HENRY PETROSKI
Austin, Texas

When asked to spell his name, Will Wood would willfully respond with "Double U - I - Double L, Double U - Double O - D". Imperturbable clerks would, with surprising accuracy, dutifully write down Will Wood. You wonder, however, about the decipherment of, say, a Mr. Ruud's reply. Does his "R - Double U - D" exist in county records as Ruud or Rwd?

The question naturally arises as to whether this seemingly innocent practice of duplation could one day get you in serious trouble. By a trivial extension, the Suwannee may come to be spelled "S - Triple U - A - Double N - Double E" and challenge the old, standard, humpbacked, crooked-lettered Mississippi. But do you record Suwannee or Swuannee?

The spelling bee judge may someday meet powwow disguised as "P - O - Quadruple U - O - Double U" and be forced to discuss whether the contestant has offered poww, poww, etc. The confusion could lead to spelling bees played under protest. Perhaps the quintessential will be achieved in the Chinese city of Wuwei. Could it be that "Quintuple U - E - I" would spellbind the judges? (Double U - O - Double U!)

Not all duplations need lead to confusion alone. Is it not desirable to be able to call upon such words as woolly to challenge bookkeeper for consecutive double letter honors? (Is it allowed to take honors with sweet tooth? How about sweet tweed, a darling suit?) Note that doubloon repeats itself when spelled with duplication: "D - O - U - B - L - Double O - N". And vacuum as "V - A - C - Double U - M" may lead to vacwm, whose pronunciation suggests the word's connotation. Certainly the whimsical joys could outweigh the clerical disasters.