

# 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 an appropriate 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 realization), “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 some areas of the USA, for example, different vowel sounds are merging, so that words such as “cot” and “caught” or “stock” and “stalk” sound identical; other vowel sounds are shifting, so that the word “block” is pronounced like the word “black.” Vowel-pronunciation change is nothing new, however; in the 1500s, “geese” was pronounced *gace* (to rhyme with *face*) and “mice” was pronounced *mace*.

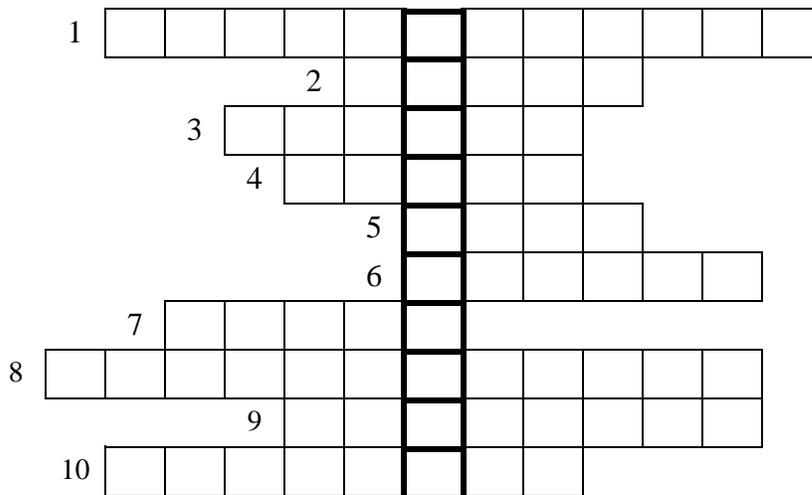
Another recent tendency is to use a rising intonation at the end of sentences that are not questions, often called “uptalk.” Despite teachers and professors finding this trend extremely irritating and trying their best to dissuade students from using it, it is now fairly ubiquitous in American English for people under the age of 25.

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WORKSHEET B

## 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 vacation 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. Two words that are often pronounced the same in American English are “stock” and “\_\_\_\_\_.”
3. The tendency to make your voice rise at the end of sentences so that statements sound like questions is called “\_\_\_\_\_.”
4. About 500 years ago, “geese” used to \_\_\_\_\_ with “face” in English.
5. Man flu is really nothing more than a \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Cyberbullying is not associated primarily with \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Parts of the USA are undergoing a vowel \_\_\_\_\_, which means that some vowels have started to be pronounced like other vowels were in the past.
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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WORKSHEET C

## 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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Another ongoing change, albeit a slow one, is in pronunciation. In some areas of the USA, for example, different vowel sounds are merging, so that words such as “cot” and “caught” or “stock” and “stalk” sound identical; other vowel sounds are shifting, so that the word “block” is pronounced like the word “brock.” Vowel-pronunciation change is nothing new, however; in the 1500s, “geese” was pronounced *gace* (to rhyme with *face*) and “mice” pronounced *mace*.

Another recent tendency is to use a rising intonation at the end of sentences that are questions, often called “uptalk.” Despite teachers and professors finding this trend extremely irritating and trying their best to dissuade students from using it, it is now fairly ubiquitous in American English for people under the age of 25.

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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/<br>Fictitious   | Points<br>bet | Points<br>lost | Points<br>won |  |
|----|--|---|---------------|----------------|---------------|--|
| 1  | <b>internetter</b> (noun): internet user   |   |               |                |               |  |
| 2  | <b>storming</b> (adjective, informal): great, excellent  |   |               |                |               |  |
| 3  | <b>WAGs</b> (noun, plural, informal): abbreviation for “wives and girlfriends.” Usually they are the wives and girlfriends of men who are celebrities (often famous sportsmen), and might themselves be quite glamorous and/or well known. |   |               |                |               |  |
| 4  | <b>SSI</b> : abbreviation for “such a stupid idea,” used in emails, etc.   |   |               |                |               |  |
| 5  | <b>TBH</b> : abbreviation for “to be honest,” used in emails, etc.   |   |               |                |               |  |
| 6  | <b>vuvuzela</b> (noun): plastic horn that South African soccer 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  | <b>fake foreigner</b> (expression, informal): someone who looks foreign but isn’t  |   |               |                |               |  |
| 8  | <b>toxic debt</b> (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  | <b>chocolate bank</b> (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 | <b>tanorexia</b> (noun, informal): an obsessive desire to get a suntan   |   |               |                |               |  |
|    |  | Total points lost and won   |               |                |               |  |
|    |  | <b>Final total</b> (subtract total points lost from total points won) |               |                |               |  |

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