

NASPA OTR Update - General Overview

Substantive Changes

In updating the rules, we made a few deliberate changes that were more than just repackaging for plain language and readability / usability. These include:

Omitting unenforceable rules wherever possible: Where a rule relies on subjective information or trying to read a player's mind, we have opted to recharacterize as ethical considerations or remove entirely. (Intentional misscoring, phoneying, 'frivolous' challenges etc.)

Standardizing Timings: We made timings for player actions and decisions more consistent: 15 seconds for routine play, 1 minute for late game decisions of greater consequence

Omitting obsolete rules and references that don't match current reality: We tried to modernize the new rules and generalize references to specific word lists.

- For example, we removed manual adjudication procedures (printed word lists, word judges, second opinions) because all challenges are now done electronically

Omitting contradictory rules: We tried to stay consistent throughout, removing rules that contradict core NASPA principles and values.

- For example, we removed the rule about forced overtime because clock management is each player's own responsibility, and legal moves (passes, exchanges, phonies) must remain legal regardless of your opponent's remaining time

Note: In the 'Exchanging with Fewer than 7 Tiles' rule we simplified so that we no longer distinguish between whether tiles are combined with the rack or not, and whether or not you've put any old tiles back in the bag.

Proposal: Heidi strongly recommends that we also remove both distinctions for overdraw procedures:

- whether you were supposed to draw 1 or more than 1 tile ($x+1$ vs $x+2$)
- whether or not tiles are combined with rack

Instead, she proposes that all such cases are resolved such that the opponent selects $x+2$ from both overdrawn tiles and the tiles on the rack. This would GREATLY simplify the rules for all.

Plain Language Edits

Most of the changes we made involved adding, removing or rephrasing language to reduce ambiguity or simplify procedures while preserving NASPA intent:

- For example, we added language to explicitly state that playing from an underdrawn rack is an irregularity with no penalty (as opposed to an illegal move in the case of playing from an overdrawn rack).
- We also removed information and rare scenarios that create more confusion or that don't add anything — instead generalizing to be more broadly applicable, and noting that Directors should be called in situations that aren't covered

To further enhance usability, we made many structural changes — moving, merging, or separating rules to flow more logically or increase clarity.

- For example, we moved all rules relating to Overdraws into one section, Challenges into another, Loose, Spilled (exposed) Tiles together, and so on.

Please see [NASPA OTR Changes](#) for a map of changes against the previous version.

WESPA Compatibility and Alignment

NASPA's official tournament rules govern NASPA-sanctioned play. They are broadly compatible with the [World English-Language Scrabble Players' Association \(WESPA\) Official Rules](#), but do not attempt full textual alignment.

Where differences exist, they reflect deliberate design decisions to improve clarity, enforceability, and player experience.

This appendix highlights areas of alignment, partial alignment, and intentional divergence — but is not an exhaustive list.

Areas of Substantive Alignment

Core Game Mechanics

These rules are fully aligned in substance with WESPA regarding:

- turn order and tile placement
- word formation and legality
- scoring principles
- use of clocks
- challenges and challenge outcomes
- endgame scoring adjustments

Most differences are stylistic rather than substantive, with minor exceptions (e.g. WESPA gives players 5 seconds to hold or challenge on outplay where we give 15).

Holds, Challenges, and Courtesy Tiles

The following principles are shared with WESPA:

- players may hold a play before challenging
- courtesy tiles may be drawn after a defined waiting period
- courtesy tiles must be kept separate and revealed after a successful challenge
- failure to reveal courtesy tiles entitles the challenger to view additional tiles

The procedures are expressed differently but the rights and remedies are equivalent.

Note: WESPA states explicitly that players cannot concede challenges without adjudication.

Tile Irregularities

Both rulesets address:

- overdraws and underdraws
- loose or spilled tiles
- improper returns to the bag
- missing tiles discovered mid-game or near the endgame

NASPA rules restructure these cases for clarity and consistency but preserve the same fundamental remedies.

Areas of Partial Alignment

Lexicon Governance

WESPA specifies the version of the CSW wordlist for sanctioned play.

NASPA rules generalize to “the lexicon currently in effect”, allowing NASPA or event Director to specify the applicable lexicons.

The CSW lexicon for NASPA events will always be the same as one in effect for WESPA-sanctioned events, and many tournaments will be both NASPA and WESPA rated.

Conduct and Penalties

WESPA defines graded offense levels with prescribed penalties.

NASPA rules:

- prohibit the same categories of misconduct
- rely more heavily on Director discretion rather than formal offense tiers

The behavioral standards are compatible but the enforcement model differs.

Areas of Intentional Non-Alignment

Clock and Timer Management

NASPA rules deliberately diverge from WESPA in how clock control is handled:

- timing rules are simplified and standardized
- players are responsible for managing their own time
- Directors intervene only when necessary

We do not agree with WESPA’s more prescriptive timer-neutralization framework because we find it unnecessarily complex for routine tournament play.

Board Upsets

WESPA explicitly and extensively addresses upset or overturned boards (4.5) where NASPA does not.

Appeals Procedures

WESPA provides a formal right of appeal with a defined escalation path.

NASPA rules do not outline the separate appeals process in the Official Rules, but we do mention the right to 2nd and 3rd opinions (though Director decisions are final within the tournament).

While this reflects a preference for timely resolution and tournament flow over multi-level adjudication, we may want to add mention of the right to appeal to the Tournament Committee.

Virtual Rules

WESPA includes an Appendix on virtual play, where NASPA primarily sanctions over-the-board tournaments and virtual play is considered on a case-by-case basis.

Summary

These rules are **compatible but not identical** to WESPA rules.

They intentionally prioritize:

- clarity over exhaustiveness
- player responsibility over referee micromanagement
- enforceability at the table over procedural formality

For events requiring strict WESPA compliance, additional provisions (lexicon specification, appeals procedures) may be appended without altering the core ruleset.