

NASPA Code of Conduct (effective June 7, 2011)

Behavior Contrary to the Integrity of the SCRABBLE Game

The favorable reputations of SCRABBLE® Brand Crossword Game and the North American SCRABBLE Players Association (NASPA) are valuable assets. They create tangible benefits for all NASPA members.

SCRABBLE players and officials serve as ambassadors for the game. Accordingly, everyone involved in organized SCRABBLE should refrain from engaging in conduct or behavior detrimental to the integrity of SCRABBLE when attending a club or tournament. All SCRABBLE participants should also strive to present a positive image during SCRABBLE events even during those times when they are away from the tournament area, in such places as restaurants or hotels.

Players and directors are reminded that their friends, spouses, relatives, and other associates who attend SCRABBLE events with them should not negatively disrupt the event nor impede club and tournament officials from doing their jobs.

Players and officials are encouraged, to the best of their abilities, to be cooperative and courteous with media personnel who are covering SCRABBLE events.

A SCRABBLE event should be an enjoyable experience for everyone involved. Behavior that is deemed harmful to this objective will not be tolerated. All players are urged to inform club and tournament directors about any incidents which are detrimental to the positive atmosphere at a SCRABBLE event. In order to create a pleasant atmosphere at SCRABBLE events, the following guidelines have been established.

Classification 1 Code Violations

a. Abuse of Equipment

Players shall not throw, slam, break, damage or destroy any game equipment or tournament equipment. This includes (by way of example, but not limited to) tiles, tile bags, racks, boards, clocks, chairs, tables, receptacles, documents, or computer equipment. This also includes personal items such as clipboards, pens, items of clothing, and other possessions.

b. Verbal Abuse

Players shall not at any time verbally abuse an opponent, a club or tournament official, volunteer, or any other person connected within the precincts of the club or tournament site. Verbal abuse is defined as any statement that is derogatory, insulting, threatening, or otherwise abusive.

c. Audible Obscenities

Players shall not use any audible obscenities while playing a game or in the accepted boundaries of the club or tournament area. An audible obscenity is defined as the use of words commonly known and understood to be profane and uttered clearly and loudly enough to be heard.

d. Visible Obscenities

Players shall not make obscene gestures of any kind while playing a game or while in the accepted boundaries of the club or tournament area. A visible obscenity is defined as the making of a sign by a player with hands or other means that is commonly known to have an obscene meaning.

e. Written Obscenities

Players shall not use any written obscenities to insult, demean, or harass other players or club or tournament officials. This includes the writing of words or statements, commonly understood to be profane, that can be easily seen by nearby players or passersby. It is permissible to write offensive words on a challenge slip when such words are challenged. It is also permissible to write offensive words that have been played during a game (or words that were considered for play) on one's score sheet or note paper.

f. Leaving the Playing Area during a Game without Legitimate Cause

With the exception of unavoidable restroom breaks or other legitimate reasons, players shall not leave the playing room before their games are completed. This type of behavior is both disrespectful and unnerving to opponents.

g. Deliberate Noncooperation with Tournament Officials

Players must be cooperative with club or tournament officials and staff at all times. Deliberate noncooperation includes (by way of example, but not limited to) refusing to complete mandatory paperwork, refusing to cooperate with official game annotators (at tournaments where annotation was advertised), refusing to leave the playing area when asked to do so, refusing to tidy the playing area, and other acts of noncompliance that hinder the smooth operation of a club or tournament.

h. Unsportsmanlike Conduct

Players shall at all times conduct themselves in a sportsmanlike manner and give due regard to the authority of officials and the rights of their opponents and other players. Unsportsmanlike conduct is defined as any misconduct by a player that is not specifically defined in other sections of this code, but is clearly abusive, negative, or detrimental to the success of the club, tournament, NASPA, or organized SCRABBLE in general.

Penalties for Classification 1 Code Violations

When a club or tournament director ascertains beyond a reasonable doubt that a player has committed a Classification 1 Code Violation, the director is empowered to discipline said player in the following manner:

1st offense: official warning

2nd offense: 100-point penalty applied to club or tournament spread

3rd offense: ejection and disqualification from the club or tournament

Note: A director may use his/her discretion to apply a stricter penalty for a first offense if the violation is especially flagrant or egregious. (i.e., A director may immediately issue a 100-point spread penalty or eject the transgressor for a serious transgression. Likewise, a director may eject a transgressor for a flagrant second offense.)

Additional sanctions may be imposed against the player by NASPA as detailed below.

Classification 2 Code Violations

a. Physical Abuse

Players shall not at any time physically abuse any official, opponent, or other person within the precincts of the club or tournament site. Physical abuse is defined as the unauthorized touching of an official, an opponent, or other person at a club or tournament site, that harms, harasses, provokes, or intimidates that individual.

The penalty for physical abuse is the immediate ejection and disqualification of the perpetrator from the club or tournament. Additional sanctions may be imposed against the player by NASPA as detailed below.

b. Intimidation, Threats, and Harassment

Players shall not at any time engage in behavior that intimidates, threatens, or harasses fellow players, club officials or tournament officials. This includes (by way of example, but not limited to) sexual harassment, stalking, confrontational or antisocial behavior, spoken or written threats, or any other malicious acts that can reasonably be perceived as intimidation.

Directors are empowered to remove and disqualify any player from a club or tournament who behaves in the aforementioned manner. Additional sanctions may be imposed against the player by NASPA as detailed below.

Classification 3 Code Violations

a. Cheating

Players at SCRABBLE clubs and tournaments are honor-bound not to cheat. Cheating is a serious infraction that cannot be tolerated. Those who are caught cheating at a club or tournament will be immediately ejected and disqualified from the event. Additional sanctions may be imposed against the player by NASPA as detailed below.

Acts of cheating can include (by way of example, but not limited to)

1. Concealing or palming tiles (other than in the ordinary course of drawing or playing tiles).
2. Disguising an overdraw situation by hiding, palming, discarding, or destroying tiles.
3. Failing to report an overdraw immediately.
4. Deliberately falsifying data on a result slip.
5. Using marked tiles.
6. Consulting premade word lists, dictionaries or other reference books, or word-source devices during a game.
7. Using an accomplice to gain information about the validity of words, an opponent's rack, or any other information.
8. Peering into the tile bag by any means.
9. Colluding with an opponent to achieve a specific game result.
10. Attempting, by any means, to look at a score sheet or notes that an opponent is concealing.
11. Knowingly announcing an incorrect turn score or cumulative score, or knowingly verifying an opponent's incorrect turn score or cumulative score.

b. Suspicious Behavior

A player whose actions and/or behaviors are deemed to be suspicious by the director will be warned that his/her behavior is suspicious. Any further occurrences of suspicious behavior can result in ejection and disqualification from the tournament. Additional sanctions may be imposed against the player by NASPA as detailed below.

Note: It is understood that tournament newcomers may sometimes "accidentally" cheat or engage in suspicious behavior because of their inexperience. Considerable leeway and the benefit of the doubt should be given to unseasoned players who violate the rules without malicious intent. The rules pertaining to cheating are generally designed for experienced tournament players who are trying to gain an unfair advantage with their actions and who realize what they are doing is wrong and contrary to the spirit of the game.

Record of Code Violations

Club and Tournament directors are required to report all code violations to NASPA as soon as they can conveniently do so, and not later than 7 days after the event (use the Incident Report Form). Players are also permitted to report code violations to NASPA using the Incident Report Form. Incidents which occur at a club shall be reported to the NASPA Club/Directors Committee (CDC). All other incidents which are related to NASPA organized SCRABBLE® Brand Crossword Game play, whether at a tournament or otherwise, shall be reported to the NASPA Tournament Committee (TC).

As described above, a director may impose disciplinary measures that apply within their clubs and tournaments. Upon receipt of an incident report, the CDC or TC will also investigate the incident and shall levy such broader sanctions against parties as it deems appropriate. Such sanctions may include, but are not limited to, suspension of an individual from participation in club and/or tournament events for a period of time or permanently, suspension or revocation of an individual's NASPA membership without refund, financial restitution, and adjustment of game results or spread, or cumulative spread. Additionally, where appropriate, the CDC or TC may require an individual to provide reasonable evidence that circumstances underlying that person's misconduct have been appropriately addressed, prior to that person being permitted to participate in NASPA-sanctioned activities. An accumulation of transgressions may result in longer suspensions and/or other disciplinary action.

The CDC and TC will keep records of all reported transgressions, and any action taken with respect to them, and will share this information with each other.

All reports/statements provided to the CDC or TC shall be deemed non-confidential, unless a request for confidentiality accompanies the report/statement. Confidential reports/statements are given less weight.

Right to Appeal

A player who has been disciplined may appeal the disciplinary ruling as follows:

1. Tell the director or committee chair immediately that you object to their decision, and explain why, citing specific rules and presenting evidence as appropriate. Do not delay, as most problems quickly become harder to resolve fairly with the passage of time.
2. If you are at a club or tournament and the decision concerned the conduct of the event, you may ask if a second director is available to offer a second opinion.

3. If you disagree with a club or tournament director's ruling and are unable to resolve your disagreement with them, email or mail the Club/Director Committee (CDC) or Tournament Committee (TC) respectively within 30 days of the ruling. Give as much information as you can about the ruling, and include eyewitness or other evidence to support your case. The CDC or TC will ask the director to provide in writing their ruling and the evidence on which it was based, and make its own ruling within 30 days of gathering all necessary information. The CDC/TC may uphold, overturn or modify a director's original ruling.

4. If you disagree with a working committee's ruling and are unable to resolve your disagreement with them, you can appeal it to the Advisory Board (AB). To do so, email or mail the Executive Committee (EC), and explain why you believe the committee's judgment was unjust. The EC will ask the committee chair to forward all files pertaining to the ruling, offer the chair an opportunity to reply to your appeal in writing, and prepare a motion for the AB to debate the matter at its next meeting, typically within 30 days of gathering all necessary materials. The Advisory Board may uphold, vacate, or modify (to increase or decrease) sanctions levied by a director or another NASPA committee. The decision of the Advisory Board will be final.