SHIFTING VOWELS & CONSONANTS INDEPENDENTLY

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A basic shift sees the letters of a word shifted along the alphabet \( n \) steps, looping from Z to A, to make another word. Today, however, the alphabet, as we recognise it, no longer exists. The 5 major vowels have opted out of that all-embracing 26-letter series to set up an alphabet of their own, predictably christened the ‘vowel alphabet’, AEIOU. The consonants, taken off-guard, are at a loss for words. The letter Y, never quite sure of where its loyalty lies but a believer in safety in numbers, stays with the consonants. So, we start shifting with the 5-letter vowel alphabet AEIOU and the 21-letter consonant alphabet BCDFGHJKLMNPQRSTVWXYZ.

In the vowel alphabet, the letter A shifts 1 step to E (not the usual B), 2 steps to I (not C), 3 steps to O (not D), and 4 steps to U (not E). And that is all, because a 5 step shift would bring A back to itself. Similarly, each of the other 4 vowels can shift a maximum of 4 steps. It follows that each of the 21 consonants is limited to a maximum 4-step shift. The vowels, it seems, have made a point! In the consonant alphabet, D shifts 1 step to F (not E), H to J (not I), N to P (not O), T to V (not U) and, by looping, Z to B (not A). The letter D shifts 2 steps to G (not F), 3 steps to H (not G), 4 steps to J (not H)... and so on.

Let us take a look at a selection of the resulting shifts.

Words can be found in the Oxford English Dictionary, Second Edition, unless stated otherwise. Locations, identified by country, are taken from The United States Board On Geographic Names.

1 STEP SHIFTS

4 letters
GINA - HOPE     ACES - EDIT     DORA - FUSE     NEAR - PIES     MAIM - NEON

5 letters
SISAL - TOTEM     CAMEL - DENIM     TAMIL - VENOM     DEWAR - FIXES     LEMUR - MINAS
C A G E R S - D E H I S T     B U R S A R - C A S T E S

2 STEP SHIFTS

4 letters
J E S U - L O V E     S U R E - V E T O     C O I L - F A U N     P E R U - R O T E     C O A L - F A I N
L E A P - N O I R     R E D O - T O G A     K I E L - M U O N     S A L E - V I N O     T A L E - W I N O

5 letters
M O P P E R - P A R R O T     M A L L O W - P I N N A Y

3 STEP SHIFTS

4 letters

5 letters
H E R R O N - L U V V E R S A L L O N - W O P P E R

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