

BALANCED WORD PAIRS

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And weigh thy words in a balance (Ecclesiasticus 28:25)

Given the 26 letters in the alphabet, the midpoint lies between the 13th and 14th letters, M and N. Imagine a process which can take a word and each of its letters and transform the word into a different string of letters, such that the letter A is changed to a Z, the letter B is changed to a Y, a C to an X, and so on, with M being changed to an N. Here, the midpoint of the alphabet acts like the fulcrum of balance, with the original word and the transformed string of letters pivoted equally. As an example, take the word JOLLY; this transforms to the meaningless sequence QLOOB.

Suppose we decide to search for words which, when transformed in this way, become valid new words. Here's an example using everyday words: GIRL TRIO. Are there other examples? We've conducted an extensive search, and can report that there are very few pairs of such words. A full list of our 85 pairs of words is given below. Unmarked words are from *Official Scrabble Words International*; others have been taken from *Webster's Second* (W2), *Webster's Third* (W3), *Random House Dictionary* (RHD), *Times Index Gazetteer* (TIG), and the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED).

Balanced Word Pairs are a special example of what Susan Thorpe termed Balanced Partners, in her article "Balanced Words" in the November 1994 Word Ways. If one is allowed to rearrange the letters of the second word, such as GIRL RIOT, the resulting pair of words are Balanced Partners.

Two-Letter Words

al, zo	ch, xs (W3)	ks (W3), ph	li, or
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Three-Letter Words

all, zoo	als, zoh (W2)	ark, zip	arm, zin
art, zig	avo, zel	Eli (W2), vor	elm, Von (W2)
ern, vim	fez, uva	fon, Ulm (RHD)	fop, ulk (OED)
hob, sly	ill, roo	irk, rip	ivy, reb
kob, ply	lez, ova	lig, ort	lon (OED), olm
low, old	loz (OED), ola (W2)	lug, oft	

Four-Letter Words

arks, Ziph (OED)	blip, york	blow, yold
blow, ylow (OED)	brim, yirm (W2)	brin, yirm (W2)
brog, yilt (W2)	broo, yill	brow, yild (OED)
brug (OED), yift (W2)	drib, wiry	drob (W2), wily
drop, wilk (W2)	drow, wild	fill, uroo (OED)
gift, trug	gilk (OED), trop	gill, troo (OED)
gilt, trog	girk (OED), trip	girl, trio

girn, trim	girt, trig	glib, tory
glim, torn	glob, toly (W2)	glow, told
glug, toft	greb (OED), tivy	grog, tilt
groo (OED), till	grow, tild (W2)	hold, slow
holk, slop	holl (W2), sloo (W2)	holt, slog
holy, slob	illy, roob (OED)	kill, proo
kiln, prom	kilt, prog	kiva, prez
klip (W2), pork	klob (OED), poly	klop (W2), polk
koft (W2), plug	korn (OED), plim	Krio (OED), pirl
Kroo (W2), pill	Levi (W2), over	looz (OED), olla

Five-Letter Words

brogh, yilts (W2)	drogh (W2), wilts	drool, willo (OED)
gilts, trogh (W2)	glogh (OED), tolts	Kolga [Laht] (TIG), plotz

Six-Letter Words

kilerg, provit

At the six-letter level, we are pretty desperate. We have found only one pair, and one of the two words involved appears only in a quotation in the OED under SIMONITE:

1508 Kennedie *Flyting w. Dunbar* 525 Sarazene, symonyte, provit Pagane pronunciate

Can we make any sense of this quotation? The author is Walter Kennedy, and the full title of the publication is *The Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedie*, published in 1508. *Flyting* is a scolding or rebuke; *Sarazene* is merely a 16th-century spelling of Saracen, a nomad of the Middle East; *symonyte* is a 16th-century spelling of simonite, one who practices simony, traffic in sacred items; *Pagane* is a 16th-century spelling of pagan, or heathen, probably a noun rather than an adjective; and *pronunciate* is an adjective meaning pronounced. Our mystery word could be a 16th-century form of profit or prophet, though neither is clearly supported by the OED; it could be a form of prove, proved, provide or purveyed, but again the OED doesn't give any clear indication. Can anyone explain PROVIT to us, or, better still, an alternative, more recent definition of this word?