Problem of the Week
Solution Ten

Find the only number which, when written out in English, has its letters in alphabetical order.

SOLUTION: The answer is FORTY.

You can arrive at this pretty quickly simply by noticing that any number that ends in “ion” is not going to be in alphabetical order. Likewise, a quick inspection shows that “hundred” and “thousand” do not work, nor do the digits “one” through “ten.” Then it is just a matter of checking the multiples of ten smaller than one hundred. “Forty” is then seen to be the only number that works.

Actually, though, since the problem does not stipulate that we must use a whole number, there are two other answers we might accept. If we allow irrational numbers, then “e” must be considered an acceptable answer. And if we allow complex numbers, then “i” gets the job done.