

# 720. Longest Word in Dictionary

[Leetcode Link](#)

Given an array of strings `words` representing an English Dictionary, return the longest word in `words` that can be built one character at a time by other words in `words`.

If there is more than one possible answer, return the longest word with the smallest lexicographical order. If there is no answer, return the empty string.

Note that the word should be built from left to right with each additional character being added to the end of a previous word.

**Example 1:**

**Input:** `words = ["w","wo","wor","worl","world"]`

**Output:** `"world"`

**Explanation:** The word "world" can be built one character at a time by "w", "wo", "wor", and "worl".

**Example 2:**

**Input:** `words = ["a","banana","app","appl","ap","apply","apple"]`

**Output:** `"apple"`

**Explanation:** Both "apply" and "apple" can be built from other words in the dictionary. However, "apple" is lexicographically smaller than "apply".

**Constraints:**

- $1 \leq words.length \leq 1000$
- $1 \leq words[i].length \leq 30$
- `words[i]` consists of lowercase English letters.

## Solution

### Brute Force

For this problem, we're asked to find the longest word with smallest lexicographical order such that all its non-empty prefixes exist in `words`. Let's call a word **good** if all its prefixes exist in `words`. We can verify if this is the case by iterating through all prefixes to check if they all exist. Let's denote  $L$  as the length of the longest **good** word. Out of all **good** words with length  $L$ , we'll return the one with lexicographically least length.

### Full Solution

Let's denote  $x_i$  as the length of `words[i]`.

We can observe that `words[i]` is **good** if  $x_i = 1$  or the prefix of `words[i]` with length  $x_i - 1$  is **good**.

Let's try to find a way to use this idea to process all words efficiently. Since processing a word with length  $x_i$  requires a word with length  $x_i - 1$  to be processed, we should process words by **non-decreasing** length. This can be done by sorting and simply iterating through the sorted list. In addition, we'll use a [hashmap](#) to act as a lookup table for **good** words.

In our algorithm, we'll iterate through words by **non-decreasing** length. For each word, we'll check if it's **good** with the method mentioned above. If the word is **good**, we'll update it in our [hashmap](#).

### Time Complexity

Let's denote  $N$  as the length of `words` and  $S$  as the sum of lengths of all words in `words`.

Since sorting takes  $\mathcal{O}(N \log N)$  and our main algorithm takes  $\mathcal{O}(S)$  from comparing keys, our final time complexity is  $\mathcal{O}(N \log N + S)$ .

**Time Complexity:**  $\mathcal{O}(N \log N + S)$

### Space Complexity

Since our [hashmap](#) has  $\mathcal{O}(N)$  memory, our space complexity is  $\mathcal{O}(N)$ .

**Space Complexity:**  $\mathcal{O}(N)$

### C++ Solution

```
1 class Solution {
2     public:
3         static bool comp(string s, string t) { // sorting comparator
4             return s.size() < t.size();
5         }
6         string longestWord(vector<string>& words) {
7             sort(words.begin(), words.end(), comp); // sort words by non-decreasing length
8             unordered_map<string, bool> goodWords; // lookup for good words
9             int maxLength = 0;
10            string ans = "";
11            for (string word : words) {
12                if (word.size() == 1) {
13                    goodWords[word] = true;
14                } else if (goodWords[word.substr(0, word.size() - 1)]) { // word with length - 1 prefix is good
15                    goodWords[word] = true;
16                }
17                if (goodWords[word]) {
18                    if (maxLength < word.size()) { // find longer word
19                        maxLength = word.size();
20                        ans = word;
21                    } else if (maxLength == word.size()) { // find lexicographically smaller word
22                        ans = min(ans, word);
23                    }
24                }
25            }
26            return ans;
27        }
28    };
```

### Java Solution

```
1 class Solution {
2     public String longestWord(String[] words) {
3         Arrays.sort(words, (a, b) -> a.length() - b.length()); // sort words by non-decreasing length
4         HashMap<String, Boolean> goodWords = new HashMap(); // lookup for good words
5         int maxLength = 0;
6         String ans = "";
7         for (String word : words) {
8             if (word.length() == 1) {
9                 goodWords.put(word, true);
10            } else if (goodWords.containsKey(word.substring(0, word.length() - 1))) {
11                // word with length - 1 prefix is good
12                goodWords.put(word, true);
13            }
14            if (goodWords.containsKey(word)) {
15                if (maxLength < word.length()) { // find longer word
16                    maxLength = word.length();
17                    ans = word;
18                } else if (maxLength == word.length()
19                    && ans.compareTo(word) > 0) { // find lexicographically smaller word
20                    ans = word;
21                }
22            }
23        }
24        return ans;
25    }
26 }
```

### Python Solution

**Note:** A set can be used in python which acts as a hashset and serves the same purpose as a hashmap in this solution.

```
1 class Solution:
2     def longestWord(self, words: List[str]) -> str:
3         words.sort(key=len) # sort words by non-decreasing length
4         goodWords = set() # lookup for good words
5         maxLength = 0
6         ans = ""
7         for word in words:
8             if len(word) == 1:
9                 goodWords.add(word)
10            elif word[:-1] in goodWords: # word with length - 1 prefix is good
11                goodWords.add(word)
12            if word in goodWords:
13                if maxLength < len(word): # find longer word
14                    maxLength = len(word)
15                    ans = word
16            elif maxLength == len(word): # find lexicographically smaller word
17                ans = min(ans, word)
18        return ans
19
```

Got a question? [Ask the Teaching Assistant](#) anything you don't understand.