

NEW

NTC's Dictionary of Euphemisms

Anne Bertram

The Most Practical
Guide to
Unraveling Euphemisms



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Introduction

Euphemisms are entertaining because they show the weaknesses of people who design words and expressions in order to avoid being direct, obvious, or literal. Not only are euphemistic expressions entertaining, but they are alleged to reveal what people *really* think and to show to the outside world bits of deep-seated modesty lurking in the remote corners of the subconsciousness. Euphemisms, though, represent all sorts of verbal avoidances and sincere efforts to avoid producing negative reactions to one's words—a big order these days.

In this pluralistic society, there are probably as many interpretations of the cultural significance of euphemisms as there are euphemisms. Euphemisms and their uses mean different things to different people; you are free to make your own interpretation.

This collection includes examples of the most widespread and widely celebrated categories of euphemism, such as death, drunkenness, and pregnancy, as well as a few terms for the downstairs body parts and noisier body processes. It focuses not only on tabooed words and expressions, but on mundane verbal pussy-footing, politically correct words and phrases, and innocent expressions that really *do* have some cultural significance.

Whereas this book does not take a position for or against specific euphemisms or the use of euphemisms in general, it will probably irk some people by labeling as euphemistic some of the more frequently heard shibboleths of political correctness. So be it. *Server*

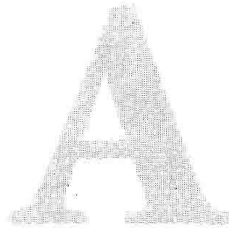
(waiter and waitress) and *pass away* (die) are both classic expressions of verbal avoidance that are meant to be substituted for less desirable terms or concepts. It is important to note that most euphemisms have a literal meaning; however, only the euphemistic meaning is included in these pages.

This collection is brand new, up-to-date, and unique in that it covers more than just the lewd or attention-getting euphemisms. Each concise definition is followed by at least two example sentences that illustrate the use of the euphemism in everyday language. A thematic index at the back of the book lists entries under 32 broad themes that allow the reader to get a good idea of the use of euphemism in various categories.

This book is especially useful for the learner of English and for writers, as well as anyone interested in words or the English language in general.

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abbatoir a slaughterhouse. (French.) □ *The crime scene looked like an abbatoir.* □ *The beef is shipped directly from the abbatoir in refrigerated trucks.*

abdomen the belly; the visible stomach. □ *The doctor felt the patient's abdomen.* □ *I had terrible cramps in my abdomen.*

abdominal protector a cup worn to protect the penis and testicles. (See also (athletic) supporter, cache-sexe, cup.) □ *All the boys on the Little League team had to wear abdominal protectors.* □ *Joe forgot his abdominal protector, so the coach wouldn't let him in the game, fearing that he would get hurt.*

aberration sexual intercourse with a person of the same sex. (Offensive to homosexual people.) □ *Despite his youthful aberrations, Jim married and became the father of a happy family.* □ *The gossip hinted at some aberration in Jane's private life.*

ableism a prejudice against people who cannot walk or move easily. (See also handicappism.) □ *Debbie uses a wheelchair. When she was looking for a job recently, she was upset*

by the ableism of many of the job interviewers. □ Bill thought that his coworkers' insensitive jokes revealed their ableism.

above critical [of a nuclear reactor] melting down. □ *One second more, and the reactor would have been above critical. □ If the power plant is above critical, it won't do any good to evacuate the personnel.*

abstinence the practice of refraining from sexual intercourse. □ *The counselor recommended abstinence as a very effective birth control method. □ The book encouraged young people to practice abstinence.*

abuse someone to rape someone. (Note: **abuse** does not always mean *rape*. Judge from the context.) □ *That awful man had been abusing his stepdaughter since she was six years old. □ The invading soldiers killed all the men in the village and abused the women.*

AC/DC bisexual. (Slang.) □ *LINDA: I thought Jim was gay. JOE: No. He's AC/DC. □ I heard that Angela was AC/DC, and I didn't want her flirting with my girlfriend.*

acceptable damage AND **acceptable losses** wartime damage that would not destroy the armed forces. □ *At present, the enemy's first strike capability would produce acceptable damage. □ The general indicated that the fifty thousand casualties were within the range of acceptable losses.*

acceptable losses See acceptable damage.

accident 1. an unplanned pregnancy. □ *Their fourth child was an accident. □ Did they intend to have a baby so soon after getting married, or was it an accident?* **2.** urination or defecation in an inappropriate place. □ *Billy had an accident in the middle of the night. □ The dog has had an accident right next to the front door.*

accost someone [for a prostitute] to ask someone for business. □ *Three different women accosted me as I walked down 42nd Street.* □ *The sex worker regularly worked Linden Park, accosting likely customers.*

accouchement the act of giving birth. (French. Old-fashioned.) □ *The time was drawing near for her accouchement.* □ *Her mother came to stay with her and to help with her accouchement.*

account for someone to kill someone. □ *The soldier accounted for six of the enemy.* □ *One of our sharpshooters accounted for the sniper.*

a certain number of years young a certain number of years old. (Cute.) □ *This lovely lady is eighty-three years young today.* □ *My father, God bless him, is seventy-eight years young.*

acquire something to steal something. (Note: **acquire** does not always mean *steal*. Judge from the context.) □ *I, uh, acquired this software from the computer at work.* □ *Jill acquired a Cadillac convertible from somewhere, even though she couldn't possibly have afforded it.*

acquisitiveness greed. □ *Joe's acquisitiveness got him into trouble when he tried to take business away from the powerful company.* □ *Not even the purchase of her third home could satisfy Jane's acquisitiveness.*

action 1. violence. □ *Jill likes movies with action. I prefer love stories.* □ *That TV show always has lots of action, like gunfights and car chases.* **2.** battle. □ *Our unit last saw action in February.* □ *The soldier was killed in enemy action.*

action figure a doll, especially one intended for boys. □ *The Soldier Joe toy helicopter comes with everything you see*

here. Action figures sold separately. □ Jimmy wants a Space Patrol action figure for his birthday.

active 1. engaging in sexual intercourse. □ Jim has been active since he was fourteen. □ The nurse asked me if I was active, and if I needed birth control. **2.** [of an old person] doing many things. □ Grandma is still spry and active, bless her heart. Just this spring, she went on a Pacific cruise. □ Mr. Simmons is eighty-two, but alert and active.

active euthanasia the giving of pain-killing drugs in increasing doses, in order to kill the person who is taking them. (Compare with **passive euthanasia**.) □ The doctor considered active euthanasia to be immoral. □ The patient, who was in great pain, requested active euthanasia.

activist a person who fights for a political cause, and may be willing to break the law in order to do so. □ Anti-abortion activists were suspected of vandalizing the abortion clinic. □ Environmental activists prevented the loggers from cutting down the trees.

act of love an act of sexual intercourse. (Similarly: act of shame, bit of fun, coition, conjugal rites, conversation, fun and games, horizontal exercise, nooky, roll in the hay. See also **catch someone in the act**, (sexual) **act**.) □ The young man was inexperienced in the act of love. □ The newlyweds were too exhausted by the wedding festivities to perform the act of love.

actor a man or woman who acts in plays or movies. (Replaces *actor* for men and *actress* for women.) □ Jane is an actor with training in Shakespeare and the classical theater. □ The director needed five actors, two men and three women.

act out to behave badly. (Usually used to describe young people.) □ *Your son has been acting out in the classroom, and we feel that professional intervention is desirable.* □ *After their mother died, the kids acted out in a number of ways. Mary started smoking, and Billy was caught shoplifting.*

adipose fat; heavy. □ *Bill has a medical condition which makes him adipose.* □ *After Ellen stopped exercising and started eating all those sweets, she became downright adipose.*

adjourn to take a break in order to urinate or defecate. (Jocular. Note: **adjourn** does not always have this meaning. Judge from the context.) □ *Excuse me while I adjourn. I'll be back in a minute.* □ *May we adjourn? I need to use the ladies' room.*

adjustment a decrease. (See **technical adjustment**, **workforce adjustment**, **currency adjustment**, **inventory leakage**.) □ *The memo stated that an adjustment in the number of personnel would be taking place in the next six months.* □ *Owing to the stock market adjustment, your account shows negative growth for the month of October.*

adjust one's dress to fasten up the zipper on one's pants. (British.) □ *Please adjust your dress before leaving the lavatory.* □ *"You may want to adjust your dress," Nigel warned me when I came out of the W.C.*

administrative assistant a secretary. □ *My administrative assistant will set up the appointment.* □ *The budget spreadsheets were prepared by Jill's administrative assistant.*

adult pornographic. (See also **(adult) novelty**.) □ *That theater shows adult movies.* □ *You must be 21 years old to purchase adult magazines.*

adultism a bias against children. □ *Wayne's adultism kept him from realizing that children are intelligent and capable.* □ *JANE: Kids shouldn't be able to decide what parent they want to live with after a divorce. They don't know what's good for them.* *CHARLES: That remark smacks of adultism.*

(adult) novelty a sex toy. (See also **adult**.) □ *This catalog carries enticing lingerie, erotic videos, and a variety of novelties.* □ *At Susan's wedding shower, her friends surprised her with funny gifts, including a few adult novelties.*

advanced in years old. □ *Mrs. Sanders is considerably advanced in years, but she is well able to take care of herself.* □ *The librarian was a kind gentleman, quite advanced in years.*

adversary, the Satan. □ *Some days, I tell you, I feel that computers were sent into this world by the adversary himself.* □ *If the adversary tempts you, resist him.*

adviser a soldier. (Note: **adviser** does not always mean soldier. Judge from the context.) □ *The United States sent five thousand advisers into the disputed territory.* □ *The Marine Corps is sending advisers at the request of the prime minister.*

aesthetically advantaged good looking. (Usually jocular.) □ *He was tall, dark, and aesthetically advantaged.* □ *When she was a teenager, Linda learned that being aesthetically advantaged could be a problem when it came to making true friends. Everyone seemed to like her for her looks alone.*

aesthetic procedure cosmetic surgery. (See also **cosmetic surgery**, **plastic surgery**, **procedure**.) □ *Have you considered an aesthetic procedure to reduce the size of your chin?* □ *Dr. Jones specializes in aesthetic procedures.*

affair sexual relations outside of marriage. □ *He discovered that his wife was having an affair.* □ *The two co-workers tried to conceal the fact that they were having an affair.*

affirmative action a policy that favors women and minorities. □ *There was a rumor that Jane was hired because of affirmative action, and not on her own merits.* □ *The school follows affirmative action in its admissions policies.*

affordable cheap. □ *The car has many luxury features, but is surprisingly affordable.* □ *A number of units in this building have been set aside as affordable housing for people on welfare.*

afterlife AND **afterworld** the life after death. □ *Many mourners accompanied the deceased on his journey to the afterlife.* □ *The dying man hoped to see his parents and his brother in the afterworld.*

afterthought an unplanned baby. □ *They had three children one right after the other. Then, ten years later, Andy came along, an afterthought.* □ *My next oldest brother is almost fifteen years older than me. I was an afterthought.*

afterworld See afterlife.

ageism a bias against old people. □ *You shouldn't treat old people as if they're stupid. That's ageism!* □ *Again and again, the company refused to give promotions to employees over the age of 50. This ageism was the basis of a lawsuit brought by the employees who had been discriminated against.*

agent 1. a deadly poison. □ *The nerve agent could cause death in fifteen seconds.* □ *As a result of the accident, a chemical agent was released into the atmosphere.* **2.** a spy. □ *A number of agents were assigned to monitor radio broadcasts*

from the capital. □ The ambassador's secretary was, in reality, an enemy agent.

aging old. □ *The aging residents of the neighborhood were concerned about crime in the area. □ Bill is aging. He isn't as active as he was when he was younger.*

aid money given from one country to another. □ *The parliament voted to send aid to Mexico. □ We are sending humanitarian aid. None of it may be used to purchase weapons.*

air support the dropping of bombs from airplanes. □ *The Air Force unit will provide air support. □ After we have weakened the city's defenses with air support, the ground troops can move in.*

all there alert, aware, and mentally sound. (Usually in the phrase *not all there*, not mentally sound.) □ *After talking with Larry today, I get the feeling that he's not quite all there. □ You do such foolish things sometimes! I wonder if you're all there.*

almighty "damned." □ *If you're so almighty smart, you figure it out! □ He's almighty heartless when it comes to business dealings.*

Almighty, the God. □ *Trust in the Almighty. □ They got down on their knees and prayed to the Almighty.*

alter to remove the testicles or uterus of an animal so that it cannot reproduce. □ *Fluffy can't have kittens. We had her altered. □ The animal lovers' organization debated whether or not it was cruel to alter house pets.*

alternative controversial. □ *The health insurance policy does not pay for alternative medicine, such as massage or*

homeopathy. □ Jane lives with her boyfriend and their baby. She calls it “an alternative living arrangement.” Her grandmother calls it “living in sin.”

alternative container a plain box or bag used for burying a person. □ If you choose cremation without a viewing, you may wish to save on the expense of a casket and purchase an alternative container instead. □ She did not want a fancy or expensive funeral. Her will stated that she wanted to be buried in an alternative container.

alternative energy source a fuel other than oil, gas, or coal. □ If your home is heated using an alternative energy source, you may be entitled to a special tax credit. □ The utility company is exploring a number of alternative energy sources, such as wind and solar power.

Alzheimer’s (disease) a disease that destroys the memory. (Replaces *senile dementia*.) □ I’m in shock. My mother has been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease. □ Mr. Lawrence suffers from Alzheimer’s. He may wander off on his own and get lost if someone doesn’t look after him.

ambidextrous bisexual. (A play on words. Ambidextrous usually means *able to write with either hand*. See also **ambivalent**.) □ JIM: Is Bill interested in men? JANE: Let’s just say he’s ambidextrous. □ The rock singer was widely supposed to be ambidextrous. There were many rumors about her affairs with both women and men.

ambivalent bisexual. (See also **ambidextrous**.) □ Until he was seventeen, Jason was sure that he was straight. Then he got a crush on one of his soccer teammates, and decided he was ambivalent. □ Although Lydia is married, she is ambivalent in her sexual preferences.

amenities a toilet. □ *We soon discovered why the hotel room was so cheap. It lacked the amenities.* □ *Does the cabin have amenities?*

amour a sexual relationship outside of marriage. (French.) □ *Don Juan was famous for his amours.* □ *I gather that Aunt Sarah had numerous amours in her youth.*

amour propre self-centeredness; selfishness. (French. Literally *self love*.) □ *Mary tells wonderful stories about herself and her adventures, but after a while, one tires of her boundless amour propre.* □ *Larry thought that nothing but the best was good enough for him. This amour propre led him almost to bankruptcy.*

ample fat; large. □ *He eased his ample bottom into the chair.* □ *The women in Rubens' paintings are generally of ample proportions.*

anatomical gift a gift of one's dead body or organs to a hospital or medical school. □ *His will stated that he wished to make an anatomical gift.* □ *You may sign the back of your driver's license to indicate that you are willing to make an anatomical gift.*

anatomically correct [of a picture or figure] showing the genitals. □ *The therapist used anatomically correct dolls to talk to the children about sexual abuse.* □ *These baby dolls are anatomically correct.*

anatomy the genitals, especially the penis. □ *"I didn't care for the nude beach," said Nancy. "I didn't like having to see everyone's anatomy just hanging out."* □ *We were impressed by the size of the horse's anatomy.*

angler a person who fishes. (Replaces *fisherman*, which does not include women.) □ *Dozens of anglers were out on*

the lake. □ *The anglers gathered at the bar to discuss the day's catch.*

Anglo-Saxon swear words. (Many swear words in English come from the Anglo-Saxon language.) □ *When I told him I wouldn't pay for such shoddy work, he treated me to a burst of Anglo-Saxon.* □ *I was surprised that such a young girl would have such a fine command of Anglo-Saxon.*

animal control the catching and killing of unwanted animals. □ *The Department of Animal Control publishes a pamphlet on how to get rid of rats.* □ *There is hardly any animal control in the city. Starving stray cats and dogs live in all the alleys.*

anomaly something wrong. □ *The reporter found some anomalies in the police file on the suspect.* □ *A radar anomaly made it appear as if a plane were approaching, when in reality, there was nothing there.*

answer the call to die. (Folksy. See also **call, the**.) □ *Grandma answered the call and went home.* □ *Our dear brother has answered the call and gone to his eternal rest.*

anticipating pregnant. □ *It's easy to get worried about many things when you're anticipating.* □ *BILL: Do you know when Mary's baby is due? JILL: I didn't even know she was anticipating!*

anticipatory attack an attack. (See also **preventive strike**.) □ *We staged an anticipatory attack to prevent the enemy from attacking first.* □ *The anticipatory attack caught the enemy forces completely by surprise.*

antipersonnel designed to kill people. □ *At what point should the antipersonnel weapons be deployed?* □ *This antipersonnel device is designed to leave buildings unharmed.*