MUST YOU JOIN THE QUEUE?

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One of the most enduring pieces of orthographic folklore is the assertion that the letter Q in a word is always followed by the letter U. Thes staunchest defenders of this rule are unruffled by the counterexample Iraq, for this is a foreign proper name and not a genuine English word; similarly, they quickly dismiss Qantas (an Australian airline) and Qiana (a synthetic fabric) as trademarks designed to attract notice.

Actually, a considerable number of words in which Q is not followed by U can be found in English-language dictionaries. A substantial fraction of these words are borrowed from Hebrew or Arabic, describing particular institutions or situations that may have no direct counterpart in Western culture; if the use of these words were barred in English-language texts describing the Near East, it would be necessary to resort to clumsy circumlocutions. Of the remainder, many come from the French.

To avoid being overwhelmed by examples, I somewhat arbitrarily restricted myself to uncapitalized words; furthermore, I ignored a very large number of obsolete words in use in England or Scotland five hundred or more years ago, listed in the Oxford English Dictionary. These words fall broadly into two classes: the substitution of W for U (as in square for square), and the substitution of QW for WH (as in square for square). A handful of such words can be found below the line in the First Edition of Webster's Unabridged: beqweythe (bequeath), noqwere (nowhere), qwatte (quat), qweer (choir) and qwere (choir). One word, amazingly, made it into the Second Edition: acqwyte (acquit).

I am indebted to Dmitri Borgmann, Darryl Francis and Philip Cohen for various contributions to the lists given below. At a later stage of the research, I was materially aided by a list of words in which Q is not followed by U prepared by Homer Calkins of Los Angeles, Cal.

bathqol
burqa
cinqu
cinque-foil
cod
coq-a-l'ane
coo au vin
faqi
fakir
fuqaha
miqra
paq
qabbala
qaf
qaid
qaneh
qantar
qasab
qasida
qat (q'at)
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wafq
vara. of wakf, a charitable trust in Moslem law

yaqona
vara. of yanggona, an intoxicating beverage (kava)

zaqqum
a tree with bitter fruit, mentioned in the Koran

zindiq
a heretic extremely unfaithful to Islam

By including additional references, other words can be added to this list. *Mugaddam*, a head-man, is listed in Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary; *ganat*, an underground tunnel, can be found in the Dictionary of New English; and *qepo*, a form of the parasitic disease leishmaniasis, is listed in *Dorland's Medical Dictionary*.

Words in which Q is not followed by U may be rare, but words in which Q is followed by U and a consonant are considerably rarer. The list below gives all known uncapitalized words of this type taken from the same set of dictionaries. To make the list as large as possible, I include several words (indicated by asterisks) that are cited as obsolete, perhaps falling into the class of *acqwyte* and *nogwere*.

**alquhair** everywhere 2

**l~n~uhard** a small lodge or cottage 2

**piqure** a puncture or wormhole 2

**qubba** var. of *kubba*, a small domed Moslem shrine 2R

**quhair** var. of *quair*, an obsolete form of *book* 2

**quhilk** which 2

**qur(u)sh** a monetary unit of Saudi Arabia 8P

**squdge** to ooze, as soft mud 23

**squgy** squat and pudgy 23

**squg** a symmetrical ink-blot, as in a Rorschach test F

**umquhile** formerly; of late 2F

**zaqqum** a tree with bitter fruit, mentioned in the Koran 2

Help is solicited from readers to add to this list.

How often do words in which Q is not followed by U occur in English-language text, as compared with the garden-variety Q followed by U? A little light is shed on this question by an examination of Kucera and Francis's *Computational Analysis of Present-Day American English* (Brown University Press, 1967) which tabulates the word-frequencies of a million-word sample of writings published in the United States in 1961. Of the approximately five thousand words containing the letter Q, the only words with Q not followed by U (excluding abbreviations such as *seq* or *IQ* were: *Cinq*, *Haqvin* 1, *Helsq*’iyokom* 1, *Iraq* 3, *Iraqw* 2, *Istiqlal* 11, *Istiqlal’s* 2. *Iraq* is well-known, and *Istiqlal* is the name of a political party in Morocco; the three asterisked words cannot be identified. (One cannot even say whether or not they are capitalized, as Kucera and Francis is reproduced from computer printout.)

If the aforementioned dictionaries (including Webster's Gazetteer and Biographical sections) are mined for capitalized Q-without-U words, the number of examples would likely quadruple. Any takers?