THE BIG CHALLENGE

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In the November 1974 Kickshaws, we challenged Word Ways readers to select ten different letters from the alphabet so as to maximize the number of five-five letter-splits that could be anagrammed into words. We were careful not to specify rigid rules -- we dislike the Procrustean nature of most puzzle contests with cash awards, and we think that anyone willing to tackle this arduous research ought to have the privilege of determining xes own acceptable and unacceptable words. In the February Kickshaws, we suggested a simple weighting scheme designed to force readers to use common words whenever possible, and lightheartedly proposed a fictitious 12-volume set of logological goodies as a prize to the compiler of the best list.

At first, interest in this challenge lagged. Faith Eckler, using the letters in INTERPOSAL, managed (with the aid of some finishing touches by Dmitri Borgmann) to score 689 points on 101 completed pairs (out of a possible 126 letter-splits).

In order to receive credit for a higher score without improving that of another competitor's prior entry, Dmitri Borgmann used the letters of LORANDITES to score 744 points on 105 completed pairs:

ADEIL	ideal* snort*	ADILN	Ladin store*	ADLOT	dotal rinse*
ADEIN	Edina* strol	ADILO	aloid stern*	ADLRS	lard's* tenio
ADEIO		ADILR	laird* stone*	ADLRT	ratld noise*
ADEIR	aired* (lonts)	ADILS	dials* tenor*	ADLST	dalts norie
ADEIS	aside*	ADILT	tidal* snore*	ADNOR	adorn* tiles*
ADEIT	snorl	ADINO	adion	ADNOS	donas liter*
ADELN	laden* riots*	ADINR	drain* stole*	ADNOT	Donat riles*
ADELO	adelo- snirt	ADINS	dains lerot	ADNRS	darns* toile
ADELR	alder* Sinto	ADINT	daint loser*	ADNRT	(drant) Ioles
ADELS	deals* nitro*	ADIOR	Lents* radio*	ADNST	oriel* stand*
ADELT	delta* irons*	ADIOS	adios* lernt	ADORS	inlet* roads*
ADENO	anode* slirt	ADIOT	lerns (todai)	ADORT	lines* tardo
ADENR	redan toils*	ADIRS	lento raids*	ADOST	liner* toads*
ADENS	sedan* litro	ADIRT	noels* triad*	ADRST	darts* olein
ADENT	anted* roils*	ADIST	loner* staid*	AEILN	alien* dorts
ADEOR	adore* lints*	ADLNO	nodal* tries*	AEILO	elaio-
ADEOS	oades	ADLNR	sotie	AEILR	ariel don'ts
ADEOT	oated snirl	ADLNS	lands* Torie	AEILS	aisle*
ADERS	Nilot reads*	ADLNT	osier*	AEILT	alite dorns
ADERT	lions* trade*	ADLOR	(aldor) inset*	AEINO	
ADEST	dates* (lorin)	ADLOS	inert* loads*	AEINR	dolts* reina

AEINS anise* (trold)	AENRS snare* toild	AINRT doles* train*
AEINT lords* tinea	AENRT antre solid*	AINST older* saint*
AEIOR Areoi	AENST antes* droil	AIORS Orias
AEIOS (Eiaos)	AEORS arose*	AIORT lends* ratio*
AEIOT aetio-	AEORT linds orate*	AIOST lernd ostia
AEIRS raise*	AEOST asote	AIRST olden* stair*
AEIRT irate* (londs)	AERST indol stare*	ALNOR edits* laron
AEIST taise	AILNO aloin drest	ALNOS salon* tried*
AELNO alone* dirts*	AILNR dotes* larin	ALNOT rides* tonal*
AELNR doits learn*	AILNS doter snail*	ALNRS (doite) snarl*
AELNS droit leans*	AILNT doers* Latin*	ALNRT idose
AELNT Doris laten	AILOR dents* -orial	ALNST (dòrie) slant*
AELOR dints* orale	AILOS aliso trend*	ALORS solar* tined
AELOS aloes* (trind)	AILOT Italo- rends*	ALORT dines* rotal
AELOT alote rinds*	AILRS noted* rails*	ALOST diner* sloat
AELRS laser* tondi	AILRT nodes* trial*	ALRST deino- slart
AELRT dinos later*	AILST drone* tails*	ANORS arson* tiled*
AELST least* Rodin	AINOR delts noria	ANORT slide* trona
AENOR (roans) stild	AINOS a ions	ANOST aston riled*
AENOS aeons* trild	AINOT Taino	ANRST oiled* rants*
AENOT atone* dirls	AINRS rains* toled	AORST lined* roast*

David S. Robinson of Los Angeles chose the same letter set as Dmitri Borgmann, scoring a very creditable 728 points on 103 completed pairs. It is worth noting that he discovered word-improvements totalling 22 points in Dmitri's list, which would have raised it to 766 points on 108 completed pairs:

nolts 1 (pl. of nolt)	dieto- 1
tedia 2 (+3)	altos 1 (pl. of alto)
Slert 1 (+3) (surname)	NATOs 1 (pl. of NATO)
diota 1	drant 1 (in Webster)
Nordt 1 (+4) (surname)	donas 1 (in MWPD, pl. of dona)
nod'ls 1 (pl. of nod'l)	

Working independently, Tom Pulliam used the letters of ANCHOR-ITES to push the score up to 769 points on 112 completed pairs:

ACEHI snort*	ACEOR ocrea thins	ACHOR roach* stein*
ACEHN chane torsi*	ACEOS caseo- thrin	ACHOS chaos* inter*
ACEHO instr.*	ACEOT aceto-	ACHOT cahot rinse*
ACEHR reach* stion	ACERS scare* thion-	ACHRS crash* tenio
ACEHS chase* nitro*	ACERT crate* Shion	ACHRT chart* noise*
ACEHT cheat* rosin*	ACEST caste* rhino*	ACHST chats irone
ACEIN aince short*	ACHIN chain* store*	ACINO Ciona Resht
ACEIO oecia-	ACHIO chiao* stern*	ACINR cairn* those*
ACEIR acier Tshon	ACHIR chair* stone*	ACINS Incas other*
ACEIS saice thorn*	ACHIS Achis tenor*	ACINT antic* shore*
ACEIT Caite shorn*	ACHIT aitch snore*	ACIOR Cairo hents
ACENO ocean* shirt*	ACHNO Ochna tries*	ACIOS icosa-
ACENR crane* hoist*	ACHNR ranch* sotie	ACIOT coati rensh
ACENS canes (hotri)	ACHNS chans Torie	ACIRS sacri ethno-
ACENT enact* Sihor	ACHNT chant* osier*	ACIRT artic shone*

ACIST cista honer*	AEINR Erian socht	AHIRT arith.* scone*
ACNOR acorn* heist*	AEINS anise* torch*	AHIST crone* saith
ACNOS ascon their*	AEINT (schor) tinea	AHNOR cesti rohan
ACNOT canto* shire*	AEIOR Areoi	AHNOS Hanos trice*
ACNRS crans Hotei	AEIOS	AHNOT antho- cries*
ACNRT hoise	AEIOT aetio-	AHNRS (coite) harns
ACNST hiero- scant*	AEIRS arise* notch*	AHNRT cosie anthr-
ACORS Oscar thine*	AEIRT Chons irate*	AHNST Coire snath
ACORT actor* shine*	AEIST Chron.* saite	AHORS cetin rosha
ACOST ascot* Rhine	AENOR chist (roane)	AHORT since* Torah*
ACRST carts hie on	AENOS Aeson crith	AHOST nicer* shoat*
AEHIN crost haine	AENOT oaten* chirs	AHRST coine trash*
AEHIO	AENRS Chiot saner*	AINOR Arion chest*
AEHIR const.* hiera	AENRT antre ischo-	AINOS Ainos retch*
AEHIS contr.* (haise)	AENST antes choir*	AINOT anito serch
AEHIT aithe scorn*	AEORS arose* nicht	AINRS cothe naris*
AEHNO ahone crist	AEORT chins orate*	AINRT chose* train*
AEHNR hearn stoic*	AEOST rinch SEATO*	AINST chore* stain*
AEHNS ashen* toric	AERST chino* stare*	AIORS Orias tench
AEHNT thane* siroc	AHINO Hanoi crest*	AIORT ratio* sench
AEHOR Horae	AHINR estoc hairn	AIOST ostia rench
AEHOS Hosea ((trinc))	AHINS Hanis recto*	AIRST Cohen stair*
AEHOT Tahoe crins	AHINT ahint score*	ANORS arson* ethic
AEHRS share* tonic*	AHIOR haori scent*	ANORT Echis rotan
AEHRT heart* sonic*	AHIOS centr- Hosai	ANOST riche santo
AEHST corni haste*	AHIOT	ANRST trans.*
AEINO	AHIRS cento hairs	AORST niche* roast*

Since these two logomasters have chosen to interpret the loosely-stated rules in somewhat different ways, it is difficult to say which of these solutions is "best". Tom Pulliam was very strict in one respect, not allowing words on his list unless they appeared in boldface type in the dictionaries involved; on the other hand, he allowed abbreviations (arith., SEATO, instr.), multiword entries (hie on) and words from multiword phrases (rosha grass). Dmitri Borgmann allowed plurals of words in the MWPD (aeons, Lents, riots) or comparatives (older) to count as Pocket Dictionary words, worth 4 points each; however, he did not use abbreviations or multiword phrases. Both used gazetteer words (Edina, Coire). Few words in either list fall outside the Websterian dictionaries and only one non-dictionary word was used (trinc, from Rabelais).

In any event, the question of the most fecund set of ten letters remains an open one. It is rather likely that several different letter-sets are so close to each other in performance that the answer will depend upon the exact set of rules involved.