

SWAPPING TERMINAL LETTERS

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Richard Lederer in the Nov 1997 Word Ways mentioned words which become other words when their terminal letters are interchanged (the first and the last letter are swapped), as DWINDLES to SWINDLED. He gave seven examples of four-letter pairs, five examples of the "rarer" five-letter pairs, and three examples of six-letter "prize" pairs, giving them the title "simultaneous loopers" since the two letters are looped to the other end of the word at the same time. The purpose of this article is to explore further. Such pairs are a special case of transposals. I found over 600 pairs of length five, with numbers quite sharply decreasing with word length until the single examples for words of length 13 and 14. I refer to these as STLs (Swap Terminal Letters) for brevity.

Word Length	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
STLS/1000	36	12	2.5	0.8	0.3	0.16	0.08	0.06	0.02	0.02
Reversals/1000	5	0.5	0.01							

There are 18 pairs of STLs for every thousand five-letter words--about one STL per 27 words. All STL figures exclude the special case where the first and last letters are the same. "Reversals" refer to words which are palindromic apart from the initial and terminal letters, as LEVER-REVEL. Reversals are included in the STL count, and are marked with an asterisk.

There is an easy way to create SLT pairs. Start with a verb, for example COLOUR. Put RE in front and ED behind to get RECOLOURED, a plausible word. The other word of the pair becomes DECOLOURER, perhaps also plausible. In this manner, I created an example of length 14. Usually the root meaning is the same, but a gratifying exception is REFLOWED-DEFLOWER!

The reader is invited to peruse the lists to find his own favourite pairs: political satire as in MAOIST-TAOISM, libel as in ENID'S-SNIDE, fashion as in SOBER-ROBES, gangsterism as in SOUGHT-TOUGHS, unkindness as in REPEL-LEPERS, capital punishment as in DOPER-ROPED, people interest as in SALEM-MALES, Silk Route tales as in SPICE-EPICS. Some STLs have their own appeal: SWINKT-TWINKS, NUDER-RUDEN. All words are found in the Oxford English Dictionary, Webster's 2nd, Official Scrabble Players Dictionary, Stedman or Pulliam unless otherwise noted: AmHer=American Heritage Dict, Ro=Roget's first edition. Forenames are labeled with fn, medical words with Med, and derived words with d.

5-letter STL pairs (almost a quarter of the examples, including a similar fraction of the reversals)

ALENE—ELENA	ALISE—ELISA (fn)	AMINO—OMINA	ATOMS—STOMA	AUBIN—NUBIA
AURIC—CURIA	BARIC—CARIB	BLURS—SLURB	*CANAL—LANAC	CARID—DARIC
COGIL—LOGIC	COP IT (slang)—TOPIC		CUNIT—TUNIC	CURIO—OURIC
CYLIX—XYLIC	CYRIL (fn)—LYRIC	DAIRY—YAIRD	DANES—SANED	*DARAF—FARAD
DATES—SATED	DAWES—SAWED	*DEFER—REFED	DEPIT—TEPID	*DEWER—REWED
*DEWES—SEWED	*DEXES—SEXED	DICER—RICED	*DIMIT—TIMID	DIVEL—LIVED
DIVER—RIVED	*DIVIL—LIVID	DOLES—SOLED	DOPER—ROPED	DOSER—ROSED
DOVER—ROVED	DOWEL—LOWED	DOWER—ROWED	DRANG—GRAND	DRENT—TREND
DRING—GRIND	EAGER—RAGEE	EARST—TARSE	EARTH—HARTE	
ELATS (W87-197, pl. place)—SLATE		ELOPS—SLOPE	ENIDS (fn pl.)—SNIDE	EPICS—SPICE
ETONS (pl school)—STONE		FLOOK—KLOOF	*GENER—RENEG	GIANT—TIANG
GLANS—SLANG	*HARAS—SARAH	HELAS—SELAH	HOOTS—SOOTH	HUMPS—SUMP
*KANAT—TANAK	KHANS—SHANK	KLANS—SLANK	KLAUS (fn)—SLAUK	KNOWS—SNOWK
KUSAM—MUSAK	LAMES—SAMEL	LATER—RATEL	LAVER—RAVEL	LEATS—SEATL (vf)
*LEBEN—NEBEL	*LEBER—REBEL	*LEPER—REPEL	*LEVER—REVEL	LEVIN—NEVIL
LEVIS—SEVIL (old spell. Seville)		LIVER—RIVEL	*LOBOS—SOBOL	LOGAN—NOGAL
LOSER—ROSEL	*LOTOS—SOTOL	LOWER—ROWEL	LUCAN—NUCAL	LUREX—XUREL
LUTES—SUTEL	MAGUS—SAGUM	MALES—SALEM	MATES—SATEM	*METER—RETEM
MOTET—TOTEM	*NAMAZ—ZAMAN	NAMES—SAMEN	NARIS—SARIN	NATIS—SATIN
NAVES—SAVEN	*NEPER—REPEN	*NEVER—REVEN	*NEVES—SEVEN	NIPER—RIPEN
NIVER—RIVEN	NODES—SODEN	NOSER—ROSEN	NUDER—RUDEN	NUDES—SUDEN
NUKES—SUKEN	OULAP—PULAO	OUSTS—SUSTO (Med)		PALES—SALEP
PARIS—SARIP	PLEAS—SLEAP (vf)	PLUMS—SLUMP	*RAGAS—SAGAR	RAGES—SAGER
RAKES—SAKER	RAMET—TAMER	RATES—SATER	RAVES—SAVER	*RENET—TENER
REPOT—TEPOR	*RESEW—WESER	*REWET—TEWER	RIDES—SIDER	RIGET—TIGER
RIPES—SIPER	RISES—SISER	RITES—SITER	RIVES—SIVER	RIVET—TIVER
ROBES—SOBER	ROPES—SOPER	ROTES—SOTER	SALET (vf)—TALES	SALEW—WALES
SAPIT—TAPIS	SEARY—YEARS	SEGGY—YEGGS	SEISZ—ZEISS	SELLT—TELLS
SELLY—YELLS	SHEET—THEES (vf)	SHIRT—THIRS	SHOUT—THOUS	SILLY—YILLS
SINET—TINES	SINEW—WINES	SINOW—WINOS	SOKEY—YOKES	SOURY—YOURS
SUMPT—TUMPS	SURTY—YURTS	SWEET—TWEES	TACHY (vf)—YACHT	
TEASY—YEAST	TOUSY—YOUST			

6-letter STL pairs (selection of about one-third, but with all reversals)

AEREST—TERESA	BECARD—DECARB (onise)	CITRIN—NITRIC	CLAVIS—SLAVIC
COMBAT—TOMBAC	DABLET—TABLED	DAFTER—RAFTED	DAGGER—RAGGED
*DALLAS (Texas)—SALLAD		DAMPER—RAMPED	DANGER—RANGED
DAPPER—RAPPED	DARKEN—NARKED	DASHER—RASHED	DASHES—SASHED
DEARER—REARED	DECKEN—NECKED	*DEFFER—REFFED	DEMONS—SEMOND
DENIER—RENIED	DENTER—RENTED	*DEPPER—REPPED	*DESSSES—SESSSED
DESTEN—NESTED	DESTER—RESTED	*DETTTER—RETTTED	DIBBER—RIBBED
DICKER—RICKED	DIGGER—RIGGED	DIMMER—RIMMED	DINGER—RINGED
DIPPER—RIPPED	DISARM—MISARD	DISPEL—LISPED	DOBBER—ROBBED
DOCKER—ROCKED	DOGGET—TOGGED	DORRIT (Dickens)—TORRID	DOUSER—ROUSED
DOUSES—SOUSED	DUBBER—RUBBED	DUCKER—RUCKED	DUCKET—TUCKED
DUDGEN—NUDGED	DUFFEL—LUFFED	DUFFER—RUFFED	DUSTER—RUSTED
EARTHY—YARTHE	EWINGS (Med, or family name)—SWINGE		*HALLAN—NALLAH
HANSEL—LANSEH	*HARRAT—TARRAH	HEARTY—YEARTH	LAPPER—RAPPEL
LAQUER—RAQUEL (fn)	LASCAR—RASCAL	LATHER—RATHEL	*LETTEN—NETTEL
*LETTES—SETTEL	LICHEN—NICHEL	LICKEN—NICKEL	LIEDER—RIEDEL
LOOSEN—NOOSEL	LOXIAN—NOXIAL	LUBBER—RUBBEL	MANDET—TANDEM
MANDOR—RANDOM	MAOIST—TAOISM	MODIUS—SODIUM	
MOMIST—TOMISM (W77-056)		NATTER—RATTEN	*NEDDER—REDDEN
NEVERS—SEVERN (river, Eng)		NODDER—RODDEN	PESTER—RESTEP
RACKET—TACKER	RANGES—SANGER	*RENNET—TENNER	RHINES—SHINER
RHODES—SHODER	RICKET—TICKER	RINNES (pl. famous German otologist)—SINNER	ROUSES—SOUSER
RISHEW—WISHER	RISTES—SISTER	ROSSET—TOSSER	RUSSET—TUSSER
ROUTES—SOUTER	ROWLEY (rag)—YOWLER	*RUCCUS—SUCCUR	*SENNET—TENNES
SACHET—TACHES	*SEMMET—TEMMES	SENETT—TENETS	SOUGHT—TOUGHS
SENNIT—TENNIS	SESTET—TESTES	SONNET—TONNES	
SWINKT—TWINKS	TOUGHY—YUGHT		

7-letter STL pairs (all, with the well-known reversal)

ACARIDS—SCARIDA?	AMELING—GMELINA (AmHer)	CICONIE—EICONIC
DABBLER—RABBLED	DADDLES—SADDLED	DALLIES—SALLIED
DANGLER—RANGLED	DEARLEY—YEARLED (both W94-103)	DEBASER—REBASED
DEBATER—REBATED	DECODER—RECODED	DEDUCES—SEDUCED
DEFACER—REFACED	DEFILER—REFILED	*DEIFIER—REIFIED
DELATER—RELATED	DELAYER—RELAYED	DEMOTES—SEMOTED
DENEGER—RENEGED	DEPONER—REPONED	DERRIES—SERRIED
DESINER—RESINED	DEVILER—REVILED	DICHTEL?—LICTED
DICHTER—RICHTED?	DIDDLER—RIDDLED	DIMPLER—RIMPLED
DIMPLES—SIMPLED	DINGLES—SINGLED	DOUGHER—ROUGHED
DRILLET—TRILLED	DUBBLER—RUBBLED	DUFFERS—SUFFERD (Ro)
DUMPLER—RUMPLED	DWARVES—SWARVED	EIGHTIN—NIGHTIE
ENFERMI—INFERME	EORNEST—TORNESE	GUBBINS—SUBBING
HAGGISS—SAGGISH	HOBBISM—MOBBISH	LATCHER—RATCHEL
LATCHES—SATCHEL	LETCHES—SETCHEL	LINCHET—TINCHEL
LOUNDER—ROUNDEL	NEROLIS—SEROLIN	NIGHTER—RIGHTEN
PHALLOS—SHALLOP	RADDLES—SADDLER	RALLIES—SALLIER
RALLYES—SALLYER	RAMMIES—SAMMIER	RAPIDES—SAPIDER
RATTLES—SATTLER (Med)	REDATES—SEDATER	RECEDES—SECEDER
RECURES—SECURER	RICKLES—SICKLER	REVERES—SEVERER
REWIRES—SEWIRER	ROOTLET—TOOTLER	RINGLET—TINGLER
RIPPLET—TIPLER	SABANUT—TABANUS?	RUCKLES—SUCKLER
RUMMIES—SUMMIER		SELLERY—YELLERS
SICKERT (painter)—TICKERS		SONDERY—YONDERS
SOUCHET—TOUCHES		

8-letter STL pairs

ACAUDATE—ECAUDATA	DECANTER—RECANTED	DECAPPER—RECAPPED	DECEIVER—RECEIVED
DECLINER—RECLINED	DEFECTER?—REFECTED	DEFERRER—REFERRED	DEFLATER—REFLATED
DEFLOWER—REFLOWED	DEFORMER—REFORMED	DEFRAYER—REFRAYED	DEGRADER—REGRADED
DEJECTER—REJECTED	DEMANDER—REMANDED	DEMERGER—REMERGED	DEPARTER—REPARTED
DEPELLER—REPELLED	DEPORTER—REPORTED	DERAILER—RERAILED?	DESERVER—RESERVED
DESIGNER—RESIGNED	DESPITER—RESPITED	DETAILER—RETAILED	DETAINER—RETAINED
DETESTER—RETESTED	DIFFEREN?—NIFFERED	DISTREAM—MISTREAD	DOWELLER?—ROWELLED
DWINDLES—SWINDLED	ETERNALS—STERNALE	FINEDRAW—WINEDRAF	
LIMONIAS(W92-011)—SIMONIAL		MELONIST—TELONISM	NEFASTER—REFASTEN
RATINGES (W94-090)—SATINGER (W90-085)		SERMONET—TERMONES	

9-letter STL pairs

ALBERTINE(W76-063)—ELBERTINA (fn)	AUCHRONIE?—EUCHRONIA	DECLAIMER—RECLAIMED
DECOUPLER—RECOUPLED	DELEGATER?—RELEGATED	DELIGHTER—RELIGHTED
DELIMITER—RELIMITED?	DEMIDOMES?—SEMIDOMED	DENOUNCER—RENOUNCED
DENSIFIES—SENSIFIED?	DEPAINTER—REPAINTED	DESCRIBER—RESCRIBED?
DESPONDER—RESPONDED	DETHRONER—RETHRONEED?	DETRACTER—RETRACTED
DEWATERER—REWATERED?	DIGNIFIES—SIGNIFIED	
ENAMORATI (pl. of -ata?)—INAMORATE	RUNFISHES?—SUNFISHER	SETTEROUT—TETTEROUS
SHACKLEST (d, vb)—THACKLESS	SHINGLEST (d, vb)—THINGLESS	

10-letter STL pairs

DEBRANCHER—REBRANCHED	DECOMPILER—RECOMPILED	DECOMPOSER—RECOMPOSED
DEFLOWERER—REFLOWED	DEFORESTER—REFORESTED	DEHYDRATER—REHYDRATED
DEOXIDISER (d)—REOXIDISED (d)	DOCKWORKER—ROCKWORKED?	

11-letter STL pairs

DECALCIFIER—RECALCIFIED	DEENERGIZER (d)—REENERGIZED	DEPOLARIZER—REPOLARIZED
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12-letter STL pairs

DEMONSTRATER—REMONSTRATED	DEPROGRAMMED—REPROGRAMMER
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13-letter STL pairs

DEMINERALISER—REMINERALISED

14-letter STL pairs