

# CLOCK WORDS

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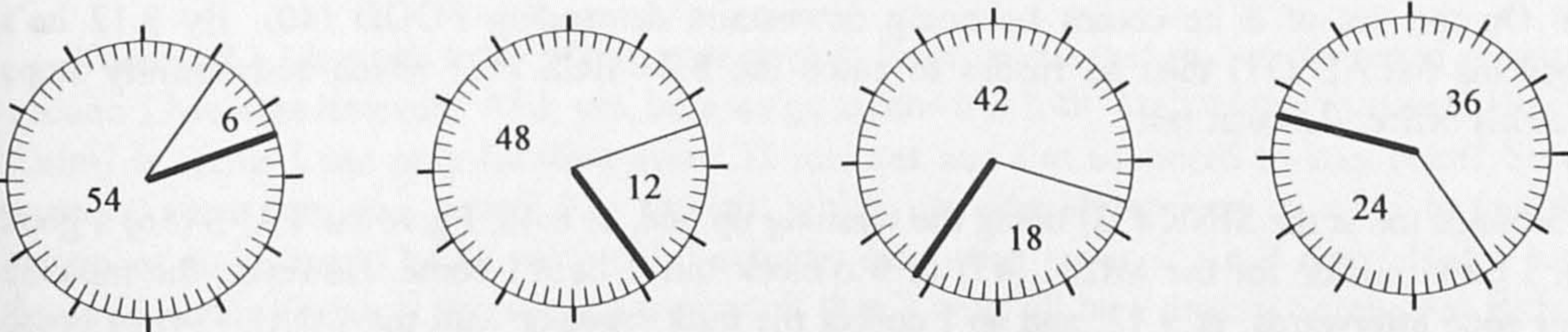
To understand my episode of horological horror, various things need to be explained. I began by assigning a number of minutes to each letter of the alphabet so that A occupies one minute, B two minutes, C three minutes through Z 26 minutes. The time occupied by a word is therefore equal to the sum of the minutes occupied by each of its letters. Thus the word TIME occupies a period of  $47 = 20 + 9 + 13 + 5$  minutes.

## The Hands

The number of minutes available for word making is determined by the relative position of the hour and minute hands on a clock face. At any specific time, there are two different sets of minutes potentially available for making words: on the one hand (sorry!), the number of minutes between the hour hand and the minute hand and, on the other, the number of minutes between the minute hand and the hour hand, always travelling in the same direction be it clockwise or anti-clockwise. In practice there are exceptions, times which only offer a single set of minutes (unless you count nil minutes as a second set) such as each time the minute hand passes the hour hand. However, as will be made clear below, we are only interested when this particular phenomenon happens at 12 o'clock. The only other time which does not offer two different sets of minutes is 6 o'clock, when we have available either 30 minutes or 30 minutes!

## Clock Words

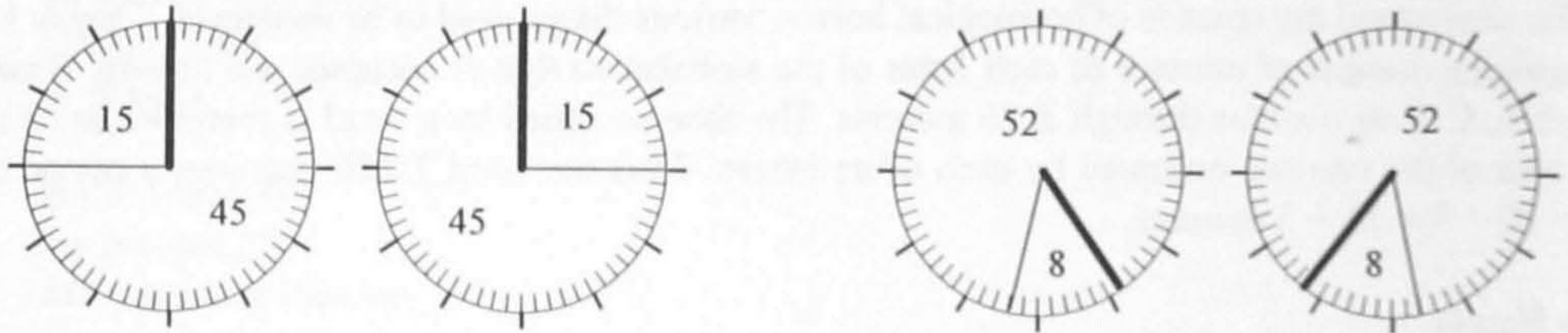
The two sets of minutes available for making words always add up to 60 minutes, whatever the relative positions of the two hands. However, there is a constraint on our word making. Words can only occupy a whole number of minutes, so can't be made when either hand is in limbo between two adjacent minute-markers. It is only possible to make *clock words* when both the hands are aligned with two of the minute-markers or, at 12 o'clock, with a single minute-marker. How often does this occur? The hour hand moves through 5 minutes every hour, thus hitting a minute-marker every 12 minutes. This means that clock words can only be made every twelve minutes, specifically on each hour and at 12, 24, 36 and 48 minutes past each hour. These four clock faces show the minutes available for making clock words at 1.12, 2.24, 3.36 and 4.48.





## Mirror Images and Clock Words

Now let us consider a different time, say 3 o'clock. If we look at a mirror image of the two hands at this time, they tell us that it is 9 o'clock. However, the times between the two hands are 15 minutes and 45 minutes in both cases (see below). So it is that each of our clock word times has a mirror image time which offers the same two sets of minutes. Also shown here are the mirror image times 6.24 and 5.36 which offer 8 minutes and 52 minutes for making words.



In my story below, every 12 minutes is linked with a particular clock word. At 9 o'clock, for example, I happen to use the clock word MILK which occupies 45 minutes. It follows, therefore, that my 3 o'clock (mirror image) clock word must occupy 15 minutes. In this manner, clock words occupying all the values from one minute to 60 minutes can be incorporated into a period of 12 hours. Thus, although my eerie experiences actually cover a total period of 24 hours, I omit the details of the 12 hour period from midday to 11.48 pm inclusive. Clock words are capitalised and the numbers in brackets are the numbers of minutes they occupy.

## The Story

*The day started much like any other, or so I thought.*

It is 6.24 on a chilly April morning and yet the BIRDS (52) are singing as though there's no tomorrow. Now it is 6.36, the time I CRAWL (57) out of bed in response to the bedside alarm. Shivering, I don my slippers and dressing gown and head toward the bathroom. On returning to the bedroom at 6.48, I note that my husband is still DEAD (14) to the world, which is not at all unusual. Just as the 7 o'clock news starts, I catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror and decide that my dressing gown looks decidedly DRAB (25). I really must buy a new one. At 7.12 I pour the OAT (36) cereal into two dishes ready for breakfast. Up above, I hear my husband turn over in bed at 7.24 and wonder what sort of MOOD (47) he will be in today, and how long it will be before he manages to stagger out of bed. In the event, he AROSE (58) at 7.36. I hear drawers and doors opening and closing and then, at 7.48, he has his shower, doubtless leaving SOAP (51) all over the place. On the dot of 8 he comes bounding downstairs demanding FOOD (40). By 8.12 he's finished his MEAL (31) then he rushes to catch the 8.24 BUS (42) which conveniently stops outside his office. Peace at last!

8.36 finds me at the SINK (53) doing the washing up and, at 8.48, I give the TAPS (56) a good clean. I peek outside for the MILK (45) at 9 o'clock but it hasn't come. However, the milkman arrives soon afterwards, at 9.12, and so I collect the milk together with the LOAF (34) of bread which he also delivers. At 9.24 I BAKED (23) a chocolate cake, then BADE (12) 'good morning'



to the postman at 9.36. Twelve minutes later Polly the parrot suddenly squawks 'A' (1)--I've been trying to teach her the alphabet. The refuse collectors arrive at 10 and collect my garbage BAG (10), all the while muttering about its weight. At 10.12 the secretary of the Local History Society rings to tell me that the date of the AGM (21) has been changed. I CALL (28) my friend at 10.24 and we arrange to meet for lunch. Time for a morning break now so, at 10.36, I sit down with the biscuit TIN (43) and a welcome cup of coffee. I KNIT (54) a couple of rows of my jumper at 10.48 then at 11 o'clock answer an AD (5) in the paper for a part-time job. Polly squawks loudly at 11.12; she always seems to sense when I am about to leave her. I tickle her through the bars of her CAGE (16), grateful for her timely reminder. So, at 11.24, I COMB (33) my hair and generally make myself look presentable. At 11.36 I set off by CAR (22) and meet GWEN (49) at 11.48, as arranged.

*The next twelve hours pass in a flash and it seems more like one hour than twelve.*

Now it is midnight. All is quiet and the cat's whiskers twitch as it DREAMS (60) of ever more mice running up and down the clock. Hubby's Anthony Burgess novel falls onto the floor as he drops off to sleep. I climb into BED (11), noticing as I do so that it is 12.12 am. Oh dear, my mind automatically logs on to tautonyms and this does not bode well for a good night's sleep. It now becomes a challenge for me to find the wretched words before I can allow myself to sleep. At 12.24 I already feel nearly as dead as the proverbial DODO (38). By 12.36 I really don't CARE (27) any more but then, at 12.48, MIMI (44) springs to mind. Twelve minutes later, I recall that she appears in the OPERA (55) *La Boheme*. At 1.12 I am inspired with Ali BABA (6) but at 1.24 my whole body starts to ACHE (17) as it cries out for sleep. My last waking thoughts, at 1.36, are of that lovely film GIGI (32)...

*So it is that I am quite unaware of both the RAT (39) which at 1.48 starts scuttling around in the cellar, and of the bottle it dislodges which FALLS (50) onto the floor at 2 o'clock or, indeed, of any of the rodent's other nocturnal antics.*

...GIGI. Some noise WAKES (59) me. It's only 2.12, for heaven's sake! I hear it again and it seems to be coming from the cellar. By 2.24, I have convinced myself there's a THIEF (48) in the house. I try to wake my husband but to no avail. At 2.36 I switch on the light but the BULB (37) pops, so I am left in the dark. Did I lock the doors and shut the windows? How could there be anyone in the cellar? At 2.48, the neighbour's DOG (26) starts barking and by 3 o'clock I'm really FED (15) up. At 3.12, I distinctly hear the BAA (4) of a sleepless sheep and, in a way, I can sympathise. At 3.24, I decide to drown out the various noises by switching on to the BBC (7) World Service where at 3.36 the newscaster reports that the HEAD (18) of some African country has been assassinated, just what I need to hear!

Where did I leave my brain? Only now does it dawn on me that my whole world is revolving around 12-minute intervals. And, yes, here we go again--it's 3.48. I tell myself to stay CALM (29). Calm? It seems I can only function every 12 minutes and I'm supposed to stay calm? So think, woman, what does this mean? The thought which immediately springs to mind is that if this continues and I live to be 84 years old, I actually died when I was 7. Am I dead? Is this heaven? More like hell, I'd say. I try to convince myself that it must all be a dream. Surely that is the only possible explanation. So to hell (or heaven or Armageddon or whatever) with it! I decide to make



the most of my dream and begin, on the hour, by treating myself to a piece of the chocolate CAKE (20) which I'd made the previous day. A few minutes later I have another slice and this time I ADD (9) a dollop of cream. Scrumptious!

You'll notice that, subtly, I've resorted to using the words 'on the hour' and 'a few minutes later' in an attempt to break out of the 'dozen' syndrome in which I find myself. But it makes no difference. However, I try to maintain a positive attitude and recall at 4.24 (when else!) how nice the AA (2) [Automobile Association] man had been last Thursday when my car broke down on the motorway. At 4.36, happening to glance at the bookshelf, I remember how lucky I had been to find a copy of the EDD (13) [English Dialect Dictionary] on Saturday, and in such excellent condition. But at 4.48 I am prematurely distracted from my positive thinking, this time by the CAT (24) who is scratching at the cellar door. Well, my beloved feline, not in a month of Sundays am I going to open that door, so scratch on, puss!

It is now 5 am and I have the HEADACHE (35) to end all headaches. Is it too much to ask for an hour's peace and normality? Apparently yes. PETE (46) from next door thoughtlessly revs his car as he returns at 5.12 from his night shift at the factory. This in turn disturbs the parrot and at 5.24, as she squawkily awards herself a BA (3), it vaguely registers that I must devote more time to teach Polly her alphabet. I switch on the radio but some BF (8) tells me the time is 5.36! Is this a conspiracy? And, whatever it is, what can I DO (19) about it, especially at 5.48 in the morning? Perhaps it's not just me, perhaps the whole world has changed to a twelve-minute time schedule! However, I'm far too befuddled to bother about the implications of this. I feel dreadful and by 6 o'clock begin to wonder if I've picked up a BUG (30). Could this be responsible for my 'time out' syndrome, I wonder? My terrifying ordeal has now been going on for almost 24 hours. I don't need to tell you what time I screamed for HELP (41)!

No one hears my heart-rending appeal, not even my husband who wakes 'some time' later--I've deliberately given up looking at the clock now. Unbelievably, he's fully refreshed and oblivious, so he tells me, of any untoward nocturnal comings and goings. However, when asked, he says that the last thing he remembers is hearing the clock starting to strike midnight as he was reading a clock word ORANGE (60)...

*Something snapped at that point and suddenly I'm back to normality with a vengeance! He's produced the punch line, the devious ---, albeit inadvertently. I tell him this and the smirk which appears on his face is nauseating. But wait, it seems that my brain is in overdrive now, presumably catching up for lost time. It has already come up with a punch line of its own. Yippee! However, when I tell him I've got a trump up my sleeve it's obvious that he doesn't know whether or not to believe me. So, O.K., I'll let him sweat for an hour or two. Meanwhile, I anticipate with relish the moment when I inform him that A CLOCK FACE occupies 60 minutes!*