

AN 1800-POINT SCRABBLE TURN?

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In SCRABBLE[®] crossword game (hereafter referred to simply as SCRABBLE), playing all seven tiles at once entitles one to a 50-point bonus, which, when added to the score for the word(s) formed, often results in a single turn of 70 points or more. Even 100-point turns can occur when the tiles are played on one or more premium squares which double or triple the values of letters or words. Theoretically, in fact, well over 1,000 points are possible when seven tiles are added in key positions to eight tiles already on the board to produce several words including a 15-letter word spanning two double-letter squares and three triple-letter squares.

For over 20 years, logologists have been attempting to discover the upper limit for this theoretical score. While the record has been improved again and again, the source of the 15-letter words used nearly always has been the same -- Webster's New International Dictionary, Second Edition. The most recent edition of this unabridged word source, Webster's Third, has never supplied record words, though it's full of modern chemical and medical sesquipedalians.

Recently, though, the 1981 edition of Webster's Third appeared, and hidden in its addenda was just the word necessary to dethrone Webster's Second as the champion SCRABBLE word source. Imagine my elation when, while pursuing the addenda, my eyes fell on OXYPHENBUTAZONE, a phenylbutazone derivative ($C_{19}H_{20}N_2O_3$) used to relieve the pain and inflammation of arthritis. Having disappointedly resigned myself to the fact that all the best 15-letter words had been discovered before I had even heard of SCRABBLE, I had suddenly happened upon one that would outscore them all. Indeed, having found OXYPHENBUTAZONE over a year before in a technical dictionary (where playing it was not possible due to that dictionary's lack of the necessary short words like hen, uta or on), I could recall its base score without stopping to calculate it: 54 points (the sum of all letter and premium letter scores before considering premium word scores). Surely OXYPHENBUTAZONE's 54 points would easily outscore the current 1,762-point record based on the 51-point DIAZOHYDROXIDES. Perhaps even the 1,800-point mark could be reached. Eager to investigate just how high this discovery could score, I began working with my list of hundreds of curtailments (words that remain words with their final letters removed) mined from Webster's Third. First I concentrated on finding high-scoring curtailments for the three letters placed on the triple-word squares, O, B and E. From the remaining letters I chose four more curtailments (one of which, defibrillator(y), I found in the addenda), and, connecting the words in a legal SCRABBLE game, I finished with a 1,784-point turn:

	C	A	C	I	Q	U	I	S	M		+O		
									A	X			
D	E	F	I	B	R	I	L	L*	A	T	O	R	+Y
									P	O	L	Y	+P
									S	T	D	H	
									I			R	E
							D	I	V	E		E	N
							E			H	A	J	I
												N	U
												E	S
												T	A
			G					W	A	L	T		+Z
		S	O	U		A*				O	O		
			O	V	E	R	D	R	A	W			+N
F	R	A	N	K	A	L	M	O	I	G	N		+E

The blank tiles are indicated with asterisks. All of the words used appear in boldface in Webster's Third, labelled as a part of speech. In the turn in which the seven letters set off to the side are played simultaneously, eight words are formed: OXYPHENBUTAZONE (1,458 points), CACIQUISMO (75), DEFIBRILLATORY (23), POLYP (15), HAJIB (51), WALTZ (27), OVERDRAWN (16), and FRANKALMOIGNE (69). The total score for the turn is 1,784 when the 50-point bonus is added.

Not satisfied with less than 1,800 points, I next tried beheadments (words that remain words with their initial letters removed). After doing some general research and finding several relatively good beheadments for the three important letters O, B and E, I decided that beheadments, surprisingly, would score higher than curtailments (ordinarily, they do not). So I set out to determine with certainty the highest possible beheadments score by thoroughly searching each of the sections in Webster's Third containing words beginning with any of the letters in OXYPHENBUTAZONE. To date, I have finished the O, X, Y, E, B and Z sections and achieved 1,794 points:

O+	P	A	C	I	F	I	C	A	T	I	O	N	S
X+	E	N	A	T	E	S							
	Y	A	L	A									
P+	R	E	F	O	R	M	A	T	I	V	E		
	H	R	K						D				
	E	R	G						D				
	N								E				
B+	R	U	S	H	W	O	R	K	S				
	U		W										
	T	I	I	A									
A+	J	I	N	G	L	E							
Z+	O	O	G	A	M	E	T	E					
	O								U				
	N	E							D				
E+	L	O	Q	U	E	N	T	L	Y				

The eight words formed in this record single turn are OXYPHENBUT-

AZONE (1,458 points), OPACIFICATIONS (69), XENATES (14), PREFORMATIVE (25), BRUSHWORKS (66), AJINGLE (15), ZOO-GAMETE (31) and ELOQUENTLY (66). XENATES is found in the addenda. The 50-point bonus brings the turn's score to 1,794. As required by the current SCRABBLE rules, all words used are labelled as a part of speech or are inflectional forms given at words so labelled. Also allowed by the rules is (B) RUSHWORKS, a compound whose plural, -s, is found at work, according to Webster's Third explanatory notes.

Though I still feel that the goal of 1,800 points is possible and that beheadments are more likely than curtailments to yield this score, the huge, unsearched (but beheadment-filled) P, A and T sections stand between me and this goal. I hope to penetrate their barrier and reach 1,800 before the next edition of Webster's Third appears!

ALEXANDER, ELLIOTT, MEDORA, JEREMY, JOANNA, TAYLOR

These are Willard Espy's six grandchildren, for whom he wrote A Children's Almanac of Words at Play (Clarkson N. Potter, 1982; \$8.95 in paperback). It follows the same format as his earlier two Almanac books, with a joke, short poem, or bit of wordplay for each day of the year. Although the book is written at an elementary level, Espy does introduce more logological concepts than the done-to-death palindrome and anagram. Specifically, I noted such items as lipograms (typewriter words), word ladders, pangrammatic sentences, letter changes (bag-beg-big-bog-bug), transdeletions, -gry and -dous words (Espy lists five, but on June 9 uses a sixth, sciapodous), word etymologies, plurals changing to singulars with another s (cares-caress), sentence positionality (place only in each possible position in the sentence 'I hit him in the eye yesterday'), and words-inside-words.

Word Ways authors are represented on Jan 28 (Mary Hazard's rebuses of May 1971), Mar 25 (Dave Silverman's Feb 1971 Kickshaws on foreign spellings of onomatopoeic sounds), May 7 (Mary and Harry Hazard's Nov 1978 Kickshaws enumerating humorous 'How do I love thee' phrases), May 9 (Pearl Feldman's Feb 1972 classroom exercise, a paragraph with no repeated words), Jun 28 (Ralph Beaman's May 1978 Kickshaws quotation of a Seattle schoolboy), Sep 2 (Faith Eckler's May 1976 Kickshaws on updated literary quotations), Sep 4 (Leonard Ashley's short-order cook jargon of Feb 1970), Dec 5 (Darryl Francis's statename chain of Nov 1970), and Dec 17 (Jezebel Xixx's strange paradoxes of Feb 1977 et seq.). I wish I had this book to introduce me to logology when I was a kid.