

# KICKSHAWS

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*Readers are encouraged to send their favorite linguistic kickshaws to the Kickshaws editor ([drABC26@aol.com](mailto:drABC26@aol.com)). Answers can be found in Answers and Solutions at the end of the issue.*

## The Mad Scientist

Once a week I teach creative writing in my son Danny's 5th/6th grade class. The past few weeks the topic has been wordplay. I ended the first class by asking the students to write something for next time, but I learned that it's better in most cases to do wordplay on the spot. Three students out of 25 turned in wordplay writing that they'd written at home. Two of the works were alphabet sentences (26 words, each beginning with A to Z). The third was an oxymoron story by Danny and his friend Sam Offut, whose father is a novelist and teacher in the UI Writers Worksh0op. The two spent quite awhile composing it together and alone. Danny took Ove Michelsen's *Words at Play* to school so that they could pick out a few of the oxymora from Ove's extensive list. The story, called "The Mad Scientist", uses many of them:

Once there was a mad scientist named Bogo. One day he was eating jumbo shrimp and reading the "Old News" paper about the Civil War when he met a spider monkey in a baggy swimsuit who claimed he invented the Internet. The monkey took the mad scientist for a walk and they saw his best friend George Bush the honest politician. They also met the smart jock who had an athletic scholarship. They were all jogging down a path when a serious comedian came by. He looked like a dimwit. He was wearing long shorts. He said "I want you to meet my friend. He listens to soft rock and could give you a permanent loan."

## Kangaroo Name

Danny discovered a rare occurrence of a kangaroo name, in which the first name is a joey whose letters appear in order but not in a single string in the last name. The person bearing the name is a well-known actress. Her last name also contains a joey indicating her species, in case her fans should forget.

U MA  
THURMAN  
HU MAN

## O, No? OK! O, Yoko Ono!

Yoko Ono is a name with a unique property: subtracting the alphabetic values of one vowel from the other one each side gives a correct result: O-O = O-O, or 15-15 = 15-15, which is 0=0. That's no big deal, but presenting the consonants as a subtraction problem gives a less trivial correct result: Y-K = N, or 25-11 = 14.



## Y's Names

Jay Ames found several last names in the 2000 Ottawa phone book that push the pronunciation envelope to its limit. For one thing, they use only Y's as their vowels: Laszlo HRYNKYWYCZ, Salima KRZYNZYNSKY, Hank RYBCZYNSKY.

## Lousy Latin, Phony French

Here are some foreign language phrases that Jay translated using his intuition and his typewriter. Sounds good to me!

|                 |                                      |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------|
| ab asino lanum  | 'no wool on my ass'                  |
| esprit de corps | (this is) one lively corpse          |
| il penseroso    | one real sad sack                    |
| oblast          | Russian expletive (borrowed from UK) |
| espresso        | java jive                            |
| en route        | in deep, well-rooted                 |
| en tout cas     | 'gimme yer wallet, not yer umbrella' |
| en train        | all aboard!                          |

## A Bunch of Bastards

"Excuse me, but I heard that you've got a bunch of bastards hanging out here."

"Yeah, you looking for a mill bastard?"

"No, I'm looking for a flat bastard."

"What about a round bastard? Would one of them help?"

"Not much. I doubt that a half round bastard would help, either."

"How about a fat bastard?"

"Very funny. I suppose he's here with the others."

"No, just kidding. You'll find all of our bastards over there."

One of the bastards in this dialog is totally different from the others. Who is he, and how?

## Cinematic Pig

Pig Latin has appeared in many movies and television shows. The word **ixnay** is perhaps the most popular. Here are a few examples. Can you provide any others or verify the "Our Gang" reference?

'Ixnay on the ottenray.' --Igor, in Young Frankenstein

"Ixnay on the hound" --John Jacob Jinglemeier Schmidt, in To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything Julie Neumar

"Ixnay! Ixnay!" --Eddie's girlfriend, in Who Framed Roger Rabbit?

"Ouyay ashway othesclay" --Buckwheat in an "Our Gang" show

## Extra! Extra! Read All About It!

A January 3 Associated Press news article had two items of logological interest. The first to catch my attention was an oxymoron in the opening line: "The Federal Reserve, faced with a rapidly



slowing economy..." When I started typing it up for Kickshaws, I noticed that the title of the article had an excellent example of subliminal wordplay. The initial letters of the first four words of the title form an acrostic that might have been a secret editorial comment by the reporter: Fed Unexpectedly Cuts Key Rate Half a Point.

The Waterloo-Cedar Falls Courier, not to be outdone, had a couple of items in the March 6 issue—a redundancy and an oxymoron in the same sentence. The story was about a St. Louis rapper called Nelly: "Nelly released his debut album, "Country Grammar," last year and watched the first single of the same name climb the charts after audiences nationwide were introduced to his sing-song style rapping."

### A Reverse Alphomic Word Ladder

Susan Thorpe has extended the word ladder concept that appeared in the August 2000 Kickshaws. She writes "I offered 'Alphomic Word Ladder' in which the letters of each word were in alphabetical order, and each letter-change was to a letter further along the alphabet. Now I offer the reverse of this. The letters of each word are in reverse alphabetical order, and each letter change is to a letter nearer the beginning of the alphabet. As before, all the words (30 in this case) can be found in the OED, Second Edition."

ZUNI-ZUNG-YUNG-YONG-YONE-WONE-VONE-TONE-SONE-RONE-ROME-ROLE-  
POLE-POLD-POID-POED-PLED-PIED-PEED-NEED-MEED-LEED-KEED-JEED-HEED-  
GEED-FEED-FEEB (or FEDD)-FEDB-FEDA

### Double Double Trouble

Susan has also found an unusual type of word that may at first seem to be the result of double vision: "Quite by chance, I came across the German name Hans ZZEE. This prompted me to search for 4-letter words made of two different doubled letters. Excluding hyphenated words and abbreviations, here are the words I found:

From the Oxford English Dictionary, Second Edition:

AALL meaning *all* (see 1893-4 citation under *put* verb 1)

FFEE meaning *fee* (see 1639 citation under *fee* noun 1)

FFOO meaning *foe* (see c1485 citation under *wind*)

OOLL see 1888 citation under *harl* noun

YYFF meaning *if*

From Chambers Scots Dictionary, 1975:

OOFF *noun* an elf, a weak harmless person

OOFF *verb* to walk stupidly; used of peaty soil; to cause oats to die out before ripening

OOFF *adjective* decrepit; worn down by disease

OOSS *noun* fibrous stuff put into an inkstand to prevent spilling (cf. *ooze*)

*Mrs. Byrne's Dictionary* (1990) lists OOAA, a Hawaiian bird, but it would appear that she has removed the hyphens from the word O-O-A-A which is how it is presented elsewhere, including Webster's Second Edition. Can readers find any more examples?"



## Letter-Truthful Numbers

Susan also sends the following numerical kickshaw on letter-truthful numbers. A number is letter-truthful when one or more of the letters in its name have alphabetic values (A=1 to Z=26) that add up to the same number (see Nov 2000 page 298 for more info). She writes "I tried this exercise for the number names **ninety-nine** down to **eighty-one** (excluding **ninety** which has a total of only 87). I allowed any number of letters and discovered that (a) in all cases, at least two different numbers of letters will make the required total, and (b) in some cases, different sets of the same number of letters will make the required total. The highest ratio of used letters to total letters was 8 out of 10 (99, 95[2], 89, 85). The lowest was 4 out of 11 (83)."

- 99 NINETyNINE (8), NiNetYNINE (7)
- 98 NiNETYEiGHt (8), nIneTYeIGHt, NinETYElghT (7), NiNETYeighT (6)
- 97 NINETYsEvEn (8), NiNETYsEveN, NInETYSEven (7) NiNETYSeven (6)
- 96 NINETYsIx (7), NIneTYSIx, NiNETySiX (6), NiNetYSiX (5)
- 95 NInEtYFIVE, NINETyFiVE (8), NINetYFiVe, (7), NInETYfiVe (6), NiNeTYfiVe (5)
- 94 nInETyFOUR, NINetYFoUr, NInETYFOur (7), NineTyFOUR, NInETYfoUr (6), NiNeTYfoUr (5)
- 93 NINetyTHREe (8) NINetYtHRee (7), NInETYThree (6), NiNeTYThree (5)
- 92 nInETyTWO, NiNeTyTwO (6), NineTyTWO (5)
- 91 NINETyONE (7), NiNetYONE (6)
- 89 ElGHtYNINE (8), ElGHtYNIne (7), eIGHtYNiNe (6)
- 88 eIGHTyElGHt (8), ElghTYelghT, eiGHTYeighT, eiGhTYeIGHt (6)
- 87 ElGHtySEVEN, ElGHtysEVEN (8), ElGHtYsEVeN (7), EiGHTYseVen (6), elghTYSeveN (5)
- 86 ElGHtYSix (6), elGHtYsiX (5)
- 85 ElGHtYfIVE (8), ElGHtYfiVe (7), EiGhTYFiVe, EigHTYfiVE (6), elghTYfiVe (5)
- 84 ElGHtYFOUr, elGHtyFOUR, EiGHtYFOuR (7), elGhTYFOUr, eiGHTYFouR (6), eighTYFOuR (5), eighTYfoUR (4)
- 83 EiGHTYtHrEE (8), EiGHtyThREe (7), EiGHTYthRee, elGHtyTHRee, EigHTYThrEe, eighTYTHrEE (6), eighTYThRee (4)
- 82 ElGHtYtwO (6), ElghTYtWo (5)
- 81 ElGHtYONE (7), ElGHtYOne (6), eiGhTYONE (5)

## Longest Words, Longest Titles

When I worked at Iowa Book & Supply in the 1970s, I saw a book with a long one-word title, something like *Psychopharmacotherapeutics*. The actual title, whatever it was, suggests several questions. What are the longest words appearing in the titles of books, movies, plays, television programs, songs, artworks, etc.? What are the longest one-word titles? The song "Batman" from the old TV series of the same name is especially unusual in that it uses only one word, "Batman," throughout. Does anyone know how many times it occurs? Is it the most repetitious song? Any others like it? For creative works in general, what are the longest titles (without subtitles) in terms of number of words? Double titles of books connected by *or*, such as *Hans Brinker, or The Silver Skates* (6 words) count as a single title. Are there any triple titles connected by *or* twice?



## One-Letter Titles

At the other end of the spectrum, what are some one-letter titles? In literature, two poetry magazines have appeared with a single letter for a title: *C* (Ted Berman, editor) and *L* (Curtis Faville, editor). Louis Zukofsky published a book-length poem titled *A*, and Andy Warhol published a novel titled *a*. In cinema, several one-letter titles have lit up the silver screen (see “The Pangram Film Festival Revisited” by Richard Sabey in Nov 2000). Can anyone provide other one-letter examples for any creative work? There are many poems and paintings with one-digit titles. Is there any one-symbol title that isn’t a letter or a number? A novel called *&* or a movie called *\$*, perhaps?

## Unwritten Novel

I’ve written an unwritten novel, which is titled *Unwritten Novel*. It is 316 pages long. It has an introduction, fifteen chapters of different lengths, and an epilog. The pages are blank except for page numbers and certain other words that aren’t part of the novel itself, such as “Introduction,” “Chapter 1,” and so on. The “Introduction” begins on page i and ends on page iii. The next page is completely blank except for the words “This page left intentionally blank.” It separates the “Introduction” from the body of the novel. “Chapter 1” starts on page 1 and ends on page 9. The other chapters begin and end on the appropriate pages. The body of the novel ends on page 309. Page 310 is completely blank except for the words “This page left intentionally blank.” It separates the body from the “Epilog,” but, although it has no page number, it is counted as page 310. The “Epilog” is on pages 311-312. The text is 102,947 words long, all equally important to the story and all equally unwritten. It is the story of—but I’d rather not say. If I were to tell any part of it, there would be the possibility that someone would figure out the ending and reveal it to others.

Many people have said that they have an unwritten novel inside them. However, if it exists only in their minds, it isn’t really an unwritten novel. It is simply an unwritten idea for a novel. To really *have* an unwritten novel, it has to be written. Unwritten unwritten novels can’t exist. My written unwritten novel is the only truly unwritten novel. It is not untitled, since, as I mentioned above, its title is *Unwritten Novel*. It is subtitled *An Unpublished Book*. If it is ever published, I’ll have to change the subtitle to *A Published Book*. At this point, it exists only in typescript. Since finishing it, I rewrote it once. In the rewrite, I didn’t change anything, but, of course, I would have if I thought anything needed to be changed. The rewrite has the same unwritten text as the original, but nobody has ever read it. Technically speaking, it’s a written, rewritten, unwritten, unpublished, unread novel.

## Letter Similarity and Contrast

If the (capital) letters are arranged in pairs that are equidistant from the midpoint of the alphabet (the space between M and N), how many pairs have similarity—that is, how many have the same number of lines and/or curves? Surprisingly, only two, A and Z, with three lines each. On the other hand, how many pairs have the highest contrast—that is, letters having the most or fewest lines matched with letters having the fewest or most curves? To figure out the contrast, subtract the number of lines and curves of one letter from the corresponding lines and curves of the other and use the absolute value of each. The contrast of A-Z is, of course, 3-3 lines = 0. The contrast of B-Y is 1-3 lines = -2 and 2-0 curves = 2, resulting in  $|-2,2| = 2,2$ . The equidistant letters with greatest contrast are F-U and H-S, both having a contrast of 3,1. Note that they are on either side of the semi-midpoints (G and T, which divide that halves in half).



## Temptation Island

Mike Morton has the inside dope on "Temptation Island," a TV series. He writes "I'm sure we've all been looking forward (one way or another...) to Wednesday's finale of 'Temptation Island' which turns out to have much better anagrams than 'Survivor'."

### Top Ten Anagrams

Timid plan; no taste  
Adman spit on title  
Maidens taint plot  
I'd spot main talent  
Planet to admit sin  
AMA tip: don't listen  
Plan? It ain't modest!  
Top Ten ain't dismal  
Nation sated 'til p.m.  
I tattle on damp sin

### Some Strange Runners-Up

Alien minds top AT&T  
Animals tend to tip  
I don't eat implants  
I intend to splat, Ma  
I meant to split DNA  
Listen to Pa, damn it!  
Nod: PETA's militant!  
Mild tension at PTA  
Polite, distant man  
Site to implant DNA

### Some Risque Runners-Up

Idea-man: Plot 'n' tits  
Intimate pal? No STD?  
Lads ain't impotent  
Limit pants on date  
Listen to maid pant  
Not limp? Ain't sated  
Not limp? Dates ain't!  
Sand; intimate plot  
Tits dominate plan  
Top minds: "Tail? Neat!"

### What reviewers say

Admit: nation slept  
At points, I'd lament  
Dismal. Ain't potent  
Instant media plot  
Lament: idiots pant  
Last time I don't nap  
Lost and impatient  
Mania isn't plotted  
Plot isn't animated  
Talent? I'd spit, moan

### The Straight Dope on Some of the Islanders

Dano: militant pest  
I plant Tom instead  
Lads mention Patti  
Lisa 'n' Tom: tepid, tan  
Matt to spin denial  
Matt, Lisa: endpoint  
Matt: "Don't pine, Lisa"  
Ms. Patti led nation  
Old men stain Patti  
Patti: mad, insolent

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## A First-Class Boner

"To bone" is a fairly recent slang term meaning "to have sex." In the pet food aisle at the nearby Hy-Vee, there is a product for dogs called "Bone-Us Bag." I howled when I saw it.

## Third Words

The letters I and R divide the alphabet into thirds: eight letters come before I, eight come between I and R, and eight come after R. Letters can be considered equidistant from either of the third-points. E and M are equidistant from I, which is appropriate since they spell ME. O and U are equidistant from R, which together spell OUR. Each letter in the middle third is equidistant from a letter in the first third and one in the last third. A "third word" is composed of pairs of letters that are equidistant from I, from R, or from both letters (each referred to as a pair below). Some third words have special patterns as well. The selection below has, in parentheses, the paired letters, their third-point letter (in brackets), and their patterns. Can you find longer examples of third words—or other patterns in which the letters occur?

MINED, DENIM (ME, I, ND [I], no special pattern)  
COME (CO, ME [I], consecutive pairs)



POUT (PT, OU [R], equidistant pairs within word)

DIM (DM, I [I], equidistant pairs within word)

FLOUR (FL [I], OU, R [R], consecutive pairs, words from both third-points)

## **Ludigrams**

“Most of us,” Peter Newby writes, “have a favourite anagram in one of two categories: the apt or the ironic. My personal choices are the apt classic INCOMPREHENSIBLE / PROBLEM IN CHINESE and the ingenious irony of what some have termed an ambigram, MOTHER-IN-LAW / WOMAN HITLER. However, a third category exists—that which the self-styled logologists dismiss as a ‘transposal’ but which, nevertheless, can produce delightful (albeit ludicrous) pairings. One such, probably created by Michael Wylie of the programme’s production team, was recently featured on British TV’s Countdown: LIFESTYLE / SILLY FEET. What other ludicrous anagrams do Kickshaws readers consider worthy of attention?”

## **Sim Metrical**

“The good folk of New Bybwen detest the Napoleonic metric system imposed on the British by the politicians,” Peter says, “and, naturally, these sturdy Mercians retain traditional measures in their commerce, such as the fo, a measure of eight square yards. Fanny Sim, the world’s fattest exotic dancer, was typical of Wessex Brits in coping with the Mercian heritage. Requiring a large square of lace for her act, she expressed her wishes in Europeak to a local draper, only to be informed politely that what she needed was TEN FO, MISS SIM, OF NET.

## **Eskimology and More**

Qaasanaaq’s Lisa Rdggy was invited to address the New Bybwen Historical Association on Norse myths and chose as her subject the great ash tree of life, knowledge, time and space. The Historical Association’s Dr. Offa fford introduced this celebrated Greenlander and her subject thus: YGGDRASIL: LISA RDGGY.

Basil Fawltly was distraught when his wife Sybil, in a fit of pique, had the zab (male generative organ) of Basil’s pet tomcat amputated, stuffed, and mounted. In the course of time this trinket was purchased by a private museum in New Bybwen and displayed as BAZ’S BIG GIB’S ZAB.

Nell Allen, a New Bybwen seamstress, was employed by an American film company on location in Qaaanaaaq. The well-known actress Deborah Raffin insisted upon a local Greenlander dress designer providing genuine ethnic outfits. Nell reported that NIFF ARHA ROBED DEBORAH RAFFIN.

## **Bryn Pertwee Asks**

What on EARTH is a change of HEART? Does NIS, in Serbia, back SIN? Can you put A TOYOTA in reverse? Is ‘YAW, alias SAILAWAY’ a fair definition? And does A MERCIAN confuse an AMERICAN?

## **A Case of Ecclesiastical Miscegenation**

Mike Keith quotes Rob Morris of the San Francisco Chronicle: “Britney Spears, an anagram of PRESBYTERIANS, has been signed by Pepsi-Cola, an anagram of EPISCOPAL.”



Mike also notes that Amazon has outfoxed itself by requiring that CD titles not be indexed by their initial article: "Law is an Anagram of Wealth, The."

### March 4th

When I was in grade school, I heard a riddle that forever turned March 4th into a special day for me that hardly anyone else notices. The riddle goes "What is the only day of the year that is a command?" The answer is, of course, "March forth!" Actually, all the days of March can be considered commands differing only in the position of the marcher, but the 4th goes beyond simple positions and becomes direction. I think about that riddle when the day rolls around, and I march forth into it.

### Alphabetically Based Calendar (ABC)

Ever since I was 20 or so, I've lettered my age. The ages 1-26 were small a-z. Ages 27-52 were capital A-Z. Ages 53-78 are italic small *a-z*. And ages 79-104 will be italic capital *A-Z*. I plan on living to 104 and not a day longer. (For those of you who are above 104, ages 105-130 are bold small **a-z**.) Interestingly, with that system, the ages 1,26,27,52, etc., the A's and Z's, stood out for me above all the other ages. The transition from Z to the next A involved changing from lower case to upper case and then from upper to lower italic. It was more memorable to go from z to A than to go from 26 to 27.

This century can be alphabetically termed bold face U (21st letter for 21st century). In fact, with the new century comes the opportunity to begin alphabetizing time instead of numbering it. Give temporal reality a fresh start! The 100 years can be lettered a-z, A-Z, *a-z*, and *A-U*. This year, 01, becomes "a" (or "a U" to indicate the century). The clock can also be alphabetically remade (not to be confused with Susan Thorpe's clock words in the Feb 2001 Word Ways) by using A-L for the hours 1-12. The 60 divisions of the clock face can be lettered in a way similar to that discussed for the ages 1-104. The first 26 divisions are small a-z, the second 26 are capital A-Z, and the remaining 8 minutes are italic small *a-h*. "AM" is represented by small a, and "PM" is represented by small z. To represent the date, the months are also lettered A-L, like the hours. The days are numbered with small a-z for the first 26 days and capital letters A-E (for 27-31) as needed for the remaining days of each month. Using the present moment as an example, it is now 9:24 PM March 10, 2001. In the Alphabetic System it is I:x z, C-j-a U.

### Deletion Definiton

DOOMSDAYER is defined by Webster's Seventh Collegiate by listing DOOMSAYER as a synonym. This must be the longest example of a word being defined by deleting one letter and nothing else. The first half is etymologically related, and the last half isn't. Are there any more deletion or insertion definitions other than trivial examples such as PREDIAL-PRAEDIAL that are simply variations on a theme?

### No. 111 2.7.93—7.2295

This is the title of a new kind of writing, a writing that goes between literature and art. The artist, Kenneth Goldsmith, has been exhibiting texts in museums. Others have also "seen the writing on the wall" and have created such text works (see *Art in America*, April 1996). Goldsmith's No. 111 is his 111th text. The 600-page work is divided into at least 1366 chapters! The chapters are structured in a very nontraditional but very simple way: each chapter consists of words or phrases



with the same number of syllables taken from different sources—newspaper headlines, Shakespeare, pop song, dirty jokes, book titles, his own diary—and arranged in alphabetic order. The longer chapters consist of single quotes of the appropriate number of syllables. Goldsmith had to count the syllables himself, since computers aren't very good at that job. Chapter I begins with "A woah!" and ends "zuder," and so on. The text isn't intended to be published in book form but to be exhibited in galleries. Thus, more people view it rather than read it. And yet it provides an interesting read for awhile and shows once more (as wordplay writers like Mike Keith and Richard Brodie do in *The Anagrammed Bible*) that there are literary structures for book-length works that go beyond the novel. Here is a short quote from the 5-, 8-, 12-, and 14-syllable chapters of Goldsmith's opus:

a baby better, a basic error, a big fat liar, a biscuit mixer, a blind pig sampler, a castrated deer,  
 a class A splinter, a closed mouth gathers, A Current Affair...  
 my 15 minutes are over, my cold-blooded mother-in-law, my heart says yeah yeah yeah yeah  
 yeah, N.O.C.D.—not our class dear, name rank and serial number...  
 for instance I switched over from briefs to boxers, for somebody who's supposed to be big on  
 bras, generalizations are of little use here. Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers...  
 reading begins when the eye receives the words as pictures, render therefore unto Caesar the  
 things which are Caesar's, Roy Cohn fist fucking Jean Genet in the judge's chamber,  
 Save-a-hoe had better strap on his cape the shot calla...

### Kay Jewelers

The slogan for Kay Jewelers in Iowa City is "Every kiss begins with a Kay." The reply to that could be "Every overpriced Gold rinG begins and ends with a 'gee!'"

### The Missing Invariants

In the last Kickshaws there was a poem that used 21 words with different invariant alphabetical letters (from *Making the Alphabet Dance*, p 170). Ed Wolpow writes "The last item in Feb 2001 Kickshaws notes 5 missing letters from the list—letters in the same place in a word as the numerical order of the letter. You might have had more luck with less limited sources:

hexahemidemisemiQuaver: a run of six 64th notes  
 semithermoelectromotiVe: pertaining to energy, half of which is derived from the heat  
 generated by electricity, and the other half, usually, from Kirlian radiation  
 pseudoarchibreechesfloWer: highly-deceptive fossil remains, suggestive of Dicentra, but  
 actually those of a Cambrian goldfish  
 cholecystocolohysteropeXy: combined surgical anchoring of the gallbladder, colon and uterus,  
 thereby preventing their unseemly migration  
 counterdisdenominationaliZe: to oppose the breaking up of religious sects; to oppose the  
 removal of unusual values of money from circulation (such as the two-dollar bill)"

### Pangrammatic Initial Sentence

Like alphabet sentences, a pangrammatic initial sentence has all letters of the alphabet beginning its 26 words. However, the initials can appear in any order. The goal is to create the shortest possible text using real words and common names. The only one-letter words allowed are the four common ones A, I, O and X. In the two examples, the first (57 letters) avoids using musical syllable words but the second (55 letters) uses all of them. Both use common words. The shortest



possible sentence (using no additional one-letter words beyond the four) would consist of 48 letters—can you do it?

O, do 'x' a cat, Ed. Lo! We zip up my red van. Ha! So I quiz ye, Pa, to go by kin for no joy  
'Do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti—' I go up. Pa, quiz Ed. O joy, be a cat. 'X' kin! We zap no vat. 'Yo! Hi!'

### **O, Quiz!**

On all cars made from 1980 and on, the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) is attached somewhere. If you can find yours, check out the tenth symbol. It indicates the year the car was made, from 1980 to the present. A year in this system may be represented by one of the letters ABCDEFGHJKLMNPRSTVWXY or one of the digits 1-9. For letters, start with A=1980, B=1981, up to Y = 2000. Then, instead of Z, the digits 1-9 begin, going from 1=2001 to 9=2009. According to my State Farm agent, in 2010 the system will recycle with A. The letters IQO are excluded because they resemble the digits 1 or 0. The letters U and Z are also excluded, but the handout doesn't explain why. (Perhaps so that the 1-9 digits would occur in the corresponding years?) So, what is the longest word that can be formed by the VIN Year Alphabet? O, Quiz! That exclamation includes all the letters, each once, that are not in the VIN Year Alphabet.

### **O, Qwyz?**

If you start at the top left of the keyboard with Q and pick the next letter on the keyboard that occurs after Q in the alphabet, you get W. If you take the next letter after W both in the alphabet and on the keyboard, you get Y. The next after Y is Z, way down in the bottom row. At QWYZ, there's no place to go but back to the top, to the first unused letter after Q, which is E, and repeat the process. If you do this until exhausting all the possibilities, you wind up with QWYZ, ERTUX, IOPSV, ADFGHJKLN, CM and B. That's one way the letters can be arranged based on their alphabetic occurrence on the keyboard. Another way is to require that the chosen letters also occur consecutively in the alphabet: AB, C, D, EFGH, IJKLM, N, OP, QRS, TUV, WX and YZ. Note that this group, unlike the group above, can't be represented in any other way except for arbitrarily dividing one of its sets to produce a trivial variation (for example, EFGH to EF, GH). The first approach suggests several questions. Can you go from left to right and down the keyboard, picking any choice of letters as long as they are in alphabetic order so that the result is a set of letters or a group of sets that works in any of the following three ways?

- (1) a group with fewer than seven sets
- (2) a group the sets of which have the same number of letters (except for a remainder)
- (3) a group made of sets that increase by one (set of one letter, set of two letters, etc.)

### **Up The Down Staircase**

Bill Webster, perusing Webster's Third, caught a prime example of self-contradictory words. The dictionary has the word "uppercase" followed by "see LOWERCASE."

### **In Short**

Bill notes that "ABBREVIATION is 12 letters long, and its abbreviation, ABBREV., is 6 letters long." Now that's longer than a whole bunch of full-fledged, unabbreviated working-class words. Can a long abbreviation be abbreviated? Can I use ABB. to stand for ABBREV.? Is there a rule about abbreviating a word too quickly? Does taking out more than half its letters make it fly



around in a zigzag pattern like a balloon? If a word is too short, can it be debreviated? The word IF itself seems way too short, considering that its very presence at the beginning of a sentence changes the meaning so dramatically. If IF were debreviated to IFISTICAL, it would do a much more impressive job: "Ifistical I were you..."

### Scrabble Irony

"Isn't it an oddity," Bill writes, "that while capitalized words are not allowed in the game, the letters themselves are all CAPS?" This discovery may bring about the downfall of the game! If someone had a set custom-made with all lowercase letters, they could win the World Scrabble Championship simply by claiming their opponents were using capital letters.

### Brooklynese: Dismay? No, Disjune!

The following story has 34 disses in it. Bill sent it with a note asking if it is "Just disserts?"

"Disability to play a good game is discouraging," was Sid's [Diss] disclaimer. "Disguise in dissuade jacket is a winner. Disarrangement of tiles is disarming." Sidney [Disney] discarded the Q, displayed two ewes. Disquieting! "I was disclose, den disbud guy got DISRATE [ASTERID]. Disabuse has me discombobulated! Discontinuance is losing." Discretely, Sid [Dis] discovered DISASTER [DIASTERS]. "Disman has AIDS [DISA]," Sid said. "Discommon word, DISSENTS [DISNESTS] should disillusion disassociate." "Dislocation is disturbing." "For dismember."

### Letter-Sound Beheadment

Some words begin with a letter separated by a hyphen from the rest of the word: C-section, I-beam, etc. Others begin with the sound of a letter's name: BBegin, DEtour, etc. In a letter-sound beheadment, the letter sound from the beginning of a word is removed so that the result is a shorter word with a different meaning and spelling but the same or very similar pronunciation. It can be represented by the single letter followed by the shorter word. I ronic doesn't qualify, because ronic isn't a word, and P nuts doesn't qualify because nuts is spelled the same in peanuts (however, P con does qualify).

An alphabet of such words appears below. W is excluded because no single word begins with the sound "double-you." The word for H is less than ideal, but it's the best in the Tenth Collegiate. A couple of other letters might not be represented by perfect words, either, but they come close. While there is one word for each of the 25 letters, the 25 smaller words that remain after the beheadment have some duplication of initial letters. B appears in both A bull and L bough, and C in both P con and S cargo. Two other letters, G and H, don't begin any smaller words at all. Can you come up with a set of words that begin with 25 different letters and that behead to shorter words that also begin with 25 different letters? The problem can be reversed: form letter-sound curtailments with the word first and the letter second, as in bull E (for bully).

|          |        |         |          |         |
|----------|--------|---------|----------|---------|
| A bull   | F fuse | K purr  | P con    | U night |
| B yawned | G owed | L bough | Q tickle | V kneel |
| C word   | H eve  | M it    | R me     | X acute |
| D fie    | I very | N jinn  | S cargo  | Y lee   |
| E quill  | J did  | O shun  | T zing   | Z row   |



## Syllabic-Alphabetic Words

Each word below is “spelled” with two letters, one uppercase and one lowercase. The uppercase letter is pronounced by its name, like the first letters in the previous kickshaw, as if it were a syllable. The lowercase letter is pronounced in the regular manner as a letter. To some degree, each word combines the way that symbols are used in syllabic languages like Japanese with the way that they are used in alphabetic languages like English. Bd combines the syllabic sound of the capital letter’s name with the alphabetic sound of the small letter: BEE+d = BEAD. An alphabet of words of this kind is more difficult to complete than the alphabet in the previous kickshaw. The five letters FHMSX aren’t able to begin common short words unless Sk can represent “ask” and Xs “excess.” (Furthermore, CHQW can’t end words without causing some confusion in pronunciation.) Can you fill in these five blanks? For an extra challenge, try coming up with an alphabet of words that reverse the order of the two elements, forming alphabetic-syllabic words such as bR = BAR, hM = HEM, etc.

Am (aim), Br (beer), Cn (scene), Dd (deed), Ek (eek), Gp (jeep), Iz (eyes), Jg (jag), Kj (cage), Ls (else), Nd (end), Of (oaf), Px (peaks), Qb (cube), Rk (ark), Tz (tease), Ur (your), Vr (veer), Yf (wife), Zl (zeal)

## At Ease

What does the surrealistic sentence below represent? Can you find any other word(s) that could increase its length?

EIGHT EUPHORIC EAU-DE-VIE EMISSARIES, EFFORTLESSLY ESCAPING  
ELOQUENT ENTITIES, EAT EXTRA EIDERDOWN

## Punctuation Ways

Punctuation marks are rarely dealt with in Word Ways. To really experience punctuation play, one must read Punctuation Ways. The magazine discusses all nonalphabetic, nonnumeric symbols used in common English text. A recent issue discusses numerous ways to question the uses of question marks without actually using question marks. It also has an article entitled “Exclamation Points: Shakespeare’s Real Gift to the English Language.” In a surprising expose, it reveals “Thirty-Five Punctuation Marks Suppressed by the FBI” and shows top secret pictures of them. It also discusses “X-Rated Ampersands in the Clinton & Lewinsky Affair.” One challenge posed last issue was to write a sentence that correctly uses the longest string of different marks. The winner, who signs his work Ezra #, won with a sentence that ends in 18 different marks. Another contender entered a sentence with 19 different marks, but he was disqualified because he included a curly bracket, a mark that no one has ever used in a regular sentence since its creation in the fourteenth century. He was accused of cheating, and his subscription was cancelled. The issue concluded with a special article by Ezra # titled “A Parenthetical Note About Curly Brackets (What Good Are They?)” Here is the prize-winning sentence, which includes an asterisk and the note it refers to:

She said, “He said, ‘I saw a brand-new Lamborghini I wanted to buy (but I couldn’t afford it [with an interest rate @ 50%+? = \$-!], &:...)’”\*; at least, that’s what I heard.

\* He bought a used Yugo instead.