

TRANSLATION **A**CES NEWS

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◆ WRINGING IN THE NEW! ◆



Wrestling with ‘wr’ words after wrecking the wreath? We’d rather write a writ than incur wrath about it! While wringing your neck to see the ocean from your resort balcony’s wrought-iron fence, don’t writhe in anguish, but wrest (Ye Merry Gentlemen) some fun from this **consonant cluster**.

Usually at the beginning of an English word, a great many starting with the ‘wr’ phonogram imply bending or distorting, as those just used above; you won’t be wrong to add wrench to the wrinkle, and don’t wring your hands in despair. What else hath the new year wrought?!

As for the history, some linguistic theories profess it’s Germanic, some say Greek, claiming the letter W originates from an old Greek letter of exactly the same shape, which was used instead of omega Ω (the contemporary small omega ω is a rounded W). Yet, it’s also been retained in Dutch, Flemish and German and kept as ‘vr’ in Danish and Swedish from a common Germanic consonantal combination, especially at the beginning of words implying twisting. So though still spelled ‘wr’ in English, except in dialects the ‘w’ sound ceased to be pronounced well after the fifteenth century.

YUMMY CLUSTERS WE LOVE

While we won’t get into the ‘al’ pronunciation dilemma in **almond** clusters, it’s fun that some consonant clusters (groups of consonants with no intervening vowel) having a silent consonant are at the beginning of words in English (**wr**, **kn**, **ps**, **pn**) and yet many are at the end of words (**mn**, **mb**), so we’ll **solemnly comb** through our **knowledge** before **autumn** knocks on our door! Silently, of course, as the **w**, **k**, **p** are silent.



In English, the longest series of consonants is only 3 (**strike**, **split**, **twelfth** –where the ‘th’ is really only one sound, etc.). An **excruciating** argument can be made for **extra** (etc.!), spelled with 3 but sounding like 4 consonants (**ekstra**). Standard Arabic does not permit initial consonant clusters, and we think Georgian holds the record: this a word has eight consonants in a row: *gvbrdyvnis* (“He’s plucking us”) though many Slavic languages such as Czech, Slovak and Serbo-Croatian can show off clusters of four or more too: e.g. *prst* [“finger”] in Czech.

◆ **THIS MONTH'S HIGHLIGHT** ◆

We recently provided a world-renowned art museum exhibition department with translations from German, French and Italian of loan agreements for works to be shipped and exhibited.



◆ **FEATURE** ◆ Lingua Quiz!

1. If you knew what's new: Are these homonyms or are they pronounced differently?
 - (a) Does Hugh hew if you have a ewe?
 - (b) Don't squawk about it but: Is it awkward that walk and talk rhyme with auk and Falk?
 - (c) If a doe needs to be needed, does dough need to be kneaded?
 - (d) Do snobs on Nob Hill have expensive doorknobs when they hobnob?
 - (e) Do nits knit?
 - (f) Do knights meet at night or write when it's right?

2. A Sigh is just a Psi Dep't.: Which "SY" words are Greek, which not?
 - (a) Science
 - (b) Scythe
 - (c) Psychology
 - (d) Psittacosis

3. Which place names have silent syllables, according to native counterintuitive pronunciation?
 - (a) Worcester
 - (b) Louisville
 - (c) Toronto
 - (d) Baltimore
 - (e) Leominster
 - (f) Pago Pago
 - (g) Wrotham

ANSWERS:

1: All are homonyms in the US
2: Only (c) came to us from Greek; (a) is from Old French via Latin; (b) is Old English; (d) Trick answer! It's from Latin, but doesn't belong since it's pronounced "sit-ah-koh-sis"
3: All of them! (a) The first 'r' is swallowed, so call it "WOO-stir." (b) The 'iss' evaporates, so call it "LU-vill." (c) The first 'o' is eliminated and the last syllable is slurred, so call it "TRON-uh."
(d) The middle syllable 'tih' disappears, so call it "BALL-murr." (e) The 'o' and 'in' disappear, so call it "LEM-stir." (f) Trick answer! INSERT a nasal 'n' and call it "Pango Pango." (g) Root for this 'wr' word and call it "Rootm!"