

NON-CRASHING WORD SETS

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In a December 1981 letter, the editor of *Word Ways* proposed the following challenge:

The September/October 1981 issue of *Games* magazine sponsored a contest to find the maximum number of four-letter mutually non-crashing words in boldface in Webster's Third (or inferred plurals of boldface). To my surprise, the winner came up with 21 words: abbe, baff, cleg, djin, eddy, frum, gnaw, huzz, isn't, jowl, Khmu, Lvov, myth, Omsk, PFCs, repp, skyr, Tchi, upgo, vild, Xtra. (In *Pocket Webster*, I never found more than 17.) I'm now wondering if, with all the weird spellings in the OED, whether that dictionary might be used as a single source to equal or exceed this record. (It might be interesting to look at five-letter words, too; the current record based on Webster's Second is 18.)

Two words are said to crash if they have the same letter in the same position, as gLee and sLow, but not fast and slow; the maximum possible size of a list of mutually non-crashing words is 26, the alphabet.

In the non-crashing list cited above, Omsk and Lvov are cities; Khmu is the name of a Laotian people; Tchi is a variant spelling of Twi, a language; Xtra is a communications code word ('extra'); and PFCs is the plural of the acronymic Private First Class (listed in Webster as 'abbr or n').

Using only the Oxford English Dictionary and its Supplements, I was able to raise the number of mutually non-crashing words to 23:

ABBA	IDDY (Iddy Umpty)	RAZZ
BRWK (brook)	JUJU	SKUL
CZAR	KNEV (know)	THR W
DJIN	LYMB	VMFF (umph)
ECKO	MPHM (mph)	WGGS (ug)
FISC	NEVI (nevus)	XWLD
GLYG	OFTE (oft)	YTCH
HVNT	POPP (pop)	

I think that 24 is certainly possible; for example, if UCKO was a word it could replace ECKO, and ESXO could be added to the list.

Here is a list of 20 five-letter mutually non-crashing words, also

taken from the Oxford English Dictionary:

AFFIX	HEXYL	POPPI (poppy)
BWRCH (burgh)	IGHTS	RYGHT (right)
CHAUM	KNIJF (knife)	SCOBB (scob)
DILDO	LAKKA	TRWMP (trump)
ESCRY	MUSSE (muss)	UTTER
FJELD	NDUGU	VPMAK (upmake)
GLYNN	OXBOW	

SOUSED SYNONYMS

In the course of preparing a book entitled Words (to be published by Delacorte Press in August 1982), Paul Dickson has collected 2231 synonyms for the word DRUNK. This may well be an English-language synonym record, although he notes that Arabic is reputed to have 6000 synonyms for CAMEL, including 50 which describe various stages of camel pregnancy. Here is an alphabetic sampler of the more outre ones:

all mops and brooms, arfarfanark, bacchi plenus, banjaxed, bosco absoluto, can't hit the ground with his hat, detained on business, elephant's trunk, flako, gone Borneo, got his snow-suit on and heading north, has a brick in his hat, hiccius-docius, incognitibus, jug-steamed, killed his dog, low in the saddle, mug blotto. not able to see through a ladder, on a brannigan, paintin' his nose, quisty, ratty as a jaybird, shel-lacked the goldfish bowl, swallowed a tavern token, touched as a boiled owl, umbriago, vulcanized, wearing a barley cap, yappy, and zorked (alas, no X)

If this is typical of the material in Words, this book ought to be a lot of fun to read.