

NUMBERS IN WORDS

Darryl Francis
Brampton, Cumbria, England
darryl.francis@yahoo.co.uk

This article was inspired by my 5-year-old grand-daughter who once asked me “Do some words have numbers in them, as well as letters?” By ‘numbers’, I assumed she meant ‘digits’. I knew of items like SE7EN (a 1995 film starring Brad Pitt) and CHICAG8 (an early spelling of Chicago, taken from Frederick Webb Hodge’s *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico*). I thought these examples might be somewhat advanced for her, so assured her that the words she would come across at school and in her books would all just have letters.

However, this set me thinking. Instead of digits in words, could I find words which contained the number names (**ONE**, **TWO**, **THREE** and so on) but which had no connection with the number names contained? I wasn’t interested in words like **FOURSOME**, **FIVEFOLD** and **MULTIMILLIONAIRE** where the number contained has got an obvious relation to the full word. The remainder of this article explores this idea in more detail.

ONE: It’s very easy to find examples. Three obvious ones are **DONE**, **GONE** and **TONE** - note that these examples don’t even rhyme. Obviously, plenty of longer examples exist - for example, **AUCTIONEER**, **EXPONENT** and **TELEPHONED**. I like the longer examples because, presenting them, along with others in this article, to non-logologists and asking what they have in common makes it more difficult to spot their commonality.

TWO: Here are some common words containing this number name – **NETWORK**, **SOFTWOOD** and **TRUSTWORTHY**. Many others also exist.

THREE: This is where the challenge starts to kick in! Here are three examples, all obscure, taken from the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED): **BREETHREED** (a 15th century spelling of ‘brotherhood’), **STHREEL** (a variant of ‘streele’, a disreputable, untidy woman), and **STOUTHREEF** (an 18th century variant of ‘stouthreif’, theft with violence).

FOUR: Again, it’s not easy to find familiar words. But I have come up with **BEFOURE** (an obsolete spelling of ‘before’ in the OED), **SAFFOUR** (an obsolete spelling of ‘savour’, in the OED), and **SULFOUREA** (an organic chemical compound, listed in *Webster’s Second Edition*). And here are a couple of proper names - **BALFOUR** (the surname of Arthur Balfour, British prime minister between 1902-05), and **FOURIER** (an 18-19th century French mathematician known for his technique of ‘Fourier analysis’).

FIVE: It’s getting harder now to find familiar words containing this number. I’ve found **RUFIVENA** and **RUFIVENTRIS**, which appear in a variety of scientific names. The former appears in the names of moths **AORAIA RUFIVENA** and **TIRATHABA RUFIVENA**, both of which can be found in Wikipedia. The latter can be found in the scientific name of the Australian bird called a coachman, **PACHYCEPHALA RUFIVENTRIS**. I suspect the RUFIV- part of

these names is connected to redness. The OED says that RUF- is used to form adjectives describing animals and plants that have reddish parts.

SIX: The website for the Unabridged Merriam-Webster Dictionary has **LASIX** (a tradename for the drug furosemide); and the OED contains **POSIX** (a set of formal descriptions that provides a standard for the design of certain features of computer operating systems).

SEVEN: Again, it's difficult to find familiar words containing this number. The OED has **MISEVENT** in a quotation, but shows the headword hyphenated, **MIS-EVENT**. The OED also has **THRISEVENERABLE** in a quote at **THRICE**, meaning 'three times venerable'. **ASSEVENT** is a commune in northern France, according to Wikipedia.

EIGHT: Back to familiar words! **HEIGHT** and **WEIGHT** are familiar, everyday words. Longer words include **FREIGHTAGE** and **HEIGHTENED**.

NINE: It's relatively easy to unearth words containing this number. A few familiar examples include **CANNINESS**, **SKINNINESS** and **TINNINESS**. Other words not ending with **-INESS** include **LEONINE** and **TANNINED**.

TEN: There are lots of familiar words having these three letters embedded in them. Some familiar examples are **ANTENNA**, **EXTEND** and **STENCH**.

ELEVEN: This is another challenging number when it comes to finding familiar examples. The OED contains these two words – **RELEVANT** (an obsolete spelling of the familiar word 'relevant'), and **WANBELEVENESS** (a state of unbelief). There's also a couple of proper names I've uncovered – **TRELEVEN** (a family surname, taken from *Dictionary of American Family Names*, published by the Oxford University Press, apparently derived from a placename in Cornwall, England, although I am unable to find this placename in detailed lists of English placenames), and **SZELEVENY** (a village in central Hungary, according to Wikipedia).

Now a big gap

FORTY: This number appears in several obsolete spellings found in the OED - **BEFORTYMES** (an obsolete spelling of 'beforetimes', meaning formerly, previously, in the past), **COMFORTYE** (an obsolete spelling of 'comfort'), and **FORTYFIE** (an obsolete spelling of 'fortify', and also being one letter short of the number **FORTY-FIVE**). There is also the placename **ARTIFORTY** (a place in Antrim, Northern Ireland, listed on Wikipedia).

Another big gap

EIGHTY: There's one very familiar word containing this number, **WEIGHTY**. And the OED has **OVERWEIGHTY** (too heavy) and **UNWEIGHTY**, which it doesn't define, but which presumably is simply the opposite of **WEIGHTY**. The OED also has **SLEIGHTY** (making use of sleight or craft).

NINETY: I've come up with some faulty examples here. The first is the hyphenated **STRYCHNINE-TYPE**. In its entry for LACTAM, the OED has this as part of a quotation: "the corresponding lactams show pronounced strychnine-type toxicity". The second is the two-word term **CANINE TYPHUS** (another name for EHRLICHIOSIS, a disease of dogs, which appears in Wikipedia).

HUNDRED: I've only managed to find a single example here – **THUNDRED** (an obsolete spelling of 'thundered', which appears in numerous quotations in the OED).

MILLION: At its entry MUSKMELON (an edible fruit), the OED has these four obsolete spellings of the word: **MUSKMILLION**, **MUSKEMILLION**, **MUSHMILLION**, and **MUSMILLION**. The online Unabridged Merriam-Webster Dictionary has **VERMILLION** as an alternative spelling of VERMILION (a scarlet cosmetic). The surname **GOMILLION** can also be found. Charles Gomillion was the lead plaintiff in the landmark 1960 civil rights case Gomillion v. Lightfoot, which led the Supreme Court to declare gerrymandering unconstitutional.

BILLION: Webster's Third and the OED have **TOURBILLION** (a whirlwind). The OED also shows the obsolete spelling **TURBILLION**. Wikipedia has an entry for **TINUS LAMBILLION**, a Dutch boxer who competed in the 1936 Summer Olympics.

TRILLION: According to Wookieepedia, the Star Wars wiki, I note the existence of **DESTRILLION** (a planet in the Dubrillion system of the Outer Rim Territories).

GOOGOL: And finally, I couldn't resist this one - **GOO GOO GOLIATH** (a 1954 *Merrie Melodies* mockumentary cartoon, according to Wikipedia).