

LETTER-DELETION ACROSTICS

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As a cryptic crossword constructor and solver, I see a lot of letter deletions: words that become other words when a single letter is deleted. Examples are SALUTED to SALTED, or MUFFING to MUFFIN.

In the August 1990 issue of *Word Ways*, Darryl Francis presented the challenge of finding a list of words for each word length that will provide a letter deletion for each successive position. His five-letter example was Stale, sTale, thRee, barGe, spanK (the letter deleted is capitalized). I decided to take this further by making the deleted letters spell a word. For example, in the five-letter case, the word EPOXY is provided by the list Erode, sPlit, fLOat, twiXt, earLY.

Are there any five-letter words that cannot be represented this way? The easiest way to find out is to see if there is a letter deletion for every letter in every position. I prefer to use common words, although I will use a less-than-common word when no common one will work. Most of the few unfamiliar words in this article appear in Webster's Third New International Dictionary, although I did resort to Chambers English Dictionary for a couple of tough spots. If I can avoid an unfamiliar word by using a familiar proper noun, I do so.

The words in each deletion pair should have meanings that are etymologically unrelated. For example, while DEADLINESS to DEADLINES is a neat deletion, both words come from dead, which detracts from the wordplay. Compare the deletion of HURTLESS to HURTTLES: that seems more exciting! Finding essentially different pairs is not always possible, especially in longer words, and some of the deletions given below are not ideal. But better something than nothing.

In preparing a list of five-letter positional letter deletions, I found the letters J and Q to be particularly recalcitrant, but one expects that from letters like J and Q. Surprisingly, X and Z were manageable and even provided choice in some positions. At first I was surprised to find D and F causing problems in position 2, but after a bit of thought I realized that this made sense. I don't know of any five-letter words that end in V, let alone deletions, so there's a blank there, and for V in position 2.

A	Aides	tArot	beAst	sprAy	parkA
B	Bread	aBide	biBle	limBo	blurB
C	Cache	aCrid	deCal	minCe	antiC

D	Dally		wiDth	briDe	weirD
E	Ebony	bElow	wiEld	bowEl	lungE
F	Fever	aFire	unFit	beeFs	scarF
G	Galas	oGres	beGan	merGe	thinG
H	Hover	tHank	acHes	nicHe	cloth
I	Ivied	pIlot	alIas	tacIt	swamI
J	Jaunt	fJord	maJid	polJe	samaJ
K	Keyed	sKate	liKed	booKs	shook
L	Lease	fLunk	tiLde	burLy	cameL
M	Moral	sMear	coMma	bliMp	hareM
N	Nears	kNeel	soNar	areNa	heroN
O	Ovary	bOred	avOid	envOy	combO
P	Plaid	sPent	coPed	beePs	clamP
Q		sQuit	roQue		
R	Reach	wRest	beRet	chaRt	cover
S	Shall	aSide	baSil	exiSt	brass
T	Taxis	sTeam	meTal	visTa	valeT
U	Using	sUing	gaUze	forUm	HindU
V	Vroom	eVery	duVet	curVe	
W	Waver	sWift	seWer	vieWs	sineW
X	Xrays	aXles	maXim	flaXy	lateX
Y	Yeast	dYing	maYst	braYs	silly
Z	Zones	cZars	boZos	furZy	spitZ

Anyone complaining that FJORD and FORD are too close etymologically is quite right, and is encouraged to find a better word for that spot. And, although X-RAYS and RAYS seem related, RAYS can also be fish, which is etymologically unrelated to RAYS that are beams.

Six-letter words provide few problems. I am still missing some spots in my six-letter chart, but few words require these positions anyway. Here's what I have:

A	Ablest	pAlace	piAZza	forAge	annuAl	CrimeA
B	Blouse	aBides	AlBert	triBal	plumBs	
C	Clever	sCales	biCker	plaCid	inseCt	parseC
D	Downer	aDvert	deDuce	powDer	boardS	suiteD
E	Ethane	bEacon	crEate	appEal	planEt	karatE
F	Flower	aFlare	reFuse	stiFle	bereFt	belieF
G	Grouse	aGnise	roGues	finGer	resiGn	basinG
H	Height	tHrash	aching	latHer	writHe	hearth
I	Irides	sImile	maInly	bluIsh	heroIn	scampI
J	Jargon	fJords	inJure	praJna	rakiJa	
K	Knight	sKewer	biKers	monKey	sparkS	debark
L	Lawful	fLight	goLfer	angLer	castLe	driveL
M	Manger	aMbler	caMper	salMon	stormy	condoM
N	Neaten	sNooty	wiNdoW	prince	asseNt	asterN
O	Oinked	bOring	quOits	undOer	bathOs	dinerO
P	Pimply	sPails	poPlar	tamPer	skimPs	scrimP
Q	Quinta	sQuint				
R	Radios	dRolly	caRnal	stuRdy	ensuRe	latheR
S	Sexist	aSides	coSmic	tenSor	cubiSt	theseS
T	Trough	sTeamy	haTred	mortAl	guesTs	molest

U	Usable	pUrism	paUper	aroUse	pursUe	congoU
V	Valley	kVetch	seVers	driVer	starVe	
W	Wholly	sWerve	laWyer	breWed	shreWd	burroW
X			laxity	minXes		duplex
Y	Yearly	bYroad	trYout	canYon	honeYs	colonY
Z	Zinked		doZily	priZes	blowZy	quartZ

Even the seven-letter table isn't bad. Most of the positions can be filled with common words whose deletions are etymologically distinct. Here's my list:

A	Aitches	pAlates	reActor	belAted	reveAls	overlAy	temperA
B	Bassist	aBiding	unBlock	garBage	sickBed	reverBs	proverB
C	Climber	sCandal	exCited	quaCked	radiCal	parseCs	nucleiC
D	Drugged	aDverse	deDuces	finDing	breadth	remandS	severed
E	Eastern	fEather	duElled	appEals	galleEon	candiEd	diverseE
F	Fattest		riFling	graFted	scarFed	belieFs	ourselF
G	Gratify	aGround	reGally	ridGing	finaGle	resinGs	raisinG
H	Harmful	sHingle	asHtray	batHing	abashEd	heartHs	haggisH
I	Isomers	blasing	deIcide	conIfer	applieS	reverIe	martinI
J	Jocular	fJorded	inJured	conJure			
K	Kinkier	sKeptic	liKable	booKing	slicKer	squawKs	outrank
L	Leasing	slender	salVage	inkLing	drawLer	groveLs	chanceL
M	Marcher	aMbling	arMrest	creMate	unkeMpt	balsaMs	misterM
N	Noodles	aNguish	fiNance	garNish	throNes	violeNt	patterN
O	Opinion	fOamily	stOring	corOner	lassOes	cartoOn	pamperO
P	Plumber	sPeller	dePrive	insPect	steePly	forcePs	mantraP
Q	Quintas						
R	Regress	pRickle	baRking	outRage	exceRpt	statuRe	BarrieR
S	Sextant	aScetic	buStler	proSper	thirSty	closeSt	possesS
T	Theater	sTinger	unTruly	morTals	gristly	diverTs	sleighT
U	Upraise	aUction	boUlder	popUlar	statUes	residUe	
V	Vending		deVices	carVing	starVes	resolve	
W	Weighty	sWerved	coWshed	froWsty	screWed	casheWs	
X			maXimed	MarXian	indeXed		tripleX
Y	Yawning	cYanine	spYring	canYons		phoneYs	gravelyY
Z	Zincite	cZarina		booZing	WaltZer		

After seven letters, there are fewer words for each position, so instead of a chart, I provide some long words for which I have found letter deletion acrostics. I have stacked the deletion words one on top of the other so that the acrostic word reads diagonally. For the eight-letter case, I present the acrostic words EXACTING, MAJORITY, and YESHIVAS. I have two nine-letter examples, TANGERINE and FLOWCHART, and two ten-letter examples, CHAMPAGNES and PERMITTEES.

Equipped	Meagerly	Yearning
eXternal	hAunting	dEriving
reActors	inJuring	inSanity
preClude	denOting	bushiest
starTing	legiRons	cashiers
mistrIal	supplIer	resolved
posterNs	sleighTs	imperial
aspirinG	flatterY	needless

Trimester	Flummoxes	Chastening	Pentangles
lAunching	bLotching	tHreadless	lEathering
puNniness	stOriated	brAininess	vaRnishing
emiGrates	froWstier	herMitages	herMitages
reliEving	addiCtive	prosPector	charItable
prostRate	hardsHell	insulAting	immorTally
unmarrIed	imperIals	continGent	consulting
underliNe	overheaRd	overturNed	commandEer
brassierE	overplanT	commandeEr	overcrowEd
		timelinesS	deadlinesS

There are other possibilities. One can construct MARGARINE quite easily from the TANGERINE square by substituting the words Maligning, poRtholes and educAtion in the appropriate spots. Can anyone find some other good nine-letter or ten-letter squares?

GRAND ALLUSIONS

When I saw the above title, I groaned inwardly. Not another book on allusions? But when I examined Elizabeth Webber and Mike Feinsilber's paperback in more detail (Farragut Publishing Company 1990; \$12.95), I realized that it complemented my three other books on this subject. In fact, it concentrates on more than 500 fairly contemporary terms (not predominantly numerical or classical-Biblical-literary). Each term has an extended discussion (a half-page or more) and a recent citation or two accompanying it. Perhaps the best way to get a feeling for the scope of the book is to list a few entries; here are ones starting with L.

Last Hurrah, Lazarus, Lebensraum, Leitmotiv, Lèse-majesté, Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom, L'Etat C'est Moi, Level Playing Field, Leveraged Buyout, Libido, ...

It's all reminiscent of Hirsch's recent best-selling book on cultural illiteracy.