

... AND THE LAST SHALL BE FIRST

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Previously, in **Some of the First Shall be Last**, transpositions of one particular type were explored. These were based on dividing a word unto two parts which, when interchanged, again revealed a word. Another type is looked at here, based on a word being divided into three parts in such a way that leaves the middle letter(s) unchanged while the outer letters get swapped over. A short example would be the word *west*: dividing this into *w/e/st* and swapping the end sections yields the word *stew*. Similarly, *le/a/p* would give *pale*.

One thing quickly becomes clear. All palindromes fit this pattern but only produce clones of themselves – *bib, bob, pip, pop, level, redder*, and so on. Also, there are many other trivial examples where the first and last letters are the same, especially those having S at both ends, such as *sits, shops, swells, strains, supernumeraries*: also those with D at both ends, such as *dead, dined, danced, dangled, diminuend, disenfranchised*: and likewise with the letter R. Furthermore, letter groups of two letters (bigrams) occur quite often – as in *sense, decide, edged, retire, magma, vegetative* – and even trigrams like in *entertainment, antioxidant, ionization, tormentor, respire, underground, and hotshot*. However, beginning and ending with the same letter(s) need not mean that transposition results in a clone: *toast* can transpose to *stoat, ductedI can give deduct*, and *reader* can give *reread*.

Ignoring three-part transpositions that do not produce new words, there remain quite a few examples. With the two-part variety, even a 10-letter word exists and quite a few other longish ones, due to the presence of such compounds as *workpieceI and piecework*. Three-part transpositions do not have that advantage, and also there are not many letter groups that occur both as word endings and word beginnings. Endings like –ing, –tion and –ment do not often start a word, and ad-, com-, con-, dis-, pro-, trans- hardly ever occur as endings, which rules out a wide range of common words. Making do with words of up to nine letters, here are some of the available candidates:-

Three-letter words –

Among the many examples are the following:- *are, ate, bad, bag, bat, bin, bog, bud, bun, bur, but, dam, daw, dew, dim, dog, gar, gel, mat, may, way*.

Four-letter words –

There are two configurations these can take – either -/--/- (where the middle two letters remain unchanged) or -/-/-- (where the other word of the pair becomes --/-/-). Starting with the first configuration we can have –

Baud, dear, deal, leap, leat, meat, seat, neap, reap, deep, deer, keel, keep, leer, meet, neep, seep, liar, foal, loin, room, doom, door, loop, loot, rout, sued, dolt, news, nowt, dens, dent, dink, gins, guns, darn, morn, sort, east.

The pattern -/-/-- yields –

Bast, dare, dash, fade, gash, kale, mare, mash, nape, lade, lave, late, laze, mate, pale, pane, rasp, rage, rape, rate, sate, sale, tale, tame, tape, wash, deep, demo, dene, meet, pest, post, redo, reap, disk, liar, lira, nipa, dosh, polo, loco, nope, posh, solo, rood, tosh, bust, dust, scar, snow, slow, star, slaw.

Five-letter words –

th/or/n, t/oa/st, st/a/le, tth/ro/b, s/ave/r, s/oot/h, d/owe/l, r/eve/l, d/ive/r, d/owe/r, t/r/ove, r/e/mit, .

Six-letter words

As the words get longer, more and more of them use the letters d,r,s, in conjunction with the letter e. In examples like *formed* and its pair *defoem* there is a strong semantic link via the word *form* itself. In cases like *caller* and *recall* the link to the word *call* is etymological but not semantic. And in the case of *solder* and *resold* there is no link of either sort.

s/e/arch, r/e/sist, re/si/de, d/ocke/r, d/ange/r, d/imme/r, d/appe/r, r/e/form, d/e/form, d/ippe/r, r/ampe/d, r/agge/d, r/igge/d, ar/m/ful, s/ore/st, r/e/cent, e/n/sile.

UK and US spellings can give rise to either two-part or three-part transpositions. For example *recent* can produce *cent/er* or *cent/r/e*, and similarly with *remit*, *relit* and *respect*.

Seven letters or more

s/addle/r, ter/nit/e, s/educer, d/ampe/st, d/e/scent, d/e/flower, r/e/strain, d/elive/r, r/e/bound, d/eceive/r, d/ebate/r, d/enounce/r, and there may be even longer words of the form d/e----e/r, having ten letters or more.