Criteria for Quality Baby Names

Much is in a name. We all hear our names daily; read and write them countless times throughout our lives; and literally identify with their looks, sounds, and meaning. Our names are our cues; our names are our brands; our names, in this digital age, are frequently the only information about us that people will ever perceive or remember. So giving children good names is important.

Knowing this, when my wife and I had our first baby, we decided to spend dozens of hours picking a great one. As part of this process, we thought and researched deeply what that really means. Here's our main result, which we hope might prove useful: the criteria we used to evaluate names.

1. A good name **looks & sounds good**, on its own and together with middle and last names.

2. A good name has a **significant, positive meaning** (from literature, family, nature, &c).

    A. A good name is **<u>not</u> from modern popular culture**, nor do people suspect it to be.

    B. A good name is **<u>not</u> from any unfinished story**, in case its significance changes.

3. A good name has an **unambiguous pronunciation** (for reading / text to speech).

4. A good name has an **unambiguous spelling** (for writing / speech to text).

5. A good name is **unambiguously gendered**.

6. A good name is **unique**[1] (but not because it is misspelled).

7. A good name is **short**, or if long, it has a **clear nickname**.

8. A good name is **early (or very late) in the alphabet**, for position in alphabetical lists.

    [ordered from most to least important; the last four are our ~subjective preference]

My name—Brennan—passes #1, #3, #5, #7, and #8. It is <u>very</u> ambiguous to spell (#4). It means "brave" in Celtic, but my mom got it as the last name of an ancestor; half for #2. It is rare but not unique: half for #6. So overall it gets 6/8, which matches my perception: good, but not great.

My wife's name—Mattea—passes #1, #2, #5, #6, and #7; fails #3 in myriad and hilarious ways (it's supposed to be "muh-tay-ah"); and gets half for both #4 (people drop the second "t") and #8. The same score as mine, which matches her opinion, too: she likes it, but it isn't quite perfect.

Our new daughter's name—Arcadia—passes #1, #2 (a rural part of Greece; literary byword for an idyllic agrarian paradise; and the precocious teen protagonist of Asimov's "Second Foundation"), #3, #4, #5, #6, #7 ("Cadi"), and #8. Perfection! We hope she enjoys it as much as we do.

<u>B. D. Colberg</u>
Corvallis, Oregon
November 2024

---

[1] We think it best to avoid the 1000 most common names in recent years. You can check name rarity <u>here</u>.