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## Hangman words with hints

One of the differences for this version of the hangman game is that we have chosen a fairly small dictionary of words from the world of Computing compared to the Oxford English dictionary and we have listed this Dictionary for you to use. We shall be adding Computing words and their meanings to it as we go. First, we are looking for a strategy for playing hangman as a human being, and to find ways to express this as an algorithm.(see Human Solutions, Hints below). Then, perhaps, we may look to see if the computer can help us in different ways to play more effectively. Our final goal is to devise algorithms in which the computer plays the game! We may be able to build a program in which the computer is more successful than humans at playing hangman. We are taking a meaningful look here at Artificial Intelligence. In all these tasks there are plenty of different solutions. We can test how well we are playing the game as a human by using the Test Hangman program over 5 games. We might then improve our rating in the Test Hangman program by playing Hangman using some computer tools that are available: 'Scanner' and 'Reduce Dictionary' buttons. See Hints 6,7 below. The challenge that we are making is: to find a good human solution for a strategy to play the game perhaps to enlist the help of the computer in our algorithm test out our expertise at playing hangman use our human strategy to guide us (or not) in developing an algorithm to build a program so that the Computer can play the game with a human choosing a word from the Computing dictionary. We then try to find ways to improve the computer's performance by making it more 'intelligent'. 1. Human Solutions There are different ways to approach this problem. You can create your own solution. The hints below are offered as aids on your journey. Hint 1: Number of letters in the random word At the start of the game the computer, which hosts the game, chooses a word randomly from the Computing dictionary, which is a small dictionary compared to the English dictionary and you are able to scan through it in minutes should you wish. The computer then prints a set of underlines in a template, which tells us how many letters are in the word, say it is 7. So when we go looking through the dictionary we only have to consider the words with 7 letters. We will come back to this later... Hint 2: Guessing a letter Remember only 5 incorrect guesses and you are out on the sixth wrong guess. A correct guess and the letter is entered in the template (the random word pattern) as many times as it occurs in the word. Which letter(s) do we start with? Why would we consider the vowels a,e,i,o,u? And why y? And in what order? ('insubordinately' has all 6.) It is rare in English to have 4 or more consecutive consonants in a word. Would that figure in your strategy? Hint 3: Letter frequency in the Oxford dictionary The eight most frequently occurring letters in the English Oxford dictionary in order are: e a r i o t n s Would you make use of this information in your strategy? Hint 4: Pattern matching When we have guessed a number of the letters in the word (but not exceeded 5 incorrect guesses) and our template looks like a\_\_ern say, we look at the combination of letters and underlines and rack our brains to see if we know words that would fit the word template/pattern, or letter combinations that would fit and go together in the word. For example, if the word ended \_i\_n and we had already guessed e and a, what letter would you guess to go in between i and n? If you get to 4 or 5 guesses down and you have racked your brains and can't see a pattern and you don't recognise a potential word, what do you do? Hazard another guess? Or use the 'Scanner' button! Hint 5: Scrolling through the Computing dictionary Because our dictionary is relatively small we could compare our template against each word in the dictionary to see if we could find a word that matches. On the hangman page, when we scroll down we have enlisted the help of the computer by arranging for our template to scroll down with us to make the comparison easier. In our example, we would be looking for the 7 letter words in the dictionary, which fitted the template. But we can do more: 2. Human and Computer-aided Solutions Hint 6: Using the Scanner Press the 'Scanner' button to enlist the help of the computer to transform the dictionary words into a format similar to the template. Scroll down the page when you want to find a match of your incomplete template with a word in the Computing dictionary. What do you do now, when you find a match? Hint 7: Reducing the size of the Computing Dictionary (a) Press the 'Reduce dictionary' button to get the computer to remove all the words that are not the same length as the random word you are trying to guess to form a current dictionary of words of the right length. Then you can scroll down and compare your template against a much smaller list of dictionary words of the right length. Again what's your next move when you find a match? There may be more matches... (b) when your guess of a letter is wrong: Reduce the dictionary by removing all the words in the current dictionary, which include that letter (c) when you guess of a letter is right: Reduce the dictionary by removing all words from the current dictionary that do not have that letter, and if there is more than one occurrence of that letter in the word, remove all words from the current dictionary that do not have that letter in all the positions it occupies in the word. Hint 8: How do you measure the success of your computer aided strategy/algorithm? Not being hanged? Yes, but we think you can do better than that. As it stands, with the help of the scanner and dictionary reducer buttons you should be seeking a solution with the least number of incorrect guesses. We guess that if your strategy is good enough you should be able to guess any word with no more than 3/4 incorrect guesses. Let us know if you have a human computer-aided strategy/algorithm that you think does better. 1. Computer Solutions Hint 9: Your algorithm Make your human computer-aided algorithm explicit in pseudocode or a flow diagram. Hint 10: Artificial Intelligence: The Computer starts to learn how to play Hangman See if you can use your own 'human' algorithm, together with how the computer helped you, as a basis for developing an algorithm which describes how the computer might play the game. There are many solutions to this problem. Can you make one happen in Python 3? Hint 11: Here is a bare bones possible starting Algorithm for the Computer to play Hangman. This algorithm incorporates the idea of the scanner. When we get to pattern matching, it is the computer that has to recognise the pattern match between the incomplete word template and a word in the dictionary, not your eyes and brain. How does it do it? Can you program it? Remember the Computer here sees a word as a linear pattern: as an ordered string of characters and that is how, in this instance, we will program it. The computer's name in our version is 'Ruby'. Ruby asks the user to pick a word from the Computing dictionary on the hangman page and to enter the number of letters in the chosen word. Ruby then displays on screen the word template/pattern with underlines, a record of the number of incorrect guesses she has made, (none to start with), and a record display of the letters she has used in her guesses. (We don't need to include drawings at the barebones stage). While the number of incorrect guesses is less than 6 and the template is not an exact word in the dictionary: do loop: Ruby guesses a letter taken from her computer frequency list after taking stock of the current position and asks the user to verify Ruby's guess with a yes/no response; to give the position(s) of the letter in the word if the guess is correct; Ruby adds the letter to the displayed list of letters she has used and updates the template if the guess is correct; if the template is full (and therefore equal to a word in the dictionary), Ruby exits the while loop; If the guess was incorrect, Ruby increments the count of incorrect guesses; adds the letter to the record of letters used; if the count of incorrect guesses is 6, Ruby exits the while loop; Otherwise, Ruby continues in the loop, guessing the next letter... If the template is full, Ruby checks that the full template is indeed a word in the dictionary and declares success! - Game over. If incorrect guesses is 6, Ruby asks the user to type in the solution, checks that it is in the dictionary, before acknowledging she has failed! Ruby offers to play another game/or to check out. We can develop this algorithm to make the computer act more intelligently and therefore more successfully We will have an 'intelligent' computer, Ruby, playing the game available on site in the near future. We will see what rating Ruby is able to achieve with our Hangman test program. Watch this space. If winning is everything to you, here's how to dominate hangman like I do. That'll show those kids. Ya know, they say video games are violent. But long before there were video games, people were playing a game where they happily snapped a man's neck just because the letter "b" wasn't in a word. I know it's a little obsessive to write an entire list about dominating Hangman since, most likely, you'll be playing it against a 10-year-old cousin or something. But a win is a win. Also, you might play the Hanging With Friends app which isn't pure Hangman but certainly draws from it. (It's nice to see Zynga rip off a game that isn't copyrighted occasionally.) So much like my list of 11 Strategies For Dominating Monopoly (hint: mortgage everything and go for the kill immediately), here's my list of suggestions for dominating Hangman. Now you show those teens who the REAL genius is. 1 | Aim for a simple Hangman You don't want to play Hangman where he gets gallows plus a head, body, two arms, two legs, hands, feet, eyes, nose, ears, mouth and penis. Since you'll be picking more difficult words and making smarter letter guesses, you want as few turns as possible between guessing and death. Six is the minimum, eight is ok, 10 and 11 are standard. I recommend starting by pushing six. You'll get a big backlash for at least 10, maybe 11, 12 or 13. Make a big deal about it — "That's half the alphabet!" — and finally faux-acquiesce to eight, which is what you wanted all along. 2 | Don't bring up minimum word length You want to play short words. If you say anything like "No minimum size on words, right?" or "Any length word is ok?" then you're inviting discussion on the topic. If you don't mention it, anything goes. Remember: Just like in life and cognitive dissonance land, lying through omission isn't actually lying. 3 | Hustle the other person in by curbing early cleverness Assuming you'll play multiple games, you've got to treat this as a long term play, not a "take it one game at a time" cliché. And that means you need to run a minor hustle as if you were a pool player with the same first name as a state (male) or lethal Korean woman in a catsuit (female). As we'll get into below, "jazz" and "buzz" are the hardest words to guess. But if you bust them out first, you've shown your hand. You're an obscure letters guy. And then you can get blown up because your opponent will stop guessing nice, suburban letters like E and S and start guessing letters from the wrong side of the tracks like X and K. So for your first word, go with a difficult but not too aggressive pick like "embryo." Or sucker them in even more with a word like "rhythm" or "crypt" or "gypsy" — that will make them prematurely guess the mediocre letter Y for several games to come. 4 | Now play a short word with obscure letters I'll be referencing this statistical analysis quite a bit through this list. But the best way to win at Hangman is to give the other person a brutal four-letter word. The hardest word to guess in Hangman (at least against a computer or a rational human)? Jazz. Based on letter frequency of words in the dictionary, J is the least common letter and Z is the fourth-least. (Although A is more common than I in terms of vowels. So if you're playing Dirty Hangman, take that as a hint.) Buzz and jazzed are the next hardest words to guess, followed by haji. If someone challenges you that "haji" isn't a real word, play the race card. 5 | After one or two turns, get off the Z words So a word with a double Z is great for an early win. But after you get that victory, you've just made the other person savvy to your style. So now you can dip down into other good four-letter words to obfuscate the other person: Hajj, jinx, puff, jiff, zine, junk, fife, foxy, jays, and duff (or Fudd, if proper names of imaginary beers are allowed). 6 | Prepare for the switch to longer words Once four-letter words have been banned because the other person has unleashed a barrage of \*other\* four-letter words at you for being a dick, switch to longer, more difficult words. Five-letter words can include fazes, foxed, waxes, staff, babes, and joker. Also, if you want to go back to using multiple Zs, you can do jazzy, fuzzy, fizzy, dizzy and swizz. Which isn't just the made-up first name of the guy who used to make beats for DMX, apparently. Some good, even longer, words are zapping, bopping, queuing, blobbing, fluffiest, wooziness, babbling, kookiest, overjoying, woolliness, hobnobbing, mummifying, alkalizing, cockiness, voodooing and overjoying. 7 | Switch to phrases by combining tough words If you then have to switch to phrases, just combine a few of these awkwardly. Like "Foxes Like Jazz" or "Queuing With Babes." And if your opponent questions the validity of your phrases, you can always say they're the names of indie bands. 8 | For almost every word of every length, your best four guesses will be vowels In the next point you can see which vowel to guess first. But the rule should be roughly this: Guess E with your first or second turn. I and A are next, then O. We're conditioned to gravitate toward T, but based on a conditional probability analysis, it's never a great guess in the first four letters. Just because it's popular doesn't make it right. Like watching Bachelor Pad. The best guesses are vowels, even U. S is the best consonant to guess, although if it's at the end of a word it doesn't give you much valuable guessing information. 9 | Strategically pick your first vowels based on word length Based on a breakdown of the standard dictionary, A is the most common vowel in words four letters long and less. E is most common in six- to 12-letter words. I is most common in words 13 letters and longer. U is always the least common. O is more common in short and long words than mid-length words. But vowels are virtually always the best statistical plays — and nothing says "double the fun" like bringing math into a word game. 10 | Follow up correct guesses with semi-common letters Since we've all watched Wheel of Fortune forever, we know that R-S-T-L-N and E are roughly the most common letters in English words. But we also know that no one in the history of Hangman has gone with the word STREETS or RESENT or, fittingly, LETTERS. So after you're done with a few vowels, each time you correctly guess a common letter, guess a less-common one on your next turn. Based on what you're seeing in the word, there's a lot of mileage in D, G and B — and even the more infrequent F, V, K and W. 11 | Use the other person's guesses to eliminate obscure letters You don't just get information when you guess, you can mine good information when your opponent guesses as well. The other person isn't going to give away their obscure letter by guessing it. So if you get a J or a Z guess, assume the word you're guessing isn't "jazz." Or "Jay-Z." — You may also like... 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