

ATTRACTIVE OPPOSITES

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Opposites attract. Opposites also attract people who love to mess around with word meanings and letters. Here's a brief logological taxonomy of 15 yin-yanging patterns.

(1) Perhaps the best-known category of opposites beyond simple antonyms, the concept of **word ladders** was invented by Lewis Carroll. Start with a word and change one letter at each step, while keeping the other letters in the same order, transforming the starter word ultimately into another word, often the opposite of the original. Each rung in the ladder must be a word in its own right:

<i>HEAD</i>	<i>HATE</i>	<i>BLACK</i>
heal	rate	blank
teal	rave	blink
tell	cave	clink
tall	cove	chink
<i>TAIL</i>	<i>LOVE</i>	chine
		whine
		<i>WHITE</i>

(2) **Contronyms**, pairs of words that have the same spelling and pronunciation but opposite meanings:

with. alongside; against: *a*. England fought *with* France against Germany. *b*. England fought *with* France.

out. visible; invisible: *a*. The stars are *out*. *b*. The lights are *out*.

clip. fasten; separate: *a*. *Clip* the coupon to the newspaper. *b*. *Clip* the coupon from the newspaper.

(3) **Convergents**, two apparently opposite words or expressions that have the same meaning. (I know of no word for this phenomenon, so I have made up the term *convergents*.):

Loosen and *unloosen* mean the same thing.

A *good licking* and a *bad licking* are the same thing.

A *slim chance* and a *fat chance* are the same thing.

(4) **Rhyming antonyms** (recently brought to my attention by “Potshots” creator and artist Ashleigh Brilliant, who provides the concept and examples that follow), rhyming words that are the opposite of each other:

adore/abhor

glad/sad

hired/fired

(5) **Antigrams**, anagrammed words or phrases that communicate opposite meanings:

words:

united/untied

ruthful/hurtful

marital/martial

(some might interpret that last pairing as synonymous)

words and phrases:

antagonist/not against

filled/ill-fed

funeral/real fun

(6) **Anticharades**, words that when cleft into two or more parts, reveal their own opposites:

amok/am o.k.

inaction/in action

therapist/the rapist

(7) **Punctuational opposites**, statements that convey opposite meanings when their punctuation is altered:

A dog knows its master./A dog knows it's master.

Woman: without her, man is helpless./Woman without her man is helpless.

I would like to tell you that I love you. I can't stop thinking that you are one of the prettiest women on earth./

I would like to tell you that I love you. I can't. Stop thinking that you are one of the prettiest women on earth.

(8) **Beheadment opposites**, words that, when their first letter is lopped off, become their own opposites:

bonus/onus

covert/overt

preview/review

(9) **Antiroos** (another term I've neologized), kangaroo words that, when internal letters are deleted, retain the original order of the remaining letters and become their own opposites:

courteous/curt

saintliness/sin

threat/treat

(10) **Letter substitution opposites**, wherein the replacement of a letter by another letter begets an opposite:

auspicious/suspicious

collision/collusion

milestone/millstone

The intrepid logologist can imagine other possible contrastive clusters that may tremble into birth if WORD WAYS readers can supply authentic examples:

(11) **Curtailment opposites**, words that, when their last letter is lopped off, become their own opposites. *Infinitesimal/infinite* is a lovely example of multiple curtailment, but single-letter curtailments beyond the drab categories of plural-singular – *words-word* – and female-male -- *fiancee/fiance* – appear to be in short or no supply.

(12) **Homophonic antonyms**, two words that sound the same, are spelled differently, and have opposite meanings. To my knowledge, there is only one authentic pairing: *raise/raze*. Other attempts, such as *reckless/wreckless*, are contrived.

(13) **Palindromic opposites**, words that, when their letters are reversed, become logological and lexical mirror images. *God/dog* and *stressed/desserts* are bubbles off antonymic plumb.

(14) **Shiftword opposites**, words that, when each letter advances the same number of steps along the alphabet, reach their flipsides. *Ape + 15 = pet* and *God + 12 = sap* do not achieve satisfying antonymy..

(15) **Heteronymic opposites**, word pairs that are not etymologically related but that are spelled the same, sound different, and have opposite meanings. *Deserts/deserts* (as in “just deserts”) is a not-so-near miss, and *resign/re-sign* are etymologically related.