MORE LONG WORDS FROM THE OED

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Did you see that article in a previous Word Ways about the longest word in the Oxford English Dictionary?

You mean the one which mentioned the longest words according to various criteria--you know, words which were main entries and words which were buried in illustrative quotations, unhyphenated and hyphenated, and even words containing characters that weren't letters, like digits, commas, brackets and so on?

Mmmm, yes, that's the one.

Yes, why?

Well, after seeing it, I decided to do a bit of research of my own into long words.

What did you do that wasn't in the original Word Ways article?

I decided it might be fun to look for the longest words in the OED beginning with each letter of the alphabet.

So you came up with a list of 26 words, one beginning with A, one with B, and so on, all the way through to one beginning with Z?

More than that! I came up with two lists of 26 words. The first list contains words that use only letters—no hyphens, no digits, no other characters. And the second list contains words that use letters and possibly hyphens, apostrophes and slashes, but no other characters. No digits, no brackets, no Greek letters. It's quite interesting to see how much longer words can become merely by allowing inclusion of a hyphen, apostrophe or slash.

So what do these two lists look like, then?

The first list--remember, no hyphenated words--has words varying in length from 17 letters to 55 letters. The average word-length is 27.3 letters. Since many of the words in the list are taken from illustrative quotations, I've shown in the list the main entries at which the words can be found in the OED. Of course, a few of them are main entries in their own right. Here's the first list...

I an manda washing to the same and	
Length Longest words - unhyphenated	Main entry where found Sedormid
29 allylisopropylacetylcarbamide 23 betaimidazolylethylamin	
	histamine
23 columbotantalotitanites	betafite
37 dimethylamidophenyldimethylpyrazolone	Pyramidon
27 ethylenediaminetetraacetate	E militari e de la composición del composición de la composición de la composición del composición de la composición de la composición del composición de la composición del composición del composición de la composición del composición del composición del composición del composición del composición d
37 formaldehydetetramethylamidofluorimum	pyronin
23 glycylglutamyldiglycine	glutamyl
28 hepaticocholangiogastrostomy	hepatico-
25 immunoelectrophoretically	immuno-
20 justitieombudsmannen	Ombudsman
20 keratoconjunctivitis	keratoconjunctivitis
24 laryngotracheobronchitis	laryngo-
27 microspectrophotometrically	micro-
22 neuropharmacologically	neuropharmacologically
28 octamethylcyclotetrasiloxane	octamethylcyclotetrasiloxane
55 porkchopbeefsteakhamandegghamburgersteakorliverandbacor	
20 quartermasteriveness	quartermasteriveness
26 radioimmunoelectrophoresis	radioimmunoelectrophoresis
34 supercalifragilisticexpialidocious	supercalifragilisticexpialidocious
39 tetramethyldiaminobenzhydrylphosphinous	Michler
21 undercharacterization	undercharacterization
20 ventronudibranchiate	ventronudibranchiate
19 Whitsungilliflowers	Whitsun
23 xenylenedihydropyrazine	
17 Yankeedoodledodom	pyrazine
43 ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ	Yankeedoodledodom
40 FEFFERENCE FEFFERENCE FOR THE PARTY OF TH	Z

27.3

Wow, that's pretty impressive. Are these words in other dictionaries?

Some are, many aren't. I'll leave you to check out the details, though.

How about the second list, the one containing hyphens, apostrophes and slashes?

I've laid out the list in the same way, so it shows the number of characters for each word, the actual word, and then the main entry in the OED where it can be found. As you can see, the lengths vary from a meagre 23 characters to a mind-blowing 81! And the average length is 41.8 characters. Just compare that with the average in the first list, which was 27.3. That's an increase of 14.5 characters. Or, in percentage terms, over 53% longer!

I'm mightly impressed. I guess this must be the absolute, definitive last word on long words!

Hardly! You could repeat the exercise all over again using a different dictionary-something like Webster's Third New International-and I'm sure you'd get very different results. Anyway, here is my second list from the OED...

enath	Longest words - with hyphens, apostrophes & slashes	Main entry where found
61	abortion-divorce-homosexuality-censorship-racialism-marijuana	lefty
64	Baconian-pyramidological-cryptographic-spiritualist-theosophical	pyramidology -
49	chemico-philosophico-politico-economico-botanical	chemico-
37	dimethylamidophenyldimethylpyrazolone	Pyramidon
11	evenway-multiform-exquisitely-mechanical	everyway
81	feeling-upset-physically-and-mentally-with-anticipatory-excitement-and/or-anxiety	journey
54	great-great-great-great-great-grand-niece-in-law	great
44	honest-to-goodness-twelve-months-in-the-year	honest
37	isopropoxy-methyl-phosphoryl-flouride	Sarin
	Jaguar-threepointfoursville	relocate
30	Kiss-me-behind-the-garden-gate	garden-gate
13	legs-do-your-duty-for-the-body-is-in-danger	muck-a-muck
30	metaphysico-theologo-cosmologo-nigology	metaphysico-
30	needy-hollow-ey'd-sharpe-looking-wretch	hollow-eyed
	octamethylcyclotetrasiloxane	octamethylcyclotetrasiloxan
20	porkchopbeefsteakhamandegghamburgersteakorliverandbacon	Hamburger
20	quartz-fayalite-magnetite-buffered	norm
	revolutionary-existentialist	revolutionary
20	Shakespeare-designed-to-be-read-as-word-music	word
40	tetramethyldiaminobenzhydrylphosphinous	Michler
35	r tetrametriyidariiiloberizriydryipriospriiiloda	law
28	underdone-pie-crust-coloured visibly-rational-and-reportable-for-all-practical-purposes	ethnomethodological
50	without and for everlasting	world
	world-without-end-for-everlasting	pyrazine
	3 xenylenedihydropyrazine	philosophist
	Yankee-Gallico-philosophists	Z
43	3 2727777777777777777777777777777777777	

What would the second list look like if you included words with digits, Greek letters, brackets, and a variety of other punctuation marks?

I'm not sure. That sounds like a piece of work for some other day ...