



THE 2014 NATIONAL SCHOOL SCRABBLE CHAMPIONSHIP RULES

UPDATED 1/30/14

INTRODUCTION

Students play in teams of two. All teams play seven games. No teams will be eliminated before the final championship game. The games are timed with digital clocks, which will be provided, and each team has a total of 25 minutes per game in which to make all of its plays before incurring an overtime penalty.

At the start of the tournament, teams are seeded based on ratings from the North American SCRABBLE® Players Association (NASPA) and School SCRABBLE® tournaments, if applicable. After the first game, teams are paired with other teams that have similar win-loss records.

SETUP

Confirm that there are 100 tiles in the bag before beginning. To determine which team will play first, each team selects a tile. The rank of order of the tiles is as follows: blank, A, B, C, etc. The team going first draws seven tiles from the bag and places them on its rack. Then the second team does the same. Once the first team has viewed a tile, its clock is started by the opponents.

GAME PLAY

1. The first team combines two or more tiles to form a word and places the word on the board to read either across or down with one letter on the center (star) square. The center square doubles the score for the first word.
2. A team completes a turn by announcing the score and pressing the clock. The team records its new cumulative score and then draws as many new tiles as played, always keeping seven tiles on its rack.
3. Play alternates between teams. Each team, in turn, adds one or more tiles to those already played to form new words. Diagonal words are not permitted. All tiles played in a turn must be placed in one row, across or down on the board, to form one complete word. If, at the same time, they touch other tiles in adjacent rows, they must form complete words, crossword fashion, with all such tiles. The teams get full credit for all words formed or modified during a turn.
4. New words may be formed by:
 - Adding one or more letters to a word or letters already on the board.
 - Placing a word at right angles to a word already on the board. The new word must use one of the letters already on the board or must add a letter to it.



- Placing a complete word parallel to a word already played so that adjacent letters also form complete words.

5. No tiles may be shifted after the clock has been pressed.

THE BLANKS

6. The two blank tiles may be used as any letters. When playing a blank, the team must state which letter it represents and record the letter on paper before pressing the clock to end its turn. The blank remains that letter for the rest of the game.

7. A blank tile may be turned over and confirmed to be a blank before the play is accepted. Once the next team makes a play, a false blank may not be corrected. If a false blank is detected before the next team makes a play, then the play using the false blank comes off the board. The team who played it loses a turn.

EXCHANGING TILES

8. A team may use a turn to exchange all or some of the tiles in its rack. To do this, the team announces how many tiles it will exchange then places the discarded tile(s) facedown and presses the clock to end its turn. After pressing the clock, the teams draw the same number of tiles from the bag and then mix the discarded tiles with those in the bag. Tiles cannot be exchanged if there are fewer than seven tiles in the bag; if this occurs a penalty applies, and the player(s) must call for the director.

9. A team may pass its turn at any time without exchanging any tiles by saying “pass.” The team receives no score for this turn.

CHALLENGING A PLAY

10. The free computer program Zyzzyva will be used to adjudicate challenges, using its electronic copy of a corrected version of The Official SCRABBLE® Players Dictionary, Fourth Edition (OSPD4) and for words with more than 8 letters not appearing in OSPD4, Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, Eleventh Edition (MW11), omitting those labeled as foreign, hyphenated, capitalized, disparaging, derogatory, obscene or offensive. Players should try to familiarize themselves with the use of this software before the championship; there will be demonstration copies available at registration.

11. Any play may be challenged after the playing team has hit its clock to begin the other team’s turn. If a team wants to consider challenging a play, one of its players must announce “hold” before its opponents have drawn any new tiles. Teams must allow at least five seconds for opponents to see the play before drawing new tiles. A good way to ensure that this happens is for the same player who records the score to be the one who draws the replacement tiles.



When a hold occurs, the challenged team cannot draw new tiles for 20 seconds. After this time, the team can draw new tiles but must keep them separate from its other tiles until the other team decides to challenge the play or withdraws the hold. After one minute, if a challenge has not been issued and the clock stopped, the hold is automatically withdrawn, and the play can no longer be challenged.

12. To challenge the play, the challengers stop the clock and say “challenge.” The challengers then write on a challenge slip any or all of the words formed on that turn. Only the words written down will be used to determine the result of the challenge. All four players go together to the nearest computer station. Following the on-screen instructions, the challengers type in the word or words being challenged. When both teams have verified the spelling of the challenged words as typed on the screen, the team being challenged hits the “Tab” button. The adjudication of the challenge appears on the screen.

If at least one word is found unacceptable, the team being challenged takes back its tiles and loses that turn. If all of the words challenged are acceptable, the challenger loses its turn. There is no penalty for challenging the final play of the game. It is strongly advised that BOTH players on a team agree to challenge. This will help minimize careless challenges.

SCORING

13. Both teams are required to record each team’s score. The team making a play must record its turn and cumulative score after a play is announced and before drawing new tiles. Teams should record their opponent’s cumulative score before making their own play. It is recommended that teams check the score announced by their opponents for accuracy. It is also recommended that teams check the score with their opponents periodically to ensure accuracy and agreement. Teams can do this during their own turn. Games will not be recounted later—though either team may correct a score or addition before the game ends.

14. The value of each letter is indicated by a number at the bottom of the tile. The value of the blank is always zero.

15. The score for each turn is the sum of the letter values in each word formed or modified on that turn, plus the additional points obtained from placing tiles on premium squares.

16. A double letter square (DLS) doubles the value of a letter placed on it; a triple letter square (TLS) triples the letter value. The score for an entire word is doubled when one of its tiles is placed on a double word square (DWS); it is tripled when one of its tiles is placed on a triple word square (TWS). If a word covers more than one word premium square, the bonuses are multiplied; two triple word squares multiply the word score by nine. Include premiums for double or triple letter values, if any, before doubling or tripling the word score. Letter and word premiums count only on the turn in which they are played. On later turns, tiles already played on premium squares count at face value.



When a blank tile is played on a DWS or TWS square, the value of the word is doubled or tripled, even though the blank itself has no score value.

17. When two or more words are formed in the same play, each is scored. The common letter is counted for each word and the full premium value, if any, is awarded for both.

18. Any team that plays all seven of its tiles on a turn scores a premium of 50 points after totaling the score for the turn. This play is commonly called a “bingo.”

USING THE CLOCK

19. The clock has two digital timers, each set to an initial readout of “22:00”. As time is used, the timers countdown until they reach “00:00”. At that point, all of a team’s time has been used. After that, the team enters an overtime period with a reduction of 10 points for each minute, or partial minute, that it uses. The time during this period counts up and is always shown with a negative sign in front of it.

Each side of the clock has a button that, when pressed, starts running the other team’s timer. A team is only allowed to press the button on its side. Pressing the button officially ends a team’s turn, and no changes to the play can be made after that point. There is a middle button on the clock, which can be pressed to stop the timer for both sides. This is only done when there is a scoring disagreement, a challenge, a question that requires a director to resolve or when the game ends.

ENDING THE GAME

20. The game ends when all tiles have been drawn, and one team uses its last letter; or when all possible plays have been made; or when there are six successive scores of zero resulting from passes, ex-changes or challenges and the cumulative game score is not zero-zero; or when the round officially ends.

21. No game may continue after the Director at the podium ends the round. All games will end after 44 minutes regardless of whether teams have completed all possible turns. The Director will periodically announce the time remaining in a game. Once the official end of the round is announced, the team that is not currently taking its turn should press the middle button to stop the clock. Once the clock has been stopped, no tiles can be placed on the board. Neither side may touch the clock again until after both scorecards have been signed.

22. If a team makes its play and the end of the game is announced, it must still draw its replacement tiles. Each team must end the game with full racks unless there are no tiles left in the bag to be drawn.

23. When the game ends, each team’s score is reduced by the sum of its unplayed tiles. In addition, if a team used all its tiles and the bag is empty, the sum of the other team’s unplayed tiles is added to that team’s score.



24. The team with the highest score wins the game. In case of a tie, both teams earn 1/2 of a win. The spread for each game is limited to a maximum amount. In Round 1, this limit is 100 points. For Round 2, it is 150 points. For Round 3 and all rounds that follow, it is 250 points. For example, in Round 2, an actual score of 400-225 will be recorded as 375-225. These adjustments are made automatically by computer; players do not need to calculate them.

ADDITIONAL REGULATIONS

25. Unless a waiver is granted by the Director, both players on a team must be present for a game to begin. At the start of each round, the Director will start a clock. Any team not present will automatically lose 10 points for each three-minute interval it is absent. The game will be forfeited if the team fails to arrive 15 minutes after the round begins, with the opposing team earning a win and 50 points added to its cumulative spread. The forfeiting team is awarded a loss and -50 points of spread.

26. Always hold the tile bag at eye level or above and avert the eyes when drawing tiles. A player may be disqualified from drawing additional tiles for his/her team if the Director determines that he/she has violated this rule.

27. Never pronounce, discuss or define any word(s) out loud to your opponents.

28. Never return any tiles to the bag unless you are exchanging letters on your turn. If you have drawn too many tiles, raise your hand and ask for assistance; an overdraw penalty will be applied.

29. Never make use of any dictionary, word list or electronic device during a game. You may have an approved tile-tracking sheet and/or score sheet and pencils or pens on the playing table, but should keep all other items out of sight.

30. Never communicate with anyone during a game except your teammate, opponents and event staff.

31. Never speak in an abusive, offensive or confrontational tone to your opponents and do not tell them what they can or cannot do. Whenever there is any question or concern, a team should raise their hand and ask to speak with the Director.

32. Tile tracking is allowed. Players may use the tile tracking sheet provided at the tournament or their own version showing the same information.

33. Cell phones and electronic equipment must be turned off in the tournament room.

34. No ear pieces (i.e. iPods, etc.) are allowed in the tournament room.

35. All four players must remain at the table until the signed results slip has been reviewed and validated by event staff. No other players, coaches, parents or other persons may approach the game table until the slip has been validated by staff.



Punishment for violation of these rules, including penalty points, forfeits and disqualification, may be assessed at the discretion of the Director. If a situation arises that is not explicitly addressed in these rules, the Director may refer to the more detailed Official Tournament Rules of NASPA.

WINNING THE TOURNAMENT

36. The top two finishers after seven games qualify to play in a one-game championship final. If multiple teams have the same number of wins, standings order is determined based on cumulative spread. A team's spread is calculated as explained in Rule 24. For example, if a team wins its first game by 40 points and loses its next game by 10 points, its spread after two games is +30.

PLEASE NOTE:

All rules are subject to updates before the event. Final decisions on all rulings are at the discretion of the official National School SCRABBLE® Championship Director and staff.