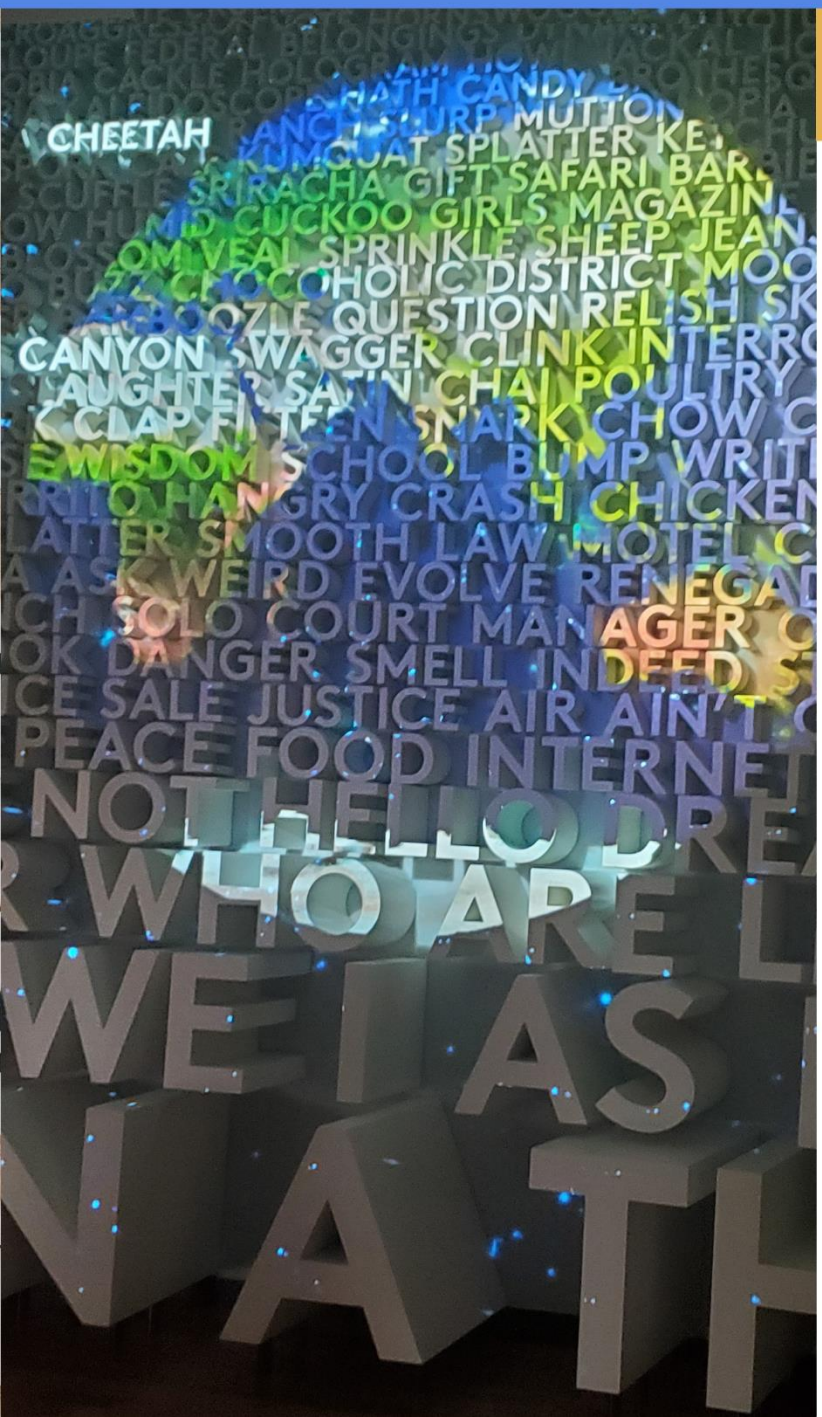
The Journal of Wordplay



#2 • Aug 2023

Talking with the Founder at Planet Word Museum

PLUS:

Supercalifragilistic...
Famous Ambigrams
Performance Puns
Special Overlaps
Emoji Literature
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Lost Works · Isograms
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THE JOURNAL OF WORDPLAY

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Cover images from **Planet Word Museum,** photographed by T Campbell. Front cover: “Where Do Words Come From?,” Planet Word’s wall-of-words exhibit. Back cover: this statue made of signs from various alphabets greets visitors as they come in.

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JOINING THE CONVERSATION

By T Campbell

A lot of wordplay study is done in a private study, without much company outside one's own household. This suits my semi-hermetic lifestyle (there are days where Janice's is the only human face I see), but sometimes it's not the best for learning.

So with this installment, we're getting a little more conversational.

For one thing, I've tried something that you didn't see much in this publication's predecessors: an interview. It was a real in-person thing, too! I drove over and sat in an office and everything. Ann B. Friedman and her Planet Word Museum are taking the study of language, and the practice of wordplay, into fascinating new spaces. Mostly three-dimensional and four-dimensional ones.

Don Hauptman did some exploring too, heading to a Vocabaret, a regular word-lover's event in New York City.

The theme of conversation also runs through the fact that a lot of this issue's features are more open-ended, likely to have continuations in the following issue or asking readers to submit their responses. Or both!

Finally, we've got a couple of responses to material from our first issue! Darryl Francis' response to issue #1's Wordle article is a whole article of its own, but Anil's got a quick note that I'll just reproduce below…

I'd like to reply to the Will Shortz contest in the May '23 issue, p. 19. The contest is over, but I'd still like to submit a statement from My Old ***Kentucky*** *Home.* ***U. Ky. ken tuck ye, keen teen!***

Cram in a lot of knowledge at the University of Kentucky, high schooler. Go! Learn!

(Tucking the state name into the sentence is called a nestled charade by logologists.)

Kentucky wasn't in any of those examples in the article. I don't know what he got for Kentucky, so this may not be original.

Was it? What say you, Will?

TOWARD A SYSTEMS THEORY OF WORDPLAY

By T Campbell

Many people think wordplay is an impossible field to organize. Play is just whatever goofy foolishness you come up with, right?

Not so, really. Play has structure and rules that we all quietly agree upon. And if you spend enough time with various forms of wordplay, you start to see structure there too—fundamental things in common, categories, subcategories.

Taxonomy is an inexact science, though! What I say below will be subject to revision, either by myself or by others.

Broadly speaking, then, **there are three categories of wordplay: *visual, phonetic,* and *semantic.***

The visual type further subdivides into **alphabetic**, **image-specific,** and **matrix** types. Alphabetic types of wordplay involve the letters that make up the words, and nothing else really matters but their meaning.

Alphabetic types involve some of the best-known wordplays, especially to people who seek out wordplay. Within that heading are yet more subheadings, including **anagrams, letter-patterns, letter requirements,** and **alchemies.**

An anagram is any word or phrase that has the same letters as another, in a different order. There is a kind of anagram where the letters are exactly reversed, "war" for "raw," "gateman" for "nametag." This form has many names, including semordinlap, heteropalindrome, anadrome, volvogram, and reversal. Let's go with **"reversal."**

Here's the first wrinkle in the system: most people would put reversals next to palindromes. But they really don't behave the same at all—a reversal is a relation of two words or strings, while a palindrome is a single word or string that has an unusual quality.

Of the letter-patterns, **palindromes** are the best-known: their letters are symmetrical, as in "redivider." There's also **repeaters** ("can-can," "beriberi") and **neckouts** ("legal age," "teammate"). For **isograms,** the pattern is no pattern: all letters are unique, which is unremarkable in a four-letter word but gets more impressive in words or strings of ten or above, like "uncopyrightable." Overlapping all of these are **cryptograms,** words and phrases that share an unusual pattern, like "alfalfa" and "entente." (There are also "natural ambigrams": we'll come back to those.)

Letter requirements divide into **letterbanks** (which *allow* the use of some letters and *forbid* others) and **letter musts** (which *require* the use of some letters and may have other constraints). The definition of the letterbank overlaps with that of the **lipogram,** but there's a difference in connotation. For the most part, lipograms are longer works allowing *most* of the alphabet to be used, whereas letterbanks are shorter items allowing *less than half* of the alphabet to be used.

Often the letterbank's "bank" is a single isogrammatic word or phrase, like "lens" for "senselessness."

Letterbank/lipogram variants include **monovocalics,** which use only one vowel, though they resolve the y question in different ways. Variations on the letter must, though, include **supervocalics** and **euryvocalics,** which include all vowels once and only once—supers use just AEIOU, and eurys include the "y." We could group all three of these variants as **vocalics.**

Letter musts include **nested words, nested anagrams,** and **kangaroo words** (where one word or string must contain another according to various rules) and **pangrams** (where all twenty-six letters have to be in there somewhere).

Alchemies include exercises like **add-a-letter, subtract-a-letter,** and **change-a-letter.** You can change "a" to "any-example-of-a" here, and/or change "letter" to "string."

The image-specific kind of wordplay depends on specific visual presentation. This includes tricks of typography like **kinetic typography, logo design,** and most **ambigrams.** (See "Ambigrams in the Wild," page 36, for more on what makes an ambigram.) A few words show "natural" ambigram qualities in most typefaces, like "bid" or "NOON," but most need to be designed to work as they should.



The natural ambigrams are better classed with the letter-patterns. That's another oddity of the system—that it separates some ambigrams from others—but it's a logical one.

Image-specific wordplay also includes pictographs like emoji 😜, photos, or icons as substitutes for words. Tricks with sign language might also qualify.

Matrix types are in between the alphabetic and image-specific types, in that they don't need a specific image or typeface but do require a certain arrangement of letters on the page. They include **crossword** grids, but also **word searches,** crossword variants like the **snake charmer** and **spiral,** and other tricks of visual arrangement (like the meme below, which is better shown than described).



The phonetic type of wordplay includes **homophones** (same sound, different letters) as well as **heteronyms** (same letters, different sound) and **rhymes** (same end sound or sounds, with end letters either different or the same). Other poetic devices like **alliteration, assonance,** and **consonance** are part of the same area as rhyme—they're all about similarities in pronunciation. Rhyme's similarity is at the end of words, alliteration is at their beginning, assonance and consonance in the middle.

There are also games of rhythm to be played. Nineties kids who grew up with the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* theme song, with the strong, repeated "DA-da DA-da DA-da DA-da" beat in its chorus, have enjoyed finding other phrases that work with the same beat. (Image from XKCD.)



This is an example of **poetic meter,** using trochaic tetrameter (four beats) instead of the more familiar iambic pentameter (five). Quiara Vasquez points out that the song "Tom's Diner" is also in trochaic tetrameter. (For Boomers, the *Gilligan's Island* theme uses iambic heptameter, with seven beats.)

A word's standard pronunciation can be represented as a series of signs, using IPA notation or other systems. Because of this, almost any alphabetic wordplay can *become* phonetic wordplay and vice versa. People talk about **eye rhymes** as opposed to real rhymes, and it's possible to imagine **ear anagrams** and **ear palindromes** as opposed to the usual types, which manipulate *sounds* instead of letters. (More on that at page 21.)

The semantic type is the subtlest and most constrained. Sometimes you can't even tell when it's being used; other times, it's obvious. All semantic wordplay does is play on words' multiple meanings, without changing or using any quirks in their spelling or pronunciation. But when you consider how many words have multiple meanings, that turns out to be plenty.

Q: What did the mayonnaise say when the girl opened the refrigerator?
A: Close the door, I'm dressing!

Semantic wordplay doesn't have as many subdivisions that are already in our vocabulary, although it's possible to imagine some. You can classify it by parts of speech, for example, and whether one part of speech *changes* to another. The more conventional use of "I'm dressing" above uses "dressing" as a verb, but the punnier usage has "dressing" as a noun. This kind of distinction is mostly an academic one, but… [points at title of *The Journal of Wordplay]*

One subdivision of semantic wordplay that does get a lot of attention, though, is the **double entendre,** in which one of the meanings is sexual or otherwise eyebrow-raising, and the other is what we might call "fit for polite society."

This is a rudimentary system; it needs a lot of refinement. There are lots of categories I've skipped over, such as polylingual play and word lipograms, other types that need naming, and ontological debates about where certain types should be classified.

For instance, I struggle a bit with where to put plays on capitalization, spacing, punctuation, or some combination of those three. One notable reinterpretation (with a little anti-tax sentiment) is "The IRS => Theirs." Should we group these close to the heteronyms since the letters basically don't change but the pronunciations do? Or are they better treated like anagrams since there is *some* rearrangement afoot? Leaning a bit closer to the heteronymic zone are capitalization plays like "Polish sausage" (delicious) versus "polish sausage" (inadvisable, and possibly a double entendre).

In some contexts, classification doesn't matter much. Sitcom dialogue, for instance, makes no distinction between puns using homophones and puns with multiple meanings. It all sounds the same, and most people aren't reading the subtitles.



Still, all things considered, this taxonomy is a good start. In the next issue of the *Journal*, I'll present a refined version in outline form, adding in any notes that I get from others!

THE APPLE SAUCE CHRONICLES #14

Fairly original wordplay by Louis Phillips

THE IMPORTANCE OF MATH

The number Zero proves that nothing matters.

CROWDED ELEVATOR

Everybodyisall
Pushedtogether
Likethis&there
Nobreathingno
Roomatallhere
Sirsnosmoking.

K = A piece of cake

Is the opposite of conclusion PROCLUSION?

Death – Just live with it.

THOSE WHO SEIZED CAESAR'S SCISSORS

Those who seized Caesar's scissors
Were Caesar's scissors' seizers.
Various sizes were Ceasar's scissors
& they who seized Caesar's scissors
of various sizes
Live across the seas, near Suez, sez Caesar.

(With the help of Robert Scotto, the following film title):

Goya Goya Goya—a Japanese film about a sneak attack on European paintings.

Future Menu Item –Welsh Robot

ANOTHER MUSICAL FILM FESTIVAL
From Martin Smith & Cynthia Epstein

1. the heroes of TELEMANN
2. the ROREN twenties
3. HAYDN plain sight
4. how to succeed in BIZET-ness without really trying
5. bad day at BARTOK
6. sundays and SIBELIUS
7. how GRIEG was my valley
8. DOYLE in the sun
9. RAVELs with my aunt
10. the sound and the FAURE

Short story of a shotgun marriage – screWED

In a barroom moot tool looters are not welcome.

(sentence with six consecutive double letters)

ANSWER: Fast acting

QUESTION: What do you call it when you pretend to go on a diet?

PASTELS – subways of a bygone era
OPTIMIST – high fog
FRUSTRATION – a dole of frust

Horror cowboy film: HOME ON DERANGE

CLEAN PORNOGRAPHY

The Philaunderer -- About a man who has numerous love affairs and does the laundry while making love

CARDINAL PROBLEMS

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Here are some word-and-number problems I've seen elsewhere, but which I thought might appeal to *Journal* readers.

The First

In order, write down the words for the cardinal numbers 1 to 99. Now sort the words into alphabetical order. Only one cardinal number stays in the same position. Which is it?

The Second

The cardinal number 2 is composed of one digit, and the corresponding word, TWO, is composed of three letters. So the numbers of digits and letters are not equal. Similarly, the cardinal number 23 is composed of two digits, and the corresponding word, TWENTY-THREE has eleven letters (forget the hyphen). Again, the numbers of digits and letters are not equal. So, the puzzle is to find the smallest cardinal number having the same number of digits as letters.

The Third

This is an extension of the second problem above. Find the next ten smallest cardinal numbers having the having the same number of digits as letters.

A SMALL FONT OF HUMOR

By T Campbell

Can you find the visual pun in these two images? Here's a hint: it combines something about their content and something about their design.





Give up?

Both images relate to Batman, the superhero who lives in the city of **Gotham…**

…and both use the **Gotham** font.

(Or at least they're close enough to it that they probably used it as a basis. A lot of logo designers tweak fonts at least a bit, allowing them to be trademarked and ensuring they can't be copied by just anyone. But the logos used here are *pretty much* Gotham.)

Weirdly, I've more recently seen "DC" in the Gotham font at a science-fiction convention, where there were many comics in sight…but the "DC" was not with reference to DC Comics. Instead, this time it referred to Washington, D.C., the real-life city.



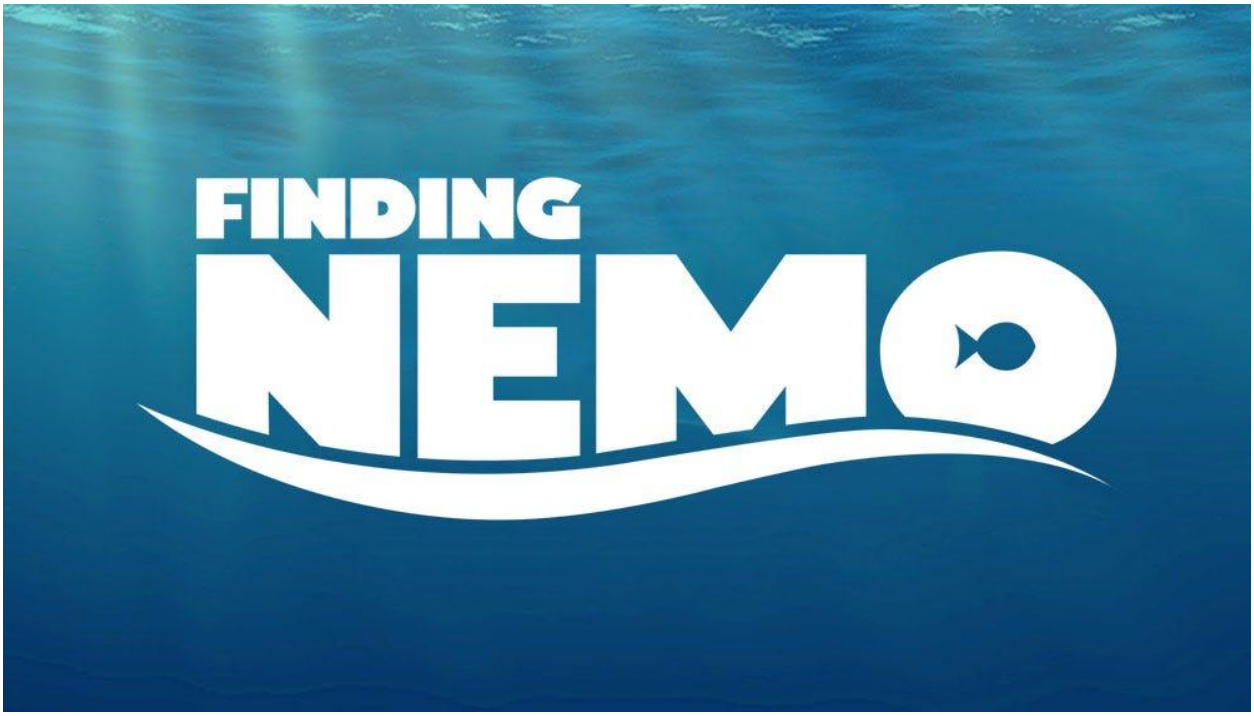
As material for jokes goes, there's only so much ore in this vein. The average well-educated reader has seen a *few* font/typeface names like Helvetica and Garamond, if only when using a word processing program. But not too many such names are widely known. And some of the ones that are known—like Helvetica and Garamond—don't have any obvious homophones, near homophones, or secondary meanings to cross over.

(The movie *Across the Spider-Verse* does include a cameo from the typography-themed villain Typeface, who snarls, "I'll see you in Hell-vetica!" But I think this pun would be insufficiently "on the nose" to work in reverse.)

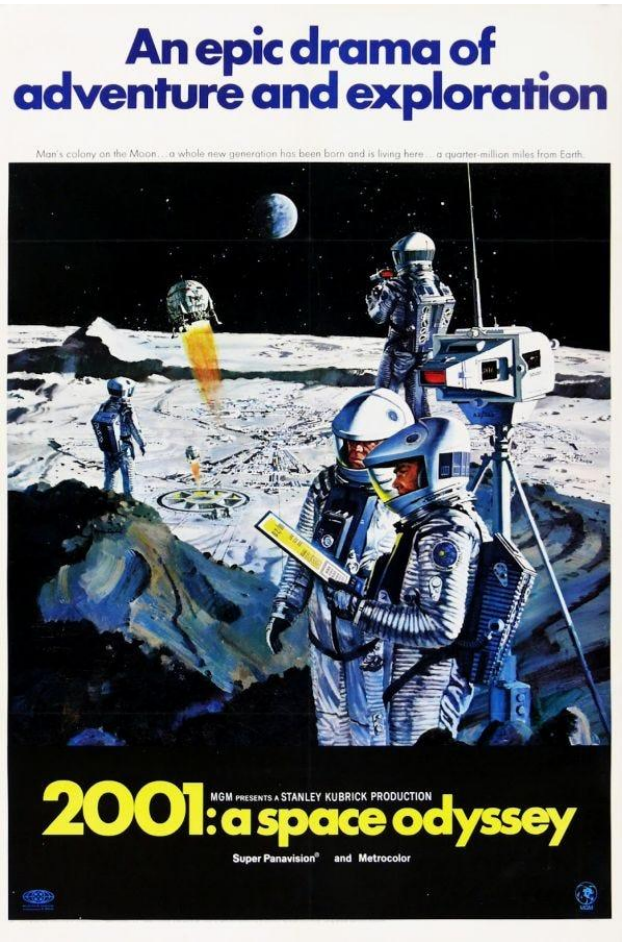
So the few examples that do exist are exceptional. Here's a logo that looks close to Arial, which sounds like ***aerial:***

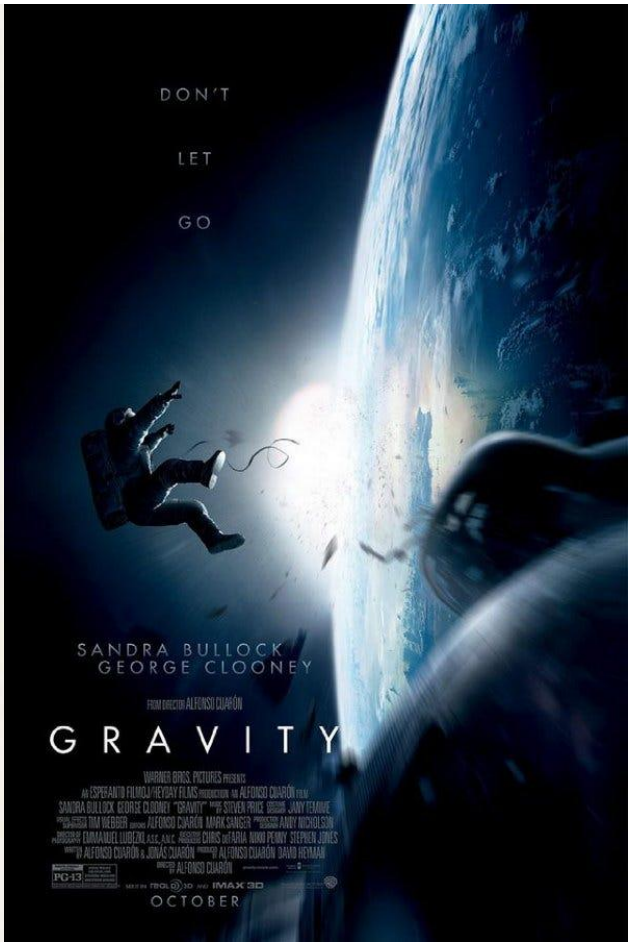


And one based on **Gill** Sans:



The use of **Futura** to publicize two well-known space movies might be more of a single entendre since designers have always used Futura for forward-looking projects. But it still feels punny enough to mention.





That's about as far as I can take it. There's no T-shirt line appealing to Southern pride with a logo in Georgia Bold. No baby sleep aids with branding in Rockwell. And there's no TV show about a time-travel-displaced Roman centurion called *Time's New Roman,* with a Times New Roman title to match.

Although maybe there should be. Know anyone at Netflix who's still taking pitches?

NECKOUTS

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The subject of neckouts was raised by the editor in his Substack column of May 22 (tcampbell.substack.com/p/neckouts). In his article, he referred to Adam Aronson's Wordlisted website (aaronson.org/wordlisted), where Aaronson defined neckouts as "words whose left and right halves are anagrams, like ***intes*tines."**

Said T: "I have some issues with that definition, though. For one thing, it includes any palindrome with an even number of letters, like **boob**. I feel like palindromes are already their own thing, and less-explored letter-patterns deserve more love. … Also, it does *not* include phrases, nor does it include words whose left and right halves are identical, like **couscous** and **hotshots**. Those don't get as much attention from word-lovers and probably merit more. **Hotshots**, **testes**, and **meme** are the only words I can find that have repeated letter-patterns but *not* repeated pronunciations … By any definition, neckouts are fairly rare occurrences. Working without palindromes or 'self-repeaters' means that the *smallest* neckouts would have to be six letters, since only even-numbered letter-counts work, two-letter words don't, and a four-letter word could only use the patterns of **boob**, **bobo**, or **oooo**."

T offered various single word neckouts - among them, these:
• **Aphrophora** • **bilabial** • **gensengs** • **horseshoer** • **intestines** • **mesosome** • **natant** • **Oenone** • **reappear** • **shammash** • **signings** • **teammate** •

He also offered a number of neckout phrases, such as:
• **best bets** • **latent talent** • **legal age** • **married admirer** • **ocean canoe** • **precise recipes** •

There's no limit to the number of neckout phrases like these. Just pick a pair of appropriate anagrams and slide them together. Here are some I've just fabricated:
• **top spots** • **mega-game** • **a German manager** • **thousand handouts** • **section notices** • **New York wonkery** • **horsewomen homeowners** • **Supreme Court computer user** •

T explained that neckouts are called "neckouts" because the term originates from the phrase ***stuck one*'s neck out**, the past tense of the dictionary-listed term **stick one's neck out**. Maybe a single sneckout, or more sensibly, multiple neckouts!

Neckouts form an interesting set of words and terms, and can be much added to. Neckouts overlap the set of what word-puzzlers have long called "pair isograms." A pair isogram is simply a word or term containing two examples of *n* different letters—for example, **appeases**, **arraigning**, and **scintillescent**—but these aren't neckouts because the different letters aren't repeated in each half of the words. Neckouts such as **married admirer** and **precise recipes** aren't pair isograms, because they contain more than two occurrences of at least one letter. Where the worlds of pair isograms and neckouts overlap will be found examples such as **intestines** and **horseshoer**.

I'll come back to neckouts in a short while, but here's a resumé of pair isograms. Pair isograms have been explored extensively in *Word Ways: The Journal of Recreational Linguistics* (digitalcommons.butler.edu/wordways) during its publication between 1968-2020. Here are just a few of the pair isograms which have appeared previously in *Word Ways*:

• appeases • arraigning • Caucasus • Cicadellidae • concisions • Gradgrindian • happenchance • horseshoer • inaccidentated • jipijapa • millieme • mononymy • notionists • pynepeny • rereigning • scintillescent • shippish • Taeniodontidae • tessellata • Transnistria • trisectrices • tromometer • unsufficiences • Vivienne •

From the above list of pair isograms, **horseshoer**, **pynepeny**, **shippish**, **Taeniodontidae** and **trisectrices** are also neckouts. There are very few examples of words and names which are both pair isograms and neckouts. A few more of these later.

Parenthetically, I take great pride in my discovery of **Taeniodontidae**. Without any kind of computer assistance, I discovered this buried in *Webster's Second Edition* over five decades ago. The August 1971 edition of *Word Ways* records my discovery of this 14-letter pair isogram. As *Word Ways* editor Ross Eckler commented about the word back then: "… the first half containing one each of seven different letters, and the second half the same letters rearranged." Further, the February 2012 edition of *Word Ways* ran an article of mine entitled "New Pair Isograms," where I offered a slew of previously unidentified pair isograms. One of these new items was **stuck one's neck out**. As I noted in that article, this is the logical past tense of the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s entry **stick one's neck out**. Not surprisingly, the term neckout wasn't used in either of the 1971 and 2012 articles.

It would seem reasonable to assert that there are far more pair isograms which aren't neckouts than there are those which are simultaneously pair isograms and neckouts. After all, the concept of pair isograms isn't concerned with where the duplicate letters appear, while neckouts require that the different letters must appear in both the first and second halves.

Note that if a neckout can be anagrammed, it may or may not remain a neckout—for example, **signings** can be anagrammed to **singings**, both of which are neckouts, but while **reappear** can be anagrammed to **rapparee**, the latter is not a neckout. A pair isogram, regardless of whether it is a neckout or not, will always remain a pair isogram when anagrammed.

Let's take a look at some more newly discovered neckouts which aren't pair isograms—remember, these will include more than two occurrences of at least one letter.

- **Catallacta** (a group of single-celled organisms)
- **meteorometer** (an apparatus for receiving and transmitting meteorological readings)
- **Niederreiden** (a town in Bavaria, Germany)
- **Retama raetam** (a species of flowering plant, native to northern Africa)

Personal names are a fertile hunting ground for further neckouts which aren't pair isograms. Here are some new finds:

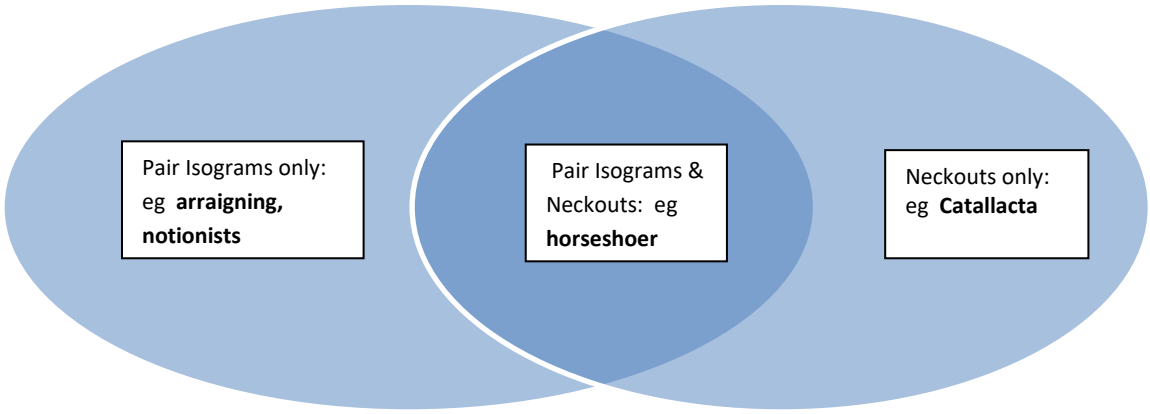
- **Auguste Gustaeu** (a Disney-Pixar character)
- **Lester Telser** (an American economist, 1931-2022)
- **Lisle Ellis** (a Canadian composer, 1951-)
- **Mariana Marin** (a Romanian poet, 1956-2003)
- **Senjan Jansen** (a film music composer)

Here are some new pair isograms which are also neckouts:

- **Anthonotha** (a genus of plants found mainly in Africa)
- **Arnold Landor** (an English write and explorer, 1865-1924)
- **Elvis Lives** (a 2016 television movie; also an oft-heard trope about Elvis Presley)
- **Erich Reich** (an Austrian-born British entrepreneur, 1935-2022)
- **panel plane** (a woodworking plane for fine smoothing)
- **Parker Peak** (a mountain summit in the Sierra Nevada range in California)
- **Soweto West** (part of a major slum area in Nairobi, Kenya)
- **tompeeptom** (a word appearing in James Joyce's *Ulysses*)
- **Yan Stastny** (a Canadian-born American ice hockey player, 1982-)

And to finish with, here's a further clutch of neckouts (of varying quality!) that can be created from words and terms which are mutual anagrams:

• **an aisle is a lane** • **bedroom boredom** • **continued unnoticed** • **dishonest hedonists** • **Easter teaser** • **eleven plus two = twelve plus one** • **esoteric coteries** • **garden danger** • **gory orgy** • **happiest epitaphs** • **highest heights** • **I love voile** • **one's nose** • **oriental relation** • **solitary royalist** • **supersonic percussion** • **Texas taxes** • **untidy nudity** • **valiant Latvian** •



EAR PALINDROMES AND ANAGRAMS

T Campbell

Ear anagrams and **ear palindromes** behave like their visual counterparts but feature rearranged or symmetrical *sounds* instead of letters.

Assigning a pronunciation to many different words is a tricky proposition, though, even when using IPA symbols. Some words have two common pronunciations or more, and that doesn't even count heteronyms (as in *bass* drum versus fried *bass* for dinner), which are spelled the same but with different pronunciations and meanings. Lexical drift and regional dialects mean that pronunciations are always shifting, too.

However, the CMU Pronouncing Dictionary is a reasonably good source of word pronunciations. A couple of apps are also helpful, but for this research, I went with the CMU.

Ear anagrams, it turns out, are common enough that I could probably do some themed lists for them as grist for smaller puzzles. Maybe I will at some point. The longest such anagram pair I found was *constellations* and *consultations*—both are fifteen sounds long, with only the "t" sound migrating a couple of places south. *Consultations* is [kɑˌnsʌltejˈʃʌnz], *constellations* is [kɑˌnstʌlejˈʃʌnz].

Some other interesting ones are *Clintonites* and *Lichtenstein, deprecate* and *predicate* (as a verb), *anatomically* and *commonality, reiterated* and *deteriorate, analytics* and *inelastic, rocks* and *scar, downright* and *write down,* and *pleasantry* and *presently.*

Single-word ear palindromes, like single-word eye palindromes, tend to be short. The longest I could find was *canonic,* at seven sounds. I couldn't find any with an even number of sounds, since that would require a repeated sound right in the middle. But there were a number of five-sound ear palindromes that were not also eye palindromes, including *Kazakh, revere, fief,* and *Zulus.* Even some of the three-sound ones have some interesting character: *easy, caulk, judge, cease, cook, church, whoa.*

The shortest ear palindromes might not always meet your expectations since some vowel sounds are considered to carry consonants with them. That's why *whoa* is an ear palindrome: its long *o* is covered by a closing "w" sound. So *O* itself doesn't pass muster as an ear palindrome, though A, E, I, and "Ooo!" do.

There are ways to develop this idea further, into soundbanks (instead of letterbanks), add-a-sound exercises, phonetically nested words. Gregg Siegel did a piece on "Aural Palindromes" in *Interim* Volume 2, Number 1 which covered some ear-palindrome phrases and sentences.

Here are a few more such by Lori Wike:

Finite time might tie knife.
Time: I fib if I might.
My rhyme? Might I fib if I time my rhyme?

ANN B. FRIEDMAN: THE PLANET WORD INTERVIEW

By T Campbell

If wordplay were a building, it might be Planet Word Museum in Washington, D.C.

Opened in 2020 even as the pandemic was cresting, it survived and continues to thrive today, billed as "the museum where language comes to life." Exhibits can put wordplay front and center: there's one room all about joke-telling and another all about songwriting devices. The first room people enter presents a collection of tablets around a globe, with the speakers of various languages explaining little quirks of those languages to an English-speaking audience. After walking out of there, you encounter a literal wall of words, with interactive light displays that teach you about word origins. Even the exhibits that cover other aspects in a little more depth retain elements of playfulness and visual interest. There's a "library" that offers up interactive displays and audio tailored to books that the visitor selects.

I sat down with Ann Friedman, the museum's founder, in the Planet Word offices (tucked away quietly from visitors' eyes) and we talked our way through the museum's thought process, story, and future.

T: How did the museum itself come to be?

Ann: I was a reading teacher, and I retired. And I was hoping to continue doing something in the literacy area, because I felt like to be a strong democracy, we needed a nation of readers. And so when I read about a museum in New York, which you may have visited, I said, "There's an idea." They're taking a lot of technology and interactive experiences, to convey the abstract concepts of math to visitors in an informal educational setting. That's what museums do: informal education. And I said that I think you could do that with words and language.

So I started just thinking, what if you had a museum about words and language? What would need to be in there? What concepts would you need to cover? And could they be made interactive? Or how would technology be involved in it? That was really important, because I didn't want to turn away people who said, "I don't like reading, books aren't my thing." I wanted to suck people in. We have cool technology experiences, and when people get through them, we can say, "Oh, by the way, you just read a little bit," or "You just wrote a little bit," or "You used your words listening, speaking." And so that's what we've tried to do.

T: I did not presume you had a background as a reading teacher, but it makes a great deal of sense. The techniques my favorite teachers have used over the years sync up with what I see at the museum.

Ann: I didn't want it to seem like a school experience. Why have a museum, unless you're offering visitors something that they can't experience in their home, on their own computer in school? It needed to take advantage of the characteristics of museums, which is large spaces, money to spend on technology or celebrities or whatever will create more of a buzz, that people can't get on their own.

There are some museums of language, as I'm sure you know. And there's a museum of linguistics in Paris. I visited just as many as I could trying to figure out, is this something that could work? Have we tried it before?

T: I did not know about the linguistics museum; I'll have to check that out.

Ann: Mundolingua in Paris, Left Bank. I've been there twice. But it's very traditional. All reading and listening, not interactive.

T: That doesn't surprise me entirely. I remember doing some looking into the Académie Française and the French approach to language which is—we can throw these words around—prescriptivist versus descriptivist.

Ann: Descriptivist. And we're descriptivist because we do not have an academy. One of the great things about English is its flexibility. And for wordplay, for rap, for spoken-word poetry. There's a renaissance going on right now, about how we use words. And I wanted to celebrate that. And I thought also that that was a way that everybody would feel could feel at home here and not be intimidated. Like, "I don't know grammar," or "I was bad in school diagramming sentences." I didn't want that at all.

It's like, "Come here, just come in. And I guarantee you, there's something here that will appeal to you. Maybe you're a songwriter, maybe you love poetry, maybe you want to run for student council…"

T: Do you have an official mission statement?

Ann: We want to renew and inspire a love for language and reading. I mean, it's a little bit longer than that, but that's the heart of it.

T: I am wildly impressed with the exhibits in the museum, with one exception only because I haven't been able to experience it for myself yet. And that's your escape room, Lexicon Lane, which is relatively new?

Ann: Yeah, it's relatively new.



Lexicon Lane (not exactly an escape room).

T: And the reason I have not had a chance to get into that is my wife is extremely, extremely good at and proud of being good at escape rooms. And if I did it without her, I would be in trouble.

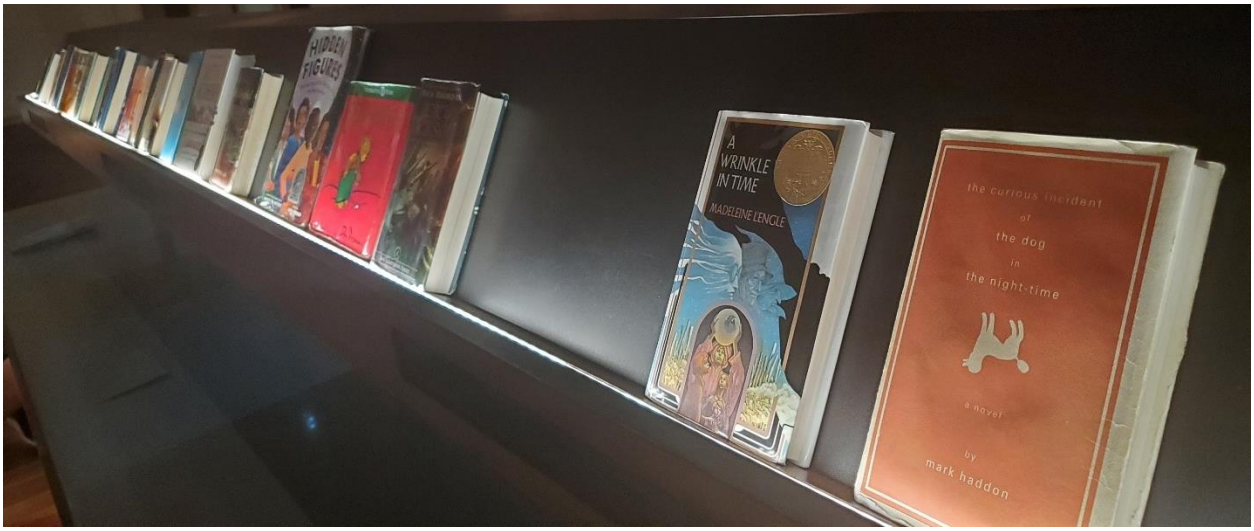
Ann: It's like an escape room, but it's not an escape room. We're not trapping anyone. It's word puzzles you solve with pencil and paper, or by finding clues that you manipulate or look at. Loan Shark Games proposed it to us. And we loved it, because it was analog, so we didn't need any more technology.

T: What was the decision-making process that led to one of your better-known exhibits?

Ann: Oh, you're not picking?

T: I'm letting you pick. I could pick if I had to.

Ann: The library. That whole idea that I went to exhibit designers with was to make words and language come to life. So I had all different topics that I wanted to cover. And of course, one was something that literature and books, but they presented us with this idea for books that triggered a projection when you open them. So there were decisions we had to make about which books? How many? The design of the projections, the voices that you hear the testimonials…who is it, who's talking about each particular book… So in that respect, there were hundreds and hundreds of decisions that had to be made. The look of the room, what was hanging on the bookshelves and the diagrams and picking those, the artists, but that was where words came to life without much help from me or with the word wall. That was a long process of getting to what you would experience today.

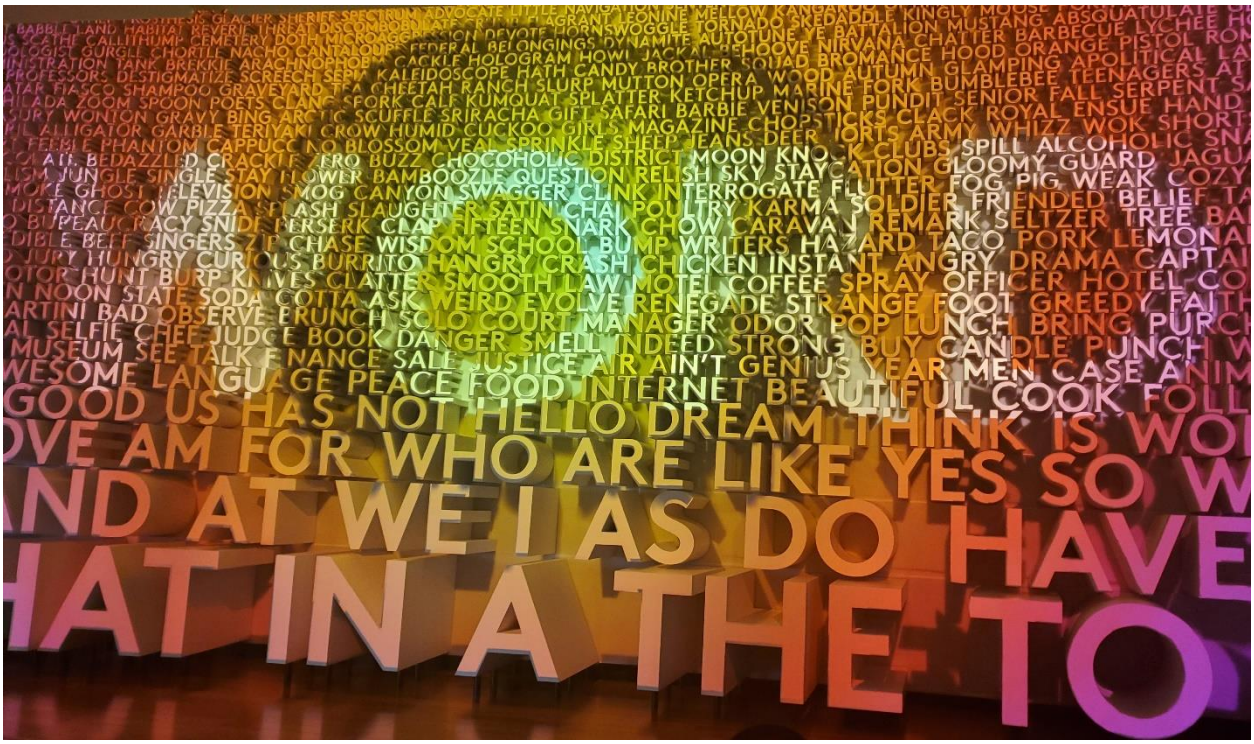


In the library, opening any book on a reading station triggers a set of light displays and recordings.

What I said to the exhibit designers was, "I want one gallery to be about where words come from. Then we list all the sources. There's anatomy, there's war, there's new discoveries where we need new words that we didn't have before. There's neologisms—people just invent words." So I made a list of about twenty-eight ways that words enter the English language, just looking in books and thinking about that.

But the exhibit designers, or the museum professionals, they know to ask questions like…How long will visitors tolerate for an experience to last? How can we make this fun? And with our word wall, where do we place the words physically, the three-dimensional words that light up? And so all those decisions they made, they took that list of twenty-eight and narrowed it down to about eight ways that words enter English in particular. And then they chose words to represent each way. And words that could become good stories, because that's what that is, telling stories. So, *burrito,* for instance, as a word of Spanish derivation, lent itself to a good projection. In the projections there, nothing can be too detailed. So we had all these constraints that we had to work with.

Also, they convinced me to take a nonlinear approach with that exhibit. I thought it would be linear, and everybody who went in would get the same information and leave with the same knowledge. But they said, we'll prove to you that a nonlinear experience would be great. And they were so totally right.



The wall of words discusses word origins with a voiceover, illuminates key words or (as above) renders larger images on the wall's face. At key points, it responds to spoken suggestions.

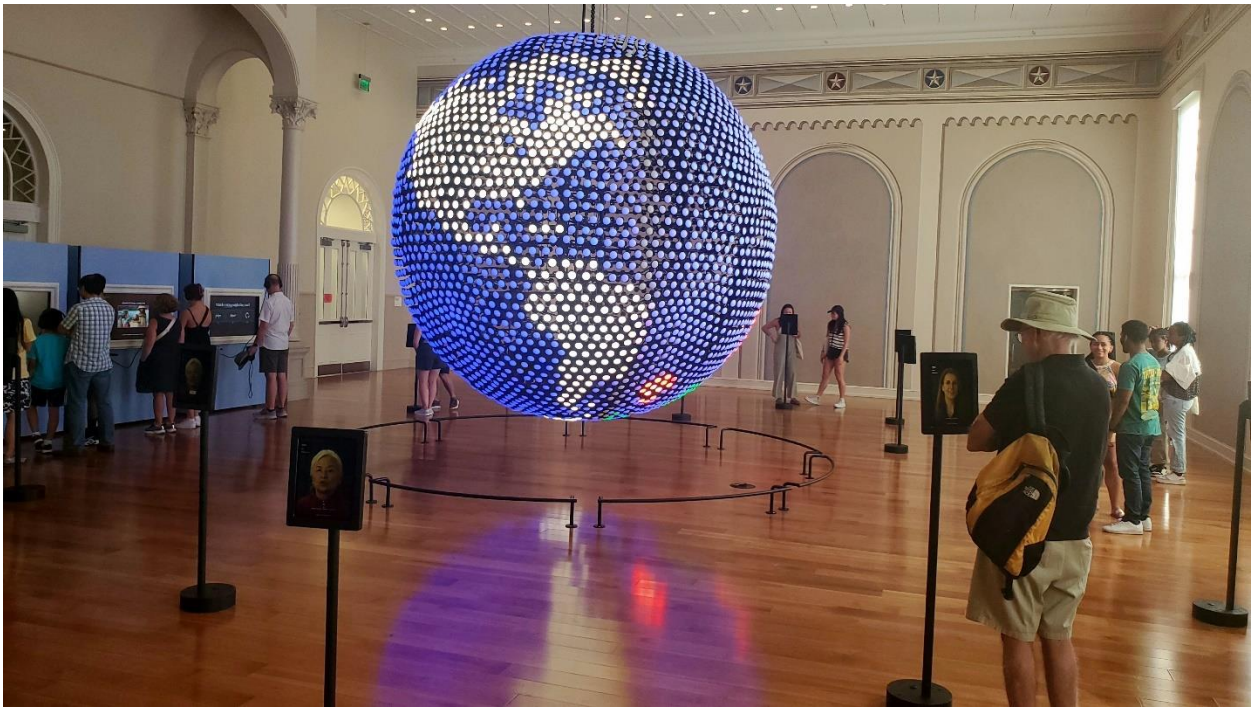
Everybody gets certain lessons about where words come from, that are key. And we don't want you to leave Planet Word without those. But not everybody needs to hear every story, so instead, the exhibit asks you to choose one. And then you have the experience of speaking to the exhibit and maybe what you said is chosen, which makes it much livelier.

T: It makes you feel heard, which is an important part of modern education.

Ann: I have young kids whose parents have told me they've come back five times, just because their child wants to try everything that the word ball does.

T: There are a few exhibits like that, the globe and the…

Ann: There's more than enough. I'm always shocked when I see a review that says an hour is enough to get through it all.



Around the globe seen here, tablets show native speakers of various languages telling visitors about their languages. Interaction with the tablets creates displays on the globe. Other learning opportunities line the left wall.

T: Lord! Full disclosure: I came by here yesterday just to refresh myself. I wanted to make sure I hadn't forgotten anything important. And I was actively hurrying through the exhibits, skipped a couple of them altogether that I felt like I'd remembered pretty well. It still took me two hours and change.

Ann: At least two and a half hours to sample… some peek into the copywriting exhibit, try a few of those techniques, or record a speech…there's plenty to do. A question we get all the time is, "Oh, you don't have changing exhibits? Why would anyone come back?" Just come and see once you're here, I think you'll figure it out.

T: I'm also curious if there were if there was anything that that was on the drawing board for a while that just didn't make it in for whatever reason.

Ann: Yes, there is. I have a lot of ideas for physical outdoor activities. But we don't have a space. I really am sad about that. We also didn't do a technology gallery. But we're working on that right now. Because, you know, there was no ChatGPT when we started. That's more of an ultimate extension of language technology than where we are right now. With AI.

I think that belongs in Planet Word. And you're looking for space for an experience. And it needs to be interactive and participatory, like everything at Planet Word. So we need some really smart people to help us, and we hope we'll get something out on the floor before too long.

T: That sounds great. I can relate. Around the time *we* were starting up, ChatGPT started rolling out. And we're still testing some of the boundaries between the things that it does well and the things it does not do well at all.

Ann: As a museum, we cannot afford misinformation. Museums are the second most trusted institution in people's lives after their family and friends. And why is that? It's because everything is vetted, and based on evidence and science and research, and so we can't afford to have exhibits that have mistakes. You can't be like that lawyer who relied on ChatGPT to come up with cases. And then they were all fake and not true.

T: They *sounded* good.

Ann: But they weren't real. No hallucinations allowed at a museum!

T: It's good to have trusted institutions cross-examining some of this stuff. I'm glad to hear that you are. Would you say the future is mostly that you're planning a few extra exhibits at this point? No major changes on the horizon? I mean, you've only been here for a little while, and most of that was during COVID.

Ann: Changes would just be additive. We can add content to the interactive videos on the walls. So we don't even know what format something about language and technology would take. Would it be a new beacon, or would it be a three-dimensional device installed somewhere? We're just not that far along. Deciding the form of these things is for exhibit designers who are good at this.

T: That's a part you're happy to delegate?

Ann: Yeah.

T: What do you consider the museum's community? There are a number of different ways to answer that. But are there certain demographics here you're thinking about in particular?

Ann: Well, our exhibit designers needed a target age audience to design for: vocabulary level, concept sophistication level. We chose 10 to 12-year-olds. And that's because that's the age at which kids might stop reading. And they also have the empathy to understand other people's points of view, or have started studying foreign languages, the world, other countries, and so they're more aware of those things happening around them. So that age, up to all adults.

This is not a children's museum. It wasn't trying to attract toddlers. Because it's a word museum. We have plenty of nonreaders and toddlers who come and have a good time at a couple of different exhibits…but that was the target audience. But then beyond that, we want everyone to come here, because we all use language, we all talk, we all have words, signed or spoken. And so we have six core values that we incorporated in everything we did, that are still to this day all any decision. We run by those six core values and see if they match. And if they don't all have to be present, then at least some of them do. We want things that are **fun,**

playful, unexpected, meaningful, motivational, and **inclusive.** Those are really important to me.

T: I can see that ties to what you said about empathy. A lot of the museum's exhibits seem to run on that…the presumption that people who are listening to this can put themselves into other people's shoes.

Ann: And we try to weave some humor into everything, even the most fraught, serious topics, like hate speech. We've got a video from Wanda Sykes in there about the slur. And it's kind of funny, but it's kind of not.

And so we use humor and playfulness a lot to capture people's attention. I'm pretty sure people remember that a little better than being lectured to.

T: My favorite teachers, humor and multimedia were huge tools for them. There is some lightness even in the most serious part of the museum, but it's useful that you put the serious part toward the end of the experience.

Ann: Yes, that was a deliberate decision. The exhibit designers recommended we start on the third floor with galleries and work our way down. So that meant that The Power of Language is on the third floor, where first we introduce you to words and languages and where they come from, and all the characteristics of all these languages all over the world. Then the second floor is about what you can do with words, activity with words. And so that left the power of language for the two galleries on our ground floor. And that was good, because then the last gallery words matter. You've heard all these stories about how important words are, now you can choose how to use them. And then you go out on the street, hopefully with that message in your head. It was conscious. I'm glad you noticed that.

T: And when I first started planning this interview, I thought we'd delve into the wordplay side as a separate topic, but it really runs through so *much* of what you do that that there would be no point.

Ann: And like, I don't know, if you noticed the different words and wordplay and stuff on jokes on the walls. That was intentional too. I told the exhibit designers, I want words to spill out, like to be all around you. So they came up with phrases and things and they called them "spills." I didn't realize that it wasn't a term of art. They just took my word and created spills all over.

T: Well, it's important to represent the client's thought process.

Ann: So you're reading the walls, you're reading the floors, in some places. Originally, I had wanted things dangling from the ceilings. We've got words and arches and doorways…

T: And the tree that dangles as you come in.

Ann: The one surface we have left untouched is ceilings. We used everything else.

T: The museum does seem very keyed to the present and how people are using language now. I'm curious about how the way you perceive trends in that regard, beyond ChatGPT because that's what everyone is talking about, right?



Messages, jokes, and other verbal "spills" line many of the museum's walls, floors, and doorways.

Ann: You mean like texting or reading on Audible?

T: The prevalence of listening to books versus reading them, the singular "they," that sort of thing.

Ann: For myself, sure, I'm old fashioned, if you want to call it that. I like to have a book, a physical book and, and read it and underline it or fold the pages back and go back and look at things again. And so for me the physical experience of reading is important.

I was a copyeditor; I don't know if you know that. So I'm a stickler for proper grammar. Everybody makes mistakes…no matter how many copyeditors, you have something sneak through. People watch, and they like to play "gotcha." You know that with your publication too.

And if you're a language museum or a language magazine, they're going to be waiting to find some mistake. So I am careful about anything that comes out from Planet Word. I don't mind *impact* as a verb, or *contact* as a verb, but I think twice before using them, because I don't want to have those conversations. And I don't want people to think that we don't know we can use "they" to refer to a singular.

We do know. And so if we do something not traditional, it's because it was a conscious choice. But you err a bit toward conservatism, just so you don't have to have those conversations.

T: I can relate.

Ann: As far as texting, it's good that everything has its place, and isn't it nice that we have all those choices now? They add some character to life.

But who would write a job application with texts? Does that kind of reading affect your comprehension? We have a professor on our advisory board who studies that particular and she cites evidence that comprehension is suffering.

Because people aren't used to reading long things. And it's partly economic, in that you can copy shorter articles, passages, whatever, without running into copyright concerns. There are a lot of different aspects of this problem that are all leading to shorter attention spans.

T: That ties to the final question I had, which is about looking forward to the future through language. What are your personal principles there?
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Ann: There's nothing that will happen here that will divide people with words. Nothing is going to feed into hate. And it's a private museum. Because there are the absolutists in the free speech world, I had to say, "We're not going to go that way." Because I want to advocate for words used to bring people together and create community and to heal, not harm. And that's my choice.

T: Well, I think that's a very good choice. And it becomes leading by example.

Ann: I hope so. I'm very concerned about misinformation and disinformation. I just saw two articles in the *Post* this morning that are very scary examples of people not listening, not debating civilly, in equitable way, looking for evidence. That's a problem for our society, but it's not just national. It's international. And so we feel that we need to be a small voice advocating for ways to combat misinformation. A lot of times, misinformation is just a mistake…

T: It's important to be able to tell that apart. I feel like a lot of my friends who get exercised about this sort of thing assume it's always malicious. When a lot of times it's either a mistake, or a non-malicious person who's been misinformed by someone else…

Ann: And so teaching people to question: What's the source of that information? Who stands to benefit from it? What kind of source did it come from? Is it reputable? Do they correct their mistakes? That's what any reputable news outlet will do, eventually correct their mistakes. Those are important topics for me. We started a program series on the science of reading in May. And we may continue with more programs related to that in the fall, because teaching children to read is a civil right, and we know a lot about how best to teach beginning readers. And so we need to follow the science there. But there's a lot of arguments missed by some people who advocate for the science of reading and just think that means phonics.

So we want to bring light to the general public. More of the layers to that argument we shouldn't forget about as we're also giving our children a good grounding in phonics. So that's important to us and then we are part of a team that just got a National Science Foundation grant on trustworthy AI. We don't know what our role exactly will be, they wanted to include, I think, a museum partner, where ordinary people could come and learn about the challenges and be aware of how AI works. And set up guidelines so that it will be used ethically. We're glad to be part of that effort to know. Absolutely expanding at least in our programming, beyond the galleries, the physical experiences that you have here, incorporating a much wider view of language and in words and how they're used.

T: Well, I'm glad you're on it. And to bring this full circle, I appreciate knowing that these kinds of weighty concerns can be served hand in hand with the lighter, joyous approach that you've embodied with the museum.

Ann: Yeah, that's our responsibility. I think if you're gonna call yourself a language or word museum you have to look at all the perspectives and topics. It keeps my mind alive thinking about all these topics. I like the intellectual challenge. "What can we *do* with this museum?"

T: I'm right there with you.

FAMOUS PEOPLE

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Here are the names of thirty famous people, some living, some dead, some fictional, each with a thumbnail biog. Actors, singers, politicians, Nobel laureates and even royalty—they all appear in *The Journal of Wordplay*. Go figure why these have been selected!

Allen Drury
American novelist: his first novel *Advise and Consent* won a Pulitzer Prize in 1960.
Andy Warhol
American visual artist and leading figure in the pop art movement.
Dan Rather
American journalist, commentator, and former evening news anchor at CBS.
Dolly Parton
American singer-songwriter, known primarily for country music.
Dorothy Fowler
New Zealand writer.
Harold Urey
American physical chemist who won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry, 1934.
Henry Ford
American industrialist and founder of Ford Motor Company.
Henry Tudor
Henry VII, King of England, 1485-1509.
Jean Harlow
American actress, the leading sex symbol of the early 1930s.
Jerry Hall
American model and long-term partner of Rolling Stones frontman Mick Jagger.
Jody Powell
White House press secretary of Jimmy Carter.
John Ford
American film director.
John Paul Woodley
US Assistant Secretary of the Army from 2003-09.
John Tyler
10th president of the US.
Jordan Taylor
American professional racing driver.
Laura Nyro
American singer-songwriter, who had commercial success with the 5th Dimension.
Lord Fauntleroy
Title character in the novel *Little Lord Fauntleroy* by Frances Hodgson Burnett.
Nelly Furtado

Canadian singer and songwriter.

Noah Wyle

American actor, who played John Carter in the tv series *ER*.

Paul John Flory

American chemist, winner of the Nobel Prize in Chemistry, 1974.

Paul Ryan

Former speaker of the US House of Representatives.

Plato

Ancient Greek philosopher.

R. Dean Taylor

Canadian musician, most notable as a singer and Motown producer in the 60s/70s.

Ralph Lauren

American fashion designer, philanthropist, and billionaire businessman.

Ralph Nader

American political activist noted for involvement in consumer protection and environmentalism.

Rand Paul

US senator for Kentucky.

Rod Taylor

Australian actor.

Ron Howard

American director, screenwriter, and actor.

Roy Wood

English musician, a member of the Move, Electric Light Orchestra, and Wizzard.

Woody Allen

American filmmaker, actor, and comedian.

See the last page for answers!

WORDPLAY DOUBLE FEATURES

By T Campbell

Movie night is always more fun if you can bring in two different films that have something surprising in common. What these pairs of movies have in common is a wordplay link.

Found using a database of roughly 46,138 movies, collected from Wikipedia. Some obscure foreign films are included in the larger database, but I've verified that all the movies presented here are films with a presence in the English-speaking market.

Anagram Movies

13 – 31
War – Raw
Reno – Nero
Open – Nope
Nerve – Never
Daniel – Denial
Respect – Spectre
Miracle – Reclaim
Hustlers – Ruthless
Breathe – The Bear
Cheaters – Teachers
Ned Rifle – Renfield
Breakout – Outbreak
Dead Cert – Redacted
White Dog – White God
The C Word – The Crowd
Center Stage – Secret Agent

Honorable mention to *Saw IV* and *Saw VI* and *2001* and *2010;* both pairs share a franchise but technically qualify. I could also get into stuff like *Godzilla vs. Mothra* and *Mothra vs. Godzilla*, two separate films released decades apart. But anagrams are more fun when they're "well-mixed" and when there's clearly no relationship between the two movies.

Side notes: *13* and *31* and *War* and *Raw* are also reversals of each other. *Cheaters* and *Teachers* are both satiric films about the education system. Some titles, like *Breakout* and *Dead Cert*, apply to more than one movie.

Homophone Movies

Starred "homophones" are only homophones in certain accents.

Toni – Tony
*Shark – Shock**
*Barbie – Bobby**
[•REC] – Wreck
Hannah – Hanna
*Harlow – Hollow**
Hell's Bells – Hell's Belles

Night Club – Knight Club
Night Moves – Knight Moves
Officer Down – Officer Downe
All About Eve – All About Yves
Night and Day – Knight and Day
Made for Each Other – Maid for Each Other

The Night Riders – Knightriders is also pretty close.

Of course, movies aren't everything. There's also TV and books, which eventually *become* movies. My database of the latter is less extensive, including 5,342 TV shows from Wikipedia and a couple of other sources, and 5,332 books that were notable for appearing on other lists of bestsellers or critical favorites.

Anagram TV Shows

E-Ring – Reign
M.A.S.K. – SKAM
Cheaters – Teachers
Doctor Who – Torchwood
SportsCentre – SportsCenter
The Real L Word – The Real World

That's not a misprint: *Cheaters* and *Teachers* are the names of different films and different TV shows. In fact, *Teachers* is the name of two separate shows, though one was better known online.

Homophone TV Shows

SportsCentre – SportsCenter
Martial Law – Marshall Law

Anagram Books

Thaïs – Tisha
Transit – Tristan
Hamnet – The Man
The Statement – The Testament
The Americans – The Rains Came
Commonwealth – The Common Law

WORDPLAY IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Language Enthusiasts Cavort Onstage

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A nightclub act devoted to puns and other flavors of recreational linguistics? Who knew??

Vocabaret (a neat portmanteau) takes place on the second Friday evening of each month at Caveat, a 110-seat underground venue on Manhattan's Lower East Side.

The panjandrums describe it thus: "At Vocabaret, New York City's most-decorated wordsmiths come together for an eclectic variety hour (and a half) of raucous wordplay, etymological deep dives, and alphabetic absurdity that investigates the intersection of language and everyday life."

Guided by an emcee, four panelists participate in several segments, most of which are competitive. All are performers or have a showbiz connection, professional or amateur. And all wanted to share their enthusiasm for language and wordplay, with the goal of making these topics entertaining and accessible.

On July 14, 2023, I attended—virtually, via livestream—a Vocabaret for the first time.

One regular panelist is Sam Corbin, staff columnist in the Games department *of The New York Times*. In an interview, she told me: "The five of us whom you saw onstage—Tim Donnelly, Jerzy Gwiazdowski, Ally Spier, Nikolai Vanyo, and myself—founded Vocabaret in 2019. We met doing pun competitions some years prior and had attended the O. Henry Pun-Off in Austin together. So we had wordplay as a shared interest before we began."

First up on this occasion, a "Fun Language Fact" each panelist had been assigned to find. They included discoveries in etymology, slang, foreign expressions, and accents.

Despite the name, that part is mostly serious. The real fun begins with the games and quizzes. The "Pun Run" challenges each panelist to quip speedily on a specified subject. Unlike other such competitions, which require improvisation, these segments are prepared and recorded in advance, and captions illustrating each pun are interpolated. For example, Tim's assigned theme was "musical instruments." Among the rapid-fire patter he devised: "I was theremin-it before leaving. You would never castanets fan out like that. I wanted to ask: 'Say, didgeridoo any of this?'"

Other segments that evening involved punctuation, plurals, nonsensical neologisms, "better names," and impromptu mashups, which call for a blended pun on two disparate subjects.

At the end of the evening, the winner receives the coveted "Word Championship" award: a silly hat.

Other shows cover a wide variety of topics and themes, differing from the ones described above. Future plans for Vocabaret might include touring to other cities. Meanwhile, you can watch dozens of excerpts of past performances on the usual social-networking sites. Search Vocabaret via Google's Videos tab.

If you decide to attend in the flesh or remotely, admission fees are reasonable. In-person is $15; the livestream is $10. Dates for the remainder of 2023: Sept. 8, Oct. 13, Nov. 10, Dec. 8. Tickets here: https://caveat.nyc/events/vocabaret

AMBIGRAMS IN THE WILD

By T Campbell

Ambigrams are one of the railway stations where the world of words meets the world of art. In simple terms, an ambigram is a design of letters that can be read in more than one way.

In most of the best-known ambigrams, the multiple "readings" lead to the same result. If you look at these title designs right-side up, and then look at the "flipped" version of them below, you'll see the titles haven't changed at all. In other words, they have rotational symmetry.





These three ambigrams show three different approaches. The distortions in ***Angels and Demons***—designed by John Langdon, the originator of the modern form—have an ornate, calligraphic quality, recalling illuminated manuscripts. This matches the book's obsession with old church documents that might have secret meanings and alternative readings. There's an ambigram within the story, too.

In ***Princess Bride,*** the ornate, looping letters seem made of ivy, which is more appropriate to the film's rural heart. The DVD cover divides the lovers' two realities, one of idyllic innocence, one of epic adventure…but the reversible design sends the message that in the end, their essence and their love remain deep and unchanged.

The ***New X-Men*** title is close to a natural ambigram: if you turn the letters in "NEW X MEN" upside-down, they'll read something like N3W X M3N. So all designer Richard Starkings had to do in this case was simplify the "E's" and give it a more vertical, X-centric design than seen in standard comic-book logos, then and now. This advertised the creative intent behind the series: *This is still "X-Men," but it's not how you remember it.* Long-running comics titles need such self-reinventions now and then, just like pop stars.

All three of these properties exist both in print and onscreen, and all three of them are often marketed without ambigrams. It's not hard to see why. As beautiful and arresting as an ambigram can be, it's usually harder to read than its straightforwardly lettered counterpart. Often, designers will want to keep the typography simpler and put more focus on other elements.



But there are other cases where ambigram logos are *not* competing with any such images for attention, as in musical groups **(Aerosmith** and **ABBA**—which uses mirror symmetry instead of rotational symmetry), fashion **(New Man),** and Silicon Valley **(Sun** Microsystems, whose logo has *four-way* rotational symmetry). In those cases, the ambigrams get a lot more play.



Rounding out this "top ten," here's one more from music, following ABBA's example (for **N**ine **I**nch **N**ails), plus a rotational logo for the home-improvement marketplace **Handy**—and **OXO,** a cookware brand that has natural mirror *and* rotational symmetry.

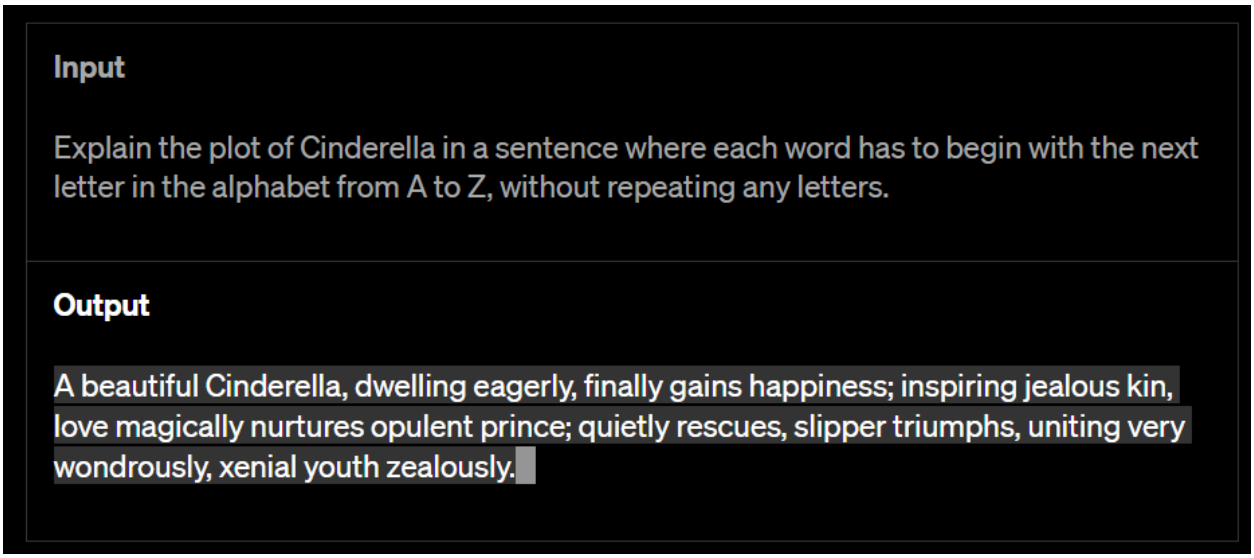


Ambigrams are a fun graphic exercise for the sheer beauty and interest of them. But these examples are notable as the ten I've encountered out in the world. Maybe you've seen others?

JOHN-HENRYING CHATGPT, PART TWO: CINDERELLA TEST RESULTS

T Campbell

As you may recall from the previous issue, GPT-4 introduced itself with the following wordplay exercise:



I challenged my friends and colleagues to see if they could do better and got a lot of promising efforts. I boiled the results down to eight that I thought were interesting and diverse, and asked my local library to help me poll their patrons to see which they thought was funniest and which they thought was best. GPT's version was hidden at #4, and no information about the authorship of any entry was given.

Here was the sheet as they saw it:

1. *A ball? Cinderella's desperate; enter Fairy Godmother. Heroine, in jubilation, knowing limit's midnight, nearly overstays. Prince's quest: revisiting slipper-wearers, trying until... victorious! Wedding's xenial, years zoom.*
2. *A basketball Cinderella dreams eternally for glory, heaving impossible jumpers, knowing longshots mostly never obtain precious quest, rather stressing teamwork, underdog vitality... Xavier yearns zenith!*
3. *A beautiful Cinderella dances. Earlier, fairy godmother helped impressively. Junior king loves mystery night outing. Plentiful questioning regarding shoes, toes. Ultimately, wonderful victory. Xylophone yellow zebra oh god I've had a stroke*
4. *A beautiful Cinderella, dwelling eagerly, finally gains happiness; inspiring jealous kin, love magically nurtures opulent prince; quietly rescues, slipper triumphs, uniting very wondrously, xenial youth zealously.*
5. *Abused beauty crashes dance. Enchantress facilitates gatecrash heist. In jazzy kicks, lady makes noble overtures princeward. Queenship readies search to uncover vixen's wearabouts, eXamining YeeZys.*

6. *Always, by Cinderella's decree, every fairy godmother had input jarringly kindling love; making no open prophecies/quaint resolutions, save to undermine veritably wasteful xanthic yellow zealots.*
7. *Angst burdened, Cinderella daintily emerged from galley's hellfire incessantly jig kicking, lightly moved, never ominous, perpetually quick regarding secret tales upon vested waifs xylomancing yesterday's zealots.*
8. *At brilliant cotillion, debutante employs fairy godmother's help, impeding jealous kin; love magically nabs opulent prince, quartz resembling slipper's timely use validating wondrously xenial youths' zeal.*

The results?

GPT-4 won "best" by one vote.

The winner of the *funniest* entry was #3, and combining votes for funniest and best results in a tie between #3 and #5. I'd say that aside from #2, these were the most subversive of the lot, and they might benefit slightly from being in a collection of similar entries, since they gently poke fun at the conventions the others are establishing. (#2 may have suffered from playing on the other meaning of "Cinderella story." A clever idea, but that second meaning may not be widely known.)

This is more of a win than I expected for GPT…but by no means conclusive. At 24 voters, the sample size was small, and a single vote's difference could have pushed the spotlight to #8, the second-place winner.

I've been conducting other studies of GPT from a wordplay perspective, and I intend to have a broader set of results alongside a version of this test with a bigger sample size, in the third issue.

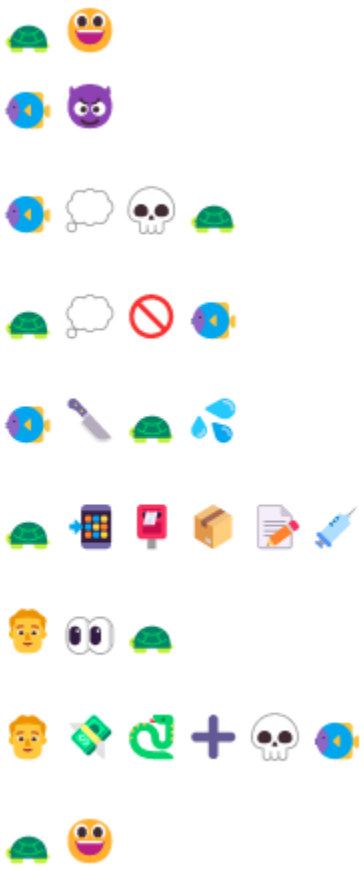
THE STATE OF EMOJI LITERATURE

T Campbell

Like a lipogram, an emoji story uses a different "alphabet" than the twenty-six letters we're used to. Some emoji stories use *only* emoji, exchanging one alphabet for another, arguably universal one. Some of them put emoji alongside traditional words, broadening the expressive possibilities of language by using every sign that an English-speaker can understand.

I love telling stories through pictures, so I'm excited by the possibilities here. But so far…I'd say those possibilities are still mostly untapped.

***The Book Written Entirely Out of Emoji*, by YarnStore,** is a good way to turn yourself off the whole concept. This 166-line construction—a little short even by novella standards—has a few arresting and interesting moments, but more often it just reads as incomprehensible nonsense.



Some of us had higher hopes for ***Emoji Dick, or*** 👊**, by Fred Bennenson.** This ambitious project used Amazon's Mechanical Turk and online voting to "find" matching emoji for each line of the original text of *Moby Dick.* The results are… underwhelming. The inclusion of that original text means one can read it smoothly, but I wracked my brain trying to connect its lines to their emoji accompaniments.



Some years ago--never mind how long precisely--having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me on shore, I thought I would sail about a little and see the watery part of the world.



It is a way I have of driving off the spleen and regulating the circulation.



Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off--then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can.



This is my substitute for pistol and ball.



With a philosophical flourish Cato throws himself upon his sword; I quietly take to the ship.



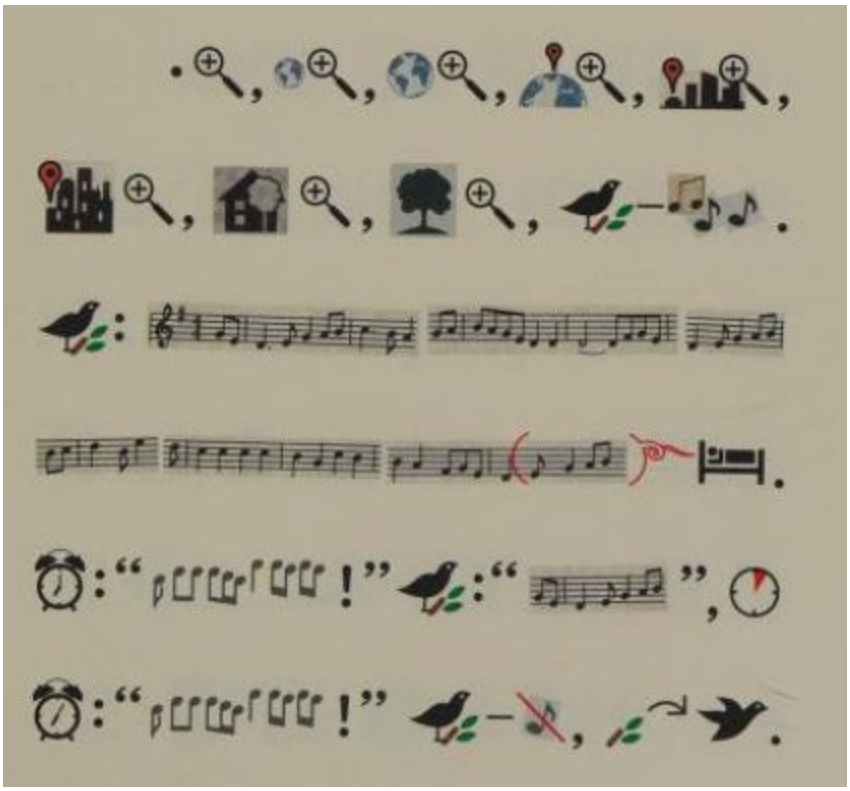
There is nothing surprising in this.

Some of the text's problems are due to age. It was produced in 2009, and emoji have come a long way since. (Queequeg could actually be Black now, as he couldn't then.) But even today's "vocabulary" is inadequate to the story: the closest emoji to a harpoon is a trident, and emoji whales have one default color, more often blue or gray than white. To do this right, you'd have to be willing to design new emoji for the task, not just use what's already available.

There have been other such emoji "translations," using the original text, using part of it, eschewing it altogether. Artist Joe Hale made a name for himself by translating the texts of *Alice in Wonderland, Peter Pan,* and *Pinocchio*. There's an Emoji Bible available on iBooks, from an author who uses the "sunglasses guy" emoji 😎 as a pseudonym. Some of these works do well as a sort of puzzle where you guess at each word the emoji signify. Some are aesthetically interesting…

But none of them engage the consciousness as something to *read* instead of just decoding and looking at. I don't think this means long-form emoji works are impossible, just that they're in a young phase. It took time for longer movies to come into their own and stop imitating stage plays. The same principle applies here. We need to figure out emoji's "native" powers of expression before we can tell *any* story with them, whether adapted or original.

Book from the Ground: From Point to Point **by Xu Bing** might point the way. Like *Ulysses, Book from the Ground* confines its scope to 24 hours; unlike *Ulysses*, this 24-hour period goes from 7 AM to 7 AM. Our protagonist wakes up, goes to work, goes on a date, worries about his love life and the state of the world, and has an uneasy sleep. Xu Bing freely mixes symbols from different systems, including corporate logos, to create an experience words alone can't offer.



I can’t say it’s *always* easy to interpret: I puzzled over some of the later pages’ specific incidents. But it is a rewarding new way of looking at the everyday world and everyday life. As qualifications for literature go, that’s an impressive hurdle to clear.

OVERLAPPING WORDS

ANIL
Perth, Australia

Chains of overlapping words make a common type of 'crossword' puzzle. They've been explored in *Word Ways* but not seeking pairs of synonyms. Here I present numerous examples—a survey of MW Pocket Dictionary's ABCQXYZ plus random others.

All pairs are unrelated etymologically. I exclude single-letter overlaps except for very short words. Several are from Jeff Grant, who has already presented a large sample to *Interim* following on from this delayed article.

SYNONYMS

aba**SH**ame
brown-nos**ING**ratiating
dogfi**SH**ark
abju**RE**nounce
bub**BLE**b
eat**ING**esting
abstinen**CE**libacy
build**ER**ector
enrollm**ENT**ry
acqua**INT**roduce
burd**EN**cumbrance
e**VIL**e
addition**AL**so
burni**SH**ine
exist**ENT**itative
admi**RE**spect
bu**SH**rub/bru**SH**rub
f**ACTUAL/ISATIONS**
aga**INST**ead
b**RIM**
gra**DE**gree
am**PLE**nty
cab**AL**liance
heret**IC**onoclast
car**GO**ods
impea**CH**arge
ann**EX**tension
amusem**ENT**ertainment

catar**RH**initis
incepti**ON**set
annihila**TE**rminate
caterpil**LAR**va
invent**OR**iginator
appe**AR**rive
catk**IN**florescence
-issi**MO**st
app**LAUDED**
censu**RE**buke
i**T**hing
ard**ENT**husiastic
certa**IN**dubitable/
certa**IN**disputable
jej**UNE**xperienced
ari**D**ry
chagr**IN**dignation
knowledgeab**LE**arned
arre**ST**op
cha**SE**ek
no**NE**gative
a**S**o
choo**SE**lect
o**F**rom
a**T**o/a**T**oward
chur**CH**apel
o**R**ather

au**BURN**t sienna
cl**AP**plaud
orientati**ON**boarding
au**GUR**u
cl**ASS**embly
parab**LES**sons
awa**RE**alised
clo**SE**al
prepa**RE**ady
b**AD**verse
coa**ST**rand
proven**ANCE**stry
bagga**GE**ar
co**IN**vent
pu**SH**ove
balla**ST**abiliser
coloni**SE**ttle
qua**SI**milar
b**E**xist
com**BAT**tle
re**ACH**ieve
befri**END**ear
com**ING**oing
readab**LE**gible
beg**IN**itiate
confiden**CE**rtainty
resolu**TE**nacious

bi**G**reat/bi**G**iant
conta**IN**clude
se**ES**pies
blea**CH**lorine
conte**ST**ruggle
st**OVE**n
bon**ER**ror
coquet**TE**ase
thru**ST**ab
boo**ST**imulus
c**OVER**lay
to**TAL**ly
b**OUT**break
creat**OR**iginator
tra**IN**struct
bra**IN**telligence
cunn**ING**enious
umpi**RE**feree
br**ASS**ertiveness
cu**RE**medy
undo**NE**gated
brea**CH**asm
deodor**ANT**iperspirant
vindicti**VE**ngeful

SELFIES

Jeff and I found a triple overlap or better selfie for every initial letter. All are Scrabble words, as with the whole above list, unless a source is cited. Tautonyms (MEME, TESTES) are also selfies.

ANTidepressANT
JHAnJHA†
SINGulariSING
BEDauBED
KINGmaKING (OED online)
TORmenTOR
CALendriCAL
LETterLET (OED)

UNDERgroUNDER
DERiDER
MICrocosMIC
VERSeloVERS (Net quotes)
ENTertainmENT
NICotiNIC
WODeWOD††
FELaFEL (=falafel)

OVERcOVER
XERoXER (Wiktionary)
GALanGAL (=galingale)
PHYsiograPHY
YESterdaYES (OED quote)
HOTsHOT
QUEenesQUE (OED online)
ZERoiZER (Net)

IONisatION REDeliveRED

† the ‘clashing’ cymbals of India. (*Musical Instruments: A Comprehensive Dictionary*, S Marcuse, 1975)
†† widowhood (Middle English Dictionary)

ANIMALS with two names that overlap (excluding total overlaps like *Gorilla gorilla*):

be***AR****ctos* (brown bear, *Ursus arctos*)
MUS*culus* (mouse, *Mus musculus*)
BEEtle (bee beetle, *Trichodes apiarius*)
PAN*iscus* (bonobo, *Pan paniscus*)
*Euder**MA**culatum* (spotted bat)
*Tenr**EC**audatus* (tailless tenrec shrew)

ANTONYMS:
ap**ART**iculated custo**MER**chant usel**ESS**ential bo**UND**one o**N**eath

Several strong COGNATES, some arguably synonyms:

a**GER**ontic
bi**AS**sumption
g**O**n!
a**IL**l
borr**OW**e
p**UP**start
a**M**e
bo**SH**it
sha**PER**iphery
Arct**IC**y/
Arct**IC**eland
brea**ST**ernum
che**ST**ernum
shellfi**SH**rimp
b**AN**ti
buc**KET**tle
s**I**s
b**AT**tack/be**AT**tack
climate ch**ANGE**r!
st**IR**ritate
bea**RING**
compl**EX**acting
besi**DES**pite
free**ZE**ro 0ºC
xenopho**BIA**s
w**AR**my (synonym: w**AR**med conflict)
and last but least…ya**HOO**n

Forsaking synonymy, some GEOGRAPHY overlaps:

Pat Grant suggested Gisbor**NE**w Zealand.

Jeff and I found several of them to add to hers:

Alba**NY**
Lub**ANGO**la
Siedlisz**CZE**chia
Awq**AF**ghanistan
Orme**AU**stralia
Teyv**AZ**erbaijan
Coch**IN**dia
Ousd**EN**gland
Tope**KA**nsas
Glanm**IRE**land
Salo**BRA**zil
Tripo**LI**bya
Ha**DJI**bouti
Shpatm**AL**bania

Jeff used a search program and determined that the following countries have no overlaps: Sweden, Switzerland, Bhutan, Wales. (But Sweden does overlap with a good neighbour: Swe**DEN**mark. The others also overlap other countries, but not neighbours: Switzerl**AND**orra, Bhu**TAN**zania, Wa**LES**otho.) Meanwhile Jeff extended the search for places in countries and published an exhaustive list of “Overlapping Place-Names” in *Interim* Vol 2, Issue 1, Feb 2022, including a couple of 6s—BanBANGLAdesh and YenbekshiKAZAKHstan!

Strings of overlapping words suggested a challenge to do a Mary’s Little Lamb parody composed of one continuous overlap. Here’s my first go at it, unavoidably awkward, and with far more single letter overlaps than in all the above. The overlapping letters are **bold**, with longer solid strings at the beginning before I got a bit tied to a chain, and desperate, and tired.

Mary’**S**mal**L**amb

M**ary, Aryan Yank, yanked kedgy gy**mnastica**l lamb; ambled; led ed**ucati**on onto (toward) Ward’s s**cho**ol. Old d**oy**en en**forc**ed ed**icts**, s**ay**ing ing**rate**y, “You, out!” The “he-he!” he**ar**d d**id d**amag**e e**gos **so of f**ai**r ra**m, “M**o**m” M**ary.

I learned a happy new word doing this. Kedgy (or cadgy), Scots dialect for cheerful and friendly.

SUPERCALIFRAGILISTICEXPIALIDOCIOUS

Darryl Francis
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darryl.francis@yahoo.co.uk

That's the 34-letter spelling entered as a main entry in the online version of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED). The same spelling also appears in my 1965 copy of the *Random House Dictionary of the English Language*. Both dictionaries essentially define the word as a nonsense word, originally used especially by children, and typically expressing excited approbation.

The OED notes several variant spellings of the word dating as far back as 1931 and explains that the Walt Disney film *Mary Poppins* in 1964 reinforced the spelling used in this article's title.

Let's ignore the variant spellings and just concentrate on the string of thirty-four letters at the top of the page. What games can we play with those thirty-four letters?

I wondered how few words would be needed to use up all thirty-four of the letters. I started off with this easy-to-nail-down six-word group:

super fragile socialistic aioli cud pix

Those short words suggest that a better solution, using five words, ought to be achievable by turning to slightly longer words. After some letter juggling, my first five-word solution was this:

artificial clips group idiocies sexual

But even this five-word solution suffers from a short average word length. Time to move up a gear, use some longer words, and generate a four-word solution. Here's my first go at a four-word grouping:

explicit fiasco plagiarise ridiculous

I'm sure that further letter juggling would throw up many additional four-word solutions. But rather than persisting with a search for further four-word solutions, let's jump straight to seeking out three-word solutions, recognizing the inevitability of obscure words necessary to conquer this feat. My first attempt at a three-word solution was a near miss:

pseudosacrilegious accipitral filix I

The OED defines **filix** as a group of plants including ferns; **accipitral** means sharp-eyed or hawklike; but there is the solitary letter **I** (the personal pronoun) left over. So, not really a three-word solution.

My next stab at a three-word solution was this:

superficialised occipitoaxial lurgis

Superficialised is the past tense of **superficialise** (to make superficial), an alternative spelling of the Z-containing **superficialize**. We've got a medical word with **occipitoaxial**, relating to the occiput and axis bones in the human body. But the final word **lurgis** presents us with a problem. The OED has **lurgi** as a

variant spelling of **lurgy**, a non-specific disease. Can **lurgi** be pluralised; and if so, is the spelling **lurgis** or **lurgies**? The OED makes no mention of a plural form.

Rather than sticking here with the dubious **lurgis**, I decided to push on to a problem-free three-word solution. I finally came up with:

superficialised axiological puristic

Just a couple of definitions needed here: **axiological** is the adjective relating to axiology, the theory of value; and **puristic** means characteristic of a purist or relating to purism.

There are probably other three-word solutions using the thirty-four letters. Feel free to send any solutions to the editor. But I defy anyone to generate a valid two-word solution!

A second challenge is to use all thirty-four of the letters to construct a meaningful sentence, regardless of how many words are used—the more natural the sentence sounds, the better. Let's see what's achievable. I found this particularly difficult—grammatically correct sentences can be created, but they seem stilted. Here are six attempts, though I have to say none is particularly meaningful, and all are certainly far from natural! Can you do better?

I get Alicia up for six delicious car lips.
Peculiar sugars fix political idiocies.
I fix supercritical suicidal apologies.
A facile pig spoils idiocratic luxuries.
I fix peculiar classical idiot groupies.
Social groups exile pitiful acidic airs.

If you can improve on these, please send your sentences to the editor at tcampbell1000@gmail.com.

LOST WORDPLAY WORKS

By T Campbell

When I was in college, taking a class in Greek mythology, I got a set of poems to read that I wish I'd held onto. I remember laughing at them in the cafeteria, heedless of any food stains I was getting onto the cheap, legal-sized Xerox paper.

They were delightful in their use of language, knowledge of mythology, and comical, poetic placement of words on the page, as if e.e. cummings were a classical scholar but also Robin Williams.

They were called ***Zeus in Therapy*** **by Douglass Parker.**

If you look for them today, you'll find promising-looking leads at first. Though Parker died in 2011, his website is still active, and a sub-page states "the sessions [of *Zeus in Therapy]* are available in eBook format as well as PDF." However, no link is provided, there or anywhere else.

More remarkably, the plays were adapted for the stage. The Tutto Theatre Company produced a limited run in 2013. But all my attempts to find them—including speaking to the play's producers and trying to contact Parker's family—have so far ended in failure. I'm trying a fresh lead at this writing but would appreciate any further help.

Zeus in Therapy is a modern "lost work," literature that we *know* existed once but can't produce today. There are other cases, some far older, that would be invaluable to the history of wordplay.

Magrites**, attributed to Homer by several sources,** was supposed to be as great a comedy as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were great epics. Aristotle himself said so. Not much is known about it except that the title character was such an utter buffoon that Greeks in real life would use his name to insult each other. "You walked to Sparta when you were trying to get to Athens?! You…you utter *Magrites!"*

A few quotations from *Magrites* survive in other classic works, including this great line in Plato: "He knew many things, but he knew them badly." Scholars are divided on whether Homer wrote the original, but the evidence is conclusive that someone did. And any work that influenced both Plato and Aristotle clearly left a big footprint.

Speaking of that footprint, ***On Words in Homer with Multiple Senses*** **by Longinus** might have been the first-ever wordplay study, one of a set of Longinus' many Homeric analyses.

Pamphilus of Alexandria wrote a 95-volume lexicon of obscure and foreign words, just the sort of thing every author needs to expand the range of their tricks with language.

There are lost **Shakespeare** pieces too. Or…we're fairly sure there are. The one most likely to have existed is ***Cardenio,*** a late play whose name suggests a connection with a story in *Don*

Quixote. There's also loose talk about ***Love's Labour's Won,*** a sequel to *Love's Labour's Lost,* although some think that title is just a renaming of one of Shakespeare's other comedies.

An earlier draft of this piece mentioned two lengthy palindromes, *Satire: Veritas* and *Dr. Awkward and Olson in Oslo,* which got some exposure on the *Journal*'s predecessor *Word Ways.* Michael Helsem has since helped me locate these pieces, and I'll offer a more extensive review of them some other time.

If you have knowledge of any of the other works mentioned here (especially *Zeus in Therapy),* you can send it to me at tcampbell1000@gmail.com.

MEAN SIDEWALKS

ANIL
Perth, Australia

Mean Sidewalks was my column in Word Ways and will continue here. It's a collection of side-walkings or asides. It covers any and all logology miscellanea.

• Narrowly, MEAN SIDEWALKS are double changes: MEANing *and* words diverge ("walk sideways" and jump around; usually without letter changes) in parallel; often simple swaps. They're word or syllable unit "anagrams" and frequently are word or syllable palindromes. Here is an example:

nightless = lightness

Here's an oldie which is an antonym:

unanswered questions ≠ unquestioned answers (altho they often coincide)

• Other Mean Sidewalks (M.S.) **ANTONYMS**:

ageless reason ≠ Reasonless Age (21st C.?)
Bill of Rights ≠ rights of bill
($ bill money power overriding the power of rights! Still, even BILLionaires start with one bill.)
brain trust ≠ Trust brain!
rack of lamb ≠ lack of ram Antonym if a he lamb. (Spoonerism)
rejection slip ≠ *Slip* rejection! (Slip as a verb, escape, bypass.)
trail blazer ≠ blaze trailer (Is vs. follows that light, and its trail.)
turn someone on ≠ turn on someone

• PUZZLE

Decipher these words by discovering the code. There's a couple of hints later. Answers after that.

best	bNnS	bSTrd	boy	CID
forge	LbSTER	mMs	N	pPyS
pRENTl	relY	RRy	sID	TTinBLE

• **Afterwards** is another ten-letter left half of keyboard word. I discovered it by the feeling of my right hand not being used.

• Elves make great Elvis imitators.

• Beauty is in the I of the beholder.

• WITHOUT DOUBT (in la la land)

I find out I find doubt a lout I could do without. DOwithoUBT!

• FOUR-RHYME DEFINITION

rheme = cream theme meme

The rheme is the "creamy" part of a sentence adding most new to the subject, usually related to the theme. None of these words are etymologically related.

• PUZZLE CLUE #1

I stumbled onto this idea by consistently confusing two keys.

• EX to X-RAYS!

Why do we still call them X-rays? X = the unknown. They're no longer "unknown" that other wavelengths, are they? They were named by and for ignorance. I call for a contest to re-name them. Send your entries to the North Pole where they will carry the most weight. Or to our substantial but lighter-weight editor. Here are my indecisions.

"**No longer unknown rays**" is too long. Something snappy, like
EX-rays or simply
XX-rays.
Might rays would rhyme with Light (visible) and Night (IR) and Outasight (cosmic).
Q-rays to honor the Curies. They made great discoveries because they were Curieous.
T-rays for Thanasi rays, just to keep it mysterious.
ZZZ-rays for sleep-inducing rays (like this rave?)

• A PREPOSTEROUS IDEA?

Supermarkets are preposterous. They put the cart before the horse (us)! Etymologically, preposterous means "before after" or "last first," cart in front. A pushcart was considered preposterous to our extinct language ancestors. One needed pull to cart things. Now trucks don't get the cart before the horse because there's no horse. Trucks pull, hence aren't preposterous, whatever you thought before.
Whereas supermarkets are *super* preposterous, no? They're making horses/asses of us customers!
And sorry, **logol**ogists, we must also admit that palindromes are preposterous!

But moan not, they are also anti-preposterous. They get the cart before the horse before the cart.

• PUZZLE CLUE #2

Still need help? Okay, here's one more example which should give the game away: overcME.

• TRIPLE ANAGRAM **lily livered** illy reviled

Separate anagrams of the two words combine into a third single cognate anagram of the phrase. (**Lily, deliver** this lost soul with flower power!)

• BOOK IN PROGRESS

Why I Am Not a Fish: A Position Paper
I was a fish once. Hundreds of millions of years ago. I hated it. There was no toilet paper!
I disclaim all ichthyological relevance to my true nature today. Claiming otherwise is flake news!

• PUZZLE ANSWER:

When I go to type an **a** I always hit the adjacent caps lock key by mistake. A second **a** in a word will unlock the caps key. Hence the words are:

best	bananas	bastard	boy	acid
forge	alabaster	mamas	an	papayas
parental	relay	array	said	attainable

The hint word is *overcame.* Other clues included the absence of A's in the puzzle, the word bSTrd, and the fact that the "red herring" words without an A contain no capitals.

COUNTRY DUOS

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No, we're not talking Brooks & Dunn, or Maddie & Tae, or the Judds, or any of the other numerous country music twosomes. Explanation coming…

In a couple of issues of *Word Ways* (August and November 2019), Jeff Grant and I presented transposals of numerous country names. As explained at the time, the names came with various caveats. We included the names of some countries which are disputed areas or are not recognized officially by the United Nations (such as Kosovo and Somaliland); we admitted multiple forms of the names for some countries (e.g., East Timor and Timor-Leste); and we admitted names which are no longer official names (e.g., Ceylon, Siam, Zaire). Here are just a few of the many examples we offered:

Algeria / regalia
Cameroon / coenamor
Cyprus / sprucy

England / endlang
Macedonia / daemoniac
Palestine / penalties

Country duos are about pairs of country names that can be anagrammed to give a dictionary word or term. For example, **China** and **Mali** can be anagrammed to give **chainmail**; another example, using an abbreviated form of a country name, **Cuba** and **USA** come together to form **aucubas**. Below are one hundred words, names, and terms, all findable in at least one of our regular printed dictionaries. Can you deconstruct each of these into the two countries involved? There's a cheat list a little further on so that you can see which countries have been used—this should help with the deconstructions.

amanous	**Russelia**	**Hereagain**	**remailing**
arachnid	**unrepair**	**ingrainer**	**Salisbury**
aumails	**unskewed**	**mailplane**	**sudaminal**
saurian	**upcheard**	**marimbula**	**sun-marked**
siruelas	**archaized**	**nail bones**	**uncapable**
Arianism	**Arianizer**	**ngaio tree**	**anaerobism**
gambusia	**Bangorian**	**palmature**	**aplanatism**
paenulas	**born-again**	**passional**	**battlewise**
palouser	**chagrined**	**paunchier**	**begroaning**
Plumeria	**desaurine**	**Prussians**	**burial-case**
poundals	**enamoring**	**regiminal**	**Calamintha**
reissuer	**handicaps**	**regionals**	**chalcedony**

charladies	**Russomania**	**Old Armenian**	**marchaundise**
Chilinidae	**undersweep**	**orange salad**	**silicoethane**
cholaemias	**unsalaried**	**railroad men**	**star begonia**
Dulanganes	**aortoclasia**	**Sanguisorba**	**aerogenically**
earlierise	**apicultures**	**saurischian**	**cosmonautical**
ergomanias	**bear-hunting**	**Sauromatian**	**German-Italian**
Gallomania	**coenamoring**	**Tamburlaine**	**peritrematous**
indagation	**Europeanist**	**unbreathing**	**bacteriostatic**
itcheoglan	**gubernation**	**unsatirical**	**iatromechanist**
Leucadians	**ladder chain**	**unswathable**	**renationalised**
martingale	**laminarised**	**autistically**	**Serengeti Plain**
patibulate	**masculation**	**half-inclined**	**theoreticalism**
Repaneling	**nonmailable**	**late-cruising**	**sea island cotton**

There are sixty-three different country names involved, so obviously some are used more than once. To help with the deconstructions, here is the cheat list of those sixty-three names:

Algeria Andorra Angola Argentina Austria Benin Bhutan Brunei Burma Ceylon Chad Chile China Costa Rica Croatia Cuba Denmark East Timor Eire England Estonia Finland Gabon Gambia Ghana Grenada Iceland India Iran Ireland Israel Italy Laos Lebanon Libya Mali Malta Monaco Nepal Niger Oman Palau Palestine Peru Poland Russia Samoa Scotland Serbia Siam Spain St Lucia Sudan Suriname Sweden Tibet Tonga UK US USA USSR Wales Zaire

TOTALLY AMAZING DYNAMIC APPROACH! (TA-DA!)

A 30th-Anniversary Tribute to *Acronymania*

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Lionel Bart (1930-1999) was a British musical-theater composer and lyricist, most famous for the 1960s stage and screen hit *Oliver!* The show is still frequently performed; a major revival was mounted here in New York City this past May.

Like some other talented people, Bart made a mess of his personal life, abusing alcohol and drugs, among other problems. Despite fame and financial success, at one point he declared bankruptcy.

Reminiscing about his downfall, an actress in the cast of one of his shows recalled a conversation with Joan Littlewood, a prominent director: "'With him, it's typical. It's all that L.S.D.' And I said: 'Oh, Joan, don't say that. We're all in this for the money.'"

This exchange proves yet again the dangers—and humorous potential—of ambiguous abbreviations. (If you don't get the point, see the note at end.)

This year marks the 30th anniversary of my book, *Acronymania* (Dell, 1993). It summarized the long history of abbreviations, dating from the origins of the alphabet; explained the rules for coining and deploying them correctly; cited numerous examples from various fields and other languages; and debunked mythical acronymic etymologies.

Therein, I noted a frequent error that persists to this day: calling every abbreviation an acronym. Abbreviations that are pronounced letter by letter (**C.P.R**, **E.S.P, Q.E.D.**) are properly called *initialisms*. Only those pronounced as words (**AWOL**, **NIMBY**) are legitimately termed *acronyms*.

In the ensuing decades, abbreviations have experienced a renaissance because of the ubiquity of texting and email. A March 2023 article on buffer.com compiles 170 "social-media acronyms," both obscure and familiar, including **AFAIK** (**A**s **F**ar **A**s **I K**now), **FOMO** (**F**ear **O**f **M**issing **O**ut), **GOAT** (**G**reatest **O**f **A**ll **T**ime), and the useful **TL;DR** (**T**oo **L**ong; **D**idn't **R**ead).

Some critics are not pleased. Complaints abound that unfamiliar abbreviations can be ambiguous, opaque, and confusing, as demonstrated by the anecdote above. But exegeses are readily at hand via Google. Today, there are even online "acronym generators."

My favorite chapter of the book was devoted to facetious "redefinitions," whereby frustrated consumers and employees mock companies and other institutions. **Delta** becomes "**D**oesn't **E**ven **L**eave **T**he **A**irport." And **Ford** stands for "**F**ix **O**r **R**eplace **D**aily." This phenomenon brings acronyms squarely into the realm of wordplay.

And there's another fun side of the genre. In *Acronymania*, and a 2013 *Word Ways* article, I coined a few playful acronyms, such as **TOUSLE** (**T**ons **O**f **U**nread **S**tuff **L**ying **E**verywhere). Alas, they didn't enter the language. But that won't dissuade me from suggesting other whimsical candidates. Though allegedly original, Googling reveals that I was in some cases anticipated. After all, anyone can examine a phrase and discern the abbreviation, so independent multiple creations are inevitable. Here are my nominees:

- **F**rankly, **L**ife **I**s **T**oo **S**hort: **FLITS**
- **S**ome **M**ake **I**t **L**ook **E**asy: **SMILE**
- **W**alking **O**n **E**ggshells: **WOE**
- **B**y **O**rders **O**f **M**agnitude: **BOOM!**
- **G**o **A**long to **G**et **A**long: **GAGA**
- **A**ugh! **I**t's **N**ot **T**rue!: **AIN'T**
- **S**omething **I**'m **N**ot **S**eeing: **SINS**
- **B**etting **A**gainst **T**he **H**ouse: **BATH** (as in "taking a bath," suffering a major financial loss)
- "Are you **O**ne **O**f **U**s?": **O.O.U.** (appropriately pronounced, "Oh, Oh . . . You!")

But at least one of my suggestions *did* catch on. I probably, sort of, invented the now commonplace **I.C.Y.M.I.** (**I**n **C**ase **Y**ou **M**issed **I**t). The initialism was included in a 2004 memo accompanying hard-copy newspaper clippings I routinely sent to friends. No doubt coincidental, but according to the infallible internet, its first widespread use was in 2006. No credit for my pioneering creation, but perhaps I'll have better luck with these additional candidates, suitable for email and texting:

- **HI YA!: H**ere **I**s **Y**our **A**nswer
- **LOLIPOP**: **L**ink **O**f **L**ikely **I**nterest, **P**rofessional **O**r **P**ersonal
- **MATH**: **M**ore **A**nnoying **T**han **H**elpful
- **HEKY**: **H**ardly **E**ven **K**now **Y**ou (so why should I comply with your request?)
- **PAPER CUT**: **P**rohibiting **A**ll **P**ostal **E**nvelopes, **R**ejecting **C**umbersome **U**nsolicited **T**hings

And because the conventional epistolary salutation, as in "Dear Joe," has been universally eschewed, I suggest redefining **DEAR** to mean "**D**on't **E**xpect **A R**esponse."

Finally, one more pet peeve: interpreting **ASAP** or **A.S.A.P.** (acronym and initialism are equally acceptable) as "immediately, right away, now." Of course, it's short for "**A**s **S**oon **A**s **P**ossible." That could mean in an hour or week or year—or never! My hunch is that procrastinators and other obstructionists deploy the expression as a convenient excuse. A LinkedIn article reports that savvy managers deplore its use and insist on precise delivery timelines. The problems it creates likely explain why one sardonic redefinition is "**A**lways **S**ay **A P**rayer."

Explanation of the lead anecdote: L.S.D. = £ s.d., meaning "pounds, shillings, pence." Here's one exegesis that comes up via search: "They are abbreviations for the Latin words libra, solidus and denarius, or L.S.D. You could say 'How much is that in L.S.D.?'" A 1994 documentary on Lionel Bart's life and work is well worth watching. It's the source of the confounding conversation, at 40:43.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uuwICEQnq88

NEVER USE A PREPOSITION TO END A SENTENCE WITH

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In colleges and universities, students from time to time lead a cow upstairs and into an administrator's office. The prank is popular because while you can lead a cow upstairs, you can't lead it downstairs. I know a number of cows like this. They're the bogus usage rules that self-appointed grammarians herd into our national consciousness. It isn't long before we can't get them—the pundits and their rules—out.

One of the most hefty and intractable bovines is that of using a preposition to end a sentence. The rule banishing terminal prepositions from educated discourse was invented by the late-seventeenth-century British critic and poet John Dryden, who reasoned that *prepositio* in Latin means something that "comes before" and that prepositions in Latin never appear at the end of a sentence. Dryden even went so far as to re-edit his own works to remove the offending construction. A bevy of prescriptive grammarians have been preaching the dogma ever since.

Unfortunately, Dryden neglected to consider two crucial points. First, the rules of Latin don't always apply to English. There exist vast differences between the two languages in their manner of connecting verbs and prepositions. Latin is a language of cases, English a language of word order. In Latin, it is physically impossible for a preposition to appear at the end of a sentence. Second, the greatest writers in English, before and after the time of Dryden, have freely ended sentences with prepositions. Why? Because the construction is a natural and graceful part of our English idiom. Here are a few examples from the masters:

- Fly to others that we know not of —*William Shakespeare*
- We are such stuff/As dreams are made on. —*William Shakespeare*
- Houses are built to live in, not to look on. —*Francis Bacon*
- What a fine conformity would it starch us all into. —*John Milton*
- . . . soil good to be born on, good to live on, good to die for and to be buried in. —*James Russell Lowell*
- All words are pegs to hang ideas on. —*Henry Ward Beecher*

The final preposition is one of the glories of the English language. If we shackle its idioms and muffle its music with false rules, we diminish the power of our language. If we rewrite the quotations above to conform to Dryden's edict, the natural beauty of our prose and verse is forced to bow before a stiff mandarin code of structure.

"Fly to others of whom we know not"? "All words are pegs upon which to hang ideas"? Now the statements are artificial—people simply don't talk like that—and, in most cases, wordier.

The most widely circulated tale of the terminal preposition involves Sir Winston Churchill, one of the greatest of all English prose stylists. As the story goes, an officious editor had the audacity to "correct" a proof of Churchill's memoirs by revising a sentence that ended with the outlawed

preposition. Sir Winston hurled back at the editor a memorable rebuttal: “This is the sort of arrant pedantry up with which I will not put!”

A variation on this story concerns a newspaper columnist who responded snappily to the accusation that he was uncouthly violating the terminal preposition “rule”: “What do you take me for? A chap who doesn’t know how to make full use of all the easy variety the English language is capable of? Don’t you know that ending a sentence with a preposition is an idiom many famous writers are very fond of? They realize it’s a colloquialism a skillful writer can do a great deal with. Certainly, it’s a linguistic device you ought to read about.”

For the punster, there’s the setup joke about the prisoner who asks a female guard to marry him on the condition that she help him escape. This is a man attempting to use a proposition to end a sentence with.

Then there’s the one about the little boy who has just gone to bed when his father comes into the room carrying a book about Australia. Surprised, the boy asks: “What did you bring that book that I didn’t want to be read to out of from about Down Under up for?”

Now that’s a sentence out of which you can get a lot.

My favorite of all terminal preposition stories involves a boy attending public school and one attending private school who end up sitting next to each other in an airplane. To be friendly, the public schooler turns to the preppie and asks, “What school are you at?”

The private schooler looks down his aquiline nose at the public-school student and comments, “I happen to attend an institution at which we are taught to know better than to conclude sentences with prepositions.”

The boy at public school pauses for a moment and then says: “All right, then. What school are you at, dingbat?!”

In other versions of this joke, the last word is saltier than *dingbat*.

COMMENTS ON THE WORDLE ALGORITHM ARTICLE

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I was interested in the Journal's article "Finding Wordle Strategies Humans Can Master" from the previous issue.

Apart from not quite understanding some of the math—how did the tan function and π get into the formulas? —I was surprised that the best result achieved by the algorithm was around 87%. And that even with a reduced set of the NYT wordlist (down from 12,972 words to something smaller—but how many?) it could still achieve only 97%.

I started doing the NYT Wordle puzzle in early 2022 and did 365 of them, not all in one streak, as there were some days when I forgot (!) and other days when I didn't have my iPad with me. Even so, I managed 365 successful solutions—a 100% record. If I can do 100%, why can't an algorithm, with presumably better info available to it, achieve the same as me?

I always started with the same word, ADIEU. I wasn't bothered about the terminal U. I was simply trying to identify which vowels were in the target word. (I could have started with AUDIO and followed up with STREP, but never did.)

In 364 cases out of 365, my second choice was always SPORT. This takes care of checking for the remaining vowel O. The one exception to SPORT was when I got green-grey-green-green-grey in response to ADIEU, allowing me to go straight to the target word ALIEN. This was my only solution correctly achieved in two guesses.

For my third choice, sometimes I managed to make a correct guess of the target word, based on the results of my first two guesses. Frequently, I played LYNCH. This checked whether there was a Y (a sort of vowel) in the target word and ensured that all letters of the twelve commonest ETAOINSHRDLU had been used.

Fourth choice, there were many occasions when I was able to guess the target word at this stage. If not, my fourth choice was often BEFOG, which took care of using three as yet unused consonants.

Fifth choice, again, there were many occasions when I correctly chose the target word. If not, I occasionally used MIKVA, this one taking care of three more unused consonants.

Sixth choice, if I hadn't gotten the target word already, this is where I would unfailingly get it.

Here's my stats for the 365 plays:
1 guess - 0
2 guesses - 1

3 guesses - 51
4 guesses - 178
5 guesses - 108
6 guesses - 27

And here's a 2-streak update just to see if I could maintain my record—done with the NYT Wordle puzzles of May 29 and 30, 2023. So let's see how my 366th and 367th attempts went.

May 29 puzzle:
First word: ADIEU gets grey-grey-grey-yellow-yellow
Second word: SPORT gets yellow-grey-yellow-grey-grey

So I now know the target word has E U S and O in it, but none in the positions of my selected words. It was almost certainly going to be something ending in OUSE. Potential target words could be HOUSE, LOUSE and MOUSE. It couldn't be DOUSE, ROUSE, SOUSE, TOUSE and YOUSE as the initial letters in these had already come up grey or yellow. (Anyway, would DOUSE, SOUSE, TOUSE and YOUSE even be in the NYT list of allowable words? BOUSE is a valid Scrabble word, but almost certainly not in the NYT list.)

Third choice, I tried MULCH, as it allows me to check all three of H, L and M.

MULCH - green-yellow-grey-grey-grey
Fourth choice was MOUSE which gets green-green-green-green-green. Yes!

Even if I had tried my oft-used third choice of LYNCH, that would have checked out the H and L of HOUSE and LOUSE—with both results grey-grey-grey-grey-grey. So my fourth choice would still have been MOUSE—green-green-green-green-green.

May 30 puzzle:
First word: ADIEU gets grey-grey-grey-green-grey
Second word: SPORT gets grey-grey-grey-grey-grey
Third word: LYNCH gets yellow-grey-yellow-grey-grey

Okay, so I've got an E in the right place, no other different vowels, but there could be another E elsewhere. And the target word has an L and an N somewhere. I'm thinking the target word could be KNEEL or NEWEL. These are the only common words I can think of, but there are probably other words unlikely to be in the NYT list (ELMEN, ELVEN, NEBEL, NEVEL). So my fourth choice needs to check for a K and W, and maybe a second E. A good choice seems to be WEEKS. I know the target word won't be a plural, but WEEKS checks nicely for the presence of K and W, and a second E in position three.

Fourth word: WEEKS gets grey-yellow-green-yellow-grey

So I now know the target word has K, L and N, and two E's in positions 3 and 4. The target word is obviously KNEEL.

Fifth word: KNEEL gets green-green-green-green-green

Great!

So what does this mean?

For the time being, I would pit myself against the algorithm and be confident of matching or bettering it on all Wordle puzzles based on the NYT 12,972 wordlist. However, expand the NYT list to include substantially more words (say, to include all the 5-letter words in the unabridged Merriam-Webster dictionary, at unabridged.merriam-webster.com , including plurals and -S, -ED and -ING verb forms), then I suspect that the algorithm might well be more successful than me, simply because of (a) the algorithm's ability to process a lot more info than me, and (b) there would likely be many words in the expanded list that I wouldn't be familiar with.

ALPHAGRAMMATIC ISOGRAMS: 2-6 LETTERS

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Introduction

This is the second in a series of three articles about alphagrams of isograms. Definitions of the terms alphagram and isogram, and relevant background material, were in a previous *TJoW* article, "Alphagrammatic Isograms: 7 Letters," but I'll explain these terms again below. This current article explores aspects of alphagrams of isograms of length 2 to 6 letters. The third article will consider those of length 8 to 15 letters.

Quick Reminder

Isograms are words with no repeated letters. An alphagram is the ordering of the letters of a word alphabetically—for example, *AEGINR* is the alphagram of **EARING, GAINER**, **REGAIN, REGINA**, etc. To distinguish between alphagrams and isograms, I will italicize alphagrams (for example, *AEGINR*) and embolden isograms (for example, **REGAIN**). This article will explore some ideas around the alphagrams of isograms having 2 to 6 letters. So, off we go.

2-letter Isograms

There are 650 ways of selecting two different letters (that's 26 x 25). But selecting two letters (for example, FG and GF) will only result in a single alphagram *FG*. So, the number of alphagrams is only 325 (that's 650 divided by 2). The very first alphagram is *AB* and the very last is *YZ*. The midpoint of the 325 alphagrams is the 163rd one, which is *HQ*.

There are two real words which correspond to the alphagram *AB*—namely, **AB** and **BA**, both in W3, W2 and OED.

The midpoint alphagram is *HQ*, and while this is a familiar set of initials, regular dictionaries show it as an abbreviation. Which are the two real words lying nearest either side of the *HQ* alphagram? Coming before *HQ* is the alphagram *HO*, with corresponding real words **HO** and **OH**, both in W2, W3 and OED. And coming after *HQ* is the alphagram *HS*, with corresponding real words **HS** and **SH**. Readers familiar with W3 will be aware that it shows an S plural form for all twenty-six letters.

The last real-word alphagram varies, depending on the dictionary consulted. Some collegiate size dictionaries list the word **YU** (a type of jade), corresponding to *UY*. Further towards the final alphagram, the word **WY** (the letter Y) corresponds to the alphagram *WY*, and appears in W3, W2 and OED. But there is a genuine word, albeit obsolete, corresponding to the final alphagram *YZ*—it is **ZY**, which the OED lists as an early Middle English form of the definite article "the."

3-letter Isograms

Things become a bit more interesting when investigating alphagrams of three-letter isograms. There are 15,600 ways of selecting three different letters (=26 x 25 x 24), and these are represented by 2600 different alphagrams (=15,600 divided by 3 x 2). The first alphagram is *ABC*, and the last is *XYZ*. The midpoint of these 2600 alphagrams lies between positions 1300 (*FHS*) and 1301 (*FHT*).

The first alphagram *ABC* corresponds to the real words **CAB** and **BAC**. The former is a familiar word needing no definition, but the latter only appears in the OED (it's a shortened form of the casino game "baccarat," as well as a type of French boat) and in *Chambers Dictionary* (as a shortened form of "baccalaureate," a type of degree).

Which real words have alphagrams lying nearest to the two alphagrams adjacent to the midpoint? Coming a short way before *FHS* is *FHO*, from the real word **FOH** (an exclamation in both W3 and OED). And coming some way after *FHT* is *FIK*, corresponding to the word **KIF** (a term of approval, according to the OED; and a state of dreamy tranquility, according to W3).

One of the last alphagrams corresponding to a real word is *UWZ*, from the word **WUZ** (a colloquial form of "was," shown in the OED). But the very last alphagram *XYZ* corresponds to **ZYX** (a Middle English form of "six," according to the OED).

4-letter Isograms

Things become more interesting still when investigating alphagrams of four-letter isograms. There are 358,800 ways of selecting four different letters (=26 x 25 x 24 x 23), and these are represented by 14,950 different alphagrams (=358,800 divided by 4 x 3 x 2). The first alphagram is *ABCD*, and the last is *WXYZ*. The midpoint of these 14,950 alphagrams lies between positions 7475 (*DPQV*) and 7476 (*DPQW*).

Checking W3, the first real-word alphagram is *ABCH*, corresponding to **BACH** (a shortened form of "bachelor"). But the OED improves on this with *ABCE*, corresponding to **BACE** (a blow or drubbing).

Which real words have alphagrams lying nearest to the alphagram midpoint? I think that the nearest real-word alphagram coming before DPQV is *DOYZ*, which corresponds to **DOZY**. My first thought about the nearest real-word alphagram coming after *DPQW* was that it would be *DPSU*, which corresponds to **PUDS** (puddings) and **SPUD** (a potato). But once again, the OED improves on this by listing **DRUP** (an old spelling of "droop"), which has the alphagram *DPRU*.

One of the last alphagrams corresponding to a real word is *TUYZ*, from the word **YUTZ** (a foolish person, according to the collegiate-sized *Collins English Dictionary*). But closer to the very end of the alphagrams is *TXYZ*, corresponding to **ZYXT** (a Middle English form of the verb "see," according to the OED).

5-letter Isograms

Onwards and upwards to the alphagrams of 5-letter isograms. There are 7,893,600 ways of selecting five different letters (= 26 x 25 x 24 x 23 x 22), and these are represented by 65,780 different alphagrams (= 7,893,600 divided by 5 x 4 x 3 x 2). The very first alphagram is *ABCDE* and the last is *VWXYZ*. The midpoint of these 65,780 alphagrams lies between positions 32,890 (*DEJUY*) and 32,891 (*DEJUZ*).

The first alphagram corresponding to a real word is *ABCEH* (**BEACH**).

The two real-word alphagrams lying nearest before and after the midpoint are *DEJUX* (**JUDEX**, a judge, according to W3) and *DEKNO* (**KENDO**, a Japanese fencing sport using bamboo swords, according to W3 and OED). The former of these, *DEJUX*, is immediately adjacent to DEJUY, while the latter is quite some distance away from *DEJUZ*.

While the very last alphagram is *VWXYZ*, the nearest real-word alphagrams are a long way from this. A contender for being among the last real-word alphagrams is *RSTUY* (**RUSTY**). But the OED trumps this with *STXYZ* (**ZYXST**, an obsolete spelling of "sixth").

6-letter Isograms

Moving on to alphagrams of 6-letter isograms. There are 165,765,600 ways of selecting six different letters (= 26 x 25 x 24 x 23 x 22 x 21), and these are represented by 230,230 different alphagrams (= 165,765,000 divided by 6 x 5 x 4 x 3 x 2). The very first alphagram is *ABCDEF* and the last is *UVWXYZ*. The midpoint of these 230,230 alphagrams lies between positions 115,115 (*CGIPQV*) and 115,116 (*CGIPQW*).

The first real-word alphagram, lying only third in the list of alphagrams, is *ABCDEH* (**BACHED**, lived as a bachelor, according to W3 and OED).

Two real-word alphagrams lying closely before and after the midpoint are *CGIORS* (**CORGIS**) and *CHIKNS* (**CHINKS**). But quite a bit closer to the midpoint than *CHIKNS* is *CGIRSU* (**UGRICS**, members of the Ural-Altaic peoples, from the OED).

Probably the last of the real-word alphagrams is *PRSTUY* (**UPRYST**, an old form of "upriseth," itself an old form of the verb "uprise," according to *Chambers Dictionary*).

Summary

Numbers, alphagrams and words mentioned in this article and the earlier article (about 7-letter alphagrams and words) are summarized in the table below—but only those words findable in regular dictionaries.

Alphagrams of isograms						
Number of letters	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**
Number of n-letter sets	650	15,600	358,800	7,893,600	165,765,600	3,315,312,000
Number of alphagrams	325	2,600	14,950	65,780	230,230	657,800
Theoretical midpoint - position(s) & alphagram(s)	163 HQ	1,300 *FHS* 1,301 *FHT*	7,475 *DPQV* 7,476 *DPQW*	32,890 *DEJUY* 32,891 *DEJUZ*	115,115 *CGIPQV* 115,116 *CGIPQW*	328,900 *CDHNRUY* 328,901 *CDHNRUZ*
First word's alphagram	*AB*	*ABC*	*ABCE*	*ABCEH*	*ABCDEH*	*ABCDEHN*
First word(s)	**AB, BA**	**BAC, CAB**	**BACE**	**BEACH**	**BACHED**	**BANCHED**
Alphagram for nearest word before midpoint	*HO*	*FHO*	*DOYZ*	*DEJUX*	*CGIORS*	*CDHMORU*
Nearest word before midpoint	**HO, OH**	**FOH**	**DOZY**	**JUDEX**	**CORGIS**	**MURDOCH**
Alphagram for nearest word after midpoint	*HS*	*FIK*	*DPRU*	*DEKNO*	*CGIRSU*	*CDHORSU*
Nearest word after midpoint	**HS, SH**	**KIF**	**DRUP**	**KENDO**	**UGRICS**	**SCHROUD**
Last word's alphagram	*YZ*	*XYZ*	*TXYZ*	*STXYZ*	*PRSTUY*	*NORSTUY*
Last word	**ZY**	**ZYX**	**ZYXT**	**ZYXST**	**UPRYST**	**SUNTORY**

A further article describing work with the alphagrams for 8 to 15-letter words will appear later.

My thanks to Nina Warwick (of Peterborough, England) who did sterling work helping to identify the alphagrams for most of the different word lengths.

TOWARDS A BETTER PUN: WORD DECONSTRUCTION/RECONSTRUCTION, ESCHEWING IDIOMS, AVOIDING PUBLIC DOMAIN PUNS & OTHER INSIGHTS FROM THE FRONT LINES OF PERFORMANCE-LEVEL PUNNING

A potpourri of thoughts from a participant in the fun and thriving world of organized paronomasia

By Gregg Siegel
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Although remaining under the radar even for many life-long pun lovers, the concept of organized punning has existed for decades; the O. Henry Pun-Off World Championships, for example, a highly respected annual event, has been going strong since at least the late 1970s.

Indeed, there is a thriving community of performance-level punners participating in live and virtual events throughout the United States and abroad. In the post-COVID world, these events are usually hosted in comedy clubs and similar live venues, with new ones emerging all the time, as club owners note sell-out shows and highly enthusiastic audiences.

Although formats can and do vary—The PUNDERDOME® in New York City, for example, is often praised for its innovative, challenging and audience-engaging structure—many events follow the basic one-two punch long ago established by the pioneering O. Henry Pun-Off. The O. Henry divides its competition into two parts—"Punniest of Show," featuring two-minute pun soliloquies on a chosen topic, and "Pun Slingers," a more combative—although usually good-natured—event with two participants required to begin punning back and forth immediately upon presentation of a surprise, assigned topic category.

The soliloquy style is most often a painstakingly pre-written, well-rehearsed, very polished one-person monologue. The presenter picks their own pun category topic—or prompt in punner parlance—like Countries, or Elements, or Dogs, and makes puns on upwards of 40-60 words—called cues—in that category in the time limit, with the puns hung on some kind of a rant or loose story framework.

Slingers-type events are more improvisational; basically, it's "your topic is 'Hats'—Go!" Each participant must then, in a matter of 5-10 seconds or so, quickly think of a legitimate example of a word in the assigned category and immediately make a pun on it, taking turns doing so until time or ideas run out. "Boots, have you FED DORA," "I will not CAPitulate," "Check out my STATS SON," and "I knelt in some lentils and now I have BEAN KNEEs," would all be exquisite fare in this regard.

Since very belatedly discovering the concept in mid-2019, the author has been an enthusiastic participant in events of these types, and, although still a relative novice compared to many, has enjoyed performing in dozens of contests and shows both streaming and live. It is hoped that this modest collection of hard-won insights may be useful to punners coming up behind, including the "civilian" punner who wishes to raise the level of their output—and the response received therefrom.

A pun defined. Or not.

As is done in some manner in just about any pun competition or show, it's good practice to start out by presenting the definition of a pun, so all stakeholders, initially, are on the same page.

Most often proffered is the Merriam-Webster definition, "A pun is the usually humorous use of a word in such a way as to suggest two or more of its meanings or the meaning of another word similar in sound."

The Dictionary app built into many computers similarly defines a pun as "a joke exploiting the different possible meanings of a word or the fact that there are words which sound alike but have different meanings."

And, along the same lines, in their official literature, the O. Henry Pun-Off agrees that "A pun is the humorous use of a word or words in such a way as to suggest different meanings or applications OR words that have the same or nearly the same sound but different meanings. Just think homophones and you're most of the way there."

With so much similarity among definitions, it may be surprising to find that, when it comes to what one hears and what may be judged appropriate at pun shows and competitions, there seems to be no universally agreed upon definition, especially when things are moving quickly in a Slingers-type event. Indeed, after offering their definition above, the O. Henry Pun-Off organizers go on to admit "but honestly, even WE sometimes disagree on what is actually a pun. And we're good at this!" And that's true on both accounts. Listen to any episodes of their highly recommended podcast "Pun Intensive" and you'll hear plenty of insightful pun-related commentary. And plenty of pun-driven arguing.

With that in mind, by reading further you warrant that you accept that any of the insights expressed herein are to be understood as the opinions of the author, and in no way an "official" directive, as, certainly, there is no such thing. Nor are they incontrovertible rules; at best, they are helpful insights and guidelines. The reader may agree with my point of view, or they may not, and they may feel free to write their own damn article.

The punning continuum, from idiom fails to word swaps to full-on de/reconstruction

One of the first things that a freshly minted performance punner learns or realizes—often the hard way—when initially entering this world is that, to the general civilian public, idioms and similar word associations are very frequently misclassified as puns. Indeed, ask your Uncle Billy at the family barbeque to riff on his world famous "electricity puns" and you're likely to be treated to such fare as "I get a *charge* out of this event," "I'm getting tired, I need to replace my *battery*," and "I find it *shocking* that you asked me to do this."

In fact, as organizers of pun events from the first O. Henry Pun-Off on down frequently find themselves repeating again and again, *none* of these kinds of pronouncements are actually puns. Rather, they are related words used in a sentence within their expected meanings, often invoking pre-existing idiomatic phrases.

In contrast, and to illustrate, if Uncle Billy at the barbeque were to endeavor to make legitimate puns out of these same "electricity" words, he might say "I don't have any cash, will you take a charge card?," "Don't grab my burger from me, that's assault and battery," and "I used to have a big shock of red hair, just ask your mom." Further, if, so emboldened, he began getting all show-offy, he might also add "I don't know watt you're talking about" and "We are all boats against the current," and then begin to loudly meditate over his potato salad with a deep resounding "ohm." Go Uncle Billy!

Perhaps apparent to the reader, all these examples are true puns because they use the same word or pronunciation with a clearly different meaning or usage of the word. However, in my opinion, these word swapping efforts, while legit, do not yet reach the level of the true epitome of the punner's art, which we will get to in a moment.

The idea that idioms and similar expressions constitute puns seems to be so engrained in the zeitgeist that one sees the error made not only by civilians self-describing as "great punners," but even among many performance punners, eliciting knowing glances, sympathy but also a little frustration from more

seasoned peers. “We’re trying to spread the word, why is no one listening” is a common perspective, although most punners, certainly myself included, have all made the mistake early on to some degree.

A similar common point of contention in the pun world is the “word used in a sentence” as a pun. For example, if Sitcoms is the category, you’ll often hear someone say “You gotta have *Friends.”* And there’ll likely be a little titter of recognition from the audience. And if the judge reprimands the speaker, they may argue something like “one is a title with a capital F and one is the word with a lower case so they’re different usages and therefore it’s a pun.” Some judges will call BS, some won’t. Personally, I think it’s clear that it’s literally the word in both cases—friend, a person with whom one has a bond of mutual affection—and used the same way. This, in my opinion, is not a pun.

Note, however, that if the sitcom *Friends* were not about such confidantes and was instead about NYC-based, latte-drinking members of the Quaker faith, then it would in fact be a successful pun. And quite an interesting show.

But it’s not. So, when people try to sneak by with that kind of nonsense, I get so mad it sends me into a FRIENDSzy (frenzy). People who do that should give up punning and go into FRIENDSics (forensics). I could explain in more detail on a Zoom video conFRIENDS (conference).

You see the difference. There is, I believe, a clear elevation in the level of quality and sophistication in these examples. Many experienced punners would agree—as seemingly, would pun shows audiences, based on their relative reactions—that the most creative and impressive puns are those that display some element of actual multi-syllabic word deconstruction/reconstruction. That is, breaking up the syllables or appending them to something else before or after, rather than leaving the word intact, as in the Uncle Billy examples above.

One can liken this deconstruction/reconstruction to a diamond cutter carefully tap-tap-tapping at apparent seams in the raw material, strategically cleaving it so that when it splits apart the most beautiful result will emerge. Poking and prodding and splitting at the junctures of different sounds/syllables open up different possibilities, often as lovely as they are unanticipated, and sometimes, well, just garbage as the planes between two sounds offer up nothing immediately usable to the ear. However, the pun artist has opportunities unavailable to the diamond artist, with the chance to add syllables or sounds before and after once the word sounds are deconstructed, or squeeze the sounds of one word into another, as in many of the examples herein.

So, for illustrative purposes, let’s go ahead and move Uncle Billy along the punning evolution continuum. Looking at some of his electricity-related cues, rather than merely presenting a different use of the same whole words “current,” “battery” and “charge,” he might offer superior puns such as “I accept cash or currency,” “I have a maple in front of my house where a bunch of winged nocturnal mammals nest. It’s my bat tree,” and “Never burn your plants, don’t char geraniums.” All these puns make use of different contexts with actual de/reconstruction of the target word/cue.

In the soliloquy event, this phenomenon may rear its head by a presentation of the mere stringing together of names of sit-coms, “My American Dad is a real Family Guy with strong Family Ties,” none of which are puns. Similarly, I was challenged to write my first pun soliloquy on rock and roll bands in part because all the prior efforts I had seen in that category were of the “I’m in a Rush to take a Journey to Boston” variety. Again, an effort just using the words strung together in a sentence and not a pun to be seen. Feeding those same cues forcibly through the mind of a pun-savvy practitioner, however, we might see emerge a truly pun-rich sentence such as “BOSs, TONs of people like to go mountain climbing in RUSHia, but be careful that you don’t fall and hurt JOUR-NEY” (your knee).

One final clarification on all this—note that it is *not* the fact that a phrase is an idiom or expression that makes it not a pun, it is because idioms in the examples above suggest the use of the actual word rather than any alternative meeting. However, one could in fact make a pun out of an idiom just as they could any other phrase. For example, if the category were dogs or pets, and the cue were "bark," the offering "his bark is worse than his bite" should be disallowed because the word bark as used is literally the sound a dog makes and is not a pun. However, if the category were trees, the same "his bark is worse than his bite" WOULD be a pun because the bark is a different usage, twisting the definition of bark in the category to mean not the sound of a dog but the skin of a tree.

Coming full circle, to complete the illustration, a much better, higher level, deconstructed/reconstructed class of pun, good for either category, would be something like "This making up puns stuff is so hard; afterwards I am going to go take a nap in my BARKolounger."

Using accents to deconstruct

Adopting an accent—New Yorker or Bostonian or Southern or British for example—or similar excuse for a nonstandard pronunciation, can be a handy lubricant to help a punner squeeze one word into another. To wit: In the Countries category "Being a doctor can be a very rewarding KOREA." (Career). Or Alcohol—"It is very nice to BEER!" (Be here) Or perhaps, my friends, you could make the following work by adopting a broad Southern accent and manipulating the aforementioned cue in the Sitcom category above: "My HVAC system is full of chlorofluorocarbon refrigerant, that's right, FRE-ONS."

But pronunciations can also backfire. Once, on the UK Pun-Off, an online pun show, where I happened to be the only American onscreen, we were given the topic Spices. There were three other competitors and at my turn I went around the horn, pointed at each colleague in turn, and said, "So the winner of this round will be Bob or Sue or Jim or Gregg you know." Honestly, I thought that was so darn clever! But all I got was blank stares. Turns out that the way they pronounce that spice in England is or-eh-GANO. No "Gregg" sound in there at all, so big FAIL for me. However, looking on the bright side, I'm now ready if I'm ever on a streaming UK-based pun show and the category is American States. "What spices do you want on your pasta—how about some OREGONo?" I can't wait.

The "public domain" pun vs. the "never (rarely?) spoken before" pun

When I first got into performance-level punning, being thoroughly wowed by the skills of some of the more talented and experienced punners in the events, I quickly noted that there can and I believe should be a world of difference in response between puns that we hear somewhere, repeat and get a semi-pained smile from, as compared to ones you create yourself which may offer a new and welcome surprise to the listener.

Take for example, the States category. One will often hear a newer punner say something like "You are my MAIN(E) man." This is doubtless a legitimate pun, as it uses two different meanings (and spellings) of a word that both sound the same. Similarly, if the given category were Vegetables, offerings such as "please lettuce in" or "don't you carrot all?" are all clean and neat and fine puns—and they even manage a little bit of deconstruction/reconstruction, putting them arguably a step above of a "readymade" single word swap like "Main/Maine."

However, here is where all three of these may be said to fall short: they've all been said millions of times by millions of people, so everyone's heard them, and everyone knows that they were appropriated and not quick-wittedly created by the punner on the spot. Or, as the late great Gary Hallock, consummate punner and long-term producer of the O. Henry Pun-Off often said, "that's right out of *Boy's Life* magazine April 1952, page 23."

Doubtless, those type of "public domain" reiterations can be fun and have their place, and to be fair, clichés often become clichés because they were pretty good and worth remembering to begin with. But the laugh we might get from delivering them may be more one of recognition than one of honest comedic appreciation, and it could be argued that an opportunity to do better is lost. Indeed, on a pun stage, it is more than likely you'll notice a huge difference in the character of the laugh or audience reaction received in response to something new vs. something clearly borrowed.

There's a perspective to be gained by a comparison to regular jokes that one might make in the course of human interaction. Someone might say "I wasn't expecting that." And someone else might answer "No one expects the Spanish Inquisition." And everyone will laugh good-naturedly, but everyone realizes in those instances that the speaker is quoting, not creating.

Or take the perspective of the comedy stage for comparison. If one were to premeditatedly repeat an obviously "quoted" joke in a stand-up comedy stage context, it could be considered "stolen" or "hacky" material and lead to negative input from fellow comedians and audiences. Pun traditions are somewhat different, and, in fact, even if proffering multiple, public domain-type offerings one after the other, one could likely do fine moving forward in a Slingers-type event, where staying power, not quality—just say *something!*—is often the main goal.

However, many top tier punners will usually attempt—given the time and their presence of mind at that instant—to at least tap at the word and try to come up with something new or different or more original as possible. A good goal, not often achieved, is a pun featuring some group of words never before spoken.

Looking to earlier examples written for this article, has any sober person in recorded history ever before uttered the words "Never burn your plants, don't char geraniums?" While it's certainly not impossible, it is inarguable that this phrase has been said far fewer times than "please lettuce in," or "don't you carrot all." Equally inarguable is that it would likely get a better response from the audience and fellow punners alike.

So, looking at our public domain offerings above around "Maine," "Carrot" and "Lettuce," perhaps superior alternatives might be "I hope I can MAINE-tain a high level of pun quality today," "I know judo and CARROTay," and "Leave my generic cough medicine alone—LETTUCEin be" (tussin).

Indeed, if you want to hear an honest rolling laugh of appreciation from the audience—whether out in the venue seats or around the dinner table—concocting a more unusual and surprising pun is *de rigueur*. And at places like the PUNDERDOME, where you have some very well-vetted and highly sophisticated punners on stage, you can usually tell when they hear something new vs. the same old thing, and they will react accordingly with snaps or enthusiastic nods or other form of accolade. Honest appreciation by fellow punners, who might have even higher standards than the audience, is a great compliment too—and something to strive for.

And once you have that superior pun—and the knowledge and ability to create many others just like it—consider checking around your area for a nearby pun event. Or at least, so equipped, planning to give Uncle Billy a run for his money at the next family barbeque.

Next Time: **Anti-Punitism and the Dad Joke Phenomenon**

This article is dedicated to the late Gary Hallock, longtime producer of the O. Henry Pun-Off. We agreed on some of this, disagreed on some no doubt, but one thing we agreed on—along with most anybody else who ever met him—is that, at his best, he had one of the greatest ears for punning ever. Watching his mind work in pun events or just ordinary conversation was often an extraordinary and humbling experience. If he had written this article, it would have been far better and wittier. Rest in peace, my friend. I would add that he would have undoubtedly written "rest in piece" there, with no reason or apology. I miss him anyway.

FURTHER READING

By T Campbell

Here are the best recent publications outside our pages of interest to the wordplay-lover.

"Academic clickbait: articles with positively-framed titles, interesting phrasing, and no wordplay get more attention online." Gwilym Lockwood tests which pieces are getting shared via social media and other online outlets. In defiance of Lockwood's initial hypothesis, wordplay in titles *lowers* the likelihood that they will be shared, while positive framing and interesting phrasing boosts that likelihood (and question-phrasing makes no measurable difference).

Lockwood doesn't speculate why wordplay titles are an article-killer, but I'd guess that in the information-overload of social media, ambiguity gets overlooked or ignored, and wordplay is all about multiple, ambiguous meanings. Something to bear in mind!

"The JOKER Corpus: English-French Parallel Data for Multilingual Wordplay Recognition" discusses efforts to get natural-language processing to understand humor…in English and French. The JOKER Corpus is covering somewhat similar ground to Witscript, which was discussed in our first issue.

For the British Journal of Aesthetics, Robbie Kubala dissects "The Aesthetics of Crossword Puzzles," from the solving experience to the grid image to the pleasures of colloquial language.

"How accurate and predictive are judgments of solvability? Explorations in a two-phase anagram solving paradigm" looks at solvable anagrams versus unsolvable ones and finds we're somewhat good at predicting which are which,

"The hidden arrow in the FedEx logo: Do we really unconsciously 'see' it?" looks at a well-known use of negative space in design, playing on the natural qualities of a capital "E" and lowercase "x." It finds that we don't tend to "see" the FedEx arrow without prompting, but once we do, we can't unsee it and we're primed to see similar forms.

CARDINAL NUMBERS – The Answers

The First:
69 remains in the same position.

The Second:
onebillion
1000000000

The Third:
two billion, six billion, seven trillion, eight trillion, eleven trillion, twelve trillion, twenty trillion, thirty trillion, eighty trillion, ninety trillion. There are many further numbers like this, going into the quadrillions, quintillions, and larger still. For example:

ninetysixquintillion
96000000000000000000

FAMOUS PEOPLE – The Answers

Why these thirty? The name of each can be spelled out from the letters of *The Journal of Wordplay*. Sorry if you thought some of them were going to have articles appearing in the *Journal!* Which others, famous or maybe not so famous, could be added to the list?

COUNTRY DUOS - The 100 Answers

amanous	Oman	USA	cholaemias	Chile	Samoa
arachnid	Chad	Iran	Dulanganes	England	USA
aumails	Mali	USA	earlierise	Eire	Israel
saurian	Iran	USA	ergomanias	Niger	Samoa
siruelas	Israel	US	Gallomania	Angola	Mali
Arianism	Iran	Siam	indagation	India	Tonga
gambusia	Gambia	US	itcheoglan	Chile	Tonga
paenulas	Nepal	USA	Leucadians	Iceland	USA
palouser	Laos	Peru	martingale	Malta	Niger
Plumeria	Mali	Peru	patibulate	Palau	Tibet
poundals	Poland	US	repaneling	Nepal	Niger
reissuer	Eire	USSR	Russomania	Oman	Russia
Russelia	Israel	US	undersweep	Peru	Sweden
unrepair	Iran	Peru	unsalaried	Ireland	USA
unskewed	Sweden	UK	aortoclasia	Croatia	Laos
upcheard	Chad	Peru	apicultures	Peru	St Lucia
archaized	Chad	Zaire	bear-hunting	Bhutan	Niger
Arianizer	Iran	Zaire	coenamoring	Monaco	Niger
Bangorian	Gabon	Iran	Europeanist	Estonia	Peru
born-again	Gabon	Iran	gubernation	Brunei	Tonga
chagrined	Chad	Niger	ladder chain	Chad	Ireland
desaurine	Eire	Sudan	laminarised	Ireland	Siam
enamoring	Niger	Oman	masculation	Oman	St Lucia
handicaps	Chad	Spain	nonmailable	Lebanon	Mali
hereagain	Eire	Ghana	Old Armenian	Ireland	Oman
ingrainer	Iran	Niger	orange salad	Grenada	Laos
mailplane	Mali	Nepal	railroad man	Andorra	Mali
marimbula	Burma	Mali	Sanguisorba	Gabon	Russia
nail bones	Benin	Laos	saurischian	China	Russia
ngaio tree	Eire	Tonga	Sauromatian	Austria	Oman
palmature	Malta	Peru	Tamburlaine	Brunei	Malta
passional	Laos	Spain	unbreathing	Bhutan	Niger
paunchier	China	Peru	unsatirical	Iran	St Lucia
Prussians	Spain	USSR	unswathable	Bhutan	Wales
regiminal	Mali	Niger	autistically	Italy	St Lucia
regionals	Laos	Niger	half-inclined	Chile	Finland
remailing	Mali	Niger	late-cruising	Niger	St Lucia
Salisbury	Libya	USSR	marchaundise	Chad	Suriname
sudaminal	Mali	Sudan	silicoethane	Chile	Estonia
sun-marked	Denmark	US	star begonia	Serbia	Tonga
uncapable	Cuba	Nepal	aerogenically	Ceylon	Algeria
anaerobism	Oman	Serbia	cosmonautical	Monaco	St Lucia
aplanatism	Malta	Spain	German-Italian	Argentina	Mali
battlewise	Tibet	Wales	peritrematous	East Timor	Peru
begroaning	Gabon	Niger	bacteriostatic	Costa Rica	Tibet
burial-case	Cuba	Israel	iatromechanist	China	East Timor
Calamintha	China	Malta	renationalised	Estonia	Ireland
chalcedony	Ceylon	Chad	Serengeti Plain	Niger	Palestine
charladies	Chad	Israel	theoreticalism	Chile	East Timor
Chilinidae	Chile	India	sea island cotton	Estonia	Scotland

