

NSA Tournament Rules (1995)

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I. OFFICIAL WORD LIST

A. Official SCRABBLE® Players Dictionary, 2nd Edition

Only the main entries and their inflected forms and run-ons listed in the Official SCRABBLE® Players Dictionary, 2nd Edition (OSPD2), are acceptable for tournament play. The latest printing of the OSPD2 includes changes that are listed on the *Official OSPD2 Correction List*. This list usurps old printings of the OSPD2. All players should review this list, which is included with every new and renewing NSA membership kit.

B. Merriam Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition

If a word having more than eight letters is played, first look it up in the OSPD2. There are almost 12,000 words having more than eight letters in the OSPD2. If a longer word is listed in the OSPD2, it is acceptable. If it is not listed in the OSPD2, 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 New Collegiate Dictionary, 10th Edition. It must not be capitalized, hyphenated, contracted, foreign or listed only as part of a multi-word phrase. Words of fewer than nine letters listed in the Merriam-Webster but not in the OSPD2 are not acceptable, nor are inflections of main entries of fewer than nine letters. Any word used in the definition of a word, but not listed in the dictionary itself, will not be acceptable.

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

Digital clocks shall be considered equally as acceptable as standard-faced clocks. Clocks are to be used in preference to sand-timers. (See Section [IX](#).)

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.

D. Second Player's Preference

If there is disagreement as to which other 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 [Page 3] it is discovered later in the game that there is an incorrect number of certain letters available for the game, the game proceeds with the letter pool as is. Note [Guideline 4](#) on page 15.

F. Who Plays First?

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 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.J.](#) for further information on byes and forfeits.

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 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.

J. Letter Frequency 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.

III. DRAWING TILES

A. How to Draw Tiles

When drawing tiles, 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 [Page 4] considered cheating and is grounds for expulsion from a tournament.

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.

C. Overdrawing

If too many tiles have been drawn (called ``overdrawing"), then there are three 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 draws $(X + 1)$ tiles randomly from the new tiles (facedown), looks at them, shows them to the player and then returns X tiles to the bag while the remaining tile is put on opponent's rack.
2. When at least one new tile has been mixed with the old tiles, the opponent takes $(X + 1)$ 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 $(X + 1) = 2$.

3. If there are seven or fewer tiles in the bag, follow #1 or #2 above as appropriate, except you should change the $(X + 1)$ to $(X + 2)$. *Example:* If there are 5 tiles in the bag and Player One is supposed to draw three tiles, but instead draws four. In this case $X = 1$ and so $(X + 2) = 3$. So Player Two draws three tiles from Player Two [sic] and returns one tile to the bag and the others to Player Two [sic].

D. Drawing Tiles Out-of-Order

When tiles are drawn out-of-order, (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.

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 [Page 5] Double-Word-Score bonus square for a subsequent play.

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.

E. How New Words are Formed on the Board

You may:

1. Add one or more letters to a word already on the board.
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.
3. Place a complete word parallel to a word already played, so that adjoining letters also form complete words.

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.
3. In resolving disputes involving rule [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.
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 overdrawing), 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.

[Page 6]

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. Announce to your opponent how many letters you wish to exchange. Spread the tiles to be replaced face down on the table, start your opponent's timer, and then draw the same number of tiles from the bag. Place them face down on the table to verify the count, 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.

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 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.

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*.

J. Playing the Blank

1. Recording the Blank Letter

When using a blank, the player must state and print (either in the designated space on the score sheet or on a blank sheet) which letter the blank represents. This is to be done before starting opponent's timer. 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 [Page 7] 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.

K. 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.

L. Leaving the Playing Area

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 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.

M. 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.

N. 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 Monitor 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 [Page 8] the play, plus the additional points obtained from placing letters on premium squares.

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 DLs and TLs 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.

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.

J. 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.

K. 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.

L. 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 commonly 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.

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 [Page 9] timer has not been started, opponent may hold or challenge the play within a grace period of 20 seconds. (See Section [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 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.

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 the opponent's timer is started until the "hold" either becomes a challenge or is rescinded. [Page 10]

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 Section [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. 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. If there is a time shortage the Director may call a halt to the recount.

J. Byes and Forfeits

1. Should a player receive a bye (i.e. there are 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 spread added to the player's total spread.
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).

K. 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 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 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

When using clocks, 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 calculating a player's contested turn score or cumulative score, verifying a blank's designation, or while awaiting a rules resolution or announcement 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, and for each extra minute 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 [Page 12] 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.

B. Calling ``Hold!''

When the opponent is considering a challenge, s/he must promptly advise the player not to draw replacement tiles. This is done by calling ``hold." Opponent may call ``hold" up to 20 seconds after his 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 Slips

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 Monitor, Word Judge or Director to come to the table. When a staff member arrives, the challenge slip is used by the Monitor as the source of words to look up. If time permits, the Monitor 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.

E. When the Word Judge says ``Unacceptable''

If any challenged word is judged unacceptable, the Monitor 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 at least pretend to look up every word challenged, 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.

H. 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.

J. Who Adjudicates Words?

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

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 (or the letter that the blank represents), followed by recording the cumulative score and designated blank letter, before drawing tiles. So our advice here is: "Pay attention!"

XI. OBSERVING INCORRECT RULINGS

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.](#) for the only exception.)

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 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 at 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. However, the Director may be called to determine if there is any willful misuse of this blank-designation rule, and (s)he will have the power to alter the outcome if deemed appropriate. Players are advised to always print clearly in the designated place on their score sheet or on a blank what the blanks represent.

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. 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 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?

The Rules Committee recognizes that many players may 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 rules were compiled and agreed upon by the National SCRABBLE® Association Rules Committee, formed by Mr. John Williams in 1987. The current Committee members are as follows: Nick Ballard (San Francisco, CA), Chris Cree (Dallas, TX), Joe Edley (Greenport, NY), Paul Epstein (Ann Arbor, MI), Jan Dixon (Marietta, GA), Dave Johnson (Lafayette, LA), Sam Kantimathi (El Dorado Hills, CA) Robert Mulet (Miami, FL), Stan Rubinsky (San Diego, CA), Charlie Southwell (Arlington, CA), Ron Tiekert (New York City, NY) and Mike Wise (Willowdale, Ontario, Canada).