

USING THE Digital Timer

Each tournament game will be timed using a digital clock that provides each team with 22 minutes to complete all of their moves. This clock has two digital timers each set to an initial readout of “22:00”. As time is used, the timers countdown until they reach “00:00”. At that point, all of a team’s time has been used. After that point, the team enters an overtime period with a reduction of 10 points for each minute, or partial minute, that they use. The time during this period counts up and is always shown with a negative sign in front of it.

Each side of the clock has a button that, when pressed, starts the other team’s timer running. A team is only allowed to press the button on their side. Pressing the button officially ends a team’s turn and no changes to the play can be made after that point. There is a middle button on the clock which can be pressed to stop the timer for both sides. This is only done when there is a scoring dispute, a challenge, a question that requires a director to resolve, or when the game ends.

Digital Timer Q&A

Q. Is a team limited to a maximum number of minutes per turn?

A. No. There is no time limit associated with each turn. However, all of a team’s turns must be completed within the 22 minutes allotted to them or their score will be reduced based on the amount of overtime they use.

Q. Will a team always be able to use all of the 22 minutes that they are allotted?

A. No. Their 22 minutes is the time in which they can play without incurring an overtime penalty. It is possible, due to challenges and the like, that when the round ends, neither team will have used their full 22 minutes. However, this is very unlikely.

Q. Why are digital clocks used at the National School SCRABBLE® Championship (NSSC)?

A. Digital clocks are used for three main reasons:

- They are clearer and more accurate compared to sand timers.
- They provide teams with more control over how they want to spend their time during the game. Some turns might call for a five-minute analysis while another may take just a few seconds to announce an exchange of tiles or to make a quick play.
- They provide participants in the School SCRABBLE® Program with a chance to use the same type of equipment as they will encounter in most sanctioned clubs and tournaments.



Q. Does a school need to purchase this kind of digital clock to practice for the NSSC?

A. No, there are other ways for teams to practice with 22 minutes for their turns. If each team uses a stopwatch, they can press theirs on and off after each turn. There are also less expensive pocket digital timers that are available from the NSA’s Word Gear catalog (www.wordgear.com) which can be set for 22-minute games and which will track overtime. Some schools or students may already have this type of clock as part of their chess equipment.



Q. What must a team do after they make a play but before they press the clock?

A. They must:

- State what letter the blank represents if one was used and record the letter on a Blank Designation form.
- Announce the score for their play.

Q. When can a team stop the clock?

A. The clock can only be stopped

- when there is a disagreement about the score of a given play or the cumulative scores
- when there is a challenge [but not for a “hold”]
- when either team requires the assistance of a director
- when the game ends by a team playing their final tiles with none left in the bag [the team making the final play stops the clock]
- when the game ends after a time limit is announced [either team may then stop the clock]

Q. What happens to the clock when a team is considering challenging a play?

A. If a team calls “hold” after their opponents have made a play and pressed the clock but before they have drawn new tiles, their opponents must refrain from drawing new tiles for 20 seconds. After this time, they can draw new tiles but must keep them separate from their other tiles until the other team decides to challenge the play or withdraws the hold. During this entire time, the clock of the team that issued the “hold” continues to run. It is only stopped if they choose to challenge the play. After one minute, if a challenge has not been issued and the clock stopped, the hold is automatically withdrawn and the play can no longer be challenged. **The digital clock has a special signal that is displayed during the first minute of each turn; this signal must still be visible when the clock is stopped or the challenge will not be allowed.**

Q. When can a team press the button on their opponent’s side?

A. Never.

Q. What happens to the clock when a team wants to use their turn to exchange letters?

A. They do the following in this order:

- Confirm that there are at least 7 tiles remaining in the bag.
- Announce how many tiles [from 1 to 7] they wish to trade.
- Remove that number of tiles from their rack and place them face down.
- Press the clock.
- Records a zero for that turn and draw the replacement tiles, keeping the tiles separate from the tiles that are to be exchanged.
- Return the exchanged tiles to the bag.

Q. Does a team have time penalty points subtracted if their clock reads “00:00” at the end of the game?

A. No. Only when the time has a negative sign in front of it is it considered overtime. After one second, the clock will change from “00:00” to “-00:01”. At this point, the team will have lost 10 points. When a team’s clock is anywhere between “-01:01” and “-02:00”, the team will lose 20 points, etc. 10 points is subtracted for each minute [or partial minute] that is shown as overtime on the clock.

Q. Is there a maximum number of points a team can lose due to overtime?

A. No. For example, if a team scores 100 points in a game but goes 6 minutes into overtime [i.e., their clock reads between “-5:01” and “-6:00”], they will subtract 60 points and be left with a total of 40. If the other team then finished with a score of 150 points, the game spread would be 110 points.

Q. Is each team still given a “final turn”?

A. No, however a warning will be given before each round ends. Once the official end of the round is announced, the team that is not currently taking their turn should immediately press the middle button to stop the clock. Once the clock has been stopped, no tiles can be placed on the board. Neither side may touch the clock again until after both scorecards have been signed. No game shall continue after 60 minutes.

**All rules subject to updates before the event.

***Final decision on all rulings are at the discretion of the Event Director.