



# Rulebook

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## Credits

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Design . . . . . Kristan Lawson & Herbert R. Lawson  
Graphic Design . . . . . J. Scott Reeves & Jeff Tidball

*Kristan Lawson is the author of several books, including Weird Europe and California Babylon. Herbert R. Lawson is a master wordsmith who has been designing games for decades. This son-and-father team developed Letter Head through countless hours of play around the kitchen table.*

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## Welcome to Letter Head!

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For almost all the games in this rulebook, you will need the following equipment:

- A complete **deck** of 124 *Letter Head* cards.
- A **sheet of paper** for keeping score, and a pen or pencil.
- A **dictionary** for looking up words that have been challenged or questioned. Any dictionary around the house will do. Advanced players may wish to use a large and comprehensive dictionary. Before a game session begins, announce which dictionary will be used, and remind the players that the dictionary itself will be the final arbiter in all disputes. If one or more players objects to a particular dictionary, find one that all players can agree on.
- Your **head**.

# Rules For All Games

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The following rules apply to all games using the *Letter Head* deck, unless the rules of a specific game dictate otherwise.

## Shuffling the Deck

Make sure the deck is shuffled thoroughly before starting any new deal. If you find it difficult to shuffle the entire deck at once, divide the deck approximately in half, shuffle each half separately, then mix the two halves together.

## Wild Cards

Each of the four wild cards in the deck can be used as a substitute for any letter a player requires. For example, if a player held in her hand the letters P, R, wild card, N, K, she would want the wild card to represent the letter A so she could spell PRANK.

*Important note:* Each wild card is equal in letter point value to the letter for which it is substituting. In the above example, the wild card would be worth 2 points, since an A is worth 2 points. Because of this, players should strive wherever possible to use their wild cards in place of valuable letters. For example, if a player held wild card, U, M, B, O, she could use the wild card as a G to spell GUMBO, earning 7 points for the G. She would do better to use the wild card as a J, spelling JUMBO, since a J is worth 18 points. Players must decide, considering the letters in their hands, whether it is better to use a wild card to help form a long word or instead to use it in place of a valuable letter in a shorter word.

## Valid and Invalid Words

Any word found in the dictionary chosen for the game is considered valid, as well as any correctly spelled plural (-s), participle (-ing), past tense (-ed) or other standard variation on the various parts of speech. Words found in the dictionary that are archaic, obsolete, of foreign origin, slang, or colloquial are also valid unless the players agree beforehand to exclude them. Abbreviations, prefixes and suffixes standing alone, hyphenated words, apostrophized words, proper nouns (words always capitalized), and acronyms are not allowed unless they have entered the language as standard words and are listed as such in the dictionary.

Needless to say, all words must be spelled correctly to be considered valid, although alternate spellings are permitted, if they appear in the dictionary.

If all players want a change of pace, everyone can agree to play “anything goes,” where every conceivable word of any kind is valid, including foreign words, obscure acronyms, obscene words, onomatopoeias, names and proper nouns, and any grouping of letters that a player can convincingly demonstrate has meaning, whether or not it can be found in the dictionary. (Only play “anything goes” late in the evening when no one is bothering to keep score anyway.)

## Time Limits

In most games played with the *Letter Head* deck, players are expected to form words within a reasonable amount of time. Some players, however, are faster than others, and you may find it necessary to impose a time limit for each turn if one or more players take too long. Two minutes per turn is recommended, though you may increase that to three minutes if you want to give each player

extra time to form the best word possible, or decrease that to one minute if you want to speed up the pace of the game. Any watch or clock with a second hand will work as a time-keeping device; it is up to the dealer to enforce the time limits. If a player fails to form a word in her allotted time, she forfeits her turn.

# Letter Head

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*For 2-8 Players*

*Letter Head is an action-packed word-forming game that requires both mental agility to create high-scoring words and social skills to bluff the other players. It is the “basic” game played with a Letter Head deck.*

## The Goal

To form words using the cards in your hand — or least convince the other players that you are doing so.

## Getting Started

Choose a dealer by drawing cards: the player with the letter closest to the beginning of the alphabet deals and keeps score.

## The Deal

All players are dealt five cards face-down, and the remaining deck is placed face-down in the center of the table.

## The Play

The first player to the dealer's left looks at her cards and tries to arrange them to form a word; long words or words with rare letters score the most points. Each player, when it is her turn to form a word, is referred to as “the declarer.” At any time during her turn, the declarer has three options:

1. Form a word of any length using the cards in her hand by announcing it to the other players and displaying the word on the table. The cards need not be all face-up; see “Bluffing.”
2. If she cannot form a word with her original five cards, or is dissatisfied with her limited choices, she can draw up to five additional cards, one by one, from the deck. After each draw she should reconsider her hand and seek to form a word if possible, since players earn higher bonus points when they keep the number of cards in their hands to a minimum. No player may ever have more than ten cards in her hand.
3. At any stage, if a declarer feels she cannot form a sufficiently high-scoring word, she may attempt to bluff the other players. To bluff, a declarer pretends to form a word that she in fact can not legitimately spell with the letters in her hand. She announces the word, and then lays it on the table, making sure to leave the false card or cards face-down. See “Bluffing.”

After any challenges to the declarer's word (see "Challenges," page 6), its point value is tallied and added to her score (see "Scoring," next page). The declarer retains all unplayed cards. If fewer than five cards remain in her hand, she draws additional cards from the deck until she has five. If she still has five or more cards, her turn is over. The completed word is then gathered together and placed face-up in the discard pile next to the deck.

Play then passes to the left and the second player's turn proceeds the same way. The game progresses until all players have taken five turns.

## All Players Can Draw Cards at Any Time

The other players need not wait passively while each declarer is deciding which word to play. Every player has the right, at her discretion, to draw additional cards from the deck, even when it is another player's turn. In this way, all players are continuously figuring how to best use their cards, and the turn moves more quickly from player to player, since each declarer is more likely to have already decided what she plans to do by the time her turn comes around. *Note:* Though players are *allowed* to draw cards when it is not their turn to play, they are not *required* to do so.

## Passing a Turn

If a declarer has ten cards in her hand, is unable to form a decent word, and is unwilling to bluff, she may decide to pass. She may then discard as many cards as she chooses. If she discards more than five cards, she must draw a sufficient number of cards to fill a five card hand again. The turn then passes to the next player and continues around the table as normal.

## When the Deck Runs Out

Once the stock of cards in the deck has been exhausted, the cards in the discard pile are shuffled and turned over to form the new stock, and play continues as before.

## Bluffing

When the declarer announces her word and lays her cards on the table, she may lay each card face-up or face-down as she wishes. There is no limit on the number of cards that can be arrayed each way — all could be face-up, all could be face-down, or any combination of face-up and face-down cards could be laid.

The other players do not know if the hidden face-down cards do in fact display the letters the declarer claims they do. So, each time a word is played with any face-down cards, all the other players must decide if they think the declarer is bluffing. Every player is given a chance to say whether she believes the cards on the table actually spell the declarer's word. Those who do not believe the declarer are "calling the bluff." Once all other players have been given the option to call the declarer's bluff, any face-down cards are turned over.

If no one calls the bluff, the declarer adds up the point values of the cards she actually played, including those that are face-down (not the point values of the cards she claimed to have played) and any bonus points (see "Scoring," next page). The total is added to her score, *even if the letters do not spell the word that was declared.*

If one or more players call the declarer's bluff and the declared word is in fact spelled correctly, the declarer tallies her score as normal and adds 10 additional points for each player that thought she was bluffing.

If one or more players call the declarer's bluff and she was bluffing — that is, the cards do not form the word that was announced — the declarer scores no points and loses her turn. All players that correctly called the bluff add 10 points to their scores.

The displayed word, whether or not it is spelled correctly, is then gathered up and placed in the discard pile, and the declarer replenishes her hand as normal.

*Remember:* even if you are not bluffing and are putting down on the table a perfectly spelled word, it is usually a good idea to place some of the cards face-down anyway, in order to lure other players into thinking that you are bluffing. You will score the point value of your word in any case, but you will also earn 10 extra points for each player that mistakenly calls your bluff.

For a discussion of how to bluff well and successfully fool your opponents, see "Strategy and Hints."

## Scoring

To determine how many points you earn for a successfully played word, add up the sum of the letter point values on all of the cards used in the word, in addition to the bonus points from the Scoring Chart below. (The Scoring Chart also appears on the back of this rulebook and on a number of reference cards for ease of access during play.)

If your word contains a wild card, state which letter it stands for, find that letter's point value on the Letter Values and Frequencies Chart and include that letter's points in your total.

## Scoring Chart

		Number of Cards in Hand					
		5	6	7	8	9	10
Number of Letters in Word	3	5	3	1	0	0	0
	4	15	10	5	3	1	0
	5	25	20	15	10	5	3
	6		30	25	20	15	10
	7			35	30	25	20
	8				40	35	30
	9					45	40
	10						50

## Letter Values and Frequencies Chart

Letter	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
Point Value	2	9	4	3	1	5	7	2	2	18	13	3	5	2
Frequency	9	2	4	5	15	3	2	6	8	1	1	4	3	8
Letter	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	?	
Point Value	2	5	20	2	2	1	4	12	7	15	6	25	?	
Frequency	9	3	1	8	7	11	3	1	2	1	2	1	4	

? = Wild Card

## Example

You hold 8 cards in your hand: KOMYENRQ. You decide not to draw any additional cards and play the word MONKEY. Your letter score is

$$\begin{array}{cccccccc} \mathbf{M} & & \mathbf{O} & & \mathbf{N} & & \mathbf{K} & & \mathbf{E} & & \mathbf{Y} \\ 5 & + & 2 & + & 2 & + & 13 & + & 1 & + & 6 = 29 \text{ letter points} \end{array}$$

Since you played a 6-letter word out of an 8-card hand, you also earn 20 bonus points, according to the Scoring Chart. Your total score for the word is thus 49 points (29 letter points + 20 bonus points). Since the R and Q are unused, you do not score their letter points yet; you retain them in your hand for possible use in future words.

After each turn, all letter points, bonus points, bluff points, and challenge points (see “Challenges,” below) should be added to the appropriate players’ scores; the dealer should keep a running total so that all players may know how they stand in relation to the other players.

## How to Win

The player with the highest total score at the end of five complete rounds of play is the winner. A round of play is complete when each player in the game has had one full turn. If you want to play a longer game, all players should agree ahead of time on how many rounds will be played; keep track of rounds by noting on the scorepad each time a round is complete.

## Challenges

After all the cards of a declared word are turned face-up, any player may *challenge* the word if she thinks it is misspelled and/or can not be found in the dictionary. Play stops momentarily while the dealer looks up the word in the dictionary. If the word *can* be found and proves to be valid, the declarer scores an additional 25 points for each player that challenged her. If, on the other hand, the word can *not* be found in the dictionary, it is deemed invalid and each challenger immediately adds 25 points to her score; the declarer scores no points for an invalid word.

A declarer who plays an invalid challenged word is not allowed to retract her cards and play a different word; she scores no points and the turn passes to the next player. Whether or not a challenged word proves to be valid, all the displayed cards are gathered up and placed on the discard pile as normal.

## Example of Play

All players are dealt five cards. Player 1 cannot at first make a word with her hand, so she draws two additional cards. She then announces she is playing the word PARTY and lays down P A R face-up and two cards face-down. No one calls her bluff so she turns over the two cards which in fact are T and Y. No one challenges the spelling of the word so she adds up her score, 5 for P + 2 for A + 2 for R + 1 for T + 6 for Y + 15 bonus points for playing a 5-letter word out of a 7-card hand = 31 points, which are added to her score.

Meanwhile, players 2, 3, and 5 have all drawn additional cards from the deck, hoping to improve their hands. Player 4 is satisfied with her original five cards, and she stands pat.

Player 2 then declares that she is playing the word BEVELS and lays down all six of her cards, the first one face-down, then E, then two more face-down, then L and S. Player 5 decides to call her

bluff, though none of the other players do. Player 2 turns over U, W and K. Her word is clearly not BEVELS, so she scores no points while Player 5 adds 10 points to her score.

The turn then passes to Player 3 and so on around the table.

## Strategy and Hints

The key to success in *Letter Head* is to keep the other players guessing as to whether or not you are bluffing. If you *always* bluff, the other players will catch on and your bluffs will not go uncalled. If you *never* bluff, then you are less likely to achieve an impressive score since you will always be forced to play legitimate words and never the high-scoring fantasy words that the expert bluffers get away with.

Your best strategy is to mix it up and keep your opponents confused. Act confident when you’re bluffing. Act nervous when you’re playing a legitimate word. Sometimes keep a blank poker face just to keep everyone off balance. If you play an especially high-scoring legitimate word, put all the cards face-down. People will call your bluff and get burned. Once you’ve established this pattern, you can declare a high-scoring word for which you have *none* of the letters; place them all face-down, and no one will dare to call your bluff. The look of horror on your opponents’ faces when you turn over a garbled set of junk letters will give you even greater satisfaction than the mountain of points you just scored.

## Vultures

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*For 3-6 Players*

*Every word you play in Vultures becomes tasty “carrion” for the player after you to feast upon. And if you don’t like your cards, you can always call out “Fresh meat!” and snatch a letter from an opponent.*

## The Goal

To score points by forming high-value words using the cards in your hand and at least one of the cards melded by the previous player.

## Getting Started

Choose a dealer by drawing cards: the player with the letter closest to the beginning of the alphabet deals and keeps score.

## The Deal

All players are dealt seven cards, face-down. The deck is placed face-down in the center of the table.

## The Play

The player on the dealer’s left goes first: she assesses her cards and displays on the table the highest-scoring word she can. After her score is totaled (see “Scoring,” next page), the second player must form a new word that reuses at least one card from the previous player’s word and at least one

new card from her hand. She then displays her word, taking cards from her hand and from the word already on the table. She may use any number of cards from her hand and any number of cards from the previous player's word, as long as at least one letter is taken from each source. The remains of the first player's word are then placed in a discard pile and the second player's word is scored. The third player must then cannibalize the second player's word, and so on. Valuable letters might be cannibalized repeatedly and recycled through many words. Each player, after her score is totaled, must replenish her hand up to seven cards from the deck.

Any player, if she is dissatisfied with her cards, may — on her turn and prior to melding a word — announce, "Fresh meat!" Each player, holding her cards fanned in her right hand, must then reach over with her left hand and grab hold of one of the cards of the player to her left. Once everyone has done this, the dealer cries "Eat!" and all players simultaneously pull the cards from their opponents' hands and place them in their own hands. After this exchange, the player whose turn it was must form a word as normal.

If a player is unwilling or unable to form a word, even after calling for "Fresh meat!", she may pass her turn by discarding as many cards as she wishes and drawing new cards from the deck to replenish her hand to seven cards. The next player then plays from the letters still on the table.

If a player melds a word using a wild card, it is no longer wild for the succeeding players; while it remains in play, the wild card must continue to substitute for the letter designated by the first player.

When the deck runs out, the dealer should gather all the cards in the discard pile, reshuffle them, and place them face-down as the new deck.

## Scoring

Each player's word score is determined by adding up all the letter points on all of the cards in her word *as well as* any bonus points, which are determined by the word's length: 3 points for every letter in the word. Thus, a 3-letter word earns 9 bonus points, a 4-letter word earns 12, and so on. Do *not* use the standard Scoring Chart, since players will often have access to more than ten cards on each turn.

Once a player's word score is tallied, it is added to her total score and the turn passes to the next player.

## How to Win

The first player to reach 300 points wins the game.

## Challenges

A player may challenge any word played and insist that it be looked up in a dictionary. If the word can not be found, it is deemed invalid and each challenger immediately adds 25 points to her score; the declarer scores no points for an invalid word, and she is not allowed to retract her cards and play a different word. If the word *can* be found and proves to be valid, the declarer scores an additional 25 points for each player that challenged her. Whether or not a challenged word proves to be valid, all the displayed cards remain on the table to be cannibalized by the next player.

## Strategy and Hints

It isn't necessarily in your best interest to reuse valuable cards melded by the player preceding you, because by so doing you allow later opponents to use them too, when they cannibalize *your*

word. Sometimes it may be a good idea to avoid using valuable cards to deny access to them by your opponents.

Call for "Fresh meat!" whenever you feel that your hand might be improved by the addition of a new card — but remember that the opponent to your right may randomly snatch the best card in your hand.

# Red-Handed

*For 3-7 Players*

*Based on concepts developed by legendary theoretician John von Neumann in his famous studies on game theory, Red-Handed features some new and cruel twists: the player who wins the hand is rewarded accordingly, but the player who comes in second fares the worst among the also-rans. Thus, the closer you get to victory, the greater the risk you are taking. And throughout the game, players are compelled to accumulate cards that usually end up hurting their scores, making for an especially suspenseful experience.*

## The Goal

To earn cards by recognizing words in the letters on the table, and eventually be the first player to form a word with the letters in your hand.

## Getting Started

Choose a dealer by drawing cards: the player with the letter closest to the beginning of the alphabet deals first and keeps score, and the deal moves to the left with each successive round.

## The Deal

Arrange nine cards face-down in a 3 x 3 grid in the center of the table. Place the remaining deck to one side.

## The Play

### Spelling Words on the Table

Once everyone is ready, the dealer turns over all nine cards as quickly as she can. The first player to recognize, amid the nine cards, a five-letter or longer word should immediately announce the word and then spell it out by tapping the cards in order. For example, if the letters W, Z, V, K, C, R, U, M, B were on the table, one player might



call out, “Crumb! C-R-U-M-B,” as she taps out the letters. The letters need not be adjacent to one another or in any particular order within the grid.

At any point, if no one can find any five-letter or longer word in the grid, then the dealer must discard any one letter — she gets to choose which one — from the cards in the center and replace it with another from the deck. Repeat until a word is recognized.

## Picking Up Cards

The player who calls out a correctly spelled word must then pick up one of the cards in the word and keep it in her hand. The player is not allowed to *choose* one of the letters in the word. Rather, the letter point value of the first card in the word determines which card must be picked up. If the letter point value of the first card is 1, they must pick up the first card of the word; if the letter point value of the first card is 2, they must pick up the second card; if it is 3, the third card, and so on.

In the example word CRUMB, since C is worth 4 points, the player must pick up the fourth letter in the word: M. If the letter point value is greater than the length of the word, count to the end and then “wrap around” to the beginning of the word. If, for example, the word spelled was GROAN, the card picked up would be the R. Since the letter point value of the first letter in the word, G, is 7, count five all the way to the N, then start again at G for 6. Thus R, the “seventh” letter, would be the one picked up.

Once a player has picked up the appropriate card, the dealer takes a new card from the deck and places it face-up in the grid to replenish the missing card.

Wild cards can substitute for any letter as usual. If a player picks up a wild card, it reverts to wild and can be used for any letter of the player’s choice when trying to form a word with the cards in her hand (see “Spelling Words in Your Hand,” below).

## Spelling Words in Your Hand

The eventual goal of all the players is to accumulate enough of the right cards to spell a five-letter or longer word with the cards in their hands. The first player to announce and then display a five-letter or longer word using solely the cards she has accumulated in her hand wins the round. Everyone’s score is then tallied and a running total is kept on the scoresheet. After the scoring, all the cards are gathered, the deck is shuffled, and a new grid is dealt by the next dealer.

## Scoring

The player who formed a word from her hand adds up all the letter points of the cards that she used in the word, and the total is *subtracted* from her score. All the other players must total the points of all the cards in their hands, and the total is *added* to their scores (wild cards count as zero in this case.) It is possible for skilled players to sustain negative scores.

## How to Win

The player with the *lowest* score after six rounds wins the game.

## Challenges

A player may challenge any word spelled by another player using the cards on the table or the cards in her hand, and insist that it be looked up in a dictionary. If the word can not be found, the challenged player may not pick up a card or play her word, and is not allowed to form a word on the next turn. If the word is in the dictionary, then the challenger is not allowed to form a word on the next turn.

## Strategy and Hints

The strategic key to *Red-Handed* is in the scoring. Every card that you “earn” by recognizing words on the table will eventually count *against* you unless you are the player who wins the round, because the goal is to achieve the lowest score. Thus, you may be tempted to do nothing at all, since that way you’ll stay at zero the whole game. But if more than one player makes no attempt to win, they will allow other skilled players to waltz to victory with no competition. The best strategy is to pick up cards as rapidly as possible so as to be the first to form a word in your hand, thereby catching all the other players “red-handed.”

Once you accumulate five cards in your hand, you must divide your attention between the action on the table and the cards in your hand. There’s no point in accumulating cards if you don’t inspect them to look for words. But if you ignore the table action altogether, the other players will catch up with you by snatching all the cards while your attention is elsewhere.

## Word Slam

For 3-6 Players

*You’ll need a quick mind and quick hands to play Word Slam, a raucous fast-paced game for players of all ages and skill levels.*

## The Goal

To form words using both the cards in your hand and the cards face-up on the table.

## Getting Started

Seat all players equally spaced around a table, or in a circle on the floor. Choose a dealer by drawing cards: the player with the letter closest to the beginning of the alphabet deals first and keeps score, and the deal moves to the left with each successive hand.

## The Deal

All players are dealt three cards, face-down; no one is allowed to look at her cards yet. One card is placed face-up in the center of the table; the remaining deck is placed face-down off to the side about eight inches away.

## The Play

When everyone is ready, the dealer says “Slam!” and all players pick up their hands simultaneously. The first person to announce a word and spell it on the table using any or all of her letters *and* the face-up card wins that hand. Words must be at least four letters long, and must incorporate the face-up card. If no player can play any word, then each player is dealt one more card face-down. Again, everyone picks up their new cards at the cry of “Slam!” from the dealer, and a new race begins: all players try as quickly as possible to form a word four letters or longer. Once someone successfully plays a word, she gathers up the cards she played (including the face-up card) and puts

them in a pile next to her, to be added up later (see “Scoring,” below). All the remaining cards in everyone else’s hands are then placed in a discard pile and a new hand is dealt. When the deck is depleted to the point that there are not enough cards for the next hand, all players total their scores and the next dealer shuffles the discards, deals a new hand, and play continues as before.

## Scoring

When the deck runs out, play is temporarily halted as each player adds up the letter points on all the cards of the words she has played. There are no bonus points for forming long or short words, and wild cards count as zero regardless of the letter they substituted for. Each player’s total score is noted on the scoresheet, the discards are reshuffled, and a new deal begins.

## How to Win

The player with the highest score after the deck has been played through twice wins the game.

## Challenges

A player may challenge any word played and insist that it be looked up in a dictionary. If the word can not be found, the player who formed the invalid word must retract her cards, and play continues as before. If the word *can* be found, there is no penalty for the challenger, and the player who formed the word gathers up the cards as normal.

## Strategy and Hints

As soon as you see *any* word at all (four letters or longer) using some of the cards in your hand and the face-up card, slam it down on the table as quickly as possible. Don’t mull over your letters trying to find the longest word or the most valuable word — while you hesitate, someone else will beat you to the punch!

# My Word!

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*For 3-8 Players*

*My Word! is a tense, action-packed game that requires strategic thinking, a deep knowledge of English, and lightning-quick reactions. All players are engaged in the game at all times — there are no long waits for other players to complete their turns. Every time a new card is played a momentary, excited hush falls over the players as each competes to out-think the others in as little time as possible — a hush that is sometimes broken by the triumphant cry of “My word!”*

## The Goal

To form words by adding one card from your hand to the communal face-up cards in the center — before your opponents do the same thing.

## Getting Started

Choose a dealer by drawing cards: the player with the letter closest to the beginning of the alphabet deals first and keeps score, and the deal moves to the left with each successive hand.

## The Deal

All players are dealt ten cards each, face-down, and the deck is set aside until the next deal. The player to the dealer’s left goes first.

## The Play

The first player lays one card from her hand face-up in the center of the playing area. The player to her left then also plays one card face-up, and so on around the table. As each new card is played, make sure all the face-up cards remain visible to everyone. Once at least three cards are face-up, every player should inspect the cards in her hand and the cards on the table. If anyone is able to form a word at least four letters long using one card from her hand and a minimum of three cards from the table, she should call out “My word!” and arrange the cards involved into a word, which she then must name aloud. If no one challenges the word (see “Challenges,” below), the player gathers up the word and places it in a face-down pile in front of her. All players have the right to form a word at any time during the game, regardless of whose turn it is, with only one exception: The player who has just played a card face-up in the center is *not allowed* to immediately thereafter call out “My word!” and form a word using a new card in addition to the card she just played moments earlier — she must wait to form a word until the next player has put a card in the center. Everyone should pay close attention every time a new card is played, because the *first* player to call out “My word!” and arrange the appropriate cards into a word gets to add the cards to her pile; slow players lose their chance. All players seek to form a word every time a new card is played; if no one is able to do so, or if the number of face-up cards has dropped below three, then the next player in line must play another card from her hand to the center. Play continues around the table until only one player is left with cards in her hand, even if some players run out of cards before others. When there is only one player left with cards, the deal ends and each player’s score is totaled (see “Scoring,” below). All the cards are then gathered together and reshuffled with the unused deck, the next dealer deals out ten cards to each player, and a new hand begins. Play continues for three complete deals (or more, if all players agree ahead of time that they want to play a longer game).

## Scoring

When there is only one player left with cards in her hand, each player turns over the cards in front of her and adds up the point value of all the letters. The totals are then added to the players’ scores. There are no bonus points for long words, and wild cards count as zero.

## How to Win

The player with the highest total number of points at the end of three complete deals wins the game.

## Challenges

A player may challenge any word played and insist that it be looked up in a dictionary. If the word can not be found, then the player who formed the invalid word must retract the card that she

played, and she forfeits the opportunity to form any other word that turn, even if she might otherwise have an alternate valid word. If another player called out “My word!” immediately after the player who formed the invalid word, this second-place finisher is permitted to form her word instead. Play then continues around the table as before. If the challenged word *can* be found in the dictionary, then the challenger forfeits the right to form a word on the next play.

## Play With Children

When children play *My Word!*, the minimum allowable word length should be lowered to three, instead of four. When playing a mixed game with both children and adults, allow the children to form words of any length; the adults remain restricted to words of four letters or more.

## Strategy and Hints

When it is your turn to put a card face-up in the center, always try to play a letter that does not “go with” the letters already visible, to make forming words as difficult as possible for your opponents. For example, if a T was face-up, and you had in your hand both an R and a B, you should play the B because the digraphs “tb” and “bt” almost never occur in English, whereas “tr” and “rt” are very common. You should generally avoid playing vowels face-up, as they will almost always help your opponents form words. You may play difficult letters such as J and Q if you think they will be of no help to your opponents, but you also may want to retain them in case late in the game other players are forced to play vowels that you can use to form high-scoring words with your valuable letters. When it is someone else’s turn to play a card in the center, pay very close attention and be ready to pounce with a word as quickly as possible. If the cards in your hand are so good that you have several different word-forming options, try to use uncommon letters with high point values to form the word that has the highest score — but don’t take too long fumbling for a high-scoring word, or another player may call out “My word!” first.

## Word Poker

*For 2-8 Players*

*Poker is one of the most well-known games in the world, and its rules are familiar to almost everybody. Word Poker plays exactly like poker except that there are no standard hands like three-of-a-kinds, straights, or flushes; the pot is instead won by the player with the highest-scoring word. Word Poker consistently ranks as one of the favorite Letter Head games.*

## Quick Rules

This section gives a very brief overview of how to play *Word Poker* if you are already familiar with standard poker. The game is explained in more detail in the following sections.

1. All players ante one chip.

2. The dealer deals all players five cards.
3. The first round of betting: starting with the player to the dealer’s left, everyone bets, raises, or folds as in standard poker.
4. The draw: all players can discard and draw as many cards as they wish up to five cards.
5. Second round of betting: starting with the player to the dealer’s left, everyone bets, raises or folds as in standard poker.
6. The showdown: if more than one player is left in the game after the second round of betting, then everyone must show their cards and announce their words. The player whose word has the highest point value wins the pot. A word’s point value is determined by adding up all its letter points as well as its bonus points: 25 bonus points for a five-letter word, 15 for a four-letter word, and 5 for a 3-letter word. The player who wins the pot collects all the chips that have been bet, and a new hand begins.

## The Goal

To win all the chips in each deal’s “pot” by being the player with the highest-scoring word.

## Getting Started

Choose a dealer by drawing cards: the player with the letter closest to the beginning of the alphabet deals first, and the deal moves to the left with each successive hand. You will also need something to bet with: poker chips or coins are recommended, but any small household objects such as buttons or paper clips will do. Distribute an equal number of chips to each player, in sufficient quantities to allow for several rounds of play. Different colors or sizes of chips can indicate different values; white chips can be worth one, red chips worth five, and so on.

## The Deal

All players are dealt five cards face-down. In certain poker games (see *Seven-Letter Stud*, page 18, for example) players receive more than five cards, and some are placed face-up. The standard version of poker described here is sometimes called “five card draw.”

## The Play

The rules for betting, drawing cards, and winning the hand are exactly the same as for standard poker. Each player starts the hand by putting one chip in the center of the table. This compulsory initial bet is known as the “ante.” The communal pile of everyone’s bets in the center of the table is called the “pot.” On each deal, the pot is won by the player who holds the highest-scoring word at the climactic “showdown” at the end of the hand, or by the last player left if all the other players have dropped out during the betting in the belief that they have no chance to win.

After the deal, everyone picks up their cards and rearranges them however they wish, attempting to form the most valuable word. Remember that once per hand



everyone can discard as many cards they want and be dealt new cards to replace them (see “The Draw,” below).

### Betting: First Round

The player to the dealer’s left goes first. She has the option to bet as many chips as she wants, depending on how good she thinks her hand is. She must announce how much she is betting and place the proper amount of chips in the pot. If she bets nothing (also called a “check”) the option to bet passes to the next player. As soon as any player bets one or more chips, every player around the table in turn has to match the bet by putting the same number of chips in the pot. If a player feels her hand is not very good, she can at any time “fold” instead of betting and drop out of the game until the next deal. If a player wants to increase the bet, she can, on her turn, “raise” by announcing that she is matching the amount bet so far and putting additional chips in the pot as well. All the players around the table, in order to stay in the game, must then also match the raise as well as the original bet. There is no limit to the number of possible raises during each round of betting.

So, each player must in turn decide whether to a) stay in by “calling” or “seeing” the bet, b) drop out or “fold” by not betting any further and withdrawing from the hand, or c) “raise” by increasing the size of the bet. Once every player still in the game has put an equal number of chips in the pot and the turn has gone around the table to the last person who raised (or who started the betting if there were no raises), then the first round of betting is over and everyone gets to discard and draw new cards (see “The Draw,” below). If everyone folds except for one remaining player, she wins the pot.

Players who fold after having already made some bets cannot retrieve their chips, which become part of the pot to be won by the player with the best hand.

If, at the beginning of the hand, the option to bet goes all the way around the table and everyone checks without betting anything, then the hand is abandoned. All players return their cards to the dealer, the deck is reshuffled, and a new hand is dealt. The antes are left in the pot and everyone must ante again.

Players may wish to agree ahead of time on the maximum amount allowable for any one bet, to prevent excessively large bets designed to force out players with only a few chips left.

### The Draw

After the first round of betting is complete, each player, starting on the dealer’s left, has the option to discard as many cards as she wants, from zero to five. After each player in turn places her unwanted cards in the discard pile, the dealer then deals her replacement cards from the deck, face-down. No one is allowed to look at the discards, nor at the cards in anyone else’s hand, nor at the cards in the deck. Once all players, including the dealer, have drawn new cards, all players should reconsider their hands and try to form the highest-scoring word.

### Betting: Second Round

After the draw there is a second round of betting, which progresses exactly like the first round. Players have the option to fold and drop out at any time, forfeiting their bets made so far. Unlike in the first round, if everyone checks during the second round the hand is not abandoned.

After the second round of betting is complete, the players remaining in the game have a showdown to determine who is the winner.

### The Showdown

Each player lays her cards face-up on the table and announces the word she is spelling. She then calculates the point value of her word and announces it to the other players. She must stand by the word that she has played; if she or another player notices that she could have played a higher-scoring word, it is too late to change her play by rearranging the cards.

### Calculating the Point Value of Words

Each word’s score is determined by adding up all the letter points on all of the cards in the word *as well as* any bonus points, which are determined by the length of the word. Bonus points are the same as in the basic *Letter Head* rules, the chart for which can be found on the back cover of this booklet as well as on the reference cards. Since all players have five cards, the bonus values are easy to remember:

Letters in Word	5	4	3	2	1
Bonus Points	25	15	5	0	0

Make sure that all players at the start of the game are familiar with this “25-15-5” bonus point scheme, because it is essential knowledge for calculating how likely a hand is to win the pot.

### Winning the Hand

The player whose word scores the most total points wins the pot and collects all the chips in the pot. If two or more players have words with the exact same point totals, then they split the pot evenly; any leftover indivisible chips should be left in the pot to be collected by the winner of the next hand. If, on the off-chance that *everyone* was bluffing, and not a single player has any word at all in her hand, then the player with the single card of the highest point value wins the pot. If two or more players are tied, then they split the pot as above.

(If a player runs out of chips in the middle of a hand, she may stay in the game but only win the total in the pot at the time she ran out of chips. All succeeding bets are placed to the side of the pot. If the player who ran out of chips wins the hand, she only wins the chips in the main pot. The remaining chips in the side pot are won by the player with the *second* best hand. If someone *other* than the player who ran out of chips wins the hand, then the winner takes all the chips in both pots as normal.)

Keep in mind that none of the traditional poker hands, such as pairs, flushes, or straights, count for anything in *Word Poker*. Having three R’s does not constitute a three of a kind, nor does having L, M, N, O, and P constitute having a straight.

### Scoring

There is no need to keep score — the chips themselves serve as a scorekeeping device. Players can count their own chips to see if they have more or less than their opponents.

### How to Win

There is no set ending point for a *Word Poker* game — the game ends either at a predetermined time agreed on beforehand, when all players agree it is time to stop, or when one player has won all of the chips. If you are just playing for fun, the person with the most chips at the conclusion of play

is declared the winner. If you are gambling with real money, then the game is won by the player or players who finish the game with more money than they started.

## Challenges

At the conclusion of a hand, any player still vying for the pot has the right to challenge the word claimed by the winning player. If the word cannot be found in the dictionary, then the challenged player is disqualified and the player with the second best word wins the pot instead. A challenged player is not allowed to rearrange her cards into a different word; once you declare a word, you are committed to it. If the word *can* be found in the dictionary and turns out to be valid, there is no extra penalty for the challenger, since she is going to lose the pot anyway. Players who have folded and are no longer in the hand are not permitted to challenge a word.

## Strategy and Hints

As with standard poker, the most successful players have a knack for bluffing and misleading their opponents. Bluffing can entail pretending to have a hand better than you actually do, or maintaining an expressionless “poker face” while making large and risky bets. The purpose of bluffing is to scare off players with good hands, so that you may win the pot with a mediocre or bad hand. “Sandbagging” is the opposite of bluffing: acting passive and disappointed with your cards when in fact you have a high-scoring hand likely to win the pot. The purpose of sandbagging is to keep as many players in the game as possible and thereby increase the size of the pot and your winnings. A good mixture of bluffing, sandbagging, maintaining a poker face, and playing honestly will keep the opposition confused and running scared.

## Seven-Letter Stud

*For 2-8 Players*

*Seven-Letter Stud is based on the popular poker variant seven card stud, which allows for more creativity in forming the best hands and more opportunities for betting than standard five card draw. The rules are essentially the same as for Word Poker, except for the number and manner in which the cards are dealt, the increased number of betting rounds, and the expanded possibilities for forming words up to seven letters long.*

## Quick Rules

This section gives a very brief overview of how to play *Seven-Letter Stud* if you are already familiar with standard poker. The game is explained in more detail in the following sections.

1. All players ante one chip.
2. The dealer deals all players two cards face-down and one card face-up.

3. The first round of betting: starting with the player showing the highest value face-up card, everyone bets, raises, or folds as in standard poker.
4. The dealer deals to all players a second, third, and fourth face-up card, each of which is followed by an additional round of betting.
5. Finally, the dealer deals all players a seventh card, face-down, which is followed by a fifth and final round of betting.
6. The showdown: if more than one player is left in the game after the last round of betting, then everyone must show their cards and announce their words. Players may use any or all of their seven cards in forming a word. The player whose word has the highest point value wins the pot. A word's point value is determined by adding up all its letter points as well as its bonus points: 35 bonus points for a seven-letter word, 25 for a six-letter word, 15 for a five-letter word, 5 for a 4-letter word, and 1 for a three-letter word. The player who wins the pot collects all the chips that have been bet, and a new hand begins.

## The Goal

To win all the chips in each deal's “pot” by being the player with the highest scoring word.

## Getting Started

Same as *Word Poker* (see page 15).

## The Deal

All players are, at first, dealt two cards face-down and then one card face-up.

## The Play

The rules for betting and winning the hand are exactly the same as for *Word Poker*, with the following exceptions noted below.

After the deal, everyone picks up their *face-down cards* and rearranges them however they wish, attempting to form the most valuable word. Players must leave their face-up cards on the table in front of them.

Players are not allowed to discard or draw replacement cards in *Seven-Letter Stud*.

## Betting: First Round

The player whose face-up card has the highest point value goes first. Aside from this one distinction, all rules for betting are exactly like those in *Word Poker* (see page 16).

## Dealing and Betting: Second, Third, and Fourth Rounds

After the first round of betting is complete, the dealer deals to all players still in the game another face-up card, which also must remain displayed on the table. This is followed by a second round of betting, starting again with the player showing the highest value face-up card or cards. The dealer then deals to all players still in the game a *third* face-up card, followed by a *third* round of betting. The dealer then deals to all players still in the game a *fourth* face-up card, followed by a *fourth* round of betting.

## Dealing and Betting: The Final Round

On the final round the dealer deals to all players a seventh card face-down. The players are allowed to pick this card up and again rearrange their cards, attempting to form the best word possible. This is followed by the fifth and final round of betting, which is often quite wild. Players maintain the option to stay in, raise, or fold all the way through the final round of betting.

## The Showdown

Same as *Word Poker* (see page 17). Note that in *Seven-Letter Stud* players may use any or all of their seven cards to form the highest scoring word possible.

## Calculating the Point Value of Words

Each word's score is determined by adding up all the letter points on all of the cards in the word *as well as* any bonus points, which are determined by the length of the word. Bonus points are the same as in the basic *Letter Head* rules, the chart for which can be found on the back cover of this booklet and on the reference cards. Since all players have seven cards, the bonus values are easy to remember:

<b>Letters in Word</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
Bonus Points	35	25	15	5	1	0	0

Make sure that all players at the start of the game are familiar with this "35-25-15-5-1" bonus point scheme, because it is essential knowledge for calculating how likely a hand is to win the pot.

## Winning the Hand

Same as *Word Poker* (see page 17).

## Scoring, How to Win, Challenges

All of these are the same as *Word Poker* (see pages 17-18).

## Strategy and Hints

Each player should carefully examine the face-up cards of her opponents when deciding whether to call, fold, or raise; being able to see some of your opponent's cards is one of the unique features of all stud poker games. Otherwise, the Strategy and Hints recommendations are the same as for *Word Poker* (see page 18).

## Game Variants

### Fewer Betting Rounds

If all players agree they want fewer rounds of betting, the first two rounds can be skipped entirely, with the dealer immediately dealing everyone two face-down cards and three face-up cards without interruption at the beginning of the hand. After this, the betting and the rest of the game continue as normal.

### Seven-Letter No Peeky

This is played exactly like *Seven-Letter Stud*, except that all cards are face-down at all times.

# Stormy Letters

For 2-8 Players

*This wild and woolly poker variant is like Seven-Letter Stud in which all players share the same face-up cards. Players are also allowed to improve their hands by discarding and redrawing, which frequently leads to high-scoring words and high-drama showdowns.*

## Quick Rules

This section gives a very brief overview of how to play *Stormy Letters* if you are already familiar with standard poker. The game is explained in more detail in the following sections.

1. All players ante one chip.
2. The dealer deals all players four cards, and three cards face-down in the center of the table.
3. The first round of betting: starting with the player to the dealer's left, everyone bets, raises, or folds as in standard poker.
4. The draw: all players can discard and draw as many cards as they wish, from zero to four.
5. Revealing the center cards and further rounds of betting: the dealer flips over the cards in the center, each flip followed by a round of betting.
7. The showdown: if more than one player is left in the game after the last round of betting, then everyone must show their cards and announce their words. Players may use any or all of their four cards *and* any or all of the three cards in the center in forming a word. The player whose word has the highest point value wins the pot. A word's point value is determined by adding up all its letter points as well as its bonus points: 35 bonus points for a seven-letter word, 25 for a six-letter word, 15 for a five-letter word, 5 for a 4-letter word, and 1 for a three-letter word. The player who wins the pot collects all the chips that have been bet, and a new hand begins.

## The Goal

To win all the chips in each deal's "pot" by being the player with the highest scoring word.

## Getting Started

Same as *Word Poker* (see page 15).

## The Deal

All players are dealt four cards face-down, and three cards are dealt face-down in the center of the table, next to the pot.

## The Play

Same as *Word Poker* (see pages 15-16).

## Betting: First Round

Same as *Word Poker* (see page 16).

## The Draw

Same as *Word Poker* (see page 16), save that, obviously, four cards is the maximum number of cards that can be drawn.

## Revealing and Betting: Second, Third, and Fourth Rounds

After the draw, the dealer turns face-up one of the cards in the center. This is followed by a second round of betting, starting again with the player to the dealer's left. The dealer then turns over the second and third cards in the center, each followed by a round of betting as before. After the last round of betting is complete, the players remaining in the game have a showdown to determine who is the winner.

## The Showdown

Same as *Word Poker* (see page 17). Note that in *Stormy Letters* every player may use any or all of the cards in her hand *as well as* any or all of the cards in the center. If one player incorporates a particular letter from the center into her word, the letter is *not* "used up"; the other players may use the same letter in their words too, if they choose to. If a wild card is in the center, each player can use it to substitute for whichever letter she wishes.

## Calculating the Point Value of Words

Each word's score is determined by adding up all the letter points on all of the cards in the word *as well as* any bonus points, which are determined by the length of the word. Bonus points are the same as in the basic *Letter Head* rules, the chart for which can be found on the back cover of this booklet and on the reference cards. Since all players have seven cards available to choose from, the bonus values are easy to remember:

<b>Letters in Word</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
Bonus Points	35	25	15	5	1	0	0

Make sure that all players at the start of the game are familiar with this "35-25-15-5-1" bonus point scheme, because it is essential knowledge for calculating how likely a hand is to win the pot.

## Winning the Hand

Same as *Word Poker* (see page 17).

## Scoring, How to Win, Challenges

All of these are the same as *Word Poker* (see pages 17-18).

## Strategy and Hints

Remember that the three cards in the center can also be used by all the other players, so don't get too excited if you can incorporate a high-scoring letter from the center in your word; the other players will likely be able to do the same. The key to winning *Stormy Letters* is to make 6- or 7-letter long words, or to incorporate high-scoring letters *from your hand* into your word. Otherwise, the Strategy and Hints are the same as for *Word Poker* (see page 18).

# Freeze

For 3-6 Players

*Based on a notorious cutthroat gambling game popular in the Old West, Freeze requires nerves of steel and a good sense of timing. In each round, the suspense grows and grows until one brave player takes the plunge and calls "Freeze!"*

## The Goal

To form the highest-scoring word as early in the game as possible.

## Getting Started

Choose a dealer by drawing cards: the player with the letter closest to the beginning of the alphabet deals first and keeps score, and the deal moves to the left with each successive hand.

## The Deal

All players are dealt five cards each, face-down, and the remaining deck is placed in the center of the table. The dealer then turns over the top card and places it face-up next to the deck to start the discard pile. (Game variant: *Freeze* may also be played with six-card hands.)

## The Play

The player to the dealer's left goes first. Progressing clockwise around the table, each player in turn draws the top card either from the deck or the discard pile, and then discards any card from her hand face-up. Each player tries to improve her hand by discarding whichever card she feels is least helpful. All players must maintain a five-card hand. At any point during the game, any player, as she is discarding, may call out "Freeze!" if she thinks she has a higher-scoring hand than anyone else. Once a player calls "Freeze!", all the *other* players aside from the "freezer" get to draw and discard one additional time, after which there is a showdown to see who has the highest-scoring word. Each player lays her cards on the table, spelling out the best word she can. The player with the highest-scoring word wins the round (see "Scoring," below). If the freezer ties for highest score with another player, then she loses and the other player wins the round. If two players other than the freezer tie for highest score, then they both get credit for winning the round. After the winner is noted, the cards are gathered and reshuffled, and a new hand is dealt.

## Scoring

Once all players have displayed their cards, each player adds up the point values of all the letters in her word. There are no bonus points for having longer or shorter words. Other cards in a player's hand not incorporated into her word are not counted. The player who scores the most letter points wins the round; the scorekeeper then adds a mark to that player's tally on the scoresheet. Word scores and letter points are not recorded; they are only used to determine who wins each round.

## How to Win

The first player to win fifteen rounds wins the game.

## Challenges

A player may challenge any word played and insist that it be looked up in a dictionary. If the word can not be found, then the challenged player scores no points for that hand. A challenged player may not rearrange her cards to form a different word. If the word *is* in the dictionary, then the word is scored as normal and there is no penalty for the challenger.

## Strategy and Hints

It may appear at first glance that the freezer is at a great disadvantage: all the other players get to improve their hands one more time than the freezer, and she loses in the case of a tie. However, the freezer gets to stop the action at the moment her hand has reached its maximum probable value; the other players will have yet to form decent words, or they would have called "Freeze!" themselves. Once you form a fairly respectable five-letter word, or a three- or four-letter word that uses high-scoring letters, it may very well be to your advantage to call "Freeze!" immediately, before the other players have a chance to substantially improve their hands. Because there are no bonus points in Freeze for longer words, high-scoring letters become especially valuable; often a short word with rare letters will outscore a long word with common letters.

## Crosswords

*For 2-4 Players*

*Crosswords is a classic word-building parlor game made more exciting and competitive with the introduction of cards, point values, and the ability to select which letter you want.*

## The Goal

To arrange your cards in a 5 x 5 grid so that the greatest number of words possible are formed both horizontally and vertically.

## Getting Started

Choose a dealer by drawing cards: the player with the letter closest to the beginning of the alphabet deals for the entire game. Make sure that everyone around the table has ample space to arrange their cards.

## The Deal

Place the deck face-down in the center of the table. The dealer then turns over two, three, or four cards face-up next to the deck, depending on whether there are two, three, or four players in the game.

## The Play

The player to the dealer's left then chooses one of the cards for her own use. She takes it and places it face-up in front of herself, as the first card in what will eventually grow into a 5 x 5 grid of cards. The player to *her* left then selects the card of her choice from the remaining cards, and places it in front of herself, and so on with the third and fourth players, if any.

The deal and selection process are repeated exactly 25 times, with the option to select the first card passing from player to player clockwise around the table. So on the second deal, the dealer would again deal four cards (if there are four players) face-up in the center, and the player *two* seats to her left would first choose the card of her choice, with each player in a clockwise direction choosing from among the remaining cards. Note that the final player on each deal has no choice but to take the one remaining card and place it in her grid.

Once a player has placed a card in a specific location in her grid, she is not allowed to move it under any circumstances.

As the game progresses, each player will find it more and more difficult to decide on the appropriate place in the grid for her cards. The dealer may want to enforce a one minute time limit on slow players.

Players try to arrange their cards so that the greatest number of words are spelled both in the five horizontal rows *and* the five vertical columns. Words must be at least three letters long. Wild cards can substitute for any letter, and may be used in the place of a certain letter for a horizontal word and for a completely different letter for a vertical word, if the player so chooses.

A player's grid may grow in any direction, but there may never be more than five columns and five rows. If a player finds that her cards are too close to the edge of the table, she may slide them as a group to a better spot on the table, but not change the arrangement of her grid.

## Scoring

Once all the players have completed their 5 x 5 grids, every player in turn announces which word is in each column or row of her grid. She adds up the letter point values of all the cards in each word, notes them down, and then totals up all the points for all her words to arrive at her grand total. Note that if a letter is used in both a horizontal word and a vertical word, it is counted twice, once in each word.

Letters that are not used in any word are not counted. Players are allowed to spell only one word in each column or row. Words spelled with diagonally connected letters are not allowed. There are no bonus points for word length. Wild cards count the point value of the letter for which they substituted, so that if the player used a wild card in the place of J to spell JAB, he would score 18 points for the wild card, just as if he really had the J. If the wild card represents a different letter in the other direction, the new point value is calculated the same way.

## How to Win

The player with the highest grand total points wins the game.

## Challenges

A player may challenge any word spelled in another player's grid and insist that it be looked up in a dictionary. If the word cannot be found, then it is disqualified. The challenged player may then announce a different word for the same line, if by chance there is one. If no other words can be

formed with those five letters in a row, then the challenged player scores no points for that particular line. If the word *can* be found in the dictionary and proves to be valid, then it is scored as normal and there is no penalty for the challenger.

## Strategy and Hints

A player might be tempted to select high-scoring letters when she has a chance, but this plan may backfire: high-scoring letters are often difficult to form words with, so she may end up with a grid full of V's, J's, and X's with which she cannot form any words. On the other hand, the player who plays it safe and fills her grid with easy-to-use letters like E's, T's, and S's may be able to spell many words across and down, but she won't score very much because the common letters have low point values. Each player must decide which course of action she thinks is best.

Despite its apparent simplicity, *Crosswords* is a very difficult game to play well. Players must visualize the possibilities of the entire grid each time they select and place a letter.

## Take a Letter

*For 2-6 Players*

*This game takes the old parlor game Concentration to an entirely new level. Players not only have to remember the location of dozens of hidden cards, they also have to manipulate the hidden combinations in their minds to form legitimate words — vastly more difficult than simply finding matching pairs as in the original game. Players are pitted against each other in a desperate race to be the first to use long-remembered letters before opponents steal them away.*

## The Goal

To spell out words with face-down cards by remembering the location of hidden letters as they are turned over one by one — before your opponents do the same thing.

## Getting Started

Choose a dealer by drawing cards: the player with the letter closest to the beginning of the alphabet deals first, and the deal moves to the left with each successive hand.

## The Deal

Arrange 64 cards face-down in the center of the playing area in a neat 8 x 8 grid. Make sure no one sees the cards as they are dealt.

## The Play

Play moves around the table starting on the dealer's left. Each player on her turn selects one card from the field and turns it over for all to see. Once everyone has seen the card she turns it back over face-down, and the turn passes to the next player. Play continues like this around the table as

more and more cards are exposed one at a time. Eventually one player on her turn may think she is able to spell a word of at least three letters using some of the hidden cards. At this point (only when it is her turn) a player announces she can form a word. Then, instead of turning over a random card, the player names the word she intends to spell and calls out each letter in order and subsequently turns over each card. If she is successful in predicting the location of every card in a correctly spelled word, she gathers up all those cards and places them in a pile in front of her, to be added to her score later. But if a player, for example, attempting to spell the word HOB0, successfully turns over H and O but then calls out "B" and instead turns over an M, she must stop immediately and replace all the cards face-down. She forfeits the remainder of her turn. Play then passes to the next player as usual. Play continues until there are no cards left in the entire 8 x 8 grid, or until all players agree that no more words can be formed with the remaining hidden letters. On the second deal, if the players all want to advance to a more difficult challenge, everyone can agree to increase the minimum word length to four letters long. *Note:* wild cards can be used to substitute for any letter.

## Scoring

Once there are no more cards left in the field, or once it becomes apparent that no playable words remain to be discovered, all players then tally up the total of all the letter points in the card piles in front of them, comprised of all the words they successfully played during the game. These totals are then added to each player's score, and a new deal begins.

## How to Win

The player with the most points after two complete 8 x 8 grids have been played through wins the game.

## Challenges

A player may challenge any word and insist that it be looked up in a dictionary. If the word can not be found, or if it was obviously misspelled, all the cards must be turned back over and replaced in their original locations. The challenged player must then close her eyes the next time a new card is turned over. If a challenged word turns out to be authentic, then the challenger or challengers must close *their* eyes the next time a new card is turned over.

## Strategy and Hints

The key to this game is not getting distracted. Try to concentrate as carefully as possible on each card as it is turned over, and don't let the other players' antics disturb you. Spell a word as soon as you sure you can do so — it rarely pays to wait to construct a better or longer word.

# Letter Hogs

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*For 5-9 Players*

*This is a fast-paced and comical game based on the old children's game Pig. In Letter Hogs it helps to know the alphabet, though, turning a fun-filled party game into a fun-filled learning experience.*

## The Goal

To be the first player to get three cards in consecutive alphabetical order, or at least avoid being the last player to notice that another player has done so.

## Getting Started

First, remove all wild cards from the deck. Then, choose a dealer by drawing cards: the player with the letter closest to the beginning of the alphabet deals first, and the deal moves to the left with each successive hand. If an adult is arranging the game, she can deal the cards to speed things up.

## The Deal

All players are dealt seven cards face-down.

## The Play

Each player looks at her cards and tries to find any three that are “in a row,” i.e. in consecutive alphabetical order. If she can't find any at first (which is normal), she chooses the one card from her hand she doesn't want and passes it to the player on her left by placing it face-down on the table between them. Each player then picks up the new card that has been passed to her. There are no turns or waiting for other players — everyone is passing and picking up cards simultaneously. No player is allowed to accumulate more than seven cards in her hand at any one time, so each player must pass a card to the left and *then* pick up the card coming from the player on their right. If one of the players is being slow to pass a card, the player or players waiting for her can verbally encourage her to hurry up.

## Scoring

There is no scoring per se, unless players want to keep track of who wins each game.

## How to Win

Once any player sees in her hand that she has three cards in a row alphabetically, she silently and as inconspicuously as possible puts her finger on her nose. She may stop passing cards, or attempt to keep playing with one hand. In any case, she should not do anything to draw attention to herself. As each player notices that someone has gotten three in a row, they, too, put fingers on their noses. The player who is most absorbed in looking at her hand and passing cards will be the last to notice. After every player but one has a finger on her nose, everyone shouts “Letter hog!” and the last player to notice is compelled to stand up and recite the alphabet. The game is won by the player who first got three letters in a row, and lost by the player who was the last to notice.

## Challenges

If a player claims to have three cards in a row and it is later discovered that she in fact does not, everyone immediately picks up their cards and continues passing as before.

## Strategy and Hints

Make sure to get rid of duplicate letters — they never do you any good. Try to keep letters that are clustered close together, and pass away isolated letters that are off all by themselves. For example, if you had in your hand B, C, E, H, I, L, T, pass away the T and try to accumulate letters near the beginning of the alphabet, because you're much more likely to get three in a row there. It helps to arrange the letters in your hand in alphabetical order so you can see all the possible groupings.

# Letter Perfect

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*For 1 Player*

*This game is for very young children first learning the alphabet.*

## The Goal

To help your child learn the alphabet, spell simple words, and become comfortable manipulating letters.

## Getting Started

Take one card of each letter from the deck. Scramble them all face-up on the floor or on a flat surface in front of your child.

## The Play

Encourage your child to arrange the cards in alphabetical order. If she has already mastered the alphabet, you can arrange the cards in alphabetical order in front of her, and encourage her to find the cards which spell out easy words.

## Strategy and Hints

If your child is having trouble finding the next letter in the sequence, you can help her to locate the card or to remember which letter comes next — singing the alphabet song works as a friendly encouragement and reminder.

# Letter Head Solitaire

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*For 1 Player*

*This is a no-frills, basic form of solitaire that takes up very little space and doesn't involve remembering any complicated or special game rules. It's a good game to play while waiting in airports or taking planes, riding trains or buses, or in any other setting where you don't have a lot of room to spread out.*

## The Goal

To form a series of words using every single card in the deck.

## Getting Started

Place the thoroughly shuffled deck face-down in front of you.

## The Deal

Draw seven cards from the deck to start.

## The Play

Inspect the cards in your hand and find among them the longest possible word, or the word that uses the rarest letters. Meld any word at least three letters long and place the cards face-up in the used pile. Replenish your hand up to seven cards again from the face-down deck. Wild cards can be used in place of any letter. Keep playing words from your hand, placing them in the used pile, and replenishing your hand from the deck after every word. The goal is to keep playing and replenishing until the deck runs out, and you have used every card in a word.

At any point in the game you may find yourself with a seven-card hand in which no words at all can be formed. This is called *getting stymied*. Every time you get stymied, take all the cards in your hand and place them *face-up* on the bottom of the unplayed deck, which is otherwise face-down. When you reach the end of the face-down cards, take all the unplayed face-up cards, turn them over, reshuffle them thoroughly, place them face-down in front of you, start drawing again from these recycled cards, and play as before. If you are again stymied, repeat the process until you have used up all the cards or you are unable to play any more words.

## How to Win

You win if you are able to use up the entire deck; you lose if you are stuck with any unplayable cards.

## Strategy and Hints

Try to play words that have a high proportion of consonants and just one or two vowels. Use up difficult letters such as J and X whenever you possibly can, even in short or unimpressive words. You want to make sure your hand does not become clogged up with six or seven incompatible consonants. If you have played halfway through the deck and notice that the Q has not yet appeared, you may want to try to hang on to any unplayed U's if possible, to avoid getting stuck with an unplayable Q at the end of the game. Beware, though: if your hand has only one vowel, you will be compelled to

play it in a word, even if you don't want to. Try to hang on to wild cards as long as possible, especially as you get near the end of the deck; they will come in very handy when and if you find yourself facing a stack of troublesome letters that stymied you earlier.

# Crosswords Solitaire

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*For 1 Player*

*Unlike most solitaire games using standard playing cards, Crosswords Solitaire is an engaging intellectual challenge — not just a way to pass the time. This solitaire version of Crosswords is even more of a brain-teaser than the multi-player game, since you have no choice as to which cards you draw from the deck.*

## The Goal

To arrange your cards in a 5 x 5 grid so that the greatest number of words possible are formed both horizontally and vertically.

## Getting Started

Place the thoroughly shuffled deck face-down in front of you. Make sure that you have ample space to arrange your cards.

## The Deal

Draw one card at a time from the deck. Do not peek at the next card, though you may very well be tempted.

## The Play

Take the card you have drawn and place it face-up in front of you, as the first card in what will eventually grow into a 5 x 5 grid of cards. One-by-one draw a total of 25 cards, carefully placing each one in the grid in such a way as to maximize the possible number of words that can be spelled both horizontally and vertically. Words must be at least three letters long. Wild cards can substitute for any letter, and may be used in the place of a certain letter for a horizontal word and for a completely different letter for a vertical word, if the player so chooses.

Once you have placed a card in a specific location in the grid, you are not allowed to move it under any circumstances. Your grid may grow in any direction, but there may never be more than five columns and five rows. If you find that your cards are too close to the edge of the table, you may slide them as a group to a better spot on the table, but not change the arrangement of the grid.

## Scoring

Once you have completed your 5 x 5 grid, identify which word is in each column or row. Add up the letter point values of all the cards in each word, note them down, and then total up all the points

for all the words to arrive at your grand total. Note that if a letter is used in both a horizontal word and a vertical word, it is counted twice, once in each word.

Letters that are not used in any word are not counted. You are allowed to spell only one word in each column or row. Words spelled with diagonally connected letters are not allowed. There are no bonus points for longer words. Wild cards count the point value of the letter for which they substituted, so that if the player used a wild card in the place of J to spell JAB, he would score 18 points for the wild card, just as if he really had the J. If the wild card represents a different letter in the other direction, the new point value is calculated the same way.

## How to Win

Compete against yourself. Keep a record of your highest grand totals, and try to outdo your own best score.

## Strategy and Hints

Carefully ponder each card before you decide where to put it — one misplaced card can wreak havoc on your entire grid.

### Design Note: Letter Frequencies

The *Letter Head* deck contains 124 cards. The distribution of letters in it (with the exception of wild cards) genuinely reflects how frequently they actually occur in English and the point values precisely reflect how difficult it is to form a word using each letter. In this respect, *Letter Head* has a large advantage over other popular letter games, all of which — at this time, anyway — contain serious inaccuracies in the distribution of letters on their game pieces.

To ascertain the true frequency with which each letter of the alphabet occurs in the English language, *Letter Head's* designers synthesized the information presented in dozens of reliable and detailed studies done over the last century. A complete analysis of how this was done can be found on the Atlas Games web site ([www.atlas-games.com](http://www.atlas-games.com)), for those who are interested.

Of course, none of this information is needed to play the game. The average player need only know that the deck seems to always have the right amount of each letter, and that the scoring makes sense.

## Letter Head Quick Rules

1. **Dealing:** Deal each player five cards from the deck.
2. **Forming words:** The player to the dealer's left goes first and tries to form the highest-scoring word possible with the letters in his hand. If she wants, the declarer (player forming a word) can draw one-by-one up to five additional cards from the deck before deciding to play her word.
3. **Drawing cards:** All players have the right to draw cards in this manner at any time during the game, whether or not it is their turn.
4. **Scoring:** Once she has successfully played a word, the declarer scores the total of all the points on the letters in her word, added to a bonus which varies according to how many cards in her hand she used (see Scoring Chart on the back cover or reference card).
5. **Bluffing:** If she so chooses, the declarer may bluff the other players by displaying some or all of the cards in her word face down. If none of the other players dare to call her bluff, then she scores the word as normal whether or not it was spelled correctly.
6. **Calling bluffs:** If someone *does* call the declarer's bluff but her word was in fact spelled correctly, then she scores an additional 10 points for every player that called her bluff. If her word was spelled *incorrectly*, then she scores no points for that turn and everyone who called her bluff adds 10 points to their scores.
7. **Challenging:** After a declarer's word is fully revealed, any other player may challenge it if she thinks it is not a real word. If the word can be found in a dictionary, the declarer scores an additional 25 points for each challenger; if it can not, then each challenger scores 25 points and the declarer forfeits her turn.
8. **Players' turns:** After a player's turn is over, her score is noted on the scoresheet and she replenishes her hand up to five cards from the deck. The turn then passes to the player on her left.
9. **Passing a turn:** On any turn, if a player is unable or unwilling to play any word, she may skip her turn by discarding as many cards as she wants, and replenishing her hand up to five cards from the deck.
10. **Winning:** The game is won by the player with the highest score after five complete rounds of play.



**Visit Atlas Games on the world wide web** for an in-depth discussion of *Letter Head's* design and card distribution, new games you can play with your *Letter Head* deck, and tips on creating your own *Letter Head* games.

If any component of your copy of *Letter Head* is missing upon purchase, please contact Atlas Games immediately for a replacement. If you would like to replace lost cards, contact Atlas Games for current prices and availability.

PO Box 131233  
Roseville, MN 55113  
USA

Phone: 651-638-0077  
Fax: 651-638-0084  
[info@atlas-games.com](mailto:info@atlas-games.com)

**[www.atlas-games.com](http://www.atlas-games.com)**

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# LETTER Head

## Play Reference

### Scoring Chart

Number of Letters in Word	Number of Cards in Hand					
	5	6	7	8	9	10
3	5	3	1	0	0	0
4	15	10	5	3	1	0
5	25	20	15	10	5	3
6		30	25	20	15	10
7			35	30	25	20
8				40	35	30
9					45	40
10						50

### Letter Values & Frequencies

Letter	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
Point Value	2	9	4	3	1	5	7	2	2	18	13	3	5	2
Frequency	9	2	4	5	15	3	2	6	8	1	1	4	3	8

  

Letter	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	?
Point Value	2	5	20	2	2	1	4	12	7	15	6	25	?
Frequency	9	3	1	8	7	11	3	1	2	1	2	1	4

? = Wild Card