



T H E
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O F

NEW
WORDS

First Published as *The New New Words Dictionary* by Ballantine Books
Expanded for Facts On File

Harold LeMay,
Sid Lerner and
Marian Taylor

The Facts On File
Dictionary of
New
Words

Harold LeMay
Sid Lerner
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*First Published in paperback as
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Facts On File
New York • Oxford

The Facts On File Dictionary of New Words

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**Facts On File, Inc.
460 Park Avenue South
New York, New York 10016**

Published by arrangement with Ballantine Books, A Division of Random House, Inc.

British CIP data available on request

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ISBN 0-8160-2088-4

Compositon by Facts On File/Maxwell Typographics

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

This book printed on acid-free paper.

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Acknowledgments

The authors are grateful for advice and contributions from Marilyn Abraham; Juliann Barbato; Maria Behan; Donna Buffa; Larry Earle Bone; Harold I. Drucker; Nancy Garrett; Constance Jones; Helaine Lerner; Marla Maidenbaum; Abigail Meisel; Stanley Nass; Emily Rechnitz; Blake Taylor; Rachel Urquheart; J. Bud Feuchtwanger; and Nancy Toff.

Preface

New words are now entering the English language at an ever-increasing rate. Those of us who compile large dictionaries sift through tens of thousands of potential entries for each new edition. In the rapid ebb and flow of language, standard dictionaries cannot list all the words and expressions in frequent use at any one moment: to do so would require that a new dictionary be printed every week and that all the unimportant words and expressions that were coined to live for a day or a few weeks would need to be listed.

Even though the best standard dictionaries, such as the *Random House College Dictionary*, may be updated every two years, there is a necessary time lag in collecting and verifying new words and checking their exact pronunciations, meanings, uses, and etymologies, and then editing, proofreading, printing, and binding a large book. In addition, there are many ephemeral words, short-lived catch phrases, slogans, and terms, in the news for a few days or weeks because they are attached to one political speech or news item, that are only of brief topical interest and are thus never entered in standard dictionaries. This leaves us with flurries of words and phrases scattered throughout our newspapers and magazines, rolling out of our radios and television sets, swirling through the air of our homes, workplaces, schools, and streets, which are not yet recorded or may never need be recorded in any authoritative dictionary.

Thus, there is a need for a small, informal book of new words, one that can be produced quickly and without consideration of the criteria and standards of authoritative dictionaries, a book for those who are interested in the latest words and expressions, whether or not these prove to be important or unimportant, long-lasting or just passing. This book attempts to fill that need. It is not meant to be a complete or even a precise coverage of new words and expressions but is for those who need or want

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to have a good sampling of them even before they can be pinned down as to importance or exact use. The authors of this book do not pretend to be professional lexicographers and do not attempt to be arbiters in the world of today's neologisms. They do not promise that their work is based on the vast citation files, a staff of experienced dictionary editors and consultants, or the years of research, checking, and painstaking editing needed to create major dictionaries. They do, however, promise to be alert, to serve as part of an early-warning system of new terms that may become important in the language, and to attempt informal definitions from the first imprecise evidence while the terms may still be emerging and not fully formed.

The Facts On File Dictionary of New Words promises only one thing: to be interesting to all those who want to keep abreast—right now—of our constantly changing language. It will be useful to all who want to know at least the preliminary meaning of current new terms, whether or not all these terms will be needed tomorrow as well as today, and useful to those who want advance warning of words that may enter our standard dictionaries after they have proved their usefulness and been pinned down more exactly.

This, then, is an informal, unscientific sampling of important, or often merely interesting, new words and expressions. It will make every reader more aware of our ever-changing vocabulary, of the fluctuation of words in modern life. It will also make every reader more aware of, and better able to talk and write about, current events, trends, and fads, better able to keep up with today's world by becoming aware of today's words.

Stuart Flexner

Introduction

This book is an eclectic assemblage of new words currently used by people of all ages, in all professions, and at all economic levels. As we go to press, few of these words—with their up-to-the-minute meanings—appear in any of the superb college dictionaries now available, not even in the 1987 unabridged edition of the *Random House Dictionary of the English Language*. We make no claim to listing *all* the not-yet-dictionaryed words in use; we do claim that sooner or later you will run into many of these words in everyday contexts.

In the first edition of the *Dictionary of New Words*, published in 1985, we predicted that “some of the words in this book will take root in the language and will appear in the upcoming major dictionaries.” It seems we got that right: almost half of the new words in the first *DNW* found their way into the mighty new *Random House* and, therefore, were edited out of this edition. Even if a word has a short life, however, it’s important to know what it means while it is appearing in headlines and talk shows. The words and phrases in this book are in frequent use *now*. Not to understand them puts us at risk of not fully understanding the world we live in.

In gathering words for this book, we have reviewed newspapers, magazines, books, pamphlets, labels, and catalogues. We have listened to radio and television, to conversations on trains, at sports arenas, rock concerts, and computer conventions. We have consulted experts in many fields. Our hardest job was not finding and defining new words; it was finding, defining and not *including* certain new words. The slang words and phrases we have chosen, for example, we encountered in places like *The Wall Street Journal* and TV’s *60 Minutes*, as well as on the street. There are, of course, hundreds of others, many of which, if they survive long enough to be recorded, will find homes in future compilations of colloquialisms. Some of these, which we heard often but not quite

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often enough were: *living large* (on top of the world; life at its best), *noid* (worry unnecessarily; probably derived from *paranoid*, as in “Don’t noid at the way he looked at you”), and *in traffic* (in the fast lane).

Other words absent from these pages are most of those in the “inside” lexicons of special or technical fields. Take medicine: We accepted *gomer* and *box* but left out a book’s worth of expressions used by doctors in sentences like this one from a *New York Times* column by Perri Klass: “Mrs. Tolstoy is your basic LOL in NAD, admitted for a soft ruleout MI.” (Translation: Mrs. T. is a Little Old Lady in No Apparent Distress who is in the hospital to make sure she has not had a heart attack [rule out Myocardial Infarction].)

Or, in the computer world, for instance, we assumed that people who need to know the new words spawned daily either already know them or will use one of the many techno-specific books about them, and therefore we have not included many. Exceptions are such terms as *phreaking*, *cracker*, *base-band*, and *electronic cottage*, which have migrated from the narrow streams of their conception to the mainstream of popular language.

We have also left out many new words spun off *other* new words. From the *Couch Potato* phenomenon, for example, have sprung such coinages as *spudismo*, *vidspud*, and *transcendental vegetation*—all choice but not likely to survive the tuber-emblazoned T-shirts, banners, hats, buttons, and other potatophernalia accompanying the potatomania of the late eighties. Another float of transient words and expressions springs from government and military sources. Particularly hard to reject were newspeak phrases like “terminate with extreme prejudice” for *kill*, “permanent prehostility” for *peacetime*, “predawn vertical insertion” for *early-morning airborne invasion*, and “controlled flight into terrain” for *plane crash*.

New words and expressions sometimes materialize out of thin air, dominate headlines and news broadcasts for an hour or a month, then disappear into the limbo of yesterday’s *lingo*. Such a phrase was 1987’s *Dodge City loophole*. Applied to Florida’s astonishingly permissive new gun law—which allowed anyone to carry firearms openly—the *loophole* looked like a serious contender for these pages. When Florida’s legislature

prudently closed the loophole only nine days after opening it, however, we prudently shot it down as an entry.

The words that do, at last, appear in this book are likely to pop up anywhere. Readers will already know what some of them mean. We guarantee that none of you will know them all. We have not *decided* what these words mean; we are merely reporting that they are currently used in certain ways to mean certain specific things. Some readers may dispute our definitions or have additional meanings for these words. We'd like to hear from you. In the next edition, we'll use appropriate additions and suggestions you send us.

A

acid wash (*noun*)

The process of washing jeans in chlorine to soften the fabric and produce a streaked, worn look. After the stiffening resin is stripped from the material, the clothing is washed in a machine with fist-size pumice stones impregnated with chlorine solution, which removes some of the dye and leaves the garment lighter in color with white spots and streaks—inspiring the name “acid wash,” although no acid is actually used.

Activase TPA (*noun*)

Introduced by Genentech in 1988, Activase TPA is a biotech drug that dissolves blood clots that damage heart muscles.

ACT UP (*noun*)

Acronym for Aids Coalition to Unleash Power. Founded by playwright Larry Kramer to press for increased government involvement in the fight against the AIDS epidemic; ACT UP deliberately focuses on the homosexual aspect of the disease, employing confrontational demonstrations known as *zaps*.

ADRMP (*noun*)

Acronym for automatic dialing recorded message program. A computer-software program used in telemarketing, ADRMPs can dial hundreds of telephone numbers per day to make a recorded sales pitch. As a result of public complaints, many states are passing legislation against the practice.

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advid ADD-vid (*noun*)

An advertising videotape, most frequently used to demonstrate the strong points of an applicant for college or a job. In 1988 U.S. colleges and universities reported receiving advids from about 5 percent of their would-be freshmen or graduate students.

aeroshell (*noun*)

The outer structure for the aerospace vehicle scheduled to replace the space shuttle by the year 2000. Covered by the aeroshell, the new vehicle will be lightweight, rocket-propelled, reusable, and functional under all weather conditions, announced the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

affinity card (*noun*)

A bank credit card offered in conjunction with a nonprofit or charitable organization. Banks that sponsor affinity cards donate a percentage of all purchases charged with the cards to such organizations as the March of Dimes, the Sierra Club, or one of the political parties.

afterburst (*noun*)

The phenomenon presumed to follow a nuclear war, in which radioactivity would be released into the earth's atmosphere, water, and soil, as well as into the tissues of all animal and plant life, there to remain indefinitely.

Afro-pop (*noun*)

Contemporary African music that incorporates traditional elements and instruments in combination with such electronic devices as synthesizers and electric guitars.

AgendaTM (*noun*)

One of a new generation of computer software dubbed by its maker "a personal information manager." Using aspects of traditional programs without their rigid rules, these new systems enable users to compile and correlate huge amounts of information into personal data bases.

aging gene (*noun*)

Term used by medical researchers for the as-yet-unidentified substance that creates the signs of old age in mammals: gray hair, wrinkles, brittle bones, menopause, etc.

agita AJ-it-uh (*noun*)

An Italian word meaning, simply, acid indigestion. Agita is gaining currency as a description of the distress induced by unpleasant social circumstances, such as dealing with an overbearing boss or anticipating the visit of one's mother-in-law.

agrigenetics (*noun*)

Biotechnical research in plant breeding; the attempt to control plant evolution by genetic manipulation and gene splicing to provide desirable new varieties, such as a (still experimental) strain of wheat with the soybean's capability of fertilizing its own roots with airborne nitrogen. Agrigeneticists have produced such new agricultural items as a redder, less watery commercial tomato and disease-resistant sugar cane.

agrimation (*noun*)

A compound of *agriculture* and *automation*. The use of sophisticated robots in farming to do work requiring judgment and sensitive dexterity formerly possible only with human labor—from harvesting crops to caring for a dairy herd.

aircraft carrier (*noun*)

A star basketball center who excels at handling the ball, making baskets, and playing defense.

akachochin (*noun*)

Japanese for red-lantern restaurant, from the traditional red paper lantern that hangs in front. An akachochin is a small establishment, often only a counter with stools, sometimes outdoors, that serves sake, beer, and yakitori (charcoal-broiled chicken).

A-list (*noun*)

The most important people in a specific field; thus, in Washington, D.C., the A-list might include the top-ranking

4 all hat and no cattle

members of the diplomatic corps, the nation's most powerful politicians, and the city's leading socialites. A Manhattan A-list would not only consist of high-society figures but real-estate barons and Broadway luminaries. The Barbra Streisand film *Nuts*, said *Newsweek*, was "a classic example of A-list Hollywood turning out what it thinks is Important Entertainment."

all hat and no cattle (*colloquialism*)

A descriptive phrase from the American Southwest, applying to a person whose assets are mostly on the surface.

alley apple (*noun*)

A slang term meaning a loose brick or rock, especially when the brick is used as a projectile.

allophone (*noun*)

any person who does not speak French, especially in Canada, where the use of French, particularly in government communications, is an important political issue.

ambisonic am-buh-SON-ik (*adjective*)

Describing a form of high-fidelity sound reproduction that, by electronically simulating the directional attributes of the sound waves it disseminates, gives the listener the impression he is in the center of a group of instruments or singers. Ambisonic music is sometimes called "surround sound."

American Eagle (*noun*)

The gold and silver bullion coin issued by the U.S. Mint. The one-ounce and one-half-ounce gold coins are 91.6 percent gold and are engraved with the figure of Liberty by sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens with the American eagle on the reverse. The face of the one-ounce silver coin features A.A. Weinman's "Walking Liberty," which appeared on the silver half-dollar from 1916 to 1947.

animal (*noun*)

Politicians' and journalists' term for a reporter, technician, or photographer who accompanies candidates on flying campaign trips. Animals are a shade lower in the hierarchy of the

trade than the politicians and top-level newspeople whom they often follow in a “zoo plane,” a second, far less luxurious aircraft than that allotted their colleagues.

animal rights movement (*noun*)

A burgeoning worldwide crusade that teaches that the pleasure or pain felt by animals is as important as the pleasure or pain felt by human beings. Animal rights activists have launched recent strenuous campaigns against laboratory experimentation on animals, seal hunting, and *factory farming*.

ankle (*verb*)

Slang expression meaning to quit, to leave a job. “Peter Trueman, news anchor at indie Global TV web for 15 years, has ankled effective June 30.” (*Variety*)

anti-sense medicine (*noun*)

An experimental science that looks to target and block bad genes, such as cancer-causing oncogenes, much as correcting tape blocks out a typographical error. By using an inverted piece of the gene code to lock onto potentially dangerous genetic messengers, their ability to cause harm can be canceled out.

appliance garage (*noun*)

A custom kitchen cabinet designed expressly to house small, frequently used appliances.

Arabsat (*noun*)

A radio-relay satellite owned by the Arab Satellite Communications Organization.

arb (*noun*)

Abbreviation for arbitrageur, or risk arbitrageur, a Wall Street trader who seeks profits from buying and quickly selling stocks in companies that announce merger plans.

arena football (*noun*)

A version of football played indoors on an artificial turf field measuring 150 x 85 feet (half the size of a regulation field). The

6 Argentine method

field boasts high nets on either side of nine-foot-wide goalposts and foam-padded sideline barriers like hockey boards. Eight players on each side play both offense and defense with the exception of the quarterback and kicker; missed field goals bounce off the end-zone nets and back into play, and the clock runs as in hockey, stopping only for time outs, substitutions, scores, penalties, and injuries.

Argentine method (noun)

The practice in some Latin American countries of secretly kidnapping and executing people without trial. So-called from the "dirty war" in which government death squads "disappeared" more than 12,000 Argentines suspected of undesirable political activity.

aristology (noun)

"The science of dining or the art of eating well," according to food authority Craig Claiborne, who quotes an essay on aristology asserting that "the number of guests at a meal should not exceed eight and ideally there should be only six so that the conversation may be general."

Arkie (noun)

The computer-games industry's equivalent of an Oscar. Arkie winners are selected by a reader poll conducted by *Electronic Games* magazine.

arms supermarket (noun)

An international arrangement designed to supply arms to the Nicaraguan contras. *Newsweek* defined the market as "an unlikely partnership involving longtime CIA arms merchants, agents of the Israeli Mossad secret service and the intelligence arm of the Honduran military . . . financed at least in part with drug money."

aromatherapy (noun)

Introduced as an exclusive treatment with aromatic facials of floral and herbal masks individually blended to harmonize with a particular client's skin type, aromatherpy was said by *Vogue* to be "aimed at energizing or calming the skin *and* the

spirits." Now major cosmetics firms have come out with mass-market fragrances that are, they claim, scientifically proven to affect people's moods and behavior.

Artagraph (noun)

A patented process for reproducing oil paintings with extremely high fidelity. A laser light-filtering technique is used to copy the colors, which are printed on an oil-based foil and heat-transferred onto canvas. The facsimile has exactly the same texture as the original, with brush strokes, impasto, or palette-knife applications all faithfully duplicated, and finer color reproduction than has ever before been possible. The Artagraph process has been used by A.R.T., Inc., of Toronto to copy masterpieces at Britain's National Gallery and the Hermitage museum in Russia.

artificial gill (noun)

An experimental system for extracting oxygen from seawater; its future application is expected to be in making available unlimited oxygen supplies for divers and submarines.

artspeak (noun)

The vocabulary used by those hoping to sound knowledgeable about art. Artspeak, says artist, lecturer, and wit William Quinn, allows you to "sound halfway intelligent about art when you're not." Quinn, who teaches New Yorkers how to talk at art galleries and museums, advises his students to avoid such terms as "incredible," "cool," and "totally awesome." "Interesting" is a more effective word, he says, "especially when uttered with the head cocked and a hand cupping the chin contemplatively."

artsport (noun)

A form of modern dance that uses movements usually associated with athletics or gymnastics.

asham uh-SHAHM (noun)

A Jamaican powdered confection made from grinding together brown sugar and dried roasted corn.