

Word of the Day

May 16 – May 22

Highlighted word: New word. Unsure about its meaning or pronunciation.

May 16, 2020

bodacious

bō-'*dā*-shəs | boh-DAY-shuss

Definition

- 1 *Southern & Midland* : outright, unmistakable
- 2 : remarkable, noteworthy
- 3 : sexy, voluptuous

Did You Know?

Some of our readers may know *bodacious* as a word that figured prominently in the lingo of the 1989 film *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure*. Others may recall the term's frequent use in the long-running "Snuffy Smith" comic strip. Neither the creators of the comic strip nor the movie can claim to have coined *bodacious*, which began appearing in print during the 1800s, but both likely contributed to its popularity. The exact origin of the word is uncertain, but it was most likely influenced by *bold* and *audacious*, and it may be linked to *boldacious*, a term from British dialect meaning "brazen" or "impudent."

Examples

"House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy has made a *bodacious* name for himself on several fronts. The California lawmaker has now set an all-time annual fundraising record for any Republican...." — [Jennifer Harper, *The Washington Times*, 29 Jan. 2020](#)

"The other period elements, as always, remain intact: **jousting** on horseback, outrageous **cockney** accents from bearded storytellers **strumming** lyres, and many *bodacious*, curvy bodices." — [Phillip Valys, *The South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, 10 Feb. 2020](#)

joust: to fight on horseback as a knight or man-at-arms

horseback: the back of a horse

cockney (n): A native of the East End of London. (a): Relating to cockneys or their dialect.

strum: to brush the fingers over the strings of (a musical instrument) in playing

May 17, 2020

malapropism

'ma-lə-, prä-, pi-zəm | MAL-uh-prah-piz-um

Definition

: the usually unintentionally humorous misuse or distortion of a word or phrase; *especially* : the use of a word sounding somewhat like the one intended but ludicrously wrong in the context

Did You Know?

Mrs. Malaprop, a character in Richard Sheridan's 1775 play *The Rivals*, was known for her verbal blunders. "He is the very [pine-apple](#) of politeness," she exclaimed, complimenting a courteous young man. Thinking of the geography of contiguous countries, she spoke of the "geometry" of "contagious countries," and she hoped that her daughter might "[reprehend](#)" the true meaning of what she was saying. She regretted that her "[affluence](#)" over her niece was small. The word *malapropism* derives from this blundering character's name, which Sheridan took from the French term *mal à propos*, meaning "inappropriate."

Examples

"A *malapropism* is using the wrong word, but one that sounds similar to the right word—like saying that medieval cathedrals are supported by flying [buttocks](#). A good *malapropism* can throw you off, so that you scrape your head trying to figure out the error, and then having to think what the word should have been. (It's [flying buttresses](#), by the way)." — [Britt Hanson, The Tucson \(Arizona\) Weekly, 3 July 2014](#)

buttock: the back of a hip that forms one of the fleshy parts on which a person sits

buttress: a projecting structure of masonry or wood for supporting or giving stability to a wall or building

"[Gilda Radner] brought a lot of charm and energy as a player [on Saturday Night Live]; from her impressions of Lucille Ball ... to her unforgettable characters like ... the *malapropism*-prone Emily Litella, the geeky Lisa Loopner and the letter-reading Roseanne Roseannadonna." — [Paolo Alfar, Screen Rant, 10 Mar. 2020](#)

May 18, 2020

exiguous

ig-'*zi*-gyə-wəs | ig-ZIG-yuh-wus

Definition

: excessively scanty : inadequate

scanty: limited or less than sufficient in degree, quantity, or extent

Did You Know?

Exiguous is so expansive sounding that you might expect it to mean "extensive" instead of "meager." Even a scanty glimpse at the word's etymology will disabuse you of that notion, however. *Exiguous* derives from the Latin *exiguus*, which has the same basic meaning as the modern English term. *Exiguus*, in turn, derives from the Latin verb *exigere*, which is variously translated as "to demand," "to drive out," or "to weigh or measure." The idea of weighing or measuring so precisely as to be parsimonious or petty gave *exiguous* its present sense of inadequacy. Just so we aren't accused of being skimpy with the details, we should also mention that *exigere* is the parent term underlying other English words including exact and exigent.

petty: marked by or reflective of narrow interests and sympathies : small-minded

skimpy: deficient in supply or execution especially through skimping : scanty

Examples

New computer equipment would be prohibitively expensive, given the rural school's *exiguous* resources.

"[Adam] Smith's death was the subject of rather little interest, in England and even in Scotland. The published obituaries were *exiguous*...." — Emma Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments*, 2001

obituary: a notice of a person's death usually with a short biographical account

May 19, 2020

disabuse

,dɪs-ə-'*bü*z | diss-uh-BYOOZ

Definition

: to free from error, misconception, or fallacy

Did You Know?

We know the verb *abuse* as a word meaning "to misuse," "to mistreat," or "to revile." But when *disabuse* first appeared in the early 17th century, there was a sense of *abuse*, now obsolete, that meant "to deceive." Sir Francis Bacon used that sense, for example, when he wrote in 1605, "You are much abused if you think your virtue can withstand the King's power." The prefix *dis-* has the sense of undoing the effect of a verb, so it's not surprising that *disabuse* means "to undeceive." English speakers didn't come up with the idea of joining *dis-* to *abuse* all on their own, however. It was the French who first appended their prefix *dés-* to their verb *abuser*. English *disabuse* is modeled after French *désabuser*.

revile: to subject to verbal abuse : vituperate

Examples

"While it's difficult to predict how the practice of hiring will evolve over time, one thing is clear: it is extremely difficult to *disabuse* people of their biases, especially when those biases become cultural norms." — [Mark Travers, Forbes, 22 Mar. 2020](#)

"[Anton] [Chekhov](#) has a way of *disabusing* us of our specialness, of making us realize that our problems are, in fact, just like everyone else's." — [Megan O'Grady, The New York Times, 19 Feb. 2020](#)

May 20, 2020

neoteric

,nē-ə-ˈter-ik | nee-uh-TAIR-ik

Definition

: recent in origin : [modern](#)

Did You Know?

An odd thing about *neoteric* is that this word for things that are modern and new is itself rather old. It's been part of English since at least 1596, and its roots go back even further—to ancient Greek. We adapted the word from Late Latin *neōtericus*, which also means "recent." *Neōtericus* in turn comes from Late Greek *neōterikós* and ultimately from Greek *néos*, meaning "new" or "young." As old as its roots are, however, *neoteric* itself entered English later than its synonyms [modern](#) (which appeared earlier in the 16th century) and [newfangled](#) (which has been with us since the 15th century).

newfangled: Attracted to novelty. Of the newest style or kind.

Examples

"From the runways of Paris to the boutiques of New York to the time-sucking scroll of my social media-feeds, it seemed as if every few weeks I encountered some *neoteric* innovation that made me **smirk** or scratch my head, sometimes simultaneously." — [Jacob Gallagher, *The Wall Street Journal*, 30 Dec. 2019](#)

smirk: to smile in a smug or condescending way

"The projects I have designed mirror the correlation between past and present, always celebrating the old and welcoming the *neoteric*. I am respectful of the strong impressive history and strive to elevate the level of what has been left behind in time." — [Melinda Bell Dickey, quoted in *The Danville \(Virginia\) Register & Bee*, 15 Mar. 2020](#)

May 21, 2020

cowcatcher

'kau-, ka-chər | KOW-ketch-er

Definition

: an inclined frame on the front of a railroad locomotive for throwing obstacles off the track

Did You Know?

New Jersey's Camden and Amboy Railroad was the first in the U.S. to adopt the cowcatcher, adding it to its John Bull locomotive in the early 1830s. But, as the *Model Railroader Cyclopedia* warned, "don't ever let a railroad man hear you use 'cowcatcher.'" In its heyday, railroad workers preferred the name **pilot** for that v-shaped frame. In the 1940s and '50s, *cowcatcher* jumped the tracks and took on a new life in TV and radio advertising jargon. The term was used for a commercial that was aired immediately before a program and that advertised a secondary product of the program's sponsor. Such ads apparently got the name because they "went in front."

Examples

For his entry in the town parade, John **outfitted** his black truck with a *cowcatcher* and smoke stack to resemble a 19th-century locomotive.

outfit: to furnish with an outfit

"Not in this show, unfortunately, is the amazing 'Galloping Goose,' which Springer photographed. Until the early 1950s its modified truck-**boxcar** **mashup**—with a *cowcatcher* in front—**lumbered** from Ridgway to Lizard Head Pass in Colorado." — [Harriet Howard Heithaus, *The Naples \(Florida\) Daily News*, 17 June 2019](#)

boxcar: a roofed freight car usually with sliding doors in the sides

mashup: something created by combining elements from two or more sources

lumber: rumble: to travel with a low reverberating sound

May 22, 2020

preeen

'prēn | PREEN

Definition

1 *of a bird* : to groom with the bill especially by rearranging the **barbs** and **barbules** of the feathers and by distributing oil from the uropygial gland

barb: any of the side branches of the shaft of a feather

barbule: a minute barb

uropygial gland: a large gland that occurs in most birds, opens dorsally at the base of the tail feathers, and usually secretes an oily fluid which the bird uses in preening its feathers — called also oil gland

2 : to dress or smooth (oneself) up : primp

3 : to pride or congratulate (oneself) on an achievement

4 : to make oneself sleek

5 : to behave or speak with obvious pride or self-satisfaction

Did You Know?

Preen hatched in 14th-century Middle English, and early on it displayed various spelling forms, including *prenen*, *prayne*, *prene*, and *preyne*. The word traces to Anglo-French *puroindre*, or *proindre*, linking *pur-*, meaning "thoroughly," with *uindre*, *oindre*, meaning "to anoint or rub." One of the first writers known to apply *preen* to the human act of *primping* was Geoffrey Chaucer in *The Canterbury Tales*. Centuries later (sometime during the late 19th century), the prideful meaning of *preen* hatched, joining another bird-related word, plume, which was being used with the meaning "to pride or congratulate (oneself)" from the first half of the 17th century.

hatch: to bring into being : originate

primp: to dress, adorn, or arrange in a careful or finicky manner

plume: to indulge (oneself) in pride with an obvious or vain display of self-satisfaction

Examples

"Adding a water source to your yard also will attract birds, providing not only drinking water for them but a place to wash their feathers and *preen*." — Joan Morris, *The Mercury News* (San Jose, California), 13 Apr. 2020

"We keep tight control over our [Instagram] accounts' aesthetics, down to the color scheme.... A select few follow the lead of celebrities who log on to publicize their lavish lives to millions, turning Instagram into a place to *preen* and present a reality far above the mundane." — [Diti Kohli, The Boston Globe, 8 Apr. 2020](#)