

Five and Ten Let's Solve One Together

Almost any word puzzle can be solved more easily by a person with an extensive vocabulary. That is my prime reason for recommending my word puzzles to folks who want to build their vocabs. Five and Ten takes one missing letter from five-letter words to build a ten-letter word. Here is a puzzle I published last October.

Puzzle. Final answer:

— — — — —

1. B L E _ T
2. P R I M _
3. G U S T _
4. S M O _ E
5. _ A I R S
6. D _ A L S
7. P A _ E R
8. Q U O T _
9. _ A T E D
10. G U S T _

Seeing all the possibilities in “5. _ A I R S” increases your chance of success. To make some words not as obvious as that, Uncle Bob looks for words where the blank could be filled by either a vowel or a consonant. Oh, what a meanie he is. Seeing pieces of the ten-letter solution word helps as well.

Pieces? We call them letter strings. Vowels and consonants often string together in patterns, for example, in typical word endings like -tion, -ly, or -ing. Vowels pair up more often in certain ways like -ea-, -oi-, or in doubles like -ee-, but not -ii- very often.

Making a chart or grid will help with many puzzles. Crosswords come with their own grids. Five and Ten words come in a column of ten — not very helpful for visualizing a ten-letter solution. Here’s my grid for solving the puzzle above. For example, I see gust-o, gust-s, and gust-y as possibilities for #10.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
A	E	O	K	F	E	C	A	B	O
S	O	S	T	H	I	G	E	D	S
	P	Y		L	U	L	H	H	Y
				P		P		M	
						R		R	
						others		others	

I've listed possibilities for the missing letters in ten columns. The final solution can now be read across, but there is still much thinking to do. We see that the solution could start and end with either a vowel or a consonant, and that the second and second-to-last letters don't help determine which. Typical beginnings might be soo-, soy-, apo-, or aps-. Ending strings might be any trigram with a or e, like ady, or eds — lots of possibilities.

Let's see what's in the middle. In fourth position we have k or t. Unless we have a compound word, I don't see k as likely. With t we have the same situation except for -tl- and -th-. If they are in the answer, then we see an o, s, or y preceding them. Soothsayer and spyglasses are tremendous 10-letter words, but they don't work here. [Look for them in future puzzles. Ha!] We come around to apoth- and see -ary at the end. If this puzzle caused you discomfort, it may be time to consult your local apothecary.