
Evolving English

WORKSHEET A

English, like any other modern language, never stands still, and one of the clearest indications of its evolution is the continuous creation of new words and expressions, while others fall gradually into disuse. This, of course, requires dictionaries to be regularly updated.

Such is the good reputation of the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* – the longest official dictionary of the English language, with around 600,000 words and their history – that new words are widely deemed to have officially arrived, to have become accepted, when they enter its pages. Not everyone greets the new arrivals with enthusiasm: there are new words many people regard as ugly, contrived, or simply unnecessary.

Some recent additions to the *OED* reflect the importance of the internet and modern forms of electronic communication. The last twelve months have seen the inclusion of the adjective ‘bloggable’ (used to describe a subject regarded as a suitable topic for a blog) and the nouns ‘onliner’ (internet user) and ‘cyberbullying’ (use of the internet to intimidate or generally be nasty to someone, a problem associated primarily with children and teenagers using social networking sites). The *OED* has also included some of the extremely informal abbreviations used in emails, text messages and on Twitter, such as ‘IMO’ (in my opinion), ‘LOL’ (laughing out loud – used when someone finds something very funny) and ‘OMG’ (Oh my God/gosh/goodness – used to express shock or excitement).

Other recent additions to the *OED* include ‘light-bulb moment’ (a moment of sudden realisation), ‘lappy’ (slang for laptop), and – something most women have probably witnessed – ‘man flu’ (a common cold, as experienced by a man who exaggerates its symptoms and behaves as if he has a more serious illness).

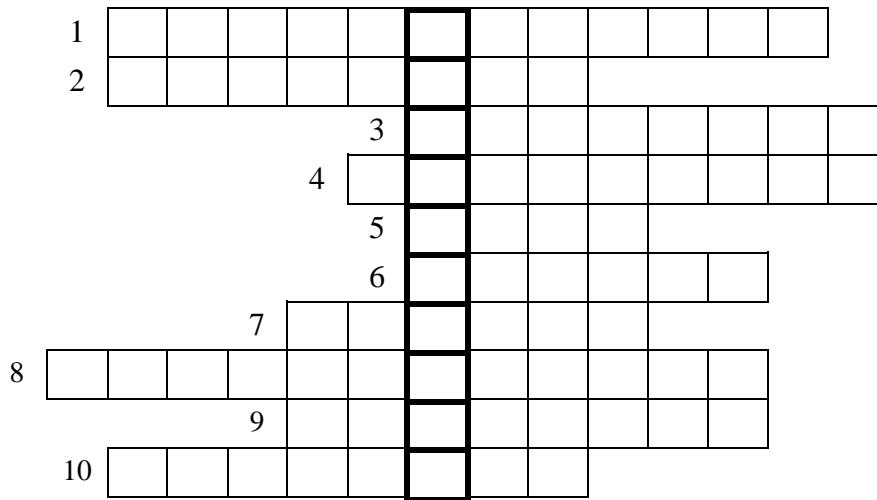
Another ongoing change, albeit a slow one, is in pronunciation. In Britain, for example, a recent project found that for many words that can be pronounced in different ways, there is a growing preference for one particular pronunciation. With ‘schedule’, for example, younger British people favour the American pronunciation, ‘skedule’, rather than the traditional British ‘shedule’. In the case of ‘garage’ they have largely opted for ‘GARidge’ instead of ‘gaRARGE’. The less favoured pronunciations might eventually die out – as happened with the pronunciation of ‘hospital’ without the ‘h’, widely regarded as correct in Britain in the nineteenth century.

Few people in Britain would object to the above developments, but that is not true for some other tendencies identified by the project. For example, many young people in Britain apparently refer to the letter ‘h’ not as ‘aitch’ but as ‘haitch’, which might become increasingly tolerated but for the time being is widely regarded as wrong. Strangely, many young people also add an extra syllable to ‘mischievous’, pronouncing it ‘mischeevy-us’, which is unambiguously wrong and almost guaranteed to irritate schoolteachers.

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Exercise 1

Complete the crossword below. If all the words are correct, another new word that recently entered the *Oxford English Dictionary* will read from top to bottom. It means a holiday for which you don't travel abroad but instead remain in your own country, perhaps not even leaving your local area.



1. According to the text, not everyone is _____ about all the new words and expressions that enter the *Oxford English Dictionary*.
2. '_____' is an example of a word whose pronunciation has changed, at least in Britain.
3. One of the findings from the project mentioned in the text is that young British people increasingly use what has generally been regarded as the _____ pronunciation of the word 'schedule'.
4. Many young people in Britain pronounce 'mischievous' as if it had more _____ than it actually does.
5. Man flu is really nothing more than a _____.
6. Cyberbullying is not associated primarily with _____.
7. The text discusses the pronunciation of a _____ as well as the pronunciation of certain words.
8. 'LOL' is an example of a popular _____.
9. The English language is _____ continuously.
10. Someone who _____ sees how they can solve a difficult problem could be said to have had a light-bulb moment.

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Exercise 2

The text from Worksheet A has been copied below, but now contains one mistake on each line. Can you find the mistakes and correct them?

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WORKSHEET D

Exercise 3

Below are some words and expressions, with explanations of their meaning. Some are genuine recent additions to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and some have been made up. Decide if they are real (R) or fictitious (F), then bet a minimum of 10 points up to a maximum of 50 on your choice.

		Real/ Fictitious	Points bet	Points lost	Points won
1	internetter (noun): internet user				
2	storming (adjective, informal): great, excellent				
3	WAGs (noun, plural, informal): abbreviation for 'wives and girlfriends'. Usually they are the wives and girlfriends of men who are celebrities (often famous sportsmen such as footballers), and might themselves be quite glamorous and/or well known.				
4	SSI : abbreviation for 'such a stupid idea', used in emails etc				
5	TBH : abbreviation for 'to be honest', used in emails etc				
6	vuvuzela (noun): plastic horn that South African football fans like to blow. The word, and the noise associated with it, became well known to TV viewers worldwide during the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.				
7	fake foreigner (expression, informal): someone who looks foreign but isn't				
8	toxic debt (expression): debt that a person, institution or country is unlikely to be able to pay. The word has often been used since the 2008 global financial crisis.				
9	chocolate bank (expression, informal): bank that seems to be a good place to put your money but is actually a very risky place. The word has often been used since the 2008 global financial crisis.				
10	tanorexia (noun, informal): an obsessive desire to get a suntan				
				Total points lost and won	
				Final total (subtract total points lost from total points won)	

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WORKSHEET E

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