

THE XX BIGRAM

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"A Collection of Word Oddities and Trivia" compiled by Jeff Miller of New Port Richey, Florida can be found on the Internet. In the October 1997 update, it is stated that

EXXON (oil company), FOXX (surname), and LEXXEL (new prescription drug) are examples of words with a double X, but all such words are proper names; there are no words in dictionaries containing XX ... XX is the only double letter combination not found in English

Jeff notes that XX is however found in Maltese. Apparently the sign on their embassy in Washington D.C. reads AMBAXXATA DA MALTA, and there is a town in north central Malta called NAXXAR. Other languages also contain a double X; for example the palindromic SAXXAS means 'to identify or recognise' in Iraqi.

Commercial names with XX abound. Besides the well-known EXXON, there are the likes of AXXA, AXXESS, EXXACT, EXXELENT, FAXX, MAXXAM, MAXXCOM, NOXXON, ROXXIES, TRAXX, XXTRA and hundreds more.

Surnames containing XX are somewhat scarcer. However, the following are all listed on the US PhoneDisc (June 1995). By far the most common name is FOXX with just over 700 entries, followed by BOXX with around 200. Many of the names occur only once in the database:

ALEXXAN, AXX, AXXE, BAXXTER, BLIXXARD, BOXX, BOXXE, BUXXON, CHEXX, COXX, DEXXERS, DIXXON, DRAXX, ERIXXON, EXX, EXXEDINE, EXXES, EXXLESTON, FIXX, FLEXX, FOXX, FRUXXETI, HIXX, JAXX, KNOXX, KOXXY, LAXX, MAXX, MAXXI, MAXXWELL, MIDDLESEXX, MIXX, MIXXE, MUXX, NOXX, OXX, RAXX, REXX, RIXX, RIXXO, ROXX, SAXX, SAXXE, SAXXMAN, SAXXON, SIXX, SLAXX, STAXX, STIXX, VOXX, XXIN, XXU, ZAXXON

Most of these surnames have no doubt been changed (e.g. DIXON to DIXXON) or coined for effect. Some may be typos. A couple of particularly eye-catching examples on PhoneDisc are David SWIXXXX of Des Moines, Iowa and Tom XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX of Austin, Texas.

Finally, to set the record straight on English words containing XX, here are nine specimens taken from seven different dictionaries. All except XX are uncapitalised, although XX-DISEASE 'usually' is, according to Webster's 3rd:

- AXXLE-TOOTH West Yorkshire variant of 'axle-tooth', a molar (English Dialect Dictionary, editor Joseph Wright, 1970)
- DAXXED variant of 'daxed', dashed, damned (South Pembroke quotation in English Dialect Dictionary)
- MAXXED OUT adjusted up (Juba to Jive, A Dictionary of African American Slang, editor Clarence Major, 1994)
- OXX early Scots form of 'ox' (Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue, Craigie, 1937)
- OXXIN early Scots form of 'oxxen' (Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue)
- SEXXE Middle English spelling of 'six' (Middle English Dictionary, editor H. Kurath, 1959)
- WAXXENN 13th century form of the verb 'wax' (Oxford English Dictionary, Second Edition, 1989)
- XX pronounced 'double-X', slang for a double-cross, a betrayal (New Dictionary of American Slang, editor Robert L. Chapman, 1986)
- XX-DISEASE hyperkeratosis, a disease of cattle marked by thickness and wrinkling of the hide (Webster's 3rd New International Dictionary, 1976)

ONE WORDY GUY

This quirky novelette, privately published by William Webster for \$6 postpaid (Box 5023, Carefree AZ 85377), depicts the world of tournament Scrabble[®] (called THE Game to avoid legal hassles). Tournament players may find the hero, Gary Gray, difficult to believe: he needs only 8 minutes per game instead of the legal 25, but nevertheless never loses any (until page 157). Can you see why he might better have been named Verne Soles? Readers will probably be more interested in the numerous tactical analyses of board positions than in the less-than-gripping girl-wins-boy plot. Webster augments the narrative with several word quizzes (one of the hardest: find short words containing tetragrams like ALEE, ASCI, BOXY, LECH, THUS) and introduces minor characters via a plethora of puns (Pearl E White, Dawn East, Chili Winters, Fran Chise). Promotional literature invites the reader to discover a hidden puzzle in the text--no one has yet supplied the author with a full solution.