

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...

