

SUMWORDS: A NEW CROSSWORD GAME

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The letter B occurs, on average, once in every hundred letters of standard English prose. So, too, do the letters G and V. By contrast, those same hundred letters will include 13 E's, 9 T's and 4 D's, but J, K, Q, X and Z will, in all probability, be completely absent. Assigning individual letter values which reflect a realistic view of their frequency of use in the language and including decimal points up to 0.5, we have the following table:

A	8.5	F	3	K	0.5	P	3.1	U	3.3	Z	0.1
B	1.5	G	1.3	L	4.5	Q	0.4	V	1		
C	3.5	H	6	M	2.5	R	7	W	2.3		
D	4	I	7.3	N	7.5	S	6.5	X	0.3		
E	13	J	0.2	O	8	T	9	Y	2		

which we can now put to a fascinating hybrid effect.

Take a simple example, the three-letter words. TEE (9 + 13 + 13) totals 35, whereas the Hebrew coin the ZUZ (0.1 + 3.3 + 0.1) is, at a total of 3.5, a tenth of the value of a golf peg.

TEE and ZUZ are the highest and lowest scoring standard three-letter words. In a companion article, Darryl Francis supplies some incredible superlatives; however, this introductory description is centred on everyday words.

Playing Sumwords at the fun level, can one find the SEXIEST women in the world? Which women have names which total the same as SEXIEST (55.6)? How about the world's LARGEST (49.8) microbes or UGLIEST (44.9) men? Conversely, what adjectives match those whom we admire or cannot tolerate?

What are the relative values of saints and sinners? Which saint and which sinner equate mathematically? Can we discern ideal partners? It is hardly surprising that ROMEO (38.5) and JULIET (37.3) are star-crossed lovers -- who would have been a better computer match for either?

Pears Word Games, which launched this concept, is more concerned with word sport than word play, so it introduced games with Sumword values for two or more competitors and, of these, Sumwords-Crosswords is a prime example.

A single (say) 15-by-15 grid is drawn or else perceived on graph paper. Two players (say) Jack and Jill are in contention and Jack is to go first. He sticks a pin in a book and the nearest three-letter word to the pin (called the pinword) is inserted in the centre

of the grid. Jack and Jill have a limit for a grid of this size of any 50 letter each, and the game ends as soon as a player has exhausted his or her exact stock. The object of the game is the scoring of the lower total, and unused letters are penalized at a rate of 7 points per unused letter. Words must be capable of being confirmed in an agreed dictionary in the event of dispute, and they must be lower case, unhyphenated, capable of being written without an apostrophe, and English. There is no objection to dialect, slang, plurals, inferred forms not specified in the dictionary (e.g., verbal inflections, adjectival comparatives) but such forms must be standard. Thus, MAKES, MADE and MAKING are perfectly valid; MAKETH is not, unless it is actually given in the dictionary. Archaic and obsolete words are perfectly acceptable providing that they appear in the dictionary but Middle English and even older forms of the language may not have presumed inflections or other inferences drawn for them. Finally, no word may be used more than once.

Jack's pinword is TWO. This is inserted in the centre of the grid. He can now add to this any word of any length he may select. His choice is DIZZY and he records the following data. One, he has used five letters. Two, he has scored 13.5 points for DIZZY and 12 points for DO. His opening total is 25.5.

By playing QUIZZICAL (35 points) through either Z of DIZZY, Jill has added eight letters to the grid and has 42 letters remaining to Jack's 45. As Jack went first and it is only fair that Jill should have an equal number of turns, if Jack is the first to finish he must still permit Jill a final turn. Whilst neither player is likely to convert QUIZZICAL to QUIZZICALLY at this stage in play, one or the other may be forced to do so at the end of the game in a desperate attempt to shed his or her last remaining letters. In the event of dispute which requires an offending word to be removed, have typewriter correction fluid handy; the offender loses that turn.