

MY STRUGGLE WITH A TEN-SQUARE

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The genesis of the work described herein was a conversation with Murray Pearce ('Merlin', in the National Puzzlers' League) at the Charlottesville convention in July 1987. We agreed on collaborative efforts to construct a nine-square, something no NPL member had done for a number of years. The first results appeared in the December 1987 issue of the Enigma: a nine-square by him based on STEERLESS, and one by me on TERSENESS.

The sine qua non of constructing large squares is access to word lists which have all entries arranged in reverse alphabetical order. Many years ago, I acquired one such list from Rufus T. Strohm ('Arty Ess'). I acquired a second through a trade with Murray Pearce. Joseph Adamski ('Mercury') sent me eleven computer disks containing all the entries in Webster's Second International (NI2). This listing was in normal alphabetic order; Eric Albert ('Eric') made a major contribution by re-sorting into reverse order the nine-letter words in the list, as well as those seven-letter and eight-letter words which became nine letters long when pluralized.

At least four extensive lists of nine-letter words were compiled by members of the NPL during the first half of the century. The following summary will perhaps give present-day logologists an inkling of the dedication old-timer formists had for their avocation. The information has been gathered from old Enigmas and a number of surviving lists in the possession of various NPL members:

Original 9-List (1908), based on 43 dictionaries and gazetteers, compiled over a 4-year period by 'Mentor', 'Arty Ess', 'Dan D. Lyon', and 'Majolica'. In two volumes of 412 and 472 pages, with 4 60-word columns to the page (in a 1934-35 transcription of the original by 'Wick O'Cincy'). 212,000 words.

First Supplement (1921), based on about 60 references including N11 and (probably) A-L of the OED, compiled by 'Dan D. Lyon' and 'Lateo'. In one volume of 340 pages, with 3 65-word columns to the page. 66,000 words. (This book is apparently the one mentioned in the October 1921 Enigma, although it there was stated to contain 90,000 words.)

Second Supplement (1934), based on 13 references including M-Z of the OED, compiled over a 2-year period by 'Lateo', 'Mytho', 'Sherlock Holmes', 'Ralph', 'Numero', and 'Arty Ess'. In one volume of 381 pages, with 4 84-word columns to the page. 119,000 words.

Third Supplement (1937), based on 47 references probably including N12, compiled by 'Arty Ess'. In one volume of 341 pages, with 5 58-word columns per page. 99,000 words.

These lists contain the astonishing total of almost half a million nine-letter words and phrases, but there may well be some duplication.

Unfortunately, no one has ever, to my knowledge, compiled a reverse-sorted ten-list. Nevertheless, remembering Jeff Grant's excellent article "Ars Magna: The Ten-Square" in the November 1985 issue of *Word Ways*, I decided to try my hand at the construction of a ten-square.

I can confirm what Jeff Grant said about Palmer Peterson ('Sherlock Holmes'). Peterson visited me in Scarsdale, New York ten or twelve years ago. I asked his opinion about the relative difficulty of word squares as size increased. He said, "A nine-square is ten times as hard as an eight-square." I took him to the next step. "And a ten-square is at least ten times as hard as a nine; I'm not sure one is possible." He felt that without ten-letter word lists, it was almost a waste of time working on a ten-square.

Waste of time or not, I started. My first quest was to find a base word with several letters enabling me to use my nine-lists. Trial and error led to the selection of SEEDSSEEDS; five of its first nine letters are D or S.

Three of the words (all from the OED) I tested for ninth place in the word square were:

S S	I S	E S
T E	N E	N E
R E	T E	T E
E D	E D	E D
N S	R S	R S
G S	E S	M S
T E	S E	E E
H E	S E	T E
E D	E D	E D
D S	D S	D S

Each has its flaws. In no case was I able to find satisfactory words for the seventh or eighth place. Next I tried words starting with A, and found ANTECELLED in the OED. Despite the relatively poor -AS ending for the first word in the square, I found:

S I A S	C I A S	T I A S
E N N E	E N N E	E N N E
R I T E	R I T E	R I T E
O M E D	U M E D	A M E D
T I C S	M I C S	T I C S
I T E S	I T E S	I T E S
N A L E	N A L E	C A L E
B L E	B L E	B L E
E D	E D	E D
S	S	S

Formist shorthand--to avoid repeating each letter twice--is used in the diagrams on the preceding page. For each word, follow the letters down a column, then across the row.

INAMICABLE, INIMICABLE, and INEVITABLE are possible alternates for INIMITABLE. The word in seventh place presents a problem. English words ending in -AL are fairly common; those ending in -ALE are not common. They are, however, fairly common in French and Italian. I decided to use the -AL words that fit best and gamble on being able to find the equivalent in a language that permitted suffixing an E. SEROTINAL, CERUMINAL, and TERATICAL surfaced as possibilities.

My next step was to locate as many words as possible for the first or second places. A botanical directory provided a number of flower genera ending -NSIAS.

The -ENNE ending is far more common in French than in English. Nouveau Petit Larousse produced a variety of words including ASSYRIENNE, ARMENIENNE, ALGERIENNE, EBURNIENNE, OCEANIENNE and others. Putting words into the first and second places of the square gives:

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H O R T E N C I A S
  C E A N I E N N E
    . . . R I T E
      . . . U M E D
        . . M I C S
          . I T E S
            N A L E
              B L E
                E D
                  S

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Next came a search for words to fit RE....RITES, NI....ITES, EN....MICS, and TA....UMED. Hours of work produced no instances where more than two of the four words interlocked. Two words could be filled in in several different ways, but beyond that it was no go.

HORTENSIAS and HORTENTIAS, variants for the first word, did no better. How about MERTONSIAS for the first word and EBURNEENNE for the second? Still no better results. Ditto with many other combinations. Finally, better luck with FEODOSSIAS and ESSENIENNE. An excellent third word emerged, OSTEOTRITE. That led to either ONOMASTICS or ONOMANTICS for the fifth word:

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F E O D O S S I A S
  S S E N I E N N E
    T E O T R I T E
      . M . O M E D
        A N T I C S
          . I T E S
            N A L E
              B L E
                E D
                  S

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For the sixth word, an obvious coinage is SITINSITES, i.e., sites where sit-ins take place. DEEPROOTED fits the fourth word except for its fifth, sixth, and eighth letters. No amount of dictionary thumbing turned up a satisfactory word starting ONOR-, nor could I find any way to switch the M of INIMITABLE to a T.

The final ten-square, with two letters shown instead of one in three places, is as follows:

F	E	O	D	O	S	S	I	A	S
	S	S	E	N	I	E	N	N	E
		T	E	O	T	R	I	T	E
			P	R/M	O/I	O	T/M	E	D
				A	N	T	I	C	S
					S	I	T	E	S
						N	A	L	E
							B	L	E
								E	D
									S

The definitions are:

FEODOSSIAS possessive case of Feodosiya, a seaport in the Crimea (N12 Geog.), as spelled in Steiler's Atlas

ESSENIENNE feminine gender of Essenien, i.e., Essenian, in the Nouveau Petit Larousse

OSTEOTRITE an instrument for removing bone (N12) (Oddly, N13 gives *osteotribe*--is the N12 spelling erroneous?)

DEEPROOTED having deep roots (N12, N13)

ONOMANTICS those who are onomantic, i.e., practice divination from the letters of a name (N12, obsolete)

SITINSITES sites where a sit-in has taken place (coined phrase) (Sit-on sites meshes with *deeprooted*, but is a more strained coinage)

SEROTINALE feminine gender of serotinal (N12, N13), appearing late in the summer (A search of French and Italian dictionaries is in progress)

INIMITABLE not capable of being imitated (N12, N13)

ANTECELLED excelled, surpassed (OED, obsolete)

SEEDSSEEDS sows kinds of seeds (cf. "To seed seed", page S-384, (OED, obsolete), third person singular of the verb, plural of the noun)

So, how far are we out of line?

1) The word *deeprooted* with three non-matching letters (two if you accept *sit-on sites*)

2) Sit-in sites, a logical coinage, possibly occurring in someone's history of college uprisings in the 1960s.

3) A missing French or Italian source for *serotinal*, a word in both N12 and N13. Incidentally, Webster's Ninth Collegiate gives ca. 1909 as the date of first usage for *serotinal*.

My general premise is that anyone who embarks on an enterprise as difficult as a ten-square is entitled to use words or phrases

based on the same criteria that determine acceptability in a New York Times crossword. On that basis, sit-in sites would doubtless be accepted, but not the other two items given above.

Where do we go from here? Temporarily, I'm at a standstill. I suspect it'll be some months before I'll have the energy to mount another assault on the ten-square fortress.

Perhaps a reader of this article will produce a successful variation or modification of the SEEDSSEEDS square. My hat's off to him or her! Another possibility is that someone will be inspired to tackle a different base. If so, hallelujah!

One practical step that would improve the prospects of any worker in this vineyard is to re-sort the ten-letter words in the existing N12 listing from regular alphabetical order to reverse alphabetical order. This would take an IBM or IBM-compatible computer, know-how and time, all of which were used by Eric Albert when he performed the operation on nine-letter words described earlier.

To whomever this article spurs on, zillions of good wishes, dozens of hours of free time, and infinite good luck. My current belief is that a fully acceptable ten-square can be constructed.

THE BASICS OF ENGLISH GRAMMAR

Which three books would you take with you if you were to be marooned on a desert isle? While there is almost no agreement about which books to select, there is, I suspect, one that would almost never be chosen: a book on grammatical usage. Most people's memory of grammar is a dry as dust high-school English course harping on the proper placement of commas or the diagramming of sentences. Nevertheless, understanding of the elements of grammar is essential if one is to write clearly. In Good Grief, Good Grammar (Facts on File, 1988; \$19.95), consulting-firm executive Dianna Booher focuses on an audience sorely in need of help: the writers of obfuscatory business letters, memos, and reports. Although few Word Ways readers are grammatical illiterates, many might welcome a book of basics, where one can quickly refresh one's memory on such matters as the difference between a participle and a gerund, the use of that versus which, or the hyphenation of related adjective pairs (but not adverb-adjective combinations). More generally, this abecedarian text may perhaps inspire the reader to seek stylistic help offered by such standard works as Fowler's Modern English Usage or Strunk and White's Elements of Style.