

Wordplay: Fundamentals of Scrabble Strategy – Syllabus

Jemmin Chang

www.contrib.andrew.cmu.edu/~jemminc/

jemmin.chang@cmu.edu

Course Description:

Contrary to popular belief, knowledge of obscure words is not the foremost determiner of Scrabble success. This course will cover the strategies and paradigms that advanced players employ to consistently outplay even those with wider vocabularies, including: anagramming; bingos; rack management; S, blank, and Q strategy; defense; bluffing and challenging; exchanging; and endgame finesse. Beginning with the rules of Scrabble, the course does not presume any prior experience and is absolutely accessible to beginners. Classes will follow a structure of alternating lessons and workshops where students will have the opportunity to practice skills with each other in real Scrabble games.

Assignments:

Weekly assignments will consist of targeted exercises to reinforce the concepts taught in class. These will mostly be in the form of fun Scrabble puzzles (the goal is to determine the best possible play for the given board), the answers to which will be graded subjectively based on the student's reasoning and explanation, as there is no single "correct" answer to any puzzle. Students will also be expected to play at least one Scrabble game per week, either in person or on the ISC (see Resources).

Exams:

There will be a midterm and a final. Both will be given in class, and will follow a format similar to the assignments. As a fun alternative to the final exam, ambitious students can challenge the instructor to a game of Scrabble. Winning will garner the student a 100% grade on the final. (Losing means the student must take the paper exam.)

Grading:

This course is graded pass/fail. Students must achieve an average of 60% to pass. Averages are calculated as follows:

- Final Exam: 30%
- Midterm: 15%
- Assignments: 45%
- Participation: 10%

Attendance:

Students are expected to attend all classes, except when unavoidable absences are communicated to and excused by the instructor *ahead of time* (at least 2 days).

Resources:

Students will be required to create a free account on the Internet Scrabble Club (ISC) and download the WordBiz application at www.isc.ro if they wish to play their games online. Additional useful Scrabble resources are:

- Wapnick, Joel. *How to play Scrabble like a champion*. New York: Puzzlewright Press, 2010. (Interesting study: take a look at the 1986 original edition, and note how Wapnick's strategy has changed hugely mostly as a result of computer analysis.)
- Edley, Joe and John D. Williams, Jr. *Everything Scrabble, 3rd edition*. New York: Pocket Books, 2009.
- And dozens of other Scrabble resources online. Be sure to check dates for currency.

Class Schedule:

Week 1: Course Administrivia, Introduction to Scrabble: Rules & Guiding Principles

Week 2: Rack management, bingos, fishing, anagramming

Week 3: Workshop: rack management, bingos, fishing, anagramming

Week 4: The game changers: S, Blank, and Q

Week 5: Defense

Week 6: Workshop: the game changers, defense

Week 7: Midterm Exam

Week 8: The game plan – board control, tile tracking, prescience, The Endgame

Week 9: Workshop: the game plan

Week 10: Zero-point moves: challenging, bluffing, exchanging, (passing)

Week 11: Workshop: zero-point moves

Week 12: A look at the Z?NY world of professional Scrabble: *Word Wars: Tiles and Tribulations on the Scrabble Circuit*

Week 13: Final Exam

Week 14: A special challenge