

## LOOKING FOR THE LONGEST INSIDER WORD

JIM PUDEK  
Saratoga, California

The notion that physical objects may sometimes best be hidden by being left in plain sight, but camouflaged or disguised in some way, was famously propounded by Edgar Allan Poe in his celebrated short story, "The Purloined Letter." A wordplay incarnation of this idea is found in the fabrication of "insider" sentences, sentences akin to charade sentences in which occult non-sentence words are spelled out in consecutive letters of the sentence, albeit usually broken up into two or more parts by the sentence's word breaks and/or punctuation. Such sentences should in some way suggest or hint at the occult word(s), e.g.:

Shucks—chugging, miss, is "sipping," here in the Magnolia State.

So effectively concealed are such "insider" words that their presence usually goes unsuspected if it is not disclosed, and even then they can be exasperatingly difficult to discern. For example, each of the following short sentences contains two closely related insider words; can you readily spot them? (If you give up, the answers are given at the end of this article.)

Man dreads rigid ethic. Diet helps homer manage. Ego repulses avid allies. Host ever shall endure. Egyptian warps visa data.

These sentences are the creations of Robert Malinow, who composed around them a symmetrical themed crossword puzzle entitled "Insiders" which appeared in the Nov. 8, 1998 edition of the *New York Times* (*NYT*). Intrigued by the insiders concept, I clipped and saved Malinow's crossword and ten years later elaborated his idea into an article of my own, also entitled "Insiders," which appeared in the Aug. 2008 issue of *Word Ways*, displaying a number of sentences harboring the names of noted persons as insiders.

Now Will Shortz (who coincidentally may, as the *NYT*'s crossword puzzle editor, have contributed to Malinow's crossword in 1998) has published an article in the Nov. 2014 *Word Ways* entitled "Finding the Answers Within" in which he presents a selection of original insider-type sentences submitted to him by listeners for a contest on his weekly NPR program. My 2008 article and Will's recent one differ in several respects, in particular the fact that in my article I followed Malinow in using only personal names as insiders, whereas in Will's article, 18 of the 21 insider words are uncapitalized. In a further blow to the prestige of proper nouns, he awards first place in his contest to a sentence having as its insider word the decidedly common noun *thermostat*. (A similar insider word, *Thermopylae*, occurs below.)

Whether by coincidence or not, *thermostat*, with its ten letters, also happened to be the longest insider word in Will's contest, which brings us to the topic of the present article, which is ultimate insider word length. What is the longest possible unhyphenated, dictionary-sanctioned English insider word? Logology must obviously explore this question, but before we begin, a comment about an artistic problem which can arise in the composition of insider sentences hosting compound insider words seems in order.

Insiders are most fascinating, I think, when they seem to materialize suddenly and unexpectedly from the fabric of an unrelated sentence. But this may fail to happen if an insider is embedded in its sentence in a too-obvious way, such as when one or more parts of a broken-up insider word have the same meaning in their host sentence as they do in the intact word. Consider, for example, the word *straightforwards*; it is easy to make an insider of this long compound word simply by separating it at the joint of the compound:

The sobriety test was simple enough: just walk straight, forwards or backwards, for six yards.

Note that in this sentence the words *straight* and *forwards* have about the same meanings as they have in *straightforwards*, and so the presence of this word as an insider in the sentence fails to either surprise or very much interest us. To remedy this problem, I would suggest that in insiders play we would do well to observe a rule to the effect that **no separated part of an insider word as it is used in an insider sentence may have the same meaning in the sentence that it has in the intact word.** Such a rule would force players to come up with reasonably imaginative host sentences for compound-word insiders, e.g.:

To mark any very unusual occasion, such as the time I saw a rat leap high in the air and catch a fly in its lips, I'd yell "All magnify the next Ra!" or din Aryan harvest chanteys in my tiny cell.

That said, here are some of the random products of a progressive search for an ever-wider insider word:

**11 – Mississippi** (see above); **Thermopylae**

Kindly tell us, then, in what famous battle did Spartans and Persians confront each other, mopy Laertes?

**12 – Thessalonica** (The city's ancient name; to replace it with modern **Thessaloniki** as the insider in the following sentence, simply swap out *came upon* for a *ki-* verb such as *kicked, kidded, kissed*, etc.)

There, in Greece's second city—was it at Goethe's salon?—I came upon Lord Byron.

**12 – interstellar**

Kuiper Belt objects, those icy glinters, tell ardent observers of lonely orbits amid the stars.

**13 – extraordinary** (see above); **intergalactic**

Oh do not, frosty winter gal, act icily cold to this barely thawed cryogenic voyager from a galaxy far away!

**14 – dermatological**

"I'm off yonder, Ma, to log," I called, ignoring my—whatchamacallit—skin problem.

**14 – parallelepiped**

"I have identified the key hepar allele!" piped the annoying little robotic analyzer, whose six sides, for some reason, were all parallelograms.

**15 – tarsometatarsal**

I needed some tar, so met a tar salvager who told me he didn't give the lower leg bone of a leghorn what I needed, he couldn't get away from his work just then.

**15 – bougainvilleas**

Of course, once those migrating caribou gain villa easements, say good-bye to all of your pretty flowering vines.

## 15 – psychosensorial

To be sure that it's hallucinogenic spores from your fern that are causing you to feel like your toes are taking root, we'll have to biopsy chosen sori also.

## 15 – thermotherapist

Another mother, a pistic soul, volunteered to help the diathermy specialist—I forget what it was she called herself—demonstrate the procedure.

(*Pistic* is defined in Webster's Third as meaning "of, relating to, or exhibiting faith.")

## 16 – disacknowledgers

Lest our thefts be detected, I sack now ledgers of which we will hereafter profess ignorance.

From this point on, the lengthier insider words tend to force the use of a more exotic vocabulary, as well as a sometimes more complex sentence structure. A peculiarity of the six insider words of 19 or more letters that I was able to find (two of them, *disestablishmentarian* and its *anti-* inflection, are omitted here to reduce repetition) is that all have ecclesiastical themes, having to do with such things as denominations and church-state ties. Might higher letter-counts imbue words with loftier horizons? Heaven knows.

## 19 – interdenominational

It seems a bit odd that one hibernating rodent's late-winter den omination, allegedly fixing the time till spring, should be a matter of such manifest interest to persons of all religious beliefs.

(*Omination*, which derives ultimately from the Latin word for "omen," is a boldface headword in Webster's Third, where it is defined as the act of prophesying. [*Ominate*, the verb from which *omination* is derived, is defined as meaning to prophecy or augur from signs or omens.] That most dictionaries label *omination* as obsolete or archaic is immaterial to this survey, which requires only that a critical word be a boldface entry in a standard English dictionary, or a basic inflection of such an entry.)

## 23 – interdenominationalists

There in our winter den, omination A-lists of the kinds of auguries thought most likely to appeal to the various sects whose credulity we hoped to exploit were assiduously compiled.

(*A-list* is a slangish term in wide current usage (it rates not one but *two* Wikipedia pages) designating the preferred or foremost group of people or things in some category. *Interdenominationalists* is not a headword in W3, but qualifies for this survey as a basic inflection of *interdenominationalism*, which is.)

## 24 – disestablishmentarianism

No, *here* is how we must the defenders of this bankrupt bit of moldy medieval merchandise "stab, lish men: tar—I, an ismene-wearing pacifist, condone it—they with the brush of covertly-creeping clandestine theocracy!

(According to Webster's Third, "lish," in British dialect, means lithe and quick, or nimble, and an ismene is a Peruvian daffodil.)

And finally, the P-45 Prize for being the longest known dictionary-listed unhyphenated English insider word goes to an old friend, that ageless sesquipedalian stalwart,

**28 – antisestablishmentarianism** (reputedly the longest nontechnical, noncoined word in English)

No, I *don't* know what “id” is...no, never *mind* any more irrelevant “id ises”—tab lish men, tar (I, an ismene-wearing pacifist, condone it!) this overtly anticlerical campaign with the brush of overweening militant atheism, and pray!

(*Ises* is a headword in W3, defined as the plural of *is*. Alas, *antisestablishmentarianism* has itself been disestablished from Merriam-Webster dictionaries in recent times (unlike, for some reason, its rival term *disestablishmentarianism*). Still, it soldiers on in various other dictionaries, notably the *OED*.)

### Is This the World's Longest Insiders Poem?

Insiders poets must sometimes feel a bit frustrated, given that the whole point of their art is to conceal itself from casual notice—perhaps that is why so much of their rarely recognized poetry seems tinged with melancholy. Be that as it may, to anyone who might be interested in perusing an excellent example of the genre, I would highly recommend Ed Wolpow's poem “Adirondacks Shingles,” which may be found on page 303 of the Nov. 2003 issue of *Word Ways*. Each line of this 17-line poem, including the title line, incorporates at least one specimen of a certain category of insider words. Despite this challenging constraint, “Adirondacks Shingles” manages to work rather well as poetry on its own merits.

In Robert Malinow's five sentences, the insider word pairs are *Steve Allen*, *Andre Gide*, *Ethel Merman*, *Anwar Sadat* and *Gore Vidal*.

### What's My Name?

To fill in this leftover space, here is a selection of noted-person insider sentences, some new and some revised from my 2008 article. As for the names of their incognito insiders, why, they're right in plain sight.

“Someone said cuttingly of me, ‘She lent a little *too*-fugitive glamour to those Hellespont royals.’”

“Step by step—hence so thence—my books hawk ingenious cosmological deductions.”

“An old Clydesider I used to know once said to me, ‘Eras must end, Desiderius.’”

“I found no jam escape-proof as I deftly dispatched M's inevitable odd job on demand.”

“Self-stilettoed, I pushed a self-obliterating blackness over existence.”

“Apart from some *nihil* laryngitis, my last job left no impolitic lint on my aspirations.”

“In France, my trim, auric-edged bolero jacket always traveled well.”

“As Cesare says, it was always lucre, ziarats, rich garb, orgiastic sex and deadly nightshade with me.”

“No bar acknowledging, I was inclined to see in my new job a mandate.”

“Yes, antacids do help me to cope with my chronic chimney claustrophobia.”

Down in Coventry, lad,    You'll be asked to believe a    Tale of gaddings unclad    By a long-ago diva.  
Derma-Shave

(In what may be the first *intentional* insiders limerick, a ghost is glimpsed twice:)

Quoth the raven, fed garlic and Brie,  
“D—n the squall—ante up!” o'er tea;  
“Let ichored garb sprawl,  
And doomed houses fall,  
And lorn poets lament by the sea!”