

COMPUTER ANAGRAMS: NOT MUCH PROGRESS

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In 1982, I wrote a computer program (later known as *Ars Magna*TM) which used a dictionary to produce all possible anagrams for a phrase entered by the user. At about the same time, Jim Woods of the NASA/Ames Research Center in California wrote a similar program. Perhaps there are more, though I haven't heard of them.

One might expect that this kind of program would relieve puzzlers of the drudgery of anagram-searches. Not usually: many phrases produce thousands or millions of anagrams. To produce the interview with George Bush, I skimmed (very quickly in parts) about 350,000 anagrams. For the Reaganagrams published in the May 1984 *Word Ways*, the number was 250,000. Both of these barely begin to cover the full set of anagrams, although the program is organized so that more interesting anagrams tend to appear first.

For some time now, I've been thinking about how anagram-creators really work, and how a program could assist them instead of forcing them to act as a proofreader. Right now, reading long lists of gibberish to extract a few gems is the only solution, and it's quite boring. So, I'd be interested in hearing from both novice and expert anagram-finders -- how do you work, what physical tools do you use (paper, tiles, etc.), what do you like to keep track of, etc.? A page or two on this topic would be quite helpful. I can't guarantee any sweeping changes in the program by any particular date, though, but I will keep a mailing list in the hope that I'll someday get to this project. My address is P.O. Box 11378 Honolulu, HI 96828-0378.

A version of *Ars Magna* for the Macintosh computer is currently available through the Boston Computer Society's Macintosh group. I hope to finish the version for IBM-compatible computers soon and the IBM group will sell that. Both are quite inexpensive, and I request a small fee sent direct to me if you find the program useful. For information on ordering the Mac version, or notification of when the IBM version is ready (please specify which), send an SASE to my address above.

For programmers interested in the technical aspects of how *Ars Magna* works, there's a detailed writeup in the November 1987 issue of *BYTE* magazine.