

Generic Pai Gow Tiles House Way

1. With two pairs, each pair should always be played as a separate hand. With one pair, the pair should be kept together and played as the high hand except as follows:
 - A. Any pair should be split to make two Strong Hands (High Nine, Gong, and/or Wong), if possible. (See Note 1)
 - B. Teens or Days should be split to improve the low hand to 3 or higher, if possible. (See Note 2)
 - C. Other pairs should be split if doing so would improve the low hand from 3 or less to 7 or more while keeping the high hand 9 or higher. (See Note 2)
 - D. Eights should always be split with H10 + L10.
2. With no pair, the hands should be balanced by making the low hand as high as possible, **BUT** if it is possible to play a Strong Hand, the final set must include at least one Strong Hand. (See Note 3)
3. After balancing the hands as stated in rule (2) above, the tiles should be reset to make the high hand as high as possible if:
 - (a) the low hand, after balancing, is less than 3, and the tiles can be reset to improve the high hand to 7 or more (see Note 4), **or**
 - (b) the low hand, after balancing, is a 3 in which the high tile ranks below Chong, and the tiles can be reset to improve the high hand to 9 or more (see Note 5).
4. The choice of where to play two tiles having the same numerical value but different ranks should be made part of the balancing or boosting process: when the low hand is being made as high as possible, the higher ranking tile should be played in the low hand; when the high hand is being made as high as possible, the higher ranking tile should be played in the high hand. **EXCEPT:**
 - A. In hands containing a Teen and a Day, the Teen is played in the high hand if the other two tiles are 6 (or Gee) + 5, or if the high hand is a Strong Hand.
 - B. If the low hand is 8 or higher, the higher ranking tile is played in the high hand.
 - C. If the hand contains two or more tiles ranking Chong or higher, the two highest ranking tiles should be played in separate hands, if possible. (See Note 6)
5. Common Exceptions:
 - Play 7/9 instead of 8/8 with the following hands:
 - Teen (or Day) + 6 + Gee + 5
 - Gee + 5 + H4 + L4 (See Note 7)
 - 11 + 10 + H8 + 7
 - Play 6/9 instead of 7/8 with 11 + H10 + H8 + 6 (or Gee)
 - Play H3/9 instead of 4/8 with 9 + 5 + H4 + L4
 - Play 3/Gong instead of 2/Wong with Teen (or Day) + 9 + 8 + L4
 - Play H5/7 instead of 6/6 with 9 + H8 + L8 + 7
 - With 7/9, play the high tile in the high hand, if possible. (In many house ways, the high tile will go to the high hand in some, but not all, 7/9 hands.)
 - Play H7/8 with Teen + Day + 6 (or Gee) + 5 (i.e., Teen in the low hand)
 - Split 7's with H10 + L10 or 11 + 10

NOTES

Note 1: Few house ways explicitly state what should be an obvious principle: Never split two pair. With Teen + Teen + 9 + 9, splitting the two pairs would produce two Strong Hands, but each hand would be lower than the corresponding hand without splitting (Wong vs 9 Bo, Wong vs Teen Bo). Therefore, you would not split the two pair.

Note 2: It is important that when looking at the low hands in order to apply each of these rules, both conditions must be satisfied: first, the low hand resulting from splitting the pair must be at least the threshold number (3 or 7), and, the low hand resulting from splitting the pair must be higher than the low hand that would be played if the pair were not split. For example, with Teen + Teen + 6 + Gee, the low hand after splitting would be 8, but the low hand without splitting would be 9. Since splitting would not improve the low hand, you would not split the pair, even though the resulting low hand would be 7 or more.

Many may find this way of stating the pair-splitting rules to be controversial, but I find it useful for exposing the logic underlying the familiar rules that list when each pair should be split. In practice, dealers and players who already know the traditional rules might do just as well to stick with them.

Note 3: This is the simplest way of stating a potentially confusing rule. Most house ways include a lengthy set of provisions specifying what to do if you can play a High Nine, Gong, or Wong. They all boil down to the following basics, however:

- a. If it is possible to play a Strong Hand (High Nine, Gong, or Wong) you must do so.
- b. If it is possible to play two or more different Strong Hands (say, with Teen + 9 + 7 + H6), you should generally play the lowest possible Strong Hand as the high hand – in other words, balance the hand while playing at least one Strong Hand.
- c. If, after balancing the hand while playing a Strong Hand, the low hand is less than Chong 3, then you should play the highest possible Strong Hand. Many house ways do not state this as a general rule but spell out each possible combination of tiles as exceptions. In fact, this is just a special case of the general rule that if any low hand, after balancing, is less than Chong 3, and it is possible to boost the high hand to 9 or more, then you should make the high hand as high as possible (note that all Strong Hands are 9 or higher.)

Many house ways also list extensive rules about how to play hands containing a Teen and/or Day (but no strong hands) and/or two "small tiles" (4, 5, 6, or Gee) that total 7, 8, or 9. In all cases I have seen, these rules are very useful, but they are simply practical methods of balancing the hands by making the low hand as high as possible. The purpose of the Generic House Way is to set forth the fewest possible general rules for setting the hands, not the practical steps one should follow to play the correct hands. Different players will have different ways of getting to the same place. Especially for dealers moving from one casino to another, it is important to realize that in more than 99% of cases, the destinations are the same.

Note 4: Again, it is important to pay careful attention to how the rule is stated: even if the high hand, after balancing, is 7 or more, you should make it higher, if possible.

Note 5: Many house ways do not explicitly state this as a general rule, but instead list as exceptions all the possible hands in which the principle applies. Again, stating it as a general rule is far simpler. In practice, the only instances where this rule applies are:

L8 + 5 + H4 + L4
 7 + L6 + Gee + 5
 7 + L6 + Gee + 4
 H6 + L6 + Gee + 5
 H6 + L6 + Gee + 4
 6 + 5 + H4 + L4

Note 6: Again, many house ways do not explicitly state this as a general rule, but instead list as exceptions all the possible hands in which the principle applies. In many cases, however, the house way will only list those instances where applying the general rule would weaken the low hand; there are also many instances where the general rule can (and, in practice, would) be applied without weakening the low hand. For example, with H10 + L10 + L8 + H6, we would normally set H10 + H6 as the low hand and L10 + L8 as the high hand; applying the rule to separate two high tiles (H6 or higher), if possible, we would reset the hand as L10 + H6 (low) / H10 + L8 (high), strengthening the high hand while slightly weakening the low hand. This hand is generally listed as an exception in most written house ways. But consider H10 + L10 + 9 + H4. We would normally first set H10 + H4 as the low hand and L10 + 9 as the high hand, and then separate the two high tiles to produce L10 + H4 as the low hand and H10 + 9 as the high hand. Here, the high hand is strengthened but the low hand is not weakened; the highest tile in the low hand remains H4. Most written house ways would not list this as an exception, since it seems to follow from common sense that you should reset tiles to maximize both hands, whenever possible. I find it easier to remember the one general rule – always separate two tiles ranked H6 or higher, if possible – than to remember a series of exceptions or to search for whether it is possible to maximize both hands.

Note 7: Most written house ways I have seen also list, as an additional exception, the rule that you should always play a 9 as one of the hands when holding Gee + 5 + 4 + any other tile. While this is a sound principle to follow, it is not, in fact, an exception to the general rules set forth in any of those house ways, which always suggest balancing the hands if you can't play a pair or a Strong Hand. Consider the possible combinations, and how the hands would be balanced with each:

Teen (or Day) + G + 5 + 4	Play 8/9
11 + G + 5 + 4	Play 7/9
10 + G + 5 + 4	Play 6/9
9 + G + 5 + 4	Play 5/9
8 + G + 5 + 4	Play 4/9
7 + G + 5 + 4	Play 3/9
6 + G + 5 + 4	Play 9/9

With 5 + G + 5 + 4, or H4 + G + 5 + H4, or L4 + G + 5 + L4, it might seem that you should play 8/9 or 7/9 instead of 7/Bo or 8/Bo, but this would violate the general principle set forth in the written house ways that you should never split 5's or 4's. Only with G + 5 + H4 + L4, which is always listed as a separate exception, would you not balance the hands, playing 7/9 instead of 8/8. So it is not necessary to try to remember "Gee + 5 + 4 + any" as an exception. (You should, however, pay attention to how the exception Gee + 5 + H4 + L4 is played; in some house ways it is H7/9, in others it is 7/H9.)

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