MUST YOU JOIN THE QUEUE?

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One of the most enduring pieces of orthographic folklore is the assertion that the letter Q in a word is always followed by the letter U. The staunchest defenders of this rule are untroubled by the counterexample Iraq, for this is a foreign proper name and not a genuine English word; similarly, they quickly dismiss Qantas (an Australian airline) and Qiana (a synthetic fabric) as trade names designed to attract notice.

Actually, a considerable number of words in which Q is not followed by U can be found in English-language dictionaries. A substantial fraction of these words are borrowed from Hebrew or Arabic, describing particular institutions or situations that may have no direct counterpart in Western culture; if the use of these words were barred in English-language texts describing the Near East, it would be necessary to resort to clumsy circumlocutions. Of the remainder, many come from the French.

To avoid being overwhelmed by examples, I somewhat arbitrarily restricted myself to uncapitalized words; furthermore, I ignored a very large number of obsolete words in use in England or Scotland five hundred or more years ago, listed in the Oxford English Dictionary. These words fall broadly into two classes: the substitution of W for U (as in square for square), and the substitution of QW for WH (as in qwere for where). A handful of such words can be found below the line in the First Edition of Webster's Unabridged: beqweythe (bequeath), noqwere (nowhere), qwatte (quat), qweer (choir) and qwere (choir). One word, amazingly, made it into the Second Edition: acqwyte (acquit).

I am indebted to Dmitri Borgmann, Darryl Francis and Philip Cohen for various contributions to the lists given below. At a later stage of the research, I was materially aided by a list of words in which Q is not followed by U prepared by Homer Calkins of Los Angeles, Cal.

bathqol var. of bathkol, a divine revelation in Hebrew tradition 2
burqa var. of burka, a veiled garment worn by Moslem women 3
Cinq var. of cinque, the number five in dice or cards 2
cinq-cent a card game similar to bezique 23F
cinqfoil var. of cinquefoil, a plant of the genus Potentilla 2
cod a trimming of cock feathers on a woman's hat 3
cod à lin an incoherent and ridiculous story; a satire 2
coq au vin chicken stewed in a sauce of red wine R
faqih a Moslem theologian 3
faqir var. of fakir, a Moslem mendicant or ascetic 3R
fiqh Moslem jurisprudence based on theology R
fuqaha plural of faqih 3
miqra the Hebrew text of the Bible 23
nastaliq an Arabic script used in Persian poetical writings 23
paq var. of paca, a South American rodent F
qabbala(h) var. of cabala, a mystical interpretation of the Bible 23F
qadi a Moslem judge dealing in religious law 3
qaf the 21st letter of the Arabic alphabet R
qaid var. of caid, a local official in Spain or North Africa 23R
qaim(m)aqam var. of Rainakam, a minor Ottoman Empire official 3
qanah an ancient Hebrew measure of length 2
qantar var. of kantar, a Mediterranean unit of weight 23
qasab an ancient Near East unit of length 2
qasaba an ancient Arabian measure of area 2
qasida var. of kasida, a laudatory or satiric Arabian poem 23R
qat (q'at) var. of kat, an Arabian shrub used as a narcotic 3R
qasi var. of qadi (see above) 3
qere var. of kere, a marginal reading in the Hebrew Bible 23
qeri var. of qere (see above) 23F
qibla(h) var. of Kiblah, the direction to the Kaaba, in Mecca 3R
qinah var. of kinah, a Hebrew elegy 3
qindar var. of qintar (see below) R
qinot(h) plural of qinah 3
qintar an Albanian unit of money 238 PR
qivit the wool of the undercoat of the musk-ox 38P
qiyas analogical interpretation of Moslem law 3R
qobar a dry fog of the upper Nile F
qoph var. of koph, the 19th letter of the Hebrew alphabet 23PR
qere var. of qere (see above) 3
qri (q'ri) var. of qere (see above) 3
qvint(in) var. of quint(in), a Danish weight 2
sambuk var. of sambuk, a small Arabian dhow 3
shoq var. of chogak, an East Indian tree 2
shurqee a southeasterly wind of the Persian Gulf 2
suq a marketplace in the Moslem world 23
taluk var. of taluk, an Indian estate including subtenants 2
taluqdarg var. of Talukdar, a collector of the taluk's revenues 2
taluqdari var. of Talukdar, a landholding tenure in India 2
taqiya(h) outward Moslem conformity in a hostile environment 3
taqlid uncritical acceptance of a Moslem orthodoxy 3
tariqa(h) mystical communion; the Sufi path of spirituality 3
tariqat var. of tariqa (see above) 23
trinqu an oracular statement in Rabelais' Pantagruel 2
By including additional references, other words can be added to this list. Muqaddam, a head-man, is listed in Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary; qanat, an underground tunnel, can be found in the Dictionary of New English; and qcepo, a form of the parasitic disease leishmaniasis, is listed in Dorland's Medical Dictionary.

Words in which Q is not followed by U may be rare, but words in which Q is followed by U and a consonant are considerably rarer. The list below gives all known uncapitalized words of this type taken from the same set of dictionaries. To make the list as large as possible, I include several words (indicated by asterisks) that are cited as obsolete, perhaps falling into the class of acqwyte and noqwere.

- alquhair* everywhere 2
- l~n~uhard* a small lodge or cottage 2
- plqure a puncture or wormhole 2
- qubba var. of kubba, a small domed Moslem shrine 2R
- qhair* var. of quair, an obsolete form of book 2
- quhilk* which 2
- qur(u)sh a monetary unit of Saudi Arabia 8P
- squdge to ooze, as soft mud 23
- squdgy squat and pudgy 23
- squg a symmetrical ink-blot, as in a Rorschach test F
- umquhile formerly; of late 2F
- zaqqum a tree with bitter fruit, mentioned in the Koran 2

Help is solicited from readers to add to this list.

How often do words in which Q is not followed by U occur in English-language text, as compared with the garden-variety Q followed by U? A little light is shed on this question by an examination of Kucera and Francis's Computational Analysis of Present-Day American English (Brown University Press, 1967) which tabulates the word-frequencies of a million-word sample of writings published in the United States in 1961. Of the approximately five thousand words containing the letter Q, the only words with Q not followed by U (excluding abbreviations such as seq or IQ) were: Cinq 1, Haqvin* 1, Helsq'i yokom* 1, Iraq 3, Iraqw* 2, Istiqlal 1, Istiqlal's 2. Iraq is well-known, and Istiqlal is the name of a political party in Morocco; the three asterisked words cannot be identified. (One cannot even say whether or not they are capitalized, as Kucera and Francis is reproduced from computer printout."

If the aforementioned dictionaries (including Webster's Gazetteer and Biographical sections) are mined for capitalized Q-without-U words, the number of examples would likely quadruple. Any takers?