A beheadment is the removal of the first letter of a word to generate a new word: WHERE → W = HERE.

Ordinarily, beheadments are of little interest for short words unless there is a dramatic or unexpected change in meaning or pronunciation: SLAUGHTER → S = LAUGHTER. On the other hand, beheadments are of interest when there is no change of meaning: ALONE → A = LONE, LONE → L = ONE.

Of immediate concern here, however, are the longest beheadments. In this article, by "longest" we mean "none longer than"; for in many instances there are ties which generally will be resolved arbitrarily by selecting just one example. Except for some obvious special cases, we shall only consider words of four or more letters.

What, then, is the longest beheadment? We offer our candidate: PREMISREPRESENTATION → P = REMISREPRESENTATION. No, you won't find either of these words in Webster's Third Unabridged. However, both words are in Webster's Second Unabridged, below the line. Thus, reader, beware. We shall consider any dictionary entry as fair game. We shall not, however, worry about the ordinary inflectional forms. If you want a still longer example, simply add an S at the end to form the plurals.

What is the second longest example? We really had to scramble for this one: METHYLHYDROCUPREINE → M = ETHYLHYDROCUPREINE. The full unbeheaded word is found in Dorland's Medical Dictionary, but the beheaded version is in Webster's Second. As this example illustrates, we do not hesitate to draw our two words from different dictionaries. To put some bounds on ourselves, we shall be wary of words (particularly in Webster's Second) that are clearly archaic and obsolete.

Rather than bore the reader with shorter and shorter examples, we now make the big jump. What are the longest examples for the removal of each letter of the alphabet? Our candidates are:

Aquintocubitalism Emotionlessness
Blithesomeness Frightfulness
Chemotherapeutics Gastrophotography
Demulsification Hedrophthalmous

Certainly, the 26 end:

Adiadochokinesis
Preabdomen
Panherblast
Thenceforth
Methylhydrosulfite
Outfancy
Wheeling
Predilection
Oesophagus
-----
Ahorseman
Ametabolic
Aquinthology

But, as so often, In the list:

According to each word in the lists, many such perfectionistic examples in Webster's Second. Further, or Webster's Second:

Arhynchus
Blab
Chemotaxis
Dunder
Certainly an impressive list. But we are disturbed by having 12 of the 26 end with the letter S.

We now consider the longest beheadments ending in each alphabetical letter. Unfortunately, we were unable to find examples for words ending in the rare letters J and Q that were beheadments of more than three letters. But the rest of the alphabet yielded to our search. Considering the limitations placed upon ourselves, we are pleased that so many are of commendable length:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identification</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
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</tr>
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But, as soon as we focus on one end, the other end becomes distorted! In the list above, one-half of the words start with either A or P.

Accordingly, we now require that the initial and final letters of each word (before beheadment) be the same. The only such example in the lists above is SELECTIVENESS - S = ELECTIVENESS. Yet, many such words exist. Not unexpectedly, there are blanks for words beginning and ending with J, Q, V, X or Z. To make up for these imperfections, we offer a new A-beheadment, equal in length to the previous example, but certainly noteworthy because both words are in Webster's Third, a source not known for its unusual and long words. Further, only the beheaded RHYNCHOBDELLIDA appears in Webster's Second. The doubly-alphabetical beheadment list:

<table>
<thead>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blab</td>
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Itali
Knock
Loathful
Macrocondium
Navigation
Onicolo
Partisanship
          Renunciator
Selectiveness
Tautologist
UBussu
Wallow
Yabby

By this time, the casual reader may wonder how we were able to scrape up so many examples of long beheadments, especially with the alphabetical restrictions placed upon them. The explanation is simple: we merely collected the longest beheadments starting with and ending with each alphabetical letter (a possible 26 x 26 combinations).

Only a handful of final letters furnished examples for each initial alphabetical letter -- A, E and N. Here are our findings, restricted to those having at least four-letter words:

Adiadochokinesia
Brachialgia
Cacosmia
Dejecta
Emetastrophia
Fabronia
Glioniomyoma
Hamella
Iguana
Jagua
Koltunna
Lomenta
Macrocephalia
Az ygobranchiate
Bladderlike
Corbiculate
Denumerative
Emollescence
Flabellate
Gallocyanine
Histiophoridae
Iconoscope
Japaconitine
Knightlike
Lionizable
Methylhydrocupreine
Avascularization
Bleachman
Cannulation
Demulsification
          Natremia
Ochroma
Panophthalmia
Quinta
Regna
Sacrodynia
Thalesia
Utopia
Vanilla
Wangara
Xenomania
Yakala
Zamia
Noosphere
Oecoparasite
Preacquaintance
Qere.
Revolutionise
Sexarticulate
Telectroscope
Uprestore
Virldescence
Whooplike
Xanthophyllite
Yonside
Zooxanthine
Emasculation
Futilitarian
Gratification
Halcyon
Identification  
Junction  
Klippen  
Lactification  
Magnification  
Navigation  
Oestrostilben  
Premisrepresentation  
Qoran  
Remancipation  
Speculation  
Thereupon  
Urheen  
Vacuation  
Whereupon  
Xincan  
Yaryan  
Zayin


Our heart bleeds -- doesn't yours? What does one do when one is beheaded? Simply grow another head! Two examples of long reheadings are:

Renunciatory - R = enunciatory  
enunciatory + D = Denunciatory  

Iodometrical - I = ometrical  
odometrical + H = Hodometrical  

Yet they can be bettered by:

Revolutionist - R = revolutionist  
revolutionist + D = Devolutionist  

Much more interesting are words which we call hydrations. The Hydra, as you will remember, grew two heads for each one severed. Words, too, can more than regenerate themselves. A sequence involving words you might not quickly recognize is:

Morologist - M = orologist  
orologist + H = Horologist  
horologist + C = Chorologist  

Of equal lengths are the more familiar:

Dreaminess - D =reaminess  
reaminess + C = Creaminess  
creaminess + S = Screaminness  

We move up one final notch to one of the longest hydrations known to us:

Morological - M = orological  
orological + H = Horological  
horological + C = Chorological  

But certainly you yourself would quickly have come up with the very common:
Devaluation - D = evaluation 
evaluation + R = Revaluation 
revaluation + P = Prevaluation

By now you must suspect that one can easily play both ends against 
the middle in a beheadment-reheadment-hydration series. And so 
true! The longest apparently begin and end with eight-letter words:

Twangler - T = wangler 
Wangler - W =angler 
angler + R = Rangler 
rangler + W = Wrangler 

Ramentum - R = amentum 
Amentum - A = mentum 
mentum + O = Omentum 
omentum + M = Momentum

Just above are some examples of double beheadments. Because of 
their special character as also being reheadments, they are not the 
longest possible. Here are some longer double beheadments:

Devisceration - D = evisceration 
Evisceration - E = visceration

Remancipation - R = emancipation 
Emancipation - E = mancipation

Identification - I = dentification 
Dentification - D = dentification

For a triple beheadment, the longest we have encountered are 
the two ten-letter words:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mathematics</th>
<th>Preversion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Athematic</td>
<td>Reversion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thematic</td>
<td>Eversion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hematic</td>
<td>Version</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We now attempt to go down to no letter at all. We started this 
article with the word WHERE being beheaded to HERE. But note:
WHERE to HERE to ERE to RE to E. There appear to be five candi­
dates for the longest complete dismemberment. Here are four:

Aspirate  | Oestrone | Prestamp | Prestate |
-----------|-----------|----------|----------|
Spirate    | Estrone   | Restamp  | Restate  |
Pirate      | Strene    | Stamp    | State    |
Irate      | Trone     | Tamp     | Tate     |
Rate       | Rone      | Amp      | Ate      |
Ate        | One       | Mpy      | Te       |
Te         | Ne        | P        | E        |
E          | E         |          |          |

The greatest, however, appears to be: SPLASHER to FLASHER to 
LASHER to ASHER to SHER to HER to ER to R. This has a number 
of side branches, for LASHER may also be reached from CLASHER 
or FLASHER, or SLASHER; ASHER may also be reached from
CRASHER, or SMASHER, or SWASHER; and SHER may also be reached from BLUSHER, or FLUSHER, or SLUSHER, or SHUSHER, or CRUSHER. Note that one may construct a large number of beheadment-rebeheadment-hydration series beginning and ending with seven-letter words from the words above: 10 based on USHER, 15 based on ASHER, and 35 having an extra step based on SHER. One example of the last type should suffice: CRUSHER to RUSHER to USHER to SHER to ASHER to RASHER to CRASHER. If the archaic word THER is allowed, even more interesting series exist: BLUSHER to LUSHER to USHER to SHER to HER to THER to OTHER to MOTHER to SMOTHER.

If a hydration may grow two heads for one, certainly we may remove two letters at a time to form new words. To skip down a dismemberment is cheating; we require the intermediate beheadments not to be words. That is, one must lop off two letters to reach new words. Since all single letters are words, we must stop short of the last step.

We have only looked at this in passing. But we didn't pass:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{INDividually} & \\
\text{DIVidually} & \\
\text{VIDually} & \\
\text{DUally} & \\
\text{ALly} & \\
\text{LY} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

Here are a couple of examples in which letters are removed three at a time and four at a time:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{BIOgeochemistry} & & \text{BACKbonelessness} \\
\text{GEOchemistry} & & \text{BONElessness} \\
\text{CHEmistry} & & \text{LESSness} \\
\text{MIStry} & & \text{NESS} \\
\text{TRY} & & \\
\end{align*}
\]

We confess. Our search for beheadable words was materially aided by the Normal and Reverse English Word List, eight volumes edited by A. F. Brown in 1963 and available from the U. S. Department of Commerce (see May 1972 Word Ways). This list is based principally on Webster's Second Unabridged and a number of smaller technical dictionaries. However, a few words were drawn from sources not available to Brown in 1963 -- the Random House Unabridged, and Webster's Third Unabridged. The Oxford English Dictionary (not used by Brown) was consulted for the word REACKNOWLEDGEMENT.