

# CIRCULAR ALPHABETS

DARRYL FRANCIS  
London, England

In Language on Vacation, Dmitri Borgmann exhibited several words having their letters arranged in alphabetical order (for example, ADELOPS, BILLOWY and AEGILOPS) and also in reverse alphabetical order (for example, ZYXOMMA, SPOON-FEED and SPOON-FED). Other examples of comparable length which didn't appear in Borgmann's book are these:

Forward: beefily, begorry

Reverse: spiffed, sponged, spoofed, spooked, spooled, spooned, trigged, trolled

With one exception, all of these words are in Webster's Third. The exception is BEEFILY, which appears in Webster's Second Edition.

However, suppose now that the alphabet is written in a circular fashion, with the letters A to Z written in a clockwise manner, so that the Z ends up next to the A. Two questions immediately arise: (1) reading clockwise, what is the longest word that can be spelled out within one "revolution" of the alphabet? (2) similarly, what is the longest word that can be spelled out by reading in an anticlockwise direction? A few of the words that have been located to answer these queries are given below. Can you add any to the list?

Forward: filose, glossa, oppugn, orchil, ossein, ostein, ostyak, rabbin, sabino, begorra, bellota, glossae, subcell, mortbell, subfloor

Reverse: busked, carped, invade, noyade, applied, brooked, broomed, carried, collied, crooked, crooned, trolley, buttoned, carromed, polecats

With two exceptions, all of these words are in Webster's Third; SUBCELL and MORTBELL are from Webster's Second Edition. Of course, the straightforward alphabetical and reverse alphabetical words (such as AEGILOPS and ZYXOMMA) can automatically be spelled out in one revolution of the circular alphabet. Two last questions: (1) what are the longest words that can be spelled out (clockwise or anticlockwise) within two revolutions? (2) what are the longest words which use only letters from one half of the circular alphabet (for example, from D to P, S to E and so on)?