

# Constructing Acrostic Puzzles

Fred Henle

G4G11

Once when I was little, one or more of my parents or grandparents (this was a long time ago and I don't remember it very clearly) taught me how to construct an acrostic puzzle, which at its heart is an anagram problem. It was a good way to spend a few lazy summer days, but I imagine rather frustrating to do using only pencil and paper. A sufficiently large set of Scrabble tiles makes it easier and even pleasurable for those who like to work their hands, but it can still be a bit of a chore, especially when it comes to the process of checking and rechecking the final candidate puzzle, and writing out the finished form.

Several years ago I wrote a tiny web tool to help me find anagrams. It's not an automated anagram solver such as one can find on the Internet. To me, using an automated solver would remove the creative element and also be limiting in that any automated solver would have a certain vocabulary—such as a standard dictionary—that likely would not include some words or names that I might like to use, but at the same time would include words that I don't know. Certainly there are ways to incorporate a solver in one's process, but I prefer instead to have a tool that makes it *easy* to for me to do what I want without actually making any decisions for me.

I recently extended my anagram tool to help me construct acrostic puzzles, and I created a new tool to do the scut work of assigning letter positions, and to construct the playable puzzle. The output is a web page that can either be printed out and solved with a pencil, or solved online just by typing. I have used these tools to construct a few puzzles for G4G11, and I will make both the puzzles and the tools available at <http://fredhenle.net/puzzles/>. In the future I would like to make it possible for anyone to construct acrostics and store them on my website for other users to enjoy. Perhaps by the time you read this, I will have done so!

To construct an acrostic puzzle, I begin with a short quotation (usually between 150 and 200 letters, ignoring spaces and punctuation) that necessarily includes enough letters to spell the author and title. I've constructed a very small example (49 letters) for illustrative purposes using a line spoken by the character Dr. No in the movie *Dr. No*:

“One million dollars, Mr. Bond. You were wondering what it cost.”

I'm using Dr. No as the author as well as the title. Therefore, I need to partition the 49 letters of the quotation into eight clues, two each beginning with the letters D, R, N, O.

To use my anagram utility, I enter the quotation, then start typing words as I think of them. The utility takes away letters as I type, and flashes red in error if I type a letter that is no longer available. I put letters back by hitting the Backspace key. Because I want to keep track of the initial letters, I add them in upper case to the quotation, and then because they would otherwise be double counted, start the anagram exploration by typing them again in lower case.

The anagram tool also tracks the available letters on the left, in blue and red. It is easy to find tables of letter frequencies. I took the general frequencies (for lower case) and initial letter frequencies

```

length 49 / 8 => 7
DR NO DR NO one million
dollars mr bond you were
wondering what it cost

```

```

length 41 / 8 => 6
DR NO DR NO __e milli__
__olla_s m__ bon__ you were
wondering what it cost

dr no dr no

```

```

length 14 / 5 => 4
__ N_ DR NO __
__ m_ yo_
wo_de__g wh__ __ cost

dr no dr no Rulebritannia Demolitions
Orwell

```

```

length 11 / 4 => 4
__ __ DR NO __
__ m_ yo_
__ o_d__g wh__ __ co_t

dr no dr no Rulebritannia Demolitions
Orwell News

```

(for upper case) from the Wikipedia article at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Letter\\_frequency](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Letter_frequency). On every keystroke, the tool computes the expected number of each type of letter in the quotation for the number of letters remaining. Where the actual number of that letter exceeds the expected number, it renders the excess in red. When the actual number is less than expected, it renders the difference in hyphens. This gives immediate visual feedback suggesting letters to use as soon as possible, and letters to conserve, in order to minimize the chance of ending up with an unusable collection of letters toward the end of the process. I also show the number of letters divided by the number of capital letters remaining to indicate the average clue length for the remaining letters. Note that clues may be multi-word clues, as in the case of *Rule Britannia*.

Once I have all the clues and have written the hints that describe them, I run it through my other program to create the puzzle itself.

Every white square in the upper grid corresponds to a blank in the lower section with the same number, and in the clue of the letter given in the upper left of the square. For example, the white square in the upper right corner of the grid is marked “13 B” and the letter that should be written in the box is the letter occupying the blank marked 13 in the second clue (B) in the bottom half.

The grid looks two-dimensional, but is really one-dimensional with line breaks; it reads from left to right just as the text in this paragraph does. One usually begins by answering the easiest clues, first filling in the blanks, then copying the letters to the corresponding white squares in the upper grid. After enough squares are filled in, one may start working in the other direction (from the grid to the clues) as well. Finally, the first letter of each clue should spell the author and title for the quotation in the grid.

1	A	2	C	3	A		4	A	5	A	6	A	7	H	8	B	9	F	10	A		11	E	12	C	13	B
14	H	15	B	16	B	17	G		18	D	19	H		20	B	21	D	22	B	23	E		24	E	25	H	
26	B		27	H	28	B	29	B	30	G		31	F	32	E	33	G	34	A	35	H	36	F	37	A	38	B
39	E		40	G	41	C	42	B	43	B		44	B	45	C		46	C	47	A	48	A	49	A			

A. Explosives

34 3 4 47 6 37 49 5 1 10 48

B. Song for the Royal Navy (2 wds.)

16 26 13 28 20 29 44 43 15 22 38 8 42

C. Narrow pass

2 12 45 46 41

D. Mystical sound

21 18

E. Dishonest

23 32 11 39 24

F. Tiff

36 9 31

G. Headlines

33 30 40 17

H. Creator of Big Brother

25 19 27 35 7 14

1	A	2	C	3	A		4	A	5	A	6	A	7	H	8	B	9	F	10	A		11	E	12	C	13	B
14	H	15	B	16	B	17	G		18	D	19	H		20	B	21	D	22	B	23	E		24	E	25	H	
26	B		27	H	28	B	29	B	30	G		31	F	32	E	33	G	34	A	35	H	36	F	37	A	38	B
39	E		40	G	41	C	42	B	43	B		44	B	45	C		46	C	47	A	48	A	49	A			

A. Explosives

D E M O L I T I O N S  
34 3 4 47 6 37 49 5 1 10 48

B. Song for the Royal Navy (2 wds.)

R U L E B R I T A N N I A  
16 26 13 28 20 29 44 43 15 22 38 8 42

C. Narrow pass

N O T C H  
2 12 45 46 41

D. Mystical sound

O M  
21 18

E. Dishonest

D O D G Y  
23 32 11 39 24

F. Tiff

R O W  
36 9 31

G. Headlines

N E W S  
33 30 40 17

H. Creator of Big Brother

O R W E L L  
25 19 27 35 7 14

I hope you enjoy these other acrostics, constructed by me for G4G11. They are also available at <http://fredhenle.net/puzzles/> and are in fact much more fun (in my opinion) to solve in a web browser than with a pen.

# Mutually Assured Destruction

by Fred Henle

fredhenle.net/puzzles/acrostic

1	M		2	I	3	M	4	F	5	M		6	A	7	M	8	E	9	H	10	J	11	K	12	A	13	E	14	M		15	H	16	E	
17	J	18	G	19	C	20	M		21	C	22	M	23	J	24	M	25	B		26	F	27	A		28	M	29	K	30	L	31	A		32	L
33	A		34	K	35	B	36	G	37	E	38	L		39	F	40	E		41	I	42	I	43	I	44	D		45	K	46	L		47	F	
48	G	49	K	50	B	51	F	52	K	53	D	54	D		55	B	56	J	57	M	58	M	59	E		60	K	61	C		62	C	63	H	

A. Fast

6 31 12 27 33

B. Sound a horn

25 35 50 55

C. Portable music player

19 21 61 62

D. Undetermined ordinate

53 54 44

E. Devour

59 16 13 8 37 40

F. Thrush

51 26 39 47 4

G. Exclamation of disgust

36 48 18

H. Drunk

9 63 15

I. Tactical missile

41 43 42 2

J. Irritation

23 17 10 56

K. Peace-loving (hyph.)

45 49 60 29 34 52 11

L. Flock of pheasants

46 32 38 30

M. USSR (2 wds.)

20 3 28 1 14 5 7 24 57 22 58

# Algorithm

by Fred Henle

fredhenle.net/puzzles/acrostic

1	M	2	B	3	S	4	S	5	E	6	B	7	B	8	I	9	T	10	T	11	L	12	R	13	H	14	E	15	B	16	K	17	I	18	G	19	I	20	H	21	D																																																
22	F	23	H	24	J	25	N	26	T	27	J	28	C	29	A	30	D	31	J	32	O	33	J	34	R	35	K	36	D	37	G	38	H	39	H	40	L	41	A	42	R	43	F																																														
44	A	45	C	46	O	47	M	48	O	49	O	50	A	51	F	52	D	53	T	54	D	55	E	56	Q	57	E	58	P	59	O	60	C	61	C	62	L	63	M	64	N	65	E	66	F	67	I	68	N	69	G	70	N	71	P	72	A	73	E	74	D	75	I	76	G	77	Q	78	A	79	R	80	B	81	O	82	L	83	L	84	P	85	L	86	J	87	S	88	E
89	R	90	M	91	E	92	L	93	K	94	S	95	D	96	H	97	E	98	P	99	C	100	M	101	K	102	J	103	J	104	I	105	R	106	J	107	R	108	A	109	M	110	P	111	N	112	D	113	F	114	T	115	E	116	R	117	Q	118	T	119	R	120	O	121	P	122	K	123	R	124	N	125	N	126	F	127	A	128	N										

A. Nihongo

50 127 41 44 72 29 78 108

B. Servers

2 15 6 7 80

C. Throng

28 45 61 60 99

D. Snake

74 30 54 21 112 36 95 52

E. Indoor swimming pool

65 5 57 97 88 91 14 55 115 73

F. Flip flop

126 51 113 66 22 43

G. Poker stake

18 37 76 69

H. Cowardly

96 39 23 38 13 20

I. Keep

104 8 19 17 67 75

J. Doctrinally correct

103 102 31 33 86 24 106 27

K. Frequently

101 16 35 122 93

L. Broderick or McConaughey

85 40 62 82 83 11 92

M. Moves slightly

109 63 47 100 1 90

N. Religious adherent

111 64 70 25 124 125 68 128

O. States or proves

120 59 48 81 46 32 49

P. Northern New Englander

58 110 98 121 84 71

Q. Greek symbol with value 100

56 77 117

R. Event that can be celebrated on almost any date

79 107 12 123 116 119 89 105 34 42

S. Give temporarily

4 3 87 94

T. Struggle

26 9 10 114 118 53

# Syntax

by Fred Henle

fredhenle.net/puzzles/acrostic

1	CC	2	N	3	C	4	E	5	P	6	BB	7	M	8	M	9	Q	10	T	11	P	12	D	13	Q	14	A	15	A	16	A	17	Z	18	C	19	O	20	B	21	J	22	Y	23	F				
		24	Z	25	I	26	B	27	R	28	Z	29	W	30	A	31	K	32	E	33	BB	34	B	35	I	36	Z	37	AA	38	J	39	O	40	D	41	D	42	H	43	W	44	K	45	P				
46	D	47	D	48	Z	49	Y	50	V	51	T	52	CC	53	C	54	T	55	M	56	Y	57	J	58	B	59	E	60	G	61	M	62	I	63	Q	64	C	65	C	66	S	67	F	68	R				
		69	B	70	N	71	C	72	P	73	CC	74	M	75	Q	76	E	77	BB	78	Q	79	X	80	G	81	U	82	W	83	M	84	T	85	V	86	M	87	Y	88	S	89	P	90	L	91	M	92	J
93	Y	94	H	95	R	96	N	97	L	98	G	99	H	100	F	101	T	102	BB	103	V	104	E	105	AA	106	Y	107	I	108	P	109	S	110	X	111	A	112	CC	113	Z								
114	N	115	J	116	F	117	W	118	X	119	G	120	A	121	S	122	I	123	CC	124	U	125	U	126	Z	127	AA	128	W	129	G	130	T	131	O	132	D	133	D	134	M	135	N						
136	V	137	F	138	L	139	O	140	BB	141	W	142	R	143	T	144	O	145	AA	146	V	147	K	148	K	149	M	150	T	151	V	152	P	153	X	154	K	155	J										

A. Exertion

14 111 16 15 120 30

B. The opposite of late

69 58 20 26 34

C. Blithe

71 53 3 65 64 18

D. Howl in wordless lament

47 41 12 46 132 133 40

E. Perhaps

104 32 59 4 76

F. Lunar period

100 67 23 116 137

G. Notions

98 129 80 119 60

H. Pen tip

99 42 94

I. Pitcher Gossage

122 35 107 25 62

J. Add spice

155 38 21 57 115 92

K. Ancient county

44 31 154 147 148

L. Tattoo

138 90 97

M. Lukyanenko or Pratchett novel (2 wds.)

149 91 8 134 7 61 83 74 55 86

N. Sequence of links

96 2 70 135 114

O. The complement of ivory

131 19 144 139 39

P. Unit of plumage

45 152 89 11 72 5 108

Q. Third planet from the sun

9 63 13 78 75

R. Units of maize

27 95 68 142

S. Unit of foliage

109 88 121 66

T. Production of goods or services

54 143 130 84 10 150 51 101

U. Forty winks

81 124 125

V. Collect

85 146 136 151 50 103

W. No man is one

141 29 82 117 128 43

X. Large boat

153 79 110 118

Y. Motion through atmosphere

106 87 22 93 56 49

Z. Inverse strait

24 28 48 126 17 36 113

AA. Coarse file

37 127 105 145

BB. Imaginary creature or connected graph

6 33 102 77 140

CC. Tall building

1 73 52 112 123

# Amped

by Fred Henle

fredhenle.net/puzzles/acrostic

1	Z	2	K	3	W	4	P	5	P	6	Y	7	G	8	O	9	B	10	J	11	G	12	I	13	Y	14	P	15	H	16	S	17	T	18	X	19	Q	20	S	21	Q	22	C	23	M	24	N	
25	O	26	S	27	M	28	J	29	U	30	E	31	J	32	A	33	W	34	G	35	R	36	Q	37	Q	38	Y	39	F	40	Q	41	L	42	I	43	N	44	Z	45	B	46	Q	47	I			
48	Q	49	Z	50	G	51	E	52	U	53	Y	54	O	55	W	56	N	57	L	58	W	59	S	60	U	61	X	62	R	63	Y	64	Q	65	P	66	R	67	Q	68	A	69	Y	70	S	71	B	
72	P	73	E	74	V	75	H	76	A	77	Q	78	A	79	D	80	I	81	T	82	Y	83	M	84	Q	85	L	86	S	87	U	88	H	89	E	90	S	91	A	92	L	93	Z	94	G			
95	Y	96	S	97	K	98	A	99	L	100	H	101	A	102	N	103	R	104	Z	105	V	106	N	107	C	108	Z	109	V	110	P	111	I	112	R	113	U	114	Q	115	P	116	S					
117	O	118	A	119	S	120	N	121	N	122	X	123	H	124	S	125	K	126	M	127	F	128	D	129	I	130	K	131	G	132	M	133	C	134	A	135	T	136	N	137	G	138	B	139	Q			
140	E	141	V	142	F	143	O	144	J	145	B	146	L	147	N	148	J	149	A	150	W	151	N	152	S	153	C	154	Y	155	H	156	K	157	Q	158	M	159	X	160	N	161	I	162	D	163	D	

A. Star Trek communications officer (2 wds.)

B. Comic book artist

C. Podagra

D. Sea eagle

E. Unable to hold water

F. Binary base

G. Out of the ordinary

H. Idol creator

J. Consumed

K. 2012 Gordon-Levitt film

L. Penn associate

M. Gritty ingredient

N. Study of fish

O. Orientations

P. That which flows no good (2 wds.)

Q. Understanding each other (4 wds.)

S. Career invention (2 wds.)

T. Wrath

U. Opposite of or

V. Major artery

W. Humble

X. Ruins

Y. Independence

Z. Native American cultural gathering (6 yrs)

# Fringe

by Fred Henle

fredhenle.net/puzzles/acrostic

1	N	2	W	3	L	4	G	5	Y	6	I	7	T	8	L	9	Z	10	S	11	K	12	E	13	E	14	X	15	Z	16	A	17	Q	18	P	19	U	20	P	21	I	22	J	23	F	24	J	25	B	26	E		
		27	T	28	D	29	Z			30	R	31	Z	32	Q	33	I	34	H	35	A	36	W			37	X	38	J	39	C	40	F	41	Y	42	J			43	Q	44	T	45	S			46	N	47	U	48	V
49	O	50	G	51	D	52	J	53	D	54	U	55	G	56	N			57	U	58	J	59	P	60	T	61	C	62	N	63	W	64	D	65	M			66	Y	67	L	68	H			69	U	70	F	71	F	72	X
73	S	74	K	75	U	76	M	77	G	78	T	79	I	80	H	81	J			82	E	83	Q	84	V	85	V	86	Y			87	O	88	L	89	M	90	F	91	O	92	Z	93	X	94	F			95	E		
96	A	97	U	98	W	99	Z			100	R	101	O	102	Y	103	J	104	J			105	C	106	Q	107	H	108	S			109	U	110	O	111	V			112	B	113	R			114	P	115	T	116	M		
117	J	118	J	119	E	120	D			121	S	122	Y	123	R	124	P			125	E	126	F			127	X	128	L	129	X	130	C	131	X			132	G	133	I	134	L	135	X	136	C	137	L	138	N	139	O
140	R			141	C	142	X	143	N	144	Z	145	H			146	P	147	V	148	E			149	E	150	F	151	C	152	J	153	Z	154	Q			155	I	156	Y			157	H	158	Y	159	X	160	G	161	K
162	U	163	Z			164	R	165	X			166	M	167	J			168	N	169	X	170	J	171	Y			172	U	173	A	174	N			175	W	176	S	177	K	178	S	179	W			180	J	181	N	182	U
		183	Q	184	M	185	B	186	L	187	F	188	F	189	J	190	H	191	G			192	G	193	M			194	J	195	U	196	B	197	N	198	J																

A. Pap

35 173 16 96

B. Indian potato

185 25 112 196

C. Tapping sound (hyph.)

130 39 61 151 105 141 136

D. First extra inning

53 64 51 120 28

E. Teeny-tiny (hyph.)

13 125 119 148 149 95 12 82 26

F. Busybody (2 wds.)

40 126 70 71 188 23 150 187 90 94

G. Speculating

77 4 160 132 191 50 55 192

H. Phoenician fertility goddess

80 157 190 107 68 145 34

I. Elaborately ornamental

33 6 79 155 21 133

J. Lost in Space catchphrase (3 wds.)

104 52 170 198 118 58 194 22 24 81 38 189 117 180 152 42 167 103

K. Not any

11 74 161 177

L. Pilate's utterance (2 wds.)

128 186 8 3 137 88 134 67

M. Cockerel

89 193 76 65 166 116 184

N. Uninviting (hyph.)

143 168 46 1 62 174 181 138 197 56

O. Sergeant or Corporal

110 91 139 49 101 87

P. Provokes

114 20 146 18 59 124

Q. Small ax

106 43 83 183 154 17 32

R. Dummy

30 100 113 164 140 123

S. Word indicating choice

121 176 10 108 73 45 178

T. Babylonian fertility goddess

78 7 115 27 60 44

U. Surgery via tiny incision

75 47 19 97 195 109 182 162 172 69 54 57

V. Mounds of sand

85 84 147 111 48

W. Change direction suddenly

2 175 179 63 98 36

X. Unreachable

169 131 129 72 37 135 165 14 189 142 127 93

Y. Looney Tunes character (2 wds.)

5 122 66 156 86 171 102 158 41

Z. Director

29 31 163 153 144 15 9 92 99