THE BIG CHALLENGE

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In the November 1974 Kickshaws, we challenged Word Ways readers to select ten different letters from the alphabet so as to maximize the number of five-five letter-splits that could be anagrammed into words. We were careful not to specify rigid rules—we dislike the Procrustean nature of most puzzle contests with cash awards, and we think that anyone willing to tackle this arduous research ought to have the privilege of determining xes own acceptable and unacceptable words. In the February Kickshaws, we suggested a simple weighting scheme designed to force readers to use common words whenever possible, and lightheartedly proposed a fictitious 12-volume set of logical goodies as a prize to the compiler of the best list.

At first, interest in this challenge lagged. Faith Eckler, using the letters in INTERPOSAL, managed (with the aid of some finishing touches by Dmitri Borgmann) to score 689 points on 101 completed pairs (out of a possible 126 letter-splits).

In order to receive credit for a higher score without improving that of another competitor’s prior entry, Dmitri Borgmann used the letters of LORANDITES to score 744 points on 105 completed pairs:

ADEIL ideal* snort*
ADEIN Edina* strol
ADEIO
ADEIR aired* (lonts)
ADEIS aside*
ADEIT snorl
ADELN laden* riots*
ADELO adeloo snirt
ADELR alder* Sinto
ADELS deals* nitro*
ADELT delta* irons*
ADENO anode* slirt
ADENR redan toils*
ADENS sedan* litro
ADENT anted* rolls*
ADEO adore* lints*
ADEOS oades
ADEOT oated snirl
ADERS Nilot reads*
ADERT lions* trade*
ADEST dates* (lorin)

ADILN Ladin store*
ADILQ aloid stern*
ADILR laird* stone*
ADILS dials* tenor*
ADILT tidial* snore*
ADINQ adion
ADINR drain* stole*
ADINT daint loser*
ADIOS adios* lernt
ADIQ adion
ADIQN adion
ADILN laden* riots*
ADINR drain* stole*
ADINT daint loser*
ADIOS adios* lernt
ADILN laden* riots*
ADINR drain* stole*
ADINT daint loser*
ADIOS adios* lernt

ADLOT dotal rinse*
ADLS adion
ADLR latid noise*
ADLS dials* tenor*
ADLQ adion
ADLQN adion
ADLOT dotal rinse*
David S. Robinson of Los Angeles chose the same letter set as Dmitri Borgmann, scoring a very creditable 728 points on 103 completed pairs. It is worth noting that he discovered word-improvements totaling 22 points in Dmitri’s list, which would have raised it to 766 points on 108 completed pairs:

- snort 1 (pI. of snort) dieto- 1
- chan torsis 1 (surname) tedia 2 (+3)
- instr. 1 (pI. of instr.) slert 1 (+3)
- reach stion 1 (in Webster) darts 1 (+4)
- chase nitro 1 (in Webster) donas 1 (in MWPD, pI. of dona)
- cea 1 (pI. of cea) tardo 1 (+3)
- ace 1 (pI. of ace)列入* toads 1 (+3)
- alien 1 (pI. of alien) alien 1 (pI. of alien)
Since these two logomasters have chosen to interpret the loosely-stated rules in somewhat different ways, it is difficult to say which of these solutions is "best". Tom Pulliam was very strict in one respect, not allowing words on his list unless they appeared in boldface type in the dictionaries involved; on the other hand, he allowed abbreviations (arith., SEATO, instr.), multiword entries (hie on) and words from multiword phrases (rosha grass). Dmitri Borgmann allowed plurals of words in the MWPD (aeons, Lents, riots) or comparatives (older) to count as Pocket Dictionary words, worth 4 points each; however, he did not use abbreviations or multiword phrases. Both used gazetteer words (Edina, Coire). Few words in either list fall outside the Websterian dictionaries and only one non-dictionary word was used (trinc, from Rabelais).

In any event, the question of the most fecund set of ten letters remains an open one. It is rather likely that several different letter-sets are so close to each other in performance that the answer will depend upon the exact set of rules involved.