



## Advice for New Players

Welcome to the guide for people who are new to tournament Scrabble. We hope you will find this a useful guide to what we're all about, and we would also strongly recommend reading Martin Gardner's article My First Scrabble Tournament (<https://www.absp.org.uk/play/first.shtml>)

The events shown on the calendar (<https://www.absp.org.uk/calendar/calendar.shtml>) are open to everyone, just follow the instructions for entering and come along! You don't have to be an ABSP member to enter any event, but it will cost you a small amount more if you're not. Details of how to join are at the bottom of the page. **If you've never played a tournament before then your first year's membership is FREE.**

This is not a complete guide to the rules, it is just the answers to a few questions you might have, and a summary of some useful information. If you have any queries at all then please feel free to email us (<mailto:webmaster@absp.org.uk>) - we're happy to help!

### Do I have to bring a Scrabble set?

**No.** Although playing equipment is not provided by the organisers, most people coming to a tournament do bring their own boards, tiles, racks etc. along with them. This means there is never a shortage of equipment to go around! It is by no means compulsory to bring any playing equipment with you.

The only thing you should bring is a pen and paper for recording the score. Various designs of printed scoresheet which you are welcome to download and use can be found on the online version of this page (<https://www.absp.org.uk/play/newplayers.shtml>).



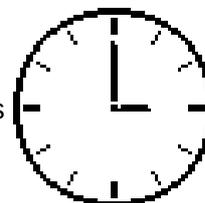
### How do I know who to play?

The name of your first opponent, which table you are playing on and who starts the game will appear shortly before the first round, usually on a computer printout which people gravitate towards when it is posted up on the wall. Who starts each game is normally determined by the program making the fixtures - it tries to ensure that everyone has an equal number of starts and replies in the event.

### What do I need to know about playing with a timer?

Your move is officially finished when you have pressed the button on your side of the timer and started your opponent's clock ticking. Until then, you can do anything you like - place a word on the board, announce the score, change your mind altogether, etc. until you announce the score for that move and then press your clock. This even applies if your opponent has prematurely said "Challenge" before you have ended your move by pressing your clock.

Each player has a total of 25 minutes in which to complete all his/her moves. People who are not used to playing Scrabble with a clock sometimes have difficulty remembering to press their clock when they have finished their move. If all of your time ticks away there is a penalty of 10 points for every extra minute or part of a minute used, but don't panic and play too quickly - you will find you have plenty of time as long as you remember to press



your clock when you have made your move.

### **What if I want to exchange?**

If you wish to use your move to exchange tiles, place the tiles you are going to exchange face down on the table, announce "Change" and the number of tiles being exchanged, then press your clock to end your move. Take fresh tiles from the bag before putting the unwanted ones back in (otherwise you could end up getting the same tiles right back again!). There is no limit to the number of times a player can use their moves to exchange tiles, although there must always be at least seven tiles in the bag; after this point it is no longer possible to exchange.

### **How do I tell how many tiles are left in the bag?**

You are allowed to pick up the bag and feel it at any time to judge roughly how many tiles are left in it. If you wish to feel inside the bag to count the remaining tiles more precisely then show your opponent an open hand, count them without too much disruption to your opponent, and show an empty hand afterwards.

### **How do I challenge moves?**

It is imperative that you are not afraid to challenge any words played by your opponent of which you are unsure. There have been cases in the past when new players have felt intimidated by their opponent's rating, "word knowledge" or apparent experience and so have not felt confident enough to check the validity of what is played against them. Players at all levels of the game play invalid words quite often; there is no penalty <sup>1</sup> for making an unsuccessful challenge and so you are encouraged to check anything which your opponent has played which you don't know. There's nothing worse than finding out you lost a game because you were afraid to challenge your opponent's phony word!

To challenge a word, remember to **wait** for your opponent to finish their turn (which they do by pressing the button on their clock) and then *before* they draw new tiles, announce "Challenge!" and press the button in the middle of the clock which neutralises both sides of the timer. You can challenge any or all of the words played by your opponent in their preceding move, but you must tell your opponent which word/words you are challenging. Usually, you both march up to the adjudication laptop and the challenger types in the words being challenged and the challenged player makes sure the words have been typed in correctly and then presses the key to adjudicate the challenge.

Be aware that all challenges are adjudicated with one tick or cross - the whole move is simply deemed either "valid" or "invalid", regardless of how many words have been challenged.

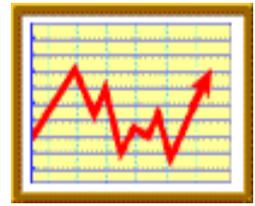
Some players may have a special app on a tablet or phone so you don't have to visit the adjudication laptop, which is OK provided you can both see the screen all the time. For players who don't have their own device and have difficulty moving to the adjudication laptop, write the word/words to be challenged in one of the boxes on the slip provided and call the Tournament Director to adjudicate the challenge.

<sup>1</sup>This is almost certainly the case for your first tournament. In the top divisions of larger tournaments, there is sometimes a 5 point penalty per word for challenging something that is valid.

### **What's this about 'ratings'?**

You will notice that most other people in your division have a rating listed next to their name, whereas you will find you don't because this is your very first event. After every tournament the results are sent to the ABSP Ratings Officer and entered into our rating system; after you have played 15 games you will find

you have your own provisional rating and after 30 games a full rating, which will appear in the list published in OnBoard magazine and also on the ABSP website. Ratings are fun and a useful indication of your own performance, and ensure you are always put in a division with people near your own ability.



### Anything else?

It is important to arrive on time, and even more important to let the organiser know if you are going to be late. Most organisers will have provided you with an emergency contact number for this purpose.

There will always be a Tournament Director (TD) at every event. If there is ever any problem or something you are unsure of then don't hesitate to neutralise the clock and call him/her over to help you out; everyone has queries from time to time, not just people at their first tournament. However, lousy letters are not a problem the Director will help you with!

### Finally...

Don't worry, relax and have fun. Most people find their first tournament an enjoyable experience - you might discover a few things you didn't realise and will perhaps feel a bit "new" at first, but most people go home having really enjoyed themselves and already looking forward to the next one.

### Good luck!

The Association of British Scrabble Players (ABSP) is the official organisation to which the majority of people at tournaments belong. The ABSP publishes a **magazine** every two months entitled OnBoard, which contains many interesting articles - tournament reports, latest news and ratings lists, letters, wordy articles and puzzles, player interviews, competitions and much more.

ABSP members benefit from **reductions** on all tournament entry fees. To become a member or find out more go to the Join Us (<https://www.absp.org.uk/absp/joinus.shtml>) page.

**Data Protection Act:** In joining the ABSP I accept that personal information relating to Scrabble, including my rating and my photograph, may appear on the ABSP website and in ABSP publications. I accept that the ABSP will not be responsible for use or misuse of personal information.

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