

Are you ready to play in a SCRABBLE® Tournament?

So, you like to play SCRABBLE® and you want to sign up for a tournament... but *are you really ready to play in a tournament?*

This page talks about the tournament experience: what you should expect and what will be expected of you. Please read and review the issues and recommendations below to help figure out if you are ready for tournament Scrabble.

You and the people you play against will have a much more enjoyable tournament experience if you are adequately prepared.

It's a Commitment

Tournaments are usually 6 to 8 games in a day, with just a lunch break, so you need to be able to play many games in a row. You can't just quit or leave if you are tired or losing, either. Signing up for a tournament is a commitment to play ALL the games.

Some big tournaments are 2 or 3 days long, so you are playing 16-20 games (or more). You should try to find a one-day tournament for your first time.

Rules and Procedures

Tournament play follows strict rules covering everything from how to decide who goes first and how to draw tiles, to how to deal with irregularities like finding stray tiles or what to do if you accidentally see tiles in the bag.

All players are expected to know and follow the [Tournament Rules](#).

Practice, Practice, Practice!

Before signing up for a tournament, you should have played at least several dozen games with experienced tournament players. That means live games, where you are following tournament rules, using a clock, keeping score, etc. It's best if you can find a [local club](#), but if there isn't one nearby you should contact NASPA or the director of the tournament you are interested in to see if they can fix you up with nearby tournament players.

Learning to play competitively is a skill that takes time to be comfortable with--and we're just talking about skill with the [procedures of play](#), not [skill at playing the game](#) (that's an entirely different set of issues!). Playing online, or just with family or friends is not enough. You wouldn't sign up for a marathon if you had never run more than 5 miles, would you?

How good a player do you need to be?

Most tournaments group players into divisions, so you are playing against people of similar skill level (quantified by your tournament rating). Your first tournament you won't have a rating, so

you will most likely be placed in the bottom (lowest rated) division. Exceptions to this are rare. Unrated players are allowed to "play up" only if the director approves, and usually only if you have been playing at a club for a substantial period and demonstrated your skill with (i.e., wins against) rated players. [Note: some tournaments are "opens", where there is just one division so you could be matched against any player--but those are generally multi-day tournaments, which we recommend against you trying for your first time (see [It's a Commitment](#))].

Even in the bottom division, all players know the valid 2-letter words, and so should you. You should also be familiar with the short words with J, Q, X, and Z (see the [Cheat Sheet](#) for a list of all these, plus the 3s, vowel dumps, and basic bingos). Find links to word lists, study apps, and other resources on our [Study Tools](#) page.

You also need to be able to find and play bingos (a "bingo" is a play using all 7 tiles on your rack, which nets you a 50-point bonus). Top players average 2 or more bingos per game, but even low-rated players usually get at least one per game. It's unusual to win a game without binging.

It's a Competition

At a Club you might get free challenges (for a while) and coaching on rules and strategy, but there's none of that at a tournament. The rules are strictly enforced, so if you misplay a tile, or try to exchange without putting tiles on the table before you hit your clock, you're going to lose a turn.

Folks play at tournaments for a variety of reasons, but basically everyone wants to win. Some people can get pretty worked up about "just a game", especially when pride, rating points, and money are on the line.

Trash-talking and "coffee-housing" are not allowed (this is not poker), but a tournament is still a tense environment. Socializing is okay between games (outside the playing room), but once the games start the loudest noise is usually just the rattling of tilebags and announcing of scores, interjected with the occasional "Challenge!" or call for a director.

Aren't you just trying to discourage me from signing up?

Yes and no.

Scrabble is actually fun, which is why most us play! If you know the rules and procedures well enough to play without difficulty and know enough words to compete, it can be a fascinating and rewarding game.

Tournaments demand a significant commitment of time and money, and many folks only get to attend a few each year. They don't like to feel their opportunity is wasted, and neither will you. So, be sure you are really ready before you sign up.