

Contacts for Word of the Year:

# American Dialect Society

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## **“Hashtag” 2012 Word of the Year, as voted by American Dialect Society**

BOSTON MARIOTT COPLEY PLACE—JAN. 4—In its 23rd annual words of the year vote, the American Dialect Society voted “*hashtag*” as the word of the year for 2012. *Hashtag* refers to the practice used on Twitter for marking topics or making commentary by means of a hash symbol (#) followed by a word or phrase.

Presiding at the Jan. 4 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 and executive producer of the Visual Thesaurus and Vocabulary.com. Zimmer is also a language columnist for the *Boston Globe*.

“This was the year when the *hashtag* became a ubiquitous phenomenon in online talk,” Zimmer said. “In the Twittersphere and elsewhere, hashtags have created instant social trends, spreading bite-sized viral messages on topics ranging from politics to pop culture.”

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 124-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 “*Sandy*” as Name of the Year for 2012 in its ninth annual name-of-the-year contest. It refers to the superstorm that ravaged the East Coast.

## 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

**YOLO:** acronym for “You Only Live Once,” often used sarcastically or self-deprecatingly 32  
**fiscal cliff:** threat of spending cuts and tax increases looming over end-of-year budget negotiations 25

**\*#hashtag:** a word or phrase preceded by a hash symbol (#), used on Twitter to mark a topic or make a commentary 45/118

**Gangnam style:** the trendy style of Seoul’s Gangnam district, as used in the Korean pop song of the same name 19

**marriage equality:** legal recognition of same-sex marriage 57/99

**47 percent:** portion of the population that does not pay federal income tax 31

### MOST USEFUL

**YOLO:** acronym for “You Only Live Once,” often used sarcastically or self-deprecatingly 59/62

**\* -(po)calypse, -(ma)geddon:** hyperbolic combining forms for various catastrophes 66/115

**hate-watching:** continuing to follow a television show despite having an aversion to it 39/

**beardruff:** dandruff from one’s beard 10

### MOST CREATIVE

**mansplaining:** a man’s condescending explanation to a female audience 54/90

**alpocalypse:** the Mayan apocalypse predicted for Dec. 21, 2012 (*alpaca* + *-lypse*) 50

**\*gate lice:** airline passengers who crowd around a gate waiting to board 53/93

**dancelexia:** inability to pull off dance moves (such as misspelling “YMCA”) 36

### MOST UNNECESSARY

**\*legitimate rape:** type of rape that Missouri Senate candidate Todd Akin claimed rarely results in pregnancy 94

**Frankenstorm:** term for Hurricane Sandy’s hybrid storm system (after Frankenstein’s monster) 14

**HD:** abbreviation for “high-definition,” used for things that could not be high-definition 21

**feels:** slangy shortening of “feelings” 20

**MOST OUTRAGEOUS**

**Dunlop effect:** when one's stomach protrudes over ill-fitting pants ("belly done lop over the belt") 3

**\*legitimate rape:** type of rape that Missouri Senate candidate Todd Akin claimed rarely results in pregnancy 156

**slut-shaming:** attacking a woman for socially stigmatized sexual activity 2

**butt-chugging:** an alcohol enema, used in college fraternity hazing rituals 36

**MOST EUPHEMISTIC**

**disruptive:** destroying existing business models 3

**Gray Thursday:** name given to Thanksgiving as a shopping day before Black Friday 12

**\*self-deportation:** policy of encouraging illegal immigrants to return voluntarily to their home countries 142

**ratchet:** slang term originally referring to "urban divas" now used to mean "ghetto" 7

**evolution:** change of opinion 21

**MOST LIKELY TO SUCCEED**

**fiscal cliff:** threat of spending cuts and tax increases looming over end-of-year budget negotiations 8

**superstorm:** an unusually large and destructive storm, such as Hurricane Sandy 9

**MOOC:** acronym for "massive open online course" 4

**\*marriage equality:** legal recognition of same-sex marriage 156

**big data:** large collections of digital information used for revealing behavioral insights 20

**LEAST LIKELY TO SUCCEED**

**cray-cray:** slangy shortening and reduplication of "crazy" 5

**Gangnam style:** the trendy style of Seoul's Gangnam district, as used in the Korean pop song of the same name 5

**Windows Metro:** name originally used for the Windows 8 operating system 8

**\*phablet:** mid-sized electronic device between a smartphone and a tablet 76/92

**\*YOLO:** acronym for "You Only Live Once," often used sarcastically or self-deprecatingly 79/91

**meggings:** a blend for "male leggings" 22

**ELECTION WORDS (new category)**

**47 percent:** portion of the population that does not pay federal income tax 64

**Etch-a-Sketch:** metaphor of reinvention used by Romney campaign adviser Eric Fehrnstrom 8

**Eastwooding:** photo fad inspired by Clint Eastwood's unscripted speech at the RNC 10

**Romney/Obama:** names of candidates used for blends (*Obamaloney, Obamageddon, Romnesia, Romney Hood*) 13

**\*binders (full of women):** term used by Romney in the second presidential debate to describe the resumes of female job candidates that he consulted as governor of Massachusetts 107

**malarkey:** nonsense, empty talk (as used by Biden in the vice-presidential debate) 8

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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](http://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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