

TALL WORDS

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In Language on Vacation (Scribner's, 1965), Dmitri Borgmann mentions a class of words called "narrow" words. Narrow words are those in which all letters are written without any extensions (lines, loops or dots) either above or below the line, both in handwriting and lower-case type. For example, Borgmann instances OVERNERVOUSNESSES and OVERNUMEROUSNESSES as two long narrow words.

The existence of narrow words suggested to us the possible existence of "tall" words. Tall words are those in which all letters are written with extensions either above or below the line. In handwriting and lower-case type, the tall letters are b, d, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, p, q, t and y. Can we find words composed solely of these letters? If so, what is the longest such word?

A quick check of the dictionary (any dictionary) will reveal a multitude of tall words having six or less letters. For the sake of brevity, we shall mention just a few of the commoner tall words here.

2 letters: by, hi, id, if, it

3 letters: bib, bid, bit, did, dig, dip, fib, fig, fit, fly, gig, git, gyp, hid, hip, hit, hyp, ilk, ill, jib, jig, kid, kip, kit, lid, lip, lit, phi, pig, pip, pit, ply, thy, til, tip, tit

4 letters: biff, bilk, bill, fill, find, flip, flit, gift, gild, gill, glib, high, hill, hilt, idly, illy, jill, jilt, kill, kilt, kith, lift, lilt, lily, pill, pith, tidy, till, tily, typy

5 letters: bidy, bifid, billy, bitty, digit, dilly, ditty, fifth, fifty, fight, filip, filth, gidly, gilly, glyph, hilly, hippy, idyll, jiffy, kiddy, kitty, light, lipid, lippy, piggy, pigly, pipit, pippy, pithy, thigh, tight, titty

6 letters: blight, fillip, filthy, finity, flight, giggly, glibly, highly, jiggly, phytly, plight, tibbit, tipply, titbit

The interested reader may perhaps care to search for the many words which we have omitted from the above listing. Tall words of seven and more letters are much rarer, and deserve a complete listing. Here is the full list of our tall word finds.

7 letters: bifidly, biggity, blighty, diglyph, fifthly, fittily, flighty, lightly, lithify, tightly, tipilt

8 letters: bifidity, filthify, libidibi, philippi

9 letters: flightily, lilipilly

10 letters: lillypilly

Have we missed any examples of longer tall words? LIBIDIBI would seem to be the longest tall word not including a letter with a below-the-line extension of any sort. Similarly, GYP seems to be the longest tall word without any letter having an above-the-line extension.

Perhaps Word Ways readers would care to search for words exhibiting various patterns of tall and narrow letters. For example, SINICIZING and LUTEINIZING are two words which use alternately narrow and tall letters. We feel that there must be longer examples than these. Will some reader prove us right?