

Section 1. ABSP GAMES RULES

April 2009 Edition

Update Information	
Originally compiled by:	Allan Simmons
Previous Editions:	April 1989, June 1990, March 1991, December 1991, January 1993, December 1993, June 1995, February 1996, March 1996, January 1998, January 2000, February 2002, December 2002, January 2004, December 2004, Jan 2008

INTRODUCTION

In devising these rules, care has been taken to cover all the frequently occurring situations as comprehensively as possible. It must be borne in mind, however, that it is not possible to anticipate every situation. In such cases, it is up to the designated tournament Director to exercise his discretion, taking into account the rules and guiding principles as set out here and the particular circumstances of the case/situation in question. In all such cases the tournament Director's decision shall be final and binding.

For ease of reference these rules refer to the two players in a game as Player A and Player B.

References to "Director" within these rules denotes the Tournament Director or his duly appointed deputy.

These rules have been adopted by the ABSP and will be the rules by which all tournament games played under the aegis of the ABSP or qualifying for ABSP ratings shall be played.

Update Information

The following summarises the changes to this document since the start of 2004.

Reference	Description
January 2004	
2.4	New clock type added
8.1	New end of game procedure
December 2004	
4.10.5	Use of the word "hold" to indicate player is considering a challenge
5	Clarification of the end of turn procedure
January 2008	
2.2	Word authority now Collins Scrabble Words 2007
4.10.10	Added to cover variations
9.3	Timer overrun limitation now 10 minutes
Appendix	Added for visually-impaired players
November 2009	
2.3	Non-reflective boards now take precedence.
3.1.2	Director has responsibility over starting/stopping the timer when both players are late to start a game
3.1.3	Clarifies it is the Director's responsibility to stop the timer when one player is late to start a game
4.10.1	Correct process for self-adjudication added
4.10.2	Clarifies "point of no return" for challenges
4.12	Racks must be visible during a game
9.1	Overtime and each successive minute thereof starts <i>after</i> the display shows :00 seconds
9.3	Clarifies the losing margin when a player runs out of time

ABSP GAME RULES

NB: for visually impaired players there is an appendix 1 which takes precedent over the standard rules below where it is in contradiction to them.

1. Conduct

- 1.1 All players are honour bound not to cheat.
- 1.2 It is the responsibility of every member, while playing, not only to guard at all times against any action of his/her own which might incur suspicion or misinterpretation, but also immediately to draw to the attention of his/her opponent any such action on their part. If there is persistent dubious conduct then the Director should be called.
- 1.3 If any player is *caught* cheating he/she will immediately be disqualified from taking part in the tournament. All games played by that player thus far may be awarded to the player's opponents. The player caught will receive an automatic indefinite ban from ABSP tournaments and have his/her membership revoked. (See also section 6, etiquette.)

2. Equipment

2.1 Basic rules

The basic game rules published by J.W. Spear (latest edition 1988) will apply unless otherwise stated in these rules.

2.2 The Dictionary

From May 15th 2007 the official word authority for all lengths of words is Collins Scrabble Tournament and Club Word List (2007) list. Please note that METERSTICK and METERSTICKS were previously allowed and omitted in error but remain acceptable in ABSP play.

2.3 The Scrabble Set

It is the responsibility of both players to check that the set contains the correct number and distribution of tiles. Under no circumstances can corrections be made once the game has started.

All boards used should be rigid, with indentations to prevent the sliding of tiles and should be of a size akin to the Mattel deluxe boards. Where players have a choice of boards the order of precedence is :

1. Circular boards which revolve within their own area.
2. Mattel deluxe boards.
3. Mattel new style fold-up board.

Non-reflective boards supersede others within the same category.

The above guidelines may be over-ridden because of local conditions where table space means that it may not be feasible to use circular boards. In the event of a dispute on the choice of boards, the matter should be referred to the Tournament Director whose decision is final. The boards should be in an acceptable state of repair.

Tournament tiles (ie smooth tiles) should be used at all times. Standard tiles are only acceptable in extremis.

American de luxe sets and tournament tiles (pro-tiles) are acceptable providing both players agree to their use.

In case of dispute on non-standard tiles, the Tournament Director should be consulted and his decision is final.

It is acceptable to have identification marks on the back of tiles providing these are uniform for the complete set of tiles.

Tiles and bags should not be below an acceptable standard in terms of wear, cleanliness and hygiene.

2.4 The Timer

Where players have a choice of timer devices the order of precedence is:

1. Electronic count-down timer (ie counts down from 25 minutes and displays overtime in minutes and seconds *see note below)
2. Non-standard electronic count-down timer (eg those that need a different neutralisation procedure other than a central button)
3. Electronic count-up timer (ie counts up from zero)
4. Analogue 'chess clock'

*note - electronic timers designed for chess are not acceptable if they do not measure overtime, i.e. they stop at 00:00.

It is the responsibility of both players to agree the timer device is set to the specified time limit, and that the timers are working properly.

Reference is made to 'neutralising the timer' throughout this document. This means:

For analogue chess clocks - depressing both clock buttons such that they are balanced and neither player's clock is ticking.

For electronic timers - depressing the 'hold' button (normally in the centre) such that both digital displays are frozen.

2.5 Written Aids - Tile-Tracking

Pre-prepared word lists are not permitted at the playing table but players may prepare lists of tiles prior to the game for the purpose of tile-tracking.

What is written on paper once the game has begun is up to the player and there are no restrictions.

3. Starting the Game

3.1 Late arrivals

3.1.1 It is the duty of all competitors to be present at the announced time of commencement for any given round.

3.1.2 If both players are absent at the start of a round then the Director may start the timer and, when the first player arrives, assign him/her the elapsed time by starting the timer of the second player. Upon the arrival of the second player, the Director will allocate the full amount of elapsed time (i.e. that shown on the first player's timer plus that shown on the second player's timer) to the second player. Only then should the players continue as per 3.2 and 3.3 below.

3.1.3 If one player is absent at the start of a round, his/her timer must be started if instructed by the Director. When that player arrives the Director will neutralise the timer. Only then should both players continue as described in 3.2 and 3.3 below. A late player whose clock was started may, if the time left before penalties is less than 15 minutes (i.e., for normal 25 minute games, after being 10 minutes late), elect to forfeit the game. If the game is played, then it will be rated as a normal game.

3.1.4 If a game is forfeited because a player is late, then the game stands as a win for the opponent with a spread of 75 points. The game will not, however, count for ratings.

3.2 Determining Who Starts

When there is no system to predetermine who starts, the players draw tiles to determine who starts play. The player who draws a tile closest to the beginning of the alphabet, with the blank preceding an A, starts the game.

3.3 Starting the Timer

Player B may start Player A's timer:

- once Player A finishes drawing all seven tiles
- if Player A sees any tile face up
- if Player A places any tile on the rack

4. The Turn

4.1 Orientation of Board

The layout of the Scrabble board is symmetrical and the markings on it are for indication only. The orientation of the board is set by the first play of the game and all of the moves must follow this orientation.

A player may invert the opening move to fit the lettering on the board but not thereafter.

4.2 Playing of Tiles

Tiles must be placed on the board to form the required word. If any of the tiles are blanks the player must state clearly the letter the blank represents. Players should write down on the scoresheet the letter a blank is agreed to represent to avoid subsequent misunderstandings.

4.3 Scoring

Once Player A has computed the score, Player A should announce it. The score may be computed aloud.

4.4 Exchanging Tiles

4.4.1 There is no restriction on the number of times a player may exchange tiles during a game. However, there must be at least seven tiles remaining in the bag regardless of the number of tiles being exchanged.

4.4.2 To exchange tiles Player A must announce "Change" and the number of tiles being exchanged, remove those tiles from the rack, press player B's timer, pick replacement tiles and return old tiles to the bag.

4.5 Passing

4.5.1 Passing is permitted at any time during the game. If *each* player passes *thrice* in succession the game ends.

4.5.2 To pass, Player A announces "Pass" and starts Player B's timer. (See also 4.6 "Unplayable Tiles" and 8 "Ending the Game".)

4.6 Unplayable Tiles

If Player A is unable to play any tiles in the final stages of the game then the procedure for a turn must still be followed, i.e. announce "Pass" and start Player B's timer. It must not be assumed that Player B has the knowledge the Player A cannot play, even if it is only the Q left on Player A's rack.

4.7 Pressing the Timer

4.7.1 Once Player A has made a play and announced the score, Player A should immediately press the button on Player A's side of the timer to end the turn and thereby simultaneously start Player B's turn.

4.7.2 No change to the play may be made after the turn is ended, i.e. opponent's timer started. However, any change may be made before the timer is pressed even if Player A has announced the score and Player B has called "Challenge".

4.7.3 It is each player's responsibility to press the timer at the end of their turn. If Player A forgets to press the timer then Player B is entitled to free use of Player A's time.

4.8 Restarting the Timer

If the timers have been neutralised due to a challenge, score query, excess tiles being drawn, or to call the Director, then it is the responsibility of the player whose turn was last completed to restart the timer. The timer shall not be restarted after a successful challenge until the challenged player has taken his tiles off the board.

4.9 Keeping Score

4.9.1 Both players must keep score, that is, the score for each turn and the cumulative score. It is the responsibility of both players to verify the scores from time to time. Verification must only take place at the end of a turn.

4.9.2 If at any time prior to signing the final scoresheet, either player wishes to correct the score for a move or a cumulative score then this is allowed providing both players agree. If both players do not agree, the timer should be stopped and the Director should be consulted to determine the correct score for the game.

4.10 Challenges

4.10.1 Once Player A has indicated the end of his/her turn by pressing the timer, Player B may challenge the play by announcing "Challenge" and neutralising the timer. Player B then legibly writes on the provided slip of paper[†] which word(s) are being challenged and confirms them with Player A.

If self-adjudication is being used for the game, both players should take the action necessary to protect their tiles from the view of their opponent and make their way to the self-adjudication station. Player B, who is making the challenge, enters the word(s) on the challenge slip into the computer. Player A then presses the appropriate button to make the adjudication, the slip is marked appropriately and both players resume their game.

If self-adjudication is not being used for the game, player B should call for a "runner".

4.10.2 Once the challenger has neutralised the timer, the decision to challenge cannot be altered unless both players agree that the challenge be withdrawn. The challenger should immediately write the word(s) being challenged on the challenge slip. Once the challenge has been confirmed by both players and the challenge has left the table, the word(s) being challenged may not be altered or added to.

4.10.3 It is too late for Player B to challenge Player A's play once Player B has entered the score on the score sheet. The entire score for the move must be written down; it is not necessary to compute or write the cumulative score for this rule to take effect. In cases of dispute it is the responsibility of the Tournament Director to determine whether the entire move score has been written.

4.10.4 Also, if Player A begins to draw replacement tiles prior to pressing the timer, Player B may alert Player A to this, at which point Player A must

[†]Note that ABSP result sheets have spaces for challenges on them.

press the timer, and Player B may challenge.

- 4.10.5 Time allowed for challenges - once Player A has made a play, Player B may take any amount of time to consider or to declare "Challenge". If he is considering challenging, Player B should indicate by saying "hold" to stop Player A from drawing tiles. This is on Player B's time and Player A may not draw replacement tiles until Player B has accepted the move. (See also Appendix - Conduct of Players.)
- 4.10.6 Where more than one word is challenged the adjudicator must only rule the play acceptable or not acceptable, without any indication towards the acceptability or non-acceptability of individual words.
- 4.10.7 If either player is dissatisfied with adjudicator's decision on the word(s) challenged it is permitted to ask for a recheck along with a clarifying note. (Additional words can *not* be added to the challenge slip at this point.) The adjudicator will then recheck the word(s) and inform the players of the decision which will then be final.
- 4.10.8 Other than for a recheck (see 4.10.7) a challenge can only be resubmitted if the original word(s) challenged do not correspond to the word(s) actually on the board.
- 4.10.9 When a challenge has been made, control of the board remains with the challenged player.
- 4.10.10 An incorrect challenge incurs no penalty under standard ABSP rules. [Some tournaments may wish to apply penalty challenges (eg 5 or 10 points per incorrect challenge) but must make this clear at the time of applying for rating approval. Such variations will be considered on a case by case basis.]

4.11 Drawing Tiles

- 4.11.1 The bag must be held at shoulder level when tiles are being drawn from it. The Director should be consulted if this is not possible for any reason.

It is recommended that tiles be drawn from the bag one at a time to ensure picking the correct number.

- 4.11.2 If player A has picked more than the correct number of tiles then the timers should be neutralised whereupon Player B can :-
 - insist that both Player A's retained tiles and replacement tiles are placed face down together on the table whereupon Player B must turn the surplus tile(s) face upwards and return it(them) to the bag.
 - choose simply to return to the bag the surplus tile(s) from those claimed by Player A to be the replacement tiles. Player B is entitled to see the surplus tile(s) if Player A has seen them.

4.12 Racks

Players are required to keep their rack of tiles within their opponent's view at all times during the game, except during a self-adjudication challenge. Note that this is merely to allow the opponent to confirm how many tiles the player has.

5. Correct End of Turn Procedure

- Position tiles on the board, Declare and Exchange tiles, or Declare Pass
- Declare the score for the move (also letter blank(s) represent if applicable)
- Start the opponent's timer
- Record score (for move and cumulative)
- Await opponent's confirmation of the move by their recording the move or cumulative score on the scoresheet
- Replenish rack from letter bag
- Tile-track (if desired)

6. Interrupting the Game

- 6.1 It is not permitted to neutralise the timer other than for the purposes of agreeing the score, calling a challenge, enforcing the rule on extra tiles, or calling the Director.
- 6.2 If either player must leave the board temporarily they must do so with the Director's permission and on their own time. Therefore, if Player A leaves in the middle of the game and it is Player B's turn to play, Player B may make a play and then start Player A's timer. However, Player B should refrain from picking fresh tiles until Player A's return.

7. Counting Remaining Tiles

- 7.1 At any time the number of tiles left in the bag may be counted externally (i.e. by feeling through the bag). If you wish to confirm the number of tiles remaining by counting them in the bag this should be done in your own time and with the opponent's consent. If your opponent does not consent then the tiles can only be counted by a third party. The timer must be neutralised whilst waiting for the third party but restarted when the third party commences counting tiles.

8. Ending the Game

- 8.1 Once the last move of a game has been played, it is the responsibility of the player who makes the last move to neutralise the timer. The opponent must either accept the move and write down the score as normal, or challenge the play. If neither of these are done immediately, the player who played out is entitled to restart his opponent's timer until a decision on whether to challenge has been made.
- 8.2 Other than a natural conclusion, the game is also ended when each player passes thrice in succession. When the game ends in this manner, each player deducts the total value of their tiles from their scores.
Note that exchanging tiles does not count as a pass for the purposes of this rule whereas a disallowed move does.

9. Time Penalties

- 9.1 The game time allocated to a player has been exceeded when:
- for an analogue chess clock, the flag has dropped
- for an electronic count-down timer, the display shows -00:01 or less (-00:01 is when the 'flag' has dropped)
Thus -01:01 to -02:00 is the second minute of excess time.
- for an electronic count-up timer, the display shows 25:01 or greater (25:01 is when the 'flag' has dropped)
Thus 26:01 to 27:00 is the second minute of excess time.
- 9.2 If either player exceeds the specified time limit, that player subtracts ten points for each minute or fraction thereof by which the time limit was exceeded. If the players are unable to decide on the amount of extra time that has elapsed then the Director must be called to the table. The Director's decision will be final and not subject to appeal.
- (See also 3 "Starting the Game" re time penalties for late arrival.)
- 9.3 When a player has commenced a game and then overruns the allotted time by 10 minutes the game shall be forfeited by that player. If, after imposing time penalties, the forfeiting player is ahead, or behind by fewer than 150 points, the forfeiting player is deemed to have lost by 150 points. In all other cases the losing margin shall be the margin when the 10 minutes is reached, after imposing time penalties.
- This is different to a game forfeited by a player for not turning up (see rule 3).

10. Result Sheets

- 10.1 Once the scores have been checked and the sheet to be used for recording the result signed by the losing player, no changes can be made to it, unless both players agree that a mistake has been made prior to handing in the scoresheet.
- 10.2 When ABSP result sheets are used, players must ensure that the winner's and loser's names, player codes, and spread are correctly entered, and the loser signs his name. It is the responsibility of the winner to ensure that the result sheet is handed in before he leaves the playing area. No changes may be made to the result sheet once the subsequent round has been played without the express permission of the Tournament Director.

Game Rules – Appendix 1 – Rules for Visually Impaired Players

The specific game rules which needed to be noted are as follows:

ABSP Tournament Rule 2.3 states that smooth tiles must be used at all times and that standard (i.e. non-smooth) tiles are only to be used 'in extremis'. Tiles are to be drawn from an opaque cloth bag. ABSP Tournament Rule 2.4 states that it is the responsibility of both players to agree the timer device is set to the specified time limit, and that the timers are working correctly. ABSP Tournament Rule 4.9.1 states that both players must keep score throughout the game. ABSP Tournament Rule 4.10.1 states that if a player wishes to challenge a play then they must write the word on the slip of paper provided.

ABSP have consulted with the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) and the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB). Based on their advice we have concluded that the following amendments to the ABSP Tournament Rules should be allowed in games involving visually impaired players:

- 1) A Braille Scrabble board and Braille tiles can be used.
- 2) If a Braille game clock is not available, a visually impaired player is entitled to ask his/her opponent how much time remains on either side of the game clock.
- 3) The tiles will be placed 'face down' in a box lid and both players will draw from this pool.
- 4) If either player wishes to use their turn to exchange tiles the Tournament Director will perform this action, to avoid the possibility of either player replacing tiles in the box lid and thus knowing their location.
- 5) Either player can write the challenged words on the slip of paper provided, regardless of who played the word. The word(s) written on the slip should then be read to the visually impaired player for confirmation that they correspond with the word(s) on the board.

The RNIB has confirmed to us in writing that the above special measures should allow any visually impaired player to compete equally and that no further modifications to the ABSP Tournament Rules should be necessary.

After learning that a visually impaired player in New Zealand is a regular tournament competitor the ABSP contacted the New Zealand Association of Scrabble Players (NZASP) for advice on what special measures are taken in this player's games. Based on their advice the ABSP has also agreed to amend its Tournament Rules further as follows:

6) Visually impaired players are not required to keep score throughout the game.

7) Visually impaired players are not required to complete the results slip at the end of the game, provided that the score is agreed verbally. As with any other issue during the tournament, in the event of a dispute the Tournament Director will be happy to adjudicate.

Please note that (6) and (7) above are adjustments which go beyond what the RNIB have said they expect us to make but which we have agreed to in order to make tournament Scrabble play as accessible as possible to visually impaired players. The RNIB advised us that a visually impaired player should be able to keep score using a hand-held PC or palmtop device. There is a tournament player in North America who keeps score using her own Braille typewriter. Please note that all of the amendments listed above are optionally available to visually impaired players but should they wish to disregard any of them with intention of competing equally with other players then they should not hesitate to do so.

In every respect apart from (1) to (7) inclusive listed above, all visually impaired players are bound by standard ABSP Tournament Rules in the same manner as any other player. It is imperative that this is understood by all visually impaired players, their opponents and the Tournament Director of any tournament they should choose to enter.

Entry into any tournament is always subject to the individual decision of the tournament organiser who maintains the right to refuse entry to their event for any reason.

Section 2. CONDUCT OF PLAYERS

It is impossible to offer a comprehensive list of players' actions that constitute a violation of the proper manner and etiquette with which a game is played. However, there are actions which are considered to be unacceptable, some of which are outlined below. Tournament Directors should report any matters arising from breaches of etiquette described in these appendices to the Committee. Repeated infringements could lead to disciplinary action.

This section has been expanded with some material from the Australian Scrabble Players Association's etiquette guidelines

1. Overall Conduct

Participants should maintain ordinary standards of politeness to each other during the full course of the tournament. Not only does this encompass the actual games themselves, but also at refreshment and other breaks.

Particularly at residential events, participants should be aware that noise does travel easily and that some people's nocturnal habits include sleeping.

2. Unnecessary Conversation

Do not talk or rattle tiles during pre-game announcements. Players should listen to and where appropriate act upon those announcements.

Keep any comments, unnecessary conversation or other noises to a minimum during a game, to reduce distractions not only to your opponent, but also to surrounding players. Avoid saying aloud the word that you are playing but do say aloud what any blank represents, or better still also write down the letter on the results sheet to avoid dispute later. Avoid "stream of consciousness" talk about your decision-making.

Especially refrain from moaning or commenting during the game about your tiles or your luck as such comments can annoy or mislead.

It is advisable to confirm cumulative scores at intervals during the game, but it should be done on your own time and not over-frequently, because it can break the opponent's train of thought.

Players must resist the temptation to look at their neighbour's racks. Staring can telegraph that the rack is interesting.

If observing a game, leave a comfortable distance around the players, stay absolutely silent, make absolutely no indication of your opinion of a player's rack or the board, do not look up words. Call the TD if anyone is disturbing your game. The TD may modify or put a halt to observation if necessary.

3. Announcing a Play

It is not acceptable to simply announce, "I think I'll try this word..." and show your opponent your rack. Tiles must be laid on the board and the score announced as per the Games Rules.

It is not acceptable during a game to ask your opponent if a word is allowable (yours or theirs), or to ask what a word means.

It is inadvisable to announce the number of tiles left in the bag when you count or draw tiles, and players are not required to indicate to the opponent when the bag is empty.

4. Turning the Board

Turning the board round following a play is not considered an essential part of the turn. It is the responsibility of the player whose turn it is next to turn the board round if so desired.

5. Challenge

If Player B is considering whether to challenge Player A then decides not to challenge (by recording Player A's score) then Player B should inform Player A of the decision not to challenge.

It is unethical to challenge 'everyday' words with the sole aim of gaining time while the challenge is being adjudicated.

On returning from a self-adjudicated challenge, it is polite to allow the challenger some time to replace his/her tiles back on his/her rack before restarting the timer.

6. Smoking

If smoking is permitted at a tournament then normal etiquette and courtesy should be exercised by the smoker. Note that smoking is not allowed in the playing or dining areas at ABSP-organised tournaments.

7. **When Games are Finished**

When a game is over you may want to discuss aspects of that game with your opponent or with others before you clear the board. However, after handing your result sheet in, your first concern should be for nearby players who are still playing. It is unacceptable to disrupt their game with your conversation.

At the end of each game, clear the table of debris – challenge slips, half-empty cups, own equipment – so that it is ready for the next users. Return any equipment (e.g. clocks) that you have borrowed.

8. **Tile-Tracking**

Tile-tracking for your own move must be done only after drawing fresh tiles so as not to introduce a situation which delays your opponent from making a play. (See 5 "Correct End of Turn Procedure" with respect to tile-tracking.)

9. **Keeping the timer running at the end of a game**

If the timer is left running at the end of a game, it is unethical for either player to take advantage of this by delaying verification of the final score in any way in order to earn penalty points from an unwary opponent.

10. **Mobile Phones/Pagers**

No use of mobile phones (receiving or sending) or pagers is acceptable in the playing area while any game is still in progress. Phones left in coats/bags etc should be switched off to prevent possible disruption. Permission to receive emergency calls may be obtained from the TD. In such circumstances, silent/vibrating mode should be utilised if the device supports such a feature.

Care should also be taken to ensure that other audible devices, alarm clocks, radios etc stored in bags are switched OFF so that they do not trigger during the course of a game.

11. **Use Of Equipment**

Play your tiles the right way up, with the number at the bottom (e.g. N, I, O). Place tiles properly on the squares.

Respect the equipment. Do not mark tiles or boards with pen/pencil when adding up a move's score.

Place the tile bag within comfortable reach of both players.

Allow plenty of room to rotate the board and take care not to dislodge the other player's tiles. Do not push the board towards your opponent to gain extra space.

Do not obstruct the opponent's view of the board or clock with your hands, rack, score sheets, tile bag etc.

Be aware that over the course of time, tile bags, like other cloth items, can get to a condition where their odour, particularly in a warm playing environment, becomes unpleasant. Please launder them regularly.