

OF VOWELS AND THINGS

JOHN FOSTER

Some years ago I was in hospital for an operation and every morning at some ungodly hour a bright young nurse came in to ask if my vowels had moved yet. The reason for this strange request was not immediately obvious, for the answers "yes," "no," "purple," "broccoli," "42" and "Ford Prefect" all seemed to elicit the same noncommittal response. But I'm not stupid. I knew what they were after. If my vowels were to move far enough to actually transpose then my surname would become FESTOR, obviously undesirable in one recovering from surgery. You can be very sure I maintained a close watch on my name-tag to detect any early signs of movement.

Fascinating to it is, the foregoing has absolutely nothing to do with the remainder of this article, and is mentioned only because it was about the same time that a friend told me that FACETIOUS was the only word in the English language to contain the five vowels in their correct order. I doubted this, and started checking the 1988 edition of Chambers English Dictionary. On page 2 I found ABSTEMIOUS, a word which would not readily have occurred to this gentleman, and promptly told him he was full of hot air and there were probably heaps more such words. I now believe I did him something of an injustice as the only two I have found in our Scrabble references (Chambers and the second edition of the Official Scrabble Players Dictionary, 1990) in addition to the two above are CAESIOUS and PARECIOUS, although other dictionaries contain such terms as ACHEIROUS, AERIOUS and ARTERIOUS. The only two allowable Scrabble words I have found with vowels in reverse order are SUBCONTINENTAL and UNCOMPLIMENTARY, but terms such as UNORIENTAL and DUOLITERAL can be found in other dictionaries.

More importantly for Scrabble players there are, I believe, only 30 allowable words of eight letters or fewer that contain all five vowels at least once, including regular and irregular plurals of seven-letter words. These words are

aboideau*	aboteau*	aequorin	aerobium	agouties
caesious	dialogue	douanier	douleia	douleias
edacious	equation	eulogia	eulogiae*	eulogias
euphobia	euphonia	euphoria	exonomia	jalousie
miaoued	moineau	moineaus	odalique	outraise
poulaine	sautoire	sequoia	sequoias	thiourea

The three words marked with an asterisk are the only ones in this article that contain an extra vowel, but are worthy of inclu-

sion because there are, to the best of my knowledge, only two other eight-letter words in Chambers or the Official Scrabble Players Dictionary that contain six vowels (AUREOLAE, EPOPOEIA).

The shortest and longest words that are known to meet the conditions of all five vowels (and no extra vowels) are the non-Scrabble terms EUNOIA and SULPHOPHTHALEINS. I have found seven fifteen-letter words, the longest that can be played on a Scrabble board; these are listed below.

countercharming countermarching grandiloquently incommensurably
neuropsychiatry uncomplimentary unsportsmanlike

COUNTERMARCHING and COUNTERCHARMING have the added distinction of being the longest transposal-pair in Chambers. Because of the limitations placed on the length of base-words in the OSPD and the Chambers derivative Official Scrabble Words, it is not possible for words of such length to be found there, but OSW has OUTTRAVELLING, which at thirteen letters is the maximum possible length for an extended verb. OSPD contains a number of eleven-letter words, but no twelve-letter example, which would be the maximum possible under its rules of compilation.

So far, I have found a total of 520 words of nine to fifteen letters containing the five vowels only once. All of these could theoretically be played on a Scrabble board. There are quite a number of transposal pairs, and even a pair of exact antonyms (VERACIOUS, MENDACIOUS). It would be possible to go on an on by including hyphenated terms like WATERING-TROUGH, multiple word phrases like LAWN TENNIS COURT or capitalized names like JACQUEMINOT, but I am getting as bored writing this as I am sure you are reading it, so I will leave you with a final word from Dorland's Medical Dictionary (23rd edition), PSEUDOHEMAGGLUTINATION, which in 22 letters contains the vowels AEIOU twice!

Now did you hear the one about the delegate from the TRADE-UNION of BOAT-BUILDERS who went for a ride on a train and dined in the OUTSIDE-CAR on SOUP-MAIGRE followed by a MAIN-COURSE of GUINEA-CORN? Well, that's another story as they say; anyway, a QUESTION-MARK still hangs over the ILL-FAVOURED outcome!

QUERY

Justin Baker, 3/15 Kelvin Gve, East Prahran, Victoria 3181 Australia, a new subscriber, wishes to know where he "can purchase computer software to perform anagrams, wordsquares, etc." Can readers suggest any?