

Four Letter Words

Ages 8+

2 to 8 Players

15 to 25 Minutes

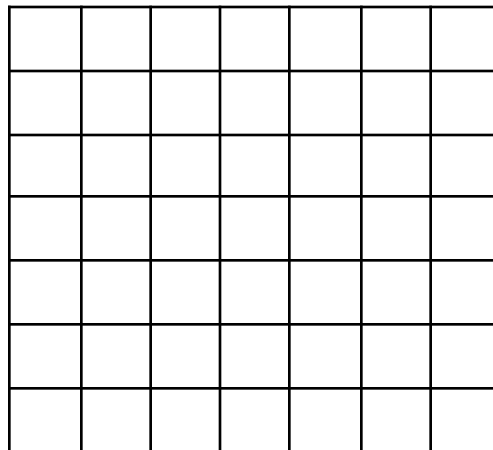
A word game by Kyle Haas; all rights reserved. Download at kylehaas.xyz/four_letter_words_rules.pdf

How to play

These rules are for 2 to 4 players. If playing with more, see the *Variants* section below.

Each player needs something to write with and something to write on (pen-and-paper, marker-and-whiteboard, chalk-and-pavement, etc.)

Each player draws a 7-by-7 grid (alternatively, a printable grid is located at kylehaas.xyz/flw.pdf)



Pick a first player. Players take turns starting with the first player and continuing clockwise.

On your turn you must choose, announce, and spell out a four letter word for all players to hear. Each player (including you) writes that word inside their own grid. You may choose any four letter word in whatever dictionary or dictionaries players agree to play with. The following types of words are invalid, and may not be chosen:

- Words that are *always* capitalized (such as “Anne”, “Zeus”, “Nike”, “Mars”, and “Reno”)
- Words with spaces, hyphens, or apostrophes (such as “don’t” and “no-no”)
- Words that are abbreviations of other words (such as “RSVP”, “NASA”, “tbsp”, and “ROFL”)

You may choose previously chosen words.

On the very first turn of the game, players write the chosen word anywhere inside their grid.

Words can be written left-to-right, top-to-bottom, right-to-left, or bottom-to-top. Words may *not* be written diagonally. Every letter you write must be inside a space of your 7-by-7 grid. A grid space may hold only one letter. Words must be written in their entirety and without empty spaces between letters.

For example, if the first chosen word is "TOSS", it could be written as:

	T	O	S	S		

"TOSS" could also be written as:

			S			
			S			
			O			
			T			

It is a secret where you write your words; other players should not look at your grid.

When writing a word chosen after the first turn, you must utilize one, two, or three already-written letters. Nonsense words — letters next to each other that don't form valid words — are allowed to appear inside your grid (and, if cleverly located, may be utilized later.)

For example, if the the next chosen word is "SALT", it could be written as:

			S	A	L	T
			S			
			O			
			T			

"SALT" could also be written as:

			S			
			S			
			O			
S	A	L	T			

Next, if the words
 “MALT”, “PLUM”, “SALT”, “SOON”, and “SITS”
 are chosen (notice that “SALT” was chosen a second time),
 your grid might look like:

			S	A	L	T
S	T	I	S	O	O	N
	L	P	O			
S	A	L	T			
	M	U				
		M				

If your grid has no place to write another player’s chosen word — utilizing one, two, or three already-written letters — then take a strike. You may also *choose* to take a strike to skip any word chosen by another player (you might do this to keep an area of your grid usable for future turns.)

You must announce whenever you’ve taken a strike, and then mark an *X* outside your grid.

If you take three strikes, you’re out of the game. Additionally, you’re out of the game if it’s your turn and you’re unable to choose a word that fits in your grid (this can happen once your grid is mostly full.)

You win the game immediately if all other players are out.

You may challenge another player’s chosen word if you believe a valid definition doesn’t exist in any agreed-upon dictionary. The challenged player may either choose a different word, or attempt to locate a valid definition of the challenged word in any agreed-upon dictionaries. If a valid definition cannot be located, the challenged player must choose a new word.

Variants

- ★ If playing competitively, it is recommended you enforce the following penalties when a word is challenged:

If a challenged player fails to locate a valid definition for the challenged word, they lose their current turn. If they successfully locate a valid definition, the challenger loses their next turn. A challenger may lose multiple future turns in this way.

- ★ If more than 4 players are playing, the following grid sizes are recommended:

- 5 & 6 players: 8-by-8
- 7 players: 9-by-9
- 8 players: 10-by-10

Playing Four Letter Words with more than 8 players is not recommended.

- ★ You may play with a smaller or larger grid. 4-by-4 is the smallest usable grid. You may also play with non-square grids such as 4-by-7 or 5-by-9. All players must use the same grid dimensions.

- ★ You may modify restrictions on word validity. For example, you may . . .

- . . . require that all chosen words start with a vowel.
- . . . allow common abbreviations, such as “ROFL” or “LMAO”.
- . . . limit chosen words only to foods.
- . . . ban the letter *S*.

- ★ All players may agree to play with the following modification: any time a player would take a strike, they instead choose any three empty cells in their grid and write an *X* in each. If this happens to you and you have less than three empty spaces, you’re out of the game. Like taking a strike, you may do this to skip another players’ chosen word. Unlike taking a strike, you may do this more than three times in a single game. These *X* letters may be utilized like any other letter.

Credits

Design: Kyle Haas

Playtesting: Jenn Kotler, Marjorie Gold, William Haas, Lauren Levin, Sarah Katinsky, Chris DiGregorio, Janna Morton, Max Peek, Josh Peek, Wayne Koenig (@Orwe11), Julian Anstey (@j409603), Karl Hanf (@karlhanf), Adam Sequoyah (@Barninator), and Kevin Privalle (@kevinplaysgames).