

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

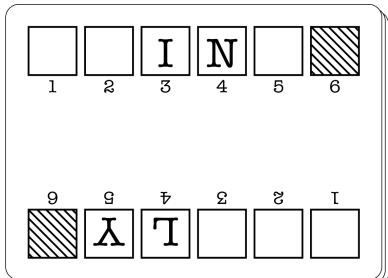
Telegram is a flip-and-write spelling game. Players will combine word fragments with letters over the course of the game in order to transcribe the most expensive telegram.

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

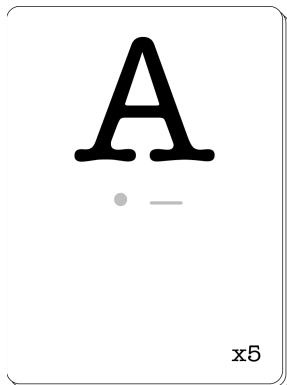
The game is played over a series of rounds in which all players perform actions simultaneously based on the offering provided by the Morse code from the wire and record from the paper tape.

Overview	2
Components	3
Setup	4
Objective	6
Round Overview	6
Offering	6
Actions	7
Bonus Sections	10
Cleanup	13
Goals	14
Transmissions	15
Game End	16
Scoring	16
Solo Mode	18
Credits	19
Letter Frequencies	20

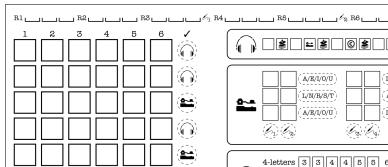
Components



27 word fragment cards



30 letter cards



100 player sheets

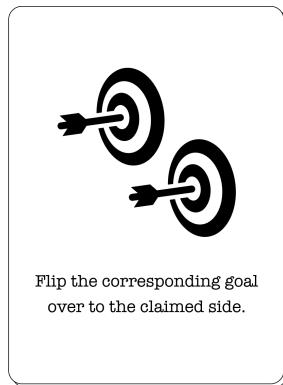
Mixed Messages

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

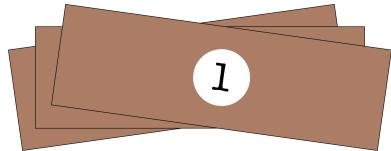
e.g. TREE / WEIGH / SENIOR



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, complete additional setup steps before continuing (see Solo Mode).

3

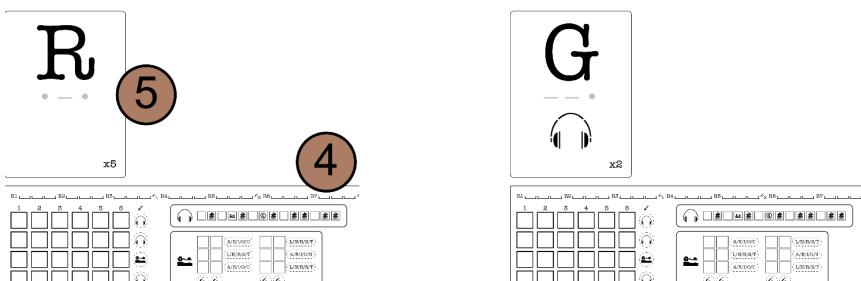
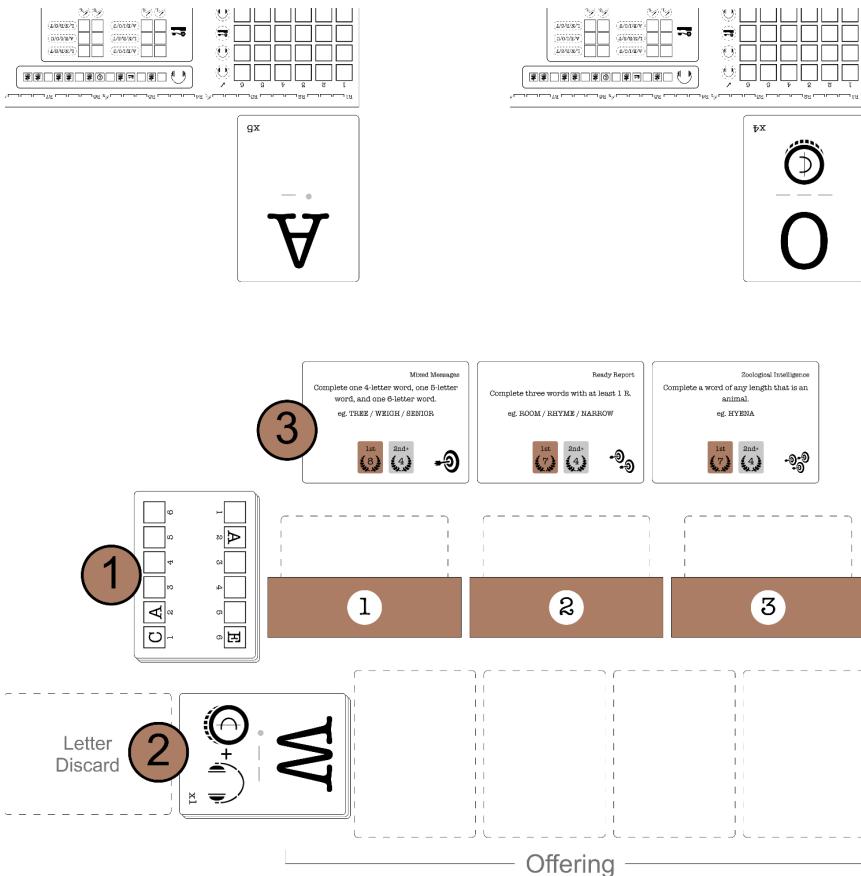
Fetch three random goal cards: one , one and one . Place the goal cards faceup (side with two point values) in a row above the offering.

4

Give each player a player sheet and something to write with.

5

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



Setup of a 4-player game

Objective

Transcribe the most expensive telegram by completing and transmitting words, as well as increasing the price per word.

Round Overview

Each round is played over three phases:

1. Offering
2. Actions
3. Cleanup

Offering

At the start of each round, follow these three steps:

1. Check if final round (see Game End).
2. 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.

3. 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. This way, all letters in the offering will be unique. When the letter deck is empty, shuffle the discard pile into a new deck.

Everything drawn in the offering is available to all players.

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. Players may perform the same action type multiple times.

There are two primary action types a player can take:

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

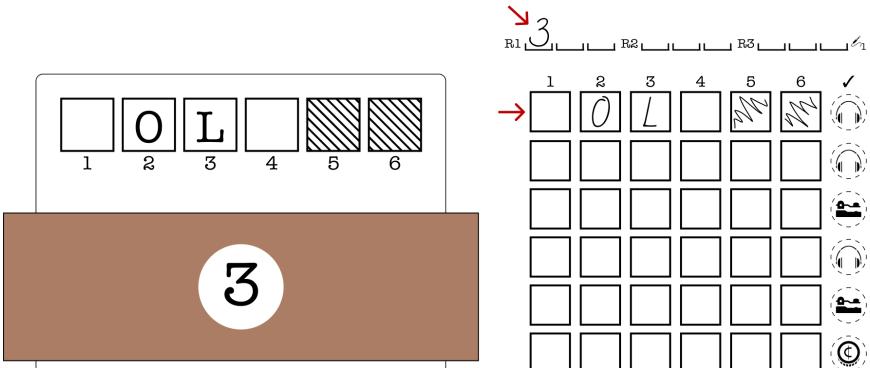
There are three free action types a player can take:

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

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 numbered spots they appear and scratch out any unused cells as it appears on the card.

A player may choose the same word fragment multiple times in a round for separate actions.

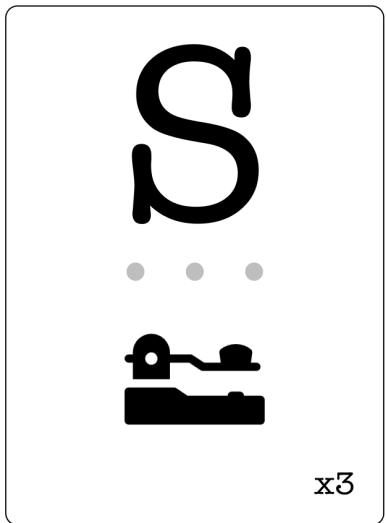


Example: As her initial action, Katrina decides to take the third word fragment from the offering. She writes the number 3 into the first space of her round tracker and copies the word fragment exactly into the top row of her telegram.

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.



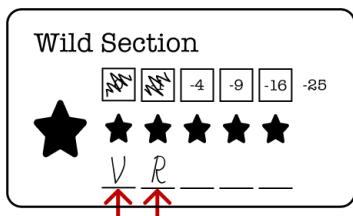
R1 1 C R2 2 S ← R3

1	2	3	4	5	6	✓
C	A				N	
		U	S	E		

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 a 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 4 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 Telegraph Reward

During the game, players can earn specific letter rewards from the  section (see  Telegraph Section). These can be used at any time as a free action to insert one of the letters shown into one of the player's words. The  rewards are only relevant during transmissions (see Transmissions).

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. If there is only a single card to draw, discard it instead and shuffle the letter discard into a new deck before drawing.

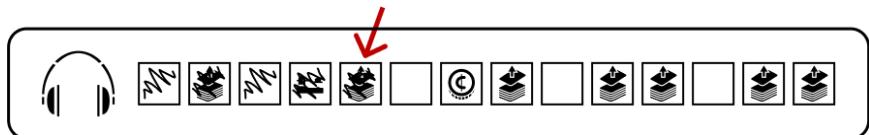
Bonus Sections

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 (see Insert Letter).



Listening Section

The Listening (🎧) section is a track that progresses from left to right. When progressing the 🎧 section, scratch out the leftmost empty space. 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.

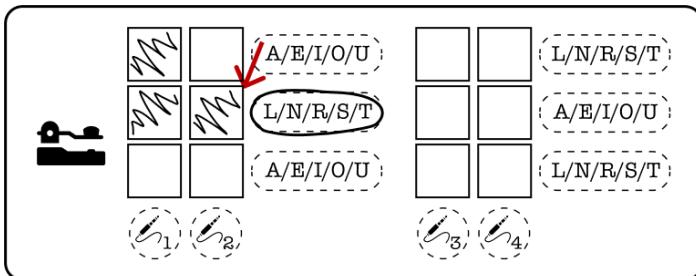


Example: Chris marks the fourth space on the 🎧 track, which earns him a 📜 reward. He draws the bottom card of the deck, which has an “H” on one side and an “N” on the other. He decides to keep the “H” side face up in front of himself. Chris can discard the “H” on this round or any future round to insert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



Telegraph Section

The Telegraph (📠) section is made up of 2 grids with six spaces each. When progressing the 📞 section, choose any empty square to scratch out. When a row or column is filled, circle the corresponding reward. The 🖊 rewards prepare players for a specific transmission (see Transmissions) as noted by the subscript.



Example: Katrina marks a third space in the section filling the second row, which earns her a letter reward that could later be used as an L, N, R, S, or T.



Money Section

The Money () 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 scratch out the leftmost empty space. This increases 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.

Cleanup

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

1. Players validate words they have completed in their telegram this round with the player to their left.

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. On rounds 3/5/7/8, players transmit their telegram (see Transmissions).
4. Players discard down to two reserve letters.
5. Discard the word fragments and letters in the offering.

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

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.

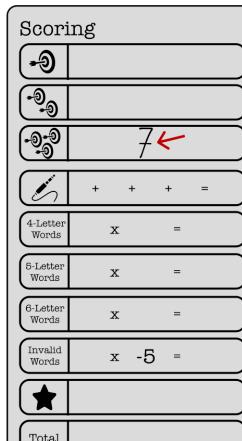
The first players to complete a goal score the higher value visible on the card (noting this on the right side of their player sheet). The goal card should then be flipped to the facedown side for future rounds. Any other player that completes the goal in a future round scores the lower point value.

Only valid words may contribute towards goals. 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 during the Cleanup phase. 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.

Zoological Intelligence Complete a word of any length that is an animal. eg. HYENA						
1st	2nd+					
1	2	3	4	5	6	
						
						
						
						
						
						

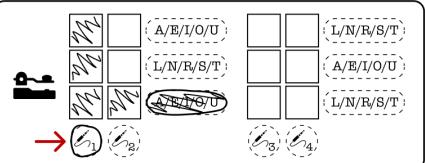
Transmissions

On certain rounds, all players will retransmit their in-progress telegram over the wire, scoring points for each valid word. This occurs during the Cleanup phase of rounds 3, 5, 7, and 8.

During a transmission, players normally score one point for every two valid words in their telegram. However, if a player had prepared for the transmission by completing the corresponding column in their  section then that player will score one point for every valid word in their telegram instead. Either way, the player's score for that transmission should be noted on the right side of their player sheet.

1 C 2 R2 S O 1 R3 M L N ↙

1	2	3	4	5	6	✓
C	A	V	E	R	N	
M	O	U	S	E		
L	E	A	N			
						
						
						



Scoring		
		
		
	7	
	3+	=
4-Letter Words	x	=
5-Letter Words	x	=
6-Letter Words	x	=
Invalid Words	x -5	=
★		
Total		

Example: At the end of the third round, Nicolai reviews his  section to see if he has prepared for the first transmission. Since he completed the first column, he will score 1 point for each valid word in his telegram so far. He will score 3 points for this transmission. That's great, because if he hadn't completed the first column, he would only score 1 point total.

Game End

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

Players will play through one final round before scoring (see Scoring).

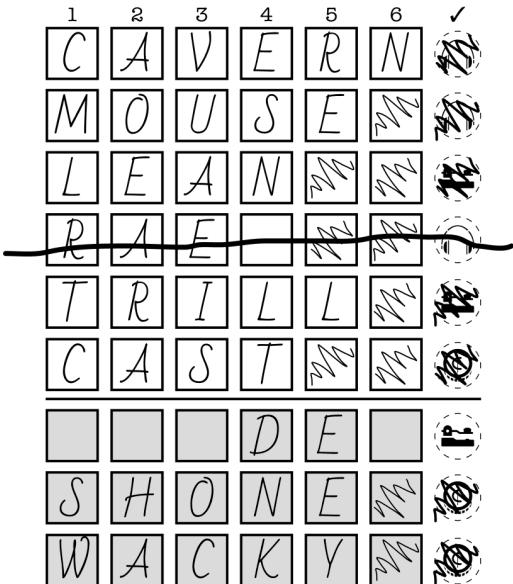
Note that the game can never exceed 9 rounds, regardless of how many empty rows are remaining in players' telegrams.

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 and transmissions during the game.



Scoring

	4
	—
	7
	$3 + 2 + 7 + = 12$
4-Letter Words	$2 \times 3 = 6$
5-Letter Words	$4 \times 10 = 40$
6-Letter Words	$1 \times 7 = 7$
Invalid Words	$1 \times -5 = -5$
★	-4
Total	67

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

Wild Section

		-4	-9	-16	-25
★	★	★	★	★	★

V R _____

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 bonuses on increasing the price 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 RAE, 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 the 12 points earned from transmissions and subtracts the 4 points from the track to get a total of 67 points.

Solo Mode

Setup Changes

First shuffle the letter deck thoroughly as described in the setup (see Setup). Then, set aside 9 letter cards for a  draw pile. Taking the remaining letter cards, shuffle a random solo card into the bottom third (without flipping as you shuffle) to form the main letter deck. Proceed with the remaining setup as normal.

Rule Changes

When drawing letters to add to your reserve, draw letters from the bottom of the  draw pile instead of the main letter deck.

When forming the offering, set aside any solo cards drawn and draw additional letter cards to replace them. After scoring goals during the Cleanup phase, identify any set aside solo cards and flip the corresponding goal to the claimed side. You will not have access to the higher point value for this goal (if not claimed prior).

After going through the main letter deck once, shuffle the discard along with the remaining two solo cards into a new deck.

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	Points Level
<30 Poor listener	80-99 First-class
30-39 Trainee	100-119 Genius
40-59 Part-time operator	≥120 Legendary
60-79 Model employee	

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, Birchell Eversole, Brian Henk, Brian Larson, Brook Elf Nichols, Charles Wallace, Chaz, Chris Ekanha, Chris Hall, Colby Price, Colin, cylverxz, David Vuong, Dirk Johnson, Duckie, Dylan Johnke, Ely, Eric, Erik Wilson, Floyd McWilliams, Gabi Gomez, Hyrum Mack, Jacob, Jayant, Jennifer A, Jim McCollum, Jimmeeé Greco, Jocelyn, Joe 'Fritz' Paul, John Brieger, John MacLaughlin, Johnny Chin, Jonah Kagan, Julene Johnson, Justin Kominar, Justin Wan, Karsten Kim, Katrina Connors, Kendall M., Leland, Lil Turner, Lorelei Sorrentino, Lunatic Esex, Marion Agranovsky, Mark Schwab, Mark Schynert, Marley Timmerman, 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, Spencer Franks, Ted Schaller, Tiffany Pham, Ting Wei-Ting Chow, Tom Draper, Tristan Muntsinger, Velgus, Will S, Yun, Zachary, Zachary Sockol, and many others that prefer to remain anonymous

Letter Frequencies

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