In 1969, Word Ways published a trigram list by Faith and Ross Eckler; based on the 5th and 7th editions of Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, it gave the "most common" word for each trigram the authors could find. Since that time, Philip Cohen has greatly extended the list by mining Webster's Unabridged as well as various gazetteers and other references. For some letter-groups, such as ESS, a trigram is almost too trivial to be worth printing; but others, such as JVJ, are so hard that one would be pleased to find a word containing a bigram using two of these three letters. In this article, instead of picking a single length for each group of letters, I have tried to find the longest string for each possible choice of two different letters. Thus, the letter-pair ES can be used to generate the octagram aSSESSEES, and the letter-pair JV can be used to generate the bigram blJVer.

All of the words on the following list can be found in either the second or third editions of Webster's Unabridged. However, most of them were actually discovered by scanning many word lists: the previously-mentioned trigram lists, the Levine list of pattern words, and Word Ways articles and Colloquy on bigrams, vowel trigrams and tetragrams, monoconsonantal and biconsonantal words, and words with two pairs of doubled letters.

I have restricted the list to uncapitalized words in which the string is not broken by a space, hyphen, apostrophe or other punctuation; however, the lexeme in which it is found need not be solid (see CN). Some of the major improvements which can be made with other words are AEAEAn (capitalized), TAT-TAT-TAT, and ZYZZYva (not in Webster). Other near-misses: granDDAD, DADDA and granDDADDy are all given, but not granDDADDa; most-proof words in Webster's Second are given as solid, but waRP-Proof is hyphenated.

There are only three letter-pairs not represented by words: GO, JO and JX. Of the 322 words listed, 93 contain bigrams, 122 trigrams, 35 tetragrams (eight of these are all-consonant), 46 pentagrams (including CHCHH), 22 hexagrams, 2 septagrams, and 2 octagrams (ES, KU).

ab graBBAbLe...
The August 1978 Word Ways briefly reviewed a book giving the frequencies of spoken English words based on a sample of 100,000 words overheard in restaurants near Kent, Ohio. Hartvig Dahl has now analyzed a far larger corpus -- slightly more than one million words tabulated from tapes of fifteen psychoanalytic sessions with two speakers (the analyst and the patient) each session. Dahl believes the sample is more representative of spoken English than the narrow basis of the sample might suggest; in psychoanalysis, patients are encouraged to free-associate (say whatever is on their mind). The commonest twenty words turned out to be

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you 26598 was 15091 this 8815
it 20542 uh 14017 me 8506
of 20290 in 12964 just 8377
a 19385 but 9799 about 8318
know 15285 is 8875 don't 8307
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Perhaps not surprisingly, I and ME are far commoner on the psychoanalytic couch than in the restaurant. It is interesting that the Dahl spoken corpus contains 17,871 different words while the Kucera and Francis written one of the same size contained 50,406 different words; when we write, we are more likely to remove repetitions and introduce synonyms to add variety.

This 348-page book, a 1979 Verbatim Book (distributed by Gale Research), is available for $50 from Verbatim, Essex CT 06426.