

A LOGOLOGICAL COMMONPLACE BOOK

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Commonplace Book:

- A book in which "commonplaces" or passages important for reference are collected, usually under general heads; hence, a book in which one records passages or matters to be especially remembered or referred to, with or without arrangement (Oxford English Dictionary)
- A book of literary passages, cogent quotations, occasional thoughts, or other memorabilia (Webster's Third); a book containing memoranda of passages or events for reference (Webster's Second)
- A book in which noteworthy quotations, poems, comments, etc. are written (Random House Unabridged)
- A book in which memoranda or memorable passages or facts are recorded methodically (Funk & Wagnalls Unabridged)
- A note or memorandum book (Chambers Twentieth Century)

Commonplace books were more commonplace two or three centuries ago than they are now; the Oxford English Dictionary gives quotations from 1578 to 1839. They were kept by eminent personages in various walks of life -- the poet Burns, the historian Gibbon, the philosopher Berkeley. Commonplace books can be distinguished from diaries in two ways: they usually consist of selected quotations from various written sources, literary creations (such as poems), or philosophical observations rather than daily experiences; and they are ordinarily arranged under various headings rather than in the chronological order of discovery. Books with blank pages, recently offered for sale in many places, might be regarded as ideally suited for commonplace books, but a loose-leaf notebook, enabling one to reorganize headings and rearrange sections, is more practical.

Commonplace books can be readily adapted to logology. I know of at least two varieties: a collection of linguistic curiosities taken from various books, newspapers and magazines as they are read, and a collection of various types of words or phrases as they are encountered in reading, television or conversation. The former is maintained by Charlie Bostick of Ashton, Maryland, and Word Ways readers were exposed to a sample of his book in the February 1977 Kickshaws. The latter is maintained by John M. Meyer of Walton, New York, and it is the purpose of this article to describe his commonplace book in a little more detail as a variety possibly worth cultivating by others. When such a book is kept, each new word oddity can be immediately classed with its fellows, discovered days or years earlier, and a list of examples built up.

The following description of the contents of Meyer's two spiral-bound notebooks is more systematic than the original; as noted earlier, fixed binding cannot easily reflect changing emphases. Obviously, the classification reflects his logological interests, and should not be blindly followed by other would-be commonplacers.

The lists in Meyer's commonplace book are of varying degrees of comprehensiveness; many have apparently been copied from Word Ways articles or Dmitri Borgmann's Language on Vacation. His longest lists are those of charade phrases (50 pages), spoonergrams (45) and phonic charade phrases (21). However, to me his most remarkable achievement is the list of 173 pangrams; I have never before seen more than a few in any one reference. (Alas, this feat has recently been eclipsed by the computer, which has found 3300 pangrams using the Air Force tape of Webster's Second.)

I. Words in General

A. Words as Units

Visual Charades

Solid word: boathouse / boa tho use, Manhattan / man hat tan

Phrase: so lead vice / sole advice, in chest all / inches tall

One sentence: Tom is so nice to miss on ice

Two sentences: I, fearless, made a fist, Ed / if earless, Ma deaf is, Ted

Palindromic: top seven eve spot / tops even Eve's pot

Phonic charades

Solid word: sparkling / spar cling, it she / itchy, a door a bull / adorable

Phrase: no sow / knows how, seek answer / see cancer

Spoonergrams

Initial sound switch: check rap / wreck chap, ball smeared / small beard

Consonant switches: bossing / sobbing, gummy / muggy

Phonic tautonymic phrases: air fare, back pack, bigwig

Syllabic reversals: kingly / leaking, Dora / adore, loci / silo, delay / lady

Word chains: echo - chop - hope - open - pend - ends

B. Groups of Letters in Words

Seven letter words of form (3-letter word, letter, 3-letter word) using all possible middle letters:

bugAboo, catBoat, teaCher, . . . , endZone

Nine-letter analogue:

turnAbout, hairBrush, stagEhand

Palindromes

6-letter words: hallah, terret

5-letter in 6-letter words: Aegean, banana

Internal to word: pRETERite, tREKKER, recoGNIZING

Internal to phrase: aLSO SLOW, MILE LIMit

Words containing reversals:

reLATIVE - VITAL, riDICULed - LUCID, miSERABLE - BARES

Repeated bigrams, trigrams

Any position: tORpOR, seNTieNT, LOGoLOGy

Adjacent: ARARat, rINGING

Reversed: ENgiNE, foREfingER, deROgatORy

At ends: TORMentOR, UNDErgroUND

Alphatetically adjacent letters

In order, adjacent: gyMNOPlast, DEFT, HlJacking

Any order: ABDiCatE, DEIGHtFul, BrAZenLY, sOLeMN

Words with -ful endings

C. Letter Distributions in Words

Pair isograms: horseshoer, intestines, best bets

Pangrams: glyph coq zimbs vext junk dwarf, kings hex

fjord cwm zap vly qutb

II. Special Classes of Words

Words inside words

Birds in words: bitTERN, meadOWLark, miCROWave
(reversals: dinNERWare)

Animals in words: CATtle, leapFROG, puMICE
(reversals: batTABLE, dECIMate, TAC/KLE)

Places in words: toMAHAwk, baROMeTer, comPARISon
(reversals: avaILABLE, moistUREProof)

Given names in words: maverICK, BENDable, liMELight
(reversals: gENERal, enorMITY)

Opposites

Male-female: woMAN, feMALE, fATHER, LADy, sHE
HERman, HERbert, MANDy, aMANDa

Opposite words, identical bigrams, and vice versa:

minUS-plUS, THick-THin, eerIE-wEIRD, simILAr-ALiKe

Name play

Words into names: Norm-Al, Sal-Ted, Al-Kaline, Don-Ned

Reversals: weL-deR, trA-deR, deT-aileD

Phonetic: Polly-Ester, Rus-Ted

Phrases into names: loud and avid / Lou, Dan, David

Reversals: even older / Red, Lon, Eve

Phonetic: syndicate / Cindy, Kate; bested / Bess, Ted

Transpositions

Words to names: nail / Lina, hate / Thea, liven / Nevil

Names to names: Leila / Allie, Leon / Noel, Alice / Celia

Beheadable, curtailable: Joe-Jo, Elena-Lena

Transdeletions: Kelly-Kyle, LeRoy-Oley-Leo

Single-letter Change: Hilda-Hulda, Barry-Harry-Larry

Letter homophones: ME-Emmy, LC-Elsie, LN-Ellen

Tautonyms: Fay Wray, Mark Clark, Phil Hill, Larry Sherry

Name chains: Elton John Dean Martin, Patti Duke Snyder

Spoonergrams: job back / Bob, Jack; Fulbright / bull fright

Palindromic: Bob, Hannah, Ava, Eve