

# The Alphabetic New Year & Other Incredible Words

## EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

*Certain words do more linguistic work than others. Dave Morice, the author of The Dictionary of Wordplay and The Adventures of Dr. Alphabet, has created a fascinatingly aberrant catalogue of just these sorts of words. The following list is a selection from the newly published Teacher's Guide to The Dictionary of Wordplay.—The Editors*

**Alone** is a singularly unique word. Removing its first letter changes it to lone, and removing its second letter changes it to one. All three have basically the same meaning—alone, lone, one. In lowercase letters, “l” is often used to stand for “1.” Alone and lone both have 1 in them.

**April 8<sup>th</sup>** is the Alphabetic New Year. When all the days of the year are placed in alphabetic order, it comes first, and April 18<sup>th</sup> comes second. However, if the days are named using ordinal numbers, then April 18<sup>th</sup> comes first, and April 8<sup>th</sup> second. Alphabetically speaking, what is the last day of the year? Using cardinal numbers, the last day is October 22<sup>nd</sup>, and using ordinals, the last day is October 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**Husband** has no letters in common with wife. Furthermore, husband has us together, and wife has we separated. What other words with opposite or contrasting meanings have no letters in common? There are many: smile-frown, boy-girl, walk-run, art-science, etc.

**Jason**—the name of a king in Greek mythology—is spelled with the initial letters of five consecutive months: July, August, September, October, and November.

**KENNETH** is the longest name spelled with capital letters all having vertical lines. One person named Kenneth used to print his name by drawing ten vertical lines in a row and then adding the rest of the lines to make the letters. The letters with vertical lines include BDEFHIKLMNPRT. What other names or words use only letters from that set?

**March 4<sup>th</sup>** is the only day of the year that is a command: "March forth!" Which day of the year is a question? "May one?" Actually, all the days in March can be considered commands ("March first!" "March second!"). And all the days in May can be considered questions ("May two?" "May three?").

**NOON** in uppercase letters is the only time of day that is a palindrome both rightside up and upside down. Thus it's fitting that noon divides the day into two equal parts: After the twelve A.M. hours have passed, noon flashes as a single, timeless point, and then the twelve P.M. hours begin to pass. N.B.: Midnight used to be called "noon of the night," but noon was never called "midnight of the day."

**One** is the first of three numbers that count their consonants. One has one consonant, two has two, and three has three. This works the same way in Spanish—*uno, dos, tres*—and in French—*un, deux, trois*. One, because it is the name of the first number, has a big advantage over all other number names. It refers to itself in several ways: It counts itself as a word. It counts its syllable. It counts the number of O's, N's, E's. No other number does any of those things.

**Ucalegon** is one of the strangest words of all. In *Webster's 2<sup>nd</sup>*, an Ucalegon is defined as "a next-door neighbor, or a neighbor whose house is on fire." Unabridged dictionaries are crawling with strange words. Here is an example from a randomly-picked page of *Webster's 2<sup>nd</sup>*: moup, moup: "To nibble; also, to keep company or associate (with)."

**WWW** is the abbreviation for World Wide Web. It reduces the amount of letters from 12 in the words to 3 in the abbreviation, and that is its advantage; but *www* increases the amount of syllables from 3 in World Wide Web to 9 in "double you double you double you," and that is its disadvantage. The abbreviation takes less time to type, but more time to pronounce. This must epitomize the difference between oral and written traditions.

**Year** has 365 days and 365 letters. The total number of letters in the names of the days of the week, the dates (one to thirty-one), the months, and the seasons (using autumn instead of fall) is 365, one for each day of the year. What is special about Friday, September 4<sup>th</sup>? Friday, the sixth day of the week, is spelled with 6 letters. September, the ninth month, is spelled with 9 letters. Four, of course, is spelled with 4 letters.

**Zero** signifies nothing, and many other words signify zero. At least 52 synonyms or alternatives have appeared seemingly out of nowhere, including—aught, bagel, cipher, duck, goose egg, love, nix, off, and void. What are some other names for zero? Zip, zilch, and zot are three zeros that begin with "z."