

A DICTIONARY OF LETTER WORDS

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INTRODUCTION

Letters can be used to represent words. That is to say, the sounds of the letters can mimic the sounds of words. An example of everyday use of a letter word is the promissory note called an IOU, which stands for, and sounds like, "I owe you". Letters used to represent words have been called "grammagrams" by Richard Lederer and "ABC language" by Willard R. Espy. Two books with collections of sentences composed with letters as words are *CDB!* (Aladdin Paperbacks, 1968) and *CDC?* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1984), both by William Steig. The most well-known example of letter words is the conversation at the restaurant:

F U N E M? (Have you any ham)
 S V F M. (Yes, we have ham)
 F U N E X? (Have you any eggs)
 S V F X (Yes, we have eggs)
 O K L F M N X (OK, I'll have ham and eggs)

Letter words can be used to create dialogue, short stores, and even limericks. For example:

N R E S N 10-SE (Henry is in Tennessee)
 I C E S E-10 A B (I see he has eaten a bee)
 E S U U N D B B (He is using the bees)
 N N-6 S D D (And insects as these)
 2 Q R A B-9 L R G (To cure a benign allergy)

GENERAL GUIDELINES

In order to make it easier to read and write with letter words, the following guidelines are suggested.

General Pronunciation and Notation Rules

Single letters are pronounced as the name of the letter, for example B sounded as *bee*

Double letters are pronounced as the plural names of the letter, for example PP sounded as *peas*

Double letters are pronounced individually but indicated with a hyphen, for example NT-T sounded as *entity*

Specific number of letters is indicated with a numerical prefix, for example 10-S sounded as *tennis*

Numbers are pronounced as the name of the number, for example 4 sounded as *for*

Double numbers pronounced as the plural of the numbers, for example 4-4 sounded as *force*
 (Exception: 22 can be pronounced as *twos* or *tutu* depending on its use in the sentence)

Individual numbers are indicated with a hyphen, for example N-2-8-F sounded as *intuitive*

Pronouncing Vowels

Vowels are generally pronounced with a long sound, for example “a” as in *bay*, “e” as in *eel*. Although this is beneficial for maintaining consistency in reading letter words, there is an exception for the letter A when it is the last letter in the letter word. In this case if the letter A is pronounced with a short sound, for example “a” as in *above*, letter words can be expanded to include words such as IDA for *idea*, VNA for *Vienna*, CNA for *Sienna*, and IOA for *Iowa*.

Accent Pronunciations

Although speaking English with a regional or foreign accent allows for the creation of more letter words, it should be avoided as much as possible since not everyone is familiar with the wide variety of accents that exist. One accent which most people are familiar with, and is an exception to the rule, is dropping the pronunciation of the letter H, usually when it is the first letter in the word. This allows for letter words such as RD for *hardy*, LT for *healthy*, AAT for *hasty*, FV for *heavy*, OIO for *Ohio*.

Syllable Emphasis

Many words become almost unintelligible if they are pronounced with the accent on the wrong syllable (try pronouncing “syllable” with the accent on the second syllable). Other words change their meaning entirely (Are you content with the content? Did you present the present?). Some letter words have the same problem. For example, if all the letters in MRL are pronounced evenly it does not sound like a word. However, if the second letter is emphasized it sounds like *immoral*. If the first letter of NML is emphasized it sounds like *animal*, but if the second letter is emphasized it sounds like *enamel*. There may be no way to avoid this, and the only solution may be to try reading the letter words with the emphasis on different letters.

Writing Letter Words

Letter words should be written with capital letters. Each letter word should be separated from the following letter word by a blank space. Depending on the font used, sometimes using a double space between letter words makes them easier to read. To make it easier to recognize where one sentence ends and another begins, punctuation should be included. To make it easier to recognize numbers it is advisable to separate them from the letters with hyphens. This is especially useful to avoid confusing a “one” with a capital I, or a “zero” with a capital O.

Multiple Word Combinations

In order to keep things simple, each letter word should represent a single real word. This will also help reduce the number of letter words that can be interpreted as more than one real word. An exception is for multiple-word letter words where the first word in the combination is an article. This provides useful words such as LAD for *a lady* and LMN for *a lemon*. There is one other exception that is worth keeping, 10-Q for *thank you* (we wouldn’t want letter words to become a thankless exercise!) Many multiple word combinations can be represented in other ways. For example, instead of using EE for *he is*, use E S, or instead of using NMLZ for *animals he*, use NMLL E.

Multiple Words from the Same Letters

Since many letter words depend on stretching some of the sounds of the real words, some words will need to be “translated” based on the content of the sentence. For example, M can be *am*, *ham*, *him* or *them*, N can be *Ann*, *an*, *and*, *in*, *end* or *hen*, and X can be *ask*, *axe* or *eggs*.

Using Symbols for Letter Words

Although some symbols can provide interesting words, such as D¢ for *decent* and NO¢ for *innocent*, symbols should be avoided to keep things simple. Sometimes letter words contain

Greek letters. Although they can also provide interesting words, such as $\chi\pi R$ for *expire*, Greek letters should also be avoided.

Syllable Consistency

The number of syllables in the letter words should as much as possible match the number of syllables in the words they represent. In most cases there is a perfect match. For example, NML and *animal* each have three syllables. There are a number of exceptions where the letter words have more syllables than the words they represent. In these cases only the letter words that are very close in pronunciation should be used. Some examples of good matches are BUT for *beauty*, CL for *seal*, 2-L for *tool*, UR for *your* and FRE-1 for *everyone*. Some examples of letter words that do not meet this criterion and should be avoided are TRNE for *tyranny* and MSE for *messy*.

Use of Acronyms

There are a number of acronyms that look somewhat like letter words. However, if you try to read them as such, they do not sound like real words. In the interest of keeping things simple and keeping the principle of pronouncing each letter, avoid using acronyms mixed in with letter words. This would include ones such as RSVP, ASAP, ASPCA, CIA, BBC, MBA, AMA, DVD, VCR, PTA, BMW, AAPR, etc. However, if acronyms are essential to what is being written, they should be made to stand out by using italics or boldface.

SOURCES AND EXAMPLES

A recent example of an extended text in *Word Ways* is given by "Katie and Jay, an Odious Essay" by Nick Montfort in the August 2000 issue. The first Letteral Limerick was written by Stuart Kidd and appears in the May 2003 *Kickshaws*. Ted Clarke exhibits a short "Canine Narrative" in *Colloquy* in August 1991. "Odyssey to Arcadia" is an extended example by Dave Morice in the May 1991 *Kickshaws*. An older example is found in May 1976, "A Man For All Seasons" by Betsy Burr. Willard Espy gives a mixed example, using both letter words and real words, in "Rebus Poetry" in February 1974.

Willard R. Espy, *The Game of Words* (Bramhall House, 1971)

Willard R. Espy, *An Almanac of Words at Play* (Clarkson N. Potter, 1975)

Willard R. Espy, *Another Almanac of Words at Play* (Clarkson N. Potter, 1980)

Willard R. Espy, *A Children's Almanac of Words at Play* (Clarkson N. Potter, 1982)

Anthony B. Lake, *A Pleasury of Witticisms & Wordplay* (Bramwell House, 1975)

Richard Lederer, *Pun and Games* (Chicago Review Press, 1996)

Richard Lederer, *The Word Circus, A Letter Perfect Book* (Merriam-Webster, 1998)

Dictionary of Letter Words (4 NE-1 2 UU)

1	won	6-S	success	C	sea
2	to	6-SS	successes	C	see
2	too	8-8	hates	C-10	sitting
4	for	10-N	tenon	CC	seas
8	ate	10-NN	tenons	CC	sees
8	hate	10-NC	tenancy	CC	seize
1,000,000-AR	millionaire	10-UR	tenure	CC	cease
1,000,000-ARR	millionaires	10-US	tenuous	CCLE	Sicily
10-10	tense	A	a	CCN	season
10-10	tents	A	hay	CCNN	seasons
10-L	tunnel	AA	ace	CCR	Caesar
10-LL	tunnels	AA	haze	CCREN	cesarean
10-Q	thank you	AAS	aces	CCZM	cesium
10-R	tenor	AAL	Hazel	CD	seedy
10-RR	tenors	AAL	hazel	CK	seek
10-S	tennis	AAN	Asian	CL	seal
10-SE	Tennessee	AAT	hasty	CLL	seals
1-1	once	AB	Abby	CLN	ceiling
1-1-D	Wednesday	AC-C	Assisi	CLNN	ceilings
1-1-DD	Wednesdays	ACDN	ascidian	CM	seam
1-R	winner	AG	age	CM	seem
1-R	wonder	AGG	ages	CN	seeing
1-RN	wondering	AGN	Aegean	CN	seen
1-RR	winners	AQQ	accuse	CN	scene
1-RR	wonders	AQQN	accusing	CNA	Sienna
2-2-D	Tuesday	AQQS	accuses	CNCNAT	Cincinnati
2-2-DD	Tuesdays	AR	air	CNN	scenes
2-D	today	AT	Haiti	CT	city
2-II	twice	AV-8	aviate	CTT	cities
2-L	tool	AVN	avian	D	Dee
2-LL	tools	AVRE	aviary	D	the
2-N	twin	AVREE	aviaries	D-2-R	detour
2-NN	twins	AYE	Hawaii	D-2-RR	detours
2-R	tour	AZ	hazy	DAT	deity
2-RN	touring	B	be	DATT	deities
2-RR	tours	B	bee	DCC	decease
2-RR	Tours	B-10	beaten	DD	these
4-4	force	B-4	before	DDIN	design
4-4-S	forces	B-9	benign	DDINN	designs
4-A	foray	BB	bees	DDIR	desire
4-AA	forays	B-B	baby	DDIRN	desiring
4-C	foresee	B-BB	babies	DDIRR	desires
4-CC	foresees	BBNS	business	DDL	diesel
4-CN	foreseen	BBNS-S	businesses	DDLL	diesels
4-FR	forever	BBTL	bestial	DDN	descend
4-K	fork	BD	beady	DFI	deify
4-M	forum	BF	behalf	DFII	deifies
4-MM	forums	BN	being	DFIN	deifying
4-N	foreign	BUT	beauty	DK	decay
4-NR	foreigner	BUTS	beauteous	DKK	decays
4-NRR	foreigners	BUTT	beauties	DKN	decaying
4-S	forest	BZ	busy	DL	deal

DLL	deals	GLOG	geology	L	ill
DM	deem	H	hatch	L-10	Elton
DNN	dance	HH	hatches	LA	allay
DNN-N	dancing	HN	aging	LAA	allies
DR	dear	HN	hatching	LAD	a lady
DR	deer	I	eye	LC	Elsie
DV-8	deviate	I	I	LE	alley
DV-8-8	deviates	IC	icy	LEE	alleys
DV-8-8--N	deviating	IDA	idea	LEG	elegy
DVS	devious	IDL	ideal	LEGG	elegies
DZ	dizzy	IDLE	ideally	LEM	allium
DZZ	disease	IDLSM	idealism	LEN	alien
DZZS	diseases	II	eyes	LENN	aliens
E	he	II	ice	LEV-8	alleviate
E-10	eaten	IL	aisle	LEV-8-8	alleviates
ED	Eddie	IL	I'll	LEV-8-N	alleviating
EE	ease	ILN	island	LF	elf
EE	his	ILNN	islands	LF-8-R	elevator
EEL	easel	IN	ion	LF-8-RR	elevators
EELL	easels	INN	ions	LFN	elephant
EES	eases	IOA	Iowa	LFNN	elephants
EL	eel	IR	higher	LL	else
ELL	eels	IR	hire	LM	elm
EPQR	epicure	IR	ire	LMM	elms
EPQRR	epicures	IRR	hires	LMN	a lemon
ER	ear	IRN	hiring	LMNM	aluminum
ERR	ears	IRN	iron	LMNII	aluminumize
EZ	easy	IRNN	irons	LMN-8	eliminate
EZR	easier	IV	ivy	LMN-8	illuminate
F	have	IV	Ivy	LMN-8-8	eliminates
F	if	J	Jay	LMN-8-8	illuminates
F	off	JJ	jazz	LMN-8-N	eliminating
F-10	often	JL	jail	LMN-8-N	illuminating
FE	Effie	JLL	jails	LN	Ellen
FI-10-10	evidence	JM	jam	LNR	Eleanor
FY	iffy	JMM	jams	LO	allow
FAA	efface	K	cay	LO	hello
FAAN	effacing	K	Kay	LON	allowing
FAAS	effaces	K-10	kitten	LONN	allowance
FEG	effigy	K-10-10	kittens	LOO	allows
FEGG	effigies	KB	cabby	LRG	allergy
FN	haven't	KBB	cabbies	LRGG	allergies
FN	having	KC	Casey	LT	healthy
FN	heaven	KF	calf	LX	Alex
FND	effendi	KFF	calves	LXS	Alexis
FNU	avenue	KG	cagey	M	am
FNUU	avenues	KK	case	M	ham
FR	ever	KKN	caisson	M	him
FRE-1	everyone	KKNN	caissons	M	them
FT	hefty	KL	kale	MA	Emma
FV	heavy	KM	came	MBC	embassy
FX	affects	KN	can	MBCC	embassies
FX	effects	KR	care	MC	emcee
G	gee	KRR	cares	MCC	emcees
GG	cheese	KT	Katie	ME	Emmy
GGG	cheeses	L	all	MET	amity

MH	image	NKK	encase	OL	owl
MHH	images	NKKS	encases	OLL	owls
MLE	Emily	NLII	analyze	OM	ohm
MLN	a melon	NLIIN	analyzing	OM	home
MM	hams	NLIIS	analyses	OMM	homes
MN	a man	NLL	annals	OO	owes
MN-8	emanate	NLOG	analogy	ON	owing
MN--8-8	emanates	NLOGG	analogies	P	pea
MNA-10	emanating	NLS-EE	analyses	PK	piquet
MNCT	immensity	NLS-S	analysis	PL	peel
MNN	amends	NME	enemy	PLL	peels
MNN	immense	NMEE	enemies	PNE	peony
MNUL	Emanuel	NMNE	anemone	PNEE	peonies
MPS	impious	NMNEE	anemones	PNO	piano
MR	hammer	NML	animal	PNOO	pianos
MRE	emery	NML	enamel	PP	peace
MRR	hammers	NMLL	animals	PP	piece
MT	empty	NN	ends	PP	peas
MUN	immune	NN	hands	PPA	Pisa
N	an	NN	hens	PPA	pizza
N	and	NN-10-10	instance	PPS	pieces
N	Ann	NN-10-10-EE	instances	PT	pity
N	end	NOI	anyway	PV	peavey
N	hen	NR	inner	Q	cue
N	in	NRE	Henry	Q	queue
N	inn	NRG	energy	QES	curious
N-10-10	intense	NRGG	energies	QQ	queues
N-10-10-CT	intensity	NT	ante	QR	cure
N-2	into	NT	auntie	QRN	curing
N-2-2	induce	NTT	auntie's	QRR	cures
N-2-2-N	inducing	NT-T	entity	QT	cutie
N-2-2-S	induces	NT-TT	entities	QTT	cuties
N-2-8-F	intuitive	NUL	annual	R	are
N-4-4	enforce	NULL	annuals	R-8	alright
N-4-4-N	enforcing	NUU-UL	unusual	RA	array
N-4-4-S	enforces	NV	envy	RAA	arrays
N-4-M	inform	NVN	envying	RABN	Arabian
N-4-MM	informs	NVS	envious	RD	hardy
N-4-MN	informing	NVV	envies	RE	hurry
N-6	insects	NX	annex	REA	area
N-8	innate	NXPDNC	inexpediency	REE	hurries
N-10-A	antenna	NXS-10-10	inexistence	REL	oriel
NA	Anna	O	owe	REL	oriole
NCDM	ancidium	O-8-N	awaiting	REN	hurrying
NCQR	insecure	O-8	await	RI	awry
ND	Andy	O-8-8	awaits	RII	arise
ND	handy	OA	away	RIIN	arising
NDA	India	OBB	obese	RIIN	horizon
NDCC	indices	OBBIT	obesity	RIIS	arises
NDD	Andes	OBDN	obedient	RKDN	Arcadian
NDN	Indian	OBDNN	obedience	RL	oral
NDNN	Indians	OCN	ocean	RLE	orally
NDR	endear	OCNN	oceans	RM	arm
NE	any	ODM	odium	RME	army
NE-1	anyone	ODS	odious	RMEE	armies
NF	enough	OIO	Ohio	RMM	arms

RN	aren't	TDM	tedium	X	axe
RO	arrow	TM	team	X	eggs
ROO	arrows	TMM	teams	X-10-U-8	extenuate
RQ	argue	TP	teepee	X-10-U-8-8	extenuates
RQN	arguing	TPP	teepees	X-10-U-A-10	extenuating
RQQ	argues	TR	tear	XAVR	Xavior
RR	hours	TRN	tearing	XI-10	exciting
RR	ours	TRR	tears	XII	excise
RT	Artie	TT	teas	XIIS	excises
RT	arty	TT	tease	XL	excel
RTTN	artisan	TTN	teasing	XLL	excels
RTTN	artesian	TTS	teases	XLN	excellent
S	as	U	ewe	XLNC	excellency
S	has	U	yew	XLR-8-10	exhilarating
S	is	U	you	XM	exam
S	yes	U-4-EA	euphoria	XMM	exams
S-2-RE	estuary	UR	ewer	XMN	examine
S-2-REE	estuaries	UR	your	XMNN	examines
SA	essay	URR	yours	XMN-N	examining
SAA	essays	UU	ewes	XNR-8	exonerate
SKP	escapee	UU	use	XNR-8-8	exonerates
SN	hasn't	UUN	using	XNR-8-N	exonerating
SN	isn't	UUS	uses	XPDN	expedient
SN-9	asinine	UU-UL	usual	XPDNC	expediency
SN-10-10	ascendance	UU-ULE	usually	XPTT	expertise
SNN	essence	V	we	XQQ	excuse
SQ	askew	VDO	video	XQQN	excusing
S-S	assess	VNA	Vienna	XQQS	excuses
S-SN	assessing	VNS	Venus	XS	excess
S-SN	assassin	VR	veer	XS-10-10	existence
S-SNN	assassins	VRE	very	XTC	ecstasy
S-SR	assessor	VRN	veering	XX	axes
S-SRR	assessors	VRR	veers	XX	axis
S-SS	assesses	VVA	visa	Y	why
SU	issue	VVUL	visual	YF	wife
SUN	issuing	VVULE	visually	YL	while
SUU	issues	VVULII	visualize	YN	wine
SX	Essex	VVULIIR	visualizer	YNN	wines
T	tea	VVULIIS	visualizes	YY	wise
TDS	tedious	X	ask	ZN	zein