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An Obituary for the Letter E

BY JOSHUA DAVID STEIN 12.05.13 6:30 AM

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Image: Diverse Images/UIG

The letter E, an influential vowel and one of the most frequently used letters in the English language, died yesterday. It was 2,800 years old.

The cause was obsolescence in the face of emerging technology, said the letter's next of kin, the letter F.

Long considered one of the most influential letters in the Roman alphabet, at the turn of the century E had originally been heralded as the signal letter in the digital world. But in recent years, the letter had suffered a series of debilitating setbacks that closely correlated with the rise of online applications. It died May 20, 2013.

As recently as 1998, the letter was voted both "Word of the Year" and "Most Likely to Succeed" by the American Dialect Society. (It narrowly defeated the phrase "sexual relations" by a vote of 31 to 28.) In awarding the distinction, the organization noted the letter's prolific role in words describing burgeoning online technology like e-mail, e-commerce, and e-tailing.

But in 2004, Stewart Butterfield and Caterina Fake founded Flickr, a photograph-sharing application, without the standard penultimate E. "The most compelling reason to remove the E," explained Ms. Fake, "was that we were unable to acquire the domain Flickr.com ... The rest of the team were more in favor of other options, such as 'FlickerIt' or 'FlickerUp' but somehow, through persuasion or arm-twisting, I prevailed." It was good news for the company but bad news for the letter. A year later, the company was acquired by Yahoo for \$35 million.

Soon many startups began jettisoning their Es like toxic assets. In 2009, Grindr, a geosocial network application for gay men, chose to make do without the letter E. Membership quickly swelled. Myriad other brands followed suit, including Blendr, Gathr, Pixlr, Readr, Timr, Viewr, Pushr.

And of course, there is the blogging platform Tumblr, whose launch in 2007 may have marked the true end of E. "There are a variety of reasons why Tumblr contains no E, from branding considerations to environmental factors (fewer letters mean lower power consumption by our servers)," said the company's editorial director, Christopher Price. "At the end of the day, however, it all comes down to one simple, absolute truth: Tumblr.com looks fucking stupid."

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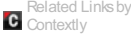



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The decline in E-ness was also hastened by the realities of venture capitalists. "You take out the E from your company name, and you increase the valuation by millions," said Lockhart Steele, the founder of Curbed, a lifestyle publishing empire. "Being E-free," agrees Esther Dyson, a venture capitalist and an early investor in Flickr, "distinguishes you from the run-of-the-mill vowel-infested world."

According to some linguists, the writing has been on the wall for years. "What you are seeing is a very natural process – the omission of the letter in final unstressed syllables before /r/, is something that has been a feature of written English since Anglo-Saxon times," said Professor David Crystal, OBE, a linguist and author of *Internet Linguistics*. "'Gather' in Old English was spelled both 'gaderian' and 'gadrian,' for example." In other words, the law of *lex parsimonae* doomed the E's of Flickr, Tumblr, and Gather a long time ago.

The letter E was born in the late 8th century BC in Athens, Greece. His father, the Phoenician letter **He**, died between 323 BC and 31 BC. E travelled widely throughout the Western world.

E is survived by his brothers, A, I, O and U; three daughters, é, è, ê; and a son, e.


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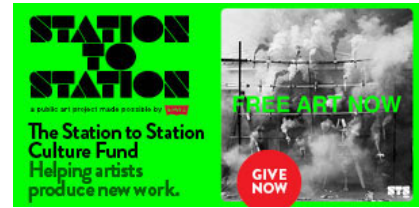
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 **airbag** ago
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 **jack33w** ago
Wll, thr was no ltr "J" didn't rly xist about 200 yrs ago (for xampl thr's no "J Strt" in Washi anoht tick in th volution of Nglsh writing... lik th Grt Vowl Shift back in th 1600s is stil lbg NOT advancing.



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111
1
• Reply • Share >


 **ItsMe** → jack33w ago
• a day
*rally :)
39
1
• Reply • Share >

 **Russian55** → jack33w ago
• 20 hours
Similarly, the ligature "thorn" became confused with the letter "y" which means "Ye Olde Spice Shoppe."
My apologies for using dead letters.
3
• Reply • Share >


 **adamweishaupt** → jack33w ago
• a day
The first historic use of the letter "J" was in Italian. In the book "Epistola del trissino italiana" published in 1524. So nothing to do with the "evolution of english".
5
1
• Reply • Share >

 **theUg** → adamweishaupt ago
• a day
Well, it does, at least inasmuch as it had to be adopted into English language.
2
• Reply • Share >

 **Kude** → adamweishaupt ago
• a day
But everything to do with the evolution of language. Over time, we will gain letters, when pronounced alone, already have an "ee" sound at the end, or letter pronunciation, and the letter "e" will be obsolete.
1
• Reply • Share >


 **theUg** → Kude ago
• a day
Or, on the contrary, you may have a phonetic system that is more s virtually every letter or a combination is assigned exactly one sound (Russian, for instance). Can't say it is necessarily the best way to go,
3
• Reply • Share >


 **gletob** → jack33w ago
• a day
The reason there's no J street is because I and J looked very similar.
2
• Reply • Share >

 **Yǒuhǎo Huǒ Mǎo** → Yǒuhǎo Huǒ Mǎo ago
• a day
For example, in Year 1 that useless letter "c" would be dropped to be replased either by "k of the alphabet. The only kase in which "c" would be retained would be the "ch" formation, "w" spelling, so that "which" and "one" would take the same konsonant, wile Year 3 might fiks the "g/j" anomalì wonse and for all.

Generally, then, the improvement would kontinue iear bai iear with iear 5 doing awai with us modifaing vowlz and the rimeiniing voist and unvoist konsonants. Bai iear 15 or sou, it wud "c", "y" and "x"— bai now jast a memori in the maizdz ov ould doderez —tu riplais "ch", "s

Fainali, xen, aafte sam 20 iers ov oxrogrefkì rìform, wi wud hev a lojikl, kohirnt speling in ius
59
• Reply • Share >

 **bgbs** → Yǒuhǎo Huǒ Mǎo ago
• 18 hours
What english alphabet needs is to be russified. Russian alphabet is so easy to read you can still read it correctly because letters don't change sound, ever, no matter w
2
1
• Reply • Share >

 **Yǒuhǎo Huǒ Mǎo** → Yǒuhǎo Huǒ Mǎo ago
• 8 hours
For the curious, this is from something often attributed to Mark Twain, but likely not
• Reply • Share >

WIRED *underwire*

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CONTRIBUTORS


[Angela Watercutter](#)
[Rachel Edidin](#)
[Chris Kohler](#)
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 **SamHamilton** → Yóuhǎo Huǒ Māo ago • 9 hours
Well done.
^ | v • Reply • Share >


 **theUg** → Yóuhǎo Huǒ Māo ago • a day
I see what you did there. ;) But keep in mind that some of these suggestions are r
alphabet-based phonetic systems there are conventions that may be more efficient
looking at you, France) does now.
^ | v • Reply • Share >


 **mrtoad** ago • a day
The letter 'e' is ~3.84% of the alphabet (1/26). However, out of all the letters in this article
I also believe it still sponsors Sesame Street from time to time.
39 ^ | v • Reply • Share >


 **Jared Woody** → mrtoad ago • a day
Yeah, but is Sesame Street really the bar we want to hold our letters to? They're s
a number hold the spot for the day.
15 ^ | v • Reply • Share >


 **Alexandre** ago • a day
So now th magazin will b calld WIRD?
39 ^ | v • Reply • Share >


 **Hiro Delivers Pizzas** → Alexandre ago • a day
Wird.
17 ^ | v • Reply • Share >


 **Andrew Purvis** → Hiro Delivers Pizzas ago • 14 hours
Wird up!
^ | v • Reply • Share >

 **Jared Woody** → Alexandre ago • a day
I vote for Wir'd. If they're going to kill their E, they may as well leave a memorial '
8 ^ | v • Reply • Share >


 **Sarkazein70** → Alexandre ago • 20 hours
No, it's now called APPL.
^ | v • Reply • Share >


 **CezarT** → Sarkazein70 ago • 14 hours
You meant AAPL?
1 ^ | v • Reply • Share >


 **iondg** ago • a day
Odd, with the knowledge Lockhart Steele had, he missed the opportunity to add millions to
10 ^ | v • Reply • Share >


 **dr2chase** → iondg ago • a day
Blindd by his own last nam, no doubt.
7 ^ | v • Reply • Share >





 **MogadishuJones** → iondg ago
Yeah, Lockhart Steele apparently has no problem looking like a fucking moron. Sort
8
1
• Reply • Share >


 **Jason Norwood-Young** ago
I'm a little confused - when exactly did the letter E die? According to the article, it died "yes later the article goes on to state: "It died May 20, 2013."
8
• Reply • Share >


 **lostviking** ago
Why do they let fools be published?
11
1
• Reply • Share >

 **mmn_slc** ago
With it gone, how will we more simply represent 2.718281828459045235360287471352662
5
• Reply • Share >


 **The_Doorman** → mnm_slc ago
I think in a similar manner to what Prince, or more specifically "The artist formerly k by a symbol, so we'll just make a symbol to represent "the numerical figure forme
2
• Reply • Share >


 **Marcus Pereira** ago
So many bullshît... I am sure Google and Apple are very happy with their Es.
5
• Reply • Share >


 **ranhalt** → Marcus Pereira ago
Stop being a fucking idiot.
2
1
• Reply • Share >


 **Andrew Purvis** → Marcus Pereira ago
They predate the death of E.
• Reply • Share >


 **Tulz** ago
You should read George Perec's "La Disparition".. a book written entirely without the usage
5
• Reply • Share >


 **lakawak** → Tulz ago
So the book didn't include the author's name?
11
• Reply • Share >


 **Kkuja** ago
Does this also mean that Wired is dead?
3
• Reply • Share >


 **Wolfy Kovac** ago
This is stupid, w hav facbook, googl, appl, wurd, and a bunch of othr wb sits, and compani
3
• Reply • Share >


 **Russian55** ago
This artic nds to b rwrtn, It is full of ltrrs that do not xist.
3
• Reply • Share >


 **DexterMike** ago
What th F*ck am I rading?
3 • Reply • Share >


 **paraspritehugger** ago
Wird Why ya asking?
• Reply • Share >


 **headhopper** ago
We had the option of going for [Zurkr.com](#) but decided for [Zurker.com](#) instead. The E is aliv
exaggerated.
3 • Reply • Share >


 **Andrew Purvis** ago
But if you had gone with [zurkr.com](#), you would be famous and have visitors.
• Reply • Share >


 **Vierotchka** ago
If it died last may, how come you have used it so much?
2 • Reply • Share >


 **Olly Osborne** ago
Thr is absolutly no nd to writ an obituary. This is so stupid.
2 • Reply • Share >


 **Derek C. F. Pegritz** ago
Dafuq?! That article about is FULL of upper- AND lower-case E's. And so was the previous
one only had *one* E--but THIS one has SIX.
2 • Reply • Share >

 **lakawak** ago
Actually, your previous sentence had very few e's of any kind. Just one in the first t
• Reply • Share >

 **ranhalt** ago
Twitter was originally named twttr. Vowels are not welcome in Web 2.0.
2 • Reply • Share >

 **lakawak** ago
Twitter made sense to want to shave off letters since they knew that that is what v
• Reply • Share >

 **adamweishaupt** ago
There is no Roman Alphabet. The accepted term is Latin Alphabet.
3 • Reply • Share >

 **Chiguy** ago
"There are a variety of reasons why Tumblr contains no E, from branding
considerations to environmental factors (fewer letters mean lower power
consumption by our servers)," said the company's editorial director,
Christopher Price"

How in the name of anything that is technologically accurate does the elimination of ONE LI
consumption for their servers? Tumblr holds gigabytes, if not terabytes of data, and they'r
power consumption saver? Really?

Sorry, that was the piece of the article that screamed "LOL" to me (LOL: And it's a word w

4  [Reply](#) • [Share](#) >



[neeneko](#) • a day

[Chiguy](#) ago

No, not really. The piece is intended to be funny.

9  [Reply](#) • [Share](#) >



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