

Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year 2016 is

POST-TRUTH

post-truth adjective

Relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.

16 November 2016, Oxford, UK: Today, Oxford Dictionaries announces [*post-truth*](#) as its 2016 international [Word of the Year](#). The Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year is a word or expression chosen to reflect the passing year in language. Every year, the Oxford Dictionaries team reviews candidates for word of the year and then debates their merits, choosing one that captures the ethos, mood, or preoccupations of that particular year. Language research conducted by Oxford Dictionaries editors reveals that use of the word *post-truth* has increased by approximately 2,000% over its usage in 2015.

The concept of *post-truth* has been in existence for the past decade, but Oxford Dictionaries has seen a spike in frequency this year in the context of the EU referendum in the United Kingdom and the presidential election in the United States. It has also become associated with a particular noun, in the phrase ‘post-truth politics’.

The compound word *post-truth* exemplifies an expansion in the meaning of the prefix post- that has become increasingly prominent in recent years. Rather than simply referring to the time after a specified situation or event – as in *post-war* or *post-match* – the prefix in *post-truth* has a meaning more like ‘belonging to a time in which the specified concept has become unimportant or irrelevant’. This nuance seems to have originated in the mid-20th century, in formations such as *post-national* (1945) and *post-racial* (1971).

‘It’s not surprising that our choice reflects a year dominated by highly-charged political and social discourse,’ says Casper Grathwohl, President of Oxford Dictionaries. ‘Fuelled by the rise of social media as a news source and a growing distrust of facts offered up by the establishment, *post-truth* as a concept has been finding its linguistic footing for some time.’

Grathwohl goes on to say, ‘We first saw the frequency really spike this year in June with buzz over the Brexit vote and again in July when Donald Trump secured the Republican presidential nomination. Given that usage of the term hasn’t shown any signs of slowing down, I wouldn’t be surprised if *post-truth* becomes one of the defining words of our time.’

The Word of the Year need not have been coined within the past twelve months. To qualify for consideration we look for evidence that its usage has increased significantly across a broad range of media. On the basis of that evidence, *post-truth* made it into [OxfordDictionaries.com](#) this month.

The earliest known usage of *post-truth*

Post-truth seems to have been first used in this meaning in a 1992 essay by the late Serbian-American playwright Steve Tesich in *The Nation* magazine. Reflecting on the Iran-Contra scandal and the Persian Gulf War, Tesich lamented that ‘we, as a free people, have freely decided that we want to live in some post-truth world’. There is evidence of the phrase ‘*post-truth*’ being used before Tesich’s article, but apparently with the transparent meaning ‘after the truth was known’, and not with the new implication that truth itself has become irrelevant.

The Word of the Year shortlist

The Word of the Year (*post-truth*) and accompanying shortlist have been selected as they reflect the social, cultural, political, economic, and technological trends and events that have been a part of 2016. The list includes words that have been coined this year as well as older words that have taken on new meaning or have particular resonance in 2016.

In alphabetical order, the **shortlisted words for the Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year 2016** are:

adulging *noun, informal*

The practice of behaving in a way characteristic of a responsible adult, especially the accomplishment of mundane but necessary tasks.

With an increase in usage and countless memes, *adulging* is hugely associated with this year. *Adulging* and the related verb *to adult* shift the noun *adult* into verbal use. Such ‘verbing’ of nouns is often criticized, but it is a common source of new words in English (it’s how we got the word *parenting*, which *adulging* is probably modelled on). The word *adulging* was used from time to time during the 20th century in various meanings, but the modern meaning—associated especially with millennials, known for their ambivalent relationship with the trappings of adulthood—seems to have begun to appear on social media in 2008.

alt-right *noun*

An ideological grouping associated with extreme conservative or reactionary viewpoints, characterized by a rejection of mainstream politics and by the use of online media to disseminate deliberately controversial content.

The term *alt-right* is shortened from the fuller form ‘alternative right’, which was first used by self-described paleo-conservatives in 2008 and was the title of a far-right online publication founded in 2010. The *alt-right* abbreviation was in use among the movement’s adherents by 2011, but it was rarely used outside that circle until the past year. Usage of the term *alt-right* surged during the spring and summer of 2016, with 30% of usage this year in August alone, as the movement became associated with support for the presidential candidacy of Donald Trump and was widely discussed in the American media.

Brexiteer *noun, informal*

A person who is in favour of the United Kingdom withdrawing from the European Union.

Brexit has been one of the major political/cultural talking points of the year. The word *Brexit* itself was on Oxford’s word of the year shortlist in both 2014 and 2015; for 2016, we opted to highlight one of the many spin-off words it has spawned. We’ve chosen *Brexiteer* because it is the most widely used of the various *Brexit* coinages we’ve investigated, including items such as *Bregret*, *Bremain*, *Brexodus*, and even the very similar *Brexiter*. It was rarely used before 2016 but shows no signs yet of retreating from the English lexicon.

chatbot *noun*

A computer program designed to simulate conversation with human users, especially over the Internet.

The use of *chatbot* has skyrocketed in 2016, with some tech commentators dubbing this ‘the year of the chatbot’. The word has been used to refer to programs designed to simulate conversation with humans since the 1990s, however the Oxford Dictionaries corpus shows a surge in evidence beginning in March 2016, when Microsoft launched and then quickly withdrew its *chatbot* ‘Tay’ on Twitter after it began to produce offensive tweets. Usage of the word continued to rise in the following months, as high-profile announcements were made about new *chatbot* applications and platforms.

coulrophobia *noun*

Extreme or irrational fear of clowns

2016 saw a perturbing trend of people dressing as scary clowns. *Coulrophobia* encapsulates the feelings people have towards this trend. It originated in the 1980s: from the Greek *kōlobatheron* ('stilt', apparently with allusion to stilt-walking as a form of popular entertainment) and 'phobia'.

The phenomenon of clown fear is apparently common, but the word *coulrophobia* is relatively rare, although its use surges occasionally in response to contemporary events. Prior to the creepy clown hysteria of 2016, where there was a brief but marked increase in use, the biggest spike in usage of the term was in October 2014, when the US television programme *American Horror Story: Freakshow* featured a killer clown.

glass cliff *noun*

Used with reference to a situation in which a woman or member of a minority group ascends to a leadership position in challenging circumstances where the risk of failure is high.

The psychologists Michelle Ryan and Alex Haslam **coined** the term *glass cliff* in 2004. Their research identified a phenomenon in which women or minorities were more likely to break through the 'glass ceiling' to achieve leadership positions in situations where there was an increased the risk of failure and criticism. The appointment of Theresa May and candidature of Hillary Clinton have brought *glass cliff* to greater cultural prominence in 2016.

hygge *noun*

A quality of cosiness and comfortable conviviality that engenders a feeling of contentment or well-being (regarded as a defining characteristic of Danish culture).

Fascination with *hygge* first arose in the United Kingdom, which has been gripped by enthusiasm for Scandinavian culture for several years now, but it has also recently begun to make an impact in the United States. English does not have a word for this precise concept, which is, after all, grounded in Danish culture. As is often the case when a word is initially borrowed from another language, much of the evidence for *hygge* in English publications so far is self-conscious, and is accompanied by explanations of what it means. However, there is growing evidence of contextual use on social media, where *hygge* has been used as a hashtag for photos of candlelit tables and embraced as the ultimate respite from the year's more serious events.

Latinx *noun*

A person of Latin American origin or descent (used as a gender-neutral or non-binary alternative to Latino or Latina).

Latinx arose in response to a fascinating quandary: how can a language like Spanish, in which nouns and adjectives have grammatical gender, be used in a gender-neutral way? In contexts where gender is mixed or unspecified, the masculine form is typically used, but some people have objected to this convention, arguing that it excludes women, as well as people who identify as neither male nor female. *Latinx* replaces the gendered -a or -o ending with -x. *Latinx* was being used online in Spanish by 2009, and had made its way into English use by 2012. It is still uncommon in mainstream English publications, but is widely used on American university campuses.

woke *adjective, US informal*

[originally in African-American usage]

Alert to injustice in society, especially racism.

This usage of *woke*, appearing especially in the phrase ‘stay woke’, is novel in general US English but has existed in the variety known as African American Vernacular English (AAVE) for decades. In some forms of AAVE, *woke* is used as an alternative to ‘awake’ or ‘woken’. By the mid-20th century, that adjectival use of *woke* was appearing in metaphorical contexts relating to political awakenings, as well as in a more general slang meaning of ‘well informed’.

It was the use of the phrase ‘stay woke’ by supporters of the Black Lives Matter movement that introduced the word to a broader audience, especially on social media. Eventually, alongside earnest uses of *woke* to denote vigilance about systemic racism, trivial and humorous uses also appeared. As more and more non-black people began to appropriate ‘woke’ to describe their own political awakenings, the use of the word became both more common and more fraught. In 2016, Oxford Dictionaries witnessed a tenfold increase in use in the press, including a flurry of opinion pieces about *woke*’s proliferation outside the black community.

[ENDS]

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Is *post-truth* in an Oxford dictionary?

Yes, *post-truth* was added to [OxfordDictionaries.com](#) this month. It is not yet included in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED). See the OED website for [more information on how a word qualifies for inclusion in the OED](#).

What is the Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year (WOTY)?

The Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year is a word, or expression, that we can see has attracted a great deal of interest during the year to date. Every year, candidates for Word of the Year are debated and one is eventually chosen that is judged to reflect the ethos, mood, or preoccupations of that particular year and to have lasting potential as a word of cultural significance. The Word of the Year selection is made irrespective of whether the candidates are already included in an Oxford dictionary, and selection does not guarantee future inclusion. The names of people, places, or events are not suitable as Words of the Year.

Does the Word of the Year have to be a new word?

The Word of the Year need not have been coined within the past twelve months but it does need to have become prominent or notable during that time.

How is the Word of the Year chosen?

Many of the candidates for the Word of the Year are drawn from our language research programme and the Oxford English Corpus, which collects around 150 million words of current English each month from newspapers, books, blogs, and transcripts of spoken English. Sophisticated software allows our expert lexicographers to identify new and emerging words on and examine the shifts in how more established words are being used.

Dictionary editors will also flag notable words for consideration throughout the year and use other sources of data to identify contenders. We regularly take into account the many suggestions sent to us via social media and in the comments on our blog.

The final Word of the Year selection is made by the Oxford Dictionaries team on the basis of all the information available to us.

Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year in the US and the UK

Oxford Dictionaries has editorial staff based in the UK and in the US. Over the years, the UK and US dictionary teams have often chosen different Words of the Year. Each country’s vocabulary develops in different ways, according to what is happening culturally and in the news, and as such the Words of the Year can be different. Sometimes, a word captures the imagination on both sides of the Atlantic and can therefore be considered as a joint Word of the Year.

Which words have been selected as Word of the Year in recent years?

Year	Oxford Dictionaries UK Word of the Year	Oxford Dictionaries US Word of the Year
2004	chav	
2005	Sudoku	podcast
2006	Bovered	carbon-neutral
2007	carbon footprint	locavore
2008	credit crunch	hypermiling
2009	Simples	unfriend
2010	big society	refudiate
2011	squeezed middle	
2012	Omnishambles	GIF (verb)
2013	selfie	
2014	vape	
2015	😭 (Face With Tears of Joy emoji)	

Is this the OED Word of the Year?

OED editors are an integral part of the Word of the Year selection team, but the Word of the Year is not exclusively chosen by the [OED](#) editors. Oxford University Press publishes many dictionaries including the OED, and the Word of the Year is selected by a group representing both the OED and OxfordDictionaries.com. Find out more about the [main differences between the OED and OxfordDictionaries.com](#), or [about Oxford University Press](#).