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“App” 2010 Word of the Year, as voted by American Dialect Society

WYNDHAM GRAND HOTEL, PITTSBURGH—JAN. 7—In its 21st annual words of the year vote, the American Dialect Society voted “app” (noun, an abbreviated form of application, a software program for a computer or phone operating system) as the word of the year for 2010.

Presiding at the Jan. 7 voting session were ADS Executive Secretary Allan Metcalf of MacMurray College, and Ben Zimmer, chair of the New Words Committee of the American Dialect Society and executive producer of VisualThesaurus.com. Zimmer is also the “On Language” columnist for the New York Times Magazine.

“App has been around for ages, but with millions of dollars of marketing muscle behind the slogan ‘There’s an app for that,’ plus the arrival of ‘app stores’ for a wide spectrum of operating systems for phones and computers, app really exploded in the last 12 months,” Zimmer said. “One of the most convincing arguments from the voting floor was from a woman who said that even her grandmother had heard of it.”

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 121-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
“Eyafjalljökul” as Name of the Year for 2010 in its seventh annual name-of-the-year
contest. It’s the name of an Icelandic volcano which spewed enough ash this year to severely
disrupt flights across Europe.

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 for each category might not be
identical because the number of voters might have changed for each category.

WORD OF THE YEAR

app: application program for a computer or phone operating system. As in "there’s an app for
that," an advertising slogan for the iPhone. 52/69 WINNER
nom: Onomatopoetic form connoting eating, esp. pleasurably. Can be used as an interjection or
noun to refer to delicious food. 34/51.
junk as used in junk shot (attempt to fix BP oil spill), junk status (Greece’s credit rating), don’t
touch my junk (protest against TSA pat-down procedure). 17

Wikileaks as proper noun, common noun, and verb. 12
trend verb: to exhibit a burst of online buzz. 12

MOST USEFUL

nom Onomatopoetic form connoting eating, esp. pleasurably. Can be used as an interjection or
noun to refer to delicious food. 49/72 WINNER
fat-finger verb: to mistype, as by accidentally striking more than one key on a keyboard/pad. 16
junk junk shot (attempt to fix BP oil spill), junk status (Greece’s credit rating), don’t touch my junk
(protest against TSA pat-down procedure). 46/42
vuvuzela: South African plastic trumpet used by fans during the FIFA World Cup matches.

MOST CREATIVE

prehab Preemptive enrollment in a rehab facility to prevent relapse of an abuse problem. 45/65
WINNER
-sauce Intensive suffix, as in awesome-sauce ‘great’ and lame-sauce ‘stupid’. 37/51
spillion An immense number, especially of gallons of oil in the Gulf spill. Also spillionaire,
person made rich by money from BP’s spill cleanup fund. 29
phoenix firm A troubled company that reemerges under a new name. 13

MOST UNNECESSARY

refudiate Blend of refute and repudiate used by Sarah Palin on Twitter. 72/WINNER
ironic moustache Facial hair worn as a statement of retro hipsterdom. 6
star whacker Imagined celebrity killer (alleged by actor Randy Quaid and his wife Evi). 16
hipsterdom: the state of being hip beyond all recognition. So hip you’re unhip. 14

MOST OUTRAGEOUS

gate rape Pejorative term for invasive new airport pat-down procedure. 55/67 WINNER
terror baby Baby born to a terrorist family on U.S. soil in order to establish citizenship. 52/56
**bed intruder** Perpetrator of a home invasion in Huntsville, Ala., made famous by viral video. 22

**MOST EUPHEMISTIC**

**kinetic event** Pentagon term for violent attacks on troops in Afghanistan. 84/WINNER

**corn sugar** Corn Refiners Association’s rebranding of high fructose corn syrup. 1.

**enhanced pat-down** TSA’s term for controversial new frisking procedure. 21

**bed intruder** Perpetrator of a home invasion in Huntsville, Ala., made famous by viral video. 19

**MOST LIKELY TO SUCCEED**

**trend** Verb: to exhibit a burst of online buzz. 73/WINNER

**hacktivism** Using computer hacking skills as a form of political or social activism. 34

**-pad** Combining form used by iPad and other tablet computers (ViewPad, WindPad, etc.). 22

**telework** Term used at federal level for work by an employee away from the office. 9

**LEAST LIKELY TO SUCCEED**

**culturomics** Research project from Google analyzing the history of language and culture 44/85

**fauxhemian** Winner of a Gawker poll to replace the term “hipster.” 31

**skyaking** Jumping out of a plane in a kayak. 47/33

**top kill / top hat / junk shot** Various failed techniques to fix the BP oil spill. 11

**ELECTION TERMS (new category)**

All terms agreed to be losers. The entire category was deleted by acclamation.

**Aqua Buddha** Fictitious deity in collegiate scandal involving Rand Paul, raised during his Kentucky Senate campaign.

**mama grizzly** Sarah Palin’s term for a fiercely conservative female candidate.

**man up** Exhortation to be responsible or “act like a man,” used by Sharron Angle against Harry Reid in Nevada Senate race.

**Obamacare** Pejorative term for the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010.

**FAN WORDS (new category)**

**gleek** A fan of the TV show “Glee” (Glee + geek) 90 WINNER

**belieber** A fan of pop singer Justin Bieber (Bieber + believer) 3

**little monster** A fan of pop singer Lady Gaga, so called by the singer herself. 0

**Twihard** A fan of the “Twilight” books and movies. 7

**Yat Dat** A native-born fan of the New Orleans Saints. 14

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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

2009 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. 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. MOST USEFUL fail A noun or interjection used when something is egregiously unsuccessful. Usually written as “FAIL!” 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. MOST UNNECESSARY sea kittens fish (according to PETA) MOST OUTRAGEOUS 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. MOST EUPHEMISTIC 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. MOST LIKELY TO SUCCEED 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)

LEAST LIKELY TO SUCCEED name of the decade 2000-2009, such as Naughties, Aughties, Oughties, etc.

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: recombolulation 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: toetapper, 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
American Dialect Society: Words of the Year

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.


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: suicide 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.)


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: multislapping, 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) -jrazzi, 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

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.


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.


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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