

Scrabble Hints  
Some Tips for  
Improving Your  
Game

by Jeff Grant

Word Knowledge is a key factor in Scrabble. Half of the following hints relate to vocabulary. If you make an effort to learn new words your game will improve. The authorised dictionary has changed since writing this article so some of the information here is somewhat out of date. Always check the words given as examples before playing them.

### Suggestion

Write out your own word lists and read them over from time to time.

## 1 Twos and Threes

These little words are the basis of the game. You need to know them. There are only 119 two-letter words and just over 1200 threes. Many of them are everyday terms. Work on the ones you are unfamiliar with and the benefits will come.

## 2 Fours and Fives

There are thousands of these. It will help you to become acquainted with some of the more unusual ones. Concentrate on particular groups, such as:

**Hooks:** Learn what comes before and after commonly played 3- and 4-letter words, eg AZO takes an L in front (LAZO) and an N at the end (AZON).

**High letters** Make a list of words containing J, Q, X or Z (BENJ, QUENA, MIREX, FOZY, etc). Sometimes these score as much as a bonus word!

### Suggestion

Don't be afraid to change. If your rack is AAIIIO there is little point in playing AIA for 8 points and keeping IIIO. In most cases it would be better to change all seven tiles.

## 3 Too Many Vowels

This problem affects all Scrabblers. It helps if you can learn some of the shorter 'vowel-heavy' words. After the twos (AA, AE, AI, EA, EE, IO, OE, OI, OO, OU), make sure you know AIA, EAU and EUOI. Then have a look at the 3-vowel fours, and the 4-vowel fives, eg

AITU, EIDE, IURE, NAOI, UNAI

AIOLI, MIAOU, OUIJA, URAEI, ZOOEA

### Suggestion

If you have three or more I's on your rack, it is often best to change.

## 4 Too Many I's

This particular vowel problem occurs frequently. There are nine I's, and unlike the other vowels, no 3-letter word containing two of them. Some words can get you out of trouble - KIWI and LIMIT for instance. Why not make a list of 4- and 5-letter words with two I's. eg

ILIA, INIA, HILI, PILI, WILI

FICIN, RICIN, LIMBI, NIMBI, ZIMBI

## 5 Q Without a U

The Q was once a real bogy letter, but now you should be able to score well with it. Learn the Q-words that have no U, in particular QI, QAT, QADI, QAID, WAQF, QANAT, QIBLA, TALAQ, TRANQ, QINDAR and QINTAR. All these can have an S added.

Some Q-words contain a U, but not following the Q, eg SUQ, BURQA, UMIAQ, QIVIUT.

### Suggestion

If you compile more of these lists, try to make the stem an actual word. For example, the combination AEINST makes a 7-letter word with every letter except Q and Y. Some Scrabblers know this best-of-all stem as SATINE, others STAINÉ, neither of which is a word. Better to call it TISANE, which is a word, then you won't be tempted to play something like SATINE or STAINES.

## 6 Stems

You may have heard other players mention SATIRE or RETINA words. There are common 6-letter stems that combine with lots of other letters to make bonus words. Because these letters are so common they should appear on your rack regularly. As an exercise, perhaps you could write out the RETINA stem and learn all the words that go with it.

RETINA + A = nothing!

+ B = ATEBRIN

+ C = CANTIER, CERATIN, CERTAIN, CREATIN, CRINATE, NACRITE etc

### Suggestion

Playing out plenty of tiles increases your chances of picking up S's and blanks.

## 7 Bonus Words

If you play out all seven tiles a 50-point bonus is gained. There are certain things you can do to make it easier to spot these on your rack.

Try shuffling the tiles around to gain different perspectives. If you have a single high letter it will often start the word. Look for beginnings and endings such as be-, re-, un-, out-, dis-, over- and -ed, -ing, -ier, -iest, -able, -less. Be aware of letter combinations like 'tch' and 'ght'. If you have an awkward-looking rack, maybe there is a compound word hiding there, eg RAGWORT, BLUEJAY or COWPOKE. Sometimes you may be able to use a letter on the board to make an 8-letter bonus word.

### Suggestion

If your opponent looks like taking a winning lead with an unfamiliar word, CHALLENGE it! Always challenge the last turn if you are not absolutely sure of the word — you have nothing to lose.

## 8 Esses and Blanks

These are the most valuable tiles for making bonus words. Don't hesitate though to use an S in a shorter word if you can get a reasonable score, particularly in the early stages of the game when there are lots

of goodies still to come, or if you have two or more of them.

You should try to get a bonus word with a blank, unless there is an especially high-scoring move available using less letters.

## 9 Rack Control

Aim for a good score, while leaving a reasonable selection on your rack. Sometimes it is desirable to sacrifice a few points. For example, when holding ZOITINI, it is better to get 28 for ZITI (leaving ION) than 33 for ZO (leaving IIINT). Try to maintain a good balance of consonants and vowels.

In general get rid of duplicated letters, particularly awkward ones like C, I, U, V, W. If your rack is really bad, and there are no decent moves on, consider changing.

## 10 Board Control

Avoid opening up high-scoring opportunities (particularly triple-word squares) unless you are scoring highly yourself. If you are well ahead, keep the board tight. Let your opponent take the risks. However, if you are miles behind, try to keep the board open so that there are places to get your bonus words down.

## 11 Time Strategy

You have limited time to play the game. Use it wisely. As a general guide, try to make about seven moves in the first 10 minutes of your allotted time, and five moves in the next 10 minutes. You should allow a minimum of 5 minutes for the endgame. This is where many

games are won and lost. Be aware of any key letters unplayed - JQXZ, Blanks, S's. What is your opponent planning? Can you go out and catch him with some tiles? Look for the best option.

## 12 Luck and Attitude

On some days the words just flow; on others nothing seems to go quite right. Accept your losses and your wins graciously. Don't be 'psyched out' when facing a superior opponent. The tiles may go your way. Any player can beat a better one on occasions. Follow these tips and it should happen more often.

Be Positive. If you think you have a word, give it a try. Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

Do your best, respect other players, and above all

**ENJOY THE GAME!**

[Note: These are general hints, some of which are obviously not applicable in every situation.]

