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:

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


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
  - ruthless/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/OK
- 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 — *fiancée/fiancé* — 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.