

Contacts for Word of the Year:

# American Dialect Society

Allan Metcalf, Executive Secretary  
americandialect@mac.edu

English Department  
MacMurray College  
Jacksonville, Illinois  
62650-2590

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- **Grant Barrett**, Chair of the New Words Committee of the American Dialect Society, <http://americandialect.org>, [grantbarrett@gmail.com](mailto:grantbarrett@gmail.com), cell (646) 286-2260.
  - **Ben Zimmer**, executive producer of the Visual Thesaurus, <http://visualthesaurus.com> and member of the Executive Council of the American Dialect Society. [bzimmer@thinkmap.com](mailto:bzimmer@thinkmap.com), (212) 381-0550.
  - **David K. Barnhart**, editor *The Barnhart Dictionary Companion*, Lexik House P.O. Box 2018 Hyde Park, New York 12538 [Lexik@highlands.com](mailto:Lexik@highlands.com) (914) 850-8484

Contact for Name of the Year: **Cleveland K. Evans**, Past President, American Name Society, [cevans@bellevue.edu](mailto:cevans@bellevue.edu), (402) 557-7524

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(For immediate release)

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## **“Tweet” 2009 Word of the Year, “Google” Word of the Decade, as voted by American Dialect Society**

HILTON BALTIMORE—JAN. 8—In its 20th annual words of the year vote, the American Dialect Society voted “*tweet*” (noun, a short message sent via the Twitter.com service, and verb, the act of sending such a message) as the word of the year and “*google*” (a generic form of “Google,” meaning “to search the Internet) as its word of the decade.

Presiding at the Jan. 8 voting session were ADS Executive Secretary Allan Metcalf of MacMurray College, and Grant Barrett, chair of the New Words Committee of the American Dialect Society editorial director of online dictionary Wordnik.com. Barrett is also the editor of the column “Among the New Words” in the society’s quarterly academic journal *American Speech*.

“Both words are, in the end, products of the Information Age, where every person has the ability to satisfy curiosity and to broadcast to a select following, both via the Internet.” Barrett said. “I really thought blog would take the honors in the word of the decade category, but more people google than blog, don’t they? Plus, many people think ‘blog’ just sounds ugly. Maybe Google’s trademark lawyers would have preferred it, anyway.”

Word of the Year is interpreted in its broader sense as “vocabulary item”—not just words but phrases. The words or phrases do not have to be brand-new, but they have to be newly prominent or notable in the past year, in the manner of *Time* magazine’s Person of the Year.

The vote is the longest-running such vote anywhere, the only one not tied to commercial interests, and *the* word-of-the-year event up to which all others lead. It is fully informed by the members’ expertise in the study of words, but it is far from a solemn occasion. Members in the 120-year-old organization include linguists, lexicographers, etymologists, grammarians, historians, researchers, writers, authors, editors, professors, university students, and independent scholars. In conducting the vote, they act in fun and do not pretend to be officially inducting words into the English language. Instead they are highlighting that language change is normal, ongoing, and entertaining.

In a companion vote, sibling organization the American Name Society voted “*Salish Sea*” as Name of the Year for 2009 in its sixth annual name-of-the-year contest. The Salish Sea is the includes

Washington State's Puget Sound, the Strait of Juan de Fuca, and the San Juan Islands on the western coast of the United States and Canada.

### AMERICAN DIALECT SOCIETY VOTE TALLIES

The number after each nomination is the number of votes it received. Numbers separated by slash marks indicate a run-off. Voting totals are for each category might not be identical because the number of voters might have changed for each category.

**WORD OF THE YEAR WINNER: tweet**, noun, a short message sent via the Twitter.com service, and verb, the act of sending such a message. 69

*Other nominees for word of the year:*

**-er** A suffix used in such words as birther, someone who questions whether Obama was born in the United States; deather, someone who believes the government has death panels in its healthcare reform plan; Tenther, someone who believes the Federal government is mostly illegal because it usurps rights which belong to the States, in violation of the 10th Amendment; and truther, someone who doubts the official account of the 9/11 attacks. 6

**fail** A noun or interjection describing something egregiously unsuccessful. Usually used as an interjection: "FAIL!" 34

**H1N1** The virus that causes swine flu. 14

**public option** A government-run healthcare insurance program, desired by some to be part of the country's healthcare reform. 5

**Dracula sneeze** Covering one's mouth with the crook of one's elbow when sneezing, seen as similar to popular portrayals of the vampire Dracula, in which he hides the lower half of his face with a cape. 1

**WORD OF THE DECADE WINNER: google** Verb meaning "to search the Internet." Generic form of the trademarked "Google," the world's dominant Internet search engine. 74

*Other nominees for word of the decade:*

**9/11** The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Pronounced "nine eleven." 16

**blog** A web site for publishing a chronological and ongoing series of related entries, especially when they are all by the same person(s) or on the same topic. Also a productive combining form: blogosphere, blogerati, milblog, blogola. 31

**green** Related to ecological or environmental conservation or protection. Also a productive combining form: greenwashing, green collar, etc. 1

**text** Verb: to send a text message via a mobile phone. Noun: such a message. 1

**war on terror** A global effort to prevent terror and terrorists. 0

**Wi-Fi** abbreviation. Wireless Fidelity, a group of technical standards enabling the transmission of data over wireless networks. 2

### —MOST USEFUL—

**WINNER: fail** A noun or interjection used when something is egregiously unsuccessful. Usually written as "FAIL!" 78

**-er** A suffix used in such words as birther, someone who questions whether Obama was born in the United States; deather, someone who believes the government has death panels in its healthcare reform plan; Tenther, someone who believes the Federal government is mostly illegal because it usurps rights which belong to the States, in violation of the 10th Amendment; and truther, someone who doubts the official account of the 9/11 attacks. 40

**rogue** Someone who acts in an unexpected way.

**un-** As prefix used in some online verbs: unfriend, unfollow, unlike, unfavorite, untag, etc. 4

### —MOST CREATIVE—

**WINNER: Dracula sneeze:** Covering one's mouth with the crook of one's elbow when sneezing, seen as similar to popular portrayals of the vampire Dracula, in which he hides the lower half of his face with a cape. 60

**botax** A proposed levy which would be charged on cosmetic procedures and surgeries. It would be used to help pay for healthcare reform. A play on Botox, a trade name for a substance used to smooth skin wrinkles. 18

**bragabond:** A person who travels a lot and brags about it a lot. 11

**Kanye interruptus** An important speech or event that is interrupted. Also, to kanye, to interrupt someone else's speech.

—MOST UNNECESSARY—

**WINNER: sea kittens** fish (according to PETA) 50/60

**birther** A person who believes Barack Obama was not born in the United States and, therefore, is disqualified to be president. 3

**micronumerosity** The state of having too small a sample of data. *micro* + *numerosity* state of being numerous; numerousness. ca1991. 7

**Octomom** Nadya Suleman, who gave birth to octuplets in January. 45/46

**Salahi** To gate-crash. Named after Tareq and Michael Salahi, who visited a White House event without an invitation. 5

—MOST OUTRAGEOUS—

**WINNER: death panel** A supposed committee of doctors and/or bureaucrats who would decide which patients were allowed to receive treatment, ostensibly leaving the rest to die. 77

**sexting** The sending of sexual messages or pictures by mobile telephone. 0

**teabagger** A derogatory name for attendees of Tea Parties, an organized gathering of anti-tax, anti-government, and/or anti-Obama protesters. 24

**underpants bomber/pants bomber/ crotch bomber/panty bomber/eunuch bomber** Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, the Nigerian man who tried to blow up a passenger plane over Detroit on Christmas Day using a liquid bomb in his underwear. 0

—MOST EUPHEMISTIC—

**WINNER: hike the Appalachian trail** To go away to have sex with one's illicit lover. Follows on a statement by South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford, who went to Argentina to visit his mistress. 120

**public option** (explanation above) 0

**sea kittens** Fish, as coined by PETA. 2

—MOST LIKELY TO SUCCEED—

**WINNER: twenty-ten** A pronunciation of the year 2010, as opposed to saying "two thousand ten" or "two thousand and ten." (twenty- as prefix until 2099) 121

**charging station** A place where electric cars recharge their batteries. 13

**green shoots** Signs of a country's economic recovery or of a company's financial turnaround. Widely used in the UK during the 1990's, but now spread to the rest of the English-speaking world. 0

**-er** suffix as in birther, deather, truther 3

—LEAST LIKELY TO SUCCEED—

**WINNER:** Any name of the decade 2000-2009, such as Naughties, Aughties, Oughties, etc. 45/59

**Poliwood** Stars who are political. 34/48

**slow media** Newspapers and other paper-based periodicals. 8

**tether** To connect a laptop to a cellphone for Internet access. 4

**oh-ten** name for the year 2010. 1

**sea kittens** fish. 14

Founded in 1889, the American Dialect Society is dedicated to the study of the English language in North America, and of other languages, or dialects of other languages, influencing it or influenced by it. ADS members are linguists, lexicographers, etymologists, historians, grammarians, academics, editors,

writers, and independent scholars in the fields of English, foreign languages, and other disciplines. The society also publishes the quarterly journal *American Speech*.

The American Dialect Society began choosing Words of the Year in 1990. Winners are listed below. A full account of the previous choices may be found on the American Dialect Society's website, [www.americandialect.org](http://www.americandialect.org).

Not all words chosen for a particular year are destined to become permanent additions to the vocabulary. *Y2K* in 1999 and *chad* in 2000 are examples of prominent terms that faded quickly. An explanation of which words are likely to succeed may be found in *Predicting New Words: The Secrets of Their Success* by Allan Metcalf, published in 2002 by Houghton Mifflin.

### American Dialect Society: Words of Previous Years

2008 Word of the Year, *bailout*, the rescue by the government of companies on the brink of failure, including large players in the banking industry. Most Useful: *Barack Obama*, both names as combining forms. Most Creative: *recombobulation area*, an area at Mitchell International Airport in Milwaukee in which passengers that have just passed through security screening can get their clothes and belongings back in order. Most Unnecessary: *moofing*, from "mobile out of office," meaning working on the go with a laptop and cell phone. Created by a PR firm. Most Outrageous: *terrorist fist jab*, A knuckle-to-knuckle fist bump, or "dap," traditionally performed between two black people as a sign of friendship, celebration or agreement. It was called the "terrorist fist jab" by the newscaster E. D. Hill, formerly of Fox News. Most Euphemistic: *scooping technician*, A person whose job it is to pick up dog poop. Most Likely to Succeed: *shovel-ready*, Used to describe infrastructure projects that can be started quickly when funds become available. Least Likely to Succeed: *PUMA*, An acronym for Party Unity My Ass, used by Democrats who were disaffected after Hillary Clinton failed to secure a sufficient number of delegates. It was later said to stand for Party Unity Means Action. New Category, Election-Related Words: *maverick*, a person who is beholden to no one. Widely used by the Republican Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates, John McCain and Sarah Palin. Also in the adjectival form *mavericky*, used by Tina Fey portraying Palin on Saturday Night Live.

2007 Word of the Year, *subprime*, an adjective used to describe a risky or less than ideal loan, mortgage, or investment. Most Useful: *green- prefix/compounding form*, designates environmental concern, as in *greenwashing*. Most Creative: *googlegänger*, a person with your name who shows up when you google yourself. Most Unnecessary: *Happy Kwanhanamas!* [*Kwanza* + *Hanukka* + *Christmas*] Happy holidays! Most Outrageous: *toe-tapper*, A homosexual. Senator Larry Craig was arrested in June for an encounter in a public restroom in which toe-tapping was said to have been used as a sexual come-on. Most Euphemistic: *human terrain team*, a group of social scientists employed by the US military to serve as cultural advisers in Iraq or Afghanistan. Most Likely to Succeed: *green- prefix/compounding form*, designates environmental concern, as in *greenwashing*. Least Likely to Succeed: *strand-in*, protest duplicating being stranded inside an airplane on a delayed flight. New Category, Real Estate Words: *subprime*, used to describe a risky or poorly documented loan or mortgage.

2006 Word of the Year, *to be plutoed*, *to pluto*, to be demoted or devalued. Most Useful: *climate canary*, an organism or species whose poor health or declining numbers hint at a larger environmental catastrophe on the horizon. Most Creative: *lactard*, a person who is lactose-intolerant. Most Unnecessary: *SuriKat*, the supposed nickname of the baby girl of Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes. Most Outrageous: *Cambodian accessory*, Angelina Jolie's adopted child who is Cambodian. Most Euphemistic: *waterboarding*, an interrogation technique in which the subject is immobilized and doused with water to simulate drowning; reported to be used by U.S. interrogators against terrorism detainees. Most Likely to Succeed: *YouTube* as a verb, to use the YouTube web site or to have a video of one's self be posted on the site. Least Likely to Succeed: *grup*, a Gen-Xer who does not act his or her age. New Category, Pluto-Related Words: *to be plutoed*, *to pluto*, to be demoted or devalued.

2005 Word of the Year *truthiness*, what one wishes to be the truth regardless of the facts. (From the *Colbert Report* with Stephen Colbert, a mock news show on Comedy Central.) Most Useful: *podcast*, audio or video file for downloading. Most Creative: *whale-tail*, the appearance of thong or g-string underwear above the waistband. Most Unnecessary: *K Fed*, Kevin Federline, Mr. Britney Spears. Most

Outrageous: *crotchfruit*, a child or children. Most Euphemistic: *internal nutrition* force-feeding a prisoner. Most Likely to Succeed: *sudoku* number puzzle from Japan. Least Likely to Succeed: *pope-squatting* registering a likely domain name of a new pope before the pope chooses his new name in order to profit from it. Special nonce category, Best Tom Cruise-Related Word: *jump the couch*, to exhibit frenetic behavior like Cruise's couch-bouncing on Oprah Winfrey's talk show.

2004 Word of the Year: *red/blue/purple states*, red favoring conservative Republicans and blue favoring liberal Democrats, as well as the undecided *purple states* in the political map of the United States. Most Useful: *phish*, to induce someone to reveal private information by means of deceptive e-mail. Most Creative: *pajamahadeen*, bloggers who challenge and fact-check traditional media. Most Unnecessary: *stalkette*, a female stalker. Most Outrageous: *santorum*, byproduct of anal sex, using the name of a senator opposed to the practice. Most Euphemistic: *badly sourced*, false. Most Likely to Succeed: *red/blue/purple states*. Least Likely to Succeed: *FLOHPA*, Florida, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, important states in the 2004 presidential election.

2003 Word of the Year: *metrosexual*, fashion-conscious heterosexual male. Most Useful: *flexitarian*, vegetarian who occasionally eats meat. Most Creative: *freegan*, person who eats only free food. Most Unnecessary: *freedom* for "French," as in fries and kisses. Most Outrageous: *cliterati*, feminist writers or leaders. Most Euphemistic: *pre-emptive self-defense*, attack before a possible attack on oneself. Most Likely to Succeed: *SARS*, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, viral disease first reported in Asia in February. Least Likely to Succeed: *tomacco*, poisonous hybrid of tomato and tobacco. Best Revival of an old term: *spider hole*, World War II term for a hole deeper than a foxhole used for surprise attacks; in 2003, where Saddam Hussein was hiding.

2002 Word of the Year: *weapons of mass destruction* or *WMD*, sought for in Iraq. Most Likely to Succeed: *blog*, from "weblog," a website of personal events, comments, and links. Most Useful: *google* (verb), as in "to google someone," to search the Web using the search engine Google for information on a person or thing. Most Creative: *Iraqnophobia*, strong fear of Iraq. Most Unnecessary: *wombanization*, feminization, from Alexander Barnes's book "The Book Read Backwards: The Deconstruction of Patriarchy and the Wombanization of Being." Most Outrageous: *neuticles*, fake testicles for neutered pets. Most Euphemistic: *regime change*, forced change in leadership.

2001 Word of the Year: *9-11*, *9/11* or *September 11*, terrorist attacks on that date. Most Likely to Succeed: *9-11*. Most Useful (tie): *facial profiling*, using video "faceprints" to identify terrorists and criminals, and *second-hand speech*, cell phone conversations heard by others in public places. Most Creative: *shuicide bomber*, terrorist with bomb in shoes. Most Unnecessary: *impeachment nostalgia*, longing for the superficial news of the Clinton era. Least Likely to Succeed: *Osamaniac*, woman sexually attracted to terrorist Osama bin Laden. Most Outrageous: *assoline*, methane used as fuel. Most Euphemistic: *daisy cutter*, large bomb that explodes a few feet above the ground. Most Inspirational: *Let's roll!* words of Todd Beamer to start the attack that foiled the hijackers of United Flight 93 on September 11.

2000 Word of the Year: *chad*, a small scrap of paper punched from a voting card. Most Likely to Succeed: *muggle*, Harry Potter term for a non-wizard; a mundane, unimaginative person. Most Useful: *civil union*, legal same-sex marriage. Most Creative: *dot bomb*, a failed dot-com. Most Unnecessary: *sudden loss of wealth syndrome*. Least Likely to Succeed: *kablokeys*, used in phrases like "It scared the kablokeys out of me." Most Outrageous: *wall humping*, rubbing a thigh against a security card scanner to allow access without removing the card from one's pocket. Most Euphemistic: *courtesy call*, an uninvited call from a telemarketer. Brand New (coined during the year, not previously attested): *unconcede*, to rescind a concession as presidential candidate Al Gore did on election night. (It was later discovered that candidate Bob Dole had *unconceded* the presidential election in 1996, and there were occasional instances of that word going back several centuries.)

(Also chosen in January 2000: Word of the Decade: *web*. Word of the Twentieth Century: *jazz*. Word of the Millennium: *she*.)

1999 Word of the Year: *Y2K*. Most Likely to Succeed and Most Useful: *dot-com*, a company operating on the web. Most Original: *cybersquat*, to register a web address intending to sell it at a profit. Most unnecessary: *Milly*, dance commissioned by the city of Chicago for the millennium. Most

Outrageous: *humanitarian intervention*, use of military force for humanitarian purposes. Most Euphemistic: *compassionate conservative*. Brand New (coined during the year, not previously attested): *Pokémania*, obsession with Pokémon.

1998 Word of the Year: prefix *e-* for “electronic” as in *e-mail* and newly prominent *e-commerce*. Most Likely to Succeed and Most Useful: *e-*. Most Original: *multislacking*, playing at the computer when one should be working. Most Unnecessary: the entire Monica Lewinsky word family, including *Big She* as a synonym for M.L., and the verb *Lewinsky*, to engage in what might be sexual relations. Least Likely to Succeed: *compfusion*, confusion over computers. Most Outrageous: *Ejaculation Proclamation*, the President’s confession. Most Euphemistic: *senior moment*, momentary lapse of memory due to age. Brand New (coined during the year, not previously attested): *-agra* or *-gra* (from the drug name *Viagra*), suffix denoting substance prompting men to perform unusually, as in *Directra* that causes men to ask for directions.

1997 Word of the Year: *millennium bug*, also known as *Y2K bug* or *Y2K problem*, that causes computers to think that the year after 1999 is 1900. Most Likely to Succeed: *DVD*, Digital Versatile Disk, optical disk expected to replace CDs. Most Useful: (tie) *-[r]azzi*, an aggressive pursuer, and *duh* (with a falling intonation), expression of someone else’s stupidity. Most Original: *prairie dogging*, popping one’s head above an office cubicle for the sake of curiosity. Most Unnecessary: *heaven-o*, replacement for “hello.” Most Outrageous: *Florida flambe*, fire caused by Florida electric chair. Most Euphemistic: *exit bag*, bag placed over the head to assist in suicide. Brand New (coined during the year, not previously attested): *El Nonsense*, illogical association of an event with El Niño.

1996 Word of the Year: *mom* as in *soccer mom*, newly significant type of voter. Most Likely to Succeed: *drive-by*, designating brief visits or hospital stays. Most Useful: *dot*, used instead of “period” in e-mail and URL addresses. Most Original: *prebuttal*, preemptive rebuttal. Most Unnecessary: *Mexican hustle*, another name for the Macarena (which is not Mexican). Most Outrageous: *toy soldier*, land mine. Most Euphemistic: (tie) *urban camping*, living homeless in a city, and *food insecure*, said of a country where people are starving. Most Controversial: *Ebonics*, African-American vernacular English.

1995 Word of the Year: (tie) *World Wide Web* on the Internet, and *newt*, to make aggressive changes as a newcomer. Most Likely to Succeed: *World Wide Web* and its variants *the Web*, *WWW*, *W3*. Most Useful: *E.Q.* (for *Emotional Quotient*), the ability to manage one’s emotions. Most Original: *postal* or *go postal*, to act irrationally, often violently, from stress at work. Most Unnecessary: *Vanna White shrimp*, large shrimp for the restaurant market. Most Outrageous: *starter marriage*, a first marriage not expected to be the last. Most Euphemistic: *patriot*, one who believes in using force of arms if necessary to defend individual rights against the government.

1994 Word of the Year: (tie) *cyber*, pertaining to computers and electronic communication, and *morph*, to change form. Most Promising: *Infobahn*, the Internet. Most Useful: *gingrich*, to deal with government agencies, policies, and people in the manner of U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich. Most Imaginative: *guillermo*, an e-mail message in a foreign language. (The Spanish name *Guillermo* has the nickname *Memo*.) Most Trendy: *dress down day* or *casual day*, a workday when employees are allowed to dress casually. Most Euphemistic: *challenged* indicating an undesirable or unappealing condition. Most Beautiful: *sylvanshine*, night-time iridescence of certain forest trees.

1993 Word of the Year: *information superhighway*, network linking computers, television, telephone, and other electronic means of communication. Most Likely to Succeed: quotative *like* with a form of the verb *be* to indicate speech or thought. Most Useful: *thing* premodified by a noun, e.g. “a Chicago thing.” Most Imaginative: *McJob*, a generic, unstimulating, low-paying job. Most Amazing: *cybersex*, sexual stimulation by computer. Most Unnecessary: *mosaic culture* to describe a multicultural society. Most Outrageous: *whirlpooling*, assault of a female by a male group in a swimming pool. Most Euphemistic: *street builder*, a homeless person who constructs a shanty. Most Unpronounceable: *Jurassosaurus nedegoapeferkimorum*, a new dinosaur.

1992 Word of the Year: *Not!* expression of disagreement. Most Likely to Succeed: *snail mail*, *s-mail*, mail that is physically delivered, as opposed to e-mail. Most Useful: *grunge*, a style of clothing. Most Original: *Franken-*, genetically altered. Most Amazing: *Munchhausen’s syndrome by proxy*, illness fabricated to evoke sympathy for the caregiver. Most Unnecessary: *gender feminism*, belief that sex roles are social, not biological. Most Outrageous: *ethnic cleansing*, purging of ethnic minorities.

1991 Word of the Year: *mother of all* —, greatest, most impressive. Most Likely to Succeed: *rollerblade*, skate with rollers in a single row. Most Successful: *in your face*, aggressive, confrontational, flamboyant. Most Original: *molecular pharming*, *pharming*, genetically modifying farm animals to produce human proteins for pharmaceutical use. Most Amazing: *velcroid*, a person who sticks by the (U.S.) president, especially for photo opportunities. Most Unnecessary: *massively parallel*, many small computers yoked together.

1990 Word of the Year: *bushlips*, insincere political rhetoric. Most Likely to Succeed: (tie) *notebook PC*, a portable personal computer weighting 4-8 pounds, and *rightsizing*, adjusting the size of a staff by laying off employees. Most Useful: (tie) *technostupidity*, loss of ability through dependence on machines, and *potty parity*, equalization of toilet facilities for the sexes. Most Original: *voice merging*, the oral tradition of African-American preachers using another's words. Most Amazing: *bungee jumping*, jumping from a high platform with elastic cables on the feet. Most Unnecessary: *peace dividend*, anticipated saving in military spending due to improved relations with the Soviet Union. Most Outrageous: *politically correct*, *PC*, adhering to principles of left-wing social concern.

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