

OF WORDPLAY

THE *Journal* THE

OF WORDPLAY



#13 • MAY 2026

## **Musical Redivers**

**Finding Pangram Subsets**

**Mapping Letter Patterns**

**Defining Words for Play**

**Crossword Criminality**

**“Squabbling Twins”**

**Movie Genre Titles**

**Monoconsonantals**

**“I Love A Charade”**

**Errata, Oddities**

**Name Games, Light Verse, More...**

THE JOURNAL OF WORDPLAY

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## INTRODUCTION: NEOPHILIA

T Campbell, editor

I once wrote a story featuring a bad guy infiltrating a crossword competition some time back, so of course, I was interested when the detective series *Elsbeth* did the same. I was more nervous than excited, though, because mainstream film and TV portrayals of crosswords have often been...bad. Like, really, *really* bad.

I was relieved to see it wasn't another *All About Steve*, although it didn't quite meet the high level set by the classic *Simpsons* episode "Homer and Lisa Exchange Cross Words." The fandom is mostly accurate—one costume is stolen from the *Wordplay* documentary, and a crossword-focused song performed onscreen is real. Insidery references include crossword faves like Anais Nin and the length of Elsbeth's full name, 15 letters—perfect for a 15x15 grid.

There are three major departures from reality. The first two are probably necessary concessions to the mystery-of-the-week format. One is that, while no real crossword tournament is spread over two weekends, this fictional tournament has to be, so the murder has time to be discovered and the suspects interviewed. *Elsbeth* is not a whodunit, it's a howcatchem—we see the murder and cover-up as it happens. So the only question is whether Elsbeth will figure out what we already know.

The second is that the high-profile murder victim is the tournament's founder and director, Morris Long, who bears *certain* similarities to sometime *Journal* contributor Will Shortz...but also some drastic differences. The victims on shows like this are rarely as likable as real-life Will.

And the third? *Elsbeth*'s version of the crossword community is divided by neophilia and neophobia. Almost all the crossword-solvers who get speaking lines resent that Long's editorship keeps pushing them to learn *new* things: slang like "yasss queen," TikTok dances, new definitions for old words like "cringe." Unlike the real American Crossword Puzzle Tournament, this National Crossword Tournament doesn't have any noticeable solvers under 30, possibly none under 40, just older folks rolling their eyes at this fallen culture.

We can all get cranky about having to learn new things now and then, but word lovers are far more likely to celebrate the opportunity. And that's one thing the *Journal* is for.

**In our thirteenth issue**, Lori Wike explores how redividers behave in linguistic and musical contexts, some with even more than two interpretations available. In a similar but simpler exercise, Richard Lederer takes us through his collection of charades. Don Hauptman offers some amusing errata, Louis Phillips some name games, and both of them a bit of light verse (a very short example, in Louis' case). Michael Keith and Darryl Francis collaborate to construct pangrams from given word lists, and Darryl and Charles Montpetit team up with me to study words containing "123123" patterns. And I've got a few more letter-pattern studies, crossword history, and cinematic odds and ends. It's not Must-See TV, it's Must-Say Play Day! Join us. ■

## **THREE QUICK TAKES**

Louis Phillips

### **Appropriate Authors**

*Howl* by Saul Bellow

*The Inferno* by Joseph Heller

*Of Mice and Men* by Walt Disney

*Gone with the Wind* by Hurricane Carter

*Much Ado About Nothing* by Zero Mostel

*Farewell To Arms* by Venus De Milo

*The Man Who Knew Too Much* by J. Edgar Hoover

*Moby Dick* by James Whale

*Huckleberry Finn* by George Raft

*Paradise Lost* by Barbara Eden & Eve Arden

*Noah and the Ark* by Claude Raines & Ethel Waters

*The Color Purple* by Red Foxx & Monty Blue

*Haircut* by Samuel Barber

### **Ode to My Vacuum Cleaner**

This sucks.

### **Name Game**

Robert Browning, but Amy Tan

Robert Frost, but Carol Snow

Horton Foote, but Legs Diamond

Cookie Lavagetto, but Pie Traynor

Pearl Bailey, but Jack Ruby

Matt Batts, but W.C. Fields

Earle Combs, but Red Grooms

## TWICE IN FIVERS, TWICE

T Campbell

In the original "Twice in Fivers," Ralph Beaman worked out a new type of pattern, leaving some entries blank for future logologists to fill in. Each spot below represents one of the 260 possible patterns...10 for each letter...that include two paired letters and three unique ones.

<u>A</u> Aron	BB---	CCoya #	DD---	EEmis #	FF---	GG---
<u>Ag</u> Ain	BiBle	CaCti	DiDst	ElEct	FiFty	GaGes
AbeAm	BooBy	CatCh	DeeDs	EasEl	FieFs	GauGe
Aroma	BlurB	CiviC	DreaD	EaglE	FeoF #	GoinG
bAAIs	aBBot	oCCur	aDDer	tEEth	aFFix	eGGed
nAsAl	aBiBs	aCoCk	aDaDa #	dEtEr	aFiFi #	aGoGe *
gAmmA	<u>a</u> BwAb *	aCmiC *	<u>e</u> DgeD	gEstE	aFieF \$	aGinG
isAAc	caBBy	boCCi	caDDy	quEEen	taFFy	yeGGs
<u>dr</u> AmA	naBoB	muCiC	faDeD	thErE	--F-F	unGaG *
ijmAA §	stuBB #	floCC \$	reaDD §	agrEE	gruFF	cleGG *
HH---	II---	JJ---	KK---	LLama	MM---	NName \$
HoHes *	ImIde	JuJus	KaKas	LiLac	MiMic	NiNth
HetHs	IndIa	JinJa §	KhaKi	LadLe	MagMa	NouNs
Har sH	Iambi	J---J	KayaK	LabeL	MaxiM	NomeN
-HH--	bIIsk §	-JJ--	eKKas *	aLLey	aMMos	aNNex
sHaHs	tImId	aJaJa #	aKeKi *	sLyLy	iMaMs	iNaNe
sHisH	vIII	-J--J	sKunK	fLaiL	sMarM *	iNurN
ruHHa \$	maIID *'	haJJI	hoKKu	heLLo	coMMa	peNNy
epHaH	alIbI	--J-J	<u>u</u> sKoK *	moLaL	hoMaM #	reNiN
---HH	radII	---JJ	<u>q</u> uiKK \$	speLL	<u>dr</u> aMM #	djiNN
OOmph	PP---	QQ---	RR---	SSine \$	TT---	UUere \$
<u>Ob</u> Oes	PaPer	Q-Q--	ReRun	SiSal	TiTitle	UvUla
OniOn	PuLPs	Q--Q-	ReaRm	SenSe	TasTe	UncUt
OrthO	PinuP	<u>Q</u> azaQ *	RaceR	SinuS	TainT	UvroU #
bOOty	aPPle	-QQ--	aRRow	eSSay	aTTic	qUUik \$
hOnOr	ePoPt *	-Q-Q-	cRoRe	aSiSe \$	sTaTe	cUtUp
mOtto	uPsuP #	-Q--Q	aRdoR	aSheS	sTarT	kUdzU
grOOm	guPPy	--QQ-	meRRy	poSSe	diTTY	eqUUs *
brOmO	riPuP #	--Q-Q	faReR	oaSiS	ocTeT	heUaU #
iglOO	stuPP *	---QQ	whiRR	croSS	choTT	---UU
VVula \$	WW---	XX---	YYeve \$	ZZ---		
ViVid	WoWed	X-X--	YaYas *	ZuZus *		
ValVe	WheWs	X--X-	YsaYe §	ZanZa *		
VotiV #	WidoW	XeroX §	<u>Y</u> ummy	ZmudZ #		
iVVer *	-WW--	-XX--	<u>i</u> YYar *	<u>i</u> ZZat *		
<u>a</u> ViVa §	gWaWl §	-X-X-	<u>a</u> YuYu #	<u>a</u> ZiZa #		
<u>e</u> VolV #	eWhoW #	eXlex *	gYpsY	-Z--Z		
naVVy	--WW-	--XX-	--YY-	diZZy		
--V-V	paWaW #	--X-X	shYlY	gaZoZ *		
---VV	---WW	---XX	---YY	friZZ		

As is my tradition, I took up the challenge. I've given myself the widest possible creative license here: the only rules are that each entry must include two and only two of each letter in the given positions (no *erie*, no *xxxxx*), must be five letters long, and must produce a definition when I searched for one. And "a given name" was not an acceptable definition, though names for specific people were, in a pinch.

Other than that, anything went—though if there was a common, well-known example, of course I preferred that one. A couple of answers ended up being vulgar when no better alternative emerged. Some are inarguably strained, but they may be rewarding to explore.

Aaron, award, assay, anima, NAACP, banal, fauna, kraal, plaza, HIPAA  
B-ball, babka, bimbo, blurb, abbey, ababa, A-bomb, kebab, lobby, chubb  
C cleft, cache, crack, cynic, occur, acock, octic, mecca, mucic, thicc  
D-days, dodge, dandy, dread, oddly, ADHDs, edged, giddy, jaded, R and D  
Eensy, elegy, eager, evoke, leery, vexed, terse, sneer, piece, three  
F-flat, fifth, fiefs, floof, offer, TFTFY, AFSOF, gaffe, Hofuf, scoff  
GG rub, gigue, gorge, going, aggro, a-gogo, aging, foggy, Magog, Frigg  
H-hour, ho-hum, hoo-ha, harsh, oh hai, shahs, which, erh-hu, ephah, COSHH  
IIRC, idiot, ionic, issei, Gling, timid, aioli, alibi, teiid, radii  
Jjinn, jujus, jinja, Jony J, ijjit, ajaja, DJ Maj, hajji, bajaj, Frijj  
K-kill, kukri, kinky, knock, Akkad, mkeka, skulk, pukka, sukuk, Thokk  
Llama, lilac, lowly, level, allow, slyly, flail, folly, halal, quell  
mmBtu, mimic, magma, madam, immix, umami, smarm, dummy, in mem, Grimm  
N-name, nonce, no one, nylon, ennui, inane, union, funny, canon, djinn  
Oomph, ovoid, onion, outdo, loose, honor, folio, aloof, photo, taboo  
P-pops, pupil, pulpy, plump, apply, epopt, splop, top up, frapp  
qq. hor, quqon, Qusqu, qepiq, Aqqik, IQOQI, aqeeq, duqqa, Daquq, et sqq.  
-rrhea, rural, retro, refer, array, crore, order, sorry, furor, chirr  
S-star, sushi, sense, steps, issue, msasa, ashes, lasso, basis, cross  
T-tops, titan, trite, tacit, utter, state, stout, petty, octet, slatt  
Uunet, usurp, undue, Upolu, tuuli, augur, wushu, Equus, Nauru, hapuu  
VVSOP, vivid, verve, VIS/UV, AVVID, rvsvp, Ivan V, savvy, MAVAV, Olav V  
WWIII, wrawl, wowed, widow, ewwie, Gwawl, aw naw, sowwy, oh wow, ICYWW  
XXIII, x-axis, xuixo, xerox, Exxon, AxBxC, Ex-Lax, mexxy, MMXIX, Vioxx  
YYSSW, yo-yos, yagya, yummy, Iyyar, my eye, byway, diyya, coyly, ABBYY  
ZZ Top, zazen, zhuzh, Zubaz, izzat, Aziza, tzitz, fizzy, gazoz, frizz

...but which is more vulgar, the A-bomb or an f-bomb? Discuss. ■

## MOVIE MUSINGS

T Campbell

I try to get to the cinema a lot, and the titles of recent movies have inspired a few thoughts.

### Movies With a Title Including a Genre, Ranked by How Well the Movie Fits the Genre (Subjective)

1. *Crime 101*
2. *The Amityville Horror*
3. *Swashbuckler*
4. *High School Musical (1-3)*
5. *Missing in Action (1-2)*
6. *The Adventures of Tintin*
7. *Love Story*
8. *The Adventures of Robin Hood*
9. *Zathura: A Space Adventure*
10. *Matilda: The Musical*
11. *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen*
12. *Back in Action*
13. *True Romance*
14. *Waitress: The Musical*
15. *Last Action Hero*
16. *Adventures in Babysitting*
17. *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure*
18. *Disaster Movie*
19. *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure*
20. *Cannibal: The Musical*
21. *Superhero Movie*
22. *Sci-Fi Vixens from Outer Space*
23. *The King of Comedy*
24. *Looney Toons: Back in Action*
25. *Little Shop of Horrors*
26. *The Poseidon Adventure*
27. *Fantasy Island*
28. *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*
29. *The Drama*
30. *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*
31. *A Civil Action*
32. *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within*
33. *Confessions of a Teenage Drama Queen*
34. *Adventureland*
35. *Class Action Park*
36. *Fantasy Life*
37. *All Quiet on the Western Front*

You can argue some titles at the bottom of the list contextualize their keywords; most people won't look at the title *Confessions of a Teenage Drama Queen* and expect a hard-hitting tragedy about young royalty. Still, I avoided *Rocky Horror* for years because I expected it to be terrifying, and I was well into adulthood before I learned that *All Quiet on the Western Front* wasn't actually a Western.

Oddly, though *Crime 101* tops the list, it's misleading in another way. It sounds like it's about people learning the basics of committing crimes, but it's actually about crime that happens on **Highway** 101. I can't help but feel it would've done better without that disconnect.

Going into it, I had thought *Project Hail Mary* might have an unusual property, but as it turns out, it didn't. What unusual property was that? I thought it might turn out to be one of the few movies that uses a name in its title that's *not* in its cast of characters.

A "hail Mary" is a last-ditch effort, so I didn't expect any characters in the movie to be named Mary, but after Ryan Gosling makes contact with the alien, he uses that name for "her."

Since *Project Hail Mary* didn't work out, can we think of film titles including names *not used for characters* in the movie? The only one that leaps to mind is *Chasing Amy*. Can you name another?

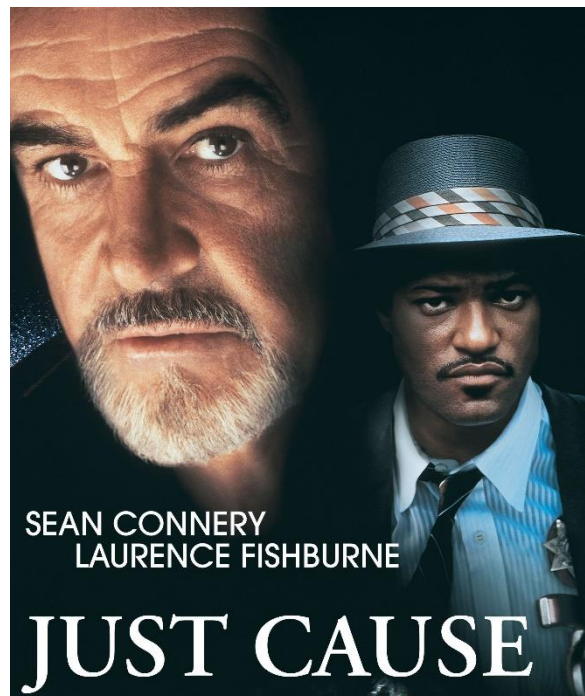
The movie *Goat* is about a goat who gets picked on as a "goat," but who wants to become the GOAT (Greatest of All Time) in his basketball-like sport. If it were released ten years ago, its audience might not have been familiar with "GOAT/goat" in the sense of greatness. Ten years from now, they might not understand why "goat" would be considered an insult. The verb form "goated," meaning "became the greatest," is already in use.

### Movies Released in the Last Year Whose Titles You Can Mutter to Yourself When You Realize How Bad They Are (Also Subjective):

1. *Oh. What. Fun.*
2. *Run*
3. *Now You See Me, Now You Don't*
4. *Mercy*

I didn't see all these films, but I like the idea of walking out of the theater and whispering "Run" or "Now You See Me, Now You Don't." Or staying in my seat and murmuring sadly, "Oh. What. Fun." Or "Mercy."

This makes me think back to my college roommate who cited the title of one film as his reason for selecting it. "You know why I want to see that movie? *Just 'Cause.*" ■



## “SAY WHAT?!”

### A New Chrestomathy of Published Flubs and Anomalies, with Wry Ripostes

DON HAUPTMAN

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As a freelance copywriter for more than three decades, I subscribed to the venerable trade magazine called *Advertising Age*. One day, I spotted the ambiguous headline, “Agency Plans Mushroom.” That catch was likely the origin of my obsession with funny published errors and oddities.

Here are selected specimens gleaned from my reading since the previous collection in the February 2025 issue of *The Journal of Wordplay*. Note: Not all quoted items are mistakes; I will seize anything that lends itself to a barbed or witty (one hopes!) retort.

*The Wall Street Journal*, Weekend Edition, February 14-15, 2026:

“As relates to artificial intelligence, we are people on a beach seeing a tsunami coming at us and thinking ‘It’s huge’ and ‘We can’t stop it’ and ‘Should we run? Which way?’”

▶ **Um . . . maybe *away* from the water?**

afr.com (Australian Financial Review), February 26, 2025:

“His views on trade have long been in sync with Trump, who sometimes calls him ‘my Peter’ and named him in December as a senior counsellor for trade and manufacturing.”

▶ **A different affectionate nickname might be worth considering.**

News Brief, cidrap.unm.edu, Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy, University of Minnesota, April 16, 2026:

“[USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service] reported new detections of H5N1 avian flu, with positive tests revealing the virus in five Idaho dairy herds. The milking cows were the first avian flu detections in cattle since a Wisconsin report in December 2025.”

▶ **Gulp!**

forbes.com, March 31, 2026:

“As a keynote speaker at a writing instrument symposium several years ago, I was shunned by a group of educators who thought my stance on the positive effects of cursive handwriting on the brain was out of touch, or at its worst, harmful.”

▶ **Cursive! Foiled again!**

*The Spirit*, Manhattan neighborhood newspaper, April 16-22, 2026:

“[Following an altercation between a couple], the boyfriend then warned her: ‘Mess with me again; next time I’ll finish the job!’”

▶ **Well, at least he was literate enough to speak with a semicolon.**

*The Wall Street Journal*, headline deck, March 3, 2025:

“After Zelensky spat, Democrats and some Republicans express frustration”

▶ **His breach of etiquette was perhaps justified.**

us.printemps.com/about/, March 21, 2025; the gaffe was fixed the following day:

“Continuing its reinvention and acceleration, storied French luxury department store, Printemps, will open a new store in New York, marking the brand’s first US initiative. Printemps will open in the historic 50-story landmark building, One Wall Street (1 Wall Street) in the rapidly changing Financial District.”

▶ **Without the parenthetical, who would have known the address?**

On May 11, 2025, in *The New York Times*’ well-read Sunday real-estate section, a couple’s search for an apartment included this description: “A one-bedroom in a prewar building near Central Park was 700,000 square feet.” Only *one* bedroom? Out-of-towners are often astonished when they learn that New Yorkers tolerate and pay high prices for tiny spaces. This abode would be generously sized: larger than a dozen football fields. The correct figure, noted elsewhere in the article, is 700. (The term *prewar* refers to buildings constructed prior to WWII, which are regarded as especially desirable.)

Finally, I’m not immune to occasional howlers in writing and speech. At my gym recently, I couldn’t find a piece of equipment that frequently goes astray. Exasperated, I commented to a fellow member: “It’s like socks that disappear in the dishwasher.” I wasn’t joking.

## SQUABBLING TWINS

T Campbell

In *Word Ways* #11.4, Mary J. and Harry W. Hazard mention a class of words where two consecutive consonants are pronounced two different ways: **ACCEPT** [ks], **SUGGEST** [gj], **NEWSSTAND** [zs]. There are many -CC- and -GG- terms that meet that criterion, but -SS- is rarer.

They also bring up **POWWOW**, **SNARLEYOW**, **WITHHOLD**, **MISSHAPEN**, **JACKKNIFE**, and **OUTTHINK**. In the first two of those, the first of the doubled consonants is part of a diphthong with the preceding vowel; in most of the others, it's part of a digraph (TH, SH). The odd one out is **JACKKNIFE**, where we know the component words well enough to know that one of the K's is silent, even though one could read it as **JACKK + NIFE**.

Are there any other double consonants that work in this fashion? Other silent-letter/speaking-letter combos include **DUMBBELL**, **SOLEMNNESS**, and arguably **GRANDDAUGHTER** and **SHELFFUL**. C + CH doesn't yield much that I can see—some words like **GNOCCHI** have only one k-sound instead of two, but that just seems like simple elision. CH + H gives us some examples (**HITCHHIKE**, **BEACHHEAD**) and so does SH + H (**FISHHOOK**, **WASHHOUSE**).

But there is one “double letter, different pronunciation” combo that's risen to greater prominence since the 1970s, -XX-. In words like **DOXXING**, **ANTIVAXX**, and the brand **EXXON**, one of the X's is pronounced as X most often is ([ks]) and the other is silent. In fact, -XX- should get a special notice here as the *most* “disagreeable” pairing; I can't think of a single example where both X's are pronounced the same. Also notable is **LOOKSMAXXING**, which does have two “x sounds” [ks], but not next to each other.

It's not too hard to find an example of *almost* every double *vowel* that operates in this way: **REELECT**, **HAWAII**, **COOPERATION**, **CONTINUUM**. There aren't many double-Y terms in English, but the name **SAYYID** works this way too. Only -AA- seems to resist such “disagreement” in most instances, but there are pronunciations of **BAAL** (or **BA'AL**) that qualify. **MA'AM** might be an exception in some dialects, but I've always heard it as one syllable with one simple vowel sound.

I again invite the reader to fill in anything I've missed! But I believe this may cover all the *kinds* of “squabbling twins” in modern English. FF, JJ, LL, MM, PP, QQ, RR, VV, and ZZ all seem to maintain harmony at all times, from what I can see! ■

# RENEW YOUR POETIC LICENSE HERE

## Original Limericks and Other Light Verse, Concatenated

DON HAUPTMAN  
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Two decades ago, I was an honorary member of a small group of light versifiers that met regularly here in New York City. I had dabbled in the form occasionally, but I wasn't as talented or prolific as these people, who went by "The Bards." Alas, most members were older at the time and are probably now gone. But I have continued dabbling.

Here are some of my creations, published and un-, over the years. For unknown reasons, theater and politics seem to dominate the themes. If any are puzzling, see the explanations at the end, where you'll also find the names and dates of the venues where they first appeared.

### Stage Fight

Divorce, though no snap to survive it,  
Inspired those *Lives* all too *Private*.  
    A battle of sexes  
    With four witty exes.  
Good God! It's such fun! Let's revive it!

### New Broom

Morris Dees knew the candidates' woes  
And denounced them in vehement prose:  
    "All these guys look asleep.  
    How can *anyone* sweep?"  
The headlines ran thus: "Dees: Dems Doze."

### Hollywood and Whine

Poor Francis Ford Coppola's muse!  
    The critics gave tepid reviews  
    To *Heart*; it dismayed them.  
Though Francis had made them  
An offer . . . they couldn't enthuse.

### Party Politics

Their convention, the pols made it clear,  
Was to be the event of the year.  
    So great was the posh  
    Jimmy Carter cried "Gosh!"  
Then to Roz: "Fancy meeting, you hear?"

## Plea and Sympathy

Bob Anderson's play really shined,  
But its impact today has declined.  
That's an outcome he guessed,  
For he made this request:  
"Years from now, when you stage it . . . be kind!"

## Pet Peeve

Cats and dogs and mice better scurry  
Or they might wind up in a curry.  
Everything on the menu looks furry  
With a cringe on top!

Phony rumors spread in a hurry.  
Who cares if the truth might be blurry?  
Lies don't fire up some folks to worry  
'Bout the harm that's caused  
By the imbecilic stories  
That these days never stop.

## Gender/Gap

The neutral pronoun "he (slash) she" has come into its glory.  
In conversation, though, some say, it tends to sound quite gory.

The British, in their wisdom, call the "/" an oblique stroke,  
Which offers a solution for the language as it's spoke.

To dodge offensive references say "he (oblique stroke) she."  
So no one claims that you endorse such gross misogyny.

For surely here's a case in which we each react uniquely.  
Faced with a choice, would you opt to be slashed—or stroked obliquely?

\* \* \*

## Exegeses and Published Sources

Some of these compositions were published in the *New York Magazine* Competitions. I wrote a tribute to the beloved and much-missed contest in the November 2019 issue of this *Journal*. In the credits below, it is abbreviated as NYMC.

**Stage:** The paean refers to the classic Noël Coward play, *Private Lives*. NYMC, November 3, 1986. **Broom:** As I type, in the news is a scandal involving the Southern Poverty Law Center; Morris Dees is one of the founders. NYMC, March 21, 1988. **Hollywood:** *One from the Heart* was the director's notorious 1982 musical flop, savaged by critics. NYMC, April 26, 1982. **Plea:** Robert Anderson wrote *Tea and Sympathy*; the reference is to the sexually charged line of dialogue at the conclusion of the play and film. NYMC, May 27, 1985. **Peeve:** A parody of the "Surrey" song from *Oklahoma*, inspired by the debunked 2024 rumors of Ohio residents dining on pets. **Gender:** Letter to editor in *The New York Times*, August 27, 1989, and subsequently republished in several other periodicals. Note that the poem's publication prominently predates the popularity of "preferred personal pronouns."

## ADJACENT REPETITIONS OF THREE

T Campbell  
Darryl Francis  
Charles Montpetit

In “Alfalfa and All That” (*Word Ways* #11.4, 1978), Leroy F. Meyers identified a point of logological interest: words that contain repeated, consecutive strings of two letters or more. ALFALFA meets this requirement twice over: it has two ALFs next to each other and also two LFAs. The following list focuses on the three-strings: the higher numbers might get attention at a future date.

For the sake of freshness, the list sticks to one example per word root—we don’t need ASSESSED when we already have ASSESSES. Also excluded are duplications that add no meaning but emphasis: for instance, BYE-BYE, TSK TSK, and HAR-HAR can communicate their meaning at half their length.

T initiated this list, but Darryl and Charles contributed generously to it!

**ACH: STOMACHACHE**

**ACH/CHA/HAC: CHA-CHA-CHA**

**ACK: ACK-ACK GUN**

**ADE: MADE A DENT, AT A DEAD END**

**AGE: ESPIONAGE AGENT, AVERAGE AGE**

**AKE: AKEAKE**

**AKU: AKUAKU**

**ALC: ORAL CALCIFICATION, DIFFERENTIAL/  
DENTAL/INTEGRAL/RENAL CALCULUS**

**ALE: PALE ALE**

**ALF/LFA: ALFALFA**

**ALL: FALL ALL OVER**

**ALT: ALTALTISSIMO**

**ALV: MITRAL VALVE**

**ALV/VAL: CAVAL VALVE**

**AMI: TAMIAMI**

**AND: EVAN DANDO, HAND AND FOOT,  
THOUSAND AND..., STAND AND DELIVER**

**ANE: JANEANE GAROFALO**

**ANG: URBAN GANG**

**ANS: KANSANS, ARKANSANS**

**ANT: GIANT ANTEATER, CHANTANT**

**ARB: CIRCULAR BARBELL**

**ARE: AREA REVITALIZATION/REGULATION  
/REDEVELOPMENT, MARKET SQUARE**

**ARENA**

**ASE: CASEASE**

**ASS: ASSASSIN**

**ATC: GNATCATCHER, RATCATCHER**

**ATE: RAT-EATEN, GNATEATER**

**ATE/EAT: MEAT-EATER**

**ATI: EXPATIATING, INGRATIATION,  
SATIATING**

**ATL: ATLATL**

**ATT/TAT/TTA: RAT-TAT-TAT**

**AYS: NAYSAYS**

**BAL: BAL-BAL, CHRISTÓBAL BALENCIAGA,  
HERBAL BALANCE™**



**BAR: BARBARIAN, BARBARY**

**BEN: BENBEN**

**BER: BERBER**

**BON: BONBON, CARBON BONDING**

**BOO:** BOOBOO  
**BOR:** BORBORYGMUS  
**BOU:** BOUBOU  
**BUL:** BULBUL  
**CAL:** CALC-ALKALINE, FISCAL CALENDAR,  
 LOCAL CALLS, THERMOCHEMICAL  
 CALORIE  
**CAN:** CANCAN, MEXICAN-CANADIAN,  
 MOHICAN CANYON, VULCAN CANNON  
**CAR:** CAR CARE, CAR CARRIER  
**CHA:** MUCHACHAS (see also ACH)  
**CHE:** CHECHEN  
**CHI:** CHI-CHI  
**CHO:** CHO-CHO SAN  
**CHU:** CHUCHUPATE  
**CIN:** CINCINNATI



**COL:** DISASTER PROTOCOL COLOR CODING  
**COO:** COOCOO  
**CUS:** CUSCUS  
**DAR:** STANDARD  
 ARITHMETIC/ARABIC/ARCHITECTURE  
**DEE:** DEEDEE  
**DIK:** DIKDIK  
**DIN:** DIN-DIN  
**DLE:** UNBUNDLED LEGAL SERVICES  
**DON:** LONDON DONOVAN MVP AWARD  
**DOO:** DOODOO  
**DUK:** DUK-DUK  
**DUM:** DUMDUM  
**EAR:** NEAR-EARTH  
**ENT:** OXYGEN TENT, SENTENTIAL  
**ENT/NTE:** ENTENTE  
**EOG:** PALEOGEOGRAPHY

**ERS:** TRAVERSERS, DISPERSERS, REVERSERS  
**EST:** BESTEST, HONESTEST, MODESTEST,  
 EARNESTEST, AMES TEST  
**ETR/TRE:** PET RETREAT  
**ETS:** JET SETS  
**EXT:** SEX TEXT  
**FIN:** CHRONICLE/EDGE/SHARDS OF INFINITY



**FOO:** FOO-FOO  
**FOR:** EARL OF ORFORD  
**FUR:** FURFUR  
**GAR:** GARGARIZE  
**GEE:** GEE-GEE  
**GIN:** BARGING IN, IMAGING INSTRUMENTS,  
**GIN/ING:** GINGING  
**GIN/ING/NGI:** RINGING IN THE NEW YEAR,  
 SINGING IN THE RAIN  
**GLE:** DOGLEG LEFT  
**GOO:** GOO-GOO EYES  
**GRU:** GRUGRU  
**HAT:** THE CAT THAT HATED PEOPLE



**HEC:** THE CHECK  
**HIT:** THE SHIT HITS THE FAN

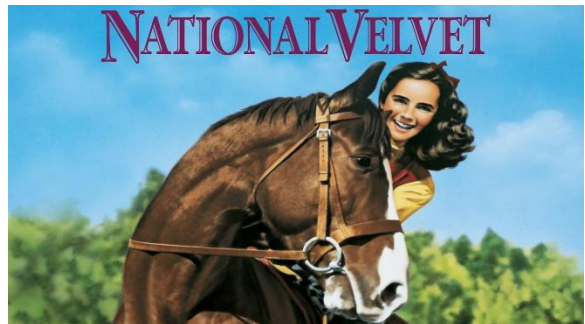
**HOE:** PAHOEHOE  
**HOW:** SHOW HOW  
**HUA:** CHIHUAHUA  
**IAN:** LOUISIANIAN, MODIGLIANIAN,  
 INDIANIAN... CHRISTIANIA, NORWAY  
**ICH:** TAI CHI CHUAN  
**IER:** FIERIER  
**IKO:** IKO IKO  
**ING:** BINGING, BOWSTRINGING, BRINGING,  
 CLINGING, CRINGING, DINGING,  
 FLINGING, FRINGING, GUNSLINGING,  
 HAMSTRINGING, HINGING, IMPINGING,  
 KINGING, MINGING, MUDSLINGING,  
 PINGING, RINGING, SINGING, SLINGING,  
 SPRINGING, STINGING, STRINGING,  
 SWINGING, SYRINGING, TINGING,  
 TWINGING, UNHINGING, UPBRINGING,  
 WHINGING, WINGING, WRINGING,  
 ZINGING (see also GIN)  
**INT:** PAINT INTO, JOINT INTELLIGENCE  
**INT/NTI:** POINT IN TIME  
**INT/NTI/TIN:** RIN TIN TIN  
**IRC:** AIR CIRCUS  
**ISS/SSI:** MISSISSIPPI  
**ITE:** DEFINITE ITERATION  
**IWE/WEI:** AI WEIWEI  
**JAR:** JAR JAR BINKS  
**JAY:** VAJAYJAY  
**JIN:** JINJIN TEA  
**JUB:** JUBJUB  
**KAL:** BLACK ALKALI  
**KEN:** KENKEN  
**KIN:** KINKINESS, KINKING, SKINKING, PAY  
 BACK IN KIND, PUMPKIN KING



**KOO:** KOOKOO  
**LAA:** LAA-LAA



**LAB:** LABLAB  
**LAN:** CATALAN/ROMULAN LANGUAGE  
**LAR:** OCULAR LARVA (ugh)  
**LIC:** PUBLIC LICENSE  
**LIN:** FALL IN LINE  
**LIT:** CLIT LIT  
**LVE:** NATIONAL VELVET



**MAN:** HUMAN MANURE, ONE-WOMAN  
 MAN  
**MAR:** MARMARIZE  
**MAS:** CHRISTMAS MASS  
**MAU:** MAU MAU  
**MIA:** MIAMIAN  
**MIC:** COSMIC MICROWAVE, DYNAMIC  
 MICROPHONE  
**MOT:** MOTMOT  
**MUR:** MURMUR  
**MUU:** MUUMUU  
**NAE:** NAE NAE  
**NGI:** HANGING IT UP (see also ING)  
**NIL:** NIL-NIL

**NIN:** SEVEN-INNING GAME  
**NOW:** NOW, NOW  
**NSE:** NONSENSE  
**NTE:** CONTENTED, JOINT ENTERPRISE, ON TENTERHOOKS, UNTENTED (see also ENT)  
**OMB:** ATOM BOMB  
**OND:** LONDONDERRY  
**ONE:** ONE-ONE  
**ONI:** NONIONIC, ONIONIER  
**ONS:** SPONSONS  
**ORD:** WORD ORDER  
**ORR:** HORROR ROCK  
**ORS:** ENDORSORS, TORSORS  
**OUT:** ROUT OUT, SHOUTOUT  
**OVE:** MOVE OVER, SHOVE OVER  
**PAL:** PALPAL, PAPAL PALACE  
**PAN:** PAN-PAN  
**PAW:** PAWPAW  
**PER:** HYPERPERFECT, HYPERPERISTALSIS, SUPERPERSON  
**PHI:** AMPHIPHILE  
**PHO:** EUPHOPHOBIA, TAPHOPHOBIA, DYSMORPHOPHOBIA, GRAPHOPHOBIA, NEPHOPHOBIA, SOPHOPHOBIA, MORPHOPHONEMICS, GRAPHOPHONE, LOPHOPHORE, SULPHOPHOSPHATE  
**PIP:** PIP-PIP  
**PLE:** PEOPLE PLEASER, SIMPLE PLEASURE  
**POM:** POMPOMS



**POP:** POP-POP  
**POR:** PORPORA

**PRE:** PREPREG, PREPREGNANCY, PREPREPARED  
**PUR:** PURPURA, PURPURE  
**QUA:** QUAQUAVERSAL  
**QUE:** LA TUQUE, QUEBEC



**QUI:** SESQUIQUINTILE  
**RAG:** BRAG RAG  
**RAH:** RAH-RAH  
**RAY:** RAY-RAY  
**REA:** CULTURE/DEPARTURE/NATURE/PRESSURE AREA, REAR EASEMENT  
**RED:** RED RED



**RIE:** CURRIERIES, FARRIERIES  
**RYE:** RYE RYE  
**SAR:** SARSAR  
**SCH:** ESCHSCHOLTZIA  
**SEN:** SEN-SEN  
**SER:** BROWSER/USER SERVICE  
**SES:** OBSESSES  
**SES/SSE:** POSSESSES, ASSESSES  
**SHO:** SHOSHONE  
**SIN:** COUSINS-IN-LAW, LIVES IN SIN

**SON:** PRISON SONG



**STA:** JUST A START, POST A STATUS UPDATE

**STE:** STRESS-TESTED, STE. STEPHANIE

**STO:** CYSTOSTOMY, HAS TO STOP

**TAM:** TAMTAM

**TAN:** INSTANTANEOUS

**TAR:** TARTAR

**TAS:** METASTASIS

**TAU:** TAUTAUG

**TEN:** TENTEN

**TER:** COMPUTER TERMINAL, INTERTERM, SHORTER TERM, COUNTERTERRORISM, INTERTERMINAL, INTERTERRITORIAL

**TES:** TESTES

**THE:** EPISTLE TO THE THESSALONIANS, THE THE



**TIN:** RETINTING, STINTING, TINTIN, TINTING, TINTINNABULATION

**TOE:** TOETOE

**TOI:** TOITOI

**TOM:** TOMTOM

**TON:** TONTON MACOUTE

**TSE:** TSETSE

**TUK:** TUK-TUK

**TUM:** TUMTUM

**TZI/ZIT:** TZITZIT

**UNH:** UNH-UNH

**USA:** MORTEAU SAUSAGE

**USE:** IN-HOUSE USE

**UTE:** ABSOLUTE UTERINE INFERTILITY

**UTO:** PUT OUT OF

**VAL:** VALVAL, SURVIVAL VALUE (see also ALV)

**VER:** COVER VERSION, DRIVER VERIFIER™, OVERVERBOSE, VERVE RECORDS™



**WAH:** WAH-WAH

**WAR:** WARWARDS

**WAS:** WASWAS, WAS WASTED, WAS WASHED

**WIN:** WIN-WIN

**XIN:** XINXIN MING

**YEB:** "BYE BYE BABY," "BYE BYE BIRDIE," "BYE BYE BLACKBIRD" (song titles)

**YEH:** YEH YEH (Georgie Fame record from 1964)

**YOK:** YOKYOKU/YO-KYOKU

**YUM:** YUM-YUM (sauce)

**ZHU:** ZHU ZHU, ZHUZH UP

As you can see, we've sometimes cast a wide net. Can you find any others? I'm amenable to zhuzhing this up a little further... ■

## MONOCONSONANTALS

T Campbell

In *Word Ways* #12.1, 1979, Darryl Francis put together a list of “monoconsonantal” words, containing only one unique consonant each, each of them as long as he could find. Below is a direct quote from the article.

B	BAOBAB	N	NONANE
C	COCCACEAE	P	PIOUPIOU
D	DIODIDE	Q	QUAEQUAE
F	FEOFFEE	R	RIRORIRO
G	GEGGEE	S	ASSESSEES
H	HOIAH	T	OTTETTO
J	AJAJA	V	VEUVE
K	KUKUKUKU	W	WEEWOW
L	ALLELUIA	X	OXEYE
M	MAMMEE	Z	ZOOZOO

If hyphenated words are to be allowed, there are two improvements to the above list: NONNY-NONNY and TAT-TAT-TAT.

Turning to dictionaries other than the two Websterian ones, a number of words on this list may be bettered. Thus, the Oxford English Dictionary gives FEEOFFEE as a nineteenth-century variant spelling of FEOFFEE. Funk & Wagnalls New Standard Dictionary allows us to replace HOIAH with HUAIHO, a Chinese river. And, returning to the Oxford English Dictionary, the triply V'd EVVIVA is a good replacement for VEUVE. EVVIVA, in case you wondered, is a cry whose meaning is roughly "long live the king".

\* \* \*

What options are available to us today? I've put my preferred choices in bold below.

**B: Baobab** is still familiar, and while there are multiple other six-letter options—*bubbie*, *baubee*, *buibui*, *boobie*, *beebee*, *booboo*, and *boubou*—none exceed that length. The buibui and boubou are both African garments, but surprisingly, there's no etymological relation between the two.

**C: Coccaceae** is a family of bacteria, but I usually avoid scientific names of creatures when there's an alternative name, and these are more often called *cocci*. Excluding that entry, again there are multiple six-letters but nothing bigger. Of those, the most familiar is **acacia**.

**Diiodide** (a chemical term) remains undefeated.

So does **feoffee** (trustee of a fiefdom).

*Geggee* (victim of a hoax) is an archaic Scots term; better terms of the same length these days would be *agogue* (“chemical stimulant” when it’s not a suffix) or ***gee-gee*** (British “horsey”).

You might think this is all a lot of ***hoohah***, but we’ll keep going.

***Ajaja*** is defined as “a traditional Inuit song accompanied by dancing and drumming.” The roseate spoonbill once had the scientific name *Ajaja ajaja*, but this is out of date and an unhyphenated phrase anyway. The only other notable term with two Js and five letters is the town of *Ujiji*; and the only really familiar term that’s even four letters, albeit not used much today for obvious reasons, is *juju*.

*Kukukuku* is unbeatable if we’re allowing proper names; it’s a tribe in Papua New Guinea. If we want to keep things lower-cased, there’s no clear winner. The big candidates are *oekaki*, a message-board system that allowed collaborative drawing; ***akeake***, a name used for several kinds of small tree from New Zealand; or *kokako*, a bird that looks like the image below:

***Allolalia*** is speech disorder related to brain injury, so it’s a little macabre that it eclipses *alleluia* in this list.

*Mammee*, a kind of apple, is just fine, but I think that of the candidates available, audiences today might prefer ***muumuu***.

***Nonunion*** is a good word whether you’re talking about unprotected jobs or just a failure to come together. *Nonny-nonny* is longer, but even in Shakespeare it just seemed to be a nonsense noise. And if we allow that sort of thing, it feels like a slippery slope to *Hahahahaha* and *Awwwwwww*.

*Piouiou*, a French word for a baby bird’s tweet, no longer has much purchase in English. But we still have ***epopoeia***, a variant of *epopee*, meaning epic poem.

Likewise, *quaequae* is Latin that’s gone out of fashion, but English dictionaries now have ***quiaquia***, a spindly fish.

Nothing wrong with ***riroriro***, another little bird, and I can’t find anything over six letters I like nearly so well.

Likewise ***assessees***, which all of these entries are as I evaluate them.



Francis mentions *tat-tat-tat*, but that's a repeated sound that can be any length. Better candidates are *tit-tat-toe* (a variant on *tic-tac-toe*) and the now-familiar **tête-à-tête**, two-person conversation.

Much as I love *evviva*, I don't see it used in contemporary English like *viva* is. The term **veuve**, which means *widow* in French, used to also mean a widowbird. These days, though, *veuve* owes its continued familiarity in English to wine. While *Euboëa* Island is disqualified as a proper name, it would otherwise qualify for *two* spots on this list, since its Greek name is *Évvoia*.

*Weewow* is so gone from records I couldn't even tell you what it used to mean, but **wow-wow**, a kind of gibbon, is still around and has one more *w* in it.

If you get a chance to eat a **xuixo** and you're not on a diet, you won't regret it.

Francis skips *y*, but I think most people would consider *y* as a consonant in the word **yo-yo**. I gave a lot of consideration to *youyou*, sometimes cited as a word for dinghy, but it doesn't have much dictionary support.



A **zoozoo** is a kind of wood pigeon, making five birds here, with *veuve* and *riroriro* getting top honor and *kokako* and "Ajaja ajaja" scoring mentions. Honorable mention to *zoæææ*, a British term for crab larva. ■

## I LOVE A CHARADE

Richard Lederer  
San Diego  
verbivore.com

When I was a boy (and dinosaurs trampled the earth), the game of charades was wildly popular. In that competition, some of the players tried to guess a word or phrase from the actions of another player who was not allowed to speak but who broke up the word or phrase into parts by gesturing.

Although few of us play the game of charades these days, charade words abound, words that can be meaningfully cleaved into smaller words. For example, *nowhere* do you read about charade words, but they are NOW HERE. Don't let charade words *bewilder* you. Just BE WILDER about how you look at them. The *onus* is ON US.

What does a *buccaneer's* pair of earrings cost? A BUCK AN EAR. I *scream* for ICE CREAM. I wanted to use an *asterisk*, but I decided I'd be an ASS T' RISK it. Don't *assume*. It will make an ASS out of YOU and ME. I'm so *asinine* that when I sold my burros, only one ASS IN NINE fetched a fair price. A *meteorologist* became A MEATY UROLOGIST. What could be more *abominable* than A BOMB IN A BULL? In a *dialogue*, I learned that many a tree will DIE A LOG. A *cantaloupe* CAN'T ELOPE with his honeydew. I submitted ten puns to a puns contest and *intended* to impress the judges, but not one pun IN TEN DID. These ten examples tickle the logological brain, but it's even more fun when the charade words faithfully retain the spelling of their source:

I'm so *wordstruck* that I drive around town in a WORDS TRUCK.

Please don't *prosecute* me for writing this article. I hope you find my PROSE CUTE.

If you have not *faced anger*, you will certainly FACE DANGER.

Your *identity* is your I.D. ENTITY.

An overgrown *mustache* MUST ACHE.

*Manslaughter* seldom evokes MAN'S LAUGHTER.

*Abracadabra*, presto chang-o! A BRA, CAD! A BRA!

If you are *apathetic* about voting, you are A PATHETIC citizen.

*Alienation* characterizes A LIE NATION.

We *atone* to be AT ONE with the universe.

On a *beanstalk*, do the BEANS TALK?

A *caravan* often includes a CAR, A VAN.

A *generation* is a GENE RATION.

A *daredevil* DARED EVIL.

*Connecticut* is the oxymoron state because its charade is CONNECT I CUT.

I don't want to go off on a *tangent*, but every summer I become a TAN GENT.

*Mentally* MEN TALLY the number of women they wish to seduce.

The *converse* of a prisoner's prose is CON VERSE. A *conspiracy* can be a CONS' PIRACY. I'm not *condescending*, but a prisoner walking down stairs is a CON DESCENDING. The *consequence* of prisoners standing in line is a CON SEQUENCE. My *conscience* should tell me if I should be pro or CON SCIENCE.

I value *alternatives*, but I don't wish to ALTER NATIVES.

Praying mantis *insects* are all IN SECTS.

William Shakespeare, husband of Anne *Hathaway*, HATH A WAY with words.

A *therapist* addressed the crimes of THE RAPIST.

A *novice* is likely to have NO VICE.

A *soap opera* makes us sigh, "SO, A POP ERA."

It's *miserable* that seldom is a MISER ABLE to help others.

Alcoholism is never a *bargain* and there's no such thing as a BAR GAIN. *Barflies* live in an atmosphere of BARF, LIES and a *barrage* of BAR RAGE. A *barking* dog drank with the barflies, and they called him the BAR KING.

When a city's population reaches *capacity*, it's time to CAP A CITY, but *mendacity* won't MEND A CITY.

I know an outstanding farmer who is OUT STANDING in his field.

The incompetence of my *brokerage* agency ignited my BROKE RAGE.

The people of *Panama* respect their mothers, so they never PAN A MA.

With a *manicure*, a manicurist explains, "MAN, I CURE hangnails."

I've never seen an *antelope*, but I've seen an ant and another ANT ELOPE.

My *tenants* complain that their apartment is swarming with TEN ANTS.

I've just made a *discovery* that I like DISCO VERY much.

I love charade words in *abundance*, but I've never seen A BUN DANCE.

After you *initiate* a trip to a restaurant, you may exclaim, "IN IT I ATE."

A *Hispanic* man hid HIS PANIC.

A *seasick* person thinks, "SEAS, ICK!"

I'll never *abandon* my love of A BAND ON a stage.

An equestrian will *reinforce* a horse's good habits by applying the proper REIN FORCE.

A *healthy self* results from the advice, "Physician, HEAL THYSELF."

Poetry lovers are never *averse* to A VERSE.

The *Heisman* trophy is really the HE IS MAN trophy.

She created an altered *meme* of herself with the caption ME! ME!

Just after a *gunshot*, the GUN'S HOT.

When one suffers from *expectoration*, don't EXPECT ORATION.

I run *amok*, but AM OK.

The *penis*—oops—PEN IS mightier than the sword.

In The "Scarlet Letter," Hester Prynne asked, "Must I add AN 'A' TO MY *anatomy*?"

When governments *overtax*, they wield an OVERT AX on our wallets. They think our hard-earned money is *theirs* because they are THE IRS. Priests *perspire* when their churches are taxed PER SPIRE.

A *pungent* wit makes me a PUN GENT. I should be *punished* for every PUN I SHED.

When a boy and a girl are *amiable together*, he may well wonder, "AM I ABLE TO GET HER?"

I always make sure that my *significant* other has good credit, so that she can SIGN IF I CAN'T.

Here's a 1-2-3-4-5 segmenting of the word *temperamentally*, Keep in mind that all 26 letters in our alphabet are entries in almost all dictionaries and that an *em* is a printer's measure:

T E M P E R A M E N T A L L Y

Now let's go backward with the word *plainclothesman*:

P L A I N C L O T H E ' S M A N

Logologically *pastern*, "the part of a horse's foot between the fetlock and the top of the hoof," is, in my view, the most charadeable of all words in the English language. That is, when you sextuply cleave *pastern* at any point in the word, you will come up with two words.

As you gaze upon the charaded words below, bear in mind that all letters are entries in dictionaries and hence qualify as words, that *pas* is the plural of *pa*, that *ern* is a variant spelling for a long-winged species of sea eagle, that an *RN* is a registered nurse, and that a *paster* is someone who pastes:

*p astern pa stern pas tern past ern paste RN paster n*

I'll conclude my charade parade with long sentences that can be charaded into other long sentences, hoping that they will flabber your gast and smack your gob:

SEA RINGS UNLIT SEASHELL.  
SEARING SUN LIT SEA'S HELL.

O, HAD A MAN DEVELOPED A WAY.  
OH, ADAM AND EVE LOPED AWAY.

FLAMINGO: PALE, SCENTING A LATENT SHARK.  
FLAMING, OPALESCENT IN GALA TENTS—HARK!

HA! THOU TRAGEDY INGRATE, DWELL ON, SUPERB OLD STAG IN GLOOM!  
HATH OUTRAGE, DYING, RATED WELL? ON, SUPER-BOLD STAGING LOOM! ■

## FORM US? I CALL FOR MUSIC, ALL Redividers in Music and Language

Lori Wike

*We should rather say that melodic contour has two aspects: the pitch contour of ups and downs, and the rhythmic contour of longs and shorts and patterns of accent. “Melodic contour” is the superordinate category. Further, we believe that the two aspects of melodic contour—pitch and rhythm—are essentially inseparable features of the melodic pattern.*

*To illustrate the inseparability of the pitch and rhythmic contours, take as an example a pair of melodies that share not only their pitch contours, but also have identical pitch patterns: the popular song “Rudolf, the Red-Nosed Reindeer” and the old hymn “Rock of Ages.” The pitch patterns [in C major: G, A, G, E, C, A, G; contour: + - - + - - ] are identical, but due to the differences in rhythm and tempo that fact is not at all obvious. In fact, in our laboratory we didn’t realize the identity of the pitch patterns until we started using them as stimuli. We could say that the pitch pattern has a different “meaning” when it is given a different rhythm.*

*While we can almost do without the pitch component of melodic contour—in some melodies it almost disappears—the rhythmic component is indispensable.*

—W. Jay Dowling, Aron Barbey, and Laura Adams, “Melodic and Rhythmic Contour in Perception and Memory”<sup>1</sup>

### Musical Redividers

I am never not astonished when I think about the fact that the *pas de deux* descending scale theme from Tchaikovsky’s ballet *The Nutcracker* and the melody of “Joy to the World” are made up of the exact same pitch relationship sequence: both are simply a descending major scale. If placed into the key of C major, their pitches are C – B – A – G – F – E – D – C. These two wildly different melodies are the same in terms of pitch, but the rhythm of each is crucial to their melodic identification and differentiation for the listener.

Is there a term for this phenomenon? Is there a name for melodies that share a pitch relationship sequence, but have different rhythms—and which, because of this, are virtually undetectable aurally as having the same pitches? (Or, if not undetectable per se, their pitch identity is not immediately obvious to a listener). To the best of my knowledge, no term for this exists.<sup>2</sup>

I propose borrowing the wordplay concept of the **redivider** in language and using it to describe this curious musical phenomenon: the **musical redivider**. A redivider in language is a sequence

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<sup>1</sup> Dowling, W. Jay, and Aron Barbey, and Laura Adams. “Melodic and Rhythmic Contour in Perception and Memory”; 2. [https://www.decisionneurosciencelab.org/pdfs/Dowling\\_et\\_al.,\\_\(1999\).pdf](https://www.decisionneurosciencelab.org/pdfs/Dowling_et_al.,_(1999).pdf) In S.W. Yi (Ed.), *Music, Mind, and Science*, 166-188. Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> The musical set theory of Allen Forte, particularly the idea of ordered set classes, could be seen as somewhat parallel in the realm of atonal music analysis, but does not really address the specific and surprising phenomenon described here.

of letters that can be segmented or subdivided into words in different ways to produce multiple—often two—meaningful phrases or sentences.

The title of this article begins with a redivider composed of two segmentations of the 11-letter sequence F O R M U S I C A L L: *Form us? I call for music, all*. The identical sequence of letters in this redivider may be envisioned more clearly when presented in a stacked format:

FORM US? I CALL  
FOR MUSIC, ALL

In a similar vein, a stacked look at these melodies from “Joy to the World” and *The Nutcracker*—an example of what I am calling a musical redivider—brings their relationship to each other and their parallel to redividers in language into greater focus.

“Joy to the World”



*Pas de deux* from *The Nutcracker*



Even if one cannot read music, the identical pitch sequence (analogous to identical letter sequences) and non-identical rhythmic segmentation (analogous to non-identical word divisions) in the two melodies can be seen clearly in the above presentation.

This is not, of course, an isolated example. There are many other musical redividers made up of well-known melodies, though they are not necessarily well-known for having such a remarkable relationship with each other. As mentioned in the quotation at the beginning of this article, the hymn “Rock of Ages” and the song “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” share this relationship, which the researchers emphasize as being “not at all obvious” to a listener.

Similarly, Caroline B. Monahan points out in “Parallels Between Pitch and Time and How They Go Together” that the theme from the TV show *Dragnet* and the opening motif of Schubert’s Eighth Symphony are “different entities despite the fact that they have the same pitch pattern.”<sup>3</sup> Yet another example that I find particularly delightful is the fact that the opening bassoon solo of Stravinsky’s ballet *The Rite of Spring* shares an identical pitch sequence with the chorus from

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<sup>3</sup> Monahan, Caroline B. “Parallels Between Pitch and Time and How They Go Together,” 151. In Dowling, W. Jay and Thomas J. Tighe (Eds.), *Psychology and Music: The Understanding of Melody and Rhythm*. East Sussex: Psychology Press, 1993.

Queen's *We Are the Champions* ("till the end" in which each sequence contains one additional note not found in the other).<sup>4</sup>

### A Shared Sense of Wonder

*While not always expressed with all the visible signs of a wonderstruck child—eyes wide, mouth open—it is true, nonetheless, that the experience of wonder arrests us. We stop and stand in wonder. When wonder arises it is as if the surface of water is suddenly broken—with a gentle plop or a startling splash—by the presence of the unexpected. We are plunged into and saturated by it. Or, it is as if our steady, habitual course were radically redirected by an object which would not give way to the usual momentum of our experience. However it is described, its impact is felt and it leaves its impression: "Oh!"*  
—Philo H. Hove, "The Face of Wonder"<sup>5</sup>

Musical redividers and language redividers share more than just structural parallels between pitches/letters and rhythmic divisions/word segmentations. I believe that these redividers also frequently provoke similar reactions when encountered by a receptive listener or reader: surprise, astonishment, wonder. What is so striking, to me at least, is that the melodies of musical redividers are in no way obviously or at least immediately identifiable as being "the same" to a listener, even when one knows this to be true!<sup>6</sup>

The relationship between the *pas de deux* and "Joy to the World" is perhaps one of the easiest musical redividers to "hear" given that both are simply composed of a descending major scale. Yet, even then, they somehow "mean" differently: they are understood and identified as separate and different musical entities due to the indispensable element of their rhythms. Their identities as melodies depend on the combination of pitch with rhythm, with heavier weight given to the rhythmic segmentation.<sup>7</sup>

As in music, one may also experience a sense of wonder and delight when coming upon (or creating) a redivider in language. I think this is especially true with redividers that seem particularly well-crafted, humorous, and/or surprising, as in one of my all-time favorites: *In every ode linger many / I never yodel in Germany*.<sup>8</sup>

This sense of wonder and appreciation, even amazement, may also occur when encountering other forms of wordplay, perhaps especially so in close relations of the redivider like

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<sup>4</sup> A detailed discussion and illustration of the *Rite of Spring/We Are the Champions* connection can be found in Michael Monroe's *MMmusing* blog entry "Hidden Rites": <https://mmmusing.blogspot.com/2021/01/hidden-rites.html>

<sup>5</sup> Hove, Philo H. "The Face of Wonder," 449. In *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 28:4, 1996.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Monroe (in "Hidden Rites") articulates a similar observation: "The most surprising - even inexplicable - thing to me is that I never really find myself hearing the Stravinsky melody in what Fake Freddy does, even when the pitches are exactly the same."

<sup>7</sup> Dowling, et al, point out that listeners can often recognize "Rudolph" from its rhythmic pattern alone.

<sup>8</sup> This redivider was written by Jim Meyer of Lynnwood, Washington, and was a response to a challenge posed by Will Shortz on the December 7th, 1997 NPR Weekend Edition broadcast. Meyer's winning redivider in this broadcast was "Seeking sin, Diane wants a real lover / See kings, India, new ants are all over." Thank you to Will Shortz, Dhanika Pineda, and Douglas Fink for their generous assistance in tracking down this attribution!

palindromes,<sup>9</sup> anagrams, oronyms, and other forms of simultaneous text construction. Jeremiah Farrell’s famous 1996 Election Day NYT crossword also comes to mind in this context. In his remarkable “Schrödinger crossword,” the clue “lead story tomorrow” could be solved with either “Clinton elected” or “Bob Dole elected.” Here one might ask: is this character of surprising simultaneity, and the way in which it catches us unawares and stops us in our tracks, a particularly salient mechanism for provoking the “wonderstruck” response?

### **Differences: Intentionality and Divisibility**

While possessing many structural parallels, musical redividers also have a number of differences from their language counterparts. First, the musical phenomenon I describe as a redivider is generally accidental in nature, a quirk of musical synchronicity, rather than intentional. (Queen and Stravinsky—how about that?!) It is typically a discovery or realization made by someone other than the composer.

In the realm of wordplay, by contrast, the redivider is intentionally and creatively constructed, although such constructions also rely somewhat on the discovery of happy accidents: serendipitously useful patterns contained within the formal qualities of language itself. There is a certain element of excavation, of archaeological discovery, involved in their construction, particularly with shorter redividers. As with palindromes, particularly short ones, I like to think of this as a kind of co-invention between the constructor and language itself, which delivers up its treasures if we go digging for them.

Music and language redividers also part company due to the fact that the domain of each has, in general, a very different relationship to meaning. Theoretically, an infinite number of rhythmic divisions of duration could be constructed out of a given pitch sequence like a descending major scale. A potentially infinite number of melodic entities can be constructed in this way, each with a distinct formal identity and each evoking various moods, emotions, characters and responses—evocations which can resist easy or definitive classification.

A given letter sequence, in contrast, possesses a limited number of segmentation possibilities. The divisibility of letter segments is limited by the necessity of constructing intelligible words that produce a meaningful, or at least legible, phrase or sentence. Redividers are often presented in a dual form, with the two possible (or two best) readings shown side by side or stacked.

### **From Scriptio Continua to Solutio Continua**

*Had the space between words been deleted and the signs been written in scriptura continua, the resulting visual presentation of the text would have been analogous to a modern lexogrammatic puzzle.*

—Paul Saenger, *Space Between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading*<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> As Will Shortz succinctly states with regard to palindromes: “There is something *exquisite* about a beautifully constructed palindrome.” From *The Palindromists* documentary, dir. Vince Clemente, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Saenger, Paul. *Space Between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading*, 9. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.

*Scriptio continua* (or *scriptura continua*), Latin for “continuous script,” was an ancient form of writing without spacing, punctuation or capitalization, and still exists today in certain language scripts. In *scriptio continua* a reader must supply word breaks and punctuation themselves, resolving any ambiguities based on contextual clues.

What happens when we present redividers in *scriptio continua* form? In music, one would essentially be faced with the act of composition itself if supplied with the constraint of using a particular pitch sequence. One would be confronted with a surfeit of possibility, rather than any kind of discrete puzzle to work out.

A letter sequence, however, cannot be subdivided in an infinite number of ways. Because of this, we can construct redividers in puzzle form by presenting them as a continuous stream of letters which the reader/solver must parse, as in: I S E N D O F F E L O N. Furthermore, it is possible to construct letter sequences that present more than two possible solutions, a task made easier with longer letter sequences, of course. While an infinite number of solutions—what we might call *solutio continua*—is not possible in language redividers, we can nevertheless strive toward a kind of musical rhythmicity and the possibility of multiple simultaneously possible solutions: *solutio continua* as an aspiration.<sup>11</sup>

In *solutio continua* fashion, one can experiment and push the redivider constraint so that more than two readings are possible. How many different intelligible “rhythmic segments” or duration divisions can one fit within a chosen letter sequence? In this next example, three segmentations immediately come to mind, although the third one has a more tenuous relationship to meaning: what, one might ask, is a “poem brace”?

#### HERESYSTEMPOEMBRACES

1. Here, system poem braces
2. Heresy’s tempo embraces
3. Heresy, stem poem braces

Possibilities begin to expand and explode with longer strings of letters. Constructing a small sequence of letters with a large solution set of redivider possibilities can become a puzzle in itself.

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<sup>11</sup> As a thought experiment, can we imagine a puzzle that may *always* have yet another solution? Like the divisionless writing in *scriptio continua*, which required constant interpretation on the part of the reader, can we imagine a puzzle with solution after solution after solution? Can we envision a form of puzzle solving that would be an infinite game, an explosion of simultaneously endless answers and exponential excess, a true *solutio continua*? What might be gained—or lost—in such a proliferation, as opposed to puzzles with a singular or discrete set of solutions?

## A Potential Direction for Redivider Puzzles

A more extended discussion of redivider puzzle possibilities<sup>12</sup> is a subject for another article, but I'll end with a partial-puzzle teaser, adding letters to the redivider letter sequence above. This is less a puzzle in and of itself and more a suggestion of a potential direction for going about constructing redivider puzzles. Below, the sequence of letters is presented in two ways: first in *scriptio continua* form and secondly as a grid of letters. One might imagine any number of puzzling means by which a solver could have arrived at this letter sequence in a previous step which could make for a more robust puzzle.

Reading the letters in typical left-to-right fashion, and beginning in the top left in the grid format, how many meaningful sentences and phrases can be parsed out via differing segmentations, capitalizations and punctuations?

HERESYSTEMPOEMBRACESINFORMALICEDEMEANINGLESS  
SONSET

H E R E S Y S  
T E M P O E M  
B R A C E S I  
N F O R M A L  
I C E D E M E  
A N I N G L E  
S S O N S E T

A few possible solutions can be found on page 68. ■

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<sup>12</sup> While writing this article I discovered Nick Proch's bracketgrams, an interesting puzzle type that combines elements of crosswords with redivers:  
[https://www.reddit.com/r/WebGames/comments/1lc6mv5/bracketgram\\_puzzles\\_daily\\_word\\_puzzles\\_that\\_play/](https://www.reddit.com/r/WebGames/comments/1lc6mv5/bracketgram_puzzles_daily_word_puzzles_that_play/)

# CRIME AND SUCCESSION: CROSSWORDS 1927-1928

T Campbell

This continues an ongoing year-by-year exploration of the history of the crossword puzzle begun in issue #7 of *The Journal of Wordplay*.

In most accounts, the crossword bubble popped in 1925. After some months' staring at the prospect of collapse, the ensuing century was a period of relative stability. Year by year, things weren't so simple.

For instance, 1926 and 1927 saw a sort of aftershock to the crossword craze—a boomlet or bubble, you might say. The difference was that this second mania was concentrated in the UK and Australia, and it didn't focus on solving puzzles for their own sake but on solving puzzles for cash prizes. And where there was big money, there was crime.

Publishers put puzzles in the newspapers' advertising sections, promising cash rewards for the first correct solution given—if one sent in a small entry fee, of course. This was legal gambling crossed with an IQ test, and it proved so addictive to British audiences that their post office had to form a new branch just to handle the 2.8 million letters a year devoted to crossword solutions.

In January, the *Sunday Express* realized its readers were being had and banned all such ads from its pages. Some of its advertisers' contest crosswords were ambiguously written to allow for multiple answers—so many possible answers, in fact, that the publisher could claim the *intended* answer was one no one had sent in.

A rogue outsider subverted another contest. Cecil Bernard Richmond, a motor-driver and scam artist, posed as the contest winner and notified organizers he had changed his address. Richmond had acquired tires, inner tubes, and motorcycles by means of phony checks, but his pioneering attempt at identity theft led the police right to his doorstep.

# WOULD YOU LIKE A CHEQUE FOR £500?

Simple Puzzle: Simple Rules: No Entrance Fee. Simply Enter

**FIVE HUNDRED POUNDS!** What couldn't you do with £500? You may think "Oh! I'll never win it," but why shouldn't you? Every reader, no matter what or who they are, can win this big free cross-word prize, which is offered for the correct solution of the puzzle printed below.

Give yourself the opportunity of being the winner and enter now. Even if your solution is not correct, it may very likely contain only one or two mistakes, in which case consolation prizes of £100 or £50 may be yours. It costs you nothing; and an amusing hour spent in solving this puzzle may make you richer by £500.

### CLAIMS FOR LAST WEEK'S PUZZLE

The solution of Puzzle No. 42 will be found in Page 3. Readers whose entries are correct, or contain one error only, are eligible to claim for the £200 and £100 prizes. Claims should be addressed to The Editor (Claims), "The Weekly Dispatch," Carmelite House, London, E.C. 4, to arrive first post on Wednesday, May 11. The conditions of claiming will be found below in rules 4 and 5.

### RESULT OF COMPETITION No. 41.

No competitor submitted a correct solution of this puzzle. The £100 prize for one mistake only, however, is shared among sixteen readers, whose names appear in Page 3.

### RULES OF THE COMPETITION.

1. £200 is offered for the correct solution of today's puzzle. If the £500 prize is not won a consolation prize of £100 will be awarded for one mistake only. Should neither the £500 nor the £100 be won a further prize of £50 will be shared among competitors whose answers contain only two errors. Entries must be addressed to "Square," The Weekly Dispatch, Carmelite House, London, E.C. 4 (Comp.).
2. On the back of the envelope the name and address of the sender must be written in block letters.
3. All entries must bear a postmark not later than Wednesday, May 11.
4. The correct solution of the forty-third puzzle, which is known only to the editor of The Weekly Dispatch, must be enclosed in a safe, will appear in next Sunday's issue.
5. Each claim must be accompanied by a postal order for 2s. 6d., which will be returned if the claim is substantiated.
6. All claims must be clearly marked with the number of the puzzle to which they refer, and must be accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope.
7. The prizes of £500, £100, and £50 are open to division in each case.
8. Any number of attempts up to 100 can be submitted, provided that each attempt is made on the printed form and is accompanied by a coupon cut from Page 19.
9. Every competitor must sign the form in Page 19 and attach it to the entry.
10. Proof of posting will not be accepted as proof of delivery.
11. Mutilated, damaged, or altered coupons will not be accepted for the competition.
12. No competitor will be allowed more than one share of any of the prizes.
13. Only those coupons which correspond with the sealed solution will be qualified to share the prizes.
14. The Editor's decision is final.
15. No correspondence can be entered into with regard to this competition.
16. Employees of the Associated Newspapers, Limited, are not eligible.

**CLUES.**

**ACROSS.**

1. Churchyard entrance.
7. Unsteady.
10. Willow.
12. Motoring association (abbr.).
14. Void.
15. Surveying instruments.
18. Guided.
19. Wealth.
20. Proposition.
22. Rocky height.
23. Corroded.
25. Language of Irish origin.
26. To keep back.
28. Part of the eye.
30. Smooth, shining.
33. Large plant.
34. The name (abbr.).
35. Prefix meaning out.
36. Prohibit.
37. Definite article.
38. Hurry.
40. Bird.
41. Thus.
44. Enemy.
45. Drinking vessel.
48. Bird.
49. Cunning.
51. Ion and I.
52. Period of time.
53. Part of a plant.
57. Fruit.
58. Animal.
59. Negative prefix.
60. Part of the neck.
61. In like manner.

**DOWN.**

1. Short rope.
2. Young animal.
3. Proceed.
4. Behind.
5. Fastened.
6. Fish.
8. Likewise.
9. Spun threads.
11. Remainder.
13. Help.
16. Very small.
17. Sides.
18. Dawdle.
21. From.
22. Story.
23. Old (Scottish).
24. Reside.
27. Woods.
29. Feminine suffix.
31. "Soft" drink.
32. A plant.
37. Truck.
39. Inhaled through nose.
41. Kind of serpent or fish.
43. Lubricated.
45. Propeller.
47. From 13 to 19.
50. European range of mountains.
52. Girl's name.
54. Prefix meaning new.
56. Preposition.

## AN ORNITHOLOGICAL TEST.

The winner of the £2 2s. prize offered last Sunday is Mr. F. Juinece, of 53, Derr-road, Cardiff. This week another prize of Two guineas is offered to the sender of the first correct solution opened of the small puzzle printed below, which contains names of a number of birds. Address entries to "Nine," The Weekly Dispatch, Carmelite House, London, E.C. 4 (Comp.), to reach here by Wednesday, May 11. The Editor's decision is final.

**CLUES.**

**ACROSS.**

4. Small bird.
7. Bird.
1. Preposition.
3. Church seat.
5. Jug.
6. To draw together.
8. Beasts.
9. Foundation.
3. Face.
5. Bird.
4. Knight (abbr.).
6. Bird.
7. Bird.
9. To.
1. Hi.
2. Bird.
3. Part of the verb "to be".
5. Pronoun.
6. Brown.
8. Edible seed.
10. River dam.
14. Bird.
17. Negative.
19. Confused noise.
20. Rooted.
21. Ancient with oil.
22. Desert.

The solution of last week's puzzle was:  
**ACROSS:** 1. Certain. 8. Hair. 9. Deter. 11. Army. 12. East. 13. Care. 14. Dull. 16. Ear. 18. Asia. 20. Sedan. 22. L. 23. Stain. 24. Cull. 26. Desert. 27. Pass. 28. Year.

A typical crossword competition invite.

And then there was the case of Phillip Simmons and Phillip Marks, Australian brothers-in-law and photographers running their own crossword contest. As reported in the New South Wales newspaper *Truth*, on September 25, the two Phillips either ignored or didn't know whether local Australian law permitted the gambling elements of a contest like this—and hey, guess what.

# PUZZLES

## Two Men Arrested and Charged C.I.D.'S WARNING

*The headline for Simmons and Marks' arrest.*

*Truth* even argued that submitters to the contest might be arrested as “particeps criminis,” AKA accomplices, depending on how Simmons and Marks’ trial went.

*If the puzzle is conducted against the law, there is little comfort in winning it. While the winnings might help to pay the fine, the indignity of being dragged to court would outweigh the pleasure of success.*

It’s sometimes hard to judge how tongue-in-cheek certain commentary was in older newspapers. At any rate, the charge was dismissed on October 15, but Simmons and Marks discontinued their partnership thereafter.

Many crossword contests *were* honest—the numbers already favored their profitability without the need for extra trickery. Even Torquemada’s puzzles in the *Observer* fetched a modest financial reward for early solvers.

But—with the exception of branded features like *The Observer*—the difficulty in determining the real from the fake carried the seeds of the contest era’s decline. By the end of the year, the number of solving-related correspondence in the UK was at half its peak and still falling.

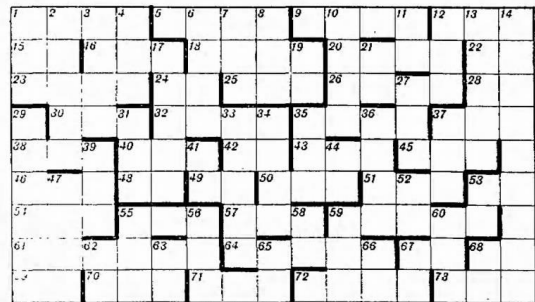
Back in America, the most famous crossword contest winner was walking away from the tournament that had made her name. Ruth von Phul had won the *New York Herald-Tribune* tourney in 1924 and 1926. Her husband’s work now took her to Dallas—but she still served the *Herald-Tribune* as a test-solver, providing “bogey times” for each day’s solvers to test themselves against. She would enjoy a few years as constructor, too, before drifting off to other intellectual pursuits in the early 1930s.

### CROSSWORD: 49.—ABBREV.

By Torquemada.

We offer three prizes of Three Guineas, Two Guineas, and One Guinea, for a correct solution of the accompanying Crossword Problem. The prizes will be awarded in order to the first three correct solutions opened after the date fixed for their receipt.

Solutions marked "Crossword 49" on left-hand corner of envelope, should reach the office not later than first post on Thursday next, and be addressed to the Editor, THE OBSERVER, 22, FADLER-STREET, E.C.4. In all cases the Editor's decision must be accepted as final.



N.B.—All the initials or shortened words which make up this puzzle are simple and customary abbreviations.

*One of Torquemada's first puzzles.*



Ruth Von Phul does cross-word puzzles in minutes which others do in hours. Her best performance was a complete solution in four minutes 20 seconds. She holds a cup for that feat.

*A contemporary von Phul profile.*

Although “enjoy” might be a generous term. “Just knowing it’s work takes the spirit of diversion out of almost anything,” Von Phul said in an early interview, as she described her routine of solving for the *Herald-Tribune* and composing for other New York papers. Still, she did seem to like that she had her sphere and her husband his—it kept her from having to feign any interest in that other Ruth, Babe Ruth of baseball.

Von Phul and her immediate successor, J. Van Cleft Cooper, were the only crossword champions until modern times to earn microcelebrity from competitive solving. For the next few decades, crossword competitions would either come too thick and fast—or too slow and with too little publicity.

Who succeeded Margaret Petherbridge Farrar at the New York *World*? Prosper Buranelli and/or F. Gregory Hartswick are likely candidates, but no one seems sure. The *World* was in trouble by then: visionary editor Frank Irving Cobb had died in 1923, and the paper was losing contributors like Heywood Broun to other markets. The Pulitzer family would sell it off in 1931, and any staffers remaining would then be let go.

Farrar’s real successor was Helen Haven. She started her crossword-editing career with the *Chicago Daily News* in September 1924, where she continued until March 1926—even though she left Chicago in 1925 to settle in with her new husband, a New York adman. While there, she was known as Helen Hahn.

The *New York Herald-Tribune*’s crossword section was syndicated from 1925 to 1942. Not long after the paper recruited her for the short-lived “How Do You Rate?” feature in 1927, Haven had moved into the “Meeting Place” to stay. As Todd Gross documented for the Pre-Shortzian Puzzle Project:

*In the Herald-Tribune’s daily puzzle column, Ms. Haven included a paragraph or so of text every day. And it wasn’t just about the puzzle printed below—it could be about puzzles in general, or interesting stories about people who solve puzzles, or questions and/or comments addressed directly to the readers. It could even be content from readers themselves. Through this limited channel, six times a week, readers were able to comment*

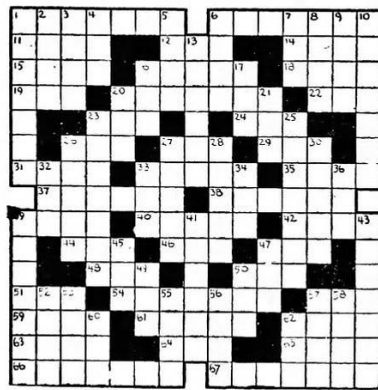
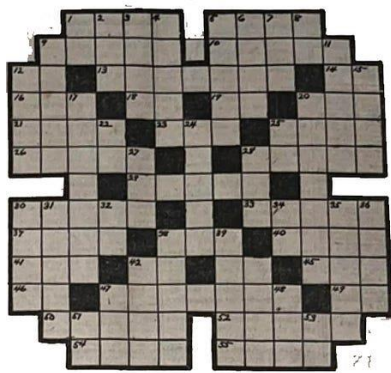
about puzzles, and their comments might be incorporated into future columns, even future puzzles.

This kind of community-building had been seen earlier at the *World* and the *Boston Globe*, but outside the *Herald-Tribune*, no one was investing in that anymore. With a few exceptions, including a how-to piece by constructor Richard H. Tingley, 1927 newspapers just served up the crossword with no preamble or post-game analysis. Here's another one of these. We assume you know what to do with it.

Still, advancements persisted, percolating from innovators to imitators as they tend to. A new diversion was occupying American audiences by then, the trivia game known as "Ask Me Another." Some sources speculated that ask-me-another features would replace crosswords, though book sales figures remained more robust for the latter than the former.

Crossword writers, sensitive to new trends in puzzling, started writing puzzles with "ask-me-another-style" clues for 1-Across, like "What American poet wrote the hymn, 'Nearer Home'?" (Alice CARY). You'll find many such clues in the sample at right.

This period also saw an unusual prominence of "ink-saving designs," squarish grids with little pieces cut out of them, as if to save ink that would otherwise be used to supply black squares at the edges:

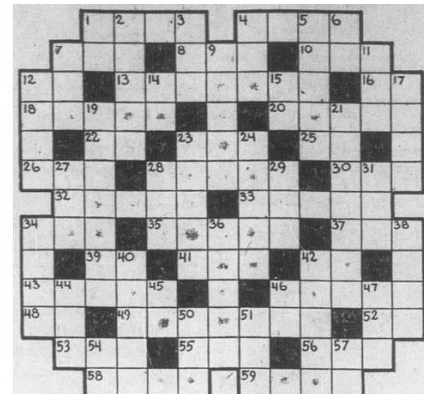


"Ink-saving" designs.

**VERTICAL**

1. What favorite prima donna soprano is the wife of the singer Rimini?
2. You and me.
3. Sins.
4. To scold contantly.
5. What is a vast treeless tract in Asia called?
6. Allotment of food.
7. Black bird of the cuckoo family.
8. What is the secret jargon of gypsies and tramps?
9. Delty.
10. What famous English author and student of physical phenomena wrote "Lightning Conductors and Lightning Guards"?
11. What is the small upper space of the tympanic cavity?
12. Adverbial negative.
13. Helped.
14. To do wrong.
15. Nothing.
16. What is the inner bone of the forearm?
17. What emperor rebuilt Rome after the great fire?
18. Profuse.
19. What season occurs when the sun shines most obliquely?
20. What is the nameplate over a merchant's shop called?
21. Measures of cloth.
22. What is the divine word for the Second Person of Trinity?
23. Bulk.
24. What are the constellation of Cancer, Hydro, and Scorpio combined called?

"Ask Me Another" clues.



T.M. Greene invented a new sort of crossword puzzle called the "Victoria Cross Crossword Puzzle." Answers could be found in four directions—the traditional "Horizontal" and "Vertical," and along the two downward diagonals (left to right down and right to left down):

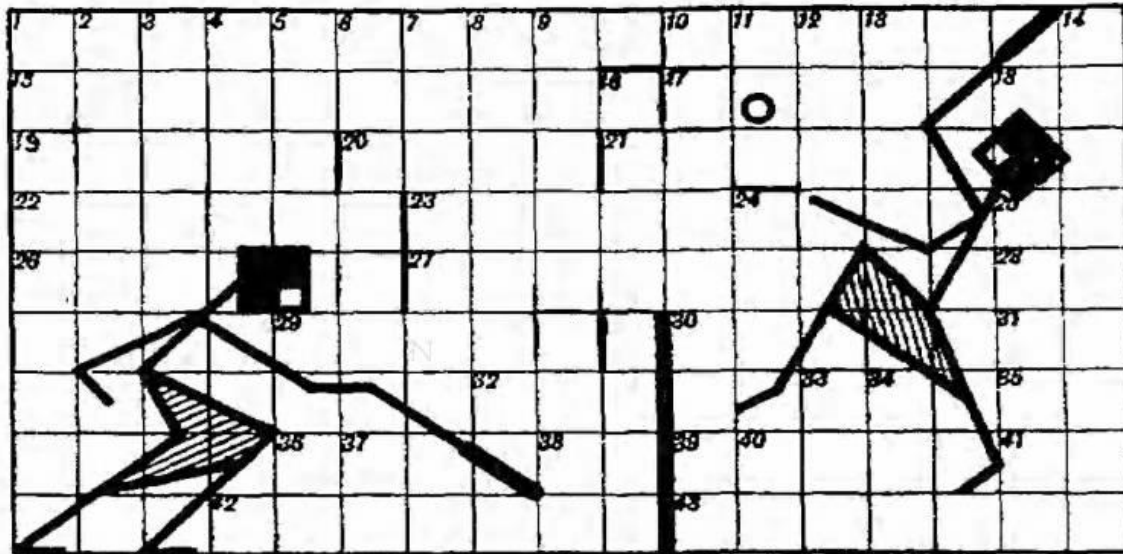
<p><b>HORIZONTAL</b></p> <p>1—The present time (init.)          3—Illicit buying (init.)          5—An insect.          7—Performs.          11—Void (abb.)          14—Head office (init.)          15—Criterion (abb.)          16—Sphere.          18—I am (cont.)          20—Debating association (init.)          25—Medical man (abb.)          26—Ancient musical instrument.          27—Adverb.          29—International correspondence (init.)          32—Aust. trained nurse (init.)          34—Road, rail, and tram (init.)          37—First name of famous Klan.          39—Athletic club (init.)          41—It is (cont.)          42—Mislaid.          43—Sunday Nat. League (init.)          45—Army rank (init.)</p> <p><b>L. TO R. DOWNWARDS.</b></p> <p>1—Pertaining to air.          2—Causing loss.          3—The (Italian).          5—Centralised system of business.          7—Exclamation.          8—Bush call (pl.)          11—National Institution (init.)          17—Office administration (init.)          18A—Courtesy title (abb.)          20—Takes liquid.          22—Present tense (init.)          26—Chinese name.          27—Adverb.          28—Canvas for a ship.          34A—Rave.          36—Banker's mark (init.)          41—To-morrow (init.)</p>		<p><b>VERTICAL</b></p> <p>1—Seaman (init.)          4—Color (abb.)          6—Wander.          8—Church (abb.)          9—Preposition.          11—Nat. Rifle Brig. (init.)          13—Member of the body.          15—Creole (abb.)          17—What bookmakers lay.          19—To swear (coll.)          21—Suffix making adj. of noun.          23—Concerning.          24—Each (abb.)          30—Nat. Rifle Assn. (init.)          32—Exclamation (pl.)          35—An Aust. State (abb.)          36—Nimble (abb.)          37—Boxing term (init.)          38—Personal pronoun.          40—Adjective (indef.)          44—Army Officer (abb.)</p> <p><b>R. TO L. DOWNWARDS.</b></p> <p>3—Not yielding to request.          4—Knob.          9—Used for sewing.          10—Adverb.          12—Licentiousness.          18—Institute of Architects (init.)          19—Sign for Church denomination (init.)          25A—Returned soldier (init.)          31—Statutory (abb.)          32—Definite adjective.          40—Adverb.</p>
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NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

The "Victoria Cross" crossword puzzle...solved in four directions.

Yes, puzzles of this era still tended to use "Horizontal 1" and "Vertical 2" instead of "1-Across" and "2-Down." But the shorter and more accurate headings were starting to creep in, especially in the work of the greatest crossword innovator of the day, Torquemada. There's a certain irony in the fact that Torquemada—ordinarily a champion of harder words and more obscure references—helped guide us into the simple, unvarnished "Across" and "Down."



**ACROSS.**

1. Very old family wearing coats of mail
15. Monster production
17. About dawn
18. 36dn. always makes game of me
19. To bully
20. Omar's birthplace
21. Bods in a pickle
22. One of nine magistrates
23. Practised
25. Identical with 18
26. Not all glorious with in
27. The tailless skink
28. You sometimes get this when you wake
29. Chargeable for debt in the plural
30. Both a little mixed
32. We run out while marking time (anag.)
33. Broken sleep under uncomfortable conditions
35. The whole does the first half before meals
39. Reach
41. American rookies
42. Defame

**DOWN.**

1. A tall large person
2. Ordinary freeman
3. Heath
4. Slack
5. Rumpied cushions
6. Proceedings
7. Mousier occurring in Pilgrim's Progress
8. Plural reverse of Party Spirit
9. I cannot take my money with me or leave it behind
10. This would describe putting on fresh coats
11. of paint, starting with red
12. "The bird of dawning"
13. 32 (anag.)
14. The horn of a coach
16. Reminiscent nautical symposia
24. To slap on the back for services rendered
25. Rock-rose (rev.)
33. Used for cutting teeth (anag.)
34. My special fever is typhus
36. My special fever is typhus
37. My special fever is typhus

A more elaborate Torquemada design. with a new approach to blacked-out spaces.

The stick figures in the above layout serve the same function as black squares in a typical grid: any square that they occupy is *not* to be filled in with a letter.

The *Observer* printed an "Everyman" crossword for those looking for an easy-to-moderate challenge. Torquemada's experiments were for the hardcore. "Added Determinants" featured clues like "9 + fastening = deadly potion" (answer: HEM, which when added to *lock* makes *hemlock*).

Sometimes you had to subtract a string from most answers to make things work—"Solfeggio" only fit together if you took SOL and FA out of the front of answers like SOLOMON, FARE, SOLID, and FATTRELS. At least one puzzle had answers meant to be read back and forth—RAPHERNALIA, for instance, should be read as PARAPHERNALIA by starting at the P, reading right to left, then turning 180 to read left to right. Clues could be embedded within

limericks or entire short stories. Many of these innovations wouldn't reach American shores for decades.

Even Torquemada's approach to fairly straightforward clues could be...*not* straightforward. "Bear leader" was BALOO.

Also worth noting were the many charming illustrations in the Torquemada grids, facilitated by the use of bars or illustrations to separate answers. Since Rosamond Mathers designed the grids while Edward selected the seed words and clues, it's likely the illustrations were Rosamond's. (Note the limerick clues in the grid below.)

**ACROSS.**

1. There once was a person bombastic,
8. A fellow most lean and elastic,
15. Yet a Polish Socinian's
16. Sloppy opinions
17. Could streak him until he was plastic.

**DOWN.**

2. } Till the hawks on the tapestry froze.
3. }
4. Observe the proceedings of bats!
5. To avoid making holes in their bats
6. They spread stuff with a sheen
7. Underneath the demesne
9. Of a shadowless person in spats.

*Torquemada was often fond of limericks and nature-inspired illustrations.*

But while the art form was developing, the public was no longer paying much attention. *Cross-Word Crazy*, a play released in 1927, was the only real nod crosswords got from pop culture that year, and it was—wait for it—another story about crossword addiction landing people into a mental institution.

Publishers were a fickle lot. Every year since 1924, they'd offered up at least one invention they hoped would become "the puzzle craze of the year 192X"—displacing crosswords the way crosswords had displaced anagram games. Riddles, limericks, Arthur Wynne's step-words, and "ask me anything" books—all were tried. All soon tired.

In 1928, the latest such offering was the *Scotchogram*, which now reads like trying to correct a bad speech-to-text app. Readers had to translate phrases from their soundalikes—the example given was "Value loamy fifty economy being broke andle return Saturday" into "Will you loan me fifty on account of me being broke and I will return Saturday?" *Stop the presses.*

“The new craze is to be introduced by *Judge* humorous magazine,” announced an ad in *The Montana Record-Herald*, Aug 7, 1928. One can respect the moxie, but—that’s not really how crazes work.

Besides, despite the boom and bust of a few years earlier, the U.S. crossword was showing signs of stability.

An August 25, 1928, edition of *Editor and Publisher* included information about the following crossword syndicates:

<i>Crane, Dr. Frank</i>	(d)	(700 wda)	<i>Associated Newspapers</i>
<i>Crossword Puzzle</i>	(d)		<i>Bell Syndicate</i>
<i>Crossword Puzzles</i>	(d-w)	(2-mat.)	<i>Graphic Syndicate</i>
<i>Crossword Puzzles</i>	(d)	J. W. White	<i>International Syndicate</i>
<i>Crossword Puzzles</i>	(d)	(2)	<i>King Features Syndicate</i>
<i>Crossword Puzzles</i>	(d)	Walter B. Gibson	<i>Ledger Syndicate</i>
<i>Crossword Puzzles</i>	(d)	(2)	<i>McClure Newspaper Syndicate</i>
<i>Crossword Puzzles</i>	(d)	(2)	<i>NEA Service, Inc.</i>
<i>Crossword Puzzles</i>	(d)		<i>N. Y. Herald Tribune English</i>
<i>Crossword Puzzles</i>	(d)	(5)	<i>Premier Syndicate, Inc.</i>
<i>Crossword Puzzles</i>	(d)	(3)	<i>Republic Syndicate</i>
<i>Crossword Puzzles</i>	(d)		<i>International Syndicate</i>

Here was the same list from the same source four years earlier, in the craze days:

*Ledger Syndicate, Independence Square, Philadelphia.*  
*King Features Syndicate, Int., 241 W. 58th St, New York.*  
*McClure Newspaper Syndicate, 373 4th Ave., New York.*  
*New York Herald Tribune Syndicate, 225 W, 40th St., New York.*  
*New York World Syndicate, 63 Park Row, New York.*  
*Bell Syndicate, Inc., 154 Nassa St., New York.*  
*International Syndicate, 213 Gell. ford Ave., Baltimore.*  
*Metropolitan Newspaper Service, 150 Nassau St., New York.*

So while crossword mania had vanished, the number of crossword syndicators had *increased*, from eight to eleven. (The 1926 list had ten, so this looks like steady growth.) To be clear, no newspaper business lived by crosswords alone; all these syndicates offered their puzzles as part of a larger spread of reproducible content.

The *Ledger* syndicate had two distinct features in 1924, dropping to one by 1928. The *New York World* was no longer a syndicator in the post-Petherbridge era, nor was Metropolitan Newspaper Service, but Associated Newspapers, Graphic Syndicate, NEA Services, Premier Syndicate, and Republic Syndicate had all joined the party. There weren’t a lot of ways to distinguish one





Other businesses still relied on the U.S. crossword market. In its early days, the *Racing and Football Leader* advertised itself as a “leading authority on racing, football, and crosswords”—tracking competition winners in its two namesake sports as well as “the favorite indoor sport of America” (*Des Moines Tribune*, Oct 27). *The Waverley Modern English Dictionary* dubbed itself a solving tool, and *Everybody’s Weekly* offered solutions to all the major crosswords, just in case you missed them.

In the U.K., *The Evening Standard* joined Torquemada’s *Observer* puzzles in exploring the form’s limits—for a while. Its October 13 “Beheading” puzzle began with the following instructions:

*To solve the words across, find the word indicated by the clues, then behead it, and insert the remainder, which is in itself a complete word. Downward clues are straight clues.*

The idea of “beheading” words to create smaller but still valid words would have legs in British crosswords. (If not heads!)

Other puzzles well ahead of their time included a seaside-resorts theme, an “answers beginning with animal names” theme, and an experiment in indirect word association.

On November 16, the *Standard* published the earliest known example of the **quip crossword**, a type that'd see more popularity in the mid-century U.S. A quip crossword's marquee entries add up to a single statement the constructor composes. W. Leslie Cave submitted this one and promised its solution would be "good advice."

## A Good-Advice Crossword.

**T**HE prize of five guineas offered for the best crossword submitted this week is awarded to:—  
**Mr. W. Leslie Cave, 16, Dealtry-road, Putney, S.W.15.**  
 Mr. Cave's good advice begins at 1 down, continues at 20 across, 33 across, 44 across and 59 across and finishes at 74 across—in each case running right across the row concerned.

Crosswords submitted for next Saturday should consist of fifteen squares across and fifteen down, be accompanied by a signed declaration that they are original, and addressed "Crosswords," "Evening Standard" Office, to be received not later than the first post on Wednesday. No crosswords will be returned. No prize is offered for solutions, so, therefore, they should not be sent.

**ACROSS.**  
 14—Sent in a hurry  
 15—Absent in musical comedies

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		11	12	13	
14				15				16		17		18		19
20														
21				22							23	24		
25			26	27	28	29	30		31					32
33				34						35		36		
37							38		39					
	40	41				42		43						
44	45		46		47						48	49		
50				51		52				53				54
55								56	57					58
59							60					61	62	
63			64	65				66		67		68		
69				70	71	72				73				
74														

Even better advice would have been to publish the solution, but the next two days' papers may have been skipped—they don't appear digitized at all—and ensuing days included answers to other puzzles, not this one. Eight days later, the paper would stop publishing and paying for reader-submitted puzzles:

*A NOTICE TO READERS.*

*Since the Literary Competitions were started in the "Evening Standard" months ago, they have each week gained wider popularity, but novelty must ever be the aim of an enterprising journal, and the Literary Editor realizes, though reluctantly, for the weekly task of judging has been a very pleasant one, that the time has come when these competitions muse give way to other new features.*

*No further tests will, therefore, be set, or no more prizes given for crosswords.*

So maybe they didn't find Mr. Cave's advice so good, after all. Alas, this was the end of the *Standard's* aggressive experimentation in this era. In-house constructors did an occasional theme but often just cranked out themeless ones marked "easy" or "difficult."

*The Daily Telegraph* reached another milestone in 1928—more or less. Since 1926, it had been evolving toward the "basket weave" design now standard in cryptic crosswords, with each word 50% crossed or barely more, none filled in completely. (Its puzzles were not cryptics themselves but helped introduce the layout.) The example to the right still isn't quite there—eight four-letter words have four crossings—

But the next page shows two more from the end of the year, the first with a few three-letter exceptions, the second with none.





**MES OF PRIZE WINNERS.**

**SOLUTION OF PUZZLE No. 1,013**



In 1928, the newspaper market for short fiction still looked robust, although it was starting to compete with radio shows—a competition it would eventually lose, but that’s another story. After appearing almost everywhere in pop culture in 1924 and 1925, and then almost nowhere in 1927, the crossword started showing up a lot more in this venue in 1928.

Mid-1920s stories tended to tie the puzzle to the craze: we’ve discussed how sending the puzzle-afflicted to mental institutions went from gag to cliché in a few short years. And when stories weren’t calling crosswords a menace to society, they were tying them to the *great mystery of modern womanhood*. Behold the New Woman, fellas! She drinks, smokes, wears short(er) skirts, debates politics—and loves cross-word puzzles!

In 1928, there were still some of the latter. Dorothy Douglas’ “Cross Words and the Puzzle” (*Williams News*, April 27) focuses on Fenway, a charming modern man who improves his love life by embracing the puzzle. But on the other hand, Retlaw Spring’s “Is He a Cat Burglar?” (*The Australasian*, December 1) features a woman not very interested in crosswords, and it’s the man who gets her into them.

And by 1928, if a story featured a crossword addict, they were likely to be a child or a character in juvenile fiction. “The Crossword Dream” (*Leicester Chronicle*, February 25) is about a crossword-addicted child who—brace yourself—

says “Shan’t” to his mother rather than put down the puzzle to do his homework. Sent to bed without supper, he dreams of facing an executioner if he can’t explain what crossword puzzles are to the king. Don’t worry, Mom kisses him with forgiveness at the story’s end.

“Madame’s Cross-Word Puzzle Party” (*Greensboro Record*, February 5) involves the spider Madame Arachne, whose son Tim urges her that she’ll catch curious insects if she weaves a web in the pattern of a crossword puzzle. Despite Madame’s skepticism, the plan succeeds.

*Madame Arachne said: “Tim, you are wise after all.” But Tim was too full of flies to reply.*

On January 26, *The Morning Call* published a prize-winning story titled “Crossword Puzzles” by Jennie Jaffe, age 14. A New Jersey resident, Jaffe had probably been around crosswords all her young life. The simple tale involves two sisters, one who loves crosswords and one who doesn’t. The crossword-lover wins money in a spelling competition, but needs her sister’s help fixing her automobile to go home...

*which goes to show you that each mind and each person are valuable in their own way in this big wide world.*

*The New York Herald-Tribune* promoted its feature with the earliest known passage written in pure crosswordese:

### **A CROSSWORD PUZZLE TEST**

*New York Herald Tribune*

*Every crossword esne who can espy an erne in its eyrie, stalk ai, unau and eria, and evocate the eft eftsoon, will deem the event of April 28 the apogee of eclat. The heremite who eludes the onset deles his chance, atomic mayhap, of emerging ace of the arena, In the argot of Ra, the wight too otiose to dent the redan of the crossword fortalice desiderates the elan of an emu. Ere Eos optically opes on April 29, a new champion will have donned. The tiara, for Mrs. Von Phul, Phul, bester of bogey and peeress of par, is estopped by her itinerary from es-saying a combining-form-for-third-time triumph. Ave, old-form-of-the-second-person-plural thralls of the crossword demesne! Be not loath, or loth, but rather avid, to revie for the argent olla!*

Another such passage would appear in the UK the following year.

The courts seemed to agree with the fiction writers that the crossword was no longer to be feared. At the height of the craze, crossword addiction was often blamed for the breakup of marriages. But now the *Stockton Independent* reported with great sympathy on July 27 the case of a woman granted a divorce because her husband, jealous of not having her full attention, destroyed her crossword puzzle books. There was no cheekiness to its tone; its outrage seemed quite sincere:

*Volumes might be written upon the educational value of the cross-word puzzles. And yet in the face of the tired housewife trying to fit herself to be an intellectual pal to friend husband there are men—they really ought to be called brutes—who will indulge in the refined cruelty of destroying the illuminating data contained in a cross word puzzle book. Little wonder the judge rendered a prompt divorce—there are some things no self-respecting person should be called upon to undergo. The decision will serve as a precedent for other scoffing males who have tried to belittle the place of the cross-word puzzle in modern home life.*

And in *The Daily Telegraph*, the issue of the legality of crossword contests was resolved in the favor of the defendants: games for prize money were permissible in the UK as long as there was “an element of skill involved.” The ruling judge, Sir Chartres Biron, did his research with admirable humility—though he couldn’t resist taking a quick swipe at some of the contest’s fans:

*“I thought the fairest way,” continued Sir Chartres, “would be to try to solve this puzzle myself, and I spent a little time in endeavouring to do so. Taking the puzzle as a whole, it is possible, and indeed probable, that it was deliberately designed to eliminate skill down to a point which would protect the composer of the puzzle, and at the same time give competitors the least possible trouble.*

*“But is skill eliminated altogether? I found considerable difficulty in getting some of the words. I thought that might be due to my own stupidity, but I tried them on a friend who has had considerable experience of crosswords, and he could not solve some of them without some research. It has to be remembered also that a good many of those who are attracted by these competitions are not people of any intellectual attainments, and to them the puzzle might present very considerable difficulty.”*

Boy, I'll bet those other solvers feel owned right about now. Not *me*, though. I'm one of the *smart* ones. ■

## PLAY AS STRUCTURE

Émile Benveniste (Translated by Jack Cox)

***This classic 1947 piece is an unusual pick for our publication, but in a way, it fits right in. Benveniste explores the subjects of play, and words for play, and less directly wordplay...guiding us into thinking about all three subjects in big and bold new ways.***

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The domain of play is immense. So varied are its forms that there is no part of our behavior, speech or thinking that does not belong to it in some measure; forms so incompatible that it is surprising to see them designated under the same name. The origin of the infinitely diverse manifestations belonging to this domain, and which make play appear more as a *modality* of all human activity rather than one activity in particular, has been sought after above all in some biopsychological tendency supposed to exercise and satisfy itself in it. I shall not be following this path here: I am concerned with play, not with the player. Working in the opposite direction, I shall regard play, *qua* form, as a fact, so as to try to uncover the elements that furnish its structure and to attempt a definition of the function it fulfils.

To begin with, a minimal definition of play can be proposed that highlights its basic characteristics, those without which it does not exist. I shall call “play” all regulated activity that has its end in itself and does not aim to usefully modify reality.

From this definition, the principal traits that distinguish play can already be seen: the fact that it is an activity that takes place in the world, but is heedless of the conditions of “reality,” since it deliberately abstracts these; the fact that it “serves no purpose” and appears as a series of forms whose intentionality cannot be oriented towards the useful and which find their end in their own accomplishment; finally, the formal and regulated nature of play, which must take place within a rigorous set of limits and conditions and constitutes a closed totality. It must be said that all these features set play apart from the “reality” in which human will, in thrall to utility, everywhere runs up against events, incoherencies, arbitrariness, where nothing turns out as planned nor according to the accepted rules, where the only certitude man possesses—that of his final end—appears to him both iniquitous and absurd. Play escapes all these limitations, in that it is first and foremost *form*.

To say that play and the rule-bound games that are a part of it are a “form” is to contrast them with a “content” that would be reality itself. But from this it does not follow that play is an empty form, the production of meaningless acts. On the contrary, the coherence of its structure and its internal purpose imply a meaning that is as if inherent to its form and always extraneous to any practical aim. This meaning is produced by the very arbitrariness of the conditions that limit play and through which, passing from one to the next, this is carried out; the being of play is entirely bound up in the convention governing it. If a single one of the rules maintaining a given game outside of “reality” is violated, the game ceases and the player reverts to reality. The condition of the participants is thus also necessarily arbitrary; they strip themselves of their ordinary personality in order to take on only that assigned to them by the

requirements of the game. Their only function is to allow the game to realize itself. And it must be realized as action, being the transcription of a scheme given in advance that exists for itself up until its conclusion. Hence it is the game that determines the players, not the other way around. It creates its actors, it gives them place, rank and figure; it regulates their bearing, their physical appearance, it even renders them, as the case may be, alive or dead. Everything is conditioned by the way the game unfolds, internal to those conditions that constitute the game.

It is not enough to say that this second reality into which play inducts us and in which we are held for as long as the game lasts is different from “true” reality. With the help of the expressions that we apply to it, we can characterize it more precisely. The extension given to the word *jeu* sheds light on the representation that we make of it. We talk of a *jeu de cartes*, of the *jeu de paume*, as well as the *jeu* of a piston, the *jeu* of state institutions, and the *jeu* of a musician or an actor. We say that an actor *joue* and that a door *joue*. We employ expressions as wide-ranging as *borborygmi jeu*, *mettre en jeu*, *donner du jeu*, *se faire un jeu de*, etc.<sup>13</sup> The same term seems to signify at once movement and constraint and artifice and ease and exercise. All this apparent dissimilarity, even contradictoriness, is full of instruction, though first and foremost about ourselves; the testimony of words elucidates *our* conception of play. There is no fixed notion in such a matter as this: where we see only varieties of a single species—a children’s game and an athletic game—the Greeks distinguished two independent realities (παίγνιον and ἄθλος) that it would never have crossed their minds to conflate. Many languages make the same distinction. With this proviso, the consistent features of a definition are discernible in the multiple uses to which we put the word. The fact that has brought about this semantic proliferation is that all collective activities, all “representations,” all figurations are now seen as “play,” as “non-serious” imitations of reality. It is their fictive side that is thus emphasized. The soldier being drilled, the wrestler in the ring, the actor on the stage make none but the gestures pertaining to their role, and they do so until they have exhausted them. All behavior that reproduces the outer appearance of a concerted action, that imitates its motions and development, is characterized as play. By extension, an operation considered from the outside, in its regular movement, without regard for the result obtained, is designated accordingly: hence we speak of the movement [jeu] of the muscles, a formal mechanism, the way the parts link together in the whole that commands them, but whose function we do not keep in view. Our representation of play is thus unified in the terms that convey it. This representation was formed once, in Latin, *jocus* (which has given us our word *jeu*) supplanted *ludus*. *Jocus* is wordplay, frivolous remarks, jokes; *ludus* is properly “training” in all of its forms: training for study (whence *ludus* “class, school”) and training for combat, military exercise (whence *ludus* “competition; game for the arena”). The replacement of *ludus* with *jocus*, which alone survived, sanctioned a change in attitude towards these exercises and demarcations, now demoted to the rank of simple “games.”

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<sup>13</sup> The extension of this key word is wider than that of English “play” or “game.” The examples cited here elicit the following varied translations: a *deck* of cards, the *game* of handball, the *action* of a piston, the *workings* of state institutions, and a musician’s or an actor’s *style*; an actor who *acts* (*plays* a role) and a door whose wood *swells and contracts* with the effect of the atmosphere; as well as the equivalent expressions *come into play*; *bring into play*; *give slack*; *child’s play*. [Trans.]

We are thus able to measure the area of this representation. But we are no better informed as to its nature. We learn only this: that play is increasingly clearly specified as being distinct from reality, as “non-serious.” And yet play is also, in its own way, a reality. Since it is separated by its conventions from reality and everyday life, play must have its own reality. Indeed, there is an equally specific reality proper to play, with its laws, its necessity, its logic, its code, and even its language. What is the nature of this distinctive reality, and what is its relationship to the other reality, which it excludes?

The form of play found in a game realizes, through the intermediary of the participants, a sort of complete drama, generally agonistic in form, consisting in the struggle for the possession of an object, instrument, or symbol of victory. It is played in a closed group—a team, circle, club, troupe, class, etc.—which only exists for the sake of the game and is entirely dedicated to carrying it out. A game can forge a tie between the members of such a group that is stronger than that of blood. It creates the very keen feeling of a community that draws its mission, its honor, its symbols from it. The players each have an identity that belongs to the game, often a disguise. All this helps to define the type of reality that the game inhabits: it is a mystical reality that borrows from the realm of the sacred some of its most salient characteristics.

This conclusion agrees with those deduced by sociologists from contemporary forms of play. Numerous studies on the origin and signification of most of our games point to more or less clear remainders of ancient dances, combats, masquerades and sacred ceremonies. Ball games dramatize ancient tribal myths. Wedding rites find a continuation in children’s games and dances. Games of chance are meant for interrogating or influencing fate. There are competitive games in which the memory of agrarian cults is still recognizable. The spinning top is an ancient divinatory teetotum, etc. There thus appears everywhere a deep relationship between play and the sacred.<sup>14</sup> And it is all the more tempting to identify the two essences given the way the player’s passion, which removes him from the real world, often resembles the ecstasy of the worshipper when he is in contact with the sacred. It is the same exaltation, the same pathos, a frenzy that can lead to murder or suicide.

And yet underneath this undeniable lineage, certain fundamental differences can be discerned, the principal instances of which must be brought to light. The sacred supposes a reality, that of the divine; through ritual, the worshipper is brought into a separate world, more real than the real world. Play, on the contrary, deliberately separates itself from reality. It can be said that

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<sup>14</sup> Here I converge with—though in order to contradict them—some of the claims made by J. Huizinga in his otherwise remarkable book, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Routledge, 1949). The present reflections had already been composed when I encountered this work, in which anyway I would only have found arguments *against* the thesis he puts forward. Huizinga annexes absolutely all regulated human activity to play. It is no longer possible to see what play would be opposed to, nor, as a consequence, what it would consist of. The fundamental question of the relationships existing between play and the sacred is thus, as I see it, entirely distorted, and yet this is the heart of the problem. Huizinga nonetheless has succeeded in bringing new light to the analysis of major cultural phenomena, showing in an often highly evocative way the importance at least of the various forms of play. (M. Roger Caillois, who was able to read this article in manuscript, was so kind as to indicate to me a study of his own [published in *Confluences* 10 (1946), pp. 66–77], in which he penetratingly analyses and discusses this same work by J. Huizinga. Despite a difference in point of view, his remarks anticipate some of my conclusions in respect to the relationships between play and the sacred.)

the sacred is super-real [*sur-réal*], while play is extra-real. Moreover, the sacred operation has a practical aim, which is to render the terrestrial world inhabitable, to repel hostile forces, to organize society, to procure subsistence or victory. Play has in itself no practical purpose; its essence lies in its very gratuitousness. For the aim of play can't be said to be to provoke the emotions it arouses; these emotions are merely consequences and do not concern the nature of the phenomenon. Finally, in the realm of the sacred, each of the very strict rules of the ceremony has its own efficacy in and of itself; it must provoke the intervention of the divinity through direct appeal and at the same time make it possible for men to safely endure the terrible and malefic contact of the sacred. In games, the rules are nothing in isolation and everything when combined with each other, which clearly exhibits their structuralizing property; they serve to delimit the spatial and temporal frame, the "conventions," and at the same time they themselves constitute the entire game. This is why ultimately the sacred is all tension and anxiety, while play is all exaltation and deliverance.

Play and the sacred are, then, opposed in every way. And yet in every way they are also akin to one another. Doubtless their true connection lies in this dialectical relationship. Indeed, they share a symmetrical but opposed structure. This homology defines play and the sacred by way of certain common characteristics together with a contrary orientation. Whereas the sacred raises man up to the divine, which is a "given" and is the source of all reality, play safely brings the divine down to the level of man, and through a set of conventions, makes it immediately accessible to him. Play is thus fundamentally nothing but a *desacralizing operation*. Play is so much inverted sacredness and the rules of the game serve solely to secure this inversion. This will appear in a clearer light if we see what this transmutation consists in and how it comes about.

The sacred is the seat of supreme efficacy, the primordial condition of human efficacy. Our acts attain nothing and remain forever futile if their power has not first been guaranteed by the ceremony in which the officiant performed them in the prescribed forms and evoked their divine prototype. Now, the power of this sacred "act" lies precisely in the conjunction of the *myth* that utters the story and the *ritual* that reproduces it. If we compare this schema with that of a game, the difference appears essential: in a game, only the "ritual" survives, all that is preserved is the *form* of the sacred drama in which all things are posited anew each time. But the "myth," the pregnantly worded tale that confers meaning and power on the acts, has been forgotten or abolished. Cut off from its myth, the ritual is reduced to a regulated set of now inefficacious acts, a harmless reproduction of the ceremony, a pure "game." Of the divine struggle for the possession of the sun there remains a ball game in which the player may with impunity (did any god ever enjoy such a privilege?) take possession of the solar disc at will. Such is *ludus*.

*Jocus* presents the same structure but reversed. It is words and no longer acts that constitute this form of play, but words that dispose of their own power only; they are spoken "as if" they expressed a reality, but according to the convention—accepted by all the participants—that they have in fact no true content. *Jocus* is characterized by the deliberately fictive character of the reality it alludes to, but this is not a forged reality, one that would simply be a lie; lies

suppose or create the same kind of reality as truthfulness, whereas wordplay and jokes refer to a different reality, one that is admitted as such. It appears then that, contrary to *ludus*, and in a symmetrical way, *jocus* consists in a pure “myth,” without a corresponding “ritual” giving it purchase on reality.

In summary, we possess the elements of a definition of play as structure. It originates in the sacred, of which it offers up an inverted, broken image. If the sacred can be defined by the consubstantial unity of myth and ritual, we can say that there is play when only half of the sacred operation is performed, either by conveying the myth alone in words or the ritual alone in acts. We are thus outside of the divine and human sphere of efficacy. Play understood in this way comprises two varieties: jocular when the myth is reduced to its own content and separated from its ritual, and ludic when the ritual is practiced for its own sake and separated from its myth. Under this double guise, play embodies each of the two halves into which the sacred ceremony has been split. Moreover, it is in the nature of play to fictitiously recompose in each of its two forms the missing half: in wordplay, we speak as if a factual reality were to follow; in physical games, we act as if they were motivated by a reasoned reality. This fiction makes it possible for these acts and words to be coherent with themselves, in an autonomous world removed by a set of conventions from the inevitabilities of reality.

Pursuing this definition further, for the purposes of verification, it can be argued that it furnishes the necessary and sufficient conditions for the production of play of any sort, for converting any regulated activity into a game. Indeed, for such an activity to switch over into play, it is necessary and sufficient for it to be viewed according to its organized structure without taking into account the “real” end that it sets itself: law courts with their immutable rituals and ceremonies become play when we overlook the case under judgement; politics, which is engaged in amidst so many forms and rules, becomes play if we are not concerned with the government of men; poetry, an arrangement of tightly regulated, arbitrary forms, becomes play if we disregard the feeling that is being expressed; religion, the most regulated of things, becomes play if we separate it from the myths it actualizes; war becomes play...etc. Every coherent and regulated manifestation of collective and individual life can be transposed into play once we subtract the reasoned or factual motivation that lends it efficacy.

Perhaps we can now discern what in ourselves invites play and finds satisfaction there. Play as structure undoubtedly relates to a human structure that, having fashioned it, adapts itself to it. Viewing play from a very general standpoint in respect to man, it is first of all noticeable that it is bound up with the predominance of subconscious life, of which it is a vital manifestation from the earliest age. Precisely in that it frees up spontaneous activity, it corresponds to a deep instinct. When the child acquires his first notion of reality, when he understands that the “useful” world is made up of dangers, illogicalities and prohibitions, he finds refuge in play and in so doing compensates the tiring effort that his apprenticeship to reality imposes on his mind. And at any age, whether we let ourselves get caught up in it or whether we seek it out, play signifies a forgetting of the useful, a beneficial surrender to forces that real life reins in and injures. In group play, there is, beyond the individual unconscious, a strong collective unconscious that finds satisfaction. For children’s playful activity corresponds to their native

representation of things, which is essentially *magical*. This magical understanding, which the real world disappoints at every turn and ever more inflexibly, is the same that play allows the child to *experience*: he may identify with anyone, create whatever he wants, shatter the reign of the possible and the impossible. From one age to the next, the charm of play is the same: suspension. The rigor of the fictive subverts reality. It is enough to become the figure required by the game and to embrace the prescribed risks for a satisfying and intelligible world to emerge from out of its own rules.

This antinomy of the mind and the “real” world must be posited in order for the authenticity of the life of play and its function to come to the fore. Play makes it possible to resolve or abolish the conflict in which the relationship of consciousness to the world is encapsulated. Consciousness is condemned to painfully grope about in a reality that it can neither experience immediately nor completely embrace, for while it often manages to modify it, it is never capable of understanding it. Such is its fate. In order to realize itself according to its deepest tendency, consciousness must *unrealize itself* according to the universe. This is where play comes in: it represents one of the most revealing modalities of this unrealizing to which the subconscious aspires. This is why play means free expansion. It is not the only expression of this impulse—the imagination, dreams and art are others. But play and play alone allows consciousness to *experience* its unrealizing in a world adapted to it and in which unrealizing is law.

We thus find ourselves at the point where a need issuing from consciousness meets with a form proposed by play. The need to unrealize ourselves flourishes in this pre-given, complete structure. It will not find the same satisfaction anywhere else—not in the sacred, for instance; for all its separateness, the sacred is nonetheless aligned with real life, which it commands. The sacred alone gives reality and consistency to what is real, and the power of shaping and governing this to men. The distinction between the sacred and the profane thus in no way overlaps with that between play and reality, it is merely parallel. In preserving only the form of the sacred and projecting this outside of reality, play secures for itself at once the magic of the unreal and the consistency of the human, the joy of free expansion and the writ of safety. We may each of us then, in proportion with our own imaginations and passions, valorize it anew and even re-sacralize it according to a personal myth. ■

## MINIMAL PANGRAM\* SUBSETS OF A WORD LIST

Michael Keith

Darryl Francis

One of the authors was recently exploring a particular type of wordplay using the names of the 193 member states of the United Nations (more informally, countries of the world). At one point it was helpful to know the answer to this question: what's the smallest subset of those country names that makes a pangram?

That's a difficult question for a list of 200 or more items. One can certainly find small pangram subsets by hand, but it's hard to prove that a specific subset is minimal. So one of us wrote a computer program to assist with this task. Given an input list, it finds the provably smallest pangram subset(s) of that list, of which there are two kinds:

- (1) Using the fewest entries from the list—the min-items solutions, and
- (2) Having the fewest total letters—the min-letters solutions.

For many lists, the min-items and min-letters solutions turn out to be the same, but sometimes they're different. And sometimes there are multiple solutions to (1) and/or (2), while other times the solution to (1) or (2) is unique. So this turns out to be quite an exciting "game" to play.

In this article we present the minimal pangram subsets for 26 different topical lists. These were found by a human/computer collaboration—one of us (Darryl) crafted pangrams manually, not using the computer search program, while Mike used the computer to find the rest of the pangrams and to verify that Darryl's solutions are minimal. Almost one fourth of the minimal solutions (8 out of 37) were first found by Darryl and simply verified by the search software.

We also need to explain the asterisk in our title. It's because many lists don't contain every letter of the alphabet—for example, the 118 elements in the periodic table are missing the letters J and Q. In these cases it's still interesting to find the smallest pangram subset containing every letter *that appears in the list itself*. We call this a pangram\*—but having said that, we'll omit the asterisk and just write "pangram" from now on.

### Remarks on the Lists

For a study like this it's usually best to use topical lists that are precisely defined. But strictly following this rule is somewhat limiting, so we did allow a few lists having some "fuzziness" about the actual items in the list. The online source that we used as the basis of each list will be included in the table of results later.

To keep it interesting, we only allowed lists with three or fewer missing letters of the alphabet. After compiling each list, we removed all duplicates, which were sometimes many (e.g., the U.S. counties list had about 1100 duplicates since many county names are used in multiple states).

Our lists vary widely in size, from a low of 26 entries (NATO phonetic alphabet) to a high of 25,950 (all named Minor Planets). As one might expect, bigger lists tend to produce smaller

pangrammatic subsets, but there are at least two other factors that affect the solution size: (1) the number of distinct letters of the alphabet present in each list (fewer is better), and (2) the average number of letters in the items in the list (smaller is better). But the relative influence of these factors on the solutions is hard to quantify; one reason is that minimal solutions have the property of being sensitive to initial conditions. Adding a single “lucky” word to a list with 1000 items (which changes the list only slightly) can dramatically reduce the size of the minimal pangram subset.

As mentioned earlier, we used the U.N. member states as our definition for “country,” but note that there are quite a few countries whose official name is (much) longer than its oft-used informal name. Venezuela is officially *Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela*, Brunei is *Brunei Darussalam*, Laos is *Lao People’s Democratic Republic*, etc. Long names like this aren’t very useful for making small pangrams, but we chose to be a stickler for the rules with this list and always use the official names.

The list of characters in Shakespeare’s plays is probably our fuzziest list, but it was too colorful to pass up. We consulted and compared three online lists (settling on the Wikipedia list as the most comprehensive) and insisted on using only fully named characters. So characters like *Boy*, *Countess*, *First Messenger*, *Watchman*, and so forth were prohibited, as were appellations such as *Simpcox’s Wife*, since that doesn’t give her actual name. We think this makes the solutions more elegant, being comprised entirely of well-defined characters from the plays.

## Solutions

Each of the 26 lists we used is described in the table below, followed by its minimal solution(s). The first line starts with the number of items in the list, followed by the letters of the alphabet, if any, that are missing from that list. Next (on the same line) is the name of the list, followed by a description or link to an online source of the items in the list.

Each solution line starts with two numbers: the number of letters in the pangram and the number of items (from the list) in the pangram. These are followed by the items in the pangram subset on a single line, separated by spaces. An asterisk at the beginning of a solution means that it was found manually by Darryl.

If only one solution is shown for a list, the min-items and min-letters solutions are the same. Otherwise, both types of solutions are shown, with the min-items solutions listed first.

Sometimes there are closely related solutions; for example, two solutions might be the same except for several choices for one or two items. Similar solutions are usually merged into one line, with the symbol “+” meaning to combine items and the symbol “|” meaning “or.” For instance, (W + X | Y + Z) means “either W combined with X, or Y combined with Z,” where W, X, Y, Z are items from the list.

Every solution in the table has been proved to be minimal, and if there is more than one solution with the same number of items and letters, all such solutions are shown, except for the Chemical Abbreviations list, which has too many solutions.

## 26 Lists and their Minimal Pangram Subsets

- 193 **Country Names** (U.N. Member states—[un.org/en/about-us/member-states](http://un.org/en/about-us/member-states))
- 50 6 Bosnia and Herzegovina Cyprus Fiji Iraq Kuwait Luxembourg
  - 43 7 Chad Egypt Fiji Mexico Mozambique Slovakia (Norway | Rwanda)  
Egypt Fiji Iraq Mexico Slovakia (New Zealand + Bhutan | Zimbabwe + Honduras)
- 193 **Country Capitals** (of U.N. Member states)
- 47 6 Baghdad Brazzaville Freetown Mexico City Quito Skopje  
Ciudad de la Paz Freetown Kyiv Luxembourg Quito St. John's
  - 44 7 Beijing Dhaka Freetown La Paz Mexico City Quito Suva  
Mexico City New Delhi Quito Skopje Sofia Zagreb (Kyiv | Suva)
- 193 **Capital + Country as a unit** (country name omitted if present in the capital name)
- 62 4 Ciudad de la Paz, Equatorial Guinea Mexico City Suva, Fiji Windhoek, Namibia
  - 51 5 Doha, Qatar Kigali, Rwanda La Paz, Bolivia Mexico City Suva, Fiji
- 50 **Q U.S. State Names**
- 60 8 Arizona Florida Michigan Nebraska New Jersey Pennsylvania Texas Utah
- 50 **QWZ U.S. State Capitals**
- 47 5 Dover Jefferson City Oklahoma City Phoenix (Harrisburg | Baton Rouge)
  - \*43 6 Dover Jackson Olympia Phoenix Santa Fe (Harrisburg | Baton Rouge)
- 50 **Q U.S. Capital + State Name as a unit**
- 64 4 Albany, New York Jefferson City, Missouri Phoenix, Arizona Richmond, Virginia
- 50 **Q U.S. Capital + State Postal Abbreviation as a unit**
- 55 5 Augusta, ME Bismarck, ND Charleston, WV Jefferson City, MO Phoenix, AZ
- 1922 **U.S. County Names** (Wikipedia, *List of United States counties*)
- 35 5 Buckingham Quay St. Joseph Wexford Zavala  
Jim Hogg Levy Pasquotank Wexford Ziebach
  - 33 6 Bath Jack La Paz Oxford Vieques Wyoming  
Bingham Jack Quay Wexford (La Paz + Travis | Vilas + Zapata)  
Bosque Ingham Jack Levy Wexford Zapata  
Bosque Jack La Paz Smyth Wexford (Garvin | Loving)  
Jack La Paz Quitman Shelby Wexford (Gove | Vigo)
- 332 **Largest U.S. Cities** (Wikipedia, *List of United States cities by population*)
- 44 6 Elizabeth Fargo Knoxville Quincy West Jordan (Tampa | Tempe | Nampa)
- 14,279 **All U.S. Cities/Towns** ([census.gov/geographies/reference-files/2025/geo/gazetter-file.html](http://census.gov/geographies/reference-files/2025/geo/gazetter-file.html))
- 34 4 Foxburg Jackson Township Quimby Valdez (in states PA, NJ, IA, AK)
  - 30 5 Big Flat Dix Joseph Marquez Van Wyck (in states AR, IL, UT, TX, SC)
- 40 **QZ U.S. President Surnames**
- \*44 7 Jackson Nixon Trump Van Buren (Ford + Tyler + Washington | Garfield + Hayes + Wilson)

- 48 Z **U.S. Vice President Surnames**  
 \*44 7 Colfax Johnson Quayle Tompkins Van Buren (Agnew + Ford | Dawes + Gore | Dawes + King)
- 71 Z **U.S. President and Vice President Surnames** (the two previous lists combined)  
 40 7 Agnew Biden Colfax Hoover Jackson Quayle Trump
- 272 **London Underground Stations** (Wikipedia, *List of London Underground Stations*)  
 52 6 Belsize Park Chalk Farm Oval Queensway St John's Wood Uxbridge
- 118 JQ **Chemical Elements** (Wikipedia, *List of Chemical Elements*)  
 \*46 7 Bismuth Flerovium Gold Krypton Lawrencium Xenon Zinc
- 118 JQ **Chemical Elements – standard abbreviations**  
 \*24 13 Au Bk Co Dy Fm Hs I Lv Pt Rg W Xe Zn (and 25,320 others)
- 26 **NATO/ICAO Phonetic Alphabet** (www2023.icao.int/pages/alphabetradiotelephony.aspx)  
 \*49 9 Golf Juliett November Papa Quebec Whiskey X-ray Zulu (Delta | India)
- 88 KWZ **Constellations** (Wikipedia, *IAU designated constellations*)  
 42 7 Apus Aquila Bootes Canis Major Fornax Hydra Virgo
- 63 W **Named Moons of Saturn** (Wikipedia, *Moons of Saturn*)  
 46 6 Bergelmir Fenrir Jarnsaxa Kiviuq Polydeuces Thiazzi
- 943 **Moon Craters (near side)** (<https://planetarynames.wr.usgs.gov/Page/MOON/target>, *Craters*)  
 37 5 Dembowski Fedorov Joy Palitzsch Xu Guangqi  
 32 7 Back Dag Huxley Jomo Prinz Swift Vlacq  
 Burg Demonax Joy Peek Swift Vlacq Zach
- 100 QWZ **First 100 minor planets** (Wikipedia, *List of minor planets: 1 – 1000*)  
 37 6 Aglaja Beatrix Dike Fortuna Minerva Psyche  
 Alkmene Beatrix Fides Juno Psyche Virginia
- 1000 **First 1000 minor planets** (same source as previous list)  
 40 6 Cava Dembowska Gryphia Josefa Quintilla Zeuxo  
 39 7 Arequipa Bilkis Cava Fatme Hedwig Jenny Zeuxo
- 25,950 **All named minor planets** (minorplanetcenter.net/iau/lists/MPNames.html)  
 44 3 Jordansteckloff Wulumuqiyizhong Xavierbaptista  
 27 6 Buxus Fogh Jandl Kviz MPC Qwerty
- 66 Q **Books of the Bible**  
 55 8 Acts Exodus Ezekiel I Timothy Job Proverbs Song of Solomon (Matthew | Hebrews)
- 840 **Shakespeare characters** (Wikipedia, *List of Shakespearean characters*)  
 \*42 4 Jaques DeBoys King Henry V Lord Fitzwater Simpcox  
 \*35 7 Davy Elbow Friz King John Quintus Simpcox
- 371 **Beatles Songs** (Wikipedia, *List of songs recorded by the Beatles*)  
 52 4 God Save the Queen Jazz Piano Song Matchbox Twenty Flight Rock  
 God Save the Queen Jazz Piano Song When I'm Sixty-Four (Blackbird | I'll Be Back)  
 45 5 God Save the Queen Matchbox Suzy Parker (I Will + Just Fun | Julia + Two of Us)

The table below summarizes some statistics for each of the 26 lists. AvgLen is the average number of letters in the items of the list, #miss is how many letters of the alphabet are missing from the list, and Min-L and Min-I are the number of letters and items in the min-letters and min-items solutions.

	Name of List	#Items	AvgLen	#miss	Min-L	Min-I
1	Country Names	193	9.1		43	6
2	Country Capitals	193	7.4		44	6
3	Capital + Country	193	15.6		51	4
4	U.S. State Names	50	8.2	1	60	8
5	U.S. State Capitals	50	8.1	3	43	5
6	U.S. Capital + State	50	16.4	1	64	4
7	U.S. Capital + State Abbrev.	50	10.2	1	55	5
8	U.S. County Names	1922	7.3		33	5
9	U.S. Largest Cities	332	8.4		44	6
10	U.S. Cities/Towns	14279	8.7		30	4
11	U.S. President Surnames	40	6.6	2	44	7
12	U.S. Vice President Surnames	48	6.5	1	44	7
13	U.S. Presidents + VPs	71	6.6	1	40	7
14	London Underground Stations	272	10.8		52	6
15	Chemical Elements	118	7.8	2	46	7
16	Element Abbreviations	118	1.9	2	24	13
17	NATO Phonetic Alphabet	26	5.3		49	9
18	Constellations	88	7.4	3	42	7
19	Named Moons of Saturn	63	6.5	1	46	6
20	Moon Craters (near side)	943	7.1		32	5
21	First 100 Minor Planets	100	6.4	3	37	6
22	First 1000 Minor Planets	1000	7.0		39	6
23	All Named Minor Planets	25950	8.7		27	3
24	Books of the Bible	66	7.1	1	55	8
25	Shakespeare Characters	840	10.6		35	4
26	Beatles Songs	371	14.1		45	4

The most noteworthy solutions in the table (red numbers) are for list #23, names of all the Minor Planets in the solar system. Its min-items solution (3 items) *and* min-letters solution (27 letters) are the smallest in the whole table, except for list #16 (element abbreviations), which is a bit of an outlier because of its unusually small AvgLen = 1.9 combined with #miss = 2. Note that list #23 is the largest list in the table, so it's not surprising that its solutions are especially good.

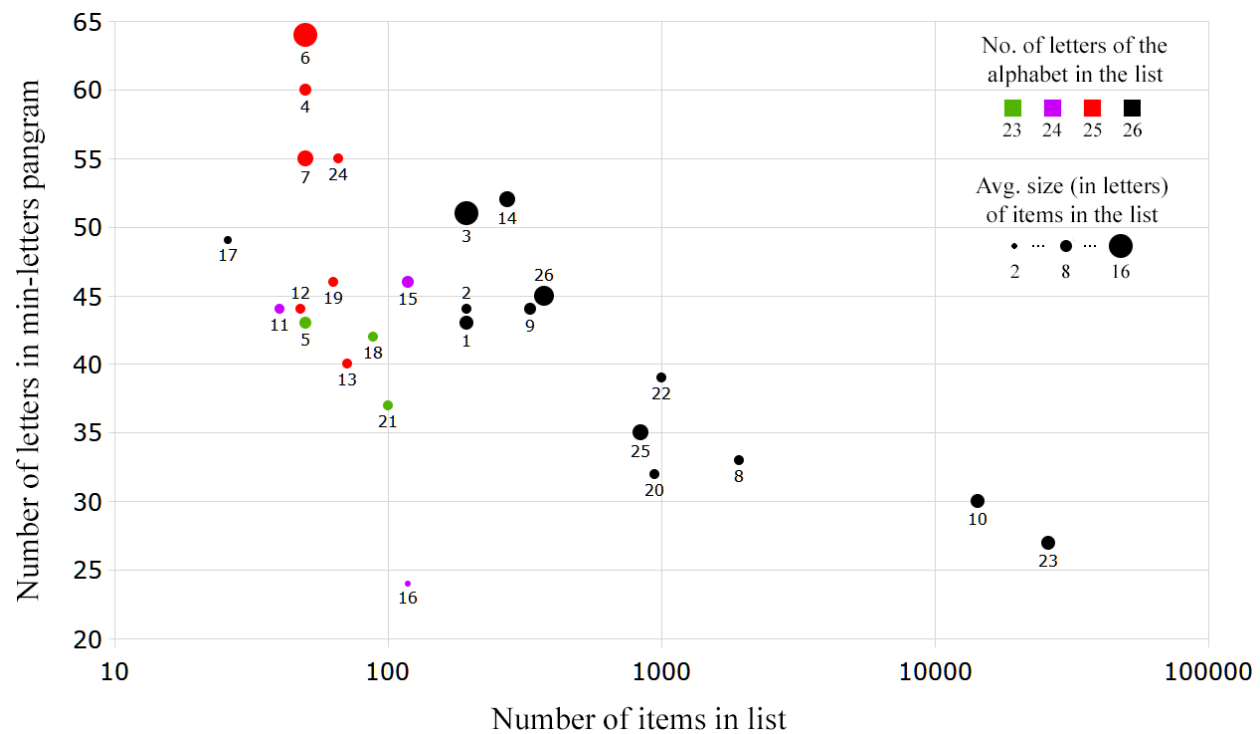
The Minor Planet Center documents the origin of the name for every minor planet; here's an excerpt for each of the three special names in the min-items pangram:

- *Jordansteckloff*: Jordan Steckloff (b. 1985) is a research scientist at the Planetary Science Institute who develops models of the physical processes at work in the solar system.
- *Wulumuqiyizhong*: Named for Urumqi No.1 Senior High School in Xinjiang Province, China, founded in 1891, which has contributed to the work at Xingming Observatory.

- *Xavierbaptista: Francisco Xavier Baptista (1730-1797) was a Portuguese composer from Lisbon where he was the first organist at the Cathedral of St. Mary.*

The scatter plot below illustrates how the three parameters discussed earlier influence the size of the best solution. The X axis is the size of the list, the size of each circle represents the average size (in letters) of items in the list, and the color indicates whether 23, 24, 25, or all 26 letters of the alphabet are found in the list. The number next to each circle in the scatter plot is the index number of the list from the table above. Finally, the Y axis shows the size of the min-letters pangram for that list.

Moving along the X axis (size of list) from left to right, the Y value (size of the best solution) tends to decrease, as expected. Lists with larger circles tend to have larger solutions, because items in the list have more letters on average. Lists containing more letters of the alphabet (as indicated by the colors) also tend toward larger solutions.



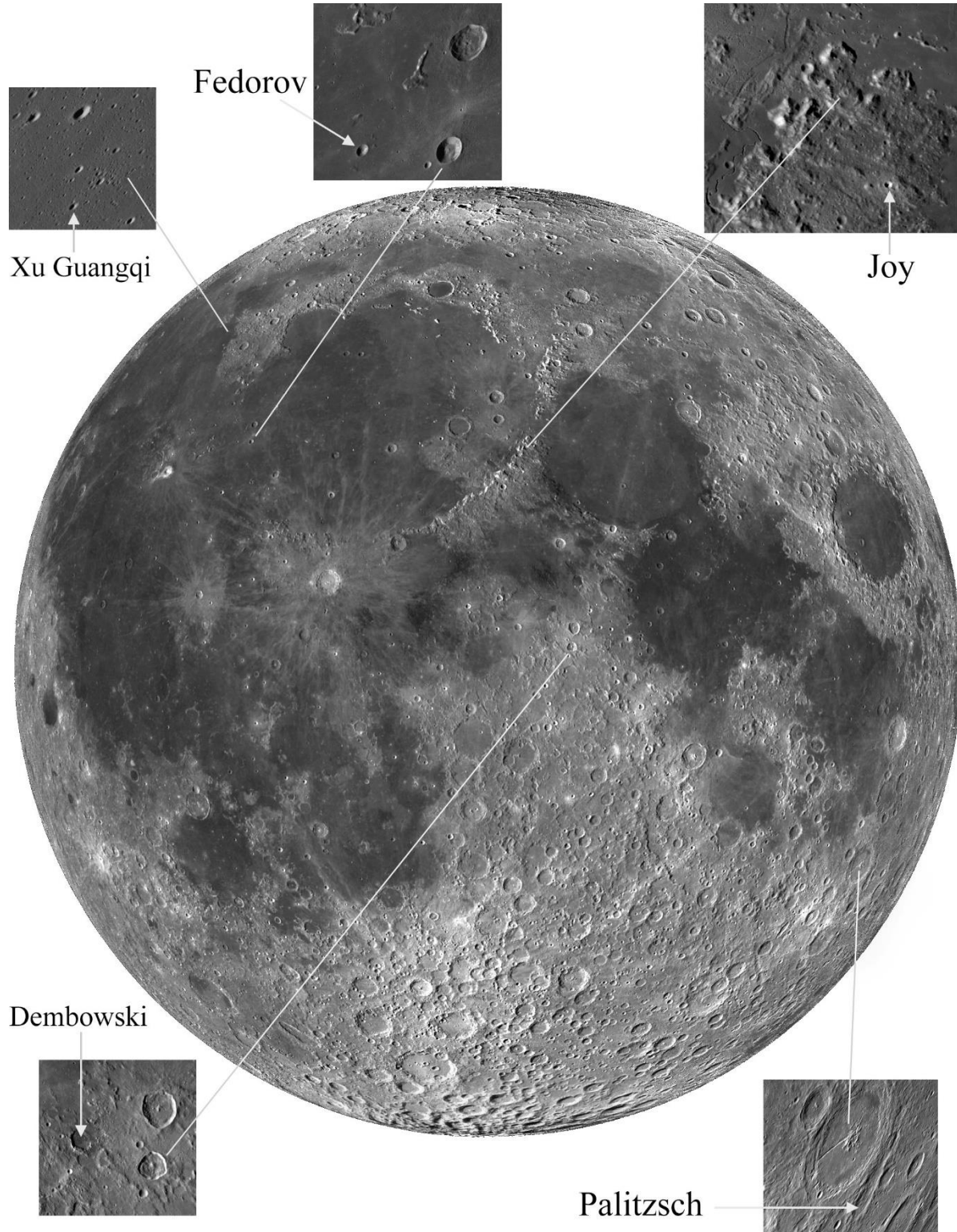
For geography-related lists it’s interesting to imagine “touring the pangram,” and the London Underground seems like a fun choice for this. Alas, one of the stations in the optimal pangram is Uxbridge, located in the far northwest corner of the Tube network. As a result, visiting all six stations via the Underground takes an unsatisfyingly long time—a little over two hours.

We wondered how much the tour time could be improved if we allowed just one more letter in the pangram (53), and found this solution: Vauxhall – Angel – Chalk Farm – Belsize Park – St. John’s Wood – Queensway. All six of these stations can be visited (in that order) in a single journey of about 80 minutes. The map on the following page shows the central London section of the Underground map with these stations highlighted. Mind the Gap!



*These six London Underground stations make a 53-letter, 6-item pangram that's just one letter over the minimum possible. They fit neatly inside a circle about 6 km in diameter, and can all be visited in an 80-minute journey on the Underground.*

The five-name lunar crater pangram also makes a nice tour. The sizes of these craters range from 41 km (Dembowski) to 0.4 km (Xu Guangqi) in diameter. Crater Xu Guangqi is famous for having the unmanned Chinese lunar explorer Chang'e 5 land next to it in November 2020. The locations of these craters on the moon's near side are shown below.



## Finding Optimal Solutions—Manually

While Mike used computer software to find optimal pangrams, Darryl employed what he calls “good old-fashioned eyeball and slog (albeit fun!)” Here’s his description of how he tackled one of the lists, the 118 names of the chemical elements:

*To begin with, all the element names were scanned, looking for no or few occurrences of particular letters. The element names contain no J and no Q, and only one element has a W (LAWRENCIUM), so that had to be the starting point. Only two elements have an X, OXYGEN and XENON. I chose OXYGEN on the basis that not only does it use an X, it also uses G and Y. Next, only two elements use a Z: ZINC and ZIRCONIUM. ZINC was chosen because it’s shorter, and all the other letters in ZIRCONIUM have already been used in LAWRENCIUM and OXYGEN. Then the elements with a K were found, and there are only three—BERKELIUM, KRYPTON and NICKEL. NICKEL was not worth bothering with as all its other letters are already in LAWRENCIUM. Choosing BERKELIUM would use up B and K, but using KRYPTON used K, P and T, as well as being shorter than BERKELIUM. Thus far, the elements chosen were*

*LAWRENCIUM OXYGEN ZINC KRYPTON*

*At this point the only six unused letters were BDFHSV. Several elements used two of these letters (for example, HAFNIUM has FH, SILVER has SV, and FLEROVIUM has FV), but one element has three of these letters—BISMUTH (BHS). So BISMUTH was added to the growing pangram. The unused letters were now DFV. The next choice was FLEROVIUM, leaving just a D to be used. There are two four-letter choices here—GOLD and LEAD. I could have stopped there and offered*

*LAWRENCIUM OXYGEN ZINC KRYPTON BISMUTH FLEROVIUM LEAD*

*as a min-letters solution. But...I realised that if I used GOLD instead of LEAD, then I could go right back to the start and swap out OXYGEN for the one letter shorter XENON and still have a Y from KRYPTON. So the final solution became*

*LAWRENCIUM XENON ZINC KRYPTON BISMUTH FLEROVIUM GOLD*

Darryl notes that even shorter lists, like our seven lists having 50 items or less, are even easier to tackle manually. All or most of the names can be held in personal memory, and it’s easy enough to swap out words and bring in alternatives. But the manual process becomes a lot more difficult with larger, or much larger, lists. For example, for the set of U.S. Cities/Towns, Darryl worked with a list of about 22,000 names (in which duplicates hadn’t been removed). His best effort at a min-letters solution had 32 letters, which is quite small, but the exhaustive computer search was able to beat that by two letters, giving the 30-letter solution shown in our table of results.

## Finding Optimal Solutions—By Computer

Without delving into all the details, a few remarks on how the computer search works—and

specifically, how it is able to find optimal solutions fairly quickly—might be of interest. For simplicity let's take one specific example: the 45-letter, 5-item min-letters pangram of Beatles songs.

First, because this turns out to be more efficient, we designed the search program to take the number of items as an input parameter. So for a min-letters search we look for pangrams having the fewest number of letters and exactly  $k$  items. We will have to run the program a few times for different values of  $k$ , but this is still faster than it would be if the program had to deal with all possible values of  $k$  at the same time.

To be sure that the solutions found are optimal we must, one way or another, try all selections of exactly five items from the list and check if each is a pangram. Since the Beatles list has 371 items, the number of distinct 5-item selections is  $C(371, 5) = 57,007,846.644$ , where  $C(371,5)$  is the standard “binomial coefficient” function. 57 billion is a rather large number, so it's almost necessary to do some pruning of the “search tree” to reduce the number of combinations that have to be tested. Each time we're about to choose a new item  $X$  to add to the in-progress pangram, we can do these two simple tests:

- (A) Is every letter of the alphabet in  $X$  already in the partial pangram?
- (B) Would adding  $X$  make the total number of letters greater than the smallest full pangram found so far?

It's easy to see that if either (A) or (B) is true, the candidate word is useless, so we can skip it. This reduces the total number of combinations tried from ~57 billion to ~1 billion. That's fast enough to be reasonable (it takes 112 seconds to run on Mike's computer), though this would still be too slow for lists of, say 1000 items).

Now comes the master stroke—and an interesting stroke it is, because it mimics what one does when constructing a pangram manually. We add a third bit of logic  $C$  that tests whether each candidate word contains *the rarest letter of the alphabet (in the word list) that we haven't used yet in the partial pangram*. If not, item  $X$  can be skipped. This is exactly like Darryl choosing LAWRENCIUM first in his element pangram (because it's the only element with W), then noting that OXYGEN and XENON are the only ones with X (so only those two have to be tried as the second element in the pangram), and so on.

Augmenting the Beatles search with test  $C$  reduces the number of 5-element possibilities from one billion (using tests A and B) to just 983! That's about a million-fold improvement in speed, and it now finds the two optimum 45/5 pangrams in just 112 microseconds (0.000112 seconds). That version of the algorithm is fast enough to handle lists with 10,000+ items. For example, the 34/4 min-items solution for the U.S. Cities/Towns list (with 14,279 items) took just 33 seconds to find, while the 30/5 min-letters solution took 90 minutes (because a 5-item search is much harder than a 4-item search). ■

## OTHER RESOURCES OF INTEREST

T Campbell

This is the spot for additional items of interest to *Journal* readers. Though it's aimed at recent work, sometimes things don't come to my attention right away, so publications can be from anytime in the last couple of years.

### **Beyond initial misanalysis: the disruptive nature of garden-path sentences processing**

M Ceháková, J Chromý

"This study investigates the resulting representations of two types of garden-path structures in English: the main verb/reduced relative ambiguity (e.g., *The professor awarded the grant gained more attention from marine biologists*) and the transitive/intransitive ambiguity (e.g., *While the assistant shaved the actor who was overworked watched the sports news*)."

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0163853X.2025.2513210>

### **Words at Play: Benchmarking Audio Pun Understanding in Large Audio-Language Models**

Y Su, S Zhong, Y Zhu, R Wang, Z Huang

"In this paper, we present APUN-Bench, the first benchmark dedicated to evaluating large audio language models (LALMs) on audio pun understanding. Our benchmark contains 4,434 audio samples annotated across...pun recognition, pun word location and pun meaning inference."

<https://arxiv.org/abs/2603.18678>

### **When I use a word... The funniest medical words**

JK Aronson

"In the lists I've surveyed I've found the following 13 words, supposedly funny, all of which have some medical connection, however remote: *anencephalous, boobs, borborygm, burp, coccyx, dipsomaniac, earlobe, elixir, fornication, glabella, itchy, puking, and upchuck*. Not as many as I would have expected, but then medicine is a serious business."

<https://www.bmj.com/content/388/bmj.r533.abstract>

### **Linguistic Features of English Advertising Slogans**

BOR Mekkamtoosh, N NAZAROVA

"The study explores various phonetic, lexical, and syntactical devices, such as alliteration, wordplay, imperative structures, and elliptical sentences, which are strategically employed to enhance memorability and persuasive impact."

<https://tilvaadabiyot.uz/f/7-son-2026-filologiya-va-pedagogika-292597.pdf>

### **Book: *Puns Upon a Time***

Ninad Jog

Ninad Jog is an award-winning punster for *Son of a Pun* and *Dew Diligence*. *Puns Upon a Time* is along similar lines, a roiling, endless brainstorm of wordplay and witticism. ■

## SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

*The Journal of Wordplay* is a free-to-submit, free-to-read publication. All rights revert to the original authors after publication.

Formats are generally 12-point Times New Roman or Calibri without indents, though exceptions can be made, especially if the format is important to the content of the piece.

*The Journal* is interested in any studies, essays, puzzles, exercises, or other works that showcase wordplay of any kind. However, broader forms of wordplay call for a more specific approach.

Almost any material that uses specific wordplay types like anagrams, spoonerisms, palindromes, or letterbanks might be of interest. That's just a quick list of some of the most prominent types: there are many more.

Broader forms of wordplay include puns, puzzles, writing-style exercises, and even well-worn literary techniques like alliteration and rhyme. However, we wouldn't want to publish a piece of short fiction just because it reads like James Patterson, or song lyrics just because they rhyme, or a crossword with some punny theme entries. In the case of each of those examples, there are plenty of other venues for such works, and there'd be no point in us competing for those!

Here are a few examples of specific approaches to those broader forms: a jokey exercise where a famous work is rewritten in the styles of different authors, an account of how a songwriter might build a "book of rhymes," a study of Shakespearean punning, or a survey of the most commonly used crossword grids. (Here too, there are many more possibilities.)

We are fine with wordplay that ventures into sex, bathroom humor, and other taboo topics. However, we do not generally accept studies that focus on words that primarily insult genders and minority groups, and we will sometimes edit submissions to remove those terms. This policy helps maintain the playful spirit and long-term health of the publication.

Rule of thumb: *The Journal of Wordplay* is here to provide studies and perspectives on wordplay that readers won't often find anywhere else. If that sounds like something you're into, then we look forward to your *Journal* submission!

Submissions can be directed to the editor at [tcampbell1000@gmail.com](mailto:tcampbell1000@gmail.com). ■

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Émile Benveniste** was born Ezra Benveniste in Aleppo, Aleppo Vilayet, Ottoman Syria. His father sent him to Paris to undertake rabbinical studies, but he left the Rabbinical School after receiving his baccalauréat and enrolled in the École pratique des hautes études. There he studied under Antoine Meillet, a former student of Saussure, and Joseph Vendryes, completing his degree in 1920. He gained his teaching qualification in 1922 and taught at the Collège Sévigné in Paris for two years. Benveniste changed his first name to Émile upon naturalization as a French citizen in 1924. He then spent 18 months in Pune, British India working as a tutor to children of the Tata family. After serving as an infantryman in the Rif War from 1926 to 1927 (despite personal opposition to the war), he would return to the École pratique des hautes études in 1927 as a director of studies, and would receive his doctorate there in 1935, with his major thesis on the formation of noun roots, and his secondary thesis on the Avestan infinitive. Following Meillet's death in 1936, he was elected to the Chair of Comparative Grammar in the Collège de France in 1937. He was taken prisoner by the invading Germans in 1940, and escaped in 1941, spending most of the rest of the war in exile in Switzerland. He held his seat at the Collège de France until his death, but ceased lecturing in December 1969, after suffering a stroke that left him aphasic. He also held several high academic positions as a scholar of Iranian and Armenian studies. A few months prior to his 1969 stroke, he was elected as the first President of the International Association for Semiotic Studies, and he stayed nominally in that position until 1972. Benveniste died in a nursing home in Versailles, aged 74. He is buried in Versailles at the Cimetière des Gonards.

**T Campbell** has written many experimental works, including long-running webcomics series (*Fans*, *Cool Cat Studio*, *Rip and Teri*, *Penny and Aggie*, *Guilded Age*, *Traveler*), collections of anagrams, and the Ubercross Abecedaria, the world's largest crossword puzzle. He has served *The Journal of Wordplay* as editor and contributor since its inception. Regular updates can be found at his Substack, <http://tcampbell.substack.com>.

**Jack Cox** has a master's degree from the University of Sydney and is currently living in Paris. He is known for the experimental novel *Dodge Rose*.

**Darryl Francis** writes:

My introduction to word puzzles and word games came via a Martin Gardner review in *Scientific American* of one of Dmitri Borgmann's first two books—either *Language on Vacation* or *Beyond Language*. I very quickly bought both books, then began subscribing to *Word Ways*, from its first issue in February 1968. I've created over 200 articles for *Word Ways* right up until its last issue in 2020. Then a brief stint at *Interim*, and now finally onto *The Journal of Wordplay*. I had ongoing correspondence with *Word Ways* editors Borgmann and Ross Eckler over the years, plus plenty of occasional contact with other word puzzlers. I've also been a member of the National Puzzlers' League. I've written books on Scrabble and been a longtime compiler of Collins Official Scrabble Words, which is used pretty much everywhere outside the US. I also collect all sorts of dictionaries, word books, gazetteers, thesauruses (thesauri!), and puzzle material.

**Don Hauptman**, *TJoW* Resident Punster, says:

I'm a recreational linguistics enthusiast, thoroughly captivated by what Leo Rosten once called "the mischief of language." I've written two published books in this genre: My celebration of spoonerisms, *Cruel and Unusual Puns* (Dell, 1991), received rave reviews and quickly went into a second printing, selling in total almost 40,000 copies. The second book is *Acronymania* (Dell, 1993), a serious/funny look at abbreviations.

For its last several decades, I was a regular contributor to *Word Ways*. My humor, wordplay, and light verse have appeared as articles, fillers, and letters in *Reader's Digest*, *Writer's Digest*, *The Village Voice*, *The New York Observer*, *7 Days*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and two major in-flight magazines: *Sky* (Delta) and *American Way*.

I made more than 100 appearances in the wordplay competitions that were a popular feature of *New York Magazine*. For four and a half years, I wrote "The Language Perfectionist," a (mostly) serious weekly column on grammar and usage, for *Early to Rise*, at the time the largest-circulation online daily newsletter. In real life, I'm a freelance advertising copywriter, now quasi-retired.

**Michael Keith** is a retired software engineer whose career included Bell Labs, the David Sarnoff Research Center, and Intel. His abiding interest in recreational mathematics and wordplay is the direct result of religiously reading Martin Gardner's monthly column in *Scientific American* starting in the mid-1960s. He contributed around 40 articles for *Word Ways* and 10 or so for *Interim*. In 2010 his book *Not A Wake* was released, the first (and still the only) book ever published written entirely in Pilish (English but with the letter counts in successive words following the digits of pi).

**Richard Lederer, Ph.D.**, is the author of sixty-five books about language, history, and humor. His newest language books are *Lederer's Language & Laughter*, *A Feast of Words*, *Anguished English*, and *Jest for the Pun of It*. He is a founding co-host of "A Way With Words" on public radio. Dr. Lederer has been named International Punster of the Year and Toastmasters International's Golden Gavel winner.

**Charles Montpetit** has authored several books for [children](#) and [young adults](#) in Quebec.

**Louis Phillips** is a poet and playwright who enjoys wordplay.

**Lori Wike** is a musician and writer based in Salt Lake City, Utah. Her work has been published in the *Popogrou Anthology*, *Reflections*, *The Book of Penteract*, and *Seen as Read*, and her first full-length puzzle poetry book *Jump Search* was published by Penteract Press in 2023. Her writings can also be found in the journals *Word Ways*, *Anamorphoseis*, *InVisibleCulture*, *aswirl*, and *The Journal of Wordplay*. She is principal bassoon of the Utah Symphony and teaches at the University of Utah, Westminster University, and Festival Napa Valley. ■

## ANSWERS

### Form Us? (p. 32):

Here, system poem braces. Informal, I cede meaningless onset.

Heresy's tempo, embrace sin for malice demeaning: lesson set.

Here, system poem braces in, for malice demeaning—less on set.

Heresy's tempo embraces; informal I cede meaningless onset.

Heresy stem poem, brace sin. Formal, I cede meaning, less onset.

Heresy's tempo, embrace sin: formal. Ice, demeaning: less onset.

