

Nominations for the 2008 Word of the Year
to be voted on by the American Dialect Society
January 9th in San Francisco
<http://americandialect.org/woty2008/>

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These are the terms that represent some of the ideas that dominated American discourse during 2008.

age-doping: The falsification of records to show that an athlete meets participation requirements for a sporting event. This issue arose with Chinese gymnasts in the Beijing Summer Olympics.

bailout: In the specific sense used most frequently in 2008, the rescue by the government of companies on the brink of failure, including large players in the banking industry.

Barack Obama-derived terms: The President-elect's name continues to provoke an avalanche of one-offs and nonce terms, some of dubious utility and few of great lifespan. Variations on "Obamination" and "Obamanation" are common, with the first term largely being used in a negative sense and the second in a positive one. More were catalogued by the online magazine *Slate*, which created an application for Facebook and published a book of the terms called *Obamania! The English Language, Barackafied*. A sample of other forms include Bamelot, Baraccoli, Baracked, Barackintosh, Baracklamation, Barackstar, Barackupied, Barackwurst, Nobama, Obamacam, Obamacize, Obamafy, Obamalicious, Obamalujah, Obamamatopoeia, Obamamentum, Obamanos, Obamaphoria, Obamarama, Obamascope, Obamatopia, Obamatose, Obamazon.

burrowing n. When political appointees find their party out of power, they often seek to stay on the government payroll by taking a different but similar job as a civil servant, burrowing in like a hibernating animal until their party should take up the reins again

carborexix: A person who is "energy anorexic," meaning that they avoid power-consuming devices such as air conditioners in order to conserve energy and reduce their responsibility for overall fossil fuel consumption. Also an adjective.

Caribou Barbie: A nickname for Alaskan Governor and former vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin.

change: Not so much a buzzword as political wallpaper, background noise, and ambient energy rolled into one. The idea of discarding old ideas and methods seemed to underlie everything said by national political candidates.

credit crunch: A scarcity of capital in the form of consumer and business loans, necessary for nearly every major form of commerce.

credit default swap: Generally, a complicated financial maneuver by which risk is shared between multiple parties through insurance and reinsurance.

digital cliff: The sharp degradation of a digital broadcast signal beyond a certain distance. This cliff could be encountered when analog signals cease broadcasting on Feb. 18, 2009. Households that received analog signals just fine may find that the digital signal doesn't work.

DWT or driving while texting: The sending of text messages while conducting and automobile. Increasing awareness of telephones being a major distraction to drivers has led to legislation, rules, and awareness campaigns to encourage people to not send text messages while driving an automobile.

edupunk: A style of hands-on self-education that benefits the student without concern for curriculums or the interests of schools, corporations or governments. In other words, an autodidactic approach that spurns commercialism, mass-market approaches and top-down goal-setting. Coined by Jim Groom, an "instructional technologist" at the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, Va.

fail: Largely used online, this is a verb turned into a mass noun, as in "A bucket of fail." Common forms include *epic fail*, meaning a huge overall tendency toward failure or a great example of failure, and *FAIL!* as an interjection or derogation. Often an antonym of *win* (see below).

fish pedicure: A cosmetic procedure in which fish eat the dead skin off the feet.

frugalista: A person who is frugal but fashionable. Similar to *secessionist* (see below).

futarchy: A theoretical government controlled in part by speculative markets. Coined by Robin D. Hanson of George Mason University.

game-changer: In business and politics, something that alters the nature of a marketplace, relationship, or campaign. From sports 'something that changes a match or contest.'

gas-sipper: The opposite of a *gas-guzzler*. Though more than 30 years old, the term took on new significance as gasoline prices rose to record highs.

-gate: After more than 35 years, the *-gate* suffix from Watergate is still productive, producing among others *Bittergate* in response to Barack Obama's comment about bitter voters, *Lipstick-gate* in response to his comment about putting *lipstick on a pig* (see below), and *Sweetie-gate* in response to his calling a female reporter "sweetie."

Greyjing: A nickname for Beijing, whose skies are some of the most polluted in the world.

ground game: A widely used political term which refers to the door-to-door, voter-by-voter tactics used in the presidential campaigns.

hockey mom: A mother who spends a great deal of time and money aggressively abetting her children's interest in the sport of hockey. Sarah Plain described herself as one. Borrowed later as marketing term akin to *soccer mom* to mean an upper middle-class suburban mother from states where hockey is a common pastime.

Joe: An everyman. Seen in this election in *Amtrak Joe*, *Joe the Plumber*, *Joe the Biden*, *Joe Six-pack*, and other terms.

lipstick on a pig: An adornment of something that can't be made pretty. When Barack Obama said "You can put lipstick on a pig, but it's still a pig," many people assumed he meant Sarah Plain, who frequently has said, "The only difference between a bulldog and a hockey mom is lipstick."

long photo: A video of 90 seconds or less. Used by the photo-sharing web site Flickr, which began permitting videos this year.

malus: A penalty or salary cut suffered by a business executive whose company suffers market setbacks or failures. The opposite of a bonus. The term dates to at least as early as the 1960s in usage among actuaries.

market meltdown: A massive decline in the value of stocks according to multiple indices and in multiple countries, even for companies seen as too big to fail.

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*.

naked short selling: Shorting shares of stock that someone else owns without their knowledge, with the intention of purchasing them after the sale has gone through.

nuke the fridge: To ruin a movie franchise through the arrogance of a successful producer or director. The term was coined based upon a scene in the latest Indiana Jones movie, in which the hero survives a nuclear blast by hiding in a refrigerator. The term is patterned after *jump the shark*, which was coined a few years ago to refer to anything that had peaked in popularity or quality and was now on a downward slide toward ridiculousness and irrelevancy.

Phelpsian: Excellent in the fashion of swimmer Michael Phelps, who won eight medals and set seven world records in the 2008 Summer Olympics.

photobombing: Intentionally inserting oneself as an unwelcome subject in the background of someone else's photograph.

plutoid: A new term designated by the International Astronomical Union to refer to Pluto and space objects like it.

pregorexia: Obsession with staying thin by a pregnant woman. Coined from *preg(nant)* and (an)*orexia*.

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.

quake lake: A new lake formed by May's major earthquake in China.

recombobulation area: An area at Mitchell International Airport in Milwaukee in which passengers that have just passed through security screen can get their clothes and belongs back in order.

recessionista: Originally, someone who either favors a recession as ultimately good for the economy. Subsequently, a person who stays fashionable during an economic downturn without spending a lot of money.

sister wife: A woman who shares a husband with another woman. Used by members of Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in Texas and other polygamous groups.

skadoosh: A term coined by Jack Black for the movie *Kung Fu Panda* and popularized by the movie's promoters. It appears during a crucial scene in the movie and accompanies a gesture.

stag-deflation: A growing economy in which prices fall.

staycation: A vacation from work or school that does not involve traveling.

tank, in the: To say that someone is *in the tank* for someone else is to suggest that support comes as the result of backroom deals or political logrolling.

TBTF: An initialism for "too big to fail," used to describe very large financial institutions which it is believed should be protected from financial collapse.

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. The name was taken up by opponents of Barack Obama, who is prone to do the bump with members of his family. He and his wife, Michelle, were featured making the gesture in a cartoon on the cover of *The New Yorker* in July. The expression is now used ironically across the political spectrum.

throwie: A sticky or magnetic battery-powered LED used in bunches as a form of graffiti.

Tw-hard: A fan of Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* book series about vampires. Pronounced to rhyme with "die-hard."

Tw-, tweet-, twitt- Combining forms all inspired by Twitter, what might be called a free nano-blogging service. It helps small groups share what they're thinking or doing in just 140 characters per message, or tweet, as such a message is called. The service has generated new words and related Web sites. Tweet-up, for example, is either a meeting of people organized through Twitter, or the Web site that helps bring about the meetings.

win: Now a mass noun, as opposed to the usual count noun. Often seen online in forms like "Full of win!" which means, "It's good!" An antonym of *fail* (see above).