

SENESCENT SENTENCES: TEN SCENES

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Staring at my tube of toothpaste the other morning, I noticed the word GINGIVITIS. It occurred to me that this was an anagram of IS IT GIVING. Having nothing better to do while brushing my teeth, I started pondering the significance of sentences that may be broken down into components which are anagrams of each other, like "Is it giving | gingivitis?" and "The potato's | shot at poet, | past the too-|-hot-to-paste | tooth-paste." By the time I had finished brushing, the basics of the game of Senescent Sentences had been formulated.

Number of players: two or more

Object: to score the most points

Equipment: paper and a pencil for each player; a decent dictionary

A Senescent Sentence is a grammatical English sentence comprised of consecutive anagram phrases, as in "Is it giving | gingivitis?" (a two-part, ten-letter sentence) or "Swine | sinew | is new" (a three-part, five-letter one).

Rules:

1. At the beginning of each round (or scene - see title), an eight to twelve letter word is selected at random (players take turns)
2. Each player has two minutes to construct a Senescent Sentence using the letters of the word chosen for that round
3. When the time is up, players compare and score sentences (see below)
4. The game ends when one player has reached a pre-agreed number of points (say 500) or when a pre-agreed number of rounds (say 10) have been played

Scoring:

For each sentence, one point is awarded for each letter in the repeat. The score is doubled for each part in the sentence. Thus, a two-part, ten-letter sentence scores 10×2 or 20 points, and a three-part ten-letter sentence scores $10 \times 2 \times 2$ or 40 points. A ten-point bonus is awarded for using all letters in the selected word.

Sample Game (three players, ten rounds):

Round 1 selected word YESTERDAY

Player A: Aster | rates | a rest $5 \times 2 \times 2 = 20$

Player B: Daters | stared | at red's | treads $6 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 = 48$

Player C: Yesterday, | ye rest day, | Yeat's dyer | eyes tardy | steady rye (disqualified for not being a meaningful sentence; had it been accepted, C's score would have been $9 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 + 10 = 82$)

Round 2 selected word TOMORROW

Player A: O, Mr. T., o | motor | Tom, or | motor | Mort O. (disqualified after players vote to disallow initials)
 Player B: (can't think of anything)
 Player C: Moor, tow | room two | worm.too $7 \times 2 \times 2 = 28$

Round 3 selected word ESPERANTO

Player A: O, repent as | a son, Peter, | opens rate $9 \times 2 \times 2 + 10 = 46$
 Player B: Person ate | pear stone $9 \times 2 + 10 = 28$
 Player C: O, Peter's an | opera nest: | notes reap | ten operas (C's play is challenged ; it is decided that "opera nest" is meaningless)

Round 4 selected word INTERLINGUA

Player A: Internal | linen rat | in rental | ran inlet $8 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 = 64$
 Player B: I tear in | retina, I | tie rain, | I retain | inertia $7 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 = 56$
 Player C: I gain rent | retaining | anger in it $9 \times 2 \times 2 = 36$

Round 5 selected word ANAGRAMS

Player A: Mars | arms | rams $4 \times 2 \times 2 = 16$
 Player B: Granma | rang Ma $6 \times 2 = 12$
 Player C: A nag rams | a granma's | ragman as | a man rags | a granma's | anagrams $8 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 + 10 = 266$ (but see Comments, below)

Round 6 selected word ALPHABET

Player A: Tape | a pet | pate $4 \times 2 \times 2 = 16$
 Player B: Abet | a bet $4 \times 2 = 8$
 Player C: Help a bat | bathe, pal $8 \times 2 + 10 = 26$ (an apt score!)

Round 7 selected word PARANOMASIA

Player A: O, Pam ran "Asia", | a Romania spa $11 \times 2 + 10 = 32$
 Player B: Romania's a Pa $11 + 10 = 21$
 Player C: Norma's | Romans | ransom | Norma's | manors $6 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 = 96$

Round 8 selected word PALINDROME

Player A: Redo lamp in | red lion map $10 \times 2 + 10 = 30$
 Player B: O, red pal | paroled \ leopard, | ole pard $7 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 = 56$
 Player C: Dame | made | mead $4 \times 2 \times 2 = 16$

Round 9 selected word SPAGHETTI

Player A: Hag pet its | pigs at the | tag pit, she | pats eight $9 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 + 10 = 82$
 Player B: Pate's | paste, | tape's | paste, | peat's | paste $5 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 = 160$
 Player C: Pat's | spat | taps | Pat's | spat $4 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 = 64$

Round 10 selected word LINGUINE

Player A: Nigel, | ingle | leg in | gel in | Elgin $5 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 = 80$
 Player B: Neil, | line | Nile $4 \times 2 \times 2 = 16$
 Player C: Glue | luge $4 \times 2 = 8$

Final Score: Player A 384, Player B 425, Player C 540

Comments:

From the above game it is clear that certain issues need to be agreed upon by the players in advance. The most important ones are

1. Should elements be allowed to repeat, as in "Pat's | spat | taps | Pat's | spat"? My feeling is that this should be acceptable, but that repeated vocatives, as in "Neil, | Neil, | line | Nile", and repeated adjectives, as in "User | rues | sure, | sure | ruse" should be dis-allowed.
2. Should words be allowed to span a repeat, as in "Stall|'s tall"? I am opposed to this.
3. 4B and 9B each show examples of three sentences conjoined by commas. Players may wish to limit senescent sentences to one subject and one predicate.

Nothing Risque, Nothing Gained

Most adults enjoy sex and humor, so a book featuring dirty jokes ought to be a best seller (much like the apocryphal one about Lincoln's doctor's dog). In this \$12 paperback published by Chicago Review Press, Richard Lederer has restricted himself to "sexual humor that depends on wordplay", a limitation that is hard to define but easy to recognize. (My attempt: humor that is based on two different meanings of the same word, or of two different words that sound the same. For example, Lederer omits humor relating to rape, AIDS, or homosexuality: jokes should be obscene but not hurt.)

There's a wealth of obscene material in this 292-page book, from old chestnuts like the Young Maid From Madras and the mythical *The Yellow Stream* by I.P. Daly, to witticisms you've never heard before. There are many formula jokes: updated classics (The Mooning and Sex Pants, From Here to Maternity), what's the difference (... between a rooster and a lawyer? the rooster clucks defiance), a spoonerized dictionary (frigid female golf pro: an unpliant lay), have you heard (...about the cow that jumped over the barbed-wire fence? udder disaster), she was only (...a clergyman's daughter, but she loved to catch him by the organ), Tom Swifties ("You get on top now," said Tom flippantly), and National Condom Week slogans (before you bag her, sheathe your dagger). These should be read in small doses to avoid literary indigestion. The book is enhanced by approximately 50 illustrations by *Word Way's* Dave Morice.