

Contacts for Word of the Year:

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(For immediate release)

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2016 Word of the Year is *dumpster fire*, as voted by American Dialect Society

JW MARRIOTT, AUSTIN, TX—JAN. 6—In its 27th annual words of the year vote, the American Dialect Society voted for *dumpster fire* as the Word of the Year for 2016. Defined as “an exceedingly disastrous or chaotic situation,” the term *dumpster fire* was selected as best representing the public discourse and preoccupations of the past year.

Presiding at the Jan. 6 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 the language columnist for the *Wall Street Journal*.

As a metaphor for a situation that is out of control or poorly handled, *dumpster fire* came into prominence in 2016, very frequently in the context of the U.S. presidential campaign. It evokes an image of an uncontrolled blaze in a dumpster, a large trash receptacle that originated as a proprietary name. *Dumpster* was in commercial use beginning in the 1930s before becoming genericized.

The expression came to be used metaphorically, a rough equivalent of *train wreck*, chiefly on sports talk radio, before being circulated in wider use as a highly negative term for such events as the 2016 campaign season. On Twitter and other social media, the “trashcan” and “fire” emoji were combined to provide a visual representation: 🗑️🔥

“As 2016 unfolded, many people latched on to *dumpster fire* as a colorful, evocative expression to verbalize their feelings that the year was shaping up to be a catastrophic one,” Zimmer said. “In pessimistic times, *dumpster fire* served as a darkly humorous summation of how many viewed the year’s events.”

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 128-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 “*Aleppo*” as Name of the Year for 2016 in its twelfth annual name-of-the-year contest.

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

* **dumpster fire**: an exceedingly disastrous or chaotic situation (🗑️🔥). 112/162

woke: socially aware or enlightened. 74/129

normalize: treat as if normal that which was previously deemed beyond acceptable bounds. 60

post-truth: belonging to a time in which facts matter less than beliefs and emotions. 25

#NoDAPL: hashtag protesting the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. 24

🔥: fire emoji, used as a general superlative: 2

POLITICAL WORD OF THE YEAR

deplorables (basket of): epithet used by Clinton in speech about Trump supporters. 26

nasty woman: epithet used by Trump addressing Clinton in final presidential debate. 89/138

Pantsuit Nation: popular Facebook group for Clinton supporters. 2

* **post-truth**: belonging to a time in which facts matter less than beliefs and emotions. 133/164

unpresidented: erroneous version of *unprecedented* in a tweet by Trump. 44

DIGITAL WORD OF THE YEAR

fam: one's crew, squad, or circle of friends; a member thereof (used as term of address). 5

Harambe: gorilla killed at Cincinnati Zoo, launching numerous tributes and memes. 9

tweetstorm: series of connected tweets about a particular subject, often a passionate rant. 138

* **@:** (verb) reply on Twitter using the @ symbol. 155

SLANG WORD OF THE YEAR

fire: (adj.) cool, fun, stylish; also used as a general superlative. 7

receipts: proof (as in "show me the receipts"). 130/136

slay: succeed, be excellent or amazing. 25

* **woke:** socially aware or enlightened. 122/168

MOST USEFUL / MOST LIKELY TO SUCCEED

chip: (verb) insert a bank card into an electronic chip reader (as opposed to *swipe*). 64

* **gaslight:** psychologically manipulate a person into questioning their own sanity. 153

normalize: treat as if normal that which was previously deemed beyond acceptable bounds. 82

turn up: get excited, have fun, enjoy oneself. 4

MOST CREATIVE

-exit: combining form relating to departure, after *Brexit* (*Calexit*, *Texit*, *Brangelexit*) 124

facticide: killing or distortion of facts. 7

gynotician: politician seen as interfering with women's healthcare. 31

* **laissez-fairydust:** magical effect brought upon by laissez-faire economics. 152

EUPHEMISM OF THE YEAR

alt-right: umbrella term for extremist racial ideologies including white nationalism and white supremacy. 61

fake news: misinformation, hoaxes, and propaganda, especially as spread on social media sites to boost web traffic. 15

* **locker-room banter:** lewd, vulgar talk (used by Trump to downplay Access Hollywood tape), euphemizing discourse about harassment of and aggression toward women. 187

small/tiny hands: a jab at hand size implying other anatomical deficiencies. 15

WTF WORD OF THE YEAR

* **bigly:** in a significant manner (from widespread mishearing of Trump's use of *big-league*). 159

cuck, cuckservative: derisive term for mainstream Republicans by alt-right. 64

pussy: term for female genitalia used by Trump in Access Hollywood tape. 9

yuuge: dialect pronunciation of *huge* used by Trump and Bernie Sanders. 2

HASHTAG OF THE YEAR

#blackgirlmagic: celebration of black women and their achievements. 5

* **#NoDAPL:** protest against construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. 198

#OscarsSoWhite: criticism of Academy Award nominees' lack of diversity. 8

#pussygrabsback: rallying cry responding to Trump's "pussy" remark. 29

EMOJI OF THE YEAR

🙌: raising hands (celebration, praise). 16

✊: raised fist (fist pump, solidarity). 33

🙄: upside-down face (silliness, sarcasm, irony). 11

* 🔥: fire (“lit,” exciting); also used in 🗑️🔥: dumpster fire. 201

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.

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

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