

# Picking Up the Lingo

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One of the most exciting aspects of the English language is that it's constantly evolving. As each generation comes of age, it adds new and creative slang to the culture, so you're sure to hear something new pretty regularly.

Slang is very informal language or specific words used by a particular group of people. You'll usually hear slang spoken more often than you'll see it put in writing, though emails and texts often contain many conversational slang words.

Though slang sometimes gets a bad rap for being inappropriate or incorrect, it's also highly creative and shows that the English language is constantly evolving over time.

## Examples of Outdated Slang

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Some slang words that were once popular are no longer used. For example:

- **Cat's pajamas:** Used in the 1920s to mean that something was exciting, new, or excellent. Though it doesn't make much sense, it does use vivid imagery. "That new phonograph is the cat's pajamas."
- **Wallflower:** This term describes a shy person. It was used for decades in the 20th century to describe a person - typically a girl - who preferred to stand along the wall instead of participating in a dance. "You'll have more fun at the dance if you aren't such a wallflower."
- **Don't have a cow:** This term is used to try to calm someone down. It was popularized by the TV show *The Simpsons* in the 1980s and 90s. It's no longer very common to hear in conversation. "Don't have a cow, mom! I didn't eat all the ice cream."

# Examples of Evolving Slang

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Some slang words change their meaning over time, usually across generations. This keeps the word in usage but can lead to some miscommunication between older and younger speakers. For example:

- **Busted:** To your grandparents, "busted" probably meant that something was broken. To your parents, it means getting caught doing something wrong. The latest use? As an adjective to mean "ugly."  
"No, I won't go out with your little sister. She's busted."
- **Ride:** Originally a verb for the act of being a passenger in a vehicle, this word also evolved into a noun to describe a car. Most recently, "my rides" can mean sneakers.  
"I got new rides to match my favorite shirt."
- **Hip:** Originally "hip" or "hep" meant someone very fashionable in the first half of the 20th century. It evolved to mean someone into jazz and beatnik culture in the 1940s and 50s, and changed further still into "hippie" to describe flower children of the 60s. Today it's changed again to "hipster," meaning a self-aware, artsy person.  
"My hip grandfather plays the sax, but my hipster brother just makes homemade pickles."

# Examples of Portmanteau Slang

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Some slang terms are created by combining two words into one that has a new meaning. A new word created by combining portions of two existing words is called a portmanteau, and they are very popular as a way to give a new name to a celebrity couple. For example, the actors Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie were known as "Brangelina" when they were married. Other examples of portmanteaus:

- **Frenemy:** This combination of "friend" and "enemy" describes a person who is a little bit of both, perhaps a friend with whom one experiences regular

conflict.

"You'd be a lot happier if you stopped hanging out with your frenemy."

- **Bromance:** This combination of "brother" and "romance" describes an intense friendship between two straight men.

"I haven't seen Michael since he started hanging out with Jeremy. Their bromance is epic."

- **Ginormous:** This combination of "gigantic" and "enormous" means something very large.

"You could find a parking space more easily if your car wasn't so ginormous."

## Examples of Modern Slang

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Slang is changing all the time, but here's a list of modern slang terms:

- **BAE:** A term of endearment, meaning "before anyone else," used between romantic partners that can also be used between close friends.  
"Bae, you're the best."
- **Basic:** A put-down describing someone or something that's very common or a conformist.  
"Those women are so basic. They're only drinking pumpkin spice lattes because everyone else is."
- **Bye Felicia:** A fast way to tell someone to go away. This term comes from the 1995 movie Friday.  
"I know you're just copying my style. Bye Felicia."
- **Coin:** Another way to refer to money.  
"She's about to earn some major coin."
- **Dying:** Something that was so funny, you died laughing.  
"OMG. This standup is hilarious. I'm dying."
- **Epic:** If something was "epic," it was highly enjoyable.  
"His latest novel was epic."
- **Extra:** If someone's "extra," it means they're way too dramatic.  
"Her boyfriend was always putting her down, calling her extra."
- **Fierce:** Usually attributed to Beyonce, "fierce" signifies a strong, independent person.  
"I love her to death. She's so fierce!"

- **GOAT:** Current usage is actually a compliment, as this is now an acronym that stands for "greatest of all time."  
"I don't care what you say, because Tom Brady is the goat."
- **Lit:** If something is "lit," it means it's super cool or "on fire."  
"Last night's party was lit."
- **Low key:** If someone or something is "low key," it means it's being done under the radar or they don't want anyone to know.  
"I low key love Imagine Dragons, but don't tell anyone!"
- **On point:** Outstanding, perfectly executed.  
"Her accessories are on point. She looks great."
- **Read:** To "read" someone means you're calling them out for their bad behavior.  
"Wow. Stefon read Amy for filth at last night's dinner."
- **Salty:** Angry or bitter about something.  
"Why are you so salty? I said I would share if I win the lottery."
- **Savage:** Someone who "roasts" people nonstop and doesn't care what others will say.  
"Jimmy Kimmel's monologue on Donald Trump last night was savage."
- **Ship:** Short for "romantic relationship," sometimes used as a verb.  
"Everyone wants to ship Edward and bella, but they say they're just good friends."
- **The tea:** When someone is dishing "the tea," they're gossiping, particularly with the juiciest or most dramatic gossip.  
"Let's call Wendy. She always has the tea."
- **Thirsty:** If someone's "thirsty," it means they're a little too eager or even desperate.  
"Look at the way she dressed for their second date. She's way too thirsty."
- **Throw shade:** To "throw shade" means to insult or say something unkind about someone.  
"I can't believe he said that. He just threw some serious shade."
- **Woke:** Slang for "awakened," as in being highly aware of social injustices.  
"If you're so woke, why didn't you vote?"
- **YOLO:** An acronym for "you only live once," encouraging people to seize the day.  
"Of course you should go on that trip to Dublin! YOLO!"

## Why Do People Use Slang?

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Because slang terms are often only understood by people in a certain group, using slang is, above all, a way to show that you belong. You show that you're a part of the crowd by using terms that others don't understand, and you can connect with like-minded people who understand just what you mean by using the latest slang terms.

For this reason, slang is often a mark of being "cool," or at least in the know about something. People who are "in" with a group know the slang, and people who aren't don't. Slang is, therefore, a way of using language for separating oneself from others. The best example of this is the way each generation of teens uses new slang to separate themselves from their "uncool" parents.

Over time, slang terms either die out from lack of use as groups move on to new terminology, or they may become so popular that they are absorbed into the common language. In the latter case, everyone understands the terms, and they aren't likely to be considered inappropriate or poor grammar any longer. This is how language grows and evolves over time, as new words are added to the dictionary while old ones fall into disuse and disappear.