

Bonus Lines and Letter Dynamics

It is essential to gain a fundamental understanding of which openings are dangerous bonus lines. The risk factor of a bonus line depends on the commonness of the tile (Es are in more bonuses than Ys) and the positioning of the tile (a bonus line where you must start with E is less dangerous than a bonus line where you must end in Y.) Learning these factors can allow you to figure out which lines to open and which lines to block.

High risk:

C₃			DL				TW
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TW			DL				D₂
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	DL			E₁	DW		
		TL		N₁	DW		
TW				T₁			TW

These bonus lines are extremely dangerous as there are many words that use these tiles in these placements. Many bonuses will start with C, end in D, or have an E, N, or T in late position.

Medium risk:

Sample Page 1

TW		C₃	DL				TW
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TW			DL				R₁
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	DL			DW		E₁	
		TL			DW	N₁	
TW			DL			T₁	TW

These bonuses lines are less dangerous. The C is not as frequently in the middle of words, the R doesn't end as many words as the D, and the E, N, and T don't end nearly as many words as often as they are the penultimate tile.

Low risk:

TW			DL				C₃
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O₁			DL				TW
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E₁	DL			DW			
N₁		TL			DW	N₁	
T₁			DL				TW

These bonus lines are far less dangerous. Despite the -IC suffix, the C ends few words, and despite the OB/OVER/OUT suffixes, the O doesn't start many words. In addition, the E, N, and T don't start nearly as many words as they end.

Diagram 1: Right Angle

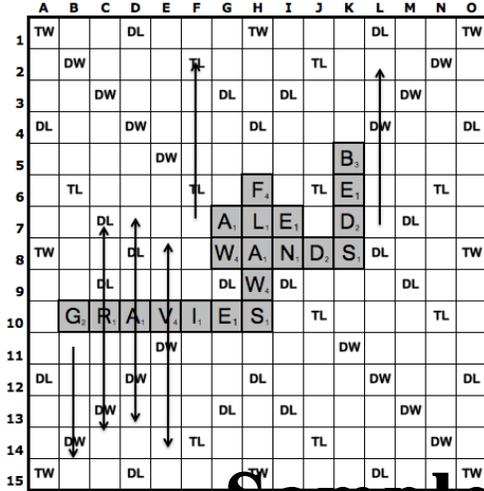
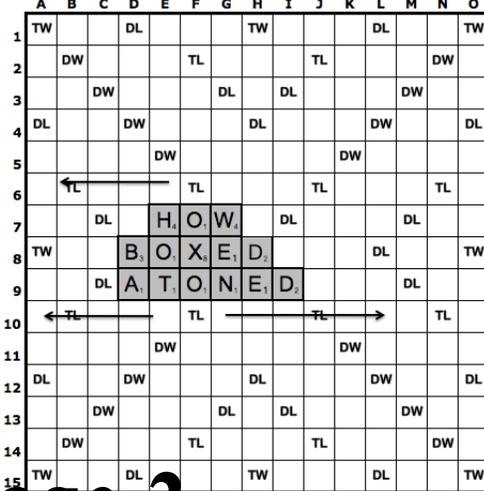


Diagram 2: Zipper



Sample Page 2

Diagram 3: Staircase

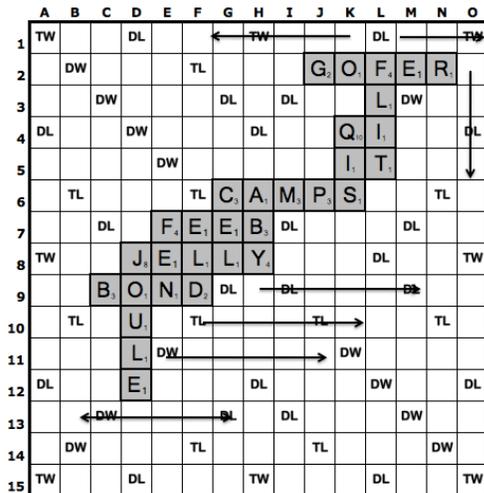
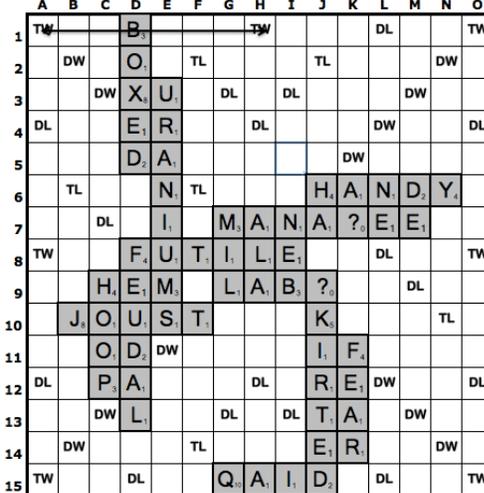


Diagram 4: Board Exhaustion



These diagrams illustrate a mental arrow representation of the various board dynamics described in this chapter. Feel free to use this page as a reference for the dynamics in this chapter!

In Diagram 1, the lower right quadrant is difficult to use because of the FLAW-S and WAND-S hooks leading away from the quadrant. Diagram 1 is an illustration of a *right angle*. Diagram 2 is closed because of the three parallel plays limiting the number of tiles you can play through. This board dynamic is called a *zipper*.

Diagram 3 is an example of a staircase. Here, the openings to both unused quadrants are both weak and difficult to use without good scoring tiles. While there are several arrows, none of the open spots individually are all that strong: but because of all the arrows, staircases are actually a fairly weak closed board dynamic.

Diagram 4 is an example of an exhausted board: in this case, this looks sort of like a windmill. There are no hooks open, the only letter(s) available are generally bad for bonuses, and your opponent will immediately shut down any bonus opening you make. As such, there are nearly no arrows to be seen.



To figure out what your opponent is holding, you need to play detective, hunting for clues and solving the mystery that is your opponent's rack. To accomplish this, you need to look for evidence, such as the following:

- *Your opponent's skill level:* Leave inference works best against strong predictable opponents who find the best play consistently. It is not a good weapon against the weak, or against sly, chaotic players who play unconventionally.
- *Time taken:* Quick plays indicate your opponent had few alternatives last turn, whereas deliberate plays indicate your opponent had several options to choose from. Quick plays are signs of good leaves or heavy duplication.
- *Background Check:* What has your opponent done recently? Your opponent's last move often leaves behind a paper trail, giving you information on the tiles that remain (known as positive leave inference), as well as allowing you to eliminate possible tiles from consideration (known as negative leave inference).
- *Check their story:* Quick plays indicate your opponent had few alternatives last turn, whereas deliberate plays indicate your opponent had several options to choose from. Quick plays are signs of good leaves or heavy duplication. Think about whether their story make sense: if someone plays off AWA for 25 immediately, it makes a lot of sense that they have a third A: however, if they took 4 minutes to do so, the idea that they have a third A makes a lot less sense.
- *The Silent Interrogation:* Often, suspects give away their tiles by their physical tics and body language, especially as they draw tiles or search for plays on the board. Deliberate movements or improvements in posture are often signs of a strong rack (such as a blank), while worse posture or disinterest are often signs of a weak rack. Players often gaze at spots they are going to use, although some players will consciously look at every spot **except** the spot they plan to use.

Suspicious behavior: Rapid and dramatic changes in behavior often mean that your opponent's rack is polarized: either extremely good or extremely bad. Sporadic shuffling often indicates a blank, while players who separate their rack into sets of three or four tiles often have a bad rack with clunky tiles.