

Most regular players realise the worth of an S in helping to yield a seven-letter word for a 50-point bonus. The S makes it easier to form bonus words and also means that they are more likely to be playable (by pluralising an existing word).

Once you've learnt to respect the bonus potential of the S, it can become difficult to let go of it in a non-bonus play. To assist, here's some guidance on other situations when you might use the S:

- The S play gets a lot more points than any alternative. I consider eight extra points worth having. If the other letters are very bonus-friendly and there are bonus openings, then I'd expect more than ten-points to justify using the S.

- The board is not friendly to an S bonus word so there's less potential in keeping the S.

- There is some defensive advantage in scoring a few more points to close down the only S bonus spot, especially if you have a 30-plus lead.

- The S helps you to score well with awkward letters on your rack (eg, vowel surplus).

Any two of those reasons would justify use of the S without too much heavy thought. One alone would need more consideration of the risks and threats, relative scores and unseen tiles.

Let's look at a few example racks with the board position

shown below. What would you play in each case? Would you use the S or not?



With the first rack, it's worth using the S to help score and use the awkward J and V in JIVES J2a (37), making OS. The best play keeping the S is FA J6a (32), but the rack leave is then handicapped by the J and V.

The second rack has more bonus potential. Plays such as JUG E7d (24) or JUN F6a (26) to keep a nice balance with the S are better than using the S in JUGS F14d (32).

The third rack is vowel heavy. The best play is to take a triple word with AROUSE A10a (30), or the unusual AUREUS and AUROUS.

From the final rack, EAU J8a (16) leaves strong bonus potential in AERS and opens up row K for an -S ending bonus, should you need it.

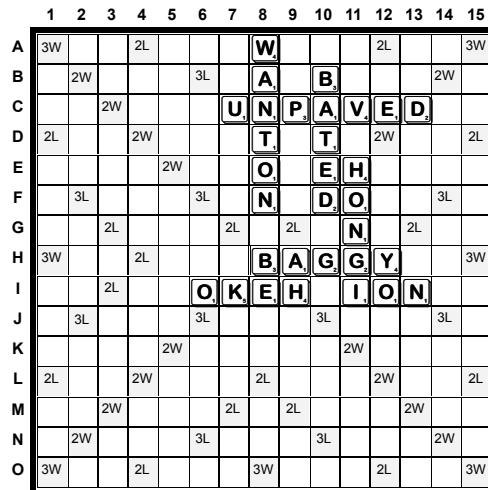
Some definitions

- HONGI a Maori greeting
- JUN a N. Korean coin
- OKEH same as OKAY
- OS a bone (anatomy)

Feedback to Allan Simmons via www.onwords.biz

Chambers Official Scrabble Words International is the word authority used. Word positions use the grid reference plus (a)cross or (d)own.

- 2L double letter square (dl)
- 3L triple letter square (tl)
- 2W double word square (dw)
- 3W triple word square (tw)



Letter values

1 point:



2 points:



3 points:



4 points:



K = 5

J, X = 8

Q, Z = 10