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Tumblewords - 14 April 05

Tumblewords: It's like a cross between that game where you make words with tiles and that game where you drop checkers into a vertical grid. For two wordsmiths.



by [Jonathan A. Leistiko](#)

Banner by [Kathy Bateman / Platypus Dreams](#)

Object

To form words by dropping letters into a bin.

You Need

- A [Tumblewords board](#)
- A set of letter tiles from a commercial letter-tile game
- Pen and paper to keep score

Setting Up

Place the board in the center of the table where all players can reach it. Put the tiles in an opaque container, shake it to assure randomness. Let each player draw 7 tiles. Keep your tiles secret. Choose a player to go first.

Play

On your turn, Place a tile from your hand in a vacant space at the top of a column. That tile "falls" down the column until it reaches the bottom or lands on another tile.

Look for words that can be formed that use the tile you just played. Words can read up, down, left, or right, but must be in a straight line. Score one point for every letter in each word you find; palindromes count twice. If your tile set has blank or "wild" tiles, declare what letter the blank represents when you play it. That tile continues to represent that letter for the rest of the game.

When you feel that you've found all the words you can, draw a tile and end your turn. Play passes to your left.

The game ends when there are no vacant spaces on the board.

Winning

The player with the most points at the end of the game wins.

Variants

Zapper!

If the bottom row is full of tiles, remove them from the game and move all tiles down one space. The game ends when all tiles have been played.

Ticker

Your turn can only take 30 seconds from start to end.

Pressure Cooker

Your turn can only take 30 seconds from start to end. After your turn is done, your opponent has 15 seconds to declare and score any words you could have claimed but failed to notice.

Origin and Credits

I suspect that every game designer has to make at least one letter or word game. Tumblewords is my first, and I'll post another one in June. I like Tumblewords because it's quicker than most letter tile board games, but less frenetic than that popular dice with letters in a 4x4 grid game. It's also a very good game for two players, while most of my games tend to require four players.

I don't remember how long ago I made this game up. Wait a minute... I can look at the date on the first board draft. (pause) Looks like I made Tumblewords in November of 2002. There are a few reasons why Tumblewords has been delayed in getting posted, none of which relate to playtesting or game quality. Reason #1: I really wanted to make an Invisible City letter tile set and include it with this game. Obviously, I didn't. There are lots of reasons for this – the primary one being that y'all probably already have a set of letter tiles. Reason #2: I had plenty of other games ready to roll, so I didn't need to "fall back" on Tumblewords. Reason #3: I forgot about it. Really! I worked on it, it came together rapidly ('cause seriously, it's not a very complex game y'know...), and I set it aside. I only rediscovered it recently as I planned out the menu of games for 2005. Reason #4: I was stumped on what to do for banner art. Big thanks to [Kathy Bateman](#) for making the banner for me!

Thanks to Mike F. for playtesting.