

Contacts for Word of the Year:

# American Dialect Society

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## 2014 Word of the Year is *#blacklivesmatter*, as voted by American Dialect Society

HILTON PORTLAND—JAN. 9—In its 25th annual words of the year vote, the American Dialect Society voted *#blacklivesmatter* as the Word of the Year for 2014. For the first time, a Twitter hashtag was selected by the society as its overall winner.

Presiding at the Jan. 9 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. Zimmer is also executive editor of Vocabulary.com and language columnist for the *Wall Street Journal*.

The hashtag *#blacklivesmatter* took on special significance in 2014 after the deaths of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo. and Eric Garner in Staten Island, N.Y., and the failure of grand juries to indict police officers in both cases. It became a rallying cry and vehicle for expressing protest, fueled by social media.

The word *hashtag* itself was the ADS Word of the Year in 2012. Now, two years later, hashtags were recognized with their own special category in the voting, which was also won by *#blacklivesmatter*.

“While *#blacklivesmatter* may not fit the traditional definition of a word, it demonstrates how powerfully a hashtag can convey a succinct social message,” Zimmer said. “Language scholars are paying attention to the innovative linguistic force of hashtags, and *#blacklivesmatter* was certainly a forceful example of this in 2014.”

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.

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 125-year-old organization include linguists, lexicographers, etymologists, grammarians, historians, researchers, writers, editors, 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 "*Ferguson*" as Name of the Year for 2014 in its tenth annual name-of-the-year contest, to recognize the significance of the Missouri town as a flashpoint for protests after the death of Michael Brown.

## AMERICAN DIALECT SOCIETY VOTE TALLIES

The number after each nomination is the number of votes it received. Winners are indicated by an asterisk, and 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

- \* **#blacklivesmatter**: hashtag used as protest over blacks killed at the hands of police (esp. Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo. and Eric Garner in Staten Island). 196
- bae**: a sweetheart or romantic partner. 3
- columbusing**: cultural appropriation, especially the act of a white person claiming to discover things already known to minority cultures. 11
- even**: deal with or reconcile difficult situations or emotions (from "I can't even"). 5
- manspreading**: of a man, to sit with one's legs wide on public transit in a way that blocks other seats. 5

### MOST USEFUL

- \* **even**: deal with or reconcile difficult situations or emotions (from "I can't even"). 133
- budtender**: a person who specializes in serving marijuana to consumers, especially in legal dispensaries. 69
- Ebola**: deadly virus that, in 2014, killed thousands in West Africa. 9
- robocar**: a self-driving car. 7
- unbothered**: not annoyed or distracted. 15

**MOST CREATIVE**

- \* **columbusing**: cultural appropriation, especially the act of a white person claiming to discover things already known to minority cultures. 158
- manspreading**: of a man, to sit with one's legs wide on public transit in a way that blocks other seats. 44
- misogynoir**: misogyny directed toward black women. 8
- narcissistick** (or **narcisstick**): pejorative term for a selfie stick. 22

**MOST UNNECESSARY**

- \* **baeless**: without a romantic partner (lacking a *bae*). 96/133
- narcissistick** (or **narcisstick**): pejorative term for a selfie stick. 57/93
- basic**: plain, socially awkward, unattractive, uninteresting, ignorant, pathetic, uncool, etc. 27
- lumbersexual**: fashionably rugged man who adopts the stereotypical dress and facial hair of a lumberjack. 43

**MOST OUTRAGEOUS**

- \* **second-amendment**: *v.* to kill (someone) with a gun, used ironically by gun control supporters. 192
- God view**: display mode used by ride-sharing service Uber providing employees with real-time information on all users. 11
- sugar-dating**: pay-to-play relationship between an older, wealthier person (sugar daddy/momma) and a younger partner (sugar baby). 6

**MOST EUPHEMISTIC**

- \* **EIT**: abbreviation for the already euphemistic “enhanced interrogation technique.” 108/139
- conscious uncoupling**: a divorce or romantic separation by polite mutual agreement. 84/103
- bye, Felicia**: a dismissive farewell to someone deemed unimportant. 30
- thirsty**: so hungry for a romantic partner as to appear desperate. 13

**MOST LIKELY TO SUCCEED**

- \* **salty**: exceptionally bitter, angry, or upset. 78/131
- basic**: plain, socially awkward, unattractive, uninteresting, ignorant, pathetic, uncool, etc. 58/89
- budtender**: a person who specializes in serving marijuana to consumers, especially in legal dispensaries. 44
- casual**: a new or inexperienced person, especially a gamer (also in *filthy casual*). 7
- plastiglomerate**: type of stone made of melted plastic, beach sediment, and organic debris. 10
- selfie stick**: a pole to which a smartphone is attached to take selfies from a distance. 48

**LEAST LIKELY TO SUCCEED**

- \* **platisher**: online media publisher that also serves as a platform for creating content. 173
- normcore**: “anti-fashion” trend of adopting an intentionally ordinary, inexpensive personal style from cheap off-the-shelf brands. 15
- pairage**: term proposed by Utah legislator Kraig Powell to refer to same-sex marriages. 53

**MOST NOTABLE HASHTAG (new category)**

\* **#blacklivesmatter**: protest over blacks killed at the hands of police (esp. Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo., Eric Garner in Staten Island). 226

**#icantbreathe**: final words of Eric Garner, turned into rallying cry against police violence. 14

**#notallmen**: response by men to discussions of sexual abuse, sexism, or misogyny that they see as portraying all men as perpetrators (countered by **#yesallwomen**, used by women sharing stories of bias, harrassment, or abuse). 1

**#whyistayed**: explanation by women about staying in abusive domestic relationships. 1

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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.

**American Dialect Society Words of Previous Years are at  
<http://americandialect.org/woty>**

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