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)
- list/insertion/Art of Computer Programming (Vol.3 index)
- littlefinger/Swanfeldt’s Crossword Dictionary
- livelihood/American Heritage Dictionary (second edition)
- livelylong/Webster’s Vest-Pocket Dictionary
- Loi/National Union Catalogue (1979)
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.