CONSECUTIVE IDENTICAL LETTERS

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Many common words contain a doubled letter, for example LEER, GRAMMAR and DAZZLE. To find dictionary examples for every letter of the alphabet is a difficult but not impossible task. Well-known words can be found for 22 of the letters: the list below (supplied by the editor) gives the most commonly-encountered word in the Kucera and Francis million-word corpus:

bazaar (Isaac), grabbed (Bobbie), according, added, been, off, suggested, withholding, skiing (Hawaii), bookkeeping, all, community, cannot, too, support, carried, less, little, vacuum, revved, powwow (actually, no ww could be found in the corpus), jazz

This leaves only J, Q, X and Y:

J HAJJI variant of 'hadji', a pilgrim to the tomb of Mohammed at Mecca, listed in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) and Webster's Third Edition (Web 3)

Q HOOOOA variant of 'hookah', an eastern pipe (OED)

ZAOQUM an infernal tree with bitter fruit (Web 2)

Y SAYYID (SEYYID) in Mohammedan countries, a descendant of Husain (OED, Web 3)

SNARLEY YOW jocose term for a dog (Web 2)

GAYYOU an Annamese narrow flat-bottomed boat (Web 3)

The rarest double letter is X, which to my knowledge occurs in only three dictionary words:

XX-DISEASE hyperkeratosis (Web 3)

WAXXENN a 13th century form of the verb 'wax', hidden somewhere in Ormin's 'Ormulum' (OED)

AXXLE-TOOTH a West Yorkshire form of 'axle-tooth', a molar tooth, listed in the English Dialect Dictionary (EDD)

Unlike as it may seem, there are a number of words containing three consecutive identical letters. These curiosities first came to light in Faith Eckler's article "On Searching for Three-L Lamas" in the November 1969 Word Ways, where it was revealed that the remarkable words WALLLESS and HEADMISTRESSSHIP appear, unhyphenated, in Webster's Second Edition. The results of a computer tape search revealed the additional words PATRONESSSHIP and GODDESSSHIP in this dictionary, the latter appearing also in the Random House Unabridged.
Since then, a number of additional examples have come to light. In addition to my own discoveries, this article contains examples supplied by Alan Frank, Philip Cohen and Darryl Francis. In the quest for more of these elusive specimens it has been necessary to use open sources—even so, I have been unable to find examples for every letter, and some need to be improved.

A KAAAWA a town on the island of Oahu in Hawaii, listed in the Times Atlas of the World (TAW). Other examples are FAAA, a small settlement on the west coast of Tahiti (TAW) and AASIRI, a common Egyptian designation of the town of Busiris, given in "An Archaic Dictionary" by W. R. Cooper. This text also lists AAA, AAAAB, AAAANI and AAAUASU.

B BBBEL surname of Bhenjamin Bbbel of Los Angeles, mentioned on p. 176 of the August 1976 Word Ways. The best dictionary examples are abbreviations such as BBB (Better Business Bureau) suggested by AF.

C I know of no example other than the abbreviation CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) suggested by AF.


E WEEEEST superlative of 'wee' (small) given in an 1878 OED citation: 'Tell me all about the wedding - every smallest, weeeest thing'. The OED also lists the word SEEER, one who sees, and the EDD has EEE (the) and EEECE (yes). Chamber's Dictionary is reputed to contain the place-name TAEEE.

F PFFFT also PFFF, PHFFFT - to go to ruin, listed in Berrey and Van Den Bark's The American Thesaurus of Slang. Another word is the excellent coinage FIRESTUFFFOSTERED, on p. 42 of Finnegans Wake (FW) by James Joyce. PC notes that ZRFFF is a place name in Superman 335 (May 1979).

G EGG-GLASS marred by a hyphen, this is an egg-timer (OED).

H SHHH an exclamation enjoining silence. In dictionaries, this is spelled SH or SHH; can anyone supply a reference containing three or more H's? The eerie sound YYYNNNHHH is listed in John McClellan's "Comic Book Coinages" in the August 1980 issue of Word Ways.

I POTASSIIISATATE a chemical term, reputedly found in Foster's Medical Dictionary by Palmer Peterson (can anyone verify?). Similarly, he cites SHIIIM from Walker's Dictionary, another very old reference. AF suggests the ingenious coinage MANUALIIING, the present participle of 'manuali' (Porphyrio porphyrio samoensis); this is listed only as a noun in Web 3, but it ought to be usable as a verb by analogy with 'whaling' or 'birding'.

J HORKKK the name of a doctor in Robert Silverberg's Across a Billion Years (Dial Press, 1969), according to PC. Similarly, RRRWWWWKKKRRR is an exclamation on p. 378 of FW.
L FRILLLESS meaning 'lacking frills', this word was found by DF in the OED, joining WALLLESS in Web 2 as a dictionary-sanc tioned triple-letter word. The February 1974 Kickshaws reports Andrew Griscom's discovery of HELLLLESS in E. E. Cum mings' Six Nonlectures (Harvard Paperbacks, 1972). On p. 100 of FW there is found the coined word LOLLLLIKE. PC notes that A. E. van Vogt's The Battle of Forever (Ace Books, 1971) contains the personal name GLYDLLL (page 27).

M HMMMM an expression of pleasure or astonishment in The American Thesaurus of Slang. MMMFF is a lion name in Shel Silverstein's Lafkaudio, the Lion Who Shot Back (Harper and Row, 1969) found in Chapter 9, according to PC. Marred by a hyphen, MM-M is found (as a variant of 'mm') in the OED Supplement.

N CUNNNNIAN an Old English form of the verb 'come', to learn to know, as given in an a1000 OED citation 'Uncuhne eard cuntynnian'. A more up-to-date example is badly needed.

O LAPAROHYSTEROSALPINGOOPHORECTOMY a medical jawbreaker meaning 'surgical removal of the female reproductive organs', in Mrs. Byrne's Dictionary of Unusual, Obscure and Prepostorous Words. Unfortunately, dictionaries usually insert a hyphen before -ophorectomy in words of this type. PC observes that OOLA is the female lead in the Alley Oop comic strip, and Andrew Griscom found NANNOOOZE, a short form of 'nanooossil ooze', in the June 1973 issue of Geotimes.

P PPPPPPP a nonce-word on page 116 of FW. !!!!Pppppppp!!! is the title of a Portuguese dramatic monologue written about 1890 by Baptista Machado, listed in Beyond Language (Scribner's, 1967).

R BRRRR expressive of shivering with cold or apprehension (OED, A-G Supplement).

S COUNTESSSHIP the quality, personality, or position of a countess (OED). The OED also contains DUCHESSHIP, GODDESSSHIP (1704 quotation) and BOSSSHIP (A-G Supplement). HEADMISTRESSHIP and PATRONESSHIP, as noted earlier, are in Web 2.

T BITTIEST an apparently spurious word in Jack Levine's A List of Pattern Words of Lengths Two Through Nine (along with SHOOOSHES, SLOOOSHES, HALAAA and VEED, none located in Web 2 or 3).

U VERTUUUS a 14th century spelling of 'virtuous', found in the OED quotation 'His cote ... Ensured vpon veluet vertuuus stonez'. The OED also has UUULA, an early form of 'uvula', and the TAW lists NUUULI, a town in American Samoa.

V W RRRWWKKKKRRRR discussed under K. AF adds the whimpering of hounds, HOOOOWWOO, in John McClellan's "Comic Book Coin ages".

X XXX a trademark in the Trademark Register of the United States, 1971. PC discovered a human yell, FIBBIXXX, in Alan Dean Foster's The Tar-Aiyim Krang (Ballantine, 1972). He notes also that XXX is a symbol for triple-strength ale, in Web 2.
Words containing four consecutive identical letters are extremely scarce. Examples for B, M and P have already been given; here are thirteen more letters.

A AAAAAAMAD the Egyptian name of an unidentified town in Palestine (W. R. Cooper, "An Archaic Dictionary")
D DDD'D contraction of 'DDD would', as in 'DDD'D be used in most New Zealand orchards'. Obviously, this is marred by the intervening apostrophe.
E EEEEEE local name of the Hawaiian bird 'i'iwi', mentioned in a 1779 citation in the OED, H-N Supplement: '...Another is of an exceedingly bright scarlet colour ... its native name is eeeeve'.
L LLANFAIRPWLLGWYNGYLLGOGERYCHWYRNDROBWLLLLANTYSILLOGOGOGOCH the name of a village railway-station in Anglesey, Gwynedd, Wales, cited in the Guinness Book of World Records.
N NNNN a nonce-word on page 16 of FW.
O COOKKOOSNEE the tribes of the Kusan Indian family, in F. W. Hodge, Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico. PC discovered OOOO (along with MMMM) under the interjections of pleasure in Roget's International Thesaurus (Section 863.17 in the 1962 3rd edition, Section 865.17 in the 1977 4th edition).
R RRRRR a variant of 'brrr' (OED, A-G Supplement). GRRRR is a lion name in Chapter I of Shel Silverstein's previously-cited book, according to PC.
S ESSSE an old spelling of 'ashes' in the OED.
W OOOO-WWWWW is a human yell in Alan Dean Foster's previously-cited book, according to PC. He also recalls seeing the evocative HANDSAWWWWWW recently in a book-length anthology of short verse.
X XXXX a trademark in the Trademark Register of the United States, 1971.
Y KYYYY a non-official variant of Kyyy in the Official Standard Names Gazetteer of the USSR.
Z ZZZZ the sound of snoring, given in the American Thesaurus of Slang.

Words with more than four consecutive identical letters are invariably interjections such as AAAAAARGH and EEEEEK, or coinages like the 18th century racehorse name POTOOOOOOOOO (POT + 8 O's = potatoes). The record in this field appears in the novel Portnoy's Complaint by Philip Roth, where a howl of anguish represented by ZSCI consecutive A's, followed by 4 H's, can be found on the last page.