2004 WORDS OF THE YEAR
TO BE CHOSEN IN OAKLAND

The American Dialect Society will choose its Words of the Year 2004 on January 7, 2005, at its annual meeting in Oakland, California.

Representatives of the media are invited to join members and friends of the American Dialect Society as they discuss and vote on the words and phrases that are most salient and representative of the past year.

On Friday, Jan. 7, the final selections will be made in two sessions at the Marriott Oakland City Center, where the American Dialect Society meets in association with the Linguistic Society of America. Nominations and categories will be determined in a meeting from 10:30 a.m. to noon in Rooms 210-211. The final votes in all categories will be taken in the same place from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m.

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 election is serious, based on members’ expertise in the study of words, but it is far from solemn.

In addition to an overall Word of the Year, words will be chosen in a number of categories. The categories are determined each year, but they generally include Most Useful, Most Creative, Most Unnecessary, Most Outrageous, Most Euphemistic, Most Likely to Succeed, and Least Likely to Succeed.

Presiding at the Jan. 7 nominating session will be Professor Wayne Glowka of Georgia College and State University, chair of the New Words Committee of the American Dialect Society. He conducts the column “Among the New Words” in the society’s quarterly journal American Speech.
Glowka will present his list of candidates, as well as those proposed by David Barnhart of Lexik House, Hyde Park, N.Y. and Grant Barrett, project editor of the Historical Dictionary of American Slang. But anyone is welcome to propose candidates. Suggestions can be e-mailed in advance to wayne.glowka@gcsu.edu.

Among the many candidates already proposed for Word of the Year 2004 are political terms like red and blue states, red favoring conservative Republicans and blue favoring liberal Democrats, as well as the undecided purple states; proclaimer, a candidate’s required statement “I’m ___, and I approve this message”; the Dean scream; and flip-flopper and girly man, unflattering apppellations for candidates. The Iraq war brought hillbilly armor, makeshift armor for unprotected military vehicles, and recently Defense Secretary Rumsfeld’s phrase the army you have. From the world of entertainment, there was Janet Jackson’s unforgettable wardrobe malfunction, and from the world of the World Series (as well as the American League playoffs), Who’s your daddy? Television also produced the CSI effect, impacting jury expectations of forensic evidence.

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.

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. Metcalf, the executive secretary of the American Dialect Society, may be reached at aallan@aol.com.

American Dialect Society: Words of Previous Years


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.*)


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) *-razzi*, 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

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: *guillerma*, 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.