

# OFFICIAL TOURNAMENT RULES

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NATIONAL  
*SCRABBLE*<sup>®</sup>  
ASSOCIATION

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# OFFICIAL TOURNAMENT RULES

*These rules are effective as of February 1, 2009*

## **I. Conduct**

All players are encouraged to play with a spirit of fun, guided by a sense of fairness. The following practices WILL NOT BE TOLERATED:

### **I.A. Cheating**

All players are honor bound not to cheat. Directors will immediately, but discreetly, investigate suspected cheating and may penalize or eject any player found cheating.

### **I.B. Resigning**

Except as specified below, resigning a game or quitting a tournament in progress are considered unsportsmanlike and subject to penalty unless approved by the Director for a medical or personal emergency. (See Rule V.J. Forfeits and Byes.) “Tanking” a game by repeated passing or otherwise deliberately playing in an exaggeratedly poor manner is also subject to penalty.

*Exception:* The Director may allow a resignation option in any tournament where spreads and scores are totally irrelevant and where the Director has clearly stated the resignation policy in all tournament announcements and flyers. Under those circumstances, a player who is obviously losing a game may, on his or her own time, request to resign. The opponent then has the choice of honoring the resignation at the current score (minus any time penalties), or requiring that the game continue.

### **I.C. Abusive or Disruptive Behavior**

Players who threaten, verbally abuse, or exhibit any seriously disruptive behavior will be warned once, and thereafter ejected. Players who are physically abusive will be ejected immediately. Please see the *Policy on Disruptive, Intimidating and other Unacceptable Behavior* at the National Scrabble® Association (NSA) website.

## **I.D. Distracting Speech or Behavior**

Inappropriate speaking, moaning, or other distracting or misleading behavior during a game is unethical. Each player has the right to ask the opponent to remain silent (except when quietly counting, verifying the score, or otherwise speaking as indicated in the rules), and may ask the Director to intervene on their behalf.

## **I.E. Collusion**

Players found guilty of the following may be severely penalized, barred from future participation in prize-sharing or rotisserie arrangements, and/or banned from future NSA games:

1. Purposefully attempting to lose a game or to score fewer points in a game in order to benefit another person.
2. Participating in a prize-sharing agreement or bet on a tourney result (including participation in a rotisserie) **WITHOUT** the approval of the Director and full disclosure to all other players in the division. Playing poorly in this type of arrangement to improve one's chances of winning a prize is strictly prohibited.

*Note:* A rotisserie is a betting arrangement in which participants create imaginary teams of players whose success is based upon the actual tournament performance of those players.

## **I.F. Inappropriate Conduct While Viewing Games**

Never assume it is your right to watch games in progress (kibitzing). Respect the wishes of any player who may seem disturbed by your presence or who asks you to leave the playing area. If you are permitted to observe a game, guard that your demeanor does not give either player valuable information about the other player's rack. *Never* look up words while watching a game. Do so only after discreetly moving out of view of either player.

## **I.G. Suspicious Behavior**

It is every player's responsibility to guard against any action which might incur suspicion or misinterpretation, and to immediately inform opponents of any such action on their part.

## II. General Principles

### II.A. Clock Neutralization

The clock may be neutralized when there are scoring discrepancies or when a player has not followed appropriate procedures or behavior. Players should not study their tiles or the board when the clock is stopped for these purposes. Call the Director if a rule, procedure, or question needs clarification.

### II.B. Adjudicating Unusual Situations

Directors should keep in mind that no player should benefit from an irregularity s/he created, and no player should be harmed or potentially harmed by an irregularity s/he did not create. All players should be considered innocent of willful wrongdoing unless sufficient evidence exists to the contrary.

### II.C. Observing Infractions

Notify the relevant players or tournament staff of any rules violations or improprieties you observe in your game or in other games. For example:

1. Suggest that a player request a second opinion if you think a ruling or word adjudication is incorrect.
2. Prompt the Word Judge to check the *Long List* for words of ten or more letters.
3. If you notice a rack with more than seven tiles, inform the players and/or the Director. (See Rule IV.B.4.b.)
4. Inform players of stray tiles in their area. See Rule IV.B.3. (Loose Tiles) and Rule V.A. (Finding Missing Tiles).
5. If you notice a game whose clock should be running, but is not, inform the players that no clock is running in their game.

Except as noted above, DO NOT inform players of other games when you notice mistakes regarding scoring or time clocks. These are the sole responsibility of the players themselves.

# III. Beginning the Game

## III.A. Equipment

### III.A.1. References

The *Official Tournament & Club Word List*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (*OWL2*), published by Merriam-Webster, Inc, contains ALL acceptable 2- to 9- letter words and their inflections.

The *Long List* contains ALL acceptable words of ten or more letters which are not listed in the *OWL2*.

Approved Software Self-Lookup programs for adjudicating challenges are posted on the NSA website.

### III.A.2. Tiles

Tiles are preferred in this order:

- a. Smooth
- b. Three-piece (paper letter insert)
- c. Heavily faded or hard to read

Braille tiles are not permitted.

Tile sets must contain 100 tiles in the traditional distribution which has been utilized since the game's inception. See also Rule III.B. (Confirming the Number of Tiles).

Adjacent games should not use identical tiles. If one game has already begun, the other game should change tiles. If neither has begun, then one player from each board draws a tile, and the player with the letter closest to Z changes tile sets. If three adjacent boards have identical tiles, and none of the games have begun, the middle board should change tiles.

### III.A.3. Clocks

Clocks are required for all NSA tournament games. Each player is allowed 25 minutes to complete all plays, after which an overtime penalty applies (see Rule V.F.2.). There is no limit on the time allowed per turn.

Clocks are preferred in this order:

- a. Digital clocks that count down and show exact minutes and seconds of time remaining and of overtime



- b. Analog clocks that count down and show exact minutes and seconds of time remaining and of overtime
- c. Digital clocks that count down and do not show exact minutes and seconds of overtime
- d. Digital clocks that begin at zero and count up, or analog clocks that do not show exact minutes and seconds

Do not use a clock which cannot readily indicate minutes of overtime.

A quieter clock is preferred to one which the Director deems excessively loud.

### **III.A.4. Racks / Boards**

The top of each tile on your rack must be visible to your opponent at all times. You may use any rack that meets this requirement.

Boards which are glary, do not turn easily, knock tiles off of racks, or have distracting background designs are less preferred. Any board which blocks the opponent's view of the top of your rack is unacceptable. Any board without the standard 15x15 grid or without the traditional layout of premium squares (as specified by the original inventor and as utilized for decades thereafter) is unacceptable.

### **III.A.5. Tile Bags**

Tile bags which are too big (tending to hide tiles when nearly empty) or too small (causing players to drop tiles or inadvertently see letters in the bag) are less preferred.

### **III.A.6. Papers**

The only visible papers allowed in your playing area are blank paper, your contestant scorecard, blank or current game score sheets, challenge slips, blank-designation slips, tally slips, and letter-distribution lists. You may construct and use your own letter lists. All other papers in the playing area (e.g. old score sheets) must be kept out of sight and cannot be referred to at any time.

### **III.A.7. Other Objects**

Headphones and other devices, electronic or otherwise, are forbidden during the game. Exceptions may only be made for legitimate medical reasons, and must be approved by the Director. Earplugs, however, are acceptable.

### **III.A.8. Choice of Equipment**

If tables and setups are not preassigned, then equipment which more conforms to the standards above shall take precedence. If equally conforming, the player going second

gets choice of equipment. If degree of conformity is disputed, the decision of the Director shall be final.

### **III.B. Confirming the Number of Tiles**

Before each game, verify that 100 tiles are present. Either player may also confirm exact distribution. If you realize after the game has started that 100 tiles are not present, or that the distribution is inappropriate, the game proceeds with the incorrect set. See also Rule IV.B.3. (Loose Tiles) and Rule V.A. (Finding Missing Tiles Near the End of the Game).

### **III.C. Arriving Late**

If a player is late for a round with an announced starting time, the Director may start his/her clock no earlier than 5 minutes after the start of the round. After 25 minutes (or when a digital clock reads -0:01), the game is over and is forfeited. If the missing player arrives before then, the Director or the opponent may stop the clock. Otherwise, the arriving player stops it. If the late player does not opt to forfeit, s/he is allowed to become situated, count/bag the tiles, and draw for first (if necessary) before the game is begun with whatever time remains.

For rounds without an announced starting time, players should generally be allowed 10 minute breaks between games. However, the Director, with proper notification, may limit any break to 5 minutes to maintain an overall schedule.

### **III.D. Who Plays First?**

If the order of play is not predetermined, utilize the first method below that applies:

1. The player with fewer firsts
2. The player with more seconds
3. The player who draws the tile closest to "A" - blank counted before "A" - repeating as needed

*Note:* A player who forfeits a game before it has begun will be considered to have gone first for that game, second for the next forfeited game, first for the third, etc. The opponents of such games, and all players who receive byes, are assigned neither firsts nor seconds for those unplayed games.

### **III.E. Starting Play**

Both players may shuffle the tiles before the game begins. If the second player has not already shuffled, the first player is encouraged to offer the bag for that purpose. If the second player is not afforded this opportunity, s/he may request to shuffle at any time

during the first player's draw. Tiles already drawn will not be returned to the bag unless the second player was not present when they were drawn.

The first player's clock should be started as soon as s/he has seen the face of any tile.

## **III.F. Positioning Tiles**

### **III.F.1. Missing the Center Square**

The first word should cover the center square. Otherwise, it may be challenged off the board regardless of acceptability. If not challenged, the play is scored accordingly, and the center square remains available as a double word bonus square.

### **III.F.2. Establishing Orientation**

The FIRST PLAY, which will establish the game's orientation, must create an accepted word from left to right or top to bottom. It should also conform with the orientation of the bonus square lettering. If not conforming, it may be placed in the equivalent conforming position at any time before the completion of the next successful play. After that, the orientation of the bonus square lettering is irrelevant. If all tiles are not oriented identically, the orientation of the majority of the tiles will be considered the orientation of the play. If the letter values of exactly half the tiles face one direction, and half the opposite direction, the natural orientation of the board - as determined by any printing or illustrations on its surface - shall establish the game's orientation.

### **III.F.3. Misoriented Tiles**

Any play which does not follow the game's orientation may be challenged off. If all played tiles are not oriented identically, the orientation of the majority of the tiles in the main word formed will be considered the orientation of the play. If exactly half of the tiles are oriented correctly, the orientation of the play will be considered correct. *Note:* The "main word" is defined as whichever newly formed word contains the greatest number of newly placed tiles.

If your opponent plays some tiles which are upside down or sideways, but the play itself is not misoriented, you may neutralize the clock, reposition the tile(s) with reasonable quickness, and restart the clock.

## **IV. Playing the Game**

### **IV.A. Basic Rules**

Please see *Appendix: Basic Rules of Play and Scoring*.

## **IV.B. Tile Drawing**

### **IV.B.1. How to Draw Tiles**

Mix the tiles, if desired. (Note: Any time tiles are shuffled, the mixing time must not exceed 10 seconds.) Hold the bag at eye level or higher and avert your eyes. Never hold tiles in one hand while drawing tiles with the other. Open the drawing hand and draw the necessary number of tiles. Place them either directly onto your rack or, preferably, face down on the table and then onto your rack.

### **IV.B.2. Improperly Returning Tiles to the Bag**

A tile is defined as drawn when your hand has completely left the bag. If you return tiles to the bag improperly, the following penalty applies, where  $X$  = the number of tiles returned: The clock is neutralized, and the opponent draws  $X$  tiles from the bag plus two from your rack, exposing them face up to common view. Within one minute, s/he returns any  $X$  tiles to the bag, and the remaining two tiles to you.

### **IV.B.3. Loose Tiles**

If tiles accidentally spill out while drawing from or setting down the bag, or if loose tiles happen to be discovered on or near the table, they should simply be returned to the bag without penalty. If one player has seen the face of a loose tile, then it should also be shown to the other player before being bagged. (If the bag is empty when a loose tile is discovered, see Rule V.A.)

### **IV.B.4. Overdraws**

#### **IV.B.4.a. Overdraw Procedure**

If you draw too many tiles, or become aware at any time that you have more than 7 tiles, inform your opponent, neutralize the clock, and complete the procedure below. If the non-offender is in the process of drawing when the overdraw is discovered, s/he stops further drawing and completes the overdraw procedure. The offender then mixes the bag before the non-offender resumes drawing.

Overdraw Procedure, where  $X$  = the number of extra tiles:

*If you should have drawn a single tile but drew two tiles, and have combined neither of them with your old tiles, your opponent selects only the new tiles.*

*If you have drawn more than two tiles, and none have been combined with your old tiles, your opponent selects  $(X+2)$  of the new tiles.*

*If you have combined at least one new tile with your old tiles, your opponent*

selects (X+2) tiles from the mixed group of all tiles. The offender may mix and place all tiles face down on the table before this selection is made.

In all cases, the opponent exposes the selected tiles face up to common view. Within one minute, s/he returns any X tiles to the bag, and the remaining tiles to you. *Note:* If the non-offender exposes MORE tiles than specified above, all exposed tiles should again be placed face down in the drawing pool, and the non-offender will select X tiles to return to the bag unseen.

#### **IV.B.4.b. Racks with More Than Seven Tiles**

ANYONE who notices a rack with more than seven tiles should always make this known to the players and/or the Director. Players are required to announce their overdraws as soon as they become aware of them.

If a play is made from a rack with more than seven tiles, and:

- (1) *If the opponent has not yet played and started the offender's clock*, the illegal play shall be withdrawn, the overdraw procedure applied, and the offender will lose that turn.
- (2) *If the opponent has already made a play and started the offender's clock*, the offender simply loses the points scored from the illegal play.

*Any intention to hide an overdraw is considered cheating and should be investigated by the Director, who may penalize the offender and/or file an Incident Report. Three such incidents in a tournament is punishable by forfeiture of the game in progress, expulsion from the tournament, and forfeiture of any prizes offered at the event.*

#### **IV.B.5. Drawing Out of Order**

If you complete a play and draw tiles before your opponent has made his/her previous draw, there is no penalty or corrective procedure. Late in the game, the Director has the discretion to penalize either player 50 spread points, particularly if the bag holds at least one but fewer than 7 tiles. If no tiles remain, Rule IV.B.6 applies.

#### **IV.B.6. End of Game Underdrawing**

Near the end of the game, if Player A draws too few tiles, and Player B subsequently draws ALL of the remaining tiles, then:

- a. *If the mistake is noticed before Player B completes his/her NEXT play (not the play which empties the bag)*, the clock is neutralized and within one minute Player B gives the appropriate number of tiles to Player A.
- b. *If the mistake is noticed after Player B completes his/her NEXT play (not the play which empties the bag)*, there is no penalty.

## **IV.C. Managing Tiles**

### **IV.C.1. Keeping Tiles on the Rack**

Never bring tiles below the plane of the table. Always keep your tiles in sight and on your rack unless moving them to/from the bag, board or table when appropriate. Although you are free to change your play before starting opponent's clock, do not use the board as a physical working area for deciding a play.

### **IV.C.2. Counting Tiles**

Either player may count the remaining tiles in the bag. The player whose clock is running has first rights to the bag for tile counting, and his/her opponent must immediately relinquish the bag if requested.

Hold the bag at eye level or higher and avert your eyes. Open your hand before reaching into the bag. Do not mention how many tiles remain.

### **IV.C.3. Tiles from an Adjacent Game**

If tiles from a nearby game are noticed on either player's rack, immediately stop the clock, return the foreign tiles to the proper bag, replenish tiles (if available), and restart the clock.

If a play clearly includes one or more tiles from a nearby game, and:

- a. *If the discovery is made before the next player completes a play*, the clock is stopped, the first player withdraws his/her play, the foreign tiles are returned to the proper bag, and replacement tiles are drawn as necessary. If the player has already mixed replacement tiles, and therefore has more than 7 tiles on his/her rack, the overdraw procedure (Rule IV.B.4.a) shall be invoked. Tiles returned to the player from the original play will not be part of the overdraw pool. After the player's rack has been established, the clock is restarted and he/she makes another play.
- b. *If the discovery is made after the next player completes a play*, the Director shall remove any foreign tiles, return them to the proper bag, and replace them with tiles from a NEUTRAL bag.

## **IV.D. Board Etiquette**

During your turn, you may rotate the board to whatever angle you prefer.

Allow your opponent clear visual access to the board at all times, except when making a play or verifying a score. Do not place arms, hands, or fingers directly over the board at any other time.

Do not touch the board when your opponent's clock is running.

## **IV.E. Passing and Exchanging**

### **IV.E.1. Passing**

You may pass your turn at any time during the game, scoring zero. To pass, announce that you are passing and start your opponent's clock. *Note:* If you mistakenly start your opponent's clock without clearly indicating your intention to pass, exchange, or request a written blank clarification, AND if your opponent has not subsequently exposed any tiles to you, then your turn will not be ended and your clock may be restarted. The opponent will be awarded 1 extra minute of game time.

### **IV.E.2. Exchanging**

#### **IV.E.2.a. Tile Exchange Procedure**

You may use your turn to trade one or more tiles for new tiles, provided the bag contains seven or more tiles. The exchange constitutes your turn and scores zero. The proper procedure is to:

- (1) Announce the number of tiles you are exchanging.
- (2) Place those tiles face down on the table, even when exchanging seven tiles.
- (3) Start your opponent's clock.
- (4) Draw new tiles from the bag, either placing them face down on the table to verify the count or directly onto your rack.
- (5) Place the old tiles into the bag and mix.
- (6) Put any face down tiles on your rack.

#### **IV.E.2.b. Improper Tile Exchanges**

- (1) If the number of tiles placed face down does not equal the number of tiles announced, the face down tiles shall be exchanged.
- (2) If "Exchange" is announced but NO number is specified and NO tiles are placed on the table, the turn counts as a pass.
- (3) There is no penalty for putting the old tiles into the bag before drawing new tiles.
- (4) If you complete at least the first three steps of the Tile Exchange Procedure with fewer than seven tiles in the bag, neutralize the clock and resolve the situation as follows:
  - (a) *If you have not yet drawn new tiles, your turn is a pass. Old tiles are returned to your rack.*
  - (b) *If you have drawn at least one new tile, have put no old tiles into the bag, and have put no new tiles onto your rack, your turn is a pass. Show new tiles to opponent, bag them, and return old tiles to your rack.*

- (c) *If you have put old tiles into the bag but have put no new tiles onto your rack, the opponent looks at all tiles in the bag, any new tiles you have drawn, and 2 tiles from your rack (or 1 if you exchanged six). Within a minute, s/he replenishes your rack and bags the remaining tiles.*
- (d) *If you have put old tiles into the bag, at least 1 new tile onto your rack, and opponent has either not made a subsequent play or has not placed at least one new tile on his/her rack after a subsequent play, add all of the new tiles to your rack. Opponent looks at all tiles in the bag and X+2 tiles from your rack, where X = the number of tiles exchanged. Within a minute, s/he returns X + 2 tiles to you and bags the remaining tiles.*
- (e) *If your opponent has made a subsequent play and has placed at least one new tile on his/her rack, subtract 30 points from your score.*

## **IV.F. Playing the Blank**

### **IV.F.1. How to Designate the Blank**

After positioning your tiles on the board, clearly state the blank designation and circle or write it on the blank designation slip. The clock may be neutralized to locate a slip if none are readily available. Use a blank sheet if no standard slips can be found. Place the completed blank designation slip midway between the players. Complete your turn in the usual manner. (Rule IV.G.1., steps d-i.)

### **IV.F.2. Clarifying the Blank**

#### **IV.F.2.a. On the Play Immediately Following the Blank Play**

- (1) If you did not properly designate the blank, your opponent may request that you do so and restart your clock. You must then record the blank and position the slip – no other changes may be made. See also Rule IV.E.1. (Passing).
- (2) If your verbal and written designations differ, or if your opponent is confused for any reason, s/he may neutralize the clock for blank clarification. After such clarification, the written designation (or the verbal designation if the blank has still not been recorded) becomes binding.
- (3) If the play is made without a request for blank clarification, the written designation (or the verbal designation if the blank has not been recorded) becomes binding.
- (4) A challenge may be withdrawn if the blank is misunderstood, but only if the blank designation has not become binding.
- (5) If the blank is clarified after the normal window for holding or challenging has passed, no challenge may be made based upon the clarification.



### **IV.F.2.b. On All Plays Thereafter**

You may require that the blank be designated in writing, or seek blank clarification, but only on your own time. After any such clarification, the written designation (or the verbal designation if the blank has still not been recorded) becomes binding.

### **IV.F.3. Disputes**

All blank designation disputes shall be resolved by the Director, who has the authority to designate the blank as reasonably as possible in the event an actual binding verbal or written designation cannot be determined. The Director should also be called if a player refuses a request to record the blank designation.

## **IV.G. Completing a Turn**

### **IV.G.1. How to Complete a Turn**

- a. After your opponent's last play, record the cumulative score. (May be waived if bag is empty.)
- b. Position your tiles on the board. You may remove or reposition tiles before starting opponent's clock.
- c. If playing a blank, designate it appropriately. (See Rule IV.F.)
- d. Declare the score.
- e. Start your opponent's clock, ending your turn. If opponent's clock has already been running, the turn ends after step d.
- f. Record your cumulative score. (May be waived if bag is empty.) You may NOT pre-record this score.
- g. Record your play, if desired.
- h. Draw tiles to replenish your rack.
- i. Track tiles, if desired.

### **IV.G.2. End of Turn Irregularities**

#### **IV.G.2.a. Failing to Start Opponent's Clock**

If you make a play, announce the score, and draw a tile before starting opponent's clock, your turn ends. Opponent has 20 seconds to hold the play. If the play is successfully challenged, unmixed tiles are returned to the bag (and shown to your opponent if you have seen them). If any new tiles have been added to your rack, the Overdraw Procedure (Rule IV.B.4.a.) shall be invoked, where X is the number of new tiles on your rack.

#### **IV.G.2.b. Failing to Record Cumulative Score**

If you draw tiles before recording the cumulative score, your opponent has 20 seconds to hold the play. If the play is successfully challenged, unmixed tiles are returned to the bag

(and shown to your opponent if you have seen them). If any new tiles have been added to your rack, the Overdraw Procedure (Rule IV.B.4.a.) shall be invoked, where X is the number of new tiles on your rack.

#### **IV.G.2.c. Tracking Out of Order**

If you track tiles before drawing replenishment tiles, and if this delays your opponent from drawing tiles, the Director may be called to issue a warning. After each subsequent delay caused by tracking out of order, your opponent shall earn 1 extra minute of playing time.

#### **IV.G.2.d. Not Allowing Sufficient Time for Holds or Challenges**

If a quick draw does not allow your opponent 5 seconds to consider holding or challenging, s/he may petition the Director to allow a hold or challenge to proceed. If the play is successfully challenged, unmixed tiles are simply returned to the bag (and shown to your opponent if you have seen them). If any new tiles have been mixed with old tiles, the Overdraw Procedure (Rule IV.B.4.a.) shall be invoked, where X is the number of new tiles on your rack.

### **IV.H. Scoring Issues**

#### **IV.H.1. Verifying the Play Score**

If you request your opponent's previous play and/or play score on your time, s/he must comply. If you do not agree with an announced play score, neutralize the clock to resolve the discrepancy. If you desire, you may also voice an objection before your turn has ended. After three such objections, you may notify the Director to receive 1 extra minute of playing time.

#### **IV.H.2. Verifying Cumulative Scores**

You may ask for cumulative score verification only when your own clock is running. Your opponent must then agree or disagree with the stated score. Neutralize the clock to resolve any discrepancy. *Note:* If the bag is empty and the opponent has waived recording the current cumulative score (as per Rule IV.G.1.), then s/he is only obligated to reveal his or her most recent cumulative score.

#### **IV.H.3. Willfully Fostering Incorrect Scores**

It is unethical to *knowingly* announce an incorrect score, to verify an incorrect score, or to allow an opponent's incorrect single turn or cumulative score to go unchallenged.

## **IV.I. Holding and Challenging**

### **IV.I.1. When to Hold or Challenge**

When your opponent's turn ends, you may hold or challenge a play within 20 seconds or until your opponent has drawn at least one tile. You are also allowed 20 seconds if opponent fails to start your clock and/or record the cumulative score before drawing. See also Rule IV.G.2.d. (Not Allowing Sufficient Time for Holds or Challenges). Recording a score does not affect your right to hold or challenge, but any verbal acceptance of a play - such as saying "OK" or "I accept" - is binding, and you may no longer hold or challenge. However, the Director may allow a hold or challenge if acceptance was clearly not meant. A verbal challenge, whether or not it occurs during a holding period, is always binding.

### **IV.I.2. Holding the Play**

If you wish to consider challenging a play, call "hold" to notify the opponent not to draw tiles. A play may be held only to consider challenging and not as a ploy to delay an opponent from drawing. End a hold by saying "OK" or "I accept".

*Courtesy Rule:* During the hold, your clock continues to run, and there is no limit on the time you take to challenge or release the hold. However, after one minute your opponent may draw replacement tiles, keeping them separate from any unplayed tiles. If you then successfully challenge, your opponent shows these tiles to you and returns them to the bag before removing the challenged play from the board. If any new tiles have been mixed with unplayed tiles, the successful challenger will examine the original unplayed tiles, all new tiles mixed with them, and all tiles returned from the board, choosing 7 tiles to return to the violator's rack.

### **IV.I.3. Challenging the Play**

You may challenge any word(s) formed on a play by declaring you are challenging, neutralizing the clock, and following the adjudication procedure in Rule IV.J.1. (Software Self-Lookup) or, if applicable, Rule IV.K.2. (The Manual Lookup Procedure). Challenging before your opponent's turn has ended is void and improper. The penalty for the loser of the challenge is zero score and loss of turn. You may withdraw a challenge if you misunderstand the designation of the blank, but only if the blank designation has not become binding. (See Rules IV.F.2.a. and IV.F.2.b.)

## **IV.J. Adjudicating Challenges by Computer**

### **IV.J.1. Software Self-Lookup Procedure**

- a. The challenger writes the challenged word(s) on a slip of paper.
- b. Both players verify the challenged word(s) are written as played.

- c. Both players place all racked tiles face down.
- d. Both players walk to the computer station without speaking or disturbing others.
- e. If either player at any time before the adjudication feels a word was recorded wrongly, both should return to their board to verify spelling.
- f. The challenger types the word(s) being challenged. All word(s) must be typed before adjudication.
- g. Both players verify the word(s) have been entered correctly, and the player being challenged presses the adjudication key (usually the TAB key).
- h. The adjudication result is marked on the challenge slip.
- i. Both players return to their board without speaking or disturbing others.
- j. The appropriate player loses his/her turn.
- k. If the player losing the challenge had already drawn tiles, those are shown to the opponent and returned to the bag. If the drawn tiles have been mixed with unplayed tiles, see Rule IV.I.2.
- l. All face down tiles are reracked, and the successfully challenged word removed from the board, before the clock is started. If this process is not begun immediately, the appropriate clock may be started.
- m. Computer adjudication is final unless you feel the computer or program is flawed and you request a manual adjudication, or unless you feel a word was not entered correctly and you choose to re-input/re-adjudicate the challenge.

#### **IV.J.2. Improper Self-Lookups**

If any words are looked up separately in a multi-word challenge, then no penalty shall be imposed if both players contributed to the error. If one player is solely responsible AND if the adjudication is “unacceptable,” then that player shall receive a 10 point game penalty. In either case, if the error is discovered before all words have been checked and if the adjudication at that point is “unacceptable,” then no further words shall be entered.

### **IV.K. Adjudicating Challenges Manually**

#### **IV.K.1. Who May Utilize Manual Lookups**

Players with physical challenges should inform the Director prior to the event that they will require manual lookups. All others must utilize software self-lookup (Rule 4.J.1.) unless adjudication computers are not available.

#### **IV.K.2. The Manual Lookup Procedure**

The challenger writes the challenged word(s) on a slip of paper, verifies spelling and legibility with the opponent, and alerts a Word Judge. If the challenged word(s) are NOT written, the opponent may require it. Before the lookup, the Word Judge confirms that the words on the slip were actually played, and the players must resolve any discrepancies. Only the Director or designated staff may act as Word Judge. The play will be designated

acceptable or unacceptable, and the appropriate player loses his/her turn. Play proceeds as described in step 1 of the self-adjudication procedure (Rule IV.J.1).

### **IV.K.3. Appropriate Word Judge Behavior**

- a. If you notice at any time during the adjudication that the clock is running, you must request that it be neutralized before continuing.
- b. Require a clearly printed challenge slip. If the spelling is in doubt, ask the players for clarification.
- c. Confirm that the word(s) on the slip were actually played, and require the players to resolve any discrepancy.
- d. Do not reveal the acceptability of specific words. Designate the play acceptable or unacceptable.
- e. Check words of 10 or more letters first in *OWL2*. If not found, then check in *Long List*. *Note:* Unless a player specifically requests a manual adjudication, the word judge may optionally adjudicate the play by computer in lieu of a direct *OWL2/Long List* lookup.
- f. Verify blank designations by using the blank designation slip or by asking what letter the blank is.
- g. Never engage the players or show any personal responses to a challenge.
- h. Never research words while observing games because such actions can give extra information to the players.
- i. Never rush an adjudication.
- j. If time permits, verify after a challenge that the appropriate player loses his/her turn.

### **IV.K.4. Requesting a Second Opinion**

Either player may request a review of a manual adjudication from another Word Judge, and may obtain a third opinion if the first two differ.

### **IV.K.5. Compensating Erroneous Adjudications**

If you lose a turn because an adjudication was erroneous, and you notify the Director before leaving the tournament area for that day, your cumulative spread will be increased by the points scored for the play plus 25 points.

## **IV.L. Leaving the Playing Area During a Game**

If you must leave the playing area during a game, do so only after making a play, starting your opponent's clock and recording the cumulative score. Do not draw tiles. If your opponent plays while you are gone, s/he starts your clock and records the cumulative score, but does not draw tiles. When you return, s/he must point out the play. You then have 5 seconds to hold or challenge.

# V. Ending the Game

## V.A. Finding Missing Tiles Near the End of the Game

1. If one or more tile(s) are found in your area (not in the bag) AFTER the game has ended (Rule V.D), they are ignored.
2. If one or more tile(s) are found in your area (not in the bag) BEFORE the game has ended, but after the bag is empty, place them in the bag (unseen, if possible), call the Director for assistance, and try to decide who should have drawn them. That player then receives the tile(s), and play resumes without penalty. If the determination cannot be made, or if time is too short to continue deliberating, then play resumes without the found tile(s).
3. If you find at least one tile IN THE BAG within 20 seconds of the end of the game, and both players have not yet signed or initialed the tally sheet, then the player who should have drawn it, gets it. If both players then have at least one tile on their racks, the game continues.
4. If a tile is found in your area or in the bag DURING A FINAL PLAY ADJUDICATION (but before acceptability has been determined), then the player who should have drawn it, gets it. The challenge may be rescinded if the tile goes to the player who had “gone out.”

## V.B. Forced Overtime

If one player has unplayable tiles, it is unethical for the other player to repeatedly play obvious phoney's solely to force overtime penalty points. The Director should be called to erase any overtime resulting from this practice.

## V.C. Final Play

The game ends in either of two ways:

1. One player has successfully played all of his/her tiles, and the bag is empty. (See also Rule V.D.)
2. There have been six successive scores of zero (passes, exchanges, or challenges), and there are successfully played tiles on the board.

*Note:* There is no penalty for challenging the “out” play.

## V.D. Neutralizing the Clock on the Out Play

After the final play, neutralize the clock. The game is over unless your opponent holds or challenges within 20 seconds. If the play is held, start your opponent's clock. It will run until s/he releases the hold (ending the game) or challenges.

If the clock is not neutralized after the final play, the game is considered over and the clock is considered neutralized 20 seconds after the player with tiles reveals them or declares their total point value. It is unethical to attempt to earn overtime points when the out player either forgets to neutralize the clock or starts the opponent's clock. The Director, by estimating the exact moment unused tiles were revealed, may erase all time penalties caused by the failure to neutralize.

All parties should avoid touching the clock, if possible, until the final score has been established and any required score cards/tally sheets have been signed or initialed. If a time penalty cannot be agreed upon, the Director should be called to assist.

## **V.E. Director-Shortened Games**

The Director may terminate any game which interferes with tournament function. A warning should be issued a few minutes before termination, giving the players a chance to finish naturally. The score when the game is stopped becomes the final score.

## **V.F. Adjusting the Score**

### **V.F.1. Unplayed Tiles**

If you go out, increase your score by double the total value of the opponent's unplayed tiles.

If the game ends with neither player going out, each player's score is reduced by the total value of his/her unplayed tiles.

Leave all tiles on the board to facilitate verifying the count for the next game.

### **V.F.2. Overtime**

If you use more than 25 minutes, reduce your score by 10 points for each minute or fraction of a minute of overtime. (Exception: See Forced Overtime, Rule V.B.) A digital clock is not in overtime when it reads 0:00 or -0:00.

## **V.G. Winning the Game**

The player with the highest adjusted score wins the game. If scores are the same, the game is a tie, and each player is awarded one-half (1/2) a win.

## **V.H. Recounting the Game**

Either player, or both, may recount a game. No third party should participate. If your opponent wishes to recount, you must provide your score sheet whether or not you participate.

If you choose not to participate in the recount, you may contest only specific mistakes found by your opponent. You may not begin or demand another recount.

The Director may terminate a recount that interferes with tournament function. In that case, the Director will adjudicate the result by applying any adjustments agreed upon to that point. Additionally, if the score of any individual play cannot be resolved, the Director may intervene to verify the score for ONLY that play, and is advised to complete an Incident Report with the NSA.

## **V.I. Recording the Game**

Any recount must be made, and any discrepancy resolved, before results are submitted. Enter game results on the tally sheet, or on scorecards if tally sheets are not utilized. Both players must then sign or initial these results to certify their correctness. After that, no further adjustments may be made unless both players, in agreement, notify the Director of a reporting error. Score sheets and/or score cards may be used to substantiate the adjustment. However, if unethical behavior is involved, and is proven or acknowledged by the wrongdoer, the Director may use his/her discretion to make adjustments after the fact.

If tally sheets are used for submitting results, but score sheets are used to record/determine who goes first, they should be signed/initialed to verify firsts and seconds only.

## **V.J. Forfeits and Byes**

1. *If you fail to show for a game*, you receive a forfeit loss and 50 points are subtracted from your total spread. Your opponent receives a forfeit win and 50 points are added to his/her total spread. The forfeit is not a rated game. However, if both players and the Director agree, the game may be postponed without forfeit and played as a rated game at a time convenient to all.
2. *If you must leave a game in progress*, and the game cannot be postponed to a time convenient to all, you receive a forfeit loss for that game. (See Rule I.B. Resigning.) If you are ahead when you leave, 50 points are subtracted from your total spread. If you are behind, 50 points plus your game deficit are subtracted. Your opponent is assigned the same winning margin as your losing margin. The game has begun - and is therefore considered a rated game - when the first player has drawn at least one tile and the second player is alerted to this action.



3. You receive a *bye* if you are present for a given round but are not assigned an opponent. A bye counts as a win, with 50 points added to total spread. A bye is not a rated game.

# Appendix: Basic Rules of Play and Scoring

## Appendix I. Making Plays

### Appendix I.A. The First Play of the Game

The first player places two or more letters on the board to form a word in either a horizontal or vertical position, with one tile covering the center square. (See Rule III.F.1. Missing the Center Square.) The center square is considered a **DOUBLE WORD SCORE** square. Any player has the option of passing or exchanging tiles instead of playing. See main tournament rules (IV.E.) for details regarding passing and exchanging.

### Appendix I.B. Subsequent Plays

The game continues as players add one or more letters to those already played to form a new word or words. All words added to the board must touch tiles already formed and must make new words wherever they touch existing tiles. The player gets credit for all words formed in this fashion. Diagonal words are not permitted. All tiles added to the board in any individual play must help to spell one main horizontal or vertical word; otherwise the play may be successfully challenged off the board.

### Appendix I.C. How New Words are Formed on the Board

Assume “ARM” is already on the board. You may:

1. Add one or more letters to a word already on the board.  
Example: “HARM”, “ARMED”, “CHARMED”, “ARMS”.
2. Place a word at right angles to a word already on the board. The new word must use at least one of the letters already on the board or must add a letter to a word or words on the board.

Example:

H <u>A</u> <u>R</u> <u>M</u>	or	<u>A</u> <u>R</u> <u>M</u>
A		I
D		D

3. Place a complete word parallel to a word already played, so that adjoining letters also form complete words.

Example:

M E A L  
A R M

## **Appendix II. Scoring**

### **Appendix II.A. Letter Values**

The score value of each letter is indicated by a number at the bottom of the tile. The blanks have a score value of zero.

### **Appendix II.B. Scoring Each Play**

The score for each turn is the sum of the letter values in EACH word formed or modified during the play, plus the additional points obtained from placing letters on premium squares.

A turn using all 7 tiles earns a 50-point bonus. Such a play is commonly called a “Bingo.”

### **Appendix II.C. Double and Triple Letter Bonus Squares**

1. A DOUBLE LETTER SCORE square doubles the score of a letter placed on it.
2. A TRIPLE LETTER SCORE square triples the score of a letter placed on it.

### **Appendix II.D. Double and Triple Word Bonus Squares**

1. The center square and any square labeled DOUBLE WORD SCORE doubles the score of an entire word when one of its letters is placed on it.
2. A TRIPLE WORD SCORE square triples the score for an entire word when one of its letters is placed on it.

### **Appendix II.E. Score DLSs and TLSs before DWSs and TWSs**

When scoring a turn, all premiums from double or triple letter values, if any, are totaled before doubling or tripling the word score.

### **Appendix II.F. Double-Double (DWS-DWS)**

If a word is formed that covers two DOUBLE WORD SCORE squares, the score is doubled and then redoubled, or is four times the total letter count.

### **Appendix II.G. Triple-Triple (TWS-TWS)**

If a word is formed that covers two TRIPLE WORD SCORE squares, the score is tripled and then tripled again, or is nine times the total letter count.

### **Appendix II.H. Bonus Squares Score on One Turn Only**

The letter premium squares and the word premium squares apply only to the turn in which they are originally covered by a word. In all subsequent turns, letters on those squares count only at face value.

### **Appendix II.I. Using the Blank on a DWS or TWS**

When a blank tile is played on a DOUBLE WORD SCORE square or a TRIPLE WORD SCORE square, the value of the word is doubled or tripled even though the blank itself has a zero score value.

## **Acknowledgments**

These updated year 2009 rules were compiled, reviewed, and agreed upon by the National SCRABBLE® Association Rules Committee, formed by John D. Williams Jr. in 1987. Committee members who provided significant input to this revision included David Boys (QC), Jan Dixon (DE) [rewrite subcommittee], Paul Epstein (MI), Sam Kantimathi (CA), Jim Kramer (MN), John Luebke (VA) [chair], Steve Olinger (PA) [rewrite subcommittee], Mary Rhoades (TX), Dan Stock (OH), Geoff Thevenot (TX), and Ron Tiekert (FL).

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