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## Let's welcome the new words into our language

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"Ginormous" made the cut. The word, meaning very large or humongous (a better word, in my opinion), appears in the 2007 edition of Merriam-Webster's Dictionary. Once a word appears in the dictionary, it officially exists and may be used without penalty in high school.

I'm running a bit late, but I like to check out the new dictionary entries every year just so I know which words are and are not yet legit (recognized as slang, but as a legitimate substitute for "legitimate" — except in high school).

Unlike Latin, a dead language with no new words in a couple of millennia, English is always changing. New words are always forcing their way into the dictionary as people use them. And unless you are writing a high school assignment, you are more or less free to make up words and start using them; all words, after all, have to come from someone's imagination. Making up a new word could be called "wordbirth." A word new to the dictionary could be called a "freshword." The 2007 freshword class contained about 100 entries.

Here's a sample of recent freshwords — from 2006 or 2007.

A "mousepotato" is slang for a person who spends a lot of time on the computer.

A "soul patch" is a small growth of beard below a man's lower lip. (This used to be called a shaving mistake.)

A "labelmate" is a singer or musician who records with the same company as another.

An "ollie" (I know this one from being exposed to skateboarders) is a "maneuver in skateboarding in which the skater kicks the tail of the board down while jumping in order to make the board pop into the air, or 2: a maneuver in snowboarding in which the rider transfers weight from the front to the back foot to snap the board up off the ground."

"Polyamory" is "the state or practice of having more than one open romantic relationship at a time." We used to call this "cheating." Being "open" about it didn't make it OK. No doubt the cheater who wordbirthed this freshword wanted a term that implies no moral judgment. Ain't language wonderful?

"Blamestorm" and "perfect storm," both made the book in 2007. Blamestorm is a verb that refers to a bunch of whiners sitting around after some major failure pointing fingers at someone who is not present. The perfect storm, once a meteorological term, has been "genericized" (another of my own wordbirths) to refer to any collection of forces coming together to create a disaster.

"Hardscape" refers to the benches, gazebos and other furnishings used in landscaping. "Microgreen" refers to the shoots of standard salad greens. "Crunk" is a style of southern rap music.

"Unibrow" and "big box" made it, too. I have no idea what took so long. Both have been in popular use for many years.

Visitors to Merriam-Webster's Web site picked the word of the year. It's "woot," often written as "w00t." It's an expression of joy uttered after a victory, or for no reason at all. It is actually an acronym — for "we own the other team." I'll use it in a sentence: "Woot, woot, woot, woot."

Even as the dictionary folks are accepting new words, however, a committee of language guardians at Lake Superior State University publishes an annual list of words that should be banned — including "perfect storm" this year, and the phrases "under the bus" and "it is what it is."

Banning words is fun, but futile. Words are what they are; they die when they die. But I digress. I just want to officially welcome the new freshwords into the language. Woot, woot, woot!

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