

[Up to SCRABBLE® Tournament Rules](#)

The OFFICIAL SCRABBLE® Brand Crossword Game TOURNAMENT RULES Updated May 1, 1998

[This file is still being edited.]

Comments [] by John Chew

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I. OFFICIAL WORD LIST

A. Official Tournament & Club Word List (OWL)

The only 2- to 9-letter words acceptable for club and tournament play are those found in the *Official Tournament and Club Word List*, published by Merriam-Webster, Inc.

B. Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition

If a word having more than nine letters is played, first look it up in the OWL. If a longer word (more than 9 letters) is not listed in the OWL, to be judged acceptable the word must appear as a main entry or inflected form or alternate spelling in bold print in *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 10th Edition* (MW10). It

must not be capitalized, hyphenated, contracted, foreign or listed only as part of a multi-word phrase. Words of fewer than ten letters listed in the Merriam-Webster but not in the OWL are not acceptable, nor are inflections of main entries of fewer than ten letters. Any word used in the definition of a word but not listed in the dictionary itself, will not be acceptable. *Example:* ``QUO" is only listed as part of a two-word phrase, ``status quo", and is therefore unacceptable. ``TOREUTICS" is listed in MW10 as a noun and is therefore acceptable.

[The rules ought to say that if two printings of MW10 disagree about the acceptability of a word, the newer printing should be deemed correct.]

[They also ought to say that diacritical marks do not affect the acceptability of a word in MW10.]

II. PREGAME PRELIMINARIES

A. Tiles

If there is a disagreement over which set of tiles to use, the smoother tiles take precedence. Smoother tiles are defined as those for which there is less possibility of sensing the letter of a tile by touch alone. Tiles at adjacent boards should be different in color and/or style if at all possible.

B. Clocks

Clocks that show the exact number of seconds used by the player, both before and after the time limit elapses, whether digital or analog, shall be used in preference to clocks that do not*. Set each player's time to 25 minutes. Do not use clocks that do not easily show how many minutes have elapsed after the initial 25 minutes have been used. Clocks are to be used in preference to sand-timers. (See Section [IX.](#)) In addition, the loudness of a clock shall also [sic] be considered a factor in determining its preference. A clock deemed ``too loud" by a player and confirmed by the Director, shall have less preference than a quieter clock.

*Exception: Digital clocks that begin at zero and count up to 25 minutes shall be considered equivalent to analog clocks but less preferred than "count-down" digital clocks or analog clocks that show the exact number of seconds remaining. This means that the 2nd player may choose to play with an up-timeing digital clock when his/her opponent can only offer the use of an analog clock (one [Page 3] that does not show the exact number of seconds remaining).

C. Racks

On non-standard racks at least the top of each tile must be visible to opponents. That is, each player must be able to see exactly how many tiles are on opponent's rack at all times. As long as this requirement is followed, either player may choose his/her own specialized rack.

This rule should also be applied when determining if the board is raised too high. If a player can't see his opponent's rack when it's in the usual position in front of the board, then the board is raised too high and should either be lowered or another board be used.

D. Second Player's Preference

If there is disagreement as to which shared equipment should be used (tiles, board, clock, bag), the equipment which conforms more closely to the specifications in the rules is to be used. If they conform equally then the player playing second has the choice.

E. Count the 100 Tiles

The players count the tiles. There should be 100 with the letter distribution shown on the lower left corner of the gameboard. If the distribution or the number of tiles is incorrect, notify the Director immediately. If it is discovered later in the game that there are missing tiles, and they cannot be found, then the game proceeds with the letter pool as is. Note [Guideline 4](#) on page 21.

[The rules should say what to do if it is discovered that there are extra tiles in the bag after the game has started.]

F. Who Plays First?

[titled differently in toc]

1. If one player has had fewer firsts during the tournament than the other, that player shall go first; otherwise, each player draws a tile from the bag. The player drawing the letter nearer the beginning of the alphabet earns the first turn. Tile drawing is repeated, as necessary, until the players draw different letters. Drawing the blank earns the first play, unless the opponent draws the second blank, in which case both players draw again.

2. If one player has had a bye or forfeit, the player who has played first the fewer [sic] number of times goes first. If both players have the same number of firsts, then the player who has had more `seconds' shall go first.

**Note:* See Section [VII.I](#) for further information on byes and forfeits. *Example:* Player One & Player Two are paired together. Player One has 3 firsts, 3 seconds and one bye. Player Two has 3 firsts and 4 seconds. They've both had the same number of firsts. By comparing ``seconds", the rule indicates that Player Two should play first in their game.

[The rules ought to say that the players should draw to see who goes first if a bye or forfeit is involved, and they are both tied on firsts and seconds.]

G. Shuffling Tiles

Return the tiles to the bag. Both players have the right to shuffle all 100 tiles thoroughly before the game begins. The [Page 4] second player forfeits this right as soon as (s)he either initiates the opponent's timer or allows the first player to draw tiles while watching.

1. The first player must draw tiles while the second player is alerted to this action. The second player has the right to shuffle all the tiles and may ask to do so. However, the first player does not need to ask the second player if (s)he wishes to shuffle the tiles, although it is considered polite to do so.

2. If the first player has already drawn at least one tile, and the second player, not having shuffled the tiles previously, now wishes to exert his/her right to shuffle the remaining undrawn tiles, this is permitted.

H. Drawing the First Tiles

At the Director's signal, the player with the first turn draws seven tiles from the bag and places them on his/her rack. The opponent starts the first player's timer as soon as the first player has seen the first letter. Opponent draws seven tiles. *Example:* Player One draws one tile at a time and places each face down, without looking at them, until drawing all seven. Player Two should wait until Player One looks at his first tile before starting Player One's clock. If Player One looks at each tile as s/he draws it, the clock should be started as soon as the first tile is seen.

[What if the first player sets aside the first letter unseen, but looks at all the rest? Is Player One supposed to place drawn tiles facedown as in the example, or on the rack as in the rule?]

i. Letter Distribution List

The only papers allowed at each player's station are one Score Sheet, one Contestant Score Card, Challenge Slips and a preprinted list of the alphabet and/or a letter frequency list of the 100 tiles, if so desired. Both players may construct and use his/her own letter frequency list. [sic]

III. DRAWING TILES

A. How to Draw Tiles

When drawing tiles, remember to keep your head and eyes pointed away from the bag, take a brief moment to show your open, tile-drawing palm to your opponent*, hold the bag at eye level or at arm's length, reach in to draw the number of tiles that replenish the rack, and place them face down on the table to verify the count. Then transfer those tiles to the rack. Under no circumstances should the tile-drawer look into the bag while drawing tiles. Such behavior is considered cheating and is grounds for expulsion from a tournament.

*Your opponent may not notice your open palm if you do it quickly, as suggested. That's okay. However, repeatedly failing to do so for an observant opponent may earn a warning and ultimately a penalty from a Director. It may take some time to develop this habit, but it is a worthwhile courtesy. [Page 5]

B. Drawing Tiles - A Second Method

If a player wishes, s/he may put the tiles on the rack directly after taking them from the bag. However, this can sometimes lead to overdrawing. (See [III.C](#)). If a player notices s/he has drawn too many tiles and his/her hand has left the inside of the bag, it is forbidden to voluntarily drop back the extra tiles back into the bag.

If a player drops tile(s) back into the bag after the hand completely leaves the bag, the overdraw penalty should be enforced (See [III.C](#)) [punctuated sic]

C. Overdrawing

If too many tiles have been drawn (called "overdrawing"), then there are two possibilities. Note that X = number of extra tiles drawn.

1. When none of the new tiles have been mixed with the old ones, the opponent takes $(X + 2)$ tiles randomly from the new tiles (face down), looks at them, shows them to the player and then returns X tiles to the bag while the remaining tiles are put on opponent's rack.

An exception to the above $(X+2)$ rule is when two tiles have been drawn instead of one, and the tiles haven't been mixed. In that case the opponent will only look at those two tiles, returning one to the bag and one to the player's rack.

In addition, if one tile is supposed to be drawn, but more than two tiles are drawn (and not mixed with the old tiles), then only those drawn tiles are looked at by the opponent. (None from the opponent's rack is drawn.) The opponent returns all tiles but one to the bag, and that one goes to the player.

2. When at least one new tile has been mixed with the old tiles, the opponent takes $(X + 2)$ tiles randomly

from the whole mixed group of new and old tiles, looks at them, then returns X tiles to the pool. *Example:* If Player One should draw two tiles but instead draws three, then $X = 1$, and so $(X + 2) = 3$.

[What happens when this rule gets invoked from [Rule IV.I.4](#) or [Rule VI.D](#)"? It might happen that opponent was not supposed to draw any tiles at all, but is now required to show $X+2$ of the X tiles drawn.]

D. Drawing Tiles Out of Order

[titled differently in toc]

When tiles are drawn out of order during most of the game, (that's when Player One has played but not drawn tiles, and Player Two plays and draws tiles before Player One has replenished his/her rack) there shall be no penalty. However, please read the Guidelines at the end of these Rules. It is unethical to knowingly draw tiles out-of-order or knowingly allow opponent to do so, and players may be penalized for doing so near the end of the game.

[That is, there will and will not be a penalty.]

E. When is a Tile Drawn?

When the drawing hand has completely left the bag, the tile(s) are understood to have [Page 6] been drawn. If the hand is still partially in the bag, the tile(s) have not been completely drawn, and so the hand may draw more tiles before completely leaving the bag. Keep in mind that the head and eyes must be turned away from the bag at all times during the drawing process.

[Does spilling tiles constitute drawing them, for penalty purposes? Does a drawn tile have to come in contact with the drawing hand? If someone knocks the tile bag off the table when it isn't their turn, and some tiles escape, should they be penalised?]

IV. DURING PLAY

A. The First Play of a Game

The first player, should s/he choose to play a word, combines two or more letters and places them on the board to form a word in either a horizontal or vertical position with one tile on the center pink square. The center pink square indicates Double Word Score.

B. Missing the Center Square

If the first word played on the board does not cover the center square, and the opponent's timer has been started, the opponent may challenge the word successfully off the board, regardless of the word's acceptability. If the opponent chooses not to challenge the word, it is scored in the usual manner, without the Double Word Score bonus usually earned by covering the center square. The center square may be used as a Double-Word-Score bonus square for a subsequent play.

[Can the second player challenge even after the first player has drawn replacement tiles?]

C. Subsequent Plays

The game continues as players add one or more letters to those already played on the board and form a new word or words. The horizontal and vertical positioning rule remains in effect during the entire game. Any words added to the board must touch words already formed and must make new words wherever they touch existing words or letters. The player gets credit for all words formed in this fashion.

D. Arranging Tiles on the Board

Diagonal words are not permitted. All tiles used in any individual play on the board must help to spell one main horizontal or vertical word. If this is not the case, the whole play may be successfully challenged off the board. If such a play is not challenged off the board, there is no score for either the diagonal words or disconnected words formed on that or future plays touching these words.

[What should be done if a player moves tiles that were already on the board, while making his/her play?]

E. How New Words are Formed on the Board

Example: ``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 it/them. *Example:*

```

H A R M      A
A           or  A R M
D           I
           D

```

[Page 7] 3. Place a complete word parallel to a word already played, so that adjoining letters also form complete words. *Example:*

```

A R M
M E A L

```

F. Board Orientation

1. After the first word has been played on the board, the orientation of spelling words left to right and top to bottom has been established. Words played subsequently must follow the same orientation or can be successfully challenged off the board. Please note that this is unrelated to the orientation of bonus-square lettering.
2. It is not strictly against the rules to place individual letters upside-down (letter still showing), though this is generally considered inappropriate and should be avoided at all times. The Director may be called if a player continues to do so, and a warning given to desist.

[And if the player continues to do so after the warning? What about tiles that are placed sideways, or not completely in their squares?]

3. In resolving disputes involving [1](#) or [2](#) above), it will be presumed that an opening play was intended to be interpreted as that play reads when the board is oriented so that the values of a majority of the tiles appear at the bottom-right corner of the tiles.

[What happens if an equal number of tiles are pointing in each direction?]

4. It is the right of each player, during his/her turn only, to orient the direction of the board so that the letters already played are oriented at whatever angle is most convenient for the player.

G. Tiles Should Remain on the Rack as much as Possible

Players may shuffle tiles on their rack at will, but mustn't hold them in their hands unless moving them directly to the bag (after exchanging or over-drawing), moving them to their rack (after drawing tiles or removing them from the board or picking up dropped tiles) or placing them on the board.

H. Exchanging Tiles

1. How to Exchange Tiles

A player may use a turn to exchange one or more letters on the rack for new letters. The exchange counts as a turn and no word is played on the board. Here's the recommended procedure: a) Announce

[switch to second person, sic]

to your opponent how many letters you wish to exchange. b) Spread the tiles to be replaced face down on the table. c) Start your opponent's timer. d) Draw the same number of tiles from the bag. e) Place them face down on the table to verify the count. f) Put the replaced tiles into the bag, and shuffle the bag. The player may change his/her mind as to which tiles may be exchanged until s/he starts opponent's timer or begins to draw new tiles, whichever happens first.

[What happens if a player does (c) before (b) and/or (a)? What happens if the number declared in (a) is not the number of tiles laid out in (b), or if either is not the number of tiles placed in the bag in (f)?]

[Page 8] *Note:* Confusion may develop when a player inadvertently sets aside 2 tiles and announces "Exchange 5", followed by starting opponent's timer. In this case the two tiles set aside may be the tiles to be retained, while the five still on the rack will be exchanged. It is the "verbal announcement" which is binding. However, a slip-of-the-tongue mistake may be corrected if caught immediately: Example: "Exchange 5." (starts opponent's timer and then with no pause: "No, I meant exchange 4." This is acceptable as long as the player has separated four tiles from the remaining three. However, when the following occurs: "Exchange 5." Pause for 5 second (starting opponent's timer either just before or just after the pause), followed by: "No, I'll exchange 4.", then the player must still exchange those same 5 tiles. Likewise, if a player says: "Exchange 4 tiles," and starts opponent's timer, but has separated 5 tiles from his rack, then opponent has the right to neutralize the clock and ask for clarification and call the Director. The player should be thinking about which tiles to exchange on his own time. The Director is advised to issue a small time penalty to offset any time gained by an offender using this ploy, whether it be by accident or otherwise.

2. When to Exchange Tiles

A player may exchange tiles on any turn or turns, provided there is a minimum of seven tiles in the bag.

3. When Exchanges Occur at the Wrong Time

If a player exchanges one or more tiles when there are fewer than seven tiles in the pool, that player shall be penalized, but only if opponent realizes the misplay before ending his/her turn. In that case the opponent

neutralizes the timer and looks at all the tiles in the pool, face up. Then s/he also looks at all tiles on the player's rack. Opponent now chooses within one minute which seven tiles the player shall have. The remaining tiles go back to the pool and opponent's timer is started.

[What constitutes ending one's turn here? What happens if opponent hasn't made a choice within one minute? Does the one minute really start when the last tile on the player's rack is exposed?]

There is one more important rule pertaining to inappropriate tile exchanges: Consider the interval of time after the opponent's timer has been started but *before* the player actually draws the new tiles: If either player notices in this interval that there are fewer than 7 tiles in the bag, then the player attempting to exchange tiles shall, as usual, lose his/her turn without exchanging any tiles, and *no further penalty shall be enforced*.

I. Playing the Blank

1. Recording the Blank Letter

When using a blank, the player must state and print on a separate sheet of paper (challenge slip is suggested) which letter the blank represents. This recorded designation [Page 9] must be shown to the opponent prior to starting his/her timer. Failure to do so gives the opponent the right to neutralize the clock and politely insist the player do so.

The player may change and reprint the letter s/he wishes the blank to represent as often as s/he likes before starting opponent's timer. After opponent's timer is started neither player may change the letter the blank represents.

2. Misunderstanding the Blank Letter

If a player challenges due to a misunderstanding about which letter the blank has been designated that turn, whether hearing incorrectly or reading incorrectly the name of the letter, then once the misunderstanding has been corrected, the challenge may be withdrawn with no penalty to either player.

3. Failure to Designate the Blank

If a player has not designated which letter the blank tile represents before initiating opponent's timer, opponent may immediately neutralize the timer and demand to know what letter the blank represents. However, this may be a penalty situation. The Director should be notified and a warning be given to the offender to make sure that future blanks be designated prior to starting opponent's timer. It is suggested that repeated offenses be penalized by Director (subtract 50 points from offender's total spread).

4. Verifying the Blank

Each time a blank is placed on the board, it is the responsibility of the opponent to turn it over to verify that it is truly a blank. If it is not a blank, and the turn is completed, the player who placed it on the board must pick up all tiles played in that turn and lose that turn (score zero). If a false blank is not detected when it is played, it remains on the board as a blank with no penalty to either player. The opponent has to notice the false blank before s/he completes his/her turn (starting the other player's timer). If the false-blank player has already drawn tiles, then the Overdraw Penalty is in effect (See [III.C.](#)) [punctuated sic]

J. Passing

A player may pass his/her turn anytime during the game. Passing is not exchanging. Passing is doing nothing to change the board or your rack. Score zero for passing.

K. Leaving the Playing Area During a Game

[titled differently in toc]

A player may *only* leave the playing area after making a play, starting opponent's timer, recording the cumulative score and *not* drawing tiles. If a player must leave the playing area on his/her own turn due to an emergency, the Director shall have the power to intervene using his/her experience and judgment.

If a [Page 10] **MISSING PAGE 10** contestant leaves the table during a game, the timer will *not* be neutralized. If the seated player makes a play while the opponent is away from the board, the seated player must start the opponent's timer and record the cumulative score but *not* draw tiles until the opponent has had time to return to the table. Within 5 seconds of becoming aware of the play, the opponent must acknowledge whether s/he wants to hold or challenge the play.

L. Verifying the Score

It is advisable and appropriate to verify that your record of the scores coincides with your opponent's. However, a player should only ask for verification while his/her own timer is running, and *not* while his/her opponent's timer is on. Only if there is a discrepancy should the timer be neutralized.

The opponent is required to respond appropriately by agreeing or disagreeing with the suggested score. To avoid delayed responses, players are advised to verify scores *after* opponent has drawn and tracked tiles, if applicable.

[Is it permissible then to delay tracking tiles, so as to delay having to verify the score?]

M. Counting Tiles

When using smooth tiles, you may put your hand into the tile bag and count the number of tiles remaining.

When using indented tiles you may count the number of tiles remaining unless your opponent objects, in which case a staff member may be called to count the tiles.

V. SCORING

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.

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.

[Plus the bingo premium, if any]

C. Double and Triple Letter Bonus Squares

1. A light blue square *doubles* the score of a *letter* placed on it.
2. A dark blue square *triples* the score of a *letter* placed on it.

D. Double and Triple Word Bonus Squares

1. The score for an entire *word* is *doubled* when one of its letters is placed on a pink square.
2. The score for an entire *word* is *tripled* when one of its letters is placed on a red square.

E. Score DLSs and TLSs before DWSs and TWSs

When scoring a player's turn, all premiums for *double* or *triple* letter values, if any, must be included before

doubling or *tripling* the word score. **END MISSING PAGE**

10 [Page 11]

F. Double-Doubles (DWS-DWS)

If a word is formed that covers two pink Double Word Squares, the score is *doubled and then redoubled*, which is *four* times the total letter count.

G. Triple-Triples (TWS-TWS)

If a word is formed that covers two red Triple Word Squares, the score is *tripled and then tripled again*, which is *nine* times the total letter count.

H. Bonus Squares Score on One Turn Only

The letter premiums and the word premiums apply only in the turn in which they are first played. In all subsequent turns, letters count only at face value.

I. The Blank on a DWS or TWS

When a *blank tile* is played on a pink Double Word Square or a red Triple Word Score square, the value of the word is *doubled* or *tripled* even though the blank itself has zero score value.

J. Scoring with Two or More Words

When two or more words are formed in the same play, each is fully scored. The common letter is counted (with full premium value, if any) for each word.

K. Using All Seven Tiles

Any player who plays *all seven* of his/her tiles in a single turn, scores a premium of 50 points in addition to his regular score for the play. This is called a "Bingo".

VI. END OF TURN

A. Shifting Tiles on the Board

The player's tiles used for the immediate play may be shifted any place on the board until the opponent's timer is started or tiles drawn, whichever comes first.

[Until the opponent's tiles are drawn?!]

B. Drawing Tiles to End a Turn

If the player plays a word, announces the score and puts his/her hand into the tile bag before starting opponent's timer, then his/her turn is officially over and opponent may hold or challenge the play. Even if the drawn tiles are on the rack, and still opponent's timer has not been started, opponent may hold or challenge the play within a grace period of 20 seconds, or hold the play within 20 seconds and take longer to decide whether to challenge or not. (See [X](#). for more on challenging.)

C. Recording the Cumulative Score

After the player has played a word, announced the score, and started opponent's timer, the player must record the cumulative score to that point in the game before drawing new tiles. A player who repeatedly forgets to do this may be penalized by the Director. We recommend that the Director warn the offender once before exacting a 50 point penalty. Such a penalty should not [Page 12] affect the outcome of any game, but simply be subtracted from the player's overall spread.**

In addition, it is forbidden to record the score before making the play on the board. By recording the score after making the play and before drawing tiles, the opponent has a few seconds to examine the play and decide whether to challenge or hold. Any player found deliberately recording the score prior to the play should be warned by the Director while repeated offenses should be penalized. An appropriate penalty would be to give the opponent a free challenge.

**Only when there are no tiles left to draw will there be no warning or penalty if opponent or player fails to record the cumulative score.

D. Procedure for Completing a Play

Sequentially, this is how a turn should proceed:

1. Position the tiles on the board.
2. Declare the score.
3. Initiate the opponent's timer.
4. Record the cumulative score to that point in the game.*
5. Refill the rack.

It is advisable to record the words played and the individual scores tallied each turn, though it is not necessary.

*If a player draws tiles before initiating opponent's timer, or if a player draws tiles before recording the cumulative score, the opponent still has 15-20 seconds to decide to say ``Hold!``. Subsequently, if there is a successful challenge, the tiles are replaced in the tile bag after following the procedure used when tiles are overdrawn.

*The opponent **may not challenge** if, prior to the opponent's ``Hold!`` or ``Challenge!``, the player has performed 1-4 above and drawn at least one tile from the tile bag.

VII. END OF GAME

A. The Last Play

The game proceeds until one player goes out (uses all of his/her tiles and none remains in the bag) or when there are six successive scores of zero. A player scores zero when s/he either passes, exchanges tiles or loses a challenge.

The only exception to this rule is at the beginning of a game. If there are six consecutive zero scores, and the score for each player is still zero-zero, then the game continues. After one player has earned points, the six-consecutive-zeros-ends-the-game rule will be enforced if it occurs later in the game.

B. Neutralizing the Timer

The player going out must neutralize the timer. The opponent has 5 seconds to say ``Hold!`` or ``Challenge!``. Otherwise, the playing portion of the game is then officially over. If a ``Hold!`` is announced, then [Page 13] the opponent's timer is started until the ``Hold!`` either becomes a challenge or is rescinded.

C. Unplayed Tiles

If both players have unplayed tiles on their racks, each player's score is reduced by the sum of the values of his/her unplayed letters. If one player has used all the available tiles, that player's score is increased by double the total value of the opponent's unplayed letters. The opponent's score remains the same. (See [VIII.C.](#) for further scoring adjustments, when appropriate.)

D. Winning the Game

The player with the highest adjusted score wins the game.

E. Ties

If both players have the same adjusted score, the game is ruled a tie. Each player is awarded one-half (1/2) win.

F. The Winner Records the Win

At the end of each game, each player fills out his/her own Contestant Score Card, signs the opponent's Contestant Score Card, and the winner delivers them to the Director for the posting of scores and the pairing of players in the next round.

G. Leaving the Playing Area

As a courtesy to other contestants, players should leave the playing area when their round is over. Tiles should remain on the board to facilitate verifying that there are 100 tiles in that set.

H. Recounting the Game/Final Scoring Adjustments

A recount of the game will be permitted (usually after a very close game), but there will be no one but the players themselves who do the recounting. Should one player not want to recount while the other one does, the recounting player shall have access to the opponent's Score Sheet to facilitate the recount. If both players are recounting, they both may have access to each other's Score Sheets. Once a player signs his opponent's Contestant Score Card, s/he is attesting that the score is correct and no other scoring adjustments will be made for that game*. (See Section [VII.F.](#) for exception.) If there is a time shortage the Director may call a halt to the recount.

*Prior to the end of the last round of a tournament, Directors may change the score of a finished game after the players have signed their opponent's Contestant Score Cards, but only if both players agree, truthfully, that the score is wrong and by how much. (See [Guideline 12](#) on page 24.)

I. Byes and Forfeits

1. Should a player receive a bye (i.e. there are [sic] an odd number of players in a given division, so that one player has no opponent), the bye shall count as a win, with +50 points of [Page 14] spread added to the player's total spread.

Please note that except in extreme circumstances, no player should have more than one bye in any one tournament. Directors are urged to make appropriate adjustments to pairings to avoid repeated byes.

2. Should a player not show up for a scheduled game, for whatever reason, that player should receive a forfeit loss, which is counted as a loss, with -50 points of spread subtracted from his total spread. The designated opponent receives a forfeit win, which counts as a win, with +50 points of spread added to the total spread.

Please note that byes and forfeits are not used to compute new ratings.

3. If a player must leave a game in progress and both players are not able to finish that game at an arranged time later, then that player will automatically earn a forfeit loss for that game. If the player is ahead at the time of departure, the loss will earn a spread of -50. If behind, the loss will earn a spread of -(50 points plus whatever the spread is at the time of departure). Should an unavoidable delay keep one player from appearing for a round, and both the opponent and Director are in agreement to play the game at a later time, then the game may be postponed instead of forfeited. However, there is no responsibility on the part of the opponent or Director to agree to such a delayed game. It is considered a favor only if time permits.

4. During a tournament, when the Director has begun the next round, some players may have taken a break and may still be away from their assigned table. The Director should start the late-player's clock no later than 5 minutes after the actual starting time, and no earlier than 3 minutes after the actual starting time. In the case of an extreme time shortage, if the Director wants to start the late-players' clocks prior to 3 minutes, s/he should first have announced to the whole player group, well ahead of time, that late-arrivals will be penalized time earlier than usual. [sic] At events that announce future pairings for several rounds, it is appropriate to take breaks lasting up to 10 minutes between rounds. However, any longer breaks may be penalized unless the opponent is informed of the lengthy break and/or it is okayed by the Director.

J. When the Timer Hasn't Been Neutralized

1. If, for whatever reason, the clock is not neutralized after the last play, the game shall be considered finished 5 seconds [Page 11] after the opponent has revealed his/her unused tiles and/or their point value to

show the player how many [Page 15] **MISSING PAGE 15** points are added to his/her score. This act of revealing the unused tiles or announcing their value (plus 5 seconds) ends any further enlargement of any time penalties accrued.

2. If the player going out starts the opponent's timer and in so doing either moves the opponent into a time penalty situation (-10 points per minute or fraction thereof: see [IX.C.](#)) or costs the opponent to go over yet another minute of penalty time, those [sic] extra penalty points shall not be deducted from opponent's score.

For example, suppose an opponent has already used 25 minutes and 10 seconds (both players agree to this) and the player goes out and erroneously starts the opponent's clock. When the opponent realizes his clock is still running and is 89 seconds overtime, s/he can rightfully claim that only 10 penalty points be deducted.

VIII. CLOCKS

A. Time Limit

For all NSA Sanctioned Tournaments when using clocks, [sic] each player is allowed 25 minutes time to complete all plays. (Note [VIII.C.](#) for the overtime penalty.) There is no limit on the time taken per turn.

B. Neutralizing the Timer

When a turn is challenged, the challenger neutralizes both clocks. When the Word Judge's decision is declared, the loser of the challenge initiates the other player's clock and turn. Clocks may also be neutralized while an opponent is either [sic] calculating a player's contested turn score or cumulative score, verifying the number of tiles the opponent has drawn while exchanging, verifying a blank's designation, or while awaiting a rules resolution or announcement by the Director.

When using Protiles it is *not* appropriate to neutralize clock in order to count tiles. However, suppose you are using the typical wooden tiles, which, upon opponent's request, mandates that one of the tournament staff count tiles. The querying player may then neutralize the timer, but only during the counting process, not while waiting for someone to begin the count.

[What if the tiles are neither wooden nor Protiles?]

It is appropriate for any opponent to check with the Director about the legitimacy of a player neutralizing a timer. Any inappropriate clock-stopping may result in a time or cumulative spread penalty, if deemed appropriate by the Director.

C. Exceeding the Time Limit

If a player uses more than the allotted 25 minutes, his/her total score will be reduced by ten points for each minute overtime or part thereof. When using a digital clock there is no penalty when the clock reads 0:00. When the clock is -0:01 (25 minutes and one second has elapsed) then the 10 point penalty is enforced, [Page

16] **END MISSING PAGE 15** and for each extra minute

or part thereof, another 10 points are subtracted similarly.

IX. SAND TIMERS

A. When to Use

When clocks are available, they are to be used in preference to sand-timers.

B. Time Limit

Each game using three-minute sand-timers shall be stopped after 54 minutes. After time has been called, each player may make one more play, replenishing his/her rack if possible, and then compute the adjusted final scores.

C. Tapping the Sand Down

Each player shall receive approximately three minutes per move. When the top of the sand-timer is almost empty (five to ten seconds), it is the responsibility of the opponent to tap the top of the timer to insure that the last few grains of sand flow smoothly to the bottom and to say to the player that there is but a short time left. If opponent fails to do this and the timer for the player's turn empties, the player has a five second grace period (after becoming aware of the situation) to make a play.

D. Exceeding the Three Minute Limit

A player loses his/her turn if all the sand has dropped and one of the following occurs:

1. The player has failed to announce his/her score within five to ten seconds after opponent has announced the time shortage.
2. The player has failed to announce his/her score within five to ten seconds after being notified that all the sand has dropped (no warning was given prior to sand dropping).

X. PROCEDURE FOR CHALLENGING WORDS

A. When to Challenge

When a player has completed his/her turn, the opponent may challenge any word or words formed on that play. Once the player has started opponent's timer, the turn has ended and may be challenged.

If the player does not start opponent's timer, but instead begins to draw tiles, then the turn is also considered completed, and opponent has 20 seconds to decide to challenge or hold the play.

If there are not tiles to be drawn, then the opponent has 20 seconds to say ``Challenge!" However, if the opponent says ``Hold!" within 20 seconds, s/he may then take longer to consider whether to challenge or not. Also, when opponent verbally accepts the play (i.e. ``Okay, I'll accept that"), it is still possible for the opponent to change his/her mind and challenge the play using the standard challenge rules.

B. Calling ``Hold!"

When the opponent is considering a challenge, s/he must promptly advise the player not [Page 17] to draw replacement tiles. This is done by calling ``Hold!" Opponent may call ``Hold" up to 20 seconds after his [sic] timer has been started or until the player has his/her hand out of the tile bag with at least one tile drawn, whichever comes first. There is no relationship between recording the player's cumulative score and accepting the play.

C. Courtesy Rule

When approximately one minute has elapsed after ``Hold!" has been called and the player is waiting for the opponent to decide whether or not to challenge, the player may draw his/her replacement tiles and must keep them separate from his/her other tiles though s/he may look at them. The player will return the letters to the pool only in the event of a successful challenge. In that case opponent must also be allowed to see the tiles going back into the pool. Note that during the ``Hold!" the challenger's timer is running. There is unlimited time for a ``Hold!".

D. Record Challenged Words on a Challenge Slip

When the decision is made to challenge, indicated by either saying ``challenge" or neutralizing the timer (either action is final and cannot be taken back except for the situation of misunderstood blanks or score verifications), the challenger records the word(s) to be challenged and both players verify the spelling of the challenged word(s) written on the Challenge Slip. If the challenged words are not written properly or legibly, either player may rewrite the challenged words so that they are easily read by the Word Judge. The challenger raises his/her hand to signal a Word Judge or Director to come to the table. When a staff member arrives, the Challenge Slip is used by the Word Judge as the source of words to look up. If time permits, the Word Judge should verify that the words written on the Challenge Slip are indeed the words played on the board and challenged. This process should not be rushed.

In order to verify that the words on the Challenge Slip are the actual words being challenged, the Word Judge should first read the Challenge Slip and then look at the board to find those ``words" and make sure they are spelled out in one play. In the event of a discrepancy, the Word Judge should say ``I see a discrepancy." [punctuated sic] and return the Slip to the players for review.

In actual practice, players don't always use Challenge Slips for their challenges. In that case, Word Judges should be doubly careful about which words are being challenged. However, when not using Challenge Slips, then if there is a misunderstanding about which words were challenged, and an adjudication of the wrong ``words" occurs, the [Page 18] majority of the responsibility for the error will fall on the challenger, not the Word Judge.

If the player of a challenged word(s) notices that the challenger hasn't used a Challenge Slip, s/he may insist that one be used. This is because it's important that both players understand exactly which words are being challenged.

E. When the Word Judge says ``Unacceptable"

If any challenged word is judged unacceptable, the Word Judge will label the play `unacceptable'. The player returns the offending tiles to the rack, loses the turn (scores zero) and then restarts the timing device for the opponent's next turn. The Word Judge will not specify which word(s) are unacceptable, and will face away from both players while looking for the words. This is to avoid revealing unnecessary information to the players.

F. When the Word Judge says ``Acceptable"

If all words listed on the Challenge Slip are judged acceptable, the Word Judge labels the play 'acceptable.' The words remain on the board and the challenger loses that turn. The challenger starts the timer as the player replenishes his/her rack and starts another turn. An unsuccessful challenger scores zero for that turn.

G. Second and Third Opinions

The challenger or player may request a review of the challenge ruling. The review decision, if it substantiates the original decision, and usually in concert with the tourney Director, should be final. However, the Director may make an exception and review the challenge for the third time if further information suggests that a mistake has been made twice. In addition, if the "second opinion" is contrary to the original ruling, then either player may ask and receive a third opinion.

I. Suggest Checking the Webster's Collegiate, Tenth Edition

Players (and observers) are allowed and advised to prompt the word judge to look in the Merriam Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition, for challenged words of nine-letters or more if these words aren't listed in the OSPD2. [Page 19]

J. Who Adjudicates Challenges?

[titled differently in toc]

Only the Director or designated staff may rule on the validity of a challenged word. Although it may appear easy to do, becoming proficient as a Word Judge takes time and experience. Directors may test potential Word Judges with a National SCRABBLE® Association Word Judge Test, which will be provided free to any tournament Director looking for Word Judges to help them.

K. Early Challenges may be Nullified

[titled differently in toc]

Until a turn is officially over, there may be no challenge. If an opponent verbally "challenges" a play before the player has officially completed his/her turn, the "challenge" is nullified. Such a "challenge" is considered inappropriate behavior, since it may influence the player's decision for his/her play.

Note: It is up to the opponent to say "Hold!" within the few seconds between the player's starting the timer and drawing new tiles. There need be no responsibility on the player's part to say anything but the score and the letter that the blank represents, while recording the designated blank letter and showing it to the opponent, followed by starting the opponent's timer, recording the cumulative score and thereafter drawing tiles. So our advice here is: "Pay attention!"

XI. OBSERVING INCORRECT RULINGS AND OVERDRAWS

[titled differently in toc]

A. Incorrect Adjudications

If any player or knowledgeable observer becomes aware that a tournament official makes either an incorrect word or rules adjudication, then that person has the right to suggest to the wronged party: "You may want to ask for a second opinion." Any other communication at that time is forbidden. (Read [X.H.](#) [sic; should be [X.I.](#)] for the only exception.)

A. Overdrawing

If any tournament observer notices a player either overdrawing or having more than seven tiles on his/her rack, s/he must first wait a few seconds to see if an appropriate announcement is made by the offender. If not, then the observer may mention it to the players as discreetly as possible. By "observer" we also refer to other players sitting nearby.

XII. RULES QUESTIONS? CALL THE DIRECTOR!

Please note that the Director is responsible for making reasonable decisions pertaining to any situations not specifically described or implied by these Rules and for interpreting these Rules in any situation which arises. S/he will also be responsible for maintaining proper ethical decorum at all times, and will report serious breaches of conduct to the [Page 20] National SCRABBLE® Association for possible subsequent disciplinary action.

GUIDELINES FOR PLAYERS AND DIRECTORS: PLAYING WITH A SPIRIT OF FUN, GUIDED BY A SENSE OF FAIRNESS

Over the years The Rules Committee has recognized the difficulties of defining "ironclad" rules. Players with a "win at all costs" attitude may find ways to circumvent the strict interpretation of rules. In some cases these players point the way to creating better rules. However, in many cases this attitude simply fosters an atmosphere among experienced players of taking advantage of the unwary. We may all try to use words that others have not yet learned, but when it comes to rules, it is more appropriate to teach the uninitiated the correct way to follow our procedures instead of taking advantage of them. If we intend to enlarge our family of SCRABBLE® game players, we need to promote the sheer enjoyment of playing the game, win or lose. In keeping with this policy, we wish to clarify some "gray" areas, keeping in mind that players should be considered innocent of any willful wrongdoing until there is sufficient evidence to the contrary. There are certain situations that occur repeatedly in SCRABBLE® game tournaments in which players may not have a clear understanding of what behavior is appropriate, for they may not be specifically discussed in the Rules. What follows are several guidelines:

1. Stuck with an Unplayable Tile

Imagine that Player One is "stuck" with one letter on his/her rack. There is no way to play the letter on the board and form an acceptable word. Should Player One also be very short of time (2-3 seconds before the time penalty begins), Player Two, with a full rack, may decide to take 21 turns, playing two phoneys and a real word, and then repeating this action seven times, in order to push Player One into the penalty situation. This is considered highly unethical. A Director who becomes aware of this situation is advised to erase such a time penalty. While it is acceptable (and advisable) in many situations to play phoneys, the above behavior is contrary to the spirit of the game.

2. Undesignated Blanks

Regarding undesignated blanks: If a player has not recorded what letter his/her blank tile represents, *and* if a

disagreement arises later in the game as to what the blank tile should be, then the player whose turn it is at that time shall define the blank as s/he recorded it. However, if neither player recorded the blank and a disagreement arises later on about which letter the blank represents, the player whose [Page 21] turn it is shall define the blank. In this case, the opponent may challenge all the words formed using the blank (as well as other words formed on the play). However, if the original play (as understood by the current player) using the blank was initially a phoney (but unchallenged then), then the Director should be consulted to determine if there is willful misconduct on either side (such as announcing one letter vocally and not recording it, while later on ascribing the blank a different letter). In this case the Director shall have the power to overrule the penalty for this particular challenge and file an Incident Report with the NSA.

3. Shuffling Tiles Before the Game Begins

It is appropriate for the first player to ask his/her opponent if (s)he would like to shuffle the tiles, but it is not necessary. The second player is advised to be alert to when his/her game will begin. (S)he should simply take the tile bag and shuffle the tiles.

4. Finding the Missing Tile(s)

It sometimes happens that a tile(s) is discovered under the board or table after all or most of the tiles are played. What should happen? If the game is over (meaning that the bag is empty and one player has "gone out"), then the extra tile(s) is (are) not added to the game. However, if the game is not quite over (meaning there is at least one tile on both players' racks) then the extra tile(s) (unseen if possible) should be put into the bag and an effort should be made to determine who should have drawn it (them). That player should then receive the tile(s) and play continues with no penalty. If it cannot be determined (or there is not enough time to determine) who should receive the tile(s), then the game shall proceed without it (them). Only the two players and the Director may participate in making such determinations.

5. When the Timer is Still Ticking After the Game

If the player going out forgets to neutralize the clock (either starting opponent's timer or keeping his/her own timer running), it is unethical for either player to take advantage of this by delaying the verification of the final score in any way in order to earn penalty points from an unwary opponent. The Director will have the power to intervene to erase a time penalty should the evidence gathered prove sufficient to do so. In this situation the players should mutually try to ascertain when the unused tiles were revealed to help recall the exact moment of the end of the game.

6. Delayed Tile Tracking

Many players track tiles. Tracking tiles is the act of recording what tiles have been played on the board. Tracking tiles can be helpful when trying to determine the best play [Page 22] at any time during the game. Indeed, the NSA provides space on its Score Sheet for doing so. Some players delay their drawing tiles after forming a word on the board in order to track their tiles first. This practice can actually delay the opponent from drawing tiles if the opponent plays quickly. To avoid this situation we advise players to draw tiles prior to tracking.

7. Drawing Tiles Out-of-Order

If a player draws tiles out-of-order (see Section [III.D.](#)) when there are fewer than 14 tiles in the bag, the circumstances could warrant investigation by the Director. That's because drawing tiles out-of-order can affect the outcome of a game when very few tiles remain to be drawn. Honest mistakes should be

acknowledged and accepted, but the Director may want to penalize a player +50 spread points, particularly if fewer than 7 tiles remain to be drawn. Each case should be considered individually since either player may be acting inappropriately, depending on the specific tiles remaining.

8. Colluding with Opponent

The tournament culture and rating system thrives best only when each player strives to play his/her very best. Therefore, any player who has been found guilty of purposefully either losing a game or losing by a much bigger spread than necessary may lose their right to participate in National Scrabble® Association tournaments.

9. Inappropriate Behavior

Speaking aloud during play is often distracting and can mislead the opponent. A player who does this purposefully is considered to be acting unethically. It is every player's right to ask his/her opponent to remain silent during play. While many people often play the game in informal social gatherings where it may be accepted by the group to talk during play, players should understand that tournament conditions require that each player respect his/her opponent's right to concentrate fully during play. The Director has the power to intervene on behalf of a player whose opponent is showing such disrespect. Here are some examples of what you should not do:

- a. Purposefully mispronounce your play ("RE-STING"), hoping to draw a careless challenge.
- b. Play a phony-looking word which you know is acceptable (CALENDER) but intentionally saying something like: "I'm not sure if it ends in AR or ER."
- c. Saying "You may want to challenge this", either when you know the word is good, or when it's not good and you feel your statement will suppress a challenge. In the first case you may not get challenged, but your opponent may be reluctant to add an S to it.
- d. You play an obviously acceptable word (i.e. APRICOTS) and do a lot of talking about it ("It took me a long time to find this word with these letters".) to divert attention from a phony hook you used to get your word down (i.e. the S hooked onto AH).
- e. The game is close, the Q is still out, and whoever gets it will be stuck with it. You play a letter and draw a tile, leaving 3 others. Immediately you begin to moan about your bad luck. Your opponent feels he can now safely play 3 tiles and draw the last 3 from the bag. What will (s)he think about your moaning when he draws the Q?

10. Cheating

It is incumbent upon all tournament players during games to refrain from any form of cheating. Directors are urged to take seriously any suspicion of cheating and immediately, but discreetly, question the offending player in order to limit further suspicion and/or penalize the offending player.

11. Word Judging

After playing at a SCRABBLE® Game Club or several tournaments, most players find themselves acting as a Word Judge on occasion. Here are some guidelines for effective word-judging:

- a. When you arrive at the table, ask for a Challenge Slip with all the challenged words printed clearly on it. If

one or both of the players just point to the challenged word on the board, even if it's obvious, ask again for a Challenge Slip.

b. Once you have the Challenge Slip, check to see if the words being challenged are spelled out on the board the same as on the Challenge Slip. If not, give the Slip back and say: "I see a discrepancy." If they are identical, turn your back to the players, look up all the words, noting if any are unacceptable.

If they are all acceptable, mark the "acceptable" square on the Challenge Slip and say "Acceptable." If you have any doubt about the spelling of one of the challenged words, please ask the players to clarify the spelling of the challenged word(s).

c. If any words are unacceptable, check to see if these have more than 9 letters. If so, make sure to research them again in the MW10. If you still can't find the word, mark the "unacceptable" square on the Slip and return it to the players and say: "Unacceptable."

d. When a challenge involves a blank, *don't ever ask* "Is the blank a ?" (whatever letter you imagine). There should be a printed record of what the blank is, and you [Page 24] may ask for it. If not, ask only: "What letter is the blank?"

e. *Do not* show any personal responses to the challenge. The Word Judge should not engage the players at all except to learn what the challenged words are and to adjudicate them. This includes avoiding giving any signs of approval or disapproval of the challenge. Any such interaction between the Word Judge and the players is considered inappropriate. It is also inappropriate to watch over players' shoulders and research words that either have been or can be played. This can give extra information to the opponent and influence the game unnecessarily.

f. Despite the number of pending challenges, *do not rush* your adjudication.

g. If you researched the initial challenge, then always have *another person*, rather than yourself, research the Second Opinion challenge.

12. Changing Game Results

[Rule VII.F.](#), regarding changing the outcome or score of a game, refers only to the situation where the players' Contestant Score Cards (CSC) already show identical results for a particular game, and one or both players later realize that those results are incorrect. In contrast, whenever an individual game result is not recorded identically on both players' CSCs, it is the Director's responsibility to make a concerted effort to determine and post the "actual" result. If a Director uses a "Tally Sheet" to post tournament results, on which both players have signed and recorded the game results, then it is not mandatory to verify each CSC. By signing the Tally Sheet, the players have agreed that it records an accurate result of the game. However, any evidence that suggests a Tally Sheet is inconsistent with the player's CSCs could be reviewed by the Director. However, in such disputes, when there is too little evidence for resolving the situation, the Director is advised to maintain the Tally Sheet as the final arbiter.

If, prior to the end of the tournament, a Tally Sheet has not been signed by both players, the Tournament Staff should require the missing signatures/initials from the player(s), or at least verify the game's result on the CSCs.

13. End of Game Underdrawing

[titled differently in toc]

Near the end of the game, if Player A draws too few tiles, while player B subsequently draws the remaining tiles after making his/her play, and this mistake is caught prior to Player B completing his/her *next* play then Player B must, within one minute, choose and [Page 25] give to Player A the appropriate number of tiles from his/her own rack and the game continued at that point. *Example:* With four tiles in the bag, Player A makes a three-tile play and draws only two tiles. Now, Player B plays and draws the remaining two tiles while Player A also plays again. At this point it is discovered that Player A should have drawn one last tile. Player B must choose to give Player A whichever tile s/he prefers. However, if the underdrawing is discovered only after Player B has played again and started the timer, then there is no penalty and the game continues.

14. End of Game Underdrawing

After the player going out neutralizes the clock, neither player should touch the clock until they both have signed each other's score sheet and/or tally sheet and/or agreed on the final score of the game. If the players cannot agree on the time penalty to be imposed, they should call the Director for help. The Director should make every effort to adjudicate the time penalty without touching the clock. However, in some cases that may be unavoidable.

This guideline is meant to overcome the potential hazard of a clock being jarred or adjusted so that the number of time penalty points is not easily determined. When it is agreed by both players that no time penalties are mandated, this guideline is not applicable.

15. Announcing the Play Again

Occasionally, a player's attention may be diverted from the board. It is in the spirit of the game for one player, upon request, to announce to the opponent what his/her previous play was, including the correct score.

16. Denying Opponent Visual Access to the Board

[titled differently in toc]

It is inappropriate for any player to prevent his/her opponent from seeing the board clearly. This includes using hands and/or fingers directly over the board to count played tiles.

17. Loose Tiles

Occasionally, tiles accidentally fall out of the bag, either as a person is drawing tiles or when the bag is put down on the table after a draw or count is made. Sometimes loose tiles are discovered on the table but with nobody having seen them get there or admitting to having been involved with their getting there. When both players agree that such an occurrence has happened, the Director is advised to have the players return the tiles to the bag (with no penalties for, say, overdrawing) and to continue on in the normal fashion from there.

18. A Rack with More than Seven Tiles

[titled differently in toc]

Directors, Word Judges and even fellow players should always identify either to the players and/or Director when a player has more than seven tiles. While accidental overdrawing can occur, a player should immediately announce the overdraw. Any intention to hide that fact is considered cheating. The Director should be notified immediately and, following an investigation, the offender penalized, if the evidence is

convincing.

The Rules Committee recognizes that many players may habitually though innocently or accidentally do any one or more of the above behaviors. We ask that Directors please be firm but unprejudiced while teaching the players the correct habits.

These updated 1998 rules were compiled, reviewed and agreed upon by the National SCRABBLE® Association Rules Committee, formed by Mr. John Williams in 1987. The current Committee members are as follows: Jan Dixon (Wilmington, DE), Joe Edley (Coram, NY), Paul Epstein (Ann Arbor, MI), Larry Gradus (Margate, FL), Sam Kantimathi (El Dorado Hills, CA) Charlie Southwell (Arlington, VA), Ron Tiekert (New York City, NY), and Mike Wise (Willowdale, Ontario, Canada).