

Telegram

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Designed by Lucas Connors

The year is 1869. It's your first day as a telegraph operator and this job is not at all what you expected. Learning Morse code was difficult enough, but the hours are long and it's easy to get confused with all of the clicking you can hear from other operators' telegraphs. You may just have to go back and review the paper tape...

Overview

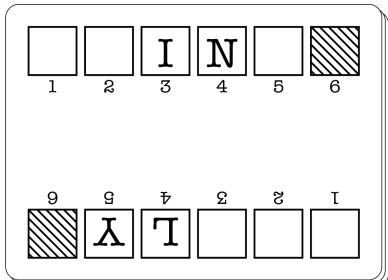
Telegram is a flip-and-write spelling game where players will combine word fragments with letters over the course of the game in order to transcribe the most valuable telegram.

Using different letters provides different perks, so players will have to respond tactically and stretch their vocabulary skills to produce the best result for their clients.

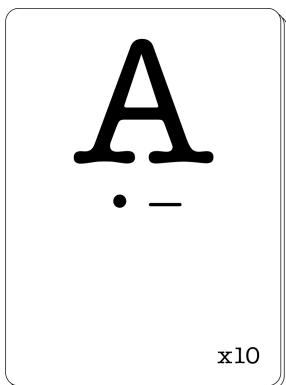
The game is played over a series of rounds in which all players perform actions simultaneously based on the offering provided by the Morse code from the wire and record from the paper tape.

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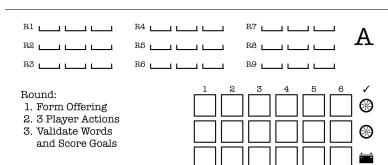
Components



30 word fragment cards



60 letter cards



100 player sheets

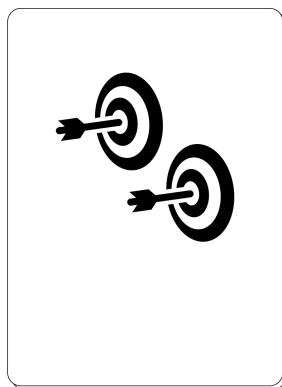
Mixed Messages

Complete one 4-letter word, one 5-letter word, and one 6-letter word.

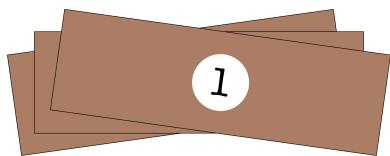
e.g. TREE / WEIGH / SENIOR



15 goal cards



3 solo cards



3 number tiles

Rulebook

Setup

Shuffle the word fragment deck thoroughly, taking care to both flip and rotate cards as part of the shuffle (word fragment cards are double-sided and can be oriented in two directions). Place the word fragment deck in the center of the table. Place the tokens with the numbers 1, 2, and 3 in a row next to the word fragment deck for the offering.

1



You can use the app instead of the word fragment deck and number tiles for even more replayability. The app is available at telegram.revolutiontech.ca.

2

Shuffle the letter deck thoroughly, taking care to flip (but not rotate) cards as part of the shuffle (letter cards are also double-sided). Place the letter deck below the word fragment deck.



If setting up for a solo game, note that there are additional setup steps (see Solo Mode).

3

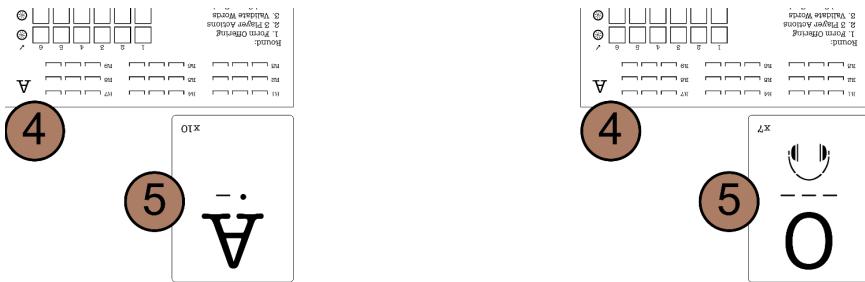
Fetch three random goal cards: one , one , and one . Place the goal cards faceup (side with two point values) in a row above the offering.

4

Each player also needs a player sheet and something to write with. For a basic game, all players should use the A side of the sheet (recommended for new players).

5

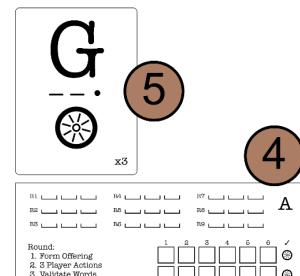
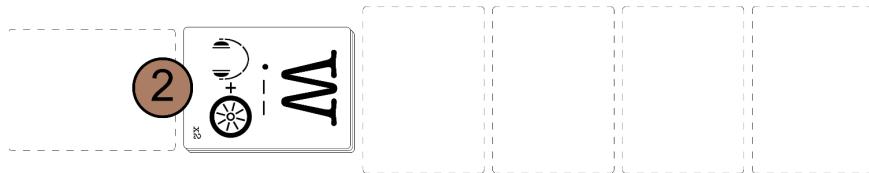
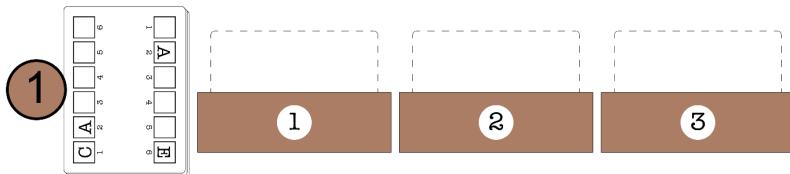
Draw and deal one letter card from the bottom of the deck to each player. Each player chooses one side of the card to place in front of them, starting their reserve.



Mixed Message
Complete one 4-letter word, one 5-letter word, and one 6-letter word.
eg. TIGER / WEIGH / SENIOR

Quick Clicks
Complete two words of any length with at least 5 vowels each.
eg. AXIOM / EAGLE
Y is never considered a vowel.

Zoological Intelligence
Complete a word of any length that is an animal.
eg. HONEY



Setup of a 4-player game

Objective

Earn the most points before the game ends (see Game End).

Round

Form Offering

At the start of the round, follow these two steps to form the offering for this round:

1. Reveal 3 new word fragments.

Each word fragment card should be placed under one of the number tiles in a random orientation so that only one of the word fragments on the card is showing.

2. Reveal 4 new letters.

When drawing letters, take care to use the side opposite to what was visible at the top of the deck. If that letter was already drawn this round, flip the card to the other side. If that letter has also been drawn already this round, discard the card and draw the next card. All letters in the offering should be unique. If the letter deck ever runs out, shuffle the discard pile into a new deck.

Everything drawn in the offering is available to all players.

Perform Actions

All players perform actions simultaneously. Each player can perform up to 3 primary actions during the round, tracking each of these actions in the round track on their sheet. Players may also perform any number of free actions (see Player Actions). Players may perform the same action multiple times.

There are two primary actions a player can take:

- Start a new word
- Insert a letter into a word

There are three free actions a player can take:

- Progress the ★ section
- Use a reward
- Use a reserve letter

End of Round

At the end of the round, follow these three steps to prepare for the next round:

1. Players validate any words they have completed in their telegram this round with other players (in any order).

For a word to be considered completed, a player must fill in all of the blank spaces. For a word to be considered valid, the row must spell a real word with what has been filled in and the word must be different from all other words the player has already spelled in this game. Consult an agreed-upon reference (eg. Scrabble dictionary) to resolve conflicts over whether something is a word or not.

If the word is invalid, the player should scratch out the entire row as a reminder that the invalid word will score negative points at the end of the game (see Scoring).

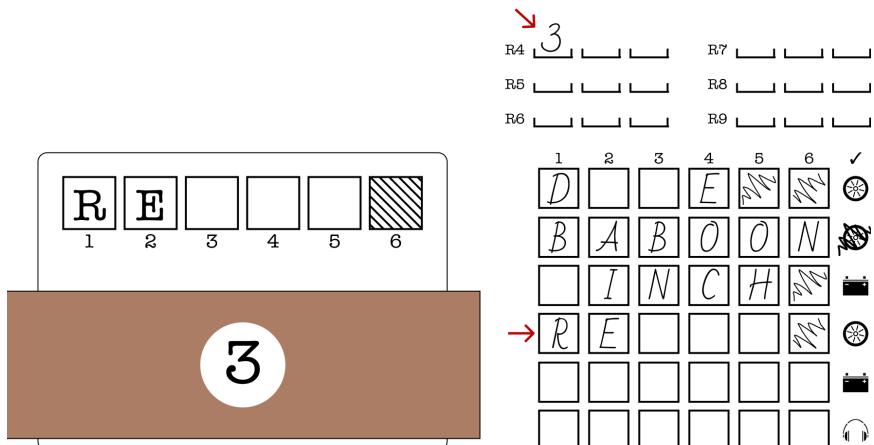
2. Players score goal cards (see Goals).
3. Discard the word fragments and letters in the offering.

Players may also review each others' sheets during this time.

Player Actions

Start Word

For a primary action, a player can start a new word by selecting one of the word fragments from the offering. First, the player writes the number under the word fragment into the active action of their round track. Then, the player copies the word fragment onto their player sheet in the next empty row of the grid. When a word fragment is copied into a row, players should take care to copy the letters in the exact spots they appear and scratch out any unused cells as it appears on the card. This action can only be taken when a player has two or fewer words in progress as players may only have up to three words in progress at a time.

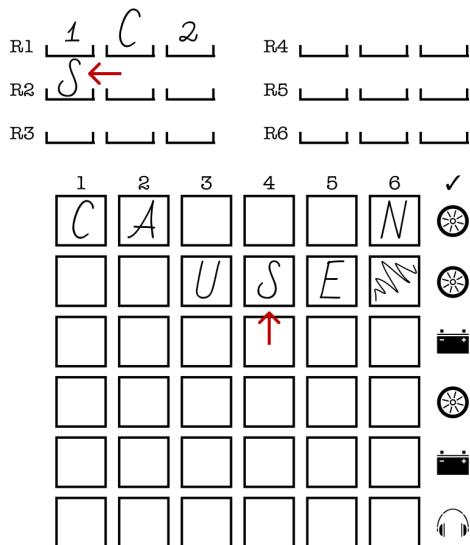
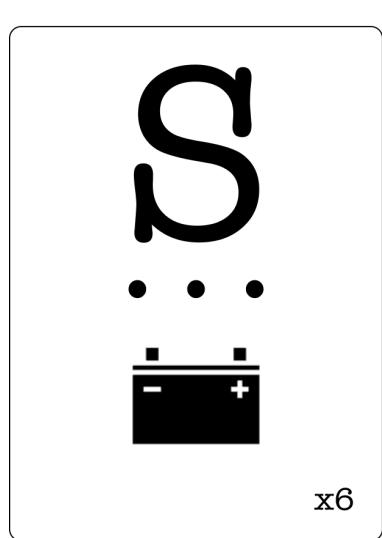


Example: On the first action of the fourth round, Katrina decides to start one of the word fragments from the offering. She writes the number 3 into the round tracker and copies the word fragment exactly into the next available row. She cannot take this action again until she finishes one of the three words she has in progress.

Insert Letter

For a primary action, a player can insert a letter into a word in progress by selecting one of the letters from the offering. First, the player writes the letter into the active action of their round track. Then, that player copies the letter onto their player sheet into a non-empty row. Each letter may contain bonuses on it as well. For each bonus, the player immediately progresses in the corresponding sections (see Bonus Sections). A player may choose to insert the same letter multiple times in a round for separate actions.

If a player completes a word during the round, the player may mark the corresponding bonus to the right of the word to use it.

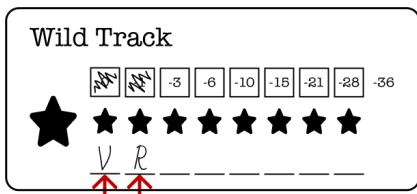


Example: Nicolai decides to insert an S from the offering for his first action of the second round. He writes the S into the round tracker and writes the letter into a word he figures could eventually be either CAUSE or MOUSE. He then progresses the  section (not pictured).



Progress Wild Section

The Wild (★) section is a special track that can be progressed as a free action in order to insert any letter into any word in progress. This benefit comes at the cost of points however, as the leftmost visible value represents a point penalty at the end of the game.



Example: Nicolai was hoping for “V” and “R” to be drawn in the offering this round, but no such luck. He wants to finish the word CAVERN this round, so he advances the ★ track twice to gain those two letters. This move will cost him 3 points at the end of the game, but on the other hand he has all three of his actions for the round still available.

Use Reward

During the game, players can earn , , or rewards from the section (see Battery Section). These can be used as a free action to insert a letter into one of the player’s words. A can be used as a vowel (A, E, I, O, or U). A can be used as a common consonant (L, N, R, S, or T), and a can be used as any letter.

Use Reserve Letter

Players have a reserve of letters exclusive to them in their player area. Each player starts the game with 1 letter in their reserve (see Setup).

Letters in a player's reserve can be discarded at any time to insert the letter into a word as a free action (including using any bonuses on that letter).

When adding a letter to the player's reserve during the game, draw the bottom card of the letter deck, choosing one side to keep face-up. Once the player has decided which letter to keep, the card cannot be flipped later in the game.

Bonus Sections

Players can earn  ,  , and  bonuses to progress bonus sections on their player sheet. Bonuses are earned primarily from certain letter cards as well as by completing words in the player's telegram.

All sections in the basic game are tracks that progress from left to right. When progressing a track, scratch out the leftmost empty space.



Headpiece Section

The Headpiece () section has three rows of tracks, one for each word length in the game. The leftmost visible value in these tracks represent the number of points that will be awarded for each valid word completed at the end of the game. When progressing the  section, choose any of the rows to advance, increasing the point value of the corresponding word length.

4-letters		3	4	4	5	5	6				
5-letters	5	5	6	6	7	7	8	9	10		
6-letters					9	9	10	11	12	13	14

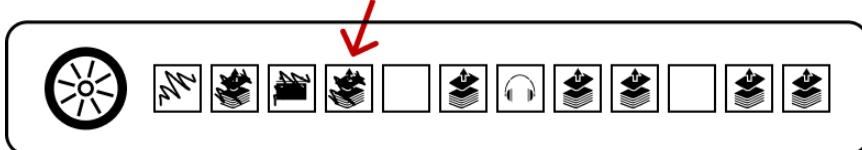


Example: Jennifer earns a bonus by inserting the letter “O” from the offering. Even though she decided to write the O into a 5-letter word, she decides to use the bonus to increase the point values of 6-letter words instead, since she has more 6-letter words than anything else. Jennifer has advanced the 6-letter row four times now (including this time), so now her 6-letter words are worth 9 points each.



Wheel Section

The Wheel () section provides reserve rewards. When scratching out a space, the player adds another letter to their reserve (see Use Reserve Letter). The and rewards allow players to progress the corresponding sections.



Example: Chris marks the fourth space on the track, which earns him a reward. He draws the bottom card of the deck, which has an “H” on one side and an “N” on the other. He decides to keep the “H” side face up in front of himself. Chris can discard the “H” on this round or any future round to insert it as a free action.



Battery Section

The Battery () section provides common letters and wilds.

When scratching out a space with a , , or , circle the corresponding reward above the sections. The and rewards allow players to progress the corresponding sections. In the basic game, the section is a track that progresses from left to right, although it works a bit differently in the advanced game (see Advanced Game).



Example: Katrina marks the third space on the track, which earns her a reward.

In the age of the telegraph, telegraph companies charged for telegrams by the word. To improve efficiency and reduce costs, telegraph operators would write telegrams in abbreviated messages known as “telegram style” or “telegraphese”. The Adams Cable Codex was a telegram style that used English words as shorthand for full expressions (eg. “Baker” → “Will send draft (or check) by first post.”).

Goals

Your client has specific expectations for the message you are transcribing. These are represented by the Goal cards, which provide players with an objective such as completing a certain number of words of a particular length.

The first player(s) to complete a goal score the higher value visible on the card (noting this in the bottom left of their player sheet). The goal card should then be flipped to the facedown side for future rounds. Any other player that completes the goal in a future round scores the lower point value.

A goal may not be completed by the same player multiple times.

Example: Katrina spelled the word BABOON this round, so she can claim the goal Zoological Intelligence at the end of the round. Nicolai spelled the word MOUSE on the same round, so both Katrina and Nicolai will enter a  7 into the box of the scoring section on their player sheets. The goal card is flipped over to remind other players that if they spell an animal in a future round, they are only eligible to earn 4 points instead of 7.

Game End

At the end of a round, if any player has fewer than 3 empty rows remaining in their word grid, this will trigger the end of the game.

Players will play one final round before scoring.

If all players still have 3 or more empty rows remaining at the end of the 8th round, this will also trigger the end of the game as the game can never exceed 9 rounds.

Scoring

To determine your score, first count up all of the points earned from completed words. Count the number of valid 4-letter words you've completed and multiply the result by the number in the 4-letter row in the  section. Do the same for your 5-letter words and 6-letter words.

Count the number of invalid words. Each one is worth -5 points. Incomplete words are only considered invalid if a player cannot propose any valid word that the incomplete word could eventually become with additional hypothetical wilds.

Additionally, subtract points for wilds used from the  section and add any points obtained from completing goals during the game.

1	2	3	4	5	6	✓
C	A	V	E	R	N	✗
M	O	U	S	E	M	✗
L	E	A	N	W	W	✗
R	A	X	W	W	W	✗
T	R	I	L	L	W	✗
C	A	S	T	W	W	✗
			D	E		✗
S	H	O	N	E	W	✗
W	A	C	K	Y	W	✗

4
—
7
2 x 3 = 6
4 x 10 = 40
1 x 7 = 7
1 x -5 = -5
★ -3
Total 56

4-letters	3	4	5	5	6
5-letters	3	4	5	6	7
6-letters	7	7	8	8	9

Wild Track



Example: Nicolai finished two 4-letter words and each of his 4-letter words are worth 3 points each, so Nicolai scores 6 points for 4-letter words. Since Nicolai spent most of his headphones bonuses on improving his points of 5-letter words, Nicolai earns 10 points per 5-letter word! Fortunately he has four of them, so he'll earn 40 points from 5-letter words. This is where most of his points will come from. Nicolai also scores 7 points for a 6-letter word. As far as incomplete words go, Nicolai has two. For the first one starting with RAX, Nicolai can't come up with any possible word that could become so he scratches it out and takes a -5 point penalty. The other incomplete word he just started could have become SPADES or many other possible words with additional rounds so this incomplete word won't count against him. Nicolai adds the 11 points earned from goals and subtracts the 3 points from the ★ track to get a total of 56 points.

Solo Mode

To play solo, first shuffle the letter deck thoroughly as described in the setup (see Setup). Then, split the letter deck into three piles of roughly equal size. Shuffle the solo cards into the middle pile (without flipping as you shuffle this time). To form the letter deck for the solo game, stack the piles together ensuring that the middle pile is stacked between the other two piles. Finally, draw and discard the top four cards of the letter deck. Proceed with the remaining setup as normal.

When drawing letters for the round, if any solo cards are drawn, set them aside faceup and draw additional letter cards to replace them. At the end of the round after scoring goals, identify any set aside solo cards and flip the corresponding goal to the claimed side (if it is not claimed already). You will not have access to the higher point value for this goal if you haven't already claimed it.

The goal of the solo mode is to score as many points as possible. A player can evaluate their final score using the following table:

Points	Level
>120	Legendary
100-120	Genius
80-99	First-class
60-79	Model employee
40-59	Part-time operator
25-39	Trainee
<25	Poor listener

Advanced Game

When playing an advanced game, all players should use the B side of the player sheet. The advanced game introduces two major changes to the basic game.

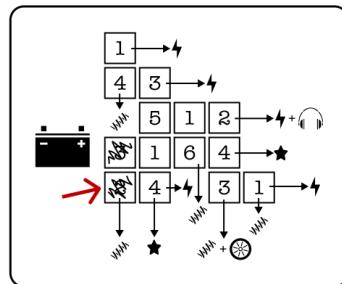
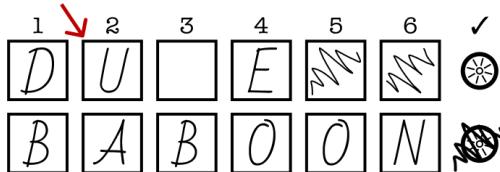
Player Action: Start Word

In the advanced game, players are not required to start words from top to bottom. Instead, when taking the Start Word action, players may copy the word fragment onto their player sheet in *any* empty row of the grid. The game still ends when a player has two or fewer empty rows in their word grid at the end of a round, but these empty rows could be anywhere.



Bonus Section: Battery

In the advanced game, the section consists of rows and columns of numbers. When a bonus is earned from inserting a letter, mark off a space with a number corresponding to the position the letter was entered into in the main word grid. When the bonus is earned elsewhere, any space of the player's choice can be marked. Completing rows and columns in this section provides rewards. The rewards function the same as in the basic game.



Example: Katrina inserts a "U" into the 2nd position of one of her words.

Since the "U" provides a bonus she marks a space with the number 2 in it and completes a column, earning her a reward.

Credits

Game Design: Lucas Connors

Special Thanks: Katrina Connors, all of the great folks in the Golden Gate Gamemakers community

Playtesters: Aaron Daar, ACrow, Adam Johnson, Albert Julius Liu, Alex K, Alexander Brady, Aly, Ananda Guneratne, Andrew DiLullo, Andy Rausch, Angus, Apollo, Azlen Elza, Brian Henk, Brian Larson, Brook Elf Nichols, Charles Wallace, Chaz, Chris Ekanha, Chris Hall, Colby Price, Colin, David Vuong, Dirk Johnson, Duckie, Ely, Eric, Erik Wilson, Floyd McWilliams, Gabi Gomez, Hyrum Mack, Jacob, Jayant, Jennifer A, Jim McCollum, Jimmeé Greco, Joe 'Fritz' Paul, John Brieger, John MacLaughlin, Johnny Chin, Julene Johnson, Justin Kominar, Karsten Kim, Katrina Connors, Kendall M., Leland, Lil Turner, Lorelei Sorrentino, Marion Agranovsky, Mark Schwab, Mark Schynert, Matthew Soloman, Max, Maxim Gurevich, Michael Grieb, MMF, Nathan Y., Nicholas, Nick Jackson, Nick Watson, Nicolai Gould, Nolan L, Olena, Pico Paco, Rebecca Wang, Rich O, Robert, Sam Bushell, Shane Carr, Ted Schaller, Tiffany Pham, Ting Wei-Ting Chow, Velgus, Will S, Yun, Zachary, Zachary Sockol, and many others that prefer to remain anonymous

Letter Frequencies

A	x10	•—	N		x7	—•	
B	+	x3	—•••	O		x7	———
C		x5	—•—•	P		x4	•——•
D		x5	—••	Q		x0	——•—
E		x14	•	R		x10	•—•
F	+	x2	••—•	S		x6	•••
G		x3	——•	T		x7	—
H		x3	••••	U		x5	••—
I		x7	••	V	+	x1	•••—
J	+	x1	•———	W	+	x2	•—•
K	+	x2	—•—	X	+	x1	—••—
L		x7	•—••	Y		x3	—•——
M		x4	——	Z	+	x1	——••