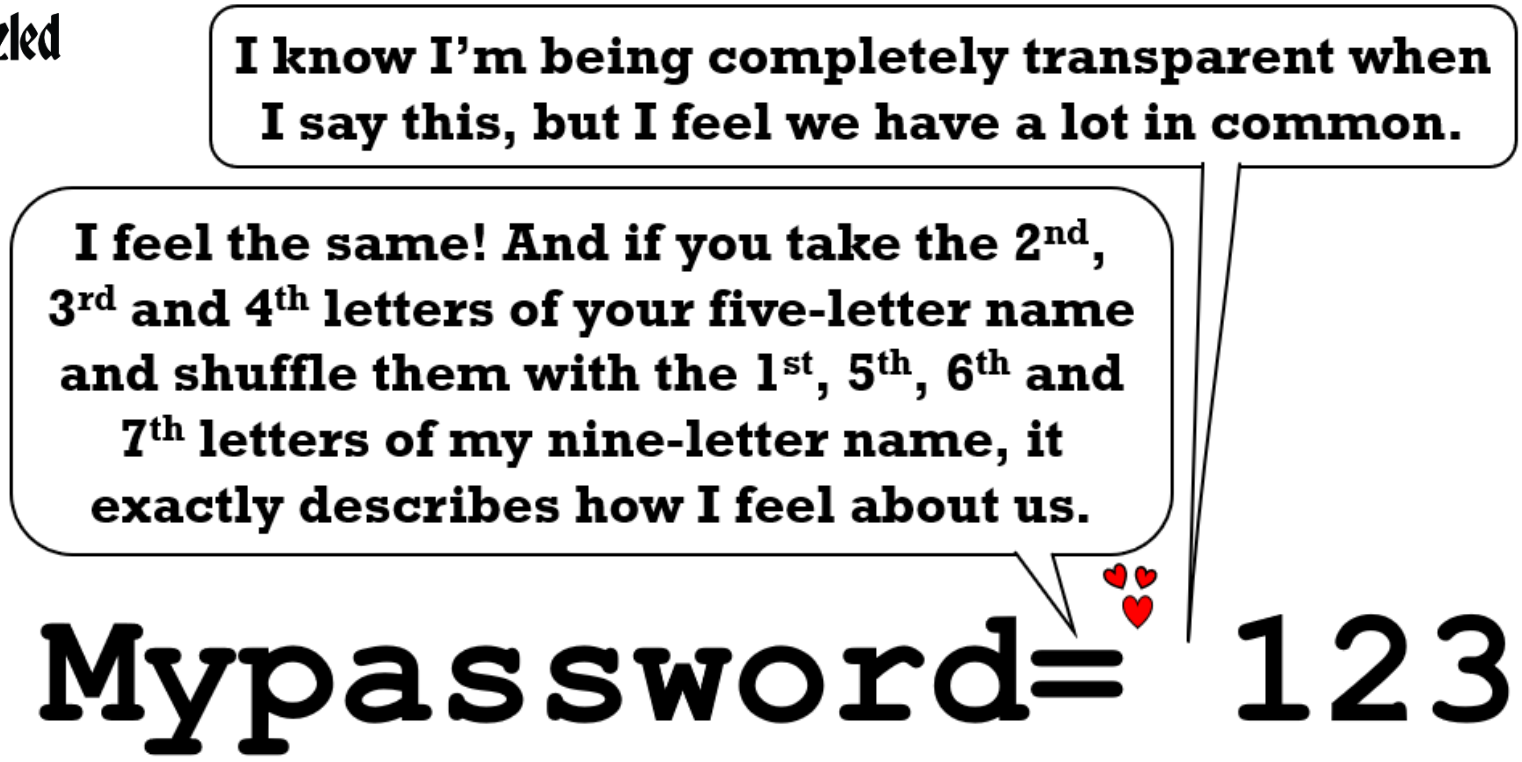
$*#&^}\

Puzzled Pint

When certain characters fall in love...



The letters are P, A, C from SPACE and E, L, S and I from EQUAL SIGN. It's not quite a random anagram, because the word "shuffle" implies the letters must alternate like shuffled cards. The only single word to do that is **SPECIAL**. And after all, equal sign and space are "special characters!"

Other possibilities: LA SPICE, EPIC SAL and EAL PICS don't really make sense!

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Puzzled Pint @¢+ 2@22

2. The Path to Spiritual Enlightenment

Samantha was feeling pretty stressed. Sure, her Windows XP desperately needed to be updated, but she knew she had saved that important work file somewhere; she just couldn't remember which drive or folder it was in. And then Claire walked in reminding her that they had to leave soon for their church social action committee meeting which Claire had just signed them both up for. Samantha felt like screaming, but instead she took a deep breath and tried to connect with her zen. "You know, Claire, our days are pretty busy as they are. I'm not sure why you always feel the need *to squeeze in just one more thing*."

"That's just me," Claire conceded with a smile, "But at least I'm good at keeping track of *what exactly I am adding, and where it is being added*." Samantha rolled her eyes. What exactly might help her find which folder and directory she put that file in?

Parasitic insect found in children's hair (singular)	LOUSE ⇨ BLOUSE	**Long, loose shirt**
Follower of market, Park, hundreds and 1st	PLACE ⇨ PALACE	**Buckingham abode**
Type of skate	INLINE ⇨ INCLINE	**Tilted plane**
Strip the skin off, violently	FLAY ⇨ FLAKY	**Like pastry or a dandruff sufferer's scalp**
Large bird dog	SETTER ⇨ SETTLER	**Colonist (perhaps in the land of Catan)**
Scorsese, Van Buren or Luther	MARTIN ⇨ MARTIAN	**Inhabitant of fourth rock from the sun**
These are difficult to find in haystacks	NEEDLES ⇨ NEEDLESS	**Unnecessary**
Italian pasta dishes made with shrimp and garlic	SCAMPIS ⇨ SCAMPISH	**Mischievous, rascally**

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BACKLASH ⇨ BACKSLASH ⇨ **Kitchen feature**
(a little extra – just for fun!)
BACKSPLASH

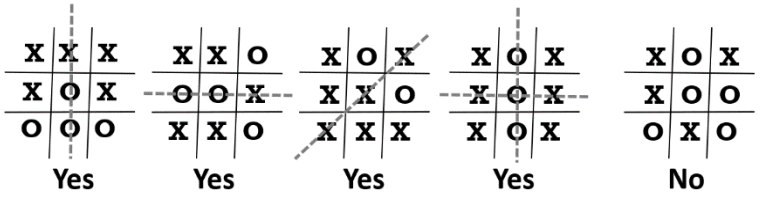
3. Tic-Tac-Toe... taken to the next level

Samantha and Claire enjoy playing tic-tac-toe (#classic game, #pointless pass-time), but they have made up some pretty crazy rules:

1. Rather that alternating turns, they flip a coin: if it comes up heads, it's X's turn; tails, it's O's turn. (Samantha always has X, Claire, always O.) This can make the games very lopsided!

2. Each game is played until the entire 3x3 grid is filled, so players can sometimes get several wins out of one grid.

3. The pattern of X's and O's must always end up symmetrical, with the line of symmetry running vertically, horizontally or diagonally. (Some patterns can have multiple axes of symmetry as the fourth example demonstrates.)

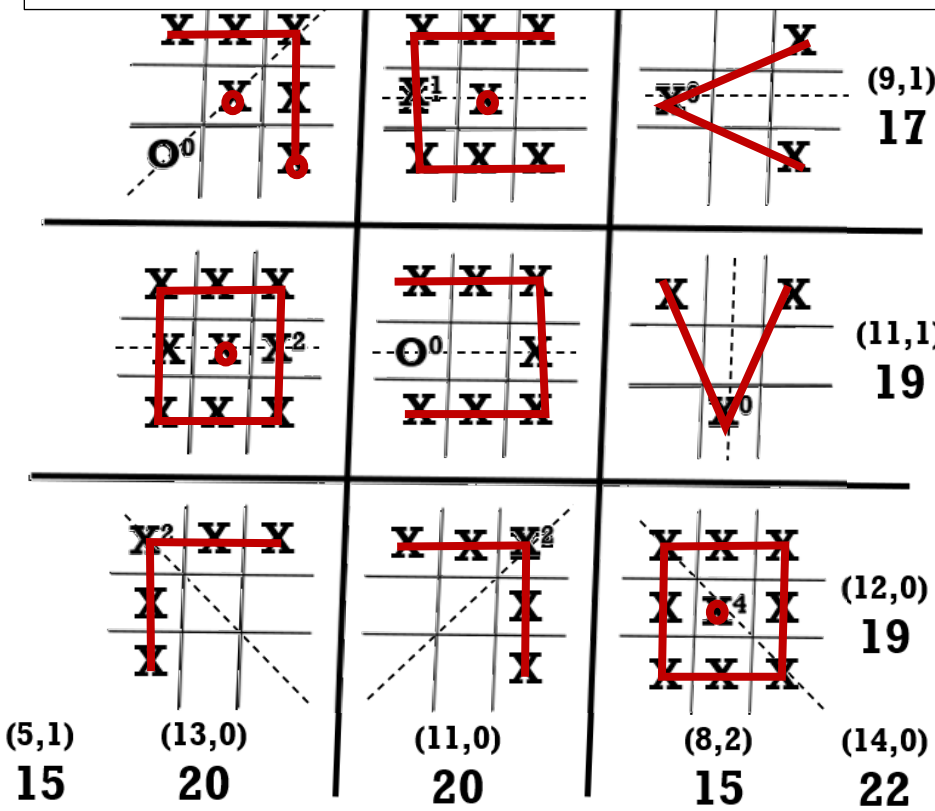


4. They play nine games at a time (in a 3 x 3 meta-grid, just for fun), and they keep track of the total wins and losses.

On this particular day, *it was a mess*! Samantha totally dominated, *hogging the pen* with all her X's and winning 32 games to Claire's 2! Of course, it helped that out of the 81 coin tosses, it came up heads 55 times!

- The axis of symmetry (or one of the axes) is shown with a dotted line for each 3x3 grid.
- One X (or one O) is filled in for you for each 3x3 grid.
- The small number next to that X or O indicates the # of wins that particular X or O was a part of.
- In the parentheses at the end of each row, column and diagonal is the X and O total number of wins for that row, column or diagonal. For example, (9,1) in the top row indicates that in the three games combined in that row, X had nine wins and O had just one.
- The large numbers below each set of parentheses represents the total # of X's in that entire row, column or diagonal. For example, the 17 for the top row means that of the 27 total spaces in that row, 17 contain X's and the remaining 10 contain O's.

In the solution grids below, only the X's have been added. All other spaces are filled with O's.



Fill in the rest of the grid to reveal what symbol Samantha used to show the thorough thrashing she had just given Claire.

Using pigpen *("it was a mess," "hogging the pen")* code, this spells out the solution:

POUNDSIGN

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