

*trash cash*

A D I C T I O N A R Y

*fizzbos* *and*

O F T O D A Y ' S

*flatliners*

W O R D S

*Sid Lerner, Gary S. Belkin*

AND THE EDITORS OF THE  
AMERICAN HERITAGE DICTIONARIES

# **Trash Cash, Fizzbos, and Flatliners**

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## **A DICTIONARY OF TODAY'S WORDS**

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by Sid Lerner, Gary S. Belkin,  
and The Editors of the  
American Heritage Dictionaries



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# Acknowledgments

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# Introduction

Keeping up to date with the English language is a task that never ends, as anyone who compiles and edits dictionaries can confirm. Life keeps changing, and English hustles to keep up with new coinages, reinventions, and reshaping of the language. Science, technology, politics, communications, computers — all keep developing and requiring fresh vocabulary to fit the new developments. Slang and street language are in a perpetual state of unpredictable novelty and recycling that manages to keep insiders in the know and outsiders mystified. *Trash Cash, Fizzbos, and Flatliners: A Dictionary of Today's Words* captures this language on the wing, before it can vanish or before it has become established and recorded in standard lexicons. It is a dictionary of the moment, intended as a useful and entertaining supplement to the familiar dictionary kept in the home, office, or school.

Every new edition of a standard dictionary contains its share of new vocabulary that has withstood the test of time. For example, the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition*, published in 1992, has 16,000 entries or meanings added since its previous edition. Since a standard dictionary is published in a new edition only at intervals of some years, and since space within the dictionary is limited, there is for the most part no room left over for the ephemeral. A bright new coinage will have to stay around for a while to justify its inclusion. Short-lived slogans, slang, and catch phrases may perish unrecorded.

# **A Dictionary of Today's Words**

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This is where *Trash Cash, Fizzbos, and Flatliners: A Dictionary of Today's Words* makes its special contribution: it takes a snapshot of newly minted language, analyzing and defining it while it is still fresh. The authors, Sid Lerner and Gary S. Belkin, along with their corps of citation-gatherers, have explored books, magazines, newspapers, pamphlets, advertisements, catalogs, product labels, and any other reading matter that came to hand in their search for new vocabulary. They have listened to radio and television and to conversations on buses, subways, trains, and planes. They have picked it up in sports arenas and at rock concerts and computer conventions. They have accessed information-retrieval databases.

The hardest job has been exclusion, rather than inclusion. Sometimes a term seemed too made-up for a specific occasion or circumstance to warrant its inclusion (for example, **hairshift**: a shift in discussion of a political candidate from the candidate's political views to the candidate's hair style, or **flag bait**: patriotic imagery, as of the stars and stripes, used to attract votes). Other terminology generally omitted is in the specialized vocabulary of obscure or highly technical fields. In a book like *Trash Cash, Fizzbos, and Flatliners: A Dictionary of Today's Words*, with a limited number of pages, a balance must be struck between the serious and the frivolous.

We have tried to present a cross section that demonstrates the constant vigor and originality of English vocabulary building. There are many quoted examples of usage in this book. Pronunciations, respelled in a simplified and easy-to-understand system, have been provided when it seemed they would be useful. The practices of traditional lexicography have been applied throughout to clarify the definitions. A very valuable feature of the book is its Index, divided into several subsections to give a quick overview of new words covered in particular fields.

The editors will be glad to hear from readers who wish to comment upon an entry in this book. Suggestions for new entries, accompanied whenever possible by printed examples of actual usage, will be most welcome. They can be sent to Sid Lerner, c/o Reference Department, Houghton Mifflin Company, One Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108. Unfortunately, it is not possible to give either compensation or credit for such contributions.

*Trash Cash, Fizzbos, and Flatliners: A Dictionary of Today's Words*, is, finally, meant to be fun to read. We hope it will on many occasions provide the meaning for a new word you have just come across. But just as often, we hope you will find it simply a source for happy browsing.

Robert B. Costello, Executive Editor  
American Heritage Dictionaries

# A

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**abb** *noun*

(*Surfer Slang*) An abnormal person; weirdo.

**A-Beijing virus** *noun*

A virus strain that causes a type of flu (**Beijing flu**) that has a higher than usual death rate and is somewhat more resistant to standard flu shots than other strains.

**ableist language** *noun*

Language that is presumably insensitive to disabled or handicapped individuals, such as saying to a blind person, "Do you see what I mean?"

**abortion pill** *noun*

See RU 486.

**abortuary** *noun*

A clinic where abortions are performed. A term used by opponents of abortion. [From *abortion* + *mortuary*]

**ABS** *noun*

An automobile safety feature that uses a computer to control the wheels during emergency braking to prevent them from locking. [Abbreviation of Antilock Braking System] Also called **anti-locking brakes**.

**accelerated death benefits** *noun*

See LIVING NEEDS BENEFITS.

**acceptional child** *noun*

A variant of the phrase "exceptional child," indicating a youngster with special problems that need attention in the school or in clinical settings. This variant spelling is intended to stress the idea of acceptance, as opposed to the presumed exclusionary implications of exceptionality.

**ACE inhibitor** (ays) *noun*

Any of a class of drugs (technically, angiotensin converting enzymes) that are used in treating high blood pressure and have recently been designated by the FDA as dangerous for pregnant women. [From **A**ngiotensin **C**onverting **E**nzyme]

**acoustical oceanography** *noun*

A new branch of oceanography that deals with the sources, physics, and distribution of sound waves in ocean waters. The acoustic phenomena under the ocean's surface reveal a wealth of climatological and historical information about the planet earth. See MICROBUBBLES.

**active-optics mirror** *noun*

A flexible mirror used in ground-based reflecting telescopes. Using an adaptive optic technology, these mirrors respond to information from a light sensor, bulging and dipping to compensate for the natural distortions in the light reaching it from faraway planets and stars.

**addiction medicine** *noun*

A new branch of psychiatry specializing in the treatment of addictive disorders, such as substance abuse or compulsive gambling. The American Board of Psychiatry and Neu-

rology now offers a certification examination for psychiatrists who wish to be recognized as specialists in this new field.

**ADHD** *noun*

A syndrome that chiefly affects children and is characterized by short attention span, easy distractibility, and physical restlessness. [Abbreviation of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder]

**adult gamedy** (GAY-muh-dee) *noun*

A late-night, sexually charged television program, as "Studs" or "Personals," that is an updated version of the older dating game format.

**advance directive** *noun*

A written instruction by a medical patient stating in advance what kind of medical treatment he or she wants or does not want in the event the patient becomes incapable of communicating intentions and wishes during the course of treatment.

**AFM** *noun*

A new instrument that uses an atomic-sized tip that resembles a phonograph needle to read a surface by touching it and then tracing outlines of its atomic structure on a computer screen. [Abbreviation of Atomic Force Microscope] Also called **atomic force microscope**. See OPTICAL MOLASSES; OPTICAL TWEEZERS; STM.

**African snail** *noun*

See GIANT AFRICAN SNAIL.

**Agenda 21** *noun*

A major environmental cleanup plan for the 21st century that has been the subject of new and expert analysis, strong

public support and criticism, and political maneuvering over the past ten years. Various efforts by the 12 nations of the European Community, the US, and many of the Latin American and Third World countries have yet to establish a date or method of implementation.

**AG\*SAT** *noun*

An educational satellite-delivery system, named for the Agricultural Satellite Corp. of Lincoln, Nebraska, a consortium that operates the system for 37 of the nation's land-grant universities. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, in 1991 about 70,000 people, using AG\*SAT, took courses at home ranging from agricultural marketing to hog-manure management, from schools such as Pennsylvania State and Iowa State. See DISTANCE EDUCATION; LEARNING CIRCLES.

**AirLand Battle** *noun*

A multi-force military strategy, integrating naval, air, and land forces, deployed successfully for the first time during the Persian Gulf War. Developed as a theoretical model by the Pentagon in the 1970s and 80s but never before tested in combat, the AirLand Battle strategy positions the thrust of an attack against the enemy's rear lines and support reserves, with the goal of making the enemy's front line vulnerable to attack by weakening its underpinnings from the rear.

**Alar** *noun*

A trademark for a chemical preservative (daminozide) used on fruit. It has recently become the source of controversy after being identified as a potentially carcinogenic agent. Products marketed as "Alar-free" are not supposed to show any traces of this preservative.

**alternative dentation** *noun*

False teeth. A bias-free term.

**alternative rock** *noun*

A category of rock music that includes a blend of metal, heavy metal, and mainstream pop and is generally performed by regional bands, such as "Nirvana," that achieve some degree of fame by their signing to large labels or sudden and unexpected success of a regional album.

**American Ecowriter** *noun*

A new type of pencil, manufactured by Eberhard Faber and marketed as environmentally friendly, in which the barrel is made from recycled newspaper and cardboard instead of wood and the ring around the eraser is recyclable. Also called **Ecowriter**.

**AMT** *noun*

A minimum tax that certain taxpayers have to pay, based solely on income and earnings and without regard to allowable deductions. [Abbreviation of Alternative Minimum Tax]

**amyloid beta protein** *noun*

A toxic brain chemical that accumulates in concentrated plaques in the brains of people suffering from Alzheimer's disease.

**ANI** *noun*

A business telephone service that automatically accesses the appropriate customer record associated with a calling number. For example, if you call your stock broker from your office phone, as soon as the broker answers, your portfolio file, which is keyed in the system to that phone num-

ber, is retrieved from the computer and displayed on the screen. The practical value of the service is in its speed in automatically retrieving the correct account at the instant a call is being answered. [Abbreviation of Automatic Number Identification]

**animal companion** *noun*

An alternative designation for what is traditionally called a "pet." Also called **companion animal**.

**animalist** *noun*

An advocate for animal rights.

**animal lookism** *noun*

A bias toward protecting, pampering, or adopting members of attractive animal species rather than those of less attractive species. See **BIOCENTRISM**; **SPECIESISM**.

**animatronic toy** *noun*

A toy or game featuring CD-I technology for high image and sound quality. Animatronic toys are a growing category of new play products for children that is being "spurred on by the success of Nintendo," according to *Toy and Hobby* magazine. See **CD-I**.

**Anonymous Call Rejection** *noun*

A new telephone service that will automatically disconnect callers who try to mask their telephone numbers from receiving systems such as Caller ID or ANI. See **ANI**; **CALLER ID**.

**antenna shop** *noun*

A retail store in Japan that is run by manufacturers for the sole purpose of introducing new product ideas to consumers for their reactions (as reported in *Advertising Age*)



An antenna shop does not have products available for sale, unlike an outlet store, which has manufacturers' merchandise for sale at a discount.

**anticipointment** *noun*

A term coined by television executive George Schweitzer to describe "what happens when a television network sells expectations to a major level, achieves something less than that, and leaves everyone disappointed."

**anti-locking brakes** *noun*

See ABS.

**anti-slasher law** *noun*

A law aimed at controlling the distribution and viewing, especially among minors, of excessively violent videotapes, as *Friday the 13th* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*.

**anti-stalking law** *noun*

Legislation, already approved in several states and before legislatures of many others, prohibiting the persistent following or harassing of one person by another.

**appointment television** *noun*

A television programming term descriptive of viewers who plan in advance to watch certain programs, as opposed to those who uncritically watch whatever is on at any time. Appointment television viewers are considered a more sophisticated audience group, one that is highly desirable to marketers.

**appropriation art** *noun*

Art created by photographing photographs appropriated from magazines, advertisements, and other media sources. See REPHOTOGRAPHY.