

Sesquipedalian

Definition of Sesquipedalian

Sesquipedalian is derived from the Latin word *sesquipedalis*, which means the words are a foot and a half long. It is a stylistic device, defined as the use of words that are very long and have several syllables. In other words, sesquipedalian writing or speech involves the overuse of long syllabic (multisyllabic) words, or excessive use of extraordinarily long words.

This [style](#) of speaking and writing is called “sesquipedalian style,” and is shown in this example:

“Antipericatametaanaparcircumvolutiorectumgustpoops of the Coprofied”(From *Gargantua and Pantagruel* by Francois Rabelais). Some words are made longer by adding multiple suffixes and prefixes to the ordinary terms, like this long syllabic word, “antidisestablishmentarianism” (anti-dis-establishment-arian-ism).

This device was first introduced in literary texts in Roman times, when the famous poet Horace coined the word *sesquipedaliaverba*. Thereafter, no examples of sesquipedalian were found until the 19th century. Later on, this literary device has been extensively used.

Examples of Sesquipedalian in Literature

Example #1: *Finnegans* (By James Joyce)

“The fall (bababadalgharaghtakamminarronnkonnbronntonner-
ronntuonnthunntrovarrhounawnskawntooohooorderenthur —
nuk!) of a once wallstraitoldparr is retaled early in bed and later
on life down through all christian minstrelsy. The great fall of the
offwall entailed at such short notice the pftjschute of Finnegan ...
one well to the west in quest of his tumptytumtoes: and their

upturnpikepointandplace is at the knock out in the park where
oranges have been laid to rust upon the green since dev-linsfirst
loved livvy. What clashes here of wills gen wonts,
oystrygodsgaggin fishy-gods! **BrékkkekKékkkekKékkkekKékkkek!**
KóaxKóaxKóax! UaluUaluUalu! Quaouauh! Where the **Baddelaries**
partisans are still out to mathmasterMalachusMicgranes and the
Verdonscata-pelting the camibalistics out of the **Whoyteboyce** of
Hoodie Head. Assiegates and boomeristingstroms...”

There are many sesquipedalian examples in this James Joyce book. Joyce has used words up to hundred letters long in this novel. In this excerpt, he has used one of the most famous long words in the first line. This word supposedly represents a symbolic thunderclap linked with the fall of Adam and Eve.

Example #2: *Chrononhotonthologos* (By Henry Carey)

“Enter RIGDUM-FUNNIDOS, and **Aldiborontiphoscophornio**.
Rigdum-Funnidos.
Aldiborontiphoscophornio! Where left you
Chrononhotonthologos?...
King.
Peace Coward! were they wedg’d like Golden Ingots,
pent so close, as to admit no Vacuum.
One look from Chrononhotonthologos
Shall scare them into Nothing. RigdumFunnidos,
Bid **Bombardinion** draw his Legions forth,
And meet us in the Plains of Queerumania.”

This is a very good example of sesquipedalian, as Carey has coined long syllabic words. Here, the opening line, and then the second to the last line, contain multisyllabic words that are very long coinages that give a humorous effect.

Example #3: *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (By William Shakespeare)

“Cost. O! they have lived long on the alms basket of words. I marvel thy master hath not eaten thee for a word; for thou art not so long by the head as **honorificabilitudinitatibus**: thou art easier swallowed than a flap-dragon...”

Shakespeare used a 27-letter long word, honorificabilitudinitatibus, as shown in bold. It means the capability to be honored, and is considered as one of the longest words in literature.

Example #4: *Assemblywomen* (By Aristophanes)

“Lopado--temacho--selacho--galeo--kranio--leipsano--drimmeno--kichl--epi--kossypho--phatto--perister--alektryon--pterygon....”

Aristophanes, being a comedic playwright, created a long Greek word of about 171 letters, which is shown above. This word means a dish consisting of different ingredients, like fish, dainties, sauces, and flesh.

Example #5: *Headlong Hall* (By Thomas Love Peacock)

“Osteosarchaematosplanchnochondroneuromuelous...
osseocarnisanguineoviscericartilaginonervomedullary...”

Thomas Peacock has coined two words in this example. The first one has 44 letters, and the second has 51 letters. These two words are roughly translated as of “flesh, bone, organs, blood, nerve, gristle and marrow.” He describes the human body by using these words.

Function of Sesquipedalian

The English language has an abundance of sesquipedalian words, which are often used to add humorous effect. The most likely users of such words are language professionals and word hobbyists. Many language lovers and hobbyists are prone to attempt topping one another in order to set new records using these words and devising them

It is also used as a humorous attempt to reformulate popular English expressions. Since the multisyllabic words slow down the pace of a [verse](#), it gives readers more time to comprehend the meaning of such words. Hence, the main function of sesquipedalian words is to put emphasis and draw the attention of the [audience](#).