

OMINOUS WORLDLY MAXIMS

CHRISTOPHER McMANUS
Chevy Chase, Maryland

Each word in the above title has a repeated letter. Remove those repeated letters and new words emerge: MINUS, WORDY, AXIS. Such words, which drop a repeated letter to form a new word, number in the thousands. When technical and proper nouns are ignored, they still number around a thousand. Such words amuse us by their transformations, and give rise to several non-trivial studies.

Word-pairs like OMINOUS-MINUS are known to the National Puzzlers' League as repeated-letter deletions; all occurrences of a repeated letter must be deleted, which is not a requirement in this article.

The first natural goal is to find, for each letter of the alphabet, examples of a word which drops two of that letter to reveal an unrelated word. The list below approximates that goal, using only the most common, uncapitalized, non-technical words where possible (exceptions given in brackets). For each letter, the first word listed is the shortest word that remains a common non-technical word after dropping two of that letter. The second word in each sequence is the longest common word. I also wanted to find at least one word which drops two consecutive identical letters, and another word which drops two non-consecutive letters. In many cases these are already exemplified by the longest and shortest words. If not, a third word is given to illustrate the missing example.

AreA, AscribAble, bAAed	iNNs, skiNNing, peNaNce
BiBs, baBBling	ObOe, tattOOing
ChiC, CresCents, oCCur	PaP, sandPiPer, stePPed
aDD, Devaluated	[riQQ], [QazaQ]
EasE, pEEresses	aRdoR, pReacheRs, paRRy
doFF, unruffled, FlatFish	aSS, verSificationS
GiGs, beGGaring	TaT, TempTresses, preTTY
HaH, unsHeatHing, [?]	lUaU, sUtUring, [litUUs]
ldIot, haIrness, [radI]	ValVe, fliVVers
[haJJ], [haJJ], [?]	WheW, WaxWing, [?]
KinK, KicKing, treKKed	[eXXon], [XXx-rated]
aLL, worLdLiness	gaYlY, YearlY, [saYYid]
MuMs, geMMologists	jaZZy, pizzaZZ, [ZanZe]

RADII contracts to become RAD, a technical term. HAJJ is not common enough for my taste. RIGG, an Egyptian pipe, and QAZAQ, a Turkic language, are found in Borgmann's Beyond Language (1967) and contract to RI, a variant sol-fa note, and AZA, a Biblical

name. As expected, neither the full nor contracted Q-words are common, and QAZAQ and AZA are proper nouns. LITUUS is not in the common vocabulary, and its contraction is LITS, an uncommon name of Lithuanian gold and silver coins. EXXON is a proper name. XXX-RATED and its contraction, X-RATED, are both capitalized and hyphenated. SAYYID is not an everyday word, nor is ZANZE, the African musical instrument, which contracts to become ANE, the dialectal variant of one.

A natural corollary to the above project would be to extend the results to each of the 676 different bigrams of the English alphabet. This project awaits another day, and should doubtless only be undertaken after extending the conditions to include all English words, common, technical, proper names and all.

A separate corollary goal is to compile a list of words which survive as words after dropping three of the same letter. Such words are rarer, so the following list provides only one example per letter, if any. As before, words shown in brackets are uncommon words or proper nouns, or else their reduced form is.

[AcAriAsis]	[?]	hoOdOO	muUmUUu
BAbble	lElItIs	PePPery	[?]
[suCCinCt]	[?]	[?]	[?]
aDDleD	[?]	stiRRerS	[?]
[chEEriEst]	fLoraLLy	disposSeSS	[?]
[?]	[MaMMa]	TaTTles	[?]
braGGinG	peNNaNt		

Want to drop four letters? The only common examples that come immediately to mind are baSSiStS, craSSneSS, croSSneSS, maSSleSS, and StreSSeS. Add also KnicKKnacK, beloved of logologists, although the derivative word is uncommon.

Another tack is to delete all letters which occur multiply in the same word. The results are often starkly dramatic, as a tiny word emerges from a large shell. One of the starkest transformations collapses the medical term COCCIDIOIDOMYCOSIS into MY! The following list provides examples of contracting words starting with each letter of the alphabet in turn. Each word drops at least three different sets of letters. In each sequence, the first word contracts to the shortest common word, the second to a longer, and the third contracts curiously.

aSSIGNING, ACquAiNtANCe, ARlSToCRATICALLY
 BankBOOK, bACCAIAurEAtEs, BARBARiAns
 CoMMERCE, CoNvalesCENCE, cLaSSLESSneSS
 DECAdENCE, dIFFERentIatING, DISJoIntEDNESS
 ERASERS, ENTERtained, EarNEStNESS
 FIFTIeth, FoREFatherS, fRaTERnITIEs
 GaINING, gUTTUrally, GLaCIoLOGIStS
 HELLiSHneSS, HEarTHsTonE, HEdGEHoG
 INTONaTION, INtrIGuIngly, ImPRoPRIETIEs
 KEePsaKES, kiNdNESSeS
 LIfeLESS, LEISurELInESS, loONiNeSS
 MESSMatE, MERRYMaKerS, moZZareLLA

NEatNESS, NORThERNmOsT, NORThEaSTERNmOST
 oPPrESSES, ORIGInatorS, OPPOrTunitIes
 PREPaRER, PHOtOGraPHinG, PREPOStEROUsnESS
 quANTITATIOn, quaRRELEd, quaRRELLER
 RETREaT, REDECoRatED, RhODODeNDRON
 SiDEStEPPED, SUPPUrationS, SenSITivITy
 TELLTaLE, TOOTHaCHes, TENDERhEaRTEDNESS
 uTTERERs, UNILLUMINatEd, UNNAtUrALLY
 VaLVELESS, vEGETaTinG, vILLIANESSES
 WOODWinD, wOOLLInESS, WINdoWInG
 YEstERYEaRS
 ZIGZaGGInG

Missing above are J and X. Defective solutions for J include joY-
 LeSSLY and juStlNIANIAN, as well as joInING, jUJitsU and JUJUBE.
 Each of the latter drop only two different sets of letters. For X,
 a defective solution is XERoXEd.

The above lists illuminate only a few haRRying coRneRS (haying
 cones) into which the haPPy StartS (hay tart) of fiDDling leTTers
 (filling leers) liSpS AgAin (lip gin). One last, difficult project
 is to write meaningful sentences that contract, by deleting a let-
 ter pair from each word, into other sensible sentences:

Whew, all riddling punsters cracked gags - well-worded Saturday
 alibis

He, a riling punter raked as - we wore sturdy albs

A LANGUAGE QUIZ BOOK

Sterling Eisiminger, erstwhile (1977) Word Ways contributor, has compiled several hundred language-oriented quizzes in a 243-page paperback entitled Wordspinner: Mindboggling Games for Word Lovers (Littlefield Adams, 1991; \$12.95). Broadly speaking, the quizzes (usually involving the matching of 10 answers to 10 questions) fall into three categories:

- 1) *strictly logological aspects of words (heteronyms, homonyms, beheadable or curtailable words, rebuses)*
- 2) *word meanings or connotations (jargon, slang, regionalisms, words from the past, punning business names, slogans, cliches, proverbs, portmanteau words)*
- 3) *special fields of knowledge (rock group names, famous last words, ancient causes of death, dog breeds, nicknames of persons or places, brand names)*

*There's a vast collection of colorful terms in these quizzes, and it's fun working out the answers to the ones you don't know by the process of elimination. With the exception of some of the special fields of knowledge, most **Word Ways** readers should find these quizzes rather easy.*