

'It's every Scrabble player's wish to get their seven letters out at once'

Chris Broderick from east Cork is the chairperson of the All-Ireland Scrabble Association and says there are lots of tips and tricks players can use to improve their game

'I started playing Scrabble 30 years ago. My cousin had children who were the same age so we used to meet up and she showed me how to play. When my kids were older, my cousin and I joined a club that was setting up in Cork and we've been playing ever since.



I'm now the chairperson of the All-Ireland Scrabble Association. We help people set up Scrabble clubs all over Ireland and we really try to encourage people to give it a go.

Scrabble is good for your brain: it increases your word knowledge and spelling, plus it keeps you active and social if you're partaking in tournaments.

It's also great for keeping you focused because you have to stay focused during your game. I used to think a lot about work and what I was doing the next day but when you're playing Scrabble you can't think about anything else.

There is a lot of learning with Scrabble. Every few years you get a list of all the new words that have been added. You're learning new words all the time and I'm still learning. Some of the higher-ranked players study Scrabble. They learn off all the word lists and all the new seven-letter words. Lots of people write down new and interesting words when they encounter them. I tend not to write them down. I try to remember them, although I don't always know the meaning.

It's every Scrabble player's wish to get their seven letters out at once. Long words are great but what every Scrabble player would love to play are seven- and eight-letter words with high-scoring letters.

Examples of this would be cazique (a tribal chieftain or an oriole), quetzal (South American birds) or jonquil (flower of daffodil family). I think a nine-letter word is the longest I've ever put down on the board during a tournament.

Knowing all your two- and three-letter words is important as they can be hooked to letters to make another word. Think 'cat', 'mat', 'hat' and, believe it or not, 'qat' is a word too. You're constantly thinking about the letters that can go before and after these words to make longer words. Some new people might be put off by the fact that there are so many three-letter words. Take the word 'dzo' for example. It's a Tibetan breed of cattle but you might get people thinking, 'That's not a real word!' Other people might say there are too many 'i's on the board. These are just some of the reasons why it can be hard to get people into it but the Scrabble website has great learning tools for beginners.



There are around 100 members of the All-Ireland Scrabble Association and there are clubs across the country. The elite players come from a variety of countries including the US, the UK and Africa. A lot of schools in Nigeria play Scrabble and they work very hard at promoting it. They say it keeps kids off the streets. It's very strong in Thailand too — they play an awful lot of Scrabble in schools there.

Some Irish schools have recently contacted us looking for advice on how to start up clubs. In Waterford they are talking about an inter-school competition. A nine-year-old recently came third in the Group C division in the MGI International Scrabble Classics in Milton Keynes. The prize money is higher in international tournaments because there are more players.

There are six Scrabble tournaments in Ireland this year, which we help to organise. I'm just back from a two-day tournament in Waterford, which I won. I think I got lucky on the day!

Tournaments are long days. On the Saturday we started at 10am and finished at 6.30pm. You play 14 to 15 games per weekend and every game is timed. Each player has 25 minutes on their clock so the total game time can't go beyond 50 minutes, although you might have to pause the clock to check words. We use the Scrabble checker on our phones but some people will insist on double-checking. All of the international players play with the same dictionary, the CSW21, which is also available as a phone app. The tournament director is there to settle any issues that may arise. There is also a book with the Scrabble rules, but most players more or less know them.

The most popular tournaments abroad for Irish people are in Berlin and Malta. I've travelled as far afield as Cyprus, Morocco and Tunisia for tournaments. You have a great social life with it and you meet lots of interesting people from all walks of life and every age group.

Some people play poker late at night when the tournament is over. People are out for a weekend and they are out to enjoy themselves. And while some people take their Scrabble very seriously, some are just in it for fun.



Mattel recently introduced a new, less competitive version of the game. I would say regular Scrabble players won't play it but maybe it will encourage beginners into Scrabble?

A few years ago, we were asked to vote on the removal of all offensive words from the dictionary and it caused an awful lot of debate. Some people disagreed vehemently and said we had gone too politically correct. But hundreds of words were removed. Some of the words I was glad to have gone. They are in the dictionary but you would prefer not to be using them. But some of the words that were removed made no sense to me.

I retired two years ago but with Scrabble I'm still constantly learning. I've met people who are in their 90s and still playing. In saying that, we love seeing young people starting and some of them just take to it like a duck to water. We'll give them a run for their money but we love seeing them coming up through the ranks. If you love words, you'll love Scrabble."

www.irishscrabble.org

As told to Katie Byrne