ALPHABET-CRASHING WORDS

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In previous issues, Word Ways has dealt with the topic of word crashes: the occurrence of individual letters of two words in the same position in both (for example, SLATE and FLASK crash with a common L at their second letters and a common A at their third letters). In this article I introduce the topic of words crashing with the alphabet -- considering the alphabet to be circular rather than linear, so that A is the next letter after Z. I also consider crashes with the alphabet written in reverse order (Z-to-A).

One type of problem involves constructing an intelligible 26-letter phrase or sentence that maximally crashes with the alphabet. I propose a 13-crash and a 14-crash solution, but appeal for better ones:

ABeD: EIGHT iiL MyOPic STUDents
ABiDE by HIJack NOteR’S fUn WaYs

Here is a 13-crash for the reversed alphabet:

mYoWl? iT is uPON My agInG FEDorA

Actually, considering the alphabet to be circular, there are 52 alphabet crash problems -- each starting with a different letter for A-to-Z and Z-to-A alphabetic orders.

Now consider the special case in which a word is matched with the alphabet at that place in the alphabet corresponding with the first letter of the word. In this case, there is automatically at least one letter that crashes -- the first. It is possible to construct a list of such words that crash at least four times with the alphabet: the following two lists represent the shortest four-letter crashes I could find for the A-to-Z and Z-to-A alphabets.

A to Z

ABiDE
BoDEFul
ChEssHoK
DEPacInG
EiGHtfoLD
FlirInG LiNe
GHibeLLiNe
HighLaNd
InKLiNg

JapaNOphile
KoMondoRS
LaNOlinS
MyOPiaS
NO-PaR
OPeRaTe
PaRST
QuaTUrVIRate
RoTuNdLY

ZinjanThRoPl
YaWmeTeR
XiSUThRos
WiTe RoPe
VeRsatiON
UTErolOgy
TaRQuIn
SIP-ON
RePONe

Z to A

QuInoLinIc
PONdLet
ONsLaugHt
NucKlinG*
MockInGstoCk
LovInGnEss
KrInGIE*
JInGIE

InGrEDient

This issue.
All unasterisked words are in Webster's Second or Third Editions. 'Yellowish-pink' is listed in Webster's Second, and 'pinkly' in the Third; I have combined these to coin YELLOWISH-PINKLY. HOVERCRAFT is missing from Webster's Third (it doesn't even appear in 6000 Words!), but is in the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language. (The Webster's Second word HyperClassical solves the problem but uses more letters.) NUCKLING is a derivation of the Webster's Second below-the-line 'nuckle', a variant of 'knuckle'. KRINGLE is part of the phrase 'Kris Kringle'. Hyphenated words or two-word phrases (all dictionary entries) were used when no solid word could be found.

Very long words ought to crash a good many more than four times; however, none of the 77 long dictionary words offered by the editor in the May 1972 Word Ways did so. (Three of them crashed the A-to-Z alphabet four times, and three more crashed the Z-to-A alphabet four times.) I extracted from the 1975 World Almanac the names of 153 United States cities with population of 100,000 or more, and appended to each one its state name. Four of these crashed four times with A-to-Z (Chicago illINOiS was the shortest one), and three others crashed four times with Z-to-A (TrentON new Jersey was the shortest).

This suggests that crashes at more than four letters are rather hard to find. Some five-letter A-to-Z crashes are NO-PARS, HickscorneRS, CIEarHeadedNesses; a five-letter Z-to-A word is ZinjanThRoPiNe. If the Webster's Second alternate spelling for the prefix clino- is allowed, the word KLiNOPyRoxene crashes A-to-Z six times. Can words of more than six A-to-Z or Z-to-A crashes be discovered?

Editor's note: Edward Wolpow's interesting word-crashing problem can be generalized slightly by allowing a word to be moved along the alphabet to discover its maximal number of crashes (which may not include the first letter). This subject was briefly explored in a Query in the August 1972 issue, exhibiting inOPeRaTiVe and coOPeRaTiVe with six crashes apiece.