

THE MIDDLE OF AN ALPHABETIC LIST

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What's the middle of the alphabet? It's HA to a cryptic crossword aficionado, and M or N by strict counting. But what if you look in the middle of a reference book? The answer depends a lot on which book you choose. Here are fifty samples:

Eaton/National Union Catalogue Supplement
 ground/Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary
 Jahrbuch/Boston Public Library current serials
 Jeshurun/street names in Boston
 Just/Birmingham (England) white pages
 Keeley/Manchester (England) white pages
 Kirkpatrick/ Canberra (Australia) white pages
 Knoop/Indianapolis white pages
 Kohler/N12 biographical section
 Kolikof/Boston white pages
 Krea/North Suburban Boston white pages
 Kriensky/South Suburban Boston white pages
 Kurn/Scrabble rating list
 Kwietniewski/Baseball Encyclopedia, player register
 Labella/Melbourne (Australia) white pages
 Lacey/Los Angeles white pages
 lament/Pulliam and Grundman Crossword Dictionary
 lancer/Webster's Dictionary (1860)
 Landers/US Chess Federation rating list
 Laskey/West Suburban Boston white pages
 Lawson/Art of Computer Programming (Vol.1 index)
 lawyers/Boston yellow pages
 lefthand/American Heritage Dictionary
 legman/N12 addenda section
 Leon/N12 geographical section
 Leonard/Milwaukee white pages
 Levi/Funk and Wagnalls Dictionary (1959)
 liberalism/Roget's Thesaurus index
 light-adapted/N13 addenda section
 line/Blakiston's Medical Dictionary
 linear.../Art of Computer Programming (Vol.2 index)
 lissom-like/National Puzzlers' League puzzle corpus, by type
 list insertion/Art of Computer Programming (Vol.3 index)
 little finger/Swanfeldt's Crossword Dictionary
 livelihood/American Heritage Dictionary (second edition)
 livelong/Webster's Vest-Pocket Dictionary
 Loi/National Union Catalogue (1979)
 Loma/Rand McNally World Atlas (1963) index

lombrosian/N13
 love/Bartlett's Familiar Quotations
 Lowe/National Union Catalogue of pre-1956 imprints (685 vols.)
 lunatic/Webster's 8th Collegiate
 maid/Langenscheid's English-German Dictionary
 Maine/World Almanac (1984) index
 mambo/Official Scrabble Players Dictionary
 mandrel/N12
 martial/Oxford American Dictionary
 mazarine/Mrs. Byrne's Dictionary
 merry/National Puzzlers' League puzzle corpus, by token
 nominal/Oxford English Dictionary

The first two entries on the list are supplements to major works. This is to be expected, because if additional material is discovered which is near the end of the alphabet, it will be in the original work, but if additional material is discovered near the beginning of the alphabet, the publication will have passed it by and it must be held over for the supplement. Similarly, the primary works to which these are supplements have a midpoint displaced toward the latter part of the alphabet, and therefore appear near the end of the above list.

Names seem to come earlier than dictionary words, especially in England and Australia. The white pages for the twenty largest US cities were examined (except San Antonio, which was not available); the first (Indianapolis), median (Los Angeles) and last (Milwaukee) are listed.

The National Puzzlers' League puzzle corpus consists of the words in 2,000 versified puzzles published in *The Enigma* from 1915 to 1983. These estimate the median word in English-language text with repetitions allowed (by token) and with repetitions not allowed (by type). It would be interesting to know what the corresponding words are in Kucera and Francis' million-word corpus of English-language text; from the Alphabetical List, a rough estimate of the median word (by type) is **leaving**.

Editor's Note: The Eckler-Ackler-Ackley Genealogy, privately published by the editor in 1970, is arranged by first names of people born with the name of Eckler, from Abram to Zula. The name on the median page is Isabel, earlier than any entry on the above list except for the two supplements. This extreme bias is explained by the fact that many early Ecklers were named Henry (or Harry), and the corresponding biographies take up a disproportionate amount of space.