

Rules for Scrabble® House

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1 Equipment Needed

- Two Scrabble® boards.
- Two full sets of different color tiles (for example, the red tiles packaged with Scrabble® Deluxe, and the white tiles packaged with standard Scrabble®.)
- Two chess clocks
- Four people

2 The Set-Up

The four players are divided into two teams. Players, boards, and clocks are arranged as in Fig. 1. The boards may be arranged in any orientation. Each player plays only on the board in front of them. A bag of tiles of one color only rests near each board, in easy reach of both players.

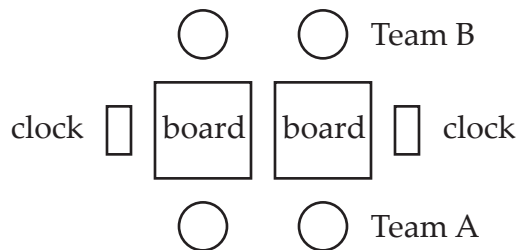


Figure 1: Arrangement of players, boards, and clocks.

3 The Goal

Each player's goal is to build a continuous string of words from their "home row" (the row of tiles nearest them) to their opponent's home row. This wins the game.

4 The Rules

1. Each player draws one tile to determine who plays first, according to Scrabble® rules. The player with the alphabetically lowest tile, and the player diagonally across from him or her, will play first.
2. Each player starts with a rack of seven tiles drawn randomly, as in Scrabble®. Throughout the game, all tiles, except those in the bag, are placed on the table, face-up, in view of all players.

3. Play begins when the opponents of those who will play first simultaneously activate the chess clocks.
4. Each play is consistent with the rules of Scrabble®. Tile points and special squares on the board (e.g. double-word-score) have no role in Scrabble®House. Letters are placed right side up with respect to the player playing them. Their opponent therefore sees upside-down letters and backwards words. Each player must play words that are legal when viewed by their *own* orientation.
5. A player may build a word from any square on their home row. Each player's first play *must* touch their own home row, but any future play may also. A player may also build off of words he or she has already built. When a player has completed his or her words, he or she speaks the words aloud for all players to hear.
6. When a player builds a word that touches one of their opponent's words either by
 - using one of the letters in their opponent's word in their play, and/or
 - building a new, legal word (in their own orientation) off an opponent's existing word,

then they may "explode" one or more of their opponent's words. An explosion proceeds as follows:

- (a) All tiles used for any *new* words in the play, including tiles previously placed by the opponent, are placed or rotated so that they are right-side-up with respect to the player.
- (b) Once tiles from new words have been rotated, any tile string with *mixed* tiles, (that is, tiles in both orientations) is partially removed from the board by the player and given to the player's partner. The letters of the string which are right-side-up *and* spell legal words (from the player's point of view) are kept on the board.
- (c) The board is now examined for existing tile-strings of the opponent that no longer make legal words (from the opponent's point of view) due to removal in the previous step. If a tile string is not a legal word, the entire string is removed, even if a subset of it is a word. Again, the player causing the explosion removes these tiles and gives them to their partner.
- (d) Step 6c is repeated until all remaining words are legal. In this way, a single explosion can take out several words.

This explosion algorithm is to be done on the time of the player causing it to happen. However, this player must give his or her opponent opportunity to see the play before the tiles are removed, to check for mistakes.

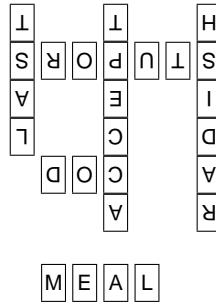
7. After tiles are played and explosions performed, the player toggles the clock. They may then draw more tiles so that they again have seven letters of their own color. This may be done promptly while their opponent plays. If they have been passed additional tiles of the other board's color by their partner, those tiles do *not* count as part of their seven-letter rack; they are "bonus tiles" which can allow a player to have many more than seven letters available at a time. However, if their partner passes them tiles of their *own* board's color (tiles which have been exploded once, passed to the other board, exploded again, and passed back), the player must then refrain from drawing more tiles until they are back down to below seven tiles of their own color.

8. The game is won either by completing a continuous string of words touching both home rows, or by the opponent running out of time.

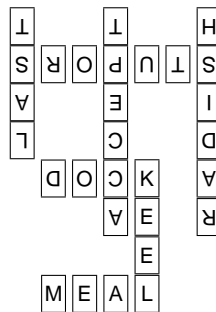
5 Example Explosion

The following example contains most of the subtleties of play it is possible to encounter during an explosion. Real examples are infrequently this complicated.

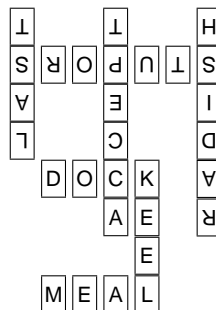
Suppose you are faced with the following board.



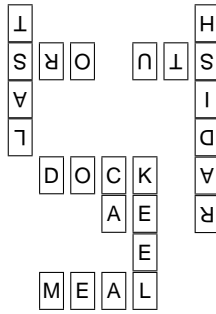
You see the opportunity to explode by extending the string **D O C** with a **K** you have in your rack to spell "dock". It is tempting to read the starting word according to how your opponent sees (and played it), namely "cod," but words must be read from your own orientation, so it begins as "doc." You make the following play:



After placing the letters, you recite "dock," "keel," and "ae," as these are the new words you have made. You give your opponent a chance to see what is about to happen. The first step is to rotate all the letters of the new words you have made so that they face you:

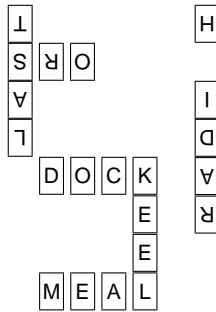


Now, the word "accept" is *mixed*, and therefore the upside-down tiles, **C E** **d T** are removed and given to your partner, leaving:



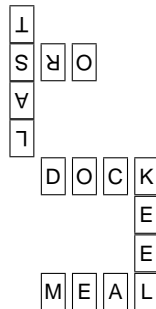
Our first subtlety is now apparent: our algorithm has generated the illegal tile-string $\boxed{C} \boxed{A}$. This is a leftover from a word previously legal to the *opponent*. If “ca” were a legal word, it would be left on the board, as it is right-side-up (a result of each tile being included in the new words “dock” and “ae.”) Since it is not legal, the part of it in line with the word just exploded, the \boxed{A} , should be removed.

Also left is the dangling string $\boxed{U} \boxed{T} \boxed{S}$. The word “uts” is in fact Scrabble[®]-legal; however, this upside-down string must be evaluated from your opponent’s point-of-view, in which case it says $\boxed{S} \boxed{T} \boxed{U}$. This does *not* spell a Scrabble[®]-legal word. You therefore remove these tiles and give them to your partner, leaving:

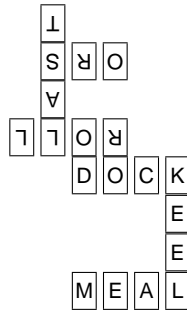


A dangling \boxed{H} is certainly not a legal word, and is therefore removed. The string $\boxed{R} \boxed{A} \boxed{D} \boxed{I}$ is also left behind. It contains a Scrabble[®]-legal word, “rad,” but as explosions are performed string-by-string, the whole string must be evaluated and correspondingly removed or kept. In this case, “radi” is *not* a legal word and so the entire string is removed.

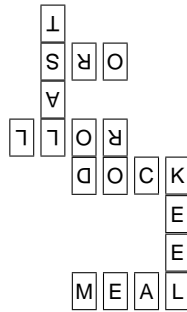
Finally, since “ors” is Scrabble[®]-legal, it remains on the board, and the explosion is complete.



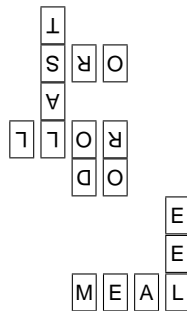
This play has gained substantial ground, but such ground is seldom lasting. The opponent regains a little ground with the following play:



Your opponent recites “roll,” “or,” and “do.” He then inverts the letters from these new words,



and explodes the mixed word “dock:”



Note that if “od” were illegal (like “ca”), then the D O (formerly of “dock”) would also be removed! However, “od” is legal so it stays.

“Eel” is a legal word, and therefore your opponent’s explosion is over, and it is again your turn.

6 Additional Info

- We used 10 minutes per person on the clock, and found that roughly 50% of the games were won by someone actually winning, and 50% were won by someone running out of time. This may need to be adjusted as we get better at the game.
- Defensive strategy is very important. If your opponent is encroaching on your territory, build a “blocking” word that will be very hard for them to build off of. You can always place a word in your home row, making it that much more difficult for them to complete their goal.
- Make sure that your plays make sense when viewed in your own orientation, especially when using your opponent’s tiles (which are upside-down, to you). It’s tempting to read words upside-down when the tiles are upside-down, but every play you make must be legal when viewed by you (once the tiles are flipped over, of course).

- Words that can have some letters removed and still be legal are very powerful, as they stop an explosion from doing too much damage.
- If an explosion removes the “base” of a word chain (the connection to the home row), and leaves some words dangling, the player may still make plays adding to them. However, the player would have to restore the connection to the home row in order to win (i.e. touching the opponent’s home row with a word chain does not constitute a victory if the chain has no connection to the player’s own home row).
- Generally this is a friendly game with mutual consent for words played. When a word’s legality is challenged and no agreement is made by the players, the game is over. The victor is the party who is correct about the legality of the word, according to the Official Scrabble® Dictionary.
- The symbol for wanting to play Scrabble® House is simply to scrabble (“To scrape or grope about frenetically with the hands”), followed by the usual “house” symbol from bughouse. Those who do not know this symbol may have trouble attracting other players.