American Dialect Society

CONTACTS:
Wayne Glowka (Georgia College and State University), Chair, ADS New Words Committee: wayne.glowka@gcsu.edu, office (478) 445-4222, cell (478) 414-8578.
Grant Barrett (Historical Dictionary of American Slang): gbarrett@worldnewyork.org, office (212) 726-6142, cell (646) 286-2260.
David K. Barnhart (Lexik House): Barnhart@highlands.com, (914) 850-8484.
Hyatt Regency Albuquerque: (505) 842-1234.

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2005 WORDS OF THE YEAR TO BE CHOSEN IN ALBUQUERQUE

For the past 15 years, the 116-year-old American Dialect Society has chosen Words of the Year—a word or phrase that best reflects the language and preoccupations of the year gone by. The society will choose its Words of the Year 2005 on January 6, 2006, at its annual meeting in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

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. The ADS vote is the longest-running “words of the year” vote and the only one conducted by an non-commercial entity.

On Friday, Jan. 6, the final selections will be made in two sessions at the Hyatt Regency Albuquerque, 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 Fiesta 1-2. 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. 6 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.
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.

Glowka’s candidates include exopolitics, dealings with space aliens; nuclear option, most extreme course of action in the U.S. Senate, and refugee, a newly controversial term for a displaced person. Barnhart’s include Cyber Monday, the Monday following Thanksgiving (for online shopping); rendition, transfer of a person for interrogation by a foreign power, especially by torture, and spim, instant-messaged spam. Barrett’s include dirka dirka, a mimicry of spoken Arabic, jump the couch, the Tom Cruise-inspired slang meaning to exhibit frenetic or bizarre behavior, and whale tail, the appearance of thong or g-string underwear over the waistband of clothing.

But everyone is welcome to propose candidates. Suggestions can be e-mailed in advance to wayne.glowka@gcsu.edu.

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.

American Dialect Society: Words of Previous Years


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: shuiicide 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: 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) -[f]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.


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: bushwhips, 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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