

DIAGONAL REVERSIBLE WORD SQUARES

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In the preceding Word Ways article, the editor defined and gave examples of various types of reversible word squares. An interesting and more complex variation of the reversible word square occurs when the main diagonals also form words which can be read from either the top or the base of the square. This adds a further four words to the totals possible in conventional reversible squares. For example, the square on the right contains sixteen different three-letter words -- three vertically down, three vertically up, three left to right, three right to left, and four on the diagonals. All words can be found either in the Oxford English Dictionary or Webster's Second Edition (MAA, to bleat, and MEE, a Chinese dish popular in Malaysia, are found in the Oxford's H-N Supplement). Several more 3x3 examples of diagonal reversible word squares are shown in "A Survey of Small Squares" by Maxey Brooke in the May 1975 Word Ways.

T O M
R A E
A T E

All twenty words in the 4x4 diagonal reversible word square on the right can be found in the OED, although some are a bit difficult to track down. EARO is an archaic plural of 'ear', ORAE is the plural of 'ora', a measure of weight, shown in a 1707 quotation, and SERG is an early form of 'serge'.

G O L S
E R I A
R A E P
D E N S

The two variant squares below are the culmination of my endeavours in the field of diagonal reversible word squares -- each contains twenty-four different five-letter words. Although these squares look remarkably similar they have only twelve words in common. Many of the terms used are difficult to locate, so here is a full list of definitions. All are taken from the OED unless otherwise stated.

S A R E S
E L E M I
E L E E R
L E S E O
S N E R P

S A R E S
E L E M I
A L I E N
L E S E O
S N E R P

alien	strange, foreign
allen	variant of 'old-land' (English Dialect Dictionary)
ele'er	just now, lately (English Dialect Dictionary)
elemi	a type of stimulant resin

- emeer variant of 'emir'
- eseer comparative form of 'esee', a 14th-16th cent. spelling of 'easy'
- esier an early form of 'easier', shown in a 1488-89 quotation under the adjective 'easy' in the Oxford
- i-mele to speak, say
- leseō 15th-cent. spelling of 'leasow', pasture or meadow land
- Nelia variant of the feminine given name Cornelia, given in What to Name the Baby, by Evelyn Wells
- Nella another feminine given name in the above book
- Oesel an island in the East Baltic Sea (Webster's New Geographical Dictionary)
- peels strips
- peils 16th-18th cent. spelling of 'peels' (verb)
- ponis 14th cent. spelling of 'punish'
- poris an early plural of 'pore', given in a 1501 quotation in the OED
- prens plural of 'pren', an early form of 'preen', a pin or brooch
- reele an early spelling of 'reel'
- reeme an early spelling of 'realm', 'ream' and 'rime'
- reese to become rancid
- reise a journey
- sares Scottish variant of 'sores'
- seals types of aquatic mammal
- seels prevents from seeing, makes blind
- seems appears
- seims an early Scottish form of 'seems'
- seras early form of 'serais'
- Sinop a province in Northern Turkey (Webster's New Geographical Dictionary)
- sirop a syrup of concentrated fruit juice, sugar and water (Webster's Third Edition)
- slaes Northern and Scottish variant of 'sloes'
- sleep repose, slumber
- slees dialectic form of 'sloes'
- sliep dialectic form of 'slip' (English Dialect Dictionary)
- smees smews
- smies plural of 'smy', a small fish
- snerp to shrink or shrivel (English Dialect Dictionary)