

Advice for new tournament players

Welcome to the guide for people who are new to tournament Scrabble. This is not a complete guide to the rules, which can be found in the useful links section at the bottom of this document. 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 ask us - we're happy to help!

Do I have to bring a Scrabble set?

No. At Prague all necessary Scrabble equipment will be provided. The only thing you should bring is a pen and paper for recording the score.



How do I know who I'm playing against?

The name of your first opponent, which table you are playing on and who starts the game will appear shortly before the first round, on a computer printout which people gravitate towards when it is posted up on the wall and also displayed on the monitors near the computer operator. 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 tiles?

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. If you are unsure whether there are enough tiles left please check before you exchange.

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

You are allowed to pick up the bag and put your hand inside to count how many tiles are left. The player whose turn it is has priority if they also wish to count. To do this you need to declare your intention to count the tiles and then show the relevant hand is empty before and after the procedure.

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 a five point penalty for each word challenged in a valid move. There's nothing worse than finding out you lost a game because you were afraid to challenge your opponent's phoney word!

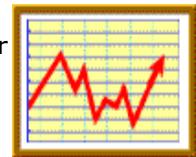
To challenge a word, declare "challenge" and press the button in the middle of the clock which neutralises both sides of the timer, write the word/words to be challenged in one of the boxes on the slip provided and hand it to one of the nearby "runners" or proceed to the nearest adjudication laptop – please ensure to cover your racks or turn the tiles face down before leaving the table. You can challenge any number of words played by your opponent in the preceding move. 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.

Hold

You may also declare "hold" to your opponent if you are considering challenging a move. This gives you a chance to think without having to make a quick decision. A player whose move is held cannot draw new tiles until after a minute has passed – then the newly drawn tiles must be kept separate to the rest of their rack, this is called a courtesy draw. The player who declares hold can decide to accept or challenge the move and play proceeds as normal.

What are '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 a ratings officer and entered into our rating system. Ratings are fun and a useful indication of your own performance. The Prague event is rated in both the WESPA (international) system and ABSP (British) system.



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 you're unsure of the rules then don't hesitate to neutralise the clock and call out "director". 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!

Your main director at the Prague event will be Craig Beevers. John Chew will also do directing duties.

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!

Useful Links

Prague Mind Sports Festival website: <http://www.praguemindsportsfestival.com/>

WESPA website: <http://www.wespa.org/index.shtml>

WESPA rules summary: <http://www.wespa.org/rules/rulesv2summary.pdf>

WESPA Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/WorldScrabble>

ABSP website: <http://www.absp.org.uk/index.shtml>

British Scrabble Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/BritishScrabble>