

MY VISIT TO GRANT'S TOME

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It started as a simple mathematical problem discovered in the book *365 Exercises for the Mind*, by Pierre Berloquin.

Find seven words which appear consecutively in the given word *industrialization*. The solution to the problem identifies the seven words as *in, dust, trial, at, on, rial, and ion*.

In mathematical counting problems the usual problem is to find the greatest number of words in any given word, but this problem obviously had a different twist. As any true mathematician would attempt, I decided to find all possible words rather than the seven consecutive words.

Starting at the beginning, I wanted to find all one-letter, two-letter, three-letter, etc. words in any given word. There was only one problem. Even though I have a fairly large vocabulary, I do not know many words which are one-letter words. Ask me to identify three- and four-letter words, and I am at ease. One letter? The only common single letter words are “a” and “I”! However, I was fortunate to hear about a book which could be my saving grace, *One Letter Words – A Dictionary*, by Craig Conley. I felt my confidence begin to soar because with the help of this dictionary I should easily be able to count all one-letter words in any given word, or could I? Being a bit of a skeptic, I tested my skill with the word “ait”. “I” and “a” are legitimate, but what about “t”? Sure enough, Mr. Conley provides 58 instances in which “t” is used as a word. As an example, “it suits you to a T” uses “t” as a word. Hallelujah! But “ait” is a fairly simple word. What about “Mozambique”? I feel a time-consuming project ahead. Actually, the dictionary is fool-proof. There are thirty-five examples using the word “z” and even twenty-seven examples of the word “q”.

Now I can move on to counting the two-letter words. However, once again, I do not know many two-letter words: am, an, be, do, go, he, is, me, no, of, so, to, up, and these are the only ones which come to mind quickly. Once again my vocabulary is being tested, but Jeff Grant has compiled *The Concise Dictionary of 2 Letter Words*, revised edition. This source has made counting words much simpler for me. I now feel that I can tackle just about anything. Let’s start with “ait” again. We have three single-letter words, and we need to investigate the three 2-letter words (ai, it, at, ti, la, and ta).

Looking at each word independently, I found the following information:

1. ai – “any member of one of the four species of three-toed sloths found in tropical America.”
2. it – (this one I can identify) – a pronoun, or “physical allure, especially when accompanied by personal magnetism and charm; sex appeal, particularly female).
3. at – (ah-ha! Another easy one!) – if not a preposition, then at least a subsidiary unit of value in Laos since 1955.
4. ti – identified as “the name of several woody plants of the *Cordyline* genus.” I thought it was a symbol for the element tin – oh, well, what do I know?

5. ia – another tricky one – “15-16th century Scots form of ‘jay’. A noisy European bird of the crow family with striking plumage.”
6. ta- as in ta-da? Nope – an “Annamese unit of weight equal to 16,000 dong, about 62.4 kg (137.5 lb). Wow, who would have guessed?”

So for the word ait, we have three single-letter words, six two-letter words, and one three-letter words for a grand total of ten! Not bad.

What else? I expanded my search to identify all words in a four-letter word, starting with the word *main*.

I found the following:

1. Four single-letter words – m, a, i, n (all accounted for in the *One Letter Words – a Dictionary*).
2. Twelve two-letter words – ma, ai, in, mn, na, am, ni, mi, an, nm, im, and i. This is serious! Because I can only account for ma, ai (the two-toed sloth), in, am, an, and ia (the Scottish form for jay) as two-letter words, I hope that Jeff’s dictionary will save me for the other six possible words. Actually, they are all accounted for in the helpful book.
3. Twenty-four three-letter words – mai, man, min, ain, nim, nia, nmi, mni, mna, ima, aim, nam, ani, ina, imn, mia, ami, amn, anm, nma, inm, ian, nai, and iam.

In the last listing, acknowledging there are twenty-four arrangements of three-letters does not guarantee that they are all verifiable words. The few I can verify include mai, man, min, aim, nam, mia, and ami. That means I still need to justify the other seventeen permutations of letters as actual words.

I now believe I have a new project for Craig Conley and Jeff Grant. They have successful dictionaries for those of us who want to count one- and two-letter words, but I have exceeded the application of their books and need them to compile a complete dictionary of all three-letter words for me!

I found the two dictionaries to be extremely educational, entertaining, and useful for a novice word counter. Maybe if I never let anyone use these books, I will be able to win all games which include identifying actual words in any given word.

Added by the editor:

Word Ways readers are used to regarding any single letter as a word, but perhaps do not realize that each has multiple definitions.

Jeff Grant’s tour-de-force now lists all 676 two-letter words with legitimate citations for each. The book is written in Jeff’s delightful, playful style and well-illustrated by the artists David Lloyd (see “an ai”) and Debbie Caldwell (see “ro by ro”). For example, a humorous riddle is cited:

Q: What is an Eskimo dwelling with no toilet called?

A: An *ig*. (Ig is also defined later as to ignore or snub)

Anyone who would like a copy of the dictionary can post Jeff Grant \$10 or 5 pounds sterling (post paid) to: Jeff Grant, 1109 Allenby Street, Hastings 4122, New Zealand.