

THE PANGRAM FILM FESTIVAL REVISITED

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In the February 2000 issue of *Word Ways*, Douglas Fink reported on the Pangram Film Festival. The idea is to construct a list of film titles which are collectively a pangram (i.e., they use every letter of the alphabet) which is a heterogram (i.e., they do not use any letter more than once). Digits and punctuation may be used freely. Douglas's article raised questions as to what superlatives are possible among heterogram pangram film lists (from now on in this article, usually just "lists"). Here are some of my answers to this question, followed by questions of my own.

Foreign film titles are allowed, including Romanised ones and those transliterated into the Roman alphabet. Any title which any reference work gives to a film is allowed. After all, with many films, reference works disagree on how to write the title (VideoHound's *9 to 5* is Halliwell's *Nine to Five*) or which of the titles of a film to index it under (Maltin indexes *Q* and *Z.P.G.* under those titles, but Halliwell uses *Q - the Winged Serpent* and *Zero Population Growth*). Compilation videos and TV series of video are not allowed. Films made for TV or video are films and are thus allowed. Here, I mark them (TV) and (V) respectively.

One-letter titles are the most versatile. Almost a complete alphabet is possible, with just T and Y missing. Here are some one-letter films for each of the other letters.

A 'A' (1965), 27a (1974), 8-A (1993) A (1998)	M M (1931), M 3/2 (1991)
B 9B (1986 TV), B (1996)	N N 45° (1994)
C C4 (1996)	O O (2000)
D D 14 (1993), 18 D (1999)	P P (1964)
E 'E' (1981)	Q Q (1982)
F F2533 (1995), F (2000)	R R-1 (1927), R-34 (1967)
G G (1983), G. (2000)	S S1 (1913), S (1998)
H H-8 (1958), H (1991), H (1995), H@ (1998), 2H (1999)	T ???
I I-94 (1974), I... (1995)	U U-571 (2000)
J J9 (1996)	V V. 1 (1944)
K K-9 (1989), K2 (1991), K (1997), 56k (1999)	W W (1974), W (1983)
L L (1961), L.627 (1992)	X X-3 (1916), X-15 (1961), X (1986), X 2000 (1998)
	Y ???
	Z Z (1969)

For T and Y, there are such films as Ta, TC 2000, Te, It, J.T., To, PT 109, TV; Y2K, Why, X.Y.

This renders some aspects of making lists trivial. To make a longest possible list, you need only use two-letter film titles containing T and Y, and a one-letter title for each of the other 22 letters, for a total of 24 films.

It is more interesting to collect shortest possible lists. So, from now on, I show each phenomenon with the fewest films possible. When choosing among lists with the same number of films, I prefer a list with no films made for TV or video. The smallest number of films in a list is 5.

What sort of title is best for making lists? The versatility provided by one-letter titles means that any heterogram film title can be put into a list: another aspect of list-making rendered trivial. This also means that any heterogram film title is worth putting into the title stock, although those with many vowels and few consonants are rarely useful.

Refine the question. What sort of title is best for making lists with few films? Pangram film lists rely heavily on vowelless titles to soak up the excess of consonants, and the 5-lists are no exception. Unfortunately, few vowelless titles have 4 or more letters (BLVD. and DKW F.1000 come up a lot). If there are only 5 film titles, their average length is more than 5, so the average length of those that have vowels is greater still, reducing choice. One-vowel titles are usually no longer than 5 letters (Hawmps! comes up a lot), which is mediocre at soaking consonants up.

One idea that helps to make a list with few films is to use as long a title as you can find. I will show that, even if this title uses many vowels, this might not be a disadvantage.

Another strategy is to put into your title-stock titles in languages in which consonant-rich words are more common than in English (defining "consonant" in English terms). Slavic languages are examples. Those that use the Cyrillic alphabet are transliterated as necessary. It helps that those that use the Roman alphabet sometimes use R and J as vowels. Each of my several 5-lists including Max Q needs one of Jiny vzduch, Kljuc (Czech); Vstrechny, Vzlyot (Russian, transliterated); and Zedj (Serbian, transliterated).

Here are some 5-lists. The selection has been made as varied as possible, and was based on the least varying aspect of the set of lists: the distribution of titles containing Q. *Fermont, P.Q.* is one title. Note that each title in the Max Q list has 4 or more letters. The commonest Q-title in 5-lists is McQ; a 5-list including McQ appears near the end of this article.

Cai hong qu, DKW F.1000, J.B. 1, Przemysl (TV), XTV 1 (V)
 Dr. Iqbal, MVG, Spy Hunt, Wojeck (TV), Z F/X 2 (V)
 Fermont, P.Q.; Black Dju, Vig (TV), W.S.H. (TV), XYZ
 Max Q (TV), Cyborg, Flush, WPINK-TV, Zedj
 Mr. Q, BLVD., Jak zyc, The Fox, Wings Up
 Q, By The Sword, Kljuc, Vamping, Z F/X 2 (V)
 Q&A, Fight Club, Pod zrvnjem (TV), SWK4, X.Y.
 Qu mo jing cha, BLVD., F.T.W., Perks (V), XYZ
 Vidocq, Jägerblut, Nymph, SWK4, Z F/X 2 (V)
 Waqt, F/X, Jiny vzduch, Kolberg, PMS

My title-stock allows only 36 5-lists, but thousands of 6-lists. Many titles can appear in 6-lists which cannot appear in 5-lists. Here are some examples, again arranged by Q-title.

633 Squadron, Flick, J.B.1, Why Me?, XTV 1 (V), Z.P.G.
 Chique, Bjørn, DKW F.1000, Psalm, TGV, XYZ
 Conquest, DWM, Ghalb, JFK, Prvi, XYZ
 Croquis, DKW F.1000, Hjalten, MVG, P&B, XYZ
 Equinox, BLVD., Jack, Rhytm, S.F.W., Z.P.G
 For the Squaw, Cindy, LBJ, K-Z, MVG, PX
 G-Squad, J.B.1, Newfilm, Rocky V, THX 1138, Z.P.
 I.Q., Black Fox, Judgment, R.S.V.P., Why?, Z
 I.Q.S., DKW F.1000, Hex, Jon, Plumb Crazy, TGV
 Inquest, Dr. Max, JFK, LVCOB, Why?, Z.P.G.
 Iqbal (TV), Chumps, DKW F.1000, Jorge, T.V.N. 595, XYZ
 Ishq, F/X, Judgment, P&B, Rocky V, Walz
 Jacquot, BLVD., F/X, Mewy, Shrink, Z.P.G.
 Love's C.Q.D., Brigham, F.T.W., Junky, PX, Z
 Masque, BLVD., F.P., J.C., Night Work, XYZ
 Mr. Quilp, Jack, Snow, The BFG, VD., XYZ
 Nuqa, Blips, JFK, MVG, The Crowd, XYZ
 Q Planes, F, Growth, Jim Buck, VD, XYZ
 Qaid, Chleb, JFK, Mug Town, R.S.V.P., XYZ
 Qian, BDZh, Lyuk, MVG, Project X., S.F.W.
 Qiu (or Qui), Black Snow, J.R., MVG, The Pyx, ZDF
 Quack Shot, Benjy, Mr. X, VD, Wilf, Z.P.G.
 Quake (V), BLVD., J.C., Prom Night, S.F.W., XYZ
 Quest, Chong, DKW F.1000, LBJ, Vampir, XYZ
 Quick, Bjørn, Fled, Hawmps!, TGV, XYZ
 Quick Money, BLVD., J.T., SX-70, Wharf, Z.P.G.
 Quicksand, FM, LBJ, Vortex, Why?, Z.P.G.
 Quilt, DKW F.1000, John, MVG, P&B, Sex Crazy
 Quits, Black Fox, DWM, Henry V, J9, Z.P.G.
 Quiz Show, Agency, BLVD., JFK, MR. X, PT 109
 Quo Vadis, Benjy, FLMKR, THX 1138, W.C., Z.P.G.
 Racquet. Blips, DKW F.1000, John, MVG, XYZ
 Squirm, Black Joy, PX, TGV, When, ZDF
 The Flying Squad, J.B.1, K-Z, Mr. X, PoV (V), W.C.
 The Quack, LBJ, R.S.V.P., Wyoming, X, ZDF
 The Quiz, Blow Dry, F/X, J.C., MVG, Spank
 Vice Squad, F/X, LBJ, Mr. K, Why Not!, Z.P.G.

The longest heterogram film titles have 15 letters. Douglas Fink mentioned Boulevard Nights and The Foxy Duckling. There's no need to worry that using either of those titles is "throwing away your vowel pool before you even get started" as he termed it. In each case, you still have a vowel left, and are more than halfway there, with only 11 letters left. The stock of titles is capable of providing a 6-title list from such a stock of letters. Here are some titles of at least 13 letters:

Longest title has 15 letters:

Boulevard Nights, JFK, McQ, W, X.Y., Z.P.
 Flagship "New York", J.B.1, McQ, X, Utz, VD
 The Flaming Sword, J.C., P&B, Q, Vuk, XYZ
 The Foxy Duckling, Jaws, Mr. Q, P&B, V. 1, Z

Longest title has 14 letters:

My Favorite Duck, LBJ, N 45°, Q, W.S.H. (TV), X, Z.P.G.
 Rhapsody in Blue, F/X, J.T., K-Z, MVG, Q, W.C.
 The Young Rivals, DKW F.1000, J.B.1, McQ, PX, Z
 Torchy's Big Lead, 12:01 PM, Junk, Q, V. 1, W, Z F/X 2 (V)

Longest title has 13 letters:

Belyj prazdnik, Hugo, McQ, S.F.W, XTV 1 (V)
 Very Bad Things, JFK, Luz, McQ, P.X.O., W

The longest title in a 5-list is Belyj prazdnik (another Czech title). The longest English-language title in a 5 list is:

Mighty Pawns (TV), Club DV8 (V), Joker, Q, Z F/X 2 (V)

The Young Rivals (1897) and Flagship "New York" (1898) are among the earliest films whose titles are heterograms. But which entire list is the earliest? Douglas Fink called one of his lists "the only line-up doable in the 1970s". This uses Bog; was it available in the 1970s? It was filmed in 1978, but wasn't released until 1984. Fortunately, this question does not matter; a list was possible in 1958. This is a 7-list; a 6-list was possible in 1965, a 6-list without TV films in 1967, and a list of the ultimate 5 films in 1974.

Jinx (1919), By Heck (1921), God's Law (1923), F.P.1 (1933), V. 1 (1944), Tuz (1948),
 Mr. Q (1958)

Gun Shy (1922), Pax (1932), Liv (1934), Mr. Q (1958), DKW F.1000 (1965),
 Object Z (1965 TV)

X-3 (1916), Le Schpountz (1938), Gaby (1956), Mr. Q (1958). DKW F.1000 (1965),
 Vij (1967)

Jinx (1919), The Flaw (1933), Dubrovsky (1936), Z.P.G. (1972), McQ (1974)

The record minimum of 5 films is secure unless unplanned future releases are obliging. If Sqn. Ldr. J should appear, one can construct the list

Sqn. Ldr. J, The Magic Bow, Vykup, Z F/X 2.

The 3-list My J.B.Z, Q XV, Wuthering Flapdocks will be possible only when Q has acquired 14 sequels and someone has produced a film from the as-yet-undiscovered first draft of *Wuthering Heights* rejected by Emily Brontë!

Where now for the pangram film festival? One thing to do would be to repeat the exercise, but use only film titles in one specified language, or (not the same thing!) titles of films whose dialogue is in one specified language. (Perhaps readers tired of Romanised Chinese and Slavic titles would like it done in English.) For example, take German, You lose F.P.1 (whose German title is *F.P.1 antwortet nicht*) but keep some consonant-rich vowel-thrifty titles like *Abgeschminkt!*.

Working entirely in one foreign language raises the issue of how to treat modified letters. In this article, I have just ignored the modification. However, the standards appropriate to the language should be used. The *ä* in *Jägerblut* is not the same as an unmodified *a*; it is a different letter. A German pangram must contain not only the 26 unmodified letters but also an *ä*, an *ö* and a *ü*. Having three more vowels should make things easier.

Another thing to do is just wait for more film releases. It was only the recent release of U-571 that filled the U slot in the 1-letter film title alphabet. It would be nice to fill the last remaining slots. It might not be long before the release of films with just the right titles to do this. According to IMDb, the releases of C.Q. and John Q are expected in 2001. With each, more 5-lists will be possible. With John Q, you won't even need a foreign-language title (Temps appears from its IMDb entry to be an English-language film):

C.Q., Big Sky (TV), Flux, Pod zrvnjem (TV), Thaw (or What?)
John Q, Wild Buck (V), Z F/X 2 (V), Gravy, Temps (or MVG, Pyrates)

What list has the shortest total running time? For a harder challenge, show the greatest number of lists which collectively have no films in common, and no mutual transposals, either. If the rules were relaxed, so that duplicating letters were allowed, but the whole alphabet must still be used, what lists would have the fewest film titles then? And, among those, what lists would have the fewest letters? If the rules were relaxed the other way, so that the whole alphabet need not be used, but duplicate letters are still banned, what lists of 2 or 3 films would have the most letters? The 5-list including Q shows that 4 films can use 25 letters, all distinct.

All titles are in Halliwell's Film and Video Guide, The Internet Movie Database (IMDb), Leonard Maltin's Movie & Video Guide or VideoHound's Golden Movie Retriever.