can draw this tile naturally.

## QUESTION 2 — DOES EXPOSING DESTROY MY FLEXIBILITY?

**Safe (expose):** You're committed to one hand. This exposure doesn't eliminate your other melds.

**Dangerous (wait):** You're still deciding between 2-3 hands. This exposure locks you into one path too early.

## QUESTION 3 — WHAT INFORMATION DOES THIS REVEAL, AND IS IT DANGEROUS?

**Acceptable:** Reveals your suit but not your specific hand. Early-game ambiguity remains.

**Dangerous:** Reveals exactly which hand you're playing. Opponents can now block you precisely.

## QUICK EXPOSURE REFERENCE

Situation	Expose?
3-4 tiles from Mahjong, tile completes a meld	✔ Yes — do it
Still choosing between 2+ hands	✘ No — wait
Rare tile (4th copy, rare honor) you may not see again	✔ Yes — take it
Turn 5 or earlier	✘ No — too early
You have 3+ jokers as backup	✔ Probably yes
Would expose a joker in early-to-mid game (Dallas)	✘ Wait — save for late
Tiles are coming naturally, no pressure	Consider staying concealed

## Pivot vs. Commit Framework

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*The pivot decision is one of the hardest in mahjong — and one of the most important. This framework takes the emotion out of it.*

### PIVOT TRIGGERS — WHEN TO CHANGE COURSE

- No progress after 12 draws.** Same gaps, no completed melds, nothing coming. The hand isn't working.
- Your tiles are being discarded everywhere.** If your suit is flooding the discard pile with no callers, it's being cleared out of the game.
- Two+ opponents exposed in your territory.** They've claimed the tiles you need. You're now competing for scraps.
- Three copies of a critical tile are discarded.** If you need a pung and three have been thrown, the fourth isn't coming to you.
- You've been in "almost there" for 8+ turns.** If you keep thinking "one more tile" but it never comes, the hand may be dead.

### COMMIT SIGNALS — WHEN TO LOCK IN

- You have 2 complete melds and a clear, achievable path to finish
- Your tile density is strong and draws are confirming it
- You're at or past turn 10-12 and the time to commit is now
- Waiting longer would only help opponents catch up

**The Sunk Cost Reminder:** The turns you've already played are gone. They cannot be recovered by staying the course. The only question that matters is — can you win from *right now*? If no, pivot. If yes, commit.

### LAST RESPONSIBLE MOMENTS

Decision	Last Responsible Turn
Commit to your final hand	Turn 10–14
Pivot away from a failing hand	Turn 12–14 (earlier is better)
Make a major exposure	When you're 3-4 tiles from Mahjong
Enter pure defensive mode	When 2+ opponents appear close



# Joker Rules at a Glance

*Joker rules are some of the most commonly confused in American Mahjong. Here's the complete quick reference — standard rules and Dallas/blank tile adjustments.*

## STANDARD JOKER RULES

Joker Can...	Joker Cannot...
Substitute for any tile in a pung (3 of a kind)	Be used in a pair
Substitute for any tile in a kong (4 of a kind)	Complete a hand where only pairs are used
Substitute for any tile in a run (consecutive numbers)	Substitute for a joker that's required for a special hand
Be held until you find the right use	Be passed in the Charleston

## JOKER STRATEGY BY COUNT

**0-1** Conservative play. Choose common-tile hands. Avoid trap hands. Focus on tile availability.

**2-3** Standard flexibility. Pursue moderately complex hands. Use jokers for hardest-to-fill melds.

**4+** Aggressive mode. Target faster/harder hands. Expose earlier. Push tempo. Take advantage.

## DALLAS MAHJONG — BLANK TILE & SWAP RULES

## JOKER / BLANK SWAP RULES

- Who can swap:** Any player, on their turn, if they hold the exact tile the joker is replacing
- When to swap:** When the joker solves a real problem in your hand and you have the matching tile
- When NOT to swap:** When the joker is "nice to have" but not needed; when your opponent is close to Mahjong
- Protect your jokers:** Expose joker-backed melds LAST, when you're already 1-2 tiles from Mahjong



# Key Numbers Every Player Should Know

*These are the tile counts, supply limits, and timing benchmarks that should be running in the background of every game you play.*

## TILE SUPPLY REFERENCE

Tile Type	Total in Game	Per Rank
Dots (1-9)	36	4 of each number
Bams (1-9)	36	4 of each number
Craks (1-9)	36	4 of each number
Winds (E, S, W, N)	16	4 of each wind
Dragons (R, G, W)	12	4 of each dragon
Flowers	8	— (numbered 1-8)
Jokers	8	— (all wild)
<b>Total</b>	<b>152 (standard)</b>	<b>166 with extras</b>

## CRITICAL THRESHOLD NUMBERS

**3** If 3 copies of a tile you need for a pung have been discarded, **pivot** — the fourth is likely out of reach.

**10-14** The commit window. If you haven't committed to your hand by turn 14, you're running out of time.

**12** The pivot deadline. If no meaningful progress by turn 12, seriously evaluate whether to change course.

**2** Keep at least 2 hands viable until you're 60%+ toward one. Bridge tiles overlap between them.

**60%** The commit threshold. When you're 60%+ complete toward one hand, it's time to focus.

**3-4** The exposure window. Expose when you're 3-4 tiles from Mahjong, not before.



# Tile Temperature Quick Reference

*Before every discard, check the temperature of the tile you're about to throw. Hot tiles can donate wins. Cold tiles are safe. Know the difference.*

Temperature	What It Means	Examples
 <b>Hot</b>	High risk — could complete an opponent's hand	Tiles matching opponent exposures; tiles nobody has thrown yet (virgin tiles); tiles in active suits
 <b>Warm</b>	Some risk — possible but unconfirmed need	Tiles in suspected suit of an active player; tiles in a medium range with runs possibly active
 <b>Cold</b>	Safe — unlikely to help any opponent	Tiles discarded 3+ times already; tiles in dead suits (heavily discarded all game); extreme numbers when no runs showing

## TEMPERATURE UPDATE TRIGGERS

Tile temperature changes constantly. Update your mental model when:

- An opponent makes an exposure — tiles matching that exposure jump to **Hot**
- A tile is discarded a third time — it moves toward **Cold**
- An opponent changes behavior (stops discarding freely) — reassess their range, update temperatures
- You receive a tile you've been tracking — your own hand changes, so might your assessment of theirs

**The three-second rule:** Spend three seconds on every discard checking its temperature against your current opponent reads. This one habit prevents more donated wins than any other single practice.



## Common Mistakes & Quick Fixes

*These are the mistakes that cost most players the most games. Identify yours and apply the fix.*

Mistake	Why It Costs You	The Fix
<b>Emotional hand selection</b>	You build a hand your tiles can't support	Run the 5-Factor Check before committing to any hand
<b>Exposing too early (turns 1-8)</b>	Locks you in, reveals your hand, opponents can block	Wait until you're 3-4 tiles from Mahjong
<b>Passing a joker</b>	You've given away your most flexible tile	Never, ever pass a joker. Full stop.
<b>Ignoring opponent discards</b>	You throw hot tiles without realizing it	Before each discard, check against opponent exposures
<b>Sunk cost stubbornness</b>	You ride a dead hand instead of pivoting	Ask "can I win from RIGHT NOW?" — not "how much have I invested?"
<b>Hoarding jokers too long</b>	Jokers that never get used provided zero value	Deploy when they solve a real gap — not just "the right moment" that never comes
<b>Committing too late</b>	You run out of time after staying flexible too long	Set a mental commit deadline — turn 12 at the latest
<b>Chaotic Charleston passes</b>	You miss intelligence from pass patterns	Pass with intention: what are you signaling? What are you learning?





## Your Turn Checklist

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*Run through this mental checklist on every turn. It takes about five seconds and prevents most costly mistakes.*

### WHEN A TILE IS DISCARDED (BEFORE YOU DECIDE TO CALL)

- Does this tile fit my hand? (If not, immediately pass)
  - If it fits — does exposing accelerate me meaningfully? (3-question framework)
  - Am I close enough to expose safely? (3-4 tiles from Mahjong)
  - Do I still need flexibility, or am I committed? (If still flexible → probably wait)
- 

### WHEN YOU DRAW FROM THE WALL

- Does this draw help my hand? How much closer am I?
  - Does this draw change my hand direction? (Pivot signal?)
  - Which tile do I discard? (Check temperature before throwing)
  - Is any opponent close to Mahjong? (Scan exposures and behavior)
  - Am I in SCAN, SHAPE, COMMIT, or DEFEND mode right now?
- 

### BEFORE EVERY DISCARD

- What is the temperature of this tile? (Hot / Warm / Cold)
- Does it match any opponent's exposures?
- Has it been discarded already? How many times?
- Is there a safer option I haven't considered?

**The most important question of all:** Before every discard, ask — "Is there any reason NOT to throw this?" If yes, find something safer. If no, throw it without

hesitation.



## The FAST Framework (Beginners)

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*New to the game? This is your core framework. Four letters, four questions. Run through it when you're not sure what to do.*

### F — FIND THE EASIEST HAND

After Charleston: What suit do I have the most of? Do I already have pairs? Which card hand matches my tiles *right now*? Choose the hand that fits your current tiles, not the one you wish you had.

### A — AVOID DEAD TILES

Dead tiles are tiles that aren't helping you win. If a suit is being thrown everywhere and nobody's calling it — it's dead. Pivot to a suit that's being held, not discarded.

### S — STAY FLEXIBLE

Keep two possible hands alive early. Don't lock in too soon unless you're already loaded with tiles for one hand. Bridge tiles overlap between hands — hold them as long as possible.

### T — TAKE PROGRESS

When you can expose safely AND it helps you finish, do it. Momentum matters. Don't wait for perfection — take progress when it's available and build from there.



# SCAN-SHAPE-COMMIT-DEFEND (Intermediate+)

Phase	What You're Doing	Key Question
SCAN	Reading the table before choosing your hand	"What tiles are available to me?"
SHAPE	Building flexibly, keeping 2 hands alive	"Which bridges overlap my top two hands?"
COMMIT	Choosing the line and accelerating	"Is this my last responsible moment to commit?"
DEFEND	Stopping feeds, protecting position	"Is there any reason NOT to throw this tile?"



SECTION TWELVE

MAHJONG MASTERY

## Dallas Mahjong Quick Adjustments

Adjustment	Rule
Blank tiles	Function as additional jokers / wilds
Joker swaps	Any player, on their turn, with exact matching tile
Protect joker melds	Expose joker-backed melds last — only when 1-2 tiles from Mahjong
Chase a swap when:	Joker solves a real gap AND opponent isn't close to winning
Skip a swap when:	Joker is "nice to have" / opponent is close / swap costs you significant tempo

