

Chapter 6:

The The TILES

Any good chess book begins with a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of each piece. Yet if you ask another Scrabble player: “What are the strengths and weaknesses of the T?” most players will think you are from another planet. However, learning the nuances of each tile is important.

Not all tiles are created equal. Tiles such as the blank and S are valuable since they score well regardless of the board. Meanwhile, tiles such as the V and Q are poor tiles since they tend to be inflexible and impede your ability to play a bingo.

This chapter should be used as a reference guide. By reading and rereading this chapter, over time you will acquire an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of each tile. This information will help you assess leaves in a precise and informative way.

To help you understand the capabilities of each tile, I have created several metrics that assess their strengths and weaknesses:

Type: Each tile is categorized into one of three different types based on each tile’s usefulness. These types are:

- **Scoring Vowel/Consonant:** These are tiles primarily used for scoring 30+ point plays. These tiles usually score a lot of points by using bonus squares or forming high-scoring 5 and 6 letter words. These tiles are also used for parallel plays.
- **Bingo Vowel/Consonant:** These tiles are used for bingos. Bingo vowels or consonants are tiles that exist in many 7 or 8 letter words.
- **Clunkers:** These are bad tiles you should get rid of as quickly as possible. Clunkers are used to make low scoring plays to balance your rack. Clunkers are poor tiles since they are too inflexible to be useful as scoring tiles, and are rarely found in seven or eight letter words.

Tile Equity: Although each tile has strengths and weaknesses, some tiles are better than others. Tile equity uses a scale centered on zero to measure the relative worth of each tile independent of the board position. Each tile has an equity value spanning from the Q (-12) to the blank (+24). Tiles like the Z or R have a high equity because of their ability to score and/or form a bingo, while tiles such as the V and U have a low equity since they rarely score well and are rarely found in bingos.

Duplication fear: Duplicating tiles is bad because it decreases the number of words in your rack. Some tiles duplicate worse than others: tiles like the I have *high* duplication fear since there are few words with two Is in them. Meanwhile, tiles like the F have *low* duplication fear, since many words have multiple Fs.

Tile Volatility: In certain positions, bad tiles like the Q can be useful while in other positions it can be paralyzing. Meanwhile, tiles like the R have a consistent worth; it is usually a good-but-not-great tile. Tile volatility measures the propensity for a letter's tile equity to change over the course of a game. The Q has a high tile volatility while the R has a low tile volatility.

Friends: Friends are tiles that work well with the tile being analyzed. For example, the H has friends C, S, and T, since there are a lot of words with SH, CH, and TH. Friends have a positive *synergy*: the value of the two tiles together is greater than the sum of their individual tile values. For example, the Q has an equity of -12, and the U has an equity of -6, but the two tiles together have an equity of -1.

Enemies: Enemies are tiles that work against the tile being analyzed. For example, the X has enemies S and J, since there are few words that contain JX or SX. Enemies have a negative *synergy*: the value of the two tiles together is less than the sum of their tile values. For example, the equity of the X is 0.5, and the equity of the S is 12, but the two tiles together have an equity of SX is only 10.

Bingo standing: Bingo standing ranks tiles from 1 to 27, in order of how good each tile is for playing bingos, with 1 being the blank and 27 being the Q. The R has a high bingo standing since there are over 25,000 bingos with an R, while the F has a low bingo standing since there are only about 5300 bingos containing an F.

Scoring standing: Scoring standing ranks tiles from 1 to 27, in order of how good each tile is at scoring, with 1 being the blank and 27 being the G. Tiles with a high scoring standing such as the X can be used to score 30 or more points with ease, while tiles like the I are difficult to use for a high scoring play.

The **A**₁

Type: Scoring/Bingo Vowel
 Duplication Fear: Medium
 Friends: Z, L, I

Equity: 0.5
 Volatility: Low
 Enemies: O, U

Bingo Strength: 8th
 Scoring Strength: 7th

The A is the second best vowel in Scrabble. It is a useful bingo tile that scores well when paired with high-point tiles, as there are many short words using the A. Strong bingo tiles such as the A are more valuable when kept in conjunction with other bingo tiles. The A is a significant addition to a 3 tile leave (such as RIN or RET).

The A is good at scoring with bad high-scoring clunkers. It is a bad tile to leave adjacent to a TWS/TLS, since several tiles can score well by forming a parallel play.

Despite its positive equity, it is incorrect to keep an A on the opening rack exchange unless accompanied by a consonant. Since the A is a vowel, the 0.5 equity of the A is overcome by the poor vowel-consonant ratio of holding one vowel and no consonants. Thus, the A should not be held alone on an opening rack exchange, but only kept with an accompanying consonant.

The **B**₃

Type: Clunker
 Duplication Fear: Low
 Friends: L, O, Y, M, R

Equity: -4
 Volatility: Medium
 Enemies: C, P, N, T

Bingo Strength: 16th
 Scoring Strength: 24th

The B is a typical clunker. It should be played or exchanged as quickly as possible. It is poor at scoring and inhibits your ability to play a bingo. The B's friends and enemies are typical of a clunker: it doesn't go well with most bingo consonants. Clunkers tend to be synergic with vowels, the L and the R.

BL is an especially powerful synergy: the BL leave is just as good as the L alone. The B is moderately good at absorbing vowels but combines poorly with high scoring tiles. Clunkers should be used for short plays that balance your rack so you can score well or bingo on future turns.

When forced to keep multiple clunkers on your rack, you should keep tiles that can form parallel plays with other clunkers on your rack. For example, the F (FAB, FIB, FOB, and FUB) or J (JOB, JIB, JAB, JUBA, and JUBE) are good choices to keep alongside the B.

The prefixes and suffixes with clunkers do not form significant synergies. Prefixes such as AB-, BI-, and SUB- are poor leaves, and clunkers should not be kept to complete a prefix or suffix. Only -ABLE is a good leave, and this leave is still worse than AELT or ACEL.

The **C**₃

Type: Bingo Consonant
 Duplication Fear: High
 Friends: H, R, I, K

Equity: 0.5
 Volatility: Low
 Enemies: Clunkers, U

Bingo Strength: 9th
 Scoring Strength: 12th

The C is a multitasking tile that does many things well. It is good for defense, scoring, bingos, and getting rid of vowels. The C's only drawback is its inability to form short words and parallel plays with clunkers.

The C is one of only 2 tiles that do not make a 2 letter word; thus, the C is a good tile for blocking bingo lines. With a lead, its role as a defensive tile becomes increasingly important. If you want to outscore your opponent, the C is a valuable scoring tile, but if you want to close the board, the C can help you do that as well.

The C can help you to get rid of vowels, with words like CIAO, OCA, CURIO, IODIC, and AECIA. It is also good for bingos, and starts the second most words in the English language (behind the S). This means that leaving a bingo column open where the bingo can start with a C can be dangerous.

Many people dislike the C since it parallels poorly and since few high scoring plays contain the C. While its benefits are not immediately obvious, the C is still a good tile. Don't let these players fool you: they don't realize the full potential of the C since they don't possess good word knowledge and can't use the C effectively. The C is definitely worth keeping during exchanges, both in short and long leaves.

The C is a poor tile in the endgame because of its inability to form short words or parallel plays. While the C scores well by forming long words, it does not form a lot of short words. The C is also weak on closed boards for the same reasons: it is a good tile for an open board, where you can play bingos and use the C to get rid of bad racks.

Vocab Builder 1:

These are words that would be useful for any Scrabble player to know. If you want, you can memorize the word with definition, although doing so is not necessary for Scrabble play.

EDDO: A variety of taro
 ICTIC: pertaining to a seizure
 BUBO: A swelling of the lymph nodes
 FATWA: An Islamic decree
 TAIGA: sub-Arctic forest
 AALII: A tropical shrub
 AGORA: A Greek marketplace

CECUM: a one-hole body cavity
 AGHA: A Muslim general
 NAIAD: A water nymph
 TREF: Disallowed by Jewish law
 DEMETON: A type of insecticide
 RUDD: A freshwater fish
 ARIEL: A type of gazelle

The **D**₂

Type: Bingo Consonant
 Duplication Fear: Low
 Friends: E, N, R

Equity: -1
 Volatility: Low
 Enemies: T, Clunkers

Bingo Strength: 11th
 Scoring Strength: 20th

The D is a decent bingo tile, but despite being worth 2 points, it is a poor scoring tile. The D enables players to get rid of vowels with words like OI₁DI₁A, EI₁DE, AU₁DI₁O, and ADIEU. Many short bingo leaves containing an E are better off with the D compared to the N or T, because of the ED synergy.

One useful attribute of the D is its ability to hook words ending in E. Learning which words take the D hook is critical to use the D effectively. This is especially true when hooking the D to longer words ending in E, as many players do not remember which 7 and 8 letter words take a D back hook.

The **E**₁

Type: Bingo Vowel
 Duplication Fear: Low
 Friends: R, D

Equity: 2.5
 Volatility: Medium
 Enemies: Clunkers, U, O, G

Bingo Strength: 3rd
 Scoring Strength: 14th

The E has the third highest equity of any tile because it is a strong bingo vowel. It forms significantly more bingos than the A or I, and increases your odds of drawing a bingo. It duplicates well for bingos: leaves such as EE₁RT are strong bingo leaves. Although it is not essential to bingos, you should only part with the E if doing so scores significantly more points, improves your vowel-consonant ratio, or helps you to get rid of other problematic clunkers.

However, the E is a weak scoring vowel. It is weaker than the A and O, and it does not combine well with clunkers or other vowels. Duplicate Es are especially bad when combined with high point tiles or vowels. Because of this weakness, other vowels are often preferable to the E when combined with high-point tiles.

While the E helps most bingo leaves, it also makes these leaves more volatile. Although AE₁IRS is slightly stronger than AIRS, it often results in a low scoring play or even an exchange next turn. Many amateurs are scared to part with the E, but since there are 12 Es in the bag, you can always draw another one.

Although the E has an equity of 2.5, the value of an E leave is closer to a single point. This is because equity does not factor in vowel-consonant ratio: the E's equity is mitigated by the fact that it is better to have a consonant in your leave instead of a vowel.

The **F**₄

Type: Clunker

Duplication Fear: Low

Friends: Y, L

Equity: -4

Volatility: Low

Enemies: N, S, O

Bingo Strength: 19th

Scoring Strength: 19th

The F shares many similarities with the W and B. It is useful for high-scoring parallel plays with the X or Z. The F can also score well by forming 5 or 6 letter words. Although the F a poor tile, it is better than other clunkers.

Often, Scrabble is not about choosing between a good choice and a bad choice, but rather between several bad choices, and the F is often the better of evils. While it is not a good bingo tile, it is a better bingo tile than most clunkers. It is capable of making both short parallel plays and 5 or 6 tile plays to clear your rack of bad tiles.

The **G**₂

Type: Clunker

Duplication Fear: Medium

Friends: N, A

Equity: -4

Volatility: Medium

Enemies: C, T

Bingo Strength: 17th

Scoring Strength: 27th

The G is overrated by most amateur players since they overrate the G's ability to form a bingo. While the G is a good bingo tile when paired with the N, the G without the N is like the Q without the U. The G is a nuisance in leaves such as AEGR or EGIST, or nearly any leave without an N present.

The G is also a poor scoring tile, as it doesn't form a lot of high scoring plays. While it does an adequate job of eliminating vowels, it can be problematic for getting rid of the I, as there are few short words with GI in them.

While -ING a nice leave, it is only marginally better than INT or CIN. The ING leave is inflexible: it doesn't function well if there is nowhere on the board to play the ING ending. Keeping ING often forces you to keep the leave intact until you bingo. If you have an opening rack such as GINNORT, don't open with TON: simply play NOTING, take your 18 points and go on with the rest of the game.

The G is useful for defense since it is not a strong bingo tile and cannot be paralleled easily. There are surprisingly few bingos that begin with G.

The **H**₄

Type: Scoring Consonant
 Duplication Fear: Medium
 Friends: C, S, T

Equity: 0.5
 Volatility: Low
 Enemies: N, Z, V

Bingo Strength: 14th
 Scoring Strength: 5th

The H is an average bingo tile that will score well on nearly any board. It can form longer words and is a good tile for making parallel plays. The H can also be a useful bingo tile when combined with its friends: the C, S, and T.

The H's best friend is the C. CH is a strong leave for both bingos and scoring, and thus has a substantial synergy; while the H has an equity of 0.5, and the C has an equity of 1, the CH leave has an equity of 5. CH can also function as one consonant, so you can afford to keep a leave such as CHR or CEHRS.

One unfortunate side effect of parallel plays with the H is that most of these parallels can be re-paralleled. This is also the case with the W and X; many parallel plays involving these tiles can be used by your opponent on the ensuing turn.

The H is valuable in closed boards and endgames. It will often score in situations where few other tiles will. It can help you to get bad tiles off of your rack. It is one of the only high point tiles that will both start and end words easily. The H is malleable in its ability to make parallel plays since both consonants and vowels can precede the H.

At first it is difficult to remember that the H forms the words HM and SH. These words may be difficult to find, but you must be aware of these potentially lucrative hooks.

Mental Note #2: Don't be paranoid about the tiles you draw!

Thinking about which tiles you draw and how many blanks or S you draw is a recipe for losing emotional control. Thinking about tile draws is paranoid at best. It simply DOES NOT MATTER. Thinking about anything else other than the best play is a surefire way to play poorly.

Whenever you think that you can't possibly draw worse, remember that there is almost certainly someone who is. On the rare occasion that you actually are drawing much worse than anyone else over the course of a game or a day... congratulations! You've managed to reach the extremes of statistics! Rest assured, you will manage to draw better tiles in the near future.

The **I**

Type: Bingo Vowel

Equity: -1

Bingo Strength: 7th

Duplication Fear: High

Volatility: High

Scoring Strength: 21st

Friends: N, C, L, A, V

Enemies: U, J, Y, W

The I is a better bingo vowel than the A. Many people dislike the I because of its habit of duplicating easily and its limited scoring ability. Nevertheless, the I is a good tile in long leaves, where duplication is unlikely. The I is a valuable addition to leaves such as TER, END, ERS, and ANTS.

The I is a weak scoring tile. It has poor synergy with high scoring tiles, and is not a good tile for short words or making parallel plays. While it is an okay tile for 5 or 6 letter words with high point tiles, it is weaker than the A or O.

The 'I' duplicates terribly. Many amateur players spend hours moaning about how they drew 3 "I" on their rack, and talk about how they should change the tile distribution so there are fewer 'I's in the bag. You should avoid drawing multiple I on your rack, and should get rid of the I if duplication is a problem.

Leaving an I near a bonus square is a dangerous proposition if words of the pattern _I hit the bonus squares. Leaving an I open for parallel plays such as QI, XI, PI, BI, KI, or HI is a bad idea. However, the I is a safe tile for the pattern I_ as the only high-point tile that can be used for a parallel play is the F.

 Vocab Builder #2

BIDI: a flavored cigarette

TIPI: an Indian dwelling

TIKI: a type of wood

GIGUE: a type of dance

GUID: a commodity (Scot.)

(A)ERUGO: film that grows on copper

LIRI: Maltese monetary unit

VERJUICE: the juice of unripened fruit

IWIS: certainly

GHEE: South Asian clarified butter

GLEG: alert

AJEE: to one side (Brit.)

JELL: To thicken (to gel)

IRID: a type of iris plant

RAKU: A style of Japanese pottery

ARAK: A type of liquor

KAGU: A type of bird

KIVA: A room used for ceremonies

KENTE: A colorful fabric from Ghana

NIDI: nests or breeding places

TORII: the gate of a Japanese temple

VIRID: green; full of vegetation

IMPI: a South African militia

INTI: Peruvian currency

EGGCUP: a small type of bowl

TITI: an evergreen shrub

The **J**₅

Type: Clunker

Equity: -6

Bingo Strength: 25th

Duplication Fear: N/A

Volatility: Low

Scoring Strength: 11th

Friends: O, B, U

Enemies: Z, I, R, ?,

The J is a decent scoring tile. It is useful for high scoring parallel plays and DLS-DWS opportunities: there are a good deal of 4 and 5 letter words starting with J, as well as 3 letter words with high point tiles such as JIB, JAG, and JOW. However, the J is inflexible since it forces you to play off your better tiles. Unless there are a lot of scoring options, the J can cripple your chances of playing a bingo.

The J is primarily an impotent version of the Z. Like with the Z, many players miss plays if the word does not begin with the J. Words such as NINJA, CAJON, and RIOJA are often missed. Also, the J is less flexible and scores fewer points than the Z.

Leaving the J open near a TWS invites your opponent to make 35-40 point plays using their bad tiles. Since there are a lot of 4 and 5 letter words starting with J, leaving the J open near a TWS is a bad idea.

The **K**₅

Type: Clunker

Equity: -2

Bingo Strength: 15th

Duplication Fear: N/A

Volatility: Low

Scoring Strength: 14th

Friends: C, A

Enemies: Clunkers, T, D

The K is a mediocre tile that can bingo or score moderately well. The K does not do anything spectacularly, but it is a better tile than other clunkers. The K scores well with 4-5 letter words as well as two-letter parallel plays. Many 4 or 5 letter words with K are not part of most people's everyday vocabularies. In addition, many of the words that start with K have odd combinations, such as KN, KH, or KL.

While KA and KI make the K seem like it would be good for parallel plays, it is not used that frequently in parallels because there are not a lot of clunky letters that form short words with the K. Most of the short words that the K forms contain odd combinations, such as KUE, ICK, or KYE that don't tend to form parallel plays.

Many players overvalue the CK combination. The CK combination is far weaker than the CH combination. If you are given a choice, you should discard the K and keep only the C in your leave, as C is a better leave than CK.

The **L**₁

Type: Bingo Consonant
 Duplication Fear: High
 Friends: Y, B, A, C

Equity: 0
 Volatility: Low
 Enemies: N, R, H, M

Bingo Strength: 11th
 Scoring Strength: 18th

The L is a good bingo tile but a poor scoring tile. Although many bingos contain an L, these bingos contain high point consonants which should not be retained in your leave. Oddly, the L is anti-synergic with the N and R. However, this anti-synergy should not keep you from keeping the L and the R or N together if they are a part of a strong bingo leave.

The L can easily clear vowels from your rack. The L is present in words such as AALII, ULU, LOUIE, and OLIO. For this reason, the L has a low volatility, since you will rarely need to exchange with an L on your rack.

Although many words contain the sequence LL, the L duplicates quite poorly. It does not form parallel plays easily, and goes poorly with other high scoring tiles.

The **M**₃

Type: Scoring Consonant
 Duplication Fear: Low
 Friends: A, R, U

Equity: 0
 Volatility: Low
 Enemies: N, T

Bingo Strength: 13th
 Scoring Strength: 6th

Many amateur players underestimate the M's value. The M is a scoring consonant that can also be used for bingos. It is versatile because of its ability to score with both vowels and consonants. It is particularly useful at scoring 20 or more points with bad tiles on your rack, and parallels exceptionally well, forming many short words with other high point tiles.

The M is a reasonable bingo tile and plays a role similar to the C and P. The M should be kept for bingos if your leave can absorb another consonant, and can be added to leaves such as ERT, ES, or AR?. If your rack does not turn into a bingo, then you can score with the M and bingo on the next turn.

Like the L, the M can be used to get rid of excess vowels. Words like OLEUM, MIAOU, AMIE, and AMIA can help you balance your rack.

The **N**₁

Type: Bingo Consonant
 Duplication Fear: High
 Friends: G, I, T, D

Equity: 0
 Volatility: Medium
 Enemies: B, H, X

Bingo Strength: 6th
 Scoring Strength: 19th

The N is a strong bingo tile, but a poor scoring tile. It is useful to compare the N to the T. It can save a vowel-laden rack more successfully than its counterpart 'T'. The N (like the T) is often overrated because of its ability to bingo and because most people know words containing the N.

The N duplicates terribly, since there are few bingos with 2 Ns. It is not a good tile for scoring points unless it is combined with high point consonants. While the N scores slightly better than the T and absorbs vowels better, the T is slightly better for bingos, particularly when combined with the R or the S.

The **O**₁

Type: Scoring Vowel
 Duplication Fear: High
 Friends: J, Z, W

Equity: -2
 Volatility: Medium
 Enemies: A, Q

Bingo Strength: 15th
 Scoring Strength: 8th

The O is a good tile for scoring, combining well with high-point scoring tiles. The O scores well with clunkers such as J, Z, Y, H, W, B, and X. Like the A and I, you should avoid leaving the O next to bonus squares because it lets your opponent score well with high-scoring tiles.

Most prefixes and suffixes containing the O aren't very useful. Letter combinations such as CON, OUT, and OUS are poor leaves.

The O is a poor tile for bingos, and should not be retained unless you need a vowel to repair your vowel-consonant ratio. The O should only be kept for bingos if there are at least two more consonants than vowels. While the O is a welcome addition to a leave such as RST or ENRST, it is a drawback to a leave such as ERT, ES, or ING.

Despite words like POOL, the O duplicates poorly. Having two Os in your rack is as bad as holding two Is, and worse than holding 2 As. While multiple Os aren't so bad when holding a scoring leave, it is a disaster when you are trying to play a bingo.

The **P**₃

Type: Clunker

Equity: -1

Bingo Strength: 12th

Duplication Fear: Low

Volatility: Low

Scoring Strength: 12th

Friends: R, H,

Enemies: N, Clunkers

The P can be thought of as the ultimate “borderline tile”. It is an average tile in every way. While it is versatile, it has no obvious strengths or weaknesses. It can score, clear vowels, block, or form a bingo, but it is not exceptional at any of those tasks.

The P can be used as a defensive tile since it is only capable of being paralleled as _P by an O or U. It is difficult to bingo with either an O or U late in a word: thus the P is a good defensive tile.

The P is more likely to start words than to show up in the middle of words. Thus, it is a dangerous tile to open if it can start an 8 letter word, but not so dangerous if it must be in the middle or end of a word.

TRACKING TILES

Part of the excitement of Scrabble is drawing tiles, wondering which tile you’ll draw next. The unknown is one of those things that keep us coming back. Wouldn’t it be nice to know what’s in the bag, and whether or not you’ll draw that cool word?

In Scrabble, you can “peek into the bag” by tracking tiles. By recording which tiles have been played, you can figure out what tiles are remaining. These remaining tiles are either in your opponent’s rack or in the bag.

Tracking is useful in many situations. During the endgame or pre-endgame, you can use your tracking to see what tiles your opponent may have. This information gives you the ability to block your opponent’s high scoring plays and see what tiles you might draw.

Tracking is especially useful if certain tiles are *case*. If you are holding the last tile (for instance, the last available S), then you have the *case S*. If you have a case tile, then if there is a spot on the board for that tile, only you will be able to use that spot. For example, if there is a Q next to a TWS and you have the case I, then only you will be able to use that TWS, and you can use the TWS at your leisure. Case tiles also allow you to create setups with near impunity. (Setups will be discussed in Chapter 8.)

Tracking is also useful since it helps you maintain diversity. Suppose that you are deciding whether to play PIX or POX for the same amount of points, one keeping IRST and the other keeping ORST. Both leaves are nearly equivalent, so if there are 5 Os left but only 2 Is, you will want to play POX. However, if there are 5 Is and 2 Os, you will want to play PIX.

The **Q**₁₀

Type: Clunker

Equity: -12

Bingo Strength: 27th

Duplication Fear: N/A

Volatility: High

Scoring Strength: 22nd

Friends: U, I, A, T

Enemies: Everything else

The Q is the worst tile in Scrabble. It can cripple your rack and make it difficult for you to bingo or score. If you cannot score well and must keep the Q on your rack, you should strongly consider exchanging.

Although the equity of the Q is *only* -12, it is a much worse tile if you don't have spots to play QI or have a U to go with the Q. Without either option available, playing with the Q on your rack is essentially playing with a 6 tile rack.

Many beginners mistakenly play QI whenever it is available. Playing QI for minimal points is not a good idea unless you have a strong leave: often you are better off trading the Q along with other undesirable tiles in order to score more points next turn.

Although the Q and U are highly synergic, the QU leave is still usually a bad leave. QU is a terrible combination for both bingos and short parallel plays. If these options are not readily available, then you should trade both the Q and the U.

Whenever you have the Q, you should ask yourself: "Where can I play the Q? If there's no place for you to play the Q, then it is unlikely that a Q spot will manifest itself in the future. For this reason, you should get rid of the Q sooner rather than later.

It is worth noting that the Q can often be a saving grace at the end of the game if it ends up on your opponent's rack and your opponent cannot use it. In certain cases you should block Q spots earlier in the game in hopes that your opponent draws and will be stuck with the Q later.

The **R**₁

Type: Bingo Consonant

Equity: 1

Bingo Strength: 4th

Duplication Fear: High

Volatility: Low

Scoring Strength: 17th

Friends: E, T, D

Enemies: L, X, W

The R is a good bingo consonant, second only to the S. It can also get rid of poor tiles such as vowels or clunkers. Like other bingo tiles, the R duplicates poorly, as 2 Rs are devastating to both your bingo chances and scoring ability.

The ER leave is synergic, and is useful for both scoring easily and hitting a lot of bingos. ER can score and will inevitably lead to bingos, especially if you keep other strong bingo tiles alongside the ER leave.

The R can also be used to stop short parallel plays. The only back hook to the R is the E: a tile scarcely found in short words. Thus, you can use the R as a defensive tile to make parallel plays and bingos less likely.

The **S**

Type: Bingo Consonant
 Duplication Fear: Low
 Friends: T, H, R

Equity: 12
 Volatility: Low
 Enemies: X, Y, G, Z

Bingo Strength: 2nd
 Scoring Strength: 2nd

It should come as no surprise that the S is the second best tile behind the blank. However, the S is substantially worse than the blank. The equity of the S depends upon the board. Some boards have no S hooks or setups, and on these boards, it is not much more valuable than other bingo consonants such as the R. On other boards, the S is a valuable tile that can be worth 15 or more points. The S is especially valuable on closed boards with S hooks, as often the S is the only tile that you can use to score or bingo.

One unique problem the S faces is telegraphing. When the S is duplicated, you may be tempted to play one for a few extra points. However, doing so tells your opponent that you likely have an S. As a result, they won't open new spots for your S and may block already existing S spots.

Do not be afraid to use the S to score points. Many players are attached to using the S for bingos and miss opportunities to score points instead. While the S is a good bingo tile, you can still draw another one, and you can still bingo without it.

It is easy to develop tunnel vision with the S. Many players get into bad habits: they believe that the S is only good to use as a pluralizing letter, or that there is a specific spot on the board where the S should go. Although the S is useful for plurals, one shouldn't forget that the S starts more 7 and 8 letter words than any other letter.

The S is also a good tile for setups. It provides an opportunity for you to set up spots on the board that only you can use to score, allowing you to add an S next turn for a lot of points. This is especially true if you have the *case* S: the last S (or blank) available in the remaining tile pool. Setups will be discussed further in Chapter 8.

The S is also an important defensive tile used to prevent your opponent from making setups. While it typically does not score well on a closed board, withholding the S is often important to ensure your opponent cannot open the board.

 Vocab Builder #3

OLIO: a miscellaneous collection
 ORRA: occasional
 TORPID: a type of boat
 OLLA: a wide-mouthed jar
 IMMY: a type of playing marble
 NENE: a Hawaiian goose

LINN: a pool beneath a waterfall
 PUPU: Asian appetizer
 PUPA: a stage of insect development
 YIRR: to snarl at
 URARI: a type of poison
 KUDU: a large antelope

The **T**

Type: Bingo Consonant
 Duplication Fear: Medium
 Friends: S, R, H

Equity: -1
 Volatility: High
 Enemies: B, M

Bingo Strength: 5th
 Scoring Strength: 25th

The T is a good bingo tile but a poor scoring tile, and functions similarly to the N. You should not keep the T unless you are close to drawing a bingo.

The T is an inflexible tile. It goes poorly with bad racks and doesn't help you balance your vowel-consonant ratio. It duplicates poorly and does not work well with vowel-laden leaves or clunkers.

With opening rack JTUUVWY, you should exchange all your tiles, and not keep the T. However, with EJTUVYY, you should pass 5, keeping ET, since the E increases your chances of drawing a bingo. Like the N, P, and A, the T should not be kept on an exchange unless accompanied by other bingo tiles.

The **U**

Type: Clunker
 Duplication Fear: High
 Friends: Q, N, M

Equity: -6
 Volatility: High
 Enemies: V, W, Y, A

Bingo Strength: 20th
 Scoring Strength: 26th

The U is the worst vowel in Scrabble. It is a good defensive tile since it is difficult to parallel the U with tiles that either begin or end bingos, other than the S.

Although UN has a strong synergy, the U should be discarded since the synergy does not overcome the U's deficiencies. The same holds true for other prefixes/suffixes such as SUB-, -OUS, and -IUM. As a general rule, prefixes and suffixes should be ignored unless they are especially powerful (such as -ING).

There are situations when it is appropriate to keep the U in preparation for a possible Q draw: however, these instances are rare. Most players keep the U too often and fear the Q too much. Understanding the dynamics involved with the QU combination can be quite complex, especially late in the game.

The **V**₄

Type: Clunker

Equity: -6

Bingo Strength: 21st

Duplication Fear: High

Volatility: Medium

Scoring Strength: 23rd

Friends: I, E

Enemies: B, T, U, O, N

The V is a strong defensive tile since it is difficult to parallel. While the V is a poor tile for both bingos and scoring, it is a good tile for expelling vowels from your rack. However, the V combines poorly with other consonants and is usually a liability.

The V can help you close the board. Words like VEG and VAC are strong opening plays because they leave your opponent with few options. Although the V is a poor tile, it can still be useful to balance racks with a poor vowel-consonant ratio. A leave such as AEIRV is better than AEIR because the superior vowel-consonant balance and synergy makes bingos or high-scoring plays more likely.

The **W**₄

Type: Clunker

Equity: -5

Bingo Strength: 23rd

Duplication Fear: Medium

Volatility: High

Scoring Strength: 10th

Friends: H, O, A

Enemies: U, I, T

The W is a scoring tile usually reserved for making parallel plays. When these plays aren't available, the value of the W drops dramatically. The W is a mooch: it eats up good tiles and combines poorly with bad tiles. The W is much better at forming short words than long words.

The W is also prone to re-parallels. Any two letter word with W can form numerous three letter words. Thus, any play with the W is liable to give your opponent a lucrative comeback. While the W can score well, its scoring potential comes at a cost.

Vocab Builder 4:

WAUL: (WAWL) to cry like a cat

WYND: a narrow street

URUS: an extinct ox

UNAU: a two toed sloth

VIVE: an exclamation of approval

YUGA: a period of time in Hinduism

YAGI: a type of shortwave antenna

TIVY: with great speed

TOIT: to walk leisurely

TOFT: a small hill

YETT: an iron gate, usually in Scotland

YEOMAN: an independent farmer

ZAMARRO: a sheepskin coat

AZAN: a Muslim call to prayer

VELOCE: a musical direction

VIZI(E)R: a Muslim official

VIZARD: a type of mask

WYCH: a type of elm tree

The **T**, **I**, **L**, **E**, **S**

The **X**₅

Type: Scoring Consonant
 Duplication Fear: N/A
 Friends: O, A, E, F, T

Equity: 0.5
 Volatility: High
 Enemies: Q, J, S, R, ?

Bingo Strength: 26th
 Scoring Strength: 4th

The X is overrated by amateur players because of its ability to score. While it can score 50 points with words like XU, XI, OX, EX, and AX, most of the time these words will score much less. Good players will not allow you to make 50 point plays with the X since they rarely leave vowels next to TWS/TLS squares, especially early in the game.

Plays involving the X provide your opponent with a high scoring comeback because of the hooks words like AX and OX possess. Although parallel plays using the X score well, they also allow your opponent to score well on the next turn.

You should be wary if your opponent has the X in the latter portions of the game, as a 40-50 point X play can often be devastating. You do not want to give your opponent a high scoring X play, as they will find it every time. This is especially true against less skilled opponents; even novices can easily find high scoring plays using the X.

Some amateur players retain the X too long, waiting for their opponent to open a bonus square so they can use their X to score 40 or more points. Instead of holding the X in hopes of a scoring spot, you should hold bingo tiles waiting to bingo. The scoring spot for the X will likely never materialize.

The **Y**₄

Type: Scoring Consonant
 Duplication Fear: High
 Friends: L, M, B, P

Equity: -2
 Volatility: High
 Enemies: U, I, R, E, S

Bingo Strength: 22nd
 Scoring Strength: 9th

The Y is a good scoring tile but a horrible bingo tile. Although the Y is technically a consonant, it tends to function as a vowel; the Y is a good tile with consonant-heavy racks, but it becomes a bane with vowel-heavy racks.

The Y's main scoring ability comes by making 5 or 6 letter words with consonants with combinations such as -LY, -ITY, or words using the Y as a vowel, such as FRY or WYN. The Y also parallels well, much like the H, W, and X.

If you have a choice, you should parallel the Y in front of vowels, making YA/YO plays. As with the H, W, and X, parallel plays with the Y are prone to being paralleled, as AY, OY, and YE have a lot of hooks.

The LY combination is synergic and worth keeping despite the fact that the Y is a bad tile. The combination will form a bingo or score well together, and when broken up the Y is capable of scoring well while the L is a good bingo tile.

The **Z**₁₀

Type: Scoring Consonant
 Duplication Fear: N/A
 Friends: A, O

Equity: 2
 Volatility: Medium
 Enemies: V, W, Q, U, ?, I

Bingo Strength: 24th
 Scoring Strength: 3rd

The Z is a good scoring tile used for long words and parallel plays forming ZA. It combines well with the A/O and often scores 40 or more points. The Z is used for 4 or 5 tile plays and vowel dumps such as OUZO or ZOEA. E.

The Z usually does not stay on your rack for long; while it is a good scoring tile, it is a crippling tile to a bingo leave, and is only desirable in a scoring leave. Although the Z is a poor bingo tile, it is still worth keeping during exchanges because of its scoring potential. It is too good to exchange unless you have a strong bingo leave, such as ERT.

The Z lends itself to plays that are easy to find. Like the J, leaving the Z open in the TWS column or next to a TWS or DWS leads to an easy 40+ point play for your opponent if they have a 4 or 5 letter word beginning with Z.

Blanks

Type: Bingo tile
 Duplication Fear: High
 Friends: E, R

Equity: 24
 Volatility: High
 Enemies: J, X, Z

Bingo Strength: 1st
 Scoring Strength: 1st

The blank is the most valuable and dynamic tile in Scrabble. Since it can represent any letter, it is a powerful weapon for bingos and scoring. The blank is so valuable that there are situations in Scrabble that degenerate into a race for the last blank. If one player draws both blanks, that player is a large favorite to win.

While the blank introduces a lot of luck to the game, it also introduces a significant amount of skill. The blank makes it significantly harder to find the best play, since it can represent any letter in the alphabet. It is easy to miss bingos and other high scoring plays that involve the blank. The blank can also create strategically awkward decisions when no bingo exists or you need to block.

In leaves with several tiles, the blank is worth approximately 20 points of equity + the value of the rack where the blank represents the value of the most synergic tile. For example, a leave like GN? has an equity of $20 + \text{ING} = 20 + 7 = 27$.

It is worth noting that while two blanks is better than one, the second blank is not nearly as valuable as the first. While two blanks almost always allows you to play a bingo, these bingos don't score much more than single-blank bingos.

Finding words with blanks

Even experienced players have difficulty finding words with blank. While the blank is an extremely powerful tile because of its flexibility, that flexibility provides players with so many options that they often feel overwhelmed. Finding the best play with a blank in your rack is far more difficult than when your rack consists of 7 letters.

With a blank, the primary goal should be looking for bingos. Finding the 7 letter bingo in a rack like AALNOR? (gRANOLA) is difficult, and finding an 8 letter bingo through any of the letters in the word FRYABLE (ABNORMAL or BARONIAL) is even more difficult. Luckily, finding a bingo is usually not so difficult: most racks with blanks either have no bingos (usually due to vowel-consonant ratio or an excess of high-point tiles) or have multiple bingos to choose from.

Many players forget that the blank can also be used as a scoring tile. This is especially true when you have a high point tile on your rack: the blank allows you to use high point tiles combining a DLS/TLS square and a DWS/TWS square, allowing you to score well with the J, Q, X, or Z.

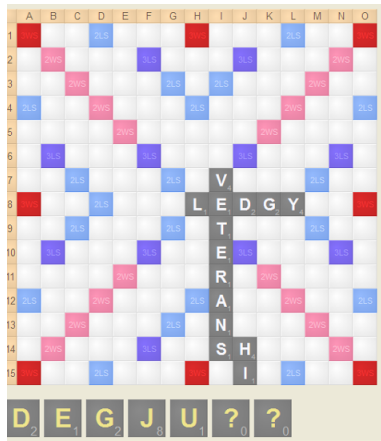
The top players in the world find bingos with blanks by mentally going through the alphabet and visualizing the blank as every single letter. World-class players rely on their proficient alphagram study and use memorization to find words in their rack. However, for non-experts, there is a better way to try to find bingos:

1. Balance your vowel-consonant ratio. If you have a surplus of consonants, first try to make the blank a vowel (and vice-versa)
2. Look for synergies. If you have a I and a G in your rack, then first try to make the blank an N and search for -ING bingos. If there is an I Y in your rack, consider making the blank an L or a T.
3. Look for strong bingo tiles. Vowels such as A, E, and I as well as consonants such as S, R, T, N, L, and C often can form bingos.
4. Look to start words with high point tiles, solve problem tiles, and use permutation. Many of the same techniques that you use to find words with seven tiles can be used to find words with the blank on your rack.

Saving Blanks

Since the blank is such a valuable tile, there are many situations where you should sacrifice points to retain the blank, even if you have a bingo available. Here are some situations where you should pass up a bingo to keep a blank on your rack:

Diagram 1:



Choices: rEJUDGE^d 10h (83),
JUGhEAD^s 12d (82), JUGGIED^k 5 (64)

Diagram 2:



Choices: FLYWH^eEl 12b (69),
FEW^e 11 (33)

In Diagram 1, you should play JUGGIED, saving the blank for next turn. In Diagram 2, you should play FEW e11 preserving both blanks for next turn.

Diagram 3:



Choices: BUCK⁸ 1 (55),
BUCKLE^r d4 (81), BUCKLE^s d4 (81)

Diagram 4:



Choices: OI^o 7 (39),
ERICOI^d 3g (73), PECORInI^f 8 (67)

In Diagram 3, playing BUCK 81 (55) instead of a conjugate of BUCKLE will often allow you to play a bingo or high scoring play next turn.

In Diagram 4, playing OI o7 (39) will likely allow you to bingo next turn, often scoring more points than any bingo this turn.

An Important Note on Tile Equity

Diagram 1:



Score: 223-227

Choices: TAX j12 (26), DEX 14h (27),

TAXA j12 (27), EASED 14d (32)

Pool: AAAACDEEEFFGGH

IIIIIIIMNNNOOOORRRSSTTTUUYZ?

Diagram 2:



Score: 299-364

Choices: HIVES o8/15h (51),

ELVISH o8/15h (54), HI 12a (20)

Pool: AAAAAABCDEEEGIII

LMNOOPRRRRRTTTUUVX

In Diagram 1, the S has limited worth. While the S is usually valuable on closed boards, this board is not conducive to S-hooks, and creating a useful S-hook for your case S will prove difficult. Instead of trying to play a bingo, you should play EASED 14d (32), since it scores more points, and saves the X for 25+ points next turn.

In Diagram 2, the S has increased in value. Thus, you should sacrifice points to play a bingo as soon as possible and take the stronger leave after HI 12a. The EILSV leave is valuable on this board, worth closer to 35 points instead of 13.

The value of tiles changes drastically over the course of the game. In this case, the value of the S is about 2 points in Diagram 1 and 20 points in Diagram 2. Every tile's value can change drastically, depending on its propensity for duplication, the open spots on the board, and the other tiles remaining in the bag.

Even though this chapter quantifies each tile's ability to score, bingo, and get along with other tiles, these numbers should be understood as guidelines. However, guidelines have exceptions and should not be applied universally. Good tiles in one position are often bad tiles in another position. As you learn more about Scrabble, you will learn how to adjust your conception of leave more precisely.

Puzzle Break #6

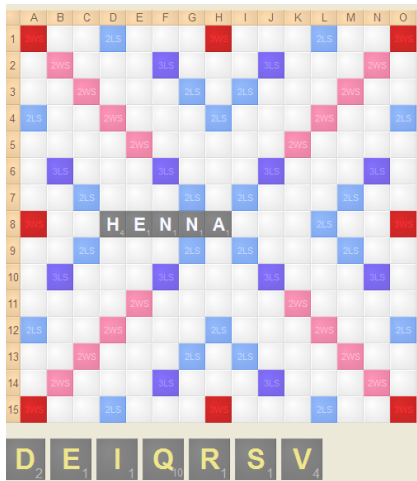
Answers on page **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Diagram 1: Opening rack **DEIOSTV**: **VOTED** 8d (26) or **VIDEO** 8d (26)?

Diagram 2: Opening rack **EORTUUV**: **WROTE** 8d (24) or exchange?

Diagram 3: Opening rack **ABCEHKR**: **BREAK** 8h (32), **BACKER** 8d (34), or **CHARK** 8h (38)?

Diagram 4:



Score: 0-24

Diagram 5:



Score: 206-164

Diagram 6:



Score: 332-324

Choices: VANNER b10 (17),
JNANA 12i (24), JAVA 12i (28)
Pool: AAAACDDGIORTWW?

Diagram 7:



Score: 310-341

Choices: PFUI f7 (11), Exch. 7,
Exch. 5 (ET), Exch. 6 (E), Exch. 6 (T)
Pool: AABDDDEEEEEIIKOOORRRV?