

COMPASS CURIOS

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"Compass roses" is an appropriate name for diamond-shaped word sets, where the four extremities are the letters N, E, S, and W, in appropriate order. Compass roses of axis-length 5 and 7 are fairly simple to construct. No fully satisfactory compass rose of length 9 was found. Examples of compass roses include:

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  N
V I A
W I N C E
M E T
  S

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      N
    B U M
  T A C O S
W A R L I K E
  P O E S Y
    N U T
      S

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      N
    Y I P
  A C H E D
O B L I G E E
W H E E L B A S E
  S A P I E N S
    M E S A S
      D E N
        S

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In the compass roses shown above, all words except WHEELBASE, NIHILISES, and PEGBEAN, were found in the Official Scrabble Players Dictionary, Version 3 (OSPD3). WHEELBASE is found in most standard dictionaries, including Webster's II New Riverside. NIHILISES is found in a handful of Web references, in the sense of "annihilates," but appears in no standard dictionary consulted. PEG BEAN could refer to a bean used as a game marker. A Web search reveals several references to PEG BEAN, but all are actually a person's name.

The following compass rose is especially appropriate for four reasons. It contains the compass directions SSE and ESE. Each of those "words" overlaps its appropriate compass heading. Eight of the 10 interlocking words contain at least two principal compass headings (N, E, S, W) each. The principal axes each contain all four principal compass headings. All words in the compass rose are found in the OSPD3, except for BÉTES, and the direction headings SSE, and ESE. BÉTE is a French word, but used in the borrowed phrase BÉTE NOIR.

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      N
    B E G
  P E W E E
W E T N E S S
  G E E S E
    S S E
      S

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Alternately, one could define a "compass rose" as a diamond-shaped word set, where the major axes both consist of the word COMPASS. The next example uses only OSPD3 words:

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      C
    M O A
  B O M B E
C O M P A S S
  A M A S S
    A S H
      S

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"Boxing the compass" is a nautical term. In word-play, it could refer to word squares which contain the word COMPASS. Such word squares are uncommon, and their construction probably requires use of more than one dictionary. Even using several dictionaries, I found "boxed compasses" only where COMPASS occupied the first or fourth column of the square. Examples include:

C O M P A S S
 O L E A N O L
 M E A T I L Y
 P A T U L I N
 A N I L I D E
 S O L I D U S
 S L Y N E S S

N A R C I S M
 A R E O L A E
 R E E M I T S
 C O M P A S S
 I L I A C U M
 S A T S U M A
 M E S S M A N

For the two word squares shown above, all words were found in the OSPD3, except OLEANOL, PATULIN, ANILIDE, and ILIACUM. The exceptions were all found in an electronic version of Stedman's Medical Dictionary, 25th Edition.

For the intrepid adventurer, many compass challenges remain. These include better 9-length compass roses, and also boxed compasses where COMPASS occupies columns other than the first or fourth. For simpler amusement, try constructing 5-length or 7-length compass roses without computer aid. Good luck on your explorations; don't forget your compass!