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About the Author

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The Words

This book is written as a sequel to Breaking the Game and is intended for experienced Scrabble players who have a basic grasp of Scrabble terminology as well as a knowledge of the two and three letter words. Although the puzzles in this book will not use obscure words, many of the diagrams do contain obscure words, and knowledge of obscure words may influence many strategic decisions.

To play Scrabble at an elite level, you are going to have to learn words. This book is not a dictionary: it cannot teach you tens of thousands of words nor can it teach you how to find all of these words consistently. Learning and finding words is something that must be done on one's own, through study and practice.

The two and three letter words are absolutely essential: they help you score with high point tiles and allow you to play longer words and bingos. Playing Scrabble at a high level without these words is nearly impossible.

Of course, other words are also extremely useful. Four and five letter words can score extremely well, and are especially useful when vowel or consonant heavy, or when they use high point tiles. Seven and eight letter words are also useful, as they can reach bonus squares and form bingos (with their 50 point bonus) that can prove very lucrative.

Here are some words that could prove useful in Scrabble:

AALII: a tree	MUFTI: a Muslim judge
ACAI: A type of berry	NENE: a goose
AGIO: currency fee	NIXY/NIXIE: undelivered mail
AGEE/AJEE: to a side	NEROLIS: fragrant oils
ALULA: a wing part	OGEE: an S shape
AMIA: a fish	OHIA: a tree
ANEROID: a barometer	OIDIA: fungi
ANTIPODE: a polar opposite	OLIO: a collection
ATONIES: muscular frailties	OURIE/OORIE: shivering
ATROPIN(E): a poison	OVOLI/OVOLO: a molding
BABOO/BABU: Hindu man	QADI/KADI: a Muslim judge
BUBO: lymph gland swelling	QANAT: underground tunnel
CIAO/JIAO: farewell	RAISONNE: ordered
COVEY: bird flock	RONDEAU: a short poem
COZEN: to mislead	SOUTANE: long robe
DIDO: an act of mischief	STOURIE: dusty
DIDY/DIDIE: a diaper	TAENIAE: Greek headbands
ETESIAN: a repeating wind	TENTORIA: insect craniums
EYRY/EYRIE/AERIE: a bird's nest	UMBO: shield part
FOEHN/FOHN: a type of wind	UNAI/UNAU: a sloth
FOVEA: anatomical imprint	UVEA: eye part
FRITT/FRIT: to fuse together	VIRID: green-colored
GENITOR: a dad	VODOU/VODUN: African religion
GIGA/GIGUE/GIGHE: a dance	VUGG/VUGH: a rock cavity
GODETIA: an herb	VULN: To wound
JEHU: a fast driver	WAWL/WAUL: to cat cry
JUPE: a jacket	XYST: place of training
KLONG: a canal	ZILL: finger cymbal
KRAFT: a type of paper	ZORI: a slipper

Introduction

This book illustrates high-level concepts relevant to tournament level Scrabble play. It is written for tournament players, Scrabble enthusiasts, and those curious about the strategy involved in high level Scrabble.

Some Words of Wisdom concepts will be new to almost every player. While some of these concepts may not be intuitive, they are grounded both in extensive theoretical knowledge as well as personal experience. I've done my best to make all of these concepts as clear and straightforward as possible: trying to elucidate Scrabble strategy in a way that everyone can understand.

Many of the concepts in this book are much more commonplace in other games (such as chess or poker) but are much less accepted within a Scrabble context. My website (<http://www.breakingthegame.net>) covers some of these concepts in even more detail. I urge any player interested in Scrabble to visit my website.

I would like to encourage you to discuss the concepts in this book with others. Advancing your personal strategic understanding of Scrabble and the understanding of those around you will not happen without robust discussion of various Scrabble concepts. While I can introduce new concepts, these concepts will never be internalized until you question and analyze the themes mentioned in this book.

Before we start, I will briefly go over the building blocks needed to play Scrabble: concepts that are largely not covered by this book. For a brief refresher, I highly recommend that you read my other book, Breaking the Game.

Anagramming

One important Scrabble skill is the ability to find words in your rack. Mentally unscrambling words in your head is known as *anagramming*. For many players, anagramming is what makes games such as Scrabble unique and fun.

Players use different anagramming techniques but improvement comes largely from the process of solving those puzzles. While there are good methods that can help new players anagram more proficiently, the best ways to improve your anagramming skill are learned internally through repetition.

Group 1: ACHLLOO CEIINNOT ACEEFFIN ACESSTY AIINPRS
 Group 2: AAIJMNURU EHINOR ACCEINO DEIORSST HMMOORSSU

Because of the complex nature of the English language, some words are much easier to anagram than others. The above groups contain anagrams of drugs. For most people, anagramming the list of drugs in group 1 are more difficult than group 2. This is because most words follow patterns that are already engrained into your brain.

Group 3: ACEGLMOU ABBCEERU AEGHIPSTT ADLMNOS
 Group 4: AAFJIST CNOOPPR ACHNOS IKMNPPU

A group of foods. Group 3 words are harder to find for most people compared to Group 4 words.

Anagramming also requires looking for shorter words. In many ways, this process is even more difficult than finding 7 and 8 letter words since there are so many different sets of anagrams to look for: you need to find 4 and 5 letter words in a 7 tile rack. The extra tiles make finding shorter words difficult: discovering the only 5 letter word in AAKLNOW is far more difficult than finding the same word in a rack of AAKLOOU. (KOALA)

Board Vision

Another key element of Scrabble is identifying all of the options available to you on a given board. This is often referred to as *board vision*. Board vision requires seeing and identifying the various high scoring options and bonus squares that allow you to score well.

The process of finding spots on the board is much like reading a map. While at first unfamiliar, players develop an innate understanding of a map over the course of time. The same holds true for the Scrabble board: players acquire a feel for the board.

On every board, there are scoring and bingo opportunities that are obviously lucrative as well as hidden treasures that can be used to score big with the right tiles. Good players can identify the potentially lucrative openings that solve the challenges their rack presents while being mindful of the high-point opportunities that the board offers given the right tiles. Players with good board vision think of the board not as a divergent word playground, but as an organized list of possibilities.

Like rack vision, board vision can be greatly enhanced after playing many games of Scrabble. Studies have shown that developing experience with various boards and game pieces board causes your brain to develop an intuitive understanding: experienced Scrabble players can visualize a Scrabble board in their head. Scrabble players learn the board the same way most people learn their way around a new house.

Bonus Squares

Without bonus squares, Scrabble would be a boring, simple crossword game. Scores would be low, and the game wouldn't feel the same. Bonus squares bring Scrabble to life: higher scores combined with many positional factors created by the bonus squares bring Scrabble to life!

Bonus squares are primarily used for high point tiles such as the H, W, X, and Z. These tiles are used primarily for parallel plays as well as bonus square combinations, such as the DLS/TWS combination. These combinations and parallel plays can level up high scoring tiles to be worth 40, 50, or even 60 points on some occasions!

As a general rule, you should avoid leaving bonus squares available unless you are either scoring a lot of points yourself, there are several bonus squares already available, or the bonus square is hard to use.

Decision Making

Part of what makes Scrabble different than other word games is that it's not just about words: it's also about strategy. As a result, you need a logical, consistent thought process when comparing the various advantages and shortcomings of all of your plays.

Sadly, this aspect of Scrabble is often neglected. Scrabble is a strategic game just as much as it is a word game, and as a result, you not only need to develop various skills: you need a framework that will help you evaluate these skills consistently. This is not something that can easily be intuited: cleaning up your thought process so it is efficient and effective is a necessary part of becoming a skilled Scrabble player.

Decision making occurs using *heuristics*, or mental rules of thumb that help you make decisions. In some cases, these can be drilled into your head through repetition; in other cases, heuristics seep into your mind unconsciously, and are subjected to biases. Shaping and refining your heuristics about Scrabble is one of the most difficult tasks if you want to become a Scrabble master.

To make better decisions, it is important that you limit comparisons and decisions to a few at a time. Comparing more than three plays at once is usually something that no person can handle. In the first stages of decision making, you should compare similar plays. Once you've narrowed it down to a few candidates, then you should make a choice between plays that are distinct, using the process of elimination until you find a candidate play that satisfies your goals.

Leave

“*How do you bingo so often?*” is a frequently asked question by new, aspiring Scrabble players. Many presume that it’s because expert players have massive vocabularies and tremendous anagramming skill. But the real answer isn’t that we can find bingos out of racks like ACJMNTU (MUNTJAC, a type of deer): it’s that we *usually don’t get those racks in the first place*.

Top players have mastered the ability to manage their *leave*, or the remaining tiles on their rack. They aim to score well now, but also ensure that they keep good tiles so they can score well on subsequent turns, turning their game into a barrage of scoring and bingos designed to overwhelm their opponents.

There are two ways to think of leave: the strength of the individual tiles alone, and the ability of those tiles to work together. A leave such as HHSX might contain strong tiles individually, but these tiles don’t work well together: they contain no vowels, duplicate Xs, and the HX and SX combinations do not work well together. Conversely, a leave such as ILVY works very well together, but isn’t a very strong leave since the tiles are individually just not very strong.

There are several metrics used to describe the way a leave works together. The first important metric is vowel-consonant ratio, or the balance between vowels and consonants on your rack. The second component is duplication: duplicated tiles typically limit your options and make it more difficult to score. The third component is synergy, or how well your tiles work together. Tiles such as CH or QU work well together, while combinations such as CG or UW typically are not found in the same word very often.

Scrabble players use a concept called equity to assess the value of leaves. Equity is a mathematical approximation of a leave’s worth, calculated by adding the worths of each individual tile and making adjustments for how well those tiles work together.

There are also two types of leaves: scoring leaves and bingo leaves. Scoring leaves typically keep high scoring tiles and good scoring vowels and are designed to use bonus squares to score well, often using parallel plays. These leaves are good on most boards but suffer from a lack of upside: it is very difficult to bingo with most scoring leaves. Bingo leaves hope to capitalize on the 50 point bonus that accompanies a bingo. When they draw a bingo they can score big, but when they miss, bingo leaves are usually relegated to low scoring plays.

Fishing and Setups

Fishing is the act of playing a tile or tiles in hopes of drawing specific tiles hoping for a high scoring play or bingo. Fishing plays are inherently high-risk: while the reward if you draw well is usually a bingo, it comes at the cost of a low scoring play this turn as well as a potentially low scoring play next turn.

Fishing makes sense only when you are very close to an extremely high scoring play that is unlikely to be blocked. Fishing for a bingo or extension that is likely to be blocked (either out of reason or paranoia) is not a winning proposition.

In most cases, fishing is not a play that players are happy about: it is usually only a good idea if there are not other high scoring plays to choose from. When you hit your fish, there is a high reward, but missing a fish can often prove devastating.

Setups are often similar in their high-risk vs. high reward calculus. When setups are hit and remain unblocked, they can score huge points. When your opponent blocks, or worse yet – uses the setup themselves - the results can drastically swing in their direction.

Setups allow you a chance to use clunky tiles or hooks for big points, and can allow you to use your bingo tiles to play a bingo. They allow you to create a board conducive to your remaining tiles. When there are no good Scrabble plays, good players can create scoring plays next turn by making setups.

