

CLOSED SCRABBLE BOARDS

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Most SCRABBLE crossword games end only after all 100 tiles have been drawn and one player has "played out" (used all the tiles in the rack). However, the rules say that the game may also end when all possible plays have been made -- when the players have created a "closed board." Games rarely end in this manner, and when they do, the players have usually used nearly all the tiles. Just how few tiles are theoretically necessary, then, to close the board?

The number of tiles depends on the dictionary chosen as word authority. Nine or fewer tiles are sufficient for most dictionaries. (In fact, zero tiles will close the board when the players use a dictionary having no legal words, such as a medical dictionary that does not label words with parts of speech.) For example, using from six to nine tiles, here are closed boards for seven dictionaries (using asterisks to indicate blank tiles):

Webster's Third
(7 tiles)

J P J G
P D Q* or G U V
 Q S V S

Official SCRABBLE Players Dictionary
(9 tiles)

J*
J U S
S O X*
X U

Webster's Second
(6 tiles)

V
V O X*
X S

Random House Unabridged
(7 tiles)

J S
S O X*
X S

Webster's New Collegiate
Webster's Ninth New Collegiate
Merriam-Webster Pocket Dictionary
(6 tiles)

Q*
Q T S
S S

In accordance with the current rules, all words used in the above boards are labeled with parts of speech or are inflected forms of words so labeled, and none are always capitalized.

For the Webster's Second closed board, VOX is the past tense of WAX (the other VOX listing has no part-of-speech label). In the Random House closed board, the S or O of SOX must be played on the center star square to prevent DESOXYRIBOSE from reopening the board.

Can readers improve on any of these closed boards, or perhaps find words to reopen them?

THE GARDEN OF ELOQUENCE

*In an earlier age, rhetoric was one of the principal components of a university education. Its jargon, though strange to modern ears, dates back to the Greeks: metaphor, antithesis, hendiadys, epizeuxis, aposiopesis, litotes and the like. These are fancy names for literary devices which most writers unconsciously use every time they put pen to paper (or finger to computer terminal keyboard). Willard Espy has created a rhetorical bestiary, inventing delightfully wacky animals to characterize the various rhetorical devices, and placing them in a Garden of Eloquence where the Queen of Eloquence awards medals to each. Although this makes for much more interesting reading than a dry definition-pronunciation-example format, the book is more suited for browsing than cover-to-cover reading; it's a formidable tax on one's memory to keep the devices separate and recall which is which (was *tmesis* the loss of an initial letter in a word, or is that *aphaeresis*?). Available in hardcover from Harper & Row for \$16.95, the book also includes extensive quotations from a 1577 book on rhetoric by Henry Peacham, plus a number of short items originally appearing in *Word Ways* by Mary Hazard, Darryl Francis, Walter Shedlofsky, J. A. Lindon, Howard Bergerson, Donald Drury, Ralph Beaman and Walter Penney. Enjoy!*